

**A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Workers Who are  
Born with a Light-Skin Complexion: A  
Case of Mindset Design Company  
Durban Branch, South Africa**

By

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## DECLARATION

I, Lindiwe Mavis Madziwa, declare that:

- a) The research reported in this dissertation, except where stated otherwise, is my original work;
- b) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university;
- c) This dissertation does not entail other people's work unless specifically attributed as such, in which case their words have been rephrased and referenced. However, where their exact words have been used; their writings have been placed in quotation marks or indented and referenced.

Signed :  
Lindiwe Madziwa

Date:

I, Prof Augustine Nwoye, confirm that the work reported in this thesis was carried out by Lindiwe M. Madziwa under my supervision.

Signed:  
Professor Augustine Nwoye

Date: \_21 July 2021

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## ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the natural light-skinned employees who work at Mindset Design, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The specific objective was to determine the advantages and challenges of those who are light-skinned by birth. The study employed the qualitative research design to generate comprehensive information about the stories and personal experiences of the participants of the study, regarding their condition of being born light-skinned. The participants for the study were selected using the criterion purposeful sampling technique, in which only those who were born light-skinned and have maintained that condition without the use of bleaching tones were included in the study sample. Following this criterion, participants selected for the study were individuals who were light-skinned and worked at Mindset Durban branch, in KwaZulu- Natal. An in-depth interview technique was used to gather data for the study. The data generated were analysed through the application of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and thematic analysis.

The study established that being light-skinned does lead to positive life experiences. The positive experiences that the participants reported included those of being given preferential treatment as children and adults; being given less harsh punishment in school, compared to their counterparts who are dark-skinned; and being awarded positions of leadership in school and finding that they were favoured in the workplaces. However, while the study participants, overall, reported enjoying positive experiences as a result of their being born light-skinned, the balance of the findings also showed that in addition there are some challenges that those who are born light-skinned also do experience. These challenges included the problem of feeling like not belonging associated with the infuriating problem of name-calling; and for male participants being treated as not being man enough, as well as the need to constantly prove that one is good at what one does.

Implications of these findings were drawn and some recommendations for enhanced policy and further research were made.

## Operational Definition of Terms

*Apartheid*: Racial classification system whereby people, mainly Black people, were deprived of opportunities based on the colour of their skin (Brown, 2000).

*Coloured*: “Any person of mixed blood; and includes children as well as descendants from Black-White, Black-Asian, White-Asian, and Black-Coloured unions” (Brown, 2000, p. 198).

*Colonialism*: “Acquisition of political dominion over another county or group of people with the primary goal of economic advancement” (Nkrumah, 1962 as cited in Utsey, Abrams, Opare-Henaku, Bolden, & Williams, 2014, p. 3).

*Colourism*: “Preference for and privileging of lighter skin and discriminating against those with darker skin” (Glenn, 2008, p. 281).

*Glutathione* - an antioxidant with additional anti-melanogenic properties, that has recently become the most popular systemic skin lightening molecule (Sonthalia, Jha, Lallas, Jain & Jakhar, 2018)

*Yellow Bone*- A term used for a light-skinned person, usually used to describe black women who have a light skin tone

*KZN*- Kwa Zulu-Natal

*UKZN*- University of Kwa Zulu-Nata

*Prom*- A formal dance for students in school or college

*Prefect*- A leadership position in a school

*Skin bleaching/whitening*: Used interchangeably in this study, and “involves the application of various cosmetic products (e. g. creams, soap, and lotions) that contain potentially dangerous chemical agents” (Kpanake, Sastre, & Mullet, 2010, pp. 350–351).

*Mulatto*- the first general offspring of a black and white parent; or, an individual with both white and black ancestors. Generally, mulattoes are light-skinned, though dark enough to be excluded from the white race. (Merriam-Webster n.d)

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

As a mother to girls, I have had to address the issue of skin tone with my daughters at a young age. When my first daughter was five, she asked me why she did not have my skin tone. This shocked me because I am not light or fair-skinned. This brought back my own memories growing up, where my mother who was light-skinned always told me not to sit in the sun because I will get dark. In her direct words “O tlabá motala”, meaning you will be so dark that you will be a shade of blue, navy blue, to be exact. As a dark-skinned girl, you are always compared to the light-skinned girl and society reminds you that you are not pretty, according to their standards. Ever since the day my daughter asked me about her skin tone, I made a conscious decision to make sure that I teach her to love her skin tone and to have her know that she is just as beautiful as those light-skinned girls she sees on TV and that she is also intelligent. It was at this point that I started becoming conscious of colourism and how it impacted the lives of black people. I no longer sit in the sun because of the fear of getting dark, I no longer swim because of fear that I would become darker. The more colour conscious I became the more I noticed local celebrities becoming lighter.

One local celebrity that stands out to me and the whole of South Africa is Khanyi Mbau, who has had the same skin tone transformation as Michael Jackson. She went from having a brown skin tone to having a more pale, yellow skin tone in ten years. Khanyi has never been one to shy away from the fact that she has had plastic surgery and other cosmetic procedures to improve her skin complexion and appearance. In an interview with *Drum* magazine, 2017, she detailed how she did not skin bleach but rather did a skin lighting process, that costs her R 15 000 per month. On Wednesday the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2019 Khanyi Mbau posted a picture of herself on Instagram displaying her pale bleached complexion. This post started an outrage on social media where people started commenting about how light Khanyi Mbau has become. Most of the comments were negative with people calling her “albino” and others saying she was a bad role model who displayed self-hate.

At the same time, there was a Twitter war between Pearl Thusi, a light-skinned South African actress, and Bonnie Mbuli, a dark-skinned South African actress. Mbuli accused the light-skinned actress of crying for a role that was given to Lupita Nyong'o who is dark-skinned. Mbuli said that the roles available to dark-skinned actresses are already limited to that of a slave who is raped and beaten throughout the movie or a drug addict who sits in prison, while light-skinned actresses will be given first preference when it comes to roles of love interests and leads.

The above scenario presents a glimpse into the world of colourism in South Africa and the world. For decades, many young women and men all over the world, but particularly here in Africa tended to yearn for fairer or lighter skin, with the perception that having lighter skin will lead to more privileges (Blay, 2011). Black people who are light-skinned are perceived to have more privileges in the areas of education, income, housing, criminal sentencing, mate selection, and beauty judgments compared to those who are darker in complexion (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Glenn, 2009; Varghese, 2017). Because light-skinned individuals appear to enjoy more privileges than dark-skinned people, light skin is seen as the preferred skin tone (Glenn, 2008). The preference for a light skin tone has been linked to slavery in America, colonialism in African countries and South Africa due to the apartheid system (Jones, 2000). Colourism is skin colour stratification and discrimination based on lightness or darkness of a person's skin colour mostly within the same race (Okazawa, Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1987; Monk, 2014).

Colourism has a silent impact on how individuals perceive the worth of skin complexion, with light skin being seen as better and having more worth than dark skin. Because dark skin is not as cherished as light skin this contributes to dark-skinned individuals taking risks, such as skin bleaching to achieve this valued complexion. According to Ajose (2005), the use of creams to lighten the skin has remained a prevalent and common practice in various African countries, such as Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa. Dlova, Hendricks, and Martinogh (2012) stated that despite the government's effort to do away with the existence of toxic products in the South African market, skin bleaching continues to be practiced.

Yearning for lighter skin has resulted in people bleaching their skin, even though they are aware of the risks involved. Topical steroids that are implicated in this practice cause a range of cutaneous side effects such as telangiectasia, atrophy, hirsutism, steroid-induced acne, striae, and opportunistic infections (Findlay & De Beer, 1980; Adebajo, 2002; Kooyers and Westerhof 2004; Ajose, 2005; Faye, Keita, Diakit , Konar , and Ndiaye, 2005; Pitch , Kombat , & Tchangai- Walla, 2005; Olumide, Akinkugbe, Altraide, Mohammed, Ahamefule, Ayanlowo, & Essen, 2008; Agrawal & Sharma, 2017). And in the past few years, there has been an introduction of skin lightening glutathione injections, creams, and pills (Makhoba, 2017). These procedures have become a common practice amongst local and international celebrities.

Extensive research has been done on the risks of bleaching and the motivations of bleaching (Glenn, 2008; Fokuo, 2009, Lewis, Robkin, Gaska, & Njoki, 2011; Davids, Van Wyk, Khumalo, & Jablonski, 2016; Keakile, 2016). A large body of literature also shows how colourism has benefited those who are light-skinned over those who are dark-skinned (Banks, 1999; Hunter, 2007; Hill, 2002; Mathews, 2013). Research has been done in the United States on people who are light-skinned and their experiences (Hunter, 2007; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013; Uzogara, Lee, Abdou & Jackson, 2014; Varghese, 2017). However, little or no research has been done in South Africa to study the experiences of those who are born with a complexion that is perceived as most valued in the African communities by Black people. The present study is proposed to contribute to this need, to close the gap.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

All over the world studies have found that there is a consistent increase in skin bleaching practices since people value light skin (de Souza, 2008). Despite the known risks involved in skin bleaching (Pitch , Kombat , & Tchangai-Walla, 2005) we still find a large number of people in South Africa including those who are famous, taking the risk to attain this light skin. There is a need to explore if being born with light skin has resulted in more benefits in comparison to those who are born with darker skin tone. In South Africa around 1986, approximately 30 million pounds had been spent on the purchase of skin bleaching products (Mahe, Ly, Aymard, & Dangoe, 2003), this indicates that a large number of people are making

use of skin bleaching products in South Africa. The South African government has made an effort to ban the use of toxic skin bleaching products in the market, skin bleaching is still a common practice in the country market (Dlova, Hendricks, & Martincgh, 2012). In 2005 Ntshingila reported that Mictert Marketing found that one in thirteen South African Black women aged between 25 and 35 bleached their skin. Since light skin is so valued amongst black people, it would be interesting to explore the extent to which those who are born with this skin tone have recorded personal experiences that are positive or negative associated with their being born with a light skin tone. This is a task for which this study had set itself.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of black individuals who are born with a light skin tone. The study explored the experiences of individuals who work at Mindset Design, based in Westville Durban. The research was interested in determining the benefits and challenges experienced by both male and female members of the sample for the study who had lived as light-skinned black individuals in a country where the colour of one's skin weighs a lot when it comes to the way people are treated in interaction with others.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study were, therefore, to:

1. Explore and document the lived experiences of black people who are born with a light skin complexion.
2. Identify the perceived benefits of being born with a light complexion among the sample was studied
3. Establish some possible challenges and negativities associated with the experience of being born with light skin.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What characterizes the lived experiences of Black people in KwaZulu-Natal province who are born with light skin complexion?

2. What are the possible benefits associated with the experience of being born with a light skin complexion as perceived by those who are naturally light-skinned?
3. To what extent does the experience of being born with a light complexion attract some challenges and negativities as perceived by those who are born light-skinned?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study was considered significant as it was designed to explore the lived experiences of people who are born with a light skin complexion that is sought after by a majority of Black people globally. Most research in this area had focused on the experiences of those who live in America and some of such studies, unlike the present one, focused on the experience of women (Hunter, 2007; Mathews, 2013; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013; Adams, Kurtz-Costes, & Hoffman, 2016; Varghese, 2017). This study would generate data that will help to contribute to the body of knowledge about the experiences of colourism in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province of South Africa. The study would also help to make people aware of the real experiences of having light skin and to determine the extent to which it comes with both benefits and disadvantages when studied from the perspective of those born with a lighter skin complexion.

## **1.7 Summary and Overview of the Study**

This thesis is composed of 5 chapters. The first chapter consists of an introductory chapter, that gives a synopsis of the study foregrounding the background and rationale of this study. Chapter 2 presents the literature review for the study. The chapter highlights the previous literature and major findings of the topic at hand, as well as an overview of the theoretical perspectives on the topic of the present study. Chapter 3 presents the methods that the researcher used to conduct the study. The chapter discusses the research design, the research sampling and the method used in selecting the participants, the methods of data collection and data analysis as well as the ethical considerations that were made in the course of the study. Chapter 4 reports on the findings of the study while Chapter 5 presents the researcher's attempt to discuss the findings of the study, with an effort made to relate the study findings to trends that corroborate or concur with data drawn from the existing literature reviewed. The report closes with the presentation of the implications and conclusions of the study and the recommendations for policy and further research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The desire to be light-skinned has resulted in people using dangerous chemicals to attain this admired skin tone (Ajose, 2005). The preference for a light skin can be traced as far as the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in England, which started in 1559. During this period both men and women would use white powder made from lead to attaining a pale white skin. The lead was used daily even though it was dangerous. During that era, pale skin was a perfect example of what was believed to be evidence of simplicity and beauty (Hunt, Fate, and Dodds, 2011). Although the desire for pale looking skin has been moved towards a tanned skin tone amongst people of European descent, those of African, Asian and Latino decedent are still using dangerous creams to attain a lighter skin tone. Research has shown that Africans, Asians, and Latinos have associated light skin with privilege, this is known as colourism (Davids, van Wyk, Khumalo, and Jablonski, 2016).

### 2.2 History of Colourism

Colourism has been around in the literature for decades and can be traced back to the period of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid (Walker, 1983; Hunter, 2002; Uzogara, Lee, Abdou, & Jackson, 2014). The term colourism was first coined by Alice Walker 1983 in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*. She defined colourism as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour.” (p.290). According to this definition, colourism is a form of discrimination based on skin tone that generally benefits lighter-skinned Blacks and disadvantages those that are darker skinned (Allen, Telles, & Hunter, 2000; Hunter, 2007, 2008). Colourism impacts the way that individuals perceive the value of skin complexion, with light skin being perceived as better and having more value than dark skin. Because the colour of one's skin colours our understanding of racial classification, colourism and racism are linked. In societies that are racially heterogeneous such as the United States and South Africa, skin colour preferences are commonly tagged as racism, whereas similar preferences may be classified as colourism in societies that are racially uniform (Bhattacharya, 2012). In many nations, Colourism is expressed as a desire for whiteness. This is when black people want to pass

as white because possessing whiteness meant enjoying various privileges that were exclusively associated with being white (Bhattacharya, 2012). The practices of colourism tend to favour individuals that have a light skin tone over those that have a darker skin tone. This is due to the fact that the lighter skin tone is associated with a person's appearance being close to a White phenotype. Hair texture, eye colour, and facial features, as well as education and income, also affect perceptions of who is considered dark or light-skinned (Hunter, 2005). Colourism beliefs and practices operate both within and across racial and ethnic groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2009).

### *2.2.1 Slavery*

Skin-colour bias or colourism in the United States originates from a history of slavery and racial oppression (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992). During slavery, black people were seen as mentally and morally inferior to white people. This was used to justify discriminatory laws and policies in the United States (Mucherah & Frazier, 2013). To justify racial slavery, a white supremacist ideology was held by those with slaveholding interests. White supremacist ideology held that persons of African descent were innately inferior to whites. Whiteness became identified with all that is civilized, virtuous, and beautiful; while blackness is identified, with all that is lowly, sinful, and ugly (Hill, 2002). As slavery took shape in the United States, it brought with it, intra-racial division. According to Hunter (2004), Mulatto slaves, slaves who had one Black and one White parent, were preferred for a house or skilled work roles that sometimes resulted in the opportunity to learn. The slaves that were of pure African descent, both parents being black, were given the more labour-intensive tasks. This division created the impression that a slave with a lighter skin tone was better than those who were darker.

When black people were liberated, this divide and colour-based discrimination continued amongst the black people themselves. Within their communities, black people started to create their social divide based on the factor of skin tone. It is well noted that there were churches, social societies and educational institutions that used the "Paper bag test" to determine if one was light enough to be accepted into these organizations (Maddox & Gray, 2002). Studies further show that those who were light-skinned often distanced themselves from dark-skinned Blacks through fraternal organizations, blue vein societies and marriage preferences. The "Blue vein" societies were created for black people who had a light skin complexion and you could see their

blue veins through their skin. This form of discrimination and stereotyping reinforced the view that lighter-skinned blacks were better than those who are dark-skinned (Harrison, 2010).

### *2.2.2 Colonialism*

Colonialism brought about a lot of changes that impacted the lives of many nations in which Europeans established a system of power to rule and dominate their colonies (Mpingsi & Nzuza, 2014). Colonisation is a form of domination that involves the subjugation of one group of people by another (Bulhan, 2015). Colonisation is a history of the control of a group based on the ideas that establish a developmental differential (Bulhan, 2015). Kenyan author Thiong'o (1981), explains colonisation as a "cultural bomb" that has the effect of annihilating "people's belief in their names, languages, environment, a heritage of struggle, unity, as well as their capacities, and ultimately in themselves" (p.3). Colonization makes those who are colonized identify with that which is reactionary, all those forces that would stop their springs of life; it even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of one's struggle (Thiong'o, 1981). To be able to gain power and dominance over the nations that the Europeans wanted to colonize they instilled into the colonized, the mentality of White supremacy (Blay, 2011).

Colonialism can be described as the "outcome of the colonial experience that has fostered psychological injuries to the colonised people that have led them to aspire to be like their colonisers, regardless of their skin tone, way of thinking or cultural values" (Street, Gaska, Lewis and Wilson's, 2014, p.52). It can be said that South Africa is one of the numerous nations that have been colonised and are still struggling with the stigma of colonialism and apartheid (Julien, 2014).

The past inheritance of colonialism affected the black people's notion of the standard of beauty as the colonizers imposed their standard on those of the colonized and this impacted the way black people define and view beauty (Julien, 2014; Robinson, 2011). It has been argued that "the idealisation of the coloniser's culture led to associating blackness with the coloniser's beliefs" (Glenn, 2008, p. 281). This resulted in "blackness being associated with primitiveness, lack of civilization, unrestrained sexuality, pollution and dirt" (Glenn, 2008, p. 283). During colonization, Missionaries were sent to the colonies on "Civilization missions". These

missionaries came with goods that they assumed were to upgrade and improve the living standards of the people (Thomas, n.d.). Some of those commodities that were introduced included soap, which the missionaries held with high esteem because soap represented their Christian virtues of cleanliness and adequate self-care (Blay, 2011). The one thing that the missionaries had to do was to teach the natives about Christianity, and through the teachings of Christianity, it was indicated that all dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority while the white skin, or whiteness itself, as defined by the opposite qualities: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority; all of which implied that whiteness symbolized goodness and purity whereas blackness symbolized everything bad and immoral (Charles, 2003). In this way, being White suggested greater social prestige and reverence compared to being Black (Hunter, 2011).

Of course, the problem of colonialism cannot be discussed without mentioning the related term white supremacy. For, it could be argued that these two terms reflect similar views. White supremacy is the upholding and maintaining of racial hierarchies, such as slavery, and in South Africa apartheid (Gillborn, 2006). The term white supremacy emphasizes the idea that black people are not only socialised to live and accept the values and attitudes of white supremacy but that “white supremacist control” can be exercised by black people over fellow black people (Gillborn, 2006). Skin complexion and physical features that are associated with white people, such as light skin, long straight hair and straight noses take on the meaning that they embody beauty. Similarly, skin tone and features associated with Africans or Indians, such as dark skin, broad noses or kinky hair are assumed to represent the normative standard of beauty (Hunter, 2002). In other words, colonisation has brought along with it the idealisation of light skin.

Europeans were on a mission to colonize the world and left no section of the world untouched by their influence. Following centuries of domination, the mission to civilise non-Europeans has resulted in a universal, almost mystic, belief in the power of skin tone to evaluate, using light skin as the standard of feminine beauty. With regards to Western colonies, skin tone was used to define an intermediate class among the natives. Any person of colour who was European-like in appearance was treated as white and those who were not were treated as black (Baker and Gringart, 2009). Skin tone became important during colonisation as it was used for divisions of races where the white skin tone was at the pinnacle of humans and dark skin tone at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Robinson, 2011). During this period of colonisation, the skin tone was

imperative. The relative power of light complexion over dark skin tones has specifically affected women who were regularly treated and assessed based on physicality. It could be suggested that colonisers left cultural models that have hugely influenced the standards and values of indigenous people around the world. The system of colonisation ensured that the European standards of beauty have now become the reference point of beauty.

Colonisation affected a lot of people on how they see themselves and how they view their skins. It developed something called the bleaching syndrome amongst people of darker skin. According to Hall (2013) the Bleaching Syndrome as a conscious and systematic process of self-denigration and aspiration to assimilate based on alien ideals, resulting from colonial domination. The Bleaching Syndrome was created to make the colonised to understand beauty according to the coloniser's understanding and to accept it. It could be argued that the phenomenon of yellow bone and skin bleaching is but a lingering effect of colonisation. Colonialism and white supremacy gave birth to colourism, which describes a phenomenon of prejudicial treatment of individuals based on varying degrees of skin tone (Keith & Hourton, 2004). Light skin has been perceived as a social status in different races. Having explained that colonisation historically led to colourism, the next thing to explore is the impact of colourism among black people.

The social advantages afforded to lighter-skinned Blacks represent a preferential system in our society that favours light skin over dark skin (Hunter, 2002). The preferences and benefits awarded to those who are light-skinned make such a skin tone the most valued skin tone amongst black people. According to Glenn (2008), another way of conceptualizing skin colour is as a form of symbolic capital that affects, if not determines, one's chances in life. Colourism amongst black people is still common throughout the world, with studies showing that light-skinned Black people are more advantaged than dark-skinned black people and are most likely to experience less discrimination than their dark-skinned counterparts (Seltzer & Smith, 1991; Hunter, 2007; Hill, 2002; Mathews, 2013).

In Jamaica, there is the tripartite legacy of British colonialism in descending order of prestige, the White section at the top, the Brown section in the middle and the Black section at the bottom (Smith 1990; Robotham, 2000). Also, in Jamaica, the 'cake soap', as it was commonly referred to, was valued for its effectiveness in beautifying the skin by removing the "shine and greasy" or "tarry" look in an individual's face (Hope, 2011). Moreover, over time, it became a norm to have

soap advertisements that depicted Black people as filthy, hence needing a thorough washing as evidenced by the 1930 French poster demonstrating an African man's hands turning white after washing with soap (Glenn, 2008). The introduction of goods could have negatively influenced Black people's perception of themselves in relation to others because goods instigated colour hierarchies.

Even though colonization has nominally ended, the effects of subjugation continued in the sense that people of colour who were colonised remained victims on a psychological level (Hill, Kim & Williams, 2010). Those who were colonised continued to view themselves through the lens of whiteness, meaning that the colonised populations tried to imitate the light skin tone of their coloniser to enhance their quality of life and improve self-image (Hill et al., 2010). The past inheritance of colonialism disorganized the black people's standard of beauty and imposed that of the colonisers and also disrupted the way black people define and view beauty (Julien, 2014; Masaka and Chemhuru, 2014; Robinson, 2011). It has been argued that the idealisation of the coloniser's culture led to associating blackness with the coloniser's beliefs (Glenn, 2008). This resulted in "blackness being associated with primitiveness, lack of civilisation, unrestrained sexuality, pollution and dirt" (Glenn, 2008).

### *2.2.3 Apartheid in South Africa*

Looking at the history of South Africa, it can be said that South Africa is one of the numerous nations that have been colonised and are still struggling with the stigma of colonialism and Apartheid (Julien, 2014; Masaka and Chemhuru, 2014; Herring and Hourton, 1991). The white population of South Africa traces its roots back to 1652 when the first permanent European settlement was established in the Cape of Good Hope. From 1654, slaves were imported to the Cape from West Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, India, and Indonesia to work on the settler farms (Coovadia, Jewkes, Barron, Sanders and McIntyre, 2009). These farmworkers and slaves were to become some of the ancestors of the people classified as coloured under apartheid. It was during this period of colonialism that segregation laws came into place. The settlers came with their colonial beliefs aimed at getting rid of black pride and instilling white supremacy into the minds of Africans. The colonizers made it clear that it is a matter of civility and morality to cover and change all things African about Africans (Ribane, 2006).

In South Africa, racial discrimination was prevalent, and people's skin colour often predicted their position in society (Dlova, Hamed, Gwegweni, Grobler, and Hift, 2014). The social ranking was based on an individual's skin tone, ethnicity and culture (Williams, Gonzalez & Stein 2008). This led to some ethnic groups thinking that they were better than other groups because of their skin complexion. Harries (1989) noted that 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.

Although racial segregation has been in place in South Africa before 1948, it was only when the National Party came into power that segregation laws became stricter and more intense. It was during Apartheid that segregation was formalized with the Population Registration Act (No. 30 of 1950). This act provided clear traditional racial categories of black and white, and at the same time, the act introduced the racial category of coloured (or mixed-race) individuals (Erasmus & Ellison, 2008). The introduction of coloured category provided a social distinction and allowed the government to reinforce each racial group hierarchical standings in society. The white people were the most privileged in terms of class and legislative freedom. The white group was followed by the Asian coloured group, who were subjected to fewer legislative restrictions than blacks who were the lowest in society (Glenn, 2008). The classification of groups and racism led to the belief that Eurocentric features are the beauty standards and having a light skin tone meant that you would be entitled to better social standing and therefore have access to more legislative freedom. In addition to the racial hierarchy of the Apartheid state, colonial histories were dominated by misleading interpretations and morally coded indictments of race and beauty (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017).

Even though skin lighteners have been used globally for centuries, in South Africa the earliest records of their use among black women can be traced as far back as the 1950s; particularly around the same time as the Coloured Labour preference Act of 1955. This was one of the racial legislations that made sure that a distinct advantage was awarded to coloured individuals over black Africans when it comes to employment, accumulation of material wealth and property, and ease of movement (Dlova et al, 2012). It is no surprise that this practice of skin bleaching was common amongst Black women in the Western Cape Province, as this improved their chances of

getting employment as domestic workers and cooks if they appeared to have a lighter complexion (Levin, 2012). The legacy of Apartheid in South Africa coupled with westernised ideals of beauty underpins the desire to skin lightening as a means to overcome institutional forms of discrimination including colour stigma (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017).

Although apartheid ended in 1994, we still see a large number of people using skin lightening creams, soaps, lotions and IV drips. The number reported by Dlova et al.'s (2014) study was that out of 292 Africans and 287 Indians included in the survey sample, 32.3% had used skin lightening products (60% of Africans and 40% of Indians). This number is still high considering that the Apartheid rule ended 25 years ago.

## **2.4 Preference for Light Skin Tone**

Although slavery ended more than two centuries ago and apartheid ended in South Africa 25 years ago, the menace of colourism remains a prominent social ill (Hunter, 2011). Cultural stereotypes that depict Black people as violent, criminal, dirty/smelly, lazy, ostentatious, poor, sexually aggressive, and unintelligent still exist in the current day (Maddox & Gray, 2002; Herring, Keith, & Horton 2003; Hunter 2005; Maddox 2004). Black people who are light-skinned are perceived to have more privileges in the areas of education, income, housing, criminal sentencing, mate selection, and beauty judgments compared to those who are darker in complexion (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004, Hunter, 2007; Glenn, 2009; Varghese, 2017). Because light-skinned individuals enjoy more privileges than dark-skinned people, light skin is seen as the preferred skin tone (Glenn, 2008).

### *2.4.1 Colourism and Education*

Research has shown that during the time of slavery in the USA free light-skinned blacks were more likely than dark-skinned blacks to be literate (Bodenhorn and Ruebeck, 2007). It has further been found that people who are of darker skin tones have lower educational achievement and lower earnings than those with lighter skin tones (Flores and Telles, 2012; and Telles, 2014). A study by Campos-Vázquez and Medina-Cortina (2018) found that in Mexican urban areas and Brazil individuals of lighter skin tone have, on average, higher wages and higher educational

attainment. They also found that in terms of social mobility, that conditional on the parents' household wealth, individuals of darker skin tones end up in lower positions in the wealth

distribution process compared to those with lighter skin tones. They further noted that in the United States the population with darker skin tones experiences higher rates of downward social mobility. Other studies by Allen, Telles & Hunter (2000); Hunter (2002); Keith & Herring(1991); Murguia & Telles (1996); Telles & Ortiz (2008) show that light-skinned Latina/ and African Americans complete more years of schooling than their darker-skinned counterparts.

Due to having European phenotypes, those light-skinned individuals are seen as attractive; a factor that affects the judgment of teachers to think positively of them and they are seen as kinder and more intelligent than those who do not have these European features (Hersch, 2011). This type of halo effect will have a strong impact in the classroom. The way that the teachers interact with the students of colour tended to differ. Because light-skinned students were perceived as more attractive to teachers, teachers often unconsciously favoured students with light hair, light eyes, or other European features (Ryabov, 2013). Such students would not only be seen as physically attractive, but the teachers would also have a perception of them as intelligent, competent, and having integrity. Similarly, light-skinned students tended to be perceived as well behaved, the good children in the class and consequent upon this they do well in school because of the high expectation and attention that they receive from the teachers (Hunter, 2007). These light-skinned children end up having a positive experience and a positive relationship with their teachers meaning that the light-skinned students are most likely to have a more positive schooling experience and stay in school longer. In contrast, the dark-skinned student would have a different experience from that of the light-skinned student. Due to the negative experience that the dark-skinned student experiences they become more likely to drop out of school. Students 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 workplace (Sekayi, 2003). The culture of colourism lifts the status of light-skinned students and reduces the status of darker-skinned students (Telzer & Vazquez-Garcia, 2009).

It is important to note that colourism, which is a subsystem of structural racism, operates in many institutions and does not require the actual presence of racist individuals (Hunter, 2011). Both black and white people internalize skin tone hierarchies and it has been noted that even in

schools that are extremely racially segregated, there will be hierarchies that benefit the lighter-skinned students and disadvantage the darker-skinned students (Hunter, 2011). Even if black students find themselves in schools where there are no White people, they will still experience the effects of white racism from their peers and teachers.

Using experimental data, Campos-Vázquez and Medina-Cortina (2018) show that skin colour stereotypes have a negative effect on life achievement expectations of female teenagers in middle school. Educators generally perceive African American females as exhibiting less academic and behavioural risk than African American males, yet they are also viewed as requiring greater social control than females from other racial/ethnic backgrounds because of their perceived precocity (Rollock, 2007; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Educators' preoccupation with African American females' social precociousness is echoed in other qualitative accounts, reflecting a tendency for educators to adultify African American youths' behaviour, perceiving African American students as more adult-like and less innocent than their peers (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014). This identification results in African American students' care-taking behaviours and social acuity being misconstrued as markers of maladaptation as opposed to indicators of resilience (Burton, 2007). Maddox and Gray (2002) found that dark-skinned African American men were more likely to be perceived by White students as being involved in criminal activity and to be poorer than lighter-skinned African American men. Similarly, African American women with darker skin were more likely to be perceived by White students as unattractive, unintelligent, poor, and more aggressive than lighter-skinned African American women.

Due to stereotypes of portraying African American women as being aggressive, hypersexualized, and boisterous. Maddox and Gray (2002), found that African American female students who possess more phenotypical characteristics of African American people, darker skin tone and more Afrocentric features, are more likely to be subjected to broader societal stereotypes of African American females. Hannon, DeFina, and Bruch (2013) reported that African American students with darker skin experienced a higher risk for school suspension than African American youths with lighter skin. This would result in less dark-skinned students completing school and

going to college and being able to acquire well-paying jobs in comparison to their light-skinned counterparts.

#### *2.4.2 Income and housing*

The economic advantages of light-skinned blacks date back to the period of slavery. Reuter (1917) and Frazier (1957) noted that a complexion advantage appeared early in the slavery era when slaveholders deliberately selected light-skinned blacks to work as house servants and field foremen. Others reported that light-skinned slaves resisted fieldwork by arguing that their physical constitutions could not stand up to the demands of hard labour. Although few slaveholders hesitated at setting light-skinned slaves to fieldwork, they preferentially selected light-skinned slaves for craft training and apprenticeship (Bodenhorn, and Ruebeck, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, during slavery mulattoes had access to education and were more literate than other slaves and therefore mulattoes worked at more remunerative jobs than blacks.

Although neither mulattoes nor blacks worked in high prestige occupations, among African Americans, mulattoes dominated positions at the top of the African American employment ladder, such as merchants, shopkeepers, and skilled craftsmen. Bodenhorn (2002) found that among rural free African Americans, mulattoes were more likely than blacks to work as tenants or to own their farms.

By 1920, colourism in the African American community started to gain the attention of sociologists, such as Reuter (1917). Reuter contended that light skin tones and perceptible traces of non-African heritage were associated with material advantages for African Americans (Hill 2000). Using longitudinal analysis, Hill (2000) finds that biracial men enjoyed modestly advantaged backgrounds compared to blacks. Light skinned men are twice more likely to find high-prestige employment than dark-skinned men. Those with fair complexions were also over-represented among skilled workers and professionals. History provides compelling evidence of a consistent pattern of preferences shown by both whites and blacks toward light-skinned African Americans (Bodenhorn and Ruebeck, 2007).

### *2.4.3 Criminal Sentencing and Colourism*

One of the most common stereotypes of black people is the notion that they are criminals. Several scholars have argued that assumptions of criminality are deeply intertwined with whites' thoughts about blacks (Gyimah-Brempong, and Price, 2006). Criminality is one of the few factors prior research associates with racial ascription as a great deal of evidence shows the importance of race for perceptions of criminality (Blair, Judd, and Chapleau 2004; Penner and Saperstein 2008; Saperstein and Penner 2010). Researchers (Maddox, 2004; Maddox & Gray, 2002; Norwood, 2014) have argued that skin tone is a feature-based cue that shapes stereotypic perceptions. The basic finding to emerge from this line of work was that darker-skinned African Americans are described using more negative stereotypic traits such as criminal, poor, while lighter-skinned African Americans are described using more positive, counter-stereotypic traits such as wealthy, educated.

Studies (Blair, Judd, and Chapleau 2004; Gyimah-Brempong, and Price, 2006; Penner and Saperstein 2008; Saperstein and Penner 2010 ) have shown how the general public link blackness with criminal behaviour. The more an individual possesses more African phenotypes and less European phenotypes the more likely they are to be classified as criminals. A few studies have been done to argue that people associate Black physical traits with criminality. In 2004, Eberhardt and her colleagues did a study using primes to show how stereotypes can influence police officers' reaction to seeing weapons. They primed participants with stereotypical "black" words such as jazz or basketball and then showed a screen on which an object slowly appeared from a neutral background. Respondents who were given a black word prime were more likely to see a weapon. A study conducted by Correll., Park, Judd, Wittenbrink, Sadler, & Keesee, (2007), used first-person shooter video games to measure reaction times to threats. In these games, the player was positioned behind a gun with targeting sights and given the objective to shoot threats. Participants were faster to shoot black targets as blackness was perceived to be implicitly dangerous.

In 2010, Kahn and Davies conducted a study where they manipulated the targets' features by using the same photos, but digitally darkening skin tone, broadening noses, and creating fuller lips. The authors found that darker-skinned blacks were not only more likely to be shot while unarmed than armed Whites but also that they were more likely to be shot while unarmed than

unarmed Light-skinned Blacks. Furthermore, light-skinned blacks were less likely to be shot when armed than dark-skinned Blacks. In 2006 Eberhardt et al did another study using a photographic data set of 600 death penalty eligible cases from Philadelphia in the years 1979 to 1999. Viglione, Hannon, & DeFina, (2011) analysed data from a large sample of women in North Carolina and find that perceived darker skin tone as recorded by corrections officers at intake is associated with longer prison sentences.

Non-whites experience more negative treatment from police than Whites, ranging from being stopped more often by police (Ridgeway, 2006) and searched (Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007), to being subjected to greater use of force (Walker, Spohn, & DeLone, 2012).

#### *2.4.4 Mate selection and Media*

Beauty is identical with all that is good. Good-looking people are labelled as kind, interesting, sociable and to have a good quality life (Shelembe, 2014). Beauty is, therefore, a pleasurable feeling (Donne, 2010). As much as beauty is a cultural thing and differs from one cultural group to another, globally we can see that beauty is associated with skin tone, where a light skin tone is always associated with beauty and preferred more than dark skin (Mathews, 2013; Glenn; 2008; Hunter; 2011). Because beauty leads to a person being seen as more sociable and the most preferred, the bias against dark skin people, especially women is one of the most common and serious social problems that exist today.

With the spread of social media, more and more black local and international celebrities are becoming lighter in skin tone. On social media, television, movies, advertisements there are images of the perfect persons as light and smooth-skinned. Advertisers and marketers exploit this gap and market for their skin-lightening products. The use of these images encourages the desire for dark-skinned people to lighten their skin. The lightening of one's skin tone is motivated to perceivably access privileges and benefits (Tenai, 2016), one of those benefits are being attracted to the opposite sex and looking like the models and celebrities in the media. Beauty enhancements through medical interventions have equally become a growing norm amongst women in South Africa, and some celebrities are reported to have undergone surgery to achieve their ideal of feminine beauty (Madikwa 2009; Naidoo 2015; Van den Heever 2016)

As was established earlier in this review, what is being seen in the media as a preference for light skin is a result of the system of colonization. This system ensured that the European standard of beauty has now become the reference point of beauty. To be black in relation to such a standard is being viewed as primitive, backward, ugly, inferior, evil and unappealing, while to be white is to be beautiful, humane, intelligent, refined and godly (Gabriel, 2007: 6; Hunter, 2007; Robinson, 2011).

Racialized beauty norms enhance the importance of physical appearance for girls, making light skin colour even more important to their social status (Glenn, 2008; Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2005).

Lighter-skinned individuals are also more likely to marry and to marry sooner than dark-skinned females (Hamilton, Goldsmith, & Darity, 2009). Among a sample of middle-aged African Americans, skin tone was associated with having a higher status spouse (e.g., a spouse with higher educational attainment and income; Hunter, 2007). Gordon (2016) has explained that this preference among men is likely a result of the overrepresented images in the media and the generational approval of light complexions. Treating people differently because of the lightness or darkness of their skin is not exclusive to white people. Research by Saperstein and Penner (2012) showed that from housing opportunities to employment and chances of getting married, the lighter-is-better dynamic is at play for African American women.

Lighter skin is considered a sign of beauty and men specifically seek light skin colour as a requirement in a prospective mate (Darity, 2005). Qualitative research and autobiographical accounts highlight negotiations that often take place when people of colour are thinking about having children (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 2013). Individuals often select or at least seek out potential mates based on their skin tone in anticipation of the potential skin tone of their children and, in some cases, desire for lighter-skinned children despite the potential mate's socioeconomic status, education, or achievement (Russell-Cole et al., 2013). The consequences of lighter-skinned women being preferred mates are associated with negative outcomes (Wilder & Cain, 2011). Not meeting the criteria of an "ideal" partner could lead to feelings of being hopeless, unwanted, and inferior (Mathews, 2013). Dark-skinned participants discussed feelings of helplessness when confronting limitations on social, economic, and relational opportunities they experienced based on their skin tone (Coard, Breland, and Raskin, 2001).

The media has created its criteria of what beauty is (Goldman & Waymer 2014). Media images seem to portray western beauty as the ideal beauty. The Western ideal of beauty is understood to consist of slenderness, a small figure, long hair, straight nose and light skin (Foo, 2010; Alcala & Najjar, 2013; Lindsey, 2011; Hunter, 2007). The Western view of beauty requires women to create beauty through makeup, hairstyles, skin bleaching or plastic surgery (Alcala & Najjar, 2013). Western beauty that is presented in the media requires women to resort to dieting and cosmetic surgery to try to attain the culturally defined ideal body (Alcala & Najjar, 2013, Foo, 2010, Hunter, 2007, Lindsey, 2011). The media depicts white ideals of beauty as the beauty commodity that black women must possess to be successful (Gooden, 2011).

The Radio, Television, Film and Social media constitute cultural materials out of which we search for our identities (Kellner, 2003, Cushion, Moore & Jewell, 2011). Media provides its audiences with the chance to create new and liberating meanings for themselves and to see how the world operates in other people's lives, besides theirs (Gauntlet, 2008). It is important to note that the media plays an imperative part in the socialisation process too, especially socialisation into gender roles (Baker, 2005). It provides its audience with an opportunity to create new meanings for themselves and their lives, while also positioning itself as an efficient means of socialisation and diffusion of popular culture (Kellner, 2003). Most Television commercials, as Hamed, Tayyem, Nimer, & Alkhatib (2010) stated present light-skinned models as more attractive; they are also more likely to achieve success in terms of accessing employment opportunities, including access to better options on mate selection. Fairness cream advertisements connect fairness to greater employability, beauty, a modernized and independent person who has it all. The women who were considered appropriate models and ambassadors for cosmetic products are typically the ones with almost Western features as this made them desirable and the perfect definition of what all progressive Black South African women should look like (Ribane, 2006). Initially, these products catered specifically for women, but recently, many of these fairness creams have started being marketed for men. Some fairness creams include "shade meters" that measure skin tone before and after using the product. This is a clear instance of the social legitimization of the desire for whiteness and its commodification by the encouragement of whiteness as an ideal that can be attained by gradually moving from a darker to a lighter shade (Bhattacharya, 2012).

These adverts contribute to a singular impression that light skin is divinely superior and is associated with civilization, cleanliness, modernity, luxury, beauty, femininity, and desirability. Adverts provide dark-skinned individuals with the perception that being light-skinned is a symbol of respectability and social power that dark-skinned people could obtain through the use of skin lightening products. In this way, the message is emphasised that dark-skinned people can change their circumstances of supposed inferiority and gain access to respect and power through consumption of skin-lightening products (Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka, Gwegweni, and Grobler, 2015). Tenai (2016), in an article entitled “Skin lightening practices: an epidemiological study of South African women of African and Indian ancestries published in *The British Journal of Dermatology*, 173, 2-9, remarked that. the manufacturers’ success in marketing and selling skin-lightening products to dark-skinned people is predicated upon a colonial promotion of idealized whiteness.

Cosmetics have been used to enhance and improve women’s beauty globally; the use of cosmetics is an intricate part of how colour is used to adorn the body of women across the world (Davis, 2013). Research has shown that during the period of the 1920s and 1930s adverts were created in chain stores to improve perceptions of race and promote self-image to encourage increases social mobility (Blay, 2016; Charles, 2003). It could be argued that today the beauty industry uses media to sell their products and to influence more women to purchase beauty products in the hope of beautifying or enhancing themselves (Kozee, 2016). The cosmetics industry has collaborated with celebrities to change or modify consumers’ attitudes towards brands (Blay, 2016; Davis, 2013; Kozee, 2016).

Several people in the society and entertainment industry have criticized the way that black women have been portrayed in the media. The way that black women are depicted in the media impacts the way that blackness and black people are seen. This also impacts how other groups respond to black people based on their relation to those constructed images (Brooks & Herbert, 2006). The images of black women in the media result from prevailing racial, gender and class ideologies. These stereotypes together reproduce and disfigure both how black women view themselves and how others view them (Brooks & Herbert, 2006; Coltrane & Messineo, 2008).  
The way that

black women are represented in the media could be one of the reasons why men prefer the white ideal of beauty because white individuals are shown with flawless faces and with perfect bodies (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000).

When talking about the representation of black women in the media, it is impossible to not look at the way that black women are represented in Hip-Hop music videos. In most hip-hop music videos, black women are depicted negatively. They are considered “ratchet” in the words of the society, they are considered angry, promiscuous and dependent (Baker, 2005; Claudius, 2005). These negative connotations and misrepresentation of black women have made black women continuously try to become the ideal woman, which mostly does not reflect black women and especially not dark-skinned black women (Bess, 2015). In these music videos, we also see the light-skinned girl as the love interest or the girl that wins the main artist. Media representations of black women often make people want to be what they and others deem “good” and that often means imitating what is deemed “good” (Bess, 2015).

Baker (2005) found that black women in media were mostly exposed as unimportant and even though regardless of race or ethnicity, women continue to be much more likely than men to be exposed as sex objects. Furthermore, while white women are singled out as icons of beauty, black women are classified as aggressive and divergent from the submissive image of female sexuality that is most prominent in society (Brooks & Herbert, 2006; Baker, 2005; Hunter, 2011). The black body is thus systematically excluded from the good narrative in the popular media (Lindsey, 2011, Baker, 2005). White feminine beauty is regularly associated with whiteness and middle-class status, while black women are presented in three depictions, namely jezebel, matriarch and sapphire (Baker, 2005; Brooks & Herbert, 2006). Although black women are still underrepresented in the movies, whenever they are featured, they are often shown as sufferers.

In media, it is noted that people who are not white or male tend to be portrayed in a stereotypical and unfavourable light (Hazell & Clarke, 2008). Images of women portray the norm of a perfect woman that is a physically beautiful, obedient sexual object, and these ideal images are used in selling products to both men and women (Hazell & Clarke, 2008). In the same way, as the sexualisation of women objectifies women, the racial subjugation of black women is reinforced by the media (Hunter & Soto, 2009). The media plays a large role in reinforcing white

supremacy and legitimates the power of males over females and other races (Hazell & Clarke, 2008).

The desirability of whiteness is also reflected in mainstream cinema. Black women rarely play romantic leads in Hollywood films and those that do are usually lighter complexioned. The few times that we will see a dark-skinned female lead is in movies that are directed by black directors such as Tyler Perry. In black-oriented media, black women are portrayed as dominant and have high self-esteem (Baker, 2005), and this gives women in the black community the chance to resist the white ideals of beauty that have been depicted in the mainstream media (Baker, 2005; Poran, 2006). The black-oriented media serves as the voice of the voiceless by representing black women in a positive way and by reintroducing the idea of black beauty (Baker, 2005; Poran, 2006), which disputes what the mainstream has depicted about black women. Pictures of black women in black-oriented media depict women as financially strong and holding occupational status (Hazell & Clarke, 2008: 9). One could argue that the black-oriented media is beneficial for the under-representation of black women in the mainstream media, because it has a protective effect on the body esteem of black women (Poran, 2006: 740). This is in contradiction to what the mainstream media depicts black women. Poran (2006) argues that black women do not identify with the white women on screen or in fashion shows, but “actively disidentify with them and so are protected from the effects of negative self-comparisons” (Poran, 2006). This assertion is clearly in contrast to what the mainstream media portrays about black women, where women who have dark skin tend to have lower self-esteem, due to the depictions of them being too black, sex objects and submissive.

The black-oriented media gave rise to the Blaxploitation films which were a way of eradicating the under-representation of black people. Francois (2014) argues the interests of Blaxploitation films was about representations of black women which is opposite of slavery times. It is further argued that black women in Blaxploitation films have taken full control of their sexuality. He further stated that black women also enjoy a more implicit sense of control over themselves, including their sexuality. While in the mainstream media black women are often portrayed as sex objects who don't have control over themselves as they are only included in the media to be products and serve as sexual desire for men. The Blaxploitation films represent “women as having a high sense of self-awareness, almost mocking male sexual fantasy and using sexuality

to their advantage” (Francois, 2014 p. 9). These depictions in Blaxploitation films about black women give black women a chance to resort to their own beauty and replacing the norm that has been made by the mainstream media that beauty is associated to the white ideals of beauty (Francois, 2014; Poran, 2006). This seems to resonate with what Afrocentricity reaffirms to the notion that there is no need to adhere to any beauty standard (Chawane, 2016). Blaxploitation films have created a freer sense of values, identities and ideologies regarding black women. These portrayals fight against the negative stereotypes associated with black women or dark-skinned women in general (Francois, 2014; Poran, 2006). The black-oriented media and Blaxploitation films have a similar priority, which is to protect and fight against negative connotations that are attached to black women (Francois, 2014; Poran, 2006). With these explanations, this leads us to black culture. Black culture protects black women from the negative body-related images in the media and dominated white biased culture (Poran, 2006). “Black culture is presented as a guardian or buffer which shields young black women from danger and aids them to maintain positive esteem” (Poran, 2006, p. 740). This is very rare in media advertisements because black women are always compared to their white counterparts and are always driven to accept or to imitate to what the media thinks of them as well as to conform to what society thinks of them and this has a negative impact on how they perceive themselves. Black culture is protecting black women images in media because it is with media that black men or men, in general, have found to value lighter skin for black women and that makes black women feel rather targeted by media standards, men’s standards and comparisons with other women (Poran, 2006).

Similarly, almost all Indian women who play romantic roles in Bollywood films are also light-skinned (Bhattacharya, 2012). The same thing can be noted in South Africa where most of the leading ladies on local soapies and movies are mostly light-skinned. The influence of international trends on perceptions of beauty is noticeable in South Africa (Ribane 2006). In her book, South African actress and model Nakedi Ribane, 2006, notes that there was a clear division based on skin tone within the South African Black community. She further stated that at present and during the Apartheid era, even if you were not white, having a lighter skin afforded one a chance of having a better life. Through history, it has also been noted that in popularity contests such as homecoming beauty queens and beauty pageants also brought skin tone and colourism dynamics into play. In the US the majority of queens and court members were light-

skinned, and these individuals were often handpicked by presidents of HBCUs (Taylor,2009). Moreover, if a darker-skinned woman was chosen as Homecoming Queen, she risked being jeered and becoming the victim of insults (Taylor, 2009). In South Africa, Ribane (2006), has identified the presence of colourism 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 tone, from Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho clans.

#### *2.4.5 Colorism and Gender*

It is known that a man can be dark to be handsome while a woman is expected to be light-skinned to be beautiful as noted above. Skin colour discrimination or colourism, much like the standards of weight in modern beauty and fashion norms, is a gendered phenomenon that has affected women to a much greater degree than men (Parameswaran & Cardoza, 2009). Research has acknowledged that women are more profoundly affected by issues of skin tone because it is inextricably tied to cultural values regarding beauty (Hill, 2002; Hunter, 2007). A gendered skin-tone preference has been illustrated among male peers who reported a preference for lighter-skinned partners (Bond & Cash, 1992; Hunter, 2007) and within the family context, where lighter-skinned girls received preferential treatment (Landor., Simons; Simons, Brody, Bryant, Gibbons & Melby, 2013; Wilder & Cain, 2010). It is no surprise that several studies have contended that the psychological effects of skin tone biases are more amplified in the lives of African American women (Hunter, 2005; Keith, 2009). That is, African American women may, as a result of incongruences between their physical appearance and societal preferences, experience greater emotional and psychological distress than African American men (Hill, 2002). Given the research on the societal objectification of women, and their propensity to equate physical appearance with existential value (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson, 2011), the notion that gender may modulate the effects of skin tone biases among African Americans is theoretically supported. Ribane (2006) recalled that having a lighter complexion in South Africa 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). Khan (2011) added that the issue of colour has become indistinguishably intertwined with the image that Black women have of themselves. It is no

surprise the tendency to bleach or lightens their skin is a common practice amongst women rather than men.

African feminists believe that women should not conform to any given standard of beauty. They challenge the beauty norm that has been set by the media that women are only beautiful when they are light-skinned, have a slim body and long silky hair (Matiza, 2013; Shelembe, 2014). Women are encouraged to believe in their beauty, embrace their skin tone and believe in their femininity (Synder, 2008). It is argued that women can define who they are, and they can view beauty according to their perception whether they are light-skinned or dark-skinned (Kralokke & Sorensen, 2005; Synder, 2008). Therefore, it could be argued that women can subvert negative social constructions. However, in reality, such an agentic notion often does not exist, and women seek to change negative social identities by bleaching their skin (Khumalo, 2015; Masaka & Chemuru, 2014). However, African feminists believe that women should be given the freedom to construct their own gender identities and that neither the medical establishment nor cultural institutions at large should intervene. "They also resist essentialist notions of identity" (Kralokke & Sorensen, 2005).

From the position of privileges and benefits, it is socially and psychologically understandable why one would pursue skin lightening as a way to upgrade one's social standing. Because dark skin is not as valued as light skin this contributes to dark-skinned individuals taking risks, such as skin bleaching to achieve this valued complexion. According to Ajose (2005); the use of creams to lighten the skin has remained a widespread and common practice in many African countries, such as Tanzania, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa. Dlova, Hendricks, and Martincgh (2012) stated that despite the government's effort to banish the existence of toxic products in the South African market, skin bleaching continues to be practiced.

Studies have shown that people opt for skin lightening for various reasons, one of the reasons being that lighter-skinned individuals were more likely to have higher-status occupations, higher incomes, more years of schooling and higher chances of getting married to those who were dark-skinned (Hill, 2002; Keakile, 2016). Lewis et al, 2011; Lewis, Gaska, Robkin, Martin, Andrews, & Williams, 2012 also found that Tanzanian women bleached their skin for various reasons such as to remove pimples, rashes, and skin diseases; to have soft skin, to be white, "beautiful"; to remove the adverse effects of extended skin-bleaching use on the body; to satisfy

one's partner and/or attract mates of the opposite sex and to satisfy or impress peers. In Ghana, the women who bleach associated a light complexion with beauty, attractiveness, and the ability to find a marriage mate (Fokuo, 2009).

Yearning for lighter skin has resulted in people bleaching their skin, even though they are aware of the risks involved. Topical steroids that are implicated in this practice cause an array of cutaneous side effects such as telangiectasia, atrophy, hirsutism, steroid-induced acne, striae, and opportunistic infections (Findlay & De Beer, 1980; Adebajo, 2002; Kooyers and Westerhof 2004; Ajose, 2005; Faye, Keita, Diakité, Konaré, and Ndiaye, 2005; Pitché, Kombaté, & Tchangai- Walla, 2005; Olumide, Akinkugbe, Altraide, Mohammed, Ahamefule, Ayanlowo, & Essen, 2008; Agrawal & Sharma, 2017). And in the past few years, there has been an introduction of skin lightning glutathione injections, creams, and pills (Makhoba, 2016).

When it comes to beauty standards Black women are the ones who are most challenged to change identity due to the pressure they get from media and men. Black women in South Africa are negotiating their physical identities or their appearance due to the psychological impact of colonisation and apartheid. They are forced to question their identities, “being-ness”, humanity and self-worth through the pressure they get from media, men and the society at large (Marco,

2012: 16). They do this by engaging in skin bleaching as an attempt to rework their identities.

More pressure seems to be put on black women to be attractive because women are often judged more on their looks than any other personal aspects or qualities. In this case, much pressure is put on the physical identity of black women to conform to white notions of beauty by bleaching their skins (Mophosho, 2013; Marco, 2012).

Widespread attention has been given to skin tone in black communities and quite a few studies have found that it seems that in black communities a person with a lighter skin tone is preferred over one with a darker skin tone (see Collins, 2004; Charles, 2003; Davis, 2015; Hunter, 2011; Thompson & Keith, 2001). A South African term often used to refer to black people, especially women, with a light skin tone, is “yellow bones”. The phenomenon of labelling light-skinned women cuts across the African continent. For instance, in Kenya, the term *mzungu* is used for women with a light complexion, while in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the terms *tshoko* and *metises* are used and in Zimbabwe the term *muroora* (Msonza, 2015). In South Africa, the term “blondes” is also used – in contrast with *mnyamana*, an isiZulu word for black women (Shamase, 2016). The media reports the assumption is that this is with the hope of appearing more attractive to the opposite sex, and by reinforcing this point of view, the media contributes to the social construction of female “yellow bones” (Khumalo, 2015). Due to the idealisation of a light complexion, some black women go to great lengths to achieve a lighter complexion (Khumalo, 2015).

If a woman is not naturally light-skinned, she has the option to acquire this sought-after quality using make-up or skin lightening chemicals and, in this way participate in the construction of a particular version of female beauty (Khumalo, 2015). The social value of lighter skin is intensified by local celebrities, such as Mshoza, Kelly Khumalo and Khanyi Mbau, who are affectionately known as the “queens of bleaching” (Ntlintili, 2015). Furthermore, Shamase (2016) suggests that men often put pressure on women with darker skin to use skin-lightening products, as they prefer “prettier, lighter-skinned women” (Shamase, 2016). In other words, there is considerable evidence that the media and the cosmetic industry contribute to the social construction and communication of preferring a lighter skin tone over a darker one.

## **2.5 Research on Experiences of People Who are Born with Light Skin Complexion**

Although not much has been done in this area, one has to take note of a recent study by Chivore, T (2019). Chivore’s study looked at the lived experiences of students at UKZN, who are born with light skin. This study found that the students who are born light-skinned are faced with both negative and positive experiences from being light-skinned. While Chivore looked at the experiences of students, this study looks at the experiences of light-skinned people who are working.

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

The focus of this study was on the experiences of those who are born with a light skin tone. A skin tone that is perceived as the most valued skin tone amongst Black people.

The theoretical framework that was chosen to guide the interpretation of the findings of this study is Cooley's *Looking Glass Self*. In its simplest terms, Cooley's idea of the looking-glass self teaches that we tend to see ourselves through the eyes of others. Cooley believed that people often come to know themselves through the social cues that are given by their environment (Cooley, 1902). Cooley developed the notion of the 'looking-glass self' in which he suggested that there is an essential relationship between the self and society, in which the sense of self can only be acquired through engagement with society.

Fundamentally then, according to Cooley (1902), the overall thoughts we hold towards ourselves are contingent on the positive or negative associations one believes others reflect; it is an imagined or reflective judgment (Mathew, 2013). Seen in this way, the perception that light skin is more valued and has more benefits is, drawing from Cooley's theory, a perception that is developed through social interaction with others. Such interactions, according to Cooley, compel individuals to look at their skin tones and rate them in the light of the negative or positive judgements of them they hear from society. This is a product of their self-consciousness which involves the exercise of continually monitoring self from the point of view of others. And this is often so since as Cooley put it, we "live in the minds of others without knowing it." Secondly, living in the minds of others, imaginatively, gives rise to real and intensely powerful emotions, either pride or shame. (Scheff, 2005).

## **2.7 Summary**

Light skin tone has been idealized for decades and while attitudes toward certain Afrocentric features have become more idealized, we see this through the increasing rate of the lip and buttock enhancement procedures (Kim, 2014), skin colour remains a highly evaluated physical attribute, influencing social processes such as economic attainment (Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity, 2006), mate selection (Hill, 2002), litigation (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004), and body modification (Glenn, 2008). We still see an increase in the number of women who are bleaching and resorting to the use of skin lightening techniques to attain light skin. The literature has

shown that light skin is more valued than dark skin. From the above literature, it would seem that people who are light-skinned have better economic and social standing than dark-skinned people. A large body of literature also shows how colourism has benefited those who are light-skinned over those who are dark-skinned (Banks, 1999; Hunter, 2007; Hill, 2002; Mathews, 2013).

Extensive research has been done on the risks of bleaching and the motivations of bleaching (Glenn, 2008; Fokuo, 2009, Lewis, Robkin, Gaska, & Njoki, 2011; Davids, Van Wyk, Khumalo, & Jablonski, 2016; Keakile, 2016). Research has been done in the United States on people who are light-skinned and their experiences (Hunter, 2007; Mucherah & Frazier, 2013; Uzogara, Lee, Abdou & Jackson, 2014; Varghese, 2017). However, besides the study by Chivore, T (2019), little has been done in South Africa to study the experiences of those who are born with a complexion that is perceived as most valued in the African communities by Black people.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher describes the methods that she used to answer the research questions explored in this study. The chapter also looked at the theoretical paradigm that guided and informed the researcher's choice of research design and data analysis. Included in the discussion is a detailed and precise account of the research process itself, from design, data collection, data management, analysis to reporting.

### **3.2 Design of Study**

A qualitative design was chosen for the study as according to Henning Van Rensburg & Smit (2004), it can generate in-depth information about the experiences of the participants of the study. A qualitative design was considered suitable for this study as it allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of people who are born with light skin, enabling the researcher to capture the richness of human experiences such as how the real world is lived and felt. (Polkinghorne, 2005). Apart from the study by Chirove (2019), so far little is known about the lived experiences of those who are born with light skin in South Africa. According to Creswell (2007), the research problems and the research questions explored in a qualitative study aimed to understand specific issues or topics- such as the conditions that serve to disadvantage and exclude individuals or cultures, for example, hierarchy, hegemony, racism, sexism, unequal power relations, identity, or inequities in our society. A qualitative research design allows the researcher to explore events within the participants' natural, social and cultural settings (Merriam, 1998; Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). According to Maxwell (1998), qualitative studies seek to understand: 1) the meaning of life experiences, 2) the particular context within which people act, and 3) the process by which events or actions take place. The design is, therefore, suitable in providing the researcher with an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the lived experience of those who are born with a light skin tone.

### **3.3 Research Paradigm**

This study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm. An interpretive paradigm involves making sense of people's experiences through interacting and listening to them using qualitative research

methods to collect and analyse data (Terre Blanch, Kelly, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that the word qualitative is used because of the emphasis it makes on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured. They also remarked that the qualitative researcher focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality. Hence the information collected in this study was based on the experiences and knowledge of those who are directly concerned. The type of interpretive methodology that was used in this study is the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Smith and Osborn (2007), state that IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk, their thinking and emotional states. This approach was considered as best suited for this study as the researcher was interested in exploring the experiences of those who are born with a light skin complexion that is desired by most people in Africa and the wider world. The overall aim of the study was to provide an understanding of the lived experience of those who are born with light skin complexion.

### **3.4 Study Location**

The study was conducted in South Africa at a company called *Mindset Design* in Westville, Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal. Mindset design has two offices, one of which is in Westville and the other in Johannesburg. However, the study was limited to the Westville office due to the financial and technical constraints faced by the researcher.

### **3.5 The Study Population**

Data was collected from a sample of three (3) black men and four (4) black women who work at Mindset Design in Westville, Durban, KwaZulu Natal South Africa. The participants who were selected for the study had a natural light skin tone. The total number of participants originally intended for the study was ten (10); however due to the size of the company the target was not met as there were not enough participants who met the inclusion criteria. The total number of participants interviewed for the study was seven (7). Fortunately, this small sample fitted well with the requirements of an IPA study in which the sample size needed to be small as the to allow for the emergence of an in-depth perspective from participants. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), in IPA the main concern is to give full appreciation to each participant's account, and it is for this reason that the samples in IPA studies are expected to be small. With

IPA, the aim is to produce an in-depth examination of certain phenomena rather than that of generating a theory to be generalized over the whole population.

### **3.6 Sampling Technique and Sampling Size**

The participants for the study were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases\participants related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). Participants selected to take part in the study were individuals who were born with light skin complexion and had not used any skin lightening products to get a lighter skin tone. According to Silverman (2000), purposive sampling requires the researcher to think critically about the parameters of the population that they are interested in and choose the sample carefully on this basis. The participants for this study were selected because they have lived their whole lives as light-skinned individuals. Participants in this study were therefore considered knowledgeable, willing to participate, and readily available (Greyling, 2005). This type of purposeful sampling is usually referred to as criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is a kind of purposeful sampling of cases on preconceived criteria (Sandelowski, 2000). In addition, purposive sampling takes place when the group of participants is homogenous, sharing a similar experience of a particular situation (Willing, 2001). The participants were selected because they met the preconceived criteria of being born with a light skin complexion. Palinkas et al (2015) further state that from a qualitative perspective, participants who meet a specific criterion or criteria possess intimate (or, at the very least, greater) knowledge of the phenomenon of interest by virtue of their experience, making them information-rich cases. Creswell (2007), noted that criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon under study, like in the context of this study being born with a light skin complexion.

#### *Recruitment strategy:*

To find participants for the study, the researcher approached the Company HR Manager and requested for gatekeeper approval before she could access the employees of the company. The HR department referred the researcher to the Managing Director of the company who provided the researcher with the gatekeeper approval letter (see appendix 4). Once the Managing Director had granted the researcher access to the employees the researcher spent time at the company

talking to potential participants whom she had identified as individuals with light skin complexion and engaged them in a polite conversation explaining to each of them what the study was about and what the aims of the study were. After the researcher had developed some rapport with the potential participants, she asked politely if they are naturally light-skinned or if they have achieved their light complexion through bleaching. The potential participants who confirmed that they were born with a light skin complexion were then invited by the participants to take part in the study. Those who revealed that their light skin tone was acquired through bleaching were excluded from participation, as the aim of the study was to get an understanding of the lived experiences of people who are naturally light-skinned.

### **3.7 Research Instrument**

Data for this study was collected in approximately 20 minutes of voice recorded semi-structured interviews with each participant. Silverman (2011) states that interviews are best suited for qualitative studies as they allow the researcher to examine what happens in real life rather than just asking participants to comment on it. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant to get an understanding of their individual lived experiences of being born with a light skin complexion. This data collection method was best used when researchers want to get detailed information about the experiences of individuals over an issue under study and to get people to talk about their views on those issues and perspectives (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Through this form of data collection, the research was able to have an in-depth discussion with the participants in collecting data that was informative, rich and relevant for answering the major questions of the study.

For this study, the researcher used an Interview Schedule (the content validity of which was crosschecked by the researcher's supervisor, (See Appendix 2). The researcher made use of open-ended questions that allowed the participants to give detailed information about their experiences. According to Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, & McNeill, (2002), open-ended questions allow the researcher to obtain data in more detail as the interview followed the model of a conversation. Open-ended questions allowed a two-way interaction between the researcher and the participants which helped to provide a more intensive way of exploring the key themes of the study (Hennink et al., 2011).

The research interview schedule was piloted amongst the six (6) colleagues of the researcher to test if the questions were reliable. The interview schedule was divided into four parts. The first part was the general information, whereby the research gathered the biographical information of the participants. The second section looked at the participant's perception of being light-skinned. The third section focused on the participants' childhood experiences as a light-skinned child. The fourth section looked at the participants' experiences currently and in their adult lives. Six (6) of the seven (7) semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants and two were not recorded as participants declined to be voice recorded. The interviews were later transcribed, by the researcher, verbatim to capture the verbal data for data analysis.

The interviews were conducted in a place that the participants felt comfortable, some were conducted in the participants' office, some in the meeting rooms that were available at that time. Some of the interviews had to be conducted after office hours at the participants selected venue. The semi-structured interview schedule provided a framework to ensure all relevant topics about the research study's focus were covered during the interview sessions (Patton, 2002). This also allowed for flexibility in exploring certain topic areas and probing for more in-depth perspectives as they arose. According to Patton (2002), the outline of the interview increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data systematic for each participant. Furthermore, logical gaps were anticipated and covered. Patton (2002) also points out some limitations of the interview schedule included the fact that important and significant topics could be overlooked, as well as the flexibility of the interviewer in the sequencing of questions, which could result in substantially different responses from different perspectives.

Interviews were recorded with the participants who gave consent to having the interview recorded. Out of the seven (7) participants that the researcher approached the only one refused to be recorded and the researcher had to make notes of the interview. The interviews were recorded using the researcher's smartphone and transcribed by the researcher; permission was obtained from the participants to record the interview (See Appendix 1). The recordings were transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. Larkin and Thompson, (2012), recommend that IPA requires a verbatim transcript of a first-person account that has been generated by a research participant, usually in response to an invitation by a researcher.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

For this study, the data were analysed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), IPA aims at investigating how people make sense of their experiences. IPA is a distinct psychological qualitative approach (Smith & Eaton, 2007) where the central concern is the subjective experiences of the individual, understanding and representation of their motivations, thinking, and actions. IPA is wed to a phenomenological epistemology (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2003), which gives experience primacy (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and is about understanding people's everyday experiences of reality, in great detail, to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question (McLeod, 2001).

To analyze the data the researcher made use of thematic and coded sorting of the research data according to topics and questions discussed during the interview sessions. According to Nueman, (2011), coding or thematic analysis is 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. Through thematic analysis, the researcher was able to sort out the data and encourage the researcher to conceptualize the themes that emerged from the interviews. Participants' responses were coded according to themes that were common through all the seven (7) interviews conducted.

### ***3.9 Ethical Considerations***

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the researcher was responsible for maintaining the dignity and welfare of his/ her study participants. This obligation involved protecting participants from harm, unnecessary risks or any danger that may arise during the research process. To maintain high ethical standards during the study, every effort was made to avoid exploitation of the participants. This was achieved through the preservation of their autonomy by obtaining informed consent to take part in the study (Neuman, 2007). In the context of the present study, every effort was made to promote the safety of the participants and to avoid their being exploited and to safeguard their dignity and respect.

### ***3.9.1 Confidentiality and Informed Consent***

While conducting the study, it was considered important that the researcher addressed the issue of confidentiality of the participants in detail before data collection could take place. At the beginning of every interview the researcher provided each participant with the study information sheet and a consent form (see appendix). The researcher explained the purpose of the study to each participant and explained the consent and audio recording form. Each participant was allowed to individually consent or refuse to participate in the study. According to Kruger, Ndebele and Horn (2014), informed consent from participants is very important when one is conducting a study with human participants. Discussing confidentiality at the outset was considered necessary in the present study for acquiring informed consent and building trust with respondents (Crow, Wiles, Heath and Charles, 2006). Participants were informed of their rights in a clear manner as well as the right to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted to. A written and verbal explanation of their rights was given to the participants. Any questions or concerns were addressed by the researcher during the consent clarification process. Participants were also informed that if they had any concerns or questions about their rights as study participants, they could contact the relevant authorities (for example, the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration office) and their contact details were made available to them.

Participants' right to confidentiality was ensured by using pseudonyms. Any identifying information was also altered so that the information provided cannot be directly linked to the participants (Kaiser, 2009). Data from the interviews will be stored for five years in the supervisor's office. Thereafter, the taped data will be erased.

### ***3.9.2 Beneficence and Non-maleficence***

The study looked at individuals' lived experiences in being born with a light skin complexion. Due to this fact, some ethical considerations were addressed. Beneficence refers to the act of charity, mercy, and kindness. It entails the task of doing good to others and involves moral obligation (Kinsinger, 2009). Consistent with the principle of beneficence, the study was considered beneficial to the participants as this could bring about an appreciation of a skin tone that is

sought out by most. The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence aims at affecting participants positively and avoiding any harm to the participants in a research study (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). It was considered important to preserve the integrity of the participants; to ensure that each participant was interviewed in a place that they felt comfortable and given the opportunity to express themselves in a way that was comfortable to them. The opinions, attitudes and experiences shared by the participants were not challenged and all responses were treated as valuable contributions to the research findings. After each interview, the researcher followed up with each participant to find out if they were feeling any kind of distress after or during the interview, and all eight participants reported that they did not experience any form of distress during or after the interview.

### **3.10 Possible Bias**

Being a dark-skinned person, I could have influenced the interview process and the interpretation of the interviews. I could have also allowed my perception unconsciously to impact the study. However, every effort was made to minimize the intrusion of this bias.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. This presentation is preceded by first highlighting the demographic characteristics of the study participants. The study findings are presented in line with the research questions investigated. The study aimed at exploring the lived experiences of black people who are born with a light skin complexion, to identify the perceived benefits of being born with a light complexion and to establish possible challenges and negativities associated with the experience of being born with light skin.

The research questions investigated were the following:

1. What characterizes the lived experiences of Black people in KwaZulu-Natal province who are born with light skin complexion?
2. What possible benefits are associated with the experience of being born with a light skin complexion as perceived by those who are naturally light-skinned?
3. To what extent does the experience of being born with a light complexion attract some challenges and negativities as perceived by those who are born light-skinned?

### **4.2. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants**

This section provides background information of the participants in the study. The analysis indicates that of the 8 prospective participants who agreed to take part in the study, only seven (7) participants finally found the time and convenience to take part in the study. Out of these seven, three (3) were males, while four (4) were females. All seven (7) participants were of Black ethnic South Africa. In addition, five (5) reported that they were single/not married and two (2) stated that they were married. Four (4) of the participants reported having completed a diploma or B-Tech, two (2) had an undergrad degree and one (1) had completed an Honours degree.

The study participants' profile is given below:

**Table 4.1: Participant Profile**

<b>Participants Names (Pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Kutlwano	Female
Sandra	Female
Sello	Male
James	Male
Sipho	Male
Barbra	Female
Nonjabulo	Female

### **4.3 Background to Presentation of Findings**

In this study, the researcher conducted a total of seven (7) interviews with black employees of Mindset Design in Kwa-Zulu Natal who were born with a light skin tone. The participants' ages ranged from between 18 and 40 years. The participants met the eligibility criteria of being a black individual who was born with a light skin complexion and did not attain a light skin through bleaching or skin lightening products.

### **4.4 Emerging Themes and Subthemes**

The data from the interviews with the participants were put into themes in response to these research questions.

#### **4.4.1 Research Question One:**

*What characterizes the lived experiences of Black people in KwaZulu-Natal province who are born with light skin complexion?*

#### 4.4.1.1 **Theme One:** Light skin complexion is rated as the colour of preference

All the participants noted that they noticed that their light-skin colour was preferred by most people around them and in their societies. They indicated that they were treated better than their counterparts who had a darker skin tone, whether it be their siblings or friends. They also confessed that they themselves had a preference for this light skin.

This trend can be seen reflected in the words of the participants thus:

Female participant Kutlwano said:

***Kutlwano:** Neighbours and everyone, would say she is darker... but now it is different. But when we were younger she was a bit darker and I was lighter. So, everyone you know would be like, "O, ao motle jwang" ( Oh this one is so cute/pretty), if you are lighter and the other one "oh nana" (oh, baby), you know. Some advantage, cause people to think things are easier because you are light-skinned...*

In their interviews, James and Siphon gave an indication that a light-skinned person is more trusted than a person with a darker skin tone.

***James:** Let's say we are in a room and somebody happens to lose a cell phone, a dark-skinned person will be the first suspect.*

Siphon also concurred to this view:

***Siphon:** yeah, privileged to a certain extent depending on work, socially or in relationships, you see. I think seeing a light person you trust them more than a dark person. Do you see that... what I see? like you are going to ask a person with dark-skin or light-skin for directions? Or I... feel safer with the lighter*

#### 4.4.1.2 **Theme Two:** Being light skinned makes you the centre of attention

The participants alluded to the fact that being light-skinned, often made them the centre of attention everywhere that they went. As children, they reported being their parents' favourites and as well as among the others around them and paying more attention to them in comparison to their siblings and peers who were born dark-skinned.

To support the above Nonjabulo stated:

*Nonjabulo: ... What I can say is that on my father's side definitely I was treated more special. I think because of my colour as well, but mostly at my mother's place we are, they are light-skinned. My father's side, it was like preference... special treatment, ja.*

Sello said:

*Sello: I feel like people are always looking at me, women are always commenting about my skin colour. Sometimes it's nice, especially while you are young, wa bona (you see). You are seen as a charmer and the girls are always talking about you.*

Barbra just stated:

*Barbra: It's all about us, yellow-bones...ja... Men want us and women want to be like us. They change their skin colour.*

#### **4.4.2 Research Question Two:**

*What possible benefits are associated with the experience of being born with a light skin complexion as perceived by those who are naturally light-skinned?*

##### **4.4.2.1 Theme One: Being light-skin equals privilege**

Some of the participants reported that they have found that due to their light skin complexion they have been privileged.

Nonjabulo spoke about her primary school experience:

*Nonjabulo: I have experienced ... Uhm... what was happening. Okay maybe it would have been my perception but... at school, there was an incident where other kids were punished more. So, the dark-skinned children would get harsh punishment compared to us who are light-skinned. Our punishment would kinda be softer.*

Kutlwano recalled her high school experience:

*Kutlwano: there was if I look back there was, what are they called? Prefects (leadership position in school) or what did we call them. Almost all of them, I had never, I have never seen a dark one hey?... Well, Ummm, I had never seen like a dark-skinned one. From grade 8,9. Ja. And then grade 10 I was a prefect. Ja, I have never seen one. We would go to the meetings, committees or social clubs... No man it was, in fact, light-skinned or fair-skinned girls.*

Barbra mentioned her work experience:

*Barbara: I'm talking about me now, wherever I go, people just like me. So, it's easier, wherever I go and even if I do need favours and all so it's easier for me to get there because of my yellow bone. So, I think it's a good thing for me, even though it's got disadvantages. Because some people think that we are too much, we are full of ourselves*

4.4.2.2 **Theme Two:** When it comes to Mate selection light skin is preferred

When it comes to mate selection the women seemed to not be bothered by the colour of their mate. Only Nonjabulo mentioned that she had a preference for light-skinned men when she was younger.

To support the above Nonjabulo stated:

*Nonjabulo: right, ok, I would go for... growing up I would go for light-skinned guys because, oh because they are presumed to be cute... but not anymore now, 'cause I've seen that it's just colour. It's just a skin complexion and that's it... there's more to a person than just the colour of their skin. But growing up I would think that these guys are the people, ja, these are the people you need to associate yourself with.*

On the other hand, the men showed a preference for women who are light-skinned and that they found them to be more attractive.

*Sello: A yellow bone baba... Yoh, there is just something about walking into a room with a light-skinned woman on your side. All the other guys look at you like ...You know? You are the man or something. Ja.*

Kutlwano referred to her older brother having a preference for light-skinned women:

*Kutlwano: But, actually my brother the one that I come after, Ndlovu. He never dated a dark. Never, and you know like, those proper, super, super light, like yellow, yellow, yellow, yes. He has always dated those.*

#### 4.4.2.3 **Theme 3:** Being Light skin has benefits in the workplace

When asked if their current work success could be linked to their being light-skinned some of the participants agreed that they can find a correlation between their skin complexion and work success.

James stated:

***James:** Being light-skinned has been an advantage on career growth-wise. When approaching potential employers, they tend to be welcoming, they see me as an ideal person, who is intelligent and can do the work properly.*

While James believes that his skin tone meant he had a better chance of getting a job, Barbra recalled an instance where she got a job and she believed that it was because of her skin tone that made her to be recruited.

***Barbara:** ... cause here at my previous Company X, I started in January. I was working at Company Z some years back. Then from there, uhm, staff from HR they just called me and said “you know what there’s a person who wants you to swap. Come from Company Z to Company X are you interested?” Then I said, “yes, I’m interested.” Then it’s when I came there, then when I was there, they said “no, no, no, you must bring your things. You got a job.”*

Sandra, on the other hand, had a different experience from those by Barbra and James where her light-skinness led to her not being selected for a job she wanted.

According to Sandra:

***Sandra:** Ok, umm, in regards to the employment there was this advert I wanted to audition for. And they said to me that you are pretty good, cause we were like dancing, you are pretty good but we are looking for like darker girls. So, I never got that part because of my complexion, right... Well it sucks, cause I mean like, you go for an audition hoping and especially when they say that you are good, you deserved it.*

### 4.4.3 Research Question Three

*To what extent does the experience of being born with a light complexion attract some challenges and negativities as perceived by those who are born light-skinned?*

#### 4.4.3.1 Theme One: 'Not black enough, therefore, you don't belong.'

The participants reported that as light-skinned individuals they often experience exclusion by black people who were born dark-skinned because they were seen as not black.

Commenting in this regard Sandra noted as follows:

*Sandra: Ja, so you would get those kinds of callings, like "hey le dushu le li. Come here" Like' "Why didn't you go to white schools, cause you are white?" ja... I was, I wasn't black enough and when I go to the coloured community I wasn't light-skinned enough, not coloured enough. So growing up I didn't really know where do I fit in.*

Similarly, Kutlwona recalled being treated differently by her grandmother because of her light complexion:

*Kutlwano: And the story that I remember vividly, uh. When I was brought home from the hospital after I was born, just after I was born. To my grandmother from my mother's side. Which is the older, apparently when my mom walked in and then they opened my blankie and my grandmother said, " No, never this cannot be a Ndlovu child". Exactly as she said, "Le kgowa le letswa kae?" (Where is this white child from) and my mom would always say because she treated me differently vele (obviously).*

Because the participants were not seen as being black they reported experiencing being called names such as dushu and hubedu which are derogatory names for coloured people.

In this regard, Sandra further reported :

*Sandra: I was still in the township. I finished my matric in the township. It was the worst man. I mean like a guy would call you like " Come here " and you would be like "No" . : "Ja wena dushu, just because you are light-skinned you think you are it?*

#### 4.4.1.2 **Theme Two:** ‘Light-skinned Men are perceived as Weak and not Man enough.’

The male participants reported commenting that due to their light skin complexion they were made to feel that they were weak and not man enough because of their light skin tone.

Sipho was the first to highlight this:

*Sipho: ...because most of the time they think the light-skinned guy, they are more weak or gentle, they are more... ja, actually growing up I used to feel that in high school. I used to live in a location, being light-skinned, it's like you are a target for most guys. For most guys, I used to live in a location where most of the people are smoking drugs, so when we all together there, there are more older guys than us. So, when they are picking some people to go out, you know, to get something for them, they just pick me all the time. Maybe because I'm lighter they see my skin first or something like that. So, sometimes I do wish I was darker.*

Corroborating the above, Sello said:

*Sello: As a teenager, I have to be very aggressive to prove to my friends and those around me that I was a man.... To show that I am strong like a man and that I can protect myself against them... I was always challenged by the darker guys, even now as a big man.*

James also reported that in a social setting he found women did not see him as a lover but rather a friend:

*James: I have heard women say light-skinned guys are too soft and nice and for that reason, they cannot protect them... Some women say dark-skinned men are good “making love”, wise compared to us light-skinned guys. So, they like me as a friend and not a lover*

#### 4.4.3.2 **Theme Three:** ‘The need to constantly prove you are good at what you do’

While the participants in the present study found that their light-skinness might have contributed to their work success, they also reported that being light skin they are always having to prove that themselves are worthy of their success. They have to work harder to prove that they deserved the current job position or position of leadership.

Commenting in this regard, Kutlwano stated:

**Kutlwano:** ...because you are light-skinned you find hore (that) there is a lot of prejudice because you have to prove yourself hore (that) you are a Prefect (leadership position in school) cause, ukile wabona (you know/notice), you deserve it. You have to go and work harder.

James also agreed saying:

**James:** Being a light-skinned man, you hear things like... Ja, wena you are liked by the "molungu" (white person). You know, because of my skin colour. So, they think that the white man likes me and gives me a promotion because of my skin. So, they always question my worth and whether I can do the job. So, you see I always have to prove them wrong, cause I am good at my job. I have been doing it for a long time.

#### 4.4.3.3 **Theme Four:** 'The use of the Term Yellow Bone is Derogatory.'

The term yellow born is a term commonly used in South Africa referring to people who are naturally light in complexion. The participants rejected the term yellow born and indicated that they don't like the term yellow bone. They found it to be derogatory.

Commenting on this, Siphso stated:

**Siphso:** yellow bone, I feel like it's sort of an insult, you see, I feel like it's an insult to be yellow bone, more of the time we usually call females yellow bones, so if you are going to say I'm a yellow bone it's sort of saying I'm a Ben 10 (someone dating an older woman) to someone older than me... mm, ja, it's a bit degrading.

Sandra concurred to this and commented saying:

**Sandra:** not a yellow bone but I'm light-skinned. Uhm... it's-it's-it's stereotyping I might say... ja, there's just light-skinned and dark-skinned people. I don't believe in the yellow bone... Blonde and dumb?.... ja, 'cause a lot of people when you first think, you supposed to be pretty and dumb.

According to Kutlwano in this regard,

***Kutlwano:** Yeah, I find these terms offensive. I mean yellow bone you can't reduce me to colour. You can't! I am a woman, I am a mother, am a daughter, am a sibling, I am a sister, and you wanna reduce me to just colour. No, I don't like it.*

#### **4.4 Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the findings of the study have been presented and analysed. The findings highlighted the participants' experiences associated with their being born light-skinned. The study suggested that these experiences are varied, some positive, some negative. The next chapter will discuss and give some interpretation to these findings.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to explore and document the lived experiences of black people who were born light-skinned in complexion. The aim was to identify any perceived benefits of being born with a light skin complexion and any possible challenges and negatives associated with the experience of being born light-skinned. Through the use of interviews, the researcher did a phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of seven individuals born with a light skin complexion. This chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the three research questions investigated and the literature reviewed. This will be followed by drawing of implications of the study and some recommendations based on the findings and limitations of the study.

### 5.2 Discussion of Findings, Research question by research question

#### 5.2.1. Research Question One:

*What characterizes the lived experiences of Black people in KwaZulu-Natal province who are born with light skin complexion?*

In relation to the above question, a number of themes emerged from the findings of the study.

*Theme one: Light skin complexion rated as the colour of preference*

Like the majority of the people in society, the participants in this study presented positive perceptions of being a light-skinned person. This was no surprise as previous studies (Herring, Keith, & Horton, 2004, Hunter, 2007; Glenn, 2009; Varghese, 2017), have proved this perception as global and linked it to white supremacist ideologies that light skin colour and Caucasoid features have traditionally been associated with attractiveness, beauty, and superiority (Bond & Cash, 1992; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang, 2009; Hill, 2002).

Study participants such as Kutlwona experienced being called beautiful more often when compared to her darker-skinned sister. James and Sipho both reported that a light skin

person is more trusted compared to a dark-skinned person, with Sello saying that he felt safer with a light-skinned person. The participants agreed that as light-skinned individuals they have noticed that society has a preference for light-skinned individuals.

*Theme Two: Being light-skinned makes one the centre of attention*

Childhood experiences differ for all of us and the lived experiences of those who are light-skinned are no different. However, although the participants narrated different personal experiences associated with their being light-skinned, one thing that was common amongst them was that as children, they did experience some form of favouritism and they usually found themselves to be the centre of attention in their homes and wherever they went. As children participants who had siblings noted that those of their siblings who were darker than them found that they (the light-skinned siblings) were favoured by their parents and relatives in comparison to their darker-skinned siblings and relatives. This finding is in line with the findings of Landor et al. (2013), where they found that parents in their study enacted preferential treatment to their children based on skin colour; in which those who were light-skinned got preferential treatment than those who are dark-skinned. In the present study, one of the participants (Nonjabulo) specifically remembers receiving special treatment by her relatives from her father's side of the family as she was the lightest one in the family. Previous studies have shown that light-skinned children had a better schooling experience as they were popular and favoured by their peers (Sekayi, 2003, Craig; 2009 and Fergus; 2009). Sello, another participant in the present study mentioned that most of the time he also gets stares and comments from women because of his light skin complexion. Barbra, a female participant confirms this stating "everything is about light-skinned people, men want to be with them and women want to be light-skinned."

The above indications mean that overall, the participants of this study reported that from their experiences they found that their skin tone has caused them positive experiences when compared to those who are dark-skinned. The participants implied the perception that the light-skinned is perceived in the society as the skin of choice for all. This perception can be explained by Cooley's theory, 'Through the Looking Glass Self', which proposes that as individuals we see ourselves through the eyes of others. Those who are light-skinned experience being the centre of attention wherever they go from the stares and comments of those around them. As children, they were given special treatment compared to their siblings and peers. This gives the light-

skinned individuals the conviction that their light-skinned tone is the preferred skin tone. Because they saw themselves through the eyes of the people in their society, admiring the colour of their skin, the participants ended up having a positive image of their being light-skinned.

### **5.2.2. Research Question Two:**

*What possible benefits are associated with the experience of being born with a light skin complexion as perceived by those who are naturally light-skinned?*

Again, in relation to this question the present emerged with a number of exciting themes as highlighted below:

#### *Theme One: Light Skin equals Privilege*

Throughout the years, literature has shown that black people who are light-skinned have had more privilege compared to their counterparts who are dark-skinned. Most of this literature is based on studies done in America. However, in her study recently conducted here in South Africa Chivore, (2019) found that her light-skinned participants reported that due to their light skin complexion they have been privileged. Chivore's finding has been corroborated in this study in which the participants reported having experienced privilege in their lives right from their primary school period. Thus, Nonjabulo one of the participants in this study spoke about her primary school experience where she recalled light-skinned children as receiving less harsh punishment when compared to those of their mates who were born dark-skinned. Similarly, Kutlwano, another of the present study participants, talked about her high school experience and how the lighter-skinned girls were always awarded positions of leadership in her school. Similarly, according to Barbara, another of the present study participants, confirmed that she has continued to experience privilege as an adult, where she found that it was easy to get favours from people compared to others who are not light-skinned, and he accounted this to be as a result of her light skin complexion.

*Theme Two: When it comes to Mate selection light skin is preferred*

In this study, the male participants highlighted their preference for light-skinned women. Darity (2000) stated that lighter skin is considered a sign of beauty and men specifically seek light skin as a requirement in a prospective mate. According to Hunter (2007), a lighter skin tone was associated with having a high-status spouse. This can be seen in Sello's (one of the study participant's) response which showed that having a light-skinned woman on your side meant *"that all the guys will look at you like you are the man or something."*

However, it is interesting to note that while the male participants in this study appeared to unabashedly declare their preference for light-skinned women, the women in the study reported that they were not much concerned with the skin tone of their partners. The findings of this study are similar to those by Chivore (2019), who found that her participants who were male had a preference for a light-skinned partner while the female participants felt that they want other qualities in a partner than just the colour of their skin.

*Theme Three: Being Light skin has benefits in the workplace*

From the time of slavery, light-skinned individuals have enjoyed economic advantages compared to their counterparts who are dark-skinned. When asked if their current work success could be linked to their light-skinned some of the participants agreed that they can find a correlation between their skin complexion and work success. For example, one of them, James, found that when he approached potential employers he is welcomed and seen as the ideal candidate, who is intelligent and can do the work. In line with this finding, Hill (2000) reported that light-skinned men are twice more likely to find high prestige employment and were overrepresented among skilled workers and professionals in the United States. Similar to James who believed that his skin tone meant he had a better chance of getting a job, Barbra recalled an instance where she got a job and she believed that it was because of her skin tone that she was recruited. However, it is not important to highlight that while the general perception emanating from this study appears to be that light-skinned individuals have it easy when it comes to finding work and progressing in

the workplace, Sandra, one of the study participants, on the other hand, had a different experience. Sandra, reported she being rejected because she was too light. Sandra's experience thus shows that there are times where dark-skinned individuals are given preference over those who are light-skinned.

An important stand out finding in this study relates to the fact that while the women reported that they were popular among their peers, two of the male participants in this study reported that they felt pressure to be mischievous or aggressive. They felt that they had to prove to their dark-skinned male counterparts that they are not weak and that they can be manly as well despite their skin tone. For a light-skinned man, this could be challenging as masculinity is here being associated with being dark. The male participants thus suggested that their masculinity was constantly being questioned. They would be told that they look like girls and that made them look soft/weak. They were always painted as mama's boy, someone who cannot stand for himself. Corroborating this observation, Siphon mentioned that he grew up in a township, and during his growing up years, he found that the older guys who are dark-skinned would always pick on him; and he felt that this was brought about because he was light-skinned and seen as an easy target. Sello, another male participant, concurred with Siphon's report just presented, highlighting that he also grew up in a township and had to learn to fight at a young age so that the darker-skinned boys could respect him as a man.

These indications can thus be interpreted to mean that the experience of being born light-skinned appears to favour women more than men in the South African context.

### **5.2.3 Research Question Three**

*To what extent does the experience of being born with a light complexion attract some challenges and negativities as perceived by those who are born light-skinned?*

Although, as we have seen in the previous sections, that the participants can recall having a positive experience as light-skinned children, some of the participants did report that they experienced some form of bullying and name-calling due to their being light-skinned. Sandra and

Barbra were the participants who highlighted that they were always told that they were better than everyone else because of their light skin complexion. Apart from the positive aspect of their experience, some of the other participants gave evidence to the fact that being light-skinned often appears to come with some disadvantages. Some negative themes associated with the phenomenon of being born light-skinned are discussed below as follows:

*Theme One: Not black enough, therefore You don't belong*

Although the participants identified as black people, some of them felt that their light skin complexion betrays them, causing them to feel as if they were not black enough and therefore, did not belong or fit into their black communities. The feeling of not belonging was caused by people who are dark-skinned in their communities or families. For example, Kutlwano reported that her grandmother treated her differently from the other grandchildren when she asked her mother why she was told that when she was a newborn baby her grandmother said that there was no way that this white child was part of her family. In her study, Chivore (2019) found that her participants had the same experience and she related this to her Shona up bringing that when a Shona child is born the people in the community want to know who the newborn baby looks like and if the child has no resemblance of the father the newborn baby will be rejected and the mother suspected of having an affair. The same can be seen in South African black cultures where an elder from the man's family comes through to see the newborn child and they will look for certain traits that they expect the children who belong to that family to possess. If the child is rejected by the elders that means that the woman has lied about the paternity of the child. The rejection also leads to name-calling such as dushu, which is a derogatory term used for coloured people. The use of this term confirms that at times those who are light-skinned might be referred to as coloured people and this makes them feel like they don't belong to the black community and as they are not black enough.

*Theme Two: Light skinned Men are perceived as Weak and not Man enough*

One of the challenges of being light-skinned as revealed in this study was reported by male participants. The men of the study reported that due to their light skin complexion they were made to feel weak and not man enough. They reported that their masculinity was challenged by those who are dark-skinned. This is the problem with Siphon, who reported that he felt like he was targeted by the older guys in his community because of his light skin and that at

times this would make him wish he was dark-skinned. Sello found himself having to be aggressive to prove to his dark-skinned friends that he was man enough. Similarly, James related his experience with women, where he found that women saw him as soft and nice, that meant that he could not protect them. He also experienced that some women preferred dark-skinned men as lovers as they were perceived as being better lovers compared to light-skinned men. These trends are in line with the findings on the same theme made by Chirove (2019).

*Theme Three: The need to constantly prove you are good at what you do.*

The light-skinned individuals in this study as mentioned in the previous chapter affirmed that they were some privileges for being born light-skinned. Privileges such as receiving preferential treatment, being awarded leadership roles in school, and that of being the preferred candidate for a job are the main examples highlighted. Again, these aspects of the present study's findings corroborate those by Chirove (2019) on the same theme. And it is no surprise that those who are light-skinned are challenged to prove that they are good at their jobs or deserving of their leadership positions. This was the point that Kutlwano had made in her interview. She highlighted that she was always working hard to prove that she was deserving of her leadership role at school and in the workplace. James equally reported that his colleagues always suggest he gets preferential treatment because of his light skin.

*Theme Three: The use of the Term Yellow Bone is Derogatory*

Yellow bone, a common term used in South Africa to describe black people who are light in skin complexion. This term has become popular in the past few years, with a lot of local and international songs referring to yellow bone. The present study established that the term 'yellow bone is a term used to describe a light-skinned black woman; whose skin looks like it is yellow. The term "yellow bones" appeared in 2009 in the Urban Dictionary, and in 2014 the term has been used widely in the media (Matika, 2015), and in hip-hop music, positive reference is also of it as applicable to lighter-skinned women. A good example here is that of Emtee da Hustler's song about South African celebrity Pearl Thusi (Ramakobya, 2016; Khumalo, 2015).

This term is also associated with beauty; as women who are called yellow born are considered as the most beautiful. In the present study, however, it was interesting to note that the term 'yellow bone' was not a preferred term by most of the participants. One of the participants, Barbra, was

the only participant who referred to herself as a yellow bone throughout the interview. The other participants made it clear that they found the term to be derogatory. This is true with the participant called Sandra who stated that she does not like being called yellow bone as the term is associated with being unintelligent. Similarly, Sipho commented that the term was an insult as it is a term that is used mainly for women. Kutlwano, another participant in line with the above trend, preferred to be called a black person as she felt that she is more than her skin complexion. The discovery of rejection of the term yellow bone in this study was surprising, as it is usually used by black people as a complement to those who are light-skinned.

### **5.3 Summary of Study**

The principal aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the naturally light-skinned employees who work at Mindset Design, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The specific objective was to determine the advantages and challenges of those who are born light-skinned.

The study employed the qualitative research methodology to generate in-depth information about the stories and personal experiences of the participants of the study, regarding their condition of being born light-skinned. The participants for the study were selected using the criterion purposeful sampling technique, in which only those who were born like-skinned and have maintained that condition without the use of bleaching tones were selected for the study. Using this criterion, participants selected for the study were individuals who were naturally light-skinned in complexion and worked at Mindset Durban branch, in KwaZulu-Natal. The in-depth interview technique was used to gather data for the study. The data generated were analysed through the application of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the thematic analysis.

The study established that being light-skinned does lead to positive life experiences. The positive experiences that the participants reported included those of being given preferential treatment as children and adults; being given less harsh punishment in school as compared to their counterparts who are dark-skinned and being awarded positions of leadership in school and workplaces. Yet, while the study participants, overall, reported enjoying positive experiences as a result of their being born light-skinned, the balance of the findings also showed that in addition

there are some challenges that those who are born light-skinned also do experience. These challenges included the problem of feeling like not belonging associated with the infuriating problem of name-calling; being treated as not being man enough, as well as the need to constantly prove that one is good at what one does.

#### **5.4. Implications and Conclusion**

The above findings add up to one thing and that is that being born light-skinned in the South African context usually come with both positive and negative consequences. Positively, while people tended to adore people with light-skin colour due to their colour, which is generally understood as a colour of privilege, others see in their colour a number of limitations. The study suggested that being light-skinned and living in black communities do not go down well with those involved.

At the same time, the perception that light skin is better than dark skin is one that is not about to change. The present study discovered that those who were born with a light skin tone hold a similar attitude and perception. Indeed, the majority of the participants said that they would not change their skin tone and even indicated that if they were darker, they would have had a more challenging life. This is not surprising as the participants felt that they were favoured compared to those who are dark-skinned. Overall, the conclusion from this study is that as much as the light skin tone does have advantages those advantages often lead to some disadvantages such as being constantly questioned about whether or not they are deserving of being called truly black people.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the above, it is suggested that policymakers need to create a colourism awareness programme that can be integrated into schools and society. This will help make people more aware of how they talk about people of different skin tones. This will also create a consciousness of the fact that all skin tones are equal.

These policies should not be rolled out to schools that are in the townships and rural areas only, they should also be rolled out in multiracial schools in the suburbs as well. These policies will assist in the reduction of feeling that light skin is more valuable than a dark skin tone. In turn,

this should lead to a reduction of the urge to engage in skin bleaching and skin lightening and the health risks that come from such a practice.

### **5.6 Limitations of the study**

One of the limitations of this study was that some of the potential participants were not comfortable with the interviews being done in English. They requested for interviews to be done in isiZulu. The participants of the study did agree to be interviewed in English although there were instances where they would say some words in isiZulu or Sesotho. To get a better understanding of the participants to experience allowing them to express themselves in their language of choice will provide richer data.

A second limitation was that some of the participants seemed to be uncomfortable discussing their full experiences. This could have been because the researcher was a dark-skinned person; in which case the participants might have felt more comfortable talking to someone who had the same/similar skin tone with them.

Thirdly, the study and its findings are limited to the South African context, KwaZulu-Natal at Mindset Design in Westville Durban. The findings cannot be generalized to the whole Mindset company as only one branch was involved in the study. Mindset Design has two branches the Westville branch and another branch in Johannesburg.

### **5.7 Recommendations for further research**

Based on the above limitations the following suggestions for further research are therefore put forward:

- 1, There is a need for future research to expand on this current study and to compare and contrast the lived experience of those who are light-skinned in other provinces and careers. This will allow for more generalizability of the findings. A larger and broader study with a larger number of participants is therefore recommended.
2. The second recommendation is that the participants, if possible, could be interviewed by someone who has a similar skin tone as them. This might help with making the participants comfortable to speak freely about their experiences.

3. Thirdly, a new study is recommended that should allow the researcher to collect data or conduct interviews in the participants' preferred language of communication.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Schedule**

Question 1:

### General information

Age:

Where you from:

Education level:

Marital status:

Question 2:

### Perceptions of being light-skinned

- What are your perceptions of being light-skinned?

Question 3:

### Childhood Experiences

What was your experience growing up as a light-skinned child?

- Are your parents light-skinned? What was your experience with your parents?
- Are your siblings light-skinned? What was your experience with your siblings?
- What were your experiences with friends who were light-skinned and those who were dark-skinned
- What were your experiences at school?

Question 4:

### Adulthood Experiences:

What are your experiences as a light-skinned adult?

- What are your experiences with people of the opposite sex?
- What are your experiences when it comes to career growth/opportunities?
- What have your experiences been like with those who are dark-skinned?
- Would you change your skin complexion if given the chance?

## Appendix 2: Informed Consent Contract



My name is Lindiwe Madziwa. I am a Master's student specializing in Research Psychology. I am doing a phenomenological study of the experiences of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal workers who are born with a light complexion. The results of this study could provide important information that could be incorporated into awareness creation programs as a primary intervention strategy.

Before you decide whether to take part in the study it is important that you understand what the research is for and what you will be asked to do. Please take time to read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form. You can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without giving a reason.

The standard of care you receive will not change whether or not you decide to participate in this study. You are welcome to phone me if you would like any further information.

The purpose of the research study is to examine/explore your lived experiences as an individual who is born light-skinned. I would like to ask questions about what it is like for you, your thoughts, your feelings as well as situations, events, places and people connected with your experience.

You have been chosen because you are a staff member at The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and have are light-skinned. The study will involve [up to 20] participants, who will all be interviewed separately. The interview will take approximately [30 – 60 min]. If you choose to take part I will organise a location for the interview convenient to you.

The interview will be recorded on audiotape and then transcribed onto a computer. The audiotapes will be stored in a locked secure place at all times and the computer data will be protected from intrusion also. The audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Your response will be treated with full confidentiality and anyone who takes part in the research will be identified only by code numbers or false names. You can request a copy of the interview transcript if you wish. The interviews will be analysed by me.

Participation in the study is unlikely to involve any risks or discomfort, however, should you incur any psychological discomfort as a result of participating in this study, referral mechanisms will be put in place to provide the necessary support ( Student Counselling Center Reception Pietermaritzburg: Mike Murray 0332605233 {Psychologists: \*Mariam Jassat Email: [jassat@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:jassat@ukzn.ac.za) OR \*Tracey Visser Email: [visser@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:visser@ukzn.ac.za) } and Howard College Student Counselling Center Reception: Vinotha Moodley 0312602668 {Psychologists: \*Ayanda Zondo Email: [zondoa2@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:zondoa2@ukzn.ac.za) OR \*Candice McCain Email: [mccain@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mccain@ukzn.ac.za)). Furthermore, if you are interested in finding out the results of the study, you can contact either me or my supervisor on the contacts below, and a verbal or a written feedback report will be provided to you. In addition, a copy of the thesis will be made available in the university library at the end of the research which you can access.

If you have any concerns or questions about your rights as a study participant, or if you are concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then you may contact the relevant authorities (e.g. Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration: Ms Ximba -Tel: 031 260 3587 OR [HssrecHumanities@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HssrecHumanities@ukzn.ac.za)). This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Research Ethics Committee. My ethical Clearance Protocol Reference number is HSS/0675/018M. Gatekeeper permission to conduct research on university premises has also been granted by the Registrar's office.

You must be 18 years old or older to participate in this study. If you are not at least 18, please do not participate.

More information about the study

You can contact me: phone 0769161102 or via email: [lindiwemajiki@yahoo.com](mailto:lindiwemajiki@yahoo.com)  
OR my research supervisor [nwoye@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:nwoye@ukzn.ac.za)

By signing the section below, you are indicating that you have understood all of the information that has been presented to you and that you agree to participate in this study.

-----  
-----

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the information presented to me concerning the nature of this research and I understand my rights and responsibilities as a research participant. I agree to take part as a participant in the individual interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like to receive feedback after the research has been completed (please tick one):

- Yes
- No

-----

In addition to the above, I agree to the audio recording of my interview for the purposes of data capture. I understand that no personally identifying information or recording concerning me will be released in any form. I understand that these recordings will be kept securely in a locked environment and will be destroyed once data capture and analysis are complete.

I hereby consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# Appendix 3: Ethical Approval



10 September 2018

Mrs Lindiwe Mavis Madziwa 215074981  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Madziwa

Protocol reference number: HSS/0675/018M

Project title: A phenomenological study of the experiences of University of KwaZulu-Natal workers who are born with a light complexion

### Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 9 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

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

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

Yours faithfully

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Prof Augustine Nwoye  
cc. Academic Leader Research: Professor D Wassenaar  
cc. School Administrator: Ms Priya Konan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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18 June 2019

Mrs Lindiwe M Madziwa 215074891  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Howard College Campus

Dear Mrs Madziwa

Reference number: HSS/0675/018M

Full approval - Change in project title

Your application dated 23 May 2019 in connection with the above, the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the application and the research protocol has been granted **Full Approval**.

- **Change in title from:** A phenomenological study of the experiences of University of KwaZulu-Natal workers who are born with a light complexion.
- **New project title:** A phenomenological study of the experiences of Mindset Design employees who are born with a light complexion.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach/Methods must be reviewed and approved through amendment/modification prior to its implementation. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 1 year from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully



Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/px

cc New Supervisor: Prof Augustine Nwoye  
cc Academic Leader Research: Prof M van der Riet (Acting)  
cc School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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