"This big bum thing has taken over the world": Considering Black women's changing view on body image and the role of celebrity.

Introduction

This paper is based on a small scale study, carried out in the spring of 2014. The project considered racial distinctions in women's motivations for dieting, and shifts in cultural attitudes in relation to body ideals. Traditionally, academics have argued for racial distinctions in perceptions of body image, with Black women generally appreciating a fuller or heavier figure than their white counterparts, and therefore being less inclined to diet (Awad, et al., 2015; Buchanan, 1993; Brown, et al., 2009; LeBesco, 2004; Lovejoy, 2001; Powell and Kahn, 1995). Over the last decade, however, there has been a growing suggestion that these perceptions are changing (Robert, Cash, Feingold and Johnson, 2006), and as the thin ideal becomes more widely disseminated there is increased motivation amongst Black and ethnic minority women to lose weight.

Certainly there are indications that Black women are becoming less satisfied with their bodies. In recent years demands for liposuction and rhinoplasties have increased (Rainwater-McClure, Reed and Kramer, 2003), and so too have the numbers of Black women diagnosed with eating disorders. Although these shifts cannot be fully explained by a growing desire for the 'aesthetic of thinness' (Malson and Burns, 2009; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Tate, 2014), there is a body of work which strongly suggests that cultural assimilation is a influencing factor (Bordo, 2003; Grogan, 2008). Black celebrities, such as Oprah Winfrey and Jennifer Hudson are increasingly fronting dieting campaigns, and there is some suggestion that the 'cult of thinness' is spreading (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Moreover, while Black women's body ideals are perhaps shifting more towards the white aesthetic, white western women appear to be seeking a fuller shape, with growing numbers of women opting for cosmetic surgery to enhance their derrière (Cohen, 2014; Orbach, 2011) fuelled by media images of celebrities, such as Kim Kardashian (Orbach, 2009).

The project, conducted jointly with Dr Cecilia Cappel, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Kingston University London, involved a questionnaire sent to members of a dieting organisation and a series of three focus groups with predominately Black women. These focus groups centred on the women's attitudes and practices in relation to dieting, body image and exercise, and were conducted through church organisation and with university students. In total 23 women took part in these focus groups. All of the women identified as Black African or Black Caribbean, except for one who identified as White, and the women were aged between 19 and 55.

The focus groups were conducted because literature suggests that women of colour are less likely to 'diet' (LeBesco, 2004; Levine and Smolak, 2010) and therefore they were unlikely to participate in our questionnaire. This was certainly reflected in our quantitative data, as only 2% of our 933 participants identified as non-white. However, as the focus groups revealed, the lack of enthusiasm for slimming organisations was not simply due to a reluctance to diet, but because the membership, management and approach of these groups was perceived to be overwhelmingly white.

> Claudine: There's also issues around how women perceive us [at slimming groups] …With [Slimming Organisation]… it's not just you go and you lose weight, you become part of an organisation, and you have to feel confident within that organisation, and it's so very, very, very, very white…'

That said, four participants were attending organised slimming groups at the time of the research, motivated by a desire to lose weight, and significantly there was a general consensus that 'healthy eating' had become a more common concern, due to anxieties over hypertension and diabetes. Though neither of these actions were necessarily accompanied by a desire for thinness, as it was still important to have curves (Baruth et, al. 2014), they did suggest a change in attitude towards food, and most of the women perceived being very overweight as a sign of being unhealthy.

Moreover, conversations amongst the younger participants, those aged between 19 and 25, provided even greater evidence of a cultural shift and a move towards a new beauty aesthetic. This centred on a more exaggerated hourglass figure, which consisted of a very slim waist, large hips and a big bottom. Described as 'slim thick', this was the type of shape that respondents felt was embodied and encouraged by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, and which increasingly appealed to both Black and white audiences, as it combined a desire for both slimness and fuller figured curves. Though widely considered to be an 'unrealistic' look, as it was so very difficult to achieve and believed to be largely the product of photo editing and cosmetic surgery in the case of celebrities, this did not prevent these young women and their peers from pursuing this ideal through diet, exercise and fashion.

Centring on this focus group data, the following paper considers these young Black women's changing attitudes towards body image and ideals, and the influence of celebrities such as Kim Kardashian. In doing so, the paper explores the concept of 'slim thick' and the ways in which this ideal combines the desire curves with the desire for thinness. Moreover, the paper highlights the contrast between this 'slim thick' ideal, and traditional attitudes towards body image which suggest that Black women have higher levels of body confidence even when fuller figured, and that they are more resistant to 'fat anxiety' (Shaw, 2006).

The paper is divided into 4 main sections, the first of which explores the traditional theoretical arguments about race, beauty and body image. Noting the work of Bordo (2003), Collins (2004), hooks (1992) and Shaw (2006), this section examines the 'tyranny of slenderness' (Cherin, 1994) which dominates perceptions of white western beauty, and the 'othering' of Black women whose fuller figure has traditionally been read a sign of hyper-sexuality and deviance. In the following section, these ideas are considered in relation to Kim Kardashian, who although Caucasian, is notoriously 'booty-iful' and can perhaps be understood as an exotic 'other', bridging the gap between Black and white ideals. More specifically, the paper considers whether Kim Kardashian's body shape, her big bottom and very small waist, can be understood as an example of cultural appropriation, using Black sexuality as a mechanism for fuelling celebrity, or whether her image is an example of cultural assimilation, which incorporates a big bottom into the white aesthetic and thus converts it into a site of cultural value, as opposed to shame and disgust.

The third section centres more closely on the research data and explores the attitudes presented by the women in the focus groups. Starting with the views of the older participants, this part discusses not only the preference for a fuller figure, but the way in which these curves are understood. Noting the relationship between body shape and food, the paper argues that curves for these women are read as signs of love and affection rather than sexuality, as they indicate a women's ability to feed and care for her family and friends. Indeed, the importance of food for developing a sense of community and care giving is shared amongst all of the women, and presents them with a further barrier to dieting.

However, as the fourth and final section considers, there is an important shift in attitudes which indicates something of a cultural turn. Focusing on the concept of 'slim thick', the paper considers young women's desire for both thinness and fullness, and questions whether this can be understood as an example of cultural assimilation. Highlighting the importance of celebrities, specifically Kim Kardashian, the paper explores the way in which diet, exercise and fashion are used to achieve this 'unnatural' or 'unrealistic' shape which combines aspects of both the Black and white aesthetic.

Traditional Arguments

When looking at the academic arguments around race and gender, authors tend to agree that notions of beauty and body image are constructed around a dominant white ideal (Heywood and Dworkin, 2003). The 'ideal woman is… fair skinned, tall with light hair (Burk, 2015: 496). She should have a small nose and thin lips (Craig, 2006: 163), and she is expected to be slim. In fact, since the 1920s and certainly since the 1980s, thinness has been central to the female beauty ideal and dieting has become something of a cultural fixation and a western obsession (Bordo, 1993; Shaw, 2006; Wolf, 1990). Under this 'Tyranny of Slenderness' (Cherin, 1994) fat is understood as ugly and unhealthy (Bell and Valentine, 1997: 29), read as a sign of self-indulgence and laziness (Evans, 2006), whereas thinness is deemed attractive and beautiful (Malson, 1993). Even though thinness presents an unrealistic and unobtainable ideal for most women, magazines, movies, television, and not least the dieting industry, continue to perpetuate this 'beauty myth' (Wolf, 1990).

For Shaw (2006), this focus on whiteness and slimness means that 'fatness and Blackness have come to share a remarkably similar and complex relationship with the female body' (2006:1), for in order to be considered typically beautiful, both characteristics need to be erased. Writing about American beauty pageants, she argues that whiteness remains the 'zenith' of physical attractiveness, and thus the 'better a contestant can perform whiteness both physiologically and behaviourally' the more likely she is to be successful (2006: 1). Applying this to a wider social context, Shaw and others (e.g. Berry, 2008; Craig, 2006) argue that there remains great pressure on those from Black and minority ethnic groups to adopt white notions of beauty in order to be socially mobile, and despite western societies presenting an image of diversity and inclusion, racism and segregation very much remain.

Though fatness and Blackness may have been excluded from dominant representations of beauty, this does not mean that the Black body is any less significant in the social construction of beauty ideals. The Black body is of fundamental importance, because it sits in opposition to whiteness. As such, it can be understood as a non-normative 'other' against which the ideal female citizen is defined (Collins, 2004; Shaw, 2006), helping to affirm the legitimacy of white beauty and reinforcing the ideal standards of thinness, notions of respectability and sexual morality. Equally, it can be viewed as a site of resistance, offering an 'alternative' concept of beauty (Collins, 1990) which challenges the 'colonial inspired dominate aesthetic' by defying 'both imperatives of whiteness and slenderness as an ideal state of embodiment' (Shaw, 2006: 9).

The 'othering' of Black bodies has a very long history, dating back to Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus of the 1800s. Born in South Africa and taken to Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Saartjie Baartman was famously exhibited in London and Paris to white audiences so that they could witness her unusually large buttocks and genitals, which were understood as a sign of her heightened sexual nature (Gilman, 1985; Coleman-Bell, 2006). Over two hundred years later

and the narrative of Black bodies still centres on deviance and sexualisation as the Western 'fascination with Black butts continues' (hooks, 1992: 62; Coleman-Bell, 2006; Gilman, 1985; Tate, 2014). Black female bodies continue to be eroticised, sexualised and fetishized (Tate, 2014), often depicted as 'hypersexual' and amoral (Hallam and Street, 2000; Omi and Winant, 1994). Like Baartman, they are objectified in ways which focus on parts of the body, chiefly the bottom, all of which has the effect of dehumanising these women and making them a spectacle.

Significantly, hooks (1984) argues that of the consequences of this racial discrimination is it can offer Black women an insight into the reality of white domination and white privilege, resulting in challenges and resistance to Black stereotypes and normative standards of beauty. By making Black women visible and by creating cultural spaces 'that validate and celebrate African and Black bodies' (Buchanan, 1993: 48), Blackness and fatness can work to rival the white aesthetic and confront the racism inherent in dominant beauty standards (Collins, 1990; Craig, 2006; Shaw, 2006). One such example is provided by *Essence* magazine, an American publication established in 1970, which offers an alternative to the stereotypical depictions of Black women and reconstructs them as beautiful. Offering a political critique on the enforced norms of slenderness and whiteness, the magazine features articles on health and beauty, but rarely discusses dieting, and typically includes models of varying shapes and sizes (Brown, 2010; Buchanan, 1992).

Moreover, in some instances, it appears that black women are able to use the process of othering and the spectacle resulting from fatness and blackness to challenge the normative standards of beauty. Black music artists Jill Scott, Missy Elliott, and Beyoncé Knowles, for example, arguably exploit cultural stereotypes in order to be successful, and in doing so challenge the white privilege which exists within the media and music industry. Indeed, in her essay *'Selling Hot Pussy'* (1992) hooks argues that this fascination with 'big butts' has been used by celebrities and performers, from Josephine Baker to the 'booty-licious' Beyoncé for financial gain. Unable to control the negative portrayals of Black women, as 'wild', sexual and deviant, these women have found ways to appropriate the racial stereotypes in order to take advantage of them and 'reap the benefits' (hooks, 1992: 65).

Embodying Black Sexuality

One of the implications of the fetishisation and commodification of Blackness, however, is that given the right assets, even those who are clearly not of African descent have the potential to employ 'Black sexuality' as a marketing tool. As Collins argues, 'Black sexuality need not be associated solely with bodies that have been racially classified as "Negro," "mulatto," or "Black". Western imaginations have long filled in the colour, moving women from Black to White and back again depending on the needs of the situation' (2004: 29).

Such an example is provided by Jennifer Lopez, who, according to Molina-Guzmán, has 'consciously negotiated the ways in which she is racialized' (2010: 59) to occupy a space which is 'not white, but not quite black' (2010: 64), thus maximising her market appeal. Exploiting racial signifiers such as clothing, hair style, body shape and choice of partner, J-Lo has been able to court the Hollywood film industry on the basis of her 'ethnically ambiguous' and 'exotic' status, whilst at the same time situating herself in Black popular culture through her music career. Indeed, both Collins (2004) and Molina-Guzmán (2010) suggest that J-Lo's celebration of her 'booty', as exhibited in music videos such as *Love Don't Cost a Thing*, has helped her challenge normative standards of beauty, distancing her from notions of white femininity, and simultaneously moving her closer to a black aesthetic. Combined with the sporting of African braids, collaborations with Black hip-hop artists, not to mention her relationship with Sean Coombes, Lopez has been able to market herself as sexually desirable, inhabiting a space somewhere in between blackness and whiteness.

When looking at the example of Kim Kardashian then, could this be another instance of the appropriation of Black sexuality, and the commodification of Black women's body parts? Or does it represent, a 'cultural change in how the bottom is valued' which has 'enabled Kim Kardashian to grow a bottom that is big enough to be Black' (Tate, 2014: 49)? Is the big bottom still indicative of Black sexuality, and therefore read as a sign of shame and disgust? Or can Kim Kardashian's bottom be understood as a challenge to this hegemonic view, and considered an example of cultural assimilation?

Certainly, several news articles, blogs and tweets have challenged the Kardashian's on the grounds of cultural appropriation. Writing in New York Magazine, following the #breaktheinternet image, Lindsay People's (2014) argued that the Kardashian's fetishize Black culture, but without any recognition of the history behind Black sexuality and thus 'without actually having to deal with any of the downsides of being Black'. In the same month Amandla Stenberg criticised Kylie Jenner for wearing her hair in cornrows arguing that she was appropriating Black culture but failing to use her position to challenge racism or promote Black issues. As La Bennett (2011) argues, there is no doubt that like Jennifer Lopez, Kim Kardashian has obtained power and wealth through the commodification of her derriere, a cultural stereotype which goes all the way back to Baartmen. But in doing so, has Kim Kardashian, following in the footsteps of Beyoncé Knowles or Alicia Keyes, been able to integrate the Black aesthetic into White culture (Tate, 2014) and visa-versa, resulting in some degree of assimilation between Black and white ideals?

Like Jennifer Lopez, Tate (2014) and Sastre (2014) argue that Kim operates as a 'racial other', coloured as 'exotic' as opposed to Black or white, and consequently her image 'bridges the desires of both' (Hobson, 2003: 97). Able to embody 'whiteness', due to her fair complexion, slender body and European hair and facial features, her big bottom distances her from white notions of femininity and

respectability, and situates her closer to the black aesthetic. As a result, she is deemed more sexual than white women and yet she is perceived as 'less deviant than Black' (Tate, 2014: 56). Able to transcend the stigma or burden of Black sexuality, she has arguably becomes an object of desire for both, bringing together aspects of both Black and white beauty.

When considering this in a wider social context, this may mean that amongst young Black women there has been a shift in terms of beauty expectations, and though there may be a continued desire for 'curves' this may be balanced alongside features more commonly associated with whiteness, such as slenderness. As Berry suggests, in recent years 'young African American women… have learned that upward mobility depends on them being slim' (Berry 2012: 39), and although Black girls may still consider very thin bodies, the size 0, to be unhealthy and unattractive (Burk, 2015; Allan, et al. 1993) the 'cultural reality' is that 'regardless of race and ethnicity, socio-economic status and sexual orientation' there is a growing anxiety over food, body, and physical appearance (Berry, 2012: 39). As celebrities, such as Kim Kardashian, start to bridge the gap between Black and white beauty, and high profile Black women such Oprah Winfrey, Jennifer Hudson and Mel B further endorse dieting and slimming products, slenderness may become a growing ambition of young Black women.

Curves and Caring

Turning attention to the conversations which took place as part of this research, collectively it seems that there remains a strong appreciation and desire for curves, but it is important for these curves to be in the right places. The hourglass shape is the ideal, and having a fuller figure, a bottom, hips, thighs and bosom are deemed key to looking womanly, looking attractive, and fitting in. This is emphasised particularly by women who have been much more slender in the past and when growing up. Having experienced anxiety and embarrassment about appearing too 'maaga' - too skinny, and thus, too mannish, these women sought ways to increase their size and appear more curvaceous. They describe, for example, how they would eat all that they could in order to put on weight, or took pills to help them gain weight or wore extra clothing or padding to give the appearance of hips and thighs.

> Lorraine: … I was very conscious of how skinny I was. And I ate everything! Anyone leave anything on the plate, I ate it and I wouldn't put on any weight. So … I was very conscious of my body because to me I looked like a boy [Black Caribbean, Aged 45]

> Patricia: When I was growing up I wanted to put on weight, because … in Jamaica where I lived, skinny is equal to maaga… But when I began to have my children I realised that my body shape was changing. I was no longer straight. To me I looked at my body and I was top-heavy, and I wasn't happy with that. I wanted hips …so I'm still not happy [Black Caribbean, Aged 48]

Michaela: …when I was growing up, hard to believe, but I was skinnier than I am now. And I used to hate, anyone tell me that I was skinny, I used to hate that word. And I used to eat to put on weight, I took tablets to put on weight… They found attractive, the fuller body woman, more attractive, and I was very conscious about how I looked and my weight [Black Caribbean, Aged 40]

The desire for curves, and the emphasis on shape is striking, and the women are keen to demonstrate and discuss the importance of creating the right silhouette. Yet, despite the concern around shape there is really very little discussion or concern around size. Dress size is not really an important issue, rather, the priority is to ensure that you are curvaceous. Moreover, the idea that curves are an important aspect of specifically Black culture is also evident, and the women highlight the strong expectations there is for Black women to be fuller figured. Indeed as Jennifer comments 'it's cultural. It's good to be curvaceous, it's good to be well, they say, "You're looking well"'.

Contrary to the stereotype of Black sexuality, however, which deems Black women's curves as a sign of sexual deviance and amorality, these curves are understood by the women in the context of love and affection, and read as sign of nurturing and care which in turn makes a woman more attractive and more desirable. Writing about Caribbean beauty pageants, Oliver (2009) suggests that within traditional Caribbean culture a woman's curves are indicative of health and fortitude. A woman with a 'healthy ass had an appetite, and could clearly cook' (Oliver, 2009: 110) and as a result she was well respected and admired. For women, cooking offered routes into business and a degree of agency in the public sphere, and within the context of poverty and deprivation food operates as a vehicle demonstrating wealth and affluence and for bringing people together (Bass, 2001). Consequently, though there is an important relationship between food, flesh, and desirability, rather than operating as a marker of sexuality these curves are read as a sign of pleasure because of their association with love, and demonstrate a woman's ability to nurture and care for her family (Parasecoli, 2007; 2008).

Changing Attitudes

There is a sense though that perceptions are starting to change, and although participants are generally keen to embrace their fuller figures some have concerns over health, and particularly diabetes and high blood pressure. As Michaela explains,

'in the past it's okay when you are bigger, it's a sign of affluence or eating well, but now there's evidence the bigger you are the more likely you to are to have illness, so because of that more people are trying to watch their diet, watch their weight, and how they look is changing.' [Black Caribbean, Aged 40]

Over the last twenty years public health policy has become increasingly focused on the 'obesity epidemic' said to 'threaten a global health catastrophe' (Guard and Wright, 2007: 2). As a result, today's discourse on the slender body has 'become associated not only with preferred physical appearance, but also with health' (Ristovski-Slijepcevic, et al., 2010: 321), and the medical industry has become a key player in reaffirming the white western ideal, suggesting that fat is not only unattractive but unhealthy.

For a number of participants there is a clear link between obesity and ill health, and being 'very' overweight is seen to bring with it significant health risks. Gabourey Sidibe, for instance, is cited as an example of someone who was 'too fat'. This does not necessarily mean that slimness is seen as marker of fitness, however, as the white western ideal is equally considered 'unhealthy and unrealistic' (Burk, 2015; Ristovski-Slijepcevic, et al. 2010: 324), but there is a feeling that individuals should 'watch what they eat'. Several of the participants are keen to note that they have a 'healthy' balanced diet, they prioritise fruit and vegetables, and they do not eat late into the evening.

> Pearl: I try to eat a lot of vegetables, a lot of stew, like chicken fillet, that's what I mostly cook now, and when cooking the chicken …I skin the whole thing, I take all the skin off, season it up, so when I am cooking I have no fat. And I'm not cooking with no oil at all, I don't use no oil not at all, so that helps too. [Black Caribbean, Aged 55]

For Delia, her concern over her health was so great it had led her to join Weightwatchers. Keen to stress that she is not 'dieting' but eating healthily, Delia explains that her motivation came from a desire to improve her mobility and fitness, not to improve her physical appearance. So far, she has lost just over 12 stone, and for her the weight loss has had the desired effect. It means that she no longer needs medication for high blood pressure and the pain has eased her joints.

> Delia: 'for me, I was fine in my size… but for health reasons, because before I was taking pills for blood pressure and whatever, and I don't take any medication now, only for joints' [Black Caribbean, Aged 51]

This practice of healthy eating is a source of tension however, for although there are anxieties over health it remains difficult for individuals and communities to distance the long-standing traditional values and understandings surrounding food and weight. For these women and their families, food is still tied up with love and care. It is a significant aspect of family life, and there is therefore, some significant resistance to change. As Collette explains, it can be difficult to adjust.

> Collette: '….my husband is Nigerian and you can see …the oil on the plate, because it's a very important part of the food. So to say to somebody, "Oil's not good for you," it's like, "What? Sorry?" You know what I mean? … it's not in our culture to have soup and

vegetables, but it is to have elements of seasoning and certain things that aren't actually good for your health. So it's a big cultural difference. [Black African, Aged 34]

Amongst the younger women, however, these traditional values are perhaps less entrenched, and influenced by friends and the wider social discourse, there is a greater willingness to challenge well established cultural norms. Encouraged by a desire for a different physical appearance and motivated not only by health concerns, but by media images and celebrity culture, these young women are engaged in dieting plans, exercise regimes and fashion trends in a bid for a new beauty ideal which sits somewhere between the Black and white aesthetic, and which draws together Black and white beauty practices. Described as 'slim thick' this shape recognises and celebrates full hips and a big bottom but place heavy emphasis on having a very slender waist, offering a middle ground between Black and white ideals.

> Eve: It's like where you've got a bit of boobs, and then you have to do your squats to get a bigger bum… and a flat stomach.. so you look like a Barbie… you've got to have a little waist. [Black African, Aged 21]

As Burk (2015: 504) identifies, 'slim thick' is understood 'as a stage between being fat and skinny'; a 'good combination' of fat and thin. Discussed within the context of health by Burk's participants, for our respondents this ideal was believed to have emerged through social media and celebrity culture, and has been largely encouraged by Jennifer Lopez, Beyoncé Knowles and, most recently, Kim Kardashian. In fact, as the conversation between Eve and Chantelle highlights, Kim Kardashian is seen to offer the most exaggerated example of 'slim thick', and one which is therefore the most aspirational.

> Eve: Some girls appreciate Beyoncé more, because it's the lifestyle, they want the big bum, the hair the nails
> Chantelle: She doesn't really float my boat, I follow Kim. Kim is like, if you want to look at someone, and your aim was to be slim thick you wouldn't go to look to Beyoncé, because she is too mediocre, like she is too in the middle,
> Eve: She's (Beyoncé) realistic, but the girls don't go for realistic, you go for the extreme…
> Chantelle: You're going to go for the best [Kim], and she's [Beyoncé] not the best, she is too ordinary. [Black Caribbean, Aged 19]

Realising this 'slim thick' look, however, is something of a paradox, as it requires women to gain weight in some places but not in others, and as a result it poses the 'greatest challenge to achieve' (Burk, 2015: 505). As Shona comments, it is largely considered a very unnatural, 'unauthentic' look, which is virtually impossible for most women to attain through normal diet and exercise. In fact, there is a strong suspicion that even Kim Kardashian has only been able to achieve her shapely bottom and very slim waist with the help of cosmetic surgery. Though her X-ray in 2011 may have sought to halt

the rumours that her figure has been created by going under the knife (Sastre, 2014), unfortunately it seems that there are still firm questions over the authenticity of her body shape.

> Shona: I think her bum is too much, it's too exaggerated. Apparently she removes fat from her thighs and puts it into her bum. That's why when they did a scan on her bum to see if it was fake nothing came up, because she's just moving fat around her body basically. [Black Caribbean, Aged 19]

Yet, despite these young women recognising that this ideal is a largely 'unrealistic' ambition, it is nevertheless a shape which they find very desirable, in part because it seen to make women more physically and sexually attractive across the racial divide.

> Lorna: I know that there was a time when even white men found a big bottom unattractive, but I think it's more coming together now, all merged into one that Black people and white people find the small waist attractive and a bit more of a full bottom attractive as well. [Black Caribbean, Aged 23]

In some respects then, 'slim thick' can be understood as bridging notions of beauty, and creating an 'exotic' other which brings together the desirable qualities from both Black and white beauty ideals. Even the term 'slim thick' indicates this cultural assimilation, combining the aspirations for curves and thickness, alongside the normative requirement of slimness. Like Kim Kardashian, this look is seen as sexually attractive, but not sexually deviant, and therefore it offers these young women an aesthetic which they consider legitimate and attractive to a much wider audience.

Due to its 'unnatural' character achieving 'slim thick' requires the average women to adopt strict diets and rigorous exercise. Chantelle, for example, follows various meal plans, available via the internet, to help her obtain the 'slim thick' look, which focuses on building muscle. Very low in fat and carbohydrate but high in protein, these plans mostly consist of vegetables and white meat and in many ways follow the same model as the programmes offered within organised dieting groups. As Chantelle explains, however, the aim is not to lose weight but simply to tone and sculpt that body that she has. For her, these plans are most definitely not about dieting in the conventional way, although they are concerned with being healthy and building a strong shape.

> Chantelle: I mainly follow them because I'm into healthy stuff, lean, like lean meat and protein. But …girls don't want to lose it. They want to gain it…I don't want to lose weight, … I would still go to the gym to tone it how I like it. But I let myself gain, if you know what I mean. [Black Caribbean, Aged 19]

In this way the 'slim thick' ideal can again be seen to bridge the gap between Black and white perceptions of body image, but it also integrates Black and white beauty practices, for on the one hand it cultivates a culture of 'dieting', prominent within the white western ideal, but at the same time

embraces and celebrates the larger size more akin to Black culture. This assimilation is also embodied and cultivated by Kim Kardashian herself, as she encourages dieting and normative standards and policing of the body through her endorsement of dieting products, slimming pills and cellulite treatments, but at the same time is seen to celebrate and flaunt her curvaceous figure and her booty-iful bottom (Sastre, 2014).

Yet, as Chantelle's quote highlights, dieting alone is rarely enough to achieve the 'slim thick' look, and meal plans needs to be supported with exercise, chiefly squats to tone and shape the thighs and bottom. Again widely endorse and promoted by Kim Kardashian, via Instagram, Twitter and fitness videos ('*Fit in Your Jeans by Friday*', 2009), squats have become a key means of exercise for women across the racial divide, endorsed by a wide range of fashion magazine and newspaper articles, including Harper's Bazar and Vogue, who offer women advice on 'How to get a Bigger Butt' (Nagi, 2014, Dickens, 2015).

Within white western culture the idea that the body needs to be disciplined has existed since the mid-Victorian period (Huff, 2001), and for over a century dieting and exercise have operated as a central means of control. As Heyes (2006: 126) suggests, the ideal body operates a 'powerful symbol of self-discipline, controlled appetite and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behaviour and appearance' and those that fail to meet it are under constant pressure to conform under the threat of punishment or social exclusion (Foucault, 1990). Yet, here the exercise which is being encourage is used to enhance the figure, rather than slim it down, and to develop a shape which is more typically associated with Black sexuality, as opposed to white femininity. Whereas Black bodies have traditionally sat outside of the normative judgement, classified as something other, here white women are being encouraged to develop stereotypically Black attributes, and at the same time Black women are being encouraged to adopt strict forms of exercise and dieting, in order to achieve the 'slim thick' look, which are more closely associated with white western beauty.

When exercise and diets fail to achieve the ideal body shape, as is so often the case, due to the unrealistic challenge that it presents, fashion offers women an alternative solution. By wearing pants that lift and pad the derrière and waist trainers which 'cinch' in the stomach, young women are able to create the desired silhouette, at least temporarily. As Jantzen et al., (2006: 178) notes, underwear, like exercise and diets, has long been part of the female identity, and for more than 100 years it has been used as an instrument 'to constrain and control the female body by moulding it to fit the aesthetic ideals' (Jantzen, et al., 2006: 178). 'Styles of the feminine figure… reflect cultural obsessions and preoccupations' (Bartky 1988: 28) and it seems that the 'slim thick' look is no exception.

Endorsed by the Kardashians, as well as Amber Rose and Nicki Minaj, waist trainers, in particular, have become an increasingly common tool in the quest for a slimness, tightening the body around the

waist in a corset-like fashion, whilst pants with padded sections or cut outs, work to lift and shape the buttocks helping to create a more curvy look.

> Lorna:… it's not realistic to achieve it, so sometimes it means faking it, whether it's implants, surgically or wearing certain clothing that enhances one part of your body, keeps the top part small. And I think the way that they think they can achieve it. I mean, the other day in Primark they were doing these pants that had bum pads. There are some things that you want, but your body just won't do it. There are things now called waist cinchers, they are like corsets that you have to wear literally like all day. And they just basically bring your waist in, in, in… [Black Caribbean, Aged 23]

Like corsets, waspies and girdles, and ultimately diets and exercise too, these underwear garments work to discipline and control the body (Bartky 1990; Heyes, 2006), and just in the same way that white western women have been subject to forms of policing and constraint through fashion, it seems that increasingly so too are Black women, as they look to achieve the 'slim thick' ideal or a healthier lifestyle. As Wolf (1990) suggests, 'thinness is not an obsession about female beauty but an obsession about female obedience', and although these beauty practices may be motivated by body image or by health, they inevitably bring Black women closer to notions of respectability and appropriateness, and encourage Black women to perform femininity in legitimised ways. Equally, what is considered legitimate may also be changing, as the white western ideal shifts, if ever so slightly, closer towards a black aesthetic, mobilised by a celebrity culture which bridges the gap between Black and white.

Conclusion

There appear to be some important changes taking place in the world of beauty and body image, and celebrities such as Kim Kardashian offer an interesting example of the ways in which Black sexuality may be appropriated, or perhaps assimilating with the white ideal. Certainly the 'slim thick' phenomena seems to offer an example of bridging between Black and white aesthetics, and even the term itself suggests a coming together of black and white beauty. Like Jennifer Lopez, Kim Kardashian arguably occupies a middle space, which is not quite black but not quite white. An 'exotic' other, she embodies the curvaceous aspects of Black sexuality which enables her to be sexual but not sexually deviant, and balances this with thinness, situating her closer to a dominant white ideal. As a result, she appeals to women across the racial divide, raising her reputation as a fashion icon and fuelling still further her celebrity status. As Shona exclaimed, it seems that 'this big bum thing is taking over the world!'

More importantly though, Kim not only offers an example of cultural assimilation, she is arguably encouraging a hybrid of Black and white beauty amongst young Black women. Considered attractive across the racial divide, Kim's 'slim thick' look is cultivating dieting and exercise habits amongst young Black audiences, whilst fears over obesity and ill health motivate older Black women to adopt

similar practices. Increasingly concerned with policing and disciplining their bodies, whether through diet, exercise or fashion, it seems that the 'cult of thinness' is spreading, and that a common beauty aesthetic is emerging. Curves may still be celebrated, but as Black women move closer to the white aesthetic, there is a growing sense that they should be balanced with a desire for slimness.

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