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**History and its remnants (HAIR): South African and Nigerian women  
negotiating professional and physical identities**

by

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**PRETORIA**

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## ABSTRACT

The documenting of the experiences of Black African women in professional workplaces, both historically and currently, remains a topic of critical discourse despite the increasing opportunities in what were previously and sometimes still exclusive workplaces. The need for such discourse arises from the persistence of prejudice and marginalisation, which is sustained by the legacies of colonialism. Previous research on prejudice and biases against hairstyles worn by Black women in workplaces has largely concentrated on African American women, with comparatively limited attention devoted to women in Africa. Given the focus of the study, the intersection of three powerful identity markers is evident: racioethnicity, gender and social class. The study offers an African perspective and delves into the hitherto unexplored consequences of both settler and non-settler colonialism on the perceptions and subjectivity of Black African women with respect to their hair, as well as with regard to their personal, physical, and professional identities. The professional settings in South Africa and Nigeria, as locations within the context of settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism respectively, offer a compelling backdrop for examining the effects and implications of colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts. This study focuses on South Africa and Nigeria for three main reasons: their history as British colonies, recognition by international organisations as leading African emerging economies, and extensive scholarly work on the effects of domination systems on individuals in institutional contexts. Moreover, the research highlights the significant intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class in the hair of Black African women and their identity work.

The research employs a qualitative life story approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of how Black African women perceive and navigate their experiences because of their intersecting identities, how they subjectively conceptualise their hair in relation to these identities, and how they wear their hair in order to be seen as presentable, professional,

competent, and beautiful. The study employs an inductive approach to examine the applicability of postcolonial theory and the theories of intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work, as well as the concepts of othering, lookism, and aesthetics. The integration of postcolonial theory establishes an interdisciplinary framework, drawing upon sociological theories and historical contexts. The research findings indicate that workplace cultures continue to promote experiences of exclusion and devaluation, particularly targeting Black African women and their hair. This is achieved through othering, lookism, aesthetic labour, and hair bias. In South Africa, the study found that the settler colonial environment socialised the women to perceive the devaluation of their hair during their early years, particularly through educational institutions, leading them to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty and professionalism. In Nigeria, the women's non-settler colonial environment allowed them to embrace their hair during their formative years. However, as they observed successful career women, they associated career success with specific hairstyles, such as wigs, and when they entered the workplace, they faced institutionalised grooming policies that favoured Eurocentric hairstyles. Ultimately, the socialisation of these women is so strong that they begin policing each other regarding the professional aesthetics of Black women's hair.

One would think that Black African women's subjective view of their hair in Africa would be resolute; however, it was incredible to perceive that even Black African women experience hair bias. The present study is significant as it elucidates organisational cultures that perpetuate experiences of exclusion and devaluation in the workplace through othering, lookism, and aesthetic labour, and sustain intersectional and embodied identity work challenges among the participants, resulting in their inability to achieve acceptance and belonging in organisations.

*Keywords:* hair bias, intersectionality, embodiment, identity work, professionalism, South Africa, Nigeria

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

Full names	Lonwabo Makapela
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### REMARKS

This research has been organised in accordance with the Doctoral Thesis Framework specified by the Human Resource Management Department, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences of the University of Pretoria. The formatting, layout, and referencing style of this thesis adhere to the stipulations set out in the 7th edition of the American Psychological Association's Publication Manual and the formatting requirements for a qualitative research thesis that are recognised by the University of Pretoria, Human Resource Management Department.

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*“I come as one, but I stand as ten thousand” paying homage to my heritage and those who have preceded me.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACK TO THEIR ROOTS: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

#### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Negotiating one's identity, be it personal, physical, or professional, can often be a daunting and taxing prospect (Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). Arguably, modifying a significant marker of femininity and beauty, such as hair, to meet Eurocentric standards of beauty, neatness, presentability, and professionalism within societal and organisational contexts that encourage such modifications without considering the consequences, such as scalp-burning chemicals, can be especially detrimental and challenge one's sense of self (Hunter, 2002; Koval & Rosette, 2021; Miranda-Vilela et al., 2014; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). This issue is particularly salient in the African context, where the existing literature on organisational studies largely lacks an African perspective, especially regarding the intersectionality of Black women and their hair in the workplace. While some studies have explored the experiences of Black women in professional settings (Jaga et al., 2017; Mcdowell & Carter-Francique, 2017), there remains a notable gap in research specifically addressing hair-related issues for African women in organisational contexts. The intersectionality framework, which examines the convergence of race, gender, and other social identities (Wilson et al., 2019), could be invaluable in understanding how Black African women's hair influences their workplace experiences. Scholarship has shown that Black women receive messages about their skin colour and hair from various sources, including family, peers, and media (Tribble et al., 2019), potentially impacting their identity development and workplace interactions. However, the absence of African-specific research on this topic limits our understanding of how these dynamics manifest in African organisational settings, particularly given the unique socio-political-historical and cultural contexts that shape racial and gender identities in African countries (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). The present study extracts valuable insights regarding societal-political-historical influences, organisational consequences and individual experiences from ten Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria comprising

an equal representation of five individuals from South Africa and five from Nigeria. In this chapter, I present an introduction to the research, including its purpose and contribution to theory and literature, as well as a high-level overview of the research methodology.

### 1.1.1. Research background

An increasing number of studies have focused on the influence of intersectionality and identity on organisational behaviour, encompassing investigations into institutional and group-level phenomena, using different theoretical lenses (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Atewologun & Sealy, 2016; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Brown, 2004; Svenningson & Alvesson, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory posits that a significant portion of one's self-concept and self-esteem are derived from group memberships. People as group members tend to associate positive attributes with those who share their group affiliation (in-group), and negative attributes with those who are different (out-group). Furthermore, social identity theory assumes that individuals rapidly categorise others into 'us' versus 'them' groups, eliciting a preference for the in-group and a drive to protect its status (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). There has been a gradual but steady increase in scholarly interest concerning intersectional identities, which underscores the limitations of focusing solely on a solitary social category, without taking into account the distinctions that may exist within it (Atewologun & Sealy, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022; Raver & Nishii, 2010). Crenshaw's (1989) seminal work on intersectionality emphasises the shortcomings of prior research that only considers race or gender as the primary source of oppression and disadvantage. The research emphasises the drawbacks of focusing exclusively on a particular social category, without taking into account the disparities that might exist (Collins, 2004; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Moore-Berg & Karpinski, 2019). Intersectional identity work helps us to understand multiple identity dimensions, to recognise the complexity of identity creation, and provides a person-centred perspective on experiences (Atewologun & Sealy, 2015). Intersectional identity work allows for the discovery of distinct

identity-specific strategies that individuals with multiple identities utilise to cope with identity threats in their environment (Atewologun & Sealy, 2015; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016).

A study by Harrison and Thomas (2009) has demonstrated that the privilege bestowed upon individuals extends beyond race and gender and is deeply ingrained in physical attributes such as hair texture, lip fullness, nose shape, and eye colour, which often results in fewer privileges (Glenn, 2009; Thompson & Keith, 2001). As per Hunter (2002), these phenotypes influence how people are perceived. Consequently, there is an expanding body of scholarly literature focused on hair and hairstyle bias directed towards Black women in educational institutions and in the workplace, where such bias is often ingrained in institutional policies on grooming, discriminatory hiring practices, and societal and normative pressures (Chapman, 2007; Donahoo, 2021; Johnson & Bankhead; Koval & Dumas, McGill et al., 2017; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Weitz, 2004; Winkler, 2018). Literature on hair symbolism examines the representation of hair within Black societies, considering the historical and contemporary significance of hair within these communities (Alubafi, 2018). To gain a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted nature of identity, this study will explore the concepts of embodiment, lookism, aesthetic labour, and othering. These concepts offer valuable insights into the subjective experiences and cultural contexts in which we are constantly immersed (Weiss & Haber, 1999). They also assist in elucidating the preconceived notions that individuals hold about others based solely on their appearance (Tietje & Cresap, 2005). Additionally, they shed light on the aesthetic requirements that employers may have for their employees to 'look good and sound right' (Warhurst & Nickson, 2003). Moreover, they illuminate experiences of othering, in which individuals self-identify to differentiate themselves from the other, often by emphasising and dehumanising the other's otherness (Brons, 2015). According to Uda and Singh (2019), the concept of othering provides a more effective framework for analysing the construction, marginalisation, exclusion, and positioning of Black African identities and sense of belonging. This is attributed to the fact that othering practices stem from a hierarchical perspective that categorises individuals into 'us' and 'them', with 'them' being subject to negative stereotypes

and narratives (Abrams & Hogg, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1978). Such practices can reinforce and perpetuate positions of dominance, exclusion, and subordination, given that an individual's social position or group membership is multifaceted and influenced by various aspects including gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989, Collins, 1990). These elements shape their standing within societal power structures and hierarchies (Uda & Singh, 2019). Othering discourses depict those viewed as the 'other' as inherently flawed and morally deficient, assigning them a diminished essence and inferior status (MacNaughton, Davis, & Smith, 2009).

Conversely, Davidio's et al. (2008) research on recategorization examines how modifying self and other classifications can contribute to reducing bias and discrimination. This dual identity approach involves maintaining connections to one's original group while also adopting a wider, overarching identity, thereby decreasing prejudice by emphasizing shared characteristics among different groups (Davidio et al., 2008). This process is demonstrated through the reclassification of previously separate subgroups into a larger inclusive group, promoting empathy, trust, collaboration, and positive attitudes through perceived commonalities and shared identity. The modification of 'ingroup' membership subsequently impacts group identity (traits and standards) and individual opportunities for influence (Gaertner et al., 1993). By adjusting the observer's perspective, it becomes possible to influence how individuals form impressions and interact across group boundaries, potentially fostering improved intergroup relationships and reducing prejudice (Davidion et al., 2008; Gaertner et al., 1993). These concepts will be explored in greater depth within the context of social identity theory in Chapter 2, with a focus on their role in shaping the manifestation of hair expectations on Black women and in the workplace.

Colonialism played a significant role in shaping the identity of Black individuals, and the ramifications of colonialism continue to impact the experience of African identity negotiation (Makamo, 2022). Research has shown that individuals hold biased attitudes towards Black

women and their hair, perceiving it as less appealing, unprofessional, and less attractive than straight hair (McGill et al., 2017). The Perception Institute (2017) conducted a study on 'good hair' biases and discovered that these biases stem from dominant and oppressive societal forces that harm the self-esteem of Black women, leading them to view their natural or most authentic hairstyles as inferior (Koval & Rosette, 2021; McGill et al., 2017).

The significance of individuals' overlapping social classifications, including their locations, which mandate them to engage in intersectional identity work, is emphasised by their social standing, derived from daily occurrences. This is corroborated by the research of Atewologun and Sealy (2016), Chaney et al. (2021), Ponce de Leon and Rosette (2022), and Raver and Nishii (2010), which demonstrates that Black women frequently confront obstacles in their societies and workplaces, as a result of the lower status conferred upon them due to their intersecting identities. This can result in a threat to both their racial and gender identities. Such threats are further exacerbated by experiences of racism, sexism, and marginalisation, leading to double jeopardy circumstances for these women (Atewologun & Sealy, 2016; Chaney et al., 2021; Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022; Raver & Nishii, 2010).

In their study exploring the intersectional identity formation of British Asian and Black individuals in organisations, Atewologun and Sealy (2016) involved ten participants. One of the participants was a Black African female, who was born in Nigeria and worked as a tax specialist. This individual reported having to engage in extensive intersectional identity work before meeting clients due to anticipated differences between her client's expectations and her multiple identities, which included her gender, ethnicity, and her Nigerian name 'Amarachi' (Atewologun & Sealy, 2016). The authors suggest that gender, ethnicity, and seniority are crucial factors to consider when examining intersectional identity work, and recommend investigating additional identity dimensions, such as sexual orientation, disability, and social class, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of intersectional identity formation.

Nkomo (2011) observes the notable absence of African representation in organisational studies literature, wherein texts and references to Africa are predominantly lacking. The observed oversight can be linked to the historical neglect of non-Western viewpoints and racial 'Others', as Western discourse typically employs its own subjects as benchmarks for characterising cultural 'Others' in leadership and management theories (Nkomo, 2010). A comparable pattern is evident in international and cross-cultural comparative management studies (Jack & Westwood, 2009; Nkomo, 2010). As a consequence, there exists a greater body of knowledge concerning African American women and workplace hair bias, whilst the experiences of Black African female professionals remain largely unexplored. Strich et al. (2021) posits that individuals in professional fields establish a profound connection to their work through extensive education and socialisation, enabling them to construct their identities around the objectives, principles, standards, and interactions of their occupation. Consequently, they formulate their self-perception both in relation to their own work and in comparison, to others within their field (Strich et al., 2021). For the purposes of this study's sampling criteria, a professional is defined as a woman who has attained university-level education and occupies a position at or above the lower management level in either the public or private sector.

To address this gap, the current study employs a socio-political-historical perspective and incorporates the aspect of social class to address the identified gap by investigating the unexplored influence of systems of domination, such as colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts, on Black African women's subjective perceptions of their hair and its impact on their personal, physical, and professional identity in the workplace. The professional settings in South Africa and Nigeria, as locations within the context of settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism respectively, offer a compelling backdrop for examining the effects and implications of colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts. Odukoya (2018) elucidates settler colonialism as substantial migration from the colonising country to establish permanent

communities in colonised territories, exemplified in South Africa. Non-settler colonialism, as observed in Nigeria, involves imperial control without significant citizen relocation, relying on direct governance from the imperial centre through appointed officials, with a focus on administration and resource extraction (Odukoya, 2018). South Africa and Nigeria are selected as the contextual backdrop for the present study due to three primary factors: (a) Both nations were once colonies of the British Empire (Dolamo & Olubiyi, 2013), (b) Many international organisations have identified both countries as leading emerging economies in Africa (Aman et al., 2018), and (c) there is a growing body of scholarly work documenting the impact of systems of domination on individuals within the context of institutional membership in both countries (Carrim, 2016; Gbadamosi & Adisa, 2022; Nkomo, 2011; Odukoya, 2018; Phakathi, 2012; Ayling, 2015). Additionally, the research emphasises the crucial role played by the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, as manifested in the hair of Black African women, and the identity work undertaken by these individuals.

## 1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2020, Clicks, a South African beauty and pharmaceutical distributor, released an advertisement featuring Tresemme hair products, which has since come under scrutiny for its portrayal of hair types. The advertisement featured two sets of photographs, one depicting White women's hair as "normal" and "fine and flat," while the other portrayed Black women's hair as "dry and damaged" and "frizzy and dull." This form of discrimination against Black women's hair is not uncommon and is a pervasive issue in regions with populations of African descent, including Africa, the United States, and beyond (Alubafi, Ramphalile & Rankoana, 2018; McGill Johnson et al., 2017; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Such negative judgments extend beyond advertising and social interactions, as they are deeply entrenched in various societal structures such as educational institutions, with their codes of conduct and grooming policies, workplaces with their hiring practices, and the subtle and explicit microaggressions that prioritise Eurocentric standards of neatness, professionalism, and beauty over natural Black

hair, which is often considered unkempt and unacceptable (Chapman, 2007; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Koval & Rosette, 2021; McGill Johnson et al., 2017; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Swartz, 2016).

In several instances, the codes of conduct in South African schools have been found to exhibit bias against the natural hair of Black learners. For example, at Pretoria Girls High School in August 2016, Black learners reported being told that their natural hair was "untidy" and "unladylike", and they would not be allowed to take their exams if they did not "fix" their hair (Mansfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2017). Similarly, in 2021, a student at Cornwall Hill College in Pretoria was instructed by a teacher that her hair was "unrepresentable", "messy", and not in line with the school's standards (Shenge, 2021). Most recently, a video emerged on social media in 2023, showing a 13-year-old student at Crowthorne Christian Academy being forcibly removed from her classroom and banned from attending classes due to her dreadlocks violating the school's new hair policy (Magadla & Sibiyi, 2023). The consequences of such occurrences have a long-lasting and deeply negative impact on Black girls' ability to confidently navigate academic and professional settings.

In 2010, a significant case of hair discrimination in a South African workplace was evidenced in the Department of Correctional Services (Rycroft, 2011). Five male officers, who wore their hair in dreadlocks, were issued a written directive to conform to the Department's dress code by altering their hairstyles. Subsequent to their non-compliance, these officers were dismissed (Rycroft, 2011). This incident led to a Labour Court case, *POPCRU & Others v Department of Correctional Services & Another* [2010] 10 BLLR 1067 (LC), which adjudicated this as unfair discrimination based on religion, belief, and culture. Despite the officers being male, the case highlighted the widespread issue of race-based hair discrimination in professional environments. These occurrences of race-based hair discrimination draw parallels to The Population Registration Act of 1950, implemented during South Africa's apartheid regime. This legislation employed the "pencil test" as a method for racial classification, subsequently

influencing residential allocations. The resulting system hierarchically positioned individuals, with Black people at the bottom, White people at the top, and those of mixed race or Coloured background in the intermediate position (Molebatsi, 2009).

This assessment involved the insertion of a pencil through an individual's hair (Powe, 2009). Black individuals could potentially be reclassified as Coloured if the pencil traversed their hair with minimal resistance. Likewise, Coloured individuals could be categorised as white if their hair texture and skin tone were deemed sufficiently straight and fair (Powe, 2009). Consequently, hair, akin to skin colour, acquired political significance (Molebatsi, 2009; Powe, 2009). The pencil test discourse underscores the significance of hair as a critical element in political discourse and identity formation (Molebatsi, 2009). Comparable situations exist in the United States. For example, a Black female educator was informed that she could wear her natural hair at work, provided it was styled in a neat, orderly manner (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013). In another case, Cheryl Tatum, a Hyatt hotel restaurant cashier, was terminated for having an 'extreme and unusual hairstyle.' A newspaper article about Tatum depicted her as violating workplace norms, but the accompanying photo showed a woman with neatly braided hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). These cases support Smith et al.'s (2019) contention that Black women are often concurrently visible and invisible, which implies that they are frequently devalued or overlooked.

A study conducted by Chapman (2007), which investigates the cultural influences of Africa and Europe on African Americans' concepts of identity, beauty, and hair, has found that the notion of 'othering' has tangible consequences for Black women, as their hair is suppressed by rules and restrictions with which other social groups are not confronted (Chapman, 2007; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). The research revealed that, while a majority of women from different racial backgrounds are preoccupied with their hair, Black women tend to grapple with a more profound sense of anxiety and unease concerning how others view their hair, especially in professional settings (Chapman, 2007; Dawson et al., 2019; McGill et al., 2017;

Rosette & Dumas; 2007). Furthermore, studies have shown that Black women's hair is more policed in the workplace through policies, practices, and microaggressions, leading to identity threats (Donahoo, 2021; Johnson & Bankhead, 2014; Joy Collective, 2019; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). While this assertion holds true, the phenomenon of hair bias extends to Black men's experiences, encompassing situations involving natural hair (Crown Act, 2022; Mbilishaka et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Johnson and Bankhead (2014) posit that hair serves as a symbol of femininity, and consequently, any attempt to constrain or disparage one's hair represents a direct challenge to women's sense of self. Steele, Spencer and Aronson (2002) highlight the significant danger of discrimination and mistreatment stemming from a negative and prevalent group stereotype, which can pose an enduring challenge in one's life.

According to Whittington et al. (2021), despite sharing similar physical characteristics and racial classifications, native Africans and African Americans constitute distinct groups, notwithstanding their shared Black identity. The concept of Blackness is not a singular, fixed identity, but rather a complex intersection of various elements that are continually negotiated, redefined, and reconciled within the context of shared historical experiences and challenges (Whittington et al., 2021). Similarly, the notion of a homogeneous 'African' leadership or management style in organisational studies is problematic. Nkomo (2011) posits that Africa's vast cultural diversity, spread across a large continent, renders it challenging to propose a comprehensive, all-encompassing concept of leadership and management (Nkomo, 2011).

Based on the research conducted by Unterhalter et al. (2004), the interplay of class, race, and gender is particularly intense in the unique socio-political context of South Africa, which is shaped by its history of racial segregation through apartheid, political repression, and the emergence of democracy. This complex situation renders South Africa an especially compelling backdrop for the exploration of intersectionality theory. Moreover, Nigerian women have reported facing challenges with their natural hair and being advised to "do something" about it in the workplace (Simone, 2017). While previous scholarly texts have mostly focused

on African-American women (Chapman, 2007; Koval & Dumas, 2021; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Smith et al., 2019), this study aims to contribute empirical evidence from the South African and Nigerian contexts, specifically concerning Black African women.

The expanding body of academic literature on management research underscores the importance of acknowledging that the challenges faced by Africa, particularly those concerning identity, are rooted in both the continent's colonial legacy and its postcolonial present (Ahluwalia, 2001; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Nkomo, 2010). Despite the growth of African educational texts on the influence of identity on organisational members and culture, there has been a noticeable lack of attention given to the exploration of the influence of various colonial histories on identity in the context of African organisational studies.

The hegemonic efforts of colonialism are largely instrumental in Europe's territorial claim and power over Africa, and the persistence of imitative submission in African societies, institutions, and consciousness is a result of its remnants (Ahluwalia, 2001; Nkomo, 2011; Odukoya, 2018; Schraeder, 2004). In her analysis of the scholarly works on postcolonial and anti-colonial representations of 'African' management and leadership, Nkomo (2011) contends that postcolonial scholarship provides an opportunity to scrutinise multiple accounts of colonialism and postcolonialism, as well as the methods through which subjugated peoples resist the constraints imposed upon them by colonialism. In addition, the author advocates the use of multiple narratives to prevent the oversimplification of 'African leadership and management' and to foster liberating dialogue and practice in the field of organisation studies in Africa (Nkomo, 2011).

The inception of colonialism had a long-standing agenda for enduring supremacy and mistreatment of the African continent and its people (Odukoya, 2018). It was carried out through cruel and unethical means by dominant colonial powers over parts of the African continent, all in the pursuit of attaining supremacy (Odukoya, 2018). While the study of colonial

phenomena is much older, the specific mode of domination and subjugation known as settler colonialism has only recently gained traction and is particularly relevant to this study (Veracini, 2010).

The emergence of settler colonial studies as a distinct academic field in the 1990s, was a response to the unique conditions present in settler societies (Veracini, 2022). However, despite its establishment during this period, the discipline's scope remained notably constrained. The field predominantly centred on English-speaking settler communities in North America and Australasia, whilst largely overlooking Africa (Veracini, 2022). Settler colonialism involves the establishment of permanent residence by the colonising community, which can lead to the retention of the colonising community, even after the termination of the empire, to leverage existing social disparities and accumulate favourable conditions (Odukoya, 2018; Veracini, 2022). Smith et al. (2021) and Wolfe (2006) conceptualise settler-colonialism as an enduring colonial practice that establishes social structures to displace indigenous populations. The key characteristic distinguishing settler-colonialism from other forms of colonialism is its fundamental objective to displace Indigenous peoples, thereby ensuring the permanent establishment of a new immigrant population (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Veracini, 2010). This perspective facilitates the construction of an alternative narrative of colonial history and settlement, one that fulfils the settlers' psychological and emotional requirements to develop a robust connection and sense of belonging to their newly adopted homeland (Bonds & Inwood, 2016).

A mode of contrary, characterised as 'dominated but not settled,' non-settler colonialism involves the oppression of indigenous people through administrative control, solely to maintain colonial hegemony (Saito, 2014; Veron, 2021). The primary objective of non-settler colonialism is to exploit colonial resources through accommodative methods, which may encompass assimilation, association, or indirect rule (Odukoya, 2018; Wolfe, 2006). Veracini (2022) differentiates between non-settler-colonial and settler-colonial systems based on their primary

objectives. The former aims to maintain long-term control over the colonised population, whilst the latter seeks to establish a new settler society, effectively displacing the indigenous people. During the colonial era, European powers, whether engaged in settler or non-settler colonialism, endeavoured to minimise the perception of the exploitative nature of their practices, which implicitly suggested that Africans were not fully human (Odukoya, 2018). Despite these two unique colonial histories, all African countries that were under colonial rule are grappling with segregation due to the discriminatory socio-political systems that were in place during the colonial period and have carried over into the postcolonial era (Olaniyan, 2021). The varying forms of segregation range from racial and ethnic segregation to socioeconomic segregation (Olaniyan, 2021; Veron, 2021). As such it is plausible that a comprehensive examination of the effects of the differing forms of colonial histories in Africa, within the field of organisation studies may offer unexplored insights.

A recent six-year study conducted by Krivkovich et al. (2022) has found that Black women face more challenges in the workplace than any other racial group of women, across multiple metrics. For instance, in South Africa, the majority of the population consists of females, accounting for 51.1% of the total. Out of this percentage, 90% of the female population is Black. However, a substantial proportion - 39.8% - of Black females in South Africa remain unemployed, which is higher than the national average for other demographic groups (Cowling, 2023). Black women occupy a position of subalternity, as described by Spivak (1988), due to their marginalisation based on race, gender, and social class which is reflected in their experiences shared across multiple matrices. The subaltern is a marginalised figure, representing the opposite of those who are actively engaged in society (Thomas, 2018). Societal participation warrants inclusion within systems and structures of representation, at the limits of which subalternity begins (Thomas, 2018). According to O'Neil (2023), the female demographic in Nigeria comprises of 49% of the overall population, with a proportion of 5.49% unemployed. While this unemployment rate may not be ideal, it is relatively acceptable when compared to global standards.

Placing this research within the realm of critical scholarship, I focus on Black African women, as they are frequently subjected to hair bias and discrimination due to their overlapping identities of racioethnicity, gender, and social class. As a result, I investigate how their experiences embody subalternity, given their lower social standing based on intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Although Loden's (1987) research suggests that a glass ceiling representing an invisible barrier hinders upward career mobility for women in organisations, Bell and Nkomo (2001) argue that Black women in particular encounter a concrete wall during their career trajectory. This wall manifests in various forms, including racism, stricter standards, exclusion from information networks, challenges to their authority, and insincere company pledges (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Additionally, Black women frequently encounter obstacles in their pursuit of reaching the glass ceiling, which often leads to resistance, necessitating the need for them to either overcome these barriers, bypass them, or shatter them entirely to gain a glimpse of the glass ceiling (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

This research stems from the desire to explore the utility of postcolonial theory and the Theories of Intersectionality, Embodiment, and Identity Work in the field of organisation and management studies for Black African women. These women, due to their multiple intersecting identities experience various forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on racism, patriarchy, and classism, which negatively impact their sense of self and self-esteem. These interconnected systems of oppression perpetuate social inequality and manifest in complex patterns of disadvantage. Racism, a system of prejudice, discrimination, and power based on racial categorisations, often results in the marginalisation of people of colour (Burdsey, 2011). Patriarchy, a social structure that privileges men and masculinity while subordinating women and femininity, manifests in various forms of gender inequality (Fuchs, 2017). Classism, involving discrimination based on social class, frequently intersects with race and gender, further compounding the challenges faced by Black women (Allen, 2001). The study examines the consequences of the embodiment of these intersecting identities as they manifest in Black

women's hair. A suitable starting point for examining a group that has received limited scholarly attention is to employ theories of intersectionality to analyse the extent to which their multiple identity factors are subordinated (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989); identity and identity work to investigate how the fundamental traits of institutions impact (self-)identity work (Alvesson & Millmott, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003); and the paradigm of embodiment to assess the extent to which Black African women's hair serves as an embodiment and manifestation of their intersecting identities (Csordas, 2002; Csordas, 1999).

Consequently, the aim of this study is to diverge from conventional, uniform methods of assessing diversity in organisations, which frequently disregards the viewpoints of marginalised individuals. This research specifically targets illuminating the nuanced experiences of Black African women professionals, delving into how their identity construction is shaped by socio-political-historical factors that extend beyond the boundaries of professional settings. Moreover, the research seeks to investigate the perceptions and subjective viewpoints of Black African women regarding their multiple intersecting identities and hair, taking into account the interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success.

The research questions function as a comprehensive directive that guides the study towards its predetermined objective. In the subsequent section, a discussion of the research questions will be provided to offer a clearer understanding of the study's purpose and intent.

### 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) How did the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria, as manifested through the systems of colonialism and apartheid, and the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, contribute to the formation of multiple social identities in which women were located, specifically addressing questions such as

‘Who am I?’, ‘What does it mean to have my hair?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a professional?’ among the women?

- b) What is the nature of the identity work undertaken by the women concerning their hair when they enter professional positions? How did their early life understandings of their hair identity influence their sense of self, and how did their subjective view of their hair interact with the demands of becoming a professional (as an adult) in settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria? What strategies did they use to cope with hair identity expectations?
- c) How does the interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success among Black African women influence the development and understanding of identity theory within the broader context of organisational scholarship?

#### 1.4. CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT

The present study is built upon four fundamental theoretical underpinnings, namely postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work. Each of these theoretical arguments will be discussed in the following section. It is critical to consider the consequences of colonialism on Black African women in organisations, particularly in the settler colonial and non-settler colonial contexts of South Africa and Nigeria, respectively, when examining the intricate experiences of Black African women and the subsequent ramifications.

##### 1.4.1. Postcolonial Theory

Originating from literary, political and religious studies, postcolonial theory serves as a mechanism for opposing exploitative and discriminatory practices, irrespective of temporal or spatial context (Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007). The evolution of postcolonial theory is substantiated by referencing Young's (2001) works. The author posits that postcolonial theory emerged as a "political discourse" primarily from the struggles against oppression and the

pursuit of independence following the "tricontinental" awakening in Africa, Asia and Latin America - regions frequently characterised by poverty and conflict (Young, p. 383). This theoretical framework constructs its critique around the social histories, cultural differences and political discrimination that are normalised and practised by colonial and imperial structures (Bulhan, 2015; Young, 2001). It focuses on examining the oppressive and coercive forces at play in contemporary society (Young 2001; Ziltener & Künzler, 2013).

Postcolonial theory employs a political perspective to analyse the ongoing effects and cultural heritage of colonialism, calling for a re-evaluation of established systems and frameworks that categorise and ascribe historical narratives to various social groups (Kanu, 2006; Young, 2001). Nkomo (2011) asserts that postcolonial studies encompass a broad spectrum of theoretical approaches, contributing to its multifaceted nature. This complexity is partially attributed to its interdisciplinary scope, which encompasses literary and cultural studies, economics, and political science. The field's diversity is further amplified by its varied theoretical underpinnings (Nkomo, 2011). This theoretical framework offers a modern interpretation of knowledge forms that have existed throughout history but were previously unacknowledged (Dirlik, 1999).

The fundamental philosophy of postcolonial theory is not to critique the past, but rather to challenge current realities that are, either explicitly or implicitly, consequences of that historical legacy (Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007). Consequently, postcolonial theory provides a crucial theoretical lens for the current research, as one of its objectives is to explore how the identity construction of Black African women professionals is influenced by socio-political-historical factors that extend beyond the confines of professional settings. The historical text reveals a scarcity of references where African individuals are gendered, further obscuring the presence of Black women from view (Haggis, 1990). Black women, in addition to being overlooked, have been relegated to the margins from the concept of womanhood and subjected to the compounded marginalisation of race and gender. This has resulted in the perception of White

women as the embodiment of true femininity (Collins 2004). Compounded marginalisation has been a hallmark of intersectionality, and an explanation of the term will follow next.

#### 1.4.2. Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), emerged as a significant theoretical framework in sociological texts. This analytical framework, as noted by Cho (2013), was conceived to illuminate the multifaceted interplay between similarities and differences within anti-discrimination efforts and social movement politics. Intersectionality was formulated as a heuristic framework to comprehend these nuanced relationships. The framework has exhibited remarkable adaptability and relevance across various academic fields, including history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. Moreover, it has served as a crucial analytical instrument in feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, and legal scholarship (Cho, 2013). Although initially grounded in the experiences of African American women and Black feminist thought, intersectionality has since expanded to encompass a wider array of marginalised groups and diverse social power dynamics (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990). The proliferation of intersectional research and praxis has not only highlighted the theory's potential but also corroborated its effectiveness in examining and addressing intricate power structures across numerous contexts (Cho, 2013).

Women's gender, race, and class-based positions are determined by their social location relative to other groups (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality encompasses a variety of social categories, including race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, religion, and physical ability, resulting in unique experiences that are distinct from their originating categories and intrinsic to an individual or a group's identity (Rosette et al., 2018). The interactions between these social categories, marked by power, privilege, and disadvantage, lead to complex inequalities that cannot be reduced to a single category or sum of categories (Gray, Johnson, Kish-Gephart & Tilton, 2017; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

Therefore, for the current study, intersectionality theory provides a crucial framework to examine how the social positioning of Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria, in terms of gender, race, and class, is influenced by their relative standing amongst other groups (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). This framework also considers how socio-political-historical factors beyond the workplace influence the construction of their identities. Furthermore, the theory is utilised to investigate Black African women's perspectives and personal interpretations of their intersecting identities and hair, emphasising the multifaceted nature of their lived experiences. Individuals with multiple identities often face identity-related threats in their contexts and must engage in identity work to develop clear and effective responses (Atewologun et al. 2015). In addition, individuals with multiple intersecting identities frequently exhibit characteristics that serve as markers of their identity, which can significantly impact their social standing within an organisation. Consequently, these individuals may be subject to heightened visibility and may face adverse consequences stemming from violations of normative standards for embodiment (Barlösius & Philipps, 2015). An explanation of embodiment will be provided subsequently.

#### 1.4.3. Embodiment

Emerging from a diverse array of academic fields, including biology, psychology, neuroscience, education, and various branches of the social sciences (Marshall et al., 2021), the concept of embodiment serves as a unifying principle. Embodiment functions as an integrative framework, consolidating diverse research areas into a cohesive whole by incorporating three core perspectives: the body's physical structure, the dynamic interaction between the body and its environment, and the subjective, lived bodily experience (Johnson, 2007; Overton, 2008). Embodiment encompasses the intertwining relationships between individuals, their biological composition, and cultural influences (Csordas, 2002).

Embodiment is the concept whereby our physical form as active agents fundamentally influences our perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and desires, ultimately shaping how we

behave, experience the world, and live our lives (Taylor, 1995). This notion implies that our bodily existence provides the essential context for our interactions with and comprehension of our surroundings (Overton, 2008). The notion of embodiment in discourse encompasses an individual's assumption of a particular persona or identity, including that of a worker, professional, or manager (Harman, 2012). It is essential to recognise that research focusing on embodiment is not limited to the physical body, but rather encompasses cultural, experiential, and comprehensive aspects from a physical perspective (Weiss & Haber, 1999). Clayson (2018) states that embodiment comprises embodied knowledge, which refers to the understanding gained through direct engagement with the material world through lived experiences. This notion supports Veinot's (2007) idea of embodied knowledge, which is based on the assumption that it is acquired through experiential and practical learning that is unique to a certain context or through the process of being and doing. Furthermore, embodiment is an integral component of mental processes (Overton, 2013). This viewpoint adopts a socio-cultural stance, suggesting that culture is not merely an antecedent to the individual, but rather a key component in the dynamic interrelationship between individuals and their cultural environment (Overton, 2013). Consequently, the embodiment serves as an essential theoretical framework for the present study, as it investigates Black African women's perceptions and subjective perspectives regarding their intersecting identities and hair. Furthermore, the study examines how socio-political-historical factors, extending beyond professional environments, influence the identity formation of Black African women. The significance of embodiment is crucial for grasping and examining the day-to-day identity work that occurs in organisations, as extant research suggests that identity work is a vital method for marginalised groups to manage themselves in relation to workplace norms that categorise them as 'other' (van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019). The subsequent discussion briefly delves into the construction and performance of identity, focusing on identity work as a central component.

#### 1.4.4. Identity and identity work

Identity formation is a crucial developmental process that spans an individual's entire life, with adolescence playing a particularly important role. During this stage, a new identity configuration emerges, which is shaped by the reorganisation, evaluation, and modification of childhood identities (Marcia, 1966). Within the framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT), Tajfel and Turner (1978) propose that an individual's social identity is derived from their recognition of membership in specific social groups or categories. SIT posits that individuals undertake a process of social comparison, wherein they categorise those with shared characteristics as members of their in-group, whilst designating those who differ as part of the out-group (Turner 1975). These social classifications, into which individuals place themselves, serve as elements of a structured society and are defined in relation to contrasting categories (e.g., black versus white). Furthermore, each category is distinguished by differing levels of power, prestige, status, and other attributes (Abrams & Hogg, 1998).

Social categories are pre-existing structures into which individuals are born, entering a society that is already organised (Abram & Hogg, 1998). As individuals become integrated into society, they predominantly construct their identity or self-perception based on their social group affiliations. However, each person's unique life trajectory involves participation in a distinct combination of social categories, yielding a singular set of social identities that inform their self-concept (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

According to Brown and Coupland (2015), reflexively constructed identities are the subjective meanings that individuals assign to themselves in response to questions such as "Who am I?" Organisational structures promote noticeable distinctions in status among various groups and roles, in order to efficiently oversee individual identity, which in turn leads to intricate identity negotiations that involve power dynamics related to disparity, pre-eminence, and subjugation (Alvesson & Millmott, 2022). Identity work is a process that involves the utilisation of various techniques, such as forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, and revising, in order to

create a well-defined and logical self-identity (Brown, 2004; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This process can involve a conscious effort to understand and respond to events that challenge one's self-identity and self-esteem (Ashforth et al., 2008; Atewologun et al., 2015). Identity work highlights the dynamic interplay between individuals, their environment, and the efforts they make to find balance between the two (Atewologun et al., 2015). Examining identity work allows for the isolation of various distinct challenges at the very core of the diversity paradox (Polzer & Caruso, 2008, p. 110). Identity negotiation is particularly challenging for marginalised members with positive self-views, such as successful marginalised individuals in prominent organisational positions (Atewologun et al., 2015). Considering the present study employs identity and identity work as a critical framework to examine the social positioning of Black African women in relation to gender, race, and class, as shaped by their relative standing among various groups (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). This framework further considers the influence of socio-political-historical factors beyond the workplace on identity construction. Moreover, the theoretical framework is applied to explore Black African women's views and personal interpretations of their overlapping identities and hair, highlighting of their lived experiences.

The life stories of Black African women professionals ought to be examined through the prism of their experiences to encapsulate the essence of their singular points of view, unique perspectives and circumstances. According to Nkomo and Kriek (2011) and Shamir and Eilam (2005), a life story is a narrative that reflects the identity of the storyteller, shaped by their experiences, which serves as a system of meaning. The telling of a life story allows the storyteller to interpret reality and give personal meaning to their actions and interpretations and is inherently linked to socio-political-historical and organisational change (Musson, 2004; Nkomo & Kriek, 2011). The methodological approach employed in the research study will be discussed in the forthcoming section.

## 1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology to be employed in this study will comprise the design and approach, the sampling technique, the data collection method, and the pilot study conducted prior to the initiation of the actual research. In addition, the strategy for data analysis and the ethical considerations of the study will be addressed. A comprehensive discussion of each component of the methodology will be presented below.

### 1.5.1. Research design

The study utilised the life story approach to understand the women's early childhood through university experiences, career experiences and personal lives to the present period of their lives (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). According to Atkinson (2007) and Habermas and Bluck (2000), life stories provide a methodological approach for the recollection, description, and reflection of narratives that elucidate how a particular individual's life is narrated in depicting that life as a story. According to Atkinson (1998), life stories occupy a unique position as a blend of science and art. As a scientific endeavour, the researcher adheres to the principles of objectivity when gathering data and presenting the narrative as truthfully as feasible (Atkinson, 1998). Life stories encompass two primary elements: life narratives and autobiographical reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The former represents the comprehensive output of an individual's life story, whilst the latter denotes the process through which it is developed and utilised. Life narratives comprise explicit recollections of memories, situated within temporal and social contexts (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Life stories are an authentic mode of understanding how motivating forces and customs represent the sensitive intersection of individual and institutional experience in the present world (Dhunpath, 2000). Life stories are associated with the life history approach, which captures past events and the socio-cultural context of participants lives (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Plummer, 1983).

In the life stories compiled in this work, I sought to show respect for the individuals who have shared their life stories by incorporating their actual words through direct quotes, while simultaneously offering interpretations that are centred on the specific research questions (De Chesnay, 2015). Each life story provided an analytical narrative that offered a comprehensive perspective on the individual's life (De Chesnay, 2015). Life stories typically encompass the entirety of an individual's experiences, as there exist numerous methods for eliciting such narratives and various approaches for recounting one's past (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). According to Etherington (2009), within the present study the methodology was employed in a flexible manner, wherein I adopted a concise method for a more extensive approach that closely resembles traditional ethnographic life histories (De Chesnay, 2015). Through this process and through the participants' sharing of their stories, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the common themes and patterns that emerged from their diverse experiences. Furthermore, the life stories presented a means for participants to craft a narrative of their lives, situating it within its cultural context, and facilitating the development of a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Telling their life stories provided a means for the participants to explore the interconnectedness of their experiences and accomplishments (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). This reflection allowed me to recognise the ways in which their past experiences have shaped their present circumstances and future prospects.

According to Smith and Nkomo (2021), life stories play a crucial role in the construction of one's identity, both in personal and public contexts. Essentially, these narratives demonstrate how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). According to Denzin (1989), life stories and life histories function as a means of accumulating personal accounts to convey the subjective significance of an individual's experiences over their lifetime, which cannot be comprehensively captured through quantitative methods. As a method of looking at life-as-a-whole and as a mode of conducting an in-depth study of individual lives, the life story interview has come to occupy a pivotal position within the domain

of the narrative study of lives (Atkinson, 1998). This method provides insight into an individual's perception and understanding of their life course. Smith and Nkomo (2021) define life course as the progression of socially defined roles and events that the participant experiences over time. The life course perspective enables the integration of historical events, sociocultural context, and internal psychological changes, and allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of a woman's entire life (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). Consequently, life story methodology is greatly valued for its interdisciplinary applications in grasping the intricacies of individual lives and the diverse roles that individuals play in society (Atkinson, 1998).

The methodology of life stories is additionally focused on the intersections between individual life stories and more extensive historical processes, as well as how those processes have influenced the way in which individuals recount their own experiences (Henderson & Bigby, 2019). Habermas and Bluck (2000) assert that the life story enables individuals to integrate their recollective memories with abstract knowledge of their past into a cohesive biographical perspective, which is essential for self-continuity and self-understanding. Life stories have meaning beyond the local and personal context; they resonate with others and outlast their telling or reading: they sometimes have profound consequences (Etherington, 2009). They change us in ways that we may not always anticipate, because they can move us emotionally, change public and political attitudes and opinions, and sometimes influence future actions (Etherington, 2009). Furthermore, it has been widely acknowledged that sharing life stories can serve a therapeutic purpose for individuals, relationships, and societies, and can thereby be considered a moral act (Frank, 2000; Rosenthal, 2003). Moreover, storytelling, a vital mode of human communication, plays a significant role in our lives. According to Atkinson (1998), stories held a significant place in traditional societies, where they were transmitted from one generation to another, imparting enduring values and wisdom.

Habermas and Bluck (2000) elucidate the dual application of the term 'life story'. Primarily, it pertains to sociological, anthropological, and psychological studies examining life development from an external perspective. Secondly, it refers to individuals' interpretations of their own lives, encompassing the narrative as recounted, recalled, or contemplated by the individuals themselves. According to Carrim (2012), the stories we tell ourselves and others offer a response to the question "Who am I?" thus revealing our identities. Therefore, the stories in the present study demonstrated a fertile terrain for the development of substantial concepts, which were characterised as illuminations rather than scientific explanations (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984). The life story facilitated a comprehensive recounting, recollection, description, and reflection upon the personal life stories of ten Black African women professionals. This approach encompassed two primary aspects: firstly, their early recollections associated with their multiple identities and hair, with a particular focus on the socio-political-historical factors that influenced and shaped their personal identity; and secondly, their experiences as adults and professionals, including the challenges and barriers they encounter in professional settings, and how these experiences have shaped their subjectivity regarding their intersecting identities and hair in terms of their personal, physical, and professional identities. Therefore, the present study focuses on self-generated accounts rather than those elicited through interviews, emphasising individuals' personal interpretations of their lives (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

#### 1.5.2. Ontology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Maree (2007), ontology is related to what is known to be real. Ontology delves into truths which go beyond the history and experiences of a particular group of humans (Paleček & Risjord, 2013). The ontology facilitates the comprehension of cultural diversity by analysing categories, while it simultaneously illustrates the interconnections among various groups of individuals (Paleček & Risjord, 2013). Relativism is a fundamental element in defining ontological presumptions of the constructivist

inquiry paradigm, which posits that all beliefs about a particular topic are equally valid (Gura, 1992; O'Grady, 2014). In the relativist ontology, each individual is responsible for exploring their own conceptual schemes, as their reality is socially constructed (Bogna, Raineri & Dell, 2020). According to this perspective, people not only think or experience the world differently, but they also inhabit different worlds (Knudsen, 1998). As a result of cultural and historical differences, relativist ontology posits that there are multiple accounts and interpretations of the social world (Charmaz, 2015). The present study adopts a relativist ontological stance, acknowledging that individuals subjectively interpret and experience reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The study delves into the personal accounts and subjective viewpoints of participants to elucidate how the socio-political-historical context has shaped the formative experiences and socialisation processes of Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria. Furthermore, the study explores the identity negotiation these women engage in regarding their hair upon entering professional environments, as well as the adaptive strategies they develop in response to hair-related identity expectations in these settings.

### 1.5.3. Epistemology

According to Crotty (1998), epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge that defines which information is conceivable and inevitable. Epistemology encompasses the relationship between the researcher, myself, and what is known, serving as a perspective through which a research topic is explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lipscomb, 2008). According to McMahon (1997), social constructivism places great emphasis on the role of culture and context in shaping our understanding of society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. For social constructivists, knowledge is a human creation that is moulded by social and cultural interactions, whereby the meanings individuals derive are a result of their relationships with others and their environments (Kim, 2001). Constructivist epistemology refers to the social construction of knowledge following personal experiences in collaboration with social, cultural and political circumstances (Charmaz, 2008; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Ward et al., 2015). Constructivist epistemology emphasises the truth as acknowledged

by a particular individual or collective, sharing a distinct experience with others to clarify lived experiences of everyday life (Charmaz, 2006; Ward, Hoare & Gott, 2015). The tenets of constructivist epistemology posit that individuals, due to their inherent differences, construct meaning in distinct ways, including variations between individuals from diverse cultures and generations (Feast & Melles, 2010). It is broadly recognised that constructivist epistemologies assert that individuals construct their own realities, and it is commonly accepted that the realities constructed by different individuals will differ. However, it does not necessarily follow that those who hold these beliefs necessarily subscribe to the existence of multiple realities (Crotty, 1998; Kim, 2001). The nature of the external world and the nature of knowledge are distinct and separate (Crotty, 1998). Constructivist epistemology permits negotiated meaning, knowledge and reality as part of human experience in conjunction with others (White, 2004). The present study employs a social constructivist epistemological approach as the perspective through which the research topic is explored, due to the role of the socio-political-historical context in shaping the formative experiences and socialisation processes of Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria, and constructing knowledge based on this understanding (Lipscomb, 2008; McMahon, 1997). Furthermore, the study provides multiple account of identity negotiation that these women engage in regarding their hair upon entering professional environments, as well as the adaptive strategies they develop in response to hair-related identity expectations in these settings. Consequently, the research aims to generate meaning and construct knowledge by synthesising participants' experiences with their socio-political-historical contexts and circumstances (Ward et al., 2015).

#### 1.5.4. Research approach

As a researcher aiming to explore the reasons and mechanisms behind human behaviour and experiences, I hold the view that a qualitative research design is the most appropriate methodology for this particular study. The research study employs a qualitative approach, which was informed by interpretivist/social constructivist principles. Qualitative research, as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), involves a set of interpretive and material practices

that aim to make the world visible and to understand the perspectives of participants. Qualitative research offers researchers a method to understand a topic from the viewpoint of the individuals involved. The present study greatly benefited from the participants' subjective viewpoints, which offered valuable insights into their lived experiences and identity development processes (Low et al., 2016). Integrating this research approach into the study helped to generate unique perspectives that are essential for understanding the complexities of the participants' experiences. Consistent with the perspective expressed by Bryman (2017), qualitative research accentuates the viewpoints and interpretations of the individuals being studied, focusing on their significations and perceptions. Qualitative methodology is essential in comprehending the intricate relationships between individuals and their surroundings, as well as the manner in which these phenomena affect outcomes (Anderson et al., 2014). Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm is distinguished by its emphasis on the qualitative approach, which prioritises interpretation over quantification and values subjectivity over objectivity. This approach grants researchers flexibility in their processes and focuses on the research process itself, rather than just the outcome (Ekaterini, 2014). This approach is particularly well-suited to describing and capturing the essence of a specific phenomenon (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2013). In contemporary times, qualitative methods have come to be widely acknowledged for their efficacy in tackling a multitude of pressing concerns, one of which includes the influence of culture on psychological and identity development (Spencer et al., 2014).

In the context of diversity and gender research, qualitative research is preferred because it allows for a focus on women's experiences and for listening and exploring the shared meanings between women with the aim of reformulating traditional research agendas (Skeggs, 2001). Qualitative research allows researchers to understand the participant's view and understanding of their socially constructed realities on the situation which is under study (Bryman, 2016). This approach is particularly useful for gaining insights into how Black African women negotiate their personal, physical, and professional identities regarding their hair.

Furthermore, high-quality qualitative research is characterised by a profound and intricate richness. Hence, upholding qualitative rigor implies that a researcher who possesses an in-depth understanding of theoretical frameworks and has access to substantial data is most capable of discerning nuances and complexities (Tracy, 2010). The social constructivist perspective suggests that the same event can be interpreted differently by different individuals, and that none of the descriptions and perceptions are 'wrong' (Willig, 2008). Within the interpretivist paradigm, I can obtain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon in question (Carrim, 2012). The interpretivist process is descriptive in nature, as the participant's individual experiences are described in detail (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). Therefore, this approach will allow for a nuanced understanding of the complexities and subtleties of the phenomenon under study, and for the development of a rich and detailed description of the experiences of Black African women in this context.

This study aims to shed light on the experiences of Black African women professionals, exploring how their identity formation is influenced by socio-political-historical factors that transcend professional environments. Additionally, the research examines the perceptions and subjective perspectives of the Black African women concerning their multiple intersecting identities and hair, whilst considering the interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success. Consequently, the study has opted for a qualitative approach to address the specific research questions, as opposed to alternative methodologies, for the following reasons: a) qualitative methodology offers a distinct advantage in its inductive approach to investigating relatively unexplored, novel, and sensitive topics (Dunwoodie et al., 2023). These areas encompass the strategies employed by individuals from marginalised or underprivileged groups to manage their identities in the workplace, the methods women use to challenge traditional gender structures and career advancement barriers, and the tactics individuals adopt to cope with negative work-related experiences (Dunwoodie et al., 2023). b) Qualitative studies facilitate the expansion of theoretical frameworks by employing existing conceptual ideas or preliminary models to generate novel insights. This process involves comparing,

elaborating on, or structuring constructs and relationships to elucidate empirical observations. Researchers refine or broaden theories to provide precise descriptions of phenomena (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017).

#### 1.5.5. Sampling

The sampling methods employed in the present study are purposive and snowball sampling techniques. In purposive sampling, participants are selected based on a particular purpose per the researcher's judgement (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). The aim of purposive sampling is for participants to possess a majority of the attributes that are distinctly representative of the study's purpose (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010; Grinnell & Unrau, 2008). Purposive sampling discovers and increases the researcher's insight, as a result, a sample is selected from which the most can be learnt about the population (Merriam, 2009). The study's participant criteria encompass ten Black African women from South Africa and Nigeria, equally distributed with five individuals from each country, who presently hold professional roles within South African and Nigerian workplace settings. Data was gathered through the personal life stories of women middle and senior-level professionals, who operate in diverse sectors, including law, higher education, commerce, entrepreneurship, financial management, the natural and agricultural sciences, the biological sciences, and the entertainment industry. In snowball sampling, I began with a small number of initial participants who served as 'seeds' and were of research interest; the participants were then asked to recommend potential participants who might be willing and did, in turn, propose other prospective participants and so on (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). Snowball or chain referral sampling acquires potential participants through recommendations and referrals made among individuals who have knowledge of others with attributes that fit the research criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Nonetheless, this network-based convenience sampling approach necessitates recognition of its inherent limitations, including the potential emergence of an inadvertently homogeneous sample (Parker et al., 2019).

Snowball sampling is typically used in situations where locating participants that fulfil the study's inclusion criteria proves to be challenging (Etikan, Alkassim, & Abubakar, 2016). I relied on South African and Nigerian-based business schools as her network to refer research participants that meet the inclusion criteria. I communicated with two institutions, one in South Africa and one in Nigeria, via telephone and email to request permission to participate in the research study. Pursuant to the authorisation granted by the business schools to participate in the research study, I requested a written permission letter from the participating institutions. Employing the networks of chosen business schools, I initiated a referral process whereby these schools, as custodians of the potential participants' contact information, uploaded an information sheet regarding the research study onto their student portal, enabling participants to voluntarily indicate their interest in participating. The information sheet comprised the study's title and objective, along with a clause pertaining to voluntary participation, specifying that participants could discontinue their participation at any point in the study without incurring any consequences. Moreover, the information sheet provided contact information for the researcher responsible for the study. Prospective participants reached out to me as researcher via email, indicating their desire to participate in the study and providing their voluntary consent. Upon receiving confirmation of a potential participant's consent and willingness to participate, discussions regarding availability and scheduling of interviews were initiated. In addition, as researcher I utilised a snowball sampling technique, relying on previously selected participants to recommend suitable candidates who fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

#### 1.5.6. Data collection

The method of data collection was one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were utilised in the qualitative research and were arranged around a set of pre-planned open-ended questions, with supplemental questions materialising from the conversation between myself and the participant (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The open-ended questions were used in a systematic way to encourage participants to share their unique subjective views (Struwig, Struwig & Stead, 2013). Semi-structured interviews tend to

build on the responses of participants to obtain a detailed understanding of the participants' views on the research study (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were utilised among 10 professional Black African women from South Africa and Nigeria in varying occupational fields such as law, higher education, commerce, entrepreneurship, financial management, the natural and agricultural sciences, the biological sciences, and the entertainment professions. Adriansen (2012) underscores the comprehensive approach of life story interviews as an advantage, highlighting the indispensability of the public and private aspects of lives and their contextual nature. Bryman (2016) asserts that these interviews provide researchers with a deeper understanding of pivotal moments in a person's life. However, Hagemaster (1992) points out the time-consuming nature of life story interviews and the difficulty in controlling the pace of the participant's storytelling. Adriansen (2012) likens the process to a collaborative jigsaw puzzle, with the participant also seeking to fill gaps in their own narrative. Atkinson (2004) notes that the duration of such interviews varies, generally comprising two or three sessions of 60 to 90 minutes each. At the outset, I commenced with a 60-minute interview; however, in accordance with Hagemaster's (1992) recommendation, I permitted the participants to dictate the pace of their narrative, followed by subsequent shorter sessions for clarification with the participants. The interviews and follow-up sessions were all conducted either in person or via Google Meet, depending on the availability and convenience of the participants.

#### 1.5.7. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted before the commencement of the actual study (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010). To validate the efficacy of the life stories in addressing the research questions, three pilot interviews were conducted with two South African and one Nigerian professional. The interview questions delineated in Appendix E served as a guide for these pilot sessions. Subsequent to these interviews, an additional inquiry was incorporated into the interview guide: "As a Black woman, do you perceive a sense of inclusion or belonging within your company? Do you believe that your opinion and voice are valued? Please elaborate on this

experience." This question was integrated to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of intersectional dynamics of how embodied identity and self-presentation overlap within the organisational context, particularly in relation to normative pressures, cultural expectations, and perceptions of belongingness. All pilot interviews were conducted virtually utilising Google Meet to accommodate the participants' convenience.

All three participants agreed to be voice recorded and chose their own pseudonyms. The following participants were recruited for the pilot:

Diva, a South African university lecturer between the ages of 25-34 with a Master's degree, provided a retrospective account of her life experiences. During her developmental years, she held the perception that hair straightening was essential for maintaining a tidy and orderly appearance at school. However, as time progressed, she made the decision to preserve her natural hair texture, a practice she continues to this day. Presently, for professional practicality, she opts for cornrows as they facilitate more efficient hair management. Diva proposed that providing the interview question structure in advance would enhance participant awareness and improve the efficacy of the interviews.

Grace-Storm, a South African advanced social work practitioner aged 25-34 with a Bachelor's degree, shared her experiences with hair and disability. Paralyzed at a young age, she recalled perceiving that her able-bodied peers and light-skinned classmates with hair extensions were more valued, as she frequently encountered discrimination due to her disability. Notably, she expressed experiencing greater acceptance within the white community compared to her own black community. While pursuing her university education, Grace-Storm stopped straightening her hair but felt that hair extensions appeared neater and cleaner as she felt judgment when wearing her natural hair, perceiving it as untidy and indicative of financial constraints. The concept of intersectionality is highly pertinent in this context as the account provided by the participant shed light on the complex experience of

navigating the intersection of disability with racioethnicity, gender, and social class, and its influence on her professional integration and the identity work she has performed throughout her life and leading into the workforce. The interview with Grace-Storm regarding her professional experiences led to the inclusion of a more explicit question about workplace belonging in the interview guide. The additional question was: "As a Black woman, do you perceive a sense of inclusion or belonging within your company? Do you believe that your opinion and voice are valued? Please elaborate on this experience."

"Girl-in-STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), a Nigerian network operations engineer, aged 25-34 with a Bachelor's degree, stated that during her childhood, her mother insisted on styling her natural hair in cornrows, believing she was too young for hair extensions. Throughout her school years, she and her peers wore identical hairstyles due to school regulations. However, upon entering university, she developed a negative self-image regarding her hair and experienced a loss of confidence. She observed that Black girls with a lighter skin tone and those wearing wigs were generally preferred. Consequently, she now opts for wigs, perceiving them as more aesthetically pleasing, flattering, and socially acceptable, and easier to maintain. No suggestions were made by Girl-in-STEM; however, the participant assisted in making the interviewer aware of the potential complexities in comprehending the participants' African accents. This awareness prompted the interviewer to meticulously review the transcript multiple times and contact the participant for clarification to ensure accuracy.

It is beneficial to carry out the pilot study on a participant group with similar characteristics to the actual study to identify any challenges that may occur during the interview process (de Vos et al., 2011). The pilot study was conducted to test whether the interview questions posed were pertinent to the study. The pilot study allowed for the detection of ambiguous questions and aided in identifying whether participants would incur any challenges with answering the

questions. Furthermore, the pilot study was used to refine the interview guide and clarify any ambiguous questions.

#### 1.5.8. Data analysis

The present research will follow the narrative approach regarding the presentation of interpretations provided during interviews (Glaser, 1992). According to Mischler (1986), narrative inquiry functions as a method for qualitative researchers to attentively listen to the stories of participants and gain a more profound understanding of the context and construction of those stories in relation to the participants' positioning. Narratives are a diverse and wide-ranging form of spoken accounts that encompass stories and histories that span past, present, and future timeframes. These stories frequently feature characters, whether real or fictional, and are often situated within specific spatial and temporal contexts to convey significant experiences or concepts (Daiute, 2014). According to Smith (2007), narratives are a crucial aspect of life that unveil the underlying meaning in our experiences. They extract the inherent significance from events and invest even minor occurrences with perceived meaning. Furthermore, narratives can generate meaning by situating themselves within the domain of social connections and interactions (Smith, 2007).

According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), narrative researchers concentrate on examining stories or narratives, which recount events in a sequential manner and are a fundamental aspect of human experience. In recent years, the topic of organisational identity has garnered substantial interest in the field of management studies (Clandinin, 2007). Within the workplace, life stories can be categorised as either career narratives or organisational identity stories. Career stories typically undergo analysis using Foucauldian discourse analysis, which situates identity construction within or in opposition to a prevailing discourse (Czarniawska, 2007). Slay and Smith (2011) support this notion, stating that narrative analysis is commonly believed to be especially effective in examining careers. Theorists have argued that narratives function as personal identities, enabling individuals to comprehend themselves through the stories they

narrate about specific challenges at specific points in their lives (Slay & Smith, 2011). According to Czarniawska (2007), narratives frequently depict life stories or career trajectories within organisational contexts. Moreover, these narratives align with historical descriptions of events revealed through interviews. Notably, topics like reformation or reorganisation of identities generally transpire over an extended period, and thus frequently elicit narrative responses (Czarniawska, 2007). In addition, a narrative perspective is appropriate for examining professional identity, as a career is essentially an accumulation of work experiences that are acquired over time (Slay & Smith, 2011). Analysing career stories can provide a deeper understanding of these experiences and contribute to the development of a professional self-concept (Slay & Smith, 2011). Additionally, Andrews (2007) argues that crossing cultural boundaries poses a significant challenge to the applicability of prevailing theoretical frameworks (p. 32). The concept of boundaries raises questions about the participants who are authorised, and in a sense, these boundaries can be viewed as defining traits of one's identity, thus answering the question "Who am I?" Furthermore, the aim of narratives' applicability to historical, cross-cultural, and identity contexts is not primarily to underscore the significance of specific institutions and occurrences, but rather to demonstrate how certain stories can lend purpose and meaning to individual existences.

All interviews were recorded using a cellular device and saved to a password-protected folder for initial coding. The transcription software Cockatoo was employed to transcribe the interviews, resulting in hundreds of pages of data. Due to the complexity of comprehending some participants' African accents, I meticulously perused each transcript multiple times to guarantee accuracy. In cases of ambiguity, I listened to the participants' voice recordings and referred to my field notes. In some instances, I even contacted the participants for clarification. This extensive process enabled me to create a biographical account for each woman interviewed (Smith & Nkomo, 2021).

The participants' stories were analysed by considering both their subjective experiences and the surrounding contexts that influenced them (Smith, 2016). Initially, I utilised an inductive theme-based approach to create individual narratives for each participant, which were then organised in a table format using Microsoft Word. The purpose of this exercise was to tell the stories of the participants and identify commonalities and dissimilarities among the participants' stories. Following the initial coding process, I presented a draft of the interview transcripts to my supervisors, who provided me with valuable feedback and guidance on the coding and data synthesis. This interaction enhanced my analytical rigor and sharpened my data synthesis skills. After addressing the length and synthesis of the transcripts, I meticulously examined each interview, extracting the key ideas and concepts, while simultaneously acknowledging the depth and emotions present in the participants' narratives. At this stage, I concentrated specifically on the following domains: early childhood, which encompassed family experiences, education, career aspirations, and racioethnic, gender, and class identity; and the participants' adult and professional life, which included career choices, organisational experiences, racioethnic, gender, and class identity, and personal life.

I commenced the coding process by utilising a spreadsheet format on Microsoft Excel, after gaining a comprehensive understanding of the themes and the size of the data. This format facilitated a thorough line-by-line coding of the data, providing a close reading and enabling a more analytical engagement with it. In vivo coding, which prioritises the participants' intended meanings over my personal assumptions (Charmaz, 2014), was employed. Direct quotes from the data were almost exclusively coded as in vivo codes, ensuring a faithful representation of the data. This approach enabled the identification of stories that were culturally specific and relied on familiar cultural references (Esin et al., 2014). Several codes remained unchanged from the initial interview transcript, as they represented significant patterns in the data. Integration across themes was conducted to establish how they related to one another and to the broader questions guiding the study (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). For instance, I sought to understand the impact of the socio-political-historical context on the early life experiences and

socialisations of Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria, and the nature of the identity work these women engaged in concerning their hair when they entered professional positions, as well as the coping strategies they employed in relation to hair identity expectations. My analysis of the data led to the identification of similarities and differences in the life stories of women and their effects on their careers and experiences within organisations. The findings from this research either supported, modified, or conflicted with existing theories and concepts.

#### 1.5.9. Strategies employed to ensure quality data

To ensure the integrity and quality of the data and maintain trustworthiness throughout the research process, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were utilised throughout the research process. Additionally, I implemented reflexivity to engage in self-reflection and continually assess my biases and motivations during the study (Tracy, 2010).

##### 1.5.9.1. Credibility

Tracy (2010) declares that credibility refers to the research findings' trustworthiness, plausibility, and genuineness. To address the research question, in-person and virtual in-depth interviews via Google Meet were conducted with a targeted group of Black female professionals from South Africa and Nigeria. The interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability, with some participants meeting in person and others preferring virtual meetings. For in-person interviews, the researcher visited the participants in their homes. The life story interviews were primarily conducted in a single session, followed by multiple follow-up sessions for each participant during the data analysis phase to obtain better clarity. All follow-up sessions were conducted virtually. Two participants, namely Faith and Sunflower, had two sessions due to scheduling and time constraints. The first session focused on the women's early childhood through university experiences, while the second session covered career experiences and adult lives. Each interview averaged two and a half hours, with some interviews exceeding three hours. The details of the interview guide, along with the interview questions, are detailed in Appendix E.

Credibility ensures that individuals can relate to the research findings (McGloin, 2008). Qualitative credibility is acquired by ensuring thick data descriptions and triangulation or crystallisation of the sources of data (Tracy, 2010). Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement with the data and undergoing an iterative process when analysing the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Adriansen (2012), life story research exhibits an iterative nature, where the analysis of an interview commences concurrently with the interview process. Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) provide further insight into this concept, explaining that it involves an engagement with the ongoing process of meaning construction and the progressive focus inherent in analytical procedures. Iteration is a vital aspect in the process of developing insight and meaning, as it functions as a catalyst in the process (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009).

#### 1.5.9.2. Transferability

According to McGloin (2008), transferability refers to the degree to which the research findings are generalisable to different settings without losing their essence. Transferability is achieved when the stories of the research either intersect or are an extension of the reader's situation in such a way that they instinctively transfer the research to their context (Tracy, 2010). Following revisions to the length and synthesis of the transcripts, I carefully examined each interview, identifying key concepts while acknowledging the depth and emotional content of participants' narratives. The significant patterns remained consistent with the initial transcript. Theme integration established their interconnections and relevance to the broader research questions. I achieved this by presenting the findings using detailed descriptions, allowing readers to resonate and empathise with the lived experiences and circumstances of the participants (Tracy, 2010).

### 1.5.9.3. Dependability

According to De Vos et al. (2011), dependability consists of the documentation, consistency, and arrangement of research findings, which are maintained through sufficient data descriptions. It is crucial for ensuring the consistency of findings across different settings, as emphasized by Krefting (1991). An initial inductive thematic approach Initially, was employed to generate individual accounts, organised in table format using Microsoft Word. After the preliminary coding, I shared a draft of the interview transcripts with my supervisors, who offered crucial feedback and direction on coding and data synthesis. This collaboration enhanced my analytical thoroughness and refined my data synthesis abilities. Upon gaining a comprehensive understanding of the themes and data scope, coding commenced using Microsoft Excel. Inter-rater reliability achieved satisfactory levels. Given the manageable volume of data resulting from ten interviews, specialized coding software was deemed unnecessary. Microsoft Excel facilitated detailed line-by-line coding and in-depth analytical engagement. To ensure accurate representation of the data, verbatim quotes were coded as in vivo codes, identifying culturally specific narratives and references.

The process of establishing coding for inter-coder reliability involved a systematic approach to develop and refine the coding scheme, ensuring consistent interpretation across multiple coders. This process began with standardising the units of text established during the preliminary coding phase. To achieve strong levels of inter-coder reliability, my research supervisors and I employed an iterative process of theme and subtheme revision and recoding (Campbell et al., 2013; Hruschka et al., 2004). This rigorous approach enhanced the reliability of the findings and deepened our understanding of the nuanced data collected from the interviews. Achieving dependability involves documenting the research process in a well-structured and logical manner (Schurink et al., 2011). Moreover, systematically documenting the study's planning and implementation authenticates the findings (Schwandt, 2001).

#### 1.5.9.4. Confirmability

According to De Vos et al. (2011), the concept of confirmability pertains to the extent of objectivity and neutrality possessed by the researcher, ensuring that the research findings accurately reflect the participants' voices and experiences without the influence of the researcher's biases. To achieve confirmability, it is necessary to employ strategies that validate and confirm the research findings from multiple perspectives (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). I accomplished this goal by engaging in self-reflexivity, which entailed reflecting on and reporting my opinions and interpretations in relation to the participants and the study (Tracy, 2010).

#### 1.5.9.5. Reflexivity

According to Willig (2008), the researcher plays a critical role in the research and can impact the construction of meaning throughout the research process. Reflexivity refers to the process in which the researcher continuously reflects on their values, opinions, interpretations, and pre-planned ideas concerning the phenomenon, since this may have an impact on the study (Krefting, 1991). Thus, prior to embarking on the fieldwork and conducting interviews, I undertook self-reflexivity. I ensured transparency and self-awareness by continually evaluating my motivations and biases, while simultaneously engaging in introspection throughout the research process (Tracy, 2010). To maintain a record of my emotional state, thoughts, and personal journey during the research, I kept a journal.

#### 1.5.10. Ethical Considerations

The present study sought to comply with all requirements of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences' Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria. The study comprised voluntary participation, where all participants were at liberty to quit the study at any phase of the research process (Rogers, 1987). All personally identifiable information obtained during the data collection process is strictly confidential and is fully de-identified. Furthermore, all participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms to ensure their

anonymity and privacy as study participants (Dearnley, 2005). In my role as a researcher, I made certain that the research participants were fully aware of the purpose of the study, and that informed consent was obtained from them. Furthermore, I ensured that no harm would be inflicted upon the participants and that their right to privacy would always be respected and upheld (Wiles, 2013; Willig, 2013).

In the section below, a discussion of the ethical considerations, including procedural, situational, and relational ethics, that were adhered to during the present study is provided.

#### 1.5.10.1. Procedural ethics

The following section will provide a comprehensive explanation on the procedural ethics that were implemented in the study.

- Informed consent forms were developed to provide all participants with insight into the research and the purpose of their participation in the study. The informed consent form allowed participants to be completely informed about the purpose of the study and the implications of their participation (Bryman, 2016). All participation in the research was voluntary, and participants were permitted to depart from the process at any time without repercussions. All participants were treated fairly, with respect and dignity.
- By signing these forms, the participants indicated their agreement to participate in the study and their understanding that the outcomes could be employed for academic purposes while maintaining confidentiality.
- Privacy and confidentiality of participants: The confidentiality of the participants' data was ensured by assigning them pseudonyms, which they selected themselves. Furthermore, all data remains anonymous to safeguard the participants' identities (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). The anonymity of participants was at all times preserved, whereby I was the only party with access to tangible documents such as informed consent and completed biographical questionnaires.

- The names of participants and any identifiable information was not contained in the transcripts from the interviews.
- Interviews took place in a private, safe, and quiet location where participants felt comfortable answering questions during the interview.
- For instances in which linguistic obstacles arose between me and a participant, a translating research assistant was present to convey interview questions in a comprehensible manner to the participant (Inhetveen, 2012). My responsibility included engaging and compensating the translating research assistant, and ensuring that the translating research assistant possessed a thorough comprehension of the current research. Fortunately, no language barriers were encountered between me and any of the participants during the study.
- The integrity and accuracy of the data was maintained by comparing the audio recordings taken during the interviews with the transcripts from the interviews. The transcripts and audio data are safely stored.

The Faculty of Economic and Management Science's Ethics Committee granted ethics approval, evidenced by a certificate with protocol number EMS116/23, in compliance with the ethical guidelines set forth by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria (Appendix A). A consent form was developed and administered to all participants. To maintain confidentiality, interviewees selected their own pseudonyms at the commencement of each interview. Prior to participation, all individuals received an information sheet and combined letter of introduction and informed consent and were debriefed following the interview. The consent form and combined letter of introduction and informed consent are included as Appendices B and C, respectively. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they possessed the right to withdraw at any point during the interview process; however, no participant chose to exercise this option.

#### 1.5.10.2. Situational ethics

Each interview comprised the participants' life stories, particularly emotive stories about evolutions in the women's personal, physical, and professional identities (Nkomo & Kriek, 2011; Weber, 1990). I considered that each interview would entail a different experience and situation. I remained conscious of any biases while conducting the research (Grant, 2014). My lived experience as a Black African woman that lived in the apartheid era and currently resides in post-apartheid South Africa, as well as my personal experiences with race-based hair discrimination, have significantly influenced my methodological approach and stance as a researcher. My primary objective for this research was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of participants, provide an explanation for organisational phenomena, and offer actionable proposals to improve working lives. To mitigate any bias and ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, steps were taken throughout the research process. These steps included reflections and reflexivity, with me engaging in self-reflection and documenting my thoughts and impressions in my journal throughout the research journey. The final chapter of this study includes a dedicated section to reflexivity and documents my journal entries throughout the research process. Furthermore, this section of the final chapter serves as a reflection on my own biases and how they may have impacted the research, as well as an exploration of my role in the research process, and how this has influenced the findings.

#### 1.5.10.3. Relational ethics

The semi-structured interviews were arranged around a set of pre-planned open-ended questions, with supplemental questions developing from the dialogue between researcher and the participant. The open-ended questions were conversational, encouraging the participants to provide their views (Struwig et al., 2013). Furthermore, the in-depth interviews probed the participants' subjective experiences (Suddaby, 2006). Therefore, I afforded participants with the platform to tell their stories and experiences. Moreover, I established rapport to ensure a comfortable interview process for all participants involved.

## 1.6. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study contributes to existing academic literature on the experiences of individuals with marginalised identities, specifically Black African female professionals within organisations. The research employed a multidimensional approach, incorporating a postcolonial lens, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work embodiment. Building on the findings of Summers et al. (2020), the study explored the invisible rules that Black African women must navigate in order to achieve success in their careers, including the need to reconcile their authentic identities with the identities that they present in order to conform to organisational norms (Winkler, 2018).

According to Rosette and Dumas (2007), Black women must often craft a professional image to combat negative stereotypes, which can cause mental and emotional strain through the process of social identity threat (Kahn et al., 2017; Steele, 1997). According to Kahn et al. (2017), when individuals experience identity threat, they may feel de-individualised, leading to increased anxiety in seeking ways to avoid being stereotyped by others. In the workplace, Black women may employ various strategies to manage identity threats and reduce the negative perceptions of others towards them (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). These strategies may include confirming, reconciling, accepting, distancing, condemning, and disagreement (Winkler, 2018). It is imperative that the current study delves deeper into the intricacies of the subject of hair bias as it pertains to the workplace experiences of Black women in Africa. Specifically, the research seeks to understand the factors that negatively impact the subjective views of Black African women regarding their hair, as well as the influence of the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria on their personal, physical, and professional identity work and experiences throughout their lives and in the workplace. The research builds on the traditional methodology commonly employed in organisational research when examining diversity, by incorporating the viewpoints of individuals with multiple

marginalised identities, particularly Black African women professionals. By delving into the intricate and nuanced experiences of these individuals, this research endeavours to highlight the impact of settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism on identity construction and navigation, transcending organisational boundaries.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the intersections of racioethnicity, gender, and class play a significant role in shaping the experiences of Black African women in the workplace, and as such, a more nuanced and empathetic examination of hair bias is necessary to fully comprehend the unique challenges faced by this group of participants. Therefore, the current study employs an intersectional approach to examine the life stories, personal and professional experiences of Black women in South Africa and Nigeria. The research will examine the lived experience of gendered, racialised, and classed barriers through the lens of Black African women's multiple identities and their hair in society and the workplace. This analysis will be informed by colonial and postcolonial studies. The study will explore how settler and non-settler colonialism are implicated in the influences on the personal, physical, and professional identity of Black women concerning their hair, and how Eurocentric hegemonic control is maintained in workplace practices, systems, and structures. Furthermore, the research investigates how implicit and explicit biases and stereotyping affect Black African women in various ways, and how organisational policies and practices can influence attitudes towards intersecting identities and natural hair in the workplace.

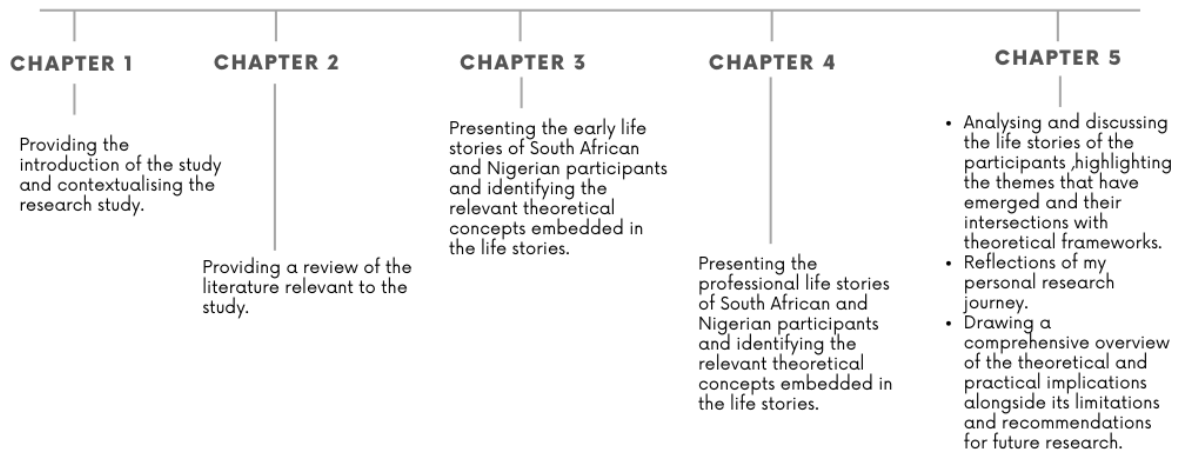
Drawing on Weber's (1968) seminal work on the notion of bureaucracy, and Powell and DiMaggio's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism, this study aims to explore the embodiment of organisational rationality's power to control individuals efficiently and effectively. Additionally, it seeks to understand how organisations establish practices that produce isomorphic pressures, resulting in growing uniformity among employees over time. It is plausible that Black African women, who possess multiple intersecting identities, encounter regulations that impact their expression within repressive organisations, leading to the

motivation to imitate and subsequent engagement in identity work (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Atewologun & Sealy, Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022). Consequently, it is imperative to study the experiences of individuals who identify with multiple social categories and face unique challenges as a result (Kringen & Novich, 2018; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). The study contributes to ongoing discussions within the fields of intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work, by offering a theoretical framework for understanding the intersections of societal and organisational systems of oppression in South Africa and Nigeria. The research shed light on the complex experiences of Black African women professionals, exploring how their identity construction and navigation are influenced by socio-political-historical factors, and extending beyond the confines of the organisation. The study aims to explore the subjective perspectives of Black African women regarding their intersecting identities and hair and the detrimental external attitudes towards it, taking into account the complex relationship between intersectionality, identity work, and career success.

## 1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The thesis comprised five chapters. Chapter 1 commenced with an introduction and a discussion of the contextual background of the research. Furthermore, this chapter elaborated on the problem statement, the theoretical framework that formed the foundation of the study, the research questions, the methodology and the research design that were employed. Additionally, the chapter highlighted the contribution of the study and the chapter outline of the research, which is depicted in Figure 1 below.

## Chapter outline of the study



### Figure 1

Chapter 2 examines the extant literature on the historical and postcolonial contexts of South Africa and Nigeria in relation to settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism respectively, with a particular focus on the manifestation of bureaucracy within organisations resulting from colonialism. Additionally, the chapter analyses concepts such as Black women professionals, hegemonic femininities, stereotypes and discrimination, othering, hair bias, lookism, and aesthetic labour. Furthermore, the chapter elucidates and discourses the theoretical foundations of the research, which encompass postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity, and their significance to the study.

Chapter 3 delves into the early life experiences of the selected ten Black African women participants, comprising an equal representation of five individuals from South Africa and five from Nigeria. The chapter commences with the participants' chosen pseudonyms and brief biographical information of each of the participants. The chapter offers descriptions of significant events in the participants' lives, spanning their childhood until they embarked upon

their university education. The participants' accounts commence with the relevant theoretical concepts identified in their story.

Chapter 4 analyses the experiences of the participants in their professional lives, starting from when they first entered the workforce until the present. The chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of the participants' lived experiences as Black African women within their respective organisations, taking into account their intersecting identities and the significance of their hair. Moreover, the chapter delves into the strategies employed by the participants in navigating professional settings as Black African women, and the techniques which they have developed over the years to manage the appearance of their hair. The life stories of the women are synthesised, and relevant theoretical concepts are identified and discussed.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive analysis of the life stories of Black African women who have taken on professional roles within organisations, focusing on the themes that have emerged and their intersections with theoretical frameworks. This chapter represents the central component of my scholarly contribution, which explores the intricate and multifaceted identity work that Black African women engage in as they navigate their multiple intersecting identities and their hair in professional settings. Additionally, the chapter offers an in-depth account of my personal journey in conducting and compiling this study, including my reflections on the experience. Furthermore, the chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the theoretical and practical implications of the study, along with its limitations and suggestions for future research.

## 1.8. CONCLUSION

There is a growing body of research within the African continent that is dedicated to exploring the concept of identity, with a particular emphasis on identity as it relates to organisations (Ahluwalia, 2001; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Nkomo, 2010; Scheepers & Mahlangu, 2022;

Unterhalter et al., 2004). This area of study is experiencing a considerable amount of expansion and is attracting increased attention, as it is becoming increasingly recognised as a critical aspect of organisational dynamics. A significant portion of scholarship on identity within the African context aligns with Ahluwalia's (2001) argument that problems facing the continent and questions regarding identity are deeply rooted in both its colonial past and postcolonial present. The postcolonial perspective provides a way in which to reveal the intricate nature of history, as the self-determining will of previously marginalised individuals to safeguard their cultures from western encroachment (Dirlik, 1999).

Nkomo's (2011) research underscores a pronounced scarcity of resources on African perspectives in organisational studies, illuminating the marginalisation of non-Western viewpoints. The author further argues the perspectives of racial 'others', such as those from Africa or other non-Western societies, who have traditionally been excluded from organisational frameworks (Nkomo, 1992; Nkomo, 2011). Collins (2004) posits that hegemonic femininities and culturally specific ideals of womanhood, validate and sustain oppressive systems. These systems are further bolstered by intra-female power dynamics (Hamilton et al., 2019). The 'controlling images', particularly those of Black African women, provide an ideological bedrock for racial and gender oppression, perpetuating domination across diverse social statuses (Allen & Lewis, 2016; Collins, 1990, p. 78). Smith et al. (2019) propose a dichotomy of visibility and invisibility for Black women, indicative of their frequent marginalisation.

The development and exploration of Black African women's identity are substantially shaped by their socio-political-historical contexts, which transcend the confines of the organisation. According to Carrim and Nkomo (2016), these contexts can be leveraged to accentuate intersectionality and identity work within organisations, encompassing race, ethnicity, gender, and other facets of identity. The ensuing chapter will delve into the intersectionality prevalent among Black African women of racioethnicity, gender, and social class, as well as the scarce

scholarly work available on topics such as hegemonic femininities, othering, hair bias, lookism, and aesthetic labour within the field of management research. Furthermore, the subsequent chapter will examine the historical contexts of South Africa and Nigeria in terms of settler and non-settler colonialism respectively. Additionally, the chapter will scrutinise the theoretical foundations of the study, including postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity and identity work.

## CHAPTER 2

### TWISTS AND TURNS: HISTORIC CONTEXT, LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The development of Black African women's identity and their engagement in identity work within the unique socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria's settler colonial and non-settler colonial societies and organisations respectively, is a multidimensional and complex process. Considering the intricate historical backgrounds of these countries, including their experiences of colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts, it is essential to adopt a multi-vantage point approach when analysing organisational behaviour and psychology. Moreover, a single organisational or management theoretical perspective is insufficient for fully comprehending the intricacies of one's identity. The investigation of one's self-concept among individuals, particularly those who are frequently marginalised, such as Black African women, in various African countries that have undergone colonial rule, should consider the impact of societal factors, such as power privilege, oppression, and disadvantage (Van Aswegen, 2020). However, it is important to acknowledge that long before the advent of colonialism, patriarchal ideologies were prevalent in numerous societies; however, colonial practices often served to reinforce and intensify these existing patriarchal frameworks (Arneil, 2023; Murthi & Hammell, 2020). The interaction between patriarchal norms and colonial influences engendered a complex system of oppression, the ramifications of which continue to manifest in contemporary societies (Ortner, 2022).

According to Childs and Williams (2014), the question of "who is postcolonial" has been raised, implying that identities have been established and can be classified as postcolonial or not. Nonetheless, this idea does not hold true for all groups or individuals, as postcolonialism encompasses not only the identity aspect, but also the traumatic process of attempting to regain "lost" pre-colonial identities, the futility of such efforts, and the challenge of constructing

a new identity based on this impossibility (Jewsiewicki & Mudimbe, 1993). The identity of the postcolonial becomes increasingly complex due to the dynamic nature of colonial and post-colonial legacies (Castree et al., 2020; Jewsiewicki & Mudimbe, 1993). Both formerly colonised groups and imperial powers are undergoing changes in their respective identities, and it is unfeasible to predetermine or restrict them (Childs & Williams, 2014). Therefore, the research currently being conducted is critical in examining the various identities of Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria, taking into account the influence of colonial and postcolonial socialisation and organisational dynamics on structures and cultures that marginalise, render invisible, and alienate individuals. These factors result in limited opportunities and the internalisation of oppression and exclusion for specific social groups.

This chapter delves into the historical context that shaped the life experiences of the Black African women who participated in the study. Specifically, the chapter explores the colonial, apartheid, and ethnic conflict histories of South Africa and Nigeria respectively. Table 2.1 offers a succinct comparison between South Africa and Nigeria, highlighting the differences between settler and non-settler colonialism respectively. The table provides a clear distinction between these two countries in terms of their racioethnic, gender and social class dynamic.

Table 2.1: comparison between South Africa and Nigeria

<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	<b>NIGERIA</b>
Settler colonialism entails the long-term establishment of European settlers, with the objective of displacing indigenous populations (Englert, 2020; Saito, 2020).	Non-settler colonialism entails the exploitation of resources and exertion of political authority without substantial long-term settler presence (Odukoya, 2018; Veracini,2022).
<b><i>RACIOETHNIC DYNAMICS</i></b>	
Apartheid established a rigid racial stratification system in South Africa. The legacy of racial segregation persists in job	Nigeria contends less with racial issues and more with ethnic divisions. The country comprises numerous ethnic groups with

types, with the country now endeavouring to address racial disparities in employment through legislative measures such as the employment equity act 55 of 1998 and affirmative action policies. These initiatives aim to promote diversity and foster the "rainbow nation" concept in the post-apartheid era (Thomas & Jain, 2004).

longstanding tensions. Strong ethnic identities and regional divides persist, particularly between the Northern and Southern regions. Ethnic and regional factors significantly influence job opportunities and career advancement (Fenske & Zurimendi, 2017).

**GENDER DYNAMICS**

In South Africa there exists a propensity to emphasise gender transformation and address inequities across various sectors. the workplace has witnessed advancements in female representation, with women occupying 30% of parliamentary positions. nevertheless, persistent patriarchal issues continue to present challenges (Morrell, 2005).

Nigeria contends with ongoing gender disparities and a higher prevalence of workplace discrimination based on gender. The country's culture is influenced by robust patriarchal norms, which create impediments for women endeavouring to achieve a balance between their professional and personal lives (Adisa et al., 2019; Akanji et al., 2022).

**SOCIAL CLASS DYNAMICS**

In the South African context, a historical correlation exists between racial identity and socioeconomic position (Clark & Worger, 2011).

Within the Nigerian society, social hierarchies frequently align with ethnic affiliations and regional distinctions(Fenske & Zurimendi, 2017).

The profound effects of colonialism on the indigenous peoples of Africa, particularly on the cultural and identity implications for Black African women, are examined in detail. This chapter sheds light on the dehumanising treatment of Africa by Europe and the internalisation of such discrimination by African society, as well as its manifestation through bureaucratic systems and practices within institutions, organisations, and social groups. Additionally, the chapter

addresses the ongoing, direct perpetuation of discriminatory behaviour towards Black African women, particularly concerning their hair.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I will explore the relevant theoretical and empirical literature from organisation and management studies, as well as social psychology. By analysing this literature, I will provide crucial context for the current research and significantly contribute to the field. As a narrative inquiry study, I will conduct a condensed literature review to situate this research within the broader academic discourse on postcolonialism, intersectionality, embodiment, identity, and identity work in society and organisations. Through this review, I will investigate the intricate experiences of Black African women professionals, scrutinising how their identity construction, navigation, and reworking are shaped by socio-political-historical factors. Furthermore, I will provide a succinct summary of relevant literature to position the research within the academic discourse surrounding concepts such as othering, lookism, aesthetic labour, and hair bias.

## 2.2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

According to Kohn (2012), colonialism can be defined as the act of subjugating one people to another, which constitutes a practice of domination. Colonialism was the exercise of complete control by one country over another through the presence of foreign power in the governing body (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). As part of its historical landscape, colonialism comprises forms of intergroup domination, subjugation, oppression, and exploitation, involving the domination of one group of people over another (Ziltener & Künzler, 2013). It exercised the global power of hegemonic mystification that blurs previous distinctions of race, ethnicity, and social class (Bulhan, 2015), as it asserted that Europeans and their descendants are superior to other human beings in terms of intelligence, power, beauty, and wealth. This phenomenon is known as the colonisation of values. A phenomenon that is characterised not only by political

and economic control, but also by racism, cultural subjugation, and self-aggrandisement on the part of Europeans, leading to the perpetuation of European dominance (Bulhan, 2015).

In nature colonialism embodied a multifaceted approach, incorporating economic, political, cultural, and psychological dimensions (Bulhan, 2015). This was achieved through colonial ideologies and practices that were characterised by multiple power dynamics, which were fundamental to its domination (Adisa, Cooke & Iwowo, 2019). Its primary objective was not only the pursuit of material gain and cultural domination, but also the enhancement of the European self to compensate for the uncertainty and self-doubt that pervades all individuals (Bulhan, 2015). While its economic and political rationale was most evident initially, the cultural and psychological aspects are always present and became more pronounced over time (Ziltener & Künzler, 2013).

In addition, Christianity exerted a profound influence on the formation of colonialist perspectives and their subsequent effects on colonised societies. Helmholz (2017) argues that Christianity significantly shaped the evolution of English common law over centuries, reflecting the religious convictions of legal practitioners in their judicial capacities. This Christian influence extended beyond legal frameworks to encompass broader societal structures in colonised territories (Helmholz, 2017). Moreover, missionaries played a pivotal role in the dissemination of Christianity, and their early access to diverse regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America continues to have far-reaching implications in the political, educational, and economic spheres of these regions in the present day (Becker et al., 2021).

The classical form of colonialism originated in the Americas through European invasion, occupation, and exploitation (Bulhan, 2015; Quijano, 2000). However, according to Bulhan (2015), over time colonialism evolved beyond previous forms that were limited to a national or regional scope and obtained a global reach that penetrated deeper into the psychology and social relations of all people. The period of colonialism in Africa is generally considered to

have occurred between 1800 and the 1960s and is often considered a direct form of imperialism, as it is a subset of imperialism (Maseland, 2018; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Imperialism, which traces its roots to the Latin verb *imperare* meaning "to dominate," has been characterised by the desire of powerful nations to assert their dominance over foreign lands and peoples deemed to be inferior (Arneil, 2023). This concept has evolved over time, from one based on conquest to one that is grounded in the language of civilisation and development (Arneil, 2023). This is why it is commonly stated that 'all colonialism is imperialism, but not all imperialism is colonialism' (Bulhan, 2015; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012; Ziltener & Künzler, 2013).

In the subsequent section I discuss the means by which colonialism delineated African nations and communities.

- *Economy and institutions*

The establishment of rail and road networks which facilitated the integration of African producers and economies into the global economic network, ultimately transformed their traditional modes of production and cultivation (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). These economic systems were often accompanied by coercive labour regimes and cultivation patterns, which were designed to meet the requirements of European-controlled railways, mines, farms, and plantations (Amah, 2023; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). As a result, African producers found themselves subordinated to the demands of colonial economies (Williams, 2003). Furthermore, despite gaining independence from their colonial rulers, most African countries found it extremely difficult to break free from the role of the state that had been perfected by colonial rule, due to the systemic disruption of the indigenous economy and its inherent connection to the external economy of the colonial rulers (Amah, 2023; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). In fact, the legacy of colonialism, which has established extractive institutions that benefit postcolonial elites, continue to have a lasting impact as present structures, practices and the elites are both capable and willing to perpetuate this system indefinitely (Maseland,

2018). Therefore, Africa's colonial past continues to have a lasting effect on domestic institutions, as evidenced by research (Amah, 2023; Maseland, 2018; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012).

- *Knowledge, culture and identity*

The lasting impact of colonial practices, regarding both the identity and manner of colonisation, cannot be ignored in terms of development (Maseland, 2018). The process of moral education was corrupted, leading to the rejection of traditional norms and values through the deliberate dehumanisation of Africa and the devaluation of its cultural heritage (Igboin, 2011; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). The process of suppressing resistance towards colonial domination necessitated the undermining of social connections, native beliefs, principles, affiliations, and indigenous wisdom (Bulhan, 2015). Colonialism expressed a belief in the superiority of the morals and values over those of the colonised rooted in Eurocentrism (Igboin, 2011). This discourse imposed a Eurocentric perspective on the continent, leading to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge and practices (Ahluwalia, 2001; Nkomo, 2010; Olaniyan, 2021). The widespread adoption of Eurocentric values and the subsequent decline of African cultural values have significant negative impacts on Africa and its values (Igboin, 2011). A critical by-product of colonialism that has not been sufficiently examined is how formerly colonised people acquire knowledge, interpret their history, form their understanding of the world, and define themselves (Bulhan, 2015). By taking into account the impact of colonial history on their identity, the current study aims to elucidate the manner in which Black African women perceive and define themselves and their hair.

- *Patriarchy*

The emergence of colonialism in Africa also brought about an ideology that encompassed multifaceted power dynamics. One such dynamic is the phenomenon of patriarchy (Adisa et al., 2020). The patriarchal system is deeply ingrained in many African societies, encompassing norms, values, and customs, making it difficult for many individuals to distinguish between

African culture and patriarchy (Adisa et al., 2020; Bvukutwa, 2019). This system is marked by the control and domination of men over women, children, and property, and women are often economically dependent, subject to violence, domesticated, and limited from decision-making (Bvukutwa, 2019). Utilising the patriarchy framework is valuable for understanding gendered relationships and examining gendered communication behaviours in the public sphere (Nash, 2009).

- Patriarchy in the workplace

In many African countries patriarchy is pervasive in various institutions, including places of worship and the workplace (Adisa et al., 2020). Although there may be similarities between African and Western organisations in terms of male dominance, Kandiyoti (1998) characterises African patriarchy as a classic form of patriarchy that significantly disadvantages women. African societies often have unique cultural specificities that marginalise women and put them at a disadvantage in various aspects of life, particularly the workplace (Adisa et al., 2019; Mudau & Obadire, 2017). The concept of patriarchy in the workplace highlights the systematic organisation of male superiority and female subjugation, and is characterised by values that are male-centred and male-identified (Adisa et al., 2019; Kalabamu, 2006). These power structures perpetuate gender discrimination in the workplace, with certain African countries exhibiting more severe instances of this phenomenon (Adisa et al., 2019; Burke & Richardsen, 2016). The doctrine of patriarchy, which entails the institutionalised subjugation of women, highlights the importance of delving deeper into both scholarly research and indigenous practices within the realm of human resource management (Adisa et al., 2019).

- *Eurocentric standards of beauty*

The notion that individuals of European descent embody the epitome of beauty has become deeply ingrained in society. This belief often leads to Black individuals in particular engaging in harmful practices in an attempt to conform to these standards. These practices include skin lightening, hair straightening, and the use of wigs to conceal their natural skin tone and hair

texture (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the colonisation of beauty (Bulhan, 2015). According to Bulhan (2015), the media, including radio and television programmes, relentlessly broadcast messages promoting European beauty standards, which are reinforced by the material rewards and lavish displays depicted in these programmes. The media has historically excluded Black bodies and beauty from mainstream representation, perpetuating a Eurocentric aesthetic (Perkins et al., 2023). Images presented by the media have contributed to the perpetuation of racial stereotypes by promoting the idea that lighter skin is more desirable and beautiful, and that straight hair is more preferable than curly hair (Ahluwalia, 2001; Nkomo, 2010; Odukoya, 2018). In pursuing a comprehensive understanding of the diverse ways in which colonial history has affected African society, institutions and individuals, the present study endeavours to shed light on the impacts of these influences, specifically on Black African women and their hair-related subjectivity.

Arneil (2023) posits that the underlying objective of colonialism was not to coerce or compel indigenous populations to convert or assimilate through force, but rather to establish conditions that will, over time, encourage voluntary change from within. The impact of colonialism on Africa has been significant, resulting in the rise and evolution of social classes across the continent and its various regions (Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). Its aftermath is extensive and pervasive, with its growth and spread impacting the beliefs, behaviours, and overall life of colonised populations (Bulhan, 2015). This is why the long-lasting effects of colonialism on African communities continue to be a crucial and significant topic that cannot be overlooked or underestimated (Maseland 2018).

The following section presents an overview of two primary forms of colonialism that have impacted the African continent: settler colonialism, particularly as it relates to South Africa, and non-settler colonialism, as it relates to Nigeria.

### 2.2.1. Settler colonialism: South Africa

Settler colonialism involves the forced displacement of indigenous peoples by a group of external settlers who establish a self-governing political body in a new location (Veracini, 2019). It is a phenomenon that has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Settler colonialism's objective was to acquire land so that colonisers could establish permanent settlements and create new communities (Glenn, 2015). The African continent has experienced several instances of settler colonialism, including South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, and Kenya.

Dladla (2018) depicts South Africa in particular as the quintessential example of the philosophical conundrum faced by the native population, who were oppressed during the unjust wars of colonisation. According to the viewpoint of Amaechi and Masoga (2020), colonialism and its related practices are typically viewed as an epoch or period rather than a singular occurrence. This is because epochs comprise various attributes, one of which is the capacity to establish the social and ideological groundwork that forms the basis for constructing social structures (Amaechi & Masoga, 2020). Unlike events, epochs involve a series of interconnected events and consequences that have an impact on social structures (Amaechi & Masoga, 2020). Dladla (2018) and Shubane (1992) argue that the effects of colonialism have not vanished with the withdrawal of colonial rulers from Africa; instead, they have led to the formation of social frameworks that may have surpassed the imaginations of even the most innovative players during the colonial period. These frameworks provide the basis for contemporary social and political activities in South Africa (Amaechi & Masoga, 2020).

Analysts contend that colonialism came to an end with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which severed the connection between the country and its colonial ruler. However, others argue that this view overlooks the issue of economic disparities and thus, the decolonisation process was not complete (Chaka, 2016; Shubane, 1992). Magubane (1997)

posits that this is because South Africa experienced considerable transformations during this time period, from the arrival of the Dutch in 1652 to the establishment of British rule in 1795 and the implementation of apartheid in 1948, which ultimately led to the emergence of distinct racial groups.

Halliday and Feeley (2012) concur and resolve that South Africa's journey to independence as a settler colony was complex and prolonged. Although granted dominion status within the British Empire in 1910, significant British influence persisted until 1961 (Halliday & Feeley, 2012). The five decades between 1910 and 1961 saw a gradual transition from colonial rule to full sovereignty, marked by various political, economic, and cultural changes (Chapman, 1996). During this period, South Africa grappled with issues of national identity, belonging, and the apartheid system, further complicating its path to true independence (Chapman, 1996).

In terms of the emergence of distinct racial groups in 1948, apartheid significantly escalated the principle of White supremacy by heightening the degree of racial and socioeconomic segregation from indigenous South Africans, an idea that had already been established (Clark & Worger, 2011). During the apartheid period the ruling government enacted a series of laws that institutionalised racial segregation and restricted political participation for Black South Africans. These laws prohibited non-Whites from voting and exercising their civil rights (Clark & Worger, 2011). Furthermore, non-White children were mandated to learn in Afrikaans<sup>1</sup> rather than English (Naidu, 2011). The imposition of such language restrictions was intended to maintain control over Black South Africans (Kallaway, 2002; Naidu, 2011). This was done to provide Black South Africans with substandard education through the implementation of the

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<sup>1</sup> A West Germanic language that is primarily spoken in South Africa, Namibia, and to a lesser extent, in Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It originated as a result of interactions between the predominantly Dutch settlers and the enslaved population of the Dutch Cape Colony, where it evolved to have distinctive features over time.

Bantu Education Act<sup>2</sup>, thereby limiting their career prospects to lower-paying jobs (Mariotti, 2012; Naidu, 2011).

The apartheid system engendered significant disparities in power and justice among the diverse racial and ethnic groups within the country (Canham, 2015; Rampele, 2008). The apartheid regime enacted laws that precluded non-White racial groups, women, and individuals with disabilities from gaining access to meaningful employment and training prospects, thereby resulting in the oppression of these groups in all social, economic, and political spheres (Mazibuko & Govender, 2017; Thomas, 1996). Through legislation and policies, the apartheid regime fostered a culture of White dominance and masculinity (Reddy, 2004; Wolpe, 1995). Literature suggests that White, masculine, and patriarchal legacies persist and pose a significant challenge to transformation, as the resistance and oppressiveness within organisations create uncomfortable environments for marginalised groups (Booyesen, 2007; Mabileka & Magubane, 2004; Nkomo, 2011). The resulting climate of injustice, coupled with the belief that only White individuals were destined for success and happiness, deepened the sense of despair among Black South Africans, as they have internalised the notion that their struggles were due to the colour of their skin (Rampele, 2008).

Shackleton and Gwedla (2021) argue that the lasting impact of colonialism and apartheid on South Africa can be observed through three key indicators: the disadvantages faced by indigenous South Africans, the ramifications of both the colonial era and the subsequent apartheid regime, and the persistent manifestations of these historical legacies in contemporary society. South Africa has yet to fully overcome its colonial origins in several crucial ways (Shackleton & Gwedla, 2021). According to Shubane (1992), colonial domination

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<sup>2</sup> The Bantu education system in South Africa was established to further the interests of White supremacy. This system deliberately denied Black individuals the same standard of educational resources and opportunities as their White counterparts. The Bantu education system not only undervalued the historical, cultural, and identity aspects of Black people, but also propagated racist myths and stereotypes through its syllabus and educational materials.

did not come to an end for Black South Africans, but rather took on a different form. In the South African context, as indicated by Idahosa (2018), historical legacies and intersections of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation continue to influence inequalities. Furthermore, the profound influence of colonialism and apartheid on the mental well-being of individuals, can sometimes lead to altering one's physical appearance to conform to Eurocentric aesthetics. This practice is often undertaken to enhance self-esteem and garner more favourable attention (Johnson, 2014; Julien, 2014).

### 2.2.2. Non-settler colonialism: Nigeria

Non-settler colonialism, on the other hand, does not involve the displacement of indigenous peoples, but rather the establishment of control over their land and resources through economic and political means (Odukoya, 2018). In contrast to settler colonialism, under non-settler colonialism, colonisers adopted a more indirect rule system that allowed them to exert control over the colonies from their home countries through appointed bureaucrats (Odukoya, 2018). Examples of this type of colonialism in Africa include Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, and Togo (Saito, 2014).

The British colonial policy was characterised by an autocratic approach, which prevented the people of Nigeria from actively participating in decision-making processes and denied them access to fundamental needs, equality, and social well-being (Jacob, 2012). This policy also led to the implementation of the "indirect rule" system in Nigeria, which exacerbated conflicts and caused tribal tensions and conflicts in the colony (Amah, 2023; Jacob, 2012). Analysts contend that this approach not only intensified ethnic divisions, but also hindered the process of integrating Nigeria's diverse components into a cohesive nation, as the implementation of this form of governance resulted in ethnic groups becoming more separated, enabling traditional leaders to take advantage of their power for personal interests, such as accumulating wealth, land, and establishing patronage networks (Bala, 2019; Siollun, 2021).

According to Amah (2023) and Siollun (2021), the British government imposed a form of governance upon Nigerian ethnic groups without the consideration of the diverse cultural, historical, and socio-political backgrounds which existed in the country. The attempt to merge disparate ethnic groups with varying government structures, cultural norms, and beliefs into a single nation was not adequately prepared for by the groups in question, resulting in significant challenges (Amah, 2023). As a consequence, disparities between social classes arose, culminating in conflicts between these classes (Bala, 2019). In certain instances, specific social strata cooperated with colonisers in their quest for supremacy over the populace, which sometimes entailed compromising the nation's welfare (Ake, 1981; Amah, 2023). Consequently, as the indigenous population of Nigeria battled the British, the concept of regionalism emerged after their defeat, leading to political parties being established along regional lines (Amah, 2023).

During the period extending from 1952 to 1966, the political landscape of Nigeria experienced significant transformation, resulting in the emergence of three distinct political entities comprising of the North, East, and West (Bala, 2019). Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, a shift in power dynamics led to a change in the struggle for independence to a competition for ethnic dominance (Falola, 2009). During this time, both the Eastern and Western regions faced threats to their survival due to the rise of ethnic and sub-ethnic loyalties, while the Northern region was divided along religious lines between Christianity and Islam (Falola, 2009). Garba (2012) asserts that the period in question was marked by heightened politicised ethnicity and resource competition, which exacerbated the strained relationships between ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Nigeria has experienced ongoing ethnic divisions, conflicts, and disputes since gaining independence, which have permeated various aspects of life, including politics, the economy, leadership, religion, and social class (Jacob, 2012). Additionally, Amah (2023) and Bala (2019) argue that the departure of the British left a country with a name but no unifying identity, as

demonstrated by the national divisions along ethnic, class, religious, regional, and political lines. The maintenance of unity within Nigeria was no longer being ensured by the common interests shared by its people, as various ethnic, regional, and political groups had differing justifications for advocating nationalism (Bala, 2019; Garba, 2012). This became evident during the postcolonial era, as the country's efforts towards unity instead led to additional divisions along numerous fault lines (Amah, 2023; Bala, 2019).

Various factors derived from the colonial era were responsible for the leadership shortcomings that emerged during the postcolonial era (Amah, 2023). Ethnic conflicts, often fuelled by both internal and external state rivalries, with power struggles and decisions over economic resources played a crucial role in their development (Falola, 2009), and required coordination among multiple stakeholders for their resolution (Garba, 2012; Jacob, 2012). Despite this, prejudice and animosity were common in the provinces, as diverse ethnic groups began to view one another with suspicion in all areas of interaction (Bala, 2019). The underlying cause of this intense competition and unequal, discriminatory treatment of ethnic groups was colonialism, leading to disparities in educational attainment and exacerbating political and economic divisions between northern and southern Nigeria (Garba, 2012). Hence, the evolving nature of the concept of ethnic dominance is a critical factor when examining colonialism's influence on the sentiments of ethnic minority and majority groups in Nigeria (Amah, 2023; Bala, 2019; Siollun, 2021).

In conclusion, the colonial legacy has complex and multifaceted impacts, and scholars have employed diverse methods to assess these influences and understand the similar and dissimilar long-term consequences of colonialism across different countries (Ziltener & Künzler, 2013). Torgovnick (1990) posits that although racism might be more pronounced under settler colonialism compared to non-settler colonialism, colonialism as a whole has been effective in creating psychological and racial distinctions that aid in the subjugation and domination of indigenous Africans. Despite extensive evidence demonstrating the substantial

influence of history on contemporary institutions, the existing literature offers limited insights into the long-term impact of these institutions (Maseland, 2018; Nunn, 2014).

Additionally, a significant amount of the impact of colonialism was directed towards the socio-economic and political life of Africans, particularly regarding the emergence and institutionalisation of classes and class struggle (Bulhan, 2015; Maseland, 2018). The initial shocks of colonisation resulting in institutional evolution were path-dependent and had long-lasting effects that persisted far beyond the initial event (Igboin, 2011; Maseland, 2018). Consequently, the institutions that an African country has today are heavily influenced by its history, whether colonial or not (Maseland 2018). In many developing countries, the colonial legacy has left a dominant characteristic of bureaucracy within organisational institutions, despite efforts to rehabilitate and reform the administrative structure following postcolonial times (Haque, 1997; Mollah, 2015). In the ensuing section, I will explore the fundamental aspects of bureaucratic organisations.

### 2.3. BUREAUCRATIC ORGANISATIONS

In his seminal work, Weber (1968) underscores the notion that bureaucracy, as an embodiment of rationality's organisational power, serves as an efficient and effective means of controlling individuals. According to Weber (1983) and Trondal and Veggeland (2014), bureaucratic organisations possess internal mechanisms to mould their personnel. These mechanisms include socialisation, which entails behavioural internalisation through the establishment of bureaucratic cultures, discipline that promotes behavioural adaptation through incentive systems, and control, which enforces behavioural adaptation via hierarchical supervision and control (Trondal & Veggeland, 2014). Weber (1983) argues that organisational structures are responsible for shaping the concept of the "organisational man," wherein bureaucratic systems have the ability to operate autonomously from broader societal

influences. The author asserts that the momentum of bureaucratisation is irreversible once established (Weber, 1968).

The iron cage metaphor which has captivated scholars as the pace of bureaucratisation escalated has evolved since Weber's era (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to Ashworth et al. (2009), organisations within the same industry are trapped in an "iron cage" that standardises and homogenises their characteristics. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that the reasons behind bureaucratisation and rationalisation have evolved. The completion of bureaucratisation in both the corporation and the state has resulted in the motivation for organisations to become more uniform, with bureaucracy remaining a predominant organisational structure (DiMaggio, 1988; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). The authors propose to explain the lack of diversity among organisational forms and practices, that is, they ask, 'Why have organisations become so similar?' The concept that best captures the process of uniformity within organisations is isomorphism (Ashworth et al., 2009; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphism is a phenomenon in which members of a group conform to the characteristics of other members subjected to the same environmental conditions. As propounded by Hawley (1968), isomorphism denotes a process of constraint that leads to the similarity of one unit in a population to other units that are subjected to identical environmental conditions. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that at the societal and organisational levels, this perspective posits that workplace characteristics resemble environmental characteristics, leading to the number of organisations in a population being determined by the diversity of organisational forms, which is isomorphic to environmental diversity.

The concept of institutional isomorphism provides a useful framework for understanding the political and ceremonial aspects that are intrinsic to contemporary organisational life (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional isomorphism can occur through three distinct mechanisms, each with its own set of underlying causes. These mechanisms include coercive isomorphism, which arises from political influence and issues of legitimacy, mimetic

isomorphism, which results from standard responses to uncertainty, and normative isomorphism, which is associated with professionalisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism arises from political influence and legitimacy concerns, which are the formal and informal pressures imposed by societal expectations on organisations, as well as the pressure exerted by the organisation itself for conformity and collusion (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). According to the authors, coercive isomorphism takes place when organisations are subjected to formal and informal pressures from external entities, including other organisations upon which they are dependent and the cultural expectations within their societal context. Such pressures may manifest as coercion, persuasion, or the extension of invitations to engage in collusion (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The adoption of a mimetic culture refers to when the organisational environment creates symbolic uncertainty, which can result in organisations promoting imitation and uniformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Mimetic behaviour arises from the use of uncertainty as a powerful motivation to imitate (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012), while normative isomorphism is linked with professionalism and serves as the institutional standard for what is considered professional (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, DiMaggio, 1988; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). Normative isomorphism results when companies believe a certain "way of doing" is the norm and implement specific disclosure styles because they believe it is the norm, or because it has always been done that way. This often occurs when practices are carried out by individuals from the same profession or training (Du Toit & Esterhuyse, 2021). Mimetic and normative isomorphism are behavioural phenomena that are exhibited at the managerial level within an organisation and are not typically made as conscious strategic choices but rather are assumed as a matter of course within the organisation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1988).

Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework serves as an additional mechanism fostering homogeneity within organisations. This framework suggests that institutions draw and recruit individuals whose attributes align with their organisational culture.

Employees whose characteristics differ from the organisational culture demonstrate an increased likelihood of leaving the organisation. This phenomenon results in a workforce that tends toward homogeneity in specific behavioural dimensions, subsequently shaping organisational structures and processes (Schneider, 1987). This homogeneity arises from the process of individuals being attracted to, chosen by, and persisting in organisations that are compatible with and similar to their personal attributes.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) as cited in DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that rationalised societies and large organisations control social spheres, creating uniformity and a focus on institutional norms. This leads to greater compliance with institutional rules and legitimisation by the society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The degree of uniformity within the organisational field can be assessed through a decline in heterogeneity and diversity, which serves as a marker of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to the theories of Meyer and Rowan (1977), as well as DiMaggio and Powell (1983), it is anticipated that this uniformity and passive conformity will prevail over heterogeneity, and diverse culture within organisations. Subsequently institutional isomorphism serves to legitimise the institutional research as a scientific theory that predicts a prevalence of uniformity and conformity, rather than diversity and strategic behaviour within organisations (Aksom & Tymchenko, 2020). In 'The Iron Cage' DiMaggio and Powell (1983) change the inquiry from the source of organisational diversity to the exploration of organisational similarity and homogeneity. The relationship between institutionalisation, the conformity of social demands over technical needs, the continued value of this conformity, and uniformity is a crucial element of organisational behaviour (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). Organisations strive to legitimise themselves to persist, which often involves complying with coercive, normative, and mimetic institutional demands. This process results in organisations and its members becoming alike, as they adopt the same socially significant practices (Aksom & Tymchenko, 2020; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This homogenisation of the environment contributes to the overall similarity of organisations within that field (Aksom &

Tymchenko, 2020). Moreover, the extent to which organisations are expected to adopt methods and systems that are widely accepted by relevant professional circles and conform to established professional standards is significantly influenced by the professional organisations that shape these norms by offering instruction and training to their members (Ashforth et al., 2009). Drawing on the tenets of bureaucracy and institutional isomorphism, and attraction-selection-attrition which accentuate how organisations mould norms of conformity and professionalism within their framework, the incorporation of these concepts underscores the organisational cultures and behaviours that press Black women to conform to Eurocentric standards of professionalism and aesthetics. In the subsequent section, we will explore the perception of professionalism within organisational contexts.

### 2.3.1. Perceived professionalism

The impact of professional communities on organisational features, as well as the collective consequences of professional expectations, is generally referred to as normative forces (Ashforth et al., 2009). Adisa et al. (2019) and Ashforth and Fried (1988) propose that individuals conform to workplace norms and expectations through organisational socialisation, past work experiences, and various other factors, such as cultural beliefs. The topic of professionalism has remained consistent over time, yet the definition of the term has undergone a transformation (Martimianakis et al., 2009). Professionalism, as defined by McCluney et al., (2021), refers to an individual's specialised knowledge, character, and ability to meet the technical and social demands of their profession, and is bestowed upon those who embody the values and norms of their professional community. Professionalism encompasses a multifaceted set of qualities that extend beyond a simple list of appropriate behaviour, dress, and demeanour, to include elements influenced by societal, institutional, historical, and contextual expectations (Martimianakis et al., 2009). The significance of developing the "appropriate" or "desirable" professional qualities increased with the emergence of professions in society and remains a critical consideration in literature today (Martimianakis et al., 2009). Illustrating these values and norms permeates not only one's professional output, but also

their personal presentation, encompassing modes of communication, physical appearance, and displaying interests that signify one's affiliation with the profession (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; McCluney et al., 2021).

Being perceived as professional is highly desirable for employees in white-collar occupations, as it can result in greater respect, status, power, and access to networks in their field (Ashcraft, 2013; Ibarra, 1999). It is worth noting that individuals who share similar characteristics with most of their professional peers tend to be perceived as more professional (Ashcraft, 2013; Ibarra, 1999; McCluney et al., 2021). Moreover, McCluney et al. (2021) posit that implicit assumptions of professionalism, rooted in Eurocentric cultural norms, play a role in shaping evaluations of others in the workplace. According to Bartol (1979) and Swailes (2003), the efficacy of various measures in gauging the attitudinal or ideological professionalism exhibited by employees or their perceptions thereof has been a subject of debate. As Bartol (1979) points out, such assessments may be arbitrary and could account for some of the discrepancies observed in research involving professionals. Swailes (2003) states that the classical conceptions of professionalism, characterised by a strong sense of identity with one's profession and professional activities, continue to hold significance in contemporary professional life. However, it is essential to consider how these traditional views are complemented by a social element that incorporates skills, competencies, and technical knowledge (Swailes, 2003).

O'Sullivan et al. (2023) posit that professional identity is characterised as an individual who thinks, acts, and feels as if they are a member of the profession. According to Nagatomo (2012), the establishment of professional identity is a significant bond between individuals and their environment, which is subject to constant change and formation. According to Bell (1990), personal identity is a construct that encompasses your core values, significant attachments, and life roles. Furthermore, it comprises the inner resources or qualities that make you a distinct and evolving individual. One essential aspect of identity is cultural affiliation, which

infuses life with meaning and imparts a feeling of belonging (Bell, 1990). Garrett (2004) defines physical identity as the lived physical experiences that shape the subjectivities of members of a particular social group. In the case of women, physical identity encompasses discussions around gender and the body, which impact their social behaviour and sense of self (Garrett, 2004).

The workplace provides an environment where individuals present themselves, which includes an element of survival. In such a context, debates arise over whether hegemonic workplaces allow employees to present their authentic selves, or whether they are conforming to the norms of the organisation (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005; Sheridan, 2013). Integrating personal, physical, and professional identities into organisational discourse on professionalism offers an opportunity to examine the debate surrounding hegemonic workplaces and the question of whether Black African women are able to express their authentic selves, in terms of their identities and hairstyles, or whether they are expected to conform to Eurocentric norms within the organisation. Wenger (1998) emphasises the dynamic process of identification as a crucial aspect of social connectedness, which is cultivated through daily interactions and experiences and involves both an active participation in the environment and recognition of oneself as a member of the workplace community. As genuine members of their workplaces, employees' individual trajectories play a crucial role in shaping their perceptions of colleagues and their work environment. The process of boundary crossing, as described by Wenger (1998), is fundamental in fostering connections between their occupations, as well as personal and professional identities. Furthermore, negotiation is a critical component of identity formation (Atewologun & Sealy, 2016; Slay & Smith, 2011; Wenger, 1998). Negotiability encompasses power dynamics and reflects an individual's position within their organisational community (Atewologun & Sealy, 2016; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). However, when the beliefs and values held by an individual's social group are not aligned with their professional identity, personal identity can sometimes intertwine with aspects of their professional identity (Sheridan, 2013). Therefore, the significance of allowing individuals to participate in, accept accountability for,

and influence the meanings that are meaningful cannot be overstated (Wenger, 1998). The integration of these aspects significantly influences one's self-definition and how others perceive them in a particular profession (Slay & Smith, 2011).

Brown-Iannuzzi et al. (2013) note that individuals from underrepresented groups frequently grapple with the challenge of adapting their self-presentation in order to align with professional norms. This alteration may grant them entry into professional settings and enable them to be perceived as a competent professional (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2013; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). This point is supported by Koval and Rosette (2021) and Rosette and Dumas (2007), who highlight the specific pressures faced especially by Black women to conform to Eurocentric standards of professionalism and beauty. This conformity can extend to chemically straightening their hair in order to meet these standards (Summers et al., 2020). By doing so, Black women are more likely to receive job offers and job stability, as they appear more "professional" (Koval & Rosette, 2021; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). The implications of perceived professionalism expose the hegemonic and Eurocentric influences that shape the norms of professionalism within organisations. This, in turn, exacerbates the marginalisation of Black women and compels them to conform to these standards, without taking into account the effort required to meet them. In the subsequent section, I will delve into literature depicting the experiences of Black women professionals in the workplace.

#### 2.4. BLACK WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN THE WORKPLACE

Research pertaining to Black women professionals in corporate settings is notably scarce in comparison to the expanding body of literature on women in management. These individuals are frequently categorised either as 'women' or 'Blacks,' with the dual classification of 'Black women' frequently going unacknowledged (Bell, 1990; Nkomo, 1988; Rosette et al., 2018). This is supported by the concept of intersectional invisibility (Crenshaw, 1989). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) hypothesis asserts that intersectional invisibility arises in

individuals who belong to multiple subordinate identity groups, such as Black people and women. The phenomenon of intersectional invisibility has traditionally been attributed to a dual deficiency in recognising Black women as both women and Black individuals—that is, it arises from the fact that the archetypal woman is typically envisioned as a White woman, while the archetypal Black person is usually envisioned as a Black man (Coles & Pasek, 2020). According to Coles and Pasek (2020), intersectional invisibility can also arise from a failure to distinguish between Black women and Black men which subsequently overlooks the unique, intersectional experiences of racism and sexism that can sometimes distinguish Black women's experiences from those of Black men (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectional invisibility provides insight into the manner in which Black women, who occupy the intersection of racism and sexism, may experience harm when their unique experiences as Black women go unrecognised (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

In particular, the influence of gender, which encompasses the socially constructed differences between men and women, as well as the beliefs and identities that perpetuate such disparities and inequalities, is pervasive within all organisations (Acker, 2006). Historically, gender was closely associated with class in many workplaces, with managers predominantly comprising of men, while lower-level white-collar employees were predominantly women (Acker, 2006). The attitudes and biases surrounding gender and sexuality continue to influence class relations within the workplace, impacting factors such as supervisory practices and wage-setting processes. While secretaries, clerks, servers, and care providers are still predominantly women, there has been an increase in the presence of women in organisational class structures, mirroring the distribution of men (Acker, 2006).

This dynamic is reinforced through the utilisation of gender specific qualities to maintain the existing gender hierarchy (Charlebois, 2011). Hamilton et al. (2019) bring attention to the lack of attention given to the influence of gender specific qualities and femininity in perpetuating

social domination, by delving into the idea of women who occupy unmarked categories where power and privilege are prevalent.

Hamilton et al. (2019) acknowledge Collins' (1990, 2004) intersectional perspective, which is based on the concept of the 'matrix of domination'. This viewpoint sheds light on the advantages enjoyed by those who embody "hegemonic femininity" and the reinforcement of oppressive axes, rather than solely focusing on gender (Collins, 2004; Hamilton et al., 2019). By examining this social position as actively complicit in the perpetuation of inequality, a more comprehensive understanding of the intersections of power and identity is achieved (Collins, 2004).

Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that social inequality is not attributable to a single axis of discrimination, such as race, gender, or socio-economic status, but rather emerges from the interaction of multiple axes of differentiation. The authors assert that racism, sexism, and classism are not inherent, but instead acquire significance in relation to one another within the context of power relationships (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Theories within the realm of sociology utilise a comprehensive framework to meticulously examine the role that gender plays in shaping and being shaped by various social elements, such as institutions, historical occurrences, and cultural norms (Glenn, 2000). The concept of gender encompasses societal distinctions that are anchored in physical characteristics, cultural practices, and historical subjugation and discrimination, and are perpetuated by deeply held beliefs.

The concept of gender hierarchy is a key area of investigation in current studies on femininities, however, the intersections of race and class with femininities are often overlooked (Hamilton et al., 2019). Overlooking the presence of femininity in hegemonic power relations is a result of adopting a mono-categorical approach to gender. Furthermore, the widely held cultural notion of feminine beauty, which places a premium on bloneness, has been

racialised, thereby disqualifying women with darker hair, skin, and eyes, and relegating them to the margins (Collins 2004; Cottom 2019; Hamilton et al., 2019).

The concept of hegemonic femininity is characterised by the expression of feminine qualities that work to sustain and sanction a hierarchical and mutually supportive relationship with hegemonic masculinity, as governed by social disapproval, thereby extending men's predominance and women's subjection (Budgeon, 2014). Thus, the current era does not necessarily mandate the use of force or coercion; rather, it is the manner in which discourse, systems, and practices are established within institutional and organisational frameworks that results in the collective conformity of individuals (Hamilton et al., 2019).

According to Smith and Nkomo (2021), Black women remain in the shadows. Regardless of whether they are designated as "women" or "Blacks," they frequently face challenges in the workplace that their colleagues seem to be unaware of, which often leads to their contributions being overlooked. As a result, they may experience subtle or invisible forms of discrimination (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The challenge that frequently presents itself to Black women is to successfully traverse the three interconnected cultural realms of race, gender, and class, (Bell, 1990). Furthermore, research suggests that Black women face significant obstacles in education and professional settings due to the pervasive influence of racism, sexism, and classism (Bell, 1990; Dickens & Chavez, 2018). For centuries, those in positions of power have imposed identities and labels upon women of colour, effectively denying them the opportunity for self-definition (Nayak, 2015). The 'angry black woman' stereotype, which can be traced back to the early 19th century, originated from white males in blackface portraying African individuals in an unflattering and masculine manner for the entertainment of predominantly white audiences (Kent, 2021). This stereotype has persisted, resulting in women of colour who express anger, speak loudly, or exhibit overt hostility being frequently categorised as 'aggressive', 'intimidating', or 'overly emotional' (Kent, 2021). Research by Smith & Nkomo (2021) has revealed that Black women professionals

have developed the capacity to maintain positive self-perceptions, despite constant exposure to societal messages depicting them as manipulative, domineering, angry, harsh, confrontational, and ranging from sexually promiscuous to unattractive. These stereotypical portrayals continue to endure in contemporary society, showing minimal signs of subsiding (Smithl & Nkomo, 2021). These stereotypes and barriers can have a detrimental impact on their mental health, potentially intensifying their psychological distress.

Given the prevalent societal pressure to present a particular image, it is not uncommon for individuals to feel compelled to exhibit a persona that they believe will be more palatable to others (Dickens & Chaves, 2018; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). The concept of intersectional invisibility is relevant in this context, as individuals with multiple subordinate identities often do not conform to the prototype of their respective subordinate groups. One of the factors contributing to this distress is linked to identity, particularly the multiple intersecting identities that Black women embody (Bell, 1990; Smith & Nkomo, 2021; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Koval & Rosette, 2021). This may lead to identity negotiation among Black women which is a multifaceted process that holds great importance, due to its occurrence within the daily lives of these individuals (Dickens & Chavez). In spite of this, the professional identity of present-day Black career women plays a vital role in their core identity (Bell, 1990). As a collective group, they are driven career women who invest substantial time and energy into shaping their professional personas (Bell, 1990). To succeed in their professional roles, it is essential for Black women to develop proficiency in negotiating their identities, which entails adopting effective tactics to navigate negative stereotypes that may arise (McDowell, 2008). Additionally, research by Dickens and Chaves (2018) and McDowell (2008) emphasises the extent to which senior-level Black women leaders must compromise and negotiate their identities within the workplace environment. The findings of Bell (1990) suggest that although the attainment of professional roles and the bicultural life experience can serve as a source of empowerment for Black women, it may also give rise to psychological distress. The present study incorporates the concepts of intersectional invisibility and hegemonic femininities to

highlight the subordinate status of Black women relative to Black men and White women in the professional sphere. These individuals confront discrimination on account of their race and gender, resulting in the need for continuous identity recalibration, despite attaining notable achievements in their careers. In the subsequent section, I will delve deeper into the process of othering.

#### 2.4.1. Othering

The process of othering was initially introduced within the context of Section 1.4.1 postcolonial theory, where it was first conceptualised as a theoretical framework (Jensen, 2011; Spivak, 1985). According to Spivak (1985), the process of othering, which involves classifying individuals based on race, class, and gender, and other social categories creates and sustains social divisions between the dominant and subordinate groups. This division is established through the mutual opposition of desirable and undesirable characteristics between the self or in-group and the other or out-group, leading to an unequal relationship (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brons, 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, the process of othering involves creating a distance between the self and the other, but it does not always involve an affirmation of self-superiority and other-inferiority (Brons, 2015; Canales, 2000; Canales, 2010). As a result, the other is perceived as a radically alien entity (Brons, 2015).

Canales (2000) distinguishes between two categories of othering: exclusionary othering, which utilises power embedded in the relationship between domination and subordination, and inclusionary othering, which utilises power to develop coalitions and promote transformation (Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Canales, 2000). The process of othering is complex and multifaceted thus encompassing various forms of social differentiation (Crenshaw, 1989). The concept of othering can be combined with intersectionality or interlocking systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, Collins, 1989). Specifically, the ramifications for individuals who are subjected to exclusionary othering are substantial, including marginalisation, alienation, diminished opportunities, and internalised oppression and exclusion (Canales, 2000;

Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1989). Conversely, the consequences of experiencing inclusionary othering are significant, including inclusion, consciousness-raising, and a sense of community (Canales, 2000).

In various academic disciplines, the notions of 'the other,' 'othering,' and 'otherness' have become established as a means of contrasting with 'the self' (Brons, 2015; Canales, 2010; Crang, 1998). Othering is a nuanced interpersonal process that is contingent upon the delineation and differentiation of identities ((Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Canales, 2000). On two levels, the concept involves the perception that identity construction is controlled by those in power, and that identity formation can be understood as a binary relationship between the self/first and the other (Fielder & Catalano, 2017; Jensen, 2011). Additionally, the theory of identity formation is inherent in the concept of othering, which posits that subordinate individuals are granted and restricted to subject positions as 'others' in discourse (Fielder & Catalano, 2017; Jensen, 2011). Furthermore, it is often societal processes, systems, and structures that construct and sustain the identities of individuals defined as others ((Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Canales, 2000).

The significance of othering lies in its capacity to illuminate how power structures and systems shape agency and influence, and how socio-political-historical symbolic meanings delimit the avenues for negotiating identity (Canales, 2000; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Jensen, 2011; Lister, 2004). The accusation of othering carries both psychological and political implications, as it involves the creation and maintenance of power dynamics between groups (Brons, 2015). The concept of "othering" is grounded in several philosophical and theoretical tenets: (a) those wielding power are those who possess the ability to form an identity, and (b) the construction of these identities represents a separate relationship between the self and others (Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Jensen, 2011). The "other" is always inferior and subordinated (Fielder & Catalano, 2017; Jensen, 2011). Spivak (1985) and Wren (2001) posit that racism, sexism, and classism are intrinsic to othering, as othering constitutes an acknowledgement and a

response to these forms of discrimination. Regardless of whether the dominant group comprises a numerical majority, it employs a simplistic method to determine which individuals or groups constitute a subordinate group, imputing inferior traits to these groups, and justifying its superiority over the subordinate (Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Jensen, 2011). Furthermore, with regard to the overlap of race, gender, and class, Black African women often face a double and, in some cases, triple marginalisation that renders them excluded from mainstream practices, from their formative years and into adulthood (Chaney et al., 2021; Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022; Wright, 2010).

The concept of othering is employed to highlight the complex power dynamics that arise between groups, as a result of socio-political-historical factors, which are further intensified by intersectionality or overlapping systems of oppression. Moreover, othering emphasises that even if the dominant group constitutes a numerical minority, it determines which individuals belong to a subordinate group and ascribes inferior traits to these groups, thus justifying its superiority over the subordinate. This approach facilitates a more thorough understanding of the dynamics involved in the exclusion and othering of Black African women, particularly in professional settings.

#### 2.4.2. Stereotypes and discrimination

Stigma connotes a deeply disgraceful characteristic that implicates an individual, resulting in their adherence to the common judgment regarding their own identity (Goffman, 1963). Stigma imputes that a person is discredited and unacceptable, deviating from the typical people with whom they habitually interact (Abbey et al., 2011). Stigma is a highly damaging personal phenomenon that has been the subject of scholarly advocacy for a more accurate term to convey the depth of public disapproval of discriminatory and stigmatising behaviour, similar to racism (Chidrawi, Greeff, Doak & Temane, 2016; Deacon & Stephney, 2007; Goffman, 1963). The manifestation of stigma is a direct result of societal constructs, often in the form of acts of social domination, discrimination, and marginalisation, which lead to the labelling of certain

individuals or groups as "undesirable" (Chidrawi, Greeff, Doak & Temane, 2016). Individuals generally exhibit a more favourable response to those they perceive as members of their own group compared to individuals from other groups. This predisposition constitutes the psychological basis for bias, stereotyping, and discriminatory behaviours (Davidio et al., 2008). According to Cvetkovska et al. (2021) and Schmitt et al. (2014), individuals who belong to disadvantaged groups and those with stigmatised characteristics are likely to experience significant negative impacts on their self-esteem due to the social stigma associated with their identity. This is because tolerance involves disapproval of the target's actions, and targets may avoid engaging in certain behaviours or disclosing stigmatised aspects to avoid negative evaluations from others. However, such efforts to conceal one's identity can lead to a decrease in positive self-feelings (Cvetkovska et al., 2021). A target typically refers to an individual, often people of colour, who are frequently subjected to racist prejudice and discrimination, which can manifest in both subtle and explicit forms. These experiences often result in feelings of isolation, pain, and distress for the affected individuals (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2019).

According to Goffman (1963), as a strategy for combating stigmatisation, Black women may choose to "cover and shift" by downplaying and concealing their stigmatised identity in order to protect their social standing. This may involve adjusting their behaviour, such as modifying their speech, to mask stigmatised physical characteristics (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Hamilton et al. (2019) argue however that only a select few women from any racial or socioeconomic background can meet the stringent physical requirements set by elite agency gatekeepers. The author states that the standards do not necessarily preclude the success of a handful of women of colour who conform to Eurocentric beauty standards, which the author refers to as 'high-end ethnics' which these individuals possess: a body, hair, and aura similar to that of a White woman, but their skin is dark (Hamilton et al., 2019, p.329). While this approach may provide greater comfort to others in the workplace, it comes at a cost, as Black women must continually navigate between their physical and professional identities, in order to present an image that demonstrates their competence and credibility among their peers (Rosette &

Dumas, 2007). Furthermore, in relation to natural physical traits such as hair, even when Black women adopt hairstyles that are considered professional when worn by other racial groups, the appearance and texture of their hair can still be perceived as unprofessional (Dawson et al., 2019), given that the inherent nature of Black women's hair is typically characterised by woolly and tightly curled textures (Rosette & Dumas, 2007).

In particular, Black women face both gender and racial stigma, leading to anticipated double jeopardy (Chaney et al., 2021). Chaney, Sanchez and Remedios (2021) highlight the profound impact that experiences of discrimination and prejudice can have on individuals who possess stigmatised identities, affecting their interpretations and understandings of social environments and interactions. Stereotyping individuals with intersectional membership is a detrimental act that involves incorrectly assuming that they belong to a negatively labelled and disrespected group, despite their genuine relationship with that group (Wigger, 2019). The concept of intersectional stereotyping, which arises from the interaction of racial, gender, and religious biases, provides a framework for understanding how intersectionality manifests in media representation and discourse in practice (Wigger, 2019). Those who possess stigmatised identities are aware of both external factors that can predict experiences of discrimination (Chaney, Sanchez & Remedios, 2021).

More recently, there has been increased recognition of the tangible consequences of discrimination and stigma, particularly for marginalised social groups (Abbey et al., 2011). The media play a crucial role in both promoting and combating stereotyping and discrimination (Abbey et al., 2011). Furthermore, intersectional stereotyping allows for the examination of media representations where individuals with multiple social identities are portrayed in multiple narratives of difference that intersect and result in a racist portrayal of Section 2.4.1. Othering assigned by society ((Baikovich & Wasserman, 2020; Wigger, 2019). Power imbalances can hinder discriminated individuals from asserting their status, leading to further discrimination. It is important to acknowledge our shared humanity and diminish the perception of division to

minimise stigma and prejudice (Abbey et al., 2011). Negative societal attitudes and discrimination towards individuals with stigmatised identities can result in self-stigmatisation, leading to feelings of shame and a decreased sense of self-efficacy, as stated by Naidoo et al. (2007). Furthermore, the awareness of societal devaluation and the embodiment of a stigmatised identity result in experiences of social identity threats (McGonagle & Barnes-Farrell, 2014). The incorporation of intersectional invisibility, hegemonic femininities, othering, and the stereotyping and discriminating of Black women serves as the cornerstone for comprehending the difficulties and predicaments that Black women confront in the workplace, as a result of their multiple identities. An illustration of this is the prejudice directed towards Black women's hair, which is linked to assessments of their competence and professionalism. These evaluations are often hindered in professional settings by not only their superiors, but also by those they supervise, those in leadership positions, and those responsible for assessing and promoting them. By integrating these concepts, we gain insight into the experiences of Black women and how their intersecting identities and hair appearance are perceived. In the following section, I will delve into the concepts of lookism and aesthetic labour to further elucidate the expectations that organisations have regarding the appearance of these women in professional settings.

#### 2.4.3. Hair Bias

Given the cultural significance that women attach to their hair, it is imperative to delve deeper into its sociology, symbolism, and gendered implications (Manning, 2010). Furthermore, the seemingly innocuous nature of hair belies its symbolic importance and capacity to challenge professional norms (Allen & Lewis, 2016). According to Weitz (2004), hair is a social construct that is intimately linked to women's identities. Weitz (2004) expands on this by characterising hair as a component of a broader language of physical presentation that communicates essential information about us, whether we intend it to or not. From a tender age, women and girls are socialised to develop an emotional connection with their hair, as it often serves as a primary medium through which their identity is conveyed to others (Manning, 2010). Women's

hair can function as a form of everyday resistance against the social norms imposed by dominant cultures and can contribute to a sense of group identity (Manning, 2010). Despite the growing acceptance and visibility of natural Black hairstyles in contemporary society, these styles continue to be subject to stigmatisation and discrimination (Johnson et al., 2017). A study that asked participants to associate specific hairstyles with particular traits and stereotypes revealed that straight, Eurocentric hair was linked to femininity, cleanliness, and professionalism, while the afro was associated with being radical and wild, and dreadlocks were connected with being nasty, ghetto, and drug use (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013; Kennedy, 2020).

According to the 'good hair' study, negative attitudes towards Black hair and hairstyles manifest as implicit and explicit bias (Johnson et al., 2017). Implicit bias refers to damaging stereotypes ingrained within an individual's subconscious that are automatically associated with a specific social group (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2017). Explicit bias refers to the conscious formation of adverse beliefs and attitudes toward a particular racial group (Daumeyer et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2017). According to Allen and Lewis (2016), both implicit and explicit biases can result in the subordination of the ethnic gender identity of Black women for the benefit of larger, White, male-dominated institutions. The continued exposure to straight, Eurocentric hair as the standard of beauty and professional aesthetics, the lack of representation of textured hair in mainstream culture, and the negative stereotypes associated with natural Black hair, have further perpetuated an automatic 'othering' of images of Black-textured hair (Johnson et al., 2017; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Rosette et al., 2018).

As a result, women of African ancestry in an organisational context have to control and suppress their ethnic identity, particularly with regard to their hairstyles, in order to advance in their careers (Allen & Lewis, 2016). This may involve adopting more Eurocentric hairstyles and suppressing natural hairstyles that are perceived to be unprofessional (Koval & Rosette, 2020; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Summers et al., 2020). Accordingly, the hairstyle options for

Black women in the workplace are shaped by the pressure to conform to the dominant standards of professionalism and attractiveness (Opie & Phillips, 2015; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Trusty et al., 2019). As Koval and Rosette (2020) note, natural hairstyles may evoke questions about the competence of Black women. The manner in which job seekers present themselves has been demonstrated to impact how recruiters perceive their professionalism, with appearance serving as a critical factor in this regard (Koval & Rosette, 2020; Donahoo & Smith, 2022).

A study on early career Black women found that hair bias towards textured hair can impede upward career mobility in the workplace (Winkler, 2018). Black women are often required to exhibit strength and resilience, simply by wearing their hair in its natural form (Johnson & Bankhead, 2013). Hair bias and race-based hair discrimination encompass negative mindsets and stereotypes, whether conscious or unconscious, regarding Black women's hair and hairstyles (Dawson, Karl & Peluchette, 2019; McGill Johnson et al., 2017). Hair bias is a recurring form of oppression in which hair texture or hairstyle is utilised as a basis for targeting specific groups of people (Stowe, 2019; Summers et al., 2020). Research on workplace grooming policies and bias demonstrates how whiteness is often attributed to workplace standards for what is considered attractive and professional (Rudman & McLean, 2016). In the workplace, discrimination towards Black women can originate not only from a superior towards a subordinate, but also from a subordinate towards a superior (Allen & Lewis, 2016). This creates a dilemma for Black women, as their competence and professionalism are often undermined by those who report to them in leadership roles and those who evaluate and promote them (Allen & Lewis, 2016; Brake, 2013).

Research conducted by Davis Tribble et al. (2019) examining how Black women interpret and cope with messages about their hair and skin colour revealed that certain participants had unknowingly internalised Western beauty standards to a greater extent than they had previously recognised, with this self-awareness being precipitated by specific life events.

According to Norwood (2018), the persistent exposure to messages that deem the natural Black feminine aesthetic as unattractive leads to their internalisation over time. Nkimbenz et al. (2023) further notes that absorbing negative biases can result in intensified and prolonged stress reactions. Individuals may internalise unfavourable stereotypes associated with natural hair, such as 'nappy', 'kinky', 'unprofessional', or 'bad hair', whilst straightened hair is deemed 'good hair'. This internalisation could ultimately influence their perceptions of beauty and contribute to stress (Nkimbenz et al., 2023). This internalised racism has a detrimental impact on the psyche, with the most severe forms of this phenomenon often perpetuated by one's own family or by individuals upon themselves or others who possess similar physical traits (Norwood, 2018). Consequently, the Association of Black Psychologists has categorised hair discrimination as an "aesthetic trauma", emphasising its profound and detrimental effects on mental health (Nkimbenz et al., 2023).

This study aims to investigate the complex experiences of Black African women professionals in relation to their hair subjectivity, taking into account the socio-political-historical factors that influence their identity construction and navigation. Scholars of intersectionality emphasise the interconnected nature of multiple social identities and the inherent oppression present in each of these identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990). Moreover, the impact of colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts goes beyond just racial oppression, and the study will also take into account other oppressive experiences, such as those faced by girls and women (Davis Tribble et al., 2019). Incorporating the concept of professionalism within bureaucratic organisations requires examining the position of Black women professionals within these structures due to their intersecting identities, which concurrently contribute to their lived experiences (Davis Tribble et al., 2019). The study will investigate how these interconnected systems of oppression - gender, racial, and class - have influenced the participants' perspectives on the messages they have received regarding their physical appearance, particularly their hair (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Davis Tribble et al., 2019; Johnson &

Bankhead, 2014; Opie & Phillips, 2015). In the following section, a more comprehensive explanation of how hair bias manifests in organisations will be provided by discussing lookism.

#### 2.4.4. Lookism

Lookism is a form of discrimination that is based on an individual's physical appearance, and it is often considered a prejudicial "aestheticism" or "physicalism" (Tietje & Cresap, 2005). According to Minerva (2017), discrimination against individuals who do not conform to socially and/or psycho-biologically prescribed standards of attractiveness is often referred to as 'lookism', in order to draw parallels with other prevalent forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, and ageism. This type of discrimination has been identified as a potential battlefield in employment practices, and it has been noted that even if an individual's race and gender do not disqualify them from being considered for a job, their physical appearance may still be a factor in their exclusion from the applicant pool (Oaff, 2003). According to Tietje and Cresap (2005), lookism refers to the preconceived notions that people have about others based solely on their appearance, and it has become an increasingly important issue in the discussion of equal opportunity. According to Ayto (1999, p. 485), lookism refers to prejudice and discrimination where individuals perceived as beautiful are afforded the most opportunities. According to DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2011), lookism is prevalent as early as in the classroom, where teachers form impressions of students based on their racial and ethnic appearance, and students are subsequently stereotyped. The authors contend that these stereotypical perceptions not only result in unequal treatment in the classroom, leading to unequal access to educational opportunities, but also serve as a detrimental form of gatekeeping by teachers (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011). Lookism increases the discrimination and othering that people encounter, for instance Granleese and Sayer (2006) posit that the existence of "lookism" in the workplace is a phenomenon that represents an additional prejudice faced by female employees beyond gendered ageism. The authors further note that older women in organisational settings, are disadvantaged by the dual jeopardy of age and gender discrimination, a predicament that men do not encounter (Granleese & Sayer,

2006). Mahajan (2007) further adds that the prevalence of lookism has been found to contribute to the overall levels of racism and discrimination that people encounter (Mahajan, 2007). It is important to be aware of the potential for lookism to influence employment decisions and to be cautious about relying on cultural norms of appearance when making judgments about others (Nevaer, 2003; Warhust, van den Broek & Nickson, 2012).

Nevaer (2003) states that making judgments based on appearance is a trait that was developed by early humans as a survival mechanism against prehistoric dangers. Although this characteristic was hardwired into the human brain, it now poses a threat to the survival of the human species, as people engage in acts of discrimination on a regular basis (Nevaer, 2003). According to Minerva (2017), the prevalence of unrecognised discriminatory behaviours towards those perceived as unattractive by the majority of individuals, despite the pervasiveness of lookism, is a commonly observed phenomenon. The media's portrayal of beauty and the way in which individuals perceive their appearance at times intersect with public practices and societal standards of beauty (Nevaer, 2003). Cavico, Muffler and Mujtaba (2012) maintain that widely held norms on appearance, specifically on beauty and physical appeal, are shaped by cultural norms and societal standards. Minerva (2017) argues that Eurocentric features are disproportionately represented in the media, a phenomenon that can be attributed to historical, economic, and political factors, and which has a significant impact on the present-day beauty ideal (Minerva, 2017). Furthermore, the concept of aesthetic labour is characterised by feminised performativity, which implies that the focus of lookism is primarily on female employees, particularly those in service-oriented positions where interaction is required (Hancock & Tyler, 2007). An examination of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) conducted by Warhust et al. (2012) concurs that lookism is primarily directed towards female employees in interactive services. However, discrimination based on appearance is not limited to the workplace, but pervades everyday life, including social, personal, and private contexts (Nevaer, 2003).

In order to address the issue of lookism, the social-constructionist perspective advocates for altering the current beauty standard (Minerva, 2017). This standard is constructed by society through the promotion and criticism of specific physical characteristics. Though it is widely acknowledged that evolving societal norms and beauty standards may ultimately benefit the majority of individuals, however, this shift can also result in a greater burden for those who are currently subjected to lookism (Minerva, 2017). Lookism refers to discrimination against individuals who do not conform to socially or psychologically established standards of beauty. This form of discrimination is on par with other common forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, classism, and ageism. This study focuses on the experiences of Black African women in terms of their racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities, as well as the societal expectations placed on their hair. By examining the phenomenon of lookism, which predicts the expectations placed on Black women's appearance, we can better understand the extent to which women must go to conform to these pressures. Subsequently, aesthetic labour is discussed, which further highlights organisational expectations for employees to "look good."

#### 2.4.5. Aesthetic labour

Warhurst, Nickson and Witz (2000, p.12) first developed the concept of aesthetic labour through empirical studies of job advertisements in the UK hospitality and retail sectors, which sought prospective employees who were deemed "attractive," "trendy," "stylish," "well spoken," and possessing a "smart appearance." Esra and Omer (2021) further note that within the hospitality industry, employers tend to favour female employees to survive highly competitive environments and also seek to institute "aesthetic labour," which involves modifying employees' appearance, attitudes, and behaviours. This is because employees are considered as representing the company's image in the hospitality industry (Nickson et al., 2005; Story et al., 2017). Aesthetic labour is associated with organisational expectations for employees' attractiveness, style, and interactional mannerisms (Lipton, 2020). The theory was based on observations of personal grooming and subsequent empirical studies (Karlsson,

2011; Warhurst, 2000). Aesthetic labour involves aesthetic requirements made by employers on those who they employ to "look good and sound right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2003).

Aesthetic labour places an additional burden on employees, as it requires them to expend extra effort to maintain a specific appearance (Esra & Omer, 2021; Karlsson, 2011; Tsaur & Tang, 2013). This extra effort can lead to feelings of exhaustion and burnout, as reported by employees (Esra & Omer, 2021). Additionally, Tsaur and Tang (2013) found that employees in positions which require aesthetic labour experience burn out due to the excessive effort required for these roles. Furthermore, employees also cite the need to spend additional time and money to maintain their appearance at the workplace (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). According to Warhurst (2000), the theory of aesthetic labour has been well established, thereby allowing for new approaches to be considered in arguing it. Aesthetic labour involves the appointment, administration, and supervision of employees based on their physical appearance (Nickson et al., 2003; Warhurst et al., 2000).

The central focus of aesthetic labour lies in embodiment, and moving beyond a clear emphasis on emotions and perceptions to reveal an employee's corporeality is crucial for commercial benefits (Mears, 2014). Schwarz and Merten (2021) highlight the significance of corporeality in gendered social belonging, as the self-determined actions and individual hopes of women are largely dependent on social conditions and the physical body. The material development of bodies, confined socially to structures of meaning, is crucial to understanding the significance of corporeality (Csorda, 2024; Schwarz and Merten, 2021). In an organisational context, possessing an appropriate physical appearance, such as being attractive, smiling nicely, caring for one's hair, having an ideal figure, and having an appropriate accent is considered essential in Aesthetic Labour (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). The physical efforts expected from employees are central to Aesthetic Labour (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Esra and Omer (2021) have reported that while researchers acknowledge the importance of static appearance, encompassing dressing style and bodily properties of employees, it is noted that

attractiveness, weight, ethnicity, and body odour are encompassed under bodily properties. Furthermore, some organisations even restrict the use of excessive hairstyles and makeup (Esra & Omer, 2021; Efthymiou, 2018). Koval and Rosette's (2021) finding that hair bias occurs during recruitment and selection processes is consistent with Warhurst et al.'s (2000) observation that management evaluates candidates' aesthetic labour performance during the recruitment and selection process. Aesthetic labour can thus be evaluated as a prolonged process, commencing from selection and recruitment (Esra & Omer, 2021). Warhurst and Nickson (2007) define aesthetic labour as the hiring of individuals with desirable physical attributes, with employers purposefully utilising the embodied characteristics of employees as a means of achieving a competitive advantage.

Aesthetic labour, which involves the manipulation of appearance for economic gain, is susceptible to unlawful job discrimination due to the direct relationship between appearance and classifications such as race, gender, age, religion, and ability (Mears, 2014). The performance of aesthetic labour produces intersectional classifications that construct social standing, including race, gender, geography, and class, which are visibly labelled in space and disproportionately valued (Mears, 2014). For instance, studies of the retail and modelling industries have found that, in addition to being female and middle-class, managers tend to select and reward White employees while using lighter-skinned and chemically straightened Black, Hispanic, multiracial, and Asian employees to diversify representation within the brand (Walters, 2018; Wissinger, 2012). These biases are held by employees throughout their employment and are developed through recruitment, selection, training, monitoring, discipline, and reward (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). According to Warhurst et al. (2009), another area for this theory is the examination of the experiences of employees with these types of requirements and discrimination based on appearance, which is referred to as "lookism". The present study aims to fulfil the aforementioned requirement through the incorporation of lookism and aesthetic labour principles, with the intention of providing a foundation for the participants' experiences with regard to the appearance of their hair in the workplace. This

encompasses their personal physical and professional identity, as well as the organisational expectations that impact the manner in which employees present themselves within professional settings. The following section expounds upon the theoretical underpinnings of this research which are rooted in postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, identity, and identity work. These concepts serve to elucidate the influence of the socio-political-historical milieu of the participants in both settler and non-settler colonial contexts on the perceptions and subjectivity with respect to Black African women's hair, encompassing their personal, physical, and professional identity.

## 2.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The current research is premised on four key theoretical foundations, namely postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work. In this section, I will delineate the pivotal theoretical and empirical literature in the fields of management and organisational studies, as well as African, anthropological, psychological, social, and medical studies, which will serve to contextualise this study and to which this study aspires to contribute. These theories facilitate an exploration of the enduring impact of colonialism on Black African women in organisations, specifically in the settler colonial and non-settler colonial contexts of South Africa and Nigeria, respectively, while taking into consideration the intricate experiences of Black African women pertaining to their multiple intersecting identities and hair, and their subsequent ramifications.

### 2.5.1. Postcolonial Theory

According to Althusser (1971), postcolonial theory is instrumental in comprehending the ideological mechanisms of hegemony, wherein racial, ethnic, and cultural relations are shaped and delineated by dominant discourse and power relations (Althusser, 1971; Kanu, 2006). Postcolonial studies acknowledge the urgency of reassessing the historical classifications and people's shared past, recognising it as a significant attempt to come to terms with a specific

historical state (Gandhi, 2019; Haggis, 1990). A significant portion of scholarly work on postcolonial theory focuses on questions related to the nature of colonial discourse, national identity, and the formation of nations (Nayar, 2016). Sawant (2012) argues that postcolonial theory serves as an analytical framework for English literature that prioritises works from formerly colonised countries. This approach generally excludes British or American perspectives, and instead concentrates on the writings of colonised cultures in regions such as Australia, New Zealand, Africa, South America, and other regions that have been influenced by European traditions. As a result, postcolonial scholarship has become a point of contact and a battleground for a range of disciplines and theories (Gandhi, 2019). However, while postcolonialism can recount the consequences of current economic and social status, it does little to determine its causes and shift its premise (Young, 2001). Additionally, Mudimbe (1988) argues that Western commentators, as well as African analysts, continue to use classification frameworks dependent on Western epistemological structures, despite descriptions being explicitly 'Afrocentric' in nature. This limits the ability of African studies to form Africa-centred discourse and information systems, which can hinder the evolutionary needs of the African continent and its people (Arowosegbe, 2014; Mudimbe, 1988).

The psychological ramifications of colonialism on both colonisers and colonised have been extensively examined by Rukundwa and Van Aarde (2007). Building upon this premise, the Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective (2022) proposes that colonial influence transcends physical occupation, permeating the realm of thought. The authors contend that true liberation necessitates psychological decolonisation (Readsura Decolonial Editorial Collective, 2022). A prime illustration of this phenomenon is the displacement of indigenous knowledge systems and lifestyles, deeply rooted in vernacular languages, by colonial tongues. This psychological subjugation manifests as feelings of inadequacy, self-repression, or widespread self-deprecation associated with the colonial mindset (Readsura Decolonial Editorial collective, 2022; Suffla et al., 2023). For example, a study conducted by Lukate (2022) explores Black hair salons in England as decolonial spaces where Black women negotiate and challenge their

racial identities within the English colonial framework. The study highlights how Black women's racial identity is moulded by beauty standards that privilege Eurocentric features whilst deeming Black characteristics exotic or unattractive (Lukate, 2021). In response, women cultivate decolonial spaces such as Black hair salons, providing communal support to nurture positive self-perception and resist psychological onslaughts. The process of decolonisation demands psychological emancipation from colonial influences that perpetuate colonial aggression (Readsura Decolonial Editorial collective, 2022; Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007; Suffla et al., 2023). Adams et al. (2015) posit that the synthesis of cultural psychology with academic insights from African Studies and related disciplines enables a nuanced analysis of the historical factors underpinning Western economic hegemony. This interdisciplinary approach elucidates the mechanisms through which material wealth has been accumulated and maintained via exploitative and extractive relationships (Adams et al., 2015).

Roy (2016) asserts that postcolonial theory is a method of engaging with, rather than dismissing, the epistemological issue of Eurocentrism. Rather than solely focusing on interpreting and narrating the post colony, postcolonial theory is a means of interpreting and narrating the West, specifically the stories that the West frequently tells about itself. According to Bhabha (1984), mimicry is a central idea in postcolonial theory that pertains to the intricate and ambivalent relationship between colonisers and colonised individuals. The discourse of colonialism encourages the adoption of the coloniser's cultural practices, values, institutions, and beliefs by the colonised. Nevertheless, this process engenders a blurred and distorted reflection, which is frequently perceived as a potential threat (Bhabha, 1984; Sawant, 2012). Sawant (2012) states that the theoretical framework of postcolonialism investigates intricate cultural aspects, including contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalences. As per Chakrabarty (2012), postcolonial theory is a vital aspect of a more extensive cultural and critical process that facilitates adjustments to the continuous decolonisation process. Moreover, scholarship on postcolonial theory draws attention to and empowers the evaluation of new forms of hegemony (Chakrabarty, 2012; Roy, 2016; Sawant, 2012). The study builds on the theory by

integrating settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism as crucial elements in grasping and tackling the epistemological challenge of Eurocentrism. It does so by highlighting the works and experiences of individuals from countries that have been colonised in the past, and by re-evaluating the consequences of historical classifications on Black African women. This involves considering their multiple intersecting identities and shared experiences related to their personal, physical, and professional identity, with a specific focus on their hair.

### 2.5.2. Intersectionality

The scholarship of Black feminists was articulated through the lens of intersectionality, which aims to comprehend the intricate network of domination that encompasses the interconnected and interwoven nature of cultural patterns of oppression, as well as the intersectional systems that influence and shape them (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality serves as a theoretical framework that is capable of more than simply describing intergroup differences in a descriptive manner. It can be employed to critically examine social institutions and dominant ideologies in terms of their inability to address the specific concerns of individuals who are multiply marginalised (May, 2015).

What is the role of intersectionality in deepening our comprehension of gender-related problems at the workplace? Coles and Pasek (2017) argue that the application of intersectionality theory provides a more comprehensive perspective on how systems of power and oppression, for instance, racism and sexism, operate in tandem and augment each other to engender intricate and pernicious forms of systemic maltreatment and unfairness. In their research, the authors argue that the idea of intersectional invisibility elucidates how Black women, who occupy the nexus of racism and sexism, may be disregarded and subjected to harm when their specific experiences as Black women are not duly acknowledged (Coles & Pasek, 2017). A study conducted by Davis Tribble et al. (2019), which explores gendered racial socialisation among African American women, reports that a section of the women acknowledged that they were confined by detrimental beliefs about skin tone and hair texture

that they had unknowingly ingested before developing a strategy for determining their own identity as Black women. On the other hand, additional participants divulged that they were still wrestling with these issues during the course of the investigation. The moving accounts of these individuals highlight the intricate process of identity formation, which involves their intersecting identities (Davis Tribble et al., 2019).

According to Carrim and Nkomo's (2016) research using an intersectional lens, the managerial identity of South African Indian women is not solely shaped by personal and social identities in the workplace. Rather, it is also significantly impacted by socio-historical, political, and cultural contexts in which individuals and groups are situated. The intersectionality theory, as employed by Ayling (2015), reveals that a significant number of elite Nigerian parents choose UK-based private boarding schools for their children due to the belief that exposing them to Eurocentric (elitist) environments will help them to acquire essential demeanours and manners, such as 'respectability' and a 'refined accent,' which are considered crucial for establishing a genuine elite identity in contemporary Nigeria. Intersectionality emphasises the inseparable and inextricable aspects of various dimensions of social existence, which cannot be segregated into distinct and unmixed components (McKittirick, 2006). Intersectionality presents a conceptual framework for comprehending the interactive and interconnected nature of multiple identities and the disparities which they experience, across diverse historical periods and geographical contexts (Brar, 2021). Various challenges arise when examining multiple social classifications as indicators of individuals belonging to marginalised groups in the workplace. Investigating the intersection of these categories is crucial because stereotypes frequently originate from their unique combinations (Atewologun & Singh, 2010).

The acknowledgment of intersectionality's significance in organisational scholarship has been widely recognised for several years, with researchers advocating for its application (Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Rosette et al., 2018; Smith & Nkomo, 2021). However, achieving a clear understanding of how

intersectionality operates and how it produces inequality is an ongoing challenge, (Holvino, 2001; Weber, 2001). According to Acker (2006), critics could argue that the constructs of "race" and "class" are often fraught with complexity, as they are influenced by gender and class differences. Additionally, the relationship between "race," and "ethnicity," is highly interconnected, and it is imperative that theories and research on inequality, dominance, and oppression take these intersections into account. Acker (2006) posits that despite the significant body of research dedicated to understanding the persistence of gender biases within organisations and the role of organisational practices in perpetuating racial disparities, leading to broader societal discrimination and disadvantage, much of this research has been limited in its scope. Specifically, it has often focused primarily on one category, namely gender, while neglecting the complex ways in which these categories intersect and interact, and this narrow approach can lead to important interconnected realities being overlooked and oversimplified (Acker, 2006).

Previous studies have aimed to identify nuances and contextual elements that impact discoveries regarding gender, yet much of the current literature still attributes these findings to women in general (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Exploring the intersection of ethnicity and gender provides a deeper understanding of the daily challenges faced by individuals who are part of these groups and who are becoming more prevalent in the talent pool of organisations (Atewologun & Singh, 2010). Adding the dimension of class to the intersection of ethnicity and gender introduces an additional layer of complexity, as the experiences of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may vary significantly from those of women from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Rosette et al., 2018). Acker (2006) posits that each organisation has an inequality regime, which is an assortment of practices, processes, actions, and significances that generate and perpetuate inequalities predicated on class, gender, and race within the organisation. Collins (2012) emphasises the importance of intersectionality research, which examines the intricate interplay and interdependence of social positions within oppressive systems, as a means of gaining a more profound

comprehension of the compounded effects of overlapping power structures. Therefore, the present study delves into the intricate interplay between race, ethnicity, gender, and social class among Black African women, and specifically focuses on the ways in which they relate to their hair in terms of cultural influences, personal experiences, and physicality. By examining these social positions within oppressive systems, the research aims to gain a deeper understanding of the compounded effects of overlapping power structures on the participants' personal, physical, and professional identity. The study extends existing theory by providing a more detailed analysis of these intersections, with a focus on the ways in which they intersect to shape the participants' experiences and identities.

### 2.5.3. Embodiment

Bourdieu (1991) states that the body is configured by social structures referred to as the 'habitus' and bodily inclination is referred to as the 'hexis', that human beings obtain through their upbringing in a certain class or culture. The habitus can be understood as a 'socially made body' as it emphasises the theorised person and the dominance and conditioning of our behaviour by the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The 'bodily hexis' is a permanent disposition, an enduring way of being and therefore feeling and thinking (Weiss & Haber, 1999). Bourdieu (1991) theorises that beliefs, attitudes, and values are moulded by habitus, the world in which one resides, and the interactions one has with others (Goffman, 1959; Davies & Harre, 1990, 1999; Harre & van Langenhove, 1999). Hogg and Abrams (1988) and Tajfel (1978) maintain that group affiliation, characterised by shared objectives or traits, aids in self-understanding and the comprehension of others. Therefore, the habitus comprises early experiences that are formed before the subjective sense of our identities emerge (Weiss & Haber, 1999).

Anthropologists have traditionally been captivated by the concept of "the body," as demonstrated by classic ethnographic studies, such as cross-cultural examinations, which have uncovered the myriad ways in which perceptions of the body differ notably based on

distinct historical and cultural contexts (Csordas, 2002; Lock, 1993; Mascia-Lees, 2011). The notion of embodiment was introduced in anthropological discussions to counteract the hierarchical divisions that characterised the enlightenment period, specifically those between nature and culture, biology and society, gender and sex, individuals and groups, and body and mind (Csordas, 2002; Outram, 2019). During this time, the body was often portrayed as an inactive, unalterable entity that succumbed to societal expectations (Csordas, 2002; Mascia-Lees, 2011; Outram, 2019).

According to Csordas (2002), it is essential to regard the body as the foundation of culture rather than as a cultural object. The body is a sentient, dynamic, and indeterminate experiential agent that is relational and intersubjective (Csordas, 2024; Mascia-Lees, 2011). Adopting the embodiment paradigm removes dualistic distinctions, thereby providing a deeper understanding of cultural phenomena (Csorda, 2024). This paradigm is critical for elucidating and theorising how Black African women and their hair are situated within the habitus, as outlined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Csordas, 2024; Csordas, 2002).

The notion of embodiment in discourse encompasses an individual's assumption of a particular persona or identity, including that of a worker, a professional, or a manager (Harman, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to appreciate that research under the heading of embodiment is not about the body; instead, it centres around culture, experience, and comprehending them from a physical standpoint (Weiss & Haber, 1999). Clayson (2018) states that embodiment comprises embodied knowledge, which refers to the understanding gained through direct engagement with the material world through lived experiences, thus supporting Veinot's (2007) concept of "embodied knowledge" which is premised on the assumption that it is gained through experiential and practical learning that is specific to a particular context, or through the process of being and doing. Embodiment emphasises the individual under context, the embodied essence of central superiority, and the circumstances of our acts in the field (Idahosa, 2019). The person embodies circumstances within their

respective context while drawing on their insight into such conditions in their behaviour (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Idahosa, 2019).

Theories of embodiment extend beyond the development of the body to encompass the influence of societal construction on its form (Weiss & Haber, 1999). In accordance with Foucault's perspective, historical factors not only shape the body, but also lead to its deconstruction (Csordas, 2002). By adopting an analytical approach that centres on embodiment and the discursive processes facilitating the integration of the social into the body, the ongoing identity work performed by the participant comes into focus (Harman, 2012). Gargett (2002) stresses that the physical manifestation of the participant is a vital aspect of the feminist movement's efforts to reassess subjectivity. It should not be regarded as a biological or sociological classification, but rather as a synthesis of the physical, symbolic, and material realms. According to Overton (2013), the nature of our physical form serves as a fundamental prerequisite for the types of behaviours, experiences, and meanings we possess. The concept of embodiment encompasses not only the physical composition of the body but also the body as a lived experience, actively interacting with the sociocultural and physical environment (Csordas, 2002; Johnson, 2007).

The body's form represents the biological perspective, its lived experience reflects the psychological subject's viewpoint, and its active engagement with the world embodies the sociocultural standpoint (Overton, 2013). According to Davies et al. (2005), it is essential to incorporate the feminine body as a central theme in the discourse to render it visible and pertinent. The present research endeavours to expand upon the theory by delving into the intricate intersections between Black African women's racioethnicity, gender, and social class, and their subjectivity of their hair in terms of culture, personal experiences, and physical characteristics. This is accomplished by highlighting the merging of the social and the corporeal, as well as the continuous identity work that Black African women engage in within their societal and organisational contexts. This process encompasses the consideration of

embodied knowledge, which is acquired through direct interaction with the tangible world and the participants' lived experiences, particularly in relation to their hair and its ramifications on their personal, physical, and professional identity.

#### 2.5.4. Identity and Identity work

Exploring the methods employed by Black African women in professional roles in both settler-colonial and non-settler colonial contexts in South Africa and Nigeria, respectively, to grapple with questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What does it mean to possess my hair?', and 'What does it mean to be a professional?' places the research squarely within the academic discourse surrounding identity construction. The concept of identity encompasses the interconnection between the 'social' and the 'personal,' the sense of similarity with certain individuals and dissimilarity with others, and a perception of 'us' and 'them' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This construct also connotes an active involvement on the part of those who assume a particular identity, an aspect of self-determination, while simultaneously being influenced and even moulded by existing social frameworks and processes (Jenkins, 2014). According to Atewologun (2008) and Hogg and Terry (2000), it is widely accepted that identity-related constructs and processes possess considerable potential for advancing our comprehension of organisational behaviour. The workplace can be considered a microcosm of society, and the dynamics of workplace interactions are often shaped by the cultural and societal context in which they occur (Atewologun, 2008). For instance, in many societies, women and individuals from marginalised racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, may experience less favourable outcomes in comparison to their male, White, and more affluent counterparts (Atewologun, 2008; Rosette et al., 2018; Smith & Nkomo, 2021).

Cultural identity has garnered significant attention, and along with it, the recognition of the close interconnection between cultural processes and particular socioeconomic practices. It has become apparent that these practices often exacerbate existing inequalities (Bottero,

2004). The notion of racioethnicity refers to an individual's affiliation with biological and/or cultural groups that possess varying degrees of privilege within society (Cox; 1990). Racioethnic identity is often defined by the degree to which an individual's sense of self is shaped by their membership in a specific racioethnic group, as well as the level of participation and engagement in cultural practices associated with that group (McKay & Avery, 2006).

Research conducted by McKay and Avery (2006) on the factors that affect job acceptance intentions among different racioethnic groups after visiting a company site found that having a strong sense of identity is closely related to increased awareness of racioethnicity, indicating that group membership is a vital element of one's self-concept and easily retrievable in memory. These authors argue that individuals with weaker racioethnic identities, such as Black individuals, were less likely to report experiences of discrimination and were more influenced by explanations that emphasise social factors for persistent injustice than those with stronger identities (Mc Kay & Avery, 2006).

Gender denotes the cultural meanings and expectations that are associated with being male or female in a particular society. These meanings are internalised by individuals, who then incorporate them into their sense of self-identity (Wood & Eagly, 2012, 2010). By recognising and accepting their gender identities, individuals can gain a better understanding of how they align with the culturally defined traits of femininity and masculinity, which can influence their thoughts and behaviours (Wood & Eagly, 2015). The prescriptive nature of gender roles mandates the adherence to specific beliefs about the appropriate behaviour for women. According to Rosette and Toste (2010), these notions are particularly prevalent among individuals occupying lower levels within organisational hierarchies. Atewologun and Sealy (2014) posit that their research strand, which delves into the nexus of gender and ethnicity, endeavours to deepen comprehension of the processes by which both participants and investigators interact with women's professional experiences. Block et al. (2012) and Darwin and Norton (2014) argue that the rise of individualism and consumerism has led to a decrease in collectivist politics and an increase in the significance of gender, race, and ethnicity as social

categories, while social class has become an understudied construct. The paradox of social status is that it often goes unnoticed, despite its significant impact on people's lives, as it is a central component of society. In contrast to being a recognised aspect of social identity, social class is frequently neglected (Bottero, 2004).

The paradox of social status is that its influence on people's lives is frequently disregarded, despite its prominence within society. Contrary to being an acknowledged aspect of social identity, class appears to be neglected (Bottero, 2004). Bottero (2004) underscores the significance of employing the term class when exploring the influence of organisational cultures, social networks, and politicised representations on social identity and economic outcomes. Moreover, Sha (2006) maintains that identity prominence pertains to the degree to which a particular aspect of one's identity holds significance in a given context, compared to other aspects of one's overall identity. Therefore, an individual's identity becomes more apparent when it is differentiated in a specific context (Sha, 2006).

Atewologun (2008) analyses the methods by which individuals from subordinate social identities, such as women and people of colour present themselves professionally and form their professional selves. This study supplements prior research, including Ely (1995) and Ibarra (1999), which has demonstrated that workplace identities are socially constructed and that individuals utilise various strategies to project specific images of themselves within the workplace.

There has been a notable increase in research within the fields of organisational studies that utilises the concept of identity as a means of comprehending the everyday identity work that takes place among organisation members (Gherardi 2006; Gherardi, 2009). For example, remote acculturation and enculturation significantly influence the identity work of Black women in colonial contexts. Remote acculturation, involving cultural and psychological changes in non-migrants through indirect contact with distant cultures (Ferguson et al., 2016), affects

Black women's identity development without direct migration. This process occurs via exposure to Western ideologies, media, and cultural products, potentially leading to the adoption of colonising cultural values and behaviours (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2017). The impact on Black African women's identity work is complex and often contradictory. While it may result in the conformity to and assimilation of Western cultural elements, it can also strengthen connections to heritage culture and identity as a form of resistance (Schwartz et al., 2006; Weinreich, 2009). This dynamic interplay between acculturation and enculturation is particularly relevant in colonial contexts, where maintaining cultural heritage can serve as a means of empowerment and resistance against colonial influences (Cole & Arriola, 2007; Yoon et al., 2020).

Foucault (1980) and Hall's (1996) perspective on identity work scrutinises the way in which employees assume specific personas and engage in ongoing bargaining and re-negotiation of their identities, thus offering a valuable lens through which to view the identity work that transpires in the work environment. An important aspect of identity work involves members of subordinate groups simultaneously challenging and seeking acceptance from members of the dominant group (Ezzel, 2009). This can lead to counter-discrimination towards the worth of subordinate individuals' high rank, and inclusion may extend to an organisation (Polzer & Caruso, 2008). Atewologun et al. (2015) propose intersectional identity work as a paradigm for analysing the ongoing construction of joint identities in the face of identity threats. Atewologun (2015) argues that the integration of identity work theory with intersectionality provides a clear design and analytical framework for understanding the complexities of combined identities in everyday experiences. Atewologun, Sealy and Vinnicombe (2016) further emphasise the need for continued theory development in this area to provide a nuanced understanding of the operation of multiple identities in ordinary life. Similarly, Netto et al. (2020) employed intersectionality and identity work to examine the interplay between patriarchy, racism, and other structural forces in the workplace among low-paid migrants. This study extends the theory by considering intersectionality and identity work as a crucial

foundation for understanding how settler and non-settler colonialism influence Black African women's racioethnic, gender, and class identity, and their subjectivity on their hair in terms of their personal, physical, and professional identity.

Therefore, in the context of this study, intersectionality, identity work, and embodiment are intricately linked concepts that profoundly influence the workplace experiences of Black African women. Intersectionality provides a framework for analysing how multiple identities intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination (Cooper, 2015). For Black African women, the intersection of race, gender, and social class often results in distinct workplace challenges, including simultaneous racial, gender, and class-based discrimination (Ireland et al., 2018; Opara et al., 2020).

Intersectional identity work becomes a critical process through which Black women navigate complex power dynamics, leveraging their intersecting identities in workplace interactions (Atewologun et al., 2015). Embodiment contributes an additional dimension to this dynamic, as the physical presence of Black African women can prompt identity-heightening episodes that necessitate the interpretation of their intersecting identities (Atewologun et al., 2015). This embodied experience may result in "misperceived identity imposition," wherein others' perceptions based on visible identities influence Black women's well-being and psychological safety (Opara et al., 2020).

In response, Black women may engage in identity shifting, consciously or unconsciously altering their cultural behaviours to mitigate discrimination-related negative outcomes (Dickens et al., 2018). The interplay of these theoretical frameworks in the organisation context reveals how structural arrangements and power relations contribute to the complex experiences of Black African women (Atewologun et al., 2015; Hopkins, 2017; Nash, 2008; Smith & Nkomo, 2021).

## 2.6. CONCLUSION

In their research on intersectionality Rosette et al. (2018) highlight the importance of developing research programmes outside the United States to investigate the relationships between various social classifications and different social identities. It would be beneficial to explore whether there is a pattern of cultural stereotyping for specific intersections, which could contribute to intersectional experiences such as exclusion in both organisational settings and society as a whole (Rosette et al., 2018). Winker (2018) in their work on identity work encourages future studies to strive for a deeper understanding of the emotions that are elicited during the restoration of a cherished identity, and the emotional labour associated with identity reconstruction. According to van Amsterdam and van Eck's (2019) research, future studies should delve into the embodied and material aspects of identity work, as well as the affective dimensions, including shame, anxiety, fear and anger, which extend beyond the scope of their research. Summers et al. (2022) propose a prospective investigation that scrutinies the experiences of women with natural hair in a diverse array of professional domains, which would significantly impact the field of career development and enrich its scholarly corpus. Furthermore, Rosette et al. (2018) suggest that in culturally homogenous societies, it is more likely for diverse subgroups to be noticeable, making it a suitable starting point for future studies to investigate gender intersectionality across national and cultural boundaries. This study aims to address the call by offering a unique context to examine the influence of the socio-political-historical context on the perceptions and subjectivity of Black African women professionals from South Africa and Nigeria regarding their hair in terms of their personal, physical, and professional identity.

Through this research study I aim to better understand and give voice to the perspectives of Black African women professionals who are often marginalised. Specifically, the aim is to gain insight into how these individuals interpret their experiences at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. In addition, the study employs an inductive approach to explore

the utility of postcolonial theory and the theories of intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work, as well as the concepts of othering, lookism, and aesthetic (Dunwoodie et al., 2023). Moreover, the study aspires to investigate how their lives have been influenced by their daily lived experiences as South Africans and Nigerians, their subjective perception of their hair, and their professional encounters. In the subsequent chapter, the researcher will reveal the participants and present the primary outcomes from their formative years.

## CHAPTER 3

### UNRAVEL THE TANGLE: EARLY LIVES AND PERSONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will relate the early personal life stories of ten Black African women, five from South Africa and five from Nigeria. The life stories shared by the participants are motivated recollections, descriptions and reflections of the socio-political-historical conditions and environments in which the women grew up, providing a window into the women's lived experiences (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Their early life stories provide an insight that delineates the development and evolution of their lives, shedding light on the external influences that have moulded their perspectives on their personal identity, as well as the subjective views that they hold on the multiple intersections of their identities and their hair.

This research examines the intricate dynamics that exist within the relationships that the women have with their multiple identities and their hair, and endeavours to investigate these dynamics at various stages of their lives. The aim was to comprehend the primary intersecting identity categories that the women embody, namely racioethnicity, gender, and social class, and their formative experiences of these social categories. The narratives of the participants reveal the extent to which they navigate and negotiate their personal and physical identities from a tender age. The objective was to grasp the social resistance, if any, that the women encountered towards their embodied identities during their early lives. Additionally, the aim was to explore the manner in which the women coped with the internalisation, negotiation, resistance, or acceptance of these external forces. Furthermore, the role that the Black women's hair, as a symbol and embodiment of their intersecting identities, played in the development of their personal identities and subjective views of themselves was also examined.

The synthesis of the early life stories of the participants comprises two components: the biological information of the women and the narratives of their early life experiences regarding their personal identity development. The biographical information and occupations of five South African women and five Nigerian women are introduced using pseudonyms that they chose themselves to protect their identities. The narratives of the women's formative years provide unique and nuanced perspectives and experiences, offering valuable insights into their personal journeys with their intersecting identities and their hair. The narratives shed light on the social, psychological, and structural factors that have influenced their subjective views of their interlocking identities and their hair, ultimately shaping and sharpening the development of their personal identities. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, each area of investigation - conforming and confirming gender roles and expectations, race and ethnicity, and social class - is examined independently through the participants' narratives about their early life socialisation. However, it is important to note that the intersection of these topics is more comprehensively explored in the subsequent chapters 4 and 5. The stories of these women highlight the prominent themes that have emerged in this investigation. A significant number of their remarks are cited verbatim, and their words are presented in italics; however, any identifying data is intentionally excluded to preserve confidentiality. Additionally, in analysing the women's life stories, I acknowledge my own subjectivity in the interpretation of the data.

Table 3.1: Participants Characteristics

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Professional field</b>	<b>Country</b>
<b>Faith</b>	25-34	Bachelor's	Business and Entrepreneurship	South Africa
<b>Neatgirl</b>	35-44	Master's	Financial Management	South Africa
<b>Suki</b>	25-34	Master's	Law	South Africa

<b>Susan</b>	25-34	Master's	Natural and Agricultural Sciences	South Africa
<b>Sunflower</b>	25-34	Bachelor's	Law	South Africa
<b>Bella</b>	35-44	Bachelor's	Biological Sciences	Nigeria
<b>Hairee</b>	35-44	Doctoral	Higher education	Nigeria
<b>Ifenkili</b>	25-34	Bachelor's	Business and Entrepreneurship	Nigeria
<b>Ngozi</b>	35-44	Master's	Higher Education	Nigeria
<b>Stargirl</b>	25-34	Bachelor's	Entertainment	Nigeria

Table 3.1 presents the demographic information of the participants in the life story study, including the pseudonyms which they selected, their age range, educational qualifications at the time of the data collection, professional field, and country of origin. The women disclosed the significant meanings and reasons behind their chosen pseudonyms. Faith, who is an MBA candidate and the proprietor of her business, initially selected 'Big Faith Big God' as her pseudonym, requesting that Faith be used instead of the full name. Her reasoning for choosing the name is her steadfast faith in God, as well as how she feels that God has guided her through life and directed her towards her true purpose. Neatgirl, who is an assistant director in finance, chose the name because she believes that from a young age to the present, she has been thoughtful and concerned with being neat, particularly regarding her hair. Suki, an advocate, selected the name as a tribute to her natural hair, which she has worn and celebrated with joy from a young age. She chose the name Suki as a nod to her favourite natural hair product, 'Suki Suki Naturals.' Susan, who is a geologist, chose the name as it is generic and random, which she believed would serve well to mask her identity. Sunflower, who is a legal practitioner, selected the name because sunflowers are her favourite flower, and she finds them beautiful. Bella, a pharmacist by profession, who deeply believes in God, chose Bella as it translates to 'gift of God's favour' in Hebrew. Hairee, a professor, selected the name as it represents her childhood, where people often commented on the size and

unmanageability of her hair. Ifenkili, an MBA candidate and entrepreneur, chose the name which is a phrase from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria meaning 'beauty to behold.' Ngozi Egosonwa, a computer information systems programmer who later became a head university administrator, named herself in honour of her late mother, whom she believes provided her with a beautiful childhood through her best efforts. Finally, Stargirl, a media personality and broadcaster, requested that I, as the researcher, suggest a name that accurately described her following our interview. After thoroughly considering her character and accomplishments, I recommended that she be called 'Stargirl.'

The age range of the women in the study was between late 20s and early 40s, with 60% falling between the ages of 25-34 and 40% falling between 35-44. Despite the variation in age, many of the women shared similar experiences, particularly those from the same country of origin. All of the women had completed four-year university degrees with majors in a range of fields, including law, pharmacy, economics, geology, computer science, and English literature. These women exhibited strong aspirations for their education and career advancement, as evidenced by the fact that five of them held master's degrees, two were at the time of data collection enrolled in master's programmes, and three planned to pursue a master's degree in the future. Moreover, in their respective professional areas, 30% of the women were self-employed, while the remaining individuals held middle management positions or higher.

### 3.2. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EARLY LIVES OF THE WOMEN

Analysing historical events from the perspectives of those who suffered their consequences and examining their contemporary social and cultural implications is a crucial aspect of postcolonial cultural critique (Young, 2001). The five women from South Africa hail from the era of the 1980s and 1990s. Some of these women were born during the apartheid era itself, while others were born towards the end of this era, and yet others were born in the era that ensued the conclusion of apartheid. Equally, the five Nigerian women originate from the 1980s

and 1990s. Notably, in 1960, Nigeria achieved its political independence, following a meticulously planned and supervised transition of power from British to Nigerian rule (Uka, 2008). Thus, these women were all reared in the aftermath of Nigeria's independence.

In South Africa the apartheid policies that were based on "separate development" effectively delineated Black homelands from the remaining parts of South Africa and resulted in an urban layout that featured affluent White inner cities and suburbs, and deprived Black, Coloured<sup>3</sup>, and Indian townships and informal settlements situated on the peripheries, respectively (Durrheim & Dixon, 2010). All of the participants from South Africa reportedly grew up in either a village or a township. Sunflower's account offered a portrayal of the township in which she was raised:

*"So, I grew up in the township. So, when you look at the townships, you can kind of see maybe that this family is almost like middle class, if you can even call it that. And then you can see that this part of the township is very poor or that part of the township is a bit richer than our side."*

Suki's account of the village provided insight into its composition:

*"I grew up in a small rural town that hardly had what anyone would regard as suburbs. It was a cluster of villages, but some were more modernised or looked slightly more modern than others."*

However, notwithstanding this, these women represent a generation of women who were brought up during a period of optimism, as they all witnessed significant events in South African history at a tender age, including Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the lead-up to the nation's first democratic election, and their parents' delight at casting their first-ever

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<sup>3</sup> Coloured communities primarily consist of descendants of the Khoisan individuals who originally inhabited the western areas of South Africa, as well as members of multiracial ethnic communities in South Africa who possess ancestry from African, European, and Asian lineages.

votes. Neatgirl's words described her experience of growing up during the apartheid era and observing the events leading up to its end:

*"I'm a girl of the 80s... we'd grow up seeing on TV and our mothers would talk openly, our dads would say during our time this was happening, 'during our time' and when the elections happened in 1990, I was in Grade One. So, I remember how things were being said on the TV and the media and I remember Madiba coming out of prison, I remember the lines [voting lines], I remember my parents being excited about going to vote and everything. So, I guess as soon as I could make sense of things, I knew I was Black."*

Suki recalled being four years old and following a crowd of people to a rally prior to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994. She described the event as follows:

*"But to me, it was simply the excitement and the... just the feeling, the feeling in the air. What I quite remember is there was just this fever of... now that I know the historical events, now that I know... we were so close to freedom and it was just this feeling with everyone that we just had to get politically involved and, you know, freedom was on its way. Like, it was just... it was just here. Now that I know, it fills me with, I'd say, an interesting memory that even though I was a child, I was quite aware of the anticipation and the hope that was around, because it was an experience I'd never felt before. I was seeing people rally, the helicopter in the air, just every person that I could think of all rushing towards one place. A common thing that freedom might just be here, and we need to hear what is being said".*

During this period in the lives of the South African participants, there was a sense of optimism and liberation that they had not previously experienced as Black individuals. Despite being young, the participants felt the enthusiasm and expectation conveyed by their parents and those within their community. These factors played a significant role in shaping their racial identity. As per Adams et al. (2014), the democratisation of South Africa in the early 1990s led

to the establishment of policies that aimed to address social and economic inequalities, including affirmative action and the repeal of laws that restricted intergroup interaction. However, the enduring consequences of the segregationist policies that were in place during the apartheid era continue to contribute to the segregation of South African society in terms of social, political, and economic aspects (Adams et al., 2014).

In contrast, upon gaining political independence from British colonial rule, Nigeria also did not attain economic independence. Moreover, the Northern region was awarded a political advantage over the Eastern and Western regions, which led to a heritage of ethnic and religious division in Nigeria, which has endured until the present day (Uka, 2008). Ngozi specifically highlighted the profound impact that the Civil War between 1967 and 1970 had on her family, who are members of the Igbo tribe. She mentioned that the conflict resulted in significant displacement of individuals and their families, as well as substantial loss of property. Through her narration of her experiences, Ngozi conveyed the severity of the situation:

*“So, we are all victims of war, kind of. So, in this setting, my father moved to River State and at the time, after the war, the Igbos lost everything, practically everything. Wherever they were in the country, they lost everything. They got just probably 20 pounds or so, equivalent to 20 pounds in their bank account. They lost everything. They were the real victims of the war, and it was like we all had to start all over again. So, the people that really made it a bit easier were the people who went to school.”*

According to Okafor's (1997) analysis, the fundamental cause of Nigeria's social and political instability is the unhealthy ethnic politics and mutual distrust that exist among the diverse linguistic and ethnic groups within the country. Uka's (2008) argument suggests that Nigeria adopted a federal system of government in order to address concerns of dominance by any of the major ethnic groups, such as the Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba. Despite this measure, rivalry among these ethnic groups has persisted since the country's inception. Hairee narrated her

account of Nigeria's political climate during what she perceives as its initial attempt to establish a democratic government:

*“In 1993, there was a first attempt at becoming a democratic country. We had the elections... In 1993, I was 10... So, someone won, but the position was like taken from him and we went back into military rule. Well, so we lapsed into military rule under the president called Abacha. And Abacha was a tyrant... There was a massive case of him pulling up people he thought were trying to do a coup against him. And killing them. And I remember I had a classmate who, who her dad was one of the guys who was a coup plotter at the time. So that sort of stuck in my mind. And he was just perceived as this very ruthless military dictator. But at the time when Nigeria was excluded from the Commonwealth, we couldn't participate in games or competition because Abacha wanted to create a self-sufficient state that did not need any Western influence and did not subscribe to Western rules.”*

According to Uka (2008), the primary reason for the persistent political rivalry was the pursuit of leadership at the national level. As a result, the struggle for state power resulted in the marginalisation of ethnic minority groups. Stargirl recounted her personal experience of being a member of an ethnic minority in Nigeria:

*“Growing up in Nigeria, back then there were stereotypes that were already assigned to different tribes in Nigeria. For people that were from the Yoruba tribe, they were deemed as educated, intelligent, but very dirty people. For people that were from the Igbo tribe, they were deemed to be very beautiful women. Their women were very beautiful, their men were hardworking, their men knew how to take care of their women. And yeah, like that. For me, I'm from Akwa Ibom, so you can call me from the Ibibio tribe. People like us, our stereotype was that we eat dogs. So, when you hear people say, oh, Calabar people eat dog, that's what I mean. They say, we are Calabar people. And mind you, in Nigeria, we have people from Akwa Ibom, and we have people from Cross River. Now, the capital of Cross River is Calabar, but they now*

*generalise that Calabar people, we eat dog. Calabar people, we stink. They say we smell. They say Calabar people, we are dirty. They say Calabar people, we are very dumb. We don't know anything. So those are the stereotypes that I grew up with."*

The participants from Nigeria reported a noteworthy level of tribal dynamics during their formative years, particularly with regard to the displacement of tribes and political leadership. Furthermore, the women encountered significant stereotyping based on their tribal affiliation, which had a profound effect on their ethnic identity development.

In terms of family structure, the majority of the South African participants and all Nigerian participants were raised in conventional nuclear families, characterised by the presence of both parents and siblings. Neatgirl provided insight into the composition of her own family during her formative years in South Africa:

*"I had a two-parent household, my mom and my dad. I have two brothers, one older one and a younger brother, and I have one older sister."*

With regard to her early years, Ifenkili provided a description of her family composition in Nigeria:

*"So basically, I lived with my parents, my own family... my younger ones [siblings]: I'm the first child, so, and first daughter. So I lived with them, all children, except in very few instances where I had to go to visit maybe an uncle or an auntie's family for holidays."*

In contrast to the majority of participants in the study, two of the South African women were raised in non-traditional households. Sunflower, for example, described being raised by her paternal grandmother:

*"My mom was 18 and my dad was in his early 20s [when I was born]. And my grandmother then raised me from 5 months until where I am right now, basically. And*

*then I would often visit my mother in [the city], because that's where she then eventually started working... And my dad was in [the same town as me] so he would see me on the regular because we were in the same place and he didn't live far from the house. But [I was] mainly raised by my grandmother, who is my dad's mom."*

Susan recounted her upbringing where she was primarily raised by her father and nanny:

*"My mom was always somewhere studying... yeah so I lived mostly with my dad and my nanny and then my brothers were always at boarding school or at university so I've never really spent much time with them either."*

Both the South African and Nigerian participants were raised in nurturing and loving homes where family played a central role in their childhood socialisation and identity formation. These women fostered close and supportive relationships with their parents, guardians, and siblings, who supplied them with indispensable support and on whom they relied for guidance. The participants grew up with a strong support system of individuals around them. Schachter and Ventura (2008) assert that parents and guardians play a crucial and intentional role in shaping their children's identity and subsequent growth, as they continually assess and contemplate their evolving duties and aspirations in light of this ongoing process. Suki described the impact of her family on her:

*"I think I've gotten such influence from the close-knit nature of my family. Due to that the influence comes from everywhere. But I think also the reason for that is there was never any hierarchy in my family. Everyone's opinions were everyone's opinions. So I think due to that there was no disregarding of the opinions of my younger siblings because they were younger, because there was no hierarchy. It was just that everyone is a member of this family and yes there are two adults and three children, but everyone seems to have equality of say for the most part, particularly I'd say once everyone was above the age of 10. I think yes, all four of the members but also we were not, my*

*family was not particularly close with my extended family. And so I think due to that, there was a lot of reliance placed on the four individuals by everyone.”*

Ngozi emphasised the significance of her family and teachers in her life:

*“So, my dad, my mom, their friends, my teachers, my aunts, my uncles that come around, plus my siblings. And then at the time we had some of my cousins with us, so they were my siblings. So, it was a bigger family when they lost their parents. They lost their parents at the same time. So, they came to stay with us and we grew up together. So they are a significant part of my life as well.”*

The vast majority of participants from South Africa and Nigeria typically derived significant support and encouragement from their parents and family throughout their formative years, and this had a substantial and positive effect on their identity development. Conversely, Stargirl did not possess the same close familial bond with her relatives as the other women did. In her own words, she expressed a feeling of insufficient affection from her family, which led to a decreased influence of her family over her life:

*“So you know what they say, when you have daddy issues, mommy issues, I actually had both issues, daddy issues and mommy issues... So the relationship was not like this lovey-dovey relationship between mother and daughter, no, because she had daughters like we were four girls, you know. So my older sister, she was giving them more love. And I don't know if it's because she didn't want them to go astray. I don't know. But I just felt like my parents did not like me. Who I am today, none of my family members influenced me because they had their own path. Is it no offense to my family. I mean, I love them. I respect who they are and where they are now. But I won't say any of them. Because my family is so diverse. Everybody is their own person in their own different way.”*

Schachter and Ventura (2008) acknowledge that parents' levels of identity agency vary. Nonetheless, the depth of their self-perception as active contributors to their children's identity formation, along with the complexity of their perspectives, hinges on the nature and rationale of their involvement.

Both South African and Nigerian participants reported their upbringing in environments that were significantly shaped by the respective countries' political climates. On the one hand, in South Africa, the women grew up in segregated township and village communities that were primarily racially and ethnically homogenous and marginalised, as mandated by apartheid policies. The women reported having a definitive awareness of their Black racial identity from a young age, as their early lives took place during the formal end of apartheid, as evidenced by their early memories of their parents and communities experiencing hope and freedom due to the release of Nelson Mandela during their childhood. On the other hand, the Nigerian women grew up in urban areas, however they noted the impact of communal conflicts that arose after Nigeria's independence, causing tensions among the tribes. The participants recalled how these conflicts led to the displacement of their families and tribes, emphasising that these disputes affected the country's politics and its international standing. Furthermore, the women demonstrated a clear understanding of their respective tribes, and their experiences varied, depending on the tribe to which they belonged. As members of specific tribes, they encountered various stereotypes during their formative years.

In contrast to the South African women, who were highly conscious of their racial identity due to the lower social status imposed by apartheid on Black people, Nigerian women were highly conscious of their tribal and ethnic identity. According to the participants in Nigerian society, individuals from tribes other than Igbo and Yoruba were often viewed as having an inferior social status. According to Erik Erikson's (1975) psychological approach, an individual's identity is formed through interactions with historical contexts (Kroger, 2004). This perspective

emphasises the interdependence between the individual and social, cultural, and historical contexts (Cote & Levine, 2002).

The upbringing of the women varied, with all but two of them growing up in traditional nuclear families with their parents and siblings. Two of the women from South Africa were raised by their grandmother and father, respectively, although they had regular access to their other parents, primarily during school holidays. All of the women's socialisation and identity development were significantly influenced by their families. Suki, for instance, mentioned that she grew up in a family without hierarchies, where she and her siblings had equal say, which positively impacted her identity. Ngozi, on the other hand, was influenced not only by her family but also by teachers, a sentiment shared by many of the women across countries. Stargirl, however, had a different experience and did not have a close relationship with her family, feeling that she was treated differently from her siblings, owing to her status as the youngest daughter. This disparity had a detrimental impact on her gender identity.

The women's social and cultural experiences within their families and communities significantly influenced their personal identity development. It is worth noting that African societies have distinct cultural practices, traditions, and social norms that are shaped by the way in which individuals are raised and socialised (Adisa, Cooke & Iwowo, 2020). These cultural and social norms are frequently established through patriarchal systems that often produce an environment in which women are marginalised and disadvantaged in various aspects of life (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Tuyizere, 2007). In the following section, the early life influence of traditional gender roles and expectations on the participants will be explored.

### 3.3. CONFORMING AND CONFIRMING GENDER ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS ON PERSONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Throughout history and across all societies, patriarchy has been a pervasive phenomenon that has fostered the subjugation of one gender by the other, thereby constituting a significant mechanism of domination (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). Literature has helped us to gain a better understanding of gender differences over the years (Adisa et al., 2020; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Dogo, 2014; Okoroafor & Iheriohanma, 2014). In Africa, gender plays a significant role in shaping how women grow up (Adisa et al., 2020; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010). Women's lives are more nuanced than men's, and this becomes evident from a young age (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016).

### 3.3.1 Confirming gender roles

According to Bako and Syed (2018), women have historically been confined to gender roles due to cultural practices and traditional beliefs, including religious and political norms. These expectations have restricted women to domestic roles and resulted in unequal treatment and compensation for women in the professional realm (Bako & Syed, 2018). In the study, both the South African and Nigerian women were taught to be self-sufficient from a young age. Notably, the Nigerian women were specifically taught to manage household responsibilities, including washing their school clothes and ironing, as well as assisting their mothers with domestic tasks. Bella's reference to her early independence and the expectations placed upon her reflect this cultural norm:

*“I was pretty independent, even in my home. Nobody checked up on me to ask me, did you do your homework? Did they not give you homework? None of that. So, I was responsible for myself. And that is why I got into high school at 10. So, I was responsible for my uniform. Nobody was checking if I was washing my uniform or ironing it or not. I was responsible for all of that. So, I think it made me a little bit... it made me independent really early compared to my peers at that age”.*

Certain Nigerian women were entrusted with the role of being their mothers' confidante, possessing insight into the challenges that their mothers faced as wives and family matriarchs. This notion is expressed by Ifenkili's words:

*"I don't know how to put it, [I was] like a daughter but more like a partner sort of. Or like a house help. So sometimes I used to feel like my mom used me as, since I was the first child and the first daughter. So, I'm the one taking care of my younger ones [siblings]. If she's [mom] having issues with her husband, she's coming to tell me everything. So that was the kind of relationship we had. And yeah, so she's always teaching me. So, it's more like it's mostly like a teacher, like a mentor. So, it's teaching me: 'oh, this thing that happened in somebody else's life, yeah, this is how to handle if it comes to your own life. Don't let it even come to you.' That kind of thing. She's always teaching us through folklores too."*

Stargirl perceived herself as being in a state of enslavement, due to the substantial burden of household responsibilities that she held as the youngest female member of the household:

*"You know, my brothers, my siblings, they are chilling. I'm the one in the kitchen with my mom. I'm the one doing everything. I felt like a slave. I felt like I was serving my family. I was a lap girl. So traditionally, it's expected as a last girl, you're the one that will do the most work. So, I did the most chores in the house. I was stressed. I was tired. I hated it I'm not gonna lie."*

The majority of the Nigerian participants, at times, harboured resentment towards their mothers and felt that they did not identify with them, often feeling sorry for their mothers. This sentiment was shared by the majority of the Nigerian women, including Stargirl, during her formative years:

*"So, my relationship with my mom was not, it was not solid, but we spent the most time together because I was the only child that was involved. It's like a salesgirl with the owner of a supermarket. So, I was at my mom's side all the time and I did not like it."*

*But there were times when I would watch her sit and she's like this [exhausted]. She's in deep thought, she's exhausted, she's tired. At those times I would feel pity, I would feel sorry for her.”*

The Nigerian participants reportedly acquired knowledge about gender roles for women at a young age from their mothers, who aimed to impart the significance of being a woman in Nigerian culture. Nevertheless, while some derived satisfaction from the autonomy that came with being self-sufficient, the majority of Nigerian participants expressed discontent with these prescribed gender roles and grappled with internal turmoil as they attempted to conform to them, even from a tender age. For the women, the conforming and confirming gender roles encompass a range of presumptions and convictions, both at the individual and societal levels, which have an impact on the thoughts, emotions, actions, resources, and treatment of women and men (Akoroafor & Iheriohanma, 2014). Among the South African women, the women reportedly received instruction primarily from female figures in their lives to exhibit respect. Susan recounts learning valuable lessons from her nanny’s teachings:

*“My nanny was all about respect. She was all about respect... And as a result, like I don't know man, I just feel like with our generation's [children] that element of respect somehow, like it's somewhat lacking, you know... And I find myself so frustrated watching other people's kids. So, yeah, I think that's the one thing that my nanny, really just, constantly preached growing up.”*

In addition, the majority of the South African participants reported that some of these gender role teachings were extended to educational settings. For example, the participants in South Africa were taught to knit and do needlework as extracurricular activities. As reported by some of the participants, Neatgirl was compelled to engage in needlework as an extramural activity, and she expressed her dissatisfaction for it:

*“The extra murals were something that my mind could not understand. Because we had sewing, we had sewing for girls and gardening for boys. Those were the only other*

*extra murals that we had. And for the life of me, I could not stomach, even as a child, why I have to sit there and knit. I didn't like it; it wasn't a part of my personality. But we would knit things like an apron. I don't want to sound... but it was mindless for me, even at that young age, because I didn't like it. I didn't see why I had to learn how to use the needle and everything else. I think that's more of a South African issue maybe.”*

Most of the South African women closely identified with their mothers. Faith, like the majority of the South African women regarded her mother as a gentle and caring figure, with whom she shared a strong, enduring bond:

*“You know, my relationship with my mom, my mom was like my somebody who I confide in. She was soft spoken, she was easy, you know, I could tell her things and she would advise.”*

The South African participants whose mothers did not reside with them due to occupational obligations or familial circumstances did not have a close relationship with their mothers. As a result, these women found it difficult to emulate or relate to their mothers. Susan provided the following insight:

*“My mom and I were not that close. She was always like somewhere studying and what-not, she was really very busy trying to get her career together and what-not, so yeah.”*

According to the participants' reports, the South African women did not receive the same level of socialisation regarding gender roles and domestic duties as the Nigerian women during their formative years. The South African women reported that gender roles were more emphasised in school through extracurricular activities such as knitting and needlework. Most of the South African participants reported having a close relationship with their mothers, perceiving them as nurturing and supportive. However, participants who were raised by other members of the family and guardians mentioned that their relationship with their mothers was strained.

### 3.3.2 Gender and beauty through hair

In Nigeria, the custom of young women styling one another's hair was widespread, particularly among those who attended boarding school. According to Hairee's account, she aspires to pass on this tradition to her children in the future.

*"If you had friends who could braid, you could maybe make your friends braid and then she makes yours, kind of thing. It was at boarding school I learned how to braid because I was like, oh, let me learn how to braid. So that, at that time I thought, well, I want to be able to braid my children's hair."*

Furthermore, the custom of esteeming their hair as a symbol of beauty and femininity was instilled in participants from a tender age among both South African and Nigerian women. This is demonstrated by the accounts of Suki, who remarked:

*"You [we] would all be at the salon, and everyone would be commenting on how lovely you looked."*

Bella highlights the fact that her mother invested time and energy into her hair since she was young, emphasising that a woman's beauty originates from her hair:

*"My mom, from when I was really little, she really paid attention to my hair, right, at the time because it grew really well and it grew really long and full. So, I remember as far back as maybe when I was four or five, I remember having people around touch my hair and say your hair is so full, your hair is so long, yeah, so she [mom] really took her time she would take us to the salon to make beautiful hair styles but the one that we would do as the regular hairstyles for school... She always wanted us to look good, it felt like it gave her joy to just see us look good and of course, you know that she would always say that a woman's beauty starts from her hair."*

Additionally, the women were conscious of the possibility of being rejected and being perceived as resembling a boy if they had shorter hair. Neatgirl recounts this experience:

*"It's the moment when you look like a boy, and everywhere I'd go I'd be told that, mostly by adults with the short hair."*

Hair, consequently, played a significant role in shaping the South African and Nigerian participants gender identity in terms of beauty and femininity, impacting how others perceived and defined their beauty and femininity, as well as how they perceived and defined their own beauty and femininity.

The most salient similarity among these women was that hair became a hallmark of femininity and beauty at an early age. Many of the women recounted going to the salon and having their mothers meticulously style their hair from as early as five years old. They reported that their mothers believed that the beauty of a woman originated with her hair, and other women at the salon would also compliment the young girls on their well-styled hair. In particular, the Nigerian women who attended boarding school learned to style each other's hair from a tender age, with some hoping to be proficient enough to do their own children's hair in the future.

### 3.3.3 Gender and patriarchy

Moreover, in situations where the participants, from both counties, were in families where all of the children were female, the women experienced pressure due to the absence of a male child in the household, as well as felt an expectation to meet male-related standards, whether this pressure was self-imposed or came from external sources. This led to a sense of inadequacy and drove the women to strive to achieve what male individuals could do. Ngozi recounted the following:

*"So, my mom is Igbo, my dad's Igbo. And I think I was exposed quite early to the importance of having a son, you know. And so, I was the first. And I know my mom tried to have more children. So, in the course of trying to have more kids, she lost a lot*

*of children. And so, we were three girls. So, growing up, there's the whole thing like, oh, people are like, oh, you need to have a son, you need to have a son to make sure that you have place in the family, whatever, whatever. So, I wanted to be an engineer, or at a point I wanted to be a pilot, even though I have fainting spells and I have no business being in the cockpit. But I just wanted to do what men were doing."*

Faith narrated her experience:

*"And I wanted to please him [father] all the time, all the time. So, I think somehow, he, because he loved boys, like, not that he didn't love me, he loved me so much, but I would see that he sort of wanted me also to be like a guy, so I ended up being tomboyish, you know, because, you know, wearing shorts."*

In the context of South Africa and Nigeria, daughters who were raised in families consisting only of females often felt compelled to take on the role of a male heir, as they believed that their fathers desired a male child. It is worth mentioning that the pressure on Nigerian participants also came from external sources, as their society held the belief that families needed to have a son to be considered in good standing. This societal expectation had an impact on the aspirations and gender identity of these participants.

The majority of the participants in the study, from South Africa and Nigeria, were closely connected to their fathers, embodying the role of a "daddy's girl." However, these women's experiences varied in terms of their fathers' approach and position within the family unit. Some fathers adopted a more traditional stance, assuming the role of an authoritative figure and protector, while others had fathers who were more vocal in expressing their validation and assurance of their daughter's beauty and abilities from a young age. In accordance with Neatgirl's observations in South Africa, some women had fathers who embraced a more conventional role as protectors of the family:

*“I think my dad is very traditional. My dad is from a rural area. My dad is traditional. So, the relationship that I had with my dad is not as open as the relationship that I had with my mom. He was more a provider, a... protector type of dad.”*

Similarly, in Nigeria Ifenkili viewed her father's role as more soldier-like, emphasising instruction-giving:

*“My dad is more like, when growing up was more like a soldier. You know, or a master. Like someone that just comes to dish out instructions and he's on his own. So, he's a little bit more detached than, but growing up, after a while he got better.”*

Conversely, Suki, in a similar manner to a select few of the women, reflects upon her father's caring and nurturing disposition, which he consistently exhibited during her formative years in South Africa. She recalls his unwavering validation of her beauty:

*“He [father] was a very involved parent and my relationship with him has been very... I felt very nurtured, felt very cared for and I felt very beautiful because you know there was not any day where particularly I... I think when I started really hearing it was when I did not feel particularly beautiful myself. And so, it was always that what he was saying and how I was feeling were two different things. But when I started really hearing him was in my teen years and in my late teens and early twenties when he was very intentional about verbalising how beautiful, how beautiful I looked, how beautiful my hair looked. How beautifully I was dressed... I've always felt that if anyone in the world ever regarded me as ugly, at the very least my father would think that I'm beautiful. That was one thing he just would repeat all the time.”*

Ngozi described her father as the first feminist she ever knew, as he did not adopt the typical Nigerian, Igbo man role of being authoritative, but instead enabled and empowered her and her sisters to pursue their aspirations:

*“I tell people like my dad is the first feminist I knew. I don't think he even knew he was a feminist. Like he didn't know the term. Like I don't think he knew, but he was an enabler and gave empowerment to women. Because his sisters were also empowered by his father. So, he's the one that was never, was never a typical Nigerian man, never a typical Igbo man. He was completely 100%. So, my dad was like: ‘anything you want to do, I got you.’”*

All of the participants in the study had a connection with their fathers, with the majority of the women being daddy's girls as their fathers invested in their development. Nevertheless, the relationships that the women had with their fathers differed, with half of the women having traditional and authoritative fathers. These fathers provided instructions, took care of the home, and were seen as protectors of the family. The other half of the women had fathers who were nurturing and validated their feelings, cheering them on and encouraging them to pursue their goals. Despite these distinctions, the women's relationships with their fathers were generally strong, providing an understanding of what it meant to be a woman, and had a significant impact on shaping their personal identity.

### 3.3.4 Gender and economic status

The South African and Nigerian women attained self-sufficiency at a tender age. They engaged in domestic tasks, such as laundering their clothing, ironing, cleaning, and assisting in the kitchen. While both groups of females experienced early independence, the Nigerian women exhibited a stronger propensity for domesticated gender roles compared to the South African women. Furthermore, a hierarchical structure existed in the distribution of housework, with boys occupying the pinnacle of the pyramid and girls following in order of age, which meant that the youngest girl had the most chores. The regulations governing housework occasionally generated resentment among some of the women towards their mothers, as they occasionally felt that their mothers imposed the chores in an unfavourable manner. The women disliked assisting their mothers with domestic duties, and sometimes empathised with

their mothers. In other instances, the women felt that their mothers confided in them about the tribulations of marriage and the pressures of being a woman, either verbally or through actions of deep thought and exhaustion, which elicited feelings of compassion towards their mothers. Among South African women, a strong emphasis was placed on respect for the women in their early years. These women often looked up to the female figures in their lives, such as their mothers, grandmothers, and nannies. They admired their mother figures' blend of softness and firmness and frequently sought guidance from them. However, the women who did not reside with their mothers due to them working or studying in different towns often had strained relationships with them during their formative years. A notable portion of South African women born in the 1980s and early 1990s were required to participate in extracurricular activities such as needlework and knitting in school, and many of them did not enjoy these activities. The socialisation process that taught them about household duties, respect and observing the motherly figures in their lives played a crucial role in shaping their understanding of womanhood and influenced their personal identity.

According to the theory of intersectionality, race and gender are not isolated or cumulative, but rather intertwined and synchronous (Holvino, 2008). Research has demonstrated that gender identity is intrinsically linked to racial identity (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). To thoroughly investigate gender, it is necessary to also consider race, as both factors contribute to the distinctiveness of our perceptions and experiences (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). In the subsequent section, the formative influence of race, ethnicity, and physical appearance on the women will be delved into.

#### 3.4. RACE AND ETHNICITY: THE ROLE OF SKIN COLOUR, SKIN TONE AND PHYSICAL APPEARANCE IN SHAPING THE IDENTITY OF THE WOMEN

The subject of race continues to be a deeply intricate and contentious matter in numerous societies, including those situated within the African continent. Colonialism, in particular, is a

historical process that has provided social and political meaning to the concept of 'race', and has sustained these meanings through various practices, institutions, ideologies, and contexts (Omi & Winant, 1994). The system of apartheid and its practices perpetuated and reinforced the beliefs and attitudes regarding race within South African society, resulting in the subordinate and subaltern positioning of the Black race in relation to notions of hegemony, power, and superiority (Adams et al., 2012; Durrheim & Dixon, 2010). The recognition of Blackness in early childhood among South African women is exemplified by their day-to-day experiences of living in townships or villages, as well as occasional visits to cities or towns for activities such as shopping, medical check-ups, and, in some cases, school attendance. During these outings, the women encountered individuals from other races and began to form a sense of their own identity and their position in society. Neatgirl elaborates on the experience:

*“The township was fine. By the time, only Black people, no other race. But the interaction with other races was not a problem because you go into town. I remember at a very young age my doctor, our family doctor was White, so we'd go into town. But generally, all of us were Black.”*

In the early 1990s, as the apartheid system began to falter in South Africa, the government implemented new policies that allowed White government schools to enrol Black students. Although a small number of students from various racial backgrounds had previously been enrolled in predominantly White private institutions, this marked the first instance of large-scale integration in South African education (Dolby, 2002). During this time the women also looked forward to transitioning from township and village schools which were racially homogenous encompassing a Black student body, to multiracial schools. Susan narrates how her transition came about:

*“I studied Grade One in a village primary school. And then the following year my dad was like, no, no, no, there's a new school that's opening here. And so, when my older brother was in Grade 6 or 7, he moved from a school from the village to now former*

*Model C schools<sup>4</sup>, and he couldn't speak English. So, my dad was very heartbroken about that, because I think he failed an interview in a nearby Model C school for not being able to speak English or something like that. I think that's when yeah so, I go to a new school right and then I'm basically fascinated with the teacher's [White teacher] hair and things like that."*

For the women whose parents were unable to finance their education at multiracial schools, observing their peers who had transitioned to such institutions and returning with improved English accents, different hairstyles, and increased confidence created a sense of awareness that they did not have the same access to these better/different opportunities. According to Neatgirl's account, she shared her experiences and observations while growing up:

*"You get girls that have gone to multiracial schools who have their own ideas of how hair must look. So now you start seeing girls wearing weaves, weaves in different colours. You see people that, Black girls that dye their hair blonde and it was quite a shock, not necessarily a shock, but it was quite interesting to see that. And I think somewhere, somehow, I also got a bit influenced because then you'd get, like you'd have a pony and put a clipper on much longer or, you kind of want to fit in with the beauty standards. Some of my friends starting to go to multiracial schools because then we would now hear stories about the White people and how they have White friends."*

*Faith added the following:*

*"In high school, I knew that I could achieve anything I wanted as well, but it was no longer just to say anything is possible. I knew that I had to put in the hard work and I knew that I had the capabilities to put the hard work in, but the limiting thing was*

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<sup>4</sup> Model C (or semi-private) schools were a component of a government strategy to desegregate predominantly White schools while preserving White majority populations and maintaining White administrative control (Dolby, 2002).

*obviously going to certain schools and not being able to go to certain schools which would limit how you express yourself and you know how you view yourself as a person. You know sometimes it would be one of those things to say I don't speak well enough like them, you know it would be one of those challenges; it was just only on the English part.”*

Moreover, these women would be selected to represent their educational institutions at interschool athletic competitions and community outreach events that involved multiracial or private schools. During these events, the women experienced a sense of racial segregation and disparities along socioeconomic lines. Faith narrated her experience as a high school athlete:

*“I think I became aware that I'm Black when I was competing in athletics because like I said, I was only exposed to Black people. Plus, my teachers were Black, my classmates were Black. We only saw White people on TV, but we also couldn't relate. So, it was not an issue. But when we went to the athletics and we saw the separation, yeah, that's when I realised that actually racial disparity, if I may use that word.”*

Neatgirl recalled being selected for an academic outreach programme at a nearby private school, where the criteria for selection was based on academic performance. She describes her experience as follows:

*“So, you get there and here's this big school with different races. Their moms are fetching them in these big cars, and they talk differently from how we talk. I told you. You know when you're young you don't see it. But now, like my memory, and I'm going back into my memory, they saw us as poor kids. But they did influence us positively. I think the activities really helped a lot.”*

Two of the South African women attended Black township schools, where they witnessed some of their peers transferring to multiracial institutions. Both women were academically

gifted, with Faith also excelling in sports, leading to their participation in mentorship and outreach programmes, which allowed them to interact with students from other schools. These experiences bolstered their confidence in their ability to succeed in their respective schools. However, they also became acutely aware of the divide among children based on race and socioeconomic class. Their township friends who attended multiracial schools returned with improved English language skills and better hairstyles. As a result, the women gained an understanding at a young age that race and socioeconomic status were closely intertwined. These experiences significantly influenced their racial and socioeconomic identity.

The women who attended predominantly White multiracial schools mentioned experiencing segregate treatment. Sunflower narrated her experience where their White peers would receive preferential treatment by schoolteachers:

*“You could see that the White kids were being favoured a lot more than us, a small group of Black children that were at the school. And not favoured in, like, I’m going to show you that I’m favouring this person, but in a lot of small things, in you giving them hugs, but you don’t want to give us hugs. You can take, for instance, a slice of bread or a snack that they are giving you, but you don’t want to take a snack that I’m giving you. Like, that doesn’t make sense. So, it was really small, little things that you started to then think, okay, there’s probably something wrong with me.”*

Suki voiced her experience of being a racial and ethnic minority at her school:

*“I was both in a racial and ethnic minority. At first when I think Grade 8, 9, and 10, the teachers treated me well, or as well as one could be treated in that school. But the teachers treated me well because I was a relatively good academic performer, and I was a woman who participated quite a bit in class. But in terms of the school, the boys, both Black and White boys, bullied me quite a bit and then from Grade 10 to 12, I was treated like a social piranha by the teachers because I had entered my extremely rebellious stage.”*

When discussing the specifics of her high school rebellion, Suki explained it as follows:

*“So, pre-Grade10, I participated in just about anything. I did the school plays, I did netball, I did hockey, I did soccer. I was in what was called the land service, which was basically Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts in a way. But I think after Grade 10, because at each of those activities, it became quite clear that the minute it became a situation where it looks like you might be capable of something. It was instantly, instantly discouraged. And so, there's a study that was done, because this reminds me of that, there was a study that was done... I think it was a well. And if a monkey went beyond a particular, there was a line, if any monkey started climbing out beyond that line, they would spray... would spray with water so that it would fall down. So first the monkeys did that, and they would be sprayed down. Then new monkeys would be introduced into the lot and then what happened would be, now when the monkey would try and climb beyond that line, the other monkeys would drag that monkey down. Post Grade 10, that became very clear. You would be ridiculed by the Black people for even thinking you could do something in that school. So now the establishment no longer had to discourage you. It simply could trust that the other jaded Blacks that had tried would tell you that, no, there's no point in you trying here because this is what it was. So that was really very much the experience in that school, such that when you got to Grade 10 you understood now why the rest were like that because they had also tried, and they realised it gets you nowhere.”*

Suki continued:

*“Racial rebellion, if I can put it like that, is almost completely due to that school. My understanding of the actual workings of how oppression works and what oppression seeks to achieve was all based on that school. But beyond 16, I never had any insight, but I did not need to simply because of how well it was prevalent in that school or how well it was obvious for me in that school. I think my perception also of the dynamics of*

*White South Africans also stems from that school and also my lack of fear, my lack of inferiority in the presence of White people stems directly from that school. So, I think every single experience in adulthood, other than the gender aspect of it, which I learnt in the last couple of years, but every single experience or opinion I have of myself as a Black South African stems from my experiences in that school.”*

In contrast, Susan explains the approach she adopted over time:

*“I think I probably spent most of my life in my little corner so I never really interacted much with other people if I can put it that way. I don't think I interacted much with other racial groups if I can put it that way, I had my few people that I was with, I guess, the whole time, comfortable with.”*

Three women from South Africa attended predominantly White multiracial schools where they were racial and ethnic minorities. These women reported experiencing feelings of rejection and exclusion from a young age, both from their White teachers and peers. They believed that they were situated at the lower echelon of the social hierarchy in their schools. Suki, for instance, disclosed that she had faced bullying from both Black and White boys, which had a significant influence on her racial and gender identity as a Black girl. Moreover, she believed that the racially oppressive systems and behaviours prevalent in her school were hindering her from realising her full potential. She further highlighted that the socialisation of Black students to refrain from participating and becoming disillusioned in school activities was so pervasive that even longer-tenured Black students would mock or belittle those who attempted to engage. Sunflower expressed feeling rejected by White teachers in her school, to the extent that she felt that there was something wrong with her. Susan made a decision not to participate in school activities and instead sought out a community of people to whom she could relate. These women's experiences with racial and, at times, gendered and ethnic discrimination at school influenced their racial, ethnic, gender and socioeconomic identity.

The women from Nigeria grew up in a society where everyone was Black. This racial homogeneity was a defining characteristic of their upbringing. All of the women reported that they became aware of Blackness either through books and television programmes during their adolescence, or during their travels to Western countries when they attended university. Additionally, within the context of their country's independence the women were not aware of any official discourses or practices within their country that degraded Blackness as a racial identity. Hairee explained her awareness of her racial identity:

*“As a child I never was aware that I was Black. I only got aware I was Black when I moved to the UK and could see White people. Well, when you grow up in a homogenous, at least racially homogenous society, that really is not spoken about.”*

Stargirl shared her experience:

*“So, I was fortunate enough to study English language and literature. So, we learned a lot of history about racism. In fact, racism was a course on its own. Okay. So, I studied racism, read a lot of books by great authors. I read about apartheid, read about slavery. That was when I became informed.”*

Ifenkili expressed her views on race as follows:

*“I don't, even till now, it doesn't really sink in that I know I'm Black. And I mingle with other people from other races. I work with some people too. I also mentioned some of them, my primary school proprietors family always came to visit her in the school, and also I am aware of other races, but it wasn't something I needed to be aware of, the way some people speak about it or something that says I'm different sort of the way people speak about it to me, it was normal to be like me.”*

Due to the homogeneity of the Nigerian society in terms of race, all of the women who participated in the study reported a lack of awareness of their Black racial identity. During the interviews, most of the women interpreted the term "being Black" as meaning being darker-

skinned than their peers, rather than as a reference to a specific race. The women were familiar with the concept of racism through literature and media, and those who had lived abroad only became aware of their Black racial identity due to racial categorisation in those countries. The majority of the women indicated that being Black was not something that needed to be acknowledged in Nigerian society, because it was the norm. These nuances and complexities revealed a sophisticated and elaborate lived experience among the Nigerian women with regard to their racial identity. Despite this, the women were aware of the social hierarchies that existed based on the shade or tone of their skin, from a very young age. Skin tone has been a common divisive factor in Nigeria, with countries that are racially homogenous having the highest level of diversity in skin tone due to varying levels of melanin (Ogbujah, 2021; Popoola & Ayandele, 2019). The assessment of the women's complexions began early on in their households, where comparisons were made among siblings and inquiries were made about whether they inherited their skin tone from their mother or father. Those who were deemed lighter in complexion among their family members felt a sense of pride in their skin tone and were cognisant of their beauty, sometimes even seeking to attain a lighter complexion upon interacting with peers who were lighter in skin tone. Hairee elucidated the subtleties inherent in the skin tones present during her upbringing:

*I grew up as the lighter [skin tone], I was a pure child of the other kind of thing. My mom is really light [skin tone] and I think I took her colour more than my siblings, my sister's siblings. And then, you know, I was aware that I was light, but there were lighter [skin tone] people that I would meet in school. And something like, I think I wanted to be lighter, like, you know, you were like, oh, I want to be much lighter [skin tone], like, it's the influence of TV and, and the definition of beauty, especially in Nigeria, like being lighter was perceived as beautiful kind of. So, the first time that I got aware of that, was maybe as a young teenager, but not about race. Not so much about race, more about colour or tone [of your skin]."*

According to Tenai (2016), lighter skin is frequently perceived as a pinnacle of beauty among populations with darker skin tones. This practice, known as colourism, entails discrimination against individuals with darker skin in favour of those with lighter complexions (Popoola & Ayandele, 2019). Hunter (2013) indicates that this form of intra-racial prejudice is widespread and has significant consequences, granting advantages to individuals with lighter skin over those with darker skin tones. Therefore, colourism is expressed through the subtle depiction of Eurocentric features as the standard of feminine beauty and attractiveness, which is often unconsciously perpetuated in society (Tenai, 2016). As a result, the women who were considered darker or darker than their family members experienced feelings of shame, inferiority, and bewilderment, as they struggled to comprehend why they were darker than others. Stargirl recounts her personal journey of being both dark-skinned and belonging to an ethnic minority group:

*“So, it was in school. They made me aware of my skin colour and they made me feel very ugly. They made me feel like Black was ugly. So, we had these kids that were from the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, they are known for having very light skinned women. I mean back in the day. Then my tribe, the Ibibio people from Akwa Ibom, we had a lot of dark-skinned people... So in primary school, whenever we had the end of the year party coming, and we had people [teachers] who wanted to select kids that would participate in activities like maybe welcoming parents, maybe leading the cultural song, or maybe leading anything that has to do with a speech. I'd always aspired to be a broadcaster...And I raised my hand and the teacher said, put your hand on one side, you're this Black mamba. You're so Black. And then they would say the girl that looked yellow would look good on camera. And they were so loud about it. So as a child, the question I kept on asking was, what is wrong with me? What is wrong with me? I'll never forget that woman [primary school headmistress]. She made me aware that there's a difference in my skin colour. And she made me dislike my Blackness. She made me dislike it.”*

According to Popoola and Ayandele (2019), in societies like Nigeria that uphold patriarchal values, women are often taught to be submissive and are judged more harshly on their physical appearance and attractiveness than on their abilities or intellect. As a result, colourism becomes a means for subjugation (Bhattacharya, 2012). The women also endured comparisons regarding their complexion relative to their broader ethnic groups, in which certain groups such as the Igbo tribe had a reputation for having lighter-skinned women, who were commonly considered more attractive. According to Fakorede's (2022) findings the Nigerian educational system is marked by a deeply entrenched belief in the superiority of individuals with lighter skin tones. Regrettably, it is not unheard of for darker-skinned children to be subjected to ridicule and derogatory names such as 'blackie', 'charcoal', and 'burnt offering'. In contrast, those with lighter skin tones are often referred to using terms such as 'Yellow pawpaw' (Fakorede, 2022, p.4). The significance of both colourism and ethnicism can be seen in the way in which they lead to the marginalisation of individuals (Ogbujah, 2021). Ngozi explained her skin tone variation from the remainder of her family, as well as her experiences associated with it:

*“The only self-esteem issue I had growing up was about my colour because I was dark and then everyone was fair in my family. I was aware I was dark. So, colourism in Nigeria is a problem even till now. So, I mean, everybody wanted to be light, to be fair. Fair in complexion. Lighter in complexion. And then I was dark. And then it wasn't fun that my ethnic race, my tribe, most of the girls are fair, are light. So, it's like, that's what Igbo people are known for, being light skinned. And so, I was dark. Like, what the heck? My mom was light skinned, my twin sister was light skinned, my junior sister was light skinned. Like what the hell? So, I was not happy with being that way but... my dad made me embrace who I was but yeah so, I was aware I was dark but when I was I think probably three or four years old, because everyone was like this one is dark, this one is fair, this one is you know so I knew from a very young age I was dark.”*

From a young age, the Nigerian women faced a cultural preference for lighter-skinned children. This bias had consequences for those with darker skin tones, who experienced shame and discrimination due to colourism. In their social interactions, these women were often subjected to judgment and comparison, with those with lighter skin tones receiving favour. These experiences had a lasting impact on the women's sense of ethnic and gender identity.

The relationship between race, ethnicity and gender in the early stages of the lives of the South African and Nigerian participants was intricate. It seemed that their gendered racioethnic identity played a significant role in their marginalisation, both explicit and implicit, which served to exclude and "other" them within their surroundings, particularly in the educational context. As Booysen and Nkomo (2016) suggest, researchers should consider the intersections of gender with race and ethnicity, rather than focusing solely on gender. Moreover, like all identities, race and ethnicity can lead to feelings of "othering" and exclusion of outgroups, often based on common acts of racism and ethnicism that favour in-groups (Ogbujah, 2021).

Although the experiences of women from South Africa and Nigeria highlighted the theme of othering and exclusion, their experiences were complex and nuanced, influenced by various factors, particularly socioeconomic standing. In South Africa, participants who attended township schools encountered challenges due to their social class, as a consequence of their racial identity. They believed that they lacked adequate access to resources and opportunities, resulting in feelings of inferiority and the belief that they would have better prospects if they attended multiracial schools with superior resources. The experiences of South African participants who attended multiracial schools were intricate and influenced by the interplay of race, gender, and class dynamics within their educational institutions. These experiences led to their exposure to more overt racial discrimination and exclusion at an early age. This included preferential treatment towards White students by teachers, bullying from peers, and

a sense of inadequacy as Black girls in their schools. The Nigerian women, on the other hand, faced challenges related to ethnicism, colourism, classism and patriarchy. They experienced stereotypes based on ethnicity, preferences for lighter-skinned girls and biases for failing to meet those standards. As a result, the darker-skinned participants often experienced exclusion during their critical developmental years due to their physical appearance which instilled in them a sense of inferiority. Overall, the South African and Nigerian women's interlocking identities of racioethnic and gender identity were further influenced by classifications related to social class and skin tone, which impacted the development of their personal identity. In the following section, the impact of socioeconomic conditions on women will be explored in depth.

### 3.5. SOCIAL CLASS: THE IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THE PERSONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMEN

Smith and Nkomo (2021) posit that social class can be assessed by considering the extent of access to resources and power. These resources may differ culturally and can be quantified. The social class of the women has an impact on their access to economic power, land, political power, education, and admission to significant social networks. Consequently, social class segregates individuals in society along a spectrum of economic achievement and social privilege (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). One of the essential factors determining the social status of the women was where they grew up. Living in townships or villages played a pivotal part in their lives, as it had an impact on their sense of identity. Despite the enforced homogeneity of race and ethnicity within the women's communities as a result of apartheid policies, the women observed people of different social classes living in close proximity within the same village or township, and over time, a slight placement according to social class occurred. The description of the class structure of Sunflower's township is shared by her words.

*“Class, if I can call it that, was different in each household. We had nurses, we had doctors in the same street as mine, but you could just see, man, there is some bit of a struggle, but it's not as bad as other areas. But we learn to live with it. It's almost like*

*an acceptance of okay they're a bit better off and they're not you know what I mean so that's exactly how I mean.”*

The majority of the women were raised in lower and middle-class households and resided in communities where the role models for success were teachers, social workers, nurses, and police officers. While some of the women's parents held these occupations, others were unemployed. This outcome was a direct consequence of the primary objectives of the apartheid policies, which aimed at the exclusion of Black individuals from highly skilled vocations. Upon entering the workforce, these Black people encountered yet another form of racial inequality: occupational segregation. This was a key component of the apartheid policy, involving job reservation policies and discriminatory practices that prevented Black individuals from obtaining skilled or semi-skilled positions (Gardin, 2019). Faith's comment reflects the economic circumstances of her family and community:

*“It's a township, man. Like the majority of people in the community were grant recipients, right? The bulk of them where the highest qualification that they would get was matric. You know, like you know in a normal South African township, very seldom where you would find, well people who had money were people who owned spaza shops, so you can imagine. Yeah, and you would have teachers here and there, nurses here and there, but the bulk of the people really, we were if I would classify them, it was really lower LSM<sup>5</sup>”*

The result of the women's upbringing in their respective communities was such that their ambitions were closely linked to financial gain. Although the women had numerous aspirations, they frequently scrutinised whether those goals would prove financially lucrative. Suki recounts her evaluation of her ambitions in light of their capacity to yield monetary gain:

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<sup>5</sup> The Living Standards Measure (LSM) serves as a research and marketing tool employed in South Africa to categorise individuals' living standards and disposable income.

*“When I was small, I wanted to be famous. That’s all I wanted. I wanted to be known. I wanted to be revered. I wanted to be just someone who had some type of significance or international recognition of sorts. So, I thought briefly about going into acting and going into drama, but I think for whatever reason either it was discouraged or it just dawned on me that that wouldn’t be something that would be lucrative in the sense that I also as much as I wanted a claim, I also wanted something that would be lucrative or something that would bring me a lot of money.”*

Susan's statement exemplifies the mindset of the women, stating:

*“I’ve just always wanted to earn a lot of money with whatever career I chose, because I remember at some point saying that my passion is money and I’ll just learn to love whatever it is that I do.”*

According to Hart (2007), the presence of two key conditions is necessary to be classified as human: the ability to maintain a high level of self-sufficiency and engage in a wide range of social connections that entail integrating our identities. Money is typically viewed as a vital element that supports personal identity and promotes a sense of connection within society, representing the aspirations and shared wealth of all members of society (Hart, 2007).

The education of the women played a significant role in determining their social class and shaping their self-perception. The women discussed at length how their experiences at school illuminated the hierarchical nature of South African society. For those who attended Black township schools, the women felt that they lacked exposure to better opportunities and were acutely aware that factors such as access to relevant information regarding academic choices for higher learning were lacking. A prime example was Neatgirl's experience:

*“I think because my mum was a professional woman, and she's someone that I looked up to, I don't think I was ever fed any message that I can't be anything that would stop me from being what I wanted to be. But when you get older and you get out there you realise no, but the kids that went to better schools knew more information than you did. When you get to varsity, they've already done their research about the courses there. They had three steps forward types of mentality. So, it's not necessarily that I knew growing up that there were certain hindrances. I just became aware of them later in life when I got out into the world. That's when I realised that maybe I could have gotten more opportunities than what I had originally thought.”*

Moreover, Neatgirl posited that her involvement in a mentorship programme at a nearby private school facilitated her awareness of the racial and social disparities, which subsequently equipped her with the ability to navigate the racial and economic realities when she attended university. She additionally asserted that this exposure prepared her for the transition to university, where she had acclimatised herself to the racial and class disparities that her friends confronted once they commenced attending university.

*“As opposed to the other students that I went to school with, and then we went to university together, I think they had a hard time adjusting to the new environment, public speaking... no matter how smart you were back then, when you get big, I think you kind of doubt just how smart you are because of the race issue and how other Black kids speak better than how you speak, you know. You kind of equate intelligence with the way people present themselves. So, I think by the time I got there I was quite comfortable because I had that interaction and also, I had that mentoring programme that I did also in high school. So, I think by the time I got to tertiary it wasn't really a shocker for me as opposed to the other kids that had never really been exposed to that.”*

Neatgirl's sentiments are apparent in Faith's experience, reflecting those of her friends from her township school. Faith recounted her racially and socioeconomically related culture shock during her first year at university, when she realised that she possessed significantly fewer resources than her peers. This revelation had a profound impact on Faith's sense of self. Faith emotionally narrated her experience:

*“Going to varsity, was manageable academically, but then I think some reality started hitting where you're attending a lecture with another race, Whites, you're attending with Indians now, Coloureds as well. You know, there's other people different from you; where now you have to express yourself and expressing was a bit of a challenge sometimes because, you already had this thing that your English was limited, right? But there's that thing also, I think which is also something that I still have even now where you would judge yourself because of how you pronounce things or how you sound you know... remember I told you that the finances at home was not so great. Um, so that meant, uh, I had to do with what my parents gave me, with what I had. I'm remembering it now, when I was going there. You know, my parents gave me... I had the bed cover. It was my mom's best, and it was like the only one she had, right? So, she gave me some of her pots. I had some of the food that they had in the house. I had two pumpkins as part of the things that I needed to go to a city and eat for some time... while I'm waiting for bursary money right here yeah so then it got a bit challenging because it meant I had at least something to eat. Because I didn't have cash.”*

Although Neatgirl had adapted to and was unperturbed by the discrepancies she encountered upon beginning her university studies, she still acknowledged the existence of social class disparities between herself and her peers. During these instances, she sought solace in her parents, as she described in her own words:

*“When you meet other kids with better social spending than you. I remember I could not believe that you had this... you know this... cheese girls, what you call them? They*

*had cars, they lived in raves, and they had cars. And I had to travel by train from home to school, and I had to wake up and catch a train at 6 o'clock in the morning. I think also realising the different social statuses, also realising that uniform doesn't work for you anymore, like you have to look a particular way. So, you see the challenges in that? What made it easier was the support of my parents and my background.”*

The women who attended township schools faced transitional challenges as they moved from high school to university. Despite their hard work earning them a place at their respective universities, they often felt like they didn't belong. These women's experiences were complex, with Neatgirl, who did not live in university residence, benefiting from exposure to mentorship programmes in high school that made her aware of racial dynamics and class differences. However, she still had to navigate the social expectations of traveling to university by train and realising that she needed to dress and present herself in a certain way while seeing other students with cars and better clothes. In contrast, Faith, who lived in university residence, struggled with exposure to other races and peers who had more than she did, as she grappled with not having enough money. Ultimately, these women's experiences influenced their racial, class, and physical identity.

The South African women who attended multiracial schools conveyed that socioeconomic status played a pivotal role in their educational experiences. Suki elaborated on the class-based hierarchy that existed in her school, where Black students occupied the lowest rung of the ladder, while affluent White students with parents who were alumni of the institution held the highest position. In her words, Suki narrates the following:

*“I attended what was called a, I think it was called a parallel medium or a Model C dual language school which taught or instructed in both Afrikaans and English ...Okay. So, for the first time I was in both a racial and an ethnic minority. My high school was almost completely governed in accordance with class. So, Black people were at the very bottom, middle class White people were in the middle, and upper middle class and*

*upper-class White people at the very top. The students that succeeded in that school were so-called legacy children. So, children who had a) been at the school, were wealthy, and whose parents were well-known in the town, or who were successful in the town. And you saw the class because there were some middle-class White students who were academic performers, but because their parents were not legacy children or any person that was well-regarded in the town, they were still considered social pariahs. The same with Black people, there would be Black people who were excelling in sport or excelling academically, but also would not be regarded. So, it was not a school where any meritocracy was prevalent. It really and truly was an unfair, class-based society in that school.”*

Sunflower recounts instances where her socioeconomic background, along with that of her fellow students of colour, prevented them from participating in fundraising activities and extra-curricular pursuits at their school, ultimately resulting in feelings of exclusion. According to Sunflower:

*“So, I was in an Afrikaans school from Grade One up until Matric... I remember even in my Grade One class, we were probably at the most five Black kids the treatment was, yeah, a bit sketchy because like obviously abelungu<sup>6</sup> were being favoured more in certain things, and as I was explaining earlier, that they were having all of these extra murals that their parents could afford, and you're just sitting in the class, and the teacher doesn't even know what to do with you... it was a bit weird at the beginning, but then, I don't know, as a child you probably don't really care for those things and only realise as an adult or later on that, oh, that was not okay, actually... There was a group that was always at school on Fridays and they were a private company type of thing and your parents had to sign up for that and pay an additional amount because it was this additional extra mural activity. And literally, almost all of the White kids in*

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<sup>6</sup> A term commonly utilised to refer to individuals of Caucasian descent in South Africa.

*my class used to go and do that. And a few of us would be left in the class because they would literally do that probably from 12 o'clock. So now the whole class is gone because their parents were able to afford this thing that they're doing extra and yours obviously did not afford to pay for that and they did not see the necessity of that or whatever. So, with that as well, I really felt like, this is a bit weird. I'm not sure what it means or what to do with it, but I know that there's a difference in the way we are being treated or the way that things are being done around us."*

Conversely, Susan posited that her adopted method was to restrict her social circle to a small, homogenous group of individuals with whom she could relate, and to abstain from attempting to assimilate with people of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, as she had experienced in high school and throughout her university years. Susan, in her words, stated:

*"I had my few people that I was with, I guess, the whole time, comfortable with, I was doing classes with, so I've never really made an effort to actually meet other people or interact even with other racial groups. But, yeah, if there were people that I went to class with, it was 'hi-hi', there was really not much interaction."*

Prior to commencing their university studies, the women grappled with the financial feasibility of attending university. Sunflower articulated her trepidation in the following manner:

*"I always thought that finances would definitely play a big role in me getting to where I want to be. I don't come from the wealthiest family. You know, we literally live hand-to-mouth all the time. So, thinking about going to varsity and eventually being where I am right now, I never thought that would be possible. Yes, I know that there are funds available from the government and stuff, but I never thought that I was clever enough to get them or just a suitable candidate for any of those things. But yeah, mainly I think financial struggle and just I think a mentality thing of seeing, for instance, at school that a lot of White kids were the ones who were getting all of these achievements and*

*trophies and certificates, and then thinking that there's absolutely no way that I can get there because of my skin colour, for instance.”*

However, upon successfully enrolling in university, the women did not experience a jarring adjustment to university life. Sunflower elucidated her experience of the transition to university as follows:

*The transition specifically then, that was not difficult for me. And also, when I got to the university, I was just like, it feels like I'm back in high school. Because of the structure of it, they speak Afrikaans the whole time, there's a whole lot more White people than Black people. So, it just felt to me like I'm going into high school but just with different people.*

Similarly, Suki felt that her high school had equipped her with the knowledge and understanding necessary to navigate the university system. She also acknowledged that her transition to university illuminated the sheltered nature of her previous life. In her own words:

*“University impacted my experience more or less in the way that my high school impacted it, but this time I was unfazed by White people and their oppressive tactics and the oppressive nature of the system. And because it is academia, I find academia to a certain extent, perhaps not so much now, but academia to a certain extent can be immune to too much unfairness, racial unfairness in certain instances. And also, the other adjustment was realising I grew up quite sheltered. Once you start seeing people who grew up in abject, not just poverty, abject poverty, people who grew up in unstable homes, people who grew up extremely spoiled and rich, so you start to realise that your thing is that you grew up sheltered.”*

The experiences of the South African women who attended multiracial schools exposed them to racial and socioeconomic disparities at a younger age. These women observed social hierarchies in their schools, where White students from affluent backgrounds were positioned at the top and Black students at the bottom. They were excluded from participation in

extracurricular activities that provided career and networking opportunities through private companies. Susan, one of the participants, adopted a strategy of accepting her circumstances and not actively participating while forging a small circle where she felt accepted. When these women transitioned to university, they did not experience significant culture shock in terms of racial and socioeconomic disparities. They employed the strategies they developed in high school to navigate university. A notable finding reported by the participants was that their parents demonstrated a consistent approach to preserving what they had while also recognising what they lacked. This was evident in their reactions to encounters with students from both extremely impoverished and wealthy backgrounds, which elicited shock and surprise. These experiences impacted the women's racial and socioeconomic identity.

The residence of Nigerian women during their upbringing was indicative of their social standing. Frequently, Nigerian women and their families resided in urban areas within the country. It is important to note that multiple tribes often coexisted in the same area. The majority of the women grew up in the city, describing their residential areas as suburban. Their parents were predominantly well-established entrepreneurs and directors. Hairee described the environment she grew up in:

*"My parents were very middle class, and my dad was a director. I grew up in the city, grew up in relative privilege, predominantly Black, because in Nigeria, we don't have, it's not similar to South Africa where you have like racial differences in the same way. Predominantly Black Nigerian suburb, but what we had was different ethnic groups. So, I remember as a Grade 11 we had Yoruba and Igbo neighbours. So, I didn't grow up in a space where it was all of my ethnic group in the same area. So, I grew up, it was almost like a mix of different privileged children living in like areas and trying to do life.*

Bella and her family relocated from Nigeria to Cameroon, a decision prompted by her father's entrepreneurial pursuits. She points out that although their community was considered lower-middle class, her family held a higher socioeconomic standing at that time.

*“I grew up in Cameroon, the north province of Cameroon. I wouldn't call it a rural area, call it a suburb, right? So, we had mostly French speaking people... There were very few people who were doing really well. At some point, my father was doing well as a businessman, you know, but they came up with some policies that affected his business along the line. But and we were living in our own house, not a lot of people-built houses there, you know, to live in. So, we were doing pretty well compared to the people on our streets, for example, or the area. We had more people in the lower class and people in the upper class.”*

However, one of the women, Stargirl, grew up in abject poverty, where her father had lost his job as a banker and her mother operated as a street vendor. Stargirl indicated that she was frequently required to assist her mother in transporting the food that she sold, ahead of attending school, and as a result, she would often be subjected to teasing and mockery due to the lingering scent of food on her clothing.

*“So, I grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. I grew up on the mainland of Lagos. On the mainland of Lagos, it has the rich part, and it has the poor part. In the part that is poor, but not completely wretched, right? The part that was completely wretched, they were literally living in the slums. Like they were living on top of a refuse dump. So that was the wretched part of the mainland. And it still exists till today. So, I lived in the poor part... My dad lost his job as an accountant via a very unfair process. My mom became the breadwinner of the house, solely the breadwinner of the house. So, she was making fufu<sup>7</sup>. So, I wake up in the morning 5 a.m. or 4 a.m. I would drop my mom in the kitchen. We will make fufu, but in a bigger pot, very massive pot. We'll make it, we'll mould it,*

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<sup>7</sup> Fufu is a traditional West African dish made from starch and has a consistency similar to that of mashed potatoes. It often serves as a side dish with soup or stew.

*and then we'll supply to people that were selling it on the streets. And that comes with a smell. It's not a pleasant smell. It's not nice. So, you know when you're making the fufu, the smoke from the firewood, the smell of the fufu, it sticks to my uniform... By the time I'm on my way to school, half my colleagues or half my schoolmates, they've seen me on the road and they're laughing at me.*

Stargirl experienced a sense of shame and felt like an outcast, as she recounted:

*So, they don't want to sit close to me. They don't want to talk to me. So, I was like an outcast."*

In contrast, the majority of women, such as Ngozi, felt proud of the families and communities they grew up in, believing that they could achieve anything.

*"So, I grew up in a very exposed, educated environment. I had no limitations, to be honest everything was possible for me."*

It is worth noting that there also existed various tribal stereotypes within the communities which were associated with social class, business acumen, and financial success. In this context, the Igbo tribe was commonly perceived as being business-oriented, as stated by Bella:

*"Igbos are very business-oriented, and there are opportunities to do business and make money."*

According to Collins (1990) and Smith and Nkomo (2021), social class, race, and gender are interconnected systems of power that have been constructed over time and mutually reinforce one another. Therefore, the value of the women's social class origin is to gain insights into how the women's nuanced social class background has influenced their identity, aspirations, and career pursuits, as well as the obstacles they face in advancing their careers.

The education of Nigerian women was also a significant indicator of their economic status. Many of the women attended private schools, which they acknowledged were more expensive. Stargirl elaborates on the type of school that she attended:

*“My school was a private school. My parents put me in the school because they had put my siblings in the school. You know, at that time, that was when my dad was working in a bank, so he had a bit of money to, you know, so the school fees were not cheap, it was expensive.”*

The women who attended private schools further emphasised that although children were generally provided with equal opportunities, the students who were often the face of the school or succeeded were those whose parents were of a higher social standing. These preferences, according to the women, were more evident between teachers and parents, rather than among the children themselves. Ifenkili explained:

*“In primary school. So, I went to a private school. And thank God I went to a private school. All Blacks and we were treated nicely. We were treated okay. I didn't feel like some people are treated differently than we other people are. Unless, yeah, there's something important. Sometimes you felt like people that had money had more, a little bit of an upper hand than those that didn't have a lot of money. But that didn't come from us, it was coming from maybe the teachers; and parents' relationship. So, like, most of the times we were just okay.”*

In contrast, Bella attributed the reason for her parents placing her in a government school in Cameroon to the good quality of education in the country. She noted that although the volumes of students were large, there were teachers who paid great attention to the children's education:

*“I attended a government primary school in Cameroon. You know that government schools have quite a number of children, maybe a thousand or more. So, we didn't have any special treatment at all. And of course, they used to spank us very well when*

*we come late or when you make mistakes here and there. When it comes to the quality of teaching, quality of the lecture, we had, I'd say it was a very good one. Was a very good one; I had a good foundation. They taught us well. I was mostly first or second, first or second throughout my primary school.”*

Despite the majority of the women having attended private schools during their formative years, two of the women transitioned to public schools for their high school education, citing financial constraints as the reason for their parents moving them from the private schools. Stargirl elaborated on her parents moving her to a public school.

*“High school was a mess. It was a public high school owned by the government. So, it was a big estate and then there were different secondary schools. We had different uniforms, right? And there were a lot of fights... That was a time where things became really hard at home. My dad lost his job”.*

They reported that the classes were large in volume and that the teachers were negligent towards them due to the low wages they received from the government. Ifenkili explained the difference between her primary and high school:

*“My high school was a bit different. I went to a public school. There were a lot of people in my high school... The treatment was different here. You're on your own mostly, just come and do it. Now in my primary school it was all around academics, personal life, extracurricular activities. But in my secondary school, it was a little bit different here because there were a lot of people. In JSS1<sup>8</sup> alone, we have about 1,000 students. Over 1,000 people in JSS1, the same in JSS2... So, you are basically almost on your own apart from the teachers come to teach and go.”*

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<sup>8</sup> JSS is an abbreviation for Junior Secondary School in Nigeria. In this educational system, students typically spend a total of six years in secondary school, which is divided into two phases. The first phase comprises three years of study in JSS1, JSS2, and JSS3. The second phase consists of three additional years of study in SSS1, SSS2, and SSS3.

Stargirl expressed similar views to Ifenkili, stating that:

*“The high school itself was not an enabling environment for studies because the government was not paying the teachers. So the teachers were not coming to class, they were not serious... There were only a few teachers that were passionate about their job, that were coming to class.”*

It is worth mentioning that Ngozi's parents transferred her from a private school to a public school. However, despite this change, Ngozi's sentiments are that the school's mandate and her experience were characterised by unity and excellence. In her own words, she recounted her school as a place where these values were upheld:

*“So, there were these federal secondary schools that were set up by the government after the war. The government schools were called federal government schools, and they were called unity schools, because they were made up of all of the tribes of Nigeria and the government was intentional about children going to school there so that they could mix up and then there wouldn't be too much tension amongst the tribes. And after the war, and they were in every state. So, I went to that unity school. The staff made sure that they had the best teachers.”*

The aspirations of all of the women were geared towards attending university, with Stargirl referring to it as a means of escape from poverty, as perceived by the people in her community:

*“The first reason I wanted to go to university was to gain my freedom from my environment. It was a way out for me... So, I had seen enough in my environment. I needed a way out. So going to university wasn't really to get an education for me. It was to escape.”*

Most of the Nigerian women grew up in middle-class households in urban areas, where their parents held professional jobs. These women attended private schools for their primary education. Despite some differences in their social class experiences, the majority of the

women reported positive experiences in private school and felt that they had access to many opportunities. However, there were nuances in terms of treatment in school, as there were hierarchies based on the affluence of the family. One woman, Stargirl, experienced bullying and rejection at school due to her lower-class status and assistance in her mother's street-vending business, which resulted in her school clothes having a food odour. Her experiences of exclusion were intertwined with her origin from the Ibibio tribe, which was not as highly regarded in Nigeria, and her darker skin tone compared to her peers. These experiences made her feel like an outcast. The majority of the women were moved to public school for high school, and they noted that the school environment was not enabling as there were many students in each class, and the treatment was different. The women also noted that the government teachers were not paid well, which played a part in their experiences at school. One woman, Bella, attended school outside of Nigeria in Cameroon and reported that the public-school quality in the country was good. Ngozi, who attended a recently established unity government school designed to educate children from different tribes and promote tribal harmony, reported that the quality of education was commendable. The Nigerian women, both overall and within their respective social classes, navigated the complex interplay between gender, cultural, ethnic identity, and social class, thereby shaping their personal identity in unique ways.

The transition to university for each of the women was unique, as some of them experienced financial hardship due to tuition fees. Ifenkili, in particular, recalled having to start businesses and take on multiple jobs to make ends meet:

*“It was not easy. What made it easy is because that's what I wanted to do. That's the school I wanted to go to and what I was doing was what I wanted to do. That's the only thing that made it easy. It was challenging because as I said I didn't have any money. My parents didn't have any money. I had to go through doing menial jobs and waiter jobs and combining it with school as a teenager and as a young girl.”*

According to Ifenkili, she was primarily in survival mode throughout her time at university, and she did not have the opportunity to engage in social activities. Instead, her focus was on earning money and successfully completing her studies:

*“I was in survival mode in university. If I was not studying, I was at work or doing business.”*

Stargirl, had faced similar circumstances as she could not evade the class disparities between herself and her peers. However these compelled her to spend even more time at the library. In her own words, she recounted the following:

*“So, it was a struggle and wearing clothes, my hair, how I looked, I felt I did not fit into the system. Partially, going to the library all the time and studying and studying and studying, it was like a camouflage, you know, to hide the fact that I had all of those internal struggles. So, it was a coping mechanism as to how I looked because I was living in the hostel. I had girls who had money, girls who were from rich homes, girls whose parents are government officials.”*

The experiences of the women who lacked financial resources, the effect that had on their appearance, and the necessity to give up their social lives to go to work or conceal their financial limitations, all contributed to their social class and physical identity.

Bella encountered multiple transitions as she entered university, including relocating back to Nigeria with her family. She had to adapt to the educational system of Nigeria after having previously studied in Cameroon. Furthermore, she needed to secure employment to manage the financial constraints associated with attending university. In her own words, she recounted her experiences:

*“So, when we moved back to Nigeria, the state of origin [the state and city she and her family lived in prior to relocating to Cameroon] is very far from university. But my brother was trying to make ends meet in that city already. So, he told me to come join*

*him. I came and I joined him, and we started doing jobs here and there. We worked in a factory... The transition to university, I'd say that the tutorials helped quite a lot because transitioning from the educational system in Cameroon to the one in Nigeria was a shift."*

The other women referenced the existence of family members who were employed at universities and the capacity to reside with them as factors that had an impact on their decisions regarding which university to attend and facilitated an easier transition to university, whether in Nigeria or abroad, for Hairee and Ngozi, respectively. In Hairee's words she stated the following:

*"So, the transition was relatively easier because my uncle was a professor at the university. So, moving to that state, at least I had like a scaffold because my uncle was there and I could stay in his house till I got my accommodation sorted, that kind of thing. But in terms of from a personal viewpoint, so I was 16, I wasn't 16 at the time, I was 16 when I got into university. So, I was really young, just being in this space with very many different people, it was quite overwhelming. And I was a shy girl. I'm a shy person. What am I supposed to do here?"*

Ngozi, in her words narrated her experience of relocating from Nigeria to the United States of America for university:

*"So, it was easy for me because my dad's sister, who is a professor, was a visiting professor at that university at the time. That was mainly why we actually chose the school. So, it was really easy to be honest. We had a soft landing. But it was different".*

When elaborating on what was different, Ngozi stated the following:

*"When you go to stay with your aunts and uncles, it's almost like they bear the cost... Maybe your parents can just give them money behind the scenes or something. But*

*for the first time my auntie before I could even, in fact we landed in the U.S. First place she took us was the bank to bring money to pay for rent. I was like whoa and my dad didn't know about it. So that was that was the game changer for us. For us to stay with her, so that we are going to help her. That's the way she said it, we have to help. I remember telling my sister I want to go back home. We hadn't even seen the house we were paying for. We are paying already."*

According to Olasupo and Idemudia (2017), the quality of life for Nigerians is undoubtedly impacted by their socioeconomic situation in the country. Despite being the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria faces numerous socioeconomic challenges that have contributed to poverty and conflict within its borders. These challenges manifest in the political, social, and economic dimensions of the society, and poor governance and weak institutions have been a pervasive feature of Nigeria's experience (Ofoche, 2012). When transitioning from high school to university, the Nigerian women faced financial challenges that forced them to take on low-paying jobs to cover their expenses. Out of the five women, only one lived in university residence. Stargirl, who lived in university residence, felt pressure to conform to her peers' appearance, as she lacked the same clothes and hairstyles. This led her to avoiding socialising, fearing that her physical appearance would reveal her socioeconomic status. On the other hand, Ngozi had a softer landing in the U.S., living with her aunt, who was a visiting professor in the country. However, Ngozi was taken aback by her aunt's expectation that she provide financial assistance in order to continue staying with her. The diverse experiences of the women influenced their social class and physical identity.

In the study, the social identities of both the South African and Nigerian women, including their gender and racioethnic identities, are interconnected with social class, which is a system of power that exacerbates the experiences of women. According to Booyesen and Nkomo (2010), the meanings associated with these women's social identities are continuously shaped, modified, and reinforced throughout a person's lifetime by social systems and institutions.

Specifically, a recurring motif arose from the accounts of participants at three diverse stages, including when South African multiracial school attendees entered these institutions, when South African women who attended township schools transitioned to university, and when Nigerian women pursued university education. The convergence of social class with the pre-existing intersection of racioethnicity and gender intensified the adverse experiences of the participants and significantly influenced their personal identity. Classism denotes the practices, beliefs, behaviours, and policies that perpetuate the marginalisation and subordinate status of individuals with limited financial resources (Smith & Mao, 2012).

Moreover, based on the early life stories of women, they seem to skilfully manoeuvre and reconcile their multiple identities of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, despite often encountering obstacles as a result of their intersecting identities. Despite these challenges, the women seem to navigate their intricate and nuanced lives, as this is their reality. The interplay of these identities yields a richer understanding of their lived experiences. The following section delves into the embodiment of Black African women's hair as an intersection of their identities related to gender, racioethnicity, and social class.

### 3.6. HAIR BIAS: THE EMBODIMENT OF THE INTERSECTION OF RACIOETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Hair had been an integral aspect of the women's lives from a tender age, with their mothers and female caregivers, such as grandmothers and nannies, serving as their first examples of hair styling. The mothers of South African women generally sported natural hairstyles, whether it was a short cut or a longer afro, and in some cases, they wore a doek<sup>9</sup>. Neatgirl described her mother's hair as follows:

*“My mother has always worn her hair short and natural. I don't know anything else.”*

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<sup>9</sup> A South African term for a head wrap.

Suki also discussed her mother's natural hair, highlighting how her mother's hair choices inspired her own. Additionally, she noted how her mother nurtured and affirmed her hair throughout her life.

*“She always wore her hair natural. But all throughout my life, I don't recall that I've ever ever had a comment from my mother that my hair was anything less than spectacular. To her really and truly whether it was plaited, whether it was it was just that it was just beautiful. Her favourite word was neat. You know, so neat, so neat, it just looks so neat. So, I think the message that I got from her, and I think that that has been something that has informed my hair choices to a T, was that to her, my hair is something that is beautiful, something to be marvelled at, and something to be very, very proud of. Not just in the way that she wore her hair, but the way that she regarded my hair.”*

Susan provided a description of her mom and nanny who always wore a head wrap:

*“My nanny always had a doek on. So... I don't think hair was a thing back then like, you know being raised by very traditional Black people, you know, ladies put on a doek and things like that. It's like, my mom to this day, she has a doek full time. And as a result, like her hair's gone now, like she doesn't have hair anymore. But I've never seen her with hair basically. She's always had a head wrap, you know, that type of thing.”*

Prior to reaching the age of school attendance, the experiences of the women with regard to their own hair were limited to two specific circumstances. Some of the women had mothers who enjoyed taking care of their hair and styling it since a young age. In such cases, the women's mothers would praise them on the beauty of their hair and emphasise the importance of proper hair care. Suki describes how her mother took great care in styling her hair in her preschool years:

*“In having me get ready for preschool every day, the care that she would take in there was very much that I had a beautiful head of hair and that was well taken care of and that I looked very pretty and every day I mean regardless of the fact that now when I think about it I looked like a middle-aged woman going to, I don't know, going to work, but with her it was just that my hair was very, very beautiful and that it was a lot and that I was just very pretty. And so, every time that she would do my hair, it was just, it's moments that I now in my adulthood, I think back on with great joy.”*

In alternative circumstances, the women's mothers or caregivers were incapable of styling and maintaining their hair, and consequently resorted to cutting it. Sunflower recounted her own experiences with her grandmother's inability to tend to her hair:

*“I grew up with my grandmother. My grandmother didn't really know what to do with my hair or how to do my hair, so there was never like a love from the start as I was growing up.”*

Similarly, Susan recounted her father's act of cutting her hair as a result of his inability to attend to her hair.

*“My dad just wanted to cut my hair all the time because he didn't know how to manage it. I guess it was that thing when it's really difficult to maintain the hair. So, for him, I think it would have been better if I was a boy so he could just cut my hair every day.”*

Once the women reached school age, most of them were taken to the salon around the ages of 5 and 6 to have their hair chemically straightened. Suki describes this experience as a momentous occasion prior to primary school.

*“Oh, I'll have to start from zero to five, the typical hairstyle was very much unrelaxed hair. It was very much unrelaxed hair. Some type of what they called bambatha<sup>10</sup> where*

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<sup>10</sup> Combing out one's afro and patting it down with the intention of achieving a rounded appearance.

*it's a little afro... But from around age five, because I remember it was quite a momentous occasion to relax the hair for the first time because it would have a nice curl and you would all be at the salon, and everyone would be commenting how lovely you looked. And what I recall was that the relaxing of the hair was also to prepare you for school. And in the preparation for school, so part of beautifying you, preparing you, you're a big girl now, part of that was to also relax your hair."*

However, some of the women's hair and scalps reacted poorly to the chemicals, leaving their hair thin, and their scalps sustained patches and burns from the chemicals. Faith and Susan discussed this situation. Faith explained the effect that relaxers had on her hair texture:

*"When I relaxed my hair, it was too fluffy. So, I didn't want it to look like, they used to call it the kats-kats. <sup>11</sup>Kats-kats means like cat hair."*

Susan in her words, described how relaxers caused patches to her scalp:

*"I spent most of my childhood with very short hair you know and also even with relaxed hair, sometimes you get like patches man, patches, you know. Then I just wake up one day and my mom has shaved off the one side, you know, and I'm forced to shave off the other side now because I like relaxed hair. And I think it came from, like you know at school, most kids would have relaxed hair. And that's how they were managing their hair at the time. So, I also wanted to look like other kids, have relaxed hair and stuff like that."*

The women, however, wished to continue straightening their hair in order to appear similar to other children at school, however the women recounted the extent of damage to their hair. As with Susan, Sunflower shared her experiences of desiring to continue utilising relaxers to ensure that her hair closely resembled that of the other girls at school:

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<sup>11</sup> A term commonly used in South Africa to describe the after-effects of applying chemical hair straighteners, resulting in thinning hair and a cat-like texture and appearance.

*“I was in an all-White school and there weren’t a lot of Black kids in the school. So that was also difficult because all we saw all day is this flowy silky hair and blonde and brown and black and all these different colours and you just have black, coarse hair basically. And you just, don’t understand. So, you start to have this whole love-hate relationship with your hair that really isn’t necessary, because I mean it is what it is. And yeah, I remember growing up as well like I wanted to always have my hair relaxed and I wanted it to be silky I wanted it to be straight and it damaged my hair a lot.”*

Susan recalls an unfortunate event in which her hair was set alight on Christmas day, shortly after she had relaxed it. She stated that the burns had long-lasting effects on her and recounted the details of what occurred:

*“Something that still affects me to this day is when I burnt my head, I had just relaxed my hair, it was Christmas. And then usually my nanny used to just burn her hair, so every time she’d comb her hair or do something then like the hair that’s left over on the comb then she would take that hair and burn it basically like you know so I had just done my hair I think I just relaxed my hair that day it was Christmas, getting all dressed up to just look cute you know you dress up for Christmas... So I tried to do the same thing but then because the products that you use like when relaxing your hair are very flammable, they attracted the fire and then yeah, so my head was on fire and then I ran to the garden under the tap and I managed to basically put the fire off, but I had burnt my hair so I had to be in hospital for a couple of days to have that treated. This was the end of Grade 6.”*

The women reported that as they grew older, their parents dissuaded them from placing excessive emphasis on hair length, with Faith's father emphasising the accomplishments of women with short hair. Faith shared a recollection of her father's advice to her, cautioning her against placing excessive emphasis on having long hair:

*“We all wanted the long hair. And I didn't have that. There's a saying that he [father] used to say. Butle babulaya<sup>12</sup>. So, all of that was part of him discouraging this long hair and all of that... In fact, he used to tell me about people like Naledi Pandor who was a minister at that time for education. Thandaza<sup>13</sup>, was my role model and she looked good in her short hair, she had that skin. So, for me it was, you can still look good even in the short hair, because of how she presented, she was the CEO at that time with that short hair.”*

Although the majority of women at home were encouraged by their parents to embrace their natural hair and refrain from comparing it to their peers' hairstyles, the women also faced pressure to conform to beauty standards. Specifically, the women were often viewed as more attractive when their hair was straightened. Girls with Afrocentric hairstyles such as dreadlocks, were often associated with certain stereotypes, leading to the expectation to modify their hair in some way. In her words, Neatgirl stated the following:

*“Because we lived in an area where you just plait your hair, or you relax it. And then when you get to high school people start experimenting then the era of the dreadlocks started. The teachers were taken aback even in the Black schools about the dreadlocks because the dreadlocks were associated with reggae, with dagga smoking people, that sort of thing. So, in high school I had short hair, I didn't have a problem with that, but the later years in high school I would style my hair, because it was relaxed, I would have a pony most of the time, I would let it loose so people can see how long it was I guess, and you'd get more compliments. If you had long hair that was relaxed as opposed to a girl's short hair, you'd be told how beautiful you look.”*

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<sup>12</sup> A proverb in Southern Sotho, which translates to "beauty kills," warns that the pursuit of beauty can be detrimental.

<sup>13</sup> A successful businesswoman and CEO on the SABC 2 soap opera Muvhango in South Africa.

The women encountered judgements from teachers regarding the hair of students. Susan indicated that negative stereotypes were particularly directed towards natural hair, which subsequently led her to adopt hairstyles that were more acceptable. Susan narrated how she styled her hair for school and shared her observations on how teachers perceived the hairstyles of students:

*“Okay in high school it was mostly braids that I used to wear my hair in, but I just tied like I just tied back you know because also it was deemed as neat if I can put it that way. So I guess at that point I felt like those hairstyles with those hairstyles I was really not bothering anyone like in terms of the teachers, because the teachers could really just be on your case about the hair and how you wore it. They really deemed certain hairstyles very like neat so if you had like braids or your hair was tied the whole time or you had relaxed hair, those things were acceptable. But like having your afro in an afro I don't think that was okay back then, because yeah it looks like you were just trying to attract attention, or you were just you know attention seeking basically.”*

As the women progressed through high school, some opted to adhere to the regulations, while others chose not to comply anymore. Sunflower specifically mentioned that it was a science class where she was studying about the detrimental consequences of using chemical relaxers that motivated her to discontinue the practice. In her account, she explained her choice to discontinue relaxing her hair during her high school years:

*“I think also in what made me change to my natural hair in Matric was because of science. I did physics in school and in the chemistry part of it we were talking a lot about like what relaxers have in them, all the chemicals and we were seeing pictures of what actual damages it causes and it was tense. So, after seeing that I was like okay I am done with relaxers. I'm never going back to that again. Yeah, and that's where the I don't know the fire was ignited to just really try and think and try and research and try and see like what other people are doing with their hair, what other people are saying about their hair and the more I saw that the better it was actually.”*

On the other hand, Suki transformed her hair into a bold statement of non-conformity in opposition to her school, which she considered discriminatory. Her emotions and convictions were embodied in her hairstyle, leading her to a pivotal moment. Suki articulated her sentiments through the following declaration:

*“So, Grade 10 and prior, it was mostly the way that I had worn it in primary school. So relaxed, long, and then Grade 10, that is when I cut it. The express chop I was talking about. And from then on, I guess my hair was a direct communication of my attitude because I cut it short and then it was red. And then it was short and relaxed styled in a mohawk, a very rebellious two-toned mohawk. And then when I started having a racial identity overhaul, it started being natural and short, and then natural and long. So, I'd say it was conforming, and then rebellious, and then anti-establishment. I think that's how my hair can be characterised through the different eras of my high school.”*

The sentiments that Suki holds were later reflected in her professional career choices as a lawyer. Her experiences also influenced her physical identity, particularly with respect to her hair.

The Nigerian women grew up with a particularly strong emphasis on the care of their hair. The women's mothers invested considerable time and energy, especially during weekends, in nurturing and braiding their daughters' hair into a range of hairstyles, including cornrows and threading<sup>14</sup>, to ensure that their hair remained healthy and natural. Bella recalled her mother's dedication to her hair:

*“I know that my mom invested in our hair when we were younger. So, we had very healthy-looking long hair.”*

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<sup>14</sup> An African hairstyle characterised by the wrapping of sections of hair in wool or thread.

Hairee related how her mom would care for her hair during wash-days:

*“My mom had this thing where whenever it was wash-day, she would thread our hair with like a plastic. So, after she washed your hair, she will divide it into like big chunks and then thread it. And what this threading process used to do was that it would stretch your hair and make it like really straight. So, the threading process was almost like blowing out your hair. And that was like the closest I would come to having straight hair. And it was a thing. It was like, I would look forward to when mommy would do the thread just because I know at least for a day I can have like straight hair.”*

In contrast to South African women, Nigerian women were more likely to see their mothers' wearing wigs and hair extensions. Ifenkili, in particular, remembered seeing her mother's extensive collection of wigs throughout her childhood:

*“My mom was always putting on wigs. Her excuse is that she couldn't braid her hair. She had a very sensitive scalp, so braids really hurt her a lot. So, she'd either wear her natural hair in different styles and style her natural hair or she'd put on wigs because she didn't have that strength to always be styling her natural hair all the time. So, she wore wigs a lot. We saw a lot of wigs hanging in the house and that experience made me know I'll not do wigs in my life a lot like my mom.”*

As the eldest daughter, Ifenkili held a distinctive position in her family, acting as both a deputy mother to her siblings and a trusted confidant to her mother. Despite their close bond, Ifenkili did not share her mother's fondness for wigs and did not identify with her extensive wig collection. Instead, Ifenkili embraced her natural hair, moving further away from wigs. This decision had a significant impact on her physical identity.

Ngozi recounts the time when her mother embarked on her natural hair path, motivated by the discomfort caused by the braids she had installed. In her own words, Ngozi related the experience:

*“My mom was somebody that just, she took care of her hair really well... my mom used to have hair, she was one of the people that permed her hair early. I think it was because she had gone to Jericho. And she came back, and I remember she had these braids, you know these tiny braids? They call them million braids in Nigeria because they are like so many. So, my mom sat down, did this hair, came back home and she was like, oh my God, my hair is in pain, my hair is in pain. You know what my mom did? In frustration, she used scissors to cut her hair short, marking the beginning of her short hair journey.”*

Ngozi's mother was a frequent traveller, and this event occurred during one of her excursions outside of Nigeria. Despite cutting off all of her hair and refraining from wearing hair extensions again, Ngozi held her mother in high regard for this decision and deemed her brave. Exposure to this experience influenced Ngozi's physical identity. Similarly, Stargirl recounts her mother's commitment to preserving her natural, beautiful hair, while also detailing the pivotal moment when her mother cut off her hair during a financially difficult time in the family's lives, as a means of demonstrating solidarity to her children:

*“So, my mom's hair is thick, it's luscious, it's long and oh my god it's so black and then she's got one silver strand in front... She used to take care of her hair, she used to put oils, coconut oil, she'll massage it into her hair and then she'll brush it out and then she'll pack it in a bun. So, my mom carried her hair like that. She did for a while. But then when things got really tough in the house, to set a good example for her daughters, she started cutting her hair. My mom would be cutting her hair and would be crying. We'd be crying because we loved it. But as I said before, my mom's hair is magical and it's magical because she could cut her hair which was growing at this crazy rapid rate, you know, so that was one thing she said: she had to use herself as an example that look at my hair, every time I cut it, it grows back.”*

Furthermore, Stargirl recounted that her family was unable to afford the upkeep of her hair, leading to the decision to cut it. In her own words, she articulated her experience of not having a relationship with her hair:

*“I don't really have a relationship with my hair because my parents started cutting my hair from a very young age. We had two names actually. So, the first name is gori magpa<sup>15</sup>. Or the funny one, afari korondo<sup>16</sup>. So, they have their reasons. And as I said, I grew up to understand I had no choice, just let it go. So, you know because of the struggle of taking care of your family, feeding the kids, making hair for kids was quite expensive. And when you put your kid in school, every school back then had a hairstyle for every new week.”*

By demonstrating to her children that hair can regrow, Star's mother served as an example of perseverance and determination, while also promoting a unique standard of beauty. These experiences during her formative years had a significant impact on her physical identity as a woman.

All of the Nigerian women's mothers made a conscious effort to maintain their daughters' hair in its natural state from a young age, and were firmly against the use of chemicals such as perm or relaxers, which could alter or straighten the natural texture and appearance of the women's hair. As a result, the women have memories of having natural hair throughout their formative years. Hairee recalled her mother prohibiting her and her sisters from using perm on their hair until the end of high school:

*“You know, my mom had this rule, so she had six girls, so she had this house rule that you couldn't put any relaxers on your hair till Grade 12. So, till you had to go to university you couldn't have any relaxers or anything, so you had to go with like your natural hair so like all the six years of being in school and you know seeing girls with*

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<sup>15</sup> The term that is commonly used in Nigeria to refer to a clean-shaven or bald head.

<sup>16</sup> A term used in Nigeria to mock someone with a clean-shaven head.

*relaxed hair and like nice and sleek. I always, you know, thought it would be nice to have like relaxed like permed hair”.*

The women's educational institutions also had specific regulations regarding hair, including its tidiness and the appropriate hairstyles for pupils. Notably, during their primary school years, the women were obligated not only to sport their natural hairstyles, but also to ensure that their hairdos were uniform with many of their peers opting for cornrows or threading, which proved to be a more bearable option for mothers to do on their daughters in terms of discomfort and even promoted hair growth. Ngozi recounted how her mother would style her hair:

*“In primary school I did cornrows and thread, but I did more of the thread and the reason was because my mom knew that my pain threshold was very low when it comes to making my hair. She believed that making that thread made the hair soft. And I just noticed that after making thread it's easier to comb your hair. And our hair always looked longer... And then with the threading, it tangles less because you wrapped up the whole hair inside the thread. So perhaps that's why it's easier to comb.”*

As the women grew older, they became increasingly responsible for the maintenance of their own hair, which led to their hair not being as well taken care of as it was when their mothers were still responsible for it. Bella described her experience as follows:

*“So, in high school, because I was a little bit more independent, I didn't pay so much attention to my hair. Yeah, but my mom would always make my hair do, I think on Sunday nights for the coming week. And maybe I would have the hair for two weeks and then she'd make another one. I cut my hair at some point, midway in high school. I cut it because I didn't know, I felt like it was stressing my mom. I just wanted to give her a break when she was going through quite a tough time with her business.”*

Furthermore, some of the women proceeded to attend high schools where they were obligated to shave their hair off, as the school administrators held the belief that the hair was a distraction. As per Bella's explanation, this was the rationale behind the school's decision:

*“First, they didn't want it to be a distraction, then secondly, they didn't want to allow people from the, you know, external community coming to the school to make hair and all of that. So, they just put a rule that if you're coming in, you cut your hair.”*

In her narrative, Ifenkili described a harrowing event at school that involved the sudden cutting of all of the students' hair. This incident has had a profound and enduring effect on her:

*“In secondary school, one day, the vice principal, not the principal herself, came to the assembly ground and those that had bushy hair, they put scissors, and their hair was cut. And I'd spoken and I didn't like that, and I couldn't just complain like others. I had to write a letter to the principal, telling the principal that even if she's new, that this is downgrade, that it's a downgrade, like we have junior students over here and they kneel us down and get our hair cut. I loved my hair. I felt really slighted and I didn't like to be insulted that way.”*

This experience, along with the sentiments expressed by Ifenkili, demonstrated her dissatisfaction with her parents' decision to transfer her from a private school to a public school. She believed that the treatment that she received was inadequate.

In analysing the life stories of the women, it became evident that it is imperative to illuminate their unique perspectives and experiences, while also considering the social, political, and cultural ramifications of colonialism during apartheid and communal conflicts in South Africa and Nigeria, respectively, on their intersecting identities. The implications of these dynamics have impacted the social standing of these women within their societies, as their hair inadvertently functioned as an embodiment and a symbol of their intersecting identities and consequently been treated as such. The narratives of the women's formative years detail a

multitude of demeaning, prejudiced, and exclusive experiences grounded in racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic elements that have endured and accompanied them throughout every phase of their lives and growth. Nevertheless, their families, as a critical contributor to the development of their identities, instilled in the women a sense of pride and self-care, perseverance and determination, and an appreciation of diverse standards of beauty. This, in turn, has facilitated the women's progression through their early years, enabling them to navigate their intersecting identities with remarkable ease. It is evident that these women have grappled with the nuanced and complex life experiences associated with intersecting and interlocking identities as Black African women, and have devised methods to pursue their aspirations and ambitions despite these circumstances, while also celebrating the intricate beauty of their identities. This approach has helped them to navigate their way forward.

The concept of identity encompasses the question "Who am I?" and pertains to the various meanings attributed to oneself by both oneself and others (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Identities are formulated based on an individual's personal and demographic attributes, group memberships, relationships, and the roles which they occupy in society (Ashforth et al., 2008). Thus, the narratives of the women's early lives in this chapter, as well as their intersectional identities in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, highlight the fundamental aspects that their identities are interconnected, dynamic, and multifaceted, rather than being a single, monolithic entity. The findings reveal that the context in which these women were raised plays a crucial role in their identity formation, including the residual effects of apartheid and communal conflicts in South Africa and Nigeria, respectively. The cultural beliefs, values, and norms related to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, which are communicated through a country's historical context, educational institutions, communities, and families, have an impact on the socialisation of the women and significantly influence the formation of their identity. These factors operate concurrently during the early lives of these women and play a crucial role in shaping their embodied identities. The women's lived experiences and their consciousness of how their intersecting identities are perceived by their surroundings is a

crucial factor, not only to answering the question "Who am I" but that exacerbates the embodiment of their intersecting identities. This includes the ways in which they are treated as a result of these identities and their position within society, as well as their acceptance, internalisation, resistance, and rejection of these aspects.

### 3.7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I initially provided an overview of the historical contexts in which South African and Nigerian women lived. This included the colonial remnants of apartheid and communal conflicts, which influenced where the women resided and the conditions in which they were raised. Subsequently, I discussed the role that racioethnicity, gender, and social class played in influencing the experiences of these individuals. Moreover, other intersecting factors contributed to shaping their experiences, albeit some characteristics, such as skin colour, hair length, and texture, were more noteworthy than others. I then delved into the process of identity formation for these women during their childhood and school years, and how this carried over into their transition to university. The interlocking identities of these women, encompassing racioethnicity, gender, and social class, as well as the symbolic manifestation of their hair, played a crucial role in their identity development.

Despite the experiences of marginalisation and subordination endured by women in various contexts and to varying extents, these women have developed resilient and forward-looking identities. From a tender age, they have had to endure being marginalised due to their gender, racioethnicity, skin tone, or social class, either simultaneously or at different times. Moreover, their childhood experiences were compounded by the policing of their hair. Nevertheless, these women made peace with this being their norm, and persevered as they developed their identities. Although certain experiences took a considerable toll on their self-esteem, confidence, and sense of self, their support system, educational achievements and persistence set them in good stead to achieve their goals and, to some extent, restored parts

of their personal identity and sense of self. Their family's support system provided them with a healthy and nurturing home environment, while their parents instilled in them the importance of self-care, appreciation, persistence, and healthy standards of beauty. Their educational opportunities prepared them for university admissions and professional prospects in lucrative career paths. Furthermore, their lived experiences as Black African women provided them with unique perspectives that facilitated their identity navigation. This chapter aimed to address the research queries pertaining to how the systems of colonialism, apartheid, and patriarchy, along with the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, intersect to produce social comprehensions of 'Who am I?' and 'What does it signify to possess my hair?' among women. The chapter particularly provided a response to the research question on the impact of the intersecting identities of racioethnicity, gender, and social class on the participants' formulation of personal identity and the role of their hair in personifying these identities, as well as the implications of hair bias. Moreover, the chapter illuminated the continuous identity work that the participants engaged in throughout their formative years.

The following chapter delves into the contemporary professional identity of the participants, examining the query, 'What does it mean to be professional?' and 'What does it mean to have my hair?' The nature of the identity work that the women undertook upon entering their professional roles, the manner in which their experiences in the workplace impacted their identities, and the strategies they employed to navigate their work environment and challenges are the primary focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### TANGLED TO TAMED: NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AT WORK

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3 I dealt with the early life experiences of the women, as well as their childhood socialisation in relation to both their personal identity and the subjective views on their hair. The chapter concentrated on the socio-political-historical contexts of apartheid and communal conflicts in which the women from South Africa and Nigeria, respectively, were raised. Additionally, it emphasised the central role that their race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and family played in their identity formation. All of the women, regardless of their nationality, shared a unified perspective on what constituted 'neat' hair and were required to adhere to this standard throughout their formative years. In South Africa, the women learned to straighten their hair and use hair extensions at an early age, as their notion of what was considered neat and beautiful was shaped by Eurocentric standards stemming from their socio-political-historical background and reinforced by their educational environments. The Nigerian women were bound by their mothers' rigorous guidelines for wearing their natural hair in cornrows or threading, as well as the strict regulations of educational institutions, which mandated cutting their hair short during their formative years. However, the Nigerian women also faced the influence of Western media standards of beauty that preferred lighter skin tones within their society. As a result, these women eagerly awaited the completion of their high school education, as it would grant them the allowance to straighten and relax their natural hair. The influence of the socio-political-historical context of the women was instrumental in shaping their socialisation and ingrained beliefs regarding the level of neatness and presentability required for their hair in their respective surroundings.

During their early lives and into their early adulthood, the women grappled with the intricate and nuanced aspects of their personal identities, which presented challenges in their lived experiences. Drawing from their life stories, the women appeared to have adeptly navigated

and reconciled their multiple identities of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, despite often encountering obstacles stemming from their intersecting identities. Upon completing high school, all of the women were accepted into university. At this stage, the South African women embraced their hair in its natural state, occasionally incorporating hair extensions. In contrast, the Nigerian women had the autonomy to experiment with their hair, opting to use hair relaxers, weaves, and wigs as they navigated early adulthood. As the women transitioned into university life, they encountered identity and financial challenges, primarily stemming from their racioethnic, gender, and class identities. Despite these complexities, the women demonstrated determination and resilience as they navigated their way through challenges and successfully completed their higher education.

The current chapter focuses on understanding the organisational context in which the women are currently situated, and how they navigate their professional identity and hair appearance to be perceived as competent and professional. The objective of this chapter is to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the intricacy involved in identity work that the participants of the study undertake in their professional setting. The chapter focuses on analysing various elements in the context of South Africa and Nigeria, particularly in light of the intersecting identities of women, including their race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. The research emphasises the significance of accounting for the postcolonial climate including apartheid in South Africa and the communal conflicts in Nigeria. These factors are assessed within the broader socio-political-historical context of both countries.

The current study is premised on the need to gain insight into the lives of women and how various elements, including people and institutions, have influenced and continue to shape their subjective perception of their hair, regardless of their career path and the trajectory thereof. It is important to recognise that the professional life of Black African women is interconnected with other aspects of their lives and the socio-political-historical context in which it takes place (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Smith & Nkomo, 2021). I observe that these

women have demonstrated exceptional diligence and ambition in their pursuit of economic advancement. Consequently, I am eager to gain insight into the coping mechanisms that they employ to surmount the obstacles that they encounter in their professional lives and sustain their progress.

Moreover, the chapter explores the intricate dynamics of professional identity development and renegotiation among the South African and Nigerian women, with a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved. This entails analysing the various themes that arise throughout the women's career progression. The study seeks to explore these themes in a structured and organised manner.

#### 4.2. THE INTERPLAY OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

All of the women in the study completed four-year university degrees, with majors in a variety of fields, including law, pharmacy, economics, geology, computer science, and English literature. Several of these women have achieved advanced academic qualifications. In particular, one has earned her Doctorate, five have obtained their Master's degrees, and two are currently enrolled in Doctoral programmes. In addition, two are enrolled in MBA programmes, and three plan to pursue their Master's degrees in the near future.

Upon beginning their careers, all of the women shared a unified sentiment in that they had finally attained the ability to achieve financial independence. All of the participants in the study commenced their careers in the labour market during the 2000s. Notably, three women entered the labour market between the years 2000 and 2009, while five entered it between the years 2010 and 2019. Additionally, two women entered the labour market between 2020 and the present time. The women held the conviction that the years of dedication to their education and professional aspirations had finally provided them with the opportunity to bring

honour to themselves and their families and acquire financial stability. Suki articulated her unwavering conviction towards attaining widespread acclaim and her aspirations for earning distinction and esteem:

*“I did regard myself as having the necessary competencies for a lawyer, but I also thought a lawyer is someone who has some type of significance, who has some type of acclaim and who will receive some type of recognition. I'm not sure where I got that from, but it was just clear to me from the get-go that it would be the best career option for me. It wasn't anyone that had imposed it or anything along those lines.”*

From the time that the women joined their respective organisations, they observed the organisational hierarchies, which were based on race, gender, and class classifications. These hierarchies were further compounded by classifications of xenophobia, tribalism, ageism, and lookism in professional settings. These hierarchies, according to the women, existed from the time they entered the workforce until the present, with some women still in those organisations and others having opted to leave. Faith described the feeling commonly experienced by the majority of the women from both South Africa and Nigeria, upon their initial entry into a professional setting:

*“My first formal job of corporate, how I learned to cope was for me to pick up quickly in spaces that I'm not supposed to be in and accepting that this is not where I am called to function and it's okay to not function in there, although I thought I would function in there. So that made me to be able to be realistic with myself and it opened a way for me to see other avenues and other channels that I could use to still be in a marketplace, but in a marketplace where I didn't feel out of place.”*

According to Scott et al. (2013), workplace exclusion is understood as the degree to which an individual believes they are being overlooked or excluded at work. In her account, Faith, who joined the South African workforce in 2015, recounted being taught early in her career to recognise when her environment was not inclusive and accepting of her, and when it was. She

added that her sense of not belonging prompted her to explore other career paths. Faith further elaborated on a feeling of social exclusion in her workplace, emphasising its impact on her decision to avoid future attempts at inclusion:

*“It would be things that you really cannot put on the table. It would be your sense of suspicion or sense of feeling like you’re not welcome in this space and you would just safely just remove yourself without saying anything... It would be like... during lunch, when you find people sitting together and they’re talking, laughing, laughing and then you join them and then suddenly the conversation goes a bit down and then 5 minutes into you sitting they’re leaving. Then next time you know that okay, you know... let me sit somewhere else.”*

The narratives of exclusion experienced by Faith in her professional setting shed light on and presume the experiences of women during their early lives. In describing her experience, Faith portrayed being excluded from her workplace due to her race and lower social standing, as her peers did not recognise her as an equal. The women in this study frequently encountered exclusion as a result of the intersection of their identities, which can be traced back to their formative years and persist in the workplace, leading to tension in their professional identity. According to McCluney and Rabelo (2019), factors such as race, gender, and social class can give rise to tensions related to belongingness and distinctiveness for Black women at various stages of their careers.

Suki, like all of the South African women, characterised the South African workforce as a space that accommodates various social groups, except for Black women. In her own words, she expressed exhaustion and a lack of enthusiasm for any prospect of change and an organisation that embraces Black women based on their merit and hard work:

*“What I do not like is that I have become very jaded, and I no longer have an optimistic sense of transformation, empowerment, evolution of concepts, anything, because I realised that that is mostly a farce. I’ve worked with enough people in the upper*

*echelons of society to know that those types of changes are only insofar as they benefit those in the upper echelons, but otherwise a maintenance of the status quo is actually the preferred way of being for a lot of people, whatever the status quo might be. In government the status quo is Black men, in my profession the status quo is White men; with the civil society space the status quo is White women, White liberals. So, as long as the transformation of the little that they are willing to do benefits them at the end of the day, they will go with it. But it's never on the basis that everyone is equal and deserves to be treated equally, or there is an equality of sexes, or there is a meritocracy and people who work hard or to be champions. No, none of that."*

According to Sanders et al. (2023) and Wang et al. (2020), racial battle fatigue (RBF) is defined as the feeling of being mentally and emotionally drained that is experienced by individuals from marginalised communities, as a result of continuous exposure to racism and discrimination. This sentiment arises due to ongoing contact with discrimination and racism, leading to a social-psychological stress response that includes feelings of frustration, rage, exhaustion, physical retreat, psychological or emotional detachment, evasion, and acceptance of discriminatory ideas related to being a marginalised person (Wang et al., 2020).

Ngozi entered the workforce in 2003 and relates her experiences with the recruitment and selection process in the United States as a Nigerian woman who relocated for economic reasons. She recounted facing explicit racism in her professional environments, which she believes was due to her being a Black woman and her nationality as an African:

*"In Florida but not here... So there was a company, okay I didn't even work there myself at all because I went for the interview, I don't know the lady maybe she... cause she saw my name, you know [my name] is the name of a Greek drink so I don't know if she thought I was Greek and invited me to the interview only for me to get there, I'm a Black African. So after the interview she goes... "you know"... and I like people like that, I like people that are straight up... it's good you tell me straight up what's on your*

*mind... “yeah I think it was like well the thing is you won’t be able to hire me [you] here because the clientele they don’t like Black people. I should look around it’s White people that you know they’ll [we’ll] prefer someone that’s not Black”... she just said it straight up straight up, yes straight up. I appreciated it, though Black Americans would have had a fit over it, but I was like, thank you for telling me that I don’t, because me, I don’t want to.”*

In accordance with social identity theory, individuals categorise themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups based on attributes such as name, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These classifications are subjective and can vary among individuals (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Adamovic (2020) posits that the level and nature of hiring discrimination may depend on the intersections of diversity attributes. The participants in the study, consisting of South African and Nigerian women, found that they did not feel as though they fit into their professional environments as Black African women, as a result of external influences stemming from their intersecting identities or their own perceptions. The participants in the study, who were all Black African women, reported a common experience and perception of feeling excluded and not belonging upon entering their respective professional settings. In the following sections, I will concentrate on the social categories that shape the identities of these women, specifically race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, and how they intersect and manifest within the women’s professional identities. Additionally, I will explore the obstacles that these women encounter due to their intersecting identities within organisational settings. Furthermore, I will focus on the additional identities that these women possess, such as nationality, tribe, age, hair texture, and aesthetic, and how they compound to create obstacles and exacerbate their professional experiences as they progress in their careers. Moreover, I shed light on the strategies that these participants employed throughout the progression of their professional careers. Moreover, the strategies that these participants utilised throughout the progression of their professional careers will be illuminated.

The obstacles confronting South African women in the context of organisational settings are mainly rooted in racial hierarchy. For these women, the confluence of race, gender, and social class played a crucial role, with White males occupying the highest rung of the value chain in terms of both professional and salary disparities based on race and gender. Additionally, the women's experiences were compounded by the effects of tribe, culture, and age. In the case of Nigerian women, gender was the primary impediment to their advancement within their organisational settings. The intersection of gender, social class, and tribe played a pivotal role in the women's experiences. Moreover, the racial hierarchies that emerged among those who relocated abroad and became expatriates further exacerbated their situation. It is noteworthy that these women's decision to move from Nigeria to South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States was driven by economic hardships in their home country. Furthermore, the interpretations of the women's narratives suggest a potential compounding effects of accent, xenophobia, and age further exacerbated the women's experiences.

#### 4.2.1. The South African women – intersections with race and professional identity

Sunflower, like the majority of the South African participants in the study, joined an organisation with a predominantly White workforce. Like the other women, Sunflower believed that she had joined an organisation where White employees held economic power and where the organisation's culture was focused on creating a positive work environment for White employees. Consequently, she experienced a sense of exclusion within her workplace:

*"I think when you walk into a firm that has been established since forever with these strong Afrikaans surnames and the majority of the people that are working there and that are running the place and that are in charge of things are all White people and also are White people that are much older than you, then you kind of have to either adapt or leave. They have created for themselves a culture, they've created for themselves a space and place where they know that even if they are not at home, the*

*workplace is their home as well, but they haven't extended that to the rest of the groups that are present in the company."*

In her legal profession, Suki highlighted the privileged socioeconomic position held by White men, specifically:

*"For example, to be a White man, post-apartheid South Africa, for all intents and purposes means nothing. But to be a White male lawyer in post-apartheid South Africa, is nirvana. They're at the top of the food chain. And so, we [millennial employees] come in [to the workplace] thinking that no, no, no, no, White people are not where they used to be. No, they're even higher now. So, it's things like that where if you understand that, if you understand that the current regime is so indebted to White lawyers, that they're untouchable."*

Referencing notable legal figures such as George Bizos, a human rights and anti-apartheid lawyer, and Justice Arthur Chaskalson, who was appointed by President Nelson Mandela as the first president of South Africa's Constitutional Court, Suki emphasised the close ties which these figures shared with Nelson Mandela and their significant contributions to law in South Africa and the struggle for social change. Suki's perspective on the regime's indebtedness to White men reflects and highlights the socio-political-historical connections and impact on her profession and subsequently on her professional identity as a Black African woman lawyer. Furthermore, she delved into the aspirations of South African millennials, hoping for a more inclusive profession where Black people, women, and other marginalised groups experience equality within the professional setting, only to find that White men still hold the highest position. These sentiments have shaped Suki's professional identity, as she embodies the intersections of being a Black African woman.

Faith's remarks highlighted her observed disparities in compensation that stem from both racial, gendered, and socioeconomic discrimination, thereby amplifying the women's

perception of socioeconomic disparities within professional spheres. Faith's comments effectively captured the prevailing sentiment among the South African women in the study, who often feel that their intersecting identities are not valued within their respective professional domains:

*“They recruited five interns for the whole company, and this is an international company for that matter. Three were Black. So, it was two Black females and one Black male. And then we got two White males. All three of us got the same salary, the Black people, even the guy. Their White ones, they were the ones who got a decent amount, right? But also, when it came to the annual increase for the following year, the guys, all guys got I think it was 12 percent or something, 10 percent or more, and we only got two percent raise, something along those lines. So, yeah, that’s where you also saw that gender was an issue. Because my other one friend also made a joke to say, the problem is that we are female, we don’t have what males have in terms of the private parts and all of that. So, she was just joking about it, but the bottom line was because we’re female, probably that’s why we’re not getting as much as the men.”*

Faith's experience corresponds with the findings of Mabuza's (2020) research among the four primary racial groups in South Africa. According to the study, Black individuals receive the lowest salaries, followed by Indians and then Coloureds, while Whites earn the highest salaries, which are 23% more than the salaries of Blacks. It is worth noting that, across all racial groups, male workers consistently earn more than their female counterparts, with an overall difference of 14%. This results in Black women occupying the lowest position in the earnings hierarchy, while White males occupy the highest position (Mabuza, 2020). The concept of intersectionality unveils the interplay between power and oppression systems that give rise to intricate and distinct forms of systemic harm and injustice (Coles & Pasek, 2020). One example of this is the systematic harm that Black women in South Africa may experience due to single-axis feminist movements that fail to account for the unique, intersectional experiences of race and gender discrimination and overlook their distinct concerns as women

and Black individuals (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023; Coles & Pasek, 2020). Studies reveal that racial disparities in labour earnings continue to persist in South Africa, with wage discrimination and income inequality remaining pervasive in the country's labour market, despite government efforts to promote fairness and equality (Mabuza, 2020; Szelewicki & Tyrowicz, 2009).

Sunflower described experiencing a dilemma wherein she frequently grapples with the decision of whether to attempt to conform to what she describes as the “in-group,” as she possesses the capacity to comprehend the Afrikaans language, or empathise with her peers who share her racial identity and experience exclusion due to their inability to understand the language:

*“I can speak Afrikaans; I understand it and have grown up with it all my life. It actually makes me feel, indiphelisa amandla [depletes my energy] because then I sit and feel like if I sit here and laugh with these people then my fellow Black people are still going to feel like they don’t understand what is going on, ‘why is she laughing, why is she in this in-group’, and then if I don’t laugh then the White people will feel like ‘why are you acting as though you don’t understand what we are saying’ so I don’t feel a sense of belonging in each of the groups. Maybe it’s just this company and one day the Lord will bless me to go into my own company with different people and a vast variety of other people and cultures and beauty and amazing things.”*

According to Kang et al. (2016) and Robotham et al. (2018), the practice of code-switching, which involves altering accent, language, or shifting, can be employed to reduce the significance of racial and gender identities. This approach presents an assertive response from Black women to workplace and labour market norms that undervalue their social identities. As a result, despite Sunflower's capacity to comprehend the Afrikaans language, she expressed a sentiment similar to that of the other South African participants in the study, stating that she believed her voice was not valued within her organisation:

*“Also, I think there are enough voices in the company, not because I don’t think what I have to say, or my ideas don’t matter or I look down on my opinion or I don’t think the ideas will never work or anything like that. I just feel like they won’t be heard, so why even raise the voice in the first place knowing that nothing is going to happen in any case with regard to it.”*

McCluney and Rabel’s (2019) study revealed that the belongingness and uniqueness inclusion framework proposed by Shore et al. (2011) suggests that employees may experience exclusion when they feel a lack of belongingness and/or when their uniqueness is not appreciated. Nevertheless, McCluney and Rabel’s (2019) research findings indicate that Black women may still experience exclusion, even if they have high levels of belongingness and/or distinctiveness.

Suki, along with the other South African women, conveyed how Black women are often afforded less room for error in the workplace compared to their counterparts. In contrast, when Black women do underperform, it is widely anticipated that they would eventually do so:

*“There’s less leeway given to Black women to fail. So, a White man can fail time and time again. They can lose this case, this case, but time will still come back because they ‘proved’ that they were intelligent and capable. But a Black woman it is almost as if people are waiting for you to fail. ‘I knew it was too good to be, I knew it! It was maybe a one-time thing. Maybe it was when she started, but I knew.’ So, you’re constantly apprehensive about maintaining the standard and maintaining perceptions and not failing, which is impossible because this is a job where people are going to fail.”*

Two South African women, Neatgirl and Susan, became members of an organisation in which the majority of the workforce is Black, with a minority of White employees. In their daily professional lives, they have reported experiencing racial hierarchies and have frequently been required to demonstrate the quality of their work due to a lack of trust, which has

persisted as their professional careers have progressed. Neatgirl and Susan's comments encapsulate the sentiments shared by all of the South African women, suggesting that in professional settings, individuals of White ethnicity are often afforded greater trust than those of Black ethnicity:

*"I had never experienced anything like that in my life before. Even with, even though it's [the organisation] predominantly Black, White people are trusted more than Black people [by Black senior employees]. It does not matter the level of education. I don't know, is it a generational thing, most of our leaders are in, still have their own identity, being influenced by what happened in the country, I think. But they are, because I'm in finance, they [White employees] are more trusted than the Black people."*

Susan expressed the sentiment that her proficiency is called into question due to her gender and racial identity:

*"So, I conduct monitoring on farms. So, if I have to go to your farm, and like you need to trust me basically, like as a farmer, because also what I've realised is that there's a lot of violence, man, when it comes to farms. So, farmers [White] are very sceptical when it comes to who are we allowing to our property, that type of thing. So, you need, people need to trust you basically, like in terms of things like that. And I interact a lot with mines [line of work involves water processing in mines and farms]. And also, I think another thing... I don't know if I can just... being a Black female, I feel like in my field you constantly need to prove yourself a lot because no one expects you to know anything. Anything or you know like people don't have much expectation out of you like when you first interact, especially the people that have been there for the longest time you know they're not expecting much. It's just like they're not expecting much so you constantly need to prove yourself that you're competent at what you do; you actually know what you're talking about."*

The narratives of Neatgirl and Susan describe a work environment where their Black colleagues do not acknowledge or trust the quality of their work, which leads to a situation where they are constantly required to demonstrate their worth within their professional settings. Furthermore, these women assert that the minority of White employees in the organisation are trusted more by both senior Black employees and White employees. The professional identity of these women is significantly influenced and shaped by the racial hierarchies and Black-on-Black discrimination which they encounter, as they are frequently required to prove their worth due to their intersecting identities.

#### 4.2.2. The South African women – intersections with ethnicity and professional identity

The women of South Africa, particularly those in predominantly Black workplaces, with the exception of a few women in predominantly White workplaces, reported experiencing patriarchal tribalism and ageism from their Black co-workers. Neatgirl's experience exemplified the hostility she faced from her senior male colleague at work due to her tribal affiliation. Her colleague's behaviour towards her was indicative of the broader experiences faced by the other women in the study:

*“So, we work...because this is the central point where all of the other provinces come and work here. Zulu men, in particular have a certain idea about how women must behave and how women that come from other areas behave as opposed to how they think we are supposed to behave. I have experienced that ‘hu m’Sotho lo!’<sup>17</sup> type of thing. I remember when I got interns, I was part of the interviews. So, it was myself and this other South Sotho guy, so I’m Northern Sotho, so me and my supervisor are both Northern Sotho, and there was a South Sotho guy there, and because the CFO had not chosen the Zulu guy to be part of the panel. It was just us. And we got the interviews with the interns, and we finished. When they came, this guy, there was an incident that*

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<sup>17</sup> Using a condescending tone, when referring to "this Sotho person" or "this Sotho woman".

*happened there with the interns, where this guy then went to the CFO and said, 'I'm not surprised that all of this is happening, because not even one Zulu person was picked. You chose Northern Sotho speaking girls, [my supervisor and I] to go do this whole panel thing, and you trusted these women to go and do this, and they didn't even choose. And we were not even aware. We had chosen based on their performance. We were not even aware that there were no Tswana's or Venda's or Zulus, but he particularly said that. And also, he doesn't take kindly when... because we report to the same lady, he doesn't take kindly when being given instruction by a Black girl who's also not Zulu. And also with me, the teamwork is not. It's the 'moSotho' first before the work. Maybe let's say we share a task, and I go to him and ask him. He's more hostile, but if my Zulu friend comes up, which is awkward, my best friend is Zulu, they are from the same area. When she comes and talks to him, the entire demeanour changes. So, it's not really racism, but more on the tribal side of things.'*

According to Neatgirl's personal experience, she faced discrimination based on her gender, tribal affiliation, and cultural background at her place of work. Her male colleague and supervisor displayed a preference for a Zulu female colleague, which highlights the intersection of gender, tribe, and culture, and how culture can be used to exclude individuals. Tavernaro-Haidarian (2019) argues that the concept of the "rainbow nation" is a central part of South Africa's public discourse since the end of apartheid, promoting the country's diversity of cultures, tribes, and backgrounds. However, many South African citizens continue to struggle to attain equal rights and privileges in practical terms, making the image of the rainbow nation an illusion, as the complex interactions between individuals from different tribes persist (George, 2018; Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2019). In this context, identity and agency are recognised as vital factors that help individuals to overcome the limitations imposed by problematic social structures (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2019). Furthermore, among the South African women, Susan discussed her experiences of ageism in the workplace. Notably, she

faced discrimination from both Black male and female colleagues. As per her account, Susan revealed the challenges she faced in proving her competence as a young Black woman:

*“Like I said, like in terms of being young, being Black, being female, people just don’t take you seriously. You just need to constantly prove yourself the whole time. You know, for them to actually take anything you say seriously or believe that you know what you’re talking about. Yeah, but it’s never been like blatant where, you know, it’s you can’t do this because you’re Black or we’re not, I don’t know. It’s never been blatant like that. It’s just that people just don’t take you seriously. You constantly need to prove yourself as a Black female in the working environment, especially a young female, also because I don’t even think it’s a racial thing, if I can put it that way. It’s also a old and young battle, if I can put it that way, where the older generation just don’t take it seriously. It’s like, what do these kids know? They just graduated the other day, what do they know? So, I think people have a fear that you’re there to take their jobs. That’s another thing. People are very intimidated by education, if I can put it that way.”*

In Susan's professional experience, she believed that her race, gender, and age as a young Black woman placed her in a position where she had to constantly prove herself. Her age was used to undermine the quality of her work, highlighting the intersection of her race, gender, and age. Research by Ayalon and Tesch-Romer (2018) has shown that age is now recognised as a source of social division, functioning as both a social and identity marker and underscoring its influence in defining social relations, giving rise to institutions and fostering inequalities. Similarly, Itzin and Phillipson (1993) introduced the concept of gendered ageism, which highlights the impact of patriarchal norms combined with a focus on youth, resulting in a more rapid decline in the status of both older and younger women compared to men (Barrett & Naiman-Sessions, 2016). For South African women such as Susan and Neatgirl, it is particularly significant to consider the compounding impact of age and patriarchy on their intersectional professional identity. This has been a means of exclusion and devaluation within their professional setting, thereby affecting their professional identity.

#### 4.2.3. The Nigerian women

According to Adegoke et al. (2016) and Bako and Syed (2018), the marginalisation of women in Nigeria is prevalent across all sectors of the economy. Research indicates that women frequently experience significant disparities in the labour market, as they are more likely to be unemployed, have fewer opportunities for career advancement, and earn lower wages (Bako & Syed, 2018; Owoyemi & Olusanya, 2014). In her narrative, Stargirl recognised that she lives in a patriarchal and unequal society. However, similar to many of the women in the study, she contended that she has made considerable efforts throughout her career, fulfilled her obligations, and earned her position within her respective professional realm:

*“I live in a society where women are not really taken seriously when it comes to, you know, the corporate world or serious facets like I grew up in, you know, so it was something I had to really fight for and like I had to really prove myself for them to actually take me seriously. So initially it was not an easy thing to do, but now I believe I have paid my dues. I believe I have walked my way and I've earned my stand where I am.”*

The accounts of Nigerian women's experiences with social hierarchies in their professional work environments were described in a distinct manner. Two of the study's participants moved to the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and South Africa respectively as expatriates. The primary motivation for these women to relocate was often economic, as they reported low wages in Nigeria. Hairee explained her decision-making process and the economic factors that influenced her choice to move abroad for employment with the support of her family:

*“So, I come from a family that's very, we're very tight-knit, right? You know, at different points in time, different parts of the family have been very, have played strong roles in the UK trying to make the decision to go back to Nigeria to teach, I had two opposing views from two of my siblings. So, my brother thought, how do you want to go to Nigeria and earn peanuts? Like you'd literally be earning what a peanut earns in the UK.”*

Hairee's decision-making with regard to her professional life reflects her identity, as well as that of many of the other women in the study from their earlier lives, as their families played a crucial role in their lives. Hairee refers to a challenging decision faced by the Nigerian women in the study, who had to decide whether to move to other countries for economic reasons. This choice has influenced the women's social and professional identity. Ngozi, who has returned to Nigeria after working in the United States of America for several years, characterised her present economic circumstances as follows:

*“The biggest challenge for me now is the money for me. I’m not getting paid enough to meet my needs in the way I would like. Hustle jobs are necessary because if not, I won’t be able to be able to even pay my rent.”*

Ngozi and several other Nigerian women reportedly encounter lower wages, which have a detrimental effect on their quality of life. In their childhood, some of the women in the study aspired to pursue a professional career that would allow them to escape their challenging upbringing, while the others envisioned a fulfilling life, similar to the one provided by their parents. However, according to Bako and Syed (2018), Nigeria's patriarchal culture, which prioritises men over women, has led to a perception of women being inferior in the job market. This has resulted in unequal opportunities and rights (Bako & Syed, 2018), causing these women to contemplate whether or not to remain in Nigeria for better pay. Eventually, the experience of low wages affects their social and professional identity.

Stargirl revealed another reason for her desire to move abroad as an expatriate. She explained that her lack of a Western accent had led to her being turned down for broadcasting jobs:

*“I mentioned that I had always wanted to be a broadcaster. That’s one. So, um, I tried applying to get a job at TV stations. It did not work. There was a particular TV station I really wanted to join. And I noticed they were employing people with accents. That was also part of the reason I wanted to migrate to Canada.”*

Yusuf (2022) argues that attributes such as accent and skin colour, linked to nationality, can generate tension in interactions between expatriate colleagues in Nigerian workplaces. Research indicates that expatriates with specific accents are more likely to have their suggestions accepted, even if they are the same as those made by a host country national. Stargirl's account of a preference for Western accents in her professional setting parallels her childhood experience of a preference for lighter skin tones over darker ones within a homogenously Black society in Nigeria. This experience has had a lasting impact on her personal and professional identity.

As expatriates, Hairee and Ngozi experienced xenophobia due to their identity as Black Nigerian women. They experienced discrimination on account of their gender, race, social class, and nationality, with nationality being the cause of their exclusion and discrimination in their workplaces. According to Mubangizi (2021), xenophobia is not only a problem in South Africa, but a global issue with increases in xenophobic rhetoric and hate crimes against migrants in both Europe and the United States. Xenophobia in South Africa has its roots in the pre-1994 era when immigrants faced discrimination and violence due to institutionalised racism caused by apartheid (Mubangizi, 2021). Hairee herself recounted her personal experience of xenophobia in her professional setting in South Africa:

*“In my whole career, I think my biggest job challenge, to be honest, was in South Africa, just navigating the... Like I’ve never, like I felt like in South Africa, I had to... There was an unwritten line that I couldn’t cross as a Nigerian. And I felt it very strongly. I felt a lot of times, discriminated against because of where I was from. And that was just a massive challenge for me. And it really tampered with my confidence again, like feeling like, you know, remember a lot of my career has been self-motivated. I’ve driven myself and said, this is what I want to do. And I’ve gone and done it. But South Africa really put a dampener on some of the things I thought I could just go out and do. And sometimes like I had an instance where I had a manager, a White manager, tell me: ‘uh, my boss knows the way I work, so if anything goes wrong, they will know it’s you.’”*

*You know, almost like I was being threatened on the job, and eventually that contract was cancelled.”*

Hairee's narrative elucidates how her experience of discrimination based on her identity as a Black Nigerian woman impeded her self-esteem. Hairee, along with all of the women in the study, asserted that she is self-motivated and has achieved her current position through hard work. However, having her professional abilities and contributions doubted and threatened have impacted her gender, race, ethnic, nationality, and professional identities.

Ngozi related an anecdote from her internship in software engineering, where she created an application that earned her supervisor's commendation and led to her presenting it to the board. Despite her considerable contributions, Ngozi feels that her age and ethnicity, as a young Black girl, hindered her ability to have her idea accepted:

*“Then I remember my, one of the internships I had, I had it in a Fortune 500 company then in the U.S. So, I had developed this way of, in fact, now I think about it, it was one of the first times someone was able to create like an app, like an interface. So back in the day, they used to write code to be able to interact with a database, but then I now created like an interface... So, I was even doing data analytics at the time without my knowing... And it was fantastic. And I remember my boss at the time was like, whoa, I need to take you, we're going to present this to the board. Yeah, so I was really young and then I was in this board meeting, and I was like, so he's like, oh, you need to keep quiet, don't worry, I'm going to do the thing. And so, I was there and then they were talking about it and all that kind of stuff. But I remember they never asked me much. They would just talk to my boss and then my boss sometimes would refer to me a bit and I would answer something. And then at the end they were like, oh they're not sure if this is going to work, if we really need it, some story, story, story, story. And I was in shock. So, when we came out, my boss is [was] really pissed off. And I didn't, at the time I didn't understand why he was pissed off. But I'm older [now], I do [understand].*

*I'm a Black girl... I was Black. I was young. Yeah. Yeah. We grew up with a bunch of White guys. Most of them were older. And this, my boss was White, but he was not, you know, that type of guy [racist]."*

Ngozi's accomplishment in creating an application was highly regarded by her boss, and her being taken to the board marked a significant milestone in her early career. However, during the meeting, she was excluded by both her boss and the board members, and her proposal was ultimately rejected. Reflecting on the situation, Ngozi now recognises that her race, gender, and age as a young Black girl were likely the reasons for her exclusion and rejection. This echoes her previous experience in the recruitment and selection process, where she was informed that her status as a Black Nigerian woman would prevent her from being considered for the role. These experiences have had a profound impact on Ngozi's professional identity.

Among the women who lived and worked in Nigeria, they reported experiencing tribal discrimination within the patriarchal structure that was prevalent in their professional setting. The experience assumed the stereotypes attributed to certain tribes within their society, which were used to marginalise the women. This scenario echoes the experiences of these women during their formative years, when they were exposed to the stereotypes that pertain to specific tribal groups within their society. Comparable to the South African women, these women faced prejudice due to their gender, tribal affiliation, and cultural identities. Ifenkili shared an experience in which she felt marginalised in her workplace due to the nuanced beliefs that are prevalent in Nigeria about the Igbo ethnic group. These beliefs encompass the idea that Igbo individuals have it easy in Nigeria, that the women are attractive and materialistic, and consequently, she believes that others may attempt to humble her by side-lining her and preventing her from obtaining what she desires:

*"I'm Igbo so, we like to think that many people don't like us in Nigeria, or we are marginalised a lot in Nigeria and all of that. So, sometimes it might be, it might be as a Black, as an Igbo girl, sometimes some things...how would I put it... it might be, you*

*are supposed to get something, but because people don't like you or people are afraid of you, you don't get [it], you get side-lined for other people. And as a girl too, and as a pretty girl, people will like you, some people will not like you because you're pretty, they say Igbo people like money. So, there are just some nuances about Igbo people in Nigeria. Yeah, I've experienced a lot of that in my own personal [life], even at work too."*

In her professional work environment, Ifenkili highlighted the nuances in stereotypes that are attributed to women of certain tribal and cultural affiliation as a means of marginalisation and exclusion. According to Anyoha et al. (2015), cultural and religious tenets and practices can hinder gender equality by limiting women's ability to reach their full potential. Similarly, Yusuf et al. (2022) note that in Nigeria, traditional customs, sexual stereotypes, and cultural prejudices have impeded women's active contribution to national development and the enjoyment of equal rights with men. These experiences, shaped by gender and cultural biases, affect both Ifenkili's tribal and professional identity.

According to Ifenkili's perspective, she, like the other Nigerian women, recognised that her viewpoints were deemed unimportant within her organisation, and thus decided not to express them. Ifenkili elucidated how her professional surroundings influenced her belief in herself, as her voice remained unheard and she faced ridicule in her workplace, which prompted her to commence formulating an exit strategy just two months into her job:

*"Okay, in the workplace, I didn't really talk a lot because I tried doing that. Okay, so maybe I would have an opinion if I really made a lot of effort [on my work]. But when I came [started working], I said [thought] there are things they [the professional setting] are not comfortable with, which I started talking about and tried moving [advocating] for it. Remember I told you that I was groomed, my mindset is that there's nothing I can't do, but again it is a military environment, and you can be penalised for nothing, and nobody will say anything about it. Your superiors are always right whether they*

*are right or not. So, after getting picked on a couple of times in my first two months. I just had to sit back, talk within myself that okay, this is not working. And then map out a plan to leave there [the workplace]. So, I didn't stay there beyond a year."*

Ngozi's remark conveys the sentiment that as a Nigerian woman her contributions would be given greater weight within her organisation if she held a PhD degree:

*"I feel like because, let me tell you what the issue is for me. I feel like in my organisation right now, if you don't have a PhD, well, you don't really know much. You can't comment."*

Alex-Hart (2016) asserts that patriarchy, cultural practices, and female subordination are profoundly ingrained in African societies, particularly in Nigeria, which has been influenced by colonialism. This has resulted in the perpetuation of a social order that favours males within organisations and has a particularly significant impact on the intersectional professional identity of Nigerian women like Ifenkili and Ngozi, as it serves as a means for their exclusion and devaluation within their professional setting, affecting their professional identity.

#### 4.3. EMBODIED IDENTITY WORK IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

The notion of embodied identity work pertains to the actions that individuals undertake through their bodies to cultivate a consistent self-perception (Alvesson, 2010; Brown, 2015; van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019). Drawing from their initial entry into the professional environment, the professional identities of the women were significantly influenced by their personal identities and formative experiences related to their intersectional identities and their hair, which are historically constructed. This influence extends to the workplace, where their professional identities are developed. As a result, nuanced tensions exist between the women's personal identities and the formation of their professional identities in relation to their hair. The women must navigate and adapt to the perceived expectations and demands of their

hair to conform to the organisational norms of Western-influenced and Eurocentric standards of professionalism and beauty. By negotiating, adopting, conforming to, and at times resisting certain aesthetic organisational norms, the women are then able to establish their professional identities.

Some of the women that participated in the study had limited exposure to professional work settings, since their families held non-corporate occupations. When these women entered the labour markets in South Africa and Nigeria, they carried with them certain socialisation and internalised ideas about the standard of neatness and presentability expected within the workplace for their hair. These expectations, which were rooted in ideas of neatness, presentability, and beauty, were then transformed and internalised as professional standards once they entered the workplace. Similarly, Neatgirl, like the other participants in the study, styled her hair in a way that conveyed a sense of tidiness, reflecting her experiences in school:

*“[My] famous high school hairstyle. I still have that thing of, I’m at work, I have to look and dress a particular way. I think I never let go of that to this day. I think it’s really influenced me to that extent. Even if I had braids, I would tie my braids if I went to work. I would make sure it’s in... I would [makes hand gesture of patting hair neatly] ... I think I’ve carried that. I’m only being aware now. Yeah, but I did wear my hair like that even when I started working because I think I had a certain perception that people would see me in a particular way if I wore my hair in a particular way.”*

The extent to which Neatgirl internalised and manifested her early childhood experiences and socialisation of modifying her hair to be perceived as neat within the construction of her professional identity, resulting in conformity, is articulated through her words. This was done to avoid being perceived in an adverse manner by others. The majority of the women altered their hair using chemical relaxers, braids, weaves, or wigs upon entering the workforce for the first time. While looking presentable was the primary objective, each woman had distinct and diverse reasons for styling their hair in this manner. The women who opted for relaxers and

perms cited the convenience and ease of styling as the reasons for their decision. Having begun her career in the U.S.A., Ngozi, in her own words, explained why she straightened her hair for work:

*“So, the very first time my hair was straight, it was permed. So, I wore it that way because it was easier, right? It was just easier.”*

Hairee described her experience of styling her hair for her first day of work. She stated that she followed the examples she observed around her, which showed how hair should be styled for the workplace within the Nigerian society:

*“My hair was still permed, so I probably had a weave on a lot of times, but if I didn't have a weave on, I'll have braids or comb my hair... my straight hair back, it was convenient. Remember I said this was what you know, my sisters did this, it was what I saw as the definition of beauty. Yeah, and this is the way hair should be worn, especially in Nigeria it was like, you know, if you're... Yeah, that's the way hair is worn. You wear it straight and packed, or you have a braid on, or you have a weave on.”*

The sentiment shared by these Nigerian women regarding the convenience and standard of beauty associated with straightening and modifying their hair is reminiscent of their early life experiences. They observed older female figures in their lives, such as their mothers and sisters, donning straightened hair and wigs while they were required to keep their hair until they finished high school. This aspirational attribute became a goal for them to one day perm their hair and wear a wig in their adult years.

Susan expounded upon the rationale for her choice to wear a weave as a hairstyle upon beginning her new professional position in the South African workforce:

*“I started experimenting with weaves. Yeah, so I'd get like hair extensions, weaves and also, I think at some point it became very I guess fashionable to have a weave and also going into the workspace, I don't know like the way you look has a lot to do with*

*how people respond to you or treat you I can put it that way. So, at that point I felt like you can't go into the workplace looking like 'you're here to get the land'. If I can put it that way you need to make them comfortable, sort off, but yeah, you need to put them at ease first, you must be like one of them... They relate to you differently honestly; they relate to you differently when you have an afro versus when you have a weave for example. They relate, they're more calm around people with weaves than they are when you have like an afro. An afro, I don't know, something about an afro, just like, I don't know man, something about wearing like your hair like in a weave puts them at ease as though this was one of us, if I can put it that way. Whereas they feel a bit [makes face and hand gesture of unacceptance], you know, when you wear your hair in an afro. So, but otherwise, yeah. But other than that, I think I also like weave to a certain extent. Yeah. Like I also like weave, I was just experimenting. Also, you've got the money now, you started working. You've got the money, you're able to afford certain things that you were not able to afford maybe as a student. So, you know, rather than limited to braids and, you know, the cheaper hairstyles, I guess. Now you can buy. And also, it was a thing like in terms of your own peers when you have a weave you've made it you look like you've made it you know it was like a perception if I can put it that way but yeah, but I learned that yeah, I think basically that's why I started wearing weave."*

Susan's feelings towards the South African workforce were characterised by a) a sense of acceptance and seeking to providing comfort to colleagues who did not share her racial identity. b) Her reference to land within the South African political context, alluding to hair politics resulting from the country's socio-political-historical context. Hair held significant social and cultural importance in identity, according to Greensword (2022), and was a primary means through which political power was exerted over the Other's body during the colonial period, shaping White-Black interactions through the process of biopoliticisation. c) A perception of hair extensions and wigs as symbols of a higher economic status. Susan's sentiments

highlighted her effort to avoid exclusion and devaluation in her workplace due to the symbolic nature of her natural hair for race, gender, and social class.

Among the Nigerian participants, Stargirl provides an explanation of the aesthetic requirements for wearing wigs and makeup, which were present when she initially entered the professional setting:

*“That job required me to wear makeup every day. Ugh, my God. Every day. It required me to look presentable every day. So, I had to wear one wig every day. Yeah, I had to wear one wig every day. So, I had to wear my hair in cornrows every day so that I could put the wig over my head every day. It was exhausting.”*

Bella expressed the opinion that having a weave installed was a practical solution, as it was a more efficient use of time than other hair extensions and did not result in excessive tugging on her hair:

*“I was doing mostly weave-ons, right? So, I think that's because braids take a lot of time to make. And I didn't have that time at that moment. Okay, first of all, I know I told you; I believe I have a sensitive scalp. So, I don't like people pulling my hair a lot so, Weave-ons made it easy for me...Yes, it wasn't too time consuming, exactly. I could go into the salon and in one hour I'm done. And then all I have to do is just brush my hair when I'm leaving in the morning and I'm good to go.”*

The justifications provided by the women who opted for braids on their initial day of work varied, with some aiming to demonstrate their eagerness for the job to the employer, while others found it more practical, and yet others believed that braids were more suitable for their appearance than their natural hair. According to Ifenkili, her decision to opt for braids would serve to convey her enthusiasm for the job to the employer:

*“I remember I wore my hair in braids because I really like braids and I want people to know that I really like this place.”*

According to Entwistle and Wissinger (2006), the concept of aesthetic labour necessitates the continuous presentation of the entire self in the workplace to appear presentable. In accordance with Rodionova (2017) and Wissinger (2012), employees were instructed to chemically straighten their naturally curly hair, while Black models were required to fulfil stricter height, weight, and skin tone criteria to resemble their White counterparts. Moreover, Oluyadi and Dai (2023) contend that a specific form of embodied aesthetic labour entails the expectation that women should wear makeup and wigs at work. Participants in the Nigerian workforce described the requirements for their hair, among other things such as makeup, and adhered to specific guidelines. Wigs and hair extensions such as weaves and braids were considered professional, and being well-groomed was essential within the Nigerian workforce.

Faith recounted the reasoning behind having her hair in braids on her first day of work in South Africa:

*“I don't remember my hairstyle correctly, but I remember I had like a maroon colour on it. Yeah, so I think it was braids, it was braids. I think it was the hairstyle that I had over the festive season, that I had done. And I thought it was so fresh, so there was no need for me to redo my hair. I just thought that one suits me better than my natural hair because of how my natural hair looked.”*

The sentiment expressed by the way in which Faith styled her hair on her first day at work reflects the early life experiences of many of the South African participants. These women often had a strained relationship with their hair due to socialisation from a young age, which led them to believe that their hair was not good enough or that it looked better when altered. Furthermore, these women internalised the view that their hair was difficult, while hair extensions were perceived as easier and more convenient.

Sunflower clarifies that her hairstyle, which was braided, was motivated by practicality, although she eventually returned to wearing her hair in its natural state, an afro. According to her own account:

*“The first time I started working I remember I stepped into the workplace with my hair the way it is right now, it was braided. It really wasn't like my choice but now yes, I'm going to braid my hair and I'm going to go to work with my hair braided because that's what I want to do. It was literally because it was December holiday, I had braided my hair because I also feel like during December there's so many stuff happening, you don't really have time to be taking care of the hair and the afro needs a lot of maintenance and it wants you to focus on it. So, it was just out of convenience at that time when I started working that it was in braids and then after I had taken off the braids, it was worn in an afro throughout. And then obviously occasionally I still braid my hair and all of that.”*

Although the majority of the women typically modify their hair to meet specific organisational aesthetic norms and professional requirements, as well as their internalised perception that modifying their hair was more practical and easier to maintain, Suki opted to wear her hair in its natural afro when she initially entered the workforce. As per her narrative, she encountered resistance for wearing her natural hair texture, stating she was astonished by the considerable amount of the backlash which originated from her Black female co-workers:

*“I wore my hair natural. I think by the time I finished university, it was no longer a question of wearing my hair natural or not, it was just simply this is what it was. And there will be variations of this, but this is what it was. So, yes, I wore my hair natural, but it was mostly also the same thing as in my varsity experience, where just the bewilderment of Black women. And it was always Black women, because as I say, the only other demographic that has commented on my hair has been Black older men or Black younger men, but for different reasons. But for the entirety of, I guess coming back to that monkey example again, the people that were policing my hair were Black*

*women at all times. And so, I worked in a small law firm and I was the only Black [legal practitioner], there were a lot of Black women, all of them were service staff. I was the only Black woman that was a professional. So, quite apart from the fact that I was the only educated Black woman, I was then the only Xhosa person. So, the comments had a double entendre, a double use. One, to police my hair, and two, as a method of putting me down. Because there was a collective understanding that it was embarrassing that the only Black woman in the firm looks like that or chose to look like that. You've got so many options. You could, you've got money; you could look otherwise and yet you choose to look this way. And so very interesting. And I was the only Xhosa person. So, it was just a very hostile-ish environment, where that was considered. The hair thing was always very much an othering, a feeling that this is not acceptable, this is not up to standard, this is not up to par. And within that firm, a feeling of I was letting the collective down in a way, because of all the things I could choose to do, I'm out here showing White people how crazy I look.”*

Suki was the only female participant who entered the workplace with her natural hair, which was consistent with her early life experiences of having a strong racial and ethnic identity. She reported several negative experiences as a result of wearing her hair naturally, emphasising an explicit policing of her hair attributable to her race, tribe, and social class. Often, the policing came from fellow Black female co-workers who did not understand why a successful lawyer with financial means would have natural hair, as well as expressing concerns that her hair was not representing Black employees well among White co-workers. The influence and tensions towards Suki's racial, tribal, and social class identities during her professional identity construction are evident in her experiences in the South African workplace.

It is evident that all of the women were actively engaged and embodied identity work in relation to their hair upon entering various workforces across different geographical locations. These experiences were intricate and multifaceted, as the majority of these women conformed to

what they perceived as professional, acceptable, and convenient. Despite this, all of the women demonstrated a heightened awareness of their hair in the workplace, which reflected their early life experiences of grappling with societal beliefs and perceptions about their hair. The experiences of the two groups of women differed, despite both facing varying levels of control over their hair. The South African women's experiences were more akin to a politics and bias of hair, which lacked formal policies or rules, but was still universally understood among the women. Susan's reference to not wanting to look like she was "here to take the land" highlighted the socio-political-historical and present context of South Africa, where hair in a natural afro form was attributed to a 'disrupter' of sorts, alluding to the racial tensions that at times exist within South African society. Susan further stated a desire to make co-workers who did not look like her racially more comfortable, which meant conforming was to her the best way to not be excluded or othered within the professional setting. Susan stated that wearing a wig was a symbol of her financial success, a sentiment echoed by Suki, as her Black female co-worker did not comprehend why successful lawyers would have natural hair. As the sole South African participant who entered the workforce with natural hair, Suki experienced explicit policing of her hair on account of her race, tribe, and social class, which created tensions between her personal and professional identity. It is worth noting that the majority of the South African women conformed to their belief of what was professional, easy, and convenient, by opting for straightened hair and hair extensions, which mirrored their early life socialisation.

The aesthetic labour required of the Nigerian women was more stringent, involving rules and regulations that dictated how they should look in the workplace, and in particular, how they should style their hair in professional settings. This aesthetic labour adhered to a Western and Eurocentric standard of professionalism and beauty, with wigs and straightened hair being deemed professional. All of the Nigerian participants entered the workforce and did so with permed hair, or hair extensions in the form of wigs, weaves, and braids. A majority of these women stated that their workplaces required them to wear their hair in a particular way, while

some followed examples of what was considered the more presentable way of wearing their hair from older female figures in their lives.

All of the participants in the study have advanced in their respective professions and attained career success. This success can be divided into two categories: objective and subjective. Objective career success can be objectively verified through quantifiable aspects, such as salary increases, promotions, and an individual's job level and occupational prestige (Hirschi et al., 2017). On the other hand, subjective career success refers to an individual's own assessment of their career accomplishments. In their career progression, the participants continue to engage in embodied identity work in relation to their intersecting identities and their hair. Now we will focus on how the women currently style their hair in professional settings, the ongoing embodied identity work involved, and how this has influenced their subjective views of their hair.

Following her years of work experience in the Nigerian workforce, Hairee made the decision to relocate to the UK to pursue postgraduate studies. After completing her qualification, she started working in the UK. However, during this time, she experienced hair damage while using hair relaxers to straighten her hair and consequently opted to cut her hair short. Subsequently, she returned to Nigeria for work purposes after her big chop. Hairee related a scenario in which she chose to wear her hair in its natural state at her workplace in Nigeria and encountered resistance from her colleague, who questioned whether she had styled her hair before arriving at the workplace. Hairee also mentioned that, in her experience, having one's hair done in Nigeria typically involves braids or a wig, rather than wearing one's natural hair:

*“When I moved back to Nigeria, after living in the UK and doing my big chop [due to hair damage from hair straightening chemicals], I had to learn how to love my hair and style my hair. I would have twists when my hair was six centimetres, and I would be confident enough to come up with it. I really built a lot of confidence in what I looked like without a wig or a weave. And I had one of those twists in Nigeria because I would*

*literally just twist my hair. And I had a colleague walk up to me and say, when are you going to make your hair? I said, my hair is in braids or is a wig. Made hair is not your natural hair in twists. That is not made, you know. And for me, it was a highlight point as to, you know, how we don't appreciate what we look like and who we are really because our hair is like a... it's with you from the start till the end it must be part of my identity."*

The experience of Hairee's in Nigeria, where her hair was policed by a Black female colleague, is similar to that of Suki in South Africa. Both instances illustrate the extent to which Black African women are socialised and internalise negative attitudes towards their hair based on their socio-political-historical context, resulting in an adverse subjective view that persists throughout their lives and manifests in the policing of each other's hair. This sentiment is shared by Neatgirl, who agreed with Suki and Hairee's views on the policing of her hair by co-workers, particularly Black women. This experience is acknowledged by both the South African and Nigerian women. According to Neatgirl, maintaining neatness in her own hair through relaxed hair and a ponytail has been internalised over the years to the point where she offers advice to her work friends on how to maintain neatness in their hair. In her words, Neatgirl stated:

*"I think I still do my hair in a way that is deemed appropriate in my head. I think also my friends always complain about it. I even tell them that they must look a particular way. I do with my work friends. Yeah, I think I still wear it the same as I did all the other years. Its relaxed and in a pony, yeah. If I'm plaiting, nice plaiting, not adding crazy colours. It has to be brown or black."*

The insights provided by these women are reminiscent of the monkey experiment recounted by Suki during her early life experience, which mirrors the pattern she observed in her high school. This phenomenon is widespread in organisational cultures, where individuals frequently adhere to conventional procedures without critically examining or reassessing their

relevance, even when the underlying rationale is no longer pertinent. Stargirl discussed the common perception of natural hair in the workplace in Nigeria and described the preferred appearance of hair, which is consistent with the views expressed by other Nigerian women:

*“So, if you go to work with your natural hair, you are deemed undressed and unprepared for work. You are deemed unkept. Now, it goes in two ways. If your hair is short and like if it's something you can't pack in a bun and maybe the bun is one tiny bun, they deem you undressed. So, you have to go make your hair, you have to go fix your hair. But if your hair is long enough for a bun, then you look presentable, right? So, it's like in a work environment it's like it's a crime for your hair to even be unpackable. So, if your hair is going to be short in the work environment it has to be really short to have curls. Or it has to be very long to be packed in a bun. So those are the only two styles... or you have to wear a wig, a presentable wig, a good wig that looks good, that looks expensive.”*

According to Bella, patients assess the trustworthiness of a pharmacist based on their hair, and this motivates her to consistently preserve the look of her wigs and ensure that her wigs present a professional appearance at work:

*“So, the thing I noticed is that the appearance of my hair... lets people know very quickly who's the pharmacist, even when I'm not wearing my white coat, right? So, there's the way that the, I don't mean this in a disrespectful way, right? But as the salesgirls or the auxiliary nurses look, hair wise, you know, can be shabby, can look... But for me as a professional, I cannot afford to wear any kind of hair, right? Yes, because of the appearance it gives you. So, people look at you first before they decide if you are trustworthy, you know? That's the way it is. So that makes me pay attention to what my hair looks like, you know. And if, for example, since I like wearing wigs, if this wig is not looking good anymore, it's either I do the refurbishing thing they do, or I discard it and get another one.”*

In terms of describing the present aesthetic requirements in the Nigerian workforce, Stargirl and Bella present a picture where Black African women wearing their natural hair are not only deemed less professional and presentable, but are also considered to be of a lower social standing. The two women assert that sporting a good wig is indicative of trustworthiness, professionalism and a higher social status. Their aesthetic views of the Nigerian workplace echo the early life experiences of South African women, where straightened hair and hair extensions signified a higher social standing, neatness, and beauty. As a result, Stargirl elucidated the impact of not wearing a wig in her professional endeavours, as a public figure in the entertainment industry. Additionally, she acknowledged her struggle in fully embracing her natural hair while on camera, and emphasised her greater sense of confidence, presentability, and appeal to the international community when she wears a wig:

*“I still haven’t learned to embrace just using my own natural hair for a video. I could carry my hair and I don’t know what to do with it. I’m confused. I’m lost. But if I have a very good wig, a perfect wig to put over it, my confidence is back. I’m good. I’m ready. I feel I am presentable now...I feel like they are more presentable, and they give me the look that I want. I have this look that I have in mind. I want my audience to not be distracted by my hair. I want them to listen to me. And I also want to attract more of the international community. And there’s a way you look that attracts the international community. So sometimes the way I wear my hair, it’s to wear wigs that looks relatable with the international community. Yeah, so most of the time, as I said, looking presentable is not just about looking beautiful and looking well put together. It’s also strategic, you know, you want people to, because I mean, on [public platforms], people only see you from your head to your chest most of the time, you know, you’re on this international platform.”*

Black women's intersecting identities, as highlighted by McCluney and Rabelo (2019), significantly influence how they are perceived and evaluated in the workplace. Research shows that Black women often do not feel that their complete selves are recognised or valued

at work, leading them to manage their identities through strategies such as 'shifting' and code-switching, in order to downplay their race and gender (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Oluyandi and Dai (2023) further emphasise that despite initiatives to promote diversity, 61% of women of colour in the UK have felt pressured to modify their language, appearance, hairstyles, or even their names to fit in at work. Stargirl's words reflected this pressure, as she stated that she feels more confident and relatable on her public platform as a broadcaster when she uses wigs, as they are less distracting to her audience and create a greater sense of relatability for her international audience. Moreover, Stargirl's sentiment exemplifies the context-laden nature of the professional appearance of the women in the study.

Suki articulated a complex differentiation regarding the classification and categorisation of Black women within her legal profession in South Africa, specifically in terms of their overall appearance and hairstyle, which ultimately determines the types of legal cases they are assigned:

*"I made the distinction earlier between the two groups that women are pulled into in my workplace where you have conventionally attractive women who wear their hair a particular way and who look a particular way and present themselves in a particular way, and I would describe that as a positive discrimination because it is to their benefit, but they are simply just good to look at. There's nothing beyond that. Now, where I say they benefit, it's a paradox, is that they then will receive work on that basis, but the work is not respected. The work is not regarded as quality work, but they will still receive work and therefore will still be financially well off in that sense. Then the second group of women, they are what I would say actively discriminated against because people would actively not want to work with them because of how they look. So, an example that I can give is with regard to male colleagues and how they are expected to look by this profession. There is a very huge mining client that has mining magnates as the client. And male juniors are usually told by male seniors when going to those meetings that the specific watches you cannot wear, the specific suits you cannot, this*

*means you have to look the part. The specific cars you cannot be driving into their pocket. They require you to be driving the most expensive car, the most expensive watch on your wrist. And so, there is that pressure on the Black male or even the White male to look the part in terms of material positions. Where that is concerned with Black women, the women I just spoke about in that category would never see the inside of a boardroom in those offices because they simply are not regarded as women that these mining magnates would regard as palatable or up to par, because they simply do not make the cut. It would have to be the most expensive weave, the tightest suit, etc. So, they would be actively discriminated against because that advocate that brought them would probably never see work again from that mining company. Situations like that where you are being brought along, yes, but it's mostly because of how you look, not so much what you bring to the table, or you are not being given certain things because of how you look, or being given certain things because how you look is consistent with that particular look. The inverse is also true. You have the public interest space where you need to look like someone who is a social justice warrior, and there is a specific mental expectation of what that means. So if you get there and you have the most expensive 24 inch weave, your nails are long and you have the eyelashes, you would be discriminated against in those circles because again, they would not be able to respect you or view you as someone that is capable of dealing with these complex constitutional questions because your IQ is to them not up to par, even if it was but you have been prejudged on your appearance. So, when I talk about that I haven't experienced discrimination it's because I fit comfortably into both those instances both intentionally and unintentionally."*

In her narrative, Suki delineated the prejudices present in her professional sphere, which are founded on appearance. Specifically, she elucidated the manner in which the appearance of Black women dictates the nature of work they receive. Lookism, as expounded by Ayto (1999), is prejudice or discrimination grounded in appearance. This form of discrimination is rooted in

the perception of attractiveness (Adomaitis et al., 2017). Dean (2021) further accentuates that the physical appearance of employees can influence customer perceptions and behavioural responses. Furthermore, Suki emphasised the hierarchies established by appearance, which determine whether women are assigned work or not, as well as the nature of the work they are assigned. Hegemonic femininity, as expounded by Annes et al. (2021) and Schippers (2007), denotes the characteristics deemed feminine that establish a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity. This relationship subordinates' women and sustains men's dominance. Moreover, hegemonic femininity also proscribes a set of desirable behavioural norms, attitudes, and representations that women are expected to embody (Annes et al., 2021). Suki brought to light the paradox that arises when Black women in her field who wear long weaves and tight suits are more likely to secure employment due to their appearance, yet their work is not accorded the respect it deserves. On the other hand, women with more natural hair are viewed as social justice warriors, but they are not afforded certain types of work. The tension that pervades among these groups of women, where they judge one another, raises questions about the absence of sisterhood in the workplace. It seems that these women do not have fellow women who support and open doors for them. Smith and Nkomo (2021) postulate that the rhetoric of sisterhood and solidarity implies that women can bond across class and race boundaries, but this appears not to be the case in practical application. Moreover, Suki shares her own experiences with embodied identity work, which creates tension surrounding her personal and professional identity, as she finds herself fitting into each of the aforementioned circles both intentionally and unintentionally.

Ifenkili characterised herself as a creative and vibrant individual, however she experienced constraints on her self-expression in the military environment in which she worked. Specifically, she felt that her hair and attire were subject to scrutiny and regulation, which limited her ability to express her creative side. Consequently, Ifenkili decided to leave the environment to pursue opportunities that would allow her to fully embrace her artistic and colourful nature:

*“I couldn't express myself with myself as much as I would like to or as I'm used to. So, there are constraints in how you really need to dress, how you wear your hair, what kind of colour you wear your hair, length also... So, I think one of my biggest challenges is that I wasn't, I didn't express myself, I wasn't given a space to express myself as much as I need to express it and I'm a very creative person. So, I felt boxed working there...So for the workplace you don't, you know though I'm a civilian, but there's constraints in wearing very colourful clothes, right? Or wearing very colourful hairstyles or colours, right? So, I like colours. I told you, I'm a creative person. So, I like to dress up. I like to wear my hair not just in black, other vibrant colours also... I found that hard to deal with because I'm not very corporate like that, so I felt boxed, really.”*

Ngozi agreed with Ifenkili, highlighting that due to the conservative nature of her workplace, colours other than black are not allowed, as she has personally experienced:

*“Someone has come and said, oh, something's wrong with your hair. Like I said, it's just colour. Colour of extensions. Yeah. You know, I know, you know my office is a bit conservative, so they were just like, oh, don't put bright colour extensions in your hair. Just let it be neat. That's all... The colours are just the issue.”*

Bella clarified that her profession, in Nigeria, imposes certain restrictions on the use of certain colours, given that these may have a negative impact on patients with psychological conditions. Thus, specific colours are prohibited:

*“Yes, the way that I have to keep looking, yes, because I go to work then there are some colours hair colours, I can't make right because you may have to interact with patients that are psychologically unstable right, and so it could be triggers for them. I think there's some hair that can be triggers for them so it's not every kind of hair I can wear.”*

Ngozi appreciated the leniency of her present employer in contrast to other organisations that are more restrictive towards natural hairstyles, such as dreadlocks. She expressed her appreciation by stating the following:

*“I pack it in a bun on top of my head. I just pack it and then leave my hair out. So, I wear it natural most of the time. And I wear it... It's easier for me and my organisation is very okay with it. I think [my organisation] is amazing because to be honest I think [my organisation] is the first organisation where I saw women with dreads. That's the first educational institution. Other institutions, other companies, you see that a lot, but I didn't know people carried dreads like that in educational institutions in Nigeria till I got to [this organisation].”*

The women from Nigeria highlighted the prevalent aesthetic labour surrounding their hair, in their workplaces. Ifenkili felt constrained in expressing her true self at work and consequently left her job. Ngozi and Bella acknowledged the organisational culture that prohibits natural hairstyles like dreadlocks and certain hair colours. Their experiences resonated with the early life experiences of these women, particularly the negative stereotypes associated with natural protective styles like dreadlocks. According to Lewis and Aune's (2023) research, employers often struggle to manage the gendered aspects of workplace experiences adequately. In light of this, the authors suggest that organisations should recognise women for the additional aesthetic and emotional labour required to maintain professional appearances (Lewis & Aune, 2023).

Sunflower mentioned that while she wears her hair naturally at her South African workplace, she does not encounter any challenges per se. However, she has noticed subtle behaviours directed at her hair, such as requests to touch it:

*“I don't think I've experienced any challenges, but obviously people, or a lot of them, I feel they're always weird with regard to, like, an afro, for instance. It's like, they've never seen anyone with hair like that, so they want to touch it and feel how it feels. Of which*

*I don't mind, but like, I don't walk around going, can I please touch your hair? Like, that's weird. I'm just like, to some extent, being like, I am really not going to make anything of it. And then, yeah, I haven't felt like I should, or I haven't felt any type of way with regard to anyone commenting on anything with regard to my hair. Like, I'm just like, it's mine. I didn't comment on yours or say anything about you so why should I take whatever thing you are saying about mine in any way? So, I don't take it to heart if there ever is someone saying something.”*

In her reflection on her previous employment situated in South Africa, Suki shared her viewpoint on the disparity in hair texture privilege that she observed between herself and her Black female colleagues, who had a more tightly coiled hair texture. As Suki explained, she has received a greater number of compliments on her hair, which features a looser curl pattern compared to that of other Black women:

*“When I was [names previous job] and two of us out of the four Black clerks had natural hair, I would notice how the judges would always compliment my hair and one judge made a comment about the other person with natural hair who had a tighter coil than me and referred to her as, which means, the one who doesn't comb her hair. And again, I guess the thing about the texture was quite clear to me that even in the natural hair space, there's still a demarcation or class ranking of sorts, where there's certain types of hair that will be acceptable and certain types of hair that might not be acceptable. And me knowing this and me sort of being on the receiving end of the positivity, I leveraged that to make me more popular with the judges, which is something I've also done in my job, I'm noticeable and distinct because of my hair. And so, I play that up to then bring in, let's say my capabilities or my opinions or whatever. But I've been quite aware of how the, I guess I'll call it privilege, certain privileges that I'm able to enjoy that I don't know that I would enjoy if my texture was kinkier than what it is.”*

*Susan, similar to many of the women, indicated that after a certain period of time had elapsed since she had been in her workplace, she began to feel that her colleagues knew her on a more personal level. Consequently, she started wearing less weaves at work, believing that her colleagues would be less unsettled if she wore her natural hair:*

*“I think I mentioned earlier that I think it's even better now because I've been at the workplace for quite some time, so the people have gotten used to you they know you so they're not really alarmed or they're not really I don't know unsettled I guess, because they know you on a personal level, but at the beginning, like I mentioned earlier on, you need to make them feel comfortable, right? You, rocking up at the workplace with a weave makes them feel at ease somehow. I don't know like what the psychology there is, you know. Yeah, whereas when you get to the workplace with your afro then people start feeling unsettled. Or something I don't know like but there's nothing making them feel uncomfortable in your physical appearance basically. And as time, like I'm saying because I've been at the same place for a while now, as time goes by those things don't really matter because they get to know you and so they become comfortable basically around you, but at the beginning you need to sort of try and make them comfortable around you by not appearing too, I don't know,, too radical.”*

In a similar vein, numerous women, including Hairee, opt to embrace their natural hair as they progress in their professional careers, a decision that elicits feelings of pride and accomplishment among the women:

*“Now, I wear my hair in my locs. I let them loose. Sometimes I'll pack them up, but I haven't been to the offices. I still have to decide on whether to leave my locks down or pack it up. But me, this is, yeah, why? Because this is what, this is who I am. I really am very proud of my hair.”*

The participants of the study have skilfully navigated, negotiated, resisted and accepted the complex tensions that exist between their personal and professional identities. Over the course of their career advancements, these women's professional identities have evolved in conjunction with their subjective views of their hair in relation to others' perceptions of how it should be worn in professional settings. As they have achieved career success, gained confidence, and become more self-assured, the women have exhibited less intimidation in response to identity threats against their intersecting identities and hair. They have persevered in their environments despite persistent marginalisation and oppression directed towards their racial, gender, and class identities. I note that the women have displayed resilience and courage as they take control of their appearance, embrace their hair, and at times use it as part of their armour to combat more explicit and visible forms of discrimination targeted towards their race, gender, class, and the intersection thereof, as well as their appearance. Subsequently, I will discuss the coping strategies employed by these women to navigate hair identity expectations within professional environments.

#### 4.3.1. Hair identity strategies

The women participating in the interviews disclosed a range of coping strategies that they utilised to deal with the hair identity expectations placed on them as they develop their professional identity in the workplace. Notably, their career advancement contributed to increased self-assurance among the women regarding their subjective perception of their hair and appearance. I now delve into the strategies highlighted by the women.

Some of the women in both South Africa and Nigeria have chosen to adopt the use of wigs and hair extensions as a means of simplifying their lives, while adhering to societal and organisational expectations regarding hair identity. These women frequently interchange wigs with their natural hair and other forms of hair extensions, including braids and weaves. Bella's attitude indicated what is commonly heard from some women, suggesting that they have the

option to choose from various hairstyles if they are not comfortable with wearing their natural hair out:

*“The wigs are the answer to, you know, to addressing that. So, when I want to purchase a wig...it has to look professional, classy.”*

The majority of the participants have come to appreciate the uniqueness and appearance of how their hair grows out of their scalp. The women feel that they are now embracing and celebrating their African identity and heritage, emphasising that it took time to reach the point of acceptance they are currently at. As a business owner, Faith has established a welcoming environment at her workplace where the hair of her employees is respected and accepted. This fosters a sisterhood-like atmosphere that creates a safe space for Black women to bring their full selves to the workplace:

*“So, I think we have really come to really embrace it as much as we have options, but we have come to embrace our Africanness and the type of hair that we have, such that it's not only an issue when you wear your Afro to work, I believe. Like, in my workplace, where I work, where I am the boss, when somebody wears their hair, it's nothing out of character or out of place. It is still acceptable.”*

The women have accepted and acclimatised themselves to the prejudices prevalent in society and their work environments, in order to avoid being seen as disruptive. Consequently, they have learned to navigate their own paths within their professional settings, regardless of the circumstances. Suki emphasised the significance of comprehending the operation of the world, government, and workplaces, as well as the idea of legacy and its impact on people's actions. This exemplifies their astuteness in recognising the socio-political-historical contexts of their societies and the enduring ramifications of the past:

*“So, I think a lot of EQ [emotional intelligence] is necessary and a lot of soft skills that have got nothing to do with actual knowledge of the job or culture. Understanding how the world works, understanding how government works, understanding how corporate*

*works and having a notion of what that legacy means and how that informs how people act in the context.”*

The participants in the study acknowledged the continuous strains that pervade their lives concerning their hair identity expectations. Each of them displayed a resolute commitment towards fostering their relationship with their hair. Stargirl has elected to work more with her own natural hair and to cultivate a sense of ease with this decision:

*“Well, I've decided that I'm going to work more with my natural hair. Because to be honest, my natural hair is not going to cost me as much as what it's costing me to buy hair that is not mine... I have two plans, it's either I cut my hair again and go low or I start doing braids. It's gonna be either of those two things because to be honest, I am now tired of the wigs.”*

The participants' hair has historically served as a symbol of their racioethnic, gender, and socioeconomic identities. Among the South African women, those who attended multiracial schools chemically straightened their hair as they transitioned into formerly White, multiracial schools, perceived as institutions of higher social status. This was due to the intertwined nature of race and social class in South Africa, resulting from the country's socio-political historical context. Consequently, the South African participants who attended township schools did not straighten their hair until they were well into their schooling years; among their influences was their township friends who returned to the township from their multiracial schools. In contrast, Nigerian participants had their natural hair throughout their formative years, as stressed by their mothers. However, those from abject poverty and whose parents could not afford to maintain or change their hair styles were clean-shaven. These women looked to their mothers as their influences, noting that those who had higher social standing had wigs on. These trends followed the participants into their professional lives. The vast majority of South African participants continued to conform to modified hair to avoid being seen as disruptive, while the Nigerian women conformed to wigs and hair extensions to adhere

to grooming rules and present themselves as enthusiastic about their professional positions. Thus, the participants' professional identities are influenced by a multitude of intersecting factors, with socioeconomic status being a prominent one, and this influences their conscious professional identity choices within professional settings.

Moreover, I observe that during their formative years, these women placed a strong emphasis on financial independence and achieving financial success, which significantly influenced their subsequent career choices, regardless of their personal passions. Their career choices intersected with their racial, ethnic, gender, and class identities in several ways. For example, some of them chose careers that were traditionally associated with men to gain their parents' approval. Others selected careers that they believed were associated with the socioeconomic status of affluent White individuals with whom they attended school, or were exposed to through outreach programmes. Furthermore, some of these women opted for careers that would improve the financial situation of their childhood homes, thus making their parents proud. The complex and intricate nature of these women's early childhood experiences manifested itself in their ambitions and professional aspirations.

After concluding their university education, the women who participated in the study aimed to attain financial independence and economic stability by joining the workforce. However, they found that their interlocking identities were not entirely embraced in the professional settings that they entered, resulting in numerous organisational barriers that hindered their integration.

#### 4.4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I delineated each of the intersecting categories, comprising race, gender, and social class, that comprise the women's identities, and how they intersect and serve as barriers for the participants within their professional settings. I outlined the compounding categories, such as tribalism, xenophobia, ageism, and lookism, which further exacerbated the women's

experiences within their professional settings. I detailed the organisational barriers that these women encountered in their work environments and the methods which they employed to circumvent these challenges. To combat these difficulties, the women used a range of strategies and coping mechanisms, such as preserving work-life balance, drawing upon their faith, capitalising on their strengths, being content with their established track record, accepting their professional circumstances, utilising their entrepreneurial drive, demonstrating self-assurance, asserting themselves, setting boundaries, exhibiting an inclination to start anew, and devising a plan for leaving their workplaces.

Furthermore, I have explained how the women initially styled their hair to convey a sense of professionalism and the identity work they performed to navigate their respective professional settings. The women shared their insights on their own hair and the implicit and explicit regulations surrounding it in a professional context, including hair bias and politics, as well as aesthetic labour. They discussed how others perceived and verbalised their thoughts about their hair. The women have negotiated the aesthetics of their hair in the workplace and adopted certain strategies to reinforce and enhance their subjective views of their hair, sometimes in alignment with and sometimes against their professional norms. The awareness among the Black African women of the interconnectedness of their intersecting identities, as well as their hair as a symbol of these identities, is evident in their experiences within society and the professional setting. The way in which the women's hair identity expectations are manifested and policed illustrates the organisational barriers that they face, such as exclusion, devaluation, and othering within their professional settings. The personal and professional identities of the women continue to be significantly impacted by various factors that influenced their formative years, including their family dynamics, educational environment, and societal expectations within their respective socio-political-historical contexts.

Ultimately, despite the efforts of the women to adjust and conform to the acceptable form of their hair in professional settings, the women now manage to cope with these demands by

acquiring a greater understanding, acceptance, and embrace of what it means for them and their broader workplaces to be Black African women, and by making use of wigs, embracing their Africanness, comprehending society and their professional environment, and opting for natural hair.

In this chapter, I have analysed the intricate and nuanced interplay between the socio-political-historical context of women, as well as the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, in shaping the constructs of 'Who am I?', 'What does it mean to have my hair?', and 'What does it mean to be a professional?' among the women. I have investigated the identity work that the women engaged in with respect to their hair when they entered professional positions, and how their early life understanding of their hair identity influenced their self-perception. Additionally, I have examined how the women's subjective perspective on their hair interacted with the demands of becoming a professional (as an adult) in South Africa and Nigeria. Furthermore, I have elucidated the coping strategies that they utilised to manage hair identity expectations and explored the complex interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success among Black African women. This chapter focused on providing answers to research questions concerning the nexus of colonialism, apartheid, patriarchy, and class and race categorisation, and their roles in shaping the social construction of identity for women, particularly in relation to the questions 'Who am I?', 'What does it mean to have my hair?', and 'What does it mean to be a professional?'. The chapter additionally addressed the nature of the identity work that participants undertook with respect to their hair, particularly in the context of professional settings. Furthermore, the chapter illuminated the strategies that participants used to navigate hair identity expectations and how their early life experiences with their hair influenced their sense of self. Additionally, the chapter provided answers regarding the relationship between participants' subjective perspectives on their hair and the demands of professional life in settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria.

The subsequent chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the interpretation of the research findings in relation to the pertinent literature. Additionally, the chapter delves into how the present study contributes novel insights on intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work.

## CHAPTER 5

### STRANDS OF STRENGTH: NAVIGATING AND REDEFINING INTERSECTING AND EMBODIED PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I offer an extensive interpretation of the key findings from the research as outlined in the previous Chapters 3 and 4. Through a comprehensive analysis with relevant literature, I aim to ascertain whether my findings align with or contrast to existing knowledge within the field. The overarching objective of this research was to explore the impact of socio-political-historical context on the subjective perception of Black African women regarding their hair, and how they navigate their personal, physical and professional identities. I conducted this study by examining the life experiences of South African and Nigerian women who were professionals in fields such as law, business and entrepreneurship, financial management, natural and agricultural sciences, biological sciences, higher education, and entertainment at the time of the study. Through the use of narrative analysis, I was able to gain insight into and give voice to the participants' stories and life experiences as professional Black African women in settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria.

By interacting with the participants and their life stories, I was able to glean crucial insights into the environments where they spent their formative years, the ways in which their socio-political-historical contexts shaped their identities and aspirations, the obstacles they encountered, and the factors that motivated them. Additionally, I learned about the identity work they had to undertake throughout their lives, and how they managed to persevere through their circumstances until they entered the workforce and until this point in their careers. A question that I, as a researcher, grappled with during my research was how these women managed to reconcile their multiple intersecting identities and their hair as they pursued professional careers. The women's accounts suggested that their paths were significantly hindered by obstacles, which were the direct consequence of one or more of their

intersecting social identities, most notably that of being a Black African woman. In order to overcome these hurdles, the women had to demonstrate remarkable perseverance and resilience, both in their youth and in adulthood. Despite the obstacles posed by their intersecting identities, the women were able to enter the professional sphere, where they continuously had to conform, adapt and reconstruct their identities to meet the expectations of their environment, while at times resisting the societal pressures placed upon them.

The life stories of these women highlight the intricate and nuanced identity work that takes place among Black African women, particularly the negotiation and navigation of multiple intersecting identities such as racial-ethnic, gender, and social class, which can be compounded by factors such as nationality, tribal affiliation, age, and the socio-political-historical contexts of racism, racialised socioeconomic disparities, and patriarchy that the women encountered throughout their lives.

In this chapter, I will delve into the theoretical concepts of intersectionality, embodiment, identity, and identity work, as they pertain to the experiences of the participants in the present study. Furthermore, I will endeavour to elucidate how the findings of the current research converge or diverge from the extant literature.

## 5.2. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

The first chapter of the present study began by expounding on the predicament faced by Black women in reconciling their identity with Eurocentric beauty and professionalism norms, with particular emphasis on the intersections of their multiple identities and their distinctive hair, which is a hallmark of femininity and beauty. This type of identity negotiation in relation to Black women's hair is not unique to regions where people of African ancestry reside. Despite this, scant attention is paid to the obstacles that they encounter, including societal pressures that devalue their natural hair and artificial barriers in the workplace related to their hair. This

problem is further exacerbated by the prevalent encouragement for Black women to modify their hair to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty, neatness, and professionalism, without considering what it takes to achieve this. The chapter underlined the significance of the context of South Africa and Nigeria in relation to settler colonialism and non-settler colonialism, respectively, while simultaneously taking into account the historical contexts of apartheid and tribal conflicts within the countries. Furthermore, the chapter delved into the central theoretical concepts, such as postcolonial theory, intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work.

Chapter 1 also delineated the research methodology, which utilised the life story approach to comprehend the participants' early childhood experiences up to their career and personal lives in the present period of their lives. The primary objective of this chapter was to accentuate the drawbacks of focusing solely on a particular social category without considering the disparities that may exist, and to recommend adopting a wider viewpoint on the consequences of the intersecting identities of Black African women, while simultaneously considering the influence of socio-political-historical context on their perceptions and the manner in which they perceive their hair.

The central aim of the opening chapter was to emphasise the obstacles faced by Black African women in relation to the policing of their hair, particularly during their developmental years, as a result of school policies and media representations that consistently perpetuate the idea that their hair is inferior. The histories of South Africa and Nigeria indicate that it is essential to analyse the study through both a settler colonial and non-settler colonial lens, which can help to elucidate the manner in which the socio-political-historical contexts of these countries mould and inform the subjective perspectives of these women on their intersecting identities and hair.

Chapter 2 delved into the subject of colonialism in Africa and highlighted the dehumanising treatment of the continent by Europe, the internalisation of such discrimination by African

societies, and its manifestation through bureaucratic systems and practices within institutions, organisations, and social groups. Furthermore, the chapter shed light on the ongoing, direct perpetuation of such discriminatory behaviour towards Black African women's identity, specifically concerning their intersecting identities of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, as well as the embodiment of their hair. In this chapter, the first research question, which pertains to: How did the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria, as manifested through the systems of colonialism and apartheid, and the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, contribute to the formation of multiple social identities in which women were located? was explored. Specifically, the fundamental objective of discussing intersectionality was to delve into the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, and social class in Black African women, and to examine the consequences that the convergence of multiple identities has on their experiences in both their personal and professional lives. The notion of embodiment was centred on the cultural, experiential, and physical aspects of the intertwined identities of Black African women and aimed to comprehend these identities from a physical standpoint. Furthermore, the identity work of individuals with multiple identities was discussed as a paradigm for analysing the ongoing construction of joint identities in the face of identity threats.

The chapter explored the concepts of othering and hegemonic femininities as social hierarchies that operate in both social and organisational contexts, placing certain groups in a dominant position and others in a subordinate one. These hierarchies also serve to marginalise individuals with multiple subordinate identities. Furthermore, the chapter delved into various phenomena such as professionalism, lookism, aesthetic labour, and hair bias to illustrate the policing and devaluation of Black women's physical and embodied identity, particularly with respect to their hair, in the workplace.

Chapter 3 introduced the participants through their biographical information and the use of their chosen pseudonyms. Their personal and early life stories were narrated using the life

story approach research methodology. The life stories of each participant were synthesised within specific themes of their historical context, such as their respective countries of South Africa and Nigeria. In this chapter, the first research question, which pertains to: How did the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria, as manifested through the systems of colonialism and apartheid, and the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, contribute to the formation of multiple social identities in which women were located, specifically addressing questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What does it mean to have my hair?' among the women, was examined. Particularly, the influence of their intersecting identities of racioethnicity, gender, and social class on their development and personal identity, as well as the role of their hair in embodying these identities and the consequences of hair bias, which they experienced during their formative years, were told. Additionally, the ongoing identity work that the participants undertook was also analysed.

The aim of investigating the formative years of the Black African women was to gain a deeper understanding of their upbringing, which was shaped by the socio-political-historical context of settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria. This enabled a comprehension of how these women embodied their intersecting identities within these contexts. Moreover, it provided a means of grasping the extent to which they were aware of their identities from a young age, as well as how they pursued their career aspirations and goals of achieving a favourable socioeconomic position. Therefore, the participants' life stories shed light on how their foundational years were influenced by those who raised them, the educational institutions they attended, and their relationships with authority figures, such as their fathers and patriarchy.

Chapter 4 of the study scrutinised the interconnected themes of race-ethnicity, gender, social class, nationality, tribal affiliation, and age within the professional and adult life stories of each participant. In this chapter, I delved into the first and second research queries, which specifically address: a) How did the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and

Nigeria, as manifested through the systems of colonialism and apartheid, and the processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification, contribute to the formation of multiple social identities in which women were located, specifically addressing questions such as ‘Who am I?’, ‘What does it mean to have my hair?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a professional?’ among the women? And b) What is the nature of the identity work undertaken by the women concerning their hair when they enter professional positions? How did their early life understandings of their hair identity influence their sense of self, and how did their subjective view of their hair interact with the demands of becoming a professional (as an adult) in settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria? Additionally, I explored the strategies that the participants used to cope with hair identity expectations.

This chapter delves into how these identities intersect and influence the participants' workplace experiences and career progress, as well as the additional obstacles encountered by the women due to their compounded identities. In particular, the chapter explores the embodied identity work associated with the women's hair, which they adopted as they entered the workplace and grappled with the challenges of the professional environment. Additionally, the chapter examines the coping mechanisms employed by the participants to surmount the organisational barriers of racism, patriarchy, classism, which are further compounded by classifications of xenophobia, tribalism, ageism, and lookism that resulted from their personal intersecting identities and physical embodied identities.

The research has demonstrated a highly nuanced and complex experience for Black African women in professional settings, as a result of their multiple identities. Despite this complexity, the research has also uncovered a spirit of determination and resilience among the participants, as they navigate their way through their workplaces in pursuit of career success.

Chapter 5 explores the final research query, which specifically addresses the following: how does the interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success among Black

African women influence the development and understanding of identity theory within the broader context of organisational scholarship? This chapter offers a thorough analysis into the critical themes of intersectionality, embodiment, identity, and identity work that emerged from Chapters 3 and 4. The intersections of racial-ethnic, gender, and social class identities, as uncovered by the findings, result in a complicated experience of racial-ethnic, gender, and class discrimination that many may not fully grasp and can be exacerbated by additional factors such as tribalism, xenophobia, and ageism within the workplace. Furthermore, Black women's hair, which serves as a unique aesthetic feature, becomes a physical manifestation of their multiple intersecting identities. The participants utilised their hair as a means of smoothing their transition into the workplace, given their understanding of the stereotypes attached to them. Additionally, the women employed the resilience that they developed during their formative years to carve out their own path within their professional spheres. The identity work that these women have consistently engaged in throughout their lives up to the present reveals their intricacy and resilience.

Furthermore, this chapter delineates a succinct account of my life story, comprising my formative years and my experiences with the physical embodied aspect of my hair as a Black African woman. Additionally, the chapter showcases my reflections and insights amassed during the data collection process and research ventures. The chapter also features an appraisal of the contributions of the research, limitations, and recommendations for future investigations.

### 5.3. INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The participants' life stories shed light on several aspects of their experiences throughout their lifetimes within their families, communities, educational systems, workplaces, and personal lives. In the following section, I will present an analysis of these insights. The findings from this study either align with, diverge from, or challenge existing theories, practices, and

concepts. In this section, I aim to reconcile these findings with theoretical concepts and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their practical application.

### 5.3.1. Intersectionality

Regarding the initial research query, which aimed to explore the manner in which the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria give meaning to the multiple social identities in which the women were located, the study found that from a tender age, the South African women were conscious of their racioethnicity, and socioeconomic identities. The consequences of apartheid on both the Black and White populations of South Africa were multifaceted, and after its dismantling, all citizens were confronted with the task of adapting to and comprehending their altered identities (Nkomo & Kriek, 2011). For instance, the participants regarded the release of Nelson Mandela as a significant historical event in their formative years, and media coverage surrounding it reinforced their awareness of their racial identity. The South African women reported being highly attuned to their Blackness, starting at five years old, due to the history of forced racial segregation. According to Adams et al. (2012), the significance of self-descriptions among African groups can be attributed to their strong emphasis on historical context and the experience of oppression during apartheid, which has led to heightened ethnic awareness. The legacy of apartheid in South Africa led to socioeconomic disparities that affected the upbringing of these women, who were raised either in a village or a township that was predominantly inhabited by individuals of the same race. Their parents held a range of occupations, such as teaching, social work, nursing, and policing, while others were unemployed. As a result, these women belonged to the lower middle or lower socioeconomic class during their formative years. After the end of apartheid, some of them were able to attend multiracial schools, but their parents could not afford some of the extracurricular activities within the school. The cultural stereotype typically denotes Black South African students who attend historically all-White, English-medium educational institutions, possess proficiency in proper English, and exhibit upward social mobility (Lo et al., 2017). The rationale behind parents and guardians placing these students in these schools

was to offer them better opportunities, with education being a top priority, even if it meant sacrificing their personal financial situation.

These women reported a social hierarchy within their schools, where students from affluent White families were at the top, middle-class White students in the middle, and Black students at the bottom. For the participants whose parents could not afford to send them to multiracial schools, they felt that the schools and resources available to them were insufficient. According to Durrheim and Dixon (2010), historically schools that possess more resources for White, Indian, and Coloured students have demonstrated patterns of integration. However, underfunded and racially homogenous schools continue to cater to a disproportionate number of economically disadvantaged Black students (Lo et al., 2017). While the educational institutions attended by the South African women may have varied between multiracial and township schools, the underlying racialised socioeconomic disparities remained unchanged. These disparities were merely exacerbated by different temporal factors, specifically during the earlier school years for the multiracial attendees and during the transition to university for the township school attendees. Despite the shared experience of these disparities, those who were more exposed to them developed a heightened awareness and devised their own coping mechanisms. Throughout history, systemic racism and classism have been recognised as systems of oppression that have contributed to the establishment and perpetuation of a social hierarchy. In this hierarchy, individuals who are predominantly White and wealthy hold a disproportionate amount of power and access to resources (Smith, Mao, & Deshpande, 2016).

Despite this, the women were hardworking and participated in outreach and developmental activities, where they interacted with children from private schools. Through these experiences, these women felt empowered, however they confronted the reality of racialised socioeconomic disparities within the country. Moreover, the participants, especially those who attended multiracial schools, experienced a preference for their White peers at both the macro system level and the micro-level of individual teachers. This resulted in a sense of exclusion

for these individuals. As per Dovidio et al. (2018), instances of exclusion and microaggressions in educational settings have been shown to lead to feelings of invisibility, isolation, and self-doubt.

Conversely, those who attended homogenous township schools believed that White individuals possessed access to superior educational facilities and resources, thereby accentuating the racialised socioeconomic disparities in South Africa. According to Francis and Webster (2019), South Africa's historical narrative is characterised by racialised dispossession, and the country's labour market continues to exhibit discrimination based on race and gender, despite the post-apartheid government's endeavours to rectify past injustices and inequalities. Unfortunately, inequality remains a formidable socioeconomic challenge in South Africa, enduring for three decades since the conclusion of apartheid (Francis & Webster, 2019).

The South African women did not receive strict instructions to adhere to their gender roles at home, as they did in their educational environment. This was due to the racial intersection in education, which compelled them to engage in extracurricular activities such as knitting and sewing. The intersection of race and gender presented a unique challenge for the young women, as they often lacked guidance on how to navigate and negotiate their identities in such a complex societal landscape. According to Carrim's (2018) findings, women were viewed as inferior during the apartheid era in South Africa, where the government was dominated by men. This led to the division of educational subjects based on gender, with girls being encouraged to learn needlework, while boys were directed towards woodwork (Carrim, 2018). This further emphasises the societal position of the women during this time, as they considered these activities redundant.

The observation that was particularly noteworthy among South African women in the context of settler-colonialism and its socio-political-historical impact was the strong correlation

between race and socioeconomic status. The findings revealed that the women's multiple identities relegated them to a lesser position in society, based not only on racial-ethnic and gender identity, but also on their socioeconomic status. On the one hand, Nattrass and Seeking (2001) assert that the inequality prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa cannot be attributed solely or primarily to race. Johnstone (2022) insists that throughout history, systems of ethnic inequality have consistently been intertwined with other forms of social inequality, particularly class inequality; however, this connection is often disguised by the ethnic aspect, in a manner akin to how cultural factors that are rooted in biological factors, such as racism and sexism, can conceal it.

On the other hand, the socio-political-historical context of non-settler colonialism in Nigeria shaped the multiple social identities in which the women were located. During their formative years, Nigerian women were less aware of their blackness due to the homogenous racial make-up of Nigerian society. However, tribal conflicts, displacement, and marginalisation of certain tribes during the formative years of the participants led to an early onset of tribal affiliation for the women. Ogbujah (2021) contends that the unrelenting advancement of identity politics has consistently fanned the embers of tribalism, prejudice, and strife within societies. The participants reported that certain tribes, such as the Igbo tribe, were known for having lighter-skinned women, who were also associated with beauty. Often the tone of a woman's skin was used to identify her tribal affiliation, with lighter-toned skin being associated with specific tribes and darker-toned skin being linked to different tribes. Ogbuja (2021) asserts that in particular, the proverbial "colour of one's skin," which functions as the principal determinant of one's racial identity, is often employed as the point of departure for racial profiling and discriminatory practices. The participants were conscious of the shade of their skin from a young age, with participants reporting that those with darker skin tones were subjected to ridicule, ostracisation, and invisibility, while those with lighter skin tones were favoured and perceived as beautiful. Furthermore, the Eurocentric standard of beauty, characterised by a lighter skin tone, was persistently promoted and instilled in women through

socialisation, ultimately leading to their internalisation of this particular Eurocentric beauty ideal.

From an early age the Nigerian women's experiences were traditionally more nuanced than the men's, particularly when it comes to their siblings. The Nigerian women more so than the South African women were socialised to take on their gender role from a very young age, as they managed household chores, such as washing their school clothes, ironing, and reported being self-sufficient. According to Dogo's (2014) assertion, Nigeria is a society characterised by unequivocal and well-defined gender roles, wherein gender relations are moulded by patriarchal factors that assign women to a subordinate standing in relation to men. The women assisted their mothers with household duties and at times acted as their mothers' confidants in relation to their experiences as women and wives. Azodo and Eke (2007) and Dogo (2014) state that in Nigeria, the conventional viewpoint is that women's primary domain is the household, where they are accountable for domestic chores and child-rearing, while men are the ones who seek excitement and challenge in their occupations. Some of the participants often felt that they were overworked with domestic duties due to being a girl and being the youngest in the family, and that led to some of the women resenting their mothers as they struggled to relate to their mothers' hardships as women. The majority of the Nigerian women were raised in urban middle and upper-middle-class homes where they believed that they had access to good education and resources, with the exception of one woman who grew up in extreme poverty and struggled to make ends meet. The women attended private or public schools, and they reported instances of preferential treatment for children from affluent families at their schools. The outcome was linked to the interplay between social standing and ethnicity with economic conditions. Research conducted by Davidio et al. (2018) highlights the importance of examining intersectionality to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how class and race function as oppressive systems that impact disadvantaged groups in their day-to-day experiences.

The women's parents held a variety of occupations, including director, entrepreneur, banker, and street vendor. Nonetheless, the majority of the women encountered financial constraints that hindered their attendance at private schools during their high school years. A study carried out by Baum et al. (2018) uncovered that student's originating from lower income backgrounds encounter difficulties in gaining access to private schools with higher fees in Nigeria, as these institutions are largely accessible only to students situated at the upper echelons of the income distribution. Consequently, they were compelled to enrol in public institutions. The observation that stood out among the Nigerian women in the context of non-settler-colonialism and its socio-political-historical impact was the strong correlation between tribal affiliation and gender. According to Dogo (2014), the traditional patriarchal system that exists among certain Nigerian tribes has been entrenched by the incorporation of religion and subsequently strengthened by the arrival of colonialism. However, it is evident that women's actions within these societies prior to colonialism were confined within gender-specific limitations within a gender relations structure that perpetuated and justified male dominance. Women's roles were intended to complement that of men. Women were expected to be lighter in complexion to be perceived as beautiful, indicating that their multiple identities placed them at a lower level within society, particularly if they were darker in complexion. Research suggests significant evidence that Nigerians commonly show a preference for light-skinned women over those with darker complexions. Dark-skinned women in Nigeria have faced discrimination due to their skin colour, which has limited their opportunities in life (Ogbujah, 2021).

In both South Africa and Nigeria, the women were socialised to believe that a lighter/White complexion was superior, more beautiful, and associated with wealth, while a Black/dark complexion was less favourable and associated with a much lower social class. In South Africa, the notion that White individuals held an advantage over their Black counterparts was deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of racial segregation and economic disparities. According to Taylor and Yu (2009), this racial hierarchy, which granted White individuals access to wealth, prestige, and power, was entrenched over centuries. The

socialisation process in Nigeria during colonialism led to the belief that individuals with lighter skin tones were more attractive and superior. This belief was linked to status, privilege, and cultural superiority, as tribes with lighter-skinned women were deemed more beautiful, while those with darker complexions were considered inferior (Egbi & Kasia, 2021; Fakorede, 2022; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2007). However, Fakorede (2022) posits that this preference is only applied to women, as dark-skinned men have been found to benefit from stereotypes about their masculinity. This intersection between ethnicity, skin tone, and gender takes place within a patriarchal context. Furthermore, Fakorede (2022) asserts that dark-skinned individuals may face rejection in the labour market due to the belief that they will not attract customers with their dark skin.

The participants reported relying on their parents for support and validation, and although most of them admired their mothers' nurturing nature, most of them became "daddy's girls," seeking acceptance and support for the development of their self-esteem from their fathers. The importance of family communication in shaping the social and individual aspects of teenagers has been emphasised by research. Parents who foster open and unrestricted conversations on various topics contribute to the development of young people's social comprehension, self-awareness, and identity formation (Ramadhana et al., 2019). This aligns with Schrodts et al.'s (2009) findings, which indicate that parents who engage in extensive dialogue with their adolescent children exhibit greater cooperation, and that the social identity of adolescents is crucial and interconnected with their overall identity.

A central finding in terms of the answers to questions relating to the participants' early understanding of "Who am I?" was that the racioethnicity, gender, and social class of these women were all salient at different moments and in conjunction with one another during their early years. The participants involved in the research study were confronted with exceptionally complex circumstances, as they were consistently positioned at the lower echelons of the social hierarchies due to their racioethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic standing. Despite

these challenges, the participants have achieved a significant improvement in their respective professional fields, although they continue to grapple with the consequences of the intersections of racioethnicity, gender, and culture. Nevertheless, even though the women have attained a higher social standing than they possessed in their earlier years, their hair, especially when worn in its natural state, is often perceived as embodying a lower socioeconomic status in professional settings. As a consequence, the women must navigate and negotiate the intersections of their racioethnicity, gender, and social class in relation to their professional identity. According to Smith and Redington (2010) and Davidio et al. (2018), classist microaggressions can overlap with racial ones, such as making comments like "that's ghetto." Moreover, Black women often experience a combination of race, gender, and class microaggressions that include such stereotypes. As stated by the study participants, wearing their natural hair in professional settings led to questions about their social standing and job level from Black women colleagues and clients. Additionally, wearing their natural hair in professional settings gave the participants the impression that they were not trusted by their White counterparts in these settings. Lewis et al. (2016) posit that a recurring theme in gendered racial microaggressions against Black women involves assumptions about their appearance, including hairstyles, features, and body types.

Coles and Pasek (2020) assert that women who are of Black heritage and are situated at the intersection of sexism and racism may encounter distinct forms of oppression that cannot be fully understood when only taking into account the consequences of one system of oppression at a time. As a consequence, they experienced marginalisation across various domains, perpetuated by unjust systemic forces (Ngandu-Kalenga Greensword, 2022). Within these lower-ranking categories, there were additional subtleties that engendered additional divisions based on skin pigmentation, tribal affiliation, and further delineations of their socioeconomic standing. The experiences of individuals from South Africa were characterised by intricate racial disparities that were intertwined with socioeconomic elements. In contrast, for the

Nigerian women, their experiences were shaped by a nuanced interplay between tribalism and patriarchal influences. The intricate intersectionality of the women's racioethnicity, gender, and social class results in a nuanced triple jeopardy, rendering them nearly invisible within social domains. Traditional perspectives on intersectional invisibility generally ascribe its genesis to a combined shortcoming in recognising Black women as both female and Black individuals (Grzanka, 2019). In other words, intersectional invisibility emerges when the ideal woman is conceived as a White woman, and the epitome of Black identity is envisioned as a Black man (Coles & Pasek, 2020). The findings suggest that participants regularly navigated and negotiated the complex and intersecting social categories of racioethnicity, gender, and social class.

All participants from South Africa and Nigeria were motivated throughout their formative years to pursue higher education at university. However, financial constraints threatened to prevent many of them from realising their aspirations, with this being their primary concern as the time to attend university approached. A significant finding was that the majority of participants in both South Africa and Nigeria, with the exception of two Nigerian participants, did not anticipate attending university due to their families' socioeconomic conditions. Despite attending multiracial or township schools in South Africa or private or public schools in Nigeria, the majority of the participants believed that their parents could not afford university education, and that their only option for achieving this aspiration was to work hard. This underscores the multifaceted nature of intersectionality in African contexts, which encompasses factors beyond race, gender, and class. Moreover, this highlights the aspirations and resilience of the women.

Despite this, the women from both countries were determined to improve their financial situation and uplift their socioeconomic status by studying law, pharmacy, economics, geology, computer science, and English literature. A number of the women perceived their enrolment in university as an opportunity to escape the financial hardships that they and their families confronted in their respective communities. These women's primary motivation for

pursuing their chosen careers was to generate income, regardless of whether or not they truly possessed a passion for them. According to Muhammad and Rasool (2014), parental education has a profound impact on educational plans and occupational aspirations, and the socioeconomic status and educational level of parents are strongly related to students' career choices and curriculum focus. Family background, including factors such as parents' socio-economic status, educational level, and biogenetic factors like gender, play a crucial role in shaping career development (Muhammad & Rasool, 2014; Salami, 2007). Furthermore, they aspired to bring honour, dignity, and pride to their parents and families by earning university degrees and achieving financial independence. Notably the women from families with only girl children felt compelled to prove their capabilities on par with their male counterparts, which influenced their career choices. Salami's (2007) work suggests that the girl children of parents who exhibit high levels of engagement are more likely to pursue careers in male-dominated fields. The parents' involvement includes offering encouragement, being responsive, providing approval, and offering financial backing for children's vocational goals.

The research uncovered that among the South African participants who had attended multiracial schools, they experienced a smoother transition to university, particularly as they developed strategies to adapt to their surroundings by conforming, rebelling, or remaining indifferent. Wale (2010) as cited in Lu (2017) suggests that former Model C school-educated Black South Africans possess knowledge of White customs, behaviours, and language, which positions them racially between Black and White individuals. In contrast, women who attended township schools faced a more challenging time during their transition to university, as they struggled with the racial and socioeconomic disparities that they encountered within the university environment. A notable finding was that one of these women noted that her limited exposure to private school children during outreach programmes provided a buffer in terms of her awareness of racial and socioeconomic disparities, which helped to reduce the cultural shock she experienced. According to the research conducted by Wilson-Strydom (2012) on facilitating the transition from high school to university in South Africa, the results for students

who had previously attended township schools revealed that learners from South African township schools faced financial constraints and encountered adverse circumstances related to language during their transition from high school to university. Across races the student participants to the study expressed their difficulty in coping with their biases and learning to appreciate diversity (Wilson-Strydom, 2012).

The research narrated that the Nigerian participants' parents faced financial difficulties during their university years. According to Egbue (2009), the common portrayal of Nigerians in Western literature is inaccurate, as it fails to reflect the reality that most Nigerians are not actively engaged in modern wage employment in either the public or private sectors. Instead, their primary occupations typically involve farming, craftsmanship, and petty trade. Furthermore, power dynamics in Nigeria are often replicated in the public sphere, perpetuating existing inequalities that originate in the domestic sphere (Egbue, 2009). The participants disclosed that they had to resort to doing menial jobs to make ends meet while studying. Some of the participants pointed out that attending university provided them with a way out of their socioeconomic conditions, but their education and being deeply immersed in their studies also served as a means of concealing their dire financial and socioeconomic circumstances. Two of the participants opted to stay with family members instead of using university accommodation, which they mentioned offered a comfortable environment for them within the university setting. One of these participants moved to the United States for her undergraduate studies and revealed that it was during this time that she experienced a cultural shock and became aware of her racial identity and Blackness for the first time. As per Oriji (2020), a division existed between being Black and being Nigerian. The author contends that many Nigerian immigrants do not hold the assumption that their Nigerian identity is inherently Black, and thus do not consider themselves bound by White supremacy in both Nigeria and the United States. Oriji (2020) emphasises the necessity of developing distinct frameworks for understanding Blackness based on the unique experiences of Nigerians in Africa to address these issues.

The research unveils the intricate journey undertaken by the South African and Nigerian participants, who share the commonality of being Black African women, as they manoeuvred their way through the labyrinthine interplay of their racioethnicity, gender, and social class identities at various points in their lives. Consistent with Davidio et al.'s (2018) assertion is that intersectionality is understood as the experience of multiple forms of discrimination and oppression based on overlapping marginalised identities. This perspective is also supported by Coles and Pasek (2020), who contend that Black women are often excluded from higher-ranking categories of women and have their distinct identity within the Black community diminished through under differentiation from Black men, which may carry significant social and political ramifications. Moreover, classism intensifies the intersectional experience and can result in feelings of exclusion (Smith et al., 2016). This study elucidates the finely tuned experiences of each individual in connection with their multiple identities, wherein at different junctures and in diverse contexts, one or more of their identities acted as a hindrance or obstacle that needed to be addressed and overcome, culminating in a feeling of being an 'othered' outsider.

### 5.3.2 Embodiment

In terms of the participants' early understandings of 'What does it mean to have my hair?' at an early age, the hair of the South African women came to symbolise their intersecting identities. Johnson and Bankhead (2014) indicate that from a tender age, young Black girls are taught that their hair is a symbol of beauty and attraction. Nevertheless, media advertisements capitalise on prevailing notions of hair and racial inferiority that were prevalent in both White and Black communities. Many of these women reportedly began straightening their hair as early as five years old, in preparation for attending multiracial schools in South Africa. According to Alubafi et al. (2018), school administrators in South African multiracial schools often require Black students to straighten their hair in order to be considered presentable, as stipulated by the school's code of conduct. This practice was undertaken to

comply with the neatness standards established by their educational institutions. The aforementioned women were constituents of a collective comprising individuals whose parents possessed the financial resources to relocate them from village and township educational establishments to multicultural institutions of learning. Two of the participants from South Africa who received their education at township schools revealed that they began to straighten their hair at a later point in time, as a result of the influence of friends who had attended multiracial schools or peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. As a result, from an early age, these women were socialised to associate natural hair with a lower socioeconomic standing. The majority of these women's mothers had short hair or wore head wraps while raising them.

All of the participants from Nigeria reportedly adhered to their mothers' stringent rules and preserved their hair in its natural state until the end of high school. In their formative years, the women had their natural hair which was sought after by their mothers. Some of these women had short or shaved hair, either due to school regulations as teachers did not want them to become distracted by maintaining their beauty through their hair, or because their mothers felt they could not afford to care for their hair due to financial constraints. The women also witnessed their mothers perming their hair and wearing wigs and saw this as a symbol of how women had to look when they are older and in the workplace.

The life stories of the research participants indicated that from a young age, all the participants in the study attached great importance to their hair and its appearance, as it served as a symbol of their femininity and beauty. In South Africa, the natural hair of Black women was often devalued, and this devaluation was explicitly exhibited through school rules and regulations, as well as the subtle discrimination that occurred within the school environment. These actions had a formative influence on the participants from a tender age. Moreover, the devaluation and subsequent regulation of the women's hair seemed to occur primarily in school settings where the Black women were in the minority and White people were in the

majority, as the standards of neatness were tailored to Eurocentric hair types. To be considered presentable or of a higher social standing, their hair had to be altered through the use of chemical straighteners or the addition of hair extensions. In Nigeria, the mothers of the women placed a premium on preserving their daughters' natural hair, but the women's perception of their own natural hair was influenced by the permed hair and wigs worn by their mothers and older sisters. Furthermore, the school policy requiring the women to cut their hair short in order to not be distracted at school contributed to their belief that longer hair was more valuable and desirable. Moreover, the Nigerian participants who had been accustomed to shaving their hair due to financial limitations held the belief that longer hair and wigs were indicative of a higher socioeconomic standing. Among the Nigerian participants, the natural hair of Black women was commonly viewed as a more youthful hairstyle during their earlier years and was also linked to a lower socioeconomic standing. On the other hand, longer hair extensions and wigs were perceived as symbols of maturity, beauty, and femininity, as well as an indication of a higher social status.

According to Davis et al. (2005), the notion of a normative social/political body enabled social scientists to disregard physical disparities, such as race and gender. The White male form was implicitly deemed the standard for political authority and ethical value. This generalisation in academic writings resulted in an idealised communal body, obscuring its inherent masculinity and reliance on the denial of femininity for self-definition. Consequently, even women may not have immediately recognised these aspects (Davis et al., 2005). The study's findings indicate that the policing of Black women's natural hair is a result of its devaluation, a phenomenon akin to the lower status treatment experienced by the participants due to their intersecting identities of racioethnicity, gender, and social class. This underscores the women's hair as a visible manifestation and embodiment of their intersecting identities. According to Smith and Nkomo (2021), the chic hairstyles of Black women serve as visible cultural markers that emphasise their identity and convey cues to White co-workers. The participants' hair, especially when styled in its natural state, is commonly perceived as

indicating a lower socioeconomic status in professional settings, despite the women having achieved a higher social standing. This phenomenon arises from the embodiment of intersecting identities of race-ethnicity, gender, and social class as they manifest in the women's hair. As a result, these women often need to negotiate their professional identity due to assumptions made by Black women counterparts regarding their lower ranking and perceptions by White counterparts that they cannot be trusted, when wearing natural hair in professional settings, as reported by the participants. Racism and classism, as identified by Davidio et al. (2018), exhibits an intersectional nature and is evident in everyday ideologies surrounding criteria like aesthetic standards and hair texture. Furthermore, van Amsterdam and van Eck (2019) argue that organisations influence the construction and evaluation of embodiment within the workplace, and to some extent, institutionalise these practices.

### 5.3.3. Intersectional and embodied identity work in the women's adult lives

Upon beginning their professional careers, the participants were well-versed in the requirements for acceptance and presenting a professional appearance. A substantial number of the women from South Africa and Nigeria opted to chemically straighten their hair, wear wigs, or use hair extensions, each group having their own rationale. On the one hand, the South African women cited factors such as convenience, ease, and the desire to prevent their natural hair from causing discomfort among colleagues as their reasons. On the other hand, Nigerian women cited reasons such as convenience, ease, and the need to adhere to job requirements and grooming regulations. One woman entered the workplace with her natural hair and cited comfort and affection for her hair as her motivation for doing so.

The study highlighted a crucial element, which was that some Nigerian women utilised their hair as a means of expressing their enthusiasm and interest in the job, either by wearing a wig or having braids installed. This indicates that these women were aware of the perceptions others had about their hair. Another significant point was that the participants from South Africa and Nigeria were socialised to refer to hair extensions as a more convenient and effortless

option than managing their own hair. One South African participant explicitly stated that she wanted her colleagues to feel comfortable around her rather than perceiving her as an activist when wearing her afro. The sole participant who entered the professional setting with an afro hairstyle conveyed her alignment with the experience of rebelling against the rigid barriers she faced in school. She recounted the various phases she underwent, comprising conformity, rebellion, and anti-establishment sentiments. This, together with the observed conformity, highlights the South African women's consciousness of not creating conflict. This is likely due to their early life socialisation regarding their subjective views of their hair. The utilisation of hair by women served to convey their eagerness and preparedness, with the intention of being perceived as competent and professional prior to entering their professional environments.

Despite their belief that they had surpassed their socioeconomic circumstances from their formative years and attained financial independence and a sense of accomplishment through achieving their educational goals, which would provide them with work opportunities and financial stability, their intersecting identities of being Black African women in their workplaces significantly influenced a substantial portion of their professional experiences within the workplace.

The study narrated how from the onset of their professional lives the women faced discriminatory barriers in gaining access to specific workplaces due to their racioethnic identity. When they migrated to other countries in search of better career prospects, the Nigerian women reported discrimination based on their racioethnic identity, gender, nationality, and age. The research uncovered a case of othering and exclusion towards the participants, who were deemed unfit for the organisation without being afforded a fair chance to demonstrate their competence. People are systematically and strategically subjected to othering on the basis of their multiple marginalised positions, which ultimately form an unavoidable matrix of oppression. According to Khrebtan-Hörhager (2019), regions of the world which are perceived to be impoverished and non-White are conceptualised and treated

as the ultimate undesirable. Hwang and Beauregard's (2022) research findings highlight that the intersection of gender and ethnicity among migrant workers lead to discriminatory practices in recruitment, promotion, and interpersonal relationships, resulting in workplace inequalities such as scapegoating and perceived injustice in recruitment and promotion opportunities. According to Khrebtan-Hörhager's (2019) account, othering is achieved through rhetorical strategies that emphasise the significance of self and impart cultural stigma on others, ultimately drawing new lines of humanity, belonging, and exclusion. Hwang and Beauregard (2022) argue that this leads to a stereotype and labelling of individuals as "perpetual foreigners," which can result in the devaluation of qualities related to ethnic minority immigrant status, negatively impacting organisational and interpersonal practices.

Among the South African women, the research uncovered disparities in remuneration between Black women and other social groups in South Africa, which impeded their financial growth in their careers. The reinforcement of the racialised socioeconomic status was evident in this situation, as the financial growth of the women was hindered. This situation provided a vivid illustration of devaluation and invisibility, as the participants reported receiving significantly less compensation than their White and Black male counterparts.

The South African and Nigerian women's experiences at work differed depending on the type of organisation in which they worked. For instance, South African women who worked in mainly Black organisations and those who worked in predominantly White organisations had distinctly different experiences. Similarly, Nigerian women who worked in Nigerian organisations and those who worked abroad in South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America encountered variations. It is important to note that the Nigerian organisations were homogeneously Black, while the organisations abroad were predominantly White.

The study suggests that South African and Nigerian women who worked in predominantly Black South African and Nigerian organisations, respectively, shared a complex but similar experience. These participants reported facing discrimination based on their tribal affiliation in environments marked by patriarchy and tribalism. According to Alex-Hart's (2016) findings, the viewpoints and experiences of women in the workplace in Nigeria are significantly influenced by the historical events of colonialism, state formation, and ethnic identity development. Cultural diversity, as reported by Owoyemi and Olusanya (2014), has been observed to propagate gender bias in the workplace, because cultural customs often view women as subordinate to men. They experienced hegemonic femininities in terms of their tribe, as their tribal identity within the organisational context was undervalued, and female colleagues from other tribes were held in higher esteem. Furthermore, these women's expertise was undermined by their male counterparts, leading to a constant need to prove themselves. The findings underscore the ethnic intersections experienced by the Nigerian participants. It is worth noting that the South African context has its own unique ethnic intersections that have not been deeply examined in prior research. This is because Black South African women are often depicted as a homogenous group due to the diversity of racial groups present in the society and its institutions. The dynamics between tribes within South African organisational settings are just as intricate as those in Nigerian settings, however they have not been adequately explored in the literature.

In South Africa, for example, these women felt that their expertise was overshadowed by that of White colleagues, even when they were part of a minority of White employees. Additionally, these women were undervalued and disregarded by older generations in situations where the workforce comprised an older generation. These experiences are consistent with the phenomenon of intersectional invisibility and devaluation within their work settings. According to Bhattacharyya and Berdahl's (2023) research, the existing literature does not afford a thorough understanding of the subtle aspects and intricate details pertaining to women of colour's experiences and reactions to invisibility. The complexity arises due to differences in

identities and workplace social standing, which are influenced by factors such as racial identity, immigrant status, organisational rank, and age, and thus affect how women of colour perceive and respond to invisibility (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023).

The research findings suggest that South African and Nigerian women who are employed in predominantly White South African organisations and organisations located outside of Nigeria, respectively, frequently experience a sense of exclusion and disconnection from their workplaces. Despite their efforts to become part of the team, they are frequently overshadowed by their White colleagues, who foster a strong sense of belonging among themselves and those who share their physical appearance. The study also revealed that the quality of the women's work was often underestimated, and they were required to work harder to prove their worth. They reported feeling discouraged from making errors and feeling that their failures were expected. Furthermore, their physical appearance, such as the presence of hair extensions or longer nails, influenced their career prospects. In South Africa, women with natural hair are often perceived as activists, while those with extensions are more likely to be limited to specific corporate roles that cater to a predominantly male clientele. These experiences align with the broader phenomenon of lookism. According to DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2011), lookism is the act of discriminating against individuals based on their appearance, often targeting those who do not conform to societal or psychological standards of attractiveness. This issue is widespread and pervasive (Kim et al., 2024). Additionally, Yang et al. (2023) assert that females are more likely to experience lookism in professional settings than their male counterparts.

It is essential to recognise that, throughout their professional lives, some women, particularly those in South Africa, began wearing their natural hair to work. Some participants disclosed that they felt at ease and confident in their natural hair, as they had developed trust among their colleagues and believed that they would not be judged based on the appearance of their hair. However, a few participants mentioned receiving subtle comments and microaggressions

about their natural hair, such as requests to touch it, which did not significantly impact them. The study demonstrated that while South African women were accustomed to conforming to certain hair norms, most of the policing of hair among the women originated from other Black women. The results indicated that in reinforcing the correlation between natural hair and perceptions of socioeconomic status, those who policed the hair did not understand how successful career women could wear natural hair when they had the means to modify it. This experience underscores the devaluation of natural hair, lookism, and its association with a lower social standing.

In Nigeria for example, participants stated that, in the pharmaceutical industry, patients could distinguish between a pharmacist and a non-pharmacist general worker based on the quality of the wig that the individual was wearing. Among those working in the entertainment industry, participants found it challenging not to wear wigs as they considered it more presentable and appealing to a wider audience. In the professional setting of higher education institutions, participants reported a prohibition on natural hairstyles, such as dreadlocks. These experiences highlight the undervaluation of natural hair and aesthetic labour in professional settings. Aesthetic labour therefore highlights the significance of workers' bodies as sources of value, as workplaces emphasise the importance of looking good, and appearing presentable (Walters, 2022; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Moreover, it is evident that class inequality is perpetuated when professional settings require aesthetic labour from their employees (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Warhurst et al., 2012). This phenomenon provides valuable insights into the embodiment of class.

Over the course of time, some participants elected to remain in their organisations, while others opted to leave, as a result of their experiences of devaluation, exclusion, invisibility, and othering. Of those who left, some chose to establish their own businesses or pursue further education by obtaining an MBA. Others sought employment elsewhere after departing from their organisations. It is noteworthy that these women either planned their exit or left

abruptly due to the severity of their mistreatment. This was contrary to their initial career aspirations, as they had believed that these were the careers that they would pursue for many years. Their determination and resilience were palpable, as they continued to persevere despite their challenging workplace circumstances. Smith and Nkomo's (2021) study revealed that the glass ceiling is a barrier that impedes the upward mobility of women, particularly White women, beyond a specific level in the professional hierarchy. However, this barrier is more formidable for Black women, who encounter a concrete wall that takes the shape of six distinct and persistent manifestations: regular experiences of racism, elevated expectations, invisibility, exclusion from casual networks, questioning of their authority, and insincere commitment to advancements (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). Yamaguchi and Burge (2019) argue that adverse organisational experiences resulting from Black women's multiple intersecting identities lead to feelings of isolation and lack of support, causing them to consider leaving their positions.

The level of contentment among women who chose to stay in their jobs varied significantly. While some were content with their work and accepted their circumstances, others intended to leave their current positions. Those who were content believed that their work was valued due to the scarcity of employees in their field, which made them feel appreciated. This aligns with their aspirations during their formative years. Additionally, some participants felt that they needed to accept their career circumstances to maintain their psychological safety. These women focused on completing their tasks and receiving their pay checks without any additional expectations. Lastly, other participants intended to leave their jobs and were actively applying to other positions, hoping for an opportunity to escape their current situation due to their reliance on their jobs for financial independence. According to Bhattacharyya and Berdahl (2023), earlier research has demonstrated that feelings of injustice typically give rise to anger and social action, and perceptions of undeserved mistreatment often result in shame and an inclination to avoid conflict. However, these researchers discovered that women of colour may not always adhere to these typical responses. When angry, they may choose to remain silent

rather than expressing their anger, and when faced with perceived injustice, instead of feeling ashamed, they may employ self-regulation and practicality as their response (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023).

The research demonstrated that participants were required to navigate their multiple and embodied identities upon entering the professional environment. Women were obligated to adjust their personal and physical identities to align with the dominant culture of the organisation and be perceived as professional and competent. The study indicates that women encounter a complex rejection of their intersecting and embodied identities in the workplace, leading to a situation where South African women mostly conform to avoid any issues, while Nigerian women partly conform but also express themselves more. This underscores the necessity of preserving their personal and intersecting identities, while simultaneously grappling with the boundaries between the organisation's expectations and their physical and embodied identities, which are subject to negotiation. According to Dickens and Chavez (2017), Black women often modulate their identities to conform with the professional norms and cultural values of the workplace when interacting with colleagues who do not share their racial or gender identity, while simultaneously navigating the expectations and values associated with their roles in their Black communities. Moreover, the authors highlight that variations exist in the negotiation of multiple-oppressed identities based on concerns about being judged (Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Rosette & Dumas, 2007)

The research indicated that, whether the women left their organisations to start their own businesses or remained in their current roles, they recognised their resilience and continued to make strides towards their career advancements. As the women's careers progressed, they gained greater confidence and self-assurance in their work, experience and expertise, which also impacted their perceptions of their physical and embodied identities. They felt that they had earned their positions and were deserving of their achievements. Furthermore, the participants formulated various coping mechanisms as a means of further navigating their way

through their workplaces preserving work-life balance, drawing upon their faith, capitalising on their strengths, being content with their established track record, accepting their professional circumstances, utilising their entrepreneurial drive, demonstrating self-assurance, asserting themselves, setting boundaries, exhibiting an inclination to start anew, and devising a plan for leaving their workplaces. The participants in the study identified various coping strategies pertaining to their hair, by choosing to wear wigs, embrace their African identity by accepting their hair in all styles, understand the societal and professional expectations, and opt for natural hair. In this case, the participants began a journey of learning how to care for their hair and opted to wear it down more often.

The research findings contribute to the expanding body of literature that explores hair bias towards Black women in professional settings. The study enhances understanding of postcolonial theory by demonstrating that hair bias against women occurs in both settler and non-settler colonial contexts. In settler colonial contexts, where institutions and organisations are often predominantly White, these women are socialised from a young age to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty, and as a result, the majority of them modify their hair accordingly to avoid being seen as disruptive. In non-settler colonial contexts, where the environment is predominantly Black, hair bias against Black women is more prominent during their adult years through grooming rules and guidelines that require them to conform to Eurocentric standards of beauty. Hence, the study contributes to organisational scholarship by demonstrating how the socio-political-historical context interacts with the organisational context to perpetuate norms of othering, exclusion, and devaluation of Black women based on their intersecting and embodied identities. Furthermore, the study expands our understanding of intersectionality, embodiment, and identity work by incorporating social class and hair bias into the lived experience of Black African women. This shed light on the embodiment of class as manifested in their hair. Although Black women's hair serves as a marker of their racial identity, the present study extends literature by showing that Black women's hair, especially in its natural state, is also associated with perceptions of their social class. Thus, Black

women's hair is an embodiment of class status, as well as a marker of racial identity. Consequently, the present research contributes to expanding our understanding of class, lookism, aesthetic labour, and hair bias within organisation scholarship, by shedding light on why Black women's hair is perpetually devalued within institutions and organisations.

The life stories of the Black African women participants are emotive and poignant portrayals of their individual experiences. As a Black African woman and researcher in this study, I can empathise with some of the experiences recounted by the participants. Therefore, in order to uphold ethical research conduct and ensure that the participants' voices guide the study, I will present my reflections as a researcher in the following section. Reflexivity entails revealing the beliefs and values that the researcher possesses, which shape their choice and defence of their methodological approach (Reid et al., 2018; Sharlock & Smyth, 1998). From an epistemological standpoint, reflexivity recognises that knowledge is constructed during the research process and is influenced by the researcher's pre-existing comprehension and beliefs (Palaganas et al., 2017; Reid et al., 2018).

#### 5.4. REFLECTIONS

In my capacity as a Black African woman, I hold the integrity of the data in the utmost regard as I strive to convey these life stories in an objective manner, unencumbered by any bias or external influence. It is of paramount importance to me that the life stories accurately reflect the actual lived experiences of the women who participated in this research and are presented with sincerity and transparency.

I emerged into the world in 1991, during a pivotal juncture in South Africa's history, when the nation was grappling with the issue of apartheid and contemplating its eradication in the aftermath of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. As South Africa prepared for its first democratic elections, I was reared in a family with strong political ties in the rural Eastern

Cape, an area where the majority of the population is Black. As a result, I became acutely aware of the deeply entrenched racial and socioeconomic disparities that pervade the South African society, due to my father's position as mayor of our town during my formative years. I was subsequently enrolled in a former "Model C" primary school where my teachers were predominantly White, with a more equal racial composition of Black and White students. As some South African participants mentioned, I had my hair chemically straightened for the first time around the age of six or seven, in preparation for primary school. What I explicitly remember from that time was that my scalp was highly sensitive, and I often witnessed other young Black girls enduring the pain until the hairdresser took them to the sink to wash their hair. In contrast, due to the burns I experienced within minutes of applying the chemical straightener, I always had to request that my hair be washed, as I could not tolerate the discomfort for the full duration. I also recall how the hairdresser would look at me with disappointment because there is a predetermined amount of time that one should have the chemicals on their scalp for the straightening to be fully effective. I despised the process, but it was what I was accustomed to.

Some years later my parents relocated me to a different school, a Model C school, which was also staffed by White teachers, however the student body was predominantly Black. During this period, my mother cut my hair and allowed it to grow naturally. Throughout my time at this school, my hair was short and natural, as I was not blessed with a full head of hair like my mother and sister. At the end of primary school, I transferred to a Model C high school, which had an equal racial composition of both Black and White students. During these years, although my hair was natural, I consistently had braids. This was entirely my choice; I would inform my mother of the desired hairstyle, and she would comply and take me to the salon.

In my academic pursuits in high school, I initially grappled with the notion that my natural hair, in its unaltered state, was deemed insufficient. This conflict arose from observing the teachers whom I revered and aspired to emulate, while simultaneously navigating the rigid school

regulations governing tidiness and the appropriate styling of female students' hair. I particularly recall an incident in Grade 9 when I was 14 years old in 2005. I had recently removed my braids and sported a short, combed out natural afro, approximately 6 centimetres in length. While transitioning between class periods and enroute to my next class, I was stopped by an administrator at the school responsible for ensuring our neatness. She summoned me to her office, inquired as to why my hair was unkempt and then informed me that my hair needed to be neat when I attended school the subsequent day. Consequently, the idea that my hair was unkempt in its natural state and only neat when styled with synthetic braids or hair extensions perpetuated throughout my high school and university years.

The university I attended for my undergraduate studies was a predominantly White institution, and as an active student, I participated in various leadership activities, sang in the choir, and competed in track and field events. As a sprinter, I occasionally grappled with my braids being too heavy, and I would go through periods of negotiating whether they were too cumbersome to maintain. Despite this, I never truly considered abandoning them, as I felt that they were an integral part of my identity. My parents occasionally told me that my natural hair looked better than my braids, but I struggled to believe them. It wasn't until my first internship in a rural area of the Eastern Cape that I decided to start wearing my hair naturally. The workforce consisted mainly of older Black women who also wore their natural hair, which influenced my decision to wear dreadlocks, a hairstyle I have maintained to this day.

As discussed in Chapter 1, in recent years I have observed media coverage on the policing of Black schoolgirls' hair. In 2016, Black students at Pretoria Girls High School <sup>18</sup>reported being told that their natural hair was "unladylike and untidy," and were even prohibited from taking exams if they did not "fix" their hair. In 2021, Black learners at 18 recalled a teacher saying, "your hair is unrepresentable, messy, and it is not the Cornwall way." In 2023, a 13-year-old

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<sup>18</sup> This institution is esteemed and deemed to be a prestigious and costly school in South Africa.

learner at Crowthorne Christian Academy was barred from attending classes because her dreadlocks violated the school's new hair policy. Furthermore, the infamous Clicks advertisement for Tresemme labelled Black women's hair as "dry, damaged, frizzy and dull," while portraying White women's hair as "normal, fine and flat." Moreover, discussions with friends and acquaintances piqued my interest even more, as I recollect an acquaintance who sported dreadlocks and was employed as a civil engineer at the time informing me that one of her colleagues, a White male, during one of their site inspections had remarked that her hair was a fire hazard. This realisation on my part was that such incidents were not confined to my personal experiences or schools alone, as policies and codes of conduct within educational institutions also occurred subtly in the workplace, where they took the form of microaggressions. However, my interactions with the participants' life stories led me to recognise that the hair identity experiences of Black women are more intricate and nuanced than I had originally anticipated prior to embarking on my research. This prompted me to fully engage and comprehend the participants' experiences more profoundly and beyond my own personal experiences. This means that I now acknowledge that hair bias is pervasive in both settler and non-settler colonial nations, due to Eurocentric influence, and has contributed to this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the policing of Black women's hair is not solely the result of predominantly White institutions; it also emerges from Black women who have internalised these beliefs to such an extent that they themselves regulate those who share their appearance.

My present situation is characterised by a profound awareness of the deeply entrenched wounds inflicted upon Black women's identity in South Africa by the socio-political-historical context, which manifests in numerous ways, including the persistent rejection of their intersectional identities, particularly through the symbol of hair. Although some may view it as a mundane aspect of the human body, personal experiences shape our perspectives, and those who collectively endure such challenges hold unique insights. Indeed, hair serves as an intersection that perpetuates inequality and oppression, allowing institutions to create

conformist cultures and unequal structures. Therefore, it is essential to share life stories of others to broaden our knowledge and understanding of diverse experiences.

Undertaking life story research is a means of preserving and disseminating historical narratives, thereby guaranteeing that individual experiences are not disregarded or neglected. As a researcher, it is a crucial objective of mine to shed light on the experiences of Black African women, particularly those that pertain to their intersectional identities and how they navigate these aspects of their lives. It is crucial to recognise that all individuals, particularly those who are marginalised, possess unique stories to share, and gaining a comprehensive understanding of the context in which these individuals grow up and enter the workforce is critical. However, without an appreciation for the severe impact of systems of domination such as colonialism, apartheid, and tribal conflicts, the true essence of these stories may be lost. Therefore, the utilisation of life stories as a research method within the present study is of paramount importance.

From the outset of my research, I sought to explore the factors that shape perceptions of Black South African women's hair in terms of their personal, physical, and professional identities. However, it was not until Professor Stella Nkomo brought to light the settler colonial nature of South Africa's socio-political-historical context and the non-settler colonial nature of other African countries that I became interested in comparing these contexts. Consequently, I selected Nigeria as the non-settler colonial context for the study, having spent several years observing Nigerian television and admiring the portrayal of Nigerian women's confidence on screen. As I commenced the preparation of my proposal, I simultaneously grappled with my insufficient knowledge of Nigeria beyond the visual content which I had consumed through television. In particular, I possessed a meagre comprehension of Nigerian history, customs, and its populace. As a South African woman undertaking extensive research on Nigerian women professionals, I sought to spend three to five weeks in the country prior to conducting interviews with Nigerian participants. To this end, I engaged in discussions with professors at

my host university, delving into the country's colonial past. Additionally, I had informal conversations with professional women during lunchtime and other casual settings, discussing their hair experiences. For a week and a half, I resided with one of these women and her family, affording me a unique insight into socioeconomic conditions in a specific region of Nigeria, as well as the experiences of a working professional woman within the society. These experiences proved invaluable in providing a brief yet insightful perspective. Through this experience, I have come to understand that my visit to Nigeria to conduct interviews with the participants was met with great appreciation, thereby fostering a favourable rapport. Furthermore, I observed that I was able to grasp many of the Nigerian Pidgin <sup>19</sup>words that were occasionally used by the participants during our conversations.

Once I began conducting the interviews with both South African and Nigerian participants, each of the life stories shared by the women was an emotional experience. I shared numerous emotional moments with them, some of whom cried during certain parts of their narratives. This deeply moved me, and I found myself empathising and identifying with numerous aspects of their stories. At times, I grappled with the uncertainty of whether I was the appropriate person to recount these highly personal and heartfelt stories, and whether I would do them justice. I was also moved by how their narratives also revealed a story of their brave quest for the dreams they held during their formative years, and the manner in which they carved a path forward despite encountering obstacles throughout their lives. Individuals frequently employ storytelling as a means to comprehend their past and construct their sense of self, and they recount their life experiences to emphasise the importance of recollection in the struggle of conveying a narrative of personal identity (Henderson & Bigby, 2019). Life stories are not only significant within personal contexts, but they also have the ability to resonate with others and transcend their telling. Often, they can yield profound consequences that surpass our

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<sup>19</sup> Pidgin is a dialect that originated from English and is broadly spoken throughout Nigeria. It was established as a medium for communication between individuals who did not share a common language.

expectations. The reason for this is that they have the power to evoke emotions, alter public and political attitudes and opinions, and, in some instances, shape future actions (Etherington, 2009).

In their research titled 'our separate way: Black and White women and the struggle for professional identity', Smith and Nkomo (2021) acknowledge the significant impact of interviewer race in cross-racial interview scenarios. They observed that the race of the interviewer substantially and consistently influenced responses from both Black and White participants, particularly on racially-sensitive topics. The authors argue that an interviewer's demographic profile may affect responses to delicate subjects such as gender, religion, or racial relations (Smith & Nkomo, 2021). Drawing from these insights, I share the authors' belief that the primary consideration for data collection in the current study was selecting a method that would encourage participants to be open and genuine in recounting their life experiences. I believe my race, gender and professional make-up facilitated my data collection approach of matching interviewer and interviewee races. Upon reflection, I also consider that if the interviews were conducted by someone of a different race, gender and or professional make-up, participants might have been less forthcoming and authentic in sharing their life stories, given the occasionally sensitive nature of the subject matter.

As a Black African woman, I find solace in the narratives of these women, and I am deeply moved by their bravery and perseverance. Their stories have taught me valuable lessons in coping and have inspired me to keep pushing forward towards achieving career success. As a scholar and researcher, I take pride in disseminating these narratives, as the present research contributes to the progress of African management scholarship, particularly in areas such as intersectionality, embodiment, and identity. By investigating the intricate nuances and multifaceted challenges faced by individuals navigating society and organisations from the margins, new perspectives are gained on previously unseen experiences.

## 5.5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

The current research examined four broad areas of inquiry, specifically how did the socio-political-historical context of South Africa and Nigeria give meaning to the multiple social identities in which the women were located? How did the systems of colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy and processes of racialisation, gendering, and class classification intersect to socially produce understandings of ‘Who am I?’, ‘What does it mean to have my hair?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a professional?’ among the women? What was the nature of the identity work that the women engaged in concerning their hair when they entered professional positions? How did their early life understandings of their hair identity influence who they were, and how did their subjective view of their hair interact with the demands of becoming a professional (as an adult) in settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria? What strategies did they use to cope with hair identity expectations? How does the interplay between intersectionality, identity work, and career success among Black African women influence the development and understanding of identity theory within the broader context of organisational scholarship?

Investigating the convergence of racioethnicity, gender, and social class in the lives of Black African women significantly enhances comprehension of the daily obstacles they encounter, as they constitute a sizeable portion of the talent pool in both South Africa and Nigeria. This study substantially advances the field of diversity and gender in organisations by addressing a knowledge gap resulting from the scarcity of studies employing a settler and non-settler colonial lens to examine the historical journey of identity for Black African women in South Africa and Nigeria. Prior to this research, little was known about the nuanced experience of intersectionality among Black African women, particularly as it relates to the consequences of their socio-political-historical contexts in terms of their personal, physical, and professional identities.

This study reveals that the identities of the Black African women both in South Africa and Nigeria are not monolithic entities but rather interconnected, dynamic, and multifaceted constructs (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2004; Crenshaw, 1989). The findings emphasise the critical role of context in identity formation, particularly highlighting the residual effects of apartheid in South Africa (Jaga et al., 2017) and tribal tensions in Nigeria (Amah, 2023). The study demonstrates that cultural beliefs, values, and norms related to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class, which are communicated through historical context, educational institutions, communities, and families, significantly influence the socialisation and identity formation of these women (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Hoobler et al., 2021).

The research illuminates how these various factors operate concurrently during the early lives of the Black African women, shaping their embodied identities in profound ways (Atewologun & Sealy, 2016; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Smith & Nkomo, 2021). This intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between multiple identity dimensions and how they manifest in professional settings, particularly in relation to perceptions of hair. By examining these intersections, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the ongoing identity work and negotiation processes that the Black African women engage in within professional environments. Consequently, this study explores the complex interplay between hair identity, professional expectations, and sociocultural dynamics among these women in professional settings. In terms of early life experiences, the study reveals that the formative years significantly shaped the participants' understanding of hair identity and self-perception. These experiences laid the foundation for how the women later navigated professional environments and their hair choices. Notably, the concepts of neatness, appropriateness, and beauty in relation to the participants' hair emerged during these early years, establishing a recurring standard that would persist throughout their lives. In terms of identity work, the research demonstrates that the Black African women engaged in complex negotiations of their personal, physical and professional identities upon entering professional positions. They were often required to adjust their appearance, including

hair choices, to align with dominant organisational cultures and to be perceived as professional, neat, not disruptive and competent, and beautiful.

Regarding the interaction between subjective hair perceptions and professional integration, the women faced challenges while navigating their intersecting and embodied identities within South Africa and Nigeria's socio-political-historical contexts. The study reveals a complex rejection of these identities in society and the workplace, leading to varying degrees of conformity among the women. These include conforming to Eurocentric hair aesthetics, self-regulation, and in some cases, resistance leading to perceived injustices towards the women's choices to keep their natural hair. Notably, some women ultimately achieved acceptance and embrace for their natural hair once they had attained career success. This progression suggests a nuanced interplay between professional advancement, personal identity, and societal expectations surrounding hair aesthetics. The study notes that the women found varying levels of contentment in wearing their hair in its natural form as that is who they are.

According to the invisibility/visibility paradox outlined by Faulkner (2009), Black African women professionals and their hairstyles are highly visible, as Black women progressing in their careers within gendered and racialised organisations, while their hair is policed within various institutions. However, these women are invisible with respect to their intersecting identities. This paradox is of paramount importance for understanding how Black African women professionals perceive their workplace cultures and why they encounter challenges in integrating into these cultures. Their visibility as Black African women professionals evokes contradictory pressures, as they are expected to excel, while their presence and expertise are devalued and excluded, while simultaneously negotiating conformity to beauty and professionalism standards regarding their hair. Intersectional invisibility, as discussed by Coles and Pasek (2020), emerges when individuals possess multiple subordinate identity groups, such as Black people and women. This concept aligns with the perspectives put forth by Ghavami and Peplau (2013), who suggest that Black women faced invisibility due to the

dual marginalisation of their racial and gender identities. The emergent research expands insights by incorporating social class and hair bias into the lived experience of the invisibility/visibility paradox of intersectionality, thus extending existing theory.

The findings contribute to the theoretical elaboration of embodied identity work, as called for by Amsterdam and Eck (2019). The study expands on Mirza's (2013) concept of embodied intersectionality, providing a comprehensive understanding of how Black African women's hair symbolises and mediates their representation in professional settings. The research also aligns with Bhattacharyya and Berdahl's (2023) findings on atypical responses to workplace injustices among women of colour. Participants often chose conformity and employed self-regulation to perceptions of neatness, practicality and beauty in response to perceived injustices. Furthermore Atewologun et al. (2017) and Opara et al. (2020) argue that the concept of 'professional' lacks a definitive definition but is nonetheless subject to gendered and racialised processes. Stating that these processes significantly impact how professionalism is perceived and enacted in the workplace, particularly for Black women (Atewologun et al., 2017; Opara et al., 2020).

Black African women in professional settings face an ongoing negotiation between their personal identity, cultural heritage, and workplace expectations. This complex interplay is characterised by the paradox of the Black professional, where they must navigate the expectations of needing to conform to Eurocentric organisational norms while inhabiting a Black body (Ferguson & Dougherty, 2021). To mitigate the negative outcomes associated with race, gender, and class-based discrimination, Black women may engage in identity shifting, consciously or unconsciously altering their aesthetics and cultural behaviours to fit workplace expectations (Dickens et al., 2018; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). This negotiation often involves power relations based on race, gender, and class, leading Black women to employ strategies

of conforming, negotiation, and resistance as part of their identity work in professional settings (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996).

The study highlights the prevalence of pressure to conform to Eurocentric hair aesthetics in the workplace, reflecting broader issues of identity and the facades of conformity theory (Dawson et al., 2019; Trusty et al., 2020). This pressure is rooted in historical rejection of Black women's bodies and beauty standards (Donahoo, 2021; Perkins et al., 2023). Intersectionality emerges as a crucial framework for understanding the complex relationships between race, ethnicity, gender, class, and professionalism in shaping perceptions of natural hair (Bowleg, 2012; Corus & Saatcioglu, 2015). The study also uncovers instances of internalised policing and self-regulation among the Black African women, reflecting broader issues of racial, ethnic, gender and class discrimination in the workplace (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Dawson et al., 2019; Donahoo & Smith, 2022, Hoobler et al., 2021). This behaviour perpetuates certain notions of "appropriate", "presentable" and "neat" hair in professional settings.

The study reveals how socioeconomic status and education level influence hair choices and perceptions in professional environments. The research reveals a stark contrast in early socialisation patterns between South African and Nigerian participants. South African participants reported being conditioned from a young age to associate natural hair with perceived untidiness and lower socioeconomic status. Conversely, Nigerian participants were socialised to view well-maintained natural hair as indicative of higher socioeconomic standing, with those unable to afford proper hair care resorting to shaving their heads. Intriguingly, despite these divergent early experiences, both groups converged on a common perception in their adult years. Regardless of individual accomplishments, both South African and Nigerian women perceived natural hairstyles in professional settings as signifiers of lower

social status and inappropriateness. This shared perspective underscores the profound impact of societal norms and expectations on personal grooming choices in the workplace. The study's findings extend beyond the role of racioethnic identity, highlighting the embodiment of class through hair. This phenomenon demonstrates how physical attributes, such as hairstyles, can serve as powerful social markers, influencing perceptions of professionalism and socioeconomic status. These insights contribute to our understanding of the intricate relationship between personal appearance, social classifications and professional environments in African contexts. The research emphasises the need for comprehensive theoretical frameworks that integrate aspects of embodied intersecting identities into organisational behaviour and psychology (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014; Cho et al., 2013; Opara et al., 2020; Van Amsterdam & van Eck, 2019). This approach contributes to the development of theories such as intersectionality, identity, and embodiment (Brown, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Csordas, 2024).

Theories in organisational behaviour and psychology are essential for understanding workplace dynamics and human behaviour in organisational contexts (Bond & Smith, 1996; Hackett et al., 1991). The present study emphasises the need for comprehensive theoretical frameworks that integrate aspects of embodied intersecting identities into our understanding of workplace dynamics (Atewologun et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2013; Opara et al., 2020). By examining the hair of Black African women as a physical manifestation of multiple intersecting identities in South Africa and Nigeria, this study provides insights into how individuals navigate workplace transitions, prejudices, stereotypes, and biases. This approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of Black African women's experiences regarding their hair and its significance in organisational settings, contributing to the development of theories such as intersectionality, identity, and embodiment (Brown, 2015, Crenshaw, 1989; Csordas, 2024). These advancements can lead to more effective interventions, improved organisational performance, and enhanced employee well-being and psychological safety (Eby & Robertson, 2020; Fornes et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2023).

The research findings contribute to the growing body of literature that explores hair bias against Black women in professional settings. Furthermore, this study uncovers organisational cultures that perpetuate experiences of exclusion and devaluation in the workplace through othering, lookism, and aesthetic labour, and sustain intersectional and embodied identity work struggles among the participants, resulting in their failure to achieve acceptance and belonging in organisations.

## 5.6 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The primary objective of the current study extends beyond the realm of academic scholarship alone, as it seeks to motivate African societies, educational establishments, and workplaces, particularly those situated in settler colonial contexts, where hair prejudice is more pronounced against Black girls, to develop legal and policy frameworks that adhere to the tenets of the CROWN Act of 2022. This legislation, which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair, represents a ground-breaking step in the fight against hair discrimination, as it constitutes the first anti-hair bias act to be enacted in the United States (CROWN Act, 2022). Several studies including the participants to this study have revealed that hair straightening products can result in damage to the hair shaft, inflammation of the scalp, burns, scars and alopecia (Miranda-Vilela et al., 2014; Wise et al., 2012). Furthermore, a 25-year long study of 59,000 Black women indicated that frequent use of hair relaxer chemicals is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer (PBS, 2021). This study demonstrated that educational institutions and organisations in Africa contribute to the policing of Black women's hair, leading them to chemically straighten their hair to meet standards of neatness, beauty, and professionalism. This study sheds light on the multifaceted and intricate experiences of Black African women in relation to societal and professional expectations regarding their hair

appearance. Furthermore, the research revealed the ways in which class disparities are perpetuated through hair identity expectations for Black women.

Furthermore, although the current study focused on the micro-level individual experiences of Black African women with the organisation, it may have broader implications for understanding and addressing macro-level organisational issues and barriers related to perpetuating inequality and exclusion. This can be achieved either intentionally or unintentionally through lookism, aesthetic labour, and hair bias. By shedding light on the intricate experiences resulting from hair expectations for Black African women, the present study illustrates how grooming policies and codes of conduct contribute to perpetuating inequality and exclusion within organisations.

## 5.7. LIMITATIONS

The participants in the study, which used South Africa and Nigeria as examples of settler colonial and non-settler colonial countries, respectively, came predominantly from the Xhosa, Southern Sotho, and Northern Sotho (Sepedi) tribes in South Africa and the Igbo, Ibibio, and Idoma tribes in Nigeria. However, it should be noted that these groups are not completely representative of the diverse ethnic makeup of South Africa, which comprises nine main ethnic groups, or Nigeria, which has 250 ethnic groups (Guelke, 1992; Moyo, 2010; Obadina, 2014). It would have been more comprehensive to gather data from a wider range of South African and Nigerian tribes, particularly given the participants' references to societal and workplace tribal tensions and biases.

With regard to accessing the 'field', I took proactive measures to ensure that the participants were outside of my personal and professional networks. However, due to the nature of snowball sampling, where some of the participants referred me to potential participants who met the inclusion criteria, some of the participants that formed part of the study were within

each other's personal or professional networks. Consequently, while the participants' unique lived experiences were different, some of them had an overlap in either tribal affiliations or geographical backgrounds.

Furthermore, the life narratives of individual participants demonstrated substantial diversity; however, the Snowballing sampling technique may have introduced a potential limitation to the study. This network-based convenience sampling approach, while selecting participants based on specific attributes or group affiliations, can inadvertently result in a homogeneous sample, as evidenced by all participants occupying professional roles. As Parker et al. (2019) note, such methods can lead to a lack of diversity among the chosen subjects. Thus, the sampling strategy employed may represent a constraint on the research's scope and generalisability. To address this limitation, future research should focus on developing a quantitative instrument to assess hair bias, based on the qualitative data collected in this study. This instrument should undergo initial testing and validation in three distinct settings, with the potential for broader application to entire populations using simple random sampling techniques in subsequent investigations.

The recollective nature of life story methodology, as noted by Habermas and Bluck (2000) and Morselli et al. (2016), relies on participants' readiness and ability to divulge their past experiences to the researcher. Memory can be influenced by various factors, potentially leading to the exclusion or inaccurate recounting of life events. From a mnemonic standpoint, certain occurrences and objects may become less memorable as they lose relevance when linked to a social context that may no longer exist (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Morselli et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential to interpret participants' lived experiences as a window to that particular era while explicitly recognising the constraints inherent in this recollective approach.

The comparative analysis of settler colonialism in South Africa and non-settler colonialism in Nigeria offers valuable insights into the distinct colonial experiences and their lasting impacts.

However, the comparison of two contexts may have limitations that future research could address. Mwita (2022) argues that comparing only two contexts' risks oversimplifying complex phenomena and potentially overlooking important nuances that could emerge from a broader comparison. The binary nature of such an analysis may inadvertently neglect intermediate or alternative perspectives that could enrich the study's findings. Furthermore, Felix (2005) suggests that limiting the comparison to two contexts constrains the generalisability of results and may not adequately capture the diversity of experiences or perspectives within the broader scope of colonial and post-colonial studies. To address these limitations and enhance the robustness of the research, future investigations could extend the scope of inquiry to include additional contexts. For instance, incorporating African countries that were never colonised, such as Ethiopia would allow for a more comprehensive analysis. By expanding the comparative framework, researchers can better account for the complexity and diversity of colonial experiences in Africa.

As pertains to the interviews, there were three constraints that arose. Initially, the permission letter for participants specified a 60-minute time limit for interviews; however, due to the nature of the life story methodology and the interviews themselves, some lasted on average, 150 minutes. Fortunately, the participants were gracious enough to allow me this additional time and were receptive to any follow-up questions or requests during the data analysis process to facilitate a better understanding of their stories. Secondly, the interviews were conducted either in person or via Google Meet, depending on the participants' availability. However, in one case, the participant was unable to turn on her camera, thus preventing me from observing her body language during the interview, as I had with the other participants. Finally, as the study concentrated on South African and Nigerian women and given my South African background, I occasionally encountered difficulties in understanding the accents and communication styles of certain Nigerian women in certain parts of the recordings. In such cases, I sought clarification from the participants involved.

## 5.8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The existing body of research has primarily focused on South Africa and Nigeria, which are both instances of settler and non-settler colonial nations. To further expand upon the understanding of the impact of colonialism on diverse societies, organisations and cultures, it would be advantageous to conduct similar studies in African countries that have not experienced colonialism, as well as in settler colonial states where the White population predominates. Conducting research in these countries would provide invaluable insights into the ways in which diverse colonial histories have influenced distinct societies, organisations and cultures.

The current research focuses on Black African professional women who work in a variety of sectors and are at diverse stages in their professional development. Future investigations could extend the scope of this inquiry to include women executives, as doing so would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of career success and achievements on women in leadership positions.

A prominent issue among the Nigerian women is the prevalence of colourism, particularly during their formative years. It is crucial to explore the experiences of Black African women in relation to other phenotypes of Blackness. Investigating the lived experiences and workplace challenges faced by darker skinned women in Africa is warranted. Furthermore, one participant reported her encounter with a recruitment process that was influenced by a mistaken assumption about her ethnicity. Despite the incorrect assumption that her name was Greek, she was invited for an interview. However, upon arrival, she did not fit the expected ethnicity, being a Black African woman. Consequently, she was informed that her racioethnic identity made her unsuitable for the organisation. It is crucial to investigate the impact of name bias on recruitment and selection procedures.

While this research focuses on the representation of Africans in organisational studies literature, particularly Black African female professionals, the field would benefit from a more comprehensive examination of African-American historical experiences. For instance, a comprehensive analysis of studies on African colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic conflicts with African-American perspectives could yield significant insights. These might encompass intergenerational trauma resulting from slavery, Jim Crow legislation, healthcare abuses such as the Tuskegee experiment, and the persistent effects of systemic oppression on educational access. Such comparisons could potentially draw notable parallels with post-apartheid South Africa. Future research should conduct comparative analyses of hair bias from both African and African-American perspectives to further enhance this area of study.

Although the objective of the present study was not to generalise the findings, but to provide an in-depth understanding of the contextually relevant dimensions specifically elucidating the nuanced experiences of Black African women professionals, examining how their identity construction is influenced by socio-political-historical factors that extend beyond the confines of professional environments. Future research directions include developing an instrument measuring hair bias, derived from the qualitative data. This tool would undergo pilot testing and validation across three contexts inclusive of the African-American context, with the potential for broader application to entire populations through simple random sampling methodologies in subsequent studies.

Hair bias is a pervasive issue that extends beyond Black women; however, my research has highlighted a particularly acute effect on Black African women due to their multiple identities. White women with curly hair may encounter distinct treatment from those with straight hair and engage in identity work to meet particular standards of beauty and professionalism. Additionally, brown-haired White women in specific industries may experience less favour than blonde-haired women (Semcow, 2008). Investigating the consequences of hair bias on White women in organisations can broaden the existing literature on lookism and hair bias.

## 5.9. CONCLUSION

This research utilises the life story methodology to explore the socio-political-historical consequences on the perceptions of Black African women's hair in relation to their personal, physical, and professional identities. According to Henderson and Bigby (2019), the way in which people narrate their life experiences are influenced by broader historical events and how these processes have, in turn, moulded the manner in which people talk about their own experiences. Through the provision of extensive descriptions of the experiences of Black African women professionals in both settler colonial South Africa and non-settler colonial Nigeria, this study offers these individuals a platform to voice their perspectives. By applying this research in diverse geographical locations and varying socio-political-historical contexts, the study has succeeded in uncovering the intricate experience of intersectionality and hair bias faced by Black African women, positioning them at the margins of society and organisations, and as they negotiate their identity.

Participants in this study have demonstrated an awareness of their multiple identities since a critical juncture in their lives. As they grew older and encountered diverse experiences, they became aware of the subordinate societal position that each of their identities conferred upon them. Nonetheless, these women have also acquired the skills necessary to navigate life effectively, even when faced with challenges arising from their singular or combined social identities.

The study effectively achieved its aim by clearly expounding upon the intricate theoretical framework of intersectionality, embodiment, identity, and identity work in Black African women's hair, while also rendering the findings accessible to both academics and organisations. My focus on the hair of Black African women facilitated a detailed

understanding of their experiences and how they navigate their personal, physical and professional identities in various social contexts.

It is my aspiration that the novel insights derived from the life stories of these women and this research will enable workplace establishments and educational institutions in diverse regions to comprehend the intricate and demanding experiences that call for resilience among Black women. My hope, by doing so, is for these institutions to thereby foster a more inclusive environment where individuals may freely express their true authentic selves and move beyond the confines of obscurity.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS CERTIFICATE



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE  
Tel: +27 12 420 3927  
Email: emsethics@up.ac.za

**Amendment Approval Certificate**

12 July 2024

Department: Human Resource Management

Dear Miss L Makapela

The amendments to the research project described below served before this committee on:  
2024-06-14

<b>Protocol No:</b>	EMS116/23 Line 3
<b>Principal researcher:</b>	Miss L Makapela
<b>Research title:</b>	History and its remnants (HAIR): South African and Nigerian women negotiating professional and physical identities
<b>Student/Staff No:</b>	10159127
<b>Degree:</b>	Doctoral
<b>Supervisor/Promoter:</b>	Prof HG van Dijk Prof H Kanengoni
<b>Department:</b>	Human Resource Management

The decision by the committee is reflected below:

<b>Decision:</b>	Approved
<b>Conditions (if applicable):</b>	
<b>Period of approval:</b>	2023-07-15 - 2023-12-31

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely



**PROF JA NEL**  
**CHAIR: COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS**

## APPENDIX B: COMBINED LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

Department of Human Resource Management

Combined Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent

### History and its remnants (HAIR): South African and Nigerian women negotiating professional and physical identities

Research conducted by:

Ms L. Makapela  
10159127  
(+27) 0633779288  
makapelalonwabo@gmail.com

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by [Lonwabo Makapela](#), a Doctoral student from the Department of [Human Resource Management](#) at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the study is to explore the socio-political-historical influence of systems of domination (ie colonialism and patriarchy) on black African women's subjective views of their hair, and how they form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise constructions of their hair concerning their personal and professional identity. Demographic information such as age, home language, occupation will only be used to either (1) describe the composition of the sample in general terms (2) provide context for analysing the data or (3)

Please note the following:

- This is an anonymous study and your personal information will not appear on any transcript. The responses you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be stored on a safe and secure platform as governed by the University of Pretoria's Research Data Management Policy.
- Please answer the questions in the interview as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than 60 minutes of your time.
- The data gathered for the purpose of this study will be stored for a minimum of 10 years for the purpose of verification on a password-protected Google Drive, and will be uploaded on the Figshare data management system of the University of Pretoria in a de-identified format. Once the 10 years have lapsed, the data will be destroyed according to information management policies of the University.
- The information that you share for the purpose of this study could be combined with historical data of other individuals, or with data to be collected in the future. When an investigator associated with the University wishes to use such combined or sections of data, specific ethical clearance is required, and will be sought by the researchers.

If you agree to participate in this study, kindly sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.
- You understand you have the right to withdraw at any time.

## APPENDIX B (Cont.): COMBINED LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INFORMED CONSENT

- You understand that de-identified information cannot be removed from the data set at a later stage.
- Please contact my study leaders, (Professor, G, Van Dijk, +27 (0)12 420 3334 and [gerda.vandijk@up.ac.za](mailto:gerda.vandijk@up.ac.za) AND Professor, H, Kanengoni, +27 (0)12 420 6680 and [herbert.kanengoni@up.ac.za](mailto:herbert.kanengoni@up.ac.za)) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

In research of this nature the study leader may wish to contact respondents to verify the authenticity of data gathered by the researcher. It is understood that any personal contact details that you may provide will be used only for this purpose, and will not compromise your anonymity or the confidentiality of your participation.

Thank you for the time you are willing to give to answer the questions in the survey, and for your willingness to participate.

---

Participant's signature

---

Date

---

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences  
Fakulteit Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Disaense tša Ekonomi le Taolo

## APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET

University  
of Pretoria

28 November 2023

Dear Participants

### **Information Sheet for participants**

Welcome! Thank you in advance for participating in this research. My name is Lonwabo Makapela and I am a PhD student at the Department of Human Resource Management, University of Pretoria. I am asking you to take part in a research study. Participation in this study is optional.

If you choose to participate, you will take part in one-on-one Semi-structured interviews via Google Meet. The questions are pre-planned and open-ended, with supplemental questions arising from the conversation between you and the researcher.

The research seeks to understand how Black African women's identity construction and navigation are shaped by their historical, socio-political, and economic contexts, and extend beyond the boundaries of the organisation. The interview questions will focus on your experiences with hair throughout your life, with a particular emphasis on childhood, education, and career. Please answer the questions as thoroughly and frankly as possible, as this should not consume more than 60-120 minutes of your time.

To ensure your privacy and comfort, please choose a private, safe, and quiet location where you can openly respond to the questions during the interview. During the interview, audio recordings will be taken, but no video recordings will be made. Your name and identifiable information will not be included in the transcripts or audio recordings, thus maintaining your anonymity. Your cooperation in this study is greatly appreciated, and you may choose not to participate or discontinue your participation at any time without any repercussions. If you are unable to participate, please consider sharing the opportunity with someone who may be interested.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Lonwabo Makapela at [makapelalonwabo@gmail.com](mailto:makapelalonwabo@gmail.com) or **0633779288** for additional information.

Best regards,  
Lonwabo Makapela

APPENDIX D: LANGUAGE EDITING LETTER OF CONFIRMATION

**KNG LANGUAGE EDITING SERVICES**  
**“Say It With Style”**

K.N. Groenewald  
22 Marais Street  
Bailey’s Muckleneuk  
Pretoria  
0181  
0829366250

18 August 2024

To Whom It May Concern

**CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING OF A PHD DISSERTATION:**

**History and its remnants (HAIR): South African and Nigerian women negotiating  
professional and physical identities**

Herewith confirmation that the abovementioned dissertation, by Ms Lonwabo Makapela, has been language edited.

Yours sincerely



K.N. Groenewald

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

### Individual

- Please tell me about yourself. What were your aspirations when you were growing up?
- What were the factors that you thought would hinder or facilitate you to achieve these goals?
- When did you first think about your hair and its texture? What do you think about your hair?

### Neighbourhood

- Please tell me about the neighbourhood you grew up in (township, suburb, and rural area)? What was its racial, ethnic, and class mix?
- What were the typical hairstyles worn by other children in your neighbourhood?
- Who were the significant people in your life as a child? (This can include immediate and extended family, friends, individuals in the community, and anyone else you particularly remember.) How did they wear their hair?

### Family

- Please tell me about your family. Who did you live with when you were growing up?
- What was your relationship like with your mother? What messages or advice did your mother give you about your hair?
- What was your relationship with your father? How did he talk about your hair?
- As a child, how did you first become aware that you were black or that your hair was textured/afrocentric?
- Talk about your hair? About issues around your natural hair and/or afrocentric hairstyles? Did they ever talk about your hair and the styling of it as you grew older?
- Growing up who are the significant women in your life? How did they wear their hair? How did they talk about your hair? What lessons did you learn from them regarding your hair?

- Who were the people/person in your family that most influenced who you are today?

## **School Context**

### *Primary school*

- What type of primary school did you attend? What was the racial composition of the school? How were you treated in school?
- What type of students succeeded in your school? How did your school environment shape the person that you are today?
- How did you wear your hair in primary school? Why?
- What was the messaging around neatness and hair in your primary school? How did that influence you?

### *High school*

- What type of high school did you attend? What was the racial composition of the school? How were you treated in school?
- What type of students succeeded in your school? How did your school environment shape the person that you are today?
- How did you wear your hair in high school? Why?
- What was the messaging around neatness and hair in your high school? How did that influence you?
- While you were in high school did you think about going to university? Did you think a lot about your future? Do you remember having any career plans? Describe them.
- Did your teachers or counselors encourage your university and career plans?
- What activities did you participate in while in school? What supports were there for you in primary and high school? What obstacles? Were any of the obstacles due to your racioethnicity? How did they affect you? Were any of the supports due to racioethnicity? How did they affect you?

- While you were growing up, what historical events stand out in your mind?

### **Tertiary Institution**

- Where did you attend university?
- How did you find the transition from school to university? What made it easy and what were your challenges?
- Was the racial composition of your university? How did this impact your experiences at university?
- How did you wear your hair at university? Why?
- What activities did you participate in while at university? What was your experience?
- Who were your friends at university? How did they talk about your hair?
- Did you pursue post graduate education? Was it at the same university? If not which university, did you go to? What led you to choose graduate school?

### **Work Context**

- What other factors contributed to your career selection?
- When you first had a job, how did you wear your hair? Why?
- Can you tell me about your current job? What's the nature of your work?
- What's the biggest job challenge you have ever faced?
- How do you currently wear your hair at work? Why?
- As a Black woman, have you experienced discrimination in your company? Tell me a little bit about those experiences. How did you respond when you became aware of the discrimination?
- As a Black woman, do you feel included or a sense of belonging in your company? Do you feel that your opinion and voice matter? Tell me a little bit about that experience.

- How have you changed significantly as a person over the course of your career?  
What changes do you like? Which changes don't you like?

### **Transitions**

- Please tell me about key historical moments relating to your hair which significantly influenced the way you view your hair?

### ***Private world***

- Are you currently involved in an intimate (committed relationship or marriage) relationship? How does your partner talk about your hair?

### **Strategies**

- What have been your biggest challenges in the workplace? What strategies have you devised to cope with these challenges?
- What challenges have you experienced in the workplace, regarding the appearance of your hair? What strategies have you devised to cope with these challenges?
- How much time and money would you say you spend on your hair per month in order to look professional?