

Introduction

Everyday life is strongly based on social divisions and the way in which people are divided into different categories according to gender. This classification inevitably leads to social expectations and the construction of different behaviours, as women and men live their lifeworld together and at the same time behave and act in different ways. The constituted gender differences, therefore, creates a need for sociologists to study the distinctions between women and men in everyday life, with the social scientist's analysis of gender differences leading to specific notions of femininity and masculinity.

The classification of gender and the resultant differences related to femininity and masculinity become problematic over time as a consequence of the societal expectations that are placed on each gender. For women, it results in specific gender expectations as women are expected to be feminine, loving and self-less. In addition, women are expected to abide by often unrealistic standards of beauty. These beauty standards often give value to the Eurocentric standard of beauty (fair light skin tone, a slim body, and long, straight, silky hair). As a result, such expectations make African black women's lives more complicated as most do not possess the associated physical features of the Eurocentric standards of beauty.

This study examines "The perceptions of femininity by young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa". I pursue this through an exploration of the perceptions of female beauty and the body by African black women. Furthermore, I analyse how their everyday conceptions of femininity impact on their everyday constructions of female beauty. Therefore, participants from diverse backgrounds (body, ethnicity, hairstyle, skin colour, class) are selected to participate in the study.

Chapter one constitutes the theoretical premise of the dissertation. The theoretical framework consists of theories concerned with people's everyday lives in their lifeworld. The theories also give a voice to those being studied, in other words, they allow the participants to narrate their everyday lives and experiences in the lifeworld from their own point of view. The theories that provide a context for this dissertation are related to social constructivism, phenomenology, feminist theories (feminist phenomenology, standpoint theory, and intersectionality), and Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the body as physical capital. These theories are used as a framework to

get a deeper understanding of young African black women's perceptions of femininity.

Social constructivism is utilised to explain how everyday perceptions of female beauty are socially and historically embedded. It is also used to establish how meanings of beauty change over time and come to be taken for granted by people as they live their everyday lives. I draw on phenomenology in an attempt to understand African black women's subjective experiences of femininity (female beauty and the body). Furthermore, phenomenology is used to explore how black women's everyday conceptions of femininity are influenced by those with whom they share their lifeworld.

Moreover, the use of feminist theories enables me to give a voice to participants under study as I try to provide an understanding of African black women's perceptions of femininity in everyday life. Feminist phenomenology is utilised to situate the study by showing how perceptions of beauty and the body are embodied. This is done by presenting the narratives as they are told by those being studied. From a standpoint theory perspective, the provided narratives are expected to differ due to participants' unique social context in the lifeworld. As a result, perceptions of beauty are expected to differ slightly from one participant to the next. Nonetheless, all the participants are given the opportunity to explain how they individually comprehend and perceive female beauty and the body in their everyday lives.

The intersectionality theory is used to determine the way in which beauty is racialised. That is, how it is understood through the intersection of gender, race and class, and how this intersection influences how participants perceive and negotiate female beauty in everyday life. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the body is used to understand how participants attend to the female body in their everyday lives, and how this in turn influences their everyday constructions as well as their negotiations with beauty.

As already stated, female beauty is predominantly understood and valued along the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Eurocentric standards of beauty valorise a light skin tone, a slim body and long, straight, silky hair. My intention is to look at the historical constructions and conceptions of female beauty and the body that exclude African black women. I thus seek, from this exploration, to understand how exclusion within

the Eurocentric standard of beauty impacts on African black women's everyday perceptions and constructions of female beauty. This is done by looking at the available literature on beauty and the female body, particularly the black female body. Additionally, the literature review also considers African black women's everyday beauty constructions that pay attention to hair, body and skin colour issues. The above mentioned will be covered on Chapter 2 of the dissertation

Chapter three of the dissertation provides an overview of the research steps taken in the course of the study. This chapter highlights the importance of qualitative research and the narrative approach in the study of everyday life. The chapter also presents information on how the narratives on female beauty and the body are collected. This is done by looking at the formulated research questions for the study: i) How do young black women in South Africa perceive of the female body? What is their subjective experience of the black female body in everyday life? ii) How do they perform their femininities? Are these gender performances informed by the dominant culture? iii) And how accessible is the cultural and economic capital to follow the aesthetics standards of the female body?

Chapters four and five focus on the presentation of the data analysis and discussion of the findings. All the aforementioned steps and literature processes are used to understand further how young African black women perceive female beauty and the body in their everyday life.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework to the study on “The perceptions of femininity among young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa”. The chapter considers various interpretative paradigms in order to provide a context on the issues explored in the study with regard to femininity, especially issues on female beauty and body among young African black women.

1.1 Interpretative paradigms

Max Weber’s call for analytic methods that acknowledge individual action and subjective involvement has been important within the study of everyday behaviour by social actors (Ritzer, 2012:124). These methods, which are incorporated in qualitative research, are interested in how social agents establish and attach meaning to their everyday behaviours within the lifeworld. Qualitative research can be understood as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a multiple of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recording, and memos to the self” (Creswell, 2013:44). As a result, qualitative research studies social phenomena as it conducts research on participants with the intention of understanding the meaning that people attribute to objects and their social world. Moreover, qualitative research subscribes to the existence of multiple realities within the lifeworld (Creswell, 2007:16-17). Therefore, I focus on individual meaning as expressed by female participants and analyse it with the intention of establishing a better understanding of their lived experiences within the lifeworld.

I also use narrative analysis as a method of inquiry within the study, as participants give account of their experiences in the social world (Creswell, 2013:70). This is because narrative analysis is regarded as a vital tool in constructing a deeper understanding of social agents’ subjective experience of everyday life. As an analytical tool, narratives are “spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions chronologically connected” (Czarniawska

2004: cited in Creswell, 2013:70). Data are thus collected by means of storytelling in which participants give a narration of their everyday experiences in the lifeworld.

The data collection methods demand that I use a number of theoretical approaches. The approaches include social constructivism which attempt to comprehend the world within which people develop meanings (Creswell, 2007:20). These are the meanings that people establish through their subjective experiences of and interaction within the social world. However, these meanings tend to vary due to the existence of multiple realities in which social actors find themselves. Furthermore, social constructivism together with phenomenology, feminist theories and Bourdieu's theory of the body provide the analytical lenses for my research. These theories have been chosen because of their emphasis on participants' lived experiences as well as how they make sense of their everyday life. I thus use the theoretical lenses to try and understand young African black women's perceptions of femininity, especially that of the female beauty and the body. I also seek to comprehend how the intersection between race, gender and class impacts on the female participants' construction of femininity in their everyday life.

1.2 Social constructivism

Social constructivism (sometimes referred to as interpretivism) operates on the premise that social actors try to comprehend their social world and its surroundings (Creswell, 2013:24). In trying to understand their surroundings as well as their social world, people are believed to establish meanings which are intentionally directed to objects in the lifeworld. According to Harris (2007:232), these meanings are socially constructed and learned, and reinterpreted during social encounters with others. As a result, all objects within the social world are given meaning on the basis of the relevance that the objects have for people. In addition, these meanings are multiple, and thus require researchers to be open-minded to the multiple interpretations of phenomena. I therefore expect the study's female participants' understanding of femininity, and more specifically their perceptions on female beauty and the body, to vary because of their diverse social contexts. Different meanings will be attributed to femininity by female participants.

Departing from social constructivist meanings of femininity, particularly of female beauty and the body implies that I need to situate my research socially and

historically (Creswell, 2013:25). Moreover, femininity is negotiated by social actors through social interaction with others (Creswell, 2013:25). Femininity here includes beauty practices such as wearing make-up, doing one's hair, and wearing high heels, all of which are performances often associated with femininity. Conceptions of femininity are therefore understood to be the result of socialisation. Hence, by using social constructivism I seek to understand how knowledge about gender (femininity) and race is socially constructed and negotiated during social encounters, and how such knowledge impacts on black female participants' constructions of female beauty and the body in their everyday life.

1.2.1 The social construction of reality

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's interest in the individual as well as social action, in which they sought to show how everyday reality is the socially constructed (Ritzer, 1983:208), is significant in the outlining of the concept of social construction of reality. Here Berger and Luckmann's focus is on the individual and how the individual operates within social structures and institutions of the lifeworld. This can be achieved by situating the individual within the wider society. The main focus of Berger and Luckmann's work is the analysis of objective facticity in combination with subjective meaning by social actors. These ideas have been captured in their book "The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge" (Ritzer, 1983:209). In this book Berger and Luckmann state that they want to move away from the focus on abstract concepts to the everyday construction of reality by people (Harris, 2007:233; Ritzer, 1983:209). As such they argue that the sociology of knowledge must delve deeper into what social agents know to be reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966, cited Harris, 2007:233). The focus on everyday life assists in the attempt at understanding the common-sense knowledge of people. This is because common-sense knowledge is to them the foundation of all knowledge as well as meanings about the lifeworld. Hence, it is for this reason that Berger and Luckmann emphasised the focus on "the social construction of reality" by social actors.

In their book ("The social construction of reality: a treatise to the sociology of knowledge") Berger and Luckmann stipulate that the social world appears to social agents as real and independent of their own actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:13; Inglis, 2012: 93; Ritzer, 1983:209). Furthermore, it "appears as objectified

and seems to impose itself on the actor” (Ritzer, 1983:209). Inglis (2012:93) contends that the very existence of this reality is maintained by individuals, but it comes to be taken for granted as people go about their everyday activities. As such, we never put this reality into question in our quest to live normal lives (Berger and Luckmann 1967, cited in Ritzer, 1983:209). The scholar also argues that language, which gives life as well as meaning to people’s everyday behaviours and actions in the lifeworld, is important to the objectification of reality. It is indeed, during institutionalisation that certain aspects of everyday life become routinised (Inglis, 2012:94). Thus, during habituation repetition of behaviours takes place, and certain behaviours become naturalised by actors. Habituation his time witnesses the production of typifications that serve as guides to everyday life (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:45; Inglis, 2012:94-95). These typifications are then implanted into individuals’ practical consciousness. As a result people rarely reflect upon them and they therefore get naturalised (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:33).

I understand, drawing on the principals of social construction of reality that, people’s subjective experiences of femininity (female beauty and the body) are socially constructed during social interaction with others. I am also aware that people attach certain meanings to female beauty and the body. These meanings become objectified through the use of language and words in everyday social encounters and therefore acquire their natural status as already mentioned. Therefore, I argue that people’s knowledge about female beauty and the body is located in views about a so called ideal woman constructed by society over time. That means for women to be considered beautiful they must possess certain qualities that are associated with Eurocentric beauty such as long, straight, silky hair, a straight nose, a light skin tone and a slim body shape. These qualities are socially and historically bound and have come to form an objectified reality for women over time. Hence, I seek to understand, within this study, how female participants construct and negotiate meanings of female beauty and the body in the light of what the broader society defines as female beauty.

1.2.2 Language and intersubjectivity

I draw on the concept of language and intersubjectivity to show how meanings about femininity (female beauty and the body) are communicated and objectified through everyday interactions with others. Human forms of expression, as understood by Berger and Luckmann (1966:49), have the potential of being transformed into objectified objects. Both scholars argue that language expresses objective meaning and define it as “a system of vocal signs” (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:51). According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:483), language is essential in the creation of meanings about everyday reality and the expression of these meanings as objective reality. Consequently, these communicated meanings result in different ways of thinking and doing things among different groups of people. Therefore, in this study I state that the different meanings that people attach to femininity and beauty and the language they use to define femininity (female beauty and the body) lead to different understandings of female beauty and the body by individuals from across different social contexts. These understandings are the result of shared meanings through social interaction. Hence, in this study I seek to understand the role of language and intersubjectivity in female participants’ construction of female beauty and the body in everyday life.

1.2.3 The construction of gender

Gender is a contested concept and its intricacy can be connected to the existence of various schools of thought on gender. The different schools of thought include those schools that take a biological stand, usually referred to as essentialist schools, and those that view gender as socially constructed, which are commonly called the social constructionist schools. However, within this dissertation the working definition of gender that is utilised perceives gender as socially constructed rather than biologically determined notions of “‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’” (Moffett, 2008:105). According to Rabe (2014:153) gender draws us to the physically noticeable features that make one either male or female. As a result, Wood (2007:18) states that there exist notable differences between women and men, and these dissimilarities are important in understanding the complexity of gender. These differences are reinforced through adornment in which young boys and girls are encouraged to wear clothing that coincides with their various genders (Rabe, 2014:154). The following

discussion, nonetheless, focuses on how gender has been viewed by both the essentialists and social constructivists.

The essentialists' perspective on gender is based on biological differences between women and men (Wood, 2007:19). These differences are considered to be natural by people. According to the essentialists' view, the biological differences between women and men lead to gender specific experiences and behaviours (Spellman 1988, cited in Wood, 2007:19). As a result, essentialists can be viewed as taking a biologically determinist view of gender (Wood, 2007:19). They thus maintain that there are certain biological differences that serve to distinguish women from men based on sex (Wharton, 2005:19). This concept is however, confused with gender and the two terms are then used interchangeably as if they refer to the same thing (Imafidon, 2013:22).

The essentialist way of thinking has been widely abandoned as it does not explain the differences among members of the same sex. Furthermore, it does not explain the existence of similarities between women and men. Such views have been seen to be true in cases involving transsexual individuals whose assigned gender tends to conflict with their perceived sex (Rabe, 2014:154). Consequently, Delphy (1993:61) considers determinist thinking as problematic since it often equates sex with gender. This is because sex is biologically determined, while gender is a social construct. Therefore, using social constructivism in this study, I seek to show how gender is socially constructed. I also seek to show how gender cannot be simplified to biological differences because it is a social construct (Wood, 2007:22). Finally, I intend to use social constructivism as a lens to examine how meanings are created and how people attach meanings to gender (Allen, 2010:18).

Social constructivism postulates that an individual's subjective experience of the social world stems from their social interaction with others through social encounters (Gergen and Gergen 2000, cited in Allen, 2010:68). It can then be assumed that what female participants know as well as understand about gender is a result of social interaction with others. It is through social interaction that meanings to gender are attached. These meanings are then subjectively negotiated and interpreted by individuals in relation to the society's conceptions of gender (in this case femininity).

The social constructivist approach to gender also considers sex as inescapable and beyond our control (Wharton, 2005:22). However, the same cannot be said about gender. This is because gender, as noted above, is understood to be a “system of social practices” that works to construct and sustain differences between women and men (Wharton, 2005:7). Within this definition gender is comprehended to be both fixed and changing across space and time. Furthermore, it is the by-product of social interaction with others in which meanings are attached to male and female behaviours (Rabe, 2014:156). These meanings are then transferred from one person to another through shared meanings in social encounters within society (Wetherell 1996, cited in Rabe, 2014:156). It is also important to know that the meanings are learned and internalised by people during childhood socialisation (Wood, 2007:23). Children are encouraged to act in gender-appropriate ways that conform to societal norms of gender during socialisation. For instance, young girls are encouraged to be selfless and play with dolls, whilst boys are encouraged to be tough, strong, and show no weakness (Wood, 2007:23). Consequently, various institutions, which include the family, church and the media, serve as socialising agents in the transmission of gender appropriate behaviour and messages (Rabe, 2014:157). It is from these observations that social constructivists argue that we should view gender as socially constructed, rather than naturally acquired (Wetherell 1996, cited in Rabe, 2014:158).

I therefore intend, in this section of the dissertation, to understand how gender meanings are constructed and communicated through social encounters with others. I also assess how these constructions impact on female participants’ comprehension and constitution of femininity in everyday life.

1.2.4 Gender performance in everyday life

This section focuses on gender performance in everyday life and its impact on women’s construction of female beauty and the body. I begin the discussion by claiming that both women and men engage in gender performance in order to prove their worthiness as societal members (West and Zimmerman, 2002:4). The performances involve a string of activities aimed at validating one’s masculinity or femininity. In addition, social and political institutions are organized in a manner that maintains gender differences.

The understanding of gender as performance enables us to view gender as something undertaken by people (West and Zimmerman, 2002:4). Gender performance is marked by social encounters with other societal members engaged in the establishment of certain gender specific behaviours. As a result, gender can be viewed as the consequence of social interaction between people organised precisely for the management of social relations and a social construction that validates the existence of divisions among societal members. Gender, as a tool for societal organisation, also influences how people behave (West and Zimmerman, 2002:4). This can be noted in how people manage their behaviour to correlate with a specific gender, while also expecting others to do the same.

West and Zimmerman (2002:6) consider the notion of gender as a social product by focusing on Goffman's work on gender display. This analysis seeks to show how gender becomes perceived as natural, rather than socially created. Within his work on gender display, Goffman contends that human interaction is possible through the notion of 'essential natures' (Goffman 1979, cited in West and Zimmerman, 2002:6). These 'essential natures' are displayed in people's enactment of masculine and feminine behaviours through social encounters with others. As such, the division of labour serves to validate gender differences. Goffman also states that gender display is a conventionalised behaviour. That is, it is gender behaviour performed for a specific audience. This understanding of gender follows a scripted dramatisation. According to West and Zimmerman (2002:7) this dramatisation is in accordance with society's designated male and female roles.

Gender performance is also perceived as subject to accountability by societal members (Heritage 1984, cited in West and Zimmerman, 2002:12). Accountability, here, means that social actors act in a gender appropriate manner. This is also where the actual performance of gender by people takes place. In doing/performing gender, people would therefore be behaving in ways that validate their masculinity and their femininity. According to West and Fenstermaker (2002:43) doing/performing gender sets the stage for differences between women and men, and is independent of social situations. Gender differences can therefore be found through the separation of spaces for women and men as noted in locker rooms and beauty salons. Consequently, gender accountability entails naming, categorising and explaining social activities. These interpretations are themselves rendered a certain

level of accountability by societal members. This means that people are expected to abide by the socially created gender behaviours. Furthermore, this goes beyond individual behaviours and can be found to be a feature of social relationships as well as dimensions of social institutions.

Femininity as a concept of gender is a social construct that emerged within the eighteenth century text (Poovey 1984, cited in Skeggs, 2002:311). The ideal femininity designed during this period was aligned with the lifestyle of upper-class women. These were women of class and stature who were calm and exhibited restraint. More importantly, these characteristics set them apart from the rest of the women in that time period. The ideal femininity was communicated through textual media such as magazines. This image continued to the nineteenth century through textual messages and other forms of media that continued to reinforce such understandings of femininity.

Visual images have proved to be the most important source in the construction of femininity ideals and the allocation of values to different groups of women (Skeggs, 2002:312). This femininity was associated with passiveness, gentleness and respectability. By the end of the eighteenth century these characteristics were implicit symbols of femininity among middle-class women, and thus sought after by all women. With the understanding that the media plays a significant role in communicating meanings of gender (femininity), I seek to determine the extent to which female participants' gender performances are informed by the media. The focus on gender performance is to unpack how femininity is an act that female participants engage in in everyday life in the lifeworld and how their everyday gender constructions (femininity) render some degree of accountability depending on whether they coincide with societal members' idealisation of femininity.

1.2.5 The construction of race

Race, like gender, is a contested concept which cannot be studied from a deterministic perspective, but rather from a social constructivist point of view. Also, like gender, race is the consequence of social constructions and not only by biological validations (Elam and Elam, 2010:186; West and Fenstermaker, 2002:66). It is a social category supported by political and imagined differences by people (Elam and Elam, 2010:186). These imagined dissimilarities are often based on one's

skin colour, hair texture, and eye shade (Greenstein, 2014:175). In other cases the perceived differences are founded upon body features and blood groups, and gene pool (Bhavnani 1993, cited in Woodward, 2003:115).

Moreover, people are often classified into various groups using so-called scientific methods that serve to validate the biological nature of race (Bhavnani 1993, cited in Woodward, 2003:115). The differences are also validated by individuals' obedience to them. Accountability to race categorisation has sustained the existence of race within society (West and Fenstermaker, 2002:69). The classification of people into various groups has come to inform everyday life, social organisation, political institutions and religious rituals. I thus intend to find out how the construction of race impacts on young women's perception of femininity. I also consider how the construction of race as a social category influences women's subjective experiences of female beauty and the body in everyday life. Lastly, I consider how race and gender impact on the women's construction of femininity.

1.2.6 The construction of race in South Africa

The history of human development has often been based on the idea of natural evolution (Erasmus, 2008:169). This understanding informed much of what we know about human life, including the move from primitive to modern societies. It is also from this understanding that nineteenth century biologists founded their theories of human evolution, descent and kinship. Ideas of race were often established using science and natural evolution. It is thus from this scientific discourse that race became naturalised.

Within the nineteenth century, Southern Africa served as a location in which a number of the period's human scientific experiments were undertaken (Erasmus, 2008:170). Prominent here was the use of Khoisan people as test subjects in order to fill in the gap between humankind and apes (Dubow 1995, cited in Erasmus, 2008:170). This is noted further in the exhibition of the body of the Hottentot woman, Saartjie Baartman, in Europe (Abrahams 1997; Strother 1999, all cited in Erasmus, 2008:1700). It is through the work of French anatomists that the ideas of race became naturalised and therefore used to validate the claims related to visible differences between people.

Race then became comprehended as a natural construct that reinforced notions of superiority and inferiority between different groups of people. Inequalities were consequently born out of such biological distinctions. Colonial South Africa took up these European science-based ideas on racism to create a cruel racist system (Fredrickson 2002, cited in Erasmus, 2008:171). Later on, these ideologies influenced the twentieth-century institution of the apartheid systems in South Africa which was organised around the notion of race as a biological construct. However, the formation and operation of apartheid in South Africa tended to be inconsistent with the science of race. This was because race was a social construct, rather than biological.

The early 20th century racism in South Africa was informed by the outcome of the South African war of 1899-1902 (Erasmus, 2008:171), and the separation of natives and settlers which was based on language and race. Furthermore, nationalism was used to distinguish white races, that is, white British from white Afrikaners. It is however during the Great Depression (1929-1939) as well as the period of industrial urbanisation that segregation laws became stricter. This is because many white people felt threatened by the move of large numbers of black to the cities in search for jobs. This then led to the enactment of firm laws of segregation in the early 20th century that sought to separate blacks and whites in South Africa and the segregation became more pronounced during the apartheid era.

During the apartheid era in South Africa the social categories of race, class as well as cultural nationalism become intertwined (Erasmus, 2008:1710). These social categories were used in the formulation of Bantu policies that separated South African blacks to different areas on the basis of ethnicity. In addition, race was utilised in the grouping of people into hierarchies and in determining access to basic human needs such as housing, health and education. Within this classification, white people were awarded full citizenship, and coloured and Indian people received partial citizenship (Erasmus, 2008:171-172). Black Africans within this classification system were perceived as mere tribal subjects and therefore occupied the bottom of the hierarchy (Erasmus, 2008:172). They were further divided into ethnic and non-citizen groups of Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, and other black South African indigenous groupings.

These separate African groups and nationalities were later constituted into the so-called independent “nations” (Erasmus, 2008:172). Race, however, became more pronounced in determining the allocation of basic needs such as housing, education, and employment. Race was thus naturalised by the unequal access to social necessities, including people’s relation to their social world and views and more importantly, it facilitated a visible definition of spaces between different racial groups that served to validate racial distinctions.

The after effects of apartheid continue to have an impact on the lives of many South Africans within post-apartheid (1994) South Africa (Erasmus, 2008:172). This is evident through the social inequalities that continue to have devastating effects on the lives of many South Africans. Race still plays a big role in shaping their everyday lives. Also what seems to be clear within post-apartheid South Africa is that the social categories of race and class intersect in even more complicated ways than it did in apartheid South Africa. Race in post-apartheid South Africa, indeed tends to operate in more discrete ways (Erasmus 2006, all cited in Erasmus, 2008:172; Luhabe 2002; Soudien 2004; Steyn and Van Zyl 2001).

A few black South Africans have been able to overcome some of the effects of apartheid (Erasmus, 2008:172), but social inequalities still seem to be at an all-time high (Greenstein, 2014:181). This can be noted in the way a large number of African black South Africans still struggle to make ends meet on a daily basis (Erasmus, 2008:172-173). This can be linked to the residual effect of a long history of colonialism in South Africa. Race relations as such can be understood as both socially and historically constructed. Moreover, these constructions of race are entangled with issues of class and gender. It is then for this reason that I focus on the construction of race in South Africa in order to understand how race construction based on apartheid South Africa impact on female participants’ perceptions of the black female body.

1.2.7 Gender and race

Race is one social category which has had the most significant impact on gender and especially femininity (Glover and Kaplan, 2000:10). Histories, such as that of slavery continue to constrain black women’s constructions of femininity, especially beauty and the body. It is small wonder that, as argued by authors such as W. E. D

DuBois, the emergence of black middle-class women assisted in raising questions about black femininity (Glover and Kaplan, 2000:37). However, this also functioned as one of their biggest challenges when they had to prove their femininity to others, especially due to descriptions of black women as sexually promiscuous creatures, a description that originates in the period of slavery (Glover and Kaplan, 2000:37).

The understanding of black women as sexually promiscuous beings has had a double impact on their lives as both women and black people. An awareness of this interlocking system of oppression has been perceived as vital by scholars such as Davis (Spellman, 1988:123), and ignorance of these factors serves as a disregard of black women's experience. As already mentioned, conceptions of black women that are based on derogatory messages have greatly influenced perceptions of femininity, particularly those of beauty among black women. This has made many black women to be uncertain with regards to constructions of femininity in everyday life. As a result, black women do not fall within the Eurocentric notions that define beauty as characterised by long, straight, silky hair, a long nose, a light skin tone and a slim body shape. I therefore, seek to understand how the intersection of gender and race impacts on female participants' perceptions as well as constructions of femininity.

1.3 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a theory which is concerned with people's everyday experiences of the world (Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:98). Everyday experiences here relate to how social actors feel, perceive and experience their surroundings within the lifeworld (Inglis, 2012:86). Phenomenology thus assists in the examination of meaning construction by individuals and their sense of the nature of everyday life (Inglis, 2012:86). Phenomenology is also interested in how the social world comes to be perceived as real by social actors as they go about their everyday lives (Rogers, 1983:14) and as a result phenomenologists integrate "reason and "experience" as they attempt to understand the world from the viewpoint of social actors. As a result phenomenologists pay close attention to:

"The descriptive delineation of what presents itself to consciousness as it presents and insofar as it presents itself. It seeks the most radical way to examine consciousness directly, to appreciate its contents and structures

quite apart from prior scientific commitments or philosophical pre-judgements, and strives, above all, to regain the immediate experiential world which we have forgotten, denied, or bartered away” (Rogers, 1983:14).

I therefore use phenomenology in an attempt to understand the female participants’ subjective perceptions and experiences of femininity in their everyday life. Using phenomenology I intend to find out how female participants make sense of everyday life, especially within the socially created meanings of what is gender (femininity) and race within the lifeworld.

1.3.1 The lifeworld

One of the most important concepts within the discipline of phenomenology is the lifeworld. The lifeworld, as understood by Rogers (1983:49), is the “surrounding world that provides the grounds of conscious existence”. It is the “everyday taken for granted world” by people as they go about their everyday lives (Inglis, 2012:90; Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:97; Ritzer, 1983:198; Smelser and Baltes, 2011:11361). It is comprehended as socially and culturally bound, and results in common-sense thinking as well as feelings about the world by a group of individuals. This common-sense thinking tends to be taken as normal by people and is thus never put into question by social actors. Moreover, the lifeworld is the pre-scientific world in which all human experiences take place (Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:197), and in which human life is possible (Rogers, 1983:49). Within this world, certain meanings about the social world are constructed and shared through social interaction with other actors (Husserl 1935/1970, cited in Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:97). It is therefore the place in which evidence about human experiences can be found.

The lifeworld, as observed by Schutz, “provides us with ready-made courses of action, solutions to problems, and interpretations of the social world, etc.” (Ritzer, 1983:199). Thus, people are forced, in everyday life, to routinised patterns, particularly in non-problematic situations. As a result social actors never find themselves in situations in which they have to question their surroundings. For that reason the lifeworld can be thought of as a vessel of typifications, that is, the container of all social experiences and knowledge about the social world.

This study uses the concept of the lifeworld because it is where the subjective experiences of femininity occur, especially that of female beauty and the body. It is also where meanings about gender and race are co-constructed by social agents during social interaction and subjectively interpreted by female participants' in everyday life. As outlined above, meanings of female beauty and body are socially created within the lifeworld; consequently, it is within the lifeworld that they acquire objective meaning through social encounters by people. My study therefore, seeks to understand how meanings of femininity (female beauty and body) are created and shared within the lifeworld by female participants. I also seek to understand how meanings about female beauty and body in the lifeworld impact on the constructions and perceptions of femininity.

1.3.2 Consciousness and meaning construction

In trying to explain how social actors comprehend their surrounding world, Schutz claimed that all answers could be found within consciousness (Ritzer, 1983:202). This is based on his belief that consciousness is the foundation of "meaning constitution, interpretation as well as understanding". Consciousness he believed, was "always intentional". This means that it is "always directed towards something or an object in the lifeworld" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:34; Rogers, 1983:22). According to Rogers (1983:22), it does not matter whether it is a book or a person's consciousness, it is always directed towards that object. It serves as the medium to the "real" and the "meant as real" world. Furthermore, various objects appear to consciousness as real and occupy different spheres of meaning, such as dreams (Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:99). Hence, within everyday life, objects and people present themselves as belonging to different "provinces of meaning" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:35).

However, the awareness of such realities, especially through consciousness, comes to be taken for granted by social actors (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:35). Everything within everyday life appears as already ordered for social agents and free of their actions. Language as such serves as the catalyst in which objects are institutionalised and acquire real meaning in everyday life. It is for this precise reason that I contend that meanings of femininity (female beauty and the body) should be understood as socially and historically embedded, but acquire real meaning over

time and space and therefore become viewed as natural by people. This arises from the fact that perceptions of femininity, particularly female beauty and the body are modelled after the Eurocentric beauty standard. Hence, for a woman to be considered beautiful she must have long, straight, silky hair, a slim body, light skin tone and other Eurocentric normatives of beauty. I seek to comprehend how meanings of femininity based on Euro-centrism are communicated and what language the female participants use to give these descriptions. I also aim at examining how they are subjectively interpreted and negotiated by female participants, and how this influences their perceptions of femininity in everyday life.

1.3.3 Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity is defined as the sharing of meaning between two or more people in the lifeworld, or shared knowledge about the social world (Johnson, 1995:146; Scott and Marshall, 2009:371). This collective constitution of meaning between social actors arises out of their shared experiences of everyday life within the lifeworld. These shared meanings are also comprehended as the consequence of an internalisation of components of the social world, or experience and interpretations thereof by people (Appelrouth and Edles, 2012:524). Lastly, intersubjectivity can be viewed as the interplay of typifications, intercommunication and language in everyday life by individuals (Appelrouth and Edles, 2012:24).

Within this study the concept of intersubjectivity is crucial to understanding how perceptions of femininity, particularly perceptions of female beauty and the body are communicated through social interaction, and how shared meanings about female beauty and body arise out of these social encounters by social actors. I therefore, use intersubjectivity to find out how meanings about femininity are communicated by female participants in their everyday interactions, how these meanings are subjectively interpreted by female participants and how it impacts on their lived experiences within the lifeworld.

1.3.4 Typifications and habitus

Schutz understood people's everyday experiences of the lifeworld and their surroundings as the result of typifications (Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009:102). Typifications are comprehended as special ideal types that individuals use in

everyday life (Appelrouth and Edles, 2012:522). They are used in relation to their specific functions by social agents. Moreover, typifications, including knowledge on how and when to use them, are instilled in people during early childhood socialisation (Ritzer, 1983:197). Hence, typifications can be seen as a recollection of individuals' experiences within the lifeworld (Natanson, 1979:534). In this study, I therefore seek to understand how female participants use typifications in their everyday constructions of femininity (female beauty and the body) and how they influence their perceptions of femininity in everyday life.

Habitus is defined as the uniform set of mental capabilities found among a group of people (Inglis, 2012:213). They provide cues to everyday behaviours during social encounters, including how individuals must conduct themselves in certain social situations. Just as typifications, they are the result of a long history of internalisation of social structures within the lifeworld (Bourdieu 1989, cited in Ritzer, 2012:531). As a result, they can be regarded as internalised embodied social structures (Bourdieu 1984, cited in Ritzer, 2012:531). Within the undertaken study habitus is used to unpack how habitualised practices of femininity, especially the female participants' everyday beauty practices of female beauty and the body, influence the constructions of femininity, as well as the subjective experiences of female beauty and the body in everyday life.

1.4 Feminist theories

Within this part of the theoretical framework I draw on the ideas of feminist researchers in shedding light on the issues affecting women's everyday experiences. Feminism operates from the notion that both women and men must be afforded the same rights within society (Rabe, 2014:158). These rights cover most of everyday life, including access to various social institutions. Feminism as a movement is, nevertheless, dedicated to raising awareness about issues affecting women's lives (Creswell, 2013: 29) and considers women's lived experiences as shaped by their social context and existing institutions. Consequently, feminists challenge the oppression of women within a patriarchal society.

The development of feminism can be traced back to the development of three strands of feminism (Rabe, 2014:158). The first wave, called liberal feminism, was associated with women such as Mary Wollstonecraft and dates back to the late

nineteenth century and early twentieth-century (Inglis, 2012: 235). Liberal feminism was concerned with the attainment of the right to vote for white women and that of equal rights. The second wave, called Marxist feminism, emerged within the twentieth-century and operated for more than thirty years (Rabe, 2014:158). This strand of feminism sought to raise awareness about the domination of women in a patriarchal society, especially within its various institutions (Inglis, 2012:236). The third wave of feminism, known as radical feminism, is concerned with how gender exploitation, that is, the exploitation women by men works to the benefit of men (Rabe, 2014:159). It thus tackles issues such as unpaid work by women within the home as an institutionalised form of subordination.

A number of feminist schools of thought have since emerged from these three waves of feminism. Among these has also been the growth of theories aimed at analysing women's everyday life. What these theorists have in common is their concern for women's lived experiences in everyday life. They also seek to express these descriptions from a woman's pointed of view, thus avoiding male-centred biases within research. Within this study I use feminist phenomenology, standpoint theory, and the principles of intersectionality in providing insight into issues of femininity in the everyday life of young African black women.

1.4.1 Feminist phenomenology

Feminist phenomenology utilises a variety of scientific methods from the social sciences and tries to connect them to real life problems or situations (Simms and Stawarska, 2013:80). It also entails a philosophical style of thinking which can be traced back to the ideas of Husserl (Simms and Stawarska, 2013:9). Thus, in trying to understand women's lived experiences (Allen-Collinson, 2011:302) and their surroundings, feminist phenomenologists are interested in human consciousness (Simms and Stawarska, 2013:80). These lived experiences are seen to be embedded within a long history of social structures. This has therefore resulted in an analysis of women's lived experiences that takes into account the social structures that impact on their everyday life (Allen-Collinson, 2011:302). Hence, in their examination of women's lived experiences feminist phenomenologists pay close attention to human consciousness (Simms and Stawarska, 2013:9).

In addition, feminist phenomenologists are aware that women's experiences of the world are embodied, intersubjective and reflect the groups in which they belong (Simms and Stawarska, 2013:12). They also recognise that these experiences cannot be removed from both the personal and cultural spheres of life. They further note that our knowledge and experiences of the world is facilitated by our bodies (Butler, 1986:38). Goffman, a symbolic interactionist, attests to this by stating that social action is the product of bodies through the works of time and space (Butler, 1986:38). Moreover, it also considers that social action is linked to one's management of their body. These experiences are then maintained through social relations by social bodies. It is from these various processes that embodiment becomes an essential part of human experiences.

Based on that, I make the argument that experiences of femininity, especially female beauty and the body are embodied. This process of embodiment can be noted in the process of gender formation and internalisation that takes place during socialisation (Bigwood, 1991:57). Additionally, the process of embodiment reflects cultural ideologies and therefore explains the dissimilarities in gender roles across different groups. As a result, feminist phenomenologists argue against the naturalisation of gender by linking it to sex. Such arguments have also led to the discrediting of essentialism which is based on the natural/biological basis of femininity and masculinity between women and men (Bigwood, 1991:58). This work has been vital in the unpacking of cultural meaning attached to the human body. Hence, as suggested above, gender should be perceived more socially created than naturally given.

Butler argues that common understandings of gender are based on the notion of the body being natural (Bigwood, 1991:58). This comprehension of both the biological body and gender is believed to be the same across different cultures. However, to Butler both concepts of the body and gender have socially and historically constructed meanings that were established for the validation of specific epistemological and ontological claims. From this premise, gender is understood to be a mask worn for the inscription of distinctions between women and men (Bigwood, 1991:58). Consequently, gender results in the emergence of binary systems in which heteronormativity is given higher preference. Gender identities therefore emerge through the routinisation of bodily practices in everyday life.

In addition, certain body movements and gestures are developed through the everyday body practices and these then give the body its biological state (Butler 1990, cited Bigwood, 1991:58). Nonetheless, the analyses of gender and the body is aimed at untangling the inherent meanings attached to gender in everyday life. The body within this work is described as a cultural symbol resulting from political discourses. Any meanings attached to it are socially created, but they end up being viewed as natural. Bigwood (1991:57), argues that we try to perceive the human body as both culturally and historically embedded, and as a biological given. Gender, however, unlike the sexed body, cannot be comprehended from biologically deterministic views. This is because what we know about gender, including gender differences, is the result of social constructions (Butler 1990, cited in Bigwood, 1991:58).

According to Shilling, the extent to which individuals act towards and respond to their bodies varies between sexes and different social systems (Shilling, 2003[1993]:20). This is because different cultures have different ways of attending to their bodies (Mauss 1979[1934], cited in Shilling, 2003[1993]:20). These methods of responding to the body include providing individuals with a clear sense of identity, and a set of rules to see one through infancy, adolescences, and adulthood. They also encompass ways on how one should walk, talk and behave in general. In addition, the body is treated differently within different cultures (Shilling, 2003[1993]:20). These performances are perceived and interpreted differently in ways that oppose our intended actions. Consequently, our bodies enable certain actions such as walking (Craig, 2006:160). Lastly, Shilling believes that the human body embodies specific social norms and beliefs that are present within a group of people or society (Craig, 2006:160).

An analysis of the human body using feminist phenomenology enables us to transcend the inherent biological nature of the body that functions and validates sexual differences between women and men (Bigwood, 1991:60). This has been possible through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the human body, which argues that the human body senses stimuli from its environment, rather than just record phenomena (Bigwood, 1991:60). As such, it is actively engaged with the surroundings and fully experiences what is happening (Bigwood, 1991:62). For instance, all bodily sensors and movements, when gazing upon the sky, become perfectly attuned to the

action. Additionally, the body becomes completely absorbed into the moment and the sky colours penetrate through the individual engaged in the gaze (Bigwood, 1991:62). The human body is not a passive recipient throughout this entire process, rather it is involved in a reflexive relationship with its visual field (Bigwood, 1991:63; Inglis, 2012:103). As such, it reacts to the taken action which is a result of one's knowledge about the lifeworld.

I therefore use feminist phenomenology in this study to show how gender (femininity) is both socially constructed and embodied, and how the embodiment of femininity influences the female participants' everyday lived experiences in the lifeworld. As a result, I argue that gender must be seen as learned through the course of one's life in the lifeworld, and one's gender performances in everyday life should be conceived as the result of this socialisation.

1.4.2 Standpoint theory

According to McLaughlin (2003:53), feminist epistemology should be aimed at the creation of methods that draw upon individual' experiences within the lifeworld. By focusing on individual experience, standpoint theorists seek to provide a sense of agency to minority groups. This is evident in their analysis of structures established for the suppression of minority groups and women (McLaughlin, 2003:53). They perceive these institutions as not resulting from biology, but rather from social relations (Ritzer, 2012:476). Moreover, they argue that these social relations are culturally and socially bound. Standpoint theory thus developed out of this need to address social inequalities among minority groups, especially women (McLaughlin, 2003:47). The theorists are concerned with their everyday experiences within a capitalist patriarchal society. The theory, therefore, emphasises women's lived experiences as the source of knowledge to everyday issues affecting women (McLaughlin, 2003:34).

Standpoint theorists also examine how the lived experiences can be used in liberating minority groups, as well as women, from repression (McLaughlin, 2003:34). They identify women as possessing a special form of insider-outsider location (special knowledge about the world) which provides them with special knowledge about the social world. The theorists believe that this special insider-outsider knowledge cannot be found amongst any other groups within society

(Longino, 1993:201). As a result, Dorothy Smith (1990) cited in Longino (1993:201), argues that we must refrain from methods that turn a blind eye to women's lived experiences in the analysis of everyday life. She also contends that these methods must proceed from women's experiences of the lifeworld (Longino, 1993:203). This is because Smith views such methods as possessing the power to address the gap found within traditional sociology, particularly studies focusing on women's everyday experiences.

By using standpoint theory in this study I intend to show the significance of insider-outsider knowledge in the production of knowledge about women's everyday experiences of femininity (female beauty and the body), and how such knowledge should be reported from the female participants' point of view (Collins, 1990:343; Hekman, 1997:343; McClish and Bacon, 2002:28).

1.4.3 Intersectionality

With the shortcomings of early feminism, there was a need for a feminist social theory that recognised the experiences of all women, particularly at the intersection of race, gender and class. This call led to the emergence of black feminism (Rabe, 2014:160). Many black feminists felt that early feminism was blind to the experiences of black women. This is evident in their comparison of white middle-class families with black families (Rabe, 2014:160). Such cases have also been found in the USA, during the 1960s civil rights movement in which black men's issues enjoyed precedence over black women's' issues (Haralombos and Holborn 2000, cited in Rabe, 2014:160). Similarly, South African feminist, Jacklyn Cock, discovered that the lived experiences of black domestic workers differed completely from the experiences of their white madams (Cock 1980, cited in Rabe, 2014:163). This thus called for an all-inclusive theory that would deal with issues affecting all members of society (hooks 1984, cited in Gunew, 1991:27).

Furthermore, Collins (2000:6), argues that the intersection of race, gender and class has shaped much of African American black women's lives, including their relationships with loved ones and communities. She postulates the need for a political system centred on black women's experiences (Collins, 2000:6). Consequently, black women's lives have been understood as shaped by three interrelated dimensions. The first centres on the repression of African American

black women under American society (Collins, 2000:6). The second focuses on the structures that deny black African women access to basic necessities (Burnham 1987; Scales-Tren 1989, all cited in Collins, 2000:6-7). The third dimension pays attention to controlling images that depict black women in derogatory ways (Carby 1987; King 1973; Morton 1991; White 1985, all cited in Collins, 2000:7). These three dimensions operate to suppress African American women to subordinate positions. Such a bias has also been identified within the academic system which denies black women intellectuals the right to have their work taken seriously (Collins, 2000:7).

For Collins (2000:11), the comprehension of the intersecting oppression of race, gender and class has the potential of producing a unique standpoint based on black women's experiences. This special knowledge is also believed to have the potential to challenge the status quo. Furthermore, there is agreement that this knowledge differs from standard academic theory for a number of reasons (Collins, 2000:11). It does this by taking new forms of social thought, such as poetry, music and essays, which have been generally ignored (Collins, 2000:15). Such emphasis on black women's lived experiences has been vital in the development of Collins's "Black feminist thought epistemology". The development of Black feminist thought has allowed for the analysis of issues affecting marginalised groups, such as black lesbians (Hull, Scott and Smith 1982, cited in Collins, 2000:16). It possesses specialised knowledge which includes both intellectuals and those women who are not thought of as intellectuals (Collins, 2000:17). This is because throughout history African American women's work, such as the blues, has taken place outside academic spheres (Kennedy and Davis 1993, cited in Collins, 2000:19). This sphere has been very important in producing work that challenges male-centred academia; hence the need to consider this unique focus on black women's lived experiences that have often been ignored.

The establishment of Black feminist thought has led to the development of intersectionality, a theory addressing the inequalities caused by the intersection of race, gender and class (Davis 1993, cited in Collins, 2000:19). This theory is associated with Kimberlé Crenshaw who sought to show how women's experiences were influenced by a number of social issues (Rabe, 2014:162). Intersectionality examines the impact of social practices and dominant ideologies in individuals' lives (Davids, 2008:68). It also seeks to understand how the social categories of race,

gender, and class are structured and subjectively experienced by people (Steyn and Van Zyl, 2009:8). In addition, the interlocking social categories are also said to impact on each other (Steyn and Van Zyl, 2009:9), as a result, gender will be experienced differently when combined with race and class.

In this dissertation, intersectionality is utilised to try and determine how the intersection of race, gender and class impacts on female participants' construction of femininity in everyday life, especially female beauty and the body.

1.5 Pierre Bourdieu and the body as physical capital

In developing his theory of the body as “physical capital”, Bourdieu was concerned with how bodies could be transformed into physical capital, which he considered as leading to the formation of social classes (Bourdieu 1984, cited in Shilling, 2003:111). His concept of physical capital focuses on how human bodies are transformed through participation in sports, leisure activities and other forms of body regimes (Shilling, 1991:654; Shilling, 2012[1993]:135). Consequently, these body regimes are understood to lead to the expression of a certain class background as well as symbolic significance (Shilling, 1991:654). What Bourdieu meant by this is that status and privilege are attached to the body based on how it appears. Bourdieu therefore observed that people develop their bodies into physical capital in order to attain cultural and economic capital and this process entails an investment of time and financial resources to developing the body into physical process.

According to Bourdieu, our bodies carry with them a multitude of meanings, including symbols (Bourdieu 1989, cited in Shilling, 2012[1993]:135). He understood these meanings to be the result of an individual's social location in the lifeworld and body practices that transform human bodies. He also considered the association between individuals and their social context as essential in the acquisition of social status by people. Bourdieu referred to the relationship between social context and individual as one's closeness to economic capital which he perceived as playing a significant role in the development of the body (Shilling, 1993:654). Therefore, I use Bourdieu's analysis of the human body in an effort to find out the different types of body regime practices that the female participants engage in to maintain their bodies, and whether these body maintenance practices are aimed at developing their bodies into

physical capital. I also consider whether they have the cultural and economic capital to participate in body regime practices.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu is aware that different body regimes, activities and local context result in different ways of attending to the body (Shilling, 2004:475). For example, he noticed that the working class and the middle-class (together with the upper-class) have different body practices intended for transforming the body. Middle and upper-class people usually engage in activities that perceive the human body as a project in need of perfection (Shilling, 2012[1993]:139), while in contrast, the working class participates in activities such as weightlifting and household work. These different activities then lead to different body gestures and manners between the working class, middle and upper-class (Shilling, 2012[1993]:136). For example, different groups of people have different ways of walking and talking. Nevertheless, working class people, unlike the middle and upper-class, have little time to engage in leisure activities (Wilkes 1990; Wacquant 2004, all cited in Shilling, 2012[1993]:138) as they tend to focus more on making ends meet (Shilling, 2012[1993]:139).

Bourdieu also observes that taste plays an important role within the process of transforming the bodies' habitus (Shilling, 2012[1993]:136). Habitus as has already been mentioned consists of mental capabilities found among a group of people (Inglis, 2012:213). Taste refers to people's learned habits to a certain lifestyle, which overtime turns into a necessity (Bourdieu 1989, cited in Shilling, 2012[1993]:137). Bourdieu argues that habitus is learned from one's social location and influences one's acquired taste to a specific lifestyle (Shilling, 2012[1993]:137). In this study, I analyse the way in which habitus impacts on the female participants' everyday body regime practices and the acquisition of certain lifestyle choices. I am aware, in my analysis that, there is a fundamental association between female participants and their location which then influences their habitus and body practices.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduces the various theoretical frameworks that one can use within the study of everyday behaviour by social actors. The chapter started off with a review of social constructivism which outlines the social world as a product of human activities and how these activities are also the products of their environment. A consideration of the social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann showed

that people engage in activities that establish and attach meanings to the social world. Overtime these meanings become objectified and therefore provide a more concrete shape. Femininity and the black female body are social constructs produced in the course of social interaction. This theory assists my intended examination of how various meanings are created and attached to gender and the black female body.

Another theory introduced within this chapter is phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses at how social actors feel, experience and perceive their surrounding world. It recognises the importance of meaning construction by social actors, and how these meanings affect their subjective experiences of everyday life. Consequently, phenomenologists understand that meanings about the world are commonly shared by social actors within a specific social context, and these are the result of social encounters. The aim behind using this theory is to find out how young African black women perceive and experience female beauty and the black female body in everyday life.

Feminist theories, which stress the importance of women's experiences in understanding the social world are also considered in this chapter. The feminist theories considered here are feminist phenomenology, standpoint feminism, and intersectionality thinking. Feminist phenomenology focuses on the way women's experiences of the social world are embodied and how this embodiment is the result of childhood socialisation. Standpoint theory emphasises the role of women's social context, and how their social location influences the lived experiences of their life world. Moreover, it views this location as providing them with a specialised form of knowledge. This knowledge, the standpoint theorists argue, should be used as the starting point of all social investigations as we try to understand our surroundings. Lastly, I focused on intersectionality which emphasises the importance of the intersection of race, gender and class in black women's everyday lives. I also outlined how this intersection influences black women's everyday experiences of the world. These theories are important within this study as they consider the position of women as a minority within a male dominated world, and how their everyday experiences are affected by their minority status.

This chapter ends with a review of Bourdieu's work on the body. The analysis by Bourdieu examines the way the maintenance of the body has increased within modern society. He thus views people as actively engaged in bodily practices that transform their bodies into entities. These practices, he believes, are the result of the inherent inequalities in society. Within his analysis of the body Bourdieu highlights the importance of one's social context in transforming the body. A similarity can therefore be observed between Bourdieu's emphasis and feminist theorists. Actually, what all the previously mentioned theories have in common is the significance of individuals' locations in the lifeworld and how social context influences their appraisal of the body. This chapter serves as a theoretical guide to the following chapter where I discuss issues concerning femininity in everyday life with regard to young African black women.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEWING DEBATES ON THE FEMALE BODY

Introduction

This chapter, which is a continuation from the theoretical framework of the dissertation in the previous chapter, reviews the available literature on the female body in order to provide insights into and a background against which the research can be situated. The chapter is divided into two main sections with various sub-sections. The first part of the chapter outlines both the historical and current global overview of perceptions about the female body, while the second part of the chapter focuses on conceptions of the female body in the African continent.

2.1 An overview of the female body

2.1.1 The human body as a social construct

Different cultures and societies ascribe different ideas, meanings and understandings to the body. For instance, breasts, thighs and hair form part of the body, and are more than just parts (Synnott, 1993:1). As a result, human bodies carry a variety of social meanings (Synnott, 1993:1), and these meanings are perceived of as the core of social perceptions (Reischer and Koo, 2004:279). This means that human bodies embody cultural meanings of what a body is, and how a male and female body are supposed to look (Reischer and Koo, 2004:297). These social conceptions have thus defined the body as more than just mere skin and bones; rather it is the embodied self. This understanding has led to the body being conceived of, within Anthropology, as a system of social signs (Turner, 2008:494). As a system of social signs it undergoes “ritual preparation, scarification and cultural transformations” through the rites of passage (Blacking 1977, cited in Turner, 2008:494). In the twentieth century, the work of Anthropologist Mary Douglas on the human body has been comprehended as closely connected to the ordering of society (Douglas 1966, cited Turner, 2008:494). This led to the understanding of the body as containing characteristics of the types of social relations that exist between people in a specific culture. According to Lock (1993: 133), the body serves as the reflection of the social world, and of human actions. Hence, social transformations and changes must be seen as the result of both inputs and outputs concerning the human body (Turner, 2008:494).

Despite the various understandings of the body, its role is at times not easy to comprehend (Lock, 1993:134; Synnott, 1993:1). Such difficulty often arises from discourses about the ownership of the body, meanings about the body and perceptions about what a body is (Synnott, 1993:1). The Oxford English Dictionary defines the body as “the physical or material frame or structure of man or of any other, the whole material the organism viewed as an organic entity” (Synnott, 1993:7). Nonetheless, definitions differ from one person to another and may include body parts such as hair or blood (Synnott, 1993:7). The body, as both subject and object, derives its meanings from the sex-gender linkages in society (Turner, 2008:497). Furthermore, the body is perceived as a social construct thus making it not a mere given object. As a consequence, meanings attributed to the body vary between individuals and between group individuals (such as different age groups). This also includes conceptions of physical attractiveness that impact on social actor’s life chances. The body therefore serves as the primary symbol of the individual (Synnott, 1993:2). It is characterised by worries over issues such as beauty, weight gain or loss, and hair. Regardless of the changes that the body undergoes, it still remains the primary concern of the individual as it is viewed as comprising all that makes up the self. As such, body changes that include puberty and other natural biological changes that take place during one’s life, influence concepts about the self and identity. In contemporary times, however, body changes have been achieved through cosmetic surgery during which people undergo medical procedures to transform their bodies.

Nevertheless, the body is open to a wide array of meanings that change over time (Synnott, 1993:3). Within these meanings are understandings of the self as well as of social identity in the social world. However, these meanings are also perceived to lead to negative stereotypes such as the categorisation of people into different races and genders that are then compared in terms of attractiveness. In this section of the dissertation chapter, I examine how meanings of the female body are created and attached to it. I also consider the ways in which these meanings are comprehended by people in everyday life. The intention here is to determine how such conceptions impact on the way young African black women attend to the female body in everyday life. Thus, I review related literature on the research topic to discern insights into the

undertaken study. A more detailed examination of the female body and meanings attributed to it are provided in section 2.3.

2.2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FEMALE BEAUTY AND THE BODY

This section of the work focuses at how perceptions of female beauty and the body have changed overtime and ultimately impacted on the everyday life experiences of black women. The aim of this overview is to get an in-depth understanding of how historical conceptions of the female body influence present day construction of female beauty and the body. Finally, this assists us in finding out how historical perceptions have resulted in an intersection of body, hair and skin colour discourses in everyday life. This overview begins with an examination of the role of the media in creating and transmitting messages about the female body.

From a psychological evolutionary perspective, a woman's beauty has always held significant meanings for people (Singh and Singh, 2011:274). In primitive societies, a woman's beauty was equated with her fertility and good health. This understanding of female body automatically translated into notions of female attractiveness (Symons 1979, cited in Singh and Singh, 2011:724). Such standards of female beauty may have also been the result of evolutionary developments and natural selection related to reproduction of the species. Nonetheless, beauty standards should be comprehended as unfixed as they constantly change and are beyond one's control (Singh and Singh, 2011:725). Understandings of female beauty have over time moved away from fertility and good health to an emphasis on specific women body features. This shift has also resulted in a major emphasis being placed on the Eurocentric features as the standard of beauty, that is, for a woman to be considered as beautiful, she has to have long, straight, silky hair, a long straight nose, a light skin tone, and a slim body shape (Craig, 2006:163; Patton, 2006:24).

Popular perceptions of beauty are often based on what dominant groups consider to constitute beauty at a particular time (Patton, 2006:24), and these ignore what constitutes beauty in other cultures. Moreover, beauty is racialised, and this racialisation results in certain groups often not falling within the dominant Eurocentric standards of beauty. One such group that falls outside the Eurocentric standard of beauty is that of African black women. To writers such as Wallace (1979) cited in Patton (2006:25), this realisation has never really been anything new to black

women. For years African black women watched as the American society broadened its category of beauty to other racial groups (Wallace 1979, cited in Patton, 2006:25), but never to those of black women. In exceptional cases entrance into mainstream expectations was only possible through close approximation to Eurocentric features, which includes long, straight, silky hair, alight skin, and a small body frame.

In contemporary times, there has emerged new media depictions of what constitutes beauty and these have started to include African black women through the importation of images of famous African American and black celebrities such as Tyra Banks (American Model), Naomi Campbell (British model), and Ale Wek (African model) (Patton, 2006:25). This shows that the Eurocentric standards of beauty have been slightly broadened in the media over the years to include African black women (Sekayi, 2003:468-469). Nevertheless, Sekayi observes that even the black celebrity women's limited acceptance and appearance in the media and as beauty standards have been broadened have only been possible through their embrace of certain Eurocentric features. For instance, Alek Wek, indeed has a dark skin tone, but resembles Western beauty ideals of a slim woman. It is less wonder then that, regardless of such changes many women still do not feel liberated by such images (Jones-Gooden 2003, cited in Patton, 2006:25). Stereotypical messages are constructed from the intersection of race, class and gender that depict black women in negative ways (Collins, 2000:69). Among such stereotypes have been the framing of black women as the mammie, jezebel and welfare recipients. Such stereotypical images of black women as the jezebel, mulatto, and welfare-mother still continue to circulate the media thus distorting perceptions of black femininity (Collins 1983, cited in Collins, 2000:69). The resultant degradation has also been evident in the extreme derogatory depictions that associate the black body with that of apes (Gilman, 1985:212). Finally, understandings based on these descriptions have led to the notion of black women as hypersexual beings.

2.2.1 Meanings of beauty and the female body among black women

The racialisation of beauty, as stated in the previous section, has led to black women's long history of struggle with what constitutes beauty for them (Patton, 2006:24-25). As a result of such constructions of beauty (long, straight, silky hair, a slim body and a light skin tone), beauty remains a sensitive topic in their everyday

lives as they try to live up to the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Currently, the mass media continues to circulate images conveying stereotypical messages about black women, even after the witnessing of changes in the Eurocentric standards of beauty (hooks, 1992:1). According to hooks (1992:1), such images are the creation of an internalisation of racism by those who produce them. Thus, current perceptions of black beauty in the mass media are based on the Eurocentric standard of beauty, which in hooks's (1992:1) view highlights white supremacy on the everyday lives of African black women (hooks, 1992:1).

Black beauty has been compared with white standards of beauty since the 1600s (Patton, 2006:26). This is evident in the United States of America where African American women's beauty was contrasted with the Eurocentric standards of beauty and its emphasis on a light skin tone and long, straight, silky hair. During this time, light-skinned slaves with features approximating that of the white women were treated better than their dark-skinned counterparts. Consequently, they performed household work, while dark skinned slaves had to labour in the fields of their masters. This division of labour and treatment led to the internalisation of light skin as better than dark skin among Africans (Patton, 2006:26). Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) cited in Patton (2006:26) refer to this as the 'lily complex'. The 'lily complex' entailed manipulating one's physical features (e.g., skin tone and hair) in order to assimilate to the Eurocentric standards of beauty. The people, who failed to follow such beauty standards, resorted to the creation of a black beauty ideal that would accommodate African black women (Patton, 2006:27). This in turn was followed by a celebration of African features such as kinky hair. The creation of unique African hairstyles by African American women was thus one way in which black people challenged the Eurocentric beauty standards. This can be seen in African black people's hair practices during the fifteenth century (Patton, 2006:27). These hair rituals could last for a couple of days and were essential in the uniting of the community. The hair practices involved the crafting of elaborate hairstyles which signified one's position within the group. However, during the 1400s and the beginning of slavery such practices came to an end. In resorting to saving whatever was left of their hair as well as protecting it many Africans took to wearing head scarfs (Patton, 2006:28). Other protective hairstyle practices included the use of

bacon grease, butter, all of which were intended for the maintenance of African black hair.

The slaves' hairstyling choices sometimes indicated the type of work they did (Patton, 2006:28). For example, women who laboured in the fields were required to wear rags on their heads, while men had to shave their hair off. The slaves working directly with their masters on a daily basis wore adorned hairstyles and at times wigs just like their masters. In the twentieth century, these imitative hairstyles would soon come to an end with the invention of Madam C.J. Walker's relaxer cream and hot comb (Patton, 2006:29). In 1905 Madam C.J Walker would change the lives of black people through the creation of her hair-straightening products that redefined black beauty for many black women and men. However, the invention of hair straightening products was not welcomed with the same sentiments within the African community. One notable opponent was Malcolm X who believed that hair-straightening practices were a sign of shame of one's African features (Patton, 2006:29). Such practices also affected other black people of African descent outside the United States of America (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, cited in Patton 2006:30). Many other countries seem to have been greatly influenced by Eurocentric notions of beauty, particularly African black women.

Adherence to Eurocentric standards of beauty can be traced back to nineteenth century European women (Patton, 2006:31). Going back to the sixteenth century, European women had to wear corsets and hardened canvas. This practice was accompanied by the use of a metal that would run vertically go up the woman's chest with the intention of flattening up the breasts together with the abdomen. This practice continued to the seventeenth century, however, during this time period emphasis was placed more on the breasts. Breasts, hips, and buttocks were valued traits in women. The use of corsets was later on accompanied by crinolines which were designed to make the waist appear thin. Nonetheless, these practices entailed a lot of health dangers such as pulmonary diseases, damage to internal organs and miscarriages (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, cited in Patton, 2006:31). It is thus worth noting that throughout these centuries the changing beauty practices emphasised Eurocentric beauty over African beauty as is still the case even in contemporary times (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, cited in Patton, 2006:30).

The aim of the discussion above, was to show how beauty standards have changed over time due to the developments made in each time period. Despite this factor beauty standards still place more emphasis on Eurocentric beauty.

2.2.2 The media and popular culture in everyday life

This section of the literature review focuses on the role of the media in the transmission of messages about the black female body in everyday life. This review seeks to assist the researcher to understand how media depictions of the black female body impact on young African women's perceptions and experiences of the black female body in their everyday lives. The section begins with a brief discussion on how race and gender have been used in the objectification of specific groups and the resultant construction of stereotypes on certain groups in society. The aim of this discussion is to provide an overview of the emergence of stereotypical images of black women in the media. This discussion is followed by an elaborate discussion on how these stereotypical images are used to create understandings about African black women and the black female body as well as in the communication of a distorted image of black womanhood in contemporary times. This is followed by an analysis on the role of the media as a primary means of communication in the transmission of information, especially stereotypical imagery about the black female body in the twentieth and twenty-first century, and how it is used to inform people's everyday reality.

Race and gender depictions are historically embedded (Cliff, 1992:140). Black women in the United States of America have been historically been viewed as mere objects. According to Cliff (1992:141), this process of objectification served to dehumanize and subject black women into minority positions. The images were therefore constructed in a way that stripped the women of characteristics that emphasise their common humanity. Objectification, it must be underscored, is a method of labelling a specific group as inferior (Collins, 2000:71). Turning one into an object leads to the definition of that which they would have become as their everyday reality, history and social relations (hooks 1989, cited in Collins, 2000:70). In addition, black women have been forced to do the same form of work as their black male counterparts. Such objectification has resulted in the African American people being described as different from European people. The objectification of

women, especially black women, has therefore, played a crucial role in the creation of controlling images (Collins, 2000:70). Such notions of black people even include proclaiming in the most derogative way that they are products of black women mating with apes (Stetson 1981, cited in Cliff, 1992:141).

However, this objectification of black women was not homogenous as it differed depending with the group of black women (Cliff, 1992:142). For example, black women working in the American plantations were subjected to rape and seen as sex objects by their masters. These were realities that both black and white women were aware of. Later on black women's objectification took many forms as they were variously described as the mammy, mama, cooks, sex objects and other stereotypes. Scholars such as Littlefield (2008:675) contend that such representations compelled the media into a tendency of reproducing racialised images of black women. These negative images can also be seen in the depiction of black women within music videos, which, as noted by Littlefield, reinforce the stereotypical images of black womanhood and sexuality. Early Western conceptions of race defined Africans as beasts prone to lascivious tendencies (Jordan 1968, cited in Littlefield, 2008:675). These descriptions would for a long time shape black people, especially black women's lives in the American society. Within this historical context black female bodies were seen as unattractive (Hobson, 2003:87). They were also perceived as hypersexual and voluptuous, which many saw as offensive. An example of this kind of depiction and reaction is found in the case of the South African Hottentot woman Saartjie Baartman (Hobson, 2003:87-88). The slavery-based conceptions of the black female body even continue today to shape and define black women in their everyday life. Subsequently, these racial divisions have meant that white women are often seen as epitomising what constitutes female beauty. It is little wonder then that the black female body has over the years been evaluated in grotesque ways in comparison with the white female body (Hobson, 2003:88). Such understandings and comparisons of black and white women evidently give rise to what constitutes the concepts of beauty, sexuality and disability (Hobson, 2003:90).

The exhibitions of Saartjie Baartman's body in London and Paris in 1810 contributed further to the differentiating of black women from white women (Hobson, 2003:88-89). A number of cartoons featuring Baartman's famous bottom emerged and in

some instances these were overly exaggerated (Hobson, 2003:90). These comics displayed Baartman as a freak. As a consequence of such representations, black women often became perceived as unattractive by white men (Hobson, 2003:91). In addition, the early European explorations contributed to the portrayal of black women as inferior. Accordingly, from 1500 to 1770 African women's bodies were described as both mythic and monstrous due to their overly exposed physical body (Morgan 1997, cited in Hobson, 2003:94). As a consequence, the black body was left open for interpretation. These interpretations would often describe the black female body as grotesque, sexually aggressive, and repulsive. Following Hobson's (2003:94), the legacy of these images continues to live on even in the twentieth and twenty first century, and can be seen in the work of artists such as Jean-Paul Goude and Robert Mapplethorpe. The work of these two artists features images of black women with a particularly focus on their bottoms. The representation of black women in such light is also found in a variety of media, such as magazines, newspapers and the television. Therefore, as aptly noted by Littlefield (2008:677), the media often reinforces further and popularises beliefs concerning black people's hyper sexuality.

According to Patricia Hill Collins (1983) cited in Collins (2000:69), the stereotypical images, which she termed the "controlling images", have a negative impact on black women. These "controlling images" consist of imaginings that portray African women in negative and derogatory ways such as the Jezebel. The media is thus viewed as a key player in the production of exploitative images of black women (Aufderheide 1986; Dines and Humez 1995; Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg 1993; Hurley 1994; Kaplan 1987; Stockbridge 1987; Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski 1987, all cited in Emerson, 2002:117). Collins (2000:69) also states that "controlling images" are constructed in a way that constantly makes social categories of race and gender appear as natural constructs. However, problems arise in trying to undo the effects of the images as they inform black women's everyday lives. This is because of the intersection of race and gender in the images (Mullings 1997, cited in Collins, 2000:69-70). Black women are therefore, defined according to race and gender categories and these descriptions are then naturalised (Collins, 2000:70).

Emerson (2002:120) observes that black women have been objectified in several ways. Firstly, they have been deemed as 'the other' through their bodies (Emerson, 2002:120). Secondly, they have been condemned into a 'one dimensional black

womanhood' owing to the objectification. Thus, all descriptions of black women are based on the point of view of the dominant group and perspective of their describer. This is exemplified by the African American woman Ruth Shay's testimony that the dominant are not interested in the viewpoint of minority groups (Collins, 2000:70). Shay further argues that "It will not kill people to hear the truth, but they don't like it and they would much rather hear it from one of their own than a stranger. Now, to white people a coloured person is always a stranger. Not only that, we are supposed to be dumb strangers, so we can't tell them anything" (Gwaltney 1989, cited in Collins, 2000:70). hooks (1992:3) argues that the way black people have been represented reflects the overriding ideologies of dominant groups within society. These descriptions in return function to normalise the representation of black women in the media. She states that the internalisation of the dominant ideologies impacts on how black people come to perceive themselves. Hence, the media remains a site of struggle in the representation of black women, as negative depictions of black women continue to circulate even today.

The media is today understood as one of the most powerful tools in the transmission of information worldwide (Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:395). Perhaps the most important developments in the field of the media have taken place within the twentieth and twenty first centuries resulting in the wide spread of information. Through the media, time as well as space is compressed as news and information travels at an accelerated rate to all corners of the world (Giddens 1990, cited in Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:395). Furthermore, because of technological advancement this information is made readily available to people from different parts of the world through newspapers, television, magazines and internet sites. Giddens (1990) cited in Magaiza and Gumbi (2014:396), considers this as the alteration of time and space. As a result, countries are more interconnected with each other than ever before and therefore influencing one another. However, the role of the media is at times questioned as it can have disastrous effects on society. The media can also be used to control and maintain the power of the dominant group within society (Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:396). By focusing on the role of the media in everyday life, I intend to examine the power of the media in the communication of messages that people come to view as their reality. I am thus interested in communicated messages focusing on the black female body, and how such messages influence

female participants' everyday experiences of female beauty and the body. The following discussions therefore take a close look at the power of the media in conveying messages about the social world and society in everyday life. The discussion ranges from a functionalist perspective of the media to conflict and a feminist view of the media.

The media is often questioned about its ability to affect people's agency. These questions have become even more critical with the rise in information technology and the new media, particularly the internet. Sociologists have over the years raised their concerns over the power of the media on people and its impact on their conceptions of everyday life (Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:399). From a functionalist perspective, the media is one of the institutions that contribute to the overall functioning of society. The media is perceived as essential in performing four primary functions to society (Lawswell 1948, cited in Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:399). The first one is the scouting of societal happenings within society (Lawswell 1948, cited in Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:399). Secondly, it interprets these societal happenings for societal members from their perspective. Thirdly, the media provides people with entertainment. Fourthly and lastly, the media functions as a socialising agent to future generations. I draw on the functionalist view about the role of the media as a socialising agent in my analysis of what female participants know about female beauty and the black female body in everyday life.

The conflict theory tends to take a more critical view of the media and views it as a tool of domination and for maintenance of power by elite groups (Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:399). Dominant groups use media to disseminate certain symbols in order to protect their interests. People are suppressed by being provided limited choices and meanings within society. The media in the eyes of Antonio Gramsci utilises hegemony over minority groups in society, and reports as well as interprets the world from their point of view (Gramsci 1971, cited Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:403). Critical theorists' concern over the media and technology has, as a result, focused on its repressive power over people's individuality, especially through the use of culture (Ritzer, 2012:284).

The sociologist Herbert Marcuse who is part of the Frankfurt school and of critical theory (Marcuse 1964, cited in Ritzer (2012:284), views this domination of people as

taking place through media forms such as television. Through television people lose the ability to think logically for themselves and think critically about their society. The critical theorists are concerned about the media's falseness and tendency to repress people into passive recipients (Cook 1996; Friedman 1981; Tar 1977; zips 1994, all cited in Ritzer, 2012:285). This the critical theorists saw as being made possible through the production of ideology, that is, false information sent to the masses (Ritzer, 2012:287). I therefore, examine how the media provides limited meanings and understanding of female beauty and the body, and how such limited perceptions of female beauty and the body influence female participants' construction of beauty and the female body in everyday life.

Feminist theorists are concerned with social stereotypes that naturalise gender, and consider the media as playing a vital role in perpetuating messages about women as loving, nurturing, and passive (Meehan 1983, cited in Magaiza and Gumbi, 2014:403). Consequently, the media representations project women as only capable of household tasks (King, 1992:17). Moreover, satisfaction derived from household chores is perceived as enough and thus it discourages women from seeking employment outside the home. Feminists therefore consider the way in which the media contributes to the objectification of women and to gender inequality. These representations are conceived to be the result of patriarchy. Feminists like conflict theorists identify the media as a key player in the maintenance of patriarchy and domination of women. Using feminists' conceptions of the role of media in everyday life I seek to understand how gender stereotypes about women and the role of women are reinforced and how they impact on female participants' perceptions of femininity.

Brooks and Herbert's (2006:297) state that what most people know about gender and race is mediated by the media. The media is a vital source in the transposition of meanings about gender and societal relations. Contemporary scholars have observed how media tend to depict women, particularly African black women, in negative ways (Bobo 1995, Collins 2000, 2004; hooks 1992; Lubiano 1992; Manatu 2003, McPhail 1996, Perry 2003, all cited in Brooks and Herbert, 2006:298). These images impact on how other racial groups view black people (hook 1992, cited in Brooks and Herbert, 2006:299). In addition, the images are perceived as representations constructed by society's dominant groups (Hudson 1998; Collins

2000, 2004; all cited in Brooks and Herbert, 2006:299). They have also been found to impact on how African black women view themselves. For instance, pornographic images showing African black women as objects of sexual desire for men (Allen, 1992:26). Nonetheless, as noted by Edhlof (1992:155), these images can be found in a wide range of media such as advertisements, television and magazines. Subsequently, people are persuaded into liking these images as women are depicted as objects of male desire.

Furthermore, there has emerged literature dedicated to analysing the representation of black women within the media (Brooks and Herbert, 2006:299). This literature examines a variety of television shows and films that depict African American women in stereotypical ways and has noted how the women are portrayed as the jezebel, matriarch and other stereotypical images (Meyers 2004, cited in Brooks and Herbert, 2006:299). Other works focus on how black femininity is depicted in stereotypical ways in Hollywood films (Burks 1996, cited in Brooks and Herbert, 2006:299). Hence, media representations exhibit women as the weaker sex.

It is upon this realisation that hooks (1992:3), notes how black people lack power over the type of images about them that are put out there. Moreover, the system of internalisation makes it difficult to undo the damage caused by these images. Hence, she views any attempts by black women to undo the effects of the “controlling images” as an act that leaves them heartbroken and emotionally drained. Within contemporary times such valorisation of whiteness has been evident in the increased usage of ‘skin bleaching’ products by black women as they often associate a white skin tone with beauty and better life (Blay, 2009:5; Charles, 2003:157; Hill, 2002:77). A number of cases of ‘skin bleaching’ have indeed been observed in African countries and in the United States among African Americans and Black Jamaicans. I therefore, seek to understand, in this study, how media depictions of black women influence young black South African women’s perceptions of themselves, female beauty and the body in everyday life. I also intend to find out how such conceptions impact on their construction of beauty in the world where Eurocentric standards of beauty dominate.

2.3. Body politics

2.3.1 The female body

The human body as composite of social meanings (Douglas 1966, cited in Lovejoy, 2001:239), must be seen as consisting of rules, hierarchies and commitments inscribed to it. Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) cited in Lovejoy (2001:239) consider the body as a 'natural' symbol that one uses in thinking about nature, society and cultural relationships. As such, it carries various cultural meanings, as was mentioned in section 2.2. The body is therefore understood as a symbolic capital of culture among a specific group of people (Lovejoy, 2001:239). An exploration of the body therefore requires that an intersectional approach be taken, especially within the studies of the female body (van Amsterdam, 2013:155). In addition, the intersectional approach is necessary as understandings of the female body are intertwined with issues of race, class and gender.

The aim of the intersectional analysis of the female body is to highlight the important influence the intersection of race and gender has on women's everyday lives, and how it leads to their categorisation into various groups (Crenshaw 1989, cited in van Amsterdam, 2013:155-156). An intersectional evaluation is also important in arriving at an understanding of how certain groups come to be labelled as different from the dominant group. Therefore, intersectionality here becomes vital in understanding the impact of body politics on women, particularly black women. According to van Amsterdam (2013:156) the use of intersectionality is essential as it goes beyond mere categorisation of advantages and disadvantages and increases understanding of both.

2.3.2 Body satisfaction discourses

Socialisation plays a significant role in the way society views the body. Reel, SooHoo, Summerhays, and Gill (2008:321) note that girls are taught, at a young age, to play with Barbie dolls. This practice of playing with dolls has taken place over four decades and communicates messages of beauty and femininity (Walker and Edut 2003, cited in Reel et al., 2008:321). Certain parts of the female body such as breasts and a small waist are deemed, through play, as important over others. Children as a result internalise these stereotypes about the female body. This

influences women's body image of themselves. In this dissertation the concept of body image refers to women's overall mental image of how they look to others (Featherstone, 2010:194). Pruzinsky and Cash (1990) cited in Peltzer and Pengpid (2012:4510) define body image as people's attitude towards how they look. In the twentieth as well as twenty-first centuries there has been increasing attention to the human body (Featherstone, 2010:197). This obsession with the body is indeed noted in the recent increase in lifestyle television shows that promote fitness and other body maintenance practices. Observations can be made in the promotion of a slim body shape that adheres to the Eurocentric standard of beauty.

Regardless of the rise in these body maintenance regimes, many have viewed them as superficial and resulting in the neglect of more serious societal issues. Findings also show how body obsession has led to the stigmatisation of big bodies which van Amsterdam's (2013:158) conceives of as deriving from a patriarchal society. The conceptions have further led to the views of the body as gendered. These understandings of body-size discourses tend to impact more on women than men, especially in Western societies (Bordo 1995; Wolf 1991, all cited in van Amsterdam, 2013:158). As a result, the preoccupation with the body has become something of a norm among societies, particularly Western ones. I thus aim to find out how women come to develop body satisfaction or dissatisfaction in everyday life. I also seek to find out how messages about the female body are communicated through social encounters, embodied and subjectively processed by female participants.

Body regime practices are perceived as both shallow and dangerous to the human body as they are understood to impose ideas of how one is supposed to look (Featherstone, 2010:197). Popular has been the employment of the 'before' and 'after' pictures by consumer culture to persuade people to follow body practice regimes. Consumers are thus swayed to invest a lot of time and resources if they want to look good. Additionally, through consumer culture people are encouraged to engage in self-improvement activities such as exercising and eating healthy. Consumer culture can thus be viewed as making great efforts to convince people to invest their time and money to body management practices in order to meet social standards.

A lot of concern has been raised, over the years, with regard to the association of the female body with beauty (Featherstone, 2010:197). Molloy and Herzberger (1998:631) point out that the inherent link between the female body and beauty in countries such as the United States has resulted in body dissatisfaction among women as they fail to meet the Eurocentric standards of beauty within their societies. In these societies women spend long hours partaking in body fitness practices as they try to obtain a thin body. Women therefore find themselves engaging in a number of diets (Parker, Nichter, Nichter, Vuckovic, Sims, and Ritenbaugh 1995, cited in Molloy and Herzberger, 1998:631). In Chaiken and Pliner's (1987) view cited in Molloy and Herzberger (1998:631), women's obsession with attaining a thin body shape can be seen as society's preference for thin bodies among women. This thin ideal body type for women is then promoted and circulated in media forms such as women's magazine, television, and the dieting industry, to name but a few (Molloy and Herzberger, 1998:632).

Nevertheless, the quest to obtain a thin body often leads to eating disorders among women (Polivy and Herman 1987, cited in Molloy and Herzberger, 1998:632). Such eating disorders often include anorexia and bulimia, and are most of the time associated with middle-upper-class white women (White and Grilo 2005, cited Reel et al., 2008:322). Black women appear to be resilient to eating disorders (Abrahams, Allen and Gray 1993; Akan and Greilo 1995; Rucker and Cash 1992, cited in Molloy and Herzberger, 1998:632; Reel et al., 2008:322). This difference has been attributed to black women's perceptions of beauty that goes beyond physical traits and focus on personal qualities (Landrine, Klonoff, and Brown-Collins 1992; Parker et al. 1995, all cited in Poran, 2006:739). Another reason is that black women consider themselves to be more of partners than competitors (Parker et al. 1995, cited in Poran, 2006:739). This sense of sisterhood among black women has therefore served as a protective mechanism against body dissatisfaction.

At presently there has emerged research that challenges previous findings on black women's resilience to eating disorders (Coetzee and Parrett, 2010:72). Studies conducted among South African university students show that a large number of black female students are battling with eating disorders than their white counterparts (Le Grange, Telch, and Tibbs 1998, cited in Coetzee and Parrett, 2010:72). The studies show that a high number of black female students are reported as wanting to

obtain a thin body (Wassenaar, Le Grange, Winship, and Lachencht 2000, cited in Coetzee and Parrett, 2010:72). Researchers have also identified societal pressure from peers to fit in among young people as another factor pushing black students to obtain a thin body (Striegel-Moore, Silberstein and Rodin 1986, cited in Coetzee and Parrett, 2010:72), and media depictions of thin women that are then internalised by the younger generation of women (Grogan 1999, cited in Coetzee and Parrett, 2010:72).

2.3.3 Views on body dissatisfaction

A number of views have been put forward to try and explain the differences in body satisfaction and dissatisfaction between black and white women. Molloy and Herzberger (1998) cited in Poran (2006:739) argue that black women are protected from body images that lead to body dissatisfaction. This is because black women develop certain mechanisms that focus on personal inner qualities to protect themselves from media depictions of thin bodies. Black men's preference for large women is another factor that explains body satisfaction among African black women. These observations were confirmed in a study conducted by Black men feminist theorists' among African men (Poran, 2006:40). The men showed a preference for big women (Grabe and Hyde 2006, cited in Poran, 2006:40), while their white counterparts showed a preference for thin women and perceived big women to be lazy and uneducated (Poran, 2006:740). European women, as already highlighted, endure peer pressure to adhere to popular cultural standards of slim bodies (Fallon 1990; Stormer and Thompson 1996, all cited in Cusumano and Thompson and Thompson, 1997:701), which has been understood to lead to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders among the women (Fallon 1990; Stice, Schupak-Neuberg, and Stein 1994, all cited in Cusumano and Thompson, 1997:702).

Finally, the social comparison theory notes that people self-monitor themselves in accordance to how they appear to others (Festinger 1994, cited in Lennon et al., 1997:192). This then leads people to engage in self-comparison actions with others. This self-comparison is noted as leading to body dissatisfaction (Goethals and Darley 1997, cited in Lennon et al., 1997:192). For instance, Richins observed how his participants engaged in self-appraisals after being exposed to media depictions of the ideal feminine body (Richins 1991, cited in Lennon et al., 1997:192). This self-

comparison seemed to be targeted against women who are often perceived as more attractive therefore resulting in negative evaluations of the self.

From the above mentioned, body issues are constituted from the linkages between the female body and beauty modelled after the Eurocentric standard of beauty. Moreover, meanings of beauty attached to the female body are perceived as the cause of body dissatisfaction and eating problems among white women. However, new findings have shown changing trends among body satisfaction issues, particularly among African black women as evidenced by the study conducted among University of Cape Town students. All these changes are the result of societal pressure to uphold to societal standards of beauty. Therefore, I examine, in this study, female participants' body perceptions and experiences in everyday life and how they influence body maintenance practices of the female participants.

2.4 Hair politics

The legacy of slavery continues to have an impact on women, particularly on African black women, and their relationship with hair. The legacy of slavery is also deeply rooted in racial discourses that link beauty with hair (Robinson, 2011:358). This has tended to be particularly true for African Americans (White, 2010:19) as hair politics make it difficult for them to fit in within American society (Robinson, 2011:358). This struggle with hair continues to be an issue for many women even in the contemporary times. Concerns over black women's preoccupation with hair have also been documented by the African American actor and comedian Chris Rock. In Chris Rock's view negative connotations attached to African hair have served and continue to put African black women at a disadvantage when compared to other groups (Robinson, 2011:358). When compared to long, straight, silky hair, short kinky hair is always ranked last in the hierarchy of 'good hair'.

The intersection of race and gender has led to a debate on what many call what is 'good' and 'bad' in African communities (Taylor 1999, cited in Robinson, 2011:359). It has resulted in attempts seeking to understand the process through which beauty becomes racialised through its connection with hair, thus putting black women at a disadvantage from other racial groups. Robinson (2011:359) expands on this in her focus on the anti-racist aesthetics by paying attention to how the legacy of slavery and its associated culture serve as tools of black people's evaluations of 'good' and

'bad' hair. This analysis, which takes a historical view of hair and slavery, recognizes that perceptions of black hair as 'good' or 'bad' has linkages to the Eurocentric standards of beauty (Robinson-Moore 2008; Taylor 1999, all cited in Robinson, 2011:359). Attempts to obtain straight or wavy hair are associated to efforts of individuals to be perceived as beautiful within Eurocentric standards of beauty.

According to the anti-racist aesthetics, the Eurocentric standards of beauty are projected as the ones all women have to aspire to (Robinson, 2011:360). Within this model of beauty, long, straight hair or long, waving hair becomes the standard for female beauty. Hegemonic ideologies have indeed made long straight hair to be deemed as a norm for all women (White, 2010:17). Black women, who do not fall within these categories, have to negotiate a beauty ideal that defines black beauty. White (2010:170), views this struggle as beginning during the early years of child development as the children are taught to internalise Eurocentric standards of beauty. However, for African black women hair politics tends to be more complicated due to the racialisation of beauty in everyday life through race and gender. Hence, the twentieth and twenty first century have witnessed the racialisation of beauty receiving a lot of attention (Badillo 2001; Patton 2006; White 2005, all cited in Robinson, 2011:360).

The discussion of 'good' and 'bad' hair has stressed the understanding that even though both black women and men may be subject to various forms of sexism and racism, black women find themselves at the intersection of both. As has already been stated, beauty among black women is understood as historically embedded and cannot be removed from the intersection of race and gender (Lara 2010; Taylor 1999; White 2010, all cited in Robinson, 2011:361). The interlocking of beauty with race and gender explains the importance of hair among black women (Weitz 2004, cited in Robinson, 2011:361). Consequently, the significance of hair as a beauty symbol can also be attributed to the male gaze which associates black women's beauty with hair (Gottshall 2008; Wolf 1991, all cited in Robinson, 2011:361).

2.4.1 Hair as symbol of beauty among black women

For most African women hair constitutes an essential part of their everyday life (White, 2010:19). This is because hair, for women, epitomizes one's femininity, sexuality as well as attractiveness (Bank 2000; Brownmiller 1984; Schreiber 2003, all cited in White, 2010:19). As such, hair becomes the definition of beauty (Brownmiller 1984, cited in White, 2010:19). African black people attach great importance to hair and this has led to the understanding of hair as a vital characteristic of female beauty. African black women thus find themselves in a quest to obtain long straight hair as they attempt to fit into the Eurocentric standards of beauty (Robinson, 2011:363).

For people of the African descent hair has served as a symbol of beauty, culture and spirituality (Rosado 2004, cited in Chapman, 2007:14). This is because of the physical importance and meanings that black people attached to hair (Marco, 2012:10). Moreover, these meanings highlight the existence of cultural differences among groups of people (Rosette and Duma 2007; all cited in Marco, 2012:10). Black women's hair discourses thus entail a roller coaster of emotions as they attempt to obtain long straight hair (Chapman, 2009, cited in Marco, 2012:11). Dating back to the eighteenth century, hair encompassed various meanings for African societies (Chapman, 2007:14). It was a symbol of communication to others and through hair messages and meanings were communicated to others, including other tribes. For instance, the Kuroma people in Nigeria communicated their surnames by shaving the top of the head, which was referred to as the turf (Byrd and Tharps 2001, cited in Chapman, 2007:14). These hairstyles took various forms such as braids, plaits as well as beads woven on the head (Patton, 2006:27). Within these communities, women used the hairstyles to show "creativity, personality, including social status" (Chapman, 2007:14). It was also an indication of one's lifestyle and the hairstyles were used to show people's age and the clan they belonged to (Banks 2000, cited in Chapman, 2007:14).

According to Patton (2006:27), the hairstyling practices functioned as a socialising tool among group members, particularly among women as they resulted in stronger social ties. These hair practices could last for several hours to days depending on the hairstyle chosen. Nevertheless, with the beginning of the slave trade and

realisation of the importance of hair practices among Africans, such practices soon came to an end in the Western world (Patton, 2006:28). This was done by shaving the heads of the slaves by their owners, including the once treasured hairstyles such as twists and Zulu knots (Thompson, 2009:833), and hair maintenance materials would vanish (Byrd and Tharp 2001, cited in Thompson, 2009:833). In the new world, Africans had to find new methods of maintaining and protecting their hair such as wearing scarfs. In "400 years without a comb", Morrow talks about how Africans had to adapt to the new world without their hair maintenance tools and how this hair journey led to the connection between hair and race (Morrow 1973, cited in Chapman, 2007:15). Morrow also shows how hair came to be such an important aspect for many (Bank 2000, cited in Thompson, 2009:833), especially when African hair was not conceived of as attractive (Thompson, 2009:833). As a result of strong social ties that derived from hair practices, it thus becomes clear why hair holds so much significance in the everyday lives of African people.

Within the American society, slave abolishment brought along freedom to explore various types of hairstyles among Africans (Byrd and Tharps 2001, cited in Thompson, 2009:833-834). This freedom also meant that people had to find alternatives to transform their African tresses, that is, their kinky hair in order to properly assimilate into the American society. The newly found freedom was welcomed by advertisements of 'before' and 'after' pictures to persuade people to change their skin colour and hair (Rooks 1996, cited in Thompson, 2009:834). It is also around this time that the hair industry started to boom. As has already been stated, this led to the emergence of self-made millionaires such as Madam C. J. who created the first chemical relaxer that would temporarily transform African kinky hair to straight, silky hair. This invention would be followed by the creation of the hot comb (Thompson, 2009:834). However, many attacked Madam C. J. Walker for promoting European beauty standards among black people (White, 2010:20).

The creation of hair products that sought to transform African hair led to the emergence of differences between African people, that is, black middle and working classes (Rooks 1996, cited in Thompson, 2009:834), and such transformations signified the freed slave (Patton, 2006:30). This was the consequence of the symbolic capital attached to straight hair by black people. The practices of chemically straightening one's hair was seen as an attempt by black people to gain

acceptance within the white society and its institutions (Gibson 1995; Speller 2003; Byrd and Tharps 2001; Cadwell 1995; Kaba 2001, all cited in White, 2010:20). This is evident in the cases in which women have been discriminated against at work based on their hairstyles. One case involves 'Rogers versus America Airline' in which airline companies reserved the right to employ people with braided hairstyles (Cadwell, 1991:366). Rogers, an employee of the American Airline was discharged from her job for wearing a braided hairstyle in the workplace. The second case involves a West Virginia African American woman who was fired from her employment for going to work with braid extensions (Thompson, 2009:386). Rogers' and the West Virginia case that happened in 2007 are just among a few cases which have document African black women who were fired from work because of their hairstyle choices. Such incidents are an indication of society's reluctance and refusal to accept African hairstyles.

2.4.2 Hair in the twentieth-twenty first century

Hair politics continue to constitute an essential part of black women's everyday lives in the twenty first century (Thompson, 2009:837). Despite a variety of hairstyle choices available to African women, chemically relaxed hair still remains the first preference for many (Persadsingh 2003, cited in Thompson, 20ed09:837). The preference for straight hair is more than just a matter of self-hate by black women. Erasmus (1997) cited in Marco (2012:11) considers the way hair was and still is an important part of women of colour in her work which outlines how the use of chemical relaxers is an important aspect of African black women's lives. The application process involves the use of chemicals to straighten the roots of one's hair (Marco, 2012:11) and requires maintenance on a monthly basis (Olasode 2009, cited in Marco, 2012:11). The process, is therefore, according to Erasmus (Erasmus 1997, cited in Marco, 2012:11) the result of a colonial-racist system that promoted white beauty standards in South Africa and in my view among global women societies in general.

There exists various literature and images that push the agenda about the need for black women to straighten their hair. The Big Girls Chair (TBGC), a comic book, is one such text that illustrates the importance of hair among African black people and how the practice of chemically straightening hair has become a norm (White,

2010:21). Within this comic book, hair relaxing is perceived as a norm and natural part of black women's everyday lives. The TBGC narrative proceeds by stating that "young girls and women desire to look presentable at least if not attractive" (White, 2010:12), thus placing the dominance of societal expectations on hair, the body and beauty among women. The message indeed claims that one can only obtain good hair through relaxing. Also inherent in the message is that "without any question a girl not born with straight hair will have to relax it" (White, 2010:21). Such messages are perceived by White as promoting the hegemonic ideologies of straight hair as the only form of 'good' hair. As a result, straight hair is understood to be the only path towards womanhood (White, 2010:23). The largest irony here is that, by implication, one's life only begins once a person makes the choice to get her hair chemically straightened.

Media forms such as the TBGC play an important role in the transmission of the importance of straight hair (White, 2010:23). Amongst one of the studies conducted by Thompson, one participant argued that she chose to wear her hair straight because it had become something natural for her to do (Thompson, 2009:847). Despite the fact that long hair is not natural among African black people, the participant perceived having chemically relaxed hair as a normal part of her everyday life. Therefore, it is through such stories that one can truly understand why hair is so important to women.

I seek, therefore, in light of the hair discourse above, to understand how hair dialogues in everyday life impact on female participants and especially on the meanings that they attribute to hair. My study here, is well aware of the importance that hair holds for female participants in everyday lives and how they construct their beauty through hair.

2.5 Skin colour politics

The use of 'skin bleaching' agents has increased over the years within the black community (Blay, 2011:15). This practice can be traced back to the period of queen Elizabeth in which the use of whitening powder and paint was common (Blay 2009a; Peiss 1998; Williams 1957, all cited in Blay, 2011:15). Thus, this rise in the use of bleaching products has been attributed to the privileging of white skin, which is a valorisation that has had a negative impact on black women's everyday lives. This

increase in the use of 'skin bleachers' can therefore be viewed as black women's attempts to fit into the Eurocentric standards of beauty and acquire the privileges attached to whiteness.

The practice of 'skin bleaching' among African black women emerged around the time of the African independence movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Blay 2009b; Souza 2008, all cited in Blay, 2011:5). During this period 'skin bleaching' among the African community rose as one of the most popular cosmetic practices. In the twenty first century this practice can be found in a number of African countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Mali (Adebajo 2002; Oyo 2001; Baxter 2000; Gbenga 2004, all cited in Blay, 2011:5). For instance, 'skin bleaching' agents can be found in 75% of Lagos' trading stores in Nigeria, 52% of the traders stock these agents in Dakar, Senegal and 35% in Pretoria, South Africa. Moreover, in countries such as Cote d'Ivoire it has been discovered that eight out of every ten females uses 'skin lightening' products (Gender Bulletin 1998, cited in Blay, 2011:5). In addition, Southern African countries such as Zambia have an estimated 60% of women between the ages 30 to 39 using 'skin bleaching' agents (Pitche, Kombate, and Tchangai-Walla 2005, cited in Blay, 2011:5). Finally, Ghanaian dermatologists who examined "skin bleaching" practices in that country have concluded that 30% or more of the female population use 'skin lightening' products (Delle 2001; McKinley 2001, all cited in Blay, 2011:5). Therefore, the use of 'skin bleaching' products is rampant in African black people's everyday lives, especially black women as a high number of people engage in the practice of using 'skin lighteners'.

Research findings by the United Nations has found that light-skinned African American women tend to hold higher status, income and higher qualifications than their dark-skinned counterparts (Hill, 2002:77). Skin colour stratification among African American communities is considered to be the result of the internalisation of race paradigms that reward people based on their close approximation to the white beauty ideals (Hughes and Hertel 1990, cited in Hill, 2002:77). According to Hill (2002:77) social institutions give out rewards based on black people's close approximation to whiteness. Scholars in this field have identified skin bias and bleaching to be related to the history of slavery (Blay 2007; Charles 2009, all cited in Blay, 2011:6; Abrahams 2000; Singham 1968, cited in Charles, 2003:712; Drake and Cayton 1945; Myrdal 1944; Russel, Wilson, and Hall 1992, all cited in Hill, 2002:77).

Thus, the legacy of slavery, wherein the Western societies (e.g., Great Britain) promoted white values over black values (Charles, 2003:712), still has a huge bearing in the way society values individuals on the basis of their skin tone.

The presence of past slavery period perceptions on skin tone in the present Jamaican experiences. According to Charles (2009:156), the history of slavery in Jamaica forced people to develop an external orientation towards their skin colour. This process, he continues, took place over the three centuries of colonisation and it impacted in the way they perceived themselves. What is more, social hierarchies between black and white people culminated in the formation of the middle-class in the Jamaican society (Charles, 2009:157). The middle-class consisted of the children of both the black and white population of Jamaica and the new generation of mulattoes (mixed race children of black and white people) occupied a higher position than black people. Thus, the internalisation of the importance of whiteness created hierarchies of significance between white and black people (Brathwaite 1978; Patterson 1969; Williams, all cited in Charles, 2009:157). These processes and the legacy of colonial slavery explain why the use of 'skin bleaching' has increased in modern day Jamaica (Blay 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Charles 2003, 2009; de Souza; Glenn 2008; Lewis, Robkin, Gaska and Njoki 2010; Thomas 2008; Wallace 2009, all cited in Blay, 2011:6).

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, 'skin bleaching' practices owe their existence to the way blacks compare themselves with the European society (Blay, 2011:20). Within these European societies whiteness was equated with access to power (Blay 2009, cited in Blay, 2011:20). Subsequently, this process was gendered and practised by European women (Dyer 1997, cited in Blay, 2011:20). Whiteness in these societies also symbolised the capacity to prolong and retain specific characteristics and one of such characteristic was having women with pale white skin occupy the top of the social hierarchy. Much of nineteenth century beauty practices were thus shaped by 'skin bleaching' practices of European women. Moreover, the rise in the use of these 'skin lightening' agents dates back to the time of Queen Elizabeth I (Gunn 1973, cited Blay, 2011:21). During this time period Queen Elizabeth constituted what many considered to be beauty, and had a huge impact on women's beauty practices, which in a way shows the link between 'skin bleaching' and the attainment of a high status and power in society.

The use of 'skin bleaching' products however, and to a large extent, came to an end in Europe and North American countries because of the harmful toxins found in the products (Peiss 1998; William 1957, all cited in Blay 2011:21). Among the chemical toxins found in the 'skin bleaching' products were ceruse, lye and ammonia, and thus the use of many of the products was banned. Nonetheless, 'skin bleaching' products can be found everywhere on the African continent, with the majority of the people who use the 'skin bleaching' products being women (Blay, 2011:22). This is evident in the studies that have been conducted among African black women (Baxter 2000; Bly 2007, 2009a; Delle 2001; Lewis et al. 2010; Pitche, Kombate, and Tchangai-Walla 2005; Thomas 2008, all cited in Blay, 2011:22). For instance, studies conducted among Tanzanian women, found that there were a number of reasons why women bleached their skins (Lewis et al. 2010; Walla 2005; Thomas 2008, all cited in Blay, 2011:22). It was found out that women participated in 'skin bleaching' because they wanted to obtain light skin and have Eurocentric features (Lewis et al., 2010, cited in Blay, 2011:22). Furthermore, they argued that they wanted to look attractive for their partners and be seen as beautiful. The practice of 'skin bleaching' by black women has also been understood as an attempt to gain access to societal institutions and attain Eurocentric looks, as confirmed in a study conducted among Ghanaian women. Some of the women stated that they bleached their skin in order to appear clean, beautiful, and to obtain economic capital (Blay, 2011:22). As such, the quest to obtain light fair skin has become too many women, a way towards economic freedom and to maximize one's chances of getting married. A fuller discussion of 'skin bleaching' practices in African countries by African women is outlined in the section that focuses on perceptions of beauty and the female body in Africa. Nonetheless, the aim of this section of the dissertation is to examine the practices undertaken by women to obtain a light skin tone and how such practices reflect their understanding of beauty in everyday life.

2.6 The female body in Africa

2.6.1 Beauty and the female body in the African context

As was already mentioned in Chapter One, gender is a "socially constructed rather than biologically determined notion of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'" (Moffett, 2008:105). Through gender, differences are created that distinguish women from

men, and such differences play a vital role in the way people perceive what gender is (Rabe, 2014:153). Subsequently, gender roles are constructed to correspond with the two genders' set views and are then taught to children at an early age (Furnham, Pallango and Gunter, 2001:21). These gender roles and gender behaviours are then extended to social encounters as people are expected to exhibit gender appropriate behaviours during social interaction with others (West and Zimmerman, 2002:4). As explained in Chapter One, gender discourses have led to the existence of two schools of thought, the essentialists and social constructionists. One of them, the essentialists take a biological view of gender and it postulates that gender is fixed and unchangeable (Wood, 2007:19). So gender differences between women and men according to Fuss (1960, 1989) cited in Oloruntaba-Oju and Oloruntaba-Oju (2013) are a "real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity". The existence of such differences has been at the risk of women as they tend to favour men, whilst disadvantaging women. This shortcoming has therefore often resulted in the reduction of the female body to biological experiences (Millet 1969, cited in Oloruntaba-Oju and Oloruntaba-Oju, 2013).

Bodies are linked to gender and as a result are perceived as open to various forms of expression (Craig, 2006:162). They can be understood in different ways by different people. Furthermore, people are placed into different categories in accordance to their bodies. As a result, it is vital that the body be comprehended through the intersection of race, gender and class (Murray, 2012:92). Subsequently and, as noted by Craig (2006:162), beauty discourses are generally characterised by the intersection of race, gender and class. As a result, beauty ideals must be regarded as contested, that is, various beauty standards will exist at a specific time among groups.

However, as already mentioned, contestations over female beauty and the body tend to revolve around Eurocentric beauty standards. This Eurocentric understanding of female beauty and the body often contradicts the perceptions of female beauty and the body in African societies such as Sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, some Ssub-Saharan African countries celebrate obesity as a trait of female beauty and the body among women (Propenoe 2004, cited in Reischer and Koo, 2004:299). This is definitely true among the Yoruba people in Nigeria, where a woman's beauty is

measured through body features such as eyeballs, teeth, buttocks and breasts (Oloruntaba-Oju, 2007). However, special attention tends to be given to the woman's buttocks, just as metaphors are used in the description of body parts which at times entails the use of sundry-names and expressions as well as complementation of one's overall appearance and skin complexion (Oloruntaba-Oju, 2007). This understanding of beauty is reflected in Nigerian literature and culture (Oloruntaba-Oju, 2007). Subsequently, the nexus between beauty and plump bodies leads to conceptions of a woman's fertility; thinking that has roots in primitive societies. It nonetheless does not imply that slim bodies are less attractive than bigger bodies.

Colonisation however, led to the emergency of discourses about the female body that made it impossible to comprehend the black female body outside the confines of race and culture (Oloruntaba-Oju, 2007). These body discourses have resulted in a racialisation of beauty that emanates from the use of the Eurocentric standard of beauty. This racialisation altered African conceptions of beauty in many African countries, and the following section examines how African perceptions of female beauty and the body have changed since the beginning of the European colonisation of African states. I therefore, acknowledge and understand that beauty perceptions change over time, and that these changing and shifting perceptions have been influenced by Western societies in Africa, as I study how colonisation and imposed European standards of beauty influence young African black women's perceptions of female beauty and the body.

2.6.2 New meanings of beauty and the body among African women

The colonisation of African states led to a change in African perceptions of beauty and the female body. One such notable change has been the great importance placed on skin complexion as already mentioned. Sociologists and psychologists have been linking 'skin bleaching' practices with colonialism and slavery in an attempt to determine how this reality has come to inform the "everyday taken for granted" reality of people (Blay, 2011:6). Consequently, they also try to comprehend how white supremacy creates beauty hierarchies based on skin colour, and how such practices have resulted in the widespread use of 'skin bleaching' agents. White supremacy can be understood as "systematic exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and people classified as non-white by Western nations" (Blay,

2011:6). This system of white supremacy operates by giving privilege, rights, and social and economic power to those categorised as white (Ross 1995, cited in Blay, 2011:6). White supremacy is more than just a system of belonging to those classified as white and thus in the present day society any person who adopts white supremacist ideologies can be grouped under white supremacy (Blay, 2011:7). As a result, 'skin bleaching' practices by those categorised as non-white can be seen as an example of their acceptance of white supremacy. Hence, it is through 'skin bleaching' practices that whiteness is embraced as the standard of beauty by those who participate in the process as they try to obtain privileges associated with whiteness.

Perceptions of the use of 'skin bleaching' chemicals have evolved over the years. Initially when 'skin bleaching' practices began in African countries it was conceived of as an immoral practice employed by prostitutes and loose women (Deme, 2012:91). However, with the adoption of the practice by people in the upper-class, the stigma attached to the 'skin bleaching' soon disappeared (Deme, 2012:92). With the passage of time, the use of 'skin depigmentation' products by society's socialites led to the association of 'skin bleaching' with status and wealth. 'Skin bleaching' was also partaken by those wanting to obtain the Eurocentric beauty standards and social acceptance. These factors have been regarded as the leading factors pushing people to engage in 'skin bleaching' processes, and as a result, the practice has become part of black women's everyday lives in which they equate whiteness with beauty. It is for this reason that Coetzee, Faerber, Lefevere, Re and Perret (2012:1) make the assertion that society tends to view white skin as much more beautiful than darker skin. Consequently, skin colour, especially light skin, is at times linked to fertility, femininity of a woman and providing better chances for upward social mobility, as evident in Brazil, West Africa, United States and Mexico, where light skin is believed to maximise one's employment opportunities and chances of a better life (Arderner 1954; Hunter 2002; Rahman 2002, all cited in Fokou, 2009:47).

Skin lighteners play a crucial role in African countries such as Ghana, in increasing one's likelihood of getting married in the marriage market. Consequently, many Ghanaian women take up 'skin bleaching' in order to maximise their chances of getting married (Hunter 2002; Rahman 2002, all cited in Fokou, 2009:48). This practice has been in Ghanaian societies for more than forty years (Fokou, 2009:93).

This popularisation and increased use of 'skin bleachers' has led to an embracement of light skin and its peddling in the communication of messages about female beauty, desirability and higher status. Such importance also seems to be prevalent among men as was discovered by Coetzee and colleagues (2012:1). Studies focusing on skin colour hierarchy identified the possession of a 'yellow' skin complexion by both African and European men increased perceptions of their attractiveness (Coetzee et al., 2012:1). Prior to the introduction of 'skin lighteners' in African societies a woman's beauty was determined by her personality and ability to look after loved ones. Skin colour during these times was not an important trait of beauty among women (Deme, 2012:95-96). However, in the past few years, 'skin depigmentation' has come to be viewed as a key role player in the attainment of social status by people. For example, a light skin, as noted above, maximises one's opportunity to marriage, family life and better life. It therefore, becomes clear that the closer one is to obtaining the Eurocentric standards of beauty, the better their chances of moving up the social hierarchy (Deme, 2012:96).

Many African women, as noted above, are concerned with their hair, whether natural or chemically straightened, and because of this the making of hair has become a common practice among them (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53). Hair politics among African black women tends to be a very sensitive and controversial issue. Through hair, social identities are formed and these then form part of women's everyday lives. To a majority of African black women, appearance is important in their everyday lives and this is where hair comes to play a vital role in their lives. According to the sociologist, Anthony Synnott, hair is a "powerful symbol of individual and group identity" (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53). The global preoccupation with hair can be seen in Japan where people engage in hair cutting practices, curling and primping. In countries such as Venezuela it has resulted in hair theft from shops selling hair extensions (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53). Thus hair plays a significant role in women, irrespective of race and gender.

The great importance that people place on hair has been exhibited in human trajectories. The first sign is evident in the bible story of Samson. In addition, the seventeenth and eighteenth century witnessed hair wigs as the most treasured hair items by most. Later on in the 1960s, long loose hair dominated and was considered to symbolise free spirited individuals. By the 1970s, hair was associated with racial

identities (Rooks 1996, cited in Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53). However, for black women hair carries a variety of meanings (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53) and these cut through many social hierarchies as well as subjectivities. Hair can be seen as impacting on black women's subjective experiences of the social world. Through hair, different social categories are constructed between women and men, and between social classes. In such constructions long and wavy hair is given higher social statuses and in the process constituting the so called true definition of femininity (Craig, 2002:120). This is evident in the curiosity that surrounds African communities on whether a new born girl child will have 'good' or 'bad' hair (Craig, 2002:121). At times this anticipation goes beyond specific class and regional boundaries. As a consequence, judgements are made on the length and texture of one's hair. Ironically, judgements of female beauty based on hair continued and were evident during the Black Power Movements by African Americans and afros and other African hair hairstyles resurfaced as standards of beauty and fashion among African women (Craig, 2002:121).

The focus on new meanings of female beauty and the body here, I seek to show the nature of hair practices by African black women and the way this relates to the way meanings of female beauty are constituted in everyday life. I therefore aim, through this analysis, to understand how historical meanings attached to hair and hair practices by African black women impact on present young black women's hair practices and how such practices influence perceptions of beauty in everyday life, particularly with the alteration of African hair practices after colonisation.

2.7 Colonisation and the changing meanings of female beauty in South Africa

The preoccupation with the above noted beauty practices is not something new in South Africa (Thomas, 2006:469). Such practices are evident in the stories of early European travellers in the nineteenth century that describe how early Zulu societies celebrated 'Stout women' (Thomas, 2006:469). The 'stout women' were young black women who had shiny skin and were considered to be the most beautiful amongst the group. The women kept themselves looking good and young by using animal fat, beaded ornament and skirts from animal skins. In addition, they were of light brown skin complexion. Hunter (1936) and Schapera (1941) cited in Thomas (2006:469) outline early travels within Tswana and Xhosa tribes in which they attest that female

bodies, especially heavy bodies, held very high social status among these groups. Both Hunter and Schapera also show how beauty practices involving fat and butter were common among the Xhosa speaking women. This also entailed the facial tattoos, plaiting of hair, including the use of sweet smelling leaves. So beauty practices among African black women aimed at the female body is something that has always existed prior to colonisation

However, with the arrival of the early European settlers and the introduction of a dominant Western culture that promoted whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth century resulted in racial tensions, especially the idealisation of Western beauty standards over African beauty standards, which led to an end of such practices in South Africa (Spencer, 2009:68). The colonially introduced beauty ideals continue to weigh heavily on African black women in contemporary South Africa as demonstrated in the novel "Coconut" (Murray, 2012:92; Spencer, 2009:68). Throughout the story, the two lead characters of the novel, Fikile and Refilwe, are shown trying to find their way in the new South African. The novel pays special attention to the way Fikile and Refilwe understand and construct beauty in a world where Western ideals dominate (Spencer, 2009:68). The novel also takes into account the socio-economic changes that take place in the lives of black people in post-apartheid South Africa and Fikile and Refilwe find themselves on opposite side of this changing new South Africa. Fikile, on the one hand, comes from a poor background and dreams of a life as a white person as she equates whiteness with a better lifestyles and socio-economic advancement. Refilwe, on the other hand, comes from a well off family that can afford to send her to the best schools and in the process exposed her to a new world, which was once shut off from her and other black South Africans. What these two characters have in common is their aspiration to fit into Western standards of beauty. Throughout the novel they are depicted engaging in various beauty practices aimed at bringing them closer to the Eurocentric standards of beauty, but there are just too many contradictions. For example, the colour of their skin, hair and other physical features prove problematic in their attainment of beauty specified by the Western standards of beauty. This novel shows how the Eurocentric standard of beauty continues to impact on African black women's everyday lives as well as their construction of beauty.

The study by Salo and Davids (2009:39) is another example that seeks to show how young black women's perceptions of female beauty and femininity in post-apartheid South Africa are influenced by Western notions of femininity and female beauty. The study focuses on the influence of global markets, beauty and fashion trends on South African youth. Salo and Davids observe that global consumption practices have had an impact on the popularisation of the Matric dance as evident in the "Glamour, glitz and girls: meanings of femininity in high school Matric ball in urban South Africa". The practice, has roots in early Western societies, more specifically England where a young woman of age would be displayed to others and made available for marriage to the public (Salo and Davids, 2009:41). It was through such practices that the meanings of womanhood and femininity were communicated. Other changes resulting from Westernisation which have been very evident in the black population of South Africa are the perceptions of attractiveness during the selection of an ideal partner. For Coetzee et al. (2012:1) one such change has been noted in the importance placed on facial appearance, a requirement that is the consequence of the influence of Western beauty ideals on people of African descent. Facial appearance, here tends to be the most significant factor as it signals one's youthfulness and fertility (Coetzee et al., 2012:1). In such situations, the attractiveness of a woman is based on her close approximation to the Eurocentric standards of beauty.

Further emphasis has also been put on the lightness of one's skin tone, a preference deriving from the Western notions of beauty (Coetzee et al., 2012:1). Such preferences as well as celebration of Western ideals by black Africans have also led to a change in the inclination of once-valued beauty traits, such as a big body shape and size for African black women, which were once held highly by South Africans. Recent studies on black female South Africans show a growing liking for smaller bodies, particularly among university students. This has also been accompanied by the assumption that the closer one is to the attainment of such qualities the better their chances of social and economic mobility (Coetzee et al., 2012:2; Ogana and Ojong, 2012:32). The change in body preferences has resulted also in eating disorders among the black population, something that was once rare but more common among Western populations as has already been stated.

Big voluptuous bodies were once valued among African black women within the South African context (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:32). This is a view that was also held by the Zulu population of South Africa. One reason according to Ogana and Ojong (2012:32) is the equation of larger bodies with wealth, beauty and a good life. Thus, overweight people were accepted among the Zulu ethnic group as beautiful and worthy (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:34). This view still prevails among the older generation of the Zulu ethnic group in South Africa. Entangled here in the notion of big bodies with the intersection of beauty, race, class, and gender. However, the younger generation of the Zulu population tends to display rather contrasting views from the older generation owing to the consequence of the Western ideals of female beauty (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:36). This tends to be particularly true for the younger generation of Zulu youth who have been exposed to races as well as cultures other than that of their own (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:37). The exposure to outside racial groups and cultures has resulted in shifting perceptions of female beauty and the body by the younger generation of Zulu women and men, thus making them want to adhere to such standards (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:38). The changing perceptions of beauty have led to an increasing number of African black women participating in body fitness regimes.

Body perceptions as well as differences in the conceptions of the female body have also been understood to exhibit the intersection of race, class and gender (Ogana and Ojong, 2012:38). This is evident in the study conducted by Ogana and Ojong as they wanted to understand the “Sexual body ideals among Zulu women, continuity and change”. The above discussions therefore, shows the changing perceptions of beauty among African black women and how the shifting perceptions of beauty have influenced how the black female body is perceived in post-apartheid South Africa. In this study I seek to understand how such changing views of beauty have impacted on female participants’ construction of beauty and the black female body in everyday life.

2.8 Hair and African black women in South Africa

South Africa’s colonial past has resulted in hair playing a significant role in the way of life of a majority of women within different racial groups (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:53). Under South Africa’s racialised system close attention was paid to

people's natural features. This for African black women led to their inferior status as their hair and other bodily features were deemed unattractive when compared to white bodies (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:54). During apartheid's racial categorisation, there was a pencil test used to judge whether one was white or non-white. As a result straight hair was equated to whiteness and high status, black hair become synonymous with inferiority and exclusion. This is exemplified through the famous exhibition of Saartjie Baartman in Paris and London that was mentioned in the previous discussions. Because of such understandings the majority of black women struggle to create a beauty ideal that accommodates African black women. As a result, a large number of black women engage in the consumption of hair products such as shampoo, hairdryers, and chemical relaxers in an attempt to acquire the Eurocentric standard of beauty.

Black women's everyday struggles with beauty are demonstrated in the novel "Coconut" which tries to show how beauty relations work in a world that promotes the Eurocentric standards of beauty (Spencer, 2009:68). Despite the novel being based on fiction, "Coconut" reveals the intersection of race, gender and class, and how this intersection underlies South African black women's construction and perceptions of female beauty and the body in everyday life. The novel therefore takes a look at African black women's everyday beauty practices such as hair and these are made visible to the reader (Murray, 2012:91092; Spencer, 2009:68). The quest to attain straight and long hair by black women is understood as the direct consequence of a historically divided society in South Africa during apartheid, which has therefore impacted on black women's relationship with their hair (Erasmus 1997, cited in Murray, 2012:92).

Moreover, the realisation that beauty can be both the result of nature and human alterations of nature has pushed African women to go to great lengths in caring for and maintaining their hair (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:55). Black women have thus undertaken hair alteration practices such as chemical relaxing and the wearing of artificial hair in an attempt to escape the so called limitations imposed on them by nature. However, according to Nyamnjoh and Fuh (2014:55) these are the consequences of unrealistic standards of beauty that disadvantage women, and unfortunately black women find themselves as being such a group. African women

as a population therefore find themselves falling outside Western standards of beauty as has already been discussed.

In South Africa, debates surrounding 'good' hair often centred on women in the media and public eye, such as newscasters (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:55). This is because a majority of African black women wear their hair either in the form of weaves or braids. The popularisation of such hairstyles in the South African context has meant that putting one becomes a symbol of a clean and professional image, while hairstyles such as dreadlocks are perceived to be unprofessional (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:58). Hair dialogues of 'good' and 'bad' hair among African black women have even been addressed in a variety of television shows and documentaries by people such as Deborah Patta in South Africa, and Chris Rock as well as Tyra Banks in the United States. In all these hair discussions, notions of 'good' and 'bad' hair among the African and African American communities have been comprehended as deriving from apartheid and slavery. This is because African black women were forced to compare their beauty against that of white women.

As has been already stated, understandings of 'good' and 'bad' hair have resulted in the categorisation of people into different groups based on the colour of their skin (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:58). Slavery meant that black hair acquired negative connotations in the United States of America. For instance, black hair was derogatingly viewed as wool, such that black people have engaged in hair alteration practices in an attempt to counteract such meanings. In South Africa such actions have led to the emergence of an R800 million hair industry (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:58). Hair consumption practices in South Africa have also been accompanied by an increase in the use of 'skin lightening' practices by black women (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:58). Such incidents show the extent to which black women are willing to pursue in order to fit into the Eurocentric standards of beauty as was reflected in one of Deborah Patta's "3rd Degree" television show dedicated to hair politics in South Africa (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:58).

Other television shows have also shown the degree to which black women have internalised racism as well as the Western standards of female beauty (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:59). South African television shows such as the now off-air "Three talk" with Noleen Maholwana Sangqu place hair politics at the centre of attention

through its discussion on extensions such as weaves and braids versus natural hair. In one specific show in which Maholwana Sangqu's show tackled the issue of hair among black women she invited along a panel of South African celebrities in which she asked their views about the issue of natural hair versus artificial hair (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:59). The guests that were against weaves as well as any form of artificial hair, contended that black South African women should stop copying the Western ideals of beauty. Among this group was a South African poet Ntsiki Mazwai who went on to state that young black women are taught from a young age to embrace Western notions of beauty that promote straight hair as the ideal among women. It is thus for this precise reason that hair politics must not be taken for granted. Through the imposition of white beauty standards, black women are not awarded the opportunity to decide for themselves what constitutes natural beauty she added. For Mazwai such actions are the result of an internalisation of whiteness by black women.

However, the group of panel for weaves and other forms of artificial hair stated that whether one wears their hair natural or not is a personal choice (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:59). Among this group of guest was Zanele Nkosi (leadership coach and inspirational speaker) who stipulated that one's hair was in not related to their identity. Therefore, choosing to wear weaves does not make one less African. Nkosi also argued against the view that African women's choice to wear extensions or chemically straighten hair was the consequence of an internalisation of a historically racially divided South Africa. The only problem she stated was the level of importance that people place on hair, rather than extensions. This was a view that was held by two more guests on the show, Dineo Ranaka and Luthando Shosha, who are both local television presenters. Both countered the notion of straight hair as an emulation of whiteness (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:60). The panel of male guests on the show also saw the choice to wear artificial hair or not as a personal one on the part of the woman (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:60). Simba Mhere (who was a Top Billing presenter), stated that a woman's hair does not define her in any way and that it would not stop him from dating a woman just because she wore a weave.

A group of students at the University of Cape Town argued that identities and people's sense of freedom are influenced by Western ideals of beauty (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:60). As far as they were concerned, personal choices were in part the

results of the standards promoted by colonialism in the country and the Eurocentric standards of beauty. Such consensus around hair politics can be seen in the work of authors such as Tony Morrison, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and television host Oprah Winfrey (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:60-61). They in part share the views held by Ntsiki Mazwai that the choice to wear artificial hair is not in any way a personal choice. Therefore according to South African philosopher and author Eusebius McKaiser (2012:23-24) people's personal choices must be examined, especially in a country like South Africa which has a long history of racial division. This is because whiteness has been for a long time associated with superiority, whilst blackness has been linked with inferiority (McKaiser, 2012:24). South Africans internalised such understandings and for this reason people's personal choices should not be taken for granted. From this argument, African black women's choice to wear artificial hair can be seen as an issue that requires more exploration if we are to understand the reasons why black women wear weave extensions and other types of artificial hair.

Oprah Winfrey has also commented on the complex relationship between African black women and hair, and how debates about natural hair versus fake hair tend to over simplify the issue (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:60-61). These views have also been expressed by University of Cape Town students who view hair practices among black women as a matter of acceptance within a world that celebrates Eurocentric beauty. Such arguments would then explain why South African women may feel compelled to consume artificial hair to make themselves appear and feel beautiful. This is even despite the view of hairstyles choices and diversity by black women being a personal choice (Nyamnjoh and Fuh, 2014:61).

Nonetheless, debates around hair have led authors such as Murray (2012:91) to conclude that the preoccupation with appearance has become almost an end to itself among African black women. This is evident in the novel "Coconut" by Kopano Matlwa (Matlwa 2008, cited in Murray, 2012:91). Such work has also been accompanied by a body of literature by feminist scholars such as Hunter and de Beauvoir (Hunter 2002; de Beauvoir 1997, all cited in Murray, 2012:91). Hunter (2002) cited in Murray (2012:91) on one hand, has focused on how women are pressured to live up to unrealistic standards of beauty, and how these standards put a burden on their everyday lives. While on the other hand, de Beauvoir, as was already mentioned articulates how "one is not born a woman", but becomes a

woman through specific societal practices (de Beauvoir 1997, cited in Murray, 2012:91). In her view femininity is thus a product that women obtain through social practices that embrace female beauty standards.

The aim of the previous discussions and the inclusion of the novel “Coconut” by Kopano Matlwa, the “Matric ball” by Salo and Davids, the article by Coetzee and colleagues, and the study by Ogana and Ojong titled “Sexual body ideals among Zulu women, continuity and change” are intended to show how perceptions of female beauty and the body among black South African women have changed since 1994. Such changes in the perceptions of female beauty and body among black South Africans are the result of a long entrenched system of racial segregation that promoted whiteness (Marco, 2012:17). Erasmus (1997) cited in Marco (2012:17) points out that South Africa’s racial past has deeply altered Africans’ understandings of beauty in everyday life, thus shaping their everyday constructions of beauty and the female body. Consequently, demonstrated from the cited articles and novel is the extent to which the social categories race, class and gender still play an important role in the construction of female beauty and the body in everyday life. This also demonstrates the role that media play in the construction of meanings on female beauty and the body and perceptions of femininity in everyday life. In the views of hooks (1992) cited in Spencer (2009:75) examples can be seen in the celebration of Eurocentric beauty in the media. This was the same predicament faced by the two characters in the fiction novel “Coconut” as there was a lack of media that promoted black beauty and as a result, they found themselves unable to reject such messages of female beauty and the body (Spencer, 2009:76). These scenarios do not however, deny the still prevailing traditional values that still celebrate African beauty in the South Africa as shown in the study by Ogana and Ojong.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the available literature on female beauty and the body in everyday life. The chapter began by examining the body as a social construct in everyday life and how meanings are attached to the female body across different groups of people. The body is understood to be the primary source of the self and

open to societal meanings by social actors. The meanings attributed to the body as well as to its various parts are perceived to have led to changed conceptions of female beauty and attractiveness over time. They have also led to an increased attention to and privileging of certain body parts. This is exemplified in the emphasis of beauty practices that celebrate the Eurocentric beauty standard (long, straight, silky hair, long straight nose, a light skin tone and a thin body frame). It has also led to the negative labelling of specific body parts, including conceptions of how a body ought to look and such actions have tended to have a negative impact on the female body, especially for black women.

For African black women beauty perceptions based on the Eurocentric standard of beauty have had a negative impact on their lives as their failure to adhere to such standards, makes them outsiders to the Eurocentric standards of beauty. This is evident in the section that provides a historical overview of female beauty and the body over time. This historical overview showed the way in which beauty is racially and historically embedded and how race further intersects with gender and class in everyday life. This was followed by an examination of the historical perceptions of beauty in the African context and how perceptions of beauty and the female body have changed over time due to the impact of factors such as Western colonisation. As a result, female beauty is now understood and constructed in relation with the Eurocentric standard of female beauty as evident in the importance placed on hair, skin tone and a thin body. In South Africa this has resulted in hair dialogues focusing on the everyday hair practices of African black women, as attested in studies conducted in South Africa by Salo and Davids, Spencer, and Nyamnjoh and Fuh.

From the consulted literature it is clear that despite the changing meanings of beauty, it is a social construct based on what dominant groups deem as beauty at a particular time. For specific groups of women, particularly black women, such standards of beauty have served to discriminate against them, despite the fact that these standards have been subject to change. Furthermore, media play a vital role in the continued discrimination of black women outside the Eurocentric standard of beauty through the reinforcement of stereotypical images dating back to slavery and later colonialism and apartheid. These historical events impact on the way current constructions of female beauty and the body by African black people should be understood. This literature review chapter serves as an insight to how female beauty

and the body are understood by black women in everyday life. The chapter therefore provides an in-depth insight to the theoretical framework provided in chapter one of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the steps that are taken during the course of the research project. This overview begins with an outline of the research design used in the research study. It also discusses the importance of narrative approaches in the process of collecting stories and outlines the research steps that are utilised in the study. Finally, it describes methods of data collection and analysis in the study as well as ethical considerations to the study.

3.1 Research design: qualitative research

Durrheim (2006:34) refers to a research design as “a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research”. According to Creswell (2013:47) it is a “plan for conducting research”. Moreover, a research design can be understood as a guideline on how the researcher intends to conduct his or her research (Sellitz, Jahoda, Deauchs and Cook 1965, cited in Durrheim, 2006:34). This research design entails a detailed plan of how the data will be gathered and analysed and specifies the relevance of the undertaken research project. The need for a research design comes from the comprehension that individual actors understand their surrounding world in different ways and that our observations enable us to make attempts at understanding our research participants’ views. This requires that researchers have a planned research design (Durrheim, 2006:34). As such, these planned observations assist the researcher to draw conclusions based on what he/ she would have observed.

I use qualitative research as my research design in this study. Qualitative research gathers data through the use of “written or spoken language or in the form of observations that are recorded in language, and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes” (Durrheim, 2006:47). It is mostly based on inductive reasoning in which the researcher starts from a specific case and moves to the general. The use of inductive processes enables the researcher to explore the social phenomena under focus in depth in order to grasp a deeper understanding of it (Durrheim, 2006:47). Using qualitative research in this study, I work together with research participants to co-construct meanings about female beauty in everyday life which will be recorded using a digital recorder during the individual interviews and focus group

interview. The aim is to move from these specific cases and provide better comprehension of beauty discourses in the social world. This is to enable the researcher to get a deeper understanding of how the female participants perceive femininity in everyday life.

As a research approach, qualitative research is concerned with the placement of researchers within the research process (Creswell, 2013:43). Moreover, it is interpretative in nature and it seeks to make the hidden facts of life visible, thus, facilitating a change in our understanding of the social world as we know it. This research approach utilises a variety of data gathering strategies ranging from interviews, conversations, and recordings (Creswell, 2013:43-44). It also includes the use of case studies, documentary analysis, and biographies (Woods, 2006:2). My study seeks to reinterpret the everyday subjective experiences of female beauty by young African black women.

Qualitative research is interested in subjective meaning by research participants as it gathers meanings through the use of interviews in the participant's natural setting (Creswell, 2013:44; Woods, 2006:2). It aims to understand the world from the viewpoint of those being studied and the meaning that they attach to it (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, cited in Creswell, 2013:44). As a "naturalistic, holistic and inductive research design" (Durrheim, 2006:7), qualitative research focuses on everyday human behaviour as it occurs within its natural setting (Woods, 2006:3). Thus, the researcher makes sure that they do not disturb everyday interactions as they occur. I therefore, use qualitative research to find out how subjective meanings of femininity are co-constructed in the everyday life of female participants and how they are subjectively understood and interpreted by female participants in everyday life.

Qualitative research can lead to the empowerment of research participants (Creswell, 2013:6). The storytelling inherent in qualitative research provides participants with a voice and thus eliminates the researcher's primary authority within the research process. In addition, this form of research is conducted to get a better understanding of social actors' everyday lives (Creswell, 2013:46). Consequently, it assists in the establishment of current trends that shape people's everyday lives within the broader lifeworld. Finally, qualitative research is also utilised for the

development of theories, particularly where old theories seem to be inadequate in the study of the changing social world.

Qualitative research requires the full engagement of the researcher when he or she would be studying social phenomena (Creswell, 2013:47). It works with the understanding that everyday social life is complicated, especially because of the meanings that people attach to it (Berger 1966, cited in Woods, 2006:3). Qualitative research, therefore, often requires that the researcher be prepared to spend a long period of time with the social phenomenon under study both when collecting data and getting to know the social phenomenon being studied (Wood, 2006:3; Creswell, 2013:47).

Data in this study is gathered using a qualitative research design which recognizes the existence of a plurality of lifeworlds. In addition, the research considers the need for sensitivity with regards to the empirical study of female beauty (Flick, 2010:12). Through the use of the interpretive paradigms described in chapter one, qualitative research seeks to make some aspects of the experience of the empirical world visible to the observer (Creswell, 2013:43). Therefore, the interpretive paradigms that are used here are; a) social constructivism, b) phenomenology, c) feminist theories and d) Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the body as social capital. These approaches aim to provide a context for us to understand how people perceive and understand the lifeworld in which they live. Feminist theories do this by focusing on the role of gender in women's everyday lives. These meanings about the social world are seen as historically embedded and shared through social interaction with others (Creswell, 2013:26; Inglis, 2012:86).

3.2 The narrative approach

Narrative researches uses various concepts to offer an account of the stories told by those being studied (Chase, 2005:652). These concepts make provision for studying the flexible meanings in the description of everyday life. Narrative research can take various forms (Daiute and Lightfoot 2004, cited in Creswell, 2013:70). This means that narratives can either be descriptive or explanatory (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:16), with both descriptive and explanatory forms of narratives data is collected in a similar manner. Using descriptive narratives, the researcher aims to provide a

full account of events as told by people in their everyday life (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:16).

Explanatory research, on the other hand, takes the reported stories and tries to make sense of them through cause and effect, that is, by making connections between the stories that would have been told (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:16). Data is often collected through the employment of in-depth interviews and the analysis of documents. In this study, data is gathered through the use of in-depth interviews and analysis of visual documents in the form of pictures, magazines, and videos. The use of in-depth interviews and visual documents assists the researcher to understand how young African black women understand beauty in relation to their surrounding world and those around them (Chase, 2011:422). The undertaken research study is explanatory in nature as female participants provide detailed explanations of their subjective experiences of female beauty and the body in everyday life.

According to Chase (2005:652), “a narrative can be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation”. A narrative outlines an event that would have taken place either in one’s life or in the life of someone. According to Creswell (2013:70) it is the phenomenon under study, and examples of such are divorce or death of a loved one. Narrative research is a subtype within qualitative research (Chase, 2005:651) and it comprises a number of analytical approaches that are used in a wide range of disciplines, including traditional and new methods. Moreover, narratives can be the object under study or the method used to analyse phenomenon (Chase 2005; Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Pinnegar and Daynes 2007, all cited in Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2013:70). In this piece of research oral narratives are used in collecting data as female participants provide an oral account of their everyday perceptions and experiences of female beauty in the lifeworld.

Narratives as inquiry can be understood as “spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska 2004, cited in Creswell, 2013:70). This process entails the researcher presenting the storyteller’s life according to stages (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Denzin 1989a, cited in Creswell, 2013:280). The researcher is interested in people’s

lived experiences of everyday life as they are told by social actors (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:2). Through the use of narratives, people are seen to live storied lives in which they provide a narration of their everyday life. Finally, narratives take us through people's everyday life experiences in the lifeworld, including the good and bad of their experiences (Riessman, 2008:22).

The aim of narratives as already mentioned, is to connect the events in order to determine how they impact on the everyday lives of research participants. This usually involves visiting past events and then connecting them to present day events (Riessman, 2008:220). A concept often used in the description of these narratives is life history (Chase, 2005:652). A life biography can be understood as a biographical compilation of an individual's life (Geiger 1986, cited in Creswell, 2013:281). The person being studied is dealt with as a living being, whose life is understood as shaped by personal, institutional and historical events that would have taken place in his or her life.

As a method, narratives are both action and experience driven (Riessman, 2008:22). They are primarily concerned with social actors' actions and experience in the social world. As a result, the narrative method looks into people's everyday actions in the social world and the way in which the social world influences people's everyday lives. However, the nature of the stories told tends to differ due to cultures and type of societies (Bell, 2002:207). This is because different cultures and societies have different ways of making sense of their social world and interpret it in different ways. Within this study, I take cognizance of the fact that the stories told by female participants about femininity, particularly on female beauty and the body, differ due to the participants' different cultures and belief systems.

Narratives, as an analytical tool, are founded upon the assumption that people are always trying to make sense of their everyday lives and the structures found in their lifeworld (Bell, 2002:207). This is a natural process that helps individuals to better understand themselves and their lived experiences (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999:1243). Through this process, people are able to organise their everyday events in a way that makes sense to them (Bell, 2002:207; Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999:1243), a process that is done through the incorporation of certain thoughts and feelings (Chase, 2005:65; Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999:1243). However, narrative

approaches attempt to go beyond the told in order to comprehend the meanings inherent in them (Bell 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Conle 1992; Golombek 1998, all cited in Bell, 2002:208). It also attempts to provide answers and bridge the gap between past and present events (Bruner 1986; Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Hinchman and Hinchman 2001; Laslett 1999; Polkinghorne 1995, cited in Chase, 2005:656).

The role of the researcher within narrative inquiry is to give an account of the stories as they are told by research participants (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:2; Creswell, 2013:70). As such, in the undertaken study the narrative approach is used to inquire into the stories told by female participants as they outline their perceptions of femininity, especially those on female beauty and the body. This is because “people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe those lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of them” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:2). These stories, focusing on the participants’ “perceptions of femininity, especially female beauty and the body” in everyday life, are gathered through the use of interviews. According to Riessman (2008:23) this form of collecting narratives within human sciences has over the years grown in demand as more and more social researches are using it to collect data. Through the utilisation of interviews, researchers are able to use open-ended questions, thus allowing the researchers to delve deeper into people’s everyday lives.

In addition, narrative researchers view the stories told as a form of dialogue comprising of past and present events (Chase, 2005:656). The stories contain hidden meanings that individuals are sometimes unaware of (Bell, 2002:209). It thus becomes the task of the researcher to try and uncover the hidden meanings. He or she also has to perceive the told stories as leading to something, such as the challenging of dominant ideologies or confirming perceptions about events (Chase, 2005:657). The stories are also understood as being both situated and influenced by social events and people must be seen as distinct individuals (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, cited in Clandinin, 2006:46). Furthermore, narrative inquiry recognises that people live the stories that they tell by means of reflection (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:5). The narrative researcher therefore has to use the stories as a starting point in interpreting and giving an account of the stories told by people (Coles 1989, cited in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:4; Denzin and Lincoln 2000, cited

in Chase, 2005:657). The researcher has to interpret the stories by unpacking all the hidden meanings inherent in the stories and as the researcher interprets the story, he or she has to give voice to the person telling the story (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990:4). By using narratives, the researcher recognises that people's experiences of everyday life and the associated interpretations change over time. Finally, the use of narrative is also understood to be essential in assisting individuals to get a better grasp of their lived experiences and the struggles that they would have gone through (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992, cited in Chase, 2005:667).

Within the undertaken study, a narrative approach is utilised because it allows both the researcher and the female participants to outline and co-construct meanings about female beauty and the body in everyday life. This is done by delving deep into the female participants' everyday experiences of femininity in everyday life with the intention of uncovering the female participants' "everyday taken for granted" beauty perceptions. The aim of these narratives is to understand how young black women perceive beauty by connecting events in their everyday lives. This task then requires the revisiting of female participants life history with the intention of providing answers to their present day life.

3.3 Data collection process

This section outlines the steps that I will engage in during the data collection process, the ethical considerations of the study and data analysis.

3.3.1 Sampling

According to Durrheim and Painter (2006:133), sampling "is the process of selecting cases to observe". This study's chosen sampling method is purposive sampling which involves the selection of a certain population by the researcher based on the knowledge she has of them, its elements and purpose of the undertaken study (Babbie, 2010:193). This study begins with the researcher using purposive sampling. This is because purposive sampling allows the researcher to use her judgement in the selection of research participants (Babbie, 2010:193; Creswell, 2013:155). Most often it is used when a researcher already has a particular case in mind. Another important factor that influenced the decision to use this form of sampling method is the availability of the research participants (Creswell, 2013:155). Nevertheless,

sampling here is not dependent on the fact that randomly chosen research participants need to be included in the research (Durrheim and Painter, 2006:139). The disadvantage of the sampling method is that the researcher is at times not guaranteed that the chosen population will be representative of an entire population. Nonetheless, purposive sampling has three advantages for the researcher, which is discussed in the following section.

As already stated, a researcher selects this type of sampling method when he/she has a specific case in mind that he/she believes will prove very informative (Babbie, 2010:193). In this case, this researcher is interested in young African black women's perceptions of femininity, especially female beauty and the body. So in undertaking this project I already have certain participants in mind whom I want to interview for the research project. This form of sampling method is at times utilised in the location of difficult to reach populations groups. I also use this form of sampling method because I want to get a deeper comprehension of certain cases.

The second type of sampling method that I utilise in this study is snowball sampling. This form of sampling method, sometimes referred to as network or reputational sampling, is the most appropriate when a researcher wants to identify difficult to get by cases within a specific population (Crause, 2014:48). With this type of sampling, the researcher starts off with one or two people and then continues to recruit other research participants using initial cases as links to get more participants (Babbie 2010; Neuman, 2012, all cited in Crause, 2014:48). In using this sampling method the researcher relies on the few participants that she has identified to lead her to other potential research participants. This form of sampling thus, often complements purposive sampling.

3.3.2 Target population

The study's target population consist of eight young African black female undergraduates and postgraduates students from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. They ranged from the ages of 19 to 29 years, which allows for diversity of the sample and thus enrich the understanding and perception of black female beauty and the body. The interviewees also represent different socio-economic backgrounds. The women recruited for the study have different hairstyles that include weaves, short hair, natural hair hairstyles such as Afros and

African hairstyles such as braids and plaits. This diversity among the interviewees is significant as it enriches the prospective data. The women also vary in terms of their body shapes and sizes and there is no preference for any specific sexual orientation within the participants.

3.3.3 Recruitment of research participants and language

Purposive sampling is used in the search for potential participants. The researcher also uses snowball sampling in which she will rely on leads from the chosen research participants. The interviews are conducted using English as a language of communication between the researcher and participants. This is in part because the researcher is of Xhosa origin and the research participants come from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The researcher, therefore, chose to carry out the interviews in English and made sure that the selected participants' are fluent English speakers and could fully express themselves in English.

3.3.4 Observation

Qualitative researchers use a variety of methods to gather data, and observation forms part of such data gathering strategies that they employ. Observation, as a means of data collection, entails the use of the researcher's senses, especially the eyes, to observe phenomena (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004:82). However, the use of observation as a tool for gathering data depends on the form of questions used by the researcher, especially in non-ethnographic research. Observation also entails one familiarising him/ herself with their research setting and the people being observed. In this study, observation is used in the selection of research participants, that is, the researcher plans to observe and then recruits female participants on the basis of their physical features. Observation as a data collection method is also used in the individual interviews and focus group interviews to be conducted by the researcher. This method will enable the researcher to obtain the data required in the provision of insights into the research study at hand.

3.3.5 Research setting

Qualitative research stresses the importance of conducting research within a setting that participants feel most comfortable in. This is often referred to as the research participant's natural setting. In the study, interviews will therefore be conducted in an

area of the participants' choosing, such as the participants' homes and private facilities at the university, where they feel most secure.

3.3.6 Ethical considerations of the study

The sensitivity of the study demands that the researcher get ethical clearance from the Humanities Faculty's Ethical Clearance Committee. According to Flick (2009:36), who makes reference to the Nazi experiments in Germany, states that this has become essential amidst the ever-growing controversial scandals that cloud social research in contemporary research. I applied for ethical clearance at the beginning of my research study. The process involved the drawing up of research questions that I intend to ask the female participants, drawing up an information sheet that I will offer the participants to read about the research and their rights, and the drawing up of a consent form which participants have to sign to indicate that they agree to participate in the study. These issues are often referred to as the code of ethics, and are utilised to guide as well as control the research process (Flick, 2009:36). They thus caution researchers from inflicting any form of harm to research participants.

After applying for ethical clearance from the Humanities Faculty's Ethics Clearance Board at the University of the Free State, permission was granted to proceed with my study (UFS-HUM-2013-27, 14 May 2014); I set out to conduct my research interviews. This process entails the provision of an information sheet given to participants to read prior to the interview, and a consent form which the participants have to sign on to show that they agree to participate in the research project. In addition, the research participants are assured that any information shared during the interviews will remain between the researcher and the researchers' supervisors. As such, they are also informed that their identities will stay anonymous, and pseudonyms will be utilised so that the information cannot be traced back to them. In the unlikely case of psychological stress resulting from the interviews, research participants are made aware of the free counselling services offered at Kopsie Health at the university.

3.4 Data collection

Data for this study are collected using interviews. According to Mishler (1986) cited in Riessman (2008:23) interviews are important as they lead to a dialogue between

the participant and researcher. As such they allow the interviewee to give an account of her everyday life. Hence, Mishler argues that the relationship between the speaker and listener in research interviews is encouraged because it leads to a collaborative construction of meaning between the researcher and the research participant. Within this study the researcher uses two types of interviews; a) semi-structured individual interviews and, b) focus-group interviews.

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In the case of semi-structured interviews, a researcher plans the interviews well in advance of the actual interview (Braun and Clarke, 2013:78). A copy of the interview schedule used in this research is attached in appendix F to indicate the type of questions that the researcher intends to ask participants during the interviews. Semi-structured interviews facilitate face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the participants (Novick 2008, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013:79). Using this form of interview, I intend to ask female participants open-ended questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013:79). Open-ended questions allow the participants to answer questions in their own words and according to their experiences. It also allows for deeper exploration of questions during interviews.

Participants are assumed to have specific ideas about the subject matter (Flick, 2009:156). We accept that the research participants possess a stock of knowledge with regards to the topic covered by the research. As a result, semi-structured interviews are often seen as ideal. This stock of knowledge consists of a variety of assumptions that are seen as explicit and immediate. These are expected to be expressed spontaneously during semi-structured interviews. Hence, the subject under scrutiny is also retrieved through the employment of complementary questions that the researcher formulates during the interview as well as through the use of open-ended questions guiding the research process.

Finally, the use of semi-structured interviews in the gathering of narratives is aimed at assisting the interviewer to generate scenarios and events within the interview (Riessman, 2008:23). This is because qualitative research interviews are taken as a form of dialogue that people employ in everyday life. During the interview the research participants can move back and forth when talking about specific events in her life. In the study at hand individual interviews are conducted among eight African

black women. Out of the eight women interviewed by the researcher six were called back for follow up interviews. The follow up interview are utilised by the researcher as a means of further exploration of questions explored in the first individual interviews with the participants. Overall, the conducted individual interviews are one hour and a half long, while the follow up interviews lasted for an hour.

3.4.2 Focus group interviews

The research study also makes use of focus group interviews. This form of interview is employed as an extension to the individual interviews that are conducted by the researcher (Flick, 2009:195). A focus group interview involves an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. It can also be understood as a sophisticated technique to obtain data from various participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013:108). The groups are typically made up of between six and eight people who participate in a combined interview (Patton 2002, cited in Flick, 2009:195). Focus group interviews are ideal if one wants to get a better understanding of an issue (Patton 2002, cited in Flick, 2009:195), and elicit reactions between various participants at the same time (Braun and Clarke, 2013:108). The form of interaction found in focus groups interviews serves to separate it from other types of interviews used in research. This is because focus group interviews allow for the expression of opinions and attitudes that are normally present in everyday encounters by social actors (Flick, 2009:197). As such, focus group interviews facilitate an open and free environment in which participants can talk to one another about sensitive issues using everyday language that they employ in their social encounters (Wilkinson 1998a; Kitzinger 1994b, all cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013:110).

Focus groups are essential in research for a number of reasons. The opinions and attitudes expressed in the focus group interview are used as validation to attitudes express in the individual interviews (Flick, 2009:197). They also provide information that researchers would have not been able to retrieve using other forms of interviews, especially insights into a specific issue because participants in the group context react to other participants' views and perceptions (Wellings et al., 2000, Wilkinson 1998c, all cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013:110). In addition, as noted by Flick (2013:197), group discussions are a significant tool in changing how others feel, think and perceive certain issues. Within the research project three participants

out of the six participants interviewed in the follow up interviews are selected to participate in the focus group interview. The focus group interview is between 2 to 3 hours long. The researcher plans to use the focus group interviews, in this project, in an attempt to find out whether the participants, when put in group context, still provide accounts which are consistent with the views that are expressed in the individual interviews. It is indeed important to find out if participants adjust their views because of the group dynamics and pressure. Therefore, the use of focus group interviews assists in the elaboration and provision of a detailed account of certain social issues (Wilkinson 1998a, 1998c, cited in Braun and Clarke, 2013:110).

3.4.3 Demographic information sheet

A demographic information sheet is used to collect background information about the participants. This information is used to enable the researcher to determine the female participants' class, thus providing information about female participants' accessibility to economic and cultural capital required to follow aesthetics standards of the female body. This demographic sheet is attached in the appendix documents of this dissertation.

3.4.4 Pilot study

The researcher intends to conduct a pilot study, prior to the actual interviews. The aim of a pilot study is to check whether the drafted questions provide the data needed for the research project. Here, I want to check whether the questions are easy for research participants to comprehend and to determine which questions will require reworking in an effort to obtain richer data. Once the suitability of the questions has been established based on the pilot study, the researcher will set out to conduct the pilot study, which will assist in the determining of the quality of the formulated interview schedule and the reworking of some unclear questions as well as determining research prompts to be used during the data collection phase of the study.

3.4.5 Discourses of beauty

Contestations over what constitutes beauty are not something new for black women (Patton, 2006:24). For centuries, African women have posed a challenge to what is predominantly regarded and understood as beauty and this challenge has been

based on the understanding that beauty varies from one culture to the next. What is often neglected is that beauty discourses tend to impact more on black women than any other group of women. Furthermore, such discourses often centre on the intersection of hair, race, beauty and the body. These discourses, have however been noted as owing their existence to slavery in which hair, skin colour and body image of white women were valorised over those of black women, particularly in the United States of America (cf. Chapter 2, p.63).

Everyday discourses and understanding of beauty derive from the dominant standards of beauty (Patton, 2006:25). According to Saltzberg and Chrisler (1997), cited in Patton (2006:25), "beauty is an elusive commodity". More importantly, beauty discourses are found among black and white women as well as other racial groups. For example, there is foot binding practice among Chinese women (Saltzberg and Chrisler 1997, cited in Patton, 2006:25). Another case involves Fijian women who, after the introduction of American television shows, started to show eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia as they tried to live up to societal standards of beauty. Thus, what is comprehended as beauty in everyday life differs across cultures but nevertheless, discourses of beauty dominate the everyday life of different women.

The case of Fiji shows the influence of the Western world in the construction of beauty standards by other societies (Patton, 2006:30). The standards are often based on the lightness of one's skin colour and the possession of a slim body shape as well as straight hair. For years, European women have also had to live up to the stringent standards as they wore corsets and crinolines to obtain slim bodies and enhance their appearance, despite the health risks posed by such practices (cf. Chapter 2, p.33). However, what constitutes beauty in European societies has changed over the centuries, but such changes have always been instigated by dominant groups (Patton, 2006:30-31). Ironically, in modern day society, such beauty standards are often achieved through cosmetic surgery.

Black women as a group have often been erased from Western notions of beauty as emphasis is almost always on a light skin, long, straight, silky hair and a slim body shape (Patton, 2006:26). Such actions have resulted in female beauty being seen as historically racialised (Chapter 2, p.32). A consequence, therefore, there has been the juxtaposing of white female beauty with black female beauty over the years.

Nonetheless, black women have, in trying to assimilate into the Eurocentric standards of beauty, sought to create their own understandings of female beauty through the creation of unique African hairstyles for black women, as already discussed in the literature review chapter.

3.4.6 Representation and the media

Analysis of the representation of African black women in the media has proved to be important in understanding current representations of black womanhood (Littlefield, 2008:679). The utilisation of this media has framed black women as the other within the American society and ultimately led to the emergence of stereotypical images about African black women. As a result, the media has been used, throughout history, to disseminate derogatory images that put black women at a disadvantage than any racial group (Littlefield, 2008:677). For Littlefield, the images are racialized as can be seen in the history of slavery, thus supporting white supremacy (hooks, 1992:1). As a result, these media images inform African black women's reality of what they know as femininity (Littlefield, 2008:678).

Twenty-first century notions of female beauty, particularly black female beauty, continue to be shaped by slavery and the colour caste system (Patton, 2006:38). Notions of long wavy hair as better than kinky hair often prevail within contemporary times (Patton, 2006:38), a condition that can be viewed in relation to the 'good' hair versus 'bad' hair discourses. Such perceptions are nevertheless, the result of social constructions, which the contemporary media continues to perpetuate drawing on Euro-centrism that celebrates long, straight, silky hair, a light skin tone, and slim bodies (Patton, 2006:39). This tends to be particularly true when it comes to the portrayal of African black women. Finally, what is interesting is that despite the broadening of the Eurocentric standards of beauty to accommodate black women, most black women included within the Eurocentric standard of beauty seem to be those that have adopted Euro-centrism characteristics, such as long straight or waving hair, a slim body shape and light skin in one way or another.

There are a few exceptions that can be made about black women such as Alek Wek (South Sudanese born model), Tyra Banks (African American model) and Naomi Campbell (British born model), although they still embody Western notions of a thin female body (Patton, 2006:39). These exceptions show how at times beauty

standards can celebrate one single feature of female beauty (cf. Chapter 2, p. 31). The promotion of such beauty standards is however found in a wide range of media which convey messages on how women can beautify themselves. Furthermore, the media portrays beauty in a way that makes beauty to be viewed as a determining factor of womanhood. Here, countless images of beautiful women are showed in advertisements often depicting white women with long, straight hair (Patton, 2006:39). This has an influence on black women's perception of beauty as they are excluded from dominant standards of female beauty, but as suggested above, cases of celebrated black women that challenge this predominant exclusion of black women in media discourses about beauty exist.

There are other media images that perpetuate stereotypes of black women (cf. Chapter 2, p. 31). These images are referred to by Patricia Hill Collins (2000:69) as "controlling images". For instance, music videos disseminate derogatory messages of black women (Aufderheide 1986; Dines and Humez 1995; Frith, Goodwin, and Grossberg 1993; Hurley 1994; Klapan 1987; Stockbridge 1987; Vincent 1989; Vincent, Davids and Boruszkowski 1987, cited in Emerson, 2002:117). Collins conceives these "controlling images" as being utilised to naturalise conceptions of black women within the larger society (Collins, 2000:69). As such, the messages are always portrayed from the perspective of dominant groups. These messages impact greatly on the construction of female beauty by young women. This study therefore seeks to comprehend how, in the midst of these "controlling images", young black women perceive and experience the black female body in their everyday lives.

The study is aware that the media is a key player in the framing of people's reality of what they know about the social world. Thus, I also use visual prompts such as magazines, pictures and videos to gather data in the study in order to determine the extent to which female participants' perceptions of black womanhood are informed by the media in everyday life.

3.5 Data analysis

Both the individual and focus group interviews are recorded and later transcribed. The texts (transcriptions) are later analysed. Here the researcher goes through the text word by word and unpacks the meanings of participants' statements. The researcher also focuses on the repetitive use of certain words by the female

participants and use of expressions such as laughter (including body language). All the interviews are examined to identify common themes and categories.

According to Riessman (2008:53) all narrative inquiries are primarily interested in content. They focus on what participants say, write or observe in their everyday lives. Thematic analysis pays special attention to content. This form of analysis relies on stories told by research participants and written documents such as magazines and newspapers. In this study, data gathered is by means of face-to-face interviews which are digitally recorded and later transcribed. The form of transcription that the researcher intends to employ is orthographic or verbatim (Braun and Clarke, 2013:161). With verbatim transcription the focus is on the spoken words by research participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013:162). As such, transcriptions reflect the manner in which things are said during the interviews.

This form of transcription can be tricky when it comes to writing down spoken language (Braun and Clarke, 2013:162). This is because everyday spoken language does not clearly make use of punctuations. However, it does entail the use of pauses and intonation. During everyday spoken language people can speak fast or slow, louder or lower. In addition, everyday conversation tends to be more disorganised than the written because in conversations people at times hesitate or stumble over their words. At times people repeat their speech by saying the same word over and over again and participants seldom express themselves continuously in full sentences. All this provides a challenge to the researcher. Transcription is nevertheless, the result of the interventions of the researcher with the recording. A good transcription includes everything that would have been said by the interviewee, including sounds words such as 'mm' and 'erm' (Braun and Clarke, 2013:163). Therefore, a transcriber is not expected to edit the participants' words even if the participants do not express themselves in standard form English.

Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006:321) note that it is important for the researcher to show an empathetic understanding during data analysis. The very task of interpretive analysis is the depiction of thick data (Geertz 1973, cited in Terre Blanche et al., 2006:321). Thick descriptions here are defined by Cliff Geertz as every aspect of the research participants' experiences and utterances that should be included within data analysis as well as the researcher's role. The descriptions are

intended “to place real-life events and phenomena into some kind of perspective” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:321). Data analysis in qualitative research entails analysing data by either employing quasi-statistical styles or crystallisation style (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:322). Within this study, data is analysed the using quasi-statistical style. This method involves the utilisation of certain predetermined categories by the researcher (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:322). These specific categories and codes are then taken up and applied to the data in order to produce solid results.

Through coding the researcher organises gathered data into specific categories on the basis of their relevance. I therefore code and highlight certain text and arrange them into specific themes. I also aim to organise the collected data into different themes for analysis. Subsequently, I create codes to place the data depending on their relevance to the different themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:325).

3.6 Validity and reliability of the collected data

3.6.1 Values

There is controversy within social research with regards to the issue of values in social sciences (Bryman, 2012:39). Values within social research can be understood as the personal beliefs and conceptions about reality held by a specific researcher (Bryman, 2012:39). Qualitative research often considers whether research can be value free, and whether it can be objective and free of the researcher’s bias and not be distorted? Such debates have been addressed over the years. However, it is unlikely, within contemporary research that one can remain objective and her values removed from the research, for feelings and conceptions can arise at any time during the research process. For example, the researcher’s choice to conduct her study at a specific study site, the choice of the research questions, including the methodology used in the research project are all affected by values. As a result, values are perceived to be triggered by several issues during the research process and this can at times impact on the research process. Discussions based on the objectivity of value laden research contend that no research can remain value free. It is precisely because of such assertions that certain steps are to be taken to ensure that the researcher’s beliefs do not unduly influence the research conducted.

3.7 Transferability

The concept of replication entails the possibility of interrogating the findings by other researchers (Bryman, 2012:47). The research methodology utilised by a researcher in a specific study should be replicable and the findings should be compared in order to ensure validity as well as reliability (Hardy and Bryman, 2004:7). This involves the use of methods and steps that are clear and can be comprehended by other researchers (Bryman, 2012:47). As such, clear guidelines must be provided to illustrate the steps in the research process and to allow for replication of the study (Hardy and Bryman, 2004:7). The use of similar ways of observation, field notes, and similar interviews ensures that a research study can be replicated by other researchers wishing to study the same topic. In this research project it will be, however, difficult to replicate the undertaken research study based on two reasons. Firstly, the research is interpretative in nature as the researcher interprets notions of female beauty held by the research participants at a given time. These interpretations may change over time, thus making replication of the research project impossible. Secondly, the research study is interactional and makes use of observation as one method of data collection. Nevertheless, the researcher is aware that the physical appearance of the female participants changes over a period of time, which therefore makes the duplication of the study difficult for other researchers wishing to study the same topic.

3.8 Reliability and validity

The concept of reliability refers to the consistency of the results of a certain study (Bryman, 2012:47, Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee, 2006:150). The employment of reliability in the social sciences is used to determine whether a tool designed to measure the social category of race or religion is consistent (Bryman, 2012:47). This method is often used through the reintroduction of the same measurements, but with regard to different populations at different occasions (Bryman, 2012:168). In this research project the concept of reliability is used only to determine the consistency of answers provided by research participants during the individual interviews and the focus group interview.

By using validity I refer to the accuracy of the findings in one's study (Bryman, 2012:47). According to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:82) the main objective of

research is to identify a causal relationship between a dependent and independent variable. The use of validity tends to be more applicable to quantitative research than to qualitative research. This does not mean that specific and precise steps striving towards validity are absent in qualitative research. It remains the researcher's obligation to ensure validity of obtained findings. In this research validity is ensured by checking for similarities in the data collected from the eight research participants. Validity is further sought by comparing individual interviews with what is said during focus group interviews. Finally, validity is also pursued through the use of a demographic information sheet that is handed to participants to fill in. The demographic sheet is, during the later stage of the research process, contrasted with the collected individual interviews and focus group interviews to determine the accuracy of the information provided by research participants, especially with regards to their financial and cultural ability to follow aesthetics standards of the female body.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the steps taken by the researcher during the data collection process and the data analysis methods to be utilised for the research project. The chapter provided reasons for choosing a qualitative research design and a narrative approach in the gathering of life stories by female participants in everyday life. It also shows the importance of qualitative research and narrative inquiry in the construction of meaning in everyday life by participants in order to get a better comprehension of how participants understand their social world. The chapter also outlined the data gathering tools employed by the researcher, which are face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews. It also briefly reviewed the ethical clearance procedures undertaken before conducting the study. This is followed by a section which described how the collected data would be analysed and organised by the researcher after the data collection phase. The chapter ended with a discussion on the issue of validity and reliability and their relevance in ensuring the credibility of the undertaken research project.

CHAPTER 4: BEAUTY AND THE BODY: THE DATA

This Chapter of the dissertation provides an analysis of the gathered narratives. The analysis is based on the issues which were of most concern to the female participants during the individual interviews. Issues of female beauty tend to occupy a prominent place in the everyday lives of these women. This is particularly true when it comes to issues of hair, body and skin colour, and it is for this reason that the issues are explored in more detail during the individual and focus group interviews. The aim of the exploration was to understand how participants subjectively experienced femininity in everyday life, especially with reference to hair, body and skin colour. In Chapter five, I provide a reflection on the data by reflecting back on the theoretical framework and literature review.

This study is primarily concerned with “The perceptions of femininity among young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa”. Research questions are formulated to guide the researcher towards understanding how young African women perceive female beauty and the body in everyday life. The research questions are: a) How young black women perceive the female body? What is their subjective experience of the black female body in everyday life? b) How do they perform their femininities? Are these performances informed by the dominant culture? c) And, how accessible is cultural and economic capital to pursue the aesthetic standards of the female body. From these questions an interview schedule is drawn up to enable the researcher to get a deeper understanding of participants’ perceptions of female beauty and the body in everyday life. The researcher also used research prompts such as pictures, magazines, newspaper articles, and videos in the gathering of data. The interview schedule as well as media prompts were utilised to facilitate female participants’ understanding of femininity. Furthermore, the media prompts are used to determine the extent to which participants’ gender performances are informed by the media in everyday life, and whether they have access to the cultural capital that enables them to pursue the aesthetic standards of the female body. A demographic sheet in which female participants have to write details about the type of home they come from, including parents’/guardians’ earning ability is also drawn up to determine whether participants have the economic capital to pursue the aesthetic standards of the female body.

In the study, eight young African black women, from various ethnic groups (Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi and Sotho), were recruited to allow for diversity of opinions in the study. The female participants are between the ages 19 to 29 years. Furthermore, participants are selected based on certain exhibited physical features (see appendix) which the researcher sees as important in comprehending how participants understand and construct beauty in everyday life. The selection of participants to the focus group interview is based on the information that the participants' provided during the first individual interview and follow-up interviews.

4.1 Perceptions of female beauty and the body

The study's interest in participants' perceptions of female beauty and the body compels me to begin the analysis with a presentation of the way in which the participants' comprehend beauty. The participants' subjective understanding of beauty is elicited by asking them what beauty is and finding out if they agree with the saying that beauty is 'skin-deep'. In general a majority of the participants provide an understanding of beauty that is linked to one's inner qualities:

Nthabiseng is a 23 year old student. To Nthabiseng beauty is:

Uhm, beauty is definitely skin-deep. Uhm, but beauty to me...I have always believed that there are three kinds of people. It's you know...it's who you are; definitely it's who you are. It's who you think you are. And it's who other people think you are. Uhm, beauty is when all of those things happen to come together. If who you are comes together with who you think you are, and who other people think you are, then you [are] beautiful. As much as we would like to think that other people's influences, and other people's opinions and thoughts don't, don't have an influence, or don't have a say in the way we do things. Aah, we wrong, we live together, we [are] supposed to have opinions about each other. So if someone else says you're beautiful, and you happen to agree and you've always thought you were beautiful then there it is. You don't need anything else. If you know you [you're] beautiful, but you don't... there's a part of you that doesn't say you are, and some people also doubt it. Then you know, then there's something wrong there, maybe you should look into yourself, work on certain things. Then you will be beautiful. [Background noise] So it's also what you think, it has to do with other people, you inner self, and yourself, those three things. [Quote 1]

Lerato, a 24 year old black female student reading for her Honours degree in Sociology, states the following, after being asked if she agrees with the saying beauty is 'skin-deep':

Ya, beauty is skin-deep. [Quote 2]

When asked to state why she thinks beauty is skin-deep, she replies:

Because you can be beautiful from the outside, but your heart...you can't accommodate people, be cruel and all that. Then you [are] not beautiful if you are like that for me. For me someone who is beautiful is someone who is kind and can talk to people, someone who helps people, doesn't discriminate and someone who is neat, ya. [Quote 3]

Nonzuzo is a 24 year old student, who, when asked what beauty is to her, argues that is:

Beauty to me is being comfortable with your own skin and loving what you, what you are, who you are. And what you...like being constant and not be embarrassed about who you are and where you come from and the skin that I have. I don't have to bleach and all of that and if I am comfortable with that then I will always be beautiful. I don't need things like make-up to enhance me. Even though sometimes I like using them, but I feel like when you got make-up you don't become shiny. You become dry in most cases for almost the whole because now you skin doesn't pop up a lot of oil, but other than that you still look the same. It's just that you have been enhanced by that product. [Quote 4]

When asked if she agreed with the statement that beauty is 'skin-deep', she answers:

I think, I think ya, I think beauty is skin-deep, I think being comfortable with your own skin. So ya I do agree with that, that beauty is 'skin-deep' no matter what you do, but how comfortable are you with your skin. [Quote 5]

Thembeke, a 21 year old student, is also asked what beauty is and starts by agreeing with the statement that beauty is 'skin-deep':

Yes, I do [Quote 6]

When also asked why she says beauty is 'skin-deep', she notes that:

It's not just the skin, it's beyond that. It's what's inside you know. What is outside is the reflection of what is inside. [Quote 7]

Xoliswa a 26 year old student, states the following, after being asked what beauty to her is:

Aah, being beautiful to me means being able to have humanity, that's the first thing because even if you are beautiful, but you nag (annoy) people then you are not since you become a distraction to them. [Quote 8]

Mpho is a 23 year old. When asked if she agrees with the statement that beauty is 'skin-deep', she points out that:

I don't agree with that whole thing that beauty is skin-deep. For me people say beauty comes from within, but in some cases it's not like that. If you are ugly people won't see the beauty inside of you. You

have to, to, to show them. You have to do something that will they will believe that beauty is deep with this person. For me beauty is all about how you look on the outside. It's not about being beautiful. It's about being presentable and being comfortable in your own skin. Not trying to look like the next person to you or whoever you idealise or what. It's about you feeling comfortable in your own skin. [Quote 9]

Karabo is a 24 year old black woman and her view is that:

Beauty [pause], beauty is what you see is beautiful. I mean some people might find something's beautiful, som- you find a lot of things, something's like...I think it's up to you what you find is beautiful. I mean it can be skin-deep if you want it to be skin-deep. It can be attraction, facial expressions or whatever. Whatever is beautiful is beautiful. [Quote 10]

Participants were also asked if their perceptions of beauty had changed overtime and their views are:

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, yes, but I'm not gonna say distinctly. I've always been very, uhm, strong minded, and strong willed. And I have always thought...don't think you know this looks pretty. I don't think because everybody thinks this is pretty it's pretty. So I have always been like that. Uhm, but as you grow older I think what's changed for me now. When I was younger you know even I didn't think that you know fake hair was nice because I never had fake hair on when I was younger, but I didn't accept it with other people as well. I didn't see why you guys have that thing on you know. I always used to judge you. I always used to comment, but now I would be more accepting. I would comment on it, but you know it doesn't mean that everybody looks good in short hair. I may not look good in a weave, but that doesn't mean that you know other people don't look good in a weave. So now it's a matter of acceptance that you know this type of beauty is acceptable, and that type of beauty is acceptable, ya. So when I was younger I wasn't accepting as I am now. Now I am accepting of what beauty means to different people. [Quote 11]

Researcher:

Okay, then would you say they have changed or they just become stronger, but accommodative to other people's perceptions of what beauty is beauty? [Quote 12]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, I think it's just a matter of maturity. Uhm, it's also been a matter of how I was raised, media. I don't want to say the media and all that have played a role. It really hasn't; they haven't. Aah, but it's my parents, my parents have always believed in being natural you know. So my whole family has always being like that. All my aunts have short hair, and everybody always looks so simple at my house. So it's just a matter of maturity, and just looking at the people around me. And you know learning to accept okay its fine people can look like that. My little sister now is at that stage where she is trying long hair, and she's trying different things. So acceptance, she will also outgrow it. She's eventually gonna go back to liking short hair like the rest of the family. So it's just a matter of maturity, different phases, stages in your life, and acceptance. You get there. [Quote 13]

Thembeke:

Yes, I would say my perception of beauty changed overtime because while growing up we were told that if you are fat you are not beautiful, you know. We were never taught to understand the real definition of beauty, you know. We were like all always trying to be lean. We were never told to understand that beauty is skin-deep. [Quote 14]

Xoliswa:

Not really because I didn't know what is beauty then, ya so I didn't have the definition of being beautiful. So I cannot say it has changed. [Quote 15]

Nonzuzo:

They did change for me because when I was young, aah, I did see that, aah, having...in fact my sister cousin was doing it. Like ke motho [she is someone], she was able to do people's hair like hair, like hair. So even when she offered to do my hair I would never refuse because it was a chance for me and I would feel so beautiful, and ya. But after that I noticed that this is no not the way...first of all it's painful. So how can you associate beauty and pain (chuckles); also taking a lot of time. So I thought like being natural is just the way to go for me because it's just cost-effective for me as well besides nje [just] just loving it. But it's also cost-effective for me as well. [Quote 16]

Karabo:

Mm, everybody is beautiful. Some people are enhanced by make-up (chuckles). Some people are just naturally beautiful. Some people they fix it, they went and did cosmetic surgery. And they become what they wanted to be so that...it's...they can define what beauty is. So ya it did change. When I was young I felt that wow she's beautiful, and then when I hear that, aah, she did this, and I'll be like never mind. [Quote 17]

Lerato:

Yes, they have changed because while growing up we play with dolls right? And then a girl with or a doll with long hair, that is slender and all that. So while I was growing up I used to think if I could look like the doll then I would be beautiful. Each and every person who looks like a doll is beautiful, but while growing up it changed, yah. [Quote 18]

Mpho:

They have changed. The more you grow the more you learn stuff, the more you see stuff. You meet people and then you learn something from them. You learn on how to, to look at a person and not think oh this person why can't she be like me and stuff. You grow to these things. So now I look at beauty in a different way than I did, maybe five years ago. [Quote 19]

Palesa:

Ya [yes], they have, aah, as a lil [little] girl I used to love long hair, and especially my body, but now I have embraced that I'm not the size 28 girl. And as I said earlier I have...I love my short hair more than any other hairstyle I've had like back then. You know around Christmas you would want braids, and all those things. It's only then you would feel, oh, I'm beautiful now. So I think I have moved from that, aah, fake hair girl, and the girl who was aspiring to be thin to a woman who has embraced her natural beauty and her plus size body. [Quote 20]

Most of the participants state that their perceptions of beauty changed over time. Nthabiseng's perceptions have changed, but, as she stipulates not in a big way, for she has always been a strong minded person. So through maturity, she have learned to be more accommodating of what other people consider as beauty. Her parents and family as a whole appear to have played an important role in instilling certain values about beauty which have helped shaped her own perceptions of beauty. Nonzuzo's changing perceptions of beauty can be attributed to a painful hair experience that she had as a little girl. This painful hair experience makes her to conclude that beauty does not necessarily need to be associated with pain. The changing perceptions of beauty for Karabo and Mpho have resulted from exposure to other people. Particularly for Karabo, it has been the realisation that other people's beauty is enhanced through the use of make-up.

However, there are those that are just naturally beautiful and do not require make-up to look beautiful. For Mpho, on the one hand, maturity and meeting new people has been vital in her changing perceptions of beauty. She has learned to look at people from a different perspective than she did when she was younger. It has also led to the understanding that people do not look the same. For Lerato, on the other hand, it has been through the realisation that not everyone can look like a doll in order to be beautiful. Her statement resonates with me as a young African black woman growing up in a township. Playing with dolls was a normal part of my everyday life with my two female cousins and we always thought that if only we could have the doll's hair and slim body shape, then we would be more beautiful. These are the same sentiments shared by Palesa, who as a child believed beauty was about having long hair and a slim body. Another change is doing her hair every Christmas, which is a common practice that young black girls go through among African black communities. Overall, the changing perceptions of beauty can be understood as

resulting from the maturity among the female participants arising from seeing things differently than they did as young children.

Participants were asked what looking good is to them and if they thought it was associated with any body part. In general, the participants provide different understandings of what is looking good to them, and the understandings ranged from feelings of satisfaction with oneself, physical appearance and notions of being natural as noted in the responses below:

Thembeke:

Looking good to me means feeling good. [Quote 21]

She explains further what she means by feeling good:

Feeling confident to walking around in...with whatever you wearing, hairstyle you have then. And I think looking good is also about the pictures you post on your social networks. I think it's another sign of feeling good. [Quote 22]

I proceeded to ask her if she thought it was associated with any specific body part and her answer is:

Hey, the society that we live in is so messed up. These days looking good is your lean figured girls you know, like they can wear crop tops you know, and I think that's what society expects us to do. I think that's what they expect when we say we feel good. And it's not necessarily the case. [Quote 23]

Nonzuzo perceives looking good as natural:

Looking good natural. [Quote 24]

I therefore asked her to elaborate more on what she means by natural:

Having your own hair no weaves. I, I just like that, ya. [Quote 25]

Nonzuzo bases her understanding of looking good from an idea of not putting on hair extensions:

For me to look good I don't mind having my own hair for the whole year or even for two years to come. It's fine to be, even if they would run out of hairpieces I wouldn't mind. [Quote 26]

Lerato also associates looking good with being natural:

My natural hair. [Quote 27]

I further asked if by natural hair she means her ethnic hair.

Lerato:

Yes, my ethnic hair. [Quote 28]

Xoliswa is also asked to provide her own comprehension of the idea of looking good and if she thinks it is associated with any body part:

Aah, certain shape yes, but size it doesn't matter with me. [Quote 29]

To Xoliswa looking good is characterised as follows:

As long as you are clean, tidy is the first thing. Uhm, have manners, yes. [Quote 30]

Palesa:

Looking good to me...I don't know if maybe I will be out of line. I think looking good neh comes from within. If you don't feel good inside you won't feel good outside. You can have the most expensive weave or make-up whatever, but if you don't feel good then you cannot look good. So I always say for one to feel good you need to be confident. If you are not confident then you not gonna feel pretty, ya. [Quote 31]

Karabo:

Feeling good, you need to feel good to look good. I mean you can look wow, and everybody telling you, you look wow, but then if you're not comfortable in your dress then you will not feel good. You need to feel good to look good. [Quote 32]

Mpho:

Looking good for me is being comfortable in everything from my clothes, to my make-up to my hair, as long as when I look myself in the mirror I feel like okay am comfortable, and beautiful. That's good for me, that's fine. [Quote 33]

Nthabiseng:

No, it is not. Looking good is not about a certain part of your body. Looking aah, you know I always hear people say looking good is about being comfortable or looking good is.... I don't believe that it has anything to do with a certain part of your body. I don't think it has anything to do with comfort. I think it has to do with you thinking so. You thinking you look good. Does it mean you look good to other people? I don't think so. For me when I get dressed I look at the colours, I look at whether it suits me. I look at what it's hiding and what its showing, and if I am satisfied with it then I look good, ya. For me it's fashion and you know it's complementing your body, and it's also hiding certain parts of your body. Uhm, that for me constitutes looking good. [Quote 34]

While looking good on the outside matters for a majority of the participants, for them looking good is more about being content with and loving oneself. Furthermore,

Nthabiseng is of the view that thinking that you look good leads to one feeling good. Nonetheless, looking good is about satisfaction with oneself despite how you look, hence, for the female participants it has nothing to do with any specific body part.

In trying to get a deeper understanding of how participants come to form their perceptions of beauty, participants are asked about who impacted on their perceptions of beauty. This led me to look at the role of social capital in the participants' everyday lives. According to Inglis (2012:21) social capital can be understood as the network of social relations with others within society. By looking at social capital I am interested in the role of social networks in female participants' lives with regard to formation of perceptions of beauty.

Participants are asked who played a role in their perceptions of beauty:

Nthabiseng:

Yoh, when I was growing up my dad was... yoh [exclamation] my dad has always been amazing. No matter what I bought whether it was oh my God an ugly shirt, vest, shoes my dad would always say you look so beautiful. Whoever is gonna marry you is gonna have to pay me millions, and all of that you know. Whether I cut my hair, whether I dyed my hair my dad always thought I looked amazing. So at that age I started getting used to being beautiful. By the time I was thirteen, fourteen and I started hearing it from boys, it wasn't new it was just different, but it wasn't new. But I understood that I was beautiful whether I had long hair, make-up, nails, whatever I just knew I was beautiful because of my dad. [Quote 35]

Palesa is a 27 year old female. Her answer when asked who played a vital role in her understanding of beauty, is:

Mm, my grandmother. [Quote 36]

I then proceeded by asking her what her grandmother said to her about beauty:

Uhm, she used to tell me you are beautiful just the way you are because I was a very fat baby (chuckles), I was chubby, and I would think that maybe skinny people are prettier. And she would tell me you are beautiful just the way you are. You are beautiful in your own way, and her teachings have taught me to even overlook...you know people who are disabled. I just overlook their disability, and just see a beautiful person. So I can say it's my grandmother in that way. [Quote 37]

Nonzuzo:

It's the natural people out there. Like even at home, my mom does...barely does weaves and those "the brats" [thick braid extensions] even the braids I like she never does that. She used to cut, cut, cut. So that's how she made me see things. I think she inspired me in most cases. That's why I view things...I really don't, I really don't see...in fact people really have got different perspectives. But I really don't see why we should go all the way out buying expensive weaves for you to feel beautiful. [Quote 38]

Lerato:

My mom the way she dresses and the way she helps me dress, and my granny she was always against the way me and my mother dressed. So of which I [so that] would stand up for the way I dressed with her negative attitude towards us dressing the way we dress, so ya. [Quote 39]

Karabo:

It's the experience, it's the experience it's not a person. You come across people that might not have facial beauty, but then they're so, so beautiful that you would be like she's beautiful. But then you find somebody that's so beautiful, but God is she different inside. So it's just experience in what you come across and exposure. [Quote 40]

Mpho:

I don't think there is that particular person that has played that role. I get this stuff like from watching television. They will be saying stuff and stuff and then I pick up from what they are saying. Yes, not a particular person that I would say yes this one it is that one that showed or taught me all these things. [Quote 41]

Family is identified as playing an important role in the shaping of the participants' perceptions of beauty, including their everyday constructions of beauty. For some participants it is exposure to different people that one meets along the way.

Participants are also asked if there is any day when they did not feel pretty. This is done to get an understanding of what impacts on participants' perceptions of beauty, especially of themselves as beautiful. Again the intention is to assess to the extent to which their perceptions of beauty are impacted upon by those around them, and how these influence their construction of female beauty.

Lerato:

Mm, [pauses] ya I do...ya. [Quote 42]

I then asked her to elaborate more:

Because I was being teased. They told me that I was ugly. [Quote 43]

I enquired who was teasing her:

My ex. [Quote 44]

I also asked her how it made her feel:

I actually felt like I was ugly because I thought I was beautiful to him and that's why he chose me, but when he told me that I was ugly and...ya. [Quote 45]

During the follow-up interview I again ask Lerato to tell me more about what her ex-boyfriend said to her.

Ya, he had told me that I was ugly, ya. [Quote 46]

I again asked her how she felt when her ex-boyfriend told her she was ugly:

Bad, it made me feel bad I won't lie because if someone that you love or they also say they love you back, but then they tell you that you are ugly with a passion and confidence that you know what: you are ugly. Then you also start feeling that maybe I am ugly or it makes you feel bad. [Quote 47]

Karabo:

(Giggles) Usually when I don't feel good I stay in my room and not do anything. So ya, but mostly when I'm very tired or disappointed in something or I'm worried about something but not most of the time I'm fine I mean I'm a very optimistic person. So I might feel down for this moment, but then quickly snap out of it and, and I try to make it the good side of life. [Quote 48]

Mpho:

I don't think so. I think maybe sometimes when I don't have my make-up on, I think I look weird because [I] am used on having it all the time. So I think yah that is, I don't have those days where I feel like, uhm, I don't look beautiful today. So I think [I] am naturally beautiful. [Quote 49]

Xoliswa:

Ya, I do like if something bad happens, but obviously your, my emotions cracks so I would feel that way. [Quote 50]

Nonzuzo:

I don't remember a day that I never felt beautiful. There's never a day where I never felt beautiful. It's just the inner you. It's all about the inner you. [Quote 51]

Palesa:

Mm, okay, I guess I shouldn't have said I feel, uhm, I feel beautiful everyday. But there are days when I am having bad hair days that's when I don't feel pretty. No matter what I can do or where...when I am having bad hair day I just don't feel beautiful. I would rather wear a doek [head scarf]. [Quote 52]

Researcher:

Okay, can you tell me about a typical bad hair day for you? [Quote 53]

Palesa:

Uhm, I have this joke that I say. I would say I look like a MEC, I don't like my hair...I don't know. I like my hair when it's like a centimetre long. When it gets bigger than that...I mean longer than that like if it is bigger than this (making hand gestures). Then I just don't feel beautiful. I feel like I am a forty-five years old MEC, I just look like a MEC (both laugh). [Quote 54]

Nthabiseng:

Aah, ofcourse I've had those days, but it's never had anything to do with my looks. It's maybe been because of my work or I didn't do this or I didn't do this, I didn't do that to the best of my ability. Or I did this wrong ya that's happened, but, aah, never because of my looks. I have always been really proud and glad of my looks, ya. [Quote 55]

Thembeke:

It was recently, Zuki [Zukiswa]. I was so tired of my previous hairstyle that I didn't even want to look at the mirror, no. Another thing with me is that I love changing hairstyles, but now the problem is the money you know. It is the money. Shame! I can't afford to change it as often as I would love to." [Quote 56]

For most of the participants, their feelings of not being pretty are associated with how they think they look at that specific day. For instance, Palesa and Thembeke feel that they are each not as a result of a dissatisfaction with the hair and hairstyles they will be putting on, although for Lerato it is her ex-boyfriend's words that impacted on how she perceives herself. For Nthabiseng and Karabo it is feelings of stress that affect how they perceive themselves.

Participants are also asked if they think different racial groups view beauty the same way. The question is aimed at understanding whether participants think perceptions of beauty are universal or differ from one race group to another.

Nthabiseng:

Yes, there are definitely differences in how we see beauty. I know in my family as well. I am from a family... my mom is Sotho [ethnic group] and my dad is Pedi [ethnic group]. From my mom's side you know being beautiful is you know is having long hair, and wearing dresses of a certain length, and having a certain...uhm. From my dad's side it'd definitely being light-skinned. It's being light-skinned and being adored by men. And you know: just taking care of yourself. So it is different for everyone. In

Xhosa I don't know, maybe it's having a certain ass [bum] or it's just everything. It's different for all the types of races that we have in South Africa. Beauty is different for all of us, yes. [Quote 57]

Thembeke:

There are differences, Zuki [Zukiswa]. There are differences, there are certainly differences. Again it's the society. Aah, with us we black people beauty is how our black brothers perceive us. We have to be...we have to have this figure going on nice big round boobs, a nice fine round butt you know. And with your white girls they have to be very skinny, you know. To them it's beauty, that's how they have been made to view them. And that's not beauty; it's just an added bonus for everything. [Quote 58]

Palesa:

I just feel that we [are] not the same. Akere [remember] we are talking about...we not the same. To start with our noses, our lips, our hair they are different...I don't think it is. Uhm, I really think it is. Let me just start off by discussing the Indians. Beauty to Indians is not, aah, it's not your natural hair, although it's natural. Their hair is natural, but you'll never find an Indian person rocking dreadlocks or having a nice, uhm, your afro hair. You will never find them doing that. They, they their beauty is in their clothes, their sere. Is it sere or what?...Ya [yes], beauty for them is what they wear, and is not about the sexy pants. Uhm, not about dyeing their colour red or whatsoever they like keeping everything natural. They are naturally beautiful, and they find beauty in clothes more than anything. It's their traditional attires more than anything. And with white people beauty for them is getting a nose job, doing something fake on them. And with us black people beauty for most of us is trying to be white. They think that if you are white...when they see a white person that's how they define beauty. That's what they aspire to look like white people. Because they always want long hair, and we are not blessed with long hair unless you have dreadlocks on. And that's the only time a black person's hair can grow that long. Uhm, so for them beauty is being white, they associate, aah, white people with beauty and they just strive to look like white people. [Quote 59]

Lerato:

I think it differs from one racial group to the next or from individuals again, mm. [Quote 60]

I proceeded to ask her about the ways in which perceptions of beauty differ:

Like your ideal of beauty is not the same as mine. Wena [you] may prefer someone who's like what, like someone who's African like African woman as beautiful. Then I would say a mixture of African and Western woman that's my ideal of beauty because...nna [I] feel that I am beautiful because I mix both, ya. [Quote 61]

Karabo:

Mm (shaking head), I had the pleasure of work...of a thing with a white guy in my commune. So, and uhm, I mean we used to watch tv together and the difference in what they saw as beautiful in a women...but a black guy was totally different. So they found that if you had nice legs, perfect body you were beautiful. I mean if you were smaller you were beautiful. And then the other guys in my house saw it if you were curved and everything you were beautiful. So I think beauty is different as much as this...I

think the facial part would be almost similar, but then the definition of beauty for us would be different. [Quote 62]

Nonzuzo:

Ya, beauty is different in almost each and every individual from any cultural group, but we are the same but it's just that we [are] created differently. So beauty is different, but we are the same, that one is common to all of us that you're beautiful, ya. [Quote 63]

Xoliswa:

Uhm, I think it's the same because if a woman is beautiful, she is just beautiful regardless of which race she is from. However it could differ from other people's views. [Quote 64]

Mpho:

We don't perceive it the same way, white people are more comfortable being big, and fat, they don't see anything wrong most of them. But black people being fat is something that we are not used to. Black people they want to lose weight, they don't want big figures, so we don't perceive beauty the same way. [Quote 65]

A majority of the participants argue that there are differences in how different racial groups perceive beauty, and these differences are more notable among blacks and whites. Furthermore, the differences are based on the preference of certain features. These include a voluptuous body with big buttocks and curves, whereas for white people it is a slim body shape. Nthabiseng reveals that perceptions of racial differences seem to be prevalent among the different African ethnic groups as she observes in her own family. Nthabiseng noticed that for Sotho people, which is her mother's side of the family, beauty is about having long hair and wearing dresses, while from her father's ethnic group, which is the Pedi group, beauty is associated with light skin.

In addition, I asked the participants if women of different racial groups make themselves look pretty in the same way and the responses are as follows:

Nthabiseng:

No, no, aah, you know I don't think we make ourselves look pretty in the same way. I don't even think we have the same reasons for making ourselves look pretty. We all have different reasons. Some people do it for themselves, some people do it for work, some do it for me. For some people it's different. So we do it differently, and we do it for different reasons. [Quote 66]

Palesa:

No, not in the same way, but [a] majority of us, aah, do it in the same way which entails make-up. Especially with us black people we don't have nice lashes [eye lashes]. So almost every second girl I meet is using mascara, aah, they twiz [shape eyebrows] their eyebrows, ya [the] majority of us do. [Quote 67]

Mpho:

I don't think so, because others use make-up and put weaves on, and other stay in their natural beauty without any make-up and weaves [extensions] and stuff. So we don't do it the same way. [Quote 68]

Nonzuzo:

I think the way we are raised also...the way we were raised and mina [me] at home we, we...my mom always liked me having short hair which was okay, but I hated it back then. But she, she, she used to show me that, you know, you don't need a weave to be beautiful. So it's just a matter...the way you were raised and now going back to the way you were raised. How you see things because now you are alone. You are no longer with parents who taught you that you shouldn't do this or you should do that. You are alone. So how, how do you see things now? What is your perspective on beauty and other things? So I feel like [it is] the way we were raised and also how we see things as an individual. [Quote 69]

Thembeka:

There are certain differences because your African girls are for natural hair, you know. Your short hair, your dreadlocks, your afro you know, your plaits, your cornrows using your own hair. And then you're Western girls they are for your weaves, your extensions all these things going on, you know. So beauty is not perceived in the same manner. [Quote 70]

Karabo:

Mm, I wanna be attractive number one. You want your hair to be perfect. I mean whites also try to do something with their hair, and you want your eyebrows and your lipstick whatever to also look good. [Quote 71]

Xoliswa:

Uhm, no other groups are very strict about their features, so they don't want to change themselves, ya. [Quote 72]

During the follow-up interview I asked Xoliswa what she means when she says other groups are strict about their features:

Uhm, no other groups are very strict about their features, so they don't want to change themselves, ya. [Quote 73]

Lerato:

No (shaking head), some people spend a lot to make themselves beautiful. Others still look beautiful without breaking their things. [Quote 74]

The understanding that there are differences with how different racial groups perceive beauty shows that women do not make themselves beautiful in the same way. These differences are the result of the beauty process that women go through and are based on personal preference in which one either chooses to use or not use make-up and stay natural. For some of the female participants, differences rest on the efforts that women take to make themselves beautiful and how much money/time they are willing to spend. However, for Karabo there are no differences as she concludes that at the end of the day everyone wants to look beautiful, hence they all engages in the same beauty practices to make themselves beautiful from head to toe. Furthermore, participants believe that such differences are the result of different ethnic group's beauty practices in which people tend to focus on certain dimensions of beauty (e.g., hair and skin tone) and socialisation within different families.

The participants were also asked if they use make-up or not. This question sought to understand how they use make-up in their everyday constructions of female beauty and why:

Palesa:

I do, I do use make-up, but I don't believe in too much make-up. I believe that when I have make-up on you can still tell that it's Queen, not that...aah, a Barbie girl. I can't find an absurd word for it. Uhm, you must just be able to identify gore ke [that it's] this is Palesa. As you can see I have a mark here. I don't use make-up to hide those marks. No, because they define me. That's who I am. There's a history about that mark on my face, so I don't use a lot of make-up. I don't use heavy make-up to hide whatever...I don't hide behind make-up, ya [yes]. [Quote 75]

Karabo:

Okay, I use make-up. Uhm, one thing about make-up is [pauses] it's your choice whether you want to wear it or not. I mean I wear it because of my own reasons. Because I want to look...not that I don't look (chuckles)...I want to look beautiful. But then it enhances some stuff like...without eyeliner I look totally different, with eyeliner I look different. So lipstick makes my lips go bolder. So ya, I do wear make-up. It depends on the present...I know my friends some of them hate eyeliner. Some of them hate lipstick, that it leaves every mark on a glass, but then ya. [Quote 76]

Mpho:

I love make-up. I use it every day. I think it doesn't necessarily make you look beautiful, but it enhances your beauty. Somehow you try to fix those little imperfections that you may have. [Quote 77]

Nonzuzo:

Uhm, I do use it but not all the time. Once in a while, probably when I'm going to an occasion then I just put, but not all the time. Even now today I am not using it. It depends probably if I am going to an event or certificate ceremony, church, but not all the time though, ya. [Quote78]

Lerato:

I use make-up (laughs) ya. I like it, but I am not dependent on it a lot, but I like it. [Quote79]

In trying to understand what she means by saying that she is not dependent on make-up, I asked Lerato to elaborate more during our follow-up interview:

I am not afraid to show my face...Without make-up. [Quote 80]

Nthabiseng:

Aah, uhm, I don't use make-up, aah. Maybe mascara qualifies as make-up, but I use mascara it's the only thing that I use. Other than that I don't use anything else. I wouldn't consider using make-up in the future, aah, irrespective of what my skin would like at that time. But now I am not using it because I have good skin. But even in the future I don't think I would use it. I wasn't raised in a family where we used make-up. I have never seen it so it's not something that I would teach myself. [Quote 81]

Thembeke:

Well, I am not a make-up type of person or girl. Reason number one is because I grew up in a household where I never saw my mother wear make-up. I have never even literally seen her. Me and my friends tried this whole make-up thing, and the effects on my skin were not so good and pimples on my face. [Quote 82]

Xoliswa:

Aah, I don't think so; first I love myself the way I am ya, and that, aah. It's sort of respecting God's ways because he created me like this. So I like myself the way I am. [Quote 83]

Most of the participants point out that they use make-up because of the way it makes them look. For most, it is seen as enhancing one's beauty and specific facial features. Nonetheless, there are participants who pointed out that they do not use make-up, and it is the result of growing up in a household where no one used make-up.

The participants are also asked what they like or dislike about make-up. I wanted to find out whether what they like or dislike about make-up is the reason which compelled them to use or not to use make-up:

Palesa:

Uhm, what I love about make-up is that it makes a girl feel good, more confident. What I dislike about it is that we tend to become too dependent on it, and that's just wrong. I think if you can't be brave to walk outside without make-up on it's like an addiction, and you need help. So that's what I don't like about make-up. And it just pushes people to overdoing it. And you know what people go through just to be beautiful. It's just wrong sometimes. [Quote 84]

I asked Palesa to elaborate more on the things that people do just to look beautiful:

Uhm, take for instance, people who do...is it 'buttocks' or 'Botox'?...'Botox', ya. People who.....do 'Botox'? Who inject their lips! .And people who get nose jobs, whatever job that you do it's just wrong. Aah, I don't support that. [Quote 85]

Karabo:

Uhm, it's the...some of them they leave marks on your clothes like if you touch something then it's gonna, ya...that sort of I hate about. [Quote 86]

Mpho:

I don't like the fact that it may damage your skin apart from that I love everything. Just some people use a bit too much of it. [Quote 87]

I continued to ask Mpho what she exactly means when she says she loves make-up:

From, uhm, your foundations, blush, lipstick, eye shadow. I love eye shadow and lipstick more, ya. [Quote 88]

I then followed up by asking her why she loves eye shadow and lipstick:

(Laughing) Just that on my lip I have like this pimple, and it leaves a pinkish mark. So at least the lipstick covers that, and then eye shadows I don't know. I think I have big eyes. Other people say that I have Chinese eyes. So, when I use eye shadow it makes my eyes pop. [Quote 89]

I also asked Mpho about the ways in which people overdo the use of make-up:

Firstly, they don't choose the right make-up foundation for their skin tones, and then I don't know maybe they feel maybe if I apply more make-up it is going to last for the whole day and maybe applying like five layers of make-up and they start looking weird. [Quote 90]

Nonzuzo:

Uhm, I think it promotes aging. The skin having wrinkles and probably also the make-up that you use which type of make-up do you use. But I feel like it promotes in the longer run-not now-in the long run then you have some sort of wrinkles. And we black people don't usually have wrinkles at an early stage. So for us it creates that. [Quote 91]

During our follow-up interview I also asked Nonzuzo to elaborate more on what she means when she says that make-up promotes aging and wrinkles and that black people don't have wrinkles:

(Laughs) Okay, uhm, make-up has certain chemicals and these chemicals as much as the people who produce them might say you gonna look good and all that. Hey yes, you gonna look good for a certain period, but at some point your skin is, is exposed to that chemical. It's not...it's an artificial thing. It's not something that is produced by the body. It's not like a hormone. So it's gonna make you have wrinkles, but some people might have wrinkles just naturally occurring. It's a natural process, but, uhm, make-what's this make-up is gonna make them grow much faster than it would be if you were just not applying it at all. So that's just my theory of, aah, wrinkles and what else? [Quote 92]

The response from request that she explains what she means when she says black people don't have wrinkles:

I've never seen one basically. But our pigments are quite stronger than other ethnic groups like for instance white people. For instance, aah, all the people who like have lighter skins even with black people. They are people who are so much lighter that when they grow older, uhm, the, the wrinkles appear much faster than the ones who are quite...have a pigmentation that is quite rich. So, uhm, in most cases, in most cases wrinkles grow faster in certain age groups and certain ethnic groups, ya. [Quote 93]

Nthabiseng:

Aah, I dislike, I dislike the fact that it is misleading. I don't like things that are misleading, that's why I also don't like hair as well. It's just that I don't like to seem like I have this type of skin when I don't look like that. I don't like to seem like I have this type of hair when I don't have hair like that. So it's misleading. Uhm, what I would like, like about it, but for other people not myself, is that some people have skin issues. They do and they have been trying to sort them out for years. So it helps them. And it helps their self-confidence as well, you know. They will be working on their skin underneath, but it helps them. [Quote 94]

The support for make-up tends to be based on how it enhances facial features, while dislikes centre on the potential dangers it poses to the user's skin.

During our follow-up interview, I asked Nthabiseng why she uses mascara if she says she grew up in a household where no one used make-up:

It's for eyes. I, I, I think it makes eyes...it enhances your eyes. It enhances the way your eyes look and I like what they do. I like what mascara does to my eyes. It just announces the way my eyes look. It just...I don't think it exaggerates them. It just highlights the size of my eyes and the colour of my eyes that's all. [Quote 95]

I also asked Nthabiseng to explain what she means when she says make-up is okay for some people as it helps build their confidence:

Skin is something very sensitive, uhm. It, it...it's virtually the first thing that people see when they look at you in your face. People...someone looks at you and they see your pimples and they say oh: my God this is what is going on with this person. So when you have make-up on, it hides it. It hides it and for some...for other people that I know it's not because they want to be misleading. They just want to hide whatever it is that is going on in their faces until it gets better. So it builds confidence, it makes people to be able to go on their daily lives while they go through that acne stage of their lives. [Quote 96]

When I ask her if she would consider using make-up should she have skin issues such as acne or blemish of her face:

I can't say yes and I can't say no because I, you know, would have to be in the situation first, especially in terms of blemishes. I've had, I've had pimples. I haven't had acne, I've had pimples, but I didn't put on make-up and you know I don't want to say yes I would because I know how I feel about make-up. And I don't want to say no I wouldn't because I don't know how I would feel about my skin looking the way it would at that time. Maybe I would consider it, but possibly it would depend on how serious and how bad it is. [Quote 97]

Nthabiseng is also of the understanding that make-up does not make a person beautiful, but enhances their beauty:

I don't think that make-up makes people beautiful. I don't, I don't. If you're not an attractive person in terms of your facial looks. I don't think make-up can make you beautiful, but I do think it can enhance the way you look. I think it can make you look better. Like if you twiz [shape eyebrows] your eyebrows look better. If you, you know stuff...if you are strategic about it I think it can make you, uhm, it could enhance your look. But I don't think it can make you pretty or make you beautiful. No, I don't think so. [Quote 98]

Lerato:

It portrays a person that you are not at that particular time. Now you see me beautiful, then the next morning I am not the person you saw or liked because of the make-up. That's the one thing that I don't like about make-up. You are beautiful today because you're wearing make-up, the next time you're not beautiful. [Quote 99]

Xoliswa:

Aah, first of all it makes people look older than their age. That's the worst part of it. And secondly, it makes them look as if they're insecure with the way they are. They are trying to transform themselves into people that they are not, yes. [Quote 100]

4.2 Hair discourses in everyday life

4.2.1 Weave extensions

Another issue investigated in the individual interviews and the focus group interview, and which seems to hold great importance to the participants, is hair. Various questions based on hair are formulated and asked to the participants. Participants are asked about their choice of hairstyle and why they choose that specific hairstyle. Participants are also asked about their favourite and least favourite hairstyle. I shall briefly discuss the types of hairstyle choices that are available to African black women. African black hair is adaptable to a variety of hairstyles because of its coarse texture. Amongst the widely prominent hairstyles, are extensions, which take various forms and shapes, but the majority are done through plaiting them to the hair. Secondly, there are weave extensions (at times referred to as bonding) which are hair that one can comb and it is put on by either sewing it to the hair or by gluing it using hair glue. Thirdly, there is chemical relaxing in which African coarse hair is straightened using chemical relaxers. Fourthly, there are dreadlocks which is natural African hair left to grow in its natural state. Lastly, is an Afro which is African hair that has not been chemically relaxed. The Afro is subject to a number of plait hairstyles and these can be achieved by using both the Afro as it is in its natural state or at times plaited with synthetic hair extensions.

Overall, it is clear from the hairstyles chosen by participants that three factors seem to play an important role in the type of hairstyle chosen by the participants. Firstly, how the hairstyle suits the person's facial features and makes them look is an important factor. Secondly, convenience of the hairstyle is another significant component, as participants are not willing to spend long hours doing their hair as seen in their choice for weave extensions, chemically straightened hair, and short hair. Convenience in terms of maintenance of the hairstyle also proves important as female participants are not prepared to spend a long time doing their hair in the morning. Lastly, economic capital also plays a determining role as some hairstyles

are chosen based on their financial affordability by the participants. The following section presents the different hairstyles that were worn by the participants during the individual interviews and focus group interview.

Two of the female participants had weave extensions on during the first individual interviews. The female participants were asked about their choice of hairstyle and their answers are as follows:

I asked about the type of weave extension she has on:

It's Peruvian. [Quote 101]

I asked Lerato how much time it takes to maintain her hair:

I can spend the whole day doing it because I am not under pressure. Whenever I feel like taking a break I take a break then carry on again. [Quote 102]

I also asked Lerato how often she does her hair:

Okay, from this semester I only bought this hair once because I only wash it and ever since that I am doing my hair. So I'm no longer spending as much than before. [Quote 103]

Within a month:

I only do it once in two months... Yes, and within that two months I wash it every three weeks, after three weeks I wash it. [Quote 104]

The weave extension costs Lerato:

It's was R2700. [Quote 105]

Lerato also did a Peruvian weave extension for her graduation. I therefore asked her if she could tell me more about it:

Oh, I did it in Joburg [Johannesburg, South Africa] and it...it was more expensive than the others that I had done before. And it was important for me to do that hairstyle because I was graduating. So [pauses] ya. [Quote 106]

Researcher:

Okay, can you tell me now, I don't remember clearly but you mentioned something about it being a closure something like that? [Quote 107]

Lerato:

Ya, lace closure, mm. [Quote 108]

Researcher:

Laughs] Can you tell me about it, was it still a Peruvian weave. [Quote 109]

Lerato:

Yes, it was a Peruvian weave [hair extension with a lace closure]. [Quote 110]

Researcher:

And how much was...how much did it cost you? And for how long did you stay with the hairstyle? [Quote 111]

Lerato:

It was R4, 500 [in rands] the weave only. Like the whole thing...like...but putting it on was R450 [in rands] and then I stayed with it two months, ya. [Quote 112]

Researcher:

So you prefer? [Quote 113]

Lerato:

Weaves [extensions]. [Quote 114]

Researcher:

Okay, now let's talk about campus. Do you often come to campus with your own hair or hair extensions? [Quote 115]

Lerato:

Extensions. [Quote 116]

Researcher:

Okay, why? [Quote 117]

Lerato:

It just happens because I always have extensions on and to be honest with you I don't feel comfortable with my hair. [Quote 118]

Researcher:

Why not? [Quote 119]

Lerato:

I don't know. I feel like people are not used to me with my own hair, ya. And I look strange without my hair. Like with my hair I look strange. [Quote 120]

Researcher:

And with the weave [extensions]? [Quote 121]

Lerato:

I, I think I become more presentable in people's eyes, ya. [Quote 122]

Researcher:

But have you ever like gone a month or a week without the weave where you just come to campus with your own natural hair? [Quote 123]

Lerato:

I, I wear this (pointing to the scarf on her head). [Quote 124]

Researcher:

Okay, why do you wear a scarf? [Quote 125]

Lerato:

(Laughs) To cover my hair (laughs again). [Quote 126]

Researcher:

But don't you think your hair is nice? [Quote 127]

Researcher:

It is nice, but I can't. [Quote 128]

But then there are certain hairstyles which you can do and that look nice on Afro hair. [Quote 129]

Lerato:

Which ones are those? [Quote 130]

Researcher:

For instance you can plait your afro, plait your natural hair or do certain hairstyles with just your own hair. [Quote 131]

Lerato:

Ey, I don't...I mean I'm not open minded when it comes to my natural hair, but when it comes weaves [extensions] ya I think of what can I do. And I can even style myself with waves, but with my hair I just don't know what can I...I just can't, mm. [Quote 132]

A weave extension is fake hair that is either sewed into one's hair or glued to one's hair using hair glue. During both interviews Lerato shows great preference for weave extensions and says they are much more convenient and can style more easily than her own natural hair. She states further that weave extensions make hair look presentable, and that her natural hair makes her look strange. For Lerato the high expenses associated with purchasing weave extension and having them attached by a hairdresser do not seem to be an issue.

Mpho:

Uhm, most of the time I admire it (Laughing). This I love it I love the volume, because it is big, it makes me more beautiful, it is nice yah. [Quote 133]

Mpho:

Either I braid my hair [puts on braid extensions] or put a weave [extension] on it. So maybe [it] lasts for three weeks or for the whole month. Then I go back to my natural hair, maybe two weeks or a month, then do another hairstyle. [Quote 134]

Mpho points out that she loves her weave extension because it makes her look beautiful and she also loves the volume of the weave extension. During the interview, she says that she changes her hair every three weeks, which entails her changing between hair extensions and her own hair (chemically straightened hair).

During the focus group interview, Thembeke wore a wavy weave extension and gave an explanation for her transition from natural hair to chemically straightened hair and weave extensions.

Thembeke:

Probably you guys won't believe this, but I am also for natural hair. So girls, I was just looking at the different hairstyles that they have. Like short hair and how they maintain it. I'm...I, I, I really love short hair. [Quote 135]

I thus asked her why she thought we would not believe that she likes short hair:

Eish! This is a touchy topic guys (laughing). The only reason I'm not going natural as yet...first year I was natural, last yearish [last year] I was also natural. The first three months of last year I was natural. The thing is with me I can't maintain hair. I, I struggle, I struggle. I don't know whether you saw [referring to me: Zukiswa] me recently. I had an Afro and it was not going [and it was not going well]. I relaxed it. He [exclamation] the relaxer was not going [it was not going well]. I'm like he [exclamation] weave [extension] come back you know. So now I'm at a point where I am thinking next year Feb [February] I am cutting my hair. I just need igrowth [hair growth] because I can't rock that Nandi Mngoma [South African female singer and television personality who has a shortcut hairstyle with a line on one side of her head]. I'll end up looking like Teko Modise [South African soccer player]. So I'm not gonna do that ya (Nonzuzo laughing). [Quote 136]

Initially Thembeke had natural hair, with extensions on, however, during the focus interview she had chemically relaxed hair with a waving weave extension on top. Thembeke explains that her decision to chemically straighten her hair is because she could not manage her Afro anymore. She again feels compelled to tell us during the interview that she might go back to her natural hair next year and is just waiting for her hair to have a bit of growth before she cuts it. The need for Thembeke to explain herself can be seen as the result of the controversy of 'natural' hair versus 'hair extensions', particularly the assumption that people with hair extensions are less African than their black counterparts with natural African hair. She therefore feels that she needs to explain her position in full.

4.2.2 Braid extensions

One of the participants, Thembeke, had a soft dread extension during both individual interviews. However, during the first interview she had a blond soft bread extension and during the following interview she had a black soft braid extension.

Thembeke:

Uhm, I love volume, the previous one was just black. We all have black hair and it's like very normal. So my friends got tired of this black thing going on with my hair because every month even if I changed my hairstyle it would still be black. Nothing much going on in there, you know. So then they dared me into trying a different colour, the blond hair that I have on now. And to my surprise I love it because it matches my skin tone so well and I am very confident with it. [Quote 137]

Thembeke:

It's like...it goes so well with my skin colour and my complexion. And it's like that thing...it's like my hair with my natural colour, but it's not my hair." [Quote 138]

Thembeke:

Okay, I do my hair once a month, aah, and because I am a res child. Hair for me is not that expensive compared to the days when I literally didn't know anyone. Doing my hair back then I would say was expensive. So now what happens is that I buy the hairpiece and do my hair for hundred rand [R100]. Unlike when I go to the salon I pay three hundred and fifty [R350], but I still need to bring with me my own hairpiece. So there is a difference. [Quote 139]

Thembeke;

Black soft dread, aah, it's all because of...with now it's all because of money and everything you know. Because back in December like, November you know everyone is like okay your coming to Cape Town. Here's money to do your hair and now it's the type of thing. Aah, my cousin...this is actually my cousin's hair piece, but this is...she actually went for a German cut [the fade] and then she's like: You can have my hair piece. Because she won't be having hair anytime soon. So that's how I got it otherwise...but, eish, my hairstylist wants me to do, aah, this brown, blond box braid because that's what I want to do soon, eish. [Quote 140]

Karabo had short braids during the follow-up interview:

The last hairstyle, okay the last hairstyle I had was short hair, cut hair and I dyed it and there was a bit of S-curl, I think. Uhm, okay I have changed from that because I wanted to grow my hair. I want to grow my hair you know. And the reason I put on an extension braids is because...okay it's been trending like. I have been seeing it a lot and I'm like: That is nice, it is very nice. And the fact that I am trying to grow my hair makes it easier to maintain as well as because hair that doesn't have extensions is very hard to maintain and stuff. [Quote 141]

The reason she decided to grow her hair is because she wants to be able to do more hairstyles with her hair. Another reason that she states is that braids are the trending fashion. Karabo's hair practices, especially her chosen hairstyles, can be seen as more than about the aesthetics of beauty, but also following hair trends. Moreover, she believes that hair is the first thing that people look at when they look at you. Hence, she is always changing her hairstyles according to what she wants or what is trending at the moment. Furthermore, she disagrees with India Arie's song, "I am not my hair":

Yes, as much as India Arie's song says "I'm not my hair", but it's...I don't think it's true. Women feel confident and more alive when they feel good about their hair. You might look good in what you wear like with what you dressed like, but then when your hair is not good. I think it impacts, it impacts on your confidence as well. You know that, okay, my hair does not look that good, you know. I mean when people look at you they look at your face, and then the next minute the [you're] head...your hair, it's your hair. So when people communicate with you they look at you in your face. So your hair plays a very, not a very important role but it plays a vital role in feeling confident and being free. So as much...it can be

anything. It can be dreadlocks, it can be an Afro, it can be braids, it be whatever, but if you [are] confident then [with] your hairstyle you feel good. [Quote 142]

4.2.3 Chemically straightened hair

Two of the participants, Nonzuzo and Xoliswa, had chemically relaxed hair. Xoliswa had her hair chemically straightened and then plaited. On the other hand, Nonzuzo had chemically straightened hair tight in a small bun. During the first interviews participants were asked about their choice of hairstyle, and why.

Xoliswa:

Uhm, aah, I just said by looking at me she should just choose any style that she thinks might, mm, yes best feature (suit me) me. [Quote 143]

I also asked two participants how much money and time it costs to maintain their hair. By asking this question I wanted to find out if participants had the economic and cultural capital to follow aesthetics standards of the female body. My intention was to also find out how much time it takes to do the hair and if female participants thought it was worth it:

Aah, maybe [every] two months I do it once yes. So it doesn't cost me too much time, ya. [Quote 144]

For Xoliswa the choice of hairstyle was based on how it suited her facial features and made her look.

Xoliswa:

Uhm, I have never put on weaves on my hair. I don't I always stay with my natural hair. I can relax it yes, but don't do weaves [weave extensions]. [Quote 145]

Xoliswa's assertion suggest that not all African black women are concerned with weave extensions even though she admits to chemically straightening her hair. As such, despite the participants' reasons for deciding to chemically straightening their hair, none of the participants mentioned anything about the potential dangers of chemically straightening their hair.

Nonzuzo:

Now my hair is natural but it's not the Afro. Its relaxed hair [chemically straightened], and the style that I have now is just styling it up there and then you ya...it's basically just playing around with my hair without any weaves on. [Quote 146]

It's, it's relaxing. [It] is less than an hour. So I like the fact that you don't sit for hours doing your hair. It's less than an hour and it's much cheaper. It's like when you relax, you have to relax...I think it's plus or minus two hundred rand [R200] in a month. Because you will be relaxing your hair and then afterwards you will be just, uhm, washing it and putting in some treatment. That's it. [Quote 147]

I also asked Nonzuzo how often she does her hair:

Okay, I change my hair like...I think I always relax it every two months. Ya, in two months I always relax my hair cause I want it to have growth so that I can...when I relax it becomes much more longer. [Quote 148]

Nonzuzo's choice of hairstyle is based on convenience with regard to both finances and time spent doing her hair. Thus, relaxing is the preferred hairstyle for her because it does not require her to spend a lot of time at the salon and it is cheap.

She was also asked if she does hairstyles other than just relaxing her hair and how much it costs her:

Uhm, I usually do cornrows [small plaits]. They call them essence in Bloem [Bloemfontein], but the essence with my hair. So I usually do that...The last time I did it, it was already ninety rands [R90], ya. [Quote 149]

The participant says that she hasn't done any extensions for a long time.

Nonzuzo:

I usually do them not, not all the time. The last time I did it I think it was two years back, two years back. I have been, been staying with this hair...cutting, having chiskop [bold head], letting it grow again, cutting it, just playing around with my hair. Not rea- I don't think I have outgrown it. It's just that I like it, I like it when my scalp breaths because such things they disturb your hair line. When you older you won't have hair on the front line and it's just not nice when you see it in older people. So I like it when my hair has just...it breathes and...cause [because] sometimes you might...hair is damaged cells. So if you keep on growing it, it won't be thicker and strong as it is. So I feel like I can put on my weaves, but I don't like weaves specifically. I put braids at least and then I put in braids and then once in a lifetime I then stop them, and I then go back to my chiskop, brush-cut and then my relaxed hair. [Quote 150]

Nonzuzo's choice of hairstyle again seems to be based solely on convenience and financial affordability. She states this quite clearly during both individual interviews.

4.2.4 Short hair

During the first round of interviews three of the female participants had short hair.

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, well I have a cut [female hair cut called the fade for which Lupita Nyong'o is well known for] on my head now (laughs), but, aah, I choose this hairstyle because I was tired of having long hair. Uhm, I grew up with long hair and for some other reason it seemed like when you are a girl you were supposed to have long hair. So I never understood that, I never understood why, you know. But I never did anything about it. My parents were also like: Why not, you just have long hair. So I was like: okay, fine. I will keep the long hair. Then I got to varsity and I saw everybody, you know, doing what they want, but what was very consistent was extensions and bondings [weave extension], and this and that. So I was like: No I don't want this. I don't want people to say I am beautiful because of my hair or my hair makes an additional look, so I decided to cut my hair. Uhm, so I change the hairstyles. Now even if my hair is short, I will have lines here and dye it like this, and I will have curls ning ning [now and then]. But I do feel strongly about having short hair. Uhm, but I don't think it's because of some sort of statement that I am trying to make. It's just that I prefer it, and I think and I am trying to maybe say that there is a different way of being beautiful. And it's not just long hair or extensions or this, there's a different way. And people compliment me all the time. So I think it is working, people like it or whatever their reason may be, I love my hair. [Quote 151]

Nthabiseng's decision to cut her hair seems to result from years of having long hair. Furthermore, from what she says long hair seems to be a norm for girls, something that she also noticed when she came to university, for most girls had weave extensions. So she got tired of that and then decided to cut her hair. She notes that she cut her hair because she wanted to show people that one can be beautiful with short hair, just as one can be beautiful with long hair. Here, Nthabiseng can be seen as transcending the dominant views of beauty that are associated with long hair through her choice to cut hair.

She was also asked how much time and money she spends doing her hair, including how often she does her hair:

Okay, I go to the salon, uhm, every two weeks. So every two weeks I go for a haircut and that's fifty rand [R50]. So my hair costs me hundred rand [R100]. But if I have to dye it then that's an additional sixty rand [R60]. So maybe one sixty rand every second month. [Quote 152]

Aah, what I love about my hair (thinking)? Aah, it's convenient, it's very convenient, aah. I don't know why people don't think that natural hair is not convenient [ethnic hair]. But short hair is convenient, it's cheap and it looks good on me, I mean I haven't seen anything that suits me like this in a very long time. Uhm, if I had an opportunity to change my hair would I? Uhm, I wouldn't change my hairstyle. But I would change the texture of my hair. I just wish it was more hard and natural you know so that I can cut

it in all different ways, but with a natural look to it. So I would change the texture just to make it a lil more natural. I do have very, not very, I just have fluffy hair, fluffy hair, ya. [Quote 153]

In terms of maintenance, her hair does not cost too much as she does it twice in a month which is not expensive. Again her hairstyle choice seems to be based on convenience and affordability. Lastly, her hairstyle choice is based on how it suits her and makes her look.

Palesa:

Okay, I am a natural girl as you can see. Mm, I love my hair natural. I haven't had a, aah, when I was growing up my mom would put all these artificial hairs on my head. But now, now that I am a woman I've had this short hair about eight years now. I've never grown my hair up to more than 5 cm long. So I just love being natural. [Quote 154]

I also asked her what made her go natural instead of putting on hair extensions:

Uhm, I looked at my face. I saw that I have a round face. And I noticed that when I have a weave on or braids, or whatever artificial hair I looked more round. So I noticed that short hair makes me look normal. Yes, I have a round face, but I looked better with short hair than long weaves or braids, or whatever you can do on your hair. Or with long hair in general. [Quote 155]

Palesa states that she loves short hair because it is convenient in terms of time management:

That it takes me less than two minutes to comb it (giggles). [Quote 156]

Mm, monthly I would say I spend less than hundred bucks [R100] because I have to get a haircut once a month which costs me thirty bucks [R30]. And then I don't do my s-curl at the hair salon, I do it myself. I just have to get a cream relaxer, and when I have hair spray I use it about for three months. So less than hundred bucks [R100] monthly' [Quote 157]

What Palesa loves about her short hairstyle is that she thinks she looks beautiful in it and it suits her face. The hairstyle is also very convenient for her and financially affordable to maintain.

Karabo:

Yoh, my hair. I think I have changed my hair colour and hairstyle four times this year (giggles). In January (giggles), let me try to think far back. January, January, January, aah, January, January I had shorter hair and it was gold. No, no, yes, ya it was gold. It was gold. I had shorter hair, cut on the side and then it was styled on top. My hair colour then was passion plump (giggles), ya passion plump. Ya, and I rolled it [curled it] and everything, and then towards March I did, uhm, yaki braids [extensions] ya. And I had that for three months, and then to June, and then in June I had, uhm, I had my natural hair but under I put on a wig. But everybody thought it was a weave. So ya I put on a weave for two months to

three, ya and then after I took it out I (pauses) oh ya I went back to my hairstyle where I rolled it and cut it on the side. Then I dyed it with passion plump. I had it for quite a time- two or three months, and then recently last month I cut it and then dyed it ruby red. And then there was black again, ya somewhere. And then I dyed it black again, and then plump, then ruby, ruby again, so ya. [Quote 158]

The participant was also asked how much money/time it takes to maintain her hair, and how often she does her hair:

Okay, I do it once a month, okay twice, okay let's say twice a month because of the rolling [chemically curling] all the time? I do it twice a month, aah, it costs about R180. Ya to do that, uhm, and then what else do I do. Uhm, like if it's braids then it's not much maintaining. It's just spray and washing, washing it regularly. Uhm, with this one there's no maintenance. It's just curls, curl, jell then that's all. I always say I shouldn't take more than one day to do my hair. If it's more than one day then it's not worth it. [Quote 159]

The choice of short hair for Nthabiseng and Palesa it is based on how beautiful they think they look with short hair compared to other hairstyles. However, for Karabo it is about changing hairstyles now and then: so for her, there is no sentimental value attached to hair as is the case with the two participants.

4.2.5 Afro

During the interviews one of the female participants had a short Afro, while two of the participants had natural hair (Afro), but had done extensions on top of their Afros.

In our second interview, Xoliswa had a short Afro. The participant is asked what made her decide to go natural:

Aah, it saves time (laughs). It saves time because now I don't have to go to the salon and wash my hair and all that stuff and I...Ya I just wash it and that's it. [Quote 160]

Thembeke:

Short hair. Eight months ago I had short hair now I am in a stage where I have an Afro, but at the moment I have something on my hair so the Afro it is not visible. [Quote 161]

Lerato:

Oh, I don't like relaxed hair because when I relax my hair [chemically straightened] it doesn't stay relaxed for a long time. It quickly goes back to its natural state. It gets ruined quickly. So I thought...and it doesn't grow if I always relax it. There is always a stage whereby it just stops and doesn't grow. So I decided let me just have an Afro. I love an Afro because it grows quickly. But combing it in the morning...that is why I always have my hair plaited because it is a problem. That is what I don't like about it. [Quote 162]

Okay, when I was doing grade 10 I already had an afro. I did my Afro from Au- let me think grade 11. There was a certain time where at my house they cut our hair when we were cleansing...like when we were doing these cleansing ceremonies [cut hair because of a cleansing ceremony at home]. So I was like: let me grow my hair natural. [Quote 163]

No but in 2009 I went to the salon in Bloemfontein where they relaxed it when I said they should just blow it out. So I just relaxed and grew it relaxed [So I just chemically straightened and it grew chemically straightened], but in 2012 I said I wanted my Afro back. So I cut my hair. Then I did an afro. [Quote 164]

Lerato also states that if she has to choose between her natural hair and extensions she will choose extensions:

Mm, ex- extensions, yes. [Quote 165]

The participant was asked why she chooses extensions:

Mm, they are easy to maintain, but ho- in terms of when you comb them in the morning and you're in a hurry you just comb it. But they also have their advantages and disadvantages. [Quote 166]

She nonetheless sees them as having certain advantages as well as disadvantages:

The advantages are the ones that I just mentioned. They are easy to comb. You [are] always up to date with your hair when you have those...when you have put these things in your hair for that one month or two months when you would have put on an extension. You [are] always up to date and osharp [just fine], but [pauses] you can't, you cannot stay with the same hair of weaves and for you to maintain that standard you need money. [Quote 167]

Even though the participants have natural coarse hair, two of them state that they frequently do extensions on top of their Afros. As such, Lerato shows some uneasiness and discomfort with staying with her natural hair for a long period as she shows preference for hair extension. She states that they make her look presentable. For Xoliswa the choice to transition back to natural hair is based on convenience and financial affordability.

4.2.6 Perceptions of hair

The participants were asked about their first memories of having hair done. This includes their subjective experiences and who they were with when they did their hair. The intention is to understand the type of emotions that participants associate with their first time hair experiences:

Nthabiseng:

Aah, I remember, aah, I don't think I remember my very first time doing my hair. I do remember that I have had long hair for most of my life, but I do remember my very first time cutting my hair. That's my most profound memory. I think I was 10 or 11 years old and I went to the salon, and I said to my mom that I wanted to cut my hair. And then I remember I wanted to cut Rebecca Malope's hairstyle [South African female gospel artist]. I don't know, but for me it was like the best hairstyle ever. It was very short on the sides and very big in the middle [German haircut]. So I loved that hairstyle and I was with my mom and brother. And I remember that it was a guy doing my hair. He cut my hair and he did it beautifully. I mean you know [emphasising]! But at that time it wasn't accepted. I got to school and people were like: why did you cut your hair: You had such 'good' hair. And the guys were laughing at me. But I have never really cared. And it's my most profound memory of doing my hair; I cut it when I was ten. [Quote 168]

Palesa:

I can't remember that one hey! Because I have been going to the salon since I was...from a very young age. So I was used to people doing whatever they liked with my hair. So I don't have...but I remember when I first cut my hair. I looked into the mirror and I was like: wow! Because it was very long. Then I noticed that I actually looked prettier with short hair than with long hair, although people tried to convince me otherwise that all hairstyles suit you. They were even persuading me to do dreadlocks. But I am content with short hair. So when I first cut my hair I noticed that I look more beautiful with short hair than with any other hairstyle. [Quote 169]

Xoliswa:

I was with my mother, it was at home. So yes, I felt pretty, ya. [Quote 170]

I further asked her what kind of hairstyle she did to her hair:

It was interesting because I have seen it before and I have seen people, aah, with nice relaxed hair. So I wanted to do it. [Quote 171]

I asked Xoliswa what makes her feel good about chemically straightening her hair:

Because I looked different (giggles). [Quote 172]

I continued to ask about the way in which the style made her look different:

Different like the...differently to the image that I used to look like. [Quote 173]

I again asked Xoliswa if she thinks she looks much better after chemically straightening her hair:

Ya, it was much more prettier, I thought so. Yes, I thought so, but now I can't, I can't tell the difference. Like when I came back to my natural hair I think I am much more prettier the...than before. So I don't know (laughs). [Quote 174]

Lerato talks about her first experience touching a real hundred percent human hair extension:

Yho! They, they, they are beautiful; they also make a person beautiful as well. And the first time I bought a weave hair I fell in love with the texture, the texture, the smell, the length and I don't know. There is something about it. [Quote 175]

I therefore, followed this up by asking her about her first time to do a real human hair extension (Peruvian weave). She gives her first experience of doing both an Ebony hair extension as well as a Peruvian weave extension as follows:

Lerato:

I didn't like it the first time and I think it was because it was my first and I didn't want to put on a weave, but had no other option but to put on a weave [weave extension]. [Quote 176]

These four participants' first-time hair experiences were associated with positive emotions of feeling beautiful and pretty. This is however different in Nonzuzo's case, as noted below.

Nonzuzo:

My, my cousin did my hair at the time. There was something called popcorn [plaits]. Do you know it? It's, it's like braiding [braid extension], but with your own hair. Small braiding and then you just roll- round it, roll it around. It was so painful. Some people do it with pantyhose, but my cousin never used pantyhose because I had long hair. So she would just wrap it around and it would stick handle [nicely]. Yho! When you sleep- the following day I woke up and I just undid it, like yoh! I unplaited it. Everything nje [just] that's how I felt gore [that] I cannot, I cannot do this- it's just torture. So that's when I noticed that something's you don't need to go...to feel some pain in order to be beautiful. If you feel good it's fine. [Quote 177]

For Nonzuzo her first-time hair experience is associated with pain owing to the technique that was applied to do her hair. As such, she recalls how she thought that one does not need to go through such pain to be beautiful.

Karabo:

My mom used to do my hair at a very, very young age. And I remember I never used to like to do it because it took me away from my brothers. So that was the time I realised I'm a girl. So, she'll make sure that I did my hair if it's a Sunday. But then, ya, it was my mom who did my hair most of the time. And then somebody...when she started working outside of town she got other people to do my hair. It was painful, it was painful, it was very painful (giggles). [Quote 178]

I asked Karabo if it was chemically straightened hair or not:

No, I didn't. My dad didn't want me to relax my hair. I only started relaxing my hair when I was in...no I'm lying that was not my first hairstyle. My first hairstyle was rolling [curling it], and it was...there were chemicals inside. [Quote 179]

Karabo:

It was my natural hair [but chemically altered]. I had long hair when I was young. [Quote 180]

Mpho:

The first time I did my hair (thinking). I did...I think it was back line [plaits done with a hair extension fibre]. I think so; am not sure. I was with my mom. It made me look different, but because I was very young, I didn't pay that much attention to it. [Quote 181]

It was painful, but it was good that I was exposed to something new that I hadn't done and it made me look different. [Quote 182]

When asked whether she loved the hairstyle or not:

Mm, it was standard, it was okay (laughing). My mom chose it for me. But it was okay. I don't look back at it regretting. [Quote 183]

Participants were also asked whether they think the painful procedures they went through to obtain a specific hairstyle was worth it or not. Many have the following to say.

Mpho:

Yes, it was. [Quote 184]

In our follow-up interview I asked Nonzuzo to tell me what she thought was painful about the whole process:

The braids, the fake hair, the artificial hair like...it was a painful process. Even relaxing that relaxer is a chemical on its own. So now when your put it...when it's been in your scalp for a long time you become burned by the, by the, by the chemicals and also the hairdryer when you've just rinsed it all off. And then the hairdryer is hot. It's just burning you. So when I was younger I never really liked putting on those things. Even my mom didn't really entertain that. So even now as much as I might have my natural hair. In some days I do such things, but now I go for the less painful ones, ya. [Quote 185]

I also asked her which one would be the less painful hairstyle:

Uhm, I usually, uhm, they call it essence in Bloem, but I usually braid with my own hair or once in a life time braid with the braids themselves but the thicker braids not the smaller ones. Because I don't want

*to sit or- long like more than one day doing the same hairstyle. So something quick and less painful.
[Quote 186]*

During the follow-up interview with Nonzuzo, I asked her if there is any painful procedure that she is willing to go through just to be beautiful:

No, no I wouldn't even do 'Botox' thank you. I wouldn't do any painful procedure just to look beautiful. I'm fine by the way I am and then people don't know 'Botox'. What, what, what organism is there. Nna [I] I study microbiology and I know which organism is there that is used for 'Botox'. If you were to ingest it in your mouth you'd be sick for days- nearly to, to die basically. It's a fatal organism that it used, but on the face it probably doesn't cause the same effects as, as it is when it's, when it's injected. So with the knowledge that I have it gives me that hint that I shouldn't even go that path. [Quote 187]

The participant is also asked if there is anything that she will be willing to do to look beautiful:

Yes, there is. Yes, there is. Like when you've got like good...when you've...for instance kere eng nna [what can I say]. Your hair it doesn't define you, but it enhances your beauty and, uhm, sometimes, putting a lil bit for instance an eyeliner or mascara enhances your eyes. Your eyes becomes brighter. I don't mind going through that and doing my hair. Renewing hairstyles now and then. That would make me feel more beautiful. [Quote 188]

It is clear from the narrative that, participants' first-time experiences with their hair are associated with a mixture of positive and negative feelings. Some of the participants mention how beautiful they felt after doing their hair, while two participants associate the process of doing hair with pain. Nonetheless, participants' first time hair experiences were with loved ones such as parents, specifically mothers. Despite the positive emotions reported from their first time hair experiences, some of the participants talk about/reveal painful memories of their first time experiences doing their hair. This highlights the painful procedures that are at times involved in hair practices in as far as the African black women are concerned.

Participants in the focus group interview were asked to share any personal experience in which they had to do a specific hairstyle or any form of beauty practice where it was painful, but they did it anyway? I wanted to understand if it was worth going through the painful hair procedures, when considering the dangers that they sometimes pose to one's health.

Nonzuzo:

Relaxing [the process of chemically straightening natural coarse hair] is a master-piece. Being burned by the left side, upwards, the hair dryer, yho! That one is a master-piece (everyone laughing). [Quote 189]

Thembeke:

Nthabiseng: Yhu! Guys (laughing), my cousin and I were actually talking about this. We don't know whether it's in our home town, but because when we here we relax our own hair [we chemically straighten our own hair] you know and then back home we go to the salons. Hey! She is busy combing your hair [the hairstylist], you don't know what is infuriating this lady qinis' ntloko [tightens your head] (making sound nose) hayi [no]. They burn you with the hair dryer, yhu! Hayi mani [no, man]. Like it's just bad stories. [Quote 190]

But we all have stories about how, you know, we've gone through pain. It's just that we think we have to go through pain to look beautiful. But yes we've gone through pain to have a certain hairstyle that we wanted to have at that time. I think so. [Quote 191]

Nthabiseng:

Yes, it's usually worth it you know. You know, looks better than, you know, what it looked like before you got there. [Quote 192]

Nonzuzo:

Cause [because] I still even put on things and my hair is growing quite well. But the relaxing [chemical straightening] was not worth it yho ha a uyabona [no even now]. Like now even if I go there to go just wash my hair, dry it, neh [right]. I know by the time I come back Akere [right] I put on eyeliner because I like it, it will be smudged because now I am doing like this (making body gestures) in there. I am just blinking my eyes involuntarily because it is hurting me, the dryer is just hurting me. So hayi nkosi yam [so no, but my goodness] it's worth it sometimes. [Quote 193]

Nthabiseng:

And I don't think people should have gone through so much. It's just that people go voluntarily. They don't know. We didn't know that we go to the salon and, and who [exclamation] and then your tissues are dying. [Quote 194]

So, hair practices among black women can be seen as entailing a number of painful procedures in the quest to obtain 'good' hair. This is evident in the participants' responses after being asked if they had any painful hair experiences to share. At first participants said the painful procedure of doing hair is worth it if it meant they would look beautiful. However, when asked if it is still worth it even if it meant permanent damage to their hair line, participants say it is not worth it.

Nonzuzo's favourite hairstyle is thick braid extensions which are time effective for her. Her least favourite hairstyle is a weave extension. She does not like a weave extension because it is very painful to do and requires a lot of maintenance. For Nonzuzo, what seems to be important when choosing a hairstyle is the convenience of the hairstyle in terms of both time and pain.

When asked what she if she had to choose between her natural hair and hair extensions, Nonzuzo chooses her natural hair:

I would stay with natural because it just, uhm, makes my life easier, basically. I don't have to stress about certain things that I have mentioned like, uhm, money. Because with other things you always need to maintain it. You have to go to the salon or someone does your hair. Buy a new hairstyle and then you have to pay money all the time and now and then. Immediately when you don't have money to renew your hairstyle you're gonna feel so depressed and miserable because your hair is not looking the way you want it to. But with Afro it's just up to you what to do and when to do it. [Quote 195]

Karabo's favourite hair style is:

I did this...okay it was my natural hair. I did...I cut it on the side and then on the top it was relaxed and stuff [when she says it was her natural hair she means that the hairstyle was done with her own hair, but overall the hairstyle involved the use of chemicals]. It was very nice, very hard to maintain you know. [Quote 196]

Karabo:

My least favourite hairstyle? Yho! I don't have because most of the time I'm with my hair and it's usually stuff that I wanna do. Right now I am not into the weave kind of...I am more into natural now cause [because] there are so many nice things we can do. [Quote 197]

The participants' evaluation of favourite hairstyle coincides with the consequence of that hairstyle to making them feel good about themselves as well as the convenience of the hairstyle. Secondly, the appearance of the hair plays a vital role with regard to whether it looks nice or not. The least favourite hairstyle for both Lerato and Nthabiseng is straight up (plaits done with a hair extension fibre). They each, nonetheless, have differing reasons for their dislike of this hairstyle, with Lerato disliking the hairstyle because it results in a receding hairline, while for Nthabiseng, it is because it is too long for her liking.

The following conversation on the debate of 'good' hair versus 'bad' hair is based on the focus group interview. Participants were requested to visit a website called www.blacknaps.org which focuses on natural hair. The website was used to test the

participants' knowledge of black hair. In addition, I sought to examine whether the blacknaps website, which teaches African black women on how to care for their hair, would change participants' perceptions of black hair.

Nthabiseng:

From the website, no, you know, they make it sound and seem like every type of texture is acceptable and you can do something with your hair no matter what your texture is. It's you know 'good'. I really...from the website I get the sense, the sense that everyone's texture is a 'good' texture. But in a practical sense: no I do think that some people actually do have 'bad' 'bad' hair and that's why some people really don't...they can't go without weave [extensions] because they really have 'bad' hair. Like too fluffy like cat hair its arg (laughing). There are people who have...have you seen their type of hair? [Quote 198]

Karabo was asked what she understood as 'good' hair, and why. This question was asked in an effort to get a deeper understanding of the debate of 'good' hair among African black women:

'Good' hair is what looks good. It can be either fibre, it can be weave, it can be dreadlocks, it can be natural, chiskop [bold head]. I think it's...it depends on who's doing it and how it looks. I mean so many people look nice...I mean your hairstyle looks very nice. It's very, very nice. So it depends how you do it, who's doing it. [Quote 199]

Despite the various ways the website tries to show that all hair types are good and there is no bad hair texture, participants are reluctant to believe this. They think that some people naturally have 'bad' hair and regardless of efforts to care for their hair, such actions are fruitless.

Nonzuzo:

Mm, ya, there is 'bad' hair, there is 'bad' hair. Uhm, depending on how you carry your hair, how you treat it, it can be 'bad' wa bona [you see]. But also sometimes you need to understand your hair texture as well then you know you can just enhance it because many people don't understand their hair texture and then something just goes deliberately like wrong because they don't know what to use and what not to use. They dye and then moririwatswa [they dye and then the hair starts breaking off] you know. Because their hair is softer you know. You need to understand your hair. Hence, it becomes 'bad' at some point. [Quote 200]

Thembeke:

Yeah, there is 'bad' hair guys! Like we cannot run away from that, you know. I cannot be using what Beyoncé [America female singer and actress] uses for her hair, you know. I, I can't do that to my hair, you know. And the quality of our hair to start with is very different, you know, ya. So there is 'bad' hair and 'good' hair. [Quote 201]

Nthabiseng:

First of all I sincerely believe that it's inherited that's the first thing. 'Good' hair is actually inherited. But the second thing is maintenance of course. When people started noticing that not all hair is 'good' hair...Not everyone has inherited 'good' hair, you know. Then people started coming with products to maintain the 'bad' hair. That's why there are products to maintain the 'bad' hairs [hair] (everyone laughing), yes you know. So people came up with these products to maintain. But I do sincerely think that 'good' hair is inherited. But you can also work towards 'good' hair by certain products boJabu Stone [Jabu Stone is a local hair product for natural hair such as dreadlocks and afros in South Africa] ... [Quote 202]

Although participants show consensus on the notion of 'good' and 'bad' hair, such conceptions are not based on black hair being bad as often understood in literature. It was clear, from the participants that any type of hair can be either 'good' or 'bad', depending on maintenance and efforts one takes to care for their hair.

The participants' decision on a hair style is determined by the availability of finance. Hair practices require money, starting from the products used (e.g. weave extension hair pieces) to the person doing the hair (hair stylist).

During the interviews, participants were also asked if they thought that hair is important to women's everyday lives. Here, I wanted to know how much they think women value hair in their everyday lives and the lengths to which they think they are willing to go to have nice hair.

Nonzuzo:

Uhm, I think it's an important thing...like it's like you're important...cause [because] without you...if your hair is clean; first of all you feel good. And you see yourself here [that] I am beautiful also. But beauty is not about the hair. It's about you, the inner beauty. How do you see yourself? Have you accepted yourself? So the hair is just there to enhance who you are, but if your hair is clean and you keep changing styles you feel good as well. Sometimes people usually say it's according to your mood. If I feel like it's hot now and my mood tells me that I should just cut it all, I should just shave it. Then it's fine." [Quote 203]

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, yes, it is, it is. Uhm, as much as I may not like certain hairstyles on certain people I do feel like your hair is an expression of a part of you and of who you are. Uhm, it's also a look, it also forms part of a look you have. It also says how much you take care of yourself. So it's also hygienic, it's also fashionable, but it's also natural. You know you should take care of your hair. You should make it part of who you are. So you should also really take good care of it and so on. It is important to do your hair everyday; it should form part of your everyday life. [Quote 204]

Mpho:

Yes, because your hair is the first thing that people notice on you and it says something about you as a person. So if you have messy hair people will also assume that you are a messy person; doesn't take care of herself. So you have to look at least a bit moulded in a way, to look presentable. [Quote 205]

Lerato:

Well there is a saying that "botle bam mme bo tloho" [a woman's beauty is in her hair] right, but I don't think to me weaves are that important me. But I think a weave defines who you are as an individual. What do you stand for. Because you with your dreadlocks it means you are original, African woman and all of that. But for someone who would stand between me and you. They will see you as more African than me because I...I am....I don't know. And then there are people who are bold and they are still African with their boldness. Okay as long as someone's head is neat. That's all that's important. [Quote 206]

It is clear that hair plays an important part in all the participants' everyday lives. Firstly, the importance of hair is associated with one's overall appearance as participants think that hair says a lot about the type of person one is and is the first thing that people look at. Secondly, hair is also important as feelings of self-worth and confidence are linked to hair. Lastly, hair is conceived as important in women's everyday lives because of the association of a woman's beauty to hair by certain African ethnic groups in South Africa. There is a difference in how African people perceive their hair.

Nthabiseng:

The hairstyle I have at the moment I just like it. I think it looks nice on me. It doesn't speak to anything. It doesn't tell you how confident I am. It doesn't tell you if I won't look good in long hair. I, I don't think it says anything about who I am, where I am in life. I don't think so, but I..just shows you because I think it looks good and I just wanted a break from long hair, that's all. And I braid my hair sometimes because I like braids. I think I look nice in braids, that's all. I don't have certain sentimental attachments to hair. I really don't. [Quote 207]

Nthabiseng does not think that she expresses anything with her hair. Her current hairstyle, as she stated, is the result of her decision to take a break from long hair for a while.

During the focus group interview, participants were asked if there is any cultural importance attached to hair from their various groups. I wanted to understand how such cultural attachments impact on their understanding of hair in everyday life, and how such perceptions influence their construction of femininity in everyday life:

Nonzuzo:

I remember when I cut my hair it was very short, "Oh did I tell you uyinkwenkwe" like "You look like a boy" [quoting those people who said she looked like a boy after cutting her hair]. [Quote 208]

Nthabiseng:

Exactly le nna [even with me]. They say that all the time with my hair. They always say: "Aah, you I think you're trying to look like a boy; why you want to look like a boy" and I don't wear earrings as well. I just, I don't think I need to wear earrings. Then "no, girls wear earrings". No, I...you don't have to wear earrings. [Quote 209]

Nthabiseng:

My mother's more than anything [Sotho people]. My dad's side would be even stricter. Yeah, that's even worse [Pedi people]. That's a big culture, very old fashioned traditional, ya. They believe in having hair and wearing earrings, but I don't. [Quote 210]

It is clear from Nthabiseng and Nonzuzo that there seems to be some cultural association of hair with gender. Within their ethnic groups, short hair is associated with boys, and long hair with girls.

During the focus group interview, participants were asked if they thought there are similarities or differences in hair perceptions by different racial groups and which type of hair they thought is preferred by a certain racial group. From this question I sought to determine if participants view hair as important to all racial groups or just to specific racial groups.

Nonzuzo:

There are differences. [Quote 211]

Thembeke:

Differences. [Quote 212]

Researcher:

How, and in terms of what type of hair is preferred? For example, white people? [Quote 213]

Nonzuzo:

They like longer hair. [Quote 214]

Nthabiseng:

It has to be long hair... [Quote 215]

Nonzuzo:

Longer, straight hair. [Quote 216]

Nthabiseng:

It has to be thick, mm, straight. [Quote 217]

Researcher:

And other racial groups? [Quote 218]

Nthabiseng:

Indians also has to be quite long. Also, black and bouncy, but straight but it has to be good hair, rich hair. Black people, I've noticed that we do not care. [Quote 219]

Nonzuzo:

We don't really have specific hair type. [Quote 220]

Nonzuzo:

It's just a variety of hairstyles. [Quote 221]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, black people for us more than anything body is important, it's very important, but hair not really. [Quote 222]

Participants do not think that hair is important to African black people nor is there is a preference for any hair type. Such understandings of hair pose a challenge to the controversies surrounding African hair that link African hair to African identity (cf. Chapter 2, p. 33). However, having long, straight, silky hair is, nevertheless, something important to white and Indian people in participants views.

During the focus group interview, participants were also asked about their views on Hugh Masekela's [a legendary South African Jazz musician] refusal to take pictures

with girls wearing weave extensions ["I don't take pics with girls who wear weaves" taken from www.news24.com which is a local news and entertainment website]. I also asked them to elaborate on Hugh Masekela's association of natural African black hair with the African identity. Again here, I wanted to detect if female participants think there is any link between black hair and their ethnicity. If they thought there is an association, I then wanted to know how this association impacts on their perceptions of black hair in everyday life, including female beauty and in turn their construction of beauty.

Nonzuzo:

In his, in his picture okay fine he does have a right neh [right]. But I feel like it's kinda [kind of] insulting. It's like going to an office and be like: No you not allowed in this interview because you're fat. It's insulting. [Quote 223]

Thembeke:

I, I personally for me I will always respect. I respect utat' Huge Masekela [Mr Hugh Masekela] ...but I feel like he, uhm, I don't understand this whole...I feel like his [he is] trying to dictate the lives of young girls you know and can he just chill [relax] a bit. Like can he just play the music for us and we'll dance whether we have one dreadlock hair, lemon dreadlocks...Have you guys seen that guy here on campus with green dreadlock, oh you guys. [Quote 222]

Nthabiseng:

I think that he doesn't fully try to understand why some girls have you know fake hair. She just explained her reasons. I don't know whether they will be acceptable for him you know that you can't maintain it. But you know you reserve the right to have that excuse from having natural hair. So he doesn't try to fully understand...for a grown man... [Quote 224]

Nthabiseng:

That he has travelled. His [he is] well-travelled. I mean you would think that he would be open minded to certain things, but he does also maintain the right not to want to take pictures for whatever reason, but I don't think he has the right to discriminate like that and say...What if people didn't want to take pictures with him because his [he is] old, because he is old. What if you know, people started...what if Beyoncé says to him: No I can't, you too old (laughs), you know... [Quote 225]

Researcher:

Can you give me your reasons for disagreeing with Hugh Masekela? [Quote 226]

Nonzuzo:

Uhm, it's about you. I'm very traditional you heard me right. But if I decide to put on a weave [extension] I have my own reasons. It doesn't mean that I am betraying the ethnic blah blah blah you know. For instance, I've got a natural hair [I have natural hair], but at some point I braid it, I do weaves [extensions], but not for a long time because why? He does not understand the reasons. I don't want to comb, uhm, I'm trying to save time; I'm attending classes, you know. He does not understand the concepts of putting a weave [extension] at some point. So he will never relate. [Quote 2267]

Nthabiseng:

I first of all what is his definition of Africanism? What did he say "African is a betrayal of what"? [Quote 228]

Researcher:

According to him weaves [extensions] are a "betrayal of the African identity". [Quote 229]

Nthabiseng:

So he defines [the] African identity as having natural hair. Yes, that's his full description of an African identity. I, I no, first of all you cannot say that being an African has anything to do with the way you look. I don't think so. That, I don't think so. And he, oh my gosh, he has no right to say something like that... [Quote 230]

Thembeke:

It's so disappointing. [Quote 231]

Nonzuzo:

He has no right. [Quote 232]

Nthabiseng:

Then he shouldn't take pictures with girls that have nails on. I mean I have natural hair, but I have fake nails on. He doesn't look at everything. He just looks at the things he wants to. [Quote 233]

Thembeke:

He'll probably not take pictures with me as well. I have fake nails, fake hair. [Quote 234]

Nthabiseng:

No, I don't think he looks at the fake nails, I don't think he looks at the girls with the natural hair and then when they take selfies then [their] nails are fake. So I, I...no, I don't think he, he fully understands that, I don't think... [Quote 235]

Thembeke:

Yaz [you know] I am so disappointed that's his definition of [the] African identity. Coming from him that's so shallow. I'm sorry, but it...you'd expect someone of his calibre to be open minded because his [he is], his [he is] well-travelled that guy, ha [exclamation]. [Quote 236]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, Africanism is about how friendly we are, about Ubuntu [humanity]... [Quote 237]

The participants are quite adamant that there is no link between hair and the construction of the African identity. Thembeke and the rest of the participants express their disappointment with Hugh Masekela for making such a link. Nonzuzo points out that he does not know the reasons that compel women to do weave extensions. Moreover, Thembeke thinks that because he is a man, he will never begin to relate to women and their reasons for doing weave extension, among which is convenience and time management. So for the participants Africaness it is mostly about the spirit of Ubuntu [humanity].

Researcher:

Do you think that hair forms part of one's identity, especially the African identity. [Quite] Do you think one's African identity is defined by the type of hair they have? [Quote 238]

Nthabiseng:

Ka hare [it's something inside]. [Quote 239]

Nonzuzo:

Ya, it's within, identity is within you. [Quote 240]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, you can't, you can't say it's' hair. [Quote 241]

For the participants identity is something within a person. So it has nothing to do with one's hair.

An article was also presented to participants for them to read during the focus group. After reading the article by Karabo Disetlhe for the Sowetan which describes Hugh Masekela's views on the weave extension and how he perceives it to be a betrayal of the African identity, "Hair today, fake it all tomorrow?", the participants were asked

on their views on the article. There are various local celebrities who are cited voicing their opinions on the weave extensions; as a result, I wanted to see if participants still maintain their position that there is no link between hair and the construction of African identity.

Researcher:

In the article that I gave you to read, do you agree or disagree with some of the opinions expressed? Why? [Quote 242]

Nonzuzo:

I agree, uhm, with Criselda's [Criselda Kanada is a South African radio personality] opinion where she said that it's her choice. Uhm, hair doesn't define who you are. I am rephrasing it by saying define because she didn't write it in there. That's not her exact words, but I like that about her that she mentioned choice. She chooses to, to do her hair and it's up to her. If she feels like I wanna put on a weave [extension] and I am feeling good it's for your [her] own sake. You wanna make yourself happy, you wanna, you know...you know, why you wanna do it. It's for your own reasons that are convenient for you. [Quote 243]

Thembeke:

I also liked uCriselda [Criselda]. She just touched home you know. U, u, ucomedian Ntuli yena [the comedian Ntuli]. These people are just nje [just]...my respect for them is just going on a zero you know. For her, she is in just a great platform neh [right] and she is out here bashing people that they are stupid if you have Injimbamba a receding hairline. Then you have to embrace it. I don't think she understands that this is...for some people it's a touchy topic, you know. I don't want to walk around with a half bold hair head. Sorry! And some people...girls looking up to her are not as confident as she is. So like hayi [no], I feel like she's also very close-minded to [on] the issue. [Quote 244]

Injimbamba [receding hairline] has never looked good, it does not look good. So can we be just real] now. Like it does not look good and I will never be confident walking around with Injimbamba [receding hairline] hayi [no]. [Quote 245]

Nonzuzo:

But if you keep on putting a lot of weaves like now. You have the weave now. Haven't you ever considered about injimbamba [haven't you thought that you will have a receding hairline] because now you are ruining your hairline? [Quote 246]

Thembeke:

It goes on with the type of hairstyle you know. When you sew the whole weave [extension] all round, like it helps your njimbs [receding hairline] to grow, but if you plant then it also takes away. [Quote 247]

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, I, I, agree with them. You know, Criselda is right. Nobody is their hair. You can't define people by their hair, uhm. Ntuli [South African female comedian] she is just outspoken and she is actually quite smart. I just don't know why she feels like this about hair. I do think that if maybe she had a 'bad' texture of hair she would feel differently about it, but she is actually a very intelligent woman unlike what she is saying here. As for Hugh [Hugh Masekela] saying people...what is this? It says here that "it's betraying one's roots by seeking to look white". I don't know what it is that people think that having fake hair or nails that you are trying to look white. I don't like that I don't, I don't agree with that. I don't think it has anything to do with trying to look white. I do think that it has to do with trying to look a certain way, but I don't think it has anything to do with looking white. I just think that people are going to attach meaning of this thing that makes me look nicer or some people actually just like long hair and theirs just doesn't grow that long. Some people like curls, but their natural hair can't be curly. But I don't think it has anything to do with them trying to look white... [Quote 248]

Nonzuzo:

You know...cause [because] you know. Some people are meant to have straight hair. For instance, whites. But you will find that they curl it and black people have got curled hair and they want to straighten it. Do you see? It's not about the roots and all of that. It's just about satisfying yourself. [Quote 249]

Participants seem to side with the ideas expressed by celebrities that are for weave extensions and do not see a link between hair and the construction of the African identity. For the celebrities that are for weave extensions, it is a matter of personal choice. These sentiments are also shared by the participants. Nonetheless, dialogues surrounding hair prove to be a sensitive issue for the participants. They feel that no one is willing to spare a thought for women's reasons to do weave extension. This view seems to dominate the entire reason behind weave extensions. For Nthabiseng women's reasons for doing weave extensions or undertaking in any beauty practice seek to make them beautiful. For Nonzuzo, it is also a matter of following the latest fashion trends and keeping up with a specific image. In conclusion, the choice to wear a weave extension can be seen as a personal choice by African black women, and not a result of emulating whiteness.

During the focus group interview, participants were also shown a video from a South African current affairs television show, "3rd degree", taken from www.youtubevideos.com. The video features African black women, black female celebrities and experts in the hair industry of South Africa as they respond to the issue of whether hair is just hair within African black communities or is a more

serious issue. I am interested in the participants' opinions on hair, especially those surrounding debates about African black hair.

Here again the debate on hair seems to be based around personal choice and satisfaction by women who do hair extensions. Another issue voiced is the matter of hair not defining a person and saying who the person is:

Nthabiseng:

Very different views from most of the people that have never got hair [people who have never had hair], it's very different, but it just seems like people still maintain the fact that they are not their hair and you know their hair doesn't define them that's true, but it's just interesting how strongly people with fake hair feel, you know, strong about fake hair. People of natural hair feel strong about natural hair, ya. [Quote 250]

Thembeke:

It's as though that no one has an open mind to this whole hair thing that at the end of the day it boils down to comfortability. Everyone nje [just] just feels like ha yho [exclamation] you are the... you are life if you have natural hair in fact 17 inch (???) [Quote 251]

Nonzuzo:

I think also it's just...it goes down to satisfaction. What satisfies you because from the video in there I noticed that Bonang [Bonang Matheba is a South African television personality] is very, very defending. [Quote 252]

Nthabiseng:

Strong. [Quote 253]

Nonzuzo:

Strong, ya how she feels about the fake hair and all of that. "If it comes from people who are willing to give it away, you know". She...she strongly believes in what she, she wants. So it goes down to satisfaction basically. [Quote 254]

Nthabiseng:

Oh, oh, the other men were fine. It's the one that has the exhibitions prepared Lerato something. Lerato exhibitions [saying the name of the guy she is talking in reference to the video they watched]. He said that: "When a woman has beautiful hair, then she is beautiful". He went that far to say you know "when you take care of your hair then you are beautiful", "When you have beautiful hair then you are beautiful", "There's nothing else it's just your hair". You must understand that (giggles). [Quote 255]

I therefore asked the participants if they also think “it is just hair”:

I don't know, I feel like that statement is very, it's very flat. I want to say: Yes 'it's just hair', but I also want to say no it's not (sighs). Aah, I don't know. It's, it's very mixed and complicated topic this thing about hair because a lot of people feel differently about hair. Some people genuinely do it because they think it makes them beautiful. Some people are just lazy to maintain their hair. Some people I, I...the reasons are so diverse and different that you can't just say 'it's just, just hair'. But, uhm, the news anchor she went on for ten years with fake hair on tv and I watched her for all these years with her hair and all of a sudden a few years later she started having short hair. So it's not just hair. [Quote 256]

Thembeke:

What broke me was when she said that she was very uncomfortable about it you know. She was not really... [Quote 257]

Nthabiseng:

Oh, she did not like it. [Quote 258]

Thembeke:

She didn't like it and then my heart really broke neh [right]. But if it was something that “oh my gosh my 17 inch, uuh, my red hair”. [Quote 259]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, so you see 'it's not just hair'. Because ya she went on for that long because...and she wasn't comfortable with it. [Quote 260]

Thembeke:

For ten years, guys. [Quote 261]

Nthabiseng:

And then she started after ten years. 'I am going to do the show because this is you know the way I want to express myself [what she is trying to say is that the news anchor decided that that's how she was going to do the news broadcast with her natural hair]. This is how I am going to present myself. So I don't think 'it's just hair', I don't think 'it's just hair'. Some hair says something about people. [Quote 262]

Nonzuzo:

I've got mixed feelings about the topic because I love my hair. So 'it's not just hair' even when you were to cut it you think twice. [Quote 263]

Overall, the participants' state that the issue is too complex to just state that hair is only hair. People attach various meanings to hair which at times include beauty. So it

is difficult to just simply say hair is only hair as people engage in various hair practices for a number of reasons. So the decision to cut hair is not a decision that one takes lightly. As a result, one cannot just conclude that it is just hair for African black women. Even though this is a contradiction to participants' earlier statements (particularly Nthabiseng) when they state that they do not attach any meanings to hair.

4.3 Perceptions of the African female body

Participants were asked to provide their understanding of the female body in everyday life. These questions are aimed at getting participants' comprehension of the black female body in everyday life. It also serves to comprehend how female participants subjectively experience the female body. Moreover, my intention is to understand how perceptions of the black female body influence how they attend to their bodies in everyday life. The first question enquires about the participants' body satisfaction:

Palesa:

To be honest I am not content. But that does not mean, it doesn't mean I don't like myself. Mm, I've in the past couple of years I've gained like...is it 40 kg (forty kilograms)? Ya. So that's a lot of weight. I used to be a nice size 34, I'm a horrific 42 now (giggles). But I still believe that I can lose weight and, uhm, although...not now. I wanna, I wanna start working on my weight and loose...and go back to my normal size. [Quote 264]

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, I am just okay with my body. I am not gonna say I love it. I am not crazy about it no. I am okay with it, I am happy with it, I walk around with it. Uhm, it has changed, it has changed. I had, I think I used to have a great body (laughs). I played sports for a really long time, so I was really fit, firm, and toned. And then all of a sudden I got sick and then I lost, and then I couldn't play sports anymore. And then I lost that good skin and good body that I used to have. Uhm, my body will, I don't know whether it will change because of the kids or because I would want to lose weight, or because I will be exercising. But it will change; it will change. Not the structure so much but the body itself. [Quote 265]

Karabo:

Uhm, I think as a woman, I don't know if I'm talking for myself or not. We always have that fight you know. So even when you say: I love my body, but, I love this but. I'm also a woman; we always see imperfections in some things that are not perfect. Uhm, I love my body, yes, I really love it (giggles). But I would love to have a bigger rack [breasts] but then my friends tell me it's not necessary. But then it's just a preference I want. So, ya, I do love my body. [Quote 266]

Lerato:

I am not fully content with my body because I will complain about my belly and all that, my breast and all that. Okay, growing up I was slender, but during teenage transition stage [puberty] then suddenly I started developing hips and all that. [Quote 267]

Xoliswa:

Yes, I am, like I said before being thin and being bigger doesn't make any difference to me. So I am thin. It's fine with me. Even if I am big it's still fine with me, yes. [Quote 268]

Nonzuzo:

Okay, I love my body, I love my body. When I grew up I used to be very skinny and then I used to play sports at the time. But when I went to high school I was more focused on my studies. But then I picked up a little weight. I am very comfortable with it because I am an African woman. So I love my curves. There is nothing I can...I don't even go to gym for heaven sake, but I eat healthy. So I love my body. [Quote 269]

A majority of the participants report that they are not entirely satisfied with their bodies. This is because people attach certain meanings to the body (cf. Chapter 2, p. 28) and this impacts on how people perceive their bodies in everyday life. Hence, body satisfaction or dissatisfaction are the result of the meanings participants attach to their bodies.

To understand the reasons behind participants' body dissatisfaction they are asked if their bodies have changed and whether they had any influence in the changing. They are also asked if they think their bodies will change in the future and how do they think their bodies will change:

Palesa:

I am a stress eater. Uhm, when I didn't graduate in record time, uhm, I had a lot of problems then. I just fell into a depression. I ate a lot, slept a lot, and I just gained weight. I wasn't in the right space then. So me being a stress eater when I am not in a good space I gain weight, but now that I am fine I think I will go back to my normal size. [Quote 270]

Researcher:

Okay, so do you think that if your body ever changes again, it will go back to its normal size? [Quote 271]

Palesa:

Ya, I'm planning to. [Quote 272]

Lerato:

I think, ya, in the future it will change, but it only depends on me, how I treat it. Especially after I have kids and all that. Obviously my breasts are going to fall. My body structure won't be the same like before I had a child. [Quote 273]

Mpho:

I don't think my body has changed. I have been like this skinny almost all my life. I was a chubby kid, but after like six years, I started losing weight. So I have been like this. So, I am comfortable the way I am, am used to being like this. I don't think I will change anything. I don't want to change anything. Maybe to gain a little bit of weight. [Quote 274]

Researcher:

Okay, why do you want to gain a little bit of weight? [Quote 275]

Mpho:

Sometimes I feel like am too skinny. [Quote 276]

Researcher:

Too skinny how? [Quote 277]

Nonzuzo:

I think in future I am going to be thick, like very thick because it's just in my family. Many people are thicker, but I will not allow that. I want to be a least...a minimum size. In fact the maximum size that I can go up to is 36. Don't go beyond that. [Quote 278]

Majority of the participants report on their bodies changing, especially when they started to enter their teen years. The bodies also changed after they stopped playing sports at high school. Moreover, participants state that their bodies might change again in the future.

I continue to ask the participants if they had a 'magic stick', would they change their bodies in any way, and why?

Nthabiseng:

Ya, I would [background noise]. I would if I did have a "magic stick" I would change my body a lil bit. Nothing hectic. Just you know maybe if something disappears here (laughs), or something a little there then, ya. But I love my height; I love my big bone structure. I do love that about myself, ya. [Quote 279]

Researcher:

Alright, and what other changes would you make to your body? [Quote 280]

Lerato:

Uhm, flat stomach, like totally flat stomach, bigger breasts than this one [these ones] and I don't know ya. [Quote 281]

Researcher:

Ok, why do you want to have bigger breasts than the ones you have? [Quote 282]

Lerato:

(Laughs) Obviously cleavage, I love cleavage. [Quote 283]

Karabo:

No, I wouldn't want it to change, fuck! I wouldn't want it to change. Sorry for the language (giggles). No, no I wouldn't want it to change. I mean, uhm, maybe if I had a "magic stick" I would pop it in my chest a bit, not big just enough for my liking. But then I wouldn't want to change anything no. No, I wouldn't want to change anything, like ya. [Quote 284]

Xoliswa:

No, not of the body, but of the personality. Because I think I am too reserved that sometimes when people talk to me I just keep quiet (laughs). I don't like that about myself. It makes people uncomfortable. So I would like to change that. [Quote 285]

During the data collection female participants were asked if they think there is a preference for a specific body shape and size. The question they were asked is: What is the ideal body shape and size within society?

Nthabiseng:

Uhm, nowadays I don't think so. Back then, maybe not so long ago but a few five, six years back there was big stigma about looking a certain way. Now I don't think so. [Gets interrupted] Sorry what was the question again?" [Quote 286]

I proceeded by asking Nthabiseng if she thinks it is important to have a specific body shape and size:

Uhm, nowadays I don't think so. Back then, maybe not so long ago but a few, five, six years back there was big stigma about looking a certain way. Now I don't think so. It's still there but I don't see it as much anymore, especially if you look at the actors nowadays and the you know singers, the presenters. Now there's no stigma, now there's no: we have to look a certain way. You have to have a certain skin colour, and all of that. Now man I look at a lot of celebrities and I see a lot of differences and shapes. And I do feel like there has been an evolution in the way society thinks and the media thinks about women and what we should look like. So it's not as bad as it used to be, I don't think so. I think now you see a lot of women, big as well, embracing themselves and they love it, you know. They are in leggings and crop tops, and so on. It's fine. [Quote 287]

During our follow-up interview I asked Nthabiseng about the nature of the stigma that existed six years ago:

Uhm, well a few...while we were growing up there was a thing about especially for girls looking a certain way. Uhm, being a certain body shape. You'd have to be smaller: very small waist, uhm, nice curves and hips and long hair, light skin. But that's evolving, that's changing. Until a few years ago girls started cutting their hair, uhm, you know. Blouses went out of fashion cause for some reason when I got to varsity [university] every girl was wearing a blouse. There was this thing about a blouse. Necklace you know a chain, exaggerated earrings, handbag. There was a stigma about that. But now when I look at girls and I'm sitting downstairs at The Bridge [student centre on campus] I cannot believe it. Girls are wearing caps, uhm, they wearing boyfriend jeans. They are there are so many different styles now and girls starting to become more and more comfortable with what they want to wear and what they want to look like. And that's important." [Quote 288]

Palesa:

Mm, I think that one... uhm, people who say it is important to have a specific body size or shape is people who are obsessed with looks. Like people who feel like if you don't have a big bum as an African woman then you don't look good. For me, I say everybody is beautiful in his or her own way. Uhm, you can have someone who has that hour glass shape, and she...yes, she looks good but I just believe that, aah, or you can have somebody with a pear shape. Or someone who looks like an apple who is just round. But I just feel that everybody is beautiful in his or her own way. The trick is to know what looks good on you. If you know what looks good on you, you can have the sexiest body on earth. And if you don't know the right clothes for you then we won't even notice that you have a good shape or you're beautiful. [Quote 289]

Thembeke:

Hey, the society that we live in is so messed up. These days looking good is your lean figured girls, you know. Like they can wear crop tops you know, and I think that's what society expects us to do. I think that's what they expect when we say we feel good. And it's not necessarily the case. There is a specific body size they have, you know, and with height. I think if you're tall like myself you need to be athletic: to have the thighs that I am talking about, to have trimmed legs you know. And then with you short people, they [you] are seen as cute and adorable you know. And with us it's a struggle. I can't be, I am not cute next to any guy Zuki [Zukiswa]. I'm this tall and I am not an athlete you know. I think that I am blessed or lucky in the sense that as tall as I am...I think if I worked really hard on it I would get this body, guys. Just that I am not willing to put in the effort. [Quote 290]

Karabo:

Mm, mm, I mean we [are] all built differently. We all have...gonna have different features in our bodies- whether be big or small. So no, I don't think there should be like, no. Everybody is gonna be different, so. No, I think we have changed in that. At first it was all about slenders, and then there was this thing about bigger and rounder people. So as I said, people have different preferences. So nowadays it's not about...I mean some guys hate skinny girls. Some guys hate big girls, so nowadays some people...some women can't stand fat girls. Some women can't thin girls. They say they think they [are] better. So there's not a specific size or weight or whatever. But then it's all about the person. And how...but...no I won't say preference. But then how they see society. I mean I don't think anybody should say okay size 28 is the right size to be. I mean if you, if you...some people are naturally thin I swear to God. No matter how much they eat they always gonna be a size 28. Some people were born big, they have big bones. Even if they eat salad everyday their body posture does not go down. I don't think there should be a certain size that say: okay a 30 is the normal size. If you're over thirty or below thirty there's something wrong. [Quote 291]

Mpho:

People have this thing that African woman must have curves, bums and boobs. I don't know where they get that. So I think they prefer that. And size they don't want like size 36, 34. But times are changing. People are now opting for slender looking girl, rather than the big ones. [Quote 292]

Nonzuzo:

Ha a [no], I don't think there is a preferred body shape at all because we [are] made differently. So we wouldn't all be the same. So ya, there is no preferred body shape. [Quote 293]

Lerato:

It's not important. What is important is how comfortable you feel with your own body. Because one person can say they like slenders [they like slim people], but when you look at that person [those persons] themselves [they] are not slender. So there's no certain body shape that is perfect. As long...what is important is how confident your feel in your body. [Quote 294]

Xoliswa:

I think they want themselves to be thin, not to gain weight. That's the first thing that they really like. And not to have, aah, a bigger upper body, like to have a proportional body, yes. [Quote 295]

In general participants feel that there is no preference for any specific body shape or size within the broader society. Previously there might have been a preference for certain body shapes, but things have changed now. For Thembeke there is a preference and this preference is for tall lean girls or slim girls. Most participants think that girls want to have a proportional body and not have a big upper body. In general, a majority of the female participants do not think that there is a preference for any specific body shape and size.

Participants were also asked what they do to ensure that they stay in good body shape and size. The question was: What kind of body practice regimes female participants engage in to maintain their bodies?

Nthabiseng:

Aah, yes, I do. I do try to keep my body looking appropriate. Uhm, but it's more: eating healthy. I am not gonna say that I eat healthy all the time, but I try to have fruits and vegetables everyday. I try to have juice instead of soda, you know. It's just small things like that. I stay away from sugar and a lot of carbohydrate. So I don't know if that's being on a diet, but I try to eat healthy." [Quote 296]

Palesa:

I do squats (giggles). [Quote 297]

Palesa:

Uhm, I don't count, but every time when I go pee, after peeing I do squats. Apparently they give you like a bigger bum. I don't have what you can call an "African ass". But my mom has always been on my case because I am the only one without a big bum in the family. But I know I look good in clothes. So I was like: aah, let me maybe get a smaller nyana (tinier bum), you know. Because when I am wearing a skirt I mustn't be just flat. I must just have a smaller nyana bum, and I saw squats worked for a friend. So I am just trying them...just to be able to wear certain clothes that I am avoiding now. [Quote 298]

Karabo:

I haven't done anything in the past year. The only thing I have done in the past two years is jog so that I don't go fat. But then I realised that it doesn't help so I let it go because I am growing up and gonna grow bigger. So now there's nothing much because I eat whatever I want. So ya there's nothing much. [Quote 299]

Mpho:

I don't exercise, I don't diet, I don't watch what I eat I just drink water, am blessed. [Quote 300]

Although Thembeke never mentions anything about engaging in anybody maintenance regimes, she states that for her, weight loss and gain happens automatically:

With me it's... it also depends on how life circumstances are at the moment, you know. Like the minute I'm too...like for example I can't handle excitement [excitement] and happiness. The minute I am too happy for a very long time I gain weight. The minute I'm too sad for a long time I also gain more weight. The minute I'm too stressed I also gain more weight. I don't know when this losing thing comes to me. [Quote 301]

Lerato:

The squats I did them for a period of a month, everyday. Because they go according to steps. A day you do fifty-five, sixty and then sixty five and then your rest. Okay, in a week you can do 4 and rest and push ups as well as, ya. [Quote 302]

Xoliswa:

No I don't go on diets and exercise because my body it's like, it is very active on its own. So I don't do those. [Quote 303]

I asked Xoliswa to explain what she means when she states that her body is active on its own:

Even if I eat fatty foods I don't gain weight, yes because I think I am active like I go [walk] to school, it's not really exercise, but I like walking." I don't have a specific diet. I just eat, as long as I, I give thanks. [Quote 304]

The participants say that they do engage in some body regime practices such as push up, squats and jogging, but none of these body practices lasts for a long time. These practices are apparently meant to lose weight, rather to tone the body and make it firm.

Female participants were also asked if they had ever been on a diet before.

Nonzuzo:

Ha a, ha a [no], I have never. I've never been in a diet. I just eat my food like my meat and vegetables, but starch I think...Okay probably I can say I have been on a diet because starch I don't like it now. When I was growing up I used to eat pap and rice and you know those...potatoes I hate...potatoes and now I just hate anything to do with starch. [Quote 305]

Palesa:

Okay, before I gained so much weight I used to maintain my weight by just eating oats [morning serial]. So, that was very unhealthy Aah, I just ate oats and I used to have one meal a day. Uhm, then I just decided that, aah, I am not gonna do this anymore. Or after having my baby I just gained weight, but a few months back I tried this veggies and fruits diet. I maintained it for three weeks, and it was working well because I was regular. I think what matters most is our metabolism, and I was very regular. So I thought...I think that was like the best diet that I have been onto. But I didn't lose weight. Maybe I did or I didn't notice. But maybe I wanted to see the results quickly but I was not patient enough. [Quote 306]

Karabo:

No, it was not a meat free diet. It was about the corn [corn meal] I have to eat a certain portion, and then I felt that...and then there's always...there was this diet that I was going with. It should be fresh, it should be this, it should be that. So like you know what stuff this I'm gonna go back to my usual thing. I hate being told not to eat that, that...like you know what stuff this I'm gonna go back to my usual thing. [Quote 307]

Some of the female participants reported to having been on a couple of diets. The diets were about eating healthy, but just like the body fitness regimes the diets did not last for long.

Participants were also asked on their perceptions of body fitness practices and whether they aimed at staying healthy and keeping up with the latest fashion trends:

Nonzuzo:

Okay, I'll start with the last one. It's not about keeping the trend that they have now. Uhm, being fit it's just for you to live longer. Being healthy for you to live longer. And it doesn't mean when you're skinny you're healthy. Many people might be skinny or in a normal size, but someone has got problems like heart problems or other things that are just chronicle illnesses. But you, your own self, you maintain it your own. So that you prevent some diseases that you might come across. [Quote 308]

Lerato:

It's about being healthy as well as with the latest trends, ya. Because I feel they have pressure because so and so have a flat stomach and you don't have a flat stomach. So and so has a six pack and then you don't have a six pack, so ya. [Quote 309]

Karabo:

Uhm, for me it was for keeping in shape, for keeping in shape. Aah, I always said that I wouldn't live with myself if I went bigger. So I always try to make sure that I stay in a certain range. There's a certain jean size I wanna be. I don't want to go below or above that. So that's, that's the jogging for me back then.

And now as well if I'd go a certain jean size above I would start doing something about it. So ya that's, that's why I jog. [Quote 310]

Karabo:

Uhm, I'm gonna be a bit racial now. Uhm, white people is for keeping fit I would say. I know a lot of people, white people because I stayed in a white res [campus residence] at some point. It was all about keeping fit. It was a lifestyle for them, it was not about looking good and losing to a certain dress size or certain weight or it was for them a lifestyle. For white people I would say it's a lifestyle. Us black people, I swear to God, we only start...okay not everybody but some. I would say ninety percent of black people start...start going to the gym for somebody, for the trend, summer body. For the trend summer, and then after that it's all gone back to soup, magwina [fatcakes], you know vetkoeks [fatcakes] and everything. And I think for some of us it's for trend setting, and trend...for trend and everything. But for some of us it's a normal lifestyle. [Quote 311]

Nthabiseng:

No, no with me it can't be. I have never been a normal size. I don't think I can align myself with whatever perception there is out there. Because I have never been you know size this and size that. I have never been an appropriate size for my age. For me it's solely just for staying healthy. I don't wanna be fat. I don't wanna be fat. Aah, especially because I don't have kids yet. So I know after I have kids maybe I will gain weight a lil bit. So I am trying to reserve myself until then, that's all. [Quote 312]

Palesa:

Mm, I think it's about being healthy because, uhm, I am not all for taking all these harmful substances or doing all these things which put your health in danger just to look good. But if you maintain a healthy lifestyle where you just...where your weight is just average and you don't have any cholesterol problems or excessive fat problem. Where you're not obese or where you're not exposed to any health problems, but you are just in good health and I think that...while we don't like to do it. I think that eating greens is the only way to maintain a good healthy. [Quote 313]

The cultural perceptions of the female body are more evident in the focus group interview in when participants are showed view visual images of women of different body shapes and sizes, as well as different races. Participants display different attitudes to the visual prompts that they were shown. They associate certain body shapes with certain races. This becomes apparent from the reaction to a picture of a slim white female model wearing a one piece swimming costume that was shown to participants:

Nthabiseng:

My thought: bonier (laughing). Are boney [bones] [she said boney]. Actually my first was: No and then I said: Too thin. I wrote: no, no, no, no (laughing). [Quote 314]

Nonzuzo:

I said anorexia (laughing again) (Nonzuzo clapping hands). [Quote 315]

Nthabiseng:

But she's too boney [bones]. [Quote 316]

Thembeke:

She does look sick though. [Quote 317]

Nonzuzo:

Very sick (laughs). [Quote 318]

Nthabiseng:

Mm, she's too thin. [Quote 319]

Nonzuzo:

(Laughing) yho [exclamation]. [Quote 320]

Thembeke:

She's sick. [Quote 321]

Nonzuzo:

Dying. [Quote 322]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, she's really sick. Something is happening with her and she needs to be helped soon. [Quote 323]

Thembeke:

Bam loyile [They have bewitched her]. [Quote 324]

By showing the participants the various pictures of women of different body shapes and sizes, I want to find out about the cultural notions that the participants associate with the female body. Female participants show certain cultural perceptions and preferences for the female body, and these appeared to be influenced by how they think and perceive the female body.

For further elaboration I asked the participants if their expressed views on the female body are based on their ethnic group's perceptions of the female body [Nthabiseng is Sotho, while the two other participants; Nonzuzo and Thembeke are Xhosa].

Nthabiseng:

Yes [Nonzuzo and Thembeke: Yes as well], my, my...the first thing that my mom would say: you know, something is wrong and you know, you must ask after her if she's okay." [Quote 325]

Thembeke:

I can see my grandmother saying the ancestors are calling her (everyone laughing). [Quote 326]

Nonzuzo:

My mom would be like offer her a breakfast a proper English breakfast (chuckles). [Quote 327]

Participants were also showed a picture of African American female actress Gabourey Sedibe.

Nthabiseng:

The way I know her, I think she's confident. I've always thought she was the most confident big girl that I have ever seen on tv. So for me that defines confidence: even the way she's standing. I, I think she's confident. [Quote 328]

Thembeke:

I saw a beautiful woman in her. Not beautiful, a happy woman in her body, ya. [Quote 329]

Nonzuzo:

She took my words, I saw happy as well. As much she's, she's fat, but she looks quite comfortable in herself. [Quote 330]

Researcher:

What makes you say she is comfortable in herself? [Quote 331]

Nonzuzo:

The way she...the posture. The way she is holding herself in that picture. She doesn't look shy. [Quote 332]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, she is a very popular actress. I've watched, I've watched a few of her things [movies]. And you know; in all of the things [movies] I've watched I think since 2009, she's always been the same size. I don't know secretly how she feels about her body when she is you know in her own room and...but the fact that she hasn't lost any weight throughout her you know commercial career. It says that she is rather okay with the way she looks, maybe...and it doesn't mean that she is not healthy. She might be healthy, she's just, you know, bigger than usual people. [Quote 333]

Researcher:

Okay, so now within your different ethnic groups, how would you describe her? [Quote 334]

Thembeke:

A very happy woman, who's very wealthy. [Thembeke's ethnic group is the Xhosa ethnic group] [Quote 335]

Nonzuzo:

Very happy. [Nonzuzo's ethnic group is the Xhosa ethnic group] [Quote 336]

Nthabiseng:

In our cultures she, she you know it says that. She has made it, she's made it, you know. Ya, she's made it, ya, especially [if] she used to be a lil [little] smaller and then you know she suddenly this big woman and started having money. We would usually assume that she has made it. [Nthabiseng's ethnic group is the Pedi ethnic group]. [Quote 337]

Thembeke:

Ya, she's made it. Uachievile in life [She has achieved what she wanted to achieved in life]. [Quote 338]

Notions of wealth are often also associated with a voluptuous body shape as is evident in a picture of Kim Kardashian shown to the participants. The participants were also shown three other pictures of three different women with different body shapes and sizes (Lira, Anele Mdoda and Serena Williams). Participants were asked to choose a picture which they find most appealing and least appealing and to explain why:

Researcher:

And when you look at this picture Serena Williams, what would you say you find appealing and least appealing? Why? [Quote 339]

Nonzuzo:

Her body, she looks fit. [Quote 340]

Nthabiseng:

I like her thighs. I don't like the six pack. [Quote 341]

Thembeke:

I also don't like it. [Quote 342]

Nonzuzo:

Like a man. [Quote 343]

Nthabiseng:

I don't want to not look like a girl, you know ripped ya. But I like being fit and I also go to the gym and I you know, I now work a lot on my legs. I like good legs and good arms so (making body gestures). [Quote 344]

Nthabiseng:

Ya, arg, women with muscles are, are they fine? I don't, I don't, I don't know. I don't think the word beautiful is what we should describe it. I think just...they're fine. They also a part of a range of women. It's not necessarily about whether they are beautiful or not, or you know. But I respect bodies like hers. But I just feel like it's just, it's too masculine (referring to the picture of the fit woman). I mean it's too masculine, but I mean what can you do if you a sportsman, you're a sportsman." [Quote 345]

Even though the women do not show strong negative feelings towards Serena Williams, some believe that a woman should not be too fit at the expense of their feminine qualities.

When asked if she thinks she is attractive, Nthabiseng states:

Mm, I do think she's attractive, I do think she's attractive. And she tries, and she knows that she's fit. So tries to look good. Serena never just also allows herself to look like a guy, and you know. She wears dresses, you know. She takes care of her hair, she so...she tries very hard. I like that about her. [Quote 246]

During a follow-up interview I again asked Nthabiseng what she thinks about women with muscles. Here, I wanted to find out if she still did not consider women with muscles as attractive:

No, I don't like, I don't like it. I don't, I don't think it makes you less of a woman. It's just, it's just I don't think it looks nice, I don't think it looks nice. I don't think...women have always been associated with having a soft look, you know. So it's very hard and you know. You look hard like a dude, I don't know. I don't like that. [Quote 347]

Mpho also expresses her dislike of masculine bodies when she's shown a picture of Lupita Nyong'o and asked what she likes or dislikes about Lupita Nyong'o:

The hair, the hair looks nice. I don't like her skin colour. I feel its way too dark, ya and also her body. Why does she look so masculine in this picture? [Quote 348]

When asked what is wrong with her having muscles, this is what Mpho has to say:

Well I don't like it (laughs). I'm not into muscles, toning you're your body that's not for me. I like looking like a lady ya. [Quote 349]

The participants tend to view muscles on women as unladylike. The only instance they see muscles as appropriate is for men, thus showing a preference of how bodies should appear.

4.4 Views on skin bleaching

This section assesses participants' perception of skin colour, particularly dark skin, in everyday life. I examine how their perceptions of skin colour influence the participants' satisfaction and conception of their own skin colour in everyday life. Furthermore, I probe how their perceptions of skin colour shape their everyday constructions of beauty in their lifeworld. To get an understanding of the participants' perceptions of skin colour in everyday life, I begin by asking female participants if they know what is 'skin bleaching'. I also ask them if they would ever consider doing 'skin bleaching' and why:

Palesa:

Oh, I forgot to mention 'skin bleaching' as well. Uhm, this is very sad that, uhm, very sad that we as African girls we [are] not content with our skin colour. I for one, I am very content with my colour. That's is why I will never use 'memez' [skin lightning cream] or what else do they call it? All these toxic things. These products that they use just to get a lighter skin. Uhm, it's very sad how...especially our generation. They are not content. It's like they hate or despise being black. They just wanna be white, and that's why they 'skin bleach'. They bleach their skin, that's why they use all these harmful products just to get a light skin, and it's just wrong. Uhm, so I am against 'skin bleaching'. [Quote 350]

Nthabiseng:

No, it's not something I would consider doing. Uhm, once again same reason: it's misleading. I don't want to be like that. I look a certain way, I am not happy about certain things. But you know work with it. Do something about it. But I don't think misleading people, seeming like you look a certain way when you don't. I wouldn't do it. [Quote 351]

Thembeke:

I've seen 'skin bleaching' and I have heard about it. But it's not a topic like, one of those things in which I thought: let me learn more about it by doing some research like: Ebola you know. But 'skin bleaching' I've seen it with the likes of Mshoza [South African female artist]! Aah, but it's not something that I have ever thought of doing. I am comfortable in my own skin and I love it. Plus I am scared of 'skin bleaching' you know, and it is not something that I would advise anyone to do. [Quote 352]

Karabo:

'Bleaching' no, aah, no. I've, I've...it's about complexion, no. So I wouldn't bleach. Uhm, bleaching for some people I think they have different reasons they do it. But then it's...I think most of the time its social media and this thing of 'yellow' bones. So (chuckles) I don't know. I don't think it's...I don't think I would ever do it though. [Quote 353]

Nonzuzo:

I'm so against 'skin bleaching'. I feel like if I would do that I am not comfortable with my skin cause [because] why would I bleach something. Why would I bleach myself and I was made this way. Something's are just unnecessary and they cause problems in the long run also. It's just modifying your genes, what you have. Modifying them and they might be dangerous when like you have children. Now you might be happy, but when you have children then you will see the after effects of bleaching. [Quote 354]

In general almost all the participants contend that they would never do 'skin bleaching'. The participants who are against 'skin bleaching' perceive the practice as an indication of dissatisfaction with one's own skin. Nthabiseng believes 'skin bleaching' misleads people because users do not put on their own natural skin colour. Mpho, however, is an exception to this. This is because she wants to even her skin complexion; particularly the areas that she thinks are darker. Some of the female participants reported hearing about 'skin bleaching' from somewhere. Nonetheless, participants' reluctance to 'skin bleaching' is based on their own reasons. So the research participants' narratives seem to be contrary to the understanding that 'skin bleaching' is an attempt to gain access to the Eurocentric

standard of beauty. Such an understanding is but one of the various reasons compelling African black women to partake in 'skin bleaching' practices.

Participants were also asked why they think people 'skin bleach' themselves. An enquiry of the reasons why people 'skin bleach' themselves enabled me to further evaluate the participants' perceptions of skin discourses in everyday life:

Nthabiseng:

It's a perception that people have about being light-skinned. There's, there's I don't know, there's something that people I don't know. There's a bad idea that people have about being light-skinned. It's almost as if it's respected or loved or admired. Only a few black girls or dark skinned girls that I know that really appreciate their skin. But most of my friends that are dark skinned always have these you know products that make you lighter. This will make you lighter, this will make you lighter in a month, this. It's just because, let me say: men and the media make it seem like being light skinned is the best thing that could ever happened to a human being. [Quote 355]

Nonzuzo:

They don't like the way they are. They don't like the skin colour they have. The other one wants to be lighter if she's black, and she's not accepted and she does not like what she has. [Quote 356]

Xoliswa:

No, but I was listening to the interview of this other girl. Who is that girl? Ya Tshidi on the radio, she said she did 'skin bleaching' because after birth she had black spots on her face, so she bleached herself. [Quote 357]

Lerato:

Maybe to look like people in the Western countries, like Christina Aguilera, ya. It's actually a...nna [I] I think here in South Africa because I once heard Mshoza [Kwaito female artist] say that here in South African we can also do things that are done by people overseas. Because she also 'skin bleached' herself because she wants to look like Christina Aguilera, and so on. Like Halle Berry. She's forty something, but she looks like she's nineteen and all that. So even us as South African women we can do...we can be like them, but I don't like it. [Quote 358]

A majority of the participants think that 'skin bleaching' is the consequence of the significance placed on light skin and dissatisfaction of black people with their own skin colour. The pressure to 'skin bleach' is, therefore, understood as the result of societal expectations of how female bodies must look in everyday life.

Participants were also asked if they think there are any dangers associated with 'skin bleaching'. I want to see, through this question if the participants are aware of

dangers associated with 'skin bleaching', and if the associated dangers are part of the reason why they would not consider doing 'skin bleaching':

Palesa:

I don't think they are aware. Yes, there are dangers associated with 'skin bleaching', but most...most girls who do it are not aware of it. Like...I've seen on the internet, aah, pictures of 'skin bleaching' gone wrong. Like it's just...gore...it's just too harmful, too dangerous, but they do it either way. And I don't think they know about it. And I don't think they are informed like, you know, if you do this, uhm, this is what...this might happen, it might go wrong. I don't think they are informed about such things. [Quote 359]

Nthabiseng:

Aah, I don't know. I am not very knowledgeable about the process of 'skin bleaching', but anything that makes you seem better than your original self does have dangers. That I guarantee. Anything I don't care what it is, even if it's hair. When someone pulls your hair out a lot of things. It's just horrible [When someone pulls your hair a lot of things come out]. So 'skin bleaching' should also have a risk. It's just like anything else that makes you prettier than your original self. [Quote 360]

Thembeke:

I think that there are quite a number of dangers and our people are not aware of it. You know, when people are selling their product they never tell you about the consequences of it. Take for example, there is this myth, I don't know what to call it. To tell you the truth that if you want to lose weight fast you must try smoking, and you won't have any appetite. So you won't gain any weight or anything, but they never tell you about the smelly breath you will have. The chances of you getting cancer. They'll never tell you about the horrible teeth that you will have. They'll never tell you about the burns that you will have on your fingers. Right now I would be wearing size 5 [shoe size] and have the most beautiful thighs. My thighs are beautiful now. But just that I want those athletic thighs but just not willing to work for them. [Quote 361]

The thing with me is that I am blessed hey or have good genes. So I don't have those things. Like for me when it's time to lose weight it just happens naturally, naturally. Oh, another thing with me is that when I am really hurt or sad whoa I literally shed off weight, but now I have been happy most times but I am still losing weight. Think it's the whole exam and test week you know. Feeling like a headless chicken after all that. [Quote 362]

Nonzuzo:

Uhm, I think one of the things that, uhm, is a danger caused by 'skin bleaching,' I think its cancer, skin cancer. Uhm, and cancer cannot be treated and it can be passed from generation to generation. So it's one of the reasons why I feel like I would never go...I can't call it a disease when it's not even in my genes. But I'm calling it, it's somewhere there. So you are modifying the genetic materials that you have, and I feel like it's just so...Many people like it. It's like fashion but it has so many disadvantages that can just ruin your life. [Quote 363]

Participants state that there are definitely dangers associated with 'skin bleaching' and the most obvious danger being cancer. However, as far as people's awareness of the dangers are concerned, participants feel that not many people are aware of the dangers. Participants also think that because people cannot afford proper 'skin bleaching' cosmetic procedures, people ignore the involved dangers and end up using illegal 'skin bleaching' products. In general participants' lack of knowledge about 'skin bleaching' can be comprehended as the result of participants' unwillingness to use it. Thus 'skin bleaching' can be seen an insignificant issue in participants' everyday lives.

4.5 Relationship

During the first interviews female participants were asked if they are involved in any special relationship with a member of the opposite sex. As a result, I asked female participants to tell me about the special people in their lives. The aim was to see whether participants' relationships with members of the opposite sex influence their everyday perceptions and constructions of female beauty and the body:

Thembeke:

I don't want to jinx [ruin it] it yet, but I think there is someone. I just met this someone a few days ago, but so far so good. I think...I know it's still early stages of getting to know each other you know. That entire admin thing going on. I am still checking [the] brother out (both laughing). Do you have what I need? Because I know his [he is] already bringing a headache, and that's what boys do. [Quote 364]

Palesa:

Mm, can I just give an answer that it's complicated, it's complicated (both laugh). So I can't say he is special because right now I just feel, aah, he is not my favourite person. Yes, I love him, I feel that he is special. Oh, are you asking in terms of like love, love relationship? But there is also somebody who is very special my son. I have a five year old and he is the most precious thing in my life. And the baby daddy I can just say it's complicated, but right now I cannot classify him as somebody who is special. I would just say, uhm, I turned...what I have done is I neglected the relationship for my studies. And I am happy with my decision. [Quote 365]

Lerato:

(Sighs) Ya, there is. He is an okay person. He always supports me and if it wasn't for him I don't think that I would be the person that I am now. He always helps me with things that I don't have. He shows me the other side of life and all that. Sometimes I feel like giving up, and he will say: No don't give up. I will help you and will do one, two three... [Quote 366]

Mpho:

(Laughing) Ya, I have a boyfriend. My loving, caring, sweet man. We've been together for five years, so. [Quote 367]

Nthabiseng:

Okay (laughs), uhm, you, uhm, there is someone. And his [he is]...I think his [he is] beyond special; ya. I adore him. Uhm, I don't know what you want to know about him (laughs again). But his [he is] great man and he is lucky. It means he's lucky to have me [both laughing]. . So he does show me everyday. [Quote 368]

Nonzuzo:

Okay, what can I say about him (chuckles) his just you know. He is...he brings happiness basically to my life. That's why I choose him. Uhm, I've known him for a couple of years like two years or two years ya. We've just been friends then we decided just to take a step further. So he brings happiness. We [are] honest with each other and what I like about him is that, uhm, we, we, we motivate each other. So, and we, you know, that's what I like about it neh. We grow together basically. That's why I like it, the relationship I'm in now. [Quote 369]

Xoliswa:

No there is no special person, but I would say the special people in my life are my parents or it's God. Because He comes first even before my parents, yes. [Quote 370]

Karabo:

No, no I don't have. No, I don't (giggles). [Quote 371]

None of the participants mentioned anything about their boyfriends in relation to how that impacts on their everyday behaviour, their gender constructions and the way they define female beauty.

4.6 Media forms

During the individual interviews, participants were asked if they are on any social networks, particularly Facebook. I am interested in why they have Facebook accounts and what types of pictures they upload on Facebook. I attempt to see if their everyday constructions of the female beauty and body are in any way informed by Facebook.

All the participants noted that they are on Facebook. Most of them reported that a friend or family member opened the Facebook account for them. Prior to opening

their Facebook accounts they had heard about it, but did not know what to expect. As such, some of the participants state that they upload pictures of themselves in which they think they are more beautiful.

Palesa:

Mostly, its pictures of myself. After taking a picture and I see it's the prettiest picture ever I upload it on Facebook so that I can get nice comments. And I also upload inspirational quotes. Ya, just pictures of myself and inspirational quotes. I don't upload my baby's, aah, pictures that much because I just feel I am putting my child out for all these paedophiles to...You understand? I don't upload my kid...my child's pictures as a form of being responsible parent. [Quote 372]

Palesa:

Actually they just excite me. Comments like: "You oh you look so beautiful", "You look so pretty", "I love your hairstyle", "I love your sun glasses", "I love that lipstick you have on", "Where did you get it", ya [yes] (giggles) it just excites me. [Quote 373]

Lerato:

I do, I upload pictures of myself and my friends. I upload a picture that I feel satisfied with first. A picture that I feel is nice for people to see, ya. [Quote 374]

Some of the participants' admit to uploading their pictures because of the likes and comments they get from their Facebook friends. This seems to play a big role in reinforcing their perceptions of beauty and of themselves. This is because the comments often state how beautiful they look in the pictures.

Mpho:

Yes, I do, uhm. In a way I think it makes me happy. At least people even strangers that I don't know, maybe they like what they're seeing my beauty or whatever reasons it might be. (Giggles) Others will say I am beautiful and stuff. Mostly my fans will be saying their own crazy things (laughing). [Quote 375]

Nonzuzo:

I usually get likes and I like it. Then it's fine because people see that I am comfortable with who I am. Most of them usually say you look so beautiful. And, ya, I like that because they see what I see in myself. But even if they don't see what I see in myself it's fine as well. It's not gonna affect me. Uhm, people usually like say: umuhle [you're beautiful] in Xhosa, you're beautiful. Oh I love your top, I love the way it suits you. Where did you buy it? Inbox me such things, ya. But I don't have a lot of people on my Facebook. I think I have less than hundred because I don't accept people, mm. [Quote 376]

Facebook can be seen as an important tool in the forming of and reaffirming of beauty perceptions among participants. It also serves as a medium in which cultural

knowledge about beauty and the female body is acquired by participants through fashion blogs that can be found on the social media networks.

Magazines

During the focus group interview participants were also asked whether they had any favourite magazine. By focusing on media forms such as magazines, I seek to understand the role of magazines in participants' perceptions of female beauty and body in everyday lives. I attempt an understanding on the role of magazines in informing participants' perceptions of beauty as well as their constructions of femininity in everyday life. Just as with Facebook, participants use magazines to keep up with the latest fashion and beauty trends:

Thembeke:

I am into media. I love reading your 'Drum' magazines just to keep up with the latest trends. To see if there's anything that caught my attention. [Quote 377]

Palesa:

Oh, my goodness. I don't know what happened to me. I kind of shutdown from all the media networks. I don't know why. I guess I focused more on my studies. But once in a bloom I would buy a magazine...I don't even watch these reality tv shows anymore. I...even when I log onto the internet I don't go and browse what's happening, and what's not happening. I don't anymore, so, aah, I just kind of shutdown, ya [yes]. Mm, I normally buy your 'Drum', your 'True Love' because I just feel that they cover almost everything. Like in 'Drum' you'll find the current news and the beauty section, and the food section, and the relationship section. So I just love those kinds of magazines because I just feel they cover everything. Uhm, there was a time when I was into 'Forbes' magazine just for inspiration. Ya it was just for inspiration.

In a magazine, mm, let's say okay...it's just current news. Well I can't just page through the fashion, aah, section. I get more interested when I see a big woman like when she is advertising clothes, big women clothes. Then I would say maybe this is what I can do with my body because she has the same shape. But I always buy a magazine just to look at the current news. [Quote 378]

Nthabiseng:

'True, 'True Love' is a preference. Aah, I've never really bought it. But if it is available sitting there, I would choose 'True love' over 'Drum' and 'Bona' any day. So 'True Love' and 'Cosmopolitan' because 'Cosmopolitan' is very fashionable. They show you the latest trends and all of that. So I do love 'Cosmopolitan' for that. 'True Love' they always have sincere and real stories about people. So that's enjoyable. [Quote 379]

Lerato:

Aah, 'Drum' at the back of it, it has recipes for food, people fashion from overseas and here. 'True Love' magazine first of all, aah. And it does not only focus...it has...like it's a South African magazine, but it has things about people from outside and it covers interesting people. [Quote 380]

The magazines play an important role in participants' following of fashion and beauty trends. This is confirmed by Palesa who states that she uses magazines to follow fashion for plus size women and how she can dress her body. Therefore, the participants' cultural capital about female beauty and the body is informed by media forms such as magazines. These in turn influence how they construct and negotiate female beauty in everyday life.

4.7 Conclusion

It is evident, from the collected data that topics of beauty are sensitive issues in the everyday lives of female participants. Moreover, everyday debates on beauty affect how women perceive female beauty in their everyday lives, which in turn impacts on how they construct and negotiate female beauty in everyday life. This is exhibited in the various beauty practices as well as body fitness regimes undertaken by participants as they follow the aesthetic standards of the female body. These practices also seem to be influenced by gender, race and class. This therefore shaped their everyday constructions as well as negotiations of femininity.

The following Chapter outlines my reflection on the data analysis in Chapter four. This discussion considers the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review in the dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES OF BEAUTY: A REFLECTION

This Chapter reflects on the findings of the undertaken study. The intention of the research project was to understand how young African black women perceive femininity. The questions that were formulated were therefore structured in a manner that would elicit a deeper exploration of how female participants perceive and understood female beauty; how they subjectively experience it in everyday life, including their everyday construction of female beauty. From the data various themes and categories are identified as important. These are; i) what is beauty, ii) hair, iii) body, iv) skin, v) social capital, vi) modesty and vii) media. As such, a reflection on the findings within this chapter is based on the above mentioned themes and categories as I try to provide an understanding of participants' perceptions of female beauty and the body.

In trying to understand how young African black women understand femininity, various questions are posed to get participants' everyday understanding of female beauty. This involves asking the female participants what they understand as beauty and whether they agreed with the saying that beauty is skin-deep. In the collected narratives, as participants try to provide their own understanding of female beauty, they emphasise personal traits over physical appearance. This is evident in the responses by Nthabiseng (cf. Chapter 4, Quote 1) and Nonzuzo (Quote 4). Furthermore, even though they provided meanings of beauty that emphasise personal qualities, their provided understandings differ. This is because everyday understandings of female beauty are socially constructed through social interactions with others within the lifeworld (cf. Chapter 1). Additionally, everyday social interaction leads to common thinking about what is beauty by a specific group of people in a certain location.

These meanings and understandings of beauty are subjectively interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals to create their own perceptions of what beauty is. Hence, the participants' show different perceptions of female beauty as can also be noted with Mpho (cf. Chapter, Quote 9) who shows a different conception of beauty from the other participants. Moreover, perceptions of what is regarded as beauty changes over time (cf. Chapter 2, p. 30), as revealed in the narratives provided by the participants (cf. Chapter 4, Lerato, Quote 18 and Palesa, Quote 20). The

participants' perceptions of beauty changed from a desire of wanting to follow the Eurocentric standard of beauty as modelled through the Barbie doll which is a desire derived from a socialisation of playing with dolls from an early age (cf. Chapter 2, p. 42).

Meanings of beauty are socially and historically embedded. These are created through social encounters with others. Participants' perceptions of female beauty are greatly influenced by their social networks, especially family (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 35 and Palesa, Quote 36). In addition, those within the immediate lifeworld of the participants also seem to play a vital role in the shaping of participants' perceptions of themselves as beautiful, particularly significant others (cf. Chapter 4, Lerato, Quote 43, 44 and 45). Therefore, what participants know about female beauty can be understood as the result of interaction with those within their social world.

Perceptions of beauty vary from one culture to the next as was mentioned. The participants' view differences in the perceptions of beauty by different racial groups as arising from an emphasis placed on specific bodily features by different groups (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng 57, Thembeke Quote 58 and Karabo Quote 62). These differences also lead to different beauty practices as understood by the participants (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 67 and Mpho, Quote 68). As much as the female participants show awareness of differences in the perceptions of female beauty, some demonstrate a lack of understanding of other racial groups as was evident with Thembeke (cf. Chapter 4, Quote 70) and Mpho (Quote 65). This can on their part be comprehended as a lack of exposure to ethnic groups other than their own. This also poses questions on the extent to which they are aware of beauty perceptions in their own ethnic groups.

Overall, differences in beauty perceptions are the result of exposure to different racial groups as is demonstrated by the participants who report to the existence of such differences. Therefore, this awareness is not something that female participants concerned themselves with despite acknowledging the differences.

In following the aesthetics standards of the female body, participants engage in various beauty practices to make themselves beautiful. One such practice is the use of cosmetic beauty products such as make-up (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 75,

Karabo, Quote 76, and Mpho Quote 77). This is an everyday practice for the female participants who report to using make-up. As a result, it forms part of their everyday beauty practices. The practices become routinised and normalised for the female participants, through the everyday use of make-up products in the construction of female beauty. In addition, the fact that it is a practice that had formed part of their everyday practices, resulted in some of the participants stating that they look strange without certain make-up items (cf. Chapter 4, Karabo, Quote76). Some participants, however, reported that they did not use make-up, and this is often the result of growing up in a household in which their mothers did not use make-up (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 81 and Thembeke, Quote 82). Another practice which proves important in the participants' everyday beauty practices is hair maintenance, as participants stated that they frequently did their hair (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 152). The provided narratives, therefore, show that the use of make-up and hair care practices by participants seems important in the construction of female beauty and the body as they try to follow the aesthetic standards of female beauty and the body in everyday life.

With hair being an important part of participants' everyday constructions of beauty, the participants' chose hairstyles that they feel made them look beautiful (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 153 and Palesa, Quote 155). As such, this connection of beauty with hair is made to short hair, which is a change from dominant views that link female beauty with long, straight, silky hair (cf. Chapter 2). For Nthabiseng, the preference for short hair is the direct influence of having aunts who wear their hair short (see Quote 13). The association of hair and beauty is also identified as the result of the importance that different cultures place on hair (cf. Chapter 4, Lerato, Quote 206). Such perceptions can therefore be seen as important to the formation of participants' perception of beauty that emphasise hair as an important aspect. Such cultural perceptions of hair are linked to gender as pointed out in the collected narratives (cf. Chapter 4, Nonzuzo, Quote 208 and Nthabiseng, Quote 209). Thus, these cultural perceptions serve as a symbol of one's femininity as well as beauty.

In addition, to attaching meanings of beauty to hair and chosen hairstyles, participants also choose their hairstyles based on how they complement their physical features, such as skin colour (cf. Chapter 4, Thembeke, Quote 137, 138). Participants' chosen hairstyles also signal a period of independence within their lives

(cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 169). This period within their lives allows them to discover how beautiful they look in short hair. The selected hairstyles by participants are attached to meanings of identity (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 154 and Lerato, Quote 206). However, during the focus group interview the association of hair with identity; especially the African identity is denied by participants as they saw Africanism to be about humanity. Such associations prove to be sensitive for the participants as evident during the focus group interview. Some of the participants use chosen hairstyles as cultural capital in their following of the latest hair style trends (cf. Chapter 4, Karabo, Quote 141). The participants' hairstyle choice nonetheless seems to be greatly influenced by their economic capital (cf. Chapter, Thembeke, Quote 140). So financial resources play a significant role in determining how often participants did their hair and the type of hairstyles they choose even though convenience of the hairstyle is also important (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 159, Nthabiseng, Quote 156 and Lerato, Quote 169).

Black women's relationship with hair has always been complicated (cf. Chapter 2, p. 17). Thus, literature covering African black women and their hair practices, perceives such hair practices as an attempt to fit into the Eurocentric standard of female beauty (cf. Chapter 2). However, the narratives prove otherwise. If anything, the collected narratives show hair practices by black women to be part of their everyday constructions as well as their negotiation of femininity that accommodates black beauty.

Again from the collected narratives, perceptions of the female body prove to be important as they impacted on how participants perceived themselves and how they feel about their bodies. From the data, participants' show that they are not entirely satisfied with their bodies as is evident with Palesa (cf. Chapter 4, Quote 264) and Lerato (Quote 267). Body dissatisfaction leads participants to engage in various body fitness regimes and diets as they seek to maintain a perfect body shape and size (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 297), Karabo (Quote 299). This is also accompanied by the participants' body fitness practices and diets even though none of them display consistency in continuing with their various exercises (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 306 and Lerato, Quote 302). The body practices are perceived as solely intended for health reasons, while some of the participants see them as aimed at both a healthy lifestyle and at following aesthetic standards of the body.

From the study it is also evident that different cultures attach different meanings to the female body and how the female body ought to look. These vary from Western perceptions of the female body with an emphasis on a slim body shape and size and African perceptions with a preference for larger bodies due to their association of heavy bodies with wealth, success and beauty (cf. Chapter 4, Thembeke, Quote 335 and Nthabiseng, Quote 337). Slim bodies, within the African cultures, tend to be associated with ill health as is shown by the participants when they comment on a picture of a thin woman (cf. Chapter 4, Thembeke, Quote 321 and Nonzuzo, Quote 322). From this study, participants showed changing perceptions in the view of large bodies and its association with wealth and beauty, as was shown by participants' dissatisfaction with their bodies. This is in line with literature investigating the changing body perceptions of young African people; especially those within tertiary education (cf. Chapter 2, p. 44). The changes can be ascribed to exposure to different racial groups and new social worlds.

Everyday perceptions of the body also entail an attachment of meanings to how female bodies are expected to look. This is evident in the collected narratives as participants perceive fit women as unladylike (cf. Chapter 4, Mpho, Quote 349). The participants state that a woman's body must be soft (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 347). The body contains symbolic capital distinguishing female bodies from male bodies. Even though participants acknowledged preferences of specific body shapes, with reference to Western and African societies, there is no preference for any specific body shape and size (cf. Chapter 4, Nthabiseng, Quote 286 and 287). Participants' body perceptions and feelings of body satisfaction were influenced by those within their social networks. For instance, Palesa's attempt at enhancing her bum so that she can at least have an African body is due to her being the only one in her family without a big bum (cf. Chapter 4, Quote 298).

Participants show disapproval of 'skin bleaching' as many say that they would never partake in the practice (cf. Chapter 4, Karabo, Quote 353 and Nonzuzo, Quote 354). Nevertheless, skin colour does not seem to be an important issue as expressed in the participants' attitudes towards 'skin bleaching' practices by African black women. This is evident from their lack of attempts to try and learn more about the phenomenon (cf. Chapter 4, Thembeke, Quote 352 and Xoliswa, Quote 357). However, some did state that 'skin bleaching' is a practice promoted by the

importance placed on light skin in the media (cf. Chapter 4, Karabo, Quote 353 and Nthabiseng, Quote 355).

The participants' perceptions of female beauty and the body are influenced by those within their lifeworld and by significant others. In the collected narratives, participants' perceptions of femininity and how they constructed female beauty in everyday life also is the result of the influence by the media in everyday life. Social networks, such as Facebook, play a vital role in reaffirming participants' perceptions of themselves as beautiful as is expressed by Palesa (cf. Chapter 4, Palesa, Quote 372, 373) and Lerato (Quote 374). Moreover, participants use media forms such as magazines to keep up with the latest fashion trends in following the aesthetic standards of the female body. This is evident in the case of Thembeke (cf. Chapter 4, Quote 377), Palesa (Quote 378), Nthabiseng (Quote 379), and Lerato (380).

The purpose of the research project has been to understand how young African black women perceived female beauty and the body in everyday life. Consequently, the purpose of the analysis was to explore how black women negotiate and construct female beauty in relation to dominant beauty standards that promote and celebrate the Eurocentric standards of beauty. As found in the literature review, the emphasis on the Eurocentric standards of beauty has meant that women with long, straight silky hair, light skin tone, and slim bodies are conceived as more beautiful than women without such physical features.

Based on that, I commenced this study with the conception that African black women's constructions of beauty revolve around emulating the Eurocentric standards of beauty. However, data in this research imply that not all black women accept the dominant, Eurocentric standards of beauty. An exploration of African black women's everyday beauty practices, such as hair maintenance, fitness practices and 'skin' care, showed me that instead of trying to imitate whiteness, African black women are creating and negotiating a beauty ideal that celebrates black beauty through the infusion of African and Western standards. This shows women's commitment to their own beauty standards. The beauty standards combine the African and Western aesthetic ideals that celebrate a voluptuous body shape with curves and big buttocks on the one hand, and a slim body shape, particularly a slim waist, on the other hand. This ideal is embodied by popular celebrities such as

Beyoncé Knowles and Nicki Minaj. Their popularity as well as the participants' constructions of female beauty may imply a change in the perception of the female beauty and body, specifically a change in the negative connotations that have always been attached to the black female body.

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APPENDIX A



16 May 2014

Ms Z. Majali

Department of Sociology

UFS

Ethical Clearance Application: The perceptions of femininity among young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa

Dear Ms Majali

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research with the following stipulation:

- Permission is required from the Dean of Students to conduct research on UFS students – please provide the committee with a copy of this letter before the onset of research
- The sampling of participants is still unclear – how will the researcher approach potential participants (advertisement on campus?) as selection based on hairstyles and body size is problematic. Also, how does the applicant define —black participants? Does this include Indian or coloured ladies?
- The consent form is only for one-on-one interviews --- in the methodology mention is made of also using focus group interviews. In the context of the latter it is not possible to claim that —Participant privacy and confidentiality will be ensured. It is also not possible to guarantee anonymity in focus groups. There should be a separate consent form for focus groups, and the ethical protocol should outline some of the steps that will be taken to enhance privacy

(e.g. sensitise participants to the need to not discuss information shared in the group; set group rules before starting the discussion)

- The wording in the consent form should be reviewed. It talks about participants as —Themll, and does not address them directly as —Youll. This is worth changing just because of the relations of power this document communicates; this is particularly pertinent in the light of the claim that — focus groups have been designed to empower the women as they offer social dynamics that reverses the balance of power in favour of research participantsll
- Some statements need to be aligned with others in the application – for instance, the section on risk mitigation says that any participants suffering distress will get free counselling from UFS; the (better) claim elsewhere is that they will be made aware of the free service available. Also in the risk mitigation section – the claim to confidentiality in the context of focus groups is not valid.
- The consent form needs to have contact names and numbers for participants – should they want to ask further questions or report anything they are unhappy with during the research.
- Perhaps worth reflecting on, are underlying assumptions—contained in the language of the application—that indicate bias: It seems though, that the researcher has already decided that black beauty in the contemporary context is the target of discrimination and constructed by Eurocentric ideas: —the black female beauty has traditionally been viewed as inferior to the Western imagery of the white female beautyll. This is not necessarily true, and in any event, what is meant by traditional in the context of South Africa? There is a long tradition of favouring bodies that are not in line with Eurocentric ideas of the ideal. Notions such as the one that participants will be freed or at least empowered in some way by the research process in that it will enable them to reflect on —symbolic oppressionll is very biased to the notion that such oppression actually exists.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-HUM-2013-27

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Katinka de Wet

Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of the Humanities)

Copy: Ms Charné Vercueil (Research Co-ordinator, Faculty of the Humanities)

APPENDIX B: Informed consent form for individual and focus group consent form

Informed consent form for individual interview

Researcher: Zukiswa Majali

Master's research programme: The narrative study of lives

University of the Free State

Contact persons: Professor Jan K Coetzee Tel: 051 4012881 (coetzeejk@usf.ac.za)

Dr Ewa Glapka Tel: 051 4012984 (Glapka@ufs.ac.za)

Ms Charne Vercueil Tel: 051 4017083 (vercuelcc@ufs.ac.za)

Participant name.....

Participant contact number.....

I,, agree of my free and voluntary will to participate in a focus group interview. The title of the research study is:

“The perceptions of femininity among young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa”

- I was informed about the nature of the study in the Participant Information Sheet and I agree to all the conditions.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that the researcher can only guarantee privacy and confidentiality to a certain extent during and after the research process.
- I understand that if I experience any form of distress during and after the research process there will be free counselling offered to me at Kovsie Health Counselling.

- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. These recording will then be shared only with the interviewer's supervisors. The data will be kept in a highly secured place; the participants' anonymity will be protected throughout the interview. Furthermore, all the gathered information during the interviews will be utilised to compile a master's thesis, and possible publications in academic journals.

Participant's signature:.....

Researcher's signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX B: Focus group interview

Researchers: Zukiswa Majali

Master's research programme: The narrative study of lives

University of the Free State

Contact persons: Professor Jan K Coetzee Tel: 051 4012881 (coetzeejk@ufs.ac.za)

Dr Ewa Glapka Tel: 051 4012984 (glapkae@ufs.ac.za)

Ms Charne Vercueil Tel: 051 4017083 (vercueilcc@ufa.ac.za)

Participant name.....

Participant contact number.....

I,agree of my free and voluntary will to participate in a focus group which focuses on a study that focuses on “ The perceptions of femininity among young black women in South Africa”.

The title of the research study is:

.....

.....

I understand that the information I have provided will be used for compiling a master's thesis and for research purposes. I am also aware that it will be almost impossible to completely guarantee the confidentiality of participants, especially in

focus group interviews where there will be a face-to-face interaction among the participants. And as the researcher try by all means to ensure that discussions within the interviews remain confidential and that the identities of participants are kept anonymous at all times. I understand that I have the right to refuse participation in a focus group interview.

I understand the information that has been given to me by the researcher.

Participant's signature:.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX C: Information sheet

THE PERCEPTIONS OF FEMININITY AMONG YOUNG BLACK WOMEN IN BLOEMFONTEIN, SOUTH AFRICA

This study seeks to understand how young black women in Bloemfontein, South Africa perceive, experience and understand the female beauty, and how these perceptions influence their experience and understanding of femininity.

The following information will be vital in case you choose to take part in the study:

- Participation in the study is voluntary
- Participants must give written consent to participate in the study
- Participants are free to withdraw from the study anytime they want
- Participants will be informed about the nature of the study
- No deception will be used at any stage of the research
- Participant privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. These recordings will then be shared only with the interviewer's supervisors. The data will be kept in a highly secured place; the participants' anonymity will be protected throughout the interview.
- All the gathered information during the interviews will be utilised to compile a master's thesis, and possible publications in academic journals.

Name of participant:

Signature of participant:

Place and date:

APPENDIX D Participant demographic sheet

First Names:.....

Surname:.....

Siblings:.....

Race:.....

Ethnicity:.....

Nationality:

Date of birth:.....

Languages:.....

Housing type in home town:.....

Housing type in

Bloemfontein:.....

Town/City/Suburb:.....

Education:

Public school Model C school Private school

Tick one of the above boxes

Other:
.....

Highest qualification:.....

Mother's highest qualification:.....

Mother's occupation:.....

Father's highest qualification:.....

Father's occupation:

If applicable:

The guardian:.....

The guardian's highest
qualification.....

APPENDIX E: Participant profile

Name: Palesa

Age: 27

Ethnicity: Sotho

Major: MA. Law

Parents occupation: Not specified

Name: Nthabiseng

Age: 23

Ethnicity: Pedi (mother is Sotho)

Major: Hons. Business Management

Parents occupation: Not specified

Name: Xoliswa

Age: 26

Ethnicity: Xhosa

Major: Bsc. Microbiology (3rd year)

Parents occupation: Unemployed

Name: Mpho

Age: 23

Ethnicity: Sotho

Major: Not specified

Parents occupation: Mother is a construction company owner

Name: Karabo

Age: 24

Ethnicity: Sotho/Zulu

Major: Bcom Financial management (3rd year)

Parents occupation: Mother is a sales person and father is self-employed

Name: Nonzuzo

Age: 24

Ethnicity: Xhosa

Major: Bsc. Genetics Microbiology (3rd year)

Parents occupation: Mother is a nurse and father retired soldier

Name: Thembeke

Age: 21

Ethnicity: Xhosa

Major: B. Soc. Sc (Bachelor of Social Sciences 3rd year)

Parents occupation: Mother is a District Director and father is an Asset Manager

Name: Lerato

Age: 24

Ethnicity: Sotho

Major: Hons. Sociology

Parents occupation: mother housewife and father security guard

APPENDIX F: Interview schedule

- Can we begin by you telling me a little bit about yourself? Who you are? Where do you come from? Your family and parents? And what type of school you went to?
- Are you a religious person? If yes, how often do you go to church? If no, why? What role can you say religion has and still plays in your life? And how so?
- Is there anyone special in your life? If yes, can you tell me a bit about them?
- What do you normally like doing in your spare time?
 - For example when you're off campus? Do you visit friends, places, etc.?
- Could shopping be amongst those things? If yes, what do you normally like buying? And why?
- With who do you go shopping? Do you do the shopping alone or with a friend? And why?
- Do you remember what you bought with the first amount of money you ever earned? If yes, what did you buy?
- What do you think about make-up? Do you use it or would you ever consider using it? Why?
- Why do like or dislike about using make-up?
- What do you think about skin bleaching? Is it something that you would consider doing? If yes or no, why?
- Why do you think people skin bleach themselves?
- Do you think there are any dangers associated with skin bleaching? If yes, what are those dangers? And do you think that people are aware of them?
- Has your body changed over time? How? Did you have any influence on it? How do you think it will change in the future? How would you like it to change? If you had a 'magic stick', would you change your body in any way?

- Can you tell me a little bit about your hairstyle? Why did you choose that specific hairstyle? Do you like it? What do you like about it? Is there anything you do not like about it? How much time/money does it take to maintain your hair? And how often do you do it in a month?
- Can you tell me about the first time you did your hair? How did you feel? What kind of hairstyle did you do if you still can remember it? And who were you with?
- Do you think that doing hair for women is an important part of their everyday life? And if yes, can you tell me why?
- What does looking good mean to you?
- Which part of the body would you say it's about?
- Do you think that it is important to have the perfect body shape and size? And why? What is the perfect body shape and size?
- Are you happy with your body? Why?
- Do you do anything to ensure that you're in the perfect body shape and size? If yes, what?
- Would you say that being in the perfect body shape and size is about being healthy or keeping up with the latest fashion trends? If yes, how so?
- Have you ever been on a diet? Why?
- Have you always been? /Have you ever been? What has changed?
- Do you remember the day where you felt particularly proud of yourself?
- Was there any day in your life when you felt really beautiful? Can you tell me about it?
- Is there any day where you didn't feel beauty? Why?

- What do you think about cosmetic surgery? Is it something that you would consider doing? Why?
- Do you think that other racial groups perceive beauty the same way as you do?
 - Do you think that all women make themselves look nice in the same ways?
 - Many people say white girls are more concerned with size and weight? Would you agree?
 - What do you think black girls are most concerned with?
 - What do you think could be the reasons for the differences in how different racial groups see beauty?
 - When did you realize that?
 - Was it through someone close to you, an event in your life or popular culture? And does it influence how you feel about your looks?
- What would you say is beauty to you? And could you say that you agree or disagree with the saying that “beauty is skin-deep”?
- Who would you say has played an important role in your perceptions of beauty?
- Who is your favourite celebrity? And why?
 - What stands out the most to you about these celebrities?
- What qualities do you most admire about her? And are they qualities you might have in common? If yes, what are they?
- Would you say that these qualities/traits make her the person she is? If yes or no, why?
- Have they in any way impacted on the person you are or would like to be? If yes or no, how?

- Are you up-to-date with the media? If yes, what type of media do you prefer?
And why?
- Do you read magazines? If yes, what types of magazines do you like reading?
And why?
- What is of particular interest to you in magazines? Why?
- Has your perception of the female beauty changed over time? And in what way has it changed?
- What is the one thing that you would like people to know about you?

APPENDIX F: interview schedule for prompt questions

- From the picture, what do you think about what she is wearing? Do you think that it suits her? If yes or no, why?
- Do you think she feels comfortable in what she is wearing? If yes or no, why?
- Do you think that she feels good or bad about herself? And why?
- If you were her would you consider wearing what she is wearing?
- What do you think about this look?
- How would you describe the next look? Is it a look that you would go for? If yes or no, why?
- What kind of look would you say she was going for? And why?
- From her appearance, what kind of background would you say she comes from? And why?
- What differences do you notice from the above pictures? If there are any? And what are they?
- Would you say her look has changed over time? If yes, how so?
- Do you think that she is happy with her new look? If yes or no, why?
- Which picture do you prefer, the before or after picture? And why?
- Do you know what skin bleaching is? If yes, what do you think about it?
- Is it something that you would consider doing? If yes or no, why?
- Why do you think people skin bleach themselves?
- Do you think there are any dangers associated with skin bleaching? If yes, what are they? And do you think people are aware of them?
- Do you know Lupita Nyong'o? If yes, do you like her look? If yes or no, why?

- What do you like or dislike about her? And why?
- Would you say she has changed people's perceptions of beauty? if yes or no, in what way?

- Which picture would you choose? And why?
- Which women to you would you say has the ideal body shape and size? Do you think she is happy with her body shape and size? And why?
- Which women would you say you identify with? And why?
- What changes can you see from Jennifer Hudson in the past two years?
- What do you think about her new look? Do you like it or dislike it? And why
- What do you think could be the reason for such a drastic change?
- Do you think that she is happy with herself? If yes, how so?
- Would you consider going through such a transformation? If yes or no, why?
- Would you say you like your hair? If yes or no, what don't you like about it?
- If you could change the way you hair is? Would you? And why?
- From the above pictures, which hairstyle would you say stood out the most for you? And why?
- How much do you think it costs to maintain the hairstyle? And how long do you think it takes to do it? Do you think it is easy to manage?
- Do you think that the hairstyle is comfortable? And why?
- Would you do it? If yes, why?
- What do you think about black girls with blond hair? Would you consider colouring your hair blond? And why?

- Do you like shoes? If yes, what kind type of shoes do you like? And why?
- When buying shoes, would you say it's about comfortability of fashion?
- What do you think about the shoes in the picture? Is it the kind of shoes you see yourself wearing? Do you think it's comfortable? And why?
- Why do you think women wear high heels?
- What would you say is you ideal shoe? And why?

APPENDIX G: Focus group interview schedule

Ice breaker

1. Can we begin with everyone introducing themselves?
2. For a beginning, I will ask you to have a look at pictures that I brought for you. I will show you them one by one. Please write down the first thing that comes to your mind when you see the picture. Then I will ask you what you wrote down and why?
3. Did you know that she is married to a white man?
4. What are your thoughts on that?
 - 4.1 What could be the reason for marrying a white guy other than love?
5. Would you consider marrying a white man? If yes or no, why?
6. Can you tell me about your Matric dance? What was the most important part of this event?
 - 6.1 Can you tell me about what you wore that day? Why?
7. Can you tell me about your twenty-first? What was the most important part about this event? Why?
 - 7.1 can you tell about what you wore that day?

Naps

Here is a website that I would like you to have a look at

1. What are your thoughts on the website? Did you find it informative?
2. Did you pay attention to the products on the website? And would you buy them? Why?
3. Did you know that Pearl Thusi recently launched a hair products line with 'AfroBotanics' called 'Black Pearl'? What are your thoughts on that?
4. Would you buy the products? And why?

5. Going back to the naps website was there anything that you liked or disliked about the website? Why?

Did you read the section why should you go natural? [if not read it to them]

6. Do you agree or disagree with what they said about natural hair?

7. Do you think there is anything such as 'good' and 'bad' hair?

8. What do you think makes 'good' or 'bad' hair?

9. Would you consider going natural? Why?

Hair

In the past few months there has been media reports about Hugh Masekela's refusal to take pictures with girls wearing weaves.

1. What are your thoughts on that? Does he have a right to?

2. One of his reasons for refusing to take pictures with girls wearing weaves, he asserts is because it is a betrayal of the African identity. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

3. Do you think that one's hair forms part of their identity, especially the African identity?

4. In the article I gave you to read, do you agree or disagree with any of the other opinions in the articles? Why?

5. Is there a relation between hair and identity? Is this relation particularly important to African people?

6. So do you agree or disagree with Hugh Masekela? Why?

[Show 3rd Degree video clip on hair "It's just hair isn't it?"]

1. What are your views on the video we have just watched?

2. Do you agree or disagree that "it's just hair"?

3. There is a saying 'beauty is pain'. Do you have any personal experience in that regard? If yes, can you tell share it with us?
4. Did you think that Bonang is the queen of weaves in South Africa? If yes or know, why?
5. What do you think about her?
6. Do you think she has an influence on the type of hairstyle choices that young women choose? If yes, in what way?
7. What is the role of hair in society;
 - 7.1 What is the role of hair in different races?
 - 7.2 What is the role of hair in different ethnic groups?
 - 7.3 Do you think hair is important in the media? Why?
 - 7.4 Do you think that hair forms an important part of a woman's beauty? How so? And do you agree or disagree? Why?

Skin bleaching

1. Can you please tell me about your understanding of the term 'yellow bone'?
2. Where do you think the term comes from?
3. Do you think it is important? To whom is it important? [e.g., women, men, white, black, Indian or coloured people]
4. Do you know anyone who calls themselves a 'yellow bone'? And do you think they like the name? Why?
5. Do you think the fascination with 'yellow bone' has an influence on 'skin bleaching' practices? If yes or on, how so?
6. Do you know anyone who might have 'skin bleached' themselves? If yes, what do you think is their reason for choosing to 'skin bleach themselves'?
7. Do you know anyone who has done 'skin bleaching'? if yes, what do you think was their reason?

Body

When you think about the body what is the first thing that comes to mind? Why?

[Show pictures of women with different body types]

1. What do you think about the pictures that you see here? Which one of those do you find most and the least appealing to you? Why?
2. Which one do you think presents the best body shape and size?
3. Can you tell me what is your ideal body shape and size? Why?
4. What do you think is the ideal body shape and size in your ethnic group, other races, and the media?
5. Are there similarities in how different races groups see beauty? If yes, what are they?