# Constructions of black female beauty and bodies: Conformity and resistance

Tshegofatso Ndabane

NDBTSH001

Department of Psychology

University of Cape Town

Supervisor: Dr Shose Kessi

Co-supervisor: Dr Floretta Boonzaier

Word Count:

   Abstract: 300

   Main Body: 9 996

**Abstract**

Post-apartheid South Africa has observed an increase in the interrogation and liberalisation of conventionally oppressive gender norms and how they affect the lives of women. Much literature has also been produced pertaining to the gendered subjectivity of black women, some of which explores and attempts to establish positive constructions of the black female body. However, research aimed at engaging young black women's subjective experiences surrounding constructions of beauty and bodies has remained minimal. This study therefore aimed to investigate young black women's constructions of their beauty and bodies, and how these constructions affect their lived realities in a post-apartheid South Africa. In line with the qualitative nature of the study, a participatory action research approach was coupled with the photovoice method to explore the narratives of a selected pool of 8 black female undergraduate students at the University of Cape Town. Two focus group discussions were conducted. These were followed by a photography training session from which the participants took photographs that were utilised to construct photo stories of their subjective experiences surrounding their ideas of body and beauty. These photo stories were showcased at *Body: A photovoice exhibition by UCT students*. A thematic narrative approach was employed to analyse the participants' narratives. The overarching themes that emerged throughout the analysis include (1) representations of black female beauty and bodies, (2) policing of black female beauty and bodies, and (3) strategies that the participants employ in resisting negative constructions of the black female body and beauty. The findings of this study ultimately advocate that we consider the familial, and the race, gender, and class issues that have an impact on young black women's experiences, as well as the construction of their intersectional identities within the South African context.

*Keywords*: beauty, bodies, young black women, intersecting identity, PAR, photovoice

## Plagiarism Declaration

1. I know that plagiarism is wrong.  Plagiarism is using another's work and pretending that it is one's own.

2. I have used the American Psychological Association (APA) as the convention for citation and referencing. Each significant contribution to- and quotation in this essay/report/project/… from the work or works of other people has been attributed and has been cited and referenced.

3. This research project is my own work.

4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as his or her own work.

**Signature:** _____


**Date:** _____

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Shose Kessi, for your amazing leadership, guidance, encouragement and insight throughout the course of this research project. To have been afforded the privilege of being under your incredible teaching and mentorship has humbled, challenged, and changed me in ways I never could have imagined.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my co-supervisor, Dr Floretta Boonzaier, for the opportunity to form part of your overarching research and your invaluable advice throughout the course of this research project.

In addition, I would like to thank my participants who kindly agreed to participate in this study and so willingly shared their narratives.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering love, encouragement and support in all spheres.

Lastly, I would like to thank Mahlatse Ndabane and Thabang Matseke, who were consistently available as my confidantes and loudest cheerleaders.

### Constructions of black female beauty and bodies: Conformity and resistance

Much work has been produced pertaining to the gendered subjectivity of black women. It may even be argued that efforts have been made to explore and to establish positive constructions of the black female body (Tate, 2007). However, efforts to engage young black women's constructions of body and beauty and their subjective experiences surrounding these constructions have remained minimal within the realm of empirical research. The following will focus on the construction of the black female body and beauty including its intersections with race, gender, and class. Changes in these constructions that have occurred over time and the strategies that have been employed to resist them will also be reviewed. It follows then, that in order for us to understand how young black women construct their ideas about body and beauty, how these affect their individual identity, and how they resist existing constructions, their narratives will have to be explicitly engaged. The unique location of young black women in post-apartheid South Africa provides an interesting landscape from which to interrogate contemporary discursive constructs of black femininity. If we are to understand how young black women either embrace or reject broader constructs of themselves, it is important that their gendered narratives be explored.

**Race and beauty**

Early constructions of race date back to the 6th and 7th centuries (Cameron & Wycoff, 2011). It was against this backdrop that 15th and 16th century Western expeditions into Africa and increasingly diverse descriptions of African people appeared in travel journals and missionary- and medical reports. Many of these were negative. They also formed the basis of 16th century Renaissance driven classification science. These classifications of race noted differences in skin colour, hair texture and physical features as well as psychological attributes, with Africans often constructed as inferior in relation to whiteness (Cameron & Wycoff, 2011).

Efforts to construct an exaggerated black femininity in a white patriarchal and supremacist ideal emerged as early as the 19th century. In order to do this, images such as those of Saartjie Baartman, mammies and jezebels were employed as part of a generalized ideology of domination (Collins, 2000:69). The London exhibitions of South African woman, Saartjie Baartman, who was displayed as a "strange-shaped Hottentot" and formed part of a line of exhibitions which marked as an example of racial and sexual difference. Similarly, images of Mammy, who was usually depicted in US literature and mass media wearing a head rag, with

a fat body and intensified blackness, are another example of dominant symbols of black womanhood (Shaw, 2005). Images of Mammy were often coupled with descriptions of her infinite willingness to love and nurture as well as her unwavering commitment to the wellness of the white household which she served. Another controlling image is that of the jezebel. The image of jezebel portrayed black women as sexually aggressive, thus providing justification for the pervasive sexual assaults that black slave women reported at the hands of white men (Collins, 2000:81). It is imperative to note that the widespread use of these images demonstrates how the body came to be a means through which the black female presence within society was inscribed (Hooks & West, 1991).

**Gender and beauty**

Masculinity and femininity can be conceptualised as models that men and women adopt to form their individual cultures, as a set of relationships that are socially constructed and continuously reproduced through people's actions (Courtney, 2000). Femininity is therefore located in the gendered social constructions that the individual forms a part of. Throughout history the objectification of women has continued to demonstrate how feminine ideals - which women are expected to attain and maintain - are set up (Shefer, 2004). A great emphasis is placed on the female body's size and shape, facial features, hair as well as style of dress and general demeanour. These inscriptions are applied differently and unequally to both the male and female body. For example, the contemporary Western society's ideal image of women being so slim that they reflect adolescent girls is seen as reproducing women's powerlessness in a male dominated society (Shefer, 2004).

Moreover, Eurocentric ideologies of beauty based on skin colour, femininity, and body shape, are culturally constructed concepts which are then projected onto specific bodies that come to be constructed as deviant (Thomson, 1997). An example of this projection is US media's response to tennis player Serena Williams' tight fitting spandex suit as "tacky" and "inappropriately sexual" during the 2002 US Open is (Schultz, 2008). This contemporary illustration, reminiscent of the historical construction of Saartjie Baartman and Mammy, is telling of a societal anxiety that can be understood through the historical context of slavery, colonialism and the ethnographic exhibition of the black female body (Hobson, 2003). The contrast between the modern and historical depictions of a sexualized Serena and asexual Mammy respectively, are also telling of the imageries that are employed in constructing ideas around the black female presence within society.

**Class and beauty**

Early classifications of race played a significant role in establishing a greater esteem for lighter skin and long straight hair over that of dark skin and "kinky" coarse hair (Gooden, 2011). This ideal continues to be replicated through mass media's visual representations (such as advertisements of products that promise to control "wild, unruly hair" in South African *True Love* magazine) within black institutions. Colourism, which refers to the superior treatment of blacks with lighter skin over those with darker skin (Hunter, 2007) also perpetuates these notions of superiority based on the lightness of one's skin. During the early 20$^{th}$ century, the "bleaching syndrome" involved the use of chemicals to lighten dark skin. A 2005 study conducted by Mictert Market Research found that 1 in 13 upwardly mobile black women within southern Africa who are aged 25 to 35 to have used skin lightening products (Glenn, 2008). While there are numerous risks associated with the practice, skin bleaching has remained prevalent as a response to the associations of black femininity and beauty as 'other' and therefore inferior to whiteness. It is also a channel through which to attain the social legitimacy that is attached to lighter-skinned black females' bourgeois status (Gooden, 2011).

There are, however, some black women who report "turning away" from white press as a way to protest, resist and reject negation (Hooks, 1996). US black press, such as *The Crisis* newspaper and *Ebony* magazine, constructed black women as beautiful and sexually attractive. However, the continuous use of images depicting light-skinned, bourgeoisie black women ultimately maintained the very constructions that it attempted to challenge (Gooden, 2011).

**Changes over time**

While constructions of black female beauty continue to be apparent in modern society, there has also been effort to resist some of these narratives. Tate (2007) notes black women's negotiation of beauty standards as entrenched in their rhetoric regarding skin tone and hair within black communities. These impressions underpin comments such as: "she is dark but she has good hair," which suggests that while a black woman's skin might not be appealing, her hair in this case serves to beautify her.

Lobbying groups such as Jamaica's Rastafarian Movement during the 1930s and the US' Black Power Movement during the 1960s and 1970s rested on the premise that dark skin,

natural hair and dreadlocks are beautiful (Weekes, 1997). These movements symbolised freedom from visual representations and standards of whiteness and instead communicated a move towards black self knowledge and love. Shaw (2005) also suggests that "ghetto-fabulousness", a style of dress that involves extensive modifications to hairstyles and outfits typically worn by white women that can be delineated as a means through which Eurocentric ideals of femininity can be inscribed on to the black female body. This dress code, however, often entails making the clothing exceptionally revealing. While this exposure asserts the physiological femininity of black woman, inherent in these efforts to reclaim the black female body lies a recognition and reproduction of the Eurocentric standards of beauty that they are measured against (Shaw, 2005).

The presence of the various strands of contemporary feminist movements provides evidence that women have previously created spaces (such as local churches and community organizations) wherein they could speak "freely" as they were separate from the dominant members of society (Reid-Brinkley, 2007), and continue to do. However, these rhetorical strategies that were previously created as a platform to discuss the objectification of the black female body have changed over time. Present day participation of black women in the rap music industry is one such example. Distinctions have been made, by black women themselves that highlight the differences between two opposing groups. They have what they term as the "queen", whose demeanour mimics that of white femininity and so represents a good black woman worthy of respect (Roberts, 1994). Black women who are involved in the rap music industry however, are often assigned derogatory terms that describe the "bad black woman" whose actions are degrading to the very notion of black femininity (Reid-Brinkley, 2007).

**Rationale and Motivation**

Existing research is largely focused on the external constructions of black women's bodies and beauty, not necessarily on their subjective experiences of these constructions. This research is also primarily located within the US context. And while some studies have incorporated the narratives of older black women (Tate, 2007), the voices of younger black women are minimal. In order to address the gaps in our knowledge of young black women's experiences, their narratives of the constructions of black female bodies and beauty were explicitly engaged.

Moreover, the available pool of research predominantly focuses on the organisational and institutional strategies of resistance that are employed in response to these constructions. This addresses the greater social constriction that women face, however, the individuals housed within these organisations and institutions are still faced with the task of constructing their individual identities and unique sense of self beyond those spaces. Conducting research with young black women has provided significant insight into their individual experiences and strategies of resistance. This research has not only presented an opportunity to uncover the challenges that young women face as they go about constructing their individual identities, it has also allowed for the formation of alternative, more positive constructions of their narratives and experiences.

## Aims and Objectives

### Aim

The overall aim of this research was to investigate young black women's experiences and constructions of their bodies and their ideas around beauty. The research also sought to yield insight into the meanings that they attach to constructions of their body and beauty, how these influence the construction of their identities, as well as the specific strategies that they employ in order to actively resist those constructions.

### Main research question:

How do young black women construct ideas about bodies and beauty?

### Sub-questions:

- In what ways do constructions of beauty affect young black women's identity and sense of self?
- In what ways do race, class and gender intersect in young black women's constructions of bodies and beauty?

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is primarily located within post-structural feminist thought.

Feminist research draws upon feminist epistemological critiques of the more prevalent masculine ideas of knowledge and its production (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006). Post-structural

feminism specifically outlines subjectivities as constructed in relation and opposition to dominant discourses, social processes and institutions within society (Kiguwa, 2006). Post-structural feminist thought also recognizes that women's bodies continue to be scrutinized and that ideal constructions of femininity are prescribed through social dialogue and discourse (Shefer, 2006).  It is through the 'doing' of that which women consider as gender appropriate that they negotiate the construction of their identities. This maintains that the ways in which women conceptualise and understand themselves, including their bodies as the primary vehicle for inscription, are subjected to these discourses.

The notions of agency and signification are also central to post-structural feminism's conceptualisation of subjectivity (Shefer, 2006). Therefore, while women's subjectivities may be influenced by external factors, they are also able to reconstruct themselves in resistance to those said discourses.  Signification also plays a significant role in this process as it entails the use of spoken or written words to attach specific meanings of the world through the representation of concepts or ideas. We can therefore come to understand knowledge as constructed. We can also understand that by being active in repeating dominant constructions women are also able to reconstruct themselves. While this study intends to explore the subjective experiences of young black women's constructions of their bodies and ideas around beauty, the research was carried out with the consideration that their experiences and the meanings that they attach to those experiences are in some ways attributed to the dominant discourses and social constrictions that women encounter. This study was also conducted with the added understanding that young black women form part of a society in which their realities are constructed within social interactions and through the use of language.  The study particularly drew on their narratives as located within the structures and institutions that are created by knowledge discourses and power. Similar to the post-structuralist argument that traditional ideas about gender need not be universalised but rather, that they be understood in radically different ways, this study rests on the premise that the black female body and beauty can also be understood and approached in different ways.

**Methods**

**Research Design**

      **Participatory action research.** In line with the qualitative nature of this study, a participatory action research approach, using the photovoice research technique, was

employed to collect and analyze data. What follows is a brief description of some of the characteristics of the PAR approach and its relevance to the proposed research study.

Action research, of which participatory action research forms a part, refers to a generic concept for a variety of research methods that are aimed at social change through the research process. Participatory action research is aimed at enabling individuals to transform themselves in relation to others and to reflect critically on themselves and the underlying causes of the challenges that they face within society (Visser & Moleko, 2012). This process of research is a collaborative process of knowledge creation. Equal relationships and the full involvement of both the researcher and the participants are encouraged throughout every step of the research process. In addition, this design is an empowering and cyclic process that combines action and research. It also takes place within participants' familiar context and seeks to build on their existing knowledge and resources.  Ultimately, by placing the researcher as a participant rather than an objective expert, the knowledge that is produced throughout the research process can be utilised in ways that will benefit the community.

**Photovoice.** This technique was developed to allow for the assessment of strengths and concerns within communities through the use of photographs as a representation of participants' lived experiences. As with participatory action research, photovoice specifically aims to enable participants to: (1) document and echo the needs and assets of their communities from their own point of view using photography, (2) promote and enhance dialogue through the discussion of the photographs, and (3) promote social change by communicating findings to policy makers within their communities (Strack, Maggill & McGonagh, 2004). Knowledge that is produced (from focus groups, individual interviews and journaling) as well as the photographs that are generated can thus be used to influence stakeholders and policy makers for the greater good of the community.

**Narrative approach.** This is a form of research practice that entails the use of personal accounts, narrative interviews, life stories and personal documents (Kiguwa, 2006). It specifically hones in on how identities are constructed by allowing participants to subjectively reflect on events and practices and the meanings that they attach to them. Participants are then also enabled to critically evaluate their responses through the telling of their own stories.

In this study, the research topic was specifically narrowed down to the issues that surround young black women's subjective experiences and the constructions of their bodies, beauty,

and their resistance to these constructions. Themes surrounding- but not limited to- body shape, weight, hair, skin tone, style of dress, and general demeanour were explored throughout the study. It is also hoped that the narratives that are generated will; (1) spark an awareness within the participants themselves about the constructions and representations that have informed the individual construction of their identities and sense of self, (2) permeate through to their peers and the larger stakeholders within society regarding the impact that these constructions bear on the greater community of women, and (3) highlight the importance of fostering constructions that are conducive to the lived experiences of young black women within their communities and society at large.

**Sampling Strategy**

As the study is set within a qualitative design, a purposive sampling strategy was utilised. The sample was not randomly selected as participants were selected based on the specific aims of the study.

The sample consisted of eight (n=8) young black women between the ages of 20 and 23 who are currently completing their undergraduate qualifications at the University of Cape Town. The young women were accessed through personal networks and advertised invitations in the undergraduate tier of the Obz Square residence at the University of Cape Town. Their participation in the research study was entirely voluntary.

**Data collection tool and procedure**

The study consisted of the following components: meetings, focus groups, a photography training workshop and the development of photo stories. These were all held at the University of Cape Town. Each focus group was also audio recorded and transcribed.

An orientation meeting was held with the participants wherein the overall scope of the study was communicated. It also included the acquisition of informed consent for focus groups and participation in the overall study. A second meeting was held once all the data had been collected wherein the researchers and participants discussed the planning, logistics and overall execution of the photovoice exhibition.

Two semi-structured focus groups were held and later transcribed. The use of focus groups in this study was specifically employed in line with feminist psychology's endeavour to understand the individual within a social world. The focus group situation in itself shifts the

power dynamics to participants as they outnumber the researcher. This shift produces high quality data as priority is given to participants' use of language, concepts, and the frameworks that the participants, whom the researcher considers as experts of their own lives, employ in making sense of the world (Kitzinger, 1994). While the group interaction reduces pressure on individual participants, other advantages of focus group discussions include the emergence of broader perspectives, initiation of contradictory reactions and additional commentary, as well as the encouragement of candour where a participant has prior knowledge of another (Wilkinson, 1998).

The first focus group focused on the participants' experiences and narratives around constructions of black female bodies and beauty, as well as the strategies that they employ in resisting these constructions. The following questions were asked in order to facilitate the discussion:

*What words do you think of when you hear the words "back women's bodies" and "beauty"?*

*How would you describe your ideas about your body and beauty as a young black woman?*

*What extent have those ideas, as constructed by the world around you, had an impact on your personal identity and sense of self?*

*What then do you do to resist these standards?*

The focus group, which lasted for an hour and fifty two minutes, was facilitated by the researcher and attended by seven out of the eight participants sampled.

Professional photographer, Shaun Swingler, was invited to host the photography training workshop following the first focus group. All the participants attended this workshop where they each received a camera. The training covered issues of ethics, safety, and practical use of the equipment. The participants were then given two weeks to take the photographs from which they would construct their photo stories. The second focus group which lasted for an hour and a half was held after the participants had taken their photographs. The following questions were asked in order to facilitate the discussion:

*How do representations of blackness, impact the way you see yourself?*

*How do different expectations (i.e. double standards) for you versus those of your male peers manifest in your daily lives?*

*What does your skin tone mean in terms of how other people see you?*

*What then do you do? In what space do you feel most beautiful as a young, black woman?*

Following the discussion, the participants were asked to describe the specific meanings and narratives behind the photographs that they had selected for the construction of their photo stories. They also submitted accompanying captions for each of their photographs.

An exhibition of the participants' photo stories, titled "Body: A photovoice exhibition by UCT students" was presented to which stakeholders at the University of Cape Town and members of the public were invited. Participants' involvement in the planning and execution of the exhibition was entirely voluntary. In conclusion of the data collection phase, participants were asked to submit a written statement describing their overall experiences of their participating in the study and exhibition[1].

**Data analysis**

In line with the aims of this study, a thematic narrative approach was employed in analysing the data collected in the focus groups, as well as the visual and written narratives that formed part of the participants' photo stories. The telling of narratives forms an integral part of the formation and maintenance of personal identities (Murray, 2003). Furthermore, this construction of a narrative identity takes place within the social context in which the individual is placed. By recognizing that all narratives are socially constructed, it becomes imperative that data analysis considers the intrapersonal in relation to the interpersonal and social context.

Therefore, this approach not only considers the thematic narratives that participants shared during focus group discussions and the social interactions that they engaged in throughout the study, it also encompasses those embedded in the photo stories wherein participants further described underlying meanings and narratives of self and identity through written captions. Fraser (2004)'s framework for this analysis of narrative data was utilised. These steps were set out as follows:

1. *Hearing the stories*; listening to audio recordings of focus group discussions and interviews and noting any emotional content and physical gestures that may have been noted in writing,

---

[1] Due to the University of Cape Town being shut down from 19 October to 01 November, the exhibition and concluding meeting were held later in the semester. I was therefore unable to comment on the final phase of the study in this report.

2. *Transcribing material*; transcribing the focus group discussions and interviews verbatim,

3. *Interpreting individual transcripts*; identifying the types, directions and contradictions of stories within individual recollections,

4. *Scanning across different domains of experience*; identifying the intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural and structural aspects to avoid fixating on a single dimension,

5. *Linking the personal and the political*; identifying explicit references to dominant or popular discourses,

6. *Looking for commonalities and differences among participants*; contrasting any differences or similarities in participants' content, style and tone,

7. *Writing academic narratives about personal stories*; presenting the finding in such a way that the researcher's written analyses corresponds with the stories told.

## Ethical Considerations

Researchers involved in both qualitative and quantitative research are obligated to remain mindful of the ethical considerations with regards to the treatment of participants (Donalek, 2005). In order to conduct this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Psychology's Research Ethics Committee at the University of Cape Town.

### Informed consent

It is imperative that participants fully understand what it means to participate in a research study (Corbin & Morse, 2003). Participants received a consent form (See Appendices A and B) for various aspects of the study. This form outlined the details of the researcher, the purpose of the study, research processes, confidentiality and other information about the study. The participants' complete understanding of the information was verbally confirmed by the researcher before the focus group discussions proceeded. The participants were also notified that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

### Confidentiality

The anonymity of participants was maintained throughout the writing of this report; where necessary, pseudonyms were utilised. Moreover, only the researcher and the supervisors have access to the audio recordings of the focus group discussions and individual interviews. The importance of confidentiality was included in the consent forms and communicated to the

participants prior to the initial focus group discussion. It could not however, be guaranteed that the  information that was shared in the focus groups would remain confidential as individual participants may at their own discretion reveal aspects of the discussion outside of the focus group setting. Further limitations to confidentiality were stated regarding the exhibition, as well as the research being written up as an honours research project that may be published in an academic journal. Participants were notified prior to printing that they could at their own discretion disclose their names alongside their photo stories.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are no known risks to participants associated with the study. The benefits associated with this study include but are not limited to the following: participants had the opportunity to share their experiences in ways that may have enhanced their ideas about issues that are important to them, participation may prove to be a learning experience as they are exposed to those of their peers, and the research findings may spark further engagement with the issues that affect other young black women. Those who have an interest in photography may have found the photography training to offer a valuable contribution in developing their interest.

**Ethics related to secondary participants**

In cases where participants wanted to photograph other people, they were instructed to obtain verbal consent. Participants who selected photographs of themselves that they wished to include in the exhibition were given the option to obscure any identifying features and to display their names. They were also instructed to extend the same consideration to any other person that they photographed. The young women were further notified that in any case where such permission could not be granted, the individuals' faces would be obscured and their names omitted.

### Limitations of the Study

The study's sample size was reasonably small (8 participants). A larger sample size may have enhanced the data; however, the scope of the honours project was limited. The specific aim to engage the individual experiences of participants was however still accomplished as findings do not serve to infer generalizations about a broader population.

## Reflexivity and the Researcher

The researcher always enters their field of research with judgements about what that field is all about (Malterud, 2001). This maintains the argument that the "neutral observer" does not exist and heralds the need for reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the ways in which researchers can become consciously aware and systematically attend to their influence on the construction of knowledge at every step of the research process (Malterud, 2001). It allows researchers to observe the personal and the theoretical without ignoring one at the expense of the other, and enables them to acknowledge the multiple roles that they may hold within their fields of research (Kleinsasser, 2000). In addition, researchers should remain wary of confusing prior knowledge that is embedded in preconceptions with knowledge that emerges through the systematic inquiry into the phenomena that they are studying (Malterud, 2001). This is particularly important in feminist research approaches as researchers usually hold specific political standpoints as fundamental to their research (Boonzaier & Shefer, 2006).

The researcher's process of knowledge production during a particular study should be made available to audiences (Watt, 2007) and any power imbalances inherent in research that may exist between the researcher and participants addressed. Although differences in backgrounds will most likely exist, the researcher in this study, a young black woman working towards a postgraduate qualification, may possess the added advantage of building rapport through shared experiences with the participants, which may also serve to even out the power imbalances.

It does however, remain imperative that the researcher establishes an introspective record of personal biases, feelings and thoughts, and that she aims to understand how these may influence the research. Thus a journal was kept throughout the scope of this study. The journal was referred to during the analysis of the data and writing up of the results. It served to facilitate an awareness of those themes and narratives that had resonated with the researcher during data collection. Moreover, while the rapport between researcher and participants was relatively high throughout the duration of the study, it also appears that the participants' knowledge of the researcher as a psychology student inadvertently allowed them to share personal experiences outside of the scope of the study in confidence. It was therefore important to note how conversations of this nature held the possibility to skew the analysis in favour of certain participants over others. The researcher also had to be wary of attaching

meanings that the participants had not intended or of 'reading too much' into the individual narratives that they had previously shared in focus group discussions.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis of the focus groups and photo stories revealed the following overarching thematic narratives: (1) Representation of black female beauty and bodies, (2) Policing of black female beauty and bodies, and (3) Narratives of resistance strategies that the participants employed against constructions of the black female body and beauty. Subsequent subthemes were structured to illustrate these three overarching themes.

### Representation of black female beauty and bodies

During the focus group discussions, the young women described the dominant imageries that portray the female body and beauty and in so doing, come to inform how they define beauty as well as the societal expectations of what a black woman should look like.

**Mammies and jezebels as dominant images of black female bodies.** One image that is central to the intersecting identities of young black women and their understanding of beauty is that of the jezebel and "hoochies"- sexually assertive women whose appetites are insatiable. It is important to understand that this controlling image is aimed at controlling black women's sexuality, which according to Collins (2000) lies at the core of black women's oppression. A study conducted by Emerson (2002) concluded that music videos emphasize black women's bodies and constructs a black womanhood that is uni-dimensional. Several participants explained that one can deduce a male artist's level of success by the women portrayed in his music videos. While black women would often be the objects of sexual desire and simply "jam" around him, white women's presence in music videos implied that there would be a storyline in which her beauty encompasses character traits that deem her worthy of his endeavours to "wife" (marry) her. These images therefore grant white women a greater extent of social legitimacy and respectability than they do black women.

The creation of mammy during the US slave era is reflective of the dominant ideology that has served to maintain black women's subordination, and continues to do so (Collins, 2000). It is not surprising then that the young women's narratives are extensively drawn from various imageries of mammy, who represents the normative measure against which black women's behaviour, is evaluated. Similarly, Hooks & West (1991) argued that images of black femininity demonstrate how the body serves as the site through which the black

woman's presence in society comes to be inscribed. They agreed that representations of black women in advertising, music video and television also play a significant role in constructing their ideas around body and beauty. When initially asked what the first words that came to mind were upon hearing the phase 'black woman's body,' Mmathabo immediately piped up the words: "sex object". Nox elaborated on this by mentioning that she should have a big bottom, large breasts and a small waist. Interestingly, only one participant strayed from this idea. Precious introduced the influence of her cultural upbringing by noting that in the Zulu culture, complimenting a women encompasses complimenting her body too, thus her immediate description of the black woman's body as beautiful, regardless of what her individual shape might be.

While several participants expressed their appreciation of the cultural phrase: "ume kahle" which directly translates to "you sit well". Bongi challenged this discourse by noting how even though this phrase is meant to be a compliment, the compliment remains reserved for a woman of a controlled body type that also alluded to her perceived maternal ability love and nurture.

> *It's interesting how 'ume kahle' can be a compliment but at the same time... I'm Xhosa, so there's that thing of you have to be a certain kind of big, you have to look a certain way.*

The images that the participants' narratives draw resemble discourses regarding the physical appeal of female bodies as well as their maternal traits. Therefore, on the above descriptions, beautiful black women are those whose physical features resemble those of the jezebel while her character traits reflect those of mammy.

**Policing of the black female body and beauty**

In light of the constructions the black female presence in society, the participant' narratives revealed that in order to get them to conform to ideal constructions of beauty, different stakeholders employ various strategies in policing their bodies and expressions of beauty. These strategies ultimately come to play a significant in the construction of the young women's identities.

**Family narratives about beauty and bodies**. It emerged throughout the various aspects of the study that the family operates as an influential site of socialisation and normalising of specific ideas about beauty and bodies. This manifested relatively early in the

study as participants' descriptions of their experiences often involved those of other family members. Interactions with other women in their families were particularly powerful in forming ideas around beauty.

According to the group of young women, their relationships with other women in their families, particularly their mothers, formed the backdrop against which they later came to construct their own ideas about bodies and beauty. Several participants agreed that in watching their mothers; how they occupied their own bodies and treated themselves as beautiful, they came to believe that they themselves are beautiful too. This was not true for all participants however, as one expressed her own struggle with beauty and its relation to lineage. She explained that while she viewed both her mother and maternal grandmother as beautiful, she often felt alienated from the rest of the family as her physique did not resemble that of the women in her direct lineage.



*In watching my mother I grew to hate myself because I did not embody the body that I would inherit, instead I felt as though I was a failure to my family for being so beneath their expectations of me.*

These young women essentially lineate beauty to their mothers and thus construct their own beauty according to the extent to which they conform to or deviate from this ideal. Where discrepancies are present between what is idealised and that which is real, women may feel the need to modify themselves so they fit into the popular mould (Fernandes, Papaikonomou & Nieuwoudt, 2006). Similarly, the participants seemingly internalise family narratives about beauty and bodies as they reported similar feelings of frustration about constantly being pulled in the different directions that body and beauty ideals, as generated by the paternal and maternal sides of their families present.

While they have different body shapes and sizes, they mentioned that the disparities between the shapes of the older women meant that they would often fit in on the one side of the family while on the other, they were regarded as deviant. The participants' keen awareness of these disparities gives us a sense of the self-monitoring that occurs, which is associated to the policing and disciplining of discourse by family members. Several of their narratives revealed that the older women within their families would draw comparisons between them and siblings or cousins of the similar age groups.

Beyond this narrative, they emphasised the irony of the older women whose comments were harshest often embodying the very body weight or shape that they fervently discouraged. Bongi's description of her interaction with an aunt illustrates this phenomenon.

> *...she's bigger than me, she's quite volumptous but she's the ONE person in my family who'll be like "oh no, you have to go to the gym" but I don't understand 'cause... we're the same though!*

Ella's description of various older women in her family illustrates a similar pattern of body policing.

> *Yeah it's always that thing of you have to lose weight but the thing is, they tell you and they're not really that skinny themselves... it's like you can't see what's wrong with you but you definitely can notice what's wrong with other people.*

This link between the young women and the older family members illustrates the discursive power relations embedded in discourses regarding culture and respect. Based on the premise that the 'African way of thinking' emphasises respect for elders (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006), it is not surprising that mothers and other older female relatives would feel justified in policing the young women's bodies, on whom the responsibility to conform to these ideals are set. It is also interesting that the emphasis is placed solely on body weight rather than shape, which is likelier to be attributed to genetics. This suggests that while they expect the young women to have control over their weight, the older women shy away from taking responsibility for the role their genes may have played in moulding the bodies of the women who have come after them.

**Entitlement to touch.** Collins (2000) maintains that it is through the process of objectification that an object can be controlled. Similarly, objectification of the young women's beauty and bodies by constantly touching them displays efforts to discipline and

control the performance of their gendered identities. The young women explained that although they often felt objectified, the objectification was not always explicitly sexual. They described how casually family, friends, even strangers felt entitled to not only comment, but also to touch their bodies. Mmathabo and Bongi specifically noted that older women take advantage of the respect that younger women are expected to display by virtue of differences in age.

Following that, the terminology used in describing the manner in which they were touched was rather specific. The participants all agreed that being skinny meant that people felt entitled to "jiggle" them, whereas being chubbier was associated with "grabbing". Their descriptions were peppered with expressions of both fear and irritation. Precious relayed an encounter with an older woman at the local church shortly after she underwent puberty.

> *...this church lady comes and she's like "oh I haven't seen you in a while, look at you, you've grown!" and she goes and she... she pretty much molested me, like I had a good sexual harrassment suit, she went from like my head down. She felt my breasts, she was touching my booty and feeling it and touching me and I'm standong there like oh my god what am I supposed to do? 'Cause it's... it's... like... she's being inappropriate but at the same time you can't scream in church.*

Moreover, casual discussion regarding the everyday task of getting dressed revealed underlying fear of street harassment it appeared to constantly inform their evaluation of the environments they would be in throughout the day as well as the people with whom they would interact, prior to their making decisions about what to wear.

> *I think it does sort of in a way dictate some, like the choices I make, like in the way I dress... You know those days when you're like you know today I wanna feel, like fly, on fleek... but you walk out and you know, and then somebody's like "eish, my size"...*

Unfortunately, such a consideration echoes discourses of victim blaming following sexual assaults as they often suggest that women's choices of outfits are able to either provoke or divert sexual assault. Several of the participants agreed that although their peers might approve of mass media's portrayal of beautiful black women in revealing outfits, their lived realities do not reflect this approval.

> *...and if you wear the same things as on the music videos it's taken differently... if you're a video girl - "ah she's hot",  when you walk out on the streets, mm you know,*

*you have words... words that I wouldn't even repeat now you know, thrown behind you...*

These descriptions feed into discourses around the respectability of women based on what they wear. Dressing modestly is therefore not only limited to avoiding street harassment, rather, it reveals the internalised desire to maintain and protect this respectability that society supposedly affords to modest women.

**Narratives about the intergenerational politics of hair.** Mother/daughter relationships emerged as a major site in the specific policing of hair. The participants' narratives demonstrate the conflicts surrounding from one generation to another and how these are navigated. While the politics surrounding hair are rife within society at large, they do begin at home. The participants specifically described how their hair was either relaxed or left natural (and often short) from a very young age. Nox reported that at 21, it took her leaving home to finally see what her own actually looks like. Okuhle explained that she would often argue with her mother who, after she decided to wear her hair in locks, discouraged it by saying that she would look dirty.

*she'd be like "I want you to look beautiful" busy straightening your hair! Who said that I'm not beautiful like, with this kind of hair?*

The young women reported growing up hearing statements like "suffer for beauty" from their mothers and other older women around them. Precious elaborates on this in her photo story.



*Getting one's hair "done" can be a long arduous process, which can be filled with pain or discomfort and tedium.*

None of the participants specifically mentioned that their mothers associated beauty with long straight hair. However, reports of the mothers insisting that they relax their hair for photo

days or to cover their natural hair with weaves for matric balls demonstrates the underlying belief that beauty is equated with hair other than their own.

> *... I don't know, she likes short but she doesn't do natural hair. I'd cut it but as soon as I grew it out she'd go "okay I'll give you money to relax or do your hair with, you know, just don't have it as it is out"...*

School was another area where they felt their hair was most stringently policed. The participants explained that efforts to police their hair in school entailed restrictions on length, style, and the use of extensions. They expressed a great degree of irritation that their natural hair was never considered in that extensions were at times necessary for them to manage and protect it from everyday wear and tear. It was particularly interesting that in schools where the staff comprised of both black and white educators, discipline regarding hair would often be relegated to black female educators. What is interesting is that the participants agreed with Precious' suggestion that black female educators were chosen because they were better able to pacify them. She noted that had it been white educators who facilitated disciplinary talks about their hair, they would readily retort. This provided a glimpse into the signifying practices employed in policing their hair as well as the participants' unheeded expectations that the individuals they had supposed would protect and defend them were instead the ones enforcing the discipline.

The young women also explained that leaving school has allowed them to finally use their hair as the form of expression that they had always desired for it to be. Precious illustrated this in her photo story by adding that:

> *III specifically showcases the versatility and freedom of being able to express yourself in whatever way you want to. Hair is one way that black woman have been able to do so...*

Several other report liberation at being able to cut their hair on a whim and described the act itself as therapeutic.

> *...my hair tends to sort of represent where I am in terms of my headspace...*

**Intersecting identities and beauty**

A US study (Schooler, Ward, Merriweather & Caruthers, 2004) argued that by the time young black women become privy to the message that beauty is equated to whiteness, they

have also only just began grappling with what it means to be a black. Patricia Hill Collins maintained further that images that depict black women as Other grants justification for their race, gender and class oppression (2000). The participants in this study drew on popular controlling images and discourses similar to those outlined in the above section to illustrate how these permeate into dynamics of race, gender and class, and contribute to their subjective realities. They described how coming to the University of Cape Town brought them to the realization of how black they are. Several of them reported feelings of inferiority in relation to their class mates similar to Precious'.

> *...there's a sense of... you know, I don't deserve to be here, and you'll know from the beginning that you have to work harder than everyone...*

They narratives revealed that they often felt undeserving of their place in Med School as their white counterparts would openly gripe about the exclusion of their friends due to the university's adjustment of admission policies that aimed to reach "black quota". Such complaints, while meant to communicate white student's grievances, echo the familiar colonial discourses that constructs the black 'other' as inferior and lacking of intellectual capacity, hence the need for an adjusted admission policy. Narrative's description of the differential attitude towards black academics provides another lens into the intricate ways that the participants experienced racial isolation.

> *...you see it happen you know, like when a black lecturer comes in there's a different vibe. No one starts opening their books and quickly \*motions packing up desk and getting seated\*; first it's like "okay we'll give him 10 minutes and see if he's actually serious, and making sense. Then I might check into it."*

Incidents such as this incited a significant level of anger and frustration at having both their intellectual ability to learn as well as that of the established academics in their field undermined. The young women's response to the displays of disrespect also illustrates South African black women's intersecting discourses about the wisdom of elders, who are meant to be shown respect at all times (Long & Zietkiewicz, 2006), and how these extend beyond the home.

As stated in relation to body and beauty above, the family serves as a multi-faceted site through which dominant ideologies are both resisted and reproduced. The young women's narratives noted that family and community members back home often reminded them to

work hard if they wanted to be taken seriously. In essence, they are encouraged to assimilate into a system that treats them as inferior, and while the encouragement to work hard is meant to resist such a system, it does however inadvertently reproduce these constructions by not challenging these discourses on a structural level.

In addition, the young women's narratives about skin tone draw on discourses around colourism and how these impact black women's lived experiences by perpetuating various inequalities. They revealed that race was almost always synonymous with class as it had become apparent to them that blackness was associated with poverty while whiteness was associated with wealth. Hunter (2007) argued that while light-skinned women might be distressed about ethnic identity, such emotional anguish cannot be equated to that of their dark-skinned counterparts who are more likely to face systematic discrimination at various other levels. An exchange between two of the participants illustrated how these constructions of skin tone, and therefore beauty, are linked to discursive power relations. In response to Precious' suggestion that light-skinned women are not considered African enough, Okuhle relays a story about a relative whose skin tone and Eurocentric features had optimised her ability to work in spaces that are predominantly white. This exchange demonstrates Gooden (2011)'s argument that beyond race, skin tone amongst black women also serves as capital to attain social legitimacy and a bourgeois status. Beauty serves as a resource through which women are able to advance in the labour-market, educational institutions, and social networks (Hunter, 2007).  Therefore, the ways in which lighter skin comes to be equated to beauty mirrors similar patterns of systematic oppression by including one group of women at the exclusion of another.

Ultimately, this demonstrates a failure to acknowledge the intersecting identities of young women. The various descriptions highlight how the young women's identities and subjective experiences are not only constructed in light of their being female alone, but rather, that they intersect with race, class, and sexuality. Furthermore, the various discourses that the young women draw illustrate binary conceptualisations of race, class etc do not acknowledge the intellectual capacities and roles that women possess and occupy.

**Narratives of resistance**

The strategies that the young women employ in resisting some constructions of the black female body and beauty were observed and engaged throughout the study. Below is a discussion of the subthemes that emerged.

**Aesthetics as site of resistance.** The participants' various narratives revealed that upon realising all the ways in which they stray from the dominant representations of ideal bodies and beauty, they actively seek to reconcile their perceived deviance from societal and familial influence. They often mentioned that in going to university, they resolved to accept various aspects of their bodies and beauty that they had previously experienced as deviant due to the commentary of family and peers, as well as those that they themselves had chastised and disliked. Ella illustrates this in her description of a time when she settled her desire for a curvier shape.

> *I wanted to have curves so badly and then at a certain time I was like you know what; screw this, why do I need curves? I don't care, I like myself.*

Ella is ironically now a curvy young woman, yet she mentioned how being curvy does not define her identity nor is it a feature from which she draws her positive sense of self. Bongi shared a similar narrative and further elaborated that her relationship with her mother became more intimate after she overtly engaged her mother's attempts to change her.

> *...I sort of built a shield around myself. And then I had to educate my mom about loving me the way I needed to be loved.*

Interestingly, the young women were particularly affirming towards one another in terms of their skin tones. Participants whose skin was fairer complimented the smooth texture and evenness of the darker women's skin. In response, those with darker skin reassured them that their being beautiful is not warranted by virtue of their skin being light. Although there were several disagreements throughout the study, the dynamic between the young women was such that they mostly acknowledged each other's individual struggles and provided a sense of affirmation toward one another. This relation between them echoes Reid-Brinkley (2007)'s observation of contemporary feminist movements that have sought to create spaces in which women separate themselves from the dominant voices present in society and are thus able to speak freely. They did not explicitly mention this, however, the consistent reassurance and encouragement to share narratives beyond the scope of the study was in itself a strategy of resistance against discourses that contrast black womanhood in light of their aesthetic differences.

**Hair as an expression of freedom.** The young women described their hair as one of the strategies they employed in resisting constructions of their bodies and beauty. They

explained that their decision to wear their hair naturally was an expression of freedom and that any changes they made were often in line with their mental health at that specific time.

Several of the participants also noted that embracing their hair was a way of embracing their beauty as they had inherited it from the women who came before them. It is here that they spoke of their ancestry as Africans. It appears that embedded in these notions is a desire for their mothers and other women in their families to also embrace their beauty as it is. By refusing to "suffer for beauty" as encouraged by the women around them, they are challenging the very ideas and ideals that others have internalised and in turn expected them to heed.

In addition, one of the participants explicitly interrogates the interaction between women at hair salons while another embraces the sense of community that women have when they gather around their hair.



*Hair: "You must suffer for beauty." – Hairstylists everywhere*

*Whether you have natural hair, relaxed hair, wear braids, or simply cannot live without weave – our paths have crossed at the hair salon. We make eye contact through the mirrors and we sneak side glances at each other's hair. Competition or appreciation?*

*Doing or unDoing a hairstyle is an opportunity for people to come together and interact. It allows a moment in time where one can let their guard down and relax with friends as we all try to achieve a common goal. It creates community and fellowship.*

One striking observation was that all of the participants were averse to straightening their hair. Beneath their various hair dresses and styles, they had all made the conscious decision to allow their hair to grow naturally. When asked about this, participants cited personal expression, acceptance, and inheritance, with only one participant including the expense of hair relaxing and straightening as one of her reasons. This revealed the participants' underlying move from Eurocentric hair ideals to that of their African heritage.

**Photo stories as resistance.** One of the aims behind the photovoice technique is to document and echo the needs and assets of participants and their communities from their own point of view using photography. While the young women had discussed ways in which their bodies and beauty had been represented, objectified and policed throughout the study, their photo stories did not reflect these discourses. They instead constructed their photo stories in ways that highlighted the assets embedded in their experiences and resisted negative constructions that they had learned around their bodies and beauty. Precious illustrated this with her description of scars.



*Involuntary tattoos*

*Scars only form if the wound has gone deeper than the superficial layer of the skin, they are a product of healing that begins from the inside out... Tattoos are chosen to celebrate or document the gossamer threads of life that contribute to who we are. They will last a lifetime. Scars, stretch marks, etc. do the very same thing except we do not choose when or where we receive these particular tattoos.... My beautiful*

*model displays hers proudly because it adds to the richness of her soul and thus her*

*beauty.*

Similarly, Ella's photo story addresses an unnamed individual against whom she now revolts.
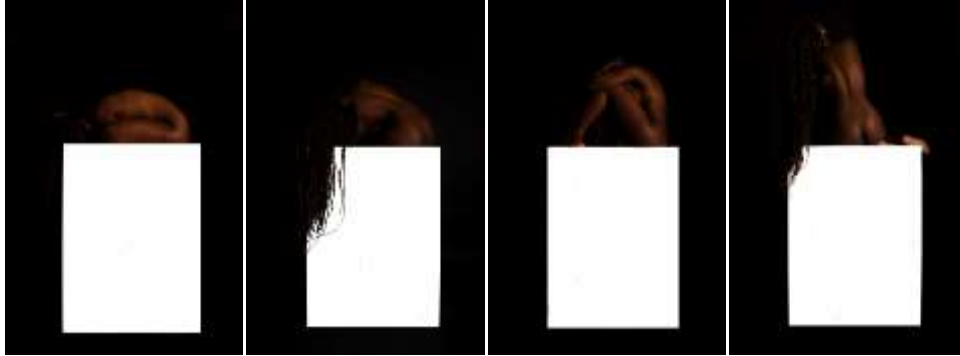


1- *The body that has bowed down to your demands*

2- *The body that has bended over backwards to please you*

3- *The body that has cowered, scared to step on your toes*

4- *The rising- Bontlebaka a se bagao- My beauty is not yours.*

By employing the photovoice technique in conjunction with a participatory action research design, the participants were able to utilise the construction of their photo stories as a strategy of resistance in itself. The discussion of their photographs enhanced the dialogue about their bodies and beauty. They also critically reflected on themselves and the underlying causes of some of the challenges that they face in the construction of their identities. While the exhibition of their photo stories allowed them to advocate for social change by communicating their strengths and concerns to stakeholders within their community.

**Narrating their own beauty.** When asked in what spaces they feel most beautiful, not a single participant alluded to their appearance. Beyond the fervour with which they unpacked issues around body shape, skin tone, hair, even those surrounding the dynamics of race, gender and class within the UCT environment, they all maintained that beauty is about one's essence. The role of the family was also a recurring theme. In speaking of their own beauty, the participants mentioned the family as a space in which they need not question their beauty. It appears that the family is a common site for the policing of their bodies and beauty, particularly female relatives. However, it is in learning to interrogate and challenge these relatives' attempts to mould their ideas around their bodies that they reconcile their own ideas. The participants expressed that although they are different, they are not deviant; they

feel most beautiful when surrounded by family precisely because that is where they are accepted. While Rati experiences herself as most beautiful at the end of a run, her narrative also illustrates the importance of young black women's emphasis on having their internal make-up acknowledged.

> *When do I feel most beautiful... when somebody spontaneously, out of the blue, says that "you are beautiful" but they're complimenting more than the way I look. When they're complementing much more than that... when somebody speaks to WHO I am.*

Bongi expressed similar sentiments, illustrated in her description of relationships with close family and friends around whom she is able to show up without the need for embellishment.

> *I feel beautiful in that space because it's not just about my beauty, it's not about my hair, it's not about my skin, it's about the person that I am. And I feel accepted in that space.*

Mmathabo further elaborated on this narrative by drawing on discourses that highlight the importance of health.

> *...if I feel healthy, I feel beautiful.*

These descriptions ultimately illustrate a sharp contrast in the young women's experiences of conformity and resistance. They struggled with the idea of having to conform to other people's ideas around body and beauty and as illustrated above, have resisted these ideas by constructing their beauty as internal. However, their narratives do present contrasting discourses as that they inadvertently construct their beauty in relation to the compliments and acceptance of the people around them. This ultimately feeds into post-structural feminism's argument that identity strategies and subjectivities are created in relation to discourse, social processes and institutions (Kiguwa, 2006).

## Summary and Conclusion

The following narrative themes emerged throughout the course of this study: (1) Representation of black female beauty and bodies, (2) Policing of black female beauty and bodies, and (3) Narratives of resistance strategies that the participants employed against constructions of the black female body and beauty. Analysis of the narratives demonstrated an overlap with existing literature and offers new insights into role the significant role that family narratives play in constructing the identities of young black women. Findings suggest

that the family is a multi-faceted site where dominant ideologies are simultaneously reproduced and resisted. The participants draw on popular controlling images and discourses to construct their ideas about beauty and bodies and amongst other strategies, utilise the development of their photo stories as resist these controlling images. Issues of race, gender and class also intersect in shaping young black women's lived experiences.

In conclusion, this study aimed to address the gap in the literature around young black women's constructions of bodies and beauty. Its findings will add value to academic literature, representation practices and policy implementation. A thematic narrative approach allowed for the exploration of participants' identities and the various representations, language and contexts that shape their experiences. The findings and interpretations of this study will ultimately contribute to the limited amount of qualitative feminist research with young black women in the field of bodies and beauty, and will add significant value to participatory action research and photovoice in advocating for social justice and change in the post-apartheid South African context.

## References

Bamberg, M. (1997). Language, concepts and emotions: The role of language in the construction of emotions. *Language Sciences*, 19(4), 309-340. Doi: unavailable.

Boonzaier, F. & Shefer, T. (2006). Gendered research. In T. Shefer, F. Boonzaier & P. Kiguwa, P (Eds). *The Gender of Psychology* (pp 3-11). Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.

Cameron, S. C. & Wycoff, S. M. (2011). The destructive nature of the term *race*: Growing beyond a false paradigm. *Journal of Counselling and Development*, 76(3), 37-45. Doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.tb02543.x.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment (2ⁿᵈ ed.).* New York, USA and London, England: Routledge.

Corbin, J. & Morse, J. M. (2003). The unstructured interactive interview: Issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(3), 335-354. Doi: 10.1177/1077800403251757.

Donalek, J. G. (2005). The interview in qualitative research. *Urological Nursing*, 25(2), 124-125. Doi: unavailable.

Emerson, R. A. (2002). "Where my girls at?" Negotiating black womanhood in music videos. *Gender & Society*, 16(1), 115-135.

Fernandes, P., Papaikonomou, M., & Nieuwoudt, J. M. (2006). Women suffering through their bodies. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 36(4), 851-879. Doi: 10.1177/008124630603600412.

Fraser, H. (2004). Doing narrative research: Analysing personal stories line by line. *Qualitative Social Work*, 3(2), 179-201. Doi: 10.1177/1473325004043383.

Glenn, E.N. (2008). Yearning for lightness: Transnational circuits in the marketing and consumption of skin lighteners. Gender & Society, 22(3), 281-302. Doi: 10.1177/0891243208316089.

Gooden, A. (2011). Visual representations of feminine beauty in the black press: 1915-1950. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(4), 81-92. Doi: unavailable.

Hobson, J. (2003). The "batty" politic: Towards an aesthetic of the black female body. *Hypatia*, 18(4), 88-103. Doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.tb01414.x.

Hooks, B. (1996). *Reel to real: Race, sex and class at the movies*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Hooks, B., & West, C. (1991). *Breaking bread: Insurgent black intellectual life*. Boston, USA: South End Press.

Hunter, M. (2007). The persistent problem of colourism: Skin tone, status, and inequality. *Sociology Compass*, 1(1), 237-254. Doi: 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00006.x.

Kiguwa, P. (2006). Narratives of gender and identity constructs. In Shefer, T, Boonzaier, F. & Kiguwa, P. *The Gender of Psychology* (pp 12-28). Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.

Kleinsasser, A.M. (2000). Researchers, reflexivity and good data: Writing to unlearn. Theory into Practice, 39(3), 155-162. Doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip3903_6.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). The methodology of focus groups: the importance of interaction between research participants. *Sociology of health and illness*, *16*(1), 103-121. Doi: unavailable.

Long, C. & Zietkiewicz, E. (2006). 'Going places': Black women negotiating race and gender in post-apartheid South Africa. In T. Shefer, F. Boonzaier & P. Kiguwa, P (Eds). *The Gender of Psychology* (pp 198-218). Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.

Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358, 483-488. Doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(01)05627-6.

Murray, M. (2003). Narrative Psychology. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods (2$^{nd}$ ed.)* (pp. 111-132). Los Angeles, USA: Sage Publications.

Reid-Brinkley, S. R. (2007). The essence of res(ex)pectability: Black women's negaotiation of black femininity in rap music and music videos. *Meridians: Feminism, race, transnationalism*, 8(1), 236-260. Doi: 10.2979/mer.2007.8.1.236.

Roberts, R. (1994). "Ladies first": Queen Latifah's afrocentric feminist music video. *African American Review*, 28(2), 245-257. Doi: unavailable.

Schooler, D., Monique Ward, L., Merriwether, A., & Caruthers, A. (2004). Who's that girl: Television's role in the body image development of young white and black women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28(1), 38-47. Doi: 10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00121.x.

Schultz, J. (2008). Reading the catsuit: Serena Williams and the production of blackness at the 2002 US Open. *Journal of Sport & Social Sciences*, 29(3), 338-357. Doi: 10.1177/0193723505276230.

Shaw, A. (2005). The other side of the looking glass: The marginalization of fatness and blackness in the construction of gender identity. *Social Semiotics*, 15(2), 143-152. Doi: 10.1080/10350330500154725.

Shefer, T. (2004). Psychology and the regulation of gender. In D. Hook (Ed), *Critical Psychology* (pp. 199-200). Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.

Strack, R. W., Magill, C., & McDonagh, K. (2004). Engaging youth through Photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5(1), 49-56. Doi: 10.1177/1524839903258015.

Tate, S. (2007). Black beauty: Shade, hair and anti-racist aesthetics. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(2), 300-319. Doi: 10.1080/01419870601143992.

Thomson, R. G. (1997). *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring disability in American culture and literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Watt, D. (2007). On becoming a qualitative researcher: The value of reflexivity. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(1), 82-101. Doi: unavailable

Weekes, D. (1997). 'Shades of blackness: Young black female constructions of beauty'. *Black British feminism: A Reader* (pp. 113-126). London: Routledge.

Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum,* 21(1), 111-125. Doi: unavailable.

Visser, M. & Moleko, A. (2012). *Community Psychology in South Africa*. Pretoria: Van
Schaik.

*Appendix A*

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**



**Department of Psychology**

Constructions of the black female body and beauty: Conformity and resistance - Study consent

### 1. <u>Invitation and purpose</u>

You are invited to participate in a Photovoice study which explores young black women's constructions of body and beauty. I am a research student from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town.

### 2. <u>Procedures</u>

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you can decide to stop participating in the study at any time, without any negative consequences.

If you decide to take part in the study you will be expected to do the following:

- Meet 3-5 times with the researcher/s as well as the other participants in the study. The meetings will include photography training, group discussions, and individual interviews with the researcher. During these meetings, discussions and interviews we will talk about the project, the expectations you have of the study, your views and experiences of body and beauty, and your photographs. The meetings and discussions will take place at a convenient venue which we will let you know about in advance, and will not last longer than 90 minutes. The meetings and discussions will be audio recorded but we will make sure that your identity is protected in any of the information that we use from these discussions.

- Participate in photography training by a professional photographer who will teach you how to use a digital camera and how to take good pictures. This training will take place at a convenient venue we will tell you about in advance.

- Take photographs relating to how you experience constructions of body in your life. You will be given a camera to use for two weeks. Together we will select some of your best pictures and we will pay for the printing of the photos after you have taken them.

- Discuss your photos with the researchers and with your other group members. You may also develop a story about your own photographs.

- If you like, we will display your photographs or digital stories at a public exhibition. You do not have to participate in the public event if you don't want to, but if you do, you will decide which photographs or stories you would like to include.

### 3. **Inconveniences**

We don't expect that you will be distressed by the research but if it does become distressing you may stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. If you become distressed by any of the procedures in this project we will refer you for counseling, if necessary.

### 4. **Benefits**

This project gives you an opportunity to share your opinion and experiences about ideas around black women's bodies and beauty. You will also receive professional training in photography.

### 5. **Privacy and confidentiality**

Any information that you share is strictly confidential and you will remain anonymous throughout the study.

In the group discussions, what you say will be heard by other members of the group and we will ask participants to respect confidentiality in the groups. We have no control over what other group members will say outside the group – so be aware that full confidentiality of the group discussions cannot be guaranteed. The group discussions, meetings and interviews will all be digitally recorded and these files will only be accessible by myself and my university supervisor.

### 6. **Money matters**

You will not be paid for taking part in the study but refreshments will be served at the focus group meetings.

### 7. **Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study please contact Tshegofatso Ndabane on 084 319 8116 or Dr Shose Kessi at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town.

If you understand all of the procedures and the risks and benefits of the study and you would like to participate in the project, please sign below:

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

*Appendix B*

# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

## Department of Psychology

Constructions of the black female body and beauty: Conformity and resistance - Focus Group Consent

1.  **Invitation and purpose**

    You are invited to participate in a Photovoice study which explores young black women's constructions of body and beauty. I am a research student from the Department of Psychology at University of Cape Town.

2.  **Procedures**

    You have already agreed to take part in the larger Photovoice project and I am now asking you to participate in a group discussion as part of the project. This discussion will focus on your experiences around black women's bodies and beauty. The discussion will also focus on the photographs you and other participants have taken. It will take place at a convenient venue we will tell you about in advance and will last between 60 and 90 minutes. The group discussion will be audio recorded but I will make sure that your identity is protected in any of the information that I use from the discussion.

3.  **Inconveniences**

    I do not expect that you will be distressed by the group discussion but should it become uncomfortable you may stop participating at any time without any negative consequences. If

    You may withdraw from the research at any time and your withdrawal will have no negative consequences for you.

4.  **Benefits**

    This project gives you an opportunity to share your opinion and experiences about ideas around black women's bodies and beauty. You will also receive professional training in photography.

5.  **Privacy and confidentiality**

    Any information that you share is strictly confidential and you will remain anonymous throughout the study.

In the group discussions, what you say will be heard by other members of the group and we will ask participants to respect confidentiality in the groups. We have no control over what other group members will say outside the group – so be aware that full confidentiality of the group discussions cannot be guaranteed. The group discussions, meetings and interviews will all be digitally recorded and these files will only be accessible by myself and my university supervisor.

Some of this research may be published in academic journals but your identity will be protected at all times.

**6. <u>Money matters</u>**

You will not be paid for taking part in the study but refreshments will be served at the focus group meetings.

**7. <u>Contact details</u>**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study please contact Tshegofatso Ndabane on 084 319 8116 or Dr Shose Kessi at the Department of Psychology, University of Cape Town

If you understand all of the procedures and the risks and benefits of the study and you would like to participate in the project, please sign below:

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date**:** _____

**Agreement for Tape-Recording**

I agree to have my voice tape-recorded in the group discussions:

Participant Signature: _____