

**AN ARTISTIC DECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE OBESITY BY REFERENCING
XHOSA AND WESTERN CULTURAL CONTRADICTING STEREOTYPIFICATION**

by

NANGAMSO NTOKOZO TSHANGANA

Submitted in accordance with the requirements

For the degree of

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

in the subject of

ART

At the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR NOMBEKO MPAKO

February 2025

DECLARATION

Name: **NANGAMSO NTOKOZO TSHANGANA**

Student number: **49083090**

Degree: **MASTER OF VISUAL ART**

AN ARTISTIC DECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE OBESITY BY REFERENCING XHOSA AND WESTERN CULTURAL CONTRADICTING STEREOTYPIFICATION

I declare that the dissertation with the above title is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality-checking software (Turnitin) and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

February 2025

DATE

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, SneAmu Tshangana, and all the young and old ladies who have been or are yet to be subjected to all types of body shaming. I want to stress the fact that just because there are images everywhere telling you that you aren't skinny enough, pretty enough or good enough, don't let people define who you are. By learning to love yourself, being proud of who you are, and not seeing yourself through someone else's eyes, you will fully know and accept who you are.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to my sisters Zanele and Sandisiwe Tshangana for their unwavering support and forever believing in me and my abilities. I also wish to thank my parents, Nomzingiso and Mncedisi Tshangana, for their words of encouragement and for being my strength when I thought of giving up along this journey. To my brothers Bavu and Mli Tshangana, ndiyabulela.

Next, to my friends, especially Nothile Hlatshwayo, for being my guinea pig and partaking in some of my photography experiments when needed; you are appreciated. Thanks to everyone who made the completion of my study a success. My fellow artists Sango Filita and Xolela Sogoni, thank you.

Last but not least, I'm extremely grateful to Professor Nombeko Penelope Mpako, my supervisor, whom I have come to call my second mother, for your emotional support and nurturing nature; the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without you, mama, NANGAMSO!

**TITLE: AN ARTISTIC DECONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE OBESITY BY
REFERENCING XHOSA AND WESTERN CULTURAL
CONTRADICTING STEREOTYPIFICATION**

ABSTRACT

This study interrogates female obesity, referencing contradicting Xhosa and Western cultural stereotypes and their impact on modern females, arguing that these stereotypes affect individuals' self-acceptance, sometimes resulting in low self-esteem. It also highlights the impact of social media on the obesity of modern young women, affecting their self-image and confidence. The study argues that the contradicting African cultural and Western stereotypes present modern African women's self-image with emotional and physical chaos. This is because most African traditional cultural people believe that a healthy child's image is that of a full body, which is in opposition to the Western norm that a thin body shape is "sexy" and a sign of wellness. This study is set within phenomenological and autoethnographic methodologies based on the researcher's self-reflection while presenting various scenarios and practices regarding the modern female body and its dilemmas. These include beauty pageantry, acceptable looks and current practices such as tummy tucks, breast enlargement and reduction, buttocks augmentation and many other modifications driven by the so-called ideal and appealing female body. This study further argues that fatness both fascinates and repels modern society, as can be seen in the popularity of fat jokes in an era of supposed tolerance and respect for diversity and in the mockery of fat bodies in the pop cultural spheres. Thus, in this context, fatness is stigmatised due to socially acceptable stereotypes. The study is situated within current feminist discourses on the female embodiment of her body and the application of stereotyping as a form of stigmatising. Feminist theories describe the present condition of women and men's ways of understanding towards eliminating race, gender and sexual hierarchies. Male and female gaze concepts are also explored to express the impact of stereotypes on the female body. This study is practice-led and practice-based, and it culminated in a solo exhibition depicting emerging visual representations towards new knowledge while improving artistic practice. The practical work was framed through various contemporary artistic discourses

that deal with and embrace the full body shape, as well as using art activism as a therapeutic endeavour.

KEYWORDS:

Obesity; Stereotyping; Stigmatising; Feminist theories; Social Media; Self-image; Beauty; Phenomenology; Autoethnography, Acculturation

**ISIHLOKO: UKUPHONONONGWA KOBUGCISA BOKUTYEBA
KWABASETYHINI NGOKUBHEKISA KWINKCUBEKO
YAMAXHOSA NEYASENTSHONA YEENKOLELO EZIGWENXA
EZIPHIKISANAYO**

ISISHWANKATHELO

Olu phandolwazi luphanda ngokutyeba kwabasetyhini, lubhekisa kwiinkolelo ezigwenxa eziphikisanayo zenkcubeko yamaXhosa neyaseNtshona kunye nefuthe lazo kubantu basetyhini bale mihla, lubonisa ukuba ezi nkolelo zigwenxa zichaphazela ukuzithemba komntu, ngamanye amaxesha zikhokelela ekuzijongeleni phantsi. Lukwabhentsisa ifuthe lamajelo onxibelelwano loluntu ekutyebeni kwabasetyhini abaselula bale mihla, elichaphazela indlela abazibona ngayo nokuzithemba kwabo. Olu phandolwazi lubonisa ukuba iinkolelo ezigwenxa eziphikisanayo zenkcubeko yamaAfrika neyaseNtshona ziveza indlela abazibona ngayo abasetyhini bale mihla kunye nokudideka ngokweemvakalelo nasemzimbeni. Oku kungenxa yokuba abantu abaninzi benkcubeko yemveli yaseAfrika bakholelwa ukuba umfanekiso womntwana osempilweni ngumzimba omkhulu, nto leyo ephikisanayo nenkcubeko yaseNtshona yokuba umzimba obhityileyo onomtsalane ngo-"sexy" nobonakalisa impilo entle. Olu phandolwazi lusekelwe kwiindlela zokwenza uphando ngokwamava oluntu kwezentlalo kunye nendlela yophandontyilazwi apho abaphandilwazi basebenzisa amava abo obuqu ukuqonda imicimbi yezentlalo (*iautoethnography*), esekelwe ekuzibonakaliseni komphandilwazi ngelixa ebonisa iimeko ngeemeko neenkqubo ngeenkqubo malunga nemizimba yabasetyhini yale mihla kunye neengxaki zayo. Oku kuquka imiboniso yoonobuhle, inkangeleko eyamkelekileyo kunye neenkqubo zangoku ezifana nokunciphisa isisu, ukukhulisa nokunciphisa amabele, ukongezwa kweempundu kunye nolunye utshintsho lwenkangeleko olubanzi olwenziwayo kwimizimba yabasetyhini olubizwa ngokuba kukufaneleka nokuba nomtsalane. Olu phandolwazi luqhubeka lubonisa ukuba ukutyeba kusematheni kwaye akwamkelekanga kuluntu lwale mihla, nanjengoko kunokubonwa indlela uluntu oluthanda ngayo ukuhlelisa ngokutyeba ngelixa kusithiwa uluntu luyanyamezelana kwaye iyahlonitshwa iyantlukwano yalo, kunye nokuhlekwa nokugezelwa kwemizimba etyebileyo kwiinkalo

ezahlukileyo zentlalo yoluntu. Ngoko ke, kule meko, ukutyeba kubekwa ibala ngenxa yeenkolelo ezigwenxa ezamkelekileyo eluntwini. Olu phandolwazi lubekelwe phakathi kweengxoxo zangoku zobutshantliziyo ngezobubhinqa malunga nokubonakaliswa kwemizimba yabasetyhini kunye nokusetyenziswa kweenkolelo ezigwenxa nanjengendlela yokubeka ibala. lingcingane zobutshantliziyo ngezobubhinqa zichaza imeko yangoku yeendlela zabasetyhini nezamadoda zokuqonda malunga nokuphelisa ukungalingani ngokobuhlanga, isini kunye nezesondo. Kukwaphononongwa nesigama sendlela yokujonga amadoda nabasetyhini ukubonisa ifuthe leenkolelo ezigwenxa kwimizimba yabasetyhini. Olu phandolwazi lusekelwe kwaye lukhokelwa ngumsebenzi wezobugcisa, lwaze lwafikelela kwinqanaba lomboniso wobugcisa owodwa obonisa ukuboniswa okubonakalayo kokuvelayo kulwazi olutsha ngelixa kuphuculwa umsebenzi wezobugcisa. Umsebenzi owenziwayo wezandla uqulunqwe ngeentetho ezahlukileyo zobugcisa zala maxesha ezijongana nokwamkela ukumila komzimba omkhulu, kunye nokusebenzisa ubutshantliziyo bezobugcisa nanjengenzame yokulungisa umba wezempilo nempilontle yoluntu.

AMAGAMA ANGUNDOQO:

Ukutyeba kakhulu; Ukuba neenkolelo ezigwenxa; Ukubeka ibala; lingcingane zobutshantliziyo ngezobubhinqa; Amajelo onxibelelwano loluntu; Indlela umntu azibona ngayo; Ubuhle; Uphandolwazi ngokwamava oluntu kwezentlalo; Indlela yophandontyilazwi apho abaphandilwazi basebenzisa amava abo obuqu ukuqonda imicimbi yezentlalo, Imfundiso yenkcubeko

THAETLELE: TSHEKATSHEKO YA BOKGABO KA GA GO NONA GA BASADI KA GO ŠUPETŠA THULANO YA KGOPOLOTEE GO SETHOSA LE SETŠO SA BODIKELA

KAKARETŠO

Nyakišišo ye e botšološiša go nona ga basadi, e šupetša thulano ya dikgopolotee tša setšo sa Bodikela le sa Sethosa le khuetšo ya tšona go basadi ba sebjalebja, ka go bolela gore dikgopolotee tše di ama boikamogelo bja batho, ka dinako tše dingwe di feleletša ka boinyatšo. Gape e gatelela khuetšo ya bobegaditaba tša leago godimo ga go nona ga basadi ba e lego baswa ba sebjalebja, go ama boitlhompho le boitshepo bja bona. Nyakišišo e bolela gore dikgopolotee tše di thulanago tša setšo sa Afrika le sa Bodikela di fa boitlhompho bja basadi ba sebjalebja ba Afrika mathata a maikutlo le a mmele. Se ke ka lebaka la gore bontši bja batho ba setšo sa setšo sa Afrika ba dumela gore seswantšho sa ngwana yo a phetšego gabotse ke sa mmele wo o feletšego, seo se thulanago le mokgwa wa Bodikela wa gore sebopego se se sesane sa mmele se “sexy” gape ke seka sa bophelo bjo bobotse. Nyakišišo ye e beakantšwe ka gare ga mekgwa ya fenomenotši le othoetenokrafi yeo e theilwego godimo ga boipotšološišo bja monyakišiši mola e tšweletša maemo le mekgwa ye e fapanego mabapi le mmele wa sebjalebja wa mosadi le mathata a wona. Tše di akaretša go bontšha botse, ponagalo ye e amogelegago le mekgwa ya bjale ya go swana le go dithamithake, go oketša le go fokotša matswele, go oketša marago le diphetogo tše dingwe tše ntši tše di hlohleletšwago ke seo se bitšwago mmele wa mosadi wo o lego maleba le wo o gogago šedi. Nyakišišo ye e tšwela pele gape go bolela gore go nona go kgahla le go tena setšhaba sa matšatši a lehono, bjalo ka ge go ka bonwa ka go tuma ga metlae ya ka ka ga go nona mehleng yeo go thwego ke ya kgotlelelo le tlhompho ya go fapafapana le go kwerwa ga mebele ye e nonnogo mo dikarolong tša setšo sa phopo (pop). Ka go realo, mo sebopegong se, go nona go kgetholla ka lebaka la dikgopolotee tše di fošagetšego tše di amogelegago setšhabeng. Nyakišišo e beakantšwe ka gare ga dipolelo tša bjale tša bofeminisi ka ga mothofatšo ya mosadi wa mmele wa gagwe le tirišo ya go se swane bjalo ka mokgwa wa go kgetholla. Diteori tša bofeminisi di hlaloša seemo sa bjale sa ditsela tša kwešišo tša

basadi le banna go ya go fediša maemo a morafe, bong le thobalano. Dikgopolo tša go lebelela ga banna le basadi le tšona di a hlahlobja go tšweletša khuetšo ya dipono tše di sa swanego mmeleng wa mosadi. Nyakišišo ye ke ya go etwa pele le go thewa godimo ga tiragatšo, gomme e feleleditše ka pontšho e tee ye e bontšhago dikemedi tša pono tše di tšwelelago go ya tsebong ye mpsha mola e kaonafatša mokgwa wa bokgabo. Mošomo wo o šomago o be o foreimilwe ka dipolelo tša bokgabo tša sebjalebja tše di fapafapanego tše di lebanego le go amogela sebopego sa mmele ka moka, gammogo le go šomiša boikgafo bja bokgabo bjalo ka maitapišo a kalafo.

MANTŠU A BOHLOKWA:

Go nona; Bokgopolotee; Go hlabišadihlong; Diteori tša bofeminisi; Bobegaditaba tša Leago; Boitlhompho; Bobotse; Fenomenolotši; Othoetenokrafi, Setšofatšo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 THE STUDY'S RATIONALE	3
1.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	6
1.3 THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
1.4 ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AND METHODOLOGY	9
1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	11
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
2.1 OBESITY AND GENDER DIFFERENCES	12
2.2 FORMATION OF STEREOTYPES	14
2.3 EMBODIMENT AND FEMALE THINNESS	18
2.3.1 Western Women and Black Women	19
2.4 BODY IMAGE AND ETHNICITY	23
2.5 THE FEMALE AND MALE GAZE	23
2.5.1 The Female Gaze	24
2.5.2 The Male Gaze	25
2.6 OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN	26
CHAPTER THREE: ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AND METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 ART CREATION PROCESS	32
3.1.1 Inspiration Behind My Exhibition	33
3.2 JENNY SAVILLE	35
3.3 LAURIE TOBY EDISON	39
3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY	43
CHAPTER FOUR: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF OBESITY AND THE EFFECTS OF BODY SHAMING	46
4.1 THE EFFECTS OF OBESITY AND BODY SHAMING ON GIRLS AND FEMALES	47

4.2	INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS ON OBESITY	53
4.3	CULTURALLY ACCEPTED STEREOTYPES RELATED TO FEMALE OBESITY	55
4.4	ARTISTIC INTERVENTION	59
4.5	THE JOURNEY OF DESPISING AND ACCEPTING BEING A PLUS SIZE	66
4.6	MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO'S VENUS OF THE RAGS.....	71
4.7	IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS	73
	CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	75
5.1	INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS OF MODERN FEMALE OBESITY..	77
5.2	SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AND BODY SHAMING	78
5.3	SOCIAL MEDIA ON MODERN YOUNG WOMEN SELF-IMAGE	79
5.4	SELF-AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE	80
5.5	RECOMMENDATIONS	81
	REFERENCES	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	Venus of Willendorf, 25000 BC	27
Figure 2.2:	Figure. 2.2: Andrea Schewe Design: Corset History, 1500-1900	
Figure.2.3:	Woman's corset figured silk, France, (1730 – 1740)	28
Figure 2.4:	Pireli Calendar, (2010)	34
Figure 2.5:	Natan engagement ring advert (2000)	35
Figure 2.6:	Jean-Léon Gérôme, A Roman Slave Market, (1884)	37
Figure 2.7:	Paul Gauguin, The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch, (1892) ..	38
Figure 2.8:	Jeff Koons, Woman Reclining, (2010-2014)	38
Figure 2.9:	Edouard Manet, Luncheon on the Grass, (1862-63)	39
Figure 3.1:	The photographs on the movie cover (2006).	41
Figure 3.2:	Theatrical release poster (2002).	42
Figure 3.3:	Saville, Jenny. Propped. (1992)	44
Figure 3.4:	Sandro Botticelli The Birth of Venus. (1485 - 1486)	45
Figure 3.5:	Jenny Saville, <i>Hem</i> (1999).	45
Figure 3.6:	Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes (1994).	46
Figure 3.7:	Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes (1994).	48
Figure 3.8:	Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes (1994).	49
Figure 4.1:	Nangamso Tshangana, Sdudla mafehlefehle series, 2024...	55
Figure 4.2:	body shaming incident extracted from an Instagram X page	56
Figure. 4.3:	Eira Aziera, Body shaming clip, 2020	59
Figure 4.4:	Sarah Baartman, BBC News Magazine, 2016	64
Figure 4.5:	Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, <i>Closed Contact #3</i> , 1995-1996.	67
Figure 4.6:	Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, <i>Closed Contact #4</i> , 1995-1996.	68
Figure 4.7:	Jenny Saville, <i>Closed Contact #1</i> , 1995-1996.	68
Figure 4.8:	Jenny Saville, <i>Branded</i> , 1992.	69
Figure 4.9:	Nombeko Mpako, Inyanda II (2021)	70
Figure 4.10:	Umzimbha negazi lam I (2021)	

Figure 4.11: Yossi Loloï, <i>Full Beauty Project</i> , 2012.	71
Figure 4.11: Figure 4.11: Yossi Loloï, <i>Full Beauty Project</i> , 2012.....	73
Figure 4.12: Yossi Loloï, <i>Full Beauty Project</i> , 2012.	73
Figure 4.13: Yossi Loloï, <i>Full Beauty Project</i> , 2012.	74
Figure 4.14: Yossi Loloï, <i>Full Beauty Project</i> , 2012.	75
Figure 4.15: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndibubhideka-Amahla Ndenyuka series, 2024	76
Figure 4.16: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndibubhideka-Amahla Ndenyuka series, 2024	78
Figure 4.17: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndimlo - And'semhle Series, 2024 ...	79
Figure 4.18: Nangamso Tshangana, Stills from the Jula-Jwi video, 2024 ..	80
Figure 4.19: Michelangelo Pistoletto's <i>Venus of the Rags</i> (1967)	81
Figure 4.20: Nangamso Tshangana, Jula-Jwi, 2024	82
Figure 4.21: Unknown artist, <i>Venus of Willendorf</i> , c. 24,000 B.C.E. – 22,000 B.C.E.	83

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This study interrogates female obesity, referencing contradicting African and Western cultural stereotypes and their impact on modern females. It focuses on Xhosa cultural accepted norms on full body size females, and the impact of social media on the obesity of modern women and the effects it has on their self-image and confidence. The argument of contradicting African cultural and Western stereotypes presents modern African women with questions about their self-image. This is because most African traditional cultural people believe that a healthy child's image is that of a full body, sometimes tending towards obesity. Local research conducted by Puoane et al. (2005:19) on the social meaning of food found that in many South African indigenous cultures, food symbolises love, acceptance and humanity (Ubuntu) and is associated with happiness. A thin body shape is not considered "sexy" as it is a sign of malnutrition and illness (Ribane 2006). For example, during the Xhosa boys' and girls' rite of passage, the initiates are fed so that when they complete the period, good care and good health are evident and are usually associated with a full body and a puffy face.

When modern children start mixing with their peers, either at school or elsewhere, they are immediately exposed to prevailing social stereotypes, and body-shaming utterances such as "you are too skinny or fat/obese", etc. Xhosa terms such as *sidudla* (the fat one) or *bitywana* (skinny) are casually used to label children and adults and are culturally accepted and unquestioned. However, they carry negative labelling and body-shaming, even though they are usually not questioned. Thus, the study argues that these stereotypes affect individuals' self-acceptance, sometimes resulting in low self-esteem. There are also very demeaning and aggressive utterances, such as:

Fat people are disgusting, smelly and stupid. They take up too much space and offend our sense of attractiveness. They are lazy, unfit and unhealthy. They let themselves go and don't have any self-respect. Can't they exercise a bit of self-control like the rest of us (Hamilton 2007).

Body shaming is defined as the act of mocking or criticising an individual's physical appearance, often emerging at the intersection of personal identity and broader cultural norms. From an academic standpoint, body shaming can be referred to as a form of social regulation, where dominant cultural ideals, often propagated by media and institutions, prescribe narrow standards of beauty and acceptability. These standards tend to prioritise thinness, muscularity, or specific racialised features, marginalising those whose bodies do not conform. Such cultural expectations create a dissonance for individuals whose personal experiences or identities do not align with these norms. For example, someone who embraces body positivity or who comes from a cultural background that values fuller body types may face ridicule or exclusion in societies where thinness is idealised, creating a conflict between self-acceptance and societal pressure.

This tension is further complicated by globalisation and the increasing exchange of cultural ideals. In many non-Western societies, traditional perceptions of beauty that once celebrated diversity in body shapes are being eroded by Western standards perpetuated through global and social media. This can lead to internalised body dissatisfaction, particularly among younger generations, who may struggle to reconcile inherited cultural values with the aesthetic ideals promoted in global social media. Academically, this clash underscores the role of power and ideology in shaping bodily norms and highlights the importance of intersectional analysis, taking into account race, gender, class, and cultural background in understanding the mechanisms and impacts of body-shaming.

This study is set within phenomenological and autoethnographic methodologies based on my self-reflection while presenting various scenarios and practices regarding the modern female body and its dilemmas. These include beauty pageantry, acceptable looks, and current practices such as tummy tucks, breast enlargement and reduction, buttocks augmentation and many other modifications driven by the so-called ideal and appealing female body. It further argues that fatness both fascinates and repels modern society.

This is evident, for example, in the lingering popularity of fat jokes in an era of supposed tolerance and respect for diversity and in the mockery of fat bodies in the pop cultural spheres. Fatness is usually read as physical proof of behaviours, such as overconsumption of food and inactivity, which are presumed to cause weight gain and related illnesses and, therefore, considered irresponsible and immoral in societies that hold individuals accountable for their health and productivity. Thus, in this context, fatness is stigmatised due to socially acceptable stereotypes. These socially accepted stereotypes result in victims living with the stigma helplessly because they are blamed instead of being helped and supported. Hence, this study is also meant to be a therapy for me towards self-acceptance, self-emancipation, as well as forgiveness.

The study is situated within current feminist discourses on the female embodiment of her body and the application of stereotypification as a form of stigmatisation. The Oxford dictionary defines the word stereotype as a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

Theories of feminist scholars and authors on female transgressions, such as Sandra Bartky, Susan Bordo, Simone De Beauvoir and Griselda Pollock, are used to guide this research. These feminist theorists attempt not only to describe the present condition of women and men but also to present ways of understanding and to prescribe methods to change conditions towards eliminating race, gender and sexual hierarchies. The concepts of male and female gaze are also explored to express the impact of stereotypes on females.

The Western ideal of beauty never promoted the voluptuous female body shape associated with black females, but there has been an attempt in recent years to include ethnic minority samples in body image studies (Grabe & Hyde 2006). On the runway, the ideal body shape for a model is assumed to be extremely thin. Compared with the slimmer women, in the Zulu culture, the

thick Zulu women are regarded as marriage material and appreciated (Radebe 2016).

However, the voluptuous body is now accepted as desirable and deemed healthy. Not only is the notion of the obese female body investigated through theories of gender, but postulations on race and its political polarities in South Africa also form a crucial part of the current study. Steyn (2001:117) points out that post-apartheid South Africa is experiencing a period marked by a moment of “gaspiness” in identity for all social groupings. This suggests that the post-apartheid period is a time when all South Africans are renegotiating their identities. The socio-political transition experienced by South Africans impacts social, political, economic, and cultural life in general (Steyn 2001). Race has traditionally been used to categorise populations based on shared biological characteristics such as genes, skin colour, body shapes, and other observable features. This study is practice-led and practice-based, culminating in a solo exhibition depicting emerging visual representations. The exhibition aimed to produce original artworks that promote new knowledge while improving artistic practice. [\[https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:5755223c-d517-4d85-8645-7d7429e0cdcb\]](https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:5755223c-d517-4d85-8645-7d7429e0cdcb) (Click on this link to open the catalogue)]

1.1 THE STUDY’S CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study is presented in five chapters that coherently frame the aim and objectives and support the argument it is making. Chapter One provides an overview of the study’s structure and introduces the research’s rationale, problem statement, aims and objectives, and articulates the significance of the study. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of the literature and the theoretical frameworks in support of the study’s aims and objectives. Since this study is practice-led and based, Chapter Three presents the artistic influences and how they were incorporated into the practical component. Chapter Four considers reflections on my practice as both an art practitioner and researcher, and references relevant artists to validate the importance of this artistic research project and highlight its value in modern society. Finally,

Chapter Five articulates the conclusion and recommendations emerging from the study's dissertation and practical works.

1.2 THE STUDY'S RATIONALE

Today, fatness constitutes what Ervin Goffman (1963) cited by Mike Fitzpatrick, in the *British Journal of General Practise* 2008 called “spoiled identity” insofar as it is considered both an “abomination of the body” and indicative of “blemishes of individual character” (such as laziness and greed) (Aronson 1974). Oliver (2006), however, discredits the epidemic as a product of media sensationalism that serves the interests of powerful government institutions and that is predicated on misleading statistics and exaggerated health risk assessments. Thus, obesity is not always perceived as a health risk by every person and may even be seen positively sometimes. A study conducted in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, by Fourie and Rosling in 2005, emphasised a high prevalence of obesity among urban black females in South Africa, even among female health workers. Puoane et al. (2002), on the other hand, found that 29.9% of South African men and 56.6% of women were overweight or obese. Bongela also wrote in the *Mail and Guardian* (Jan 2002) that being overweight was and still is considered a sign of prosperity in African black communities in South Africa. In Xhosa culture, a woman who is obese or overweight is seen as a reflection of her husband's ability to care for her and their family. According to Bongela (2002) *UmKhaba*, a Xhosa term for potbelly, is associated with power and wealth. Puoane et al. (2002) added that a Xhosa woman's wellness was also measured by her full body. Numerous factors, such as community-level, social and behavioural (mainly sedentary lifestyles combined with excess energy intake) factors, are implicated in the sustained obesity pandemic in South Africa and other populations. Thus, among some African people, several perspectives support the view that the big body is associated with dignity, respect, health, and wealth and is influenced by sociocultural, behavioural, and environmental factors.

Thus, modern black females find themselves in continuous disarray as self-acceptance of their bodies is sometimes influenced by the various environments they interact with. Peer pressure, especially in social media,

thrives in categorising people into either an inferiority or superiority complex while causing self-image damage to others. Body shaming of any kind is universal and sometimes is perpetrated through socially accepted stereotypes. However, it causes everlasting damage and even results in suicidal acts among some victims, especially among teenagers.

Reflecting on my growing up as a chubby little girl, tight jeans and crop tops were the in thing at my school then, and everyone wore them, except me. I remember being bigger than most of my classmates, who were mostly coloured and Xhosa girls and being remotely jealous when it was casual day and they would flaunt their newly bought jeans and shorts. In some of the conversations I had with my peers, it appears that the pressure to conform to contemporary body image standards is immense, and it has become important for young black women to fit in with these Westernised or modern stereotypes. In this study, cultural perceptions of female obesity in South Africa are investigated, specifically in the context of black female stereotypification and Xhosa culture, considering the impact of mass media perceptions and norms of obesity on young women's self-image and identity.

The idea for this research project developed from the awareness of my body, prompting losing weight through exercising and diet. Despite my uneasiness associated with placing myself in a vulnerable position, I decided to 'come out' as a slightly overweight woman. I set out to create a project responding to the psychosocial and physiological changes brought about by the weight-loss programme and joined a local fat-fighting group called *Team Asijiki*, meaning we will not turn back. While this study is framed by my personal lived experience, body shaming is ubiquitous and affects people in different and negative ways, hence the significance of this research and similar ones.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study's main objective is to examine the body image concerns among women and demonstrate the unique beauty issues in line with the social media consumer. This is because beauty and pageant culture's commodification of the thin ideal beauty perpetuates the stigma associated with obesity. Beauty

standards regarding body size and shape are presented, revealing that Xhosa women only preferred body size as an aspect of Westernised beauty standards. Ferguson and Adams (2017) confirm that South Africans have adopted the Westernised way of living along with its beauty ideals, which directly influence their dress practices. Given the global movement towards the adoption of the Western lifestyle in both material and non-material culture (Adeniyi & Ayedoro 2018), it is essential to keep track of indigenous cultures, especially those of Xhosa women, which is of importance. This is because culture gratifies the human social need to belong, often forming part of one's identity (Clarke 2008).

The study's main objective is to analyse and compare some feminist theories on female embodiment and the degrading damage caused by fatphobia through the concepts of male and female gazes. This study examines the male and female gazes to establish that beauty, desire, and gender are social constructs. The male gaze originates in patriarchy and has been institutionalised through visual culture for decades. Men have verbalised how women should look to be perceived as attractive, and this is deemed acceptable. Laura Mulvey's (1989) analysis of the Male gaze identified a predominant trend in which women are visualised as objects of desire and pleasure for the male audience, a trend that originated in her analysis of classic Hollywood cinema (1989: 44-77). Women have been sexually objectified by men, and the male and female gaze are also further unpacked to understand the learned roles of being male or female. Feminism defied the 'male gaze' and encouraged women to accept their sexuality (Ponterotto 2016). The female gaze is multidimensional; women respond to the male gaze by claiming agency over their bodies (Corbett 2023). The women are no longer puppets; gazing back in this manner means they can portray themselves as they see fit.

The second objective is to investigate the effect of acculturation on modern Xhosa women in relation to Xhosa culture and their food. This answers the question of whether Xhosa women are truly aware of the health risks involved with being overweight or obese and whether having a larger body than others necessarily warrants one as unhealthy. It attempts to address how post-

apartheid socio-cultural changes have affected black identity in relation to self-understanding. It shows that, in terms of black identity construction, there is a variation in the meaning of being Xhosa in contemporary South Africa (Ballard 2003). The third objective is to explore and describe the Westernisation in Xhosa women's beauty ideals. The increase in technology and the easy access to media, which connects people without physical proximity, along with the modern movement towards globalisation, make acculturation possible without direct or physical contact with another cultural group (Ferguson & Bornstein 2012).

The fourth objective is to demonstrate that black women are affected by dominant ideals of beauty, such as thin body ideals (Cameron, Muldrow & Stefani 2018). It also seeks to revalue and celebrate women's differences, liberate black women from a patriarchal understanding of womanhood, examine how fat activists strategise to reclaim a 'fat' identity and demonstrate the significance of accepting relationships with our bodies in spite of our socially prescribed "negative" bodily attributes. Finally, it demonstrates that fatness norms are challenged and subverted through the work of some selected artists.

The main research questions this study is answering are:

- How have the general customs and beliefs of young Xhosa women towards body image changed, and have their sociocultural expectations shifted and does their race have any impact in this matter compared to the demands of Western ideals?
- How do inherited cultural frameworks shape embodied experiences of the female form across Xhosa and Western contexts?
- In what ways can creative, practice-led and based research intervene in and transform internalised body ideals?

These questions affirm that post-apartheid socio-cultural shifts have impacted black identity in relation to understandings of the self, and, in terms of black identity construction, there is a variation in the meaning of being Xhosa in contemporary South Africa.

The aims and objectives were formulated to guide the creation process of a series of works that explore representations of the obese body. The dissertation situates my overweight body as an axis for research, and my experiences of being a fat woman and related investigations of obesity are at the core. Although instigated by personal events, the artworks have much more social relevance. Such an approach conveys something of the individual, and I want my story to impact wider social discourse and debate. At the outset of this investigation, it is necessary to consider current scientific definitions and existing media views of obesity to discover and comment on matters much beyond myself.

1.4 THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is primarily situated within current feminist discourses on embodiment and the female thinness ideal. This study aims to convey Bordo's (1993:309) argument that female bodies are subjected to a never-ending pursuit of "an elusive ideal of femininity" – much premised on slenderness since it is the popularly accepted ideal - which ultimately creates docile female bodies. Theories of feminist scholars and authors on female transgressions, such as Sandra Bartky 1990, Susan Bordo 1993, Simone De Beauvoir 1997 and Griselda Pollock 2003, are used to guide the research. Feminist theories are applied in this study to describe the present condition of women and men, present ways of understanding, and prescribe methods to change these conditions towards the elimination of race, gender, and sexual hierarchies. Obese stereotipification and media perceptions of the Western ideals of women's thinness were studied and brought to praxis. This dissertation is accompanied by a catalogue presenting the exhibition that formed part of the research project (accessible in the link above). There is wide consultation on a variety of theories within this theoretical framework, such as the concept of post-black, stigmatisation and othering. These theories are analysed and applied to visual texts in order to review the changing views on identity and modernism within contemporary art. According to Featherstone (2010:194), there are several definitions of body image, which argue that the nature and structure of body image shift through the years and vary between cultures. He

states that this culture follows the logic of looking good – feeling good and sees this principle as an attitude anyone can have.

In addition to the above statement, it is worth noting that cultural norms start early in life and do not apply only to women (Goedecke and Jennings 2005). The impacts of social media on body image in women, more so in Xhosa women, are investigated, focusing on debates on whether social media promotes more positive images through showcasing a wider range of body types or has a more negative impact in encouraging the objectification of women's bodies. This study critically analyses and interprets notions of blackness, thus a valuable source on blackness and the investigation of race. In recent findings, the importance of related moderators that may influence the relationship between body dissatisfaction and positive body image has been identified. For example, Tiggemann and McCourt (2013) found that this association was weakened in older women than younger women, suggesting that younger women may be less likely to appreciate their bodies when confronted with experiences of body dissatisfaction.

The pre-college period has been framed as critical for black females regarding black female body image discourse among young ethnic minority women for whom the tolls of being overweight and obese are high (Webb, Warre-Findlow, Chou & Adams 2013). For example, body appreciation views of the physical self also incorporate internalising a supple alignment to a body that is represented by protecting the body by resisting the unrealistic images of beauty in the media, being responsible and responding to the needs of the body and protecting the body from unrealistic beauty images of the media (Avalos et al. 2005). Body appreciation serves as a moderator in the context of thin-ideal media internalisation and appearance in females exposed to magazines or advertisements of thin female models (Halliwell 2013).

1.5 ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AND METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out mainly qualitatively as it embraced a strong theoretical background and relied on interpretations and explanations of relevant theories and visual texts. Qualitative research methods provide thick,

rich and nuanced descriptions that aim to capture social actions as they occur (Greenstein, Roberts & Sitas 2003). The artworks of the mentioned artists convey and understand some of the black female embodiment. A number of artists have influenced my artistic journey, and they are mentioned below.

The painting style and curvaceous images were influenced by the Kenyan artist Richard Onyango, whose obsession and relationship with Drosie, a white, curvaceous woman, put together his fantasies. The artist, therefore, depicts the stereotypes and celebrates his fascination with wealth and poverty. A series of my paintings also emulate the doubt and uncertainty of my appearance, which also impacted my self-esteem. So, exaggeration is used to overstate the importance and seriousness. Laurie Toby Edison is another artist who has influenced some of the images in my works. She is an internationally exhibited American visual activist and photographer who, with her partner working on the “Women En Large” debut that was published in 1994, celebrated and fought the way fat women have been made to become invisible. This collection of photographs made fat acceptance with its trials of being fat women accessible to a wider audience. This then gave the platform and start of the conversation that clothes, not flesh, make fat people lessened.

Social media, at times, also contributes to superficial images of perfect people and how society deems the perfect bodies and faces, creating unrealistic standards, which in turn leads to low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, and I believe this needs to be stopped in one way or another. With my artworks, I aim to recommend to viewers on how to deal with social stereotypes affecting their well-being and confidence and how to take action in their own lives.

A photograph’s value lies mostly in its beauty rather than its scientific value (Sontag 2002). Therefore, it is better to make a photo than take a photo. Just like the battles many obese and overweight women go through on a daily basis, the field of photography had to fight a controversial battle in terms of being considered an art form. With performance, the body is the medium, and this has a relationship and creates communication with the audience and me because, being overweight, women are constantly watched and gazed at to

the extent of ridicule. In a narrow sense, a performance piece is related to postmodernist traditions in Western culture.

In an effort to reduce pejorative portrayals of persons with obesity in media reporting, my practical work provides a collection of paintings of myself that portray obesity in ways that are positive and non-stereotypical. These images help promote accurate coverage of obesity-related topics and challenge harmful weight-based stereotypes. Media content may have contributed to negative public attitudes toward obese people, and these photographic portrayals are accompanied by news and stories that affect these attitudes.

Visual content can strongly affect people's responses to written material, as the reader's focus is drawn to a picture first and can, therefore, frame message perception and interpretation beyond their level of awareness (Adil 2022). The visual practice demonstrates the pressure exerted on young black Xhosa women to conform to contemporary stereotypical body image standards. In addition, Simone Leigh's 2024, celebration of black femininity through her performances created a dialogue between past and present notions of beauty and cultural legacy. She was also influenced by Berry Cook's comical depiction of her artworks, which showed her enjoyment of creating the figurative style. Her work incorporates being a free spirit and fun while depicting her images. This alluded to the acceptance of my body image and how I have come to peace and love how I look.

1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in being able to use art forms as a catharsis to painful childhood trauma and to deal with past traumatic experiences to commence a healing journey. This is because repressed emotions are usually not processed and pushed into the subconscious. The type of culture that one is brought up in also has a great influence on our personality as well as behavioural patterns. Cultural expectations and societal norms immensely affect the way we deal with our feelings. Some trauma survivors have difficulty regulating emotions, and this is more so when trauma occurs at a young age (Van der Kolk, Roth, Pelkovits & Mandel 1993).

The art-making process created an outlet when words failed, and the healing process began. Gretchen Miller (2016), a therapist, writes, “Art safely gives voice to and makes a survivor’s experience of emotions, thoughts and memories visible when words are insufficient”. My journey through this study gave me the opportunity to work through past experiences I had ignored for a while and pretended did not exist, but, looking back, some choices were made based on those past events.

Rationality in this study is achieved by dismantling societal beauty norms and seeing myself as who I am, not as what people say I am. Other artists who have used different art forms, such as photography and painting, from other studies in the literature review and reflections were explored, using these art forms for therapeutic purposes. However, the main limitation of this study is that personal reflection on past experiences could be deemed biased due to subjectivity that may not be readily tested, as it relies on the researcher’s memory and how he/she views events. Be that as it may, however, the relevant literature review and the artistic influence do, in a way, make convincing and objective views.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter first presents various issues surrounding obesity and gender differences, the formation of stereotypes, and the embodiment of female thinness among Western and modern black females. Body image and ethnicity or cultural influence are presented along with the concepts of the female and male gaze in unpacking the issues surrounding the sexual objectification of the female body. Through the male gaze, while the women gaze is a return gaze confronting their viewers, and no longer passive, thus, taking control to reclaim their sexuality demystifying and reconstructing traditional male images about how women should be perceived. Thus, both the literature review and chosen theoretical concepts are presented to shed light on the various concerns and issues surrounding female stereotypes about obesity.

2.1 OBESITY AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

Sex describes the biological differences between people we call males and females; gender is the social meaning that is layered onto those differences (Ryle 2015: 6). This division leaves sex up to those interested in the social world. A child knows at an early age that there are boys and girls, but often does this mean watching people walk by, and do we use sex or gender to categorise them? (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). The physical criterion that is often used to sort people into sex categories is usually not visible, such as people's genitalia that is not exposed when walking down the street. We see the shapes of people's bodies and their faces.

If someone has facial hair, does that mean that person is a man? Some men do not have facial hair, and some women do. What about breasts? Does that mean that person is a woman, except that some men have breasts and some women don't? "Gender exists as something internal to people and individuals that then affects their participation and actions in the outside world" (Ryle 2015: 30). A sex role is then the set of expectations that are attached to the particular sex categories that society has of the person's status as a man or woman.

Society has long defined males and females by their physical attributes. Traditionally, the male is the provider and holds the power. The women are more submissive nurturers. Within South Africa, there is a specific atmosphere which reinforces traditional gender roles. Under Apartheid, the black male was emasculated (McKenzie 2011). The whites who enforced Apartheid were the males who held all the power within South Africa, therefore, black males did not fit into their specified gender roles. Their masculinity was stripped from them. After Apartheid, the black males started looking for ways to regain their power.

De Beauvoir (1949) asks, "If we admit provisionally that women do exist, then we must face the question: What is a woman?" The answer to this question, I think, is controversial because there is no universal essence of a female body that fits the cultural assumption about femininity. Women have always had to face the representation of their bodies in the larger social structure. The work of Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* from 1949, is part of a prominent debate within the feminist movement about the possession or lack of the alleged essence of being a woman. There is controversy and wariness over the use of the naked body for feminist aims. Cultural critic and theorist Janet Wolff expresses a similar wariness of "using the female body for feminist and highlights the bare body's "pre-existing meanings, as a sex object, as an object of the male gaze", which she maintains "can always prevail and re-appropriate the body, despite the intentions of the woman herself" (Gidal in Wolff 1990:121).

Valuable literature on the cultural formation of obesity includes Voracek and Fisher (2005), who argue that the determinants of female attractiveness seem to be based on physical characteristics such as body size, weight, skin colour, breast size and facial symmetry. Historically, it is believed that beautiful people have more advantages in life, such as marriage, social mobility and in the professional arena (Wolff 1991). These ideas about physical beauty are likely to permeate some societies. However, more pressure seems to be put on women to be attractive than on men because women are often judged more on their looks than on other personal aspects or qualities (Baron 2005).

For this reason, women may be affected by how they look and by the way they perceive themselves, including how they interact with other women's beauty, because "a woman's body image is at the core of who she is" (Baron 2005:363). Cultural perceptions of beauty can be seen in the conceptualisation of beauty as linked to different time periods in all societies (Greer 1999). In the 21st century, Western culture has permeated most societies, shaping their standards of living. By asking "What is a woman" or what is the true female body, one is asking about the politics, ideology and discourse behind the construction and representation of women and their bodies in the culture (Alsop et al. 2006).

2.2 FORMATION OF STEREOTYPES AND EFFECTS THEREOF

A stereotype is when we make a generalisation about the behaviour of a group and then assume that all members of that group will show that behaviour (Blakely & Champagne 2023). If someone says, "Women are good at cooking" or "men are better car mechanics", I might say these are stereotypes. This is wrong; thus, we need to understand what stereotyping is and what stereotypes are. Other theorists attend to different types of information when making judgements about individuals. Those entities tend to focus on the traits they believe an individual possesses and use those traits in making judgments about the individual with little regard for the situational constraints or motivational concerns that may affect behaviour (Levy & Dweck 1999). Incremental theorists, on the other hand, pay less attention to an individual's traits and pay more attention to counterstereotype information, and focus instead on the individual's psychological state and environmental context when forming impressions and making judgments (Levy & Dweck, 1999; Plaks, Stressner, Dweck & Sherman 2001).

Given these differences, individual entity theorists are more likely to endorse commonly held stereotypes about ethnic and occupational groups than individual incremental theorists (Levy et al. 1998). The perceptions about groups that lead to stereotyping of their members are different from the perceptions about individuals that lead to the application of stereotypes of the group to other group members. Stereotypes are often formed due to social

learning, which is information people learn from their parents and peers. Social identity theory says, “Our identity and behaviour are influenced by the groups we belong to” (Madison 2024). In society currently, there is body anxiety formed due to the “white young thin” ideal causing concern. Historical development and clothing evolution have created stereotypes of female social roles. In ancient Chinese society, women’s clothing was often infused with symbols for fertility, as that was a consideration of their societal role. Enoch, a self-publishing blogger, with a blog titled “Slightly fat, but not skinny”, preaches that women must choose what they like to wear rather than visually adjusting their body proportions to “looking skinny”. Most women, especially young women, are accepting of their physical appearance, changing their mindset and speaking out against appearance anxiety and stereotyping on social media. For example, under a post promoting the aesthetics of black skin, the number one favourite is “Now I love my black skin, and I’m super confident” (Red 2022).

Women are gradually accepting their real selves and becoming what they like rather than showing their anxiety by becoming white, thin and young. Women are also opposing the internalisation of men’s rules and regulations on women and no longer take pleasing other people’s aesthetics as their aesthetic tendency (Chen 2023). Body image stereotypes have changed over time, and often, these stereotypes are unduly applied to women from underrepresented groups (Madeline, Caleo & Manzi 2023)

In China, for instance, the strict standard for female appearance continues in today’s society, which can be observed from various perspectives. “Internet celebrity”, “small waist” (<https://www.atlantis-press.com>), “chopstick legs”, and “white, young and thin” have become popular on the Internet. People’s aesthetics tend to be similar and particular (Jung 2018:56-72). With the ideal stereotypes population, excessive dieting and exercising are destroying women’s bodies and minds, which is not detrimental to not only the female’s mentality but also their physical health (Tang 2021). As a representative stereotype, the slender waist in ancient China reflects females’ beauty in weakness (Tang 2021).

While this beauty standard was made by patriarchal culture, females' waists are deemed more important than their cheeks. As it can be seen in that period, the stereotypes about women's appearance were made by the man who owned the absolute power. In addition, women had no choice but to refuse the stereotypes about their appearance and abide by them.

In China, the word "slim" is always connected with the word "weak". A strict diet should be put into practice to pursue the fine waist (Jiang 2020). Although there is no record of the pain and disaster the stereotype brought to women in ancient China, Tao Lai's article "On the Relationship of Clothing Modelling and the Human Body", 2002, states that in the 13th century, the West emphasised the beauty of a female's slender waist. The medieval appeared in the mid-13th century. In the 16th century, the corset had a fixed shape and practice; the iron corset even appeared when it was invented in the 16th century (Tims 2021). During this time, a slender waist was encouraged, and women began to go on a diet since childhood, with wide clothes tightening their waist, breathless. The normal development of the body was influenced, making the waist 30-33 cm, catering to fashion ideals (<https://herhalfhistory.com>).

Because of these stereotypes, women are imprisoned. With the development of medical cosmetology, unlike women in ancient China, today's women can not only see their own image accurately but also use plastic surgery to make themselves closer to the stereotypes made by others. The words such as "no makeup is impolite" and "female stars should be white, young and thin" have become hot topics in the media. In addition, these negative topics create an atmosphere of "appearance first" (Ma 2014: 77-78). This bad atmosphere makes the problem of stereotypes about women's appearance worse and worse. As a result of this, it causes anxiety in women about their appearance. Smith and DeCoster (2000:111) suggest that stereotypes "lack propositional content", meaning that stereotypes cannot be described as implied beliefs or, as Schwitzgebel (2010) suggests, stereotypes as "in-between beliefs"). Instead, stereotypes would have to be thought of as mere associations. If this is correct, the relevant wrong will occur whether the stereotypes used to judge individuals are beliefs or mere associations.

A survey conducted by DOVE in 2004 titled *The Real Truth About Beauty*, where 6400 women between the ages of 18 and 64 participated, discovered that only 2% of women would describe themselves as beautiful (<https://www.dove.com>). In today's society, self-esteem affects body esteem, and unfortunately, this is having an emotional toll on women, especially young girls, who feel inadequate and often turn to severe behaviours in an attempt to change or manipulate their bodies in order to "fit into" an unrealistic standard of beauty (Alleva 2015). The vast majority want to change parts of their bodies, so much so that these women are trapped in a negative cycle of body hatred, leading to eating disorders. Some of these extreme body image disturbances include eating disorders, dysmorphic disorder and severe depression (Madeline, Caleo & Manzi 2023).

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD): This is a disorder of "imagined ugliness" described by the National Institute of Health as a severe psychiatric disorder or severe mental disorder where a person believes there is a flaw or defect in their body leading to distress and repetitive behaviours (Philips 2004:12-17). An individual with this disorder sees a grossly distorted view of what they actually look like in the mirror. Often, these individuals will spend hours examining, obsessing and attempting to conceal flaws. Some people actually spend exorbitant amounts on plastic surgery in an attempt to improve their bodies (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>).

Anorexia Nervosa: This disorder is characterised by an extreme fear of gaining weight, and these individuals perceive their bodies as larger or "fat" (Van Eeden, Van Hoeken 2021) even though they are grossly underweight. Medical treatment may be required to restore normal weight.

Bulimia Nervosa: Individuals with this disorder are also very dissatisfied with their bodies and have extreme concerns with body weight and shape (Van Eeden, Van Hoeken 2021). Although anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are defined as separate disorders in the Psychiatric Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5th Edition, they both fall into the category of disordered eating, driven

by an irrational fear of normal body weight and a desire for thinness, leading to body image distortion (<http://www.wdsm5.org>).

Depression: In many instances, individuals with depression often have distorted views of themselves and believe they are less attractive than they really are. Body image depression and eating disorders are highly correlated (Erguney Okumumus, Sertel Berk & Yucel 2019)

2.3 EMBODIMENT AND FEMALE THINNESS

Embodiment is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a tangible or visible form of an idea, quality or feeling” (<https://www.oed.com>). People learn about themselves and the world through their bodies, making the body the basis of self-expression and prejudice (Vaughn 2024). Theories of feminist scholars and authors are presented on female transgression and the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body (Papadaki, L. 2007).

The role of media influence is investigated in terms of dominant gendered discourses in order to establish the context of the “ideal woman” and demonstrate how dominant gendered discourses are socially constructed and shift over time. Chan (2022) describes female embodiment as a concept that describes a woman’s sense of self as influenced by the experiences her body has with the world, and these can be negative or positive, thus affecting her body image and identity. “Today, girls and women are surrounded by contemporary and historical images of bodies in the mass media and social media, including images of the maternal body, the vulnerable body, the victimised body, the hysterical body, the body with no desire of its own, the regulated body, the rebellious body, the thin body” (Bayer & Malone 1996:114). The media play a pivotal role in promoting the thin ideal, which has become a social norm. Thinness is mostly valued and followed by women who follow the Western standards of the ideal body size.

The phrase “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” implies that visual beauty is this mysterious thing, meaning that not all people have the same opinion.

However, we know that it all boils down to facial and body attractiveness. This may not be fair, but it is evident what society deems beautiful or physically attractive (Margaret 2024). This is also a common misconception that our ideas of beauty come from cultural influences such as magazines and movies. These beliefs are ingrained and “taught” by the images we see throughout our lives. Then how would one perceive attractiveness if their brain was scrubbed of all societal influences? (Wargo 2011), and this is why I strongly believe it is easy to feel beautiful once someone is happy and accepts their appearance.

2.3.1 Western Women versus Black Women Acceptable Body type

Although Western cultures limit the body as private and allocate different amounts of personal space around it to form restrictions on individuals and others, Merleau-Ponty (1962) insisted that the body is never isolated from the world but is rather engaged in and touched by others. The body is seen and assessed, and others react to it. Assessments of bodies are “marked by assumptions made about their gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ‘natural’ abilities” (Weiss 1996:2). Women have a multifaceted relationship to their bodies, which should be a source of pleasure (Pujols, Meston & Seal 2010). Practising positive female embodiment allows a woman to reclaim her body and empowers her sense of self, living life without any pressures of social influences.

A woman's relationship with her body is experienced from the inside and is known, felt and lived through her experiences. At the same time, the relationship of a woman's body is shaped by societal and cultural influences around her, evident in the media and relationships. How one expresses and experiences her physicality may also tell a story about her social relationships and experiences with her own body. In fact, Hepworth (1999:61) believes placing women next to desirable objects in advertising meant women were also marketed as “objects of desire”, and this practice “encouraged a culture of self-evaluation in terms of physical appearance”. Some of these relationships and experiences, if unhealthy and negative, may lead to eating disorders being symptoms of cultural values about their bodies. Tsiantas &

King (2001:153-154) found that young females' "preference for thinness increased as self-evaluation of appearance became more negative".

As a society and culture, we are obsessed with size, and this has become connected to our identity as people, so much so that this obsession fuels societal pressures to appear and have certain body types, more especially in young women, which has changed over time. The "Venus of Willendorf" figurines, dating to about 25,000 BC, are considered masterpieces of the Palaeolithic era (Weber 2022). Some historians believe that the 4-inch statuette represents the idealised female beauty of the time, portraying round, pear-shaped women's bodies (Howard 2018). In ancient Greece, the goddess of sexual love and beauty, Aphrodite, was often portrayed with curves (Hughes 2019). Many artists continued to portray the "ideal" woman as curvy and voluptuous through the 17th and 18th centuries.



Figure 2.1: Khan Academy, Venus of Willendorf, 25000 BC

In the 17th century, the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (2023) was responsible for the term "Rubenesque", meaning plump or rounded, as he often depicted women with curvy body types. To achieve this, the corset

became a popular undergarment among women in the Western world from the late Renaissance into the 20th century. This garment helped accentuate a woman's curves by holding her waist and supporting her bosom. There was an emphasis on under-structure to shape the body.



Figure. 2.2: Andrea Schewe Design: Corset History, 1500-1900



Figure.2.3: Hagen History Center, Woman's corset figured silk, France, (1730 – 17

Whether it be hooped, caged, or padded, understructures were worn around the lower body to create a specific volume. Images of tall, slim-waisted yet voluptuous women were drawn by the American artist Charles Dana Gibson

in the 1980s for magazines, and these depictions of the new ideal were referred to as the “Gibson Girl”. Going into the 20th century, the portrayal of women’s bodies in art was constantly evolving, shifting towards an increasingly athletic and slender kind of body (Rockwell 2020).

The corset was a key underpinning of female attire in the Victorian era; the majority of middle-class women and large numbers of working-class women wore corsets on a regular basis. Clinching in the waist but remaining desirably plump in other areas of the body, it was a vital creation of the ideal feminine shape (Howard 2018). However, wearing the corset raised questions about the role and implications of this piece of underwear. It could be seen as a garment of conflicting morals. On the one hand, it created the fashionable silhouette that marked out the wearer as a delicate, feminine creature.

On the other hand, the lady who did not wear the corset was often tarred with charges of ‘sexual promiscuity or moral laxity – leading to the term loose morals, referring to their lack of corset (Bayles Kortsch 2009). The pressure that the diaphragm and chest underwent due to the shape of the corset created the feminine sexuality described in novels (Gibson 2015). A slender waist suggests that the woman has not borne children yet, implying virginity and pureness. The corset remained popular and widely accepted in Victorian society.

The thin ideal is the concept of the slim female body (Brown, Low, Jones 2003:81-89). The common perception of this idea is of a woman with a slender physique, a small waist, and little body fat. The size of the thin ideal woman is decreasing while the rate of female obesity is increasing, making this ideal difficult for women to maintain (Pinhas & Brenda 1998:223-226). A gap is created between the actual appearance, which depends on the extent to which a woman internalises the necessity of living up to this ideal. Ahern 2008 wrote an article titled Internalisation of the Ultra-Thin Ideal: Positive Implicit Association with Underweight Fashion Models is Associated with Drive for Thinness in Young Women, “ which highlights these ideals.

2.4 BODY IMAGE AND ETHNICITY

“Different ethnic groups will have different sets of beauty standards and cultural expectations...”.(UKMHF 2022). Generally, differences between people with different ethnic backgrounds in levels of body dissatisfaction are small, and there appear to be more similarities between people from various ethnic backgrounds rather than differences. These expectations could stem from many years of tradition or other deeply held beliefs.

Influences will change depending on the strongest push or pull as we get older or move to different areas. Yam (2013), saw Black women who identify with Black culture initially having a higher appreciation for curvier bodies. However, as they spent more time exposed to Western culture, their concept of the ‘ideal’ body became thinner. Cultural norms and expectations significantly influence individual body image perceptions and their association with mental health outcomes (Johson and Wardie 2005; Croghan et al. 2006). Abdoli suggest that Asian American men and women tend to have lower body satisfaction than their white American counterparts (Abdoli 2024)

2.5 THE FEMALE AND MALE GAZE

The dictionaries, in general, define gaze as “to look steadily or intently”, “to look with curiosity, wonder etc.”, “a fixed look”, and “the object gaze at” (Chambere 519; Macmillan 308). Hawthorn (2017) differentiates the gaze as forms of “literal and metaphysical looking”. In the article “Theories of Gaze”, Hawthorn (2017) asserts that the theories of the gaze may have originated from a range of theories that can, however, be applied and developed in a number of different bodies of theory. He also points out that feminism can gain immensely from theories of the gaze, as both the literal and metaphorical gaze may be associated with different gender roles. In any situation, men look, and women are looked at. The looker assumes the superior stance, exhibits control and power and can easily disempower the “looked at”. The gaze, he asserts, can both be the “product of patriarchy” (the power exercised by men over women) and also a way of dominance; this particularly relates to the woman as a spectacle (Hawthorn, 2017).

2.5.1 The Female Gaze

The 'Female gaze' has many dimensions and importance within sexual objectification. One can say that the 'female gaze' is women merely mimicking men. She takes on the masculine role of sexually objectifying women and comparing them to each other in this act. Mulvey (1989) also summarises that the female gaze reinforces and accepts how men view women (Jacobson 1999:8). Another dimension is that while a woman is being sexually objectified, she returns the gaze, participating in displaying herself. Mulvey also discusses different types of spectatorship that occur while viewing a film. She adds that film involves unconsciously or semi-consciously engaging with typical societal roles for men. Further, she states that there are three 'looks', the first one refers to the camera as it records the actual events of the film, the second 'look' describes the sexual act of the audience as one engages in watching the film, and lastly, the third 'look' refers to the characters that interact with one another throughout the film. All of these are brought together by the idea that looking is generally seen as an active male role, while the passive role of being looked at is associated with women. This means that she is now confronting her viewer, no longer passive, and taking some control; this is like the behaviour of men. Bower (1990:218) posits that the only way for women to reclaim their sexuality through the 'female gaze' is by acting, and in this, women will see themselves with clarity, which will "reconstruct traditional male images of women".

On the other hand, the 'female gaze' seems to threaten the powers of patriarchy; this anxiety has been described as 'castration anxiety'. When the female returns the gaze, the male spectator feels vulnerable and as if she might take his power away (Goddard 2000:30). He further states that men fear losing control over women and being rejected by them, and, in turn, this reflects their self-worth. Women's self-worth is measured by men; the 'female gaze' still subscribes to the beauty standards created by men. Goddard (2000:30) goes on to elaborate on the 'gaze', stating that "object and subject of the gaze are in a binary relationship – to some extent even depend on each other for their identity". Therefore, he adds that no gaze is "a gaze in isolation,

and every gaze is as much a gaze at itself as it is a gaze at another” (Goddard 2000:31).

Berger (1977:9) stresses in his book “Ways of Seeing” that when we look at images, it is always related to ourselves, “soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world” (Berger 1977:9). Berger (1977:9) further argues that women are represented sexually differently to men, not because of their gender; it is implicit that the target audience is to please men. He proposes that all female nudes be substituted with male ones and “notice the violence that transformation does” (Berger 1977: 64). He explains another part of the “female gaze” where women harshly judge themselves when looking at other women. He states that the “image steals her love of herself as it is offered back to her for the price of the product”.

Looking at analyses of the male and female “gaze” through the lens of race reveals that race was not considered at all. Mulvey and Berger’s (1975) research assumes the women spectator and women objectified are white. Hooks (1992:123) describes ‘the gaze’ for black women as ‘the oppositional gaze’. Within this explanation, the socially constructed standard of beauty dictated by the West must be considered. Hooks criticises Mulvey’s Feminist film theory saying that it is “rooted in a historical psychoanalytic framework that privileges sexual difference and actively suppresses recognition of race...” (Hooks 1992:123). Hooks describes ‘oppositional gaze’ as the negation of the black female in cinema and television and the misrepresentation calling it “violating representation”. She goes as far as saying that when a black woman watches television, she transforms into a white woman spectator; however, she then finds it difficult to come back to her reality for many reasons (Hooks 1992:121).

2.5.2 The Male Gaze

The male gaze describes a way of portraying and looking at women that empowers men while sexualising and diminishing women. The male gaze

was first popularised in relation to the depiction of female characters in film as inactive, often overtly sexualised objects of male desire (Vanbuskirk 2024). Naturally, the influence of the male gaze seeps into female self-perception and self-esteem. It is as much about the impact of seeing other women relegated to these supporting roles as it is about the way women are conditioned to fill them in real life (Vanbuskirk 2024). The pressure to conform to this patriarchal view and endure being seen in this way shapes how women think about their own bodies, capabilities, their place in the world and with other women. Essentially, the male gaze sees the female body as something for the heterosexual male to watch, conquer, and possess and use to further their goals (Vanbuskirk 2024)

The male gaze also dictates specific characteristics of men and may even contribute to the stereotype that men are more intelligent than women. The argument is that the male gaze controls the narrative, which portrays women as unequal in the world (Marcia 2019). Instead, their work is reduced to that of an erotic or supporting object, with their value as a female form reduced to how it appeals to the male viewer. To get a sense of the full ramifications of the male gaze, it is vital to recognise how the representations of women in film and various other forms of media filter out from movies, magazine layouts and pinup images to inform how women are viewed by society at large.

2.6 OBJECTIFICATION OF THE FEMALE BODY

Objectification is a notion central to feminist theory. It can be defined as seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object (Nussbaum, 1995:257). Many feminists have pointed out that women in our society are more identified and associated with their bodies than men. They are valued for how they look (Bartky 1990; Bordo 1993: 143). In order to gain social acceptability, women are under constant pressure to correct their bodies and appearance more generally and to make them conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of their time, the so-called 'norms of feminine appearance' (the standards of appearance women feel they should be living up to) (Saul 2003:144). According to Susan Bordo, a male-dominated

capitalist world dictates to women what to wear and what to eat, and women try to lose weight to be in the form men prefer (Bordo 1993).

Bartky believes that women in patriarchal societies also undergo a kind of fragmentation “by being too closely identified with their body...with the body, a thing which...has been regarded as less inherently human than the mind or personality” (Bartky 1990:130). Objectification becomes especially harmful if women internalise these judgements and self-objectify (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997:173-206). The way advertising portrays women and girls has become more and more sexualised over time (Gearhart 2022). Sexualisation and objectification cause society to view women as less capable and less intelligent, and it makes men more tolerant of sexual harassment and violence (Seabrook 2018).



Figure 2.4: NATAN, Pireli Calendar, (2010)

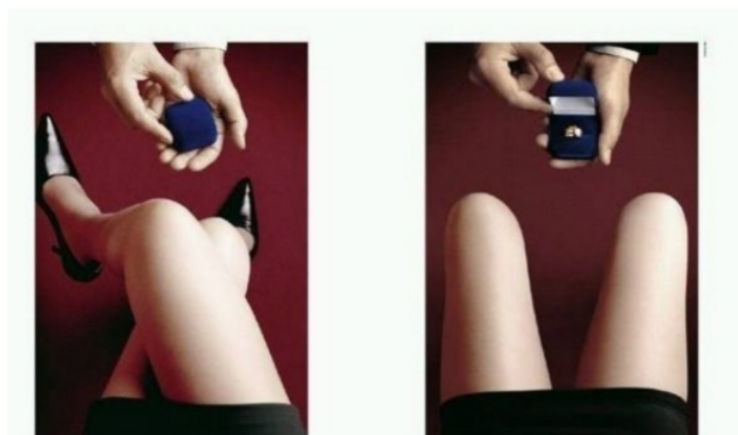


Figure 2.5: Natan engagement ring advert (2000)

The advert in Figure 2.4 of an engagement ring shows a woman sitting with her legs crossed, but once she is proposed to, her legs are shown open. This image conveys the message that buying this wedding ring will make your woman turn from a prude to a promiscuous one. However, one can simply argue with this because the statement is judgmental. There is no guarantee that once one is in a marital relationship, one will or won't accept gifts from

others. Among American couples, 20 to 40 per cent of heterosexual married men and 10 to 25 per cent of heterosexual married women will have an affair during their lifetime (Marano 2012). This encourages people to view women as objects while also creating unrealistic ideals of female attractiveness and increasing body dissatisfaction. We need to see more women in advertisements – but not like this. Women are more likely than men to be shown wearing revealing clothes or simulating sex acts, being dominated or portrayed as objects or animals. Women's bodies are digitally altered to remove blemishes, reduce waist and hips, lengthen legs and increase bust size.

The feminist group The Guerrilla Girls, whose work is committed to fighting sexism in the art world, stated, "We undermine the idea of mainstream narrative by revealing the understory, the subtext, the overlooked and the downright unfair" (The Art of Behaving Badly, 2021, ARTSpeak 2018). In their work 'The Male Graze', this group emphasise the fact that Western art is and has been obsessed with female bodies, sex and violence.



Figure 2.6: Jean-Léon Gérôme, A Roman Slave Market, (1884)

That is to say, it is the heterosexual point of view on women and society that represents females as sexual objects.



Figure 2.7: Paul Gauguin, *The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch*, (1892)



Figure 2.8: Jeff Koons, *Woman Reclining*, (2010-2014)



Figure 2.9: Edouard Manet, Luncheon on the Grass, (1862-63)

Even today, we are constantly exposed to naked female bodies, even though women are trying to reappropriate the narrative on their bodies. Still, the overwhelming majority of female body depictions, especially on social media, are perpetrated by men who hypersexualise these images. Objectification theorists suggest that the experience and observation of sexual objectification acculturates women and men to internalise an objectified view of the self. This view involves adopting a third-person perspective of the body and is manifested by chronic attention to one's physical appearance, which is self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997; McKinley & Hyde 1996). Sexually objectifying experiences are not exclusively sexual in nature but also include the societal pressure to create, present, maintain, and always improve an attractive appearance (i.e., the thin ideal for women; the muscular ideal for men (Moradi 2010 & 2011; Zubriggen 2013).

CHAPTER THREE: ARTISTIC INFLUENCE AND METHODOLOGY

Various artists relevant to this research project's theme have influenced the artworks and performances presented in the exhibition titled "Ndityebe Ndinje, Ndiyazithanda Futhi Ndizamnkeleee". Artworks by Laurie Toby Edison, Jodi Bieber, Richard Onyango, Johannes Phokela, and Jenny Saville were explored and inspired the practical work produced in this study. The investigation of their subject matter, material, and the style with which they present their messages to the world is explored. My stop-frame animation was inspired by the tiresome exercise of going to different clothing outlets and trying on different-sized garments to purchase. Not many stores cater for plus-size women, which ultimately caused me to have a 'fattitude' each time the need arose. Familiarising myself with the art industry, I have appreciated how these artists have used their media of choice to celebrate and promote the curvaceous bodies of females, making them acceptable and beautiful in society.

3.1 ART CREATION PROCESS

The exhibition titled "Ndityebe Ndinje, Ndiyazithanda Futhi Ndizamnkeleee", which loosely translates to "I love and accept my fat body", or Obese as I am, but I love myself and am at peace with my body!!!". On social media, there is a corroboration of exaggerated body consciousness and an overemphasis on slimness as a criterion for beauty. My exhibition was, therefore, a deconstruction of beauty in reference to Xhosa women and the contradicting stereotypes of Western culture.

This exhibition interrogated female obesity, referencing contradicting Xhosa and Western cultural stereotypes and their impact on modern females. It highlighted the impact that social media has and its contribution to obesity on modern young women's self-image and confidence. Modern black females find themselves in continuous disorder as self-acceptance of their bodies is sometimes influenced by the various environments they interact with. Peer pressure, especially on social media, thrives on categorising people as a way of disguising either an inferiority or a superiority complex, while damaging others' self-images. Body shaming of any kind is universal and sometimes is

perpetuated through socially and culturally accepted stereotypes. However, it causes long lasting damage and even results in suicidal acts among some victims, especially teenagers.

3.1.1 Inspiration Behind My Exhibition

As a young girl, I was chubby and had been unhappy with my weight since my early primary school days. As a teenager, I hated going shopping for clothes because I often could not find stylish options in my age section, and there were times when I felt ignored, ridiculed, and less important to my peers. I hated how my thighs rubbed together, causing “imbhiza”, the black mark on the inside of the thighs caused by friction and rubbing together of the thighs. It made me sad and angry that I could never feel comfortable wearing shorts or crop tops. In addition, my family was also concerned about my weight, and as a result, I started consuming more food as a measure of rebellion. My family’s opinions about my body negatively affected my sense of self since chubbiness was equated with laziness and thinness with youthful vitality. Although I later changed my outlook in my young adulthood, this experience had a lasting impact on me; hence, obesity among young women became the focus of this study.

This study was also inspired by the empowering and inclusive shift in body image standards. I agree that women are all beautiful, and regardless of their weight, they should be appreciated (Radebe 2016). The slight rise of plus-size modelling has challenged the traditional notion of beauty and opened up new opportunities for individuals of all sizes to embrace their natural curves. It is also thanks to the growing online shopping where plus size ranges are becoming more accessible, and some retail shops are establishing divisions for plus size women. The movie titled “Phat Girls”, released in 2006, also played an important role in creating my artwork. This movie, directed by Nnegest Likké, is a comedy that tells the story of two obese women, one of whom is played by the actress Mo’Nique, who meet the men of their dreams in the most unexpected way. It inspired me in the sense that in everyday life, people put themselves down trying to keep up with beauty norms because of

what they see and how others think they should look or feel. Watching the movie helped with my self-esteem since I've been fat all my life.



Figure 3.1: The photographs on the movie cover (2006).

“Phat” is a slang word used in place of the word fat, which many find offensive, with its meaning being highly attractive or gratifying, turning what is degrading to most to a compliment. Its first known use was in 1963 (New York Times 1998). Another film that caught my attention was the movie titled “Real Women Have Curves”. The film is a coming-of-age story with the main conflict between mother and daughter. They do not get along because of their age and traditional differences. The mother is too old-fashioned and wants the daughter to graduate high school, lose weight, join the family business of dressmaking and find a husband.

The movie sends a message that young women should be allowed to be educated and should also be proud of their education, that young ladies do not need men to define and provide for them. Contrary to what the daughter believes, the mother justifies her behaviour of not wanting the daughter to go to college by saying she does not want her family to be split up. Also, she says, “Men don’t like smart women. Then, she finally tells the daughter that she is not pretty and should lose weight for a man to like her.

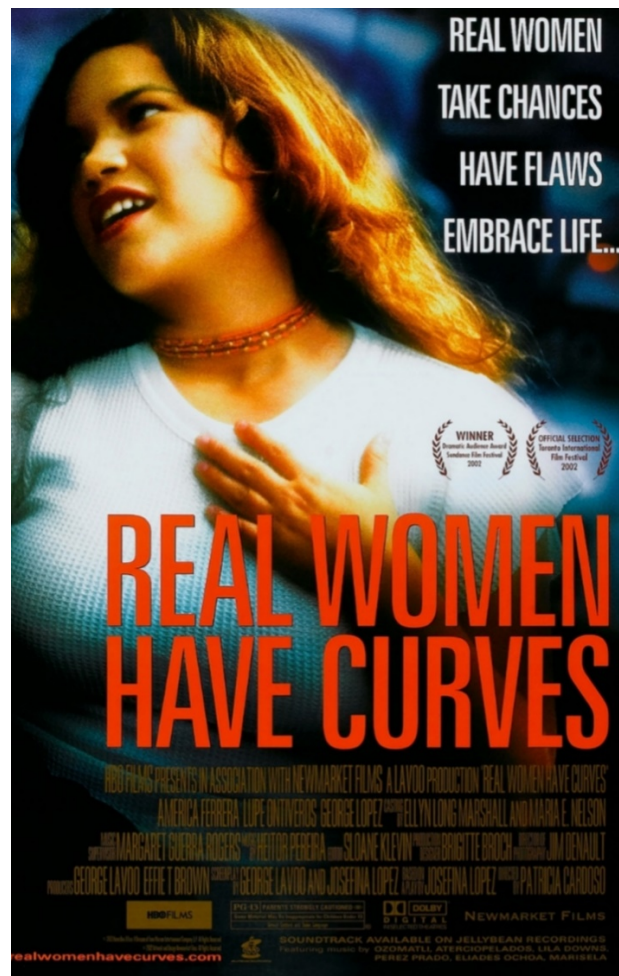


Figure 3.2: Theatrical release poster (2002).

A mother-and-daughter bond is undoubtedly one of the most complex and powerful relationships. While a mother's role is setting rules and boundaries and guiding and mentoring their children, daughters can be challenging. This is a notion and idea that most mothers and daughters would appreciate. A daughter's self-esteem is based on how she is seen through her mother's eyes (Relatsh 2017:820-836). I believe this means that daughters value themselves based on how they believe their mothers value them. This is the very issue that I didn't have the most favourable relationship with a family member because of how I thought and felt she saw me. Meta-accuracy reflects the degree to which a person accurately assesses how others see him or her (Kenny & DePaulo 1993).

3.2 JENNY SAVILLE

There is a thing about beauty. Beauty is always associated with the male fantasy of what the body is. I don't think there is anything wrong with beauty, it's just what women think is beautiful can be different. And there can be individualism. If there is a wart or a scar, this can be beautiful, in a sense, when you paint it (Jenny Saville 2016)

Jenny Saville was born in Cambridge, England in 1970. She attended the Glasgow School of Art from 1988 to 1992. "Imperfections" of the flesh were the focus of her studies, including all their societal inferences and restrictions. Time spent with a surgeon fuelled her interest in the infinite ways that flesh is transformed and disfigured. She viewed cadavers in morgues, examined meat and animals, and studied and observed classical and Renaissance sculpture. She is a multidisciplinary artist, best known for creating large installations from black stencil silhouettes that reference the profile of the Victorian bustle and slavery, as well as paintings of large, fleshy women, often featuring images of herself. Her work is provocative, depicting misogyny, fornication, and re-enactments of violence during slavery (Davis 1994). It is not surprising that her largest sculpture to date exemplifies all the issues mentioned above and more (Figures 3.3 and 3.5).

Jenny Saville's most popular work was created in 1992 as an oil on canvas. In this large self-portrait, one can often clearly see the various flaws and imperfections in the female figure. Remarkably, the painting entitled *Propped* made history when it was auctioned at Sotheby's in 2018. It was sold for about \$ 12.4 million, making it the most expensive work ever sold by a living female artist at auction (Yichen 2023). But there are still some issues to think about. Is the artwork beautiful? Why do some people show revulsion? Why does the artist incorporate her own body into the artwork? How does the picture question and reject normative notions of gender and aesthetics? (Yichen 2023). This painting (figure 3.3) critically examines the aesthetics of the female body image through its unique depiction of the woman's body, thereby challenging the male gaze and reshaping the female narrative in art history.

"If we continue to speak in this sameness, speak as men have spoken for centuries, we will fail each other. Again, words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear" (Irigaray Burke 1980). The artist does not want to present an ideal female image to the outside world as most artists do; instead, she draws fat and faulty bodies to show the rough and true sides of the female body. Again, the work has a unique painting perspective. Saville put an obese woman "...painted from a photograph through a fish eye lens..." and became even more obese, causing exaggerated perspective shortening of the knees and hands (<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/art-she-ain-t-heavy-she-s-my-sister-andrew-grahamdixon-reviews-jenny-saville-at-the-saatc-hi-1392776.html>).



Figure 3.3: Saville, Jenny. Propped. (1992)

The male gaze, in short, is the view of women in the media from the eyes of heterosexual men. As Laura Mulvey asserts, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and

passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 1989: 14-26). The male gaze was prevalent in Renaissance artworks, such as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1485) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), which idealised and deified their models and claimed to capture the perfection of the woman's flesh (Meyers 2009:155-174).



Figure 3.4: Sandro Botticelli The Birth of Venus. (1485 - 1486)

The artwork *Propped* was heavily criticised when it was released, with some viewers and scholars claiming that it scandalised the female body and that the artist's representation of flesh made them feel uncomfortable or disgusted.

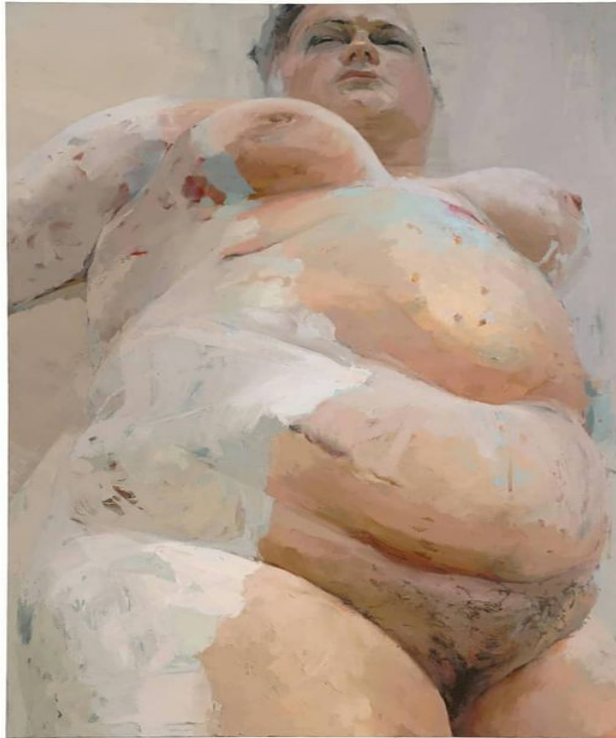


Figure 3.5: Jenny Saville, *Hem* (1999).

This, then, should make us wonder why the image of obese women arouses loathing in some people. This artwork challenged the dual aesthetic system of the thin or perfect woman image as beautiful and the fat and flawed female figure as dreadful, expanding the form of the female nude in art and questioning and destroying preconceived paradigms of female beauty.

3.3 LAURIE TOBY EDISON

Laurie Toby Edison was born on March 5, 1942; she is an internationally exhibited fine art photographer and visual activist. In 1994, Edison with Debbie Notkin, published *Women En Large: Images of Fat Nudes*. Publishing this book and working on this project embedded them deeply in the fat activist community. Fat activism is unique among the uprisings and increased awareness of the 1960s and 1970s. Specific policing of the size of women's bodies is as old as male supremacy, and her photography started out as social justice work.



Figure 3.6: Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. *Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes* (1994).

The representation of fatness and fat people is a concrete and symbolic step towards fat liberation. The artist challenges the idea of fatness as problematic and fat bodies as unsightly and unworthy of being seen in contemporary Western culture. She also reconfigures the visual culture of fat female bodies in sensual and joyful and, above all, innovative ways that push viewers from multiple points to think critically about social constructions of the fat body.

I believe these images also expose the ways in which fat people, in particular fat women, are made visible and acceptable. The term “fatphobic” is used widely in the field of fat studies to describe narratives that focus primarily on the fear of fat, the fear of staying fat, the fear of getting fat, and the fear of not striving to be thin. One woman who appears in this book is Lani Ka’ahumanu with the poem next to her picture, uses a map as her guiding metaphor where she says, “All imperfections imposed, I claim the unique, distinctive marking,

marking them perfect in the showing, my body is a map of my life, it is a patchwork quilt that is warm, soft and strong” (Edison Notkins 1994)

Debbie concurs and says “One of the reasons I share pictures of myself is that I want to grow up publicly. The phrase “grow up” is more often used to describe children moving into adolescence and then adulthood. What if growing up continues and we think of it as creating the map we need rather than following the maps of others”. Most of the work in this book is works by different photographers that represent various personal projects that overlap with the image of the large female body (Edison, Notkins 1994). These women have turned around society's discomfort with large bodies.





Figure 3.7: Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. *Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes* (1994).





Figure 3.8: Laurie Toby Edison & Debbie Notkin. Women En Large: Images of fat Nudes (1994).

These extraordinary photographs of fat women exuded power and beauty through them and changed my image of beauty. These combined pictures and text send a message of not caring or letting society define or dictate beauty. These are beautiful images of real, unashamed fat women who are a testimony to some and might frighten some and even anger others or make them uncomfortable. It also stands as the embodiment of embracing your body exactly as it is.

3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

The researcher, in this method conducts the digital fieldwork through their own personal experiences. This is similar to concepts of both phenomenology and autoethnography because the researcher reflects on her lived experiences and includes elements from her autobiography in the information gathered and

used. According to Lester (1999:1), Phenomenology is “based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasises the importance of personal perspective and interpretation”. Thus, phenomenological research approaches serve as powerful methods for “understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom” (Lester 1999:1).

Autoethnography, on the other hand and as a method of analysis, is an observational, data-driven and phenomenological approach to narrative research and writing, with the goal of providing accounts of human social and cultural life that are gripping, striking, and evocative and that exhibit or arouse strong emotions, memories, or images (Poulos 2021:5). In addition, autoethnography has a critical component of apprehending the researcher’s perspective in data gathering at the period in which it is gathered about arbitrated digital interactions. It entails research that tells of a narrative in ways that reveal its social and cultural worth. These narratives use suggestive language to engage the reader. They tend to be written by the researcher looking back at their life as if disadvantaged, abused or discriminated against in some way and fuelled by the outrage sublimated into social action (Johnes 2021: 30). The narratives seek to find and communicate social structures that underlie the researcher’s experience with a view towards changing those conditions through social action (Johnes 2021: 30).

My study enquires into the experience of body image and shaming by family, society and the influences of a woman's ideal body portrayed in social media. Autoethnography attempts to re-centre the researcher’s experience as vital to their research process and involves the researcher crafting creative narratives shaped out of their personal experiences within a culture (Poulos 2021: 5). I use autoethnography as a method of interpretation and analysis to write pensively about my direct experience with the dissatisfaction of my weight, the healing and acceptance journey. Writing from memory, I also drew narrative approaches from social and cultural phenomena from a singular first-person

voice. Researchers draw from their personal experiences to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences (Poulos 202: 4).

Autoethnographic researchers acknowledge and value the researcher's relationships with others and use careful and engaged self-reflections, referred to as reflexivity, to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, as well as the personal and the political (Poulos 202: 4). Autoethnography is an observational, data-driven phenomenological approach of narrative research and writing, with the goal to providing accounts of human social and cultural life that are gripping, striking, and evocative and that exhibit or evoke strong emotions, memories, or images (Poulos 2021: 5).

Practice-led and based research is a fairly provisional term for classifying this recent form of research in art and design, which can be conducted by a practitioner-researcher (Biggs 2002; Frayling et al. 1997). As a practitioner-researcher belonging to the art, design, and research community, I would rather define this form of research in a broad sense as an impressive engagement with artistic production and experience (Nimkulrat, 2007: 3). The continuum of experience has to be approached in a thoroughly interpretive way. In practice-based research, the experience looks at experience and thereby produces new experience (Hannula et al. 2005: 44). After the creative process ends and the artefacts eventually get displayed in an exhibition, the practitioner-researcher plays the researcher's role and looks back at the preceding artistic process (Nimkulrat 2007: 4).

CHAPTER FOUR: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF OBESITY AND THE EFFECTS OF BODY SHAMING

Obesity and overweight are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. A body mass index (BMI) over 25 is considered overweight, and over 30 is obese (WHO 2019). BMI is an approximate measure of whether someone is underweight or overweight by comparing weight to height and is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the square of their height in metres (e.g. 70kg weight and 1.7m height ($1.7 \times 1.7 = 2.89$) = $70 \div 2.89 = 24.22$. (WHO 2019). In 2019, an estimated five million noncommunicable disease (NCD) deaths in the world were caused by higher than optimal BMI. Rates of overweight and obesity continue to grow in adults and children. From 1990 to 2022, the percentage of children and adolescents aged 5-19 years living with obesity increased fourfold from 2% to 8% globally, while the percentage of adults 18 years of age and older living with obesity more than doubled from 7% to 16% (WHO 2024).

The social influence and representation of a woman's ideal body can lead to body shaming. Being a growing pandemic, body shaming has become a rising fevered pitch in recent years alongside social media (Martinez et al. 2019). Within the current culture, photographs and advertisements of perfectly shaped and airbrushed bodies plaster our cities and areas, setting an unrealistic stigma for perfection. There is an overwhelmingly negative attitude when it comes to individuals who live in larger bodies (Rammutla 2024). Weight stigma and discrimination is a serious problem.

We live in a culture that places enormous value on thinness and physical beauty. Pop culture perpetuates this perceived importance by limiting the images we see to only those including individuals who match society's high, often unattainable, expectations for physical appearance (Loth 2024).

Shame can cause severance of body image, low self-esteem and feelings of guilt (Franzoni et al. 2013), which are some of the emotions I felt while going through this turmoil. Being a victim of body shaming, I became unhappy with

who I was, had low self-esteem, feelings of anger, sadness and anxiety. This chapter presents issues associated with obesity and the effects of body shaming on modern girls and young females. It also interrogates the intercultural dynamics of obesity along with culturally accepted stereotypes.

4.1 THE EFFECTS OF OBESITY AND BODY SHAMING ON MODERN GIRLS AND FEMALES

In our society, body shaming is rife and mostly associated with being lazy and lacking willpower. Villines 2024 states that fat shaming is the act of making a person feel ashamed, inferior, anxious, or guilty about their body shape or size (Villines 2024). My exhibition featured a series of 8 A3 paintings entitled “Sdudla Mafehlefehle”, which translates to “THE FAT ONE” or “FATSO” or “FATTY BOOM-BOOM”. This series depicts exaggerated, distorted and deformed obese images of my body. This series depicts and was influenced by the emotional turmoil I felt growing up. This was a period in my life where I was struggling with my body image and concurrently fuelled by the disgust and sense of rejection I felt, leading to a sense of unattractiveness, low self-esteem and self-awareness. Due to my weight, I isolated myself from some family events and friend outings, which led to loneliness. The discrimination affected my confidence and mental health. I developed a mechanism of coping with my body image by having a meaner come back to anyone who had something to say about my weight. Food became my sanctuary, causing me to overeat. There were times when I felt so isolated because of the stares at times and comments.

This was a period in my life where I was struggling with my body image and concurrently fuelled by the disgust and sense of rejection I felt, leading to a sense of unattractiveness, low self-esteem and self-awareness. It represents a time when I hated shopping for clothes because of the fear of not finding stylish clothes appropriate for my age group and thus had to opt for older clothing styles. These were times when I felt ignored, ridiculed and less important to my peers. It made me feel sad and angry that I could not feel comfortable in my own skin; hence, I started consuming more food as a measure of rebellion. The eight images under the first series are exaggerated

and ridiculed images of myself that represent the strong feeling of turmoil I felt during this time. I appear with exaggerated breasts, stomach and buttocks and sometimes like a dwarf.

This series also depicts the self-doubt and uncertainty about my appearance, which also impacted my self-esteem. So, exaggeration is used to overstate the importance and seriousness of that period. This gave the platform and start of the conversation that clothes, not flesh, make fat people lessened.



Figure 4.1: Nangamso Tshangana, *Sdudla mafehlefehleh* series, 2024

At times, we are never satisfied with how we look and want our bodies to look differently, and seeing images on social media that perpetuate the ideal image of a woman exacerbates these emotions. I wanted to look like other girls who were of the same age as me and wear what they wore, but because I looked differently from them, this was not possible, causing self-doubt and insecurities.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, body shaming is the act or practice of humiliating a person based on their body type by making critical and mocking statements about their body shape and size. ANAD (2020) defined body shaming as the action or practice of expressing humiliation about another individual's body shape or size, which is also a form of bullying that can result in severe emotional trauma, especially at a young age. Body shaming can

create a dangerous cycle full of hatred and criticism. Criticising another person's appearance is not the only way to body shaming. Criticising one's own appearance by comparing with other people is also considered body shaming (Vargas 2019).

Research has also shown that the use of Instagram is linked to a variety of body image concerns, including body dissatisfaction and self-objectification (Feltman 2018). This issue is not very healthy for the community. It is very important to society that body shaming on social media can have negative effects on the victims, both physically and mentally. Body shame can occur in three main ways: criticising yourself, criticising someone else in front of them, and criticising someone else behind their back (Mukwamu, 2019).



Figure 4.2: body shaming incident extracted from an Instagram page

Figure 4.2 is an example of some negative comments about someone's body or body shaming someone taken from an Instagram page. Even though this individual did not entertain these insults and issued a subtle clapback at anyone who dared to body shame her, not everyone can clap back. These derogative statements negatively affect victims in different ways.

Women are primarily chastised or mocked for their weight by being labelled "fat" or "skinny" (Chudy 2023). Researchers also mention that men like to think about their bodies in terms of muscularity, lean shape, hair, and chest, and this need for muscular structure can be observed in most men. Men's confidence is often associated with their physical characteristics, such as their face, hair,

and muscularity (Hill 2012). Consequently, if men are not muscular to even match the ideal version of men with "Perfect Bodies", they are subjected to body shaming. Betz et al. (2019) discovered that women who have idealised thin and curvy bodies that are shown on social media platforms received lower body appreciation and a great number of negative comments about body shaming. According to Saxena et al. (2020), body shaming is becoming more common among young adults, as celebrities promote diets, fitness, and fashion patterns, and any who deviate from these trends are chastised or embarrassed.

A much earlier study by Shwartz et al. (2006) has observed that we live in a society where people would rather lose a limb than be fat. In another perspective, Agarwal & Banerjee (2018) found that there was a positive relationship between social anxiety and body shaming. Ko (2010) believed that people with low self-esteem resulting from eating disorders tend to suffer from shame, which subsequently causes them to have social anxiety. It was also found that individuals who were significantly concerned about how they appeared to others contributed to the relationship between eating disorders and social anxiety. As reiterated by Dixit & Luqman (2018), an individual will only be accepted in society if they have an 'ideal' body shape, and this perception is related to low body satisfaction. They further determined that there was a significant correlation between body image concern and social anxiety.

Judging someone's appearance makes them feel uncomfortable with their own body and makes them undergo extreme diets that can lead to eating disorders and other internal issues related to their own self-esteem and self-image. Some people who suffer from an eating disorder may believe that restricting their food intake will improve their appearance and bring an end to body shaming (Clarity Clinic 2020). This shows how people are distressed when someone talks about their appearance. It is good to stay positive towards yourself as the day will be happier away from worries and noxiousness. According to Perry (2021), a positive attitude is a state of mind that allows one to envisage and predict great things. It allows one person to stay optimistic all

the time. Staying optimistic may anticipate happiness, health, success, and opportunities for a person.

A study by Gerlock (2018) found that people often judge other people by their outer appearance at first impression, and this is totally not right. Even though body-shaming refers to a person's physical appearance, it can adversely affect both mental and physical aspects of a person's life. This can influence their mental health, social health, and professional lives (Perry 2021). Self-compassion is one of the ways to deal with body shame. Compassion researcher and social psychologist Kristin Neff (2021) identified that self-compassion can behave as an antidote to the self-criticism that comes with shame.

Body shaming is not new (Hannah 2019). Dettmar (2016) mentioned that body shaming could also have some ancient origins from popular superstitions, such as prejudice against red-haired people. Previous studies found that body shaming led to low self-esteem, low body dissatisfaction and symptoms of depression and poor psychological health (Puhl and Leudicke 2012; Eisenberg et al. 2003; Grabe et al. 2007).

As to why youth are subjected to peer pressure is quite apparent. An online magazine, Healthy Families BC (2019), disclosed that "...Peer pressure is about being influenced and choosing to do something you wouldn't otherwise do, hoping to feel accepted and valued by others. It isn't just about doing something against your will...". Peer pressure is amongst the most significant factors as to why youth keep on body shaming others. Even so, though youth are aware of the impact of body shaming, they still do it to comply with the basic rule of peer pressure, namely to fit in. Zaihani Zain, a well-known Malaysian fashion critic, once body-shamed someone for making her feel uncomfortable during a catwalk show she attended (Petter 2018). She mentioned in her statement on Twitter that whoever weighs more than 60kg should not attend any fashion show event as their thighs are spilling over and disturb the comfort of people sitting next to them. However, she received a huge backlash from Malaysians as well as other fashion critics for her

insensitive comments. Another incident happened on social media in the eight-minute video between Noorazira Pissal also known as Eira Aziera and Suharnizan Md Sidek on 18 August 2020.



Figure. 4.3: Eira Aziera, Body shaming clip, 2020

https://youtu.be/m_MbN2A-jf8?si=TieB7pro8Yjzlzj7

Eira was seen making derogatory remarks about Suharnizan while showing pictures of herself and her children during the livestream. The victim filed a suit against the accused, and her lawyer, Mohd Rasheed Hassan, said the compensation was for the trauma that Eira had caused to the victim by her action of body shaming his client during a live Facebook stream on Aug 18 (The Star, 15 September 2020). Doll (2019) shared that our positive and negative memories depend on what we were feeling at the most extreme (peak) point and how the feeling ended.

This peak-end theory was first proposed in 2013, suggesting that people remember experiences primarily based on how they feel at their peak and end, rather than on their overall experience. I can attest to the above statement, for it is how the comments and remarks towards my body made me feel at the time, more than how I looked. Davis (2021) explained that children lacking parental affection are likely to grow into aggressive, hostile, and antisocial adults. Cikanavičius (2019) noted that children who lack love in childhood may come to believe that love is associated with pain. Love was never something

I doubted at home. Still, there were times when I really questioned, “How could someone who calls themselves your family, in turn, say such hurtful and mean words about your weight, knowing how this subject makes you feel or even pass these derogatory words by means of a joke?”

4.2 INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS ON OBESITY

Social media is defined as “computer-mediated communication channels that allow users to engage in social interaction with broad and narrow audiences in real-time or asynchronously” (Bayer, Trieu & Ellison 2020:472). Individuals are bombarded by social icons and beauty symbols with whom they compare themselves, and social comparisons contribute to feelings of body dissatisfaction (Martinez 2019). Although evaluating and comparing one another have existed for as long as humans have, social media has accentuated the issue (Rozgonjuk, Ryan, Kuljus, That & Scott 2019). In the current media, common trends that are started and promoted by influencers like ‘thinspiration’, ‘body checking’, and ‘fitspiration’ are being observed to have negative effects on body image.

Reinten (2014) agreed that physical appearance is essential because it opens doors, minds and opportunities. But she did mention that it is not all that matters because people could still be appealing even though they are not physically attractive. A much earlier study by Schwartz et al. (2006) has observed that we live in a society where people would rather lose a limb than be fat. In another perspective, Agarwal & Banerjee (2018) found that there was a positive relationship between social anxiety and body shaming. Ko (2010) believed that people with low self-esteem resulting from eating disorders tend to suffer from shame, which subsequently causes them to have social anxiety.

It was also found that individuals who were significantly concerned about how they appeared to others contributed to the relationship between eating disorders and social anxiety. As reiterated by Dixit & Luqman (2018), an individual will only be accepted in society if they have an ‘ideal’ body shape, and this perception is related to low body satisfaction.

They further determined that there was a significant correlation between body image concern and social anxiety. To sum up, Hanson (2020) concluded that “the conversations by society of how one should look come into play when people see that they do not fit into the expected or perceived body ideals, therefore feeling shame. Media images of ideal beauty standards influence the content and sharing of pictures. Teenage girls, especially, are vulnerable to upward comparison as it means they need to improve their beauty standards, leaving them dissatisfied with their physical bodies and having doubts about their self-worth (Corcoran, Crusius, Mussweiler 2011).

Thompson and Hammond (2003) found that adult women who had competed in beauty pageants numerous times as children were likely to have a high sense of body dissatisfaction and a high risk for eating disorders. Similarly, Wonderlich and Henderson (2005) found that participation in beauty pageants as a child increased the likelihood of eating disorders, body dissatisfaction, difficulty trusting in interpersonal relationships, impulsive behaviours, and increased feelings of ineffectiveness as an adult, compared with adults who did not participate in pageants as children. Levy (2002), cited in Wonderlich & Henderson (2005), found that many mothers of young pageant participants enrolled their children in competition because they believed pageantry was a positive, beneficial experience. They suggested that children gained better social skills, listening skills, confidence, independence, poise, and talent, thus suggesting greater self-esteem as they aged. They also suggested that beauty pageant participants could differ whether they were exposed to five beauty pageants because they wanted to have fun, or if their parents made them participate in hopes of teaching life skills, etiquette, and values.

Children who grow up under the scrutiny of competition and spotlights can experience psychological hardships (Kreig 2004) and have a tremendous amount of premature stress (Canning & Hoffman 2009). Not only do children dress up like adults and practice for long hours, but they also have to endure criticism and failures. Nussbaum (2010) found that the pressure and constant awareness of their physical appearance can tax a child's development.

For example, at the age of eleven, I started participating in a number of beauty pageants, and even though I only won one, I was always amongst the top three winners. This really boosted my ego and morale so much that I was confident and had very high self-esteem. However, one pageant came to mind when I had hair extensions and became second; when the judges delivered results on what the participants could improve on, one congratulated everyone. She further elaborated on what they expected from the participants, but what she specifically addressed to me caught my attention. She said, "You would have become the winner if only you had your natural hair...". This was confusing a bit, for I had always thought that when entering beauty pageants, one should always make oneself prettier.

4.3 CULTURALLY ACCEPTED STEREOTYPES RELATED TO FEMALE OBESITY

Groups of people from different parts of the world have their own ways of thinking about the same information. Weight stereotypes are widely held and are mostly associated with negative characteristics such as laziness. This notion is based on the fact that weight is controllable, so the reasoning behind it is that since weight can be controlled, fat people must be doing something that makes them fat, like lack of exercise or overeating. Given the large number of people affected by obesity and its serious consequences, it is important to consider the effects of weight stereotypes. One culture may criticise one's weight while another might celebrate it. Culture affects body image and body size perceptions from an early age, so much so that in many African countries, overweight has been associated with richness, health, strength and fertility (Anderson-Fye, 2011).

The South African Demographic and Health Survey suggested that perceptions of weight are influenced by ethnicity, as only 27% of overweight and obese black women perceived themselves to be overweight compared with 100% of overweight and obese white women (Puoane, Steyn, Bradshaw 2002: 1038 - 1048). The prevalence of obesity in South Africa is increasing, particularly in black SA women, where the increase has been from 27% in

2003 to 39,2 in 2012 (Shisana, Labadarios, Rehle et al 2013). Black women have a higher tolerance for increased body size compared with their white counterparts and show a preference for larger body sizes (Roberts, Cash, Feingold et al. 2006:1121-1131). In South African women, body image is partly driven by culture (Caradas, Lambert & Charlton 2002), urbanisation and socio-economic status (Puoane, Mciza 2012). The language used to discuss body size can also contribute to and exacerbate weight stigma and body shaming, thus resulting in emotional reactions by fat individuals. Sarah Baartman spent years in a European “freak show” where she was paraded and given the name “Hottentot Venus” for crowds to look at. She has become and is seen as the epitome of colonial exploitation and racism, of the ridicule and commodification of black people. Even though it was highly desirable and fashionable for women then to have large bottoms and envied what she had, naturally, she was called names and made a spectacle.



Figure 4.4: Sarah Baartman, BBC News Magazine, 2016

Hearing negative words or comments about your appearance can impact one’s image and leave you anxious and self-conscious. I have felt unhappy about my weight for as long as I can remember, and some words used and attached to my body by peers and even family made me very self-aware. Even in a joking manner, remarks about what I ate and how much food I consumed were made to a point where advice about dieting or praising weight loss was a norm.

Often, friends and family would make these comments, unaware of the effect it had on me, and though they might not have meant harm by questions such as “Do you really need to eat all of that?” or “Are you really going to wear that?” damage was done. I became accustomed to the words used to refer to fat people, like SDUDLA, MAFUTHA (FAT), and STUFUZA, which were the most popular among others. Being a teenager, my beliefs and attitudes about my body were mostly influenced by people close to me and social media. A family member continually complained about my weight and shape and pointed out problems with how I looked or ate, and this impacted how I viewed myself.

I started having insecurities because of seeing myself as someone who could not measure up to my peers. My cousin, who was the same age as me, was the comparison to the point where I wanted to be like her and started admiring her. I emulated everything she did because, according to my mother, she had the ideal body weight for a teenager. Also, growing up, I noticed the number of elderly people who seemed to have no issues with their chubby and fat bodies and never really understood why this was until I started to read about obesity and being overweight.

There was a common notion that obese individuals were people who were wealthy and energetic (Mnafe, Chelule & Madiba 2022). This contradicted the way I felt about my body. It is still believed today that a fat person is healthy and does not have any illness. A fat person is not always suspected of having diseases; for example, if you become thin again, people suspect you have diseases like HIV (Akinrinlola 2012). People go around talking about you behind your back. So, as a fat person, you are not suspected to have diseases. The community sees the big person as wealthy with “a big belly like a millionaire”. This is what is normally said when one is fat. Taxi drivers are fat, yet this is not the case. For example, some people may gain weight and become fat due to diets and some because of the medication.

I recall when I was in standard 5, which is now known as grade 7, a very close cousin of mine, who we regarded as our mother, passed away. My sister and I lived with her while we were schooling in Cape Town, and we relocated that

year to start school at a boarding school. A year after relocating to the Eastern Cape, she was involved in a fatal car accident. Our parents notified us, and as we were devastated, we had to prepare for her funeral. Attires to wear at the funeral needed to be bought, and our mother took it upon herself to do this task. She came back with the outfits, and that is an event I will never forget. My sister's outfit was hip and suitable for her age; she is three years younger than I am, but when it came to my outfit, it was a two-piece suit that I viewed as a style that could have been suitable for someone older, as old as my mother, but just smaller.

I cried my eyes out and threw a tantrum, but that yielded no positive results because the response to my behaviour was "Usisidudla, meaning (you are fat), so what did you expect to wear? This is suitable for your body type". As painful as that was to hear, it was my reality, and I had to accept that that was what I had to wear to bid farewell to my cousin, and I had no choice. So, as much as the word SIDUDLA is associated with wealth and health, that was never my sentiments because of the connotations attached to the word, especially at home. These words, meaning "fat", became part of who I was, and they made me feel so self-conscious that I started rebelling. This was some sort of bullying, and what it taught me was learning to have a meaner comeback for anyone who had a fat joke or anything negative to say about my body image.

If this is who I am, what's the point of trying to lose weight and become someone I'm not? I internalised the severity and harm caused by the name-calling and weight bias. I might as well enjoy the food because, in a way, it comforted me and didn't talk back but, only in calories. So, food and sweets became my comfort space, and sometimes, I would eat to the point I became sick because I would stuff myself even though I was full. Sometimes, I convinced myself that maybe if I ate what I wanted, especially foods that contained sugar like sweets and chocolates, and later threw up, my body would not absorb the sugar, but trying this once or twice, I stopped because I would have a sore throat due to the stomach acids. In spite of all of this, chubby as I was, I was very active in sports and hardly ever lazy.

4.4 ARTISTIC INTERVENTION

Fatness is vilified in many parts of the world as an unhealthy, unattractive, and, most significantly, immoral embodiment. In cultures where health is viewed as a moral obligation and size is viewed as a personal choice, fat people are discriminated against for supposedly choosing to be unhealthy. Art has the potential not only to undermine power conceptions of fat but also to reveal such conceptions as oppressive social constructions and actively work to undermine them. Many artists have opened up new possibilities of using their bodies for self-acceptance activism to combat various painful experiences, as well as the fat stigma and weight-based and other kinds of stereotypes and discrimination. Artists such as Jenny Saville's photographic series *Closed Contact*, Nombeko Mpako's *Obu bubomi bam 8 out of 8: I teach Art Solo Exhibition* and Yossi Loloi *Full Beauty Project*.

Jenny Saville's images offer a story and experience of uneasiness, where she uses her body in these photographs to document body reconstruction, expressing the violence and pain in her own life. In her own words, the distortion of these images makes the viewer examine their own body.



Figure 4.5: Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, *Closed Contact #3*, 1995-1996.



Figure 4.6: Jenny Saville and Glen Luchford, *Closed Contact #4*, 1995-1996.



Figure 4.7: Jenny Saville, *Closed Contact #1*, 1995-1996.



Figure 4.8: Jenny Saville, *Branded*, 1992.

The images of *Closed Contact* are transformative because they transform the body in a way that potentially transforms one's conception of fat from something that is "other" to something that is a part of the "self". These images can also be seen by others as gross, just like the sight of fat people might make individuals who view obese or fat people in this manner.

Jenny Saville's artistic practice, particularly in *Closed Contact*, exemplifies a radical reimagining of the female body through both formal and political strategies that confront the viewer with ethical questions around representation, beauty, and bodily norms. Her use of her own body as subject matter, photographed under glass, distorted and pressed, does not merely document physical form but enacts a visceral performance of vulnerability, violence, and resistance. The formal distortion of the flesh challenges classical ideals of proportion and symmetry, replacing them with a topography of folds, pressure, and density. This visual strategy subverts conventional aesthetic

hierarchies and demands that the viewers reckon with their own bodily perceptions and prejudices. In doing so, Saville shifts the gaze from a traditionally objectifying lens to one that interrogates the politics of looking, where the grotesque becomes a site of embodied activism.

Saville's work operates as visual activism by recording fatness from a stigmatised marker of deviance into a shared terrain of human experience. By foregrounding the uneasiness her images provoke, she not only confronts cultural discomfort with fat bodies but also resists the dehumanising logic of othering. In this sense, her aesthetic method becomes a political act, an ethical reclamation of the body as both subject and agent. The transformation she describes, where fat is no longer "other" but part of the "self", unsettles dominant narratives and creates space for a more inclusive understanding of corporeal identity. Saville's images do not seek to comfort, rather, they confront and destabilise, thereby embodying resistance to the sanitised, commodified images of femininity in popular culture. Her work stands as a powerful intervention in contemporary debates on body politics, challenging viewers to reconsider not only how they see others, but also how they see themselves.

In the exhibition entitled *Obu bubomi bam 8 out of 8: I teach Art*, the artist Professor Nombeko Mpako (2021) presents her autobiography visually. She wrote in her catalogue that the creative process featured artworks meant to be therapeutic. She further stated that she felt it was time to shed the baggage she carried for years and forgive herself for events she had no control over and things she couldn't change to heal. The artist's deliberate choice to revisit and evoke a terrible experience of an ordeal in her past life demonstrates a sense of agency to control one's life and a determination to heal through past traumas.

We all have scars, some visible and some invisible. I find the most painful scars we carry in our lives are invisible. Hence, the need for me to revisit all memorable scars of my life as a form of healing (Nombeko Mpako: 2021).

The artist's Inyanda series consists of eight photographs of performances that were digitally edited, showing her carrying a bundle of firewood or big logs. The firewood is packed into big bundles and is traditionally used to make a fire for cooking food for the family. This series embodies her efforts of being a single parent raising her three children, which is another reference to a difficult experience. In this series, she portrays her life's ups and downs, challenges and perseverance.



Figure 4.9: Nombeko Mpako, Inyanda Series (2021)

I found her work very symbolic in that, as individuals, these invisible scars sometimes weigh heavily on us, and they become like Inyanda (a big and heavy bundle of something) that we cannot put it down at times, thus making this life journey tough.

In the *Umzimbha negazi lam* series, the artist created images from her theatre episode where she underwent a near-death surgery, as well as from visual blood test results images. Yet another evocation of a painful episode, as she said she was inspired by seeing her helpless body lying on a theatre bed, leaving her life in the hands of the anaesthetic and surgeons (Mpako 2021). These images are of a bloody body and exposed internal organs covered with

colours taken from visuals of her blood tests, hence the blues, brownish red and purples (Mpako 2021). Both her vulnerability and strength are displayed in these images. Thus, this traumatic experience has been transformed into colourful images, both a sign of resilience and a celebration of a happy ending. She further adds that this series depicts the abstracted and unawareness of our ailments.

Making art out of this painful ordeal was, for me, another healing experience. Playing with my body parts in this manner made me accept the fact that we cannot always be in control of our life's situation but must sometimes allow ourselves to be handled and controlled by others (Mpako 2021)

Mpako's artistic practice, as outlined in her 2021 catalogue, reveals a deeply personal yet politically resonant strategy of visual activism rooted in the ethics of self-representation and healing. Her therapeutic approach to creation deliberately engages past trauma, positions her work within a tradition of feminist and decolonial resistance, where the personal is inherently political. By revisiting painful memories through art, Mpako asserts agency over her narrative, transforming private suffering into a site of public reflection and empowerment.

The *Inyanda* series becomes an iconographic embodiment of resilience, symbolising the intersecting burdens of womanhood, motherhood, and single parenthood within a South African context. Through these visual testimonies, Mpako not only reclaims her own story but also challenges dominant cultural silences around emotional endurance and survival. Her art resists reductive representation by honouring complexity and embracing vulnerability as a form of strength, inviting viewers to witness, not consume, her lived experience.



Figure 4.10: Nombeko Mpako, Umzimbha negazi lam Series (2021)

Thus, similar to Mpako, the handling of the visual representation of my painful past of living with a body that I despised and sometimes left helpless and vulnerable is a way of self-acceptance and forgiving myself and those who unknowingly hurt my feelings, including my family. Hence, the title of my exhibition “Ndityebe Ndinje, Ndiyazithanda Futhi Ndizamkeleeee”, meaning “Obese as I am, but I love myself and am at peace with my body and who I am”. Thus, representing my exaggerated, distorted and deformed fat body is a way to invoke the pain I felt from numerous ridicules towards self-acceptance and healing of the invisible emotional damages/wounds I felt so that I can move on and, like Mpako, come out victoriously as portrayed in the last part of the Jula-Jwi video in Figure 4.18.

Yossi Loloi’s full Beauty Project photo series puts on display a series of images of nude obese women. These women exude fearlessness and femininity, amplifying the body-positivity trend and promoting self-love and acceptance of all body types.



Figure 4.11: Yossi Loloi, *Full Beauty Project*, 2012.

Such fat-positive imagery is seen as vital within the fat activist community because, as Erin Keating, quoted by Lebesco (2021), puts it, “visibility leads to acceptance in our seeing-is-believing culture” (Grombacher 2014). It is no wonder that image-based activism is one of the most popular modes of resistance within the size acceptance movement, and, in fact, in any type of activism, it is because visual imagery has a lasting effect on one’s memory.

Thus, Yossi Loloi's *Full Beauty Project* employs a radical aesthetic strategy, also rooted in visual activism and the ethics of representation, that challenges dominant cultural narratives equating beauty with thinness. Through his formal choices, intimate, large-format photographs of nude, plus-size women, he confronts viewers with bodies that are typically marginalised or rendered invisible in mainstream visual culture. The iconography of nudity, traditionally associated with idealised forms in Western art history, is reappropriated to centre bodies that defy normative standards, emphasising softness, scale, and presence as sites of empowerment rather than shame. By capturing these women with a dignified gaze, often reclining or posed in ways that convey agency and comfort, Loloi disrupts the voyeuristic or objectifying lens through which fat bodies are often seen. His work aligns with a political position that insists on bodily autonomy and uses representation as resistance. As Erin Keating underscores, Loloi's images function within this logic, positioning the visual as a critical tool in the fight for fat acceptance. His project becomes not just an artistic endeavour, but an act of embodied resistance that expands the visual lexicon of beauty and reclaims space for fat-positive identities.

4.5 THE JOURNEY OF DESPISING AND ACCEPTING BEING A PLUS-SIZE

My second series of six A2 size paintings, entitled "Ndibubhideka-amahla ndenyuka", meaning "I am confused: ups and downs", depicts both obese images of how I saw myself as Sdudla (fatty boom-boom) and aspiring skinny - images of myself, decoding my confusion. This series reflects the battle of who I was, how repulsed I felt, and the type of body I dreamt of. I viewed this stretch of life as having the skinny fat syndrome occurrences physically, where it was not only a battle between bodies but also episodes of cognitive dissonance. Waking up one day and committing to losing weight by exercising and eating healthy became a mission, one I would succeed at, gain my confidence and see the change in people's attitudes, but later gain the weight again as I would go back to my daily lifestyle.

My mother would criticise me and tell me to lose weight, and recognising that she was worried about my health, it rather caused me to have a love-hate relationship with food. I loved food but hated it at the same time because it

made me feel good, but at the same time, it was what made me look like that; hence, I believed when they say, YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT! There was once a time I ate fast food and got so full I hated how I felt afterwards and thought maybe if I threw up the food, it would be better. After that experience, I swore right then and there never to do that again and made a decision to start exercising.

This series entails images of myself in different outfits and also having to go out to buy clothes also became a chore. Finding the clothes for my body type was difficult, as most retail clothing stores do not cater to or have limited outfits for plus-size ladies. Retailers are somehow ignoring plus-size women, making them miss out on \$9 billion dollars in the year 2014 globally, according to IBIS World. Yet retailers barely cater to this crucial demographic. Having said this, a few stores cater to plus-size women, like Milady's, Clothing City Plus, Donna, and Lee Bex, to mention a few.





Figure 4.15: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndibubhideka-Amahla Ndenyuka series, 2024

The third series of Four A1 paintings is entitled “Ndimlo - And’semhle”. It is a resemblance of accepting my body. It translates to “THIS IS ME - I AM BEAUTIFUL”. It presents four beautifully painted images of where I am now. My past experiences regarding my body image have taught me the importance of loving myself and having self-care. I started feeling more confident and liberated by learning to embrace and accept who I am. I stopped comparing myself to others and found inspiration in bodies that looked like mine, but most of all, learning that beauty should not only be measured by physical appearance and what others deemed beauty to be, but also how I feel on the inside.

Beauty begins the moment you decide to be yourself – Gabrielle Coco Chanel 2020.

These paintings represent the moment of finally embracing and accepting my body size. I chose to celebrate and accept the way I am irrespective of my body shape, size or appearance. At the same time, I acknowledged and cherished myself, recognising both perceived flaws and physical attributes. In

doing so, I accredited my thoughts and unique qualities, nurturing a sense of self-love and self-worth. In addition, I started to understand my thoughts and beliefs about my body, replacing negative self-talk with compassionate language and appreciating my body's capabilities.



Figure 4.16: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndibubhideka-Amahla Ndenyuka series, 2024

Painting this series made me happy because I was going through the emotions of joy and enjoyment. It reminded me of this time when it felt like a weight had been lifted off me. I felt a sense of calm and focus, at times losing track of time as I became absorbed in each painting. The mood was obviously enjoyable because the subject was me, painting something I learned to love - me.

When I looked at myself in these paintings, I saw myself swirling with energy because I had accepted that my body didn't define who I was. With the constant scrutiny of societal expectations, it is sometimes hard to accept parts

of yourself. So, with the stretch marks, cellulite and rolls, one has only one body, so I have come to love it just the way it is.



Figure 4.17: Nangamso Tshangana, Ndimlo - And'semhle Series, 2024

Amongst the series of paintings is a stop-frame video entitled JULA – JWI, which loosely translates to “THROW IT AWAY”. In the Jula-Jwi video, the frustration of looking for clothes that fit my body is illustrated (click the link under the still from the video in Figure 4.18). This was inspired by the tiresome exercise of going to different clothing outlets and trying on different-sized garments to purchase.

Due to the limited number of stores that cater for plus-size women, I developed a ‘fattitude’, which refers to the act of displaying the harsh realities of fatness and not finding the clothes that fit each time the need arose. Scouring racks for my size, squeezing into outfits, and not finding what I was looking for felt

ridiculous at times, leading to unnecessary sweating and making it a mission in itself.



Figure 4.18: Nangamso Tshangana, Stills from the *Jula-Jwi* video, 2024

Link to the video: <https://youtu.be/aHciSi0hRf0>

4.6 MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO'S VENUS OF THE RAGS

Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Venus of the Rags* (1967) is a mixed-media sculpture that critiques consumerism and the relationship between the past and present. The work juxtaposes a statue of Venus, an iconic symbol of Western art, with a pile of rags. This creates a polarity between the statue's ideal of eternal beauty and the rags' representation of waste, degradation, and consumerism. The sculpture was inspired by the legendary Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles, the first female nude in Greek art. Similar to my *Jula-Jwi* video, the rags represent and symbolise everyday life. The artist creates a dialogue between the past and the present; hence, this work resonates with my journey of dealing with a derogative stereotype.

The Venus represents the goddess of love and beauty, facing discarded rags, beauty facing rejected trash, symbolising throwing culture. This sculpture is a metaphor for confronting our own waste, including mental garbage that contaminates our well-being and self-image.



Figure 4.19: Michelangelo Pistoletto's Venus of the Rags (1967)

The body is generally understood as a mental image of the body as it appears to others, so the way one's body is built will determine the clothes one buys. Previous research has indicated that exposure to thin-idealised body images in the media negatively influences an individual's body image, mood, self-esteem and appearance management (Cash & Pruzinsky 2002). Fashion marketers assume that thin-ideal images in fashion advertising will lead to more favourable brand attitudes. Understanding how women respond to models with similar body sizes and seeing the responses towards advertising where people were standing up for how they looked no matter what size, I felt a sense of relief, belonging and acceptance. Have you ever walked into a store and tried your size and then moved to another shop to fit in the same size, but it did not fit you?



Figure 4.20: Nangamso Tshangana, Stills from *Jula-Jwi*, 2024

This causes so much frustration and dissatisfaction because most clothing companies choose to create their own sizing standards, gravitating to the demographic they cater for. The fashion industry is a business, and because shapes are unique, it would be ideal to design a template customised for each body type, matching all types of curves. As a result, the fashion industry will prioritise tall and slim female bodies because it saves them money and makes it easier for them to produce large quantities.

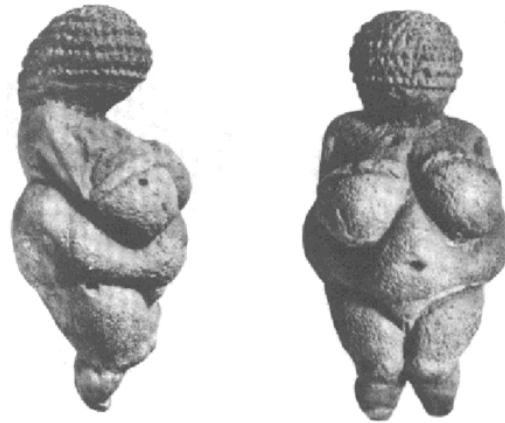


Figure 4.21: Unknown artist, *Venus of Willendorf*, c. 24,000 B.C.E. – 22,000 B.C.E.

Spivey (1995) argues that the tendency to distort images of the body recurs across many cultures and periods of history. In other words, ‘The drift of all popular art is towards the lowest common denominator, and more women look like a potato than the Cnidian Venus. The shape to which the female body tends to return is one which emphasises its biological functions (Clark 1964:87).

4.7 IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

I have considered the way in which contemporary art can open up new possibilities for body size acceptance activism. Body size acceptance is a diverse and multifaceted movement closely intertwined with fat studies scholarship, encompassing a broad range of activist strategies that inform and are informed by academic theory. However, the movement can diversify further by developing new and advancing existing activism. Saville’s contribution to size acceptance may have been inadvertent because she does not identify herself as a fat activist *per se*, but there are many parallels between Saville’s and fat liberationists’ sustained interrogation of diet culture that sought to challenge normative thinness with Closed Contact.

Our feelings about our bodies can impact us throughout our lives, causing self-awareness issues. How we view ourselves is also how we view others. When I think of some of the artworks I have mentioned above from Mpako and Jenny Saville, I can’t help but think of a few artists who have used their talent and passion for art as a medium for healing and acceptance for events and

challenges they went through in their lives. Artists such as Saville bring the female gaze to women by using images of realistic women. By celebrating who you are, one takes the power back, owns one's body, and begins to heal and progress.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation interrogated female obesity, referencing contradicting Xhosa and Western cultural stereotypes and their impact on modern females. It highlighted the impact of social media on the obesity of modern young women's self-image and confidence. The study also highlighted arguments about the contradicting African cultural and Western stereotypes that are present in modern African women's self-image. It demonstrated that in most South African indigenous cultures, food symbolises love, acceptance and humanity (Ubuntu) and is associated with happiness.

Gender differences in how obesity has been depicted run throughout the history of Western art. However, it is usually difficult to determine how far a painting and/or a sculpture reveals the artist's aspirations for his/her audiences or to know or see how far he/she represented reality. This is because artists are always influenced by their surroundings in various ways and seek to relay their personal ideas through their art. Throughout art history, women were and still are mostly depicted nude more often than men, and hence, it is much easier to assess the amount of fat they carry. Fashion has probably always influenced how the body was represented: what was unfashionable at any time may have been simply 'edited out'. It does seem likely, though, that once being fat had ceased to be a life-saving tactic for the mass of people, there came to be an innate sense of what was acceptable for the body in terms of size.

The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) initially focused on integrating fat bodies into the social mainstream by educating the public about fat oppression and supporting legal battles against weight-based discrimination. This organisation broadened its scope by hosting social events that aimed to foster a vibrant fat-positive community, including self-esteem-building workshops, fashion shows, and weekend conventions, as well as to minimise discrimination within the existing fat-phobic cultural climate.

In "Obesity and Women 1: A Closer Look at the Facts", the authors argue that health researchers have not only failed to identify either the cause or the cure

for “obesity” but that the presumed ill-health effects of fatness are likely to be caused by harmful dieting practices (Susan Wooley and Orland Wooley 1979: 70). Wooley and Sue Dyrenforth cite both Aldebaran and Orbach and argue that fatness is a highly gendered social and political issue, a stigmatised embodiment that is oppressed by both the doctor’s office and by society at large (Orland, Wooley, Sue, Dyrenforth 1979: 87-88). After reviewing a literature that documents the dangers and futility of weight loss efforts, the authors conclude that health should be pursued via size acceptance rather than dieting (Campos 2006: 55-60).

Bordo (1993) on the other hand, argues, for example, that many negative stereotypes about fatness derive from the dualist philosophical tradition and its intersections with Christianity and adds that thinness is associated with the mind, with spiritual purity and “hyperintellectuality”, whereas fatness is associated with “the taint of matter and flesh, ‘wantonness’, mental stupor and mental decay. However, some marked differences between the two works illustrate the diversity of fat activist views and agendas. For instance, both authors advocate coming out as a means for self-empowerment and social change, yet Cooper (2016) acknowledges the difficulties and contradictions inherent in the act.

This study mainly focused on two cultures: the Xhosa culture and Westernised culture as the foreign culture that Xhosa women are exposed to. In my deliberation with the literature and different views about obesity, fatness and body image, I was left with some questions such as: What state of mind should one be in for them to accept their body image regardless of size? What more needs to be done to promote perceived images of beauty to cater to all body types, especially for girls in their adolescent stage? Do retail stores cater more for the ideal body because they believe this is the majority group of real or normal women? Models and images in advertisements and social media have been altered mostly by Photoshop (Waller 2015) and are not a true reflection of reality, thus creating an illusion. The body positivity movement and the representation of diverse body types are reshaping societal attitudes towards beauty and acceptance (Griffin, Bailey & Lopez 2022). By doing so, we are

moving closer to recognising and appreciating the uniqueness of all body types and beauty. Through the showcasing of a range of body representations, individuals see themselves and others more inclusively. Various features contribute to what a cultural group perceives as attractive, the beauty ideal will differ from culture to culture according to these different features, also known as beauty standards (Dimitrov & Kroumpouze 2023).

5.1 INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS OF MODERN FEMALE OBESITY

Research has shown that nutritional and dietary ingestion has changed over the years, and this shift has been mostly recognised in low and moderate-income countries but does not exclude higher-income urban populations. This shift has been attributed to demographic transition and epidemiological transition. According to Omran (1971) all societies experience three ages in the process of modernisation: the age of pestilence and femininity during which mortality is high and fluctuating, with an average life expectancy under 30 years; the age of receding pandemics during which life expectancy rises considerably from under 30 to over 50 and the age of degenerative and man-made diseases during which the pace of mortality decreases slackness (Omran, 1971: 29 509-538).

Modern societies seem to be converging on a diet high in saturated fats, sugar, and refined foods but low in fibre - often termed the 'Western diet' and on lifestyles characterised by lower levels of activity. These changes are reflected in nutritional outcomes, such as changes in average stature, body composition, and morbidity. Females differ regarding fat distribution, with males tending to store visceral fat. Although women are more likely to be diagnosed with obesity and appear more motivated to lose weight. The differences in obesity prevalence between men and women may be explained by gender norms and identity that could also condition eating habits and physical activity behaviour. Obese individuals' dislike the terms "obesity", "fatness" and "heaviness" saw the words as undesirable for discussing excess weight (Wadden & Diddie 2003)

Gender-based differences in eating behaviours are reported by school age (Keller, Kling, Fuchs, Pearce, Reigh, and Masterson et al. 2019) and greater preferences for foods high in sugar (Vartanian, Herman, Polivy 2007) and stronger association of stress related eating with weight gain have been described in women (Cotter, Kelly, 2018: 516-525). Other factors may be represented by sex hormones and physiological events during the women's life course, such as pregnancy and menopause (Mauvais-Jarvis, Clegg, et al. 2013). Greater amounts of sedentary behaviour time associated with the worldwide use of mass media compound these effects. Additionally, neuroimaging studies found disparities between genders in structural and functional obesity-related brain alterations (Kroll, Feldman, Biesecker, McPherson, Manza et al. 2020) with stronger neural response to food-related stimuli in women (Chao, Loughhead, Bakizada, Hopkins, Geliebter, Gur, et al. 2017).

5.2 SOCIAL STEREOTYPES AND BODY SHAMING

As important as social media is in helping many people to communicate, some people are not using it positively but use it to bully and body shame women. Women who were fully figured in the past were celebrated and appreciated in different communities and regarded as the 'real women'. However, in the past years, this has not been the case as they are bombarded by images of the thin 'ideal body' shape, making them more body shamed than any other body type. They are called different names and tend to associate their body shames with anything but good. Throughout history, women have gone through extremes to conform to society's ideal of physical beauty (Gaffney 2017).

Body shaming among Black women on different social media platforms is increasing, despite the complaints and concerns from these women. Black women experience body shaming because society has different ideas about what beauty is and how a woman should look. Miller & Cassidy (2021) assert that the majority of products and food advertisements feature tall, thin, white women, and this brainwashing and stereotypical behaviour exposes Black women to ongoing body shaming on social media platforms.

Black women are frequently body-shamed on social media platforms due to the harsh criticism they obtain about their skin tone, hair colour and physical appearance. Women are still being body shamed on social media, especially those who are overweight, despite the fact that some of them have expressed satisfaction with their physical appearance. It has been thought that women who are deemed attractive on social media have an advantage over less attractive women both in their personal and professional lives. This is a very concerning belief because it is increasingly becoming the norm in our societies and social media (Motseki & Oyedemi 2017). The famous DJ and Metro FM presenter, as shown in figure 4.2, was also body shamed on Twitter (now known as X) on 21 October 2021 after she wore shorts. She was body shamed for the shape of her legs and body shape, and as a result of this other followers of this DJ continued to attack and body shame her.

5.3 SOCIAL MEDIA ON MODERN YOUNG WOMEN SELF-IMAGE

The large number of images posted on some social media platforms provides regular opportunities for users to make appearance-related social comparisons. Research shows that regularly comparing one's appearance to others (particularly to those who are seen as more attractive than oneself) can lead to negative body image (Myers & Crowther 2009: 683-698). Appearance comparisons appear to play an important role in social media use and body image concerns. With the growing use of social media and its popularity in society, researchers have made a connection between a number of eating disorders and body dissatisfaction and whether women developing negative body image are influenced by social media (Klein 2013).

Engaging with various forms of social media has been shown to benefit children and adolescents by enhancing social connection, communication, and even technical skills (Ito et al. 2008). Social media greatly influences many users, especially when they are engaged in communication and activities surrounding popular media figures, such as celebrities or social media stars. These figures have been labelled by Del Fresno Garcia et al. (2016) as opinion leaders because they exert strong influence on other social media users, who view them as role models and often emulate their actions. Therefore, these

opinion leaders have the power to portray messages that may be positive or negative. Many of these social media influencers highlight their lifestyles, followers, and fans, which can create the idea that viewers need to do certain things to look like their favourite celebrities and attain the 'ideal' body. We cannot dispute the fact that using technology is a way of living and makes life easier, also that media is a form of communication. Using these influencers could assist and influence the media in changing the narrative.

Compared to boys, the combination of reaching puberty, body changing in girls, and the importance of approval from peers and romantic relationship formation can increase vulnerability to negative body image, suggesting social media has a greater influence on their body dissatisfaction (Tiggermann Slater 2013). Body dissatisfaction has been linked to low self-esteem, decreased mental health and well-being, and the development of eating disorders among adolescent girls (Wertheim, Paxton 2012: 187-193).

For body image development, sexually objectified images on social media provide ample opportunity for girls to evaluate themselves against such images which emphasise appearing 'sexy' as critical to identity and that their worth is based on constant evaluation of their appearance (Tolman, Impett, Tacy, Micheal 2006). Sexual objectification through social media may then lead to adolescent girls' internalisation of conventional ideas of femininity, with subsequent effects on their mental health and well-being (Vandenbosch & Eggermont 2012:869:887).

5.4 SELF-AWARENESS AND ACCEPTANCE

Be yourself, be happy with yourself, and don't buy into illusions and marketing- they just want you to buy their products! At times, we do not give enough importance to understanding ourselves, and family and friends do not help in this regard. I believe that without seeing yourself, you will not be able to improve and develop. When you are self-aware, you are aware of your actions and how these actions could affect you and those around you. By improving your self-awareness, your interpretation and thoughts will start to improve and yield positive results. Duval and Wicklund first theorised about self-awareness

in 1972, saying that “if people concentrated their attention inwardly on themselves, they would tend to compare their recent behaviour to their general standards and values” (Duval & Wicklund 1972).

Self-acceptance complements self-awareness. The two ingredients bring out the best in people. These two need each other for one to flourish. The lack of self-awareness leads to a lack of accountability; when you understand your flaws, emotions and strengths, self-awareness is acknowledged (Brown 2022). But, self-awareness without self-acceptance will cause you to take too much responsibility for everything. No human is perfect, and we are all works in progress.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that forms of art be utilised as an outlet for healing and therapeutic purposes to deal with unresolved past traumatic experiences. Being a creative process, art and the healing process can be explored. Size acceptance activists have invested considerable time and effort in counteracting harmful representations of fatness by creating a fat-positive visual subculture. Art processes can include different art forms such as painting, drawing, photography, performance and video installations. Understanding that some of these require skills and not all can master therapy and writing, could be other avenues explored. I recommend they find ways, where possible, to share their interventions. Another recommendation would be to encourage those who may not be artists or do not see themselves as creatives to identify an artist they trust who could help depict some of their experiences in an artistic form, creating a collaborative work between the victim and the artist.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, A. 2016. Jenny Saville: A world of Flesh. Artnet News. Accessed 21 November 2023
- Abdoli, M. 2024. Cultural Differences in Body Image: Asystematic Review. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13060305> Accessed 15 February 2025
- Adeneyi, O.R. & Ayedero, T.M. 2018. African Culture in a world of change. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. 1(3):1-16
- Adil, R. 2022. Use of Images to support Critical Visual Literacy: A small scale Study in a religious Education. Accessed 15 February 2025
- Adams, B.G, Van de Vijver, F.J, 2017. Identity and acculturation: The case for Africa. *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 27(2):115-121.224
- Alsop, R., Fitzsimons, A., Lennon, R. (eds). 2006. *Theorizing gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ahern, A, L, Bennett, K. M, Hetherington, M. M. 2008. Internalisation of the ultra-thin ideal: positive implicit associations with underweight fashion models are associated with drive for thinness in young women. PMID. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>
- Anderson-Fye EP. (2011) Body images in non-western cultures. In: Cash TF, Smolak, L. *Body image: a handbook of science, practice and prevention*. New York: The Guilford Press
- Alleva, J. M, 2015.Body matters: interventions and change techniques designed to improve body image. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20151125ja>
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing; 2013:338-345.
- American Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 165, issue 9, 1 May 2007, 1055-1062
- American Psychiatric Association. *DSM-5 Development*. American Psychiatric Association. 2010. <http://www.dsm5.org> Accessed 16 August 2024
- ARTSpeak. 2018. Guerilla Girls: Not ready to make nice. Accessed 25 October 2024
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. Standard for sex and gender variables.

- ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/standard-sex-gender-variations-sex-characteristics-and-social-orientation-variables>
Accessed 15 February 2025
- Bakshi, S. 2011. Women's Body Image and the role of Culture: A review of the literature. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 7(2) Accessed 1 November 2024
- Ballard, R. 2003. The natives of the suburbs: Claiming the right to define the neighbourhood character in post-apartheid South Africa. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Bartky, S. 1990. *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Baron, S.S. 2005. (Un) Lawfully beautiful: The legal (de)construction of female beauty. *Boston College Law Review*, 46 (2):359-389.
- Bayer, J. B, Triéu, P, & Ellison, N. B. 2020. Social media elements, ecologies and effects. *Annual Review of Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-050944>
- Bayles Kortsch, C. 2009. *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles and Activism*. Accessed 7 December 2024.
- Berkman, L.&Kawachi, I.(eds).2000. *Social epidemiology*. New York: Oxford University.
- Biko, S. 1978. *I write what I like*. London: Penguin.
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bhuiyan, AR. Gustat, J. Srinivasan, SR et al. (2003). Differences in body shape representation among young adults from biracial (Black-White), semirural community: the Bogalusa Heart Study. *Am J Epidemiol*, 158: 792-797
- Blakeley, S, Champagne, A. 2023. Stereotype: Definition, types and effects. *Psychology 101*. Accessed 15 February 2025
- Bordo, S. 1993. *Unbearable weight: Feminism, western culture, and the body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bordo, S. 1993. The body and the reproduction of femininity, in *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture and the body*. England: University of California Press: 165-184.
- Bordo, S., and L. Heywood. 2003 (1993). *Unbearable weight: feminism,*

- western culture, and the body. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brown, B. 2022. The Importance of Self-Awareness and S-Acceptance.
Accessed 15 February 2025
- Butters, J.& Cash, T. 1987. Cognitive-behavioral treatment of women's body image dissatisfaction. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 55:889-897.
- Cameron, N.O, Muldrow, A. F, Stefani, W. 2018. The weight of things: Understanding African American Women's Perceptions in Health, Body Image and Attractiveness. *Qualitative health research*. 28 (8), 1242-1254 <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za> Accessed 14 February 2025
- Campos, P. 2006. The epidemiology of overweight and obesity: public health crisis or moral panic. *int J Epidemiol*. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov> Accessed 10 November 2023
- Chao, A.M, Loughhead, J, Bakizada, Z.M, Hopkins, C.M, Griebter, A, Gur, R.C, Wadden, T.A. Sex/gender differences in neural correlates of food stimuli: a systematic review of functional neuroimaging studies. *National Library of Medicine*. Accessed 10 November 2024
- Caradas, AA. Lambert, EV & Charlton, KE. (2001). An ethnic comparison of eating attitudes and associated body image concerns in adolescent South African schoolgirls. *J Hum Nutr Diet* 14: 111-120
- Castle, DJ.2004.38(6):439-444. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>) Accessed 24 November 2024
- Chudy, E. 2023. I've experienced both skinny-shaming and fat-shaming, I know which hurts the most. *GlamourMagazine*. <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk> Accessed 14 February 2025
- Clark K: *The Nude*. London, Penguin Books, 1964, p 87.
- Clarke, S. 2008. Culture and identity. *The Sage handbook of cultural analysis*, 510-529
- Clarity Clinic. 2020. Body Shaming: Its Affect on Young and Old. Accessed 11 November 2024
- Corcoran, K, Crusius, J, & Mussweiler, T. 2011. Social comparison: Motives, standards, and mechanisms. *Theories in Social Psychology*. <https://psycnet.apa.org> Accessed 8 November 2024

- Collins, P.H. 1989. Learning from the Outsider within: The sociological significance of blackfeminist thought. *Social Problems* 33 (6):14-32.
- Cooper, C. 2016. Fat Activism: A Radical Movement. Accessed 3 March 2024
- Cotter, EW, Kelly, NR. 2018. Stress related eating, mindfulness, and obesity. National Library of Medicine
- Corberr, A. 2023. In search of the female gaze: The evolving possibilities of postfeminist aesthetics in contemporary film and literature. UAB. <https://ddd.uab.cat>. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Davis, H. 1994. This is Jenny, and this is her plan. Accessed 14 August 2021
- De Beauvoir, S. 1949. *The Second Sex, Woman as Other*. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2ndsex/introduction.htm>. Accessed 16 July 2016.
- De la Rey, C. 1997. *South African feminism, race and racism. Agenda: race, identity and change* 32:6-10.
- Dion, K. 1976. Physical attractiveness and evaluation of children's transgressions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 24: 207-213.
- Dovido, J., Brigham, J.C., Johnson, B.T. & Gaertner, S.L. 1996. Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination: Another look. In CN Macrae, C Stranger & M Hewstone (eds), *Stereotypes and stereotyping*: 276- 310. New York: Guilford.
- Duval, S & Wicklund R.A. 1972. A Theory of Objective Self Awareness. Academic Press. (Accessed 2 November 2024)
- Duval, S & Wicklund, R.A. 1972. A theory of objective self-awareness. Academic Press Accessed 27 December 2024
- Erguney Okumumus, F.E, Sertel Berk, H.O, Yucel, B. 2019. Body image, depression and eating behaviour: a comparative study in eating disordered women and healthy controls. 29(4:774-780)
- Etcoff, N., Orbach, S., Scott, J. & D'Agostino, H. 2004. *The real truth about beauty: A global report. Findings of the Global Study on Women, Beauty and Well-Being*. Report. [SI]: Dove, Unilever.
- Fallon, A.E, & Rozin, P. 1985. Sex differences in perceptions of desirable body shape. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 94(1), 102-105

- Fanon, F. 1967(1952). *Black skin, white masks*. Translated by C.L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press. Also: <https://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/FanonBW.html>.
- Fanon, F. 1986. *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto.
- Featherstone, M. 2010. Body, image and affects in consumer culture. *Body and Society* 16(1): 193-221.
- Fourie, A.S. 2009. *Psychology empowerment: A South African perspective*. Doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Francois, P. 2012. A Beautiful Mind: Black Male Intellectual Identity and Hip-Hop Culture. *Journal of Black Studies* 43: 893-911.
- Fredrickson, B.L. & Roberts, T.A. 1997. *Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21:173-206.
- Fujioka, Y, Ryan, E, Agle, M, Legaspi, M. & Toohey, R. 2009. The role of racial identity in response to thin media ideals differences between white and black college women, *Communication Research* 36 (4):451-474
- Gaffner, K.J, 2017. *Negative effects that Social Media causes on Body Imaging*. Long Island University. https://digitalcommons.liu.edu/post_honors_theses/13. Accessed 13 November 2024
- Garde, A. 2010. *EU LAW AND Obesity Prevention*. Kluwer Law International: Netherlands.
- Gearhart, K. 2022. As seen on TV: Representation of women in advertisements and the effects on women's self-perceptions, self – objectification and self – dehumanization. <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd/1519>
- Gibson, R. 2015. Effects of Long Term Corseting. *The Canadian Student Journal of Anthropology*. 23(2):45-60
- Goedecke, J.H. and Jennings, C.L. 2005. Ethnic differences in obesity. *Continuing Medical Education*. 23 (11). <http://www.cmaj.org.za/index.php/cmaj/article/view/763> (Accessed 10 May 2016)

- Grabe, S, Hyde J.S. 2006. Ethnicity and body dissatisfaction among women in the United States: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Greenstein, R., Roberts, B. and Sitas, A. 2003. Qualitative Research Methodology. In Greenstein, R. (Ed), *Research Methods Manual*: 49-62
- Greer, G. 1999. *The whole woman*. Transworld Publishers: London.
- Griffin, M, Bailey, K.A, & Lopez, K. J. 2022. #BodyPositive? A critical exploration of the body positive movement within physical cultures taking an intersectionality approach. <https://www.doi:10.3389/fspor.2022.908580> Accessed 15 February 2025
- Grombacher, P. 2014. Art & Activism in the Age of the Obesity Epidemic. Accessed 9 October 2024
- Grosz, E.A.1994. *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Gurung, R. 2014. Health Psychology: A Cultural Approach. *What determines HealthBehaviors*. Jon- David Hague: Wardsworth.
- Hamilton, C. 2011. Obesity, a cure for loss of identity. www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/obesity-a-cure-for-loss-of-identity/2007/09/24/1190486221584.html Accessed 10 February 2011.
- Hatfield, E., & Sprecher, S. 1986. *Mirror mirror: The importance of looks in everyday life*. Albany State University of New York Press.
- Harper, B. & Tiggemann, M. (2008). *The Effect of Thin Ideal Media Images on Women's Self-Objectification, Mood and Body Image Sex Roles*. 58 (9/10): 649-657.
- Hawthorn, J. 2017. Theories of the Gaze. Accessed 19 March 2018
- Heubeck, E. 2006. Helping girls with body image. <http://www.webmd.com/beauty/style/helping-girls-with-body-image> Accessed 19 October 2015.
- Hill, L. 2012. Why do you even lift? The reasons for men attempting to gain muscular physiques through working out in gyms in the North East of England. <https://www.brookes.ac.uk> Accessed 10 December 2024

- Howard, J. 2018. The history of the ideal woman and where that has left us. CNN Health. <https://www.cnn.com> Accessed 20 November 2024
- Hughes, B. 2019. Dark side of Venus: goddess represents more than nudity, romance and sex. The Sydney Morning Herald. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Irigaray, L. Burke, C. 1980. When our lips speak together: Women, sex and sexuality. 6(1):69-79 Accessed 14 September 2024
- Journal of counselling psychology 35 (4), 463, 1988
- Jonstang IC. The effect of body dissatisfaction on eating disorder symptomatology: Mediating effects of depression and low self-esteem. A partial test of the Dual-Pathway Model. 2009. Available from: [http://www.academia.edu/6035549/The](http://www.academia.edu/6035549/The_effect_of_body_dissatisfaction_on_eating_disorder_symptomatology:_Mediating_effects_of_depression_and_low_self-esteem._A_partial_test_of_the_Dual-Pathway_Model) effect of body dissatisfaction on eating disorder symptomatology: Mediating effects of depression and low self-esteem. A partial test of the Dual-Pathway Model
- Keller, KL; Kling, SMR; Fuchs, AI, Reigh, NA, Masterson, C. 2019. A Biopsychosocial Model of Sex Differences in Children's Eating Behaviours. National Library of Medicine
- Kreuter M.W. and McClure S.M. 2004. The role of culture in health communication. *Annu Rev Public Health* 25:439-455.
- Kristeva, J. 2000. Approaching abjection, in *The artist's body*. Edited by T Warr. London: Phaidon:242 – 243.
- Kroll, D.S, Feldman, D.E, Bieseker, C.L, McPherson, K.L, Manza, P, Joseph, P.V, Volkow, N.D, Wang, G.J. 2020. Neuroimaging of Sex/Gender Differences in Obesity: A review of Structure, Function and Nutrients. National Institution of Health Accessed 10 November 2024
- Kruger, H.S., Puoane, T., Senekal, M., & van der Merwe, M-T. 2005. Obesity in South Africa: Challenges for government and health professionals. *Public Health Nutrition* 8 (5): 491-500. <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=5851> (Accessed 23 October 2016)
- Lauren Gurrieri, "Stocky Bodies: Fat Visual Activism," *Fat Studies* 2, no. 2 (2013), 202-206.

- LeBesco, Kathleen. 2021. "Queering Fat Bodies/Politics." In *Bodies Out Of Bounds: Fatness and Transgression*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco, 74-87. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Marcia, E. 2019. Analysing the psychological – what does the male gaze do? Accessed 16 February 2025.
- Madeline, F, Caleo, S, Manzi, F. 2023. Women at work: Pathways from gender stereotypes to Gender Bias and Discrimination. Department of Psychology. NY
- Makow, H. 2010. *Cruel hoax: Feminism and the new world order*. Silas Green.
- Mangcu, X. 2008. *To the brink: The state of democracy in South Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Marino, H. E. 2012. From Promise to Promiscuity. <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- Matoti-Mvalo, T. and Puoane, T. 2011. Perceptions of body size and its association with HIV/AIDS. *South African journal of clinical nutrition* 24 (1): 40-45.
- Manafe, M, Chelule, P. K, Madiba, S. 2022. The Perception of Overweight and obesity among South African Adults: Implications for Intervention Strategies. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912335> Accessed 14 February 2025
- Martinez, A. 2019. Social Media, Thin Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating Attitudes: An Exploratory analysis. NHI. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Mauvais-Jarvis, F, Clegg D.J, Hevener, A.L. 2013. The role of estrogens in control of energy balance and glucose homeostasis. National Library of Medicine. Accessed 14 December 2024
- Mchiza, Z. J-R. (2008). *Factors associated with obesity in South African mothers and their pre adolescent daughters: A cross-cultural validation and comparison study*. (Doctoral thesis). University of Cape Town Libraries, South Africa. <http://hdl.handle.net/11180/828> (Accessed 20 July 2016)
- Mciza, Z, Goedecke JH, Steyn, NP et al. (2005). Development and validation of instruments measuring body image and body weight dissatisfaction

- in South African mothers and their daughters. *Public Health Nutr* 8, 509-519
- McKenzie, M.N. 2011. Gender roles and South Africa. WordPress. Accessed 15 February 2025
- Meagher, M. 2003. Jenny Saville and the feminist aesthetics of disgust. *Hypatia* 18(4) Women, art and aesthetics:23-41. www.jstor.org/stable/3810973?origin=JSTOR-pdf (Accessed 11 August 2016).
- Miller, A, Cassidy, O, Greene, T, Bragg, M.A, 2021. Aqualitative Analysis of Black and White Adolescents' Perceptions of and Responses to Racially Targeted Food and Drink Commercials on Television. *Int. J Environ Res Public Health*. Accessed 17 December 2024
- Monteath, S.A., and McCabe, M.P. (1997).The Influence of Societal Factors on Female Body Image.*Social Psychology* 137(6):708-727.
- Monyeki K.D., Cameron N., Getz B. 2000. Growth and nutritional status of rural South African children 3–10 years old: the Ellisras Growth Study. *Am J Hum Biol*. 2000;12:42–9.*Oxford dictionary of art*. 3rd ed. 2004, sv “Feminism”. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Motseki, M, Oyedemi, T. 2017. Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty among young black women in South Africa. <https://doi.org/10.38140/com.v22i0.3299> Accessed 9 November 2024
- Mulvey, L. 1975. Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Accessed 12 October 2024
- Mulvey, L. 1989. Visual and Other Pleasures. London, Macmillan. 44-77
- Myers, T.A, Crowther, J.H. 2009. Social comparison as a predictor of body dissatisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 118 (4):683-698
- Myers, T.A, Crowler, J.H, 2008. Is Self-objectification related to inter receptive awareness? An examination of potential mediating pathways to disordered eating attitudes. *Psychology of women Quarterly*. 32(2):172-180.
- Ito, M., Horst, H. & Bittani, M. (2008). Living and Learning With New Media: Summary of Findings From the Digital Youth Project. *Reports on Digital Media and Learning*. Chicago, IL.

- Omran, A. 1971. The epidemiologic transition: a theory of the epidemiology of population change. *Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly*. 49(4):509-538
- Orland W. Wooley, Susan C. Wooley and Sue R. Dyrenforth, "Obesity and Women II: A Neglected Feminist Topic," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 87-88. Accessed 12 December 2024
- Odhiambo, T. 2008: The Black Female Body as a 'Consumer and a Consumable' in *CurrentDrum* and *True Love* Magazines in South Africa, *African Studies* 67(1): 71-80.
- Papadaki, L. 2007. Sexual Objectification: From Kant to Contemporary Feminism, *Contemporary Political Theory*. 6(3): 330-348
- Patton, T.O. 2006. Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair? African American Women and their struggles with beauty, body image, and Hair, *NWSA Journal*, 18 (2)
- Paul Campos, *The Obesity Myth: Why America's Obsession with Weight is Hazardous to Your Health* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004), 3-40. (Accessed 12 December 2024)
- Paul Campos, Abigail Saguy, Paul Ernsberger, Eric Oliver, and Glenn Gaesser, "The Epidemiology of Overweight and Obesity: Public Health Crisis or Moral Panic?" *International Journal of Epidemiology* 35 (2006): 55-60
- Perry, E. 2021. How (and why) to cultivate a positive mental attitude. Accessed 03 December 2024
- Phillips, K. 2004. Body dysmorphic disorder: recognising and treating imagined ugliness. 3(1):12-17
- Pollock, G. 2003. The visual, in *A concise companion to feminist theory*, edited by M Eagleton. Malden: Blackwell Publishing:173-194.
- Ponterotto, D. 2016. Resisting the Male Gaze: Feminist Responses to the "Normatization of the Female Body in Western Culture". *Journal of International Women Studies*. 17(1):133-151 Accessed 14 February 2025
- Poran, M. 2006. The Politics of Protection: Body Image, Social Pressures, and the Misrepresentation of Young Black Women. *Sex Roles* 55: 739–755.

- Pujols, Y, Meston, C & Seal, B. 2010. The Association Between Sexual Satisfaction and Body Image in Women. NIH. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Puoane, T. Tsolekile, L & Steyn, N. (2010) Perception about body image and sizes amongst black African girls in Cape Town. *Ethnic Dis* 20, 29-34
- Puoane, T & Mciza, Z. (2012) Socio-cultural and environmental factors related to obesity in black Africans: a perspective from South Africa. In *Obesity: A Multidimensional Approach to Contemporary Global Issues*, 91-98
- Puoane, T. Steyn, K, Bradshaw D et al. (2002) Obesity in South Africa: The South African Demographic and Health Survey. *Obes Res* 20, 1038-1048
- Puoane, T., Steyn, K., Bradshaw, D., Laubscher, R., Fourie, J., Lambert, V. and Mbananga, N. 2002. *Obesity in South Africa: The South African demographic and health survey. Obesity Research* 10: 1038-1048.
- Puoane, T., Fourie, J.M., Rosling, L., Tshaka, N.C., and Oelefs. A. 2005. Big is beautiful- An exploration with urban Black community Health workers in South African Township. *AS Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (April 2005), 18(1). Retrieved from <http://www.sajn.co.za/index.php/SAJCN/issue/view/14>.
- Ramutla, M. C. 2024. Irreversible Damage of Body Shaming on the Identity of South African Women on Social Media: A Content Analysis Study. UNISA. <https://orcid.org/0000-00018141-7198> Accessed 14 February 2025
- Redebe Z.L. & C. M Van Der Bank 2016: *Exploring Alternative Views on Western Miniskirt and isigcebhezana in the Patriarchal Zulu Culture of South Africa*. *Gender & Behaviour*, 14 (3) 7733-7763.
- Ribane, N. 2006. *Beauty: A black perspective*. University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press.
- Roberts, A. Cash, T.F, Feingold, A, Johnson, B.T. 2006. Are Black-white differences in females' body dissatisfaction decreasing? United Kingdom Mental Health Foundation. A meta-analytic review. *J. Consult Clin Psychol* 74, 1121-1131 Accessed 12 June 2024
- Rozgonjuk, D, R, Ryan, T, Kuljus, J.K, That, K, & Scott, G.G. 2019. Social

- comparison orientation mediates the relationship between neuroticism and passive Facebook use. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*. 13(1) <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2019-1-2> Accessed 15 February 2025
- Sayer, H. 2010. *A World of Art* (6th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall. Accessed 14 March 2024
- Seabrook, R. 2018. Less Than Human? Media use, Objectification of Women, and Men's Acceptance of Sexual Aggression. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000198> Accessed 15 February 2025
- Seid, R. 1994. Too "close to the bone": A historical context for women's obsession with Slenderness. In P. Fallon, M. Katzman, & S. Wooley (Eds). *Feminist perspectives on eating disorders* 1994:3-16. New York: Guilford
- Seide, M. 2024. What Scientists have to say about Facial Beauty. <https://www.verywelmind.com> Accessed 16 February 2025
- Shisana O, Labadarios D, Rehle T et al.; SANHANES-1 Team. 2013. South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1). Cape Town: HSRC Press Accessed 7 November 2024
- Steyn, M. 2001. *Whiteness isn't what it used to be: White identity in a changing South Africa*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sontag, S. 2002. An argument about beauty. *Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*. <https://www.amacad.org> Accessed 14 February 2025
- Spivey, N. 2005. How Art Made the World.
- Strausburger, V., & Donnerstein, E. 1999. *Children, Adolescents, and the Media: Issues and Solutions*. *Pediatrics*, 103(1):12-139.
- Susan C. Wooley and Orland W. Wooley, "Obesity and Women I: A Closer Look at the Facts," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 70.
- Szabo, C.P. & Allwood, C.W. (2006). Body figure preference in South African adolescent females: A cross cultural study, *African Health Science* 64 (4): 201-206.
- Tang, Y, 2021. The Stereotypes About Women's Appearance Throughout the

- History of China. <https://www.atlantis-press.com> Vol. 594:2
- The Vitruvian Man 2002 <http://www.leonardodavinci.stanfordledu/> (Accessed 7 April 2016).
- Thompson, S & Hammond, K. 2003. Beauty is as Beauty does: Body image and self-esteem of pageant contestants. *Eating and Weight Disorders*. 8:231-237
- Tims, 2021. The Corsets's recuring Comeback. <https://vogue.co.uk>
- Tolman, D.L, Impett, E.A, Tracy, A.J, Micheal, A. 2006. Looking good, sounding good: Femininity ideology and adolescent girls' mental health. *Psychology of women Quarterly*. 30(1):85-95
- Vanbuskirk, S. 2024. Understanding the Male Faze and how it Objectifies Women. www.verywellmind.com Accessed 16 February 2025
- Van der Merwe M.T, & Pepper M.S, 2006. Obesity and its health impact in Africa: *Obesity in South Africa: a systematic review*. 7(4)315-22
- Vandenbosch, L 7 Eggermont, S. 2012. Understanding sexual objectification: A comprehensive approach toward media exposure and girls' internalisation of beauty ideals, self-objectification, and body surveillance. *Journal of Communication*. 62(5):869-887. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01667>
- Van Eeden, EA, Van Hoeken, D, Hoek, HW. 2021. Incidence, Prevalence and Mortality of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa. Accessed 11 November 2024
- Vartanian, L.R, Herman, C.P, & Polivy, J. 2007. Consumption Stereotypes and Impression Management: How you are what you eat. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.200610.008> Accessed 26 October 2024
- Vaughn, C. 2024. Why Self-Expression is So Important. Medium. <https://medium.com> Accessed 15 February 2025
- Villines, Z. 2024. The effects of fat shaming on health. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com> Accessed 16 February 2025
- Voracek, M. & Fisher, M.L 2005. The shape of beauty: determinants of female physical attractiveness, *Journal of Cosmetic Dermatolog*, 5:190–194.

- Wadden, T.A, Diddie, E. 2003. What's in a name? Patients preferred terms for describing obesity. 11:1140-46.doi
- Waller, G.& Barnes, J. 2002. Preconscious processing of body image cues: Impact on bodypercept and concept, *Journal of psychosomatic*, 53 (5):1037-1041.
- Waller, D.S. 2015. Photoshop and Deceptive Advertising. <https://researchgate.net> Accessed 13 February 2025
- Warden, G. 2012. Sad South Africa: Cry, the beloved country. <http://safaritalk.net/topic/9522-sad-south-africa-cry-the-beloved-country/page-4> (Accessed 19 October 2015).
- Wargo, E. 2011. Beauty is in the Mind of the Beholder. APS. Accessed 14 February 2025
- Wassenaar, D., Le Grange, D., Winship, J. & Lachenicht, L. 2006. The prevalence of eatingdisorder pathology in cross-ethnic population of female students in South Africa, *European Eating Disorders Review* 8: 225-236.
- Weber, G.W, Lukeneder, A, Harzhauser, M. et al. 2002. The microstructure and the origin of the Venus from Willendorf
- Weitz, R. 2001. Women and hair: Seeking power through resistance and accommodation. *Gender and Society*, 15 (5): 667-686.
- World Health Organization 2012 (2019). Global Status Report onNoncommunicable Diseases 2010. Geneva:World Health Organization.
- Williams, L. Susan, 2002. Trying on Gender, Gender regimes and the Process of becoming a Woman. *Gender and Society* 16: 29-52. World Health Organization. Obesity: preventing and managing the global epidemic: report of a WHO consultation. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2000:xii, 265 (Technical report series no. 894).
- Wolff, J. 1990. "Reinstating Corporeality. Feminism and Body Politics" *In Feminine SentencesEssays on Women Culture*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of Carlifornia Press
- Yam, M. 2013. Does Culture matter in Body Image? The effects of Subjective and Contextual Culture on Body Image among Bicultural Women. Accessed 11 September 2024

Yancey, A. K., Leslie, J., & Abel, E. K. 2006. *Obesity at the crossroads: Feminist and public health perspectives*. *Signs:Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 31: 425–443.

Yichen, L. 2023. Propped by Jenny Saville: Challenging the Aesthetics of the Female Body and Image. Accessed 26 August 2021

www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2014/lancet-global-obesity-report-exp

(Accessed 02October 2015)

[http://www.philosophytalk.org/community/blog/laura-](http://www.philosophytalk.org/community/blog/laura-maguire/2015/04/simone-de-Beauvoir)

[maguire/2015/04/simone-de-Beauvoir](http://www.philosophytalk.org/community/blog/laura-maguire/2015/04/simone-de-Beauvoir) (Accessed 20 July 2016)

www.huji.academia.edu/PaulFrosh

(Accessed 11 April 20016)

[https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Bea](https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Beauvoir_onFemale_Embodiment)
[uvoir_onFemale_Embodiment](https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Becoming_A_Woman_Simone_de_Beauvoir_onFemale_Embodiment) (Accessed 18 October 2016)

<http://flavorwire.com/273653/10-famous-feminist-artworks>

(Accessed 20 August 2016)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_art_movement