

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Who taught you to hate the color of your skin? Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose? And the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself? From the top of your hair to the soles on your feet, who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to? So much you don’t want to be around each other…… You should ask yourself who taught to hate what God gave you.”

(Malcom X, 1962)

The pursuit for beauty is founded by a desire to enhance outer appearance or even completely transform it. Feeling unattractive or not attractive enough often drive young women to purchase skin lightening products, undergo plastic surgeries, diet, among other extreme steps, in a bid to attain the beauty ideals. Malcom X’s powerful speech titled who taught you to hate yourself delivered in Harlem, New York in the 1962, indicate that this feeling of unattractiveness among the black community dates back to colonial era when white supremacist ideologies took course. Skin color and physical appearances were used in differentiation of those who were enslaved from those who were free, and in justifying a person’s previous oppression. Those with deep melanin were branded as epitome of ugliness and inferiority by colonizers, (Thomas, 2020).

In the colonial times, Kenyan schools were segregated into European, Indians, Arabs, whereas the African children underwent agriculture and industry-based education. In the workforce, Europeans occupied managerial positions in the government and as farm masters. Indians took up construction, Arabs business and trade whereas Africans were manual labors in the kitchen and farms, (Okango, 2017). The internalization of white supremacy on identities of black communities are also visible in the trending concepts of good and bad hair, while also exposing outright differences that racial-oriented hierarchies create intra-culturally due to inter-cultural discrimination, (Robinson, 2011). These thoughts remained subconsciously ingrained in the minds of the majority, even in the age of post-colonialism. With the fuel of the society at large, social media, cosmetic industry, among other factors these ideas still remain part of today’s world.

Due to the level of increased disposal incomes, urbanization, population growth and rise in use of social media, there has been escalated demand on cosmetic products in Kenya hence driving the of the market from estimated 5.4 billion Kenya shillings equivalent of 53.3 million dollars in

2014 to 12 billion Kenya shillings in 2018 which is equivalent of 118 million dollars, (Global Market Research Agency: Euromonitor International, 2018). The major players in production of beauty products in Kenyan markets include, hair, makeup, hair products, fashion and a recent addition skincare products. On the other side hair business has been booming as well. The independent provider of strategic market research, estimated the value of hair care industry in Kenya at KShs.12.7 billion as of 2017, which meant it was increasing by 7% per year. Some industry players added that the actual figures could be higher by KShs.2 billion higher.

The definitions of what is regarded as beautiful varies in time and space, such that the standards of beauty in the 90s and early 2000s have changed overtime with the revolution of technology and globalization. The beauty standards in Kenya have evolved with time. Less is known about the standards that were in existence prior to the British colonialism. As per my mother's narrative during the 70s as young girls grew up, they would braid their own natural hair, thread it using strings or threads to lengthen (also called threading method). The straightening of African hair also lengthens the hair since upon washing African hair shrinks and curls depending on each individual texture. Straightening would also be done using a metal tin which would be heated on direct fire and then using a comb to firmly support it as it was dragged on hair. The method was later replaced by a hot comb which would be heated on direct fire then used to comb out the hair in order to straighten it.

The salon industry has been at the frontier of Kenyan beauty practices which in return boosted the start-ups and growth of hair products companies in Kenya such as Darling Hair, Sistar hairline from Solphia Kenya limited and Angels Hair. The hair industry has attracted foreign investments with companies like Angels Hair and Sistar hairline being owned by Korean nationals. These hair companies' products range from braids, synthetic weaves, Marley hair, kinky twists, wigs, hair sprays and hair clip-ons. However, more companies have entered the market with the evolution of hair styling and hair trends among black women. These trends are borrowed from Western practices of African American women. For instance, when Black American women (Celebrities: actresses and musicians) began the trend of using human hair: Peruvian hair, Brazilian hair, Malaysian hair wigs, the trend was borrowed by the African celebrities and later incorporated into system of hairstyling practices but mostly amongst the Kenyan elites. The reason being that human hair wigs are extravagantly pricey. This goes without saying that hair is a crucial element

of what is regarded as attractive and well-kept. Before the recent adoption of embracing natural hair movement, women in Kenya mostly wore their hair straight, relaxed, weaved, straw curls, braided, corn rows, Ghanaian lines, twist braids, under a wig or even permed. But with the rise of keeping hair natural, new companies have found cache into the market with a wide range of products for a natural woman. New hair oils have been introduced to the market like sweet almond oil, moringa oil, tea tree oil, avocado oil, castor oils and macadamia oil, grape seed oil which comes with a promise of maintaining moisturized, healthy and stimulating growth. The same goes for launch of products other than the typical shampoo and conditioner, to include deep conditioners, hair mayonnaise, leave-in conditioners, hair creams, curling creams, hair pudding and heat protectant as well as other new range of millennial black woman's hair essentials.

The use of makeup was non-existent in that era. Talcum powder was common practice on the women to enhance facial appearance however women were more natural. In the 70s with entry of red lipsticks in the market, the users were mainly call girls as a way to lure in men, up to date the red lipstick and red nail polish are associated with sex appeals of a wayward woman, (sex worker). Even Plato put it that women's beauty is more often linked to deception than to truth or goodness as it is connected to adornment and simulation. Unlike men's beauty which is seen as original, close to the forms from which sensible and bodily experience is derived, closer to the very order and proportion of the world. Women who paint their faces usually do so for seduction using sexuality to confuse men, usually with some ulterior motive in mind. Women using make-up are thus bad women, as opposed to unpainted good women, (Plato).

In the 1930s, when our grandmothers were young girls they used a special type of soil which was mixed with other concoctions to form a brownish solutions which was applied on the face to brighten and smoothen it. De Souza, (2008) research in Kenya found that about 40 decades ago, unconventional methods were practiced by individuals and their families which involved the use of herbs, soils, caustic, noxious chemicals and mixtures heated in clay pots over open fires, in a bid to achieve lighter skin complexions. He proceeded to argue that the aftermath of colonialism had painted ideologies of white supremacy into African minds which were cemented through callous acts as slavery, discrimination, mistreatment and color rating in social class against dark skin and in allocation of better jobs and executive positions to light-skinned women. This certainly further affirms that beauty is a "hegemonic" ideology, serving the interests of the dominant groups

(men and the white race) and functioning as a “tool of patriarchy and racism” (M. Hunter, 2007). In Kenya since the days my mother was in college 40 decades ago, brown skinned women were seen as being beautiful in comparison to other women of darker complexions. These beauty ideologies subjected to women did not apply to men too, therefore indicating signs of objectification of women by men. Men partake in the promulgation of beauty standards solely because they are at the fore front of ranking women’s beauty. They validate women’s beauty through compliments and expressing interest in them. The amount of beauty a woman possesses may help her land a well-paying job or marry a high-status, wealthy man (M. Hunter, 2007). The essence of beauty could be linked to the plethora of benefits considered to arise from its existence, for example a beautiful woman according to particular beliefs have it easy when it comes to attracting suitors, garnering likes on Instagram and subscriptions on YouTube channels, as well as securing certain jobs especially in the media: modelling gigs, TV presenters.

Margaret Wolfe Hungerwood coined the common phrase that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. The belief on what is beauty may be strikingly different from one person to another, one society to another, one nation to another and even one continent to another. There is no absolute ground of what kind of face is beautiful, (Leem, 2017). The question is an abstract term as beauty can be defined in terms of facial appearance that is the facial features, how they are aligned to accentuate each other, for instance Facial shape: oval face, chubby cheeks, heart-shaped, round face, Eyes: shape and color, like with almond-shaped eyes, hazel eyes, Nose shape and size, like straight, pointy nose and shape and size of lips, like full lips or thin lips. Features that are moderate not too big or too small could be the ideal, however variations in preferences are not be ignored. Symmetry is another sufficiently investigated trait due to its potential biological benefit (Rhodes 2006). Other determinants of beauty could include the body shape; hour-glass figure or pear shaped, straight and rounded shape, Body size that if a person is skinny, plus-sized or fat and last but not least hips, bust, and height, weight, fit or unfit. There many terms used in reference to describing a person’s appearance which in turn may be the embodiment of beauty or its presence in moderation or even the lack of it. Beauty cannot be defined by any one characteristic, (G.E. Moore), and in doing so one commits naturalistic fallacy, just like goodness, beauty is a simple, non-analyzable concept.

The proliferation of Eurocentric beauty standards worldwide throughout Asia, Africa and even the peripheral areas of a country like Kenya may have been instilled by impacts of colonization which included stratification and discrimination on basis of skin color. However, the culprits of today may only partly blame history as they are further instigated by images on mass media, social media, cosmetic industry and a generational narrative that remains unchanged. The modern day culprits of triggering feelings of not being pretty enough or pretty at all are the internet and the media, (Carrigan, 2017). The growth of the internet can be looked at as a technological determinism, meaning that technological change is at the core of influencing cultural changes, (Slack, Wise 2017). Thus the power of technology is seen in how the ideal look is disseminated across different societies among people with different views, this view can be draw from different societies of celebrities, magazines and Instagram models, the people around us and as well as social media influencers. This is one of the ways the beauty ideals are constructed into social realities and fed into the minds of the youths. With the connectivity of the world at its peak, an online community or society has been created, with its own culture, regulations, beliefs, restrictions among other cultural elements. We therefore cannot speak of beauty without the online community's perceptions.

Women are constantly bombarded by information in mass media which transmits and reinforces values, norms, and ideals of fashion and beauty via images of models, movie stars, and female celebrities in a variety of media formats (Polivy & Herman, 2004). The growth of social media platforms and penetration of internet to all areas of the globe greatly impacted on how people discern beauty. One of the major ways beauty is glamorized is through the images of models on famous magazine. Kenya has its own share of magazines including True Love Magazine, The Insyder, Saturday Nation Magazine, and Drum Magazine. However international magazines like Elle and the Cosmopolitan have found their way into Kenyan markets. The images represented on social media; the illusion painted by Instagram models which has been criticized in reference to use of heavy make-up, Photoshop features and Instagram filters to achieve the perfect look. A super model, Cameron Russell on TED talk stated "image is powerful and image is superficial." She reported that during photo-shoot photographers would direct on which poses to take to sell the ideal message, and before most photo-shoot she would get fake tans or barring surgeries. The definition of beauty for the past century encircled youth, health, symmetry, femininity, tall slender figures and white skin which accorded her the legacy of beauty ideal. She further pronounced that

the pictures from her photo-shoots were actually not pictures of her but were rather a construction orchestrated by a group of professionals: makeup artists, photographers, hair stylists, fashion experts among others.

The new inventions of hair regimens and skincare regimens are mostly propagated through the new age powerhouse which is social media. There are a myriad of YouTube tutorials on beauty regimens, how to style hair, body hygiene among other common. The tutorials would endorse new products to their viewers. Kenya has its own share of YouTube Vloggers (Social Media Influencers) who share their two coins on which products to use for different results, as well as which salons to visit and places to buy makeup and clothes. The spiraling appraisal of socialites in Kenya has fed the surge for desiring hourglass figures, beauty enhancement treatments that were seen as alien cosmetic procedures before. A famous Kenyan socialite underwent a procedure that turned her entirely light-skinned and claimed what she did was done abroad by a high-end dermatologist. An article indicated that some professionals opt for discreet means of skin lightening products like pills, chemical peels, injections or glutathione and laser treatments given by high-end dermatologists and beauty spas, (Udobang, 2019).

In her book, *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf pointed out that beauty ideology is used to keep modern women in its subordinate place. Drawing from beauty ideals diffused by means of media, the browner complexions of black women are preferably ranked as most attractive. In Kenya they are termed as 'Rangi ya Thao' which translates to the color of the now outdated 1000 Kenya shillings note. The note had a brownish color to it. Dating back to the 19th century brown skinned girls was still considered as most beautiful with traditional Kikuyu songs Like 'Airetu eru' dedicated to the brown skinned. Unlike the darker color of famous cake brownies, in Kenya a brown woman is one with yellowish complexion, almost resembling that of mixed race women. This skin complexion is also common in communities of Ethiopia, Eretria and Somalia. Other parts of the world also have common pet names given to brown skinned women. Phua, J et al. (2016) listed "brown sugar" and "redbones" as the labels given to the light-skinned women in the African-American community. This indicated that despite their existing contrasting opinions about the higher status of light women in this community, referring to brown-skinned women as "brown sugar" has a shared meaning and this label suggests that brown women are sweet like sugar.

Some women are born naturally brown owing to their genetics, however some as adulthood strides in and a realization that browner women are placed at high pedestals proceed to bleach their own skin. Such was a case of Kenyan incumbent socialite Vera Sidika who claimed she bleached her skin since men preferred fairer women. The practice of skin bleaching has not started in this century, in the age of colonialism the methods were more unconventional. As of today creams, surgical procedures, hydroquinone injections promise results of lightening the skin. ‘Fair and Lovely’ was common in the early 90s in Kenya and was speculated to lighten and smoothen skin. Then came Carolight, a product that has been heavily warned against for containing harmful chemicals and still, it sells on. In different countries the practice of skin bleaching is given different local names, for instance in Kenya it is termed as “kupaka mkorogo” which is a Swahili phrase for applying the lightening concoction. While in South African indigenous tribes as Davids LM, et al (2016), puts it the practice is described as ‘ukutsheyisa’ which means ‘to chase beauty’ in isiXhosa, and ‘ukucreamer’ which means ‘applying creams on the skin’ in isiZulu. The word ‘mashubaba’ is also commonly used in Johannesburg as an urban slang for ochronosis.

Throughout history to date, women have been subjected to unattainable beauty standards which even though have evolved and become inclusive still exclude some physical features from the mainstream ideologies of beauty. Such is the case of women considered to be fat, dark skinned, have broad noses among other features that have been branded unattractive. According to various research conducted women have indulged in extreme beauty practices in a bid to be beautiful. Other researchers have found reasons why women want beauty: to seek validation from society, to feel confident in their own skin or even for purposes of career selection for instance actresses. Such extremities as skin bleaching, plastic surgeries and breast augmentation and implants have also been widely studied in different countries. However a gap still persists in variety of research that covers beauty extremities like hair relaxers, however the study considers skin bleaching which is phenomenon not yet widely reviewed within Kenya. This study devotes its purpose in studying how the society, social media and cosmetic industry promulgate beauty standards that push women to try out extreme practices so as to attain these standards. The research will then conclude why these two beauty practices are termed as extremities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. How does the cosmetics industry play a part in proliferation beauty standards?

- ii. How has society contributed in creating globalized, beauty standards?
- iii. How does these beauty standards influence extreme beauty practices?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. The study will analyze the role of the society, and the cosmetics industry in creation and propagation of beauty standards and practices.
- ii. The study will also analyze the role beauty standards play in the instigation of women's extreme practices.
- iii. The study will investigate the detriments of the extremist beauty practices

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study is will be undertaken to explore and understand women's attached meanings of beauty standards as conveyed through social media, and the cosmetic industry. The study will also gain a deeper understanding how these meanings acquired have had an effect on the beauty practices amongst the women in Kenya.

Theoretical Significance

The study will provide new interpretations of Jean Baudrillard's theories and Leslie Sklair's theory into the influence the cosmetics industry has in promulgating beauty standards and attracting women to purchase their beauty jars.

Researchers have dove deeper into issues of chemical relaxers, skin bleaching and colorism. Hence, this study will give additional knowledge on how colorism and texturism fuel beauty extremities, as well as the risks of such practices.

Practical Significance

The direct recipients of this research output are women. A better representation of beauty standards by incorporation of diversity of women of all complexions, sizes and shapes would help raise the confidence in women's natural beauty. This research will also inform women of dangers associated with beauty extremist practices to health encouraging women to embrace natural beauty.

The research also devices different ways in which information on risk of extreme beauty products can be disseminated effectively to women in all parts of Kenya.

MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

The motivation to embark on this study was because the research will provide the researcher with a stock of knowledge about the experiences of different women. How women interpret the messages relayed to them by different agencies or institutions in the society that have been successfully promulgating idealized beauty standards and facilitating beauty patterns and trends. The study was selected because of researcher's interest in understanding the plights of women in their efforts to fit in, as a woman, the researcher has also experienced such issues as colorism and texturism. The latter issues greatly impact on women's perceptions of ideal beauty. Hence studying these phenomena will provide a deeper and vast understanding of how beauty standards are instilled into minds of young Kenyan women, with an aim to establish if the standards influence extremist beauty practices. Moreover, the researcher seeks to use the newfound insight to understand how to devise ways to promote body positivity, self-esteem and shatter ideologies that objectify women and feed their insecurities.