Mirror, mirror on the wall, why am I not the fairest of them all?

- an Afrocentric approach to the lack of representation of Afro-Finnish women within the Finnish beauty standard

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Abstract for master's thesis

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Abstract:

In this master's thesis, I critically examine the beauty standard present in Finland and how it excludes Afro-Finnish women. This thesis is completed partially as a written text and the analysis aspect comes in form of a three-part podcast series.

The research aims to shed light on the exclusion of Afro-Finnish women, understand why beauty in Finland means inhabiting whiteness and how detrimental it becomes for people who do not inhabit Eurocentric features. With the help of Afrocentricity and intersectionality as the main theories these aspects will be analyzed. Additionally, concepts such as colorism, capitalism and the politics of hair will be discussed. Furthermore, the notion of the self as a critical opponent regarding embracing one's beauty will be discussed, and how aspects such as social media, beauty trends and beauty industries can both aid and damage the self. Moreover, I want to emphasize healing practices, along with Afrocentric perspective being useful for Afro-Finnish women's self-loving journey. The material for the thesis is a combination of discussions in form of interviews paired with academic and non-academic articles. The material was then analyzed with the help of textual analysis. To critically examine the beauty standard in Finland, is done with the intent to strive for dismantling oppressive tools and to give recognition for a wider notion of feeling beautiful.

Keywords: beauty, beautiful, Afrocentricity, Eurocentricity, representation, Afroness, Finnishness, whiteness, gender studies, belonging, intersectionality, colorism, podcast, interviews, embracing, healing, textual analysis, Afro-Finn, hair,

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For all who do not feel that their beauty is represented within the Finnish beauty ideal, this thesis is for you.

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1. Introduction

In the spring of 2020, I went for the first time to a hairdresser that knew what to do with my hair. It had been five years since I had last set foot in a salon. I could only recall the feeling of exhaustion from the previous appointment of my hair being cut and styled merely to look good while straightened. Regardless, my hair was suffering, and a cut was long overdue. The hairdresser appointment in 2020 was unimaginably healing. It felt like my hair finally got the treatment and care it had always deserved but never received. I felt understood in the way my curls were finally being embraced. Above all, I felt beautiful leaving the salon with my natural curls. All this happened when I was 22 years old.

Writing down my experience at the hairdresser sounds almost laughable, since having such strong emotions after a haircut is something many take for granted. However, it was a first time for me having this overwhelming feeling, with a lot of emotions embedded in it. Emotions that all women should have after a visit to the hairdresser, a feeling of being beautiful. It was not this instant, that made me think about the lack of care and representation there is for Afro-Finnish hair and beauty in Finland, but it gave me perspective on how important the feeling of feeling beautiful is for one's self-esteem. Not merely the feeling but to acknowledge and to embrace the fact that you are beautiful.

Growing up as a Brown girl in a white country like Finland, the notion of being represented as beautiful was limited and sadly still is. Surely, comments and compliments were given, but they didn't take away from the side-eye looks, the unwanted hair grabbing and the general comparing oneself to the white beauty standard. I can recall multiple times looking myself in the mirror wishing that I looked more like someone else, like someone who was represented as beautiful in Finland, like someone white. The lack of Afro-Finnish women being represented as beautiful in Finland has left its scars. Scars that are deep but still possible to heal, despite being a long and rocky process. Nonetheless, during my healing process, I began to think about how beneficial it would be for me to write down what I have found, for future individuals to find. Hence, pieces started to fall into place when it came down to the theme of my thesis.

1.1. Aim and research question

In this thesis, I want to further research and discuss the concept of beauty in Finland and what it means to not be represented or recognized within it as an Afro-Finnish woman. Throughout my lived experience growing up in Finland, it has become clear what, or rather who is considered beautiful and desirable in Finland and who is not. In Finland, to be beautiful and for you to see your beauty represented within the beauty standard, one in some way must inhabit whiteness.

Beauty standards are always present and difficult if not impossible to escape. Even if we make a conscious or unconscious decision to confine ourselves to them or not, we are still judged through them. We are also constantly reminded of what is "beautiful" and how a woman should appear in society, and these images of who is beautiful, we thereupon internalize through advertisements, books, series, and other forms of media that we consume. We see models and actors/actresses with a certain look who are valued more than others and who are given a greater platform to be seen at. The people who are mainly represented in mainstream media and popular culture can be a reflection upon what is preferred in society or what society sees as most desirable. People who inhabit the bodies of those who are represented, might not see the lack of representation of other bodies. However, when one inhabits a body that is not valued as much as the bodies represented, one starts to see a discrepancy in who is being represented and considered beautiful.

There is undoubtedly a lack of representation of Afro-Finnish bodies within the Finnish beauty ideal. In my thesis, I want to further discuss, shed light on and analyze why Afro-Finnish bodies are not present within the beauty industry in Finland. I want to further comprehend what the constant images of whiteness as beautiful does to someone who does not inhabit it. In addition, when you cannot find images of yourself represented as beautiful, what does that do to oneself and one's self-esteem. Furthermore, in order not to leave my thesis open but to rather end with a solution, I yearn to discuss and emphasize how to embrace one's beauty through healing practices.

The research questions I will answer are:

- How does whiteness become equivalent to beauty in Finland?
- How does the lack of representation of Afro-Finnish women as beautiful in Finland affect Afro-Finnish women?

- What does it mean to feel represented within the Finnish beauty ideal as an Afro-Finnish woman?
- How can Afro-Finnish women heal and start to embrace their beauty?

Another important question that guided my research was for whom am I doing my research? Who are the people that I am contributing this research to? Firstly, it is to contribute to the critical studies of beauty. Alongside, not only researching for myself, but rather for all Afro-Finnish women, young and old, who have gone through a difficult journey of self-acceptance in a white world. I therefore dedicate my thesis to all Afro-Finnish women who deserve to be recognized as beautiful without being defined by white standard of beauty. To all Afro-Finnish women who are still struggling with the concept of beauty or on the patch of healing.

1.2. Limitation and situatedness

I have decided that I am only researching women and not analyzing beauty standards for all Afro-Finns or people of color. This is done to narrow down my qualitative analysis and give a rather cohesive material instead of risking generalization. I, as a female researcher, feel more prone to discuss the beauty of women knowing more personally about that world, its ideals and what the stress of belonging entails. It is also important to mention that my participants and I are all cis, mixed, and abled women, who all are raised in Finland and have the privilege of knowing Finnish and having Finnish citizenship. I want to stress this since if I were to have discussed with a dark-skinned, trans and/or disabled woman, the conversation would have been different, and it would have added aspects to the discussion about beauty and how it excludes (see Kafai 2019 & Grönqvist 2020). Regardless, for my material I aim to include a variety of literature by different scholars to broaden my thesis and for it to not only be about mixed or light-skinned individuals' experience in Finland.

1.3. Terminology- Usage of Afro-Finnishness

An important aspect of my thesis is the terminology. I will be using Afro-Finnish women as my research group, instead of "women of color". I do identify as belonging to that group, however, I decided not to use the term women of color due to its problematic tone and how it promotes generalization. Many do advocate for the term, such as Loretta Ross (2011), who argues that it allows for a sense of belonging and offers a network of support. Ross, who is the co-founder and

national coordinator of *SisterSong-Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective,* argues that the phrase women of color was coined to give a solidarity term for the collective work amongst oppressed women. Whereas Ross advocates for how women of color entail a commitment to work together with other oppressed women, many would oppose Ross' statement. For instance, many women, particularly Black women, argue that the term erases individual experiences and combines all non-white women into one homogenous group. Donna F. Edwards, a politician and columnist for the Washington Post, together with Gwen McKinney who is the creator of and communication strategist at *Suffrage.Race.Power — Black Women Unerased argue* that the label women of color erase individual experiences of racially oppressed Black women (Edwards & McKinney 2020). They continue by stating that "our [women's] lived experiences are not interchangeable", which implying that the term women of color boxes all non-white women's experiences in one group and refuses to differentiate them, thereby contributing to colorblindness.

In many spaces today, women of color are rather used as an umbrella term for all non-white women. Edwards and McKinney (2020) both emphasize the importance of claiming one's identity and being recognized for it, instead of it being erased. Milka Njoroge, who is a gender and critical race scholar, stated in an interview how Black people are made invisible through the term people of color (Lindman 2020). Njoroge adds that a collective term erases the violence Black people experience, which is something not all "people of color" experience. When it comes to the different experiences amongst women of color, Seren Sensei, an activist whose interest is seeking a bond between politics of race and popular culture, argues similarly to Edwards and McKinney, but Sensei accentuates the importance of Black identity. Sensei (2019) highlights that being a person/woman of color is not the same as being Black and the struggles Black individuals experience cannot be condensed to an ambiguous term such as women/people of color. She also emphasizes the anti-blackness within the usage of the term, such as proclaiming an increased representation of women of color within the fashion industry, while there is an enormous lack of Black individuals represented. She, therefore, indicates that non-black people of color benefit from anti-blackness and this is forgotten when discussing women or people of color as a collective.

I take the term Afro-Finnish women, or rather just Afro-Finns from the *Good Hair Day* collective, which is an anti-racist movement that aspires to strengthen the Afro-Finnish community, widen its representation and all in all create a safer space for Afro-Finns on all levels from personal to

political. The term Afro-Finns, emphasizing on afro, might be misunderstood, as it does not require its members to have an afro or wear one's hair naturally, but it rather relates to individuals who have a connection, like heritage or roots, to the continent of Africa. The second part of the term, Finns, or Finnishness addresses the connection to Finland, either as a citizen, visitor or someone who lives here permanently or temporarily. Knowingly, this does exclude many who feel more comfortable with the term women of color and are racialized but do not have a connection to the continent of Africa, nonetheless, it has been a necessary change of terminology. It is done to have a more narrowed downsample to discuss the lack of representation within the Finnish beauty standard.

2. Theory and earlier research

I aim to critically examine the beauty standard and open the discussion for dismantling it. Hence, the aim is to make room for people to embrace their beauty regardless of the mainstream idea of what beauty should look like and who should inhabit it. To achieve this outcome of the thesis, I have decided to mainly utilize an Afrocentric theory, a theory, I find, that does not only challenge normativity but also gives a solution after dismantling it. In addition to Afrocentricity, I am utilizing intersectionality to further emphasize Afrocentricity. Furthermore, I am also using theories like colorism, representation, and belongingness. The latter two theories are theories I used in my discussions with my participants, due to them being more mainstream and used in everyday language. All the three additional theories become important when discussing beauty and its ideals, since when representation of one's beauty is absent, due to color hierarchy, it creates a feeling of exclusion, or rather, the sense of belonging to that environment is detached. Although, I am going to refer to previous research in this thesis, I will additionally bring forth other theories in the analysis.

2.1. Afrocentricity - a way to re-embrace yourself

Afrocentric theory, Afrocentric standpoint or simply Afrocentricity existed as a notion and mindset before Molefi Kete Asante, professor at the Department of Africology and African American Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia, wrote his book *Afrocentricity* in 1998. However, Asante is referred to as having coined the term, its operationality and introducing it to a more academic space of theory and methodology (Mazama 2001: 394). The idea behind Afrocentric theory is to reclaim knowledge and recognition by challenging the Eurocentric standpoint of defining Otherness (Mazama 2001: 388, Patton 2006: 33). What Afrocentric theory does is position

people of African descent in the center of their reality, for them to reclaim their reality and representation of themselves, coupled with exposing oppressive tools (Patton 2006: 43). Therefore, Afrocentricity emphasizes the liberation from systematically centered Eurocentric values (Mazama 2001: 387-388, Patton 2006: 32). Ama Mazama (2001: 388), the Associate Professor at the Department of African American Studies at Temple University, describes it marvelously, when she states that "Its aim [the aim of Afrocentricity] is to give us our African, victorious consciousness back. In the process, it also means viewing the European voice as just one among many and not necessarily the wisest one."

Another aspect that sets Afrocentricity apart is its association with other theories or standpoints. Contrary to Eurocentricity, which forces itself to be universal, Afrocentricity rather highlights that it is merely one way to view the world together with many other standpoints (Asante 1991: 171, Mazama 2001: 389, Patton 2006: 33). Afrocentricity does not want to replace Eurocentricity, nor is it a "Black version" of Eurocentricity (Asante 1991: 171). Instead, it offers liberation and the ability to embrace a multitude of experiences and identities. Asante (1991: 179) concludes in his article *The Afrocentric Idea in Education*, where he discusses the need of including Afrocentricity in the American educational system, how Afrocentricity is not anti-white. He instead argues that it is against racism and ignorance and is above all else about the desire of unifying an already divided people.

Within Afrocentricity it is also argued that the researcher and the participants do not necessarily need to be of African descent for Afrocentricity to be used, additionally, Afrocentricity does not need to be reduced to only comprise African culture (Mazama 2001: 398, Patton 2006: 33). Afrocentricity is to bring forth the truth that has been denied and ignored for the protection of white hegemony that is reinforced by Eurocentric values (Asante 1991: 177). The truth according to Asante (1991: 177) "gives one insight into the real reasons behind human actions, whether one chooses to follow the paths of others or not". Hence, it is important to appreciate the notion of self-consciousness within Afrocentricity, for the truth to be told (Mazama 2001: 398).

2.1.1. Afrocentricity paired with intersectionality

I decided upon utilizing Afrocentricity in my thesis because I wanted to challenge Eurocentric approach to beauty and how whiteness operates. I additionally appreciate the notion of Afrocentricity of reclaiming and embracing oneself while exposing oppression. It offers a way to critically examine discourses and give them a solution after they have been dismantled. These are important aspects when it comes to beauty and beauty standards since the notion of embracing oneself is key in an environment where your representation is deprived of you.

Another reason for me choosing the theory, is due to a personal gratification of its usage in Tracy Owen Patton article *Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair? African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image and Hair.* Patton, who is an African American Diaspora Study and Gender Study scholar, discusses in her article how the Eurocentric white beauty ideal affects African American women's identity, hair, employment and how they can challenge it. In the article, she uses Afrocentric theory paired with standpoint theory to highlight challenges imposed by the beauty standard. Standpoint theory encourages the idea of intersectionality and individual experiences, instead of relying on the status quo (Patton 2006: 32, 43) and it compliments Afrocentric theory adequately. The two theories together emphasize the importance of individual experiences and how they can challenge the norm and even provide space to reconnect with oneself. I will personally not be using standpoint theory, as I will rather be examining my material through an intersectional perspective. Even if standpoint theory and intersectionality are different theories, I see a similarity between the two. Both theories emphasize the importance of different individual experiences and how many similar individual experiences showcase a systemic pattern of oppression. A pattern of oppression that is through the theories brought up, discussed, and challenged, hopefully, leading to its dismantling. Hence, intersectionality together with Afrocentricity does not only desire to challenge but also understand and embrace the multitude of different bodies and the beauty in them.

Intersectionality, a term coined by feminist and critical race theorist Kimberly Crenshaw in the 1980s, refers to the understanding of the complexity of human experiences (Collins & Bilge 2016: 25). Crenshaw (1989: 149) coined the term mainly for understanding the double discrimination that Black women face, due to both the racism and sexism they experience. Important to note and respect is the original usage of the term, a term for Black women, which then has spread into other

disciplines to understand human differences and oppression. The gender scholars Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix (2004: 78) talk about "simultaneously interlocking oppression", meaning that different forms of oppression do exist in an interlocking hierarchy where people are treated differently based on a multitude of reasons. The two scholars additionally argue in favor of the African American philosopher Colin West and highlight how simply one aspect of one's identity, such as race does not solely matter (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 80). Instead, one's race, gender, sexuality, and class to mention a few, matter since they construct everyone's perception of reality. In other words, intersectionality is about understanding and highlighting the different forms of experiences and discrimination that people face, depending on where they stand in the intersection of oppression. It is not only about understanding yourself and your experiences, but also how society treats you depending on who you are or rather what society sees you as.

Intersectionality is important since it does emphasize how differences are treated in society and how they cannot be erased due to differences that are a core aspect of how people experience their daily life. The feminist writer and political activist bell hooks talks about the importance of intersectionality in her book *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and Feminism* from 1990. In her book, hooks discusses how Black women have been and still are treated horribly in America, compared to White women, and how the usage of "sisterhood" is tone-deaf. In other words, hooks implies that there cannot be any form of sisterhood between women, before differences have been understood. Even if hooks does not explicitly use the term intersectionality, she argues in its favor by emphasizing the understanding of differences, instead of erasing them to create universality.

2.2. Othering - Ain't I a Beautiful Woman?

Googling image search words such as "beauty", "beautiful" and "beautiful women" the sense of who is seen as beautiful becomes transparent. The result will be an abundance of white bodies, with an occasional Black and Brown body. Google "beautiful black women", "beautiful brown women" and "beautiful afro women" and your screen is flooded with pictures of gorgeous dark and light-skinned women with textured hair and dark features. What this short exercise does is to showcase that being a non-white woman you cannot merely be acknowledged as beautiful or a woman by society, but you are rather seen as a beautiful "something" woman. The universal notion of beauty and womanhood is hence kept within the framework of whiteness. Asante (1991: 171-172, 177) argues that Eurocentricity imposes itself as universal, for instance, by claiming a universal human

experience and perception over historical events and the denial of non-white people's contribution to human civilization. This notion of Eurocentricity as universal has damaging effects, like the denial of one's blackness due to, as Asante (1991: 171-172) indicates, the fact that it is not recognized as universal.

Returning to the Google image search, some women become the object of blackness, brownness or Afroness, instead of simply the subject, women. The FInnish journalist and writer Koko Hubara speaks of the same notion when she established the Brown Girl [Ruskeat tytöt] term. Hubara (2017: 22-25) argues that non-white women are seen first as the color of their skin and only secondly as women. This understanding of the self as Othered has two approaches that I will discuss, firstly, the approach of womanhood and secondly about word association. Firstly, the notion of womanhood and who is regarded as a woman is not a new discussion. The women's right activist and freedom fighter Sojourne Truth already in the 1800s expressed the discourse of how non-white women are not regarded as women (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 76-77). In her famous speech on June 21st, 1851 Truth told the truth by saying:

> "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody helps me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm. I have plowed (sic), I have planted and I have gathered into barns. And no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much, and eat as much as any man--when I could get it--and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne children and seen most of them sold into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman? ..." (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 77)

What Truth's speech makes evident is that womanhood is preserved for only White women, while Othered women are left with the object of Otherness instead of the simple subject of being a woman. The definition of what a woman is seldom includes the transparent understanding that it should also perceive non-white women as women (Lorde 1984: 856). For instance, Black, Indigenous or Arab women's literature is not read or included in women's literature but instead they have their own subsection. Even if Truth's speech was 170 years ago, the questions still stand, "Ain't I a woman? Ain't I a woman who is beautiful?" Why do I have to be defined by the object placed in front of women?

Secondly, there are plenty of words are associated with woman and womanhood. White women are women, as evident in the Google search, on the other hand, women who are Arab, Asian, Black,

Brown, Indigenous, Indian, and Latina/-x, to only mention a few, are associated with Otherness instead of simply womanhood. This is not a new phenomenon but rather stems from colonization. Since the aftermath of colonization, human differences have been made into simplistic oppositions to each other, where attributes are placed on each side of a spectrum (Lorde 1984: 854). When White women were saviors, pure and keeper of Western values, all Othered women became the opposite, and were savages, uncivilized and promiscuous (see Coloma 2010). There became a notion of polarity, which still exists today, in the form of good/bad, dominant/subordinate, superior/inferior, beautiful/ugly, and white/black. These word associations are learned and taught, consciously and unconsciously, and affect our understanding of the world, ourselves, and our self-worth. Words like black and dark are labeled as "negative" and associated with words such as "bad", "ugly" and "not desired" and the only way to identify as the opposite is to become the opposite, white (Mathews & Johnson 2015: 258). That also indicates that the negatively loaded words become associated with shame and should be hidden, due to the belief that the opposite is "better" and more "desirable" (Adichie 2007: 234, Asante 1991: 172).

The assumption of only some women being recognized as women affects the notion of who can be beautiful, and this is a deeply engraved practice. However, with the approach of Afrocentricity and the help of intersectionality, these damaging practices can be brought up to the surface, challenged and dismantled. Something that I do, however, want to emphasize is the concept of intersectionality and simply being a woman. These two concepts do not interfere with each other. Edwards and McKinney argue that the goal is to break down boundaries, however, to achieve this collectiveness we cannot erase each other's differences, instead, they should be embraced. Likewise, as argued by feminist writer Audre Lorde (1984: 857), all women do not share the same difficulties and those difficulties should be recognized and the idea of womanhood as unity should not be confused with womanhood as a homogenous group. Wanting to simply be referred to as a woman challenges the notion of who is recognized as a woman. For instance, should the famous tennis player Serena William's success be measured by her race? She has had obstacles and the media has treated her differently due to her being a Black woman, however, she is still the woman with the most Grand Slam singles titles. In other words, her race and gender have affected her success and they should not be erased, however, what she has done as a woman, a mother and a tennis player is outstanding. An additional aspect to this would then be merely your profession and not having plenty of pre-titles. Serena Williams, who is a Black female tennis player, should also be recognized for her success merely of a tennis player. Like in the 2017 interview when Andy Murray, a British tennis

player, was asked of his opinion on Sam Querrey, an American tennis player, who qualified as the "first" U.S. player to reach a major semi-final since 2009. What the interviewer had chosen to forget, and what Murray reminded him of was that Querrey was the first male player to do so, since Serena Williams has won 12 Grand Slam tournaments since 2009 (see BBC News 2017).

Men, heterosexuality, whiteness and ableness are seen as bodiless (Dobusch 2017: 489). They do not have to specify their position, whereas others are introduced with titles. To be a woman and not white will give one the status of Otherness and one will be an "exception" amongst others, but never the standard. One is not merely a tennis player or merely beautiful, instead one always has titles to describe one's profession or beauty. The notion of not being "normal" or not being the "standard" due to reasons x, y, and z is damaging and needs to be challenged.

2.2.1 Colorism- Othering through color hierarchies

It is merely impossible to discuss beauty standards and their racist undertone, without mentioning colorism. I will be using the term throughout my thesis, and I feel inclined to already address it as an important theoretical term.

Colorism, which was coined by the feminist author Alice Walker in 1982, is the process of color hierarchies that favors light-skinned people over dark-skinned people. Colorism is a product of racism, but what sets the two apart is that colorism specifically concerns skin color and other attributes connected to it. Colorism addresses issues such as how light-skinned individuals are better treated by society, compared to their darker-skinned peers. Colorism does not erase racism; what it does is adds to the already existing conversation (Mathews & Johnson 2015: 250-251). For instance, all African Americans face a similar struggle and discrimination, but light-skinned African Americans statistically earn more money, have higher education and live-in nicer neighborhoods than their dark-skinned peers (Hunter 2007: 237-238). The history behind colorism is often dated back to colonization and the enslavement of African people, where skin color was used as an indicator of hierarchy amongst the enslaved Africans. In addition, the doctorate in Sociology Aisha Phoenix (2014: 100-101) discusses how light-skinned were the product of slave masters raping enslaved Black women, and that the offspring was given more privilege than their mothers since they had white colonial features, an indication of the "strong" white gene. However, as argued by

Phoenix, colorism might predate colonization, since in India lighter skin is preferred since it is more common amongst the higher castes. Furthermore, in other countries which were colonized, a light-skinned tone also became desired since it was the color of the colonizers and the idea of white supremacy and "white is right" was enforced by the colonial regime (Hunter 2007: 239).

Today, colorism is still present and enforces hierarchies within the community of people of African descent. For instance, heterosexual men of color reinforce colorism by actively desiring women with white features (Phoenix 2014: 98). The reason behind this is complex, but the two scholars on colorism and critical beauty studies Tayler J. Mathews and Glenn S. Johnson (2015: 253-254) argue that it might be to increase their social status. The critical race scholars Mahshid Mirmasoomi and Farshid Nowrouzi Roshnavand (2014: 60-61) also emphasizes how interracial marriages give a certain notion of acquiring power since that would make them position whiter. The known philosopher Frans Fanon (1952: 50, 53) further strengthens the argument by stating that when changing one's skin tone is impossible for men of color, they can approach whiteness by dating or marrying a White or light-skinned woman, thus increasing their and their offspring´s opportunity to be respected and gain privilege in the white society. Mathews and Johnson (2015: 255) note in their article how many non-white women not only see White women as a contributor to colorism, but also how Black and Brown men influence how Black and Brown women perceive their skin color.

All in all, this is not to say that light-skinned individuals do not face any discrimination. As stated by the researcher in colorism, racial discrimination, and skin bleaching Margret Hunter (2007: 246), who writes from an American perspective, colorism affects all African American women, and she argues that light-skinned African American also faces discrimination within the community. She states that they are sometimes discriminated against due to them not being a "legitimate" member of their ethnic community. However, Hunter stresses upon the systematic discrimination, such as education, employment and choosing of partners, against dark-skinned individuals outweigh the discrimination against light-skinned individuals.

Colorism shows the different power structures within the community, especially when it comes to skin complexion and hair texture (see Dhillon- Jamerson 2018). In addition, colorism works best when it divides a community and becomes detrimental for everyone who does not fully inhabit

whiteness, by creating hierarchies amongst people who all are discriminated against by whiteness and Eurocentric values. On the other hand, colorism also benefits some Black and Brown individuals, who are for instance mixed, light-skinned or possess Eurocentric features. This is not to say that they would not face racial discrimination, but what colorism does show is how anti-blackness operates not only in the society at large but also within the community.

2.3. Becoming the Other- representation and belongingness

To further strengthen my thesis, I include theories about Othering in the form of representation and belongingness. To begin with, the sociologist Stuart Hall is famous for his theories about representation. In his article "The Spectacle of the Other" he discusses the notion of how the "Other" is represented negatively and through stereotypical notions. The Other or non-white is depicted as the opposite of white or good, meaning Otherness is associated with bad, ugly, and primitive. Hall (1997: 236) argues that these hieratical counterparts exist to make binary categorizations which divide people based on their differences. Meaning that the way some people are represented also perpetuates a certain image of them. Word associations, as I discussed in a previous chapter, upkeep a certain sentiment of who can be good and who is bad, regardless of the person. Word associations are also a base for stereotypes and stereotypes reinforce certain sentiments of people.

Even when some words are associated with negativity and hatred, words can still be reclaimed. Both Black people and queer individuals have had and still have derogatory words when described, to further emphasize their Otherness or inferiority, however, these words can be and have been reclaimed. On the other hand, reclaiming is not always the solution. Richard Dyer, who is a professor in Film Studies, in his book *The matter of images: Essays on Representation* discuss these notions of word associations. For instance, Dyer (1993: 8-9) argues how words describing Black people and queer individuals does change and are reclaimed, however, the feeling they make one feel is difficult to shake off. Meaning that images of negative representation given to a group still lingers. In addition, he says that no matter the change in wording it is the attitude that matters, and the attitude will always creep back and continue the oppression of others.

The other notion, belongingness, is also an important part when discussing the exclusivity of the beauty ideal. The notion of belongingness can best be said as a feeling of home and safety (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197). Nira Yuval-Davis (2006: 199), who is a professor in Gender, Sexuality and Ethnic Studies, in her article "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging" discusses how belongingness can exist on three different levels. The levels are social markers, such as gender, race, and religion, individual or emotion markers, meaning what a person feels most inclined to identify as, and lastly political or ethical values, marking how someone judges themselves and others based on who can belong and who cannot. Without going deeper into these three notions or, for instance, the marker of citizenship and belongingness which Yuval-Davis discusses, I rather emphasize how belongingness becomes a desirable longing. If your surrounding representation of your beauty does not exist and all other images of you are othered, how can you achieve a notion of belongingness or a sense of home? In addition, belongingness means peace. How can Black and Brown people feel belongingness in a space that is not appreciating their beauty and where they experience violence due to their Otherness? Institutional racism is not an "American" problem, but it is an everyday experience for Black and Brown people in Finland. Hence, receiving the sense of belongingness and safety becomes difficult when one's body is hypervisible and policed while being invisible when it comes to positive representation. Nonetheless, there is a need to receive a more abundance of positive representation of Afro-Finnish bodies, to end the need to assimilate towards Eurocentric beauty standard to be granted a sense of belongingness. I would argue that by seeing your world from a perspective, such as Afrocentricity, which values you as an Afro-Finnish person, the notion of belongingness can be achieved.

3. Method and material

3.1. Interviews as discussions

In my thesis, I have chosen to conduct interviews as my method to gather material. I have chosen this method with the desire to hear more in-depth and personal stories told by these women and to include their voices in the part of my analysis. Instead of referring to the made interviews as interviews I have and will hereby refer to them as discussions. I made the creative choice of referring to the conducted interviews as discussions already at a primordial state of my thesis, for the purpose of the discussion to genuinely feel down to earth and as a conversation between two equals rather than a superior interviewee and a participant. Surely, the discussion was constructed as an interview and my participants were the ones doing most of the talking and there is certainly still

a power relation, however in my opinion, changing the terminology made the discussions more conversational.

An interview is, as stated by the feminist scholars Marjorie L. DeVault and Glenda Gross (2012: 206), to speak with others, gather stories to learn about different perspectives and to give a voice and for those voices to be heard in academic and other public spaces. Traditional research interviewing aspires to bring experiences and neglected voices forward (DeVault & Gross 2012: 209). Moreover, interviews are social interaction, and it requires constant attention from both parties to have a successful outcome (Staples & Smith 2015: 2). There can be many kinds of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Staples & Smith 2015: 5), but they can also take place online or vis-à-vis. However, instead of interview only being a means to collect information, they provide more and contributes to knowledge production and understanding. My discussions where semi-structured, where I had an outline of certain topics I wanted to address and hear their opinion on, but I also allowed the conversation to naturally flow. The discussions were divided into four sections with each section having a theme of its own. I started with what I called "warmups", to set the theme for the discussion, then I had sectioned the questions into three groups: beauty, representation and embracing. I divided the questions into these sections to help me then later structure my podcasts accordingly. I will refer to how I structured my podcast in section 4.1. Structure of podcast.

Another important factor to notice when it comes to interviews is the standpoint of the interviewer or the one conducting the discussion. Since interviews are never simple interactions, but rather all similarities and differences shape every aspect of the interview process (DeVault & Gross 2013: 215). This means the interactions affect everything from which questions are asked to how the material is analyzed. In addition, the notion of objectivity has for long been an illusion, for instance within feminist research objectivity is said to be wrapped in a positivity blanket of believing that the world is ultimately knowable and secure (Naples 2003: 52). Objectivity becomes this unreachable state, where the researcher's or participant's opinions, prejudice and biases should be dislocated from the research. Furthermore, the subjects of research are not disconnected from their material (see Naples 2003: 52-53). The subject's activities, feelings and experiences make for what social relation manifests in the interview encounter and not knowing or being aware of their standpoint, can result in exploiting, misrepresenting, and speaking for the other. In addition, when interviewing

one's personal life is also related to the lives of the participants (Staples & Smith 2015: 3). For instance, being on the inside or outside of one's study can shape what the outcome of the material is and what it will be used for. Meaning that a researcher who is on the inside can achieve a more balanced interview and decrease the pressure of a hierarchical interview environment, which would affect the knowledge interaction negatively (Hesse-Biber 2007: 134). However, one should not assume that being on the inside of one's interview subjects should make for easier research. Important to realize is that being on the inside of one's research, to only share some attributes with your interviewee, does not confirm that the knowledge production will be easier. There are always other aspects that still can differ and contribute to power relations.

Researching and writing my thesis, I do find myself being a part of my research, meaning that my personal and lived experiences were an important source and motivation for my thesis. Knowing how the lack of representation affects someone who does not fully inhabit whiteness, allowed me to come closer to my material and understand it differently. Surely, being on the inside might also give me a disadvantage, like being emotionally connected to my research, however, I would argue the contrary. I see this rather as an advantage because I can write how it truly feels to be excluded from the beauty standard of your own country, and what some real-life consequences of that are. Discussing with my participants it became clear that there was a mutual understanding, and some things were taken for granted and did not need a further explanation. This was beneficial for my research to be on the inside. Additionally, I also realized having these conversations that some of my participants would not have wanted to discuss this topic with me if I were on the outside, for instance, a White woman.

Despite finding myself on the inside of my research as a woman and belonging to the Afro-Finnish community, it does not indicate that my experiences and understanding of the world are like my participants. Surely, we have similarities, but common ground might not necessarily be found (see DeVault & Gross 2013: 212). Conversely, qualitative interviews aim to address an issue many are affected by and with the help of the discussions and the knowledge produced from the discussions, transfer the knowledge onto another relevant situation (Brinkmann & Kvale 2018: 146). Hence, none of the participants, and I included, ever assumed to be speaking for all Afro-Finnish women, instead, general thoughts about representation and healing were expressed, alongside other personal experiences. I would argue that a lot of the things expressed are something many Afro-Finns or

other people of color can relate to in some way. However, I am only one individual who aims at giving more voices and transparency to critical beauty studies. I know all Afro-Finnish women have different lived experiences and I know that on many occasions I do benefit from colorism and that I am a Finnish speaker, a privilege some Afro-Finns do not possess. At the same time, I am excluded from and affected by the frameworks of the Finnish beauty ideals, and I am passionate about challenging them.

When it comes to interviewing, consciousness -raising is important to remember. DeVault and Gross (2012: 210) argue for consciousness -raising and they bring forth a revolutionary Chinese practice of "speaking bitterness". Speaking bitterness was used by a civil rights movement to interview themselves or women like themselves, in exchange for understanding their personal and political experiences. My interviews felt similar since they gave me a wider understanding of my own experience by discussing them with individuals who understand and share similar lived experiences. The interviews that I conducted were not emotionless, given that discussing beauty can be personal. Knowing that the exclusion of Afro-Finnishness within the Finnish beauty ideal affects both the participants and me, both laughter, disappointed sighs and frustration were present in the discussions. As feminist and critical race theorist Patricia Hill Collins argue emotions are there to validate an argument of the speaker (Naples 2003: 63). Validate, or validity, refers to the strength of the argument or statement and if it is justifiable (Brinkmann & Kvale 2018: 141). Feminist writer and philosopher Sara Ahmed in her book *Living a Feminist Life* expresses how emotions bear an important role when doing feminist research. Emotions, as Ahmed (2017: 7, 20, 246) states, can be a resource and a rebellion as well as a pushing factor when doing intellectual work. All things considered, the emotions that aroused during the discussion were there for a reason and provided valuable knowledge.

3.1.1. Ethical principles

Interviews do not differ from any other research when it comes to upholding the participants' integrity and it all comes down to ethical principles of research. All my participants were handed a *consent form* where I had stated what our discussion would be used for, how it would be saved, the aim of the research and the rights of the participants, like the right to withdraw from the discussion and the research and in addition to ask for anonymity at any given time. I also informed my participants that they have the right to ask for the transcript of the discussions and that I will provide

them with a link to my finished thesis, additionally, they were informed that they can contact me during the process to see my progress (see Spradley 1979: 39). In addition, I will be using recorded bits of the discussion in the thesis, it is important as a researcher to not take quotes out of context. This implies that as a researcher, I have an obligation to my participants and their words to not edit our discussion excessively but rather show its authenticity. What it all comes down to is to consider the participants first, what their needs and desires are and not to prioritize the research and its aim (see Spradley 1979: 35).

3.2. Textual analysis as a method

After transcribing the discussions, I used textual analysis to understand the material and how I could then pair it with other theoretical works. Textual analysis is in simple terms the interpretation of a text, and how it can depict a sense of reality (Mckee 2003: 8). Text can come in many forms, such as books, movies, series, ads, magazines, and other forms of media around us, and in this case, it was the transcribed discussions. These texts could be said to be made by humans and consumed by humans, meaning that both how it is created and how it is consumed says a lot about how someone makes sense of the world (Huges & Goodwill 2014). This sense-making creates how we perceive the world and are perceived by our surroundings, and for instance how we label and identify ourselves (Mckee 2003: 32). Meaning that how we make sense of text have real-life consequences of decision-making and how we collect knowledge.

Textual analysis is something every person does in their everyday life. We see images and consume media and we make sense of it, maybe through what is seen or what is not seen. These interpretations we make after each interaction shape our identity and create our view on reality. It becomes subjective and even mundane, so how does it function in an academic text? Because of its subjectivity and positionality, a textual analysis will not give the same answers time after time since all humans perceive the world differently. Hence, its reliability and repeatability could be questioned. However, professor in digital and social media Alan McKee (2003: 92-93), argues that humans and human interactions are not like a chemical compound where the outcome is always the same and hence using a scientific methodology when understanding humans is worth criticizing. In addition, these scientific methodologies that are argued to be objective can also be analyzed through textual analysis since those methodologies have also been created by humans with a certain motive

or agenda. McKee (2003: 93-94) also argues in favor of being critical and says how many feminist scientists criticize the gendered or cultural wording of bacteria or other biological terminology.

We make sense of the world around us through the text and images we see surrounding us. A textual analysis became a natural method for the analysis of the transcriptions, and with this methodology, I could pair the discussions with other academic papers to create a more covered thesis. Textual analysis is worth criticizing as being subjective and by showing the same image to two people you can receive completely different answers, however, that also shows the diversity among humans and how individual experiences are.

3.3. Discussions as material

The material for this master's thesis is a collection of discussions, with Renée Böök and Akunna Onwen. The discussions with Renée and Akunna were conducted separately and physically. Both participants wanted to conduct the discussions face to face, rather than online and I also wanted to provide that since it would be beneficial for the discussions to be as natural and relaxed as possible. I did not require a negative Covid-19 test from any of my participants or myself but knowing the situation, if anyone would feel sick on the day of our discussion, it would have been cancelled immediately.

I chose my participants on the basis that I did not require them to be experts within beauty standard in Finland or anti-racism, but I rather wanted a mixed set of participants, from different fields. This was done because beauty standards are constantly present for us all, whether we like it or not or decide to conform to them or not. However, my criteria were that they are Afro-Finns and women, in addition to being comfortable speaking about a subject that can be emotional. On the other hand, I did not want to discuss this topic with Afro- Finnish women I am close to because I felt that would have made the conversation completely different from what I aspired the conversation to be. This led me to contact people from spaces and organizations I was already familiar with and where I might find interested participants. To start with, I contacted Renée, after I had seen her participate in the beauty pageant competition, Face of African Queen Finland 2020, and I was also familiar with her music. In addition of being an artist, Renée is also a model and actress. Akunna is someone I had the privilege to know through being a volunteer in the Good Hair Day collective, and when I

was in contact with Good Hair Day, they decided that Akunna was most suitable to talk to me. Akunna, for additionally being a part of the Good Hair Day core team, also works in the anti-racist forum on hate crime and has done anti-racist training for teachers for the Peace Education Institute. Renée and Akunna come from different backgrounds, and I truly enjoyed how different the conversations were between the two. With Renée the conversation was more casual, whereas with Akunna the conversation got a bit deeper and more complex ideas and concepts were brought up.

The discussions lasted from 80 minutes to 110 minutes, and I had reserved two hours for the discussions. I also offered a small break about two thirds into the interview. Water and sparkling water were also offered at the discussion. For the equipment used to record the discussion, I used my phone and a tape recorder. Two devices were used in case of any technical difficulties with one or the other. When I transcribed the discussions, I used a program called Otter.Ai, along with manually checking the recording to spot if the program made any errors. Before the discussions, I reassured my participants that if they wanted to share personal stories, they may and if they desire to only talk more generally, they may as well do so. However, the participants both shared personal stories in addition to more general ones. I also informed my participants that they could use Finnish words since both were native Finnish speakers, if they felt like it, however, the main language spoken was English.

4. Podcast, an inclusive form of knowledge production

Podcasts are no news today. We hear famous people starting them and even our colleagues from work having one. Podcasts, the name of which originates from the two words iPod and broadcast and was first introduced in 2004 (Bruno et. al 2007: 278), are usually consumed through listening to an audio file, but they can also be recorded and accompanied with a video to watch. Within the past years, the numbers of podcasts have increased tremendously, and the current COVID-19 situation has increased the popularity of podcasts even more (see Flynn 2020, Ioannou 2020). According to statistics as of December 2020 Apple Podcast had approximately 1,68 million different podcasts to stream, compared to only 550, 000 in 2018 (Gray 2020). Spotify currently has over 2 million podcasts in various languages tackling different interests and they have also signed contracts with well-known names such as Barack and Michel Obama (Ioannou 2020). Podcasts are therefore used not only as entertainment but also for educational purposes, to report news, promote well-being and discuss topical issues such as murder mysteries.

In the planning phase of my thesis, I became aware of a different and creative form of analyzing one's thesis' material, compared to the traditional way. This truly intrigued me and allowed me to think outside of the box. Being creative, as said by the qualitative social researcher Nina Koivunen (2009: 13), is to further show one's deepest interests, weaknesses and fears, something I felt was inevitable for my thesis. I also read and listened to a fellow peer's thesis, where she used the same method of podcast series and I truly enjoyed it. The gender scholar Adrienne Westerback studied body positivity on Instagram for her master's thesis and wanted to give voice to her interviewees instead of speaking for them, and she felt that this form of knowledge production was aligned for her thesis (see Westerback 2019). I decided to do a podcast series as my analysis, not only to creatively challenge myself but because I wanted my thesis to be more approachable for those who might not be as familiar with the academic space or its writings. I thought about my premise for my thesis being how the space of beauty ideals is exclusive and writing about it in an exclusive way that would not reach many, felt hypocritical. I desired to speak about inclusivity in a way that is accessible for all, regardless of being familiar with the academic space or not. In addition, I think that creative writings and knowledge production such as podcasting opens the academic space for a wider audience and contributes to the breaking down of the exclusivity of the academic space. As the organization scholars, Alf Rehn and Christian De Cock (2008: 5) argue in their article *Deconstructing Creativity*, being creative does not mean inventing something new, but it can rather be about returning to the roots and simplifying things. Meaning that taking on a more creative thesis might contribute to an easily consumable thesis, which can aid many struggling Afro-Finnish women of all ages. I aspire to have a positive contribution to the Afro-Finnish community with my thesis, thereupon I want my thesis to reach as many as possible and I believe that including podcasts as a way of communicating in my thesis will do just that. I do realize that a more creative approach to a master's thesis might be difficult for some since it does not follow the more traditional ways of writing a thesis, however, I would argue that introducing a different form of thesis might eventually become a more general way of academic writing (see Lie 2014:117).

4.1. Structure of the podcasts

My main source of data for my thesis is the outcome and knowledge of the qualitative interviews. This implies that the discussions will be my main source of reference in the podcasts and work the outline for the podcasts. I aim is to include as much of the conducted conversations and pair them with academic and non-academic articles that I will be citing and referring to. Thereupon, my thesis

will not only be empirical but also theoretical. Hence, making an academic discussion, where academic writings are paired together with more everyday discussions about beauty, representation, and healing. I strive to make the podcast have a more casual approach, where I will also include sources from popular culture, like books, magazines, movies, and series, which together with the academic articles strengthen the arguments presented.

I desire to make three podcasts, where I am using my material from the discussions paired with academic and non-academic texts. I will also be following the structure of my questions in the discussions as a blueprint for the podcast. In the discussions I attempted to make them follow the guidelines of how I aspire to bring up the themes in the podcast, however, my discussions were only semi-structured leading to this did not happen. Nevertheless, the podcast will hence include edited versions of the discussion, meaning that the chronological order of the discussion will be edited to have a cohesive rhythm for the podcasts. Furthermore, the editing program I am using for the podcast is a free program called Audacity, which allows you to edit and mix sounds.

I structure my podcasts by beginning with what I in my discussions called "warm-ups" or different issues that I asked my participants to give their opinion on. I called them "warm-ups" because they helped break the ice and introduced the theme of our discussion. These "warm-ups" will be the beginning and end of each podcast, also outlining each podcast. I think this creative way of including a start and a finish with a specific example in Finland regarding beauty, will guide me with each premise of each podcast. It will also aid in making it easier for the listeners to follow and even make it possible for each podcast to stand on its own. After all, the initial idea is to first read this written part and then listen to podcasts one, two and three. On the other hand, the aim is to make each podcast self-reliant and possible to tune in without the support of the other.

These warm-ups, which I had three of, will each start of a podcast episode and therefore, also set the theme for each podcast. The first podcast will include a discussion of the Miss Finland competitions, which annually select the most beautiful women in Finland. The winner almost always is inhabiting whiteness, but as seen in the short documentary "Kuka saa olla kaunis" or "Who may be beautiful", when a winner is not white according to Finnish standard, the backlash is enormous. The first podcast will mainly be a theoretical discussion on beauty and whiteness. This

podcast works as to explain the core of the beauty ideal and how it is equivalent to whiteness. The second podcast will begin with the notion of Elovena girl, the image of a popular oat brand. The image of Elovena, a blond, blue-eyed girl in a traditional dress standing in a field of crops, has been altered in different ads and arts, but Raisio Oy, who oversees the image has put a stop to anything that "misuses" the image. The second podcast will therefore be a discussion on representation and the struggle of finding representation and how that affects a person's self-esteem. The podcast will also include how important positive representation of your beauty is. Lastly, in the last podcast episode, I include a discussion of hair salons, and how it is still today difficult for people with textured hair to get service at regular salons in Finland. Furthermore, the third and last podcast will be about healing practices for Afro-Finns and how to embrace one's beauty. The episode will also include what lingers to be an obstacle for this healing, mainly whiteness, and what could be done by White peers to aid Afro-Finns embracing of themselves.

5. Analysis summary

In a white country, like Finland, Afro-Finns will always be hypervisible and judged through a white and Eurocentric gaze. This judgement encourages racial, color and body hierarchies, which promotes and desires whiteness and Eurocentric features above all else. Hence, imperial aesthetics are given power and status, which is kept through the protection of oppressive beauty standards. The reason behind protecting the status of imperial aesthetics, dates to colonization, where whiteness became the symbol for everything good, neutral, and powerful, and is therefore also entangled with the notion of who can be beautiful. Even in Finland, which did not have an active role in colonization, aspects from colonization such as white supremacy and racism, still affects how Finns identify themselves and others. Because Finns made themselves white, the status of whiteness is also protected with oppressive tools. Examples such as the Miss Finland competitions and the image of the White Elovena girl perpetuate a notion of Finnishness being equivalent to whiteness. These two examples do raise the question of who can be beautiful and belong in a white nation.

Beauty is a notable aspect of anyone's life since through beauty standards and what is seen as socially attractive, people are judged and discriminated against. This exclusion from the Finnish beauty standard, which mainly or solely promote whiteness, lacks the positive representation of Afro-Finnish women, and consequently leads to a desire to assimilate towards whiteness. Renée and

Akunna discussed a sense of exclusion that culminates from growing up as non-white in a white nation and how aspects such as longing for belongingness do take form in beauty alterations, such as hair straightening and aesthetic cosmetic surgeries. These assimilations practices, that manifest from external motivations for altering the body to feel belongingness, result in hurting and losing the self. Surely, alterations do not have to be done out of self-hate, but when the action is taken due to a social pressure to be pretty the motivation behind these alterations are worth questioning. On the other hand, there is also a rise in acquiring racially ambiguity, which does puzzle many Afro-Finns since their natural features, which has received racial discrimination, are suddenly commodity White women pay thousands of euros for.

Despite aspects, such as Eurocentric trends spreading through social media, makeup companies selling only light tone foundation or the multimillion-dollar skin bleaching industry, which suppress Afro-Finnish women from embracing their beauty, there are regardless spaces that do embrace and support the embracement of different and Othered individuals. Spaces can be found online in forms of social media refugee, but also through other communities and organizations. However, whiteness and its unaddressed privilege do become an obstacle for Afro-Finns to heal. For instance, to actively linger in ignorance and innocence to cover up structural racism and White women focusing on a "global sorority of women" that erases individual experiences, are damaging when thinking of healing practices for Afro-Finnish women. On the other hand, healing practices such as seeing positive representation, focusing on mental health, and having an easy time going to the hairdresser, does increase one's self-acceptance and encourage embracing all aspects of oneself. Embracing one's roots and heritage is possible and essential in a world that thrives in Othering. Embracing is empowering and through embracing oneself one will find new possibilities and that nothing can hinder oneself from feeling beautiful.

5.1. Final reflections

I think everyone has once in their lifetime looked in the mirror and only seen their "flaws". It is as if the social mirror that we see our reflection in screams back at us what is conventionally attractive. Living as an Afro Finn and looking in the mirror, it shouts back even louder. Our skin color, our hair, our eyes, everything seems to be wrong. We might even ask the mirror, mirror on the wall who is the fairest of them all, and we are answered with an image of a fair figure with straight blond hair and the bluest eyes. Our reflection becomes almost a distorted image, where we are erased by the white gaze, and we accept that as reality and start living our life through those distorted images. If

we fail to possess the Eurocentric views on beauty we are then approached with the sentiment of "beauty knows no pain" and are encouraged to change ourselves so we would have it "easier" in a white world. But beauty does know pains. Oppressive beauty standards that perpetuate stereotypes and Othering do cause pain to everyone and places pressure to be "pretty" to succeed. Patton (2006: 46) argues that there is a need to be critical to the stereotypical beauty standard of women. She continues by stating that if we fail in critically examining these stereotypes, we will only perpetuate racism and sexism, which leads to psychological damage to everyone now and for coming generations to come. Hence, by embracing, the image of beauty being a fair figure with blond hair and the bluest eyes cease to be and we can see our own true reflection in the mirror as the fairest. As hooks (2015: 101) beautifully states we need to see ourselves in the mirror and recognize our bodies as beautiful and deserving of care. I could not agree more and as hooks (2015: 141) continues by simply stating that love heals.

To ignore Eurocentricity, also bring me to another point I found profound while researching, namely the notion of allowing blackness, brownness and Afroness to exist as it is and not solely in the way one perceives it to be. This diversity within the community needs to be understood by Afro-Finns as a collective, but also by society on a larger scale. Not all Afro-Finns fall under one category and the diversity need to be greatly explored, for everyone to find their path and not feel the need to reach expectations. Lorde (1984: 855) argues that human differences are essential to be recognized because to refuse the recognition of differences will only separate people. In the panel "Race, Identity & Belonging in the Nordic Countries", hosted by The American Scandinavian Foundation, the speakers, which included Elizabeth Löwe Hunter, Jasmine Kelekay and Susani Mahadura, pointed out an important issue when it comes to the representation of Black and Brown individuals, namely that we need different types of representation. The speakers expressed understanding for a strategically essentialist approach in white spaces, however, when Brown and Black individuals are offered spaces, there needs to be a transparency about how there is diversity within the community. Afro-Finnishness is an umbrella term including many different individuals with different everyday struggles and experiences. For instance, if a company only promotes light-skinned Afro-Finns with loose locks, they are not being anti-racist, but rather anti-black. This brings me to another point that I found to be crucial in my research was the concept of anti-blackness within the Afro-Finnish community. I have tried to already tackle this issue within this thesis, but I sense it should receive more attention. Many Afro-Finns who are mixed or light-skinned, might not always realize the privilege we possess within the hierarchy that colorism constructs. We need to be

critical when we say that Afro-Finns are represented if the representation we see is mere of mixed individuals.

There does not exist a right to way be Afro-Finnish, something which correlates to what hooks (1992: 45) highlights of allowing differences within black feminism and how there is not a "right" way to be black. Additionally, as the Sociologist and Professor of Race and Education, Shirley Ann Tate (2010: 206) argues that there is not a "real black". Tate argues that beauty standards and beauty studies always have a white perspective, which undermines black and brown beauty and further stereotypes their self-expression, leading to an assumed right way to be black. Practices such as hair straightening and cosmetic surgeries are not done out of self-hate but can simply be self-expressions. Having a one-sided narrative of Afro-Finns is damaging and only accumulates Othering. As the scholars of critical race and beauty studies Vanessa King and Dieynaba Niabaly (2013: 14) concludes in their article, there is an urge to have different representation of Black women's hair, to increase knowledge about everyone's right to self-express. In addition, this also increases knowledge on how to care for one's hair and to increase the recognition of Afro hair as beautiful.

I once read a tweet that read as follows "Pro Black also means letting Black people exist in ways that differ from your view of Blackness" and I think this quote says a lot of how Afroness should be viewed. I found that Afrocentricity highlighted the notion of seeing oneself as one's subject and not having the need to obey norms and stereotypes of Othering placed upon oneself. As Asante (1991: 171) argues that to see oneself as the subject, one must understand one's importance in knowledge production and to be placed in the center of one's reality. Afroness is as I see it to be proud, to have the privilege to create one's patch and the idea of beauty not being confine within the oppressive tools of racist Eurocentric structure. Eurocentric beauty standard is not only discriminatory towards Afro-Finns but generally places pressure upon all to feature. Thus, a complete denunciation of beauty standards, with the aid of Afrocentricity, is a necessity for all to embrace themselves. To recognize differences is the first step towards self-acceptance and embracement. Not to embrace artificial racially ambiguous bodies, but to embrace natural Black and Brown individuals. To embrace that Black and Brown individuals exist in different ways than the societal view on blackness and Otherness. Embracing differences and most importantly seeing and accepting its beauty for what it is.

Having done this podcast series and the research beforehand, I found myself thinking of further research topics that I could not fit into this master's thesis. Even if I have been talking about the beauty standard for women and how it excludes Afro-Finnish women and frankly all non-white women, fat bodies and disabled bodies, the beauty standard does also discriminate against other genders. There is a need for a more open discussion on male beauty standard since the pressure of male beauty is a growing concern. Surely, different types of male bodies are celebrated, such as "dad bods", but the general notion of a strong physic hunt many and body dysmorphia is rising amongst men (see American Addiction Center 2020, Phillips 2001). Additionally, a rather non-binary approach to the beauty standard should also take place.

I also want to note that my discussions with Renée and Akunna did include plenty of valuable information, and I sadly could not fit everything in the thesis. I would have wanted to feature more quotes from both my participants or even our whole discussion, but then I would have ended with a ten-hour long podcast series, and I do not think it would have been easily consumable. I did my best in including what I saw as the most central themes and some quotes, which I did not feature, I attempted to explain to the best of my knowledge. Even if quotes were taken out of the discussion's context, I did them justice and portrayed my participants in their authentic way.

Another point worth mentioning is that I did find myself citing and featuring previous studies done by and of Black women and girls and not from the context of Finland. I did find a discrepancy of studies of blackness and brownness in Finnish beauty standard, leading me to turn to studies done internationally. I also do not want to neglect the extensive work many Black women have done when it comes to critical race and beauty studies. Furthermore, would it not have been for all these previous studies and research done by Black scholars, I would not have been able to write this thesis and I want to show my gratitude and recognition towards them all and their work. Additionally, a remark when recording my podcast, I found myself having some difficulties with the pronunciation of some scholar's names, however, I did ask some fellow peers' opinions on the pronunciation, and I hope I did them justice.

All in all, I must note that even if on many occasions I did find myself isolated during the thesis process, it has regardless been extremely healing. I found myself wiping tears from the corner of my eyes more times than I had anticipated, not in a negative way but more in a sense of relief and healing. Lastly, I do hope that this thesis would be beneficial and healing for many, as it has been for me. Both for someone who perhaps has gone through or still is going through the healing process of embracing themselves, but also contributing to critical beauty studies of Finnish beauty standard and anti-racist work.

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