

# **Young working women's beauty practices: a sociological exploration in a South African small city context**

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## DECLARATION

I, **Mareli Hellmuth**, declare that this dissertation and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I further declare that:

- i. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for the MA degree in Sociology at the North-West University (NWU), Potchefstroom;
- ii. Where any part of this dissertation has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at the NWU or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- iii. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed and referenced;
- iv. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this dissertation is entirely my own work;
- v. I have acknowledged all main sources of assistance;
- vi. Where the dissertation is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- vii. None of this work or its parts have been published or submitted before.

Signed: M Hellmuth

Dated: 24/02/2021

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# ABSTRACT

South African research on the meanings young working women assign to their beauty practices is scant, with specific data on women in Potchefstroom notably absent. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but given the complicated relationships women have with themselves, it would have been surprising if the topic was not fraught with contradictions. There are feminists who maintain that beauty practices oppress women, and others who argue that it empowers women. This tug of war between two extremes has been a topic of feminist research since 1974. This study examined what meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. A qualitative design was employed, as it enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. Methods included semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their subjective perspectives and experiences of their own beauty routines. The findings suggest that participants attach various meanings to their individual beauty practices. Some consider it fun to work on their hair and makeup and watch their appearance change; others feel it is a chore to be completed before leaving the house. Most women indicated that they groom themselves for work, since it influences their interactions with co-workers and clients. On the one hand, participants revealed that they willingly engage in beauty practices because it allows them time to themselves and they enjoy the process. On the other hand, most are not comfortable leaving the house without makeup, as they do not consider their natural appearance beautiful. Their hairstyles and cosmetics have become a part of their identity. These participants experience beauty practices as restrictive, since society expects them to be pretty and groomed. However, it is also a ritual that gives them confidence and makes them feel secure, so it has an empowering effect too.

## Keywords

Beauty practices, working women, young women, feminism, beauty industry, makeup, empowerment, Potchefstroom

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# Chapter 1: Introduction and problem statement

## 1.1 Introduction

The global beauty industry has grown by 4.5 percent annually over the past 20 years and it is expected to keep growing in the future (Chinedu & Baloyi, 2016). It is estimated that, in 2012, the global 'personal care and beauty market' was valued at \$200 billion (Holmes, 2015). International polls have revealed that between 81% and 84% of women believe that beauty can be empowering and that there is something enjoyable in taking care of themselves through their beauty routine (Clark & Lemay, 2017:6). It is, therefore, no surprise that the beauty industry has grown significantly over the past few decades and it is predicted that this industry will expand even more in the years to come (Holmes, 2015).

In South Africa, retailers of cosmetics and toiletries also contribute a significant amount to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Statistics South Africa, 2018). In 2015, it was estimated that production rates would double over the next five years, with an annual growth of 20% in sales of beauty and personal care products (Holmes, 2015).

From the statistics cited above, one may conclude that beauty and skincare products are highly sought after. Studies indicate that this is partly because those who possess physical beauty have been shown to be more successful in their careers and interpersonal relationships, and have better self-esteem (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:158; Ford *et al.* 2018:2). It is therefore not only beauty and personal care products and services that are bought, but also the advantages that accompany it. That being the case, it is perhaps no surprise that young women spend a significant amount of time and money on improving their appearances to conform to the beauty ideals of contemporary society (Stuart and Donaghue, 2011:109; Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1389).

Young South African women also strive to reach a form of physical flawlessness as a means to receive the benefits of being beautiful and to avoid harmful social consequences (Holmes, 2015). The indications are that this trend is set to continue and that the importance of the beauty industry and the associated beauty practices are set to keep growing in South Africa (Dalziel, 2016:140-150). Beauty practices and products play an increasing role in the economy and people's lives, and this creates opportunities for further social research.

However, very little research has been done on this topic in South Africa, thus this study is making a meaningful contribution to academic literature on beauty practices among the women of our country. Rianè Dalziel from the North-West University conducted a South African study entitled, "Factors influencing South African female generation Y students' purchase behaviour of beauty products" (Dalziel, 2016:5). The present study was conducted in Potchefstroom, a small South African city. The research was conducted among young working women, and the aim was to investigate the meaning of beauty practices. For the purposes of this study, beauty practices are used to refer to beauty treatments, hair styling, facial treatments, hair removal procedures, and

the use of makeup and cosmetics. The definition of beauty for this study is women who are deemed as attractive. This includes through the use of skin care routines, nail grooming, hair styling and/or through the use of makeup products. Therefore, women who conform to feminine beauty standards. Beauty practices can turn women in to a beautiful woman, one that has smooth, flawless and youthful looking skin, big, plump lips, long healthy-looking hair and big eyes.

The next section colours the background to the study and discusses the most important literature and sociological theories on beauty practices. This contributes to an understanding of what sociologists have found about this topic over the last few decades. It serves to situate the current study within a wider scope of research and explains how it contributes to the particular field of research.

## **1.2 Background**

There are two main perspectives in analysing and understanding women's orientations to beauty and the beauty practices they engage in. The first is beauty practices as a source of oppression in women's lives. The second is beauty practices as tools of empowerment and illustration of agency. The first section discusses theories that consider beauty practices as oppressive. The second examines theories that acknowledge the possible empowerment and pleasure that women derive from beauty practices, despite the subjective element of oppression.

### **1.2.1 Beauty practices as oppressive**

Naomi Wolf (1990:9-11), a feminist writer, described conforming to certain beauty regimes within the construction of femininity as part of 'the beauty myth'. She defines the 'beauty myth' as an obsession with physical perfection, where women go to great lengths to reach a status of flawlessness. Women may perhaps have more power and freedom in modern societies than those in previous generations ever had, but they also deal with low self-esteem, which is often rooted in the expectations and ideals associated with their physical appearance (McRobbie, 2015:271; Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017:137). This is also true for young women in South Africa who, across ethnic populations, display high levels of dissatisfaction with their bodies (Wassenaar, 2000: 232-233).

Wolf (1990:64) argued that the beauty myth has proven to be just as oppressive and restricting as the traditional image of wife and homemaker of previous decades. It may be asserted that the traditional gender roles of women have been replaced with an increasing focus on young women's appearances and highly regulated femininity. Although young women have access to careers and fields of study previously dominated by men, various studies indicate that they also experience pressure to conform to unrealistic beauty standards (Wolf, 1990:21; Jeffreys, 2005:115). McRobbie (2015:271) found that one of the means women use to conform to these standards is incorporating certain beauty practices into their lives.

More recent studies found that the use of social networking sites increases dissatisfaction with appearance. Social networking sites like Instagram are mainly concerned with the posting and

sharing of images. This site has become popular among young women, and it is through the use of social networking sites like Instagram that women learn to internalise societal beauty ideals (Elias & Gill, 2018:67). Through this, they also compare their appearance to that of others. Instagram users can make use of filters before uploading an image on the site. These filters enhance their image to look more like beauty ideals (Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1382).

Feminists point out that young women have come to 'internalise these ideals' to the extent that the quest for beauty feels like the 'natural' thing to do, not realising the extent to which the ideal is a social construct (Wolf, 1990:155). This perspective is supported by various studies (Fardouly *et al.* 2018:1388; Elias & Gill 2018:74).

Sheila Jeffreys (2005:171) argues that it is expected that women in Western societies should strive to conform to beauty standards. It is expected that these standards are accepted and become integrated with their identities. This diminishes the impetus behind choosing not to engage in beauty practices since these standards can only be attained by engaging in such practices. Young women are also subjected to high levels of surveillance and discipline regarding physical appearance, which disinclines them to disregarding beauty practices (Jeffreys, 2005:171-176). Examples of such 'surveillance' are the hundreds of computer and smartphone beauty applications. By using these apps, women can smooth their skin, whiten their teeth, and adjust numerous other physical attributes in order to live up to beauty ideals (Elias & Gill, 2018:65-67).

Not only are women evaluated by others, but they have also learned to assess and regulate themselves very strictly because their social and public standings depend on it (Wolf, 1990:75; Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1389). As a result, beauty practices become a necessity that women must incorporate into their lives to fit the 'normative bill' and participation in these practices become a way for young women to normalise their appearances (Black & Sharma, 2001:114; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:115). Radical feminists argue that women obsessively regulate their appearance to be more feminine and to measure up to beauty ideals. This obsession could serve as a disguise for male dominance and a way to keep patriarchal structures firmly in place (McRobbie, 2015:4).

Other critical theories such as Marxist feminism focus on 'beauty as commodity' in a capitalist system (McRobbie, 2015:8). This perspective sees the beauty industry as exploitative of women's insecurities about their appearance in a pursuit to maximise profit (Bartky, 1990:34; McRobbie, 2009:13). Young women are indirectly persuaded to spend money on beauty products to conform to the particular ideals and standards associated with female beauty (Dworkin, 1974; Wolf, 1990:89; Jeffreys, 2005:2 ). Beauty is presented as something that can be purchased in a variety of forms, which includes beauty products, makeup, beauty appliances, beauty treatments, books and magazines on beauty, makeup workshops, exercise routines, and plastic surgery. These different kinds of products have gained significant popularity amongst young women because of the advertiser's attention, as well as Instagram influencers and reality shows (Elias & Gill,

2018:74). Media outlets bombard women with advertisements about products that claim to enhance the appearance (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:115).

### **1.2.1 Beauty practices as empowering**

Not all feminist writers agree with a critical position. Walter (1999) states that feminism has afforded women the choice of whether or not to engage in beauty practices. She argues that, in the past, young women were forced to wear corsets and pantyhose and have their brows thinly plucked. Today, depending on their social context, women have the agency to freely reflect and make the autonomous decision to, for example, wear makeup or not. Walter (1999:98) questions arguments like those of Dworkin (1974) and Jeffreys (2005:179), which state that beauty practices are only oppressive and instituted by and for men.

Studies such as from Natasha Walter (1999), Dellinger and Williams (1997:170) and Anderssen (2017) indicate that women can experience beauty routines as fun and flamboyant and refer to the pop icon Madonna to illustrate that women often use these beauty routines to demonstrate their sexual and economic independence. It can be an act of defiance used to express freedom and it is not necessarily experienced solely as a sense of powerlessness on the part of women (Walter, 1999). Thus, according to Walter (1999:98), beauty in modern societies can be linked to power rather than powerlessness and submission. The findings of Dellinger and Williams (1997:157) support this view. They interviewed a diverse group of women that included Mexican Americans, African Americans, Hispanic whites, and Taiwanese. These reported that participating in beauty routines such as wearing makeup and styling their hair made them feel more competent. This was partly because of their belief that it influenced the way co-workers viewed them. Thus, Dellinger and Williams (1997:158) asserted that, when young women wear makeup to work, their chances of being promoted increase; thus it can be linked to empowerment. Young women reported that makeup forms part of a 'package' that allows them to feel powerful. It makes them feel more attractive and confident about themselves (Horton, 2019; Dellinger & Williams, 1997:158).

Black and Sharma (2001:113) also concluded that young women are not oblivious to the oppressive role of beauty practices, but still enjoy the positive experiences the beauty salon and beauty practices have to offer. They argue that these practices could also be viewed in a positive light, as these experiences allow women to relax and receive sympathy for their problems from beauticians or hairdressers. This, along with all the visual effects in response to the treatment, helps women experience satisfaction at the transformation of their appearance. According to Black and Sharma (2001:113), beauty practices are also often used to escape an everyday routine. Going for a facial or hair treatment allows women to feel like they are taking care of themselves on emotional as well as physical level. Receiving beauty treatments implies a form of wholeness, which is often a pleasing process (Sharma & Black, 2001:918).

According to more recent studies (Elias & Gill, 2018:69), beauty applications, which are available on most smartphones, have become like a 'best friend' that can rank the individual's facial

appearance. These apps scan a user's face and measure the 'placement and proportions of their features'. Elias and Gill (2018:17) states that these facial assessment apps increase the focus on the female face as a cultural site of value or its lack thereof. Using beauty products and having a facial care routine enables women to receive a higher ranking on apps as described above.

Beauty practices have the potential to empower and oppress and may include activities where pleasure coincides with oppression (Elias et al., 2017:52; Delinger & Williams, 1996:170). Young women find pleasure in many beauty practices, but through it, they are also told what the definition of 'true beauty' entails, and the practices become a way to direct behaviour to the more feminine ideal (Gimlin, 1996:512; Scanlon, 2007:309). Beauty practices help women to become more feminine, and the process is also seen as something essential to being female. The use of beauty products and routines are seen as compulsory in order to be classified and accepted as a feminine young woman (Black, 2002:14). It is important to be viewed as a feminine woman in various contexts, since it influences success, productivity, and mental health (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:264).

Based on the arguments above, beauty practices play an imperative part in emphasising the importance of appearance, since it assists young women to comply with beauty standards and to realise what is expected of a feminine young woman. Beauty practices are an interesting phenomenon for sociological analysis and examination. The next section outlines the problem statement for this study.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

According to Vorster (2014), South African cosmetics sales contribute 6 percent (R17 billion) to the manufacturing industry. Beauty sales have increased in subsequent years; Interget South Africa (2020) reported that, in 2017, the retail sector was valued at R27.35 billion and R19.69 billion at manufacturing level. The largest categories in South Africa were haircare, skincare, and nails. These statistics indicate that beauty routines are an important (and growing) part of the day-to-day lives of South Africans (Department of Industrial Development, 2010).

The Mail and Guardian estimated a 20 percent growth in the sales of personal care and beauty products over the next decade (Holmes, 2015). As part of a study, cosmetics assistants at DisChem in Nicolway shopping centre in Johannesburg reported that customers did not mind spending around R1 500 a month on makeup (Holmes, 2015). This was confirmed by Women24's online Female Nation Survey in 2013, which found that 47% of women in their survey spent between R500 and R1000 on beauty products monthly.

Studies found that young women who wear makeup are more likely to possess high-level job titles (Hamermesh, 2011:41; Dalziel, 2016). A significant number of young women in South Africa pursue higher education and treasure their careers, which can also contribute to some of the reasons why they choose to spend a significant amount of money on their physical appearance. This is further explained by studies that have shown that young women experience oppression in

their careers and social lives because of the difficulties they may experience when resisting the 'ideal female' image imposed on them by institutions and the media (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:264).

It is clear that beauty practices are important to women, but how do young women in particular experience the omnipresence of beauty practices in their lives? Feminists present opposing debates on this question and disagree on whether these practices are oppressive or empowering.

Radical feminists like Andrea Dworkin (1974) and Naomi Wolf (1990) argued that beauty practices are used to exploit and oppress women and prohibit them from reaching their career goals because it diminishes them to sex objects that exists to please men. Liberal feminists like Walter (1999) stated that feminism have afforded women the choice of engaging in beauty practices or not and therefore should be seen as empowering to women.

Given the range and possibility for self-expression and "beauty", one could argue that more research should be done on the meanings that women attach to these practices. The temporal and special differences reported by the studies reviewed, highlights the importance of studying women's beauty customs, its influence on their lives, and the meanings they attach to it in different contexts. Young female millennials are of particular interest, as the milieu they grew up in differs vastly from that of previous generations (Elias & Gill, 2018:60). For example, in South Africa, millennials are one of the first generations born into a free country where women have more access to educational and career opportunities than previous generations. This generation is also the first generation to have grown up with access to the internet and social media. Their perspectives on the importance of beauty rituals may be worlds removed from what is expected and from that of older generations (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

Global research on young women and beauty includes studies by Avelie Stuart and Ngaire Donaghue (2011:106) utilised a post- structuralist framework to examine how Australian women situate themselves as free-choosing agents regarding beauty practices. They acknowledged that women live in a world where beauty rituals are required, but they need to feel that they are engaging in it by choice; otherwise, they would not do it.

Swami *et al.* (2010:375) measured the sexist assumptions attached to beauty in a British community. They measured the sexist assumptions of 1 158 participants across three studies where participants had to complete a series of scales that measured their attitudes toward women, hostility toward women and their tendency to objectify others amongst other. They found that sexist beliefs are associated with Western beauty practices and ideals. Social media also brought about new trends of what is viewed as beautiful. Young women compare themselves to images of their friends and celebrities on Instagram and Facebook, and these images are often filtered to make it look more attractive than it is in reality. Various other beauty tips and tricks are also trending on social media, such as contouring and eye makeup tutorials that supply step-by-step instructions on achieving the "perfect" appearance (Elias & Gill, 2018:69; Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1390).

South African studies on the topic are limited. Thulisile Shelembe (2014:2) focused on the effect of contemporary beauty constructions on female black South African university students and how these perceptions affected their feelings about themselves in relation to their physical appearance. She found that some participants accepted their appearance while others expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies. Shelembe (2014:5) stated that young, black, female women feel that they have to conform to white Western beauty ideals as seen on global media and advertisements. In South Africa, a number of black models are ambassadors for beauty products that were formerly targeted as white women. This has an influence on how young black women view beauty and themselves in relation to what is beautiful.

Another South African study focused on the power of physical attractiveness in the appointment of an employee (Ford *et al.*, 2018:2). Ford *et al.* (2018:9) found that more value is placed on qualifications when it comes to hiring a candidate, however, when two candidates' qualifications are equivalent, the more attractive candidate will be preferred. This indicates that physical attractiveness might not be as significant in the South African work context than would be anticipated. At the North-West University (NWU), studies on young women and beauty have mostly focused on marketing and the factors that influence young women's consumer behaviour. Dalziel (2016) from the NWU conducted research from an Economics study perspective amongst generation Y students in South Africa. This study focused on determining the factors that influence their purchasing behaviour in terms of beauty products. These factors were, among others, the subjective views generation Y students have of beauty products and the influence of celebrities on the purchasing of beauty products.

Liberal feminists acknowledge that beauty practices are not necessarily only oppressive (as perceived by older generation feminists) but can also be empowering and a way to celebrate women's empowerment. It is therefore important to examine how women themselves experience and make sense of beauty practices in their lives. The problem that this study addresses is the lack of academic literature on the topic in South Africa with a particular focus on Potchefstroom, about the meanings that young women attach to beauty habits and routines. From academic (Dalziel, 2016:133-134) and personal observations on social media it is clear that beauty, hair, and nail salons in Potchefstroom are popular and young women in Potchefstroom spend a significant amount of time and money on beautifying their appearance.

### **1.3.1 Research questions**

As discussed earlier, a significant number of women feel the need to conform to beauty standards and ideals, and beauty practices help them to draw near to these ideals. Hence, the main research question of this study is: What meanings do young (aged 21-39) middle-class working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices?

The secondary research questions are:

1. How do the young women conceptualise ideas of (a) beauty, (b) beauty expression, and (c) beauty practices in their own living contexts as young working women?
2. In which ways do young women position themselves as free-choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices?
3. How, in the opinions of the young middle-class working women could beauty practices be potentially constraining?

### **1.3.2 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to examine what meanings young (aged 21-39) middle class working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices.

The specific research objectives are:

1. To explore how young women conceptualise ideas of (a) beauty, (b) beauty expression and (c) beauty practices in their own living contexts as young working women.
2. To examine the ways young women position themselves as free-choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices.
3. To explore the opinions of young middle-class working women of how beauty practices could potentially be constraining.

### **1.4 Central theoretical statement**

This study takes a feminist theoretical position. As already discussed, opposing feminist positions on women's beauty and beauty practices are presented in the literature on the topic. Radical feminists like Wolf (1990:81) states that beauty is often used as a tool for the oppression of women, and Marxist feminists like McRobbie (2015:8) argue that the process of beautification is a capitalist construct and that it is mainly used to exploit women's insecurities and maximise profits by encouraging women to consume more beauty products or treatments. In contrast, liberal feminism and post-feminism argue that those beauty routines are used for the empowerment of women and that women no longer see beauty practices as a form of oppression, but as an enjoyable, freeing and rewarding experience (Elias *et al.*, 2017:53; Walter, 1999).

In this regard, Engeln-Maddox (2006:262) argued that young American women tend to believe that their lives would significantly change if their appearance corresponded with beauty ideals. They associate various rewards with resembling the ideal form of beauty (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:258). According to Dalziel (2016:175) and Holmes (2015), young South African women also go to great lengths to improve their appearance according to national and international trends. This includes among others, buying beauty products that celebrities use (Dalziel, 2015:60). Positive stereotypes accompany beautiful young women, which encourages many young women to strive for beauty. For example, being beautiful reflects a social reality that assumes that women who meet beauty standards are more content and happier with their lives depending on the particular context and ideals (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263). Other South African research has investigated the beauty bias employers have when employing possible candidates for a job

position (Ford *et al.*, 2018:2). Ford *et al.* (2018:2) found that a beauty bias exists but is “less strong than might have been expected”. However, if both candidates are equally qualified, the more physically attractive one would be employed.

Various other feminist perspectives argue that discontent with their appearance is problematic because it could cause them to focus only on appearance-related issues, thus overlooking resources that would empower them (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:259). Objectification theory of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) emphasises the problem of obsessing over appearances by stating that a certain cultural climate causes an objectification of women’s appearances, where the physical appearance is constantly evaluated and compared to local or international beauty trends. The conclusion is therefore that young women expect their lives to improve when they apparently meet the cultural standards of femininity by engaging in beauty practices (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997)

To meet Anglo-American standards of femininity, as portrayed by social media, films, and advertisements, women must follow more or less the same beauty procedures. Beauty institutions like salons follow mostly the same type of patterns in their treatments and procedures, like waxing and manicure or pedicures, which are mainly accomplished in a mechanised manner (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:264). More recent literature states that beauty tutorials on Instagram are focused on showing how to attain the trend of the season, for example contouring, which is a manner of applying foundation that shapes the face in a more attractive manner (Elias *et al.*, 2017:273). Weitz (2001:668) and Dellinger and Williams (1997:152) both drew on the work of Foucault (1979), who argued that in Western societies, individuals are required to have “docile bodies”, in which their actions should be executed in a mechanical manner, like factory workers. Hence, most beauty practices can be considered an attempt at subordinating women, because young women act upon and internalise the different standards of feminine beauty, which reinforce their own subordination.

White (2018:139-140) noted that modern feminism tends to focus on the restrictions of beauty practices and how certain types of fashion restrict the economic and political advancement of women. White (2018:139) agrees with Walter (1999:86) that admitted that, in the past, feminine clothes were an extension of a culture that encouraged women to stay in the domestic sphere. However, Walter (1999:86) argued in 1999 that empowerment can form part of feminine practices. She argued that women delight in choosing different outfits, matching a variety of colours and fabrics with shoes and accessories. It is, therefore, necessary to question whether women need saving from the pressures of a “mysterious beauty conspiracy”. Walter (1999:101) admits that some women are unsatisfied with their appearances, but survey results show that most are comfortable with themselves. White (2018: 145) states that some vloggers on YouTube also strengthen messages of empowerment through makeup and beauty practices.

McRobbie (2007:270) writing from a Marxist feminist perspective (i.e., critique new feminist theories and feminist 'buzzwords' that hint that early feminism have accomplished its goals), uses Walby's model, which states that globalisation offered new possibilities for women in terms of public standing, businesses, and politics. However, in public standings as such, women are expected to meet cultural requirements to keep this specific position. Bradley (2013:82) describes McRobbie as a sociologist who focused on the cultural consumption of women and showed interest in how cultural consumption influences the identities of young women. McRobbie's (2015:8) most recent contribution argues that cultural consumption leads to the destruction of feminism and all the movement has done for the advancement of women. Choice, individualisation, and freedom according to her, are thus seen as illusory products of repressive neoliberalism (Bradley, 2013:82).

The influence of popular culture on feminism as a social movement is one of the most under-researched topics. This is important to grasp because some scholars state that certain aspects of popular culture negate what feminism has done for the political and economic advancement of women (McRobbie, 2009:16). McRobbie (2009:43) argues that certain cultural practices use a form of feminism, for example terms like 'empowerment' and 'choice' are popularly used, but it does nothing for the advancement of women. Popular culture also indicates that feminism is no longer necessary in the lives of modern women, by presenting feminism as a historical movement. Postfeminist culture encourages young women to be consumers by conveying a message of female empowerment on the condition that women take part in consumerism.

According to McRobbie (2007:718; 2015), 'sexual contracts' have been given to young women in postmodern societies. These sexual contracts state that women do not have the freedom to choose how they look. Women are given a 'blueprint' of what femininity should look like and they earn approval based on how closely they resemble this blueprint. The best way to emulate this ideal is by following the prescribed beauty practices (Dworkin, 1974). This reiterates an earlier point, that fashion and beauty practices have become a replacement for traditional forms of patriarchy. Popular culture makes the statement that young women are more visible in the public sphere than ever before. However, this statement carries with it an expectation of the way young women should present themselves. McRobbie (2009:68) criticizes modern beauty customs, because it undoes what feminism sought to accomplish over the years. She argues that feminism has lost its place and purpose in the political sphere, which gives occasion for reinstated patriarchy and the renewal of gender injustices (McRobbie, 2007:270). The spotlight on the alleged new freedom and individualisation of young women hides the hidden side effects of unhealthy obsessions over appearance and the torturous lengths women go to achieve that much-celebrated ideal. The central theoretical argument will therefore be a critical Marxist feminist position and its main tenets.

## **1.5 Methodological framework**

The following section outlines the methodological approaches and research design that was the most appropriate for conducting this research. It includes the broad research design, methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and addresses the epistemological and ontological questions. It also supplies more information on the population and sample of this study. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

### **1.5.1 Methodological approach**

Bryman (2016) defines research approaches as the procedures or plans that direct the steps of the researcher regarding data collection, analysis and the interpretation thereof. Research designs and methods should be chosen to best suit what will be investigated.

Quantitative research is concerned with data in the form of numbers. It is mainly associated with surveys and experiments and uses research methods like questionnaires and observations (Denscombe, 2010). A qualitative research design is more concerned with words than with numbers. Bryman (2016:318) argues that qualitative research is also favoured among feminist researchers because it provides greater occasion for feminist sensitivity to guide the research.

Qualitative research is mainly concerned with meaning and lived experience and how people make sense of the structures around them (Atieno, 2009:14). Qualitative methods were therefore highly appropriate for this study since it investigated the meanings young women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of young women. A qualitative structure allowed for an in-depth perspective on these experiences, rather than determining the extent to which certain views occurred (Merriam *et al.* 2016).

It is also important to understand the relationship between theory and research when doing social research. This includes considering that certain assumptions and views, such as the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher, will influence the research process. The first assumption that guides the research is epistemological considerations. Epistemology is concerned with knowledge and that which is deemed acceptable knowledge. It also reflects on the way information is gathered and the most appropriate method for the specific context. Interpretivism is the opposite of positivism: the interpretive form of epistemology argues that subjects studied in social sciences differ significantly from what is studied in natural sciences. Hence, it is necessary to use a different kind of logic to correctly approach social phenomena (Bryman, 2016:24). This study makes use of an interpretive epistemological framework that allows the researcher to understand the personal views and the meanings young women attach to beauty practices. An example of another study that made use of this framework is Shelembe (2014).

The second philosophical assumption is that of ontology, which is concerned with social reality. As ontological position, objectivism suggests that social phenomena are an external reality that

is beyond reach or influence (Creswell & Poth, 2018:20). Thus, it suggests that social order places pressure on individuals to conform to a specific culture. This then causes people to follow rules and regulations and standardised procedures. According to objectivism, culture is shared values and customs that people are socialised in, and are expected to respect and internalise. The second ontological position is that of constructionism – the opposite of objectivism. It does not see culture as an external reality, but one that is in an endless state of construction and reconstruction (Bryman, 2016:29). In this study, a constructivist ontological position is the most appropriate because this study is concerned with the personal reality of young women and the ways they construct and reconstruct it. A constructivist position allows the researcher to gain an understanding of the different meanings young women attach to beauty practices.

### **1.5.2 Population and sampling**

The sampling of a study has to do with the selection of units, people, organisations, or the most relevant group to answer the research question. The research questions should provide guidelines as to which sample is required. This study made use of purposive sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling and which is primarily used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling was appropriate, since it allowed the researcher to recruit participants in a strategic way, insofar as the participants and their experiences were relevant to answer the research questions (Creswell *et al.* 2018:158).

In this study, the researcher considered which units of analysis were best suited to the study. In this case, it was young, white, working middle-class women, aged between 21 and 39 who participate in beauty practices and beauty routines (hair styling, makeup, nail treatments, facials, waxing), whether at home or beauty salons. These criteria were relevant, since working, white, middle-class women in all likelihood have the means to engage in beauty routines and treatments (Black, 2004). White middle-class women were selected because majority of beauty standards are based on white beauty ideals and participants likely identify with the women used in beauty advertisements and feel significant pressure to embody these beauty ideals (Elias & Gill, 2018:67). The media also use women of this age to advertise various beauty products and practices, and it is most likely women in this age bracket who experience the most pressure to emulate the appearance of their media counterparts. Interviews were conducted with 20 participants, who were recruited in Potchefstroom.

### **1.5.3 Data collection instruments**

Bryman (2016:46) defines a research method as a technique for the collection of data. It can include open-ended or unstructured questionnaires, structured interviews, or both. The research methods also influence how the findings of the study are interpreted (Bryman, 2016:5). A variety of research procedures can be used for qualitative data collection. The data collection instrument most suitable for this study was interviews. Interviews generally involve face-to-face conversations and typically use semi-structured and open-ended questions. According to Merriam *et al.* (2016:1117), practice is needed to conduct good interviews, which delivers good data.

Therefore, this study made use of pilot interviews, which gave the researcher an idea of which questions needed rewording, which questions yielded useless data, and if there should be questions added to the semi-structured questionnaire. This study made use of a semi-structured interview schedule, which was effective because it gave some structure, but also allowed some spontaneity during the interviews, which resulted in a rich variety of data (Merriam *et al.*, 2016:1117). This format allowed the researcher to gain in-depth information on the participants' subjective experiences and perspectives. The researcher asked permission to record the interviews before the interviews commenced. These recordings were transcribed (Creswell, 2013:190).

#### **1.5.4 Strategy for data analysis**

Gray (2014:606) describes data analysis as the process of revealing the data's characteristic elements and structure. The goal of qualitative data analysis is to interpret, understand, and to explain. The interpretation process requires the researcher to be creative and critical in decisions about the significance of certain themes, patterns, and categories. Interpretation also includes conveying the larger meaning of the data (Creswell *et al.* 2018:195).

Silverman (2011:121) states that data analysis does not always have to come after data collection, since a researcher can start with the transcription process after the first interview. Transcription was started after the first interview of this study had been conducted. This created an opportunity to review the questions in the semi-structured questionnaire. The researcher transcribed the interviews directly after the actual interview, to familiarise herself with the data as early in the process as possible.

Coding in qualitative thematic analysis is in an ongoing state of revision and fluidity. Data is treated as indicators of concepts that are compared with other concepts they fit best. Thus, this study used coding as a strategy for data analysis, where findings are categorised into certain themes that are found throughout. These themes are then analysed in the discussion of findings.

This study made use of open and selective coding. Open coding refers to the comparison and categorisation of data. The data was divided into fragments and these fragments were grouped into categories related to the same subject, and were then labelled with a code. According to Boeije (2010), open coding takes place when the first data is collected. Data is not yet selected in terms of its relevance to the research material, since it is too early in the process to predict what will be of value. Selective coding follows the open coding, and this involves connecting the categories to gain a better understanding of the data. During this phase, the researcher looks for patterns or relationships in the data.

#### **1.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical behaviour is an essential part of social research, as it involves the participation of people. Therefore, to successfully conduct a study, certain ethical principles should be borne in mind. The ethics revolve around the conduct of the researcher, including how the participants are treated

and activities that should be avoided. Four main areas of ethical behaviour must be considered during research. The next section discusses these four areas to emphasise the importance of ethics in social research.

Firstly, any form of harm to participants is unethical. This includes physical harm, developmental harm, and emotional harm (e.g., causing stress or low self-esteem). No harm was done in this research project. The interview schedule did not include intrusive or potentially sensitive topics, which limited the likelihood of any possible harm. However, the researcher was cautious of causing discomfort to participants by, for example, placing too much focus on a personal or sensitive question (Bryman, 2016:526).

The second ethical issue is that of informed consent. Participants were given as much as possible information about the study and the research process beforehand so they could make an informed choice on their participation in the study (Bryman, 2016:527). Therefore, the researcher made use of consent forms, which allowed participants to be fully informed of the nature of the research and what their participation and involvement entailed (Bryman, 2016:529).

The third ethical issue is invasion of privacy. Participants to this study had the right not to answer certain questions, even if they had agreed to be interviewed. This was stated in the consent forms. The issue is also linked to anonymity and confidentiality. Participants' personal information is kept confidential, which means that the researcher alone knows that this is their personal perspective or experience. This was done by allowing participants to choose pseudonyms to prevent a participant from being connected to a specific experience or perspective.

Lastly, Bryman (2016:531) mentions that it is unethical to deceive individuals into participating in the research or to manipulate their responses. Deception occurs when research is represented as something that it is not. Researchers use deception to gain professional self-interest. Thus, the researcher was sensitive not to supply participants with false information about the study.

The researcher made the interview schedule available in advance. During interviews, the recorder was switched on when the first question was asked and switched off when the participant had answered the last question. Interviews and transcriptions are password protected and these transcripts will be stored at the faculty for a minimum of 7 years. The findings of this study are made available to the participants on request

## **1.7 The significance of the study**

The main focus of this study was to explore the meanings that young working women in Potchefstroom associate with beauty practices. As seen in the theoretical statement, women experience pressures regarding their physical appearance. The literature consulted presented opposing arguments stating that some women find the 'requirements' of femininity oppressive, while others consider it an empowering experience that allows them to change and enhance their natural appearance (Walter, 1999).

Women in South Africa, as in many parts of the world, have increased their presence in the public and business spheres. Some literature purports that the success and progress that women have shown in these areas are largely dependent on their physical attractiveness. In light of this, it just makes sense to explore whether women find beauty practices such as makeup, nail and hair care oppressive or empowering. Do their daily beauty regimes prevent them from having an individual fingerprint in terms of their identity in society, or allow them to celebrate it?

This study contributes to the broader field of research on the effects of beauty practices while informing scholars of the specific value young women in Potchefstroom attach to their own beauty practices. Potchefstroom is a university town and home to swarms of young female students. Through the data collection phase of this research, participants were made aware of notions regarding beauty practices that had not occurred to them before. They may have learned more about the oppressive and empowering sides of beauty through the questions they were asked. Although the contribution of this study may be small in terms of its sample, it constitutes a piece of the larger puzzle that is the relationship between women and beauty. It informs academia in the field of sociology of the meanings young, middle-class white women in Potchefstroom attach to beauty practices. This can be cited again in other studies regarding beauty practices.

## **1.8 Outline of chapters**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter serves as a prelude to the study and contextualises the focus of the study.

### **Chapter 2: A theoretical review**

This chapter provides a thorough overview of previous research done in related areas and presents feminist theoretical perspectives on the topic.

### **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter provides information on the research design, sampling methods, data collection instruments, data analysis strategies, and ethical issues that were considered in this study.

### **Chapter 4: Findings and interpretation of findings**

In this chapter, the themes that were identified during the empirical research process are outlined and discussed. The findings are interpreted with the aim of answering the research questions.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations**

The last chapter of this study mainly focuses on concluding the study and providing recommendations for future studies on a similar topic.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 1 served as an overall introduction to this study. It included the background, problem statement, research questions, research objectives and proposed methodology. The main research question of this study was identified as examining the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. This chapter discusses the theoretical basis of the study that assisted the researcher in answering the research question.

In the 1990s, feminists had robust disagreements about beauty practices and the so-called feminine ideal. Some deemed beauty practices a force of women's subordination, and others regarded beauty practices as an expression of choice and agency. This debate about the oppressive effect of beauty practices versus the alleged empowerment it offers still rages on today. This chapter considers both arguments by exploring the different theoretical perspectives scholars have applied to examine beauty and its effects on women.

Unpacking the different perspectives on beauty and its role in the lives of women assisted the researcher in interpreting the meanings women attach to beauty practices. This chapter helps to situate the current study in the wider subject area. Beauty practices in this study are defined as treatments offered at salons and at-home treatments women can do themselves, and include hair styling and care, beauty therapies, makeup and cosmetics.

Chapter 2 consists of three sections. First, it discusses feminist criticism of beauty from the 1970s. These radical feminist debates are discussed chronologically to demonstrate how arguments on the topic have developed. In the second place, the chapter discusses liberal feminist views of beauty as a response to and criticism of beauty as oppressive. These feminists acknowledged the possibly empowering effect beauty practices could have on women's lives. Thirdly, the chapter examines recent criticisms of the liberal feminist stance. Freedom of choice is questioned when women experience negative feedback to their natural appearance. These critiques also include how beauty practices are promoted and sold as empowering expressions of freedom, which often influences women's autonomy regarding their use.

### **2.2 Feminist foundations: a critique of beauty**

This section lays the foundation for the literature discussed in this chapter. It draws on feminist scholars who shaped the debate on beauty for decades. First, the argument of beauty practices as source of oppression is discussed. It demonstrates how beauty, as a social construct, directs women's behaviour and influences how they view themselves. Then follows a discussion of the submission of women to the feminine prototype, as well as how beauty practices alienate women from their own bodies. Lastly, the socialisation of women and beauty as performance are discussed.

### **2.2.1 Andrea Dworkin and the blueprint of femininity**

During the 1970s, radical feminist and writer Andrea Dworkin (1974:114) was one of the first scholars to examine the practices of beauty as an oppressive force in the lives of women. Dworkin (1974:26-28) argues that women receive a 'blueprint' of what femininity should look like, and this feminine blueprint entails behaviour such as beautifying themselves, smiling and exposing their bodies (Dworkin, 1974:21). She states that, even when a woman is not born beautiful, she could make herself attractive with procedures like applying makeup, removing her bodily hair, and deodorising (Dworkin, 1974:114).

In her writings, she remarks on how women are liberating themselves from domesticity ('the kitchen') and into public roles ('meetings and newspapers'). However, despite being liberated from oppressive roles in the household, they still adhere to the feminine blueprint. This blueprint, according to Dworkin (1974), helps them survive and even flourish in a sexist world where those in power are most often men. Thus, Dworkin (1974:21) argues that women feel the need to appeal to men to progress in their careers, and this is achieved by conforming to the feminine blueprint. Beauty practices are used to give women a commercialised appearance and meet the blueprint of femininity, and therefore convince people that they are good and moral citizens of society (Dworkin, 1974:26-28).

Outer appearance is often viewed as an announcement of what is going on inside of a woman, e.g., that she is respectable, responsible and hardworking, or neglectful and lazy. Dworkin (1974:27) explains that the assumption that appearance reflects the character of the individual dates back to Aristotle. Those who were beautiful were good, and those who were ugly, evil (Jeacle, 2006:90). Hence, beauty is associated with goodness; it is used in phrases of popular language like, 'divinely beautiful'. Ugliness, on the other hand, is linked to hell and sin, for example, 'she looks like hell' or 'she is ugly as sin'. Ugliness is represented as reflecting an inner ugliness or evil, whereas beauty is depicted as being morally good and having a spiritual beauty. When considered in this light, the role of beauty practices becomes vital.

Dworkin (1974:32) writes that, from the time women are too young to question what is taught, they are given only a few options of female heroic figures. In fairy tales, the young ladies are products of the feminine blueprint. In Snow White and Cinderella, the princesses are depicted as unrealistically beautiful and in need of a hero to save her. In each of these fairy tales, a kiss from the prince revives her from a deep sleep or death. The lesson is that girls should be good and beautiful, but mostly passive, unquestioning and unthinking. A more recent study (Coyne *et al.*, 2016:1919) found that engagement with Disney princesses via films and toys, increases gender stereotypical behaviour under children.

Dworkin (1974:32) stated that girls in Anglo – American contexts were socialised to believe that there is power in beauty, because it draws admiration, alliance and devotion, most often from men. Women, therefore, try to appeal to the physical senses of men by enhancing their beauty: colouring and treating their hair, applying makeup and wearing perfume. Dworkin (1974:47)

argues that this is a dangerous position for women, for it is then that they willingly expose themselves to be used and abused, and become dependent on male approval to succeed.

Dworkin (1974) inspired a significant number of other studies that questioned and examined the role of feminine beauty in the lives of women. These include Freedman (1986), Bartky (1990), Wolf (1990:3), McRobbie (2009:68), Jeffreys (2005:11) and others. Their contributions are discussed next.

### **2.2.2 The beauty myth: submitting to the feminine prototype**

Freedman (1986:51), a radical feminist, agrees with Dworkin (1974:114) and states that women seek to establish their individual self through beautification; but in the process of striving to become increasingly like the feminine prototype, they lose their individuality. Women act and dress like other women to be liked and accepted by others, and in the process use their bodies to tell social lies. Women may feel that there is power in resembling the feminine blueprint, but it is not real power. Thus, it keeps women in subordinate positions (Freedman, 1986; Dworkin, 1974:191).

With her feminine features, a woman signals that she is not a threat, because she is a passive and submissive woman. Any behaviour that hints at a dominant nature threatens the feminine image, and is ugly and dangerous. When women choose to violate the 'beauty scripts' they have been given, they are seen as less feminine and womanly (Freedman, 1986:74). Women who are obsessed with their bodies deny its sensations when undergoing painful procedures. The saying 'beauty is pain' illustrates the expectation that one has to endure pain to be beautiful (Freedman, 1986:51).

The cultural construct of beauty has an influence on how women view themselves, because women internalise these constructs. This places pressure on her to conform to conduct expected of a beauty contestant, such as not talking too loudly and suppressing intense emotions. Freedman (1986:219) adds that the way women reflect back to themselves in the mirror is more important than physical appearance when analysing beauty as a construct. It is to acknowledge how the myth of beauty has influenced the way they see themselves.

In 1990, Naomi Wolf published 'The Beauty Myth'. In this book, she argues that the pressures of beauty keep women enslaved in subordinate positions. Wolf (1990:274) states that women keep these structures of beauty in place by keeping each other accountable to them. For example, women judge other women on their appearance and behaviour. Women who are publicly seen giving speeches are often negatively judged by other women. Hence, other women are dissuaded from identifying with these women. It thus creates a certain fear of stepping into the public, because they are putting themselves out there to be judged on their appearance (Wolf, 1990:274). Fear of being judged ensures that women maintain their beauty regimens.

Unattainable beauty standards leave most women feeling inferior and ugly. Even if women are able to achieve the standard, it still does not guarantee acceptance from others or themselves

(Wolf, 1990:189; see also Freedman, 1986). Thus, Wolf (1990:290) mainly argues that women's perceptions of themselves and other women need to change. She theorised that women should aim to change the rules so their own sense of beauty cannot be shaken.

The media contributes to this strict regulation of the appearance of women. According to Wolf (1990:16-18) writing from an American perspective, the media and other advertising businesses flourish because of the appearance-based insecurities of individuals. Young women will go to any length and buy any variety of products to fit the beauty standards. Certain beauty practices like makeup have become a defence against the judgement of society. Women are often too afraid to leave the house without makeup. They feel exposed without it, and makeup can protect them from social forces that might threaten them (Wolf, 1990:46-47).

Hence, fear of judgment can keep women in subordinate positions. Wolf (1990:275) wrote about the beauty myth as a form of social control. Women still experience oppression because of the standards to which they have to conform. Wolf (1990:3) and Dworkin (1974) concur that social control over women has shifted to controlling their appearances. Wolf (1990:285) further argued that the high regulation of appearances is the real hurdle in the struggle for gender equality.

### **2.2.3 Beauty practices: alienating women from their bodies**

Bartky (1990:71), a Marxist feminist, also echoes the theories of Dworkin (1974:13) by stating that women are expected to fulfil beauty requirements or suffer social contempt. She further explains that women are as much defined by their looks as by their deeds, and they are expected to apply cosmetics. Their bodies should resemble the ideal feminine form as prescribed by society (Bartky, 1990:71).

Bartky (1990:33) quotes Dinah Shore who said that the self-esteem of women mainly rests upon their appearance. If a woman is unsatisfied with her appearance, it affects all her other achievements. Feminist scholars argue that this is not a personal feeling that is unique to women, or something that is inherently a part of being female. It is something women have 'learned' from the way society has been structured over decades (Wolf, 1990:60-67).

Bartky (1990:31) applies Marx's theory of alienation to women's experiences of beauty: women are estranged from the aspect of their own femininity. Bartky (1990:40) terms this the "fashion-beauty complex", where women are estranged from themselves because they are constantly reminded that their bodies are deficient. Sexual objectification of women's bodies can lead to this alienation. Sexual objectification requires an objectifier and an objectified, but these roles can be assumed by the same person. Women are socialised to perceive themselves the way men do – as sexual objects. However, the woman becomes estranged from herself because sexual objectification requires separation of the person from the sexual object, which is her body (Bartky, 1990: 35). Ironically, this also leads to a sense of contentment, as she has successfully managed to become what society deems a 'sex object' (Bartky, 1990:28).

In 1990, it was important for Wolf (1990:270-291) and Bartky (1990:12) that women become aware of outside forces responsible for their unequal treatment. Every woman who had ever been discriminated against for her appearance should know that she is one of many, and this awareness could create a sense of solidarity among women. Wolf (1990:287) felt that the disempowerment of the beauty myth would change the environment for women. She considered the beauty myth the central source of social oppression of women, as women were pressurised to conform to an ideal very few could ever meet (Bartky, 1990:22 & Wolf, 1990:287).

Bartky (1990:86) states that women have internalised patriarchal standards for their own bodies to the extent that they feel shame and punish themselves if they are unable to conform to these standards. Unfortunately, internalising and conforming to these standards provide women with a secure identity and some advantages in their personal lives. This statement echoes Freedman's (1986) premise that women seem to be empowered by conforming to beauty standards, although the power is not real.

According to Bartky (1990:86-90) beauty practices become oppressive when women come to depend on them for appearing acceptable and to avoid feelings of shame. If there is a lack of an alternative culture in which women can find other ways to identify as women, it automatically enforces oppression (Bartky, 1990:25). Various later studies like those of Black and Sharma (2001), Jeffreys (2006) and McRobbie, (2009) is in agreement with Bartky's (1990:25) theories and these will be discussed in the following sections.

#### **2.2.4 Socialising women: Beauty as performance**

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:186) state that sexual objectification could be deemed one of the main reasons why women experience workplace discrimination and sexual violence. The same authors proposed that objectification is when a woman is viewed as only a body or certain body parts, to be used only for self-satisfaction. This confirms Bartky's (1990:32) theory that a woman's beauty is 'split off from herself and turned against her'.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:180) aimed at building a framework to understand the experiences of being a woman in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body. Women are socialised to treat and view themselves as objects. They see themselves as objects or sights that should be appreciated by others (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:180). This results in identifying with how observers view them, and it ends with ownership of these values by incorporating it into their sense of self (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:177; Swami *et al.*, 2010:371). Women's bodies are portrayed as if it represents their personalities and qualifications (Bartky, 1990:26-29).

A woman's appearance can positively influence her life experiences, which causes a preoccupation with appearance. Research has shown that physical attractiveness correlates highly with dating and marriage opportunities (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:178). Women feel compelled to engage in beauty practices because it is contingent on how others will treat them. Bartky (1990:33-35) also argues that a certain sense of narcissism is required to be classified as

feminine. Narcissism in this regard is viewed as women who obsessively consult a mirror or each other for approval and praise their physical appearance (Bartky, 1990:37-38).

Beauty practices are essentially a key part of the female gender identity. It is something women do to make them feel and appear more feminine. Butler (1990:34) states that gender identity is a “performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo”. Butler (1990:33-34) argues that beautifying and performing certain rituals linked to femininity, is not an expression of identity; it is the creation of identity. Gender identity is therefore not something static, but is constantly being created and recreated. Beauty practices play a significant role in the socialisation of girls. Wearing makeup is seen as a rite of passage when a girl becomes “old enough” to be considered a young woman. This socialisation is what Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:178) describe as the process women go through to view themselves as objects.

## **2.3 The Rewards of Beauty**

As was discussed, beauty practices become a source of oppression when there is only a small variety of feminine images or ‘blueprints’ women can choose from (Dworkin, 1990; Bartky, 1990:25). However, women feel that conforming to this restricted form of femininity offers various rewards, including pleasure and autonomy (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263). Thus, scholars acknowledge the fact that, although beauty practices may be restrictive, they also offer rewards and pleasure, and potential empowerment for women who engage in these practices. This section investigates some of the rewards and the positive meanings that women attach to beauty.

First, this section discusses the function of beauty practices in work environments and analyses its function in professional settings. Second, it considers the ways in which beautifying can be a potential feminist practice. This then leads to the third point; arguments that insist that beauty should no longer be viewed only as restrictive, but regarded as an escape and a place of solidarity with other women. Fourth, the positive stereotypes of beauty are discussed.

### **2.3.1 The function of beauty practices in work environments**

In the world of work in an American society, beautiful women are valued above others. Studies show that they are more often recommended for promotions and pay raises (Wong, 2016). As Aristotle said, “Beauty is a greater recommendation than any letter of introduction”. This still rings true today. Dellinger and Williams (1997:165-167) found that certain assumptions are made about women who would conform to societal standards of beauty, and about those who do not. Many positive qualities are ascribed to beauty, like competency, and high moral standards (Hamermesh, 2011) Israeli research like those of Segal-Caspi et al., 2012:1112 agrees with this. Korean research states that other stereotypes accompany beautified women, like being trustworthy, kind-hearted and competent, and as scholars have demonstrated, this can be useful in social situations and in the workplace (Kim & Lee, 2018:14). South African research (Ford et al., 2018: 11) stated that qualifications weigh heavier than appearance when it come to the employment of an individual.

If women are not considered beautiful – by nature or with the help of cosmetics – they risk their careers by being labelled incompetent and untrustworthy, since they ‘can’t even take care of themselves’ (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:165). Ghodsee (2007) agrees with this and states that research has shown that women who comply with beauty standards receive higher incomes and have higher chances of receiving promotions. She found that women who are deemed beautiful by cultural standards are set up to be more successful in a capitalist society (Ghodsee, 2007).

Women’s lived experiences, as Dellinger and Williams (1997:157) found, also differ from one another. South Korean research found that beautification is central to the female experience and is something that binds together women of various backgrounds, ethnic groups and classes (Kim & Lee, 2018:2). For instance, each woman’s professional circumstances differ from the next. Some are employed full time or part time, or work from home. Women not only wear makeup to look good, but to avoid negative comments from co-workers. In a study by Dellinger and Williams (1997:156), women confirmed that, on occasions when they did not wear makeup, co-workers asked whether they felt sick or tired. This caused them to feel more self-conscious, because they internalise these comments about their appearance (Ivanaj *et al.*, 2018:870). Women who run their own businesses from home stated that they wear make-up to look presentable for their clients. They are concerned about how their clients view them; they feel that their looks may have consequences for the success of their business. It may also have a negative impact on their overall productivity (Ivanaj *et al.*, 2018:871).

Gimlin (1996:519) agrees that women enhance their appearances to succeed in their careers. For example, hairstyles are used to convey a certain image. Women in male-dominated occupations prefer hairstyles that forge a professional identity to make them look more serious. In professions like law enforcement, age is associated with experience, so women may style their appearances to look older. In the modelling or film industry, women wear makeup because it makes them look younger. However, in the process of meeting these standards, women still want to feel like they are expressing some aspect of their personality. Hairstyles are used to indicate and express aspects of the self. A specific type of femininity is expressed through a different type of hairstyle, which must match the client’s marital status, income, and age. In this way, beauty practices can be seen as a source of empowerment to women, since it encourages a form of self-expression and situates them in a specific class (Gimlin, 1996:518). South African research (Ford *et al.*, 2018: 8) refutes this by stating that managers in South Africa are not swayed by physical appearances. They were unable to confirm that attractive people are hired in South Africa based on the belief that they viewed as more competent or successful. They found that more relevance is placed on the qualifications of the possible candidate to assess their suitability to fill the position (Ford *et al.*, 2018: 9).

### **2.3.2 Beautification as a feminist practice**

In contrast with the arguments of Dworkin (1974), Bartky (1990) and McRobbie (2009:66), Cahill (2003:44) and White (2018:144) argue that beautification could be a feminist practice and

empower women. Even though women do not always have control of how the product of beauty practices will be perceived, the process of beautification can be empowering. Cahill (2003:45) emphasises that beauty should be understood by seeing the woman as an artist. Cahill (2003:45) agrees with Gimlin (1996:518), that women use these practices as a form of self-expression.

There is much pleasure to be obtained from activities associated with beauty. For most women, the experience is liberating, relaxing and even empowering (Black, 2002:8). In a setting like the beauty salon, women see the hairdresser as a 'tool' for creating the desired hairstyle. The hairstylist should have a good idea of the client's personality type to be able to style her hair according to her wishes (Cahill, 2003; Gimlin, 1996:519).

According to Cahill (2003:44), make-up, hairstyling and dressing fashionably can have a place in feminist practices. This can include receiving beauty treatments at a beauty salon, going to the hairdresser or applying makeup. Cahill (2003:50) considers it a strong feminist statement when women gain pleasure and satisfaction from these practices. When women feel that they have exercised their free will, it gives them pleasure (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011).

Beautification can be oppressive, depending on the gaze women are perceived with. Cahill (2003:50) states that there are two different gazes: one is oppressive, and the other is empowering. When men gaze upon a woman as an object, claiming her beauty for himself, the gaze is oppressive. However, when a woman's beauty is appreciated and acknowledged, the gaze is empowering.

Lastly, Cahill (2003:61) states that the "process" of beautifying might just be the best and sometimes the only fun part. The moment the beautified woman steps out into public, she no longer has any control of how her beauty will be perceived. When beauty is viewed as equipment, rather than something that is artistically and creatively constructed, the image of the woman becomes abused for someone else's pleasure and she is no longer seen as a full human being.

### **2.3.3 The beauty salon: an escape from capitalist pressures and solidarity with other women**

Scanlon (2007:312) explored how beauty is portrayed in films and how this connects with real and historic beauty culture. In most films where women receive beauty treatments in a salon, it portrays an image of solidarity with other women. It provides women with a place where they can have a relationship with themselves as well as with other women. It also depicts a "feminist fantasy of personal growth" and individual empowerment (Scanlon, 2007:310). The silver screen does not show the complicated nature of beauty or the power relations at work in beauty culture. Films portray beauty as empowering to the individual.

Black (2002:3) states that the beauty salon should be viewed as an intersection of various other aspects that could be of sociological importance. The beauty salon is a space where other bodily discourses, for example, health and well-being, intersect with beauty; this should be considered when doing research that includes beauty practices (Black, 2002:3). Intersecting themes become

visible when the functions of beauty practices are evaluated. For example, a beauty salon is a space where women are taught how to look and groom themselves. Beauty practices also constitute an escape from the normal work routine, and it forms a part of taking time for the self (Black, 2002:71).

Beauty practices and visits to the beauty or hair salon have also become part of women's daily, weekly or monthly routines (Black, 2004:7). South African women have also confirmed that beauty practices become a normal part of a monthly routine (Heggenstaller *et al.*, 2018:73). It is not the beautification process alone that give women pleasure, but the experience as a whole (Cahill, 2003:60; White, 2018). Women enjoy pampering treatments like pedicures, massages and facials. The pampering treatments are seen as a luxury and escape from day-to-day activities (Black, 2002:71). Treatments that can be described as pampering are less "painful" than other treatments such as waxing or plucking. Pampering is about feeling good, where the aim of grooming is to look 'normal' or appropriate. Anderssen (2017:30) found that these beauty practices should not be equated with spoiling, but with peace of mind, or being energised to face another day. It comes down to taking responsibility for one's health.

Beauty practices have positive connotations for women. Women try hard to avoid identification with the negative connotations with beauty practices. Vanity, self-obsession, and "pretty but stupid" are negative associations women aim to avoid (Hamermesh, 2011; Black, 2004:44). The closer a woman is to achieving the "feminine ideal", the further removed she is from rational thought and the work of the mind (Dworkin, 1997). Thus, many women claim to not be too preoccupied with the external, and even deny going for "beauty treatments"; salon visits are for grooming, health treatments and pampering (Black, 2004:16-17). Beauty therapists also describe their line of work as helping women relax, escape from their normal routines, and feel better. Referring directly to beauty triggers all the wrong associations. It also focuses more on relaxation than beauty, since many women feel that they do not want to be a part of the group of women chasing physical perfection (Black, 2002: 45).

Women would rather book "corrective" (Black, 2002:14), grooming, and health treatments at their salon. Clients do not necessarily describe these treatments as pleasurable, but as something that must be done and is not always joyfully anticipated. "Corrective" treatments are often done mainly because women want to feel and look "normal" rather than beautiful. Anderssen (2017) agrees with Gimlin (1996:518) that achieving a "normal" and appropriate appearance is largely dependent on class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality. According to therapists, what looks good on a 25-year-old may not look good on a 65-year-old, and vice versa. An appropriate appearance also depends on the social and geographical space women find themselves in, such as the workplace, private spaces, or public spaces. To be classified as appropriate and recognised as feminine in each of these environments, a woman's demeanour should be adaptable.

For most women, the beauty salon conjures up an image of physical perfection, especially for those who do not enter it. Women often feel that they will be intimidated and judged by these allegedly perfect women and staff in the beauty salon. Research has found that most salon clients and staff are quite ordinary (Black, 2002:46).

Therapists feel that all women should feel good enough, regardless of their appearance. Women live in a society where they must change all the time – their hairstyles, bodies and makeup – in order to fit in. However, therapists view the spa as a space where women can be themselves and stand on equal footing with other women there. Therapists also believe that pampering is vital for mental health. They see it as a kind of well-deserved maintenance (Anderssen, 2017:29).

### **2.3.4 Positive stereotypes attached to beauty**

Strong stereotypes regarding beauty manifest in the lives of women. Young women believe that a variety of positive consequences will follow if they are able to closely resemble social standards. Beauty practices allow women to resemble feminine ideals set by the fashion world and social media (Elias et al., 2017:37, Engeln-Maddox, 2006:206). In this light, beauty practices can be useful, as it enriches their lives and increases satisfaction (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:262). A South African study also found that participants do not feel pretty or like a woman when their bodies do not represent their own feminine ideals (Heggenstaller *et al.*, 2018: 76)

The participants in a study by Engeln-Maddox (2006:263) disclosed that they would have increased confidence and self-esteem. Women reported that if they could achieve beauty ideals, they would also experience less pressure and criticism about their looks from family and friends (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263). Research has found that expecting positive outcomes because one is beautiful may not be that far-fetched, as positive attributes may indeed accompany other positive results. However, positive results of beauty might be overestimated since research has indicated that the correlation between physical attractiveness and happiness is insignificant (Diener *et al.*, 1995).

Physically attractive individuals have also been found to have a better chance of marrying someone with a high income, compared to people who are classified as less attractive (Kwan & Trautner, 2009:54). Attractive women have a “communication advantage”: they are stereotyped as having other desirable traits like moral goodness and charisma, and good communication skills (Kwan & Trautner, 2009:63; Freedman, 1986). According to Dellinger and Williams (1997) (cited by Kwan and Trautner, 2009:57) cosmetics enhance the credibility of women and has a positive effect on their careers. However, the opposite implications are that the same women may be considered self-centred, materialistic and unintelligent (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263). Haggenstallar *et al.*, (2018:78) also found that South African women are prone to keep their cosmetic surgeries a secret because they are afraid to be labelled as narcissistic or vain.

The positive consequences of beauty reinforce a system where beauty and youth are valued above skills or competence (Kwan & Trautner, 2009:63-64). Beauty practices become a central

part of women's lives when they receive favourable treatment in social and work environments because of their appearance.

In the pursuit of beauty, women are often viewed as “cultural dopes”, but Kwan and Trautner (2009:64) argue that it is merely an active pursuit of their goals, whether it is happiness or success. In this way, beauty practices can become a source of oppression since women need to pursue beauty in order to attain their goals or attain power. They attain power since various positive characteristics are ascribed to women who are beautiful (Weitz, 2001).

Segal-Caspi *et al.* (2012:1113) explain that the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype believes that attractive people are socially better adjusted than less attractive adults. This concurs with Dworkin (1974), who stated that beauty is often linked to inner “goodness”. Segal-Caspi *et al.* (2012:1113) did a study to determine whether people really believe that attractive adults possess certain attributes, traits, and values that help them achieve social and professional success. Their results were consistent with the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype. Their study focused on traits and values. Traits do not direct behaviour the way values do, since traits mainly describe the personalities of individuals.

They suggested that the values of women influence their motivation to enhance their attractiveness. When attractiveness can help women to attain certain important goals, they are more likely to actively improve their attractiveness (Segal-Caspi *et al.*, 2012:1113).

Segal-Caspi *et al.* (2012:1113) found that the traits individuals attribute to beautiful women, e.g., extraversion and conscientiousness, correlated with the traits they owned. They concluded that attractive women possessed different values than those who were deemed less attractive. Attractive women have the drive to conform to societal expectations and have values that focus on self-promotion rather than a concern for others (Segal Caspi *et al.*, 2012:1115).

This discussion revealed the complicated nature of beauty practices in modern society. Research has proven that beauty practices keep women in subordinate positions, but also empower women to express themselves, succeed in their careers, and experience pleasure.

## **2.4 Beauty practices: Oppression sold as empowerment and agency**

This section examines criticism of the view that beauty practices empower and please women. Points of critique are discussed as levelled against beauty as a personal choice; the way beauty is promoted as a fun and enjoyable experience; beauty practices as an act of free will; and raising the standard of beauty to sell cosmetic products. It once was sufficient if women styled their hair; now, manicured nails are added as a fun activity for women.

### **2.4.1 Beauty practices: personal choice or indirect coercion?**

Bartky (1990) inspired other scholars (Jeffreys, 2005:10) to comment on beauty standards because of its negative effects on women. Jeffreys (2005:10), for example, argues that critiquing beauty must start with the understanding that personal choices are also political . Most women

are unhappy about their appearance at some point, which makes this a collective experience shared by millions of women.

Jeffreys (2005:107) condemns the idea that beauty practices are no longer oppressive, based on the assumption that women have choices about whether to participate in beauty or not. She argues that these assumptions neglect to acknowledge the forces that restrict and eliminate women's ability to choose. Jeffreys (2005:13), writing from an Australian perspective, states that there are limitations to the pleasure and power that beauty practices offer, and that these should be taken into account before lauding beauty practices as liberating. Instead, it should be regarded as a negative force in women's lives, because women are indirectly coerced to engage in beauty practices; choosing otherwise would result in stigmatisation and shame. She refers to Bartky's argument (1990:25) that the absence of a culture in which women can choose how to celebrate their femininity enforces oppression.

Jeffreys (2005:109) argues that any engagement in beauty practices, whether it takes an hour or a few minutes, is an unnatural process because Western beauty practices all hold a certain degree of harm for women (Jeffreys, 2005:28). Women spend significant amounts of time and money on makeup, hairstyles, creams, fashion and cosmetic surgery (Jeffreys, 2005:30). She agrees with Wolf (1990:20), and Dellinger and Williams (1997) that this should be problematic, because men are not required to wear makeup to work or wear high heels for a promotion or pay raise.

Jeffreys (2005:30) concurs with Wolf (1990:12) and argues that all practices only required for one gender should be evaluated for its political role in maintaining male dominance. Beauty practices are one of the forces that create and maintain the "differences" between the sexes. It creates a stereotyped role for women in which they ought to stay to survive. Hence, beauty ideals are constructed from unequal power relations that are justified by tradition (Jeffreys, 2005:11).

Beauty ideals have never represented the appearance of the majority of women. It consists of standards that only a few can attain, and the result is that most women compare themselves and come off second best. Forbes *et al.* (2007) and Swami *et al.* (2010:371) emphasise the role of sexism in the construction of unrealistic beauty standards. Men and women are assigned specific roles, and women generally assume the inferior, submissive role. Hence, the oppression of women comes down to sexism.

Swami *et al.* (2010:374) explored the sexist beliefs ingrained in beauty practices. They found that men prefer women to use cosmetics, since it influences how they perceive women, and cosmetics reinforce the notion that women are decorative objects (Jeffreys, 2005:114; Swami *et al.*, 2010:375). Cosmetics are applied to draw attention to a woman's physical attributes, and it is associated with the sexualisation of women. It undermines their abilities and competency, reinforces their decorative function, and keeps them passive and subordinate (Swami *et al.*, 2010:375; Jeffreys, 2005:114-117).

Their results also showed that women who hold sexist beliefs favour the use of cosmetics themselves and by other women. Women with a more equal gender view can readily challenge beauty standards and are less likely to be influenced by the negative effects of beauty ideals (Swami *et al.*, 2010:375). Coles (2010) found that a reduction in sexist attitudes would promote healthier beauty ideals and practices.

Swami *et al.* (2010:375) use Bartky's (1990:39) "fashion-beauty complex", to explain the corporate influence on women's desire to use cosmetics. The "fashion-beauty complex" ensures that women see their own bodies as imperfect and in need of 'heroic measures' like cosmetics to conceal the perceived imperfections. Nevertheless, even with the use of cosmetics, most women cannot realistically achieve the ideal (Wolf, 1990:2-3). Not all beauty practices are harmless; nevertheless, they are advertised as the choice of the consumer.

Jeffreys (2005:32) echoes Dworkin (1974) in maintaining that beauty practices are mainly for the benefit of men. Men often feel flattered by the trouble women go to appear attractive. They are considered the complement of, but subordinate to, their male counterparts (Jeffreys, 2005:32, Dworkin, 1974). The United Nations (UN) deemed the mandatory donning of the burkha by Afghan women as a harmful practice, because they have no choice in the matter (Jeffreys, 2005:41). Unlike the veil, makeup is seen as liberating and progressive, as women can choose to wear it or not. Jeffreys (2005:37) argues that both are equally oppressive. Islamic women are expected to cover themselves to keep from tempting other Islamic men, and women in Western cultures are expected to dress in a sexually attractive manner.

Jeffreys (2005:75) directly opposes Walter's (1998) statement about Madonna being an image of the liberation of women. Jeffreys (2005:75) states that Madonna essentially normalised the prostitute look as a fashion statement. Other scholars argue that Madonna's façade was meant to show that prostitution gives women power over men. This is then marketed to young women as a form of female empowerment. Jeffreys (2005:75) argues that Madonna takes men's fantasies out of the brothel and into mainstream culture. The danger is that this is the direct antithesis of what millions of sex workers in the international trade would say; they would like to get out but are unable to (Jeffreys, 2005:75).

The abovementioned are some examples of fashion and beauty that are promoted as fun and feminine activities and pleasurable experiences. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

#### **2.4.2 Beauty practices promoted as a fun and pleasurable experience**

In the 1990s, women saw hairstylists as experts of hairstyling. They were a "bridge" to be used in meeting beauty standards (Gimlin, 1996:505). However, in recent times, young women are able to meet beauty standards without the help or guidance of a hairstylist. Due to the vast majority of online makeup and hair tutorials, women can style their own appearances. Social networking sites are also very useful for showing the newest trends in beauty and styling (Elias & Gill, 2018:69).

Social media beauty tutorials sometimes reflect poststructuralist feminist views that contribute to changing perspectives on beauty. Women are told to celebrate and enhance their unique features (Elias & Gill, 2018:69). Celebrating one's uniqueness is encouraged and the individual is offered a choice of the type of beauty she wants to represent (Inglis *et al.*, 2012: 233). This body positivity movement has become very prominent on social media sites such as Instagram (Cwynar-Horta, 2016:36). For example, plus size model and feminist, Tess Holiday, is considered to be one of the most inspirational body positive advocates who had more than 2.1 million followers in 2020. She started the #effyourbeautystandards hashtag as a pushback against media messages that tell women they are not beautiful if they are above a size 10.

The initial goal of this movement was to encourage women of all sizes to accept and love their own bodies. However, on Instagram, this movement has come to exclude women above a size 14 (Cwynar-Horta, 2016:37). The movement now consists of young, thin, conventionally attractive women who feel positive about their bodies. Cwynar-Horta (2016) therefore argues that the body positivity movement has become politicised and commoditised, since corporations are looking to profit from this movement. Instagram transitioned into an advertising platform in 2013 and advertisers can now direct consumer advertising to buy certain products. Thus, social media has changed the way corporations direct their advertisements to young women. Cosmetic brands may approach young women with popular social media accounts that demonstrate particular beauty routines, to "recommend" their line of products (Forbes, 2016).

Twenty-one years later, Fardouly *et al.* (2018:1389) affirm the theory of Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:180): women view themselves as objects to be appreciated by others. Time spent on the social media platform Instagram is associated with higher self-objectification due to the prominence of physical appearance. This is visible on social media, where young women teach other women how to apply makeup to achieve certain effects (Elias *et al.*, 2017:134). According to Fardouly *et al.* (2018), the use of Instagram influences how American and Australian women view themselves and leads to greater self-objectification. They found that the use of Instagram negatively influenced women's perceptions of their physical appearance. Judith Butler (as cited by Cwynar-Horta, 2016:40) agrees by noting that individuals are constantly updating their statuses and profiles on social media. In so doing, they also open themselves to corporations who want to sell their products. Thus, Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues that the body positivity movement has shifted to a very productive movement for capitalist interests.

Popular culture encourages women to pursue a career and be a consumer (McRobbie, 2009:9). McRobbie (2009:54) states that the new "sexual contract" requires that women obtain qualifications and devote themselves to a career in order to earn enough money to participate in consumer culture. Having a career and spending money on beauty products, fashion, and beauty practices have become a big part of what it means to be female. It has also gained prominence in popular culture (McRobbie, 2009:124). Cultural norms require women to educate and plan their own lives, while at the same time monitoring and perfecting themselves. This post-feminist

movement encourages women to pamper themselves (McRobbie, 2009:125,132). It provides women who were hidden and unimportant the opportunity to become visible and gain a sense of self-importance. Bradley (2013:182) and Black (2004:18-19) maintain that the consumer and recreational identities of women have become an important form of female pleasure. This includes participation in shopping, fashion, and beauty.

Popular culture uses feminist terms like empowerment and choice to appeal to younger women. Thus, consumption is portrayed in the realm of freedom, choice, and empowerment (Bradley, 2013:181). McRobbie (2009:61) argues that the way women identify with consumption contributes to their subordinate status, and that this is crucial in maintaining male dominance.

McRobbie (2015:4) argues that the increased visibility of feminism in popular culture becomes an occasion for undoing feminism, and thus diminishes the need for feminism in the current political culture. In this way, the regulative dynamics are disguised, since it is more about what young women can do than what they ought not to do. The new sexual contract also requires women to abandon the critique of patriarchy. It requires them to put on a masquerade of womanliness, whereas “femininity and masquerade are seen as indistinguishable because there is not a natural feminine woman underneath the mask” (McRobbie, 2009:64).

The post-feminist masquerade entails microscopic attention to the physical details of young women (McRobbie, 2009:66; Wolf, 1990:134). Beauty rituals and practices are seen as a part of feminism because it is seen as a choice and not an obligation. To be classified as feminine in terms of media and most social and public standards, traditional practices of self-maintenance are seen as norms of feminine grooming. The post-feminist masquerade, according to McRobbie (2009:66), has accepted beauty rituals as the meaning of being feminine (McRobbie, 2009:66). McRobbie (2009:69) quotes Riviere (1929;1986) that states that the requirements of the beauty and fashion systems ensure that women remain fearful subjects, “driven by the need for complete perfection”. This confirms what Wolf (1990:134) called the beauty myth.

Women fear the loss of desirability, so they style and makeup themselves to conceal the possible threat they might pose to male dominance. This behaviour is promoted as a choice, where in the past it was seen as compulsory. The approval of men is now only indirectly sought. The main approval sought now lies in the system of fashion and beauty, which also delivers the greatest judgments. It also requires constant self-evaluation and a judgment against cultural norms. This gives the illusion that women are doing it for themselves (McRobbie, 2009:68, Stuart & Donaghue, 2011; Heggenstaller *et al.*, 2018:67). McRobbie (2009:68) agrees with Dworkin (1974) that women give up their desire for power by moving back into femininity, letting men know they are not to be considered a threat.

#### **2.4.3 How beauty practices are viewed as choice and agency**

Poststructuralist feminism believes the difference between men and women is only as a result of individual choice. When considering the harm that beauty practices cause, it raises the question

of whether women really are free to choose to participate in beauty therapies. Women need to feel that beauty is a choice, otherwise they would not engage in it. Therefore, they find ways to position themselves where their choice can be unaffected by social regulation and where it is not perceived as oppression or coercion (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011).

Stuart and Donaghue (2011), writing from a poststructuralist feminist perspective, studied women's perceptions of femininity and society's idea of "the perfect woman". For most women, being feminine meant engaging in regular bodily maintenance, such as various beauty treatments, skin care, hair care, and unwanted hair removal. They examined how women situate themselves as free to choose, to liberate themselves from social regulation. When confronted with feminist critiques on beauty practices, it was found that women feel compelled to wear makeup because they are always seen with makeup; according to them, it would be frowned upon if they do not wear makeup.

Stuart and Donaghue (2011) found that women find it easier to conform to beauty ideals, even if that means going through great lengths to achieve it. Makeup is used to change an appearance that society would likely label as undesirable. Women often feel that they do not look good enough without makeup; and some of the pressure they sometimes feel regarding appearance are of their own making (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:111). Engln-Maddox (2006:262) agrees with this by stating that participants felt that they would have more confidence and receive less critique for their appearance. Women feel that they want to be able to escape the pressures of having to look a certain way but feel that they simply cannot. The whole notion of feminine beauty is constructed to make it look easier to conform than to resist it, since there are certain unpleasant consequences women have to bear if they resist feminine ideals (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:103).

Women do not attribute being feminine as the only reason for engaging in beauty practices. Their reasons included the judgment of other women, self-approval, and the pleasure of the experience. Women are often said to be very critical of each other's appearances. Women feel the need to conform to societal beauty standards in order to be accepted. It also becomes a form of competition to see who most closely resembles society's standards for beauty.

Women can experience great and small internal and external rewards if they uphold certain beauty standards. By conforming to these standards, they are classified to belong to a certain status group (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011).

Stuart and Donaghue (2011:100) agree with Wolf (1990:133) that women are encouraged to embrace their freedom and what feminism has done for women over the decades. However, embracing freedom should not be at the expense of their femininity, since engagement with beauty practices are still viewed as an essential part of being female. They also agree with Ghodsee (2007) that women who want to be successful in a capitalist society, must aspire to beauty ideals. Scholars have found that even though certain beauty practices and standards may pose some risk, women would continue with harmful beauty treatments to fit beauty ideals.

#### **2.4.4 Raising minimal beauty standards to sell beauty products**

Beauty requirements keep changing. Lately, in order to be classified as beautiful, nails have to be done by professionals and plastic surgery is becoming even more popular (Widdows, 2017:21).

The significant raising of beauty standards can also be noted in the removal of bodily hair. Where once it was acceptable and could even be deemed sexy when a woman had bodily hair, it now is shameful and inappropriate. Increasing beauty requirements significantly narrows the spectrum for “normal”. The more individuals engage in beauty practices, the more those who do not stand out. This complies with what Bartky (1990) declared when an otherwise normal body becomes undesirable (Widdows, 2017:21). Those who do not conform suffer harm, as they are stigmatised and stereotyped as not having respect for themselves or for others.

Other postmodern perspectives on feminine ideals require women to put effort into their appearance if they want to be accepted (Anthony *et al.*, 2016:313). These authors agree with Stuart and Donaghue (2011) that young women compare themselves with each other to determine where they rank in terms of the feminine ideal (Anthony *et al.*, 2016:312). According to Fardouly *et al.* (2018) and Mehdizadeh (2010), this has also become apparent on social media platforms. Female rivalry can be defined as “comparisons and competition in the process of negotiating feminine ideals” (Anthony *et al.*, 2016:312).

Beauty practices then become especially important in women’s lives, as it helps them to compete with other women. It is also associated with consumption (McRobbie, 2009:130); certain products are better able to help women get ahead in the competition (Elias *et al.*, 2017:270,271). Pressure to succumb to these behavioural standards is easily understood when perusing social media for remedies to correct facial imperfections (Elias *et al.*, 2017:4). Advertisements successfully convince women that they would be left behind without certain treatments, products or routines (Anthony *et al.*, 2016; Bartky, 1990:139).

The beauty industry makes sure cosmetics are used to make women look “naturally” beautiful, as overt efforts to alter one’s appearance is viewed negatively (Samper *et al.*, 2017). Obvious attempts to improve one’s appearance are condemned, as it is considered a deliberate misrepresentation or concealment of one’s true self (Samper *et al.*, 2017:128).

The amount of effort put into improving one’s beauty rating is associated with poor character, because it indicates a willingness to misrepresent the true physical appearance (Samper *et al.*, 2017:128).

Ironically, a small difference does not detract from moral character, as the work done does not “mask” the true self. It will be seen as a superficial disguise only if the change is too severe, and this may even lead to an expectation of future immorality. This will influence the judgments of the woman’s moral character (Bartky, 1990; Samper *et al.*, 2017:129;).

Overly harsh judgments of moral character based on cosmetic use can be mitigated when the external reasons are considered (Samper *et al.*, 2017:141). Heavy makeup is appropriate for an evening event, but not for a casual coffee date with a friend.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The controversy around beauty centres on women's contrasting experiences of beauty regimes as oppressive, but also pleasurable. Some scholars consider other perspectives when studying beauty (Gimlin, 1996:518; Cahill, 2003:59). Their research reveals that beauty cannot only be viewed as oppressive, but that there are elements that women find empowering.

This study focused on the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. This section discussed the research and theories of feminist scholars on the meanings women attach to their beauty practices. The next section discusses the methodology that was most appropriate for this study.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a review of the literature and theory relating to beauty practices. The purpose of this chapter is to orient the reader to the philosophical paradigms, methods, and research design that was used in conducting the study. It also provides a rationale for why the chosen approach was considered the most appropriate for the study. This chapter should be seen as an argument to support the main claim, which is that a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews to collect data was the most appropriate methodological choice for this study, since it allowed the researcher to access the subjective opinions of the studied population.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, it discusses the philosophical foundations that underlies this study. Second, it discusses the definition of a qualitative study, including the rationalisation of why a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate. Third, it discusses how reliability and validity were taken into account in the execution of this study. Fourth, it discusses the methodological framework of the study, which consists of the sampling procedures, data collection instruments, strategies for data analysis, and ethical considerations.

### **3.2 Philosophical foundations: Ontology and Epistemology**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016:8) state that an understanding of the nature of qualitative research can be gained by looking at its philosophical foundations. Research is always associated with philosophical assumptions or beliefs. Feminist research focusses on understanding women's diverse situations and institutions that frame those situations. A phenomenological approach was therefore the most beneficial for this study since it allowed the researcher to explore the meanings women attach to their own beauty practices and enabled the researcher to discuss the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018:75).

The philosophical assumptions of a study describe the presumptions and beliefs of the researchers. These assumptions include how reality is viewed and how knowledge will be attained during the span of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:8). It also allows the researcher to philosophically situate their research among other forms of research. This section discusses the philosophical assumptions that underpin the selected qualitative design and distinguishes it from other approaches.

This study adopts a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist stance on epistemology. Creswell (2013) states that a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemological position best complement a qualitative research design. The following section discusses the philosophical assumptions that underpin the selected qualitative design and distinguishes it from other approaches.

### **3.3.1 Phenomenology in qualitative research**

Creswell and Poth (2018:41) state that qualitative research has various “threads”. These “threads” can be divided into five different approaches, which are narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, and case study research (Creswell & Poth, 2018:67). This study followed a phenomenological qualitative approach to inquiry. This approach was appropriate, since phenomenology is concerned with studying the lived experiences of individuals and describing the essence of a lived phenomenon. Its main aim is to identify common themes between multiple individuals regarding a certain shared experience or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018:75).

A typical method of a phenomenological study involves interviews, which were appropriate for this study since data is gathered through the interviewing process. A phenomenological study concludes with a description of the experiences of the participants, i.e., what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 77). It does not try to measure the extent or the causes of a phenomenon (Denscombe, 2010).

Gray (2014:24) states that phenomenology aims to understand social reality through people’s experiences of that reality. New meanings of social reality can emerge only if the researcher’s existing understanding of phenomena is set aside. Phenomena should be allowed to “speak for themselves”. The key to doing this is to gain the subjective experience of the participant. Value is then ascribed to these interpretations by the participant, and not only to the researcher’s interpretation.

Phenomenology was, therefore, appropriate for this study, since it allowed the researcher to access the personal experiences of beauty and the meanings they attach to their beauty practices. It is useful, since the subjective, personal experiences of young working women were required in order to answer the research question.

### **3.2.1 The ontological position**

Ontology of a study is concerned with how the researcher views the nature of reality. The ontological position of a study, therefore, conveys information about the world view and assumptions researchers use to gain new knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:102). Ontology is usually built on an assumption of multiple realities or a singular reality (Yin, 2016:16). An objectivist ontology assumes that there is a single, objective reality to any phenomenon, independent of the researcher’s views. A constructivist ontology assumes that there are multiple, relative realities and that the researcher is not independent of the research context (Yin, 2016:16).

In this qualitative research design, multiple realities were considered, and social constructivism was chosen as ontological stance. This position assumes that subjective meanings are formed through social interaction with others, along with social and cultural norms (Creswell & Poth, 2018:24). Constructivism, therefore, assumes that reality is socially constructed and not

something that can be found and observed outside of the individual. The researcher was interested in the multiple interpretations of the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:9). This was done by analysing the subjective meanings of participants attached to their lived experiences.

These meanings, according to Creswell (2013:24), are formed through interaction with others and thus through historical and cultural standards. It is, therefore, important that researchers produce knowledge that is reflective of the participants' reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:103). The researcher often searched for the complexity of views, rather than narrowing these meanings into a few categories. This was done by reporting how participants viewed their world according to the meanings they attach to their beauty practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018:20).

### **3.2.2 The epistemological position**

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, or how reality can be known. Yin (2016:15) states that it is the belief about how the researcher knows what he or she knows. This position influences the research design and methods used. A research project would typically assume either a positivist epistemological position or an interpretivist epistemological position. These positions are related to a researcher's ontological position. An interpretivist epistemology follows a constructivist view of reality. This study followed an interpretive epistemological position. Interpretivism is closely linked to constructivism. It is an anti-positivistic stance and is concerned with interpreting the world.

This study also takes a feminist theoretical position (as was discussed in detail in Chapter 2) and epistemological assumptions in feminist research should, therefore, be taken into consideration. In feminist research, epistemology is "reality... known through the study of social structures, freedom and oppression, power and control" (Creswell, 2013:37). Feminist research views gender as a tool that shapes the conditions in the lives of women. Creswell (2013:29) also states that feminist research is important, since it communicates the often "invisible and distorted" female experience to end women's unequal social positions.

According to Mason (2002) & Creswell (2013), qualitative research designs mainly follow an interpretivist epistemological approach, since qualitative research is concerned with the personal experiences of participants. The personal experiences are, therefore, viewed as valuable knowledge that is produced through interviews with participants. In qualitative research, participants share their subjective experiences within the safe space of a professional relationship (Creswell & Poth, 2018:21). An interpretive epistemological position enabled the researcher to gain knowledge through the relationship with the participants. Specific data about the significance they attach to their various beauty practices was obtained from their personal and subjective experiences. It was also important to find a context in which these subjective experiences could be understood, namely, where the participants lived and worked.

Gray (2014:23) supplies five types of interpretivist approaches in social science: symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, realism, hermeneutics, and naturalistic inquiry. This study chose a phenomenological approach to study the meanings young working women attach to their beauty practices. The researcher allowed phenomena to speak for themselves, since it was concerned with the reality of the participants (Gray, 2014).

### **3.3 Defining a qualitative research design**

Creswell and Poth (2018:8) define qualitative research as being distinct from quantitative research by using an interpretive and theoretical framework. These frameworks enable the researcher to address research problems by understanding the meanings individuals or groups attach to a certain phenomenon. This investigation focused directly on the subjective experiences of the subjects being studied and a qualitative approach comprised the appropriate tools to examine subjective experiences. Qualitative research acknowledges the socially constructed nature of reality and seeks to answer how social experiences are created and what meanings they become associated with (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:8).

Doing research requires choosing a design that corresponds with the research question of the study. Qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding meaning in context and humans are best equipped to do this, since it requires interviewing, observing, and analysing. It is concerned with understanding how people interpret their experiences and how meaning is attached to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:4; Mason, 2002:6). A qualitative design is appropriate when a topic or problem needs exploration and cannot be easily measured (Creswell & Poth, 2018:45). A qualitative design includes a process of revising and reshaping, rather than just following a set of rules. It does not follow a fixed set of steps but involves “the interconnection and interaction of the different design components” (Maxwell, 2013:3).

Other feminist studies of women and beauty practices like those of Black and Sharma (2001:102), Stuart and Donaghue (2011:103) and South African study Heggenstaller *et al* (2018:70) made use of a qualitative research design, which was beneficial for their studies because, through interviews, they could appropriately address the research problem or explore subjective opinions. Since this study was concerned with the subjective meanings young working women attach to their beauty practices, a qualitative approach was most beneficial for this study. It was useful in extracting the data most suitable for successfully answering the research question of ‘What meanings do young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices?’ Phenomenology was ideally suited to this study and is discussed in the following section.

### **3.4 Validity and reliability**

#### **3.4.1 validity**

Trustworthiness, dependability and confirmability is all associated with qualitative methodology. This study ensured trustworthiness by confirmability, where the researcher ensured that the findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the participants (Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004:64), credibility is also a way of ensuring trustworthiness. This was attained

through triangulation, which was found by interviewing participants of various backgrounds and occupation (Shenton, 2004:66). The researcher did iterative questioning during the interviews, which entails the use of probes to elicit detailed data. This was also done by extracting questions through matters raised through a previous interview participant (Shenton, 2004:67).

Mason (2002) defines validity as researching, observing, and measuring what is claimed to be researched or observed. There are two types of validity. External validity refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other social settings. Internal validity refers to whether enough evidence is provided to achieve a link between evidence (findings) and theoretical ideas that were discussed in the literature review. This study aimed to achieve internal validity, since it is impossible to achieve external validity in qualitative studies due to the smaller samples (Gray, 2014:623). Acknowledging the researcher's perspective also contributes to internal validity (Creswell, 2013:251). The researcher should be sensitised to their own possible biases toward the study (Creswell, 2013:251). The researcher was therefore aware of her own perspective being a white South African woman who is aware of beauty standards around her and also measures herself against those standards. She also uses beauty products and receive beauty treatments at beauty salons.

Creswell and Poth (2018:253) stress the importance of evaluating the quality of qualitative research. It is important to provide a valid account, and the same authors (2018:259) discuss possible validation strategies. These strategies can be classified as internal validation measures, as none of them involves the generalisation of findings. This study made use of two strategies to attain internal validation: the researcher's lens and the reviewer's lens.

Validity through the **researcher's lens** strengthens the accuracy of a study by, first of all, consulting multiple different sources, methods, and theories. This involves the use of different literature sources to exemplify different themes and perspectives. In this study, various themes and perspectives on beauty practices were reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2.

Validity through the researcher's lens is also attained when findings that do not necessarily fit into a theme are reported. In most research studies, not all findings are only negative or positive, but both. Thus, the researcher contributed to the validity by reporting all findings, not just those that agree with a particular theme. This provides a realistic assessment of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018:261). Validation also increases when the researcher discloses the position from which the study is undertaken. This states that they are aware of their biases, values, and experiences regarding a certain topic.

Validity can be attained through the **reviewer's lens** by having the research evaluated by someone familiar with the field of study. This individual should question the methods, meaning of the study, and interpretations of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018:263). This study was continuously evaluated by the supervisor who is familiar with the field of study, and this also contributed to the validity of this study.

### **3.4.2 Reliability**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016:237) argue that a study is as reliable as the strictness of procedures in the execution of the study. For a qualitative study to be reliable and authentic, the researcher has to carefully design the study and use standards that are scientifically accepted. The same authors further state that reliability and validity require ethical research and stress the importance of ethical practices in the attainment of trustworthiness.

Reliability is concerned with the consistency of research results. For example, will the same results be delivered if the study were to be repeated? Merriam and Tisdell (2016:250) argue that attaining reliability in the social sciences is impossible, since human behaviour is never static; it is always changing. Thus, reliability cannot be acquired in the traditional sense. They state that replicating a qualitative study will never yield the same results, but this does not make the findings unreliable. The same data can be interpreted differently without discrediting any of the results. Reliability in qualitative research can be attained when the researcher ensures that the data collected is consistent with the findings. As the findings of other, similar studies can also not be replicated, the best way to ensure a study is dependable is to explain how the findings were achieved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:252). In this study, the researcher explained how she arrived at her findings as best she could, and this is discussed in Chapter 4 (Analysis). Good qualitative researchers can convincingly show this and build confidence that this was the best account of their findings.

## **3.5 Methodological framework**

### **3.5.1 Population and sampling**

Sampling can be defined as the process and principles that are used to choose and gain access to relevant data sources. Participants were recruited in Potchefstroom. Potchefstroom is known for being an academic city because of the university. It is situated next to the Mooi river in the North West Province and roughly 120km from Johannesburg. Potchefstroom is the home of approximately 187 538 people in 2021 (World population review). The specific focus of the research topic as well as the fact that there is no way to identify an entire population of young, working women in Potchefstroom ruled out random sampling. Hence, non-probability sampling methods were used in this research project. The two types of non-probability-based sampling used for this study were purposive or judgemental sampling and snowball sampling. These types of sampling contribute to answering the research question and achieve the research objective.

According to Creswell (2013:300), the first type of sampling, purposive sampling, is a primary sampling strategy used in qualitative research. It allows the researcher to choose participants who can provide an understanding of the research problem. This is also appropriate for a study that follows a phenomenological approach. Sampling in a phenomenological approach requires participants who have experienced or are acquainted with the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018:156). Purposive sampling is an appropriate sampling technique for this approach, and it narrows the spectrum for recruitment of participants, as they need to identify with the questions.

For example, this study recruited young, working female participants who engage in beauty practices (Mason, 2002:128). Creswell and Poth (2018:148) also state that, through purposive sampling, the researcher can intentionally recruit individuals who will best be able to contribute to answering the research question. The non-negotiable sampling criteria for this study were that all of the participants must be young, working women between the ages of 21 and 39. This was the only non-negotiable criteria and the researcher included all willing participants. White women are mainly used to set beauty standards (Elias & Gill, 2018: 67). Therefore, this study directed its main focus toward white women since they likely identify with the white women used in beauty advertisements and social media and might feel significant pressure to embody those standards. The second reason for focussing on white women, is that, based on Shelembe's (2014:39) research, black women's experience and engagement with beauty practices differ from those of white women.

This population was used since they were able to answer the interview questions and, through interviewing them, the researcher was able to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences young working women in Potchefstroom have of their beauty habits. Women from this generation (millennials), grew up vastly differently from those before them. These young South African women have access to a great variety of educational and career opportunities, and their appearance have a significant influence on their careers. This generation is also bombarded with information about cosmetic products and beauty rituals, and social media and the internet decide what beautiful looks like (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Elias and Gill (2018: 67), for example, found that 74% of young women use filters on their self-portraits. They also use selfie- modification applications to enhance their photos to look more like the ideal.

In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling, was used in this study. The basic criteria of this method are to gain access to potential participants through people who know that their contribution might be useful to the study (Gray, 2014:425). According to Mason (2002:129), it is important to identify who has the experience, personalities, and behaviours that the research questions require, so the researcher approached participants who she knew met the non-negotiable criteria. She then asked participants for referrals to others who met the criteria. In one or two instances, participants spontaneously referred the researcher to other potential participants.

The researcher explained the scope of the research to those women who had agreed to participate and invited them to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted with 20 women – considered a reasonable number for a qualitative master's research dissertation. Data saturation was reached after 20 interviews (Mason, 2002:45).

Table 3.5. provides the biographical information of the participants. The youngest participant were 23 years old and the oldest were 35. Twelve of the twenty participants were single, and eight were in relationships. The participants that were in relationships felt that their partners did have in

influence on how they did their beauty practices and that their beauty practices also differed from when they were single. Table 3.5 also shows that the participants are employed in different fields. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, some participants stated that their appearance does play a role in their occupation, and others stated that it does not matter at all how they look.

The following table (**Table 3.1**) provides the biographical information of the participants.

|    | <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Occupation</b>                | <b>Relationship</b> |
|----|------------------|------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1  | Chelsea          | 25         | Administrative assistant         | Single              |
| 2  | Selina           | 26         | Accountant                       | Single              |
| 3  | Abigail          | 25         | Self-employed hairdresser        | Co-habiting         |
| 4  | Scarlet          | 28         | Accountant                       | Single              |
| 5  | Daphne           | 27         | Medical doctor                   | Married             |
| 6  | Mia              | 23         | Optometrist                      | Single              |
| 7  | Cindy            | 26         | Pastor                           | Single              |
| 8  | Emma             | 33         | Educational interpreter          | Single              |
| 9  | Ellie            | 29         | Teacher                          | Married             |
| 10 | Amber            | 23         | Admin assistant                  | Single              |
| 11 | Alexia           | 33         | Interpreter                      | Married             |
| 12 | Taylor           | 26         | Admin assistant                  | Married             |
| 13 | Elisabeth        | 26         | Teaching assistant               | Married             |
| 14 | Jennifer         | 24         | Representative under supervision | Single              |
| 15 | Emelia           | 26         | Research assistant               | Single              |
| 16 | Madelief         | 27         | Financial Clerk                  | Married             |
| 17 | Fiona            | 25         | Junior lecturer                  | Single              |
| 18 | Sophia           | 35         | Research Support staff           | Single              |
| 19 | Dora             | 35         | Associate professor (lecturer)   | Single              |
| 20 | Erin             | 32         | Senior Lecturer                  | Married             |

**Table 3.1 Biographical information**

### **3.5.2 Data collection instruments**

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:105), qualitative data comprises of people's experiences, opinions, feelings, and behaviours. In qualitative research, data is mainly captured through words, as opposed to quantitative research which is presented through numbers. Interviews are the best method to gain insight into people's opinions, emotions, and experiences and it was therefore

chosen as the method of data collection (Denscombe, 2010:174). More specifically, semi-structured interviews and observations were selected as the most appropriate methods to collect information on young, working women's perspectives on beauty practices. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:117), it is important to have good questions during interviews. Open-ended questions were used during interviews, since this yielded the most descriptive data, which was favourable for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:120). Also, pilot interviews were conducted to learn which questions were too vague and needed rewording, and which questions were yielding useless information. After each pilot interview, questions were discussed and revised with the researcher's supervisor.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have a clear list of questions, but with the freedom to change the order of questions and the topics under consideration. The researcher was able to provide participants with the opportunity to raise their opinions and perspectives on the issues under discussion. According to Denscombe (2010:176), the difference between semi-structured, unstructured, and structured interviews is that, in semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participants are allowed and even encouraged to use their own words and provide their own thoughts and ideas on a topic or theme. Denscombe (2010:176) states that semi-structured and unstructured interviews are always on a kind of continuum and aim to discover rather than to check or confirm existing data, i.e., the present study employed a more inductive than solely deductive approach (Gray, 2014:507).

Since these interviews were semi-structured, questions were determined beforehand, using a partly deductive approach, i.e., the question topics were based on existing findings and theoretical contributions from previous research (Engl-Maddox, 2006; Dellinger & Williams, 1996). These topics included, among others, media ideals, relationships, positive stereotypes attached to looking like an ideal form of beauty. The interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into participants' unique perspectives on their beauty practices. Each individual had a unique vocabulary and interpretation of the questions, and semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to extract this information.

Marshall and Rossman (2011:139) stress the importance of observations in collecting qualitative data. Observation consists of the "systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and objects in the researched environment". Semi-structured interviews include the observation of verbal and non-verbal cues of the participant during the interviews. These observations are recorded or written down and are often referred to as field notes. Field notes should be as non-judgemental as possible and give a descriptive account of what has been observed. Descriptions of the participant's tone of voice or other qualities unique to them were written down directly after an interview. The researcher's insights or thoughts were also added to the field notes. These field notes were discussed with the supervisor during meetings.

Semi-structured interviews require the researcher to employ active listening during the interview. It requires the researcher to purposefully attend to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the participant. According to Given (2008:7), active listening starts in the mind of the researcher. The goal with active listening is to accurately interpret the participant's experiences and opinions. Given (2008:7) also states that it is important that the researcher approach the participant with a neutral mind – not to judge or criticise the response of the participant, but to understand. Strategies that helped the researcher actively listen to the participant were paraphrasing, reflecting, and summarising what the participant had said during the interview (Given, 2008:7).

### **3.5.3 Strategies for data analysis**

Gray (2014:606) describes data analysis as the process of revealing the data's characteristic elements and structure. The goal of qualitative data analysis is to interpret, understand, and to explain. The interpretation process requires the researcher to be creative and critical in decisions about the meaningfulness of certain themes, patterns, and categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018:195).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:191), the analysis starts during the first interview. Analysis should be done during data collection, as was done in this study. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed in this study. Flick (2009) describes transcription as the graphic process of capturing conversation and non-verbal communication in written form. Transcription aims to make the conversation as a whole as clear as possible, and to capture the characteristics that make a conversation unique, such as putting verbal utterances into a written form. The dataset of this study consisted of transcribed interviews, which were then grouped (coded) into different themes and categories. Transcription started after the first interview, and the researcher started coding after the first five interviews were conducted. This assisted the researcher in refining and reformulating the questions of the interviews that followed. Small changes to the interview questions were made, such as words to clarify questions.

Coding is the main element in qualitative data analysis. According to Given (2008:85), coding is based on the inductive process of pursuing ideas, concepts, themes and categories that could help with the interpretation of the data. For this study, the coding process entailed making sense of the data by dividing it into smaller categories of information (Creswell *et al.* 2018:190). It enabled the researcher to reassemble and organise the data in light of the research question, thus separating the data into meaningful parts (Boeje, 2010:93). In later stages, connections were made between categories. It is, therefore, important to recognise a pattern or theme early on in the data, since it can help the researcher find meaning in the data.

Boeje (2010:94) distinguishes between three different types of coding: open, axial, and selective coding. Open coding takes place at the beginning of the data analysis process. It involves the categorisation and conceptualisation of the data. At this point, it is too early in the process to distinguish particularly important findings relevant to the research question. Open coding entails the processing of data into codes, whereas axial coding entails creating data out of codes. Axial

coding is concerned with making connections between categories. In the open coding stage, various possible themes were categorised, for example, participants critiqued the use of too much makeup. Another theme was that most found pleasure in their beauty practices and it was something that build their confidence and made them feel good about themselves. Other possible themes were identified like identity, social media, competition and public places were identified which were used in the later stages of the analysis process.

It gradually focuses the codes by determining the dominant elements in the research, and those that are less important. Selective coding is when a central category is selected as a main category or “vehicle for the integration of the other major categories” (Given, 2008:805). In this study, the themes that proved the most relevant were selected during this stage of the analysis, for example, themes regarding identity and the pleasurable experiences that beauty practices seemed to offer.

For this study, open and axial coding were considered the most effective methods for analysing the data. Through open coding, the data was categorised into broader categories, not necessarily relevant to the research question, but helpful for gaining a better understanding of the data. Axial coding was convenient, since it allowed the researcher to create connections between categories, determine the dominant themes, and discarding redundant codes and irrelevant themes. Flick (2014:375) argues that the purpose of coding is to prepare the data for interpretation. Both of these types of coding assisted in extracting the most relevant information and most accurate findings from the data.

The coding process started as early as possible since it allowed the researcher to become familiarised with issues emerging from the data (Gray, 2014:604). In this phase of the research, the researcher also provided an interpretation of the data based on their view or perspectives found in the literature. Detailed descriptions were built while applying codes and categorising information into themes. Detail must be provided based on the context of the individual, place, or setting (Creswell *et al.* 2018:189). The researcher ensured that codes fit the data and not vice versa. The aim was to refine the codes rather than the data. Self-selecting biases were minimised by describing and explaining the outliers found in the data; Taylor (1998: 152) states that it is often tempting for the researcher to want to ‘smooth them out’ or ‘explain them away’.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Ethics is a major concern, especially in social research. Conducting a study ethically can strengthen its validity and reliability. Merriam and Tisdell (2016:260) state that intellectual rigor forms the most important part of conducting an ethical study. Although it is not methods or research design that ensures rigor, but the “rigorous thinking” of the researcher. This includes rigorous thinking about everything from methods to analysis. It is, therefore, not only during the phases of data collection and analysis that ethical conduct is considered important, but also during all phases of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018:53).

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the North-West University' faculty of Arts Ethics Committee before data collection started and an ethical clearance number (NWU-00897-19-A7) was assigned to this study. The first ethical requirement was to obtain informed consent from participants, which is in compliance with the Protection of Personal information (POPIA) act of 2020. The POPIA act of 2020 stipulates that a participant has the right to know why and for what purposes their personal information will be collected. Their consent must be voluntary, informed and specific. This entailed sending information about the study to potential participants, including the informed consent form that they could peruse in their own time prior to the interview. The informed consent form included asking participants for their permission to audio record the interviews. They were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and they were assured that their identities would be protected by using pseudonyms. A pseudonym was assigned to each participant. Any questions from participants were addressed prior to the interviews.

Another important ethical consideration is respect for participants. Respectful relationships should be established without any stereotyping, which in this case, meant that participants were not judged according to their appearance. The researcher was, therefore, sensitive not to label participants according to superficial characteristics such as appearance or personality traits, such as pretty or less attractive, self-obsessed or narcissistic (Creswell & Poth, 2018:54).

During the interviews, the researcher also aimed to avoid any emotional or physical harm to participants. This was done by being sensitive to the participants' facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice, so to pick up any signs of emotional or physical distress.

Ethical issues may also emerge in the observation phase. Respect for persons is key in observations. The participants should be aware that they are part of a study and must provide their consent (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:142). Consent was obtained prior to the interview and participants were asked at different points during the interview whether they were comfortable and still willing to continue with the interviews.

### **3.6.1 Anonymity and confidentiality**

According to Given (2008:16), full anonymity is attained when the researcher does not know the identity of the participant and is thus unable to connect an individual with a response. Partial anonymity is when the identity of a participant is known only to the researcher. For the purpose of all publications, the identities of participants are protected by using pseudonyms. This study made use of partial anonymity: participants were required to choose a pseudonym for themselves when they were completing the consent form. The hard copies of informed consents were scanned and stored in a password protected file. The hard copies were given to the supervisor to lock away. Given (2008:111) states that confidentiality can be defined as an assurance that information will not be disclosed in any way that would identify the participant. The researcher also assured anonymity by refraining to disclose characteristics unique to participants, so they could not be recognised by readers.

Confidentiality can protect participants from harm and discrimination. It is therefore important that the researcher respects confidentiality. Confidentiality promotes the quality and validity of the data, since participants feel they can disclose personal information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:261). The participant data and audio recordings of this study were password protected and safely stored on a personal computer to ensure that all the information disclosed remained confidential and identities protected. The researcher made sure that participants cannot be linked to any personal information in how the findings were discussed. This ensured further confidentiality.

Guidelines and policies direct research in an ethical direction, but, ultimately, it was the researcher's values and ethics that determined the ethical practices of this study. For example, ethics on a relational level depended on the researcher's awareness of her role and the impact she could have on participants. Indeed, the protection of subjects and the notion of informed consent and the right to confidentiality should be considered ahead of time. Ethical issues should be addressed in the field as they arise. It thus depends on the sensitivity and values of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:261).

### **3.7 Limitations**

Limitations are inevitable when doing social research. The first limitation that should be considered is the research design, which was qualitative. A common limitation of qualitative research is that it is not generalisable due to its phenomenological nature, and future studies may not have access to the same participants. The results of this study can therefore not be generalised to all women in Potchefstroom or in South Africa.

Sample size was another limitation. The sample size of this study was small in relation to the larger population of young women in Potchefstroom. Another limitation of this qualitative study was that it was both time consuming and labour intensive. The interviews were labour intensive, since it took a lot of arrangements to get in touch with participants who were willing and met the criteria. The transcription of the data was also time consuming as the researcher took sole responsibility for the transcription of data to become thoroughly acquainted with the data. The transcription process took at least a few hours every day for two months. The coding process was also very time consuming, since all the transcribed data had to be grouped into codes and analysed.

A general lack of literature in South Africa regarding the meanings young working women attach to their beauty practices was also seen as a limitation. Only a few studies that focused on beauty practices in South Africa, which made it difficult to lay a foundation for the problem statement.

The general aim of this study was to investigate the meanings that young working women in Potchefstroom attach to beauty practices. Whether a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods study is conducted, the methodology is not without limitations. This section discusses the limitations of a qualitative methodology.

Qualitative data transcription is a time-consuming process. A significant amount of time was spent on extracting data from the recorded interviews with participants. Interviews are mostly open-ended; therefore, the researcher is not able to objectively verify results. This is opposed to quantitative data where results are fairly easily verified by something like school records (Chetty, 2016).

The sample size of this study could also be considered a limitation, as it was taken from a small geographical area (Potchefstroom). The sample also included only middle-class young women, which excluded the opinions of all the other classes. In addition, the study focused on young women only, excluding the opinions of older women. Interviews were only conducted with young white women; other races likely have different experiences and ideas about beauty and they were excluded from this study, which is a limitation. According to Bryman (2016:233), studies that utilise purposive sampling cannot be generalised to a population, which is a limitation of this study. This study's main focus was to understand the participants' realities and opinions, and not to generalise. The research design is qualitative, and this also makes it impossible to generalise the results.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodology and research design that was chosen for this study. As was discussed, each methodological approach is founded on a philosophical stance. Therefore, the epistemological and ontological stance of this study was discussed, and a clear definition of a qualitative design was provided. The methodological framework was discussed after the discussion of validity and reliability. The methodological framework included the sampling methods, data collection instruments, and strategies for data analysis. The information above made it evident that a qualitative approach was most appropriate because it lends itself to in-depth interviews, which was needed to gain the correct information to answer the research question. Ethical conduct is important in social research, and its application in this study was discussed in this chapter. Anonymity and confidentiality in this study were ensured by the researcher keeping participants' personal information safe and confidential. The next chapter consists of a thorough discussion of the findings of this study.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methodology that was used to conduct this study and argued that a qualitative design was the most appropriate choice. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the study. It addresses the empirical objectives, which are to explore and interpret the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their own beauty practices. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and 20 transcribed interviews were analysed. The themes discussed in this section broadly reflect questions and themes from the interview schedule, formulated according to the objectives of this study. The analysis theorises the findings by linking the perspectives of participants to the relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2.

This chapter comprises three main sections organised according to the three empirical sub-objectives. The first section addresses the objective to “investigate how women conceptualise the idea of beauty, beauty expression and beauty practices in their living context as young working women”.

The second section addresses the objective “to explore the ways young working women experience beauty practices as constraining”.

The third section addresses the objective “to examine the ways young women position themselves as free choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices”.

### 4.2 ‘Beauty’, ‘beauty expression’ and ‘beauty practices’ in the lives of young women

This section addresses how women conceptualise the idea of beauty, beauty expression, and beauty practices in their living context as young working women. First, the role of beauty in the work-lives of young women is discussed, followed by the ways in which beauty practices help women perform femininity and attain a female identity are addressed.

#### 4.2.1 Accomplishing a feminine identity

In modern culture, femininity is equated to femaleness, which means that to be classified as female one has to be feminine (Elias *et al.*, 2017:63,64; Wolf, 1990). This section, therefore, discusses how beauty practices assist women to attain a feminine appearance, which allows them to create and confirm their female identity through these feminine rituals.

Most participants felt that a desire to beautify is inherently part of being female because to be female is also to be feminine and to be feminine is to be female. This is demonstrated in statements like “as a woman, I feel it is a part of us to want to beautify” (Ellie) and “even if you take everything away, women will still find something to make themselves beautiful” (Amber). It is also evident that some participants felt that women are “brought up” to believe that “they have to” beautify themselves (Scarlet & Alexia). Participants felt that beauty is a natural part of womanhood. According to Bartky (1990:25), when something is seen as natural, it is unalterable.

Some women felt that beauty is also something that “differentiates them from men” (Scarlet) and allows you to appear softer and gentler”<sup>1</sup>. Dworkin (1974:114) stated that from the time women are too young to question what they are taught, they are given limited options of how to identify as female, meaning young girls are socialised from a young age to speak softly and to not make bold bodily movements. Black and Sharma (2001:100) stated that the requirements for men to conform to hegemonic masculine ideals differ greatly from the requirements for women. Men are not expected to deodorize, moisturise, and paint their bodies, which are the daily expectancies of women. Therefore, femininity is something that is constantly sought.

Judith Butler (1988) defines gender identity as a “performative accomplishment” that is influenced by what society approves and what it critiques or views as shameful. Gender is socially constructed, which is also why femininity is constantly sought. Butler (1988) argues that certain acts construct gender identity. Therefore, women spend hours and money on beautifying themselves to attain an acceptable feminine appearance, and these acts construct the feminine identity. These acts are therefore not performed because they have a feminine identity, but because they are creating the feminine identity. As Simone de Beauvoir (cited by Butler, 1988), stated: “[O]ne is not born, but rather becomes a woman”. It could thus be assumed that it is culture that determines a woman’s feminine identity, and not biology.

Most women felt that beauty practices assist them to express at least some part of their identity. Butler (1990) would argue that beauty practices assist in creating an identity. This identity is attained through repetition of certain acts, for example, to curl or straighten hair, or decide which makeup would best suit their identity. Through this, a certain identity is not only expressed but also created. Most participants felt that beauty practices such as applying makeup were a part of their routine. They felt it necessary to do before leaving the house to feel confident and productive for the daily tasks ahead. Some participants reported that they “did not feel like themselves” without makeup or carefully styled hair; thus, their appearance is intertwined with their identities (Amber, Fiona and Chelsea).

Butler (1990) claims that women believe that femininity is an entity that is true about them or a fact about all women, but in reality, it is a phenomenon that is produced and reproduced. A woman’s style in makeup or hair is seen as a “reflection of herself” (Abigail). Or, as another participant stated, “Red lips, that is my signature” <sup>2</sup>(Alexia). Participants also linked beauty practices to self-love; Cindy mentioned that, “beauty expresses how well you love yourself”. Freedman (1989) stated that women seek to establish their individuality through beauty, but they often lose their individuality during this process by becoming like the feminine prototype (Elias *et al.*, 2017:59). Cosmetic rituals produce uniformity, which Freedman (1989) argues is like giving a stamp of approval to the prevailing beauty ideal. For example, participants Jacolene, Selina, and

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<sup>1</sup> *want dit onderskei mens van mans, as ek dit so kan stel. As jy verstaan wat ek bedoel. Dit laat jou bietjie meer sagter en rustiger voorkom*

<sup>2</sup> *Rooi lippe is ek, dis my “signature”*

Cindy admitted to watching makeup and hair tutorials on Instagram and Pinterest, since mainstream beauty is advertised and promoted on social media sites (Elias & Gill, 2018:134).

Beauty practices do not only assist women to express their identity, but also contribute to constructing women's identities (Butler, 1990). Gimlin (1996:519) found that beauty practices, particularly hairstyles, assist women in constructing their professional, as well as their gender and class identity. How hair is styled becomes a symbol of the individual's identity. As one participant in this study expressed: "Okay if I'm going for a sexy slash professional look, then my hair must be straight. But if I'm fun and bubbly, I do my hair curly" (Chelsea, an administrative assistant). This signifies that the hairstyle, either "straight" or "curly", expresses the type of personal energy she wants to express, either "professional" or "fun and bubbly". Another participant captured another way of viewing it, by stating that, "it expresses what you think of your identity" and "how you want people to view you" (Sophia). Their made-up face becomes a building block of their identity; they do not feel like themselves without it.

Feeling beautiful has the potential to change a person's behaviour. One participant stated that, when she changes her appearance with makeup and hairstyling, it also changes her behaviour: she becomes more extroverted and confident (Elisabeth), an observation also made by Butler (1990). Synnott (1990) remarks that makeup conceals the private face and turns it into a publicly acceptable one. This, in turn, gives women confidence. Scarlet noticed the change of behaviour of a co-worker when she was told that she was beautiful: "They [my colleagues] told her that she was pretty and flirted a little bit and asked her why she did not have a husband yet, and when she was getting married. Her loud-laughing, cursing, and rugged persona calmed down and she giggled. She was just completely different."<sup>3</sup> This echoes a finding by Van der Westhuizen (2017), that women are given beauty pageant status when told they are beautiful, which may facilitate a change of behaviour towards more feminine, quiet and graceful mannerisms.

For the women in this study, beauty practices were strategically fit into their work and living contexts. Most admitted to setting beauty standards for themselves and for other women, for example, to have "clean hair", "be neat" and "wear makeup", but not too much makeup. Most women admitted that beauty expectations were constraining in some way or the other. This is discussed in the next section.

#### **4.2.2 Occupation does matter: Gender and beauty in varied work-contexts**

Young working women in Potchefstroom reported spending an average of between R600 and R800 a month on their beauty routines, including buying makeup, going to the beauty salon for treatments, and having their nails done. Most women reported doing their makeup and styling

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<sup>3</sup> *En hulle het vir haar gesê sy mooi en hulle het bietjie "geflirt" en gesê hoekom het sy nog nie 'n man nie, wanneer trou sy nou eendag en van die, soos wat jy genoem het, harde lag, vloek, bonkige meisie wat jy gehad het, het sy omgedraai, was sy rustig en sy het gegiggel. Sy het, jy weet, sy was net heeltemal anders.*

their hair every day, and some admitted to doing their nails every month. They spent an average of between R200 and R900 on makeup every 3 months and between R200 and R800 at the hair salon every 3 months.

Various scholars have found that appearance plays an important role in the work-lives of women (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:158; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:100). As mentioned in Chapter 2, women's positions at work are compromised whether they beautify themselves or not (Hamermesh, 2011). If, on the one hand, they do not spend time grooming their appearance, they might be stereotyped as being incompetent at their jobs. However, sometimes beauty can be a liability, since women feel that their intelligence is questioned when they look too beautiful (Freedman, 1986).

Appearance often weighs heavier than qualification (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:166, Wolf, 1990). Bradley (2013:109) states that, in industries like hospitality, catering, fashion and beauty, leisure and health, and the entertainment industry, women are employed for their appearance and are expected to present themselves in specific ways. Thus, Stuart and Donaghue (2011:105) state that women mainly compete with other women for status and jobs. Women in this study also used beauty practices as a way to compete with other women, especially when it came to employment. Ellie, a teacher, stated that:

"I always look around [at] who is sitting with me before we go in for the interview. I'm observing who my competition is. Funny enough, you judge them on appearance. When you're sitting there, waiting for the interview, you don't know those people, you don't know what qualifications they have. But appearance immediately can give you a sense of 'yeah, this one doesn't stand a chance'. You don't want to think like that, it is not nice"<sup>4</sup>.

Elisabeth admitted that "there is that preconceived idea that a lady needs to look well taken care of to get a job, which is challenging for people like me who don't feel the need to put so much effort in, then they don't look like the ideal standard of what she needs to look like". She also stated that this is why she is thankful for her career as a teaching assistant: "We don't need to *do* makeup every day. They told us as long as your hair is out of your face and you've got shoes that can tie properly, and you have clothes you can be flexible in, you need to [be able to] run in it, [then it is acceptable]".

Femininity also entails cleanliness and neatness, and this is seen as reflecting inner attributes (Hamermesh, 2011). Mia, an optometrist, stated that if a woman looks after herself, if she is clean and neat, then it enables her to conduct herself with self-confidence and assert her opinion in her career. She added that someone who takes care of their appearance doesn't feel

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<sup>4</sup> (Ek kyk byvoorbeeld altyd om my wie sit om my voor ons in die onderhoud ingaan. Ek kyk wie is my kompetisie. En snaaks genoeg, jy "judge" op "appearance", jy sit daar en wag, jy sit in die wagkamer jy wag nou vir die onderhoud, jy ken nie daai mense nie, jy weet nie watse kwalifikasies hulle het nie. Maar dadelik "appearance", dan dink ek, 'jaaa, hierdie een staan nie 'n kans nie'. Jy wil nie so dink nie, dis nie mooi nie)

incompetent. They can act with self-confidence and that results in an inner beauty that is also evident. She added that looking after oneself is also a way of expressing one's inner beauty<sup>5</sup>.

Outer beauty as a reflection of inner beauty and qualities was also emphasised by other participants (Ellie, Elizabeth, Cindy). This could be linked to the work of Synnott (1990) and Segal-Caspi *et al.* (2012:1112), who examined the stereotype that beauty equals goodness. They found that people often link physical beauty with positive inner attributes. The stereotypes attached to beauty also strengthens a system where beauty is valued above skills, because women think of their appearance in terms of achieving the perfection of beauty ideals (Kwan & Trautner, 2009:64). In previous studies, women also reported that beauty practices tempered their self-hatred because their appearance was no longer a factor in day-to-day tasks (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263). Beauty practices help women to attain a 'normal' appearance, so they can devote their full attention to other activities and tasks (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263).

Wong (2016) stated that women who meet societal beauty standards are also more often recommended for promotions and pay raises. This, however, could also disadvantage them when they work in positions of power, since they could be labelled as unintelligent or associated with the beauty-but-no-brains stereotype (Delinger & Williams, 1997; Jeffreys, 2005:115). In general, the participants identified assumptions accompany stereotypically beautiful women, including dependability, trustworthiness, and kind-heartedness. These traits have been shown to be useful in the workplace (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:165; Hamermesh, 2011).

Scarlet, an accountant, mentioned that clients are more cooperative when you look prettier. She stated that when you have pride in what you do, your appearance should reflect that<sup>6</sup>. This perception was also found in previous research – women who are good at their jobs and proud of it also put effort into their appearance (Hamermesh, 2011:103). Hamermesh (2011:102) argued that beauty is more effective for employers, since it improves the product or service, and therefore it is more productive for companies. Some participants did mention that it was expected of them to take care of their appearance and put effort into forging a professional appearance.

Some participants also noticed that they were treated differently when they looked professional. Jennifer reported that, when she comes to work looking groomed, people are nicer to her:

"I enjoy it to come to work looking presentable because then I have a nice day and people are nicer to me. Then I feel good about myself. Then I know lashes are done and hair is done. It boosts your self-esteem and then you are ready to see other people again and do not feel so out of place"<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Jy kyk mooi na jouself, jy's skoon en higiënies. Dan het jy selfvertroue om in jou beroep op te tree, om standpunt in te neem. Jy voel nie jy is soos 'n vaal persoon en jy kan niks doen nie. Ja, jy kan met selfvertroue optree en dit is dan daai mooiheid wat van binne af ook kom*

<sup>6</sup> *ek dink as jy tog trots het in dit wat jy doen, behoort jy tog trots te hê in hoe jy lyk wanneer jy dit doen*

<sup>7</sup> *Maar waar ek voel soos as ek moet werk toe kom, dit is vir my lekker om "presentable" te lyk, want dan het ek ook 'n lekker dag en mense is ook "nicer" met my, dis regtig so. Uhm, so dan voel ek ook goed oor*

Women often choose beauty practices because it makes them stand out less and it ensures acceptance. Amber stated that, “I think that when girls and women feel that when they wear makeup, it changes them into a different person”<sup>8</sup>.

Women perceive it as empowering to be able to compete with other women on appearance, but, as literature states, this should not be considered real power, because this only provides them with “miniature versions of power” and leaves true power uncontested (Wolf, 1990:129). McRobbie (2015:7) states that women focus on their appearance, as to ensure they look like they take care of themselves and not to look like they ‘let themselves go’. They post photos of themselves on Facebook looking perfect by using filters and other appearance enhances apps (Elias & Gill, 2018) and this reinstates the notion of women being ‘looked at’. Although beauty is often viewed as productive for companies, as it improves the “product” or service of the company, attractive women are not generally considered for leadership positions, because traits like leadership and assertiveness are seen as incompatible with good looks (Freedman, 1989: 99). Bradley (2013:113) states that the gendering of jobs confirms the traditional gender order; new employees enter a highly gendered work environment, where they are “absorbed into the existing patterns of behaviour which are hard to resist”. Bradley (2013:113) adds that women’s bodies are often viewed as intruders in a workplace, where the male body has been deemed the norm.

The traditional gender order in the workplace allows women to only compete with each other for positions, and this competition is mostly based on appearance (Bradley, 2013). Jennifer, a company representative, stated, “If I look neater than the other person, it kind of feels like there is no real competition, if you know what I mean. Then I know that, if they are going to judge on appearance, then I might have a place here”.<sup>9</sup>.

Sophia, a research support administrator, stated that it depends on why a person wants to look beautiful and what they want to gain from it. Beauty is strategically used and mimicked to get certain reactions and goals. She thinks that, if you want a certain reaction and are not getting it, you will look to other women who are getting the desired reaction, and you will imitate that<sup>10</sup>. Haas and Gregory (2005:451) explain this as an “expectancy of performance”. Status characteristics have value when cultural standards define people with one characteristic better than those with the opposite one, for example, attractiveness. People then often expect attractive women to be competent in their jobs (Haas & Gregory, 2005:451).

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*myself. En dan weet ek, ooghare is darem gedoen, hare is gedoen. En, ja, ek moet sê, tot 'n mate boost dit mens se selfbeeld ook. Dan voel jy weer reg om ander mense te sien en jy voel nie so uit plek uit nie*

<sup>8</sup> *Ek dink baie meisies en vrouens voel dat as hulle “makeup” dra, dan maak dit hulle 'n ander persoon)*

<sup>9</sup> *En ek lyk byvoorbeeld netjieser as die ander persoon, voel dit vir my half, daar is nie regtige kompetisie nie, as jy verstaan wat ek bedoel. Dan weet ek, “okay”, wel, as hulle my op my voorkoms ook gaan “judge”, dan weet ek dalk het ek hierso 'n plekkie.*

<sup>10</sup> *Okay, dit hang af hoekom jy wil mooi lyk en wat jy wil hê daaruit. So ek dink as jy 'n sekere reaksie wil hê en dit werk nie vir jou nie, gaan jy kyk wie kry so reaksie en kan ek daai mimiek.*

Other scholars confirm that women's credibility as serious workers are often compromised by their appearance. McDowell (1997 as cited by Bradley, 2013:113) states that in the workplace, women are expected to display their femininity by wearing skirts, but the skirt should not be too short, or it might undermine their reliability as serious workers.

It has also been proven that women are treated differently in the workplace when they look beautiful. It is empowering for them to be able to control other's reactions since they know they will be treated better, or people will be nicer to them if they look pretty. An administrative assistant, Chelsea, reported that male colleagues would walk into their section of the building, where mostly young female assistants work, and try to strike up a conversation: "At work, the men will walk here with no reason at all. Then you can see they are thumb sucking for something to say, just so they can come to talk to us".

Workplace discrimination is mainly experienced through sexual objectification. Objectification occurs when a woman is viewed as only a body (object) used for self-satisfaction; whether it is sexual or just visual pleasure (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:174). Experiences like this influence how women perceive themselves, as they adopt an observer view of themselves. They see themselves as figures to be appreciated by others (Fredrickson, 1997; Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1382).

Another example was provided by a participant who is an educator. Ellie is a teacher at a primary school in Potchefstroom. The teaching staff consists mainly of female teachers of various ages. She stated that the male colleagues are friendlier and more sociable with the older women, who look more feminine. According to her, the less feminine women are considered the "strict" teachers. A feminine image was described as "regularly wearing makeup, hair is done and nails are perfect". Women with a less feminine appearance were described as women who have "short hair and don't put in a lot of effort, don't blow out their hair". She added that it is almost as if men are "afraid of them". According to Jeffreys (2005:21), women with a less feminine appearance are threatening to a feminine image, and therefore often viewed as ugly or dangerous and, in this case, "angry". Feminine features signal passivity and a willingness to submit, and therefore a woman should not be seen as a threat to masculine power (Jeffreys, 2005:21; Elias & Gill, 2017:239).

Ellie, a teacher, also mentioned that female teachers are expected to dress appropriately. Teachers should not wear skirts that are too short or show any cleavage: "Don't give them a reason to be offended by you, because schools are very easily offended"<sup>11</sup>. She added that children are more respectful of teachers who dress appropriately and make an effort with their appearance.

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<sup>11</sup> (Moenie vir hulle 'n rede gee om afgesit te word deur jou nie. Want skole kan baie afgesit word)

According to some participants (Daphne, Erin and Abigail), appearance offers different levels of benefits, “depending on the career”. Daphne, a medical doctor, stated that she dislikes wearing makeup at work because she does not care what she looks like at work, nor does she style her hair, because of long working hours and regular night shifts. She stated that, “I don’t wear makeup to work, because its hard labour and when you work evenings, you are tired and not concerned with your appearance.” <sup>12</sup>.

Abigail, a hairdresser, said that beauty is only an asset in certain careers, such as the beauty industry. It does not benefit you in careers such as medicine, where “it is the degree that counts”<sup>13</sup>. This view was echoed by Erin, an associate professor in natural sciences, who stated that her appearance would not “help her in any way” if she “can’t do what she is supposed to do”<sup>14</sup>. However, when she has lectures, she dresses up and looks different than when she is working in the laboratory. Her reason for this is that she wants to appear professional to students. Hamermesh (2011:88) as well as Haas and Gregory (2005) argue that an attractive appearance is often judged with having other valuable qualities for a job position. These qualities include being more credible, more successful in their position, and more productive.

Erin, a university lecturer, stated that:

“I do enjoy it when I do it [makeup], because I do not do it every day, so it’s not a chore. If I have to start doing it daily, it will become a chore, but because I don’t do it every day or don’t do it intensely, it is fun”.<sup>15</sup>.

Elisabeth, a teaching assistant, corroborated this: making her face up on a daily basis would become boring.

These findings demonstrate that women use beauty practices as a tool to compete with other women for a job or position. However, this only applies to certain professions, since a smear of lipstick and a blow-dry will not help a doctor or scientist without the necessary qualifications. This is why Gimlin (1996:519) stated that women use beauty practices to forge a professional identity, to assist them to appear more serious. Gimlin (1996:519) states that this is especially true for women in male-dominated careers. Women often describe a “professional” hairstyle as simple and thus suitable for professional status. According to participants (Ellie, Erin), a big hairstyle would compromise a professional image.

On the other hand, careers in the beauty industry – such as beauty therapists or hairstylists – place a great premium on appearance, as they are the ambassadors of their own products and

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<sup>12</sup> By die werk sit ek nie baie grimering aan en so aan nie, want dis maar hard werk en so aan. Ag, soos jy werk in die aand, jy’s moeg, jy “worry” nie regtig oor hoe jy lyk nie.

<sup>13</sup> As jy nou in die “beauty” industrie is kan dit jou ‘n voordeel gee maar dit gaan jou nie ‘n voordeel gee as jy soos in “medicine practices” gaan, dan tel jou graad

<sup>14</sup> My “appearance” gaan my niks help nie. As ek nie kan doen wat ek kan doen nie.

<sup>15</sup> As ek dit doen geniet ek dit, want ek doen dit nie elke dag nie, so dis nie vir my ‘n “chore” nie. So as ek dit elke dag gaan moet begin doen, sal dit vir my ‘n “chore” word, maar omdat ek dit nie elke dag doen nie, of “intense” doen nie, is dit vir my lekker

abilities. Because they work in the beauty industry, they are viewed as representatives of the beauty culture (Gimlin, 1996:507). Some participants (Erin, Elisabeth) agreed with this and reiterated that beauty practices are important in careers situated in the beauty industry. Elisabeth stated that, “I think that in a career where you are working with other women’s appearance, for example, a hairdresser or a makeup artist [then your own appearance is important], then they must look neat. Because it is their job to improve other women’s appearances.” And Erin felt that when you work in a spa, you couldn’t look like you neglect your appearance.<sup>16</sup>

Abigail is a hairstylist who felt that beauty might hold benefits if you are working in the beauty industry, but not necessarily in other industries. However, it is not only appearance that counts. She stated that, “you can be a pretty stylist in our industry, but it is also about what your work looks like. Like, there are weird-looking men that do not take care of themselves, but then they are L’Oréal’s top stylists”.

The discussion demonstrates some of the reasons why women engage in life-long body surveillance. The body requires consistent transformation, and this produces a body acceptable to society (Elias *et al.*, 2017:14-16). Women are constantly focused on their bodies, because their social and work circumstances require it. It requires them to critically assess, fix, and reconstruct their bodies; thus, in essence, they attempt to maintain a body that will draw admiration as an object, and simultaneously communicate that she is not to be seen a threat to masculine power (Elias & Gill, 2018: viii).

### **4.3 The constraints of beauty**

Participants in this study did not identify with notions of “being oppressed” by beauty practices, which is a central theme in most literature discussed in Chapter 2. It did not occur to most participants to question the beauty industry and beauty ideals as a system (McRobbie, 2019:68), which might be the result of already having internalised these ideals (Elias *et al.*, 2017:88). However, participants did discuss aspects of beauty rituals that could be considered restrictive.

This section discusses the ways beauty practices are constraining to young working women in Potchefstroom. First, it considers beauty as a source of criticism of self and of others. Then it explores the ways in which social media increases the surveillance of women’s appearances.

#### **4.3.1 Criticism of self and others**

Many women stated that they engage in beauty practices to look beautiful for themselves. They want to look at themselves and feel that they are beautiful. Nevertheless, some participants (Ellie, Erin, Maxine, Taylor) admitted that their idea of beauty is influenced by society and the media (Elias *et al.*, 2017:273).

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<sup>16</sup> Ek meen as jy self in ‘n spa werk, kan jy nie afgeskeep lyk nie. Dis die persepsie.

As mentioned earlier, various participants (Scarlet, Jennifer, and Amber) mentioned that beauty practices change them into another person. This indicates that women feel more comfortable when they resemble society's expectations of women (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:262-263). They want to have their own unique appearance, but this appearance should still resemble societal standards. It provides them with confidence, and it keeps them safe from judgments and marginalisation: "[I]t kind of feels like you have to look like that and have to behave a certain way, or else society is not going to accept you" (Amber). Conforming to beauty standards allow young women to fit in with peers as most groups aspire to and value these standards. Women's constant pursuit of a certain ideal is what keeps this system alive (Jeffreys, 2005:34; Wolf, 1990).

Bartky (1990) states that patriarchal standards of bodily acceptance have been internalised in such a manner that women feel shame and punish themselves when they are unable or unwilling to conform to these standards. Shame is the "emotion felt upon the loss of self-esteem" (Bartky, 1990:87). Women internalise beauty standards and judge themselves as others would judge them, and experience a loss of self-esteem when they do not resemble the ideal. Thus, beauty practices are also a way of ensuring self-esteem, hence the "if I look good, I feel good" statements from various participants in this study. Participants were aware of Instagram and other social media platforms that promote a particular appearance and were aware that women do not feel good enough if they do not resemble the image, if only partly. This could also indicate an internalisation of those beauty ideals (Elias *et al.*, 2017:375).

Because women fear being judged and labelled as unattractive, they have strict expectations of their own appearance. Ellie, for example, expressed how disappointed she is after removing her makeup in the evenings: "I realise one gets so used to all the makeup, when I take my eyeliner off in the evening, then I think, 'hell, you are not pretty.'"<sup>17</sup>. Most participants felt uncomfortable leaving the house without makeup, because they did not feel acceptable without it. The feedback women received from people in their immediate environment also influenced how comfortable they felt leaving the house without making an effort with their appearance. One participant stated that, if she chooses not to wear makeup, "numerous times people ask me: 'Are you feeling well, you look pale?'" (Emma). Other participants (Taylor, Scarlet, Ellie, Abigail) had similar experiences when caught without makeup. Many of the participants, therefore, felt obligated to put on makeup to be acceptable to themselves and to others.

Criticism of appearance was a common theme found in the data. Not only were women critical of their own appearances, but also of other women's appearances. Stuart and Donaghue (2011:104) found that being feminine is not the main reason why women engage in beauty practices; they do it to avoid negative judgment and gain acceptance from other women. The participants in this study acknowledged that women are judgemental towards other women, and admitted that they

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<sup>17</sup> *Ek kom nogal agter want jy, jy raak so gewoond aan al die "makeup", as ek my "eyeliner" in die aande afhaal, dan dink ek, 'hel, jy is nie mooi nie'*

themselves would sometimes judge another women's appearance, although they do not necessarily verbalise it: "You can think it, but the trick is not to say it" (Chelsea). Stuart and Donaghue (2011:105) found that women who are considered judgemental are depicted as insecure. According to Anthony *et al.* (2016:313), post-modern culture requires that women fit into a feminine mould to be accepted as women. They also state that women define themselves based on comparisons, and how they think others perceive them. Sophia noted that beauty routines allow you to influence what people think of you. It is also part of a practice to avoid criticism or comments from people you interact with daily, as they are also "used to" seeing you a certain way, and a change in appearance might invite comments about health or wellness.

Women admitted to thinking thoughts like: "I wish she would just take care of herself a little bit better. Like, just put on a bit of mascara or lipstick" (Alexia). But, as another participant expressed, "the trick is not to say it, you keep it up here (points to her head, implying the thought must not be verbalised)" (Chelsea). Participants often expressed the desire to improve another woman's appearance:

"I really want to enrol this woman for Glam Guru, just so he can please do something about her appearance, because I just think she can look so much better if she put in a little effort. Because I literally just want them to wax her moustache, wax her eyebrows and blow-dry her hair"<sup>18</sup>.

These are examples of what McRobbie (2009:22) describes as women regulating each other's appearances. Jeffreys (2005:34-36) also states that women are indirectly coerced to engage in beauty practices, since choosing otherwise may result in stigmatisation.

According to Stuart and Donaghue (2011:111), women are aware of the expectations of their appearance. Thus, women are content when they feel beautiful, because being pretty equates with social acceptance. If you do not make an effort, you are deemed ugly, and this leads to social isolation (Freedman, 1989:52) and negative social bias (Kim & Lee, 2018).

It seems that participants felt that women deserve it if there are negative consequences to their disregard of beauty practices. These consequences could be remarks on their appearance or something more serious, like a husband's infidelity. Ellie said, "Like someone who does not do their hair [and] makeup. One thinks it's someone who neglects herself, and then you are almost not surprised when her husband cheats on her". Another participant stated that she understands why people would comment when she does not wear makeup and that these comments were justified, because they are "not used to seeing her that way".

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<sup>18</sup> *Ek wil so graag net daai vrou inskryf vir Glam Guru, dat hy net asseblief iets aan hierdie vrou kan doen. Want ek dink net sy kan soveel mooier lyk as sy regtig moeite doen. Want ek wil letterlik dat hulle net haar snor "wax", net haar wenkbroue "wax", net haar hare uitblaas*

Most women expressed some form of disapproval of women who wear too much makeup, and if they considered the makeup as having changed someone's natural appearance too much. As seen in Taylor's interview:

I mean, sometimes I see these people also on these makeup tutorials, with makeup, and without makeup, they don't even look like the same person, you know. Like, why can't you just do your makeup more naturally? Why must you look like a completely different person? Your nose is shaped differently, and the lips are bigger or what. Then they take their makeup off and they don't even look like that.

It is evident that the extent to which someone uses makeup or beautify themselves is also subject to criticism. Women are expected to wear makeup, dye their hair and wear fashionable clothes, but it should not be overdone. This confirms what Samper *et al.* (2017:141) found: overdoing beautification efforts is associated with a lower moral character because it is construed as willingness to misrepresent oneself. One participant stated that she had "natural-ish" kind of beauty standards when it comes to herself and "not to go too overboard" (Maxine).

Women were therefore critical of other women who would go "over the top" (Ellie) with certain beauty practices: "[I]t's as if they have something to hide[...] people like that also come across as very shallow [...] or maybe it is that they have hurt and pain and are trying to hide that" (Ellie). Another participant also thought that this could come across as "vain [...] and they feel like if they don't look that way that they are not good enough" (Taylor). Various participants saw an overly made up appearance as a "type of pretence" (Sophia).

The participants in Stuart and Donaghue's study (2011:105) sketched men as being unconcerned with beauty practices, and thus preferring a more natural appearance on a woman (Black, 2002). Participants in this study confirmed this perception, with Alexia, Daphne, and Ellie remarking that their husbands preferred women to have a more natural appearance. Erin said that: "The majority of them [men] are not for too much paint, they see it as high maintenance, they see it as fake to a certain extent" <sup>19</sup>(Erin).

The literature on beauty found that it took special effort to look "natural". Samper *et al.* (2017) also found that overt effort was viewed as a willingness to deceive. Hence, young women gain acceptance when their makeup produces a natural appearance and does not look like a lot of work went into it. Beauty in advertisements also makes sure to communicate that enhanced beauty should appear natural. In addition, the beauty industry ensures that cosmetics are used to make women look naturally beautiful. Overdoing beauty is seen as misrepresenting one's true self. It is for this reason that beauty products requiring higher effort are marketed as tools to

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<sup>19</sup> "Majority" van hulle is nie vir te veel verf nie, hulle sien dit as "high maintenance", hulle sien dit as "fake" in 'n mate

acquire a more natural-looking enhancement to one's physical appearance (Samper *et al.*, 2017:142).

#### **4.3.2 Social media: appearance under surveillance**

Elias *et al.* (2017:v) examined the growing pressures on women to go to extra lengths to commercialise their appearance. No part of a women's body is left out when examining the requirements of women's physical appearance. Social media, like Instagram and Facebook, closely scrutinises every aspect of beauty, while at the same time providing women with information on how to change their appearance to look more attractive (Elias & Gill, 2018:69). The influence of social media in the analysis of beauty standards also emerged as a theme.

Participants felt that social media platforms, such as Instagram, encouraged women to compare themselves with each other as well as with celebrities (Chelsea). Some (Selina, Taylor) noticed that popular Instagrammers that promote beauty tips and are commonly known as 'influencers', are often used to promote certain products. Forbes (2016:79) explained that marketing companies team up with social influencers to advertise certain products. It makes sound financial sense for these companies, since young women are encouraged to spend money on beauty products. As mentioned in Chapter 2, buying beauty products is considered a big part of what it means to be female (McRobbie, 2009:63; McRobbie, 2015:725). From the interviews, it seemed that most women were aware of the expectations social media created of women. This is demonstrated in statements like "if you go on Instagram, there are girls that are beauty crazy, that show you how you should be" <sup>20</sup>(Amber). Another participant stated that social media expects women to be skinnier and to wear more makeup (Alexia). Maxine stated that "it is expected [to beautify] of them [women], but that is just how society made it out to be.

Participants acknowledged the influence of social media on what is seen as physically acceptable. Dora, for example, reported that "you can't avoid what is seen on social media, it influences you whether you want it to or not."<sup>21</sup> Thus, as most women confessed, social media has influenced how they view physical beauty or what it means to appear "neat" (Elias *et al.*, 2017:256). When this view is internalised, they derive some form of pleasure from achieving the look (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:107).

Most participants said that they are aware of the internet's influence on women's beauty standards. That "especially on Instagram, there is that certain image they [people on Instagram] want to achieve" (Amber). Cindy also mentioned that, "they have these makeup apps and they change their faces so much that you can hardly recognise that person in real life, they have their internet life and then [a] normal life". Other participants also demonstrated the influence of the internet and social media on ideals of beauty and the looks women want to emulate. Taylor, for example, admitted that she finds her beauty tips mainly on the internet. Some participants

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<sup>20</sup> Soos as jy op Instagram gaan, daar's meisies wat soos net "beauty"-mal is en vir jou wys hoe jy moet wees

<sup>21</sup> Dit beïnvloed 'n mens en ek wil nie sê of jy nou wil of nie.

considered these beauty “influencers” and their tutorials as terribly vain, but at the same time, this is where they turned for tips on achieving these very looks.

In the 1990s, scholars noted that women’s appearances were observed and judged, and, like Foucault’s theory of the Panopticon, they started internalising this judgement and closely monitoring themselves (Bartky, 1990). The participants of this study reported that they were aware of being observed and judged everywhere they went. Most women admitted that they would not leave the house without makeup or without having done their hair, because, they “will see someone they know” (Ellie). It is often difficult to discern between what women do for the sake of pleasure, and what is done merely to be “obedient to the requirements of femininity” (Bartky, 1990).

Erin stated that she thinks beauty practices “limit you in a way and control you in a way”. <sup>22</sup>Thus, it also links with other studies that found that women want to feel relaxed about beauty practices, but they are unable to (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:111).

#### **4.4 The ways young women position themselves as free-choosing agents**

Young working women in Potchefstroom believed it was their personal choice to wear makeup or not, which is what participants in the study by Dellinger and Williams (1997:168) experienced.

All the participants in this study felt that women engage in beauty practices of their own free will. They felt that they were free to choose whether to engage in beauty practices or not (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011). Bradley (2013:181) states that women’s consumption of cosmetic and beauty products is portrayed as a realm of choice and fulfilment, but this portrayal is misleading. Certain discourses influence how women make their consumer choices and these are connected to how their gender identities are construed. These discourses may include interactions with peer groups, with social media, and the influence of celebrities. Women in this study did not view women’s relationships with beauty as a feminist issue; but McRobbie (2009:64-68) maintains that beauty rituals are a feminist issue because it is seen as a choice and not an obligation.

Most participants clearly stated that putting an effort into their appearance helped them fit in and avoid negative feedback. Looking good made them feel good about themselves, and they used beauty practices to regulate their self-esteem. Most participants also found physical and emotional enjoyment in following their beauty routines, although some of them experienced it as a “chore”. The following section discusses beauty practices as physically pleasing experiences, and explains how these practices enable participants to feel confident and empowered.

##### **4.4.1 Relaxation and pampering at the salon**

Some participants in this study liked doing their daily beauty routines. All participants admitted to enjoying treatments at a beauty salon or hairdresser, but that they do not always find the time to

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<sup>22</sup> *Nee ek dink dit beperk jou in 'n mate. Ek dink dit beheer jou in 'n mate.*

go. One participant stated that “It would be ideal if we could get time off work to [go for treatments] – beauty leave, we all need that” (Emma). Alexia was another participant who admitted that she “enjoys going to a salon, just to be pampered, I love it, I love that when I walk out, and I look beautiful again and I did nothing, so, yes, it helps me relax”<sup>23</sup>.

According to Black and Sharma (2001), the beauty salon is a setting that enables women to comply with the requirements of femininity and escape it. It is a setting where the attainment and definitions of femininity are “fought out” (Black & Sharma, 2001:101). One participant (Elisabeth), stated that the only time she enjoyed beauty routine was when she went for treatments at a salon, for example a facial or getting her eyebrows tinted. Alexia agreed, saying that she loved walking out of a beauty salon and looking beautiful again and feeling relaxed.

Many other participants also found pleasure and personal rewards in applying makeup and styling their hair in the morning. Cindy stated: “I love doing my makeup in the morning. That is me time. It is when I go through my thoughts for the day”. Chelsea mentioned that: “I wake up early just to do all of those things! So, if you have to go to a parlour or something, that’s fine. That’s like a treat. You know you go for a massage or like waxing or have makeup done. It’s like a treat actually.” Ellie said that, “I take my time in front of the mirror, put on eyeliner and all that stuff because I want to. I want to put in the effort before school, and it’s fun. I sometimes think that it’s fun to be a woman”. <sup>24</sup>Other participants (Daphne and Dora) felt that having a beauty routine in the morning felt like a chore, and that “it is not necessarily pleasing, but I’m used to it” (Dora). As already mentioned, another participant (Erin) felt that she enjoyed beauty practices [makeup] because she does not do it every day. If she had to do it on a daily basis, it would no longer be enjoyable.

Cahill (2003:43) argues that beauty and beauty practices do not need to conflict with feminist standpoints and highlights; it can contribute to “feminist understandings of the self”. She found that the process of beautification is perhaps the most and only part that could be seen as empowering to women and as part of feminist practice. After all, the results are pleasing, as Ellie reported: “It’s nice to look at yourself in the mirror after you have done your makeup and to see that you indeed are beautiful”. However, as Cahill (2003:60) also argues, how the result is received in public can never be determined.

Cahill (2003:60) states that a woman has no control over how she will be perceived when stepping out in public. It can become oppressive when women are viewed as sexual objects and their beauty is not considered an art. Various scholar (McRobbie, 2009:61; Bartky, 1990) have stated

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<sup>23</sup> *Net “gepamper” te word. Dis... ja. Ek “love” dit, ek “love” dit as ek daar uitstap en ek lyk weer mooi en ek het niks gedoen nie. En dis die beste deel. So, ja, dit laat my ontspan).*

<sup>24</sup> *Ek vat my tyd voor die spieël. Sit my “eyeliner” op en al die dinge, want ek wil. Ek doen moeite daarso voor skool. En dis lekker. Ek dink partykeer dis lekker om ’n vrou te wees.*

that beauty practices are designed to be a pleasurable experience, “something that you want to do, not because you have to” (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:106). Stuart and Donaghue (2011:106) found that women found joy and comfort in having their hair cut and styled, receiving a facial, or wearing makeup. Women found this “intrinsically rewarding”, but Stuart and Donaghue (2011:118) argue that a focus on the experience could trivialise the dark side of beauty practices, for example, the development of oppressive views of femininity and the emotional toll of disciplining their bodies to comply with often unrealistic standards. Participants admitted that fulfilling society’s standards of beauty delivers relationship and career benefits, which is considered an “effort, [but] it’s worth it” (Taylor).

#### **4.4.2 Feeling beautiful, confident and empowered**

Women reported that beauty routines also make them feel more confident, and confidence is seen as a “characteristic of a beautiful woman” (Selena). Gaining confidence is seen as a worthwhile return on the beauty efforts invested (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:109). Most participants in this study felt that they just “feel better” when “you just look better for yourself” <sup>25</sup>(Amber). They also felt that looking pretty boosts their self-esteem, even when they are not feeling well: “Like I can feel sick, but if I look pretty then, I’m like on top of the world” (Chelsea). Most participants felt that they engage in beauty routines – whether at a beauty salon or at home – for themselves, “to feel good about themselves” and “to look beautiful for themselves” (Dora). Most participants stated that their beauty routines make them feel better.

As mentioned earlier, participants were aware of Instagram promoting a certain appearance. If they internalise these standards, they would not feel good enough if they do not resemble the image to some extent (Elias *et al.*, 2017:160). Therefore, “you can give yourself confidence on the outside, maybe to suppress the uncertainty on the inside a bit” <sup>26</sup>(Erin). Not all participants saw the influence of the internet on beauty standards as limiting. One participant stated the following:

“I do, but I don’t think it’s as, how can I say, like, strict as it was a few years ago, that a few years ago, it was very much [a certain norm]. Because a few years ago, like, if you didn’t look like a model, you know, you shouldn’t leave your house, and now it’s like, opened it up completely to more expression, which is, which is really good. I mean it’s allowing people, it’s like allowing guys to wear makeup. Now me, also I think it does influence it and it’s cool” (Emelia).

Through this, it is evident that the internet has also broadened traditional views of beauty, as it offers various alternatives to the conventional definitions of beauty. Another participant also noticed that movies and the film industry had started using “normal” people as actors, which she felt broadened traditional views of beauty (Fiona).

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<sup>25</sup> *Jy voel net beter, jy lyk vir jouself beter.*

<sup>26</sup> *(jy kan jouself “confidence” gee aan die buitekant om die onsekerheid aan die binnekant dalk so bietjie te “suppress”)*

Beauty practices helped participants navigate their feelings toward themselves and their general emotional state. Feeling beautiful also means feeling good. Ellie said that, “[you] put in extra effort on the outside, and you feel better already. “Then you look in the mirror and think ‘wow, you’re beautiful!’ and then you feel better” <sup>27</sup>(Ellie). This signifies that making an effort with their appearance can positively influence self-esteem. Chelsea reported that, “When you look good you feel good. Sometimes I would be at home by myself, then I would literally do my face up and I would watch TV the whole day at home” (Chelsea).

In light of the abovementioned examples, the following must also be considered. The weight of the social consequences women face if they do not conform to conventional standards, can remove “choice as a genuine option” (Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:113). According to Stuart and Donaghue (2011:100), “the cultural privileges attached to beauty creates a compelling reason for women to engage in beauty practices”. Swami *et al.* (2010:365) state that beauty practices reduce women to sex objects. This causes them to feel that their bodies are inadequate, which forces them to engage in practices that leave them feeling unqualified if they fail to live up to the idealised form of femininity.

This could explain why some participants of this study felt less confident without makeup or styled hair. One participant stated that men would “run away” if they were to see “her face without makeup” <sup>28</sup>(Scarlet). Most participants also admitted to feeling uncomfortable when leaving the house without makeup; when they do, they ensure it is a quick errand or an area with only a few people (Dora, Ellie, Chelsea, Selina, Mia, Abigail, Jennifer, Amber, Emelia, Emma, Cindy).

## 4.5 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to explore the meanings that young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. This chapter aimed to complete the following objectives:

- To investigate how women conceptualise the idea of beauty, beauty expression, and beauty practices in their living context as young working women;
- To explore the ways young working women experience beauty practices as constraining;
- To examine the ways young women position themselves as free-choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices.

This chapter demonstrated the complexities of meanings that young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. A number of themes were identified from the data that was collected through semi-structured interviews. The main themes that were found in the data was that young working women in Potchefstroom viewed beauty practices as a tool to express some part of their identity, as well as to construct their identity and identify as being

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<sup>27</sup> (doen ekstra moeite buite, dan voel jy al klaar beter. Dan kyk jy in die spieël en dink, ‘Wow, jy’s mooi’. En dan voel jy beter.)

<sup>28</sup> hy moet hardloop of hulle gaan hardloop as hulle hierdie gesig sonder enige iets sien.

female (Gimlin, 1996:519, Elias *et al.*, 2017:160). The women did not experience beauty practices as oppressive but felt that it was customs they enjoyed most of the time. Most participants associated beauty practices with self-care and an escape, even if it was just the few minutes they spent in front of the mirror.

They enjoy “seeing the transformation” in their appearance, and it is therefore not seen as “a chore” (Emma), but “worth it” (Taylor). Participants indicated that they feel empowered when beauty practices make them look different from their natural or unmade up self. It gives them confidence to be more extroverted at work and at social gatherings. Some of them admitted that this was not necessarily a positive thing (the fact that beauty gave confidence); one participant stated that beauty rituals “limit” and “control” women in a way (Erin).

Bartky (1990:150) and Freedman (1989) place a lot of emphasis on beauty as social construction: “The harshness of a system (regimen) alone does not guarantee its rejection, because hardships can be endured if they are thought to be necessary or inevitable” Bartky (1990:150). Bartky’s (1990:150) perspective on beauty regards it as a disciplinary technology that women’s appearance is subject to complex discipline and regulation, even when it is seemingly freely chosen (Elias *et al.*, 2017:7). Other scholars state that it is important to understand that women’s personal choices are also political (Jeffreys, 2005). The fact that women are unsatisfied with their appearance is not an individual experience, but one that is shared among a significant number of other women as well (Jeffreys, 2005:10; Dworkin, 1974, McRobbie, 2007:725-726). Wolf (1990:75) states that the “beauty myth” “drives women apart” as well as “binds them together. It drives women apart because other women become competition for jobs, relationships and status, but it binds women together because the quest to be beautiful is an experience shared amongst most women”.

It was therefore important for participants to situate themselves as free-choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices. They often focused on the importance of internal qualities or internal beauty that should be expressed through beauty practices. They felt that beauty practices should not be heavy handed, but subtly used to enhance natural features. Otherwise, it could signify insecurity or dishonesty.

The findings of this study demonstrated that beauty practices are not something that can be labelled solely as oppressive or pleasurable, but that it has both qualities that are oppressive and pleasurable to young working women in Potchefstroom. It has oppressive qualities even if participants were not aware of them (Jeffreys, 2005:116; McRobbie, 2015) and it has pleasurable qualities, since beauty practices include activities that are physically pleasing and emotionally empowering.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the chapters in this dissertation. It contains a general discussion of how this study addressed the objectives as outlined in Chapter 1. It also includes the concluding remarks of this study. The limitations of this study are discussed and recommendations for future research are provided. The main objective of this study was to examine the meanings that young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. The chapter describes how the study objectives were met and briefly discusses the findings of the study.

### **5.2 Concluding remarks: the realisation of the research objectives**

Chapter 1 served as an overall introduction to the study. It introduced the problem statement, research questions, and the objectives of this study. It served as a platform where previous literature could be introduced and from which a problem statement could be formulated. Chapter 1 also introduced the research approach followed in this study, which was a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach was considered the most appropriate choice as it lent itself to exploring perspectives of young working women in Potchefstroom. The methodological choices that followed the adoption of a qualitative approach were also briefly introduced and described. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the preferred method for achieving the objectives.

Chapter 2 addressed the first objective of the study, “To state what literature and theorists have found about the various meanings attached to beauty practices”. It provided an in-depth discussion of literature that was relevant to this study. It included feminist perspectives on beauty and beauty practices. It discussed theories demonstrating the oppressive nature of beauty practices, and theories that explain why beauty practices are potentially empowering to women. Dworkin (1974:115) wrote that women’s submissive state in society is the consequence of the way women are physically portrayed, and how women feel they have to present themselves. This portrayal plays to societal expectations of women to flaunt their sexuality, and hence adopt an observer’s view of their bodies (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997:147). Wolf (1990:3) argued that it is the ‘beauty myth’ that keeps women in subordinate positions. The beauty myth entails a search for physical perfection, perfection that, more often than not, is impossible to attain. This leads to women’s obsession with their physical appearance. Some scholars emphasise the role of sexism in the constructions of unrealistic beauty standards (Swami *et al.*, 2010:366). This refers to beauty standards that expect mostly women, and not men, to focus on their appearance and look well groomed.

The role of social media in setting the bar for beauty and specifying how it should be achieved has gained prominence in recent decades. Beauty “influencers” post tutorial videos on Instagram and Facebook that show young women how to recreate current popular makeup or hairstyling

techniques, and outdated looks to avoid. This increases the degree to which women scrutinise themselves and other women (Elias & Gill, 2018:61; Fardouly *et al.*, 2018:1381).

Scholars like Cahill (2003:53), Anderssen (2017:30) and White (2018:140) argue that women can use beauty practices to feel empowered and confident. They state that most women enjoy the processes of grooming and styling, even if the process of beautifying is more pleasing than the result. When analysing beauty practices as a social entity, the pleasure of the process should be taken into consideration, as some feminists claim it as one of the main reasons women choose to engage in beauty practices (Cahill, 2003:43; Black & Sharma, 2001:113; White, 2018:144). McRobbie (2009:2), on the other hand, argued that popular culture and media have adopted feminist words like “empowerment” and “choice” to promote their own interests, which are not necessarily women’s interests. In fact, it undoes what feminism has done for women. The way women are portrayed in popular culture conveys the message that feminism is no longer necessary; women are equal to men as film and media represent them as powerful and autonomous. These strong and independent women are shown buying products to improve and enhance their appearance, and this is depicted as empowering to women (McRobbie, 2009:21). The reality is that women become obsessed with their apparent imperfections (McRobbie, 2015:15), and this is considered normal and natural for women being concerned about their appearance. When women no longer focus on the male power structures around them, gender equality turns into a non-issue (McRobbie, 2015:17).

Chapter 3 addressed the second objective, “To employ the most appropriate methodology for researching the meanings that women attach to beauty practices”. The chapter presented the research design of this study and focused on justifying it. Given the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this study, which are constructivist and interpretivist, a qualitative design was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were selected as qualitative data-collection method. Questions were formulated to be open-ended and observations were written down after each interview. Interviews were recorded, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and answers were coded. The transcribed and coded interviews were analysed and interpreted. These methods assisted the researcher to complete the objectives of the study.

Chapter 4 addressed the four empirical objectives of this study. The main objective was, “To empirically explore and interpret the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their own beauty practices”, and the related objectives were:

To explore how the young women conceptualise ideas of (a) beauty, (b) beauty expression and (c) beauty practices in their own living contexts as young working women. The participants conceptualised beauty as something that is inherently part of being a female. They felt that to beautify, was something that came natural for women. Most participants considered it important to participate in beauty practices and they groom themselves for work, since their appearance influences how they experience work. It affects how co-workers treat them and how they talk to

clients. Beauty practices help them to appear “softer and gentler”. This is related to what scholars have argued about women who are expected to appear and act in feminine ways in their careers, with the primary focus placed on their appearance, even at work (Freedman, 1989; Dworkin, 1990; McRobbie, 2009:71-72). Participants felt that beauty allows them to compete for jobs with other women. They argued that, if they look groomed and beautiful, they stand a better chance of attaining a job position or promotion compared to a woman who does not beautify herself. Participants maintained that beauty practices help them to adjust their appearance according to the requirements of the job. For example, it made them feel like they were ready to work with clients, and that they could behave and speak with confidence. The second objective was to examine in which ways do young women position themselves as free-choosing agents regarding the use of beauty practices. The findings show that young working women in Potchefstroom relate to beauty not only as something constraining, but as something that could assist them to express parts of their identity and their emotional state. Beauty is something that many participants enjoy. It was seen as something unique and natural to women. The women in this study felt that women should engage in beauty routines to appear “neat”. Most participants set the minimum standard at “appearing neat”, although they admitted to engaging in beauty routines for the sake of enjoyment and relaxation. They also viewed it as something to they could look forward to, like going to a salon to enjoy some time to themselves.

Most participants stated that they engage in beauty routines of their own free will; only two participants admitted that these rituals sometimes feel like a chore. They positioned themselves as free choosing agents; they were convinced that it was something they do for themselves. However, their responses also hinted that they were aware that their “choices” were probably influenced by other factors. Beauty practices help them “fit in” and avoid negative feedback. They were keenly aware of the treatment they received from people in their social and work environments. Thus, they would much rather put effort into their appearance than feel judged or provoke a negative comment about their looks. This suggests that engaging in beauty practices might not be as autonomous as they might believe. Although some women were aware of the rigid beauty standards women are expected to comply with, others felt that beauty requirements today were less strict than a few years ago because of body positivity movements and movies that portray different types of beauty. The third objective was to explore how in the opinions of the young middle-class working women, could beauty practices be potentially constraining. Most participants were not comfortable leaving their house without makeup. As claimed by Stuart and Donaghue (2011:104), this was to avoid negative comments or judgments about their appearance and to gain social acceptance. Their experiences echoed Wolf’s (1990:287) argument that women judge each other on appearance as a way to regulate each other’s appearance. Most participants were aware of the media’s scrutiny of appearance and of the rigid beauty requirements set for women. Participants also felt that a woman is validated by her appearance, and beauty routines and treatments enable women to increase their sense of worth. Most participants reported that beauty products give them self-confidence, and most admitted to feeling uncomfortable and plain

if they left home with a bare face. It was also something that they felt increase their worth as a person. From the findings, it was clear that beauty practices had different, sometimes ambiguous, meanings in the lives of young women in Potchefstroom. Participants admitted that beauty practices are important and valuable in their working lives. It enables them to conduct themselves with confidence and protects them from the critical comments from co-workers. It helps them to create an image that is necessary if you want to be respected in the work environment. This confirmed the findings from studies by a number of scholars (Engeln-Maddox, 2006:263; Dellinger & Williams, 1997:168; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:109).

### **5.3 Conclusions on the empirical findings**

This section discusses the empirical findings of this study. The findings are noteworthy because they add to the body of literature on the meanings young working women in Potchefstroom attach to their beauty practices. Various scholars found that beauty practices enable women to compete with other women for job positions or promotions, since appearance counts for more than qualifications (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:156; Stuart & Donaghue, 2011:104; Hamermesh, 2011:72). The young working women who participated in this study also admitted that appearance mattered in their career. In general, the participants felt that beauty practices make them feel more confident in their work environments and enable them to be more assertive and voice their opinions.

They also noticed that clients and co-workers treat them differently when they are groomed and beautiful. As one participant stated, colleagues are “nicer” to them. Beauty practices are used to protect them from negative comments. As mentioned earlier, women’s appearances elicit questions about their health and energy levels. Makeup can cover signs of fatigue or ill health and help women evade critical questions and comments.

Clients were reported as being more “cooperative” if an employee is dressed up and made up. Beauty practices allow young working women to achieve a measure of control over the way people treat them (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997:179). Participants adopted an observer’s view of themselves, and they evaluate themselves as they thought others would. Participants confirmed that certain stereotypes are associated with a beautiful appearance. For example, beautiful women are perceived to have better social skills and be more competent than their less attractive co-workers.

In general, participants felt that inner beauty is an important asset in a work environment, and beauty practices enhance their inner beauty, e.g., their personality, competency and work ethic. They also felt that appearance is a reflection of how important your career is to you. If someone is proud of the job they are doing, they make an effort to appear groomed to reflect that pride. According to participants, an individual’s appearance communicates how they value themselves. These are examples of statements women made to illustrate their status as free-choosing agents in their use of beauty practices. The remarks cited also indicate that women are rewarded for

having a beautiful and groomed appearance, but are rejected when they neglect their appearance. Hence, beauty practices could be considered a strategy for success.

Young working women in general felt that their beauty practices allow them to express their individuality and mood. It also lifts their mood when they feel despondent or sick. It allows them to create a daily identity that they feel comfortable sharing, whether it be fun and engaging or stricter and more professional.

Participants felt that neatness is an important aspect of appearance. Beauty practices help them look neat and they expect other women to look neat. Participants felt that women have a responsibility to look after their appearance, because they felt that women are naturally inclined to groom and style. Various participants preferred the term “neat”, presumably because “beauty” sounds vain and shallow.

Most participants reported that they have learned certain beauty routines from beauty tutorials on YouTube and Instagram, and they look to Pinterest for hair styling ideas. However, participants generally felt that the standards set by these platforms are impossible for the average young working woman to attain, as it symbolises an unrealistic ideal. Based on this, participants had mixed emotions about social media platforms like YouTube.

Women admitted that beauty practices are something they enjoy, and it is an escape from their normal busy lives. They enjoy visiting beauty or hair salons for treatments, as it is indulgent and relaxing. Studies have also found that beauty practices help women conform to beauty ideals and this process can be empowering and pleasing (Black & Sharma, 2001:104; Cahill, 2003:44). Others enjoy using makeup to transform their appearance in front of the mirror. It makes them feel confident and ready to face the day. Participants experienced this as “me time”. For some, it is an opportunity to focus on their emotions and thoughts.

## **5.4 Recommendations for further research**

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a general lack of academic literature about beauty practices in South Africa. Although this study contributed to the field by examining the meanings young working women attach to their beauty practices, many themes under this topic remain to be explored.

This study focused on young working women between the ages of 23 and 38. Future studies could include women in other age groups and of other races. This would contribute to a wider understanding of the significance they attach to beauty. Future studies could also focus on beauty practices in different provinces across South Africa. It would be interesting to discover the different meanings women across South Africa associate with their beauty practices.

Future studies could also include research on whether makeup influences productivity at work. Various other studies in other countries like the United States of America focused on the role of makeup in career performance (Dellinger & Williams, 1997:151; Ivanaj *et al.*, 2018:864).

There is still a lot to be explored about the dynamics and effects of beauty practices in modern South Africa. It will continue to be an important topic to explore, since statistics have shown that the sales of beauty products continue to rise year after year. The influence of social media platforms and so-called “influencers” continues to grow as the number of followers increases. The effects of social media on beauty rituals, product sales, and work and social environments must be investigated since beauty standards affect women on many different levels.

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# Appendix A: Informed Consent

**INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**  
**NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY, POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS**  
**MASTERS DISSERTATION: THE MEANINGS OF YOUNG WORKING WOMEN'S BEAUTY**  
**PRACTICES: A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLORATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN SMALL CITY CONTEXT**  
**FIELD OF STUDY: SOCIOLOGY**

**RESEARCHER: MARELI HELLMUTH**  
**Cell: 0846828399**  
**EMAIL: marelihellmuth@gmail.com**

Dear Participant,

This informed Consent Statement serves to confirm the following information as it relates to the Master's dissertation with the focus on investigating the meanings of young working women's beauty practices in Potchefstroom:

- 1 The main purpose of this study centres on obtaining information from young working women in Potchefstroom, in an attempt to explore the meanings they attach to their beauty practices.
- 2 The procedure to be followed is a qualitative research design, which includes the use of an in-depth interview comprised of open-ended questions whereby participants are given the opportunity to communicate their subjective views on the noted topic during either a face-to-face in-depth interview. Basic background information regarding age, gender identification and occupation will be asked. Interviews will be recorded, to ensure sufficient transcription of information communicated by the participant. If, at any time during the interview the participant feels that it should be switched off, the researcher will oblige.
- 3 The duration of the interview will be no longer than 45 minutes at most.
- 4 If at any point during the interview the participant should feel uncomfortable, he/she will be given the opportunity to either make his/her discomfort known, or immediately end his/her participation.
- 5 It should also be emphasised that participation takes place on a voluntary basis, with the consent of the participant without any form of coercion.
- 6 The confidentiality and privacy of participants are guaranteed. The participants will be given the opportunity to choose their own fictitious name/pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. Only this name will appear on the interview schedule and in the published report and/or articles. The actual name and surname will only appear on this informed consent form in order to safeguard both the researcher and participant.
- 7 If a respondent regards any information as confidential in nature, and wishes to prohibit the researcher to publish it in the final report and/or articles, he/she should make this known during the interview. This will be adhered to by the researcher.
- 8 A list of the questions to be asked during the interview may be made available to the participant before the commencement of the interview he/she requests this. This will be done to ensure mutual understanding of what has been asked to avoid discrepancies during the interview.
- 9 A summarised copy of the final report or published articles will be made available to participants on request.
- 10 Participants are also requested to provide their e-mail addresses, but only if they feel comfortable to do so. This is done in order to forward relevant information associated with the study (e.g. the final research report, published articles, etc.) to participants if they request this. It is, however, not compulsory to provide this. It will be treated confidentially by the researcher.

I, .....(Name and surname), ..... (Chosen pseudonym) hereby declare that I have read and understand the contents of the Informed Consent Statement, and give my full consent to the interviewer, ..... (name and surname) to progress with the interview on .....(date) and use information communicated by myself for the purpose of the Research Project outlined above.

| Name and Designation | Signature | Date |
|----------------------|-----------|------|
| Supervisor           |           |      |
| Researcher           |           |      |
| Participant          |           |      |

## Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Opening – State what the study is about and the participant’s importance in the study. This study will take approximately 30 minutes.

### Demographic information

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Age                            |  |
| Race                           |  |
| Job/ occupation                |  |
| Highest academic qualification |  |
| Single/ married                |  |
| Kids?                          |  |

### How would you describe your own beauty practices?

|                                                                                 |                   |                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                 |                   |  |
| I style my own hair                                                             | ➤ Every day       |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Sometimes       |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Never           |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Other           |                                                                                     |
| I go to a hair salon                                                            | ➤ Monthly         |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Every 3 months  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Every 6 months  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Once a year     |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Other           |                                                                                     |
| How much time do you spend on getting ready in the morning?                     | ➤ 5 – 10 minutes  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ 10 – 20 minutes |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ 30 – 45 minutes |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Other           |                                                                                     |
| I go to a beauty salon to get my nails done                                     | ➤ Monthly         |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Every 3 Months  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Never           |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Other           |                                                                                     |
| I go to a salon for other beauty procedures (e.g. waxing, tinting or threading) | ➤ Monthly         |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Every 3 months  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Never           |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                 | ➤ Other           |                                                                                     |
| I do my makeup                                                                  | ➤ Everyday        |                                                                                     |

|                                              |                                    |                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                              |                                    |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Sometimes                        |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Never                            |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Other                            |                                                              |
| I spend R . . . on hair salon                | R                                  | Per month/<br>every 3 months/<br>every 6 months/<br>per year |
| I spend R . . . on beauty salon              | R                                  | Per month/<br>every 3 months/<br>every 6 months/<br>per year |
| I spend R . . . on my nails                  | R                                  | Per month/<br>every 3 months/<br>every 6 months/<br>per year |
| I spend R . . . on makeup                    | R                                  | Per month/<br>every 3 months/<br>every 6 months/<br>per year |
| In my working environment I mainly work with | ➤ People                           |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Not people                       |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Male colleagues                  |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Both male and female colleagues  |                                                              |
| My working environment has a:                | ➤ Formal dress code                |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Informal dress code              |                                                              |
| At work, I am expected to                    | ➤ Look taken care after            |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Invest in my physical appearance |                                                              |
|                                              | ➤ Behave in a feminine way         |                                                              |

Die volgende vrae kan jy beantwoord soos dit op jouself van toepassing is, maar ook op grond van jou ervaring van die groter samelewing in Potch.

### Section A: General Questions

- 1) Do beauty practices help you to express your identity? Do you think makeup changes the natural appearance or enhances it?  
*Help skoonheidspraktyke om beter uitdrukking te gee aan jou identiteit? Watter deel van jou identiteit?*
- 2) Are beauty practices an enjoyable part of your life or a negative part of your life?  
*Is skoonheidspraktyke 'n genotvolle deel van jou lewe of 'n ongenotvolle deel van jou lewe?*
- 3) Do you have your own beauty standards?  
*Het jy jou eie skoonheidstandaarde?*
- 4) Do you have any personal beauty routines or secrets or make extra effort to make yourself beautiful?  
*Het jy enige persoonlike skoonheidsgeheime om jouself mooier te laat lyk?*

- 5) Would you ever leave the house without attending to your hair or makeup?  
*Sal jy ooit die huis verlaat sonder om na jou hare of grimering om te sien?*
- 6) Do you have permanent makeup? Or would you ever consider getting permanent makeup, why or why not?  
*Dra jy permanente grimering? Sal jy dit oorweeg om permanente grimering te kry? Hoekom of hoekom nie?*
- 7) In an ideal world, would beauty practices be part of women's lives?  
*In 'n ideale wêreld, sal skoonheidspraktyke deel wees van vroue se lewens?*
- 8) Do you think feminism support the use of beauty practices?  
*Dink jy feminisme ondersteun die gebruik van skoonheidspraktyke?*

## Section B: Social Environment

- 1) Do you think people treat beautiful women a certain way? Please explain?  
*Dink jy mense behandel mooi vrouens op 'n spesiale manier? Verduidelik asseblief?*
- 2) Describe the characteristics, personality or values of a stereotypical beautiful woman?  
*Beskryf die karaktereienskappe, persoonlikheid of waardes van die stereotipiese mooi vrou?*
- 3) Should a pretty woman display a certain type of behaviour? (extroversion or introversion, quiet or loud) Please explain?  
*Moet 'n mooi vrou sekere tipe gedrag toon? (Ekstroversie of Introversie, teruggetrokke of spontaan) Verduidelik asseblief?*
- 4) How do you think the internet, like YouTube or Instagram, teach women to appear or behave a certain way?  
*Hoe dink jy die internet, soos YouTube of Instagram, leer vroue om 'n sekere voorkoms na te streef?*
- 5) Have you watched beauty tutorials on YouTube or Instagram that helped you personally?  
*Het jy al skoonheids 'tutorials' op YouTube of Instagram gekyk?*

## Section C: Work Environment

- 1) Do you think physical appearance is important in a career? Why?  
*Dink jy voorkoms is belangrik in 'n beroep?*
- 2) Have you ever been treated differently at work when you wear makeup or for instance, did not wear makeup?  
*Was jy al ooit anders hanteer by die werk op grond van die feit dat jy grimering gedra het of byvoorbeeld nie aangehad het nie?*
- 3) Have you ever felt that beauty practices have helped you in advancing in your career?  
*Het dit al ooit gevoel of skoonheidspraktyke jou gehelp het om in jou beroep bevordering te ontvang?*
- 4) How do you feel about yourself when your hair or makeup is attended to against when it's not?

*Hoe voel jy oor jouself wanneer jy na jou hare en grimering om gesien het, en ook nie omgesien het?*

#### **Section D: Other women**

- 1) Do you think women consult their friends for appearance tips?  
*Dink jy ander vroue vra vir raad oor voorkoms by hul vriendinne?*
- 2) Do women compare themselves to other women?  
*Vergelyk vroue hulself met ander vroue?*
- 3) Do you think women have certain beauty requirements of other women?  
*Dink jy vroue het sekere skoonheidsverwagtinge van ander vroue?*
- 4) What are your thoughts on women who put overtly effort into their appearance?

#### **Section E: Romantic relationships**

- 1) Do women who pay attention to their appearance get more dates?  
*Kry vroue wat aandag aan hul voorkoms gee meer afsprake?*
- 2) Do you think women feel more confident on a date with makeup on? Please explain why?  
*Dink jy vroue voel meer self-versekerd met grimering aan op 'n afspraak? Verduidelik asseblief?*
- 3) Would you go on a date without makeup?  
*Sal jy op 'n date gaan sonder grimering?*
- 4) Do you think men comment on beautiful women? How does that make you feel?  
*Hoe voel jy oor die feit dat mans gewoonlik aanmerkings maak oor mooi vroue, en ook dalk die wat nie die 'standaarde' voldoen?*

Thank you for your time! I look forwards sharing with you the results!  
*Baie dankie vir jou tyd, ek sien uit daarna om die bevindinge met jou te deel!*

#### **OBSERVATIONS/ NOTES**