

The ‘First Skin’: Clothes and Masculinity amongst the Izikhothani

Maheshvari Naidu* and Nokubonga Mazibuko

School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

**E-mail: naiduu@ukzn.ac.za*

KEYWORDS Masculinity. Fashion. Youth. Sub-culture

ABSTRACT Izikhothani (young African males) are known for their expensive fashion sense and wearing bright colours in townships where certain gendered stereotypes exist about the colours men and women ought to and should wear. Isikhothani is a word popularly used to refer to a man who is supposedly excessively clean and well groomed, and more importantly, is obsessive about fashion and styling his body. Clothes play an important role in the representation of who and how they see themselves and appearance is perceived as the ‘first skin’, as they believe that “what a person wears says a lot about who they are”. This paper in turn examines the perceptions and feelings about clothes for izikhothani. Using data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews to study, a group of young men between the ages of 18 and 25 from Diepkloof Township in Soweto, Gauteng; the paper probes the importance of clothes and the embedded beliefs they hold for the isikhothani. The paper focuses on how clothes form and shape their identity and social status as well as how they tend to use fashion to (attempt to) break away from the existing entrenched stereotypes about how men should dress.