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Sociocultural experiences of body image among Black women in Johannesburg

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Abstract

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

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