

PASIFIKA WOMEN, BEAUTY AND RACE:

The communication of beauty ideals and the experiences of Pasifika women in contemporary society.

Malia Lesina Kelela Latu

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Abstract

Contemporary notions of beauty embedded in social ideals and values, can have a significant influence on the lived experiences of women. From social class to skin colour and ethnicity, women's bodies have been largely "defined through a white lens" (p. 65). Poran (2002) and Aduonum (2004) suggest that if women of colour do not voice their concern about unequal representation, they are unlikely to achieve social change. This study recognises a lack of Pasifika representation in the widespread communication of beauty ideals. It seeks to understand the lived experiences of Pasifika women in relation to ideas of beauty, gender and race, drawing comparison with previous studies that have considered hegemonic "whiteness" (Amigo, Bravo, Secail, Lefebure & Burrell, 2016; Osuri, 2008) and resistant black culture through concepts such as Critical Race Theory and intersectionality. To achieve this research objective, this study applies the Pasifika methodology of Talanoa and the method of thematic analysis to both gather and analyse primary data from 12 Pasifika women. Inspired by Kona-helu Thaman's (1999, cited in Fuka-lino, 2015) development of the Kakala Framework, this study also utilises the metaphor of the Kakala to interpret the process and outcomes of this research. Key findings identified several core tenets central to the experiences of the participants: Mass media and social media both influence formative experiences and an understanding of race, class and gender, which often perpetuates inequality in the pursuit of self-acceptance, social acceptance and concern for their peers. However, in the Pasifika context, personal relationships between friends and family contribute significantly to the perception of beauty ideals that account for the Pasifika traditions of the home, community and church. This study is significant in relation to the wider experiences of women of colour, because it prioritises the voices of Pasifika women who are rarely identified in existing research. In doing so, it highlights the inadequacies and potential consequences of communicated beauty ideals, challenging the value that is placed upon Pasifika women in contemporary society.

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Malia Lesina Kelela Latu

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List of Tables & Figures

Figure 1: Images of Angela Yvonne Davis taken at the Police station and placed on Top Ten Most Wanted list (Rosenthal, 2017).....	Pg. 32
Table 1: Participants Sample.....	Pg. 46

Table of Contents

Abstract

Attestation of Authorship

Acknowledgements

List of Tables & Figures

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background – Encountering beauty ideals	2
1.2 Research Aims & Objectives	4
1.3 Chapter Outlines	6
2. Literature Review	9
2.1 The origins of “beauty”	9
2.2 Race, Gender and Class in relation to beauty	11
2.3 Whiteness, normality and hegemonic ideology	16
2.4 “Black is beautiful”	21
2.5 Pasifika women, post-colonialism and beauty	25
2.6 Conclusion	28
3. Research Methodology and Study Design	31
3.1 Ko e Talanoa mo hono Kakala (<i>The talking of Talanoa & Kakala</i>)	31
3.2 Kakala mo hono talanga (<i>The talking of Kakala</i>)	33
3.3 Stage 1: Teu (<i>The preparation stage</i>)	34
3.3.1 Justification	36
3.3.2 Ethics	36
3.3.3 Procedure	37
3.3.4 Participants	38
3.4 Stage 2: Toli (<i>Kakala mo hono Paki – Collection</i>)	39
3.4.1 Talanoa’i e toli (<i>Talking of the data collection</i>)	39
3.5 Stage 3: Tui (<i>Data Analysis</i>)	44
3.6 Stage 4: Luva e Kakala (<i>Presentation of findings</i>)	46
3.7 Challenges	46
3.8 Conclusion	47
4. Findings	49
4.1 Theme One: Social Peer Pressure	49
4.1.1 School and Workplace	50
4.1.2 Family, Church and Community Support	52
4.2 Theme Two: Media	57
4.2.1 Television and Magazines	58
4.2.2 Social Media	61
4.3 Theme Three: Race	64
4.3.1 Race	64
4.3.2 Acculturation	68
4.4 Conclusion	71
5. Discussion Chapter	73
5.1. Pasifika women and perceptions	74
5.2 Role & Influence of Media on beauty notions amongst Pasifika women	78
5.3 Race & Ethnicity in relation to Pasifika women beauty	80
5.4 Conclusion	82

6.	Conclusion	84
	6.1 Summary of Findings	85
	6.1.1 Impact of Racial Stereotype	86
	6.1.2 Impact of Social Relationships	86
	6.1.3 To understand the impact of whiteness in developing self-confidence.....	87
	6.1.4 Understanding racial different, beauty and diversity	87
	6.2 Recommendation	88
	6.3 Limitations.....	89
7.	References.....	85
8.	Appendix One: Ethics Approval.....	105

1. INTRODUCTION

In mainstream media, the widespread representation of beauty generally consists of light-skinned women with tanned, smooth skin, a tall slim build and softer shaped eyebrows; in short, physical traits that generally exclude a majority of Pasifika women. Considering the lack of ethnic women represented in mainstream media, Chavez, Fedelina and Guido-DiBrito (as cited in Richardson-Stovall, 2012) highlighted that ethnic women must shield their identity from negative and biased comments projected to them through media. Such messages could continue to hinder their perceptions of ethnic beauty, making them believe they are less valued than most. As Richardson-Stovall (2012) states, radio, television, film and other media products provide materials that forges our identities, sense of selfhood, class, sexuality, race and ethnicity, to grow with, or adhere to, within society. Previous studies concerned with the concept of beauty in relation to the experiences of women have focussed on White, Black and Latina identities, but the experiences of Pasifika women are yet rarely considered. Considering that women – more often than men – are highly alerted to the notions of beauty, this study aims to examine the way in which Pasifika women understand the communication of beauty ideals and analyse their representation in mainstream media. As an introduction, this chapter begins by describing personal experiences that motivated this particular research inquiry.

A key motivation for this study can be traced back to the researcher's own experiences as a young Tongan woman growing up in Auckland, New Zealand. In my teenage years, daily shopping for cosmetic products at mainstream shopping centres was a common practice with friends. One particular memory that stands out was being confronted with the lack of representation in the products that was made available to people with my own complexion. A close friend, who is African and who was also confronted by the same challenges, shared this experience that day. As I write today, I reflect on the emotions and the disappointment that robbed us of our identity that day. The feeling of rejection and embarrassment that denied us our skin tone and the lack of consideration given to women of colour. I soon realised that the inclusivity most cosmetic brands promote, lacks the exact meaning of their purpose. More importantly, I realised that the humiliation we both encountered could be the same for many other women of colour. Although feminists have raised awareness of this issue (Barber, 2016; Portella, 2014) in some ways, the reality for many women remains as strong as ever – a lack of representation of ethnic women and societal emphasis on western beauty norms – have made it more difficult for women of colour to embrace their natural beauty. This concern has

prompted my research interest in understanding the communication of beauty ideals as experienced by Pasifika women and in the hopes of understanding their experiences, this thesis presents a primary account of what beauty means to Pasifika women.

1.1 Background – Encountering beauty ideals

The representation of beauty continues to shift according to changes influenced by the mainstream media. As previously mentioned, media platforms are a part of a large system of meaning-making that contributes to represented identity and societal notions of beauty ideals. Women in particular have been subjected to scrutiny of their physical appearance via western ideologies of beauty, perpetuating the challenges for women of colour to achieve favourable social standards in contemporary society. The ideological function of beauty carries the idea that to look beautiful is to achieve social acceptance. Failing to achieve beauty, withholds the social value that is placed on being beautiful. Rice (2014) states that for women, the significance they place on looking beautiful is part of an “important identity project, a key-medium of self-making” (p. 3) and for many, it is a source of contentment.

Theoretical discussions of the concept of beauty has long been concerned with the debate of whether it is objective or subjective. While past studies (e.g. Mole, 2016; Wladyslaw, 1963) have highlighted these debates, Sidhu, McDougall, Jalava and Bodner (2018) suggested that the difference between subjective and objective judgements of beauty lies within the characteristics of human value. That is, while subjective judgement captures the response to the stimulus, objective judgement intends to capture the artistic value of the stimulus. However, although it is difficult to determine how women judge the subjectivity and objectivity of physical appearance, Mole (2016) states that it is imperative to “treat subjectivity of beauty as if it were an uncontroversial starting point” (p. 372). Mole’s (2016) hypothesis is that since taste is the most common trope when talking about the judgement of beauty, the first necessary condition of a judgement of taste is that it is generally subjective. This means that the judgement of taste is established on feelings of pleasure. In this study, beauty is defined through multiple lenses: the studies of previous scholars, the researcher and the participants.

Societal standards of beauty have led to the scrutiny of the female body for centuries. For women, particularly women of colour the challenges lies within the pressure to uphold their physical appearances to reflect the dominant beauty standard. Many studies (Heggenstaller, Coetzee, Smit & Ryen, 2018; Nicola Di Stefano, 2017) have identified that the

pursuit of beauty ideals has led women towards plastic surgery, skin whitening and other body modifications, without resolving the root cause of significant body dissatisfaction. From my own perspective, as a young Pasifika Tongan woman, I am able to recognise a lack of representation in the communication of beauty and an inherent lack of diversity in the marketing of cosmetic beauty products.

In addition to the story shared earlier, interest prior to this study stemmed from the influence of YouTube beauty tutorials on young women. As both social media and video streaming platform, YouTube seamlessly blends content provided by everyday users and commercial entities. It has also seen a rise in particular types of content such as cosmetic beauty tutorials, promoting new products, beauty tips and other types of creativity. While in theory this concept could provide a useful platform for those fall outside the mainstream norms and for those less represented in mainstream society, YouTube can also be a vehicle to promote negative impact. Garcia-Rapp (2017) examines the authenticity and legitimacy of building bonds within the YouTube beauty community, finds that in most cases, the successful marketing or promotion of an idea occurs when the ethics and personality of the YouTube presenters are fitting with the expectations of the general community. Young women then, tend to be more compliant and accepting when they find presenters who share the same passion as them. This may be concerning because in reality most young women are unaware of the disconnect between mediated representation and lived reality. This also prompted my curiosity to develop a research project that seeks to understand the influence of beauty ideals on women, but with a specific focus on Pasifika women. Coupled with the formative experience shared earlier in this chapter, the project's focus extends to the race-based dynamics of beauty message and is further motivated by my interest in better understanding the impact of inequalities, centred on beauty within the contemporary multicultural society.

In New Zealand, 7.4% of the total population identifies with one or more Pacific ethnic groups, making a collective Pacific population the fourth-largest ethnic group in New Zealand (Pasifika Proud, 2016). However, existing studies on the Pasifika population, particularly women, focus predominantly on their traditional roles, health and sports to name a few (e.g. Mackley-Crump, 2015; Stevenson, 2009, Tongamoa, 1988). In a society that encompasses different cultures and many possibilities for developing cultural context to help fix complex social problems (De Bruin & Read, 2018) the reality for many of the Pasifika people and other

minority groups is that there is a lack of resources and knowledge. Williams, Ricciardelli, McCabe, Waqa and Bavadra (2006) add that, while some cultures may place significant values on thinness as the ideal female body type, studies have found non-western cultures such as African, Caribbean and the Pacific Islands women to associate larger body type with attractiveness and good nutrition. Other studies further support this finding, suggesting that Pasifika women are more tolerant towards larger female figures (Becker, as cited in Edman & Yates, 2004). However, according to Craig, Swinburn, Matenga-Smith, Matangi and Vaughn (1996), there is an increase in the preference for a thin body ideal among Pasifika women, which they attribute to the acculturation of the western culture (see also Craig, Halavatau, Comino, & Caterson, 1999). Their results show that gradually, more and more Pasifika women are beginning to think more highly of slimmer body sizes and Craig et al., (1999) propose that it may be a result of a growing western influence in the Pacific Islands. The current study also share these issues and contributes further to these findings.

Importantly, the use of the term “beauty” highlights an ideological function, which have established an overall influence in the wider society. Thus, how Pasifika women experience and interpret this concept through mediated messages or otherwise, is a key priority for this study. Such theory has prompted the consideration as to whether beauty’s usage has contributed to the changes in female identity and the decline of self-confidence and self-assurance amongst Pasifika women. Evident in Beech’s (2007) work, “beauty can be a purely private subjective experience although some could argue it is socially inscribed” (p. 14). As such, it is important that this study of beauty originate from a Pasifika woman’s perspective encapsulating the experiences of other Pasifika women. On this account, Pasifika women are able to share the authenticity of that experience with true feeling and honest expression of the struggle they experience as women of a minority group.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The way in which women of colour negotiate the intersections of media, discourses of dominant beauty and identity are rarely studied. As a result, the primary focus of this thesis is to look at the experiences of Pasifika women stemming from the articulation of beauty through mass media, social media and social interaction. Given that this thesis focuses on a range of different Pacific cultures, it was important to utilise a term that encapsulates the different identities involved within this study. As such, “Pasifika” is used as a term that not only represents one ethnicity but a diverse range of Pacific cultures. However, some academics

believe the term is problematic because it is considered a “new administrative stereotype” (Perrot, as cited in Samu, 2010, p. 6) suggesting that the term homogenises the Pacific community to one particular culture, in this case Samoan rather than the diverse uniqueness of each individual cultures. Dr Okusitino Mahina (as cited in Samu, 2010) also added that the term “Pasifika” is problematic due to the demographic dominance of the Samoan population - anything that is labelled “Pasifika” fundamentally means “Samoan”, which subsequently excludes other Pacific ethnicities or makes them invisible. However, as Samu suggests, only a few selected academics consider the term problematic whereas others (e.g Dr Ron Crocombe as cited in Samu) recognise “Pasifika” as a term that “satisfies both psychological and political needs” (p. 6) and that its reference and usage encapsulates both the unity *and* diversity of Pacific peoples. Ross (2017) shares her views as to why “Pacific peoples” are identified under the label of “Pasifika”. Her analysis reveals that although New Zealand’s Pacific peoples comprise of “linguistically, culturally and geographically distinct ethnic groups” (p. 1562), together they are the fourth-largest major ethnic group in New Zealand, with increasingly shared values and other related customs. To Ross (2017), despite the differences between Pacific groups, the younger, New Zealand-born generations are increasingly “adopting a shared Pacific identity” (p. 1562), that differentiates them from their parents’ migrant origins and traditions. Their diaspora becomes a basis for collective identity and unity. For these reasons, this thesis employs the term “Pasifika” to describe the cultural heritage and ethnic identity of the women represented in the study.

The aim of this research is to deconstruct the communication of beauty ideals in the hope to gain insights into how Pasifika women collectively and individually, experience and understand the coded value placed upon beauty and how it shapes their perspectives overall. While there may be conflicting ideas in unpacking such a complex issue, this thesis will create some understanding of the challenges that Pasifika women experience on a daily basis. Taken from the work of Suaalii (cited in Jones, Herda, & Suaalii, 2000) she discusses the long embedded notions of beauty amongst the Pacific community. In her work, she provides some historical context for the perception of Pasifika women through her exploration of the long embedded notions of beauty attributed by foreigners to the people of the Pacific islands. While her study may focus on colonial beauty standards influenced Pacific women’s self-perceptions, Suaalii (as cited in Jones, Herda & Suaalii, 2000) explains that this construction of the exotic beauty is partly responsible for the hypothetical and lived experiences of Pasifika women

today. This thesis places Pasifika women at the centre of inquiry, thereby giving them the opportunity to share their experiences of inequality in beauty. More importantly, it establishes a platform to discuss and consider the ongoing challenges and potential remedies for young Pasifika women. As such, the primary research question asks: How do Pasifika women experience the notions of beauty communicated through media, friends and at home? In an effort to encapsulate the overarching question, three more questions are explored:

- 1) How do mediated messages influence the perceptions of beauty amongst Pasifika women and how do they respond to societal beauty ideals?
- 2) To what extent does race play a role in shaping and forming Pasifika women's perceptions and experiences of beauty?
- 3) Do contemporary notions of beauty adequately represent the identities of Pasifika women?

Currently, there is a significant lack of studies in relation to Pasifika women's beauty. Jones et al. (2000) add Pasifika peoples have endured years of westernised framing, which makes it crucial to explore Pasifika women's stories from a Pasifika perspective rather than from a western point of view. As such, Pacific methodologies such as Talanoa and Kakala frameworks will be utilised to collect the information. Thus, the analysis of beauty in this research focuses on the personal experiences of Pasifika women. However, it was also essential to incorporate the influence of both mainstream media and social media, as studies have shown that the content presented on different platforms can have a strong influence on the perceptions and attitudes of the younger population. These influences are believed to have significant effect on young women, affecting their personal experiences of beauty and consequently their sense of self or personal identity.

1.3 Chapter outlines

In order to understand the structure of this study, this thesis is organised into four main chapters. The following section provides a brief overview of each chapter, structured in the order of a literature review, research methodology and study design, the research findings, a discussion chapter that revisits existing literature and a conclusion.

As mentioned, *chapter two* provides a review of existing literature, highlighting knowledge and insights into how beauty concepts emerged, with particular attention to how it has been re-defined and reconditioned over time. This chapter also focuses on exploring the notion of whiteness, black is beautiful and Pasifika women in relation to beauty. In addition, Critical Race Theory is introduced and relevant literature that explores how power structure is also discussed. This is followed by a discussion on whiteness as normativity and a discourse of black women's beauty. This chapter ends with an investigation of the Pasifika women's beauty and how they navigate through the western ideologies of beauty.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology processes. It explains the application of Pacific frameworks, Kakala, and the methodology of Talanoa to gather the experiences of Pasifika women. It also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen analytical approach of thematic analysis and describes a step-by-step overview of how the data was analysed. This chapter is organised into the individual stages of the Kakala framework detailing its cultural values and protocols pertaining to the overall research. In addition, it also describes the experience of conducting the research and how participants were recruited and the protocols for Talanoa.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study along with an interpretation of the data in the Talanoa. Following this, the findings of the thematic analysis are discussed. Three main themes were identified within the data: the impact of social relationships, the role of media and the intersectionality of race, class and gender. Each theme also discusses concepts that were relevant to the overall topic with reference to the participants' experiences.

Chapter five discusses the findings with reference to the existing literature that were introduced in the literature review chapter. Chapter five is divided into three themes: *Perceptions, Role and Influence of media on beauty notions* and *Race and Ethnicity*. Each theme draws on the data collected from the participants with reference to how they interrelate to previous knowledge.

The final chapter concludes the thesis and presents a summary of the overall findings. It also explores the limitations of the present study and considers recommendations for future

research. It proposes that future studies may focus on other gender groups, other race-based, cultural or ethnic identities and the perceptions of those advocating for change.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“It is not vanity to feel you have a right to be beautiful. Women are taught we are not good enough, that we must live up to someone else’s standards. But the aim is to cherish *yourself as you are* [emphasis added]” - Elle Macpherson

The concept of beauty is highly contentious, bound to debate regarding the essential qualities that make something – or someone - appealing (Eco & McEwen, 2004; Scruton, 2011). Past examinations of this concept have revealed the ideological function of beauty, suggesting that it is associated with notions of power, status and wealth (Fisher & Yu Ma, 2014). As society changes and socialised norms of beauty similarly continue to evolve, any sense of a universal or recognisable ideal becomes harder to locate. This chapter reviews existing literature that explores the social negotiation of beauty as a concept, drawing particular attention to its ideological function. It begins by accounting for the many ways that beauty has been interpreted, with a focus on how contemporary beauty concepts have manifested in, and continue to influence, the lived experiences of women. This chapter will also discuss concepts of race, class, and gender, and highlight how they intersect with and influence the experiences of women concerned with, and subjected to, notions of aesthetic beauty. In particular, it will focus on “whiteness” as a normative and hegemonic ideology, before discussing a resistant narrative of black beauty that emerged during the civil rights movement of the United States. Finally, and of significance to this study, the chapter will introduce changing concepts of beauty amongst Pasifika women, highlighting the gendered role of domesticity.

2.1 The origins of “beauty”

Through an early interpretation of beauty, Immanuel Kant (as cited in Clewis, 2018), a Philosopher best known for his doctrine of “transcendental idealism”, developed an understanding of how beauty is judged. He proposes that there are two kinds of beauty: one tied to the idea of being free and the other is purposed-based. The idea of beauty being free is equivalent to that of “pure” and “non-conceptual” (p. 306); in other words, beauty can be self-evident or free from having a concept in mind whereas purpose-based beauty is identical to that of conditioned beauty. However, Clewis (2018) emphasizes that this early interpretation of Kant’s work was not adequately made certain as further examination found Kant’s (as cited in Clewis, 2018) original interpretation argues that purpose-based beauty is rather “self-standing” (p. 306). As such, it is “independent of us, stable, lasting and subsisting” (p. 307), visible to the naked eyes without stimulating hypercritical thoughts. Essentially, the point in

Clewis's (2018) work emphasizes that this understanding of beauty has accounted for the way beauty is judged in large part of today's society. However, Clewis (2018) also suggests that with Kant's philosophy of beauty, a concept-driven strategy was never far off.

Offering a more neuroscientific perspective, Zeki (as cited in Landau, 2012) attributes beauty to a particular pattern of brain activity by examining the "neural basis for art appreciation" (p. 5). Zeki (as cited in Landau, 2012) found that, although people may find different objects beautiful, there is common activity in the brain's frontal cortex, which is part of the reward and pleasure centre of the brain. Zeki (as cited in Landau, 2012) also refers to the idea of varying interpretations of beauty between the Japanese and Western culture. In Japanese culture, there is a general preference for asymmetry whereas in the West, there is a universal acceptance for symmetrical faces. He proposed the idea that beauty is measurable, but Sauchelli (2013) argues that the concept of beauty is generally determined by the individual's beliefs, expectations and perceptions. Goodman and Rhee (2014) suggest that "studies on beauty ideals are defined by both evolution and socialisation" (p. 27). However, providing a more socially accepted notion of beauty, Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee and Druen (1995) believe it is more to do with the facial features; large eyes, small nose, fuller lips and radiant skin are all that accounts for what is socially accepted. This was found to be a universal preference amongst many women, not just within certain cultures.

Beauty is often connected to the idea of "aesthetics", which on a universal scale usually relates to the aesthetic pleasure provided by an object or subject. For the most part, a common debate focused on whether beauty can be interpreted as objective or subjective (Mole, 2016; Tatarkiewicz, 1963). Tulon-Hugon (2017) suggests that beauty emerged from the concept of taste: when beauty is judged without tastes, one must acquire the sense of taste in order to understand how beauty is determined. To Kant (cited in Kupke, 2015) taste is subject to whatever our state of mind considers beautiful. Tulon-Hugon (2017) argues that between the 17th and 18th century, the use of the word "taste" was in the context of "a flair for social life" (p. 64) and it played a significant role "in the civilisation process by replacing rudeness and savagery of the past by manners and delicacy" (p. 64). As a result, beauty began to be associated with the ideas of power, status and wealth.

2.2 Race, gender and class in relation to beauty

Race has always been an influential factor in relation to beauty. Malik (1996), who studied the meaning of race, explains that race has shaped so much of our lives and it continues to rank people's social beauty experiences according to their race. More so, race has also categorised everything from culture and physical appearance to dressing style and religion. He further analyses the concept of racial connotation – the usage of race-based terms to qualify identities, such as the term “black muggers” and many more. The conceptualisation of how race is commonly understood, substitute for “culture” and vice versa. Malik quotes, “we casually speak of Africans as one race, Asians as another, Europeans as whites” (p. 2) and in the same reference, Pacific Islanders as indigenous. Marger (2000), who wrote extensively on the notion of race and ethnic relations in a global context, states that race has a long history extending as far back as ancient civilisations. He suggests that while the notion of race may differ intrinsically, its most appropriate usage has been to describe the different categories of civilisation. In addition, Fuji Johnson, Genevieve and Enomoto (2007) acknowledged that race, racialisation and racism are intertwined. They propose that even though the notion of race is socially constructed, “racialisation derives from historical acts through which people's identities are inscribed with symbolic meanings and, on this basis, people are assigned social places” (p. 4). This suggests that, in order to understand how racialisation was established, one must believe that the notion of race is socially constructed.

For years, women have sought to be recognised as equal members of society by attempting to reduce racial differences. Menon (2016) explained that there was a time where women of second-generation American migrants – Jews, Italians, Germans and Russians – were classified as ‘ethnic’ due to their desire to look whiter or more American. Today, this behaviour is condemned by many feminists and occasionally in popular culture but for Morgan (1991), who studied the significance of cosmetic surgery amongst women, this practice in cosmetic surgery should be normalised as it will help “bring ethnic women in line with the universal white standard of beauty” (p. 599). Understandably, beauty in relation to race has a culture affinity for whiteness and class status.

In order to understand how beauty affects race and vice versa a discussion on race is of importance. When the term “race” is used or mentioned in a discussion, one would assume its meaning relates primarily to racism, ethnicity, skin colour and culture, but many critics (e.g.

Amos, 2017; Murji & Solomos, 2004) have argued the terminology is a much more complex subject yet to be fixed with a singular meaning. Malik (1996) proposes that, in order to understand race, one must understand how the relationship between humanity, society, and nature is socially constructed. Malik (1996) stresses the importance of understanding the modern discourse of race within European society. He gives insight to Fryer's (as cited in Malik, 1996) work, suggesting that race is an "ideology [that] grew out of three beliefs: that Africans were, in one way or another, closely connected with apes; the idea that people with differently coloured skins had different origins; and the idea that human beings could be graded hierarchically according to skin colour" (p. 81). Hall (1997) points out that race has been given different interpretations over the years and there is nothing permanent or fixed about it; it changes and shifts overtime. Hall (1997) also describes race as "the floating signifier", explaining that race is constantly subject to redefinition in different cultures, groups and different moments in history and that regardless of the condition, it will always shift according to times and spaces. Moreover, Hall (1997) believes that race was once considered to be the most salient factor in shaping women's beauty experiences.

Hall (2018) discusses the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework that allows activists and scholars to identify racial inequality and power imbalances in corporate businesses. CRT is often understood to be multifunctional and according to some scholars, CRT is thought to be both a theoretical framework (e.g. Benveniste, Guenther, Dawson, & King, 2018) and a social movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Mills & Unsworth, 2018). In most cases, the core of CRT is concerned with the "studying and transforming of relationships among race, racism and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). It helps to understand how racism and power structures exist within certain institutions such as schools, courthouses and corporate businesses and it aims to deconstruct these complex influences. Initially, CRT stemmed from the context of critical legal studies background and is largely attributed to the work of Bell, Freeman and Delgado (cited in Delgado, Stefancic & Harris, 2017), although earlier development can be traced back to the literature of W.E.B. Du Bois (Flores, 2009) and Frantz Fanon (Rabaka, 2007). CRT rose to popularity in the 1970s after many researchers began to notice its significance and value in addressing racism and power inequality. With much success, CRT began manifesting in other disciplines such as education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) women's studies, ethnic studies (Liu, 2018), and in communication studies, where the framework is referred to as a communication theory (Elers,

2018). In terms of the theory applied within communication studies, Campbell, LeDuff, Jenkins, and Brown (as cited in Elers, 2018) gave references to “the understanding of racism within news media, comparing legitimisation strategies between journalists and members of the public concerning racial disparities and discussing the developing of media literacy of both students and citizens” (p. 88).

In Reece’s (2018) study, CRT is used to conceptualise the idea of colourism between light skinned and dark-skinned African Americans, which he believes to be a “primary offshoot of racial domination” (p. 3). Similar to the work of Delgado, Stefancic and Harris (2017), Reece (2018) ponders the importance of CRT in analysing racism, claiming that structures and institutions are responsible for the maintenance of racial inequality. In his study, Reece (2018) employed CRT as a framework to “push back against [an individual’s] preferences as the only... mechanism facilitating skin tone stratification” (p. 3). Cooper, Nwadike and Macaulay (2017) state that CRT helps to conceptualise equality and civil rights. For example, they argue racist norms, standards, and attitudes are deeply embedded in corporations and businesses; they perpetuate a “racial hierarchy whereby whiteness is privileged, and blackness is positioned as the most inferior race to the dominant society” (Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017, p. 2008). More importantly, their findings also found that CRT continues to evolve, highlighting several key principles: that racism is an integral and permanent component of society; that whiteness remains a normative ideology; and people in positions of significant power and influence will only support ideas that benefit their own interests. CRT is relevant to this study because it examines the way in which beauty as a driver of commercial and corporate activity caters to different racial identities within society and thus exists as a fertile site for questions of equality and discrimination. According to Bryant (2013) black women in particular, are vulnerable to the effects of western beauty standards, which often exclude women of colour. As Bryant (2013) further noted, the effects of western beauty on black women is a “societal issue often unaddressed on a multisystem level” (p. 81): women of colour are subjected to constant reminders of western beauty ideals while struggling to recognise or meet these ideals in their own appearance.

In multicultural societies, the conceptualisation of beauty and race is said to shape much of women’s lives (Docker & Fischer, 2000). The use of race in this context refers primarily to the identification of physical characteristics associated with an ethnic group; for example, skin

colour, bone structure, body-type and the texture of someone's hair. In one study, Rhee, Woo and Kwon (2012) conducted an experiment in an attempt to find whether there are differences in the configuration of faces among different races, in relation to beauty. In their effort, they used seven racially different faces and a photogrammetry to photograph, measure, and analyse the faces. They performed multiple different shots from different angles to provide more selection of choices for the measure of the attractive and average faces. Their experiment found that among Asian participants, beauty lies within the idea of a slim shaped face and for Caucasian and African participants, both agreed that attractiveness lies within the idea of slightly palpebral slant shaped eyes equivalent to the like of jaguar's eyes. Regardless of racial differences, "wide set eyes and a lower brow position" (Rhee, Whoo & Kwon, 2012, p. 1236) emerged as common features of "attractiveness", highlighting the possibility of both culture-specific and universal perceptions of physical beauty.

In another study, De Casanova (2004) conducted a similar experiment with adolescent girls in which she combined ethnographic methods and a social-psychological survey to determine what Ecuadorian young women would consider ideal beauty. To encourage conversations, participating adolescent girls were provided with images of different coloured women from Ecuadorian magazine. The findings suggest that when it comes to the magazine images, participants chose two ideal prototypes of beauty: one white and one Latina. De Casanova (2004) interpreted the findings to mean that participants hold racist beauty ideals towards media images but are flexible when judging real-life women. To De Casanova (2004), there is evidence of low self-esteem in women stemming from being exposed to heavy promotion of western beauty and an apparent fixation with white beauty. Subsequently, women of other ethnic backgrounds increasingly feel excluded or inferior. This experience is perpetuated by society and the media, in which a lack of diversity in representations of "beauty" push women of colour towards pursuing white beauty by striving to mimic the physical characteristics of European ethnicities (De Casanova, 2004). To further understand the dominant ideological and racial functions of beauty, we must also consider the ideal beauty of other races in comparison to a dominant perception of western beauty. In Asia, one in every three women between the ages of 19-29 admits to undergoing cosmetic surgery in pursuit of westernised beauty ideals (Madan, Basu, Ng, & Lim, 2018). Consequently, Asian countries have a high rate of cosmetic surgery (International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, 2019 cited in Madan et al., 2018) and a significant demand for beauty products. Irrespective of

cultural differences amongst Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China, data shows that these countries are among the top spenders on beauty products globally.

It seems as though for women, beauty standards are a battlefield for a wider debate regarding racial equality. Throughout history, women have fought extensively for equality in fields of employment, education, sports and recreation, regardless of the varied feminist movements that are evident in many parts of the world (Gonzalez, 2019; Mehar, 2019; Wilson, 2019). In Gay's (2018) investigation of the evolution of the feminist movement, she examined the impact of Miss America beauty pageant on the 1968 feminist movement. Gay (2018) explains that, "Miss America has never been a progressive event, but in 1968, it sparked a feminist revolution" (p. 104). The beauty pageant, although it had been running since 1921, sparked its first radical revolution in 1968 when feminist Carol Hanisch, protested against the event in the name of women's liberation. Hanisch (cited in Gay, 2018) believed the beauty pageant was the perfect timing to bring the, "fledgling Women's Liberation Movement into the public arena" (p. 104) as so many ill treatments were prevalent amongst women. Nevertheless, Gay (2018) noted, for as long as Miss America had been running, the rules and objectives of the pageant had been very undisguised: "Women's beauty – white, women's beauty – was a tool" (p. 104). There were also specific guidelines to determine the appropriate winner; she must be single, unmarried, age between 18 - 28, slim but not too thin, clever but not too clever, bubbly personality, flirtatious but not too provocative and must be heterosexual. In 1940 there was another rule that mandated all contestants "must be of good health and of white race" (p. 104); however, that rule was eventually removed. The protest was raising awareness on the racial inequality against not just women but women of colour. Gay (2018) comments that, although the 1968 protest did not do much for the influence of the Miss America beauty pageant, they did introduce feminism to the wider society and started a national debate about women's rights and liberation. It also was a historical year for black women as the first Miss Black America beauty pageant was established. The concept behind this event sparked the interest of many women around the world and it drew the attention of critics, feminists and many social elite members.

In other parts of the world, primarily in developing countries, women still struggle to identify themselves with their own culture. FEMINA, one of India's most influential women's magazines, reports that organisers of the Miss India beauty pageant are no longer simply

searching for “Miss India” (Runkle as cited in Varghese, 2017); instead, they are looking for “Miss World” – someone who can represent the country on a world stage (Runkle, as cited in Varghese, 2017, p. 61). Although this approach is likely to disconnect women contesting from their unique cultural context, the organisers saw it as an opportunity for Indian women to advance their social standing globally. Considering the specifications and demands of beauty pageants, it is possible that these women will likely attempt to match the dominant standards of beauty – a more westernised representation (Varghese, 2017). Osuri (2008), who explored the transfiguration of Bollywood actress and former Miss World, Aishwarya Rai, describes the actress’s significant transformation from her cultural identity to a more westernised global image that connects her to the Western culture. As Osuri (2008) explains, “Rai’s beauty and skin-colour appear to resonate with investments in the aesthetics of whiteness, which govern gendered notions of beauty primarily in Western locations” (p. 109). Picton (2013) refers to the terms “caucasianisation” and “internationalisation” to explain the imposition of western ideologies of beauty on ethnic women who are seeking acceptance from the outside world. However, according to Madan et al. (2018), non-western women are not the only group that suffer from this predicament as there is a, “deep-seated desire among Asian women” (p. 62) for fair and blemish-free skin. In contrast, Varghese (2017) suggests that the pursuit of western beauty ideal is only practiced by sections of the upper class, whereas the less affluent populations appreciate the ethnic fashion and local beauty trends. Although Varghese (2017) recognises that the proliferation of white or western beauty standards can be aligned with certain positions of social class, this also highlights the scope of its influence and hegemonic function in wider society.

2.3 Whiteness, normativity and hegemonic ideology

Whiteness has become a key concept in academic discourses when discussing beauty. Thompson (1990, cited in Ferguson, 1998) notes that the construction of whiteness as normative is done so by constructing color as abnormal. Davis (2018), in discussing whiteness and Critical Race Theory, acknowledges that while diversity serves to perpetuate equality and opportunity amongst society, the historical context offered by Puzzo (1964, cited in Davis, 2018) shows that there are systems that have differentiated the Euro-western from the non-Europeans or people of colour. To Puzzo (1964, cited in Davis, 2018) these ideas were determined by two concepts – “that there is a correlation between individuals’ physical characteristics and mental qualities and secondly, that mankind can be divided into superior

and inferior stocks” (p. 136). This system of hierarchy subsequently places white Europeans at the top and coloured or non-Europeans below. According to Puzzo (1964, cited in Davis, 2018) the subsequent effect is that biologically non-European features were considered “different” from what was considered to be “norms” in society. This led to racist practices, evident in the exclusion of coloured people from certain jobs and opportunities and “other practices used to suppress non-whites” (p. 136), while positioning white people as more deserving of society’s resources and opportunities.

Guess (2006) explains that throughout history, whiteness has been treated as a standard that sits alongside other races or racial identities, as a “strategy of authority rather than an authentic identity” (p. 653). She also found that notions of “race” and “whiteness” are guided not by biological foundation but rather by the social meanings ascribed to these concepts. For many years, women of colour have been disadvantaged by the presence of white privilege and societal tendency towards ascribing whiteness as “universal beauty.” The ideals of beautiful skin conceived in global markets or industry are reflective of the cultural construction of beauty. Ahmed and Ahmed’s (2012) work on notions of race and diversity offers an account of “institutional whiteness” and explains how racism can be concealed by the standardisation of diversity. They raised the question of whether the use of the word “diversity” eases difficulties and dilemmas for businesses, or whether it simply operates as a fictional factor for most. In other words, does it only function as a safety net? Ahmed and Ahmed (2012) explain that the term ‘racism’ often remains concealed due to its negative connotations, “as if to describe x as racist is to damage or even hurt x” (p. 147) simply put an institution or an organisation. When an institution is accused of having a problem with racism, management or people within the company would often highlight the diversity of their organization to refute the claims. “When racism becomes an institutional injury, it is imagined as an injury to whiteness” (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2012, p. 147) as such, diversity is seen as a method of protecting whiteness. In addition to that, Ahmed and Ahmed (2012) claim that “diversity” is used to replace the phrase ‘equal opportunity.’ Based on these considerations, they propose that whiteness tends to remain invisible to those who inhabit it while being highly visible to others.

Skin whitening, treating whiteness as normal and concealing color are key ideas which affect majority of ethnic women around the globe. According to Ross (as cited in Russell, 2017) the gaze has always been traditionally white and never occurred problematic until all “others”

were measured. More importantly, suggestions have been made that a link between the cosmetic beauty industries as well as media institutions and networks are powerful contributing factors to these practices (Naugler, 2010; Khattab, 2012). Xie and Zhang (2013) explain that “in today’s global environment, cultural beliefs of beauty and whiteness are communicated and reinforced through mass media” (p. 540).

Women are constantly bombarded with information disseminated via mass media, which reinforces the ideals of preferred skin tone and beauty standards. Yan and Bissell (2014) elucidate this in their work explaining that the media often portrays attractive people as more desirable, credible and a source of inspiration, which inevitably reflects the dominant culture. Yan and Bissell (2014) used the *Cosmopolitan* magazine as a case study. Despite the fact that *Cosmopolitan* is published in 36 languages, has 63 international editions, and is distributed in more than 100 countries, Yan and Bissell (2014) argue that only a narrow representation of beauty is included in the magazine:

The media industry’s over-emphasis on beauty and attractiveness is not just a phenomenon found in western countries; rather, it may be a problem or issue that is more global in nature. For example, do the models look similar across editions or are they more similar to the magazine’s readership? (Yan & Bissell, 2014, p. 195)

Lopaciuk and Loboda (2013) argue that the beauty industry changes strategy according to consumer’s preferences. The consumers are the vehicle to the industry’s increasing success. However, as Maria Mena (as cited in Schuller, 2009) states, “the impact of beauty products and services is in large part determined by the political and economic context of the goods themselves” (p. 86). In other words, modern beauty standards within society are constructed simultaneously by the beauty industry and the mass media. Subsequently, Xie and Zhang (2013) argue that the beauty industries are failing to represent multicultural consumers:

Leading brands in skin care and cosmetics such as L’Oreal, Estee Lauder, and Procter & Gamble generate billions of dollars’ worth of business every year with women comprising much of their target markets all over the world. However, the standards and ideals of skin beauty conceived in the global beauty market are reflecting and influencing the cultural construction of beauty and femininity on the local level. (p. 539)

It is also important to note that the ideals of beauty, particularly skin tones, vary across cultures, generations and societies. In America, people who are of light-skinned tone may try to darken

their skin tone through tanning; meanwhile, in African, dark-skinned women may use various products to lighten their skin tone. Xie and Zhang (2013) note that in East Asia, women generally prefer to have a light or fair skin tone, and skin products that promise to brighten, whiten or lighten their yellow toned skins are highly favored. A tanned or bronze skin tone is highly fashionable and desirable among white women from other parts of the world (p. 538).

To give context to how these ideologies are formed, it is appropriate to acknowledge the hegemonic ideology framework. Gramsci (cited in Amigo, Bravo, Secail, Lefebure & Burrell, 2016) explains that often certain social groups or culturally diverse societies are conditioned to the philosophy of the ruling class through the influence of their beliefs, values, culture and much more, insofar that their views become a worldview. According to Byungju-Shin and Gon-Namkung (2008), the subtlest form of hegemony is culture. Their argument is that although it is known to be a form of hegemony, “it attracts less resistance than any other form of hegemony” (p. 116) due to its widely accepted influence. Cultural hegemony is therefore disseminated through media such as Hollywood films and, in a more contemporary context, social media and the increasing prevalence of “influencers.” Scott (2009) argues that whiteness holds a hegemonic position, equated with both normality and superiority. In light of her work, Scott (2009) weighs in on how “whiteness” can be challenged within critical whiteness studies. It follows that, while many research studies may focus on ‘people of color’ in the study of race, the challenge lies within “deconstructing whiteness and its current forms of racial oppression without reducing the effects of white supremacy to material privilege” (Scott, 2009, p. 804) taking into account the identity of the Appalachian people. In Scott’s (2009) work, the Appalachian people, although identified within the white race, have a strong marker for being the marginalised whites of the white population. This is due to the stigma and stereotypes that categorises them as the “hillbillies” and/or the “white trash” of the white population. Scott (2009) believes such claim accounts for both negative and positive representation however; despite deconstructing white supremacy and white ideologies, it will remain a universal non-racial marker in society.

Davidson (2007) argues that “an ideology can reach a hegemonic status when there are clear reflections of that ideology” (p. 106) being practiced in cultures other than the west. To illustrate his point, Jackson and Lyons (2012) listed the use of body-altering cosmetic treatments or surgeries, practices which have become commonly recognised in some parts of

the world and are often rewarded by the social capital of acceptance. Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes and Sassons (1992, cited in Jackson & Lyons, 2012) also suggest that while media is understood to incentivise certain traits or behaviours, friends and family are just as much active in enhancing hegemonic ideologies through daily interaction. Nadeem (2014), who conducted research on skin whitening creams in India, explains that women are constantly being ridiculed by friends and family for being dark skinned: “The anxieties their complexions prompt about self-worth and social position are etched on their concerned faces. That is, until whitening cream surfaces and, like a *deus ex machina* device, disperses the darkness” (Nadeem, 2014, p. 225). Her interpretation suggests that media does not whitewash disparities and biases; instead, they offer propositions to women of colour on how to use these products to their advantage:

They do not point to a post-color future, they tell you what to do in order to get ahead today. They are the parables of darkness and light. They are tales of metamorphosis, the lowly caterpillar becomes a sprightly butterfly, the ugly duckling becomes the most beautiful bird of all. (Nadeem, 2014, p. 225).

Asante (2016) who studied the changing discourse surrounding whiteness on the African continent, found that the usage of African light-skinned women in advertisements gives biological African women an illusion of inclusion, enabling them to feel a part of the dominant group. Interestingly, Peirre (2012, cited in Asante, 2017) also added, that the use of whitening products by ethnic women is not wanting to be white but rather to enhance natural beauty, just as white women enhance their skin tone through tanning. In his view, this is necessary for critics to discuss as it will bring more awareness to people on the benefit of using whitening creams rather than assuming negative influences. Twine (cited, in Frankenberg, 1997) states that, the construction and enactment of whiteness and white identities began in the mid-18th century. Here, Twine (as cited in Frankenberg, 1997) studied mixed identities of African-European women who, as children, identified themselves as white. The research also considered how this identity can shift. Findings suggested that majority of these women identified themselves as white based on their social status and suburban experiences. In other words, women of ethnic backgrounds who were brought up in a middle-class family network and are predominantly upper middle-class suburban community would identify themselves as white regardless of their biological markers (Twine, cited in Frankenberg, 1997). Essentially, this perception highlights the hegemonic significance placed upon whiteness and its influence on social status.

Given the idea of western constructions regarding race, Orientalism has played an important role in understanding this phenomenon. Edward Said is identified as the main contributor to the critique of Orientalism, and spent most of his work arguing that the concept of Orientalism is an invention of the West. Kennedy (2000) summarises Said's version of Orientalism in three ways: it is an academic tradition of learning about the Orient; it is a way of thinking from an ontological and an epistemological viewpoint, and thirdly, it is a Western way of thinking considered to be of dominating, influential and ruling over the "Orient". Hamdi (2013) who commented on the work of Edward Said noted Orientalism was already having an impact before the integration of Said's work. He argued that, "Said effectively began the interrogating of Western discourse" (p. 130) in an attempt to analyse the impact of the Western style on the "other", recognised as anything geographically outside of the West. In reference to that, Hamdi reiterated Said's definition of Orientalism as:

The corporate institution for dealing with the orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorising views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978 cited in Hamdi, 2013).

Varisco (2017) further explains that the term had generated a long and historical course of debate in the academic world prior to Said's work. In early records of Orientalism, the East was told to be against the West in virtually every way; political, aesthetic, spiritual and even materialistically. Anything outside of the American and European imagination was deemed improper or namely considered as other to the West.

Considering the framing of Orientalism, Czajka (2005) explained that any incorporation of the West fundamentally considered to be powerful and critical to the "Orient". Following her analysis, she also explains the history of the African continent in reference to the West, Czajka (2005) interpreted how the West gives itself credit for the development of African evolution. While this remains controversial in some parts of the academic literature it is evident that hierarchal positioning of the West over the "others" feeds their perception as "more civilized than the native population of Africa" (Czajka, 2005, p. 120). Burney (2012) added to this in her work stating, Said's work of Orientalism sheds light on the underlying structures of power and cultural hegemony of the West over the Orient as the other. Burney's

interpretation argues that the negative depiction of the “other” is an invention of the West and that Orientalism is a system constructed to control the functions of non-Western peoples ranging from images, representation of art, visual media, film and other aspects of cultural and political appropriation.

2.4 “Black is Beautiful”

For many years, black women have had their lives “defined through a white lens” (Poran, 2002, p. 66) and though they live in a white micro culture they are subject to dominant ideologies. Molloy and Herzberger (1998, p. 640 cited in Poran, 2002) identify the concept of “black culture” as giving black women “protective factors that shield them from developing low-self-esteem and body-images” (p. 67) caused by being marginalised. Interestingly, Poran (2002) also found that whilst white women may have an informed notion of beauty, women of colour have yet to develop a similarly uniform notion of beauty that matches the popular trends commercialised in the mainstream media. This was also interesting as early study by Zinn (1990, cited in Poran, 2002) found that white participants have frequently been generalised to ‘all women’ (p. 65) in research findings. In addition to that, Poran (2002) stated, there is an assumption that what is presumably true for white women is also assumed to be true for women of colour, suggesting that the standards in the western culture are assumedly the same for black women.

Yerima (2017), who studied the practice of western beauty by black women, stated that women of colour “throughout history have had roles ascribed to her by society” (p. 640). They are in constant battle with society while “striving to maintain self-worth within a world that judges them against the white notions of beauty and femininity” (Holmes, 2007, quoted in Yerima, 2017, p. 643). For many years, women of colour have been oppressed for the colour of their skin, their features and the right to be a black woman. Habermehl (as cited in Karl Holubar, 1997), who theorised the connotation of black skin commented that, “black skin has unjustifiably been equated with negative values and at the time, the use of “black” were synonym for bad, malicious and repugnant was perpetuated” (p. 813). Holubar (1997) reveals that the deal of beauty at the time was heavily associated with “pale” or “white” all across the world. Although this tradition was carried on for many years from one generation to another, shifting began during the civil rights (1960s) movement. Holubar (1997) believes it was the changing aspect of the negative connotations of black skin that triggered the shift. It was during

this time in history that the slogan “black is beautiful” was coined by women of colour to boost self-confidence and pride in their identity (Holubar, 1997).

The redefinition of black beauty emerged as a form of resistance to the hegemonic positioning of whiteness as superior or preferable to black physical appearances. According to a study on black women’s identity, the first form of resistance to societal beauty norms began in the 1960’s (Beauty is Pain, 2017) with Malcolm X’s liberation movement and his advocacy for the celebration of black beauty by rejecting inculcation practices such as the use of chemical hair alterations and perms. During this time, dark skin and natural African hair were reclaimed by black women (Tate, 2007, cited in Beauty is Pain, 2017) while they continued to empower and educate each other on the dominating influence of white culture. Dash (2016, cited in Beauty is Pain, 2017) notes that “hair conking and straightening were perceived as symbols of self-hatred” (p. 9) and the Afro hairstyle becoming a marker of black pride. People began using the slogan “black is beautiful” as an act of resistance to the hegemony of whiteness. Fanon (1991) draws on his experiences as a black man in white society when he states, “I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” and he uses this understanding to unpack the construction, continuity and the “denegrification” (p. 111) of black people. Denegrification in this context is what Fanon (1991) refers to as the “whitening” of black people. Through his experience, Fanon (1991) offered insight into the white-scripted notion of blackness. Here, he explains that:

Without a white man, there is no black man and as far as skin colour is concerned, a black man can indeed be ontologically brown or even possess a skin shade that can make him pass for white as history has shown us. (p. 119)

Thus, the pertinent issue is not whether you are black or brown, but rather the pre-conditions of the “white gaze”: that not only “must the black man be black but he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon, 1991, p. 110). This experience ultimately highlights the “otherness” of being black in a white-dominated society, but it also establishes a foundation for resistance to domination through the celebration or reclamation of difference.

The resistance to hegemonic beauty ideals can also be described through the story of activist Angela Davis. Without reducing the activist struggle against racism (that continues in contemporary society), the framing of Angela Davis as a representative of beautiful black

women may have helped to reduce discrimination against black culture and reconstruct the representation of black beauty whilst sustaining the fight for racial equality. In discussing Davis, Ford (2015) draws attention to her popularised mugshots (see Figure 1 below) and their subsequent representation in the media. The FBI released the images after she was arrested for guns registered under her name were used during her court trial (Ford, 2015). The image on the left was the first mug shot released by the FBI and it displays her afro hair prominently. In the image on the right hand side, taken several months later, Davis sports fashionable round glasses and a dashiki. Davis quickly became the headline for many mainstream media outlets who labelled her a revolutionary glamour, whilst others labelled her as a “fashion-forward beauty who embodied the transformative ideal that black is beautiful” (p. 2). In most cases, media portrayed her as a “femme fatale” (Ford, 2015, p. 2) rather than intellectual. The celebration of Davis in these images has been critiqued as painting a picture of a model rather than of a revolutionary and a professor. However, to Ford (2015), these images were a clear representation of Davis’ resistance to the cultural and political status quo. Black women struggled to “redefine themselves against the stereotypes of black female that circulated in both mainstream and activist culture” (p. 1). For many young black women, Davis’s controversial image gave a sense of empowerment and resistance to the dominant ideology of the ruling class. Her influence gave women the confidence to feel a sense of black pride and she “reflected the changing aesthetic tastes and political ideologies of college women of colour” (Ford, 2015, p. 2), encouraging them to feel a sense of power and beauty in their culture.



Figure 1: Images of Angela Yvonne Davis taken at the Police station and placed on Top Ten Most Wanted list (Rosenthal, 2017)

Aduonum (2004) notes that “black women have been doubly objectified as black, as women and under white supremacy” (p. 279) and if black women are not voicing their experience then they are destined to repeat the same failures that they went through for social change. Aduonum (2004) further explains that, to empower and support the endeavor of the black community, black women worked effortlessly to resist the western mainstream as retaliation against negative portrayals and the devaluation of black women’s beauty. For years, many women were taught to believe that feminine beauty could only be found in the white female body while the black female body was deemed ugly. As a result, scholars and black feminists have challenged this idealised notion by offering definitions that encompass and value all body types. For Martinez-Jimenez, Galvez-Munoz and Solano-Caballero’s (2018), the concept of “black is beautiful” can be seen more recently in the identity of the popular singer Beyoncé. The significance of her image relates to her involvement in celebrating black female sexuality, whilst at the same time engaging in a conscious discourse on equal opportunities for black women. To Martinez-Jimenez et al. (2018), Beyoncé is also a representative of neoliberal post-feminism – she is the epitome of a powerful and successful black female who embraces her sexual empowerment in the celebration of black women. While this global recognition of black beauty is evident in celebrities like Beyoncé, it also provides black women with a sense of inclusivity. However, without disregarding her significance to the wider black community, it is important to highlight that while her identity serves as an embodiment of black beauty, she also serves as a profitable motor, which essentially places her in a hegemonic position representing a dominant ideology of beauty. As a result, black women are gradually being acknowledged on a wider spectrum compared to Pasifika women due to their minority representation.

2.5 Pasifika women, post-colonialism and beauty

According to Jazeel (2019), Pasifika women were free to embrace their natural beauty until the arrival of western beauty through colonialism. It follows that, since the inception of western beauty, traditional concepts of Pacific beauty have been transformed. As western ideologies evolved, it definitely brought forward new influences central to face, skin and hair treatments among the Pasifika community, particularly amongst women. The influence and impact of western beauty became increasingly apparent during the 1860s. Suaalii (1997) analysed and deconstructed the “exotic” notion of Pasifika female beauty from two contexts: an academic approach and her experiences and understanding as a Pasifika woman. The term

“exotic” can be “described as synonymous with the following words or phrases: outside; foreign; ...strange or different in a way that is striking or fascinating; strangely beautiful, enticing...” (Suaalii, 1997, p. 76). These concepts are reflected in the construction of Pasifika female beauty seen in magazines, tourist products, advertisements and picturesque postcards from a western perspective where the term is commonly used to describe the beauty and settings of tropical islands as well as its people 1997), . Suaalii (1997) refers to images of Pacific Island women in magazines such as National Geographic where the depiction of women displays, “long flowing dark hair covering dusky bare skin... with blooms over her left ear signifying that she is unmarried” (p. 78-79). Here, Suaalii (1997) argues that this construction of Pasifika women’s beauty involves her sexual availability, designating her as something of sensual natural native. Suaalii (1997) encourages women to deconstruct the appropriation of Pasifika female identities by writing about themselves - their experiences, perceptions and understanding of their identity.

There are limited studies on the subject of Pasifika Island women in relation to beauty. As such, the few studies that are concerned with this topic focused on the history of Pasifika women in relation to body sizes. According to Braginsky, Kataoka-Yahiroa and Inouye (2016), the bigger body frame was once attributed to the history of long distance travelling, working on farms and doing hard labour however, modern technology gradually transformed Pasifika people’s lifestyles which has increased the problems of overweight and obesity. Heinberg et al. (as cited in O'Brien et al., 2007) examined the role of physical appearance comparisons and note that, “women with the tendency to make physical appearance comparisons with societal standards of beauty [are] likely to experience greater body dissatisfaction and eating disorder” (p. 249), as opposed to women comparing themselves to those who are perceived to be less valued than them (i.e. fat). O’Brien et al. (2007) suggest that “anti-fat prejudice” is likely to occur due to this conceptualisation of appearance-related comparisons. In order to support their work, O’Brien et al. (2007) draw on the concept of ‘upward’ and ‘downward’ comparisons, which refers to the comparison of one’s self to people superior or less inferior than them (i.e. people more attractive or less attractive). Another suggestion was made that women with strong investment in their appearances most likely expect others to take similar care of their physical appearances. Thus, a woman who deviates from these values are deemed less comfortable with their body. Supposedly, one could argue that this is such a problematic argument to present; however, according to Braginsky, Kataoka-

Yahiro and Inouye (2016), attitudes and behaviour from these individuals are the result of their uninformed judgement. Understanding body images from a socio-cultural framework in the context of migration helps to understand how the past, present and future are connected (p. 11). In other words, Pasifika women have a uniform awareness of big body sizes and appearances, which lessen the negative connotations of big sizes compared to white communities.

In an attempt to understand how Pasifika women came to be more tolerant of larger body sizes than those favoured in other cultures, Hokowhitu (2008) discusses the Maori and Pacific body. He theorises that Pasifika ancestors voyaged into the Pacific many centuries ago and since it was not an easy trip, whoever made landfall in the Pacific islands were survivors. That is to say, only the strongest and fittest ones were able to survive the journey. Brewis, McGarvey, Jones and Swinburn (1998) note that, despite the common ancestry, Pasifika women residing in the islands have a different perception of what is considered beautiful compared to Pasifika women in foreign countries. Considering this, women in the islands perceive larger body sizes as normal, where it is considered attractive and seen as representing power and wealth, while women in other countries see it as unhealthy and a sign for a lack of self-confidence (Brewis et al, 1998). According to Knight, Latner and Illingworth (2010), who studied the body image and self-esteem of Asian, Pacific Island and White students, body dissatisfaction amongst the three cultures are relatively similar in terms of longing for a thinner body. However, also evident in their study is that Pacific Islanders have higher rates of obesity than the two other cultures. Nevertheless, Pacific Islanders also show more positivity and acceptance of their appearance and body image despite being bigger than other cultures. Suggestions have been made that such acceptance comes from the fact that there is “low levels of cultural stigma and fear of [being] overweight” (Knight, Latner & Illingworth, 2010, p. 364). The findings may also suggest that such acceptance derives from the principle of accepting people the way they are, or the likelihood of not being aware of the health issues associated with being overweight (Knight, Latner, & Illingworth, 2010, p. 431). In light of this, suggestions have been made that “understanding these factors could help maintain a positive body image in the presence of heavier weight” (Knight et al, 2010; Latner & Illingworth, 2011, p. 366) that does not conform to Western beauty standards.

For Pasifika peoples, the domestic role that stems from cultural tradition is a source of internal pride. Pasifika women can appreciate different types of beauty irrespective of body

size and/or shape and skin colour. Tongamoa (1988) explains that their level of education and understanding of the outside world determines the perceptions of a woman's role in the Pacific Islands and Moura-Kocoglu (2017) notes, colonialism affected the way in which the Pasifika community categorises gender roles. She explains that since the invasion of the Pacific Islands, the role of women has been greatly relegated to the context of traditional and oral culture whilst at the same time establishing male authority within Pasifika communities. Moura-Kocoglu (2017) also proposes that the traditional role of Pasifika women was changed through the highly sexualised "white male colonial gaze" and it happened at a time when a demonstration of patriarchal gender division was convenient in political struggle for power; men were positioned as leaders and women as the custodians of unchanging traditions. Moreover, Moura-Kocoglu (2017) also notes that this belief has been challenged by many Pasifika women who continue to change and adapt to the complex dynamics of economic and political imperatives characterised by globalised societies.

Pasifika women have always been known to hold less status than men. Similar to women in other cultures, their roles and social status are ascribed to them by society, regardless of their contribution to the family's welfare and economy. Tongamoa (1998) discusses the traditional roles of women in their respective societies - Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu and comments that they all share the belief that a woman must be subordinate to her husband, she is responsible for the "cleanliness of the home, cooking and the general comfort of the family" (p. 1) and that she must be "seen not heard" (p. 70). However, Tongamoa (1998) also finds that this embedded notion of women is gradually becoming less acceptable. While some women are disassociating themselves from these traditions, it is also evident that some women do not view this to be in any way degrading. Tongamoa (1998) explains that women see "the quality of their services bring dignity to the family therefore the value women place on their performances makes it difficult" (p. 4) for themselves to see it differently.

2.6 Conclusion

This review of literature has, at its centre, examined the hegemonic influence "white beauty" continues to instil upon the beauty practices, and therefore experiences, of ethnic women. As Russell (2017) argues, the gaze has always been white, and all "others" are measured by it. His argument points to the notion that "whiteness as a discrete ethnic category has never been the subject of serious scrutiny, since the powerful have no need to explain or

justify themselves to the powerless” (p. 23). Though Gramsci (cited in Amigo et al., 2016) develops a theory explaining how whiteness has established itself as a hegemonic ideology, essentially, his suggestion argues that the construction of whiteness is passed through the conditioning of values, beliefs and culture by the ruling class to the extent that their view becomes a worldview.

Numerous researchers (Stokinger & Wilson, 2018; Taylor, Coates, Anyansi-Archibong & Tanaka, 2013) position the beauty industry and mass media as the two main contributing factors to the construction of beauty; they also suggest is that these institutions must be resisted in many ways. There is some sense that women must embrace their cultural and traditional beauty as part of the wider objective of resisting discrimination and/or cultural domination. As a young Tongan woman living and researching the lived experiences of Pasifika women, I write from a position of having an understanding of two worlds – traditional Tongan society and that of the Pasifika diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand. To an extent, this literature review has presented an exploration of the critical discussion of beauty, and importantly, its intersections with race and power, in an attempt to ascertain how it can be better understood. It ultimately revealed that race is still a prevalent factor in the shaping of women’s experiences of beauty worldwide. But an open question remains as to how Pasifika women navigate their own experiences in between the more common examinations of “white” normativity and “black” counter-ideals.

For the researcher, as a young Tongan descendant who grew up in a multi-cultural society, beauty was already anticipated as a concept that has changed significantly over time, and from experience it was considered that beauty has a strong link with the ideas of power, status and wealth. As such, it was an objective of this study to understand the particular influence of these concepts on Pasifika women. Casanova’s (2004) notes that, regardless of whether you are mixed or of one ethnicity, ethnic women or racially mixed women are increasingly encouraged to embrace the practice of self-acceptance. Such self-acceptance may be evident among Pasifika women, who were found to be more tolerant towards big body sizes in comparison to white, black and Asian women (Braginsky et al., 2016). Knight et al. (2010) theorise that such acceptance may derive from “low levels of cultural stigma and fear of overweight” (p. 364). They further propose that understanding these risk factors could help encourage women to strive for healthier lifestyle and could potentially be a solution to those

struggling with body dissatisfaction. Above all else, this study seeks to understand the lived experiences of Pasifika women in relation to notions of beauty, by encountering Pasifika women directly and establishing an opportunity for their voices to be heard. The following chapter outlines the selection and design of a Pacific research methodology to achieve this objective.

3. RESEARCH METHOD AND STUDY DESIGN

3.1 Ko e talanoa'i e talanoa mo hono kakala (The talking of Talanoa and Kakala)

Patten and Newhart (2017) state that, “research methods are the building blocks of the scientific enterprise” (p. 4), that they are the “how” for building systematic knowledge. In Pacific studies, many of the “hows” are located in the cultural and traditional methods of “*Talanoa, Kakala, Vanua, Fa’afaletui, Fonofale, Tivaevae, ‘Ula, Fonua and Kaupapa Maori*” (McFall-McCaffery, as cited in Tunufa’i, 2016, p. 228). These are just some of the relatively new methods utilised in the field of Pacific studies. In accordance with the nature of this research, the researcher has chosen to utilise the approaches of Talanoa and Kakala. These methodologies can be attributed to Sitiveni Halapua (as cited in Tunufa’i, 2016), Semisi Prescott (2008), and Konai-Helu Thaman (as cited in Fua, 2014). This chapter discusses the methodological approaches and considerations that guide this research project. Firstly, it will outline the purpose and key stages of a Kakala research framework before detailing the use of Talanoa as a research method to identify and interpret the experiences of Pasifika women.

As a means of collecting and interpreting data, a variety of research methodologies can be considered for most studies; however, certain subjects or topics may also require a highly specified methodological approach. In this study, the nature of the subject informs the decision to employ Pacific research methodologies where possible, as opposed to any western or alternative non-Pacific research methodologies. This is not to discredit or invalidate the significance of non-Pacific research methods, but the common identity of the participants as Pasifika women and their experiences of beauty encourages the use of Pasifika research methodologies. As the researcher, I also identify as a Tongan woman, raised and nurtured in a multi-ethnic society. In the Tongan culture, or more so in my Tongan-ness, conversations around Pasifika women and beauty is central to how we perceive ourselves. To understand the experiences of Pasifika women is to firstly understand the cultural and value differences they have to other non-Pacific cultures. As a young Tongan woman, I consider this thesis from two different perspectives. I, as a Tongan who examines the impact of beauty on women in general as well as being a Pasifika woman who can identify with the experiences of the women involved in this study. As challenging and emotional it was to share these participant’s personal experiences it paints a small representation of the concerning reality for Pasifika women. Importantly, it raises the question of my own position in this study. Reflecting on my position,

I refer to the work of Rewi (2014) as she discusses the complexities of being both an insider and an outsider in research. Rewi (2014) explains the importance and advantages of being an insider as being able to create a space that is culturally safe for both parties as well as adhering to appropriate customs. This is in opposition to an outsider that may have little-to-no familiarity, kinship and understanding of the researched culture/cultural group. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) who writes extensively on decolonizing indigenous research methodologies adds that being an insider means to be in a privileged position as access to deeper levels of information and “cultural considerations are respectfully interwoven together” (p. 2). Given the overall sensitivity of this topic I position myself as insider who touches on certain issues that are rarely discussed amongst the Pacific communities let alone within more intimate settings such as family homes. I believe that through this study I also advocate for the value and importance of Pasifika women to retrieving self-love and self-acceptance from as a form of socially constructed identity that may instil, rather than hinder, confidence.

Simonds and Christopher (2013) conducted research on how to better understand indigenous people using western research methodologies and found these minority groups have long experienced exploitation by researchers in this context. As more and more researchers are engaging with the study of Pasifika and indigenous people, it has become crucial to practice cultural sensitivity and show respect for traditions and customs. Simonds and Christopher (2013) argue that Pacific research methodologies should be developed “alone or in conjunction with appropriate western methods when conducting research” (Simonds & Christopher, 2013, p. 2185) in these communities in order to facilitate a more culturally appropriate context and minimise the risk of misrepresentation or exploitation.

Smith (2013), drawing on Stuart Hall’s study of the western system of knowledge suggests that the western system is a concept, which makes up complex stories that functions in four ways:

- (1) Western system allow ‘us’ to characterise and classify societies into categories, (2) condense complex images of other societies through a system of representation, (3) provide a standard model of comparison, and (4) provide criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked (Hall, as cited by, Smith, 2013, p. 44 – 45).

Hall (as cited in Smith, 2013) explains that Pasifika people and their traditions were coded into, “the Western system of knowledge” (p. 45) using these techniques. However, Smith (2013) believes that the western systems are not fixed as Hall suggests as they can be modified to

allow researchers to respectfully engage with other communities and recognise cultural-specific knowledge. These are the rules of classification, rules of framing and rules of practice. The point presented therein is that in the world of research, a sophisticated and mutually negotiated understanding of how one's culture works is essential. Whilst some may argue the western methodologies can be utilised to facilitate Pacific studies, Pacific methodologies contain traditions and customs and have a unique way of revealing knowledge gained from Pasifika peoples.

The practice of Talanoa is commonly shared by many of the South Pacific regions. While many of these Pacific islands share the same understanding of Talanoa, it is of importance to address its meaning for a greater understanding. In Fiji, Talanoa is known as a method to “disseminate information by local government departments, village representatives and local agencies” (Morrison, Vaoleti & Veramu, as cited in Vaoleti, T., 2006). It is also used as a data collection tool from leaders, villages and different local avenues. From a Samoan perspective, Talanoa is known as “fa’atatalanoa” and refers to an ancient practice where only critical concerns and discussions is communicated amongst. In this thesis, the notion of Talanoa is based on a Tongan perspective. The research methodologies of Kakala and Talanoa have been selected to affirm that this study will generate knowledge and understanding of our Pasifika peoples and their respective communities. It also reflects a range of Pacific world-views, thereby increasing the motivation for Pasifika people to stay alert to, and be informed of, the development and deviations that their histories, cultures and traditions have reflected. Solomona (as cited in Tima, 2013) notes that “what should drive us researchers in seeking appropriate research methodologies is the desire that the research will support beneficial outcome[s] for our people” (p. 67). Pacific studies should not only aim to outline and inform our experiences but also invest in providing solutions. Therefore, the following sections will discuss the Kakala framework followed by Talanoa as a research method. However, as this chapter will demonstrate, some use of Western research methods, in particular “Thematic Analysis”, is necessary in the design of this study.

3.2 Kakala mo hono talanga (The talking of Kakala)

Kakala is the name given to the garland used at ceremonial events (Fuka-lino, 2015). Tui kahoa kakala in the Tongan context is the practice of garland making, a common practice in the islands whereby one or more women gather in a circle with their tools and flowers threading it into a kakala. Fua (2014) explains that the process of making kakala is a

demonstration of collaboration, sharing of resources and the passing of skills to the next generation. It is a process that requires distinct focus and quite often, the maker has a specific person in mind as the recipient of the kakala. This practice of weaving the kakala has been identified by a number of Pasifika researchers as a useful metaphor and guide for the process of an academic study. The concept was developed in 1999 by Konai Helu-Thaman (Fuka-lino, 2015), but it can also be identified in the work of Ete-Rasch and Nelson (2013) and Fuka-Lino (2015) in studies examining health care, the study of epistemologies significant to Tongan students learning experiences by Kailahi (2017) and studies on gambling problems common amongst Tongan communities (Vatuvei, 2017). Initially, the Kakala framework conceptualises research to consist of three stages: 1. *Toli* (the data collection stage); 2. *Tui* (the data analysis stage); and 3. *Luva* (the presentation of findings). However, Taufe'ulungaki and Johansson (2005, cited in Fuka-lino, 2015) redeveloped the framework into four stages by adding *Teu* (the research preparation stage), as the first stage, preceding the 3 existing stages. Thaman (cited in Fuka-lino, 2015) expressed that the use of Kakala in Pasifika research allows Pasifika researchers the opportunity to articulate theories from their perspective and to recognise Pasifika worldviews in their own thinking. Similar to western methods of collecting, storing and analysing data, Kakala provides a blueprint for the recruitment of participants, the conducting of interviews, data collection and analysis. The following section outlines the research methodology based on the four stages of Kakala.

3.3 Stage 1: *Teu [The Preparation stage]*

Applying Kakala to studies concerned with Pasifika women is useful because “when exploring aspects of Pacific culture, it is important to refrain from trying to apply western frameworks to describe epistemologies that fall outside of western cultural constructs” (Toluta’u, 2008), p. 27). In kakala (garland weaving), the teu stage is where the preparation for the overall occasion takes place. It is where the goals and purpose of each kakala is determined. It is also the stage where the garland maker is has to decide what types of kakala would be suitable for the occasion. Significantly, not all kakala are the same. For instance, a kakala made for a wedding ceremony will not be appropriate for funeral ceremonies, just like a kakala made for traditional Tongan dance would not be appropriate for someone of royal hierarchy status. There are particular techniques and approaches that go towards making the garland and the type of garland to be used. This is because each garland has a meaning, purpose and hierarchy status and it requires particular attention and a definite person in mind. Likewise, in a research

framework, the researcher is required to identify purpose, aim and logic in order to know which approach/es can be deemed appropriate, taking into account, deliberations, planning, premeditation and brainstorming. The researcher is challenged on many aspects, such as:

1. Would a qualitative approach or quantitative approach be best suited to the research project?
2. How will the overall results benefit from the chosen approach?
3. Will the chosen approach collect a suitable range of information in a timely manner or lead to delays in the overall process?

These are concepts included but not limited to, what a researcher takes into consideration in the preparation stage. This stage is also about determining who your potential participants will be and what number of participants would be appropriate for the research project. Fuka-Lino (2015) suggests this stage is also about considering the ethical appropriateness of the research including, but not limited to, its cultural relevance and application as well as ensuring that the application for formal ethics clearance to collect data is finalised. Once completed, the next stage is the collection of information.

In the Teu stage of this study, the research topic was identified and refined. Initially the study was concerned with a primary critique of the beauty industry, but through greater consideration of the researcher's own identity, personal experiences, and the lack of representation for Pasifika women's voices, both Pasifika and non-Pasifika research, the chosen focus of this study was determined. Essentially, the initial focus of this thesis was to examine and explore the perceptions and experiences of women participating in any Pacific beauty pageant. It is believed that those within the beauty pageant have more conscious definition and perceptions of Pasifika beauty, which is why I saw a significance and value in studying their experiences. However, through deep consideration of the researcher's own identity, it was evident that the experiences of ordinary everyday women would be raw and authentic compared to those who are heavily immersed within the beauty pageant, which would add a distinctive perspective to the study. As a result, ordinary women were chosen as the main focus.

3.3.1 Justification

Once the objective was established, the following step was determining the appropriate methods for the data collection. While many different approaches were available, such as qualitative research, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and others, I felt that my identity as a Pasifika woman who investigates the experiences of Pasifika women required the application of a Pasifika research framework. As such, the method of Talanoa was taken into account and measured. While many could argue that Talanoa is like an unstructured interview, Prescott (2008) explains:

Talanoa is any form of communication aimed at reaching understanding towards the building or enhancing of relationships. The openness associated with Talanoa is a product of the underlying trust relationship and sense of cultural connectedness between those involved. The benefits associated with reaching a state of understanding are shared between the participants, without prejudice. The modern interview on the other hand, while mimicking the transparent characteristics of Talanoa, is primarily focused on gaining knowledge. The relationship thread, which is central to Talanoa, is not embedded within the modern interview process.

In much of the theses I read involving the use of Talanoa, it was fascinating and encouraging that a study such as this, which involves the partaking of Pasifika women, to employ the use of Talanoa. With Talanoa being justified, the next step was the ethical approval processes.

3.3.2 Ethics

With the nature and the cultural appropriateness incorporated within this study, an ethical approval was necessary. To ensure each participants was aware of the research subject, an information sheet detailing the study and the ethical principles were provided. Confidentiality was a central part of the process as some women were concerned about sensitive information being shared. Participants were given weeks to decide before making any further decisions about their involvement and as part of the mutual agreement, each participant was also provided with a consent form to validate use of information within this study. Since participants were of legal consent age, it was not necessary to seek the permission of a legal guardian. With the ethical approval in place, the recruitment process began.

3.3.3 Procedure

Participants were recruited with the help of friends and use of personal networking—Facebook and LinkedIn. Information about the study was distributed throughout Facebook and LinkedIn posts. Women who showed interest were sent a brief email along with two attachments; an information sheet detailing the research subject, research proposal and a consent form. While many women were showing interest, some women did not meet the participation criteria due to the age restriction, language barrier and conflicting schedules. As a result, women who were unable to commit their time to this study offered their support by extending the invitation to friends and colleagues who they believed would be interested. The women who met the criteria were invited to meet in person. To provide comfort and stability, these women were advised of their rights and options to withdraw or decline answers at any given time, should they experience discomfort or change of mind during the Talanoa. However, should they wish to continue, they were assured that any information they shared would be kept confidential and that their names would be replaced with the use of pseudonyms for any publications that may come out of this research. All participants involved, were video recorded solely to capture any non-verbal communication and allowed for a well-grounded and deep Talanoa between the researcher and the participant without any interruption. These Talanoa were conducted in a face-to-face interaction with the exception of one participant due to other priorities. As a result, our Talanoa was conducted via video calling. Although this may contradict and challenge the authenticity of Talanoa, in my view I felt determined that any participant who was willing and strongly supportive of the research must have valuable perspectives and therefore should be included. This particular Talanoa was also video recorded. Each Talanoa consisted of two people: the researcher and the participant. In one of the Talanoa there were 4 people presented; the researcher and the 3 participants. This Talanoa was spontaneous and the researcher only became aware of the additional people on the scheduled date. In turn, the researcher adapted to the participants' wishes to conduct the Talanoa with all three participants simultaneously, as any additional feedback would add value to the topic. In total, each Talanoa took a maximum of 2 - 3 hours. For each Talanoa, the participant was seated across from the researcher with a copy of the information and consent form in front of them to read and sign. In order to make the participant feel comfortable, the researcher began the Talanoa by asking how their day was and what inspired them to be part of the research. This

allowed both parties to interact with each other in a comfortable manner, which eventually lead to the start of the Talanoa.

3.3.4 Participants

Overall, 12 Pasifika females participated in this study. They identified with a range of different ethnic backgrounds, including Tongan, Samoan, Niuean, Fijian, and Cook Island, and some even identified with more than one, including non-Pacific backgrounds. All participants were between the ages of 20 - 30 and lived in Auckland, New Zealand (NZ). It was important that any female who volunteered to participate would be of Pacific descent due to the sensitivity of the subject researched. More importantly, it was crucial to the researcher and the nature of the study that these women have relatedness to the topic discussed, as not only will it benefit the overall outcomes of the study but also their personal experiences will add values to the discussion. As such, those who reportedly identified with more than one ethnicity expressed that they identified more with their Pasifika identity based on their upbringing. The primary focus was to invite a maximum of 6 – 8 women. However, the number of responses received led to extending the number of participants involved, allowing those who fit the research requirements to participate. This resulted in a more diverse participant cohort and a greater range of perspectives to base the analysis on. After all, it is not the number of participants but the balance and richness of their justification related to the research that is relevant (Saunders & Townsend, 2016).

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Participant 1	22 yrs. Old	University Law student	Tongan/Maori
Participant 2	23 yrs. Old	University Social worker student	Niuean
Participant 3	21 yrs. Old	Customer Service Operator	Fijian
Participant 4	20 yrs. Old	Hospitality Customer Service Agent	Fijian
Participant 5	24 yrs. old	University Law student	Fijian/Maori
Participant 6	22 yrs. Old	Researcher/Writer	Cook Island/African
Participant 7	22 yrs. Old	TV Sports reporter	Samoan/Maori
Participant 8	21 yrs. Old	University Visual Arts student	Samoan
Participant 9	20 yrs. Old	University Law/Art student	Samoan
Participant 10	22 yrs. Old	University Graphic Design student	Samoan
Participant 11	27 yrs. Old	University Law student/Mentor	Samoan
Participant 12	23 yrs. Old	University Culinary Art student	Samoan

Table 1: Participant sample

3.4 Stage 2: Toli [Kakala mo hono Paki - Collection]

Toli is the name given to the collection of flowers used to make kakala. The garland maker is required to go out and collect the nominated flowers suitable for the occasion, which requires her to pay attention to the picking of the flowers, the collecting of the flowers and safety of the flowers. In a research context, the tasks of Toli stage include that the researcher attends to the location of the interviewee and begins the collection process, in this case, through the process of Talanoa.

3.4.1 Talanoa'i e toli - The talking of the data collection

McFall-McCaffery (2010) comments that when conducting Pacific research, it is important to consider the Pacific knowledge systems as it allows Pasifika participants to be represented in a manner that is culturally appropriate. Talanoa has made quite an impression amongst Pasifika researchers, as the approaches offers researchers and participants the opportunity for the cultural production of stories, sharing of information and expressing emotions in a culturally familiar content. In the Tongan culture, Talanoa is a combination of

two distinct words: Tala means “to talk” or “to tell” and noa means “anything or nothing in particular” (Fa’avae, Jones & Manu’atu, 2016, p. 140). In other words, to perform Talanoa is to have an outpouring conversation without the same premeditation that would guide a structured interview. Although the use of Talanoa in this study relates broadly to the Tongan definition of the concept, it is important to acknowledge that Talanoa in general is a shared concept that belongs to many Pacific cultures, rather than one nation. In the wider context, Talanoa is the traditional Pacific practice of “engaging with dialogue or telling stories to each other, absent of concealment of the inner feelings and experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds” (Farrelly & Nabobo-Babam, 2014, p. 319).

According to Semisi Prescott (2008), the decision to use Talanoa in a research context emerged after experiencing Talanoa sessions facilitated by Sitiveni Halapua during the 2000 Fiji political coup. This session was Halapua’s way of addressing how to better deal with issues held by those involved in the often opposing parties of a governmental body. Since then, Talanoa has played a significant role in a number of Pacific studies; educational research (Prescott, 2008; Tunufa’i, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006), sports management research (Stewart-Withers et al., 2017), research examining the relationship between Pasifika fathers and their involvement in their children lives (Tautolo, 2011), social science research examining the experiences and perceptions of NZ-born Tongan males living in New Zealand and “their participation in the Tongan cultural practice known as faikava” (Fehoko, 2015) as well as gambling issues amongst Pasifika communities research (Guttenbeil-Po’uhila et al., 2004). Vaioleti (2006, cited in Tunufa’i, 2016) states that, “Talanoa allows more authentic information to be available for Pacific research rather than data derived from other research methods” (p. 236). Tunufa’i (2016) concerns is that this statement places other research methodologies as ineffective when in actuality, is untrue. He believes Talanoa is different in the sense that the researcher must be informed of the cultural values, practice and all other significance traditions before conducting Talanoa. Here, he uses the work of Davidson (2008, cited in Tunufa’i, 2016) to articulate his claim. “The historian studying multicultural situations must learn to use new forms of evidence to involve himself in the other men’s ways, and to avoid interpreting men’s actions in terms of the patterns of his own culture” (p. 237). Aligning with the belief of Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba (2012, cited in Tunufa’i, 2016), “Kaupapa Maori, Kakala framework and Unaisi’s Vanua Research framework” are the only methodologies that have been specifically used to study Pacific topics in a cultural context for research. Prescott (2008) explains that the difference between traditional method Talanoa and other forms of unstructured or semi-

structured interview is that Talanoa is a product of the underlying trust relationship and sense of cultural connectedness between those involved. The benefits associated with reaching a state of understanding are shared between the participants without prejudice, whereas other modern interview techniques focus primarily on gaining information (Prescott, 2008, p. 130). That is to say, the understanding, awareness and acknowledgement fundamental to Talanoa offers an important distinction from other modern interview approaches.

Despite the concept being interpreted and applied differently in various studies, most researchers favour Vaioleti's model of Talanoa. Vaioleti (2006, cited in Tunufa'i, 2016) outlines Talanoa as having an unguided or unstructured conversation without ground rules or instructions to direct the conversations that take place. That is to suggest that Talanoa is simply led and sustained by the content discussed, hence similar to an unstructured or semi-structured interview. However, Prescott (2008) argues that the concept of Talanoa as a research method is anything but an unstructured or unguided conversation. He claims that such a method cannot be unguided or unstructured as the sole purpose of Talanoa is to obtain knowledge and information about a particular topic:

The Talanoa process is characterised by having no set agenda. In research, this is impractical as any study is bound by a research topic or area. The absence of an agenda in the case of Talanoa does not necessarily mean a free-for-all discussion on whatever topic the speaker wishes, but rather an open format for the participant to raise any matter they feel relevant to the issue or issues being discussed. (Prescott, 2008, p. 137)

Fa'avae et al. (2016) also explain that Talanoa as a research method should simultaneously be understood as a research methodology. Their claim is that Talanoa incorporates both theoretical and practical concerns in order to enact data collection and analyse the information obtained. For example, emotions and empathy are central in this practice, alongside interview protocols. The benefit of employing Pacific research methods helps reflect the lived realities of research participants. Fa'avae et al., (2016) also explain that western research methods can obtain the same kind of information as Talanoa but, "the nature and focus of Talanoa is determined by the interest of the participants themselves, their immediate surroundings and worldview" (Fua et al, 2016 p. 140). Vaioleti (2006) also suggests that whilst one can assume that all Western, Eastern and Pacific knowledges may have had the same origins, constructions and instruments used to collect their findings, the differences position them in a way that findings are "unlikely to have values and lived realities that allow

understanding of issues pertaining to knowledge” (p. 22) and ways that originated from Pasifika people themselves. As previously mentioned, Vaiolleti’s (2006) interpretation of Talanoa has made quite an impression amongst many Pacific studies. In brief, he defined Talanoa as a personal encounter between the interviewee and the interviewer(s) where they communicate their stories on a deeper and connected level, allowing pure and authentic information to be available for Pacific research.

In the history of Talanoa as a research methodology, it is important to acknowledge that there are different types of Talanoa. These include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Po Talanoa, the deeper exchange and sharing of ideas type of talk and both participant and researcher already have a close bond.
- (2) Fakatalanoa, encouraging the discussion of a topic or issue that both participant and researcher have not met prior.
- (3) Talatalanoa, discussion based on selected topics, and the unravelling of cultural concepts.
- (4) Fokotu’utalanoa, the topic is given by the researcher and the discussion is based solely around that topic.

While these individual customs play different roles in Pacific culture, their focus and purpose are relatively similar – to reach a state of understanding between those involved in Talanoa. Likewise, it is important to remember that the context of Talanoa discussed here is primarily addressed from a Tongan perspective. This perspective is different, or at least includes some aspects that differs from the interpretations in other Pacific cultures. Prescott (2008) explains that Talanoa is a shared concept amongst Pacific Island nations, which is why any claim that Talanoa belongs solely to one’s nation is unjustified. However, he believes the reason behind such claim most likely stems from the fact that Talanoa is applied uniquely different across variety of contexts. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher considers the use of both “Talatalanoa” and “Fokotu’utalanoa”. This in my view is essential as it allows both the researcher and participant to build the discussion and Talanoa around the topic while at the same time allowing for personal and free interaction that will encourage participants to talk openly and willingly.

Time and place are vital considerations in conducting Talanoa. In most instances, the major concern is trying to arrange a place or venue where the participant feels they can talk openly. Halapua (as cited in Prescott, 2008) suggests that ideally, Talanoa is should be

conducted during weekends rather than weekdays. This is to allow the participant to put aside weekday obligations and feel comfortable engaging in an open Talanoa without any worries. This, in the Tongan culture, is referred to as Talanoa heliaki, the process in which one discusses topics which may or may not be relevant before concluding (Prescott, 2008). Although the definition of Talanoa heliaki conveys the impression that it means “talking nonsense”, it has benefits for the research in the sense that it allows the participant to explicate their responses rather than provide a one sentence answer. In addition, as Kaeppler (1993, cited in Ka’ili & Mahina, 2017) notes, another possibility for one to Talanoa “heliaki” can be from the pressure or limitation of time given to discuss the topic, in which case participants tend to feel pressured and speak figuratively rather than directly. Importantly, although according to Halapua’s (as cited in Prescott, 2008) belief, Talanoa should best be conducted on the weekends, the majority of the Talanoa in this study were conducted during weekdays. This is because many of these women had other weekend commitments and to avoid conflicting schedules, the researcher allowed them to pick a location and time that suited them. Hence, it is imperative when conducting Talanoa to negotiate in advance the time, place and expected duration.

Talanoa is also a custom which is often exercised during a faikava. A faikava is a well-known cultural practice that “encompasses social bonding, fostering of friendships, exchange of stories, knowledge and life-experiences whilst drinking the narcotic beverage of kava” (Fehoko, 2015, p. 132). However, the contemporary context in which people engage in Talanoa can start with a formal or in-formal introduction. In this study, the Talanoa began with asking the participants how their day was. As the researcher, it was crucial to ease into the conversation without pressuring the participant. With every new question their response was based on something they last said. For instance, when a participant shared her perceptions of what defines beauty and she referenced physical features, the following question would acknowledge the physical features of beauty while also inquiring about the inner or the non-physical aspects of beauty. In some instances, and when it seems appropriate, the researcher may briefly share their thoughts as well, which often helps to break or reduce any possibilities of discomfort or tension that may occur. With that being said, almost all the participants were excited and inspired by the research topic and its overall purpose. It follows, that majority of these women had never thought about the underlying issues of beauty in relation to Pasifika women and they felt it was an important issue to highlight.

Emotion is another aspect that is evident in the Talanoa. The Talanoa offered a forum where participants could share both positive and negative experiences as well as general views. In some instances, sharing their stories would make some participants emotional and it was important for me to acknowledge this part of the Talanoa and allow the participant to compose. Reflecting on these emotions, it seemed that each time the participant shares a negative experience that occurred at home it sparked emotions. When personal experiences were shared, it seemed to stimulate a sense of “deep thinking” and “regret” because oftentimes participants find themselves talking about a particular incident or mind-set they once maintained. It was the kind of mind-set that does not challenge the ideal of beauty rather: it adheres to its standards. While signs of “regret” and “sadness” were manifesting in some Talanoa, some participants were exhibiting signs of ‘concerns’ for the benefit of the future generation. This suggests that some participants fear the future generation may experience the same trauma, if issues such as these are not highlighted and addressed immediately.

3.5 Stage 3: Tui [Data Analysis]

This stage is concerned with the weaving of the flowers into kakala. In terms of the research process, this stage focuses on the analysis and the arrangement of the information collected from Talanoa. In a kakala context, once the garland maker finished collecting her flowers, she starts arranging them into colours, types and level of significance. Once this form of structure or grouping is completed she begins weaving the flowers together. The primary focus in this stage is the arrangement of themes as once that is established the rest of the flowers will fall into place. In relation to the research context, the researcher begins to analyse the collected data, reviewing information that is essential and organising them into categories before preparing to present the findings of the research process. More importantly, the researcher also needs to justify what information is relevant to the discussion as such. The benefit of this justification helps to create a well-informed discussion of the topic that acknowledged that not all information are relevant and, therefore, some information may be excluded.

Thematic analysis is one research methodology that many would argue serves a similar function of Tui within kakala, in terms of categorising flowers and themes prior to weaving. Just like garland weaving, the researcher begins by arranging themes and disseminating information into categories. Strachan, Yellowlees and Quigley (2015) explain that “thematic

analysis is a process of recognising and categorising patterns of meaning in a body of data” (p. 156). This is evident in the work of Castleberry and Nolen (2018) who suggest that the process of thematic analysis consists of six steps: familiarity, compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding. Familiarity involves reading the information collected to gather an understanding of the overall findings. Compiling relates to the transcription of the data, disassembling refers to the picking and rearranging of the information into subheadings. Reassembling involves mapping the concepts and potential themes. Interpreting is grouping of relatively information to support the themes identified within subheadings, and lastly, concluding means the overall reflection of the research. In other words, the data collected from Talanoa should answer the research question. Similarly, in line with Vaioleti’s (2006) explanation, Tui, just like thematic analysis, is where the stories are arranged and woven together; much like the integration and weaving of knowledge made available by Talanoa. He also explained that attention to details are essential at this stage, as ineffective selection and integration of rich information could easily lead to invalid conclusions.

Having used thematic analysis in conjunction with the Kakala framework, it became a shared pattern where both its cultural and western relevance were incorporated collectively to organise and analyse the collected information. This combination of the two methods were able to generate and strengthen the overall findings in a more rigorous manner. Since all Talanoa were documented using video recording, it was necessary to transcribe the data into words to facilitate organisation and documentation of the data. Each Talanoa session lasted between 2 – 3 hours long. Each video was transcribed manually, taking between 2-4 days each. Once the transcription was completed, the familiarity stage began. All transcripts were read to grasp a better understanding of the overall data. It emerged from the data that high school friends, colleagues and oftentimes, family members often had a profound impact on participants’ perceptions of beauty. In addition, some participants highlighted television programs, social networks – Instagram and Magazine – as risk factors. Lastly, the idea of race, class and gender differences were identified as additional contributing factors. Many of these factors featured in all of the participants’ experiences. These factors were then grouped separately under each individual sub heading, which was later categorised into three themes. All As the following chapter will show, the three themes were Social Relationships, Media and the construction of Race, Class and Gender.

3.6 Stage 4: Luva e Kakala [Presentation of Findings]

Luva e Kakala is the final stage of Teu, Toli and Tui. It is the presentation of the kakala to the nominated person. Although there is no formal procedure to the gifting the kakala, it is a process whereby the garland maker is highly acknowledged for their hard work. Whether it is a cultural ceremony, birthdays or weddings, this stage corresponds to the dissemination of results. Similar to the kakala presentation the researcher is encouraged to present their findings back to the public to allow for feedback. As Guttenbeil-Po'uhila et al. (2002) explain, Luva e kakala means returning the knowledge created to the people it was gifted from to ensure it serves its purpose. By using this research as a platform to share the voices of Pasifika women, the intended publication of an academic thesis provides a meaningful opportunity to share this information with the wider communities of first and foremost Pasifika women but also other populations similarly affected or concerned by the issues represented in this study. It is important to highlight that the quotes presented in the following chapters as interview data have been edited slightly. Minimal changes have been made to account for hesitation and excessive repetition. Overall, this editing greatly assists the readability of the quotes and ensures that the substance of each participant's contribution is not obstructed by the nuances of casual speech.

3.7 Challenges

The Talanoa process requires a significant amount of time and commitment from all participants. Therefore, ensuring that the scheduling of Talanoa sessions was convenient for invited participants was an essential stage in the process. In view of this, during the invitation stage, a large number of invited participants did not respond to the invitation to participant within the 2 weeks' period given in the information sheet whilst others did not respond at all. Due to this, the invitation was extended to more people. Each of the participants was asked about their eligibility to participate, which led to the majority of them being excluded from the project based on their age and other commitments. Some of these participants suggested I contact other people who were likely to fit the participant criteria. While it was necessary to find participants who solely fit the criteria, the ethnicity of women who strongly showed support and interest in the research were identified with more than one ethnic group. This prompted the researcher to further question their involvement in the research and their relatedness the topic. From the extended conversation it emerged that some of these women spent their whole life knowing only of their Pacific background and consequently identify more as Pasifika citizens regardless of their multicultural background; others were raised with single

parent which led them to have one sided experience of their multi-ethnic background whilst others began experiencing beauty as they grew, realising the reality and the sensitivity of the subject have conditioned them to think and act a certain way. To some of these participants, it painted a reality in their minds of what they can do to help the younger generations to be aware of the consequences of this concept. Even though as a researcher I wanted to include all people who showed interest, the nature and the requirements of the thesis required me to make appropriate decisions on how many participants should be included. Considering that, the Talanoa process demands an in-depth discussion with a limited number of participants rather than with a large number of people. This allows the researcher time to assemble all data collected and analyse it in a timely manner.

3.8 Conclusion

The methodological considerations of the Kakala framework and Talanoa data collection approach have marked significance amongst Pacific studies both in local and international contexts. The essence of these approaches is to embrace the underlying values and relationships of Pacific cultures, while also being flexible in its function to accommodate multiple social settings such as formal and informal ceremonial events, social gathering such as *faikava* and academic research. While Talanoa and Kakala may have similarities with other Western research frameworks such as thematic analysis, uniqueness lies in the fact that the traditional practice of Talanoa centres on cultural connection, stories, emotions and social understanding. A practice absent of the concealment of the inner feelings and experiences differs from other guided research methodologies, particularly in the case of Western research of indigenous or minority populations.

Talanoa, Kakala and thematic analysis were all essential in the overall data collection and analysis process. They helped to create and analyse the data in a way that was culturally appropriate as well as theoretically practical. While the following chapter highlights the primary findings of Talanoa, it also reveals the importance of establishing effective investigation protocols and develop the means to communicate about matters that have so far been given little consideration. On many occasions, the participants involved in this research commented that the representation of beauty was rarely discussed in the media or even among their friends: and the perpetuation of beauty in amongst society made them think differently of themselves. An issue that would not have been examined thoroughly, if it was not brought to

attention with the use of Kakala and Talanoa. Despite its challenges, this study underlines both Talanoa and Kakala as a mode of communication suitable for collecting data in Pacific studies. Inevitably, allowing more studies to be explored on the issue of Pasifika women, beauty and race.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings, along with an elucidation of the data in reference to the research questions established prior to the Talanoa. To set the tone of the discussion, during each Talanoa session, participants were presented with the same question, “what is beauty and how would you define it?” To some participants, beauty was an internal affair; others perceived it as an attainable objective. While beauty may be socially concerned with the physical aspect of the woman, some participants believe that ‘true’ beauty lies within the idea of being involved in church and community duties, thereby focussing on the emotional rather than the physical aspect of beauty. However, within the broader categories, there were number of sub-themes that emerged, still connected to the context of the experience. These include the influence of mainstream media; the impact of social relationships and pressures from family, friends, and employers; and the construction of race. Based on these connections, this study established three main themes: Social peer pressure, Media, and Racial structures. According to these participants, excessive media consumption and use of social media contributed to and shaped participants’ perceptions of beauty, in ways they deemed both negative and positive. Direct and indirect social peer pressure affected their beauty experiences significantly, and those with negative perceptions of communicated beauty ideals tend to find it difficult to unbridle themselves from the constructed ideologies. Others tend to exercise the ideologies keeping in mind an awareness and an understanding of its impacts. Whilst each of the themes demonstrated a significant impact in each woman’s experiences, it shows that some of the issues highlighted in this study, such as family support and community involvement, are experiences that are culturally specific to Pasifika women. For the following section, I present an overview of the findings starting with the influence of social peer pressure.

4.1 Theme one: Social peer pressure

Social relationships had a significant impact on the experiences of the young women that participated in this study. Much of the Talanoa conversations centred on the influence of their peers in school, workplace and at home. For most of the participants, a lot of the pressure occurred during high school and through their formative, adolescent years – a time of heightened vulnerability when ideas about one’s self can easily be influenced by the judgement of others. Bissell and Hays (2010), who studied the influence of beauty on young adolescent girls, found that children spend approximately 25% of their time watching television and engaging with others, which reinforces their ideas of attractiveness and thinness. They also

emphasised the composite effect of peak vulnerability during the teenage years when girls start to form their own beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of themselves and of others. Most participants agreed that their family played a role in supporting their navigation of these ideas where they had both a positive and negative impact on the way the participants experienced these new challenges. Interestingly, most of the participants acknowledged that social pressure still occurs in their adult lives; however, their consciousness and self-awareness of such pressure allowed for a more positive and encouraging response to perceived criticism.

4.1.1 School and the workplace

Schools, and occasionally workplaces, were strongly identified by almost every participant that was involved in this study as a place that heavily influenced their perceptions of beauty. It believes that while participants were unreceptive to what determines beauty given their juvenescence age, in school participants often found themselves in situations where other students made judgemental references about their physical features, suggesting ways on how to enhance it. Some participants have also been subjected to beauty discrimination in the workplace, they stated it did not have the same effect as during their high school years as they are now more experienced in how to deal with social biases.

One participant shared some of the troubling experiences she endured during high school and how it constructed her way of thinking from an early age:

“I think I was bullied in school but it was small things like some of the girls would tell me... “Oh, I think you would look prettier if you straightened your hair”, because I would always wear my hair curly” (Participant 1).

She also explained that, for a long time, she had mistaken these interactions as examples of “friendliness” and/or “amiable” behaviour, when in reality these were subtle pressures to conform to a particular standard. In essence, it made her think that these compliments were reasonable and appropriate and ideals that one should adhere to in order to be considered beautiful. She further explained how it began to affect her perception of beauty and how she saw herself:

I felt like I probably put the most pressure on myself to look a certain way. Like growing up, I hated how I looked, like my hair especially. I was in an all-white school and I did not understand why I wanted to look different so badly. Why I wanted to have lighter skin. Why I wanted to be thin and prettier like others. (Participant 1)

“All-white school” in this context refers to schools that are predominantly visited by white students with small population of brown students. However, for this participant, these experiences affected her subconsciously and pushed her towards different ways of altering her appearance such as chemical hair straightening and lip enhancements in order to look “beautiful” without realising its harmful consequences.

In an attempt to understand how judgment of beauty develops at such a young age, Diessner et al. (2016) designed a model to capture how beauty can be “reliably and validly identified” (p. 29) and why young children are not able to probe logical reasons as to why certain objects are beautiful to them. For instance, they can say what they like and do not like but more often would not offer any reasons for their preferences to make logical sense. Therefore, it is a very common practice for children to call something beautiful simply because they like it (Diessner et al., 2016). Parsons (as cited in Diessner et al., 2016) adds that “this is when egocentric perspective of judging beauty comes from because [within the child’s own experience] there is nothing else to compare it with” (p. 29). In other words, children are more likely to make judgemental comments about others because they have representational thoughts - the process that occurs when one thinks about their surroundings using images, languages and symbols - that do not take the perspectives of others into account. However, school is a place where these occurrences are common, particularly for those attending an “all-white” school. Understandably, the use of the term ‘all-white’ in this study is a representation of lived experience and/or perceived-reality rather than a representative of the actual population of the school attended by the participants. In reference to this idea, the previously cited participant shared how her surroundings had influenced her perception of beauty:

I wanted high cheekbones, smaller nose and straight hair. Like I wanted straight hair so bad especially all throughout primary, throughout high school. It was not until recently that I started to realise, why have I been so conditioned to hate the way I look! (Participant 1)

This attitude or mind-set is common amongst many younger women, who, when it comes to “negotiation of beauty ideals between the individual and society, women were found to aptly draw on the existing discourses of beauty” (Glapka & Majali, 2017, p. 174). Participant 1’s experiences offer an example of the ways that powerful and convincing social pressures can

have a lasting impact. This was also evident in another participant's experience, where she described feeling persuaded by peer pressure to conform to society's beauty standards:

My hair is naturally big and puffy so I remember in high school I was told if I could straighten it because it was too big, and I started straightening it. I think that would be one of the most frustrating things during high school but also because it was a trend where everyone was straightening their hair and it was on the mainstream media. You never really saw anyone with curly hair, so I gave in. (Participant 2)

As she explains, social pressure shaped her perception of beauty as a young Pasifika woman all throughout high school and she continues to encounter similar ordeals in other places such as university, her workplace and other public settings. While to some degree she interprets the purpose and meaning of her experiences differently from the previous participant, she conveys in a similar sense how they amount to social pressure:

I have never been directly told to look a certain way, but it was kind of subtle. You just get the message that you have to wear certain clothes or do your hair a certain way, and there are some things that are bit harder in most days especially at work because of my hair. I have to tame it. I am comfortable in myself but in terms of fitting into this standard of beauty, [that is when] I do not feel comfortable at all because then I have to do all these things to fit in, in order not to be judged or stereotyped. (Participant 2)

Both participants agreed that their experiences were common for many other women their age. However, they also believed that this experience has made it more difficult to embrace their identity of being Pasifika women in an egocentric society. Although these were identified as challenges by the participants, it was also suggested that these experiences subsequently fostered a sense of power, understanding and knowledge on how to deal with criticism that comes with their identity as Pasifika women, allowing for a more positive and assertive attitude towards their sense of self.

4.1.2 Family, church and community support

The relationships with, and subsequent influence of, family and community emerged as another key theme in the lived experiences of the participants. One of the Talanoa conversations revealed how mother and daughter communication as well as being involved in church and community teachings help young Pasifika women navigate societal standards of beauty. In Pacific culture, the involvement of mothers in their daughter's social development

is considered natural and common. As such, mothers are seen as influential figures in their daughter's life. Taniguchi and Thompson (2015) believe that a home "that encourages children to express their opinion and feelings may implicitly communicate to children, that they are worth attention. Daughters, in turn will feel appreciated and valued, contributing general positive feelings about themselves" (p. 414). When this communication is not facilitated, young women may feel vulnerable and at risk of negative social impact. During the Talanoa, some participants shared how their relationship with their family helped them sustain "self-love": "My mom is my idol. I feel like the characteristics I have is from her and she just has a lot of self-love and I learned to embrace it too. She makes me feel beautiful and confident in myself" (Participant 6).

Being confident is a form of beauty that is highly talked about, but less inclined to practice in some women. When the researcher asked the participants to define beauty, the majority of the responses were centred on the idea of being confident. In one Talanoa, the participant described how the mother-daughter conversation helped her to build confidence, which gave her the strength not to adopt the dominant societal standards of beauty:

I think we just need to be confident and realise that we are beautiful in our own way. But we also need that support, even if it is from one person. I get that experience with my mother – because I am her only daughter, she always tells me to lose weight. She is more concerned about my health; she is not too concerned with my appearance in terms of beauty. I always tell her how I wish I had her arched eyebrows and I always compared [them] to mine. She always tells me, "no, do not wish for it, use what you have". (Participant 7)

This highlights how, although a complex web of life factors is involved in the production of societal beauty standards, parental communication provides young girls with crucial support when it comes to developing their body subjectivity (Taniguchi & Thompson, 2015).

However, for many other participants, the pressure to conform to certain beauty ideals was often seen stemming from home as well as wider social encounters:

I have this sibling who takes it upon himself to be the master mocker of everything. He is really thin and has his own gym gear in the garage. He goes for a run and he always teases me about my weight. He would say comments like, "you're so fat" etc... but it does not really bother me because I find ways to mock him back or respond. But still, even though it is a joke at the end of the day it is harsh and when

it continues to happen almost every few days you start to feel some type of way.
(Participant 7)

Curtis and Loomans (2014) note that families are often not seen as a negative influence on young people's body image due to their perceived function as positive role models in familial support structures. However, the data in this study suggest that family and friends had a tendency to provide constant feedback and commentary on the physical appearance of the participants. As such, these family members would at times reinforce the stigma of being "oversized" or convey the demands of being attractive, which inevitably contributed to a strong drive for thinness amongst the participants. Whether it was through critical comments, teasing or encouraging to diet, Hardit, Hannum, Kichler and Crowther (as cited in Curtis & Loomans, 2014) comment that this type of behaviour can lead to body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders. They stress that people need to exercise more positive parental care, as it will help lower the risks of body dissatisfaction. In one of the Talanoa, one participant shared how she tends to humour those who make comments about her body weight:

I am the biggest one in my family and they always tell me to lose weight, but I never bother. I always have this joke where I tell them I am "PHAT" (Pretty Hot and Tempting) not FAT *laughs* I know it is their way of telling me to do something about my weight but maybe the way I perceive it or the way it is communicated to me, does not encourage me. (Participant 5)

Another participant described a slightly different approach from Participant 5's. She explained that it was difficult to respond to some of the negative or constructive criticism at home, making it difficult to have a positive outlook on her physical appearance:

I think for me it is different because I was brought up in the islands before moving here and that some of the women in my family are health conscious, especially my mom. She always tells me I need to lose weight even my whole family would consistently tell me to lose weight, because I would not be able to find a husband. So, my support system at home is not so great. (Participant 7)

She noted in many instances that comments from her family members regarding body image that are intended to be positive caused the greatest negative impact on how she sees herself. On a similar note, another participant explained that home was always a safe space for her. However, growing up in a household that consisted of two different cultures – her mother identifies as Maori and her father as Tongan – she often found that when she visits her dad's

side of the family, she was confronted with different expectations of how to look ‘proper’ in terms of beauty:

When I was growing up my aunty [from my Tongan side] would always plait my hair for school and she would constantly tell me that it is not lady-like to leave our hair out because young girls should have their hair nicely plaited. Even though she was saying that, I still felt like my hair looked prettier out than being plaited. (Participant 2)

In Pacific cultures, hair was always considered a symbol of beauty (Mageo, 1994) and girls with long hair were thought to be extraordinarily pretty. Girls were also taught that leaving one’s hair out suggested sexual availability (Myford, 2005). Consequently, girls were taught to tie their hair up in a bun or plait it. In instances where a young girl follows through, respect is upon her mother.

Diverse experiences in multicultural households are not always attributed to ethnicity, as varying social standards or expectations also play a role in influencing the participants. For one participant, “conservative” values still feature in their household, but also extend outside of the home where they are seen to represent the family:

In my family I cannot wear revealing clothes, I mean short sleeves and mini dresses are not allowed. I cannot wear short dresses without tights and my shoulder and everything has to be covered. [My family] kind of see it as exposing yourself so I cannot do that but then my mum also has trouble with me not wearing makeup and wearing too much makeup. At one point she would tell me to put on a little more effort and then at times she would tell me it is too much. One time we were getting ready to go out and I did not feel like getting dolled up and my cousin asked me what happened to my face. (Participant 3)

I spent most of my life living here [Auckland] and my parents live in Samoa so I would never dream of swimming in the beach in a bikini where here, I would do that freely because that is the social norms. In the islands, people would look at you and you will stand out like a sore thumb. So yeah you can say it is conservative, in a way where we are kind of stick to our fa’asamoa traditions (Samoan tradition) and I have no problems with that so it is just adapting to where you are at the time which is definitely conservative but it is also not bad. My mom always tells me, you can still be beautiful wearing a long-sleeves up to your neck just as wearing a singlet. (Participant 8)

Given these experiences, conservatism is not always followed through the same way. While families may come from similar backgrounds, how these participants deal with beauty

ideals is rooted in how it is taught at home. For some of these participants, having unsupportive comments from their family members does not help in balancing or countering the negativity they deal with outside of home. However, based on these participants' experiences, conversations about body image are rarely acknowledged and generally uncommon in the Pacific culture. Due to the lack of support at home, participants indicated that they would seek help outside of their immediate family and instead confide in relatives such as cousins and aunts:

I think beauty is more about loving yourself, which is something I rarely ever practiced and especially in our culture, our Pasifika people because basically, the standard of our women is being overweight. You always hear comments like, "you have gone fat", 'you cannot lose weight' or 'you cannot find a husband if you are that size'. I find it really sad because we all have different ideas of beauty. For instance, for me it is about practicing self-love and from there comes self-respect. I always share this with my aunt whom I am really close with and she always tells me I do not need to listen to other people's nonsense. (Participant 6)

For me, it would have to be my aunty. My aunty is very important to me because I have always had natural curly hair and I used to straighten it all the time. She would encourage me to be natural. She would say stuff like, 'your hair is perfect that is who you are, that is your identity so you should keep it natural' that is why she is so dear to me because she always made me believe that I am beautiful from hair to the colour of my skin. (Participant 9)

Diversity and inclusiveness also plays a significant role in how women internalise the notion of beauty. From a Pasifika perspective, there is a strong acceptance of beauty linked to the support of the local church community. Having a relationship with the church community can help young women embrace their identity and natural beauty. Participants commented how the messages preached in church can help them navigate the pressure and ideologies that the wider society enforces on women. One of the ways that the participants conveyed this was through the idea of moving away from posting filtered and digitally modified images on social media, to posting unfiltered images:

Growing up my parents were always very religious and heavily involved with the local community, so when we were young it was already established as a routine where weekends were for church and community activities. When I got older, I started drifting away doing my own thing until last year [2018] I somehow found myself got involved in church and community work again but it came at a time where I was not happy with myself and for some reason being involved in church duties became a safe space for me to find confidence within myself and how to deal with negative consequences. (Participant 4)

The idea of keeping God centred in their everyday lives meant they could cope with all obstacles. For most of the participants, this relationship with the church community acts as a coping mechanism against the burdens of life, allowing them to excel in the face of social adversity.

Community support also acts as a strengthening system when it comes to fostering social development. It facilitates a great sense of empowerment and those who identified a strong sense of faith in their religion and support from their religious communities were able to have a different appreciation for what defines beauty. The participants' stories highlight how the link between church and women helps to nurture their perception of the world. It gives them the idea that going to church will not only help decrease social pressures but increase contentment within one's own beauty:

Being involved in community events has not only given me the opportunity to interact with other women, but also gives me the opportunity to help those in the circle, build self-confidence. I feel it is necessary at this point especially with a lot of the social norms coming through. (Participant 9)

It seems that schools, workplaces and home plays a huge role in these young participant's lives especially with how they project beauty ideals and their self-perceptions. It follows that schools came as a particular formative which may be due to the adolescents developmental stage and their vulnerability to other people's projection of beauty. Workplaces are considered similar in terms of beauty discrimination; however, the participants in this study noted it is more subtle and in-direct compared to previous experiences. Finally, while families are often believed to be supportive and encouraging, this study's findings revealed they can have both positive and negative impacts on the developing body images of young Pasifika women.

4.2 Theme two: Media

The role of the media has been a comparatively well-researched factor in relation to the concept of beauty (Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986), albeit less so from the perspectives of Pasifika women. Based on the stories and comments made by participants during the Talanoa, media is a key influence when it comes to the lived experiences of the participants. The majority of participants expressed their concern with advertisements through social media, magazines and television. Some expressed their disappointment with how the media portrays and communicates messages about the ideal of beauty. A common idea that

emerged from the Talanoa was that how one views the world depends on the type of media they consume, taking into consideration the ideologies and values placed on beauty and how they are communicated to the public. From this perspective, there were two objectives during the Talanoa: to understand how these women interpret media messages and to what degree these messages influence their experiences. In the Talanoa, television, magazines and social media were described as highly effective in terms of communicating beauty ideals.

4.2.1 Television and magazines

Many of the participants agreed that television (TV) programs and magazines were a key factor contributing to their perception of beauty ideals. For the majority, growing up watching their favourite movies and shows on TV was not just entertaining but also another way of learning about social trends and norms. In one Talanoa, the participant talked about how important it is to showcase diversity on TV, citing the news media and the lack of diversity she sees on TV:

People see people on TV, therefore, automatically there is the preconceived notion that only a certain type of people should be a news reporter - white, blonde, thin and first class. If you put a [non-Pasifika] reporter on a Fijian news or Samoan news that is going to eventually shape their perceptions of what is acceptable and not acceptable. (Participant 8)

More than half of the participants expressed that whilst their idea of beauty derives from different sources, television was the one they felt influenced their perception of beauty the most. In one Talanoa, the participant talked about how excessively watching excessive TV programmes convinced her that her frizzy hair was not attractive. When asked to what extent she believes these TV programmes influenced her perception, she responded, “We are [conditioned] to find European features attractive, but it is very unconscious” (Participant 2).

In research conducted by Zhang and Lien (2010), the authors explain two important theoretical frameworks related to the impact of TV programs - social learning and cultivation perspectives. Social learning is concerned with the idea that social behaviour can be learned through observing and imitating TV personalities. Cultivation perspectives is about the impact of excessive TV consumption on their audience. In other words, these theories argue that “extensive and repeated exposure to television over time gradually leads viewers to learn and accept TV portrayals as a true representation of social reality. In brief, TV is served as a core transmitter of societal ideals” (Zhang & Lien, 2010, p. 15). With majority of these women

having been influenced through their TV consumption, one participant shared the moment she began to think about how unrealistic and unnatural her perception of beauty was:

So being Fijian and growing up, the things I experienced as a young child were painful. Thinking back now at how much I hated the way I looked, I used to wish I looked like Zendaya all those Disney channel kids. I would dream of having the perfect skin with the perfect smile. Then as I got older I started to think about it....it is what you see on TV. That the idea of beauty is like the long lashes, the hair is never curly hair or anything frizzy. Then you see our women [Pasifika women] straightening their hair to look a certain way and it becomes culturally internalised, which I think is the worse part. (Participant 8)

Verdugo and Fierro (2014) offered an insight to the effects of TV programs and their influences on people, saying it is a platform, which we learn to see but are also blinded by it. To further understand, all responses related to the influence of TV programs were gathered and subsequent analysis found that the majority of participants grew up learning about beauty through television and magazines. For most of them, it started off as pure entertainment, but as they grew older it influenced their perceptions and understanding of the world they lived in. That is to say, they became more conscious that their own identities were rarely visible in the media:

When I was growing up on TV the main character is always like... white girl, white girl, white girl! You have quirky white girls, white girls with big glasses, big eyebrows, but that is always like the standard and the only coloured women who gets praised are like... you either have to look like Beyonce or Rihanna. It starts from a very young age and it keeps building up. You start to realise...what does it mean when people are like, "oh you are pretty for an Islander?" or "you are skinny for an Islander?" Like what is that supposed to mean? (Participant 9)

Generally, when the discussion concerned the functionality of TV programs, participants frequently highlighted the extreme impact of media contents and how it heavily affects their social lives. It follows that these media programs generally focus on homogenising western culture and promoting the already dominant social ideologies. In one Talanoa, the participant talked about how she views trends that advertised through media, saying: "We have to remember it's a trend and trends can fade out after some time" (Participant 11). She suggested that the representation of beauty ideas is usually temporary and prone to changing. In the excerpt below, she describes how fast-moving popular culture trends can be and how delicate human minds are when it comes to trends:

It has been ongoing for decades and what people do not realise is that, what you normally see on TV will eventually change so we have to take precaution when it comes to our media consumption. Once something is done to your body permanently, it cannot be undone and in most cases it becomes addicti[ve], and this takes into account the most extreme body modifications such as plastic surgery, skin bleaching, tanning, hair straightening treatments and tattooed freckles to less extreme body modification such as microblading, hairstyling, manicure and much more. (Participant 11)

Television as a communication medium has not only opened opportunities for entertainment but also allowed audiences to interact and engage with cross-media extensions. As these TV programmes evolve, it is important to understand how these participants are engaged with the social dimensions of contemporary TV fiction. One participant shared her thoughts and her experiences as a young Pasifika woman. In the excerpt below, she refers to TV programmes as just one side of beauty rather than an overall depiction of beauty:

If you are going to show me something on TV I want an overall depiction of beauty. I want to be able to see me, someone that represents me. There should [people] of all colour on the runway, ethnicity of all people not just one or two races. I think that is a massive misrepresentation that our media has, especially in New Zealand, because beauty should be a reference of all cultures and putting one race [on a screen] does not speak for multiculturalism. (Participant 3)

In relation to multiculturalism, another participant shared how her understanding of Pasifika beauty being represented on TV imperceptibly speaks for the majority of Pasifika women:

If I can think of one person that closely resembles my beauty, my culture it would be Frankie Adams. She is like the one person I can think of that is breaking the mould for the Pasifika women. She is super beautiful, and she has got those typical island features: the woman with the dark skin and the hair. She has that cultural clout and attention, but as far as everyone else in the mainstream media, there is just no one that looks like me... on primetime television and covers of magazines, they are not giving a platform to be outspoken about this and that is why these conversations are really necessary. If they are brown, they are like the tiniest brown and they will be like "oh we have got a diverse newsroom." For instance, they will be like, "oh Pippa Wetzell is part Samoan." Like, no shade to her, she is great, but that is what they will promote. They will just never put a full-blooded brown woman in there... not yet. (Participant 2)

Although diversity is not evident in all news media, it is important to highlight that Participant 2's view stems from a subjective observation seeing as some NZ media, such as Tagata Pasifika and Pacific Media Network, have high representation of Pasifika women. These stories and

views highlight the important role television and magazines play. Another media type that emerged as having a crucial impact on participants' perceptions of beauty was social media. Although functions just as mass media in terms of channelling ideas and information it also allows the accessibility to engage amongst users which many could argue problematic.

4.2.2 Social media

Social media networks are widely integrated in many aspects of life, from personal communications to business connections, and they also have a greater diversity of representation, making this a potentially powerful medium for the representation of non-mainstream beauty concepts. Fardouly and Vartanian (as cited in Griffiths et al., 2017) found that minority groups are able to better represent themselves on a global scale through social media. Meta-analyses on the way that social media influences political participation and civic engagement suggests that people who consume news on social media have a greater probability of being civically and politically engaged across a variety of measures (Bajak, 2019), which suggests that social media has a dynamic effect on people's lives on a near daily basis. However, social media does not only have positive impacts on people's lives and Fardouly and Vartanian (as cited in Griffiths et al., 2017) also acknowledge that the study of social networks is often concerned with the effects of social media on the body image of young women and adolescent girls. According to a 2017 Sensis Social Media Report (Griffiths, Murray, Krug, & McLean, 2018), at least 79% of social media users are exposed to body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptoms as a result of online exposure. For the most part, social media provides companies, sponsors and celebrities with the platform to network and construct themselves as influential figures and in the process influence everyday users with their messages – regardless of whether these messages are constructive or destructive. Though it can be easily misused and misunderstood, social media remains a key communication channel for people in society to keep up with what is happening around them.

Seeing that social media plays an increasingly significant role in contemporary society, it was important to determine whether mass media and social media have the same impact on the study's participants. Analysis of the Talanoa found that participants favoured social media more than any other media platforms, as social media “not only allow for consumption but also for production – and diffusion – of content” (Erz, Marder, & Osadchaya., 2018. p. 49) by everyday users. Social media networks, such as Instagram, are increasingly used by Pasifika women to embrace cultures, promote self-confidence and being beautiful. According to the

participants, although Pasifika women that feature on social media may not be classified as “beauty gurus”, the stories, beauty tips and ideas they advocate resonated more with the participants’ own beauty experiences than international celebrities. One participant agreed that Instagram is a platform she turns to for inspiration:

I follow plus size girls who I find an inspiration to my day to day life. One of the girls who I followed lost a lot of weight and she is very beautiful, and a lot of her followers were not happy with the fact she lost weight. They said that she is a traitor for losing weight, but she came out and responded to the criticism saying that she did it for the right reasons, for health reasons. (Participant 6)

This observation reveals that despite creating a safe space for female empowerment, beauty subjectivity is a personal journey where women can either choose to conform or resist. In this case, when physical transformations become evident in the celebrity or personality on social media, other women felt forsaken, highlighting the capacity for social media to facilitate a greater diversity of representation but not necessarily alleviate the social pressures of conforming to particular ideals or standards.

Many participants shared how encouraging it is to have Pasifika women influencers promoting issues and topics that are relatable. Here, one participant talked about how important it is to be proud of her heritage and her culture, especially those who have a lot of influence on the younger generation:

There is this Instagram influencer that I follow on Instagram. She is a plus size model, and she is amazing. She is Samoan and I like that she acknowledges her culture and she is proud of being Samoan. She advocates self-love and because it comes from a Pasifika woman, I admire that. (Participant 4)

According to two participants, Instagram shows potential for Pasifika women to showcase their beauty as it not only provides them the platform to be inspired by women who they can identify with, but also shows a promise for a greater diversity of representation than other forms of media, such as TV and magazines. The two participants also expressed how they were mostly concerned about the superficiality and extreme unrealistic beauty standards favoured in the mass media, and how it will affect those of the future generation than it does to them:

I have a lot of family in America and I think seeing their social media, they always post a lot of stuff about Black is beautiful and I would follow these beautiful light-skinned women on social media. They always talk about ‘you need to deconstruct

your ideas of beauty and stop withholding European standards of beauty' and there was this whole discourse about it. When I saw them talking about it and saw how they had their hair the way I have my hair, their skin tone and the way they were confident about their body I think I started to get this idea that...'I may have grew up a certain way but I need to start deconstructing all these ideas. For instance, why did I try to be a brat (*a term used for a child that is badly behaved*) for so long? Imagine not knowing you are conditioned to think a certain way; how will you teach your children? Imagine telling your daughter her hair is beautiful the way it is, and she keeps saying otherwise. We really need to start deconstructing our ideas of beauty. (Participant 7)

This ties in with Poran's (2002) call for women of colour to deconstruct the socially constructed notions of beauty before it is too late. Some participants talked about how comfortable it can be to imitate or try to fit in with other cultures. In the excerpt below, a participant describes her response to some of the people she sees on social media:

I see so many of our girls [Pasifika young women] following big celebrities like Rihanna, Ciara and even Instagram model like Indie Love, Miranda Kerr and they try so hard to look like them. They would have pictures with layers of make-up trying to give that natural nude look and posting really bold captions like 'Baddie' which I think it is great, but it would have been so much more realistic if they did not have to spend hours putting layers of makeup and be somebody else on social media. Like what is wrong with being yourself, being different? (Participant 3)

According to Grau, Klesier and Bright (2019), social media can be addictive and it can be difficult to avoid especially in a contemporary society. For some of the participants, they have at least one or two people they idolise on social media. One participant shared how social media offers functionality for user-generated content that is attractive to a wider group of "followers":

Social media only gives you what you see. For example, Beyonce and Rihanna they are praised a lot on social media and all other media platforms but there is a strong emphasis of them on Instagram so in terms of beauty and who we look up to and inspired by? These are the only closest representation of brown beauty we [our Pasifika girls] get. (Participant 5)

However, she also feels that teaching self-care is a key that should be encouraged as it will help to better guide the younger Pacific generation, particularly when it comes to their culture and identity:

Also, teaching as well. I feel we do need to educate our younger girls as well. It will be nice to educate our younger Pasifika girls on the concept of beauty, the definition of a Pasifika Island woman because you never see that a lot and it is not

on any international platform at the moment. Hence, girls do not really know how to go about it so they will just be like 'oh I will look for the closest person that have similarities with me and that is Beyoncé and Rihanna. (Participant 5)

While Pasifika social media influencers help to minimise the negative ideals of beauty, they do not guarantee a complete desirable experience of beauty. Rather, it highlights that there is a slow but progressive movement among Pasifika women in terms of advocating for advancing Pacific beauty. While it can be acknowledged that social media provided Pasifika women an opportunity to depart from the socially constructed notion of “white beauty” through the influence of African celebrities such as Beyoncé and Rihanna, essentially the problem lies within these women being of non-Pasifika background. Therefore, experiences may differ from time to time. However, the overall point highlighted in this thesis is that social media is preferred over other media platforms as it allows for a more participatory approach and represents diverse women.

4.3 Theme Three: Race

Given the overall results of the Talanoa, much of the responses centred around the idea of race. Participants felt that their idea of beauty infrequently meets the equivalent of the perceived dominant standards. Furthermore, they find themselves victims of stereotypes and criticism. The third and final major theme explores the idea of race affected their beauty experiences and what factors of race-based identity contributed to that influence.

4.3.1 Race

Beauty is perceived and practiced differently in many cultures. In some cultures, casual or natural looks may be the societal norm whereas in others, body jewellery is considered an artistic expression of beauty. Journalist Taube (2014) sent a photo of herself to graphic designers in more than 19 countries with a request to make her look “beautiful” however they may define the term. The results were a powerful representation of cultural bias with each photo displaying the personal and cultural beauty standards of the respective designer/s. In North American countries, blue eyes and long hair is considered beautiful whilst Europe and Asia countries added jewelleries and darkened her skin tone (Taube, 2014). In comparison to the Pasifika culture, the majority of the participants in this study stated, part of what defines beauty is being confident and natural in every being of your essence - appearance, personality and skills. Drawn from the Talanoa, one participant shared her feelings when it comes to people complimenting her beauty:

I feel like people put you in a category and try to say all these nice things like, you have such a nice brown skin colour and it makes me think...what does that mean? Is there a wrong shade of brown? (Participant 2)

Moran (2016), who cited the work of Kant states that beauty judgement is subjective to two senses; pleasure and objectivity, although he emphasized that “pleasure” in this context does not include the representation of an object. Objectivity in his interpretation refers to the idea of no preconceived concept rather, a genuine cognition of the subject. While beauty judgements, including compliments, are a common practice in social interactions and on social media, the complexity lies within the fact that racialisation seems practical amongst some women:

Sometimes I get told I have nice skin like nice brown skin but that is such a problematic thing to say and people do not realise that it is actually racist because you are comparing someone’s skin tone to what they think is a nice colour. What if I was dark brown? Would they still have said those things?” (Participant 5)

Being brown skinned women in a white dominated space, the participants find themselves constantly battling with internalised racism. For these women they have exerted significant pressure on themselves in the process of attaining Western European features. For one participant, her background in education allowed her to view the world differently from her peers:

I think because I come from an art history background, [where] we study the female nude and different portraits, it makes you look at how artists have interpreted beauty. So much of it is like, “this is a beautiful woman... a portrait of a white, thin, cisgender woman”, and it is like when they talk about classical beauty; it is always the small nose, high cheekbone, skinny body and they’re always like...”oh it is not a race thing” but it always is – unconsciously it is. If you look like the blonde Grecian goddess, then you are beautiful and that is the European standards of beauty and if you do not look like that then you know [it is tough]. I specifically see so many different people as beautiful but I still think that society still privileges women who look like that and they are always going to have that beauty privilege attached to them, that a lot of our women do not. (Participant 1)

Often when beauty is discussed amongst participants, it draws attention to the importance of social status and how it is shaped by privileges that arise from standards of beauty. Some participants noted that social hierarchy as well as racialisation stems from criticism of visible and physical appearance; and expectations are generally based on these concepts. If deviate

from or not adhered to, results in the hatred for others or self-hatred. In one Talanoa, the participant described how internalised racism affected her perception of beauty:

I would always try and act so white in my actions, I would do everything in my power not to be considered Pasifika. The way I would speak, the things I was interested in, even to the point where people would be like, “oh are you Fijian?” And I would [say] no and they will be like “oh, are you Egyptian?” and I would say, “yes!” People would say comments like, “you are so smart, you are so white” and because you would get complimented on it you would [think] okay that is a good thing and you did not want to be considered [as a] brown girl. Even the group of friends I hung out with, I just wanted to hang with white girls and stuff and obviously a lot of these has stemmed from a lot of internalised stuff. (Participant 11)

It took a lot of courage for the participant to share this comment openly during the Talanoa and in doing so, she clearly demonstrated the influence and effects of “whiteness” on Pasifika women. Guess (2006) drew a similar conclusion, suggesting that society is to blame for the social standards that is prevalent today. She says everything that has happened in history has either been internationally generated or inadvertently left behind, assuming to be a reason for why internalised racism occur within society.

For some of the participants, attaining societal beauty standards is often problematic because of the belief that Pasifika women are naturally curvy, hence, they have to work twice as much as the “average person” to meet the standards. In one of the Talanoa, the participant described what it means to be a Pasifika woman in a westernised society:

I feel like it means working extra hard for what you want, [more] than the normal average person because of the stereotype that has been forced down on you. When people look at us, they already have an image of what we are like, so we have no choice but to break that cycle and to strive even harder. I guess that is where most of our girls go wrong because we are busy trying to achieve that standard that we forget our culture in the process. (Participant 3)

These issues are also reflected in Ahmed and Ahmed’s (2012) work, who discusses the “invisibility of the whiteness”. This concept highlights how whiteness is often treated as “invisible” or “hidden” in comparison to the “otherness” or women of colour. In a sense, it emphasizes the idea of colour being treated as abnormal next to white. In a society where multiculturalism and equality is expected, these Pasifika women still experience racialisation. In one Talanoa, the participant talked about how her perception of Pasifika women in New

Zealand motivates her to be culturally and educationally aware of her surroundings and those of others:

I know there is a big feminism movement and I think it is great that we are pushing women's equality and liberation. I just feel like, it needs to be more intersectional. I understand that women have been subordinate [in a] generally patriarchal society, but [as] Malcolm X said, "the most disrespected person in America is the black woman" and I feel like in our society the most disrespected person is the brown woman. She is always at the intersection of class, gender and race and she is always at the bottom and I feel like with a lot of the feminist movement, a lot of white women should understand the privilege that they have and how they are given opportunity and a platform and how they are perceived and they make sure that whatever they are doing, they let women of colour have their voice and not drown them out. (Participant 1)

Intersectionality is an issue that this participant highlighted and one that needs critical attention in the discussion of Pasifika women. Harvey (2005) also highlights that intersectionality helps us understand the way in which race, class and gender affect women and as such it can help women in privileged positions to understand the struggle that women of colour go through to be seen as equal. In highlighting this issue, an interesting conversation arose in the Talanoa where a participant talked about the idea of bearing mixed children. Evident here was the suggestion that mixed children are assumed to be cuter, prettier and more beautiful than single-ethnicity children. This perception is problematic as it suggests to brown women that full brown children are not as beautiful (Bland, 2017):

I think there is a subtle culturally racist thing [where] people fetishise half-caste children. Even in movies, I hear white women talking about having a brown baby daddy so they can have a cute half-caste baby... I think there is a really cultural thing about half caste children and biracial children and I think it can sometimes sexualise and fetishise [that identity] and I think that comes out [in] things like colourism and even some of the guys would be like, "oh you are one of the light skinned girls", like, "she is dark, but not too dark". That is really bad because there is a lot of dark brown skinned women who are beautiful. (Participant 4)

For most of the participants, being told they are "too pretty or too skinny for a brown girl" has become embedded in their minds to the extent that they become fixated on white beauty and are oblivious to its meaning. In one Talanoa, the participant shared her experience as a young Pasifika woman:

I think people think I am not supposed to be skinny or probably used to the stereotypes of Pacific Island culture that they always say stuff like, "you are so

skinny” or “oh you got that palangi size” and sometimes my cousins would tell me I eat like a palangi and I always think, “how am I supposed to eat?” (Participant 9)

This subtle discrimination of the female body is a prime example of how fixated people, just like the women represented in this study and the people they encounter, have become with perceived societal standards of beauty. Malik (1996) notes that it is important to understand that the results of our thoughts are an interrelation between humanity, society and nature and evident in this study, it is important to recognise that each participants have different experiences.

4.3.2 Acculturation

In addition to the heightened experiences attributed to issues of race and racial identity, acculturation was found to be another factor contributing to the challenging experiences of the participants, particularly for those that migrated from one country to another and those who have close relationships with people identified as non-Pasifika. Chaker et al. (2015) discuss this concept in their research, stating that “greater mainstream acculturation contributes unique variance to lower levels of body esteem, internalisation of the thin ideal and greater perceived pressure to adhere to media’s beauty standards” (p. 87). As introduced earlier in this chapter, most participants felt these changes occurred during high school, when friendships with peers were developing. In the excerpt below, one participant explained that her group of friends in high school were predominantly white students. As a result, she felt that the only option to fit in was to adapt herself to their standard:

I went to [school removed] and I remember a being in the one per cent of brown students there. I have friends who have grown up in [location removed] their whole lives and they have never interacted with a brown person at school, hence University is their first time ever to be in class with another brown person. In that case, I would always try and act white just in my actions, the way I speak, the things I am interested in. (Participant 1)

Interestingly, her experience is similar to another participant who shared that, as a half-caste student in a predominantly brown school, various factors such as her circle of friends, the environment, and her surroundings influenced her outlook on beauty. She reflected on this time, saying she despised being identified as a Pacific Islander because of the stigma and stereotypes that is attached to the culture. More so, she began to practice “being black” through the way she talks, how she performed beauty and the way she carried herself, eventually leading to her trying everything in her power to not be considered as a brown person:

When I was younger, I did not really accept who I was as a person even though I went to a predominantly multicultural school, with many of my friends being Islanders and other cultures. I did not like being a Pacific Island girl. For example, my friends were mainly Islanders and Africans but I did not feel like I fit in as my own self. I did not know, and it was not until I went to university that I started to realise, “am I acting a little different?” Like, “do I know my culture? Yes, we go to family meetings and Pasifika events but do I really know my culture?” I think it was not until my last year at university that I started to embrace my Pacific culture. I started wearing those Pacific Island garments half knowing what it meant and half beautifying it. (Participant 8)

This notion is also reflected in Weik’s (2018) work, who comments that “beauty is as much a social as it is an individual phenomenon. It is anchored in the individual body but subject to socialisation, acculturation and discipline” (p. 5). Clearly, much of the participants’ encounters are in one way or another influenced by their interaction with non-Pasifika communities and their exposure to non-Pasifika culture. Some participants expressed how they wished this would have been conveyed to them from an early age, to allow them to be more cautious and understanding that self-hatred can be a result of your surroundings and environment. In one Talanoa, the participant talked about her experience in this way:

When I was younger, I remember one of my cousins who I was close with was kind of exposed to the beauty pageant lifestyle so now thinking back, she would obviously have a different perception of beauty than mine. Her outlook of beauty was different from mine. I feel like she made me feel it was necessary to wear makeup every day and I had to be skinny, that I would have looked prettier with a short hairstyle and have my teeth ultra-white. We would play [with dolls] and she would often say comments such as, “you can be the ugly one and I will be the princess” because obviously, she is in the beauty pageant world and she judges beauty based on certain physical characteristics. But then growing up I got to learn more about what defines beauty. It is about being yourself, being different and being unique regardless. You do not have to change for anyone. (Participant 3)

Many participants have encountered challenges through migration, in the process of which acculturation became another challenge that would look into their perceptions of beauty. Many of these participants had to learn to embrace their beauty and identity when they were confronted with these issues. One participant explained how prevalent hair straightening is New Zealand, a practice she assumed was only common amongst women with curly hair:

When I think of the criticism they have towards my appearance and how I look I think it has good and bad impact because when I started my first job, I began

straightening my hair but gradually got tired of straightening all the time. I eventually started leaving my hair natural and I realised it is who I am and what defines me as me, and if they are going to tell me to tame it then I am going to have to say something. (Participant 2)

Evaluations of beauty are commonly based through the expression of physical appearance. Drawn from another participant's experience, women often compare one's appearances to the dominant ideologies of beauty; that if one can slightly resemble the features of white women, inevitably they are considered good looking or attractive. All too often there is an expression common in the Pasifika community to suggest that attractiveness is an exotic affair, that to say one is 'good looking' or 'attractive' is to embody or have traces of European features and this can range from skin complexion, to facial features, to body weight. According to Samovar et al. (2009), the "judgement of beauty across cultures is a perception that is ripe for ethnocentrism" (p. 252); in other words, the desire to look beautiful is associated with yearnings for western beauty. In spite of this, some participants felt their experiences differ from those of others, particularly participants who are half-caste, born and raised in Auckland New Zealand:

If you thought of a beautiful Samoan woman, you would not think of a half-caste woman. You would think of someone that is full Samoan. So I think with half-caste they kind of struggle to identify themselves as Samoan, because they [do not] necessarily have that look so obviously my skin tone is not as dark as a lot of Samoan women, so I cannot consider myself as a Samoan version of beautiful even though I know and understand the culture, language and customs." (Participant 3)

Half-caste Pasifika women often find themselves struggling to identify with their culture. This is due to lack of cultural knowledge as well as other factors contributed to the impact of cultural loss such as migration, technology evolution and acculturation. With reference to that, two of the participants who were born and raised in the Pacific Islands before migrating to New Zealand shared how migration tremendously changed their perception of beauty:

When I was younger, I grew up in Samoa for the first 15 years so we did not have straightener at the time, so my cousin would iron my hair. For the first time in my life people looked at me differently, complimenting my hair because it was straight and long. When I came to New Zealand I started to realise, "oh wow that is the standard here". (Participant 4)

For me the one experience I remember during high school was when I signed up to join the cheerleading team. In Fiji I was participating in school activities including cheerleading so it was one thing I wanted to explore when I attended school here.

What I did not know was that part of the requirement was you had to be fit and I mean fit, fit. You had to be stick thin and when they lifted me up they told me I [was] too heavy and that I needed to lose weight in order for them to lift me up. I started dieting, training and limiting the amount of food intake even though I was at my skinniest. I think that for me was the most pressured I have [been].
(Participant 6)

While beauty ideals may arguably be an issue that varies across cultures and time, this study examined the process of acculturation on perceiving body image. It follows that acculturation has a significant impact on these participants' experiences. While some participants were able to reflect on these issues at early times, majority of them found it difficult to break away from the constructed notion of beauty.

4.4 Conclusion

The outcomes of this findings chapter highlighted various factors which have contributed to the beauty experiences of the participants. Organised thematically, these findings emphasise that the relationships Pasifika women hold with their families and peers are powerful influences on their understanding of beauty and their wider sense of self in their communities. Social relationships emerged as an important factor in Talanoa, which suggest that the direct influence of others on these participants has a high risk of negatively influencing their overall experiences. In particular, peer pressure was heightened during adolescence and occurred more frequently in high school. Since vulnerability often occurs during adolescence, women take years to regain self-confidence and understanding of how to deal with beauty ideologies projected onto them (Vogt Yuan, 2009). However, with the overall findings, it shows that even through obstacles and challenges, these participants were still capable of reflecting on and learning from these early experiences.

Family and friends seem to also have played a central role in influencing the participants' experiences. While approaches vary greatly from one family to another, the data suggests that family interactions, such as mother and daughter communication, is vital in developing the beauty experiences of Pasifika women. This is particularly critical when women are in a society where it is hard to unbridle themselves from the constructed ideologies of beauty. More importantly, the findings have suggested that having a supportive system at home helps to sustain and maintain self-acceptance and encourage self-confidence.

As expected, media was another key important area that influenced participants' beauty experiences. Influential media forms included TV programmes to social media and media in general. Evident in the findings was that, although media has a way of bombarding their audience with information and ideologies, people have control over their media consumption, which suggests how people are vulnerable when it comes to media consumption. To many of these participants, beauty is not the reality but the fantasy they consume through the media.

Race was the third major theme that was consistently addressed by the participants in relation to their perception of beauty or attractiveness and their social experiences. Rather than overt, internalised racism played a significant role in influencing the behaviour and attitudes of the participants throughout their formative years. As the women grew older, they started to embrace their beauty and identity as Pasifika women. This has led to a greater sense of belonging and a sense of their own culture as they learn to deal with criticism and stereotypes stemming from the dominance of Western ideologies.

For some of the participants, the act of acculturation was a key feature of their early experiences in new communities, often as a result of migrating from the Islands to New Zealand and forming relationships with non-Pasifika peers during high school. The idea of acculturation prompted the participants to consider how their experiences would have differed had they understood the personal impact sooner. They would have sought more guidance on how to handle the struggle of articulating identity and the theme of wishing to support or assist a younger generation of Pasifika women was mentioned repeatedly throughout the Talanoa sessions.

5. DISCUSSION

This study examines the ways in which Pasifika women experience beauty, looking at how they integrate communicated notions of beauty into their everyday lives. It offers a new level of understanding as to how Pasifika women internalise beauty, bringing forward issues such as the concept of whiteness and racialisation of non-western women that tends to go unnoticed, particularly from a Pasifika woman's perspective. The role of media emerged as a recurring theme during the Talanoa with the participants of this study. There was significant concern about a lack of Pacific representation on mainstream media platforms and the effect it is having on young Pasifika women. The impact of the media on the understanding and representation of beauty has been studied extensively elsewhere (Foo & Johnson, 2010; Harris-Moore, 2016) and the common findings are that the idea of beauty is presented as an accompaniment to notions of power, wealth and love. During most discussions, the communication of beauty ideals through media platforms was seen to contribute negatively to the participant's perceptions of beauty, and there was recognition that beauty is constructed in an unequal society. As such, this study confirms the apparent ideological function of communicated notions of beauty.

The majority of women participants in this study acknowledged the pressure they endure in order to fit within the criterion of what society defines as beautiful. As Yan and Bissell (2014) explain, "the media portrays attractive people as far more desirable, credible and a source of inspiration for others" (p. 195). Women who do not feel they fit in are pressured to embody the same standards of beauty. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that reinforcement from friends and family contributes both positively and negatively to how young Pasifika women perceive beauty. Critical to this study is that, although unfavourable remarks from friends and family can be daunting, most participants see it as a form of constructive criticism that should be taken as a learning opportunity to change what needs changed, for the betterment of their physical health. More so, it also highlights that the communication of certain beauty standards or expectations is as much a part of intimate, familiar interaction as it is a result of mass media communication and corporate interest. The findings show that the support of their loved ones is essential for Pasifika women, as very limited representation is available for Pasifika women in mainstream media. This chapter will reflect on how the summary highlighted in this study aligns with the findings from existing research.

5.1 Pasifika women and perceptions of beauty

There is a common understanding amongst the participants that contemporary notions of beauty lie within the physical characteristics of the woman in question. That, if her physical appearance appeals to the majority of a population, it may be considered the closest illustration of beauty standards in that society. As Suaalii (1997; Jones, Herda and Suaalii, 2000) discussed in reference to Pasifika women being labelled as ‘exotic’, the influence of “white consumption and eurocentric desires of white male[s]” (p. 93) diminishes the status of Pasifika women. Extending from this observation, ‘orientalism’ provides both a theoretical and a practical tool, which can further illuminate the way the term ‘exotic’ is defined within this context. It is argued here, that the expectations and ideals of beauty motivated by the commercial industry and imposed upon Pasifika women, function through an orientalist trope. According to Said (1980, cited in Quinn, 2017) Orientalism focuses on understanding the West as hegemony and anything outside of that as “other”. In Suaalii’s (cited in Jones et al., 2000, p. 95) work she explains though the term ‘exotic’ was used to describe the tropical settings of the Pacific Islands, the images of Pasifika women became a manifestation of pleasure for the white male gaze. Although seemingly contradicting to how Pasifika women were classified at the time – “savage and different” (p. 95) – there was a strong suggestion that Pasifika women were seen as both sensual and savage ‘others’ to the West, through the depiction of Pasifika women in Western magazines. Such depiction were of women being photographed partly naked in the garden/forest with flowers in their hair. This depiction of beauty not only introduced the western ideology of beauty, but also captured the “double marginalisation” (Jones, Herda, & Suaalii, 2000, p. 95) of Pasifika women. In this study, the concept of double marginalisation is still evident in today’s society in relation to Pasifika women. One participant shared how others often label her as exotic looking, a reference she understood to hold significant value to the Eurocentric ideology of western beauty. As physical appearance has become increasingly important in the everyday lives of women, many often find themselves trapped in a cycle of constant adjustment, fixing and enhancement of their feature. As Wolf (2015) noted, women are often trapped in a desperate cycle of compulsive malnourishment and exercising routines in an attempt to achieve societal beauty standards. It also follows that the constant striving for the perfect body is prevalent amongst women; and for some of the participants in this study, there is a shared believe that if the ultimate standards of beauty were achieved, they would be rewarded by the social capital of acceptance.

The recognition and interpretation of beauty that occurred in this study also emphasised the role of the cultural perspective - that to define beauty is to first look within the inner beauty of the woman and her heritage. This was also highlighted in the Talanoa where participants expressed the belief that the identity of a Pasifika woman not only represents herself but her family and ancestors. While historically, scholars have debated whether beauty can be considered as either objective or subjective, in recent years the concepts have become more explicitly concerned with its subjectivity. Most of the participants acknowledged that there is high representation of “white beauty” in society and very little emphasis on Pasifika women’s identity. In a country which encompasses 50.9% of the Pasifika women living in New Zealand (Stats NZ Aotearoa Tataranga Aotearoa, 2013), there is a lack of Pasifika representation in the fashion and beauty industry as well as the mainstream media as a whole. From a cross-cultural perspective, the western population heavily influences the concept of beauty and understandably, many of the younger Pasifika women are subject to a hegemonic ideology. The concept of hegemony in this context implies a way that coerces one to act a certain way. This understanding of beauty is consistent with Gramsci’s (cited in Amigo et al., 2016) conceptualisation of hegemony - that through the influence of western beliefs, values and cultures, the western perspective inevitably becomes a worldview where everyone ultimately abides by.

This manifestation of beauty in society has generated pressure for women of colour to respond to certain ideals or standards. Although social media offers an improvement that other media platform fail to provide, it does not guarantee that the prevalence of western beauty ideals will decrease. Rather, it suggests that Pasifika women will likely have to deal with multiple challenges but ensure a more effective way of how to better navigate those social perceptions of beauty. It follows that, being light-skinned, tall, slim with skinny body is what the majority of women - and men - glorify in today’s society. As such, there was a clear analysis that emerged from the data that concepts of beauty were influenced by western ideals were common amongst the participants. In a society, that supposedly embraces diversity and the beauty of other cultures, for women of colour the reality of marginalisation continues to remain evident in large parts of the country. Wolf (2015) adds that there is a beauty myth that tells a story: universally, beauty exists and women must want to embody it. In return, men must want women who embody those qualities. This notion is much more important for women than men as it is natural, sensual and evolutionary. “Strong men fight for beautiful women and beautiful

women are more reproductively successful” (p. 5). Wolf (2015) emphasizes that this notion of beauty is untrue and discriminatory against women. She believes that just like old times, beauty is determined by social norms. For many women, beauty exists as a series of social standards and there is a common understanding that beauty has become explicitly linked to sexuality: that for women to be considered beautiful and attractive requires them to embody beauty, and consequently men would want women who possess beauty. Having looked at how beauty is examined in this study, Festinger’s (1954, cited in David, Boyne & German, 2009) Social Comparison Theory (SCT) can be used to emphasize that women tend to compare and evaluate themselves against other women. SCT determines that “the more similar the target of comparison is to the individual, and the less objective the standards for the domain is, the stronger the drive for the individual to socially compare with that target” (Luong, Knobloch-Westerwick, & Niewiesk, 2018. p, 2). With regard to the findings of this study, most participants acknowledged that social comparison was a common practice when they were younger, particularly during adolescence when they had the constant need to compare their faces and bodies to those of the same-sex, which often resulted in a loss of self-esteem and negative self-evaluations. Although this social practice was common during their teenage years, the majority of these participants were subsequently able to recognise those imbalances and were able to re-evaluate their way of analysing beauty.

In analysing the identity of Pasifika women in this study, it became apparent that the support of family and loved ones plays a pivotal role in supporting the participants’ experiences and understanding of beauty. Most participants acknowledged that, although negative beauty-related comments were common at home, some considered it more of a constructive criticism rather than a condemnation. Those who struggled to apprehend the positive effect of such comments, would often confide in their aunts or other close family female figures. This study reveals that, despite the complicated balance between being constructive and being positively encouraging, the overall benefit is that it teaches the values of being strong, secure and confident. Similar to any other type of encouragement, it involves challenges, mutual agreement, unity and adjustment. This type of support is in line with what Taniguchi and Thompson (2015) describe as the importance of mother and daughter communication. In their work, mothers emerged as influential figures in their daughters’ lives and as such, their motherly advice was seen as an important part of that relationship. Taniguchi and Thompson (2015) modelled their studies on Mallinckrodt, McCreary, and Robertson’s (cited in Taniguchi

& Thompson, 2015) Dysfunctional Family Environment model which suggests that dysfunctional family dynamics are in prime position of causing insecurity amongst children. As such, leading to their shortfall in social competencies which can negatively impact their interpersonal relationship skills in adulthood. In cases where shortfall occurs, many young women struggle with limited social skills and experience difficulty gathering social support from interpersonal relationships and thus are more vulnerable to the impact of social expectations (Taniguchi & Thompson, 2015, p. 411). The importance of analysing this model is essential to how participants in this study experience body criticism and negative observations. This type of communication is important as it assists in mending negative social impact, and it also helps young Pasifika women build positive and strong perception on how they can observe their surroundings and the ideas presented to them.

The lack of Pasifika beauty representation in the media was evident in this study. For a majority of the participants, it took knowing what is considered socially acceptable to realise that these social norms are the reasons that hinder them from embracing their own natural beauty. As noted in the previous chapters, there is a significant lack of representation of Pasifika women in mainstream magazines. Further analysis found that the representation of a white cisgender woman is featured in almost every article. Reiterating one participant's observation, the lack of diverse representation not only speaks for the reality many women of colour encounter, but also manifests the idea of whiteness as a beauty standard. Regardless of the existence of local Pasifika magazines that may feature representations of Pasifika beauty ideals, many participants were concerned about the lack of representation in mainstream magazines that cater for the majority of the New Zealand population. It perpetuates the idea of a domination work against meaningful diversity.

5.2 The role and influence of media on beauty notions amongst Pasifika women

The controversy around beauty conveyed in this study is rooted in an apparent lack of diversity and representation in the media. Traditionally, representations of beauty in the media were exclusively embodied by western women (Adams & Adams, 2015). However, in recent years, other representations of beauty have begun to appear and for a while, beauty brands began to embrace values of diversity and inclusiveness. This study reveals that diversity remains a key concern when it comes to the marketing and representation of beauty ideals. The participants largely identified that the media and much of society still adhere to standards in

which white attributes are considered the benchmark for beauty. For these participants, each had a story of how they encountered and dealt with the lack of representation in these contexts. For some, they recalled how the notion of beauty perpetuated by the media made them feel insecure about their physical appearance. Some participants despised their body image; others fancied the idea of having a light skin complexion and others wanted to be thin and feel accepted:

Thinking back now, I hated the way I looked. I used to dream of having the perfect skin with the perfect smile wishing I looked more like these [actresses on Disney channel] then, as I got older I realised it is what you see on TV. (Participant 8)

The depiction of beauty in the media is so extensively controlled and constructed, that many young Pasifika women often embody them. Berman and White (2013), who studied the role of media played in fostering cultural norms, found that media plays a significant part in altering the attitudes, self-esteem and perception of young adults. Their study suggests that the development of media literacy skills among young people would be crucial in helping them gain the sense of self to be conscious in a world where “pervasive and unrealistic media fantasy is delivered in a multiplicity of forms” (Berman & White, 2013, p. 38). Media literacy is a complex concept that takes into account the development of “higher order thinking skills such as media messaging, writing and critical thinking skills” (Berman & White, 2013, p. 39). It also involves the decoding of media messages, target audiences and production techniques. In light of this, the findings of this study revealed that participants wished for young Pasifika women to become media literate to assist them in understanding the notions of beauty and navigating adolescence. Participants were hopeful that education and support at home may help young people understand that media content is a product that often skews the representation of reality and it should not necessarily be emulated or adhered to.

Verdugo and Fierro (2014) offer similar insight, stating that the media offers a distorted representation of reality and as a result, our consciousness becomes vulnerable to its influence. For the most part, this present study highlights that Pasifika women in New Zealand have great concern for the welfare of the younger generation with regard to their ability to deal with hegemonic beauty ideology. Schefer (1997) similarly identified that beauty nowadays has become more complex than ever before and that, even though beauty may not be significant for everyone, it still affects how we, as people, live our everyday lives. As people, there is a

sense of acceptance that our consciousness has become invested in mass media and the social ideologies that it bears. With beauty standards being a huge concern in this study, the role of media certainly plays a part in the production. The perceived lack of Pasifika women in mainstream media highlights two concerns; that the fashion and beauty industry needs to reconsider their response to challenges of diversity, and that Pasifika women should feel encouraged to address the way they interpret beauty on a larger scale. Not only will their voices help break barriers for a younger Pacific population but also serve as a form of inspiration. At the level of interaction between the researcher and participants, this aspiration is validating of the purpose of this study.

The use of social media emerged as another form of communication participants use to interact and communicate beauty ideas. It follows that Instagram was a preferred media platform (when compared or contrasted with TV and magazines) for many of the participants because there is greater representation of Pasifika women advocating for their own identity, and therefore beauty, which the participants could relate to. Instagram is a prominent vehicle for fashion, design and beauty brands. It often targets women to purchase their brands and products and it is convenient for users to share built-in filtered photos. What occurs is that most of these images are altered, which places an extreme emphasis on how these women look. However, participants in this study commented that they mostly follow women on Instagram who highlight their Pasifika heritage. Participants further suggested that seeing content made by Pasifika women on a public platform such as Instagram makes them feel proud of their own Pasifika identity and that such visibility promotes love for one's own skin and encourages others to embrace their individuality. This strategy is in line with many of the participants' experiences and their definitions of beauty as conveyed during the Talanoa conducted for this study. McKeown, Dupre, Andelic and Morrison's (2018) found that sharing personal content via social media can "facilitate a strong bond forming between peers" (p. 665). A suggestion from participants was that this type of social media participation helps encourage the expression of feelings and emotions that others may be able to learn from or use for motivation purposes. To most of these participants, their curvaceous body has been a significant part of their identity and in a society that they feel privileges thin women, having alternative inspiration through a platform like Instagram helps them feel confident in their own body.

5.3 Race and ethnicity in relation to Pasifika women's beauty

Having looked at how race is discussed within this study, there is a strong impression of how it was used to measure one's physical appearance. As if being a woman of colour was not difficult enough, participants' stories also expressed the perception that racist ideologies were often reinforced upon them. It follows that for women of colour to be considered as beautiful by the mainstream, they can be brown but not too brown or look white but not too white. This illustrates the complicated balance between notions of "whiteness" and "exotic" and raises the question as to whether white women feel the same way about being white with racist ideologies being reinforced upon them. One participant shared how a compliment from another Pasifika woman made her question her perception of beauty and the way beauty is perceived overall. After being told she was "too pretty" for a brown girl she started to wonder why her race or ethnicity was made to seem problematic against her physical appearance. Evident in this example is a true representation of how beauty is ascribed racist ideologies. It communicates the idea that to be beautiful one must look and act a certain way but that this is directly linked to the colour of their skin or the shape and size of their physical features. Participants expressed the belief that these kinds of experiences explain why there is an increase in Pasifika women adopting the dominant ideals of beauty as doing that minimises the chances of being racially stereotyped and increases their desire for changes.

Since the notion of beauty is the focus of this study, participants' contributions were also examined with regard to their experiences of race and how it affected the beauty experience as Pasifika women. The term race in this context was used to identify how influential western popular culture shifts the perception of Pasifika women and to what degree it shifts their beauty experiences. It follows that the reality of being a brown Pasifika woman, albeit in a declared multicultural society, still leads to encounters of racism on an everyday basis. Race was an important factor in this study because not only did it highlight the reality of a culturally diverse society, but also brought together the idea that Western beauty ideals still dominates New Zealand culture, which has serious implication for how Pasifika women understand social justice, racialisation and class structure. With a focus on beauty advertisements, modelling figures – mannequins, wigs etc. - clothing brands and beauty products, all these features constitute a new thinking structure on how they communicate beauty, and it raises questions about race hierarchy and colonialism. This is also reflected in Malik's (1996) work who noted that 'race has been an interesting factor in relation to beauty,

it has shaped so much of our lives and it continues to rank people's social status, physical appearance, fashion sense, according to their race' (p. 2). This view is in line with one participant's experience at art class. She spoke of how classical beauty is taught in a way where female nude is shown in art portraits. The purpose is to reiterate how each portrait is a representation of each artist's interpretation of beauty. She noted that although her point may not seem critical to others, she believe that subconsciously, this way of teaching promotes the western idea of beauty. That if one can look like the [Grecian goddess] they are going to have that beauty privilege attached to them and society will always privilege those who look like that. This is also in line with Hall's (2018) conceptualisation of what he believes to be an implicit racism.

Racist beauty ideologies often appear in places that lack diversity. In light of this, the participants stated that attending an "all-white high school" not only made it difficult to feel a sense of belonging, but also meant encountering differences in values and beliefs. As being in a white dominated space can be challenging, these participants revealed that friendship is generally determined by the similarity of the attitudes and behaviour. It suggests that their idea of beauty starts to merge with the standards of the dominant culture to the point of manifesting westernised beauty ideals. De Casanova (2004) referred to this as the 'whitening of the population' (p. 291), meaning that we all become white when we accept the goals of national culture (Stutzman, as cited in Casanova, 2004).

5.4 Conclusion

Beauty as a concept has affected the way we see others and the way we perceive ourselves. Women nowadays are continuously bombarded with different ways of how to look and how to feel. Since media plays a central role in how beauty is communicated to the public, there is strong suggestion that biased portrayals of beauty are not only towards Pasifika women but also on a global scale. The growing concern is that many of these young women are constantly striving to achieve western ideas of beauty. Many of these participants are blaming this development on the over promotion of beauty in the mainstream media This study also noted that there is lack of diversity in the mainstream media with a regard to the representation of Pasifika beauty.

Family support and motherly advice was seen as another influential figure. It follows that many of these young participants feel empowered when mother-daughter communication is encouraged. While unrealistic and negative beauty standards is monetised through various platforms, participants stated they found courage and strength through the support of their loved ones. Interestingly, engaging in a spiritual relationship with God emerged as a coping mechanism for some women. This suggests that to find peace and comfort within one's own natural beauty, one must seek the guidance of God. This was found to be a common factor amongst some participants.

Race differences had also become a central theme in this study. It appears that in multicultural environments with cultural groups of different sizes, one particular culture can sometimes end up overpowering the others. This cultural dominance and cultural control can even be found in friendships, especially when the friendships is of two different race. Many participants commented that most of their early encounters with racism took place during high school years. The critiquing of one's beauty was a common practice, where the majority of these participants did not realise the significance of these evaluations. With awareness, many of these participants nowadays have more understanding of beauty and the power it has to change one's perceptions of themselves.

6. CONCLUSION

Various factors were identified to constitute much of the contemporary beauty ideals and the lived experiences of the participants. The data presented in this study suggest that constant pressure to conform to societal standards that reflect social advantages were prevalent amongst the Pasifika women involved in the research. The core of the problem lies within society not addressing the degree of bias within beauty messages, that, when left unaddressed, leaves women of colour to feel subjugated to the westernised normativity of beauty (Bryant, 2013). Many scholars (Delgado, Stefancic, Harris, 2017; Reece, 2018; Cooper, Nwadike, & Macaulay, 2017) emphasise that to understand the complexity of these prejudices, we must first challenge the power structure within the beauty industry. To some extent, black women have challenged the power structures within the beauty industry by celebrating the idea that “black is beautiful” (Ford, 2012, p. 2); a movement that strived to empower black women to address inequality and embrace their natural beauty. This thesis was motivated to study the experiences of Pasifika women, who are less likely included in the black and whiteness discourse. The study has offered a representative view of how Pasifika women understand the communication of beauty ideals in a contemporary society. The thesis has also provided insights to the participants’ experiences, with an emphasis on several contributing factors, which have become the relevant sites for the women’s negotiated perceptions of “beauty”.

The Talanoa that serve as the foundations of this study were conducted to determine how the understanding and experiences of Pasifika women explain the impact and negotiation of beauty messages. It revealed that platforms such as television and social media have the power to alter female perceptions even at a young age. More significantly, the use of social media has provided women some accessibility to regain control of the social perceptions that are deemed “standards” in society, by advocating for and promoting realistic beauty standards of Pasifika beauty. From the Talanoa, key themes emerged, such as the influence of social relationships and the impact of racial difference in distinguishing and negotiating beauty standards. It was revealed that racial differences amongst women can often be the cause of what generates a negative experience and perception of their own beauty or appearance. Given these findings, it became evident that fostering of good relationships at home helps to balance the negative standards of beauty that are placed upon women in the wider society. However, the primary concern evident in this study was the lack of diverse representation in the

communication and promotion of beauty. This conclusion chapter presents an overview of the overall thesis along with concluding remarks in conjunction with the findings. It also provides a summary of the study's limitations and makes some recommendations for future studies.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The main objectives of this study were to examine the experiences and perspectives of Pasifika women and their understanding of the communication of beauty messages. The significance of studying this subject is to assist in understanding how Pasifika women interpret the conceptualisation of beauty and the impact it has on their own self-confidence, self-esteem and their identity. The literature review, presented earlier in this thesis, highlighted that there were discourses concerning the normalisation of whiteness, related to the impact of westernised beauty on non-white, non-western women. Existing studies also detailed how the reclamation of beauty by African Americans since the civil rights movement was as a response that many women of colour went through for social change. As Yerima (2017) noted, for years women of colour have had roles ascribed to them by society, which is why exploring their own stories enables us to gain a greater understanding of how women of colour have navigated challenges to their identity. Subsequently, the literature review also introduced the impact of western ideals on the well-being of Pasifika women, setting the scene for the qualitative study presented here.

Given the overall thesis, it was important to identify the constructed ideology of beauty, finding that whiteness and western ideology is still privileged, holding significant value when it comes to the practice of beauty. In the same way that society privileges whiteness, mainstream media homogenises this notion of beauty and raising concerns towards media exposure and consumption by young women. The influence of both television and social media platforms on the participants of this study was also found to be only one facet of a bigger issue. While mainstream media were believed to be the main influence, comments from friends and family were also found impactful in how these participants perceive beauty. These outcomes of the thesis are summaries in greater detail below.

The overall findings of the study highlight that television content was seen by the participants as having the highest capacity to produce unrealistic beauty standards. This was also understood as generic standards that society has held for many years, but leading to a long-

term negative effect due to the prejudice it promotes. This was evident in the experiences of the participants in this study and as Verdugo and Fierros (2014) noted, the media offers perfect imaginations of the real world and as a result, we often find it difficult to disconnect reality from the virtual realm. While the media has always been a relatively well-researched factor in relation to notions of beauty (Silverstein et al., 1986) this thesis focused on the lack of diverse representation of Pasifika women in the promotion of beauty, in a contemporary multi-cultural society. Although social media was understood to generate the same negative impact as other media platforms, the accessibility and participatory features of social media were seen to put users in greater control of generating beauty standards or ideals. A large number of the participants were aware of this advantage and some of them still favoured the influence of social media, despite general concerns over media influence, due to the similarity and compatibility they have with users or influencers that advocate for the beauty of Pasifika women.

6.1.1 Impact of racial stereotype

Considering how race was discussed in this thesis, racial stereotyping was still evident in the discussion of black women in the literature review. For years, women of colour fought injustice and oppression for social change and although some progress has been made, in reality every time there was a great push for women's right, there was always some ideal that arose to deter their energies, making it difficult for them to get very far (Wolf, 2015). For instance, skin colour has been discussed in this thesis as a beauty marker and women of colour have fought against this stereotype. In this study, it appears as though Pasifika women are experiencing racialisation against their physical features. In contemporary society, racial stereotypes live on in the minds of many people in both subtle and sophisticated ways. These include the negative perceptions of hair texture, the calling into question of women's multicultural identity and racial stereotype to name a few. Although much has changed in recent years, this racial stereotype against women of colour to some extent still prevails in many parts of society. For Pasifika women, the burden has been far less extreme in these areas as their experiences of beauty relates more to a race-based identity and concern with physical characteristics, which differentiates them from white and black women.

6.1.2 Impact of social relationships

The participants in this study recognised the importance of building positive relationships with friends, family and their wider community. While family members may be a positive influence in promoting self-confidence, they can also be the cause of negative influence on one's perception. Many women identified school as a place where their ideas and attitudes were often influenced by the perceptions of others, while others identified home as a place where support can be complicated by frank criticism or demeaning humour. This study revealed that for most participants, the perceived benefit of compliments from family and friends holds significant value in the way they navigate ideas of beauty. It enables them to feel a sense of confidence in their physical appearance, enough to experience comfort and high self-esteem in themselves. However, individuals may have different styles of interaction however, the most important stage in this process is that when young women will be exposed to different pressures outside of home, experiences in the home often make much greater impact on the perceptions of young women, outweighing the social stigma outside of home.

6.1.3 To understand the impact of whiteness in developing self-confidence

The study of whiteness in this thesis challenges western ideologies of beauty. It examines the way society privileges whiteness and deconstructs its function as a normative ideology. For years, the notion of whiteness serves as an ideal for women and consequently, many women of colour wanted to attain these standards of beauty. Today, there is a stronger dialogue regarding the role of whiteness and its impact on women of colour, however, this thesis was still concerned that Pasifika women remain largely excluded from this discourse. According to the findings, while the role of whiteness can create a strong awareness of what society privileges in terms of beauty, fostering positive communication about the notion of beauty at home was highlighted as a way that could provide better understanding for younger Pasifika women on how to deal with social standards.

6.1.4 Understanding racial difference, beauty and diversity

The discussion of race in the thesis looked at the prevalence of whiteness as an ideology and a solution as well as the notable resistance of "black is beauty". It also examines the way in which women of colour strive to overcome the lack of diversity in the beauty industry, particularly when it comes to their own sense of self. Existing studies found that women who lack pride in being a woman of colour tend to conform to westernised beauty standards. At the same time, women who have a well-grounded understanding of their racial and cultural

background are able to resist mainstream beauty standards and embrace their own identity in an effort to celebrate black beauty. There was a time when black women were not able to celebrate the natural beauty of their body, hair, and skin colour; the studies cited in this thesis revealed that black women are now more responsive with greater purpose. There is still lack of diversity when it comes to beauty products and the appreciation of black beauty. For years the focus has always been on western beauty and in order for progress to occur, women of colour need to continue being vocal about these issues. As Aduonum (2004) explains, if black women do not speak now they will risk going through the same struggle they went through for social change.

6.2 Recommendations

While this study has acknowledged the representation of Pasifika women in the communication of beauty, it also recognises the potential of exploring the perspectives of women who advocate for advancing Pasifika beauty. The extension of this exploration to include those who are actively engaging in promoting and advocating for Pasifika women's beauty as new ideas and information may trigger an interest in other possible areas. The suggestion acknowledges that while ordinary people will likely speak about their experiences, advocates tend to bring expertise, knowledge, and new information that normal people would not generally recognise. In addition to that, the hypothesis reveals that while personal experiences are beneficial to the overall study, advocates, due to their commitment and familiarity with such issues, can provide valuable information that are intended to seek justice and equality in these concerned areas.

Conducting a Talanoa with other ethnic groups is another possibility to build from this study. While the primary integration of Talanoa was with Pasifika women only, it would be valuable to understand how the outcomes would change if a Pacific method of talanoa were applied to a similar study with other ethnic groups. In much of the literature, Talanoa is a culturally unique method of collecting data and one that is prominent in Pacific studies. While its use in this study was successful in gathering deep and personal experiences of Pasifika women, it may be similarly useful for examining the experiences of non-Pasifika women. While this notion may break the tradition of Talanoa, it will help towards understanding shared experiences and valuing Pasifika knowledge systems.

This study could also be extended to include the experiences of other gender groups such as men and those that identify with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer and Transgender (LGBT) communities. The point is that, although the examination of beauty in this study focused primarily on women, it also considers how beauty messages can affect people of different race, class and genders in a way that is not just applicable to women.

6.3 Limitations

The major limitations in this study extends beyond its feasibility constraints nature. Since this study involved the use of Talanoa, the process of data gathering was time consuming and as such, this study was more focused on depth over breadth. Due to the limited time available to complete this study, the data collected from the 12 participants involved was somewhat influenced by concerns of feasibility within the data gathering period. While the sample size was achievable for this study, it is important to note that the results of this study do not constitute a representative majority of Pasifika women. While the use of Talanoa was valuable in this study, there is no guarantee that each participant shared their experiences accurately, but they were able to volunteer their narrative in an environment that responded to their cultural values. Evident in each Talanoa was the authenticity and sensitivity of their stories, which indicated the intensity of their experiences.

While every effort was made to ensure this thesis addresses all Pasifika women, location also played a role in its limitations. Since Auckland is known to be home to a large percentage of the global Pacific Island population, this study was comfortable focusing primarily on Pasifika women residing within the Auckland region. However, it would also be meaningful to extend the study to women located in the Pacific Islands, perhaps as indigenous peoples. Seeing that participants in this study revealed the experiences of Pasifika women in foreign countries, it would be worth exploring if those women who have remained in the Pacific Islands have their own unique experiences. It also suggests that perceptions of Pasifika women who moved from the Pacific Islands to other countries such as Australia, United States and other distant countries, are also likely to vary with the perceptions of beauty compared to those involved in this study.

Although moderately small in scope, this study revealed some areas worthy of further analysis. The age range of the participants was from 20 – 30 years old, which was decided

based on the researcher's own identity. However, after finalising and executing the recruitment process it was clear that women outside of the age bracket were interested to participate in this study, too. It is therefore suggested, that for future studies, it would be interesting to explore the experiences of the older generations who are arguably more experienced and knowledgeable. While limitations exist within this study, there is great confidence that the overall efforts taken to complete this study provides greater insights into some of the issues Pasifika women deal with on a daily basis.

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Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

15 August 2019

Rufus McEwan
Faculty of Design and Creative Technologies

Dear Rufus

Ethics Application: **18/32 Pacific women, beauty and race: The communication of beauty ideals and the experiences of Pacific women in contemporary society**

At their meeting of 12 August 2019, the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) received the report on your ethics application. AUTEC noted your report and asked me to thank you.

On behalf of AUTEC, I congratulate the researchers on the project and look forward to reading more about it in future reports.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6038.

Yours sincerely



Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: rmx7765@autuni.ac.nz; latumalia3@gmail.com