

**Shaping Black women's bodies: Religio-cultural conceptions of black women's
engagement in bodybuilding**

by

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A dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Academic Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts

In the

School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

In the College of Humanities

University of KwaZulu Natal

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Pietermaritzburg

January 2017

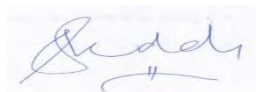
DECLARATION

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that **Shaping Black women's bodies: Religio-cultural conceptions of black women's engagement in bodybuilding** has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, it is my original work.

Thobeka Khubisa

Date:/...../.....

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this dissertation for submission



Dr. Sarasvathie Reddy

Date:/...../.....

DEDICATION

**To all the black female bodybuilders breaking
gender boundaries, breaking racial barriers,
this is for you. Your big quads, hanging
hamstrings and bulging
biceps inspire me!!**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I acknowledge God for opening the doors of higher learning to me, an opportunity that some black youth only dream of.

I acknowledge most profoundly my Academic Supervisor, Dr. Sarasvathie Reddy for accompanying me along this often lonely journey. From writing up my proposal and the many re-submissions of my ethical clearance application to this final complete dissertation. Her tireless efforts, dedication and advice have made it possible for me to complete this dissertation. It would have been far more difficult if she had not stood by me throughout my studies.

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Fatima Seedat, the Coordinator of the Gender, Religion and Health Programme for her advice and encouragement throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Her dedication to organise seminars and study cohorts for us as students has been beneficial.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Church of Sweden for granting me a student bursary that financed my enrolment into the Master's Degree programme.

I want to acknowledge all the lecturers involved in the programme for their challenging advice and contribution towards making this complete dissertation a success.

I acknowledge my family-parents and brothers for their continuous support throughout my academic journey.

To Sbusiso Ndlovu, my best friend. For this dissertation would not be complete without him being there with me every step of the way. His motivation and encouragement has made the journey worthwhile.

Lastly, to Nompumelelo Thabethe (soon to be Dr). Thank you for taking me under your wing and taking it upon yourself to be a friend and mentor to me. Thank you for the many discussions we have had and your insight on the various feminist perspectives. As black women, mentorship is what we yearn for but hardly find it amongst our own. Thank you for your motivation and for continuously encouraging me to do my PhD when I had not even completed my Masters yet.

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ABSTRACT

Female bodybuilding and female muscle have often been viewed peculiarly and have been misunderstood as deviant because muscles are conceptualised as a biologically male entity.

There has been an array of scholarly work on female bodybuilding, however, it has mostly focussed on the deviant act of women engaging in bodybuilding as transgressing traditionally accepted gender norms as well as on the implications of intense training and low energy availability for their reproductive health. Existing literature has often not focussed on black female bodybuilders and how they negotiate their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies, as black women, in their engagement in bodybuilding.

This interdisciplinary study, through the use of a Feminist research approach, determines how the shape of the black female body has been conceptualised through religion and culture and how existing religious and cultural conceptions of black female bodies influence their engagement in bodybuilding.

Based on phenomenological interviews with five black female bodybuilders, the analysis reveals that religion rather than culture is of a greater influence in the lives of the participants. Furthermore, it reveals that these black female bodybuilders develop a liberatory hermeneutic towards the religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies thus not only enabling them to continue their engagement with bodybuilding but also shaping the discourse about their bodies in new and significant ways.

Keywords: Religio-cultural; Black; Woman; Female; Bodybuilding

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background and context of the research project. It provides a brief outline of what bodybuilding is and why it is important to be studied. It also provides the research problem as well as the research questions and research sub-questions that the study aims to answer. It provides the objectives of the study and as well as the significance of the study to understand the contribution of the study. It provides definitions of certain terminology and how the use of this terminology should be understood within the context of the study. Lastly, it provides an overview of all the chapters and what is discussed in the chapters.

1.1. Background and Context

It is necessary to provide a brief history of bodybuilding as a sport. A bodybuilder is any “person who lifts weights, trains, and eats methodically in order to obtain an ideally muscular, symmetrical, and proportioned body, primarily for aesthetic purposes often related to his or her participation in bodybuilding competitions” (McTavish, 2015:167). The International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB), the biggest bodybuilding federation, was the first federation to host a women’s bodybuilding competition in the 1970’s. Prior to this, beauty pageants were the only place in which women could participate. In these competitions women were required to wear “high heels, makeup and jewellery, and they were judged for both beauty and fitness” (Lowe, 1998:57). Since then, interest in bodybuilding has grown amongst women in as much as it has been understood as a male sport.

The activity of bodybuilding, which was predominantly a male dominated sport in the past has of recent attracted female participants. Women’s participation in competitive bodybuilding has begun to raise controversial questions in current day society when it comes to the understanding of issues of masculinities, femininities and identity (Felkar, 2012; Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009; Duff & Hong, 1984). Among such questions is whether those who engage in body building are more masculine or less feminine than those who do not (Felkar, 2012; Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009; Duff & Hong, 1984). Some of the findings reveal that when it comes to black female bodybuilders, the concept of bodybuilding becomes even more complicated. Consequently, the body becomes a contested site of struggle between powers that “strive to exercise control” (Loeto, 2013:53) over it. These powers often come about as a result of socialisation through religious and cultural institutions. As a result, religious and cultural conceptions of women’s bodies have been discussed as some of the factors that influence the way women perceive their bodies and the

way their bodies are perceived and conceived by others (Felkar, 2012; Roussel and Griffet, 2000). It is these religious and cultural conceptions of women's bodies that are often used as a critique of women who engage in bodybuilding as their bodies are said to be unusual and not shaped according to their religious and cultural expectations.

Women's engagement in bodybuilding as a sport is not a new phenomenon. However, it is still shunned upon because of the many held perceptions of the sport being a male sport not suited to women (Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Felkar, 2012; Worthen and Baker, 2016). In the midst of these perceptions, more and more women are engaging in bodybuilding. New on the scene, however, is the presence and participation of black women within the circles of bodybuilding especially within the context of South Africa. Religious and cultural conceptions restrict women's engagement in bodybuilding because of the existing societal ideals of 'feminine' and 'masculine' beauty and self-image (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011; Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Felkar, 2012; Mastamet-Mason, 2014).

This study is concerned with black female bodybuilders in Durban, South Africa. Durban is a city with an emergence of gymnasiums and it is motivated by the fact that black female bodybuilding has received criticism among people in society especially those motivated by religion and cultural traditions that tend to locate women's bodies in particular spaces (Settler and Engh, 2015; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). The research focused specifically on black Christian female bodybuilders from the Zulu culture.

1.2. Research Problem

Previous work on female bodybuilding has often focussed on the deviant act of women engaging in bodybuilding as a lifestyle; their subsequent stigmatization and marginalization for transgressing traditionally accepted gender norms (Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Worthen and Baker, 2016; Felkar, 2012). It has also often focussed on the health implications of intense training and low energy availability that results in a halt in the monthly menstrual cycle of female bodybuilders (Roth and Basow, 2004; Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013; Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014). However, existing literature often lacks focus on black female bodybuilders and their experiences of bodybuilding. It does not provide an analysis on how the shape of the black female body has been conceptualized through religion and culture and how these conceptualizations influence black women in their engagement in bodybuilding. Hence, this study seeks to address this conceptual gap in the research by investigating the experiences of

black female bodybuilders and to understand how religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies, as black women, influence black women's engagement in bodybuilding.

1.3. Key research question and research sub-questions

The key research question that this study sought to answer was;

How do religious and cultural conceptions of black women's bodies influence their engagement in bodybuilding?

The sub-questions posed by the study were:

1. What are the black female bodybuilder's religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies?
2. What are the black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding?
3. How do the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding?
4. Why do the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do?

1.4. Objectives of the study

In order to realise the main aim, the following objectives have been outlined:

1. To determine the black female bodybuilder's religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies
2. To describe the black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
3. To explore how the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
4. To analyse why the black female bodybuilders mediate between the religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is of significance and importance as it sheds light on the lived experiences of black female bodybuilders. This research presents the discursive debates about female bodybuilders and their embodiment of muscle. It addresses how black female bodybuilders challenge normative understandings of femininity and the black female body. It further explores the existing Christian religion and Zulu cultural conceptions of black women's bodies, as this is

the main focus of the study, and shows how these conceptions are neither over-arching themes that wholly influence the ways in which black female bodybuilders decide to shape their bodies.

1.6. Definitions of the terminology used in the study

Religio-cultural: This refers to religion and culture. For the context of this study, ‘religio-cultural’ conceptions of black women’s bodies will be in relation to Zulu culture and the Christian religion.

Black: Historically in South Africa, the term ‘black’ has been used to encompass the oppressed (African, Indian and Coloured) as a group. However, for the context of this study, where the term ‘black’ is used, it will mean black people of African descent.

Woman/Female: Butler (1990) understands the subject ‘woman’ as one that cannot be understood in stable terms. In line with the notion of gender as a performance and socially constructed, the terms ‘woman’ and ‘female’ can be quite ambiguous. However, for the purpose of this study, any reference to ‘woman’, ‘women’ and ‘female’ should be understood as cis-gendered women, woman or female. The term ‘cisgender’ “replaces the terms “non-transgender” or bio man/bio woman” to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity” (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009:461).

Bodybuilding: The term ‘bodybuilder’ encompasses a variety of possibilities because some bodybuilders, female and male, may label themselves as bodybuilders although they may not necessarily participate in bodybuilding competitions. For the purpose of this study, the definition provided by McTavish that, “a bodybuilder is any person who lifts weights, trains, and eats methodically in order to obtain an ideally muscular, symmetrical, and proportioned body, primarily for aesthetic purposes often related to his or her participation in bodybuilding competitions” (2015:167), is employed here.

1.7. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

The study is contextualized in this chapter to give an understanding of the background. It provides a brief outline of what bodybuilding is and why it is important to be studied. It also provides the research problem as well as the research questions and research sub-questions that the study aims to answer. It provides the objectives of the study and as well as the significance of the study to understand the contribution of the study. Lastly, it provides definitions of

specific terminology used throughout the study and how the use of this terminology should be understood within the context of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review.

An overview of the literature of relevance to the study, is provided in this chapter. It focuses on scholarship pertaining to the phenomenon of female bodybuilding, with particular focus on black female bodybuilders. It provides a broad overview of the discursive gender debates around female masculinity and the transgression and reinforcement of gender norms within the sub-culture of bodybuilding. It explores how the black female body is shaped and conceptualised within religion and culture, with particular focus on the Zulu culture and the Christian religion. It also provides an overview of the implications of intense training and diet regimes, during competition preparation, on the reproductive health of female bodybuilders. It discusses how the female body is a site of struggle for black female bodybuilders as well as how they continuously negotiate a glass ceiling within the sport; how in their pursuit of gaining muscle mass they ensure that they still look feminine. Lastly, it explores the theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Gender Performativity. It focuses specifically on the Theoretical Frameworks of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Judith Butler. Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality and Judith Butler's Gender Performativity frameworks are relevant to the study as they can be discussed within the context of the experience of black female bodybuilders, their intersectional struggles as well as the performative nature of bodybuilding competitions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Research Methods. This chapter provides an overview of the methodology and methods used in this study. The methodological approach and research design employed in this study are provided as well as the sampling strategy, sampling size and participant selection criteria. The data production procedure and data production approaches are discussed. An overview of the analytical approach employed in this study, which is a thematic approach, is also provided. This chapter reflects on the positionality of the researcher and how this impacts on the validity and reliability of the research study. Finally, the ethical and legal considerations for the study are discussed.

Chapter 4: Findings. This chapter discusses the themes and discourses that emerge from the data production. It focuses on the many themes that emerged: The Body Project, Femininity and Reproductive Health, to name a few. Each of these themes reveal how black women have understood existing religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies. The themes also reveal

how black women have conceptualised their own bodies in the face of their religious and cultural conceptions, and how they mediate these conceptualizations with their engagement in bodybuilding.

Chapter 5: Discussion. This chapter provides a theoretical discussion on the findings. It discusses how black female bodybuilders rationalise their own experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in relations to the various themes, as discussed in chapter four. Finally, it explores why black female bodybuilders negotiate their religio-cultural conceptualisations of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. This final chapter presents a summary of the findings of the study. Furthermore, the limitations of the study are addressed and recommendations for future areas of the study are provided.

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter provided a background of the study and also located female bodybuilding within the context in which it will be discussed. It then highlighted the key research questions as well as the sub-research questions that the study sought to answer. It provided the objectives of the study as well as the significance of the study in order to understand its contribution. Definitions of important terminology used in the study were provided to understand what they mean and how they should be understood within the context of the study. Lastly, it provided a chapter outline of the rest of the chapters from chapter 2 to 6 and what each discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of existing literature around the idea of bodybuilding and women's engagement in the sport. The chapter aims to explore how religious and cultural conceptions of black women's bodies influence black women's engagement in bodybuilding, with a particular focus on Zulu Christian women. It focuses on the debates of how, in a previously male-dominated sport, women are becoming prevalent participators in the sport. It provides a general perspective of the debates of women engaging in bodybuilding from a Western perspective and links it to how black women's bodies are conceptualised from an African perspective.

It is important to acknowledge terminology, as stated in the previous chapter. Therefore, the use of 'female' and 'woman' should be understood as 'cis-gendered' female and woman, unless otherwise stated.

A thematic presentation of the material is offered by the literature review. It will address some of the following themes: masculinity vs femininity; the black body and culture; women's body and religion; transgression vs reinforcement; women bodybuilders and health and women's bodies in sport. Since this is an Interdisciplinary study of Gender, Religion and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights, the themes and concepts covered by the literature review, emanate from scholarly work about the phenomena of female bodybuilders and also coincides with the three disciplines, respectively. Although most of the literature in the field of women's engagement in bodybuilding pertains to white female bodybuilders, certain concepts can be generalised and related to the context of black female bodybuilders.

2.2. Masculinity vs Femininity

A female bodybuilder is understood as being "any woman who intentionally builds her body through rigorous diet and training to gain significant amounts of muscle mass" (Felkar, 2012:40). Such women are often viewed as transgressing or breaking away from the cultural constructs of gender and how women's bodies are supposed to be; their embodiment of muscle "transgresses gender norms and challenges Western ideals of what it means to be female" (Felkar, 2012:40). They are viewed as transgressors because they are developing a new self-image and identity of feminine beauty as opposed to the historically held ideal slim and skinny bodily beauty (Roussel and Griffet, 2000). As a result, cis-gendered female bodybuilders are continuously marginalized and stigmatized because "new ways of thinking and living move

female bodybuilders away from social and cultural norms” (Roussel and Griffet, 2000:131). For Worthen and Baker, “the desire to compete in bodybuilding is coded as masculine behaviour, thus women bodybuilders exemplify gendered deviance and a risk of social stigma” (2016:471). Engagement in and with bodybuilding becomes more of a lifestyle than an activity. The routine that is usually followed is from the time they wake up to when they sleep at night, all their activities are centred around their pursuit of building muscular bodies. In that way, “their bodies no longer meet the traditional and acknowledged criteria of femininity” (Roussel and Griffet, 2000:131). Instead, “while a slim and slender, willowy body is the ideal in feminine beauty, the extreme muscularity of these women’s bodies causes them to be viewed as manlike by the lay person” (Roussel and Griffet, 2000:131). Muscular female bodies are misunderstood as deviant and different to the accepted norm and, as a result, female bodybuilders are often marginalized and stigmatized for their ‘abnormal’ ways of defining themselves and defining female beauty in general (Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Felkar, 2012). It is these perceptions of the deviance of the muscular female body that motivates this study. Consideration will now be given to the existing African cultural conceptions, with a particular focus on Zulu cultural conceptions, of black women’s bodies as is explained below.

2.3. Female black body and Culture

Within the context of black female bodybuilders, the criticism is influenced by historical understandings of the black female body; as sexualised and warranting regulation (Settler and Engh, 2015). A typical example being Sarah Baartman and the 19th Century phenomenon known as Baartmanmania. Sarah Baartman, a black South African woman, was displayed in zoos and museums of Europe during the 19th century due to her extremely large hips, breasts and buttocks (Jackson, 2013; Mastamet-Mason, 2014). It was in an era that viewed black bodies as slaves and commodities. The parading of her body in particular indicates the commodification and policing of her body and the black female body in general (Jackson, 2013). She was advertised as possessing the “kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen” (Qureshi, 2004:236). Her kind of body shape was considered as being the ideal feminine shape by black African men. Mastamet-Mason reiterates how “in most African countries, it is still a common belief that thin women are not attractive” (2014:114). This is because full-figured women are considered more attractive, respected and their “padded (with flesh) and curvaceous bodies” (Mastamet-Mason, 2014:114) are said to represent wealth, good health and fertility. This is evident in how overweight or obese women of Zulu ethnicity are

generally viewed in positive light, with favourable cultural associations ranging from beauty to physical wellbeing, happiness, vitality, affluence and fecundity-all linked to the fuller figure” (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:32). This can also be referred to as the ‘traditional’ Zulu female body ideal (Ogana and Ojong, 2012).

Culture often plays a role in the construction of the ‘ideal body’ with women’s bodies being constructed and shaped as per male preferences. Often, “the privileging of patriarchy in Zulu culture has meant that often women are denied the opportunity to question their own behaviour in relation to the body ideal, size and shape” (Ogana and Ojong, 2013:110). As a result, black women are denied ownership of their bodies in consideration to male cultural preferences (Ogana and Ojong, 2013). This policing of women’s bodies can be linked to the historical regulation of women’s bodies. As Pumla Qgola states, “women’s bodies are seen as accessible for consumption and control” (Qgola, 2007:120). However, in contrast to the regulation of women’s bodies, black female bodybuilders through their embodiment of muscle communicate a message of resistance and claiming ownership of their bodies. Whereas in many cases “women’s ideal body preferences are often marginalised” (Ogana and Ojong, 2013), engagement in bodybuilding by black women shows defiance and a refusal to shape their bodies for the male gaze.

It is worth noting that in as much as the voluptuous body ideal is still held by Zulu people in contemporary times but the beginning of the 21st millennium has seen a shift in how isiZulu-speaking women perceive the female body ideal, leaning “increasingly toward the western thin ideal” (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:32). Having said that, however, it is interesting how the “Western society views a thin body as the ideal body” (Mastamet-Mason, 2014:114) while black African, especially Zulu societies, view the curvaceous full-figured body as the ideal body and how black female bodybuilders, choose to conform to neither of the two body ideals. In so doing “the female bodybuilder provides a new space for thinking about the body and produces a new image of what women can achieve” (Johnston, 1996:327). The existing cultural conceptions of black women’s bodies often coincide with religious conceptions of women’s bodies as will be discussed below.

2.4. Female black body and religion

During the colonial era, missionaries did not only shape women’s individual identities but also “constructed the meaning of womanhood based on predetermined social and sexual mores”

(Batisai, 2015:6-7). For example, in Zimbabwe, the sexuality of women “was governed by religious codes of sexual purity legitimated by biblical teachings” (Batisai, 2015:6-7). From a Christian perspective, “Christian missionaries viewed African’ exposed breasts and limbs in moral terms” (Talton, 2009:82). Public nudity was perceived by the missionaries as “a general lack of moral restraint among Africans; an outgrowth of their unbridled sexuality, and a testament to their need for Christian redemption” (Talton, 2009:82). This is an indication of the influence of religion in shaping and defining women’s sexuality. In contrast, however, the nakedness of African women in precolonial times was viewed positively; it was not attached to negative connotations of sexual impurity and immorality (Talton, 2009; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). Due to colonial perception of women’s bodies as sexually unclean and more prone to sin, “women’s bodies became a yardstick of morality in both traditional and religious perspectives” (Batisai, 2015:7). Such ideas about the sinful women’s body is even more evident in the post-colonial era.

According to Settler and Engh, “the constructions of black women’s bodies as unruly and deserving of regulation persists even in the postcolonial state” (2015:131). More often than not, this regulation of the female body is based on religious views of the female body. From a Christian perspective, “women’s bodies, because they have been inscribed as a source of mystery and danger, carry the meaning and potential for disorder and chaos more than do men’s bodies” (Sheffield, 2002:9). This has also been linked to the perception of the female body as having uncontrollable sexual urges and therefore requiring control (Settler and Engh, 2015; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). This is seen in how Christian church sermons place emphasis on dress code and adornment of women. Clothes are said to “evoke intimate responses: our deepest feelings of love, the passionate expression of our sexuality” (Bacchiocchi, 1995:44). Teachings on being a godly Christian woman, whether married or not, is that a Christian woman ought to dress decently in order to “preserve and protect something fragile which can easily be lost: her ability to be intimate with her husband” (Bacchiocchi, 1995:44). From this it is clear how even religion places the onus on women to control their sexuality and yet do not place that kind of responsibility on men. These are all attempts to control the sexuality of women.

From the perception of religious moralists, “by shamelessly flaunting their bodies, young women show their disregard for the body’s sacredness, which should be for the intimate gaze of their husbands” (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011:123). This perception is based on the heteronormative order of society and relationships and assumes that all women desire to have husbands. This

view shows the conflict between female bodybuilders who compete on stage in bikinis and the religious views of the sacred female body. Consequently, “nudity or the partially clothed female body is seen as part of a libidinal opportunity that threatens to unleash an unrestrained sexual energy into the world” (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011:122). Therefore, “the moment the naked body moves from the private arena and is displayed in the public realm, it becomes marked as sexual and exposed to social conventions of policing and disciplinary apparatus” (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011:123). This further highlights the ‘unclean’ perception of women’s bodies. It is also of importance to this study of female bodybuilders as religious conceptions of their bodies, police them by locating them within the private sphere. These religious conceptions of black women’s bodies are in conflict with the requirements of bodybuilding competitions which place emphasis on showing the entire body on stage to be judged in front of a large audience, dressed only in a bikini. This kind of show casing of the female body may be perceived as transgressing from religious morals and is further explained below.

2.5. Transgression vs Reinforcement

Female engagement in bodybuilding is often perceived as deviating away from femininity and taking on a masculine image. It is often said that “hypermuscular embodiment transgresses gender norms and challenges Western ideals of what it means to be female” (Felkar, 2012:40). On many occasions it has been said that in as much as female bodybuilding is an act of subverting the cultural gender norms, it is also a reinforcement of new norms of how a woman’s body ought to be (Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009). This is due to the fact that bodybuilding competitions have certain criteria of how the muscles on a woman’s body should be developed and the kind of shape that she should have. Bodybuilding competitions also have their own criteria of judging the female body. One of the criterion is that the female body should show ‘symmetry’ (McTavish, 2015; Worthen and Baker, 2016). The female bodybuilder is “viewed as ‘symmetrical’ if her lower body is similar in proportion to her upper body” (Worthen and Baker, 2016:472). The competitions also differ in terms of the categories and divisions that have their own criteria for selecting a winner; these are “standard female bodybuilders, who compete on the basis of musculature, and others who participate in one or two subcategories of women’s bodybuilding called ‘Fitness’ and Figure” (Lewis, 2004:606). However, in as much as “all three categories involve acquiring more muscle mass than the average gym-user, the latter two, whose aim is to preserve a feminine look among participants, require far less than what is now characteristic of the standard woman bodybuilder” (Lewis, 2004:606). Getting the body to this level of low body fat requires weeks of intense training and clean diet; a diet often

consisting of reduced carbohydrates and high in protein. It is evident how female bodybuilders are constantly in a battle to uphold the mixture of opposing standards enforced by the sport; “one of masculine muscle mass and the other of murky conceived feminine beauty” (Lewis, 2004:607). They constantly have to negotiate a balance between the two. The intense training and calorie restricted diet can prove to have severe health risks and as a result, “the deprivation of carbohydrates that characterizes the bodybuilder’s diet-a tactic that resembles the famous Atkin’s Diet-can, in its later stages, bring about mental disorientation and extreme fatigue” (Lewis, 2004:618). The health consequences of women’s engagement in bodybuilding, that result from intense training and a reduction in calories consumed, will be discussed below.

2.6. Women bodybuilders and Health

Women’s participation in bodybuilding comes with health consequences. The health aspect often focuses on the reproductive capacity and menstrual cycle of female athletes. The monthly menstrual cycles that women undergo have always been associated as being symbolic to femaleness (Kissling, 1999). This is largely due to the fact that menstruation has always been viewed as “a sign of a healthy, functional body, not one that is dysfunctional and in meltdown” (Kissling, 1999:86). In many instances, however, women have often faced marginalization from certain spaces and terrains, especially within sport because “the fact that women menstruate has been used as a justification for limiting women’s activities outside of the domestic realm” (Kissling, 1999:8). Their menstrual cycles have been perceived as decapitating them and their physical capabilities remain unacknowledged. This view is aligned to the accepted societal ‘fact’ that “women are physically weaker than men” (Roth and Basow, 2004:245).

However, female athleticism often poses as a challenge to these upheld perceptions of menstruation as female athletes, especially female bodybuilders, do not go through menstrual cycles for long periods of time due to intense training and diet. This is often referred to as the ‘Female Athlete Triad’ (Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013; Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014). The female athlete triad is described by Thein-Nissenbaum as the “interrelatedness of energy availability, menstrual function and bone mineral density” (2013:107). It is a condition that results through stress, irregular menstrual cycles and disordered eating behaviours (Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013; Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014). Having a negative energy balance is the first disorder in the female athlete triad, followed by menstrual dysfunction and low bone

mineral density (BMD) (Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013; Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014). Low energy availability occurs through “the setting of both caloric, restriction and excessive exercise” (Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014:18). Thein-Nissenbaum agrees with this view and goes on to say that intentional energy reduction occurs “though excessive exercise, by dramatically decreasing caloric intake, or by combining both methods” (2013:108). Low energy is caused by more energy being used by the body than is consumed through intense exercise and a reduction in food consumed. Athlete menstrual dysfunction is the second disorder of the athlete triad and is “more common in active women” (Manore, 2002:887). Menstrual dysfunction often presents itself as primary amenorrhea, secondary amenorrhea, or oligomenorrhea (Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014; Manore, 2002). It is caused by not only energy drain but also due to “high exercise intensity” (Manore, 2002:889). In many cases, due to “a lack of energy, numerous bodily systems, including the reproductive system, go into “shut-down” mode” (Thein-Nissenbaum, 2013:110). It is obvious how female athleticism and its health consequences pose a threat to the reproductive capacity of women. This is an important observation as it links to the issue of sexual and reproductive health rights which is on the agenda of the Gender, Religion and Health Programme in which this Masters research study registered at the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN).

It is therefore important to note that “while exercise is encouraged for general health and disease prevention, female athletes are susceptible to negative health outcomes if energy balance is not maintained” (Horn, Gergen and McGarry, 2014:18). However, in as much as female bodybuilding may be viewed as causing amenorrhea, for female bodybuilders the loss of a period is seen as an accomplishment; it signifies a low level of body fat being reached (McTavish, 2015).

Women have historically been confined to the domestic arena because of their supposedly nurturing characteristics and of their reproductive roles of bearing and looking after their children. Women’s engagement in sport, particularly male-dominated sports such as bodybuilding, and the subsequent halt of menstrual cycles raises a challenge to society’s understanding of feminine and masculine traits. Women’s engagement in bodybuilding enables onlookers to see how the sport can also be an example of gender performance. It is to this discussion on gender as performance that I now turn.

2.7. Gender Performance

It is worth noting how contradictory engagement in bodybuilding is for female bodybuilders. In attempting not to perform societal imposed standards of gender, the sub-culture of bodybuilding has a performative nature especially with sculpting the body through strategic eating and training to meet a particular shape. This coincides with Judith Butler's notion of 'Gender Performativity' in that "gender is not a fact" (Butler, 1988:522). By this she means that gender is not a fixed concept and the behaviour associated with specific genders is determined by human beings and can therefore continuously change. It is for this reason that she believes that "what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler, 1988:522). Gender is performed through various acts or gendered roles of how a girl and a boy should behave. As a result "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler, 1988:522) while "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (Butler, 1988:522). Therefore, those who go against what is the norm in terms of gendered behaviours are punished through stigmatization and marginalization. This is the case with female bodybuilders. A decision to embody muscle places them in a position of difference and failure to perform their gender. Felkar maintains that the constructed ideologies of gender and gender performativity "exaggerate and naturalize, sex and gender as binaries which has restrained women's opportunities to embody muscle without abject" (2012:42). When women choose to engage in bodybuilding as a way of defining themselves, they are perceived as rejecting traditional femininity in favour of masculinity (Duff and Hong, 1984). Gender performativity is used in this study to understand how gender is performed in bodybuilding through the criteria that is set for bodybuilding competitions. The idea of performance is further portrayed in the concepts of the body being a project and having a government of the body, as is discussed below.

2.8. Body Project and Government of the Body

Settler and Engh point out the idea of the body as being always "simultaneously fixed and flexible" (2015:128). They use the example of a person in a wheelchair to show how the person is 'fixed' in the situation of being in a wheelchair but is also flexible because the person can undergo surgery as an attempt to modify the body and change its supposedly 'fixed' state (Settler and Engh, 2015). The sport of female bodybuilding is also indicative of the 'fixed' and 'flexible' nature of the black female body. How religious and cultural conceptions of the female body 'fix' it by determining how the body should be and how the transformations that women

go through in building muscular physiques shows the flexible nature of the body. Bryan Turner understands the body as “the living site where the politics of identity is inscribed” (2008:222). This perception differs to Butler’s understanding of the body as not “simply a site of inscription but also significantly, simultaneously as site of performance” (Settler and Engh, 2015:132). The body can also be a site of resistance and self-assertion.

This resistance and self-assertion is seen in how the body becomes a location for the exercise of will over desire and “the personal achievement of personal control over diet is an act of will which enhances self-esteem” (Turner, 2008:153). This enforces Turner’s idea of the ‘Government of the Body’ in which bodies are controlled and laboured through “eating, sleeping, cleaning, dieting, exercising” (Turner, 2008:161). The nature of female bodybuilding clearly shows how, through intense training and strict eating, the body is regulated and controlled (Turner, 2008). As Worthen and Baker state, “women involved in this sport must follow disciplined and controlled diet and training regimens in order to be successful” (2016:474). Many female bodybuilders view this regimented physical training as “the ultimate form of claiming self-worth” (Lewis, 2004:620). This is due to the fact that engagement in bodybuilding is often linked with past issues in which women had no control and as a result caused them to have a low self-image and low self-esteem. However, through bodybuilding and its demands on the body, bodybuilding becomes a liberating sport in which although they cannot control the forces around them, they can control their bodies (Lewis, 2004). Therefore, diet becomes one of the few areas in which women can exercise personal control and discipline as an attempt to gain personal autonomy (Turner, 2008). Since women’s bodies are policed by religious and cultural conceptions of how they ought to be, the only control they have over their bodies is through controlling their diet.

Chris Shilling (2003) poses the idea of the body as a ‘Body Project’. According to him, society has a tendency of seeing the body “as an entity which is in the process of becoming; a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity” (Shilling, 2003:4). Bodybuilding as a sport also follows under that premise; the aim of embodying muscle and ensuring that certain muscles are visible can be seen as a project because of the amount of time and effort that one applies into getting a desired body and also because of the process of transformation that the body undergoes. According to Shilling, “bodybuilding is a good illustrative example of the body as a project precisely because the quality and sheer size of the muscles achieved by bodybuilders challenges accepted notions of what is natural about male and female bodies” (2003:6). As a result, “an initial act of governing the body to achieve

identity and autonomy is replaced by an anarchy of the body which denies the will of the subject/victim whose response is an intensified programme of dieting and exercise” (Turner, 2008:164). This intensified exercise and diet programme is a means of escaping the religious and cultural conceptions of the ‘ideal body’ and a way of achieving one’s preferred body.

By virtue of the body being a project, Shilling proposes that it should be accepted that “its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner” (2003:4). This means that the body can “be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners” (Shilling, 2003:5). This view poses a challenge to societal constructs especially within the context of black female bodybuilders because if the body is a project that can be reconstructed by its owner, that means that religious and cultural conceptions of women’s bodies fall away and have no place to influence women’s choices in their pursuit of embodying muscular physiques. It would also mean challenging the belief that muscles are ‘biologically male’. This study sought to investigate the extent to which religious and cultural conceptions influence black women’s engagement in bodybuilding. The discussion below focuses on women’s bodies in the world of sport.

2.9. Black women’s bodies in Sport

Sport is also another domain in which, historically, women have been prohibited from entering. Women were restricted from participating in sport because they were “perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports, such as marathons, weightlifting and cycling, and it was often argued in the past that sport was harmful to women’s health, particularly their reproductive health” (UN, 2007:2). It was the 1894 Olympic movement that denied women access into the sporting arena because the founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Baron Pierre de Coubertin, was vociferously opposed to women’s participation in Olympic competition” (Hargreaves, 2013:80). This is a reflection of the “dominant ideology of the 19th century that women were unsuited to take part in vigorous physical exercise” (Hargreaves, 2013:81). It was only in 1924 that women were admitted and allowed to participate in the Olympic Games (Parčina et al., 2014). The prevention of women’s participation ensured unequal gender representation and was further instilled by social constructions of female and male gender roles.

In many instances, “the extent to which a sport is framed as feminine or masculine controls if and how women participate in it” (Roth and Basow, 2004:252). As Rubin states, “sport is then

an essential part of the engendering process and helps to entrench ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ signifiers and forms of behaviour through legitimating and endorsing bodies in certain contexts” (2009:268). It is the sport that determines whether or not women can participate and sport also becomes one of the institutions for socialisation and enforcing how gender should be performed. Sport also faces the politics of muscle size in female bodies as it associates strength with men and weakness with women. The distinctions are clear because “the masculine ideal is one of physical strength, large size, and aggressiveness. The feminine ideal, on the other hand, is beautiful, small, thin, and perhaps most importantly, weak” (Roth and Basow, 2004:249). These perceptions become problematic for female athletes, such as the female bodybuilders, who seek a body of their preference, a body that embodies muscle, amidst these debates. Consequently, female athletes are perceived as having unnatural bodies and female athletes who are successful in their sport are said to be failing to be feminine (Kissling, 1999).

However, the realm of sport is also one in which gender, gender difference and gender hierarchy can not only be constructed but also challenged (Kissling, 1999). More women are becoming involved in sport and sport has become a lens through which women do and undo femininity. Female bodybuilders and their embodiment of muscle is an example of how women are challenging the societal gender differences and showing new ways of looking at the potential of the female body. As a result, “women who embrace their physical abilities and develop them are, in doing so, producing for themselves a degree of security that women are usually not afforded” (Roth and Basow, 2004:255). They are developing new ways of thinking about the female body and its physical capabilities whereas sexual scripts have often dictated females as being passive and vulnerable and males as dominant and aggressive (Roth and Basow, 2004). Historically, “sport has been seen as antithetical to femininity, and sports participation as unfeminine” (Kissling 1999:80). As more women enter into the domain of sport, this appears to be a progressive move, however, women who aim to achieve the muscular and physical strength aspect of athleticism often find themselves in a predicament as their bodies become daily sights of struggle. This struggle that women face is discussed below.

2.10. Female body as a site of struggle

Female bodybuilders who become “excessively” muscular might be considered non-normative. Portia Loeto is of the view that the female body is perceived as “a cultural artefact defined and redefined overtime in response to broad cultural and historic transformations” (Loeto,

2013:53). The female body is perceived as having no autonomy and dictated to by society how it should look. Within the case of black bodies, the black body has historically been represented in negative ways that assume their bodies as fixed and without agency (Settler and Engh, 2015). From a young age, women's experience of their bodies is that of a "burden, how the hormonal and physiological changes the body undergoes at puberty, during menstruation and pregnancy, are felt to be fearful and mysterious" (Young, 2005:29). The interdisciplinary study of the Gender, Religion and Health Programme at UKZN aims to interrogate such perceptions and argues for the sexual and reproductive health rights of women.

The body becomes a contested site of struggle due to patriarchal domination which "strives to exercise control by defining what beauty is, controlling the mobility of women and constructing social norms that impact on women's lived experiences" (Loeto, 2013:53). This coincides with Stanciu and Christensen's argument that "female bodies become socio-cultural constructs that serve a particular cultural scheme" (2014:3). Battles for control over the female body are fought daily through emphasis on the ideal body or body image for females. Women's bodies, especially black women's bodies, have been controlled and constructed negatively; the policing and domestication of black women's bodies still persists and this is evident by the criticism received by women, especially black women who engage in bodybuilding.

Although body image should be determined by the owner of the body, culture becomes a limiting factor in that throughout history, it has been a core belief of many African cultures that women ought to have a certain body type (Loeto, 2013); a curvaceous and fuller figure. As a result of being socialised from a young age about how their bodies should look, women often suffer from negative body images. In many cases, as a way of conforming to the societal standards of the desired body ideal, women go through body enhancement procedures to achieve that body (Loeto, 2013). All of these actions indicate how gender is portrayed through performance since women go through body enhancement procedures as a way of proving their femininity within their desired body ideals. Consequently, female bodybuilders are constantly under pressure to negotiate and find a balance between their pursuit of muscle and the criticism they receive.

2.11. Negotiating a glass ceiling

It is often said that "women in fitness-particularly those who seek muscular strength in the weight room-may find their bodily agency limited not by biology but by ideologies of emphasized femininity that structure the upper limit on women's "success" (Dworkin,

2001:333). Women feel that their bodies are constantly policed by men and their bodies are, therefore, treated as commodities. As a result, they have no sense of bodily agency. However, other women “have experienced sport and fitness as sites of power and agency where they have rejected narrow constructions of femininity and where they can embrace physical power and independence” (Dworkin, 2001:335). Although women experience power and agency within bodybuilding, they are often made to feel inferior due to stigmatization and are, therefore, under pressure to still look and behave like typical gendered women.

As a result, “despite increased empowerment, the prominent theme of female bodybuilders’ experience is one of contradiction, often leading to attempts to “balance” popular notions of femininity and muscularity” (Worthen and Baker, 2016:473). In many instances, female bodybuilders are often faced with the challenge to regulate muscular size to avoid being labelled as being too big or mannish (Dworkin, 2001; Worthen and Baker, 2016). For women bodybuilders to be successful in the sport, they “must delicately negotiate the edge of the boundaries between masculinity and femininity” (Worthen and Baker, 2016:472). These women work hard to obtain a hyper-feminine look in an attempt to subvert gender and sexuality confusion among the general public (Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009). They do this in an attempt to show a balance between femininity and masculinity since they are accused of being less feminine because of their muscular bodies. The theoretical lenses that enabled the production of data around issues of gender performativity and the intersectional experiences of the black, female, Christian, Zulu participants of this study is presented below.

2.12. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The over-arching framework that guided the research process was Feminist theory. Creswell’s perspective on feminist research approaches is that they “center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations” (Creswell, 2007:25). Feminist theories focus on issues of gender domination within patriarchal societies and aims to be transformative in the lives of those who experience gender oppression. Most importantly though is the centrality of gender shaping consciousness.

Since this theoretical framework may not be able to encompass all facets of this research, this study used two other theories to compliment the theoretical framework. These theories being ‘Gender Performativity’ and ‘Intersectionality’ which are explained below.

According to Nadar et al., “Intersectionality has been developed over the years as a theory of oppression” (2014:212). For the purpose of my study, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of ‘Intersectionality’ as a theoretical framework was used. The study focused on black women bodybuilders in particular and looked at their intersecting oppressions; of being black women in a white dominated sport resulting in them being oppressed by race (being black) and gender (being women). An addition to those oppressions are religion and culture which both conceptualise black women’s bodies in particular ways and influences how they exercise agency through their bodies. In many cases, it is often said that, “because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of colour are marginalized within both” (Crenshaw, 1991:1244). Hence, the intersectionality of oppressions is useful in this study. In many instances, “race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination-that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different” (Crenshaw, 1991:1242). However, for the purpose of this study, it is important to look at issues of race, gender, religion and culture as positive frameworks that encompass all the struggles of black women in male-dominated spaces, especially within the context of black women bodybuilders.

Judith Butler’s theory of ‘Gender Performativity’ was also used to analyse how gender is performative especially within the context of bodybuilding and its criteria for the female body in bodybuilding competitions. It also assisted in looking at how the religious and cultural conceptions of women’s bodies are the determinants of the behaviour one ought to take on because of the socially scripted ideas of how a gender should behave. For Butler, sex and gender are two different concepts and she states that, “the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (Butler, 1990:9-10). For the purpose of the study, the theory of gender being performative was depicted in how religion and culture have set ways of behaviour for men and women. From the literature it can be seen that female bodybuilders transcend those ‘norms’ which also indicates how gender is not fixed (Felkar, 2012; Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009; Roussel and Griffet, 2000).

2.13. Conclusion

As highlighted in the chapter, it is clear that bodybuilding and the pursuit of muscle is a contradiction of the cultural expectations of black women's bodies. This is because becoming a bodybuilder is perceived as counter-intuitive and society demands a specific physique for both men and women. However, "the success of black women in bodybuilding offers a positive model of strong, black femininity" (Mc Grath and Chananie-Hill, 2009:238). In as much as black women's engagement in bodybuilding is associated with negative connotations, other black women within bodybuilding or those wanting to become bodybuilders, feel encouraged to become members of this sub-culture since black women show a sense of strong black femininity.

The black female body has always been a contested site of struggle. With black women deciding to engage in bodybuilding and embodying muscle as beauty identity, they face marginalization because muscle is gendered as male and the cultural beliefs associated with female bodybuilding think of women who have muscular bodies as being less feminine and more masculine. However, these beliefs do not consider that the level of femininity of women is not determined by how they decide to construct their bodies.

Female bodybuilders argue that engaging in bodybuilding gives them a sense of control over their bodies as well as "the ability to self-create the body and transcend normative notions of sex, gender and sexuality" (Richardson, 2008: 297). In essence, female bodybuilding is a method by which women celebrate the female body and by so doing they can manipulate their bodies as they please without considering the oppressive patriarchal limitations. Women's engagement in bodybuilding is "redefining the whole idea of femininity by asking how far a female bodybuilder can go and still remain feminine" (Schulze, 1997:9). Black female bodybuilders are providing other black women with new ways of perceiving beauty and femininity that is not the same as the socialised way of thinking about what it means to be a feminine woman.

As highlighted in the chapter it is clear how relevant the theoretical frameworks are to the study. The framework of Intersectionality is witnessed within the context of black female bodybuilders through gender (being female), race (being black) as well as culturally and religiously (as Zulu Christian women). Gender Performativity is highlighted in how muscle is gendered which, therefore, places limitations on women and how much muscle they can develop.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology and methods employed by the research study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the methodological approaches, research design, sampling strategy, sample size as well as participant selection criteria undertaken for this study. It also describes the data production process, data production approaches, data analysis approaches, validity and reliability issues and the ethical considerations of the study.

The research was a qualitative study that adopted empirical research methods. The main research question was: *How do religio-cultural conceptions of black women bodybuilders' bodies influence their engagement in bodybuilding?*

The research objectives were as follows:

- a) To determine the black female bodybuilder's religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies
- b) To understand the black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
- c) To explore how the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
- d) To understand why the black female bodybuilders mediate between the religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do

In order to respond to the main research question and the objectives of the study as outlined above, five participants were selected and individually interviewed. A phenomenological interview schedule was crafted which provided an opportunity for me, as the interviewer and researcher, to produce data on the lived experiences of participants.

3.2. Methodological approach

In order to answer the key research question and sub-questions, the study was conducted within a qualitative research paradigm. A qualitative research study is one that "demonstrates a different approach to scholarly inquiry than methods of quantitative research" (Creswell, 2014:232). It is a research strategy whose analysis of data emphasizes words over quantity or numbers (Bryman, 2016). Using a qualitative research methodology enabled me to understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of the female bodybuilders. An interdisciplinary approach was used in line with the aims of the Gender, Religion and Health Programme wherein my study is registered. An Interdisciplinary approach is one that "synthesizes more

than one discipline” (Jones, 2009:76). A feminist approach was employed to understand the extent to which religious and cultural conceptions of black women’s bodies influence black women’s engagement in bodybuilding and the Intersectionality framework was used as a lens to look at issues of race, gender, religion and culture in relation to the lived experiences of the participants.

3.3. Research Design: Phenomenology

A phenomenological research design was used to conduct the study and enabled me to explore the real, lived experiences of the women participants through a detailed phenomenological interview. Phenomenology is “a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2014:30). A phenomenological study “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007:57), therefore, it was most suited to this study where the phenomenon under study was the religio-cultural conceptions of the black women participants and the extent to which these conceptions influence their engagement in bodybuilding. Phenomenological interviews were conducted in private settings to yield data that reflected their lived experiences.

3.4. Sampling

3.4.1. Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy that was utilized was purposive sampling which is a non-probability form of sampling. With purposive sampling, “the researcher, chooses those respondents who will best fit the purpose of the research” (Harding, 2013:17). This means that the participants selected by the researcher “can purposively inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007:125). The participants needed for my study were those who were going to provide the required information on black women who engage in the sport of bodybuilding. Since I was using a Phenomenological research design (which does not allow for generalization), purposive sampling was compatible to this research design as it also does not allow for generalization to a population. Purposive sampling allowed me to obtain rich data of the lived experiences of the black female bodybuilders and the extent to which they negotiate their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies in their engagement in bodybuilding.

3.4.2. Sample size

The sample size comprised of five black female bodybuilders who compete in bodybuilding competitions and subscribe to the bodybuilding lifestyle through following strict training and diet regimes to build their bodies. The participants were selected from those who had been dieting and training regularly at gyms in Durban for one year. There are a growing number of gyms being established and already established in Kwa-Zulu Natal. I have restricted the location of the study to the Durban area since this is where the bodybuilding competitions take place. The following gyms in Durban were identified:

- a) Virgin Active Berea (Overport)
- b) Muscle and Fitness (Musgrave)
- c) Virgin Active Moses Mabhida (Central Durban)
- d) Virgin Active Kingspark (Central Durban)
- e) Virgin Active Pinetown (Western Durban)

One black female bodybuilder from each gym was identified by the criteria listed below. This amounted to five participants. A small number of participants enabled a deep engagement of their lived experiences and thus the production of in-depth data during the interviews.

3.4.3. Participant selection criteria

The participants were required to meet certain criteria in order to be selected for the study. All the participants had to be black female bodybuilders above 18 years of age. They needed to be Zulu Christian women living in Durban and members of Durban-based gyms.

The black women bodybuilders had to show evidence of training regularly for over one year and had to have made transformations in their muscular body structure (determined through photographic evidence). They also had to show some evidence of following a strict training programme (training schedule) as well as evidence of following the diet that was required for bodybuilding competition preparation (competition diet plan). Ethical clearance was granted for the use of all photographic evidence.

3.5. Data Production

The data production process was organized in accordance with some principles highlighted by Creswell (2007:123-125) as discussed below.

3.5.1. Access and rapport

Permission was obtained from the participants to include them in the study by sending them informed consent letters (Appendix A). The consent forms included the right to voluntarily

withdraw from the study at any time, the central purpose of the study, the procedures, protection of confidentiality, any known risks, expected benefits of the study, and the signature of both participant and researcher. All the participants gave full permission for their real names and photographs to be used in the study.

3.5.2. Data Production approaches

The Phenomenological interview enquiry was used in the production of data. Five, one hour interviews were conducted, audiotaped, and transcribed. The interviews were held in private settings. Interviews were conducted at whichever location that was suitable for the participants. The phenomenological interviews were in the form of story-telling. The purpose of phenomenological research seeks “reality from individuals’ narratives of their experiences and feelings and to produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon” (Yuksel and Yildirim, 2015:1). The participants were required to bring photographs of themselves before they started bodybuilding and photographs of themselves after bodybuilding. In this way, they were able to tell in-depth stories of their transformations.

3.6. Data Analysis

A thematic approach to analyse data is the strategy that was chosen for this research study. A thematic approach uses “codes and categories to identify similarities and differences between the accounts” (Harding, 2013:135). Thematic analysis can also be understood as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006:82). This was a suitable analytical strategy since many themes emerged out of the literature and were similar to those that emerged from the interviews with the participants. This strategy also enabled me to see how, although all participants were black women involved in the sport of bodybuilding, their experiences of the same phenomena differed.

3.7. Ethical and legal considerations

Ethical clearance to perform this study was sought from the research and ethics committee of the University of KwaZulu Natal. Certain ethical measures were also taken into consideration for this study to protect the interview participants. The interviews were conducted at locations suggested by the participants. The participants were also informed that their willingness to participate in the research study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point should they wish to do so. They were also informed that the tapes from the interviews would be kept in a safe and; that their real names would not appear on the final

dissertation or any publication that may emerge out of the dissertation. Confidentiality was guaranteed throughout the research process. All consent forms and data produced were captured and backed up electronically and kept safely in a password locked computer.

3.8. Validity, Reliability and Rigour

Bryman (2016:384) has proposed trustworthiness as a criterion for assessing how good a study is and has outlined four ways in which it can be achieved. These four ways are Credibility, Transferability, Dependability and Confirmability. The credibility of my research study was ensured by sending copies of the transcribed transcripts back to the participants. Transferability was judged from the data produced from the participants; that it allowed for rich accounts of detail or thick description. Complete records of all phases within the research process were kept safely. The data produced was transcribed shortly after the interviews had been conducted in order to ensure and enhance the dependability of the results. Reflexivity had to be considered for the purpose of the study since I am involved in bodybuilding myself. Reflexivity was important as it ensured that I did not allow my personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the way the research was conducted or how the findings were derived. I did this by continuously reflecting and examining myself as a researcher, and reflecting on the research relationship. All these steps towards reflexivity ensured the confirmability of the research study.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology and research methods. It discussed how the methodological approach, the qualitative research paradigm, facilitated the researcher in making meaning of the lived experiences of the participants. Purposive sampling as a sampling strategy as well as the sample size and participant selection criteria enabled the researcher to select those participants best suited to the purpose of the study. Gaining consent from the participants as well as ethical clearance from the university to proceed with the study, ensured the validity and reliability of the study and its findings. The next chapter presents the findings chapter and discusses the various themes that emerged from data produced through phenomenological interviews.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The analysis below is based on data that was produced through phenomenological interviews with five black female bodybuilders living in Durban and training in Durban gyms during the year 2016. They all subscribed to the Christian faith and were from the Zulu culture. All the participants consented to the use of their real names as well as their photographs in the findings of the study. At the time of the interviews, the participants had all recently competed in bodybuilding competitions and were training for upcoming competitions in the following year, 2017. The competition divisions are explained below.

4.1.1. Bodybuilding competition divisions

The different divisions of the bodybuilding competitions are: Beach Bikini, Bikini Fitness (also known as Fitness Bikini), Body Fitness and Physique; in ascending order of muscularity. The Beach Bikini division is for the woman who has a ‘beach body’ (IFBB, 2016a). The Fitness Bikini division is a division between Beach Bikini and Body Fitness and it is “for the girls that are not quite Beach Bikini (who display much softer lines and even the acceptable bit of curviness) and she is also not quite Body Fitness (with that more defined and definite level of muscle tone and conditioned physique with very low body fat)” (IFBB, 2016b:1). In the Body Fitness division, athletes are judged on muscularity so this division is unlike the Beach Bikini or Fitness Bikini divisions. The Women’s Physique division requires even greater emphasis on muscle tone but also needs to be balanced with feminine markers as will be explained in greater detail under the theme of ‘Emphasized femininity’. All the participants were able-bodied and all identified as heterosexual women. Below is a brief background description of the participants.

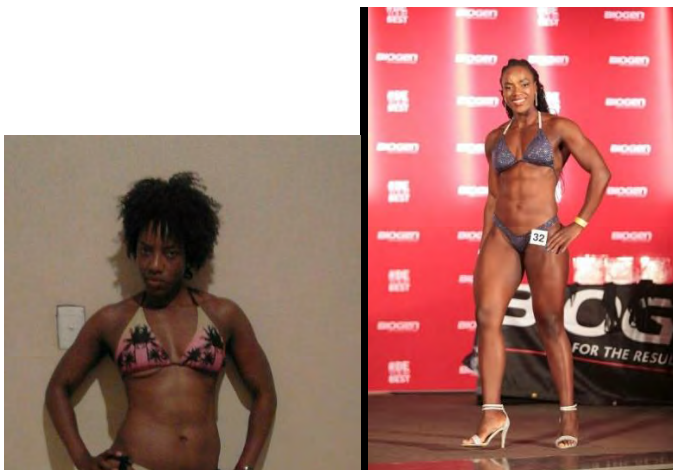
4.1.2. Background description of participants:

Participant 1: Nonhlanhla Keri Linda



Nonhlanhla Keri Linda (29 years old), is originally from Richards Bay but now lives in Durban, South Beach. She started bodybuilding in March 2015, originally in the Beach Bikini division but has since moved to Fitness Bikini division. Since two of the participants are Nonhlanhla, this participant will be referred to as Keri in the Findings and Discussion chapters.

Participant 2: Nonhlanhla Mkhize



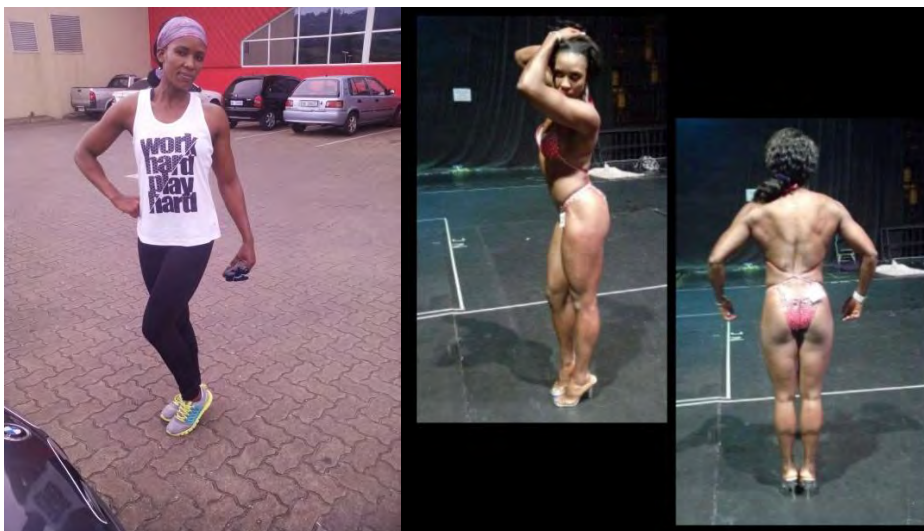
Nonhlanhla Mkhize (34 years old) is from Newlands West, Durban. She works as a Group Exercise Instructor at various gyms, particularly Muscle and Fitness, Musgrave Centre. She started competing in 2016 and has only participated in one competition. She competed in the Body Fitness Division.

Participant 3: Pamela Ndhlovu



Pamella Ndhlovu (30 years old), is originally from Johannesburg but now living in Umhlanga, Durban. She is a Personal Trainer at Virgin Active Moses Mabhida. She started competing in 2016 in the Beach Bikini division but has since moved up into the Fitness Bikini division.

Participant 4: Sihle Kati



Sihle Kati (30 years old) is from Hillcrest, Durban. She started bodybuilding in 2016 and has competed in two competitions. She competes in the Body Fitness division.

Participant 5: Nosipho Noqwaka



Nosipho Noqwaka (28 years old) is from Pinetown, Durban. She has been competing for two years and in the year 2016 she has competed in four competitions. She competes in the Fitness Bikini division.

Provided below is an analysis of the data that emanated from the phenomenological interviews conducted. Thematic Content Analysis was used as a tool for analysing the research findings. This enabled the data to be organised into themes and sub-themes. The themes that emerged from the data are: The Body Project, Embodiment of Muscle, The Male Gaze, Religious and Cultural conceptions of black women's bodies, Gender Performance, Femininity, Misunderstood sexuality, Reproductive Health, Racial politics of bodybuilding and Liberatory Hermeneutics. As previously stated, the theoretical frameworks used to analyse the data were 'Gender Performativity' by Judith Butler as well as Kimberlé Crenshaws 'Intersectionality'. Hence, the themes that emerged from the data were aligned to the notion of the politics of gender, gender identity and how gender is a performance especially with regards to female muscularity and female bodybuilding. However, because the study was an Interdisciplinary study, it incorporated not only the gendered aspects of female bodybuilding but also looked at the religious and sexual reproductive health aspects of it. The Intersectional framework analysed how other identities such as race, religion and culture worked together with gender as part of the experiences of black female bodybuilders within the sport. As a result, the emerging themes were informed by the interdisciplinary study as well as the theoretical frameworks. However, it is worth noting that certain themes not linked to either of these also emerged. These themes provided a background either to the motivations of why black women took up

bodybuilding or how religious and cultural conceptions of women's bodies influenced the ways in which black female bodybuilders understood themselves.

4.2. The Body Project

Before delving into the religious and cultural conceptions of black women's bodies, it is important to understand the underlying motivations that influenced black women to become bodybuilders as well as their reasons for embodying muscle. The participants became bodybuilders for different reasons. With the rise of health consciousness, more women become physically active. In some cases, physical exercise results from a dissatisfaction with body image as is the case of Nonhlanhla and Pamela who joined the gym because they wanted to lose weight. Pamela said:

Yeah it was to lose weight and personally I was at a bad space (Pamella)

As Mastamet-Mason states, "It is a common practice in all human societies to alter the body in order to meet an ideal set for that particular era" (2014:115). For example, Nonhlanhla who has struggled with weight management since her teenage years had a reason for losing weight since she wanted to fit into her matric dance dress. She stated:

I think I was doing my matric coz I wanted to fit in some dress. By the time I was doing matric it was the year 99'. Tony Braxton was on top. She was wearing those stomach out dresses. So I wanted one but my body could not allow me to do that. Anyway I wore that dress (Nonhlanhla)

Her decision to lose weight could have also been influenced by western society's ideal of beauty as thin and, as result, black women, like Nonhlanhla, base their understandings of beauty on Western ideologies. As Mastamet-Mason states, "full figured African women go to gyms so that they can lose weight and look like the thin model and not necessarily for health reasons. Engaging in weight-loss programmes and dressing like the thin model indicates that they endorse the thin body as being ideal and that their own bodies are not attractive" (2014:115). It is also an indication of how the body is perceived as a project that needs continuous working on to be shaped according to the desires of the inhabitant (Turner, 2008; Shilling, 2003). However this is not the case for all women who embark on a bodybuilding journey.

Not all women who become bodybuilders do it to lose weight or for health reasons. Nosipho, Keri and Sihle joined the gym because they wanted to gain weight in the form of muscle.

However, when Nosipho originally joined the gym it was not for the purpose of building muscle; it was to destress and find healing. As she stated:

My initial goals were to destress, you know. I was going through some personal things so I wanted a place where I could...I don't talk about problems, I don't talk about things that you know affect me, I just prefer doing something coz I keep them to myself. So it was just my sanctuary, a place I would just go and be at peace and let go of things through my training (Nosipho)

It is clear that a bodybuilding journey stems out of many different reasons; not necessarily for health purposes or to lose weight. It is also interesting how these women joined the gym for different reasons and how their different reasons led them into the bodybuilding lifestyle and the embodiment of muscle which will be discussed below.

4.3. Embodiment of muscle

Often people shape and “construct their bodies in ways that comply with accepted views of masculinity and femininity” (Lorber and Martin, 2007:228). This means that they try to shape and use their bodies to conform to their culture’s or racial group’s expectations of how a woman’s body, a man’s body, a girl’s body, or a boy’s body should look” (Lorber and Martin, 2007:228). This may be attributed to socially constructed gender perceptions of women as physically weak and men as strong. It is, therefore, interesting to note how female bodybuilders shape their bodies very differently, challenging assertions of female physical weakness. Pamella likes muscle because she thinks it is fashionable to build muscle. According to her:

This century muscle...female it's just in. Every female wants to have muscle but not too muscular, but just to be toned and defined. No one wants to be smooth now, even someone who doesn't compete doesn't want to be smooth (Pamella)

Pamella’s use of the bodybuilding terminology of being ‘smooth’ also indicates how the sub-culture of bodybuilding with its pursuit of muscle, is critical of bodies that do not show signs of muscle. A smooth body is a soft body and one that does not show visible muscle definition as opposed to the ‘hard’ muscular body that all bodybuilders desire. However, although Keri also likes muscle, it is not because muscles are fashionable. For her it is a matter of being different. As she stated:

I love muscle, like I think muscle is the way to go for me, yes coz I don't like myself being a girl, I want to be different (Keri)

Evidently, Keri's muscle building is as a resistance to gender identity of being a girl and the socially constructed gender roles associated with being a girl. Although she identifies with her biological sex from birth, the reason she doesn't want to be 'like a girl' is because the muscle she desires is understood as male. Even she understands muscle as male. Clearly, "the female bodybuilder offers a unique glimpse at how muscle, although not gendered in biology, becomes so heavily associated with the male" (Felkar, 2012:45). We see this as well in the case of Sihle. She declared:

I feel excited coz because it's like I'm getting what I want coz when I set goals for how I want my body to look I don't look at girl's bodies, I look at male's bodies. I look at their bodies and say this is what I want. I don't point at girls in magazines and newspapers, I point at boys...So if you're gonna say I look like a man, that makes me want more coz I know what I want. And if you think maybe you're insulting me, I take that as advice-you're actually telling me to go and put in more work... (Sihle)

These are problematic statements because they indicate that muscle are for men and even the female bodybuilders, in their pursuit of muscularity, think of the acquisition of muscle as biologically male. Sihle's desire to look like a man is indicative of the gendered nature of muscle. Female bodybuilding and the pursuit of muscle is considered an achievement and a resistance against body shaping aligned to the male gaze. It is to this theme that I now turn.

4.4. The Male gaze

Conceptions of black women's bodies are always aligned to male notions of beauty. As Shilling points out, "the way in which the body has become a project for some women would appear to be more reflective of male designs and fantasies than an expression of individuality" (2003:7). In contrast, black female bodybuilders choose to build muscle and do not shape their bodies to be desirable to men.

The participants highlighted how they have received comments of judgement towards the muscular nature of their bodies. As Sihle explained:

In bodybuilding is where I am understood. Outside, people don't understand. They always judge you see. The first thing they ask, "what does your man say when you're looking like this?". And then I ask them why does everything have to be about what my man thinks about what I look like? Why don't you ask me what I think? (Sihle)

Sihle asks an important question because in criticism about how black women choose to shape their bodies, they are not given the agency to shape their bodies according to their desires but for male desirability. Pamella pointed out how criticism of her as a black woman always has double standards. She highlighted how when dressed in a bikini practising her stage walk at the gym she was criticised for showing her body yet a white woman is not criticised. She explained:

...From my experience, when we're close to competing we go to studio and then you have to wear your bikini and heels so that you can watch yourself in the mirror when doing your T-walk and you're practising your pose. So people they will say-because you're black you're not supposed to do this but if it's a white person doing it, it's not gonna be a problem (Pamella)

Clearly the above comments are based on cultural and religious conceptions of black women's bodies that accept women who shape their bodies on cultural and religious terms while being critical of black women who resist against these conceptions which are presented below.

4.5. Religio-Cultural conceptions of women's bodies

On discussing how much of an influence religion and culture had on the lives of the participants, they revealed that religion had more of an influence in their lives than culture. Nonhlanhla pointed out that her religion influenced her 99%. She said:

My religion I think 99% coz everything that I do I get guidance from the Bible (Nonhlanhla)

It is interesting how, although their religion has so much of an influence in their lives, they take a different stance when it comes to their understandings of how their religion conceptualises their bodies.

4.5.1. Religious conceptions of women's bodies

All the participants were Christians and belonged to different church denominations. Nonhlanhla pointed out how she received support from her Pastor although he did not understand her engagement in bodybuilding. The Pastor's wife however was still very against her participation in bodybuilding. This is evidenced in the following statement made by Nonhlanhla:

So I know like I said that at my church at least my Pastor understands no but his wife..she still has those comments that, "this thing of yours is scary". How can you say that to another person? And how is it scary? (Nonhlanhla)

On the other hand, Nosipho pointed out that she receives support from people at church. She stated:

Even at church they are supportive, they don't question me that much since my boyfriend already does the sport but then it is surprising to them that "oh a girl is doing it?oh okay" (Nosipho)

Sihle highlighted how her support in her church was divided, the older women supported her but the older men judged her. She related what the older women say:

"You go girl", "Let the child do what she loves", "You were beautiful my child". The older men from church say "she wants to be a man now, will we get any cows when you're looking like this?...So they criticise many things at church (Sihle)

The cows that the older men speak of is lobola which is an indication that the ways in which black women shape their bodies should be in line with male preferences and the shape should meet the requirements of marriageable Zulu women. Clearly, from their understanding, black female bodybuilders who have bodies that 'look like men's bodies' do not qualify for marriage.

When the participants were asked what their religion says about women's bodies, the responses they provided were not direct but were rather as a justification of their engagement in bodybuilding. Nonhlanhla said that as a Christian woman her religion stipulated that:

Women's bodies are God's temple, they need to be covered. They need to be taken care of. They need to be treasured (Nonhlanhla)

In addition to Nonhlanhla's response, Pamela responded defensively that:

Yes they do say that you need to respect your body. Your body is the temple of God but it's a bit...but on that day, it's only on that day. Because there people who compete but they are Pastors. Like I didn't know that a person competes but when they get off stage they are Pastors. Coz it's a sport (Pamella)

Clearly for Pamela, her engagement in bodybuilding is justified because in as much as her religion may oppose her engagement in bodybuilding it should be understood as a sport and also because people who are Pastors and have religious authority also engage in the sport.

4.5.2. Cultural conceptions of women's bodies

For black women it is not only their Christian religion that dictates how their bodies should be shaped but as Zulu women, their culture also influences the criticism they often receive. As Mastamet-Mason points out, “over centuries, every society has had its own unique standard of feminine beauty. Perceptions about beauty differ from country to country and from culture to culture. In the majority of African countries, a full-figured woman is seen as spousal material and is sometimes envied by both men and women” (2014:115). Nonhlanhla pointed out the contrasting comments she received about her body within the different communities she was exposed to. She said:

The community, they still think that (my black community), they still think that if you work out you change and become a boy. They always ask me, “Who will marry you?”...The black community thinks that if you go to gym you must be skinny...Then when you come-when I go to a community that is white dominant I get ‘Wow’. You see when I go to the gym in Westville I get back home so overwhelmed by the white people. They say to me, “Wow, you’re such an inspiration. We like your body. Don’t stop”. You see you get positives...So it depends on the community you’re in (Nonhlanhla)

Nonhlanhla's response shows that female bodybuilders are accepted in white communities but black communities still struggle to understand this sport as a woman's sport as well. Black communities only understand two body types, fat or skinny. As a result, any woman who goes to gym for other purposes than to lose weight and become skinny or becomes a bodybuilder, is misunderstood. This is also indicative of how within the African and South African context, weight loss is often associated with HIV and AIDS; it is a sign of illness (Matoti-Mvalo and Puoane, 2011). As Nakedi Ribane points out, “even today, when ‘thin’ is so much the ‘in’ thing, Africans are not crazy about skinny legs and bodies. Being skinny is not considered sexy in African culture. It is associated with poverty and suffering” (Ribane, 2006:19). Reference to marriage also indicates how culturally, black women's bodies ought to mirror spousal material, as Mastamet-Mason points out. As can be seen, culture specifies the ideal standards of body sizes, as was explained by the participants. Pamela explained:

For a female...when people think of an African lady, they first think of curves, nice body structure, things like that. So ideally an African lady-even though you can be lean, but don't lose your curves, don't lose your 'feminine'. With me it's all about the curves like your natural beauty (Pamella)

Evidently in as much as she has built muscle into her body shape, she feels that her body mirrors the curvaceous body of the ideal Zulu or African woman. Nosipho was conflicted between the cultural appreciation of women's bodies and the criticism she received because of her engagement in bodybuilding and wearing a bikini at bodybuilding competitions. She explained:

...Because as a Zulu girl, when you are half-naked and going for your virginity monthly check-ups it is something precious. It is something seen as they are proud of you and stuff but then it contradicts because they'll be like, "you're walking around in a bikini. What the hell are you getting naked for?". "It's an unholy thing, it's not in your culture-you're doing white people's things. But then you think, but wait we walk around with boobs, what you're tryna say to me?"
(Nosipho)

These opposing views are conflicting because of the double standards placed on when it is appropriate for black women to show their bodies and when it is inappropriate to do so.

Sihle, on the other hand, was undecided about whether or not her body mirrored the ideal Zulu or African woman's body. However, she eventually concluded that it does not. She explained:

Yes I have but not really. No I don't have. You know why? An African body is breasts, hips, bums, thick legs. That's an African body...I don't have breasts, I don't have a bum, I don't have hips, I don't have thick legs. The only thing I have are muscles and calves and a squat booty. My breasts do get big but when I'm on diet they get really small that my bra becomes too big. My body is like a white person's body, not a black person's body. It's different but I don't see anything wrong with it, I like it the way it is. I know that I am an African woman but my body doesn't describe me as that. But I don't care but I know what comes out of my mouth shows that I am an African woman (Sihle)

Sihle's comment is interesting because it poses a challenge to how cultural identity is understood. Although she understood herself as a Zulu and African woman, she felt that her body did not meet the required shape of Zulu or African women. This observation possibly points to what Thenjiwe Magwaza's view that "like gender identity, cultural identity is a social construction" (Magwaza, 2001:27). With this in mind, it could be said that an ideal African or Zulu woman's body is non-existent but rather culturally constructed. As Nosipho confirmed:

I don't have. I do not. I have a cousin, she's 19 years old, she wears a size 46 and I think she's gorgeous. The ideal-I can't even say it coz I've never had it coz I think that if you are comfortable in your own body, if you are comfortable being thick, girl God bless your soul. Go

for it. You're beautiful. And I tell you she's got a nice voluptuous body and she owns it...So I've been up and down rollercoaster with my own weight coz I was not happy with me. I've been skinny. I've been really skinny. I've been fat, really fat-unhealthy and it didn't go with my body. And now I'm fit. I'm healthy, I'm eating whatever I want to eat when I'm off season and I get strict when I'm preparing for competitions. So there's no ideal body-if you're happy with yourself, that's it. There's no curves, no big booty, no small booty (Nosipho)

Nosipho's perspective points out that an ideal body does not exist; that the perfect body is if one feels happy and healthy in their body shape.

The participants pointed out how their Zulu culture and Christian religion were against showing their bodies but Keri shared a different perspective. Her church, although Christian, follows Zulu traditional teachings. Therefore, in her context, showing the body was allowed and was not in conflict with her engagement in bodybuilding. She explained:

...they don't have a problem showing your body but there are those parts of which you don't have to show of which it's this (pointing to private part). And then boobs they don't care, you have to show your boobs. You have to show your boobs, if you don't have a child you have to show your boobs...Our church follows Zulu teachings so we do the same Zulu cultural things at church (Keri)

This particularly differing view could also indicate that the other participant's ways of practicing their culture has been acculturated with the influence of foreign religions to the extent that what was once permitted culturally, such as black women showing their bodies, is now viewed as a violation of their culture. These all become factors that inform how black female bodybuilders experience their engagement in bodybuilding. We now turn to the discussion on how the participants experienced their engagement in bodybuilding.

Black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding

4.6. Gender Performance

The notion of gender as performance is explicit within the sub-culture of bodybuilding. The distinctions between what is considered feminine and masculine are always in place. These distinctions are instilled from birth in that females and males, by virtue of their sexes should behave in feminine and masculine ways. Even their bodies have to be shaped in ways that are aligned to femininity or masculinity. Sihle's experience of bodybuilding and her realisation of the necessity of wearing bikinis on competition day, shows how on stage she performs a gender

role that she does not identify with, in terms of clothing and adornment, only because the judging criteria requires her to do so. Her experience is as follows:

Wearing a bikini isn't something that was on my mind. I was just thinking about what my body is going to look like. I will have muscle all over my body. That's what I was excited about. The bikini...coz I'm not into short clothes, I wear pants and dresses only, I don't wear shorts and tights. I'm just not that kind of person. So it only dawned on me when I was really into the sport that I really have to do this (wear a bikini). Then I started to ask myself, "Oh God what's happening?". But because I was already in, there was no turning back, I had to wear it. And what's worse is heels, trust me. I'm not a heels person, I'm a sneaker person. You see if you take me to a sneaker shop, that's heaven for me, heels are not my thing, being glamorous is not my thing. I realised when I was already into this (bodybuilding) that I have to be glamorous because when I'm on stage many things have to change; the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I act, which is not even close to who I am...But when I'm done (done competing on stage), I take this thing off and throw it to the side and wear my takkies and vest (Sihle)

It can be deduced that gender is performed even through adornment and these gendered markers are accepted as either feminine or masculine. Although she identifies as a heterosexual female, her daily clothing of sneakers is interpreted as a non-identification with femininity and more of an identification with masculinity. Her stage appearance requires her to emphasise femininity even in her behaviour; in the way she walks, talks and acts. As a result, her presence on stage constitutes a kind of drag (Coles, 1999). The term 'drag' is often used in relation to drag queens. Drag queens "are performers, and many prefer the term female impersonator to drag queen" (Strübel-Scheiner, 2011:13). These are men who impersonate females. However, "the drag queen is a self-identified man who has no desire to live as a woman, nor become a woman" (Strübel-Scheiner, 2011:13). As a result, when men are seen impersonating women, they portray the message that men and masculinity are natural and women and femininity are unnatural or artificial (Coles, 1999). The reverse of this is rare; women impersonating men. Female bodybuilders in their embodiment of muscle provide this rare view of women impersonating men since muscles are gendered as male. The female bodybuilder, on stage, appears to be cross-dressed in her performance of femininity. However, as Cole states, "her cross-dress does not disappear once she is off stage. It may be covered or played down, but it isn't an instantly removable power suit" (1999:451). In as much as she may remove her bikini, make-up, jewellery and heels after the competition, her muscular body cannot be removed. Even though she may consider herself feminine in the sneakers and pants she wears daily, the

stage requirements of wearing heels, make-up and having to learn new ways of walking, highlights a hegemonic understanding of femininity as will be discussed below.

4.7. Femininity

All the participants had more or less the same understanding of what it means to be feminine. Nosipho's understanding of femininity is:

Uhm being feminine I would say it's a personal thing. You cannot define femininity. Yes society wants to say this is feminine, that's not feminine but I think feminine is confident. So I believe it's a personal thing coz for myself people say "when you gym you look like a drill sergeant. You look like a tomboy". And then when I'm outside in my heels and all dressed up and looking glamorous they're like, "oh you're a diva". I'm like no I am me. Everything that I am makes me feminine-who I am makes me feminine. So yeah I can't put a label on it and say being orange and then purple here and then, no. Being who you are makes you feminine (Nosipho)

Evidently, her different characters that she embodies whether in the gym where she is seen as a "tomboy" or her "glamorous diva" look, all contribute to her feminine self. Although being seen as a tomboy is associated with masculinity, even what is thought to be masculine behaviour contributes to her understanding of her own femininity. This indicates that there is masculinity in femininity and, therefore, femininity in masculinity and this understanding disfigures the fixed understandings of what constitutes femininity or masculinity. It reveals the fluidity of these concepts and that femininity can be understood in various ways as can be seen below.

4.7.1. Femininity as 'Girly'

Although Nonhlanhla and Pamela shared the same sentiments as Nosipho on femininity meaning to be yourself, they also understood femininity as being 'girly'. As Pamela said:

Well with me feminine is all about girlish. For me it's all about being girlish...I'm gonna sound like my daughter now. Just the beauty like the hair, even though I don't do it most of the time. But just enhancing what you have, not like over, just a bit. Make-up and stuff and hair (Pamella)

It is interesting how she places emphasis on hair and make-up also showing how she understands femininity from the judging requirements within the Beach Bikini division that she competes in, which assess contestants on hair, make-up and femininity. In the judging, the

following is taken into consideration: “Femininity and self-confidence. Hair and makeup should complement the “Total Package” presented by the contestant” (IFBB, 2016).

Nonhlanhla, on the other hand, had this to say:

As muscular as I am I still need to be girly. I don't believe that because I train I don't need to put make-up on, I don't have to wear heels, I don't have to wear weaves. This is just temporary. What you see now is temporary. Like the fact that I've cut my hair, I know for now I'm like this. But there will come a time when I'll go like, “no I'm done with this” and move onto something else just like all the other girls. I also like fashion like all girls. I also want to look good...why wouldn't I want to be feminine? That will never change. I also dream to have a family one day (Nonhlanhla)

It is clear how these two participants understand what it means to be ‘girly’ and how they should show how ‘girly’ or feminine they are through markers such as hair and make-up which emphasises their femininity. However, Nonhlanhla’s desire to have a family one day as part of her understanding of femininity, is problematic. It implies that one who does not desire to have a family is not ‘girly’ or feminine enough. It shows how gender as a social construct grooms girls and boys in different ways and even places the desire to have a family as a marker of emphasised femininity.

4.7.2. Emphasised femininity: Negotiating femininity

While bodybuilding enables black female bodybuilders to challenge and to resist against gender norms about how black women’s bodies should be shaped, its judging criteria emphasizes notions of idealized hegemonic femininity. This is seen in how women’s muscles are constantly policed by the assessment criteria of bodybuilding competitions that judge them not only on their muscle tone but on their hair, make-up and jewellery.

The Beach Bikini divisions is one of the divisions in the competition. The judging criteria is that athletes in this division should have a physique that is “soft, yet toned, being well proportioned with a bit of curviness and a healthy overall physical appearance” (IFBB, 2016a:1). Their bodies are not required to show any signs of muscular development or athletes will be marked down because the assessment criteria stipulates that athletes should “know that being tight and too lean is not what the judges will look for” (IFBB, 2016a:1). Keri, who started competing in Beach Bikini but is now in Fitness Bikini, explained:

You have to be lean but you must have meat, you must have ass, you must have like-you must be a girl. Like a beach girl (Keri)

This division does not require muscle although it is part of a bodybuilding competition; it requires athletes who show signs of a healthy, toned body. Keri further explained how she had to move to the next division of Bikini Fitness because her body did not meet the requirements of Beach Bikini. She explained:

...I competed this year in March, I was doing my last Beach bikini. So I placed 6th and then they told me that uh my body was too hard for Beach Bikini because they're looking for-not for someone who's fit. They're looking for someone who's got like a structure. So I had muscles, I was a bit harder so they asked me to go to Fitness Bikini (Keri)

Even in the Bikini Fitness division muscularity is controlled and the IFBB stipulates that “the physique should neither be excessively muscular nor excessively lean and should be free from muscle separation and/or striations. Physiques that are considered too muscular, too hard or too lean must be marked down” (IFBB, 2016b:1). This division, like the Beach Bikini division, does not require much accessories in the form of bling on the bikini and the stipulations are that, the bikini “should look more like a beach bikini-with minimum and only subtle ‘bling’ detail” (IFBB, 2016b:2). Nosipho, who now competes in the Fitness Bikini division, described the amount of work that went into shaping a body for the approval of the judges. She said:

Yeah so bad part is you sometimes you think you look good but then you know maybe yourself, your thinking, you and the mirror. It's not just you and the mirror at the end of the day coz you have to uhmm please the judges, if I have to put it that way. Coz they must look at you and be pleased with the proportion of your body. Others may say you look good but then when you get on stage oh you're not proportioned right, you're not this, you're not that. So there's a lot of details that go into it (Nosipho)

Both the Beach Bikini and Fitness Bikini divisions are almost similar in their requirements of a more natural look. Musculature becomes important in the Body Fitness, Physique and Bodybuilding divisions. However, even within those divisions, markers of emphasized femininity are still required from the female athletes because emphasis is on the muscle tone and not muscle size. Sihle who competed in the Body Fitness talked about how she was working towards being in the Physique division:

...when I started my coach looked at my body and said that my body won't be able to compete in Beach Bikini so I had to work towards being in Body Fitness...In actual fact, my goal is to be in Physique. I want to be in Physique and next year won't end without me being in Physique... (Sihle)

Within the division of Body Fitness female athletes are expected to look feminine. In the judging assessment “judges are reminded that this is not a bodybuilding contest. The competitors should have shape to their muscles but not size, definition or vascularity that is seen at bodybuilding competitions. Any competitor who exhibits these features is to be marked down” (IFBB, 2016c:1). The Women’s Physique division is a replacement of what was once the Women’s Bodybuilding division, which focussed on muscle size and vascularity as do men’s bodybuilding divisions. As the IFBB states, “the Women’s Physique category is aimed at women who prefer to develop a less muscular, yet athletic and aesthetically pleasing physique, unlike former women’s bodybuilders” (IFBB, 2016d:3). Women’s Physique ensures that in as much as athletes are judged on muscle tone, they are also judged on beauty and signs of emphasized femininity. The assessment of athletes’ bodies require a “general impression of the physique” (IFBB, 2016d:8) and also takes into consideration “the hair and makeup; the overall athletic development of the musculature; the presentation of a balanced, symmetrically developed physique” (IFBB, 2016d:8). The judging requirements are that physiques do not compromise femininity and even in their posing routines, athletes are required to show femininity. Heels are not worn in this division so it can be said to be equivalent to Men’s bodybuilding to a certain extent but judges are also reminded that “they are judging a Women’s Physique competition and not former Women’s Bodybuilding competition. The type of muscularity, vascularity, muscular definition and dryness displayed by Women’s Bodybuilding athletes will not be considered acceptable if displayed by a Women’s Physique competitor and therefore, must be marked down” (IFBB, 2016d:12). Evidently, female bodybuilders in their transgression of gendered norms of how their bodies should be shaped, are still required to conform to hegemonic forms of feminine beauty. It is interesting how the different divisions require different levels of emphasized femininity and that the more a division is judged on muscle tone, the more emphasis is placed on femininity. As Pamella stated:

They want you to look like a Barbie doll. In Beach Bikini you need to be like you know that Barbie doll like. Not too much like earrings like blingish-don't be too blingy....And then when you go to Fitness Bikini that's where you start adding bling bling to your costume. You wear

blingy earrings. And then Body Fitness that's where you go all out. Like when you enter you must be a Start light. People have to put on shades when you enter. It needs to be blingy. With them it's all about the bikini being blingy and then the hair they don't mind coz its Body Fitness (Pamella)

Pamella explained how in the Beach Bikini division, accessories on the bikini are unnecessary but in Fitness Bikini, Body Fitness and Physique, the necessity to have accessories becomes more emphasized. Keri also shared the same sentiments as Pamella:

Yeah make-up must be on point. Make-up, actually everything, you must be a girl on stage. Your make-up must be on point. In all the divisions your make-up must be on point but in Beach Bikini you don't have to put lot of make-up even though we do put it. But you don't have to put a lot of make-up because at the end of the day it's Beach Bikini so obvious it's someone who's on the beach. Jewellery is important in Beach Bikini-you don't have to put lot of accessories, you don't have to put bling-bling. In Fitness Bikini you have to put a bit of bling but not too much and then in Body Fitness and Physique you can go wild with bling, it's fine. So even the bikinis we wear are different like the bikinis in Fitness are shiny so in Beach Bikini they shouldn't be shiny. In Fitness it must be shiny but just a bit and then the Body Fitness division and others need to be blingy (Pamella)

It is evident how the different divisions in which these women compete, place more emphasis on showing femininity through make-up, jewellery and accessories the more muscular the division requires female athletes to be. Basically, all the divisions require the female athletes to “be very feminine on stage and not carry out any bodybuilding stances” (IFBB, 2016c:1). Failure to do so will mean being marked down. As can be deduced, the IFBB in its judging criteria, judges female participants not only on their muscularity but also on their femininity. This is indicative of the nature of bodybuilding, that as a sport it enables women to forge new meanings of femininity but contradicts itself because bodybuilding competitions require female athletes to perform their gender through the wearing of jewellery and make-up. This policing of women's bodies possibly also aims to show female bodybuilders that even though they are bodybuilders and with bodybuilding being a male domain, they are still females and should adorn themselves as such to prevent a misunderstanding of their sexuality which is discussed below.

4.8. Misunderstood sexuality

Female bodybuilders often face criticism because their bodies do not meet idealized cultural or religious standards of femininity. All the participants shared how they have received criticism from friends, church people and sometimes even family. Nonhlanhla explained how she had received criticism from her Pastor's wife at church because she had cut her hair to almost bald and her Pastor's wife started to question her sexuality.

...our black community is so dumb. I'm a born again Christian. You know those people they teach us that you must know yourself that you are unique and you're not the same as the next person. When God created you He just created you to be yourself. But when you are yourself they have a problem. Maybe my pastor understands me now and is modernised but others they will ask you. You see there's one woman who recently told me she thinks I must decrease now. And now I've started cutting my hair. I cut all my hair coz I lost my hairline after doing braids. So she's like "can you see what your body looks like?, the next thing you're cutting your hair. Are you sure you're straight?". And at that time I'm wearing a pencil skirt and heels...
(Nonhlanhla)

Within many Christian contexts, lesbianism or homosexuality is condemned. Nonhlanhla knows that she is 'straight' and defends her heterosexuality by saying she was wearing a pencil skirt and heels. Evidently this is her understanding of heterosexual markers and because she was wearing these clothes, her sexuality should not be doubted. This is a problematic understanding as it possibly implies that a woman cannot be lesbian and still be able to wear heels and pencil skirts.

The black female bodybuilder's gender and sexuality is misunderstood both on a daily basis and on days nearing competition time. The female bodybuilder at competition time with diminished body fat and defined muscle portrays an ambiguous sexuality. As Felkar states, "without the usual levels of body fat, diminished breast size (sometimes eliminated altogether) and ceased menstruation, the female bodybuilder no longer adheres to the biomedical markers of a cis-gendered woman. The absence of the physiological characteristics paired with the unfeminine attributes of a female bodybuilder (wanting to grow muscles, desire to lift weights etc) facilitates a larger sense of gender ambiguity (2012:45). Following up on the above quote, it is important to note how bodybuilding and its demands of the body during competition have an impact on the reproductive health of the black female bodybuilders; often affecting their menstrual cycles. This theme is discussed below.

4.9. Reproductive Health

Reproductive health is an important aspect of competitive female bodybuilding. This is due to factors such as Amenorrhea which often affects female bodybuilders during competition time because insufficient nutrition and intense training possibly means a halt in their menstrual cycles. In many instances, whilst trying to keep fit and healthy through their participation in bodybuilding, their actions often tamper with their reproductive health. Another important factor is the decision made by some female bodybuilders to not have children as well as the reasons for such a decision. The participants were questioned on their own opinions of having children taking into consideration the sport they are involved in. These factors are discussed in greater detail below.

4.9.1. Competition Preparation

For these black female bodybuilders, “bodybuilding is more than a mere activity. It becomes a thought process and a lifestyle” (Roussel and Griffet, 2000:131). The participants described their experiences during the process of preparing for bodybuilding competitions, often referred to as ‘Comp Prep’. They were all in agreement of how taxing it was on their bodies as well as how time became so important because their days revolved around being at gym, sometimes training twice or three times a day in between their work schedules and other commitments. As Keri described it:

You're always tired, you're always grumpy because of the carbs. Obviously you know if you don't eat your carbs you're always grumpy. You have to train twice a day, that is tiring. For me the worst part is I work, I study and then gym. I have to gym twice I don't have a choice. I have to gym twice so I'm always tired, I don't get time to spend with my friends. I lost a lot of friends because of this which I don't think it's a bad thing... (Keri)

Nonhlanhla described the disciplining of the body that occurs through having several similar meals a day.

You have those six meals. You eat the same thing again and again. There's this fat burner called Clen-it plays with your moods. You see if I take it maybe after gym, by the time I get to Pinetown I feel like crying for no reason. You become irritable, I don't know why...These people are eating...you see when you're on diet you crave even for Niknaks, something you don't usually crave. And then a month before competition-all these six meals have a mixture of everything including carbs everyday-there's something called carb cycling, for two days you

don't eat carbs, one day you eat carbs. It's very hard for me since I'm an instructor. Carbs give me energy. You're always tired, it's total torture. And then three weeks before competition you don't eat carbs at all. And then three days before competition you don't drink water as you're used to. You're usually encouraged to drink eight glasses of water, but the whole day you drink maybe one litre and you sip the water because you're trying to drain water out of your muscles. It's nice two days before competition because you can eat whatever you want to eat. You eat carbs-that's how you trick the body (Nonhlanhla)

The period of competition preparation emphasises the notion of the government of the body and the body as a project that is continuously worked on through disciplinary measures. These disciplinary measures being intensified training and diet programmes (Shilling, 2003; Turner, 2008). The intense training and diet are often quite strenuous on the body and the results of this are irregular menstrual cycles.

4.9.2. Amenorrhea

All the participants attested to knowing that competition preparation often resulted in Amenorrhea on female athletes but not all had experienced this. Nonhlanhla explained how low body fat levels caused irregularities in menstrual cycles.

When your body fat percentage is less than 15% it plays around with your periods. Sometimes you don't go at all because your body fat percentage is low. But immediately you stop dieting, it goes back to normal (Nonhlanhla)

Pamella also attested to experiencing this due to the types of foods eaten during competition preparation.

It does because again you eat greens, fish, greens, fish. So your body doesn't get all the nutrients that it needs. So sometimes with me I had my normal ones and then the following two weeks I just had drops, two weeks imagine. It was so frustrating but off season it was regular (Pamella)

When questioned if the irregular menstrual cycle worries her in any way, Sihle responded:

It doesn't worry me you know...that's where we become stupid...you know if you love something you don't care if it harms you or what. Coz at that time I know that I'm not pregnant

it's just that my periods have stopped and they will start again when the time comes. Yeah so it doesn't worry me even a bit (Sihle)

It appears that all the participants have accepted Amenorrhea as a normal aspect of the sport. They were not worried about the health implications because they believed that after the competition period, their menstrual cycles would be regular again. Their pursuit of muscle is at the expense of their reproductive health. They do not consider the consequences of possibly not being able to bear children in the future.

4.9.3. Having children and bodybuilding

Often, women who have been exposed to bodybuilding take a decision not to have children. The participants were asked if they felt the same way but surprisingly their view was that one can always go back to bodybuilding after giving birth. Pamella has one child and Sihle has two children and both of them were of the view that having children does not destroy one's prospects of engaging in bodybuilding in the future. In fact, Pamella confessed that she often thinks about having a second child.

I won't lie I have thought about it-I have thought about it coz I'm like okay fine God blessed me with a healthy baby girl so two? So I'm like which is the right time for me to fall pregnant off season? You think about those things even though they sound stupid. Coz I'm like, "ooh another baby?". That means on those two years I won't compete? (Pamella)

Nonhlanhla, Keri and Nosipho did not have children but they all confessed that they would love to have children in the future. Nosipho said:

So I am looking forward to having children when I'm married. I'd love maybe three of them or two... (Nosipho)

However, they did acknowledge that staying in shape was difficult, which was probably why some women decided not to have children. Nosipho said:

I would say it's a personal thing. It's hard to be in shape. I was in a show 2/3 weeks ago and that body that I had and the body that I have now is something way different. So people get attached to that look and they don't wanna mess their body but then it's because we don't know. Some it's a personal choice not to have children. I used to grow up and say I ain't having no child, I'm not having no man telling me what to do and look now I wanna be married and have kids (Nosipho)

Keri did not agree with the decision to not have children as she knew most of the women she competed with, wanted to have children if they did not already have them.

Most of the girls we compete with on stage 70%, I can say 70%. The ones I compete with in my line-up, those who doesn't have kids they're planning to have kids. Unless if we don't know if you're straight or not. Yeah but most of them are planning to have kids, some they do have kids (Keri)

She is of the opinion that women who do not want to have children make that decision because they are not 'straight' meaning that they are possibly homosexual. This is a problematic reasoning but is also evidence of the engendering process that categorises women into specific gender roles. As a result, women grow up knowing that by virtue of their gender, they should desire to have children and women who do not want children cannot possibly be heterosexual. These are many of the experiences that black female bodybuilders go through in their engagement in bodybuilding. As black women in a predominantly white dominated sport, they also experienced the racial politics, as in all white dominated sports (Douglas, 2012). This is discussed below.

4.10. Racial Politics of bodybuilding

Of the participants, Nosipho has competed longer than the rest so she was more familiar with the racial politics. She described her experiences of competing with white women as follows:

It's not competing with white girls only, it's competing with the industry coz the industry is white-dominated. On the female side and judges side. And then on the men it's black men that dominate and they cannot be denied anything. So you will find that no matter how good you are sometimes you are not noticed. Which is a sad thing at the end of the day because you're trying to motivate other girls and show them that you also can do. And what I find is that when you're amongst other white female athletes some are welcoming, some you get put in your place as if like, "you're not supposed to be doing this, it's only for us". So there'll be criticism- "how are you affording to do this when you can't afford to have A, B, C and D?. So that is also there which is sad but then you can't change people's mindsets coz it also goes back to culture- what you teach your child is what they will grow up with. So I don't blame them for how they are, to me it's just to be narrow minded because at this day and age? Come on. We're passed that era. So the acceptance of young black women trying to be in the industry is still not on. I kid you not (Nosipho)

From Nosipho's experience it can be gathered that black women are still fighting for their place within the sport of bodybuilding. Their participation in a white dominated sport means that they have to continuously fight for their recognition and acceptance in the sport (Douglas, 2012). As Delia Douglas points out, black women within the arena of sport, face an intersectional struggle of not only being ridiculed within their communities but also face racism within the sporting arena in which they are training and competing in. Basically, black women "who dare to offer different representations of what Black women should be and what they should do, risk being ostracized and ridiculed" (Douglas, 2012:132). It is surprising that in this day and age race would be a factor but as Douglas states, "race continues to matter in so far as it remains a symbol of difference, identity, and inequality" (2012:130). Nonhlanhla who was relatively new to bodybuilding also mentioned how the world of bodybuilding is dominated by white people. She said:

Okay when you step on stage that world is full of whites-it's full of them (whites). I don't completely know the inside politics because I just started, I'm still going to see but it's white dominated. Maybe for my line-up...Anyways most girls don't do my line-up..Body Fitness and Physique-it's the girls that are training very hard. Mostly they do Beach Bikini, Fitness Bikini-it's them who are complaining the most that they're not treated fairly (Nonhlanhla)

From Nonhlanhla's view, it is clear that there is a certain degree of racism within the sport seeing as her friends in the Beach Bikini and Fitness Bikini divisions complain about unfair treatment. Nosipho was also concerned with the lack of sponsorships for and recognition of black women in the sport; that it does not receive the limelight it deserves.

...But then the sport is not put into the limelight that it deserves because you are judged according to your fitness ability. It's not like soccer you can be chubby and still kick a ball but they get sponsors left right and centre-but we don't (Nosipho)

All the participants highlighted that one of the reasons why they still continued engaging in the bodybuilding is because they want to motivate more black women to participate in the sport. Nosipho mentioned how black men dominate the sport and motivated other black men to take up the sport. Therefore, the participants wanted to encourage other black women to participate in bodybuilding, so they too can be in this sport and hopefully challenge the status quo as the black men have done. Nosipho said:

...As the five ladies that I've mentioned, the gear that we're going with is have one black woman in each line-up. There are so many line-ups from Beach Bikini, Fitness all the way to

Bodybuilding. So we try and have girls somewhere because I was the only girl and you stand out...Coz like I've always seen there's actually no black girls like who's actually doing it. So I was like "you know if I'm black I would be chilled" but then others who want to try this will be like but there's no black girl so I guess it's not for us you know (Nosipho)

Nosipho and her friends, whom she mentioned are the only black women from KZN who are competitive bodybuilders, try to change the system from the inside. Whereas others would leave the sport because of the discrimination, they decided to stay and influence other black women who may be interested in participating in bodybuilding. In an article on the presence of Serena and Venus Williams in a white dominated sport such as tennis, Delia Douglas points out that "the existence of two black women in a predominantly White space does not automatically signal the achievement of racial equality and the end of racism. Their presence illustrates how White racial hegemony is continuously-and very publicly-struggled on and over" (2012:140). From the experiences of the participants it is evident that they too find themselves in such a dilemma from failure of being accepted and recognised within the sport.

Nonhlanhla mentioned how, as black female bodybuilders, they are not provided with inside information prior to competing on stage. She highlighted how she had only recently known that there was a white woman who provided posing classes and seminars for female bodybuilders two weeks before going on stage. She said that as black female bodybuilders:

We have not been taught well. So we take all our information from here and there and go, but I think the other ones I think they have seminars that they attend where-I just heard maybe yesterday or the day before yesterday that every beginning of the year there's IFBB guys who have seminars where they tell you that in this category this is what we're looking for. We don't have access to those things...Most of us we don't know and you can look good but if you can't pose, it's a waste of time. Some of them run posing clinics...You see Nosipho joined RiShape... (Nonhlanhla)

Their non-exposure to the posing clinics could also be an attempt to marginalize black women from the sport. Nonhlanhla pointed out how her friend, Nosipho, who has been competing longer than her has faced struggles within the sport and has never been placed in the competitions. However, on getting herself a coach, a white coach, she recently placed second in a competition a few weeks ago. This is evidence of the racial dynamics within the sport. The marginalization of black women in bodybuilding appears to make the statement that black female bodies are unwelcome in the sport of bodybuilding.

4.10.1. The Black female body in bodybuilding

Based on the judging criteria of the bodybuilding competitions as described earlier (4.7.1. and 4.7.2.), it would appear that certain body types are not considered or catered for in the competitions. Nonhlanhla discussed the comments she received from the judges during her first competition in the Body Fitness division. She said:

Uhhmm when I competed, I find out that in my division my upper body was fine-on point-front and back. But because I'm a black woman, my thighs and my butt (yeah my lower body) still needed a lot of work so that's what I'm working on now... (Nonhlanhla)

Nonhlanhla's body shape is one that identifies with the historical figure of Sarah Baartman (Gordon-Chipembere, 2011) meaning that like Baartman, her body fat is distributed more in her lower body with wide hips and a protruding gluteus maximus. Her genetic distribution of fat in her lower body would be called 'steatopygia' as was referred to in the case of Baartman (Mastamet-Mason, 2014). However, these days this fat distribution to the lower body is not considered a medical condition. The excess fat distributed to the lower body makes it difficult for Nonhlanhla when preparing for her competitions. Her lower body takes a long time to lose the fat and show defined muscle as is required by the judges in the Body Fitness division of the competition. She described this experience as follows:

Now that I've concentrated at the gym I realise that the lower body is very difficult to build for a female even if you train it three times a week, it takes its toll (Nonhlanhla)

Nonhlanhla's supposedly stubborn lower body fat and her disciplining of her lower body, could be likened to the disciplining of Sarah Baartman's body. The strict judging criteria of bodybuilding competitions do not take into consideration the genetic body fat distribution of some black women's bodies since the judging criteria requires balanced and proportional bodies with no wide hips or protruding gluteus maximus and in which the upper body is in direct proportion to the lower body. It can, thus, be concluded that bodybuilding competitions and their judging criteria do not cater for the majority of black women whose bodies mirror that of Sarah Baartman. Black women who want to engage in the sport but have bodies similar to that of Baartman, need to control their wide hips and buttocks. These are some of the factors that black female bodybuilders have to negotiate or mediate between when they engage in bodybuilding.

4.11. Mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding

With all the experiences of their engagement in bodybuilding and in the face of existing religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies, black women still decide to continue with bodybuilding. In order to continue their engagement in bodybuilding, they often have the task of negotiating or mediating between their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies with how they conceptualise their bodies and also with how they understand what their religion and culture says about their bodies. Nonhlanhla discussed how upon seeing the weights area at gym for the first time, she fell in love with bodybuilding, however she had issues with being 'naked' on stage. She said:

I fell in love-I wanted to be on stage one day but there was that fear that I don't like walking around naked. But when I step on stage...You see if something is within you-you forget about everything. When I was going to compete I went and did my bikini but I still had that thought that I'm gonna go there naked-half naked (Nonhlanhla)

Evidently, Nonhlanhla had to negotiate firstly her understanding of 'nudity' or 'nakedness'. She had to mediate her socialised teachings of how she ought to carry her body as a black woman in order to be able to go and compete on stage.

As discussed on section 4.5.2., Keri explained how her culture and religion were the same and were not opposed to her engagement in bodybuilding. As a result, she had been a catalogue model before getting into bodybuilding, which had also required her to be dressed in a bikini. She explained:

I used to be a catalogue model, I used to model on stage wearing different things; bikinis, underwear, all those things. So I don't mind going on stage to a full audience as long as I enjoy myself (Keri)

She further explained how, from her view and since her Christian religion and Zulu culture were not against showing one's body as a black Zulu woman, she felt that going on stage in a bikini was the same as being topless at a Zulu traditional ceremony.

Like when I'm back home as a Zulu maybe when we do traditional Zulu ceremonies, we wear things like isidwaba (a skirt made out of cow skin), you don't wear anything on top. The only thing you wear is a beaded necklace (pointing to her neck), I've forgotten the name. So it's like

it's kinda the same thing the way I see it...The same thing as going on stage wearing only a bikini (Keri)

Although all of the participants were Zulu, Christian women, their socialisation within the same religion and culture was different. Keri did not have to mediate between her religious and cultural conceptions of her body while the others had to mediate between them. To facilitate their continued engagement in the sport, these women have developed their own ways of interpreting and understanding what their religious and cultural beliefs say about their bodies, as is discussed below.

4.11.1. Liberatory hermeneutic

All the participants found ways of justifying their engagement in bodybuilding although existing religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies were said to speak a different language. On being questioned about what the Christian religious teachings were about women's bodies, Nosipho responded:

Well the only teaching that I know is your body is a temple of God, that's what I live by. And other people would read it differently but to me it means that God gave you life-that's why it is His temple coz He gave you life. Others would say it means you mustn't walk dressed like this or put this on yourself (Nosipho)

She acknowledged that other people would interpret this teaching differently to her, but this was her interpretation of the bible when it came to women's bodies. Nonhlanhla also found her own way of interpreting what the bible was understood to say about women's bodies. She believed her engagement in bodybuilding to be in line with biblical teachings. This is evidenced in what she said below:

I think I'm in line with that. You need to take care of God's temple, right? So you are taking care of your body. I don't think it (engagement in bodybuilding and religious conceptions of women's bodies) clashes. I don't know maybe it's just my way of understanding because I'm into this thing but I don't think so. The way I see it and from my perspective, since God created me it's Him who gave me this body, it's Him who gives me power to train, it's Him who gives me strength so I think by doing what I'm doing I'm praising God thanking Him for giving me the strength that he gave me and giving me the body that I have. So I don't see a clash. I see myself showing the Lord's beauty. When He says he created a woman, He created something beautiful like what you when a person is going to compete or what you see when I'm naked

and you say, "Wow you have abs". Yes that's the Lord's beauty. That's what He wants
(Nonhlanhla)

From her understanding, her engagement in bodybuilding gives praise to God and it is what God wants. It is clear that she has developed her own way of interpreting the bible, against what the general society understands what the bible says about women's bodies. In this way, the participants have developed a liberatory hermeneutic of interpreting the text in the Bible. They have developed a liberating interpretation of how their bodies have been conceptualised religiously and culturally; one that facilitates their continued engagement in bodybuilding and one that shapes the discourse about their bodies in new and significant ways.

4.12. Conclusion

This chapter first discussed the motivations for the participant's engagement in bodybuilding as well as the religious and cultural conceptions of their own bodies. It then discussed the various experiences of the black female bodybuilders within their journeys in bodybuilding, from their gendered experiences to reproductive health concerns. Lastly, it focussed on how the black female bodybuilders experienced the mediation between their existing religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies and their continued engagement in bodybuilding. The next chapter will provide a theoretical discussion of the findings, focussing primarily on religious and cultural conceptions of black women's bodies as determinants of how black women's bodies should be shaped. It will also examine why black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the findings of the qualitative data that was produced through the in-depth interviews with the five participants. All the participants had individual experiences of criticism about their engagement in bodybuilding, either from a religious or cultural perspective. These criticisms were due to them wearing bikinis on stage which from a religious perspective was criticised since Christian teachings propagate that women should cover their bodies (Bacchiocchi, 1995; Talton, 2009; Batisai, 2015). The cultural criticism that they received can be attributed to Zulu cultural preferences where women should not build muscle because they will look like men and that black Zulu women should have a curvaceous, full-figured African female body as this was more desirable to their male counterparts and a requirement for marriageable Zulu women (Ogana and Ojong, 2012; 2013). The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical explanation for why the participants, in light of the existing religious and cultural conceptions of their muscular bodies as well as their personal experiences as black women in bodybuilding, choose to mediate between the two spaces in the way that they do. Why do they not just reject the religion and cultural practices so that they do not feel the necessity to mediate between what their religion and culture says about their bodies with what they think about their bodies and their engagement with bodybuilding?

The first half of this chapter presents a discussion of the participants' religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies as well as their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding. This will be explained through the use of the Gender Performativity and Intersectionality frameworks. The latter half of the chapter is a discussion on the participants' mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their engagement in bodybuilding leading to their adoption of a Liberatory hermeneutic which was already introduced in the previous chapter.

5.2. Resistance to shaping women's bodies

From the responses provided by the participants of the reasons that led to their engagement in bodybuilding, it can be gathered that it was partly due to their resistance against normative ideas of how the black female body should be shaped. According to the literature (Duff and Hon, 1984; Roussel and Griffet, 2000; Felkar, 2012; Worthen and Baker, 2016) it is clear that in the building or the shaping of the bodies, muscles are gendered and understood as male. Keri and Sihle explained how they both had desires to have bodies that look like men's bodies (see

section 4.3.). This indicates that although they may both identify with their biological sex of being female, at a certain level they do not identify with the requirements of their gender in terms of the size and shape of their muscles. Keri's not wanting to be like a girl and Sihle's desire to have a body that looks like a man portrays how this is a resistance against how women are expected to act out their gender and also coincides with the view that "a feeling of empowerment is entailed in transgressing the traditionally masculine domain of bodybuilding and granting herself the attributes usually associated with men: strength, stamina, muscularity and control" (Johnston, 1996:334). This links to the idea of gender performativity in that, as Butler states, "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (1990:9). By virtue of them building the muscles of their bodies, they may be identifying with the "strength, stamina and muscularity" (Johnston, 1996:334) of a man but they also acknowledge their biological positioning as women. This reflects the fluid nature of gender as espoused by Butler (1990).

Pamella also made reference to the fact that she received criticism from practising her stage walk and poses at the gym while dressed in her bikini. The idea that "gender is culturally constructed" (Butler, 1990:9) is seen in reality in her scenario. Gender is culturally constructed in the sense that Zulu culture prescribed a curvaceous, full-figured female body as desirable (Ogana and Ojong, 2013; Mastamet-Mason, 2014). As a result of the cultural construction of gender, it, therefore, stipulates how black Zulu women ought to shape their bodies as well as how they should dress. However, the fact that Pamella dresses in her bikini and does her posing practice indicates that what is culturally constructed is not necessarily static or fixed and can be challenged.

Sihle also experienced similar critique from the older men at church while the older women seemed to support her engagement in bodybuilding. Since intersectionality is understood as "the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity and other social divisions" (Yuval-Davis, 2006:193), Sihle's experience is an example of how religion and gender may converge in the oppression of women. It is also indicative of how religious conceptions of women's bodies are often patriarchal and often used as constraints to prevent women, like Sihle, from practising bodily agency. As Sibanda (2014) explains, "women seem to be suffering double oppression, from religious misperceptions and male dominance under the guise of religious norms" (2014:1). The black men who criticised Sihle, by virtue of their male dominance, determine how women's bodies should be shaped. As a result of these interacting systems of

oppression, the black female bodybuilders become marginalized and are without a voice because they are dictated to on how they should utilise their bodies (Crenshaw, 1991).

In many instances, the cultural criticism received by the participants was that they should shape their bodies in line with cultural prescriptions of a desirable Zulu woman. Pamella explained (see section 4.5.2.) that in as much as she built muscle in her body, she also ensured that she did not lose the feminine markers that made her attractive such as curves. Evidently, she policed how far she could go with building muscles without being considered unattractive. Her policing of her body can be linked to Judith Butler's perception that those who fail to perform their gender face the consequence of punishment (Butler, 1988). As is discussed by Mitchell, Moletsane and Pithouse, "with the resurgence and sometimes reinvention of conservative patriarchal values and norms and the concomitant heteronormative discourse governing sex and sexuality, girls and women have been at the receiving end of the wrath of some self-appointed guardians of 'culture' in our society" (2012:4). This is caused by the religious and cultural association of women's bodies with uncontrollability and deserving of regulation. As a result, "these 'cultural' policewomen and men often use dress as the reasons for censoring women and girls' expression of their identity by publicly policing and punishing those who are seen to be defying the 'cultural' norms" (Mitchell, Moletsane and Pithouse, 2012:4). This is seen in the case of Sihle, Pamella and the other participants as the criticism they received outside of the bodybuilding subculture about wearing bikinis and showing their bodies was motivated by their apparent transgression of 'cultural' norms.

As an addition to Pamella's view, Sihle stated on page 38 that she did not feel that her body mirrored the body of an ideal Zulu woman in relation to how she had shaped it. She explained how she did not possess the breasts, hips, bum and thick legs that were supposedly attractive on a Zulu woman. Instead she had replaced these body parts with muscles. She also stated that she does not find this problematic because this is how she desires her body to be. Without the feminine, attractive markers Sihle becomes transgressive. As Johnston explains, "female bodybuilders also become especially transgressive, 'unnatural' and dangerous when they reduce their body fat to accentuate muscles, before competing. As a consequence, their breasts reduce in size (and in some cases are eliminated) and menstruation ceases. Without recognisable signifiers of femininity (breasts), the female bodybuilder becomes 'dangerous' and transgressive (1996:333). However, it is in Sihle's transgressive acts that gender transformation can be found. According to Butler, "if the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender

transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style” (2004:901). If gender is dependent on the same repetitive acts, this implies that it is not fixed. Therefore, a subversion and transformation of gender can be realised through ceasing to perform those prescribed repetitive acts and performing new acts. Sihle’s building muscles at the expense of losing the culturally prescribed attractive feminine markers, can be viewed as possibly paving the way to a potential transformation and subversion of gender as it is normatively understood. It is to the black female bodybuilder’s experiences of engaging in bodybuilding that I now turn.

5.3. Experiences of engaging in bodybuilding

The performative nature of bodybuilding is evident in the female bodybuilder’s experiences of engaging in bodybuilding. Sihle, for example, explained how she preferred wearing pants, sneakers and vests on a daily basis but the stage requirements at bodybuilding competitions were for her to dress in a bikini, heels and make-up (see section 4.6.). As much as she identified with being female, the bodybuilding requirements of emphasized femininity on stage were problematic for her as she had to take on a role and wear clothing and adornment that she was not used to wearing. Butler explains, “gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1990:179). Sihle is exemplary of this behaviour. Her moving in between masculine and feminine roles indicates that gender cannot be understood as being stable.

This instability in gender roles is exhibited in the case of Nosipho. Gender as a construction also constructs certain behaviours that appropriately indicate femininity and masculinity. However, Nosipho is of the view that being feminine can be made up of what is understood as feminine and masculine behaviour. When she is lifting weights at the gym, the way she trains is perceived as ‘tomboy’ behaviour yet when she is outside gym in a dress and heels she is perceived as a ‘diva’. A ‘diva’ is defined as “a famous female opera singer” (Soanes, 2002:256). However, in this context, it was used to mean that Nosipho exuded confidence and stood out. This coincides with the idea that “when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one (Butler, 1990:10). Since one’s

gender is not dependent on one's sex, this means that one can perform what is understood as feminine and masculine behaviours irrespective of their sex. This view disfigures the idea of gender and gender roles that are assigned to specific sexes because for Nosipho, everything that she contributes to her femininity.

The participants (in section 4.7.1. and 4.7.2.) also discussed the various divisions of the bodybuilding competitions as well as the judging requirements which stipulated that they show "femininity, complexion, hair and make-up, poise and grace" (IFBB, 2016a). Some of them shared how they were moved to other divisions because their bodies were too muscular for the original divisions they had decided to compete in. Of importance was the judging criteria which stipulated that female participants would be marked down if they posed like male bodybuilders or if their bodies showed signs of extreme muscularity that was not a requirement of their particular divisions (IFBB, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2016d). The participants were required to perform their gender as females. The different divisions also required that they place more emphasis on their femininity through feminine markers such as such as make-up, hair and jewellery. The more muscular a division required of the participants, the greater the need for emphasized femininity. This showed how their bodies were constantly policed to prevent them from going over their gender demarcations. However, this posed a question on the naturalization of gender. As Butler points out, "that culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism should be sign enough that on some level, there is a social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated" (Butler, 2004:908). If gender is not a performance but natural, there would not be so much emphasis placed on female bodybuilders on their level of musculature, hair and make-up during the competitions.

Nonhlanhla discussed in section 4.8. how she was criticised by her Pastor's wife about her supposedly extreme muscularity and her bald head which made her sexuality ambiguous; that maybe those were signs that she was a lesbian. This criticism proves that "all gender identity is performed or enacted" (Butler, 2004:900). As soon as one ceases to perform one's gender as prescribed, one's sexuality is questioned as in the case of Nonhlanhla. As Nguyen (2008) states, "in her display of masculinity on a woman's body, she demonstrates that masculinity is not the exclusive domain of men and reveals that the naturalized connection between masculinity and men's bodies to be up for renegotiation" (2008:676). In her embodiment of muscle on a female body, Nonhlanhla challenged the norm of what a Zulu Christian woman's body should look like. In the eyes of her pastor's wife she no longer complied with the idealized cultural and

religious standards of femininity and as a result, her sexuality was misunderstood. This shows that, “because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender” (Butler, 1988:420). Nonhlanhla’s appearance of a muscular body and bald head indicates the fluidity of gender and also shows that acts of gender can cease to be performed. Once ceased, what was known as female or male gender becomes non-existent.

On a sexual and reproductive health aspect, the participants described their process during competition preparation and the changes that happened to their bodies during this time (see section 4.9.). They explained how a calorie deficit and low energy levels during competition preparation often resulted in Amenorrhea, ceasing of their menstrual cycles. However, it did not appear as a health concern to them because they explained how they knew that this was only temporary and their menstrual cycles would be regular again in the days following the competition. The participants were all in agreement that having children would not prevent them from going back to bodybuilding. Keri, in section 4.9.3., confirmed that most of the women she competed with either had children or desired to have children. However, Keri was also of the view that any woman who did not want to have children was probably a lesbian or ‘not straight’ as she said. This view coincides with the idea of gender and nature; that since gender is perceived as natural, every female should, therefore, have a natural desire to have children. This is a problematic statement because it indicates how gender is understood in binaries of either female and male or feminine and masculine. As a result, behaviours are also gendered according to these binaries and anyone who deviates from the ‘norm’ is marginalized.

The participants also experienced racism in the sport of bodybuilding. Nosipho has been competing longer than the other participants and, therefore, reflected more on her experiences of racism (see section 4.10.). Nosipho mentioned that the bodybuilding industry was white dominated on both the sides of the judges and the participants. She also mentioned how most of the white women were unwelcoming of her and she was made to feel as if she does not belong in the sport. She was quite bewildered at how it was still a struggle to gain acceptance in the bodybuilding industry as a young black woman. She pointed out how the era of racism had long passed but racism still remained in the sport. As a result, black female bodybuilders have to continuously fight for recognition and acceptance in the sport, as Nosipho mentioned. This indicates that the presence of black women in a white-dominated sport does not necessarily mean the end of racial discrimination (Douglas, 2012). Hence, she and the other

four participants were the few black women who decided to engage in the sport. Instead of leaving the sport, they decided to transform the system from within (see section 4.10.).

Nonhlanhla also highlighted how, although she had recently entered the bodybuilding industry, she was already aware of the racial politics. She mentioned the unfair treatment that most black women who competed in the Beach Bikini and Fitness bikini divisions received. Most black women competed in these two divisions but struggled to get placed at competitions. As Nonhlanhla explained:

I have a friend she started competing a year before me-this one time she was, she dieted well everything was out-everything showed well but she didn't make it. She was too tiny than the other girls in her line-up. The next competition she bulked and didn't diet too much, she was too big. So you never know (Nonhlanhla)

She mentioned how her friend, Nosipho, who had been competing longer than her, had not placed as the judges said she was too tiny for her line-up. In the next competition Nosipho bulked up but was also not placed yet again because she was too big, according to the judges. Clearly there are attempts that aim to marginalize black women and this could possibly be done as an attempt to demotivate them from engaging in the sport, because as a white-dominated sport it had the potential to be discriminatory against black women (Douglas, 2012).

Nonhlanhla, in section 4.10., mentioned how as black women and from her experience they were not exposed to the posing clinics that were run by a white woman prior to the competitions. She explained how this white woman was affiliated to the IFBB and the posing clinics assisted in knowing how to walk and pose on stage yet they, as black women, did not have access to these posing clinics. She also discussed how Nosipho had recently placed second in a bodybuilding competition because she had joined RiShape, a white-managed online bodybuilding coach. The above may be possible reasons for black women not placing well in bodybuilding competitions. In the case of the participants in my study, their non-placement in the competitions may be attributed to them not having white coaches and not because they are not good enough. Consequently, as Crenshaw states, “black women continue to be judged by who they are, not by what they do” (1991:1280). These experiences of the participants show that in many instances they are not judged on whether or not they meet the bodybuilding judging criteria but are instead marginalized on the basis of their race. Their experiences of racism may also indicate that “as different groups move in to previously White-dominated spaces, new techniques of exclusion and marginalization are being employed in an effort to

regulate the opportunities and progress available to racialized minority groups” (Douglas, 2012:130). As more black women enter the sport, new methods to further marginalize and exclude them are enacted.

Of particular importance with regards to Nonhlanhla’s engagement in bodybuilding was her body type which had to be constantly disciplined in order to comply with the judging requirements of the sport. She explained how after her competition the judges had commented on her lower body being disproportionate to her upper body (see section 4.10.1.). Her lower body was also said to not be showing the required muscular definition as per the judging criteria of the Body Fitness division. This was a clear indication that the judging criteria of female bodybuilding competitions were inconsiderate of the genetic body fat distribution of black women whose bodies mirrored that of Sarah Baartman as was discussed earlier (see section 4.10.1.). In order for them to gain acceptance into and participate in the sport, they had to control their wide hips and buttocks. These judging requirements were possibly a further attempt at the marginalization and exclusion of black women from the sport of bodybuilding as Nosipho had explained that “the bodybuilding industry was white-dominated even on the judge’s side” (see section 4.10.).

All five of the participants in my study were friends and had “united because as a minority group, they all experienced the same struggles in the sport of bodybuilding” as women (gender) and as black Zulu people (race) (Crenshaw, 1991), as stated by Nosipho in section 4.10. They were also all in agreement that despite the racism they received, they continued engaging in bodybuilding in an attempt to motivate more black women to participate in the sport. As Sihle stated:

...I wish we could get more black girls who will join and have an understanding that if we talk about bodybuilding what are we talking about. And mostly this sport is for white people that’s why I wish more black people could join (Sihle)

Pamella was in agreement with Sihle and she said:

Like I said I want to break boundaries. It doesn’t mean bodybuilding is only done by whites, even black people can do it (Pamella)

They wanted to transform the status quo internally as the black male bodybuilders had done since they had also once been a minority group but were now dominating the sport on the male side. As Pamella explained:

We want to be a group (the female group) that dominated because with the black guys they also had experiences that fine they were small in number and then now all the guys now they're coming up because they're seeing the others that there is a possibility (Pamella)

Crenshaw states that black women often experience “double-discrimination-the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women” (Crenshaw, 1989:149). This is evident in the above experiences of the participants as the systems of oppression that they faced were either intersectional or they were merely oppressed for being black women. The above experiences of the black female bodybuilders point to the notion that “the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class” (Crenshaw, 1991:1242). As an interdisciplinary study that used an intersectional feminist framework, this study was focussed on exploring the lived experiences and perspectives of the black female bodybuilders as a marginalized group and placing them at the centre in order to liberate them from oppressive systems that perpetuated their subordination. Clearly “black women face subordination based on both race and gender” (Crenshaw, 1991:1270) but in the context of the participants, they were subordinated also because of their Christian religious and Zulu cultural affiliations. Despite their religious and cultural teachings and beliefs of womens’ bodies, the participants continued their engagement in bodybuilding. They were able to mediate between their religio-cultural conceptions of women’s bodies and their participation in bodybuilding as is discussed below.

5.4. Mediation between religio-cultural conceptions of women’s bodies and their engagement in bodybuilding

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s model of a Feminist Critical hermeneutics of liberation (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1997) is useful in understanding why the participants mediated between their religio-cultural conceptions of women’s bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they did. The data produced from the phenomenological interviews with the five participants revealed that the participants arrived at a liberatory hermeneutic when it came to their religious beliefs. Below is an explanation of what a feminist critical hermeneutic of liberation is as well as how this framework is useful in providing an explanation for the findings in this study.

5.4.1. Feminist Critical hermeneutic for liberation

A feminist hermeneutic may be defined as, “a reading of the Biblical text in the light of the oppressive structures of patriarchal society” (Scholer, 1987:408). This means that when a critical feminist interpretation for liberation is applied to the biblical texts, then the reader “reads the bible with the lenses and in the contexts of wo/men struggling for changing patterns of oppression which are inscribed in religious, cultural and societal texts and institutions” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1997:226). The context and experiences of women are placed as being of paramount importance when it comes to the interpretations of biblical texts. This is because Schüssler Fiorenza is aware of and acknowledges that “all biblical texts are formulated in androcentric language and reflect patriarchal social structures” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990:15) meaning that the texts are patriarchal and prioritise men at the expense of women.

As part of the model of a critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation, Schüssler Fiorenza developed a four-stage hermeneutic which makes up this model. This four-stage hermeneutic comprises of a hermeneutic of suspicion, a hermeneutic of proclamation, a hermeneutic of remembrance as well as a hermeneutic of creative actualization. As David Scholer further explains, “In presenting her position, Fiorenza develops what she calls a four-stage hermeneutic: (1) the hermeneutic of suspicion, which questions all androcentric and patriarchal texts; (2) the hermeneutic of proclamation, which takes the texts that are supportive of women and proclaims them; (3) the hermeneutic of remembrance, the retrieval or recalling of those things that will be a word of hope to women; (4) the hermeneutic of creative actualization, by which she means to take what one can learn from the Bible as a feminist thinker and then recreate or re-envision what it means to be a woman in the Christian tradition today” (Scholer, 1987:411). These four stages outlined the feminist process of interpreting a particular biblical or any other cultural texts (Scholer, 1987). Since the participants were not biblical scholars, they did not follow Schüssler Fiorenza’s approach step-by-step or in its entirety. However, the ways in which they chose to interpret and understand religious and cultural conceptions of women’s bodies in relation to their own bodies, is indicative that they did use certain elements of Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist hermeneutic for liberation model in developing their own interpretations and understandings as is discussed below.

5.4.2. Life affirming vs Life denying interpretations

When questioned about how women’s bodies were conceptualised according to their Christian and Zulu teachings, all of them were in agreement that women are encouraged to cover their

bodies because it was considered ‘unholy’ to show their bodies. Having said that though, they continued their engagement in bodybuilding although the competitions required them to be dressed in bikinis on stage. As explained earlier, they found new ways of interpreting their religious teachings and justifications of their continued engagement in bodybuilding in spite of their religious and cultural conceptions of black women’s bodies. However, the religious and cultural conceptions of how women’s bodies ought to be covered, did influence the participants even as they competed on stage during their bodybuilding competitions. This is evident by what Pamella explains:

It does...yeah it does clash a bit coz what you believe in and what you’re doing even though what you’re doing it’s only for one day so it does clash a bit with your religion. Because I believe that you don’t have to show off-like wearing short clothes, show off your skin and show that you’re sexy or something. So the more you cover, the better with me. And then when I’m on stage like I want to...It’s a bit...it does fit a bit, my belief and what I’m doing but I believe that you know what-I’m not doing wrong, I’m just showing my passion, fitness. I’ve worked hard for certain weeks so I need to show it off on the day. Like I just wanna show it off and then go backstage and wear my gown, I’ll be fine (Pamella)

Evidently, Pamella’s Christian view about women’s bodies and how they should be covered, influence her even when she is on stage. She is conscious that her body is not covered but she justifies this by saying that immediately she comes off stage, she goes backstage to wear her gown in order to cover up. Her belief in the necessity to cover her body as a woman and immediately wearing a gown when she is backstage at bodybuilding competitions struck a balance between her religious beliefs and her engagement in a sport that could possibly be interpreted as going against her religious beliefs. When she is not on stage competing, she believes in maintaining her Christian religious views by saying that for her the more one covers, the better from a religious perspective. Interestingly though, none of the participants proposed to challenge the biblical texts about covering their bodies, they accept them as they are and only justify showing their bodies on stage when competing. This points to the idea of the bible being authoritative in the lives of the participants. The bible becomes authoritative because “of the unique witness it bears to God’s self-revelation” (Matera, 2007:99). Those who hold the bible in such high esteem, therefore, do not question the actual written text of the bible and instead question the oppressive interpretations given to the written text. The covering of women’s bodies has often been based on the ideas of the sacred body which should only be seen by one’s husband and the uncontrollable sexually unclean female body (Bacchiocchi,

1995; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011; Batisai, 2015; Settler and Engh, 2015). All these religiously motivated teachings are attempts at controlling and policing women's bodies because they supposedly lack moral restraint and are sexually impure (Talton, 2009; Bakare-Yusuf, 2011). Not questioning the biblical text possibly enabled the participants to mediate between their religio-cultural conceptions of their bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the ways that they did.

While the participants had the option to reject their religion and culture on the basis that it was oppressive to them, they did not. This goes back to what Nonhlanhla said in section 4.5. that "her religion was 99% influential in her life and that she got guidance from the bible in everything she did". The other participants were just as unshaken in their religious stance as was Nonhlanhla. Their holding of the bible and their religion in high esteem indicates that they understood the bible as authoritative and, therefore, could not reject the religious text. As Nadar explains, "Most, if not all, Christians would say that the Bible does indeed have an authoritative role to play in the lives of Christians. The challenge lies in how we articulate, navigate and negotiate that authority" (Nadar, 2009:142). Holding the bible as authority can be problematic on women as this has a potential to marginalize them. It is, therefore, necessary for women to negotiate their way around the authority that they give to the bible in their lives in order to emerge with interpretations that give life to them, as the participants did. As a result, they chose to reject the dominant interpretations that sought to constrain them. For example, Nonhlanhla and Nosipho both stated their "born again Christian" status right at the beginning of the interviews which is an indication of how much their religion contributed to who they were. Nosipho said: *...I'm a child of God* (Nosipho) while Nonhlanla said: *...I'm a born again Christian* (Nonhlanhla)

In section 4.11.1, Nosipho reflected on how her Christian religion described the body as a temple of God. However, she was aware and stated that other people would probably interpret that verse differently and that perhaps the dominant interpretation was that one should not be dressed in a certain manner. Basically, in reaching her interpretation, she approached the dominant interpretation, not the text, with a hermeneutic of suspicion and interpreted this by placing her lived experience at the forefront of her interpretation. This is exemplary of the view that "every reader reads from her or his context, either explicitly and meaningfully or implicitly and misleadingly" (Draper, 2015:15). It is in line with the understanding that "some have continued to use the authority of the Bible to support discriminatory practices against women" (Casimir, Chukwuelobe and Ugwu, 2014:168). Nosipho therefore saw it necessary to interpret

the biblical texts in ways that would give life to her (Casimir, Chukwuelobe and Ugwu, 2014). She realised that the dominant interpretation of the body being the temple of God and, therefore, needing to be covered, was oppressive to her with regards to her bodily agency and within her context as a black female bodybuilder. She understood that these were attempts to police and control her body through the use of biblical teachings which she found oppressive (Bakare-Yusuf, 2011; Batisai, 2015; Settler and Engh, 2015). Consequently, she decided to interpret the verse in a way that would liberate her and her use of her body. This indicates how biblical texts and their interpretations “can either be abused to oppress the less powerful, or used to liberate or empower them” (Farisani, 2014:222). Nosipho acknowledged the different uses of biblical interpretations and liberated herself through this acknowledgement.

Nonhlanhla went as far as to say that by taking care of her body through engaging in bodybuilding, she was doing what God wants (see section 4.11.1.). However, in her justification of her engagement in bodybuilding, she also acknowledged that the reason she understood her engagement in bodybuilding as being in line with religious conceptions about women’s bodies was possibly influenced by the fact that she was already a participant in the sport. In this way, she acknowledged her social location and was aware that one’s experiences influenced the ways in which one interpreted religious texts. This coincides with Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical feminist hermeneutic as it points to the necessity of starting with women’s experiences leading to liberating interpretations (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1987; 1997; 1990). As female bodybuilders in a sport that require them to wear bikinis and reveal their bodies on stage, they placed themselves first before the interpretations they adopted. Bodybuilding is a sport that they love and in as much as the religious interpretations of biblical texts about their bodies stipulated that they should cover their bodies, they saw it necessary to justify their continued engagement in bodybuilding in the face of these religious interpretations. However, they did not look into the text for its historical context as prescribed by Schüssler Fiorenza’s model. They approached the interpretations with a hermeneutic of suspicion and in the process rejected existing oppressive interpretations. As Schüssler Fiorenza states, “a hermeneutic of suspicion does not presuppose the feminist authority and truth of the Bible, but it takes as its starting point the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions” (1990:15). Although the participants gave authority to the bible and did not question the actual texts but the interpretations, by rejecting these interpretations they were indirectly acknowledging that biblical interpretations are often patriarchal and serve the interests of men even though they did not explicitly state this (Sibanda, 2014). As stated by

Farisani, “culture and religion have supported male dominance, which has obviously contributed to the abuse of women” (2014:210). Clearly, in the context of the female bodybuilders, men have had the upper hand in the formation of the biblical interpretations and the religious conceptions of their bodies.

All the participants were unmoved in their Christian religious beliefs. This could possibly be the reason why they felt it necessary to work their way around their religious beliefs to continue their engagement in the sport. As Nosipho explained:

...only God can judge. So that's what I think (Nosipho)

It is clear how the participants ensured their continued belief in Christianity and their continued participation in the sport by perpetuating the perspective that it is only God who can judge them. Sihle was also in agreement with Nosipho. She said:

You see my religion I would say that sometimes it's against this but I don't take that to heart. I don't take it to heart because yes my religion doesn't agree with me. They usually say that “my child a woman, a female was created to be like this and that and the way you're doing it's like you're changing yourself and becoming like a man”. So that's where I see that they don't quite understand. But I don't pay attention to it and I say God knows and God will never judge me coz He knows that this is a sport. I don't harm anybody, it's a sport. When it's time for me to really respect my religion I know how to submit to the rules but the stage also needs me you see (Sihle)

Clearly, Sihle was aware that it was people who interpreted the biblical texts about how as a woman she ought to behave and carry her body, and she also chose to interpret these texts in her own way in order to continue engaging in bodybuilding.

Evidently these black female bodybuilders have adopted this perspective as it coincides with their liberatory hermeneutic and is also the reason why they mediate between their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the ways that they do. Nonhlanhla further explained how being a bodybuilder was in line with her God-given purpose. She said:

...maybe another person will say, “you say you're a saint (meaning fellow brethren in the church) but you compete. But you only wear a bikini when you compete”. It's me, it's who I am. It's my sphere of influence. When God created me He said I must have an influence in the world. Well my influence is in this because it fulfils me...I'm sure that some women will be

inspired by my life one day if they're not inspired already but one day some people will be inspired (Nonhlanhla)

From these women's experiences it can be gathered that in liberating themselves from the constraints placed on them by interpretations of Christian religious texts, instead of rejecting their Christian religion because it is oppressive to them, they worked around their religion. They liberated themselves through their belief that it is only God who understands them and only God who can judge them. Due to the authority of God and the bible in their lives, they were not swayed by what society thought. Rather God became the only judge. They considered the bible as a "foundational religious document" (Nadar, 2001:162) and, therefore, developed interpretations that took into consideration their context and were "informed by their life experiences" (Nadar, 2001:161). Despite the oppressive interpretations, it did not prevent them to continue being Christians and to continue believing in God. As Farisani states, "scripture should be interpreted in such a way that it equips women to liberate themselves from merely accepting the status society assigns to them" (2014:220). The participants did just that and as a result, this enabled them to mediate between their religious and cultural conceptions of their bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding. They did this because their religion is what they have always known and, therefore, feel no reason to completely reject it. Their actions also show that they believe the perspective that "everything the Bible says is not equally helpful to us as women of faith and that there are false interpretations and misuses of the scriptures" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985:141). By rejecting certain interpretations and adopting their own, the participants became the authoritative interpreters of the bible within their contexts as black female bodybuilders. This act showed that "authoritative texts do require interpretation" (Scholer, 1987:413). They also showed that although dominant interpretations of biblical texts may be accepted by many, others choose to differ. As Nadar states, "biblical values can be marginalizing for women in particular" (2009:136) and are consequently "life denying to women" (2009:136). As a result, the challenge that the marginalized face is to "find approaches to the Bible that are more life giving" (Nadar, 2009:141), as Nosipho and the other participants did.

Although they are Zulu women, for the majority of them it appeared easier to reject the cultural conceptions of women's bodies imposed on them. However, this was not a surprise as the majority of them had stated that their religion influenced them more than their culture did. Therefore, it was easier to reject the cultural conceptions of Zulu women's bodies whilst

religiously they sought new ways of finding an equilibrium between the Christian conceptions of women's bodies with their engagement in bodybuilding.

Their actions towards more liberating interpretations of religious texts reflected the view that “the challenge today is to live in the presence of God within the context of the faith community, but without blind submission to outdated social constructs” (Dreyer, 2011:3). This was a challenge that the participants also faced; to hold onto their faith in God and the bible while freeing themselves from oppressive interpretations used against them as women. The systems of oppression such as race, gender, religion and culture all converged in their marginalization. Interpreting the biblical text in a life-affirming manner liberated them. Intersectionality as a concept does not only serve the purpose of discussing and understanding “the positioning of black women but also as a means of liberating these women and their communities” (Jordan-Zachery, 2007:255-256). Hence, the participants, through their adoption of a critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation also took an intersectional approach towards their liberation. The participants have always given authority to the bible but were also equally aware that people interpreted biblical texts in ways that benefited them. As a result, instead of rejecting the biblical texts, they approached the existing interpretations of biblical texts with a hermeneutic of suspicion and, therefore, rejected them whilst adopting new interpretations that liberated them. Basically, they enacted their own critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation.

It may be concluded that the participants' experiences of mediating between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding is an illustration of Tinyiko Maluleke's assertion, that “the fiercest site of struggle is not so much the sacred texts themselves as the hermeneutics applied to the texts and to life in general” (2001:243). This is reflected in how these women did not reject the bible because of the authority they gave to the bible, but instead they rejected interpretations of the bible that sought to oppress them and deny them agency over their own bodies. By so doing, this facilitated their continued engagement in bodybuilding without compromising their faith and the authority that they give to the bible in their lives.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided theoretical explanations for why the participants experienced the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of their bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the ways that that they did. The theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Gender Performativity were employed in the analysis of their religio-

cultural conceptions and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding. It was established from the research findings that the participants employed a kind of critical feminist hermeneutic to their religious beliefs that enabled them to continue engaging in bodybuilding. This was done without compromising the authority that they gave to the bible in their lives. The final chapter of this dissertation provides a summary of the findings and the theoretical explanations for the participants' experiences. It will deal with the conclusions that may be drawn from the analysis of the findings as well as recommendations for future research to be undertaken.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which religio-cultural conceptions of black women's bodies influenced black women's engagement in bodybuilding. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the black female bodybuilder's religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies?
2. What are the black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding?
3. How do the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding?
4. Why do the black female bodybuilders experience the mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do?

The five participants voiced their personal experiences of engaging in bodybuilding as well as the religious and cultural conceptions about their bodies. The discussions with the participants during the interviews led to the emergence of a variety of themes, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The responses provided by the participants were a portrayal of how gendered socialisation constructs the idea of female muscularity and the notion of muscles as a biologically male entity. Their responses showed how they both challenged as well as maintained ideas of hegemonic femininity whether on the bodybuilding competition stage or in interactions with general society. The interview discussions also portrayed how the influences of their Christian religion and Zulu culture's conceptions of women's bodies resulted in their mediation between their religio-cultural beliefs and their continued engagement in bodybuilding.

The first theme was not directly linked to the research questions but it provided background to the reasons that inspired the participants to become bodybuilders. The participant's understandings of how their religion and culture conceptualised women's bodies differed to how they conceptualised their own bodies, religiously and culturally. These differing conceptions were central to the research study as the ways in which they negotiated between their beliefs and their engagement in bodybuilding were significant in relation to the research questions. This final chapter provides a summary of the themes discussed as well as recommendations for future research areas.

6.2. Summary of emergent themes

A recurring theme throughout the discussions with the participants was the idea of deviance; that female bodybuilders in their embodiment of muscle “disrupt the feminine (soft)/ masculine (hard) binary” (Johnston, 1996:333). The data revealed the participant’s understanding of their own bodies in relation to their religious and cultural conceptions of women’s bodies. From the interviews, it was extracted that “eating, like training, for bodybuilders is a constant process of self-monitoring” (Johnston, 1996:332). For most of them, their reasons for getting involved in bodybuilding was a dissatisfaction with their bodies. By becoming bodybuilders their bodies become projects which they work on daily and were involved in a sport that required constant self-monitoring through eating and training.

Their religion and culture were influential in the ways that they were expected as Christian Zulu women to shape their bodies. This indicates how “culture within which a person lives is likely to be the most powerful influence on their eating patterns, activity levels, and body weight” (Sobal, 2001:305). In their pursuit of muscle on their bodies, cultural views dictated that they shape their bodies in ways that would be desirable to their male counterparts. Zulu cultural conceptions of their bodies leaned towards a full-figured body structure because this determined whether they were marriageable or not (Mastamet-Mason, 2014; Ribane, 2006). Even the cultural criticism was that their excessive muscularity distanced them further away from being marriageable.

The religious and cultural criticism received by the participants also pointed to the construction of gender and the ways in which gender was understood in binaries of either female and male or feminine and masculine. As stated, “unlike sexual identity, which results from the differing physiological make-up of men and women, gender identity results from the norms of behavior imposed on men and women by culture and religion (Raday, 2003:666). As a result, “because femininity and ‘nature’ are often considered to be closely allied, any attempt to reconstruct the body is transgressive against the ‘natural’ identity of the female body” (Johnston, 1996:331). Certain behaviours and roles were understood as making either female or male. Therefore, the female body and its embodiment of muscle was seen as transgressive, dangerous and “out of place on women” (Johnston, 1996:331). However, this is where the subversive potential of gender lies. Female muscularity indicates the performative nature of gender and also shows that since gender is a result of repetitive act, the female bodybuilder paves the way for new repetitive acts that can possibly transform the normative understandings of gender and of hegemonic femininity and masculinity.

Further analysis of the data revealed how the religious conceptions of their bodies were perpetuated by mostly men, showing the patriarchal nature of society. These conceptions were found by the participants to be oppressive and denied them ownership of their bodies. Consequently, the participants rejected the authoritative or dominant interpretations of religious texts. In so doing, this shows how they approached dominant religious and cultural interpretations with a hermeneutic of suspicion and in the process employed a critical feminist hermeneutic of liberation to their bodybuilding lifestyles.

Just like Schüssler Fiorenza, they were engaged in a conflict between their acknowledgement that dominant biblical interpretations were oppressive to them, and their acknowledgement that the bible verses could have liberating elements for them (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1997). They did not reject the bible or the authority of the bible in their lives but they were aware that the bible is and was open to different interpretations depending on the experience and social location of the interpreter. Likewise, they too adopted their own interpretations in justification of their engagement in bodybuilding because existing conceptions of their bodies as Christian women, imposed on them by men, opposed their engagement in the sport. They took into consideration their lived experiences and context as women and as bodybuilders in their rejection of dominant religious interpretations about their bodies.

By rejecting the existing religious conceptions of their bodies in order to facilitate their continued engagement in bodybuilding, they also indirectly rejected the dominant cultural conceptions of their bodies. Butler explains gender as performance of repetitive actions that declare one as either feminine or masculine (1990; 1988). As Raday say, “culture and, with it, religion are the sources of the gender construct” (Raday, 2003:665). This means that these repetitive actions are instilled or influenced by religion and culture. Hence, in the context of the five participants, the ways in which they were expected to carry their bodies as Zulu Christian women, was determined by their religion and culture. This is why, like the five participants of the study, “many African women are still struggling to own their bodies” (Amadiume, 2008:59). Their engagement in bodybuilding as black women became for them the arena for resisting against and liberating themselves from gendered norms influenced by religiously and culturally interpreted conceptions about their bodies whilst claiming ownership to build muscle and shape their own bodies.

6.3. Future Research Directions

The participants in the study consisted only of Christian Zulu women. Future studies could possibly include all black female bodybuilders irrespective of their religious and cultural affiliation. Furthermore, this study was a first of its kind to investigate black female bodybuilders in Durban, South Africa, therefore the geographical confines limited the scope of the study. Therefore, it would be of significance to conduct a study on black female bodybuilders at a provincial level rather than Durban due to very few black female bodybuilders in Durban. Another possible research focus could be on black male bodybuilders and their racial experiences in the sport of bodybuilding as well as questioning if their religious and cultural beliefs also conceptualize their bodies in the same way as the black female bodybuilders.

In this dissertation, I attempted to show that in as much as religion and culture conceptualize black women's bodies in particular ways, these conceptions can often be oppressive to them. As a result, black female bodybuilders negotiate their way around their beliefs to gain autonomy and agency over their bodies whilst remaining rooted in their religious and cultural beliefs. This serves as a template for all black women who are constrained by religious and cultural interpretations of how they should shape and adorn their bodies; that they too can liberate themselves through adopting their own understandings of how their personal interpretations of religious and cultural beliefs can facilitate them in claiming individual autonomy over their bodies.

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Dear Participant

Participant's Informed Consent

Master's Programme in Gender, Religion and Health

This letter, respectfully, seeks your participation in a Masters Research Project in Gender, Religion and Health. You have been identified as a participant in this Research Project. As a participant in this research project you will be required to participate in interviews that will be conducted at your convenience. The times, dates of interviews as well as the venues will be at your convenience. Once you have had a chance to examine the nature, objectives and benefits of the Research Project as detailed below, we kindly request your consideration in signing the *Consent to Participation* at the end of this letter, on the attached copy and returning same to me as soon as you possibly can. I wish to draw your attention to the Clause below relating to your right not to participate in this Research Project and will respectfully accept your decision in this regard, if it is such. The following Information Sheet offers a brief background to the Research Project.

Research Project Title Shaping Black women's bodies: Religio-cultural conceptions of black women's engagement in bodybuilding

Central Research Question How do religio-cultural conceptions of black female bodybuilders' bodies influence black women's engagement in bodybuilding?

Research Aims and Benefits

1. To determine the black female bodybuilder's religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies
2. To understand the black female bodybuilder's experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
3. To explore how the black female bodybuilders experience their mediation between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding
4. To understand why the black female bodybuilders mediate between their religio-cultural conceptions of women's bodies and their experiences of engaging in bodybuilding in the way that they do

Research Project Leader Thobeka Khubisa

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Project Location

KwaZulu Natal, Durban

Alternate Contact Person

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Research Office

Ms. P Ximba Administrator

Tel: 031 260 3587

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Participation is Voluntary

Participation in this Research Project, through the planned Interviews, is entirely voluntary; with the right being reserved to the Participant to withdraw participation without experiencing any disadvantage. If the participant wishes to withdraw from the study, she should contact the researcher and indicate verbally or through written correspondence. The researcher will terminate the participant from the study under the circumstances of voluntary withdrawal.

Risk and Benefit

We do not foresee any risks with this study as it will not be conducted for the purpose of revealing traumatic ordeals of participants. We hope that the study will provide the benefit of knowledge production that will help other women who are defining their bodies and body image in similar ways to black female bodybuilders. No costs other than transport (if at all) will be incurred by the participants and there is no reimbursement for participation

Confidentiality&Anonymity Participants are offered the opportunity to elect that their

involvement in this Research Project remains confidential and anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used for the participants on request

Research Instruments

Follow-up interviews may be conducted for each participant at the participant's convenience. Audio devices will be used to record the interviews.

Disposal of Data

The primary data will be stored in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classic [Gender, Religion and Health Programme] in which the project is based. Data on which any research publication is based will be retained in the School for at least five years after publication. Should the lead-Researcher complete the MA degree with the University, the data will be retained by the University

We look forward to receiving your responses to this request.

Thank you.

T. Khubisa

Appendix B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Format: In-depth Phenomenological Questions

Date and Time:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Participant/Pseudonym:	

Step 1: The session will be initiated by greetings and introductions that will personalise the session

Step 2: I will be outlining the structure of the session by informing the participant of ethical issues and providing information of exactly what will be required during the interview session. Permission and reasons as to why the session can be recorded will also be discussed

Step 3: It is after Step 1 and 2 that I can begin drawing out stories and gather information through listening attentively. It is at this stage that the questions below will be asked

Categories of Enquiry/Questions
1. Please tell me a little about yourself?
2. Which gym do you train at? Why do you train there? How long have you been a member at that gym?
3. In which year did you join gym? What were your initial goals when you first joined gym?
4. When did you decide you want to be a bodybuilder?
5. Describe your experience on your journey as a bodybuilder?
6. Have you participated in any competitions? If so, how many?
7. Which division(s) have you competed in?

8. If you've never competed, what has been holding you back? Why have you never decided to compete?
9. What is your understanding of being 'feminine'?
10. With all the different ideal type of bodies continuously advertised by society, why do you choose muscle? Why did you choose to be muscular rather than thin or fat?
11. Have you encountered any challenges in your journey of bodybuilding? What are those challenges if any?
12. How have you been received by both males and females within bodybuilding and those not part of the sport?
13. How much of an influence do you think religion and culture has on your life?
14. What religion do you belong/subscribe to?
15. What views does your religion hold about women's bodies?
16. How did family and friends receive the transformed version of yourself?
17. How have you reacted to negative comments?(if any)
18. Describe the process and experience during competition prep if you have decided to enter competitions?
19. I understand that eating less food on competition prep and intense training sometimes causes female bodybuilders to lose their menstrual cycle. Have you ever experienced this? Has your health ever been affected in anyway?
20. What is your understanding of the ideal African body? Do you subscribe to it? Why or why not?
21. Being an African woman, what does your culture say about women's bodies?

22. How have you managed to continue bodybuilding and managed to live in your community where cultural views of the female body may be different?

23. Do you have any children? Do you plan on having any children in the future? Why or why not?

24. Research says that many female bodybuilders make the choice to no longer have children once entering the sport. Do you agree with this? Was it the same for you?

25. Are you in a romantic relationship with anyone? Married or single? How would you describe your partner's support/lack of support towards bodybuilding?

26. If not in a relationship, are there any influences or reasons to your decision? If so, please elaborate.

27. I understand that building your body is your own journey but what do you aim to achieve for the broader society?(other females who are at gym but fear weights or want to be like you one day?)

Appendix C



10 November 2016

Ms Thobeka Khubisa 211510031
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Khubisa

Protocol reference number: HSS/1882/016M

Project Title: Religio-cultural conceptions of black women's bodies and their influence on black women's engagement in bodybuilding

Full Approval — Expedited

Application In response to your application received 3 November 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment [modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....
Dr. Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Dr Sarasvathie Reddy
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis

Cc School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix D



Turnitin Originality Report

FINAL DISSERTATION by Thobeka Khubisa

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