



**The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: developing
a sense of self as an African woman**

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Declaration

I, Sinqobile Khama, declare that

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Abstract

This study explores how Black African women in South Africa view beauty, with an emphasis on how colonial and post-colonial social norms have shaped their sense of self. With a focus on the ways that Eurocentric ideals, disseminated through media, culture, and social structures, have shaped and, in some cases, distorted, the self-concept and body image of African women, this study employs a qualitative methodology with an exploratory design, seeking to understand how older and younger generations of African women define and experience beauty.

Two focus groups were formed each consisting of six participants. One focus group comprised older women who experienced apartheid, and the other with younger women who grew up in the years following the end of apartheid. Through the use of semi-structured focus group discussions, each participant was asked to consider how they saw pictures of African women in the media today and how their ideas of beauty had changed. By using thematic analysis to analyse the data, important themes and patterns in the participant narratives were identified. Key findings suggest an ongoing conflict between Eurocentric norms and traditional African beauty ideals, especially when it comes to skin tone, body size, and hair. The elderly participants favoured Eurocentric traits like lighter complexion and smaller bodies, influenced by ideals from the colonial era. On the other hand, the student participants, who were younger in age, demonstrated an increasing desire to embrace natural African traits including dark skin, bigger bodies, and natural hair while being heavily exposed to Western beauty standards through social media. Nonetheless, a significant number of younger individuals encountered coercion to adhere to Western norms, suggesting a persistent internal struggle between embracing African beauty ideals and universal ideals of beauty. This demonstrates the generational shift in views of beauty and the ongoing effects of media and society on African women's identities and self-esteem.

By highlighting the internal and external pressures Black African women endure, this research contributes to the limited literature on African beauty. In the face of globalised Eurocentric norms, it highlights the significance of fostering inclusive and diverse beauty standards that validate the identities and self-esteem of African women. This study, viewed through the lens of social constructivism, highlights the intricate relationship among beauty, identity, and self-worth in African countries, providing fresh perspectives on how these women negotiate the contradictory signals surrounding beauty in the contemporary world.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This study attempts to explore the intricate relationship that exists between cultural beliefs, psychological perceptions of themselves, and beauty standards in black African women. It is through the exploration of black African women's distinct experiences and viewpoints that this research seeks to empower and offer insightful information on the conversation surrounding beauty and identity in Africa. This chapter includes the background of the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, and the research questions. It also includes a literature review that defines important concepts in this study and delves into relevant prior research in this field.

Beauty discourse is sensitive for many people irrespective of their gender, race or culture (Greer, 1999). This means that a lot of people around the world find that discussions about beauty require a thoughtful and delicate approach due to the different beauty constructs that are put in place by society. Patton (2006) highlighted that beauty ideals change all the time. What was considered "beautiful" in a former era or by a certain ethnic or cultural group may not be considered as such in the current era or by other groups, demonstrating that beauty is not a stagnant and rigid concept (Patton, 2006), it is subjective. This reinforces the importance of this study, which focuses on the perceptions of beauty as an African woman – taking into consideration the pressures of social media and other different factors that come into play, which affects one's self-concept when looking at and discussing beauty.

This chapter focuses on discussing the different perceptions of beauty, but also understanding how those perceptions have manifested over time, as it has been stated that beauty standards change all the time. Prior to the colonialism era, African beauty standards existed and were appreciated and practised religiously, however, post-colonialism and through apartheid, an appreciation for Eurocentric beauty standards within the South African society was in full swing (Spencer, 2009). As a result, it is impossible to separate current beliefs and perceptions from colonialism and apartheid. It is crucial to consider issues related to identity, ideology, culture, and social construction while analysing ideas of beauty and self-esteem.

There have been many studies related to the discourse of beauty, however, even though there would be a comparison between Eurocentric and African beauty ideals, most would focus their investigation on the European beauty constructs. While this study takes into account the

understanding and influence of Westernised beauty ideals on African women, it also considers other factors that influence one's definition of beauty and how that affects the way an individual looks at themselves and how they relate to others. This is achieved by looking at pictures of African women that are presented in magazines, and dissecting what makes an individual beautiful. These discussions of the perceptions of beauty ideals stem from a range of different factors such as culture, family, community and the media, which consequently impact an individual's perception of beauty and as a result of this, certain social practices are done to objectify the body to represent an ideal beauty standard (Bryant, 2013).

Nawaz et al. (2023) found that while some individuals may try to "perfect," "control," or "correct" some aspect of their appearance, some of these alterations may potentially have unanticipated negative effects that could eventually harm one's self-esteem. For young individuals to be happy and healthy, Tort-Nasarre et al. (2023) suggested that they need to have a positive body image and strong self-esteem. Currently, the media and popular culture all have some form of influence on how one should perceive themselves. Young women and children are exposed to a lot of images and videos that portray certain looks as attractive. Furthermore, constant exposure to such images may contribute to negative body image and the belief that their own authentic beauty, or bodies, are imperfect. A study by Möri et al. (2022) found that these negative emotions can, consequently, harm one's mental health and sense of self-worth, which is what this study focuses on shedding light on. In addition to this, this study will dissect the constant comparison between Eurocentric and African beauty ideals as a point of reference to how society formulates current beauty ideals.

This study will be achieved through a semi-structured focus group discussion, with each set of women looking at the different images of women that are in current magazine issues and discussing the women's views of what they know African beauty to be and discussing the root of their perception. This discussion will further look at whether or not their perception of beauty has always been that, or whether have there been changes to what they think beauty entails – considering their experiences, which may speak to both physical and mental shifts that they have possibly adopted. The experiences of twelve African women who have lived through different eras will be gathered for this study. The first focus group will consist of six women, which will be regarded as the older generation that has lived through the apartheid era and the other group will be the younger generation, which have been raised post-apartheid. The reason there is such a distinction between these two groups is that their perceptions of beauty may be different as they have had different experiences and the influences of what they understand beauty to be, may differ. This can be due to the exposure of diverse facets that make up societal standards, which may have not necessarily existed during the one era.

This study will contribute to existing knowledge, and at the same time, take a different approach to understanding what African beauty means today. Falconer and Neville (2000) found that Eurocentric beauty standards have been extensively researched in the academic community for decades. Even when discourse around African beauty was being referenced in literature, the focus was often on Eurocentric ideals of beauty (Falconer & Neville, 2000), which disregarded African beauty ideals. Most of the research on African women (Weitz, 2008; Brown & Jasper, 1993; Falconer & Neville, 2000) usually compares and contrasts Eurocentric and African beauty ideas, but it does not look at African beauty in isolation, which is what this study aims to highlight because this exact narrative puts Eurocentric beauty ideals on a pedestal, ensuring that young African women ignore their beauty to try and aim for what society considers to be the benchmark and European young women stick to the norm.

Brown and Jasper (1993) found that there are many young women and girls in Western culture who feel that changing their body size or form will improve their quality of life because they are taught that their bodies are a reflection of their economic value (Brown & Jasper, 1993). Weitz (2008) discovered that women can gain power by means of conventional attractiveness in both relationships and jobs. For instance, conventionally attractive women are less lonely, more popular, and have more sexual experience. They are also more likely to marry and to marry men who have a higher socioeconomic standing (Weitz, 2008). Although this is a perfect reflection of Eurocentric beauty ideals and why this ideal is seen as the gold standard of beauty ideals, times have now changed. When discussing beauty ideals, different facets of beauty are deliberated such as facial features, skin colour, hair type, and body shape. Furthermore, the tendency to have African features such as larger buttocks, thighs, hips, and lips has grown in popularity over recent years. People have started to look at beauty standards with variations within many African cultures (Bankhead & Johnson, 2014), which has brewed an interest in this study as I, a dark-skinned young African woman, did not anticipate such changes to happen.

1.2. Background and motivation for this study

While growing up, slender bodies and being light-skinned were idealised in the media, especially when it came to the images of women on television and in fashion publications, such as magazines as well as in the various areas that I grew up in. Fouts and Burggraf (2000) expressed in their findings that "The thin and fair in complexion ideal is portrayed as normative, desirable, and achievable, and these idealised images have been praised and rewarded as highly desirable examples of physical beauty" (Fouts & Burggraf, 2000). This was further consistent with the findings of Wasyliw et al. (2009) study, some years later, which shows the huge battle around this topic. According to academics and researchers, Kim and Chock (2015), the media is crucial in spreading and sustaining the appeal of idealised body images, which is that of European

beauty standards. This led to the recognition of a gap in the available literature regarding African beauty discourse.

The rationale of a study helps to show how valuable the study could be to the field. As a result, the significance of the study and the key questions that have informed and influenced the research are presented below:

I, as a young black African woman, have observed how differently light-skinned and slender women are treated in society in comparison to dark-skinned full-figured women. Light-skinned slender women are often seen as the ultimate definition of beauty, which comes with benefits such as being treated positively in society and on social media. The term that is used to describe this phenomenon is “pretty privilege”. A study conducted by Muthuphei (2020) reflected that this phenomenon grants young women the opportunity to get first preference or better treatment in social settings such as family functions and entertainment spaces, which breeds a certain level of expectation of how one should look in relation to the world of beauty. Body aesthetics and ideas of attractiveness influence how people actively create their identities. Charmaraman et al. (2024) maintained that women's perceptions of themselves and those around them are still primarily shaped by how beauty is imagined and performed in society, which is what the focus of this study is. It is an important study to investigate as young African women want to fit in the beauty standard and they can go to extreme lengths with the alterations and modifications of themselves to create their identity and shape how they want to be viewed in society and on social media.

As a member of society and a social media user myself, I am fascinated at the constant need of young women to constantly look a certain way when posting on social media platforms, which taps into the inability to post a picture without filters and edits because of this constant pressure to not go against current beauty ideals. Pressure and internalisation, two sociocultural influences, might strongly influence the external views and impressions one has of their own body, which may consequently lead to body dissatisfaction. Regardless of a person's actual size or shape, body dissatisfaction occurs when they believe their body falls short of society's ideal in terms of size and/or shape. In other words, how we view ourselves and how we interpret society's ideals both have a direct effect on how we feel about our bodies. This suggests that perceptions of beauty and body dissatisfaction are intrinsically linked. The leading contributor to unhealthy behaviours such as clinical eating disorders and chronic diets is body dissatisfaction. Determining the causes of body dissatisfaction is crucial not just for mental health reasons, but also for theories which explain how various individuals perceive beauty and the negative behaviours which are linked to that.

1.3. Problem Statement

All aspects of women's lives, especially their bodies and notions of feminine beauty that come to dominate those bodies, are influenced and controlled by their societies (Denis, 2008). This study opines that many young African women, in modern South Africa, still believe that their beauty is not sufficient until they conform to the Eurocentric ideals. The aim of this study is, therefore, to explore the concept of beauty, which has many facets that are interpreted differently. Absent from the literature is the extent to which young South African women are currently negatively affected by exposure to certain beauty ideals on the internet and social media. There is research that being exposed to a big platform such as the Internet has many benefits, but it is not known how or to what extent culture, family and community currently contribute to young African women's perception of beauty. There are negative implications that are likely to affect young African women, who are currently struggling with their self-concept because of the attitudes around beauty that are subject to global popular culture. These beauty ideals are communicated consistently and directly to young African women through social media on a daily basis, which is concerning as it is likely to affect their mental well-being.

During my experience as a Life Orientation teacher, it was heart breaking to hear and listen to how my female learners between the ages of 14 and 16 would struggle with their self-concept due to societal beauty standards, which were constantly reiterated through interaction with peers and interactions with social media platforms such as Instagram, Tiktok, WhatsApp and YouTube. Discussions were almost always centred on skin tone, weight, body shape and hair. Considering all of this, it is not known to what extent such conceptions will impact these young African women's self-esteem and actions, especially because they are growing up in a world that constantly sees Eurocentric ideals as the gold standard of beauty.

The purpose of this study is to understand the women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa and how those perceptions of beauty impact the sense of self of African women. In essence, that is discussing what both the young and the elderly understand beauty to be, taking into consideration the range of influences that form how one looks at oneself when thinking of beauty and how one relates to others in society. This can dissect an individual's thoughts, behaviours and experiences in relation to beauty. Though this study makes an effort to provide a comfortable environment for the participants, this study depends on the truthful responses of the women engaging in the semi-structured focus group discussions and it can only hope that the participants are interested in the work and contribute to the discussion genuinely and gather authentic qualitative information. This will be achieved through an online semi-structured focus group discussion with six African females, registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburg Campus under the College of Humanities on Zoom as well as six African females, who are residents at the Issy Geshen Home for the Aged in Lamontville, Durban.

1.4. Research Questions

This qualitative research study is guided by the following key research questions:

1. What are black African women's perception of beauty in South Africa?
2. How have black African women's perception of beauty impacted their sense of self as African women?

1.5. Research Objectives

The following research objectives were identified for this study:

1. To explore black African women's perception of beauty in South Africa.
2. To determine the impact of black African women's perception of beauty on their sense of self as African women.

The research questions and objectives play a significant role as they explore relevant constructs that are linked to the problem statement. As previously mentioned, the study entails black African women's perspective of beauty. The exploration of what black African women between the ages of 18 – 55 perceive beauty to be is essential for this study because it takes into account the variety of forces that shape how people view themselves when considering beauty constructs and interacting with others in society. This is further achieved by the analysis of an individual's views, thoughts, actions and experiences in relation to beauty, which draws from the research questions and objectives mentioned above.

1.6. Rationale and Significance of the study

For this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted as one of the objectives of this study to explore and understand the concept of beauty through black African women's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviours as well as lived experiences as perceived by their social worlds (Vibha et al., 2013). The theoretical framework best to approach this study and answer the research questions was the social constructivism theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky. This framework has open-ended questions, and emerging approaches and makes use of text and/or image data, which was best suited for this study due to the emphasis placed by this theoretical framework on understanding culture, including language and other social behaviours and norms, as well as taking the context into account while trying to understand the occurrence of a specific concept related to beauty (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Denis (2008) stated that all aspects of women's lives, especially

their bodies and notions of feminine beauty that come to dominate those bodies, are influenced and controlled by their societies – which differ according to context.

The social constructivist framework further aims to understand and get the essence of specific concepts from the participants' realities. Their reality and truth are constructed by the participants through how they interpret and make meaning of the occurrences in their natural environment and how participants respond will be understood as their realities, which will be considered authentic and rich data that responds to the objectives of the study.

This study is necessary as its approach differs from previous research studies, which often looked at the comparison of Eurocentric beauty ideals against African beauty ideals. This study focuses on understanding the history of African beauty and the perceptions of African women in beauty discourse, unravelling their authentic experiences and influences that make out how they perceive beauty. Many young African women in modern South Africa believe that their beauty is insufficient unless they conform to Eurocentric notions. Although it may not be overtly expressed, there is an aspiration for white beauty; they straighten their hair to get rid of the African 'kink', a straighter nose, thinner lips, and lighter skin are still thought of as beautiful and attractive and ultimately an "aspiration" of many (Conning, 2002, p.23). This highlights the dangers – both physical and emotional – that black African women may be subjected to due to beauty discourse linked with societal pressure. Research by Okango (2017) has shown that more and more young women subject themselves to both legal and illegal cosmetic surgeries and skin bleaching procedures, which stem from not being happy or satisfied with the way they look (Okango, 2017). Additionally, a study by Mkhomba (2021) highlights the perpetuating role that social media and other forms of advertising have in fostering black African people's desire for whiteness, with skin bleaching being one method of achieving it, which can be understood as a result of a weakened self-concept and may lead to severe mental health challenges.

This study will contribute immensely to academia as it holds social value. This means that certain issues relevant to societal concerns will be either highlighted or resolved, which is consistent with what the Tribunal (1996) reported as social value, which is research that yields positive effects for the benefit of society and is not arbitrary and meaningless in nature. Whilst this study does not aim to resolve these societal concerns, sharing rich extensive knowledge around beauty ideals from families, cultures and social media and its effects on mental health will contribute to black African women's current knowledge about themselves as well as the implications based on beauty ideals on young black African women. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the empowerment of more young African women who strive for personal authenticity in a world that is filled with multiple ideologies.

This is especially imperative for young black African women who are exposed to big social media platforms, which indeed have many benefits, however, it might have detrimental effects on young African women who are battling with their self-concept due to the global popular culture of beauty ideals. Again, this can then further contribute to other or severe mental health challenges, which is what this study aims to determine through exploring black African women's perceptions and experiences of African beauty and how it contributes to their sense of self as African women.

1.7. Nature of the study

The research design adopted to answer the research questions of this study is qualitative research, which gives a voice to its participants and ultimately makes their contribution to the study authentic (Gibson et al., 2004). With this research study, the researcher has not attempted to manipulate or control any aspects of the discourse around beauty because the qualitative approach seeks to understand concepts in their most natural setting.

The qualitative research design was best suited to address the study's problem statement and research questions. When done carefully, qualitative research is internally consistent, thorough, and helpful in providing answers to significant issues about people and their lives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) – which in this study is young black women's perceptions of African beauty and how those perceptions contribute to the sense of self of African women. This qualitative study seeks to convey why people have thoughts and feelings that might affect the way they look at themselves and behave concerning beauty topics, which is valuable in this study as it captures raw information by eliciting answers to questions that ask how, what and why (Creswell et al., 2011) to the study's participants.

This study aimed at sampling two groups of black African women. The researcher did not aim to discriminate against any ethnic group, therefore, all cultural tribes were welcome to participate in the study. The first group was that of older black African women aged 55 years and above residing in an old age home and the second group consisted of young black African women aged between 18 to 35 years, who are registered students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. The two groups had separate participant demographics to ensure that the researcher explored different perspectives of African beauty, as a range of different influences can contribute to one's view of beauty constructs that another person may have little experience or knowledge of.

The snowballing and convenience sampling techniques were adopted for accessibility at the Pietermaritzburg Campus, as the other campuses were not considered due to possible issues relating to the accessibility of participants. The researcher solely focused on the older women living in Issy Geshen Home for the Aged as well as the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. The student participants could be in different levels and schools within the College of Humanities. Again, the researcher solely focused on the College of Humanities for the purpose of easy accessibility of participants as well as to bring a focus that will allow for snowballing and convenience sampling to come into effect.

Focus groups are "a way of collecting qualitative data through group discussions focused on a particular topic of interest" (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177) and are used in studies to gather information. The researcher can then acquire an understanding of how the participants' shared attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of African beauty have affected how they currently perceive or once perceived themselves. Focus groups are also very useful in capturing both the content and expressions of the participants. The semi-structured focus group discussion questions – used in this study – were informed by the Fitzpatrick skin type system, developed to assist in predicting which skin types required what amount of sun protection through categorising according to how much melanin each skin type had (Goon et al., 2021). This study did not aim to classify people, but, it used the Fitzpatrick skin type system as a guideline due to the descriptions used in the classification tool, which were only meant to represent the different complexions.

The participants were asked to identify their preferred skin tone, hair texture and body size. Thereafter, they were asked to identify their current features using different classifications for skin type, hair and body. This was done individually at the beginning and end of the discussion. In addition to this, the researcher also used the latest issue of Drum Magazine as well as Isolezwe and the Ilanga newspaper to view and discuss various images of women, with African beauty as the main focus. Drum Magazine was formally known as 'African Drum' and it was known as the first black lifestyle magazine in South Africa, "making it culturally iconic in the 1950s" (Cowling, 2016). This is something that the participants in the focus groups that are in the old-aged home could possibly identify themselves with. Isolezwe and Ilanga newspapers, sharing almost similar characteristics of both being Zulu-language newspapers will allow for the participants of the study, both the older and the youth, to be able to view images from three African-based publishing platforms that most, if not all, are familiar with. In addition, a semi-structured focus group schedule was prepared to identify the constructions of beauty from different eras.

1.8. Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following assumptions were present in the study:

1. It is assumed that semi-structured focus group participants in this study were truthful in their responses and answered questions honestly and to the best of their ability. This is because the participants were requested to share their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions around beauty through their lived experiences, which will be considered rich authentic data.
2. It is assumed that this study is a true representation of the experiences of beauty amongst black African women in Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Since it is assumed that the participants will be authentic in their responses, this will consequently provide a truthful representation of the lived experiences of black African women – taking into consideration the influences that impact their perceptions of beauty.

The following are limitations that could influence the data collection process or the study as a whole:

1. Lack of funding limited the scope of the study. The researcher will be travelling between Durban and Pietermaritzburg in preparation for the data collection of the study. Although the researcher is unemployed and not funded, they will manage their travelling between the two places. If the researcher was funded, they could explore other campuses within the University of KwaZulu-Natal to get a more accurate representation of black African women's experiences and perceptions of African beauty.
2. The researcher may unintentionally cause a biased response from the participants due to being a young black African woman. Whichever way the researcher represents herself, could cause the participants to gear their responses toward how the researcher looks.
3. This study is limited in its geographical coverage and sample population. As a result of this, the results may not be generalised to the entire population of black African women in South Africa. Considering the large number of students enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, a small sample was chosen for this study and was not totally representative of the population.
4. Time constraints could be a limitation of this study. While the researcher waits for students to be successfully registered at the beginning of the year, strikes and protests are usually a norm due to financial constraints that delay successful registration. The

researcher will have to travel to campus every day to reach as many students that are within the population criteria to reach more potential participants.

5. The researcher may have a challenge in gathering all six student participants together at the same time due to possible lack of commitment – i.e. some possibly not arriving after they have committed themselves, others requesting to leave the session early or others making excuses about their attendance.

1.9. Chapter Outline

This study is made up of six chapters which are described below:

Chapter 1 introduces the gist, background, and aims of the study. It also details the study's significance, the researcher's interests in the study, and the structure of the report.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature concerning the title of the study as well as its aims, which include the constructs of beauty among African women. These include the pre-colonial history of African beauty which speaks to African hair, body, and skin. Further to this, the interplay between the pre-colonial and colonial eras and their effects on African beauty will be discussed. This will entail discussions on African hair, body, and skin.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of the methods employed in this research study. It discusses the methodological approach and sampling methods employed, as well as a brief overview of the voluntary participants. The data collection is discussed as well as a rich exploration of the analysis employed in this study, which is thematic analysis. By acknowledging the researcher's agency as well as the study's strengths and weaknesses, this research adopts a reflective approach. Further to this, ethical considerations and implications will be discussed in this section.

Chapter 4 presents a detailed discussion of the main themes and discourses discovered in the study. The chapter focuses on three themes: hair, body, and skin. Finally, it explores how black African women use these themes to develop their sense of self in contemporary society.

Chapters 5 and 6 present a summative conclusion to the findings of this study. Furthermore, it addresses the limitations of the research and presents recommendations for future research.

1.10. Conclusion

This chapter gave an in-depth review of the study's background and a clear discussion of the key concepts that were employed in this study. Additionally, the aim, objectives, and research questions were presented. The researcher additionally addressed the significance of the study and why this study is of interest to the researcher. Additionally, this chapter also outlined the structure of the report.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. The Pre-Colonial History: Understanding conceptions of beauty in African women

The aim of this literature review is to explore black African and South African studies that address the construction of African beauty ideals during the pre-colonial era. The focus is on the historical perspective, covering South Africa and other African countries, on beauty ideals classified under hair, body, and skin. This literature review will analyse the effects of the interplay between the pre-colonial and the colonial era on African beauty, which speaks to the societal pressures of adopting European beauty ideals as the global benchmark of beauty discourse.

To understand the concept of beauty in its most authentic African viewpoint and before it had evolved and shifted, one must take a look at beauty in African philosophy and be cognisant that there is no such thing as being beautiful for beauty's sake. It is argued that the African concept of beauty believes that beauty is quantified based on two aspects: good conduct and physical attractiveness (Ibanga, 2017). This suggests that in the African context, a woman is considered beautiful when she carries herself in a manner that is virtuous – has good manners, respects herself and the values of her culture; and is able to grow her husband's family name. Matiza (2013) also found that similarly in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, the construction of beauty is determined by both the internal and external qualities of a woman. If a woman is known to have inner beauty through her good actions and morals but lacks exterior beauty, she would adorn her body with accessories and different kinds of oil to make herself seem to have both internal and external beauty. Therefore, in most African countries, beauty that pertains to human beings is defined as physical attractiveness and good conduct being in unison.

Schlaback (2011) found that Du Bois's paradigm of beauty, which noted that women had both internal and outward qualities that can be viewed as aspects and variables that, in the end, make them attractive. In addition to this, du Bois also described famous Black women as having inherent beauty that rendered exterior beauty obsolete and unimportant. Despite not meeting society's standards for physical beauty, the women du Bois wrote about had qualities that rendered their physical appearance irrelevant. Their behaviour, aspirations, strength, diligence, and unwavering faith in the greater good made them more valuable than women who only possessed physical beauty (Schlabach 2011, p. 500). This, again, reiterates that in African philosophy, both internal and external qualities are important aspects of African beauty discourse.

Individuals ought to realise that physical attractiveness is not only an aesthetic, but it also serves as a political tool for positioning oneself in society (Tate 2007, p. 5). Understanding historical viewpoints on beauty is crucial for separating these perceptions from contemporary expressions and for demonstrating how particular values have developed and endured over time.

2.1.1. Hair

Hair is one of the first characteristics that people notice since it is known to represent one's perception of attractiveness and unattractiveness. Healthy and beautiful hair can enhance one's appearance, making them look and feel beautiful. This chapter explores the framework of black hair, as well as what distinguishes and makes black African hair unique. Furthermore, it emphasizes the cultural and social significance of hair in African communities, as well as the taboos, beliefs, and customs associated with hair.

2.1.1.1. The characteristics of hair

The discussion around the perceptions of beauty and African hair is multifaceted. It covers elements like the impact on personal identity, resistance to colonial conventions, the influence of modern media, and cultural legacy. Together, these elements improve our understanding of beauty in the African context.

According to Joyner (1988), there are three distinct categories for the physical and biological makeup of hair; straight hair, wavy hair, and naturally kinky hair. Khumalo et al. (2000) further expressed that black African hair has a distinct structural and physiological characteristic, which is distinguished by the tight spring-like coiling of the hair shaft. In simpler terms, African hair is also known as "Afro" and considered kinky, curly, or frizzy, and grows parallel to the scalp whilst maintaining a flattened shape. Further to this, African hair is usually black in colour. Comparatively, Caucasian hair can be smooth, wavy, or curly and it grows diagonally. The colours of Caucasian hair can range from blonde to dark brown. When comparing hair textures, African hair has fewer hair shafts; however, because the shafts are interwoven, afro hair "appears and feels denser than straight hair" (Trüeb, 2013). Despite the differences in hair structure based on ethnicity, hair is a marker of beauty (Cruz et al., 2016) and part of an individual's personality and identity.

2.1.1.2. The cultural and social significance of African hair

Hair is a deeply rooted, significant component of one's identity and culture (Wall et al., 2022). Throughout history, African women's hairstyles have been relied on to represent status, spirituality, a mourning period, and significant phases in a woman's life. This is consistent with Byrd and Tharps' (2001) study which found that during the 15th century in West African communities, hairstyles were used to convey messages and participate in social interactions. As a

result, "grooming, styling, adorning, and removing hair were common practices across African societies" (Haas, 2008). This reiterates that hair is of utmost importance in symbolising one's identity. Prior to the colonial era, Africans held hairstyles in such high honour that an individual could identify or discern whom they were interacting with based on the type of hairstyle they had, irrespective of gender. This illustrates how Africans cherished and proudly wore their hair as a symbol of beauty and identity.

The African continent is home to a variety of ethnic groups, some of which resemble similar physical qualities to one another, particularly a dark skin tone and kinky hair. One of the ways that people from different ethnic groups and geographical places were identified was with their unique hairstyles.

Africans wore their hair in various ways and as mentioned, hairstyles held symbolic meanings and were influenced by religious beliefs, social customs, and economic factors. In most African tribes, hairstyling was a special and unique skill that was passed down from generation to generation. It required patience and commitment because some of the styles were time-consuming and took a whole day or several days to complete. Prince (2009) observed that because of traditional customs, hairdressing was solely reserved for women in African communities, and hairstyling was entrusted specifically to family and friends. For example, it is prohibited to expose one's hair to the hands of a stranger since it was and still is believed in some black African cultures that an individual is able to bewitch or cast a spell on someone using their hair (Prince, 2009). Because of this, the discarding of hair from shaving, trimming, or combing was done properly in a hole or under a rock to hide the hair, thus highlighting the delicate nature in which African hair was handled during the pre-colonial era.

Hair serves as a representation of various forms of identity, which is demonstrated through distinct hairstyles and embellishments that convey messages applied to marital status, engagements, age, affluence, and social standing. The significance of hair extends beyond its communicative function as mentioned above. It also possesses a certain degree of influence and power within society, illustrating an additional mode of unspoken communication that surpasses the ideology of hair being a mere physical object (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). This symbolism of hair is explored in various literature through the study of how hair is socially immersed and represented in historical black African societies.

2.1.2. Body

There is a preference for women with bigger bodies in traditional African cultures, so much so that young black women were subjected to various fattening methods in order to obtain a socially and culturally attractive body type (Fredrick, 2008). Traditionally, African women with bigger bodies were regarded as having higher prestige than those with smaller bodies, thus suggesting that the heavier a woman is, the more she is regarded as beautiful, and within her lies prosperity and good fortune. Shabangu (2016) found that despite increasing concerns about the detrimental effects of increased weight gain and obesity in African women, traditional societies continue to promote and encourage young women to strive for a thick body structure rather than a slim one.

2.1.3. Skin

In a study conducted by Crawford et al. (2017), most people associate Africa and African people with dark complexion. Despite this, African skin comes in a variety of colours or tones, ranging from the darkest to the lightest skin tone. Further to this, skin colour varies extremely in the African continent because of numerous gene and genetic variations related to skin colour. Thus, in the eyes of Africans, having a dark skin tone was consequently normal and not something to be ashamed of (Crawford et al., 2017).

2.2. The interplay between the colonial era and its effects on African beauty

With the rise of mass media in the 1920s and early 1930s around the globe, and in the mid-1970s in South Africa, Black African women have increasingly adopted media as a standard frame of reference from which to establish ideal beauty representations and descriptive identities (Dash, 2006). This is due to the rapid development of social media platforms and mass media, which includes television programmes, movies, advertising, radio, newspapers and magazines. Dash (2006), further claimed that the rise in understanding and knowledge of the "other" has given people more opportunities to adopt the beliefs and behaviours of others. This means that mass media has become a platform from which individuals study current trends and aesthetic ideals that they wish to emulate.

Literature has previously shown how race, racial classification, geographical location, and other comparable concepts have influenced how black African women practice as well as consider representations of beauty. In this regard, the importance of exploring ideas of beauty amongst African women is deemed to be on par with the significance of the abovementioned concepts given how pervasive and influential media is in modern social culture.

Although advertising has a stronghold in the media as a prominent and influential aspect impacting beauty representations for Black women, it is not the only kind of media that shapes perceptions of and notions about beauty. Magazines, movies, and local television are other media that have a comparable impact. A few magazine publications that have long focused on and still do so on Black women, politics, beauty, and representation in modern culture are DRUM, BONA, and True Love. Be that as it may, Madlela (2018) found that although True Love magazine has shown an increase in the visibility of black African women on the front cover over the years. However, with regard to the hair types and styles featured on True Love covers and advertisements, the dominant representation is the Western-centric concept of long, straight hair. Additionally, the promotion of hair enhancement products featured prominently, as if to suggest that black hair is only beautiful when it is altered.

2.2.1. Hair

During colonial and apartheid rule in South Africa, particular external features of black African women such as kinky hair, voluptuous hips, and thick lips were portrayed as inferior and objects of mockery and disdain. This was not only seen in South Africa, but this theme was seen across many colonised African countries.

The traditional practice of wearing a head scarf to cover one's hair has been recognised and embraced as an African custom of showing respect. However, Ribane (2006, p. 17) found that covering Black women's hair with head scarves, and now with weaves and extensions, stems from complicated racial currents and is based on Black women's socialised aspiration for whiteness (Ribane 2006). Further to this, a study by Bellinger (2007) suggested that black African women relax their hair in order to emulate European and Asian textures. However, Etemesi (2007) revealed that African women in Kenya relax their hair for the purpose of making it more manageable and less difficult to style. In addition to this, 41 percent of Etemesi's (2007) sample of 242 girls and women between the ages of 15 and 51 had previously relaxed their hair but now wore it naturally; either short or plaited or used a different sort of chemical, but not a relaxer. According to the findings, over and above the relaxed hair being considered more manageable, it allowed African women to transform their hair into different styles and made them feel good and well-kept (Etemesi, 2007). When considering African beauty and beauty constructions in general, this reinforces that colonialism and post-colonial interactions have significantly impacted what is considered beautiful in African communities.

The concept of beauty encompasses not only physical attributes but also the type of hair that women ought to possess in order to meet societal expectations of beauty. As stated by Thomas (2013), Western standards dictate that beautiful hair is characterised by its length and straightness,

thereby establishing a hierarchical system in which long, straight hair is deemed superior. This perception of hair beauty evidently favours Western women, as it fails to encompass the characteristics of African women's hair, which is typically dry, coiled, or tightly curled, as noted by Thomas (2013). Consequently, African women resort to chemically straightening their hair in order to conform to the Western ideal of beauty that is portrayed in the media (Thomas, 2013). Adhering to these standards of beauty poses a challenge to the sense of self of African women, as their hair forms an integral part of their identity.

2.2.2. Body

According to Fisher and Cleveland (1958), the historical tracing of the concept of body image is a challenging venture due to its integration within a multitude of disciplines and different levels of thought. Body image, as conceptualised by Fisher and Cleveland (1958), refers to an individual's psychological experience with their body, encompassing an individual's attitudes and emotions towards their body. This means that body image is intricately linked with the internalised perceptions and organisation of bodily experiences within each individual (Fisher & Cleveland, 1958). Thus, the concept of body image can be understood as a depiction that portrays an individual's personal embodiment, which evolves over time through their distinct life experiences. More recently, body image has been defined as an individual's subjective idea of their physical presentation (Forrest & Stuhldreher, 2007). Kimber et al. (2015) gathered that this recent notion of body image further encompasses one's personal interpretation of their body shape, size and weight.

According to Western beauty constructs, a slender and more petite body structure is typically associated with white women, who, according to Dyer (1997) receive a favourable representation in the media as 'ideal.' On the other hand, because of their fully-figured body structures, African women are commonly depicted as needing to be altered (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019). Fanon (1986) argued that black African people's attempts to understand and position themselves and their African identities in a society whose values and perceptions are based on Western culture and identity are frequently met with feelings of weakness and subordination as a result of failing to achieve or adhere to the 'dominant' Western identity. Whilst this complex experience of African women aspiring to the 'dominant' identity, Western beauty norms have a demeaning effect on African women, which is seldom addressed. This creates a cycle of negative self-perception, including a "dark vein of self-hatred and physical obsessions" (Wolf, 2002).

Research conducted in South Africa suggests that in certain non-Western societies, there is a correlation between plumpness and attributes such as attractiveness, improved health, and affluence (Gitau et al., 2013). Many researchers argue that the societal preference for a slender body type has had negative effects on the physical, social, and psychological well-being of African

women (Swami et al., 2010). In the South African context, the prevalence of overweight and obesity is influenced not only by one's dietary choices and lack of physical activity (Kruger et al. 2005). Various factors, such as ethnicity, cultural influences, preference for a specific body shape, age, educational attainment, residential area, and personal perceptions and beliefs concerning body weight, are all believed to contribute to the development and prevalence of obesity (Puoane et al., 2010).

Global beauty perceptions have taken ownership over women's bodies since women have no personal say or choice in how their beauty is evaluated and defined. Women hold the view that they must constantly alter their bodies in order to get entry to various statuses, positions and social institutions (Bordo, 1993). Again, such behaviours of conforming to contemporary beauty standards place the traditional values of African beauty as inferior, which leaves African women in an endless process of having a negative self-perception and body dissatisfaction, which could consequently lead to unhealthy decisions that are detrimental to one's mental health as a means to fit in.

Popular theories propose that women are subjected to mainstream sociocultural notions of beauty and the assumed social significance of these beauty standards in relation to their self-esteem and achievements (Cheng et al., 2017). Nonetheless, it is imperative to consider whether or not exposure to mass media contributes to the emergence of challenges with body image among females.

2.2.3. Skin

When investigating the black African communities and assessing the influence of colonialism, it becomes evident that colonialism functioned as an oppressive system of governance. Furthermore, westernisation, which is characterised by the assimilation of various cultures into a dominant one, must be acknowledged as intimately connected to the phenomenon of colonialism. This connection is crucial because these concepts persist as dominant forces in contemporary discourse and perpetuate an imbalanced status quo within societies. According to De Souza (2008), the masses of societies that were previously colonised were compelled to assimilate into the culture and values of the Western world. The idea of beauty in Western society does not only hold sway over social conversations, but it also exerts a significant impact on the self-perception of contemporary Africans up to the present time (De Souza, 2008).

Social media and media advertisements play a huge role in creating a hierarchy of values founded on the idea that fairness is what all women should strive for when it comes to their physical appearance (Shankur & Subish, 2016). This is done by projecting the idea that a fair skin tone is an essential requirement for professional, personal and romantic success. As stated by Arnold

(2004), light-coloured skin or a fair complexion has historically been associated with attractiveness, intelligence, order, self-control, and good manners. On the contrary, having dark skin or a dark complexion has been attributed to unattractiveness, low intelligence, problematic behaviour, unsoundness, aggression and a lack of self-control.

During the era of slavery, slaves that were lighter in complexion gained a higher position and a better chance of working in their masters' houses, obtaining better attire, learning to read and write, and gaining freedom upon their master's death. Their darker counterparts, on the other hand, constituted being of a lower class and worked on the field, with no potential for gaining such perks or privileges (Patton, 2006). These principles resulted in classism and colourism within the black African communities, which again, is deep-rooted in an aspiration toward whiteness for better treatment in society.

These practices and beliefs can be seen even today, in contemporary South Africa and within black African communities, where better treatment and desirability by society differs based on skin colour. This is known as colourism. The importance and value placed on skin tone expressed by Western beauty standards have been and is still shared by black Africans (Matthews, 2013), further acknowledging that the persistent behaviours of controlling and modifying the female body generate emotions of anxiety, fragility, and a duty to adhere to society's rules and beauty ideals.

According to Craige (2006), colourism is when discrimination exists amongst women of the same race, especially women of colour. In addition to this, Keith and Herring (1991) described colourism as prejudice against oneself and others based on one's skin colour, as well as established societal intra-racial implications associated with one's skin tone. To reiterate the practices that are presently consistent in our society, Williams et al. (2008) found that social ranking based on skin tone, ethnicity and culture is prominent amongst the black race in South Africa. Be that as it may, light-skinned black African women are not exempted from racial prejudice. Despite their almost white characteristics, whether natural or artificial, they remain black women (Hochschild & Weaver 2007; Hunter 2007). Dark skinned women, on the other hand, are more likely to experience both racism and colourism at the same time (Jones, 2015).

It is important to note that colourism is not only practised by Black people on Black people; white people may also discriminate against black people based on their skin tone (Espino & Franz 2002). Espino and Franz (2002) discovered that when it comes to recruiting black women for employment, both white and black African employers favoured light skinned persons over dark skinned people because they are regarded as the most trustworthy, reliable, and capable. To support this, Mason's (2004) study also revealed that lighter-skinned persons, particularly women, are more likely to marry or be in long-term or stable relationships than darker-skinned women. This speaks

to the extent that social ideals are entrenched into the lives of black women as colourism exists in most if not all social structures such as in employment and personal relationships.

Since looking white accurately represented purity and delicacy, which are central components of upper-class European features, while being black encompassed being immodest and physically strong (Tate 2007, p.3), the consequence of such ideas had powerful implications in women's lives who indeed were the epitome of European beauty constructs, as they gained a sense of security using their physical appearance. Having the whitest skin was considered a social and economic advantage historically but similar perceptions can be said to apply today, as in recent years, there was a spike in the usage of skin-lightening products. Most of the skin whitening products present in the market are produced in an illegal manner and subsequently imported into illicit markets, where they are sold through unregistered markets and street vendors, without any regulatory oversight or punitive measures for the individuals who create and disseminate these hazardous products.

A range of international studies regarding the utilisation of skin-lightening products in Europe was conducted. Studies revealed that the majority of people who partake in the practice of skin lightening are of African descent. In a research study conducted by Dadzie and Petit (2009), an analysis found that the prevalence of skin lightening in Africa was significantly higher than in Europe, with rates ranging from 26% to 67%. Moreover, at the time of their study, Dadzie and Petit (2009) found that the prevalence rates were between 16% and 28% among individuals of African descent residing in Europe during their study.

A few years later, in the United States of America, a qualitative research study was undertaken by Jackson (2013) in order to investigate the phenomenon of skin bleaching within the black American female population. The findings of this research study suggest that the motivation for skin bleaching is rooted in the desire to achieve a lighter complexion and eliminate facial imperfections. Moreover, the participants expressed that this practice required the continual use of bleaching products to maintain their skin tone and reduce facial acne and blemishes, indicating a dependency. In an additional study centred on the utilisation of cosmetic products among young African American individuals and its connection to self-identity, Davis (2013) found that the participants initiated their use of makeup and other beauty products around the ages of 13 or 14, with the aim of enhancing their physical attractiveness and bolstering their self-confidence. This study was of significant importance, as it has assisted in understanding the challenges pertaining to identity experienced by adolescent females, as well as the possible associations with the practice of skin bleaching in the young black American female communities.

In a study conducted by Edmond (2014), he reported that in Jamaica, skin bleaching is a widely practised custom, with both men and women actively participating in this behaviour, even though skin bleaching has received considerable attention through media initiatives aimed at discouraging its use. A range of studies highlighted that, in Jamaica, the factors that motivate or prompt individuals to partake in this practice stem from historical, cultural, socio-political, and psychological nature. This is consistent with Robinson's (2011) study which revealed that a preference for a lighter skin complexion stems from the legacy of slavery and colonisation, which influences how individuals perceive beauty and identity. This is the case due to beauty being perceived as a form of capital and carrying importance among black individuals of African descent, as it produces economic, educational, and social benefits. Similarly, literature on skin bleaching in African countries also revealed a prevalent and frequent use of illegal and prohibited products in the majority of these countries (Dadzie & Petit, 2009).

Within the South African context, Julien (2014) debated the perpetuation of white supremacy through the forces of Colonialism and how the Apartheid regime extended the discrimination and exploitation of the black majority through their policies, which not only enforced racial segregation, but also instilled doctrines that further reinforced the concept of white superiority. These deeply ingrained doctrines not only served to elevate white individuals as superior, but also became firmly embedded in the psychological framework of the marginalised black population. Thus, black Africans developed a sense of inferiority that had a profoundly negative impact on all aspects of their lives.

The above studies have made it evident that possessing a fair complexion due to Western beauty ideals, has become now highly valued in black South African communities. They shed light on the development of economic and social systems that magnify the power of individuals with a lighter complexion. This implies that individuals with darker skin tones are subject to systematic oppression, not solely due to the fact that a lighter skin tone is perceived as beautiful and acceptable, but also because it is accompanied by economic advantages and societal approval.

As a result of this, Julien (2014) highlighted that skin-lightening products have become increasingly accessible and dangerous in South African communities because those who cannot afford to visit plastic surgeons and dermatologists mix their own skin-lightening treatments, which is incredibly dangerous. These concoctions are effective in the sense that they successfully lighten one's skin at a fraction of the doctor's price, however, they can cause irreparable damage to one's skin and potentially cause serious health concerns. Julien (2014) encouraged black African women in South Africa to ignore the stigma attached to having dark skin because it is that stigma that perpetuates the use of skin-bleaching techniques, which have been reported to have detrimental

side effects. The adoption of skin-lightening practices and procedures serves as a reminder that black African women in South Africa feel compelled to undergo cultural and physical transformations in order to be 'beautiful'.

As seen in the Jamaican communities, the widespread perception that black South African women should conform to society's dominant beauty norms stems from the overarching biological, cultural, and environmental complexities of beauty and attractiveness (Gitau et al., 2014) that have become increasingly difficult to avoid as a society due to the use of social media platforms and the internet, which reach a high number of people in a short space of time. Further to this, more and younger black African women are exposed to these global beauty standards, which make it increasingly difficult to detach from them. Skin complexion remains a symbol of beauty within the black female population in South Africa, as presently, the perception of attractiveness is directly correlated with a lighter complexion (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Furthermore, whilst the phenomenon of Westernisation may provide insight into the increase in the use of skin-bleaching products and the role of mass media in perpetuating oppression in postcolonial societies, it is the self-evaluation maintenance model that offers a comprehensive understanding of the psycho-social aspects associated with the construct of beauty.

2.3. Developing a sense of self: Body satisfaction and self-esteem

According to Stets and Burke (2003), identity can be defined as qualities that represent a specific person or group of people and it informs their perceptions, interactions, and behaviour with others within a particular social environment. Identity can also be developed through historical events, race, ethnicity, culture, and geographical region, as such, it is an important aspect when discussing or conceptualising issues surrounding African beauty.

Both historically and in contemporary Africa, beauty is seen as the most basic expression of one's femininity and womanliness. Its assumed value and power in women's lives imply that women are essentially born or created to be portrayers and performers of beauty. The concept of beauty itself is fraught with complications. Women's skin, hair, and bodies are essential components of their physical appearance that, when considered collectively, define or determine whether or not a woman is thought to possess the ultimate trait: beauty. Culture, ethnicity, class, gender, and social institutions, all of which are intertwined and symbolically powerful, influence perceptions of beauty, particularly in relation to skin, hair, and body structure.

Beauty has been considered to be almost as important to women as food and oxygen because it supports their identities and is at the very core of their femininity as women. For those who possess it and those who aspire to it, beauty as a concept is a daily conflict between one's subjective perceptions and aspirations and those of society (Dworkin, 1974).

In addition to this, Larson (1990) noted that it is imperative to highlight that young women, who are exposed to the societal pressures of beauty through various forms of media, recurrently utilise online platforms due to the abundance of leisure time that characterises this stage of their lives (Larson, 1990). Arnett (2007) further argues that it is commonplace for students to heavily engage with social media as they strive to shape their own identities and establish a sense of self (Arnett, 2007), a process intricately linked to physical appearance.

2.3.1. Body

The first feature to look at in relation to the ideal of beauty that has been portrayed in the media is body shape or body image as a whole. Body image is simply understood as one's own view of oneself and body (West, 2012). On the other hand, Cash (2003) goes into greater detail and defines body image as a multifaceted psychological and physical experience of embodiment in relation to one's physical appearance, which includes one's self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours concerning one's body. Furthermore, body image entails self-evaluation of one's physical appearance, which is aided by discrepancies between one's view of one's body as well as valued physical characteristics in one's culture. Furthermore, people frequently experience conflicting emotions about their body image because they have a desire to hold onto notions about what their body is, what they want it to be, and what it is supposed to be, whilst still attempting to conform to what society deems is beautiful (West, 2012).

Body image is a significant concern for numerous women within society. Often, women struggle to conform to the idealised standard depicted in the media. Slevic and Tiggemann (2010) emphasised that it is because of the media's widespread dissemination of unrealistic ideals of female attractiveness that has prompted socio-cultural models to attribute it as the primary cause of heightened levels of dissatisfaction with one's own body. The notion of body dissatisfaction can be interpreted as a "subjective disapproval of one's own bodily shape or form, coupled with the belief that it is unappealing to others" (Ferguson, 2013, p. 20). In instances where women fail to uphold the desirable body image, body dissatisfaction can result in diminished self-esteem and potentially drive individuals to adopt harmful practices in an effort to attain this desired image.

The ambiguous message conveyed by society through the media ought not to conceal the extent to which these suggestions and ideals harm and discourage women from being their true selves (Bordo 1993). Women, for example, are subjected to media messages about how they should

appreciate themselves as they are, while also being exposed to messages on how to become 'better versions' of themselves according to society's narrative (BONA magazine, 2015). Bordo (1993) went on further to assert that society's perceptions of women's bodies are deceptive, ironic, and paradoxical; and that they gradually make their way into women's consciousness because they persuade women to abandon their own perceptions and identities in favour of the supposedly better perceptions and identities of others, which are that of European standards. Tembo (2010) advocated that diverse societies and cultures be empowered with the freedom to create and express their own distinct and ideal interpretations of beauty in contrast with the increasingly global ideals. Furthermore, Tembo (2010) conveyed that establishing such a world may be difficult due to the global cultural assimilation of traditional societies and the growing influence of hegemonic beauty ideals, particularly due to the media and constant interaction between diverse groups.

Paquette and Raine (2004) argue that the media has a significant and subconscious impact on women's perception of themselves, which is influenced by their confidence and self-assurance, as well as their interpersonal relationships with partners and other women. It is important to note that body dissatisfaction is not solely limited to young individuals, but rather it is also prevalent among middle-aged and older women. Body dissatisfaction is not limited to young individuals only, but rather it is also present among middle-aged and older women. Lewis and Cachelin (2001) argue that middle-aged women possess a stronger desire for thinness and engage in disinhibited eating behaviours in comparison to older women. Furthermore, their research also indicates that older women demonstrate body dissatisfaction and size preferences similar to those of younger women. After conducting an extensive analysis of 24 different studies, multiple scholars have uncovered that women with diverse occupational or social roles possess a more varied perception of body dissatisfaction.

The risk of body disappointment has additionally been analysed by Mitchell et al. (2001), who asserted that depression can be a more suitable indicator for predicting whether an individual experiences body dissatisfaction. Another study by Bell and Dittmar (2011) discovered a connection between the introduction of thin 'perfect body' goals in the media and the emergence of negative self-perception in young girls and women. The concept of body dissatisfaction is often associated with the desire for thinness and the ideal body (Bell & Dittmar, 2011), however, it is crucial to understand that correlation does not imply causation. Academics assert that there is no direct causation between social media and the development of negative self-perception and body dissatisfaction. Instead, it relies on the individual's internalisation of the content being presented.

Some women possess a greater inclination to internalize data, especially when it concerns self-perception, in comparison to other women. Ridolfi et al. (2011) posit that those individuals who display a higher degree of internalisation are more susceptible to negative self-perception and dissatisfaction with their bodies.

2.3.2. Hair

As part of a woman's identity, Thompson (2009) noted hair for black women "is not just hair", it is linked to events in one's life from birth to death. For example, in Black South African communities, Black women typically shaved their hair as a sign of mourning and respect after a loved one passed (Setsiba 2012). This suggests that in African communities' hair serves as a 'spokesperson' for Black women, charting who they are in the past, present, and future.

Thompson (2009) further discussed the different types of hair that are said to exist in society, paying close attention to the hair African women wear. 'Natural hair' is hair that is in its natural state and has not been touched or tainted with chemicals or heat straighteners, braids, or weaves. 'Unnatural hair' is defined as hair that has been chemically straightened, heated, or weaved - in other words, hair that has been altered from its natural form and texture. 'Good hair' is defined as hair whose condition makes it easy to maintain and typically resembles European and Asian hair, whereas 'bad hair' is defined as hair that is difficult to manage and frequently resembles ethnic hair (Thompson, 2009). To understand the detrimental effects of the grading of good and bad hair, Robinson (2011) discussed how such grading negatively impacts women because it reinforces and concurs with European beauty standards while demoting other or different beauty standards, which include varying body shapes and sizes, skin tones, and hairstyles and textures. Whilst some young African women say they wear their hair relaxed or use weaves and extensions because they are "moving with the times" and some because weaves and extensions are easy to manage, there has been debate concerning the manageability of African hair. Some women believe that young black women are using excuses to change their natural hair because weaves and extensions are equally demanding as natural ethnic hair (Bellinger, 2007).

According to Bellinger (2007), such acts and decisions could be interpreted as a false consciousness because moving with the times does not necessitate changing or abandoning one's ethnic heritage and identity. Some young black women are resistant to the idea of westernising natural ethnic hair and prefer to preserve their 'natural' or 'ethnic' hair as a symbol of racial pride.

African hairstyles, both historically and currently, represent status, identity, and lineage. People believe that the manner in which a woman wears her hair can reveal her personality, character, and status (Bellinger 2007). The instances outlined above call into question the relationship we have with ourselves, our physical characteristics, our society's construction of

beauty and body image, and the resulting implications for our identities and behaviours. As a result, in South Africa, a significant number of black African women have embraced the global trend of wearing weaves made from either synthetic or natural human hair (Oyedemi, 2016), which is closely tied to social status and a Western concept of desirable hair. While the practice of wearing weaves from Indian, Brazilian, or Peruvian origins has become a popular phenomenon in South Africa, a number of influential women in the country strongly support the use of authentic Brazilian and Peruvian weaves as the preferred aesthetic for black African women.

2.3.3. Skin

Glenn (2008) and Phoenix (2014) noted that beauty and cosmetic firms target women around the globe through subliminal marketing that presents people of colour as "ugly but remediable," advertising skin and body modification products as solutions to their ugliness. The influence of international trends on perceptions of beauty is noticeable in South Africa (Ribane, 2006). Further to this, Ribane (2006) observed that there is a clear division based on skin tone in the South African Black community. It is stated that even if you were not white, having a complexion that was lighter gave you a better opportunity in life, both currently and during the apartheid era (Ribane, 2006). Ribane (2006) further recalled that having a lighter skin tone indicated the paramount form of beauty. As a result, lighter-skinned girls got all the attention of most popular and well-off men and appeared to advance more easily than darker-skinned girls.

Despite the fact that South Africa has undergone great improvement as well as social, political, and economic development, the apartheid legacy ensures that the link between self and socially perceived self-worth based on skin colour persists (Khan 2011). Light-skinned black women in South Africa also experience prejudice because they encounter hostility from darker-skinned women due to society being more accepting of them (Bryant 2013). Furthermore, light-skinned women are sometimes excluded from black community culture since they are not considered authentically black or African. Furthermore, they are exposed to disparaging name-calling that emphasizes their lack of blackness such as yellow-bone or cappuccinos, which are derogatory words used to describe people with lighter complexion. (Swain, 2012). The value associated with being light in complexion as adopted from colonial value systems, as well as the tendency to strive for such values, is still prevalent in and amongst black women in South Africa (Ribane 2006). Television and print-based media beauty advertisements aimed at all women frequently depict European ladies or more light-skinned women. This has a negative impact on black African women since the beauty image that is portrayed in the media is not a true reflection of African beauty. Thus, Tesser (1988) suggested that people's identities and self-perceptions are shaped in part by the interplay between social comparison and individual self-worth. (Tesser, 1988).

2.4. Theoretical Framework

2.4.1. The Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

Abraham Tesser's Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model of 1988, which is adopted in this study, assumes that an individual's experience of beauty, whether it is perceptions from global constructs or individual views formulated through family or peers affects how they evaluate themselves and their place in the world. In agreement, Sinkman (2012) also shared that the psychology of beauty suggests that people usually pursue beauty as a mirror of their sense of self and values rather than merely for its outward appearance. Further to this, Sterner (n.d.) advised that this quest can manifest in a variety of ways, such as using makeup to change one's appearance or changing one's behaviours to conform to social expectations around beauty. It is, however, important to note that for black African women, this pursuit of beauty is not simple – it is rather a complex obstacle – because of a blend of traditional and contemporary standards that they may try to meet.

Tesser's Self-Evaluation Model further proposes that an individual's self-concept is learned and not inherent (Tesser, 1988); which suggests that self-concept is influenced by environmental and social factors. This essentially play an important role in how an individual evaluates themselves in the construct of beauty. Since it has been suggested that African women manage diverse beauty standards and that comparisons with peers and familial expectations can have an impact on their views of attractiveness and self-worth, historical studies reveal that while certain qualities—such as flawless complexion or well-groomed hair—have always been valued, their connotations have changed depending on what society considers acceptable at the time (Boom Beauty, n.d.).

African women might obtain a better knowledge of how societal comparisons affect their self-concept by identifying the connection between cultural beauty standards and Tesser's Self-Evaluation Maintenance model, which highlights that an individual will maintain or enhance their self-concept by comparing their traits to other individuals, be it close friends and family or others that mirror idealistic standards (Tesser, 1988). With this knowledge, black African women may combat damaging narratives and embrace a more inclusive definition of beauty that takes into account each person's unique identity and cultural upbringing.

By doing this, they can support the growth of resilience to external demands and foster a self-perception that is confident and grounded in authenticity rather than strict norm conformity that can ultimately have a negative impact on one's identity and sense of self (Tesser, 1988).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Research as defined by Rajasekar et al. (2006), is a logical and systematic exploration undertaken to obtain new and valuable knowledge regarding a specific subject matter. It involves a rigorous investigation of potential solutions to scientific and societal problems through an objective and methodological analysis. Acquiring relevant data regarding a particular study or phenomenon is crucial in formulating any inference on any subject matter. Nonetheless, the means of obtaining the essential data that will assist in formulating a conclusion about the study hinges on the adoption of a methodological approach for the venture. This chapter offers a detailed overview of the research methodology necessary for this study. It will further offer detailed information on the approach employed in conducting this research study and the justification for choosing this technique. The chapter also delineates the sample population and data collection procedure used to recruit participants, as well as the assessment instruments, data analysis plan, and the ethical issues that were considered throughout the study.

3.2. The aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to explore black African women's perceptions of African beauty in South Africa. It also seeks to determine how the perceptions that black African women uphold impact or contribute to how they view themselves, which contributes to their sense of self as black African women in South Africa.

3.3. Research questions

The research questions that the study will aim to address are as follows:

- 3.3.1. What are black African women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa?
- 3.3.2. How have black African women's perceptions of beauty impacted their sense of self as African women?

3.4. Research design

The research study employed a qualitative research design, characterised by its inductive approach, with the aim to explore meaning and insight and give an in-depth understanding (Babbie, 2005) of the causes and processes underlying phenomena within a specific context (Levitt et al., 2017). Qualitative research encompasses various techniques for collecting and analysing data, such as purposive sampling and the use of semi-structured or open-ended interviews, as well as focus group discussions (Dudwick et al., 2006), thus making it appropriate for this research study as the

qualitative technique used was semi-structured focus group discussions. This technique permitted the investigation and understanding of the participants' experiences, thought processes and perceptions of themselves in relation to beauty constructs, especially after consuming media content. Essentially, for clear research discoveries, looking for opinions, directing exploration, and posing inquiries through interviews and questionnaires, are an integral part of research as this allows for observation and acknowledgement of a phenomenon that is sensitive to many, which is that of beauty standards (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020).

Qualitative research, with the aim of delving into meaning and enquiring a better understanding of concepts, opinions, or experiences, necessitates the gathering and analysing of non-numeric information, such as text, videos or auditory recordings. This methodology serves to unveil intricate details regarding a particular phenomenon, and in turn, may ignite new research concepts (Ugwu & Eze Val, 2023). This is all achieved as this design method enables the researcher to assume that the perceptions, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and experiences of the research participants are a result of socially constructed meanings and experiences, rather than meanings and experiences that are autonomously constructed by the participants themselves. This approach was suitable for this study, given that its objective was to explore black African women's perceptions of African beauty which conceivably could be influenced by societal standards of beauty. It should also be noted that this study employs a qualitative approach due to the fact that the topic under investigation encompasses intricate societal matters that can be most effectively comprehended through a detailed exploration of practices, debates, ideas and decisions. Further to this, qualitative approaches enable the researcher to thoroughly investigate specific issues, while maintaining a sense of openness and paying attention to detail, as they identify and seek to comprehend the categories of information and themes that arise from the collected data.

Qualitative methods are relevant to this research study due to their capacity to better understand any phenomenon to which little is yet known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, qualitative research findings are typically rich in detail and have profound insights into the participants' perceptions of the world. Consequently, the participants' viewpoints and experiences pertaining to beauty, whether positive or negative, will be regarded as valuable and authentic information, thus holding significance for this particular research study.

The chosen methodology proved to benefit this research study as it afforded this study a more comprehensive understanding of how black African women perceive the concept of beauty constructs and the messages it conveys to themselves through various media platforms or other relevant influences such as culture or family beliefs.

Additionally, it further examined the correlation between the imposition of beauty constructs and an individual's own perception of themselves. This is primarily due to the fact that black African women are constantly being exposed to a variety of media forms, which frequently provide them with opportunities to analyse the messages and representations in relation to their personal concepts of beauty ideals, especially as they relate to themselves.

3.5. Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which holds that people actively create knowledge by interacting with their environment and community (Pilarska, 2021). Constructivism challenges the notion of objective reality and proposes that social and cultural experiences be used to jointly generate meaning (America, Swart & Hendrikz, 2021). This framework is in line with the qualitative methodology of the study, which aims to explore how black African women perceive and construct beauty in their respective social and cultural contexts.

Constructivism is especially pertinent to this research because beauty standards are influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors and are neither constant nor universal (Mogashoa, 2014). This study's constructivist paradigm recognises that participants' views on beauty are not absolutes but rather are shaped by social interactions, cultural narratives, and subjective experiences (Raineri, 2020). Within this paradigm, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory functions as a theoretical framework, arguing that people internalise societal norms and values through their interactions with others and that learning and development take place within a sociocultural context (Lantolf, 2000).

Lev Vygotsky's social constructionism theory, formed in 1968, was employed in this study since it focused on understanding culture, including language, and a variety of social norms and behaviours. This framework also considers the contextual factors that influence the interpretation of notions related to beauty (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

By applying the theory of social constructionism, the researcher was able to gain insight into how participants created their own realities through their interactions and experiences in their communities. The interpretations and meanings that the participants derived from their experiences in their natural contexts created their realities and truths. Weick (1969) supports the idea put forth by Berger and Luckmann (1966) that people live in a world that is defined by their understanding and interpretations, which make up their lived experiences. The researcher also recognised that beauty perceptions are not just subjective but also influenced by social behaviours, language, and cultural norms by focusing on the social environment.

Chilisa and Kawulich (2012) pointed out that the epistemology ingrained in this research framework places a strong emphasis on interacting with people to understand their opinions, perceptions, and the meanings they attach to their experiences. This underscored Vygotsky's emphasis on dialectical relationships between the individual, in this context - the participants, and society (Liu & Matthews, 2005), demonstrating how participants' conceptions of beauty were developed through collaborative discussions and shared cultural experiences.

To gain a greater understanding of how these concepts are socially created, this research entailed engaging with participants to learn about their beliefs and meanings related to beauty. In line with Vygotsky's theory that knowledge is co-created through social interaction (Liu & Matthew, 2005), this collaborative technique enabled the researcher to document the nuanced ways that Black African women perceive and express their experiences of beauty.

3.6. Population and Sample Selection

The participants of the study consisted of a total number of twelve black African women. The sample included two groups of black African women, which consisted of six participants each. The first group consisted of six older black African women aged 55 years and above; and the second group consisted of six black African female students registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, aged between 18 to 35 years at the time of the study.

The decision to keep the sample size at a limit of six participants per focus group was based on Krueger's (2000) suggestion that focus groups should comprise a small number of individuals, ideally between six and nine, in order to ensure that all voices and opinions are represented while also encompassing a diverse range of perspectives on the topic. Kitzinger (1995) argued that the interaction among participants plays a pivotal role as it facilitates the observation of each individual's perspective on African beauty, including their language usage, as well as their values and beliefs surrounding the concept. Conducting a semi-structured focus group with an excessive number of participants might hinder the engagement of other individuals, causing them to feel uneasy in expressing their perspectives and encounters around the topic of African beauty.

Due to the fact that the study focusses on racialised and culturally particular views of beauty, Black African women have to meet the inclusion criteria (Hunter, 2011; Tate, 2016). Furthermore, because beauty standards change over time, participants had to be in one of the two age groups that were chosen to enable an intergenerational analysis of beauty ideals (Craig, 2006). In addition, people were chosen for inclusion based on their willingness to share their lived experiences because phenomenological research uses rich, personal narratives to comprehend social constructions (Smith, 2009). Additionally, informed consent was required of participants in order to maintain ethical research practices (Maree, 2020).

The study excluded individuals who did not identify as black African women since beauty standards vary among racial groupings (Swain, 2018). Additionally, in order to preserve the study's comparative focus, participants who did not fit within the designated age ranges were not included. Finally, since qualitative research requires sensitive and in-depth narratives to produce significant insights, prospective participants who were unwilling to publicly share their experiences were also not included (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.7. Location of the study

The research study took place in two different locations. The first location is an old age home called Issy Geshen Home for the Aged in Lamontville, Durban. The old age home provides invaluable holistic nursing care to 68 elderly people who receive a government pension as their source of income. The home provides safe and secure accommodation, daily nutritious meals, occupational therapy, and essential medical care through the generous support of donors. The 6 older black African female participants in the study were residents of the Issy Geshen Home for the Aged.

The study also took place at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus in the Master's Room in the Discipline of Psychology block on Golf Road. The black African female student participants had to be registered students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. They also could be in different levels or schools, as long as they were registered within the College of Humanities and resided in one of the on-campus female residences such as Petrie Eleanor Russell Hall, Petrie Wildon Hall, Petrie Lodge and Dennison Hall of residences at the time of data collection.

The inclusion of two institutions, Issy Geshen Home for the Aged and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, proved to be relevant and appropriate to the objectives of this study. Importantly, the selection of these research sites cannot be dissociated from the fact that they provided direct and convenient access to participants, which is of great significance to the study. Additionally, due to the limited availability of time and resources (Saunders et al., 2012) this study embraced convenience and snowballing sampling. The study's primary objective was to explore the perceptions of beauty among black African women during two distinct periods - the apartheid era, which was a time of Western domination and colonialism, as well as the contemporary era that exposes black African females to global beauty standards through various forms of influence from media platforms. Thus, the decision to employ convenience and snowballing sampling were deemed suitable.

3.8. Sampling

Participants in a study are usually selected using either probability sampling methods or non-probability sampling (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). This research study used the non-probability sampling method, specifically speaking to convenience and snowballing sampling.

According to Neuman (2011), convenience sampling is non-random sampling in which the researcher selects anyone that they come across who meets the study's sample criteria. Neuman (2011) further explained that the convenience sampling method is usually utilised when establishing the initial criteria for the selection of participants who possess the qualities of being easily accessible, convenient, and readily available. With this type of sampling, it is imperative to ensure that the selection of participants possesses characteristics that align most optimally with the criteria established by the research objectives (Richie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher ensured that the selected participants possessed suitable attributes, such as being black African, female, proficient in English and/or IsiZulu, the youth being between the ages of 18 to 35 and the older aged 55 years and above. Additionally, the researcher also ensured that the participants chosen for the semi-structured focus group discussions were residents of the Issy Geshen Home for the Aged as well as UKZN registered students within the College of Humanities, residing in one of the on-campus female residences on the Pietermaritzburg Campus. Other campuses such as Howard College, Edgewood, Westville Campus and Nelson Mandela Medical School were not considered due to potential concerns regarding participants' accessibility. The study is of limited scope due to financial and time constraints, thus taking into account the use of chosen sampling methods. When it came to the recruitment of participants, the researcher employed snowballing sampling, which is defined as "the non-probability sampling method often employed in research, whereby each participant of the study may be asked to suggest additional people for the data collection process" (Babbie, 2010). This method was also chosen because the researcher may struggle to get more participants who may be interested in being part of the study, which left room for the opportunity to request the participants who had already agreed to refer me to relevant people who fit the criteria and might also be interested in being participants.

It is important to acknowledge that although non-probability sampling has its advantages as discussed by McMillian and Schumacher (2014), such as it is often less costly and time-consuming, being easily administered, and being useful in descriptive and exploratory types of research, it does also have its limitations. With non-probability sampling, there is a greater possibility for error due to researcher or subject bias and the sample selected may not be representative of an identified population (McMillian & Schumacher, 2014).

3.9. Sources of Data

For the data collection of the semi-structured focus group discussion to be a success, the researcher was guided by a focus group discussion schedule which consisted of 6 main questions relevant to two sections; the constructions of beauty and self-perception. Further to this, there were 7 sub-questions for further exploration of the participants' views of the construction of beauty.

The first section which is that of the construction of beauty collected information about the participants' views of what beauty is, what specific physical features in a woman represent her African beauty, and what specific internal features in a woman represent her African beauty. Further to this, it also collected information on both physical and internal qualities in a black African woman that makes her undesirable or unattractive as well as differentiating between bad and good hair in African beauty. This section also sought to explore the preferred skin tone and body shape amongst black African women, as well as explore the differences in beauty ideals between the older and younger generations of black African women. The participants made use of the analysis of images form (Appendix A), which consists of the different classifications for skin type, hair and body, to guide the participants in identifying their current and preferred skin tone, hair texture and body size.

The second section which primarily looked at the participants' self-perception collected information regarding their views on characteristics that make black African women beautiful from an image chosen from a magazine. In addition to this, this section also sought to find out if the participants have ever, at some point in their lives, tried to change the way they look and for what reason, as well as how important their appearance is to their overall sense of identity.

The semi-structured focus group discussion schedule for the older and student participants as well as the guide for skin tone, hair texture and body size was informed by the Fitzpatrick skin type classification system, which was initially used to aid in predicting which skin types were more prone to sunburn and to determine the appropriate level of sun protection required based on how much melanin each skin type had (Goon et al., 2021). For this research study, it is important to reiterate that the Fitzpatrick skin type was not used as a means to profile the participants based on their race or ethnicity, the descriptions used in the classification tool were only meant to represent the different complexions (Sharma & Patel, 2021) as how one looks, as well as influences such as culture and the media, inform an individual's view and perceptions of beauty standards.

3.10. Validity and Reliability

According to Long and Johnson (2000), validity is concerned with the integrity and execution of the methods and approaches undertaken in the study. It is also concerned with the accuracy with which the findings authentically represent the data. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the

consistency observed across the methodologies used in the study, and if the study were conducted for the second time, the findings would be consistent (Grossoehme, 2014).

Patton (2002) explained that validity and reliability are two factors that should be of concern to any researcher engaged in qualitative research, from the initial stages of the research process to the design and analysis of the results. This is important for judging the quality and credibility of the research study. To ensure that the study was valid and reliable, the researcher ensured that all primary data such as audio recordings were kept safely for reference, thereby ensuring that the data interpretations were consistent and transparent (Noble & Smith, 2015). In addition to this, the researcher does acknowledge that it is unethical to incorporate subjective views and objectives in the analysis of this study, therefore, the researcher ensured that opinions and viewpoints within this field of study were delineated and she maintained objectivity throughout the research process (Gcaza, 2021). It is imperative to acknowledge that this study does not represent all black African women in South Africa; however, it represents a small portion of older black African women residing in Issy Geshen Home for the Aged as well as a small portion of young black African female students enrolled at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

3.11. Data Collection and Management

The researcher submitted a proposal through the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of the requirements for the Master's in Social Sciences in Educational Psychology degree. This proposal was reviewed by two members of staff and was then submitted to the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). Prior permission was obtained from Issy Geshen Home for the Aged and from the UKZN Registrar to recruit participants from these respective sites.

To recruit participants at Issy Geshen Home for the Aged, the researcher requested that the matron make an announcement to the residents about the study. Through liaising with the matron, the researcher then booked an appointment to share more about the objectives of the study and the process for data collection.

The researcher also distributed the flyer, which has both an English and IsiZulu version, to the residents. The researcher then took down the names of the participants interested in participating in the study and requested that if more people were interested after this session, they communicate their interest with the matron, who then communicated with the researcher. The researcher successfully had a total of 6 participants which was finalised after the explanation of the study's objectives. The researcher then communicated with the matron to confirm a date and time suitable for the researcher and the older participants to read and explain the consent form as well as to deconstruct the process around the study just to ensure that they are fully aware and answer any questions to which they were unsure. To confirm participation, the researcher carefully read

the consent form and requested the potential participants to sign it as a means of indicating their willingness to partake in the research study. Moreover, the researcher informed the participants that the focus group discussion would be recorded using an audio recorder, a detail to which the participants assented and subsequently signed the consent form to acknowledge their understanding of the recording process. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation were delineated to the participants to protect them throughout this research study.

The researcher proceeded to outline the methodology employed for gathering data and urged the participants to comply with specific regulations to ensure the success of the focus group discussion. These regulations pertained to the utilisation of pseudonyms when addressing each other. Although the particular topic of research involves beauty discourse, this may be sensitive due to varying perspectives, attitudes and values. Therefore, the researcher strived to establish an open environment that would be considerate and respectful of people's differences in opinions and experiences. This served as a pivotal groundwork for initiating the focus group discussions, which aimed to ensure that participants felt comfortable with each individual having the opportunity to express their viewpoints and beliefs without fear of criticism. This aligns with the essence of qualitative research, wherein data is regarded as reliable and genuine based on the nature of the data collection process.

The initial step undertaken by the researcher involved requesting each participant to write a brief statement about their understanding of beauty as a means to get an understanding of each participant's internal views around beauty before any potential influence or alteration through the focus group discussion. The researcher initiated the focus group discussion with this exercise to prompt the participants to think about the concept of beauty individually before engaging with the subject matter as a group. Upon the completion of writing their statements, the participants each received a copy of a magazine, from which they were tasked with selecting an image that epitomised African beauty. This exercise allowed each participant to select and later on discuss the rationale behind their chosen images. Upon the conclusion of that exercise, the researcher proceeded to utilise the semi-structured focus group discussion schedule to delve deeper and elicit more elaborate responses regarding participants' perceptions and experiences concerning African beauty. This action directly aligns with the research study's objectives, which sought to explore black African women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa and to determine the impact of black African women's perceptions on their sense of self as African women. The participants were able to address these objectives through the semi-structured focus group discussion schedule, which comprised two distinct sections. The first section of the schedule encompassed a series of questions designed to deconstruct the notions of beauty - considering both internal and external features that

represent African beauty. The second part of the schedule featured questions that delved into their lived experiences with African beauty in terms of their self-perception and identity as black African women in South Africa.

To conclude the discussion, the researcher distributed the same pieces of paper in which they wrote their statements about their understanding of beauty to the participants. They were instructed to write another statement about their understanding of beauty. They were allowed to choose to repeat the original statement that was submitted to the researcher. However, any differences identified in the participants' statements could be attributed to the social constructionist standpoint that implies meanings evolve through interaction with others (Dewey, 1938).

To recruit the student participants, the researcher printed and pinned the flyers on the notice boards in the College of Humanities department. The researcher then successfully approached two black African female students who were within the College of Humanities if they would be interested in participating in the study, to which they agreed. The researcher requested to WhatsApp the students and add them to a WhatsApp group, which was created by the researcher to better communicate with students regarding the logistics of the data collection. The researcher then made her way to the four on-campus female residences which were; Petrie Eleanor Russell Hall, Petrie Wildon Hall, Petrie Lodge and Dennison Hall of Residences to stick more flyers on the notice boards. While at these residences, the researcher also approached black African students to tell them more about the study's objectives as a means to recruit student participants. The researcher successfully recruited three students and requested them to invite another student who fits the criteria and may be interested in being part of the study. Again, the researcher requested to WhatsApp the students and add them to a WhatsApp group with other students, which will be created by the researcher for better communication regarding the details of the semi-structured focus group discussion.

Every student registered at UKZN has a student email address which was also used to send documents to the participants. The researcher emailed the participants the consent form and requested that the participants read, sign it and have it emailed back to the researcher. For queries and concerns raised, the researcher addressed them on the WhatsApp group. Once all consent forms were received, the researcher confirmed the availability of the participants for the researcher to facilitate the semi-structured focus group discussion for not more than 60 minutes in the Master's Room in the Department of Psychology on Golf Road.

With the student participants, the researcher outlined the methodology employed for gathering data and urged the participants to comply with specific regulations to ensure the success of the focus group discussion. These regulations pertained to the utilisation of pseudonyms when

addressing each other as well as being respectful of the views and opinions of others. This ensured a warm, non-judgemental environment was created before the data collection process commenced. Following this, the researcher requested each participant to write a brief statement about their understanding of beauty as a means to get an understanding of each participant's internal views around beauty before any potential influence or alteration through the focus group discussion. The participants were then requested to each submit an image of a black African woman who epitomised African beauty, which was used later in the focus group discussion.

Data was subsequently collected through two semi-structured focus group discussion schedules comprising a series of focal questions aimed at delineating the areas this study aimed to explore. Using the semi-structured focus group discussions as a source of data not only promoted the identification of key areas of interest but also encouraged opportunities for the researcher and participants to delve further into concepts or provide detailed responses (Gill & Johnson, 2010) to the questions asked. In keeping with Diccio-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) research findings, the process of conducting discussions, especially semi-structured ones, is acknowledged as a strong and effective method in assisting participants to express and clarify aspects that were previously undisclosed. As a result, this data collection technique was deemed suitable for this study as its systematic approach with both focus groups enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth and rich data.

Each semi-structured focus group discussion was a duration of between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio recorded for data analysis purposes. Consent to audio record the group discussions was obtained from the participants. The researcher acquired a deeper insight into the participants' perceptions of beauty through active dialogue and the language used in building the discussion. Therefore, the presentation and analysis of information mirror the viewpoints held by the participants. As advised by Lincoln (1995), the researcher established a sense of trust and rapport with the participants, facilitating an environment where participants felt respected and comfortable sharing their personal experiences without fear of judgment.

3.12. Data Analysis

For this study, data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Neuman (2011) suggests that the process of analysing data can be characterised as the methodical arrangement, synthesis, and examination of data obtained throughout the process of data collection. Employing a thematic analysis for one's study is essentially "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Patton and Cochrane (2002) define thematic analysis as a process where the researcher proficiently conveys all the data collected during the study to pinpoint common themes that emerge in the responses of the research participants, which are then consolidated into themes.

The data from the semi-structured focus group discussion was collected using an audio recorder, to which the participants consented to be audiotaped. The audio-recording was transcribed and themes were generated. Data analysis occurred in a series of six phases as presented by Clarke and Braun (2013):

Step one: Become familiar with the data.

This represented the foundational phase wherein the researcher preserved the gathered information. The process of absorbing the data involved engaging with the recorded audio transcript, reviewing, and revisiting the compiled information. This process enabled the researcher to acquire a level of familiarity with the data collected.

Step two: Generate initial codes.

The researcher in this context utilised labels for representing information which play a crucial role in the data collection process. The researcher identified particular attributes within the dataset that were relevant to the research question, while also considering both semantic and intentional analysis of the data.

Step three: Search for themes.

A theme provided a framework for conveying fundamental meaning through a systematic analytical approach, wherein research questions should be addressed through the themes. The researcher could now identify codes that corresponded to the similarity of collected data and the themes that had been formulated. It was imperative for the researcher, at this stage, to have an understanding of the themes and focal points outlined. Such actions were undertaken to prevent any confusion or conflation of issues.

Step four: Review themes.

The study revisited the subjects that were initially analysed and therefore suitable themes were chosen for a comprehensive compilation of data. Throughout this phase, certain topics were likely to be expanded upon, while others were condensed to align with the information index.

Step five: Define themes.

This stage pertained to the process of 'refining and defining' the themes and potential subthemes present in the data. Continuous analysis was imperative to strengthen the already established themes. The researcher needed to provide theme titles and clear working definitions that encapsulate the core of each theme in a concise and impactful way. At this point, a cohesive narrative of the data emerged from the themes.

Step six: Writing-up.

Finally, the researcher converted their analysis into an interpretable piece of writing using vivid and compelling examples that related to the themes, research questions, and literature. The report provided an analysis that reflected the validity and reliability of the analysis. The research questions must be addressed and supported by evidence, rather than simply a description of the themes.

In a qualitative research study that employs a thematic analysis, the objective is to recognise themes, specifically patterns within the data that hold significance, and leverage these themes to explore the research questions or make a statement regarding a particular topic. This process extends beyond simply summarising the data as a good thematic analysis involves the interpretation and comprehension of the data. The thematic analysis did not only assist the researcher in organising raw data but also enhanced the sorting out of participants' details. Moreover, it facilitated the researcher in conceptualising and deriving sound conclusions from the responses more efficiently.

3.13. Credibility and Trustworthiness

The researcher acknowledges that it is unethical to incorporate personal beliefs and objectives during the research study. As such, the researcher ensured that perspectives and opinions in this study were objective throughout the data collection, analysis, and the entire process of the research process.

As qualitative research aims to produce knowledge rooted in human experience, to obtain valuable results, it is crucial to approach it in a thorough and systematic way as noted by Sandelowski (2004). Qualitative researchers must clearly define their research objectives and rationale, as well as provide a detailed explanation of the analysis methods used in their study. If this step is neglected and if it is unclear to readers how the data was analysed, assessing the trustworthiness of the research process will become challenging (Nowell et al., 2017). Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that trustworthiness serves as a mechanism employed by researchers to substantiate the validity of their research findings to both themselves and their audience, therefore, the criteria that compound trustworthiness in research, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, will be concisely delineated below:

Credibility

Researchers prioritise internal validity to ensure their study accurately measures what was intended. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that ensuring credibility is a critical aspect of establishing trustworthiness in a research study. The credibility of research findings depends on whether they

represent plausible knowledge derived from the participants' data and accurately convey their views. The researcher maintained credibility in this study by accurately transcribing and reporting data, and by actively engaging with the data.

Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) explain that the ability of the research to be applicable in different situations is referred to as transferability. The researcher outlined the method employed in the analysis, allowing for future studies to be conducted using the same approach (Forero et al., 2018). In the end, the findings of a qualitative research study should be interpreted considering the specific traits of the organisations and the geographic location where the study was conducted, thus, the information that will enable the readers to gain context of the research study is provided.

Dependability

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), dependability refers to the consistency of results. The researcher ensured reliability in the study by adhering to the sequential interview schedule with all participants, as outlined by Braun et al. (2019) in their suggested thematic analysis approach.

Confirmability

Confirmability is what determines the objectivity of the research process being carried out (Elo et al., 2014). Measures need to be implemented to ensure that the outcomes of the study are primarily influenced by the informants' perspectives and inputs rather than the researcher's biases and preferences. This was achieved in the research by actively considering both the researcher's stance and the impact of the study, while also ensuring that the data collected aligns with any interpretations and conclusions made.

3.14. Ethical Considerations

To ensure the maintenance of high ethical principles throughout this research, rigorous measures were taken to uphold ethical principles and respect the rights and autonomy of the participants. This objective was effectively achieved by obtaining their consent to take part in the research (Neuman, 2007). Not only did the research study protect the autonomy of the individuals involved, but it also upheld the following research ethics standards:

Informed consent

Informed consent ensures that people have the freedom to make decisions about participating in the study voluntarily, acknowledging their right to independence and appreciating their ability to make decisions about their own decisions regarding participation. It was the ethical

responsibility of the researcher to ensure that participants understood exactly what their participation entails, which was discussed in great detail. Getting informed consent indicates that a study project is committed to openness, transparency, and integrity. In addition, participants were more inclined to provide accurate and trustworthy data when they were aware of the study and voluntarily consented to participate. This improves the validity and integrity of the study's findings.

Confidentiality

When it comes to protecting research participants' privacy, confidentiality is essential. The researcher made sure that the participants' personal data and information were kept safe and out of the hands of unauthorised people. Additionally, when participants believe that their information will be kept private, they are more inclined to respond honestly and candidly, which is what the researcher aimed for during the process of data collection. This helps participants and researchers build a trustworthy relationship, which is crucial for getting correct data and upholding the integrity of the study. Maintaining confidentiality also serves to reduce any potential harm that research participants might incur by participating in the study. For instance, as participants share their viewpoints and experiences on beauty discourse, people can experience shame, embarrassment, or other unfavourable outcomes if that sensitive data is revealed without their permission.

Ongoing respect for participants

Ongoing respect for participants is not only an ethical consideration, but it is crucial for maintaining trust, protecting the well-being of the participants, and upholding human dignity in research (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022). Further to this, it promotes inclusion and diversity, and it avoids any unnecessary discomfort or distress for the participants. The researcher guaranteed the participants the appropriate support and resources when needed as a means to protect them during this study. As means to respect the participants, the researcher recognised and appreciated the variety of viewpoints, experiences, and backgrounds that the participants brought to the study.

Nonmaleficence and beneficence

Halai (2006) discusses the significance of the principle of nonmaleficence and beneficence in research, emphasising the researcher's responsibility to delineate the potential risks and advantages that may impact the participants. In this regard, the researcher took the principle of nonmaleficence as 'do no harm' which meant that the researcher tried to minimise the risks of harm to the participants of the study, although the study and the research were not intended to cause any harm, the researcher implemented safety protocols, such as, in the event a participant experiences emotional distress, systems were set up to offer the needed assistance. In cases like these, the

UKZN Child and Family Centre and Student Counselling Centre agreed to provide the participants with counselling sessions, if needed. The researcher ensured to share this information with the participants as well. Further to this, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the institution and ensured that participants were fully informed about potential risks before consenting to participate. The researcher obtained an endorsement letter from the gatekeeper, issued by the Registrar's Office at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, before commencing the data collection process. This official document granted the reader authorisation to gather information before engaging with the student population of the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the purpose of data collection (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2020).

Additionally, the participants were informed that they could reach out to the appropriate authorities, such as the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration office, should they have any concerns or questions regarding their rights as study participants. The details as to how they can contact the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration office were provided to the participants.

Social Value

Research that has social value is related to societal needs, interests, and concerns. It tackles urgent concerns, difficulties, or issues that people—individuals, groups, or society at large—face. By focusing on topics of social relevance, socially valuable research can meaningfully contribute to improving people's lives and communities through concentrating on issues of social relevance. This research study aims to contribute to the empowerment of young Black African women to continue to strive for authenticity and genuineness in a society that is characterised by diverse beauty ideologies.

3.15. Reflexivity

According to Terre Blanche et al (2006), when conducting research, especially qualitative research, reflexivity is an absolute necessity. In research, reflexivity is critically examining one's assumptions, beliefs, and judgments as well as how they affect the research process. To do this, researchers must take into account their own cultural, political, social, and ideological perspectives as well as those of the research participants and those who will be interpreting the findings of the study (Jamieson et al., 2023).

As the researcher, I have a personal connection to this study because of my experience with the topic and themes covered in this research, even before conducting the focus group discussions. As a result, I needed to maintain constant awareness of my views and experiences, and my research objectives during the data collection and analysis process. This was done to avoid any perceived

bias on my part and to avoid imposing my personal beliefs on the participants. My perspective on black beauty may have unintentionally influenced my understanding and analysis of the study's findings because as a black African woman who has dark skin, wore her hair both naturally and in a weave respectively during the focus group discussions, and has a body shape that conforms to traditional African beauty values, it may have indirectly impacted the participants' responses due to the possibility of feeling uncomfortable talking about negative views about descriptions of beauty that the researcher fits.

On the other hand, I do also acknowledge that because I am a black African young woman who fits a certain description, this may have also had a positive influence during the data collection process as the participants were comfortable sharing their responses and I possibly understood and connected with the perceptions and reactions of the participants with ease. I acknowledged and worked incredibly hard to keep the study's objective in mind and focus on answering its questions and achieving its goals, rather than my own expectations.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings, which comprise an analysis of the two semi-structured focus group discussions conducted with two groups consisting of black African women; the older participants and the student participants. Throughout the focus group discussions, recurrent patterns in the participants' narratives were noted to reveal the main themes. As a result, three main themes and various sub-themes emerged from this study and were identified through the use of thematic analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.2. Theme One: Natural beauty with minimal enhancements

The participants perceived that the definition of African beauty was a natural beauty with minimal enhancements. This theme included various facets that are included when discussing natural beauty, such as: (a) Hair; (b) skin tone/complexion; and (c) body structure. This theme incorporated views of the ideal black African woman across both semi-structured focus group discussions.

Participant A declared that African beauty is about being natural and simple:

“This girl is not overly done up, she has just portrayed herself in a simple and natural way – she’s well put together.”

Participant E also expressed her idea of African beauty as:

“My concept of beauty is how a person is naturally and like, physically, without changing, maybe occasionally using make-up or loving themselves with the stretch marks that they have or with the freckles that they have and embracing whatever it may be that they have.”

Participant A further emphasised:

“That is very true. As I said earlier, it is being natural but knowing that there is stuff that enhances you, but not forgetting that... okay this is who I am and I can’t change this, however, I can use certain stuff to help me. Yeah.”

Participant F concluded by stating her understanding of African beauty by suggesting:

“Eeeh, my definition of beauty is being able to feel beautiful whether you are wearing makeup or not, or whether you are in your natural hair or not, but being able to feel beautiful starts from the inside, yah. Because if you don't feel that you are beautiful and if someone

else tells you that you are ugly, you will believe this because, of course, you don't trust yourself. So, self-confidence is important.”

Participant C of the student participants felt strongly about beauty enhancements:

“Personally, I am not trying to be rude, okay? But like installations, too much makeup is a no no. As an African woman you have to be proud of the way you look - that's what makes you a real African woman. So, putting on makeup a lot or often, Weaves, BBL, and things like that, I say make a woman unattractive and as if she's not representing her African beauty.”

In agreement, Participant B shared:

“We can also add makeup as what makes a woman unattractive as well because I believe a woman should always be natural.”

Both groups of participants shared a consensus that African beauty consisted of natural hair, whether altered or not, and minimal makeup or no makeup at all represents true African beauty. Other dimensions that make up African beauty were also brought up such as (a) Hair; (b) skin tone/complexion; and (c) body structure, which the participants outlined below.

4.2.1. Hair

Many of the participants alluded to preferring natural hair, whether braided or left as it is, as the representation of African beauty. Natural hair is the hair that grows from the scalp in its natural curly, kinky, or coily form. It is important to note that when most participants spoke of natural hair, they understood it has hair that has not been changed by chemical straighteners or relaxers. In contrast, some student participants argued that whether chemical relaxers were used or not, it still does not change the fact that natural hair is what grows from one's scalp. The remarks of the older participants are detailed first and those of the student participants followed.

Participant F, one of the older participants, defined her understanding of good hair in African beauty:

“Good hair is defined by the fact that it is washed, conditioned, and well-groomed. Good hair is natural hair like an Afro. Straightened hair does not look good because creams were applied and it became soft, which is not good as it is not in its natural state.”

Participant E of the older participants also shared her views on African hair:

“I say that as long as a woman has her natural hair, she is beautiful. Even if she likes braiding her hair, as long as she is not adding any enhancers to her hair, then it looks beautiful.”

Similarly, Participant C, one of the older participants, also shared similar views and stated, *“To add to that point, a woman should embrace their natural hair. She must always comb it to keep it neat. Even if it is pushed back with hair oils, as long as it is natural hair. Natural hair is good hair.”*

In agreement, Participant A, in the same group, further expressed that:

“I also say that a woman's natural hair needs to be combed, when the hair is too big, one can braid it. As long as you're not using extensions because that is all current trends, and not being authentic. Good hair just needs to be combed and braided well.”

Participant C further expressed their idea of natural hair in African beauty, using a chosen photo, by stating:

“Not to mention her hair, I love how natural it is, it has not been altered in any way and her natural hair suits her well.”

Participant F re-affirmed her views on hair:

“Hair! Hair says a lot about a woman. A woman should always have a well-combed or well-braided hair. Good hair is braided hair, not added extensions! You should not put additional hair on your head. Those braids must just be well woven.”

Participant C shared similar views by stating that:

“I also say that a woman's natural hair needs to be combed, when the hair is too big, one can braid it. As long as you're not using extensions because that is all current trends, and not being authentic. Good hair just needs to be combed and braided well.”

Participant E, from the older group, further stated:

“I would also like to say that when a woman braids her hair and puts on her earrings, it reveals her beauty.”

Participant A, one of the student participants, stated:

“My understanding of beauty is being a bit natural, but having a few instances of enhancing it - as in like wearing makeup on a good day but not overdoing it, which is what we call soft glam. Uhm... installations on a random day, just to make yourself feel better, and yah.”

Participant B, one of the student participants, expressed that:

“Okay, I would like to say... I think that hair should be natural, maybe don't put on any products like hair relaxers, just let your Afro be natural. Just love it, wash it, so that it can shine and smell nice. Comb it well, be beautiful, and style it. African beauty is just how attractive and natural a woman is.”

Participant F, also one of the student participants, felt strongly about what good and bad hair is by stating the following:

“I would like to say... in the context of African beauty, beautiful hair is afro hair that is clean because there are some people who do not wash their Afros, yah. And bad hair, in the context of African beauty, is silky hair because you are not embracing your hair as an African woman. You have put on European hair products such as relaxers because you believe your hair should be long. You also straighten the hair so that it looks like a weave, which is no longer African hair, the hair you were born with.”

Participant B, from the student group, further emphasised that:

“Bad or ugly hair is dyed hair (laughs) ... yes, a woman must have natural hair and not try to change the hair colour that the Lord blessed you with.”

Participant A, also from the student group, provided further clarity on what good hair and bad hair looks like:

“Damaged hair. Yoh, hairline ... hairline ... the moment you have to put gel on your hair, just cut it! Cutting your hair is also natural, you don't necessarily have to have an afro to be natural, even when you've cut your hair and maybe tried different hairstyles within the natural aspect, you'll be fine.”

Participant E shared:

“So, I think beautiful hair is having an afro and if you have relaxed hair, it's still fine cause it's your hair at the end of the day. But then if you already know how to curl your hair, and put things in like coloured people, that's just not African anymore. That's what I think.”

Participant C also shared:

“As the others have said, good hair is having your afro or having short hair. I feel like bad hair, as the Participant said... I don't know which Participant said silky hair is bad. I believe that if we relax our hair, we are no longer embracing our African beauty. Just like doing baby hair is also not right - if you don't have it, that's not a crime...cause we usually see baby hair on people of other races.”

Participant D, among the student participants, also shared her views, however, highlighted alterations that do not align with natural beauty:

“I would like to state that Afro hair is the girl she thinks she is (laughs) .. Afro hair? Afro hair is beautiful but as long as it’s not red. If one could make sure if it is red or brown, you change the colour to black. Black hair is beautiful.”

Participant A, from the same group, challenged this stance by expressing the following:

“But don’t you think that those different shades of colours come with the natural beauty of being African? As Africans, we’re not all going to have the same shade of hair as much as white people also won’t have the same shade of hair. So, are you telling me that a black albino person who has brown hair will always have to change their hair colour to black? Think about that.”

In closing, Participant F, one of the student participants, shared that being natural has many forms:

“Also, as African people, I must say black Afro is the best, but my Afro is black at the roots but it’s brown at the top, I didn’t do it like that, it’s just natural. One might say that my hair looks good and another person might not, which is why I believe that we must try to embrace all the sides, not choose the sides, and just agree on the fact that it must be natural.”

4.2.2. Skin tone/complexion

Another aspect that the participants looked into when discussing African beauty is skin tone, as it too, has many forms as communicated by the participants. Most participants expressed that having natural beauty as a black African woman was not altering your skin tone to suit other perceptions of beauty. Further to this, most participants alluded to having dark skin as being naturally beautiful. When asked about whether the participants have a preferred skin tone or which skin tone shows beauty in their open, the participants responded by stating:

Participant D of the older group:

“Dark beauty”

Participant D of student participants:

“Uhm... I believe that a black African woman must be dark-skinned, whether their shade is light or dark, it does not matter, as long as they are dark-skinned.”

Participant B of the older group:

“Dark complexion”

Participant E of the older group:

"I also agree with her, it's a dark complexion"

Participant B of student participants:

"As Participant D said you have to be dark-skinned, a dark beauty."

Participant C of student participants further agreed by stating:

"I also agree with Participants B and D, I think I prefer dark skin when we are talking about African beauty because at the end of the day Africa is made up of... it has black people. To be recognised as black, one must be dark skinned as you can pick up from the word black."

Participant F, of the older group, agreed and further supported this stance with an example of a photo that represented African beauty to her:

"In this photo, I see a beautiful young woman with a dark brown complexion. She did her nails and put on beautiful earrings, she looked very beautiful."

Both Participants B and C, of the older group, referred to their chosen images and stated the following:

"I also like the way she did her... her face is clean, her complexion is dark and beautiful."

"Her skin complexion is the first thing I would like to mention. She has a dark complexion, um, and her skin is beautiful and clear."

Participant C further provided clarity on her stance on her preferred skin complexion:

"A person with a dark complexion is beautiful only if she knows how to take care of herself properly. She needs to wear her earrings, do her hair well, and dress well. Even though she's dark, she looks adorable when she takes care of herself like that. Make sure you take care of yourself."

Participant F, of the older group, shared opposing views on her preferred skin complexion, which differs from the majority of the participants. Participant F shared:

"I go with a light skin complexion. Light skin is better because it is bright and even when you apply lipstick, it stands out. It is even better when a woman wears the colours pink or red lipstick because it makes her stand out."

Participant A, of the older group, who took a neutral stance, shared her response to the question of preferred skin tone which symbolises African beauty by stating:

“What I see is that colour complexion is something that we are given by God. If God created me with dark skin, I need to accept myself for who I am and not try to change my complexion to a lighter shade. If I'm light-skinned, again I need to accept myself as there are a lot of light-skinned people in the world, it is normal. It is good to keep the skin that God created you to be. If one applies the face creams that are being applied nowadays, apply one that suits your skin and don't just use something that will change you and turn you into another complexion because that is not what God created you to be.”

Participant B's opinion, of the older group, changed following Participant A's stance and later said:

“I agree with what Participant A has said. It is important that if you are a woman who loves herself, you accept what you have been given. If you were born with dark skin, accept your complexion. I have to add that sometimes one does get affected by what other people think of you, but as an individual, one needs to accept what God has blessed you with and not alter anything.”

Similarly, Participant F of the student participant shared her views by stating:

“I believe that as an African, you must be dark-skinned. However, I do want to point out that even if you are not dark-skinned, you're still African because people have different skin complexions as black people. A person can be completely African, but they have fair skin and maybe they have an Afro as well. This person can say and believe that they are an African even if their skin is not giving “I am an African. Regarding those people who are fair-skinned, from my perspective, I think they are also supposed to be considered as Africans because they did not create themselves to be light-skinned, they were born that way. So, they must be treated in the same way as dark-skinned people because, at the end of the day, they are all Africans.”

4.2.3. Body Structure

Body structure looks at the physical characteristics that make up how the body of a black African woman looks. Most of the older participants expressed a body shape that would fall into the hourglass category - a well-defined structure with an emphasis on the narrow waist. Contrastingly, most of the student participants argued that the ideal body shape of an African woman is characterised as “thick”. This body type often has wider hips and fuller thighs, giving

the woman a curvier silhouette. Although most students initially argued that the stomach of a true African woman must be chubby but still maintained to not have large amounts of fat in that region, they eventually took a stance of being comfortable in your own body type and that all body shapes and sizes matter. The views of the participants, both the older and student participants, are expressed below.

Participant F of the older participants expressed her ideal body type as:

“Yes, I wanted to say that Size 34 is the best! Because a woman’s figure is visible, her hips and breasts are well positioned. We can also see her posture and nice legs. That person is well-built.”

Participant F further clarified how she sees beauty in black African women:

“I see beauty through a woman’s good body structure! They should have thick legs, big buttocks, curvy hips, a flat stomach, and breasts. But the breasts should not be big ...”

Participant C, one of the older participants, also added to Participant F’s point by stating:

“Someone who doesn't have a big belly. A woman needs to fasten her belly after having a baby to prevent her from having a big belly.”

Participant D further emphasised the abovementioned points by stating:

“If you hear the idiom “ilamba alidlile” it is a direct translation of one that is hungry and has not had anything to eat. It is used to describe a person with a small stomach, who has a good structure and takes good care of herself. Someone would say, “Woah! I don't want to have a big belly like I have a baby!” People who have a figure would generally say this because they know they need to take care of their bodies.”

Participant E also added:

“If a person has a big belly, it doesn’t look good.”

Participant A shared a memory that she recalled from her past to emphasise her stance:

“I just grew up having a small waist. I remember this time a white male was walking behind me and said, “You've got a lovely figure!” I promise you, I was wearing my white uniform and wore high-heeled shoes that day. The white man just said, “You've got a lovely figure.” I was very slender with a small waist.”

The student participants shared their views on the ideal body structure of the black African woman. Participant A, one of the student participants, shared her views:

“Society has made it ‘thickness’. Society has made it ‘thickness’ because there are African women who are slender or petite and they look very nice. But society has made it a norm that it should be thick and round.”

Participant B also shared her stance on the body structure of an African woman:

“I think it is body structure. Most women, black women, they are... they are thick. I feel like ... I wish people embraced their thickness instead of logging into Instagram and seeing other people’s stories and then you’ll get influenced by other people’s standards. Just embrace your body and don’t change it, so that if you have younger people around you, they will also be taught to love and embrace themselves.”

Participant D added:

“Hha! You know this is the very first time of not knowing how to respond to a question. Eish, I think having a nice body structure and being umapakisha. Umapakisha has big buttocks.”

She further clarified and stated:

“I would say (starts laughing) ... someone who has a nice body structure has big buttocks, be thick, uhm ... have thick legs, ooh and have medium-sized breasts.”

When it came to matters of the waist and stomach region, participants spoke boldly of their preference. Participant E first shared:

“No, you have to have a figure.”

In contrast, Participant D’s opinion differed:

“Not always though. No guy, yoh! (laughs) ... you can have a chubby tummy but it must not seem as if you’re pregnant now.”

Participant B provided clarity by stating:

“I think what Participant D means is that one may have a chubby tummy, but it must not overlap and cover this part (points to the private area) of them. There is nothing wrong with having a big belly, one can have a chubby stomach but it should not overlap and not cover their private part.”

Participant B further added that:

“I would like to say that if a woman is in any piece of clothing, ayigc wale iJean, meaning it must fit her perfectly. For example, if she is wearing jeans, it doesn't look right if she appears to be slim or if they fit loosely because I don't see them as an African woman. All I'm saying is that clothing must fit you perfectly (laughing). You need to have thick thighs, have big buttocks although they must not be too big, but look like Duddle, everyone knows Duddle right? The lady from TikTok.”

Participants F, E, and C had different views on this aspect which highlighted that all body shapes and sizes are beautiful and that black women need to be comfortable in their own skin. Participant F explained:

“I wouldn't say there's a certain body shape or body until you have to have as a black African woman. I think erh.. all body shapes and sizes are okay because one is created that way. I mean you may be slender today, but after two months you may be big, and you have discriminated against thick people. Maybe one of the days you used to say thick people should not wear bikinis since they have stretch marks and at the time, you probably said that because you didn't have stretchmarks or dark inner thighs, you see? So that's why I think all body shapes and sizes are beautiful.”

Participant E also shared her views:

“Again, I have to agree with Participant F, that yes, all body shapes and sizes are fine cause you never know... like, some people didn't create their bodies to look like that. Others maybe had beautiful bodies, but it all changed due to certain illnesses, and later had skinny legs or a big stomach. So that's why I think all body shapes and sizes are... matter.”

Participant C concluded by stating:

“I also agree with Participants E and F because like... beauty starts from the inside, not necessarily your body structure and stuff like that. Whether someone is slender or thick, that shouldn't really matter as long as you love yourself because we all have different genes right? There are some people who are genetically slender and some are genetically big, but that doesn't define you as a black African woman. It is what's on the inside.”

4.3. Theme Two: Character

This theme outlined another one of the internal characteristics that the participants acknowledged when understanding beauty in the black African context. This theme, which speaks to someone's character, played a significant role as the participants stressed the importance of character, which entails behaviour and speaks to values.

The older participants felt strongly about the beauty of a black African woman being tied to her character and how she treats people. The participants further distinguished what a good character is and what a bad character is, which is outlined below:

Participant B from the older participants started the discussion:

"The way a woman speaks. If someone speaks to her aggressively, a beautiful black woman will respond politely and humbly. When a woman speaks like this, you can see that she is a true African woman."

Participant F explained:

"How she greets, which is a form of respect, and her smile. The world should not be able to tell when a woman is upset, as she is judged by how she speaks when angry and her facial expressions. An African woman must always smile, show her white teeth, always greet people, and talk to them nicely."

Participant D provided a detailed explanation of her views of an African woman with a good character:

"You can see beauty in a woman by the fact that she is always kind when you talk to her you know that she will say something sensible. Every time you need help, you go to her because you know she will show or tell you what's right. The person you see has a good character because she knows how to talk to people and always laughs. As other participants have said, a beautiful woman should not look angry or upset at face value - she should always laugh, have a beautiful smile, and be able to advise others. A good woman should only do good, she is always happy, be kind to people, and be humble to people."

Participant B also shared their views:

"The inner characteristics of a beautiful African woman can be seen by the fact that a person is helpful and does so with a pure heart, she may not get fame or acknowledgment from other people because if she does that, she is showing that it doesn't come from within herself."

Participant A alluded to the same point by adding her views:

“From what I know, one has to love a person no matter how they look. We can’t say that because this person looks like this or that, I cannot love them. Even the bible says, love your neighbour as you love yourself. People should not have their own perceptions and project things to other people whether they do not have food or society sees them in a bad light, etc. We must always aim to uplift and help one another. You have to care for your neighbour, bring them a bowl of food, and love them, not because you want him to be like you though!”

Participant F highlighted how character was instilled through her experience:

“You would have been hit by your parent if you did not train yourself to sit properly – in a ladylike position. Nowadays, people sit however they want to sit and they don’t respect their bodies and themselves. A long time ago, young women were constantly reminded and trained to sit respectfully and if you did not comply, you got a hiding as a way to be reprimanded.”

Participant C, from the older group, highlighted what she feels contributes to bad character in black African women:

“These children grow up so fast and they are so advanced in how they do things. They put on too much make-up and dress as though they are adults when they are still young.”

The student participants shared similar views on distinguishing between having a good and bad character. They further highlighted that looking down on other people and being an ill-mannered woman makes one unattractive, whereas being respectful, approachable, kind, and conducting oneself appropriately with good morals is what makes a black African woman beautiful. Their views are discussed below:

Participant D started the discussion by stating:

“Uhm... I believe that you must have a good heart. Just be a person who people can approach regarding. Don’t make people reluctant or avoid speaking with you, yeah.”

Participant B also added to the point by explaining:

“I think I would like to agree with what Participant D said, you have to have a good heart and just have a way of speaking to people. It must be quite clear that this is a woman that is talking right now and making people want to respect you and also be respectful and loving.”

Participant C also added to what makes a black African woman beautiful:

“For me, personally, I think taking care of yourself as a woman and also conducting yourself appropriately and treating those around you well, not in a bad way. Like being able to take care of yourself. Not being a loose woman who sleeps around with men.

You just need to have a good character, self-care, and behave appropriately. Having good morals is how you carry yourself - don't just act anyhow as a woman.”

Participant F further added:

“I was saying it in the same way. When people say that you should not be seen everywhere it is because everyone will know, including males, that they can get a chance with you. Even males who you would never involve yourself with will try to talk to you and try their luck with you, which is unacceptable. Not every male should feel comfortable to approach you, they should first muster up the courage and think carefully about what he is going to say to you. This way, this will make males reconsider their approach to you unless they will be talking to you about something serious. Males will therefore show respect to you as a female since you don't take nonsense.”

4.4. Theme Three: Self-Esteem

This theme outlines one of the internal features that the participants deemed important when discussing black African beauty, which is that of self-esteem, particularly looking at confidence. Motseki and Oyedemi's (2017) study reflected that the perception of beauty that Black African women hold is strongly correlated with their sense of self-esteem. Many other studies have indicated that Black women who conform to the beauty standards promoted by mainstream media, which generally emphasise European-descent characteristics such as fair skin and straight hair, often suffer from low self-confidence and body dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is an absolute necessity to define beauty according to African beliefs and customs rather than Eurocentric standards in order to foster a positive self-image in the Black community. In this study, most of the participants tied African beauty to confidence and not letting other people's opinions affect you as well as loving and respecting one's natural appearance, as well as respecting others in their lives. Below are the older participants' views:

Participant D, one of the older participants, shared:

“I didn't want to change anything about myself because I felt beautiful when I was growing up. So, I did not get the urge of wanting to change myself because I thought I was beautiful. Although I was dark-skinned in complexion, I considered myself beautiful.”

Participant B further highlighted:

“I also want to talk about the point of respect. Young people do not respect their elderly. They speak to their parents anyhow and they do not want to be reprimanded. One would hear that a young person talks back to an elderly old person and says unpleasant things. In addition to this, even having some self-respect as a woman – respecting one's self and their body is something that seldom happens.”

Participant E also shared:

“People like to criticise, even if something is great. If they are jealous, they will also criticize. What is important is that if you are doing something good, do not stop. If it is liked by society, then continue with your good behaviour because oftentimes what other people say or think about you – especially in a negative light, is sometimes not true. This reminds us to continue with the good that we are doing, no matter what other people say.”

Participant F shared a vivid memory that tied to being confident and respecting yourself as a woman:

“My mother used to do virginity testing on young girls, so I also started going for virginity testing when I was around 15 years old. People often thought that because I joined in and was testing, my mom thought she was better than everyone and that she would also find me engaging in sexual activities with boys. That showed me that those people were jealous of me because I was proud of my virginity.”

Participant A also shared a childhood memory that shaped her outlook on African beauty:

“What I established was that, as a woman, I have to love myself because if I love myself, then I will build myself. Some people might even say that I am self-centered and proud, but I just simply love myself. That is how I grew up even at home. My mother, who gave birth to me, died when I was young, and when my aunt and I would go to church, people would say, “Mh! We thought you guys were white people coming!”. This is because they would hear the sound of our shoes, going “qhu, qhu, qhu”. People would often mistaken us for white women because we always wore heels, especially when we would walk from Kwa Mthiyane to our

church service – I would always walk in High heels. Back then I used to wear heels and as an elderly woman, I still wore heels. The way I loved myself, I used to tell people from my community that I did not wear something that had been worn by someone else. If they ask me to borrow them some items of clothing, I would much rather give them the clothes for good. That’s how much I loved myself. I believe that it is necessary for a woman to love herself, starting from her youth because even when she has children, they will learn from her that if you love yourself, as a woman, you will act like this and like this. You will not act anyhow because when others look up to you, they will learn from you how a woman carries herself.”

Participant B highlighted:

“Yes, self-love is very important but it is important not to think you are better than someone else. You need to be beautiful and love yourself, that’s where it ends.”

Participant C also added:

“There are a lot to a woman, when we are growing up, one would go through many problems, but because you walk proudly, someone would try to destroy you. You know yourself as one thing, but someone else would see you in a different light. You can't now change yourself and turn into someone else.”

Participant D, one of the older participants, also shared vivid memories of her childhood:

“I remember when my mother was working as a domestic and her boss used to give her beautiful clothes, people were jealous of the way we dressed because they thought we thought we were better than everyone. After all, we wore the clothes without caring much about other people and what they had to say because my siblings and I were given those clothes by our mother and when we wore them, we felt dignified and respectful. So, people like to talk about other people but it is important for you to know who you are, which must not be dependent on what other people say about you.”

The student participants expressed similar views that beauty in a black African woman can be seen through self-confidence and self-respect. Participant A stated:

“I feel like your beauty should go with confidence. Yes, confidence! You should know that you’re beautiful and not allow the next person to tell you otherwise.”

Participant F also shared:

“I believe that you should tell yourself that you are beautiful, so that if you are told otherwise by someone else, you will not be affected by it. This is because one might feel sad or upset if

someone isn't being told that they are beautiful or if they are being told and they don't believe it, women will throw themselves at men who give them compliments. Also, behaving appropriately and not being rude is important. A woman must respect themselves and be respectful to others so that people can see that this is a real African and a proud one at that."

Participant C also added:

"For me, it is having good morals, valuing yourself, and being confident and assertive, especially in situations where people criticise you."

Participant F gave examples where self-respect ties in:

"Wearing bum shorts will reveal your buttocks. Because of this, I feel like you don't respect yourself and how can you expect other people to respect you when you don't respect yourself?"

Participant A also highlighted:

"I think it's also the way we grew up in black households - you're not supposed to be showing your body. As much as something is there in your size, look at how it would look on you as an individual, yeah."

Participant E further expanded on what Participant F shared:

"So, ah, I also wanted to add on what makes a woman unattractive. When a woman leaves the house, as Participant F has said, and goes shopping in their pyjamas maybe at the mall, it would look like they haven't showered, which suggests that they don't value themselves as this is inappropriate. Secondly, it's also how a woman treats other people that makes them either attractive or unattractive. As a woman, you can't look down on other people because you think it's the "in thing" and disrespectfully speak to them and think that it's okay. This will instantly make you an unattractive woman."

Participant F also highlighted her stance on confidence and respect:

"The way I look represents me because if I dress decently, I also feel like I am respected, and my self-esteem is just boosted. So it is not easy for someone to come up to me and say things like "I am not who I think I am", I don't care because I know that I am what I think I am and no one can change my mind about that."

In agreement, Participant E shared:

“I think that as a person you should know yourself. Just because you've changed sizes or anything, should not mean anything. You should continue to be the person you were despite how you look.”

Participant C concluded the topic with her view:

“I agree with everyone. Just because for example I am someone who does not like to wear pants as a young woman, that doesn't make me wife material. How you look or dress has nothing to do with who you are on the inside because today I can decide otherwise on my appearance, what I wear, etc. Still, it doesn't change who you are as an individual and on the inside.”

4.5. Analysis of the images chosen

The various images chosen by each participant in this study provide valuable insight into their personal beauty values and perspectives. Factors such as relatable imagery, aspirational content, and age, as this study included both older and young black African women, may have influenced their decisions, as these aspects reveal diverse viewpoints on beauty constructs.

The older participants' data were collected using South African magazines, True Love and BONA, which are aimed at black African women's interests and lifestyles. The student participants were requested to submit images that represented their perception of African beauty. The interpretation of the analysis of these images (Appendix A) is provided below:

The media and social media both have a significant impact on how people see beauty. Black women's underrepresentation in the media, or their portrayal according to Eurocentric standards, can lead to negative body image or a desire for Western beauty ideals. However, there are an increasing number of media platforms that celebrate black beauty. Similarly, while social media can be used to promote unrealistic beauty standards and depictions of black African women, it can also be utilised to express oneself and embrace black beauty. With that said, there is a growing movement that celebrates the diversity of African beauty. Dark skin, natural hair, and qualities that were once regarded as flaws are now valued. This movement is empowering young black African women to embrace their unique beauty. Furthermore, cultural perceptions of African beauty indicate that beauty standards differ based on the unique African culture from which one originates. Some cultures prioritise slimness, but others favour a more voluptuous figure. Skin tone preferences can also vary. This is why, when studying beauty notions, it is important to take the cultural context into account.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter, detailing the themes, reflected the collective views and experiences of the participants and provided insight into the cultural and social values that define beauty in the context of black African women, both the older and those who are regarded as the youth. This analysis underscores a holistic view of African beauty that integrates both physical and internal attributes, emphasising natural beauty with minimal enhancements, character, and self-esteem.

Chapter five: Discussion of findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on a discussion of the results generated from the two semi-structured focus group discussions that sought to explore black African women's perceptions of African beauty in South Africa. It also sought to determine how the perceptions that black African women uphold impact or contribute to how they view themselves, which contributes to their sense of self as black African women in South Africa.

Through a thematic analysis, the main themes that emerged were that of natural beauty with minimal enhancements with the sub-themes of skin, hair, and body type. The second theme was character and the final theme that emerged was self-esteem. In this chapter, the researcher also discussed the findings, according to literature and Abraham Tesser's Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model, which was used to understand and confirm the results based on what the participants have shared. Further to this, the following research questions will be discussed in relation to existing literature:

- What are black African women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa?
- How have black African women's perceptions of beauty impacted their sense of self as African women?

5.2. Discussion of results

5.2.1. What are black African women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa?

Natural beauty with minimal enhancements

According Oxford Popular School Dictionary (2008), beauty is described as the quality of being extremely appealing visually, audibly, or mentally. This definition states that attractiveness or being youthful is seen as a marketable attribute. This stems from the idea that one's physical attributes define their beauty. When giving their definitions, most participants defined beauty in relation to personality, perceptions, and behaviour, rather than focusing solely on physical appearance or material possessions. When explaining the physical aspect of beauty, participants reported preferring natural beauty with minimal enhancements. Enhancements can include items such as jewellery, cosmetics, makeup, accessories, hair extensions, and other things that enhance a person's appearance and make them feel more beautiful. These enhancements mentioned speak to the Western beauty standards, as these standards were among the many sociocultural systems that still bear the scars of colonial impact.

Western standards of beauty, which were symbolised by the use of makeup and accessories, were frequently linked to social mobility and modernism (Miller, 2018) during the 1960s and 1970s. The idea that embracing Western aesthetics was progressive and desirable was strengthened by the way in which these standards were portrayed in the local media (Nzegwu, 2019) during the era the older participants grew up in.

This research study found that the participants believe in utilising some type of enhancement to display their beauty, as stated by Bloch and Richins (1992) who proposed that individuals will heavily depend on enhancements as compensatory tools. Further to this, a study conducted by Britton (2012) found that girls are encouraged to experiment with using makeup at an early age to improve their physical appearance. Different amounts can be used as needed, serving as a momentary boost to self-confidence. Because cosmetics provide a quick and easy fix for beauty issues, most women find them attractive. Put simply, makeup is applied in various ways depending on the situation to boost women's self-confidence. As most participants reported the occasional use of makeup, jewellery, hair extensions, certain hairstyles, and dressings a certain way, which alludes to the fact that the participants seemed to note that being completely natural, or being one's true natural self, is deemed impossible without any enhancements. This is because women, both the older participants and the student participants, always modify or add something to their physical appearance to appear presentable, whether through wearing makeup, styling hair, working out, wearing earrings, or choosing an outfit.

In current times, due to its relatively easy and quick application, and affordability compared to other alternatives like diets, exercise, and surgery, makeup has become a convenient way to conform to society's beauty standards (Britton, 2021). Most participants shared various enhancements that have been used in their lifetime, however, one particular that seemed to be significant was the lipstick colour that one chooses to wear as the participants reported that it needs to match one's skin tone.

Skin

According to one of the older participants (interviewed in March 2024), *A black African woman should also always wear beautiful earrings, should wear make-up, and apply lipstick. Lipstick is so important. The colour pink looks very beautiful on a woman especially if they are light in complexion.* Skin tone, more than any other physical attribute, holds significant social significance and is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Skin complexion allowed opportunities to come easier for certain individuals while creating barriers for others in society. Further to this, the colour of one's skin has established social rankings in which individuals with similar skin colour were given preferential treatment in terms of their quality of life compared to others. This is associated

with the American term "colourism," which refers to discrimination based on the lightness or darkness of a person's skin colour typically by a person within the same race (Okazawa-Rey et al., 1987).

Colourism plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of worth, wherein lighter skin complexion is favoured and seen as more valuable than darker skin, which is often devalued and stigmatised. This research study found that most participants, when discussing true African beauty, made reference to a dark skin tone being the epitome of beauty within the African context despite common societal attitudes regarding this using terminology such as "dark beauty" in their discussions. Terms such as "dark beauty", which are commonly used in black African communities, carry both positive and negative perceptions toward the individuals being labelled (Wilder, 2010). Since beauty conversations frequently draw comparisons between light and dark skin when discussing African beauty, it appears that the emphasis on skin tone affects women's perceptions of themselves with respect to societal beauty standards and the use of adornments in an attempt to bring out their beauty. According to another participant (interviewed in March 2024), *"A person with a dark complexion is beautiful only if she knows how to take care of herself properly. She needs to wear her earrings, do her hair well, and dress well. Even though she's dark, she looks adorable when she takes care of herself like that. Make sure you take care of yourself."* This viewpoint aligns with research conducted by Neal and Wilson (1989), indicating that while perceptions of Black women's beauty have evolved and progressed, issues surrounding skin tone remain unchanged. More recently, Hamler et al., (2022) found that black African-American women with darker skin tones report higher levels of psychological discomfort and worse mental health than their counterparts with lighter skin tones due to darker skin tones being linked to unfavourable perceptions about black people (Hamler et al., 2022). Several studies have demonstrated that during the colonial era, African beauty standards were disregarded. As a result of this, the visible establishment of Western beauty standards in Africa, and globally, has been evident up to this point.

Contrastingly, a few participants in this study reported that accepting oneself is crucial if you're a woman who loves herself. While it is true that sometimes people are influenced by others' opinions and thoughts about them, black African women should embrace the blessings that God has given them and not change themselves to suit global standards. This was also found in an article where (Ekpe, 2023) emphasised the diversity of African beauty standards across the continent, as well as the range of skin tones, hair textures, and facial features among Africans. Therefore, it must be encouraged that black African women embrace the rich diversity of African beauty.

This is consistent with what Ibanga (2017) found that the idea of beauty in Africa is very diverse and differs among different cultural groups within the continent. Similarly, Crawford et al.

(2017) found that the diversity of genes and genetic variants associated with skin pigmentation contributes to the great range of skin colours found across the African continent. African people considered a dark skin tone to be normal and not something to be ashamed of.

Hair

For some people, hair holds significance in religious and cultural beliefs, and for others, hair represents style and affordability. According to Versey (2014), hair has always played a significant role in African history as a marker of an individual's identity, which is comprised of their social status, clan, and background.

Before colonisation, many African cultural groups relied heavily on hairstyles to identify people, especially within their tribes. This was the case for both genders, as men and women used various hairstyles and accessories to indicate their age, marital status, and rank in society. Adouke (2022) reported that in the Igbo culture of Nigerian Igbo, particular hairstyles were associated with different age groups; some even carried generational symbolic meanings, while in the Zulu culture of South Africa, hairstyles that were used to indicate a person's marital status was 'isicholo'. Originally, 'isicholo' was more of a hairstyle than a headpiece. The Zulu women would let their hair grow long and then use animal fat and red ochre to make a circular hairstyle. With time, the hairstyle evolved into a hat but still maintained its original appearance. To further emphasise the significance of these different hairstyles within African cultures, they were frequently embellished with beads, cowry shells, or other ornaments (Anovuyo, 2024). In addition to this, hairstyles also played an important role in spiritual and religious ceremonies. Some tribes believed that various haircuts had spiritual significance and were associated with particular spirits or ancestors (Houlberg, 1975).

The significance of hairstyles in African nations' cultural identity and social organisation is still recognised and upheld today. This is because the majority of the participants reported that black African women should embrace their natural Afro by just admiring it and giving it a nice wash to make it shine and smell beautiful. Hair should be left natural and should not be treated with items like relaxers. They further reported that African women should brush their hair well to improve their appearance and give their natural hair an alluring element. Although the majority of participants from the older participants focus group underlined that a woman's natural attractiveness is what defines African beauty, a small percentage of the student participants reported that while it is encouraged to wear out your natural hair, as an African woman, there is should be no shame in using chemicals on one's natural hair and using hair extensions such as wigs or weaves.

Shaw (2006) suggests that South African women may find it challenging to discern between traditional and international beauty standards and to make the decision not to adhere to them, due to the increasing influence of Western media on female attractiveness and changes in local society regarding social status improvement and cultural adaptation. Because of this, another important aspect to consider, which was evident in this study, is that black African women cannot be painted with the same brush, and beauty discourse is not just black and white. Smith (2011) advised that several scholars have cautioned against characterising women with natural hair as self-loving or those who wear weaves as self-hating. Instead, since not all Black women have the same beliefs and guiding principles, we need to understand the complexities of Black beauty. Therefore, a black African woman who chooses to wear a weave should not be seen as rejecting her racial identity or preserving her racial identity when she chooses to wear her natural hair out. Instead, we should acknowledge the reality that black women have the freedom to decide how they want to style their hair.

As some black African women still opt for their natural hair (Smith, 2011), just as this study has shown, there are still concerns and discussions around African hair, and Thompson (2009) has pointed out that our society still has to make more progress in this domain.

Body

Beauty ideals are generally understood as socially constructed "looks" that incorporate many facial and bodily characteristics and set the standard for physical attractiveness in a society. This discussion will be centered on the relationship between beauty and body shape, exploring both the differences and similarities between Black and White cultural conceptions of an ideal body.

In Western cultures, physical appearance is extremely important (Bordo, 1993). An article by Mona (2024) clearly highlighted that European beauty standards, which emphasise physical characteristics like light skin complexion, slender bodies, and blonde hair, have historically been strongly embedded in Western culture. Popular culture and the beauty industry have reinforced these ideals, which frequently exclude people of colour and cause feelings of body dissatisfaction and compromised mental health (Mona, 2024). This is consistent with the older participants in this study, who reflected a preference for slender bodies and placed an emphasis on smaller waists in black African women. A constant reference was made to receiving compliments from white male figures, which reflects conformity to whiteness subconsciously. Further to this, the older participants overtly rejected the African ideal body type as they communicated negative connotations such as "letting go of yourself as a woman" if you are fully figured and further

insinuated a lack of beauty so much so that even after one has given birth, they need to stomach or tummy bands believed to flatten the stomach after giving birth.

On the other hand, the message was different with the younger participants espoused the ideal African body shape and used terminology such as “thick thighs”, “umkhaba” (chubby tummy), “embrace”, “there is nothing wrong” and “loving yourself”, which conveyed feelings of positivity and acceptance. Further to this, four of the student participants who came from rural communities communicated that being bigger signified being happy and healthy. This is consistent with studies conducted thus far which suggest that 'Black cultures' value larger body sizes, especially in women (Gyekye, 1996). The other two student participants, who were much smaller in size, expressed their focus on their self-representation over their physical appearance, stating that how one presents herself holds more significance than their physical appearance. These participants place more value on their personal satisfaction and contentment with their own bodies than they do on the standards of physical perfection set by society. This challenges the universal belief that White standards and slimness define beauty. The results of this study imply that some Black women may not be overly concerned with the cultural values regarding their bodies. Rather, as Rubin et al (2003) suggested, a small group of participants is seen establishing their own mechanisms in response to social pressure about beauty standards (Rubin et al., 2003).

While these tensions may exist, Poran (2006) suggests that the issue of body shape can arguably also be seen as a significant socio-cultural indicator of beauty; in other words, the media actively shapes women's perceptions of what their bodies should look like. The standard of beauty is often derived from media sources and both men and women reinforce this standard (Poran, 2006). Women in Westernised cultures are faced with the issue of conforming to the standard body shape whereby there is an emphasis on thinness which is unrealistic for some women (Hargreaves and Tiggeman, 2004). Furthermore, Austin (2000) found that parental beliefs about their children's current and ideal body sizes may also have a significant influence on how children develop their perceptions of their own bodies. This may lead to a relentless pursuit of these beauty ideals, which consequently, can lead to negative body image and body dissatisfaction.

Although being thin is viewed more highly in Western civilisation, cultures such as those of South Africa and other non-Western cultures favour plumpness over thinness. Consequently, compared to Western cultural groups, weight gain is more acceptable in these communities (Prentice and Webb, 2006). Whereas in Western cultures, people tend to believe that smaller body sizes indicate better health. In Japan, people perceive you as more beautiful if you are thinner. According to Cooper (2021), there is a tendency among Japanese women to focus on their weight due to the limited selection of small women's clothing and the preference of males for slender

women. However, in South African black culture, because some Black women are aware of Black men's preferences, the generally reported preference of Black men for a voluptuous body shape may still have a significant impact on Black women's conceptions of body type. These conflicting messages, of Western beauty ideals and African beauty ideals, support the idea that people's opinions about body size and shape vary greatly depending on the context (Baturka et al., 2001).

5.2.2. How have black African women's perceptions of beauty impacted their sense of self as African women?

In today's society, body image is understood to comprise body shape, weight, and one's overall look. (Waller and Barnes (2002) established that certain key personal traits impact how someone views themselves (Waller & Barnes, 2002). The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between these women's sense of identity and how they perceived their physical appearance.

This study found that women's perceptions of their bodies are complex and influenced by a range of elements, including family and cultural contexts. This viewpoint emphasises how important it is to consider body image as an expansive and dynamic experience. The participants referred to various aspects of what influences their self-concept. The older participants particularly mentioned Western beauty ideals as an influence on how they, as black African women, perceived themselves externally. Similarly, some of the student participants mentioned social media and global beauty standards as influences on their behaviours such as modifying their appearance, which relates to how they, too, perceive themselves. Whereas, with the inner qualities, both the older and student participants mentioned family and cultural expectations as the main influence of how they view themselves and other black African women in society. This is because, in the black African context, beauty symbolises a recognition of value, quality, essence, and desirableness (Ibanga, 2017) which suggests that within the African culture, beauty is seen as a combination of both physical attractiveness and good conduct in society.

Character

According to Gyekye (1996), in certain traditional African cultures, beauty is defined by physical features and inner qualities. Certain African marriages require wives to be obedient, and humble, and to behave morally. In this context, a woman's attractiveness is not limited to her physical qualities because "ethical conduct is viewed as a form of beauty." (Gyekye, 1996). These values seem to be important both in traditional and modern African communities.

Most of the participants, both the older and student participants, shared consistency concerning behaviour and conducting themselves appropriately as black African women. This speaks to how they view themselves and shapes how they identify in society. It is important to note that the participants, in their responses, did not look at behaviour in isolation, they coupled it with their perception of physical qualities that contribute to making a black African woman beautiful.

Focusing on internal qualities, the participants reported that a true black African woman embodies African beauty in her good character —a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. The participants stated that a person with good character is kind, polite, and humble. A true African woman will also always welcome people with a smile, showing her respect for others. In addition to this, a true African woman should always exhibit kindness and positivity, even when life throws challenges her way. Instead of showing the world her struggles, she should try to conduct herself positively. When interacting with others, a beautiful African woman should always maintain a cheerful and warm demeanor and encourage thoughtful, sensible conversations. This way, she will always be of assistance to other people and guide them in the right direction.

These findings are similar to what Matiza (2013) found in their study, which looked at the proverb "Don't judge a book by its cover", which suggests that it is unnecessary to infer something about a person's substance from their outside appearance.

This illustrates how the African conception of beauty has impacted literary critics, as evidenced by Gelfand's (1982) discussion of characteristics that make black African women beautiful, which include honesty, modesty, love, compassion, self-control, patience, bravery, and diligence. Similarly, another study done by Jackson-Lowman (2013) on African American women used an analogy using nature and stated that a pearl is just as lovely as an opal, a palm tree is just as attractive as an oak tree, and a rose is just as beautiful as a lily. This suggests that every one of these plants has unique beauty and value, serving a certain function in nature. When linking this to beauty and African American women, this study found that before colonisation, Africans only valued beauty inside their own communities. Thus, group comparisons were meaningless. The essence of beauty, as traditionalists would say, is to be a functioning being that strives for balance, which reinforces that beauty in the African context is not looked at in isolation. For this reason, beauty is viewed as situational and subjective rather than inherent in the traditional African perspective. Essentially, Jackson-Lowman (2013) found that a person's worth and value are determined by their character and contributions to society, not by their physical appearance. Similarly, the phrase "o chakomaka" is used metaphorically in the Igbo community of Nigeria to refer to a lady who is physically attractive but not well-mannered. Despite her stunning physical beauty, a woman who meets this description is usually shunned, despised, and unappreciated (Osaghae, 2019).

The African conception of beauty includes more than just outward appearance, it also takes into account inner traits and moral behaviour. This perspective, which has its roots in traditional African cultures, continues to shape black African women's identities and values in both traditional and contemporary contexts. Both the older and student participants of the study emphasised how important it is for black African women to behave and conduct themselves appropriately, which shapes their social image and moulds their sense of self within the community.

Self-esteem

According to Muchera and Mbogori (2019), an essential aspect of children's development is their understanding of themselves, which includes understanding their self-esteem, self-concept, and identity. Children's perceptions of themselves are important indicators of their character and emotional well-being, as they represent what and how they think about themselves (Muchera & Mbogori, 2019).

Motseki and Oyedemi's (2017) study found that there is a strong link between self-esteem and black African women's perceptions of beauty. Various studies indicate that black women who internalise the beauty standards promoted by mainstream media, which primarily emphasise lighter complexion and straight hair, are more likely to have low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is an absolute necessity to define beauty according to African beliefs and customs rather than Eurocentric standards in order to foster a positive self-image in the Black community (Makkar & Strube, 1995).

The participants in the study communicated the importance of developing a positive self-esteem, which speaks to the foundation of confidence. It was only a small percentage of participants admitted that, despite not meeting society's ideals of beauty, they did not feel the need to change anything about themselves. Despite wearing their natural hair out and being dark in complexion, these individuals loved themselves and believed they were beautiful. They often spoke about being criticised by others who did not understand their decision to present themselves in their most natural state, but a crucial element was being confident in their appearance and valuing themselves. In addition, these participants reaffirmed the significance of black African women loving themselves and being confident in their beliefs, as these traits will enable them to build themselves.

The majority of the student participants reflected that building oneself as a black African woman speaks to the importance of knowing who you are, which should not be dependent on what other people say about you. They further added that beauty should go with confidence. As a black African woman, one should know that they are beautiful and not allow the next person to tell them otherwise. This is because there is a relationship between self-esteem and body satisfaction.

This is consistent with the findings of a study done by Amazue (2014) that aimed to explore the contributions of media, body image concerns, and locality to the perceived self-esteem of female Nigerian adolescents. According to this study, self-esteem enhancing initiatives should be implemented in secondary schools in Nigeria. In addition to this, it emphasised the importance of exposing adolescents to intervention initiatives that will help them resist the media's influences, and support Nigerian culture's emphasis on body image, thus boosting one's self-concept and confidence in their African beauty.

Another study by Jefferson and Stake (2019), which looked to compare appearance self-attitudes of African American and European American Women provided evidence that compared to African American women, European American women expressed lower levels of satisfaction with certain aspects of their appearance, including weight. Their internalisation of Western beauty standards and increased self-comparison with media beauty figures were closely linked to their dissatisfaction with their bodies (Jefferson & Stake, 2019) and thus having low confidence in their natural beauty and constantly changing their appearance to suit the global standards of beauty. Similarly, another study done by Kaziga et al (2021) which focused on the self-perception of young women and adolescents in the Ankole community of Uganda found that adolescent girls' perceptions of beauty are influenced by a range of factors, including relationships, dietary habits, beauty standards, and comparisons. As a result, they shift between traditional and modern beauty ideals. It was suggested by the results that young African women's confidence and self-esteem could be improved by shifting the focus of society away from physical attractiveness and towards other crucial developmental assets like education and positive media messages.

This theme emphasises how important it is for black African women to build positive self-esteem and self-perception based on their cultural background and values rather than conforming to Eurocentric beauty standards promoted by the media. Studies indicate that black women who conform to Eurocentric beauty standards typically have lower self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, which emphasises the significance of encouraging African beauty values as opposed to Western norms. The majority of participants underlined that knowing who you are as a black African woman is the foundation of true African beauty and that this should not be dependent on the opinions of others. The premise of this is that for black African women to cultivate a positive sense of self-worth and confidence, which are critical for their overall well-being and empowerment, they must embrace their own notions of beauty values and reject Eurocentric beauty standards. This is because everyone is different. While some women may opt not to wear makeup to enhance their appearance, others may choose to do so.

In the same way, in contemporary South Africa, many black African women now choose to chemically relax their hair to make it silky and easy to comb, while some black women choose to wear weaves or use extensions, and still others decide to wear their natural hair out (Smith, 2011). With that being said, black African women's perceptions of their own value and ability are greatly influenced by cultural beliefs, values, and environmental factors. Therefore, promoting good self-esteem and confidence in African women from diverse cultural origins requires acknowledging and respecting cultural differences and providing support that is sensitive to cultural differences.

5.3. The Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model

Abraham Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model may assist us in understanding how black African women's perceptions of beauty are moulded by Western standards, despite their motivation to embrace their African identity. This model posits that individuals attempt to maintain an appealing self-image by outperforming their peers (Tesser, 1988). In this context, the findings indicate that many older black African women in South Africa have adopted Western beauty values, which Wilson and Williams (2017) suggest it is most likely influenced by colonisation. Wilson and Williams (2017) alluded to the use of cosmetic enhancements such as makeup to conform to Eurocentric standards of small body types, light complexion, and specific facial features.

By conforming to these Western beauty values, the older participants may have been seeking to retain a positive self-image and obtain the respect of others in society. The SEM model predicts that when the comparison target is psychologically nearby, people are more likely to participate in self-evaluation maintenance through reflection (raising self-esteem by affiliation with a superior other). Given the pervasive impact of Western standards in South African society, the older participants may have seen these standards as the norm and strived towards achieving them in order to maintain a positive self-evaluation.

Similarly, the student participants reported being overwhelmed by Western beauty ideals on social media, limiting their ability to fully embrace African beauty. Nevertheless, some students defied these restrictive conventions by celebrating their natural characteristics such as dark skin, full body types, and natural hair. This is consistent with the SEM model's hypothesis that people maintain a positive self-image through social comparisons (Tesser, 1988).

Although Western values have an impact, the findings of this research study recognise a shared beauty standard in African beauty that is shaped by the continent's diverse realities, and some participants respected the shared standards of beauty in traditional African communities.

These findings emphasise the importance of addressing and dismantling oppressive beauty standards in order to encourage black African women to express their unique and diverse forms of beauty.

Overall, the SEM model reveals how participants' self-perceptions and opinions of beauty were impacted by a desire to retain high self-esteem by replicating mainstream Western ideals or striving to compare favourably to them. The concept gives a framework for comprehending the significant impact of societal beauty norms on people's self-esteem.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the study, discusses the findings and limitations of the study, as well as considers the implications of the findings. This research study aimed to explore black African women's perceptions of beauty in South Africa and how these perceptions contribute to their sense of self as black African women. A total of twelve black African women were participants in this study and they were split into two focus groups, where one focus group was that of six older women residing at Issy Geshen Home for the Aged in Lamontville. The second focus group consisted of six student participants from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.

6.2. A synopsis of the research findings concerning the research questions

The findings of this research study were able to answer the research questions on their perceptions of beauty in South Africa and how this contributes to their identity. Most of the older participants' perceptions of beauty stemmed from Western ideals possibly due to the colonisation of South Africa and the impact it had on the views, beliefs, and practices of black African people. This is consistent with Bhabha (2012) who found that black people do not have an identity of their own separate from the white identity, even though they desire and aspire towards a uniquely black identity. The older participants also mostly referred to the use of beautifying enhancements to show a black African woman's beauty, affecting how they view themselves and other black African women in society. To support this, Cash et al., (1989) found in their research that the use of facial cosmetics - such as makeup affects how others perceive women and how they perceive themselves (i.e. body image), as a result, the older participants constantly referred to descriptions that confirmed to Eurocentric beauty ideals, choosing a preference of a small body type, a small waist and if a woman is dark, they need to ensure that they take care of themselves for them to be regarded as beautiful. Further to this, wearing lipstick and earrings was constantly highlighted, again, showing that global standards of beauty continue to be entrenched in society even in contemporary South Africa.

In today's society, body image is understood to comprise body shape, weight, and one's overall look. Waller and Barnes (2002) established that certain key personal traits impact how someone views themselves, such as dark skin, natural hair, voluptuous and curvaceous body, big breasts, and big buttocks. These features are all central to the aesthetics of 'Black Beauty' which most student participants chose a preference for. Although the student participants reported being bombarded with Eurocentric standards of beauty on social media platforms, this makes it incredibly

difficult for them to holistically value African beauty standards. From an African-centered viewpoint, it's very challenging to avoid the judgmental eye of a society that devalues individuals who don't conform to the defined beauty norms.

Despite a broad spectrum of opinions, Njiofor (2018) recognised a shared aesthetic standard in African beauty. Although cultural and individual preferences have an influence, the foundation of the African aesthetic concept remains consistent. This viewpoint has undoubtedly been influenced by the many distinct existential realities that the African continent presents. Traditional African societies have similar standards for appreciating and judging beauty despite the size and diversity of the African continent, which speaks to a portion of the student participants who, although valued African beauty in its most natural state, also believed in feeling content with however one may look. Celebrating and recognising one's African characteristics while challenging the status quo are two ways Jackson-Lowman (2013) believed black Africans might fight the subjection to Westernised concepts of beauty.

In essence, this study gathered that Westernised beauty constructs contribute to how black African women understand and believe what beauty is as a lot of the participants revolved their responses on makeup, slender bodies, and light skin complexions. To some degree, there was a "push back" from the student participants to embrace their beauty within the African context of being dark-skinned and proud, accepting their full body types, and wearing their natural hair out. But even in their efforts, there is still that lingering influence of whiteness (i.e. being proud of your "thick" body but not allowing yourself to be too fat, being natural but occasionally wearing makeup and weaves, and using chemicals to straighten your natural hair). This research study further underscores the importance of continued efforts to challenge and dismantle these oppressive beauty constructs, empowering black African women to embrace their unique and diverse forms of beauty.

6.3. Limitations and recommendations for further research

Although there is vast research done on Westernised beauty ideals, not many studies are done on traditional black African constructs of beauty. Therefore, I had to extend my search to blogs and articles to source literature about African beauty, more especially South African beauty constructs.

The goal of qualitative research is to get deeper insights rather than generalise findings based on the participant's perceptions (Maree, 2007). Given the above, this study cannot be generalised, and the findings cannot be extended to all young black African female university students or older black African women, due to the small number of participants. As a result, future research can be

undertaken quantitatively, with a considerably bigger sample size, allowing for the generalisation of findings.

In addition to this, the study focused on black African female participants, perhaps it might be interesting to explore black African male's perception of beauty in South Africa seeing that the male gaze is a contributing factor to how women may perceive themselves and consequently behave in relation to beauty.

The findings of this research could also encourage society to hold seminars on body positivity and cultural pride, educating black African women on the significance of African beauty historically and the reasons it is necessary to uphold these standards in the present. These seminars and events, which are aimed at young black African women who are still developing their sense of self, could be held in community centers, universities, and schools. In addition to this, it could be helpful to establish mentorship programs where older black African women can impart their knowledge and experiences about ideals of beauty to younger women. Younger women could learn more about the dynamics of beauty standards and develop a more positive, wide view of African beauty from this intergenerational conversation. Advocating for policymakers to regulate media content regulations and make certain that various skin tones, body shapes, and African aesthetics are fairly represented in national advertising and media may be a great turning point, as policies that support diversity in the media and advertising have the potential to change how society views beauty.

These techniques can help break down damaging beauty standards and establish environments where young African women feel confident about their appearance. Encouraging women of all ages to participate in these conversations could lead to long-lasting cultural change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Gatekeeper's Permission



2342 Ndiwana Road, Lamontville, 4027
P O Box 32180, Mobeni, 4060
Tel: (031) 469 0247
Fax: (031) 462 2933
E-mail: info@issygeshen.co.za

15 May 2023

Miss Sinqobile Khama (217063400)
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus
College of Humanities
School of Human Applied Sciences

Dear Miss Khama

RE: GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at Issy Geshe Home for the Aged, towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research study is: "The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: Developing a sense of self as an African woman."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting a semi-structured focus group discussion with six elderly women in order to get the elderly people's perspective of African beauty since they have lived through the apartheid era and have been exposed to a time of Western domination and colonialism. Their experiences and truths of what they know African beauty to be will be based on traditional views as well as influence from their families. This information will then be considered as rich and authentic data for this study.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/discussion schedule:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/discussion schedule and to be signed by the user before he/she fills in the schedule;

Yours sincerely



Sifiso Ngidi
Administrator

ISSY GESHEN LAMONT HOME
P.O. BOX 32180 2342 NDLWANA RD.
MOBENI 4060 LAMONTVILLE 4027
TEL: 031 - 4690247 FAX: 031 - 4622933

Organisation Stamp



PBO No: 18/11/13/3252
Reg No. 002-277 NPO
VAT No: 4010175745

26 June 2022

Miss Sinqobile Khama (SN 217063400)
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Pietermaritzburg Campus UKZN
Email: 217063400@stu.ukzn.ac.za shezis1@ukzn.ac.za

Dear Miss Khama

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"The History and psychology of beauty in South Africa: developing a sense of self as an African woman."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with students (Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Pietermaritzburg campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



Dr KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 2: CFC Letter for counselling services



**CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE
DISCIPLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY
20 Golf Road
Scottsville 3209
PIETERMARITZBURG
033 260 5166
cfc@ukzn.ac.za**

25/03/2022

Dear Ms Khama (student number - (217063400)),

Thank you for showing interest in our services. I am acknowledging receipt of your request to refer study participants for your research, should they require counselling services. The Child and Family Centre grants you permission to refer these participants. You can use the details above for the referrals.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Nozipho Ndlazi (Acting CFC Director)



Appendix 3: CHUM Letter for psychosocial support



CONFIDENTIAL

09 May 2023

For attention: Sinqobile Khama (217063400)

Email: 217063400@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Cc: Dr Adelaide Nozipho Ndlazi: NdlaziA@ukzn.ac.za

School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Permission for students registered in the College of Humanities to access psychological services

This serves to confirm that students who are registered in the College of Humanities may access counselling services at the College of Humanities Student Support Services should they feel traumatised in any way due to their involvement in the postgraduate research study conducted by Ms Sinqobile Khama (Student number: 217063400) and supervised by Dr Nozipho Ndlazi entitled, *The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: Developing a sense of self as an Africa[n] woman*.

Regards

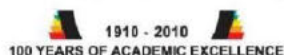







Dr Angeline Stephens
Manager: Student Support Services
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Telephone: 0800 800 017 Toll-free, Mon-Fri, 08h00-16h30
<https://coh.ukzn.ac.za/college-office/student-support-services/>

College of Humanities Student Support Services

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 1120 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 1512 Email: stephensa@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

Appendix 4: Ethical Clearance



28 November 2023

Sinqobile Khama (217063400)
School of Applied Human Sc
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear S Khama,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006427/2023

Project title: The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: developing a sense of self as an African woman.

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 15 November 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) 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.

This approval is valid until 28 November 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 5: Flyer for participants – English Version



AFRICAN BEAUTY

SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION BY:

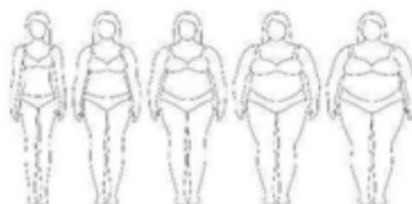
MISS SINQOBILE KHAMA

STUDENT NUMBER: 217063400

CONTACT DETAILS: [REDACTED] / 217063400@STU.UKZN.AC.ZA

VENUE: ISSY GESHEN HOME FOR THE AGED & UKZN FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

I AM CONDUCTING A RESEARCH STUDY THAT WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES AROUND BEAUTY STANDARDS AND HOW YOU SEE BEAUTY WITHIN YOURSELF AND THOSE AROUND YOU.



HTTPS://WWW.VICTORY.COM/VICTORY/100-VICTORY-ILLUSTRATION-OF-NORMAL-WEIGHT-FROM-AND-ROUN-TO-EXTREMELY-OBES-ROUY-MALE-LOOK-WEIGHT-LOGO-CORRE

SKIN TONES



HTTPS://WWW.QADRA.COM/WHAT-DETERMINES-HUMAN-SKIN-COLOR-AND-PHYSICAL-TRAIT



HTTPS://WWW.QADRA.COM/WHAT-DETERMINES-HUMAN-SKIN-COLOR-AND-PHYSICAL-TRAIT

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- TO EXPLORE BLACK AFRICAN WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY IN SOUTH AFRICA.
- TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF BLACK AFRICAN WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR SENSE OF SELF AS AFRICAN WOMEN.

GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION FROM ISSY GESHEN HOME FOR THE AGES AND UKZN HAS BEEN OBTAINED.



Flyer for participants – IsiZulu version

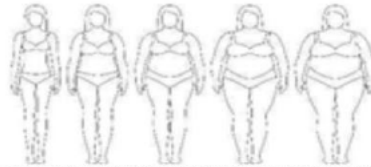


UBUHLE BASE-AFRIKA

OPHETHE INGXOXO YE-SEMI-STRUCTURED FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSION:

NKSZ SINGOBILE KHAMA
INOMBOLO YOKUFUNDA: 217063400
IMININGWANE YOKUXHUMANA: [REDACTED] / 217063400@STU.UKZN.AC.ZA
INDAWO: ISSY GESHEN HOME FOR THE AGED & UKZN KUBAFUNDI ABABAMBE IQHAZA

NGENZA UCWANINGO LOKUFISA
UKWAZI KABANZI NGEMIZWA
YAKHO MAYELANA NOBUHLE
KANYE NOKUTHI UBUBONA
KANJANI UBUHLE KUWENA KANYE
NAKWABANYE ABANTU.



SKIN TONES



<https://www.dorcas.com/next-sterling-skinn-2018-colors-and-physical-traits>



<https://www.hair.com/your-hair-type-101-what-does-it-mean-to-know-your-hair>

IZINHLOSO ZOCWANINGO:

- UKUHLOLA UMBONO LWABANTU BESIFAZANE ABANSUNDU NGOBUHLE ENINGIZIMU AFRIKA.
- UKUTHOLA IMITHELELA YEMIBONO YABANTU BESIFAZANE ABANSUNDU NGOBUHLE KWABESIFAZANE BASE-AFRIKA.

INVUME YOKWENA UCWANINGO E-ISSY GESHEN HOME FOR THE AGED KANYE NASE-UKZN ISINKIWE.



Appendix 6: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant

My name is Sinqobile Khama (217063400). I am a Master's candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. The title of my research is: *The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: Developing a sense of self as an Africanwoman.*

The aim of the study is to explore the perception of beauty in South Africa as well as to determine the impact of the perception of beauty on the sense of self of African women. This will be achieved by the participants sharing their experiences and truths of what they know African beauty to be; which will be based on family, cultural influences as well as social media and peers. This information will be considered rich and authentic data for this study. I am interested in conducting a semi-structured focus group discussion with you to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalised for taking such an action.
- Your views in this focus group discussion will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The focus group discussion will take about 45 minutes – 60 minutes.
- Should you feel that you need counselling services after our focus group discussion, you will be referred to the Child and Family Centre OR UKZN Student Support.
- The recording as well as other items associated with the focus group discussion will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed of by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures).

I can be contacted at School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville. My contact details are as follows:

Email: 217063400@stu.ukzn.ac.za.

Cell phone number: [REDACTED]

My supervisor is Mrs Nozipho Ndlazi who is located at the School of Applied Human Sciences, Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her contact details are as follows:

Email: ndlazia@ukzn.ac.za

For any questions or concerns about the rights of a study participant you can contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001 Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

I(full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research study, and I consent to participate in this study.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of this research study. I hereby agree to participate.

.....

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

I consent / do not consent to have this semi-structured focus group discussion recorded (if applicable).

.....

.....

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

Ifomu lemvume

Lungu elithandekayo

Igama lami ngingu-Sinqobile Khama (217063400). Ngingimfundi osesigabeni semfundo i-Masters eNyuvesi yaKwaZulu Natali esePietermaritzburg. Isihloko socwaningo sithi: *The history and psychology of beauty in South Africa: Developing a sense of self as an African woman.*

Inhloso yalolucwaningo ukuthola konke okuphathelele ngokufuna ulwazi ngomlando wobuhle wase-Afrika obuphathelele nabantu besifazane, kuphinde kuthinte imizwa nange indlela abantu besifazane base-Afrika bezibona ngayo uma kukhulunywa ngobuhle base- Afrika kumuntu wesifazane. Lokhu kuzofezwa ngokuthi wena usitshela ngombono wakho ukuthi ubuhle base-Afrika buyini; okuzobe kusekelwe emndenini, emathonyeni amasiko kanjalo nasezinkundleni zokuxhumana kanye nabangane. Lolu lwazi luzobhekwa njengedathaenothile neyiqiniso yalolu cwano. Nginentshisekelo yokuxoxa nawe ukuze wabelane ngolwazi lwakho ngesihloko.

Yazi ukuthi:

- Leminingwane ozosinika yona izosetshenziswa kucwaningo lwezemfundo kuphela.
- Awuphoqelekile ukuba ubeyingxenywe yalolucwaningo. Kuba isinqumo sakho ukubaingxenywe noma ungabi ingxenywe noma uhoxe kulolucwaningo. Angeke ujeziswe ngokuthatha lesisinqumo.
- Imibono yakho kulohlomvo izokhishwa igama lakho ligodliwe. Igama Kanyeneminingwane yakho angeke ikhishwe kulolucwaningo.
- Lenhlomvo izothatha isikhathi esingeqanga kwimizuzu engu-45 kuya ku-60.
- Uma kwenzeka umhlolwa efikelwa imizwa yokuphatheka kabi nengcindezi, uyobe esedluliselwa kumeluleki wase-Child and Family Centre.
- Okuqoshiwe kanye nokunye okuhlangene nale nhlolomvo kuzogcinwa kwifayela elivikelwe ngenombolo eyimfihlo engeke ikwazi ukuvulwa nanoma ubani ngaphandlekwami nomphathi wami. Ngemuva kweminyaka emihlanu, ngokomthetho wenyuvesi, iminingwane izoshabalaliswa ngokushiswa noma ngokudatshulwa.

Uma unemibuzo mayelana nalocwaningo, noma uthanda ukwaziswa mayelana nemiphumela, ungakhululeka ungithinta kuleminingwane:

Imeyili: 217063400@stu.ukzn.ac.za

inombolo yocingo: [REDACTED]

Uma ufisa ukuxhumana nomphathi/umsizi wami, uNkk Nozipho Ndlazi wase-UKZN(M.Soc.Sci) angathintwa kuleminingwane:

Imeyili: ndlazia@ukzn.ac.za

Uma uthanda ukwazi mayelana nocwaningo noma inini, ungathinta i-UKZN's SocialSciences Ethics Commette (Ucingo: 031 260 3587).

ISIMVUME YOKUBAMBA KWAKHO IQHAZA

Uma uvumelana nokuba ingxenye yaloluncwaningo, sayina ngezansi

.....
(Sayina lapha)

.....
(Usuku)

Uma uvumelana nokuba inhlolo mvo yalolucwaningo iqoshwe ngesiqopha mazwi, sayinangezansi

.....
(Sayina lapha)

.....
(Usuku)

Appendix 7: Semi-structured focus group discussion schedules

Semi-structured focus group discussion schedule (elderly participants]

Constructions of beauty

1. From your understanding, what is beauty?
 - Can you describe specific physical features in a woman that represent her African beauty?
 - Can you describe specific internal features in a woman that represent her African beauty?
 - Can you list and explain any physical features in an African woman that make her unattractive or undesirable?
 - Can you list and explain any internal features in an African woman that make her unattractive or undesirable?
 - How would you differentiate or describe good hair and bad hair in African beauty?
2. What is your preferred skin tone? (see Appendix 7)
 - What do you think is the preferred skin tone in South Africa?
3. How would you define the body shape of an African woman?
 - Do you think there are differences in beauty ideals between the older and younger generation? If so, what do you think these differences may be?

Self-perception

4. Looking at the image you have chosen from the magazine describe the characteristics that make the woman beautiful? (*show the image to the group*).
5. Have you ever, at some point in your life, tried to change the way you look? If so, what was the reason?
6. How important would you say your appearance is to your overall sense of identity?

Semi-structured focus group discussion schedule [elderly participants] (IsiZulu Version)

Ukwakhiwa kobuhle

1. Ngokuqonda kwakho, buyini ubuhle?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukuchaza izici ezithile zomzimba kowesifazane ezimele ubuhle bakhe base-Afrika?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukuchaza izici ezithile zangaphakathi kowesifazane ezimele ubuhle bakhe base-Afrika?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukubala futhi uchaze noma yiziphi izici ezibonakalayo kowesifazane wase-Afrika ezimenza angathandeki?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukubala futhi uchaze noma yiziphi izici zangaphakathi kowesifazane wase-Afrika ezimenza angathandeki?
 - Ungazihlukanisa noma uzichaze kanjani izinwele ezinhle nezinwele ezimbi ebuhleni base-Afrika?
2. Imuphi umbala wesikhumba owuthandayo? (bheka ku-Appendix 7)
 - Ucabanga ukuthi yimuphi umbala wesikhumba othandwa kakhulu eNingizimu Afrika?
3. Ungawuchaza kanjani umzimba womuntu wesifazane wase-Afrika wangempela?
 - Ucabanga ukuthi kunomehluko emibonweni yobuhle phakathi kwesizukulwane esidala nesisha? Uma kunjalo, ucabanga ukuthi lo mehluko ungaba yini?

Ukuzibona kwakho

4. Uma ubheka isithombe osikhethile kumagazini: chaza izici ezenza owesifazane abe muhle? (*khombisa isithombe eqenjini*).
5. Ingabe wake wazama ukushintsha indlela obukeka ngayo esikhathini esithile? Uma kunjalo, sasiyini isizathu?
6. Ungasho ukuthi kubaluleke kangakanani ukubukeka kwakho kumqondo wakho nakuwena?

Semi-structured focus group discussion schedule [Student participants]

Constructions of beauty

1. From your understanding, what is beauty?
 - Can you describe specific physical features in a woman that represent her African beauty?
 - Can you describe specific internal features in a woman that represent her African beauty?
 - Can you list and explain any physical features in an African woman that make her unattractive or undesirable?
 - Can you list and explain any internal features in an African woman that make her unattractive or undesirable?
 - How would you differentiate or describe good hair and bad hair in African beauty?
2. What is your preferred skin tone? (see Appendix 7)
 - What do you think is the preferred skin tone in South Africa?
3. How would you define the body shape of an African woman?
 - Do you think there are differences in beauty ideals between the older and younger generation? If so, what do you think these differences may be?

Self-perception

4. Which public figure or celebrity, whether current or from your era, do you think is the epitome of beauty? (*show the image to the group*).
 - What are the characteristics that make them beautiful?
5. Have you ever, at some point in your life, tried to change the way you look? If so, what was the reason?
6. How important would you say your appearance is to your overall sense of identity?

Appendix F: Semi-structured focus group discussion schedule [student participant] Zulu Version)

Ukwakhiwa kobuhle

1. Ngokuqonda kwakho, buyini ubuhle?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukuchaza izici ezithile zomzimba kowesifazane ezimele ubuhle bakhe base-Afrika?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukuchaza izici ezithile zangaphakathi kowesifazane ezimele ubuhle bakhe base-Afrika?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukubala futhi uchaze noma yiziphi izici ezibonakalayo kowesifazanewase-Afrika ezimenza angathandeki?
 - Ungakwazi yini ukubala futhi uchaze noma yiziphi izici zangaphakathi kowesifazanewase-Afrika ezimenza angathandeki?
 - Ungazihlukanisa noma uzichaze kanjani izinwele ezinhle nezinhle ezimbi ebuhleni base-Afrika?
2. Imuphi umbala wesikhumba owuthandayo? (bheka ku-Appendix 7)
 - Ucabanga ukuthi yimuphi umbala wesikhumba othandwa kakhulu eNingizimu Afrika?
3. Ungawuchaza kanjani umzimba womuntu wesifazane wase-Afrika wangempela?
 - Ucabanga ukuthi kunomehluko emibonweni yobuhle phakathi kwesizukulwane esidala nesisha? Uma kunjalo, ucabanga ukuthi lo mehluko ungaba yini?

Ukuzibona kwakho

4. Imuphi umuntu owusaziwayo, kungaba umuntu wangenkathi yamanje noma eyakudala, ocabanga ukuthi uyisibonelo esihle sobuhle? (*khombisa isithombe eqenjini*).
 - Yiziphi izici ezibenza babe bahle?
5. Ingabe wake wazama ukushintsha indlela obukeka ngayo esikhathini esithile? Uma kunjalo, sasiyini isizathu?
6. Ungasho ukuthi kubaluleke kangakanani ukubukeka kwakho kumqondo wakho nakuwena?

Appendix 8:

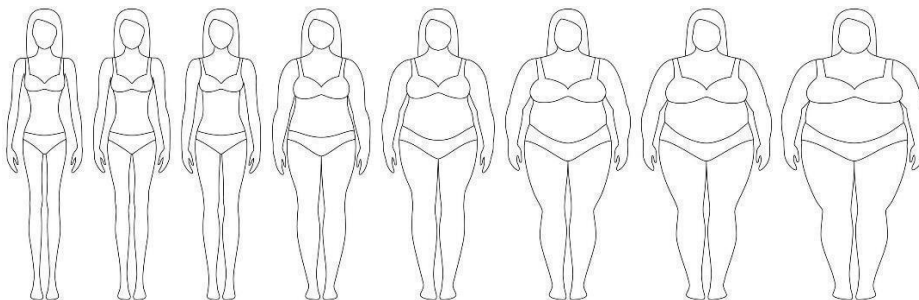
SKIN TONES



Quora [online image]. (2019). Different shades of skin tones. Available at: <https://www.quora.com/What-determines-human-skin-colour-and-physical-traits>



Meme [online image]. (n.d.) What is your hair type? Available at: <https://me.me/i/what-is-your-hair-type-open-wave-straight-to-minimal-5536050>



Vecteezy [online image]. (n.d.) Vector illustration of woman silhouettes with different weight from anorexia to extremely obese. Body mass index, weight loss concept. Pro Vector. Available at: <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/617081-vector-illustration-of-woman-silhouettes-with-different-weight-from-anorexia-to-extremely-obese-body-mass-index-weight-loss-concept>

Appendix 9: Images chosen by elderly participants

R

Recently, millions of Americans and viewers from around the world tuned in to watch one of the biggest sporting events on the calendar, American football's Super Bowl. But what got many tongues wagging had nothing to do with sport and everything to do with religion. During a break an advert promoting Christianity was flighted; it was paid for by the evangelical Christian website called He Gets Us. There was a huge online and social media uproar as the debate raged on about religion and how it has been adapted to modern-day marketing.

American politician Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted after the Super Bowl: 'Something tells me Jesus would not spend millions of dollars on Super Bowl ads to make fascism look benign.' But, the reality is that like all things out there, if you search the internet and social media with some purpose you will find it online and religion is no different, even when it's flashing across your TV screen.

In South Africa there is a much more liberal approach and it's not unusual to see celebrities and sport stars take a bold and principled approach when it comes to their religious convictions.

In 2014, SA cricketer Hashim Amla famously forfeited his match fee when he refused to wear the sports jersey with the liquor sponsor's logo on it as it went against his Muslim faith.

And on social media, where celebrities are able to freely express themselves (like all other users), some take the opportunity to openly express their religious beliefs.

But religious influencers are also on the rise in South Africa, as people spread the gospel on social media. At any given moment there are more than 3 million hashtags under the South African Christian Community on Facebook as Christians make their voices heard. The COVID-19 lockdown meant that people became more comfortable

CULTURE

MORE PEOPLE
 ARE NOW BOLD
 ENOUGH TO
 SHARE THEIR
 FAITH

with practising their religious beliefs online and in many ways this translated to social media.

In an interview with J Thebehadi, the host of 'Easing into Purpose' (Focus Media), Onela Sigobelwana speaks frankly about her journey as a religious influencer. She tells Thebehadi that although she had an online presence and influence online, it was when she started being purposeful about religion that she found her online calling. 'For the first time I felt "This feels good, this is me. This comes naturally, this is what I want to do".'

There was some hesitation for her in the beginning, which she said in the interview, for a young person, was natural at first: 'We wanna compromise, we wanna be relevant and we wanna be acceptable... When I started doing it I did it in small portions.' She took the plunge and started preaching on a live social media post and the comments encouraged her, and even overwhelmed her.

Nombulelo Malinga is a media specialist and the founder of Zizi Digital, and says this is a form of conscious marketing that has four principles, namely higher purpose, stakeholder orientation, conscious leadership and conscious culture. 'People don't just market a product for the sake of marketing it, it's a part of their belief system and their lifestyle,' she says.

'There are actually principles to conscious marketing ... this is not really a trend, it is more of a movement and this is where faith-based influencing falls into place,' adds Nombulelo.

With influencer marketing there are pitfalls, but Nombulelo says there are



Nombulelo Malinga

positives with faith-based influencers because they tend to speak to a niche audience and have a credibility that helps when they are actively marketing a product.

Nombulelo explains that there are commercial opportunities as well: 'When you find that individuals merge their personal culture and their lifestyle and it is authentic and it speaks to who they are, then it makes sense and people can believe it. It's now allowing individuals to express their religion and beliefs in a way that actually also satisfies them.'

'The whole digital age and access to information almost opens up the platform for people to explore their faith so that those faith influencers have this audience. That's why I think there is such a boom.'

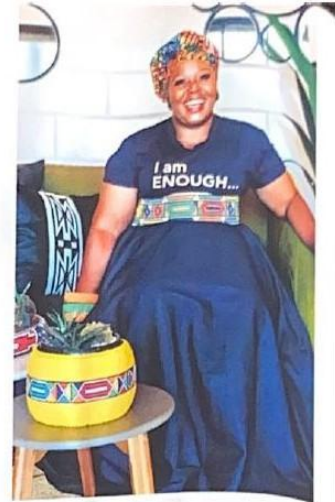
'From a faith perspective digital has worked way better and helped

A Pop Of Colour For Galentine's Day

Throw away the archaic V-Day guidebook that reserves this celebration for only those who are romantically in love. Friends around the world have known to gather on this special night, too, and as we are knee-deep in summer, Galentine's Day remains the perfect opportunity to throw caution to the wind, step outside of your comfort zone and do some experimenting with the colour of the season.

A twist on the occasional pink is a good place to start. Subtly bring it in using a vivid liner or simply add a pop of pink shadow to the inner corners of your eye. Tie it all together with a pink pout created by an immovable matte ink surprise. Try **Revlon Ultra HD Matte Lip Color** R189.95, Foschini. You'll enjoy its lightweight but super pigmented velvet-like texture. Remember to complete your look with brushed-up brows and dewy skin to keep this look modern.





EMBRACING *Africa*

Ntozinhle Lifestyle is a brand that believes in social development, woman empowerment, and the preservation of African art forms. From the humble beginnings of pop-up stores, owner Sphelele Chikowi has built her brand into the go-to store when looking for clothing, accessories and homeware with a contemporary African flair. Sphelele shares insights into what it takes to become a successful Black businesswoman in the industry, and the importance of giving back to the community.

By **AYANDA NGCOBO**

How did the Ntozinhle Lifestyle brand come about? Who or what inspires your designs?

Ntozinhle Lifestyle was born out of my determination to rise above the things that were holding me back. I think I am blessed with an entrepreneurial spirit, and there's always something in me that strives for more. My brand is built on the belief that dreams come true as long as you persevere. My designs are, of course, inspired by our rich African culture. Our continent thrives on inspiration, colour and the life force we breathe in every day.

Your primary aesthetic revolves around the use of beadwork. Why is this form of craftsmanship the focus of your designs?

Beadwork is part of our culture, and I found it really sad that it was almost a lost design element among our youth. I added a contemporary flair and made it relatable. Because all my products are handmade, each piece is unique and we never use the same patterns more than once. However, I am very much in love with the interesting patterns of the KwaNdebele people.

As a Black businesswoman, how important is women empowerment to you and what steps have you taken to empower women in this country and/or this industry?

It's extremely important to me, not only because women have always been oppressed in one way or another, but also because this has long been a male-





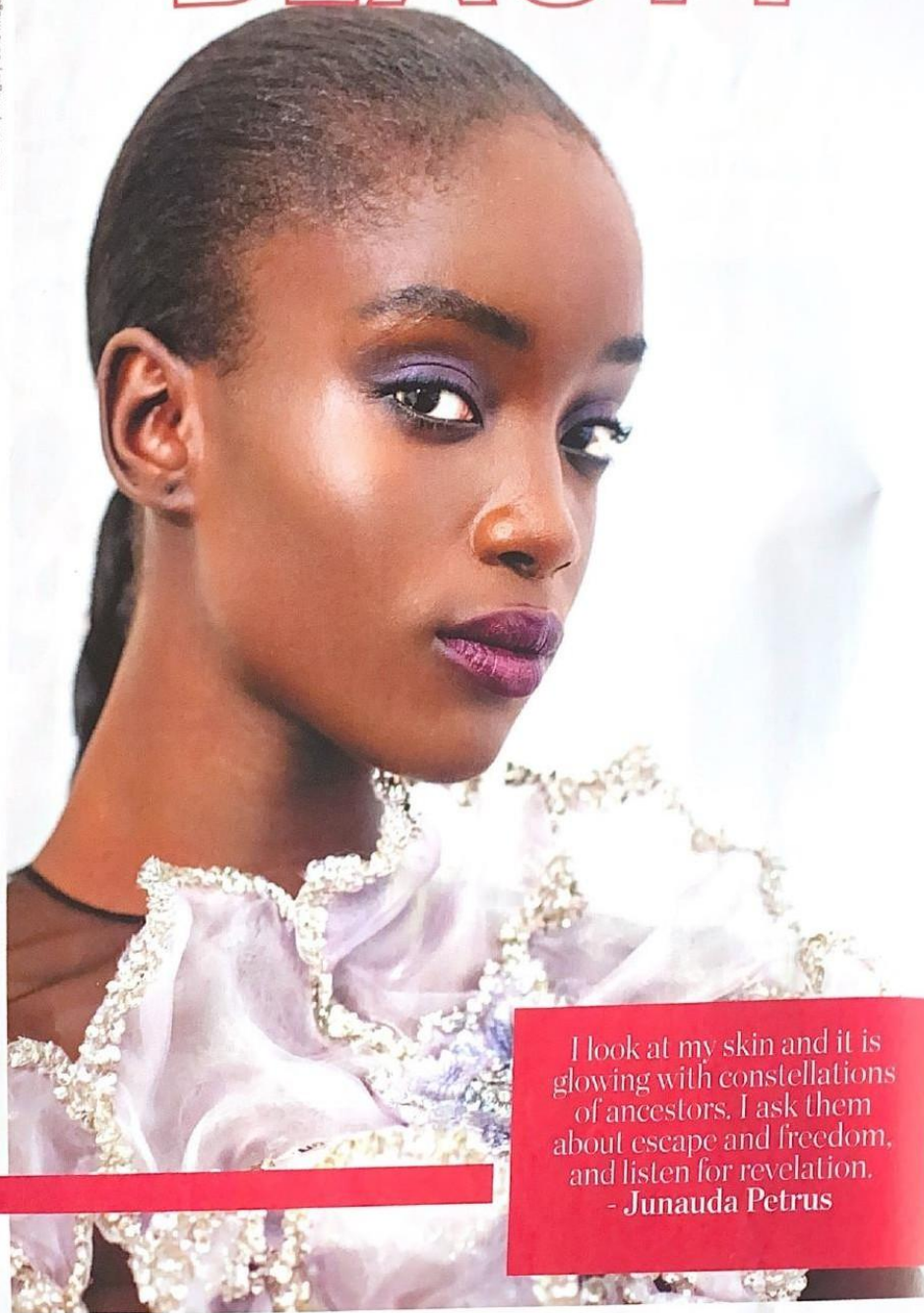


White t-shirt **R249** Old Khaki
Denim pants **R299** Woolworths
Fluffy coat **R1099** Woolworths

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BEAUTY

IMAGE Getty Images / Gallo Images



I look at my skin and it is glowing with constellations of ancestors. I ask them about escape and freedom, and listen for revelation.
- Junauda Petrus

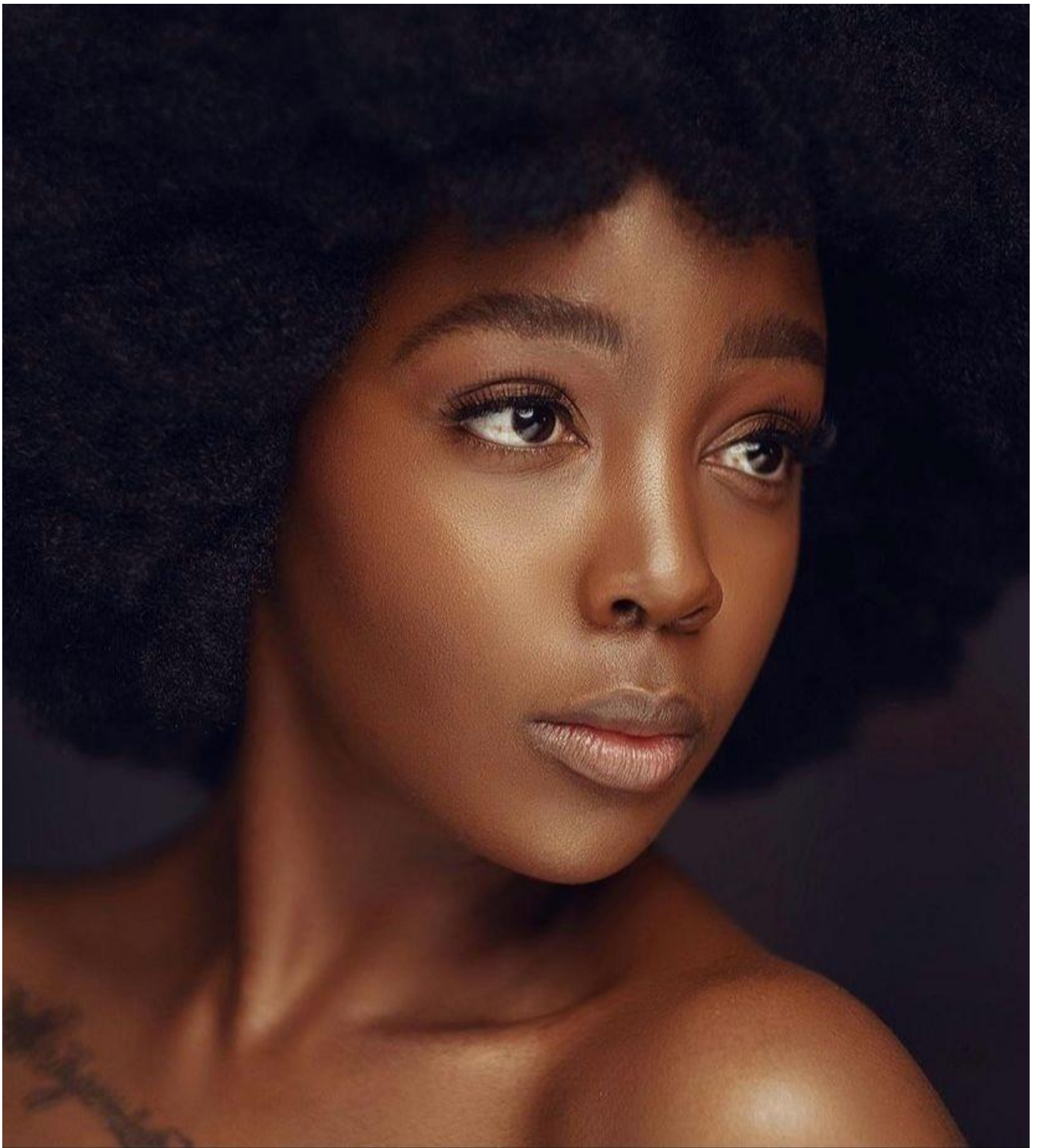
Appendix 10: Images chosen by student participants













Appendix A: Analysis of images

Analysis of images						
Source	Description of image	Placement	Colour	Shape and size	Background	General comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facial expression - Activity: what is the character doing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centrality: placing of the image in the centre or close to the centre of the page. - Images in the centre are the main focus. 	<p><i>Colours in the image</i></p> <p>Hue- primary colours: red, green, blue and secondary colours.</p> <p>Value- the brightness of colour- light/ dark</p> <p>Intensity- strength of a colour: bright or dull</p> <p><i>Skin tone</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - light pale - pale - tanned - brown - dark brown - black 	<p>The scale and/ or size is often used to indicate the importance of the image.</p> <p>The character size can convey different emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting: Where is the character? - Description of the background or setting. 	

<p>Participant A – Elderly Participant: [Photo of Zola Ayabulela Mhlongo], 2023, April/June, True Love Magazine, pg. 66</p>	<p>In the photo, Zola is looking into the camera with her mouth slightly open and pulling her grey jacket.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page and it is the main focus.</p>	<p>The primary colour is burnt orange in the background. Attention is also drawn to the colour of the grey coat worn by the model. Intensity: dull Skin Tone: tanned</p>	<p>The image is a medium shot, allowing the viewer to see the details of the photo.</p>	<p>The background is plain with a burnt orange colour.</p>	<p>The model is wearing a long, straight black wig, Type II Straight to open wave. Her skin complexion is tanned, making both these aspects more aligned with Western beauty standards. Her clothing covers her body and it is well-fitted, which caters to the preferences of the elderly.</p>
<p>Participant B – Elderly Participant: [Photo of Thuso Mbedu], 2023, July/September, True Love Magazine, pg. 50</p>	<p>In the photo, Thuso is looking into the camera posing with her hands behind her head.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page and it is the main focus</p>	<p>The primary colours are white and silver, which is the colour of the background and the model's outfit. Intensity: bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The image is a medium shot, allowing the viewer to see the details of the photo.</p>	<p>The background is plain with the colours white and silver.</p>	<p>The model is wearing her natural hair with added extensions, Type VIII Zig-Zag coiled hair and her skin complexion is dark brown, which leans toward African beauty. The model's clothing reveals her waist area and shows the participant's preference for Western standards when it comes to body size and clothing.</p>

<p>Participant C – Elderly Participant: [photo of black African model], 2022, August/September, True Love, pg., 18</p>	<p>In the photo, the model is showing a side view of her face and she is looking intensely into the camera without smiling.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page and it is the main focus.</p>	<p>The primary colour is white, which is the background. The other colour is purple, which is the colour of her lipstick and eyeshadow. Intensity: bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The image is a close-up shot, allowing the viewer to see the details of the facial features.</p>	<p>The background is plain with a white colour.</p>	<p>The model is wearing her natural hair, Type I straight to minimal wave and because the model is a black African an inference can be made that chemicals were used on her hair. The model's skin complexion is dark brown, which speaks to African beauty. An inference can be made that although this model shows features of African beauty, there is an appreciation for Western beauty standards based on the hair and makeup applied.</p>
<p>Participant D – Elderly Participant: [photo of Nombulelo Malinga], 2023, April, BONA Magazine, pg. 59</p>	<p>In the photo, the model is looking away from the camera with a closed-mouth smile.</p>	<p>The photo is placed on the top right corner of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are black and white, which black is the colour of her hair and top, and her jacket is black and white. Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a close-up shot focusing on the model's face.</p>	<p>The background seems to be outside as we can see the greenery i.e. grass or trees.</p>	<p>The model is wearing her natural hair, which is Type VI Coiled and her skin colour is dark brown, suggesting a preference for African beauty standards. The way the model has posed and her attire, head tilted back and revealing clothing, suggest an objectifying male gaze. This possibly perpetuates the notion that women's beauty is</p>

						<p>tied to their physical appearance and appeal to men.</p>
<p>Participant E – Elderly Participant: [photo of black African model, Sphelele Chikowi], 2023, February/March, True Love Magazine, pg. 16.</p>	<p>In the photo, the model has her hand on her hip and the other on her head, and she is directly looking at the camera and smiling.</p>	<p>The photo is placed centrally but on the upper part of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colour is white, which is that of the background.</p> <p>Intensity: Dull Skin Tone: Brown including a skin condition called Vitiligo</p>	<p>The photo is a medium shot allowing the viewer to focus on the details of the dress worn by the model.</p>	<p>The background is plain with a white colour.</p>	<p>The model has braids on her head, which is one of the many black African hairstyles that use hair extensions. The model’s skin complexion is brown and she has a skin condition called Vitiligo. Further to this, her body type and her colourful traditional patterned dress show an appreciation for African beauty.</p>
<p>Participant F – Elderly Participant: [photo of black African model] 2023, February, BONA Magazine, pg. 17</p>	<p>In the photo, the model placed both her hands on her head, pushing her hair back to show her face properly. She is smiling and showing her teeth while looking directly at the camera.</p>	<p>The photo is placed centrally, taking 2/3 of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colour is pink as the background, her eyeshadow and her lipstick are the same colour.</p> <p>Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a close-up shot focusing on the model's face.</p>	<p>The background is plain with the colour pink</p>	<p>The model has short natural hair, Type VII very coiled and her skin tone is dark brown, which leans toward African beauty standards. Although this is so, there is an appreciation for Western beauty due to the make-up and accessories worn.</p>

<p>Participant A – Student Participant: [photo of Zozibini Tunzi wearing a suit [https://www.sn124.com/truelove/fashion/style-crush-zozibini-tunzi-pushing-power-in-monochrome-suits-20230223]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model poses with her arm open and looking away from the camera.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are grey and light blue. The background is a grey building and the model is wearing a blue suit.</p> <p>Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a long shot.</p>	<p>The background seems to be the side of a building that is grey.</p>	<p>Although the model has short natural hair, type VIII Zig-Zag coiled hair and a dark brown skin tone, which reflects African beauty standards, her body is slim and her suit reveals her upper body. An inference can be made that although this participant has an appreciation for natural beauty, there is an influence of Eurocentric standards on their perception of beauty.</p>
<p>Participant B – Student Participant [photo of Brenda Mhlongo in gym wear [https://images.app.goo.gl/5DaaVddWVjnnZwQ86]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model has posed in a running position with her gym wear on.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are black in grey. Part of the background is grey stairs where the model posed. Further to this, the model wore black gym wear and black shoes.</p> <p>Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a long shot</p>	<p>The background seems outdoors with a flight of stairs as we can see the sky and staircase.</p>	<p>The model is wearing a weave with Type III wavy hair and although her skin tone is brown, there is a conformation to Western standards of beauty due to the hair and type of outfit the model is wearing. It can be inferred that the participant conforms to Western ideals about body structure and activities related to this ideal.</p>

<p>Participant C – Student Participant [photo of Lupita Nyong’o at Awards Ceremony [https://images.app.goo.gl/LfVvkmmgPhTGRhvf8]]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model poses in a white dress with beads, looking directly at the camera and smiling.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colour is white, which comes from the dress.</p> <p>Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Black</p>	<p>The photo is a close-up shot focusing on the model's face.</p>	<p>The background seems outdoors at an awards ceremony with spectators at the back.</p>	<p>The model has short natural hair type VIII Zig-Zag coiled hair and a dark brown skin tone, which reflects African beauty standards. The model is wearing makeup and her dress seems to just show her arms but covers the rest of her body.</p>
<p>Participant D – Student Participant: [photo of Audrey Skosana [https://za.pinterest.com/pin/amawethe--546131892326466921/]]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model seems to be speaking at an event wearing a traditional attire function.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are black, green and orange, which are colours of the attire. These colours draw attention.</p> <p>Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a medium shot allowing the viewer to focus on the details of the dress worn by the model.</p>	<p>The background seems to be in a closed setting at a traditional function.</p>	<p>The model has her natural hair, type VIII Zig-Zag coiled hair and a dark brown skin tone. She also does not have any makeup and is wearing traditional attire, showing her conformation to African beauty standards. Although parts of her body are revealed, she is wearing traditional attire.</p>

<p>Participant E – Student Participant: photo of Thuso Mbedu [https://swisherpost.co.za/local/who-is-thuso-mbedu-vila-davis-the-woman-king/]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model is posing and looking away at the camera.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are brown and black due to the image being in close range, the focus is on the colour of the model's skin. The colour of the hair and background is black, which contrasts the brown. Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Dark Brown</p>	<p>The photo is a close-up shot focusing on the model's face.</p>	<p>The background is dark and plain.</p>	<p>The model has a wig on, but it is an Afro wig with Type VIII Zig-Zag coiled hair. Although she does have makeup, it looks simple creating a natural look and her skin tone is dark brown. An inference can be made that the participant who chose this image is drawn to natural or African beauty standards.</p>
<p>Participant F – Student Participant: photo of Nomzamo Mbatha [https://images.app.goo.gl/1Mk4gSYwXpgSg7kQ6]</p>	<p>In the photo, the model is posing with her arms on the side and looking directly at the camera with a closed mouth smile.</p>	<p>The photo is placed in the centre of the page.</p>	<p>The primary colours are grey and green. Green is the colour of the dress, with many other colours and designs. Grey is the colour of the background. Intensity: Bright Skin Tone: Tanned</p>	<p>The photo is a medium shot allowing the viewer to focus on the details of the dress worn by the model.</p>	<p>The background is grey and plain making the viewer focus on the model.</p>	<p>The model is wearing is tanned and has a hairstyle in braids. She has also worn a modern dress with African prints, showing an appreciation for African beauty. Further to this, the model has makeup on, however, it looks simple creating a natural look.</p>