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Jones, Christianne

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Sociocultural experiences of body image among Black women in Johannesburg.

by

Christianne Jones

Supervised

by

Ruby Patel

A research report to be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree of

Masters of Community-based Counselling

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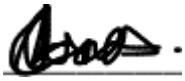
The Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

Date: 8 November 2021

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Sign: 

Date: 8 November 2021

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Acknowledgements

It is with great pride to, first and foremost, thank my mother for the endless support, encouragement, and the (tough) love when it was required.

Thank you to my people - my grandmother's prayers, my fiancé's humour and love, my best friend's late nights and cheering on. Thank you to my siblings, father and MACC friends/colleagues for the support, inspiration, and everything in between that has kept me laughing, on my toes, and pushing for greatness always.

Thank you to my supervisor, Ms. Ruby Patel, for unwavering support, and love for research, which surely enabled and deepened mine. Thank you for continuously encouraging the best work out of me, and a thank you to my fellow lecturers for doing the same throughout the years.

Finally, thank you to my research participants who made this entire project possible, through sharing your experience and hearts with me, and braving an area of discussion that was not entirely the easiest. You are all beautiful, in so many ways. This project has been a pleasure to embark on and will be forever treasured as my second research baby along the journey of becoming the Agent of Change I was always meant to become.

List of Abbreviations

IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
GBV	Gender-based Violence
SES	Socio-Economic Status

Operational Definitions

Body Image

Body image is considered a multidimensional and widely influenced construct surrounding an individual's thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards one's body, physical appearance, and attributes (Cash & Fleming, 2002; Grogan, 2016; Muth & Cash, 1997; Slade, 1994). It is considered a psychological, as well as social construct; that is made up of a combination of ideas, feelings, and self-perceptions surrounding an individual's physical characteristics and features. It is a construct that is influenced by the ideals and norms in context that arise out of hegemonic and powerful systems of class, patriarchy, and whiteness which seek to maintain various standards and influence over one's appearance.

Gender and Patriarchy

Gender is a social construct, which socialises people into identifying and performing female presentations, masculine presentations, as well as non-binary presentations, in their everyday physical and spatial negotiations. Gender within this study stands as a pillar of influence on the ways in which women experience their body image, and embody various standards that are upheld by patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and the male gaze (Archer & Ware, 2018; Shaw, 2005; Swami et al., 2013). Patriarchy is a system of domination and exclusion of women, that prescribes women as submissive and compliant to men (Acker, 1989). It suggests that women are to hold positions in society that are of lesser power and control, and that women exist for the pleasure and convenience of men (Acker, 1989; Johnson, 2004; Swami et al., 2013).

Women

Women include any person who identifies as a female, whether born with female genitals, or not. Continuing the premise that gender is a social construct that is perpetuated in context, women are seen as individuals who are viewed as encompassing various levels of femininity and submissiveness. Although gender has been previously viewed as concrete and biological due to one's sex and genitals; it is understood here that 'women' include all individuals who identity as such, including transgender, cis-gender and queer women. There are several conflicting discourses in femininity and beauty that generate vague and often contradictory images and roles for women when constructing identity, and it is from this lens that the attempt to explore the construct of femininity and womanhood arises.

Blackness/Black people

Race (and ethnicity) is considered to be a social construct which is often based on the colour/darkness of one's skin, their cultural affiliations, and even languages spoken. 'Black' or 'Blackness' is considered as individuals of medium to dark brown complexions. With this said, it is crucial to note that these racial classifications are entrenched in racist ideology, and it cannot be said that all Black people are dark(er) skinned. The concept of race and the categories within it arose from an arbitrary conception and are often contradictory and difficult to confine or conform to. However, these constructions have social, political, financial, and psychological consequences for Black people (Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006; Poran, 2006; Weekes, 1997).

Whiteness

Whiteness is seen here as a construction in society that has been perpetuated and used in spaces for power, hierarchy, and superiority. Whiteness is approached here as a construct and lens through which to view and understand racism as a system of power relationships, as well as various systems of control that perpetuate racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and others (Garner, 2007).

Abstract

The concept of 'body image' is viewed as a construct that surrounds and encompasses an individual's thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards their body, physical appearance, and attributes. It is a term that is under continuous construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. This study utilised a qualitative approach to explore the lived experience of body image among Black women in Johannesburg, South Africa. Through this, the study has unpacked the multiple layers of sociocultural influence on self and body image, and the ways in which Black women embody, perform, and experience their identity within their social and individual contexts. Using a dual theoretical framework of intersectionality and embodiment within the socio-constructivist stance, these understandings have been unpacked and theoretically grounded in context. This study draws on in-depth interviews with eight individuals that identify as Black and female, residing in Johannesburg, South Africa. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews in keeping with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, with the aims of focusing on lived experience. Findings include the subjective experiences of intersectional positions and embodiment, within a post-apartheid context, and discuss questions surrounding "How Black is Black-Enough?", "How Woman is Woman-Enough?", and 'Context, Where and How we grow up'. This study reveals the themes exploring Blackness as race and ethnicity, the embeddedness of whiteness and patriarchy, and explores the ways in which body image understandings and experiences are influenced by intersectional identities, contextual factors in media, family and cultural norms, as well as socioeconomic status.

Key words: sociocultural experience, body image, Black women, intersectionality, embodiment

Chapter One: Introduction to study

1.1 Introduction

"Brush your hair, fix your teeth, what you wear is all that matters…

Perfection is a disease of a nation, pretty hurts, pretty hurts…

You're tryna fix something, but you can't fix what you can't see,

It's the soul that needs a surgery

Blonder hair, flat chest - TV says, "bigger is better"… Vogue says, "thinner is better"…"

– Pretty Hurts, Beyoncé.

Body image: understood here as a construct that exists in, amongst, and between social experience in how people make meaning of their appearance. The above lyrics to the well-known Beyoncé song, Pretty Hurts, describes an experience of the embedded and conflicting pressures, expectations, and ideals surrounding the body and appearance of Black women (Fauzan, 2018). Black women have been measured and weighed against their white and male counterparts for centuries, and their bodies have represented many aspects of social oppression and injustice (Brand, 2000, Robinson-Moore, 2008).

This study's interest and focus surrounds the lived experience of Black women regarding their body image, as influenced by their intersectional identities, social experiences, as well as individual processes of embodiment and performativity that underlie those experiences (Butler, 2004; Jordan, 2010). The review of literature in this study highlights aspects and contexts of how and where body image exists and made meaning of; including both positive and negative aspects, beauty norms and ideals, the sociocultural contexts and influences. Further focus is on race and ethnicity, as well as gender constructions, all within a global – but more specifically South African context (Khutlang, 2018; Moodley & Adam, 2000). The theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and embodiment, alongside and intricately woven with aspects of social-constructionism and performativity, are explored as lenses for engaging with the aspects of experience for Black women in their multiple layers of norms and ideals. It further views the

aspects of those ideals and experiences in how they make meaning of their embodied (embodying), performed (performing), and actively social and existing selves (Butler, 2004, Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

For this study, a qualitative approach has been chosen over a quantitative analysis to enable individuals to share their own stories and experiences, that would ultimately help to bridge the gap between the 'researched' and the 'researcher' (Alase, 2017). This study attempts to explore and understand the sociocultural influence on the body image experiences of Black women, through exploring their racialised, gendered, and classed experiences and embodiments. It makes this attempt by using intersectionality and embodiment as a dual theoretical framework, in seeking to unpack the multidimensional and complex ways that Black women experience their bodies as social and embodied beings (Bauer, Churchill, Mahendran, Walwyn, Lizotte & Ville-Rueda, 2021; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005).

1.2 Rationale

Body image has been a topic of study for many decades and encompasses a multidimensional construct that affects girls and boys, men and women, in their everyday lives. Although body image is undoubtedly an individual cognitive and emotional experience; human beings are social creatures, and the way people view themselves is ultimately influenced by many social contributing factors within their environment (Ata et al., 2007; Levine & Smolak, 2010; López-Guimerà et al., 2010; Nasser, 1986; Swami, 2015). Previous research has often focused on body image as encompassing merely the size and shape of one's body, which has been important as the foundation for the field of research. However, it has also proven to be limiting in that it does not account for other aspects that make up physical appearance. This study encompasses a broader conceptualisation of body image to include weight (size and shape), height, skin (colour and texture), facial features, as well as hair, allowing for a more holistic view of physical appearance.

Although it is acknowledged that body image issues arise for both women and men (of all races and cultures) (Ata et al., 2007; Grogan, 2016), previous research on body image in South Africa has often favoured studying body dissatisfaction and eating disorders amongst white women (Mwaba & Roman, 2009). This study approaches the lived experience of Black women in their varying sociocultural realities in a post-apartheid context; in order to add to the conversations

filling the racial and gendered gaps in literature. Feminist critiques of traditional therapy claim that it largely fails to truthfully represent the experiences of women and tends to neglect the social and political contexts that shape and influence these experiences (Jordan, 2010). This is important to consider within the psychology field as it is crucial for mental health professionals to be aware and considerate of these specific and unique challenges for women in a patriarchal society, and more specifically for Black women who continue to be excluded and marginalised. Recognizing the oppressive and discriminatory structures that exist in society; it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and influences experienced on body image. The understandings, identity negotiations, and social intersections are considered, as well as subjective and collective embodiments and performative practices for Black women.

South African Black women face many intersectional and conflicting influences and concerns with relation to their bodies daily. Acknowledging this, it is also significant to understand their lived experiences as embodied and social beings. The diverse backgrounds of South Africans are recognised (Khutlang, 2018; Mwaba & Roman, 2009; Overstreet et al, 2010; Tiwari 2015), along with the different ways in which these backgrounds could influence both negative and positive body image. Among the common sociocultural influences that have been explored, cultural values, peer and family interactions are considered, as well as exposure to mass and social media. This sociocultural approach contributes to the literature on body image as it considers embodied beings existing in various contexts. This is important to understand regarding the different ways people experience their bodies and how this impacts their psychological wellbeing.

Studying body image within the South African context allows for the acknowledging of diverse histories and realties that exist in a post-Apartheid context (Moodley & Adam, 2000). It is argued by the authors that South Africa remains profoundly divided among racial and ethnic lines, and the same can be said for the intersections of gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. It is against this setting of underlying racial and gendered hostility and ambiguity of the post-apartheid South African context that Black women experience and negotiate their bodies, as well as make meaning of their embodiments and sociocultural influences. South African society is further plagued with stigma surrounding mental health as well as particular beauty ideals, which this study further unpacks in context, surrounding lived experiences of a group of Black women. The complexities and contradictions of a diverse society contribute to positive and negative aspects of body image,

and understanding these influences is important in addressing social issues, spreading awareness of Black women's realities, as well as encouraging and promoting more positive aspects of physical and psychological wellness. This approach is important due to the extent of misrepresentation of Black women within the areas of beauty, body image, experiences and embodiment of womanhood and femininity, in unpacking their experience (Poran, 2006; Walker, 2014; Watson et al., 2019).

1.3 Research Goals and Aims

This study primarily aims to unpack the lived sociocultural experience of Body image among Black women.

It further attempts to unpack the different ways in which these experiences contribute to the aspects of embodiment and intersectionality within daily experience and identity formation.

1.4 Research Chapter Outline

Chapter One has introduced the research and outlined a rationale for its practicality and usefulness. Chapter two engages with literature that offers insight on issues surrounding body image, beauty norms with regards to femininity and race, sociocultural influences, as well as a specific look at the South African context.

Chapter three explores the dual framework of intersectionality and embodiment as the theoretical stance, which outlines the origins, main claims, and application, as well as usefulness towards this research.

Chapter four presents the methodological framework used to analyse and interpret the participants accounts and experiences. This study is qualitative in nature which is appropriate for the research aims and questions, and therefore assumes the principles of a qualitative research design. The analytical approach utilised in this study is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that has proven useful in processing the data as in-depth and extensive. A section on reflexivity and trustworthiness is also outlined and considered as an important aspect towards the credibility of the thesis.

Chapter five includes the final section of this study, which provides a conclusion of the research in highlighting the main concepts and themes, as well as considerations of limitations and recommendations are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The review of literature highlights the key concept of body image which has been covered across many areas of research over the years. The review will include literature on negative and positive body image, cross-cultural beauty standards, and the various areas of sociocultural influences in different settings that impact the way women see themselves. Literature within the South African context will also be explored as socio-culturally and contextually bound, and as impacting the views and understandings of body image among Black women.

2.1 Body image

Body image is most often associated with the aspects of body weight and size (Slade, 1994; Thompson et al., 1999), but is approached here as encompassing other aspects of body characteristics including weight, height, skin colour and texture, as well as hair (Altabe, 1998; Hall, 1996; Swami et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 1999), to include a holistic view of the body and physical appearance. Body image as a topic of concern in research has historically been associated with self-esteem, self-worth, social confidence, positive and negative eating and exercise behaviours, various grooming activities, sexual experiences, as well as emotional stability (Burrowes, 2013; Cash & Fleming, 2002; Forbes et al., 2007; Weiss, 2013). It is an aspect of physical and social reality that is also closely linked with ones' identity in the world.

2.1.1 Negative body image and 'Normative Discontent'

Acknowledging the impact that body image has over self-esteem and confidence, Cash and Fleming (2002) present the argument that the relationship between the physical body and the social world often determines the extent of social internalisations. This relationship involves body evaluations and investments that are practiced in daily routines, to maintain or alter certain appearances. In this way, people tend to invest time and physical behaviours to uphold or change their appearance according to how they have judged themselves. The concept of normative

discontent is explored and further highlighted as contributing to the gender biases in beauty conceptualisations and the value that has been consistently placed on women's bodies. Tantleff-Dunn et al. (2011) highlights the concept of 'normative discontent', initially explored by Rodin et al. (1984), where the negative attitudes towards one's body have become prevalent in society; stating that being unhappy with one's physical appearance is considered to be normal. It is further argued by Sands (2000) for 'self-concept' to be the foundation for understanding the thin ideal and 'drive for thinness', body dissatisfaction, as well as unhealthy and differential eating behaviours and disorders. Self-concept works as a perceptual perspective and surrounds an internalised view that people have of themselves, but one that is constantly changed and moderated according to various sociocultural experiences, realities, and contexts. In this way, one's body image, self-concept, and sociocultural experience collaborate to influence a person's experience of being bodied, and embodying various aspects of this influence.

Negative body image and body dissatisfaction surrounds significant emotional distress and instances of plastic surgery (Stice & Whitenton, 2002; Thompson et al., 1999). Stice and Whitenton (2002) as well as Tiggerman (2005) present the argument that much of the existing body dissatisfaction among girls and women, is due to the pressures and unrealistic expectations of the thin ideal on bodies. This 'thin ideal' is not only viewed here as a Eurocentric and patriarchal expectation of bodies that is placed on women, but as representative of larger areas of layered oppression that exists against Black women. The standard and expectation of being thin as equating to being beautiful and therefore worthy, is something that has existed for centuries and has been perpetuated and tweaked according to the context in which girls are socialised into being women. Body image views and understandings significantly affect the self-esteem, emotional and psychological wellness, as well as physical expression and rumination of women (Grogan, 2016; Holmqvist & Frisén, 2010). It is seen here that most body image research originally began by exploring and examining the negative aspects of body image, and how this influences disordered eating, emotional distress, and low self-esteem. In this way, the ways in which bodies, and specifically women's bodies, have been researched and observed are relevant in understanding a historical view of body image experiences. It can be seen through the ways body image has been viewed and addressed that the oppression of Black women's bodies is a historical reality, as well as a current social issue, that the research of Grogan (2016), Holmqvist and Frisén (2010), Tiggerman (2005), among others, speaks to.

2.1.2 Positive body image: a shift

Although it is most common to refer to negative body image in early and previous research, there have been some developments in research surrounding the expansion of body image as having the potential for both negative and positive aspects. Positive body image cannot merely be defined as the absence of negative features (Wood-Barcalow, 2010), but has been shown in previous results that women show characteristics including lower internalisation of media influences, general appearance satisfaction, higher levels of social support and more physical activity (Williams et al., 2004). The concept of positive body image surrounds satisfactory opinions and perceptions about one's body regardless of the physical appearance, as well as engaging in healthy eating and physical behaviour for the body's needs. It also refers to rejecting negative media imagery in favour of positive messages about one's self and body to promote positive mental behaviours and thoughts about self-worth and value (Avalos, Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2005; Grogan, 2016; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

Tylka and Wood-Barcalow (2015) also highlight their findings on positive body image in defining it as including genuine appreciation of the body, body acceptance, and a more extensive conceptualisation of beauty. Grogan (2016) further explores the recent rise in research surrounding the concept of positive body image, which is still under construction to this day. Grogan (2016) highlights the significance of exploring people's understandings of their bodies and experiences with embodiment as influencing everyday behaviour. Several theoretical frameworks that are predominantly considered when exploring body image are highlighted, one of which being a sociocultural perspective. This perspective acknowledges the perpetuated body and beauty ideals that exist in society, and spread through social agents of media, internet, and parental/peer interactions. These ideals impact one's body image in various ways; where the reference point for attractiveness is often unrealistically constructed - resulting in commonly negative impacts on individual body image, more often than not (Tiggermann, 2011).

Research often emerges to highlight many angles or arguments of a phenomenon, however it is common for research to maintain gaps where various alternative or previously-ignored understandings are under-represented (Lavis, Guindon, Cameron, Boupha, Dejman, Osei & Sadana, 2010). Wood-Barcalow et al (2010) further add that there is a lack of sufficient research

around understanding body image and attempts to fill the gap with qualitative findings to further construct a working definition of positive body image. Positive body image was found to encompass the aspects of an individual's predominant and genuine love and respect for their body, which enables them to truly appreciate the unique beauty and purposes of their body that may or may not be associated with idealized images in society. There is also an aspect of feeling confident and beautiful in their body, where they are cognoscente of the body's assets as well as it's needs, and where negative images or messages in society are internally reframed or excluded. It is acknowledged, however, that many narratives that attempt to include a sense of agency or 'strength' associated with Black women can also contribute to the ignorance of existing oppressive systems. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) argues that Black women are often associated with performing and embodying 'strength', which may be true in experience, but must be something approached within the context of systems that continue to exclude, marginalise and oppress Black women.

2.2 Beauty: norms and ideals

Beauty can be understood as an unavoidable and underlying "socio-political framework for how [women] operate in the world" (Brand, 2000, p. 6). This has been mostly influenced by hegemonic Eurocentric and patriarchal ideals in many cultures of Western and developing countries. In these contexts, girls of colour are often brought up to take part in certain practices to enhance their attractiveness, mostly being socialised to be as close to 'whiteness' as possible, and to earn the male gaze in order to be deemed 'beautiful'. These hegemonic ideals as common determinants of beauty standards inform many beauty practices, ranging from seemingly menial actions (straightening of hair, use of make-up), to severely harmful and damaging actions (skin lightening practices, cosmetic surgery). This suggests that the power dynamics surrounding beauty are constantly internalised and negotiated by girls and women (Brand, 2000; Dosekun, 2016; Phoenix, 2014). However, beauty is viewed through different lenses among different cultures and societies, where Eurocentric beauty standards are not always sought after (Swami, et al., 2008). Although, these hegemonic ideals seem to cause a conflict in terms of identity negotiation and expression for many girls and women who are raised to view and internalise different, contradictory, and often impossible beauty standards. The concepts of gender, beauty, race and culture are all approached as social constructions through Butler's (2004; 2006) theory of

performativity. This considers the performative nature of social constructs and the different ways that people 'do' and re-do aspects of their intersecting identities in order to uphold and perpetuate certain social ideals. Performativity is a useful lens through which to view subjective self-concepts, narratives, and lived experiences; to unpack the more rigid models of sociocultural categories and understand a more nuanced experience of body image.

2.2.1 Beauty and Femininity

Global considerations of beauty have surrounded various expressions of femininity, aspects of patriarchal inquiry with an obligation for women to attract the male gaze, and more recently as a way through which women can recover a sense of power and status in society by being considered 'beautiful' (Brand, 2000; Craig, 2006; Forbes et al., 2007). Beauty can encompass an element of community, with boundaries and practices being taught and shared amongst groups of people to create a sense of belonging, and inversely, a potential sense of exclusion (Forbes e al., 2007; Kozee, 2016). Beauty can also be a practice to partake in by active followers of different ideals, however, there are inherent features that are praised from birth, that gender socialisations and cultural norms perpetuate. The constructs of gender, beauty and culture are understood through the lens of Butler's (2004) theory of performativity, acknowledging the performative nature of social constructs and the different ways in which people 'do' and embody their intersecting identities, in order to maintain and perpetuate certain social ideals. Beauty also encompasses ambiguity, underlying power dynamics, and subjectivity surrounding the social construct of beauty. This subjectivity speaks to how people can 'do' certain things as performative expressions of their identities to experience themselves as 'beautiful' according to the cultural ideals they have been socialised into. Although beauty is a sociocultural construct that affect both men and women alike (Law & Labre, 2002), beauty is unpacked here in terms of female attractiveness and the underlying power dynamics that often aim to restrict, exclude, and control women's expression and appearance for the benefit of men. The concept of 'feminine attractiveness' has been commonly analysed within feminist literature surrounding beauty politics, and women being socialised into striving for a position of 'beauty' as a form of power and privilege (Shelembe, 2014; Voracek & Fisher, 2005; Wolf, 1991).

Beauty has often been viewed through a lens of ambivalence, recognizing the subjective nature of experiences and preference surrounding ideals of beauty, as well as acknowledging the common notion of beauty as a means for women to reclaim a sense of empowerment and agency through their appearance. However, Wolf (1991) argues that beauty ought to be approached through a gendered lens to consider power dynamics surrounding appearance and attraction, and how women are made to feel about their appearance in relation to the advantages afforded to 'beautiful' women in society. These include but are not limited to potential marriage and love interests, employment opportunities, as well as social mobility and access.

Aside from the forced burdens and pressures of common beauty standards, many women derive pleasure from beauty, causing added tension for many theoretical perspectives attributing body image issues to the complexities of beauty. Human bodies are a means of expression, even though those same bodies are assigned various cultural meanings and read in particular ways that may not link to our intended expressions, suggesting an embodiment of social norms. Craig (2006) also highlights the multiple ideals of beauty that are in constant rotation across cultures, ethnicities, and ages; looking at beauty through a racialised, gendered and classes aspects of social life. Gender as a social device produces and re-produces notions of the masculine and feminine to be naturalised, but also a mechanism by which those terms are challenged and deconstructed during identity formation (Butler, 2004). Components of both femininity and masculinity, as well as the beauty ideals attached to each model, have been institutionally and socially monitored over time, where standard practices on both sides of the gender spectrum have come to be generally accepted or not. These standard practices consist of shared understandings surrounding ideal beauty standards that lean towards upholding and praising certain characteristics over others (Forbes et al., 2007; Swami et al., 2008).

Norocel (2015) argues that patriarchy exists as a gendered discourse that "attempts to govern and regulate women's bodies and minds" (p. 153), which renders women objectified, and controlled. Overtime, women's bodies have been treated and viewed as existing for the male gaze, often having to conform to standards upheld by the male figures of a certain context (Reel et al., 2008). This also involves experiencing multiple layers of control and oppression through the male gaze that exists within racism, capitalism, xenophobia, as well as heteronormativity. Femininity is also understood through this lens as a construct that is embedded with internalisations of

patriarchal norms and standards, which costs women in multiple ways to attain and conform to. Although it is acknowledged that in the 21st century, a time where cracks have appeared in the patriarchal system, allows for a myriad of experiences and embodiments of femininity; it is crucial to view it alongside the oppressed, excluded, and policed state that women occupy.

2.2.2 Beauty and Race

Beauty as a construct is both socially created, and "racially defined" (Robinson-Moore, 2008, p. 67). Body image has often been associated with and thought of as a 'white woman's problem', due to the lower rate of Black women found with body dissatisfaction or eating disorders. However, in order to approach the topic of gender as an intersectional identity, it is understood that gender, along with beauty, are social and cultural constructs that tend to surround a complex relationship of feminine and masculine models. Individuals are socialised into these models in various ways amongst different races, ethnicities and cultures (Butler, 2004; Robinson-Moore, 2008; Mougoué, 2015).

The intersectional power dynamics that impact the experience of Black women has been explored, acknowledging "how differences in body image, skin colour, and hair haunt the existence and psychology of Black women" (Patton, 2006, p.24). It is understood that these differences not only create further divisions among social groups but encourages the additional questioning and/or doubting of feminine and ethnic identities. Patton (2006) explains that beauty, along with other social aspects, is subject to the power dynamics and standards upheld by the ruling class of that context, which is also something that can shift in various contexts. This can be understood in that Black beauty has been intricately connected to Black inferiority, due to the centuries of oppression under Western and patriarchal ideals that have historically and continuously excluded Black women in certain contexts. It is argued here that Black women have been largely excluded from the narratives and understandings of beauty, and that there are general and widespread internalisations of whiteness, that encourage the alterations and disguises to be made for the sake of assimilation into the standards of the 'ruling class'. It is understood here that constructions of beauty have historically been used with the agenda of a hegemonic patriarchy (Shaw, 2005). This shows the intersection and interaction of gender with race in affiliating femininity with a whiteness that is inaccessible to Black women.

Swami et al (2008) both expands the concept of body image, and explores the likelihood of the preference for a heavier body weight in non-Western cultures, the aspects of lighter and darker skin tones, as well as hair texture and the social meanings attached to these aspects of appearance for women. The process of navigating those social meanings and associations attached to race and ethnicity, further bring into question historical and continuous ideals and power dynamics at play when it comes to the experience of Black women. The connection of these aspects to socioeconomic status is further stated, and the physical aspects that women may choose to uphold depending on their class positionality; surrounding a lighter skin tone, and thinner figure, or vice versa. Black women have historically been left out of the leading ideals and trends in terms of appearance and beauty standards (Anderson-Fye, 2009; Craig, 2002). Research has suggested that body dissatisfaction is primarily normative amongst women in Euro-Western cultures (Sabik et al., 2010), and has only recently attempted to break down these stereotypical views.

Reel at al (2008) further argues for the complexity of the connected variances within and between a socially defined racial category, as well as socioeconomic status issues, that complicate the commonly held belief that body image issues affect white women more than their Black counterparts. Due to this belief, the Black population of women is not considered to develop (or present with) the same extent of body dissatisfaction than white women. In this way, there may not be an awareness of their varying contexts and cultural ideals to consider different ways in which negative body image, body dissatisfaction and possibilities of eating disturbances may manifest among the Black community. Reel et al (2008) further highlights the perspectives of Objectification theory and the Panoptic gaze as invisible social structures enforced through patriarchal norms that objectify women's bodies. These social structures further enable them to internalise hegemonic societal ideals, and carefully monitor their appearance to fit as closely to the ideal(s) as possible. In this way, it is argued that some Black women operate under this 'panoptic gaze', while under the influence of two contradictory ideals. This is to say that on the one hand, Black women are expected to preserve their subjective and collective femininity in relation to thinness, while on the other hand expected to maintain a conflicting ideal of femininity in their ethnic group(s), where a larger sized/shaped body might be preferred. Hall's (1996) notion of 'technologies of femininity' is pointed out here to highlight the investment process of altering the female body; something that has been around throughout history, and across race, ethnicity, and culture. Reel et al (2008) explore some of the main evaluations and investments including dieting

or altered eating, exercise, slimming teas and brews, and cosmetic surgery; all of which occur in different ways and to different extents across cultures. Huey (2013) additionally argues that although much of the previous research suggesting Black cultures stand as a shield against common body image disturbances, there is not much explored surrounding particular cultural aspects that promote positive attitudes towards the body and appearance.

2.2.2.1 Internalisation of colonial images of Whiteness

This concept of assimilation and internalisation of the superior agendas and systems is expanded on by Fanon, as cited in Hook (2004), with regards to the ways in which Psychopolitics view the Black individual as not only seeking whiteness, but as viewing various aspects of whiteness within them, all within a post-colonial context. Patton (2006) further makes reference to the 'Lily Complex' as embedded within the Black woman's psyche and exists as a desire to reach the Eurocentric standards of beauty that are often unattainable and 'inauthentic'. This is explained as a potential for causing an internal loathing toward herself, and believing that she is not and cannot be beautiful without impersonating (embodying) something else (Fleetwood, 2011; Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006; Robinson-Moore, 2008; Shaw, 2005).

Whiteness as a construct is viewed as a lens through which to understand and approach these racialised and social relationships (Garner, 2007), and is a crucial paradigm that works as an underlying influence on the ways in which people operate in society. In this way, Fanon recognised that a Black person faces an abnormality to their experience in the world as Western/Eurocentric influence becomes paramount to their existence (Desai, 2009; 2014). Fanon's Psychopolitics allows for the view of the Black individual's perceptions, personality, and overall experience to be understood as intricately connected to race, the colonised position. It further shows how this reinforces psychological limitations, 'enslavement', and an embedded sense of inferiority (Desai, 2009; 2014; Hook, 2004). It works to covertly strip away one's sense of identity as Black/African, by way of Whiteness excluding and 'othering' narratives outside of its standards. Societal norms are placed there by systems of power for the Black individual to conform to in attempts to be recognised and included, but in ways that are impossible to attain or actualise. Fanon argues that the Black individual thus suffers with added, continuous and long-lasting mental health concerns

due to the stripping away of African culture, language, as well as their social existence being centred around conforming to and pleasing the white individual (Hook, 2004).

The Coloured community exists and continues to live and reside in South Africa and other countries in Southern Africa, where different understandings of culture and experience influence cultural identity. The Coloured identity is also related to the experience of similar marginal positionalities that many communities throughout the world consider to be mixed-race identities (Camper, 1994; Bettez, 2010). The community has held a complex and mostly disregarded position in South African society, economic, and political dialogue; and it is pertinent to understand the history of their marginality in order to address the manifestation of the Coloured identity (Adhikari, 2009; Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999). During apartheid, the Coloured community was oppressed under the white government, and suffered social, economic, and racial oppression as did every person classified as 'non-white'. This encompassed a hierarchy of skin tones, where the darker your skin, the worse off your living conditions would be. Although 'Coloureds' suffered many intersectional areas of oppression and still do 25 years into South African democracy, the community was relatively still able to enjoy a degree of privilege over their Black counterparts due to their 'mixed' nature in certain instances (Adhikari, 2009).

The Coloured community manifested within this 'middle' position; where social, economic, and political negotiation largely excluded the Coloured voice; allowing rejection and criticism from both sides of South Africa's racial Black and white 'coin'. According to Erasmus and Pieterse (1999) the coloured community is conceptualised as a "relational identity" (p. 183), and not just a racial category born out of apartheid. The Coloured identity is viewed in terms of their middle-ground and 'hybrid' positionality but remaining within the broader category of Black (non-white) South Africans (Adhikari, 2009; Erasmus, 2000; Erasmus & Pieterse, 1999; Richardson, 2013).

This racialisation (and gendering) of the body (Erasmus, 2000; Richardson, 2013) is a reality for people of colour and comprises a certain degree of hypervisibility; recognizing an individual solely by their difference, and requires the acknowledgement of the concurrent intersections of race and gender (as well as class) in body image and politics. This often becomes problematic and possibly dangerous for women who express themselves as feminist and with agency, because "acting agentically and self-reflexively on what we consider subjective preference or taste…is also

thoroughly conditioned" (Dosekun, 2016, p. 1), and women may have a sense of agency, but many spaces are continuously conditioned to uphold hegemonic ideals.

2.3 Sociocultural contexts and influences

Although body image is an individual experience, human beings exist in multiple different contexts, with discourses, norms, and sociocultural ideals that are perpetuated through social agents and interactions. As people exist and engage with their environments, there are many aspects of the social world that are internalised and made to be personally valued, which can have both positive and negative effects on the physical and mental health of individuals. The common social agents that work to uphold and perpetuate certain ideals and norms throughout cultures and communities include media, internet, as well as family interactions and cultural norms.

2.3.1 Socioeconomic Status

Eurocentric beauty standards throughout history have commonly involved the praising of thinness of body shape, delicate and slender features, short body heights, and light skin (Kozee, 2016; Puoane, Tsolekile & Steyn, 2010). However, the major differences in body and beauty preferences do not only exist between Western ideals and non-western ideals; it has been shown to occupy a space of class and socioeconomic status as well (Levine & Smolak, 2010; Swami, 2015). Swami (2015) shows the current shifts in body and appearance ideals from differences between Western vs non-Western ideals (Nasser, 1986), to highlighting the role of different socioeconomic statuses. A thinner body ideal has been favoured by westernisation, as well as urbanisation of many cultures and societies (Levine & Smolak, 2010); where it can be said that there is now a globalised preference for the thin ideal, except in many communities of a lower socioeconomic status. It is also acknowledged that some cultures may have historically upheld a thin ideal with or without Western influence. These ideals of thinness, light skin, straight hair, slight curves and medium to short height; are spread through social agents such as social and mass media, that are perpetuated through family and peer interactions. The messages and meanings attributed to these aspects directly connect physical appearance to value and self-worth, which are major factors contributing to body image dissatisfaction among young women.

Tiwari and Kumar (2015) presents a review of body image in psychology literature, that suggests that there has always been value placed on the beauty and appearance of the physical body. There is a focus placed on the socio-economic status as something that is less is explored in literature but has significant impact on body image perceptions and experiences for people. It is suggested that people of a lower socio-economic class are found to have more positive attitudes towards larger body weights and sizes, as it is associated with a level of affluence and comfortability. Tiwari and Kumar (2015) comment on some of the protective measures against body dissatisfaction, including the maintenance of a healthy weight, close relationships in one's social circle, the general improvement of well-being, and reducing any social comparative tendencies. The authors propose changes amongst sociocultural realities to explore and question current definitions of beauty, suggesting that emotional and character qualities, as well as individuality be considered components of beauty. This promotes a shift from the narrow worth placed on specific physical appearances as related to human value.

Paquette and Raine (2004) present the argument that there is a contradictory sociocultural environment with regards to weight and the consumption of food. The thin ideal is continuously upheld throughout various forms of media; however, having access to and the consumption of more food is also a sign of material comfort. The aspect of socioeconomic status and availability of and access to food is also considered by Irving and Neumark-Sztainer (2002), adding to the significance of the role of socio-economic status and the possible impacts on body image. Paquette and Raine (2004) recognized that there are many internalised sociocultural norms that favour a slimmer figure, but also contradictory social messages surrounding the overconsumption of food; acknowledging that there are conflicting contexts that influence body image development. Due to these various contexts and influences, a way forward is recommended in terms of addressing a more ecological approach in intervention by transforming the social connections, practices, and interactions in everyday life. A potential preventative measure is starting difficult conversations at the root of the negative body image problem, to prevent the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating and provide a foundation for the future promotion of positive body image.

2.3.2 Media

Cafri et al (2005) argues for the significance of sociocultural factors on body image, with a focus on the impact of the widespread 'thin ideal' associated with feminine beauty. Media places pressure on women to be thin, but the ideal is often impossible to reach for many body types, causing body dissatisfaction, and adding to the possible 'normative discontent' of women and their physical appearance. Sociocultural factors are also explored in Stice's (2002) argument in their role of placing women at risk for the development of body dissatisfaction and possible disordered eating. Coetzee and Perrett (2011) also comment on the internalisation of sociocultural ideals of beauty and the body, and the risks involved with developing eating disorders and pathologies. The exploration of African and Western ideals is presented as conflicting ideals in today's urbanised cultures, where the belief that eating disorders have not been a threat to Black women is often maintained in body image literature. Aspects of white supremacy and westernisation have aided in spreading this universalised 'white' norm, that has severely impacted society in forming and perpetuating inferior self-concepts among Black people (Gabriel, 2007; Kozee, 2016; Puoane, Tsolekile & Steyn, 2010).

Tiwari (2014) highlights the impact that body image continues to have on the general function of people in their lives. The sociocultural influences explored include social/mass media and the internet as social agents. The pressures and competitive areas of society that promote success and performance continue to impact people according to their levels of exposure and internalisation of the ideals and pressures. This is argued to have drastically contributed to the negative self-esteem and self-worth experienced by the youths of today. Tiwari (2014) suggests that society has an increasingly 'perverted' and backward image of beauty, where attractiveness is but a façade amongst social agents that spread and promote impossible beauty standards, which ultimately conflicts and damages people's ability for a positive body image and self-esteem.

López-Guimerà et al (2010) also presents an argument surrounding the influence of media as one of the main social agents, in perpetuating trending and favoured appearance ideals. The media as a social agent of spreading and sharing knowledge, culture, and norms (Bryant & Oliver, 2009; Burnette et al., 2017; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011), often spreads a distorted image of people and the world; where the hidden edits, airbrushing, and other changes done to many portrayals of appearance are drastically skewed. This creates an unrealistic and misleading construction of the social world, where a considerable amount of media content is

filled with distorted, unhealthy, impractical messages surrounding body ideals, eating behaviour and weight control, as well as backward depictions of gender roles.

2.3.3 Cultural and Lifestyle Norms

Sabik et al (2010) explores the aspects of weight-based possibilities and the associations with ethnic orientation. It is suggested that these aspects are more relevant to women as value is placed on appearance and linked with self-worth for women, more so than it is for men. It is suggested that weight-based contingencies impact behaviour, as approached in relation to a woman's self-worth and the way she sees herself. The authors explore the differences between cultural standards and influences of beauty and body ideals and the significant role of class among the influences of Western culture on African cultures, in the negotiations and idealisations of certain appearances.

Oloruntoba-Oju (2007) further highlights the complication in the evaluation process of one's body, where the appreciation of both body and beauty involves often contradictory constructions of the self in relation to others, as well as with the influences of ethnicity, race and culture. It is argued that the sociocultural transformations that are occurring regarding beauty and body ideals, highlight Synnott's (1993) notion that human bodies and experiences of embodiment are laden with cultural symbolism in varying contexts. Walker (2014) further explains that beauty standards are communicated through the mediums of family, peer, and intimate relationships, as well as media and television. She argues for the intersections of racism and sexism to be considered in understanding the ways in which these sociocultural influences may impact the body image and wellbeing of Black women. Walker (2014) further argues that cultural and contextual frameworks are crucial for exploring the effects of Eurocentric (mainstream) beauty standards on Black women in a post-colonial context. It is noted that there is an importance among intersecting identities and context in both shaping and shielding the impact of these standards (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Pace, 2016; Walker, 2014).

2.4 South African context

The South African context entails a diverse population, with many different cultures, norms and ideals that often take precedence depending on different spaces for different people. South

Africa's history of colonialism and the system of apartheid created a space where Black people were constructed as inferior to white people, causing a widespread favouring of white and Western ideals and norms. In the post-apartheid era, the political, social, and economic climate of the country have changed on the surface, but much of the Western dominance still remains, and affects people's everyday lives in various way (Tiwari, 2015). The post-Apartheid space allows for mixed and diverse spaces where people of all races, genders, ethnicities, and cultures live and exist amongst each other. This also enables various cultural values to sometimes become blurred; and research surrounding body image has attempted to account for these cross-cultural differences in perceptions and experiences of body image (Khutlang, 2018; Mwaba & Roman, 2009; Overstreet et al, 2010; Tiwari 2015). This is prevalent in the context of the Johannesburg CBD where many people residing in the city and suburbs have migrated from outer and rural areas in search of employment and better life opportunities. Johannesburg is seen as the country's test-subject city of post-apartheid urban governance (Beall et al., 2014), which has a history of cosmopolitanism, urban poverty, and inequality. It also includes spaces where many traditions, cultures and beliefs are questioned and challenged against the colour of urbanisation and globalisation respectively.

Gitau et al (2014) provides evidence for the acculturation of Western ideals of thinness by the younger Black population in South Africa, and suggests that there are many ethnic differences in terms of eating attitudes and behaviours, self-esteem, as well as body images among Black women. The authors comment on the prevalence of obesity among Black South African women, and the ways in which cultural beliefs are contributing factors. In connection with the focus on the internalisation of Western ideals in research, Khutlang (2018) conducts the study surrounding body weight perceptions on a South African sample and presents the argument that the evaluation of body weight is not a vacuumed process. The author argues that body weight evaluation is something that is largely influenced by sociocultural factors including that of media, culture, and judgement experienced in social interactions. In this way, the varying ways in which people evaluate, experience, and feel about their body weight directly impact the resulting behaviours on how they manage their eating and physical activities.

Mwaba and Roman (2009) progresses the argument surrounding body image being influenced by the exposure to Western media, and similar sociocultural pressures depending on urban or rural contexts. There is an increased aspiration to attain a thinner body weight and shape

among both Black and white women in urban areas, where it is argued that Black women in more rural areas are more contented with their bodies because of differing cultural values surrounding weight and size. These findings are further explored and suggested by Szabo and Allwood (2006), that conducted a similar cross-cultural study, adding to the significance of culture and socioeconomic factors in the ways people view and experience their bodies in context. Additionally, Puoane et al (2010) also comment on the increasing prevalence of obesity amongst Black South Africans, and further suggests the role and significance of culture, economic development and urbanisation in impacting eating and lifestyle behaviours and patterns. It is also acknowledged that positive perceptions of a larger body weight and size are often characteristic of more socioeconomically underprivileged communities, and the effects of class on body image are important to consider. It is further argued that the systems and institutions in society do more to uphold racial hierarchies and inequalities than to challenge and change them, including the school system and environment for learners around the world (Wormelli, 2016) and many young residents of South Africa (Knaus & Brown, 2015; Teeger, 2015). It is understood that even through the good intentions of the South African constitution, Black people remain at the lower end of the racial hierarchy, which is perpetuated through processes and agendas within schooling systems and environments that uphold racism, prejudice, and standards of Whiteness that are impossible for the Black child to attain.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded within the dual theoretical approaches of intersectionality and embodiment, as relevant to this study. The theories approach the embodied person as existing within a social context, and as a member of several intersecting identities that influence their embodiment, performativity, and experience of their body image. The theoretical frameworks will be discussed below regarding their unique and integrated approaches, as well as their relevance to the current study surrounding the sociocultural experiences of Black women.

3.1 Intersectionality

According to Bauer et al. (2021), intersectionality is a theoretical framework that considers diversity within and across multiple layers of social positioning and experience (p. 1). The concept of intersectionality, headed and explained by Crenshaw (1991), McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007), has contributed significantly to the present understanding of the intersection of multiple inequalities in gender theory by rejecting the notion that gender is a single understanding of identity. The concept of intersectionality was presented by Black women within the feminist movements of the 1980s, in order to address the significant lack of representation of Black women in the production of knowledge and academic literature, as well as the general exclusion of Black women's voices in much of the work of the time (Bauer et al., 2021; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2008). Crenshaw coined the term of 'intersectionality' to interrogate and address the multiple dimensions of oppression and marginalisation experienced by Black women, as unique to the various social realities that Black women face and endure daily. In this way, Crenshaw (1991) attempted to address the singular views and understandings of women's identities that had prevailed until then, due to the lack of awareness surrounding the influence of race/ethnicity in their subjective experience. Crenshaw (1991) states that the intersectionalities and complex interactions between gender, race and class ultimately restricts the overall social and political access of Black women; restricting and controlling the way that Black women operate in and experience the world. The theory of intersectionality thus expands to argue that previous approaches and literature simplified and essentialised subjective experience by focussing solely on one social identity such as gender or race, and not addressing the inimitable interactions

between the two identities and how they influence each other. This one dominant identity created an exclusion of other pertinent identity categories that may not have been viewed as a priority, which is seen here as an inadequate and inaccurate understanding of identity and subjective experience. In this way, the essence of the intersectionality theory was born out of a need to address the complex interactions between identity categories including race/ethnicity, gender, class etc. that create and include nuanced experience in the world. The theory provides a relevant depth of understanding and insight into the lived experiences of women, especially women of colour. Crenshaw (1991) questions the way in which the experience of Black women has been largely invisible, surrounding the specific intersection of race/ethnicity and gender. She highlights the partial and restricted views of the identities and experiences of women and suggests the need to approach gender and race/ethnicity (among other identity categories) as subjective experiences in context.

Nash (2011) expands on the theory of intersectionality with a critical approach in that the role of intersectionality within Black feminism literature and analysis has become narrower in exclusively focusing on the intersection between gender and race. Although the approach is viewed as a dominant framework for approaching and understanding structures of power in Black feminism, the theory's limitations are acknowledged in considering the narrow viewpoint of simply inquiring into race and gender as prioritized categories. In this way, a more critical approach to intersectionality is needed to view it as theoretically fluid and changing through further research. The concept of intersectionality is concurrently and furthermore viewed here through Anthias' (2013) expanding of intersectionality, in the ensuring of an "important corrective to essentializing identity constructs that homogenize social categories" (p. 3). It has always been, but is more so becoming, crucial to highlight the intersectional and interactive nature of social positionalities, and the way in which identity is formed differently through different intersectional positions.

Intersectionality, and the acknowledgement of the different 'worlds' and contexts in which Black women exist, aims to perpetuate the understanding of all human beings though the "complexity and mutual interdependency of social divisions" (Anthias, 2013, p. 4), and the ways identities and self-concepts are born out of this intricacy of social systems and divisions. This view, in tandem with the foundation to intersectionality presented by Crenshaw (1991) and Nash (2011),

speaks to the spaces that exist 'in-between' interacting social positions and identities, which allow for different approaches and pathways for individual subjective experience (Bhabha, 1994). In this way, alongside intersectionality, the socio-constructivist stance is elaborated on by considering the concept of identity politics as used to unpack this marginal position (Bernstein, 2005). There are contending ways of considering relationships between "experience, culture, identity, politics, and power" (Bernstein, 2005, p. 48), and the influence of each of these aspects on identity negotiation and experience. Identity politics is applied here in terms of the economic, cultural and political influences on identity formation (Dosekun, 2016, Fraser, 2013; Mougoué, 2015), and how 'subjects' are formed and embodied, among the in-between parts of intersectionality and difference (Bhabha, 1994). In this way, the theory of intersectionality is suitable and appropriately supports the study into the lived experience of Black women, in highlighting the complex interactions between identity categories and subjective experience, and including voices of nuance and subjectivity as important and relevant for study and analysis.

3.2 Understandings of Embodiment

The theory of Embodiment has been coined and expanded in many areas of sociology, psychology, and anthropology (among others), in attempting to address the complex place where culture meets with the human body (Piran, 2017; Piran & Teall, 2012). Embodiment is approached here as emphasizing human experience informed by living as and within a physical body, that is crucial to both our social lives, cognition, and our personal sense of self (Conboy et al., 1997; Cregan, 2006; Piran & Teall, 2012; Synnott, 1993; Vannini, 2016). This theoretical framework views the embodied person as an object of significance in and of itself (Piran & Teall, 2012; Vannini, 2016), with the focus on the lived and contextual experience of embodiment. Embodiment is suited to the interpretive framework of the data analysis, and often works together with the interactionist and constructionist frameworks. This acknowledges a person-environment interaction; where people both socially construct and are socially constructed. Embodiment considers and emphasizes experience, as well as various agentic reflections among people in a social context (Howson & Inglis, 2001). It allows for further understanding of the crucial relationship between the embodied experience and the constitution of society (Durkheim, 2014;

Simmel, 2011); which is ultimately important to this study's aims in inquiring into the lived experiences of sociocultural realities surrounding body image, and how these are negotiated with embodiment (and performativity).

The theory of embodiment has been developed from ideas originally formed surrounding Embodied Cognition in the 20th century by Merleau-Ponty (1964; 2012), arguing that our bodies develop in and "with regard to the world" (Moya, 2014, p. 1). The complex interaction between the social world and the subject is emphasised here in a co-existence and intricate connection in how one lives within their body in the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) states that the "essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world" (p 408), allowing for the view of subjectivity to be seen through this lens. This theory further developed within the phenomenological experience in addressing and analysing the way that the body structures an individual's experience, and vice versa (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008). Phenomenology is applied here in speaking directly to exploring the structure of conscious lived experiences (Farina, 2021; Lubashevsky & Plavinska, 2021), as well as an understanding that embodied processes develop and change throughout the lifespan. It is argued that through the body and habit, a subject/individual experiences the world, and through this understanding the theory of embodiment was developed to provide a lens to view human experience as multidimensional and influential on physical/bodily experience.

The body, and the body's complex interactions with its context and environment, contribute to and consists of the meaning that is made of subjective and lived experience. Shilling (2001) suggests the importance of understanding the embodied subject within context, and the focus on phenomenology in providing insight into the lived experience of varied embodiments, a consideration central to the aim of this study. Conboy et al., (1997) further expands on embodiment as specific to female embodiment and feminist theory; addressing the multidimensional tensions surrounding the lived bodily experience of women, and the various cultural meanings that have been imprinted on the female body. This allows for the integration between the lens of intersectionality in addressing the context and social constructs surrounding the body, as well as embodiment in highlighting the body within and between its environment. It is from this stance that the decision to use this framework was made as a foundation on which to base this current

study, due to the focus of experience surrounding the female body, as well as the sociocultural contexts in which the female body exists.

In this way, the study argues for the embodiment and 'doing' of social realities that ultimately determine people's relationship to their body image and physical appearance; also allowing for these views to be fluid in the ever-changing social world in which we live. It is useful in attempting to view and understand how women inhabit their bodies and how their bodies inhabit the world (Piran, 2017). This speaks to the subjective connection to one's body and context, as well as the role and extent of agency within social experience and embodied experience. In this way, and alongside the lens of intersectionality, this study utilises a multidimensional and integrative lens to address the ways in which women make sense of and experience their bodies in the social world.

Embodiment has been further described by Bartky (1988) as relevant and contributing to feminist studies by highlighting the complex and intricate relationships within and between social structures of power, and how this influences an array of ways that women live in their bodies. This allows for the consideration of women who inhabit diverse bodies within the interactions of race, ethnicity, social class, age, sexual orientation, which works hand in hand with the theory of intersectionality in highlighting the importance of these influences on how women decide to live within their bodies and within the world.

3.3 Conclusion

Intersectionality and embodiment as a dual framework are useful and relevant in that it reveals and demonstrates the complex interconnectedness of various identities including race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and gender in relation to one another, but neglects and moves away from essentialising and simplifying complex realities and experiences. Despite its limitations, using an intersectional and embodiment lens for understanding human experience remains valuable and transformative in adding to the production of knowledge surrounding the body image experiences of Black women as social subjects in the world. It is from this multidimensional viewpoint that the reader will gain an in-depth understanding and insight into the lived experiences of the participants in this research study.

Chapter Four: Method and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores this study's research design, data procedure, and data analysis undertaken, and offers information surrounding the background of the participants. It provides information on questions related to the trustworthiness of the study, as well as ethical considerations. Reflexivity is further discussed in this chapter, as well as the limitations of this method of study surrounding the topic and aims.

4.2 Main Research Question

What are the lived experiences of body image among Black women in South Africa?

Within this main research question, are three embedded secondary questions;

4.2.1 What are the sociocultural experiences of body image among Black women in South Africa?

4.2.2 How are body image experiences embodied among Black women in South Africa?

4.2.3 How are the experiences of internalised whiteness and patriarchy understood and embodied among Black women in South Africa?

4.3 Research Design

This study works within a qualitative research design, which emphasizes an in-depth and exploratory inquiry into the thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences of people (Alase, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas, 2006). Qualitative research allows for the collection of in-depth data that is not generalizable to all people or populations, but focuses on rich insight into the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of people in everyday life. This research design is important for this study as the core aim is to explore the phenomenon of body image among Black women who experience varying sociocultural realities. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

was used in the interpretation and analysis of the data. Qualitative research offers a richer quality of data surrounding experiences that cannot be measured or quantified with numbers. In this way, this approach is significant and useful in understanding the way in which people make meaning from their experiences, and how important it is to consider all the contributing factors to one's perception of their experiences.

The qualitative research paradigm works together with a social constructionist approach, claiming that identity and social realities are constructed within and between different contexts and social interactions (Alase, 2017). This position of social constructionism is best suited to this study in terms of the IPA methodology, as well as the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and embodiment. Therefore, considers the social aspects and influence that are experienced differently by people, and acknowledges multiple variations of truths across race, culture, gender, age, and upbringing. This is important because it highlights that people can experience the same phenomena in a particular environment, in diverse and unique ways (Willig, 2013). IPA is a method originating from phenomenology and is a suitable method and approach to meet the objectives and aims of this study. IPA is also useful in that it permits for a critical element to be explored in asking questions surrounding the stories and experiences being shared by the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2009). It enables the researcher to access and attempt to understand the participants' deepest and nuanced feelings and thoughts of their lived experiences (Alase, 2017).

It has been highlighted that qualitative researchers have a stronger focus on the process of the research, more than that of the precise outcomes and findings (Atieno, 2009). In this way, the researcher themselves is a key role-player in the process of collecting data and retrieving quality information from the participants. This is dependent on the researcher establishing a good-enough rapport with participants to trust them with understanding and relaying their experiences (Silverman, 2006). Qualitative research also recognizes the researcher's biases and invites the researcher to evaluate their own position in relation to the context of the research through reflexivity (Willig, 2009). Using qualitative research often uses semi-structured data collection methods for the flexibility of probing when necessary.

4.4 Participants

The cohort of participants in this study consisted of eight people who identified as Black (African, Coloured, and Asian) and female, and were aged between 22-30 years old. Participants were sought around Johannesburg, and found through snowball methodology of collection (Alase, 2017), using various social media platforms. This form of convenient sampling is aligned with an exploratory research design in that this study is not to be generalized or representative of an entire population, and is therefore easier to acquire participants who are more accessible and relevant to the aims of the study (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). The smaller cohort size is consistent with IPA, seeking to uncover the depth of human experience, which is ultimately more concerned with the quality than the quantity of the data (Alase, 2017). The participants ensured consent for the interviews as well as recording, which can be found in Appendices B and C.

The sample included diversity in Blackness and race, as one participant identified as Coloured, one identified as Coloured/Indian, another identified as Indian, and five participants identified as black/African. The differences within the group allowed for depth of insight into their lived experiences, as well as embodiment of their race and womanhood, in a variety of ways.

4.4.1 Table of Participants

*Sample of study containing ages and demographics *pseudonyms used*

Participant	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender/Sex
Delaney*	30	Coloured	Female Cisgender
Tiisetso*	24	Black (African)	Female Cisgender
Kamogelo*	23	Black (African)	Female Cisgender
Luyanda*	24	Black (African)	Female Cisgender
Michelle*	22	Indian	Female Cisgender
Zoey*	26	Indian/Coloured	Female Cisgender
Nozizwe*	23	Black (African)	Female Cisgender
Darah*	29	Black African	Female Transgender

4.5 Data Procedure

The population of interest for this study are people who identify as Black women. The sample was thus a purposive sample chosen due to the criteria for the study (Patton, 1990). In this way, the sample could be considered somewhat homogenous, however there are many elements of heterogeneity in the lived experiences as Blackness and womanhood do not mean or represent any one thing. The sample was obtained through a snowball method, which involved referrals from the first volunteer to point the researcher in the direction of other suitable participants who meet the criteria for the study, and would add value to the sample and data (Alase, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). The first and second participants were found through a social media post about the study, as they volunteered to share their stories and experiences. The information sheet was sent to them both via email, which can be found in Appendix A, and explains the criteria and interest of the topic. Once they confirmed that they understood their participation and involvement, three other names were sent to me from them regarding other Black women that they felt would volunteer to participate. Consent forms for interviews and recording were sent to them via email, which can be found in Appendices B and C, and the same process for collecting the sample was followed thereafter for the remaining participants.

From the outset of the social media post and information letter, it was assumed by the researcher that the interviews will be conducted in English, and a translator would therefore not be required. This is considered as a possible limitation within the sample procedure as it may have been beneficial to explore subjective experience through additional and diverse languages. Once the participants had read the information letters and understood that during the time of COVID-19 the interviews would have to be conducted online, there were several considerations surrounding the participants' access to a device for the interview, as well as internet access for the duration of the call. It was noted that the researcher had to make provisions for the differing levels of access, with all participants having access to a device, but not all of them having easy access to internet. In this way, the narratives of the eight participants used and analysed in this study involve individuals who were available, had a certain level of access to the mode of interview, and were willing to participate and engage in the interview process.

4.6 Data collection

Due to the nature of the interview process being conducted online, the researcher was aware of the possibility of the participants being in their homes, and that their families may have been present or in ear-shot of their stories being shared. This posed as an issue for one of the participants, however her family member did leave the house allowing her more freedom and privacy to speak, before anything was shared with the researcher. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes per participant, which allowed ample time in collecting in-depth information surrounding their inner thoughts, feelings and experiences surrounding their body image. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed for further probing into their subjective experience and understandings of sociocultural influence, which ultimately proved vital towards the depth of the study. Once each of the participants had settled on the call and were ready to begin, an audio recording device was used for recording upon letting the participants know and consent to being recorded.

The interview questions, which can be found in Appendix D, include a semi-structured interview process and contains questions which the researcher could probe into depending on the participant's answers and narratives (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). The interview was opened with a broad question surrounding the participant's views of their body image, which at times were responded to with a need for a brief and broader understanding of the meaning of body image. It was seen that this question was broad enough to open a wide variety of ideas, thoughts and feelings that the participant would bring, and therefore an opportunity to probe into how meaning has been made from their experiences. The follow-up or probing questions that may have come after the initial body image question give more insight into the issues and internalisations surrounding how one comes to maintain the body image they have, and what protective and precipitating factors may exist for each individual participant. Each interview recording was then placed on the researcher's password protected laptop, in a separate file and folder. Thereafter, the transcription process began once all interviews had been conducted and all relevant information gathered. It was important to ensure the quality of each recording for the capturing of important qualities and behaviours within the calls (Willig, 2013), including but not limited to pauses and silences, changes in tone and pitch of voice, giggles or sighs, and different emphasis on various emotive words.

4.7 Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) enquires into the lived experiences of people and the different ways in which they make sense and meaning of those experiences (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA is made up of three core characteristics suited to this research project: including idiographic, inductive, and interrogative aspects. The idiographic aspect of IPA emphasises rich and in-depth data to be the focus of the research, often using a relatively smaller sample of participants, and acknowledging the importance, relevance, and richness of each individual case. The inductive aspect ensures a sense of flexibility and expansion regarding the collection of the themes that emerge within the data (Smith, 2004; Alase, 2017), as is common among many qualitative analytic methods. The interrogative nature of IPA is closely linked to psychology in that it is "concerned with the human experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 5), and therefore relevant in analysing the lived experience of a human phenomenon. This method of analysis has been chosen for this study in order to gain real life subjective information towards the phenomenon of body image, within the theoretical frameworks of embodiment and intersectionality. Thus allowing the researcher to work closely with and interpret the participants' lived experience surrounding body image and the sociocultural influences thereof.

The four-stage process suggested by Smith and Osborn (2007) was followed during analysis, in the attempts to maintain the integrity and quality of information within themes and through interpretation of the data. The first stage of analysis involved the transcription of collected data from the audio-recordings attained during the interviews. Elements of reading and re-reading were then utilized to become familiar with the data, while taking notes of important use of language, and personal thoughts from the researcher in a reflective journal. The second stage involved the identification of initial experiential themes from transcripts, which are shown in the thematic chart in Appendix F. The responses in the sample ranged from 6 to 10 pages of text for each interview transcription and were analysed using IPA. In accordance with the suggestions of Smith et al. (1999), the analysis began by examining the first transcript in detail and themes were identified.

The remaining transcripts were analysed one by one, looking for more instances of the themes extracted from the first transcript, but also identifying new themes that arose as important to individuals within the sample. The third stage surrounded finding any connections between the themes, then developing and constructing meaningful groups in which to organize the themes. Themes which appeared related were clustered together. The transcripts were rechecked to ensure that the themes which appeared to be connected were related verbatim in the transcripts. In the last stage, the themes and main groups were organized into a summary table, where quotations from transcriptions were included beneath each theme for justification and reasoning, to include the participants words, and ultimately ensure the truthfulness and quality of the findings.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained through the internal School of Human and Community Development Ethics Committee, at the University of the Witwatersrand, which can be found in Appendix E. The population of interest are not considered as a vulnerable group, and thus informed consent was obtained. Participants were provided with an information sheet which they could keep, which also contained the researcher's contact details for them to keep and use should they need to. It was emphasised that participation in this study was voluntary, with no benefit for volunteering, and no penalty for choosing to decide not to answer any questions they were not comfortable with answering or deciding not to participate anymore. This was done to ensure that the participants felt comfortable enough to share anything they chose to without fear or concern. Confidentiality was emphasised to the participants before the interviews commenced, as well as after, which was then ensured using pseudonyms. The audio recordings of interviews were kept on a password protected device and will only be kept for two years – where the recordings will be permanently deleted thereafter. Written transcripts were thoroughly edited to eliminate all identifying information and will be kept by the university for possible future use in research.

Establishing rapport with the participants started during the initial conversations on social media about volunteering for the study, where the researcher introduced herself and interest in the issues surrounding race, gender, and embodied experiences. Although the sample is not considered

a vulnerable group, the experiences shared were handled delicately, and the participants were each informed of organisations and hotlines such as The Wits Emthonjeni Center, which they could contact if the interview questions were at all triggering or if they needed a counselling space thereafter. Although the sample of Black women are not considered a vulnerable group, due to the theory and lens of intersectionality used in this study, the group are considered to be marginalised considering the multiple levels of exclusion and oppression they have experienced and endured; but are more importantly viewed and considered as agentic and voiced subjects in the world.

4.9 Validity of the study

Credibility refers to the way that research was conducted when considering the validity, accuracy, and integrity involved in the interpretation and portrayal of the data. As part of trustworthiness, it remains crucial that the results are reliable in order for the research to ensure a fair and desired impact (Cresswell, 2013). As part of ensuring credibility within trustworthiness, an extensive reflection of the researcher has been discussed in the reflexivity section below. This study was also under supervision with a researcher who has extensive experience in the field of qualitative research, with an interest in human experience. In this way, these steps have been taken to ensure the credibility of this research study. A further step could have included the use of a third coder in the process of analysing the research data, however due to the number of participants and the research questions it was decided as an unnecessary step at this stage.

Guba and Lincoln (2000) suggest that the transferability of a study surrounds the ability to transfer or apply the research findings to other and similar contexts. Research is considered valued and relevant if it can offer some insight into the meaning of similar phenomenon or situations in another context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, it is important to note that transferability does not equate to the idea of generalisability; as the essence of qualitative research surrounds in-depth accounts of unique and nuanced experience, as well as the variance in the meaning-making of this experience (Probst, 2015). As such, this research does not claim complete generalisability, however, surrounds the core themes, ideas and experiences that emerge in many other contexts for Black women's body image. Due to the nuanced experience of intersecting identities core to this study such as race, gender, and class; caution should still be taken when considering transferring the findings to other contexts that perhaps have a different focus or priority. It is noted that the

experiences of Black women share a level of homogeneity in their position as largely excluded and marginalised, however, the experiences of Blackness and womanhood are acknowledged as multidimensional and influenced by many other social factors that not all Black women experience or are exposed to. The sample size also makes it difficult to ensure transferability, and it is acknowledged that a significantly larger sample size would be needed to begin a more thorough and accurate discussion surrounding the transferability of the findings to other contexts.

Measures were taken to ensure consistency and dependability in this study through the use of a standardised interview schedule across interviews, interview durations, as well as core questions as part of the semi-structured interview method; which ensures an element of stability (Cresswell, 2013). The nature of semi-structured interviews also further allowed for the topic to remain the same for each participant, as well as acknowledge nuance in subjective experience and leave room for their individual voices. The transcripts were double-checked by both researcher and research supervisor to ensure accuracy of findings, and the same was done once the themes of the research emerged to be reported on.

4.10 Reflexivity

It is argued by Alase (2017) that the in-depth reflexivity of the researcher is crucial to the integrity the qualitative research. Critical reflexivity involves a process of shifting and unpacking underlying beliefs, discourses, practices, and assumptions that one might have towards a topic. Reflexivity also entails that researchers question their own thinking and exploration with regards to the way of interacting with others. Cruz & Sonn, (2010) contend that the process of critical reflexivity is more than a basic self-awareness, but should also include researchers, especially in spaces of critical and community psychology, to be able to interrogate their own contributing factors towards power, oppression, and liberation. With this lens, I outline my reflections in a critical manner. In this way, and with remaining attuned to the lens of intersectionality and embodiment in terms of my gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality; considering my own privilege within each of these aspects.

Due to the restrictions that COVID-19 placed on the data collection process, all interviews were conducted online. When deciding on which online platform to utilise for each participant, it was seen that almost half of the participants had concerns surrounding access to data for the duration of the call. I noticed this difference in access among the participants and noted my own positioning of resources including Wi-Fi and a device. Some interviews were done through WhatsApp video call or voice call, and some on Zoom; and I wondered how the different platforms and access to data might have hindered any free communication during the interviews. At first, it took me a while to feel comfortable with online meetings; wondering whether anything in my background would make them feel uncomfortable, as the online space does sometimes create a feeling of being inside of someone's home or personal space.

Although I reside in South Africa, as do the participants of this study, it became clearer and clearer that the place where race and nationality intersect was evident in that one's identities are often held at different levels of importance or priority to them. Throughout the process, I was confronted by questions surrounding my own Blackness, womanhood, sexuality, class, and nationality in how I understand and embody various sociocultural experiences. Initially, I became concerned about whether the participants viewed me as 'whiter' than them due to my mixed-race presentation, and therefore wouldn't feel open to speaking with me about their authentic racialised and gendered experience. I was aware of this anxiety throughout the process and acknowledging more clearly that all intersections in identity provide nuance to experience. Questions of authenticity and who is allowed to tell the story of Black women arose for me, and I often questioned my role in my exploration of these experiences; being so closely aligned with the criteria for the study.

Although many of the participants' experiences and feelings did align and overlap with mine as a Black woman, the ways and contexts in which we have been socialised were important to continuously reflect on as there would always be differences to sit with and attempt to understand. At times I did have to write about, and discuss in supervision, my own feelings surrounding my body image and what meaning I have made from some of my experiences. This added to the depth and richness of my approach; not only as a researcher, but as a Black woman who embodies and exists in several intersections every day.

I believe that training as a psychotherapist gave me an advantage in being in a space of people sharing intimate details of their lives, as well as rich emotions and uncomfortable realisations. My training also further assisted me with the method of analysis used, as my interpretative skills and awareness allowed for me to explore and unpack their stories and experiences at a deeper level. As a community psychologist in training, I held a consistent awareness of the issues of power dynamics at play, and how my own privilege could have hindered the data collection and analysis processes. It was an aspect of this research that I felt allowed me to remain attuned to their various experiences, intersections and embodiments, as well as accept and hold what they brought up in the space as real and important to them within the context. I recognised my privilege throughout the research process, knowing that many aspects of my appearance provided me with a level of privilege in many spaces.

I realised that I was further privileged in that I am often able to 'move between spaces' as my race speaks to an ambiguity as being viewed as somewhat 'coloured' or mixed-race. This privilege also occurred in my ability to understand (but not converse in) some vernacular languages that my participants may have used in their describing of their experiences as authentic and personal to them. I 'move between spaces' through the texture of my hair, through my class and my relative access to somewhat affluent spaces, as well as spaces with limited resources. My nationality being Zimbabwean is something that has hindered my experiences of what being a citizen affords you, however I recognised that my other intersections of race and class deem me a 'different' kind of foreigner to other more disadvantaged foreigners. As a woman, I believe that I had an advantage in understanding and holding my participants' experiences and emotions surrounding their body image, and knowing the layers of prejudice that intersecting identities often allow; I had to become aware of my own prejudices surrounding how and what I feel women 'should' present or embody. Through these realisations, as well as my capacity to hold a variety of human experience and emotion, I believe that my role as the researcher ensured an accurate-as-possible account and understanding of their experiences. With this reflection, it is considered that confirmability has been ensured in that my own biases, prejudices, and short-comings have been processed such that the research findings involve a level of confirmability.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter explored the method of IPA and qualitative research as crucial to the aims of this study. It also discussed the participants, method of sample collection as well as data collection. The ethical considerations were considered as central and have been outlined in detail. The chapter further provided insight into the researcher's reflexivity and ensuring the trustworthiness of the present study within the field of social research.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings outlined, in relation to existing literature explored, as well as the dual framework of Intersectionality and Embodiment, all within the Socio-constructionist paradigm. Through the understanding of embodiment and intersectionality within an individual's identity, as well as the socially constructed influence of these; the realities of how Black women make sense of their body image and sociocultural experiences can be unpacked.

The chapter explores the themes and subthemes that emerged within the data and expands in identification and discussion of these themes. A list of superordinate themes was produced, and sub-themes identified. The main themes include 'How Black is Black-enough?', 'Internalisation of Whiteness, and Psychological Well-being', 'How Woman is Woman-Enough?', 'Context; Where and How we grow up', as well as Access and Barriers. 'How Black is Black-enough?' surrounds experiences of Blackness and explores the racial tensions of other races in context that may not be white or Black. This theme also highlights aspects of one's proximity to whiteness in their racial experience, and what meaning is construed by this. 'How Woman is Woman-Enough?' surrounds the experience of womanhood in context and explores the role of patriarchy in highlighting the male gaze upon Black women's bodies. 'Context, Where and How we grow up', explores the contexts of schooling, social media as well as cultural/lifestyle ideals in influencing and underpinning how Black women experience their bodies in context, as well as make meaning of their body image experiences. A theme chart can be found in Appendix E.

5.2 How Black is Black-enough?

The *How Black is Black-enough?* superordinate theme is comprised of experiences surrounding aspects of the participants' body image experiences that were not only related to, but often defined and/or determined by racial overtones. Two important aspects are considered here, which include the beauty standards in context, as well as embodied experience.

Beauty Standards

How Black is Black-enough? was found as a major theme in relating to the literature, which speaks to beauty standards as being viewed as intricately linked with and defined by and within racial terms (Robinson-Moore, 2008). The beauty standards upheld by the various Black women within the sample show the nuanced experience of Blackness in context, and the experiences that embody and influence contribute to their body image. The experiences and standards found included closely aligning beauty to white characteristics and standards; influencing their experience of Blackness to surround 'otherness' and inferiority. Experiences were also found to surround a sense of Blackness as a form of responsibility, as well as a form of privilege in certain spaces. The findings in this way can be viewed in tandem with the literature, in that the beauty standards often upheld in society have been constructed through multiple lenses, one of which involves racial associations attributed to various body and/or beauty characteristics. These include the aspects of skin colour, body size and shape, hair colour and texture, as well as more general features and looks (Altabe, 1998; Hall, 1996; Swami et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 1999). The domination of Eurocentric beauty standards within society and media has been shown as predominant for centuries, with the progressive nature of Afrocentric characteristics taking up more space in recent times; all of which can be seen throughout the stories divulged by the participants (Brand, 2000; Dosekun, 2016; Phoenix, 2014).

Embodied Experience

Although race has often been perceived as concrete and unchanging, there are various experiences and expressions of race and ethnicity that can overlap and sometimes contradict the social constructions and ideals that have been set. The concept of Blackness is perceived here as something that is experienced, embodied, and negotiated. Blackness as a subtheme is described and embodied as a racialized position in society, experienced by all women of colour. Blackness, explored as an embodied experience, can be understood through the socially constructed ideals surrounding the Black race and ethnicity, what it means to be 'authentically' Black, and how one embodies and performs their Blackness according to their individual self-concepts, as well as upbringing (Craig, 2002; Patton, 2006; Reel at al., 2008). Blackness is not only referred to here as one of the pertinent criteria for this study, but also in the ways in which the participants experience,

embody, and make meaning of their body image experiences. This also suggests a constant space of negotiation, as grounded in general understanding that Blackness is something negative and to be avoided (Watson et al., 2019; Wilfred & Lundgren, 2021). In this way, the aspects of appreciation, validation and ownership of their Blackness varies according to their context and experience at any given time.

5.2.1 Early Experiences

Society constructs ideals and appropriate discourse, teaching girls from a young age, how and what are the ideals to uphold and the aspects of identity to discard (Poran, 2006; Watson et al., 2019). Through the narratives of Black women surrounding their early and continued experiences of Blackness, they are seen and expressed as important throughout their upbringing, and as influencing their body image and sense of self as Black women. Tiisetso mentioned the early exposure to negative attitudes and beliefs around women's Blackness, and the aesthetic associated with it -

> *was like the first encounter of the way black females' aesthetic is not generally accepted – in society… then people are gonna grow up thinking that that's right or its wrong, so on and so forth*

pre-empting the common, often internalised, and later embodied sense of inferiority to white (or 'whiter') counterparts. It is described that her early exposure to a feeling of being lesser-than, largely unaccepted, and excluded in society (Fleetwood, 2011; Mahendran, 2007; Patton, 2006; Shaw, 2005), and the process of having to negotiate her own understanding of Blackness through these experiences. Tiisetso is expressing the influence over the way one thinks and sees themselves surrounding an early experience that appears to lay the foundation of a Black woman's body image and how they relate to their non-Black counterparts (Wormelli, 2016). Young girls are subjected to this exposure of ideals and are taught that their Blackness is something to be negotiated and 'figured out' depending on their context -

> *coz it was around the time when my mom and dad separated so I must have been like eight or nine years old… which is *scary* because I have a nine-year-old… so. That's a bit intense to think about it – wow. (Delaney)*

> *I think another is like I also did dancing as a child and teenager… and so that meant that (deep breath) like I also chose a classical dance so like I did ballet – and ballerinas look a certain way and I don't look like a ballerina… and so my dance teacher wasn't exactly the most forgiving about that… (Kamogelo)*

Delaney is expressing that as a young child, she began to value characteristics that she was taught were the ideal (Rice, 2016), and relays her shock in how young one can be when made aware of their body and what it says and does in various spaces. Kamogelo describes a feeling of being outed and excluded from the standard ballerina image from a young age when starting ballet dancing. There was a feeling of being in the wrong for the way she looked from a young age, becoming aware that she did not fit into the standard within her context. The early experiences are shown here to be impactful on the body images of Black women, in how their affective experience has been made sense of. Black women often feel shocked at their early experience of how they are made to feel about their bodies. There are also feelings of exasperation and annoyance, as well as that of being under trial or defensive about their Blackness and identity. Participants describe feelings and experiences that are common among Black women; learning from a young age how society responds to their appearance (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011).

5.2.2 Aesthetics; personal and societal ideals

The embodying of Blackness occurs daily and through various lenses, including the authentic 'Black aesthetic' which may be understood as being characteristic of a bigger body weight and size, as well as a curvier shape, darker skin, and more pronounced features (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Swami et al., 2008; Wilfred & Lundgren, 2021). The 'Black figure' as described within the results refers to many of these aspects, as being an ideal of Blackness, but one that is also under contention when it comes to society maintaining a sense of Black inferiority (Patton, 2006). In this way, the ideal associated with Blackness might be praised in some contexts, but it still remains that Blackness itself is kept as the substandard; leaving Black women to constantly question and negotiate aspects of their embodiment of Blackness and what position they are in due to this. The experience links to an idea of conflict between 'white' and 'black' characteristics, where some are thought to look better on others but the personal ideal and experience does not necessarily match; and often *can't* match due to the reality of different bodies.

Black women show various understandings through their experiences, surrounding the personal and societal ideals regarding aesthetics as linked closely to aspects of race and gender that exist within their contexts. Their experiences enable them to make meaning of their body image, as well as their positionality in the world. Kamogelo describes the 'Black figure' and 'Black aesthetic' in making associations between bodily characteristics and race, and further mentions a 'look' that is known commonly as an attribute of Blackness, that can often be viewed as not truly appreciated on Black women themselves -

> *like about trends and standards and what's happening with the body imagery as of late… uhm… (deep breath) personally, I think… yeah globally the – the hour glass figure, the very 'Black' figure – is extremely favoured, but it seems to be more favoured on the opposite race*

This experience and understanding of Blackness involve an aspect of societal construction, and appropriation of aesthetics and ideals on non-Black people, and seems to continue to maintain the hierarchy of racial lines when it comes to characteristics that are known as 'white' and 'black' (Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006). The 'Black' aesthetic or characteristics are further explored, surrounding associations to having less refined facial features, larger body sizes and curvier shapes, darker skin colour, etc (Capodilupo, 2015; Fleetwood, 2011). In this way, Kamogelo expands on the idea that Blackness can be a standard that is both rejected on some and sought after on others.

Testimonies expand further to express a conflict that might exist between those personal ideals and societal ideals of what Blackness ought to look like and represent. Delaney further adds to this experience and feeling of conflict and negotiation within her person experience -

> *Sooo I've got a very round nose. And I don't like it…*
>
> *honestly like, I'm not even going to lie – I uhm – I mean it looks great on other people, but I mean I think that – with relation to my body I naturally have a bigger bum, and I've never liked my bum. So, I've always looked more at skinnier people and I've always found that more attractive. And not even to say that like I look at women wo are curvier or like consider more "big girls" - and I've looked at them and I've thought that they're beautiful but when I*

*think of myself in my mind like what would make me *really* happy – I always think *thin**

expanding on the thin ideal as a sought-after standard among women in society. However, the standard is one that is under constant negotiation with how one's Blackness is experienced and embodied (Capodilupo, 2015; Swami et al., 2008). Delaney is expressing that she holds a deep negative feeling surrounding her personal characteristics that may align with a more 'Black aesthetic'. She experiences her personal ideal as more aligned with thinness, and claims that for shifting social ideals, the 'Black aesthetic' with bigger and curvier features can be appreciated on other and not the self. In this way, the ideas, and constructions of Blackness in society are portrayed and experienced as weighing heavy in one's evaluation of the self against other people, women, and specifically Black women. Delaney indicates a level of shame that also comes with owning one's Blackness and femininity (Fischer, 2018; Wicomb et al., 1998), seeming to defend the fact that the Black aesthetics or looks can still look good or be valuable at a distance; but not when it is something personal, something 'too close to home'.

It is also found that one's personal ideals might and might not be aligned with the social ideals surrounding Blackness in context, often adding to that conflict and negotiation around a Black woman may experience her appearance as related to her personal ideals, as well as what might be upheld in her context (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Mwaba & Roman, 2009). Participants divulged their personal ideals of beauty in terms of racial characteristics and aesthetics, expressing a range of difference in opinions, ideals, and experiences. Nozizwe expressed that -

the most beautiful woman has always been like, like a like a really dark chocolate skin. I've just always thought that skin tone is absolutely gorgeous. The dark like dark chocolate skin tone with - with like a really healthy Afro…
I've never really been a fan of like the light skin and I've always just had a thing for like, darker tones and yeah, I think I almost felt like I think in it was also annoying growing up in Zim as well and even coming here, people never even associated me with the country I'm from because apparently there's no light skinned people there… because I consider darker skin to be more African

Nozizwe narrates her own wonder and awe at the embodiment of her skin, wearing it like the smoothness of chocolate as a rich and luxurious experience. She describes a longing for the richness and sense of authenticity to her experience as has been appointed in what it means to be Black. This changed for her when she immigrated and was made aware that she was not viewed in this way. Nozizwe goes on to express her deep frustration with how her personal ideals do not quite match her view of her physical experience. This is viewed alongside her skin colour and nationality which are major attributing factors to how she views what it means to be Black or "more African". She touches on a contrast in the ideal and experience of racially defined characteristics of body and beauty, and how Nozizwe has embodied various ideas within her intersectionalities – ultimately influencing how she sees and feels about her body (Cotter et al., 2015; Kelch-Oliver &Ancis, 2011; Walker, 2011). For Nozizwe, race and nationality come together to create racial conflicts, which appear to be negotiated and explored in the daily embodiment and performance of these intersectional factors and ideals. This crucially speaks to the experience of Black women in their unique contexts, and the nuanced experience of body image.

The ideals that are upheld in different contexts do not always align, with the way Black women are 'supposed' to look, or have historically looked, and this mismatch can affect the way Black women grow up to perceive their bodies. Tiisetso expresses -

> *because surely you are wanting me to lose weight like because you are always pointing out that I've gained – but now like if its closer to your ideal you don't really like recognise it? You know so the kind of thing like you're so quick like to call me out in front of people when it's like weight gain but when it's like weight loss it's like ah – okay whatever – like life continues.*

Suggesting that people appear to be more vocal with their ideals when it comes to what appears to not fit, it is noticed and recognised when someone does not fit their standard. Tiisetso expresses this mismatch in ideals and presentation, with what appears to be accompanied by a feeling of hopelessness and exasperation for either not fitting the ideal and being ridiculed for it, or working hard to fit the ideal but then it is not recognised or praised. This attitude present in many contexts can affect Black women in their negotiation of how their Blackness, gender, socioeconomic status,

and sexuality can be expressed (Cotter et al., 2015; Mwaba & Roman, 2009; Walker, 2014). Blackness can also exist as both an ideal and as something that is undesirable -

> *years and years of such insecurity of it… and - also just being so dark… (giggles and pause) Yeah, like my dark skin. Um, I don't know like - I think I have a proper fear of the sun like – of being in it too long… I have these stretch marks and I don't know where they came from… but they the - the ugly purple ones, those ones that look like you been doing stuff to your body? It looks - awful. It's like these dark thick purple stretch marks (Michelle)*

Michelle describes a feeling of fear and insecurity that continues to plague her experience of her body image. She mentions an experience that continues to affect her understanding of her dark skin and scars as contributing to her Blackness, as well as the experience of summer and the sun as posing a threat to one's physical characteristics in relation to a lighter skin ideal. She avoids her the sun as a threat to her fears of being dark, and what it means for her. This is an added association because although race is a social construct, as is gender, physical attributes are perceived as being natural/unchangeable – even though many try to change them due to unsatisfaction or discontent (Patton, 2006; Rodin et al., 1984; Tantleff et al., 2011). In this way, the ideal associated with Blackness might be praised in more contexts, but it still remains that Blackness itself is kept as the substandard; leaving Black women to constantly question and negotiate aspects of their embodiment of Blackness and what position they are in due to this. The experience links to an idea of conflict between 'white' and 'black' characteristics, where some are thought to look better on others but the personal ideal and experience does not necessarily match; and often *can't* match due to the reality of different bodies.

5.2.3 Embodied Experiences

Participants expressed their experience of their Blackness and racialized position in society as something that is an unpleasant experience, and something that is inferior to others (Patton, 2006; Teeger, 2015). Kamogelo expresses -

> *an example I think is something like summer – you in the summer like how you just wear less and that is very very normal because its hot – and so uhm in*

summer now the thing that I have never forgotten is how in primary school and yeah like a bit of high school uhm… some of the guys always teased uhm black girls' legs – and these were black guys to be specific – and the reason why is I guess um our knees are darker and when you – you know have P.E and stuff like you grow darker over time so – in the beginning of summer you look like one shade and then later on you looked a different shade and they always like pointing things out – things like that… and so (deep breath) in summer like I definitely hear the echoes of their – like that torment and that taunting and stuff so – sometimes in the beginning like I really have to work over time in terms of "it's okay, you're allowed to wear short skirts you're allowed to uhm… your legs are fine. You are able-bodied – your legs work, they are great and yes your knees and are dark and yes you have all these scars – but doesn't everyone?" so I have to work really really hard to – in the beginning of that season to warm up to it

Kamogelo is expressing her experience of 'torment' as a younger Black girl, as she felt belittled and lesser-than compared to her Black male counterparts, as well as the broader counterpart of Whiteness. She describes her experience of having to work harder to accept herself during the summer time when more of her body is revealed, showing the process of meaning-making surrounding these experiences in how one's default position might be to feel slighted and devalued due to their Blackness (Fleetwood, 2011; Patton, 2006). It is an experience she has 'never forgotten' and foregrounds decisions she might make to this day, surrounding how she chooses to express her Blackness and her gender, as well as how she views herself and body image altogether (Fleetwood, 2011; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Poran; 2006; Walker, 2014). This provides an extremely rich lived narrative into the embeddedness of Whiteness and white ideals in gender and Blackness as intersectional aspects of identity (Crenshaw, 1991; Dosekun, 2016; Swami et al., 2008). The Black male appears to work as an instrument of internalised and embodied prejudice against Black women and allows for the hegemonic whiteness and patriarchy to reproduce inaccessible standards of being (Coetzee & Perrett, 2011; Shelembe, 2014).

the thing is like as a coloured woman - I – I can't exactly speak for other races or for other people – but my experience was that I did grow up in a coloured

> *uhm area in KZN, and… generally speaking, a lot of what people – or girls were doing were based off of what boys were saying (Delaney)*

Delaney further portrays this embeddedness of Whiteness and patriarchal gaze in the way Black girls are raised to view their bodies, and the influence that is imposed from a young age into their embodied experience. This association intricately connects the experience of race with gender, by reflecting what a gendered woman of colour may experience in relation to her Blackness, as well as the overall male gaze and influence on beauty ideals (Patton, 2006; Shaw, 2005). Tiisetso makes reference to the ways in which society has portrayed Blackness regarding hair, with thoughts and images of Blackness being reduced to something animalistic/primitive and unruly -

> *And I remember one of our art teachers had said that "your hair looks like a mane" to me and this other girl – that had natural hair. And she was like "you guys need to tame your hair – you guys' hair looks like a mane yeah so I was just like uhm… "excuse me?" this is how my hair is like – what do you want me to do?"*

This speaks to the integrated discrimination in the Black woman's experience and understanding of their bodies and appearance in society. Tiisetso describes an experience that left her feeling taken-aback and in disbelief of how her natural hair was being approached. She asks the question "what do you want me to do" and it is part of the negotiation of what one must *do* to be accepted in certain spaces (Patton, 2006). It leaves a feeling of helplessness and inadequacy in learning that one's natural state of being is not accepted and is deemed 'wrong' and untamed. It further suggests the role of being raised with these ideas and ideals, and how one must negotiate their experience alongside the double prejudice of being Black and female. In this way, it seems that the experience of one's Blackness can be negative in carrying with it harsh, critical, and discriminatory undertones that keep it at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Further findings show the way in which Black women are influenced by whiteness and patriarchy as the normative standards from a young age, to consider their future with regards to how they appear (Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006). Tiisetso expresses an embodied experience of discontent and dissatisfaction with her appearance -

the one time like I felt like I wanted to change who I am really… was – my dental formula as… when I did my operation for my jaw – so that only came when I was… nineteen twenty? When I actually had an operation to reconstruct how my jaw was – uhm mainly because I felt uncomfortable like – that's the one of the first things like that people see about you? And like they do judge you like on how you look (giggles)… in terms of like presentation wise of your face? And I just thought like mmmh no like my under bite is too uhm – severe for people and like I don't think like I would be… not shunned upon but like you know… I think I would be judged like… especially like entering the working world and – what like what is seen as professional and norm like of the way to look… yeah like it was definitely aesthetically driven like… I didn't feel comfortable with it you know… I didn't feel comfortable to smile – to take pictures – none of that

Tiisetso is describing a moment of negotiation for her when it became evident that the way she looked did not fit into a norm that was socially accepted, welcomed, or praised. She mentioned changing 'who she really is' by making a change to have dental surgery for her underbite, linking her appearance to her identity and as something people perceive and judge her by. An element of 'freakery' is explored here (Maddox, 2021), and was described here as something 'too severe' for people to handle or tolerate.

It is also true that Blackness is an ideal and experience that has been more recently valued and appreciated among Black women, with trends in body positivity as well as self-love and confidence. Tiisetso expresses an experience of starting to value and care for her natural hair -

So I think uhm… societal pressures or like societal indoctrination has made me feel like – the perfect hair is straight hair, relaxed hair, you know. Hair that can be styled like how you know – let's say white females hair is styled… And I think like my hair has gone through a whole entire journey – like – when I was younger, I guess I – I felt the need to always have it straight? And not necessarily appreciate the natural texture? So like now – for the past two years – I've been trying to really like embrace this natural texture and see how I can work with it and what I can do with it you know – in its natural form.

> *I even remember going to the principal's office and like complaining about that like that's not right like how can they be calling my hair a mane*

She describes the way in which whiteness and the politics of hair have been deeply embedded into the norm and what is sought after among young girls (Patton, 2006; Swami et al., 2008). She is expressing that as a younger individual she had learnt to value straight hair as the standard, internalising and upholding whiteness as an ideal (Harper & Choma, 2019; Patton, 2006; Seet & Paradies, 2021). She saw this as a societal norm and evaluated herself against it, further suggesting and expressing her feelings of shock, as well as hurt, over the scrutiny and social undermining she reflects on, now that she is an older individual. This experience created a conflict within Tiisetso, and manifests today as a journey she has undertaken in trying to resolve and overcome this conflict. Over time, Tiisetso has learnt to accept and value herself and her appearance more -

> *my hair – so I looove my hair (giggles) love love love it – like to the point where I'm like I don't want anybody to mess it up, cut it, you know. And I think like my hair has gone through a whole entire journey…*

which seems to include an aspect of denying the social ideals that are constructed to praise a white aesthetic and shows an attitude and need to value aspects of Blackness (Burnette, 2017; Patton, 2006; Wood-Barcalow, 2016). There seems to be a turning point at which Black women either abandon various ideals to appreciate their Black characteristics, but one that seems to be made from those more negative early experiences. Tiisetso describes it as a "journey"; something that must be decidedly undertaken to achieve, and that is not simply reached without effort. In this way, the embodied experiences of Blackness involve the spectrum -

> *I feel like, the way in which its being depicted in society right now… has definitely made me like more comfortable to even try and go upon this journey (deep breath) and I still have a lot to learn like in terms of what products are best for my hair, the right thing to do, because I've never known anything else but to relax you know, so now I have to go on that journey of finding uhm my routine when it comes to my natural hair – is one that I still have to you know learn more about research more about – but the space has definitely been created for me like there's more of a welcoming nature about it and so it's not so daunting anymore*

Tiisetso is articulating that the changes that have occurred in society surrounding appreciation of Blackness and Black aesthetics have allowed her to feel safer and freer to explore her appearance in this way, which has allowed her to feel positive and appreciative of both her Blackness and her body (Wood-Barcalow et al., 2010).

5.2.4 Denial of Blackness / Proximity to Whiteness

It can be understood that many identities that fall into the greyer areas of broader experience, are at times performed and embodied as closer to or further away from the 'norm' (Fleetwood, 2011; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Rice, 2016). The constant space of negotiation is further understood through the ways that Black women embody their gendered and racial positions, how they may experience and place whiteness as an ideal, and what histories and experiences have underlined their current social existence. This has been done through various practices, including skin-lightening/ tanning, plastic surgery, clothing, hairstyles, exercise, and food control. It is seen to create further conflicts for social categories; blurring binaries of race and ethnicity and allowing for different forms of bodily expression. One's proximity to Whiteness is also explored and understood as an embodied experience within ethnic identity, and can be understood as a conflictual ideal that influences Black women, whether brought up in societies that favour whiteness or not (Brand, 2000; Swami et al., 2008). This further represents a spectrum of race, in that some characteristics can lean more to one side than the other. This also suggests that the closer or further away one is from whiteness can determine their social standing or treatment; but generally, that closer to whiteness is more broadly socially acceptable.

The notion of colourism is explored by two participants as having described their experience of being Black but not having dark skin, which can be associated with both privilege and misfortune in the Black experience -

> *uhm like with skin colour – like I think that's where I'm a bit privileged like I'm quite light-skinned, so especially like now I'm bringing up issues of like colourism (Luyanda)*

Luyanda expresses her experience of having lighter skin as a Black woman, describing the privilege that is associated with her because of this. It is noted that historically lighter-skinned

Black women have been favoured for their proximity to Whiteness (Patton, 2006; Walker, 2014). This experience impacts how one perceives and feels about their body, considering their social positioning in society and what it affords them. On the other hand, Nozizwe describes her experience of being lighter-skinned as one that is of misfortune and exclusion -

> *people never even associated me with the country I'm from because apparently there's no light skinned people there*

Nozizwe's experience portrays a feeling of helplessness when it comes to how people perceive you, when you might be aligned with a certain identity but the way you look is not broadly affiliated with that intersection or identity. Blackness, when considered a racial position historically oppressed and discriminated against, is considered an intersection in one's identity that is difficult and challenging to navigate in social spaces (Patton, 2006).

> *like I can't change my skin colour I'm a black woman – that's never gonna change and the sun makes everyone darker – so I can't change that (Kamogelo)*

Kamogelo further expresses a feeling of helplessness and exasperation in being unable to change her racial and gender and speaks to the constant need for the Black woman to deny her Blackness to attain a closer proximity to Whiteness. The helplessness is further shown in that this ideal is not only impossible, but is detrimental to ethnic, cultural, and personal identity in how constructs and makes meaning of their self-image (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Patton, 2006; Poran, 2004; Walker, 2014). Within this consideration of one's 'extent' of Blackness and proximity to Whiteness, it is found that globally as well as in the South African context, Blackness is inclusive of many different 'races' and cultures, which exist on a spectrum between Blackness and Whiteness (Khutlang, 2018; Mwaba & Roman, 2009). Participants divulged testimonies of an 'in-between' position, where Delaney expresses -

> *like in your little coloured group - you have the people who are considered better because they're features are better – whether that be that your skin is lighter? Or that your hair is softer? Straighter? Uhm… accent-wise if you sound "not as coloured" it – it's a thing. I – I don't know I think – that – the – that people who are coloured hate being coloured – that are more white*

which was then further connected to an aspect of proximity to whiteness in terms of which characteristics might be considered 'better' than others, within the broader experience of Blackness. This participant introduces the aspects of standards of beauty in terms of whiteness in ideals and aesthetics, as related to Blackness in the Coloured community. Zoey continues to express the difficulty in holding a generalised ideal of one thing/characteristic, versus negotiating that ideal against a more personal ideal and experience. She describes that -

> *I mean I love afros I think they're beautiful I love that curly hair that just sticks out in all directions, I love the coloured side of my family and when they leave their hair loose and natural and curly it's so stunning and I actually admire it on them I think it's wonderful – but on myself – I almost feel like I'm… like I need to hide that part of myself? I need to straighten my hair constantly*
>
> *I think in my case it's a big denialism of the coloured parts of myself. And I'm definitely ashamed about that too you know? Because I don't want to feel that and be ashamed of any parts of myself, but I guess I am*
>
> *because like the coloured side of my family were very uhm – very coloured like they are from Cape Town and have these deep coloured accents and I know like I would hear comments and jokes made about the coloured accent and what it was associated with like lesser and lower class people, stupid people who weren't educated, and just the associations that as I was growing up I just wanted to get as far away from them as possible*

Zoey describes her personal conflict between ideals and expression; how she can appreciate Black aesthetics on someone else but not on herself. This is expressed as how she has made meaning of her social position as a Black woman brought up with embedded and internalised white ideals. She speaks of 'hiding' parts of herself, alluding to feelings of shame and rejection of her Blackness in search of a Whiter aesthetic as socially more acceptable (Patton, 2006; Shaw, 2005; Swami et al., 2008). The feelings of shame are double-bound due to being ashamed of both her Black affiliations, as well as the actual denial of her Blackness to achieve a closer proximity to Whiteness. There is a form of double-consciousness in this negotiation of identity (Wilfred & Lundgren, 2021), which further portrays the complexities in racial and gendered intersections and their influence on how Black women make meaning of their experiences and body image. There is a

further expression of the intersectionality of class as playing a role in the experience and understanding of gender and Blackness (Levine & Smolak, 2010; Swami, 2015). This intersection of class deepens the experience of the Black woman in the valuation of different bodies and what they may mean for their socioeconomic standing (Patton, 2006; Sabik et al., 2010; Swami, 2015). Zoey's shame is seen here in acknowledging that the lower one is on the race, gender, and class spectrums of identity; the less value is associated with your position and society. This is something Zoey has learnt as a young girl and has internalised various ideals of whiteness as well as a higher socioeconomic status as associated with whiteness and has expressed her embodied experience of her blackness and womanhood in this way.

It has been found that it is possible for Black women experiencing negative body image to be inclined to deny their Blackness in whichever form possible, as their negative views characteristics may be connected to 'how Black' they are perceived, ad perceive themselves (Anderson-Fye, 2009; Craig, 2002; Swami et al., 2008; Walker, 2014). Blackness experienced here on a type of continuum can be seen as 'too little' Blackness, and 'too much' Blackness, in connection to one's body image to be experienced as positive and meaningful. Experiences are shown to be intricately linked with the idea of one's proximity to whiteness, with regard to a Eurocentric societal (and personal) expectation of the self (Shaw, 2005; Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006), the media representation of standards and ideals (Cafri et al., 2005; Tiwari, 2014), as well as what the spectrum of race and the alignment to whiteness can do for one's body image, racial and gendered identification. Zoey discusses -

> *and like exploring the proximity to blackness and whiteness and how these different things are actually taught to us in different ways throughout our development and upbringing, and how like we embody various aspects of what we actually think is better or acceptable at the end of the day*

further suggesting the extent of influence within the development of Black women and linking the meaning-making and embodiment of these ideals in alignment with how a Black woman chooses to express herself and perform her identities (Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006). As beauty has historically, and continually, been aligned with Whiteness, it has been found that there is an increase of negotiation on what this means for the experience of Blackness in women seeing themselves as beautiful and/or worthy. Michelle discusses the role of media and retail -

> *was just like this pretty white skinny girl that we've always been surrounded by and bombarded with in terms of beauty and like goals I guess… like when we were little the barbies were all white, and like role models on TV or celebs, it was all the white skinny girls, and maybe the odd black girl here and there – but that no one wanted to be you know?*

This points out to the reality that many Black girls are exposed to images and ideals of Whiteness and standards that are more aligned to Eurocentric views (Burnette et al., 2017; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Poran, 2006). which in turn embeds ideas from a very young age that allude to the fact that Blackness and the 'Black woman' are not the ideals to aspire to. This reality does range from minor images, toys and games as mentioned by participant Michelle, but can include more degrading, intruding and difficult experiences to negotiate as indicated in the literature (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Poran, 2006).

5.2.5 Internalisation of Blackness, and Psychological well-being

Blackness, including and alongside all of the negative complications that have historically and continually impacted the way Black women feel about themselves, has been explored in the ways in which body image experiences can both be internalised as a source of toxicity and negativity, as well as strength and resilience. The internalisations are viewed here as innate experiences that influence both conscious and unconscious views and understandings of one's body image. The work of Fanon, as cited in Hook (2004), is used and referred to here as part of the crucial literature in unpacking how internalisations may occur for Black women in a post-colonial context. The subtheme of the internalisations arose as the expressions and embodiments of ideals as the Black women have grown up to incorporate into their daily existence. The internalisations occur due to the various contexts in which women are raised; being socialised into a positive and uplifting internalisation of Blackness, as well as a negative and demeaning internalisation of Blackness.

I think sometimes it can be toxic, like sometimes I can have a toxic – like I treat it in a very toxic manner and I think it does then like – your mental space is then maybe physicalized (Kamogelo)

and like I just instantaneously feel depressed as soon as I wake up… uhm, I think I'm very angry. Uhm… like I'm super angry about how my body looks and that I've got to this point like in a period of three months, and I guess I'm just in a space where I'm doing everything I can to ignore it and avoid looking at it or acknowledging it – but like the more I'm aware of how much weight I'm gaining, the more I'm like eating to comfort myself… and it's just a kind of sinking feeling (Zoey)

I think I think I was being gobbled up by depression I was about to just go over the edge, over the edge so, I think there's a, there's just a moment where if it's got to be life, it has to be also like authentic… Admitting to be a woman… (pause) So you lean on the privileges of what this body can afford you when you look a certain way so you failed a part of your soul like instead of [looking] how you really want (Darah)

The women describe extreme feelings of 'sinking', depression and a toxicity surrounding the ways in which they have been made to feel about their bodies in their different experiences. Many negative words and comments appear to have been internalised (Cotter et al., 2015; Weekes, 1997), and shape the ways Black women make meaning of their identities in context. As a focus of a psychoanalytic understanding of Black women's views and personalities in a postcolonial context (Hook, 2004), it can be seen that an underlying wish for something different to their reality/experience, is prevalent in their experience of their body image. Darah speaks about a level of 'authenticity' of being, that is ultimately created by the influences that are internalised by Black women. One' psychological wellbeing is therefore significantly impacted and influenced by the ways in which Black women are viewed in society against the standards that they try to, and sometimes cannot, reach or uphold. Participants describe the ways in which they have been made to feel like a failure, inauthentic in their appearance and expression, angry, and avoidant of their resources for change or a possibility for positivity. These influences can have a negative impact on Black women, and many Black women struggle with these feelings that plague their negotiation

of ideals and identities in their contexts (Cafri et al., 2005; López-Guimerà et al., 2010; Rodin, 1984).

Blackness, however, is also something that has been more recently valued, appreciated, and praised in various contexts (Maddox, 2021; Walker, 2014), in attempts to bridge the gap created by a colonial and apartheid-ridden context and expectations. In the shift towards a less essentialist view of Blackness and Black bodies (Weekes, 1997), many contexts attempt in different ways to allow for diverse expressions of Blackness that do not necessarily solely surround physicality, and can speak to the conscientisation of the hegemony of Whiteness in society.

> *my mom would also just say like – "but you're so blessed because your legs work, your knees function – your ankles and everything – like your toes stretch and you can feel them stretching and just everything works the way it does ad you should be grateful and like give thanks for that… so if somebody comments on that something just be like thank you God for that thing and how it works" you know and to this day like after an activity or doing something I'm just like "oh my gosh thank you like toes, thank you for helping me balance" or whatever I'm doing at the time like that's definitely like an aspect of my positivity and being like able and functional in my body and like giving thanks to my body for it (Kamogelo)*

Kamogelo expresses several aspects of influence on the way she has learnt to view her body positively; her mother during family interactions (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Walker, 2014); the presence of religion (Bauer et al., 2017), and an appreciation and gratefulness towards one's body as functional and strong (Williams et al., 2004). Kamogelo describes feelings of thankfulness in place of feeling belittled by negative comments; she has learnt to value her body in a way that cannot be reduced to the aesthetics, but encompasses all that her body is, does, and represents for her in terms of a higher power and purpose. There are feelings that speak to the need and attempt to de-essentialise the Black and female experience, and to create a space for other influences and voices when making meaning of how they feel about and respond to their bodies.

> *I think I would just be in like a very confident mood in a mood where it's like, you know what, like, actually God made me beautiful and like, I'm okay with this, you know what I mean? (Nozizwe)*

like crop tops and stuff I love, or like anything high-waisted – and also anything long that kind of also adds to my height and stuff, so like when I'm in those outfits I often walk past the mirror and I'm like 'yeah' you know? Like this is good this is working… so yeah I think it's like finding outfits that I feel like fit me well, that tends to bring in a good body image… it does help also having uhm – a very supportive and very loving fiancé who will like also interject and be like "wow look at you" and then I feel like that girl you know… but that also does yeah (giggles) help quite a lot. But yeah – like if I'm being honest – I don't know if this counts – but uhm, I've also maybe sometimes tried to intentionally follow influencers and celebrities who have my body shape, reason being then at least on my timeline it's a bit of a break from that certain body type that I don't have, and like those people who I can look to that look like me and they are stunning and like killing it you know? Like if she can do it then I can do it kind of vibe (Luyanda)

like usually like on a good day is like, Well, you know, whatever, it doesn't really matter. And I, I feel more forgiving of my skin on my face - where I feel like I don't have to do as much like that good body day like I want to take care of myself (Michelle)

wearing certain clothes that make me feel good uhm, when there's an event or just to work like when I've dressed in a way that I feel very strong and like capable and I have freedom to move and do whatever it is that I need to do (Kamogelo)

the experiences and feelings divulged here express that a more positive body image tends to be associated with a sense of confidence or confident mood, and a sense of acceptance surrounding the bodies that they have as vessels that 'do' (Grogan, 2016; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). They describe feeling as though they are able, and possibly want to, take care of themselves, as well as feeling strong and capable. These experiences are described as being something that Black women embody as existing within their intersectionalities of their Blackness, their womanhood, their religious affiliations, and spirituality, as well as their sexuality and socioeconomic experiences. Within these intersections in identity, it can be seen that Black women experience

themselves according to the safety of their environment in how their self-expressions are welcomed and perceived, and often find themselves having to take the additional step of intentionally being grateful and thankful for their bodies, for what their bodies can 'do' and 'be' for them, as well as negotiating a sense of acceptance towards what they have and cannot change.

5.3 : How 'Woman' is Woman-Enough?

'How Woman is Woman-Enough' superordinate theme explores the embodied experience of gender as a social construction, where the associated expressions and expectations colours one's experience and identity with regards to body image (Butler, 2004; Dosekun, 2016; Grogan, 2016; Wolf, 1991). The social device of gender exists as a binary with often clear and rigid characteristics and associations, and the hierarchy associated with gender often determines a woman's standing in society (Butler, 2004; Reel et al., 2008). The spectrum of gender is therefore understood through the lens of embodiment and performativity, as well as intersectionality in what one 'wears' and 'does' to express themselves, in terms of how they have made meaning of their body image experiences.

5.3.1 "Woman-Up"

Experiences and ideals of womanhood, what it means to be 'woman-enough' and to 'woman-up' as a gendered expectation encompasses this theme. The performance and embodiment of being as a woman were further found to directly impact the way women approached their body image and made sense of their gendered experience. This largely surrounds the negotiations that women experience with relation to the societal demands, ideals and attitudes towards femininity, feminine expressions, and how this affects what it means to be a woman, or 'woman enough', in different contexts (Reel et al., 2008). When divulging stories of how the participants experience their body image, there is a constant negotiation in how one expresses their femininity and woman identity -

> *sometimes my body is trying to be two different things because like on the top I look a bit more manly and my chest is flatter, and then on the bottom it's like*

this big bum and thighs and it's like what is happening here?... Because I feel like maybe if my breasts were bigger – I'd be more accepting of the bottom or if my bottom was smaller then I'd be like well – this makes sense. So yeah, I just feel like one part of my body was just like 'you're a woman' and then the other part [is questioning that] … I just feel like sometimes you haven't lived life if you haven't been hit in the face with your own breast (both giggle and laugh) you know what I mean (laughing) like I wanna run and I want my breast to just say "here's your womanhood" and just slap me in my face (Delaney)

but you see those things around about like the "real black women" that are voluptuous and full and – you know… to like actually look into my definition of what makes a woman you know… and why do I think that my bust size makes me less of a woman?... uhm obviously when you're around a lot of black people especially – the beauty standard for me and what I've observed is that – the curvier the better… so – you kind of almost feel… not woman enough? (Luyanda)

what the participants are expressing surrounds her experience of feeling as though they lack a level of femininity that is widely accepted and praised, as interconnected to their Blackness. They raise the view of experiencing conflictual characteristics of the body that may be socially deemed as more masculine or more feminine, and how these ideals and standards may be very difficult to impossible to achieve for certain bodies (Anderson-Fye, 2009; Forbes et al., 2007; Swami et al., 2008). The associations between womanhood and having larger sized breasts seems to be more closely aligned than being flatter chested, and it is described that a life fully lived within womanhood as having an abundance of breasts to confirm and validate your womanhood, while also questioning the relevance of this conflict. The notion of negotiation along the spectrum of gendered experience is furthered by Darah who expresses -

like in terms of society in terms of beauty standards and what's deemed important to be a black woman in society. It's a challenge. It's a challenge that you feel - you need to change certain things; you need to dress it up to make it work so that it blends in… sorts of aspects of from your shape, your size, skin colour, you know, in society and all of those standards sort of work very

> *weirdly together for - for the black woman, because sometimes in different spaces, and like we mentioned, you know, sometimes we have to make it work in those contexts*

showing her feeling of being more within a 'middle ground' and negotiating her embodiment of feminine ideals, but that can be perceived through a more masculine lens and thus experiencing a challenge in having to 'make it work' when it may not be 'woman-enough' in a certain space. Darah describes her experience of the conflicts within gendered experience due to the essentialist and/or naturalist associations of gender (Butler, 2004; Weekes, 1997). She describes difficulties surrounding how her femininity is influenced and impacted on by masculinity, not only the existence of an external gaze and influence, but a masculinity that she was socialised into from birth due to her biologically assigned male sex. The existence of a conflict in gendered experiences among the transgender community of Black women severely impacts their body image experiences and intersectional identities, and the way they make meaning of this influence as well as their gendered expressions as Black and as female (Green et al., 2018).

Womanhood is also something that is experienced through a positive lens, as something that is a privilege and to be cherished for what are often seen as womanly abilities, qualities, and capacities (Davis, 2018). There is a multiplicity to feminine norms that allow for three dimensional experiences and expressions of one's femininity and womanhood (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2018; Roussell, 2013), and which requires further inquiry into the intersection of Blackness alongside one's womanhood.

> *I think overall I love being a woman; I think that women are the most majestic and mesmerizing creatures they just have this way about them, they have the ability to do so much and embody so much… being a black woman particularly is just – such a big gift, uhm and it's such a big responsibility as well uhm – it's definitely not for the weak or faint-hearted… [journey of] proving yourself and proving your worth over and over again and defying the odds – that's a story and that's a gift in itself – because uhm… the world isn't designed for you… the world doesn't want you the world rejects you (Kamogelo)*

This portrayal of womanhood further speaks to the consideration of intersectionality and multiplicity in identity; being a Black woman, the different aspects of experience and identity that

a Black woman might choose to embody, and the ways in which the world has been constructed to respond to Black women (Davis, 2018; Hargrove, 1999; Patton, 2006; Shaw, 2005). This has been constructed and shown to be experienced as being difficult and challenging to negotiate, as well as something that is admired and valued (Weekes, 1997). Womanhood is also described as a responsibility, one that accompanies the ways in which a woman represents and expresses herself in spaces, what this expression means and how it can be perceived, as well as whether or not this expressions promotes admiration and respect, or if it succumbs to objectification, belittlement and devaluation. This added layer of intersectionality speaks not only to the complexities of womanhood, but specifically Black womanhood and the multiple associations thereof.

5.3.2 Patriarchy Shadow

The "Patriarchy Shadow" subtheme surrounds the realities that are experienced in a gendered, and largely patriarchal society, with reference to the ways in which men have historically influenced women and their experience of their bodies. It has been viewed here as a 'shadowed body', but a body nonetheless, in its constant presence and shifting form in sociocultural experience and influence. In this way, it is explored with regard to how women grow up with the awareness of a male gaze, and/or influence, on the aspects of their gendered identification, embodiment and expression to the standards that may or may not approve of (Hall, 1996; Reel et al., 2008). It can be understood that the 'shadow' that is patriarchy is also an embodiment and performance, one that may be internalised by both men and women to expect a certain standard in society from different genders.

> *generally speaking, a lot of what people – or girls were doing were based off of what boys were saying … like I think that a lot of my insecurity uhm… comes from my father's side of the family… when it came to my father and he was like 'yoh like your bum is getting big' or like 'how do you have hair under your arms but you don't have any boobs?' I'd be like uhm - is there something wrong with me? (Delaney)*

> *with my body obviously like my dad would also tease and ask if I'm starving and say like he doesn't think I'm eating enough… its nothing – like it's a bit*

weird because I also had brothers who are excessively and actively like fat-phobic (Luyanda)

I notice it especially – like it's really difficult to say – but around my dad - It's really difficult for him because he doesn't understand it… But it's usually like - I'll notice a change in my behavior around my dad… so like on a bad body day, I just don't want to see him (Michelle)

that's a bit weird, is one time my dad - not one time actually… I just have my - I have like those like big forehead like Rihanna type forehead (giggles). Okay - that's something my dad has always pointed out, like, if we're in the car together and I'm sitting in the front seat, and he wants to see if a car is coming. Like he literally put his finger on my forehead, and he will push my head back (Nozizwe)

uhm so like I started gaining lots of weight in grade 4-ish, and like I would literally come out of my room and [dad] would look at me like scan my body up and down and he'd be like "no man I can't believe how fat you looking", "you're so chubby" and he'd point things out like he'd look at my thighs and be like no man they're getting so fat, and your bum is so big and your stomach is bulging and look at your neck and look at your chin and your arms (pause) (Zoey)

Participants are expressing the ways they felt as girls and as grown women, in relation to boys and what their opinions and views were; how these views determine and impact what girls would do and how they would feel about themselves. They describe feelings of exclusion, hurt, and as though something is wrong with them. The role of a Black woman's father as a male figure in her life growing up is described in detailed and seen in these accounts as being deeply impactful on their body image; showing the first or early male influence as an extension of a 'patriarchal shadow' that follows Black women throughout their development (Ata et al., 2007; Bardone-Cone et al., 2011; Duncan, 1994; Forbes et al., 2007). Participants describe a feeling of hurt when speaking of the way their father's view(ed) them and spoke to them, showing up in their negative words, as well as nervous laughter or pauses in their speech. There is a sense that their father's felt

disappointed in the way their daughters looked and would interact with ways that made them feel belittled or bad about themselves and their appearances.

The male influence presence in areas of femininity, beauty, sexualisation and overall expression of Black female physicality is an historical one that continues to arise as part of a woman's body image experiences (Duncan, 2994; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Participants mention instances of male influence -

> *just sitting around and the boys are making fun of some - you know how I know what it is, with teenage boys and they just make fun of how everyone looks and like they need to actually go look in the mirror… my hips and my bum when we were growing up, like it - that was actually a very sexualized thing (Michelle)*
>
> *uhm yeah sometimes I feel like my body is detrimental and its – it's weaponized against me. its weaponized and used as a tool against me or like against anyone else who looks like me so in terms of my gender… because uhm I'm hypersexualized (Kamogelo)*
>
> *A male friend of mine was describing my butt I don't even know how the conversation came about and He said that it looked like a box, right? I was like…I have never like considered that. And so one day I went and I looked in the mirror and I said, Oh my goodness, it does have like, kind of like a, like us like a square kind of shape at the bottom specifically, like it goes round and then becomes like this flat area. That's weird. And then I've never been able to unsee it ever since that day, since I you know, that was pointed out (Nozizwe)*

These ladies touch on the aspects of women often being hypersexualised and objectified, as mentioned within the literature (Reel et al., 2008), and further supports the idea that woman in their bodies (and often their entirety) have been viewed as inferior to men in societies where patriarchy is upheld. The experience of being sexualised by men is commonplace for Black women, with these experiences and sociocultural realities affecting how one presents herself to society, as well as her body image and how she makes meaning of these experiences. Men and women exist among each other, and perceive themselves in relation to the other – often leaving

women to feel unsafe, unwillingly hypersexualised, objectified, and disrespected as a fellow person due to the history of patriarchy (Duncan, 1994; Katzman & Lee, 1997; Reel et al., 2008). With these feelings and perceptions, women consider their choice of embodiment and performativity in certain contexts, either enabling a stronger sense of security around them, dressing differently, or potentially avoiding certain masculine or patriarchal spaces altogether.

> *in high school… I don't know, there's almost like this fetish that guys almost had with girls that had like lighter skin or whatever (Nozizwe)*

> *I noticed with the opposite sex that there was this constant stereotype going around that coloured women were cheap and like they were good just to have a good time with and stuff like that and not actually someone to be considered a potential wife or someone to take home to their mothers (Zoey)*

> *so, my experiences also of womanhood and the things I get to experience as being a woman are definitely shaped by the South African man I'm living in (Darah)*

Participants are expressing their experience of the patriarchal shadow that policed their intersections of Blackness and womanhood; creating a conflict for their identity negotiations in 'how Black' they could be as women to be worthy of a male's attention and value. The intersectionality experienced for Black women is explored by the participants in the way they experience the male gaze as oppressive, policing, and demeaning (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2018; Duncan, 1994). There is a sense that their Blackness does something to their womanhood and femininity that is not valued and undesirable to the opposite sex, which leaves them feeling unworthy and belittled. Darah adds a layer to the oppression from the opposite sex, as something that she has internalised not only as identifying as a female, but being born in a male body which serves as a further patriarchal shadow over her experience of being a woman.

> *and at the same time I got it from boys at school, boys in the family, and I would just go home and cry and cry and just feel disgusting… and – I mean I'm totally gay and thankfully I figured that out eventually – but you know like, it really is a man's world when it comes to most of these things (Zoey)*

Zoey expresses how she identities sexually as gay (lesbian) and that she is thankful for this orientation, but how on the other hand, she has still been made to feel 'disgusting' by a patriarchal shadow over Black women that maintains its power and stance beyond sexuality (Forbes et al., 2007).

5.4 : Context, Where and How we grow up

The theme of 'Context, How and Where we grow up' surrounds the considerations of sociocultural aspects of upbringing and socialisation into different roles and social positions, how this is done, where it is done; and ultimately how experiences and ideals are internalised/externalised, embodied and performed. The context in which Black women exist is understood here as crucially influential towards the experiences of body image among Black women; considering the diverse contexts in which they live and are brought up. It is understood that one embodies ideals, 'does' the different things that are necessary to 'be' someone from somewhere; and the different contexts of school, 'home' – family and socioeconomic access, as well as social media are explored as influential (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Cotter et al., 2015; Davis, 2018; Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; López-Guimerà et al., 2010; Tiwari, 2014; Walker, 2014).

5.4.1 Schooling

The theme of 'Schooling' surrounds the influences that are found within the context of the school environment, from pre-school and day-care environments to high school and tertiary education.

> *and also like in school, it's a place of learning and you're teaching people this like we all know how school is one of the three ways of institutionalised and conditioning people… so if teachers are talking like this to students then people are gonna grow up thinking that that's right or its wrong (Tiisetso)*

> *So, I had to move to another school's way when I finished grade 7, I would go there, so I made a decision in that school like nobody knows me. I'm just going to try and blend in (Darah)*

The school institution is considered and explored here as one of the earliest contexts in which Black girls are socialised to see themselves against others, which determines various agendas that are set in that particular context. The institution (literally and figuratively) of a school system is a context that further socialises people into being. The discourses, standards and ideals upheld in schools can be beneficial and/or detrimental, as with all other contexts of upbringing. The participants are highlighting the influence of the schooling context as one that determines much about the way Black women present themselves to society, in efforts to 'blend in', and avoid disruptions to the status quo. The average South African school can be understood as reproducing standards of Whiteness that the Black child cannot attain (Teeger, 2015), and is forced to negotiate their Blackness in that context.

> *I don't know if it's because I went to schools that were model C in KZN – meaning predominantly white and more sort of private school-like – the middle-class agenda (Delaney)*

> *it's also weird when I think when I was at school – coz I was at a private school and I think things were largely influenced by your European standards if that okay to say? So, I actually just remember like growing up in school and always feeling this pressure to be thin… you know? The thinner the better … when I wore [my hair] natural in high school oh my god I heard EVERYTHING under the sun… you look like a microphone, you look like a lamb – like everything under the sun… so uhm (giggles) high school is actually so wild (giggles) (Luyanda)*

The schooling context is seen here as one that holds agendas fashioned to praise Whiteness; including a 'model-C' and middle-upper class agenda, a thin, tidy-haired, and 'tamed' agenda that is often associated with Whiteness. Participants describe experiences of being embarrassed for their access and appearance in their school contexts, leaving them feeling further oppressed and undervalued in their Blackness, and pressured to fit into a standard of Whiteness from a young age.

> *I think my thinness is probably when it was most picked on or like pointed out to me? Coz I'm even thinking uhm… with my best friend and her side of the family like I looove her family but I know like any time that I visit – I am*

definitely going to hear the comments you know: you don't eat enough… uhm, like yeah you're too skinny and stuff like you know when people like grab your arm or grab your wrist and like dangle it you know (giggles) so now you're thinking they see you as some pool noodle or something (giggles)…(Luyanda)

It is further explored here that the standards in these different schooling contexts can be conflictual, causing further detriment to the meaning-making processes of body image among Black women. Luyanda describes growing up feeling pressure to achieve the standard of thinness, but then being teased and belittled once appearing thin. There is an expectation for Black women to have the perfect balance of thinness/lower weight, as well as the right number of curves and curls in the 'right' places; and this standard is something that deeply impacts the way Black women feel about themselves and their bodies (Capodiplupo, 2015; Watson et al., 2019). This is seen through the lenses of intersectionality, embodiment and performativity as the social constructions exist as agendas, and impact how one might choose to present themselves according to the various ideals that are upheld. It has been seen that various aspects of Blackness are considered, including one's hair, body weight and size, socioeconomic status, and one's access to resources, etc. Negotiating one's identity in this way can further be seen as embodying and 'doing' something specific to fit in or stand out of the norm in that context, and the schooling system is known for its effects on young children and adolescence in the support, or lack thereof, of how one identifies in society. 'Model C' and private schools are also viewed as 'White' contexts that uphold an ideal and standard of being that is closer to whiteness, due to the additional access to resources, the languages spoken, the methods of teaching and discipline, etc. (Knaus & Brown, 2015; Teeger, 2015; Wormelli, 2016).

5.4.2 Social Media

Social media, although not an actual geographic location, is a global context in and of itself that influences many aspects of one's life, mental health, body image, and understanding of the world. The context of social media has been understood as a vast space of connection, ideals, advertising, as well as a major influence on mental health and identity (Tiwari, 2014). Social Media was a theme found as a significant influencing factor to the way Black women make meaning of their body image experiences, as the sample largely including members of the millennial and

Generation Z age groups who have been raised with significantly more access to opinions, ideals and influences from all over the world via social media.

> *also, on social media quite a lot and – obviously your Insta baddies have the same type of bodies – maybe it's just me? But it's a specific type of body like the Kylie Jenner body that's like that hourglass (Luyanda)*

> *I want that, you know, like when you go on YouTube, it's like, that's literally the exercise everybody wants to do tiny waist big booty and type thing (Nozizwe)*

> *yeah in like social spaces as well as social media spaces it's definitely a trend that I just kinda fall under, not for anything else but the fact that my boobs happen to be big (Zoey)*

Participants express the ideals that they see trending on social media, particularly targeted as ideals Black women should be achieving to fit into. This furthers the notion of a pressure place on having the 'right curves in the right places', but not the wrong ones in the wrong places. The perception of bodies, and women's bodies in particular, are surrounding by continuously difficult (often impossible) standards to attain, including an idea of 'perfection' that no one person can realistically and naturally attain. This includes many Western ideals surrounding thinness, specific and minimal curves, lighter but tanned skin, bigger boobs and bottom, tiny waist, and slim legs, etc. In this way, women are encouraged to compare their bodies with that of other, more 'ideal' bodies, ultimately affecting their embodiment and performance of their own physical characteristics to fit in various different standards. Although it is acknowledged that social comparison exists outside of and within social media, it carries a broader reach and encourages appearance concerns among many Black women. The agenda of racial hierarchy continues to be upheld in many social media spaces, exposing Black women to multiple avenues of racism, under-valuing of appearances associated with Blackness, or continuous over-valuing of non-Black characteristics.

> *even these ads on social media and all these influencers like advertising certain things, but like they get paid to use that stuff not the other way round you know… but I've also started to like unfollow some things I don't enjoy seeing or hearing about (Michelle)*

the role in which social media has played you know... I think in – in a good way it is helping us to know more about like what is self-image what is my self-image… but in the same breath there is also discrimination (Tiisetso)

I don't know if this counts – but uhm, I've also maybe sometimes tried to intentionally follow influencers and celebrities who have my body shape… reason being then at least on my timeline it's a bit of a break from that certain body type that I don't have (Luyanda)

Participants explore the ways in which social media further excludes Black women in a way that ignores one's access to resources surrounding the items and lifestyles that are advertised on social media platforms. There is a wider awareness of these advertisements as well as the agendas and standards of Whiteness (as well as Blackness) that they aim to uphold, and it has become imperative for Black women to monitor their social media use in following or subscribing to platforms and people that allow for their voices to be heard, as well as a feeling of positivity and acceptance towards what they and their bodies represent in society. It is understood that when considering the intersections, embodiment and performativity of one's identity, the influence of social media also allows for women to make various decisions on which media messages and agendas (Burnette et al., 2017) that they are going to subscribe to, and which they would prefer to avoid. This is assisted by a woman's already socially affected body image through the other contexts mentioned, as well as the new and shifting trends that continue to be valued and devalued in different spaces; leaving Black women having to constantly make those choices, and 'keep up' with the times.

5.4.3 Cultural/Lifestyle Ideals

This subordinate theme arose as crucial to the data collected, surrounding the sociocultural context and ideals that influence bodies, rituals, and ultimately body image. The context(s) in which one exists is explored as a complex interaction between one's agency and identity, and the standards upheld in contexts that are constantly changing and blurring. Cultural and lifestyle ideals surround the ways in which people are brought up in their immediate family and environment, a system that Bronfenbrenner understood as the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

you know when you go like December holidays or whatever holidays you go home, and it's like "oh you've gained so much weight…" that's the first thing they wanna like notice you know – aunties always wanna notice like ohh actually since last time like she's gained some weight… uhm for me that's always the thing – like that's always the (pause) anxiety trigger when you go home (Tiisetso)

my mom has had a really bad body image of herself… like for as long as I can remember but the one thing that I can always take away from her is like – no matter how she felt or what she did, she always did her best to try and look her best (Michelle)

I do know that when I am picking up weight or when my sister and I are picking up weight like our mom will say something (Nozizwe)

Participants express the influence within their immediate microsystems in context and show the influence of female and maternal figures to be of impact on their body image (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Watson et al., 2019). Participants describe the hurt that comes with this influence in witnessing a negative body image in their own mothers, as well as acknowledging the negotiation that comes with 'going home' in a state of appearance that might not suit their ideals and standards. These feelings show how big a role negotiation plays in the ways that Black women make sense of their body image experiences and influences.

Cultural ideals can be understood through the lens of embodiment and performativity due to various aspects and ideals in one's upbringing surrounding practices of appearance, 'doing' of one's gender, race, ethnicity, and religion, as well as the ways people think about and see the world, other people, and themselves (Cafri et al (2005). Through this lens, it is further understood as a complex interaction between an individual and their environment, how they may identify, as influenced by the identities and agendas around them. For Black women, many of the ideals that surround aspects of both Whiteness and Blackness, have a significant impact on their body image (Coetzee & Perrett, 2011).

uhm obviously when you're around a lot of black people especially – the beauty standard for me and what I've observed is that – the curvier the better … so

many different ideals and standards that we might be "for" or against I guess also speaking back to stuff being politicized like also with the body shape, the skin colour, the hair – some instances people just see you or more or less black when it suits them in that space and it becomes a major negotiation (Luyanda)

I grew up with my grandmother… and like from her world, like she was quite racist in many ways and like – yeah she would always say to my mom and to myself like we mustn't spend too much time in the sun or we'll just get darker, and like always asked if I was scrubbing and she would ask like why are you looking so dark (Zoey)

then there are other families that we choose that are even more great because of the community and the vulnerabilities and the things you can say that you can't say in a traditional setting of family… in a community-based upbringing (Darah)

Participants describe the ways in which their immediate contexts impact the way they engage with their intersections of Blackness and womanhood, with a conflict often experienced in the ways their expressions of femininity are closely aligned with Whiteness in context (Kelch-Oliver & Ancis, 2011; Pace, 2016; Robinson et al., 2012; Roussell, 2013). Many cultures claim to remain within a level of Blackness that is irrefutable, however there are many ideals of Whiteness that have also been internalised and perpetuated as the standard for young Black girls to be socialised into. In the same way that schools and social media promote and perpetuate this racial hierarchy, so too do families and communities that people grow up within. This sociocultural influence is racialised, gendered, and classed (Coetzee and Perrett (2011); in a way that enables Black women to negotiate the conflicts within their intersecting identities and consider all influences they may be exposed to and live within. Social comparison is a daily occurrence within one's family and community (Davis, 2018; Duncan, 1994) including complexities due to genetics, mixed marriages and offspring, disorders, and abnormal physical appearances, among others. It was seen that hair, body weight, skin colour and texture, as well as actual embodiments and performativity's of one's appearance, are compared to that of others in their family, and how this comparison also has the potential of othering or excluding from one's Blackness, womanhood, positive body image, and mental health (Tiwari & Kumar, 2015)

5.4.4 'Money, Money, Money'; Access and Barriers

'Money, Money, Money' is described here as an inescapable and pervasive social category of socioeconomic standing, that affects one's identit(ies) in many ways. The embodiment and performativity surrounding class is a complex one due to social structures in place that determine access and barriers to money and resources. Access to money and resources ultimately creates more opportunities for one to choose the ways in which they express themselves, through weight control, fashion, plastic surgery, etc. (Tiwari & Kumar, 2015).

> *If I could I would have had it done years ago, and I would do it right now but – financially it's ridiculous (Delaney)*
>
> *I think last year I – seriously contemplated plastic surgery? And I mean the only thing that stopped me was the price (Luyanda)*
>
> *and like think that one day when I'm rich enough I would totally get the bum that I want (Zoey)*
>
> *so, I'm doing background research on the best doctors, faces, bodies, just in case I win, like 100 million (Darah)*

participants describe their disappointment with their socioeconomic standing due to the barriers and restrictions it creates in how they choose to present themselves and express their identities through their body. It is discussed that the plastic surgery industry, the prices for the changes that the women would make are high, and often impossible to attain. This level of socioeconomic access is also something closely aligned to Whiteness (Levine & Smolak, 2010; Swami, 2015).

> *look at people who might not be able to afford to look how they want to look, and it also talks to like money and like the beauty industry and someone might just want to look beautiful but some people have to just try so much harder because things just don't fit or you have to like make a plan with certain things … it's the worst when you have to pull your pants over the rolls (giggles) and you're like what is going on with these pants… And some days like I'll just put on the baggiest sweatpants ever just so I feel okay about myself you know … I think the most demoralizing the most humiliating part of having that big bum,*

is that you could ever find pants… it's like the clothing industry is also against me (Michelle)

then I'm going to think about what is the best I can do with what I have to put myself maybe in a - in clothing where I look like an effeminate gay man [instead of the woman I am] (Darah)

The participants express here difficulties they face from the beauty industry, in terms of access to things that allow them to express themselves in the way they see and understand their bodies and identities. The clothing industry is felt to be 'against them' in that it does not cater to Black women in all their intersections and nuances, which feels exclusionary and discriminatory. They speak of 'working with what they have' as a negotiation, something they did not choose, but have to tolerate and/or accept, which is described here as 'humiliating' and 'demoralising'; feelings that ultimately influence the ways in which Black women make sense of their body image experiences, and this influence on their overall quality of life. It is understood that the beauty/appearance industry is similarly an institution of sorts, that further perpetuates ideals and standards, making it hard for Black women in various body weights and sizes to find the right size for the right price. It is another area where it appears that clothes are created with a thin (Eurocentric) ideal and agenda, which can further exclude Black women and their experience of their bodies in society.

Socioeconomic status affects almost every aspect of access in terms of what and how people can and cannot afford to do, portray, embody, and perform their identities and make meaning of their experiences. It can be understood that through the history of the world, and more specifically South Africa, the Black woman has been positioned among the bottom of the racial, gendered, as well as socioeconomic hierarchies; allowing for further disadvantages in their lived experience (Adkins-Jackson, 2020; Paeratakul et al., 2002).

5.5 Conclusion

The testimonies and experiences of the participants show that the sociocultural experiences of body image among Black women include nuanced experience within and between their intersecting identities of Blackness, womanhood, socioeconomic status, as well as sexuality and nationality. The women can choose their exposure to negative messages via social media and do their best to incorporate a resilience and positivity when met with messages of continued exclusion

and discrimination against Blackness and womanhood. They seem to find meaning in their experiences that allow them to make sense of who they are and how they present themselves to the world, acknowledging the difficulties in learning and unlearning messages that perpetuate racist, sexist and classist views against Black women.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter provides an overview of the research and highlights the main themes that emerged from the findings. It offers a summary of the primary issues and ideas that have been explored within this research. It highlights the value of using an intersectional and embodiment framework to unpack the racialised, gendered, cultural and classes experiences of Black women surrounding their body image.

6.2 Concluding thoughts

The experiences of Black women are informed by sociocultural factors in context. The ways in which they experience their bodies in different spaces, as well as construct and reconstruct their identities according to their embodiment and performativity, is dependent on the multiple layers of intersections including gender, race, class, religion, nationality, and sexuality. It is through an intersectional and embodiment lens that the experiences of these participants are understood in an all-inclusive manner, ensuring the consideration of the various nuances and distinctions that exist in context.

This study has had a primary focus on the sociocultural experiences and embodiments of Black women in the South African context, which takes into consideration a multi-layered view of different experiences due to different intersections. The three main themes that arose from this study includes “How Black is Black-Enough?”, “How Woman is Woman-Enough?”, as well as “Context, Where and How we grow up”. These themes unpacked important aspects in the way Blackness is constructed and Whiteness is embedded. The ways in which expectations of womanhood and influences of patriarchy and the male gaze were explored, as well as the different spaces in which Black women learn what to ‘do’ and how to ‘be’. Although intersectionality allows for a multidimensional perspective into the marginalisation of women at different levels of identity, the participants expressed layers of negative body experiences, as well as possibilities for positivity, gratefulness, and agency in experience. The frameworks provide a holistic

understanding and approach to Black women, as well as to contextual factors and the concept of body image, which further argues that people do not exist in a vacuum nor in isolation. It is through the perspectives of intersectionality and embodiment that these experiences have been explored and understood to account for a nuanced and multi-layered experience of body image among Black women.

6.3 Limitations of Study

The limitations of this research study include that the sample is not fully representative of the South African population; all participants who volunteered are part of the middle-class, and therefore excludes different human experience within lower or higher-class positions. Although sexuality, gender identification and ethnic considerations were made, it is thus that the sample grants insights into only a small subset of the South African population, and does not allow for generalisations to be made for all individuals who identify as Black and female. Due to the criteria, it is acknowledged that this research may have limited itself in only focusing on a female and Black perspective of a phenomenon that is experienced by all people.

When looking to explore human experience, Parker (2003) warns against the researcher attempting to search for or find an ultimate 'truth' of human experience, as well as looking for underlying or deeper meaning where it was not communicated or expressed. The main aim, in this way, should be to study and explore the diverse ways that people construct and reconstruct their identities, as well as make meaning of their experiences and histories considering what is true for them (Parker, 2003). Therefore, the experiences of the participants are subjective and are acknowledged to be shaped by many sociocultural influences, and are not thought of as an absolute 'truth', but are seen and respected as representing their realities as they experience them (Willig, 2013).

6.4 Going Forward

Considering the future of research and the possible impact that could arise from it, it is important to work towards understanding the experiences of the majority of South African individuals (and individuals that reside in South Africa), who were not represented in this sample. As a community psychologist and researcher, it is of importance and priority that research attempts

to bridge gaps where marginalisation has occurred, as well as fulfil a goal of inclusion and empowerment.

Future research should attempt to consider a larger sample size that is more representative of the population, considering ethnic and racial nuances and access to resources. It may also be beneficial to consider travel, in considering the exposure to other contexts and what this does to internal conceptions of body image. Alongside additions to research, it is important for recommendations within the clinical and community initiative spaces. Mental health practitioners should continue to expand their knowledge and awareness of the sociocultural influences affecting all aspects of social, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of Black women. The role of the male gaze and residing in what is largely considered to remain a patriarchal society, is important to consider when attempting to understand important aspects of victim blaming, body and slut-shaming, and policing the behaviour of Black women when it comes to the risk of Gender-based violence (GBV). The power dynamics that exist to keep Black women excluded should be made aware in more spaces of health (mental and physical), and expand through this to all social, work, and family spaces. With this in mind, the hegemonic concepts of masculinity and patriarchy also work to exclude and marginalise certain men. It is thus recommended that future research and mental health interventions should not only seek to understand the ways in which women are oppressed by this construct, but that it further works to oppress any individual that does not subscribe to the standards and ideals of hegemonic masculinity in context.

6.5 Conclusion

This research has aimed to unpack and understand the sociocultural experiences of Black women surrounding their body image experiences. The goal was to understand the sociocultural experiences, to explore this with the lens of intersectionality and embodiment as Black women 'do' and 'be' in their daily lives. It is clear that these experiences show how race/ethnicity, gender and the patriarchy, the schooling system, as well as cultural ideals and expectations influence how the participants make meaning of their experiences. It also shows their understandings of their bodies and what they represent in context. Although many experiences included elements of teasing, torment, and belittling in that it has formed the women to have a negative body image;

participants also expressed and described their agency in choosing more positive spaces of influence, as well as in feeling a sense of gratitude for their bodies and what they are capable of.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet



PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



Good morning/afternoon

My name is Christianne Jones, and I am currently a Masters in Community-based Counselling student enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand. I am in the process of conducting a study on the sociocultural experiences of body image among Black women who reside in Johannesburg. This research is required for the completion of my degree in Psychology, and I would like to invite you to participate in this research study.

Participation in this study will involve one in-depth interview, where you will be asked questions about your personal lived experiences surrounding body image, as well as the sociocultural influences in your everyday life that have affected your body image in some way. By taking part in this research, you will help in further understanding the sociocultural influences on body image as experienced by Black women in South Africa, where a platform is provided for you to tell your story and unpack certain experiences and meanings you have created out of them.

In ensuring the research stays true to your personal experience, I request your permission to use a recording device during our interview to help me write up the report as accurately as possible. Your personal identity will be protected by using code names, where only my supervisor and I will be permitted to listen to the audio-recordings. Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times throughout the interview process. All recordings will be kept locked away in a safe room, and on my password-protected computer. After the recordings have been transcribed, all original recordings will be destroyed. The transcripts will be kept until my degree has been completed, after which these will be destroyed as well.

The interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes, and due to the topic of discussion, there may be some aspects of discomfort when bringing up particular experiences. Counselling services will be offered to you should any persistent issues arise from the content of discussion. It is also within your rights to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refuse to answer any question(s) that you are not comfortable discussing during the interview. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and warmly welcomed.

Should you choose to partake in this study, you will be contacted at the end of the process to recieve a summary of all the findings and the full research report if you would like to read it. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated, and you are welcome to contact me should you wish to participate, and with any questions or queries; telephonically on 0724688890, or via email at christiannejones2@gmail.com.

Yours truly,

Christianne Jones

Research supervisor: Ruby Patel, contactable via email at Ruby.Patel@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Consent form for in-depth interviews



PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



I, _____, hereby agree to participate in the research to be undertaken by Christianne Jones, for her study about Black South African women's experiences surrounding body image, with the full understanding that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary
- Refusal to participate will not penalise me in any way
- I have the right to refuse to answer any questions that I prefer not to answer
- I may withdraw from the study at any time without providing any reasons nor penalty
- The information I provide will not be traced back to me and my identity will not be disclosed in any report, presentation, or other forms of public dissemination
- I understand that code names will be used to protect my identity
- No information that may identify me will be used in the research report. While direct speech from the interview will be included in the researcher's research, the researcher will keep all responses as nameless as possible

Date: _____

Participant Signature_____

Appendix C: Consent form for recording

PSYCHOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

I, _____, hereby give consent for the in depth interview (described in the information sheet attached) by Christianne Jones to be audio-recorded, with the full understanding that:

- The tapes will be heard by no other person other than the researcher and her supervisor
- All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after the completion of the research and the qualification has been obtained
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report
- Pseudonyms/code names will be used to identify different participants to maintain privacy
- I further give consent to the researcher, Christianne Jones, to use direct speech that will not have any identifying or traceable information

Date: _____

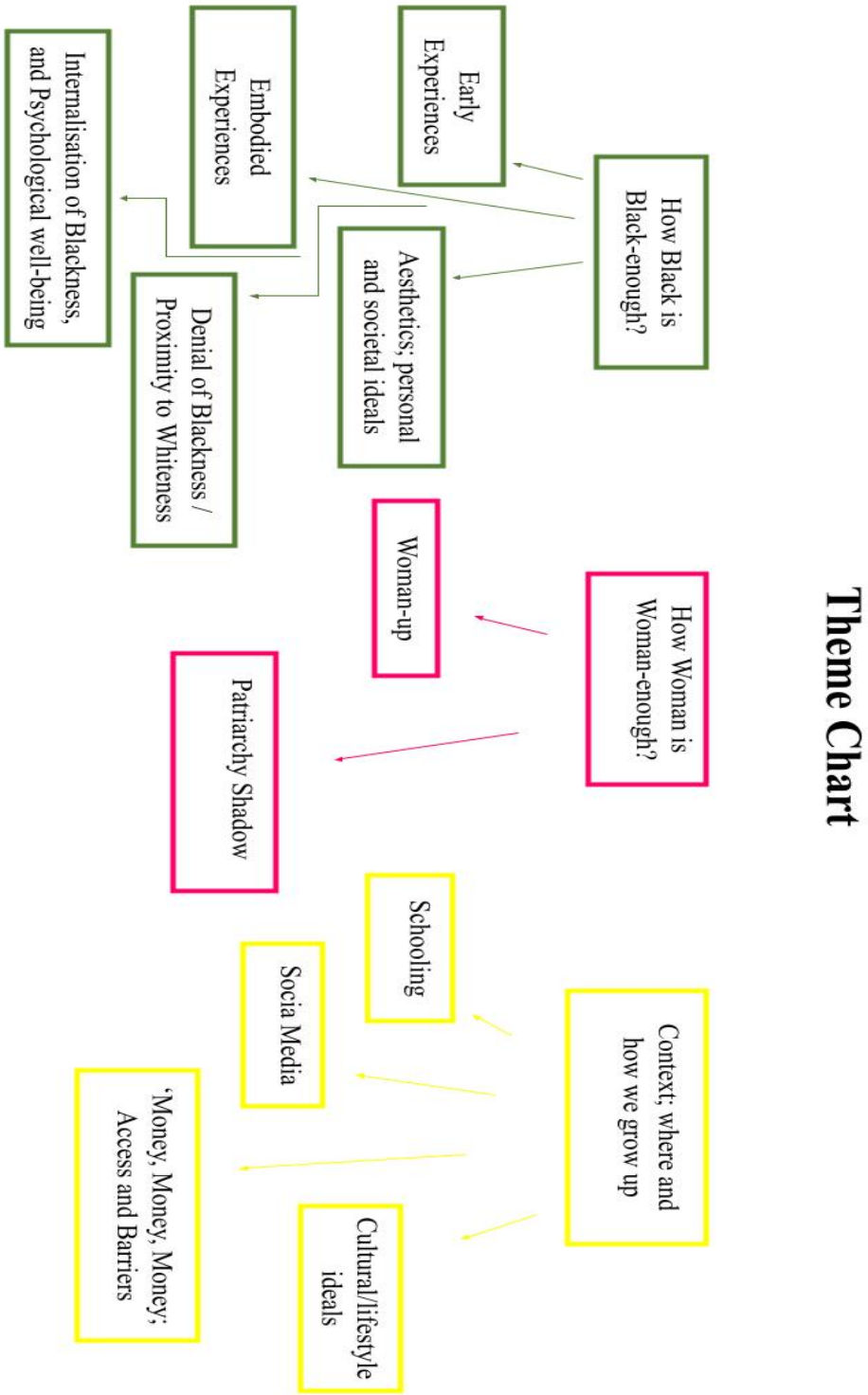
Participant signature: _____

Appendix D: Semi-structured interview Schedule

1. How would you describe your body image?
   - Could you describe your morning routine of getting ready for the day?
   - Where do you see yourself in relation to the current beauty standards and trends in society?
   - Have you ever felt the need to change/alter any aspect of your body/appearance?

2. Broadly, how would you say that your sociocultural realities as a Black woman in South Africa have affected your body image?
   - How have you embodied certain aspects of your sociocultural reality?
   - Are there any specific individual or social experiences between your childhood and now, that have affected your current body image in any way?

Appendix E


Theme Chart
How Black is Black-enough?
Early Experiences
Embodied Experiences
Internalisation of Blackness, and Psychological well-being
Aesthetics; personal and societal ideals
Denial of Blackness / Proximity to Whiteness
How Woman is Woman-enough?
Woman-up
Patriarchy Shadow
Context; where and how we grow up
Schooling
Socia Media
'Money, Money, Money; Access and Barriers
Cultural/lifestyle ideals