

WITS
UNIVERSITY



Investigating constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, Black South African women as influenced by their socio-cultural contexts.

Puseletso Molaaphene

Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand

1415340

Supervisor: Dr Mpho Mathebula

June 24, 2024

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by Coursework and Research Report (Social and Psychological Research) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 24 June 2024.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored constructions of beauty amongst young, urban Black South African women as influenced by different socio-cultural contexts. Much of the literature on this subject focuses on the influence of Western culture on Black women's conceptualization of beauty and nearly always points to the resultant negative self-perception that they go on to develop.

The study applied phenomenology research design and qualitative approach in addressing the study objectives. A sample of six young Black women who were students at the University of the Witwatersrand participated in this study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, where participants were asked a series of open-ended questions that explored their perceptions and personal meaning-making of the concept of female beauty.

True to the literature on the subject of female beauty, which highlights the multifaceted nature of this concept, major findings were that participants related in different ways to the construct of beauty. However, it was found that participants in this study employed new and evolved ways of thinking about beauty. For these young women, beauty was viewed as a personal choice, as emotive, as a state of health, moreover, as a marker of one's lifestyle. This differs significantly from the traditional manner in which Black women's ideas around beauty are usually explored – as mainly informed by Western culture. While they did not deny Western cultures influence on how they have come to understand beauty, the young women in this study communicated a sense of empowerment to think of beauty beyond these confines.

Key words: Beauty, Socio-cultural, lifestyle, Culture, Empowerment

Declaration

I, Puseletso Molaaphene, declare that this research report is a product of my independent work. I am submitting it for the Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This work has not been presented for any previous degree or examination at this university or any other institution.

Signed: 

Date: 23 June 2024

Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Metlha Property Molaaphene, in whose eyes I could achieve everything and anything that I set my mind to.

Acknowledgements

To the all-knowing, sovereign God who anchored me throughout this journey, and all in all, the anchor of my life – glory and honour belong to You.

To my supervisor, Dr. Mpho Mathebula – you are a breath of fresh air. How you balanced guidance and keeping me accountable, with grace and humility is a thing of beauty. You gave me hope when it seemed impossible. Thank you for sharing your expertise so generously and shaping this work beyond the call of duty.

My heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends who continually support me. You did not have to do it, but you did it anyway. Your grace and love have carried me through. A special thank you to my one and only sister, Nene, along with your beautiful family – I appreciate your relentless faith in me.

To my mother – you carry me so well. Thank you for laying down your life and stopping at nothing to see that this project reached its completion. Yanga uThixo angakwandisele iminyaka MaKhumalo.

Prof Yael Kadish, I appreciate your time and contribution to this research study. It was a privilege to feed off your invaluable insights.

My family in Christ – ba ga Lamola le ba ga Mogorosi. For lifting me up spiritually, thank you. Your prayers kept me going during those dark days. May the Lord bless you beyond measure.

A word of appreciation to the young women who participated in this study. Thank you for being selfless with your time and sharing your life experiences with me. May you never forget just how uniquely beautiful each one of you is, inside-out.

Lastly, to my beautiful daughter Reage Okuhle Reabetswe – my Sparkles. May you never, not for a moment, ever doubt that you are enough. I love you.

Contents Page

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents Page	v
Table of Figures.....	ix
Chapter 1: Research background.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Aims.....	4
1.3 Research questions.....	4
1.4 Rationale	5
1.5 Chapter Outline	6
Chapter 2: Literature review	7
2. Introduction.....	7
2.1 The theories on beauty.....	7
2.1.1 The feminist theory on beauty	8
2.1.2 The socio-cultural approach on beauty.....	10
2.1.3 The cognitive-behavioural perspective on beauty.....	11
2.2 Features of female beauty	12
2.2.1 Hair.....	12
2.2.2 Skin colour.....	16
2.2.3 Body structure.....	17
2.2.4 How dressing up influences beauty	18
2.3 Locating the South African perspective of female beauty	19
2.4 Western and African culture on beauty.....	25
2.5 The performance of beauty	31
2.6 The South African national identity.....	32

2.7 Factors that influence perceptions on beauty.....	34
2.7.1 Influence of the media in shaping and deconstructing beauty ideals.....	34
2.7.2 The influence of home and school on Beauty	36
2.8 The implications of Western perspective on beauty	36
2.8.1 Body dissatisfaction and reverse body dissatisfaction	37
2.9 Summary of literature reviewed.....	40
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	41
3.1 Introduction.....	41
3.2 Research Design	41
3.4 Sampling	44
3.5 Data collection	45
3.6 Instruments of data collection.....	46
3.7 Data analysis.....	46
3.8 Ethical considerations.....	49
3.9 Reflexivity	50
3.10 Summary.....	51
Chapter 4: Results and Discussion	52
4.1 Introduction.....	52
4.2 Theme One: Definition of beauty	53
4.2.1 Beauty is subjective and depends on an individual	53
4.2.2 Beauty is determined by dressing.....	56
4.2.3 Beauty is determined by personality	57
4.2.4 Body structure.....	58
4.3 Theme two: Socio-cultural influence on participants views on female beauty	62
4.3.1 Influence of the home environment on beauty	63
4.3.2 The influence of media on beauty.....	70
4.3.3. The university environment influence	72
4.3.4 Western vs. African standards of beauty.....	74

4.4 Theme three: Acculturation.....	84
4.5 Theme Four: The serious implications of conformity/non-conformity to the Braam Identity/Big City Identity	90
4.5.1 Economic and Social Implications.....	90
4.6 Theme five: The body as a site for cultivation/instrument of self-expression (Hair, body weight/shape, skin complexion).....	93
4.6.1 Physique: Body size, shape and weight conformity to Western standards	93
4.6.2 Skin complexion	97
Chapter 5: Synthesis of Results	103
5.1 Introduction.....	103
5.2 Summary of the Findings	103
5.2.1 Influence of Socio-cultural Backgrounds.....	103
5.2.2 Media Influence.....	104
5.2.3 Personal Experiences and Identity	105
5.2.4 The Braamfontein Context.....	106
5.2.5 Western vs. African Standards of Beauty.....	106
5.2.6 Physical Attributes - Hair, Body Structure, and Skin Complexion	106
5.2.7 Societal Pressures and Self-Perception	107
5.2.8 Economic and Social Implications.....	107
5.2.9 The Role of Agency and Resistance.....	108
5.3 Summary.....	108
Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations	109
6.1 Introduction.....	109
6.2 Conclusion of the research study	109
6.3 Limitations.....	110
6.4 Recommendations	111
6.5 Future Studies	113
REFERENCES.....	115

APPENDICES	130
APPENDIX A – Interview Questions Guide	130
APPENDIX B – Participant Information Sheet.....	131
APPENDIX C – Consent Form for Audi Recording	133
APPENDIX D – Informed Consent.....	134
APPENDIX E – Ethical Clearance Certificate	136

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Zulu Hairstyle -----	13
Figure 2: The Bodi hairstyle -----	14
Figure 3: The Pokot hairstyle -----	14
Figure 4: The Brazilian hairstyle extension -----	15
Figure 5: Indian hairstyle extension -----	15

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographics of participants	45
Table 2: Themes and subthemes	53

Chapter 1: Research background

1.1 Introduction

Extensive research has gone into exploring the construct of beauty, which considered holistically, exhibits humanity's endless curiosity with this multifaceted concept. Various aspects of beauty have come under scrutiny at each point; from its definition, to the different ways in which people choose to express it (Dworkin, 1974; Wolf, 1990). These years of research have yielded different and at times even contrasting outcomes. The study of aesthetics in philosophy has been the leading and most influential theory in shaping literature on the subject of beauty (Sartwell, 2017). According to philosophical aesthetics, beauty is to be counted among the ultimate values – goodness, justice and truth (Plato, Rouse, Warmington, & Rouse, 1956). It is a term associated with aesthetic experience and typically denotes certain characteristics of an object that arouse some type of emotional reaction – for example pleasure, calm or delight - in the human observer (Sartwell, 2017). The “object”, in this case could mean anything from artistic expressions and natural landforms to human beings; the latter, with a specific focus on female beauty standards, being the area of interest and relevance for this study.

This research project is an investigation into the reported experiences of a group of young, Black South African women regarding the influence of a number of socio-cultural contexts; how these are felt to affect their conceptualization and personal meaning making in response to the notion or construct of beauty. It must be noted that in the title, the phrase *constructions of beauty* sought to gather information about the ways that the participants come to their own ideas, their thought constructions as it were, regarding beauty.

It may be important to trace back, even if briefly, some of the major theories that have influenced global society's more generalised notions of beauty. At each era and across epochs, there have been an evolving set of ideas that have come in and gone out of general public thought and opinion, each of which have carved the path for how beauty would be viewed at each turn. Some of these ideas, such as the popular and widely held notion of beauty as associated with typically white features of - light skin, lean body and long, straight hair - have persisted through the ages and continue to shape how people view and understand beauty to this day (Robinson- Moore, 2008; Thomas, 2020). The perception is based on Eurocentric skin and hair valuations.

In studying the construct of beauty, the branch of aesthetic philosophy organized itself into two contrasting perspectives namely, the objective versus the subjective views of beauty. This is the earliest and amongst the most enduring arguments (Tatarkiewicz, 1963) in the study of beauty such that it underpins modern day literature on female beauty standards (Sartwell, 2017). In his philosophical review of beauty, Sartwell (2017) described the debate around the subjectivity/objectivity of beauty to be the single most-prosecuted disagreement surrounding this subject matter. Owing to this, many of the studies that have since been conducted towards understanding the construct of beauty have been greatly influenced and shaped by this debate. Moreover, the discussion around female beauty standards has its roots in this very debate of beauty as an objective or subjective construct (Eco, 2004; Kemp, 2000; Sartwell, 2017). While the researcher in this study did not presume salience of either one of these positions, it seemed important to highlight this contention as a social construct which holds relevance for the intents and purposes of this research project.

Known to have been amongst the earliest and most influential Western philosophical scholars to have documented their thoughts on the objective view of beauty were Plato and Aristotle (Sartwell, 2017). While their theories differed significantly and were even incompatible at times, these philosophers both argued for beauty as an objective quality, in that, they located it in the beautiful object itself. Measured up against the writings of many of the early Greek philosophers on the study of aesthetics, Plato's work specifically, has been the most influential in the historical progression of the European narrative of beauty (Tatarkiewicz, 1963). Weighing in on this subject, Plato proposed that beauty is not a feature of the observer's experience (Plato, Rouse, Warmington, & Rouse, 1956). This means that beauty, according to the objectivists' school of thought, is not in fact, in the eye of the beholder as the common saying goes. Of relevance to this study and applied to the ideology of modern-day female beauty standards, the objectivists' view of beauty suggests that a woman considered beautiful in one part of the world, will or should be judged the same in any other part of the world, by any perceiver, by virtue of possessing certain intrinsic, innate qualities which make her beautiful. Plato's authority gave the objectivistic theory a predominance in aesthetics, the remnants of which are still traceable in Western society's female beauty standard of tall, lean, fair, poreless skin tone, blonde hair and blue eyes – which continues to be the dominant and most upheld standard of female beauty that women around the world seemingly still aspire towards (Pappas, 2017; Taga, 2012).

Arguing for a subjective view of beauty were scholars such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant. These scholars advanced that beauty does not lie in ‘things’ but is entirely subjective, a matter of feelings and emotion (Zuckert, 2007). According to this view, beauty is understood to be in the mind of the person beholding the object, which, different from Platonian thought, means that what is beautiful to one observer may be ugly or even offensive to another. Kant believed that aesthetic judgement is based on feelings, in particular, the feeling of pleasure (Sartwell, 2017); the feeling of which he proposed, was a matter of personal taste. Subjectivists therefore, disagree with the notion of an inherent, intrinsic state of beauty but instead base the judgement of things/objects as beautiful to be a function of certain processes of the human mind. Viewing the problem of female beauty standards through this lens, no one beauty ideal is accepted as the sovereign, universal standard. The subjectivist school of thought makes room for the socio-cultural approach to understanding female beauty to come across. In that, the idea becomes acceptable, of beauty as a construct of cultural dependencies, meaning that it will differ from culture to culture, across epochs and ultimately, from person to person, based on their socio-cultural predispositions (Holman, 2011). To elaborate this point in light of the current study, the way in which the minds of the young women in this study process and ultimately form their personal constructions of beauty (i.e. the way each individual holds these ideas in mind), is understood to be dependent on their internalization of, and perhaps resistance to, various narratives of beauty as presented to them by their immediate socio-cultural (e.g. religion, schooling, language) contexts.

While strides have been made towards exploring the concept of female beauty with a meta-analysis, covering 919 studies and over 15,000 observers that reported that people agree, both within cultures and across cultures, who is attractive and who is not (Yarosh, 2019). The researcher wondered whether the impact of this social transition might come to the surface through the reported experiences and opinions of young adults like the participants (24-27 years old). The study selected university students for the study as most of them have passed adolescence period and in the stage of young black women. The adolescents’ body will be going through a lot of physical changes so it’s imperative to shift the studies to young women.

1.2 Research Aims

The primary aim of this research study was to investigate constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, Black South African women as influenced by their socio-cultural contexts and make personal meaning from the notion of beauty, in response to what they perceive from their multilayered, socio-cultural contexts.

A secondary aim of this study was to explore whether participants felt the need to adjust their behaviour in order to conform to the notions of beauty they perceive and possibly internalize.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1. Investigate how contemporary Black South African women understand the influence of their sociocultural contexts in shaping their sense of what constitutes beauty.
2. To explore the effect of contemporary Black South African women's choice to practice beauty in a manner that is socially approved, whether or not this requires them to alter their bodies from their natural state.

1.3 Research questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do contemporary, Black South African women understand the influence of their socio-cultural contexts in shaping their sense of what constitutes beauty?
2. How does this understanding affect their choice to practice beauty in a manner that is socially approved, whether or not this requires them to alter their bodies from its natural state?

1.4 Rationale

There were two reasons that suggested that this research study would be a worthwhile project to pursue. The first stems from the findings in the existing literature pertaining to issues of Black female beauty (Kaziga, 2021; Patton, 2006; Yarosh, 2019). Much of this literature has focused on the influence of Western culture on Black women's conceptualization of beauty and almost always points to the resultant body dissatisfaction and overall, negative self-perception which they go on to develop (Becker, 1995; Bordo, 1995; Coetzee, Faerber, Lefevre & Perett, 2012; Dunn, 2017; El Jurdi & Smith, 2018; Patton, 2006; Wolf, 1990). In these studies, the media's portrayal/depiction of unrealistic beauty norms has been identified to be the leading cause of constant comparison and thus body dissatisfaction amongst many women, but especially Black women (Mills, 2017 & Rollero, 2022). Secondly, much of the literature herein referred to, has focused mostly on the experiences of African American women, while research aimed at engaging other Black women, and specifically South African Black women, on their subjective experiences of society's varied constructions of beauty has remained minimal. It is mainly these reasons that informed the researcher's attempts at investigating how contemporary, Black South African women conceptualise beauty considering the extent to which their immediate socio-cultural environment - which encompasses and transmits cultural norms and values - influences their personal sense of what and who is beautiful; that is, their own idiosyncratic internal construction(s) or sense of what beauty is.

In South Africa's current political climate, of democratic governance - where there is a rise in the interrogation of conventionally oppressive gender norms and their consequent impact on women's lives in some contexts, it seemed important to investigate whether these transformational dynamics impacted participants in relation to their thoughts about beauty norms. As such, the current research study was interested in discovering whether participants might feel able/allowed/empowered to practice (or not) beauty in whichever way they chose – be it adopting the normative standards of beauty, or carving out their own unique paths of beauty altogether.

Linked to this, the study was interested in exploring whether any of these young women felt the need to alter their bodies in line with their sense of the prevailing beauty standards, in terms of the ways they felt that they fit or didn't fit in with their own personal sense of what beauty is.

1.5 Chapter Outline

Chapter One introduces the research and outlines the rationale of the study.

Chapter two engages with literature review, which is anchored on theories on beauty and how beauty is defined. The chapter also focuses on beauty perspectives between the Western world and the South African context, as well as the impact of Western perceptions on women.

Chapter three 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. Therefore, it assumes the principles of a qualitative research design and further discusses the methodology used in this study. The chapter first gives a brief overview of qualitative research. This is followed by the sampling techniques used in the research.

Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion of the data.

Chapter Five synthesises the results and provides a summary of the research findings.

Chapter Six concludes the research study and outlines its strengths and limitations. It then presents the recommendations and key takeaways emerging from the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2. Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the research background. The chapter unpacked the introduction to the study, research aims and rationale for the study. Chapter two will focus on literature review. The literature review will be anchored on theories on beauty, how beauty is defined, South African perspectives on beauty, the Western and African perceptions on beauty and the impact of Western perceptions on women.

2.1 The theories on beauty

Beauty is frequently conceived in contemporary psychosocial studies as physical attractiveness (Holman, 2011). Yet, as the study will show, the concept of attractiveness can include references to other traits than the strictly physical ones, usually when dealing with contexts which imply a hypothetical or real social interaction (or relationship) between the perceiver and the perceived such as the context of mate choice (Holman, 2011). Contemporary challenges to appearance-related practices have long-standing roots. During America's first two centuries, "respectable" women did not "rouge," a practice associated with prostitutes (Rhode, 2016). Women might ingest chalk, vinegar, or even arsenic to achieve a fair complexion, or kiss rosy crepe paper to redden their lips, but any detectable use of paints or powders put their reputations at risk (Rhode, 2016). Beauty and virtue were intertwined, and reliance on cosmetics was thought corrosive to a "chaste soul" and a sign of moral depravity. A lot of Black women that attempted to whiten their skin were condemned (Rhode, 2016).

Monti and Pećnjak (2020) posit that the essence of beauty stands as one of Western philosophy's most enduring and contentious themes, alongside the nature of art, marking two cornerstone issues in the evolution of philosophical aesthetics. Traditionally, beauty has been revered among the highest ideals, alongside goodness, truth, and justice. For Monti and Pećnjak, (2020), beauty is a primary theme among ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and medieval philosophers, and was central to eighteenth and nineteenth-century thought, as represented in treatments by such thinkers as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Burke, Kant, Schiller, Hegel,

Schopenhauer, Hanslick, and Santayana. By the beginning of the twentieth century, beauty was in decline as a subject of philosophical inquiry, and also as a primary goal of the arts (Monti & Pećnjak, 2020). There are various theories on beauty and each of the views sketched below has many expressions, some of which may be incompatible with one another. In many or perhaps most of the actual formulations, elements of more than one such account are present as evident in the next headings, as discussed in Monti and Pećnjak (2020).

The Classical Conception - The classical conception is that beauty consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole, according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions. This is a primordial Western conception of beauty, and is embodied in classical and neo-classical architecture, sculpture, literature, and music wherever they appear.

The Idealist Conception – the human soul, as it were, recognizes in beauty its true origin and destiny.

Love and Longing - Sartwell defines beauty as “the object of longing” and characterizes longing as intense and unfulfilled desire. He calls it a fundamental condition of a finite being in time, where we are always in the process of losing whatever, we have, and are thus irremediably in a state of longing.

Hedonist Conceptions – hedonist conceptions see a necessary connection between pleasure and beauty for example that for an object to be beautiful is for it to cause disinterested pleasure. Other conceptions include defining beautiful objects in terms of their value, of a loving attitude towards them or of their function.

Use and Uselessness – linked to philosophers in the Kantian tradition who identify the experience of beauty with disinterested pleasure, psychical distance, and the like, and contrast the aesthetic with the practical.

2.1.1 The feminist theory on beauty

Beauty standards are ever changing and evolve with time, culture and trends. The social expectation that women should adhere to these standards is completely unreasonable and unworldly. The butterfly affect that the media has established manipulates us to believe otherwise. Many women are utterly convinced that they are not beautiful, and likewise, they also believe that they are not strong, worthy or powerful, as we are falsely conditioned that our

worth is determined by our attractiveness. Glass (2020) says these standards invasively attempt to define our extent of femininity, as the media not only idolises particular physical features in context of what is considered ‘beautiful’, but also what is considered ‘feminine’. Due to the extent of influence the media has on modern society, traits that are deemed ‘feminine’ likely become cultural expectations of how a woman must look in order to be beautiful and accepted (Glass, 2020). Some of the most stereotypical traits include that women have long hair, a narrow waist, large breasts and little to no body hair and so on. Rhode (2016) asserts that a lot of contemporary feminists have raised shared concerns about current norms of appearance. However, the most publicized account linked to appearance is a writing Naomi Wolf titled *The Beauty Myth* where she noted that women’s absorption with appearance “leeches money and leisure and confidence (Wolf, 1990). Society tends to hold women to unattainable ideals and their task is boundless. Nearly all areas of the female body need something. The result is to focus women’s attention on self-improvement rather than social action. The costs of our cultural preoccupation with appearance are considerable. Rhode (2016) further indicated that the global investment in grooming totals over US\$100 billion, and Americans alone spend over US \$40 billion a year on diets. In addition, the author believed that much of that investment falls short of its intended effects or is induced by misleading claims. The weight loss industry is a case in point. Ninety-five percent of dieters regain their majority of their weight within one to five years.

The demand on women to create a beautiful self-presentation by male standards, Wolf argues, fundamentally compromises women’s action and self-understanding, and makes fully human relationships between men and women difficult or impossible. In this Wolf follows, among others, the French thinker Luce Irigaray, who wrote that “Female beauty is always considered as finery ultimately designed to attract the other into the self. It is almost never perceived as a manifestation of, an appearance of, a phenomenon expressive of interiority that is whether of love, of thought, of flesh” (Robinson 2000, p. 230). “We look at ourselves in the mirror to please someone, rarely to interrogate the state of our body or our spirit, rarely for ourselves and in search of our becoming” (Robinson 2000, p. 230).

2.1.2 The socio-cultural approach on beauty

Socio-cultural standards of beauty are culturally prescribed and endorsed physical characteristics that incorporate features of the face and body and “define the standards for physical attractiveness within a culture” (Molder, 2020, p14). Like most parts of the world, South Africa’s sociocultural standards of beauty for women include thin body shape, fair skin tone, youth, large breast size, flawless skin complexion, muscle definition, and symmetry. Media, including television, advertisements, music, movies, video games, magazines, and the Internet, operate as primary mechanisms for the dissemination and integration of the feminine beauty ideal into practices of daily living for young girls and women (Molder, 2020).

The term *socio-cultural contexts* in this study refers to the different environments that these young women inhabit, which would typically include their homes, university life, possibly religious spaces and the broader social environment. Burke, Joseph & Pasick (2009) noted that a number of societal forces govern people’s daily experiences, which directly and indirectly affect their attitudes and behaviour in ways of which they may or may not be consciously aware. These forces include historical and political norms, organisations and institutions such as community, schools and churches, cultural artifacts, as well as individual and personal trajectories such as family and interpersonal relationships. It is the researcher’s aim, then, to investigate how a group of young Black women from Wits University understand the manner by which the said societal forces impact their personal meaning-making of what beauty is for themselves and for others.

Equally, Eunhee and Sangjoo (2014) add that modern people put the standards for evaluating their body on the images from the mass media rather than on others around and the psychological tendency to prefer and copy those images, which made people try to change themselves by making up, managing body shape, managing skins to overcome the gap. Women in particular are trying to maintain a beautiful and attractive body shape internalizing the standards for the ideal appearance through TV or magazines (Eunhee & Sangjoo, 2014). The desire to be 'a best body' or 'a best face' can be the desire to copy the media image which includes the internalization of the media images (Eunhee Park, 2012). From this perspective, the internalization in sociocultural attitude of appearance has a significant influence on the positive weight management behaviour. This can influence on the personal internalization

while totally reflecting the self and the appearance seen by others as they think the body image will be more important personally and socially (Eunjeong Park & Chung, 2013).

As one element of socio-cultural context, culture has been investigated in various studies (Ahmed & Saltus, 2015; Bettendorf & Fischer, 2009; Walcott-McQuigg, 2005) to demonstrate its influence in shaping females' beauty ideals. Culture in this study is viewed beyond the traditional confines of race, ethnicity or geographic locations and is understood to be a multiple, ever-changing set of elements and experiences shared amongst certain groups of people. Moreover, to recognise that in a contemporary sense, each one of the above-mentioned cultural elements participate in multiple coexisting, juxtaposed cultural systems (Kirmayer & Sartorius, 2007). This view emphasizes that cultures are fluid in their nature, and that they are heterogeneous, hybrid systems of knowledge, institutions, discourse, and practices that vary with time and locations (Kraidy, 2005). As a consequence of this fluidity, the concept of acculturation, which was first proposed by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936), comes into play. By definition, acculturation is the process wherein one alters their customs, behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyle as a result of having been exposed to another culture (Graves, 1967).

2.1.3 The cognitive-behavioural perspective on beauty

Cognitive-behavioural perspective (CBP) suggests that our thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behaviour are all connected, and that what we think and do affects the way we feel (Rector, 2010). This perspective comprises five main areas which are situations, thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and actions. With these areas, the theory suggests that our thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behaviour are all connected, and that what we think and do affects the way we feel (Kaya, 2016). Brielmann and Pelli (2017) conducted a study analysing the relationship between cognitive processing and the appreciation of beauty and they reached the conclusion that thought is a prerequisite for feeling beauty. They argued that beauty requires thought (Brielmann & Pelli, 2017). Luoto (2017) debunked Brielmann and Pelli's study and said they misrepresented the philosophy, common sense, and cognitive psychology by distinguishing visually mediated beauty from sensory pleasures also arguing that that distinction is empirically grounded. Luoto (2017) said advances in cognitive science indicate that beauty can be appraised in an astonishingly short period of time adding that cognitive

processing is evoked by a particular sensory stimulus does not preclude the fact that physical beauty can be appraised quickly and without elaborate cognitive processing. Luoto (2017) argues that Briellmann and Pelli's (2017) claim that beauty requires thought is based on a dubious interpretation of their experimental results.

2.2 Features of female beauty

There are body features that define beauty for women such as hair, skin colour, body structures and even the clothes one is wearing. These will be discussed below.

2.2.1 Hair

To Black women in South Africa and in fact, the world over, hair is not just hair. Due to long standing regimes of oppression and racial segregation such as slavery in the US and apartheid in South Africa, Black women's relationship with hair has been inundated with issues of race, politics and identity (Antunez, 2013). To many Black women in South Africa, hair has been a symbol of social status and power (Antunez, 2013). An example of where this comes across is on the world-renowned Google search engine, where it was observed that a search captioned 'professional hairstyles' tends to yield images of White women with blonde, long straight hair. On the contrary, the results of a Google search captioned 'unprofessional hairstyles' produces images of black women with African locks, curls and braids. It is therefore no surprise that for black women, hair has become an essential, carefully thought aspect of how beauty is performed (Antunez, 2013). It is worth acknowledging however, that more and more black South African women are embracing the 'Afro-look' by wearing their hair natural. Even so, this is the minority (Sarwer, Grossbart, & Didie, 2003). Montle (2020, 111) notes that "African identity has been epitomised by natural hair that often portrayed African women in short hair. However, the colonial intervention has eroded this African understanding of beauty through Euro-centric hair-styles by making Africans believe that this age-old hair-style tradition of growing short hair is backward and barbaric"

Alubafi, Rampalile and Rankoana (2018) study in Tswane unpacked women in Tswane who went into contradiction with Western hair styles. The women adopted the Afro hair style. The hair style is associated with dirty hair on Western standards.

Alubafi, Rampalile and Rankoana (2018) found out that the women adopted the hair style as a recognition and revival of their cultural heritage. On the other hand the hair style gave the women a space to expressed themselves as formerly oppressed race through apartheid. Alubafi, Rampalile and Rankoana (2018) regard the contradiction as “Tournament of values.” The values that are in the contest are Western and African. The contest was witnessed at Pretoria High school in 2016 when the staff members were applying the dress code that disregarded such African hair styles as Afro (Mahr, 2016). The controversy led to protests that result in the suspension school’s hair policy (Mahr, 2016).

Montle (2020) offered various images of hair styles that depict beauty from various African cultural groups. Thus, the Zulus, Bodi and Pokot.



Figure 1: Zulu Hairstyle

Source: Montle, M.E. (2020) Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair(styles): An Afrocentric perspective.

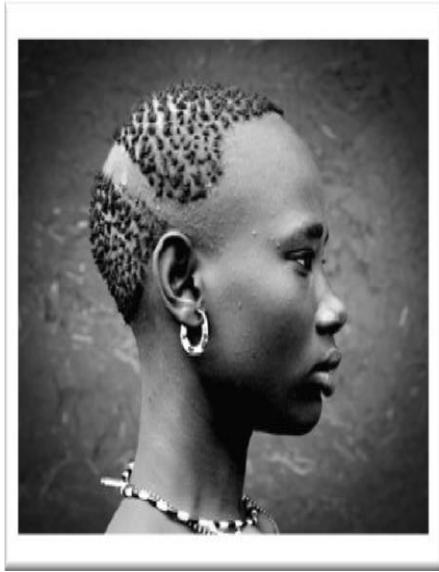


Figure 2: The Bodi hairstyle

Source: Montle, M.E. (2020) Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair(styles): An Afrocentric perspective.

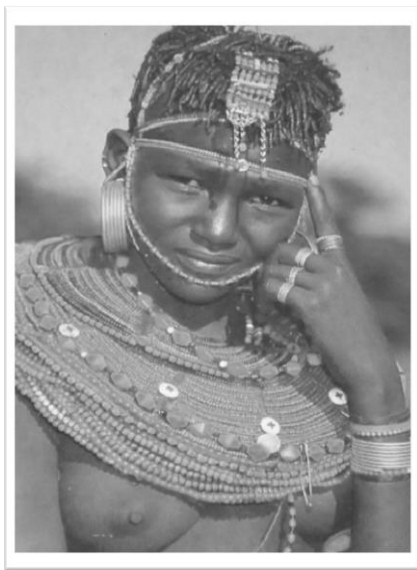


Figure 3: The Pokot hairstyle

Source: Montle, M.E. (2020) Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair(styles): An Afrocentric perspective.

Montle (2020) gave some examples of hair styles which have been adopted by the Africans that depict beauty. The images above illustrate some of the hairstyles which have been adopted by the Black African women.



Figure 4: The Brazilian hairstyle extension

Source: Montle, M.E. (2020) Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair(styles): An Afrocentric perspective.



Figure 5: Indian hairstyle extension

Source: Montle, M.E. (2020) Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair(styles): An Afrocentric perspective.

Montle (2020) asserts that the Western identity of hairstyling still tyrannise the African identities despite the advent of democracy. Montle (2020), further says there is commercialising of beauty by marketing of hair extensions in salons, as illustrated in figures five and six above. Mushure (2010, p.30) notes that “the use of hair extensions by African women is a symptom of self-hatred and ...that black women feel that their race is inferior”. Mushure (2010, p. 13) further says black women who “choose to go with the mainstream ideas of beauty, consider the Eurocentric ideals of beauty to be superior to their own African looks.”

This is because relaxing, colouring, perming and straightening of hair for beautification purposes compromises the authentic African identity through hairstyles. That in essence indicates that the industry disregards the African identity. This study therefore aims to understand the views of black African females with regards to what beauty is comprised of for them, in a social context which is more accepting of certain markers of beauty over others, such as straight hair over locks. There are many other such markers which will be explored during the course of this study and among these are skin tone and body shape. These markers of beauty are not valued the same across different societies and often pose contradicting views. The implication for the participants of this study therefore, may be that they are faced with the challenge of formulating a customized version of the concept of beauty which will favour them in some socio-cultural contexts and not in others (Antunez, 2013).

2.2.2 Skin colour

Women's skin colour was considered as a measure of beauty even during the period of slavery. Patton (2006) says Black women slaves who were lighter-skinned and had features that were associated with mixed progeny for example such as wavy or straight hair which resembled White/European facial features tended to be house slaves while those who were Black women with darker-skin hues, kinky hair, and broader facial features were sent to be fields slaves. The light skinned slaves were offered better clothes, better education, and the likelihood of being granted freedom after the death of the slave master (Swain, 2012). The assertion is supported by Holcomb-McCoy and Moore-Thomas' (2001) study of black adolescent females which found out that adolescents with physical attributes mostly different from white on features such as hair and skin colour were often alienated from others at schools and other social places, resulting in lowered achievement levels and higher high school dropout rates for darker-skinned black females.

An American talk show which centred on issues affecting young women, *The Tyra Banks Show* of April 24, 2008, featured with the topic - "do light skinned blacks have it easier?". It was uncovered in the discussion that the dark-skinned females faced discrimination in various forms as compared to their light-skinned counterparts. The show discussed the issue of a club owner who only allowed light skinned ladies free entrance to the club while light-skinned women were made to pay (Robinson- Moore, 2008). Another guest on the

show informed Banks that she was discriminated at childhood at slumber party when she was told by other girls that she was “too dark “to play with them (Robinson- Moore, 2008). On the other occasion she was told by a man that “You’re just so black, so dark” (Robinson- Moore, 2008). The implication was clear that men prefer women who are light in complexion.

2.2.3 Body structure

Beauty was deemed to be a reliable indicator for women’s fertility and child-rearing abilities (Singh, & Singh, 2011; Swami, Tovee, Miller, & Penke, 2008). As a result, good looking women – meaning those who embodied the Western ideals of female beauty (lean, straight hair, light skinned, even-toned skin), were preferable as sexual mates (Swami, Tovee, Miller, & Penke, 2008).

Body plays a huge role in defining a person’s body for both men and women. According to Fischer and Voracek (2006), men place considerably more importance on female attractiveness than women place on male attractiveness. Moreover, women pay close attention to other women’s attractiveness, relative to other traits and characteristics. Thus, given the salience of female beauty, it is not surprising that it has been well studied relative to male attractiveness (Fischer & Voracek, 2006). This dichotomy is well captured by the sexual selection theory, which connotes that people select mates to maximize their reproductive success or in other words, to maximize the probability that they will successfully have children (Fischer & Voracek, 2006).

Therefore, according to this theory, people prefer physical features that serve as cues of reproductive value, such as youth for women, which is based on the assumption that a young woman is presumably more fertile than an older woman (Fischer, 2004). However, although both women and men prefer attractive rather than unattractive mates, the critical nature of female attractiveness has been stressed to a much larger degree because of its universal, adaptive nature.

During humans’ long evolutionary history, women have been unable to secure their own resources, such as sufficient food and shelter, because of the demands of producing and raising offspring. Hence, women are thought to prefer men who possess resources, as well as skills

relating to parenting and protection of offspring. According to Fischer (2004), this is in contrast to men who generally prefer attractiveness in a mate beyond all other characteristics, where attractiveness is an indicator of a woman's potential to successfully provide offspring.

The curvaceous body shape is a typically lean body structure defined by a thin waist paired with wider variations in the upper (breast) and lower body (curves and buttocks) proportions (Harrison, 2003). The curvaceous body ideal is a newly embraced body ideal which has made its way into the beauty industry as an alternative to the thin body ideal.

2.2.4 How dressing up influences beauty

Johnson, Lennon and Rudd (2014) conducted a study aimed at providing a critical review of key research areas within the social psychology of dress. Johnson, et al (2014) review addresses published research in two broad areas namely dress as a stimulus and its influence on; attributions by others, attributions about self, and on one's behaviour as well as relationships between dress, the body, and the self. The study suggested that the way people dress influences the conclusions that other people draw about another person's character, personality, reliability, social status, intelligence, and competence. Individuals judge one another every day for things that are largely beyond their control like their face, how they are dressed up, their age, height, the sound of the voice and so on. What makes dressing different and worth doing with care is the extent to which people can use it to shape other people's perceptions about themselves and communicate how they see themselves.

The way people dress determines the extent their confidence. The way people dress affects how others see them. The way I dress affects how people see me and how they respond or relate to me. It also moulds our self-perception, thoughts, and actions which in turn affect how people perceive us. Some researchers have called the effect of what we wear on how we think.

A study by Jairath and Daima, (2021) regarding the influence of pop culture on popularizing gender-bending fashion and beauty ideals suggests that fashion and beauty bloggers have significantly impacted how ordinary people integrate these concepts into their lives as a form of self-expression. The study also found that the widespread use of social media has prompted individuals to question traditional beliefs about gender roles and identity, leading to more people exploring and expressing their gender identities through beauty, makeup, and gender-bending or androgynous fashion, (Jairath and Daima, (2021)).

Hester and Hehman (2023) in their study related to dressing as a fundamental component of person perception highlighted that clothing, hairstyle, makeup, and accessories influence first impressions and proposed a working model of person perception that incorporates target dress alongside the target face, target body, context, and perceiver characteristics. The authors' study identified four types of inferences for which perceivers rely on target dress: social categories, cognitive states, status, and aesthetics which culminated from how dressing may have an influence on beauty.

2.3 Locating the South African perspective of female beauty

Ghemawat and Actman (2013) assert that in the current era, where the world is now more interconnected than it has ever been It is of paramount importance to examine the South African view of female beauty against global society's standards of who and what is considered to be beautiful. This is important as it would be false to think of a purely South African perspective of beauty, given that beauty is a Previous studies have shown that even before the surge of social media – where South Africans along with the rest of the world now participate in negotiating issues of female beauty across different online platforms – historically, whiteness had already pervaded the country's sociopolitical ideas of beauty, which consequently, influenced the way in which black women perceived and understood their own beauty, or the lack thereof (Swain, 2012). Some of the main ideas herein date back to the era of slave trade on how black women in slavery were treated due the perceived beauty by slave owners (Awad, Norwood, Taylor, Martinez, McClain, Jones, Holman & Chapman-Hilliard, 2015). It is therefore important to understand some of these historical perspectives on beauty, firstly to acknowledge their influence on modern day beauty ideals but also and contrary to that, to disentangle them from these current/contemporary manifestations herein referenced, of who and what is considered to be beautiful.

It would be a disservice to think of a socio-politically charged concept such as female beauty in South Africa today, without tracing back its roots in the years of the country's colonization. This would hopefully provide insight into how these young women's beauty constructs have been impacted by their social milieu. Intimately linked to the notion of beauty are issues of

personal and cultural identity (El Jurdi & Smith, 2018). Being a previously colonized country, it is almost unimaginable to think of certain phenomena in South Africa without making reference to its history with colonization. Bhabha (1994) disagrees with this thought in his suggestion that post-colonial places should be able to define their identity as a people, making no reference or comparison to Western identity. According to Bhabha, in the absence of acknowledging Western influence, it is as though the previously colonised are unaware of their own identities.

For the purpose of this study however, this background is important since the beauty ideal as South Africans has been largely infiltrated and dominated by Western culture's narrative of who and what is beautiful just like any other African state (Montle, 2020). Moreover, the interaction of different world cultures is recorded to be higher and more frequent than ever before due to technological advancements such as the internet (Živković & Stojković, 2014). The internet has become a potent socio-cultural medium through which a myriad of cultural elements such as food, gender roles and of relevance to this study, female beauty, collide such that there is a wide interexchange and mutual adoption of different cultural practices across the world (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Even so, different cultures' specific idiosyncrasies have been massively influenced by Western standards through the media, although in recent years and specifically in the arena of global beauty, this has allowed for greater exposure to cultural difference. The latter was demonstrated recently, where by December of 2019, for the first time in pageantry, Black women simultaneously held the titles of five of the world's major beauty pageants; thus, Miss Universe, Miss World, Miss America, Miss USA and Miss Teen USA (Zaveri, 2019). Amongst these was South Africa's very own Zozibini Tunzi, who was the reigning Miss Universe at the time of writing this report (2019/2020). The year 2019 marked a watershed in the history of pageantry, which for years was inundated with issues of race, discrimination and gender stereotyping. While there is still a lot to be done towards leveling the ground on some of these issues, Black women having been title holders in these pageants pointed to the evolution of these competitions from typically only validating features associated with the Western beauty ideal. Together, their wins are a beacon of hope to influence communities globally, where Blackness is often excluded from that which is associated with beauty.

Owing to this, it would be correct to think of the South African view of female beauty as having been influenced by the international community's views of the concept, which is itself massively influenced by Western standards of beauty through the media. This is supported by the Tarisayi (2016) report, which has stated that the rapidly growing use of advanced communication technologies in the context of the digital era, has widened the possibilities for interaction and experimenting with issues of personal identity especially amongst the youth.

Many researchers have made valuable contributions towards arriving at a definition of beauty and female beauty, with the common goal to better understand the phenomena. Naomi Wolf, author of 'The Beauty Myth' (1990), is amongst those whose work has been central to this discussion. She proposed in this book that the myth of beauty ascertains that an objective view of female beauty exists, that women must participate in its life-long pursuit and that men must want women who embody it (Wolf, 1990). Furthermore, Wolf (1990) proposed that the beauty myth has more to do with perpetuating patriarchy and male dominance than it has to do with aesthetics. She likened it to the currency system, suggesting that it is an order of cultural and social control, which is also heavily influenced by politics. Wolf suggested that the main objective of this wild goose chase to attain the 'objective' quality of beauty is to retard the advancement of women globally (Wolf, 2002). Along with Wolf, fellow proponents of feminist thought such as Wollstonecraft (1983), Susan Bordo (1993) and Sheila Jeffreys (2005) have written extensively, although not uniformly about female beauty (Singh & Singh, 2011). Common in their work and central to their argument is that the importance placed on female beauty is often oppressive to women and hampers on their capacity to function as equal, autonomous beings who contribute meaningfully to their societies (Singh & Singh, 2011). Through the feminist's lens, female beauty standards are understood to be the long-standing arsenal by which society drives women into crippling body dissatisfaction, which has direct implications for their sense of self and ultimately, their social positioning and functionality (Wolf, 1990). The socio-political climate of the day is believed by feminists to impose physical standards which inevitably assigns value to women based on how well they fit that standard. Writing about Feminist approaches: An exploration of women's gendered experience, Kiguwa (2019) opens with two narrative excerpts, where two women narrate their experiences of circumcision when they were young children aged six and eight. One 62-year-old woman explains that she knows how painful pharaonic circumcision, yet she still forces her daughters to endure this painful practice because it is custom. The reason she gives is that the clitoris

grows as long as a man's penis and this is not acceptable. She further adds that "A woman should do everything in her power to keep her body beautiful and she should do the same for her daughters." This implies that if a woman has a clitoris, she is not beautiful, therefore she must follow oppressive customs that take away her autonomy, so that she can be seen as "beautiful" by her community.

It is as such, a power struggle where many women are conditioned to compete for the ultimate prize of "beautiful"; a crown which only men can give (Wolf, 1990). To break free, Wolf was of the idea that women needed to be mindful that insults to, or flattery of their physical appearance based on social ideals, are impersonal and political.

In his bid to define beauty, the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, described beauty as a juxtaposition of different elements (Pappas, 2017). A wide array of these elements that Plato refers to inform the age-old discussion of the concept of beauty and have been addressed by various other authors. Plato proposed that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. Fullerton (2022) asserts that Plato holds a perception of beauty is subjective meaning that people can have different opinions on what is regarded as beauty. Fullerton (2022) further says what one person perceives as perfect and charming might be dull or unattractive to another. Hence, beauty is subjective not objective.

This research study, however, takes particular interest in the socio-cultural element and its influence(s) on female beauty. Moreover, to examine how young Black women understand this influence to shape the manner in which they think of beauty, whether in relation to themselves or to others.

Holding a similar view as Ibanga (2017), Poorani (2012) proposed that traditional notions of beauty differ and are unique to certain cultures and across generations. What this statement suggests is that an objective view of beauty is achievable and possible, only within the confines of a certain culture or community of people. It is within this school of thought that sentiments such as 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' and 'beauty is skin deep' are conceived (Ibanga, 2017). While there is some value to thinking about beauty in this way, a one-sided acceptance of these sentiments, along with the aforementioned quote would be a denial to perceive female beauty in the context of the world today. The purpose of this first section of the literature review is not to define the concept of female beauty as this would be a repetition of what has already been established by many writers in and out of academic literature (Hall, 1995; Yarosh, 2019).

The study unpacks female beauty in the context of the world today, and more specifically, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, no one definition of female beauty will be adopted for this study. Instead, a merger of the different ways in which female beauty is defined and understood in different socio-cultural contexts, sets the tone for this study. Moreover, to locate the South African woman's perspective of beauty within these influences.

There are different cultural elements that exist in cultures across the world (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Female beauty is one such element. What all of this means for this study is that through the use of digital devices such as smart phones, tablets and television sets, female beauty standards are being negotiated and constructed by different members of the international community and how female beauty has been defined seems that the concept, as backed up by years of research, cannot be defined without entering into a discussion around the intersection of class, culture, gender and race. Owing to this, inquiring into the understanding of young, Black South African women's constructions of beauty requires first an appreciation of their context in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa is a country well known for its diversity and multiculturalism (Sader, 2008; UNESCO, 2016; Van Der Merwe, 1996). Over and above being home to 11 native ethnic groups, from which the country's recognized official languages emanate, the new democratic South Africa (post 1994) has seen an influx of foreign nationals who have come to call it home (Choane, Shulika & Mthombeni, 2011; Faluyi, 2018; Tarisayi, 2021). In varying proportions, there are different representation of citizens from Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, as well as other regions in Africa and Asian Countries (Dithebe & Mukhuba, 2018; Uwimpuhwe & Ruiters, 2018).

It is important to acknowledge the revolution of digital technology - such as the internet and the latest computerized smart devices - and more importantly, to hold in mind the role that these play in how beauty is performed and virtually represented. We live in the digital era, where the rapidly advancing technologies have redefined global society's understandings of how appearance relates to and informs one's identity (Sbrana, 2008). This is a change perhaps more easily observable on various social media platforms, such as Facebook, SnapChat and Instagram. These spaces have created a web wherein all the continents of the world are interlinked in cyber space (Broeckmann, 2007; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Broeckmann (2007) calls it the digital culture, which he defines as "a social environment, field of action and interaction, in which meanings, pleasures, and desires are increasingly dependent on their

construction or transmission and thus their translation by digital devices” (Broeckmann, 2007). This is such that presently and to some degree, we are perhaps moving towards a unified view of what female beauty looks like, beyond the confines to our individual cultures. Young women engage in online self-presentation of posting selfies and sharing the outfit of the day pictures to differentiate themselves with their peers on platforms such as facebook and Instagram (Mascheroni, Vincent & Jimenez, 2015). As of now the young women make us of status on whatsApp to post their images. Boyd (2014) argues that the ideal beauty standards influence the content and sharing of pictures on these social media platforms. Boyd (2014) argues that the individuals who posted their images on these social media platforms constantly seeking feedback through likes and comments to uphold a perfect and stable image of themselves.

Poorani (2012) noted that globalisation changed the traditional notions of beauty. Many societies are now valuing an “international beauty” as defined by the international beauty contests (Poorani, 2012). One can begin to see snippets of this “international beauty” in the uniformity that is observable on various social media platforms, on the profiles of different women across the world. The concept of “international beauty” is predominantly grounded on Western standards of female beauty which typically comprises a lean body, long straight hair, light skin complexion and clear, even-toned skin (Patton, 2006; Poorani, 2012).

The concept of an international beauty standard seemingly contradicts the ideas presented initially by Poorani (2012) and Ibanga (2017), of a beauty that is subject to and distinctively defined within local cultures. One might begin to wonder then, whether international beauty, as it seemingly proposes a globally objective view of female beauty, does not threaten to eclipse cultural diversity. In that, questioning the potential risk of losing local cultural or traditional notions of beauty. Some of these concerns raised herein, were documented in the UNESCO World Report (2009).

The UNESCO (2016) report proposes that it is a misconception to think of globalisation as a unidirectional and one-dimensional process, typically founded on Western principles with the objective to homogenise, standardise and streamline daily living in ways that hamper on cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2016). Globalisation in this view overly emphasizes and overestimates the possibility for local cultural activities to be sidelined and overlooked; the fear of possible cultural erosion, which is essentially the disappearance of the uniqueness of a

certain group of people and their culture (UNESCO, 2016; Wahab, Odunsi & Ajiboye, 2012). An example of some of the cultural elements in question may be seen on present day entertainment and the types of food consumed – in that, pop culture largely informs our media space and takeaway food seems to be rapidly blunting the desire for local cuisine. Vernacular languages are counted amongst the cultural elements most vulnerable to the global social climate (UNESCO, 2016). To a large extent female beauty is also amongst the most vulnerable cultural elements due to globalisation. However, this statement highlights that how beauty is viewed has evolved from how it was seen during the period of Plato and now where technology is associated with globalisation. Female beauty is sensitive to any and all cultural mutation, and as such is constantly being reinvented.

While it is true that globalisation indeed leads to forms of unification and homogeneity, this cannot be considered in a vacuum, blinded to the opportunities for creativity that it provides (UNESCO, 2016). Globalisation in contemporary society has given rise to the enmeshment of different cultural expressions, protecting some and to the exclusion of others. Thus, the process of modern-day globalisation associated with modern technology gives birth to new cultural forms, which are amicable to manipulation, so as to be representative of, yet collectively greater than the cultures from which they were formed. With female beauty in question, and in the context of the digital era as mentioned earlier, this means that the distance between different traditional notions of beauty has been shrunk by the internet, participation on social media networks and the various forms of mass media communication. This rapid increase of intercultural contact points to multiculturalism and begs a discussion of the phenomenon of culture, on which this study is grounded. It is especially significant to take a closer look at culture considering the setting of this research study in the cultural diversity of South Africa.

2.4 Western and African culture on beauty

For the purposes of this study, the term culture will be used to refer to values and norms, sets of ideas, experiences, artifacts, attitudes and behaviours shared by people of the same religion, race, ethnicity, and geographic region (Swami & Tovee, 2015). These cultural elements are often used by members of a society as they interact with each other. Moreover, these elements are transmittable from generation to generation through learning (Swami & Tovee, 2015). It is thus in and through culture that people construct their identities and locate themselves in the

world. Culture informs to a large extent, people's choice of entertainment, food, expression through different art forms, as well as their participation or non-participation in certain customs (UNESCO, 2016). While this may quickly sound like a hypostasized view of a society where human beings are organized into neat, isolated sets of groups; cultures are not self-enclosed rigid systems. They often overlap in their similarities, even if only to distinguish themselves from one another. UNESCO (2007) gives the analogy of cultures as clouds, their confines constantly changing, regrouping or separating and at times merging to create new forms which arise from those preceding them, yet significantly distinct from them. As such, with the interaction of different cultures, especially where this reality has increased rapidly with the revolution of digital technology, multiple, coexisting cultural systems are formed (Kirmayer & Sartorius, 2007; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017; UNESCO, 2016).

Basing their assertion on the African perspective Matiza (2013) regards beauty as having a social character, rather than being individualistic. Hence it is communally oriented. Matiza (2013, p.63) states that "from an African perspective, the concept of beauty has to have a purpose which it fulfils". To a large extent beauty in the African perspective must aid to communicate social values, norms, morals, and purpose. In a study carried out by Swain (2012) among black female college students who attend white colleges and universities in the United States one of the participants Rachel responded in the below statement when asked on how she defines beauty:

Well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but [big emphasis on the word but] um, I guess someone ...oh this sound stereo-, well not stereotypical, cliché, but like personality. You can have someone who's really not that attractive in the face or something, but their personality can overshadow all of that. And that's what I think. And what really makes you beautiful. Inner personality I guess, inner self.

Similarly, "Baylor states that she is a firm believer that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; how-ever, for her, she finds intelligence beauty. She felt that beauty may include a few physical characteristics, but mostly personality and intelligence" (Swain, 2012, p. 28).

Another participant, Rose stated that she has a view that a person could be aesthetically beautiful on the outside, but that their personality could sweep all that away. As a result, she does not see physical characteristics as beauty (Swain, 2012).

The cultural aspect of beauty has been massively distorted by the Western influence. Murray (2012, p. 91) states that “For a woman to be properly feminine, she must thus manipulate her appearance to conform to the very specific ideals of beauty that flow from distrust of the female body in its natural state.” The change from Afrocentric identity to Eurocentric perceived beauty was historical. Montle (2022) argues that Afrocentric identities have undergone transition as the Eurocentric identities deepen their roots in African matters. The cultural black women in the pre-colonial’s sense of beauty in their terms has changed. The terms changed with the advent of the colonists who had to despise every aspect of life of the Africans. During colonialism the colonisers applied religion, media and education to portray and manipulate Africans into believing that Eurocentric identities are better than African ones (Montle,2022).

The understanding of cultural systems as ever evolving, holds relevance for this study in that it paints a picture of beauty as a concept that inevitably undergoes its own process of evolution and constant remodeling. To illustrate how socio-cultural dynamics tend to influence constructions of female beauty, I refer to the practice of foot binding by the Chinese. Foot binding is the process that Chinese women participated in approximately a thousand years ago (Gamble, 1943) whereby they would have their feet tightly bound to prevent them from growing any further than 10cm (Levy, 1996; Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1997). Bound feet were deemed attractive and over time became a pre-requisite for marriage within the Chinese community. As a result, more and more females participated in this practice (McMahan, 2012). Although the practice of foot binding is not as popular and widely accepted today, it serves as a reference of how powerful and influential societal norms and standards of beauty tend to be. Chinese womens’ continued participation in this practice until the early 1900s (Gamble, 1943), where their bodies were changed in unnatural ways and thus subjected to considerable amounts of pain, demonstrates the lengths that women are often willing to go to gain appraisal for having attained the acceptable standards of beauty, thus rendering them as relevant to their different societies (Saltzberg & Chrisler, 1997). Not uncommonly, some beauty practices that women tend to participate in yield harmful outcomes, at times placing their very lives at risk (Ahmed & Saltus, 2015). Even so, the supposed gains which come with fitting into the beauty ideal of

the time, seemingly outweigh the potential risks associated with participating in some beauty regimes which have proven to be harmful (Ahmed & Saltus, 2015). This participation of women in certain beauty regimes introduces the discussion on beauty as performativity, which will be discussed in the next section.

Given the participants' position as students at a multicultural institution, University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), participants of this study would likely have been primed for an experience of acculturation. For those who have moved to Johannesburg from their respective homes (across South Africa), this assumed change in socio-cultural context puts them in a position to adapt - this might entail a change of emphasis in regard to some of the cultural elements which they may have carried from home - while simultaneously adopting new elements as they present in the Johannesburg city (Kelly, Bulik, & Mazzeo, 2011). Similarly, the multiplicity of cultures and thus cultural elements which characterizes Johannesburg is such that even the participants that were born and raised in the city would have had exposure to this diversity and consequently underwent their own process of acculturation (Mosselson, 2016). A study conducted by Kaziga, Muchunguzi, Achen, and Kools (2021) revealed that individuals living in urbanized wealthy areas in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg have different beauty experiences compared to those living in rural or outlying areas. The perception of beauty is influenced by various factors such as beauty expectations, comparisons, relationships, and dietary habits. These factors contribute to the oscillation between traditional and contemporary beauty ideals, which differs based on geographical location, similar to experiences across the African continent (Kaziga, Muchunguzi, Achen, and Kools, 2021). The study's findings suggest that women could benefit from a societal shift in focus from physical appearance to other valuable developmental assets.

All of these young women's internalised constructions of beauty are therefore likely to be rooted in the interplay of the different sets of experiences which they would have gained in their various socio-cultural and familial contexts (Borelli & Berneburg, 2010).

Western culture's beauty ideals have permeated many societies to the point where it would be fitting for it to be viewed as the global standard (Dolva et. al., 2014). As a result, most of the research conducted around the influence of culture on women's internalised constructions of beauty has centred on a Westernized definition of the concept (Coetzee, Faerber, Lefevre & Perett, 2012). This has therefore created an opportunity to explore beauty the multiple ways it

may be defined and understood in a previously non-Westernised country like South Africa. However, the influence of Western culture has permeated urban Johannesburg; a highly urbanised city, which has clearly been affected by Westernization (Pitso-Motlabane, 2014)

The current study therefore, is important in a multi-cultural country such as South Africa and will hopefully be a valuable contribution towards the literature around this topic area. It forms a part of the broad research literature that aims to gain a nuanced understanding of body-related opinions amongst contemporary Black females and especially speak to the South African context (Shelembe, 2015).

Non-Western notions of beauty tend to lean more towards the subjective stance of female beauty. While African philosophers also subscribe to the idea of beauty as an objective concept, the extent to which this is applicable to the broader, global society differs significantly from what was suggested by the aforementioned Western scholars, more especially Kant's theorisation of beauty as a universal concept. This means that for African philosophers, the objectivity of beauty applies to and is determined by cultural groups, with one culture's conceptualisation of beauty intrinsically unique from the next's.

Beauty in the African context is less technical and is generally associated with femininity and womanhood. This ascribes human qualities to the concept and perhaps introduces the relational and functional aspects by which African-dominated communities often define beauty. This is seen in how beauty in African cultures is often ascribed to women who over and above their outer appearance, carry themselves in ways which their individual communities deem appropriate and approve of, thus maintaining social order (Ikuenobe, 2016).

The researcher in the current study attempted to explore the main ideas that have been influential in shaping current society's (contemporary South Africa) conceptualisation of female beauty. From the broader arguments as presented in Greek thought about female beauty, down to the notion as understood in South Africa, the goal of this exercise was to identify the key socio-cultural factors that go on to inform who and what is considered to be beautiful in the different environments that the young women in this study would have interacted with.

The concept of beauty has for time immemorial, been amongst the most pursued human curiosities. For years on end, the topic of beauty has remained a point of contention amongst

researchers (Ibanga, 2017; Poorani, 2012; Tate, 2007). From its definition to the different ways in which it is performed, researchers around the world are constantly seeking to better understand this multi-faceted phenomenon. As suggested by Ibanga (2017), different cultures had already began their quest to understanding beauty even long before the global surge of Western influence. Culture itself has been proven to be foundational in determining how different groups of people come to make meaning of and understand the concept of beauty (Ibanga, 2017). Western culture's beauty standards have however, been the dominant narrative and have permeated many other cultures' ideals of beauty (Shelembe, 2015). Even so, recent years have, with the help of the internet, seen a surge in different cultures and especially African cultures reclaiming, embracing and celebrating their own unique notions of beauty. Due to the fact that typically African features have for the longest time been excluded from the mainstream beauty space, when more African women started embracing their natural features, this stood in contrast to and thus challenged Western beauty standards.

More than just understanding the concept, the said study explains how individuals and especially women are known to put in considerable efforts towards acquiring beauty at its highest level, which would typically be abiding by whatever beauty norms that apply amongst a community of people during a certain time period (Ibanga, 2017). Beauty as such, is a concept that is closely tied to and often characterizes the cultural elements of those who define it.

Owing to this seemingly lifetime pursuit of beauty and the beautiful, a large body of literature on the various aspects of this phenomenon has been generated; the broader study of which speaks also to issues of personal as well as societal body related opinions. This has yielded many definitions and different understandings of beauty, wherein the case has been made to support the contrasting, often debated view of beauty as either subjective or objective (Ibanga, 2017).

The objective sense of beauty in African cultures then, speaks to the idea that that which is beautiful is that which serves the greater good of the community, per community (Ikuenobe, 2016). For African philosophers, the idea of beauty as objective is generalizable only within the parameters of each cultural community as it is often the case that these communities, themselves, vary greatly in the intricacies of what constitutes beauty for them (Ibanga, 2017). These unique community standards therefore render the concept of beauty in African philosophy to be quite broad but also add a subjective quality to the phenomena as determined per cultural group. Against this backdrop, the African conceptualisation of beauty can be

appreciated for its dual nature as both subjective and objective (Ibanga, 2017). Even though researchers to this day have not found common ground in positioning beauty as either subjective or objective.

However, one thing has remained clear and consistent, and that is the ever-evolving nature of the concept of female beauty. Viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon, this quality of beauty is understood to be a function of its embeddedness in the cultural milieu of various communities. Since culture itself is a non-static, ever evolving phenomenon, it follows then, that beauty and particularly beauty standards would also morph around the cultural transformations of the day. Holman (2011) shares in this thought as noted in his synthesis of the contemporary approaches on the subject of corporal beauty, that beauty is a culturally dependent construct and is not necessarily about the actual body itself. This means that traditional notions of female beauty vary across cultures and generations, moreover, that individual cultures' ideologies of female beauty change as the cultures themselves evolve. In this study therefore, that aimed to explore how a group of young, Black women in South Africa understand the influences of different socio-cultural factors on their personal constructions of beauty, the exploration of these said socio-cultural factors became important.

2.5 The performance of beauty

This section will be grounded in Judith Butler's ideas on the concept of gender roles as performativity. Gender, as illustrated by Butler (1994), is understood to be socially constructed, as such, it is exposed to certain norms and regulations across cultures and society as a whole. This suggests that people are not born into specific gender roles, but these are imposed on them through socialization. Society assigns each individual to a gender category, commonly the binary distinction of male or female based on their repeated performance of a set of these socially constructed gender roles associated with either category (Çınar, 2015). Performance therefore, is defined as the sum of acts and repeated behaviour of a person according to their gender and sex as ascribed by society (Çınar, 2015). Butler spoke to this when she likened gender to a script of a set of repeated acts, which predetermine a limited choice of gender styles from which one may choose, within the strict regulatory frame of society (Judith, 1999).

This background of the performance of gender roles is relevant to this study since the quality of beauty in African culture is typically associated with women (Ibanga, 2017). A study conducted by Haselmann (2014) in Senegal found that its male participants generally associated beauty with women and femininity. Nearly every usage of the word beauty or beautiful amongst Black Africans is conceptualized in feminine terms (Ibanga, 2017). This connotation of beauty as a feminine quality therefore, denotes an assigning of gender, which is in turn determined by performativity of the female gender role. In this sense, beautiful women in African philosophy are considered to be those who portray a harmony of good conduct as well as physical attractiveness (Haselmann, 2014). Moreover, another valued characteristic of the beautiful amongst Africans is functionality (Matiza, 2013), which in the context of this study can be understood as performances. Beauty is said to be a measure of a woman's behaviour, moral conduct, dress and of course, her physical features. Matiza (2013) adds to this view in arguing that "beauty is not for the sake of being beautiful" (p.65), but that it must be intended to serve society. I propose then, that a failure for Black African women to act in accordance with their society's standard of what beauty is, carries a potential threat to their femininity in their respective socio-cultural contexts. This also highlights the relational nature of beauty amongst Africans, in that, unless endorsed by another, one cannot affirm their own beauty (Ibanga, 2017). This sets the tone for the discussion that follows, which looks at the literature on how beauty is located within the South African context.

2.6 The South African national identity

The foregoing discussion on culture and how it is constantly remodeled is important to the understanding of the backgrounds of the young women who participated in this study. More importantly, it is important to foreground the following discussion regarding the city of Johannesburg, where this study was conducted.

"Joburg," as it is affectionately known, is the hub for and is representative of South Africa's cultural diversity. The Inner City of Johannesburg, located in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, includes several suburbs such as Braamfontein, Braampark, Johannesburg CBD, Doornfontein, Hillbrow, Jeppestown, Joubert Park, Marshalltown, Newtown, Berea, and Yeoville, among others. However, rapid urbanization, unmatched by an associated supply of

housing, has resulted in overcrowding in the cities of many developing countries, including Johannesburg, South Africa (Leboto-Khetsi, 2022).

Braamfontein, the site where this study took place, is predominantly a student area marked by the vibrancy of young hopefuls from across the country and international borders, in pursuit of establishing themselves in the global market space (Mosselson, 2017).

From the picture painted above, one can begin to appreciate Johannesburg as a hub for the country's cultural diversity. As such, locals may be faced with a challenge when trying to anchor themselves in regard to their value systems and fostering a sense of belonging. The coming together of different worldviews in this manner sets up a platform for acculturation to take place. Acculturation is the process whereby intercultural contact produces mutual adoption of different cultural elements between the members of the cultural groups in question (Berry, 1997). It is important to highlight that in the context of this study, acculturation is understood to impact both the migrant and host cultural groups. By so saying, participants who are native born Johannesburg residents are not exempted from undergoing the process of acculturation. In that, by virtue of their different backgrounds, the coming together of students at an institution like Wits University creates a multicultural environment, which all students would need to find creative ways of adapting to. It can be assumed therefore that the participants of this study come with their own personal experiences of the process of acculturation.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of different worldviews, cultures and experiences in this manner introduces the idea of national identity (Mosselson, 2016). National identity supposes a common public culture which unites the members of a society or community in a way that sets it apart from others (Albrecht, 2012; Henderson & McEwen, 2005). The background given of the post-apartheid context of South Africa, affectionately referred to as the 'rainbow nation', exempts it from being viewed in terms of a homogenous, single national identity (Khan, 2013). Even before the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa's long history of colonization makes the task of defining the country's national identity a daunting one. A typical case of the past always being a part of the present. As such, South Africa, and thus Johannesburg, boasts a hybrid kind of national identity, one which is representative of the diversity of the people who inhabit it. On surface level examination and generally, South Africa is mainly comprised of two cultural orientations, namely, the African (ethnic) and the Western identities. The South

African hybrid national identity is formed by the coming together of cultural elements from both orientations, to the varying extents that they do (Schumann, 2011).

Previously, and during the early years of the democratic South Africa, Western culture dominated the beauty industry, leaving little to no room for Afrocentric features of female beauty to be embraced. However, we have seen a gradual entry of Afrocentric features into the beauty space in recent years (Agocha, Overstreet & Quinn, 2010; Dean, 2009). I might also add that these features have come to be celebrated and perhaps some even desired cross-culturally. With the introduction of celebrity figures such as the Kardashians in the media space, certain features of female beauty typically associated with African origins such as thick hips and full buttocks have come to be embraced and desired as a new ideal (Dean, 2009). Moreover, with the surge of social media's hashtags such as #BlackGirlMagic, African hair and dark skin have entered the beauty industry as beautiful and acceptable features. The current study is interested in whether or not/to what degree these new tributaries have been taken up by individuals. This will be discussed in the following section, which looks the role of the media in shaping the discourse of female beauty historically and in present day society.

2.7 Factors that influence perceptions on beauty

There are factors that influence how people perceive beauty such as media, home and school environment especially for young people at tertiary institutions. The factors are discussed below.

2.7.1 Influence of the media in shaping and deconstructing beauty ideals

The media have proven to be a powerful tool not only of communication, but also continue to play a significant role in informing and thus shaping many social phenomena (Sunstein, 2018), female beauty being one of these. Mills, Shannon & Hogue (2017) assert that mass media play a critical role in depicting the people's self-image- through informing and reflecting on what people consider as beautiful or attractive. The mass media play that role by featuring thin and attractive models in print and other forms of media, that is often termed the 'thin ideal', which communicates the way that people believe they should look in order to be attractive and desirable to others (Mills, Shannon & Hogue (2017). Therefore, the ideal standards of beauty

were communicated by way of television advertisements as well as through glossy magazines. The media's constant depiction of unbelievably thin supermodels, with long straight hair, pore less skin and straight, snow-White teeth, has sold the Western ideal of beauty to women as the quality of being flawless (Forbes, et al, 2012). The continuous consumption of these images that depict everything that ordinary women, and especially Black women do not represent, is at the root of many women's struggles with low self-esteem and a negative body image (Forbes, et al., 2012).

The US media takes centre stage in the depiction of the ideal beauty figure as adhering to the Western standard of beauty and is preoccupied with participation in beauty regimes that ensure the maintenance of this standard (Davalos & Layton, 2007). Research has revealed that the longer women look at and internalize the images of these young slender models, the more likely they are to find many flaws in their bodies (Davalos & Layton, 2007; Poloskov & Tracey, 2013; Sides-Moore & Tochko, 2011). Thus, such media publications of unrealistic beauty standards nearly always perpetuate tendencies of body dissatisfaction. Even women who are generally confident tend to evaluate themselves negatively when comparing themselves against images of idealised models. The correlation between these two variables has been examined exhaustively in multiple studies. Amongst these was a meta-analysis by Grabe, Ward & Hyde (2008) in which 77 correlation and experimental studies that linked the internalization of the thin ideal as portrayed by the media, eating behaviours and poor self-body image, proved that the media plays a significant role on influencing body image dissatisfaction (BID). More than 55% of the studies evaluated, provided reliable evidence of links between BID and exposure to the media.

Indeed, the sharp increase in globalisation and rapid technological advancements over the years, have caused a dramatic escalation in regards to all women's exposure to Western ideals of beauty, almost wherever in the world they may live. This constant exposure to the media's portrayal of "beautiful women" and "perfect bodies" has been reported in numerous studies to have increased women's feelings of body dissatisfaction (Bordo, 1993; Broeckmann, 2007; Greer, 1999; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017; Poorani, 2012). It thus seems an appropriate response to Wolf's (1990) question that what women saw (and see) was/is heavily influenced and clouded by the media and especially social media.

2.7.2 The influence of home and school on Beauty

Bryant (2019) regards family as a primary component of a child's primary and immediate environment. Therefore, families have a crucial influence in the future life of an individual. Bronfenbrenner (1993) & Hutchinson (2007) assert that family shapes children's ideals on what determines beauty.

Bryant (2019) regards the education system as a reinforcer of the messages of beauty among African students. In support Umberson and Hughes (1987) found out that people perceived to be beautiful are offered more professional and social opportunities from childhood through adulthood. Hence, society regards beautiful individuals as earmarked for success. Bryant (2019) asserts that the socio-cultural standard of beauty plays a significant role in academic achievement. Holcomb-McCory and Moore-Thomas (2001) found that black adolescent student females whose hair and skin colour which is different to those of the white females were often isolated from others at school and in other social settings. According to Bryant (2019) social isolation results in lower academic performance of learners. Bryant (2019) further says students who are dark-skinned are likely to fail academically and this can result in reduced employment outcomes.

2.8 The implications of Western perspective on beauty

There are negative effects associated with the Western perspective on young black African women. Poorani (2012) asserts that physical attractiveness has been associated with positive personal qualities as promulgated by Dion and colleagues in the 1970s who coined the phrase "What is beautiful is good". Therefore, people who are not attractive are disadvantaged in many aspects of life. Poorani (2012) further argues that fat people were viewed as less happy, less self-confident, less self-disciplined and lazier. The assertion is supported by Marika, Tiggerman and Esther Rothblum (1988) who conducted a study on how American and Australian college students viewed fat people. The participants in both cultures reported negative stereotypes of fat people. Even those who were overweight had negative stereotypes of fat people.

In an interesting study by Bettendorf and Fischer (2009) the relationship between the internalization of U.S. female beauty standards (which largely informs popular culture) and the degree of body dissatisfaction among Mexican women was examined. These researchers found that acculturation to the U.S. standards of beauty increased the likelihood of body dissatisfaction (Bettendorf & Fischer, 2009). Highly body dissatisfied individuals are more likely to participate in body modifying procedures in an attempt to make themselves look more beautiful or attractive (Warren, 2014). These procedures range from the simplistic change of hair-styles, the use of beauty creams and participation in weight-loss programs; to the more complex skin bleaching and plastic surgery. More often than not, Black females are the leading participants in such body modifying procedures, and at times endure them with much pain and even risk for harmful outcomes (Ahmed & Saltus, 2015).

Rhode (2016) argues that due to overemphasis of beauty it affects women's credibility and results in some losing focus on their potential. The prevailing Western standard on beauty affects young women who do not enough money to invest in improving their beauty to Western standards. Rhode (2016) asserts that the women had to endure costs of fashion clothes, health clubs, make up, weight loss and cosmetic products. Rhode (2016) further says, 90 percent of women had to undergo cosmetic surgery and they had to endure all the costs and physical risks associated with the procedure. What drives the women to undergo the procedure is ridicule, humiliation and shame.

2.8.1 Body dissatisfaction and reverse body dissatisfaction

Body dissatisfaction is the tendency for one to misperceive their own body as inadequate when measured up against what they consider to be the ideal beauty representation(s) (Grogan, Grill, Brownbridge, Lilgariff, & Whalley, 2013). While it was originally conceptualised as an issue among Caucasian, middle-class, female populations, body dissatisfaction and overall issues of beauty have over the years transcended to the greater population of women across cultures globally and Black women are no exception (Grabe & Hyde, 2006; Wildes, Emery, & Simons, 2001). The previously widely held believe that Black women are buffered from body dissatisfaction due to Black African cultures' tolerance, and even preference of bigger body

frames, has since changed (Marques-Hayasaki, 2016). In today's highly globalized society, and due to social processes such as acculturation, the thin body ideal has reached international status (Dunn, 2017), which Black women are also seen to aspire towards. Body-dissatisfied women are more prone to engaging in beauty modification practices in an attempt to make themselves more attractive (Stice & Shaw, 2003). This is why the beauty industry continues to thrive as a multibillion-dollar industry (Odhiambo, 2008).

Feelings of possessing beauty or a lack of it are largely informed by one's overall self-concept, which is influenced by their socio-cultural context (Poloskov & Tracey, 2013). This has implications for one's positive or negative self-concept as a determinant of what they regard to be beautiful and what they regard as unattractive. Due to obsession with beauty, it had culminated in some serious health problems such as eating disorders (Rhode, 2016). Some of the women will be obsessed with thinness that affects reproduction, work production and even someone's health (Rhode, 2016).

It is therefore important in the current study, to consider participants' constructions of beauty as guided by the juxtaposition of their home environments as well as ideas of beauty presented in the Johannesburg socio-cultural context. The university context as explained above, is one marked by diversity and multiculturalism. Previous studies have found that tertiary institutions in South Africa present ample opportunity for one to explore different cultures and create their own identity (Albrecht, Jacobs, Retief, & Adamski, 2013; Engeln-Maddox, 2006).

Amongst other points, the current study aims to explore whether there is a sense of the freedom to choose of self-representation amongst Black women or not. There is adequate research on body dissatisfaction as a function of elevated exposure to normalized beauty standards on various media platforms. However, there is a gap in literature, of how the same media platforms are used to counter body dissatisfaction, particularly social media. The current study therefore, seeks to address this gap by introducing the concept of reverse body dissatisfaction.

As the name suggests, reverse body dissatisfaction is defined as the process by which one recognizes the misperceptions they hold about their bodies, and intentionally celebrates some of the physical features which society has deemed unattractive, so as to encourage acceptance of the self as flawlessly imperfect. Moreover, this is a concept that would establish that the

very view that anything which deviates from socially idealized standards of beauty is flawed. As such, reverse body dissatisfaction is the idea of women claiming their unique versions of beauty and parading these in the media space in order to counter body dissatisfaction. Due to its personalized nature, where the user has more direct control than they do in traditional media (Mills, Shannon, & Hogue, 2017), social media is the ideal platform where reverse body dissatisfaction is observed to commonly take place. It is on various social media platforms that certain advocacy groups are visible, making use of counter-trends and hashtags (a method of labelling content on different social media platforms, sorted by the use of words or phrases preceded by the hash (#) sign for easy access to certain topics (Sunstein, 2018) to agitate the discourse on idealized beauty standards. Some of the popular hashtags include #BlackGirlMagic (Julee, 2016), #MelaninPoppin and #ThickThighsSaveLives through which open dialogue is encouraged and features which are of ethnic descent are celebrated.

Although not as rife and popular then, advocacy against the harmful effects of ideal appearance exposure had already started on television media some ten years back. With the sharp rise of eating disorders amongst young girls and women as a consequence of prolonged exposure to such media content, some celebrity figures took the initiative to use traditional media platforms to counter the social pandemic. The study by Keller 2014 about *Fiercely Real: Tyra Banks and the making of new media celebrity* have summarised Tyrabanks show establishment. Tyra Banks is one of the celebrity figures who has paved the way for advocacy to be possible in this area. Amongst the many caps that she wears, Tyra is an American TV personality and former supermodel. In 2009, she began a TV show named after her – The Tyra Banks show. One of the main objectives of the Tyra Banks show was to celebrate female beauty in all its simplicity and complexity, however that looked like. While the show casted supermodels, as such, aired women that were typically lean and tall, this was done in such a way that attempted to break societal norms of what beauty is; moreover, of what supermodels are “supposed to look like”. In that, airtime was given to exposing some of the behind-the-scenes tricks that go into creating the flawless final product that the end consumer (women) then receives. Moreover, Tyra’s show tackled issues such as skin bleaching, body image dissatisfaction as well as hair politics, which Black women and women globally are often confronted with. (Keller, 2014).

The principles which now apply in the democratic South Africa, of freedom of expression for all and the right of access to information, were non-existent (Matisonn, 2013). As such, media

reporting was repressed and selective; moreover, the content made accessible especially to the Black population was tightly controlled (Madlela, 2018; Matisonn. 2013). It was the persistent efforts of oppositional publications such as Drum Magazine, which saw some representation of the realities of Black South Africans and attempted to echo their experiences to capture how these differed from those of White people. The media's representation (whether or not reflective of real life experiences) of Black women has increased significantly in the democratic South Africa (Madlela, 2018), hence this study focused on Black women's experiences, to examine how this newly found inclusivity on such spaces would have impacted on their constructions of beauty.

This chapter presented literature review from other related authors to the area of this study.

2.9 Summary of literature reviewed

In this chapter, a review of literature related to theories on beauty and its definitions was presented. Theories such as the feminist, socio-cultural approach, and cognitive-behavioral perspective were extensively discussed, as they have an impact on how beauty is perceived. Various authors within the literature covered these theories. The chapter also examined beauty perspectives between the Western world and the South African context, as well as the influence of Western perceptions on women. This revealed that hair, skin color, body structure, and dressing up are some of the features that influence the beauty of the female body.

The next chapter presents research methodology adopted to carry out this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Research Design

Academic research is typically governed by one of two methodologies namely, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. A third alternative, the mixed methods research design is also possible, which is in essence, a combination of elements from the two research designs aforementioned. While each methodology is useful and has its place in academic research, the purpose of this chapter is to explain the research methodology of choice for the current study, which was conducted following the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research aims to study and describe events or certain social phenomena as they unfold in their natural setting(s) (Maree, 2020). In that, qualitative research is best suited to understanding how individuals subjectively perceive and give meaning to their social reality [ref]. In explaining this approach to research, Merriam (2009) noted that qualitative research is based on the view that individual experiences are located within and are shaped by socially constructed concepts. As such, the aim of a study conducted qualitatively would be to understand and capture the social reality of individuals, groups and cultures as closely as possible to how they, themselves feel and/or experience it to be. This aligns with the researcher's objectives for this study, which was to offer an account of how a group of young Black women at Wits University perceive — different socio-cultural milieu to influence their constructions of and personal meaning making of the notion of beauty. Qualitative research as such, was useful to this end since it provided an avenue for the researcher to gain in-depth insight into the individual's understanding on phenomena (Parker, 2004). Amongst the primary objectives of qualitative research are to gain a complete, detailed description of the phenomena of interest, through the lens of its members (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Qualitative research is exploratory in its nature, thus making it useful for generating insightful, in-depth and descriptive data (Shelembe, 2015). This research methodology as such, is concerned with providing rich and nuanced descriptions of participants' experiences of a given phenomenon to quantitative research, which analyses data presented in numerical format, making allowance for a broader reach into the population studied and therefore, enabling generalization of results (Greenstein, Roberts, & Sitas, 2003).

Phenomenology provides reasonable room for flexibility compared to quantitative research. While quantitative research typically begins with a hypothesis, which then informs the process of data collection, qualitative research relies on the sensitive observation of participants' experiences and the interpretation thereof, in providing answers to the research questions posed (Neuman, 2000). This was important to this study which aimed at allowing participants to freely express how they understood socio-cultural influences to shape their constructions of female beauty, as contemporary young Black women. Moreover, following qualitative procedures ensured that this process of collecting data was done with minimal engagement from the researcher, whose role was mainly to facilitate, probing only as and when necessary. Engaging in this manner was in keeping with the guidelines in literature, which maintain that the role of the qualitative researcher is to encourage the participant to open up and provide them space to talk while they listen and observe (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Owing to this, rich data was generated from participants' sharing of their viewpoints on how various socio-cultural contexts have played significant roles in shaping their lived experiences of what beauty is.

Considering the subjective nature of this study, it was important to be cognizant of the fact that people each have unique, personalized experiences of even the same phenomena (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). Moreover, meanings attached to a common situation also tend to differ. The situations described however, can become the basis for higher-level, invariable relationships between the individuals in order to account for the phenomenon of study (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011). This emphasis of qualitative research methodology on meaning, is in the interest of illustrating how research participants' individual experiences, reported in their own words, and understandings are mutually influenced by, and influence social structures (Shabangu, 2016). Moreover, it assumes that participants' thoughts, feelings and actions are born from socially constructed meanings and are not conceived of, independently of societal influence. This study aligns with this assumption as it aims to investigate the influence of socio-cultural ideals of beauty on contemporary Black women's personal constructions of beauty.

The inductive approach in research is guided by the data. This method involves collecting and analysing data to form theories, concepts, or hypotheses based on patterns and observations in

the data. It follows a "bottom-up" process, starting with specific observations and then developing more general theories or ideas. (Azungah, 2018)

The inductive approach is closely associated with the interpretivism approach. In interpretivism, analysis relies on the researcher's own actions to interpret the data, instead of using established systems or theories (Azungah, 2018). Interpretivism assumes that reality is subjective, multiple, and socially constructed. This means that reality can only be understood through an individual's experience, which is shaped by historical and social perspectives (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Therefore, interpretivism approaches encompass social theories and perspectives that view reality as socially constructed or made meaningful through the understanding of events by individual, (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020).

This study took a phenomenological approach in regard to the researcher's topic area of interest. Phenomenology in this instance, was used descriptively to refer to the researcher's interest in participant's lived experiences, and not as a commitment to it as a method and epistemology. Phenomenology falls under the interpretivist paradigm, which is concerned with individuals' meaning making of phenomena (Remeyni, 1998). An interpretive research paradigm understands the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The study explored, described, and offered an analysis of the meanings that young Black women attached to their experiences of comprehending female beauty as a socially constructed concept (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This has relevance in how participants perceived their experience, how they described and recalled it, their feelings and judgements surrounding it, how they made sense of it, as well as the manner in which they talked to others about it (Patton, 2001). To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The data gathered from this interview process was analyzed based on the premise that there is an essence to certain elements of shared experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The experiences of participants – those who have had a sort of general, common experience – were analysed as unique expressions and then compared to look for any common essence/s (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

3.4 Sampling

A total of six young Black women who are university students, were recruited to participate in this study. This is an appropriate sample size for qualitative research of this kind. Qualitative data tends to be detailed, descriptive and dense (Maree, 2007). Therefore, the size of the sample allowed for manageability and thorough analysis of the data. The criteria for the targeted sample were young, Black South African women in their second year of study and above, at the University of Witwatersrand. The prerequisite of second year students and above, was under the assumption that at that level of study, participants would have had exposure to the city of Johannesburg for at least one year and as such, would have settled into the environment.

A total of six participants were interviewed in this study. Below is their demographical information as it applied at the time of the interviews. Pseudonyms were used in the effort to protect the participants' identity.

Name	Age	Home	Race – Ethnicity	Course	Year of study
Kgabi	25	Soweto	African – Sotho	BSc – Chemical Engineering	3
Hlengiwe	24	Ennerdale, Johannesburg	African – Zulu	Bachelor of Laws	2
Mbali	26	Ennerdale, Johannesburg	African – Zulu	BCom – Human Resource Management	2
Tshego	24	Rustenburg	African – Tswana	BSc – Computational & Applied Mathematics	2
Masedi	27	QwaQwa, Lesotho	African – Sotho	Media Studies	3
Dimpho	24	GaRankuwa, Pretoria	African – Zulu	Bachelor of Nursing	2

Table 1: Demographics of participants

Volunteer sampling was used to draw the sample for this study. This is one of the sampling methods under the non-probability category of sample selection techniques. Non-probability sampling as a category, refers to sampling techniques where ones' chance of participation in a research project is not determined by the statistical principle of randomization (Shabangu, 2016). Consequently, the probability for one to be selected as a part of the sample is indeterminable. Moreover, under the non-probability category of sampling techniques, the researcher exercises personal judgment as to which participants best fit the criteria of the sample, in line with the objectives of the study (Richie & Lewis, 2003). Volunteer sampling, therefore, relies on interested individuals from the target population self-selecting to take part in the study (Maree, 2007).

This study was advertised through posters on the notice boards of second to final year undergraduate students at the Wits University main campus in Braamfontein. Moreover, the researcher sought permission from individual lecturers to be allocated a time slot during lectures of the targeted population, wherein the study was introduced. The information conveyed on both these platforms outlined the nature of the study, the participants of interest (sample criteria), the roles of the researcher and participants respectively, as well as the researcher's contact details. Volunteer sampling was the choice sampling method, mainly for the purposes of minimising bias in the study. In that, since data collection was conducted towards the University's final exams season, student participation was mostly determined by individual availability.

3.5 Data collection

Qualitative interviews were used to collect data for this study using an interview schedule as an instrument to gather information from the participants regarding "What is their experience like related to beauty"; "What does this experience mean"; or "How does this lived experience present itself to the participant", (Van Manen, 2017). Qualitative research interviews are often described as a construction site of knowledge, where interviewer and interviewee discuss a theme of mutual interest (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.6 Instruments of data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. This method of data collection entails developing a series of open-ended questions based on the study (Patton, 2001). Ten questions, which the researcher formulated upon careful consideration of the available literature, were developed (Appendix A) for this research study. These questions served to try to ensure that the research questions would be addressed by participants. At the same time, they allowed room for some flexibility for both researcher and the participants. This format of interviewing was best suited for the purpose of the study as it allowed the interviewee to express their opinions freely, using their own narratives. At the same time, the researcher took on an active role of managing the interviews so that participants would not deviate too much from the topic. This was done mindfully, showing respect towards the participants' choice of articulation as well as the manner in which they structured their responses. The researcher asked follow-up questions where it was required, so as to gain clarity and more depth during instances where participants' responses came across as superficial or if they had other relevant responses to share that were not directly covered by the questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This format of interviewing is based on one of the key assumptions of qualitative research: "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 144).

3.7 Data analysis

The six interview transcripts were thoroughly perused and analysed using the Giorgi's method of analysis which aimed to uncover the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by a human through the identification of essential themes (Ataro, 2020). The validity of Giorgi's method is asserted through supportive data (Ataro, 2020). Horizontalisation was achieved by treating every statement or expression as equally important and relevant. Quotations of the participants' responses have been extracted verbatim and are highlighted throughout the discussion of the results chapter using critical themes and argue them based on the literature sources. For the sake of clarity, extracts from transcripts have been organized so as to eliminate repetitions,

non-fluencies and information that is of less significance to the research themes identified for this study.

Giorgi's method was used to analyse the research data for this study. Ataro, (2020) defines Giorgi's method as a way of analysis that uncovers the meaning of a phenomenon as experienced by a human through the identification of essential themes. Moreover, the researcher reports on their interpretation of the identified themes in the data. This method minimally organises and richly describes the data in detail (Ataro, 2020). Literature often refers to the 'emergence' of themes from the data. This is a skewed illustration of the manner in which themes are synthesised as the notion of themes 'emerging' suggests a passive account of the process of analysis. It denies the active role that the researcher plays in actually identifying these themes; that is selecting which ones are of substance to report to the readers (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). The language of 'themes emerging' can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in the minds of researchers; from their thinking about the data collected and creating links as they seek understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997).

Giorgi's method differs significantly from other well-known analytic methods such as discourse analysis (DA), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory. Although the latter method entails developing a theory that stems from data, it requires forming an alliance with a particular theoretical framework (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In contrast, Giorgi's method is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical frameworks, thus allowing for flexibility to explore the different theories more. It can be used from a realist or an essentialist view, which reports on participants' experiences, meanings and their realities, or it can be used from a constructionist point of departure (McCoy, Gamble and Maple, 2020). This study is not affiliated to any one of these, or any other theoretical orientation. While the researcher is aware of various theories, the decision not to commit to theoretical orientation was in the interest of allowing the broadness and richness of the data, allowing participants experiences to come alive with minimal to no restrictions. As outlined in the introduction, constructions, as in young Black women's constructions of beauty was examined in relation to their personal views on female beauty, which they now hold as a function of society's predominant discourses, and not from a social constructionist understanding. As such, participants' way of making meaning of their own experiences and opinions about beauty, was the focus. The manner in which socio-

culture contributes and even directs this meaning making process is echoed throughout the discussion. Therefore, Giorgi's method in this instance, was used to reflect reality as well as to explore the participant's construction through uncovering essential themes, in the sense of their views and personal meaning of reality.

Giorgi's method was carried out in six steps; however, this was not a linear process. It was a rather recursive process (Ataro, 2020). The steps are outlined as follows:

Step 1: Reading the data - This is the phase where the researcher immersed themselves in the data in the bid to be intimately familiar with it. For this study, this involved going over the interview responses at least once and noting any initial analytic observations

Step 2: Demarcating the data - an analytic process wherein the researcher generates labels for importance elements of the data. These are typically features of the data that are of any relevance to the broad research question, therefore guiding the analysis. Every data item in this study was labelled, following which the researcher collated all the relevant data extracts to end off this phase.

Step 3: Eliminating irrelevancies – This meant eliminating data that was not relevant to the research question. It represents some form of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Ataro, 2020). Themes are made up of codes; they can therefore be viewed as the building blocks of themes. An analogy for this would be much like how the assembly of cells make up the different organs in the human body. Searching for themes in this study required a re-visitation of the codes from the previous step and forming of new codes where there were similarities in the data

Step 4: Grouping and naming data into constituents - In this step, the researcher ensured that the identified themes relate well with the coded extracts and the data set itself. This involved grouping together similar themes, dividing some themes to form subthemes, or in some instances, separating them into different themes altogether. Where coded extracts ceased to relate to the data set, they were discarded and new themes were developed again. The completion of this step and the previous one yielded a total of six themes and six subthemes. An additional two subthemes were synthesised during the last two steps of this analysis, which follows next.

Step 5: Arranging the data into themes that accurately and fully describe the participants' lived experiences - During this phase, the researcher conducted an elaborate analysis of each one of the themes. It was crucial to determine the story narrated by each theme as well as to locate this story within the overall narrative of the data set. Once this was achieved, the researcher identified the essence of each theme and constructed an appropriate, descriptive name for them

Step 6: Producing the report - Writing formed an integral part of this analysis right from the very first step. As a final check, the researcher went through her compilation of themes to ensure a concise, coherent, and non-repetitive account of the participants' stories, as told by analysis of the data set. The final report hopes to produce a clear picture of the findings of this study, which will be a meaningful contribution to literature.

(Ataro, 2020)

3.8 Ethical considerations

This study commenced upon receipt of ethical clearance from the Non-medical Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand. Participants for this study were selected on a voluntary basis. No form of coercion was used to force individuals to take part in this study, nor to prolong their participation in the case that they wanted to withdraw prematurely from the study, for whatever reason. The purpose of the study as well as the procedure for conducting the interviews was outlined clearly and elaborately to the participants (Appendix B). Furthermore, the researcher explained the purpose of audio recording the interviews (Appendix C) and sought participants' permission to do so. The participants were made aware that the audio recordings and transcripts would be stored in a password protected laptop where only the researcher and supervisor have access. Once they had confirmed understanding of the research procedure, participants showed their consent for participation in the study by attaching their signatures on the consent form (Appendix D). The consent form was written acknowledgement by the participants that they understood the interviewing process, and that the researcher was granted permission to commence the interview.

Participant's confidentiality was held in high regard, in that their names were not recorded on the audio recorder. Moreover, no identifying information was disclosed when writing the research report, as pseudonyms were used, thus maintaining anonymity in that regard. Participants were also informed of their right to cease participation in the study up until the

research report had been written. Should they take interest in the finished product of the research report and upon their request, participants will be given access to the document. The researcher was aware that this topic could evoke difficult feelings in participants which could potentially cause emotional disturbances. For this purpose, a debriefing session was held with each participant following the interviews. Moreover, participants were informed of the opportunity to be referred to free counselling services, specifically the Wits Emthonjeni Centre, should they require further counselling for any difficulties they may experience, resulting from the research process.

3.9 Reflexivity

Due to its reliance on the subjective beliefs, attitudes and intentions of the researcher, qualitative research is often criticised for lacking in empirical rigour (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). As such, it is crucial for the researcher to constantly be aware of their own personal stance and convictions throughout the duration of the study, and to reflect on how these biases may impact on the research process(es). Cruz and Sonn (2010) contend that beyond mere self-awareness, researchers need to engage in an in-depth process of reflexivity, which involves interrogating how they contribute towards dynamics of power, oppression and liberation with their participants. Reflexivity then, allows the researcher to observe the personal and theoretical, without compromising either one, as such enabling them to acknowledge the multiple roles that they hold within their fields of research (Kleinsasser, 2000) Against this backdrop, I offer my own reflections.

The participants in this study were Black South African women between the ages of (24-27yrs), bearing similar demographics to mine. This potentially gave me two advantages, namely, strengthening rapport and creating a sense of relatedness. Being of the same racial background as the participants in this study seemed to create an ease of relation, where it was apparent that the participants quickly warmed up to the interview space. Our shared gender and age group further solidified this. The participants often made comments like “you know how we women...”, which alluded to the assumption that by virtue of the above-mentioned demographical similarities, our lived realities would be relatable. This allowed me to probe into, and encourage the participants to share their views pertaining to cultural issues surrounding beauty at an honest and much deeper level. In the same breath, I held these similarities in mind so as to be mindful not to project my own preconceptions and objectives

into the participants' interview responses or data analysis. Be that as it may, I submit that being a consistently neutral observer was not always possible in this study due to the undeniable fact that I indeed, related to some of the participants experiences. As such I had the responsibility to be attuned to and be intentional with minimising my own influence on the construction of knowledge.

It might be useful to mention that at the time of this study, I wore my hair in African locks. Due to the strong rapport and sense of alliance that was created as mentioned above, there was a tendency for participants to want to project a view that would advocate for the Afrocentric view of female beauty, even when it felt inauthentic. In the bid to minimise this, I would constantly reiterate that the interview space was free of judgement and encourage the participants to be true to their views. However, caution had to be applied in doing this, so as not to treat the interviews as a therapy space. This was important to pay attention to since this study took place during a time when I was a therapist in training.

3.10 Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology applied in the study.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the findings in the form of the researcher's analysis of the data generated through interviews with the participants. The six interview transcripts were perused and analysed using the Thematic Analysis method. The validity of the Thematic Analysis is asserted through supportive data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, quotations of the participants' responses have been extracted verbatim, and will be highlighted throughout this chapter. In the interest of clear and succinct reporting, extracts from transcripts have been organized so as to eliminate repetitions, non-fluencies and information that is of less significance to the research themes identified for this study. The following are the themes and sub-themes that were identified from the data:

Theme	Subtheme
4.2 Definition of Beauty	4.2.1 Beauty is subjective and depends on an individual. 4.2.2 Beauty is determined by dressing. 4.2.3 Beauty is determined by personality
4.3 Socio-cultural Influence	4.3.1 The home environment (Initial conceptions) 4.3.2 Juxtaposition of the home environment influences the media and the Wits university context. 4.3.3 The university environment influence 4.3.4 Western vs. African standards of beauty
4.3 Acculturation	

4.5 Implications of conformity/non-conformity to Wits/Braamfontein beauty standards	4.5.1 Economic and Social Implications
4.6 The body as a site for cultivation/instrument of self-expression (Hair, body weight/shape, skin complexion)	4.6.1 Physique: Body size, shape and weight conformity to Western standards 4.6.2 Skin complexion

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

4.2 Theme One: Definition of beauty

This theme was founded on participants' direct responses to the question of how they would define the concept of beauty. This particular theme is at the heart of what the researcher is hoping to establish through this study, which is, as stated in the research aims, to investigate how various factors of their socio-cultural contexts influence young women's conceptualisation and meaning making of female beauty. The data indicates that participants held a variety of different views of what beauty is. Their responses ranged from beauty being subjective, to their understanding of beauty as a commodity, one that is constantly negotiated amongst people of different social groups.

4.2.1 Beauty is subjective and depends on an individual

The definition of beauty depends on an individual. Therefore, the term is subjective as various can have various ways of defining beauty. Starting off with the view of beauty as subjective and unique to different people, Kgabi had the following to say when defining the concept:

Kgabi: [Sigh] I think for everyone it's actually very, it's very individual. I mean as much as I think your study is based on the influence of media and etcetera, there are a lot of things trending out there, but for the mere fact that every person has their own type of look means that it's a very unique type of thing; it's very personal.

Tshego concurs with Kgabi by saying:

I think what makes a woman beautiful is firstly what you believe in. So, I think uhm... usually, I feel beautiful when I feel like I've done something right to myself. So it's what I believe. Say I believe that I need to be well dressed and covered... I'm gonna feel beautiful when I'm that way, when I'm comfortable in my own skin; because sometimes I think, if say, you look at your appearance before how you feel and your comfort, then you might feel it's useless to be pretty on the outside and then you're not really comfortable in your own skin so for me beauty is feeling good about yourself and being happy about it.

Kgabi and Tshego's was that beauty is defined in various ways by individuals. The way an individual perceives beauty is influenced by what an individual believes in. Kgabi holds a view that the way people define beauty is influenced by media.

Even with her understanding that personal views on female beauty are usually influenced by a myriad of factors, Kgabi believes that people individually, get to ultimately decide on what beauty is for them personally. This was a popular idea amongst participants in this study; the notion that it is every woman's responsibility to define beauty on their own terms, irrespective of the prevailing beauty norms. The different ways in which participants agreed on this matter will be illustrated throughout this first theme.

Giving her definition of beauty, Masedi explained that beauty carried different meanings for different people. Like Kgabi, Masedi shared in the view that beauty is personal and should be defined on individual terms.

Mm... I think beauty for me, it's not only about the external, like the outer part, but for me beauty is more about being content with who you are and then just accepting you for who you are, even if you have flaws and stuff... imperfections, and still finding inner peace that 'okay I have these things but I love myself regardless'. So for me beauty is that, just being confident in who you are, accepting who you are and not being confined

by society on what beauty is. I think for me you're beautiful if you've come to that point
[Masedi]

Offering a feelings-based meaning of beauty, Masedi defined the concept as the ability for one to love and accept themselves wholly, with an emphasis on fully embracing one's imperfections. She raised the importance of being confident with oneself and encouraged a positive self-concept, despite society's prevailing beauty norms. In saying this, Masedi seemed to suggest that it is possible for women to arrive at a place where they go unaffected by the pressures propelling them to aspire towards a certain standard to female beauty. She described this as a "point" to come to. In concept, this view by Masedi is similar to Kgabis' in that, both these participants believe that it is possible for women to override societal pressure on this matter to create and perhaps even practise their own version of beauty. Where the two participants differed however, was that Kgabi's definition focused more on outward appearance/looks and Masedi put more emphasis on beauty as measured by one's feelings and inner qualities such as confidence as well as unconditional self-acceptance.

Elaborating further on her view, Masedi added:

I think really, it's not something that you fall into; I think it's a process; you grow into it... you know. You meet different people and you come across different situations, like it's something that you grow into; it's just... you're not born into it, yeah. So there is a point where I think you'll be able to say, 'yeah, for me, this is beauty; I'm comfortable in this skin, I'm happy in this skin [Masedi]

As she expanded on her view of this process, Masedi alluded to the reality of the different influences that are at play in one's pursuit of their own personalised view of beauty. She made reference to what sounds like external influences which are likely to challenge one's intentions of loving and accepting themselves unconditionally. Understood in this light, Masedi's thinking seems to follow several studies that have explored beauty as a socio-culturally dependent construct (Burke, Joseph, & Pasick, 2009; Holman, 2011; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). These studies have in many ways, defied the notion of an independent/pure, subjective view of beauty. In that, these studies maintain that any and all perceptions of beauty have their roots in different sources (El Jurdi & Smith, 2018).

Also drawing on the view of beauty as personal and subjective, Tshego defined the concept based on how one feels and what they believe. In her definition of beauty, Tshego highlighted how one's internal feelings and levels of comfort should take priority above their outward appearance. As such, she seemed to believe that it is possible for women to be able to decide on what makes them feel beautiful as opposed to participating in beauty practices, which although socially approved and trendy, may not necessarily be preferable for them. Tshego's response bordered on a sense of moral appropriateness (more clearly stated in the excerpt that follows). She made a link between beauty and doing right by one's personal standards, as well as the positive feelings that one may experience as a result. Citing dress as an example, Tshego seemed to suggest that one's outward appearance can be a reflection of their values and beliefs.

4.2.2 Beauty is determined by dressing.

The participants stated that beauty is determined by the way one is dressed. Participants such as Tshego highlighted that:

So it's not really about how you look... But it's about what, what you do and then how you feel inside. So beauty... it's like your principles, it's what you believe in. Say you... 'cause I'm from a Christian family, so if they were to take a girl who doesn't go to church and is just... is just following... just, nje (implying one who isn't committed to any religious belief system)... not doing anything... and they take a girl who goes to church, who covers herself properly, and behaves in a right way really, in a moral way, they'd say this girl is beautiful as compared to this other one (the former), and not look at how beautiful or how pretty she looks physically [Tshego]

Making reference to her religious standing as a Christian woman, Tshego explained how for her, beauty radiates when her dress style is in line with her religious views. It appears that for her, manner of dress is perhaps one of the obvious, most apparent ways through which to express her moral and religious dispositions. Moreover, basing this on her family experience, Tshego seems to believe that people pass character judgement on others based on their dress style and social behaviour. This means that in certain communities, beauty perhaps takes the form of socially approved self-representation through dress.

On the other hand, Mbali holds a view that dressing determines beauty by stating that;

“On top of that, church. We know at church we’ve been told many a times that what you wear...think of the people around you at church because some people may be affected by what you’re wearing” [Mbali].

Kgabi and Dimpho concur with Mbali on how dress sense defines beauty as well by stating that:

You feel neat or presentable you know. So at least if I’m meeting you, you are not going to be saying... [rolls eyes] you know, she wasn’t tidy...but even at the workplace you know, they have things like dress code etc. So you cannot do this or you cannot do that. So, it’s...it has to do a lot with, ja you want to be presentable of course. You don’t want people to shift away from either what you are trying to say especially...and then focus on things that are really unnecessary [Kgabi]

“Ya because you can be...like you can have a nice body but if you don’t dress well for it, it’s not taking care of yourself because you might expose yourself to uhm...uh” [Dimpho]

The participants assertions are in line with Johnson, Lennon and Rudd (2014) when they emphasise the role of clothing in determining beauty. Johnson, Lennon and Rudd (2014) regard dressing as a stimulus that elevates one’s self-esteem. What one wears influences how people perceive an individual.

4.2.3 Beauty is determined by personality

The participants stated that beauty is not the physical structure which is visible to everyone. It is based on one’s personality. In other words, it implies that beauty is based on one’s character. This implies that personality can be referred to as character, as shown by Tshego and Mbali. Mbali says; “But, beauty is what you...uhm...what’s this word...it’s, it’s...what you do. The things you do, the way you present yourself to people...your personality, your attitude”.

Mbali further said:

Uhm...it differs in a way that people...they tend to even forget...when a person, maybe beautiful outside, but their morals and ethics are not on point, they tend to scratch that and be like, “you know what, that does not matter, this person...this is what I want” you know...people see this beautiful thing, beautiful body everything, and assume, “okay, this is the person that I want...this is what beauty is” forgetting the things on the side that made this woman beautiful.

In support of Mbali, Tshego highlighted that behaviour is of paramount importance of defining beauty.

Llike how you act and how you behave is kind of, it's linked to beauty, so for a guy or a boy, it would be how... uhm your grandmother would say: “This guy is good for you...” if say “...this guy can plant; he knows how to do the garden...” and stuff like that and for a woman [Tshego]

What is stated by the participants concurs with Matiza (2013), who emphasizes emphasises the attainment of beauty to character or behaviour. Matiza (2013) asserts that beauty has social character, rather than being individualistic as it is communal. Matiza (2013) further adds that according to the African perspective, the concept of beauty serves to communicate values, norms, morals, and purpose. Hence, beauty must edify the community where someone is a member.

4.2.4 Body structure

Some of the participants stated that the body structure of an individual determines whether one is beautiful or not. The major body features of the body that determine beauty are the hair, complexion, body size and whether a woman has hips which are curved or not. The body features are highlighted by Mbali, who says:

Body-wise, the complexion...you know, what...the society makes beauty seem as... [demonstrates being held in high regard] people want that. As growing up...as a young girl, you see this light-skinned, skinny girl...you see yourself, you're big...then you're

like, “I want that” Then you don’t...you start not appreciating yourself, next thing you’re not comfortable in your own skin [Mbali]

The participants hold a view that, the complexion is crucial. People who are dark in complexion are viewed as ugly while those with light skin are viewed as beautiful. That is echoed as well by Hlengiwe who says “hm...eh, I think we still perpetuate to that one...you must be lighter.”

Men prefer to enter into intimate relationships with woman who are light in complexion as stated by Mbali.

“And that whole thing changed, you know... So right now, I have a friend who is a guy. He’ll tell you that “I only date light-skinned girls. If it’s a dark-skinned girl...shaya i-one hit and I pass”

The measure of beauty through skin tone concurs with literature data on Holcomb-McCoy and Moore-Thomas’ (2001) study of black adolescent females which found that adolescents with physical attributes which did not resemble white features such skin colour were often discriminated in schools and other social places. Due to discrimination the students experienced poor academic achievement levels and higher high school dropout rates for darker-skinned black females.

The literature study cited The Tyra Banks Show of April 24, 2008, which discussed the preference of dark skinned and light skinned females. The study discovered that dark skinned females faced discrimination in various forms (Robinson- Moore, 2008). The show unpacked the discrimination woman endured due to their skin colour. Men were also reported to be shunning them (Robinson- Moore, 2008).

The other feature of prominence on influencing how people define beauty is the hair. Montle (2020) asserts that hair style is of paramount importance to enhancing the beauty of African women. As shown in the literature review, Montle (2020), offered images of African women depicting their beauty. The evidence supports the notion that the hair is a crucial feature for women’s beauty. Tshego states that: “So if someone believes that your hair is beautiful or you’re dressed well then you feel beautiful so people usually define beauty as other people’s opinions”.

“The modern hair styles are regarded as a measure of beauty by some of the participants. Masedi said “there are people who actually think you know...having a weave, the Brazillian hair, they’ll be “it”, the “it” girl you understand...” [Masedi].

Mbali in agreement with Masedi says, “And I think, ‘weave’. Mbali was responding to a question on the hair style that portrays beauty for young women.”

The participants identified the body size in determining the beauty of the individual. The findings are in line with (Swami, Tovee, Miller, & Penke, 2008), who found that found that good looking women are those who embodied the Western ideals of female beauty (lean, straight hair, light skinned, even-toned skin were preferable as sexual mates). Women with the curvaceous body shape on the hips were regarded as an ideal body for a beautiful woman (Harrison, 2003).

Hence, women who are heavily built are regarded not beautiful. Masedi says” okay. So what they call as beautiful, eh...if you are tall, if you are slim, if you have long, straight hair, if you have a sharp nose or something” [Masedi].

Mbali and Hlengiwe in agreement said,

“Right, so I guess you are touching on my follow-up question. What I’m hearing you say is that there is a certain way that society has set up the epitome of beauty. So, it’s that skinny...uhm...light-skinned girl, straight hair...you know” [Mbali]

“Like, for your body proportion. You can be any shape but...no extra fats, or too little fat...too much skin and bone. Oh, and not having pimples, flawless-looking face and very long...angazi i-texture of your hair, it must be strong, it mustn’t fall off, or it mustn’t be too thin like...ja, it can contribute” [Hlengiwe]

Hlengiwe went further to focus on other features such as facial appearance such as flawless looking face which is long. Hlengiwe’s definition of beauty seemed to centre on three main aspects, of which the researcher wished to highlight in the discussion, these being: beauty as being and looking healthy; beauty as evenly proportioned body fat; and lastly, beauty as flawless looking facial features and hair.

Beginning with Hlengiwe's associations of female beauty with health, this is an assumption better understood against the backdrop of evolutionary perspectives on female beauty. A fundamental tenet of this theory is that attractiveness is a reliable indicator of individual's health status as well as their reproductive potential (Holman, 2011). In this case however, and marking the second part of her definition, Hlengiwe cited the example of body fat as a possible way of determining this said state of "health". It appears that for her, being and looking healthy has to do with maintaining a balanced body weight according to one's natural body proportions. In that, she expressed that one should not have "extra fats" but should also be mindful not to have "too little fat". This sense of balance that Hlengiwe spoke of seemed to carry a latent message of her preference of the curvaceous body shape as was discussed in the literature review. This comes out more clearly in the following excerpt of a later time during her interview, where Hlengiwe was sharing her experience about a time in her life when she had decidedly put on weight with the hope that she would gain bigger breasts, curves and buttocks.

"I wanted that hour-glass 'cause I felt I was petite. I wanted the bums na mahips (and the hips) and the boobs. So gaining weight kind of had that thing. But at the end of the day na lana [touches her tummy and waist area] is a problem... eish ja (expression of disappointment), the situation is rough." [Hlengiwe]

In this excerpt, Hlengiwe shared how her desire for the hourglass silhouette influenced her decision to put on weight with the hope of gaining bigger buttocks, hips and breast size. However, she soon realized that she was also gaining weight around her abdominal area, which defeated the purpose of the exercise as one of the main characteristics of the curvy body ideal is a distinctively smaller waist. Her willingness to put on weight haphazardly, with little regard for the impact that this would have on her physical health, begs the question of whether her definition of "beauty as being healthy" has more to do with aesthetic value than it does with truly being healthy.

In the last part of her definition, Hlengiwe described beauty in terms of skin tone and hair texture. At this point, her definition somewhat shifted focus from being about one's state of health to the commonly celebrated and encouraged facial features on mainstream media of pore less skin and long, straight hair (Mills, Shannon, & Hogue, 2017). This is especially important because one's state of health cannot be concluded based solely on outward appearance;

moreover, that in Western society, thin is generally associated with good, which could easily translate to healthy.

To some participants, beauty was defined on the basis of cleanliness and all-round good hygiene practices. Dimpho is one such participant, who explained that there is little value to one's external features if they do not prioritise "taking care" of themselves. For Dimpho, this takes the form of bathing daily, keeping clean clothing garments, as well as ensuring that surroundings are well taken care of.

It is clear that different women relate in different ways to the concept of female beauty. Much like the many works in literature that have explored women's understandings of beauty, this theme too reflects the multifaceted nature of the concept. Unique to this study, however, is the participants thinking of beauty in new and evolved ways, which are different from the traditional manner in which Black women's ideas around beauty are usually explored – as mainly informed by Western culture. Beauty for these young women was viewed as personal, as emotive, as a state of health, as well as one's manner of doing certain things. While their offerings do not disregard Western influence, there is an oscillation between the long held Western beliefs of beauty, as well as a sense of empowerment to think of beauty beyond these confines. This is a tone that comes across in subsequent themes of this findings and discussion chapter.

4.3 Theme two: Socio-cultural influence on participants views on female beauty

All of the participants of this study agreed that in different ways, their socio-cultural environments played a significant role in their constructions of beauty. Elements of the socio-cultural system such as the home environment, religion, the schooling environment, social discourse and accepted behavioural patterns were identified as having a bearing in the way in which the participants conceptualise beauty. The theme has been arranged with the home environment being discussed first. This was particularly significant during the participants' early childhood and teenage years, in that they felt that it was largely influential in forming

their ideals on beauty. In their later life – that is late teens and into early adulthood – most participants reported that the media and the university environments were noted to have been the main points of reference to what beauty is and how it should be practiced. This theme is thus divided into three subthemes; Influence of the home environment on participants' initial perceptions of beauty, media influence on beauty and the third sub-theme is the university environment.

This theme looked at the three main socio-cultural contexts that were identified as the most influential to participants views on beauty, these being the home environment, the Wits university environment, as well as the media. The home environment was seen to play a pivotal role in young girls' early understanding of beauty. While these early constructions may seem final and unquestionable initially, it was established in this theme that as participants grew older and gained some independence within the Wits university context, they felt permitted to revisit what they have always believed regarding female beauty. Furthermore, it is within this same context that participants encounter the media and social media in their own personal capacity.

4.3.1 Influence of the home environment on beauty

All the participants of this study shared how their home environments shaped the way in which they think about and practice beauty. The home environment had influence on the participants on how they view beauty. The participants such as Masedi, Mbali and Kgabi highlighted the role of home influencing how learners view beauty. The most crucial social system in a child's life is the family. Masedi stated that:

“Those conversations...like if...girls like that if their fathers could tell them that you know what, it doesn't matter what you look like, you are beautiful the way you are, you understand...”

The participants stated that the conversation that takes place at home between parents and their children is of paramount importance in instilling certain behaviour or knowledge. Parents at home explain to their children what beauty is.

The other participant Mbali concurs with Masedi who expounds on the role of home in influencing how young women view beauty. The participant states that young people come from different cultural backgrounds therefore they have different perspectives on how they explain beauty.

“...or how is it similar to how beauty is defined in your home environment...in the different socio-cultural contexts that you’ve been exposed to, or how does it differ. Like...how is it similar or how is it different from the way in which beauty is defined in the spaces around you? [Mbali].

The idea of culture is echoed further by kgabi:

I think it’s very much linked to where you are. I mean, depending on your culture...definition of beauty from your culture...school, workplace... Okay, I can say that for myself [giggles] I’m a Zulu girl alright. So, I think people like my grandmother... Growing up I was a little chunky [meaning fat]. So, when you walked by they would go, “oh, wow you’ve got such a big butt” you know. I can say from my mother’s side of my family...you don’t want to be chunky [fat]...so, for me it is more of a weight thing [Kgabi]

Kgabi went on to talk specifically about her mother’s influence in shaping her ideas around beauty. In the second extract, Kgabi speaks about her own beauty regimes, which on close analysis are founded on the manner in which her mother practiced beauty. This is expression of an observation by McKinley (1999), who noted the tendency of daughters to learn of beauty early on in their lives, through observation of their mothers.

I started putting on make-up from a very young age [participant later disclosed that this was when she was between 9 and 11 years of age]. My mom used to buy me these little toys where you get like lip-gloss, and all sorts of things. My mom has always been very... a girly girl you know. She works with a lot of men... in a very corporate environment, so your presentation of yourself is very important, hence she’s always... [hand gesture to mean perfect] So that’s where I really started to experiment and you know, started to like certain things [Kgabi].

I love doing make-up! Even if it is not for myself, I love to do make-up on other people...it's fun, I love that, the whole experience! And in terms of now where I'm studying, I find a lot of people are dressed down in my class. We are engineers okay, "we're supposed to be very busy you don't have time to fix your hair etc". But I feel like that is not me, I like to do that...for me it's not an effort. It's almost like something I do automatically, like when you wake up in the morning to go and pee. For me it's bath, put on some make-up, you know, put together something cute [participant referring to outfit] you know... I like that! It's actually a fun part of my day. So I don't think where I'm studying has actually influenced me that much. I feel like I'm probably the odd one out [giggles] in the whole class...[Kgabi].

From what Kgabi has shared, it would seem appropriate to suggest that her perceptions of female beauty were learnt through observation of the maternal figures that were in her life as a child. She noted for whatever reason that as far as her maternal relatives are concerned, "you don't want to be chunky". This could easily raise a question of identity and belonging – that perhaps for Kgabi, being a member of her family meant remaining within a certain bracket of weight. She does not specify as to which gender in her family were concerned with being slim, however, it is evident that her perception of this ideal by her family was important enough for her to take note of and apply in her life since childhood, into her adult life. Having been exposed to these ideas about beauty, the way in which Kgabi now defines beauty as a young adult female seems to be in identification with her mother as her primary role model, along with her grandmother and her maternal relatives. This would be beauty as being slim, dressing well and the practice of good application of make-up. Kgabi continues to follow her mother's example - even today in a very different environment - as a young woman studying at Wits University, where she spends most of her time. She explained that although majority of the females that dominate her course of study are not keen to practice beauty in a way that overtly accentuates their femininity, she is comfortable to do so.

In one of her extracts above, Kgabi refers to her mother's tendency to pay special attention to and put in obvious effort towards her outward appearance, given her male-dominated work environment. She pauses after mentioning that her mother works with a lot of men, expressing

it as a thought that trails off, as though leaving the blanks for the researcher to fill. At a later point in her interview, Kgabi also mentions her own self-presentation in association to her position as a student engineer. Similarly to her mother's work environment, engineering, the faculty under which Kgabi is pursuing a career is amongst the fields with dense masculine connotations. Owing to these findings, it seemed important to explore what her own views and practices may be intending to communicate within this environment.

Multiple studies with an interest on the gender-based differences that exist within the engineering profession agree that there are certain female self-representation stereotypes that exist within the field, which could explain Kgabi's behaviour (Brijbans, 2025; Fernando, Cohen, & Duberley, 2018; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

Three most common stereotypes include the fact that women as overly aspirational and needing to prove themselves – the emotionally disconnected and power-driven 'ice-queen', often associated with a formal, well put together dress sense. Secondly, women are seen as frumpy and de-feminised through showing little to no concern for fashion and grooming – the dull, unnoticeable girl with thick glasses and a non-existent social life. Thirdly, women are viewed as clueless and misplaced in the field, often associated with a sexy dress sense which accentuates feminine features such as the breast and waistline – the 'blonde'/'bimbo' who uses her sex appeal to get by in the profession and not necessarily her merit (Brijbans, 2025; Fernando, Cohen, & Duberley, 2018; Tabassum, N., & Nayak, 2021).

Kgabi thus seems to be displaying her sexualised visibility to counter the stereotypes about women in engineering who pay attention to aesthetics. She seems to want to show how women can both participate in the latest beauty trends and be smart and effective as engineers and that the two roles do not have to be mutually exclusive. The concept of a beauty with brains is an important one for Kgabi and more than that, her self-representation seems to be her petition for women to be liberated from the boxes that they are easily fitted into, based merely on their appearance. This was notable at different points in her interview and the extract I use next from her interview shows this most clearly:

My mom is like a role model for me. I love...[raises voice] she's beautiful and she is very intelligent! It's something you want to mimic. I love the fact that she is in an environment where mostly, males would probably dominate. But, she's female and you are allowed to be female and strong, and be pretty, and be a girl you know. It's actually nice to be a girl, it's fun! For me, it's fun [Kgabi].

Some of the participants felt that the definition of beauty in their home environments and their neighbourhoods was idiosyncratic, such that they often felt left out since they did not meet the standard of beauty that was set out. This evoked feelings of dissatisfaction and inadequacy with their physical attributes. Furthermore, it was noted that constant comparison (whether by themselves or by others) to girls whom at the time were considered to be the epitome of beauty evoked certain emotions for the participants. Admiration and envy were the two emotions that came out strongly during the analysis. The study noted three occurrences shared by Hlengiwe and Dimpho where the narrative of beauty in their immediate home environment and the neighbourhood at large was in such a way that they were left wanting and feeling less than. They shared their experiences of growing up where beautiful girls were admired and envied by other girls, while desired and pursued by boys.

I remember when I was young, ugogo wam beka geza mina nomzala wam uGugu [my grandmother was bathing my cousin Gugu and I], and then she took her [Gugus'] hand and she's like, "you see how Gugu looks, she looks fair, so you must gotlha [scrub your body] (participant demonstrates vigorous scrubbing of her arms) and look clean and be clean". So I thought hau...kusho ukuthi ukuba mnyama [oh, it means being dark skinned] is dirty. Also, I remember we were from church and then my mom was like, "yazi, uyageza u..." [you know, this girl cleans up well] "uyageza, noma ngabe emnyama, but uyashina" [she cleans up really well, her skin looks radiant even though she is dark skinned] what, what, what... So it seemed like 'ma umnyama [being dark skinned means] you're not clean... I was like okay, 'ukuba mnyama [being dark skinned] is dirty, ukuba mlhophe [being light skinned] is clean [Hlengiwe].

Hlengiwe shares how her insecurities with her dark skin complexion begun. Her perception then, as a young girl was that there was preference by her family, for a lighter skin tone. Consequently, she started to feel that her skin complexion was not beautiful and it would seem

that this translated to other features of her body as suggested by her extract below. Herein, Hlengiwe epitomised light skin on one girl from her neighbourhood and more to that, wanted to have a body like hers as well.

“Wow, I even PRAYED...to be lighter! (participant referring to skin tone) There’s this girl that lives la [here in my neighbourhood]. She was lighter... so I’d pray to be lighter and to have her body” [Hlengiwe].

These findings are in line with Thomas (2020), where it is discussed that lighter skin and a slim body were seen as markers of beauty.

Like Hlengiwe, Dimpho is another participant who related her story of feeling dissatisfied with her body, due to constant comparison to the neighbourhoods’ “it” girl, who also happened to be in her friendship circle. Moreover, Dimpho mentions how this friend of hers often received a lot of male attention and was generally more liked by people than the rest of them in the group of friends. Dimpho shared her experience as follows:

You know in a group there’s always that girl that is more beautiful than all of you guys... more liked by guys or ja [yes], people like her more than all of you guys... and then you guys also start having that thing ya gore [to say] ‘whatever she’s doing, or whatever feature she has, I also want that’. This specific friend of mine, she was slim like thin, thin, thin. I was always big-boned, not that I was fat, but I was ja [yes]... full [meaning full-figured]. So with us, it was that thing ya gore [that] even when I looked at my body I was like, ‘maybe if I do this, join sports...maybe I’ll lose the weight, and then I’ll be her size and then I’ll feel better...’ you know [Dimpho].

It is worth noting that Hlengiwe and Dimpho’s stories centre on issues of body dissatisfaction, which is discussed as a separate theme of this study. The focus at this point in this section is on how in their early life, participants’ perceptions of beauty were shaped by the opinions of those with whom they had regular social contact. Hlengiwe and Dimpho’s experiences demonstrate the salience of the expectations projected (directly or indirectly) by loved ones onto women of how they ought to look in order to gain recognition as beautiful. This is in line with the observation made by Shelembe, (2015) that family members and significant others could be experienced as exerting pressure on women to attain their levels of ideal beauty. A

study by McKinley (1999) also supports this statement by noting the effect that family members and romantic partners have on women's self-image. It was found in the study that women whose body image was perceived positively by their partners tended to develop a positive self-image themselves (McKinley, 1999).

Hlengiwe: ...it was another scenario that he gave, he was like uhm...these girls would play... like, lentombazana beyithatha isoccer [this one girl would snatch the soccer] ball from the guys that were playing estradweni [on the streets]. So the guys would be like, “ayi letha Lerato [pseudonym Hlengiwe used to represent the girl who was deemed beautiful]” [Lerato, give back our ball, (in a playful tone)], or whatever. But as soon as uLerato [Lerato] threw it to the not-beautiful-looking girl they'd be like “ah?! MCM eh, letha lelo bola wena, ungazo sjwayela kabi!” [hey you, give back our ball at once, you are so forward (in a harsh tone)] type of thing [Hlengiwe].

The above scenario as illustrated by Hlengiwe is in line with the literature that suggests that the female body has for a long time been a subject to be watched, the concept of the gaze as I have referred to in the literature chapter. Hlengiwe and Dimpho's experiences provides insight into the differences that have been said to exist in the manner and intention for which the sexes look at the female body. Dimpho shared how she ended up joining sports in an attempt to lose weight and resemble her friend's body, who enjoyed the attention of people in the neighborhood, especially the boys.

Without delving into the conflicting ideas in academic literature of how envy and admiration correlate with one's motivation to improve themselves, I would like to state with reference to this section of my study that the participants in question held benign envy as defined by Van de Ven (2017). According to Van de Ven benign envy is the desire for what someone else has, which unlike malicious envy, does not contain a wish for the advantaged other to lose their position of advantage (Van de Ven, 2017). Only in the case that it is benign envy can one simultaneously hold feelings of admiration and therefore be motivated to improve. This is applicable to the participants' experiences wherein their desire to look like their model beauty figures was not laden with hostility or any form of malicious intent. This is seen especially with Dimpho who maintained her friendship with her model beauty figure, thus protecting her opportunities for association with the ideal.

4.3.2 The influence of media on beauty

The participants stated that media is playing a role in determining beauty. The participants highlighted that what people consume on television and other media channels such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram have influence on how they perceive beauty. Tshego explained in detail the impact on media on depicting beauty. Sunstein (2018) states that the media have proven to be a powerful tool not only of communication, but also continues to play a significant role in informing and shaping many social phenomena, with female beauty being one of them. The literature shows that exposure to thin media images makes women want to be thinner. Hence, there is strong support that forms of media such as magazines and music videos have an impact on the perceptions of beauty and appearance resulting in women assuming that a very slender body type is an ideal body for beauty (Mills, Shannon & Hogue (2017).

The participants unpacked the role of media in beauty as shown below:

Yea I think so, because uhm even media for example, it's, it is, so for me what I'd say is societal standard of beauty it's what you see on TV.; the media, so usually, you wouldn't see on the media, say advertisements, for example, it would be all those pretty girls with weaves and all these things and then they wouldn't take a woman from, say a grandmother or just a girl from villages and then, so I think that it makes it look like there's women who are fit to be perceived as beautiful and then there's just women that are not really [Tshego]

Kgabi in agreement with Tshego stated that:

The new hairstyle that I chose, I'm not re-twisting, I'm wanting this look. Uhm...I saw it somewhere on YouTube and I liked it [giggles] so I was trying it. If for instance my hair gets wet, you know, it shrinks...if I were to try the same hairstyle when my hair is wet, it would never look okay. And because some of my hair is actually starting to grow out of the sides...you do when dreads are not re-twisted it's like they fly away or something like that. Yeah, so re-twisting, just getting your dreads...is probably like quite expensive you know. So...and your natural hair I feel like it takes more effort, and it takes more money because obviously you have to keep your hair healthy you know [Kgabi].

The participant (Kgabi) stated that she changed her hairstyle due to influence of YouTube which is another agent of communication. Masedi, Mbali and Hlengiwe highlighted the role played by platforms such as television, social media, magazines and radio in portraying beauty.

Hm...whu! Since I'm in the television and film industry, uhm...we get to see how the media, and how television and film has...what we see every day, because right now the era that we in...it's you know, it's visuals, everywhere you go is visuals [Masedi].

Uhm...Okay, so how, how do you find...or how do you experience the way that the media depicts beauty figures? So social, magazines, TV, radio...how do you feel about...or how do you experience the way in which they show beauty figures? [Mbali]

You see pictures on Facebook like "before exercise", "during exercise", "after exercise" whereas umntu wase makhaya is more like, okay 'work, work, work, work', chores and stuff like that. Ja, so fitness ja...[Hlengiwe].

The findings of the current study are in line with the literature on the role of media platforms such as Facebook, and (Broekmann, 2007; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Using media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram young women engage in online self-presentation of posting selfies and sharing the outfit of the day pictures to differentiate themselves with their peers (Mascheroni, Vincent & Jimenez, 2015). Boyd (2014) asserts that the ideal beauty standards influence the content and sharing of pictures on these social media platforms. Boyd (2014) further argues the individuals who posted their images on these social media platforms constantly seek feedback through likes and comments to uphold a perfect and stable image of themselves.

On the other hand (Forbes et al., 2012) states that the ideal beauty is communicated through television advertisements as well as print media such as glossy magazines. There is constant depiction of thin supermodels with long hair and light skin on media. Forbes et al. (2012) asserts that these depictions do not depict the ideal African black women but Western ideal body features.

4.3.3. The university environment influence

From the previous theme and sub-themes, it appears that participants' home environments were very influential in informing their views in regard to beauty. In their later life and presently, participants mostly referred to the influence of the media as well as the Wits University culture when speaking about influences on their perceptions of standards of beauty. Although some of the ideals of beauty held in these socio-cultural contexts aligned with participants' initial conceptions of beauty as set out by the home environment, several of them were challenged, therefore, resulting in new and revised versions of what female beauty entails for them. Speaking about their early encounters with the different perceptions of beauty held at the university level, Dimpho and Tshego expressed the following:

First year, there was this house mate of mine...yoh! [expression of surprise] like she made a big deal about beauty and stuff. She couldn't even go out of the house if she had a bad hair day, like she would stress about it, try and fix it like... Ja! [Yes!] so lwena [even] you would feel it gore eyi [hey]... before I get out of this house I must make sure gore [that] I'm on point [up to par, trendy] otherwise, whatever she can say about herself e snaks [that is ugly] when she's a certain way, gocho hore [it means that] she feels the same about you if you go out of the house looking that way. So it influenced me to sort of like dress up, especially when we went to church because uh... that church... [participant referring to one of the students' religious organisation on campus] people would dress up at that church, like it was a thing. When you go there you dress up and stuff like that. So that year ja [yes]...looks started becoming a big deal [Dimpho].

You know at school...I never really cared about how I dress. So now it's, uhm... I actually care about how I look. So yeah... what's really changed is how... I'd say I chose to... I had to go from school to varsity, that was an influence because I had to now buy more clothes coz (because) at home I'd just wear, say from school, I'd just probably wear shorts. But now that I don't really feel comfortable showing my skin and now that I have to go to school wearing my casual clothes, I have to buy... probably jeans that I'd feel more comfortable in, going to school. It was just my decision, and it

was for the sake of my comfort and me actually enjoying myself and then going to school
[Tshego]

What comes across from these two participants' accounts of their early days as Wits students, is the sense of a sudden/newly found need to pay attention to their appearance. For both participants, this need seemed to stem from their awareness of fellow students' dress sense. While they each actively modified their appearance, the reasoning behind this seems to have been different for each participant. Dimpho was seemingly responding to peer pressure and a fear of not fitting in. Tshego's process on the other hand seems to reflect the transition that one encounters when one graduates from high school into a tertiary institution. By virtue of not wearing school uniform on a daily basis, for example, it can be expected that a first-year student would concern themselves with wardrobe. As such, Tshego seems to have acted out of self-interest and to her own degree of comfort.

The difference in their motives for enhancing their appearance seems to inform the extent to which looks became of concern. The university environment was thus seen as placing certain pressures regarding appearance, on the participants. The extent to which these demands were internalised and served as motivation for change differed from one participant to another. Even so, there seemed to be a shared feeling amongst the participants that being at Wits offered them a platform to explore themselves and interrogate their beliefs about beauty. Participants spoke on this matter as follows:

As I grew and got exposed to different things; even the course that I'm doing exposed me to so many things and not even realising before hore [that] there are always influences, you know, from the media hape (again); what media and, yea what media says about what beauty is... yea... [Masedi].

It [participant referring to her understanding of beauty since she was exposed to the Braamfontein/Wits university environment] has changed because of influence obviously, as you grow up... I've noticed that varsity actually teaches you a lot about yourself, so you see something and then you try to see if this thing is going to look good on me [Tshego].

Masedi and Tshego's accounts present the university environment as a space where it feels okay for one to put out their feelers and find what appeals to them. They seem to imply that there is a sense of freedom and independence that comes with being at university that is perhaps not there while one is still under full-time parental guidance. This entry into the university space can be challenging as much as it seems to have been experienced as providing new opportunities for participants to experiment with new versions of themselves. Perry and Allard (2003) suggest that at the centre of issues that make the transition to university difficult, is the expectation for students to form links between their pre-university experience and the university experience. For Hlengiwe the form of training she is going through at the university determines the type of attire she should wear and how she must present her body. This is well expounded by Hlengiwe, when she said:

I remember when I went to Law Clinic [participant is an LLB student] They told us...maybe it's just for Law, I'm not sure about other professions but, for Law, the proper colours are Black, navy blue, khaki and White. The reds and whatevers are not allowed in a court of law and stuff like that. So ja [yes], it [participant referring to career choice] does influence my grooming... I shave more now. I remember when I went to Law Clinic, first day. Obviously iskirt [your skirt] has to be lower than the knee five, four fingers...? Ja, four fingers situation. So ja, I felt ukuthi ugqog' istocking [you are wearing stockings] and your hair is busy...[participant referring to hair sticking out] no. Like istocking and hairs? Ah-ah [shaking her head in disapproval] [Hlengiwe].

4.3.4 Western vs. African standards of beauty

Western and African standards of beauty may be opposite of each other and differ in their meaning of beauty. Similar to the results of this study, according to the participants, Western beauty may be defined by a slim body and light skin, whereas in the African standard of beauty, one should have a curvaceous body with wide hips and full breasts as symbols of fertility, femininity, and maternal strength. From the interviews, it emerged that participants find themselves entangled between the Western and African standards of beauty. There is pressure for the students to conform to the Western standards of beauty. The participants highlighted

that the Western culture is overshadowing the African beauty standards. Masedi, Mbali and Dimpho stated that:

“So, there’s a great deal of Westernization that even now...even though now we in an era where Black people are beginning to come out...that those traces will still remain, of Westernization” [Masedi].

“You come to the Western, ah, Western is a mixture. They look at yellow bone, they look at the body of the person. So, I think it differs when it comes to the different places how people define beauty” [Mbali].

“So ja, if you take the Western way like, then you’ll define beauty as being slim, being light, uhm...what else...oh, having a fit body. Like it’s always abs, and being toned and having beautiful skin and long, full hair” [Dimpho].

The findings align with the literature that the Western perception on beauty has infiltrated the African societies. Dolva et. al. (2014) and Coetzee et al. (2012) assert that Western culture’s beauty perceptions have largely infiltrated many African societies to the point that it is viewed as a global standard. Western influence has permeated urban areas like Johannesburg, which is a highly urbanised city (Pitso-Motlabane, 2014).

The participants elaborated on the Western ideals on beauty arguing that it is in conflict with the African ideals emanating from the rural areas. In response to the question of whether she was aware of any differences in the way beauty is perceived across the country, Dimpho and Masedi had this to say:

“South Africa...yes, there are. Uhm it depends gore (on) do you focus on the traditional aspect of what beauty is; or do you conf... like do you accept and...not conform, but do you...uh...follow the Western way” [Dimpho].

Eh, ko magayeng [in the homelands/rural areas] beauty kannete [really]... They place more importance on morals and values hore [to say] naa o itshwere joang [how is your conduct]. That’s beautiful, that’s respected as a woman ko magayeng[from the homelands] that is respected. Unlike here [participant referring to Braamfontein,

which is representative of the city], like I told you, here beauty is weaves, if you are tall, slim, if you have long, straight hair, a sharp nose or something...and light-skinned... [Masedi].

Masedi's view of beauty as more than outward appearance culturally but as students there is a push for them to conform to other ideals of beauty being influenced by the university environment. Tshego expressed a similar view however, added that culturally, beauty was mainly defined through gendered role fulfilment.

*Well, at home [a village in the Northwest Province,] I think beauty is defined as how you behave as a girl. So beauty would be... it's not really on the looks and then how you tie your hair, or how you... beauty is not really attached to physical appearance as much. But it's about... it's really about something that is internal. So, say for example as a girl, they would tell me that okay, "you're always supposed to cover yourself"; "you're always **supposed to**... you're supposed to clean up after yourself", and stuff like that. So, it's not really about how you look, but it's about what you do. So, beauty I think, was defined as... as, it's like your principles. So, it's what you believe in. It's one thing to have, say you... 'cause I'm from a Christian family. So if you... if they were to take a girl who doesn't go to church, and is just... is just following...just, nje [aimlessly – as in one who does not affiliate with any religion]...not doing anything, and they take a girl who goes to church, who covers herself properly, and behaves in a right way really, in a moral way... they'd say this girl is beautiful as compared to this other one (the former), and not look at how beautiful...or, I mean how... how pretty she looks physically [Tshego].*

Against the background of Judith Butler's work on gender performativity (as discussed in theme one), beauty in the context of Tshego's cultural background is a doing rather than a being. She emphasises the words "supposed to" when talking about the things that women are expected to do which would have them recognised as being beautiful. This implies a sense of obligation; that women in this particular context are held within the strict confines of what I would call cultural bullying. By that, I mean a context such as the one described by Tshego, which withholds certain social merits from/undermines women who chose to live differently from how they are "supposed to", or what is deemed culturally appropriate. As such, perhaps

women in the rural areas do not have it easy as Masedi had initially suggested. It is possible that although Masedi and Tshego's cultural understanding of beauty minimises aesthetic value, the concept presents with its own set of challenges which make it still, a complex phenomenon for women in that context to navigate.

In teasing out the differences in the African and Western ideals of beauty, one participant, Dimpho expanded further to highlight that the divide is not only between the two cultural orientations. She went on to describe the intricacies of female beauty aesthetics that exist within the African culture itself. In her account, Dimpho paints a picture of the African culture as an umbrella under which falls multiple ethnic groups, each with their own unique sets of beauty ideals.

Because culturally like, it's very complex what beauty is. It depends on which culture you're in. For others like Ndebeles for example, having a long neck is defined as beautiful... Zulus like having a big body; it's defined as ja [yes] "yes... this one is beautiful, she's well taken care of". It depends which culture you're in, and then like, my dad once told me gore [that] with Tswanas, the thing that's prominent for them is the high cheek bones, slender figure and things like that. So, for different cultures, it's different. If you take the Western way then you'll define beauty as being slim, being light and having a fit body. Like it's always abs and being toned... you don't age... and having beautiful skin and long, full hair [Dimpho].

Dimpho's observation is in line with the findings made in a study by Shelembe (2015), which found that the different socio-cultural contexts that Black, African women occupy, each tend to present with a different set of beauty standards to which they should comply.

This is also reflected in Dimpho's statement above, where her description of the Western ideal of beauty implies a singular, clear cut and consistent set of norms. Owing to this, a challenge presents for Black women who live in different socio-cultural contexts, some of which may value inharmonious ideals of female beauty. Hlengiwe's views on this disharmony were as follows:

Okay, but emakhaya [in the rural areas], they prefer a more voluptuous body than ekasi [in the townships] or in the cities. 'Cause [because] then like, mo [here – as in the city]

we must be thin, exercise, but ja [yes]... ekasi [in the township], it's thinner and more fit or whatever... you must have a flat stomach... but also these days, you must have bums and hips too lana! [here]. Emakhaya [in the rural areas] it's more voluptuous, but also hourglass shape. It's just that the other one is bigger than ja... don't know if it makes sense [Hlengiwe].

It is interesting to note the observation made by Hlengiwe of how there seems to be a coming together of the cultural and Western ideals of beauty. From the manner in which she responded, it seems like Hlengiwe realized as she was trying to distinguish between the two orientations of beauty thus the African perception of beauty and the Western. She maintains that both orientations have a preference for an hour-glass shaped body and that body weight is the main distinguishing factor, where culturally, women are expected to be bigger as opposed to the lean figure that is preferable in Western culture (Swain, 2012). Hlengiwe exclaimed as though to express frustration at the addition of “bums and hips too” to the Western beauty ideal, which is traditionally known for its appreciation of a lean body frame (Patton, 2006). This serves as an example of how cultures evolve over time. That implies that the participants feel that they cannot be perceived as beautiful in all of the contexts in which they live. This might be different to say a White woman in SA who will possibly feel she has one ideal to live up to. As stated in literature there is a new tendency among women to revert back to African hair styles such as Afro hair style (Montle, 2020; Sarwer, Grossbart, & Didie, 2003). Alubafi, Rampalile and Rankoana (2018) refer to the contradiction as “Tournament of values”. Women are adopting such hair styles as a way to claim their freedom from the Western hair styles that are associated with oppression. The contest was witnessed in Gauteng with the learners at Pretoria high school contesting the School Governing Body school policies (Mahr, 2016).

As noted in the literature, cultures are not static entities and with the turn of the digital age, the mutual adaptation of different cultural elements, one by the other, is becoming much easier (UNESCO, 2016). Hlengiwe's observation is seemingly reflective of the process of acculturation in reverse order, where features of typical Afrocentric descent have entered the mainstream, Western orientation of female beauty. This begs the question of whether room is being created for novelty and a co-existence of the two main orientations of beauty, or whether it is yet another imposition of a set of Afrocentric beauty ideals on a Western world view. These possibilities are explored further in the subtheme that follows next in this section.

Dimpho shared a personal observation that in African cultures, where the older generation are the ones that are perhaps still invested in ensuring that their women attain the standard of beauty as prescribed culturally. In this context then, there is a devaluing of the Western ideals of beauty.

Say I had this view that the Western side is better, then I become thin, I put in bonding [a weave] because my hair doesn't grow quick enough, like it... my hair doesn't grow very long. So, like, maybe you put in bonding [a weave], you're slim, and then you go, go visit a village in KZN. There, they'll be like "no, we need to feed you, we need to..." you know... For them that's beauty... that's being well taken care of. So, ja, that's how I feel... gore [that] it's a generational thing, a perspective... the older generation, they are still holding on to 'a beautiful woman is this', and then rona [we], the younger generation see it that way [Dimpho].

In my view, the proposed difference in the understanding of beauty that exists between the younger and older generations of Black women is linked to the meanings that each group attaches to looking a certain way. Several writings in literature have determined that a fuller figure is associated with good health and wealth amongst many African cultures, while a slim body is associated with ill-health and poverty (Business Times, 2012; Shelembe, 2015). In Western culture on the other hand, a big body frame is seen to be of medical concern and associated with an unhealthy lifestyle, whereas a slim body is associated with fertility and social prestige. These meanings thus seem to play an important role in women's preferences for body weight, along with their overall choice of beauty styling.

Participants somewhat feel imprisoned and incapacitated by the constant pressure that Black women, and women in general, are often subjected to in regard to the ever-changing and not uncommonly, conflicting expectations of how beauty should be performed (Swami & Tovee, 2015). This was noted to be especially frustrating in the case where prevailing beauty standards are used to categorise and devalue women based on features which they cannot manipulate, at least without employing drastic, often harmful or expensive methods. Participants expressed the wish to be appreciated for who they are holistically, which they mostly associated with their internal attributes, achievements and aspirations. In 1990, Naomi Wolf raised awareness

regarding the significance of the growing sense of insecurity amongst women, regarding their physical appearance, in relation to beauty standards. She found this especially amongst the most accomplished modern-day women (Wolf, 2002). Wolf (2002) hypothesised that this feeling would intensify progressively with each generation.

Mbali's views on the matter were as follows:

Society has made beauty to be this... [gesture to demonstrate something of high importance] People want that! Especially the young girls 'cause [because] that is where all this starts. Growing up... as a young girl, you see this light-skinned, skinny girl, long hair... then there's you; you're big, dark... then you're like, "I want that". That's all you wish for because it's what the society has made beauty to be. Next thing, you're not comfortable in your own skin; you start not appreciating yourself. I think that they should let everyone have their own way of portraying beauty, and not have a certain way, or a certain image of what beauty is... It should be broad to the extent that there's no limits... because there's different kinds of beauty. So, if the young girls are groomed well, they will grow up knowing that this is who I am, and I'm beautiful the way I am [Mbali].

Mbali gives perspective into the status quo of women's desperation to attain beauty today, a possible manifestation of the future as predicted by Naomi Wolf. Acquiring the beauty myth today, in an age where women are supposed to be liberated, seems to be a goal pursued more relentlessly than ever before (Wolf, 2002). Mbali expresses this in sharing her wish for a social climate which celebrates diversity and embraces each woman's unique physical traits. In Mbali's view, Black women are socialized to be insecure about their outward appearance from their time as young girls. This was a sentiment shared by all the participants of this study, who expressed that their younger selves battled more with self-acceptance and were more inclined to yield to the pressures of societal expectations of beauty. It is true that the preadolescent and adolescent phases are the period during which these insecurities are most likely to thrive because naturally, the body undergoes major transformation from childhood into early adulthood (Bourdieu, 1991). More than this, the findings of the current research project seemingly indicate that amongst the reasons why the pursuit of the beauty myth begins earlier for women today may be the early exposure to digital technology, which is fast improving and is arguably at the center of contemporary society's way of life. As such, the influence of social

media platforms, which are accessible through these digital technologies, is undeniably significant in shaping young women's view of themselves (Sunstein, 2018). Dimpho was in agreement with this sentiment as expressed in her statement below:

"I do feel gore eish... [expression of concern], we are moving towards that... like we... I feel gore there's a lot of like, we're allowing social media and media nje [just] generally, to influence us" [Dimpho].

Dimpho extended this idea to suggest that in the age-old conversation about female beauty, which she felt was unlikely to change to be all-welcoming and all-embracing, a way of achieving this autonomy that participants speak of, is to develop one's self-esteem.

That's why I made that decision ya gore [that] I'm no longer gonna [going to] go with what people or the media, or whatever says because at the end of the day it's gonna [going to] change. And then are you gonna [going to] be that person who when they say today "this is beautiful", then you go and do it? Your life won't be stable, your emotions won't be stable, you, yourself won't be a stable person because you'll always be looking out for the latest trends, wanting to fit in. So, I, I think ja, it will only affect you if you have not reached that point in your life where you're like no, it's okay, I don't have to follow everything that happens, I'll follow it if I like it and I feel gore it will suit me and stuff like that. I think it comes with age... it won't affect you if you've matured, you've accepted yourself, and you have a good self-esteem [Dimpho]

Dimpho's suggestion that a stands against a body of literature that found that even the most confident, accomplished women fall short under society's watchful eye (Blank, 2002; Garner, 1995; Hayasaki, 2016). Wolf (2002) understood this to be a product of the beauty myth being used as a form of social control against the advancement of women. In that, objectifying women's bodies and keeping them under strict societal surveillance would divert attention from other parts of their selves which endorse them as meaningful and successful contributors to society (Forbes, et al., 2012). Dimpho's stance, which she shares with the other participants, of self-confidence as a way to break free from chasing the beauty myth, perhaps needs to be explored in depth for its relevance in the context of society today, as well as for its effectiveness in achieving the intended purpose.

Being able to function independently of the control of the beauty myth, appeared to be an important aspiration for the participants of this study. Participants expressed the desire to break free from beauty ideals and pressures that they reportedly experience in their daily lives. The participants' age range (23 - 27 years) may well be significant in this regard, as it highlights their generational position within South African history. They are the so-called *born free*'s, i.e. they were all born during and after the transitional era in South Africa, during which they were born and raised. By so saying, participants have had exposure to various degrees, of pre- and post-apartheid South Africa. This is an important point to consider in understanding participants vying for self-esteem, their achievements and other talents as potentially serving a protective function against the societal control of beauty ideals, a strategy which was found to be ineffective in previous research studies (Bordo, 1993; Bordo, 1993; Grogan, 2008; Wolf, 1992). While this may have not worked for their grandmothers, the young women in this study now live in an era of robust activism towards the emancipation of Black women.

As such, participants are seemingly more confident that they can exercise autonomy over their bodies with a lot more success than their predecessors. This came out in the level of conviction with which participants spoke about the possibility for them to live out their unique versions of beauty, with little to no concern about the prevailing beauty standards. Masedi commented on the matter, first talking about what her style represents, making reference to her outfit on the day:

[Participant wore a floral printed wrap top on her upper body, styled as a crop top (an upper-body female garment which typically does not cover the midriff and a long maxi skirt, with a thigh high slit on the right] - I'm easy-going, I like flowy stuff. I don't like being... [locks hands together to illustrate being confined]. That's me... it goes together with the vibe I guess. I'm just flowy, light-hearted... not bombarded with so many things [participant referring to normalized beauty ideals] [Masedi].

Masedi continued to share her thoughts on how one may be able to create and live out their own perspective of beauty:

It's a process, like, you grow into it. It's not something that you fall into. As you grow, you meet different people and you come across different situations you know, so like it's something that you grow into... you're not just born into it. So, there is a point where I think you're able to say, yeah [yes], for me, this is beauty. I'm comfortable in this skin I'm happy in this skin. It's not only about the external, but for me beauty is more about being content with who you are and then just accepting you for who you are. Even if you have flaws and stuff, imperfections... still finding inner peace that okay, 'I have these things but I love myself regardless'. So, for me beauty is that; just being confident in who you are, accepting who you are and not being confined by society on what beauty is [Masedi].

The strong desire to take charge of how one practices beauty, regardless of normalized beauty ideals comes out strongly in Masedi's extracts above. In describing this as a process and a point to journey towards, she seems to acknowledge that where humanity is concerned, there are bound to be expectations and ideals for any given social phenomena. However, Masedi maintains that it is important for Black women to develop self-confidence and resilience to create their own stability in an ever-changing world. Dimpho shared this same sentiment:

So, I think if you're strong and you believe gore I'm beautiful; this and that doesn't matter... who says what... At the end of the day, no matter what is happening around you, you'll still feel gore I'm beautiful, ha ke shote ka nex [I am enough]... like ja [yes]. I feel gore as long as you can stand up for yourself and you believe in yourself ha motho ao phoxa [when someone discourages you] and be like eyi [expression of resistance or retaliation], you can still make it [Dimpho].

One thing stands out about the young women who were sampled for this study; and it is their ability to admit to their vulnerabilities regarding these apparently frivolous issues and acknowledging that they actually matter. The participants are caught in between the ideal of the Western world and the African ideals on beauty, The students had to navigate between these ideals in order to be acceptable in the university society.

4.4 Theme three: Acculturation

It can be inferred from what the participants have shared that they were socialized into a set of beliefs about beauty that, upon feeling they did not meet these standards, led to the development of insecurities about appearance from a very young age on some of the children. Beauty, as perceived in their home and community environments, typically took on the Western ideals of tall, thin, straight hair and light skin complexion. It seems that these beauty standards were thus transmitted to them through conversations within the family, idealised beauty figures within their communities and through observing beauty practices by older females closest to them. What was common amongst the young women in this study is the feeling of inadequacy that seemed to have been born out of the “failure” to match up to the idealised beauty standards in the different environments of which they were brought up. Moreover, it would seem that growing up, these women may have not felt able to question these standards but accepted them as truth, in light of the way they seem to have internalised these beauty standards. Participants views on this matter were as follows:

When you're a child...you don't have total control of how you look and stuff like that of course, your parents and the people around you play a big part; your school and your friends... So yeah, I would say that when I was young, bo ntho tsa ho relax(a) moriri [things such as using chemicals to straighten your hair] you know, even the school I went to, it was a multi-racial school so ne ba [they would] encourage-a hore [encourage that you] relax your hair because its neater that way, like it's quicker to manage and stuff like that...[Masedi].

The influence of the family is highlighted as well with Kgabi who says:

Growing up... you know you'd be coming out of the bath being naked running around, my grandmother would look at my bums and go “your bums are so big, you need to lose weight” or something like that. Uhm, but ja there is a lot of... and I think because most of my family, especially my dad's side is kind of overweight; they are always you know, trying to either lose weight or something like that. So, for me it is more of a weight thing... [Kgabi].

Kgabi went on to explain how her childhood experience of a family that constantly primed her to be conscious of her weight, is similar to what her younger sister is presently going through. This suggested that the beauty narrative in her environment has not changed much in the last ten years when she was a thirteen-year-old in the same house.

I feel like my sister is also starting to experience it now. She's thirteen, so she's growing up of course, and I think she is gaining a little bit of weight... my cousin also started to gain a bit around that age, and constantly being told "lose weight, or you eating too much..." I found her [Kgabi's little sister] crying like once or twice because it actually hurt her feelings. It's too much of a thing... I feel a lot of Black people don't know where to draw the line, because like this is their child and they will feel a certain way. If every time I'm coming to you and you always mentioning 'oh, I'm so chunky [fat], or there's so much wrong with me' then I mean... it's not the nicest way to build someone's self-esteem. It's within the family and it's constant, it's beeen there! So ja [yes] unfortunately, you can't say certain things... especially with old people. There is probably nothing I can say to them to make them stop [Kgabi].

Kgabi highlighted that the ideal body that is in line with the beauty standards is a slim body. On the other hand, Kgabi holds a view that it is difficult now to juggle between the slim body and a heavily built body.

From the above quotes, a shared sentiment by the participants comes across, of a sense of helplessness/powerlessness to challenge the beauty standards that had been adopted in their families. There is a retrospective message communicated by these young women that they would have perhaps appreciated a home environment that protected them from the harsh realities of a society that is not all-accepting/all-embracing instead of becoming yet another context that primed them to self-consciousness. Society is governed by rules and standards, which whether to aid or impinge on, mediate humanity's co-habitation. Naturally, with the adoption of any standards, certain groups of people will be elevated while others are denigrated. Female standards of beauty are no exception.

In the same vein however, the participants' views raise the thought that if the home environment served as a base of young girls' insecurities early on, that this would help them hold their own in other, broader socio-cultural contexts. Masedi is one participant who expressed this view with some level of clarity. She believes that if young girls are encouraged to love and accept themselves from a young age, it would curb some of the insecurities they often develop when exposed to environments that set unrealistic beauty ideals, causing them to question their level of adequacy. She made special reference to fathers playing this role in their daughters' lives:

For instance, the conversations at home between parents, between girl children and mothers... between fathers and daughters... Our fathers are our first love so papa hao hao jwetsa hore [when a father tells you that] "you know what ngwanaka [my child], you're beautiful no matter what. No guy should tell you..." Those conversations... I think family values and those conversations at home are very important... and then I guess it goes out there, extends to the broader society [Masedi].

Dimpho echoes the above statement by Masedi. She had a different home experience from that experienced by Kgabi. Dimpho's family showed appreciation for and embraced her extraordinary features [a big bum, dark skin and crooked teeth], which she believes, boosted her self-esteem at a time when the larger society considered these bodily features to be unappealing.

Growing up, I did not like the fact that [clears throat] I had a big bum because I didn't see it as something nice. I just saw it as... 'hayi [no], I wish I was like other girls who have less of this' But... your surroundings, like the people around you, they will make you either appreciate or frown upon that thing that you have. For example, with uh... my big bum, my family like my cousins used to be like "Yoh! You have a beautiful body...when you're wearing something it sits well on you", "if I had a body like yours, I would dress like... and expose that bum" and stuff like that [Dimpho].

Making special reference to her father's role in encouraging her to appreciate her body features, Dimpho explained:

My dad neh... when it comes to my skin colour and stuff like that, he, from a young age... It's just me and him who are this dark in the house. So, he even gave me a nickname, and it was an affectionate one ya gore [of] "mnyamane ka daddy" [daddy's dark beauty] So ja... like [giggles,blushing] [Dimpho].

Dimpho is the only participant who shared the experience of a home environment where the family members were intentional with their affirmation of the bodily features with which she was most self-conscious. I propose that her family's way of relating to Dimpho served a protective function and helped to mitigate the stereotypical beauty standards that had pronounced her as not being beautiful. While Dimpho and Masedi's special mention of fathers as crucial in performing this function could be a reflection of their South African context where fatherlessness is rife, it is important to explore the meanings to which they may possibly attach to this.

In his book – *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image* – Morris Rosenberg examines the development of teenagers' self-esteem as influenced by their place in society. With specific focus on adolescents, he suggests that their sense of self-worth is largely influenced by family, the neighbourhood and their peer group (Rosenburg, 2015). Moreover, the father-daughter relationship is valued greatly, thus carries great potential to mitigate girl children's feelings of inadequacy, which is often born from the constant societal reminders of unrealistic female beauty standards. This might be closely linked to the power of the male gaze as already discussed. In the patriarchal context of South Africa, the nod of approval by a father figure may bring about the much-needed sense of satisfaction with one's appearance and boost a girl child's self-esteem. This is a role that can be played by any parental figure. However, according to my participants, it is especially effective with the presence of a father figure.

From the data gathered during the interviews with participants, an idea of the Braam Identity emerged. The Braam Identity is a concept which represents the coming together of the different beauty ideals which the participants of this study carry with them, given their socio-cultural backgrounds, to create revised versions of what beauty is. A highly student dense area, Braamfontein, affectionately known as Braam was named the hub of cultural diversity in Johannesburg. Furthermore, as a town within the Johannesburg metropolis, it is also marked

by years of industrialisation, as such, has been greatly influenced by the Western culture (Mosselson, 2017). Against this backdrop, Braamfontein serves as the ideal location for the blending of all the cultural elements of the people who live in it which therefore gives rise to what has been termed – The Braam Identity.

Kgabi shares her stance on beauty since having enrolled at Wits and being a Braamfontein resident. Kgabi mentioned that being a student at university brought about a lot of freedom which allowed her to think beyond her family's constant battle with weight loss. Seeing some of her fellow students embrace their full-figured body frames seems to have been liberating for Kgabi and somewhat allowed her to be open minded with what constitutes beauty.

So, you can't be chunky of course, and I'm not sure if it's like a more...and it's more like older, like my older people, like my grandparents, my older aunts etcetera, it's always about... someone is always trying to lose weight or something like that. But, I feel like now having a more curvy body is more desirable of course... here! [in Braamfontein] I can say when you walk around on campus, you see a lot of girls who are chunkier, and they are actually very comfortable with themselves. Moving away from that, there's a lot of freedom. Everyone's allowed to be how they want to be, you really cannot... I mean you don't necessarily have to have a flat stomach to wear a crop top [women's top that reveals the stomach area] you know, or to wear whatever it is you want to wear. I do feel that beauty is defined differently. A lot of people would find that you know, light-skinned girls are actually more attractive for whatever reason. Uhm...girls with maybe bigger boobs, bigger butts... that's obviously that's more attractive these days you know. And ja [yes] things like your legs, do you have brackets [bowl-shaped legs], ona le kiss-kiss [are you knock-kneed], you know certain things like that. Is your hair real, or is it natural, is it weave... are you drawing on your eyebrows, are your eyebrows real... you know it's, it's...ja [yes], there is a lot of [giggles] things like that going on around. But, I feel like because... there is no one definition of beauty; I mean there is trends for all of those styles [Kgabi].

Like Hlengiwe, Kgabi has noted the entry of the curvy body into the beauty scene in Braamfontein. As a highly globalised city, Braamfontein has been influenced by the wave of

social media. It is also important to note that with the proliferation of smartphones, anyone with it can be affected by social media, thus it can be expected that some of the world trends would make their rounds within the city. For the purposes of this study, the focus will be on the entry of the curvy body into the beauty scene in Braamfontein.

It is important to point out that the curvy body can be traced back to the days of the slave trade, where Sarah Baartman was the subject of public humiliation due especially, to the size of her buttocks (Hobson, 2018). The subsequent representation of Black women's sexuality through the "bootylicious" body refers back to the Baartman image. While Sarah Baartman's story is one of slavery and abuse at the gaze of a European audience which perceived her with marvel (also desire) and disgust, this is not the case with curvy women in Braamfontein in 2024. The desire for a curvy body frame is one of the most prominent trends not only in Braam, but in the larger society as well, particularly in the social media community. With some celebrity figures such as Jennifer Lopez (USA) Minienhle Dlamini (RSA) and Boitumelo 'Boity' Thulo (RSA), openly embracing and taking pride in their curvy body frames, many Black women started to appreciate their own curves. What has been demonstrated by this is the influence of trends and how they can potentially be used to challenge and perhaps correct certain socio-political imbalances. Hlengiwe speaks to this, focusing on how public figures that dare celebrate their Afrocentricity in a system that is tailored to exclude them allow other Black women that wish to do the same, to follow suit.

And then uNandi, ¹her style typically comprises of short, natural hair, light make-up and a play of African printed wear, she's like the new thing [meaning trend], ukuthi [that] wow, okay you can be normal, you can be me and you can still be successful... uNandi is like "okay you are you, but see, you're beautiful". Nicki Minaj is the old... "vele you must look like that" [Nicki Minaj associated with fitting the Western ideals of beauty [Hlengiwe].

¹ Nandi Mngoma – South African TV personality and singer; (<http://www.zalebs.com/interviews/nandi-mngoma-adds-african-essence-to-legit/>)

For Hlengiwe, Nandi Mngoma seems to be a relatable public figure who preaches a different ideal of beauty from what is usually depicted on different media platforms and that would be that all women should be thriving for the Western ideal of beauty. Nandi appears to be promoting the celebration of Afrocentricity by leading from the front.

Women like Nandi have used their position as public figures to promote African beauty ideals. They seem to have found a balance between embracing their African roots while remaining relevant in an industry which requires them to practice Westernised regimes of beauty. This said balance is what the Braam Identity is centred on, where participants do not feel the need to really choose Westernisation every time. Trends seem to be winning in achieving this. Through some of these trends, Afrocentric features such as dark skin, kinky hair and a curvy body, all of which were at one point regarded to be unappealing, are being socially embraced. It is through the use of hashtags such as #MelaninPopin ² and #BlackGirlMagic ³ that more and more Black women are pushing for the acceptance of and celebration of Black women in all of their Blackness.

4.5 Theme Four: The serious implications of conformity/non-conformity to the Braam Identity/Big City Identity

4.5.1 Economic and Social Implications

As the discussion delves into the intricate fabric of Braamfontein's beauty narrative, it becomes evident that its significance transcends mere shallowness. Some participants were of the view that the narrative of beauty in Braamfontein goes far beyond the individual's outward appearance. These participants explained that women's choice of self-representation may have implications on how one portrays their image on social platforms like Instagram, as one has to uphold a certain lifestyle standard. Results have shown these has economic and social implications on participants. Masedi shared her observations as follows:

² (<http://afrikanBlackcoalition.org/2015/07/27/reclaiming-Blackness-through-melaninmondays-melaninonfleek-melaninpoppin-and-melanincrushmondays/>)

³ (<https://www.reuters.com/video/2017/07/26/jada-pinkett-smith-talks-girls-trip-succ?videoId=372186193>)

Now...ja, even Instagram, it's like...if you're on Instagram, your Instagram has to be on point. It has to show the beautiful LIFE even. This beauty, it extends to your overall life you know, the company you keep, the cars you drive, places you go, places you party, people you party with... So, beauty has just been made into this... it's like this bubble now, wa bona [you see], and then if you don't have those things... then what happens? That's why people always wear make-up you know. You have to... I mean you want to uphold a certain look [Masedi]

Masedi speaks of beauty as portrayed on Instagram, as creating an illusion of a certain type of lifestyle. She explains how women's image on Instagram is intended to be and is considered to be a representation of their social status and wealth. As such, uploads are based on more than just beauty aesthetics but are also a way to exhibit of one's affluence. Masedi speaks of "upholding a certain look" which implies that there is some level of effort and consistency required to maintain a certain impression, which may not always be a true reflection of one's reality. This kind of behaviour once more, presents an element of female beauty as performativity.

The intersectionality of beauty, financial status, and social standards, particularly as depicted on platforms like Instagram, unveils a complex narrative deeply entrenched in societal norms and expectations. Masedi's observations shed light on how beauty, far from being solely about aesthetics, intertwines with notions of wealth and social standing. On Instagram, beauty is often curated to project a specific lifestyle—one that exudes affluence and status. Masedi aptly notes that women's images on this platform serve as more than just displays of physical attractiveness; they are symbols of socioeconomic privilege. This portrayal underscores the pervasive influence of financial means on beauty standards, as individuals strive to emulate the glamorous lifestyles depicted online. The concept of "upholding a certain look" underscores the performative nature of beauty on social media. Maintaining an illusion of wealth and social status requires ongoing effort and consistency, perpetuating unrealistic expectations and reinforcing societal pressures. This phenomenon echoes broader discussions on the intersectionality of beauty, where factors such as race, gender, and class intersect to shape standards of attractiveness and influence social dynamics. Women, in particular, navigate these intersections, contending with societal expectations that dictate not only their appearance but

also their perceived worth and status (Butler, 1994; Henrique & Patnaik, 2020; Mills, Shannon & Hogue, 2017).

In this instance, beautiful women in Braamfontein (and other places like Sandton, Soweto, London and New York to name a few) are those who's active participation in trending beauty regimes is noticeable on various social media platforms. Kgabi shared the view that there is a certain kind of lifestyle which women in Braamfontein aspire to live and that the attainment of that lifestyle is dependent on looking a certain type of way.

I'm guessing everybody is after a certain type of lifestyle, but that lifestyle comes with looking a certain type of way and...you know ja [yes]. Generally, I think we are, I mean as individuals... there is a certain type of way people prefer to look you know. The challenge is whether you feel like you can afford it or not (this is important), you know. I think... of course, you're trying to look the way everybody's looking now, and I mean following trends is actually quite expensive and I think most people have realised that. So, the challenge is not whether you can look that way... it's can you afford to look that way? If you can, you do, and if you can't, you'll find a way. I mean it's on TV... everywhere, you know, young ladies are dating older guys you know...it's not anything... I mean it's not a... what can I say... real connections, or real relationships. It's really about money, or buying clothes, looking a certain type of way, and living a certain type of lifestyle [Kgabi]

It is important to note that it is not just about looking good. It is about looking good and being seen to be having fun in a particular location or venue...being seen to have a 'fabulous life.' Kgabi refers to the importance that is placed on following trends in keeping with the Braam Identity and Big City identity. Kgabi raises the issue of affordability, in that, the financial costs involved in buying one the look that would then bring them closer to the goal in their pursuit of the appearance of having lavish lifestyle, which may or may not be the case in reality.

It would seem that for some of these young women, fitting in and being socially accepted are more valuable than exercising autonomy over their own personal choices of beauty styling. This is an observation attested to by Powe (2009), who's analysis suggested that the adoption of the beauty hegemonic, which is often founded on Western ideals of beauty, is less about

wanting to look White and more about attempts at establishing a social identity. This is in keeping with the timeless, global narrative of beauty, which has primed women into believing that their appearance directly impacts on their self-worth, career success and overall quality of life (Rice, 2010).

This theme echoed the complex task that modern day young Black women are faced with in regard to choosing some beauty representations over others. There is a general sense of agreement on what comprises beauty on various social media platforms, which also largely governs the Braam Identity. Conformity to this beauty hegemonic seems to yield benefits which make the choice of non-conformity a difficult and unpopular one. Participants agreed nonetheless that the Wits University environment and the city of Braamfontein at large, offer the right kind of platform for women to choose how they wish to practice beauty.

4.6 Theme five: The body as a site for cultivation/instrument of self-expression (Hair, body weight/shape, skin complexion)

4.6.1 Physique: Body size, shape and weight conformity to Western standards

After hair, physique, i.e. body size, shape and weight, were noted as elements that participants often targeted for manipulation in order to fit society's standards of beauty. A distinction will be made in the following discussion depending on which of these aspects is the focus. Of the three aspects that are discussed under this theme: hair, skin and physique, the latter seems to hold special significance as a major determinant of participants' overall self-concept. Participants spoke about physique in a manner that suggested that women who fit the ideal body weight and shape are potentially taken to be more of women than those who do not.

Much as it is counted amongst the most frequently manipulated beauty features, participants' responses suggested that they found their physiques to be the most challenging to yield to their efforts at modification. This was found to especially be the case when weight loss is the goal. Of the six participants, four shared their experiences of random weight fluctuations. These women offered various reasons of why they found the task of maintaining a consistent body weight to be a daunting one. Genetics, health conditions, lifestyle as well as stress levels were

amongst the reasons that the participants gave as having impacted on their ability or inability to control their body weight within their personally required ranges. Although participants mention these reasons, they are predominantly from the health perspective, but can be argued to lead to psychological and socio-cultural results for participants. These findings are congruent with the literature, where a study by van Schalkwyk (2008) found that factors such as dietary intake, lifestyle, genetics and certain psychological factors were significant in determining the results that one may get with their attempts at body weight regulation.

Hlengiwe shared her experience as follows:

“Over the past two to three years I’ve gained weight... gained and lost, gained and lost.”

On further prompting about whether she was playing an active role to attain these results, Hlengiwe continued:

It wasn’t intentional, ‘cause (because) I’d usually... Exam time I’ve noticed, I’m thinner. But normal school days I’m normal. Ja (yes), and holidays, yoh! [exclamation] I eat so much and then I gain [put on weight], a lot! It’s not a conscious thing, it just happens that there’s time to eat, and then there’s no time to eat [Hlengiwe].

Hlengiwe’s observations of her weight fluctuations are in line with the literature that suggests that multiple factors are at play in determining one’s body weight (Steyn, 2005; van Schalkwyk, 2008). Even so, Dimpho seemed to be of the thinking that one can exercise control over their body structure if they are adequately motivated and intentional in that endeavour.

My weight, uhm... it’s not something I control most of the time. It was up, down... but then this year, like I made a conscious decision gore okay, I’m gonna [going to] try and maintain the weight that I have because I feel gore [that] just for health-wise, gore [that] okay let me just stay a certain weight. Let me not allow things to happen to me, let me make a decision gore [that] okay... this is the weight, fine, let’s stay with it. So for me beauty; for uDimpho, was okay, I wanna [want to] be this size. I was like I wanna [want to] wear a 30 [waist size] and stay there. Because I feel when I look in the mirror, if I’m more than that, I don’t feel good, and I feel gore okay...Mphoza,

you're in health [participant is a student nurse], you expect people to look after themselves but then your body is not representing what you're saying, 'cause there was a time when I was extremely big [Dimpho].

Dimpho refers to two factors, namely, her health as well as her self-image, which seemingly, were her motivation to maintain her body weight within a certain range. For Dimpho, a leaner body frame is representative of good health. This runs contrary to her upbringing in a Zulu home, wherein she reported earlier in her interview, that her family showed preference for her curvy body, and where thinness is associated with ill-health.

This may signify Dimpho's acculturation to Western notions of beauty and the Braam beauty ideal of a lean body structure as beautiful. In this case, the argument presented by van Schalkwyk, (2008) that African females are more tolerant of fuller body structures does not quite capture the complexity described by Dimpho. Van Schalkwyk's findings, (2008) may be indicative of a period before the rapid advancement of digital technology and the acculturation processes in places like Braamfontein. Those research findings seem more fitting within the time and context when South African women lived exclusively or predominantly within the confines of their cultural values and beauty norms and had not yet been exposed to Western beauty trends that promote leanness. These trends are propagated through social interactions, the media and social media, and the fashion industry (Odhiambo, 2008).

Dimpho's resolution to maintain her body weight at size 30 seems to be one that is grounded on a myriad of reasons over and above her health. Her resolution might relate to issues surrounding society's inscriptions of its values onto the female body. Dimpho alluded to a felt social scrutiny on her body when speaking about her previous body weight being incongruent to what she represents as a health practitioner. Perhaps an internalization of the social expectations of what a female nurse should look like, propelled her to modify her body so as to look the part. Becker, (1995) writes about this socially constructed expectation for the female body to be cultivated in accordance with its alliance to certain communities or cultural ethos. Women participate to varying degrees in this phenomenon, whether as willing participants, or as hapless accomplices to the cultivation of their own bodies. In addition, Dimpho's active efforts towards maintaining low body weight seems to be in line with research projects which found an inverse relationship between body weight and levels of education (Goedecke et al.,

2013; Kilicarslan, 2018; Klumbiene et al., 2004; Kruger et al., 2020 UNESCO 2016; Wanneburg, 2006). Amongst others, this can be understood to be due to the acquiring of knowledge on the effects of high body weight on health and overall quality of life.

Like Dimpho, Hlengiwe also experienced some struggles with body weight. To give background to her extract that follows, Hlengiwe had shared earlier, that in her aspirations of acquiring a “Nicki Minaj body” (hourglass shaped) as she referred to it, she increased her food intake. She had hoped that with the weight gain, she would develop more prominent breasts, buttocks and curves. According to her, this body structure gives a woman favor with the opposite sex, thus broadens her pool of potential romantic partners. Hlengiwe reported earlier, that her endeavor failed as she was gaining weight around the areas (tummy and arms) which she was not targeting. Although having explained that she knew and understood that body shape cannot be altered naturally, and that Nicki Minaj sought surgical aid to attain her body shape, Hlengiwe said she was willing to take the chance regardless. In the extract that follows, Hlengiwe expresses a view that is like that of Dimpho. In that, she is willing to cultivate her body only to the point that it does not border on ill-health. In this case, ill-health being a lack of reproductivity, and not low body weight as in Dimpho’s case.

It would be great to be more hour-glassy but no I wouldn’t do it if it’s something that will alter my future. I don’t wanna make major physical changes because I wanna have babies, so obviously they must grow kahle [well in my tummy], so no, I don’t think I wanna change my body. Maybe I’ll wanna change it after having babies, I don’t know, like to have a flat stomach. But before, I don’t want abantwana bam bangcele plastic [my children to suckle on silicone implants], and I don’t want... those tummy tucks; vele fanele umntwana akhule kahle esuswini [a baby needs to develop comfortably in the uterus] [Hlengiwe].

Hlengiwe’s stance on the extent to which she is willing to cultivate her body, points back to the definition she offered of her understanding of beauty as the state of being healthy. She shows a similar tendency as Dimpho, of a certain level of internalisation of her people’s cultural notions on beauty. As discussed in the literature, many Black, African cultures tie a woman’s fertility to her level of health and beauty.

4.6.2 Skin complexion

In this subtheme, participants spoke about skin complexion as one of the beauty features often targeted. Skin complexion was arguably the most emphasized feature across all of the interviews conducted in this study. Bearing in mind the history of colonization in South Africa, participants seemed to have similar thoughts regarding an idealization of light skin complexion as the signature feature of beautiful women amongst Black Africans. Participants themselves have grown to hold a different view to this one, but all expressed that this was the general norm in their socio-cultural contexts. Similar to hair, skin complexion is a feature that is particularly laden with issues of class distinction, racial oppression, and identity politics. As such, participants engaged with this theme with much emotion. They all expressed having experienced an array of shame, guilt and envy in relation to skin tone or complexion. Opening this discussion, Hlengiwe speaks of the narrative of light skin versus dark skin in her home environment while growing up.

I remember when I was young, ugogo wam beka geza mina nomzala wam uGugu [my grandmother was bathing my cousin Gugu and I], and then she took her [Gugus'] hand and she's like, "you see how Gugu looks, she looks fair, so you must gotlha [scrub your body] (participant demonstrates vigorous scrubbing of her arms) and look clean and be clean". So I thought hau...kusho ukuthi ukuba mnyama [oh, it means being dark skinned] is dirty [Hlengiwe].

This extract was quoted in the second theme of this chapter, to demonstrate the home environment's influence in shaping young women's outlook on beauty. Under the current subtheme, the extract is examined specifically for locating how, and/or where Hlengiwe's struggles with skin complexion possibly begun. Her grandmother's words were reported by her as if representing the general view held by the people around her at the time. Hlengiwe's interpretation of this perceived preference for light skin complexion has reportedly stayed with her and would in her later life facilitate her discontent with her dark skin as she associated it with dirt and ugliness. Hlengiwe expressed this as follows:

I remember in high school, we used to joke about ukufaka ipolish le emnyama [applying Black polish to our skin] to make guys not be attracted to us. Like why emnyama kuy'iyoy

ezo yenza ukuthi umuntu angabi [is it that the Black coloured polish would cause people not to be] attracted to you? But that was the thing, ukuthi [that] the darker you are, the less attractive you are. That's...ja [indeed]... I remember that. Oh ja, noma sibuya estadium [also, when we returned from a day at the stadium]...we used to have sports whatever events, so our bodies would be sore, but not just that, we would be worried about...ukuthi yoh! [expression of concern] besiselangeni! [we are sun burnt!] So obviously we're darker. Oh my word! We have to sebenzisa lento le ye orange... [scrub ourselves clean, using an oranges sack] [Hlengiwe].

From these memories which she recalled; it is apparent that Hlengiwe lived with this constant concern about being dark skinned. Moreover, it shows that she made it her goal to try and make her skin lighter as far as possible; be it by avoiding prolonged exposure to the sun, or remembering to “*gotlha*”, to scrub herself clean as encouraged by her grandmother. At the time, Hlengiwe seemingly understood this action to be scrubbing herself White. Hlengiwe’s ‘teenage hood’ methods of preventing her skin from getting darker are not unique to her. It seems to be common practise for Black children at some points in their lives, to avoid the sun so as to preserve whatever lightness of skin possible; never mind the damaging effects of the sun. It is an ideal which was sold a young boy mentored by Gabrielle Union, Marcus, who she noticed was doing a stop-and-go fashion of walking. Marcus would stop under the shade of a tree before sprinting his way through direct sunlight, onto the next portion of shade (Union, 2017). Gabrielle herself recalled a time when she was obsessed with sunblock and staying in the shade in order to prove to her White counterparts, that she was capable of being nearly like them (Union, 2017). Union, (2017) further explained that this was a way to apologise in advance for all the times that she would grow any darker.

Noting this expectation, whatever its source, for Black girls, Black women and Black as a people to strive for Whiteness is not imagined, nor is to play victim. It is an acknowledgement of a people’s cycle of struggle in building their identity, which even years into transformative thinking, is still perpetuated one way or another. Perhaps it is the implicit nature of these issues of colour that make it that much more difficult to comprehend and potentially resolve. Writing on colourism, which I propose is amongst the main reasons that darker skinned Black women wish to lighten their skin, Hunter, (2016) suggests that dark skinned girls are more likely to be discriminated against. Moreover, that racially constructed beauty ideals amplify the importance

of outward appearance for girls, in this case, making the acquirement of light skin seem crucial to their social status. Hunter's research findings give perspective into Hlengiwe, Mabli and Masedi's experiences regarding fair skin tone.

"Wow, I even PRAYED...to be lighter! (participant referring to skin tone) There's this girl that lives la [here in my neighbourhood]. She was lighter... so I'd pray to be lighter" [Hlengiwe].

Hlengiwe's motivation to attain lighter skin can also be understood to have been rooted in her feelings of envy towards other girls who were lighter than she was. Perhaps wishing to enjoy the same treatment and whatever benefits that these girls had, based solely on their skin complexion. Mbali is one such participant, who expressed her feeling that she may have experienced 'preferential treatment' in society due to her light skin. She shared her experience as follows:

I think sometimes people tend to overlook... and the minute a light-skinned and a dark-skinned girl come walking past, people will concentrate more on the light... It's something that I've observed. Considering that when it comes to my friends at school, I'm the lightest. When you go to places and people are like, "hey, yellow-bone!" scratch everyone else. Mind you, my friends are also pretty. In my head I'm like, 'am I the only person that you see here...what about my friends? [Mbali].

This favouring of one person over others is not unusual as people are entitled to their choices of whom they choose to interact with. However, the issue at hand surpasses the simplistic probabilities of being chosen or rejected to hold a conversation. It is what Hunter, (2005) refers to as the beauty queue, which is the ranking of women based on their skin tone, with the fairest woman placed front of the queue to gain most privileges, and the darkest placed at the back, being subjected to discrimination. The beauty queue acknowledges the problematic role played by physical attributes alone, in the lives of women, to the detriment of other parts of their selves. For Black women and women of colour, this can be experienced as a double-edged sword as over and above being confronted with issues of racism, colourism reinforces the hierarchical order, thus intensifying the social divide. Naturally, this evokes different feelings

for the favoured and the disfavoured alike and would affect the way they relate with one another. However, it is important to recognise Mbali's perspective on the matter.

Next thing you check, if I were to compare myself with another friend of mine who is dark-skinned...and we are working, I'd be getting more attention because of my complexion. She's darker you know...and like I said, it's unwanted attention. To the extent that sometimes they might be feeling like you know what...scratch her, because whatever, or wherever we go, it's always "light-skinned, light-skinned [Mbali].

Prompted to elaborate on the point she makes of receiving favourable treatment amongst her friends as well as to share on her experience of being light-skinned in this era where light skin on Black women, is treated like a trendy accessory, Mbali continued:

[Deep sigh] To me, I don't care about all these things hey... it's not always the case that light-skinned people are beautiful, it's just the complexion that adds to the qualities they have. The true beauty is the dark people, according to...what I know... [giggles] ...you know... Yellow-bone does not make one beautiful. Look at your... who's this girl...? Lupita [Lupita Nyong'o [Kenyan-Mexican actress, well known for her dark skin] and this other girl, I forgot her name. Those women are beautiful. She's... they're very dark but, they're beautiful. I'd say that they are beautiful. Darker... dark-skinned ladies, they're pretty. You can see all their features, and my... by the way those people are protected from the sun hey... So, I'd definitely say that dark-skinned is prettier [Mbali].

Mbali was notably nervous and seemed ambivalent to talk about her skin tone in relation to her darker counterparts. She struggled to engage elaborately with her light-skinned privilege and appeared to minimise it by saying that she "don't care about all these things". Moreover, Mbali seemingly took on an activist stance. She preferred to dwell more on her pro dark-skin views, which seemed to carry a compensatory undertone. Mbali's difficulty to talk about her position of privilege as a light-skinned Black woman is in keeping with studies which have found that power and privilege can be uncomfortable to explore when it relates to your own benefits (Lorde, 2015).

Masedi seemingly shares in the same difficulty. In her extract below, it is apparent how she is able to talk about light-skinned women's privilege for as long as it is in a generalised sense. The discomfort arises when she is prompted to share her personal experience. Like Mbali, Masedi explained that she does not think anything of her light skin and that it is "whatever" to her. Again, this seemed to come from a defensive position in relation to this issue, the fact that she has a light complexion.

If you are light-skinned, yellow bone you know...yellow-bone is trending hey. Eh... [sigh and smiles] I don't know what to feel about that. But I'm yellow-bone and so...? Therefore, I'm beautiful...is that what you're saying? [Rolling her eyes] For me it doesn't... cause it's... I don't take... like ha ke [I don't] ... because I'm yellow-boned, I don't like... even when people go "oh, yellow-bone" I'm like yeah whatever! Yeah, so for me it hasn't really been that... like okay. But I think for other people that really take it seriously... I think it plays a big role because I'm telling, you, yellow-bones get away with a lot [giggles]. People become more lenient; they are nicer to them because they're yellow-bones. With men as well...[Masdedi].

Asked if she has had any personal experience of receiving better treatment due to her skin tone, Masedi responded as follows:

I can't think of anything right now. But you know, even when you're yellow-boned...there's a positive and negative side to it. Sometimes you're yellow-boned and they think you're trashy, o [you are] ratchet [slang word for wayward or having loose morals] or something. Or they think hore [that] I'm out-going, you know clubs and stuff like that, I'm that type of girl just because I'm yellow-boned [Masedi].

Masedi's narrative on light-skinned privilege is also laced with discomfort and ambivalence. It seemed easier for her to give an account of the times when her skin tone was a disadvantage.

This theme looked at three bodily features namely, hair, body structure and skin complexion, which participants considered to be most important in determining a woman's level of beauty. Furthermore, these features were explored for their ease of access to cultivation, in the interest

of enhancing participants' beauty to the levels of which they aspire. Hair seemed to be the easiest of the three features to control. While participants felt that this remains a complex issue amongst Black women, they also alluded to a new move towards merging African and Western ideals of hairstyling to create a culture of doing hair, which they felt might partly be alleviated of the racial and political weight it carries historically.

Body was also discussed. Some of the women shared their journeys with striving towards socially approved bodies successfully, while some failed at attaining this goal, which has significant socio-cultural complexities. Lastly, alongside hair, skin complexion was identified as a beauty feature that is laden with issues of racial discrimination. It is apparently the least accessible feature to participants, as such their attempts at manipulating it ended during their teenage years. The politics of colorism were at the center of participants' expressed wish (reported to have been more intense during their younger years) to cultivate their skin tone into a lighter shade.

Chapter 5: Synthesis of Results

5.1 Introduction

The chapter of this study revisits and synthesizes the findings from an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of Black women regarding beauty standards in Braamfontein. This research journey,

grounded in a qualitative framework, has unearthed rich insights into how these women navigate, negotiate, and redefine beauty norms within the interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and personal dimensions. The chapter reflects on the implications of these findings for theory, practice, and policy, acknowledging the complexities and nuances that characterize the concept of beauty in contemporary South African society.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

This dissertation has explored the diverse and complex perceptions of beauty among Black women in Braamfontein, South Africa. The research reveals that these perceptions are influenced by a myriad of factors, including socio-cultural backgrounds, media representations, and personal experiences. In summary, the key findings are as follows:

5.2.1 Influence of Socio-cultural Backgrounds

The deep-seated influence of socio-cultural backgrounds on the participants' perceptions of beauty is undeniable. Familial influence, especially from maternal figures, was pivotal in the initial shaping of beauty concepts. These influences ranged from explicit teachings about beauty routines to subtle implications about body image and skin tone. However, these familial and cultural norms often collided with Western beauty ideals, creating a dichotomy in the participants' understanding and acceptance of beauty. Traditional African values, which often emphasize natural beauty, community-oriented standards, and a broader acceptance of diverse body types, contrast sharply with the Western emphasis on individualism, thinness, and light skin.

This clash was not just a matter of aesthetics but also deeply entwined with identity and self-worth. Participants recounted instances where cultural practices and family traditions regarding beauty conflicted with what they saw in the media or experienced in more Westernized environments like universities or workplaces. The struggle to reconcile these differing standards often led to a nuanced understanding of beauty, where traditional African values were either upheld as a form of cultural pride or adapted to fit into the Westernized narrative they encountered in their daily lives.

5.2.2 Media Influence

The role of media as a formidable force in shaping beauty perceptions was a recurring theme in the participants' narratives. Television, social media, and magazines predominantly propagate Western beauty standards, which emphasize thinness, light skin, and specific hair types. This pervasive media influence has led to a complex oscillation between traditional African beauty standards and Western ideals, often leaving participants feeling caught in between (Mills et al., 2017).

In their article, “Success is our Destiny: A thematic analysis of Black South African women on Destiny magazine covers”, Ebrahim and Malatjie (2020) write about the representation of Black women in magazines, with particular focus on Destiny Magazine. Although the focus was not on beauty, Ebrahim and Malatjie (2020) indicate that Black women were historically under-represented in Western magazines. Moreover, when women of colour did appear in Western publications their representations were often obscure. Ebrahim and Malatjie (2020) also found that Black women were represented submissively in White oriented magazines (e.g. People Magazine & Cosmopolitan). In contrast, Black women were portrayed as financially strong and holding high occupational statuses in Black-oriented magazines like Destiny (Ebrahim & Malatjie, 2020). It is interesting to note that even today, with the proliferation of media into online platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Tik Tok to name a few, the same trend of misrepresenting Black women and perpetuating Western beauty standards is still taking place.

The participants in the current study observed that media platforms rarely celebrated the diversity of African beauty, instead often marginalizing it in favor of more Westernized looks.

This marginalization was not limited to visual representation but extended to the narratives and stories told, which often excluded or stereotyped African beauty. The impact of this media influence was profound, affecting participants' self-esteem and body image. The constant bombardment of Western beauty ideals led many to question their own beauty and worth, sometimes adopting harmful practices to align with these ideals. However, there was also a counter-movement within the group, where some participants actively sought to challenge these narratives by embracing their natural beauty and advocating for more inclusive representation in the media (Mills et al., 2017).

5.2.3 Personal Experiences and Identity

Personal experiences, especially during formative years, were critical in shaping the participants' perceptions of beauty. These experiences ranged from childhood interactions with family and community to adolescent and adult experiences in broader societal contexts. Participants shared poignant accounts of body dissatisfaction, often linked to their inability to conform to societal beauty standards prevalent in their immediate environments.

The journey from internalized beauty standards in adolescence to a more self-defined understanding of beauty in adulthood was marked by significant introspection and transformation. Many participants spoke of a turning point, often in their late teens or early adulthood, where they began to question and challenge the beauty standards they had grown up with. This shift frequently involved a painful process of unlearning deeply ingrained beliefs and confronting societal and familial pressures.

This journey was not linear or uniform; each participant's path was unique, influenced by their personal experiences and the particular societal, cultural, and familial contexts they navigated. Some found empowerment in embracing their natural beauty, while others continued to struggle with societal expectations. However, a common thread was the move towards a more self-accepting and inclusive perception of beauty. This evolution was often accompanied by a broader questioning of identity, where beauty standards became intertwined with larger questions about race, culture, and self-expression. The participants' narratives underscored the complexity of beauty as a concept that is deeply personal yet profoundly influenced by external factors.

5.2.4 The Braamfontein Context

In the vibrant university environment of Braamfontein, a unique context for the exploration and redefinition of beauty standards emerges. This setting, distinct from more traditional or family-oriented environments, offers a space of relative freedom where participants can experiment with and redefine their own beauty standards. This shift is significant when compared to past literature, which often highlights the rigidity of beauty standards imposed by family and societal norms. Smith and Kington (2015) suggest that university environments can act as catalysts for change, encouraging young adults to question and redefine personal and societal beliefs. The Braamfontein context mirrors this, with participants describing their university experience as a transformative journey where they could explore diverse beauty standards, ranging from traditional African to contemporary global aesthetics.

5.2.5 Western vs. African Standards of Beauty

The struggle between adhering to African beauty standards and the appeal of Western influences is a complex and ongoing narrative in the lives of the participants. This duality reflects a broader societal tension, as noted in scholarly discussions about globalization and cultural identity (Adichie, 2013). Participants' narratives revealed a growing trend towards the appreciation of African aesthetics, such as natural hair and darker skin tones. However, they also acknowledged the pervasive and often overpowering influence of Western beauty ideals. This oscillation is reflective of the global cultural exchange where Western ideals often dominate but are increasingly being challenged by a resurgence in the appreciation of indigenous beauty standards (Mbembe, 2017). The participants' experiences highlight this global-local dynamic, where African and Western beauty standards are in a constant state of negotiation.

5.2.6 Physical Attributes - Hair, Body Structure, and Skin Complexion

Hair emerged not just as a physical attribute but as a potent symbol of cultural and political identity, echoing sentiments found in earlier literature that emphasized hair as a site of resistance and cultural expression (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Similarly, body structure,

particularly concerns around weight and shape, reflected broader societal pressures that favor slimmer body types, a trend that has been widely documented in studies on body image (Swami & Tovee, 2005). Skin complexion, and the preference for lighter skin, brought to the fore the issue of colorism. This preference is deeply rooted in historical and colonial legacies, as well as contemporary media influences, as explored in Hunter's work on colorism (Hunter, 2011). The participants' discussions around these physical attributes highlight the intersectionality of beauty, where race, culture, and social influences converge to shape individual perceptions and experiences of beauty.

5.2.7 Societal Pressures and Self-Perception

The participants' narratives vividly illustrate the ongoing conflict between external societal beauty standards and internal self-perception. This tension is a common theme in beauty discourse, as highlighted in various studies (Bordo, 2023; Wolf, 1991). Participants articulated the struggle between the desire to adhere to these societal norms for broader social acceptance and the yearning to stay true to their individual perceptions of beauty. This echoes the findings of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) in their work on objectification theory, which posits that societal standards can lead to self-objectification and internalized notions of beauty. The participants' experiences underscore the complex interplay between societal expectations and personal identity, with many feeling caught between the need to conform for social acceptance and the desire to express their unique sense of self.

5.2.8 Economic and Social Implications

The economic and social ramifications of adhering to certain beauty standards were a significant concern for the participants. This aspect aligns with Bourdieu's theory of social capital, where physical appearance can be a form of capital that influences one's position in social hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1986). Participants discussed how meeting certain beauty norms could impact their social status, career trajectories, and even personal relationships. This observation is supported by extensive research indicating that physical attractiveness can affect various aspects of life, including employment opportunities and interpersonal relationships (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003). The narratives revealed a keen awareness of the

material and social benefits associated with conforming to dominant beauty standards, as well as the potential marginalization for failing to conform.

5.2.9 The Role of Agency and Resistance

Despite the evident pressures to conform to restrictive beauty norms, there was a notable sense of agency among the participants. Many expressed a strong desire to resist these norms and redefine beauty standards on their own terms. This sentiment reflects a growing trend in contemporary beauty discourse that emphasizes individual empowerment and the rejection of traditional beauty ideals (Gill, 2007). The participants' stance signifies a shift towards more inclusive and diverse beauty standards, resonating with the broader movement for body positivity and acceptance (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). This resistance and agency are crucial in challenging and potentially transforming prevailing beauty narratives, suggesting a movement towards a more holistic and varied understanding of beauty that transcends conventional norms.

5.3 Summary

This chapter synthesised the results and provided an overview of the findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents conclusion and recommendations of the study and further offers reflections on the study's limitations, and proposes avenues for future research. The insights gained not only contribute to the broader discourse on beauty standards and racial identity but also underscore the dynamic nature of beauty perceptions in a rapidly evolving socio-cultural landscape.

6.2 Conclusion of the research study

The conclusion of this study brings together the complex tapestry of themes and narratives that have emerged from the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding female beauty. Central to these narratives is the influence of socio-cultural backgrounds, which profoundly shape early perceptions of beauty. Participants articulated the pivotal role of familial influences, especially maternal figures, in molding their initial understanding of beauty. This aligns with the broader literature that underscores the importance of family and culture in the formation of beauty ideals (Bordo, 2023; Wolf, 1991). The collision of traditional African values with Westernized ideals of beauty creates a rich, albeit often conflicting, backdrop against which these young women navigate their understanding of beauty.

Media's role as a potent force in shaping and at times distorting perceptions of beauty cannot be overstated. Participants' experiences reflect the widespread influence of predominantly Western standards perpetuated through television, social media, and magazines. This exposure has led to a complex oscillation between traditional African beauty standards and Western ideals, a phenomenon well-documented in contemporary beauty studies (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gill, 2007). The media's promotion of thin, light-skinned ideals often marginalizes other forms of beauty, contributing to a narrow and exclusive beauty narrative. Personal experiences, particularly during formative years, are instrumental in shaping perceptions of beauty. The journey from internalized beauty standards in adolescence to a more self-defined understanding of beauty in adulthood is marked by struggles with body dissatisfaction and societal pressure to conform. This mirrors the trajectory identified in

objectification theory and other feminist literature, which highlights the impact of societal norms on women's self-perception and body image (Bordo, 2023; Thomas, 2020; Wolf, 1991).

The Braamfontein context, with its vibrant university environment, emerges as a space for renegotiation and redefinition of beauty standards. This environment offers a unique platform for participants to experiment with and redefine their standards of beauty, often diverging from those ingrained in their upbringing. The tension between Western and African standards of beauty remains a prominent theme, with a notable trend towards embracing African aesthetics, such as natural hair and darker skin tones. However, the pervasive influence of Western standards persists, reflecting a global trend in beauty norms.

Physical attributes like hair, body structure, and skin complexion are highlighted as significant sites of cultural and political importance. Hair emerges as a symbol of identity, body structure is scrutinized in relation to societal preferences for slimmer body types, and skin complexion is critically examined within the context of colorism. These physical features serve as a canvas upon which broader societal, racial, and gender dynamics are played out.

Societal pressures around beauty norms have significant implications on self-perception, economic status, and social relationships. Participants' narratives reveal the tensions between conforming for social acceptance and maintaining a sense of authentic self. The economic and social implications of beauty standards are evident, with adherence to certain norms impacting social status and career opportunities. Yet, amidst these pressures, a strong sense of agency and resistance emerges. Participants express a desire to challenge restrictive beauty norms and embrace more inclusive and diverse standards.

6.3 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of beauty among young women in the Braamfontein area, it has several limitations.

6.3.1 Firstly, its small sample size, age range (24-27 years old), focus on a specific geographic and educational setting limit the generalizability of the findings. The experiences and perceptions of the participants may not fully represent the diversity of

views on beauty standards among all young women in South Africa or other cultural contexts.

- 6.3.2 Secondly, the study predominantly relies on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability. Participants might have consciously or unconsciously altered their responses to conform to what they perceive as socially acceptable or expected in discussions about beauty.
- 6.3.3 Additionally, the study's qualitative nature, while offering in-depth insights, means that the conclusions drawn are interpretative and subjective. Different researchers might interpret the same narratives in varied ways, leading to different conclusions.
- 6.3.4 The focus on female perceptions also means that the study does not incorporate the views and influences of male perspectives on beauty standards, which could provide a more holistic understanding of the societal pressures and influences in shaping beauty norms.
- 6.3.5 Lastly, while the study touches on the impact of media on beauty perceptions, it does not delve deeply into the specific content or types of media that most influence these perceptions. A more detailed analysis of media influences could provide a richer understanding of how media shapes beauty standards and self-perceptions among young women.

6.4 Recommendations

In light of this study's findings on young women's perceptions of beauty in the Braamfontein area, several recommendations can be made to address the complexities surrounding beauty standards and their impact on young women's self-perception and societal roles.

6.4.1 Educational Interventions: Educational institutions, particularly at the university level, play a pivotal role in shaping young adults' perceptions and values. It is recommended that universities incorporate workshops or seminars focused on body positivity, self-esteem, and the critical analysis of beauty standards into their student wellness programs. These interventions should aim to deconstruct the prevalent beauty norms and encourage students to embrace a more inclusive and diverse understanding of beauty. This approach can help mitigate the impact of societal and media-induced pressures on young women's self-perception.

6.4.2 Media Literacy Programs: Given the significant influence of media on shaping beauty standards, media literacy programs are essential. These programs should be aimed at young people, helping them to critically analyze and question the beauty ideals propagated by various media platforms, including social media. By fostering critical thinking skills, young women can be better equipped to resist unrealistic and narrow beauty standards, reducing the risk of body dissatisfaction and related mental health issues.

6.4.3 Community Engagement Initiatives: Community-based initiatives can play a crucial role in changing perceptions of beauty at the grassroots level. Workshops and discussion forums that bring together individuals from different age groups can facilitate intergenerational dialogues on beauty standards. These initiatives can be instrumental in challenging long-held beliefs and stereotypes about beauty, promoting a more inclusive understanding that embraces diverse beauty norms.

6.4.4 Support for Mental Health: The links between beauty standards, self-esteem, and mental health are evident. Mental health services, particularly those accessible to young women, should include support for issues related to body image and self-esteem. Counseling and therapy sessions that focus on building a positive body image and coping strategies for dealing with societal pressures can be beneficial. Additionally, creating support groups where young women can share their experiences and challenges related to beauty standards can foster a sense of community and mutual support.

6.4.5 Policy Advocacy: Advocacy for policies that promote realistic and diverse representations of beauty in media and advertising is crucial. This includes encouraging the portrayal of a wide range of body types, skin tones, and physical features in media and advertising campaigns. Lobbying for regulations that require advertisers and media companies to disclose when images have been digitally altered can also help in promoting more realistic beauty standards.

6.4.6 Research and Documentation: Continued research in this area is vital for understanding the evolving dynamics of beauty standards and their impact. Future research should aim to include a more diverse demographic to gain a broader perspective.

Additionally, documenting the narratives and experiences of young women from various backgrounds can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals in developing targeted interventions.

6.4.7 Role of Men and Boys in Shaping Beauty Standards: It is important to involve men and boys in conversations about beauty standards. Workshops and educational sessions that include male participants can be instrumental in challenging the patriarchal views that often underpin societal beauty norms. Encouraging men and boys to critically reflect on their perceptions and the impact of their attitudes on women's self-esteem and body image can contribute to a more equitable and supportive social environment.

Addressing beauty standards' complexities requires a multi-faceted approach encompassing education, media literacy, community engagement, mental health support, policy advocacy, and continued research. By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards a society where beauty is celebrated in its many forms, and where young women feel empowered and confident in their unique identities.

6.5 Future Studies

Future research on the perceptions of beauty among young women in Braamfontein can take various directions to deepen our understanding of this complex topic. One intriguing area is the exploration of beauty standards across different cultural and ethnic groups. A comparative analysis could uncover how cultural heritage, traditions, and societal norms shape individual notions of beauty, offering a broader perspective on the subject.

Another valuable approach would be the implementation of longitudinal studies that track changes in individuals' perceptions of beauty over time. Such studies could provide insights into how these perceptions evolve with age, life experiences, and societal shifts, while also assessing the long-term psychological impact of beauty standards.

In the digital age, the influence of media, especially social media, on shaping beauty standards and self-perception among young women, is significant and warrants further investigation.

Research focusing on the effects of social media trends, influencers, and digital image alteration could shed light on their impact on body image and self-esteem.

The male perspective on beauty standards is another area that has not been explored in depth. Investigating how young men perceive and are influenced by these standards could offer a comprehensive understanding of the societal impact of these norms and the role of gender dynamics in shaping beauty perceptions.

Research evaluating the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote a positive body image and counteract the negative impacts of societal beauty standards is crucial. This could include educational programs, media literacy campaigns, and mental health support initiatives, which are vital in promoting healthier and more realistic beauty perceptions.

Lastly, examining the effects of globalization on beauty perceptions, especially in culturally diverse societies, could provide insights into the interaction between global beauty trends and local cultural norms. Such studies could highlight the interplay between global influences and individual identity, contributing to the development of more inclusive and empowering beauty standards. This research direction is especially relevant in our increasingly interconnected world, where cultural exchange is a constant process. This research direction could be enhanced by conducting a comparative analysis of different cultures, races, and ethnicities to better understand their impact on beauty perceptions.

REFERENCES

- Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. London: Fourth Estate
- Ahmed, I. I. (2012). *A Thematic Analysis of Female University Students' Perception of Idealised Body Image in Sudan and Their Experiences of Performing Common Beauty Practices:(Skin Lightening, Applying Black Henna Dye and Purposively Induced Weight)*. University of South Wales (United Kingdom).
- Ahmed, I., & Saltus, R. (2015). A thematic analysis of female university students 'perceptions of idealised body image in Sudan,and their experiences of performing common beauty practices. *Diversity and Equality in Health and Care*, 12(2), 40-47.
- Alharahsheh, H.H. and Pius, A., 2020. A review of key paradigms: Positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), pp.39-43.
- Alubafi, M. F., Ramphalile, M., & Rankoana, A. S. (2018). The shifting image of black women's hair in Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 4(1), 1471184.
- Antunez, C. (2013). Fros, Weaves, and Kinks: The Social and Political Significance of Hair for Black and Coloured Women in Cape Town. *Independent Study Project*.
- Ataro, G., 2020. Methods, methodological challenges and lesson learned from phenomenological study about OSCE experience: Overview of paradigm-driven qualitative approach in medical education. *Annals of Medicine and Surgery*, 49, pp.19-23.
- Awad, G.H., Norwood, C., Taylor, D.S., Martinez, M., McClain, S., Jones, B., Holman, A. and Chapman-Hilliard, C. (2015). Beauty and body image concerns among African American college women. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 41(6), 540-564.

- Azungah, T., 2018. Qualitative research: deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative research journal*, 18(4), pp.383-400.
- Becker, A.E. (1995). *Body, self, and society: The view from Fiji*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Bettendorf, S. K., & Fischer, A. R. (2009). Cultural strengths as moderators of the relationship between acculturation to the mainstream U.S. society and eating-and-body-related concerns among Mexican Americans women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 430-440.
- Blank, A. L. (2002). *The difference of body exposure: Images of females and males in three top teen magazines*. East Tennessee State University.
- Bordo, S. (1993). Whose body is this? Feminism, medicine, and the conceptualization of eating disorders. *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*, 45-69.
- Bordo, S. (2023). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Univ of California Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research in the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwald Press
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
- Brielmann, A. A., & Pelli, D. G. (2017). Beauty requires thought. *Current Biology*, 27(10), 1506-1513. doi: 10.1016/j.cub.2017.04.018
- Broeckmann, A. (2007). Image, process, performance, machine: aspects of an aesthetics of the machinic.
- Broekmann, A. 2007. "Image, Process, Performance, Machine: Aspects of an Aesthetics of the Machinic" in Grau, O. (Ed.) *Media Histories* (193-205). Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press
- Brumberg, J. J. (1998). *The body project: An intimate history of American girls*. Vintage.

- Bryant, S. L. (2013). The beauty ideal: the effects of European standards of beauty on Black women. *Columbia Social Work Review*, 11(1), 80-91.
- Burke, N. J., Joseph, G., & Pasick, R. J. (2009). Theorizng Social Context: Rethinking Behavioral Theory. *Health education & behavior*, 36(50), 55S-70S.
- Burke, N. J., Joseph, G., & Pasick, R. J. (2009). Theorizng Social Context: Rethinking Behavioral Theory. *Health education & behavior*, 36(50), 55S-70S.
- [Butler, Judith \(1994\)'Gender as performance'. *Radical Philosophy* 67: 32-9.](#)
- Choane, M., Shulika, L. S., & Mthombeni, M. (2011). An analysis of the causes, effects and ramifications of xenophobia in South Africa. *Insight on Africa*, 3(2), 129-142.
- Clifford, J., & de Lauretis, T. (1996). Butler, Judith (1994)'Gender as performance'. *Radical Philosophy* 67: 32-9. *BodySpace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, 46(1), 266.
- Coard, S. I., Breland, A. M., & Raskin, P. (2001). Perceptions of and preferences for skin color, Black racial identity, and self-esteem among African Americans 1. *Journal of applied social psychology*, 31(11), 2256-2274.
- Coetzee, V., Faerber, S. J., Greeff, J. M., Lefevre, C. E., Re, D. E., & Perrett, D. I. (2012). African perceptions of female attractiveness. *PloS one*, 7(10), e48116.
- Coetzee, V., Faerber, S. J., Greeff, J. M., Lefevre, C. E., Re, D. E., & Perrett, D. I. (2012). African perceptions of female attractiveness. *PloS one*, 7(10), e48116.
- CSU Fullerton. (2022). Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. [Retrieved 12 March 2023 from <https://www.csuerfsa.org/index.php/news-views/blog/blog/who-created-the-saying-beauty-is-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder>]
- Dithebe M & Mukhuba T (2018), 'Illegal Immigration and the challenge of border control in South Africa' Vol 15 No.2 pp 127-147, North West University

- Dithebe, M. V. E., & Mukhuba, T. T. (2018). Illegal Immigration and the Challenge of Border Control in South Africa. *African Renaissance (1744-2532)*, 15(2).
- Dlova, N., Hamed, S. H., Tsoka-Gwegweni, J., Grobler, A., & Hift, R. (2014). Women's perceptions of the benefits and risks of skin-lightening creams in two South African communities. *Journal of cosmetic dermatology*, 13(3), 236-241.
- Dlova, N., Hamed, S. H., Tsoka-Gwegweni, J., Grobler, A., & Hift, R. (2014). Women's perceptions of the benefits and risks of skin-lightening creams in two South African communities. *Journal of cosmetic dermatology*, 13(3), 236-241. doi.org/10.1111/jocd.12104
- Duncan, N. (Ed.). (1996). *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality*. Psychology Press.
- Dworkin, A. (1974) *Women Hating* (1st ed.) E. P. Dutton. New York
- Ebrahim, S., & Malatjie, S. (2020). Success Is Our Destiny: A Thematic Analysis of Black South African Women on Destiny Magazine Covers. *Issues in Race and Society: An Interdisciplinary Global Journal*, Spring 2020 edition, DOI: 10.34314/issuesspring2020.00008.
- Eckersley, R. (2006). Is modern Western culture a health hazard?. *International journal of epidemiology*, 35(2), 252-258. doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyi235
- El Jurdi, H., & Smith, S. (2018). Mirror, mirror: national identity and the pursuit of beauty. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 35(1), 40-50.
- Fisher, M. (2021). Female intrasexual competition. *In the Cambridge handbook of evolutionary perspectives on sexual psychology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fisher, M. L., & Voracek, M. (2006). The shape of beauty: determinants of female physical attractiveness. *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology*, 5(2), 190-194.

- Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. *Psychology of women quarterly*, 21(2), 173-206.
- Garner, S. Y. (1995). Self-Esteem of Elementary and Middle School Children.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility. *European journal of cultural studies*, 10(2), 147-166.
- Glass, M. (2020). How beauty standards have reshaped feminism. *One Woman Project*.
- Goedecke, J. H., Forbes, J., & Stein, D. J. (2013). Differences in the association between childhood trauma and BMI in black and white South African women. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 16(3), 201-205.
- Goedecke, J. H., Forbes, J., & Stein, D. J. (2013). Differences in the association between childhood trauma and BMI in black and white South African women. *African Journal of Psychiatry*, 16(3), 201-205.
- Grogan, S. (2008). *Body image: Understanding body dissatisfaction in men, women and children* (2nd ed.). London: Taylor and Francis.
- Grogan, S. (2021). *Body image: Understanding body dissatisfaction in men, women and children*. Routledge.
- Hall, C. C. I. (1995). Beauty is in the soul of the beholder: Psychological implications of beauty and African American women. *Cultural diversity and mental Health*, 1(2), 125.
- Henriques, M., & Patnaik, D. (2020). Social media and its effects on beauty. In *Beauty-Cosmetic Science, Cultural Issues and Creative Developments*. IntechOpen.
- Hester, N. and Hehman, E. (2023). Dress is a fundamental component of person perception. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 27(4), pp.414-433.
- Holcomb-McCoy, C. C., & Moore-Thomas, C. (2001). Empowering african-american adolescent females. *Professional School Counseling*, 5(1), 19.

- Holman, A. C. (2011). Psychology of Beauty: An Overview of the Contemporary Research Lines. *Psihologia socială*, (28), 81-94. doi.org/10.1186/s40691-014-0020-7
- Hosoda, M., Stone-Romero, E. F., & Coats, G. (2003). The effects of physical attractiveness on job-related outcomes: A meta-analysis of experimental studies. *Personnel psychology*, 56(2), 431-462.
- Hunter, M. L. (1998). Colorstruck: Skin color stratification in the lives of African American women. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68(4), 517-535.
- Ibanga, D. A. (2017). The concept of beauty in African philosophy. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10 (7):249-260 (2017)
- Ibanga, Diana-Abasi (2017). The Concept of Beauty in African Philosophy. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10 (7):249-260.
- Jairath, J. and Daima, R. (2021). Role of pop culture in popularizing gender-bending fashion and ideals of beauty and makeup. *International Journal*, 1(3), p.13.
- Johnson, K., Lennon, S. J., & Rudd, N. (2014). Dress, body and self: Research in the social psychology of dress. *Fashion and textiles*, 1, 1-24.
- Kaziga, R., Muchunguzi, C., Achen, D. and Kools, S., 2021. Beauty is skin deep; the self-perception of adolescents and young women in construction of body image within the ankole society. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(15), p.7840.
- Kaziga, R., Muchunguzi, C., Achen, D., & Kools, S. (2021). Beauty is skin deep; the self-perception of adolescents and young women in construction of body image within the ankole society. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(15), 7840.
- Keller, J.M., 2014. Fiercely Real?: Tyra Banks and the making of new media celebrity. *Feminist Media Studies*, 14(1), pp.147-164.

- Kemp, S. (2000). "Technologies of the Face" in Cutting Edge, the Women's Research Group (Eds.), *Digital Desires* (3-24). New York: I. B Tauris & Co Ltd
- Kiguwa, P. (2019). Feminist approaches: An exploration of women's gendered experiences. In S. Laher, A. Finn, & S. Kramer (Eds.), *Transforming research methods in the social sciences: Case studies from South Africa*, 220-235.
- Kilicarslan, Z. G. (2018). *Literary Critique of Women's Representations through the Analysis of Turkish Female Authors' Novels*. Indiana University.
- Kirmayer, L. J., & Sartorius, N. (2007). Cultural models and somatic syndromes. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 69(9), 832-840.
- Klumbiene, J., Petkeviciene, J., Helasoja, V., Prättälä, R., & Kasmel, A. (2004). Sociodemographic and health behaviour factors associated with obesity in adult populations in Estonia, Finland and Lithuania. *The European Journal of Public Health*, 14(4), 390-394.
- Kraidy, M. (2005) *Hybridity or the Cultural Logic of Globalisation*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kraidy, M. (2006). *Hybridity, or the cultural logic of globalization*. Temple University Press.
- Kruger, H. S., Seru, T., Mchiza, Z. J., & Speakman, J. R. (2020). The relationship between female adiposity and physical attractiveness amongst adults in rural Ranaka village, Botswana. *South African Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 33(1), 17-22.
- Le Grange, D., Louw, J., Breen, A., & Katzman, M. A. (2004). The meaning of 'self-starvation' in impoverished black adolescents in South Africa. *Culture, medicine and psychiatry*, 28, 439-461.
- Leboto-Khetsi, L., 2022. *Exploring opportunities for sustainable local economic development in South Africa through collaborative housing revitalization* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).

- Luoto, S. (2017). Commentary: Beauty requires thought. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 290047.
- Mahr, E. E. (2016). Color Theory and Cosmetics.
- Makanda, J. (2021). Meaning-Making, Negotiation and (De) Construction of Socio-Political Identities among Migrants: The Inclusion of the Forgotten Voices of Forced Migrants in South Africa.
- Makanda, J. (2021). Meaning-Making, Negotiation and (De) Construction of Socio-Political Identities among Migrants: The Inclusion of the Forgotten Voices of Forced Migrants in South Africa.
- Malcolm, M., & Kaya, I. (2016). Selection works both ways: BMI and marital formation among young women. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 14, 293-311.
- Malcolm, M., Kaya, I. Selection works both ways: BMI and marital formation among young women. *Rev Econ Household* 14, 293–311 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-014-9247-8>
- Marques Hayasaki, P. (2016). Effects of media exposure to beauty ideals on body image concerns among adolescent girls from brazilian origins living in Spain.
- Marques Hayasaki, P. (2016). Effects of media exposure to beauty ideals on body image concerns among adolescent girls from brazilian origins living in Spain.
- Mascheroni, G., Vincent, J., & Jimenez, E. (2015). “Girls are addicted to likes so they post semi-naked selfies”: Peer mediation, normativity and the construction of identity online. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of psychosocial research on cyberspace*, 9(1), 5.
- Mascheroni, G., Vincent, J., & Jimenez, E. (2015). “Girls are addicted to likes so they post semi-naked selfies”: Peer mediation, normativity and the construction of identity online. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of psychosocial research on cyberspace*, 9(1), 5.

- Mascheroni, G., Vincent, J., & Jimenez, E. (2015). "Girls are addicted to likes so they post semi-naked selfies": Peer mediation, normativity and the construction of identity online. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of psychosocial research on cyberspace*, 9(1), 5.
- McCoy, F., Gamble, P. and Maple, C., 2020. *A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach to Exploring the Lived Experiences of Participants in Georgia's P-20 Collaboratives* (Doctoral dissertation, Augusta University).
- Mills, J. S., Shannon, A., & Hogue, J. (2017). Beauty, body image, and the media. *Perception of beauty*, 10. doi.org/105772/intechopen.68944
- Mills, J. S., Shannon, A., & Hogue, J. (2017). Beauty, body image and the media. In M. P. Levine, *Perception of beauty*, 10:145-157.
- Molder, A. (2020). *Internalization of Sociocultural Standards of Beauty, Perception of Career Barriers, Depression, and State Physical Appearance Anxiety Among College Women*. West Virginia University. <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/7790>
- Monti, M. R., & Pećnjak, D. (Eds.). (2020). *What is Beauty? A Multidisciplinary Approach to Aesthetic Experience*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Montle, M. E. (2020). Debunking Eurocentric ideals of beauty and stereotypes against African natural hair (styles): An Afrocentric perspective. *Journal of African Foreign Affairs*, 7(1), 111-127.
- Montle, M. E. (2022). Scrutinising Eurocentric stereotypes against Afrocentric underpinnings of beauty through Kopano Matlwa's Coconut. *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 11(1), 34-41.
- Mosselson, A. (2016). 'Joburg has it's own mometum': Towards a vernacular theorisation of urban change. *Urban Studies*, 1, 17.
- Mosselson, A. (2017). 'Joburg has its own momentum': Towards a vernacular theorisation of urban change. *Urban Studies*, 54(5), 1280-1296.

- Mosselson, A. (2017). 'Joburg has its own momentum': Towards a vernacular theorisation of urban change. *Urban Studies*, 54(5), 1280-1296.
- Mosselson, A. (2017). 'Joburg has its own momentum': Towards a vernacular theorisation of urban change. *Urban Studies*, 54(5), 1280-1296.
- Motseki, M., & Oyedemi, T. (2017). Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty among young black women in South Africa. *Communitas*, 22, 136-148.
- Motseki, M., & Oyedemi, T. (2017). Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty among young black women in South Africa. *Communitas*, 22, 136-148.
- Mushure, M. (2010). *Why do black African women use hair extensions? Exploring reasons for the popularity of hair extensions among black African women* (Doctoral dissertation, Masters dissertation. Cape Town: University of Cape Town).
- Pappas, N. (2017). Anti-Fashion: If Not Fashion, Then What?. *Matteucci, Giovanni; Marino, Stefano (Hg.): Philosophical Perspectives on Fashion. London (ua): Bloomsbury Academic*, 73-90.
- Park, E. (2022). South Korean housewives' emerging economic authority and contestation of domesticity during the cold war era. *Gender & History*.
- Park, E. J., & Chung, M. S. (2012). Sociocultural influences of appearance and body image on appearance enhancement behavior. *Journal of the Korean Society of Clothing and Textiles*, 36(5), 549-561.
- Patton, T. O. (2006). Hey girl, am I more than my hair?: African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and hair. *NWSA journal*, 24-51.
- Perry, C., & Allard, A. (2003). Making the connections: transition experiences for first-year education students. *The Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 4(2).
- Plume Books. (1970). *Great Dialogues of Plato*
- Plume Books. (1970). *Great Dialogues of Plato*.

- Poorani, A. (2012). Who determines the ideal body? A Summary of Research Findings on Body Image. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 2(10), 1-13.
- Pyykkönen, M. (2012). UNESCO and cultural diversity: democratisation, commodification or governmentalisation of culture?. *International journal of cultural policy*, 18(5), 545-562.
- Rector, N. A. (2010). Cognitive-behavioural therapy an information guide.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M. J. (1936). Memorandum for the study of acculturation. *American anthropologist*, 38(1), 149-152.
- Rhode, D. L. (2016). Appearance as a feminist issue. *SMUL Rev.*69, 697.
- Richardson, J. G. (1986). Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education. (*No Title*).
- Robinson-Moore, C. L. (2008). Beauty Standards Reflect Eurocentric Paradigms--So What? Skin Color, Identity, and Black Female Beauty. *Journal of Race & Policy*, 4(1).
- Rollero, C. (2022). Mass media beauty standards, body surveillance, and relationship satisfaction within romantic couples. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(7), 3833.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the Adolescent Self-Image. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (2015). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton university press.
- Saar, B., Best, M., & Williams, S. S. (2023). *Betye Saar: Heart of a Wanderer*. Princeton University Press.
- Sartwell, C. (2017). Entanglements. State University Of New York Press. [Retrieved 12 March 2023, from api.taylorfrancis.com]
- Sarwer, D. B., Grossbart, T. A., & Didie, E. R. (2003). Beauty and Society. *Seminars in Cutaneous Medicine and surgery*, 22(2), 79-92.

- Sbrana, R. (2008). *Cut and Paste: Interrogating Beauty in the Digital Age* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand).
- Shelembe, T. (2015). *The relationship between perceptions about physical appearance and the body-self relationship in young, Black, female South African university students (unpublished masters thesis)*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand
- Steyn, N. P. (2005). 'Big is beautiful'-and unhealthy and confusing? *South African Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 18(1), 4-5.
- Swami, V., & Tovee, M. J. (2005). Female physical attractiveness in Britain and Malaysia: A cross-cultural study. *Body Image*, 2, 115-128.
- Swami, V., & Tové, M. J. (2007). The relative contribution of profile body shape and weight to judgements of women's physical attractiveness in Britain and Malaysia. *Body image*, 4(4), 391-396.
- Swami, V., & Tovee, M. J. (2015). The relative contribution of profile body shape and weight to judgement of women's physical attractiveness in Britain and Greece. *Sex Role*, 54: 201-211.
- Taga, C. (2012). *Maybe She's Born with It: Analyzing theories of Beauty from Biology, Society and the Media*.
- Tarisayi, K. S. (2016). *The social capital influences of land reform beneficiaries and communal farmers on satellite schools in Zimbabwe* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Tarisayi, K. S. (2021). Afrophobic attacks in virtual spaces: The case of three hashtags in South Africa. *Migracijske i etničke teme*, 37(1), 29-46.
- Tatarkiewicz, W. (1963). Objectivity and Subjectivity in the History of Aesthetics. *Philosophy and phenomenological research*, 24(2), 157-173.
- Tiggemann, M., & Slater, A. (2014). Contemporary girlhood: Maternal reports on sexualized behaviour and appearance concern in 4–10 year-old girls. *Body image*, 11(4), 396-403.

- Umberson, D., & Hughes, M. (1987). The impact of physical attractiveness on achievement and psychological well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 227-236.
- Union, G. (2017). *We're Going to Need More Wine: Stories That Are Funny, Complicated, and True*. HarperCollins.
- Uwimpuhwe, D., & Ruiters, G. (2018). Organising Somalian, Congolese and Rwandan migrants in a time of xenophobia in South Africa: Empirical and methodological reflections. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 19, 1119-1136.
- Van Manen, M., 2017. But is it phenomenology?. *Qualitative health research*, 27(6), pp.775-779.
- Van Schalkwyk, S. C. (2008). *Acquiring academic literacy: A case of first-year extended degree programme students at Stellenbosch University* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).
- Walcott-McQuigg, J. A. (2005). Weight control behavior and women: A cross-cultural perspective. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 7(2), 152-168.
- Wanneburg, G. (2006). South African Women become More Weight Conscious. Retrieved March 20, 2007 from www.redorbit.com/news/health/347607/otuh_african_women_become_more_weight_conscuos/index.html
- Warmington, E. H., & Rouse, P. G. (Eds.). (1956). *Great dialogues of Plato*. New American Library.
- Wolf, N. (1992). *The Beauty Myth, How images of beauty are used against women* (1st reprint edition). Anchor Books ISBN: 9780385423977.
- Wolf, N. (2013). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. Random House.

- Yarosh, D. B. (2019). Perception and deception: human beauty and the brain. *Behavioral Sciences*, 9(4), 34.
- Zaveri, M. (2019). Black women now hold crowns in 5 major beauty pageants. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/15/style/black-women-win-beauty-pageants.html#:~:text=Toni%2DAnn%20Singh%20of%20Jamaica,Miss%20USA%20and%20Miss%20Universe>.
- Zuckert, R. (2007). *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the 'Critique of Judgment'*. Cambridge University Press.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Interview Questions Guide

1. How would you define the concept of beauty; that is in your opinion what makes a woman beautiful?
2. How is this similar to, or different from the way in which beauty is defined in the different socio-cultural contexts you have been exposed to?
3. Would you say that there are different perceptions of beauty in the different parts of South Africa? (Rural versus urban areas for instance).
4. Would you say your physical appearance has changed significantly over the past 2-3 years?
 - Was this a conscious decision?
5. Do you think some women better fit societal standards of beauty than others?
 - Are those not fitting these standards disadvantaged in any way?
6. If you were given the opportunity for a make-over, would you accept it?
 - What would be your new look? (if accepted)
 - What are the reasons behind this change/choice not to change?
7. If asked to quote three public figures that you regard as beautiful, whom would they be?
 - Why these three?
8. Would you say black women in our country are faced with any challenges regarding issues of beauty/body image?
 - Such as?
 - Have you encountered any?
 - How is it the same for all women regardless of their race? (if answer is 'no' for Q.8)
9. How do you experience the media's (TV, magazines, internet/social media) depictions of idealized beauty figures?
10. Ideally, what would you change or improve to counter some of the above-mentioned

APPENDIX B – Participant Information Sheet



Psychology

School of Human & Community
Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050

Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



Dear Potential Participant

My name is Puseletso Molaaphene, and I am conducting a study as part of my training for a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This study aims to investigate how young black South African women understand the influence of their socio-cultural contexts in generating their own personal definitions of beauty. Moreover, it seeks to explore whether because of this influence, these young women seek to actively alter their physical appearance in any way to align with these descriptions of beauty. This is an important study to conduct as it will voice the struggles that black females are often faced with regarding issues of body-related opinions, however, also to celebrate the autonomy they have to choose to be their own kind of beautiful in this era.

Information about this topic will be acquired through one-on-one interviews with you. These interviews will take place on the school premises at a time that best suites you. The venue will be communicated to you once it has been secured. These interviews will be audio-recorded to aid me in capturing the details of the session accurately and will last for the duration of between forty-five minutes to an hour. Do take note that you are in no way forced to take part in this study; it is entirely on a voluntary basis. Moreover, whether or not you choose to participate will not advantage or disadvantage you in any way. Your participation in the study is however encouraged and would be highly valued. Everything that is said in the interview will be kept

confidential, which means that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information disclosed in the sessions.

Permission is requested from you to keep the audio recordings for a period of two years if the research is published and for five years if it is not. The recordings will be secured in a password protected file accessible only to me and my supervisor.

You reserve the right not to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. Also, please note that you may withdraw from the study any time before the research report is written up. May I further request permission to quote your actual words in my report? In doing so, a pseudonym will be assigned and no identifying information which can be linked back to you will be disclosed. Furthermore, a summary of the results and findings of the research will be made available to you upon request. In the case that the interview evokes some feelings of distress, free counselling services are available for your disposal at the Emthonjeni Centre (EC), on east campus; their contact number is 0117174513

If you agree and are interested in taking part in the study, please sign the form attached. For more clarity, or any further enquiries concerning the research, you are welcome to contact me on 0832904272, otherwise email me on 1415340@sudents.wits.ac.za.

I look forward to your participation.

Warm regards

Puseletso Molaaphene

APPENDIX C – Consent Form for Audi Recording

Appendix C



Psychology
School of Human & Community
Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING

I _____ understand that this is a consent form that will allow my answers in an individual interview to be audio recorded in a study conducted by Puseletso Molaaphene on the socio-cultural constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, black females. All the information gathered in this study will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

I understand that:

- No identifying information will be included in the research report, and all my answers will remain confidential and my identity will be protected.
- The audio recordings will be secured in a password protected
- The recordings will only be heard by the researcher and her supervisor.
- The recordings will be kept for a duration of two years if the study is published, and for five years if the study is not published.
- Direct quotes of the interview sessions may be used in the final report that will not have any identifying information.

I acknowledge the above and give my consent for audio recording.

Signed: _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D – Informed Consent

Appendix D - Informed consent



Psychology
School of Human & Community
Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



CONSENT FORM

I _____ understand that this is a consent form that will allow my answers in the individual interview to be used in a study conducted by Puseletso Molaaphene. This is a study on the socio-cultural constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, black South African women. All the information gathered in this study will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

I understand that:

- Participation in this research is voluntary. I am not forced to take part in the study.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I have the right to seek clarity to questions that I don't understand, moreover, not to answer questions that I do not want to.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my answers will remain confidential.
- My identity will be protected.
- Direct quotes from the interview session may be used anonymously in the final written report.
- The audio recordings will be secured in a password protected file which will be accessible only to the researcher and her supervisor.
- The tapes will be kept for a period of upto two years should the study be published, and five years in the case that it is not.
- There are no risks or benefits involved in the study.

The details of the study have been explained to me in a way that I have understood, and I give my consent for participation.

Signed: _____

APPENDIX E – Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/16/008 IH

PROJECT TITLE:

Investigating constructions of beauty amongst young, urban, black South African women as influenced by their socio-cultural contexts.

INVESTIGATORS

Molaaphene Puseletso

DEPARTMENT

Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

10/06/16

DECISION OF COMMITTEE*

Approved

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

DATE: 10 June 2016

CHAIRPERSON
(Prof. Brett Bowman)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Yael Kadish
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

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

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

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2018

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES