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**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**SKIN, HAIR AND BODY: BLACK WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS  
OF BEAUTY ON A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS**

by

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submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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## DECLARATION

This Masters by research thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of **Master of Social Sciences in Sociology** (Post-Graduate Programme) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Nontobeko Clementine Shabangu declare that;

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## **ABSTRACT**

Women's bodies have been considered surfaces upon which power struggles and narratives of inequality are played out (Bordo 1993). All aspects of women's lives, especially their bodies and notions of feminine beauty that come to dominate those bodies, are influenced and controlled by their societies, and should be studied as such (Denis 2008). This study aimed to uncover how Black women perceive themselves and are perceived by society, especially in terms of their skin, hair and bodies as influenced by social constructs of beauty. The study took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. It was conceptually framed within Black Feminism and Bourdieu's concepts of Symbolic Violence and Taste. Making use of qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews with 30 Black female students, the study found that young Black women experience and express 'beauty' in intricate and unique ways, as they attempt to position themselves within their societies. In doing this they engage with both their own identities and the identities of others.

**Key words: Black women, beauty, identity**

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Outline of Research Topic

“Women should be beautiful and Woman is beauty. All repositories of cultural wisdom from King Solomon to King Hefner agree that women should be beautiful” (Dworkin 1974, p.112). Both historically and today, beauty is considered the simplest expression of one’s femininity and womanliness. Its implied importance in the lives of women suggests that women are born or created almost entirely to be portrayers and performers of beauty. The concept of beauty itself carries within it vast complexities. Women’s skin, hair and bodies are significant aspects of their physical appearance which, taken together, define or determine whether or not a woman is perceived to possess the ultimate trait: beauty. Intertwined and symbolically powerful social factors such as culture, race, class, gender and social institutions, influence perceptions of beauty, especially with regard to skin, hair, and bodies. Beauty has been conceptualised as almost as essential for women as food and air because it feeds their identities and the core of their identity as women. For those who possess it and those who aspire towards it, beauty as a concept is a daily struggle between one’s subjective perceptions and ideals and those of society. Society has constructed a perception of women’s bodies as objects to be desired, gazed upon and constantly recreated (Dworkin 1974; Mulvey 1975).

As a dark skinned, plus-sized Black female, I have always been aware that my appearance is different from hegemonic beauty ideals. Growing up in both rural and township areas, as well as receiving schooling in an urban area, has given me the opportunity to interact with the different dominant perceptions in each respective area. However, dark skin/light skin binarism did not affect me negatively. I have never felt the need to alter my skin tone. It is one aspect of my physical appearance that I have never struggled with. In fact, my dark skin has always brought me a sense of pride and uniqueness. Nevertheless, society’s standards do not often associate dark skin with beauty or normality (Jabber 2014, p.1). Instead dark skin is frequently seen as something foreign, distinct and negative (Mathews 2013).

Society has been consistently preoccupied with women's appearance as though it is an aspect around which their lives ought to revolve. According to Wolf (2002, p.9), prosperous, educated, liberated women of the modern world cannot fully enjoy their freedom and affluence, because they are plagued by issues regarding their appearance. Wolf (2002, p.10) suggested that society values women's appearance more than their achievements. Moreover, Stuart and Donaghue (2011, p.99) noted that the more women achieve and progress, the higher the pressure to maintain and conform to practices of femininity. This is despite the fact that women now have access to and can participate in various social institutions from which they were previously excluded. Women and their bodies are still placed under great scrutiny and restrictions (Stuart & Donaghue 2011, p.99). Western ideals of beauty have a demeaning effect on women, which is not often acknowledged. This results in a cycle of negative self-perception: a "dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, the terror of aging and the dread of losing control" (Wolf 2002, p.10). Hence, "the images of female beauty are used as weapons against women's advancement" (Wolf 2002, p.16). Society considers beauty to be a necessity which women should make every effort to possess as it is thought to vastly improve their quality of life (Hunter 2002, p.177).

Western aesthetic ideals have tended to undervalue women's freedom of choice, disregard women's individual beauty ideals and control women's physical appearance and entire lives. However, it is debatable whether it is correct to assume that adhering to Western perspectives indicates one's association with dominant groups and their perceptions (Ashe 1995; Bordo 1993; Wolf 2002). Bordo (1993) argued that society's perceptions regarding women's bodies are deceptive, ironic and paradoxical and slowly make their way into women's consciousness because they persuade women to leave behind their perceptions and identities and adopt the supposedly better perceptions and identities of others. The ambiguous messages conveyed by society through the media should not mask the extent to which such prescriptions and ideals harm and deter women from their true selves (Bordo 1993, p.2364). For instance, women are exposed to media messages about how they should love themselves as they truly are, yet at the same time they are exposed to messages which advise them how to become 'better versions' of themselves according to the societal script (BONA magazine April 2015). Women's bodies are semiotic in the sense that how they look communicates a message about profession, social class, marital status and level of education. Society holds in high esteem the notion of 'looking



the part' and interprets women differently based on the extent to which they conform to society's ideals and rules regarding their physical appearances.

"The beautiful one is a sister of many" (Kiyimba 2005, p.2) is a saying by the Buganda people in East Africa which embodies the attitude that everyone wants to be associated with a beautiful woman because she is a status symbol and is thought to attract positive things. Being beautiful is prized, and those who are believed to be 'ugly' are constantly bullied, and reminded of their physical appearance and the need to improve it (Kiyimba 2005, p.2). The notion of beauty is said to be similar in many traditional and modern societies, including South Africa. In most aspects of women's lives, women are perceived as objects which should always be pleasing to the male gaze because it is thought that the most important trait women have is their looks. In order to live up to this expectation, women are encouraged to take part in hegemonic beauty regimes (Finzsch 2008).

Tembo (2010, pp.16-17) suggested that different societies and cultures should be empowered to formulate and express their unique and ideal versions of beauty in opposition to increasingly global ideals. Furthermore, Tembo (2010, pp.18-19) expresses that it may be difficult to bring about such a world because of the global cultural assimilation of traditional societies and the growing influence of hegemonic beauty ideals, especially owing to the media and the constant interaction between diverse groups. In addition, the structural or symbolic violence imposed on minority or subordinate groups makes it difficult for diversity to be realised, enacted or embodied. Etcoff, Orbach, Scott and D'Agostino (2004) argued that beauty should be diverse, because humans have a continual desire to see and experience new things from which inspiration and pleasure can be obtained. Charles Darwin argued that if all women were perfectly beautiful, it would be pleasing only for a short period, because human beings need change and variety (Darwin in Etcoff *et al.* 2004, p.4). But this is not the case because women seem to be expected to conform to a uniform beauty ideal, as approved by dominant groups.

“I consider myself African. But this is not a general coloured perception. In fact a lot of coloured people deny their African heritage. There is an aspiration toward white beauty, although it is not overtly stated, but they furiously straighten their hair so you can’t see the African kink, they still consider a straighter nose, thinner lips and lighter skin as beauty. And that is the aspiration.” (Conning 2002, p.23). This quote expresses the feelings and opinions of a young African American woman regarding the way she looks and is expected to look as a coloured (Black) woman in America. Although she accepts herself as a Black African woman despite her almost White physical appearance, her society convinces her to take advantage of her almost white physical appearance. Hunter (2007, p.3), suggested that most black women who possess Eurocentric features are encouraged to embrace their ‘White side’ more than their ‘Black side’ because society will be more likely to treat them favourably. This is an example of ‘structural’ or ‘symbolic violence’ which is a form of long-standing non-physical violence in which social norms and practices have a negative effect on a specific group while highly benefitting another (Lei 2013, p.1; Bourdieu 1990). Society’s beauty standards are often critiqued as causing identity insecurity to women; such insecurity is said to recur across generations and within different social spaces. In spite of being harmful, however, society’s standards are considered necessary as they categorise and mobilise women throughout their life course (Bordo 1993, p.2365).

The preoccupation with women’s bodies on the part of society and by women themselves is not a new or uncommon phenomenon. Regardless of ‘modern’ ideals, women still experience inequalities based on gender. The restrictions placed on women’s bodies’ highlight the manner in which society consistently regulates women’s lives, in the name of social acceptability, culture, tradition, class, and religion, (Bordo 1993, p186–187). Society’s perceptions of beauty are a form of gender-based inequality because, while men also have to adhere to certain socially determined regulations concerning their appearance, the pressures and expectations for women to always look good is more intense. For instance, aging is considered acceptable and desirable in men but not in women. Similarly, with skin tone, Black men with darker skin tones are not considered less attractive than light skinned Black men in direct contrast to Black women with darker skin tones who are less favourably compared with their fairer counterparts (Hall 2008, p.56).

Bordo (1993) suggested that women feel that they always have to alter their bodies as it is a prerequisite to gain access to different classes, statuses and social institutions. Dark skinned Black women are considered as being in a 'triple jeopardy' position because their race, gender and skin tone are seen as possibly posing negative effects on their life, progression, self-esteem and feelings regarding abilities (Hall 2008, p.56). The importance and value placed on skin-tone expressed by Western beauty standards is shared by Black people (Mathew 2013). The habitual practices of the regulation and alteration of the female body is also said to cause feelings of anxiety, vulnerability and an obligation to adhere to society's rules and beauty ideals. Individuals are sensitised to rebellion and objection of society's 'unwritten laws' with regard to female beauty. Bordo (1993) argued that society has taken ownership of women's bodies, because women have no personal say or choice on how they want their beauty to be perceived and defined.

As discussed, the manner in which beauty is conceptualised does not accommodate the global diversity of nations, races, ethnicities and cultures. Generally, skin, hair and body shape are used to define a beautiful woman: a light hued skin, long, straight, soft hair and a slim tall body is often presented, pictured or perceived as beautiful. The researcher acknowledges that the 'beauty struggle' is not only faced by Black women or women of colour, because women of other races also put a considerable effort into upholding and attempting to adhere to almost unattainable beauty standards. Women are seen facing daily pressures to be beautiful while similarly trying to build their own individual identities and position themselves within their societies. As women situate themselves into their society's different cultures and classes, societal perceptions attempt to push them to adhere to the beauty ideals which are in accordance with their social standings. The control or pressures placed on women by dominant beauty ideals seems almost unavoidable and inevitable.

Of interest in this study is the possibility of added pressure experienced by Black women. While the researcher does not subscribe to racial or ethnic labeling, such separations and terminology are social constructs with complex ramifications which have reference to the purpose of this study. Thus the terms 'skin', 'hair' and 'body' are used to analyse and understand the discrete experiences of Black women. Also, for the purpose of the study, the term 'society' refers to organised institutions which guide and regulate interactions, perceptions and behaviour.

## 1.2 Research Aims

The study set out to uncover and understand how a sample of young Black female students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus perceive and define beauty, both their own and that of their peers.

## 1.3 Rationale

My interest in focusing on the perceptions of Black women regarding beauty was guided by my specific interest in the overarching, embedded and interrelated issues which have an influence on the definitions and perceptions of Black women regarding this subject. I wished to specifically explore the perceptions of Black female students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Pietermaritzburg (PMB) campus with regard to beauty in terms of skin, hair and body. I wanted to examine how these are conceptualised and perceived while also uncovering the influences, consequences and other underlying issues that relate to how these students perceive themselves, others and are perceived by their society. This study will add to the ongoing conversation on issues surrounding beauty. It also strives, as far as possible, to examine the social factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, class and gender which all play an important role in the formulation, interpretation, perception and portrayal of beauty. The particular struggles faced by Black women regarding their skin, hair and bodies are said to affect almost all facets of their lives and need proper acknowledgement and exploration. The role of history and modern perceptions that have shaped how women perceive themselves and their peers are also important. Hence this study is sociologically significant because it takes into consideration these aspects and the results obtained from Black female students at the UKZN PMB campus. Even though such results may not be generalisable to the wider population, the study strives to make an interesting contribution to the ongoing conversation about the topic.

#### 1.4 Key Objectives of the Study

- Identify what or who influences Black women's perceptions and aspirations regarding beauty.
- Establish an understanding of how young Black women perceive and define beauty and evaluate that of their peers.
- Analyse what meanings are attached to the way one looks, chooses to look and is expected to look within the young student community.
- Interpret whether or not these women experience any dissatisfaction with their physical appearance (skin, hair, body), and if this may encourage a need to alter their appearance.

#### 1.5 Broader Issues the study sought to investigate

- Obtain an in-depth understanding of the role and influence of Colourism, Western and African perspectives and the unwritten laws of beauty on Black women's perceptions of beauty.
- Establish how beauty perceptions develop and evolve from birth through to adulthood.
- Investigate the influence of society, social institutions, mass media and culture on Black women's perceptions as individuals and as part of a group dynamic.
- Analyse the implication of conformity and non-conformity as stipulated by society and as perceived by Black women.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Beauty may be defined as a blend of traits such as form, colour and texture which are pleasing to the eye and intellect (Thompson 1995, p.112). Beauty is also defined as qualities which make one pleasing to the senses or to the mind (Hornby, Turnbull, Lea, Parkinson, Phillips, Francis, Webb, Bull & Ashby 2010, p.116). Beauty has always been central in epitomizing that which is feminine. Women from all nations, races, cultures, ethnicities and religions across the globe have engaged with concerns regarding being attractive and accepted in their intimate and wider social circles.

Identity may be defined as traits which define a specific person or group of people; it informs that groups' perceptions, interactions and behaviour amongst themselves and others within a specific social setting. Identity can also be formed through historical occurrences, race, ethnicity, culture and sharing geographical area (Stets & Burke 2003). Identity is an important aspect when discussing or conceptualising issues surrounding Black beauty. According to Bhabha (1994), races ethnicities and cultures in post-colonial places should be able to define and identify themselves without making reference or comparison to the identity of the West. People in areas which have been previously colonised, identify and define themselves in comparison and with acknowledgement to Western identities (ibid.). It is as though the previously colonised are not aware of their own identities without such acknowledgement (Bhabha 1994). Fanon (1986) argued that Black people's attempts to understand and position themselves and their Black identities in a society whose values and perceptions are based on Western culture and identity, are often met with feelings of weakness and sub-ordinance as a result of failing to reach or adhere to the 'dominant' Western identity. Bhabha (1994) suggested an ideal society wherein identity is accepted as something that can be formed through constant interaction of different races, ethnicities and cultures instead of that which is prescribed and preferred by dominant Western ideals. As discussed elsewhere, beauty standards are set in accordance with Western standards of beauty. Black women often find themselves unable to fit into dominant Western ideals of beauty against which they are judged as Black women. Their own identity as Black women, with regard to beauty, is considered either acceptable or unacceptable depending on the degree to which they fit into the Western identity. Bhabha's ideal society would mean that Black women would not necessarily have to measure themselves

against other races; rather they would accept themselves as having an identity of their own influenced by, but withstanding, the ideals and identities of other races.

Beauty and physical appearance is not only about aesthetics; it is also political as it is used as a means to situate oneself within one's society (Tate 2007, p.5). It is essential to understand historical perspectives on beauty in order to disentangle these perceptions from current manifestations and also to show how certain values have emerged and persisted through the years. Dating back to the era of slave trade in America is the belief that Western ideals of beauty and feminine behaviour are superior (Swain 2012, p.13). Slavery is not the only historical impetus behind the racially influenced power relations that have led to skewed ideas of attractiveness. However, there is a paucity of information on other historical events relating to racially influenced power relations which may have had an influence on present day perceptions of beauty held by Black women and their societies. These could include the interactions of different races that occurred during the times explorers, traders, missionaries and colonisers contested ownership of different parts of the globe.

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, race and racial classification was a preoccupation of scholars and researchers in various fields. At that time, race was used not only to separate people socio-economically but also to determine people's character, traits and even intelligence. The Black race was thought to be characterised by flat noses, thick lips, dark skin, big bodies and curly coarse hair (Swain 2012, pp.4-5; Arnold 2004, p.267). These attributes were considered unattractive and generally had negative connotations (Gilman 1985). For instance, Knox (1850) identified a link between race and intellect; through his 'scientific' research, he found that people of colour are intellectually inferior, not because of the sizes of their brains, but because of differences in brain 'texture'. He deduced this by dissecting the brains of deceased people from different races. Physical features were and are still used to predict a person's possible personality, behaviour, deviance or pathologies (Swain 2012, p.14).

Arnold (2004) noted that historically, light skin has been associated with attractiveness, intelligence, order, reason, self-control and good manners. Dark skin has been associated with unattractiveness, poor intelligence, disorderly conduct, absurdity, violence, lack of self-control and courtesy. Slaves with physical features closest to those of their white masters (fine hair, light skin, smaller nose and lips) were given preferential treatment and became superior to the darker slaves. The close-to-white slaves obtained a higher status and had a greater chance of

working in their masters' houses, receiving better clothing, learning to read and write and gaining freedom upon the death of their master. On the other hand, their darker counterparts constituted a lower class and worked as field slaves with no opportunity to obtain such benefits or privileges (Patton 2006, pp.32-33; Mcloughlin 2013; Hill 2002, p.80). Western-like features did not guarantee complete luxury, but they set those apart from those who did not have these features.

There is no doubt that discrimination based on physical features has been deeply entrenched in our minds, and that skin colour is, in a sense, a form of capital; having Western features is constituted as 'racial capital' in past times and in the present (Hunter 2011, pp.143-145). According to Hunter (2013), racial capital refers to how light skin may be used as social and symbolic capital. Social capital may be defined as the easy attainment of benefits and resources as a result of preferential treatment given to a group of people because of certain characteristics or acquaintances they have (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.119). Hunter (2013) defined symbolic capital as the availability of resources due to honour, prestige and recognition which is attainable through culture. Some light-skinned Black people who had white features used the advantage of looking white to uplift their communities while others completely left their Black identities and communities and moved into white communities (Sitterson 2015, p.2).

When discrimination exists amongst women of the same race, especially women of colour, this is termed 'colorism' (Craig 2006, p.9). Colorism may be defined as prejudice against self and others based on one's skin colour and established social intra-racial meanings attached to one's skin tone (Keith & Herring 1991, p5). Hunter (2007, p2) suggested that colorism is an unrelenting issue for all people of colour, especially in nations which have experienced colonialism and slavery. She perceived colorism as synonymous with skin stratification and described it as a practice which places light skinned people at an advantage over dark skinned people (Hunter 2007, p2). Colorism stems from the time people of different races interacted in the context of slavery and colonialism. It entails racist ideals that uphold white preeminence and places emphasis on the inferiority of dark skin. Colorism as a system and practice benefits only those who imitate whiteness in culture, principles, economics, and physical appearance (Hunter 2007, p.3). As discussed above, light skinned Black people have historically been seen as better suited to be leaders, have good careers, high social responsibility, take part in politics, business, and community development, to be part of "high-tea societies and sororities" (Hunter 2007, p.5). Similar notions are powerfully conveyed by Fanon who suggested that the



inferiority complex of Blackness encourages a deeply seated desire to achieve whiteness and thereby achieve superiority (Fanon 1986).

This can be applied to South African history; where the residue of colonialism also persists. Erasmus (2001, p.2) described her experience of being a Coloured South African woman and the racial intricacies it brings: “Growing up Coloured meant knowing I was not only white, but less than white, not only Black, but better than Black; the shape of my nose and texture of my hair placed me in the middle of the continuum of beauty as defined by both men and women in my community” (Erasmus 2001, p.2). The close-to-white physical features of Coloured people socially ranks them as the “privileged but misunderstood Black people” in South Africa (Erasmus 2001, pp.2-3).

Colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid have shaped the way the different races in South Africa are perceived. The Coloured race is said to have emerged from colonisers and slave owners having sexual relations with their black and Asian slaves, San, Khoekhoe and Bantu people which they found in South Africa upon arrival. Hence the Coloured people of South Africa are of many mixed races, and they are often, for example, associated with “immorality, sexual promiscuity, illegitimacy and impurity” (Erasmus 2001, p.4), but this can be said to be true for Black South African women in general too.

In Hall’s (1997, p.404) opinion, the internalisation of white supremacist concepts of race and beauty is said to have nurtured and sustained the practice of colorism. According to Hunter (2007), colorism is as much an unrelenting problem amongst Black people today as it was previously. It is accepted as a normal part of everyday life, and therefore not consciously recognised even though it has a powerful and observable effect on social mobility. Hence colorism as a form of discrimination should not be taken lightly. It is worth noting that racism and colorism are interrelated, that all people of colour experience discrimination based on race, but the amount and regularity of this discrimination differs significantly by skin tone (Hunter 2007, p.232). Skin tone-based classification can also be termed pigmentocracy. Pigmentocracy refers to a division that people of African descent make amongst each other based on ethnicity and skin tones (from the darkest to lightest) and how these affect the way one’s life plays out (Sitterson 2015; p.3). These forms of hue-based discrimination can be said to apply to all people of colour.

Social ranking based on skin tone, ethnicity and culture is considered prevalent amongst the Black race in South Africa (Williams, Gonzalez & Stein 2008). Thompson (1995, p.463) defined ethnicity as a social group that shares a similar identity regarding history, culture, language, physical features and beliefs. Ethnicity plays a role in the classification of Black people in South Africa. Harries (1989) noted that some ethnic groups consider themselves, their practices and beliefs as better than others, mainly based on skin tone. For instance, the Zulu, Sotho and Xhosa often classify themselves as light skinned, which is considered better than the Tsonga and Venda who are classified as dark skinned and consequently associated with backwardness, manual labour and participation in black-magic activities (ibid.). Moreover, access to resources and power was not only based on being Black or White, but also the “kind of Black” that one was (Deng 1997).

Ribane (2006, p.19) has identified the presence of pigmentocracy and colorism in South Africa’s beauty pageant industry from the 70s to the 90s. She noted that Black women who won beauty pageants were usually of a lighter hue, from Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho clans. The same was true for women who were considered appropriate models and ambassadors for cosmetic products. Their almost Western features made them desirable and the perfect definition of what all progressive Black South African women should look like (Ribane 2006, p.21).

Nevertheless, light skinned Black women are not exempt from racial prejudice. Despite their almost-white features, whether artificial or natural, they remain Black women (Hochschild & Weaver 2007; Hunter 2007). However, dark skinned women tend to experience both racism and colorism all at once (Jones 2015). Colorism is not only practised by Black people on Black people; white people may also discriminate against Black people based on their skin tone (Espino & Franz 2002). Espino and Franz (2002, pp.613-614) found that both white people and people of colour prefer to hire light skinned people of colour over those who are dark skinned because they are considered most trustworthy, reliable and competent. Mason (2004) also noted in an African American study that people of colour who have more Eurocentric features tend to get hired more often and move up the corporate ladder with more ease because they are assumed to be more intelligent and educated than darker skinned Black people. Mason’s (2004) findings also showed that that light skinned people, especially women, tend to get married or be in longer-term or stable relationships more often than darker skinned women.

Sitterson (2015, p.2) argued that people historically thought that Black people with Western physical features have a higher intellect. This assumed higher intellect is due to historically being afforded opportunities to have an education and participate in socio-economic and political activities unlike their darker counterparts. Furthermore, historically, the perspectives, values and principles of those considered superior were internalised by the inferior who held their own intellect with little regard, exacerbating colorism. Hence it became difficult for Black people to appreciate their way of life and appearance because it was politically, economically and socially disempowering. Voluptuous, strong, dark bodies which were presented and paraded with pride and self-assurance previous to colonial influence became symbols of shame needing to be changed or covered up (Blay 2011, pp.5-6).

Colonial beliefs renounced Black pride by instilling in African minds that it is a matter of civility and morality to cover and change all things African about Africans (Ribane 2006, p.16). For instance, missionaries in South Africa introduced the practice of wearing head scarves. What began as a religiously inspired practise became a way of controlling and covering what is African about African women, namely their unruly hair (Ribane 2006, p.16). The practice of covering one's hair with a head scarf has been adopted as an African custom of showing respect. However, it has been suggested that covering Black women's hair with head scarves and presently with weaves and extensions undoubtedly springs from complex racial currents and is based on the aspiration towards whiteness that have been socialised into Black women (Ribane 2006, p.17). The same can be said about extensively changing one's skin and body in often unhealthy and unorthodox ways (Ribane 2006, p.17). Western physical features and practices such as those mentioned above have since become symbols and measures of beauty, social status and distinction (Hill 2002, p.11). With this in mind, many Black women find themselves excluded from the definition of beauty and must negotiate a place within imposed beauty identities and standards. Highlighted in the discussion above is the creation and upholding of a racial inferiority complex which encourages Black women to aspire to have the physical features and appearance of white European women (Tembo 2010, p.4).

Schlabach (2011) wrote about du Bois' paradigm of beauty. She explained that du Bois acknowledged that women possess both internal and external characteristics which can be considered as aspects and factors which ultimately make them beautiful. Furthermore, du Bois wrote of iconic Black women whose internal beauty made their external beauty irrelevant and unimportant. Although these women who du Bois wrote of did not meet society's physical

beauty standards, they possessed traits which made their physical appearance unimportant; their behaviour, aspirations, strength, diligence and relentless faith in the ultimate good made them more valuable than women who merely possessed physical beauty (Schlabach 2011, p.500). Du Bois (1903) argued that being Black is somewhat problematic for Black people. He stated that Black people find themselves having to have a 'double-consciousness' whereby they have to perceive themselves as perceived by their own Black society, simultaneously as perceived by white society. Du Bois shared a similar notion with Bhabha (1994): Black people do not have an identity of their own separate from the white identity, even though they desire and aspire towards a uniquely Black identity.

## 2.2 Skin lightening

The beauty struggle is not one which is only faced by Black women; thus I will discuss white women's preoccupation with being and looking beautiful, but above all looking white. Such notions white women may have had a significant influence on the inferiority complex faced by women of colour regarding issues surrounding beauty and overall physical appearance.

During the Antebellum era in the Southern United States and the Victorian era, white women fashioned a beauty culture that positioned them and their fair skin tone at the apex of beauty and all that is righteous (Cain 2008, p.2; Zarrelli 2015, p.1). White women's skin tone and features were not only considered physically attractive, but were also valuable morally, economically and politically (Flagg 1834, p.2). The whiter or fairer a woman was, the farther she was from the undesirable and slavish darker colour and physical features dominated by sun-scorched dark skin and hands toughened by backbreaking low class activities. More emphasis was placed on having the fairest skin because it showed higher socio-economic status, greater luxury and most importantly, decency and inner virtue. Looking white accurately represented purity, delicacy, modesty, asexuality and physical fragility, which are all central components of upper class European features. According to the *Toilette of Health, Beauty and Fashion* (an influential historic magazine which attempted to document and define beauty in its day): "the face is the mirror of the soul, a beautiful white face resembled a pure and unstained heart and the absence of sin" (Toilette of Health Beauty and Fashion 1834, p.1).

As a result, whiteness was seen as the embodiment of femininity while being black encompassed being immodest, animalistic, sensual, physically strong, masculine and built for

hard labour (Tate 2007, p.3). The consequence of such ideas is that white women throughout history have used different methods to maintain and obtain optimum whiteness. These strategies variously included: staying out of the sun, avoiding activities which darken or redden their skin and sleeping with windows open (some avoided sleep altogether), taking warm baths, drinking warm drinks (while others avoided warm baths and warm drinks), refraining from drinking alcohol and reading at night (Carin 2008, p.6). Some women went to the extremes of eating chalk, drinking vinegar, wearing camphorated charms, eating arsenic and bleeding themselves with leeches (Carin 2008, p.6). There was the option of wearing white face powder, but it was discouraged because appearing white had to be as pure and natural as possible in order to represent virtue. Therefore, women who wore make-up were regarded as savage, unruly and unrighteous which were said to be characteristics of the lower classes, slaves, Native Americans, vain women and prostitutes. Health issues were not prioritised because the ultimate goal was being the fairest of them all (Toilette of Health, Beauty and Fashion 1834, pp.1-2). This was due to the powerful implications of having a white, untainted skin. It was a manner through which women gained a sense of security using their physical appearance, i.e. pale skin. Having the whitest skin was considered a social and economic advantage historically but similar perceptions can be said to apply today.

Julien (2014, p.3) defined skin bleaching as the use of creams, soaps and household products on one's skin in order to obtain a lighter skin complexion. The publicity regarding skin bleaching in the tabloids currently includes local celebrities parading their "new, improved, lighter" skin complexions, obtained through harmful skin bleaching techniques. For example, the local artist Mshoza who used life-threatening injections to lighten her skin (*Drum* magazine 2011, p.11). Kelly Khumalo, another well-known South African woman, was reported as having said "I'm gonna bleach until Jesus comes" on social media, this was after she had been receiving negative comments about her drastic skin complexion change (eNCA 15 August 2015). Skin lightening products have become increasingly accessible and dangerous because people who cannot afford to visit plastic surgeons and dermatologists mix their own skin lightening products in order to create effective but unhealthy products at a fraction of the price (Julien 2014, p.3).

Products such as bleaching agents, toothpaste, battery acid and washing powder are mixed as skin lighteners (Julien 2014, p.3). Julien (2014, p.4) suggested that Black women in South Africa ignore the harmful effects of such skin lightening concoctions because of the stigma of Blackness. The use of skin lightening techniques gives the impression that Black women in South Africa feel the need to be culturally and physically changed in order to be 'beautiful'. The perception that women should conform to society's dominant beauty ideals is as a result of the overarching biological, cultural and environmental complexities of beauty and attractiveness (Gitau, Micklesfield, Pettifor & Norris 2014, p.1).

The 'bleaching syndrome' as described by Hall (1995) is caused by the desire to be white. Mcloughlin's (2013) review of a British magazine whose main audiences are Asian and British women in Britain, reported that there is an overemphasis on skin lightening products and the benefits of achieving a flawlessly pale skin. Historically, Asian women too were preoccupied with being as close to snow white as possible, especially at public or family functions. Asian women's preoccupation with fairer skin was fuelled by the perception that light skin made one a viable candidate for marriage; it was said to be a clear indication of high value, youthfulness and fertility (Glenn 2008, p.12; Mcloughlin 2013, pp.8-10).

Chapkis (1986) added that India has always had the largest skin lightening market. This could be because of the perceived socio-economic and cultural benefits of having a light skin, most notably an advantageous marriage. However, Bollywood is said to have recently become most influential in prompting women to attain the lightest skin possible. Only the lightest and, hence, most 'beautiful' actresses get leading roles in telenovelas and films, which showcase them as strong, powerful and desirable women (Chapkis 1986, p.289). Hunter (2007, p.240) also noted that in Latino telenovelas, most of the leading actors and actresses look white, while 'unimportant roles', such as maids, gardeners, door men etc., look like normal light brown Latinos. This once again puts emphasis on the entrenched residual colonial construction of beauty and its high valuation of white as an aesthetic including soft straight hair, light eyes, narrow nose and light skin (Hunter 2007, p.229). On the other hand, different castes in India have a variety of skin tones which could make it difficult to argue that skin tone in India is linked to a high social status. However, the media in India is convincing Indian women and their societies that a light skin tone is equal to a high social status and the prestige of high castes (Glenn 2008, p.15).

The importance of having light skin, has also been ingrained in young children in pre-school, they understand that light skin is better and more beautiful than dark skin. Hence light skin is something they should aspire to have. The 'dolls study' by Clark and Clark (1947) observed the development of American Black children's racial identification and its influence on race and self-awareness. They defined 'race awareness' as a consciousness of self and of belonging to a specific group of people which looks physically different from other groups of people (Clark & Clark 1947, p.169). The children in this study were requested to show their skin-tone preferences and identify themselves with one of the dolls. They were also requested to define traits and behaviour which best suited each of the dolls.

This study found that most of the children preferred light skinned dolls and associated more positive traits and behaviour with light-skinned dolls as opposed to dark skinned dolls. Furthermore, most of the children who identified with the dark skinned dolls wished to have a lighter skin or made excuses as to why they looked darker than their normal complexion. For instance "I look brown because I got suntanned in the summer" (Clark & Clark 1947, p.178). The brown doll was unwanted and the white doll was accepted for the following reasons: "cause he's pretty", "cause he's white". The dark doll was unwanted "cause he's ugly", "cause him black", "cause it don't look pretty", "he got black on him" (Clark & Clark 1947, p.178). It was also noted in the Clarks' study that some children who started the study with enthusiasm found the section on self-identification traumatising because it involved having to face their socially undesirable identities (Clark & Clark 1939, p.7). A more recent American study by Jordan and Hernandez-Reif (2009) reported similar results when they looked at children's preference and identification with animated characters of different skin tones. Jordan and Hernandez-Reif's (2009) study provided the participants with more options than black and white. However, the participants still held lighter skin in high and positive regard.

Dyer (1997, p.102) proposed another way to view the need for light skin in society. He declared that to everything and everyone, something light or white is visible and is thus considered to be genuine, wise and positive. Light skin and the desire to acquire light skin is celebrated and highly valued to such an extent that it has become a source of conflict and a demonstration of self-hate and low self-esteem (Julien 2014, p.5). Skin lightening for white women is considered a normal regime to alleviate the appearance of aging and other skin conditions. For women of colour it involves taking on and emulating the skin colour of white women and alleviating blackness. Skin lightening is seen as the curing of blackness for black women, as it is the curing of aging for white women (Mire 2005, pp.7-8). Mire (2005) questioned the impossible expectations conveyed by the messages of global beauty standards: the need to be white as snow, fairest of them all as an indicator of wealth, high status and beauty and yet also the need to tan one's skin as an indicator of health, wealth and high status.

The influence of international trends on perceptions of beauty is noticeable in South Africa (Ribane 2006, p.24). There seems to be a clear division on the basis of skin tone within the South African Black community. It is said that at present and also during the apartheid era, even if you were not white, having a lighter skin afforded one a chance of having a better life (Ribane 2006, p.11). Ribane recalled that having a lighter complexion implied ultimate beauty. As a result, lighter skinned girls got all the attention from the most popular and well-off men and generally seemed to get ahead more easily than darker skinned girls (Ribane 2006, pp.11-12). Khan (2011) added that the issue of colour has become indistinguishably intertwined with the image that Black women have of themselves.

Despite the fact that South Africa has seen great improvement and a progressive transition socially, politically and economically, the heritage of apartheid ensures that the link between self and socially perceived self-worth based on skin colour still lingers (Khan 2011, p.2). Black history has conditioned Black people to accept the notion that having a fair, white-looking skin leads to a better life and that their inferiority is a direct consequence of their dark skin. The inherent aspiration to whiteness is expressed by the late former president Nelson Mandela (1995) in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*; he explained that when he was younger he had the idea that if he was well behaved he would become White in the afterlife. One may consider



such historical notions of the significance of skin colour as one reason for the practice of skin bleaching amongst South African women. 'High-yellow', 'yellow-bone', 'chocolate' and 'blackberry' are only a few terms used in Black communities to differentiate Black people based on their skin tones. Such terms carry with them both positive and negative perceptions of the people being labeled (Wilder 2010). Furthermore, Ribane (2006) explained that the term 'yellow-bone' which often describes light skinned women and the term 'blackberry' which often describes dark skinned women shows that Black women are treated and treat each other differently based on their skin complexion. The practice and acceptance of skin lightening is a clear indication of the incessant exploitation of Black women's insecurity and their need to break away from the inferior status associated with their dark skin tones (Khan 2011, p.3). The use of plants or plant-based skin lightening methods (onion wood, milk wood, assegai etc.) shows that the notion of light skinned as beautiful is so entrenched in Black women's minds, that acquiring it became and continues to be a daily cultural practice, even in native villages (Khan 2011, p.4). The preference for lighter skinned Black women over darker skinned Black women in South Africa can be observed historically and is becoming rife in the present day. A study of Tanzanian women by Lewis, Robkin, Gask and Njok (2011, pp.30-33) showed that Tanzanian women also bleach their skins in order to: remove skin imperfections, maintain youthful soft skin, meet Western standards of beauty, look more attractive for potential partners and to impress and meet the expectations of their social circles (Lewis *et al.* 2011, p.33).

According to Sandler (1994), the oppressed seek to emulate their oppressor, because the oppressor is seen as a figure of authority and power. Hence, what is white or lighter was and continues to be seen as greater than that which is darker. Fanon's (1986) groundbreaking writings around race similarly argue that Black people relentlessly and shamelessly have an unyielding desire to not only emulate whiteness, but to be white. In addition, Kirschke (2008) emphasised that women of colour seem enchanted by the notion that one has to be light or white in order to be beautiful: "The delusion that thin lips, a straight nose and hair is the epitome of beauty has been so engraved into our minds that we have long accepted it as our reality and fate. The lighter one is and the closer they are to being considered white, the better and more beautiful they are perceived to be and the better they are connected to opportunities which ensure a privileged and progressive life" (Kirschke 2008, p.8). Whiteness supposedly represents all that is superior, favourable, civilised, virtuous and beautiful, while blackness represents all that is inferior, uncivilised, sinful and ugly.

A conventionally attractive physical appearance is said to also have an effect on the quality of life of young girls of school-going age. Girls who are validated as beautiful by their educators and peers, particularly those who are light skinned, are often self-confident, perform well socially and academically during their high school years, and maintain the same positivity through to college and the work place (Sekayi 2003, p.3). The type of women mentioned above are often accused of receiving preferential treatment in formal institutions such as the work place, because they are entrusted with more responsibility, are less frequently monitored and receive better remuneration and benefits than their darker counterparts (Hunter 2013, p.2). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the US has reported that they handle more colour-discrimination cases than any other form of work-place discrimination (Hunter 2013, p.2).

Light skinned black women also report a form of discrimination as they experience hostility from darker skinned women because society is more open to and accepting of them (Bryant 2013) Furthermore, light skinned women are often excluded from black community culture, because the black community does not consider them as authentically black or African. Moreover, they are subjected to derogatory name-calling which emphasises that they are not black enough: yellow-mellow, yellow-bone, yellow-melbas, jezebels, bananas, cappuccinos are common derogatory terms for those with lighter skins (Swain 2012, p.5; Ribane 2006, p.15).

The value placed on being light as adopted from colonial value systems, and the habit of wanting to imitate those values, is still prevalent in and amongst black women in South Africa (Ribane 2006, p.22). According to Keith and Herring (1991, p.761), even though the light-skin-dark-skin inferiority complex has lessened, it is still present in modern-day communities, due to over exposure to Black celebrities who are constantly lightening their skin and religiously following Eurocentric trends. Additionally, the issue of skin tone should not only be seen as a historical factor from the legacy of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and overall racism, but it should also be considered a mechanism that plays a pivotal role in how society's resources continue to be distributed (Keith & Herring 1991, p.765; Banks 1999, p.5).

## 2.3 Hair

Butler (1995) considered beauty and hair care as 'performative'. This means that women perform their gender through hairstyling and hair care in order to meet and maintain socially set expectations. Hair care and styling is an especially important ritual for Black women. According to Butler (1995), one can understand Black women as 'performing hair' as a strategy to integrate themselves into a society whose beauty culture does not value African forms of beauty. Hairstyling is considered an important beautification practice and rite of passage for young coloured women; however, heating and straightening one's hair often carries with it a stigma of trying too hard to express one's white side (Erasmus 2001, p.2). Collins (1991) argued that women's beauty is largely connected to their hair; hair is an important aspect of physical appearance and has played a fundamental role in establishing hierarchies of race and femininity. Although other physical features can be changed only through plastic surgery, intensive diets, exercise and skin bleaching, hair is a comparatively easily changed physical feature. Thompson (2009, p.831) noted that hair for black women 'is not just hair'; it is connected to the occurrences in one's life from birth through to death. For instance, in Black South African communities, Black women traditionally used to cut their hair as an expression of grief and respect when they lost a loved one (Setsiba 2012, p.2). For Black women hair is a 'spokesperson' of sorts and charts who they are in the past, present and future. Mercer (in Bellinger 2007, p.69) also stated that in instances where race is the basis of social relations of inferiority and superiority, hair styling becomes a symbol of being and belonging. At the centre of understanding Black women's hair, one must understand 'natural' versus 'unnatural' hair as well as 'good' versus 'bad' hair.

'Natural hair' may be thought of as hair which is in its natural state, which has not been touched or tainted with chemical or heat straighteners, braids and weaves. 'Unnatural hair' is hair that is chemically straightened, heated and weaved (in short, hair that has been changed from its natural form and texture). However, there is considerable debate often by women in hair salons about whether chemical or heat straightened hair should be considered natural hair, and about the possibility for Black women to have natural untainted hair. 'Good hair' is said to be hair which is easy to manage and that which often emulates European and Asian hair, while 'bad hair' is hair that is not easy to manage and is often ethnic hair (Thompson 2009, pp.851-852).

Furthermore, 'good hair' may be considered as more reflective of European and Asian hair: long, straight, wavy, loose and soft. 'Bad hair' is tightly coiled, thick, short, coarse and clearly reflects African ancestry. How good hair and bad hair is graded is said to reflect essentialism and racially-motivated beauty principles which work against Black women and the core of who and what they truly are, i.e. their authentic identity (Robinson 2011, p.1). As a result, Black women are plagued with the burden of trying to achieve 'good hair' because their 'natural ethnic' hair is excluded from dominant ideals of beauty and acceptability. Robinson (2011, p.3) explained how the grading of good hair and bad hair has a negative effect on women because it promotes white beauty standards while demoting alternative standards of beauty, which include diverse body shapes and sizes, skin tones and hairstyles and textures.

In contrast, a study by Bellinger (2007, p66) found that young Black women now no longer Westernize their hair because they are trying to be white or less African, it is because Westernized hair is, in fact, much easier to manage than "natural" or "ethnic" hair. However, debates about the manageability of African hair have arisen as some regard hair manageability as an excuse young Black women use in order to change their natural hair, because weaves and extensions are as demanding as natural hair. "Moving with the times" is another way that young black women use to explain the choice to wear their hair relaxed or in a weave (Bellinger 2007, p67). As above, this could be seen as a false consciousness, because moving with the times should not require the alteration or abandonment of one's ethnic heritage and identity. Some young black women are against the notion of Westernizing natural ethnic hair, and prefer to keep their 'natural' or 'ethnic' hair as a way of showing racial pride (Bellinger 2007, p67-68). Both historically and in the present African hairstyles symbolize status, identity and descent. People imagine they can tell a women's personality, character and status by the way she wears her hair (Bellinger 2007, p.64). The above instances bring into question the relationship we have with ourselves, our physical features, our society's construction of beauty and body image and the implications that these have for our identities and behaviours.

Historically in South Africa, hair, as much as skin tone, was used to sort people into designated races and related social and geographical spaces. Tests were even carried out to place people into racial categories (Powe 2009, p.2). The pencil test was commonly used in South Africa: a pencil would be placed in a person's hair – if it fell out, that person would be ranked as closer to white or coloured; if the pencil stuck in the hair, the person would be ranked as Black whether or not their skin was light. Therefore, "hair was the true test of blackness" (Byrd &

Tharps 2011, p.9). As a result, some became superior to others based on their physical features. Adding complexity to the experience of African women is the fact that African hair is viewed in various incongruous ways and Black hair styling can be thought of as a political reaction to racial and ethnical hierarchies and attendant connotations (Erasmus 2000, p.384).

For instance, from the 70s in the United States the Afro became popularised as a Black activist hairstyle. Initially, the idea was to rebel against white supremacy by expressing racial pride or African ancestry. The Afro became very iconic regarding the expression of racial pride, but it was an inaccurate representation of African ancestry. It held with it the implication that Africans are wild and unruly and portrayed such behaviour through their hair, while in fact Africans wore their hair in elaborate hairstyles and patterns, often plaited flat onto their heads (Essence 1998; McKanic 2001; Thompson 2009; Powe 2009).

The media emphasises that what makes a woman beautiful is not her intelligence, abilities and inner beauty, but her physical appearance (Patton 2006, p.16; Yan & Bissell 2014). Television and print media beauty adverts directed at all women, often depict European women only. This has a negative effect on women of colour because the beauty image they see in the media does not represent them as women of colour; instead it makes them feel completely excluded from the hegemonic beauty ideal. White (2011), in an online article, articulated the effects of growing up seeing only women with Eurocentric features in all media and advertising as causing Black women to either think negatively or to think creatively about their appearance. Faria's (2013) case study on the Sudanese hair and beauty industry investigated the processes of acculturation and enculturation. According to Faria (2013, p.2), Sudanese women have tried to rework their image through adopting new hairstyles and fashions. But these women have been accused by their society's traditionalists for undermining native styles and by implication, values. Hair is very obviously a highly-invested cultural signifier.

As is the case elsewhere, beauty ideals are constructed and attached to certain socio-economic, socio-cultural and political structures. Sudanese women have been trying to adjust their appearance accordingly even though this is not widely and openly accepted by their local communities. Beauty ideals and globalisation have brought about the concept of the 'modern-working-girl' in South Sudan and many other parts of Africa. The concept of the 'modern girl' is seen as a way to explore the success or demise of concepts of style, norms, gender roles and femininity (Weinbaum 2000, p.8). It is a concept based on modern femininity and the

ideologies and practices of liberalism, modernity, capitalism and consumerism. Global trends and ideas are often viewed as a representation of autonomy and free will, while local traditional trends and ideas are seen as a representation of captivity and restriction. Furthermore, the multinational nature of depictions of modern femininities means both local and global ideas are fashioned to varying extents through the changing images and embodiments of femininity and beauty (Grewal 2013, pp.5-6). According to Weinbaum (2000), notions surrounding the 'modern girl' are accepted and loved by all who comply with multinational looks and styles which are modelled and remodelled in the United States and Europe. However, not everyone in tight-knit traditional societies is in favour of the 'modern girl; she is placed under constant national analysis and is seen as a transgressive threat to each society's value systems, order, cultural gender roles and the socially-regulated behaviour expected from women.

Yet, the 'modern girl' is enticed and excited by multinational trends and looks because they hint at possibility and opportunity for simple upward mobility, being linked to the rest of the world and its promise of a better, more fulfilling life, leaving far behind all that is native and a hindrance to their success (Gidwani 2006, p.12). Women who work, are in business, government, NGOs, and want to be taken seriously, need to have the appropriate look. It is essential to look the way you want to be perceived; hence visiting a beauty salon is not an act of extravagance but one that is considered a vital necessity by the above-mentioned women (Faria 2013, p.6).

It is considered inappropriate to attend a job interview or a business meeting with natural 'undone' hair in many fast growing parts of the world. Hence, adhering to Western ideals with regard to hair styling has become relevant in Sudan and other developing parts of the world in order to be presentable and to be considered an educated, employable and professional modern woman (Thompson 2009, p.843). For that reason, in Juba, Sudan, as in many parts of the world, looking the part suggests education level, class, competency, expertise and professionalism. Previously, being preoccupied with hair, beauty and fashion was seen as a rich women's hobby. However, the beauty industry has grown to accommodate and cater for women from diverse classes and socio-economic statuses (Weinbaum 2000, pp.9-10). In some societies, the preoccupation with looking and behaving in a modern way is still an issue which brings with it anxiety, uncertainty and hostility. For instance, in countries like Kenya, Sudan and Zambia, women are sometimes even apprehended for not dressing and behaving in a manner which is culturally, religiously and socially expected. Such a crime is termed 'indecent dress'; wearing

tight clothing, trousers, short skirts and dresses is a criminal offence for which the consequence is physical punishment or time in prison (Smith-Spark & Haddad 2015, p.1).

Thomas (2004, p.462) discussed the introduction of the Black modern girl in South Africa including the mannerisms and implications of being a modern girl and trying to be like white women, especially regarding hairstyles and facial features. The Black modern girl in South Africa is characterised by a cosmopolitan look, explicit eroticism and the use of cosmetic products to enhance her hair and her facial features using make-up (Thomas 2004, p.477). The modern girl does not take part in activities performed by submissive daughter, wife or mother; she is preoccupied with politics, international trends, commodity culture and being a socialite. The media portrays the modern girl as something desirable and progressive to which all women should aspire.

With the introduction of the modern girl concept in South Africa, it has been difficult to ignore racial implications, because it is again Black women who are encouraged to imitate another race. The modern girl has been charged with abandoning her race, culture, authentic look and identity to become someone else who is a product of international trends and global culture. As a result, the modern girl is perceived as suffering from racial and cultural shame (Thomas 2004, pp.482-490). The two biggest problems expressed by the largely pejorative concept of the 'modern girl' in South Africa is that such a woman behaves in an unruly manner and she tries too hard to emulate the physical features of white women (Celarent 2012, pp.1-2). The use of hair and facial cosmetics was and continues to be a controversial issue because it draws more attention to the distinct differences between Black and white women's physical features: i.e. using make-up and hair products which do not match one's natural skin tone and hair texture. This is reminiscent of Hellmann's 1948 survey of young Black women living in Johannesburg slums among whom, the use of lipstick, rouge (blush) and powder was a regular practice. These women reported that they used such cosmetics to look beautiful, stylish and to be respected just as white women were (Celarent 2012, pp.2-3); such thoughts around the use of make-up seem to be relevant even today.

Sanger (2009) suggested that women's magazines promote Western and patriarchal concepts as the norm, and put pressure on women to pay for beautification procedures and products. Women dedicate endless effort in order to attain unattainable norms because they feel they are only valued for their looks (Wesley 2002, p.1183). There is always a new and improved method

to adjust or completely alter the way women look and, consequently, how they feel about themselves. For instance, products for youthful skin for white women and products to tame ugly, wild hair for African women (Sanger 2009, p.3). *True Love*, a popular South African magazine aimed mostly at Black women, for example, regularly advertises products for ethnic hair and for younger looking skin: “sleek tresses – achieve bone straight sleek hair without trying too hard” (True Love 2015, p.24). “For the first time, a micro-blurring technology is combined with anti-wrinkle pro-retinol: my skin looks younger right before my eyes” (True Love magazine 2015, p.29). Literature and research on the issue of Black women's hair continues to suggest that women who Westernise their ‘ethnic’ Black hair are trying too hard to fit in and conform to Western standards while those who keep their ‘ethnic’ hair untainted are said to be protectors of their race and culture or rebellious towards cosmopolitan ideals (Ashe 1995, pp.3-4).

According to Robinson (2011, pp.359-360), skin tone and hair, more than anything, are important when defining beauty; they are therefore considered social capital for women because the social order across the world is said to be in favour of lightness and long straight hair. In *Their eyes were watching God* (Hurston 1937), a Black woman with white physical features is portrayed. Her portrayal brings into perspective the emergence and persistence of racial intricacies and colourism amongst Black women. This Black character’s almost white appearance made her desirable to men and envied by the women in her community. Her physical appearance was considered by other women as a form of social capital, but poses a problem as to whether she should be treated as a white or Black woman. Even though she is perceived as being socially and economically superior, she feels excluded from her own community and identity.

Morrison’s fictional novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), expressed how Western standards of beauty control the mind-sets of especially young Black women. The book narrates how a young Black woman who has African physical features is convinced by the perception that her life would be easier if she had Western features. As a result, she blames her misfortune on her physical appearance in the belief that all good things happen only to those who have Western features. Moreover, the young woman’s negative perception of her physical features was encouraged by her peers and society, who constantly reminded her that her dark skin and coarse hair were ‘ugly’.



## 2.4 Body

Body image may be defined as one's own holistic view of oneself and body (West 2012, p.1). Cash (2003, p.2) defined body image as a varying psychological and physical experience of embodiment with regard to one's physical appearance, inclusive of one's self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours regarding one's body. Moreover, body image involves self-evaluation of one's physical appearance which is encouraged by inconsistencies between one's perception of one's body and valued physical features in one's society. Also, people often have conflicting feelings regarding their body image because they want to adhere to beliefs about what their body is, what they want it to be, and what it is supposed to be (Yu, Damhorst & Russel 2001; Bissell & Rusk 2010 cited in West 2012, pp.1-7).

'Beautiful', 'attractive', 'good looking' are all terms which have a significant impact on the lives of women the world over. The female body is a cultural object which has been redefined over time as a result of extensive cultural and historical changes. Tshegofa (2014, p.1) suggested that the body is a contested site of struggle and that this is especially true for women who do not fit into the conventional beauty ideal. Before globalisation, societies were able to define beauty according to their own cultures and beliefs. For instance, in some parts of Africa, a woman's beauty was determined not only by her voluptuous body but also by her hard work, strength, personality and the way she carried herself. However, since globalisation, this has been redirected to only physical features.

Black women have been made to feel that their physique and overall physical appearance can only be attractive in an unorthodox sense. 'Exotic', 'fascinating', 'outlandish', 'enticing' are terms which were and are still used to describe Black women's bodies and beauty. Hobson (2005) proposed that the presentation of animalistic eroticism in the contexts of Black women's bodies has evoked an aura of sexual curiosity. For instance, in the movie *12 Years a Slave*, Lupita Nyong'o, a dark skinned Black woman, portrays Patsey, a young slave who is subjected to the sexual curiosities of her master, because of the mystique of her physical appearance. Additionally, the exhibition of Sarah Baartman, the caging of Grace Jones and Josephine Baker's banana tutu was also filled with the fetishisation of the Black female body (Tate 2007). Such overt representations of the supposedly different, exotic and animalistic nature of Black women's bodies are undoubtedly a form racial discrimination. Sarah Baartman is a historic Black South African woman who became a stigmatising symbol of curiosity, a hypothetically

absurd freak of race and sexuality, both alluring and primitive. Her feminine physique was studied and probed in order to discover what had made her so different from 'normal' (white) women. She was seen as best suited for amusement in various museums and show houses abroad, because of her 'different', 'weird' 'non-western' physical features (Crais & Scully 2008, p.2). Sarah was named the *Hottentot Venus*, ironic because *Venus* is a goddess in Western literature and mythology associated with utmost mystical beauty. The Hottentots were a racial group who were thought of as being much lower than merely being Black. Hence there is a racially entrenched irony in combining a word which represents an unexplainable female beauty and one which is seen as the definition of an animalistic race (Nelson 2012, p.3). This irony is of interest to this study because it suggests the manner in which Black women's bodies may also be perceived in multiple and even contradictory ways which pose multiple frustrations. Even when a Black women's body may be considered beautiful because its shape and size fits into the hegemonic beauty ideal, her skin may be too dark.

Women's experience and existence in their respective societies is characterised by a constant anxiety and effort to always look 'on-point', as a result of the prospect of being gazed upon by fellow members of their societies, both men and women. Women's bodies are objectified and controlled by another subject's judgements, desires, purpose and direction rather than as a manifestation of personal choice, personal identity and intention (Young 1980, p.150; Craige 2006). Consequently, women feel under constant pressure to look, be and behave in a way which is socially expected of them. The constant scrutiny women experience encourages them to view themselves and their bodies through the eyes of the other. Making use of cosmetics, changing their hair, sticking to special diets and other body rectifying techniques are all measures taken to become objects which are pleasant to gaze upon (Young 1980, p.155).

Body image is an integral, ever present but ever changing part of women's lives: for instance, in the early 1940s, being thin was associated with being tense, compliant and reserved. Later, during the late 1980s, this perception changed and thin became the most physically appealing and sexy. Past expectations around body image and beauty do not entirely disappear, however. Instead they are integrated with present ones in order to create currently relevant cultures and standards (Viulani *et al.* 2013, p.4). Kandel (1980) suggested that any behaviour or idea that is considered negative is socially reinforced over time because it is approved by a superior group. Hence globalisation has led to an increasingly uniform ideal of beauty and attractiveness; informed by historical power dynamics and popular culture. Research by Winkler (2009, pp.2-

3) suggested that young children are socialised to know the racial and gender intricacies that play a role in defining beauty. As a result, young people, especially females, become deeply drawn into the complexities which develop around beauty and body image. Cultural beliefs are a significant factor in the struggle with body image especially for young Black South African women.

Mazur (1986, p.282) noted that it has become a cultural and societal norm to see women experience greater anxiety about physical attractiveness than men. Moreover, women do not put as much of an emphasis on the essentiality of the physical attractiveness of men as men do on women. Therefore, women's preoccupation with looking the correct way could be highly influenced and determined by what men consider beautiful, attractive and proper. In contrast, beauty is said to have more to do with how one feels about one's self, and that this is influenced by how deep a person's 'roots' are, because these give an individual a sense of identity and self-worth (Ribane 2006, p.17). However, researchers have found that perceptions of beauty are more influenced by mass media, social interactions and culture, than individual identity and a sense of self-worth (Englis, Solomon & Ashmore 2004, p.6). Tembo (2010, pp.17-18) proposed that each society and culture should have an ideal type of beauty and local meanings are most influential when it comes to beauty and body image and adorning the body with what a particular society considers fashionable.

In most traditionalist and religious societies, for instance, Islamic societies, women have historically and presently been ordered by law how to dress and carry their bodies (Albrecht 2014, p.1). However, globalisation and present day trends have made it possible for such societies that have existed under strict laws regarding their appearance to experiment with other cultural practices, freedom of choice and current fashion trends (Shirazi 2000, p.118). Ribane (2006, p.16) suggested that South Africa's history and the emphasis on the ideals of white supremacy have had a negative impact on the self-image and native beauty culture of the majority of women. She explained that all things native were and still are looked down upon as they represent shame, backwardness and primitiveness, instead of the initial pride, reverence and importance. Because of the consistent influence of European culture in South Africa, it is said to be a diverse and multi-cultural society and women have become accustomed and adapted to many international trends.

According to Albrecht (2014, p.25), the steadily growing variety in beauty and fashion practices in South Africa, even amongst conservative groups, could be as a result of acculturation. Steve Biko in Kaindl (2013) spoke of acculturation. Acculturation, as defined by Biko, is the diluting of different cultures due to Western influences on various indigenous cultural perspectives – this reinforces an indigenous society’s enduring inferiority complex about everything which opposes superior Western perspectives (Kaindl 2013, p.63). Enculturation is also sometimes referred to as acculturation and is defined as the gradual acquisition of the characteristics of a certain society by another (McLoughlin 2013, p.3). Albrecht (2014, p.25) defined acculturation as a process whereby different people and cultures come into direct contact with each other which leads to changes and exchanges regarding cultural patterns of either or both of them. More radically, it has been defined as “learning the white man’s ways and slowly adopting the dominant hegemony” (Hooks 1989, p.3).

While it is true that Western standards of a beautiful body have spread across the world, not all nations have easily accepted these standards. The size 0 standard is overtly emphasised in Western societies as the ultimate beautiful body. However, in West Africa, it is believed that having a fuller figure is attractive as it reflects good health, wealth and prosperity (International Business Times 2012, p.1). In the International Business Times (2012, p.1), West African women make use of hunger-stimulating tablets with the aim of gaining or maintaining a thick and curvy body, characterised by large breasts, protruding round buttocks and thick legs and thighs. These women link being thin with poverty and the HIV/Aids virus. However, there have been many body ideal debates amongst African nations, sparked by the growing popularity of beauty pageants, modern trends and health issues which idealise a thin body and consider having a bigger body size medically and socially abnormal.

The constantly changing ‘socially acceptable’ body image causes both slim and curvy women to feel they are being undermined and or excluded from the beautiful body ideal at some point in their lives. The 2001 Miss World pageant saw the victory of Nigerian Agbani Darego which encouraged women with her type of body to be proud of their socially and traditionally rejected slim, tall bodies as they received acceptance and acknowledgement from an international modern society (Ayeza 2008, p.1). Ayeza (2008, p1) considered the aim of the *Nokia Face of Africa* contest and questioned what this contest implied about African beauty and what a person who represents the beauty of the entire continent should look like. The initial aim of the contest was said to be the promotion of a positive image for African women and an opportunity for

young Black women to take part in the international beauty industry. It is safe to say that any accurate representation of African beauty would involve some sort of racial-based bias as skin tone plays a pivotal role in defining beauty for Africans. An accurate representation of African beauty is often not always achieved by such competitions which puts forward a different view and definition of African beauty to those held by Africans themselves and the rest of the world. Even with clear signs that Africa is moving with the times, some parts of the continent still consider African beauty as meaning having a heavy chest, large rounded buttocks, a dark complexion, an ethnic hairstyle, the ability to run one's home and give birth to children whom one then carries on one's plentiful hips (International Business Times 2012, p.1).

Undoubtedly, the media plays an integral role in perceptions around body image. Jung and Lee (cited in West 2012, pp.12-13) argued that the media largely mirrors social standards and beliefs; increasingly, the media has become the main source from which standards of beauty are derived and recreated over time. In a popular South African soap opera, *Generations, the Legacy* (2015), the concept of the modern girl is portrayed by a character called Getty: she is a young, Black female with a great career and social life but struggles with accepting her body shape and weight. Even though her friends and family convince her that she is beautiful she is not convinced because of the pressures she feels from her society. She sees the need to accept her body when she realises that her younger sister is faced with a similar issue of body dissatisfaction at the early age of 15 (Generations the Legacy 2015).

This soap opera explicitly illustrates how widespread issues surrounding body weight and image have become amongst South African women in the suburbs and townships. Almost every person who is an active part of either a developed or developing society expresses sensitivity regarding issues around his or her body; this is, however, truer for women (Viulani, Dionisio, Biague, Gagnol, Zecchinato & Scarcella 2013, p.3).

Traditionally, South Africans associate plumpness with beauty, health, wealth, higher social status, happiness, and affluence; this still holds true in some parts of present day South Africa (Muris, Meesters, van de Blom & Mayer 2005, p.2). In Black African communities, being lean or skinny has often been associated with disease, misery and poverty, but has become the prominent beauty ideal in most societies (Muris *et al.* 2005, p.2). A study by Gitau, Mickelsfield, Pettifier & Norris (2014, p.470) found that there is a high prevalence of body dissatisfaction among young black South African females, especially those in urban areas.

Mwaba and Roman (2009, p.904) also found that body dissatisfaction increases dramatically during adolescence and young adulthood in modernised societies, also that body dissatisfaction seems to be more prevalent amongst young females than males. Gitau *et al.* (2014, p.473) showed that young black South African women, who live in urban areas and are highly exposed to mass media, often feel that their appearance is not what it should be; hence they take part in body rectifying practices.

Mwaba and Roman (2009, p.906) also reported that young Black South African women are becoming more open and vulnerable to Western media ideals; they have become victims of images that the media depicts and they go through extreme measures to emulate those images. Even though they take part in body modification practices, they tend to have a higher self-esteem regarding their bodies than their white counterparts. Furthermore, young Black women in America have been reported to have less body image disturbance and dissatisfaction compared with European American women (Jefferson & Stake 2009, p.1). Even with attempts to encourage racial diversity, modern day Black women, young and old, often experience immense pressure to attain the dominant body size and appearance ideals (Jefferson & Stake 2009, p.2). Jefferson & Stake (2009, p.4) further suggested that it should be taken into consideration that, although young Black women do not feel as much pressure regarding their body weight and size, this is compensated for in the high dissatisfaction with their racially distinct hair, skin tone and facial features. This is not to say that white women do not experience issues and pressures relating to body size and appearance. Perceptions of body weight and body image are said to be primarily influenced by a person's culture, social preferences, race, ethnicity and the media (Grabe & Hyde 2006, p.622).

Most evident is the difference in the body image preferences based on race. Often White and Asian races do not prefer or tolerate a bigger body to the same extent as Black people. The White and Asian races associate a big body with laziness, ill-discipline and unattractiveness. As a result, women of these body types from these races are said to have negative evaluations about their bodies (Chithambo & Huey 2013, p.1; Schieman, McMuller & Swan 2007, p.290). Politics is also said to have an influence on women's body images and body weight perspectives. Increasing political and economic roles are said to put more pressure on women to be more concerned about their body image to emulate the dominant body image ideals expressed in the media, workplace and general society (Shonenye, Johnson, Steptoe & Wardle

2011, p.539). This body image has become synonymous with success and is thus an even more compelling form of symbolic or cultural capital.

Shahani-Denning (2003, p.14) stated that conventionally unattractive women, i.e. those thought of as fat, having bad hair and skin, are not highly favoured by society, especially regarding employment and career development. On the other hand, conventionally attractive, women (the direct opposite of the above) are considered more productive, efficient, and are better at communicating and interacting with clients (Shahani-Denning 2003, p.15). Henion (2007, p.1) found that the most common form of discrimination in the workplace is faced by obese women. Weight bias has become more prevalent than racial, gender, ethnic and sexual-orientation based bias. This perception applies to women across all races, because all women are pressured to maintain a smaller body in order to look professional and presentable. The globally accepted beauty and professional ideal is skinny bodies, flawless, light youthful skin, and fine straight hair.

Local and international anti-fat attitudes and campaigns are said to have been encouraged through the beliefs that a healthy ideal female body is the direct opposite of a fat body. Counter arguments state that anti-fat attitudes and campaigns have been established in order to promote the thin body ideal. Debates about acceptable body size and image have brought about the rise of the online Fat Acceptance Movement (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p1). This movement came into being as a reaction to anti-fat campaigns and classing obesity as a medical condition in the United States and various other international countries. The Fat Acceptance Movement aims to give confidence to women who are socially and medically considered obese or overweight. In addition, the movement motivates serious debate about fundamental perceptions of women's bodies and their visual representation by disregarding standard societal norms about body image (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p.2). Women experience more of the material and social consequences of the stigma attached to being fat than men do (Daniels 2009, p.10).

Fat acceptance prioritises the perceptions and experiences that fat women have regarding their bodies. Murray (2005, p.160) has described how Western perceptions of beauty have created a negative culture and understanding of fat women. Fat women are perceived as being lazy, having a weak will power and self-control, being socially deviant and promiscuous. Social media is used to talk about fat bodies as a kind of body instead of a kind of illness, and to discuss important issues regarding body weight, image, beauty and health. In addition, these

women are compelled to peruse assimilation tactics that strengthen the thin-fat divide which maintains that fat bodies are a representation of deviance, unattractiveness and ill-health in comparison to thin bodies, hence they should be changed or covered up (Murray 2008, p.155). The idea and need for body diversity is made clear by plus size models parading the latest beauty and fashion trends on social media pages. Society and consumer culture is accused of marginalising fat women by determining how they should dress for their bodies. As a result, Fat Activists as seen on social media sites, reject presenting their bodies as an illness or unfortunate reality that thinner people and society as a whole should put up with; instead they flaunt their bodies by wearing clothes and colours that draw attention to every curve instead of disguising them (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p.7).

The 'Fatosphere' consists of internet sites through which the Fat Acceptance movement is promoted; it offers a forum where plus-sized women can debate and disclose personal issues and experiences which relate to beauty, economic participation, their society and politics (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p.3). Daniels (2009, p.107) agreed that the Internet is a useful instrument and platform for communicating and addressing serious issues, creating awareness and empowering women who are marginalised. Plus-sized women complain that they are not accommodated in fashion, beauty and consumer culture which they believe also limits their participation as citizens of modernised societies. Anti-fat campaigns go as far as highlighting that fat people cannot take part in politics and business because they do not look the part and their bodies are thought not to be healthy enough to perform any productive tasks. In addition, fat people are said to put great strain on a state's resources, increase medical aid premiums and physically take up too much space (Afful & Ricciardelli 2015, p.6). Such brutal prejudice regarding people with socially-labelled bigger bodies promotes self-effacement, dissatisfaction, body modification surgeries, extreme dieting and exercise in order to obtain a usually unrealistic socially accepted body. Therefore, people partake in Fat Activism to deal with and develop their poor self and body image. However, Murray (2005, p.159) has highlighted that anti-fat activists should not be seen as people expressing hate or disgust towards fat people, because the health issues they raise as associated with being fat or obese are not to be taken lightly.



Since the mid-1970s feminists have argued that mass media, especially women's magazines, popular TV shows, music videos etc., are oppressive because they constantly inform women about their physical inadequacies and draw them into the idea and promise that bodily satisfaction can be bought (McRobbie 1999, p.6). A Fijian study by Becker, Burwell, Gilman, Herzog and Hamburg (2002, pp.510-512) found that there was a striking increase in self-reported irregular patterns of eating and body alterations after the introduction of television into rural-sub-urban areas of Fiji. Young women in the Fijian study wanted to look like the women they saw on TV, because their bodies and overall look was a means to a beneficial end, i.e. handsome rich men, good friendships, good employment and study opportunities and a generally expensive desirable lifestyle (Becker *et al.* 2002, pp.510-12). In relation to the above, Fisher & Voracek (2006, pp.192), in their discussion of determinants of female physical attractiveness, suggested that in societies where women have little economic resources, opportunities and wealth, men prefer and consider women with a greater amount of body fat attractive. On the other hand, societies with plentiful resources, wealth and opportunities prefer women with less body fat. There thus seems to be a direct link between female body size and socio-economic status.

According to Chapman (2007, p.1) a woman's physical appearance serves not only as a marker of socio-economic status, but more of gender, femininity, womanliness and racial identity, especially their hair and bodies. The apparent difference in body image and hair continues to haunt the existence of black women (Patton 2006, p.5). Black women have been deeply impinged on by hurtful debates on issues of skin colour, hair, facial features and body shape and size (Ashe 1995, p.1). Women with African features have had an uneasy familiarity with the European beauty ideal, and have been said to continuously fail to measure up to these normative beauty standards. Patton (2006, p.7) stated that the continuance of hegemonic defined standards of beauty strengthen European standards of beauty. The impact on Black women may be a result of the overemphasis and importance placed on all women's physical attractiveness. Additionally, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) have argued that Black women deal with the continuous burden to meet impossible and inaccessible beauty standards in unique and creative ways which attempt to compensate for the negativity surrounding their failure to meet society's strict beauty standards.

Moreover, instead of trying to emulate what they see in the media women have come to an acceptance and appreciation of their different physical features such as their full noses and lips, their alluring curvy hips and round buttocks. As a result of self-acceptance, Black women are able to embrace and accept women of all shapes and sizes because all women should be entitled to be recognised as beautiful in their own different ways (White 2011, pp.1-2). In contrast, Patton (2006, pp.26-27) argued that the desire to change the way one looks as perpetuated by the media may result in some black women disliking their own physical appearance and believing that being Black is not beautiful, hence the need to alter oneself. Black women have had to be particularly creative about their looks, especially their hairstyles, in order for upward mobility in the corporate world. Adopting European traits and hairstyles seems the most viable option for black women who are especially career driven (Midge & Russel 1996, p.8). Having to internalise the course of assimilation instilled in their societies, Black women have found themselves competing and rivalling against one another for the attainment of physical beauty and the status and benefits which it brings.

With modernity comes the certainty and pressure that skin, hair and bodies can and should be modified through diets, exercise, salon treatments and plastic surgery (Anderson-Fye 2012, p.16). The Afrocentric and Eurocentric debate arises because traditional societies believe that the body is a celestial unit that cannot and should not be freely altered by humans (Anderson-Fye 2012, p.18), while modernised societies feel the human body should continuously be made better to aid an overall better life. According to South African President Jacob Zuma (2012), the black youth of South Africa make relentless efforts to adopt the lifestyles and looks of white people. He added that “even if you apply any kind of lotion and straighten your hair you will never be white” (Zuma 2012, The Mercury). Western ideals of beauty have become entrenched in the minds of society as unwritten laws which must be followed at all costs. According to Fanon (1967, p.8), Black people behave differently towards each other, and towards the white race. In addition, he suggested that because of historical eras such as slavery or colonialism, Black people hold whiteness in high esteem. He believed that the hostile interaction of the superior and inferior race has retained long lasting effects to an extent where Black people feel more appropriate when emulating white culture and beliefs than their own (Fanon 1967, pp.8-10). According to Biko (1990), oppressors possess great power over the oppressed if they manage to capture their minds.

Whether or not people should comply with standards which are dictated by their and other societies, social interactions or the media, continues to be a historically and politically relevant debate with various underlying aspects and implications. These include conflicts between the Eurocentric and Afro-centric paradigms which have raised much debate about power imbalances, distorted identities and personalities, constant feelings of insecurity, feeling unaccepted, and generally not being good enough (Sekayi 2003, p.6). Becker (2004) asserted that Western beauty standards have a continuously detrimental impact on non-Western women. As a result, the notions that western standards of beauty regulate what the global society should consider beautiful are strengthened. According to Okafor (2007, p.38) global beauty images, such as the Barbie doll, influence the dynamics which encompass the perceptions of beauty in African societies. As a result, the well-being and perceptions of women, young and old, are negatively affected and the use of indigenous African cosmetics and practices declines (Okafor 2007; Franklin 2013). Even though the global society may attempt to appreciate women of all shapes, sizes, skin tones, hair textures and styles, western popular culture symbolises one image as the acceptable model of beauty which embodies how people think about and perceive beauty (Okafor 2007, p.38). This image often disagrees with opposing images of beauty such as those of African societies.

This body of literature is mostly comprised of international work, which can be related to the experiences and perceptions of Black women locally. However, the researcher does not know how far the findings expressed in the literature can be generalised to Black female students at the UKZN PMB campus. Hence, this study sought to determine whether the above outlined issues of self and societal perceptions regarding Black women's skin, hair and bodies as influenced by social constructions of beauty, can be applied to Black female students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus.

## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically informed by the following interrelated theories: Black Feminism and Bourdieu's ideas of Symbolic Violence and Taste.

### 3.1 Black Feminism

Generally, the concept of Black feminism aims to address racial, sexual, and class discrimination against Black women (Combahee River Collective 1977). Black feminism attempts to impress upon Black women that it is vital to have an identity that takes into consideration their gender as well as their race. It considers it essential that the differences and similarities between women of all races be studied, without normalising the dominance or subordination of either one. Additionally, Black feminism promotes the analysis of the interrelated systems of oppression which are at play in Black women's lives. In order for society to understand the varying issues faced by women, society must understand that women are not a natural category but are socially created and influenced (Shaktini 2005). Black feminism suggests that women of all races and cultures are affected by social institutions and perceptions, but pressure and stress is added onto Black women. Feminism is for the idea that patriarchal systems and practices in place, in almost every society require women to behave in ways which make them a subordinate group to their male counter parts. For that reason, feminism argues that women should be socialised in a manner which gives them an equal opportunity to take part progressively in societal activities as males, without extra effort because one is a woman. Black feminism takes the argument a step further, by suggesting that Black women are not only discriminated by their gender, but also by their race and their ethnicities, which also includes historical and socio-economical aspects (Denis 2008). Feminism itself has long been concerned with issues regarding the female body, by articulating the link between women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and the influence that has on their social positioning and functionality as well as of self-worth. As shown in the literature review, society places a higher value on women whose physical attributes are considered beautiful (Shaktini 2005).

With reference to this study, Black feminism brings into perspective the manner in which Black women struggle with issues regarding beauty in terms of gender, race, ethnicity and class. As such, Black women do not only experience pressures to conform to and maintain beauty standards, but they have to make extra efforts because their skin, hair and bodies often do not fit into society's dominant beauty standards. Such is the plea of Black feminism, that Black women are often excluded from many dominant perceptions and practices because of the social institutions and systems which govern their lives. The exclusion of Black women in dominant culture does not only perpetuate social inequality and imbalances, but it also distorts Black women's identity. This is why Black feminism argues for Black women's issues to be included in the study of all women, in order for them to be able to locate and identify themselves within their societies without an added feeling of otherness (Hernois 2005). Truth (1851) extrapolated that society clearly treats white women differently to Black women, as though Black women are not women. Her argument is in conjunction with the notion that society approves of all that is white or Western and disapproves of all that is Black. Such a notion enhances the need for Black women to emulate and attempt to identify themselves as non-Black, in order to be accepted by society. The tenets of Black feminism may assist in analysing the research data in a manner that takes into consideration Black women's struggle with positioning themselves and their identities within their societies. It will also give clarity on how Black women negotiate with the dominant structures and perceptions of their communities. Such a discrimination experienced by Black women may be attributed to the concept of *symbolic violence* discussed below. The use of Black feminism together with Bourdieu's concepts of Symbolic Violence and Taste are useful because they strengthen the perception that Black women seem to experience more pressure and discrimination with regard to issues of beauty. Their physical and socio-economic features contribute to their categorisation as a subordinate and disadvantaged group in instances where dominant societal ideals are key.

## 3.2 Bourdieu's Theory of Class Distinction

### 3.2.1 Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence may be defined as ideas, attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of a dominant group which are imposed on a subordinate group with the aim of altering their self-perceptions and ultimately their behaviour so that these resemble the preferences of a prevailing group. Additionally, Bourdieu defined symbolic violence as a non-brutal and unnoticed dominance which is maintained through normal daily activities and social habits (Bourdieu 1990, p.28). Symbolic violence is seen as an elusive type of violence which emerges from innate and internalised discriminatory beliefs, and is often not recognized as a violation (Bourdieu 1990, p.29). In addition, Bourdieu argues that symbolic violence is not a physical brutality, rather it is symbolically acted upon a subordinate group by a dominant group. It is considered a 'soft' and unconscious violence which goes unnoticed and blends into everyday life, such as the class or feminist struggle (Moi 1991, p.1021). The primary means of imposition are socialisation, ideology and representation.

It is further argued that the dominated group in question is often aware that idealised perceptions and roles are being imposed on them, because they voluntarily participate in the process of being subordinated. The willingness to cooperate with the standards of a dominant group places further emphasis on a subordinated group's awareness of the manner in which they are subjected to ideals and practices which have a determining effect on their lives (Bourdieu 1990, p.30). Once a dominated group begins to actively adopt and accept the concepts of a dominant group and begins to see the world through the eyes of the dominant group, the social order becomes accepted as legitimate and pre-ordained. The manner in which symbolic violence is blended into everyday routines and dominant discourses makes it almost impossible to identify as an imposition of perceptions and ideals of one group onto another (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.144).

The cultures and identities of dominant groups are often perpetuated and reinforced in a way that is beneficial to that group, without any overt objections. There is misrecognition of what is true and what is not true and the misrecognition of a violation of one group's culture and systems as an acceptable norm. However, recognition may occur when both the dominating and dominated group become reflexive about the ways in which they have taken the world for granted by easily accepting the world presented and considering it natural. Symbolic violence

does not involve any communication or interaction between the dominant and subordinate groups. It is more a state of affairs into which most people are either born or transition into throughout the course of their lives; hence it is not easily discontinued but is regenerated through time. Bourdieu argued that symbolic capital, prestige, recognition, and privilege are granted only to those who embody the cultural values of the dominant group (Bourdieu 1990, p.36). One may argue that the symbols of beauty for dominated societies have been destroyed and new symbols and meanings have been created through the new systems, attitudes, behaviors, and cultures enforced on these societies (Frazier 2006).

In order to have a clear understanding of Bourdieu, one must describe the fundamentals which tie together Bourdieu's paradigm, namely the ideas of *field* and *habitus*. *Field* may be defined as a social setting or environment within which individuals (social agents) and their social positions are situated (Moi 1991, p.1017). A *field* is also a social space wherein social agents try to position themselves by moving up their society's hierarchy. Social agents' interactions with their field's dominant values and habits determines their position within the field. This is to say that, people who adhere to their society's standards are always considered to be at the top of the social order, as opposed to those who do not. A similar notion is shared with regard to women's interaction and reaction to dominant beauty ideals. *Habitus* may be defined as the entrenched habits, skills and traits that people have obtained through their life experiences. *Habitus* influences people's attitudes, perceptions and preferences which inform their behaviour (Swartz 2002, p.625). However, *habitus* is not a concept which imposes beliefs and feelings of being controlled, resulting in the manifestation of socially expected and acceptable behaviour, such as in Foucault's concepts of power and deviance (Foucault 1975). Rather, *habitus* is considered a collection of guidelines which inform social and individual perceptions and behaviour. *Habitus* is also an internalisation and acceptance as the norm of a societies attitudes, values and perceptions, which are transferred through interaction and socialisation of social agents (Bourdieu 1990).

Moi (1991) suggested that the effects of societal perceptions and determinants of acceptable behaviour are often not overtly expressed, such as in perceptions of beauty. People may, however, feel discomfort when trying to deviate from dominant beauty ideals, because deviating from dominant beauty ideals is often prohibited (Moi 1991, p.1018). According to Rogers (1985), Bourdieu considered the social field as a mediator of suppression; hence it ensures that objections towards dominant ideals are not allowed. This means that the

hierarchical order of the social field has become normalised to an extent that it is generally considered as truth and going against the social order is seen as a deviance towards oneself and one's society because it would impede progression into higher ranks. For this reason, Bourdieu argued that everything spoken and unspoken within a field is an illustration of and as a result of symbolic violence. Bourdieu (1990) considered it remarkable that societies that have vast differences and similarities do not require mediation to determine what *unacceptable* is. Only people or groups who society considers powerful, elite or possessing some form of capital which qualifies as higher class, have the right to determine or change social ideals such as that of beauty. Hence, such people as possessors of social capital and symbolic power become facilitators or even perpetrators of symbolic violence (Moi 1991, p.1022). Even though desires and attempts to overthrow dominant social ideals set by social elites are present, aspirations towards being an elite and possessing the social capital and conforming to dominant beauty ideals, are also present. Hence women find themselves in need of changing their skin hair and bodies as a way of adhering to dominant beauty ideals. Feminists have argued that the behaviour influencing power struggles between men and women are similar to those between dominant and subordinate classes and races (Moi 1991, p.1035). Black women, following this logic, are on the receiving end of extensive and invasive symbolic violence.

Furthermore, social inequalities are considered an essential and integral part of a well-functioning society, because inequality is said to predict and regulate the perceptions and behaviour of individuals and social groups (Haferkamp & Smelser 1992; Huaco 2008). Hence the presence of symbolic violence which is derived from socially set distinctions and tastes is said to be inevitable in every society (Bourdieu 2001, pp.21-22). Bourdieu argued that taste and symbolic violence encourage women to possess a habitus which positions them as a subordinate group. De Beauvoir suggested that women should avoid taking part in social activities and institutions which oppress and subordinate them; she also argued that socially accepted concepts which encourage and naturalise inequality in the form of symbolic violence only persist because women have accepted them as part of a normal social order (Bourdieu 1990, pp.30-31; Beauvoir 1949). Bourdieu (1990) argued that while women should be encouraged to avoid interacting with and adhering to patriarchal ideals, the difficulties of detaching from patriarchal bondage should not be underestimated, because the effects of symbolic violence do not dissolve even if a person transitions into different social settings throughout their lives.



Gender inequality illustrates symbolic violence better than any other form of inequality, because it is also played out in manners which have become disguised and accepted as a normal part of our daily lives. Gender inequality is similarly imposed through the manipulation of the dominated group's cognisance, willpower, perceptions and ultimately, behaviour (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.145; Weininger 2002, p.153). Hence, cognisance becomes shared and the relation between the dominated and dominant seems flawless and natural; it is then viewed as a society with shared values and beliefs instead of one with relations of inequality and exploitation.

For instance, in a patriarchal society, men impose their perceptions and expectations on women who, as a result, behave and adopt a world-view which will be considered appropriate. Gender-based discrepancies have become accepted by both men and women as part of their normal everyday lives. As a result, women gain symbolic capital from conforming to the beauty standards set by their society's dominant groups. Symbolic capital may be defined as resources, status and value awarded to an individual as a result of their social position, behaviour or conformity to certain standards set by a dominant group (Bourdieu 1986, p.256).

While women submit to patriarchal notions set out by society as the natural order of things, they also find themselves submitting to other women whom society deem superior because they meet certain standards that supposedly define what being a beautiful woman means. Women interact with or validate forms of violation which victimise them, such as the constant pressures to adhere to impossible standards of beauty. The subtleness of symbolic violence does not strip away the level to which women are affected and exploited by social standards, culture and practices imposed on them by those whom their societies consider dominant (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.148). Adhering to the natural order of things set out by the dominant group may lead to a seemingly logical disregard for oneself and the fragmentation of one's identity, natural self and feeling the need to change how one looks in order to attain what society appreciates as the appropriate way to look (de Beauvoir 1949).

In present day modern societies, women are constantly presented with imagery that suggests that their natural bodies are a form of deviance because they do not conform to hegemonic ideals, hence they should be changed. De Beauvoir (1949) suggested that women are not born women but become women through the interactions that they have with the beliefs and practices of their societies and with their societies in their entirety. In the same way she argued

that femininity is made compulsory for women; conformity is rewarded and disobedience is punished. A similar notion is shared by Butler (1990) who suggested that one is not born either male or female; rather one *becomes* either male or female and expresses oneself as such through repetitive social interactions, subject to or monitored by cultures and perceptions of who and what one ought to be. Women act out their femininity and womanliness in overt and covert ways through social interactions, daily routines and gender roles which create and express meaning for themselves and their wider societies respectively (Bordo 1993, p.2372).

On the other hand, “symbolic violence is the experience of feeling out of place, anxious, awkward, shamed and stupid” (Samuel 2013, p.398). This is due to the experience of being unable to construct and carry out appropriate actions and behaviour which subjectively shows one’s commitment and adherence to the rules and ways of dominant groups and their beauty ideals. Inequality amongst women is also manifested through symbolic violence, because different perceptions and behaviour categorise women in either the dominant or dominated group. Hence dominated groups feel pressured or motivated to succumb to certain rituals, trends and standards of beauty set by dominant groups as unwritten laws that must be adopted into their daily routines, as a way of conformity and to avoid being rejected or alienated.

### 3.2.2 Taste

Taste may also be defined as the culture and preferences of a group or society that do not only distinguish between genders, classes and races, but that also positions and identifies individuals within their society in a manner which either ridicules or dignifies (Bourdieu 1984, p.467). Taste is constructed through the manner in which a person has been socialised and through the particular types of people and social institutions people interact with as they transition through the different stages of their lives (Bourdieu 1984). Taste may also be influenced by a person’s family background and educational level (Bourdieu 1984).

Bourdieu (1984, p.466) argued that taste is not separate from symbolic violence; instead taste is the driving force behind symbolic violence. This is so because positive and negative judgements of people are based on what a dominant group deems acceptable and the extent to which an individual possess traits which dominant groups consider acceptable. In addition, classifying social phenomena, such as perceptions of beauty, is said to be guided by daily habits and interactions with culture and classes from deeply embedded patterns and practices which

are often perceived as society's norms and values (Bourdieu 1984, p.466). Taste is said not only to guide a person or group's preferences and attitudes about certain things, but also to determine and define what is and is not acceptable, beautiful and good. Bourdieu argued that taste does not only determine perceptions and preferences but also affects and determines the behaviour, social space and social position which is often more befitting to social preference than personal preference. Bordo (1993) suggested that sociocultural features have the greatest influence on the pressures and anxieties that women feel regarding the constant need to alter their bodies. The notion of taste is seen as an integrated issue and as a system which unites, divides and constantly constructs and reconstructs power differences among the different social classes (Bourdieu 1984, p.467). Furthermore, Bourdieu argued that culture and language are not only creators of meaning but mainly create and maintain hierarchies of power and domination. The manner in which young Black women define, label and attach meaning to what they consider beautiful and what society considers beautiful could be influenced by hegemonic beauty ideals which reinforces certain aspects as superior and essential.

Dominant people or groups are able to determine and restrict a society's tastes by making use of indigenous knowledge attached to a dominated society's cultural forms and preferences in order to constantly reinforce margins between themselves and minority groups. Through such means, Bourdieu saw the formation of social classes (Weininger 2002). Women's bodies are said to be instruments through which culture is expressed and practised and onto which beauty practices and cultures are acted on; additionally, all aspects regarding our individual bodies are said to be influenced by either one's own culture or that of others (Bordo 1993, p.2362). Bordo (1993) asserted that the body should not be considered merely a physical entity but a symbolic surface whereon unwritten societal laws on beautiful and acceptable bodies, are constructed, reconstructed, displayed and negotiated over time. Moreover, Butler (1990) expressed that the body is also a site whereon identity is expressed and performed. This performance is conducted according to a social script; if one is able to follow this script, one obtains status capital and recognition. As a result, one may understand the need and desire that women have with regard to acquiring not only the perfect body, but also the perfect femininity and version of themselves. Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of dominant groups' ability to restrict tastes can be related to the manner in which Western ideals set standards and restrictions on what women and their societies should accept as beautiful and appropriate regarding their physical appearance. For instance, society ranks women who conform to hegemonic beauty ideals in a higher class than those who do not; the aforementioned women are taken seriously.

Unlike many theories which associate class only with socio-economic status, Bourdieu's concepts of taste and symbolic violence acknowledge that class can be determined by many other things (Clark & Lipset 1991). Skin colour and hair, for instance, have been considered the two most prominent physical features to set women apart from each other and contribute to a class division based on physical appearance and the meanings attached to them. Women who have what is considered appropriate skin colour and hair are thought to have the ability and opportunity to use power and take control in their societies even though they do not, ironically, have any power over their own bodies. Bourdieu argued that every form of power in social life is a possible foundation for class formation (Laberge & Kay 2002, p.2).

Bourdieu (1991, p.18) identified cultural capital as the value attached to a feature, quality or characteristic within a particular society, for instance, the value of knowledge, behaviour, fashion sense, physical traits, etc. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991, p.22) described cultural capital as the basis upon which social life is shaped as it also regulates one's social position. Cultural capital can serve as a source of shared identity or as a source of inequality. Some forms of cultural capital may be more valuable than others and could either aid or deter the mobility of people through social ranks in a similar way to economic capital. This is the case with women who possess socially desirable and valuable physical features and those who do not (Goldthorpe 2007, p.5). Furthermore, cultural capital is considered arbitrary as it varies throughout the different stages of one's life and through the different social contexts through which one transitions. Additionally, Bourdieu noted that the culture upheld and imposed by dominant groups is one which informs what society deems acceptable. What is considered appropriate is most often determined by the interests and standards of dominant classes, and what the dominant classes consider social capital ensures the constant reproduction of inequality and unequal distribution of social power (Goldthorpe 2007, p.6). Even though the ideas of dominant groups are often accepted as true, they are not always accepted as inherent, because of the different stages and eras of socialisation people have experienced.

Moreover, economic capital cannot single-handedly form and define social classes because economic capital only classifies groups of people based on wealth. On the other hand, cultural capital encompasses many other factors that could possibly differentiate people, which include family background, level of education, personal experiences, socialisation, hereditary and learnt behaviour, skin tone, body shape, hair texture and style and other beauty-related trends.

These, he explained can create an individual or group preference and cultural tastes, hence a hierarchical structuring of society through classes (Bourdieu 1984, p.243). He described ‘high-brow’ tastes and ‘low-brow’ tastes. High-brow tastes are those which society considers justifiable tastes which ostensibly permit members of the dominant group to scoff at those who do not fit in, hence upholding restricted membership and clear boundaries between the dominant and subordinate. On the other hand, low-brow tastes are utilised by subordinate groups to rebel against the strict ideals of those whom society considers dominant, as a way of showing power and unity (Bourdieu 1984, p.244).

Additionally, by assuming that cultural and economic capital are similarly essential, Bourdieu’s concepts propose that cultural tastes and practices develop and manipulate relations of power and identity within different groups of people. Therefore, cultural tastes may also be useful in positioning and classifying economic classes as readily as classes may be useful to classify cultural tastes and practices (Bourdieu 1986, p.246). Marx stated that a group of people who are not aware that they have similar traits and interests cannot be defined as a class. Weber viewed classes as groups of people who are aware of their similarities for diverse purposes and at differing periods of their lives (Veenstra 2005, p.255). Through Marx and Weber’s understanding of class, Bourdieu acknowledged their concepts but chose to pay attention to the significance of shared cultural characteristics and activities which aid in the structuring of class awareness. For instance, women with the belief that long straight hair is beautiful and who choose to wear weaves or chemically straighten their hair in order to obtain their desired hair, share cultural characteristics and perform similar activities based on their beliefs, preferences and perspectives and hence constitute a class according to Bourdieu (1986, p.248).

Bourdieu also acknowledged that every society has variety and within every society there exists an acceptance and a rejection of such variance. The role of variety is to highlight the manner in which dominant and subordinate groups experience the same social world differently and accept their difference as normal. Through habitus, Bourdieu explained distinction and difference as social attitudes and systems which permit us to misconstrue taught and gained tastes as natural, hence creating the belief that difference is not only natural but also necessary (Foster 1986, p.104). Habitus may be defined as a deeply rooted set of attributes that, when faced with circumstances, try to actively alter them, generate social spaces and systems that allow people to react in ways which maintain and strengthen those dominant attributes (Samuel 2013, p.399). The political aspect of habitus is visible through the way the concept of aesthetics

is constructed and understood. Members of the dominant class understand their social position and cultural practices as legitimate from an early age and accept their ability to identify and intelligently interact with the concept of aesthetics as a natural privilege that should be accepted as such by the subordinate class (Veenstra 2005, p.251).

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu proposed that a society's culture, preferences and consumption thereof is mindfully and purposefully influenced by society's need and ability to legitimate and make social differences imperceptible (Bourdieu 1984, p.7). This is not to say that cultural tastes and preferences are naturally occurring. Bourdieu explained that cultural tastes occur socially, through social interactions and various social structures, but are accepted and perceived as a natural part of societal functions. He observed that the process of distinction in society is made to seem natural because the distortions which occur from it are thoroughly cloaked and made unnoticeable.

This study is concerned with Black women's perceptions of beauty and the various underlying aspects which may or may not influence their preferences and practices with regard to attaining and being defined as beautiful within their social circles and as individuals. Bourdieu's theories of taste and symbolic violence describe how people's perceptions are influenced by the hierarchies in their societies and how these perceptions are significantly constructed by these hierarchies. As such, what is perceived as beautiful involves class, gender and racial disparities as these are all social aspects which have an influence on not only perceptions and attitudes but also behaviour of individuals and groups. Bourdieu's concepts are also useful in this study because they conceptually look at the manner in which people position themselves and are positioned within their societies based on external factors, in this case, their physical appearance. In addition, beauty and perceptions thereof are potent symbolic forces that reinforce social hierarchies and often do so by appearing to be natural preferences rather than adherences to an internalised social script. Indeed, beauty is a particularly significant concept for the lives and identities of women as indicated by feminist theorists. Appearance, especially skin, hair and body, have become symbolic sites of negotiation and contestation as well as acculturation for Black women.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Study Location

The study was conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. This location was selected because of the availability of relevant participants and because of the positioning of the researcher as a postgraduate student on the campus. The Pietermaritzburg campus is divided into different fields of study located on different parts of the campus. Hence the culture of students on the different parts of the campus could differ immensely, and so could their attitudes and perceptions. Through casual observation and interaction with a variety of students throughout her time as a student, the researcher was encouraged to consider the UKZN PMB campus as an ideal location to collect varying and meaningful data, taking into consideration the small sample size of the study.

### 4.2 Research Design

This study has made use of qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodology may be defined as research methods which aid to uncover how and why humans behave and think in certain ways, including their experiences and attitudes (Neuman 2011, p.102). It is often used to investigate issues pertaining to the manner in which people organise, relate to and interact with their societies. It has aided this study in obtaining information which reveals the perceptions of Black women with regard to their physical appearance, the perceptions they have about their peers and their understandings of the perceptions held by society. In addition, underlying attitudes and reactions to these perceptions were also uncovered. Qualitative research is interested in understanding meanings which people and their societies have constructed and attached to certain parts of their lives (Merriam 2009, p.13), such as the meanings constructed, held and attached to Black women's skin, hair and bodies. Nkwi, Nyamongo and Ryan (2001, p.1) defined qualitative research methodology as research which uses any data that does not involve ordinal or statistical values; instead it relies on linguistic data and thus was appropriate for this study.

Qualitative methodology is interpretive; it puts emphasis on meaning and seeks to show how people's subjective understandings and experiences influence and are influenced by wider social systems or structures. Additionally, it allows the researcher to assume that research participants' perceptions, feelings, ideas, actions and experiences are a result of socially constructed meanings and experiences instead of meanings and experiences constructed independently by themselves. This was appropriate for this study because it aimed at uncovering the influence of societal beauty ideals on Black women's perceptions of beauty. Qualitative methodology takes into consideration that the lives and worlds of humans are primarily based on language, culture, social interactions and experiences (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2004, p.98). Neuman (2011, p.103) described interpretive research as the study of cultures and the everyday experiences of people in particular contexts, in order to get a clear understanding of the meanings which are attached to certain aspects of their lives and the ways in which their societies create reality (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2004, p.99). Qualitative methods are also appropriate because the study focused on gathering information through asking questions about perceptions, behaviours and attitudes of female students regarding the realities surrounding their perceptions of beauty with a particular focus on their skin, hair and bodies. These methods also allow the studying of influential realities constituted by subjective perceptions and underlying codes of social meaning and expression.

### 4.3 Sampling Method

Recruitment was carried out using non-probability purposive sampling. Non-probability sampling may be considered as sampling where the selection of participants is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness; therefore the chance of one being selected as a participant is unknown. In non-probability sampling, the sample of participants needs to have characteristics which best suit the participant criteria set according to the purpose of the study (Richie & Lewis 2003, p.78). Non-probability sampling is appropriate for scaled-down in-depth studies, such as this one, because it emphasises ensuring that the sample possesses well-suited characteristics. The participants were selected because they possess features allowing for thorough investigation and understanding of the dominant themes of the study. For instance, the researcher ensured that the participants selected had characteristics which were appropriate, such as Black, female, age range (18-35), studying at the Pietermaritzburg campus.



With the above parameters in mind, participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling may be defined as gradually accumulating the number of participants by identifying people who are relevant to the study and asking them for referral to other relevant people who might be interested in being participants. It was useful for the purpose of this study because the researcher could easily identify relevant and available participants and because there was not particular sampling fame attached to the recruitment of participants in this study. Snowballing proved useful in this study because students were scarce on campus due to the protest action on campus during the time of recruitment. Thus, students referred the researcher to other students who they knew would be interested, relevant and available to participate in the study. The researcher ensured that participants who were selected were relevant and met the criteria set. Students were made aware of the study mostly through word of mouth and social media; those who were interested availed themselves and also referred the researcher to people who they knew or thought would be interested in such a study.

The problem with snowball sampling is that it is not accurately representative of the larger population (non-scientific). Also, because snowball sampling is dependent on the availability of participants from the same social group, it may have a negative impact on the diversity of the data gathered and result in the collection of non-generalisable information.

#### 4.4 Sample

For this study, the sample was 30 Black female students in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels of study, ranging between the ages of 18 and 26 years. It was appropriate to choose both undergraduate and postgraduate participants, in order to accommodate the age range. The age range of 18-26 years did not only constitute ‘young women’ but also allowed for the gathering of data from different age groups, as perceptions could also vary and change with age. Also, working with both undergraduate and postgraduate participants was important because these women have a different and progressive exposure to the world around them and possibly different ways of engaging with it. For the purpose of the study, ‘Black females’ means all women of colour. All women of colour were included in the study because literature showed that they experience issues of beauty similarly to Black women, especially with their skin and hair. There was no specification or restriction on the participants’ area of origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ethnic group and religious or political affiliation. Keeping these and other aspects of women’s lives open also increased the possibility of greater variety

in the sample. The only restrictions in the selection of the study sample were gender, age and race. The participants were recruited during the second semester of the 2015 academic year. The researcher acknowledges the issue of diversity due to the skewness of the sample. However, the campus environment within which the study was conducted is diverse.

#### 4.4 1 Participant Profile

The participants were profiled as follows:

Age: 18-26

Race: 28 Black, 2 Coloured, no Indian females agreed to participate.

Nationality: 28 South African, 2 non-South African

Level of Study: 19 undergraduates, 11 postgraduates

Geographical location: On and off campus student residences.

A detailed participant profile table is attached as Appendix C.

#### 4.5 Data Collection Method

Data was collected during the second semester of the 2015 academic year. The study findings were obtained through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are one of the data collection methods used in qualitative research. According to Gray (2004, p.189), interviewing generally (and semi-structured interviews specifically) is a powerful and useful way of helping people to explain, unpack and make things clear that are or have been kept hidden. The interviewer's role in this instance involved the posing of questions and ensuring that the interview covered all the aspects of the phenomena being studied. The interviewer also probed participants for further clarification of their responses. Probing is important when the researcher's objective is to explore the subjective meanings that participants ascribe to personal and social concepts, events and experiences, such as in this study (Gray 2004, p.195; Neuman 2011, p.480). During the interview, the interviewer (researcher) did not share her experiences with the participants as this could cause further bias. The interviewer made use of an interview guide which thematically guided the conversation and outlined issues that needed to be discussed. This data collection method was the best to use in this study which sought to reveal people's attitudes, perceptions and symbolic meanings, because it allowed for the gathering of information which was rich, exploratory, reflective, meaningful and detailed (Gray 2004,

p.190). Interviews proved to be effective in this study as the data collected revealed the participants' perceptions and meanings they attach to issues surrounding beauty.

Semi-structured interviews have certain disadvantages. They are often time consuming for both the participant and interviewer, because participants often wish to elaborate their responses, reflect and refer to things they have seen, heard or encountered. However, good interviewing techniques by the interviewer eliminate the feeling of a long and daunting task, instead creating a pleasant conversation (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003, p.138). Regardless of the difficulties that come with semi-structured interviews, they were most appropriate for this study. Most students who were approached were enthusiastic to participate because the research topic focused on an issue that is currently strongly debated. In addition, students who expressed enthusiasm felt that their participation would add to the debate on the issue of Black female beauty. As a result, participants felt that they gave meaningful and insightful information and encouraged other female students to participate. The interviews in this study ranged from 20 – 40 minutes. Interviews were noted and voice recorded with the permission of each participant. Participants were at liberty to give responses in the language with which they were comfortable, to ensure that they were fully able to express themselves. Responses were translated into English during the transcription process.

#### **4.6 Data Collection Instrument**

An interview schedule has been attached as Appendix A. The interview schedule consists of open-ended questions developed by the researcher and her supervisor, after careful consideration of the research topic and literature on the topic at hand. The questions were developed to allow the participants to give intricate accounts of their experiences, perceptions and observations based on the topic. The Informed Consent Letter is attached as Appendix B.

#### **4.7 Data Analysis Method**

Analysing data may be defined as the systematic organising, integrating and examining of information gathered during the data collection process (Neuman 2011, p.507). Interpretive data analysis techniques have proved most effective for the analysis of the study's findings. Interpretive data analysis involves providing a careful account of the characteristics, processes, connections and contexts which constitute the phenomenon being studied and which is in a

language that is closely related to the phenomenon itself (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2004, p.115). In addition, interpretive data analysis aids the researcher to put real-life events into perspective, in order to derive an undeniable description of the phenomena of interest, in a manner which is close to the context. As a result, people who are familiar with the context of the phenomena will easily recognise it and could see it in a new or better perspective (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2004, p.116).

Analysis was done with the use of thematic and coded sorting of the research data according to topics and questions discussed during the interview sessions. Coding or thematic analysis involves the arrangement of raw data into conceptual groups and creating themes or concepts based on the issues tackled during the interviews and key focus of the study (Neuman 2011, p.510). Thematic analysis did not only assist the researcher to sort the raw data, it also improved the manner in which she disentangled details furnished by the participants. It further encouraged the researcher to conceptualise and make sound conclusions from the responses more easily. Participants' responses were coded according to the themes in the interview guide: definitions of beauty, hair, skin, body and beauty trends.

#### 4.8 Validity and Rigour

The term 'validity' may be defined as "the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration" (Babbie & Mouton 2011, p.122). Rigour maybe referred to as trustworthiness (Babbie & Mouton 2011, p.122. The researcher made use of three strategies to ensure validity and rigour were upheld. Firstly, the researcher acknowledged personal biases which may have had an influence on the interpretation and findings of the study. Secondly, the researcher made sure that all primary and secondary data was recorded and kept for referral, ensuring that interpretations of the data were stable and transparent (Noble & Smith 2015, p.3). Lastly, the final thesis will be made available to the public so that future researchers or writers are able to study the research findings (Babbie & Mouton 2011, p.122).

## 4.9 Ethical Considerations

It is important to preserve the integrity of the participants. Each participant was interviewed in a private space and given the opportunity to express themselves in a manner in which they felt comfortable. The opinions, attitudes and experiences shared by the participants were not challenged. Instead, all responses were treated as valuable contributions to the research findings. Moreover, in this research confidentiality and anonymity were provided. Confidentiality and anonymity ensure that the participant's identity and information are not be exposed. For instance, the participants' names, surnames, student numbers, physical addresses and fields of study have not been included in the transcriptions or discussion of results. As a result, participants openly expressed themselves during interviews. Students' real names or any other details that could make them identifiable were excluded from the transcripts, analysis and discussion of data. Participants were assured that ethical considerations such as confidentiality would be upheld, through informed consent. They signed an informed consent letter which appropriately informed them about the study, what was expected from them as participants, all the terms and conditions of participation and the contact details of all relevant stakeholders (researcher, supervisor and research office). The informed consent letters were read together with the researcher before being signed by the participants. It was made clear to the participants that agreeing to take part in the study was completely voluntary and that refusing to participate or withdrawing from an interview in progress would not affect them negatively. Few participants refused to be voice recorded; also no participants reported feeling any kind of distress during or after an interview.

## 4.10 Limitations

The time consuming nature of the collection and analysing of data may be seen as a limitation of this study. Some students who were approached indicated that their participation in the study could clash with their academic commitments. This was understandable because the data was collected towards the end of the semester, which is a crucial time for the assessment of students' performance. In addition, during the time data was collected, student protests had erupted. This increased the difficulty of finding students on campus as most students avoided campus for security reasons. Another limitation in this study was the small sample interviewed. This is one aspect of qualitative research that is often critiqued: a small sample makes it difficult to generalise the research findings to the entire UKZN, PMB campus Black female student

population. Lastly, it may also be difficult to generalise the findings to women who are illiterate or not in higher education and women who are more traditional than modern because this study's participants had some level of education which may have had an influence on their ability to give critical and reflective responses.

#### **4.11 Possible Bias**

I acknowledge that my identity and experiences with body image and the beauty phenomenon may present a potential bias. As a researcher, my perception of black beauty may have had an unintentional influence on understanding and interpreting the primary and secondary research data. Yet, my identity as a Black woman may also have had a positive impact on gathering meaningful responses because I may have been able to easily understand and relate to the perceptions and responses of participants. Moreover, being able to converse with someone who may have had similar experiences, may have fostered a conducive setting which encouraged participants to honestly and freely express themselves. On the other hand, participants may have felt uncomfortable or awkward talking about issues around negative attitudes towards dark skin and fuller figures as the researcher fits that description.

## Chapter 5: Contesting Beauty: Negotiating the Expectations

### 5.1 Defining Beauty

Six participants defined beauty as having to do with character, perceptions and behaviour rather than physical features or material adornments. Five participants also defined beauty as the manner in which one carries oneself: they associated beauty with self-love and purity, taking care of all aspects of oneself, and having a high self-esteem. These participants viewed beauty as the manner in which one perceives and portrays oneself and not as how one looks. Lastly, beauty was defined as an understanding, appreciation, acceptance and being comfortable with who and what one is, inside and outside, without any pressure to conform to societal standards. The definitions of beauty offered by these eleven participants follow (Du Bois 1903) who claimed that women possess both internal and external characteristics which can be considered as aspects and factors which ultimately make them beautiful as discussed in the introductory section of the literature review. Participants' perceptions of a non-physical definition of beauty were specifically expressed as follows:

*Beauty is about that inner beauty not appearance.* (Candice, interviewed October 2015)

*I think beauty is just a perception it's the way you see yourself, like the sentence which says "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder", I don't think it's a physical thing, but actually the attitude of the person.* (Busisiwe, interviewed October 2015)

*I would define beauty as being able to do what you love, being happy by yourself, as you are, laughing everyday makes you beautiful, being in your comfort zone.* (Simphiwe, interviewed October 2015)

Six of the participants claimed there is no universal definition of beauty, and that people define beauty according to personal criteria based on what they were raised to believe and what they are exposed to as they grow up into adulthood. A similar notion is shared by Tembo (2010) who expressed the need for diversity and individuality in the definition of beauty. Tate (2013) asserted that Black beauty is a complex phenomenon which is variously expressed and embodied by women of different societies, cases and cultures. The variations in the expressions and embodiments of Black beauty potentially result in either shame or praise, depending on

the judge's culture, class and race. Thus, it is said that there should be no definite or ultimate beauty ideal (Tate 2013, p.225).

Four participants attributed beauty to natural beauty, which was defined as the essence of who one is and a true reflection of what one is from the inside out: *Beauty is your true self, untamed, untainted, un-weaved, with no make-up or sleek straight long hair, just being natural for me is beautiful and true beauty* (Asanda, interviewed October 2015).

Three participants felt that beauty is performed every day, in that it is an effort made to look different, unique and ultimately to look good. In addition, it was said that it is impossible to be completely natural, or be one's purely natural self, without any adornments, because there is always something that women add or change to their physical appearance in order to look presentable, be it by applying make-up, straightening one's hair, exercising or dressing a certain way. Butler (1990) suggested that social symbols, expectations and aspirations result in a repeated behaviour which creates an identity or a perception of what or who a person is, all of which is acted upon and portrayed through the human body with the hope of achieving beauty. Women are said to perform beauty and gender by changing their hair, bodies and skin colours in order to live up to their society's standards and expectations regarding beauty and femininity.

For instance, Chinese girls from as young as seven years used to have their feet bound. It was a cultural and societal requirement for women to have small feet in order to be considered beautiful and to be deemed suitable for marriage. Hence, women practised foot binding as an aspiration towards beauty and adherence to their society's patriarchal standards: "Beauty was the way feet looked and how they moved" (Dworkin 1974, p.106). Furthermore, Dworkin (1974) asserted that Chinese men preferred women with bound feet and described them as having feminine goodness and self-love because they constantly adorn themselves with perfumes and make an effort to be beautiful and desirable for their men, as opposed to women who have big 'manlike' feet. Foot binding did not only serve an aesthetic purpose, but was also an aspect that either made a woman valuable or invaluable when she became a wife: "When a woman enters her marriage home, her feet are examined by the whole family, neither praise nor sarcasm is withheld" (Dworkin 1974, p.106).



In modern societies, women perform beauty by controlling their dietary intake, exercising, wearing waist trainers and undergoing cosmetic surgery in order to obtain socially desirable and appropriate bodies. Women bleach their skin in order to obtain a socially approved skin tone. Additionally, women straighten and extend their hair in order to obtain the perfect hair. All this is practised by women in order to ensure that their physical appearance is in line with their society's cultural requirements. Historically and today, women have actively participated in beauty regimes which often have underlying patriarchal and racial connotations, but most importantly which qualify them as 'beautiful'.

According to Lebohang (interviewed October 2015), *If every human being just left themselves and decided not to do anything with their selves we would look like animals ... It is what we do to ourselves to look good and different almost every day ... If we were to leave our-self to our deep nature we can't look OK.* This participant emphasised that beauty is a labour that all women have to perform on a daily basis in order to look beautiful or acceptable.

Five participants reported that conforming to society's standards is almost unavoidable. Being beautiful, however, should not entail completely changing oneself, or discarding one's natural qualities, being completely fake and competing with peers for the sole purpose of being accepted and classified as beautiful.

Six participants felt that beauty has everything to do with physical appearance and nothing else. They emphasised that having a desirable physique, facial features and hair is essential when defining a woman's beauty: *But you know how people think you have to have a presentable face, not just any face, a certain kind of nose, eyes, lips even the shape of the face matters when defining beauty in a woman, but I just think a beautiful clean and clear face is beautiful* (Lerato, interviewed October 2015). Lerato's response emphasises that women find themselves believing or adhering to ideals that are not their own, but those of their societies or peers.

Participants who associated beauty with only physical features argued that a person can and must enhance their beauty by following the latest fashion and beauty trends. It could be that for participants, physical attractiveness is not only desirable but is considered valuable for women as it aids their progress and well-being, as suggested by Goldthrope (2007, p.5) in the literature review.

Dworkin (1974) argued that society is solely concerned with women's bodies; as a result, society, especially women themselves, has developed the perception that they are only as good as the bodies they have. This perception is also shared by Naledi (interviewed October 2015): *I think beauty is a physical thing, how one looks, there is inner and outer beauty, but the outer is the more important.*

All six participants who defined beauty as solely to do with physical appearance felt that it is both difficult and futile to avoid hegemonic beauty standards and trends because they help give a guideline of what is appropriate and what is not. Stein, Steinmetz and Boroweic (2015) claimed that women have historically and presently been made aware of dominant beauty ideals and the importance of adhering to them, to the extent whereby women are almost obsessed with each other's and their own physical appearances; willingly or not they ensure that they obtain socially correct skin, hair and bodies through all measures possible: *I feel like society has shaped our minds to think that beauty is what other people think is cool and not what we find is cool for us. So we end up having and doing other things that are influenced by other people. Beauty is quite fickle to me.* (Terry, interviewed October 2015).

## 5.2 Attractive Physical Features

Eighteen participants said that a good body is what makes a woman physically attractive; a good body was defined as a voluptuous body with thick curvaceous buttocks, wide hips, a slim waist and properly proportioned breasts. The shape and size of a woman's body was also said to be an important factor of attractiveness, because women can change their bodies to be how they want them to be. More than half the participants said that an attractive body for them is being thick, with curves in all the right places. Much emphasis was placed on having thick buttocks and a slim waist.

The media has been promoting thick curves as an ideal and attractive body; simultaneously it has been promoting a slim body as healthy and attractive. Black women are made to believe that having an hourglass body with exaggerated buttocks is the signature of attractiveness. This is said to draw women closer to their African heritage and culture, as a curvaceous woman is considered beautiful in many African traditions. However, studies have shown that there is a contradiction in the messages sent because Black women, especially young girls, seem to have a preoccupation with thinness (Pienaar & Bekker 2007, pp.539-541; White 2011; Afful &

Ricciardelli 2015; Ayeza 2008). Young Black women are influenced by Black celebrities whose curvaceous bodies are placed on a pedestal as the epitome of attractiveness; hence a slim waist, big buttocks and hips and rounded breasts are the aspiration. It is also said that some African cultures still have a preference for women with bigger bodies and still perceive a woman with a bigger body as having higher prestige than one with a smaller body to the extent where young black women are subjected to various fattening methods in order to obtain a socially and cultural attractive body (Fredrick 2008, p.202; Mwaba & Roman 2009). Even though concerns about the harmful effects of increased obesity in Black women are escalating, traditional societies continue to promote and encourage young girls to strive towards having a thick body instead of a slim one. Tshidi and Nandi (interviewed October 2015) both described attractive physical features which oppose Western ideas of physical attractiveness:

*I like ass, when a girl has a nice ass she is hot, but the ass has to go with the hips and a nice figure. (Tshidi)*

*Hips, I don't have hips, but I feel if a woman has hips she is attractive, the curves of a woman make her attractive. (Nandi)*

Five participants reported that a slim body is attractive. This shows that only a minority of the female students who took part in this study and possibly their peers adhere to the western ideal of thinness as attractive and ultimately beautiful. Studies on different racial perceptions of body shape and size, have shown that even though concerns and preoccupations with body shape and size are present across all races, young Black women seem to be less drawn towards the perception that thinness is attractive (Fredrick 2008; Mwaba & Roman 2009; Grabe & Hyde 2006). Presently, women are said to have an option to choose alternative and flexible ways of defining their feminine bodies, although the media relentlessly tries to control women's perceptions of attractive and acceptable bodies (Counihan 1999, pp.89-90).

In addition, 'nice legs' were considered essential, almost as important as having thick buttocks and a slim waist when describing female physical attractiveness. Six participants said they prefer 'nice legs' as model legs, which are mostly long, slim, well-toned legs. Eight described 'nice legs' as thick 'African' legs, thick from the calf to the thigh in order to carry a woman's curves.

Two participants argued that hair is much easier to alter than one's body shape and size. Hence it should be used as a measurement of attractiveness. Hair has and still is considered an important part of a woman's body and physical appearance. It is seen as an expression of self, culture, personality, class etc. Today, Black women tirelessly make efforts to meet the dominant beauty ideal with regard to their hair. The market is flooded with products that ensure that black women tame and manage their unruly hair. As such, Black women spend thousands of hours and money on their hair. Participants emphasized the importance of a Black woman's hair in this way:

*Hair makes a woman attractive, if your hair looks good you look good, your hairstyle changes your attitude even your behaviour, so things like skin tone and all that don't really matter.* (Thuli, interviewed October 2015)

*Hair is the physical feature you can modify to look different every day. Even if you can wear make-up or not, when you change your hair you always look different.* (Lerato, interviewed October 2015)

All participants generally said that facial features are a contributing factor to the attractiveness of a woman, specifically a small nose, moderate sized lips, big bright eyes and smile, clear skin and high cheek bones. Participants' descriptions of the facial features they considered attractive are in line with Western beauty standards. Even participants who emphasised a body shape that does not fit into Western beauty standards as attractive, felt that Western facial features are the most attractive. Facial features were emphasised because it was said that the face is the first physical feature presented during a social interaction.

According to Rachel (interviewed October 2015), *I think beauty and attractiveness is in the face, because there are people with nicely shaped bodies but ugly faces and others with ugly bodies but nice faces. It's the face.* This points out the importance of the face, such a notion was also shared by women in the American antebellum era, as discussed in the literature (*Toilette of Health Beauty and Fashion*, 1834).

Two participants who said they could not characterise physical features that make a Black woman attractive, reported having an idea of what physical attractiveness is but found it

difficult to specify attractive physical features because they did not see themselves as having attractive physical features. This shows that the overexposure to media images portraying physical attractiveness in a manner that does not fit the ideals of most women, creates feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. In this way women begin to see themselves as unattractive. According to Kat (interviewed October 2015), *I think being physically attractive is about having nice legs, legs that don't look like mine are nice legs.*

One participant noted just as defining beauty is an individual task, so is describing attractive physical features, because what is considered attractive by one person, may not be the same for the next person. Such a statement may be an indication of modesty or denial of one's own physical features. Such a neutral response is not specific to Black women only, as women of other races may feel the same way about describing specific physical features. According to Zoe (interviewed October 2015), *I can say I'm beautiful and attractive and someone can disagree. I'm short so to me short people with a bit of a bracket in the legs are attractive and dark skin. I love dark people.*

Three participants argued against attributing female attractiveness and unattractiveness to physical features. They believed that attractiveness is about carrying yourself in a manner that does not compromise self-respect. *A woman is attractive based on the way she dresses, because I can't say the shape of her body because you don't design yourself. What makes her attractive or unattractive is the way she dresses. As a woman you have to respect yourself, wearing revealing clothes is gross.* (Lindiwe, interviewed October 2015).

Primarily being comfortable with yourself and your body was generally expressed as more attractive than identifying a certain body shape or size (slim or with thick curves): *People call me slender I don't mind, because I am satisfied with myself and what God gave me* (Candice, interviewed October 2015). Candice's response seems to indicate she is unaware that she fits into the Western ideal of slender body, hence she is not bothered by pressures to obtain a socially approved body type which she already has.

### 5.3 Unattractive Physical Features

Seven participants characterised unattractive physical features as a shapeless body and as either being too thin or too fat, having a face with acne or an uneven skin tone, and hair that looks untreated and unkempt. The remaining twenty-two participants felt that they could not divulge what physical unattractiveness is and preferred to only speak of what they considered attractive. They often described physical unattractiveness as ‘the opposite of what I said is attractive’. The participants were uncomfortable speaking specifically about unattractiveness. One participant referred to herself as having physically unattractive physical features, particularly her face. Again, for this one participant, the importance of having facial features which fit into the hegemonic beauty ideal was emphasised.

The researcher found the level of discomfort with this question interesting: it portrayed a sense of self-consciousness expressed by the participants regarding their physical features. The researcher observed that participants would often look at themselves when trying to respond to this question and would then sigh before claiming that they do not believe in physical unattractiveness, and that everyone is attractive in their own way. Hesitance in speaking about unattractiveness was even expressed by participants with attractive physical features.

*The only thing that makes a person unattractive for me is an unfriendly person. If you don't smile you are unattractive, you can be the prettiest girl in the world, but if you don't smile you are unattractive, I can't think of any specific physical features.* (Busisiwe, interviewed October 2015)

*Uhm, I'm a nice person, I can't say one specific thing that makes something or someone really ugly. It's kind of like art, I feel like it needs to be a collection of things, usually its bad skin, like my type of skin, kinda like acne scars or raw acne. I have acne scars, so it makes me feel ugly.* (Sindi, interviewed October 2015).

This particular participant's expression about how she considers her face and skin unattractive is significant; it is an indication of the presence of body image dissatisfaction that is not limited to body shape and size which is most prominent in current literature.

#### 5.4 Good Hair & Bad Hair

Seven participants reported that good hair, bad hair and general hair styling depend on or should depend on each person's personality and preference. They however emphasised that hair can be classified as good or bad based on its health and how the hair is kept. Healthy, well-kept hair was described as clean and well styled regardless of whether it was natural or not. Hair that is unkempt, tangled and a hairstyle that remains for a long period was considered bad hair irrespective of whether it is natural or synthetic. These descriptions of good and bad hair further emphasise that women actively perform hair styling.

According to Bongi (interviewed October 2015), *PMB campus is not a really an out there campus, it's very simple, there are not very many people who like looking glamorous, so you have a variety of people, most people have their natural hair and block braids, not many people have your normal virgin hair weave. People here are very down to earth, they live the way they want, there is not too much pressure when it comes to hair.* Bongi's response focuses on the non-glamorous nature of the PMB campus; however, the campus has changed over the years and student life has adapted to current trends especially those promoted through the media.

Fifteen of the participants specifically classified good hair as straight long hair such as a weave or hair extensions. These participants proposed that every Black woman has a desire to have hair like other races, because their hair seems nicer and easier to manage. A study by Thompson (2009) also found that young African American female students also felt that other races have hair that is easier to manage.

Although participants noted the convenience of having non-Black hair, they seemed not to have the desire to entirely forsake their race and cultures or to be racially or culturally other. Additionally, it was expressed that even though one might want to maintain their natural roots and appearance, it is often difficult because society and the media put daily emphasis on the desirability and acceptability of hair that emulates other races. Hence the participants described the crux of having or obtaining 'good hair' as manageability instead of changing who and what one is. The issue of identifying oneself in comparison to the West, as argued by Bhabha (1993), is underlying here: the need or desire for manageable hair is equated with the need and desire for Western hair, because these women cannot conceive their own Black African hair as manageable. According to Sindi (interviewed October 2015), *These days we need to have long*

*hair, but it's funny because it's for white ladies, whites have long hair, even Black guys like Black girls with long hair especially when they swing it. Even if a girl is nice and has natural hair she won't be as nice as a girl with long hair. But for me, really bad hair is hair that is too much, like a lot of colours and shades or just big hair, that's bad, and good hair for me is natural hair, a weave is nice, but I like natural hair.*

All participants described an overt 'hype' around virgin hair weaves in their wider society. They said that young Black women go to great lengths to obtain such weaves as society considers them to be the epitome of 'good hair'. Virgin weaves do not only look good, but they symbolise wealth, status and affluence.

According to Cynthia (interviewed October 2015), *I think having proper hair, like a weave or just straightened clean hair sets you apart from the crowd ... I mean like they say a woman's hair is her crown and glory, so as a crown shines gloriously, women need to wear their hair as such, in order to look good and be beautiful.* This is further emphasised in the manner in which society exempts and values Western beauty, to the extent of referring to Western-like hair as glorious.

Eight participants felt that natural hair is good hair, because it shows who a person really is: it is not fake and shows the natural beauty of a person. Participants further expressed that natural hair is a true expression of Black women's identity, especially if it is not chemically straightened. It is interesting to note that both participants who described good hair as weaves and those who described good hair as natural hair, consider chemically relaxed hair as a form of natural hair. Hence, according to the participants of this study, unnatural hair only includes weaves and extensions. They acknowledged however that natural hair is not easy to style and manage and does not look good on everyone and for every occasion, because it is too 'plain'. For instance, when going for a job interview, a date, or to any other prestigious event, these young women feel pressure to wear weaves or extensions in order to enhance their natural selves and to be in line with the standards of the people with which they will be interacting or the standards of the occasion, as explicated by Faria (2013), Weinbaum (2000) and Thompson (2009) in the literature review. This reveals that indeed women's society and societal standards play a pivotal role in not only dictating to or guiding women's preferences and perceptions, but societal standards also contribute to the inferiority complexes women experience with regard to their physical appearances.



In often futile attempts to obtain socially correct hair, rather ‘good hair’, Black women are said to sometimes go to the extent of wearing weaves and hair extensions that do not match their skin tones and hair types. Black women find themselves drawn into the preoccupation of obtaining hair that is approved by hegemonic beauty ideals. In as much as these women are critiqued by their societies for abandoning their true selves and emulating the identities of others, they are admired and praised for conforming to ‘hegemonic ideals’ even though their made-up appearance is not desirable and acceptable within their traditional beauty ideals.

According to Mpumi (interviewed October 2015), *Weaves are good hair, natural hair is bad, because it does not suit everyone ... it suits people who are plain and simple, but some people have natural hair because of their religion or other reasons, but weaves are good.* Mpumi’s use of the words ‘bad’ and ‘plain’ when referring to natural hair reveals an inferiority complex such as that found by Clark and Clark (1947) in their dolls study. They also contradict the Black pride that natural hair is supposed to express.

According to Rebecca (interviewed October 2015), *I feel that natural hair especially the latest hair-cuts like really short hair better suits light skinned people, and afros, only a few dark skinned people can pull it off.* Rebecca’s statement reveals the skin tone based complexities that exist amongst Black women. It is almost as though having a lighter skin pardons one from taking part in unconventional beauty regimes. This further shows that society seems to be more lenient to lighter skinned women, as opposed to those with a darker skin. Such a favouring based on skin tone perpetuates colourism and Black on Black hate amongst Black women. This idea was also shared in the literature review by Ribane (2006), who argued that light skinned women seem to have an easier life than dark skinned women, because they have society on their side.

*How do I put this without being politically incorrect: you can't be a typical African Black girl and expect to put on this stick straight shiny glossy hair, which obviously belongs to an Indian person then you end up looking like a very dark Indian person. So people should have hair that suits you, suits your skin tone, facial features, everything.* This was said by Candice (interviewed October 2015), a Coloured female, and is significant because it reveals that she may not understand the reasons why Black females wear weaves; she has hair that naturally emulates white hair, therefore, whether she wears a weave is a choice and is not influenced by external factors or circumstances.

Whether natural or unnatural, healthy hair was the most important factor that all participants agreed separates good hair from bad hair. They also agreed that Black hair takes considerable strain during the different hairstyling processes; hence it is more prone to damage. They further reported that even though they realise the need for adopting healthy hair regimes, it is hard to always achieve healthy hair because of the straining procedures required by both natural and unnatural hair, from blow drying, applying straightening and softening chemicals, using hot hair irons, pulling of hair when weaving and plaiting and generally trying to tame hair in every way possible. Participants described unhealthy hair as hair that is dull, discoloured, has no volume, breaks, sheds, and with a receding hair line. Healthy hair was described as thick, shiny, strong and bouncy hair with a full hair line, which is rare and difficult to achieve and maintain. With this said, it is understood that participants put the idea of healthy hair above all other characteristics of hair; this could mean that even though long, straight and soft hair is desirable, it is not considered vital. This reveals an inconsistency; it is as though participants are caught between their personal perceptions and the perceptions of society with regard to hair descriptions and preferences.

#### 5.4.1 Describing Own Hair

Nine participants described their own hair as natural hair, hence they do not apply any straightening chemicals, use hot hair irons or wear weaves or extensions on their hair. Two of these participants explained that even though they do not straighten their hair using chemicals or hot hair irons, they don't think their hair is purely natural. They said this because they felt that applying softening hair-food and conditioners nullifies the 'purely natural' notion. Eleven participants claimed to have their hair either transitioning from natural to relaxed, weaved or

plaited and braided. Almost all these participants gave reasons for not having natural hair; they claimed that natural hair is firstly difficult to manage, as it requires delicate care and treatment. Secondly, they reported that natural hair is time consuming. Lastly, they felt that changing their hair from natural to unnatural is not a loss of self or moving away from their African roots, rather it is a way of moving with the times, embracing modernity and convenience. Additionally, eight participants said they have weaves in their hair, because this is easier to maintain and looks good for all occasions. Two participants described their hair as damaged and unhealthy because it has been exposed to considerable processing and alteration into different hairstyles and textures. One can deduce that it is not only the processes of changing one's skin and body which are harmful; the same is true for hairstyling. According to Cindi (interviewed, October 2015), *My hair is very thin, I've got a hairline issue, so I use products for my hair line, but I have normal black hair not too long just normal, so I mostly wear a weave, when I have my hair out I either wear it in a bun or cover it, but I don't have it out too long.*

#### 5.4.2 Personal Hair Preference

Participants expressed their hair preferences differently; ten participants said they prefer natural hair, even though they may not currently practise natural hair styling. Fourteen participants said that they preferred weaves, extensions and relaxed hair because those hairstyling methods are not only desirable within their immediate society (PMB campus) and their wider society, but they are also the most manageable hair styling methods or hair types. According to Nikki (interviewed October 2015), *I used to have my natural hair, but because a weave is much easier to manage. That's why I have a weave now.*

Considerable emphasis was placed on the 'manageability' of having non-natural hair. Participants seemed to emphasise this or it might would seem as though they were merely being vain and attempting to emulate the racial identities, cultures and practices of others. Participants who preferred natural hair, said that they did not intend to chemically straighten or weave their hair and believe that keeping it natural is inexpensive as well as the most appropriate and beautiful way to present themselves and to express their identity. According to Rebecca, (interviewed October 2015), *I have a natural afro. I don't get why we have to have synthetic hair while we have good beautiful afro hair, my afro is beautiful.*

Four participants whose preference was natural hair and who themselves had natural hair, expressed several difficulties with their hair: firstly, hair salons charged them more because ethnic hair is said to be harder to style. When interacting with other females with unnatural hair, they are often judged to be trying to rally an ethnic or racially based movement. These participants also reported being judged as backwards or unfashionable by their peers and immediate societies (Faria 2013). They assumed that these may be some of the reasons why most Black women end up wearing weaves and relaxing their hair; changing one's hair is not an expression of self-hate, but natural Black hair is simply more difficult to manage correctly and it is perceived negatively by society. They insisted that natural hair is best, however, and that there are many ways to keep it looking good, healthy and fashionable, even though there are challenges. *I love natural hair, unfortunately my afro started falling off, because of some skin condition I have so I had to do something about it, but I like natural hair – no relaxer or anything, just natural even though it is hard to manage, I like it. Those nice long expensive weaves are nice but I like it on other people not for me, for me good and beautiful hair is natural hair* (Jabu, interviewed October 2015).

Lastly, six participants were undecided between natural and unnatural hair; they reported that they do not mind having either kind of hair and that the way they prefer to wear their hair is not determined by liking natural hair more than unnatural hair, but was rather a matter of convenience and the result of what was going on in their lives at that particular time. Again emphasis was placed on the manner in which a women's hair tells a story about her current life and circumstances, as also discussed in the literature.

*For me it depends on the day, I can have straight hair or curly hair, my own hair or a weave but mostly depends on how busy I am. If I want to have natural hair, it has to be at a time in my life where I can wake up in the morning and control my hair because my hair is very unruly because there are many genes mixed up to make up me and how I look. If it's at a time where I have constant deadlines, I would have the silky long weave because it's easy to manage.* (Candice, interviewed October 2015).

### 5.4.3 Society's Hair Preference

All participants were of the opinion that their society which includes the university campus and their wider social circles seem to prefer virgin weaves more than any other type of hair. Weaves are not only said to give you a sense of campus identity and affluence, but they make women noticeable and ultimately 'beautiful'. The unquestionable preference of virgin hair weaves by the campus society is quite significant, because a number of students on this campus do not have the financial capacity for virgin hair weaves, but somehow they obtain them. Students are of the general perception that adhering to Western beauty ideals makes women beautiful or attractive to their male counterparts. Mulvey (1999) suggested that women's bodies are presented and paraded for their society and are viewed from a heterosexual perspective. Hence women have become accustomed to participating in beauty regimes in order to be gazed upon by their societies, especially by men. Mulvey (1999) argued that women are reduced to social objects through which the desires and fancies of men and their wider societies are realised.

One participant placed particular emphasis on the superfluous nature of society's standards especially with regard to hair. She argued that while we cannot deny that wearing a weave is considered better than natural hair, it alters a Black women's sense of who she really is. Black women take on different personalities and are received and perceived differently each time they change their hairstyles. This participant's perception of weaves and the hairstyling regimes of Black women does not differ from Thompson's (2009) arguments, that hair is not just hair for Black women, but rather a platform for expressing and defining themselves. The campus society's preference for weaves was expressed as follows:

*Society prefers long straight hair, a weave is preferred, not just any weave, virgin hair weaves; Brazilian Malaysian etc., they are expensive but they are the norm.* (Melisa, interviewed October 2015).

*On campus everyone prefers weaves, I feel like on campus you need to have a weave for a guy to even stop you and say you look beautiful.* (Lauren, interviewed October 2015).

*Virgin weaves, and braids if you don't have a nice virgin weave it's like you are outdated or broke.* (Amanda, Interviewed October 2015).

*Society on campus love weaves that Brazilian hair, Malaysian and Peruvian hair. People pressurise it, we all want that hair because it's nice, those weaves are nice but put a lot of pressure, others do a lot of things to get money to buy the weave because having those weaves makes her beautiful. (Lisa, interviewed October 2015).*

*And I wonder without the hair and make-up, what they would look like. It's all superficial, it's art, the hair, the long hair is for white people and we are trying to be like white people, but having so much hair that we can't see your face is not on, we need to see your face, white people have that long hair but we can see their face even without the make-up they look fine, they have natural long eye lashes but we want to have even longer lashes, we are overdoing it. (Cindi interviewed October 2015).*

*Every girl on campus prefers having a weave, long, expensive weaves. Having natural hair makes one look as if you don't have enough money to buy hair. (Zoe, interviewed October 2015).*

*Most girls who have natural hair are light skinned, because we dark skinned ladies do not want to accept ourselves the way we are. We want to change ourselves. (Luyanda, interviewed October 2015).*

Lebo, Cindi Zoe and Lauren put into perspective the socio-economic aspect of beauty practices: beauty practices do not only give an individual an opportunity to be considered beautiful, but also place one in a higher class, or make one seem wealthier. Therefore, choosing not to take part in beauty practices places one in a lower class and ultimately makes one look ugly and poor. They also reveal that Black women constantly abandon their true African identities in their quest for beauty and status.

One participant particularly said that only light skinned women have the confidence to take part in radical beauty practices such as having short hairstyles. She said that it is so because light skinned Black women already have the biggest beauty advantage from their skin tone, hence having short hair for them is acceptable. Their light skin tones make it easier for them to be 'natural' because they are considered naturally beautiful. Such conditional acceptability of unwritten beauty laws causes a further drift between Black women of different skin hues and ultimately leads to colourism.

Another participant expressed that the Pietermaritzburg campus community has diverse hair preferences and argued that it is not everyone who wears a weave because students try almost all hairstyles. Another participant felt that society's preference and obsession with fake hair makes women fake and shows that they do not accept themselves as they are.

Hair is undoubtedly an important aspect in the lives of women across all races. Black women in particular are said to spend considerable time, effort and money on their hair care and general beautification practices. Having healthy hair is important for Black women, but having socially acceptable hair is even more important. Black women are said to also be classified and classify each other based on kinds of hairstyle, most importantly the value of the hairstyle.

## 5.5 Skin

### 5.5.1 Describing Own Skin Tone

Eight participants described their skin tones as light. Seven said their skin tone is between light and dark, hence it is 'in the middle'. They used the following words to explain what they meant by this: caramel, light brown, toffee, coffee with milk or cream. Fifteen participants perceived their skin tones as dark. However, most of those who described their skin tones as dark said that they themselves don't really think they are dark, but consider themselves dark because the beauty and cosmetic industry classifies them within the dark skin tone range. Additionally, participants who classified themselves as having dark skin described challenges with finding beauty products which properly match their skin tones, which may indicate that the beauty industry still does not entirely cater for darker skin tones. Contradictory to the participants' perceptions, the beauty industry has made great strides to embrace darker skin tones, even though dark skin is still seen as abnormal (Hobson 2005). According to Zinhle (interviewed October 2015), *I think I'm medium or dark ... According to me it's not that dark, but according to the beauty standards set by society I'm very dark. According to those foundations, face powders and lipsticks, I am very dark.*

Furthermore, participants who described their skin tone as light said that they do not think that having a light skin is as valuable as society seems to indicate. One participant in particular said that given the choice, she would prefer to be a darker shade, because her lighter hue draws too much unnecessary attention and often incorrect perceptions about her. Significantly, light

skinned participants attempted to down play the value attached to their light skin. One participant, Candice, explained that having a light skin often makes one feel less African or less Black. It was almost as though she felt guilty for having a light skin, because of the discriminatory way society classes light skinned and dark skinned women. The perception is that light skinned girls get preferential treatment, have an easier life and are successful in most aspects of their lives because of their skin tone; this is untrue because they are equally subjected to the same challenges faced by all Black women, regardless of their hue. She concluded that a light hue subjects one to further discrimination from one's 'Black sisters': *People say I am a yellow-bone, I don't think I'm yellow, but I think I'm extremely fair, white, but because I'm always associating with people of different colour and I grew up in a family of different races and colours, white, black, Indian, I even have Chinese in my family, and I've never looked at my skin tone as being different until I came to university ... only when I got to varsity did I notice that OK, there's actually a difference. When I came to varsity I saw that Indian people sat alone, Coloured people sat alone, Black people sat alone ... that's when I started to realize that OK there's a difference here and that I looked different. Plus the fact that I speak a lot of Zulu I think I'm a Zulu you know because I grew up here in KwaZulu-Natal, but when people see me, my skin colour, my hair they judge me and tell me I'm not a Zulu or even Black, because of the colour of my skin.* Candice's response gives perspective on the racial and ethnic categorisation present within campus society. Students find themselves associated with people with whom they can physically relate in order to create a sense of identity and belonging.

Participants who described their skin tone as dark explained that they need to make an extra effort in order to ensure that even though they do not fit into the hegemonic beauty ideal with regard to their skin tone, they somehow still look good or presentable. According to Mandy, (interviewed October 2015), *Ey don't go there. You see this hot sun is burning; we always have to use different soaps, lotions, lemons and other stuff to make our skin look good and proper, but well my skin tone is dark, I'm dark. I'm chocolate.* Because society does not express a positive perception of dark skin tone, dark skinned Black women have to find creative ways to at least have decent and healthy skin and to ensure that they do not get darker than they already are. Hence, dark skinned Black women seemingly also face an extra dimension of discrimination: they are not only Black women they are dark skinned as well. Even though they may try to compete in other aspects of their lives, they need to make an extra effort when it comes to beauty in order to not be too far from the hegemonic beauty ideal or skin tone preference.



### 5.5.2 Personally Preferred Skin Tone

Nine participants reported that they prefer lighter skin, and that they would prefer having a lighter skin tone. Two of these participants said that they would like to change their skin to be lighter. One participant claimed to have used skin lightening cream, which she only stopped after learning the side effects of the cream and after experiencing some discomfort on her skin after applying it.

As elaborated in the literature review, skin bleaching has always been and remains a part of the beautification practices of non-white women. Skin bleaching is a universally occurring practice influenced by cultural and racial domination and the internalisation of the value of light skin (Charles 2013, p.45).

Often women who use skin lightening creams are aware of the ramifications of their skin lightening practices, but continue to lighten their skin. The social craze around light skin and the presumed social capital gained from having light skin is presumably the reason why the side effects or health dangers of skin lightening methods are ignored. Women all over the continent and abroad are speaking out about the negative effects of skin lightening on their health and well-being, while other women have described the positive impact of having lighter skin and encouraged other women to lighten their skin. Young Black women are constantly flooded with Western ideals especially with regard to their skin tones; in this way Black women develop the perception that their Black selves are unattractive, especially if they are far from the idealised light skin tone (Charles 2013, p.46).

The media ensures that Black women are aware of the positive and valuable characteristics attached to light skin by exposing them to progressive Black celebrities whose skin tones have become lighter each year. The manner in which such celebrities are personified as almost idols or role models, makes it difficult for young women not to be lured by ideas that having a lighter skin is better than having a darker skin. There are also dark skinned celebrities who are personified as the 'victorious others' who are making a success of their lives regardless of their dark skin tone. A dark skin is thus seen as a hurdle over which young women should jump in order to fully realise their potential (Bordo 1993; Becker *et al.* 2002; Englis *et al.* 2004; Glenn 2008).

Three participants said that they would prefer to be darker and that they generally prefer dark skin. One of these participants said that she would prefer to have a darker skin tone in order to experience how life in a dark skin. She said this because she felt that society, including other dark skinned females, think having a light skin somehow makes one special and makes one's life easier, which she experienced as untrue. Another participant said that she preferred dark skin as she has a dark skin herself. She further expressed a dislike for light skinned girls, because they think they are 'all that', and society has an obsessive preference for light skinned women. In addition, she felt that having to compete with a light skinned woman as a woman with a darker skin tone is unfair because you are not only competing with her intellect and capabilities, you are competing against her skin tone as well. This participant revealed that feelings of incompetence and inferiority exist among darker skinned Black women when they compare themselves to lighter skinned Black women. Even in a modern and intellectual society such as a university campus, darker skinned Black women express inferiority to lighter skinned Black women as in the historic times of slavery and colonialism. Such notions and feelings are deeply rooted.

*I wish I was dark, because being light puts you in a spot light, society perceives light skin as beautiful. They call us yellow bones and it puts pressure on dark girls who end up bleaching, I'd really prefer to have a dark skin. I don't like being called yellow bone, it draws a lot of unnecessary attention to you. People stare at you because you have a light skin as if you are different. (Ziziwe, interviewed October 2015)*

*Yellow bone, I would like to be yellow bone, I'm still going to be one. (Nokuthula, interviewed October 2015).*

The remaining participants reported that they neither preferred dark nor light skin; they were content with their own natural skin tone, however it was classified. *Everyone would wish to be a different shade, but I'm comfortable with my own skin. (Thuli, interviewed October 2015).*

#### 5.5.4 Society's Preferred Skin Tone

Twenty-three participants believed that both males and females in their society on campus and their wider society mostly prefer light skin. As discussed in detail in the literature review, women with a light skin tone are held in high esteem by both men and women of varying races, including the Black race. Such perceptions of skin tone perpetuate the relentless issue of colourism manifested as a form of Black on Black discrimination. The feeling of high esteem and prestige is not expressed by light skinned women who feel burdened by their light skin. The irony is that the same skin tone that arouses a sense of envy in some, arouses a sense of anguish in those who have that skin tone. Society in general seems to prefer a light skin hue. According to Nicki (interviewed October 2015), *they want to be yellow bones; some people bleach and use lotions to make themselves lighter. When you are in first year they look darker, when you get to fourth year they are much lighter.*

Six participants felt that people on the UKZN PMB campus do not really have a preferred skin tone, and that people are mostly comfortable with what they look like. One of these participants suggested that the media is beginning to introduce people to the notion that dark skin is also beautiful.

*To be honest society always perceived light skinned people as beautiful, I think it's not always the case. People often attach beauty with skin tone, however, I don't think beauty has to do with skin tone.* (Candice, interviewed October 2015).

*The yellow bone thing is going out now and dark skin is coming in generally. But I've never seen or noticed any fascination or preference on light skin or dark skin on campus, people on Agric don't even know each other, we don't even look at that, at Agric we don't have time for that.* (Zama, interviewed October 2015).

## 5.6 Body Shape

### 5.6.1 Defining Body Shape

Three participants defined their bodies as 'curvy', which they also termed 'thick'. They characterised being curvy with having big round buttocks, broad hips, chunky legs and thighs, a big bust area and a waist area smaller than their hip. They clarified that there is a difference between being curvy/thick and being fat. A fat body was said to be one whereby the whole body is big. Additionally, a fat body was said to be a body whose shape and form is not clearly defined. Three other participants said that their body shape was in between slim and thick, which they termed 'medium'. Two participants perceived themselves as fat; they said this because they believed they have more fat in areas where they should not have fat, or they have curves in the wrong places, for instance, in the tummy and upper part of their body. Participants' perceptions of curvy, thick and fat body shapes and sizes revealed that it seemed more acceptable to have a heavier lower body than an upper body. This may be because thick round buttocks and hips have become idealised in the media as attractive and sensual; it is said to be a true definition of a Black African woman.

Four participants described their bodies as an hourglass shape which they perceived as a body that is perfectly in proportion. One participant said her body is not in proportion; she reported that the top part of her body is larger than the bottom part. Three participants felt that the top part of their bodies were smaller than the bottom parts, hence they are pear shaped. Two participants said they are shapeless; they felt that no part of their body has curves. Three participants described their body shapes as A shaped, which they explained as similar to being pear shape but without too many curves. One participant said she was petite. Four participants felt their bodies were athletic, three of whom said they do not work out, but have athletic bodies. Lastly, three participants said they were slim and slender. Additionally, participants who described their bodies as having an hourglass shape, those who said they were pear shaped and the one who said she was petite, felt that their bodies fitted into the hegemonic beauty ideal. This was interesting because it revealed that the participants in this study were aware of a hegemonic or dominant beauty ideal, but they characterised it differently. This shows that there either exist diverse perceptions amongst participants or that the participants have been exposed and influenced by different cultures and societies, hence their differing perceptions of the hegemonic beauty ideal. Participants expressed their different body shapes and sizes as follows:

*Eish I don't know. My shape and size... I'm not curvy, I'm just normal; other people are too curvy I'm just in the middle. (Ziziwe, interviewed October 2015).*

*Me, I'm not curvy, I'm just straight, I don't have a nice body shape. (Nomvula, interviewed October 2015).*

*I'm pear shaped, smaller waist my lower part of the body is bigger than the top part. (Zinhle, interviewed October 2015).*

*I'm not that shapeless ... I don't know, what do you think, look at me. (Thuli, interviewed October 2015).*

*I'm a slender with curves, in my culture they call me a bottle of coke. (Melisa, interviewed October 2015).*

*I'm not fat, according to me I have nice thick legs, hips, butt, small waist and small boobs, I've got a good body. (Lauren, interviewed October 2015).*

Although participants all settled on a shape and size which they felt best described their bodies, they expressed much uncertainty when speaking of their bodies. Participants seemed to need validation from the researcher regarding their body shapes and sizes. It was significant that the participants expressed uncertainty rather than dissatisfaction regarding their bodies; this is in accordance with the vast literature on body dissatisfaction which also reveals that Black women are often less dissatisfied or worried about their bodies than other races, because their culture and tradition conditions them to accept themselves as they are (Botta 2000, p.145; Jefferson & Stake 2009). It was also interesting to note that most participants described themselves as bigger than they actually were. It is said that women have developed an inferiority complex, uncertainty and general dissatisfaction about their actual body shapes and sizes because social ideals and the media constantly remind women that their bodies are always in need of improvement, be it their skin, hair or bodies (Welsh 2013, p.66).

### 5.6.2 Preferred Body Shape and Size

Eight participants said they preferred their own body shape and size, whether or not it fitted into society's dominant beauty standards. Seventeen participants said they prefer being curvy, hourglass or thick, with big round buttocks, wide hips, small waist and round breasts in proportion to their hips. Almost all participants emphasised the importance of having curves and a small waist; furthermore, they highlighted that being overly skinny like the women portrayed in women's magazines was not desirable. Five participants said they preferred a skinny body shape; they argued that a skinny body is desirable and preferable because it is an indication of good health and wealth, as opposed to the traditional African perception that considers a bigger body as an indication of good health and wealth. They further said that the thick and curvy body trend promotes and justifies ill-health and obesity.

There is an ongoing debate involving the general public, politicians, health organisations and public figures regarding anti-fat campaigns and big beautiful women promoters. It is argued that promoting big bodies is as bad as promoting overly skinny bodies as beautiful. It was agreed that there should be some level of diversity in defining a beautiful or attractive body, but beautiful bodies should also be healthy bodies. It was further said that promoters of big or fat bodies are assisting in creating a future generation of morbidly obese and unhealthy women, and that perceiving or forcing society to perceive fat bodies as beautiful is only forcing society to accept an unhealthy and unproductive human race. Arguers for big bodies state that a big or fat body, regardless of the size, is not a portrayal of ill-health; rather it is an expression self-love and diversity.

Although many pro-fat activists and plus sized models are expressing themselves and their bodies on a variety of media platforms; society has not been as accepting as they have anticipated. Additionally, society seemingly still celebrates a slimmer body and healthier shape and size (King 2015; Fredrick 2008; Murray 2005; Murray 2008). Eight of the sample expressed that cosmetic surgery is a viable option in order to achieve a perfect or one's preferred body shape and size; they were also aware of the dangers of cosmetic surgery and highlighted that there are better and healthier options to achieving one's preferred body.

Participants expressed their preferred body shape as follows:

*I think being a 1/2, not 3/2 is most preferable, having everything in proportion, small waist, hips, ass, and nice thick toned legs. – Ziziwe.*

*Everyone is confident about their own shape; or rather everyone should be confident about what they look like. I just prefer my own body as it is. – Shirley.*

*I prefer being slender, and I make sure my body remains slim, by working out and eating healthy food, the best body is a slim body. – Nomfundo.*

*I like how I am, I am slim and tall, obesity is not condoned, I prefer just having a body shape that is within a healthy BMI (Body Mass Index), not under weight or over weight, because I'm at risk with my height I'm very tall, so just being healthy and having a healthy body is important. – Cindi.*

### 5.6.3 Society's Preferred Body Shape and Size

Eight participants claimed that the most preferred body shape and size on campus is slim. Both male and female students were said to prefer slim female students. Female students were said to make relentless efforts to obtain and maintain a slim body because this was desired by their male counterparts and because a slim body allowed them to take part in the campus fashion culture by wearing short, revealing and figure hugging clothing with ease.

Sixteen participants disagreed, claiming that a curvy body as described above was preferred within campus society. A big emphasis continued to be placed on having big round buttocks and a small flat waist. Participants were convinced by the attention they received from males and the messages they received from the media that having a curvy body was most desirable. However, the slim body is also portrayed in the media as desirable and as a status symbol as is the curvy body amongst young people. Four participants said they thought society preferred an hour-glass body without the extra rear, hips and bust. It was mentioned twice in interviews that the campus environment had a diversity of body shapes and sizes and there wasn't a shape or size that seemed most preferable. Participants in this study's research location seemed generally to have a different ideal body shape and size compared to hegemonic or Western beauty ideals. The thick or curvy body was said to be in line with the expression of African women's pride and accepting their African identity. Also, the thick body ideal, popular in the

media, was criticised for overly sexualising Black women's bodies. Such an expression is especially seen in entertainment media, where Black women's curvy bodies are portrayed as objects whereon the desires of men and the curiosities of society can be expressed or realised. Such a portrayal of Black women's bodies carries with it historically negative connotations. Students' desires to achieve the curvy or thick body shape and size are because this is socially considered beautiful, but above all, it is considered sexually desirable. The campus society's preferences were expressed as follows:

*Most people on campus prefer, a 'nicki minaj' like body shape. Small waist, big ass, a big ass is very in, guys like it a lot, it's in the media its everywhere, on YouTube people twerking, showing exercises to lift and firm your butt, so that's why everyone wants to have a big butt. (Zoe, interviewed October 2015).*

*On campus it is preferred to be both skinny and thick. Mostly students prefer to be thick and have big butts; they are doing squats and exercises to raise their butt. But skinny girls are nice when they wear shorts, short dresses, when you are thick and wearing short things with big butt and thighs you just look skanky. (Thando, interviewed October 2015).*

*An hourglass body gets a lot of attention and appraisal from guys on campus. (Rebecca, Interviewed October 2015).*

*Everyone wants to be super skinny because of peer pressure and the media. (Natasha, interviewed October 2015).*

The researcher noted that participants understood 'society's preference' as referring to what men in their society prefer and find attractive. This is significant because it gives the impression that women have become socialised to accept and expect to be objects of the male gaze and that whatever efforts they make regarding the attainment of beautiful skin, hair and bodies is to receive attention and gratification from their male counterparts. This further reveals the patriarchal nature of gender socialisation, beauty standards and expectations, because it seems that women's beauty efforts are not solely for their benefit, but are a means to an end: male gratification and whatever benefits or capital may follow.



## 5.7 Prominent Beauty Trends and Standards

According to all participants, virgin weaves are the most prominent hair trend on campus. Participants emphasised the importance of ‘good’ high quality virgin weave, because this sets one apart from everyone else. Furthermore, wearing a virgin weave gives one a high status because they are expensive. Participants felt virgin hair weaves were popular because they look and feel like Caucasian or Asian hair. Even hair advertised on print media and television show Black women with hair that looks soft, bouncy and straight, like Caucasian or Asian hair. As a result Black women who are exposed to these media platforms tend to develop the perception that this hair is the most desirable. Four added that even though hairstyles which emulate non-Black races are and continue to be popular, it is worth noting that short hair is working its way into the beauty scene, and it too is becoming a prominent beauty trend. *Girls really like hair; long weaves, everyone wants a nice weave, and expensive one, but short hair is nice though, those German cuts and putting lines in their short hair, it all started internationally, it always does, now local celebrities are doing it, and a lot of people even on campus are cutting their hair* (Zama, interviewed October 2015).

All participants declared that excessive make-up has also become a beauty trend on campus; almost everyone wears make-up. They said that most often female students on campus apply their make-up u. Firstly, they do not apply a color which matches their natural skin tone; they often wear a shade lighter. Secondly, their make-up is often not properly blended into the face to look natural. Thirdly, participants added that female students have developed a tendency to shave off and incorrectly re-draw their eyebrows, in an attempt to seem as if they have eye brow extensions. Lastly, it was also said that students are wearing bold and bright colours on their lips, even though their skin colour does not suit the brightness of the lip colour. Lip colour seems currently not meant to match one’s skin tone, but often stands out. Participants have expressed that female students’ sudden fascination with excessive make-up is an attempt to be in line with prominent beauty trends expressed in the media. It is ironic that in an attempt to look ‘proper’ they look improper instead. More so, wearing make-up was said to not only be a vanity regime, but appears to boost confidence and self-esteem, especially if there are skin imperfections, or if there is a special or important occasion. The exaggerated and extravagant make-up of these female students gives the impression that they are hiding their true selves and are taking on personalities and identities that are not naturally theirs. This may devalue social interaction, because people are constantly interacting with portrayals of society’s expectations

instead of the individuals themselves. Society appears to refuse to interact with the true self. *It's as if society can't stand a woman who does not wear make-up or it's like not wearing make-up is breaking some kind of unwritten law. Like Unathi [a South African celebrity] was crucified when she uploaded a picture of herself on social media with no make-up on, that's why everyone is wearing layers and layers of make-up because society and social media tell us it's the norm, so students are following the norm by wearing so much make-up.* (Zandile, interviewed October 2015).

*Most people wear make-up every day, everyone wears make-up, you have people who wear make-up because it makes them look and feel good and others wear it because they need it or they think they need it.* (Nokwanda, interviewed October 2015).

Five participants pointed out the prominence and use of skin lightening products on campus. Female students are said to not only use excessive make-up to look flawlessly beautiful, but bleach their skin in order to obtain a clearer and lighter hue. All participants articulated that females on campus are too preoccupied with their bodies. They narrated that body rectification is a growing trend. This includes working out, using waist trainers and extensive dieting. They believed that women are more concerned about their bodies than men, because society is more accepting of male imperfections. For instance, in African culture, a man with a pot-belly is considered to exude wealth and success. Even though African tradition may still believe that bigger women also symbolise wealth and good health, modern society prefers well-toned and shaped women. Additionally, women on campus ensure they have well-shaped bodies in order to look good in clothing that accentuates their bodies. The falsity in society and prominent trends of female students were further expressed as follows:

*The waist trainer obsession with the tiny tiny waist that is not even realistic is in right now, um ya and people are walking naked your ass has to be out there or else you are not the hottest chick on campus, your ass has to be completely visible for you to be even considered or accepted by society. For girls like me who don't have our asses out, ya we are just not accepted. But also girls like that are only accepted as sex objects so I'd rather not be accepted than be a sex object, I'd rather keep my ass in my pants.* (Candice, interviewed October 2015).

This participant's response is significant because it emphasises that traditional values and integrity previously attached to Black women's bodies seem to be forgotten. The notion of virtue as expressed in historical times had been replaced with an overt and unashamed expression of sexuality and popular culture.

*With Instagram and YouTube, we have access to kinds of media ways to have the perfect make-up, perfect hair, and body ... what to wear to show off that perfect body. Well I'm at Agric so I don't really see much of these things, but when I go to Commerce, Humanities and the Arts side I see a lot of this. (Lerato, interviewed October 2015).*

Lastly, six participants reported that they have no interest in beauty trends and standards and do not know or notice any prominent beauty trends and standards on campus. One stressed that the Pietermaritzburg campus is not as glamorous and active in the beauty and fashion culture as the UKZN campuses in Durban, hence she feels there is not much pressure to partake in beauty regimes and follow specific beauty standards at the Pietermaritzburg campus.

*For me I care about my time. So I don't make an effort with all these trends things, and accept who I am, I don't even bother looking at beauty products in the shop. I accept that who you are is who you are. (Nelly, interviewed October 2015).*

*It's a diverse community ... you cannot define a certain beauty standard or trend, e.g. in Commerce people like to be glamorous, in Agric people are not as glamorous, in every faculty people look different ... that's why you can't really have a set standard for the whole campus, so I can't really say there are beauty trends on this campus, maybe other campuses. (Lindy, Interviewed October 2015).*

## 5.8 Beauty Perspectives Over- Time

Twenty-four participants expressed that there was a significant difference in past and present beauty trends and perspectives; hence women's behaviour with regard to beauty has also changed. Participants felt that the difference in the way women carry and perceive themselves and their bodies is noteworthy. It was argued that, in present times, women are overly reliant on their bodies and physical appearances. Furthermore, it was expressed that women use their bodies to enter into relationships which aid their livelihoods; they use their bodies to attract

wealthy men who provide them with luxurious lives and sometimes even careers. The manner in which women's bodies have become sexualised by the media was noted; it seems that society has no interest in the intellect or ability of women, rather prioritising their physical appearance. Not only are women's bodies sexualised and objectified by men and their wider societies, but by women themselves; hence women have accepted the fact that their bodies are not only bodies which carry them throughout their lives, but they are instruments which, if well-kept and portrayed, aid their livelihood and success.

It can be argued that women's bodies have even in historic times been part of similar surveillance and scrutiny and they have been used by women as instruments of manipulation and control, but this seems to have become more the norm today. In addition, participants expressed that although fashion trends are constantly changing, the way women react to them has also changed. In addition, participants reported seeing a visible move away from the use of natural beautification methods to ensure naturally healthy skin, hair and bodies to chemicals and surgical procedures. Historically, a beautiful woman was seen as one who expressed innocence, purity and natural beauty; today beauty is considered superfluous and wild.

*There is a change, women back then did not have as much pressure to be so extravagant, the excessive make-up, fake eye lashes and nails, I think back then only super stars did that ... everyone else was just natural but still looked good, they were more African. Also these days everything has to be very tight and revealing, you just have to adjust everything about yourself now. (Rebecca, interviewed October 2015)*

*Back then women respected their bodies and they were appreciated for respecting their bodies, now having on as little as possible clothes seems to be appreciated more, the point is to get a lot of compliments from boys on campus. However, being too revealing increases rape, boys / men are weak they just look at our revealed bodies and lose control, and we have become vulnerable because we dress revealing and drink or go out at night. (Zethu, interviewed October 2015).*

The manner in which women dress and carry their bodies was emphasised; it was said that women in the past dressed their bodies in a manner which enhanced their beauty in a modest way, but today women seem to dress in a manner which reveals their bodies and curves. The manner in which women dress and behave today seems to emphasise the need for male

attention, and it often expresses sexual availability even though this may not have been the woman's initial intention. The participants' responses revealed that Black women today are well resourced with platforms of expression; however, some of these platforms are often misused, and women find themselves expressing themselves in ways which evoke negative commentary or perceptions.

*I think there is a difference, in the past women showed their bodies but in a respectable way, unlike now it's not really respectable it's sexual and skanky. (Thuli interviewed October 2015).*

*I think so, there are things back then you would not wear and do in public, now people wear whatever just to show off what they have, it's as if we have lost the essence of who and what we are. (Kat, interviewed October 2015).*

Six of the participants felt that beauty trends have not changed: people still express themselves based on their diverse tastes and preferences as they did before. These participants also argued that beauty and fashion trends are constantly recreated, hence there is nothing new that we are currently experiencing that has never been experienced by past generations. For instance, an obsession with light skin was also experienced during the US antebellum era, the desirability of a tiny waist was expressed during the Victorian era etc., and celebrities like Marylyn Monroe became the definition of beautiful curvy bodies.

*It's circles, when you look at all the hairstyles, clothing, trendy lip colours, music videos and all that it's all from the sixties, seventies and nineties, there is nothing new, everything is getting reinvented, it's all from back in the day and its coming back, we can use stuff from our parents' generation, my mom's and aunt's closet is like a treasure chest. (Zama, interviewed October 2015).*

*Another thing that has remained constant is wanting to be light skin, Black women want to be light, while white women want to tan their skin ... it's a bit contradictory. Black people don't really want to be white it's just wanting to be lighter, I think if we all could change our skin we could, if there are no dangers we would do it I think. I would do it; I would consider it. (Gugu, interviewed October 2015).*

## 5.9 How Beauty Trends are Maintained and Perpetuated

All participants pointed out that culture and the media are the two main drivers of maintaining and perpetuating beauty standards. They perceived beauty trends as related to firstly, the culture that one is exposed to and secondly, the culture within which an individual belongs. Students are said to belong to a diversity of cultural groups based on their background, identities and the people they associate with in the campus environment. The various campus cultures are said to determine how certain people dress and behave and they set people apart from each other. Some participants said most female students change their hair and bodies in order to fit into a certain group or culture on campus. For instance, the campus group termed *o'glama* consists of female students who behave and portray themselves more glamorously than all other female students, in the way they dress, their hair and their relentless effort to follow beauty and fashion trends. On the contrary *o'farm Julia* are the *plain Jane's* on campus who do not make an effort to follow beauty trends and standards and prefer to be their natural selves. Moreover, participants have suggested that the level of study and field of study has an influence on the extent to which beauty trends and standards are followed. Furthermore, participants placed an emphasis on the role that their overexposure to mass media has on their perceptions of beauty and the extent to which they follow beauty standards in their attempt to be beautiful.

*As women, we are never satisfied with how we look, we are trying to look better than the next person we start to emulate what that person is doing and it becomes a chain reaction where everybody is trying to be unique but ends up doing the same thing and looking the same.* (Lindiwe, interviewed October 2015).

*Pop culture and the media perpetuates beauty trends, even people who like to look natural see adverts and are convinced of the various ways to always look better, so it's definitely pop culture and celebrities.* (Nomvula, interviewed October 2015).

## 5.10 Measures Taken to Conform to Beauty Standards

All participants identified similar measures taken to conform to beauty trends, standards and practices at the PMB campus. Participants narrated that most female students who conform to beauty standards and trends set out by their society and the media often go to extreme measures in order to be described as beautiful. Firstly, body rectification was identified as the most prevalent measure taken to conform to beauty standards. Female students take part in rigorous

slimming diets, exercising excessively, wearing waist trainers to achieve a smaller waist, and focus on slimming and shaping their bodies to the current desirable body shape and size. One participant in particular expressed that some students display behaviour associated with disorderly eating and that others starve themselves in order to achieve what they consider socially desirable body shapes and sizes. Secondly, participants reported that wearing a virgin weave has become a requirement and a priority not only on campus but also in wider society. Students are said to go as far as sacrificing their allowances for food and study material in order to purchase expensive hair or to style their hair in current hairstyles. Some participants have proposed that students who cannot afford to buy virgin weaves and other fashionable possessions, resort to transactional relationships in order to get all the things they want. Students reported that there is very little skin lightening activity on campus, although it is present.

### 5.11 Conformity to Beauty Standards

Twenty-three participants said they conform to beauty standards in some or other way, by wearing weaves, chemically straightening or hot ironing their hair, wearing make-up, rectifying their bodies or dressing in the latest fashion trends. However, some of these participants said that participation in any sort of beautification is inevitable and does not imply a person is conforming to certain standards set by either their society or the media. The remaining seven participants said that they completely reject conformity and do not think they follow any trends. Most of these participants who attested to rejecting conformity said they set their own standards of beauty.

Participants stated their experiences with conformity as follows:

*I wouldn't say I conform; I do some things like right now I have a weave, but usually I choose to be unique and follow my own thing. (Zoe, interviewed October 2015).*

*Yes I would say I do conform to beauty standards, I wear make-up every day, I don't really have a strict diet but a jog when I can, I have a Brazilian weave on right now and I like shopping buying nice clothes and colors, but it's not like I feel pressure, I just like doing that cause it looks good... it's a girl thing right? (Zama, interviewed October 2015).*

*Yes, I do conform, but I believe if I was not exposed to such I would not know of it, because of the exposure and being constantly made aware of beauty standards by the media and various structures of society well makes you want to do all the things they are showing us every day. I think my participation in the consumerism brought about by the beauty industry is as a result of my exposure* (Luyanda, interviewed October 2015). Luyanda's response reveals that women feel as though there are external factors acting upon or influencing their behaviour, especially with regard to issues and practices surrounding beauty. This further reveals that women seem to be unable to make decisions about their lives and actions without the influence of dominant institutions within their societies.

## 5.12 The Consequences of Conformity and Non-conformity

Thirteen students said there are consequences of conformity and non-conformity. They expressed that if one does not conform to the latest trends, there could be negative effects. Even though such negative effects are covert, they do exist. They argued that females who do not ensure that their skin, hair and bodies are well taken care of and are within the standards of society, do not receive any recognition from their peers and wider society. As a result, such women experience low self-esteem and often feel like outcasts within their own societies. Furthermore, conformity was said to not only ensure that one is up to date with one's society's standards, but it gives one a sense of belonging and identity. Lastly, it was argued that women who do not make an effort with their appearance, are often unsuccessful in the dating or relationship scene. Women who do conform to beauty trends were said to be more successful in the dating and relationship scene, fit into a certain culture and identity and they are generally happier and pleased with themselves. The other seventeen participants felt that conformity or non-conformity in no way affects any aspect of their lives.

*No I don't conform. The fact that I don't conform makes me an outcast in a group of supposedly sexy girls, but me and those girls obviously have different goals in life, I usually don't conform, I never ever follow trends, I would wait for the trend to be over and then I'd do it, I like standing out instead of fitting in to the group.* (Mpumi, interviewed October 2015).



### 5.13 Identifying a Beauty or Style Icon

Only six participants said they had beauty or style icons; they preferred Black celebrity women who were considered to have a down to earth style or a natural looking beauty. Two of these icons were plus sized women, two had natural ethnic hair. Two of these style icons portrayed themselves as made-up glamorous women. Twenty-three participants said they did not have a style or beauty icon. It was interesting because the women who were identified as having style are portrayed in media as ‘normal’ women. This reveals that women want to look up to women who look and live more like themselves in real life and not to women who seem as though they are in their own fantasised perfect world.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this study articulated the intertwined issues regarding perceptions of beauty in the lives of Black women. The theoretical framework argued that the male-female binary is an undoubted influence on women’s perceptions, behaviour and overall lives. This is due to the patriarchal nature of society. Additionally, class, culture and race also have an influence on the way in which women perceive and are perceived with regard to societal beauty ideals and further how women identify themselves according to or within these ideals. Women, especially Black women, are subtly, or not so subtly, guided to adhere to dominant beauty ideals for their benefit. The results of this study revealed that Black female students of the UKZN PMB campus critically and reflectively engaged with issues surrounding perceptions of beauty. Their responses showed that they were aware of the issues and intricacies faced by Black females with regard to their skin, hair and bodies. They presented responses similar to the arguments of symbolic violence, that is; dominated groups are often aware that idealised perceptions of beauty are being imposed on them, but voluntarily participate in, and adhere to the ideals that make them subordinate. Additionally, responses revealed that participants are aware of the influence that their societies, cultures and the media have on the manner in which they perceive and perform beauty. The extent to which participants adhere to and benefit from dominant perceptions of beauty proved not as extreme as described in the literature review and the theoretical framework. This study’s participants engaged interestingly with the issues of body shape and skin tone. They expressed an awareness of the preferences and standards of society with regard to women’s body shape and skin tone. Emphasis was placed on the manner

in which their wider and intimate social circles position those with lighter skin in a higher status than those with darker skin. It was also found that light skinned women were aware of society's preference for lighter skin, yet some expressed a desire to be darker, possibly denoting their need to be considered Black or African, rather than somehow outside their own race. In addition, participants preferred body shapes considered closest to those preferred by African or Black societies.

There were, however, pressures to emulate the perceptions and ideals of dominant groups and to behave in a manner which reflects a conformity to Western perceptions of beauty. Beauty as an institution or concept has been constructed in a manner which views the Western or white ideals as more attractive than African or Black ideals. Nonetheless, results showed that the majority of participants have a sense of pride regarding their African identities especially with regard to their bodies but felt huge pressure to conform to Western standards with regard to their skin and hair. Participants' level of acceptance of self gave insight into the manner in which they creatively and individually positioned themselves within their societies and the expectations of modern societies, even in the presence of insecurities brought forth by societal pressures and perceptions. The ambivalence expressed in this study indicates that Black women are caught in between wanting to adhere to Western ideals and simultaneously wanting to stay true to the essence of who they are as Black African women.

### Recommendations for Further Research

One participant considered her face and skin unattractive, this is an indication of the presence of body image dissatisfaction that is not limited to body shape and size which is most prominent in current literature. The face is a very important aspect of a women's overall beauty and could merit a study of its own. It could be valuable to study perceptions of beauty further or focus specifically on beautiful faces considering facial features, skin tone and skin type, because. Additionally, the preference of beautification instruments or activities such as skin lightening, make-up, the latest fashion and cosmetic surgery and virgin weaves could be insightful. Particularly in this study, participants described how female students go to great lengths to obtain expensive virgin weaves despite not having the financial capacity. The extent to which women would go for beauty was not discussed in detail in this study. This could be useful to explore further, particularly the socio-economic aspect and taking into account the latest social

trend of 'blessers' and 'blessees' (sugar daddies who 'bless' beautiful women). Lastly, using a different recruitment method, expanding the recruitment criteria and sample size for a study of this kind could be valuable in terms of ensuring that the results are more generalizable to a wider population of women.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Guide

1. How would you define the term “beauty”?
2. Could you specifically describe physical features which you think make a person beautiful/attractive?
  - 2.1 Could you specifically describe physical features which you think make a person unattractive?
3. What do you think is good hair & bad hair? – Why do you think so?
  - 3.1 How would you describe your hair?
  - 3.2 What kind of hair do you as an individual prefer and what kind is preferred by your society?
4. How would you describe your skin-tone?
  - 4.1 What is your preferred skin-tone?
  - 4.2 What is your society’s preferred skin-tone?
5. How would you define your body shape and size?

What is your preferred body shape and size?

What is your society’s preferred body shape and size?
6. What specific beauty standards and trends are most prominent in your society?
  - 6.1 Was the above any different historically? How so?
  - 6.2 How have these remained constant or changed over time?
  - 6.3 How are these standards maintained and perpetuated
  - 6.4 What measures are taken in order to conform to these beauty standards?
  - 6.5 Do you conform to these standards? What measures do you take? (Please discuss your experience)
  - 6.6 How is conformity rewarded? And what happens if one chooses not to conform?
  - 6.6 Who; if you have one, is your beauty icon? Could you discuss why? Or how so?

## Appendix B

Social Sciences, College of Humanities,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Pietermaritzburg Campus,

Dear Participant

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Nontobeko Shabangu I am a Sociology Masters candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

I am interested in learning about black women's perceptions of beauty in a diverse environment such as the University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. The main focus of this study is individual and social perspectives on women's skin, hair and body. To gather the information, I am interested in asking you some questions in the form of a semi- structured / in-depth interview

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 20-30 minutes.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action. (Voluntary Participation)
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: nontobeko1018@gmail.com

Cell: (+27) 079 432 4045

My supervisor is Ms. Moya Bydawell who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details: email: Bydawellm@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: (+27) 033 260 5358

You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your contribution to this research.



**DECLARATION**

**I..... (Full names of participant)  
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research  
project, and I consent to participating in the research project.**

**I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.**

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

.....

.....

## Appendix C

### Detailed participant information

Participant	Gender	Race	Age	Level of study	Nationality	Study residence
Candice	F	Coloured	24	Masters	South African	On-campus
Busisiwe	F	Black	23	Honours	South Africa	On-campus
Zinhle	F	Black	22	Honours	South Africa	On-campus
Asanda	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Lebohlang	F	Black	18	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Lerato	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Naledi	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Mandy	F	Black	20	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Terry	F	Black	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Simpiwe	F	Black	19	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Tshidi	F	Black	18	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Nandi	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Lindiwe	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Thuli	F	Black	20	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Rachel	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Kat	F	Black	26	Masters	South African	On-campus
Zoe	F	Black	24	Masters	Non-South African	On-campus
Bongi	F	Black	25	Honours	South African	On-campus
Sindi	F	Black	23	Honours	South African	On-campus
Mpumi	F	Black	19	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Zinande	F	Black	24	Masters	Non-South African	On-campus
Lebo	F	Black	22	Honours	South African	Off-campus
Phindi	F	Black	23	Honours	South African	Off-campus
Cindi	F	Black	19	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Nikki	F	Black	19	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Rebecca	F	Black	21	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	South African	On-campus
Jabu	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	Off-campus
Melisa	F	Black	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	Off-campus
Lauren	F	Black	25	Masters	South African	On-campus
Amanda	F	Coloured	18	1 <sup>st</sup> year	South African	On-campus