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EXPLORING THE REFLECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN RELATION TO PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS AND SENSE OF SELF.

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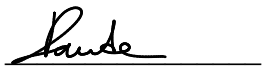
DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Human Development



Declaration

I solemnly declare that this work is my own and no plagiarism whatsoever was done. Every source used has been acknowledged and authors of such work have been referenced in this research paper.

Signature: 

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Physical appearance can be a very significant concern for many women (Glapka, 2018; Winter, Danforth, Landor & Pevehouse-Pfeiffer, 2019). If an individual experiences their personal appearance negatively, it can affect their self-esteem and interpersonal behaviour (Harper & Choma, 2019). Research shows that appearance seems to be a significant factor for women in general. However, the ways that this affects Black South African women is an even more complex question. South Africa has a recent history of pernicious racial segregation and oppression. In addition, partially owing to patriarchy, there is still a high rate of gender discrimination and gender-based violence in the country (Brady & Abawi, 2019; Hobson, 2018). Therefore, it is likely that the ways that Black South African women perceive, feel and react towards their appearance and sense of self, will be influenced by the intersection of multiple personal factors which may include race, sex, class, gender and culture (Pilane & Iqani 2016; Capodilupo & Kim 2013; Awad et al., 2015).

This study focused on exploring Black South African women's reported experiences in relation to physical appearance - the ways that they feel this has affected them. In contemporary South Africa it is likely that agencies of socialisation such as mass media, family, peers and other members of society, are influential in relation to Black women's perceptions, emotions and attitudes towards their appearance and sense of self. These are areas of interest for the current study.

The sample for this study was made of Black young women aged 19 to 28 years. The participants were studying at a University in Johannesburg. The study focused on young women because they are at a stage of development in which their physical appearance forms a bigger part of their identity (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2018; Nimmer, 2018). Erikson's theory of psychological development supports this by suggesting that people within the age range of this study's participants are on the *intimacy versus isolation* stage. In this stage there is a possibility for either being wanted or being isolated. However, young people in this stage are said to want to be intimately attached to someone else. To achieve this intimate attachment, there are requirements, especially within a university setting. The requirements may include physical

attractiveness (Ford, Price, Hofmeyr & Chiba, 2018). The university provides a unique context that is rich with factors that contribute towards facilitating the demands for identity formation. The factors within the university may include; peer pressure, the discourses on identity learned in class and everyday lives (McKay, Moore & Kubik, 2018), given that the participants for this study were all humanities students.

1.2. Study Aims

This study has three aims. The first aim is to gain more understanding on the experiences of young Black South African women in relation to their appearance and sense of self. The second aim is to explore the ways that young Black South African women perceive the influences of race, gender and culture in their experiences and feelings around personal appearance. The third aim of the study is to identify ways in which young Black South African women have tried to navigate different social demands placed on their physical appearance.

1.3.Rationale

The explanation behind focussing on women in this study is because of the way that South Africa is still to a great extent a patriarchal society (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018). One aspect typical of patriarchy is that physical appearance is more emphasised for women than men (Deliovsky, 2008). It has been argued that this is a way of controlling women (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018; Ton, 2018). This emphasis is conveyed through gender-socialisation from multiple sources such as the family, broader social structures, schools and media (Loeto, 2014). From a young age, boys and girls are socialised into gender specific roles. Boys are being encouraged to be adventurous and girls are encouraged and expected to be beautiful, naturally or through body and skin modifications (Loeto, 2014). As a result, women, typically, become more preoccupied with their physical appearance than men. Although this trend is slightly changing, with men becoming more appearance conscious, women invest a significant amount of their resources such as money, time and health on their appearance (Young, Gabriel & Schlaber, 2014).

Women's preoccupation on physical appearance can lead to negative effects, if physical appearance is too heavily linked to self-esteem.

Physical attractiveness is a social construct which differs in each cultural or ethnic group (Rieves & Cash, 1996). Although beauty differs from one cultural group to the next, in each group there is one form of beauty that is communicated as the ideal. This may put pressure on women who do not possess such ideal beauty features. Ultimately, they may engage in practices that make them fit in. When women cannot fit into the ideal beauty standard, they may develop body image dissatisfaction (low sense of self) which may lead to certain negative outcomes such as stress, depression, low self-esteem and low self-concept (Young et al., 2014).

The reason for focussing on Black young South African women is that, owing to globalisation and acculturation, in contemporary society there is one form of physical attractiveness that is disproportionately communicated as the ideal beauty standard. The ideal beauty standard that is being communicated is primarily a eurocentric or westernised beauty standard (Awad et al., 2015; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Within the western ideal beauty standard, features such as; slim but curvy figure, light skin, straight hair, and sharp noses have for long been considered as markers of beauty. The majority of Women in South Africa are Black and a great number of them do not possess eurocentric beauty features. This may mean that from a eurocentric paradigm, they might not be considered as physically attractive (Pilane & Iqani, 2016). In patriarchal societies, being regarded as beautiful functions as social capital which may afford the *beautiful ones* greater social and economic benefits (Loeto, 2014; Deliovsky, 2008; Koh & Suh, 2018).

The benefits of being a *beautiful woman* may include being viewed as good, socially acceptable, more eligible for marriage, and employable (Ford et al., 2018). Women may end up conforming to such beauty ideals and change their bodies in order to fit in or benefit from being *beautiful*. In most instances what women may do to attain beauty features could have negative consequences on their psychological, emotional and physical well-being. For example, chemically straightening hair, bleaching skin, and undergoing cosmetic surgery (Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), 2013).

It is possible that Black young South African women may experience distress as a result of having a dominant beauty standard that alienates them. This status quo may even challenge their sense of identity and self-worth (Grills, Nobles & Hill, 2018; ABPsi, 2013). This might be especially so in the case of young women (Davis, Khoza & Brooks, 2019; Gordon, 2019).

A South African study done at the University of the Free State by Glapka and Majali (2017) reported that Black South African women are often conflicted regarding identity because they receive conflicting messages from different agents of socialisation. These conflictual messages also pertain to beauty standards. Women in the study felt that, through the media and their male partners, the message was that they should adopt a eurocentric body ideal, featuring traits such as long relaxed hair or weaves. But from their families they were expected to follow ethnic beauty ideals. Another finding was that some of the messages they received from their families and male partners were contradictory as they encompass both ethnic traditional beauty standards and eurocentric standards (Glapka & Majali, 2017). Participants reported that male partners would want a Black woman to possess African features such as curves, bigger bottom and bigger breasts, but also expect her to have long relaxed hair or weaves, and the family would also expect the same. These inappropriate expectations might be anticipated to cause psychological consequences.

Previous research indicate that Black women were not affected by dominant ideals of beauty such as thin body ideals (Cameron, Muldrow & Stefani, 2018), but current research indicates that they are affected (Viviani, 2013; Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo, 2014; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013). According to Viviani (2013) young women in South Africa are affected by the thin body ideals. Capodilupo and Kim (2013) as well as Awad et al. (2015) argue that earlier research that indicated that Black women were somewhat immune to body image dissatisfaction was using research instruments meant for White women rather than for Black women. Most of the research was comparing Black women's and White women's attitudes towards the thin body ideal which did show significant difference. They argue that more studies need to use research methods that are standardised for Black women which include, body image, factors that are more relevant for Black South African women. Research thus needs to be done on body image dissatisfaction with regards to areas reportedly focused on by Black women, such as skin tone, hair texture, and physique (Capodilupo, 2014; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013; Awad et al., 2015). The authors suggest that qualitative research that aims to gather in-depth, nuanced subjective accounts of the experiences of Black women in relation to their body image, are much better at giving a holistic view of Black women's experiences. It is for these reasons that the current study was undertaken.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Literature Review

This chapter will explore some of the available literature regarding Black women's experiences and attitudes towards physical appearance and sense of self. The first part will focus on defining and exploring the concept of physical attractiveness. The review will then move onto exploring the importance of the physical features which are regarded as general markers of physical attractiveness. It will then move to discuss the theory of intersectionality which covers both gender, race and sexuality; and other issues that may relate to Black women's physical appearance, Western and African beauty standards, as well as Black women's engagement with these markers of beauty. The last part of the literature review will explore the difficulties in having both the Western and African beauty ideals.

Physical attractiveness refers to the state or degree to which the physical traits of an individual are perceived as pleasing or beautiful ("Physical attractiveness," n.d.). Hatfield and Sprecher (1986, p.4) define physical attractiveness as "that which represents one's conception of the ideal in appearance; that which gives the greatest degree of pleasure to the senses". Both these definitions suggest that what is perceived to be physically attractive is rather subjective and not the same for everyone. Physical attractiveness markers are not limited to but include body and facial symmetry, Waist to Hip Ratio (WHR), Body Mass Index (BMI), general health, age, as well as sex-specific hormonal markers (Weeden & Sabini, 2005).

Different groups of people have different notions of physical attractiveness as this is shaped by the cultural beliefs and values within society (Wheeler & Kim, 1997; Marco, 2012; Frederick, Forbes, Jenkins, Reynolds & Walters, 2015). This will be explored further within the literature review. The next part of this discussion will focus on the importance and markers of physical attractiveness.

Physical attractiveness is one of the most striking or noticeable aspects about a person. If one is deemed attractive this can have certain benefits in different aspects of life (Ko & Suh, 2018). Some of the benefits of being perceived as physically attractive may include better employment opportunities, easy mate selection, a higher self-esteem and therefore a happier life than others (Gupta, Etcoff & Jager, 2016; Song, Shinomori & Qian, 2019; Anderson et al., 2010;

Vashi, 2015). Gupta et al. (2016, p. 2), state that "brain imaging studies reveal that brain reward pathways fire at the sight of attractive strangers' faces". Gupta et al. (2016) and Ko and Suh (2018), suggest that the benefits of physical attractiveness may be linked to the halo effect. The halo effect is a cognitive bias in which a single trait of a person may influence the overall impression of that person (Cherry, 2020), for example if someone is physically attractive, one may assume that the person is smart, sociable, nice, kind, successful etc. (Ko & Suh, 2018; Gupta et al., 2016).

According to Jaeger (2011), physical attractiveness is important for both men and women, although in different aspects. Ko and Suh (2018) suggest that physical attractiveness has a positive correlation with high self-esteem. This could mean that the converse also holds, that women who value physical attractiveness but are not deemed to possess the traits that are deemed physically attractive, may develop a negative body image. Koh and Suh (2018) further argue that a negative body image is correlated with low emotional well-being and a depressed mood. Body image refers to how one perceives and feels about their own body with more emphasis on physical appearance (Rieves & Cash, 1996). According to Viviani (2013) there are three aspects that make up body image. The first aspect is perception which is about how one sees their body, the second one includes one's belief system, i.e. internalised beliefs regarding other people's views about one's body. The third aspect is attitude, which is about how one feels about one's body (Viviani, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the notion of physical attractiveness, what the markers or physical features of beauty are for any group - are shaped by cultural beliefs within a society (Rieves & Cash, 1996; Marco, 2012; Frederick et al., 2015). According to Rieves and Cash (1996) it is likely that an individual will believe him/herself to be attractive if his/her physical characteristics match general social perceptions of attractiveness or beauty standards. His/her experiences should also confirm what he/she believes based on feedback he/she receives from other people (Forsyth, 2018; Japil, Mustapha & Ee, 2018; Miller, Kelly & Stephen, 2019; Rieves & Cash, 1996). "Body image is shaped through social interactions and feedback about one's body during socialization" (Rieves & Cash, 1996, p. 64). The next part of the review will focus on some theories that may have some explanatory power in regard to understanding the experiences of Black women in relation to physical attractiveness and body image or sense of self.

The theory of intersectionality heralds from the field of Women's Studies, particularly Black feminism (McCall, 2008). It offers a way of understanding and analysing complex human experiences; experiences that are beyond the limits of gender (McCall, 2008). Collins and Bilge (2016) suggest that the theory of intersectionality offers a way of analysing human experiences that are shaped by several factors which are different but are interrelated. Theorists suggest that individuals' intersectional location and related experiences are likely to have an impact on the ways that they process feelings about personal appearance (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008; Goff, Thomas & Jackson, 2008). According to McCall (2005), the theory of intersectionality was introduced because feminists were aware of the limitations of gender as the sole analytical category, especially in relation to Black women's experiences. McCall (2005) suggests that for Black women, race is another modality which has an influence in their experiences. Both gender and race are related, however they each affect Black women differently. Black women's experiences were being reduced or homogenized into one category within the vast and complex socio-political context (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008).

Of relevance to this study, the theory of intersectionality is being used to argue that, to understand the experiences of Black women in relation to their physical appearance and sense of self, their individual experiences cannot be removed from their historical and political climates (Awad et al., 2015). Black women's experiences are influenced by both gender and racial politics (Award et al., 2015) and in accordance with social constructionist theory (Courtenay 2000; Mayo, 2004), being female or male is biological but being feminine or masculine is not, i.e. gender is a social construct which is shaped by societal beliefs of what it is to be feminine or masculine (Bartky, 1988).

According to Butler (2006), gender is performative. A body is born into a society or culture which then ascribes gender expectations. Butler (2006) suggests that the individual acts out the expectations repeatedly until they become second nature or feel normal. Grieshaber (2002) argues that from birth, a child is already gendered and made to act accordingly, whether through play or attire. Butler (1986, p. 35) quotes Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not, but, rather becomes a woman" quote. This quote suggests that being a woman is something that is learnt rather than being innate. According to Butler (2006), the act or performance of carrying out gender roles is meant to maintain social order. Poggio (2006) argues that gender is a social

practice which is negotiated within social and relational contexts. According to Butler, gender is fluid and changes, but certain discourses maintain it through certain historical sanctions and taboos (Butler, 2006).

The next part of the review focuses on how physical attractiveness has played a role in maintaining discourses around femininity.

As mentioned before, the importance of physical attractiveness seems to be particularly emphasised for women (Yang, 2007). There is also pressure placed on women to look or act a certain way for them to fit into the feminine mould (Deliovsky, 2008). Bronfen (2017) further suggests that there is pressure on women to look aesthetically perfect. Deliovsky (2008) suggests that patriarchal pressure around fitting the feminine aesthetic is actually about power exerted over female bodies. Through repeated practices of making the female body attractive such as exercise, diet, make-up, cosmetic surgery etc., it can be argued that women are showing submissiveness to patriarchal structures. It can be argued that women internalise societal standards of beauty and in turn make compliant their own bodies in these repetitive practices that then become normative (Deliovsky, 2008; Bartky, 1998; Cohen, Newton-John & Slater, 2018). Mustika (2017) and Deliovsky (2008) argue that being feminine is considered an achievement; it is achieved through investing a lot of resources such as time, money and work. For example, industries that are aimed at improving women's physical appearance such as fitness and health, cosmetic, hairdressing, clothing and dieting have become multibillion industries (Saltzberg & Disch, 2006; Shallu & Gupta, 2013; Ruck, 2018).

According to Wolf (1990), beauty is a myth created by patriarchal structures to control women. Wolf (1990) argues that women are indoctrinated from childhood into believing that beauty is a big part of their identity. According to Deliovsky (2008), an image is created through patriarchal forces about what an ideal woman should look like, even though majority of women do not look that way. Deliovsky (2008) further argues that although majority of women are aware that they might not look like the images presented to them, it still affects their self-esteem negatively, and they do engage in practices that will make them look close to the ideal.

Calogero, Broughs & Thompson (2007) give a chronological breakdown of how beauty standards have shifted over the years. They report that between the 1400s and 1700s, an ideal beautiful woman was full figured. In the 19th century, the image of an ideal beautiful woman in

western culture started to restrict fullness in favour of a cinched waist. The 19th century marks a period in which mass standardisation became prevalent and the image of an ideal women became more unrealistic (Calogero et al., 2007). During this period, the corset, although from a different century, became more popular. The corset was used to impose a specific shape on women's bodies, the *hourglass* shape became the norm. Women who wanted to look attractive during that period, had to wear the corset even though it was a lot of work. Women would sometimes wear it during sleep or even when they were bathing in order to achieve a thin waist. Decades later, this practice lead onto the "Gibson girl" beauty ideal. The Gibson girl had a thin waist and legs but had wider hips and large breasts (Calogero et al., 2007). This ideal also included athletic features such as rounded calves, erect feet and sports attire. Beauty trends then moved to the flapper era in which the ideal woman possessed boyish features such as a flatter chest (Calogero et al., 2007). During this era, ideal beauty had shifted to a cosmetically decorated face and slender legs. This period marked the rise in exercise and starvation which led to eating disorders as women were trying to achieve this look. According to Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braun and Wise (2007), after the 1920s flappers, the 1940s came the voluptuous sweater girl, the nearly emaciated body of the 1970s, and the thin curvaceous bodies of the 1990s.

The rapid increase of mass media during the 1920s, and throughout the 20th century, made it possible to perpetuate standardised beauty ideals, as well as the homogenization of western culture (Calogero et al., 2007). Films, magazines, and celebrities functioned as means to inform both women and men about what was beautiful, and iconic women such as Marilyn Monroe became symbols of ideal beauty (Calogero et al., 2007; Forbes et al., 2007). During this period, the thinness ideal became very popular. various authors suggest that the thinness ideal is still reinforced in contemporary society, and the media is still one of the most powerful disseminators of western culture (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Dakanalis et al., 2015; Markey & Markey, 2012). In the media, it can be argued that the ideal beautiful woman resembles the iconic barbie doll. The figure possesses white porcelain skin, blue eyes, long and wavy silky hair, and a slim but curvy body (Carneiro et al., 2013; Watson, Lewis & Moody, 2019; Thompson 2009; Walker, 2014). According to Calogero et al. (2007) and Jaeger (2011), both men and women compare women's body to the ideal to approximate how close they are to the ideals. For women who do not possess such ideal features or are not close to this ideal, the scrutiny they receive both from themselves and others may lead to body image dissatisfaction as

physical appearance has more social significance for women than men (Calogero et al., 2007; Carneiro et al., 2013; Thompson 2019; Jaeger, 2011; Frederick et al., 2015). Women's pursuit of unrealistic beauty ideals has often led to development of eating disorders, depression and poor self-esteem (Carneiro et al., 2013).

If we tighten this focus to consider the situation in contemporary South Africa, our country can still be considered to be a patriarchal society (Loeto, 2014; Buthelezi, 2003; Jacobs & Tyree, 2013). Therefore, gender norms and standards are likely to play a role on how contemporary women relate to and view their bodies (Buthelezi, 2003). According to Cekiso (2013, p. 201), to ensure gender equality in South Africa, an agreement was reached following discussions held about gender equality and women's empowerment in the European Union's (UN) strategy for sustainable development adopted in 2006, one of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005, 2006, 2007) priorities, discussed in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) and many other platforms". The agreement was reached by Education For All (EFA) (UNESCO) as they reached a consensus that textbooks can function as vehicles of socialization (Cekiso, 2013; Buthelezi, 2003), therefore, gender stereotypes will be removed from textbooks. Both Buthelezi (2003) and Cekiso (2013) argue that despite the agreement, South African textbooks still offer gender stereotypic material. According to Cekiso (2013), exposure to gender stereotypes from an early age perpetuate gender stereotypes later in life. Cekiso (2013) analysed English and Xhosa fairy tales on children's textbooks. The fairy tales carried gender stereotypes. Female characters in these fairy tales were portrayed as passive, submissive, dependent, having unreal expectations, self-sacrificing and beautiful whereas male characters were portrayed as the opposite. Of relevance to this study, Cekiso (2013) further argues that beauty in these fairy tales is portrayed as the most important feature. This may lead girls to internalise from a young age that their beauty takes precedence over other qualities that they may possess such as academic, sports, and artistic skills (Cekiso 2013; Loeto, 2014).

According to Pilane and Iqani (2016), the media is another agent of socialization that reinforces similar gender stereotypes found in textbooks, although on a larger scale. Sanger (2009) analysed Three South African magazines – Femina, Fair Lady and True Love – between 2003 and 2006. Sanger (2009) found that women were expected to look aesthetically perfect.

Sanger (2009), Jewkes and Morrel (2012) argue that women's practices on their bodies that may be influenced by gender, whereby they are encouraged to regulate their bodies, is a means to maintain heterosexual desirability. On a similar note, Jacobs and Tyree (2013) suggest that in there is a stereotype that women try to look beautiful for men which is perpetuated in popular magazines such as Cosmopolitan SA and True Love. Iqani (2016) suggests that males who also consume media messages may expect women whom they date to look like the women they see in the media. According to Pilane and Iqani (2016) the beauty ideal portrayed in the media is often westernised and majority of South African women do not fit into that ideal.

The next section will explore the link between race and beauty.

"In a culture that places value on women's physicality, hair and other physical markers represent a powerful political aesthetic that belies the salience of race for gender normativity" Deliovsky (2008, p. 49-50). This quote suggests that it's not only gender that has an impact on how women may relate to their bodies but race as well. In relation to race and beauty, the standard of beauty is eurocentric (Thompson, 2009). This suggests that the more closely associated a person is with european features, the more attractive he or she is perceived to be (Glenn, 2008; Julien, 2014). In this light, features regarded as attractive include lighter skin, straight hair, a thin nose and lips, and light-coloured eyes (Bryant, 2013). According to Bryant (2013) having a Eurocentric standard of beauty may have a negative impact on Black women who do not possess features that are close to whiteness or deemed as attractive such as skin colour and hair types that Black women do not possess. Both Bryant (2013) and Barnett (2016) argue that these standards might affect dark skinned Black women most severely as they internalise Eurocentric messages of beauty, and this may lead to self-hatred.

Regarding transmission, it can be argued that Black women might be subjected to messages of beauty that encourage beauty ideals through peers, family members, partners, the media, and the larger society through praise and/or criticism (Bryant, 2013; Lavin & Cash, 2000). According to Capodilupo and Kim (2013), majority of messages that Black women receive about beauty often override their feelings about their own natural features. The history of race in relation to beauty and Black women's markers of physical attractiveness will be explored in-depth later. The next part will discuss race and beauty in South Africa.

According to Julien (2014) South Africa has not healed from the effects of colonisation and apartheid. Julien (2014) argues that as a result of laws and practices implemented during apartheid, Black South Africans may have internalised self-hatred. According to Julien (2014) and Glenn (2008), practices that may have led to internalised self-hatred in Black people may include social stratification laws that favoured White people and people who were closer to Whiteness. For many Black people, their skin tones and hair texture subjected them to prejudice and as such, they may have internalised the idea that White is superior and Black is inferior (Julien, 2014; Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019).

Although both Black men and women are affected by these prejudices, Julien (2014) and Glenn (2008) argue that Black women spend more resources in trying to change their physical features through practices such as skin bleaching or hair straightening because society places more value on women's physical appearance; beauty features considered ideal often exclude them. Tate (2007) suggests that Black women do not change their skin colour and hair texture because they hate being Black, but they may do so in fear of societal backlash should they choose to present their features naturally. In contemporary society, the remnants of apartheid are still present as White features are still viewed as more attractive when compared to Black women's features (Pilane & Iqani, 2016; Molebatsi, 2009). Pilane and Iqani (2016) suggests that in South Africa, although majority of women who consume media products such as magazines are Black, they are still under-represented or misrepresented in these platforms. This may further reinforce the idea that White is more beautiful than Black (Molebatsi, 2009; Iqani 2016; Pilani & Iqani, 2016). The next section will discuss Black women's sexuality as it is closely linked to gender and race.

According to Stephens and Few (2007), Black women's bodies are highly objectified and sexualised even though paradoxically they are supposedly not considered as attractive as White women. Watson et al. (2019) suggest that the objectification and hyper-sexualisation of Black women's bodies may be linked to the history of slavery. During slavery, Black women's bodies, due to how different they were to White women's bodies – Black women's bodies were often larger, with a larger bosom as well as larger bottom – were depicted as sexually exotic and alluring (Sanger, 2009; Watson et al., 2019; Stephens & Few, 2007). A famous example is of the so called *hottentot venus* Saartjie Baartman, who was taken from South Africa to Europe for

display purposes as she presented with a larger body, different to European women's bodies (Hobson, 2018). Reports suggest that she was put in a cage for display purposes (Wallace-Sanders, 2002). According to Wallace-Sanders (2002), people would come see her body and even touch it. Hobson (2018) argues that the remnants of the 'hottentot venus' are still present in contemporary society. Hobson (2018) further argues that the remnants of the hyper-sexualisation of Black women during slavery are present, especially in how Black women are presented in media. For example, naked Black women with large buttocks and breasts appear a lot in Hip Hop music videos (Turner, 2011; Hobson, 2018). Although the Hip Hop music genre is dominated by African Americans, the hyper-sexualization of Black women's bodies is still prevalent. According to Miller-Young (2008), although mainstream Hip Hop may be owned by Black capitalists, it is not free from White, male, heterosexual hegemony. The media is driven by capitalism, therefore the content produced has to yield capital, as a result, the media reinforces certain stereotypes resulting from dominant racial, gender and class ideologies (Brooks & Hebert, 2006). Stephens and Few (2007) suggest that during slavery, Black women were viewed as powerful in relation to seducing and luring men into sleeping with them. And this power of sexual seduction assigned to Black women is still present in such music videos (Stephens & Few, 2007; Hobson, 2018).

During slavery, when compared to White women, Black women were viewed as promiscuous and fitting the Jezebel stereotype due to the hypersexuality that was imposed on them (West, 1995; Pilgrim, 2002; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas & Harrison, 2008). According to Yarbrough (2000), the Jezebel stereotype emanates from the Christian Bible, in the Bible, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab. Jezebel engaged in acts that were considered lustful (due to her beauty) and wicked such as provoking conflict that weakened Israel as she decided to worship another god. Subsequently, Jezebel became synonymous with women who engage in lewd sexual acts as well as seduce men to for personal gains (Yarbrough, 2000). According to Pilgrim (2002), White women were viewed as pure, Godly, models of self-respect and self-control, whereas Black women were considered the opposite. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) suggest that due to the Jezebel narrative, which portrayed Black women as highly seductive and luring men into sex, Black women would be sexually coerced by their masters and in turn be blamed for it. Buchanan, Settles and Woods (2008) suggest that the persistent sexual violence

towards Black women in contemporary society may be due to the reinforcement of the Jezebel stereotype.

In South Africa, a very high number of recorded cases of sexual abuse related offenses involve Black women as the victims (Jewkes & Morrel, 2012). According to Boswell (2014), Black women also experience microaggressions in different spaces in relation to their bodies. "Microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of colour, often automatically or unconsciously" (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2000, p. 60). Black women experience sexual microaggressions such as being catcalled, receiving unwanted praise or criticism about their bodies as well as being touched inappropriately (Watson et al., 2019). According to, in the past, during apartheid, the violence was mostly between Black and White people, but as a result of internalised oppression and helplessness, Black men often assert their dominance over Black women through macro and micro aggressions as a way to reclaim their masculinity (Armstrong, 1994; Posel, 2005).

The literature review will now move on to discuss a different section. The next section will explore both the African traditional culture and Western culture beauty standards.

Having a standard of beauty, whether African or eurocentric, may have a negative impact on how Black women relate with their bodies, especially if they do not fit into the standards (Thompson, 2007; Glakpka & Majali, 2017). The African traditional standards of beauty also place pressure on women to act or look a certain way (Thompson, 2007; Glapka & Majali, 2017; Loeto, 2014). Although the African traditional view of beauty is changing due to acculturation as western beauty standards are becoming the global ideal (Coetzee et al., 2012), according to Njiofor (2018) and Osaghae (2013), in the past, beauty within African cultures was defined within specific communities rather than generalised as different communities may have had different practices. Although there were different views on what beauty is, what unified the different views was that they all shared the belief that beauty is both internal and external (Njiofor, 2018; Osaghae, 2013; Mafiza, 2013; Ikuenebe, 2016). According to Osaghae (2013) one cannot separate the two as beauty is shaped by both halves. Beauty within the African traditional culture had to serve a purpose (Ikuenebe, 2016; Njiofor, 2018). Mafiza (2013) and Osaghae (2013) argue that within the African tradition, beauty should be both relational as well as functional; something that is beautiful should add value into the collectiveness of African

communities (Matiza, 2013). Due to acculturation, most African communities have changed significantly.

According to Osaghae (2013) the relational aspect focuses more on internal beauty. A woman is expected to possess values such as humility, kindness, as well as being a nurturer (Ibanga, 2017) as these qualities help strengthen communal relations (Matiza, 2013). Matiza (2013) further argues that African cultures are about collective strength rather than individualism, therefore beauty can be functional. In terms of functionality, a woman is expected to be able to act in such a way that benefits the community (Matiza, 2013). Matiza (2013) further suggests that when looking at the functional aspect, one can link it to physical appearance. A woman who is slightly bigger, has rounded breasts and stiff breasts may be considered as beautiful because she is seen as fertile (Matiza, 2013). Her beauty serves the function of reproducing and growing the community (Matiza, 2013; Osaghae, 2013). Positioning women as functional and for reproduction goes directly against feminist principles (Kramarae & Spender, 2000). According to Kramarae and Spender (2000), seeing women as only important for reproduction implies that women who may choose not to have children and those that cannot have children involuntarily are not real women or are dysfunctional. Karamarae and Spender (2000), further argue that seeing women in this way is limiting as it only puts them into one biological role which is giving birth and one social role which is child rearing. Putting women in this single role suggests that they cannot perform other multiple roles that are outside of reproduction such as their contributions to extended family, community, and political activism (Karamarae & Spender, 2000).

According to Gyeke (1996), in African cultures, although beauty is considered to both internal and external, internal attractiveness holds more value. Ikuenebe (2016), Ibanga (2017) and Gyeke (1996) suggest that if a woman is physically attractive but lacks the required values or norms, she is considered to be ugly, but if a woman is considered as not physically attractive but has the required values, she can use certain concoctions, face painting etc. to enhance her physical appearance. According to Johnson and Bankhead (2014), Njiofor (2018) and Osaghae (2013), within the African traditional culture, women engage in practices that enhance their physical appearance or act as markers of which tribe they belong to. African cultures are diverse, and they have different physical beauty markers, for example, stripes on the face for Xhosa and

Masai women, trimming of the teeth for DRC, removal of the front teeth for the Koi Koi etc. (Southworld, 2017). The practices that women may engage in, in order to fit the beauty standards within their communities also suggest that even within the African traditional perspective, women are not free from physical beauty expectations and this may also have a negative impact on how they feel about their bodies (Johnson & Bankhed, 2014; Thompson, 2007; Loeto, 2014).

In South Africa, there are diverse cultural tribes with different practices but just like other African cultures, beauty is regarded to be both internal and external (Puoane, Tsolekile & Steyn, 2010). In South Africa, the spirit of Ubuntu is emphasised (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015). The spirit of Ubuntu encompasses the values mentioned earlier such as humility and kindness (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015). Glapka and Majali (2017) suggest that as in other African cultures, there are also physical markers of beauty. Puoane et al. (2010) conducted a study in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape, in relation to physical attractiveness. The participants in the study were Black African girls aged between 10-18 years who attended five primary and six high schools in Black townships in Cape town. Most women in the study reported that a higher BMI indicates physical attractiveness and femininity. Puoane et al.'s (2010) findings were also replicated on Glapka and Majali's (2017) study. In their study with a sample of 8 Black women from different ethnic groups in South Africa, they found that some participants preferred a higher BMI as it was viewed as African. Although some women in the study reported that they preferred a higher BMI as it represents African beauty, some participants did report engaging in practices such as straightening their hair or lightening their skin which are more associated with eurocentric standards of beauty (Glapka & Majali, 2017). In relation to a higher BMI seen as attractive, women who have a lower BMI may feel less attractive or less feminine (Glapka & Majali, 2017; Puoane et al., 2010). The next section will explore Western beauty ideals.

"Popular culture is the set of practices, beliefs, and objects that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. It includes media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions, among other things. Popular culture is usually associated with either mass culture or folk culture" (Kidd, 2017, p. 1). In Western culture beauty is individualistic and focuses on physical attractiveness (Calogero et al., 2007).

South Africa is a developing country and as such, there is high exposure to western culture due to globalisation (Coetzee et al., 2012; Viviani, 2013). Acculturation refers to the

process in which members of a certain cultural group adopt beliefs and behaviours from another group (Tabither, 2014). Due to sudden economic, political and cultural changes taking place in developing countries such as South Africa, people are also going through massive personal changes (Viviani, 2013; Puoane et al., 2010; Thomas, 2006). Tabither (2014) suggests that traditional beauty standards are changing for women and are being replaced by eurocentric beauty standards due to acculturation. Although some traditional beauty standards had already started being shaped by eurocentric beauty standards hundreds of years ago, owing to the history of slavery and colonisation (ABPsi, 2013).

Women of African descent were once believed not to have adopted western beauty standards such as striving to be very slim, however, this does not seem to be the case anymore (Glapka & Majali, 2017; Carneiro et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2019, Thompson, 2007). Research shows that Black women in South African colleges, universities and even in rural areas have started adopting the thinness ideal due to their consumption of mass media products (Viviani, 2013; Julien 2014; Glenn, 2008; Mwaba & Roman, 2009; Pilane & Iqani, 2016). Through technological advancements, it has become much easier to disseminate beauty ideologies (Viviani, 2013; Iqani, 2016; Sanger, 2009). Mass media is considered as the biggest agent of socialization which reaches more people and shapes their beliefs by romanticising ideologies of those in power (Loeto, 2014, Calogero et al., 2007; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Puoane et al., 2010). As mentioned earlier, women are more affected by beauty messages because there is more value placed on their appearances as opposed to males. This is the reason why more women than men have a negative body image (Rieves & Cash, 1996; Carneiro et al., 2013, Thompson, 2007; Stephens & Thomas, 2011; Walker, 2014).

As previously mentioned, the Eurocentric beauty ideal is arguably the most highly prized female aesthetic in global media (ABPsi, 2013; Thompson, 2007; Molebatsi, 2009; Watson et al., 2019). According to Deliovsky (2008) and Thompson (2007) women around the world try to fit into this beauty ideal which is difficult for any woman to attain. If they do not conform to this ideal image, some women may deduce that there is something wrong with their natural bodies. They may then be susceptible to media advertisements offering ways in which they can *fix* their bodies e.g. exercising advertisements and weight loss pills or concoctions, cosmetic surgery and

a whole lot of make-up advertisements that show the before and after images of edited images (Greenwood & Dal Cin, 2012; Calogero et al., 2007; Carneiro et al., 2013; Bryant, 2013).

For Black women, some of these practices may involve changing things that are intrinsically part of their own natural features such as straightening their curly hair, bleaching their skin etc. (Bryant, 2013, Carneiro et al., 2013; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014 and Thompson, 2009). In a society like South Africa in which there are both African traditional and western beauty norms, women may feel pulled to opposite directions (Glapka & Majali, 2017; Loeto, 2014). Messages from older members of society may be more traditional, whereas peers, role models and even parents may aspire to westernised mass media ideals from TV, movies, magazines, celebrities etc. (Gordon et al., 2010; Schuler et al., 2008; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013).

The next part of the literature review will be discussing Black women's specific beauty markers.

According to Mgbako (2009) and King (2010), the 1960s marked a revolutionary time for Black people all over the world. It was a period in which the Black consciousness movement became popular in both South Africa and America (Mercer, 2000). According to Clowes (2006) and Craig (2002), the Black consciousness movement was meant to promote Blackness in a socio-political context which considered Whiteness to be superior. Of relevance to this paper, the Black consciousness movement endorsed the idea that "Black is beautiful" (Holloway, 2016). According to Mgbako (2009), Holloway (2016) and Thomas (2019), during that period, White or Caucasian features such as fair skin, long and straight hair, sharp noses, etc. were regarded to be more attractive and thus Black women who possessed features closer to these so-called white features were perceived to be more attractive compared to those that did not. King (2010) and Mercer (2000) suggest that in opposition to this trend, the Afro became a powerful symbol for the Black consciousness movement. It represented a certain kind of Blackness or being proud to be Black and moving away from White/Caucasian beauty ideals (Moodley, 1991; King, 2010; Craig, 2002; Thomas, 2019). Mercer (2000) further suggests that the afro and dreadlocks became recognised as popular art symbols. However, according to Mercer (2000), the Black consciousness movement's power did not last. The 1970s marked a significant shift in Black hair politics This will be explored further on the section that discusses hair as a marker of beauty.

In relation to body size or/and shape of Black women's bodies, studies consulted for this literature review expressed opposing views. Watson et al. (2019) argue that Black women are not concerned with body weight as they are more concerned with other beauty markers such as their hair texture and skin tone which have been construed to be less attractive as White women's features. Gordon et al. (2010) shared a similar finding, i.e. that ethnic minorities endorse larger body sizes which protects Black women from mainstream beauty ideals that emphasise the thin body ideal. According to Gordon et al. (2010), Black women and other ethnic minorities that endorse a larger body ideal protect women from eating disorders. In the same paper, he noted that very few women in the study, are indeed affected by the thin body ideal when exposed to the media. Schuler et al. (2008), in their research, found that older African American women usually underestimate their weight. Schuler et al. (2008) further suggests that this could be due to that some African cultures are more accepting of a larger body weight but it is important to note that African women may have been acculturated by living in that country for a long time and they are considered the minority which is different to South African Black women. However, Manuel, Connel and Pesley (2010) argue that Black women are also affected by the thin body ideal and the difference between their body dissatisfaction regarding weight when compared to White women is diminishing. Manuel et al. (2010) further argues that the more Black women are exposed to dominant culture through mass media and workplace expectations, their body dissatisfaction relating to weight has risen.

In South Africa, the studies also show variable findings. Senekal et al. (2001) conducted a study on urban versus rural Black women. They reported that most participants had a realistic perspective about their bodies. Those who were of normal weight did report that their weight was normal (Senekal et al., 2001). Those that were underweight often wanted to gain weight especially in the rural areas. And those that were overweight underestimated their body weight. However, Senekal et al. (2001) did report that the urban overweight population reported more body size/shape dissatisfaction when compared to the rural group. They reported that these differences were due to assimilation of western cultural norms due to media exposure. Research by Mwaba and Roman (2009), conveyed similar findings, i.e. that exposure to media content often resulted in body dissatisfaction.

According to Puoane et al. (2010), in South Africa, culture can still play a protective role in relation to bodyweight dissatisfaction in contemporary times. Puoane et al. (2010) suggest that a higher BMI was associated with wealth and happiness. Adolescents in the study argued that bigger women are more respected when compared to slim ones (Puoane et al., 2010). This links to an earlier discussion on African culture, whereby in some parts of Africa, a woman who is big in size is considered attractive (Osaghae, 2013; Matiza, 2013). Puoane et al. (2010) found that in rural areas, a thin body is also considered a sign of HIV/AIDS, therefore, a woman who is fuller figured can be a symbol of health. Duncan et al. (2010) further reports that in their study, a thin body in most rural South African parts is associated with stress and this links to what Puoane et al. (2010) has argued about a larger body potentially being construed as a sign of happiness.

According to Capodilupo (2015) and Ancis (2011), another factor that plays a role in how Black women feel about the size of their bodies is related to how African men feel about their bodies. Ancis (2011), argues that Black women care more about their body shape rather than body weight as their partners or men are concerned with their body shape. Ancis (2011) further suggests that the African beauty ideal is more accepting of different body types and sizes. However, Mwaba and Roman (2009) argue that due to the media, the number of Black women with eating disorders related to body dissatisfaction is rising. Ancis (2011) and Capodilupo (2015) suggest that Black men play a role on how Black women feel about their bodies, in some cases they endorse the African body ideal and, in some cases, they endorse the western body ideal.

The next part of the literature review will explore skin as a marker of beauty.

The importance of skin colour and tone has been linked to the history of slavery because socio-political stratification was directly related to skin tone (Julien 2014; Glenn, 2008). According to Monk (2014), during slavery, lighter-skinned Blacks were privileged by Whites and thought to be more physically attractive and intellectually superior than darker-skinned Blacks. Monk (2014) further argues that lighter skinned Blacks were more advantaged because it was believed that they had European ties. They benefitted from advantages such as education, property and in rare cases even freedom (Glenn, 2008; Keith & Herring, 1991; Bodenhorn, 2002).

These advantages afforded them more wealth than darker-skinned Blacks (Monk, 2014). According to Kerr (2005), Edwards (2006) and Monk (2014), even in Black churches, there was colour stratification. Some churches did not allow darker skinned Blacks and they would use a brown paper bag test or paint the skin tone that determined access on the church door. During that period, lighter skinned Black men and women were seen to hold more value in marriage than their darker skinned counterparts (Hunter, 2002; Monk, 2014; Julien, 2014; Glenn, 2008; Kerr,2005). Light skinned women were deemed good for marriage as they were perceived to be loveable, more affectionate, prettier, they had *good hair*, understanding, and intelligent (Glenn 2008; Monk 2014; Julien 2014).

According to Carneiro et al. (2013) and Bryant (2013), in contemporary society, there has not been a very big shift since those very prejudiced times in regard to a general preference for lighter skin tones. Carneiro et al. (2013) and Bryant (2013) suggest that light skin is still seen as more attractive than dark skin. Hunter (2002) argues that skin tone is still significant in different contexts such as educational, social, occupational and family. People with lighter skin are still seen as more attractive and are more successful compared to darker skinned people (Herring, Keith & Horton, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Frisby, 2020). Lighter skinned women also tend to marry high status men. According to Monk (2014), skin colour bias is still persistent even after the Black power movement which emphasised that 'Black is beautiful'. Of relevance to this paper, light skin is considered more aesthetically pleasing and feminine than dark skin (Hill, 2002; Frisby, 2020). According to Carneiro et al. (2013), women of African descent who may have difficulties in accepting their dark skin may engage in skin bleaching. Skin bleaching has been present for a long time and it involves the use of chemicals to lighten dark skin (Carneiro et al., 2013). According to Mire (2001) skin bleaching has been linked health disadvantages such as cancer. In Tanzania, many women reportedly bleach their skin to feel more attractive and benefit from getting a spouse (Carnerio et al., 2013). Thus, the preference for a lighter skin tone has existed for hundreds of years, long before the influence of mass media.

According to Dlova, Hendricks and Martincgh (2012), the legacy of apartheid in South Africa has left Black people with a lot of psychological misconceptions that will take a long time to change. Dlova et al. (2012) argue that such misconceptions include that dark skin is ugly, dirty and drabby whereas light skin is beautiful and bright. In their study that was done in Durban,

they have found that a lot of women use different products to lighten or bleach their skin. Some of the products were found to be harmful but women continue to use them (Dlova et al., 2012). Dlova et al. (2012) further argue that although there was a ban on chemicals that could change skin colour, a lot of cosmetic products still contain such chemicals. According to Glenn (2008), skin lightening has been growing rapidly among young, educated women. Light skin is associated with beauty, youthfulness, affluence and being modern (Glenn, 2008).

A local example would be that of a South African celebrity named Mshoza. She underwent a skin bleaching process (Thomas, 2016; Bizela, 2016; Rao, 2019). Mshoza claimed that bleaching her skin did not mean that she hated her dark skin, but it was just a way for her to feel more attractive and boost her self-confidence but she might have sent a message that dark skin is not good enough to her fans (Bizela, 2016; Rao, 2019; Tate, 2016). According to Bizela (2016), women with fair skin are considered more attractive in different South African communities and there is an obsession with light skin. Bizela (2016), further reports that the term 'yellowbone' which was borrowed from an American animated series called the 'Boondocks' is very popular in Black South African communities and it is used to refer to Black women with a fair skin. According to Motseki (2019), fair skin is regarded as a symbol of beauty and some artists produce songs that reinforce that, for example, DJ Citi Lytes and Sjava have a song together titled ngiphethe mtwana yellow (I am hanging out with a fair-skinned woman). According to Iqani (2016), although the media does represent a lot of Black women, most women in the media who are viewed as attractive and get more coverage tend to have features that emulate whiteness such as lighter skin, straight hair etc. and this might reinforce the idea that to be physically attractive, one has to have light skin or straight hair.

The next part of the discussion deals with hair as a marker of beauty.

Just like skin, Black hair's significance is linked to its socio-historical context (Mercer, 2000). According to Mercer (2000), Black hair is one of the features that were used at an attempt to erase Black identity during slavery. Mercer (2000) further reports that when Black slaves arrived at the plantations, their hair was shaved as it held a lot of spiritual and cultural significance. According to Dash (2006) and Mercer (2000), Black hair was considered unkempt and dirty as Black people had left behind their grooming oils and combs. Black women used to wear head scarves (*doeks*) to cover their hair which was regarded as unkempt and Black men

used to cut their hair (Dash, 2006; Barnett, 2016; Mercer, 2000). According to Mercer (2000), hair was used as a marker of social status; Black people with kinky and coily hair were at the bottom of the social hierarchy and White people with straight and long hair were at the top. This meant that mixed race Blacks, who had somewhat straight hair were treated better than Blacks who had kinky hair; they were afforded better treatment, better jobs and education (Thompson, 2009). According to Barnett (2016) and Mercer (2000), in pursuit of better economic and social privileges, Black women with coily hair engaged in practices that would make their hair straight. Mercer (2000) further suggests that this led to Malone and madam CJ Walker's big companies that promised Black women straight hair. The messages that were being communicated through advertisements of chemical relaxers and the afro comb were that Black women should love their hair and take care of it even though doing so meant changing its natural form (Mercer, 2000).

According to Thomas (2013) hair is seen as a woman's crown; it represents femininity, health and beauty. Thomas (2013) further suggests that in African culture, hair is seen as a way to express one's identity. In some cultures, how women style their hair has meaning, for example, age, religion, marriage or eligibility of marriage, and social rank (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Thomas, 2013). According to Thomas (2013) and Mercer (2000), due to the legacy of slavery, White women's hair has been considered more feminine than Black women's hair, an attempt at erasing Black and this legacy continues in contemporary society. Thompson (2009) and Bryant (2013) argue that the media plays a role in depicting Black hair as the other and White hair as the norm. Thompson (2009) and Bryant (2013) further argue that this may lead to Black women internalising such messages which may lead to self-hate and low self-esteem. According to Thomas (2013), Robinson-Moore (2008) and Glapka (2018), the media depicts White hair as more sophisticated and Black hair as unprofessional, unattractive and unkempt. According to Dosekun (2016) and Barnett (2016), negative messages about Black women's hair may have led to the growth in the chemical hair straighteners and human hair industry as many women try to achieve what is considered good hair. According to Johnson & Bankhead (2014), young educated Black women buy and wear hair weaves as a symbol of a high social status.

According to Dunn (2015), from a young age, Black girls are exposed to the politics and ideologies of hair. Dunn (2015) suggests that their mothers' relationships with their own hair plays a role in how daughters choose to relate to and wear their hair. According to Oyedemi

(2016), many young women give accounts of a time in their childhood in which their mothers chemically straightened their hair with the idea that this improves appearance. Oyedemi (2016) further argues that even in young adulthood, these women may still chemically relax their hair even though it can painful at times. They report that the pain is worth it and there is no beauty without pain (Oyedemi, 2016). According to Browne (2006), in many Black communities there are a large number of hair salons as hair has significant meaning for Black people. According to Sawyer (2005) the reason for many salons in Black communities could be that Black women's hair has not been catered for in salons for White hair but also, Black women's hair is versatile and requires a certain kind of treatment. According to Thompson (2009), many Black women believe that straight long hair will make them attractive, therefore they spend a lot of money and time taking care of their hair.

According to Thomas (2013) more recently, many Black women have started wearing their hair in its natural form, and as a result, the media has also been forced to represent more Black hair than it did before. According to Thomas (2013) and Jeffries and Jeffries (2014), there has been an increase in media content that features Black natural hair and there are also advertisements for Black natural hair treatment products. According to Jackson (2017), there is another wave of 'the natural hair movement' going on and many more women are rejecting European ideals of beauty. Various authors suggest that Black women are choosing to wear their hair natural to maintain a healthy lifestyle, support their daughters, save time and money (Thomas, 2013; Jackson, 2017; Rowe, 2015; Harris, 2015). Thomas (2013) further suggests that other Black women are curious about the texture of their hair as they had not had it natural before.

According to Deliovsky (2008), gender is performative, and hairstyling is a part of gender performativity. According to Thomas (2013) and Tate (2007), Black women may be unconsciously freeing themselves from a history of intersectional oppression through wearing their hair naturally. According to Robinson (2011), when Black women wear their hair in its natural form they can be viewed as being political, even when they are not being political, and they prefer it in its natural form. Jeffries and Jeffries (2014) argue that even though there are more Black women wearing their hair natural, there is still some push back in certain structures. For example, in 2019 Brittany Noble-Jones – a former WJTV news anchor in Mississippi in the

USA – was allegedly fired for wearing her hair in a natural style as it was considered as unprofessional.

In South Africa, according to Alubafi, Ramphalile and Rankoana (2018), recently the natural hair movement has resurfaced, and it appears that it will last longer. Alubafi et al. (2018) suggest that these recent movements were catalysed by a group of adolescents in a Pretoria school protested over their natural hair not being accepted at their school. Alubafi et al. (2018) further suggests that there are many schools whose hair policies may be challenging for women who possess natural Black hair. Capodilupo and Kim (2013), report that not all women succumb to the pressures, but it may still be an internal battle that they face. Capodilupo and Kim (2013) further argue that If Black women choose to wear their hair in its natural form, there is still a lot of difficulties they may face and even when they choose to fit into European standards, they may still face some backlash.

The next part will explore mixed messages that Black women receive from different agents of socialisation on what beauty is or what it looks like.

According to Deliovsky (2008) and Rhode (2010), all women, irrespective of race are pressured into looking a certain way or conforming into given beauty ideals. As discussed before, the Western beauty ideal is considered the norm and it places more value on physical appearance; features such as a slim curvaceous body, thin, long and wavy hair, fair skin etc. are considered attractive (Walker, 2014; Manuel et al., 2010; Stephens & Thomas, 2011). However, for Black women who do not possess such features it can be difficult as it means overriding some of their racial features such as skin colour and hair texture in order to fit into western ideals of beauty (Bryant, 2013; Thompson, 2009). According to Paton (2006), African traditional ideas of beauty are protective as they encourage Black pride which may result in high self-esteem. According to Bryant (2013), Western beauty standards have a negative impact on Black women's self-esteem as they feel like their own natural features will not be accepted. It is not that Black women want to be White, but they may be afraid that if they present with natural features, society might not accept them (Tate, 2009; Thompson, 2009). Black women may be pressured to conform to both Western beauty ideals and African beauty ideals (Glapka & Majali, 2017; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013). According to Thompson (2009), due to the Black consciousness movement, authentic African beauty is defined by having natural hair styles such

as an afro, dreadlocks or any other African hairstyle, darker skin, and various body types. According to Thompson (2009), not all Black women have darker skin tones or wear their hair in a way that is considered ‘authentically African’. Thompson (2009) further suggests that this might result in Black women who may not have dark skin or African hairstyles being judged as not being African enough. As a result, this might leave Black women in conflict, being pulled in different directions as they do not know which beauty ideal to follow due to mixed messages that they may receive from the media, their families, peers, partners etc. (Glapka & Majali, 2017; Puoane et al., 2010; Watson et al., 2019; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Study Design

For this study, a qualitative research approach was used. Qualitative research is a scientific method of gathering non-numerical data (De Vos et al., 2011). This type of research answers how and when a certain phenomenon occurs and refers to the meanings, concepts definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and description of things, instead of their counts or measures (De Vos et al., 2011).

Qualitative research offers the researcher an opportunity to gather in-depth, nuanced accounts as they naturally occur in their social setting (Gibbs, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Qualitative research focuses more on getting in-depth understanding of complex phenomena which do not have no yes/no answers (Gibbs, 2018; Flick, 2018). A qualitative approach was regarded as more suitable for this study because the study was focused on gaining deeper insight and understanding into the experiences of young Black South African women in relation to their physical appearance and sense of self, rather than seeking quantitative data and generalisability (Flick, 2018; Green & Thorogood, 2018). The study is inductive because it focused completely on the participant's subjective experiences, so as to collect this information in as an open a manner as possible (Morgan, 2017).

An interpretivist research paradigm was used in this study. An interpretivist paradigm assumes that reality is subjective and that there are multiple truths in the world (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). Meaning making or knowledge is based on diverse interpretations which are informed by subjective experiences (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). For this study, an interpretivist paradigm was used because the researcher wanted to understand more about the reported subjective realities of the participants in relation to their physical appearance and sense of self, and to make meaning of this. An interpretivist paradigm employs data collection methods that seek to view the participant in as natural a setting as possible and data collection methods like interviews and observations are used.

3.2. Research Questions

1. What are the reported experiences and reflections of young Black South African women in relation to their physical appearance and sense of self?

2. What are the reported influences of race and gender in young Black South African women's experiences and reflections of their physical appearance and sense of self?

3. What are the reported ways in which young Black South African women have tried to navigate different social demands placed on their physical appearance?

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are a method of data collection used in qualitative research (Rosetto, 2014, Bertrand & Bourdeau, 2010). Rosetto (2014) further suggests that the aim of the interview is to elicit stories, learn about meanings, emotions, and experiences of participants that are relevant to the study. The role of the interviewer is to be an active listener, paraphrase and probe further in order to build rapport and encourage in-depth discussion (Rosetto 2014; Partington, 2001). According to Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2009), an interview is more than a conversation between two people, therefore in being an active listener, the interviewer provides follow-up questions that bring more in-depth responses as well as assist the participants to stay in topic. For this study, each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule.

Semi-structured interviews provide few key questions that help define the areas that are relevant to the study but also allow the both the interviewer and interviewee to diverge in order to gain more information from a response (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews have certain advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages are that they are flexible and quite easy to administer. They provide both the interviewer and interviewee with guiding questions, yet there is also room to discover or elaborate on information that is important to the participant but may not have been in the interviewer's thoughts (Gill et al., 2008; Partington, 2001). The main disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are time consuming and labour intensive for the interviewer (Newcomer, Hatry and Wholey, 2015). Newcomer et al. (2015) further reports the interviewer

spends a lot of time preparing the interviews, setting up the interview, conducting and analysing the interviewer.

Despite the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews, the flexibility allows participants to share the fullness of their experiences (Gill et al., 2008). This was essential for the current study. The interviews in this study range in length from 20 to 60 minutes. The interviews were terminated when participants indicated that they had come to the end of the interview and did not have anything more that they wished to share. Audio tapes were used to record participants' responses during the interview. According to Gill et al. (2008) and Newcomer et al. (2015), recording the interviews allows the interviewer to spend more time listening and making other observations rather than transcribing during the interview. Audio tapes also help the interviewer not to miss or forget important information during analysis (Gill et al., 2008; Partington, 2001). The interviews were transcribed by the researcher after data collection.

The audio tapes are being kept in a password protected computer that is accessible to the researcher.

3.3.2. Instrument (Appendix A)

A semi-structured interview schedule has been attached (Appendix A). The set of questions were developed by the researcher and the research supervisor, guided by the existing literature. The questions were carefully designed to be as open, as well as open-ended, as possible and were not of a leading nature. Participants were able to explore the question as they wished, taking it in any direction they preferred. If the interviewees responses left anything out, the interviewer would gently draw the participants attention to this but never insisted that participants answer any particular question they did not wish to.

3.4. Sample

For this study a purposive sampling strategy was used because this study focused on a specific group of people: young Black South African women. The nine participants were Black female undergraduate and postgraduate students from the faculty of humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand. The age range was between 19 – 28 years. This group was selected because it is likely that they spend a substantial amount of time on social media and are more likely to be invested in their physical appearance. For these reasons, Black female participants who were doing their first year in Psychology were the group from which the participants came.

As part of faculty procedure, first year psychology students who participate in research are given a 1% incentive towards their psychology mark. Participation in this study was voluntary.

3.5. Procedure

Participants who volunteered for this study were Black female students studying psychology. Permission to introduce this study to prospective participants through an email invitation to participate was granted from the Head of school of community and human development in the faculty of humanities. The email gave a brief description of what the study is about. Participants who were interested in taking part in the study were asked to contact the researcher via email. A venue, time and date for the interview was then arranged. The interviews were conducted at the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand. The building is on Wits East campus which is accessible to psychology students.

When participants arrived for the interview, they were informed again about the study and reminded that participation was voluntary. They were informed that their information would be anonymised. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were provided with an information sheet, consent form for participation, consent form for audiotaping and a demographic sheet to fill in. Before the start of the interviews, participants were asked if they had any questions or wanted clarity on anything. After that, the interviews started. The interviewer asked the participants the questions and then listened attentively to their responses. If the researcher wanted to explore a response further, the researcher probed further. Once both the interviewer and interviewee were done with one question, the interviewer would proceed to ask another question that was on the interview schedule. The interviews lasted 20 to 60 minutes. Once the participants had responded to all questions and had nothing to add, the researcher ended the interview and thanked the participants. Two participants who seemed somewhat distressed in response to the interview process were given containment by the researcher until their distress dissipated. They were also reminded of the distress protocol, i.e. name and contact details of the supervising psychologist at Emthonjeni Centre to contact for free counselling if they felt distressed at any time after the interview.

The responses from the interviews were then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were uploaded onto the Atlas.ti data analysis programme. The data was analysed using thematic

content analysis. The transcripts and audiotapes were kept in a data protected computer accessible to the researcher.

3.6. Data analysis

3.6.1 Thematic Content Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis refers to the process of identifying themes or patterns of meaning across a data set. Minimal interpretation is used as it is a descriptive approach (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bandas, 2018; Anderson 2007). It involves coding and categorising large amounts of textual data to determine the trends of words used, their relationships, frequency, the structures and discourses of information. It is about examining who says what and with what effect. For this study, thematic content analysis was used as this study makes use of a realist approach. A realist approach refers to reporting on the experiences, meanings and realities of the participants (Anderson, 2007). This study reports on the experiences of young Black South African women in relation to their physical appearance and sense of self as it occurs in the world, bearing in mind that each participant's reality may be different and may change over time.

3.6.2 Steps for Thematic Content Analysis

To analyse the data, the six steps for thematic content analysis were used as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

1. The first step involved the researcher familiarising herself with the data. This was done through data collection, going through the data a few times and transcribing the data. Once the data was transcribed, the researcher read through the transcripts several times to begin identifying themes.

2. The second step involved generating codes. This process involved uploading interview transcripts onto the Atlast.ti software and then going through the data to see what is in it, and what was interesting that related to the research topic. The content that related to the topic were highlighted and assigned to a code. The data was then organised into different codes.

3. The third step involved searching for and identifying themes that emerged from the coded data. At this stage, the researcher was able to organise the coded data into different themes that related to the research topic.

4. The Fourth step involved reviewing and refining the themes. The researcher grouped the codes into major themes and subthemes. Data that could not be part of the refined themes was discarded.

5. The fifth step involved defining and naming themes. On this step, the researcher interpreted and labelled the themes. Each theme was then analysed thoroughly and the extracts from the data which relate to the theme were provided.

6. The last step involved producing the report. Once the researcher was done analysing the data, she compiled the report. Compiling the report involved linking information from the literature review with data collected for the study. The findings were then written up to form the research report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7 Ethics

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (School of Human and Community Development) of the University of the Witwatersrand (MCLIN/18/007IH). The following ethical considerations were implemented in order to protect participants' confidentiality and welfare:

Participants were informed that taking part in the study was voluntary. They were informed that they could pull out of the study at any time before the report was finalised, with no consequences to themselves. Information and consent forms are attached (Appendix B & C).

From an ethical perspective it was very important to ensure the anonymity and privacy of the participants at all times. The researcher maintained the protection of the participants' identities by using pseudonyms throughout the report. The researcher also removed any identifying information of the participants by not disclosing the details of where participants reside. There was no information given about physical appearance, or about the other courses that they were studying. Participants were interviewed at different times and days.

From an ethical perspective it is very important that the utmost care is taken with participants' wellbeing. The researcher remained attentive to participants' reactions throughout the interviews as some aspects of the study might have been sensitive for some participants as the study relates to personal attributes, experiences and opinions. All participants were made aware of the distress protocol. i.e. the free counselling services offered at the Wits Emthonjeni

centre, should they feel emotionally uncontained at any time after the interviews. On the information form they were given the name and contact details of the supervising psychologist at Emthonjeni to contact directly to arrange this. As previously mentioned, two participants became somewhat distressed. They were given containment by the researcher and recovered their composure. They were then reminded of the distress protocol, should they experience any further distress.

3.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is based on the premise that in research, the researcher is influenced by his/her personal characteristics and context when choosing what to study, how they relate to the participants, the kind of questions they ask, and how they analyse and report the data (Macbeth, 2001). According to Berger (2015), in qualitative research, the researcher's social position or intersections of gender, age, race, religion, and personal experiences do affect the study. Reflexivity is a method used for quality control or to ensure rigour in qualitative research (Berger, 2015; Macbeth, 2001). According to Berger (2015), reflexivity involves self-knowledge or monitoring self-bias throughout the research process to remain as objective as possible.

As a young Black woman who may share similar experiences with some of the participants, it was important for me to take conscious steps to remain reflexive, so as to avoid losing my objectivity throughout the research process. I took the following steps: I kept a personal journal to record my thoughts during the research process; Throughout the process, I kept reminding myself of my position or possible biases in relation to the topic; At points where I may have felt overly identified with participants' experiences, I took this to my supervisor who assisted me.

As a young Black woman, I have had my own experiences in relation to the topic which may or may not relate to the participants'. Growing up, as a young girl, my mother used to relax my hair to make it straight and *pretty.* She would tell me to let her know when I start to feel a burning sensation. My hair was very thick, and it took longer to straighten so even when I felt the burning sensation, I would wait for a while before letting her know as I wanted my hair to be less curly and *pretty*. However, as an adult I have chosen to keep my hair natural (dreadlocks). Oftentimes, strangers ask if my hair is real and if they can touch it as they perceive it to be different. I also have dark skin and growing up I have always heard varied reactions towards dark skin. Other

people considered it beautiful and others preferred light skin. I still receive remarks from strangers about my skin. Most of them say to me “you are pretty for a dark-skinned woman” or “you are a Black beauty”. Similar to some participants, due to the shape of my body I do receive unwanted remarks about my body from men. My appearance (natural hair, dark skin and body shape) may have had an impact on how participants engaged with me. Participants with similar features may have felt like we could relate more and those with different features could’ve felt different. One participant mentioned my height on her reflection, suggesting that due to my height (short), men might find me more attractive than her as she believed that men preferred shorter women.

I was aware that my position as a young Black woman could have influenced how participants responded to me in the interviews. As a Black woman myself, participants might have thought that I could relate to their experiences and therefore, would have felt sympathetic. Participants may have also felt comfortable talking to another Black woman. However, it must be acknowledged that some participants may have found it difficult to talk to a young Black South African woman about some of the more difficult issues raised in this research project. Being aware of all these factors helped me to remain as objective as I possibly could.

3.9 Additional participant demographics

Participant	**Age**	**Year of study**
Ayanda	20	2nd year
Brenda	19	1st year
Lebo	22	Honours
Mpho	21	3rd year
Puleng	28	Masters
Renda	24	Honours
Thandi	19	2nd year
Thuli	19	1st year

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This section reports findings from the data. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data that arose from the interviews. As a result, six themes and eight subthemes were identified. The six main themes are as follows: physical attractiveness and its benefits; the media as a point of reference for physical attractiveness; racial undertones regarding physical attractiveness; gendered physical attractiveness; messages from family members and peers with regards to physical attractiveness; and traditional African beauty standards.

4.2. Themes

4.2.1 Physical attractiveness and its benefits

All participants commented on the ways they believe physical attractiveness holds value in society. This theme will explore participants' views on what they consider as physically attractive. Participants had different views on what they consider to be physically attractive. Some participants reported that their own personal views on what constitutes as physically attractive differ from societal standards of beauty. Participants also shared that there are benefits associated with being considered as physically attractive and these will also be explored within this theme. The last part of this theme will explore ways in which participants have engaged in practices that may have allowed them to fit into societal standards of beauty.

4.2.1.1. Physical attractiveness

This subtheme explores participants' views on physical attractiveness. Participants shared how they perceive physical attractiveness. Participants had different views on what they considered to be physically attractive.

In the extract below, Mpho shares her own ideas and experiences in relation to what she considers to be physically attractive.

> *"Shoo! (Laughs) uhm well quiet recently I have been really trying to grow my hair (laughs). So uhm I really, quite recently started really liking the whole natural hair look. So, I'd say you know, the big hair and not necessarily saying no make-up you know, because sometimes people do look good with make-up too. But it's just like as more of my natural stuff as possible and, but then in terms of, I don't know like, it's different things*

but also, it's just like, I like genuine and good, genuine and honest people. And I feel like that in itself it's just beautiful because it's very rare especially in today's society. So, for me uhm being, because I am Black obviously then it means the natural hair and things like that. But anyone who is in a state where they express more of their self in as much as possible then for me that's ideal beauty" Mpho

Mpho expresses that for her, physical attractiveness means being natural. She suggests that having natural hair or being more natural in different aspects is what she finds physically attractive. Although Mpho reported that she prefers a natural appearance, she expressed her feeling that make-up also makes people look good.

Below is an extract from Lebo. Lebo expresses that for her, physical appearance matters and that she considers a body that is well taken care of to be physically attractive. Lebo also reported that physical appearance is the first thing she is confronted with when she looks at a person. Lebo's views are similar to Ko and Suh (2019) who suggested that physical appearance is one of the most noticeable aspects in a person.

"I think for me, obviously the first thing I look for is the physical appearance. But I've come to just find inner beauty more appealing. Whether you are a nice person, whether you are kind, not just how you treat yourself but other people. But in terms of physical beauty I think just the body that is well taken care of…" Lebo

In the extract below, Renda shares a slightly similar view to Mpho.

"Yooh Uhm, it's a difficult question. So, my ideal kind of beauty right, would be true self-acceptance, self-love and confidence in oneself. Uhmm, without feeling that you have to succumb to the pressures of society. So, it's not just about looks for me but it's about owning my body and owning myself as a being entirely. And not always in comparison to what the world tells me is beautiful so yeah" Renda

Renda starts by acknowledging her difficulty in deciding what is ideal beauty for her. Renda's quote suggests that although for her, attractiveness is not only about physical appearance, ideal beauty means accepting her body the way it is despite pressure to conform to societal standards of beauty. Her view is slightly similar to Mpho's view in that although Mpho likes being natural, make-up does still make people look good, i.e. she shows ambivalence. Both

Renda and Mpho's views suggests that beauty or physical attractiveness is complex and may not necessarily be the same for everyone. Renda acknowledges that even though she has her own idea of what ideal physical appearance is, there is still a societal standard of beauty. According to Capodilupo and Kim (2015), physical attractiveness is shaped by different contextual factors and may not be the same for everyone but in contemporary society, there is a beauty ideal that is considered the norm. Both participants seemed to want to integrate personality characteristics into their concept of ideal beauty.

Puleng, expressing a similar view to Renda, also touched on the complexity of physical attractiveness. Puleng also points out some features that may not be considered as ideal markers of physical attractiveness.

> *"For me I don't have a category that I would say these are the most beautiful women and these ones are not. For beauty lies within and I feel like everyone is beautiful in their own way. So, I can never say that this is ideal beauty for me although I am actually into the social thing of saying okay, she is more beautiful. We grew up in that way, to being told that somebody who is a yellow bone is much more beautiful than Black looking ladies. Those kinds of things but honestly for me ideal beauty doesn't exist, we are all beautiful in our own ways"* Puleng

Both Renda and Puleng's views suggest that society places value on physical appearance and that there are dominant beauty standards. For Renda, ideal beauty would mean being confident in herself without feeling pressure to fit into societal beauty standards. Puleng on the other hand reports that although she does not have or believe that there is ideal beauty, her social context might have influenced her in seeing certain women as more beautiful. According to Deliovsky (2008), there is pressure placed on women to look or fit into an ideal standard of beauty, which is unattainable for most women.

Puleng reports that she grew up in a social context in which a woman who was considered a 'yellow bone' was seen as more physically attractive than a woman with dark skin. According to Bizela (2016), the term 'yellow bone' was first used in an animated American series called *Boondocks*. The term was used to refer to Black women who are fair skinned. Since its first use in the series, it has become popular. In South Africa, the term 'yellow bone' is very popular in everyday township life. This can be seen in the South African music industry where

the term is often used. Women who are considered to be 'yellow bones' are depicted as more attractive when compared to women with dark skin (Bizela, 2016; Motseki, 2019). Puleng's views about the term 'yellow-bone' may suggest that she has been socialized into believing that an ideally beautiful woman possesses fair skin. According to Bryant (2013), fair skin is one of the features that is considered to be a marker of ideal beauty in contemporary society.

4.2.1.2. Benefits of physical attractiveness

This subtheme explores the views of some of the participants who felt that there are certain benefits associated with being considered physically attractive. These participants shared different views and experiences in relation to the benefits of being considered physically attractive. Their views and experiences are shared below:

> *"People would tell you that if you look more beautiful, people would listen to you and give you opportunities before you even say anything. In an interview and you are looking nice people will already like you and stuff…"* Puleng

Puleng's views in the above extract above suggest that she believes that there are benefits associated with being considered as physically attractive. Although Puleng does not share her own personal experiences in relation to the associated benefits, she reports that people have told her that being considered as physically attractive comes with benefits such as being heard and getting opportunities easily. Puleng further suggests that even in interviews, physical attractiveness may make the candidate likeable. Puleng's views resonate with the research of Song et al. (2019). According to Song et al. (2019), being physically attractive comes with benefits such as better employment opportunities and being perceived as more sociable.

In the extract below, Ayanda shares a slightly similar view to Puleng. Ayanda's view suggests in her experience, society does place a high value in physical attractiveness.

> *"…the way you look has nothing to do with your character. It doesn't mean if you are pretty that you are automatically nice and also it doesn't automatically mean that you are mean. You know, it doesn't mean that if the world deems you as ugly or not up to the standards you don't have something important to say but that's how everyone sees it…"* Ayanda

Ayanda seems to be conflicted in relation to the benefits associated with physical attractiveness. According to Ayanda, people who are considered to be physically attractive are associated with having a certain character, whether good or bad which she personally believes should not be the case. Ayanda suggests that society already makes certain assumptions about people's characters based on their looks and if a person is deemed as physically unattractive or not fitting into the beauty standard, the person may be not be heard. This is similar to Puleng's view that people who are considered physically attractive are listened to. According to Song et al. (2019) and Gupta et al. (2016), people associate physical attractiveness with goodness.

In the quote below, Thuli shares her own experiences which relate to Ayanda's view about physical attractiveness being associated with character.

> *"…yes, because before you speak, people are looking at you. Uhm people are either judging what you are wearing or what you look like and sometimes they already go into or they already have a conversation with themselves to say uthi (that) this person, I know for me, when you see me walking down the street I probably look like I am a rude person or I am a standoffish person. But I am not, I just like being, I am an only child, so I like being by myself. So, I don't have a gang of friends, especially around campus. I have a friend on campus, but she is all the way in west campus. So, I am either at class or in the library or at home, so I don't have, I don't see the need to have like, maybe it's like a deeper thing or anxiety, like social anxiety. like I don't see the need to be all smile, like I don't…"* Thuli

Thuli's experiences and personal views suggest that because of how she physically presents herself, people may assume that she is rude, standoffish or not friendly. She suggests that the way she presents relates to her preferring being alone as she is an only child and her friend is on a different campus. In relation to physical appearance, Thuli's experiences resonate with the findings of Hess et al. (2005), that women are expected to smile often as this makes them seem less dominant than men and considered to be approachable. Thuli's experiences also relate to the idea that people's physical appearance may be used to judge their character, for example, if she appeared to be smiling, she may be considered as nice. This further strengthens Song et al. (2019) and Gupta et al. (2016) argument that people who are physically attractive may be perceived as *good* and sociable and therefore appealing.

In the extract below, Thandi shares her own experiences with what she labels "pretty privilege".

> *"…we have this thing called pretty privilege. And you see it in the smallest of things like for example, you are at McDonald's and your order number came up first you know this, but the prettier girl gets her order first why? Or if you go into these almost self-serve restaurants, so you pick what you want in the food and the prettier girl gets to have more of the stuff and you get less. Does it make sense? Like Chiapas (a Mexican restaurant), you choose what you want as filling and if someone is prettier or if you identify as pretty then you get more of a larger serving than someone next to you. Even if it's the same thing, unless it's different things but you know. So you see in things like that, you go okay if you are pretty you get to have people just give things to you, people are attracted to you, people want to talk to you, versus when you are not, you must work for everything, you must work for recognition, you must work for work itself. Yeah you just have to work throughout, like eventually you just decide if I have to work for every little thing I might as well just be indoors all day and only do what needs to be done…"* Thandi

Thandi seems to suggest that women who are perceived to be more physically attractive may receive preferential treatment, even in things she deems trivial like getting their order of food first or getting more food etc. She suggests that people want to be around people who are deemed physically attractive and they do not have to work as hard as people are considered to be less physically attractive. Thandi's experiences and views reiterate much of what the other three participants shared above.

In the lengthy extract below, Dineo shares her own experiences and views in relation to an incident that she encountered that relates to the benefits associated with physical attractiveness.

> *"So, to me it's not but because of the world we live in, physical appearance matters. And so, then because the outside world cares so much about physical appearance now as an individual you kind of forced to. Uhm so uhm, in like an ideal world I don't think it matters but, in this world, that we live in, it matters because you are treated a certain way because of how you dress, because of how you look. Uhm it's something, so like, for instance, so I went to Sandton City this one time with my friend and we were looking like,*

bad because we were from a run. Our tekkies (sneakers) *were dirty and everything and this lady was giving out chocolates outside a Lindt store. Uhm so we passed by her, we were walking close to her and she gave us chocolates and when we walked back, going to the parking lot she was just like huh uh, I am not giving you guys chocolates because you've walked, you are walking for the second time. So that started the whole conversation of if we were dressed differently, she would've approached us differently. She definitely would've given us a sample again. Because of how she, because of our appearance somehow our appearance reflecting our social status and maybe the amount of money we have. So yeah it matters basically. Yeah physical appearance matters although I wouldn't want it to be. I don't think it's a big deal and it absolutely does"* Dineo

Dineo's reflection echoes what other participants have suggested that physical appearance matters in society and it has certain benefits associated to it. She is convinced that she would have been treated differently if she was dressed differently and looked differently than she did during the incident she reported. It is interesting that Dineo did not consider that her post-exercise appearance made her more recognizable to the woman at the Lindt store, that this woman might not have wanted to give anyone a second round of free chocolates. Dineo believes that a person is judged more on their physical appearance. According to Rhode (2010), physical appearance may be used to assume someone's standing in society, their social status etc. which in turn plays an important role in how people treat them.

4.2.1.3. Practices that participants have engaged in to fit the beauty ideal

In this subtheme, all participants have reported that they have tried to or do engage in practices to try and change their body or features to fit either their own standard or societal standards of beauty. Below are some of the ways in which participants have tried to look 'more physically attractive'. Lebo shared the following:

"Uhm gym. I don't know if that really changes. It tones up so it does a bit. But not like the formalised gym but I do exercise. I came from yoga just now and I realised it's quite a bit of exercise the harder it gets. So yeah I like those kinds of stuff…" Lebo

Lebo shares that she uses exercise to tone her body. Initially, Lebo seemed uncertain about whether exercise was also a way to alter her physical appearance, but she later

acknowledged that it does change the body. Unlike other practices that women may engage in to alter their bodies, exercise may be considered slightly different due to the motivations behind exercise (Greenwood & Dal Cin, 2012). Exercise is associated with health and therefore might be easily missed as a way to alter one's physique, but according to Carneiro et al. (2013), the recent boom in the fitness industry is highly motivated by aesthetics as a lot women want to lose weight or tone their bodies to fit beauty ideals in relation to what body size and shape is considered physically attractive.

In the extract below, different from Lebo, Andile shares that she engaged in exercise to lose weight. Andile also reported that even women in her family exercised to lose weight and they would celebrate each other when they lost weight. The idea that they celebrated each other's weight loss suggests that losing weight - trying to be more attractive - is important for them.

> *"Yes, like maybe not this year. But I used to run a lot, like hectic exercise and it took quite a lot of my time, like last year. I haven't found time for it this year and I just think I have my family support. We all go together, us just women. So, we will all celebrate each other when, ah if you lose weight. And if we are excising, we will exercise together…"* Andile

In the extract below, Thandi shares that she has tried both exercise and dieting as a way to lose weight.

> *"Ah yeah no. Apart from just exercising or trying these yo-yo diets, no. It's not like I have done plastic surgery. Apart from just exercising and dieting nah"* Thandi

Five participants reported that they have engaged either in exercise, dieting or sports to lose weight. Lebo reported that she exercises to tone her body whereas the other participants reported that they wanted to lose weight. According to Carneiro et al. (2013), most women feel pressure to lose weight to achieve the thin body ideal. Shallu and Gupta (2013) and Ruck (2018) further suggest that most women are not immune to the thin body ideal and there has been massive growth in health and fitness industry in recent years.

In the quote below, Puleng shares her own experiences with using make-up to enhance her physical attractiveness.

> *"Make-up yes, surgery no, the chemicals, that light skin thing no, I was tempted to but never. So, make-up yes and you know you want to look picture perfect so yeah. So, with the make-up yes, I have done it and I still do it. And usually when you apply make up on, you think you look more beautiful than you are naturally looking. So, these are the things…Yoh the confidence is on another level so yeah…"* Puleng

Puleng reports that she uses make-up when she wants to look "picture perfect". She reported that when she has make-up on, she is more confident, and the use of make-up makes her think that she is more physically attractive than when she does not have make up on. Puleng's belief that she is more attractive when she has make-up on than when she does not, resonates with Baramidze (2018). According to Baramidze (2018), there has been a boom in the make-up industry as it claims to offer women a way to look more physically attractive than when they do not have make-up on. Puleng also reports that she was also tempted to use skin lighteners (this will be explored on a theme that addresses skin as a marker of beauty).

In the extract below, Ayanda also shares her experience with make-up. Her use of make-up and how it makes her feel are slightly different to Puleng's experiences with make-up.

> *"Uhm sometimes I wear make-up, not like completely but like lipstick. I love purple lipstick. So, I put lipstick or eyeliner but it's not excessive. Like when I just feel like today, I feel like being pretty but it's not like all the time…The first days used to make me feel different but now I am just like okay it's just something. Even if it rubs off, I don't apply it again. It's not something that I am keen on, I just don't get what the hype is so yeah"* Ayanda

Ayanda reports that she uses make-up on days when she feels like *being pretty*, as if this is a state of being. Her statement might suggest that she does feel prettier, i.e. a better version of herself with make-up even though she does not use it often. She reported that initially it used to make her feel different (better) but now she seems to express having some mixed feelings about wearing make- up and how it changes the way she feels about herself.

Three other participants also reported that they do use make-up as an enhancer. They reported that they do not use it often but for special occasions. Puleng and the other two participants reported that having make-up on does boost their confidence and they do feel different. In other words, wearing make-up makes them feel as though they present themselves to the world in a more favourable light. According to Narang (2013) most women report feeling particularly beautiful when they have enhancers or make up on. According to Narang (2013), the reason why women may feel more confident when wearing make-up is influenced by the idea that somehow make-up *'fixes their flaws'* – this and makes them look better or helps them attain ideal beauty which they may not have attained without the make-up. Deliovsky (2008) argues that women are socialised into believing that for them to be physically attractive, they have to work for beauty or change something about themselves and according to Narang (2013), make-up is one of the *easiest* ways in which women can temporarily change something about themselves to fit into or look closer to the ideal beauty standard. Deliovsky (2008) further argues that women may feel pressure to look beautiful because they are also socialised into believing that beauty is intimately linked to their sense of identity, and according to Baramidze (2018), the make-up industry is one of the biggest industries targeted at women's insecurities about their bodies which is why women may feel motivated to use make-up as it offers them a way to feel more attractive and socially acceptable. According to Baramidze (2018), the beauty industry uses so-called influencers (people with many followers on social media who market or persuade their followers to use certain products) and celebrities to sell them the fantasy that if they use certain make-up products, they can be as attractive, popular, or successful as they are. And as discussed earlier, being physically attractive may convey certain benefits associated to it such as being seen as nice, intelligent etc. Therefore, women may use make-up to enhance their own physical appearance as a way to gain social acceptance and value via societal beauty ideals.

Overall, this theme focused on what participants deemed to be physically attractive. Participants had different views of what ideal physical attractiveness is. Most participants did report that they value more inner attributes than physical attributes but due to societal expectations, they also have ideas of what looks appealing. Participants did report that they engage in physical exercise to lose weight and some mentioned that they do use make-up occasionally to look prettier. Some participants did report that although for them physical appearance does not matter on a personal level, however on a societal level it matters. Based on

their experiences and personal views, participants have reported that looks have an impact on how one is seen and how one is treated. The consensus being that people who are considered physically attractive are treated better and people make good assumptions about them. The next theme focuses on the media as a medium in which a lot of ideas of what is physically attractive are communicated. However, the participants seemed to feel some ambivalence about enhancing their appearance because of what this might mean about their self-worth. Overall participants expressed the wish to be able to look the way they wanted to without so much societal pressure. However, they seemed to feel that complying with beauty standards comes with certain advantages which makes it difficult to reject them entirely.

4.2.2. The media as a point of reference for physical attractiveness

In this theme, all participants reported feeling that the media has an impact on how they or other women relate to their bodies. Participants reported that from childhood, they have been exposed to certain beauty ideals. Participants reported that through the media, certain beauty standards are communicated which do not cater for all women. Some participants also reported their feeling that certain beauty standards communicated through the media may exclude Black women. This theme explores participants' thoughts and experiences in relation to media messages about physical attractiveness.

Below, Puleng shares her views and experiences.

> *"I just see it as standards that are set for okay you are supposed to look this way, but for them it's probably just about their advertising. They took a certain standard and made it a general look for everyone. If you look like her then you are much more prettier. We are influenced by things we see on TV and magazines and stuff and if you look at it, they are actually portraying the same thing over and over again…"* Puleng

Puleng's reflection suggests that she believes that the media plays a role on how women view themselves. According to Puleng, the media sets a certain standard of what ideal beauty looks like. Puleng's view suggests that women who meet the beauty standard represented in the media are considered to be more physically attractive than those who do not meet the standard. Iqani (2016), argues that the media is the biggest disseminator of culture and therefore it is also responsible for setting ideal beauty standards. Puleng also suggests that the media sets or

communicates beauty ideals through repetition. Futhermore, Deliovsky (2008) suggests that through repetition of ideas or practice, the idea or act becomes engraved and seen as natural.

Below, Thuli shares her own experiences in relation to beauty messages in the media. Although in retrospect, Thuli shares the kind of beauty ideals she wanted to attain or fit into that resulted through exposure to the media.

> *"I wanted to be smaller, I just wanted to be skinnier and less voluptuous yeah. My whole issue has always been like my skin tone and my body size. What was the reason? Just the people on TV that you see like for instance, I looked up to Beyonce for a long time. Thought she was perfect and I thought if I could be her size I'd be happy. But then I realized that I would never look like Beyonce, I would never look like the celebrities I looked up to. Then so I think that's why I say now I don't really care, I just wanna be me yeah."* Thuli

Thuli shares the same idea as Puleng that the media presents a certain image of how women should look, she reports that she wanted to look a certain way because of the people she saw on TV. Thuli identified some beauty markers that are portrayed in the media that she wanted to attain such as being skinnier or having a certain body size as well as having a different skin tone. According to Bryant (2013) in the media, an ideally beautiful woman is portrayed as thin with fair skin. Thuli shares that there was a time when she wanted to look like the international celebrity Beyonce Knowles because she thought she looked perfect and she thought looking like her would make her happy. The idea that attaining a certain body ideal would make her happy resonates with the ideas of Wolf (1990) and Deliovsky (2008). According to Wolf (1990) and Deliovsky (2008), women are made to believe that being beautiful is their biggest achievement. However, Thuli reports that she realized that she could never look like Beyonce Knowles. Jacobs et al. (2016) argues that the media sells women the idea that there is perfection and that it is attainable. However, women do know that such beauty ideals are unattainable (Deliovsky, 2008). Thuli knows that she could never look like Beyonce but she still wanted to look like her. Deliovsky (2008) and Calogero et al. (2007) further argue that even though women know that they cannot attain such ideals, they never stop wishing that they could meet the standards. Being unable to meet ideal standards of beauty or looking like women who are considered to be more

physically attractive may impact their self-esteem negatively (Calogero et al., 2007; Deliovsky, 2008).

In the extract below, Lebo shares her views in relation to physical attractiveness and the media. Lebo is of the view that the media shows unrealistic content as a means to make profit.

> *"Sometimes I feel like no because almost everything on the media is made up. Uhm like even if they advertise cosmetics it's not necessarily natural beauty. Sometimes they have people advertising Ponds (a beauty product) but they have make up on and I'm just like hao guys and sometimes they take people who have naturally good skin because they have good genes and those are the people they use to advertise. So I don't think so, uhm I think there are a few celebrities who even though they naturally look good but they also enhance their looks so it's really rare to find natural beauty that is also beautiful beauty, I don't know what I am trying to say. Like find something that is natural and beautiful on social media but now we are going towards, not necessarily going towards but people do try and, I think but also, because there was also that yellow bone movement now people are trying to also say dark is beautiful, natural is beautiful and I appreciate that but I feel like it is going to a point where it has become so commercialised whereby natural beauty is not the thing of I am not trying so hard but I am trying so hard to be natural by being artificial"* Lebo

One participant reflected on the commercialisation of beauty within the media. Lebo believes that beauty has become commercialised and even natural beauty is made artificial. According to Amer (2016), the beauty industry is one of the largest markets targeted at women's insecurities with their own bodies. According to Watson et al. (2019), Black women spend a lot of money trying to modify their hair. Carneiro et al. (2013) reports that skin bleaching is prevalent in most African societies.

In the extract below, Ayanda shares her own views and experiences in relation to social media. Ayanda shares that she hates social media as she believes that most of the content she sees on the media is not real.

> *"I feel like that's what messes everyone up like, especially Instagram goodness. I hate Instagram because it just shows a certain thing about a person when actually in real life*

that's not actually who they really are. Like someone is struggling. And I always tell myself like, especially when I am feeling alone not to go on Instagram or Facebook and look at people's pictures. At the end of the day no one is posting ugly pictures. I tend to also feel like I am also part of the people who judge in a way because if I go on Instagram and see one picture and see like it has a lot of likes and it's simple, there's nothing what people say is special about it but why does it have so many likes. Then you see someone out there who is really trying to get a picture taken that's proper and then they post it and like it doesn't get much likes. At the end of the day it's like so what is really beautiful? Sometimes you want those snapchat pictures and sometimes you want those normal unfiltered pictures, but what's really beautiful? What's getting more likes? And it's like so frustrating, I just hate Instagram." Ayanda

Ayanda also reports that she understands that what she sees in the media may not be realistic and she believes that it "messes up people". Ayanda seems to be implying that these beauty standards cause psychological distress to some people. She shared her own strong feelings, such as frustration and hate that she experiences when viewing media content in platforms such Instagram and Facebook. She reports being left with questions about what constitutes as beauty as images she would have deemed to be beautiful aren't seen or perceived as such by other users. Ayanda's reflections suggests that exposure to media images causes her significant distress. This excerpt implies that for Ayanda, media content may have a negative impact on her self-esteem as she is left confused by what people deem to be physically attractive within such media platforms. She seems to feel that her own natural beauty is not considered to be attractive enough because unfiltered (unmodified) pictures do not receive as many *likes* as filtered images, therefore she may feel pressure to look a certain way or feel less attractive. According to Loeto (2014), women receive feedback about what is physically attractive from society or people close them. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) suggest that within social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, the number of *likes* one receives on the images they post may equate to the amount of people who consider them to be physically attractive or not, therefore, therefore receiving fewer *likes* may be associated with being less attractive which may result in low self-esteem. With a platform like Instagram, most likes come from strangers, and receiving validation from strangers may further boost one's elf-esteem (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

In the quote below, Ayanda further exclaims how exposure to media images make her feel in relation to physical attractiveness.

> *"I just don't like looking at all of that cause at the end of the day makes me feel like okay so I have to like now try and get as many likes as other people. Which means I have to pose a certain way, I have to look a certain way, I have to dress a certain way and it's like I have someone's identity…"* Ayanda

Ayanda further shares that she feels like she must almost be an imposter, somebody else entirely, for her to be considered beautiful. She associates getting *likes* from people on social media - for the photographs she posts of herself - as getting personal affirmation which she then relates to her self-worth. This seemed to distress her, she says she does not like to look. Ayanda's reflection resonates with Young et al. (2014) argument that when women cannot fit into the beauty ideal, they may develop body image dissatisfaction (low sense of self-worth) which may lead to certain negative outcomes such as stress, depression, low self-esteem and low self-concept. According to Holland and Tiggemann (2016), the reason why women may develop more body image dissatisfaction as result of media content exposure is because of social comparison. Holland and Tiggemann (2016) argue that through social media platforms, idealised images of beauty are communicated, and women internalise unrealistic standards of beauty. When they compare themselves to the women they see within these media platforms and realise that they do not look like them, they feel like they do not fit in or belong in a society that values women's physical appearance (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Tiggemann, 2006). As mentioned earlier, even though women may be aware that the prevailing beauty standards are unrealistic, it does not stop them from wishing to look like the people they see within these platforms (Deliovsky, 2008). Based on Vygotsky's (1997) cultural-historical theory of cognitive development (the theory stipulates that culture as communicated through parents, caregivers, peers and society at large shapes cognition or high order brain function) women may struggle to stop comparing themselves to these images because they want to feel like they fit in or have a sense of belonging through conforming to shared cultural values (Kholmogorova, Tarhanova & Shaylygina, 2017) and as a way to try and fit in, they compare themselves to people who are similar to them such as their peers (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

In the extract below, Renda also shares her own views.

"I think popular culture tries to create a particular woman or a certain woman without many complications. Like they want to, they put us in boxes. So, if there is a natural woman or what they deem to be natural would be a woman with natural hair or dreadlocks and who looks a certain aesthetics. And they will have another girl who has weaves and all of these things, but they are put in boxes, it's like we can't be both"
Renda

Renda suggests that a woman who is considered as fitting an ideal standard of beauty looks a certain way and does not have many complications or fits a certain box. This may imply that women can be controlled or reduced to a single category, this patriarchal ethos is highlighted in feminist theories. Wolf (1990) and Evans (2003) argue that women's bodies are policed by patriarchal forces as a means to control women and distract them from competing with men.

Renda further suggests that the beauty standards are very restrictive, a woman who is considered natural (less modified appearance) has a certain box or social category, as opposed to a woman who has modified her appearance more extensively. She suggests that a woman cannot be both or occupy multiple categories. This idea that appearance may limit women in any number of ways is a powerful one. According to Evans (2003), restrictive and unrealistic beauty standards take away women's power or agency in relation to their bodies. Furthermore, Wolf (1990) and Deliovksy (2008), argue that unattainable and unrealistic beauty standards are imposed on women who in turn internalize them and then police their own bodies. Renda's reflection suggests that women do not have power over their bodies, they cannot choose how they physically present themselves as society chooses for them. Women who may choose not to conform to societal standards of beauty may receive backlash from people around them (Capodilupo, 2015).

In the extract below, Dineo shares her own views in relation to media representations of physical attractiveness. Dineo's views are more related to race (race will be covered in more detail on the next theme). Dineo acknowledges that Black women are being represented in the media but for her the representation is not enough as it does not cater for different kinds of Black women.

"I think Blackness is really, people are trying to put Blackness out there. In magazine covers, on Tv screens, on our adverts, as brand ambassadors. I think the conversation

would be more around colorism, like who gets more privilege on the magazine cover, the light skinned Black girl or the dark-skinned Black girl. And then that could be now, something that could be pushed further. There needs to be a representation of dark-skinned women as well. But in terms of just Blackness as a whole, I think we are really doing well. I think people are really, we are starting to be recognized as a race which I think is cool" Dineo

Dineo acknowledges that recently, Black women have also been included in media representations. However, she is of the opinion that not every Black woman is represented in the media. There seems to be a particular version of 'Blackness" and Black beauty that is being presented. Dineo is of the view that although Black women are represented in the media, dark skinned Black women are not represented as much. According to Bryant (2013) and Thomas (2013), Black women who are being represented through media channels tend to emulate Whiteness as they possess features like light skin or straight hair.

Below, Thuli shares similar views with Dineo that recently, Black women are also being represented in the media. Thuli suggests that the representation of Black women in the media with features like hers rather than Eurocentric features, have had a positive impact on how she feels about herself. A well quoted feminist maxim is that the personal is political. For Black women the additional layer of racial politics is also present (McCall, 2005; Awad et al., 2015).

Thuli also suggests that more accurate representations of Black women, a depiction of the full range of Black women in the media, is still very limited.

"It's only now where you I see. I have natural hair and now you see girls with natural hair on social media and that's becoming a thing. Now you see girls with my skin tone, bo [the likes of]*, I forgot her real name. She's the professor in "How to get away with murder". Viola Davis, like when you see them embrace their beauty, you also wanna embrace yours as well. Like she's that way, I'm this way so I am gonna go for it. But back then I used to relax my hair every day, not every day but every month. Cause I didn't want it, I had really coarse hair, so it was a struggle. Yeah now they are showing it, but it's also like limited as well. There's a kind of beauty that's out there and then there is another one"* Thuli

Thuli expressed that she wished a fuller range of Black women were represented earlier in the media. Growing up she faced a lot of challenges with her own physical attractiveness as the women she saw on the media did not look like her. According to Tiggemann (2006), the standard set on television or other media platforms, young girls use it as reference for their own physical appearance. Thuli references celebrities like Viola Davis, who does appear on television screens with dark skin and natural hair and she believes that they represent her. Thuli reports that seeing Black women like Viola Davis with natural hair also make her comfortable with her own her, which she was not in the past as she straightened it a lot. For participants, the link between having a media representation of others who look like oneself seems to have importance for self-esteem (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). They all expressed the idea that this is of psychological and emotional significance for them.

Below, Mpho further reiterates what Dineo and Thuli shared about the limited representation of different types (physical types) of Black women in the media. Mpho shares her own experiences in relation to exposure to the media.

> *"Aaah not enough, not enough. The mere fact that I have to dig deep to find someone that looks like me clearly means that it's not enough… Argh! It frustrates me every time, it honestly frustrates me every time because uhm it's just weird how we are supposedly advancing but not in the way we should be or not in areas that are important you know. So, it honestly frustrates me because it's a thing of: 1.) I am not represented and, 2.) There's only so much I can do to change that you know. As much as I can take pictures and put them on social media, like I am one out of how many people. Not to be discouraging like don't do it, it's great when people take those initiatives but also, it's just like sometimes you don't want everything to be so hard you know. So, it's like you have to fight for everything"* Mpho

Mpho appears to have strong feelings about her own representation within the media. She reports feeling frustrated and discouraged that she is underrepresented as a Black woman in relation to her physical appearance. Mpho's reflection suggests that she feels helpless as she cannot change media content to represent herself and other Black women. She suggests that she feels pressure to work hard at her appearance to emulate unattainable beauty standards. She feels despondent because she doesn't feel that this is achievable, and this is disheartening. She also

questions the degree to which Black women can truly advance in society when they are still depicted in the media in unrepresentative ways, pressurised to have (or work towards) physical attributes that are unattainable because they are inappropriate for most Black women. Mpho believes that as a Black woman she has to fight for her to be represented in the media.

In the lengthy extract below, Mpho further shares her experiences in relation to the media's representation of Black women's features.

> *"Yesterday my friend showed me a video of the Winx club, and which we all, we both all just love Winx. And it was an episode on Winx where this young Black girl. Uhm! Was because, there are like these 3 witches on Winx. They did something to her, she had like straight hair and they did something to her hair and it became something like a puff. I think they were having like a beauty competition or something like that and then it became an afro and then she was crying, she was like I hate my hair, it used to be straight and now look what happened to it. And other girls because she is the only Black girl on Winx, and then the other girls were touching it, asking "what is that? What is that?" You know that type of thing. And we were even just discussing how if it was just a few years back we would've looked at that and be like 'oh hahaha look at her hair, you know what is that?' Because we also weren't exposed to that and then now it's just like it hurts, it hurts because as much as it's someone who is just out there but it's also just, these people are meant to represent you and it's just that, it hurts that you can't express yourself in your fullest form because that is not conventional, that is not beautiful, that is not allowed or you know any of these stereotypic things so it's just, it's frustrating"*
> Mpho

'Winx Club' is an Italian-American animated series (Straffi, 2004). Mpho's reported experience with the series suggests that she felt misrepresented as the series suggested that Black hair was not 'good enough'. Mpho acknowledges that in the past, when she was less aware of the implicit messages being communicated via certain media offerings, she would have also laughed about it but now that she is more aware of the message being communicated, she feels hurt. As per the program, Black women's natural hair was not represented, up until recently. Mpho's reflection suggests Black women would have also laughed at the character's hair, because they have been influenced by Eurocentric media beauty ideals imposed on Black women. Mpho's

ideas resonate with Thompson (2009) and Tate's (2007) argument that due to their socio-political history, Black women have internalised Eurocentric beauty ideals as the norm. Thus, Black women start to believe that a Eurocentric ideal is the way that all Black women should look. Tate (2007) further argues that it is not that Black women hate their hair when they alter it to make it straighter, but they do so to feel and look physically attractive as straight hair is considered as the ideal. However, this seems to deny the idea that internalisation of beauty ideals may indeed lead to self-hatred or at least hatred of parts of the body. Mpho speaks about the recent movement towards empowerment through representations of women that are a realistic and authentic, a fuller and truer depiction of Black women. Mpho's reflection reiterates the idea that Black women are doubly oppressed, as women and as Black (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Calogero, 2007). As Black women, they are expected to adhere to a certain beauty ideal, but in addition, that ideal is Eurocentric which alienates them on a racial level (Bryant, 2013).

Still focusing on Black women's hair and media representation, Thuli also expresses her own thoughts below:

> *"There is that thing that White is always right, and Black is not instilled in people's minds because I can make an example with Kim Kardashian. Very beautiful girl, I have nothing against her. There was a time she did braids, and she called them something, she made up a name and people were like no, Black people have been doing this and it hasn't been accepted in the workplace whereas now it's starting to be accepted. Not necessarily because of her but because she made it popular. It made it okay to have braids or natral hair in the workplace. So, things like that, it bothers me"* Thuli

Similar to Mpho, Thuli's reflection also suggests that people have internalised the idea that Eurocentric ideals are the norm. To support her idea, Thuli uses Kim Kardashian (a social media influencer) as an example. According to Thuli, Kim Kardashian as a White woman having braids, made it normal to have braids even though Black women have had braids for a very long time. Thuli suggests that Kim Kardashian has changed social opinion about these hair styles, she has made them widely acceptable, because she is a white celebrity with Eurocentric facial features. However, these hairstyles have been worn by Black women for centuries. She raises important questions such as why it takes a White woman to make these hairstyles acceptable to society?

Thuli's reflections echo Loeto's (2014) views on cultural appropriation. Socially advantaged people – in this case White people adopting Black culture and making it their own (Loeto, 2014). Cultural appropriation, also called cultural misappropriation, "refers to a particular power dynamic in which members of a dominant culture take elements from a culture of people who have been systematically oppressed by that dominant group" (Johnson, 2015, p.1). The dominant group uses some of the signifiers of the oppressed group to gain social capital. In relation to Thuli's reflection, Johnson (2015) argues that cultural appropriation can be problematic as it can trivialise historical oppression, for example, when a Black woman wears her hair natural, she may be labelled as 'too ethnic' but when a woman from a dominant culture styles her hair similar to that of a Black women, she may be considered 'cool' (increased social capital).

Mpho also shares similar views in the extract below:

"I have pinterest, the App, I am obsessed with Pinterest and it's honestly, I always just complain to my friend, my roommate, that uhm whenever I would look something up, like I want to braid my hair, obviously Pinterest is like an inspirational tool. So I would search braids and I would find White women with braided hair and I am like that's not what I am looking for, then you'd search natural hair and then you'd find more and even within those searches where you are specific because Pinterest is American based, so, you have to be like African American women with this type of hair and you still find White women popping up. And it's just like, so, it's something that you really have to search for, even with the women that are in positions of power, or they are celebrities or that are well known they often times don't have their natural hair so it's like even though there is someone who is supposedly to represent me they don't necessarily because that is not my hair, I don't have straight hair" Mpho

Although braids have been very popular within the Black community for many years, Mpho expresses how difficult it is to find Black women with braids on the internet. Only images of White women show up, possibly because by default they are considered the norm. Furthermore, Johnson and Bankhead (2014) suggest that young educated Black women buy and wear weaves as a symbol of a high social status. Mpho also touches on the idea that even though there are Black women celebrities who can endorse Blackness, they hardly do so as they usually

have straight hair, which does not look like the individuals own hair. Mpho suggests that even Black women who are in power or are successful are not immune to the pressure of conforming to Eurocentric beauty ideals. The reason why successful Black women may still succumb to the pressures of fitting into Eurocentric beauty ideals may be linked to the idea, previously discussed, that women's physical attractiveness is valued more than any other achievements they might have. Thus, by extension, these successful women may still feel that they need to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals otherwise they may lose social capital (Loeto, 2014; Bronfen, 2017).

This theme explored the participants' views on the media's representation of physical attractiveness. Participants' views suggest that the media uses various platforms to set a standard of how women should look. Women might try to use this standard to rate their level of physical attractiveness. Even though women might be aware that such a standard might be unattainable, they still try to fit into the standard. The standard of beauty that is represented within the media emulate Whiteness and women of other ethnic groups or races are considered the other. Black women's features are hardly represented and when they are represented, they are considered as the "other" form of beauty or used to normalise Whiteness. As has been discussed several times before, Black women may also feel pressure to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals as a means to be accepted in society through being considered as physically attractive. Black women's features such as hairstyles and skin tone (skin tanning) are adopted, they are put onto a White body and made normal there. Such features that may be considered as less attractive when they are on Black women may be considered attractive or 'cool' when they are on White women and this may trivialise the prejudicial experiences of Black women who are or have been treated differently with such features. Of course, Black women are diverse, however, Black women with features that emulate eurocentric ideals of beauty get more representation in the media. The media is also responsible for the commercialisation of beauty whereby women are sold beauty products that would make them resemble or embody the ideal beauty standard. The next theme focuses on the influence of race on physical attractiveness.

4.2.3. Racial undertones regarding physical attractiveness

For this theme, all participants have reported that there are certain aspects about their bodies that may not be considered as fitting the ideal standard of beauty. Participants reported

that features that are common to Black women like their skin tone and hair texture are often excluded from mainstream media. However, some participants reported that things are changing, and their features are being represented in certain spaces. Black women have also been associated with a higher BMI. However, women's body size and shape has long been 'policed' by society. However, the idea that Black women are more voluptuous us a stereotype. Currently voluptuous women of different races are starting to be normalised in the media, for example, Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles (Bosire et al., 2020).

This theme explores participants' perceptions of their own particular features with regards to physical attractiveness. Different participants focus on different features based on their own personal experiences and views. The first part will focus on the body; the second part will focus on skin and the last part will focus on hair. Much of these aspects have been discussed in the previous themes as it was discussed previously that the media often portrays westernised beauty ideals.

4.2.3.1. The body

Wanting to be thinner is not particular to Black women, it is something that almost all women struggle with (Calogero et al., 2013). In her book titled 'Fat is a feminist issue' Orbach (1978), argues that powerful patriarchal pressure is exerted on women to be slim which is a form of covert social control. Women who are considered 'fat' face a lot of sociocultural disadvantages compared to other women and men who may also be 'fat'. Orbach (1978) argues that women who are considered to be 'fat' receive a lot of backlash from society and as such, they internalise that they have to be thin to be successful or lovable, which can cause them to hate their natural bodies as a way to control them socially. Furthermore, women who believe that they are 'fat' or those in fear of being 'fat' end up preoccupied with buying products such as women's magazines, special foods, diet books etc. which offer ways to lose weight (Orbach, 1978). Dieting is a billion-dollar industry (Shallu & Gupta, 2013). With regards to this subtheme, participants made a lot of reference to the thin body ideal. Participants reported engaging in practices that would aid them in weight loss. Eight of the nine participants regarded it as normal to have a thin body or having certain parts of the body such as the waist or abdominal area to conform to a particular shape or size. However, some participants reported that they would like

to gain a bit of weight. This subtheme explores participants' reported experiences and views in relation to the body as a marker of physical attractiveness.

In the lengthy extract below, Thandi shares her experiences with trying to achieve a thin body.

> *"Uhm let's say before I was 12, I was rather, I was very chubby right, and then I don't know if I was bullied because of it or I was an easy target because there were fatter people than me. But anyway, which sort of resulted in me losing weight but that was like a part of it. When I was in Grade 5 they had this list of the top 10 previous girls and all of them were quite thin. So that also added to it, so that's when it clicked that oh, apart from the other issues that I facing I was like okay that's what it meant to be pretty. Plus I won't be bullied anymore so I went on a very uhm, I don't wanna use the word toxic but it was a toxic way of losing weight right cool…it was even before I discovered the terms either anorexia or bulimia, so I figured if food is making me fat, then the only way to stop being fat is if I stop eating right. But you can't stop eating because as a child people are watching you eat. So, what I'd do is after eating I would go to the toilet to vomit it out and if I could get away with not eating that's what I would do. So, breakfast would be easy to get away without eating including lunch, because my parents are not there, not that they are not there, but I woke up first. I had to eat first before my parents so no, they trusted healthy breakfast. Lunch as well, they would see me prepare but I would not eat the lunch, I would throw it away. Come dinner they would see me eat but then I vomited so, and I'd be exercising 3 times a day. Which is not healthy especially for an 11-year-old and still growing although it seemed like a healthy choice. Oh, look at you taking charge of your health whatever, it wasn't motivated by health. It was to try and achieve a certain body type or ideal"* Thandi

Thandi's reflection indicates that from a young age, she had internalised that to be physically attractive she had to lose weight. Thandi ascribes this to pressure from her school environment. Thandi shares that she went through a 'toxic' way of losing weight in which she stopped eating or she would induce vomiting after eating. Thandi also reported that she also opted for extreme exercise to lose weight. Thandi's experiences and recent research (Viviani, 2013; Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2013) support the idea that Black women are not

immune to the thin body ideal or eating disorders. This is contrary to earlier findings such as that of Gordon et al. (2010) who suggested that they might be immune as ethnic minorities endorse larger body types. Manuel et al. (2010) make the argument that due to the ubiquity of mass media, women from around the world are exposed to Western ideals at a very young age. This can have the effect of a narrowing of beauty norms to fit these globalised beauty standards.

Thandi talked about being bullied and ascribed this to stigma attached to overweight. She felt that she did not look like the other girls from the previous years. Situations like this are usually complex but it seems that Thandi's meaning making is directly linked to her internalisation of beauty norms.

In the last part of this quote, Thandi reported that she started exercising excessively which according to her was unhealthy especially for an 11-year-old considering that her body was still growing. Thandi also suggested that even though exercise is considered healthy, her motivations were driven by weight loss rather than health. Thandi's motivation for exercise seemed to be motivated by the desire to fit into beauty ideals. Thandi's views and experiences resonate with part of the literature that suggest that exercise is considered healthy but recently, there has been a boom in the fitness industry which is motivated by losing weight and not so much about being healthy (calogero et al., 2007; Walker, 2014; Vartanian, Wharton & Green, 2012).

In the extract below, Mpho expressed her belief that for one to be considered physically attractive, one must possess a slimmer body. Mpho shares that she also wanted to be thinner and have features such as long legs or appear tall.

> *"You know, uhm! I guess it's also just like the stories that we were being fed, like straight is better, skinny is better, being tall, really nice legs is better, so I obviously wanted that too. Uhm and yeah ... It was also just the thing of I don't wanna get bigger than this you know. It's not like I am a big person, or I am like fat or any of those titles, but it was like, whenever I gained a bit of weight, I'd be like oh my goodness what is happening? I need to lose weight, it' not attractive"* Mpho

Mpho acknowledged her awareness that she was not big, but still felt the pressure not to gain weight. Mpho's reflection suggests that the thin ideal does not only affect women who are

larger than this imposed norm but also women who believe they are average weight and even those who perceive themselves to fit the norm. Mpho reported that even after gaining a bit of weight, she would feel the need to lose weight. It seems that Mpho and Thandi's preoccupation with weight and working towards getting slimmer support Butler's (2006) and Deliovsky's (2008) idea that women internalise patriarchal messages about gender expectations and in turn, start to police their own bodies. Both their reflections suggest that women are constantly evaluating their bodies in a self-critical manner.

Below, Lebo shares her own experiences with weight which are slightly different to those shared by Thandi and Mpho.

> *"I think people talk more about your body when you are bigger. When you are thin it's still a thing of; like my 1 friend. I went to visit her when I was wearing leggings and she was like dude you're so thin, you are goals. I'm like I wanna put on meat and you still think I am goals. I feel like people don't have negative things to say when you have a smaller body, it's almost like that's what they think is ideal and they are not really aware of the fact that even people with tinier bodies have insecurities with their bodies"* Lebo

Unlike Thandi, Lebo's reflection suggests that she would prefer gaining a bit of weight. Lebo's reflection suggests that not every woman wants to be extremely thin but Lebo still has an idea in mind of needing to 'work on' her body to reach a goal of some sort, in this case to be slightly larger. The idea that even though Lebo is slim but still desires to look a certain (different) way may support the idea that even though being thin is considered ideal, it is not just any *thin* but a certain kind of thinness that is considered to be attractive (Calogero et al., 2007). However, she did share that her friend who is bigger than her does consider her body to be perfect. Lebo also talks about how her friend who is bigger than her wished she had her body as society suggests that a bigger weight is not attractive (Bryant, 2013; Thompson, 2009).

In the extract below, similar to Lebo, Puleng would also like to gain a bit of weight as she believes it would make her look more physically attractive. Puleng shares that she believes that if she was fuller figured, clothes would fit her better. Puleng also acknowledges that it is her own preference and not necessarily everyone else's.

"Actually, I would like to gain a little bit of weight but it's not a, it's not something that I would like to change, just a little bit of weight…I feel like clothes would look nicer (laughs). Clothes would look a little bit nicer, this is for me right, it's not for somebody else. So, I just look myself in the mirror and I go like ooh look if I had like a full figure yeah, I would actually look nicer in the clothes I like. I like clothes that are loose in a way but then I have to settle for tight clothes so that you don't look like you are going to church every single day" Puleng

Lebo and Puleng's reflections may support Gordon et al.'s (2010) idea that for Black women, there may be a perception that the shape of the body – ideally curvaceous – matters more than the size of the body. Of course, any beauty norm means that women may try to live up to it. It is thus still an imposition.

Below, Lebo adds or further suggests that the thin body ideal is changing. She reports that the type of body that women are expected to assimilate to is to look 'fit" (evidence of exercise).

"So, I think that is something that is popularised now, and that's the look that everybody needs to assimilate to. Looking like you go to the gym and you do work out, and you have that body that can look good in shorts and can also look good in a dress…" Lebo

The research of Overstreet, Quinn & Agocha (2010), seems to echo Puleng and Lebo's reflections regarding the thinness ideal. With a recent boom in the fitness industry, the kind of woman regarded as beautiful might have moved from a slimmer ideal to a rounded and more muscular shape (Overstreet et al, 2010; Watson & Moody, 2019; Calogero et al., 2007). According to this particular beauty standard, a beautiful woman is still thin but possesses certain features like a well-rounded bottom, well rounded breasts as well as toned muscles (Overstreet et al., 2010). However, this is just another beauty standard rather than a shift to bodily acceptance. Lebo's reflection about assimilating to a 'fit' body may support Deliovsky's (2008) argument that there is a socially prevalent idea that women cannot be beautiful with ease or naturally but rather they need to work to look physically attractive. For a woman to look 'fit', she must engage in exercise, which is work. This supports the idea that beauty has to be *earned* (Wolf, 1990; Deliovsky, 2008).

In the extract below, in relation to Puleng and Lebo's reflections, Thandi takes this point further, suggesting that even though curves might be seen as attractive, only certain types of curves are considered as physically attractive.

> *"…then you grow up and puberty starts happening and now you are not thin. Your curves start coming because your mom has curves, so genetics are playing a role, and then they are telling you that curves are beautiful. But at the same time, a particular size of curves"* Thandi

Thandi's reflection also touches on her genetic make-up. Thandi suggests that she inherited her mother's curves and her own curves might not be the size that is considered as attractive as per the imposed norm. Thandi's reflection resonates with Susiman et al. (2014) who suggest that there are different factors that may influence how women's bodies look such as their genes but still, women are expected to fit a particular size or shape.

Most participants reported that they do not have difficulty with their overall weight and shape, but rather with certain parts of their bodies. Most participants reported dissatisfaction with their abdominal areas, desiring flatter stomachs, believing this to be more attractive than the current shape of their own bellies.

4.2.3.2. Skin as a marker of physical attractiveness

This subtheme explores participants' views and experiences in relation skin being a marker of physical attractiveness. Black women usually have darker skin tones than Caucasian, or so-called Coloured (mixed-race) women, although in different shades. Some participants reported feeling that their dark skin may be considered as less attractive when compared to women with fairer skin, although within their own racial group. The previously mentioned 'yellow bone' concept is an example of the way that this beauty standard has become part of popular culture. This beauty norm can feel like a strong pressure for some. One participant (Puleng) reported that she was once tempted to use dangerous skin lighteners as she believed that having lighter skin would make her look more physically attractive. Participants share their experiences with their skin tones in relation to physical attractiveness.

In the extract below, Puleng shares her own experiences with having darker skin in her home environment.

> *"…my older sisters are actually lighter than me. So, in my family I am actually the one who is dark skinned. The other ones are light skinned, and I actually felt like they were more beautiful than me. And you know when you are at home people would actually say it, that they are more beautiful than me. So, I felt like there was something wrong with my skin colour. Something is wrong with the way I look in general. So we are, I am, let me put it that way. I am you know, uhm persuaded in a way to look a certain way in order to be called beautiful…"* Puleng

Puleng reports that as the only darker skinned woman in her home, she often felt she was less beautiful when compared to her sisters who had lighter skin. Interestingly, Puleng's reflection suggests that due to internalizing the idea that her dark skin was not beautiful, she started believing that there was "something wrong" with how she looks in general. This implies that believing that her skin was less attractive made her believe that everything else about her was less attractive. She also reported that the people around her would also say that her sisters with lighter skin were more beautiful than her. She shares that she believed that she had to look a certain way to be considered attractive. In relation to Puleng's beliefs, Thompson (2009) and Bryant (2013), suggest that for many years, Black women have internalized messages from society that fair skin is more attractive, and this results in Black women with darker skin tones believing that they are less attractive.

In the extract below, similar to Puleng, Thuli also shares that growing up, she admired girls with light skin.

> *"When I was younger, I always used to think I was darker than everyone else. So, in terms of that I always thought that girls who were more light skinned, those were the girls I looked up to…When I was younger I'd always admire and look up to people who are skinnier and light skinned. Yeah but like growing up, going to high school and coming to varsity has really changed, I don't know if the people I idolize have changed or my perception has changed but I feel like now I'd rather be dark than light skinned…."* Thuli

Thuli reports that growing up she admired light skinned girls, but she feels different now. Her reflection suggests that growing up, she felt less beautiful when compared to other Black women with lighter skin tones. Thuli reported that it was growing up that helped her see herself as beautiful. She suggested that perhaps the people she looked up to might have changed and that currently she is happy with her skin. Thuli's reflection suggests that as a child she might have been exposed to a lot of messages about dark skin being less attractive (Pilane & Iqani, 2016), but as she gets older and has other experiences, she has accepted her dark skin.

In the extract below, for Andile, coming to University gave her a different feeling to what Thuli experienced.

> *"Yes, I think especially now when I'm in Joburg. I think, the weight issue, the skin color issue, especially colorism"* Andile

Andile reported that it was when she came to university that the issues, she had in relation to her body intensified. She reported that she was faced with colorism and other beauty related difficulties. Johannesburg is a metropolitan area, which is highly westernized as it is a student population exposed to mass or popular culture a lot, therefore, she might have felt more exposed to western beauty ideals. Andile's reflection echoes Monk's (2014) argument that in areas whereby there is more exposure to western ideals of beauty, women tend to be more dissatisfied with their bodies.

All three participants quoted under this theme reported having felt or feeling less physically attractive than other Black women due to having darker skin. The reason why they might feel less attractive is because based on societal norms pertaining to physical attractiveness, fairer skin being promoted as more attractive (Julien, 2014). Julien (2014) suggests that fairer skin is considered more physically attractive due to its link to the history of colonization and slavery. According to Monk (2014) and Julien (2014), during slavery and colonization, people were prejudiced due to the colour of their skin. This meant that Black people were oppressed, and this was intimately associated with their darker skin. Furthermore, Julien (2014) and Glenn (2008) suggest that even though in general Black people were prejudiced due to the colour of their skin, there were hierarchies based on the tone of the skin. Black people who possessed lighter skin were treated better when compared to those with darker skin (Julien, 2014; Glenn, 2008). Those with fairer skin could work as maids in the house whereas those with darker skin

worked in the fields and as time progressed, those with fairer skin had more access to education, better jobs, better partners etc. Monk (2014) argues that Black people with fairer skin received better treatment as they were considered to be 'Whiter', to have European ties. Puleng's reflection suggests that she felt less attractive with dark skin within people of the same race as her. Puleng's reflection echo Iqani (2016) and Molebatsi's (2009) argument that, due to the history of colonization and slavery, Black people have internalized self-hate or have learnt to associate dark skin with being less attractive and having less privilege. Therefore, even today, the remnants of that historical period are still present.

Interestingly, Thompson (2009) argues that Black women with darker skin are considered less attractive whereas men with darker skin are treated differently, it is less the case for men. This suggests that in general women receive more scrutiny and social pressure about their looks (Bronfen, 2017; Yang, 2007). Bryant (2013) and Barnett (2016) argue that due to more emphasis on women to look a certain way, internalizing eurocentric beauty ideals such as having fairer skin may affect dark skinned Black women most severely and this may lead to self-hatred.

4.2.3.3. Hair as a marker of physical attractiveness

Most participants did not talk about their hair. However, this sub-theme will explore reflections of those participants who did talk about their hair. Participants reported embracing their hair in its natural form. It appears as though the recent political movement relating to Black women embracing their natural hair has had a significant impact on how they feel about their hair. According to Mgbako (2009) and King (2010), the 1960s marked a revolutionary time in Black history whereby the Black Consciousness movement came to effect. The Black Consciousness was premised on reinforcing the idea that 'Black is beautiful', and it was about embracing Black natural features such as the Afro, dreadlocks, dark skin etc (Clowes, 2006; Craig, 2002). However, Mercer (2000) suggests that the movement did not last. Alubafi et al. (2018) argue that recently, the movement aimed at accepting natural Black features such as Black hair has resurfaced again and with the use of social media, it has gained more traction. This might be the reason why most participants have reported that they embrace their hair in its natural form. Alubafi et al. (2018) suggests that the recent natural hair movement may have been catalysed by a group of adolescents in a Pretoria school who protested over their natural hair not

being accepted in school. Mercer (2000) also suggests that Black hair has made its way into popular culture as a means of artistic or self-expression.

In the extract below, Mpho shares her own experiences and views with relation to her hair.

> *"Shoo! (Laughs) uhm well quiet recently I have been really trying to grow my hair. (Laughs) so, uhm, I really quite recently started really liking the whole natural hair look… Uhm well before the whole recent natural look thing, I wanted to be that typical girl with the weave you know. Uhm, I guess it's also just like the stories that we were being fed like straight is better… So, I obviously wanted that too. Uhm and yeah, I had short hair and relaxed hair for a very long time. And I did try weave, it's really hot so it didn't work out but uhm so yeah …"* Mpho

In her reflection, Mpho reported that she likes natural hair, but is only recently that she has started liking it. She reports that in the past, she tried relaxers and weaves, but they did not work out for her. She shares that in the past, she wanted her hair to be straight as she was being told that straight is better. Mpho's reflections suggest that she had also internalized the idea that straight hair is better or more attractive which resonate with Thomas (2013) and Barnett (2016). According to Thomas (2013) and Barnett (2016), Black women have been exposed to ideologies that suggest that straight her is better as it is closely linked to Whiteness. However, how she feels about her hair currently, wanting to keep it natural supports the idea that recently, there has been a new impetus to the natural hair movement and many more Black women seem to be embracing their natural hair.

In the extract below, Renda shares slightly similar views. She reports that growing up she also used to relax her hair but when she came to university, she cut her hair and started growing it naturally. Both Mpho and Renda reported that in the past they used to alter their hair in ways that fit Eurocentric ideals of beauty such as using relaxers to straighten their hair or wearing weaves. However, they have reported that they currently they embrace their hair in its natural state which may suggest that the natural hair movement has had a big influence on how they feel about their own hair.

> *"Oh yes! Definitely! Uhm, growing up I always felt that the only way to be really pretty is that uhm, relax my hair… Uhm, when I got into university my, oh first thing I did was cut my hair and start growing it naturally and that was actually liberating… uhm, I felt quite proud of that but at the same time, like I said, I felt pressures at home of being told 'oh your hair is not neat enough. You need to do this"* Renda

Renda also reported that she received pressure from her family to change her hair after she had kept it in its natural form. She suggests that her family felt her hair was not neat in the state it was in. Renda's reflection supports the idea that Black hair has been considered unkempt and different agents of socialization still reinforce this idea (Thomas, 2013; Tate, 2007; Thompson, 2009; Bryant, 2013; Alubafi et al., 2018). In Renda's case, her family was reinforcing the idea in giving her suggestions of how to make her hair look neat. Similar to skin, Black hair being seen is unkempt or not as attractive as straight hair has its ties to the history of colonization and slavery (Alubafi et al., 2018; Thompson, 2009; Dash, 2006). According to Mercer (2000) and as mentioned previously, during slavery or colonization, Black people internalized negative messages associated with their hair as they were prejudiced based on the texture of their hair. Furthermore, Oyedemi (2016) and Powe (2009) report that during apartheid in South Africa, there was a pencil hair test (a pencil would be stuck into a person's hair. If the pencil fell it meant that the person was close to Whiteness) used to rank Black people based on how close, they were to Whiteness (White features) (Powe, 2009; Oyedimi, 2016). Oyedimi (2016) argues, as previously mentioned, that those with less coarse hair were treated better than those with coarse hair. Most Black male slaves were forced to shave their hair and women were forced to wear head scarves as their hair was considered nappy or unkempt (Mercer, 2000). In relation to Renda's reported pressure from family to keep her hair neat, Dunn (2015) suggests

that family plays a role on how women relate with their hair. Dunn (2015) argues that the way Black mothers choose to wear their hair has an influence in how their daughters choose to wear their hair.

In the extract below, Puleng shares views that are very similar to Renda's.

"I felt like I needed to change myself. There were things I needed to change in order to be considered beautiful. Put your hair in a specific way because, when I was growing up, I actually loved head wraps and then I had to change that because I felt like okay now I need to do my hair. I need to do styles like that and then but then as time went by, I realised that I do love head wraps and maybe I should just continue wearing them. Yes, there are times when I do my hair and then leave it like this but when I want to wear my head wrap, I will wear them because I love them." Puleng

Both Renda and Puleng's reflections reiterate what Mpho talked about. Both participants felt pressure to wear their hair a certain way in the past as they believed it was more physically appealing. For Puleng, she also reported feeling pressure to wear her hair in a certain way despite her liking head wraps. According to Bryant (2013), Black women feel the need to change parts of themselves to fit into beauty ideals. Although Mercer (2000) argues that Black women were forced to wear head wraps or scarves as a means to cover their 'unkempt' hair, Puleng's reflection suggests that she wears her head wraps or scarves because she loves them. Thus, this is not a simple matter but has a number of complexities.

In the extract below, Lebo shares a different view from those expressed above.

"…but I also feel like we are at a place where we wanna have the best of both worlds. Like I'll have natural hair and I will comb it out. But some days I will hide it under a wig and corn-rows…" Lebo

Lebo's reflection suggests that she wants the flexibility to wear her hair in different ways despite societal expectations. Unlike the other three participants' reflections which suggested that they have moved to wearing their hair naturally, Lebo's reflections suggests that she may want to be able to move freely between wearing her hair naturally and wearing weaves or wigs. She seems to suggest that this flexibility might be a middle ground that she feels most comfortable with.

Overall, this theme explored different markers of beauty for Black women such as body type, skin and hair. Most participants reported that in the past they felt pressure to look a certain way or to fit Eurocentric ideals of beauty which suggest that Black features are not as beautiful as White features. Pertaining to body type, most participants reflections suggest that they feel pressure to fit the thin body ideal as they reported engaging in activities like exercise that allow to lose weight, especially around the abdominal area. In relation to skin, most dark-skinned participants reported having felt pressure to have light skin as dark-skinned women were not considered as attractive when compared to those with fair skin. However, one participant did report that currently, dark skin is more appreciated in certain spaces like the modelling industry. Another participant reported that Black women with different physical attributes are being represented in the media. In relation to hair, participants reflected on the need to be able to wear their hair the way they want, whether natural or not. There is a lot of emphasis placed on women to look physically appealing or fit a certain beauty ideal, the next theme will discuss the effects gender has on physical attractiveness.

4.2.4. Gender norms and physical attractiveness

This theme will report on participants' experiences as well as their thoughts on the influence of gender on physical attractiveness. According to Forbes at al. (2007) and Loeto (2014), physical attractiveness is emphasised for women, and as a result, women invest a lot of their time and money into trying to look physically appealing. Butler (1986,) argues that gender is performative, which means that to be considered a woman or feminine, one has to perform the roles ascribed to womanhood. For women, being preoccupied with their looks and trying to look 'more feminine' is one way of performing their gender roles. Butler (2006), further suggests that gender roles are maintained through sanctions and taboos. Wolf (1990), further suggests that there is a lot of restrictions placed on how women's bodies should look by patriarchal structures and women may receive societal backlash from stepping out of the boundaries. Furthermore, Wolf (1990), argues that beauty is a myth created by patriarchal structures to distract women from fighting for equality with men. This has been effective in the sense that despite many other achievements that women may possess, their preoccupation with how their bodies look is still prevalent as they are judged by their looks more than anything (Deliovsky, 2008, Loeto, 2014). This theme is divided into two subthemes. The first sub-theme focuses on the male gaze and the second subtheme focuses on sexualization/objectification.

4.2.4.1. The male gaze

All participants have reported their belief that men have an influence on how they or other women feel about their physical appearance, whether in a positive or negative way. Most participants reported that they received messages about their bodies from men. They have also asked close male relatives about the attractiveness of their bodies and have been given feedback from romantic partners and male friends. If the men in their lives given them the validation they seek, it makes them feel beautiful and more acceptable. A few participants have reported receiving messages about their bodies from men that they did not even know and most of the messages they received from strangers were negative and made them feel uncomfortable. According to Holland and Tiggemann (2016), women may seek approval from men because they want acceptance and validation and asking for opinions from men whom they are close to may offer this. If men close to them approve of their looks, it may boost their self-esteem (Jacob & Tyree, 2013). Overstreet and Quinn (2012) further suggest that women have been conditioned into seeking external approval when it comes to their physical appearance because broader society is responsible for setting beauty standards. Inman, Snyder and Peprah (2016) argue that women are socialized into viewing their bodies as commodities which help them reap certain rewards such as getting an intimate partner, having certain friends, getting better jobs etc. therefore they might place a lot of value on how they look and as such, they seek other people's validation. Even men that may be strangers to women do offer opinions on how women look. Owing to patriarchal dominance, men may have internalised the idea that they have free access to women's bodies, therefore they can say or do what they want freely (Roberts, 1993; Gervais, Yescio & Allen, 2007). Receiving opinions from men, whether known to them or strangers may have both positive and negative outcomes (Overstreet & Quinn, 2012). This subtheme explores participants' experiences and views in relation to the influence of men on how they relate with their bodies.

Below, Lebo shares her own views in relation to the male gaze.

"I think we are shifting away from that. In as much as they don't have it upfront, I think most of the ways, women have come to define beauty has been influenced by men. We might say I am doing it for myself, but it is influenced by the idea that we come from a time when this is what men think this is a beautiful woman. And whether we like it or not

in our minds we still have those thoughts. So, men might not be saying it out loud because we might say they are trash. But they have said it before and it is stuck with us that this is what men think is beautiful and I mean there are still a lot of girls who still want to attract men by the way they look so I mean you'll try to look that way" Lebo

Although Lebo starts her reflection by suggesting that women are shifting from men's influence on how women feel about their bodies. She also contradicts herself by suggesting that even though men are not explicitly telling women how to look or feel about their bodies, it is already implied as women have internalised messages about beauty from men in the past. The contradiction in her reflection also suggests that the male gaze is complex, and it is not clear cut as it can be subtle. Lebo further suggests that even though women might not like that men may have an influence on how they feel about their bodies, the thoughts of what men would prefer are still present in women's minds. Lebo also reports that even though there is a shift happening in which women are moving away from male's influence on how they look, there are also women who still want to attract men by their looks. This suggests that women relate differently to the male gaze, for some women they explicitly look good for men and for some women, it is more internalised. Her thoughts support Jacob and Tyree's (2013) argument. According to Jacob and Tyree (2013), the male gaze is subtle but has a huge influence on how women relate to their bodies. Jacob and Tyree (2013) further argue that patriarchy has been responsible for creating an image of what an aesthetically perfect woman looks like, women then internalise this image and in tun try to achieve it. Interestingly, the image of what a perfect physically attractive woman looks keeps changing and women still to find ways to try and fit into the new ideals. Poggio (2006) and Buthelezi (2003) suggest that the reason why women may want to conform with the standards of beauty which are patriarchal is that although women are trying to achieve gender equality, men still have more power and influence than women, as Lebo mentioned, society is still patriarchal (Loeto, 2014; Buthelezi, 2003; Cekiso, 2013). According to Loeto (2014) and Buthelezi (2003), in the past, women relied on men for their livelihoods and fitting into a standard of beauty gave women more opportunities for marriage from men who were more successful than others. However, Sanger (2009) suggests that in contemporary society, although there are women who may be more successful than men, if they would like to attract men for companionship or marriage, they may still feel pressure to conform to prevailing beauty standards (Mafra et al., 2019). The reason why these women may also feel pressure to fit into a

patriarchal standard of beauty is merely to fit into society that values women's physical attractiveness as it comes with many other benefits and also, they have internalised that standard of beauty, as a result women use it to evaluate themselves and other women (Ford et al., 2018; Gupta et al., 2016; Yang, 2007; Peplau et al., 2009; Clarke et al., 2011). It must be said that in contemporary society there is far greater pressure on men to conform to certain standards of attractiveness, to work on their appearances (Grogan, 2016). However, the pressure on women is still greater (Yang, 2007).

In the extract below, Dineo shares her own views and experiences which expand on Lebo's reflection.

> *"Yeah definitely because, I think how people are socialized. I think people have been socialized into working or existing not only for themselves but for other people and particularly for men. Uhm I think, even for myself, even as a kid in high school and primary school. I needed to look good because I'm interested in that boy. It starts like that and then it grows and becomes a major thing. Even at home it would be why are you so lazy? What kind of a wife will you be? Why aren't you washing the dishes typa thing. Uhm and who's gonna marry you if you are such a clumsy dresser? Or whatever and it's just petty little things and it just goes to show that yeah, the way we look is really for the benefit of men and not really for ourselves. But also, with that, I think with our generation it's slowly shifting…"* Dineo

Dineo's reflection supports the idea that human beings are social beings, which means that their existence or what they do is influenced by or it is to please other people (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Similar to Lebo, Dineo suggests that people are socialized to exist for men in particular. Her reflection suggests that society is patriarchal, men have more power than women. Dineo takes it further by sharing her own experiences in both primary and high school, when she really tried to look good in order to please a boy she liked. Dineo's quote suggests that wanting to look attractive for men (hetero-normativity) starts from childhood. She reports that even in her home, she would be encouraged to act or look in a way that pleases men so that she can be eligible for marriage, but she also suggests that this trend is shifting. According to Loeto (2014) and McKay, Dune, MacPhail, Mapedzahama and Maple (2014), although there has been a slight shift regarding this, for most of recorded history women have been socialized into believing that

marriage or finding a suitable partner is one of life's biggest milestones or achievements. For example, in fairytales, girls are exposed to the idea that once they find a suitor, their lives will be complete (Neikirk, 2009; Cekiso, 2013). Therefore, from childhood they are reared in ways that would make them appeal to men within their own society and culture.

Dineo's reflection also touches on gender role expectations towards women, which were emphasized in her home. These roles are for women to serve men or to aspire to be liked by men for marriage. According to Jewkes and Morrel (2012), women are the ones who take the work of socializing children as they spend more time in the home rearing children and preparing them for society. This also means that women also maintain and pass on patriarchal influences on how women look or feel about their bodies. Dineo's reflection suggests that she was made to believe that it is important to perform her gender stereotypic roles in order to be able to get a mate for marriage.

In the extract below, Mpho shares similar views with Dineo and Lebo about beauty messages being subliminal and women acting in ways that satisfy the male gaze.

> *"Definitely, I mean like I said subliminally looking for approval type of thing and quite… I can count only so many few people who don't want to be married and even if they don't want to get married, there are few people who are like I am okay being alone for the rest of my life…as you grow older there's that thing of I am getting older and I don't have someone, I need to do something. So, you do a lot of things to get that approval. If men are like we don't like women, especially nowadays where men I like I don't want women with make-up. Then you are just like I will wear less make-up. For me I hate it because sometimes I will get compliments like I like you because you are not like these other women who wear makeup and have, I don't know, weaves or whatever. I don't get how my beauty should come at the expense of someone else's. So, it's also that type of thing when you know these things will get you someone, so you do them because you want someone. So again, you settle for less because you don't want to be that blemish in society*" Mpho

Mpho is of the view that women try to get approval from men because they do not want to be alone, especially when they get older. Mpho believes that for women to attract men, they may do things they do not like such as changing how they look. Mpho's reflection also

highlights that marriage is considered as important in society and if one is not married, one may be considered a "blemish in society" or seen as if there is something wrong with them. Mpho suggests that in order not to be seen as a "blemish in society", one might change their appearance even in ways that they may not like. This supports that that there are certain unspoken rules or conventions in society and if one does not follow them, they might not be accepted within certain societal circles (Jaeger, 2011; Viviani, 2013). Mpho further reports that men can also be explicit in sharing what they like or do not like in relation to women's physical appearance. She reports that some men have told her that they like her because she is more natural and that they do not like women with a lot of make-up. Mpho shares that she does not like it when men compare her personal appearance to other women's. But her reflection suggests that men have different preferences in terms of what they like about women's physical appearance. This makes it difficult for women who wish to conform to male opinion as they receive varying messages about what it means to be physically attractive (Glapka & Majali, 2017).

Below, Dineo also shares a similar view that different men want different things from women, but she also suggests that there is a basic standard. She suggests that men in different fields of work may have different preferences in women based on their interests. However, she suggests that the basic things that men may look for are breasts, as well as a "cute bum". She further suggests that recently, intellect also matters. Her reflection suggests that although there are still physical aspects that are considered attractive, these days something beyond physical appearance such as intellect is being considered as attractive. Her viewpoint differs from research (Viviani, 2013; Loeto, 2014; Deliovsky, 2008; Bronfen, 2017) that suggests that women are only appreciated for their physical appearance (an example of this would be the 'dumb blonde' stereotype'. According to Burton (2012) and Zargorsky (2016), the 'dumb blonde' stereotype suggests that men want a woman who only looks physically attractive or perfect but lacking in intellect.

> *"Oh, so with men it's really more of like yeah, it could also go down to that different kinds of men look for different kinds of things right. So, with men who are accountants will look for a different type of woman in appearance than men who are artists maybe. I think there's just a general thing of the boobs, the cute bum. I think also now, I think the brain also matters"* Dineo

In the extract below, Ayanda also shares her own experiences in relation to the male gaze.

> *"Yes, like a huge influence because I feel like it's them who tear women down to be honest and as much as we do it to ourselves and towards each other I feel like men play an important role. Especially on social media because they usually are the ones who comment. So, like you can find a person commenting, like oh you look nice or this picture just isn't it. Usually women don't go all out and comment on other women's pictures, but guys have this freedom to do it. And even like, cause I've always played with guys most of my life for some reason but like I hear it when they are talking about other people or when they are rating or judging different girls at school and I'm like you guys aren't serious right now. Like you guys don't understand if that person had to hear what you were saying how it would affect them…I just don't like people judging other people and guys have, they don't understand how powerful their words are especially to a girl. If we look up to those guys or if I like that guy, like maybe I have a crush on that person and then they say something like that it crushes a person's spirit and they go home and they are thinking so I am not good enough, so yeah"* Ayanda

Ayanda shares the view that men's opinions about women's physical appearance are more powerful than women's opinions. However, she acknowledges that women also judge each other based on physical appearance but she suggests that it does not affect them as much as men's opinions do. Ayanda's reflection resonate with Mustika (2017) and Forbes et al.'s (2007), argument that men's opinions about women's physical appearance are more powerful as women are often competing for men's recognition. In her reflection, Ayanda only talks about the negative impact that men's opinions about women's physical appearance may have on women. She suggests that men's negative evaluations of women's bodies may cause self-esteem difficulties and that the effects can last for a very long time. According to Forbes et al. (2007) women develop self-esteem difficulties or body image dissatisfaction when they receive negative images about their bodies from their peers, especially males. Ayanda also suggests that it is even harder when hearing negative evaluations from a man whom a woman *likes*. This further strengthens the argument that women try to look physically appealing to be liked by men (Sanger, 2009; Bronfen, 2017).

In the quote below, contrary to Ayanda, Thuli shares that although unwanted, unwarranted positive evaluations from men may result in a confidence boost. This also emphasises that men's opinions have a lot of power on how women feel about their bodies (Mustika, 2017; Bronfen, 2017).

> *"You know when you walk down the street and you pass a group of guys, they are gonna comment. And sometimes you don't want that comment or but when it comes, it boosts your confidence. Like when your friend says you look good, it boosts your confidence…"* Thuli

In the extract below, Renda shares a different experience from the one that Thuli shared in relation to a man's opinion about her body.

> *"When I was, I think high school, I remember I had sandals and a summer dress on. I was coming from a shop and when I get back home, I think it was some man. A hobo I think, who was trying to talk to me, and I was not interested, and he looked at my feet and he said ah you have such ugly feet and you don't even wanna talk to me. And it took me a very long time to even wear sandals and this are my, like the ones I'm wearing right now these are the first sandals I had in a long long time. Like open sandals like this, my mom tried buying me sandals I think two years ago but I made sure they were closed in front cause I was no longer comfortable with shoes that were showing of my feet because of that one comment. Uhh and that, it bothers me a lot that I took it in, and I acted in that way and that I succumbed to that belief. But it happened and somehow, I felt like I could not control it, yeah"* Renda

Renda shared a negative experience she had that still has an impact on how she feels about her feet. Renda's negative experience and how it still affects her till now resonates with Ayanda's view that men's negative opinions about women's physical appearance can have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Renda shares that since she received the negative opinion about her feet when she was still in high school, it still makes it harder for her to wear open toes sandals. Interestingly, Renda shares that it bothers her that she took in the negative evaluation, and she feels like she could not control it. This reinforces the argument that women internalize negative messages about their bodies and might become preoccupied with them even though it is about things about themselves that they cannot change (Dye, 2016; Deliovsky, 2008; Hamilton,

2008). This supports Yang (2007) and Bronfen's (2017) suggestion about men having a lot of power over women in terms of physical appearance and sense of self.

In the extract below, Puleng shares some of the features that she believes some men consider to be attractive.

> *"Yeah they do because you would say, you are walking in a mall it's you and, like for me would be me and my sisters and then you are walking in a mall and a guy likes your sister or my sister and he would come right up to me and say you know what? I want to talk to your sister and then I'll be like why aren't you talking to me? Or they will say oh yellow bone look. Imagine, you'll never walk into a group of guys and they call hey Black beauty, no, it's yellow bone, ngwana slender (slim woman), those kinds of things. Yeah guys play a big role and that is why I said in the beginning I actually wanted validation from the guys that I dated that I actually look beautiful. They do play a big role they do"* Puleng

Below, Andile also shares similar views with Puleng.

> *"Yes, yes, uh I think drawing back from my teenage years, for like a long time I've paid attention to what guys would say they want in girls. Like I only date light girls, that's what Black guys would say, and you cannot just honestly change that, and you will be like ah okay. Things like I only date yellow bones ah things like that ah. The culture in media especially in music where you find girls who are like hot girls and all of that and this is the message that we are being fed. I think as guys grow up, they internalize it and project it into women and obviously as women we can't live without men. We have to feed into what they, their ideas of what we should be"* Andile

Both Puleng and Andile share similar views with the other participants, they believe that men have an impact on how women view their own bodies. Their quotes suggest that they experience men as reinforcing popular beauty ideals such as light skin and a slim body. Andile further suggests that through the media, men have internalised patriarchal beauty ideals that they project onto women in the real world because they too are influenced by these ideals, thus it is a vicious circle. Similar to Mpho and Lebo, she further suggests that women try to live up to these standards of beauty because they cannot live without men. Furthermore, Puleng also shares that

there was a point in her life when she wanted validation that she was beautiful from the men that she dated. As discussed before, women may seek validation from men because men place a lot of value on women's physical appearance and beauty standards are influenced by patriarchy (Overstreet & Quinn, 2012). Holland & Tiggemann (2016) suggest that women try and please men by modifying their appearance in order to receive external validation, which may then result in a higher self-confidence.

Andile's reflection also focuses on the idea that, even though women are socialized into pleasing men, men are also socialized into wanting to be like women who fit certain beauty ideals (Pilane & Iqani, 2016). Andile gives an example of the music industry setting a standard of what ideal beauty looks like and men being exposed to those ideals from such platforms. As previously mentioned, from a young age, males are also exposed to standards of beauty which might influence the way they view/assess women (Pilane & Iqani, 2016; Iqani, 2016). Both Puleng and Andile's reflections suggest that for them they feel like they cannot meet the criteria that those men are looking for as it would mean changing certain aspects of themselves such as their skin.

4.2.4.2. Sexualisation/objectification of Black women's bodies

Two participants gave accounts of when they felt objectified or sexualised by men. According to Stephens and Few (2007), although women in general are often objectified or sexualised. Ironically Black women's bodies are hypersexualised despite them being considered as less attractive. Watson et al. (2019) argues that the reason behind the hyper-sexualisation of Black women's bodies relates to the history of slavery. During slavery, slave masters would rape Black women and claim that Black women lured them into sleeping with them (Watson et al., 2019; Sanger, 2009; Stephens & Few, 2007). In this way sexual attraction to Black women was simultaneously acted out and disavowed. Furthermore, Watson et al. (2019) argue that due to Black women often having enhanced features regarded as sexual (secondary sexual characteristics) such as breasts and bottoms, their bodies were fetishized and merely seen as sexual objects. Hobson (2018) argues that in contemporary society, such messages about Black women's bodies are prevalent and most notable in their depiction in hip hop music. Miller-Young (2008) and Brooks and Hebert (2006) assert that the reason for Black women's bodies being sexualised in the media, especially in mainstream Hip-hop is due to the fact that the media

is a capitalist driven industry and depicting naked Black women's bodies results in more revenue. Due to the narratives around Black women's bodies, such as them being sexualised in the media or being seen as promiscuous, men feel like they have free access to Black women's bodies (Watson et al., 2019; Stephens & Few, 2007; Wallace-Sanders, 2002). This subtheme explores participants' experiences and views in relation to sexualisation/objectification.

In the extract below, Andile shares her own personal experience in relation to feeling objectified or sexualized.

> *"I think that it's hard being a Black woman, especially in South Africa. Just like yesterday, there was a man on the street who was like do you have R2? I said no I don't, and I was wearing a tight. And he was saying oh, but you are gonna grow anyway, I don't understand why your vagina is already so big. How is it gonna be like when you grow older? And I was like wow. And this guy was way older than me and I was like if you are like this, you are probably old enough to be my dad. And I've heard stories about this and until it happens to you, and I was like, I felt uncomfortable, I felt degraded as an object. To think that somebody could speak to you like that and he thought that was okay. And I couldn't retaliate cause I was so shocked by this. Like you are older than me and you are a man. And you don't have respect for me as a person not just as a woman as a person to say things like that and I think that's the trauma"* Andile

Due to the incident she experienced, Andile believes that it is hard being a Black woman in South Africa. Her statement suggests that many Black women in South Africa have degrading experiences like this where they are objectified and denigrated. Her viewpoint resonates with statistical evidence that South Africa is one of the countries with the highest rates of gender-based violence against women (Jewkes & Morrel, 2012). Andile shares that she felt disrespected and objectified as a woman and as a person. Her reflection suggests that the experience left her feeling very uncomfortable and in disbelief considering that the man was even old enough to be her father.

In the extract below, Renda shares that she also received unwanted messages from men due to her growing body which. She reports that the messages make her feel uncomfortable which in turn makes commuting and being around the streets difficult for her.

> *"Uhm I think lately it has been my body. Cause I think I am also growing now and have like curves and all, like, and could be only Black man now comment on my body. I don't know also very uh, uncomfortable cause commuting and being around the streets difficult. And name calling…"* Renda

Both Andile and Renda suggest that they have received unwanted messages from men about their bodies that have made them feel uncomfortable as they were sexual or objectifying. Both Brenda and Renda's reflections echo Torino, Rivera, Capodilupo, Nadal and Sue's (2018) argument on microaggressions. According to Torino et al. (2018), Black women receive a lot of microaggressions directed at their bodies in many settings (Torino et al., 2018). Microaggressions refer to "subtle insults (verbal, non-verbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of colour, often automatically or unconsciously" (Yosso et al., 2000, p. 60). The most common microaggressions they receive are often unwanted sexual messages about their bodies (Torino et al., 2018). Both Andile and Renda have received messages targeted at parts of their bodies that are related to sexual desire, and this supports the argument that Black women's bodies are hypersexualized and features such as their curves and bottoms are fetishized.

Overall, this theme explored participants' views on the influence of gender on physical appearance. Most participants reported that men have an influence on how they feel about their physical appearance. Reflections from participants suggest that some men are explicit in voicing this out, but most men are subtle. Through socialization women internalise what men want and then try to act or look in ways that are preferred by men without men having to say it in most cases. Other women also judge women based on standards set by men. Participants also expressed their belief that that men also internalise beauty standards for women and then expect women close to them to fit or look close to those standards. Participants' views and experience strengthen the argument that women are judged on their physical appearance more than anything because even though women are aware of the male influence, it does not stop them from internalising or seeking validation from men. The last part of this theme explored sexualisation and objectification. Two participants shared their experiences in relation to receiving unwanted

sexual messages from men about their bodies. Their quotes suggest their belief that many men still feel entitled to access and control Black women's bodies via demeaning social interactions or even sexual violence.

The next theme explores the influence of family members and peers.

4.2.5. Messages from family members and peers regarding physical attractiveness

This theme focuses on the participants' reported influences of their family members, romantic partners and peers on how they feel about their physical appearance. Most participants reported that their families and peers usually have positive things to say about their physical appearance and it makes them feel good or boosts their self-confidence. However, some participants did report negative evaluation from their family members and peers. One participant reported that her peers and family do not talk about physical appearance at all.

In the extract below, Puleng shares both positive and negative messages from her family that have had an influence on how she feels about her body.

> *"Like I've said before, okay my dad actually played a big role in making me feel and look beautiful because when I was, like I said in 2015 I went back home and I spent a lot of time with him and every single day when I woke up he would say you look beautiful. So yeah that was like one of the things that made me feel good about myself, my mom as well, she would recommend to me the clothes that I should wear and those kinds of things. So those actually boost my confidence and she would say you look really nice today those kinds of things. But extended family, my sisters and friends, those I wanna kill them right now because they played a role in making me feel like I wasn't good enough because friends would actually compare you guys, relatives would actually compare you guys like they would come at home you know, mara waitsi Kabelo unicer (but you know Kabelo is nicer), you know she looks nice and then Puleng how did you become dark? Like what happened and then cousins would make fun of you"* Puleng

Puleng reported that her parents played a big role in making her feel good about herself or her body. She shared that there was a period in which she was home and her father would give her a compliment every day and her mother her mother would recommend clothes for her and tell her that she looks beautiful. She reported getting affirmation about her appearance from her

parents that boosted her confidence. Puleng's reflection suggests that she received a lot of positive validation from her parents which made her feel good. This resonates with Jackson et al. (2007) and Granberg et al. (2009), who suggest that family may have a positive impact on building self-esteem. Family plays a huge role in building self-esteem because it functions as the first agent of socialization, which may build self-confidence from an early age before one gets integrated into the wider society (Granberg et al., 2009). Furthermore, Granberg et al., (2009) argue that if one's self-confidence was strengthened by family from an early age, it becomes easier to manage pressures from wider society. Although Puleng had positive experiences with her parents, she reported receiving negative messages about her looks from extended family, sisters and friends. She shared that they would compare her with her sisters and tell her that her sister looked more beautiful than her. She reported that receiving these negative messages made her feel like she was not good enough. According to Druxman (2003), human beings are social beings and they require validation from other people and the ones closest to them pay a huge role in making them feel good. As previously discussed, people often compare themselves to others. It seems that Puleng struggled to maintain self-confidence, which had been bolstered by her parents, when her peers compared her unfavourably with her sisters. She reported that this had a negative impact on how she related to her body.

In the extract below, Thuli shares her own experiences.

"Uh my parents, my parents well they are gonna think I am the greatest thing on Earth, so they don't really care. I am from a very voluptuous family, so we have very curvaceous thick women in my family… the only thing is my dad always pushes us to be healthy. So just exercise very now and then, just get your heart beating that kind of thing but never to say you are getting fat you need to exercise, no. My mom as well, my mom thinks I am the most beautiful person in the world. She's always posting things about me, that's another story. Friends wise, which is funny. I have friends who are yellow bone, like yellow, yellow, yellow and I always look at them like yoh you are so beautiful, and they also say you are also beautiful. So also, them, they don't have any negative, if they do, they don't say it, to me they always have something positive to say" Thuli

Similar to Puleng, Thuli's reflection suggests that her family or parents have made her feel good about how she looks as they appear to have a good relationship with their own bodies.

She also reported that her father encourages her to be healthy. In their study, Rukavina and Pokrajac-Bulian (2006) found that adolescents who had a lot of pressure from their family and peers to conform to beauty ideals such as the thin ideal, displayed more body dissatisfaction compared to those who came from families who encouraged body image positivity.

Different from Puleng's experiences, Thuli shared that her friends whom she considers to be very beautiful have also had a positive influence on how she feels about her body as they also validate her own beauty. Krcmar, Giles and Helme (2008) and Sheldon (2010), suggest that peers play an important role on women's body esteem. According to Rieves and Cash (1996), it is likely that an individual will believe him/herself to be attractive if his/her physical characteristics match general perceptions of attractiveness or beauty standards. Furthermore, his/her experiences should also confirm what he/she believes based on feedback he/she receives from other people (Rieves & Cash, 1996; Forsyth, 2018; Japil et al., 2018). Krcmar et al. (2008) further suggests that women do not always look from validation from men, but also from other women.

In the extract below, Dineo shares a similar experience to Thuli. She reports that her family also pushes her to be healthy. She shared that she is small and there was a period when she used to exercise vigorously but her aunt cautioned her against it. Her reflection suggests that family may play a protective role in how she relates to her body.

> *"They feel fine. Uhm yeah so, I remember when I wanted to, when I started jogging because I was quite vigorous with it, I did it every single day. like I was serious, and my aunt was like uh just don't be skinnier than you already are cause you are quite small already. And I was like oh okay, I guess people see me as small so that wasn't news to me because ngiyazi (I know) that I am small, I know that I am small. So how they see me is, I'm just a tiny person"* Dineo

Although most participants did report receiving validation from their families which enhanced their self-esteem, in the extract below, Thandi struggles to believe validation from her family and friends due to her previous struggles with weight. This might suggest that although family is considered as an early agent of socialization which may have a positive impact on how women feel about their bodies, messages from other external agents of socialization may take precedence at times (Jackson et al., 2007; Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010).

"They haven't said much because most of them know where I come from. So, either they avoid it because they understand it might still be a sensitive topic to me or they think I am fat… I do have a friend who constantly compliments my body because she says it looks like my mom's and she likes my mom's body yeah but again you are my friend, you are supposed to say nice thing versus strangers who just go you got very beautiful eyes, thank you and then move on. but I do like my nose though, that's one thing" Thandi

In her reflection, Thandi appears to be struggling with her weight and she still thinks her family still sees her as fat. She suggests that her family avoid talking about her weight as they think she might still feel uneasy about it. Thandi also reports that even though her friend says positive things about her body, she thinks she only does so because she is her friend, which again shows how difficult it is for Thandi to receive validation from her friends or family in relation to the size and shape of her body. It appears as though being bullied for her weight during childhood may have had a lasting impact on how she feels about her body. According to Fox and Farrow (2009) there is a positive correlation between being overweight and being bullied by both peers and strangers. Fox and Farrow (2009), argue that bullying as a result of being overweight may result in adjustment problems such as low self-esteem or body image dissatisfaction. Thandi's reflection may indeed suggest that she is having these sorts of difficulties.

In the extract below, Similar to Puleng, Ayanda shares that she has received different messages from people close her.

"My mom would prefer me actually being interested in make-up. She just hates the fact that I have zero interest whatsoever. But my brother is just like, do what is good for you, you know. And then my friends, I don't hang out with my guy friends as much anymore because I have realised that hanging out with them can do something to my self-esteem. Like we still talk, we are still close, but I try not to get up in that space because when I hear them talking about other girls or whatever, like there's this thing at the back of my mind so I don't listen to them" Ayanda

Ayanda's quote suggests that she also receives mixed messages about her physical appearance from people close to her. She suggests that her mother would like it if she used make-up, while her brother seems to encourage her to do what feels right for her. However, with regards to her male friends, her reflection suggests that being with around them might impacting

her self-esteem negatively, so she limits contact with them. Ayanda's decision to limit contact with her friends might seem extreme. However, it may attest to the extent of discomfort she feels when she listens to them talk about other women.

This theme explored messages about physical appearance that the participants have received from people close to them. Most participants reported that the messages they received were positive and helped them to keep healthy and maintain a healthy body esteem. Participants also reported that some of the messages they received were negative and these messages impacted their self-esteem negatively. Other participants also reported receiving mixed messages from different people. Different agents of socialisation may leave women with mixed messages about their physical appearance which may result in them confused about which messages to follow.

The next theme explores participants' views and experiences in relation to the African traditional cultural messages about physical appearance and how they navigate having another beauty ideal.

4.2.6. Traditional African beauty standards.

This theme explores participants' views and experiences in relation to traditional African standard of beauty. Participants shared the view that there are traditional African beauty standards and ideals with features such as natural hair, dark skin, and a curvaceous body are seen as physically attractive. Two participants reported that having any beauty standard is restrictive as they prefer flexibility in relation to how they look. Participants shared the opinion that even though there is both the African traditional standard of beauty and the western standard of beauty, both are limiting and there is no room to accommodate both standards. This view resonates with Glapka and Majali (2017) and Capodilupo and Kim (2013) who argue that any beauty standard imposes a restriction on how women choose to look or present themselves. This supports feminist theory in the sense that women may not feel that they own or have a right to control their own bodies due to the multiple conflicting messages they receive on how they should be/look. (Deliovsky, 2008; Wolf, 1990; Poggio, 2006; Evans, 2003). One participant reported that different spaces or contexts require her to look or act a certain way and if she does not look the part, she is judged.

In the extract below, Lebo shares her experiences and views with regards to the African traditional standard of beauty.

> *"Uhm I do think though that if you are, there's that thing that a Black woman is that curvy woman, that mama looking woman. So, if you are not curvy and big to some people you are not African enough, you are more of a White girl. Like they'll even say that if you have a small bum you have a bum like a White girl but what people don't know is that White girls have bums now, they do squats. So, I don't know what you guys are talking about. There is till that thing that if you look more lean and thin you are a babe. If you look more curvy and bootilicious then you are an African woman, you're the mummy, you are the ma. They are like yeah, you are not the babe. You know how Black guys go like mama, even to a young 21-year-old if you are curvy, mama, dudlu, sis wase mzini but if you are thin and whatever they call you nice. They call you my size and they are just like slender. They do that, so there is that image that if you are light skinned you are not African, or you don't portray an African image. If you are not curvy then you don't portray that Black girl beauty, Black girl magic type of vibes. And also, you can't be too tall as a girl, if you're too tall that's a problem and guys like short girls apparently…"*
> Lebo

Lebo shares the physical attributes that an African woman is expected to possess in order to be considered attractive or *'African enough'* such as a higher BMI, having a big bottom and curves. She suggests that when one is lean and has a small bottom, one is not afforded the same respect or admiration as women with voluptuous features within African traditional cultural standards of beauty. Furthermore, she reported that one can also be referred to as being a 'babe' and a 'White girl' if they do not have those features which suggest being rejected by one's own culture due to physical appearance. This is complicated and has strong socio-political undertones about being *Black-enough* or 'too White' and therefore somehow non-compliant or a 'sell-out'.

In their study conducted with female adolescents residing in Black townships in Cape Town, Puoane at al. (2010) found that a higher BMI was associated with wealth, happiness and respect. Participants in the study also reported that women with a higher BMI had more chances of finding a romantic partner despite the high prevalence of obesity within those townships (Puoane et al., 2010). Lebo's reflection also touches on the idea that an attractive African woman

fits the ‘mammy’ stereotype. The ‘mammy’ stereotype depicts African women as the mother or nurturer and have been seen like this for centuries (Wallace-Sanders, 2008; Weir, 2010; Walters, 2017).

Lebo’s views on features that are considered as traditionally attractive resonate with the findings of Thompson (2009) and Bryant (2013), who found that features considered physically attractive within the African traditional standards of beauty may include a bigger bottom, bigger bosom, dark skin, and natural hair. Therefore, the imposition of any beauty ideals, whether traditional African or Eurocentric, may alienate the women who do not possess the idealised features, which in turn may also have a negative impact on self-esteem (Thompson, 2009; Glapka & Majali, 2017).

Below, Lebo further shares how she feels about the African traditional standard of beauty.

> *“I am literally at that point where I am not bothered by much anymore unless it comes into my space. So, if you are in my face about it and it is in my face then I am bothered. But I mean I am not really bothered because it’s not something I have internalised and yeah there are different variations into how women look and there cannot be one that is the one”* Lebo

Lebo shares that she is not bothered or affected as much by the African ideal anymore unless someone brings it up. This suggests that it used to affect her, and it still does affect her when someone brings it up. She reports that it does not affect her because she has not internalised the African traditional standard of beauty as she is of the view that women’s looks vary, therefore there cannot be one ideal. However, society does not see it this way as it imposes beauty standards on women (Bryant, 2013; Calogero et al., 2007; Awad et al., 2015; Watson et al., 2019). This seems to be something that is still a struggle for her.

In the extract below, Renda expresses that she feels like she does not belong anywhere as she does not necessarily fit either the African or the western ideal of beauty.

> *“maybe if I take out the weave (laughs) ah no, I think I don’t. Sometimes I’m not okay with that and sometimes it is because I tried and broaden the term of beauty in a sense that, ah beauty for my culture. My own is a bit complicated in a sense that I am*

Sotho and at the same time my mom is Tswana, so we just use the mixture of both. Uh there is a certain attitude that is uh kind of you know, how can I put this like for instance your behavior also contributes to how you are perceived to be beautiful so is not about the looks or whatever it is also about how you behave. The kinds of aspiration that I have and beliefs that I have or values that I have are a lil bit different because I don't wanna be submissive, I don't wanna be ah, I wanna drink, I wanna smoke, I wanna not comb my hair, I wanna wear weave when I want to, I want to do quite number of things that I think are outside of the boundaries, the category of being beautiful in both societal standards and cultural standards in that sense. And I don't feel like, I kind of, like fit in hence that I tried to usually avoid all that completely because that's not the kind of woman that I want to be and aspire to be. And it's okay sometimes, but it also feels like I don't belong anywhere" Renda

Renda shares her own difficulties with traditional African beauty ideals as she has a mixed African heritage. Her reflection focuses on the fact that within the African traditional culture, there are many subgroups, people who may have their own beauty ideals. Renda's reflection also highlights that within the African traditional culture, beauty is not limited to physical appearance, but it also includes the inner person such as a person's character which may include kindness and humility (Osaghae, 2013; Njiofor, 2013). She suggests that within both her cultures (Sotho and Tswana), a beautiful woman is one who is submissive, does not consume alcohol or smoke, has neat hair and does not wear weaves. She seems to feel that that these boundaries feel limiting for her, she wants to do things that are out of the prescribed boundaries. Renda reports that she is okay with where she stands but she also feels like she does not belong anywhere. The latter feeling might be due to the idea that women's identities have been tied to their physical appearance and if they do not fit into the beauty ideals, they may feel like they do not belong at all (Deliovsky, 2008; Wolf 1990).

In the extract below, Renda further shares her experience in relation to navigating different beauty ideals.

"Shuuu quite a lot that Uh, I recently had an experience. I always had natural uh not always, but I've always had natural hair and I love my hair and do different styles with it. Uh I had a recent experience whereby I put on a weave and someone told me that

I was not Black enough, and I was not pretty enough because I was wearing a weave. So, like, but at the same time when you have your your natural hair, like at home I was told that it's untidy, this and all of these things. And I like both, but I feel like I always have to change my self like depending on which kind of people I am around, and it is quite an uncomfortable thing. Uh those are some of the societal pressures…" Renda

Renda shares that in certain contexts, her natural hair is considered unkempt but in other contexts it is considered the symbol of Blackness and wearing a weave is frowned upon. She reports feeling like she has to change herself depending on who she is with, which makes her feel uncomfortable. According to Thompson (2009) and Glapka and Majali (2017), due to the Black consciousness movement, which promoted embracing Black features such as natural hair (afro and dreadlocks), and dark skin, Black women who do not wear natural hair may be considered as 'not Black enough', which is something that Renda has experienced. Renda also shares that when she wore her in its natural state at home, it was considered unkempt, which also suggests that even though there is a "general standard of beauty", for Black women there is also pressure to meet beauty standards within their own group which can be challenging as Renda's reflection suggests (Thompson, 2009; Glapka & Majali, 2017).

This theme explored the participants' views and experiences of African traditional beauty standards. Participants reported that these focus on both internal characteristics and physical attributes. Some attributes include respect, conservativeness and being a caretaker. The physical attributes they mentioned were: a generally rounder shape, having larger breasts and bottom, shorter stature, natural hair and darker skin. Participants also expressed that having more than one standard of beauty is confusing and alienating as they do not necessarily fit into either and are not sure how to manage the mixed messages. As a result, one participant reported that she feels like she has to change her physical appearance depending on the people she will be spending time with so that she does not feel judged.

Thus it seems that beauty standards, from wherever they come, exert a significant pressure and may leave some/many women feeling unworthy or as having less value than women whose appearance conforms to the ideal. Participants seem to feel overwhelmed in response to receiving a number of conflicting messages about how they should look or behave, and this left them feeling uncertain and even distressed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This research report focused on exploring the reflections and experiences of young Black South African women in relation to physical appearance and sense of self. The participants of this study were nine Black female students from the University of the Witwatersrand. Their ages ranged between nineteen and twenty-eight. They were all Humanities students within the Psychology Department. Participants interviews provided data which gave answers to the research questions of this project. A brief outline of the findings is presented below.

Participants' reflections and experiences suggest that they may have had or do experience some challenges in relation to societal standards of beauty. Although most participants reported that they were comfortable with their own physical appearance, they did report that society has its own standard of beauty that is considered the ideal which they feel ambivalent towards as they believe that it alienates them, especially as Black women. Participants' reflections suggest that even though they do not subscribe to the ideal beauty standard, they may have felt pressure to conform to the beauty standard in the past as physical attractiveness is emphasised for women. Participants reported that, features such as a slim but fit looking body, fair skin, and straight hair are considered to be markers of ideal beauty. These markers of ideal beauty are Eurocentric, and therefore exclude Black women and for them to fit in, they felt pressure to change some parts of themselves. Participants shared that they engage in practices that enhance their physical attractiveness such as exercise, make-up, straighten their hair, wear weaves etc. One participant reported that in the past, as a means to lose weight she may have developed from an eating disorder as she restricted her calories, engaged in vigorous exercise as well as induce vomiting.

Participants reported that one of their reasons for not feeling good about the way they looked in the past was related to media content. According to most participants, growing up they were exposed to media content especially in television shows that featured women who did not look like them. They reported that women who are presented as beautiful in the media possessed western markers of beauty such as fair skin, slim bodies, as well as straight long hair which they did not have. Some participants reported that they internalised the idea that to be beautiful, they had to possess these features, which may have negatively impacted their self-esteem. Currently,

most participants reported that they have grown more comfortable with their own natural features such as dark skin and curly hair. For most participants, the recent political movements in relation to embracing natural Black hair has made them more comfortable with keeping their hair in its natural state. Some participants reported that they were more comfortable with their own natural features because there is now more representation of natural looking Black women, who are less compliant with western beauty markers, in the media. However, a number of participants expressed the feeling that although Black women are being better represented in the media, the representation is not enough as this usually still features Black women who fit western ideals of beauty.

Participants reported other social factors besides the media that have an impact on how they relate to their physical appearance, the influence of family, peers, romantic partners, strangers etc. was discussed. Participants' reflections suggest that the messages they received about their physical appearance from significant others and more distant associates were varied, some of these messages left them conflicted about how to look. Participants reported that these multiple, mixed messages either reinforced dominant beauty ideals and/or helped them feel comfortable with the way they look.

Participants reported that men play a big role in how they or other women feel about their appearance and relative attractiveness. Participants reported that although men may not always explicitly tell women how to look (although they felt that men often do communicate this when it is unbidden), women have internalised messages from men in the past and they still try to comply with these internalised messages. Some participants reported feeling objectified or sexualised by men. Two participants indicated that men have said certain unwanted and uncomfortable sexual comments about their bodies. This has left them with lasting distress.

Participants discussed traditional African beauty standards; most felt that character was emphasised as well as physical features such as natural hair, dark skin and a voluptuous body shape. The general feeling was that these beauty standards might also be alienating if one does not conform.

Participants reflections suggest that physical attractiveness is complex as it is influenced by multiple factors. Some participants expressed that for them, having beauty ideals, whether African or western is limiting. They suggested that beauty ideals force women in boxes and they

do not fit in. Some participants reported feeling like they have to change parts of their physical appearance depending on which people they will be with. They also reported that it is particularly difficult for them as they try to find a middle ground between African and western ideals of beauty. Participants simultaneously expressed the desire to be able to look the way they wanted to without so much pressure from society. However, it was conceded that complying with beauty standards comes with certain benefits, therefore, it is difficult to eschew them entirely.

5.2. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research

This qualitative study used data from a sample of nine participants to explore the research questions in a deep and nuanced way. However, as with all qualitative research, the results obtained from the study cannot be generalised to the larger population of South African Black women. To yield results that can be generalised, future studies might employ quantitative methods.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used as a tool for data collection. Future studies may employ other interview techniques such as focus groups as they might yield different results. Furthermore, future studies may be longitudinal to assess changes over time with regards to the subject of this study.

One limitation of the present study is that the participants were tertiary educated and studying psychology. So, for example participants may have been exposed to Gender studies, feminism or identity theory which may have had an influence on how they responded to the interview questions. If University students are used as participants in future studies, it might be beneficial to use students from a different faculty.

Another limitation for this study was that the participants were University students residing in a metropolitan area. Their experiences might be different to Black women who are not currently in a tertiary institution (social milieu) or who might reside in different parts of the country. As a recommendation, future studies might use rural participants or women without tertiary education. Participants in this study were under 30 years of age. Future studies might focus on older Black women to see whether and how the findings differ.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. As a young Black woman, what does ideal beauty mean or look like for you?

2. Have you ever felt under pressure to look a certain way?

3. What part of your physical appearance do you think other people like and why?

4. If there is any part of your body or self that you could change what would it be?

5. Do you or have you ever engaged in practices that alter your body?

6. How do people close to you (family, friends, partner etc.) feel about the way you are and how you look? How does this make you feel?

7. Do you think your physical appearance is important in who you are as a person?

8. Do you feel that your beauty is represented within popular culture outlets (i.e. social media, TV, magazines and etc)?

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Madam,

Hello. My name is Pandelani Muthuphei. I am currently a Masters in Clinical Psychology student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting research for the purpose of obtaining this degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences and reflections of young Black South African women in relation to physical appearance and sense of self.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Participation in this study will involve being interviewed by me. The interview should take approximately 1 hour. Participation is voluntary, and you will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to go through with the interview. Everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential. The interview will be tape-recorded and only I and my supervisor will have access to the audio recordings. The audio recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password protected computer. Although I know who you are, confidentiality will be maintained by not disclosing any information that is of a personal nature in the report. I will assign a pseudonym to your information in the report, for example, Participant A or Participant B. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time before the report has been submitted. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question should you wish to do so. A feedback sheet in the form of a one to two-page summary of the study and its findings will be provided to you upon request. You may e-mail or phone my supervisor or myself if you would like to receive this. Our contact details appear in the signature below. The feedback will be available approximately 6 months or more after the collection of the data.

If you feel vulnerable on completion of the interview or if you know the following organisations may be contacted. These organisations are based in the University of the Witwatersrand, they provide free or low fee counselling services.

CCDU – 011 717 9140/32

Emthonjeni Centre – 011 717 4513

Researcher

Name: Muthuphei Pandelani

Contact: Pandem350@gmail.com

Research Supervisor

Name: Dr Yael Kadish

Contact: yael.kadish@wits.ac.za

Appendix C: Combined Consent Form (Interview and Recording)

Psychology
School of Human & Community Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050
Tel: (011) 717 4500 Fax: (011) 717 4559

Combined Consent Form

I, _____ consent to being interviewed by

Pandelani Muthuphei, for her study exploring the experiences and reflections of young Black South African women in relation to their appearance and sense of self. I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary.

- I may refrain from answering any questions.

- I may withdraw my participation and/or my responses from the study at any time.

- There are no risks or benefits associated with this study.

- All information provided will remain confidential, although I may be quoted in the research report.

- My interview will be audio recorded

- The audio recordings and transcripts will not be seen or heard by anyone other than the researcher and her supervisor.

- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

- Although direct quotes from my interview may be used in the research report, I will be referred to by a pseudonym (Participant X, Participant Y etc.)

- None of my identifiable information will be included in the research report.

- I am aware that the results of the study will be reported in the form of a research report for the partial completion of the degree, Masters in Clinical Psychology.

- The research may also be presented at a local/international conference and published in a journal and/or book chapter.

Consent for interview:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Consent for recording:

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/18/007 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	Exploring the experiences and reflections of young black SA women in relation to physical appearance and sense of self
INVESTIGATORS	Muthuphei Pandelani
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	29 May 2018
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 29 May 2018

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Esther Price)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Yael Kadish
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2020

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES