

Examining Constructs of Beauty through Literature.

Samantha Kur

Submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great deal of gratitude to Jennifer Stacey, my supervisor. Throughout the research she provided me with guidance and support. Mostly, I am thankful for her abounding patience, understanding and encouragement.

I am thankful to the three learners who participated in the research programme. I am particularly grateful for their insights, honesty and enthusiasm throughout the research.

I cannot thank enough my family, both in South Africa and in America. Without their encouragement, support and endless hours of babysitting, this report would not have been completed.

Most of all, thank you to my husband, Evan, and son, Betzalel, who are my constant source of devotion and inspiration and who moved across oceans so that I could pursue this research. To me, their love is the most precious alternative of beauty I can imagine.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to explore how literature can be utilised to help adolescents better understand themselves and the world around them. I focused the research on the issue of beauty. The research was conducted with a group of three female Grade 10 learners in a school in a North East suburb of Johannesburg.

The research centred on a study of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* and a workbook created to employ the novel as a catalyst for discussions and activities around aspects of beauty. This novel was selected because of the presence of the theme of unattainable beauty. Throughout the research period the learners explored their own notions of beauty as they read the novel and used the workbook.

The theoretical framework of this research draws on reader response theory as outlined by Louise Rosenblatt in order to explore how the reading of literature has the potential to help learners understand the world around them. The research also draws on the theory of feminist poststructuralism as theorised by Chris Weedon in order to examine how the learners have come to understand beauty and how they react to the text. The theory of critical literacy is used to shed light on the possibility of the learners rejecting any new constructs of beauty. The theoretical framework also provides a survey of various theories of beauty that illustrate how adolescents are influenced by a socially constructed Gaze and by the media. The framework also explores alternatives to the dominant construct of beauty. Lastly, the theoretical framework discusses how race has influenced constructs of beauty.

The content of the data revealed that the learners were profoundly impacted by peer gazing. Comments and looks from their peers caused the participants to judge themselves according to a standard of beauty created by their peers, in turn affecting the learners' self esteem. The analysis of the data showed that the media was another determining factor in the participants' construct of beauty. The participants, through a variety of media, absorbed the notion of the 'beautiful' female body as the ideal to which they should aspire. Furthermore the participants expressed a feeling of being different under the racist Gaze which caused them to question the validity of their skin colour, their noses and their hair in relation to white normative constructs they had internalised.

By the end of the research programme the participants seemed unable completely to move away from the influence of the dominant construct of beauty. They still judged themselves according to the standards projected by the media and their peers. However, the analysis of the data also shows how the participants, by the end of the research, were able to demonstrate some attitudinal change towards their bodies and to articulate an alternative concept of beauty that included positive personality traits and objects of non-visual beauty. The participants also exhibited a heightened awareness of a dominant construct of beauty and actively resisted the dominant discourse of beauty projected by the media and their peers.

This research proves that the literary experience, as described by Rosenblatt, plays an important part in the teaching of literature, providing readers with the opportunity to live through the experiences of the characters in the novel. This research shows that, to a limited extent, literature can affect the learners' worldview.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments
Abstract

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Rationale for the Research	1
1.1.1 Literature as Personal Growth	1
1.1.2 Problematising Constructs of Beauty	2
1.2 Research Aims and Question	5
CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	6
2.1 Reader Response Theory	6
2.2 Feminist Poststructuralism	12
2.3 Critical Literacy	17
2.4 Beauty	19
2.4.1 The Gaze	19
2.4.2 The Media and Beauty	23
2.4.3 Alternative Perspectives	26
2.4.4 Race and Beauty	27
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	38
3.1 Research Methodology	38
3.2 Rationale for the Selection of the Novel <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	40
3.2.1 The Gaze	41
3.2.2 The Media	50
3.2.3 Alternative Constructs of Beauty	57
3.3 Explanation of Teaching Materials: The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself	61
3.3.1 Content	62
3.3.2 Design	63
3.4 Research Context	64
3.4.1 Research Site	64
3.4.2 Research Participants	65
3.5 Research design	66
3.5.1 Data Collection Techniques	66
3.5.1.1 Observation	66
3.5.1.2 Artefacts	67
3.5.1.3 Interviews	67
3.5.1.4 The Tension of Authenticity	68
3.5.2 List of Data	68
3.5.3 Methods of Data Analysis	71

CHAPTER 4 - PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	73
4.1 Overview of the Data.....	74
4.2 Data Set 1.....	75
4.2.1 Description of the Data.....	75
4.2.2 Data Collection Process.....	76
4.2.3 Instructions for the Tasks.....	77
4.2.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data.....	79
4.3 Data Set 2.....	90
4.3.1 Description of the Data.....	90
4.3.2 Data Collection Process.....	91
4.3.3 Instructions for the Tasks.....	91
4.3.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data	92
4.4 Data Set 3.....	99
4.4.1 Description of the Data.....	99
4.4.2 Data Collection Process.....	100
4.4.3 Instructions for the Tasks.....	101
4.4.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data.....	103
4.5 Data Set 4.....	110
4.5.1 Description of the Data.....	110
4.5.2 Data Collection Process.....	110
4.5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Data	111
CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION.....	123
5.1 Introduction.....	123
5.2 Answering the Research Question.....	123
5.3 Limitations of the Research.....	127
5.4 Possible Directions for Further Study.....	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	132
APPENDICES.....	136

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Rationale for the Research
 - 1.1.1 Literature as Personal Growth
 - 1.1.2 Problematising Constructs of Beauty
- 1.2 Research Aims and Question

1.1 Rationale for the Research

1.1.1 Literature as Personal Growth

There are two reasons for selecting this research topic. The first reason stems from my own experience of teaching texts. From 2001 to 2004 I taught Biblical and Talmudic texts in a Jewish day school to grades seven and eight. In both subjects I taught the learners analytical skills and exposed them to the history and themes that surrounded the particular texts with which they were engaging. With each new unit of work the learners discussed topics such as social injustice and the importance of respecting others in their interpersonal relationships. In this way the learners became aware of how the archaic texts they were studying were relevant to their adolescent reality.

If it is true that the adolescent has “not yet arrived at a consistent view of life or achieved a fully integrated personality” (Rosenblatt 1968: 31), then the texts learners are exposed to have potential to influence the adolescents’ development. This potential was realised by many of the learners from my class who applied the discussion of the texts to their lives on two levels. On a personal level many learners expressed how the discussions of the texts impacted their relationship with their

parents and friends. On a communal level several learners were inspired by the discussions on social injustice. They began visiting the elderly and collecting food for the homeless. In this way the texts had a dramatic impact on their personal growth.

As I witnessed my learners develop values through their study of religious texts, I recognised that I had not had similar experiences in the English classroom, either as a teacher or learner. Instead, as a learner and a teacher of literature I was focused more on analytical skills. Louise Rosenblatt (1968) warns the teacher against only concentrating on analytical skills as it “tend[s] to crowd out the ultimate questions concerning relevance or value to the reader in his on going life” (1968: 30). My experience in the Jewish day school made me question whether English literature can be taught in such a way that the experience of literature can go beyond analysing the text and can be used to help learners better understand their world and how they relate to it.

1.1.2 Problematising Constructs of Beauty

The second reason for my research stems from a concern with the alarming statistics of eating disorders and negative self-image among adolescent girls.¹ Research shows that girls are greatly affected by appearance culture (Jones et al 2004: 335). Girls’ dissatisfaction with their bodies begins at a young age. Naomi Wolf (1990) reports that 53% of American high school girls are dissatisfied with their bodies as early as age 13, and that 78% are unhappy with their bodies by age 18 (1990: 151). Their

¹ Part of this section is from my essay for “Materials Development” (July-November 2005) that theorises the workbook that was used in this research.

unhappiness with their bodies manifests in various ways such as low self-esteem, depression and eating disorders. Girls develop this low self-esteem from an early age and they carry it through to adulthood. Early intervention is needed to ensure that girls love their bodies from a young age and that they do not take these problems with them into womanhood.

Research indicates that adolescent girls worldwide are faced with the same issues of body image and low self-esteem. Naomi Wolf explains that the incidence of eating disorders has risen in places such as Sweden, Russia, Italy, Holland and Australia (1990: 149). More recent research has evidenced that there is a rise in disordered eating among youth worldwide. South Africa is not immune to the issue of eating disorders especially in the black population. It was believed that “cultural expectations ‘protect’ black women from developing eating disorders because of more lenient weight and shape standards” (Wassenaar et al. 1998: 250-254).

However, Wassenaar et al. discovered that of the group they studied, 5% of the black participants had the “propensity toward binge eating or bulimia” and 13% presented “anorexic-like behavior” (1998: 250-254). They found similar statistics in other sectors of the population, indicating that eating disorders are prevalent in South Africa.

With the advent of technologies such as television, cinema and the Internet, western culture has spread to many parts of the globe. This invasion of culture has brought with it western ideals of beauty. “[T]he blending of what constitutes beauty across different socio-economic levels, different cultures, different races, and different ethnic groups may make plumpness less desirable in all regions of the world”

(Walcott et al 2003: 232). Researchers raise the concern that as these western ideals of beauty spread, not only will women reject and separate from their cultural norms but they also will increasingly engage in “disordered patterns of eating” (2003: 233).

Disordered eating is also found in minority communities. A study conducted by Root concludes that “regardless of racial or ethnic group status, most individuals are subject to the standards of the dominant culture, particularly when their culture or racial/ethnic group of origin is devalued by the dominant culture” (Walcott et al 2003: 230). Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the incidence of disordered eating among girls in minority populations in America has increased, especially in African American and Hispanic communities (2003: 227). Borrowing Susan Bordo’s (1993) theory that eating disorders are the extreme version of the general attitude of society, the increase of disordered eating worldwide reflects a general global trend.

Furthermore, the media has given rise to a new phenomenon that is influencing constructs of beauty. Extreme makeover shows that flaunt the ability to change a woman’s appearance via extensive plastic surgery, in order to conform to a normative ideal of beauty, cannot be a positive influence. Icons such as Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie, who are famous for being famous, are further examples of how beauty now incorporates wealth and status. In addition, sites on the internet that promote eating disorders are growing. On these sites, girls who suffer from anorexia and/or bulimia post pictures of their emaciated bodies, their weight, and the famous people who inspire them whom they call their “thinspiration” and encourage each other not to eat. Therefore, it is important to address these issues in order for girls to gain a new understanding of themselves both in how they see their bodies and in how they perceive beauty.

1.1 Research Aims and Question

The aim of this research was to explore how literature can be utilised to help adolescents better understand themselves and the world around them. I focused the research on the issue of beauty. The research centred on a study of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* and a workbook created for the purpose of employing the novel as a catalyst for discussions and activities around aspects of beauty. Learners explored their own notions of beauty at different points as they worked through the workbook. The broad aim of this research was to examine if the learner could emerge from the experience (a) with a perspective on beauty and her body that enables her to avoid judging herself according to artificial and unattainable standards of beauty or, at the very least, (b) with a heightened awareness of a dominant construct of beauty and how that affects her self perception.

The research question was formulated as follows:

To what extent can learners experience change in their concepts of beauty through a series of lessons based on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Reader Response Theory

2.2 Feminist Poststructuralism

2.3 Critical Literacy

2.4 Beauty

2.4.1 The Gaze

2.4.2 The Media and Beauty

2.4.3 Alternative Perspectives

2.4.4 Race and Beauty

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The review of the literature pertinent to this study will be located in the outline of the theoretical framework. I will begin by looking at reader response theory as outlined by Louise Rosenblatt. This will be followed by an overview of feminist poststructuralism as theorised by Chris Weedon. I will then provide a brief examination of critical literacy as it sheds light on possible outcomes of the research. The final section will present a survey of various theories about beauty.

2.1 Reader Response Theory

Louise Rosenblatt's (1968) theory of how readers interact with literature is relevant to this research in that it explores how the reading of literature has the potential to help "the individual to assimilate the superstructure of attitudes that he must erect on the basis of his fundamental human impulses" (1968: 189). In this light, literature has the potential to be an experience from which readers make meaning and understand the

world around them. In addition, literature helps the reader to re-evaluate her own values and norms in relation to those in the text, thus affording the learner the opportunity to integrate or reject those values presented in the text.

According to Rosenblatt, the critical analysis of the literary work removes the reader's emotions from the experience of reading. A learner of literature can understand a text from a critical perspective; however she will have a poor encounter with the text if there is no emotional connection. Rosenblatt explains, "Knowledge of literary forms is empty without an accompanying humanity" (1968: 52). She feels it is particularly important for adolescents, who are desirous of "self –understanding and ... knowledge about people," (1968: 53) to experience the 'humanity' in literature as the text provides a forum for meaning making.

When a reader encounters a text that enables her to make meaning of her reality, the reader encounters a "literary experience". Rosenblatt explains,

A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between the reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience (1968:25).

Rosenblatt is describing the process of reading literature as a synergy between the reader and the text. Selden and Widdowson (1993) explain that this synergy exists because the reader is an active participant in the experience of reading as she attempts to make meaning of the text (1993: 46). This experience of reading is affected by what the reader brings to the text and what the text brings to the reader because "[i]n

the moulding of any specific literary experience, what the student brings to literature is as important as the literary text itself” (Rosenblatt 1968: 82).

What the reader brings to the text will influence how the reader interacts with the text.

Rosenblatt explains,

He comes to the book from life. He turns for a moment from his direct concern with the various problems and satisfactions of his own life. He will resume his concern with them when the book is closed. Even while he is reading, these things are present as probably the most important guiding factors in his experience (1968: 35).

Furthermore, the reader’s personality, life experience, emotional state and even his physical state will affect the way that the learner will interact with the text either in a positive or negative way (1968: 30). In other words, what the reader brings to text will affect what the text will mean to the reader. It is the teacher’s role to lead the learner to think about what it is about the text that causes the emotion. In this way the reading experience becomes an opportunity for the learner to “reflect self-critically about the process” (1968: 25).

In the event that the learner does not respond to the text because the learner lacks lived experiences to draw upon, then the text can provide the new necessary encounter. In this way the text can broaden the experiences of the reader. Here we begin to see the second half of the synthesis between reader and text that results in the literary experience, namely, what the text brings to the reader.

Rosenblatt explains that the text brings to the reader the opportunity to increase experiences because “we participate in imaginary situations, we look on at characters living through crises, we explore ourselves and the world about us, through the

medium of literature” (1968: 37). Rosenblatt is careful to point out that reading literature does not merely provide “additional information” but rather “additional experiences” so that “literature provides a *living-through*, not simply *knowledge about*” (1968: 38) any particular topic. Thus literature is a way for the reader to make meaning of the world in which she lives through the experiences and emotions of the characters in the text.

The literary experience is the result of the simultaneous interaction between what the reader brings to the text and what the text brings to the reader. In other words, the reader interprets the text based on the reader’s experiences while at the same time the reader gains a new perspective on her experiences from the text. “Only when this happens has there been a full interplay between book and reader, and hence a complete and rewarding literary experience” (1968: 107). The reader can then incorporate the new reading experience into his or her lived experiences and draw on this new experience when she next encounters a text. Additionally the reader’s emotional connection to a text will make the reader more sensitive to the literary devices that helped to bring about the literary experience. The literary devices, in turn, deepen the reader’s understanding of the reader’s world. Therefore “a reciprocal process emerges, in which growth in human understanding and literary sophistication sustain and nourish one another” (1968: 53).

Moreover, while literary experiences have the potential to deepen the reader’s understanding of the world and herself, Rosenblatt explains how change can take place in the reader through literature. While experiencing the emotions of the characters, the reader is able to develop a sense of empathy and may change how the

reader interacts with others (1968: 187). In addition, when the reader sees her own experience reflected in a text, “it places them outside [herself], enables [the reader] to see them with a certain detachment and to understand [her] situation and motivation more objectively” (1968:41). The reader is thus learning through literature new ways to react and cope with her own reality. This potential affect of literature is particularly important to this research as the characters of Claudia and Pecola, in *The Bluest Eye*, offer different responses to the presentation of unattainable beauty. The learners often referred to these characters’ actions and emotions when explaining their *own* reactions to similar and related experiences.

Furthermore, when the reader is exposed to new ways of looking at the world, she is able to integrate these ideas into her own worldview. Rosenblatt explains,

The work of art can have this affect because it does more than merely recall to us elements out of our past insights and emotions. It will present them in new patterns and new contexts. It will give them new resonance and make of them the basis for new awarenesses and enriched understanding. It will tend to supplement and correct our own necessarily limited personal experience. Through the work of art, our habitual responses, our preoccupations and desires, may be given added significance. They will be related to the emotional and sensuous structure created by the author, and they will be brought into organic connection with broader and deeper streams of thought and feelings. Out of this will arise a wider perspective and a readjustment of the framework of values with which to meet further experiences in literature and life (1968: 107-108).

Robert McGregor (1992) notes that the effect of the literary experience is not limited to an examination of the reader’s self and her world. Rather when the reader reflects on her responses to the text and then questions the response, the reader is able to incorporate the ideas in the text into her reality (1992: 137). Selden and Widdowson explain,

The reader's existing consciousness will have to make certain internal adjustments in order to receive and process the alien viewpoints which the text presents as reading takes place. This situation produces the possibility that the reader's own 'world-view' may be modified as a result of internalising, negotiating and realising the partially indeterminate elements of the text (1993: 57).

Like McGregor and Selden and Widdowson, Rosenblatt explains that if a reader is "functioning freely and spontaneously" (1968: 120), she will be able to reflect on her own response to the text. This will lead to a further examination of the reader's assumptions and judgements about the reader's self and the world as she examines why she has this particular response. This reflexive thinking will help the reader to crystallise her own ideas about the world and help the reader to decide which ideas to incorporate into her world-view and those to reject (1968: 20). Additionally, "literature can play an important part in the process through which the individual becomes assimilated into the cultural pattern" (1968: 187). Rosenblatt explains,

Literary works may help him to understand himself and his own problems more completely and may liberate him from his secret self-doubting and personal anxieties. Literature's revelation of the diverse elements of our complex cultural heritage may free him from the provincialism of his own necessarily limited environment. Books may often provide him with an image of the kind of personality and way of life that he will seek to achieve (1968: 273).

In this way, the text and the reflexive process undertaken by the reader when she examines the response to the text has the potential to change the reader.

It is these potential consequences of the literary experience that underpin this research insofar as the research will examine if the study of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* can help the learners to examine their notions of beauty and to consider whether these notions affect the learner. This research may show that literature can play a part in the process in which the individual comes to

reject the cultural pattern, in this case the socially constructed norms of beauty.

While reader response theory presents a strong argument for how literature can potentially change a reader's worldview, Mellor et al. (1992) warn of potential problems. They raise the possibility that the learners' responses to a particular text may be learned responses. In other words, the teacher indicates to the learners in some way which response is more valued than another (1992: 41). In addition, the learners may be giving responses that they perceive to fit with the teacher's worldview. Therefore, it is difficult to ensure the spontaneous atmosphere that promotes the literary experience and the resultant changes to which Rosenblatt refers. Thus it is difficult to ascertain which responses are in fact genuine and which are constructed for the teacher. The legitimacy of any change of attitudes to constructs of beauty will be affected if the learners, who participated in the research, offer up learned responses.

2.2 Feminist Poststructuralism

As mentioned above, Rosenblatt stresses the importance of recognising that what the reader brings to the text will impact the literary experience. Because the activities during the research revolved around the notions of beauty, it is imperative to understand how the learners have come to understand their own experiences of beauty. The theory of feminist poststructuralism sheds light on how women's experiences develop. It is through the lens of this theory that I will examine how the

learners have come to understand beauty and how they react to the text of *The Bluest Eye* and the subsequent activities.

Chris Weedon (1997) points out that, while feminist theories are critical of the gender roles in society, they do not explain why women continue to choose roles that perpetuate a system of patriarchy, oppression and subordination (1997: 12). However the theory of feminist poststructuralism attempts to explain how an individual's subjectivity is formed. According to Weedon, "'[s]ubjectivity' is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (1997: 32). The individual's subjectivity is influenced by the social structures and practices and their relevant discourses to which the individual is exposed. Weedon explains that it is language that is the important element in understanding our experiences in relation to the dominant discourses that inform our subjectivity. Weedon explains,

As we acquire language, we learn to give voice—meaning—to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which predate our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify structure our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity (1997: 32).

Therefore language is the "common factor" (1997: 21) by which society's structures are examined. It is where meanings are contested and constructed. Thus if language is constructed and it "constitute[s] our consciousness" (1997: 32), then our subjectivity is, in turn, constructed and not inherent. (1997: 21)

Moreover, a woman's subjectivity is constantly under reconstruction. Every time she is exposed to a new discourse, a woman's past experiences obtain new meaning in light of the language of the new discourse. Weedon explains that "language as a

system [is] always existing in historically specific discourses” (1997: 23). One word can have multiple, if not contradictory, meanings. Weedon brings the example of the word ‘woman’ and its possible meanings of “ideal to victim to object of sexual desire” (1997: 25) to demonstrate this point. In this light, context becomes vital to the understanding of the word ‘woman’ as the meaning of it is only specific to the particular context. In the same way, the data of this research will be analysed through the lens of feminist poststructuralism in order to identify how the learners have come to understand the term ‘beauty’.

The context of language becomes important to the understanding of how the subjectivity of an individual is constructed. Dominant discourses create social structures. Weedon draws on Althusser to explain how the social structures provide preconditioned roles for the individual to accept.

Language, in the form of what Althusser calls ‘ideology in general’, is the means by which individuals are governed by the ideological state apparatuses in the interest of the ruling class, gender or racial group. The way in which ideology functions for the individual, according to Althusser, is by *interpellating* her as a subject, that is, constituting her subjectivity for her in language (1997: 29).

As language is the means by which the individual understands her reality— the said social structures— it is language that positions her within these discursively constructed norms, thus ensuring that she adopts the preconditioned role created by the dominant discourse (1997: 30). In other words, the individual is a product of the society in which she finds herself.

Feminist poststructuralism does not see the individual as passively accepting her subjectivity. Rather, the theory provides ways to challenge the existing discourse and

its constructed positions. The dominant discourses in society rely on the individual to accept and fulfil her role set out for her. Weedon clarifies,

Language, in the form of socially and historically specific discourses, cannot have any social and political effectivity except in and through the actions of the individuals who become its bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposed and acting upon them (1997:34).

In this light, if the power of the discourse lies in the individual accepting her predetermined role, then it becomes apparent that the individual has the ability to challenge the discourse. Weedon suggests that language, which gives meaning to the world and as a result constructs her subjectivity, it is also what enables the individual to be a “thinking subject” (1997: 31) and as a result, she can challenge the discourse. By not accepting her role that has been shaped for her, the individual can, at the very least, begin to change the dominant discourse, if not rob it of its power.

Weedon explains how alternative discourses can be another way to resist the dominant discourse. Often the resistance discourses can be born from the existing discourse, as the predetermined roles constructed by the dominant discourse also “imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal” (1997: 106). Reverse discourses are important as they provide an alternative space for the individual to imagine other subjectivities and give voice to them. Reverse discourses challenge the notion that the existing discourse is natural and the subject positions of the individuals are innate. It is this opposition to the power structures which “enables the production of the new resistant discourses” (1997: 106). Weedon notes that resistant discourses will not necessarily have the same power as the dominant discourse. However, in order for the resistant discourse to have any effect in society, it must be present even if it has a peripheral existence. Weedon explains,

Much feminist discourse is, for example, either marginal to or in direct conflict with dominant definitions of femininity and its social constitution and regulation. Yet even where feminist discourses lack the social power to realize their versions of knowledge in institutional practices, they can offer the discursive space from which the individual can resist dominant subject positions (1997: 107).

If this is so then it seems that through providing the learners the space to challenge already existing constructs of beauty and access to new and alternative discourses, there is potential for seeing a change in the learners' notions of beauty.

While there is this possibility of change in the learner's social constructs of beauty, the theory also warns of the possibility of the learner rebuffing any new notions of beauty. Weedon explains that this is because the learner's subjectivities are in constant flux because the forms of subjectivity are always changing due to the "shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them . . . [therefore] the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity" (1997: 33). As the individual is a site of constant flux, as she is exposed to an alternative way of representing her past experience, she can either adopt the new system of meaning or reject it.

In this way, the theory of feminist poststructuralism is important for this research as it highlights the reality that the learners will have ready-made concepts of beauty based on their social constructs. More so, it raises the real possibility of the learners rejecting any new perceptions of beauty.

2.3 Critical Literacy

While the workbook used in this research project does not fall primarily into the category of critical literacy, its outcomes are similar to the goals of critical literacy practices. McKinney draws on the works of Giroux and Freire to explain that critical literacy is the process by which learners are able to use analytical skills to examine how knowledge is constructed both historically and socially (2004: 64). The learners would apply these skills in their reading of different types of text such as novels, advertisements, newspapers and films. The learners identify and analyse aspects of the text that produce “injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices, and authoritarian social structures” (Ellsworth 1989: 300). The aim then is for the learners to use these tools to examine their own constructed selves in an effort to reach “emancipation (through the rational process of increasing students’ knowledge and understanding) and empowerment” (McKinney 2004: 64).

By employing the skills of critical literacy, learners are able to deconstruct a text successfully. They are able to write critical essays that discuss the constructed meaning of the text, the way the text positions its audience and the messages it transmits. However, as Janks (2002) points out, the fact that learners are able to assess a text critically does not mean that they are able to be transformed by the process. They might be able to explain the “faulty logic, look for silences in the text, criticise the values that underpin the text and reveal the underlying assumptions” (2002: 9) but the ability to assess a text critically does not guarantee that the learners will experience self growth or an attitudinal change.

The reason why critical literacy often does not transform learners' practices can be better understood in the light of feminist poststructuralism. How an individual relates to her world and makes meaning of her world depends on her exposure to various discourses. Gonick (1997: 72) explains,

These discourses subject girls to the limitations, the ideologies and the subject positions made available within them. It is through and in relation to these discourses and others in which they participate that their selves are defined (Davies, 1992, p. 64) ... Like we all do all the time, young readers are in the process of fashioning for themselves from the discourses available to them, a sense of self. They are negotiating consciously, perhaps for the first time who it is they are told they are and who it is they would like to be. (1997: 72)

If so, adolescent girls who are exposed to the media, teen magazines specifically, are subjected to the discourse of beauty as presented by this medium. Although they are “negotiating consciously” their sense of self, if this discourse of beauty is the only one presented to them then they have no other option but to learn from it who they should be. In addition to clear messages about how the girls should look and act, magazines instil in their audiences desires and aspirations to meet the standards set up in the magazine. In this way desire is also constructed. In other words, as the girls learn how to be, so too they learn what to desire. Gonick explains that the girls see the ideal of beauty as ‘not-me’ and “the ‘not-me’ becomes me in fantasy” (1997: 80). Therefore an individual's identity and desire are inseparable.

When a text challenges a learner's identity, the text also challenges the learner's desires. Janks explains that texts that “touch something ‘sacred’” (2002: 20) are threatening to learners. McKinney adds that if a learner's identity is challenged by a particular text, it is more likely that the learner will not change her practices but will instead “resist critical literacy” (2004: 65). It follows then, that it is difficult to

“disrupt” a learner’s identity and desires (Gonick1997: 73). As a result rationalistic tools of critical literacy will “fail to loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations of, for example, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation” (Ellsworth 1989: 313-314). In other words, a learner will be able to explain rationally why a text positions her in a particular way. However this does not mean that the learner will be able to undergo an attitudinal change as Janks explains, “[w]here identification promises the fulfilment of desire, reason cannot compete” (2002:10).

2.4 Beauty²

As the research explores the possible change in the learner’s attitudes towards beauty, it is necessary to examine notions of beauty. Firstly, I will look at the notion of an ideal beauty as an external gaze and the effects on women of being under the constant scrutiny of the Gaze. Secondly, I will show how the media, and women’s fashion magazines in particular, provide the cultural standard of an ideal beauty and how this in turn constructs women. Thirdly, I will examine alternatives to a media constructed beauty.

2.4.1 The Gaze

The power of the Gaze, of the ideal of beauty, can be understood in relation to Foucault’s theory of the permanent Gaze. Foucault (1995) uses the example of Bentham’s Panopticon, a prison with a central watchtower, to explain how constant surveillance is an effective way of ensuring the “automatic functioning of power”

² Parts of this section are from my essay for “Materials Development” (July-November 2005) that theorises the workbook to be used in the research.

(1995: 201). Even if the prisoner is not sure if there is a person present in the watchtower, the prisoner feels watched because of the very presence of the tower itself. Consequently, “the gaze is alert everywhere” (1995: 195). Today Foucault’s Gaze is the idealised notion of beauty that gazes “from every billboard, every movie, every glance” (Morrison 1990: 28).

The prisoner under the ever-present gaze of the Panopticon acts as if she is being watched. In this way she is disciplined by the Gaze and acts accordingly. In the same way, women unconsciously internalise concepts of beauty, and the internalisation leads to a change in their behaviour. To begin with, the Gaze restricts women’s choices. As early as 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft described the entrapment of women’s bodies by societal notions of beauty. She wrote, as quoted by Susan Bordo:

To preserve personal beauty, woman’s glory! The limbs and faculties are cramped with worse than Chinese bands . . . [women] are slaves to their bodies, and glory in their subjection . . . women are everywhere in this deplorable state. . . . Taught from infancy that beauty is woman’s sceptre, mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison (Bordo 1993: 18).

Wollstonecraft’s observations still hold true today, despite the strides made by the Feminist movement. Marianne Thesander (1997) explains that women change their bodies in order to suit “the physical ideal” (1997: 18) and that it is only through augmentation that the body, and hence the woman, can be given value (1997:18). Beauty enslaves women, as they are only valued when they fit the mould of the created norm. Women are not free “to imagine one’s own future and to be proud of one’s own life” (Wolf 1990: 63).

For Naomi Wolf (1990), the Gaze has political implications. She argues that the need for women to change their bodies “undoes feminism” which “taught women to put a higher value on [them]selves” (1990: 161). When women diet and degrade their bodies they are seeking to rid themselves of their femaleness and hence they are expressing a lack of self-worth (1990: 161).

The Gaze also affects the way people treat others. The modern ideal is slimness. It is associated with discipline and self-control (Thesander 1997: 32) and thus being overweight is associated with laziness and lack of self-control. Thesander explains that being obese or “overweight are regarded as signs of lower social status” (1997: 32). This extends to all parts of one’s life as it results in “biases that affect hiring and promotion practices, peer relationships, dating opportunities, self-esteem [and] stigmatising experiences” (Walcott et al. 2003: 231).

Jones et al. (2004) show how the gaze of one’s peers has a profound impact on self-development. Peer gazes occur in two ways. The first is through conversations with friends about appearance. Peer conversations draw attention to appearance and the importance of appearance in the friendship (2004: 324). Girls then strive to maintain the appearance that is expected of them in order to maintain their social context.

The second type of peer gazing is through peer criticism (2004: 324). When girls are criticised by their peers, the criticism reinforces the current ideal of beauty and highlights the particular deficits in the criticised adolescent. Jones et al. comment that there is a considerable connection between peer criticism about appearance and

poor body image. This further indicates how girls internalise the critical gaze of their peers.

Catherine Steiner-Adair (1990) accounts for the influence of peer gazing on self esteem. She explains,

Since females develop a sense of identity in the context of relationships, girls are naturally more dependent on and vulnerable to external references impacting on their sense of identity.... Girls are encouraged to remain fluid and ambiguous between their self-definition and external confirmation in self – definition; girls are oriented toward an external audience for a sense of self, for making judgements, and for signs that will confirm self-esteem (1990: 165).

In this light, social groups play an important role in the identity formation for adolescent girls. According to Mary Pipher (1994), girls are very concerned about ‘fitting in’. She describes adolescent girls as “‘female impersonators’ [who] stop thinking, ‘Who am *I*? What do *I* want?’ and start thinking, ‘What must I do to please *others*?’” (My emphasis) (1994: 22). The desire to belong to a social group causes girls to adopt the cultural norms that are expected of them in order to be accepted by their peers. By doing so, girls suspend their authentic selves in social situations for one that is “culturally scripted” (1994: 38). Along with a prescription to act a certain way, girls also need to look a certain way in order to be accepted by their peers. Consequently beauty becomes social collateral.

Pipher observes that the cultural norm of beauty is becoming harder to achieve and in a world where appearance defines social status this can be problematic as “many girls become good haters of those who do not conform sufficiently to our culture’s ideas about femininity” (1994: 68). Pipher reports that girls are afraid of being fat because it means that their peers will ridicule them and finally reject them altogether (1994:

184). Accordingly, peer approval becomes a powerful vehicle in determining the self esteem of an adolescent girl.

The Gaze also causes extreme behaviours such as eating disorders. Susan Bordo argues that an examination of eating disorders in a feminist/cultural paradigm reveals that the disorders are learned practices. The pervasiveness of the cultural norms in disordered eating is evident in the common refrain of anorexics who claim that they are not thin enough or that they are “still too fat” (1993: 55). This shows a correlation between the disorder and society’s demands for women to be thin.

Furthermore, anorexia is an example of how the Gaze is internalised. An anorexic is an example of what Foucault describes as one who does not require an external disciplinarian. Instead, she just needs “an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that [she] is [her] own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against [her]self” (Bordo 1993: 27).

2.4.2 The Media and Beauty

Jones et al. state that adolescents internalise images of cultural standards of beauty and that it is these standards of media-produced appearance that “come to represent personal goals and standards against which to judge self and others” (2004: 324). As a result of exposure to this “lookism” saturated culture (Pipher 1994: 34), they learn to judge their bodies from a young age. In fact, Steiner-Adair draws attention to one

study that shows that by age five girls have learned to “hate obesity” and another study that reveals that adolescent girls, in particular, experience high levels of anxiety about their appearance (1990: 168).

Jean Grimshaw (1999) writes that Sandra Bartky speaks of the media, specifically the beauty industry, in a way that is reminiscent of Foucault’s theory of the Panopticon:

[Bartky] notes the ‘facelessness’ of many imperatives of the fashion-beauty industry, which seem to emanate from nowhere and from no one in particular. No one apparently ‘makes’ women diet, walk in high heels, dress fashionably or wear mascara. But the power of these imperatives, she suggests, derives precisely from their facelessness; it is easier to regard them as purely self-chosen and the discipline involved as self-imposed (1999: 94).

Like Jones et al., Bartky identifies the media as the ever-present Gaze. Pipher too speaks of the media in foucauldian terms. She says that adolescent girls suffer from “imagined audience syndrome” as they constantly feel watched and judged (1994: 60).

The media offers up beauty on a silver platter for all to indulge in despite the fact that the images of beauty are unattainable by most women. The media makes women believe they are able to obtain beauty and thus happiness. However, “beauty is only the promise of happiness” (Nuttall, still to be published: 11). Thesander explains that it is necessary for the media to project an unattainable ideal because if everyone could be beautiful then there would be no reason to strive for it (1997: 33). Yet at the same time the media, especially fashion magazines, promises that everyone could and should be beautiful.

Wolf places the spotlight on women's magazines as the media's very powerful tool in transforming women. She explains that before Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, women's magazines concentrated on the guilt of the housewife by promoting cleaning agents and groceries that would make housewives better women. However, after "the insecure housewife fled the feminine mystique for the workplace", magazines shifted the emphasis and guilt to the body (1990: 48). In doing so, the magazine industry made physical beauty the quality to strive for to improve one's life. As magazines are the forums for women to find out what is the current notion of beauty, magazines hold significant power.

The power of the beauty magazine extends to adolescent magazines. The Renfrew Center Foundation provides startling statistics that show the impact of magazines on girls. After viewing a magazine, 47% of girls aged 10 to 18 wanted to lose weight and 69% said that the pictures in the magazine influenced their concept of a perfect body.³

Wolf points out that magazines divide women. Ideals of beauty set women up against each other as women judge each other according to the ideals. She writes, "Beauty thinking teaches women to be enemies until they are friends . . . women are trained to be competitors against all others for beauty" (1990: 57). The magazines enforce the division by setting up binaries of beautiful and ugly, fat and thin, old and young, and toned and fleshy. The division creates envy among women. The magazines rely on envy to sell their products, as it is this emotion that drives women to invest in the ideal of beauty.

³ The Renfrew Center Foundation is an American organisation that aims at educating, preventing and treating eating disorders. <http://www.renfrewcenter.com> last retrieved 30/07/06.

The media does not only project the way a woman's body should look, but according to Greer (1999) and Pipher (1994) the media also sexualises the female body. Pipher criticises the media for objectifying the female body to sell unrelated products such as "tractors and toothpaste" (1994: 27). This phenomenon is not limited to America but is also present in the South African media. For example, when the first BMW dealership opened in Soweto in 1989, the *Sowetan* newspaper featured the owner Richard Maponya and a car surrounded by beautiful women (Ribane 2006: 66). Greer observes that girls learn from teen magazines not only to dislike their bodies but how to be sexual. The magazines are filled with articles about how to attract and act around boys. Beauty is no longer just brokerage for peer acceptance but it is now enmeshed with sexualising girls at young age (Greer 1999: 326) resulting in beauty becoming synonymous with sexy. In addition the magazines do not focus on the activities that girls *are* engaged in such as sport, theatre and academics but rather they focus on ways to attract boys (1999: 329). Therefore the message the teen magazines send is that "regardless of all her other achievements, [a girl] is a failure if she is not beautiful" (1999: 23).

2.4.3 Alternative Perspectives

Nuttall and Wolf offer an alternative to media-constructed notions of beauty. Nuttall opens up the possibility of beauty not only being visual but also being perceived by the other senses. She writes, "Beauty (like ugliness) belongs to the world of sensations" (Nuttall, still to be published: 18). When one thinks of beauty in the trope of senses, then one removes the focus from the visual aesthetics. In doing so, beauty

is redefined as something felt and experienced, as opposed to something seen. By asking the learners to think about how they could experience beauty through their senses, they have the opportunity to begin the process of shifting from the visual aspect of beauty.

For Wolf, change will come when one alters the perspective of how one views oneself, in other words, when women see themselves as beautiful without the influence of a Gaze. Once women admire themselves without a social construct of beauty then beauty will have no power (1990: 237). As Wolf writes,

Just as the beauty myth did not really care what women looked like as long as they felt ugly, to get beyond it we must see that it does not matter what women look like as long as they feel beautiful (1990: 228).

2.4.4 Race and Beauty

The theory of how race has influenced constructs of beauty is important to this research for two reasons. First, race and beauty is a prominent theme in the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Second, the racial make up of the research group demands an examination of race and beauty as two of the learners are black and one is coloured. Consequently it is important to examine the effects of a racially constructed image of beauty.

This discussion of race and beauty will examine how race has influenced constructs of beauty from colonial to modern day ideas of beauty in America and South Africa. It is important to unpack the development of race and beauty in America as the

media, in the forms of cinema, television, magazines and the internet transport, and perhaps transplant, constructs of beauty from America to South Africa. This becomes very apparent when viewing the research data as the learners often reference American actors and musicians as icons of beauty.

According to theorists Janell Hobson (2005) and bell hooks (1981 and 1992), the representation of black women today as the “black deviant female body” (Hobson 2005: 3) is firmly rooted in colonialism and slavery. Despite various attempts in history to shake this perception of black women, it continues to persist.

Hobson highlights Sara Baartman as a prime example of the exploitation of the black female body during colonialism. Baartman, a Khoisan woman, was taken to Europe to be exhibited in the early 1800’s as an example of a person suffering from an extended buttocks, a condition known as steatopygia. Hobson describes how George Cuvier, an acclaimed anatomist, removed and preserved Baartman’s brain and genitalia as scientific proof that there were biological differences between Africans and Europeans. In addition, her body was kept at the Musee del l’Homme in Paris (2005: 1-2) until its recent return to South Africa. In this way, Baartman became evidence of “an accepted ideology of racial and sexual difference” (2005: 6). This process served to objectify her as she lost her identity as a person and as a woman. She became an exhibition in ‘freak’ shows when she was alive and an artefact in a museum when she was dead. Her life reflects the general colonial attitude towards black women, that of objects to be exploited for the needs of the colonial power.

In addition, due to Baartman's extended buttocks, she "came to symbolize both the presumed ugliness and heightened sexuality of the African race during her era" (2005: 1). As she looked so different to the 'civilized' white women of Europe, Baartman was described as "savage" and a "freak" (2005: 4). Drawing on Foucault, Hobson explains why the difference in appearance to white women caused Baartman to be perceived in such a way. Hobson writes,

[Foucault] locates visual culture as a space for regulation and installment of "disciplinary regime" and the body as a site for contested power (Foucault, 193). Perceptions of "visual" difference, based on spectacle and surveillance, are thus assigned social and cultural values, mapped onto the body, and given political meaning. Thus, the spectacle of black bodies exists as a "deviation" in comparison with the "normative" white body.... Such alarm and fabricated otherness extends itself to a racialized sense of aesthetics that position blackness in terms of grotesquerie, whereas whiteness serves as an emblem of beauty (2005: 10).

Thus the fate and perception of Sara Baartman as grotesque is extended to all black women as they are excluded from the 'beauty' of whiteness.

The white explorers and missionaries in Africa experienced other examples of ways in which black women were different to white women of the time. The black women they encountered were bare-breasted. The dances of the women emphasised "breasts, hips and buttocks" (2005: 93) which were in direct contrast to the 'modest' European dances. The unclad, hip-sashaying women fuelled the racist notions of black women as sexually deviant as they, like Baartman, "suffer[ed] under the dominant cultural gaze that defines her as an anomaly, a freak, oversexed and subhuman" (2005: 6).

The notion of black women as "fallen" (hooks 1981: 52) stems from their experience of slavery and the perception of black women during the emancipation years. hooks

explains that during slavery the social order placed black women last after white men, white women and black men (1981: 53). As a result they lacked any protection from sexual abuse. It was more than common for the white male slave owner to sexually exploit his female slaves. Thus black women were functional as labourers and desired for sexual exploits. In this way, they were the antithesis to white women “in a Europeanized context that equated femininity with weakness” (Hobson 2005:12). Hobson argues that as it was the women’s black skin that caused her functionality and desirability, so too it was her skin that set her apart from white women. Hence, her skin colour is what caused her to be perceived as deviant from the white norm and hence grotesque (2005: 12).

During the years following emancipation in America, black women tried to shake off the perception of women as “sexually permissive” and hence “depraved, immoral, and loose” (hooks 1981: 52). hooks explains that this was a difficult task. After emancipation, the success and achievements of the black population, threatened the white power in society. As a result, the Jim Crow laws were established to maintain the social order and with that came the continuation of the perception of black women as ‘fallen’ (1981: 60). In addition, negative images of the black body were being portrayed in the arts and in the media. Maxine Leeds Craig (2002) explains,

Over and over again, in brutal caricatures, physical attributes of blacks were associated with the negative character traits and low social positions. Racist ideologies created social hierarchies based on visible physical differences. Blacks were stigmatized on the basis of their skin color, the texture of their hair, and the shape of their lips. Countless reproduction of derogatory images of blacks in the form of cartoon drawings, figurines, or burlesqued portrayals by white actors in blackface established and reinforced the widespread association of dark skin, kinky hair, and African facial features with ugliness, comedy, sin or danger (2004: 24).

In a society where white women were being held as the standard of beauty, these images together with the Jim Crow laws, served to denigrate black women and deem them ugly.

For the black woman, if it was her 'ugly' body that caused her to lack equality in society, she would attempt to beautify it in order to gain her equality and dignity. Black leaders encouraged women to dress modestly and maintain a tidy appearance. They believed "the good character of the race had to be visibly demonstrated by every black woman" (Leeds Craig 2002: 31). Because black women could not change the colour of their skin, they sought to change other parts of their appearance that would make them less black and thus more 'beautiful' and dignified. As a result, women embraced the hair straightening iron as a "weapon in the battle to defeat racist depictions of blacks" (2002: 35). They came to see straight hair as a symbol "self-control, discipline and skill" (2002: 37) and they passed this 'value' onto their daughters.

Despite the fact that black women straightened their hair for decades in order to undo the racist perceptions, the negative connotations of black skin continued to persist because black women could never truly conform to the constructs of beauty as the dominant discourse still hailed white women as the icons of beauty. Even black women who did appear in cinema were lighter skinned. Some studies show that lighter skinned women were more likely to marry and gain employment (2002: 42), thus adding the promise of love and acceptance to the list of things from which women with darker skin would be excluded. Children's playground songs mocked darker skinned children (2002: 29). Furthermore, studies were conducted on black

communities that concluded that black people had low self esteem. Even though this theory would later be challenged, the idea of low self esteem and self-hatred had formed part of the black person's psyche (2002: 28-29). These examples show that, on some level, the black community internalised the racist construct of beauty.

In the 1960's, the younger generation, through the "black is beautiful" movement, sought to undo both the image of the self-hating black and the need to conform to a standard of beauty. The women of the older generation were horrified by the 'natural' hair that their younger counterparts had embraced. However, the youth welcomed the new idea of "black is beautiful" as a way to undo the perceptions of the past. Where their mothers had seen the straightening iron as a tool of liberation and conformity and as a way to escape the perceptions of the black woman as ugly, sexual and primitive, the younger generation saw the iron as a tool of oppression (2002: 30).

It was significant that the word 'black' was used in the slogan "black is beautiful".

Leeds Craig explains,

When African Americans of all shades declared that "black is beautiful," they were defying a racial order that held all blacks down but had granted some advantage to blacks who were physically closer to whites. By embracing the word "black," and not "brown," "colored," or "yellow," "black is beautiful" subverted white supremacist social rankings (2002: 42).

In this way, the "black is beautiful" movement was aimed at providing a new discourse of beauty for the black population and made the body a site for political rebellion. Sander Gilman (1999) explains that the character of a race was often linked to the body's aesthetics. He brings the example of how Kant saw the appearance of Africans as proof of their characteristics as "lazy, inactive and slow" (1999: 51). If it is the case that African Americans had internalised the racist

construct of beauty, then the underlying message of “black is beautiful” is that “black is good”. Thus the black community “had found a new way to see itself” (Leeds Craig 2002: 23).

Despite the efforts of the proponents of the “black is beautiful” movement to promote an alternative black aesthetic, according to hooks and Hobson, the image of the black woman in America resembles more the notion of the black woman as a primitive, exotic and sexually deviant being. Black women are often portrayed in cinema and movies in two ways. The first is as the *mammy* figure, very much based on the black caretaker of white families. She is maternal, often large in size but never beautiful or sexually appealing. The second way, according to hooks (1992), is often as the controlling, nagging and irrational girlfriend or wife. hooks describes her reaction to the character of Sapphire in the popular series *Amos and Andy* as a depiction of a black woman:

She was even then backdrop, foil. She was a bitch—nag. She was there to soften images of black men, to make them seem vulnerable, easygoing, funny and unthreatening to white audience.... We laughed at this woman who was not us. And we did not even long to be there on the screen. How could we long to be there when our image, visually constructed, was so ugly? We did not long to be there. We did not long for her. We did not want our construction to be this hated black female thing—foil, backdrop. Her black female image was not the body of desire. There was nothing to see. She was not us (1992: 120).

In other words, the depiction of black women in the media was unrealistic and portrayed them as how they were perceived. hooks (1981) notes that later soap operas would position black female characters with distorted features against their white counterparts who were, by contrast, images of the dominant construct of beauty (1981: 65-66). These images of black women served to equate black women with ugliness.

Hobson discusses how, even in the late twentieth century, black women were associated with the exotic and the primitive. She brings two examples to illustrate her point. The first is the Sudanese model Alek Wek. On one hand she is a positive role model who broke many stereotypes of what is considered beautiful. However, on the other hand, her appeal harkens back to Sara Baartman in the sense that she is depicted as the exotic, the Other (2005:8). Wek's presence in the beauty world can be likened to the Benneton advertisements that paired black and white models to sell their product. In this way, otherness is exploited "to highlight the whiteness, and the longing of whites to inhabit, if only for a time, the world of the Other" (hooks 1992:28). Consequently, Wek's presence on the cover of beauty magazines reinforces the image of black women as the exotic Other.

Another example Hobson highlights is Grace Jones. She participated in a performing arts show in which her husband, no less, put her and a tiger in cages. She roared like the tiger and at one point ate a piece of raw meat. This image of her in a cage, together with the sign "Do not feed the animal" prominently displayed, serves only to fuel the image of the black woman as animalistic and primitive (2005: 98). Hobson further notes how the stereotype of the 'fallen woman' is resurrected in music videos, especially of the rap genre, that often depict black women gyrating to the music (2005: 102-103). Black women become "un-mirrored" (2005: 106) through these unrealistic portrayals in the media.

Hobson observes that in the twenty-first century black women are still being portrayed as the exotic 'Other' and thus labelled 'ugly':

Because of perceived racial and sexual difference, which, as we have seen, has historical and cultural associations with grotesque and deviant sexuality, black women, who have attempted an aesthetic of the body, still struggle to articulate an affirming discourse of black female beauty. This struggle involves not only recovering the “un-mirrored” body but also reclaiming agency and subjectivity (2005: 106).

In other words, until black women are able to overcome the perception of themselves as deviant and primitive, they will always be competing, unsuccessfully, with the white construct of beauty. As a result they will be unable to maintain an identity that is not defined in relation to whiteness. Thus Hobson calls for the creation of a new black aesthetic that “challenge[s] dominant culture’s discourse of the black body grotesque and articulate[s] a black liberation discourse on the black body beautiful” (2005: 15).

Nakedi Ribane (2006) provides an insight into South African constructs of beauty in her book *Beauty: A Black Perspective*. She describes how white domination in the forms of colonialism and later Apartheid made black women feel inferior about their bodies. Because of the colour of their skin, black women were restricted in their rights and movement. They were left without dignity and filled with shame about their black skin (2006: 2-3). Ribane explains that “‘Whiteness’ became the aspirant colour that could open doors to opportunity of all kinds and ‘Blackness’ acquired the negative connotation it still sometimes has today” (2006: 2).

During Apartheid, whiteness was associated with desirability and beauty, while blackness was associated with ugliness. Ribane explains,

Because they were looked down upon in every way, Africans learnt to look down on themselves. If the continual message you are being bombarded with is: you don’t look good, smell good, do good and you

are good for nothing, then how can you not feel bad about yourself? How can you love your dark skin, when it puts you at the bottom of the political and social ladder? The social hierarchy of this country has always favoured lightness. Privileges of all kinds were connected with being White. Even if you weren't White, the lighter skinned you were, the better your chances in life would be. And the lighter you were in complexion, the more beautiful you were perceived to be (2006: 11).

This was particularly true for black beauty contests. The winners of such contests in the 1950's and 1960's reflected more of a western (or white) ideal of beauty as judges felt that they would have to compete against "lissom world beauties" (2006: 3).

However, Apartheid was not the only influence on the construct of beauty in South Africa. Many of the same icons of beauty that graced the celluloid of America and Europe were also being heralded as such in South Africa (2006: xiii). Just as these images influenced the self esteem of African American women, they similarly damaged black South African women who were once again reminded that they were excluded from the projected ideal of beauty.

Black women in South Africa reacted to the white construct of beauty in various ways. Many women embraced skin-lightening creams in the 1960's as an attempt to erase the colour of their skin. A lighter skin promised a better life (2006: 51).

Additionally, like their American counterparts, black South African women saw their bodies as a form of political protest. This was particularly true during the 1950's—the Sophiatown era. Ribane explains that it was a time "when the flame of glamour, beauty, creativity and defiance burned high" (2006: 2). Women and men donned fashionable clothes in order to counter the dominant culture's perception of them as uncivilized and ugly.

Despite the new freedoms and attitudes towards blackness in post-Apartheid South Africa, western notions of beauty still dominate. Even though traditional culture equates thin bodies with illness (2006: 12), Zakes Mda explains in the introduction to Ribane's book, "Slimness has now become trendy" (2006: x). Furthermore, black youth are purchasing more beauty products than previous generations (Ribane 2006: 123). Ribane celebrates the fact that three black women won the Miss South Africa contest in 2005. However, a cursory look at the winners (tall, very thin women with straightened hair) reveals that the South African construct of beauty is still influenced by western notions of beauty. Lastly, through the international media, that is so available to South Africans, the African American experience of race and beauty continues to influence the South African discourse of beauty. In other words, black South African women, despite the end of Apartheid, still see images that depict black women as grotesque and defiantly sexual (Hobson 2005: 106). If this is the case, then black South African women, just like African American women, have not been able to reclaim their "agency and subjectivity" (2005: 106).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

3.2 Rationale for the Selection of the Novel *The Bluest Eye*

3.2.1 The Gaze

3.2.2 The Media

3.2.3 Alternative Constructs of Beauty

3.3 Explanation of Teaching Materials: The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself

3.3.1 Content

3.3.2 Design

3.4 Research Context

3.4.1 Research Site

3.4.2 Research Participants

3.5 Research design

3.5.1 Data Collection Techniques

3.5.1.1 Observation

3.5.1.2 Artefacts

3.5.1.3 Interviews

3.5.1.4 The Tension of Authenticity

3.5.2 List of Data

3.5.3 Methods of Data Analysis

3.1 Research Methodology

I have employed a qualitative research methodology for this research report.

Silverman (2000) explains that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring the meaning of “everyday behaviour” (2000: 1) as this type of research provides “a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena” (2000: 8). This understanding of phenomena is achieved because qualitative methodology allows the researcher to gain insight into the issue from the perspective of the research participant. In other words,

it allows the researcher to examine the particular issue from “the informal reality which can only be perceived from the inside” (Gillham 2000: 11). In addition, qualitative methodology also focuses on the processes of the phenomena, leading the researcher to understand how the phenomena develop (2000:11). In this light qualitative research is most suitable for this research, as I will be examining the impact and process of literature on the learners’ worldview.

The qualitative research method I have employed is a single case study. Knobel and Lankshear (1999) explain that the purpose of single case studies is to focus on a particular group or organisation. By examining a “single bounded phenomenon” (1999: 96), the researcher is able to understand the reasons for a particular phenomenon. Gillham notes that a case study is appropriate for research that seeks to analyse “how people understand themselves. . . [their] feelings or perceptions, or their experiences of what is going on” (2000: 7).

In addition to understanding a particular phenomenon, case studies can also be employed in order to prove or disprove a particular theory (Wallace 1998: 163). The researcher can observe how a particular theory, when put into action, plays out in the group. The data yields evidence as to whether the theory applies to the particular group (1998: 164).

The case study method is appropriate for this research for two reasons. The first reason is that the research seeks to understand how the learners’ constructs of beauty have been created and the context in which the constructs exist. It also seeks to understand how any changes to the learners’ worldview came about. In other words,

the research aims to comprehend, from the learner's perspective, how the learners "understand themselves. . . [their] feelings or perceptions, or their experiences" (Gillham 2000: 7) of beauty. The second reason correlates with Wallace's explanation of the purpose for case studies. The research will examine if it is possible to bring about change in the learners' constructs of beauty, by employing reader response theory as a particular way to teach literature.

The unit of work, implemented for the purpose of this research, is appropriate for the case study method. Firstly, it created a forum that tested the theory of reader response which holds that change can take place in the reader through literature. Additionally, the unit of work created a space in which the learners could examine their constructs of beauty. The discussions and artefacts that resulted from the unit of work provide valuable insight into the learners' experience of beauty.

3.2 Rationale for the Selection of the Novel *The Bluest Eye*

The research employs Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* because of the presence of the theme of unattainable beauty in the book. The novel is appropriate for high school girls because it deals with the issues of beauty they face. Chai Feng (1997) explains,

[*The Bluest Eye* is] a story for girls growing up without positive images of themselves reflected in the mirror held up by mainstream society, and constantly under the gaze of the blue eye of dominant ideology (1997: 51).

Additionally, the book embodies the notions of beauty and race as theorised in the theoretical framework above. In this way the novel provides a literary example of the theory.

While the novel explores beauty in relation to race, it can still be used in a multicultural classroom to explore notions of beauty because whiteness, as an ideal in the novel, can be transferred to represent a normative ideal of beauty.

3.2.1 The Gaze

The novel explores the notion of unattainable beauty from the perspective of Pecola Breedlove, a young black girl. Pecola is born into a world in which the dominant culture is white. Yancy (2004) explains that the dominant culture of whiteness creates and perpetuates truths about the world that promote white power. For example, whiteness represents the “universal code of beauty, intelligence, superiority, cleanliness and purity” (2004: 108). By the same token that the white body is the embodiment of these values, the black body, being the absence of white, lacks these values. Consequently, as the white dominant culture constructs truths about whiteness that secure its power, so too it creates truths about blackness. Therefore the black body comes to know itself, in this constructed ‘truth’, as “a denigrated thing of absence and existential insignificance” (2004: 108) in relation to the white body. In this way, this dominant white culture determines that beauty is the white body and ugliness is the black body.

This construct of beauty is most damaging to black women. Grewal (1998) notes that the construct of gender associates women with visual beauty. It follows then, that if white women, who are culturally constructed as beautiful, are associated with sight, then “the cultural production of race makes the black woman unsightly” (1998: 30). Barbara Christian (1993) explains that the notion of black as ugly is a common experience for black women in America. She says,

If there is any experience black women in this hemisphere have in common it is the way our physical appearance, our bodies, have been held against us—how the norms of beauty as self-worth for a woman have systematically been denied us (1993: 197).

This racist construct of gender and beauty affects Pecola and the way she is treated.

Yancy (2004) explains,

It is Pecola as embodied, as negatively epidermized, that is subject to the weight of white power and the white racist gaze. It is her *dark* body, objectified and negatively configured by the normalizing white gaze, and negatively codified by scientific *racialese*, that is the indelible and indubitable mark of her existential and ontological contemptibility (2004: 123-124).

The ‘gaze’ to which Yancy refers is the ideal of beauty that permeates the society in the novel and is used as the racist lens through which people in the society sees others and themselves. Sight is the primary way in which we make meaning of our world. Through sight, we witness the world around us and it is these visual experiences that give testimony to, or rather form truths about our environment and ourselves. Therefore, Pecola sees the world around her as projected by the Gaze of, not only of the white dominant construct, but of her community too. It is through this looking that she forms her idea of herself.

The theme of sight is present already at the beginning of the novel in the primer. A primer is typically used to teach reading skills. However Morrison (1990) uses it to show how it teaches one to expect a particular reality. In the primer the family is “happy”. The mother is described as “nice” and the father is “big and strong” and smiles. Each character and animal is introduced by the action ‘see’ as in “See Jane” (1990: 1). As seeing is a way of witnessing a reality and thus giving credence to it, the repetition of the word ‘see’ asks the reader of the primer to witness the reality, the ‘truth’ of such an ideal existence. The primer teaches the reader that this is the way the world is according to the ‘truth’ presented in the primer. In this way the primer serves two purposes. Firstly, it is used to introduce each chapter as the antithesis to Pecola’s reality, juxtaposing the ideal and the horrific. Secondly, it comes to represent the Gaze as the idealised notion of beauty, experienced through sight, from which Pecola and her family are excluded and by which they are judged.

The idea that the Gaze is an external force that determines beauty is evident in the novel. While Claudia, the narrator, cannot name the racist construct of beauty that determines that light-skinned Maureen is considered more beautiful than her, she knows that it exists. She says, “And all this time we knew that Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made her more beautiful, and not us” (1990: 58). Here Claudia is acknowledging that the Thing/Gaze is outside of her, labelling the beautiful in the world according to skin colour.

The notion that the Gaze is an external force and that it determines beauty is most obvious in the description of the Breedlove’s ugliness:

Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove— wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly: you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes”, they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it (1990: 28-29).

This text makes it evident that the Gaze is external as it describes it as a ‘Master’ – another being- who not only declares them ugly, but gives the ugliness to them to wear. Additionally, their ugliness does “not belong to them” - it is determined by an external force. The Breedloves, seeing that there is support for the Master’s pronouncement of their ugliness in their environment, especially in the eyes of others, accept it. They wear their ugliness like a coat. By equating ugliness to an outer garment, the text further emphasises the external source of their ugliness. It is not part of their bodies, but something given to them that they choose to wear, unquestioningly. By doing so, they not only accept their ugliness, but internalise it, making the coat a permanent fixture on their bodies.

This is especially true for Pecola and her mother Pauline. Both characters accept their ‘ugliness’ while comparing themselves to the white ideal of beauty imposed on them. In doing so they can only conclude that because they are black they are ugly.

Pecola is exposed to this unattainable construct of beauty via the concept of looking. It is present in the greater milieu as all around her she sees movie icons, such as Shirley Temple, who remind her that she is not white and therefore can only be ugly.

It is also present in her community in which she is viewed as ugly by her family, teachers and peers, who in turn have internalised the dominant construct of beauty and project it onto her.

Moreover, Pecola is reminded of her constructed ugliness reflected in the eyes of others. To begin with, her experience in Mr. Yacobowski's store reminds her that her blackness is seen as ugly and makes her invisible. When Pecola enters the store, Mr. Yacobowski must muster every effort to look at her. The text explains how he strenuously "urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her" (1990: 36). Despite his efforts, the word 'encounter' indicates that he does not actually see her but rather merely senses her presence. This is apparent when he realises that she is black and "his eyes draw back . . . and he senses he need not waste the effort of a glance" (1990: 36). It is this absence of seeing that Pecola registers. She is used to seeing at best "curiosity", at worst "disgust" (1990: 36) reflected in other people's eyes. However, it is a "vacuum" (1990: 36) she sees in Mr. Yacobowski's eyes. Despite this, she is familiar with this non-seeing as it is something she often sees in the eyes of white people. Pecola is aware that her black skin causes white people to not look at her because of the revulsion they feel towards her.

When Pecola leaves the store, she takes with her the Mary Jane candies as well as Mr. Yacobowski's vacuous look. Samuels and Hudson-Weens (1990) explain that just as she swallows the candies, "Pecola in her shame reveals that she imbibes the store owner's look and the signification it conveys, not only for him but for all whites" (1990: 18-19). Thus the act of swallowing the candies mirrors the act of internalising her experience in the store.

The effects on Pecola of the internalisation of Mr. Yacobowski's disdain are made clear in how she views the dandelions. The dandelions work as bookends to her experience in the store. Before she enters the store, she rejects the common view of them as weeds. She sees them as "pretty" (Morrison 1990: 35) and useful for making soup and wine. Like the dandelions, Pecola, before entering the store, is described with an element of pleasure and anticipation as she thinks of the candies she would buy. However, leaving the store, she looks at the dandelions and declares, "They *are* ugly. They *are* weeds" (1990: 37). When Pecola verbalises this, she is projecting onto the dandelions the way Mr. Yacobowski made her feel, how she now feels about herself. Samuels and Hudson-Weens explain that even the dandelions are now a reminder of what she is not as she sees their "whites and yellows (white skin, blond hair) the colors of her obsession as well as Yacobowski's rejection" (1990: 19). Thus she devours her candies to eliminate her black skin, her ugliness and to become the white Mary Jane.

Geraldine presents another experience through which Pecola is exposed to the detrimental effects of the Gaze. Pecola's encounter with Geraldine is particularly disturbing because, while Mr. Yacobowski was white and thus part of the dominant culture, Geraldine is black. Although Geraldine is black, she is unlike the Breedloves in so many ways. She is described as one of the "sugar-brown" (Morrison 1990: 64) girls who grew up in a middle class neighbourhood. She is taught good behaviour which the text describes as, "The careful development of thrift, patience, high morals and good manners. In short, how to get rid of the funkiness" (1990: 64). She forbids her son, Junior, from playing with black children as she sees herself and her family as

separate from them. For Geraldine, “colored people [are] neat and quiet; niggers [are] dirty and loud” (1990: 67). She wants to keep the funkiness, the blackness, at bay. In this manner she is like Pecola as she internalises the Gaze and tries to make herself as white as possible. She straightens her hair, walks in a way that restrains her buttocks, and never covers her lips completely with lipstick “for fear of lips too thick” (1990: 64). She is described as sleeping in white sheets. The families Sunday shirts are “stiffly starched and white” and they eat “white, Smokey grits” (1990: 65). By surrounding her with images of white, the text is commenting on her desire to infuse her life with whiteness and eliminate the blackness. Unlike Pecola, Geraldine is successful at this, to a certain degree, because she is light skinned and this makes her already more ‘beautiful’ than the Pecola. When she does meet Pecola, she is reminded of the funk (blackness) she has managed to keep at bay and so Pecola becomes the “object of disgust and contempt” (Bouson 2000: 37).

Geraldine, in her attempt to become white, assumes the role of the racist and projects on Pecola the same Gaze she has had to live with her whole life. Bouson explains,

Defensively positioning herself as racially superior to lower-class blacks, Geraldine shuns Pecola, viewing her dark skin as a sign of her stigmatized racial identity. The narrative, as it directs attention to the class differences among black people, describes Geraldine’s prejudice against Pecola, observing the underclass Pecola through Geraldine’s middle-class—and shaming —gaze. . . . The middle class Geraldine, who as an African American in white America is a member of an outsider group, projects the image of Otherness projected onto her by the dominant white culture onto an extension of herself” (2000: 37-38).

In this projection she is finally able to fulfil her desire to be white in that she is able to be in the position of the white racist, judging Pecola according to the white standards to which she aspires.

Not only does Geraldine project the Gaze, she takes on the role of the Gaze. She achieves this in two ways. The first is in the act of seeing. In the description of her meeting Pecola, the text explains how Geraldine “*looked* at Pecola. *Saw* the dirty torn dress...she *saw* the safety pin holding the hem of the dress up....She *looked* at her” (Morrison 1990: 71) (my emphasis). The repetition of the act of looking, places Geraldine firmly in the role of the Gazer. The second way she becomes the Gaze is when she, like the ‘Master,’ pronounces Pecola a “nasty little black bitch” (1990:72) thus assigning a value judgement to Pecola’s skin colour. Samuels and Hudson-Weens note that “Geraldine’s proclivity toward achieving a perfection associated with whites victimizes and scars Pecola” (1990: 13). It is particularly scarring because Pecola is now not only declared ugly and insignificant by the white dominant culture, but by her own community.

Moreover, these experiences teach Pecola that being beautiful also means being loved. This is obvious to her in the way that Shirley Temple is loved. She also witnesses the way people value Maureen because she has lighter skin. Barbara Christian (1993) explains the correlation between being beautiful and being valued. She says,

What Morrison dramatize[s] so beautifully in *The Bluest Eye* [is] the relationship between the value of woman’s physical self and philosophical concepts about society’s definition of the good and the beautiful. How societies are fixated on *The Body* rather than valuing the fact that there are many bodies. How we create hierarchies of worth based on *The Body* as a manifestation of class, wealth, virtue, goodness. And because black women’s bodies have been the object of systematic abuse for all of this century’s history, it stands to reason that our bodies would be placed lowest in the hierarchy (1993: 198).

In this light Pecola has much to gain from having blue eyes. Such a change not only heralds promises of beauty but of being loved.

Because Pecola encounters the likes of Mr. Yacobowski and Geraldine who confirm her ugliness, she internalises all these messages and comes to believe that she is ugly. As the novel reports, “She would never know her own beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people” (Morrison 1990: 35). Pecola believes in her worthlessness that is confirmed by “every billboard, every movie, every glance” (1990: 28). Her feeling of insignificance causes her to want to disappear. She prays for this to happen.

She squeezes her eyes shut. Little parts of her body fade away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left (1990: 33).

As Pecola cannot complete her disappearance, she tries to change herself. If she cannot get rid of herself then, not unlike Geraldine, she wants to rid herself of “the ugliness that made her ignored and despised” (1990: 34). And so she prays for blue eyes. She drinks copious amounts of white milk from a Shirley Temple cup and devours Mary Jane candies, all in the hopes to become the colour of the milk, the colour of Shirley Temple and Mary Jane. Yancy explains, “Perhaps the whiteness in the milk will create a metamorphosis, a transubstantiation, changing her from black to white, from absent to present, from nothing to something” (2004: 128). When all of these attempts to whiten herself fail, she slips into another reality. Here her desires are realised and she believes herself to be blue-eyed and consequently beautiful and loved.

Thus the novel *The Bluest Eye* is an obvious choice for a study in literature and beauty. It provides ample material to discuss the notion of beauty as an external gaze and the process of internalising the messages of the Gaze. In presenting Pecola as an extreme example of the effect of the Gaze, the novel provides an opportunity for the participants to discuss the possibility of their own internalisation of the Gaze.

Discussions about the extracts from the novel, in which Pecola interacts with Mr. Yacobowski and Geraldine, allow for the learners to examine the form of the Gaze in their own lives. The theme of a racially constructed beauty is also relevant. Bouson explains, “*The Bluest Eye*, as it highlights the politics of beauty standards and the construction of African-American female identities, shows how dark skin functions as a marker of shame, a sign of stigmatized racial identity” (2000: 32). Therefore the novel’s presentation of the Gaze as a racially constructed view of beauty gives the learners an opportunity to examine to what extent race has influenced the way they think about themselves. In addition, the way that the boys in the playground and Maureen treat Pecola alerts the learners to the possibility of being the gazer. Here they explore how they and their peers have the power to influence each other’s negative self-esteem.

3.2.2 The Media

Through the media Pauline also experiences the power of the Gaze and she, like Pecola, accepts and internalises its racist messages. Her internalisation of the Gaze is foreshadowed by the name Breedlove. Katherine Stern (2000) points out that ‘Breedlove’ was the maiden name of Madam Walker who invented the hair-straightening iron and pomade that so many African American women adopted as an attempt to “get rid of the funkiness” (Morrison 1990: 64) and conform to white

standards of beauty (Stern 2000: 81-82). By giving Pauline this new name as she moves to Ohio, the text is indicating that her acceptance and internalisation of the Gaze is inevitable.

On her arrival in Ohio, Pauline feels the judging eyes of the women around her. Before moving there she is able to find joy in a beauty that was not constructed by a dominant white culture. She witnesses the beauty of the green of the June bug, the purple of the berries and the yellow of freshly-made lemonade. She is affected by the “sweetness” (Morrison 1990: 88) in church songs and by Cholly’s whistling. Before her move to Ohio, even Cholly, who would later be a reminder of ugliness, embodies all the beauty of June bugs and berries. However, despite her exposure to these different types of beauty, Pauline on her arrival in Ohio internalises the “goadings and private snickers” (1990: 92) of the women in her new community. She realises early on that in order for her to fit in, she would need to conform to a particular standard of beauty. She buys new clothes, applies makeup and wears shoes that aggravate her limp in order for the “women to cast favorable glances her way” (1990: 92). Therefore, Pauline relies on others’ approval in order to eradicate her sense of invisibility and worthlessness (Samuels and Hudson-Weens 1990: 26).

In addition to the community, Pauline learns of the construct of beauty, and hence her own ugliness, from the movies. The narrator reports,

Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap. . . . She was never able again, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of

absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen (Morrison 1990: 95).

The cinema then, becomes Pauline's primer. Amidst its darkness, she is exposed to an alternative reality, one in which white women are romanced and loved by white men, they wear beautiful clothes and live in "big clean houses with the bath tubs right in the same room with the toilet" (1990: 93). When seeing these movies, Pauline comes to believe in the 'truth' they create in the same way the primer, at the beginning of the novel, asks the reader to see and believe in the reality it has created. Furthermore, just as the primer is the antithesis to Pecola's reality, so too are the movies the antithesis to Pauline's life. Thus "it [makes] coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard" (1990: 95-96) because her family is a reminder that she does not live the reality of the movies.

Although Pauline receives messages of her ugliness from her environment, it is significant that it is in the midst of a movie that she accepts and internalises her ugliness. Sitting in the theatre, with her hair done up like Jean Harlow, she loses a tooth while eating candy. Samuels and Hudson-Weens explain, "Harlow's penetrating glance from the silver screen confronts the unpolished, unsophisticated, and partially disabled Pauline, reminding her of her unfinished self" (1990: 26). So it is at this point that Pauline realises that no matter how hard she tries to emulate the white actresses she admires, being black, she can only fail at this endeavour. She reports, "Everything went then. Look like I just didn't care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly" (Morrison 1990: 96). The text is commenting on the power of the Gaze in the form of the media since it is in the cinema that Pauline receives the final confirmation of her inability to attain the white construct of beauty.

When Pauline realises she cannot fit the racist ideal of beauty, she finds another opportunity to fulfil her cinema-inspired dreams when she becomes a maid for the white Fisher family. Claudia assigns an idyllic quality to the Fisher house. She describes it as a “proud house” (1990: 82) by a lake where the “sky [is] always blue” (1990: 81). Even the flowers risk the cold in order to be part of the perfect setting. As the Fisher’s “ideal servant” (1990: 99), Pauline seems to find her own place of white perfection. She manages the white pillow slips and sheets. She bathes the Fisher child in a porcelain tub and dries her with white towels. When Claudia comes to the Fishers’ house she notices Pauline’s white uniform and that her skin glows “in the reflection of white porcelain [and] white woodwork” (1990: 83). These images of whiteness that surround her in the Fishers’ house emphasise that, for Pauline, she is a part to the fantastical white world she learned to desire in the movies. As the Fisher’s maid she finds recognition, as Bousoon explains, “Only when Pauline embraces her black shame by assuming the inferior role of the ideal servant at the home of the white Fishers is she able to meet the goals of her ideal self and win the white approbation she desires” (2000: 34).

Although Pauline is content with her partial existence in a white world, the image of the girl’s yellow hair that “roll[s] and slip[s] . . . between her fingers” (Morrison 1990: 99) is a reminder for the reader of Pauline’s experience in a white dominant society. The image of the yellow hair symbolises her failed attempts to emulate the likes of Jean Harlow and it becomes a replacement for the hair that she desires for herself. In this way, the hair is a symbol for Pauline’s experience as a black woman: she is not able to live the life she dreams, but by conforming to a role expected of her,

she is able to taste the life she desires for herself. Like the movies, she can look, but it can never be hers.

Pauline's education at the movies not only affects the way she sees herself but also how she sees Pecola. The expectations she has for Pecola are evident in the name she chooses for her. Yancy explains that the name is similar to Peola, the light skinned black girl in the 1934 movie *Imitation of Life* (2004: 131). The text makes reference to the similarity of the two names when Maureen is introduced to Pecola. Maureen confuses Peola with Pecola and explains that she is the "mulatto girl who hates her mother 'cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral" (Morrison 1990: 52). By choosing this name Pauline hopes that Pecola's skin colour would resemble Peola's. While the Pecola and Peola do not resemble each other, they do "share the reality of internalized racial self-hatred" (Yancy 2004:131) as they both try to escape their racially constructed identities. Additionally, the name is significant because it shows to what extent movies influenced Pauline in that she expected her daughter to be as light skinned as Peola. When Pecola is born and does not match Pauline's idealised image of a light, perhaps even white, skinned child, she describes Pecola as ugly. She says, "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison 1990: 98). With these words, Pauline projects onto her daughter the white construct of beauty she has so perfectly internalised. Ironically, unlike *Imitation of Life* in which the daughter despises her mother because she was 'black and ugly', in *The Bluest Eye*, it is the mother who despises the daughter for being 'black and ugly'.

The power of the media on Pauline is best understood in her treatment of Pecola. She internalises the Gaze that makes her feel “‘ugly’—that is to say inferior and defective” (Bouson 2000: 33), and she now projects this onto Pecola. Pauline cannot help see her as ugly according to standards she learned in the movies and so she despises Pecola. Pauline’s hatred manifests itself in her poor treatment of her daughter. This is most obvious in the text when Pecola spills a blueberry cobbler on the Fishers’ kitchen floor. Pauline reacts with anger towards her despite the hot berries burning Pecola’s skin. Claudia describes the scene:

In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication.
‘Crazy fool . . . my floor, mess . . . look what you . . . work . . . get on out . . . now that . . . crazy . . . my floor, my floor . . . my floor.’
(Morrison 1990: 84-85)

On one level, the repetition of the phrase ‘my floor’ indicates that Pauline is more concerned with the mess on the clean floor than Pecola’s well being. On another level, it is symbolic of how Pecola is a constant reminder to Pauline of her own ugliness. When Pauline is at work she is able to keep the ugliness away. However Pecola’s presence disturbs her white utopia. Just as the “*blackish* blueberries” (my emphasis) splattered onto the white floor and Pecola slips in and spreads the black berry juice, so too does Pecola’s presence in the Fishers’ house spread ugliness in Pauline’s pristine white haven. Thus Pecola is Pauline’s mirror she so desperately tries to cover.

What is most troubling, yet not surprising, is Pauline’s attention to the white girl. She soothes her with a “honey” (1990: 85) voice. This is in direct contrast to the words spoken to Pecola that are described as “hotter and darker than the smoking berries”

(1990: 85). Furthermore, Pauline cleans the splatters of juice on the white girl's dress, whereas she ejects Pecola from the kitchen still covered in the hot berry juice. It is evident from this scene that Pauline cannot love Pecola because she is black and hence ugly; after all, she admits that Pecola is "the afterthought one has just before sleep" (Morrison 1990: 99). Ashleigh Harris (2002) explains that Pauline's actions stem from her exposure to cinema:

Pauline has repressed her connection to her daughter because Pecola reminds Pauline of what she sees as her own ugliness. Pauline is more affectionate towards the 'little pink and yellow girl', who complies with the norm of beauty, than to her daughter Pecola who, according to Pauline, was born 'ugly'. Thus, when Pauline, who like the other Breedloves, cannot be convinced that she is not '... relentlessly and aggressively ugly', beats Pecola, ostensibly to bend her '... toward respectability', she really seems to be expressing her own inability to successfully mimic the image of Jean Harlow that she desperately aspires to replicate (2002: 38).

Pauline's treatment of Pecola shows that she assigns her daughter a very low "category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale [is] one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (Morrison 1990: 95). It is evident then, that through the movies, Pauline "learned all there was to love and all there was to hate" (1990: 95). Similarly it is the media that teaches her to love the whiteness of "the pink-and-yellow girl" (1990: 85) and hate the blackness of Pecola.

The novel, through Pauline and her treatment of Pecola, offers opportunities for the learners to explore their own internalisation of the media-constructed ideals of beauty. The participants can critique the images they are faced with on a daily basis that present ideals of beauty. Through the study of these characters, the learners can voice how the media-generated images affect them. In addition, they can explore the ways in which they have or have not internalised messages about standards of beauty.

Lastly, by reading the novel, the learners can explore if they project standards of beauty onto the people around them. In this way they are able to examine if they can identify with Pauline to some extent.

3.2.3 Alternative Constructs of Beauty

The novel offers Claudia as an alternative to Pecola on how to respond to the constructs of beauty. Claudia is aware of the Gaze, what she terms “*The Thing*” (1990: 58), that causes adults and children alike to treat “the Maureen Peels of the world” (1990: 57) differently to her, but she tries not to internalise it. However there are times when, despite her awareness of it, she cannot help but internalise the messages from the Gaze. For example, she admits that she too would learn “much later to worship” (1990: 16) Shirley Temple. Additionally, similar in some degree to Pauline, she associates whiteness with love and romance. This is evident when she counts the white spots on her fingernails, which indicate for her the total number of boyfriends she would have. These examples make Claudia a realistic role model for the learners. They can identify with her since they also struggle with the presence of a Gaze in their lives.

It would be impossible for Claudia to be immune to the messages projected onto her in a white dominated society. However, it is the way in which she responds to the Gaze that differentiates her from Pecola. She does her best to stop the Gaze from settling on her like the Breedloves’ “cloak of ugliness” (1990: 28). A clear example of this is how she responds to Maureen calling her, Frieda and Pecola “ugly black e mos” (1990: 56). Pecola, who is used to accepting such judgements of her, responds

by “fold[ing] into herself, like a pleated wing” (1990: 57). Conversely, Claudia fights back, throwing out insults of her own. Bouson explains that Claudia and Frieda are able to “recover themselves enough to reactively and publicly shame Maureen” (2000: 31). Claudia wants Pecola to join in the public shaming of Maureen instead of internalising her own shame. Claudia wants Pecola to shrug it off, to “spit the misery out on to the street” (Morrison 1990: 57). Although Claudia does think about Maureen’s words, and even admits that there is some element of truth to them, she places the blame on the ‘*Thing*’, the “white standard of beauty that members of the African American community have internalized” (Bouson 2000: 31). Thus by casting the blame onto an external entity, and not accepting that it is an inherent fault of her own, she can temporarily cast off the Gaze.

Claudia’s “rejection of the desire to assimilate, or be assimilated into, dominant culture” (Harris 2002: 47) is also found in her dismemberment of the white baby doll, resembling the beloved Shirley Temple, she receives for Christmas. Claudia describes her dismemberment of it:

I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stroke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth, stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was loveable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around . . . Remove the cold and stupid eyeball, it would bleat still, ‘Ahhhhhh,’ take off the head, shake out the sawdust, crack the back against the brass rail, it would bleat still (Morrison 1990: 14).

This act is symbolic of her rejection of the idealised notion of beauty imposed on her by society. Her refusal to love the white doll is her refusal to accept the constructed ideals of blond hair and blue eyes. Moreover, her dismemberment of the doll is

symbolic of her attempt to dissect the Gaze in order to find the source of what “all the world said was loveable”.

At the same time that Claudia rejects the ideal of beauty presented to her, she searches for an alternative. Reminiscent of Pauline before she finds the movies, Claudia sees beauty in her mother’s songs and women’s conversation that “curtsies, shimmies and retires” (1990: 9). She finds joy in Mr. Henry’s smell of “trees and lemon vanishing cream, and Nu Nile Hair Oil and flecks of Sen-Sen” (1990: 10). She is in love with herself (1990: 57) and revels in her body’s dirt and grime. In fact she resents having it washed away, feeling humiliated in the “absence of dirt” (1990: 15). Claudia’s examples of beauty engage all her senses. Her longing for this type of beauty is epitomised in her description of the Christmas present she wants instead of the white doll:

I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been, ‘Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?’ I would have spoken up, ‘I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama’s kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone. The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and the warmth of Big Mama’s kitchen, the smell of lilacs, the sounds of the music, and since it would be good to have all my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, afterward’ (1990: 15).

With these examples, Claudia is moving away from the notion of a visual beauty. In doing so, beauty is redefined as something felt and experienced, as opposed to something seen.

In addition to Claudia, the novel presents the three prostitutes as examples of an alternative response to the Gaze. Unlike Geraldine and Pauline who attempt to conform to the Gaze, China, Poland and Miss Marie make no attempt to change themselves. There is no evidence of the prostitutes trying to undo themselves in

response to a constructed notion of beauty. They are often described as resembling elements of nature. For example, Poland's singing voice is compared to strawberries, "sweet and hard" (1990: 39), while Marie's laughter falls on Claudia and Frieda "like a wash of red leaves" (1990: 81). Marie's eyes are associated with waterfalls and clean rain and her flesh with mountains. Grewal notes that these images associated with Marie are "organically powerful" and thus she "counters the genteel image of the isolated Geraldine wiping out all expressions of funk" (1998: 40). Therefore by comparing the prostitutes to formidable elements in nature, the text is commenting on their untarnished existence in relation to the other women in the novel. This idea is further substantiated when Claudia tells them, "My mama said you ruined" (Morrison 1990: 80). This statement is filled with irony because of all the women in the novel, the prostitutes have managed to remain unchanged under the glare of the damaging Gaze.

The presence of the prostitutes in the novel serves as an example for the learners of how one can resist the socially constructed ideals of beauty. Additionally, when Pecola doubts the existence of the prostitutes, it gives the learners the opportunity to ask the same question, "Were they real?" (1990: 44). In other words, Pecola's question allows the learners to examine if it is really possible to avoid being affected by the Gaze and if the three prostitutes are an ideal to which Pecola and the reader should aspire.

While the prostitutes do serve as an example of resisting the effects of the Gaze, Claudia is a more realistic role model for the learners because, in spite of some failed attempts to cast off the construct of beauty imposed on her, she continues to reject

“the seductive symbolic powers of whiteness” (Yancy 2004: 135). Claudia’s struggle with the culturally dominant Gaze provides the learners with the opportunity to explore their own struggle with unattainable standards of beauty. In addition, Claudia’s ability to find beauty in the other four senses provides an example for learners of the possibility of alternatives to a visual beauty.

When thinking of Claudia as an example of an alternative reaction to a constructed ideal of beauty, Harris warns that Claudia’s dismemberment of the doll is not a “healthy alternative” (2002: 47). While I agree that the act of dismembering the doll and her desire to do the same to Maureen is “unhealthy”, what is valuable about Claudia’s response is that she *does* resist the norm as opposed to trying to live up to it. In this way Claudia makes possible for the learners the very idea of rejecting the existing social constructs of beauty.

3. 3 Explanation of Teaching Materials: The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself⁴ [See appendix 1 for the complete workbook]

This unit of work, presented in the form of a workbook entitled “The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself,” is based on the theme of beauty in Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. I carefully designed activities to help each girl build textual skills while exploring perspectives of beauty and her own body. The workbook aimed to expand the learners’ concepts of beauty by offering alternatives to artificial and unattainable beauty as seen in *The Bluest Eye*. By working through the

⁴ The majority of this section is from my essay for “Materials Development” (July-November 2005) that theorises the workbook to be used in the research.

workbook the learners had opportunities to apply the discussions around beauty to their own context and experience. In this way the workbook aimed to influence the learners' self-perception. By implementing this unit of work and examining the learners' responses, I will assess to what extent literature can be employed to help adolescents better understand themselves and the world around them.

3.3.1 Content

The workbook "The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself" is composed of three sections that lead the learners through the process of examining their perspective on what constitutes beauty. The workbook is divided according to the three themes of the novel as mentioned above, namely the internalisation of the Gaze, the influence of the media and the understanding of alternative constructs of beauty. In each section learners study extracts from *The Bluest Eye* that reflect the particular theme and relate the theme to themselves and the world around them.

The first section, "The Gaze", alerts the learners to the idea of an external gaze that, when internalised, affects the way the learners relate to themselves and others. In this part of the workbook the learners, like the novel, will examine the Gaze as an ideal of beauty and race as a contributor to notions of beauty. The exercises in the first section are aimed at demonstrating to the girls how the Gaze exists for them as an external force and how they have internalised it.

The second section, “The Power”, identifies the media, in particular beauty magazines, as a source of the external concepts of beauty that are internalised. The activities allow for the learners to explore and express the various emotions that the media evokes in them. The last page of the section is entitled “The New Power”. The activities on this page show the girls that *they* have the power to reject the media’s portrayal of beauty. By taking action, the girls empower themselves. When they take a stand and write to the companies that cause them to have a negative body image, they demonstrate that they are in control of the choices they make with regards to their bodies.

The third section offers alternative responses to the presentation of unattainable beauty. This section also aims to demonstrate to the learners that beauty is not restricted to physical appearance. By moving the learners beyond the media-constructed notions of physical beauty, the unit presents a tangible and real alternative to visual beauty.

3.3.2 Design

I have employed different modalities for the learners to find meaning in the novel and to relate the text to their world. Multi-modal activities allow for visual, dramatic and artistic forms of expression. When materials are composed of these types of activities, learners have access to new ways of interacting with the material and have new ways to express themselves.

While the workbook is multi-modal, the practice of Talk is featured in many of the exercises. Employing exercises that primarily require discussion is a vital method of making meaning. On a fundamental level, Talk activities help learners to “grasp new ideas, understand concepts and to clarify [their] own feelings and perceptions about something” (Groby Oracy Project Pamphlet 1988). Talk also creates a community for the girls. The first way the girls form a community is through collaborative activities. The second way they become a community through Talk is by sharing their feelings about and their experiences with the Gaze and media.

3.4 Research Context

For Gillham (2000) the context of the participants is important in a case study as it plays an important role in determining behaviour. The context becomes another form of data as it too can yield evidence (2000: 8). Therefore the next section will outline the context of the school and the participants.

3.4.1 Research Site

The school chosen for the research was desegregated in 1992. The school is in an affluent North East suburb of Johannesburg, but its feeder area is quite vast, resulting in a mixed population of 40% white learners and 60% non-white learners.⁵ It is because of this diverse population that I chose the school for the research as I hoped to have many varied opinions about beauty in the group of learners.

⁵ The terms ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ are the terms used by the administration of the school to categorise the learners.

The research took place after school for an hour and a half for seven consecutive weeks in 2006. Although the research occurred in the formal setting of the English teacher's classroom, it was transformed into an informal space, as the participants sat on the floor or on chairs, always positioned in a circle.

My aim in creating this informal space was for the girls to be more open about their views. My intention was that the informal setting would shift the focus from the teacher as keeper of knowledge to the learners as generators of knowledge. In this way, I hoped to encourage the learners to express themselves more openly and to value their own opinions.

3.4.2 Research Participants

Because the research took place after school, the learners participated on a volunteer basis. This affected the makeup of the group in two ways. The first is the number and age of the participants because only three grade 10 girls volunteered. Some grade 8 learners did volunteer. However, the content of the novel and the workbook are not appropriate for this age and so they could not be included in the group. The second way is the racial makeup of the group. Despite the fact that the school is racially diverse, the group consisted of two black girls (Thandi and Lesego) and one coloured girl (Rose).⁶ I would have preferred a larger and a more racially mixed group because I imagine that a diverse group would have offered up a variety of opinions and worldviews.

⁶ The names of the learners have been changed.

All three participants are successful learners. They take part in different sports, in and out of school. They are from middle class families and live in middle class neighbourhoods that border the area of the school. Lesego, 16, lives with her mother, two sisters and a niece. Rose, also 16, lives with her mother, father, sister and brother. Thandi, 15, lives with her mother, father, sister and brother.

It is interesting to note the occupations of the women in the participants' families. All three of their mothers are employed outside of the home. Lesego's mother is a doctor and her eldest sister is a sociologist. Thandi's mother is the deputy CEO of a large company and her sister is student at a prestigious Johannesburg university. Rose's mother is a personal assistant in a large finance company. All three learners have strong female role models.

3.5 Research design

3.5.1 Data Collection Techniques

The following section will discuss the data collection techniques I employed in this study. The use of a variety of techniques will allow for triangulation.

3.5.1.1 Observation

Observation is an essential part of a case study. It is used to record "descriptions and interpretations" (Knobel and Lankshear 1999: 92) as the research proceeds.

Observations can be recorded during the research session as field notes. However, as

I facilitated the sessions, I recorded my observations using journalistic notes after the session had ended. The contents of the journalistic notes consisted of my observations and interpretations of the learners' responses and conversations during the research.

Because I assumed the role of facilitator, I was aware that journalistic notes would not be sufficient as they were to be written after the sessions. Therefore I filmed certain parts of the research sessions where the activity was a conversation. The filming also extended to the learners' presentations of an art activity or their use of drama to express themselves. Thus the filming of the activities provided invaluable data that I could not record accurately in journalistic notes.

3.5.1.2 Artefacts

Artefacts are an essential element of data collection because they help to “construct contextualising data for a study” (1999: 93). I collected materials produced by the participants as artefacts to be analysed. I chose specific exercises from the workbook to be used as artefacts. These exercises provide a record of potential change in the participants' attitudes to their bodies. Please see section 3.5.2 for a complete list of collected data.

3.5.1.3 Interviews

At the conclusion of the workbook, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. The semi-structured interview allows room for other questions to emerge

during the interview that may add to the contents of the interview. The interview had two purposes. The first was to elicit the participant's opinion of whether her perception of herself and beauty had changed. The second purpose of the interview was to determine whether literature played a role in the girl's changed views. This part of the interview was dependent upon the participant expressing that her perceptions had changed. [See Appendix 5 for the interview questions.]

3.5.1.4 The Tension of Authenticity

There were times when the participants did not complete the assignments as I had envisioned. I wanted to maintain my role as facilitator and not consciously enter into the role as teacher. I did not correct their efforts or ask them to redo the work lest they give answers that they thought I would want to hear. By refraining from interfering with the participants' answers, other than to ask more questions about a given answer, I hoped to have maintained the authenticity of their answers. As a result, some activities might not reflect the kind of data I had anticipated.

3.5.2 List of Activities that Produced Data

All activities can be found in the workbook on the given page number.

Activity 1: Discussion around body image (page 3):

This discussion about body image is an opportunity for the participants to express how they feel about their bodies. It is framed in the context of looking in the mirror, so as to emphasise the theme of the Gaze and the visual image of their bodies.

Activity 2: “Now it’s Your Turn” (page 4)

This diary entry is similar to the above activity in that it asks the participants to express their feelings about their bodies. However, as it is a written piece that would not be read by the rest of the group, it provides a more private space for each girl to express how she feels. Activities 1 and 2 will give a clear picture of how the learners’ feel about their bodies prior to the unit of work and can be compared against later data to establish if there is any change in the learners’ perceptions of themselves and their construct of beauty.

Activity 3: “Act it Out” (page 5)

This drama activity follows a discussion about how Pecola feels when she leaves Mr. Yacobowski’s store. It asks the learners to act out a situation in which a person internalises the perception of another. The exercise is an opportunity for the learners to explore the concept of the Gaze as more than an intangible idea. The aim of this activity is for the learners to be able to identify the Gaze as a literal gaze from people and as an influence on how the girls see themselves. Furthermore, the drama exercise aims to alert the participants to the possibility that they can be the gazer and that they have the power to influence other people’s negative self-esteem.

Activity 4: “Let’s Create” (page 5)

This activity asks each participant to write down descriptions of her body on one paper doll. On each of the other two dolls she is asked to write down words that describe beauty and ugliness respectively. By comparing the doll of herself to the dolls of ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’, the participant will be able to see how she has internalised the negative judgements of beauty.

Activity 5: “The Media and Beauty” (page 7)

This discussion about the media takes place in conjunction with an examination of Pauline and her experience with the cinema. Thus this activity aims to give the learners an opportunity to identify with Pauline and to express whether the media influences their self-perceptions.

Activity 6: “Let’s Create” (page 8)

This activity provides another opportunity for the learner to express how the media makes her feel about her body. It is important to stress here that while some of the artefacts and discussions might produce the same result with some learners, this might not be the case for other learners who struggle to express themselves in writing or in a discussion. Consequently I have used different modalities in various exercises.

Activity 7: “Wishes for Real Beauty” (page 14)

This activity follows a discussion about Claudia’s wish for a Christmas present that engages all her senses. It asks the learners to bring in an object that symbolises a new type of beauty that is not visual. The aim of this exercise is to provide an opportunity for the learner to articulate an alternate form of beauty from one that is visual.

Activity 8: “Let’s Create Beauty” (page 14)

This activity asks the participants to create a double-sided collage. On one side they are to place images of beauty and on the other images of ugliness. The aim of this exercise is to ascertain whether the learners can identify images that represent beauty and ugliness that are not connected to a person’s body— in other words, an alternative beauty.

Activity 9: “Seeing Ourselves Again” (page 15)

In this activity, the participants are asked to revisit the paper dolls from the very beginning of the unit. Each participant is asked to remove the paper doll of herself and to change all the negative self-descriptions into positive ones. The aim is to assess whether the participants can articulate an alternative way of seeing the ‘flaws’ in their bodies they had highlighted previously.

Activity 10: “Time to Change the World” (page 15)

The final activity is for the learners to create a magazine that reflects their understanding of beauty. The images they choose and the articles they write for the magazine will be telling of whether and in what ways they have changed their constructs of beauty.

3.5.3 Methods of Data Analysis

According to Knobel and Lankshear (1999) the primary data analysis method for a case study is pattern matching. This process requires the researcher to look for patterns and comparisons in the data that would indicate change (1999: 99). While pattern matching can be applied to most of the data collected, I will apply this method particularly to the artefacts, as they will be clear indicators of whether a change has taken place. In addition, I will examine transcriptions of the discussions for attitudinal changes expressed in the learners’ opinions and representations of beauty.

I will also examine some of the data of the artefacts and the discussions next to one another to strengthen any analysis of changes I deduce. For example, I will use the artefacts of the paper dolls together with the initial discussion about the learner’s

perception of her body as a marker of the how the learner thinks about what constitutes beauty as well as how she thinks about her body as she begins the programme. The reframing exercise, which comes at the end of the programme, will be paired with the discussion of the affirmation cards to show whether the learner is able to articulate, in a positive manner, the way she sees her body. These two pieces of data will also serve as a marker at the end of the programme of whether change has taken place.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Overview of the Data

4.2 Data Set 1

- 4.2.1 Description of the Data
- 4.2.2 Data Collection Process
- 4.2.3 Instructions for the Tasks
- 4.2.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.3 Data Set 2

- 4.3.1 Description of the Data
- 4.3.2 Data Collection Process
- 4.3.3 Instructions for the Tasks
- 4.3.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.4 Data Set 3

- 4.4.1 Description of the Data
- 4.4.2 Data Collection Process
- 4.4.3 Instructions for the Tasks
- 4.4.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.5 Data Set 4

- 4.5.1 Description of the Data
- 4.5.2 Data Collection Process
- 4.5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Data

This chapter will present and analyse the data from the research. The data is grouped into four data sets. The activities in the first three sets of data are grouped according to the areas identified in the workbook, namely, the Gaze, the media and alternative constructs of beauty. As a result these data sets will include numerous transcripts of discussions and/or presentations as well as artefacts generated from the activities in the workbook. This organisation of the data allows for the presentation of the data to be mostly chronological. However, when necessary, data from a different group may be mentioned in order to strengthen the analysis of the current data. Each of the three data sets will be analysed according to the statements and artefacts of the three

research participants: Thandi, Lesego and Rose. This structure will generate conclusions about the group as a whole as to whether the learners experience the presence of the Gaze, if they are influenced by a media generated construct of beauty and if, through the study of literature, they are able to articulate an alternative construct of beauty.

This structure will not be employed for the analysis of the interviews, the fourth data set. Instead, each learner's interview will be compared to her beginning concepts of beauty. This will help determine whether there has, in fact, been a change in the participant's attitudes towards constructs of beauty through the study of literature. Finally, a conclusion about all the data sets will be presented that will pinpoint emerging patterns, discrepancies and deviations from the patterns.

4.1 Overview of the Data

Data Set 1 consists of the transcript from the discussion around body image (page 3⁷), and a diary entry about how the participants feel about their bodies. The data set also includes the learners' paper dolls and the transcripts of their responses about what was written on the paper dolls. Lastly the data set includes the transcript of the skit the participants presented in response to the activity "Act it Out" (page 5), as well as the discussion that followed. See Appendix 2 for the entire data set.

Data Set 2 consists of the learners' discussion about the media. It also includes the artefacts produced by the activity "Let's Create" (page 8) and the transcript of the

⁷ Pages refer to the workbook, *The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real Beauty, A Journey to Yourself*. [See Appendix 1.]

learners' explanations of their artistic responses to advertisements in magazines. See Appendix 3 for the transcripts for this data set.

Data Set 3 consists of the transcript of the learners' discussion about "Wishes for Real Beauty" (page 14). This data set also includes the transcript of the presentation of the learners' examples of alternate forms of beauty and their collages created for the activity "Let's Create Beauty" (page 14). It also consists of the artefact of the learners' reframed paper dolls of themselves (also part of Data Set 1) produced in response to the activity "Seeing Ourselves Again" (page 15), as well as the transcript of the learners' presentation of their dolls. The final activity to contribute to this data set is the magazine created by the learners, as well as the transcript of their presentation of the magazine. See Appendix 4 for the transcripts for this data set.

Data Set 4 consists of the transcripts of the interviews of the learners at the end of the research project. See Appendix 5 for the transcripts for this data set.

4.2 Data Set 1⁸

4.2.1 Description of the Data

The data set consists of the transcribed notes of the discussion about body image and diary entries about the learners' feelings about their bodies. The data set also includes nine paper dolls. Each learner handed in three dolls: one representing her concept of beauty, one representing her concept of ugliness and one that is describing

⁸ See Appendix 2 for the entire data set.

her view of her own body. The pages of transcribed notes of the learners' explanations about their dolls are also included in this data set. The set of data also consists of a description of the skit performed by the learners in response to the activity entitled "Act it Out" on page 5 of the workbook and the pages of transcribed notes of the discussion that followed the performance.

4.2.2 Data Collection Process

The discussion on the learners' feelings about their own bodies was filmed and transcribed in the first week of the research project. The instructions for the diary entry followed a reading of an authentic text from the website bodyimage.com in which the writer expresses a very negative attitude towards her body. The diary entry was set for homework for the following week. The instruction for the paper dolls exercise was given in the second week but the dolls were collected and discussed in the third week. The learners' explanations of their dolls was filmed and transcribed. The data of the skit was collected after a discussion about Pecola's experience in Mr. Yacobowski's store. The learners were allowed time to discuss and practice their skit before presenting it. The skit was filmed and summarised. The conversation about race that immediately followed the performance of the skit was filmed and transcribed. The skit and its discussion occurred in the second week of the research project.

4.2.3 Instructions for the Tasks

A. The discussion around body image

After a discussion about the Breedlove's internalisation of the dominant construct of beauty, the learners were asked to think about and discuss their own feelings about their bodies. The task was phrased as follows:

- Discuss with each other how you feel about your body when you look in the mirror.

B. The diary entry

Following the above discussion and the reading of the posting on the website, bodyimage.com, the learners were asked to write about their feelings about their bodies in the form of a diary or a posting on the website. The task was phrased as follows:

- On your own, think about your own body image.
- Do you like your body or just parts of it?
- What would you change about it?
- Can you think of some things that influence your self-perception (how you see yourself)?
- Write down your answers.
- Using the answers to the above questions as a guide either log on to the guest book at bodyimage.com to post your own entry or write your thoughts as a diary entry.

C. The paper dolls

Each learner received three paper dolls. This task required the learners to think about their constructs of beauty and ugliness and how the learners see themselves within these constructs and to write their thoughts on the relevant doll. They were asked to find similarities between the 'beauty' doll and the 'ugly' doll on one hand, and the doll that represents their bodies, on the other hand. The task was phrased as follows:

- Remove the paper dolls from the box at the back of the workbook.

- On one doll write down all the words you can think of to describe your body. Try to think of different aspects that go beyond looks such as levels of energy and power.
- On the other doll write down words that you think describe beauty.
- Examine the two dolls. In red, circle all the words that are the same.
- In green, underline all the opposites, for example, tall and short, curly hair and straight hair. On the last doll write all the characteristics you consider ugly.
- Share your dolls with a partner.
- Discuss how each of your dolls is different and the same.
- How do the differences make you feel?
- Can you think of where your concepts of beauty and ugliness come from?
- Have you internalised outside messages that form your view of yourself?
- Are these messages negative or positive?
- Now put the dolls back in the box. We will use them again later.

D. “Act it Out

The learners were asked to think about Pecola’s experience with the racist Gaze in Mr. Yacobowski’s store and discuss if they had had similar experiences. They were then instructed to create a skit that represented the emotions of the person who had experienced a discriminatory Gaze. The task was phrased as follows:

Act it out.

- Have you had a similar experience to Pecola? Did it cause you to act differently? How did it make you feel?
- Share these experiences with your group.
- Now, in your groups, create a skit about a scenario in which a person has an experience that leads her to internalise the perception of another. In the skit explore how the incident affects the person.
- Think about using different mediums to show how the person is affected. For example: body language, voice over, dance, mime, song, and even poetry.

The discussion that followed the presentation of the skit was not part of a formal exercise in the workbook. However, as the skit did not cover the issue of race I decided to open a discussion about race in order to elicit the learners’ opinions and experiences about race and beauty in relation to Pecola’s experience.

All the tasks aimed at providing opportunities for the learners to express how they felt about their bodies. The tasks also provided insight into the learners' ideas of beauty and ugliness and how these constructs have affected their self image. The task of the diary entry gave learners a private space to voice their feeling about their bodies, while the discussions allowed learners to feel they were not alone in their feelings. This data set also serves as a point of reference to compare the participants' attitudes to their bodies at the end of the research.

4.2.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

A close analysis of this data set reveals the presence of the Gaze in the lives of the learners and the ways they have internalised both a general and racist construct of beauty that stems from a dominant white culture.

The most obvious evidence of the presence of the Gaze is in the language of “lookism” (Pipher 1994: 34) the participants use to describe how they feel about their bodies. The words ‘look,’ ‘see’ and ‘watch’ appear numerous times throughout the data. For example, when discussing her perception of her body, Lesego says, “When I get dressed I have to *look* at myself in the mirror. And that’s when I really start *looking* at myself.” (My emphasis) Rose uses similar language when she describes how she feels about her body every day. She says, “You wake up in the morning and you think you’re going to *look* fine today, and you go to school and you *see* all these beautiful people around you and that’s my *mirror*.” (My emphasis) Thandi, in her diary, expresses awareness of the Gaze when she writes, “I probably *look* really weird

because how often do you *see* a black person with freckles”. (My emphasis) It is clear that the participants are aware of an audience, whether it is imagined or real, that causes them to feel scrutinized and to scrutinize themselves. In addition, the language of the Gaze is present during the discussion about race that followed the drama skit. In every story relayed by the girls, they explain how people’s looks and stares made them feel watched. Thus it is apparent that “the gaze is alert everywhere” (Foucault 1995: 195) for the participants.

The content of the data exposes three categories of the Gaze felt by the participants: Peer Gaze, the self-imposed Gaze and the racist Gaze. Rose is the most observable example of peer gazing. She gazes at the people around her in order to judge herself according to the beauty standard she sees in her peers. This is evident in her diary entry when she writes,

When I look at myself I see a body that is not that nice, well compared 2 other people, I feel mine is inadequate . . . I would feel that it is others around me people which I interact with day 2 day they are the ones that shape my views. Not people on T.V or stars because they are people you just see in mags and on T.V but those who actually interact with, especially my sister, my friends they are the ones that shape my views.⁹

Jones et al. explain that peer gazing affects body image (2004: 324). For this reason, when Rose does not measure up to the standard of beauty she perceives in her peers, she feels a need to change her appearance. This is evident in the following example from the discussion about her body image:

Honestly, I don’t look in the mirror a lot. Only when I am changing and then I’ll look and wonder if this is okay. For me the mirror is for you around others and I look at them and for me that is kind of like my mirror. You wake up in the morning and you think you’re going

⁹ Quotes from the diary entries are direct quotes, including abbreviations and spelling mistakes.

to look fine today, and you go to school and you see all these beautiful people around you and that's my mirror. You look at them and then you start thinking, wishing that you had things and that's how I am thinking.

In both these examples, Rose's peer gazing affects her self esteem and she adjusts her confidence in relation to the appearance of her peers. She is an example of what Pipher calls a "female impersonator" (1994: 22) as Rose's desire to change her body reflects her readiness to conform to a constructed standard of beauty.

Rose not only gazes at her peers in order to compare herself to them, she also relies on her peers for affirmation. When she compares the similarities between her 'beauty' paper doll to the one that represents her, she says, "I said my hair [is beautiful], because *everyone's telling me* that I have lovely hair, so..." (My emphasis). In light of this statement, Rose is an example of how girls are always looking to an "external audience for a sense of self, for making judgements, and for signs that will confirm self-esteem" (Steiner-Adair 1990: 165). Rose needs the affirmations of others in order to assign the quality of beauty to an aspect of her body.

Like Rose, Thandi and Lesego are influenced by peer gazing. After the learners explain their dolls, I ask them if they could identify what causes them to think the way they do about their body. Both Thandi and Lesego offer "school" and "people that you see around" as examples of aspects that influence their body images. They explain how the measure of a girl's beauty is the attention paid to her by a boy. They explain,

T: Because, I mean, obviously, I know you'll immediately think you're ugly if guys don't talk to you, you know?

L: Yes, definitely.

T: And, you know, it starts from a young age. Like if you're not popular, then you think you're ugly. If guys don't talk to you, you're ugly.

S: So you associate being accepted with being pretty?

T, R, L: Yes.

L: If you're ignored, then you feel that you must be.

T: Like there's something wrong with you.

S: Physically?

T: It doesn't mean "obviously they haven't gotten to know me."

L: Then it means it must be what's on the outside.

S: Ah, because every social interaction you're having, you are looking for messages about your body from that person.

L: But you don't say –you can't immediately say "Oh, no maybe he doesn't like my personality." How can you say that? Because he's never spoken to you. And if they approach you and want to know you better, then there must have been something on the outside.

This dialogue indicates that the participants are learning from their peers about what is an acceptable standard of beauty. The learners are judging themselves by this peer-generated standard and are internalising the messages they receive of whether they fit this standard or not. Consequently, if peer gazing influences the learners' identities (Steiner-Adair 1990: 165), then being ignored— not seen— by boys, causes the learners to believe they are ugly.

The extent to which such peer gazing messages are internalised is present in the data. For Thandi, her internalisation manifests in her need to be accepted by her peers. Her comments in the discussion during the presentation of the paper dolls reveal that she believes that "it's only natural" to judge a person by their body. On her 'beauty' paper doll she indicates that being "attractive" (written twice) and "popular" are signs of beauty. In this way she is equating desirability by another as a sign of beauty. Later on, in the discussion about the dolls, Lesego tells the group that Thandi has an "obsession" with looking presentable to other people. Thandi does not deny it; indeed she says it is her priority. The following dialogue explains her need to be dressed according to a perceived standard in the presence of others.

L: Like, I had my birthday get-together this week
 S: Oh, happy birthday!
 L: Thank you. And she [Thandi] wouldn't let me – like I was preparing everything, getting everything ready—
 T: But she wouldn't get dressed and she already had visitors!
 L: And she was getting panicky. She was like, “When are you going to get dressed?! When are you going to get dressed?!”
 T: Well those are my priorities
 L: I have to worry about everybody else before I worry about myself.
 T: Like, for me, I would have to dress nicely so I can feel nice...
 So before, when she didn't want to get dressed –and it didn't match—I had to get her—I mean she was already having people over and I get more embarrassed when people are there. Like when I'm home, I can't look in the mirror if I'm looking ugly because I'm not dressed nicely.
 S: So you equate “looking good” with “beautiful.”
 T: Yes. I can't look in the mirror. See, even at home, I wear stylish tracksuits, you know? Because if I look in the mirror and I'm wearing something ugly, it makes me feel ugly and it makes me depressed. (*To L*) So it's not as shallow as it sounds!
 L: No, I know it's not shallow. It's just an obsession.
 T: An obsession. Yes, well, pretty much.

Thandi was very concerned with how the already present visitors would judge Lesego. She was projecting her own need to look acceptable to others onto Lesego. She speaks of how Lesego's clothes did not match and how if she was in a similar predicament she would be embarrassed to be seen in such a way. Thandi is an example of Pipher's (1994) theory that peer gazing makes girls afraid of peer ridicule and rejection since Thandi is afraid of what her peers may think if she is not dressed to meet their standard.

Rose and Lesego also have internalised the effects of peer gazing. It is reflected in their repeated comments about women's breast sizes, which in turn demonstrate the learners' need to be desired and hence, be considered beautiful by their peers. The desire for larger breasts is first raised by Lesego when she is discussing her body image. She explains,

Big boobs make a girl feel good. Most of my friends have big boobs. And they always seem to get the attention especially when we go out somewhere and there are people there, I always look at other people and how big they are or how small they are This one girl once said she asked this friend and these boys who are so touchy feely with her yet very distant to me, what is the one thing about me that keeps them away. And they said, “Haven’t you noticed that she doesn’t have any breasts?” That’s what makes me real low.

Rose and Thandi do not deny the validity of this story which only serves to indicate that they too believe that larger breasts would make them more attractive, more beautiful, to boys. This idea is strengthened by Rose’s diary entry in which she writes that she would like larger breasts. She and Lesego list large breasts on their ‘beauty’ dolls, while on their ‘ugly’ and ‘self’ dolls they write small breasts. This shows that they consider themselves to be ugly because they do not have an element of beauty that makes them attractive to others.

The internalisation of this ideal of beauty is most apparent in the skit performed by the learners. The learners create a scenario in which a boy showers the girl with the larger breasts with attention, while the girl with the smaller breasts is ignored. The skit ends with the narrator saying of the shunned girl,

She always was insecure about her body but felt now that she had met an awesome guy, she thought he would appreciate who she is but then she saw how her friend was more popular because of her bigger breast and she spent the whole night crying.

This scenario indicates how important it is to the girls to be attractive and desired by others. They rely on others’ opinions of them to validate their beauty. They have internalised this construct of beauty to such an extent that they label themselves and others as ugly if they do not meet the standards set by their peer group.

Furthermore, the learners' internalisation of the Gaze causes them to adopt a self-imposed gaze. Thandi's "obsession" with outward appearances is an example of her self-imposed gaze. She uses the standards of beauty she has internalised to monitor her appearance, even when she is alone at home without an audience. Lesego also imposes a self-monitoring gaze. In her diary entry she explains how she needs to check herself "500 times" before leaving the house. Similarly, Rose's diary reveals how she has internalised the ideals of the Gaze. She writes that if she could change her stomach, legs and breasts she would be "complete" in *her eyes*. She too has taken in the messages around her that she is imperfect and incomplete—ugly. In this way, each learner becomes, as Bordo describes, an individual who has internalised the Gaze to the point that she has become "[her] own overseer . . . exercising this surveillance over, and against [her]self" (1993: 27).

The racist Gaze is very present in the lives of the learners. In the discussion that follows the skit, the group share numerous stories in which they were exposed to a racist Gaze and describe how it made them feel inferior. For example, Lesego recounts an incident in a store. Her mother had asked her to buy a loaf of bread. When she was in the line to pay, the white cashier indicated to her that she should allow the customer behind her with many more groceries to pay before her. She explains:

L: And, I mean, I was just standing there and I was confused. And she just looked at me, and kept looking at me funny. So I was like, okay . . . and just went to another line.

S: Wow. So how did that make you feel?

L: I felt like there was something wrong with me, she didn't want to serve me. I felt like I wasn't able to do anything about it, like I was disabled and . . . It was something not right with me – she didn't want to help me. Like, you know, there was something wrong with me.

This incident is reminiscent of Pecola's experience in Mr. Yacobowski's store. Like Pecola, Lesego takes in the disapproving racist Gaze. She repeats the word 'wrong' twice when referring to how she felt about herself during the interaction with the cashier. This shows that she feels a sense of inferiority due to the colour of her skin.

Thandi experiences a similar feeling when she and her family enter predominantly white restaurants. She explains how the "way people look and turn and talk." She interprets their looks as a judging gaze that questions her and her black family's validity in such an environment.

When the learners adopt the messages of inferiority present in the racist Gaze, they come to believe, as Lesego expresses, that they are "not right." Consequently, such experiences, as Weedon explains, impact "[their] sense of [themselves] and [their] ways of understanding [their] relation to the world" (1997:32).

While the learners do not explicitly express that they have internalized a feeling of being inferior to whites, a close examination of their conversation following the skit uncovers their belief that whiteness is more valued. During the discussion they explain how they are often called 'coconut' (implying they are black but aspire to be white) by family and peers because they speak with 'white' accents and are more likely to speak in English. When I ask why they think they are called this, they agree that it is because, as Rose articulates, "they think that you think you are better than them." Thandi insists that the girls are called 'coconut' by others because they are "jealous" of the "better schools" the girls attend and, "better houses" in which the girls live and the middle class lifestyles they lead. The girls' repetition of the word

‘better’ implies that they believe that their ‘white’ accents do make them superior to those who do not speak with the same accent. This, in turn, indicates that the girls believe that there is an element of superiority in whiteness to which they aspire. This idea is further exhibited by Thandi’s comment towards the end of the conversation. She says,

And if we’re comfortable talking to each other like this, we don’t have to *lower* our –I mean sometimes people will make themselves *stupid* when they’re not, because they want to . . . fit in. And I don’t find the need to do that. (My emphasis)

Thandi’s use of the word ‘lower’ clearly indicates that she has internalised the racist Gaze to such an extent that she associates speaking English with a ‘white’ accent with being superior. While the learners resent being called a ‘coconut’ or being labelled by their peers as ‘light-skinned’, they have internalised the critical racist Gaze to such a degree that they feel a sense of “shame about their black skin” (Ribane 2006: 3). Reminiscent of Geraldine, this shame causes them to want to shed their blackness and ‘inferiority’ and associate with the ‘superiority’ they perceive to be connected to whiteness.

The girls’ internalisation of the racist Gaze is also apparent in their concept of beauty. Interestingly, the body parts that the learners focus on in a negative way correlate with the “dark skin, kinky hair, and African facial features,” as described by Maxine Leeds Craig (2002: 24), showing that they have come to believe that being black makes them ugly.

Lesego is the learner who most demonstrates an internalisation of the racist view of beauty in her desire to change her skin and hair. The data shows that Lesego is

carrying over into Post Apartheid the messages about black skin prevalent in Apartheid as described by Ribane. Ribane explains how black skin was perceived as ugly and that the lighter the person's skin, the more beautiful she was perceived to be (Ribane 2004: 11). While Lesego does not write 'black skin' on her 'ugly' doll, she does write "bad skin colour". Because she writes the same phrase on her 'self' doll, she is indicating her black skin is "bad". It is obvious she feels her skin colour is an element that makes her ugly.

Lesego has internalised similar feelings about her hair. This is evident from her 'beauty' paper doll, on which she writes "beautiful hair". On its own, this statement cannot be linked to a racist construct of beauty; however her explanation of what she considers beautiful hair is clearly influenced by a racist construct of beauty. She explains that beautiful hair is "great flowing hair, like a waterfall . . . and . . . softness". Lesego longs for hair that is more suggestive of a white person's hair than that of a black person. She, like the women described by Leeds Craig (2002: 30), sees hair as a means to conform to a white construct of beauty. Lesego's internalisation of this racist construct of beauty is most apparent when, in the fifth week of the research, she arrived with hair extensions.

The nose is the main "African facial feature" (2002: 24) to which the learners have attached a racist construct of beauty. This is evident in the presence of the word 'nose' on each of the learners' 'ugly' dolls. Thandi's comments about her nose indicate the extent to which she has been affected by the racist construct of beauty. During the discussion about her body image Thandi describes how she "hates" her nose. She explains that when she was younger she felt that smiling made her nose

“look worse” and so she would not smile at all or she would turn her face if she did. Thandi dislikes her nose because it does not resemble her mother’s “upturned” nose and since she views her mother as an example of “ideal beauty”, Thandi associates her mother’s upturned nose with an ideal of beauty. Her perception of her nose is again revealed when she writes “ugly nose” on the paper doll that represents her.

Thandi’s statements about her nose are seemingly de-racialised. However an examination of her paper dolls reveals that her feelings about her nose are linked to racist constructs of beauty. On her ‘beauty’ doll she writes “nice nose” indicating that this is an element of beauty for her. She writes “flat nose” on the ‘ugly’ doll and “ugly nose” on the ‘self’ doll. Thus she considers her nose ugly because it is “flat”. Sander Gilman (1999) explains that, “The African nose . . . became [a] ‘racial’ sign of the character and temperament ascribed to . . . the African” (1999: 51). He brings several historical examples of white writers who describe the black nose as “flat and broad” (1999: 51). Gilman explains how these descriptions of the black nose became associated with the character of the black person. He cites Kant as an example of how “aesthetics and character are linked to the shape of the nose” (1999: 51) as Kant attributed the characteristic of laziness with the shape of the black person’s nose (1999: 51). Therefore, the image of the black flat nose has become part of a racist stereotype, both of the appearance and character of blacks. In this light, Thandi’s labelling of her nose as flat, and therefore ugly, indicates that she has internalised a racist construct of beauty. This is particularly obvious in her desire for her mother’s not-flat, not-black, upturned nose. Therefore, like the women who tried to draw attention away from their race and ‘ugliness’ by straightening their hair and

applying skin lightening creams, so too does Thandi turn away when she smiles in order to deemphasise the racist construct she associates with her nose.

It is clear from this data set that the participants exist under the glare of the Gaze. They feel watched and scrutinized by their peers' Gaze and a racist Gaze. The presence of the Gaze causes the learners to have no control over their perception of themselves or of others. They have internalised the messages of the Gaze, whether it is to change their body in order to be desirable to another or to despise their features because they are associated with racist beliefs. As a result of the internalisation of the Gaze the learners constantly compare themselves to others, monitor their appearances and aspire to conform to a racist construct of beauty. Consequently, the learners are "still struggling to articulate an affirming discourse of black female beauty" as they are unable to claim their "agency and subjectivity" (Hobson 2002: 16).

4.3 Data Set 2¹⁰

4.3.1 Description of the Data

This data set consists of the transcribed pages of the learners' discussion about the media and the influence of images in the media on their constructs of beauty. The artistic responses to the activity "Let's Create" on page 8 of the workbook are also included in this data set. Lastly, the pages of transcribed notes of the learners' explanation of their art are included.

¹⁰ See Appendix 3 for the transcripts for this data set.

4.3.2 Data Collection Process

Up until this point, the learners had been exploring the theme of the Gaze in the novel and in relation to themselves. The discussion about media in the learners' lives and how it affects Pauline begins the exploration of the media's role in the production and perpetuation of the Gaze. The discussion was filmed and transcribed. In preparation for the activity "Let's Create", the learners spent time choosing images from a variety of magazines as well as producing their creations. This resulted in the production of the artefacts that were explained to the group and then handed in at the end of the session. Their explanations were filmed and transcribed. This data set was generated in the third week of the research project.

4.3.3 Instructions for the Tasks

A. The discussion about the Media

The learners were asked to discuss the following question:

- Can you identify different forms of media and say how they influence your feelings about your body?

Following this general discussion, the learners read an excerpt from the book about Pauline and how the media influenced her construct of beauty. The learners then answered the following questions verbally:

- Find an example in the novel of how Pauline's idea of beauty affects her treatment of Pecola.
- How do you think the incident influences Pecola's perception of herself?
- The narrator points out that the concept of physical beauty "originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion". Discuss what these three emotions are. Use a dictionary to help you.

B. Let's Create

The learners were asked to find an image in a magazine that made them feel envy, insecurity or disillusion and to create an artistic representation of their emotions. The learners were then asked to explain their work. The task was phrased as follows:

Let's Create.

Now on your own, choose one of these emotions: envy, insecurity, or disillusion

- Find an example of a magazine advertisement that makes you feel this emotion.
- Stick the advertisement on a piece of paper.
- Turn it over and on the other side of the paper create an artistic representation of the emotion.
- Explain your choice to the class.

Here are some ideas to help you get started.

- You can use any *medium* you wish, for example, paint, crayons, origami or collage.
- You can colour the whole page in purple for envy. You can squash it into a ball because the advertisement makes you feel small and insignificant. You can fold the page in half because it makes you feel that you want to remove half of yourself to fit the image of beauty it portrays.

The aim of these activities was to give the learners an opportunity to express how the media influences their self perceptions. In addition, the activities were aimed at ascertaining the extent of the influence of the media on the learners' perceptions of themselves.

4.3.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

An examination of this data set shows how the learners' construct of beauty is influenced by the discourse of beauty in the media. The learners explain how television, cinema and music videos influence their concepts of beauty and how exposure to this media changes the way the learners act around their peers. When the

learners cannot fulfil their desire for the beauty presented by the media, they feel anger, envy and inadequacy.

The learners are exposed to and influenced by the media's discourse of beauty. This is apparent in the women mentioned by the learners as symbols of beauty. Already in the beginning of the research the learners identify Jennifer Lopez, Rihanna and Jessica Alba— women appearing often in the media—as icons of beauty. In this data set the learners repeat the practise of naming women in the media as symbols of beauty. When the learners were asked to find advertisements in a magazine for the artistic response to the media in “Let's Create,” they all chose pictures of famous women. Thandi and Lesego both chose images of Beyonce whom Thandi wishes she could look like and whom Lesego labels as having a “beautiful body” making her “so gorgeous and all perfect”. On her poster, Rose placed Catherine Zeta Jones who she says is “beautiful” and Jennifer Lopez who she says “has the most beautiful body I have ever seen in my life”.

It is significant that the learners chose images of these women as opposed to unknown models because it shows that they are affected by the repeated exposure to images of famous women in magazines, music videos, television and cinema. The learners' choice of famous women speaks of the impact the media has on the learners' discourse of beauty. When the media presents these women and others as icons of beauty, the girls absorb this discourse of beauty. Furthermore, the way the participants speak of the women on their posters indicates the media's construct of 'perfection'. They describe the women's “beautiful” bodies as “thin” or “skinny” and

their “gorgeous” skin as “perfect” and “tanned”. Consequently, the media influences the participants’ discourse of beauty.

The learners are aware of the influence of the media on their perceptions of beauty.

In the discussion about the media and beauty, the learners pinpoint music videos as a medium through which the construct of beauty is conveyed. Thandi explains how the videos demonstrate how women should look and act. She says,

T: Like, with hip-hop music, I love hip-hop, but it’s sort of why I started liking conscience rap. It’s completely different because normal hip-hop that’s just commercial and on the radio like 50 Cent and whatnot, they all talk about how ass—oh I’m sorry...

S: It’s okay; no one’s watching this besides me.

T: Okay, well, you know, ‘Ass so fat’ and, like, you know, things that just make you feel like ‘hold up, people are saying this and that and look at me in the mirror, I don’t have, you know, a small waist and a nice large butt. And like, you know, the way that they say how women should be, otherwise you’re worthless. That’s why people don’t understand why I like listening to conscience rap so much, you know? ‘Cause in there, they don’t disrespect women.

L: I feel they talk about real issues.

T: It’s because they talk about real issues. Like, about real stuff that goes on around and how stupid these things are. There’s this one song, ever heard about Pink?

S: Oh, I love that song! *Stupid Girl!* (Referring to lyrics from Pink’s song *Don’t Let Me Get Me*)¹¹

T: Yes, *Stupid Girl*. It’s true! And I mean, obviously everybody’s laughing at it, “Ha ha ha, it’s so funny.” But nobody’s actually thinking about it, like, ‘Seriously, this is what you’ve become; this is what the media has made.’ In our music, this is what we hear all the time. That you have to have this type of body and this . . . I dunno.

Thandi sees music videos as setting a standard of beauty, not only by the appearance of the women who dance in them, but also in the language of the songs. She feels they dictate “how women should be”, thus creating a stereotype of beautiful women

¹¹ “LA told me, ‘You’ll be a pop star, all you have to change is everything you are.’ Tired of being compared to damn Britney Spears . She’s so pretty, that just ain’t me.” Pink: *Don’t Let Me Get Me*, 2001

to which she feels expected to aspire. In addition, Thandi refers to the song lyrics by the performing artist Pink which critique how one needs to change oneself in order to achieve success in the media. Thandi identifies with the pressure to change one's appearance in order to be accepted. The reference to the song lyrics also shows Thandi's awareness of how the media wants to portray a particular construct of beauty.

As Greer (1999) and Pipher (1994) explain, the media not only tells girls what is beautiful, but it also teaches them how to act around their peers. It sexualises women's bodies; linking beauty and sex. This is true for the learners. Rose explains in the discussion about the media how music videos "influence young people today, in the way they dress, the way they act, the way they carry themselves." Thandi agrees with Rose in that she sees a direct correlation between the way women act in the videos and the way the girls around her dress. She describes the way she sees her peers act:

But you turn around, even at school and people are running forward, walking around with tops down here and up here and skirts this short and whatever. It's just to get attention. I mean, do you really need to show so much? Do you really need to be so . . . over the top to get attention? I mean, is that what you're trying to say?

Thandi's observation of her scantily dressed peers shows how the media offers a cultural script (Pipher 1994: 38) that the girls use to replace their authentic selves in order to fit in with their peers who are watching the same videos and internalising the same expectations about women.

While the learners show an awareness of the impact of the media on their construct of beauty, they, similar to their peers, have internalised the media's discourse of beauty.

The learners have developed a desire to be like the women in the media to whom they make reference. This is made obvious in this data set by Thandi's wish to look like Beyonce. She perceives Beyonce to be the ideal of beauty. Since she cannot attain this standard of beauty, she learns to desire it. Thandi learns from the media what is 'not-me' and "the 'not-me' becomes me in fantasy" (Gonick1997:80). In this way she learns to desire the images that project what is not her.

The learners' internalisation of the media's construct of beauty is further evinced in the participants' paper dolls. Each of them lists thinness as a quality of beauty and fatness as something ugly. In addition, they all write smooth and clear skin as being an element of beauty. The aforementioned qualities on their 'beauty' paper dolls are words the learners used to describe the women on their advertising posters. This shows to what extent the learners have come to believe that the images of women projected by the media are what is considered beautiful.

The learners' internalisation of the media's construct of beauty causes them to judge themselves according to the construct. When they feel that they cannot meet the standard portrayed in the media, the learners feel a range of emotions such as desire to acquire the standard of beauty, and feelings of inadequacy, envy and anger when they cannot meet these standards. Thus they both aspire to meet the standards of beauty and reject them at the same time. While all three learners express anger and envy when discussing the media images on their posters, Thandi is an example of how these emotions create conflict in the learners. When Thandi explains how she feels about women in music videos, she says that she compares herself to the women who have "a small waist and a nice large butt." She perceives that her body does not

match this image, and she feels “worthless.” Additionally, she expresses anger about the portrayal of women in the videos. She understands it to be a sign of disrespect to women. She, like Hobson (2005), recognises that the women in the music videos do not mirror a realistic image of black women. Thandi extends her anger towards her peers who emulate the images of the women in the videos in order to attract attention.

It would seem that in her disapproval of the videos and her peers, Thandi is rejecting the role of women portrayed in the videos for herself. She is challenging the discourse of beauty communicated through the videos and thus seeks out an alternative discourse in conscience rap. However, it is possible that Thandi’s reaction to the videos is also based on the emotion of envy. She explains that the magazine pictures she chose for her poster make her feel envy. As the same construct of beauty is present in both the magazines and the videos, Thandi transfers the envy and desire she feels about the magazines to the videos. Therefore it is not that she is simply rejecting the role the dominant discourse prescribes for women, but that rather she is reacting to her own realisation that she is unable to fulfil the role she sees in the videos. In this way, Thandi struggles with her reaction to the videos since she has internalised the media’s construct of beauty and rejects it at the same time.

The media does not only cause anger and envy in the participants, it also causes them to experience a sense of being watched. All three of the participants express this when explaining the posters they created around magazine images. The learners were asked to create a visual image of the emotions they feel when looking at the advertisements they chose from magazines. On the back of Thandi’s poster, she placed a picture of dark sunglasses. She explains her choice, by saying, “Looking at

these pictures makes me want to *hide* behind the glasses” (My emphasis). She is expressing a desire to hide from a judging audience. Her inability to meet the media’s standard of beauty causes her to want to be invisible, to be unseen.

Lesego also expresses a feeling of invisibility. Unlike Thandi, who is trying to hide from the glare of the media, Lesego wants to hide the women who represent the construct of beauty in the media. She expresses this by painting over the eyes of the women on her poster. She explains,

And then I painted over them [the women on her poster] in green because I’m so jealous of them, that I don’t want anybody else to be able to see them. Because I’m not like them. And people don’t really see me, so I don’t want people to see them either.

Lesego feels that the existence of the construct of beauty causes her to be invisible to others because they only see the women hailed by the media as beautiful. If the women in the media are seen, then she remains unseen and invisible.

Rose’s poster reflects the theme of invisibility. Similar to Lesego, she blots out the eyes of the women on her posters using paint. Rose explains that since she cannot achieve the same level of beauty as the women in the magazines, no one should be able to see the women or her. She feels that the women in the media are watching and judging her. She explains, “I mean, if they [the women on her poster] look at me, I mean, what are they going to think? Really.” Through this statement, Rose is identifying the presence of the Gaze as the media. Therefore, by painting over the women’s eyes she is attempting to blot out the Gaze of the media that “come[s] to represent personal goals and standards against which to judge self and others” (Jones et al. 2004: 324).

The recurrent image of eyes present in each of the learners' posters indicates that the learners feel the Gaze of the media. This data set shows the learners' desire for the construct of beauty projected in the media. Yet, their inability to meet this unattainable standard of beauty affects their self esteem, causing them to try to escape the "imagined audience" (Pipher 1994: 60) of media by attempting to hide from its glare.

4.4 Data Set 3¹²

4.4.1 Description of the Data

This set of data consists of the transcribed notes of the learners' discussion about what constitutes real beauty in relation to the activity "Wishes for Real Beauty" on page 14 of the workbook. The data set includes the transcribed notes of the learners' presentation of their own examples of 'real beauty'. The artefacts produced from the activity "Let's Create Real Beauty" and the transcription of the presentation of these collages are also included in the data set. Also included are the artefacts of each of the learners' dolls that represented their own bodies which have been 'reframed' according to the instructions for the activity "Seeing Ourselves Again" on page 14 and 15 of the workbook. The transcript of the explanations of the dolls is also included in this data set. The final addition to this data set is the magazine created by the learners and the transcript of the explanation of the magazine. The magazine

¹² See Appendix 4 for the transcripts for this data set.

consists of a front cover, two advertisements, an advice column, a poem, four articles and a set of inspirational cards.

4.4.2 Data Collection Process

The discussion about “Wishes for Real Beauty” followed an exploration of the different ways Claudia and Pecola deal with being presented with unattainable beauty. The discussion was filmed and transcribed in the fourth week. The following week, the learners brought in their own examples of non-visual beauty. Their presentation was filmed and transcribed. The learners were given time to construct a collage that represented their notions of ugliness and beauty. The learners handed in their work after they had explained it. Each of the learners’ explanations was filmed and transcribed, except for Rose, because the camera ran out of battery power as she started her explanation. As a result of this technical difficulty, the analysis of Rose’s art work will be slightly compromised as it lacks the additional data of an explanation that accompanies the other two participants’ art work.

The learners were asked to complete the reframing exercise for homework. Before they handed in their dolls in the sixth week, they explained the changes they made to the language used to describe their bodies. This explanation was filmed and transcribed.

The magazine is the last artefact created by the learners. The learners had prepared the majority of it at home and assembled it during the final session, on the seventh

week. Once it was completed, they explained their choices for the magazine. This explanation was filmed and transcribed.

4.4.3 Instructions for the Tasks

A. Discussion about “Wishes for Real Beauty”

The learners were asked to read the excerpt from the text of *The Bluest Eye* in which Claudia expresses an alternative beauty that she desires for her Christmas present.

The learners were asked to relate Claudia’s desires to their own lives. They were then asked to bring in something to represent an alternative beauty to the dominant visual construct of beauty. The assignment was phrased as follows:

On your own, read Claudia’s description of what she would want for Christmas.

Write down your answers.

- Think about how this is different from the actual present that she receives.
- How is this wish a wish for beauty?
- Through her wish, Claudia is demonstrating how beauty can be something other than visual. In fact it can be experienced through our other four senses. Can you think of a time when you have experienced beauty that is not visual?
- For the next lesson bring in something to share with the class that represents beauty that is not experienced via the sense of sight, for example, a poem that you find meaningful, soft material, your favourite song or delicious chocolate cake.

B. Let’s Create Beauty

The learners were asked to think about their own conceptions of ugliness and beauty and to create a collage that represented these conceptions. The task was phrased as follows:

Think about what things in the world you think represent beauty and ugliness.

- Collect images of these two concepts from your environment, for example: beauty is the colour of indigo or a grandmother with her grandchild; and ugliness is cruelty or violence.
- On a large piece of cardboard create a collage.
- On one side place the images of beauty and on the other side place the images of ugliness.
- Explain your choices to the class and how you would internalise the images of beauty that you have chosen. How would you “do” beautiful?

C. Seeing Ourselves Again

In this exercise the learners were asked to think about if their perceptions of their bodies had changed over the course of the research. They were required to revisit the doll that represented their body and to attempt to change the negative language used to describe their bodies. The exercise instructions were as follows:

We are going to do a reframing exercise. This means we are going to take something that we have already looked at and give it a new perspective, just like reframing an old picture.

- Take out the paper doll that you made of yourself.
- Stick it on a large piece of paper. Look at all the negative words you have used to describe yourself.
- Now turn them into something positive. Write the positive description around the edges of the page like a frame. For example, if you wrote on the doll “I have large thighs”, now ‘reframe’ it as “I have muscular thighs because I dance well”.
- Continue to reframe every negative description.
- Share your reframed doll with a partner.

D. The Magazine

The learners were asked to think about and then create a magazine that best represented their concepts of beauty. The task was phrased as follows:

The following exercise is a class effort.

Your class is now going to create a magazine for teen girls. As this is a powerful form of media you have a responsibility to your readers and therefore the magazine should reflect the way your class would want

to project beauty to your peers. You have an opportunity to change the way girls see themselves and the world.

So let's get started!

Think about how you as an individual can contribute to the magazine. For example, are you a talented photographer, poet, writer, artist, graphic designer, or editor? Everybody will be responsible for at least 1 page or the equivalent of 1 page.

As a group decide on:

- An ethos (philosophy) you would like to reflect.
- A name for the magazine that reflects the ethos.
- What is the content of your magazine: sports, entertainment, fashion or all 3?
- Are you going to include advertisements? If so, how will they reflect your message?
- Assign each person their task and decide on a deadline.
- You could even have a fundraiser so you can make copies of your magazine to distribute to the other girls in your school or community.

Overall these four activities aimed at determining whether the learner was able to articulate an alternate form of beauty from one that is visual. In particular, the reframing exercise was aimed at determining if the learners were able to rearticulate the negative qualities they had identified about their bodies at the beginning of the research project in a more positive way. In this manner, this activity will indicate whether the learners have shifted their concepts of beauty in general and in relation to themselves. The images they chose and the articles they wrote for the magazine will be telling of whether they have changed their constructs of beauty.

4.4.4 Presentation and Analysis of Data

The aim of the activities that constitute this data set was to ascertain whether the learners were able to articulate an alternative to the construct of visual beauty that has already been shown to be a determining factor in their concepts of themselves. A careful analysis of the data reveals that the learners are able to articulate an alternative

beauty. However the data also contains several examples that demonstrate how the learners are unable to alter their concept of beauty.

Data Set 1 shows that the learners entered into the research programme already with ideas of another concept of beauty. This is seen when they were asked to write down words to describe what makes a person beautiful on their 'beauty' paper dolls. Along with physical qualities, they identified positive character traits such as "giving," "loving," and "kind". The learners demonstrate the ability to identify alternatives to a constructed beauty in this data set too. For example, they were able to bring in objects as examples of a non-visual beauty for the exercise entitled "Wishes for Real Beauty". In this presentation of 'Real Beauty', Rose brought in a scarf smelling of her mother's perfume. She explains how the smell is beautiful because it conjures up images of love and comfort that she associates with her mother. Thandi brought in a song that she describes as beautiful because of its poetic lyrics. Lesego read a birthday card that is beautiful to her because of its effort and sincerity. At the end of this presentation, the participants were asked what they learned from the exercise. Rose says, "Beautiful is not exactly something you see but something you can feel or touch or hear, it's everywhere," and Thandi responds, "We all have different ideas of what is beautiful." With these answers, the learners are showing a shift from the visual aspect of beauty. Moreover, they are expressing an understanding of the subjectivity of beauty which challenges the notion of a constructed beauty, a notion of beauty to which every woman is supposed to aspire regardless of her own concept of beauty.

Throughout this data set, the learners continue to show an ability to recognise alternative forms of beauty. However, several examples of data show that at the same time the learners are attempting to articulate this alternative, they are still influenced by a constructed beauty. For example, during the discussion about ‘Wishes for Real Beauty’ the learners were asked if they could think of a time when they had experienced beauty that was not visual. Thandi and Lesego offer an example. They explain an interaction they had with girls from another school at a rugby match.

T: They were pretty girls and usually pretty girls . . . OK let’s first explain what the situation is. We went to a rugby match, but it was an interschool rugby match sort of thing. So we just went to go support and whatever and usually at those things the girls keep to themselves and look after the boys pretty much. And these girls, they came to us and were nice to us, which is quite strange because they were pretty.

L: Ja.

T: They didn’t need anyone to help them around you know, in the sense that most of the time when you meet girls like that they don’t even look at you, or they do look at you and you’re ugly . . .

T and L (overlapping): “What are you wearing?” “Who do you think you are?” “Ja”

T: But I mean these girls were genuinely nice, walking around introducing us to their friends because they have friends at the school. And I mean, it’s kind of superficial, but I mean we are young and that’s what. . .

By assigning the girls’ friendliness the quality of beauty, the learners show that they are able to shift their meaning of beauty away from the dominant construct of beauty. However, the learners describe the girls as “pretty”. When the learners assign this label of beauty to the girls, they show that they are stuck in a visual concept of beauty. Furthermore, they are still comparing themselves to their ‘pretty’ peers, expecting to be characterized as ‘ugly’. In other words, they are still defining their self-worth in relation to the Gaze of their peers.

The exercise “Seeing Ourselves Again” presents another example of how the learners are still influenced by a constructed notion of beauty. In this exercise, the learners were asked to transform the negative descriptions on their ‘self’ dolls into positive ones. To some extent the learners are able to demonstrate a change in attitude towards their bodies. For example, Thandi reframes her ‘negative’ quality of freckles as something that makes her unique. Rose comments that her pimples are a sign of her transition from childhood to adulthood. Lesego’s only positive comment about her body that shows an element of attitudinal change is that she now likes the size of her buttocks. Despite the latter examples the learners, on a whole, are unable to reframe the negative concepts of their bodies. They fail to transform qualities that they have indicated as negative such as “flat-chested” and “fat stomach” into something positive. Their inability to reframe these qualities indicates that they are unable to move away from the construct of beauty that determines that these above-mentioned qualities are ‘ugly’.

The most unanticipated finding from the reframing exercise is the negative physical qualities of race that remain unchanged by the learners. It is unexpected because the learners are able to articulate how Pecola must have felt when her mother, Pauline, rejects her because she is not white. Lesego expresses an understanding of how Pauline’s racist concept of beauty affects her treatment of Pecola. Lesego says, “I think that to her [Pauline], beauty is maybe whiteness . . . just being white to her is being perfect and it affects how she treats Pecola.” Similarly, Thandi observes how Pecola learns that her blackness is synonymous with ugliness and something to be detested. Thandi says, “She [Pecola] saw that to be treated and to be loved and to be

beautiful, you have to be white. She saw that from her own mother.”¹³ It would seem that the learners’ insights into the text would indicate that their concept of race and beauty would be affected by Pecola’s experience. Therefore it is surprising when examining the reframing exercise to discover that although Thandi attempts to reframe her “ugly nose” by saying it “leads to my happy eyes”, she continues to label her nose as ugly and Lesego does not even try to reframe her “bad skin colour”. It seems that the learners are still influenced by a racist Gaze that causes them to value white over black despite their exposure to an alternative discourse of beauty.

Similarly, the learners’ collages of beauty and ugliness show that they are able to represent visually an alternative beauty. Yet a close examination of the images the learners choose also reveals the continued influence of the racist Gaze in the learners’ construct of beauty. The exercise, “Let’s Create Beauty,” required the learners to create collages of images that represent ‘beauty’ and ‘ugliness’. The learners were provided with diverse magazines from which to choose the images they wanted to include in their collages. The ‘beauty’ collages contain images of food, music, families, dance and people enjoying themselves. On the ‘ugly’ side, there are images of war, poverty, drugs, alcohol and cigarettes. The learners’ choice of images for both sides shows that they are able to demonstrate an awareness of a different construct of beauty. They are able to see humanity and compassion as a type of beauty and destruction and devastation as ugliness.

Despite the diversity of the magazines, only Rose chose black women, who are not fashion models, as images of ‘beauty’. The women in Lesego’s collage are mainly

¹³ See Appendix 3 for the complete transcript of this discussion.

white fashion models. There are only two images of black people on her collage. The first is of a poor female farm labourer, which Lesego says represents “hard work”. The fact that Lesego chooses a poor black woman to symbolise hard work, amongst pictures of affluent looking white people, indicates her association of black women with poverty. The second image is of a young black girl during a ballet lesson. She is flanked on either side by her two white teachers who are correcting her poise and the position of her feet. The choice of this picture seems to indicate that Lesego believes that in order to achieve beauty, even if it is not a visual beauty, one needs to take directives from a white culture. Lastly, the ‘beauty’ side of Thandi’s collage consists of *only* white fashion models. For example, the image of the woman surfer who Thandi praises for competing in a male-dominated sport is dressed in a bikini and is clearly modelling a pair of jeans. The only black person on Thandi’s collage is a black man who she explains symbolises poverty. Like Lesego, she seems to be associating poverty with being black. By placing the only picture of a black person on the ‘ugliness’ side, Thandi appears to be linking blackness with ugliness, and in turn linking beauty with whiteness.

In light of Ellsworth’s criticism of Critical Literacy, it would seem that despite the learners’ articulation of the damage caused by a racist Gaze in the text of *The Bluest Eye*, they are unable “to loosen deep-seated, self-interested investments in unjust relations of, for example, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation” (Ellsworth 1989: 313-314). In other words, the reframing exercise and the collage indicate that the learners still possess a racist construct of beauty given that they continue to associate being black with ‘ugliness’. The racist construct of beauty seems to be firmly entrenched in their identity.

Like the aforementioned pieces of data, the magazine created by the learners shows both that they are aware of an alternative beauty and that they are still influenced by the media's construct of beauty. The activity required the learners to create a magazine that reflected their idea of beauty. For much of the magazine, the learners present a non-visual beauty that embodies the concept of self-acceptance indicated by the articles and advice columns that speak of loving one's self regardless of the opinions of others. The idea of self expression is also present in the magazine. This is found in the two advertisements included in the magazine advertising furniture and jewellery. Thandi explains that these advertisements encourage people to express their own style because, as Rose says, "You are unique." The absence of models in the advertisements seems to indicate that the learners have moved away from the focus of the body as a means to transmit messages. However the article in the magazine "I am not my Hair" reveals that the learners are still having difficulties shifting away from a media-constructed notion of beauty. The article begins by explaining to the reader that one's identity is not determined by one's body. The article continues to explain how adolescents' concepts of their bodies are influenced by the images of the media and it encourages the reader to try to remain distant from such influences. This is summarised in the last paragraph of the article. It says,

So next time you see a picture of *Jennifer Lopez* on the cover of your favourite magazine. And you wish to be just like her, think about the natural beauty that you behold that doesn't have 2 be airbrushed. (My emphasis)

It would seem that this article, together with the messages projected by the rest of the magazine, show that the learners have internalised an alternative construct of beauty. However the cover of the magazine reveals otherwise as it contains a picture of Jennifer Lopez even though they admonish magazines for projecting the same image.

Although the learners warn against such images, in the article “I am not my Hair,” the presence of this picture on the cover seems to indicate that the learners are unable to move completely away from the media construct of beauty. This is further evinced in the title of the magazine, “Beautifull: With 2 L’s, Let it Roll”. The title suggests that whatever is on the cover should be considered beautiful. Therefore it can be concluded because Jennifer Lopez is featured on the learners’ magazine, she is still an image of beauty for the learners and they are still swayed by the media’s construct of beauty.

4.5 Data Set 4¹⁴

4.5.1 Description of the Data

This data set consists of the final three interviews of the learners.

4.5.2 Data Collection Process

The interviews took place at the end of the research during the last session. The interviews were conducted individually and away from the remainder of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured. Each participant was asked the same set of questions. However, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, other questions were asked based on the answers given by the participant. At times the participant’s train of thought was allowed to continue even if it was irrelevant to the research so as to make the participant feel unrestrained in her answers. While the

¹⁴ See Appendix 5 for the interview questions and transcripts for this data set.

interviews were helpful to the research, some of the participants could not answer the questions because they could not remember particular details that would have provided a fuller answer. In this light, the interviews will be analysed on their own but also in relation to Data Sets 1, 2 and 3. The interview were filmed and transcribed.

4.5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Data

The aim of the analysis of this data set is to determine if by the end of the research the learners are able to express an alternative construct of beauty and whether they are able to relate this new construct to their own bodies. Interestingly, the analysis of the interviews reveals a similar pattern to Data Set 3 in that the interviews show that the learners express some attitudinal change, yet they continue to internalise the dominant construct of beauty. This inconsistency is not only evident in the interviews but it becomes apparent when comparing the interviews with the previous data.

Thandi

Thandi's interview is analysed somewhat differently from the other two interviews because she claims that any change that she feels in her attitude towards her body and about a construct of beauty occurred before she entered into the research programme. She explains how the research project served only to reinforce her already existing beliefs.

T: Before I came in here, I did have a time . . . if you had come to me last year I would have said, "Wow I have changed." But I have had a time in my own life when I have decided to change myself.

S: So it has coincided.

T: Coincided in the sense that it reinforced my beliefs that you can't try and be like someone else and you are unique.

In light of the above quotation, it is important to determine to what extent this is true because the research aims to assess whether the programme itself facilitated change in the learners. If Thandi indeed had had an attitudinal change before reading *The Bluest Eye* and participating in the activities in the workbook, then any change she shows may not be a result of this research project. Consequently, the analysis of her interview will begin with the aim to establish, using previous data, whether she had entered into the research with a positive body image and an alternative construct of beauty that does not resemble the dominant construct of beauty.

An examination of the data generated by Thandi shows that she began the research programme with a negative view of her body. Although Thandi says, in the discussion about body image, that she has learned to like her body because it is the only thing that she has control over, she explains that she needs to “pretend” to herself that she doesn’t look “ugly today”. Thandi’s need to pretend that she does not feel ugly shows that part of her does believe she is ugly. Furthermore, in the same discussion she says, “I hate my nose” and she complains about being too skinny. In her diary she expresses a desire for “bigger hips” and she says she does not think of herself as “pretty”. Lastly, in the discussion about the paper dolls she says, “I wish I had nice legs . . . I hate my legs.”¹⁵ It is clear from these statements that she did not think of her body in a positive way when entering the research project.

Moreover, as discussed previously, not only has she internalised a media-constructed beauty, she has also internalised a racist construct of beauty. In addition, the data has also shown how she values peer validation of her appearance. Therefore, while

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 for the complete transcripts of this data.

Thandi may have been thinking about changing her attitude towards her body when she began the research project, during the research sessions she presented herself as having a negative body image and as having internalised a discourse of beauty influenced by her peers, the media and racism. It follows then that when she expresses in her interview that she has grown to accept and like her “skinny” body, it can be deduced that her change in attitude is due to her participation in the research project.

In the interview Thandi demonstrates the area in which she changes the most is in her awareness of peer gazing and how she deals with it. She explains,

I don't feel like, that I have to prove myself to anybody. Sometimes when I am with my friends and that I realise that I don't have to try extra hard to be beautiful, to be noticed or anything like that. I won't say that it won't happen in the class, but outside of class, when I have been with my friends and have seen the way that they react to certain things and I can justify it. So I felt like I have changed in the sense that I can notice these things and I pull myself back from acting.

In previous data, Thandi has shown how peer approval is very important to her self esteem. For example, in the discussion about the dolls, she explains how she gets embarrassed if she is not dressed fashionably enough around her friends.¹⁶ For this reason, the above quotation shows that Thandi is now more conscious of the gaze of her peers and the effect it has on her body image. Additionally, her increased consciousness of the Gaze prevents her from internalising the messages of her peers' gazes as she no longer feels the need to meet her peers' expectations of her appearance.

¹⁶ See Appendix 2 for the complete transcripts of this data.

Thandi's participation in the research project has also changed her interaction with the media. Thandi explains how she is more aware of the power of the media,

T: It [the way women are portrayed in music videos] had always bugged me, now it bugs me more because I am seeing what it does to ourselves. Sometimes we don't recognise the kind of affect it has on you.

S: So you think you have become more aware of it?

T: Ja, now I can see it and get annoyed and switch off the TV or whatever, (inaudible) what are you trying to say.

Because Thandi has been exposed to an alternative construct of beauty through the study of *The Bluest Eye* and the subsequent activities, she now challenges the dominant discourse of beauty presented in the media. By rejecting the offending images, Thandi is not allowing the dominant discourse to influence her subjectivity. In this way, Thandi is an example of what Weedon calls a "thinking subject" (1997: 31), because she is repudiating the construct of women she sees in the media by refusing to take in the images.

Although the aforementioned examples show that Thandi has experienced change in her view of her body and is actively rejecting the dominant construct of beauty, she is still influenced by a visual construct of beauty. This is evident in her answer to the interview question of what represents beauty for her. She answers,

Just maybe the way people treat you. I feel that's the most beautiful thing. You could be very *ugly, like physically* you know, and not have the nicest attractive of features, but to have a nice personality, outgoingness, someone who is always happy and interested and caring, whatever. That is what is the most beautiful thing. (My emphasis)

Thandi's answer mirrors the pattern found in the previous data set. She manages to articulate an alternative beauty which incorporates positive personality traits such as

showing kindness and caring towards others. However, she says that people can be physically “ugly”. Pipher explains that appearance defines social status (1994: 68) and such labels as ‘ugly’ can affect an adolescent’s self esteem. When Thandi uses the language of ‘ugly’ and ‘beautiful’ to describe appearance, she is linking a person’s worth and appearance. Therefore her use of the word ‘ugly’ when describing appearances shows that she is struggling to move away from the dominant construct of beauty that associates beauty with self worth.

Rose

Rose, of all the learners, shows the least amount of change in her construct of beauty. The only possible change seen in Rose’s interview is when she is asked what represents beauty for her. Her answer indicates that she is able to articulate an alternative beauty. She explains how her mother’s selflessness and generosity exemplifies beauty for her. However, the change indicated by Rose’s expression of an alternative beauty lacks plausibility when examined in the context of the entire interview. Several of her statements show that she still defined beauty in relation to appearances. This is demonstrated when Rose comments on how beautiful her mother is “on the outside”. She also refers to models in magazines and on television as “beautiful people”. Both these statements indicate how Rose is still speaking of beauty in the trope of visual beauty.

Rose attempts to show change in her comments about the media. She says she is aware that the media manipulates the images of the models. While this may indicate that Rose is more conscious of the workings behind the media’s Gaze, this statement is not different from her earlier insights about the media. In her diary she draws a

similar conclusion about the media. She writes, “I know the stars all twick their appearances and have people 2 help them look perfect.”¹⁷ As her diary was written at the very beginning of the research, the research programme has not led to any discernable difference in her view of the media.

Lastly, Rose claims that she has a positive attitude towards her body. She says,

I have noticed a lot of confidence in myself around others but also just the way I feel about myself. I noticed that I don’t care if I don’t look like everyone else. I am happy with who I am. I am content.

An examination of the remainder of the interview reveals that Rose is not “content”.

For example, when she is asked about which parts of her body she likes and which she would change, she says,

Well I like my hair, my lips and my height. I am happy with my height, where I am right now. I wouldn’t want to be taller or shorter, I am just happy with that. But the parts I don’t like would have to be my stomach, my flat chest and my pimples, all of the three major factors. Ja, the negative factors.

She does list a few positive aspects of her body. However these positive aspects have not changed from the outset of the project. The parts of her body to which she shows a negative attitude have been present throughout the research. Ironically, these are the three aspects of her body she attempts to reframe, albeit unsuccessfully, in the exercise ‘Seeing Ourselves Again’.¹⁸ The fact that Rose continues to want to change these aspects of her body shows that at the end of the research programme she does not have a positive self image. Consequently, she continues to internalise the dominant construct of beauty.

¹⁷ See Appendix 2.

¹⁸ See Appendix 4 for the transcript.

Furthermore, Rose says that she is no longer concerned with conforming to the expectations set by her peers. However, earlier in the interview she says she identifies with how Pecola internalises the Gaze of others. Rose says,

But Pecola, whenever there were, like she internalised everything and I kind of do the same thing. When people around me are saying one thing or like something else *I want to be that thing. I want to be, you know, what everybody is talking about.* But Claudia, why I admire her is because she didn't allow herself to become like that. She just kind of told everybody, "This is who I am". She wasn't like Pecola who internalised everything. (My emphasis)

It is clear that Rose is still affected by peer gazing. She continues to rely on others to validate her self worth. She wants to become the very thing her peers desire. In this ways, Rose remains an example of how "girls are oriented toward an external audience for a sense of self, for making judgements, and for signs that will confirm self-esteem (Steiner-Adair 1990: 165).

It needs to be noted that while Rose identifies with Pecola's internalisation of the Gaze, she aspires to be like Claudia who Rose sees as remaining unaffected by the Gaze. Rose has mentioned this idea several times throughout the research. In this way she becomes an example of how Rosenblatt sees the text as broadening the experiences of the reader. Rosenblatt explains,

Literature's revelation of the diverse elements of our complex cultural heritage may free [the reader] from the provincialism of [her] own necessarily limited environment. Books may often provide [her] with an image of the kind of personality and way of life that [she] will seek to achieve (1968: 273).

As Rose has not been exposed to many alternatives of beauty, the character of Claudia provides an opportunity for Rose to live through (1968: 38) the experiences and emotions of Claudia as the character searches for an alternative beauty. Through

the reading of the text *The Bluest Eye* Rose gains insights of how to cope with being faced with unattainable beauty. Therefore, even though it is evident that Rose continues to be affected by a socially constructed concept of beauty, her exposure to the text provides her with the possibility of a new reality in which she will be able to say, “Everybody, this is who I am.”

Lesego

Lesego expresses the most change of all the learners in her attitude towards herself and her construct of beauty. However, like the other learners, there is evidence that at the end of the research she continues to harbour a negative self image. Additionally, she also continues to use the language of “lookism” (Pipher 1994: 34) in her description of others.

In the interview Lesego demonstrates an awareness of a constructed concept of beauty. This is evident in her description of how she is able to dismiss the gaze of her peers. She explains, “But now I just brush it off my shoulders—you think I’m ugly, that’s your problem.” It seems that Lesego is no longer internalising the concept of beauty constructed by her peers. Lesego attributes this change in herself to the novel *The Bluest Eye*. Additionally, she explains how reading the novel has changed the way she thinks of beauty. She explains this in the following dialogue:

S: Can you think of a specific moment or moments when you had realised you had changed?

L: Um...

S: Inside, talking about it, outside with your friends, talking to your parents? Can you think of a moment when you can say, “Wow I really have changed”?

L: It was while I was reading the book [*The Bluest Eye*]. One of my friends started asking me about the book and everything. I was telling

her about it and, I thought, “Wow”. It just hit me so hard that I have been so superficial and everything, I finished the book and everything and was just shocked at how superficial I felt. And the way I was explaining the book to my friend and afterwards she said, “Oh I want to read the book”. And I said, “Sorry, no you can’t”. And the way I made it sound, how it was more about the . . . more about the inner beauty than anything else.

Lesego explains how after reading the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, she sees beauty as something other than a visual construct. In this way, Lesego is similar to Rose in that she also has been exposed to new ways of looking at beauty through literature. As a result of reading the novel, Lesego is able to gain a “wider perspective and a readjustment of the framework of values” (Rosenblatt 1968: 107-108) and integrate these new ideas into her own world-view. Consequently, it seems that Lesego’s ability to ignore the expectations of her peers and her changed concept of beauty is due to her participation in this research project.

Lesego’s new understanding of beauty is apparent in her description of what represents beauty for her. Like Rose, Lesego chooses her mother as an example of beauty. However, where Rose blends her description of her mother’s love with her mothers’ physical beauty, Lesego describes her mother’s dedication to her family and her patients as beautiful without mentioning her mother’s physical appearance. In this way she demonstrates her ability to articulate a beauty that celebrates alternatives to physical beauty.

Despite Lesego’s strong assertions of change, an analysis of the interview in relation to previous data exposes that she is still unable to view her body through the lens of an alternative construct of beauty. This becomes evident when comparing Lesego’s

reframed doll to her interview.¹⁹ In the interview Lesego explains how she felt participating in the exercise that required her to reframe her ‘self’ doll. She says,

The dolls, when we had to do the dolls, I really had to look at myself (inaudible). The dolls were really the hardest thing for me to do. Because I really had to look at myself and say, “Do I like me? What do I not like? What do I like?” And when, when we had to redo it again, I felt so good sitting there writing all the positive things instead of just putting myself down.

The “positive things” to which Lesego is referring are limited to the reframing of aspects of her personality. During her presentation of her reframed doll, she says,

This is my body. I just wrote all things that changed in my body. I said I was unkind, but then I said I’ve become kind. I am a caring person. I had said I’m not very social, I’m not afraid of people. My confidence has risen because I’m not afraid of having my opinion heard. Like I said, I have a big bum. I like the fact that I have a big bum. I may be flat-chested, but I have a big heart and a big brain . . . Now the opposite. My dimples— got to get there eventually. Tired eyes . . . I’ve been trying to catch up on my sleep so my eyes aren’t tired anymore. My concept of beauty has changed because I’ve changed the way I see myself (inaudible).

It is clear from the interview that Lesego does believe that she now has a more positive view of herself. However, as mentioned in the analysis of the previous data set, she fails to reframe the aspects of her body that she deemed ugly at the beginning of the research. She does not reframe her “love handles,” “big hips,” “pimples” or “bad skin colour”. Consequently her ‘positive’ attitude towards herself excludes the physical aspects that she continues to label ‘ugly’. The disparity between Lesego’s interview and her reframed doll suggests that she is still unable to shift away from the construct of beauty that causes her to view her body in a negative light.

¹⁹ See Appendix 4 for the transcript of the exercise ‘Seeing Ourselves Again.’

Although Lesego is able to articulate an alternative construct of beauty when describing her mother, she continues to use the language of “lookism” (Pipher 1994: 34) elsewhere. This becomes apparent when she describes how she is no longer affected by the media. She says,

I am so much more aware now. I know like when I see in a magazine, a *beautiful* model and I think “Wow, she’s *gorgeous*”. They probably had to work on that computer and do everything to make her the way she looks. (My emphasis)

While it should be noted that Lesego is more aware of how the media adjusts photographs in order to create an image worthy of desire, she refers to the model as “beautiful” and “gorgeous”. The use of this visual language continues when Lesego describes her friend. She says,

I just told her, “You don’t understand how beautiful you are. Every time I see you, you take my breath away”.

In this statement Lesego is returning to earlier language of the Gaze that was present in her diary, in which she writes how she needs to check her appearance several times before she leaves her house.²⁰ As she uses the sense of sight to ascertain beauty and ugliness in her diary, so too she does this here. Therefore, Lesego is unable to remain completely unaffected by a Gaze-centred construct of beauty at the end of the research project.

The analysis of the learners’ interviews reveals that they all show some element of change in their perceptions of themselves and their construct of beauty. However, there is also evidence that they struggle to move away from the dominant construct of beauty. Although the learners are able to articulate rational responses to the material during the research project, the interviews show that they were unable to undergo a

²⁰ See Appendix 2.

significant attitudinal change. The interviews seem to indicate that the learners continue to internalise the dominant construct of beauty because, as Janks explains, “[w]here identification promises the fulfilment of desire, reason cannot compete” (2002: 10).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Answering the Research Question

5.3 Limitations of the Research

5.4 Possible Directions for Further Study

5.1 Introduction

This research was aimed at ascertaining to what extent the participants experienced change in their concepts of beauty through a series of lessons based on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This chapter will present the main findings of the study in relation to this research question and the implications the research has on teaching literature. It will also discuss the limitations of the research and make recommendations for further study.

5.2 Answering the Research Question

The analysis of the data revealed that the participants entered into the research programme with an already established construct of beauty. Weedon's (1997) theory of feminist poststructuralism sheds light on how the learners came to understand and internalise this dominant construct of beauty. Weedon explains that the individual's subjectivity is influenced by the prevalent discourses in the society in which the

individual lives. How the individual experiences the dominant discourse affects her subjectivity (1997: 32). The data in this research revealed that the learners' subjectivities were affected by the discourse of beauty communicated through the Gaze. There were three elements to the Gaze affecting the participants: the gaze of their peers, racism and the media. The participants understood and absorbed the concept of beauty through the discourse of the Gaze.

This research has shown that, consistent with the theory of Jones et al. (2004), peer gazing had a profound impact on the self esteem of the participants. Comments and looks from their peers caused the participants to judge themselves according to a standard of beauty created by their peers. As their peers were also influenced by the same discourse of beauty, peer gazing served to support the current ideals of beauty. When the learners could not conform to this standard of beauty, they felt inadequate and began to question their self worth. In this way, the discourse communicated in the gaze of their peers, became a contributing factor in the subjectivity of the participants. Consequently, the participants learned their position in society as determined by this construct of beauty.

The analysis of the data showed that the media was another determining factor in the participants' construct of beauty. The participants, through a variety of media, absorbed the notion of the 'beautiful' female body and the ideal to which they should aspire. Furthermore, the participants became "competitors . . . for [an unattainable] beauty" (Wolf 1990: 57). They desired the ideal bodies they saw in magazines and television. When they could not fulfil their desire for this beauty presented by the media, they felt anger, envy and inadequacy. Subsequently, they learned that

“regardless of all their other achievements, [they were] failure[s] if [they] were not beautiful” (Greer 1999: 23).

The third element of the Gaze to influence the participants’ construct of beauty was the racist Gaze. The participants expressed a feeling of being different under the racist Gaze. Hobson explains this feeling of Otherness of the black body “as a ‘deviation’ in comparison with the ‘normative’ white body” (Hobson 2005: 10). Hobson further explains that the deviation from the white norm is viewed as “grotesquerie”, while “whiteness serves as an emblem of beauty” (2005: 10). Similarly, Ribane explains that in Apartheid South Africa, blackness was associated with ‘ugliness’ and whiteness with ‘beauty’ (2006: 11). Although, the research took place in a post-Apartheid South Africa, the participants were exposed to this pre-existing discourse of beauty which positioned them as the ‘ugly’ Other. Their consequent feelings of ‘grotesquerie’ caused them to question the validity of their skin colour, their noses and their hair in relation to white normative constructs they had internalised. In the face of this discourse of beauty they could only conclude that they were inadequate.

By the end of the research programme the participants seemed unable to completely move away from the influence of the dominant construct of beauty. They still judged themselves according to the standards projected by the media and their peers. Moreover, the participants seemed to make no attempt to confront the racist Gaze that positioned them as inadequate in society due to the colour of their skin.

The participants' inability to completely embrace an alternative construct of beauty is best explained in light of Gornick's theory that it is difficult to separate one's identity and desires (1997: 73). The Gaze, in the form of the participants' peers, the media and racism, communicated clear messages that determined the participants' identity in society based upon how close their bodies were to the construct of beauty.

Consequently, the participants' identities and the ideal of beauty were closely linked. In addition, the Gaze instilled in the participants the desire to meet the standards of beauty, as Gornick explains, the participants learned to identify the ideal of beauty as the "me in fantasy" (1997:80). They imagined themselves as eventually being able to reach the artificial and unattainable standards of beauty and therefore shifting their position in society. Although the participants could speak critically of the Gaze, they found it hard to shift away from the socially constructed ideal of beauty because their identities and desires were so entrenched in it, as Janks (2002) explains, "[w]here identification promises the fulfilment of desire, reason cannot compete" (2002: 10).

However, the analysis of the data also shows how the participants, by the end of the research, were able to demonstrate some attitudinal change towards their bodies.

Each of the participants attempted to express a more favourable view of themselves. Furthermore the research showed that the participants were able to articulate an alternative concept of beauty that included positive personality traits and objects of non-visual beauty. The participants also showed a heightened awareness of a dominant construct of beauty and actively resisted the dominant discourse of beauty projected by the media and their peers.

It appears that any change that was revealed by the data analysis can be attributed to the participants' involvement in the research programme. The novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and the activities in the workbook, presented the participants with an alternative construct of beauty and the participants were able to identify with the various characters in the novel. Rosenblatt explains why this is an important part of the literary experiences because through the reading of the text, the reader is able to step out of her own situation and see how a character in a similar situation deals with the same problem. This process allows the reader to return to her life with new insights into her world (Rosenblatt 1968: 41). Similarly the research participants were able to enter into Claudia and Pecola's world and experience the different ways to deal with unattainable beauty. The participants were then able to incorporate the alternatives they witnessed in the text into their "framework of values" (1968: 107-108). In this way, literature provided a way for the participants to experience an alternative construct of beauty and subsequently, make it possible for them to resist the dominant discourse.

This research proves that the literary experience, as described by Rosenblatt, plays an important part in the teaching of literature as it provides readers with the opportunity to live through the experiences of the characters in the novel and be able to incorporate this knowledge into their worldview. However, the teacher of literature needs to be aware that learners may have great difficulty incorporating knowledge from texts that challenge their identities and desires.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

The first limitation of the research is the subjectivity of the researcher. Subjectivity is difficult to avoid in qualitative research as the collection and the interpretation of the data are always affected by the researcher. I am aware that any conclusions I have drawn from the data have been affected by my desire to read the data with the hope to answer the research question. In order to curb the subjectivity of the research as much as possible, I have tried to interpret the data and draw conclusion within the framework of the theory. However, even this tactic has a level of subjectivity as the theories have been chosen by me as the lens through which I would interpret the data. Nonetheless, the ambiguous outcome of the research shows that when reading the data, I was conscious of the possibility of no change taking place in the learners' construct of beauty.

The second limitation of the research is that the participants may have offered learned responses (Mellor et al. 1992: 41). The learners may have determined my view of beauty through the discussions during the research project and also through the wording of the exercises in the workbook. While I aimed to create a spontaneous atmosphere (Rosenblatt 1968: 120), when facilitating the research curriculum, the learners might have wanted to provide answers that would fit my view. This possibility makes it difficult to establish which responses were genuine and which were constructed for me. I have attempted to consider this limitation when analysing the data.

The third limitation is time. Firstly, the research is limited by the amount of time allocated for the research project. The learners had only seven weeks to explore the issue of beauty and the Gaze they have been taking in their entire lives. A sustained programme may have produced different results. Secondly, the short time allocated for the research did not allow for follow up interviews at a later time. Such interviews would have indicated if the changes the girls made in their concepts of beauty were sustained over a longer period of time.

The last limitation on the research is the composition of the group of learners. The number and the diversity of the learners limited the outcome of the research. While the research was a case study, which is often a study of one group, I would have preferred the group to be larger. This would have generated more data which may have led to different outcomes. In addition, not all the sectors of the population, both racially and socio-economically were represented in the group.

5.4 Possible Directions for Further Study

While this research project raised ideas about the extent to which literature can be used to help adolescents navigate their environments, as it is a case study of a small group, the conclusions and interpretations of the data cannot be generalised to other groups. Nonetheless, the fact that this research project could affect some change in the short time span with a small group indicates that the project could affect change if it were extended over a sustained period of time with a larger group of learners.

Weedon explains that an individual is born into already existing discourses and that these discourses affect “her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (1997: 32). Similarly, the data in this research showed that, despite the evidence of change in the learners’ construct of beauty, they continued to be affected by the dominant discourse to which they had been exposed for so long without being presented with many real alternatives. With this in mind, it would be interesting to begin a similar study of learners at a younger age. By being introduced to alternative discourses of beauty at a younger age, the learners would be better equipped to deal with the dominant discourse of beauty. Additionally, introducing alternative discourses early on would increase the potential of the learners to embrace resistant discourse, thus weakening the dominant discourse.

This research occurred over a seven week period. It would be valuable to sustain such programmes over a longer period of time as opposed to the ‘snapshot’ of time allocated for this research. Additionally, follow-up interviews would be important to ascertain whether change has indeed taken place and if it has been sustained. If the interviews show that the change has not been sustained, it would be interesting to study what has caused the reversal of the attitudinal change.

Further study should expand the size and diversity of the research group. This group only included learners from the black and coloured sector of the population. The small size of the group limited the group’s diversity. Furthermore, the group was made up of only girls. It would be valuable to introduce boys into the groups. There are two reasons for this suggestion. The first is that the learners in this research often commented on the pressure they felt to conform to a beauty established by the boys

around them. Introducing boys to the study would allow the boys also to grapple with their own internalisation of the Gaze and how they project these internalised expectations onto the girls around them. The second reason is that it would open up dialogue between the boys and the girls about the effects of the dominant construct of beauty on both sexes. It would be interesting to study over time if such dialogues were an effective tool in helping learners to cope with being faced with unattainable beauty.

Regardless of what route any future study will take, the goals set out by this research is important. As Gonick explains, literature can play a crucial world in helping learners to make sense of their world:

New stories may be invented out of creating the possibility of multiple readings of the old. It is perhaps through these multiple readings that the bounds of the old may finally be undone to make way for the new (1997: 85).

In this way, new discourses of beauty may be available to learners so that they are no longer made to feel inadequate because of their inability to meet a standard of unattainable visual beauty. Instead, they may begin to understand beauty as “not simply something to behold; [but as] something one could do” (Morrison 1990: 167).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Bouson, J. *Quiet as It's Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. New York: SUNY Press, 2000
- Butler-Evans, Elliot. *Race, Gender and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989
- Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1985.
- Christian, Barbara: "Being the Subject and the Object: Reading African-American Women's Novels" in Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (eds), *Changing Subjects: The making of Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Cope, Bill and Kalantzis, Mary. *From Literacy to 'Multiliteracies': Learning to Mean in the New Communications Environment*, to be published in 2006 in *English Studies in Africa*.
- Denard, Carolyn C. "The Convergence of Feminism and Ethnicity in the Fiction of Toni Morrison" in Nellie McKay (ed), *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998.
- Ellsworth, E: "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering: Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy" in *Harvard Educational Review* Vol. 59, No. 3, August 1989, pp. 297-324.
- Feng, Pin Chai. *The Bildungsroman by Toni Morrison and Maxine Hon Kingston: A Postmodern Reading*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.
- Gillham, B. *Case Study Research Methods*. London and New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Gilman, Sander: "By a Nose: On the Construction of 'Foreign Bodies'" in *Social Epistemology*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, pp.49-58.
- Gonick, M: "Reading Selves, Re-fashioning Identity: Teen Magazines and their Readers" in *Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1997, pp. 69-86.
- Greer, Germaine. *The Whole Woman*. New York: Alfred A. Knopff, 1999.

Grewal, Gurleen. *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. Louisiana State UP, Baton Rouge, 1998.

Grimshaw, Jean: "Working Out with Merlou-Ponty" in Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (eds), *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*. London: Cassell, 1999.

Grobey Oracy Project Pamphlet: "Encouraging Talk" in Jones, Pat. *Lip Service: The Story of Talk in Schools*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988.

Hammersley, M: "Introducing Ethnography" in D. Graddol, J. Maybin and B. Stierer (eds), *Researching Language and Literacy in Social Context*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters in association with the Open University, 1994.

Harris, Ashleigh May. *The Language her Ma'am Spoke: Voicing the Mother Tongue in Toni Morrison's Fiction*. Thesis: University of the Witwatersrand, 2002.

Hobson, Janell. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

Janks, H: "Critical Literacy: Beyond Reason" in *The Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol. 29 No.1, April 2002, pp. 7-26.

Jones, Diane Carlson; Vigfusdottir, Thorbjorg Helga and Lee, Yoonsun: "Body Image and the Appearance Culture among Adolescent Girls and Boys: An Examination of Friend Conversations, Peer Criticism, Appearance Magazines, and the Internalization of Appearance Ideals", in *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 19 No. 3, May 2004, pp. 323-339.

Kemmis, S: "Action Research" in M. Hammersley (ed), *Educational Research: Current Issues*. London: Paul Chapman Publishers, 1993.

Kemmis, S and McTaggart, R (eds). *The Action Research Planner, Third Edition*. Deenkin University Press.

Knobel, M and Lankshear, C. *Ways of Knowing and Researching Literacy*. Newtown: Primary English Teaching Association, 1999.

Leeds Craig, Maxine. *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty and the Politics of Race*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Mackie, A. and Norton, B: "Revisiting *Pearl Harbor*: Resistance to Reel and Real Events in an English Language Classroom" in *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2006, pp. 223-243.

- McGregor, Robert: "Imagining Realities: Values and Literature" in Jack Thomson (ed), *Reconstructing Literature Teaching: New Essays in the Teaching of Literature*. Norwood: Australian Association for the Teaching of English Inc., 1992.
- McKinney, C: "'A Little Hard Piece of Grass in your Shoe': Understanding Student Resistance to Critical Literacy in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* Vol. 22 No. 1&2 2004, pp. 63-73.
- Mellor, Bronwyn; O'Neill, Marnie and Patterson, Annette: "Re-reading Literature Teaching" in Jack Thomson (ed), *Reconstructing Literature Teaching: New Essays in the Teaching of Literature*. Norwood: Australian Association for the teaching of English Inc., 1992.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. London: Picador, 1990.
- Nuttall, Sarah: "Rethinking Beauty" in Sarah Nuttall (ed) *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. Cape Town: Kwela Books, still to be published.
- Peach, L. *Toni Morrison: Historical Perspectives and Literary Contexts*. New York: St. Martins Press, 2000.
- Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1994.
- Ribane, Nakedi. *Beauty: A Black Perspective*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature as Exploration*. London: Heinemann, 1968.
- Samuels, Wilfred D. and Hudson-Weens, Clenora. *Toni Morrison*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.
- Selden, Raman and Widdowson, Peter. *A reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Silverman, D. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London, New Deli and Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2000.
- Stein, Pippa and Newfield, Denise: "Shifting the Gaze in South African Classrooms: New Pedagogies, New Publics, New Democracies", in *Thinking Classroom* Vol. 5 No. 1 January 2004, pp. 28-36.
- Steiner-Adair, Catherine: "The Body Politic: Normal Female Adolescent Development and the Development of Eating Disorders", in Gilligan, Carol, Lyons, Nona P. and Hanmer, Trudy J. (eds) *Making Connections: The Rational World of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School*. Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1990.

Stern, Katherine, "Toni Morrison's Beauty Formula" in Conner, Marc, C (ed). *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

Thesander, Marianne. *The Feminine Ideal*. London: Reaktion Books, 1997.

Wassenaar, Douglas; Le Grange, Daniel; Telch, Christy F and Tibbs, Jason: "Eating Attitudes and Behaviors in 1 435 South African Caucasian and Non-Caucasian College Students", in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 155:250-254, February 1998.

Walcott, Delores D; Pratt, Helen D and Patel, Dilip R.: "Adolescents and Eating Disorders: Gender, Racial, Ethnic, Sociocultural, and Socioeconomic Issues", in *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Vol. 18 No. 3, May 2003, pp. 223-243.

Wallace, M. *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Weedon, Chris. *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1997.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1990.

Yancy, George: "A Foucauldian (Genealogical) Reading of Whiteness: The Production of the Black Body/Self and the Racial Deformation of Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" in Yancy, George (ed) *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*. New York: Routledge 2004.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

The workbook *The Bluest Eye: An Exploration of Real beauty. A Journey to Yourself.*

The Bluest Eye



*An Exploration of Real
Beauty.*

A Journey to Yourself.

Welcome to our first edition of *The Bluest Eye*. We will be taking you on an exploration of Beauty. No, not in the traditional way of bombarding you with images of skinny models with perfect hair! Instead we will use Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, as our pier from which to dive into the theme of Beauty. In this edition we will examine the key element of perception (sight). The first step will be to analyse passages from the novel and to try to understand how concepts of beauty destroy Pecola. The second step will be to see how this theme exists in our own lives. We will ask questions such as: "Do we see ourselves as others see us? Do we compare ourselves to socially constructed norms of beauty? How do we change this?"

We welcome you on this journey to yourself.

The Editors

This makes me feel . . .

Did you know that Toni Morrison based the novel on a conversation she had as a child with a girl in her class?



"She said she wanted blue eyes. I looked around to picture her with them and was violently repelled by what I imagined she would look like if she had her wish. The sorrow in her voice seemed to call for sympathy, and I faked it for her, but, astonished by the desecration she proposed, I 'got mad' at her instead."*

In groups of 3 discuss how you would react if you were in a similar situation as Toni Morrison. Explain to your group the reasons for your reaction.

*Desecration- ruin

Seeing Blue!

- Put on the glasses that are at the back of the workbook.
- Don't take them off until you are asked.
- In pairs, discuss how you feel about wearing them.
- Do you feel awkward?
- Take turns describing how each other looks through the blue glasses.

Remember: don't take them off!

Understanding the Text.

In pairs read the following extract from *The Bluest Eye*. While you are reading it, think about how the characters internalise outside messages about themselves. In other words, how do they make the messages part of themselves? Answer the questions around the extract. Write down your answers so they can be used later for a class discussion.

How is the rest of the family's ugliness different from Cholly's?

What causes Cholly's ugliness?

The narrator explains that the ugliness of Sammy, Pecola and Pauline is external (from outside of themselves). Give examples of images from the passage that support this idea.

How does each one of the Breedloves internalise their ugliness?

Do you think Pecola actually is ugly? Explain

Pecola wears her ugliness like a mask. Is a mask permanent? What does this tell us about Pecola and her ugliness?

Why do you think it is significant that the Breedloves live in a storefront?

The Breedloves did not live in a storefront because they were having temporary difficulty adjusting to cutbacks at the plant. They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique. But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness (the result of despair, dissipation, and violence directed toward petty things and weak people) was behavior, the rest of the family—Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove—wore their ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. The eyes, the small eyes set closely together under narrow foreheads. The low, irregular hairlines, which seemed even more irregular in contrast to the straight, heavy eyebrows, which nearly met. Keen but crooked noses, with insolent nostrils. They had high cheekbones, and their ears turned forward. Shapely lips which called attention not to themselves but to the rest of the face. You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly: you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. "Yes", they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way. Mrs. Breedlove handled hers as an actor does a prop: for the articulation of character, for support of a role she frequently imagined was hers—martyrdom. Sammy used his as a weapon to cause others pain. He adjusted his behavior to it, chose his companions on the basis of it: people who could be fascinated, even intimidated by it. And Pecola. She hid behind hers. Concealed, veiled, eclipsed—peeping out from behind the shroud very seldom, and then only to yearn for the return of her mask. This family, on a Saturday morning in October, began, one by one, to stir out of their dreams of affluence and vengeance into the anonymous misery of their storefront.

Continue to work in your pair. Discuss with each other how you feel about your body when you look in the mirror.

Now read the following posting to the bodyimagesite.com guest book. Discuss whether you relate to Mackenzie's experience with her body. How do you feel when reading her entry?

What's your name? (you can make one up) *Mackenzie*

Where are you from? *Ireland*

How old are you? *13*

Do you have a story or comment to share?

I am thiriteen years old, i am 5'1" and i weigh 130lbs. My mom tells me its normal, but normal to me is 5'3" 100lbs. I dunno why anyone would ever consider me beautiful there are just too many things that i am worried about in the when i look in the mirror. In fact things have gotten so bad that wen i do look full lengthed mirror i want to go puke. MY love handles buldge out the sides of my jeans and i ltteraly want to take a knife and cut the fat of of my body. Kids at school call me log legs, they say my calves look like tree trunks. theres nothing i can do about that tho, i play soccer and these legs of mine are all muscule , i just dont understand wut i can do to improve myself. I have tried to diet and exercise more then i vssually do and i have lost ten pounds at one time. (all was gained back) I have even tried to become bolemic at one point. Im not going to lie i deff need some help.



This website promotes positive self-perception. People from all around the globe log on to share their opinions.

Click on the icon

your story

to read how others feel about their bodies.

Now It's Your Turn.

On your own, think about your own body image. • Do you like your body or just parts of it? • What would you change about it? • Can you think of some things that influence your self-perception (how you see yourself)? • Write down your answers.

Using the answers to the above questions as a guide either **log on** to the guest book at bodyimage.com to post your own entry or write your thoughts as a **diary entry**.

In groups of 4 read these passages of Pecola in Mr. Yacobowski's candy store.

While you are reading, think about how Mr. Yacobowski is Pecola's mirror.



A Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her because there is nothing to see.

B She does not know what keeps his glance suspended. Perhaps because he is grown, or a man, and she a little girl. But she has seen interest, disgust, even anger in grown male eyes. Yet this vacuum is not new to her. It has an edge; somewhere in the bottom lid is the distaste.

C She holds the money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand. She does not know how to move the finger of her right hand from the display counter or to get the coins out of her left hand. Finally he reaches over and takes the pennies from her hand. His nails graze the damp palm. Outside, Pecola feels the inexplicable shame ebb...the shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes.

Now discuss:

- How does the text describe the way in which Mr. Yacobowski sees Pecola?
- How does Pecola internalise how Mr. Yacobowski sees her?
- How does she project that back to the world?
- Why does she feel shame?
- Why is it significant that the shame seeps into her eyes?



Act it out.

Have you had a similar experience to Pecola? Did it cause you to act differently? How did it make you feel?

Share these experiences with your group.


Now, in your groups, create a skit about a scenario in which a person has an experience that leads her to internalise the perception of another. In the skit explore how the incident affects the person. Think about using **different mediums** to show how the person is affected. For example: body language, voice over, dance, mime, song, and even poetry.


“She would never know her own Beauty. She would only see what there was to see: the eyes of other people.”

We, like Pecola, without even knowing it, take in messages from outside of us. These messages form how we **see** ourselves. The next exercise will help you to examine your self-perception.


Let's Create.

Remove the paper dolls from the box at the back of the workbook.


 On one doll write down all the words you can think of to describe **your body**. Try to think of different aspects that go beyond looks such as levels of energy and power.


 On the other doll write down words that you think **describe beauty**.

 Examine the two dolls. In **red** circle all the words that are the **same**.


 In **green**, underline all the **opposites**, for example, tall and short, curly hair and straight hair. On the last doll write all the characteristics you consider ugly.

 **Share** your dolls with a partner.


 Discuss how each of your dolls is different and the same.

 How do the differences make you feel?

 Can you think of where your concepts of beauty and ugliness come from?

 Have you internalised outside messages that form your view of yourself?

 Are these messages negative or positive?

 Now put the dolls **back** in the box. We will use them again later.

See Blue Tool

Get back into the pair you were in when you first began. Discuss whether you have become used to wearing the glasses. Remove the glasses. Is it strange to look at your surrounding without the glasses? How did this exercise help you to understand the theme of internalising external perception?

The Power

What are you saying to me?

Do you know what you are doing when you criticise your body in front of me? Not only R U believing what the media tells U about how U should look + eat, but you R pushing these negative ideas on me, your friend. I feel sad when I see you look in the mirror and you think your thighs R too fat that your belly is too round. And I feel disgusting too, because I am forced to examine MY thighs, MY belly by your (the media's) standards. It's bad enough U impose these impossible models on yourself, let alone making ME feel uncomfortable with MY BODY. Watch out for the message U send others when you put yourself down, sister.

-Sara. Riot grrrls



There are differing thoughts as to the origin of the riot grrrl. Most agree riot grrrls originated from the punk movement. Riot Grrrls are both a historical music movement and a basic ideology. Politically, riot grrrl are people (girls and boys) who stomp out sexism and inequality wherever they see it. This page is an example of the literature of the movement.

The power

The Media and Beauty.

In groups of 3 read Riot Grrls' "What are you saying to me?"

Discuss the following questions in your group:

Can you identify with the author?

Talk about the language and the way it is written. How does the style affect how you relate to the content?

Can you identify different forms of media and say how they influence your feelings about your body?

The media is a very powerful tool in the transmission of ideas and messages. We often receive different layers of messages from the media. At times we are unaware of the subliminal (hidden) messages that we internalise and that we allow to shape our perceptions of others and ourselves.

In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola's mother learns of the concept of beauty from the media, in this case the movies.

Read the extract of Pauline Breedlove's experience at the movies. Think about how the experience changes her.

"There in the dark her memory was refreshed, and she succumbed to her earlier dreams. Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another- physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion...she was never able again, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen."

Write down the answers to the following questions. Choose one person from your group to report back to the class.

- Find an example in the novel of how Pauline's idea of beauty affects her treatment of Pecola.
- How do you think the incident influences Pecola's perception of herself?
- The narrator points out that the concept of physical beauty "originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion". Discuss what these three emotions are. Use a dictionary to help you.
- Identify some of the above emotions in the quotes below.



We Hear You Sister!

“

I like thinness. I'm not happy if I think I look fat in what I'm wearing. Kate Moss* looks so cool in a bathing suit. I don't know if I'm conditioned [to think this way] or if it's just me, but I don't think anything could make me abandon my desire to be thin.”



Roshanda Betts, 19



Genevieve Gonzales, 17

“

I have so much I want to do with my life, I can't let something like 10 or 15 pounds get in my way. I'm so much more than my body size, and I don't have any time for those who would judge me just on what I look like.”

“

I've overheard guys say Pamela Anderson is the most beautiful woman on earth. The camera always zooms in on her breasts. It makes me mad. Young girls who are having an identity crisis say, 'I'm ugly because I don't look like her.' We can't all look like her.”



Jessica Green, 15



Wendy Gardner, 17

“

In the transition to high school I kind of got lost. I wanted to be a part of things, and I felt like everybody around me was thin, so I thought if I got thin like they were, everything would be perfect. I linked having the perfect body to being liked by other people.”

“

I was babysitting for this little girl--she couldn't have been more than 8--and she asked me how many calories a bottle of Coke had. She's 8 years old! What does she need to be thinking about that for?”



Aisha Watson, 16



Kim Seele, 17

“

I always thought I was fat. In high school everybody was thin and perfect. There was a lot of pressure to be beautiful. I wanted to look as slender and sleek as Kate Moss. I thought people like Cindy Crawford* were overweight.”

*Super Models

Let's Create.

Now on your own, choose one of these emotions: envy, insecurity, or disillusion

- ⊗ Find an example of a magazine advertisement that makes you feel this emotion.
- ⊗ Stick the advertisement on a piece of paper. Turn it over and on the other side of the paper create an artistic representation of the emotion.
- ⊗ Explain your choice to the class.

Here are some ideas to help you get started.

You can use any *medium* you wish, for example, paint, crayons, origami or collage. You can colour the whole page in **purple** for envy. You can squash it into a ball because the advertisement makes you feel small and insignificant. You can fold the page in half because it makes you feel that you want to remove half of yourself to fit the image of beauty it portrays.

Taming Envy

In groups of 6 discuss the following quote and do the exercise that follows.

“Jealousy we understood and thought natural, a desire to have what somebody else had but envy was a strange new feeling for us”.
Claudia, the narrator of *The Bluest Eye*.

- Can you describe the scene from the book that prompts Claudia to think this?
- Use a dictionary to define ‘Jealousy’.
- Can you say what is the main difference between ‘jealousy’ and ‘envy’? Explain whether the dictionary definitions fit the definition posed by Claudia?
- Which of the two emotions do you think is more destructive? Explain your answer.
- How does the media create envy?
- Why is it important for the media to create envy?

Now distribute the ‘Taming Envy’ cards found at the back of the workbook.

Everyone in the group should have a chance to read her card aloud. After all the cards have been read, discuss whether you agree with them or not. You may want to broaden your discussion and include some of the following questions:

- Have you ever felt jealous or envious of another person? ● How did you feel about feeling this way?
- How do you think envy could also be a positive force?

It is important, in moments of feeling envious, to appreciate our attributes. Everyone should take time to write down 4 positive qualities on the back of the ‘Taming Envy’ card. At the end of the lesson we will share these with the whole class.

Exercise adapted from *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing*. <http://www.roshhodesh.org>

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

In groups of 3 read the article “Mission Impossible” and **then** answer the questions below. Write down your answers so you can share them with the class later.

1. Why do you think the article is entitled “Mission Impossible”?
2. Explain how the puns, used to describe Alicia Silverstone, are effective?
3. What is the message the puns are sending out to girls?
4. Is the concept of beauty portrayed in the media real? Explain your answer using examples from the text.
5. How are girls responding to these images of beauty? Give examples from the text.
6. Why do you think the people in the fashion and entertainment industries do not want to take responsibility for the effect their creations have on girls?
7. How do you feel when reading this article? Why?
8. If you were Dr. Terrasse, what advice would you give to his patient?
9. Why do you think it is ironic that *People Magazine* would publish this article when they often have headlines about the weight of famous people?



The power

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

DELUGED BY IMAGES FROM TV, MOVIES AND MAGAZINES, TEENAGE GIRLS DO BATTLE WITH AN INCREASINGLY UNREALISTIC STANDARD OF BEAUTY--AND PAY A PRICE.



In Hollywood, such insecurity is not without reason. At 1995's Academy Awards ceremony, actress Alicia Silverstone, then 19, the fresh-faced sensation of *The Crush* and *Clueless*, did the unthinkable: She appeared in public despite the fact that, like many of her teenage peers around the country, she had just added on 5 or 10 pounds. Was she congratulated for the self-confidence and assurance it took to be herself? Hardly. The tabloids, noting Silverstone's role in the next *Batman* sequel, blared out lines like "BATMAN AND FATGIRL" and "LOOK OUT BATMAN! HERE COMES BUTTGIRL!" Schumacher, who was directing her in *Batman and Robin*, says he was startled by the meanness of the stories: "The news coverage was outrageous, disgusting, judgmental and cruel. What did this child do? Have a couple of pizzas?"

In a word, yes. In the moral order of today's media-driven universe--in which you could bounce a quarter off the well-toned abs of any cast member on *The O. C.* or *Friends* and fashion magazines are filled with airbrushed photos of emaciated models with breast implants--the definition of what constitutes beauty or even an acceptable body seems to become more inaccessible every year.

The result? Increasingly bombarded by countless "perfect" body images projected by TV, movies and magazines, many Americans are feeling worse and worse about the workaday bodies they actually inhabit. The people being hurt most are the ones who are most vulnerable: adolescents. "There is a tremendous stigma in our society about being fat," says Thomas Cash, professor of psychology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., and author of *What Do You See When You Look in the Mirror?* "Kids aspire to be thin. If people compare themselves with these unrealistic standards, they can only conclude they are born losers."

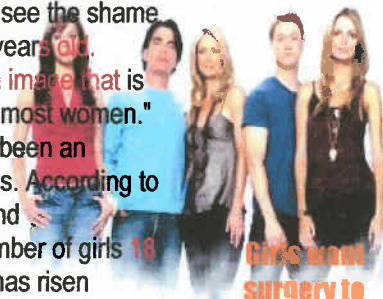
"We're evolving toward an unnatural view of beauty," says Los Angeles social psychologist Debbie Then, "thin women with huge breasts and stick legs like those of a 12-year-old. What real women's bodies look like is labelled wrong and unattractive."

Says Mary Pipher, author of *Reviving Ophelia*, the current bestseller about the psychological and physical health of teenage girls: "Research shows that virtually all women are ashamed of their bodies. It used to be adult women, teenage girls, who were ashamed, but now you see the shame down to very young girls--10, 11 years old. Society's standard of beauty is an image that is literally just short of starvation for most women."

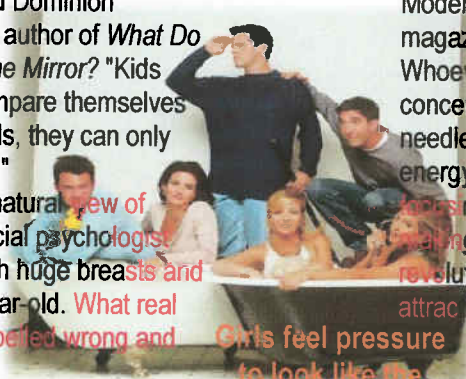
Not surprisingly, there has also been an increase in demand for quick fixes. According to the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, the number of girls 18 and younger getting liposuction has risen drastically in recent years. "The other day a teen came with a picture of the stars on *The O.C.*," says plastic surgeon Dr. Anthony Terrasse. "I counselled her on the role of exercise and diet as a first step before considering surgery."

Still, the most alarming response of all to body image anxieties is self-imposed starvation. Nationally, the reported incidence of both anorexia and bulimia has doubled since 1970, according to the American Psychiatric Association. And, say experts, the patients are getting younger and younger. "I have an 11-year-old patient who won't eat because she's terrified of developing hips," says psychotherapist Deborah A. Newmark.

While some power brokers in the fashion and entertainment industry accept some responsibility for the overwhelmingly thin and unrealistic human products offered up for public consumption, the most accountable party, it seems, is the other guy. Model agencies point their fingers at fashion magazines and movie people blame television. Whoever is to blame, Mary Pipher, for one, is concerned. "It makes me angry," she says, "the needless suffering by women who are putting energy into losing weight when they could be focusing on making themselves better people, helping the world a better place. We need a revolution in our values. We need to define attractiveness with much broader parameters."



Girls want surgery to look like the stars of *The O.C.*



Girls feel pressure to look like the stars of *Friends*.



Adapted* from K. Schneider & S. Levitt, *People Magazine*. Vol. 45/22

*The titles of the television programmes have been changed in order to make the article more relevant for today's adolescents.



The new power

LET'S GIRLCOTT!



As a consumer you have the **POWER** to let companies know that they are affecting society. In your groups decide on a company that you want to write a letter to explaining how its product or advertisement has a negative impact on society.

Some **TIPS** to help you get started:

Look in **magazines**, at **billboards**, and in **newspapers** to find companies.

You could also write to a **television** station or to a **fan club** of a famous person.

Research the company on the Internet or at your local **library**. Try to find some **information** that will help you make an argument. For example, find statistics about anorectics in your community or simply interview your peers about how the company has a negative effect on them.

What is Beauty?



Did you know that Marilyn Monroe, a 1950's Hollywood actress, was 6 sizes bigger than the average runway model of today? Yet, she was an icon of beauty in her time. As we have seen, concepts of beauty are influenced by the media and change over time. Your next task is to **explore** how beauty has changed over the years.

Choose an older woman from your community to **interview** about how beauty has changed over time. Ask her to tell you the most valuable thing she has learned as a woman. Ask if you can take a picture of her or draw one of her. We will hang up the pictures in the class and create our Wall of Wise Women.

This task is to be completed at home and brought to the next lesson to share with the class.

Here are some questions to help with the interview.

How old are you?

Who were the people you considered beautiful when you were younger?

What made them beautiful?

Did that change over time?

Who do you consider beautiful now?

What do you think is beauty?



Log onto
campaignforbeauty.com

to find out more about the work Dove is doing to help girls with self-esteem.

Click on the photo gallery of beautiful women. Go ahead and submit your own photo and contribute to the thousands already collected from around the world!

CAMPAINING FOR REAL BEAUTY.

Work in pairs. Write down your answers so you can share them with the class.

Some **cosmetic** companies, such as Dove (the creators of Dove soap products) are trying to combat the harmful expectations of beauty that are portrayed by the media. In order to do this they have created an advertising campaign using models that are of normal size. They have called it 'The Campaign for Real Beauty.'

Why do you think this is an important campaign?

Do you think it will be effective?

Do you think these models represent "real women"?

Do you feel better about yourself when looking at these models? Explain your answer.



5' 9" and 110 pounds
(50kg) is the average
height and weight of a
model.

The
number
1 wish
for
girls
11-17
is to
be
thinner
!

5' 4" and 142
pounds (68kg) is
the average height
and weight a
woman.

1% -4% of high
school girls has
either anorexia or
bulimia.

80% of
women are
on a diet.

Fashion
models
weigh
23% less
than
the
average
female.

THE Skinny on phat!

80% of
10 year
olds
have
dieted.

33% of
women
wear a
size 14
or
larger.

*The average woman sees
400- 600 advertisements a
day.
By the time she is 17 she has
received 250 000
commercial messages
through the media.*

50% of 9
year olds
have dieted.

ONLY 1 % OF
WOMEN HAVE A
CHANCE OF
BEING AS SLIM AS
a SUPERMODEL.

ONLY 7% OF WOMEN
HAVE A CHANCE OF
BEING AS THIN AS A
CATWALK MODEL.

90% of women overestimate their body size.

Wishes for Real Beauty.

On your own, read Claudia's description of what she would want for Christmas. Write down your answers.



Think about how this is different from the actual present that she receives.



How is this wish a wish for beauty?



Through her wish, Claudia is demonstrating how beauty can be something other than visual. In fact it can be experienced through our other four senses. Can you think of a time when you have experienced beauty that is not visual?



For the next lesson bring in something to share with the class that represents beauty that is not experienced via the sense of sight, for example, a poem that you find meaningful, soft material, your favourite song or delicious chocolate cake.

"I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day. The real question would have been, 'Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?' I could have spoken up, 'I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone. The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and the warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sounds of the music, and since it would be good to have all my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, afterward.'"

Let's Create Beauty!

"Beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do".

Toni Morrison

Think about what things in the world you think **represent** beauty and ugliness. Collect images of these two concepts from your environment, for example: beauty is the colour of indigo or a grandmother with her grandchild; and ugliness is cruelty or violence.

On a large piece of cardboard create a collage. On one side place the images of beauty and on the other side place the images of ugliness.

Explain your choices to the class and how you would internalise the images of **beauty** that you have chosen. How would you "do" beautiful?

LOOKING IN AND SEEING CHANGE.

We are reaching the end of our journey and now we must look inwards to see how we have emerged with a different way of seeing the world and ourselves.

SEEING OURSELVES AGAIN.

We are going to do a reframing exercise. This means we are going to take something that we have already looked at and give it a new perspective, just like reframing an old picture.



Take out the paper doll that you made of yourself.

Stick it on a large piece of paper. Look at all the **NEGATIVE** words you have used to describe yourself.

Now turn them into something **positive**. Write the positive description around the edges of the page like a frame. For example, if you wrote on the doll "I have large thighs", now 'reframe' it as "I have muscular thighs because I dance well".

Continue to reframe every negative description.

Share your reframed doll with a partner.



Exercise adapted from *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing*. <http://www.roshhodesh.org>

AND AGAIN.

Think about how you have **CHANGED** while doing this workbook.

Choose **5** of the Louise Hay Affirmation cards that represent **NEW PERSPECTIVES** about **yourself, beauty and the world** that you have gained. We will share our choice of cards as a class.

TIME TO CHANGE THE WORLD!

The following exercise is a class effort.

Your class is now going to create a magazine for teen girls. As this is a powerful form of media you have a responsibility to your readers and therefore the magazine should reflect the way your class would want to project beauty to your peers. You have an opportunity to change the way girls see themselves and the world.

SO LET'S GET STARTED!

Think about how you as an **individual** can contribute to the magazine. For example, are you a talented photographer, poet, writer, artist, graphic designer, or editor? Everybody will be responsible for at least **1** page or the equivalent of **1** page.

As a group decide on:

An **ethos** (philosophy) you would like to reflect.

A **name** for the magazine that reflects the ethos.

What is the **content** of your magazine: sports, entertainment, fashion or all **3**?

Are you going to include **advertisements**? If so, how will they reflect your message?

Assign each person their **task** and decide on a deadline.

You could even have a **fundraiser** so you can make copies of your magazine to distribute to the other girls in your school or community.

Finally Our Anthem

As a final tribute to us perform this song by Christina Aguilera as a class. You can sing it, dance to it, or move to it as long as you use your beautiful bodies!

Christina Aguilera –

Beautiful

Don't look at me

Every day is so wonderful
And suddenly, it's hard to breathe
Now and then, I get insecure
From all the PAIN, I'm so ashamed

I am beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring me down
I am beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring me down oh no
So don't you bring me down today...

To all your friends, you're delirious
So consumed in all your doom
Trying hard to fill the emptiness
The piece is gone left the puzzle undone
Is that the way it is

You are beautiful no matter what they say
Words can't bring you down oh no
You are beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring you down oh no
So don't you bring me down today...

No matter what we do
(no matter what we do)
No matter what we say
(no matter what we say)
We're the song inside the tune
(yeah, oh yeah...)
Full of beautiful mistakes
And everywhere we go
(and everywhere we go)
The sun will always shine
(sun will always, always shine)
But tomorrow we might awake
On the other side

We are beautiful no matter what they say
Yes, words won't bring us down oh no
We are beautiful in every single way
Yes, words can't bring us down oh no
So don't bring me down today...

Don't you bring me down...today...
Don't you bring me
down...mmmm...today...



Christina Maria Aguilera was born on December 18, 1980 in America.

She sings in both English and Spanish. She released her first album in 1999 and it shot her to stardom. Like *The Bluest Eye*, The song 'beautiful' focuses on having confidence in your own beauty and not allowing others to influence how you see yourself.

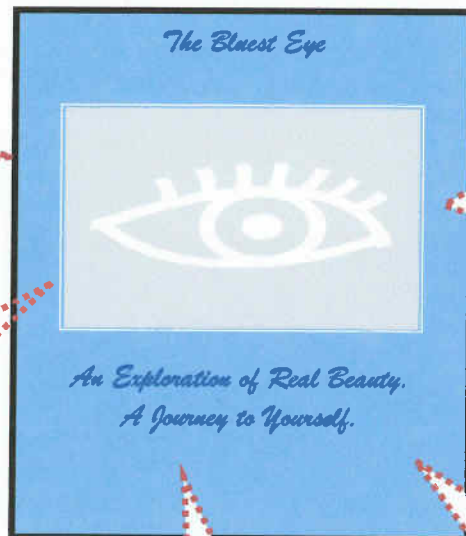
What do YOU think?

This workbook has raised questions about the power of magazines. The workbook is in the form of a magazine. What do you think was the writer's purpose in doing this?

Do you think the writer of the workbook favoured a particular group in society? How do you know this? How does this make you feel?

What does the workbook not say about magazines?

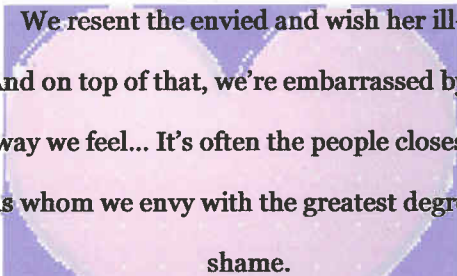
How did the workbook make you feel about the media, specifically magazines?



What is the writer's opinion of constructs of beauty? How do you know? Is it acceptable for the writer to have an opinion? Explain your answer.

Did you feel you that the workbook provided opportunities for disagreement? Give examples and explain your answer.

Taming Envy Cards

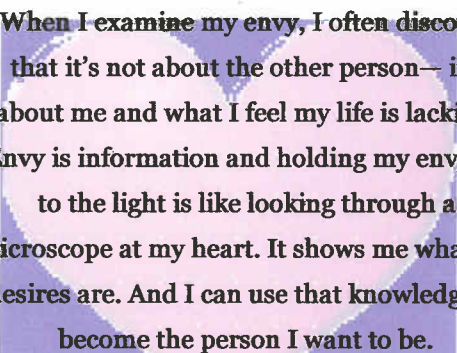


**We resent the envied and wish her ill—
And on top of that, we're embarrassed by the
way we feel... It's often the people closest to
us whom we envy with the greatest degree of
shame.**

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*,
October 2000.

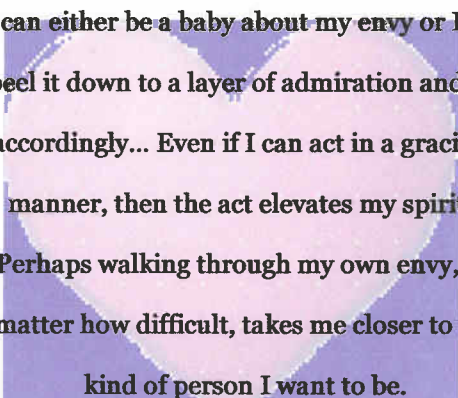
**There's a secret we woman never want to
admit: we envy other women. Perfect
example: my friend Risa, biologist...When a
young scientist won the top prize in Risa's
field, she told me, "not only is the woman
talented, but she's beautiful!" Months later, a
magazine ran a picture of the biologist— and
the woman had put on a ton of weight. "...we
just laughed," Risa told me. "I know— it's
awful. But laughing made me feel better." You
might think that Risa is petty, vindictive and
so insecure that she would use others' weight
problems to bolster her own ego. But Risa is
one of the kindest people I know. Still, her
reaction shows how deeply the roots of envy
can reach within all of us.**

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*,
October 2000.



**When I examine my envy, I often discover
that it's not about the other person— it's
about me and what I feel my life is lacking.
Envy is information and holding my envy up
to the light is like looking through a
microscope at my heart. It shows me what my
desires are. And I can use that knowledge to
become the person I want to be.**

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*,
October 2000.



**I can either be a baby about my envy or I can
peel it down to a layer of admiration and act
accordingly... Even if I can act in a gracious
manner, then the act elevates my spirits.
Perhaps walking through my own envy, no
matter how difficult, takes me closer to the
kind of person I want to be.**

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*,
October 2000.

How do you put aside this kind of envy? I've learned that sometimes you just have to move on. I simply won't allow myself to feel envious about some things. I'll never be 6 feet tall or have straight hair and green eyes. If I find myself envying someone because of her biology, I throw the sentiment right into a kind of mental waste bin labelled GET OVER IT! I'm not saying that I don't have that initial impulse of envy coursing through my brain—I do. But this kind of envy is a waste of time.

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*, October 2000.

Over the years, I've been both envied and the envier. And what I've discovered is that, first, pretending envy doesn't exist won't make it go away. Second, when you stand up to your envy and look it in the eye without flinching, it can tell you powerful things about your own heart—what you want, what you must work harder to change—and what, ultimately, you've just got to let go...And [you] can use that knowledge to become the person [you] want to be.

From 'Taming Envy', published by *O, The Oprah Magazine*, October 2000.

Affirmation Cards

<p>I say 'OUT' to every negative thought that comes to my mind. No person, place, or thing has any power over me, for I am the only thinker in my mind. I create my own reality and everyone in it.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>I radiate acceptance, and I am deeply loved by others. Love surrounds me and protects me.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>I am free to think wonderful thoughts. I move beyond past limitations into freedom. I am now becoming all that I am created to be.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>
<p>I rejoice in my own body. My body is perfect for me in this lifetime. I embrace myself with love and compassion.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>I do not have to earn love. I am lovable because I exist. Others reflect the love I have for myself.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>My heart is open. I allow my love to flow freely. I love myself. I love others and others love me.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>
<p>As I forgive myself, I leave behind all feelings of not being good enough, and I am free to love myself.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>As I move through the layers of other people's opinions and beliefs, I see within myself a magnificent being, wise and beautiful. I love what I see in me.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>	<p>There is no competition and no comparison, for we are all different and meant to be that way. I am special and wonderful. I love myself.</p> <p>From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought Cards'.</p>

I create
peacefulness in my
mind, and my body
reflects this
peacefulness
as perfect health.

From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought
Cards'.

I appreciate all that
I do. I am good
enough just as I am.
I speak up for
myself. I ask for
what I want. I
claim my power.

From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought
Cards'.

I only give out that
which I wish to receive
in return. My love and
acceptance of others is
mirrored to me in every
moment.

From Louise Hay, 'Power Thought
Cards'.

APPENDIX 2

Data Set 1

The transcript of the discussion on body image

S: What I want you guys to think about, I just want you to take a few minutes to think about how you feel, what does this mean. I want you to talk about yourselves and I appreciate it.

R: It's so much easier for someone to see how you are to the outside instead of saying about stuff (inaudible)

S: Thandi, tell us how you feel.

T: I have learned to like my body because that is the only thing that I have got control over. I can put myself down but I won't say it. Like I won't say, "My face looks ugly today," that may be okay but it makes things worse. So I like to pretend enough then I'm going to feel it.

S: That's an interesting attitude. There is something called "smile therapy" where you'll just smile and hopefully you will feel it. There are two levels of what you say. I think that when people do what you say, they are not looking for sympathy, they are looking for understanding. When people say, "Oh you are looking beautiful today," it doesn't help because your not looking for a response, this is you want to hear, "I know how you are feeling." If I can ask personally, what is it about your face that you don't like? You can articulate it any way that you like.

T: I hate my nose. I remember when I was in high school...there was a time that I wouldn't talk to anyone, and I refused to smile because I thought it made my nose look worse. But since I became happier, it's become a habit when I smile I turn.

S: Wow, look how it's affected you, that's unbelievable. What made you think that your nose is big?

T: Like I said, I used to look at it... a nose for me is a nice protruding...for me the ideal beauty would be my mother. So I look at her, the cheeks and nose—upturned....

S: But look how you've internalized somewhere along the line, somehow you got the message that your nose is too big and I have to say that looking at you that is not a object that I would focus on, and I've seen people who've...but I'm doing exactly as I've told you...but you've internalized that message so much so that you actually turn away from a happy moment because you....

T: You know the other day my mom asked me about it and I didn't want to say anything and I said, "Why wouldn't I turn around when I smile?"

S: But you see, it's noticeable when you do that. Wow. Thank you for sharing that.

L: When I wake up in the morning, I have to jump out of bed. I don't even go to the mirror. I try to run away from the mirror when I get up in the morning. I go and take a bath and when I get dressed I have to look at myself in the mirror. And that's when I really start looking at myself. First of all I hate my pimples. I hate the fact that I don't have a dimple, I hate my thighs and my arms have got to be good toned arms.

S: What are good toned arms?

T: She says that she hates her thighs and I hate my hips because I feel that they are too tiny, they're too small.

S: That's funny. I've never heard anybody say their hips are too small. Why are they too small?

T: Too skinny. Because, well now the beauty is (points to a picture) her. My mom always says, "You're so skinny, why don't you eat?" It's not that I don't eat, it's just the way I eat.

S: You know I have a friend from high school named Claudia. She was tall and skinny, skinny, skinny. But not anorexic skinny, just skinny and all the boys called her Spaghetti because she was so skinny. She used to cry a lot. And it ended up that she became a model because she was so skinny so it's interesting how who says what to you, even if you are too skinny, and someone is saying to you that you're too skinny, which is some people's wish to hear that, it's so interesting...

T: We also joke about it.

L: I hate my smile.

T & R: She has such a lovely smile and such beautiful teeth!!

L: I think my smile is too wide, it opens too much.

S: Thank you for sharing that with us.

R: Honestly, I don't look in the mirror a lot. Only when I am changing and then I'll look and wonder if this is okay. For me the mirror is for you around others and I look at them and for me that is kind of like my mirror. You wake up in the morning and you think you're going to look fine today, and you go to school and you see all these beautiful people around you and that's my mirror. You look at them and then you start thinking, wishing that you had things and that's how I am thinking.

S: Do you think you're lacking something in particular?

R: My acne. It's gone, but when I had it, it was bad. The whole thing should stay like this. It's better. Also my tummy area. And I've always wanted to have nice boobs. That's the one thing that I've always said, and nice legs. My sister has really nice legs and a nice chest area, and I'm going to have to wear padded bras for the rest of my life, but for me that would make me feel good.

S: I was thinking of a cartoon I was watching. My niece was over, and it was absolutely inappropriate for her because she is seven. It was about this little girl, little, but she was a teenager. And she went with her friends to the bra shop and she was flat-chested. So she bought a bra that you could inflate to different sizes. And she inflated it and all the boys were staring at her and asking her out on dates. And everyone was telling her, "That's not really who you are." It was a very interesting cartoon.

R: That for me would be just the cherry on the cake. It's not that I want to show everyone what I have, but just once I want to put on a top and it would be filled out, you know because I can never wear my sister's clothes because they would never fit me.

T: My mom and sister share a lot. You feel it because like I said I wanted bigger hips. My sister will come into my bedroom in the morning and she will ask, "Can I wear your jeans? You aren't wearing those." I'm so skinny; I could never fill them out.

L: Big boobs make a girl feel good. Most of my friends have big boobs. And they always seem to get the attention especially when we go out somewhere and there are people there, I always look at other people and how big they are or how small they are.

S: But I think guys, what I am picking up here, is that it is not seriously big boobs that you want. But I think what I am picking up is that it's the attention, I think to be shallow, it's the popularity that comes with it, maybe you think that you have more confidence. You said they get a lot of attention; maybe it's just the confidence that they have, not necessarily the big boobs.

L: This one girl once said she asked this friend and these boys who are so touchy feely with her yet very distant to me, what is the one thing about me that keeps them away. And they said, "Haven't you noticed that she doesn't have any breasts?" That's what makes me real low.

T: I could never tell you that. Even if I felt it, I could never say that. I would hear it and keep it to myself. Actually I would shout at them and keep it to myself. I would have it out with them rather than say something to hurt her. At the end of the day it's like saying, "Hey, they're paying attention to me because I have big boobs and you don't."

S: But also, what is it doing to her?

T: I'd just rather not tell her, because she obviously couldn't say anything to me of any truth.

L: It just came up in conversation. She said that they said something to her and I wanted to know. I'm glad that she told me. Now I know what they think.

S: Now when you are around them, what are you going to be focused on? You know, when you are around those guys, you internalized that message that they gave you. So instead of ever having the chance to appreciate yourself without them, you'll be thinking whenever you're around some guys that you have no boobs. I think you're right, that message should not have been said, but it's also something to think about when we talk about our bodies to our friends. You were saying about that mirror, and at what point are your friends going to stop you from looking at them as a mirror and having them as a support system. It can only hurt. And they're picking on something that you can't change.

Diaries

Lesego

Dear Diary,

I hate every single part of my body. From the first single strand of hair to the last toe on my foot. I hate my body. I think I feel this way because I'm not my version of beautiful. I'm not the world's version of beautiful so that automatically makes me ugly.

My friends tell me I'm beautiful all the time but I just can't come to believe it because I feel like I'm the complete opposite. I have to check myself 500 hundred times before I leave the house. I feel hideous and I feel that because of my ugliness I don't deserve to live.

I am 16 yrs old so to other people it may seem normal for a 16 year old girl to analyze herself but when its done so many times I don't feel that its normal.

Thandi

Dear Diary

I was looking in the mirror today and I realised I have a nice body but I really wish I had bigger hips. I can never find jeans that fit me well because I have long legs and small hips. I really don't think I am pretty and I have lot of acne. I probably look really weird because how often do you see a black person with freckles. I feel like when people compliment me they are lying. I really wish I had a body like Rihanna and a face like my mom then I would be happy.

Rose

Dear Diary

When I look at myself I see a body that is not that nice, well compared 2 other people, I feel mine is inadiquate, I like some things about me, but I wish I had nicer leggs, a flat stomach and bigger boobes. This would definitley complete me in my eyes oh and my face its terrible acne. I would feel that it is others around me people which I

interact with day 2 day they are the ones that shape my views. Not people on T.V or stars because they are people you just see in mags and on T.V bit it those who actually interac with, especially my sister. My friends, they are the ones that shape my views, because I know the stars all twick their appearances and have people 2 help them look perfect but people arround me don't the are unquily beautiful, natural.

Tabulated data of the learners Paper dolls

Table 1-Thandi's Paper dolls

Beauty	Ugliness	Self
*Nice nose	*Flat nose	*Ugly nose
*Straight teeth	*Ugly teeth	Flexible
*Nice hair	*Ugly hair	Tall
*Kind	*Meanness	Petite
*Sweet	*Spitefulness	Honest
*Caring	*Selfishness	*Caring
*Stylish	*Bad clothes	*Stylish
*Clear skin	*Pimples	*Light-Skinned
*Nice bone structure	*Chubby cheeks	Freckles
*Flat stomach	*Fat	Hip-hop head
*Long, nice-shaped legs		*Long legs
*Curvaceous	*Flat chest	Reliable
Attractive x 2	*Thick eyebrows	*Hairy
*Friendly		*Friendly
Confidence		Bossy
Original		Controlling
*Happy		*Happy
Popular		Long feet
*Good dancer		*Bad dancer
*Funny		*Funny
*Out going		*Shy
*Positive		*Cynical/pessimistic
*Intelligent		*Intelligent
*Witty		*Witty
*Hard worker		*Lazy
*Determined		*Motivated

* Indicates body parts or qualities that appear on two or more dolls.
 Similar or related body parts or qualities are on the same line to make it easier to read the data.

Table 2- Rose's Paper dolls

Beauty	Ugliness	Self
*Wonderful hair	*Not nice hair	* [positive feelings about] hair
*Smile	*Ugly smile	Hairy arms
*Lips		* [positive feelings about] lips
*Nice teeth	*Not nice teeth	Thin arms
*Clear skin	*Arm pimples	*Pimples
*Personality	* Not nice personality	* [positive feelings about] Personality
*Lovely figure	Ugly body	*No figure
*Dress sense	*Ugly dress sense	lazy
*Nice legs	*Thin/fat legs	*Hairy legs
*Outstanding toes	*Ugly toes	*Horrible toes
Nice eyes	*Flat-chested	*Flat-chested
Rosy cheeks	Big ears	Ugly fingers
Clever	Not nice nose	
Strong		
Confident		
* Loving	Not friendly	* Loving/ mean/caring
Happy		Kind

Table 3- Lesego's Paper dolls

Beauty	Ugliness	Self
* White teeth	* Yellow teeth	* Yellow teeth
* Soft lips	* Rough lips	* Rough lips
* Nice eyebrows	* Thick eyebrows	Big forehead
* Small ears	* Big ears	* Big ears
Colourful eyes	* Tired eyes	* Tired eyes
* Dimple	* No dimple	* No dimple
* Cute nose	* Big nose	
* Clear skin	* Pimples	* Pimples
* Good arms	* Chunky arms	* Awkward arms
* Has a bust	* Flat-chested	* Flat-chested
* Thin	* Too skinny/ Fatness	
* Thin waist/flat	* Wide hips/big tummy	* Big hips
* Toned skin	* Bad colour skin	* Bad skin colour
* Cute bum	* Big bum	* Big bum
* Nice thighs	Chubby cheeks	
* Smooth legs	* Chunky/hairy legs	* Big calves/hairy legs
* Small cute toes	* Fat toes/uncut toenails	* Ugly toes
* Confident	* Not confident	* Not confident
* Honest	* Liar	
* Happy	* Depressed	* Depressed
* Giving	* Greedy	* Selfish
* Kindness	Double chin	* Unkind
Sweetness	Too muscular	
Friendly	Obnoxious	
* Social	* Not social	* Lonely/not social
* Caring/thoughtful/selfless	* Selfish/ self centred	
Beautiful smile	* Love handles	* Love handles
Breathtaking	Fat ankles	
Charisma	* Big feet	* Big feet
* Loving	Lazy	* Loving
Great flowing hair	* Scared	* Scared
Soothing voice		
* Intelligent/smart		* Smart

The transcript of the explanation of the learners' paper dolls

S: So last week, we ended with the discussion about the...we were about to start with the "Let's Create." The paper dolls on page five. Okay. So what I want us to do is just to, um, to look firstly at the two dolls, not the one that you put aside for the ugly one, whatever that means, okay? So get your Beauty –one you think is Beauty and one you think is you. Okay, and if you could, for me, just somehow, write "Beauty," "Me," "Ugly," and then on the back, your names so that I...but you'll be getting all of this back. Okay. And now we can just briefly talk about –are you beheading your one? (*Laughter*) Is that the ugly one? (*More laughter*)

L: This one's supposed to be Beauty!

S: (*Laughs*) Even better! Okay, so what I'd like you to do is maybe just share some of the things that common some, that were not common, that were different, and also maybe about, you know, how you feel when you see things have –you know when you wrote on both whether it's good or bad. How you felt when you saw similarities. You understand? Just like, two minutes each.

T: Just talking?

S: Yes.

T: I guess not (inaudible)

(*Everyone laughs*)

S: You're right missy! Right. (*Laughs more*)

L: Ok, so you want me to say –what? The ones that are similar?

S: Well, yes. Similar and how you felt about the fact that they were similar. And the ones that were different and how you felt about it.

L: Well there's a lot of differences. Very few similarities.

S: Well talk about the similarities first.

L: Okay. Well I only found two similarities, well the one I picked out. And it was "loving" and "smart." And well I thought that I'm loving because, well, because, my friends, they give me that love and it's so easy for me just to give it back. That makes me feel like I am a loving person. And then "smart" I get all the time so... (*Everyone laughs*).

S: Fabulous.

L: And those are the two similarities. No physical similarities.

S: And how does that make you feel?

L: That there are no physical similarities?

S: Yes.

L: Well, It makes me a bit angry.

S: Okay...

L: Because there should be. But I can't think of any.

S: What were in the things that you wrote down about Beauty? What did you say? Just a few examples of what you said was Beauty.

L: I said "Beauty is a person who's got a beautiful smile, a cute nose, a person who is caring, who's got beautiful hair, who's social, who has a soothing voice, who is happy, who is sweet, who has smooth legs; a person who's smart and friendly, and, um, they must have a bust."

S: They must? (*Laughter*)

L: Yes. And they must have clear skin; I see a dimple; and, just, great flowing hair, like a waterfall...and...softness.

S: See it's funny because there are so many things that—and I don't even know you that well, that I would've underlined, or, you know, that...selfless, kind, sweet, um, what were the other ones? Beautiful smile—I don't know what you're talking about! Nose... we've been through this! What is interesting is that you don't see that in yourself.

L: No...

S: Thank you for sharing.

R: Okay. I also found similarities. I also said kind; I think I'm kind. I want to think I'm kind. (*Laughter*) And also a personality for me, is something that, for me, is beauty; is the person that you are and I think I have a nice personality. And then, very little physical features, I said. I said my hair, because everyone's telling me that I have lovely hair, so...

S: But you see—listen what you just said! "Everyone is telling me." It's not—it's like your mirror still is out—which is fine. But, just listen to the way that you're saying it.

R: And...I love my looks. (*Everyone laughs*)

S: Good!

R: Yes...just, yes. Your turn!

T: Okay. The only thing that's really the same here with facial features –I mean, like the, you know, features –physical features... Petite is one thing that I've got. And then, "Friendly", because I'm friendly. And "Stylish", and that's it.

L: Like, I had my birthday get-together this week

S: Oh, happy birthday!

L: Thank you. And she wouldn't let me – like I was preparing everything, getting everything ready—

T: But she wouldn't get dressed and she already had visitors!

L: And she was getting panicky. She was like, "When are you going to get dressed?! When are you going to get dressed?!"

T: Well those are my priorities

L: I have to worry about everybody else before I worry about myself.

S: That's very selfless! Underline it!

T: Like, for me, I would have to dress nicely so I can feel nice.

R: And for me, my hair's got to look nice before I feel I look nice.

T: So before, when she didn't want to get dressed –and it didn't match—I had to get her—I mean she was already having people over and I get more embarrassed when people are there. Like when I'm home, I can't look in the mirror if I'm looking ugly because I'm not dressed nicely.

S: So you equate "looking good" with "beautiful."

T: Yes. I can't look in the mirror. See, even at home, I wear stylish tracksuits, you know? Because if I look in the mirror and I'm wearing something ugly, it makes me feel ugly and it makes me depressed. (*To L*) So it's not as shallow as it sounds!

L: No, I know it's not shallow. It's just an obsession.

T: An obsession. Yes, well, pretty much.

S: So guys, maybe what we'll do now is start a new review because even if you haven't written it, you've already thought about what you think is ugly. So maybe you could just look at your ugly doll and think about, you know, what is ugliness. Wow, you've got a lot of ugly. (*Everyone laughs*)

T: Yes, I've got a lot of ugly: Big nose, pimples (I hate pimples) and fat. I'm so scared of being fat. And ugly teeth. And hairiness, being very hairy, like eyebrows and stuff. And then ugly hair and then selfishness –but that's what makes me ugly. And meanness. That also makes me ugly.

S: Ok, this wasn't about *your* ugliness, just about ugliness in general.

T: I just wanted to—

S: Okay that's fine, I just don't want you to sit here and berate yourself.

T: And then spitefulness.....but I mean, it's hard to say someone is ugly physically. I can't call someone physically ugly. Because, I mean, what about you? Someone could just stand around and say you're ugly...that you're ugly physically.

S: But you could say “elements of them are?” (*T nods*) Okay.

R: You know, because what I also thought that...I mean who says what is “ugly.” Because, I mean, everyone has some bit of them that's ugly. Um, but I said: a not a nice nose...

S: (*laughter*) You guys and the nose!

R: ...and not nice teeth, a flat chest, pimples, not friendly, fat legs.

T: I wish I had nice legs.

R: I do too.

T: I hate my legs.

R: But, um, I also think that your personality –the person you are emanates to your outward appearance. So if you aren't a good person inside, it will show.

S: Yes, I agree.

L: I have a lot of things to say.

S: Good! I mean, good that you have a lot of things to say not that there's a lot that's ugly. (*Everyone laughs*)

L: I said laziness, I said chubby cheeks, and like, a big nose, pimples, if you have tired eyes. I don't like a person who's not confident. Um, greediness, arrogance, if you're scared, you're unkind, flat chest, too muscular, if you're unfriendly, you're a liar, if you're fat, if you're depressed, big tummy, way big tummy, pregnant weight but you're not pregnant (*everyone laughs*), wide hips, selfish, if you're not social, love handles –oh I hate love handles –bad skin, like your skin is not toned, like you know Jessica Alba's skin is all perfect and toned? It's not that perfect. You're mean, your bum is like way too big, obnoxious.

(Everyone's laughing)

T: I thought after the first things she was listing, she was listing me!

L: I wasn't!

T: She was!

S: I'm going to stop here because you're all feeling pretty ugly now. Um, but thank you! I think that's important that you've written these down. Um, we're not, what I want you to think about for a moment is where do you think that you get these messages of "ugly" and "pretty" from?

L: The media.

S: Okay, what do you mean by that?

L: The media is obsessed with beautiful, thin, perfect –well, like to us, we see perfect and flawless. But then—

T: But even when you know that it's just fake—

L: —like makeup and everything.

T: It still gets to you that that should be what "beautiful" is.

S: Can you think of other places, besides the media, that you give you images of what is beautiful and what is not.

T: I think school. And going out.

L: And the people that you see around you.

T: Because, I mean, obviously, I know you'll immediately think you're ugly if guys don't talk to you, you know?

L: Yes, definitely.

T: And, you know, it starts from a young age. Like if you're not popular, then you think you're ugly. If guys don't talk to you, you're ugly.

S: So you associate being accepted with being pretty?

T, R, L: Yes.

L: If you're ignored, than you feel that you *must* be.

T: Like there's something wrong with you.

S: Physically?

T: It doesn't mean "obviously they haven't gotten to know me."

L: Then it means it must be what's on the outside.

S: Ah, because every social interaction you're having, you are looking for messages about your body from that person.

L: But you don't say –you can't immediately say "Oh, no maybe he doesn't like my personality." How can you say that? Because he's never spoken to you. And if they approach you and want to know you better, then there must have been something on the outside.

T: And it's only natural, because you can't seriously tell me that if you're looking for a boyfriend or whatever, you can't seriously say that you look for their personality. That's not the first thing that draws you.

S: Look, we won't go into the whole dating thing. But, I think you're saying two different things. One, you're saying about finding a boyfriend or a girlfriend. The other thing that you're saying is that if people ignore you, male or female, that it's about your physical –whether they want to get to know you or not is based on –just correct me if I'm wrong –is based on your physical...

T: But the ugliness...when you're talking about girls and stuff, it's never usually about that. But when you say, when other things make you feel you're ugly—it's getting attention from the opposite sex does go for anybody. And that's the truth. Like, even if you're not into those kinds of things and whatever, it's just natural. It happens. So, when it comes from other girls or other boys if you're a boy, it's not as, like, hard hitting. You know what I mean? Like maybe if it's a girl you could say, "She's just jealous of me." That's something that you could use to make you feel better about yourself. But when it comes from someone of the opposite sex, then it's like obviously.

S: Well, I think it's interesting that you say it's natural because clearly you've internalized it so that it is natural, which was my next question –have you internalized these messages? That fact that you can say that this is natural, which you have...and um, so I think it's a really important realization.

Summary of "Act it Out" and discussion

The learners act out a skit in which a boy ignores a girl he has been flirting with over SMS when he finally meets her. The reason for his change of heart is that the girl had brought along a friend who had bigger breasts and the boy wanted to be with this girl. He tells the first girl to go away. She cries and the audience is told, "She always was insecure about her body but felt now that she had met an awesome guy, she thought he would appreciate who she is but then she saw how her friend was more popular because of her bigger breast and she spent the whole night crying".

S: Now I'm going to ask you, maybe if you could think of an incident where maybe, you, the colour of your skin made people react toward you differently and....you know, just a brief... how it made you feel. For Pecola, what she is going through in the novel, you can't separate her from being black even though we can say that she's perceived as ugly, she's perceived as ugly because she is black. And, if you think about incidents like Maureen, for example. Remember she is the little girl, who comes in and every body loves her thinks she's an angel because she's got lighter skin. So, and the fact that her mother treats her terribly even though the mother is black she sees her daughter in comparison to the little white girl that she's taking care of and when Pecola burns herself on the hot pie, she doesn't care about the Pecola, she only cares about the little girl crying about the spilled pie. I don't think that we can separate for Pecola at least beauty and black, the colour of her skin. So I just was wondering if you know want to comment on it even if you had no experience, but think for a minute about, if anything that happened to you and how it made you feel.

L: My mom told me to buy bread at the shop and the woman at the cashier was a white lady, and I'm just buying a loaf of bread and the woman behind me was buying a loaf of bread, and she had a lot of things with her. And I was going...I wanted to pay for the stuff and the cashier told me "No, Stop!" And she told the lady behind me to come in front of me, and the line was (inaudible). And, I mean, I was just standing there and I was confused. And she just looked at me, and kept looking at me funny. So I was like, okay... and just went to another line.

S: Wow. So how did that make you feel?

L: I felt like there was something wrong with me, she didn't want to serve me. I felt like I wasn't able to do anything about it, like I was disabled andIt was something not right with me – she didn't want to help *me*. Like, you know, there was something wrong with me.

S: So you felt disempowered in a way, because you said you felt like you couldn't do anything.

L: Yes.

S: That's a (inaudible) story. It really is.

T: I don't know, I don't like looking at things... in perspective of....because I'm black. That's why I don't get things. Like, that was taught from a young age, not to use your. I don't know. Because my mom was very "anti"-that way. If there's something wrong, there's something with you, don't go blaming it on something else. But I mean, like you said, now I just think about it, and I noticed, maybe it's me, I'm just overreacting. But I go to dancing and there's not a lot of black people there. Actually I'm the only black person in the class. But you can see the way that I'm kind of left out of the people. I have other friends in other dancing classes but in my dancing class I only have one friend and that's because she goes to a school like this where we, you know, everyone is mixed, so she's just fine talking to me. But I mean, when you think about it, you could think that its racism or it could just be personal preference. But I mean, it's the worst feeling when you know that... sometimes I dread going to dance class because, you know, my friend might not be there, and then

you just have to stand on the outside, instead of in social circles. It would be like “Oh, I went to this party” and whatever, you know they invite each other to parties, but its like, “Oh, you probably wouldn’t go to this party.” You know?

S: And none of them come to this school?

T: None of them come to this school. Which is weird because at school, I’m nice to...everybody’s my friend. I’m not racist when it comes to friends. I’m not at all. So, it’s just a big difference to get somewhere like dancing, where everybody is just, “We stick together and you’re [*motions away*] there.”

S: Yes, so it’s not as overt as Lesego’s experience. Because that, to me, is plain (inaudible) racism. There’s no reason why she couldn’t serve you and she obviously just thought...and you could possibly identify most with Pecola from that....and what makes yours as powerful is that its not so open. And that’s...

T: It’s quite confusing; you don’t know what that is.

S: Yes, but you do know it is, at the same time. I’m not saying that should think that way, but part of you thinks that. That’s the reason which is quite.... It’s weird for me to here this in 2006. You would think that...

T: You would think that [*nods in agreement*]

R: When our family goes camping, we go camping at the end of the year and normally it is to very Afrikaans places and we get there and we’re the only coloured family and these people will stare at you. They will stare at you while you’re putting up your tent and they’ll stare at you when you go swimming and they’ll stare at you in the bathroom.

S: What do you think they’re staring at?

R: I don’t know! Maybe because it’s...

T: Maybe it’s because they’re not used to seeing you.

R: Probably that. But maybe it’s because this one time when we went to another caravan place, we wanted to just look around. So we ended up driving around the place and we ended up at a stop. There was this stop there and people were walking across the road. And then this guy, Afrikaans guy, says in Afrikaans, that he was going to tell the front desk not to allow us to come to this caravan place because we are coloureds. That was interesting.

S: So what happened?

R: Well, because of our colour, they said, “These people, they look dark, we shouldn’t allow them to come in...” and so, it was interesting. And we just took it as, you know, people just being ignorant, you know? They just don’t....

S: But you still went into the park?

R: Yes. I mean, there's no reason why you can't. It's open to everybody. And they said, "We're going to tell the front desk not to let them in and let them actually camp there." It was fine for us to look around, but we couldn't come in and camp... and they were using these, what do you call them?

T: Derogatory?

R: Yes! These words for coloured people.

T: You know, um, my family, well my mom is very, what's the word, she knows good things. You know, she'll go to nice expensive places and she'll know what's classy..... But when you look at her in comparison to most black families, you say go on holiday and you go to Durban or north of Durban think. You know what I mean. But my mom and dad, they'll go to nice places like Belize or Shelley beach, or you know, nice places, but they aren't very well off. But one thing I've noticed is when we walk into restaurants (inaudible) we spent a couple of holidays down there. It's totally Afrikaans. And you should just see the way people look and turn and talk. And you know it's quite obvious that it's like, "What are you doing in this place?"

S: So how do you feel guys when this happens?

T: "How do you even know about this restaurant, you're a black person how do you even know about such fancy things?" And this one time, she was on a plane the people behind her were speaking in Dutch, (my mom travels a lot) but it's very similar to Afrikaans so she could pick up what they were saying...and she spent some time in...not Holland, somewhere else where they speak Dutch. Whatever. So basically what she was talking about was black people, how can they be here. So my mom was sitting next to an Afrikaans lady who was her friend as well. And she turned around and spoke to them in Afrikaans and there were like "how did you here what we just said?!" Because, they were so shocked. A black woman and a white woman were talking to each other, they were being friends...was

S: Which is also surprising because they are not South African, which is a whole other level. And, you know, I often think about how, you know, this is going to sound awful, but, how people would treat someone who is black from America versus somebody who is black from South Africa. I think that sometimes there's a whole other level that's going on, and you know and I wonder if your mother was American and sitting in front of them, would that have made a difference? I wonder if black people from South Africa, I wonder if those people have had the same racist views of somebody who wasn't African, you know. I think that would be an interesting question.

T: They just have no sexism. Which is one thing. When my mom, again on the plane, she tells me, and lots of times she went to Denmark. And she was sitting by some man, and he was like, "Where did you come from?" or like "Have you been to Denmark?" or "Was it holiday or work?" And she's like, "Work." But she just gave

them brief, one word answers and he eventually asked her, "What do you do?" And she said, "I'm a Deputy CEO of ***." And she had explained previously what her place was, and what it was about, and he looks at her up and down and was like, "Right."

S: Shocked as if, "What do you do?"

T: Like, "Right. You lied to me" Like, he is reading his newspaper and looked at her up and down, like, he looked at her from her shoes and then up and went "mmhmm..." (*Pretends to read newspaper*).

S: Wow

T: As if "Right, like you could possibly be something like that."

S: I think there's a double prejudice there. The fact that your mom's black and that she's a woman. I think that's...

T: Yes (*nods*)

S: ... and actually I was reading a lot of theory around that; how there's this black African American writer called Barbara Christian and she talks about how that black women and women of colour, no matter...regardless...meaning anybody who's not white and have similar experience about their bodies, is that are always put on the bottom rung, so to speak, of the ladder, you know, because, you know, you're a woman and you're black. And she's black herself so she talks about it as "us," using the word "us." And she says that it's a unique experience unless you, you know, like me being a woman and white, I do not have the same experience about sexism as you do. Because, you know...

T: We learn similar people, you have in your own people, like your own culture, or whatever, immediately, black women are looked down on...well not... their not treated with equal amount of respect, you know? So, not only do you get the disrespect from your own family, you know, your own community. Then when you go out into the world and try to make a better person of yourself, other people don't agree with who you are.

S: Yes, and it's a harsh reality to live with.

T: But I mean, it's changing with this whole thing that women, that black women, get more jobs now-a-days, so I get to say that I'm (inaudible).

R: It's amazing it's still around...

S: The racism?

T: It's not going to die down.

R: I remember, I went shopping with my sister. And we went into this quite expensive jewellery place. And we walked in, and this lady wouldn't leave us alone. She kept on looking at what we were touching and...I promise you! And then these white girls walked in and she's just like...she didn't even greet them and she didn't even know who they were. And they were busy on one side and she didn't even go and bother with them. She was so busy looking at what we were touching, "Oh, you want to buy that." And we're like, "No, we're just browsing." So we just left, because it just wasn't a nice experience.

T: It wasn't a nice experience. But sometimes, just to spite the person, I'll come in, and buy it. Like, the most expensive thing. Just to spite them. And the way that they look at me –and I go to my mom, and be like...when I want to I can act like the swankiest person, I can be the spoilt brat when I feel like it. So I'll just come in, and I can get money and pay for it in five R100 notes, you know, just to spite them, because I mean, sometimes it's ridiculous the way people treat you because you're young and you're black.

L: Especially because you're young.

S: You think so?

L: Yes

S: I haven't even entered that into the equation.

L: When I went to the shop once, and I was with my older sister. And we were just walking together, browsing, and she decided she was going to go. And so, security guard now comes and watches me like a hawk while I'm looking at stuff and touching stuff and he's just watching me. And eventually I had enough and left the shop.

T: I think the thing is that when you're talking –when you speak –because I speak English with my mom and, you know, we use big words a lot of the time. We went into this café; we needed some random things... And the shop owner was so shocked that black people could speak like that. Like, they're just in awe. Like, "So you come from here?! You're South African?!? You..." And it's like, "Yes, I mean, I go to school, and..." It's not all...It's just so stereotypical the way that certain people have an idea.

S: But do you think there's a reverse thing of black people who, when they hear you speak/ treat you differently, because you speak what the, I don't know, model C's, or what –I don't know what to call it?

L: It happens here at school.

T: Yes, it's the worse. In primary school I hated it. I used to feel so insecure about myself. People used to call me "Coconut," and it's the worst thing ever. It's...It's emotionally...I don't know, it's just so horrible.

(overlapping conversations between the three girls)

R: I never stop hearing about how I don't sound like a typical coloured. Because they were born in Cape Town, they grew up in Cape Town. Or even, I mean, just in Eldorado Park, even our friends from here, or, I mean we have here these coloured that are just like, you know, "Why do you speak like that?" It's just... (*shrugs*)

S: Do you think that because they see you as better...?

R: Yes, they think...

T: I think it's probably because they're jealous.

R: ...they think that you think you are better than them. (*T and L nod and mumble in agreement*) you know, because maybe...

T: You go to better schools than them...

R: ...yes maybe better schools

T: ...and you have a better house...

R: ...so they...

T: You know, other times, because sometimes I'll speak Sotho sometimes I speak English. I mean, it's just my mood. You know, and one day, I just decided to start speaking Sotho to one of my cousins and I hadn't seen him in a long time, and he was like "Oh, so you *can* speak Sotho?"

S: Oh shame!!

T: (*Laughs more*) I mean, they just put me on the spot, like (inaudible) you know? But I have a domestic worker at the house that helps with the stuff in the house, because, you know, I focus on my schoolwork, that I don't clean and all...ok fine, maybe it's understandable and you can have that...but I mean, the way that my cousins will pick at me like "Oh yes, she probably can't even boil an egg because she's got a maid that will do everything like that for her." And it's just, okay why are you beating at me for something that my parents managed to afford for me; sending me to the better school. You know, it's, and it's petty. And you get it from your own family.

S: And kids in this school, do they..?

L: Yes. Like, I speak...I always speak English at school. Sometimes I'll speak Xhosa but I stick to English. And...

S: Is that –sorry, is that a conscious decision?

L: Yes, it's just my own decision.

S: Okay.

L: I mean, I remember once we were at hockey and those Hockey girls....she just started speaking Sotho to me; she asked me a question in Sotho and I was just like, “No I can’t speak it...” and I said, “I don’t know what it means in Sotho,” and she’s like “Huh?”

T: Yes, people are so shocked! Because, most of the people who know me speak to me in Sotho and I understand them and we talk and whatever and they are just like “So you *do* know! So you *can* speak Sotho!”

L: “You *can* speak Sotho!” and it’s like, you don’t even know me. You don’t even bother to take the time to ask me anything, you’re just like “Whoa, I always would’ve thought you were a coconut.”

T: Like, another thing, it’s the most painful thing...it makes you want to cry sometimes.

S: Okay, now I’m going to ask of you a very personal question. Okay, I understand the term, and I know that it’s painful. But is it painful because they’re saying you’re white?

T: No, It’s painful because they’re saying...they’re saying it in a mean way.

L: Yes, they’re saying it like I cannot relate to my own culture because—

T: ...because I speak English well, because I get good marks because—

L: I think they ask because we’re black, we speak English and we get pretty good marks at school. And then it’s like—

T: And if we’re comfortable talking to each other like this, we don’t have to lower our—I mean sometimes people will make themselves stupid when they’re not, because they want to...fit in. And I don’t find the need to do that. Like yesterday at hockey, they’re busy talking and they say, “Yeah, but she’s white,” pointing at me. But I’m like (*pulls a face*) and then someone else says to cover up, “You know she’s light.” I’m stupid? It’s irritating.

S: It’s interesting though, sitting here as a white person and white being an insult.

All girls laugh and protest.

S: No, I know, I’m just trying to understand the nuances. I understand why they say it. I am certainly not insulted. I’m asking the question because I’m interested. It’s an interesting insight. In the same way some one says to a boy, “Oh, stop being such a girl.”

T: Ja, there’s nothing wrong with being a girl, but what’s implied behind it.

APPENDIX 3

Data Set 2

Discussion about the Media

S: Can you identify the different forms of media and say how they influence your body.

(Girls start speaking about the magazine covers on the sides of the page)

S: These are magazines that I collected from all around the world. Unfortunately some of yours got cut off in the printing process. But there's Russian, there's Japanese, there's Chinese, there's English, there's Arabic, American, black, white...

R: You can just see that all these people are all so—

T: So gorgeous.

S: Yes?

R: So it's all around the world.

S: Yes.

T: Look at this one. (inaudible) cover with the lady in the red track top. I'm sure it's like a sporting magazine.

L: What about this one with (inaudible).

T: That just says: nobody's gonna look at you unless you're hot.

S: Okay, so, besides magazines, which is clearly what's in front of you, what other types of media are there that can influence the way that you look at—

L: TV.

S: Okay.

L: And movies and all music videos.

T: Yes, music videos! It's a disgrace to me.

L: It's so sad.

T: Like, with hip-hop music, I love hip-hop, but it's sort of why I started liking conscience rap. It's completely different because normal hip-hop that's just commercial and on the radio like 50 Cent and whatnot, they all talk about how ass—oh I'm sorry...

S: It's okay, no one's watching this besides me.

T: Okay, well, you know, ‘Ass so fat’ and, like, you know, things that just make you feel like ‘hold up, people are saying this and that and look at me in the mirror, I don’t have, you know, a small waist and a nice large butt. And like, you know, the way that they say how women should be, otherwise you’re worthless. That’s why people don’t understand why I like listening to conscience rap so much, you know? ‘Cause in there, they don’t disrespect women.

L: I feel they talk about real issues.

T: It’s because they talk about real issues. Like, about real stuff that goes on around and how stupid these things are. There’s this one song, ever heard about Pink?

S: Oh, I love that song! *Stupid Girl!* (referring to lyrics from Pink’s song *Don’t Let Me Get Me*)

T: Yes, *Stupid Girl*. It’s true! And I mean, obviously everybody’s laughing at it, “Ha ha ha, it’s so funny.” But nobody’s actually thinking about it, like, ‘Seriously, this is what you’ve become; this is what the media has made.’ In our music, this is what we hear all the time. That you have to have this type of body and this...I dunno.

R: It’s especially music videos that influence young people today, in the way they dress, the way they act, the way they carry themselves.

T: I think it’s demeaning.

S: Really? What is demeaning about it?

T: The way that these girls, I mean, don’t they come from –okay fine, maybe they have their reasons why they’re doing it. But you turn around, even at school and people are running forward, walking around with tops down here and up here and skirts this short and whatever. It’s just to get attention. I mean, do you really need to show so much? Do you really need to be so...over the top to get attention? I mean, is that what you’re trying to say?

S: If you’re saying the videos themselves are telling you what’s sexy, what’s beautiful, then that’s what they’re going to do. They’re going to try. Because if the guys are watching the videos of Beyonce and she’s got a bikini top and boy shorts—

T: I won’t go out half naked! I mean, I know if I’m cold, I’m cold! (*Everyone laughs*) I won’t be caught in a tube top and micro-mini skirt if I’m cold! I don’t care how nice the outfit looks, if it’s cold, I’m going to think about it twice.

S: Like you’ll put on a cool track suit.

T: That’s right. (*Everyone laughs*)

S: Okay, let’s read the little box. ‘The media is a very powerful tool in the transmission of ideas and messages. We often receive different layers of messages from the media. At times we are unaware of the subliminal,’ in other words, hidden

messages 'that we internalize and we allow to shape our perceptions of others and ourselves.' Okay. So now we're going to return back to the novel for a little bit, because remember, that's why we're here. Kind of. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's mother learns of the concept of beauty from the media, in this case, the movies. We're going to read this particular extract of Pauline Breedlove who is Pecola's mom. And I want you to think about how the experience changes her. Now will someone else read?

T: [reads excerpt]

S: So, let's go through the questions. You don't really need to write them down, unless you want to. So, I want you to think of an example in the novels, even if you haven't read it for a while, some of you have finished it...okay, of how Pauline's idea of beauty affects her treatment of Pecola.

L: What about the pie incident?

S: Okay, tell us.

L: Where Pecola accidentally drops the, what is it? Blueberry pie. And she gets burnt. And the first thing the mother does is run to the little white girl who's crying because there's no more pie, instead of going to her own daughter who could be hurt and in pain. And then she shouted at her daughter to clean up. I think that to her, beauty is maybe whiteness...

S: It is. It's not maybe.

L: And also...yes, just being white to her is being perfect and it affects how she treats Pecola.

T: And it affects Pecola. She saw that to be treated and to be loved and to be beautiful, you have to be white. She saw that from her own mother.

S: Exactly, so it's *not* just the media. It's not just Shirley Temple, it's her mother's of the media and how Pauline thinks about what is beautiful and then looks at her own daughter and then thinks her daughter's ugly because she doesn't reflect what the media is telling her is beautiful. How do you guys feel about that statement? Like, do you think that even today, in South Africa, that there's a portrayal of white as beautiful?

T: Not really.

L: Not as much.

T: No, actually, I...I heard in history, or something, they were talking about how one of the black country's leaders, I think it was (inaudible). Why would people try so hard to be something else? Why white people try to be black when their skin gets tan? And black people get skin-lightening cream. We just don't want to be who we are.

S: Interesting. Yes, that's very...what a great statement.

T: I don't think that's exactly how it was, but...

S: Whatever! It was well reported. So you don't think that's really an issue in South Africa anymore?

T: It's really not. It's become who you are. Because confidence is one of the most beautiful things. Because if you're shy about yourself, you can't exude...it comes within and then outside, like we said. When you're confident, even if you're not the most pretty person, you know, if you've got confidence, it's beautiful.

S: Who gives you the confidence?

L: You have to feel it yourself.

R: Well me, personally, I think others around me, like my friends. But it should come from inside.

L: If you can show people that inside, you are confident, then something about you will definitely draw people to you and then you'll also feel that confidence growing.

S: Okay, that's interesting. I think it's important that you said 'it should' but often recognizing that it doesn't. And I think that's a very honest statement. How do you think that incident with the pie, or how Pecola's mother sees her affects, from what we know about Pecola, how does that affect her self-esteem?

L: Well, she's not going to feel very pretty.

T: Yes, I mean, any child wants to make their parents happy.

R: To be loved by their parents.

L: When your mother puts someone else's child—

T: A *white* girl, before you, to get your parent's love, you want to be that. What she loves. So now that she's not white, her mother (inaudible) which makes her hate herself.

S: Absolutely.

Transcript of Learner's Explanations of Artistic Responses to "Let's Create"

T: Okay. I have this body of Beyonce because...I wish...and then this girl. She's so beautiful and thin. Perfect skin. And she's eating French fries which are oily and fat. Okay, so she stays beautiful and thin with her gorgeous skin. And then, I've got Paris Hilton. She's so rich and she's so lucky. She gets, like, anything she wants and it's right there. It's not her fault that she's (inaudible) but I mean, basically, she's got it all. Okay. Looking at these pictures makes me want to hide behind the glasses.

(Points to an image of dark sunglasses) It makes me want to scream. *(Points to the word 'AHH')* It makes me want to vomit. *(Points to an image of what looks like vomit)*

S: And why did you choose green paper?

T: Oh yes, I was going to say that now. It makes me envious. Green represents envy. And this is supposed to be tears. But I can't draw. It's a puddle of tears at the bottom here. That's my story.

S: Thank you for sharing that with us. Okay, L.

L: Okay, well, I stuck pictures of girls that are really beautiful...I stuck her because she's really beautiful. She was on Oprah and she was pregnant and she was so skinny and beautiful. And then she's *(pointing to Beyonce)* just gorgeous. And then she's got such a beautiful body. She's so tan and she's so gorgeous and all perfect. And I chose this kind of green paper because it just makes me want to crinkle up and...crinkle. And then I painted over them in green because I'm so jealous of them, don't want anybody else to be able to see them. Because I'm not like them. And people don't really see me, so I don't want people to see them either. And then, I stuck the cross over it because I'm cross with them.

S: Why?

L: Because they're so beautiful and it's not fair! Why am I not so beautiful like that?

S: So what emotion would you say that you are feeling right now?

L: I don't know, but a bit of envy, right there.

S: Fabulous. Wow, I'm keeping these, ok guys? Okay, R. Wow!

R: Okay, well I chose...I don't know who she is...

S: It doesn't matter.

R: Well she's just beautiful. And this is Catherine Zeta-Jones and she's so beautiful. And Jennifer Lopez who has the most beautiful body I've ever seen in my life. Anyway, as you can see, they've got pimples or mumps or chicken pox?

S: You've given them a disease!

R: Because, I think, why does it only have to be beautiful people? Why can't they put normal people? You know, people with pimples, who have really gone through the experiences of growing up...and life. And having people laugh at them because they have ugly faces, you know? And then, their eyes are gone because nobody should look at them and they shouldn't be able to see you.

S: Why?

R: Um, so that you don't look at...I think your eyes are the way to someone's soul and by covering their eyes, you can't see that, just the outward appearance that makes them beautiful. It's just how they look that everybody's judging. Not their eyes; not through the person they are.

S: And what's all the red stripy stuff?

R: Oh, the red? That's my anger. I wanted it to be a disgusting colour, because to me, that's how I feel—vomit. We mixed all the colours together and I tried to write envy there.

T: That did work.

R: Yes

L: I thought that was a tear.

S: Oh, wow. Okay, that's an interesting interpretation.

R: I tried to make her look ugly. See, Jennifer Lopez has got whiskers...or something coming out of her nose. And she's got a moustache.

S: And pimples.

R: Yes, and she's got red skin! (*Everyone laughs*)

S: Do you think that maybe one of the reasons that you covered their eyes is so they don't see you?

R: Yes.

S: I mean, you don't have to agree with me, you can definitely say...

R: Yes. Yes. Yes. I definitely think so, because I—I mean, if they look at me, I mean, what are they going to think? Really. Oh, and it's white so it can show the colour more. And...yes.

APPENDIX 4

Data Set 3

Transcript of the Discussion about “Wishes for Real Beauty”

R: I like how Claudia deals with it. She seems to turn it around and you know. She says, “Why is everyone telling me this is lovable,” when it’s not. I don’t have to play with it. You know. It was nice to see her pulling the hair and...

S: So she’s trying to destroy it?

R: Ja.

T: It’s not her. Ja and Pecola on the other hand internalises it. She wants to be this beautiful white girl. She drinks the milk because maybe one day she might be white and she eats the sweets because she feels it’s her. And Claudia is very cynical, “This is never going to happen. Why do I have to love this doll and I mean it’s not me and I can’t be this.” She’s taking out her frustration. She is taking what is seen as beautiful and making it ugly.

S: How would you deal with being presented with unattainable beauty?

T: You know me. I am very cynical...

S: “Get over it!”

T: (*laughs*)

R: (Nodding) Um, I don’t mean, actually um, I think I would internalise it. And I would try and say “Why couldn’t I be like that?”

S: So you identify a little bit with Pecola?

R: Yes, but I like how Claudia deals with it.

S: Yes?

R: Yes, but I’m not...

S: So you aspire to be like Claudia, but you are realistic about how you deal with it.

R: Yes. But I’m not like that (pointing to the extract from the book about Claudia), like Thandi, cynical.

S: (*To Thandi*) Are you the more Claudia type?

T: I always... I know it’s not going to happen, sometimes I am wrong, but I’d rather not get hurt, which is what happens. Why don’t you just get over it and move on?

S: It's not so easy.

T: Ja, I know but it's better than going through the pain.

R: No, I can't...

T: It's better than going through the whole pain of realising it's not going to happen and it kills you, but thinking before hand...

S: *(Laughing)* I feel there is an undercurrent here and I'm just not getting it.

T: *(Looks at Rose, laughing)*

(Learners read extract about Claudia's wish for Christmas on page 14.)

R: I like this. It's really...

S: What the extract?

R: Yes, it's really beautiful.

T: It's quite interesting that she is so young and wants something so...usually when you're... when I was young, I wanted dolls and toys.

S: Yes, I think you are right, but remember this is Toni Morrison's voice coming through in a way. But she makes her character very intuitive. Let's have a look. *(Reads passage)* What do you think Toni Morrison is doing by...if we have to compare this page *(points to page with extracts about the white baby doll)* and this extract, what do you think she is doing with this juxtaposition, by putting them together?

R: Contrasting it.

T: They don't really know what the child really wants. They assume, for right now what her mom would have want *(inaudible)*. I am not sure *(inaudible)* her dream, the mother, would have been to look after a white baby girl. Whatever the case is, they don't really understand, they don't take the time out to understand what would make the child happy.

S: So you bring to...show that the older generation is not aware of what they are teaching their kids to love. Ok, very nice. What were you going to say Rose?

R: Um I think...

S: You were saying "contrasting".

R: Yes, the difference between, you know...(laughing) I lost my point.

S: That's ok.

R: Um, no, she's, she wants love and feeling and emotion from her parents rather than a doll, you know.

S: That's interesting, so it's more of an emotional response?

R: Yes.

S: Fabulous.

T: They are also very distant...with the children and the parents, like she says, they give her directions to go like this. And it's... most of the time you want a relationship. Like sometimes I feel... because where I come from, I come from a comfortable home, money when I need it. I lack for nothing...materially. But when I think about it sometimes, I would rather...

(Interruption in classroom)

S: So what were you saying?

T: I was saying when I read this I felt that I relate to Claudia, in the sense that sometimes I would rather give up my nice clothes or what ever, just to spend more time with my mom. 'Cause it's so different, like even when she is at home, she is preoccupied with something else, you know.

S: It's difficult.

T: And so I would rather, sometimes, not go shopping every Saturday with her and rather sit and talk to her and have the relationship like Lesego has with her mom.

L: *(smiles and nods)*

T: *(giggles)* like it's quite nice. I mean when it's not work, then it's the house and then she's shouting at me. It's just like... sometimes you wish, I would rather do without money, the fancy house, the chairs that I can't sit on, you know.

L: That really bothers you.

T: It does both me, but you know. I would rather not have all these nice things and just have like a nice relationship like...

S: The emotions Rose is talking about.

T: Yes the emotions she is talking about.

S: Thank you for sharing that.

R: She's longing for something long lasting. This long lasting love that, I mean, children will remember this for ever. Instead of a doll, you know, being left alone to play with a doll and everybody is telling her that she should, just something like a memory.

S: All right, let's look at the questions. How is this wish a wish for real beauty?

T: Beauty from her parents... showing her love which is beautiful for her, not physical beauty. She doesn't find that beautiful. What she find beautiful is the relationship she will receive from both her parents.

S: So an emotional beauty? (*Lesego nods*)

T: An emotional beauty, something...a security with the whole experience.

S: (*reads the next questions*) Can you think of a time when you have experienced beauty that is not visual? Think about it for a second and then I would like you to share.

T: (*looking at Lesego*) these girls...I thought that was very nice, on Saturday.

L: Oh yes, that wasn't physical [beauty], it was nice.

T: They were pretty girls and usually pretty girls...OK let's first explain what the situation is. We went to a rugby match, but it was an interschool rugby match sort of thing. So we just went to go support and whatever and usually at those things the girls keep to themselves and look after the boys pretty much. And these girls, they came to us and were nice to us, which is quite strange because they were pretty.

L: Ja.

T: They didn't need anyone to help them around you know, in the sense that most of the time when you meet girls like that they don't even look at you, or they do look at you and you're ugly...

T and L (*overlapping*): "What are you wearing?" "Who do you think you are?" "Ja"

T: But I mean these girls were genuinely nice, walking around introducing us to their friends because they have friends at the school. And I mean, it's kind of superficial, but I mean we are young and that's what...

S: Ja, it still happens as an adult. People ignore you when you are in a new place.

T: So I thought that that was very beautiful. They were nice girls.

L: Because they were pretty girls.

S: Especially because they were "pretty girls", you expected...?

T: We were expecting...

L: Don't even look twice at us.

T: Especially because they had friends... they didn't need us.

S: So how would you describe that as a different type of beauty? Can you give it ...?
In what way was it not a visual beauty? It was a something beauty?

T: Like a sense?

S: Ja, or what ever you want to describe it as.

L: It was ...

T: Kind, but not kind, unexpected.

S: Unexpected? So the beauty wasn't physical, it was...?

L: I think it was (inaudible). It was just shocking.

T: We stereotyped them.

L: Yes.

T: Because when we first met them...

S: That's goods. I mean not because of the stereotyping, but because you can see it.

T: At first they asked us if we had something for them. They asked us ... (*giggles*)...
didn't want to go back and answer them when they walked past. We just said ...

L: No, we...

T: We immediately assumed they would be rude to us.

L: Exactly.

T: So...

L: They asked us like, in a mean way, "Do you have money for us?" or something
and we say, "No, we don't". And they would be like, "I am not surprised you don't
have money for us."

T: We were expecting that, but when they were nice, it was very shocking—an eye
opener.

S: Good, Good. Rose?

R: No, I' m good.

Transcript of the Presentation of Examples of Alternate Forms of Beauty

R: (*Holding up a pink silk scarf*) My beautiful thing is something of my mothers.
'Cause I remember when I was small, whenever she would come and put us to bed
or... she would always have this smell on her. And this smell is such a motherly
and warm and ... it's a beautiful smell...

T and L (*In the background*): It's beautiful!

R: And I brought her bottle of perfume with me, Ja so this something beautiful to me.

S: So what does the smell make you feel like?

R: It makes me feel loved... and warm inside.

S: Do we get to smell it?

R: Yes! (*Passes scarf around*)

L: It's nice

R: Thandi, did you like the smell

T: (*Nodding*) It's beautiful!

S: The colour and material is beautiful too.

Thandi plays a song from a CD as her presentation

S: Thandi maybe you want to explain why you think it's beautiful.

T: Well, um...I love music, its my life basically. So whenever I am depressed, sad or
whatever, I always put on this CD because its very... most of the songs are painful,
but they talk about serious sad issues or whatever, but the way that it's so poetic... I
think is beautiful. And the music, well some of the other tracks are more soothing
and jazz orientated. This is something beautiful, well I think is beautiful.

S: Do you think you identify with the music in someway?

T: Ja

S: And that's what makes it beautiful?

T: Ja

L: This is what my one friend wrote to me for my birthday and just sometimes when
I am feeling kind of sad, I read it because it's very nicely done. It's very wonderful.
Ja. I love the way that she has put so much heart into it.

Lesego reads the card.

(Affirmations from the group)

S: So guys what have we learned from this exercise?

R: Beautiful is not exactly something you see but something you can feel or touch or hear, it's everywhere.

T: We all have different ideas of what is beautiful.

R and L nod.

Transcript of the Presentation of the Collages of the Activity “Let’s Create Beauty”

L: White represents emptiness because I feel emptiness consumes every bit of you until you can't take it any more. Then you just commit suicide like someone did at our school. Drugs as well. It kills you and makes you ugly. And guns as well, especially because these people remind me of people in a cult who let their religion consume them so much so they want to kill other people because they are not the same as them. And I feel that's ugly, that's not fair.

S: You have a theme on your page. What do you think it is? What links all three things that you have spoken about? You said that emptiness leads to death.

L: Yes, everything leads to death in the end.

S: An interesting way that you've constructed this.

L: Beauty. Having fun is beautiful. Parents love for a child is beautiful. Just be adventurous. Hard work is beautiful. Just being with your family is beautiful. Blue is beautiful because it is a colour that's just so bright and it's pretty, I like blue and it's beautiful.

S: Thank you, thank you.

T: Red is another colour that shows hate. I put cigarettes there because I really don't like people to smoke. I don't like what it does to you. And alcohol. What it does to you is ugly. It's ugly what it does to us when they're drunk. Poverty is ugly. People who have so much take from people, it's so selfish and people who don't have anything. *(Pointing to a picture of eye)* Then I have an eye. People who look into a life without any understanding. So think of the judging eye.

S: Fabulous.

T: My life is beautiful. I have food so I can eat. There is a girl—surfing is a male-dominated sport. I think it's beautiful that she's conquered herself, with everything

against her. Pink, then pink roses are niceness and happiness. And mothers, all mothers are beautiful. Any music, any form of music, I think, is beautiful. And romantic love.

S: That's beautiful.

T: And blue because it's calming.

S: And now Rose.

R: I decided to use child and mother, the bond between them, the love that they have (*tape cuts out*).

Transcript of Reframed Paper Dolls Produced in Response to the Activity "Seeing Ourselves Again"

L: This is my body. I just wrote all things that changed in my body. I said I was unkind, but then I said I've become kind. I am a caring person. I had said I'm not very social, I'm not afraid of people. My confidence has risen because I'm not afraid of having my opinion heard. Like I said, I have a big bum. I like the fact that I have a big bum. I may be flat-chested, but I have a big heart and a big brain.

S: Fabulous.

L: Now the opposite. My dimples— got to get there eventually. Tired eyes...I've been trying to catch up on my sleep so my eyes aren't tired anymore. My concept of beauty has changed because I've changed the way I see myself (*inaudible*).

R: That is good. I don't know if I did it right.

S: There's no wrong or right.

R: Oh it's me. I said that I have hairy arms and legs. And I said I have hairy arms because where would I be with out hair. And I have a fat stomach because I eat to my hearts content. I have pimples because my body is changing into adulthood and I have ugly fingers and toes because I am me.

S: That's very nice. Thank you.

R: That's as far as I go.

T: I say I am a bad dancer because I know how to appreciate music in other ways. Instead of bossy I am a leader, brazened, controlling - determined. My freckles make me unique; I'm hairy to keep warm. My ugly nose leads to my happy eyes. I am cynical- now I have a realistic outlook.

Transcript of the Presentation of the Magazine

T: We are the editors of *Beautiful Magazine*.
(*Other girls cheer*)

T: We talk about how to be beautiful in every sense and every way.

R: And to come from within.

T: Even our adverts are really beautiful.

R: Yes. We have got poetry- which magazine has got poetry? (*Turns the page*)

S: The queen of talk is absent? – Oh it's the article. (*About Oprah Winfrey*)

R: Yes, it's by Lesego-a very good article. (*Turns the page*)

R: We have "Assist a sister", an advice column, where...

T: Where we tell you how to deal with your life, your situations.

L: That eat at you inside...

T: "I am not my hair"

R: It's catchy, it's catchy (*turning the page*) this is another article. (*Turning page*)
Adverts

T: Beautiful- love (*pointing to an advertisement selling jewellery*)

R: Advert (*pointing to an advertisement selling furniture*)

S: Why did you choose this particular advert?

T: Because look it says, (*reading the slogan*) "Now decorate it with your own exuberant style".

R: "Your own."

L: Yes!

R: You are unique.

T: Your own style.

L: Just like what you are, you put it up...

T: If you like the blackness of the wall, gothicness. Do it, because it is you!

L: Do it there girl.

S: Very nice guys.

R: (*Turning page*) Another article and at the end we have...

T: "Beautiful cards."

R: Affirmation cards, let's pull one out and see what it says.

All: You radiate gorgeousness.

APPENDIX 5

Data Set 4

Interview Questions

- What part of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, did you find most interesting?
- What part of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, did you find most challenging?
- What part of the novel or which character could you most identify with?
- What parts of your body do you like and what parts would you like to change?
- Who represents beauty for you? Why?
- Do you think your perception of beauty has changed over the course of the unit of work? Can you explain your answer?
- Can you think of specific moments when you realised you had changed?
- Did any part of the booklet facilitate the change? If so, which part?
- Did any part of the novel facilitate the change? If so, which part?
- Do you think any part of the course has made you think of the media differently?

Transcript of Final Interviews

Thandi

S: As I said, everything must be completely honest. What part of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, did you find most interesting?

T: Ok. Well can I talk about a character?

S: Whatever you want.

T: Well Pecola and Claudia, they're so different. I find that so interesting because Claudia reminds me of myself. I find that so interesting. Also how the author is able to justify things that we call 'sick'. Like you know Soaphead how he finds little girls attractive. Those types of things. She looks at it from a different perspective. I did

find it a little bit confusing, but I did like the way she looked at things at a different angle so you could understand. Sometimes we just ask ourselves “why was he sleeping with his own child? What on earth was going through his head?” So it was a different way of looking at it.

S: What part of the novel did you find most challenging?

T: The way that it jumped from the history. I mean I understood it, but I find I had to spend more time reading it than if it was another novel that was more simple.

S: So you found the actual writing quite challenging.

T: Ja, it was... otherwise you had to spend time on it

S: And the content? Did you not find it challenging?

T: M, m (shakes head) it was a beautiful book.

S: What part of the novel or character, oh you have already said Claudia, that you most identify with?

T: Yes.

S: What part of your body do you like and what parts would you like to change?

T: Um, I think I like the shape of my body. I have grown to accept it. But before, I didn't like the fact that I was so skinny. But I have grown to accept it and I like it now.

S: What represents beauty for you?

T: Just maybe the way people treat you. I feel that's the most beautiful thing. You could be very ugly, like physically you know, and not have the nicest attractive of features, but to have a nice personality, outgoingness, someone who is always happy and interested and caring, whatever. That is what is the most beautiful thing.

S: Do you think your concept of beauty has changed over the course of this project?

T: I think it has changed, but more reinforced than anything else.

S: What do you mean by that?

T: Before I came in here, I did have a time... if you had come to me last year I would have said, “Wow I have changed.” But I have had a time in my own life when I have decided to change myself.

S: So it has coincided.

T: Coincided in the sense that it reinforced my beliefs that you can't try and be like someone else and you are unique, whatever. But what I mean is when it is coming

from yourself it is different from when it is coming from the outside, you know. So it helped to reinforce it, it helped to exert it

S: Lovely. Can you think of a specific moment or moments when you had realised you had changed? During a particular exercise or part of the book or something somebody said? Was there anything in particular that helped you come to a realisation, or reinforced, as you had said, something you had already been thinking about.

T: I really enjoyed the booklet to be honest. I liked the way that it (inaudible) thought of things, you know. I think it did in a way, when I was talking to my friends about how they see things it also helped to realise that I had passed a certain level. I don't feel like, that I have to prove myself to anybody. Sometimes when I am with my friends and that I realise that I don't have to try extra hard to be beautiful, to be noticed or anything like that. I won't say that it won't happen in the class, but outside of class, when I have been with my friends and have seen the way that they react to certain things and I can justify it. So I felt like I have changed in the sense that I can notice these things and I pull myself back from acting.

S: Interesting. So you are saying that this course and also your life intersecting at the same time have helped you in the way that you deal outside of it.

T: (*Nods*)

S: Do you think that the booklet facilitates change?

T: You mean it was fun to do?

S: Well, in anyway. Did you think the exercises were good, helpful?

T: Ja, Ja, I did enjoy it. It was very fun. It opened your eyes, you know, like the article we read about, and all those interesting facts. I liked working through the booklet. It had nice exercises to do. It was nice to have them as work to do as work you know. It was nice to discuss everything.

S: You have already answered this. Did any part of the novel facilitate the change? You have already said you identified with Claudia but was there anything else?

T: You know when you read how Pecola feels towards the end of the book and she's so alone and the way we treat people who are hurt. You know we always back off the minute we hear that someone got raped or something. Like she said people are looking at me and looking away, you know what I mean. That's what we do all the time. So that's what also changed my outlook on life. When somebody says something terrible you don't immediately feel sorry for them. Treat them the same way because they need (in audible) not turning away and [not] talking about things.

S: Do you think that any part of the course: the book, the booklet, discussions, exercises has made you look at TV, magazines—the media differently?

T: Do you remember when I wrote that letter? It had always bugged me, now it bugs me more because I am seeing what it does to ourselves. Sometimes we don't recognise the kind of affect it has on you.

S: So you think you have become more aware of it?

T: Ja, now I can see it and get annoyed and switch off the TV or whatever, (inaudible) what are you trying to say.

S: Is there anything else that you want to add?

T: It's amazing, like right now, my head, I can't remember exactly that we did but everyday we came to this class we came out felt something new and understanding more.

Rose

S: What part of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, did you find most interesting?

R: A lot of parts. I especially enjoyed the end of the book where...the terrible part that her father raped her and how everybody was talking about her. How it made her feel. It wasn't something nice. And how it ended, you don't know what happened, what happened next with the story. But there were a lot of things that I enjoyed.

S: What part of the novel did you find most challenging?

R: Especially when it came to, especially the language of the book. But also when there was a deeper meaning in nearly everything Toni Morrison [writes], then you have to really think about everything she was actually saying.

S: She is like that. What part of the novel or character do you identify with the most?

R: I would have to say Pecola but I really admired Claudia. But Pecola, whenever there were, like she internalised everything and I kind of do the same thing. When people around me are saying one thing or like something else I want to be that thing. I want to be, you know, what everybody is talking about. But Claudia, why I admire her is because she didn't allow herself to become like that. She just kind of told everybody this is who I am. She wasn't like Pecola who internalised everything.

S: What parts of your body do you like and what parts would you like to change?

R: Well I like my hair, my lips and my height. I am happy with my height, where I am right now. I wouldn't want to be taller or shorter, I am just happy with that. But the parts I don't like would have to be my stomach, my flat chest and my pimples, all of the three major factors. Ja, the negative factors.

S: What represents beauty for you and why?

R: That would have to be my mom.

S: Why?

R: I think the person she is. She is just such a wonderful person; I would love to be like her. She herself thinks she is not beautiful on the outside but she can't see it. But it's the inside that makes her so beautiful, the person that she is, is what makes her so.

S: Can you think of an example of what she does that you think is beautiful?

R: She always thinks of everyone else before herself. She puts everyone before her and then you've got to say, "Mom it's you, you know, you've also got to think about yourself". But no, she's the kind of person that everybody is drawn to and she just loves to be around people and help people.

S: Do you think your concept of beauty has changed over the course of this project?

R: Yes it has, because before I would think beauty was something like a beautiful model but it is not. There's more to it than just even outside beauty, it's the inside, the person that you are. And how you see yourself, which makes you beautiful.

S: Can you think of a specific moment or moments when you had realised you had changed?

R: I have noticed a lot of confidence in myself around others but also just the way I feel about myself. I noticed that I don't care if I don't look like everyone else. I am happy with who I am. I am content.

S: Do you think that the booklet that accompanied the novel that we used helped facilitate this change?

R: Yes

S: Which part?

R: The whole book. It was so wonderful and put together so well because each task that we did complemented the next. You couldn't move onto the next one before you had done that one because you needed to experience that task, go through those experiences or talk about it to move on to the next level or step.

S: Did any part of the novel help you think differently about beauty?

R: I would have to say ... I can't specifically say but the whole book, just reading each chapter you know, each page, kind of told you something.

S: I think it's fabulous that you definitely feel a change. Do you think that the way you view the media, magazines, TV, do you think you are looking at them differently?

R: Yes. You take them lightly. You don't pay constant attention to them. You kind of, well *I* do, page through and look at all those beautiful people and adverts on the TV, it's just the media. It's not, not like...before I would say "look what she's wearing, look how she looks". It's not like that anymore. You know things like they have been airbrushed, covered up, the spots that they didn't want to show. So you kind of think it's kind of fake. It's not real. It's not natural. So it's changed.

Lesego

S: What part of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*, did you find most interesting?

L: The way that Toni Morrison described the rape.

S: Why?

L: Because she didn't make it seem like it was such a horrible thing, like we see it from the perspective of the father, so it didn't seem like it was a horrible act, so bad, only afterwards, after everything, she thought she had the blue eyes. And the way that everybody just treated her. It was only the after effects that were horrible, the way she described it, like she was just standing there. She does the thing her mother always does, and then he just went to her. The way that she described it, I found it so interesting because I thought, um, when I saw the book I thought she was going to describe it as horrible, as a horrible rape that he was brutal and violent and beat her and stuff like that. But she didn't make it sound like that and so I found that interesting.

S: She gave you a different perspective on it.

L: Yes.

S: What part of the novel did you find most challenging?

L: Most challenging?

S: Difficult to read, or that it disturbed you or...

L: Difficult to read. When she described each person, the place that they lived, she goes into so much detail. I am used to things being on the surface and not so detailed. That was a bit hard for me to get used to.

S: Do you think it was the constant thinking about what was the deeper meaning?

L: Yes.

S: Ok. What part of the novel or which character could you most identify with?

L: Probably the narrator.

S: Claudia?

L: Yes. Not Pecola, because Claudia just sees everything outside. She is the one looking in. I understood where she was coming from. So...

S: What part of your body do you like and what parts would you like to change?

L: I... wait...I like my smile, Ja. And at this point in time I am actually quite happy with my body. I don't think I would change anything. I am just happy with who I am.

S: What represents beauty for you and why?

L: My mom.

S: Why?

L: She is just so hard working and just gives so much of herself, it's quite scary. Like especially for family. To her family always comes first and she always gives so much of herself to...to... family, immediate and extended family. Sometimes it stresses her so much, I hate seeing my mom in pain, it makes me so sad. Just the way she gives of herself. Also because of her job, because she is a doctor. Just the way she is so giving, that's what I like about her.

S: Do you think your concept of beauty has changed over the course of this unit?

L: Yes.

S: Can you explain?

L: Because before beauty was really just superficial, like Jessica Albo, she's so beautiful, perfect body, perfect skin, perfect everything. After this whole thing, and reading about Pecola and everything, and how she feels like she has to hide behind her ugliness and (inaudible) It opened up to me that I should love the way I am. I should be grateful the way I am, just beauty is more skin deep than the outer experience because... media and everything and all makes beauty seem like, ja you have to be skinny like her, you have to be like this. But then what confuses me about all of this is that if you are too fat, they look at you and judge you and say you are too fat and if you are too skinny they judge you say you are too skinny. At the end of the day you never win so what is the point of worry about it, just be yourself.

S: Can you think of a specific moment or moments when you had realised you had changed?

L: Um...

S: Inside, talking about it, outside with your friends, talking to your parents? Can you think of a moment when you can say, "Wow I really have changed"?

L: It was while I was reading the book. One of my friends started asking me about the book and everything. I was telling her about it and, I thought, "Wow". It just hit me so hard that I have been so superficial and everything, I finished the book and

everything and was just shocked at how superficial I felt. And the way I was explaining the book to my friend and afterwards she said, "Oh I want to read the book". And I said, "Sorry, no you can't". And the way I made it sound, how it was more about the... more about the inner beauty than anything else.

S: So you weren't just talking about the plot, you were also talking about the issues that came up.

L: Ja (*nods*)

S: Do you think that the booklet that accompanied the novel, that we used, helped facilitate this change?

L: Yes, definitely.

S: In what way?

L: The dolls, when we had to do the dolls, I really had to look at myself (inaudible). The dolls were really the hardest thing for me to do. Because I really had to look at myself and say, "Do I like me? What do I not like? What do I like?" And when, when we had to redo it again, I felt so good sitting there writing all the positive things instead of just putting myself down.

S: Do you think that this is something you feel today but tomorrow you might not feel?

L: I think that this is... I hope that this will last because the only times I feel not good is because I know my periods is coming and then I feel all depressed and everything. But then um... the book has changed me, I feel more you know ...zest up, alive, you know. I used to feel dead and depressed. But now I just brush it off my shoulders-you think I'm ugly, that's your problem.

S: Do you think that the way you view the media, magazines, TV, do you think you are looking at them differently?

L: I am so much more aware now. I know like when I see in a magazine, a beautiful model and I think "Wow, she's gorgeous". They probably had to work on that computer and do everything to make her the way she looks. She doesn't look like that in real life. And just... I now see that the media really influences a lot of people because one of my friends (inaudible). It hurt me because she has no idea how beautiful she is.

S: Did you say anything to her?

L: I did, she wants one specific guy. He uses her and it breaks my heart to see him do that to her. And she won't listen to me also... I just told her, "You don't understand how beautiful you are. Every time I see you, you take my breath away". She still is after this guy. She is still (inaudible)

S: It is hard to watch your friend in that kind of situation, especially when you have had the courage to say something.