

Body Image: Society's Secret Obsession

discourse analysis of women's talk about their relationship with their bodies

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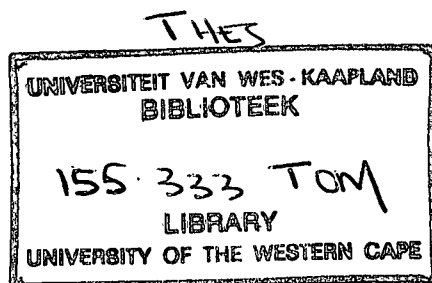


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KEYWORDS

women; body image; cultural practices; gender dynamics; qualitative research; social constructionism; feminist research; discourse analysis; focus groups; ethical considerations.



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ABSTRACT

Women and their bodies are at the very centre of a prevailing cultural obsession regarding strict standards of body weight, shape and image. The pressure to achieve unattainable body-beautiful standards has given rise to women having a negative relationship with their bodies. This preoccupation with body image has resulted in an increasing sense of body dissatisfaction, chronic dieting and anxieties associated with self-worth and appearance.

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore the relationship a group of female participants have with their bodies. The major thrusts of this study are: to explore on a deeper level how they make personal meaning of the concepts of body and body image within their own lives. To explore the way in which women understand their broader social context, as playing a role, in relation to their perceptions and attitudes of their bodies. In this respect, a closer examination of their awareness of the more complex gender issues, will be undertaken, by means of the emerging discourses within the research process.

Whilst this study generally locates itself within a social constructionist understanding of body image, it actively draws from feminist theories. The literature review outlines empirical, feminist and social constructionist approaches to body image and explores the social constructionist approach more broadly. It utilises discourse analysis and therefore positions itself within a qualitative paradigm. Three one-and-a-half-hour focus groups were conducted with eight women who are psychology honours students. A discourse analysis was carried out on the transcriptions of the three focus

groups. The findings revealed that the participants were aware of the way in which the wider cultural context impacted on their perceptions and attitudes regarding their bodies. They understood the way in which body image is socially constructed and specific to the current cultural context. They identified the current body ideal (norm), to be waif like and very slender. Despite this understanding of the body ideal as socially constructed, they continued on a personal level to evaluate themselves against the body ideal, giving rise to personal feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction.



Declaration

I declare that this whole thesis is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Janine Tommy



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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The female body has for centuries been, and continues to be, a central component of the discourse associated with women's psychological and physical health and illness. Throughout history, the direct connection between the female body and ill health has persisted and been represented by concepts such as 'the wandering womb', hysteria, anorexia, and more recently, the syndromes of premenstrual stress, postnatal depression and the menopausal syndrome (Butler, 1990). Thus the female body has been used to varying degrees as a vehicle for pathologising women, both medically and psychologically, and these practices have served to control women's experience (Butler, 1990). While these overt practices continue to exert control over women, literally through their biology, attention has recently turned to what is referred to as more subtle and subversive underpinnings of gender oppression with regard to the female body.

Foucault (in Bartky, 1990, p. 65) stated that the rise of modern society was accompanied by a dark counter-movement, namely the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body, which has effectively 'produced subjected and practised bodies' or 'docile bodies'. This is particularly relevant to women who have become the targets of a cultural obsession with strict standards of body weight, form, shape and image. These cultural disciplines that are informed by patriarchally dominated practices work towards creating women's bodies that are

more 'docile than the bodies of men' (Bartky, 1990, p. 65). As such, concepts such as the female body and body image are viewed as complex and deeply layered with both personal and political meanings.

These cultural factors interact with personal experience to create the multi-dimensional nature of body and body image that is extremely complicated to tackle. In the wake of increased attention given to body image disturbances there have been many difficulties in the way in which body image has been conceptualised and studied, in both a professional capacity and in everyday understanding. Behind these difficulties and uncertainties, there appears to be intense controversy over the best way to properly understand body image: should it be viewed literally as referring 'to the body as a psychological experience, which focuses on the individual's feelings and attitudes toward their own body' (Uys & Wassenaar, 1996, p. 236) or as a representation of cultural practices dominated by patriarchy?

This study locates its primary reasoning within the social sphere wherein gender and power dynamics are acknowledged and examined as integral elements in the conceptualisation of body image. In particular, this study focuses on the wider social, ideological and institutional contexts in which body image emerges, and thereby locates itself within a social constructionist framework (Wilbraham, 1996). It explores the individual's experience in relation to these social forces.

RATIONALE

The concept of body image has enjoyed a surge of attention from researchers in recent years (Thompson & Psaltis, in Bergeron & Senn, 1998). Evident in this surge is the disjointed nature of the various approaches to its investigation and understanding of

the area. The definitions of body image which have developed are considered neither consistent nor unitary (Fisher, 1990; Hsu & Sobkiewicz, 1991; Keeton, Cash, & Brown, in Bergeron & Senn, 1998), but are more a product of the emphasis of individual researchers (Bergeron & Senn, 1998). As a result, within the varying literature the concept of body image largely does not operate as a clearly defined unidimensional phenomenon, but rather it serves as an umbrella under which diverse facets of the psychological experience of the body can be included (Bergeron & Senn, 1998).

Due to this complexity, defining the concept is a process steeped in much debate and various studies have addressed the phenomenon in varying respects. These include empirical studies, feminist theory and social constructionist theory. For the purposes of this study, the social constructionist definition of body image is employed. Namely, that the body and the body image one experiences and conceptualises is always mediated by constructs, associations and images of a cultural nature (Bordo, 1993). As such it is understood to be specific to the cultural context in which it is embedded. The way in which the mainstream and feminist approaches define body image is outlined in their respective chapters.

Discourse with regard to the politics of women's physical appearance and objectification of their bodies is vast (Wilbraham, 1996). In most societies, men and women develop very different attitudes towards their bodies. In general the positive, almost proud attitude of many men contrasts sharply with the negative and often guilt-ridden feelings of many women. Much research has examined this dynamic by exploring the relationship between body image disturbances and eating disorders, and body affect more generally, in both clinical and non-clinical populations.

The literature suggests that more women than men have poor body image affecting their self-image and self-esteem. This has resulted in an increase in the employment of dieting regimes, exercise routines and the use of plastic surgery. As a result both gender and power dynamics are an important reference point in understanding body image.

Despite an increasing awareness of these concepts, the dieting industry and the rise of plastic surgery have become intensely pervasive within society. This implies that women are suffering from self-esteem problems and negative self-image more than ever before. While much research has focused upon body image in relation to eating disorders, very little work has chosen to focus upon the topic of body image in women more generally. Thus, this study attempts to contribute towards bridging this gap by more thoroughly examining the experience of a non-clinical group of women.

This study is located broadly in a social constructionist framework and also draws from Foucault's theory regarding discourses and the body (Malson, 1998). This is because Foucault's work is considered significant in its understanding of the direct grip culture has upon women's bodies through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life. Bearing this in mind, it is understood as necessary to examine both the wider social contexts in which the female body is understood and the manner in which this impacts upon the individual woman. Likewise it is useful to examine the influence that her own constructed conceptualisations of her body have upon her own experiences, status and identity. In doing this, this study attempts to contribute towards the growing body of literature and research which actively questions and examines the more dominant mainstream discourses. As such, it attempts to contribute towards a growing discourse of resistance. In addition, it attempts to work

towards a form of consciousness raising amongst women. Essentially then, this study aims to explore the complex relationships women have with their bodies and through the process raise awareness of the underlying issues. As Karl Marx insisted, 'changes in consciousness are changes in life, and in a culture that counts on our remaining unconscious they are political as well' (in Bordo, 1993, p. 30).

OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapters two, three and four review the literature within this field. Due to the complexity surrounding the concept of body image, three areas of literature are outlined. In chapter two empirical research in this field is explored. Chapter three describes feminist studies. Chapter four begins with an outline of the social constructionist paradigm followed by social constructionist explorations of body image.

The research design and methodology employed in the present study are presented in chapter four. The chapter provides the reader with information about the participants, focus groups and procedures used to gather the information. Discourse analysis is thoroughly outlined and discussed in terms of why it is best suited to this form of research.

The final chapter presents the results, analysis and conclusions. It uses discourse analysis to explore the transcriptions in relation to pertinent issues raised in the literature review. This chapter also points out limitations of the present study and raises issues for further research. As such, it concludes the study by briefly summarising the topics covered and conclusions arrived at earlier in the study.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW:

This chapter addresses itself to providing a background to an important area of woman's oppression in modern day western culture, namely that of her relationship to her body (Shefer, 1986). It aims to provide the reader with an historical overview of the development of the area of body image and body image disturbances, by reviewing selected literature of relevance to this area. It begins with pre-medical cases of female self-starvation, moves onto self-starvation in early medical discourse, and then looks at anorexia nervosa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following this is a detailed review of empirical studies in the area of body image. A brief discussion of psychological theories is presented before concluding the chapter with some critical comments.

Empirical research on body image has tended to focus on the connection between body image and eating disorders, primarily because a distorted view of, or a disparaging attitude toward one's body features, predominates within the diagnosis itself. Although more recently research has begun to transcend the boundary of eating disorders, much of the history of body image has focused upon it in its relationship with eating disorders (Bergeron & Senn, 1998). As such the historical overview and empirical research reviewed within this chapter is based on the literature of eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa, which features body image as a dominant feature within the literature and diagnosis (Bergeron & Senn, 1998).

Defining the Approach

Since at least the 1930's the hypothetico-deductive or positivist methodology has been presented as the dominant paradigm in psychology (Malson, 1998). This approach is characterised by its adherence to experimental control, manipulation of variables, a strict concern with research procedures, with quantification measurement and statistical analysis (Malson, 1998).

The philosophy of science underpinning this approach is that of logical positivism, which assumes an objective, knowable reality and is based on the empiricist 'epistemology that true knowledge must be grounded in experience and observation' (Malson, 1998, p.35). Objective knowledge is thus argued as only being attainable by scientific experimentation and observation which could confirm or disconfirm "the truth of logical propositions" (Malson, 1998, p.35). As such, it was believed that "by reducing complex concepts to simple concepts, related to unambiguous experimental operations, science, it was thought, could be built upon a solid foundation of indisputable facts" (Harre & Secord in Malson, 1998, p.35).

Bearing this in mind, it is apparent that in the clinical literature on eating disorders, the task of description, classification and delineation of 'pathology' has characterised all research (Bordo, 1993). Throughout the history of eating disorders within this framework, attempts to link it to one or another specific pathogenic situation (such as biological, psychological, familial) proliferate (Bordo, 1993). In addition, studies have and still continue to attempt demonstrating that eating disorders are "members of some established category of disorder (depressive, affective, perceptual, hypothalamic)" (Bordo, 1993, p.49).

As such, the search for common pathologies has and continues to characterise this framework. Crucially, this dominant framework employs an understanding of distress, by means of individualising it, “so it no longer seems to make sense to consider the gender or race of someone who is being diagnosed” (Parker; Georgaca; Harper; McLaughlin & Stowell-Smith, 1995, p.37). Therefore, it is understood that eating disorders and body image disturbances are defined by this framework within an individualised and pathologised manner. Numerous critiques have been made of this framework. Parker et al. (1995) argues that this framework reflects commercial interests, is individualistic and reproduces dominant conceptions of the western world. Importantly, the way in which this framework incorporates the cultural context within it’s understanding (specifically related to the topic of body image) is by describing it as a contributory, facilitating or a modulating factor (Bordo, 1993).

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONCEPT OF BODY IMAGE

Pre-medical cases of female self-starvation

In medieval Europe, particularly in the years between 1200 and 1500, many women refused food and the circumstances of prolonged fasting was considered a female miracle (Brumberg, 1988). The best known of these saints is Catherine of Sienna (1347–1380) who only ate a handful of herbs each day and occasionally shoved twigs down her throat to bring up any other food that she was forced to eat. Thirteenth-century figures such as Mary of Oignes and Beatrice of Nazareth vomited from the mere smell of meat, and their throats swelled shut in the presence of food. Other women covered their faces at the sight of food, refused to partake of family meals and some, such as Columba of Rieti (fifteenth century) actually died of self-starvation (Brumberg, 1988).

Several historians of anorexia nervosa have asserted that many such cases can be retrospectively diagnosed as anorexia nervosa (Malson, 1998). These historians argue that anorexia nervosa existed as early as the thirteenth century and that these women displayed typical anorectic premorbid personalities (Malson, 1998). Although fasting and restrictive eating was a widely noted characteristic of medieval spirituality, it did not engage both genders in the same manner or to the same degree (Brumberg, 1988). However, this does not automatically infer that the twentieth century concept of anorexia is applicable to these historical cases of women's self-starvation. As such, many historians approach retrospective diagnosis with caution. They argue that it is important to bear in mind that in the 'medieval period fasting was fundamental to the model of female holiness' (Brumberg, 1988, p. 41). Food, particularly the Eucharist and fasting, was located within a Christian, religious framework. For the medieval woman to fast, meant that she found other forms of food, such as prayer, the Christian Eucharist and God as sustenance (Brumberg, 1988). Thus, fasting, restrictive eating and self-starvation was understood not as an individual pathology but as an instrument of spirituality.

Bearing this in mind, the assumption that modern day anorexia is a 'transhistorical medical entity, existing independently of the discourses in which it is currently constituted and the cultural milieu in which it is now experienced' (Malson, 1998, p. 51) is highly problematic. The experiences and consequences for religious female fasters and modern day anorexics are very different. Fasting amongst medieval females was perceived as an admirable and holy expression of spirituality within their culture, thus, differing starkly from the tragic, pathologised, modern day anorexic (Brumberg, 1988).

Self-starvation in early medical discourse

'By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scientifically minded physicians began to pay close attention to food abstinence, so common among women of the High Middle Ages' (Brumberg, 1988, p. 42). They then labelled this behaviour as both 'inedia prodigiosa' (a great starvation) and 'anorexia mirabilis' (miraculously inspired loss of appetite). This labelling indicates a turning away from the theological explanations to that of medical explanations and discourses. This transition towards an adaptation of medical discourse did not occur instantaneously. However, by the end of the eighteenth century a new medical interpretation of self-starvation emerged, which had detached itself from previous religious explanations. This juncture in which self-starvation became a more medical than religious concern is taken as 'the beginning' of the history of eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and body image by association (Malson, 1998). Richard Morton's *Phthisiologica or a treatise of consumption* (1689/1694) is credited as the earliest report of anorexia in the medical literature (Brumberg, 1988). Morton described the condition as 'nervous atrophy' which was understood to be a form of 'consumption' or 'phthisis' which is a 'wasting' disease characterised by 'a lack of appetite, amenorrhea, extreme emaciation and an absence of fever, cough or other distemper' (Malson, p. 53).

A multiplicity of explanatory models existed during this period. Predominant among these was the theory of 'humours' which identified a preoccupation with nerves and nervousness (Brumberg, 1988). Traditional humoral theory stated that temperament, physique and health were determined by the same 'fluctuating equilibrium of internal fluids, spirits, appetites and souls' (Malson, p. 54). As such, diseases were understood and explained in terms of temporary concentrations of humours (Brumberg, 1988).

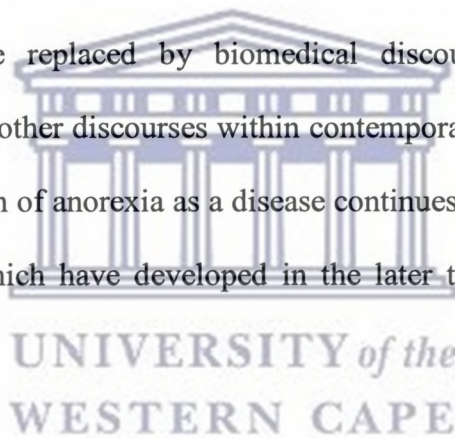
Various historians of anorexia have argued that these models and in particular Morton's work had set the groundwork for modern medical discourse. However, others argue that these early descriptions should be understood as early medical explanations of fasting and not of an eating disorder, such as anorexia nervosa (Brumberg, 1988). Central to their arguments is the belief that attempts at retrospective diagnosis denies the differing cultural 'significances of self-starvation as well as the considerable differences and discontinuities in medical knowledge' (Malson, 1998). Thus, they argue against the notion that anorexia nervosa has always existed independently of modern medical knowledge or cultural context.

Anorexia nervosa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the tradition of anorexia 'mirabilis' was again called into question by a series of public cases involving women who did not eat. The term 'fasting girls' was used by Victorians to describe cases of prolonged abstinence where there was uncertainty about the aetiology of the situation and ambiguity about the intention of the women (Brumberg, 1988). This term replaced 'anorexia mirabilis' which was more deeply associated with religious purposes. By 1900, particularly within the public domain, the term 'fasting girls' had become the label of choice amongst the emergent medical practitioners (Brumberg, 1988). The generic use of the word 'girls' also conveyed the notion of hysteria. Amongst Victorian physicians, girlhood was regarded as a vulnerable period during which 'girls' were susceptible to nervous disorders. Different explanations continued to develop within this period ranging from 'hysteria', 'hypochondria' and gastric nerves. These explanations continued to grow, develop and be replaced.

Emergence of the modern disease

By the close of the nineteenth century 'anorexia nervosa' had become an established object of medical discourse and throughout the twentieth century it has become the object of an increasing variety of different discourses and different disciplines which have labelled it either psychosomatic, psychological and/or an organic disorder (Nasser, 1997). The early part of the twentieth century included the rise of psychoanalysis which soon claimed the condition as part of its discourse. However, the early 1920's saw the growing influence of the logical positivist approach to science, 'in which empirically verifiable objective facts was posited as the only true form of scientific knowledge' (Malson, 1998, p. 77). As a result the psychoanalytic discourse soon became replaced by biomedical discourse which continues to predominate over many other discourses within contemporary society (Nasser, 1997). The medical construction of anorexia as a disease continues to exert its influence over the many discourses which have developed in the later twentieth century (Nasser, 1997).



Biomedical research is primarily concerned with the 'quantification of data (information) in order to permit subsequent statistical manipulations and analyses' (Babbie, 1989, p. 352). Characteristic of this type of framework is the emphasis on symptomatology. This is measured in terms of perceptual components (estimation of body size), subjective components (such as body satisfaction, cognitive evaluation and anxiety), and a behavioural component (Thompson, 1990). Starkly evident within this type of research is the invisibility of patriarchal relations within their grounded understanding.

Problematic relationships to the body have usually been recognised in their extreme

form by medical, psychiatric and psychological professionals. Such professionals have largely been responsible for giving the names anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa to these problematic relationships. As a result much of the attention and focus of mainstream research has been within the field of understanding clinical eating disorders. Because this focus was on understanding these illnesses as alien to the normal, and as such branded as abnormal, mainstream research has been criticised for neglecting the realm of the social which affects all women. The role of socially constructed femininity had to a large degree not been focused on within the literature. Much of the criticism was directed towards the fact that the concept of 'normal femininity' had not been adequately developed within the understanding of extreme problems like anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Equally the normal woman who lives in the culture within which anorexics and bulimics emerge, had largely been ignored empirically. In particular, the normal woman who did not fit the standard criteria for these problems, yet experienced similar problems, was neglected with very few studies having investigated women with 'anorexic-like' or 'body image' problems (Shefer, 1986).

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF BODY IMAGE

More recently empirical research has begun to focus on and address the cultural pressures concerning weight control and slimness, by including body image amongst normal or non-clinical samples. Thus the concept of body image has begun to be considered clinically significant and not only in relation to eating disorders. As a result a multitude of studies have yielded evidence relating to both clinical and so called normal populations. In addition, a number of studies have investigated both men's and women's attitudes to their bodies.

Body image and attitudes to eating

The established finding that 90 percent of eating disordered populations are women has resulted in the knowledge that bulimia and anorexia nervosa are diseases of women (Schneider, O'Leary & Jenkins, 1995). Similarly, in reviewing the literature it is clear that within normal populations, women in particular show a marked concern for their bodies (Tiggemann, Winefield, Winefield & Goldney, 1994). Women express greater dissatisfaction with their body size and shape than men (De Angelis, 1997; Dittrich, 1996; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Marshall, 1996; Schneider et al., 1995; Shefer, 1986; Thompson, 1990; Tiggemann & Dyer, 1995; Tiggemann et al., 1994; Varney, 1996; Uys & Wassenaar, 1996; Wilbraham, 1996; Zdrodowski, 1996). However, in a study by Schneider et al. (1995) results showed that heterosexual women and gay men shared many similar unhealthy patterns of eating attitudes and food-related behaviours. It was found that both groups were likely to binge eat, lack control over eating, engage in weight control activities and be over-concerned with their body shape and weight. Furthermore, both groups acknowledged feeling terrified of fat and as a result tried to restrict their eating habits, reporting similar behaviours and concerns to those associated with bulimia, anorexia and unspecified eating disorders. Whilst the two groups shared these characteristics, results clearly showed that heterosexual women had the most subjective discomfort with their weight and expressed it in the following ways: most dissatisfaction with their current weight and appearance, wanting to lose more weight, behavioural restraint despite feeling out of control, feeling fat, and feeling most depressed and guilty about eating and binge eating. Thus, it is believed that heterosexual women are the most predisposed within society towards acquiring an eating disorder.

This finding is contradicted by studies undertaken by Striegel-Moore, Tucker and Hsu

(1990) and Hertzog, Newman, Yeh and Warshaw (1992). Striegel-Moore et al. (1990) found that both lesbian and heterosexual women students did not differ in their experience of a negative body image. Similarly Hertzog et al. (1992) found that even though heterosexual women had a thinner body ideal than lesbians, both groups still experienced feeling fat, spent time thinking about their weight and shape, and experienced feelings of body disparagement.

It has become well documented that many women, ranging from pre-adolescents to adult women, in our society experience considerable dissatisfaction with their body size and shape and perceive themselves as overweight (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Tiggemann & Dyer, 1995; Tiggemann et al., 1994). In addition, a study by Deeks and McCabe (2001) found that all women within their sample of pre-menopausal, peri-menopausal or post-menopausal (ranging from thirty-six to sixty-five years of age) all felt dissatisfied with their bodies. Even though there was a trend for menopausal women to have lower ratings than pre-menopausal women on measures of appearance and fitness, there were no differences between any of the groups on dissatisfaction with body parts. Furthermore, it was found that even though the older women in the group chose larger ideal body figures, they still chose relatively small figures for what they would like to look like, and of what they felt society expected them to look like.

Overwhelmingly within the research it is evident that slimness is highly valued amongst women (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Shefer, 1986; Tiggemann & Dyer, 1995; Tiggemann et al., 1994), and the perceived social consequences of being overweight and accompanying negative stereotypes are stronger for women than for men (Tiggemann et al., 1994). Research by Tiggemann and Pennington (1990) has produced evidence that young girls from nine years of age report body dissatisfaction.

Hill, Oliver and Rogers (in Grogan & Wainwright, 1996) have further confirmed this with a study revealing that nine-year-olds are indeed dissatisfied with their body shape and size. Grogan and Wainwright (1996) conducted a study of pre-teens to adult women and concluded that women and girls have a problematic relationship with food and body image and that this may start as early as eight years of age. Similarly, Kaufman, Warren and Hamilton (1995) found in a study of young dancers that the ideal body required for dancing puts them at risk for either developing an eating disorder or having to end their careers in dance studies. The loss of thinness of prepubescence frequently results in strenuous dieting.

Studies show that regardless of weight category, women generally consider themselves as more overweight than men (Tiggemann et al., 1994). The findings by Tiggemann et al. (1994) that objectively normal-weight women consider themselves as overweight replicates previous studies and adds to the literature showing that women evaluate their bodies more negatively than men. They have also found that women's self-esteem and general psychological wellbeing are compromised by distorted body image. Tiggemann et al. (1994) state that given the proposed centrality of body weight to women's attractiveness and the importance of attractiveness to women's self-image, one could predict that a woman's body weight and her satisfaction with it would be important variables in her overall satisfaction with herself. Numerous studies have demonstrated a relationship between general concern or dissatisfaction with body weight and self-esteem, especially for women (Bergeron & Senn, 1998; Cachelin, Veisel & Barzegarnazari, 2000; Deeks & McCabe, 2000; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Kaufman et al., 1995; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Schneider et al., 1995; Shefer, 1986; Tiggemann & Dyer, 1995; Tiggeman et al, 1994; Zdrodowski, 1996).

For men, no similar correlation between psychological wellbeing and perceptions of weight were found. Such findings are consistent with much of the existing literature, namely that the notion of weight is central to women's self-image but not men's. Furthermore, Noll and Fredrickson (1998), using a mediational model of disordered eating derived from objectification theory, found that there is an array of psychological consequences facing girls and women, by virtue of them being socialised to view themselves as objects. These include risks for a broad range of psychological disorders, including eating disorders, uni-polar depression and sexual dysfunction. Their study more specifically provides evidence that self-objectification increases women's experience of body shame, which in turn may contribute to their increased risk for disordered eating. The shame that is experienced is shown to be viewed by women as a failure attributed to the self in its totality and not just their actions. Thus, feelings of failure as a result of being fat are understood as being a unique form of shame for women. It could be argued that the psychological consequences are extremely powerful, resulting in lowered self-esteem and feelings of personal shame or failure. These consequences can powerfully motivate women to dieting, binge-purging cycles and restrictive eating. As such, they experience increased risk for acquiring eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

Zdrodowski's (1996) study exploring the experience of eating in public for overweight women found that stigma is attached to body image and to anybody that does not appear 'normal' such as the overweight woman. These women are considered severely deviant from the so-called norm. The study shows that overweight women are viewed as experiencing a self-imposed condition which results in them often facing hostility and the full force of social stigma. The powerful message that overweight women are socially deviant results in many of these women leading

restricted lives. The vicious relationship between overweight women and society is one that is generally neglected and has few empirical studies focusing upon it. The study strongly points out how stigma is powerful and can be self-fulfilling, resulting in many overweight women seeing themselves as deviant.

Eating attitudes and perfectionism

Tiggemann & Dyer's (1995) work shows that amongst adolescent women within a non-clinical sample there is a drive to become thinner than what is perceived as attractive to males. They suggest that it is likely that this is due to a search for perfectionism. High perfectionism scores indicate excessive personal expectations for superior achievement in a number of different domains, such as family and school. Their results suggest that with respect to bodies, superior achievement means having a very thin figure. Their study indicates that young women with high bulimic scores appear to value thinness as a very positive attribute indicating successful achievement over and above any notion of attractiveness.

Haase, Pravavessis and Owens (1999) investigated the relationship between eating attitudes and perfectionism. They defined perfectionism as being two-fold, namely positive and negative perfectionism. Positive perfectionism was defined as the motivation to achieve a certain goal in order to obtain a favourable outcome. Negative perfectionism was understood as the motivation to achieve a certain goal in order to avoid adverse consequences. Their findings confirmed that negative perfectionism was positively correlated with disturbed eating attitudes, whereas positive perfectionism was found to be unrelated to disturbed eating attitudes or behaviours. The study suggests that this combined with low self-esteem leads to a desire to control aspects within an individual's life in order to obtain success. They suggest that this

desire for control manifests itself through the interference with normal food intake and body weight regulation.

Studies among minority groups

Although body image has gained increasing attention within research, there is remarkably little empirical investigation amongst minority groups (Cachelin, Veisel & Barzegarnazari, 2000; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Nasser, 1997). Falconer and Neville (2000) found that African American women were less satisfied with their overall appearance but reported greater satisfaction with specific areas of their bodies. Nasser (1997) argues that non-western cultures have long been considered relatively immune from body image disturbances and eating disorders, by reasons of different authentic cultural values that do not overvalue thinness and possibly associate plumpness with positive attributes. These long-held beliefs have formed the basis for the views that body image dysfunctions are rare within minority groups and thus, very few studies have been carried out. However, more recently a large number of studies have shown vulnerability amongst individuals from non-western backgrounds and minority groups within western countries.

Cachelin et al. (2000) found that women of various ethnicities (Hispanic, Black and Asian) were equally likely to report the key behavioural symptoms of bulimia, anorexia or binge-eating patterns. They further found that psychological distress was very high amongst these groups and as such shame regarding their symptoms prevented women from seeking help. In addition, it was found that the more acculturated women of these groups were, the more likely they were to suffer from eating and body problems.

A study by Strauss et al. (in Nasser, 1997) showed that both black and white American women shared similar body type preferences and displayed equally high levels of body dissatisfaction. This was also the case in a study comparing body shape preferences amongst Costa Rican, Japanese and White American students living in America.

In Britain, Kenyan Asians and Kenyan British women evaluated larger figures negatively (Furnham & Alibhai, 1983). Also, Nigerian women in Britain were found to desire a body weight that was less than their matched counterparts in Nigeria.

These studies clearly suggest that the western ideal of female body shape has permeated other ethnic and cultural groups, a process possibly facilitated by acculturation. However, there is growing evidence that non-western countries themselves are being affected with body image disturbances and eating disorders, as western ideals and norms are being adopted. In Egypt, a study carried out by Nasser (1997) showed a concern with body weight in a society presumed to have different values in this respect. These girls and women acknowledged that their reasons for dieting were a desire to be slimmer and more attractive. A total of 34 percent of them showed enough concern about their weight, dieted, used laxatives or slimming pills to make them qualify for a diagnosis of an atypical eating disorder or partial syndrome.

A study carried out in Zimbabwe (Hooper & Garner, 1986) showed that anorexic and anorexic-like behaviours were found to be more common in white and coloured women than in black women. Bulimic behaviours on the other hand were found to be more prevalent amongst black women than in white women. Oyewumi and Kazarian (in Nasser, 1997) also found high rates of bulimic behaviour among high school and

university student populations in Nigeria.

Bio-medical studies

Many studies that attempt to understand body image difficulties, have developed from theories specifically related to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. These have included both bio-medical explanations as well as psychiatric theories of causation. Within this bio-medical framework suggestions of organic abnormality, hormonal imbalance and dysfunction in the hypothalamus have been made (Brumberg, 1988). Others have argued for female reproductive endocrinal disturbances as the primary cause of eating disorders and body image disturbances (Malson, 1998). Many have agreed that there is considerable evidence of abnormalities in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal area amongst women suffering from anorexia nervosa or body image disturbances. However, others argue that this evidence does not automatically justify the construction of these type of conditions as falling within a natural disease category (Malson, 1998). These latter-mentioned theorists and researchers state that these physical abnormalities would be better understood as the physical effects of anorexic behaviour and consequent low body weight (Malson, 1998).

Contemporary bio-medical discourse discusses women's problematic relationships with their bodies in terms of neurological disturbances (Malson, 1998). Brumberg (1988) states that here again much of the evidence remains inconclusive, with various studies finding neurological disturbances and others not. Brown and Jasper (in Williamson, 1988) state that whatever neurological differences may exist must be understood as effects of varying degrees of malnutrition of the physical body. The discourse or explanation of genetics shares much in common with the bio-medical

framework and is perceived as a branch of this theory of causation (Malson, 1998). While it regards anorexia and the related area of body image disturbances as a natural disease, its emphasis lies within its understanding that these conditions have a genetic predisposition (Malson, 1998).

A number of studies have found higher rates of anorexia and body image disturbances in the relatives of those diagnosed as anorexic than in the general population (Malson, 1998). Garfinkel and Garner (1983) have found that there is more risk amongst siblings of monozygotic than dizygotic twins. Brumberg (1988) argues that there is too little evidence to adequately substantiate the claim anorexia and body image disturbances are the consequence of genetic inheritance. He further states that in reality, genetic and family studies have in fact produced conflicting findings and that many of these studies are riddled with methodological difficulties. In addition to this, it is strongly felt that separating out possible genetic factors from environmental factors remains an ongoing and unresolved debate.

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PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF BODY IMAGE

The psychological models can be categorised within three basic groups in their explanatory theories, namely psychoanalysis, family systems theory and social psychology (this perspective and its link to culture is discussed at large in chapter three and as such will not be discussed here) (Brumberg, 1988). Brumberg (1988) outlines that within both of the first two categories, anorexia nervosa and by association problematic body image is understood as a pathological response to the developmental crisis of adolescence. Refusal of food is understood as an expression of the individual's struggle over autonomy, individuation and sexual development. Much of the current psychotherapeutic thinking regarding anorexia nervosa and the

related area of problematic body image takes its direction from Sigmund Freud and more recently Hilde Bruch (in Brumberg, 1988). Freud viewed the anorexic as a girl who feared adult womanhood and heterosexuality.

Hilde Bruch (in Brumberg, 1988) considered the anorexic as unprepared to cope with the psychological and social consequences of adulthood as well as sexuality. As a result of a paralysing sense of ineffectiveness and anxiety regarding their identity, the individual opts for control of their body. Bruch argues that as a result the anorexic makes their body the substitution for the life that they cannot control. Thus, they experience a disturbance of 'delusional proportions' with respect to their body image.

One of the dominant explanations for body image disturbances is in terms of cognitive dysfunction (Malson, 1998). Cognitive psychology assigns meaning to concepts such as body image in terms of an individual's cognitions. 'The existence of a particular cognitive schema, it is argued, will produce systematic "errors" in processing information relevant to that domain, and it is therefore hypothesised that such schemas may play a role in "anorexia" and related body image disturbances' (Malson, 1998, p. 82). Clark et al. (in Malson, 1998, p. 377) state that it is understood in terms of individual cognitive deficits and 'constructs such as overvalued attitudes and dysfunctional beliefs.' Bruch (in Brumberg, 1988, p. 82) understood anorexia as a lack of the capacity for abstract thought 'characteristic of the formal operational stage of cognitive development'. In addition, it has also been understood in terms of poor cognitive performance, irrational beliefs, all-or-nothing thinking, superstitious thinking and ego-centric thinking (Malson, 1998). Essentially cognitive discourse has explained anorexia and body image disturbances as a 'manifestation of overvalued weight and food-related schemata' (Malson, p.82).

Cognitive research has produced considerable evidence that women suffering from these conditions are more preoccupied with food and weight than other women (Malson, 1998). Thus, while it does succeed in acknowledging psychological meanings to food and body weight, it continues to separate clinical and non-clinical samples, thereby separating out these problems and seeing them as being experienced within pathological or abnormal groups within society. In doing this it supports a biomedical framework of pathology and further contributes towards an individualistic understanding of body image disturbances. Whilst it provides a body of knowledge which is psychologically more meaningful, it continues to understand these conditions as a problem of an individual's cognitions.

Within the psychiatric field, body image disturbances have been closely linked with other psychiatric categories such as schizophrenia, depression and obsessional neurosis (Brumberg, 1988). However, much of contemporary mainstream psychiatric work focuses on it being a variant of depression (Malson, 1998). A relationship between these two disorders has developed as a result of an overlap in symptomatology within the two diagnostic categories (Malson, 1998). 'Clinical features of depression such as insomnia, weight loss and reduced libido are also reported as occurring in those diagnosed as anorexic, whilst anorexia symptoms are also reported in people suffering from depression' (Malson, 1998, p. 81). Much of the clinical research investigating this possible clinical relationship has shown inconclusive evidence and is believed to indicate greater divergence than overlap (Brown & Jasper, 1988).

Within family systems theory attention is paid to the values and patterns of interaction within families. Salvador Minuchin (in Brumberg, 1988), a family systems theorist,

suggests that certain kinds of family environments encourage passive methods of defiance (such as not eating) and as such make it difficult for members to assert their individuality. As such the anorexic or individual suffering from problematic body image is considered enmeshed with the family, meaning that the normal process of individuation is blocked by complex psychological needs of the sufferer, their parents and even the siblings (Brumberg, 1988). In family systems theory not just the anorexic or patient is diseased, but so too is the family.

As is evident much of the theorising pathologises either the individual dynamics, the familial environment or an interchange between the two. The next section will attempt a critical evaluation of both the theories and the research findings.

CONCLUSION AND CRITICAL OVERVIEW

In conclusion, from the research findings it is clear that physical appearance is of more salience for women than for men. For women, body affect is strongly related to self-concept. For women weight and being thin or fat is of great salience in determining their body satisfaction, feelings of attractiveness, self-esteem and self-concept. In this context women appear to be more dissatisfied with bodily appearance, their weight and shape than men are.

There appear to be two main technical factors contributing to difficulties within empirical research. Firstly, confusion arises in attempting to define body image and disturbance. As a result, broad and varying definitions have been employed, such as body anxiety, dissatisfaction and so forth. Secondly, the use of varying techniques, such as experimental procedures, interviews and questionnaires have yielded varying results. In addition, while empirical research does outline body image disturbances,

particularly amongst women and girls as young as age nine, much of these findings are largely ignored. Much of these attitudes and feelings which have been found to be widespread among normal or non-clinical populations of women are perceived as problematic only when they come to the attention of medical and psychiatric professionals (Shefer, 1986).

It is perhaps for this reason that the continuum of symptomatology remains invisible between a predominantly negative body image amongst women and the development of diagnosed eating disorders (Shefer, 1986). As such, empirical research does not adequately challenge the dichotomy between normal and abnormal attitudes amongst women regarding their body. Throughout the research it is evident that negative body image is more prevalent amongst women than men. From these empirical studies it is clear that cultural issues, in particular those related to being a woman, play a role in the widespread prevalence of these problems. However, these issues of culture, especially when researching amongst women within a non-clinical setting, remain inadequately addressed, if not completely invisible.

Although there is some literature and research which does lend itself to recognising the importance of culture, race and ethnicity within mainstream approaches, they tend to fall short in addressing the issues adequately. For example, Cahelin et al. (2000), set out to identify differences in body image amongst minority groups, yet inappropriately search for universalising similarities, thereby overlooking more complex and crucial differences. There is a noteworthy lack of studies regarding body image with specific relevance to African cultural societies. Instead what has largely been adopted are western assumptions and ideas as though they were universal and unquestionable (Shefer, 1986).

A remarkable characteristic of the empirical research is the failure to acknowledge that the complexity of body image is couched within the broader social processes of male-female relations of power and authority. As a result it disregards the way in which the body has become an internal battleground for almost all girls and women. Negative body image has become so commonplace, even amongst pre-pubescent girls that it has being labelled as the 'normative discontent' by theorists (Bergeron & Senn, 1998, p. 386). Furthermore, a large number of studies never adequately reflect on possible reasons for the strongly gendered pattern of body image disturbances or consider that it has serious implications for research. Instead there is a tendency to shift between identifying individual personality styles or dysfunctional families as the main reason behind body image disturbances.

This section of the chapter has outlined and critically evaluated historical developments in body image disturbances and more recent empirical research findings. As a result various gaps and failures to comprehend body image in its entirety have been recognised. With this in mind, let us turn our attention to the feminist framework and then the social constructionist framework.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Feminist Research

'Feminism is a threat to the beauty ideal because the beauty ideal is a threat to women' (Christine Smith, in Bergeron & Senn, 1998).

Feminist theorists recognised the body as an important site of women's oppression at an early stage in the development of feminism (Shefer, 1986). In response to growing concern about the incidence of eating disorders among women, feminism has examined the complexity of women's relationships to their bodies (Marshall, 1996). It must be pointed out that feminism does not comprise of a homogenous group of theories – there are various theoretical perspectives in feminist literature, such as self-objectification theory, feminist consciousness theory and gynocentrism. This chapter begins with generally defining the approach, then continues with an overview of feminist approaches to understanding body image. It then briefly explores the value of the body for women in terms of feminist theory and the construction of women's attitudes to the body, both of which are issues believed relevant to the development of the specific theories. These are interlinked areas but will be reviewed separately for the purposes of clarity. Following this, self-objectification theory, feminist consciousness theory and gynocentrism will be outlined.

Defining the approach

Groundbreaking work by investigators such as Susie Orbach, Kim Chernin and Marlene Boskind-White has helped to shape and define a working feminist approach to the issues of eating disorders and body image (Bordo, 1993). The feminist perspective on eating disorders, despite significant differences among individual writers, has in general been distinguished by the following characteristics:

1. It emphasises the learned, addictive dimension of eating disorders and as such casts into doubt the designation of anorexia and bulimia as psychopathology.
2. It reconstructs the role of culture and especially of gender as primary and productive rather than as triggering or contributory.
3. It emphasises the reassignment, to social causes, of factors viewed in the mainstream approach as pertaining to individual dysfunction (Bordo, 1993).

Essentially, the feminist approach calls into question the clinical value of the so called normative/pathological duality, which characterises the mainstream approach (Bordo, 1993).

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING BODY IMAGE

As an important starting point, it is acknowledged that there is no intrinsically feminist method or methodology. 'Rather, how feminist a piece of research is must be evaluated in relation to its purposes or goals, what it seeks to (and does) achieve' (Burman, in Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindall 1994, p.121.). Burman et al. (1994) highlight its development of discussions of power, subjectivity and political commitment within research. Feminism looks to history and the cultural representation of masculinity, femininity and sexuality in approaching issues of body

image. Central to all of this, is the role of patriarchy, which is a core matter of debate within the feminist framework. In this respect, feminist research approaches the concept of body image with concepts of power, gendered subjectivity and politics.

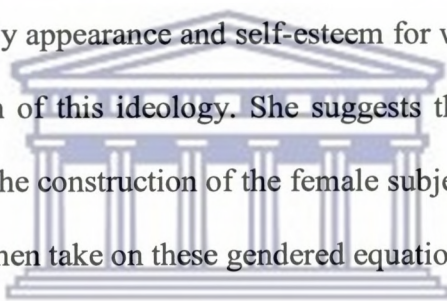
✓ THE VALUE OF THE BODY FOR WOMEN

The initial focus on the body within the feminist framework pointed towards the social emphasis on women's bodily appearance which conflated women's value in the world with their attractiveness and desirability to men (Greer, 1999; Shefer, 1986, Simone de Beauvoir, 1949). MacLeod and Sarataga (1988, p. 41) state that 'the long-established discourse on male sexuality as subject and everything else as object dominates cultural expression'. With this in mind, women and, interchangeably, their bodies, represent 'the other', and become positioned as the subject of the male gaze and domination (Ussher, 1992).

Holloway's (1989) formulation of female subjectivity uses the concept of feminine attractiveness as a model of relational 'exchange'. Levi-Strauss (in Wilbraham, 1996) suggested that systems of patriarchal kinship posit men as exchange partners and thus sexual subjects with rights of ownership, and women as merchandise and thus sexual objects to be exchanged by or given as 'gifts' to men. Irigaray (in Wilbraham, 1996) has extended this analysis by arguing that women's power in patriarchy is located in their labour to function as a means of exchange, namely, in roles as caretakers and controllers of themselves as merchandise or 'goods'. Thus, active styling of the physical self, through dieting, toning the body and more specifically camouflaging the body's shortcomings, provides a more desirable appearance or so-called 'commodity'. Irigaray (in Wilbraham, 1996, p. 162) states that 'making the self desirable and attractive to men, is the phallic mark of women's value in sexual commerce'.

In summary, given that women are set up as objects on display, their value as a human beings becomes centred around the success that they have in conforming to the social ideals concerning female physical beauty (Shefer, 1986). Women's sense of self-worth, value and success in life is seen as dependent on her success as an object on display. De Beauvoir (1949) maintained that concern with appearance may take on positive value for women as one area of their lives they have control over within an otherwise powerless life. Thus for women who feel powerless, controlling the body and its appearance may become a way of gaining a sense of power (Shefer, 1986).

Shefer (1986) states that an inadequacy with much of the feminist work that posits an association between bodily appearance and self-esteem for women is that it fails to go further than a description of this ideology. She suggests that this inadequacy stems from a lack of theory on the construction of the female subject within ideology, which would elaborate how women take on these gendered equations.



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THE CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN'S BODY ATTITUDES

The continual emphasis on and expectation of thinness, slenderness and beauty of women and girls that advertising both creates and perpetuates is considered an essential part of restricting and immobilising women's lives within patriarchy (Coward, 1984). In pursuit of the ideal or perfect female form advertised throughout society, women expose their bodies to rigorous discipline and control by means of dieting, exercise, and if all else fails, plastic surgery (Tebbel, 2000). Arguably, the ideal form globally symbolises society's disgust with fat, thereby, rejecting fat women, who are understood as not being in control.

These culturally represented expectations result in women having a punishing and

self-hating relationship with their bodies, thereby applying stringent methods to place their bodies under control. As a result, women's bodies become the site of oppression (Greer, 1999; Shefer, 1986). In this respect, the media indoctrination of what the female body should be, is considered by some feminists to be an integral part of a capitalist, patriarchal conspiracy against women (Coward, 1984; Schefer, 1990; Wilbraham, 1996; Williamson, 1978; Winship, 1987; Wolf, 1990).

Evident within the examination of these areas of work is the focus upon the way in which patriarchal relations are reproduced. More specifically, they explore the way in which body image disturbances are related to the exploitative nature of patriarchal relations. The outline of three specific theories relating to body image and body image disturbances that follows differs in focus in that each theory integrates psychological processes more fully within its understanding. The first theory, namely self-objectification theory, incorporates psychological processes to a lesser degree and one could argue is more similar to the former areas of work. It looks at the way in which body image disturbances relate to the exploitative nature of patriarchal relations. The latter theories – the work of Susie Orbach and Kim Chernin – approach women's body image and its disturbances within a psychological framework, more specifically, a psychodynamic framework. Importantly, while feminist in nature, their theories relate to psychological processes at work in both women and men albeit mediated through varying external social structures.

SELF-OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

Self-objectification theory originated with Fredrickson and Roberts (in Noll & Fredrickson, 1998) and proposes that a spectrum of psychological consequences face girls and women simply by virtue of being raised in a culture that so persistently

objectifies the female body. They argue that part of the experience of being a woman involves being treated as a sexual object, which translates into a body to be looked at and evaluated.

According to this theory, the first psychological consequence is that women are socialised to view and treat themselves as objects, becoming preoccupied with their own physical appearance, an effect Fredrickson and Roberts (in Noll & Fredrickson, 1998) have termed 'self objectification'. They suggest that self objectification in turn has a variety of emotional and behavioural costs, which, over time, may contribute to women's disproportionate risks for a broad range of psychological disorders, such as eating disorders, unipolar depression, and sexual dysfunction.

Noll and Fredrickson (1998) have focused their attention on one aspect of this theory that they believe is fundamental within the field of body image and eating disorders. Because this aspect is further explored in this study a brief summary of their theory is outlined below. Fundamental to their understanding is the proposition that self objectification increases women's experiences of body shame, which in turn may contribute to their increased risk for disordered eating.

Self-objectification is seen to relate to body shame which has an important emotional cost. Noll and Fredrickson (1998) highlight past research that clearly indicates that individuals' views of their bodies are multidimensional, including both observable (weight, measurements, sex appeal) and non-observable (health, strength, fitness) physical characteristics. Self-objectification is defined as valuing one's own body more from a third-person perspective and thereby focusing on observable body attributes (e.g., 'How do I look?') rather than from a first-person perspective and

focusing on privileged or non-observable attributes (e.g., 'What am I capable of? How do I feel?')

↳ This form of self-objectification creates increased opportunities to experience shame, especially shame about the body. They argue that this powerful emotion occurs whenever individuals evaluate themselves relative to internalised or cultural ideals and fail to meet these ideals. Importantly, they argue that shame results from global attributions of failure, thereby attributing failure to the self in totality and not merely actions or behaviours of the self. Thus women, who find their bodies scrutinised and evaluated in relation to impossible and unattainable cultural ideals of body image, experience failure in measuring up to these ideals and experience a deep and powerful sense of shame.

These theorists go on to argue that shame is often described as a moral emotion, which is used to socialise important societal standards. The mere anticipation of shame motivates conformity to social norms. They explain that within society overweight individuals are perceived as lacking in discipline and self-control and thus, perceived as 'bad'. Similarly women talk about 'being bad' or 'sinning' when they eat food that is high in calories, whilst dieting for women is a metaphor for 'being good'. They argue that these societal views suggest that body ideals are constructed as moral ideals, which elevates their importance and amplifies the affective potency of failure to meet them.

Using the understanding that shame motivates individuals to change those aspects of the self that fail to live up to internalised ideals, objectification theory proposes that body shame can motivate dieting and other behaviours which might be linked to

increased risk for eating disorders. They argue that cultural assumptions about weight include the belief that women can control their weight and choose the weight they would like to be. They further state that diets promise women relief from the body shame arising from dissatisfaction with body size. However, in most instances these types of restrictive eating patterns paradoxically serve to amplify the experience of body shame rather than alleviating it. Therefore, weight-loss practices in and of themselves lead women to pay more attention to weight and shape, which can heighten or increase their awareness of their failure to meet physical ideals. Failed weight-loss attempts or an inability to lose weight may also increase body shame. A vicious cycle may then develop in which failure to meet body ideals leads to body shame as well as weight loss efforts that may further compound the experience of body shame. They also recognise that although actual experiences of body shame may lead to dieting, anticipated body shame, or the threat of experiencing body shame, may also contribute to dieting. Furthermore, they suggest that women who do not experience body shame may nonetheless engage in some form of disordered eating to maintain their experience of satisfaction.

This approach importantly does succeed in linking disordered eating and negative body image to certain broader socio-cultural factors. However, it seems to suggest blame be attributed at an individual level. Much focus is placed upon the consequences of shame, a moral emotion that is internalised and used to socialise important societal standards. However, little attention is given to examining the social/cultural standards themselves and the dynamics of their development. While the theory clearly proposes that cultural practices of sexually objectifying the female body do have profound negative effects on women's sense of self, their emotional experiences and their risks for developing psychological disorders, it fails to bring

these very practices they mention into proper focus. As a result, much of the theory contributes towards situating pathology at an individual level.

Furthermore, while making mention of certain socio-cultural factors, they tend to not develop certain concepts far enough. Firstly, while they discuss the vicious cycle of dieting and body shame, they fail to make mention of socio-economic factors which keep this cycle in perpetuation. Secondly, while they do mention the cultural practices of sexually objectifying the female body, this is not further elaborated upon in terms of power and gender inherent within institutions and ideology. Finally, while they do briefly highlight the power of discourse and language usage, they fail to develop this any further.



FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS THEORY

Susie Orbach (in Grogan & Wainwright, 1996), strongly informed by a feminist consciousness together with a training in psychology, has written extensively within the area of eating disorders, body image and the often complicated relationship women experience with their bodies. She argues that there is good evidence that women in western society are stigmatised for not being slim and achieving the culturally ideal body set up for them. The failure to meet this feminine ideal and thus achieve society's expectations of femininity results in women internalising the stigma and becoming dissatisfied with their body shape and weight. She also suggests that women are taught to view their bodies from the outside as if they were commodities. This causes distortion of body image and a disjunctive from their own bodies, which are objectified and continually monitored for faults (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996).

She extends her theory by not only challenging socially prescribed femininity but by

also suggesting that the extreme eating and body problems such as anorexia nervosa and obesity amongst women can be considered as a symbolic rejection of prescribed femininity. She argues that both the thinness of the anorexic and the fatness of the compulsive eater, by avoiding 'natural' female curves are rejecting their socially prescribed femininity (Shefer, 1986). By ridding themselves of female curves, both groups challenge the demand on woman to be attractive to men and therefore to fulfil all that goes with the role (Shefer, 1986). She takes this a step further by stating that 'fat' women are believed to have an intense fear of being thin, which is equivalent to the ideal, and as such prevent themselves from losing weight.

She understands these women as striving to be thin but suggests that essentially they experience a basic rejection of prescribed femininity and its meaning within a male dominated culture. As such being fat is understood as a challenge to culture (Shefer, 1986). Thus Orbach makes an important theoretical leap in her conceptualisation of eating disorders as a rebellion against the powerlessness associated with femininity (Shefer, 1986). Eating problems and body image disturbances are seen as being not only an adherence to a socialisation process but also as a rejection of this at the same time. Orbach's work has been significant in its 'normalisation' of both eating and body problems. By recognising that many women have problems with eating and negative relationships with their bodies, she has allowed for the recognition of a continuum of symptomatology (Shefer, 1986). Furthermore she links all types of eating and body problems, whether severe or moderate, around the issue of femininity.

Whilst recognising the significant inroads her work has made, it is important to consider some criticism of her work. Much of the criticism directed towards her work is centred around a nature/culture split within her theory. She assumes a 'natural'

appetite and 'natural' weight which will return once women overcome the cultural distortions inherent in prescribed femininity (Shefer, 1986). This implies that there is an inherent feminine 'nature' which becomes distorted by socialisation. 'This type of theorising is strongly criticised and considered dangerous by other theorists who believe these essentialist notions are retrogressive' (Shefer, 1986, p. 57).

Orbach's work has also been criticised for not sufficiently challenging the issue of 'fat'. She ultimately portrays the fat woman as a thin woman trapped in a fat body and too fearful to allow herself to be in her natural state with a more slender figure. In this perspective Orbach advocates slimness as loudly as contemporary popular culture (Shefer, 1986). Theorists such as Diamond (in Shefer, 1986, p. 130) claim that a true feminist intervention should work at constructing alternatives rather than perpetuating ways of viewing woman's bodies.

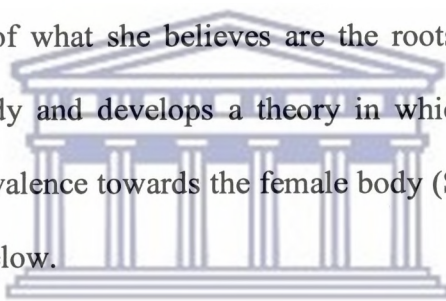
Finally, while Orbach's work remains pivotal in that it recognises the act of rebellion in eating and body problems, many argue that it does present an underlying danger. This danger is believed to occur in portraying women suffering from anorexia, bulimia and even compulsive eating as cultural heroines of a sort, because they are portrayed as women challenging societal roles. Others argue that once again this form of reasoning reduces body image disturbances to a medical view whereby the so-called anorexic, bulimic and compulsive eater is understood as pathological – the very type of discourse Orbach herself is struggling against.

GYNOCENTRIC THEORY

Kim Chernin (1983) is a radical feminist who is positioned within what is known as gynocentric feminist thought. In her view women's relationships to their bodies

cannot be viewed apart from patriarchal culture's attitudes towards the female body. In this respect, she states that it is not only with the eating disorders of anorexia nervosa and bulimia that problematic relationships with the body exist, but that importantly these are present among all women (Chernin, 1983).

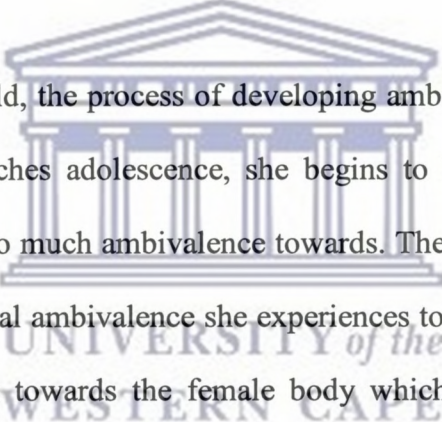
Chernin's (1983) argument centres on women's cultural obsession with body size and dieting which she maintains stems from a fear and hatred of femininity in a male dominated culture. She challenges the cultural ideal of the child-like nature of the pre-adolescent body shape and attributes this ideal to the psychological and social hatred of the female body and what it means to both men and women. She presents a psychoanalytic analysis of what she believes are the roots of the cultural fear and hatred of the female body and develops a theory in which both men and women harbour an original ambivalence towards the female body (Shefer, 1986). This theory will be outlined briefly below.



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Using object relations theory she uses the mother-child relationship as central to the development of a later ambivalence towards the female body in both men and women. The mother was everything to the child and is therefore 'the heartland of our obsession with the female body' (Chernin, 1983, p. 136). Children experience the mother as omnipotent because they are dependent on her to fulfil all their needs and desires. At times she may do this, while at others she might be unable to. This theory argues that ambivalence arises as a result of early distresses with the mother which is continued in the psyches of both boys and girls (Shefer, 1986). The way in which each gender resolves this dynamic differs as a result of their differing roles and access to power in a male-dominated culture.

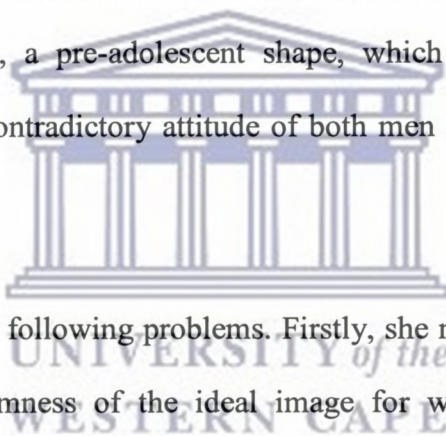
Chernin (1983) argues that the male cultural role is dominant and exerts control over the female. She suggests that when men are reminded of their infantile helplessness and feelings of powerless and being out of control, they have the means to take control of women, like they may have wished to do with their mothers when they were infants. In this position of power or dominance he has the ability to create 'ideal' images of women which act as controls over their bodies. These images in culture are of slim powerless adolescents which cannot remind him of the power his mother had when he was an infant. 'It is an image purged of the power to conjure up memories of the past, of all that could remind us of women's mysterious power' (Chernin, 1983, p. 148).



For the girl or female child, the process of developing ambivalence towards her own body differs. As she reaches adolescence, she begins to look like the omnipotent mother, whom she feels so much ambivalence towards. The ambivalence towards the mother becomes a very real ambivalence she experiences towards her own body. It is this original ambivalence towards the female body which Chernin believes is the motivating factor or force guiding women's attempts to gain control over their bodies by dieting and weight control. Simultaneously, the image she is striving towards is created by men's ambivalence towards the female body. Thus both the ideal body image and the way in which women attempt to achieve it are a result of the original ambivalence towards the omnipotent mother (Shefer, 1986). In essence, Chernin believes patriarchal culture and unequal power relations between men and women cause women to suffer as a result of this early ambivalence towards the mother's body.

One of the most important contributions of Chernin's theory is that it does not only

address women suffering from eating disorders (which Orbach primarily does in her work) but addresses the so called normal woman. Chernin (1983, p. 45) only addresses anorexics in so far as they are 'extreme examples of this quest' for smaller bodies. All women are expected to be ambivalent to some extent about their bodies in the way anorexics are. 'Anorexia nervosa is thus not simply an extreme form of dieting, but rather an extreme form of a psychological attitude to femininity inherent in all women' (Shefer, 1986, p. 136). By taking this stance she allows for the understanding that an eating disorder may not necessarily reflect a rejection or acceptance of femininity. Rather femininity itself may involve an ambivalence towards the female body (Shefer, 1986). According to Chernin (1983) the present media image of women, a pre-adolescent shape, which appears to deny female maturity highlights the contradictory attitude of both men and women to the mature female body.



Chernin's work raises the following problems. Firstly, she not adequately account for the fact that '... the slimness of the ideal image for women is historically and culturally bound' (Shefer, 1986, p. 138). Secondly, she does not account for changes in the ideal image for women such as recent shifts that continue to idealise adolescent thinness, but are now more muscular, energetic and fit. While this image has problems of its own, it does portray an active and energetic image that appears to be in opposition to the frail, thin and passive image Chernin theorises about. Thus the prescriptions about body size for women must go further than the mother/child relationship and the ever-changing image of women cannot be seen only within the determination of male ambivalence towards the female body (Shefer, 1986). Rather, this ever-changing female image, although constant in its focus on body size and shape within western culture, needs to be looked at within the context of socio-economic

systems, changing fashions and the latest fitness fads (Shefer, 1986).

In addition, her work has been criticised for idolising the 'fat' woman who is believed to reject the ideal image and represent all that is powerful and 'natural'. Though she challenges cultural standards of female beauty, she endorses an alternative prescribed shape for women in a similar manner to dominant discourse or popular culture. As in the case of Orbach's work, Chernin can be criticised for making use of the notion of that which is 'natural' to all women. Patriarchal culture is understood as a negative force which attempts and succeeds in undermining women's natural power.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that while all the areas of work covered in this feminist section examine women's relationships with their bodies and body image disturbances, there are differences in the angle of each approach. The former areas of work explore the topic from a sociological viewpoint, whereby the exploitative relations of patriarchy are understood as pivotal. The work of Orbach and Chernin – while feminist in nature – approaches the topic from a psychological viewpoint.

Some important criticisms arise regarding the latter two theories that will be highlighted briefly. While important insights have been gained from these theories, there are certain gaps or failures to carry these insights sufficiently through within a socio-economic culture. Importantly, from the point of view of this study both theories fall short in adequately challenging the notion of an ideal image. Whilst Orbach argues that 'fat' women strive to be thin and thus endorses 'thin' as the natural way to be, Chernin idolises fat women as being 'natural' and powerful. Ultimately Orbach endorses the ideal image and Chernin challenges it by setting up a new ideal

image. 'An adequate challenge to prescribed ideal images for women would necessarily challenge the notion of setting up ideals itself' (Shefer, 1986, p. 144).



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Chapter Four

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Social Constructionism

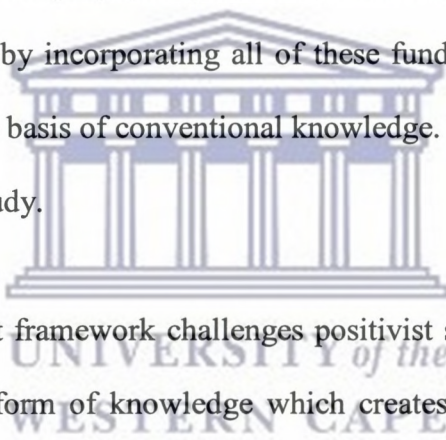
This chapter outlines social constructionism, discusses perspectives on body image from this framework, and outlines issues pertinent to the cultural context of body image. In doing this the chapter contextualises the approach of discourse analysis for the purposes of this study. Firstly, social constructionism is introduced as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. This section includes a focus on Foucault's theory and issues that are relevant to the social construction of body image. Secondly the role of mass media is examined for its part in creating a cultural context in which body image is experienced. This includes brief discussions on advertising, the film and fashion industry, the diet industry, and cosmetic surgery.

BACKGROUND TO SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

The turning away from exploring human life on an individual level and the move towards encompassing and integrating the social, was initiated by Mead in 1934 (in Parker, 2002). Based upon the underlying assumption that 'the essential nature of human life is that which occurs between two people within a society of persons' (Parker, 2002, p.52), social constructionism has grown and developed.

The more current form of social constructionism integrates concepts from post-structuralism and post-modernism (Shefer, 1998). Shotter and Gergen (in Parker, 1992, p.52) describe it as a framework which encompasses 'the extent to which

abilities and processes, formerly located in individuals, are now seen as products of human community'. As a result, this framework calls for a re-examination of theory which locates primacy with the individual in isolation to their social environments and vice versa. Instead it calls for the conceptualising of the two as existing within an inter-changeable relationship to one another. Gergen (1985) states that this framework is essentially concerned with explaining the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world in which they live. Extending this even further, social constructionist theory directs its focus to the social, moral, political and economic institutions that sustain and are supported by current assumptions about human inquiry (Gergen, 1985). In doing this, it extends its focus beyond feminist thought by incorporating all of these fundamental institutions in its challenge to the objective basis of conventional knowledge. This makes it integral and relevant to this current study.



The social constructionist framework challenges positivist social science research by viewing science as one form of knowledge which creates as well as describes the world (Banister et al., 1994). It therefore questions the beliefs of traditional biomedical and psychological research, by arguing that subjectivity, behaviour, and the meanings 'normal' and 'abnormal or illness' are constructed within practice, language, relationships, and roles (Shefer, 1986; Shefer, 1998). With this central feature, it becomes clear that social constructionist approaches, by essence, propose a more critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. Within the arena of body image and its problems, this becomes essential to a working body of knowledge and understanding, because these approaches acknowledge cultural and historical specificity and hold that knowledge is sustained by social practices (Burr, 1995).

Social constructionism has spurred the development of various critical theories and methodologies applicable to women and body image. Hirst and Woolley (in Malson, 1998, p. 26) state that 'the social totality is not a well-fitting and founded structure and that it may be better understood as a contradictory nexus of social practices'. Malson (1998, p. 27) states that the 'structuralist conceptions of language or the symbolic order as universal totalities might be better reformulated in terms of a post-structuralist Foucauldian theory of discourses and discursive practices'. The remainder of this chapter will examine and discuss the way in which this theory contributes to an understanding of subjectivity, women, power and knowledge. In doing this it provides a foundation upon which a critical understanding of women and their relationship with their bodies is further developed and examined.

Foucault's theory

Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 27) put forward the view that language cannot be understood as a 'unitary, trans-historical totality' but rather needs to be viewed as consisting of a variety of different historically specific discourses. Examples of these are economic, medical, psychiatric and psychological discourses. Foucault (in Malson, 1998) defines discourses such as these as regulated systems of statements. Burman and Parker (1994) state that while discourses are realised in texts and speech, this realisation is always fragmentary and as a result one is only ever able to find pieces of discourse. This means that discourses never appear in a unitary and self-contained manner that makes the discourse easy to recognise and pinpoint. Instead, pieces of discourse always exist within a system of references to other sources of information, such as books, texts, sentences and spoken language. For Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 27), discourses exist at the point wherein the various sources of

information meet, 'supporting a specific discursive unity'. Simply put, discourse can be described as an underlying thread within all forms of communication, both written and spoken, which aligns specific pieces of discourses to a broader, existing discourse. Foucault in (Malson, 1998 p. 23) states 'a document [or communication] only provides a weak accessory unity in relation to the discursive unity of which it is the support'. Therefore discourse is understood as a dispersed system and to identify a discourse 'is not to close it upon itself, it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within and outside it' (Foucault, in Malson, 1998, p. 29).

Taking this a step further, discourses are 'social practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, in Malson, 1998, p. 29). As a result discourse is not a transparent medium which simply describes or reflects some underlying reality, rather it and discursive practices are constitutive of their practices (Burman & Parker, 1994). Using this as an important reference point, language is not viewed as reflective or functioning in a manner which communicates an already existing meaning. Rather its function is far more active because it works towards 'making things mean' (Malson, 1998). This is best described by Prior (in Malson, 1998 p. 3) who states the following:

Objects of social reality are not 'things' set apart from and independent of discourse but are realised only in and through the discursive elements which surround the objects in question. Things then are made visible and palpable through the existence of discursive practices, and so (objects, events and experiences) are not referents about which there are discourses but objects constructed by discourse.

Closely related to this, discourses are understood as producing identities and subject positions (Henriques et al., 1984). Walkerdine (1986) describes discourses as not

simply describing individuals, but more importantly also offering up a variety of subject positions. In this way subjectivity is understood as constituted and reconstituted in texts and talk (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and identity is reconceptualised as a multiplicity of different, shifting, often contradictory subject positions (Walkerdine, 1993). From this framework, femininity is understood not as a consistent unitary identity but rather as one which 'takes on a variety of historically contingent shapes within different discourses' (Wetherell, 1986, p. 28).

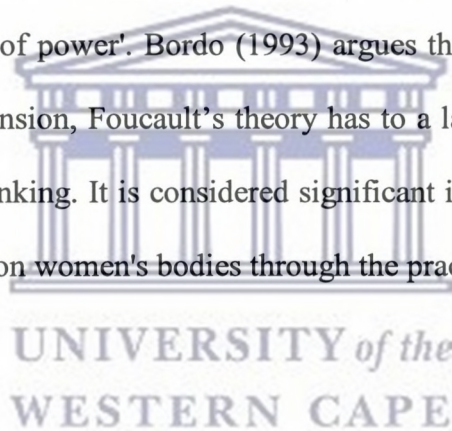
Discourses, besides being made up of linguistic practices, also include discursive practices and, importantly, social relations are embedded within them. Thus, discourses as social practice have very powerful direct and indirect effects. Various social conditions throughout history have given rise to certain dominant discourses that have both regulated and normalised human behaviours and activities. These dominant discourses define what is normal and abnormal in various social contexts and for various groups of people. These so-called 'truths' or dominant discourses are always historically and contextually specific and therefore change over time. They yield much power through their ability to legitimise particular practices and forms of authority, and to define that which is normal and that which is deviant (Walkerdine, 1986).

Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 27) argued that discourses are about power because 'In constituting a field of knowledge, a discourse rules out other truths. In not saying everything it represses what it does not say'. This power exists on an everyday basis within daily activities which Foucault describes as the 'micro-physics of power'. It is exactly these micro-physics of power or daily activities which regulate and discipline individuals. This is best described by Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 170) in the

following words: 'Discourses regulate and discipline by constituting fields of knowledge, instituting truths, constituting subjectivity's in particular ways, positioning people within discourses and shaping them to normalising judgements so that power relations, although unevenly distributed are everywhere.'

Body image in Foucault's theory

The conceptualisation of the 'body' is central to Foucault's theory of discourse, power and knowledge (Hartsock, in Nicholson, 1990). Bordo (1993, p.17), a feminist scholar, argues that neither Foucault nor any other social constructionists discovered or invented the idea that the 'definition and shaping of the body is the focal point for struggles over the shape of power'. Bordo (1993) argues that this was discovered by feminism. Despite this tension, Foucault's theory has to a large extent being adopted into much of feminist thinking. It is considered significant in its understanding of the direct grip culture has upon women's bodies through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life.



Mary Douglas (in Bordo, 1993), an anthropologist, defines the body and specifically women's bodies as operating as a metaphor for culture. Women's bodies, including what they eat, how they dress, and the daily rituals through which they attend to their bodies, are considered a medium of culture. Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 138) argues that discourses (such as what women wear, eat, dress, and the use of cosmetics, dieting, and exercise) discipline the body through 'a multiplicity of minor processes of domination'.

These minor processes or 'micropractices' of women's everyday life are therefore believed to be significant elements in the social construction of the current cultural

feminine norm. Through practices such as table manners, toilet habits, beauty routines, and body rules and practices, culture is 'made body' (Bordo, 1993, p. 138). According to this view women's bodies operate not only as a text of culture but also as a direct locus of social control. These micro-practices of women's everyday life are converted into automatic, habitual activity (Bordo, 1993). The anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (in Bordo, 1993, p. 165) states that as a result it is put 'beyond the grasp of consciousness ... by voluntary, deliberate transformations'. Operating within non-centralised forces, 'through multiple processes of different origin and scattered locations (Foucault, in Malson, 1998, p.138), normative feminine practices train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands. Foucault (in Malson, 1998) calls these 'docile bodies' as they are regulated by the norms of cultural life.

Foucault (in Malson, 1998) further states that bodies, and within this context women's bodies, are not only regulated through ideology. It is also through the organisation and regulation of time, space and movement of women's daily lives, that their bodies are trained, shaped and moulded into the prevailing historical forms of femininity. Numerous empirical studies show that women are spending far more time on the management and discipline of their bodies than ever before. Through the normalised disciplines of dieting, exercising, body management, eating healthily, dress and the use of cosmetics, a large amount of women's time and space is focused on improvement, self-modification and appearance. This clearly is direct evidence of the way in which women's bodies are socially controlled. This is not achieved through physical restraint and coercion, but rather through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms (Bordo, 1993). Thus, as Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 155) states ' ... there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by

internalising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.

Within our current image-dominated era, which can be described as a narcissistic and visually oriented culture, it becomes glaringly obvious that the contemporary preoccupation with appearance affects women far more powerfully than men (Tebbel, 2000). Through this pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenising and very often elusive ideal of femininity, female bodies continuously become docile bodies (Kanin, 1990). Thus, the relationship women experience with their bodies, whether positive, negative or ambivalent, can be understood as always being mediated by constructs, associations and images specific to the current culture. By contemporary standards for women to be beautiful, they must be slender or thin (Kanin, 1990). This current body ideal is supported by empirical studies (outlined in detail in chapter two) and constantly conveyed to all, via the realm of the mass media. There can be no doubt that there is a current obsession with the thin/slender body, which translates into the 'perfect' body within our current climate.

This 'tyranny of slenderness' labelled by Kim Chernin (1981) is becoming more and more rife amongst all races and specifically targeted at women. It has brought with it and in turn is influenced by the development of numerous technologies such as dieting, plastic surgery and the exercising industry, aimed at helping women physically transform their bodies, so as to meet this body ideal (Bordo, 1993). The mass media repetitively presents images of thinness through role models or images that imply social desirability (Nasser, 1997). These images or representations are homogenised and become the dominant 'look' for women. As a result these homogenised 'thin' images become normalised, and function as the reference source

against which women continually measure, judge, discipline and correct themselves (Bordo, 1993). In this way the mass media continually encourages women to identify with this 'thin' ideal, outlining what is considered normal and that which is deviant to the norm. Ironically, while the mass media often warn audiences of the dangers of practices such as fat reduction surgeries and eating disorders, they continue to perpetuate a preoccupation with fat, dieting and promoting slenderness as the cultural norm (Bordo, 1993).

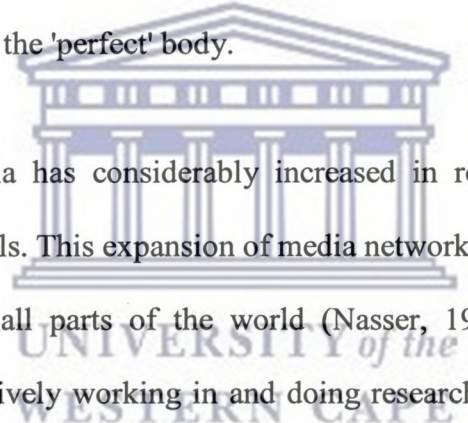
THE GLOBAL VILLAGE – THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA

Many divergent views have been proposed as to the level of influence and role the mass media plays within society and culture at large. In general, social learning theory argues that people are socialised through mass communication and thus integrate the values and norms predominantly presented in the mass media (Taylor, 2001). Closely related, the cultural norms theory argues that the mass media present common cultural norms in a specific way, and that this, very importantly could result in the reinforcement of existing stereotypes (Taylor, 2001).

More specifically, Parker et al. (1995) argues that the media is an important agent which reproduces and serves to individualise problems, thus removing responsibility for those problems from society. As such, within a social constructionist framework, the mass media is identified as a crucial instrument in the way in which individuals actively construct and engage with social reality. Importantly, it is understood that individuals exist within a backdrop of society and that the mass media effectively acts as a source which shapes, reproduces and constructs social representations.

The role of the mass media in shaping and possibly unifying culture today cannot be

underestimated (Nasser, 1997). Mass media, internet, newspapers, television, billboards, radio, cinema, photography, magazines, satellite and virtual reality all contribute towards the cultural representations of women and their bodies. The relationship between the recent information explosion and late capitalism is understood as being a mutually sustaining one (Bordo, 1993; Kanin, 1990; Nasser, 1997; Scott & Morgan, 1993; Tebbel, 2000; Williamson, 1988). Power operates at a microscopic and infinitesimal level via subtle discourses and discursive practices. It is 'non-centralised, non-authoritarian, non-conspiratorial and non-orchestrated' (Bordo, 1993, p. 26) but is experienced by women on a daily basis. With the main source being unidentifiable, the effect for women is experienced in feelings of lacking and inadequacy at not having the 'perfect' body.



Access to western media has considerably increased in recent years through the spread of satellite channels. This expansion of media networks like the BBC and CNN has been into virtually all parts of the world (Nasser, 1997). Nasser (1997), an Egyptian psychiatrist actively working in and doing research into the field of eating disorders, states that the Middle East now has several satellite channels, the majority of which are funded by individuals and survive mainly on advertising. As a result, there is a widespread tendency to adopt the western look and style that is perceived as popular. There is a high degree of consensus that the world is becoming one by reason of the mass media and information technology. This is resulting in the western value system gradually becoming the general value system adopted across the world, regardless of religious and national backgrounds (Nasser, 1997).

Similarly, when women look to the media for information, entertainment and proof that they exist, in most instances they are only able to see generally slender, white

women who are held up as the homogenised image of beauty (Tebbel, 2000). Deliberately not reflecting the diversity of all modern women, the bulk of the mass media defines women very narrowly, resulting in extremely damaging personal effects. It is acknowledged that there are numerous magazines and cinematic portrayals which consciously and strenuously promote diverse images of black strength, beauty and self-acceptance (Bordo, 1993; Tebbel, 2000). However, for the most part, advertising as well as the majority of black celebrity role models perpetuate feelings of inadequacy and insecurity over weight and racial features. This is done with advertisers insisting that to be beautiful, hair must be straightened, eyes lightened and bodies slender (Tebbel, 2000). Many role models are slender, of fairer skin and have Anglo-Saxon features. While this remains an important aspect within contemporary culture, it is a topic which is beyond the scope of this study.

Advertising

Advertising is at the very forefront of this silent and subtle battle targeted against women. Advertising uses a multitude of techniques to create perfect images of female beauty for society's viewing. Body doubles and computer retouching are two examples of how advertisers are able to manipulate images. The majority of women used in magazines, music videos and films do not actually look the way they appear in the media. Women are often led to believe that they are looking at one woman's body when they are actually viewing sections of three or four women's bodies. These may have been spliced together to allow for the most desirable aspects of each woman's body to be showcased. This effect produces one perfect image that has a pervasive influence on women's consciousness (Ussher, 1989).

Similarly, within a consumer-oriented culture advertising showcases 'desire' to its

audience (Williamson, 1988). This includes the desire to compensate for that which is lacking or inadequate, the desire for change, and the desire to identify with success and beauty (Bordo, 1993; Kanin, 1990; Tebbel, 2000; Williamson, 1980). Advertising is powerful and takes up most of the space within women's magazines and on television. Without having enough advertising space within the media, consumers would be paying much higher cover prices for magazines (Tebbel, 2000). To keep prices reasonable, advertising using 'perfect' female images infiltrates at all levels.

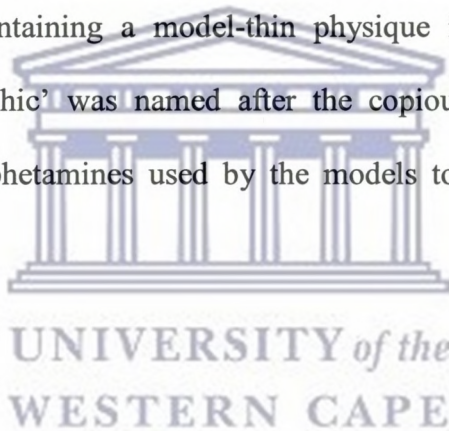
Cosmetic companies and clothing manufacturers are two of the largest groups of advertisers in women's magazines and consistently portray thin female images (Tebbel, 2000). Women's magazines are largely made up of photographs of young and generally emaciated women from the cover portrait to editorial illustrations for beauty and fashion spreads, to most of the articles and advertisements (Tebbel, 2000). These faces and bodies are uniformly attractive and airbrushed to perfection. 'This oppressive uniformity has been a staple of women's magazines for decades, for the reason that perfection of face and body is what women are taught to associate with success' (Tebbel, 2000, p. 116).

Models and actresses

The ideal or perfect image is one that is socially constructed. Whilst the 1950's ideal image was symbolised in the curvaceous figure of Marilyn Monroe, the 1990's was embodied in the emaciated figure of Kate Moss, whose shape resembled that of a young boy. In the late nineties, in an attempt to reinvigorate the marketing of clothing and cosmetics, editors around the world designated the 'actress' as the new model to help reinvent style (Tebbel, 2000). It was advertised that by doing this, they would be using real woman with flaws and personalities. This heralded the entrance of actresses

such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Nicole Kidman, Calista Flockhart and so forth. These actresses who were supposed to represent 'real' women were themselves as slender and as emaciated as the professional models. As a result, the subtle image shift did not represent anything new, just a different version of the same cultural ideal (Tebbel, 2000). These normalised representations are also racially biased and therefore impact on self-awareness in terms of race in the message they convey that to truly succeed in this world women need to look like these so-called 'real' women.

The late nineties and the beginning of the new millennium heralded an even more emaciated image, named 'Heroin Chic' (Tebbel, 2000). One of the reasons it received this label was that maintaining a model-thin physique is considered impossible without help. 'Heroin Chic' was named after the copious amounts of cigarettes, heroin, cocaine and amphetamines used by the models to suppress their appetites (Tebbel, 2000).



The dieting industry

The media's narrow depiction of women and of what is presented as the 'norm' contributes to the majority of adolescents and adult women viewing themselves as fat. For most women, this view includes a negative body image, distorted eating and low self-esteem. Slenderness is equated with success and beauty and since most women have different dimensions, the need to diet and exercise becomes the only other solution to achieving the ideal female image.

Women's magazines that have mass-circulation run articles on dieting in virtually every issue (Bartky, 1990). Dieting entails disciplining the body's hungers. It becomes necessary to monitor appetite at all times and thus willpower in relation to

food becomes essential for the modern woman. The message that is clearly articulated is that the body is an unreliable enemy.

As the gulf between the media ideal and the physical reality widens, diet advice flourishes. Despite the fact that the culturally slender ideal is unattainable for more than 95 percent of all females, the dieting industry continues to advertise the possibility of transforming women's bodies (Bordo, 1993). In America, the country with the largest dieting industry, 50 billion dollars are spent each year on anti-obesity drugs (Tebbel, 2000). Women are constantly told via the media that they can choose their own bodies. The message they receive is that 'The proper diet, the right amount of exercise and women can have any body they desire' (Bordo, 1993, p. 247). These are the messages that are relentlessly conveyed on television, in magazines, in newspapers, on the radio, on billboards, and in films. Fear and hatred of fat permeate society and women who are considered fat are viewed as unsuccessful, lazy, out of control and ugly (Bordo, 1993). Fighting this war against obesity for women, are nutritionists, medical doctors, personal trainers, pharmaceutical companies and the all-powerful fashion, beauty and slimming industries (Tebbel, 2000).

Cosmetic surgery

In a culture where self-esteem has become synonymous with physical perfection, it has become possible to 'correct' the body. Cosmetic surgery has become more and more affordable to the middle class and almost anything can be done on an outpatient basis (Bordo, 1993). 'This situation marks a period unique in the politics of appearance when admiration for women's inner qualities has given way to an obsession with physical perfection, whether gained through genetic fortune or artificial enhancement' (Tebbel, 2000, p. 34). Cosmetic surgery within the current

cultural context is viewed as a liberating development for older women who are now able to look younger (Bordo, 1993). Actresses such as Cher, Jane Fonda and many others who have undergone surgery have established a new norm, whereby the surface of the female body does not necessarily need to age physically (Bordo, 1993). Cosmetic surgery becomes the only option these actresses have if they want to continue working in an image-dominated industry. Thus, using technology to look younger and more slender aids women who want to continue working in the entertainment industry.

In conclusion, the media has served as a disciplining force in the lives of women. Advertisers create images that dictate cultural trends indicative of the time. In the current disruption of gender roles, there seems to be a cultural uprising against women's increasing power. This uprising appears to be taking the form of idealised images that are painfully thin, and totally unrealistic to attain. This results in constant worry over weight, appearance and a general dissatisfaction with body. 'Furthermore, the media, seem to embrace and perpetuate significant gender differences in gesture, posture, movement, and in general bodily comportment' (Bartky, 1990, p. 67). Women are far more restricted than men in their manner of movement and are encouraged to take up as little space as possible. These types of messages are continuously conveyed by means of waif-like fashion models and actresses. The media is rife with these images. It is precisely in this area regarding restricted mobility and comportment, that the inferiorisation of women's bodies is most evident. Essentially, women's typical body language, a language of relative tension and constriction, is understood to be a language of subordination and passivity.

The mass media appears to be a very powerful tool in shaping women's cultural

identities. Much of the media imagery is filled with mixed messages about what women can and cannot do, thereby effectively contributing towards eroding any sense of a unified female self. While conveying encouragement of female independence, it simultaneously inundates women with messages of the dangers of their bodies, in many ways contributing towards women's fragmented identities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Foucault's social constructionist theory offers an account of subjectivity and the body, as produced in and regulated by discourses. This theory also lends itself easily and usefully towards a framework for feminist analyses of women and their bodies, eating disorders and many other aspects of women's experiences and of their social reality, more generally (Bordo, 1993). The valuable reconceptualisation of power and knowledge as being bound together and underpinning discourse provides a significant account of the body as a site of power struggles, as well as a critique of scientific truths of the female body as inferior and defective (Malson, 1998). The notion of empirically-based, objective or absolute truths is dismissed as it is understood that societies produce their own specific normalising and regulating discourses (Malson, 1998).

Furthermore, Foucauldian theory provides valuable insights which differ from other frameworks, such as that of feminist thought, in the following manner. Firstly, Foucault reconceptualises power as existing via networks of practices, institutions and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination (Bordo, 1993). In this manner, power is decentralised whilst existing without a recognisable main source. This differs starkly from the feminist framework, whereby power is understood as possessed by patriarchy and levelled against woman and can thus be

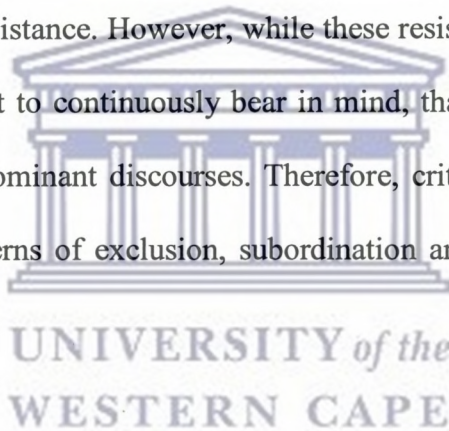
seen to adopt an oppressor-oppressed model.

Secondly, Foucault's theory describes a power base 'whose central mechanisms are not repressive, but constitutive' (Bordo, 1993, p. 167). These mechanisms '... shape and proliferate, rather than repress desire, ... they generate and focus our energies ... and construct our conceptions of normalcy and deviance' (Bordo, 1993, p. 167). In this respect, power and knowledge is perceived as productive because it literally makes and shapes women's identity. This results in the seemingly willing acceptance amongst women of the various norms and practices which are perceived as freedom of choice. In fact, many would argue that it is not freedom but rather oppression and can be viewed as women's modern day shackles. It could be argued that the relationship women experience with their bodies, regardless of whether it is positive, negative or ambivalent, must be conceptualised as always being mediated by constructs, associations and images of a cultural nature (Bordo, 1993).

Bordo (1993) takes this understanding a step further by recognising that the majority of women convert these rules and practices into automatic, habitual activity, and suggesting it is not only the norm but their way of exercising independent choice. However, she argues that there is also a high degree of consciousness involved in the decision to diet, have cosmetic surgery or exercise. She argues that women 'know the routes to success in this culture. They are advertised widely enough and women are not dopes to pursue them. Often given the racism, sexism and narcissism of current culture, their personal happiness and economic security may depend on it' (Bordo, 1993, p.30). This is not to suggest blame or that women are their own worst enemies as is suggested by much of current culture. Rather, Bordo (1993) argues that within a culture which continually pulls women away from systematic understanding by

inclining them toward constructions that emphasise individual freedom, choice, power and ability, simply becoming more conscious is a tremendous achievement.

Finally and of importance is the understanding central to Foucault's theory that where there is power there is also resistance. Culture is not 'static or seamless' (Bordo, 1993, p. 295). History proves that resistance and transformation are continual and creative, 'and subversive responses are possible under even the most oppressive circumstances' (Bordo, 1993, p.295). Discourses which contribute towards the analyses and interpretations of the current cultural context and which stand in opposition to the dominant discourses, continue to grow and make more real the actuality and effectiveness of social resistance. However, while these resistant discourses should be celebrated, it is important to continuously bear in mind, that they are still not on an equal footing with the dominant discourses. Therefore, critical focus should remain upon 'the continued patterns of exclusion, subordination and normalisation' (Bordo, 1993, p.295).



Chapters two, three and four have presented a review of the literature relevant to this study. The material presented in chapters two and three frames the context of women and body image, which is the focus of this study. This chapter has defined the study's theoretical orientation and issues pertinent to body image that arise from this perspective. The next chapter discusses the study's design and methodology, aims and objectives, and describes the research process in more detail.

Chapter Five

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter documents the design and methodology employed in this study. It begins with an examination of the qualitative research design used and the aims and goals of the study. Following this it describes the participants and how they were identified for the study. After this the method of data collection by focus groups is explained. The procedures used during the study are then outlined. Finally, discourse analysis as the method of data analysis is described.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research conducted in this study is broadly located within a qualitative framework and adopts a social constructionist approach, utilising Foucault's theory. In choosing an appropriate methodology, the goal of the study was to arrive at a deeper understanding of the following issues for the participants:

- firstly, to examine the relationship women have with their bodies;
- secondly, to explore on a deeper level how they make personal meaning of the concepts of body and body image within their own lives.
- thirdly, to explore the way in which women understand their broader social context, as playing a role, in relation to their perceptions and attitudes of their bodies. In this respect, a closer examination of their awareness of the more complex gender issues, will be undertaken, by means of the emerging discourses within the research process.

Thus, the researcher's approach to the understanding of women's relationship to their

bodies is informed by Foucault's theorisation of social constructionism. Foucault (in Malson, 1998) argues that discourses 'discipline' the body through a 'multiplicity of minor processes of domination'. That through discourses the body is constructed in particular ways exercising subtle coercion upon it. He insists that the body, is an historically and culturally specific entity, which is shaped and reshaped in different discourses and discursive practices (Malson, 1998).

It is the researcher's view and understanding that the female body is the locus in which power relations are manifest most concretely and as a result this research also draws elements of feminism in its analysis of the body as a material site of power struggle. The theoretical framework of social constructionism enables a feminist questioning of scientific truths and mainstream discourses which in many ways have constituted and continue to constitute women as inferior or otherwise lacking (Bordo, 1993). As such the researcher adopts central tenets from feminist thought within a social constructionist understanding and employs a qualitative design to explore these issues in relation to the goals of the study.

Consistent with a qualitative design, a discourse analytic approach using transcripts from focus groups was prioritised. This is in accordance with the understanding that the use of language as a shared system of meaning gives rise to particular forms of discourses. These discourses are particularly meaningful in that they reflect deeply embedded assumptions and practices which actively shape individual's life experiences and their social worlds (Antaki, 1988). In this respect, it seemed appropriate that an exploratory study of this nature would consider a method of analysis wherein naturally emerging discourses and narratives would be used as the basis of analysis.

As a result of locating itself within a social constructionist framework, using the particular method of discourse analysis, this study is encapsulated and shaped by qualitative research traditions. The interpretative process of the qualitative tradition is consistent with a contextualised approach.

Whereas quantitative methods would assume the ability to fill the gaps between 'objects' and representations, an 'interpretative enterprise ... works with the problem, namely the gap, rather than against it' (Banister et al., 1994, p. 4). Research material to be generated in this study is therefore acknowledged to be characterised by indexicality, inconcludability and reflexivity (Parker et al., 1994).

Parker et al. (1994) refer to the term of indexicality in the following manner: namely, that the meanings which are generated within this study are specific and relevant to the set of particular participants engaged in the process, as well as myself, the researcher. In this respect, the meanings and understandings that emerge, would be bound by the unique components that construct this research study. Therefore, in a changed research setting using a different researcher and participants, significantly different meanings might emerge.

Similarly, inconcludability refers to the fact that this research study is not driven by the concern to produce conclusive and generalisable findings with regard to perceptions and attitudes relating to body image amongst women. Rather, it recognises its characteristics of specificity and aims to provide a detailed examination of meanings emerging from this specific group of participants. (Parker et al., 1994).

Finally, reflexivity refers to the way in which I, as a researcher will be aware and monitor the way in which my own subjectivity plays a role in structuring the physical research and discourse analytic process (Parker et al., 1994). Also of importance, is the need for sensitivity to power relations embedded within the research practise itself.

PARTICIPANTS

The research group consisted of eight female volunteers drawn from the honours course in Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. The participants comprised of women ranging in ages from 21 to 24 and from varying backgrounds. It reflected cultural diversity because participants were from various religious and racial backgrounds. One of the participants was an American exchange student, thus the sample also reflected a slight diversity in nationalities.

This study chose to work with a pre-existing group. This means that the group members are known to each. This choice of participants was based on the reasoning that by using pre-existing groups or familiar groups, the research might tap into fragments of interactions which could be translated as 'naturally occurring' (Kitzinger, 1994). Furthermore, their familiarity with each other might mean that friends and acquaintances are able to relate each other's comments to actual incidences in their shared daily lives. It is also considered useful to work with pre-existing groups as they provide one of the social contexts within which ideas are formed and decisions are made (Kitzinger, 1994).

Wilkinson (1998, p. 120) states that 'Indeed, focus groups researchers often maximise this by studying pre-existing or naturally occurring social groups such as friendship

groups, work colleagues, family members, or members of clubs and organisations.' With this in mind it could be argued that research of this nature is more 'authentic' or 'closer to the essential meanings of women's lives', than data collected in any other manner (Wilkinson, 1998, p.120). Wilkinson (1998) cites several research studies conducted with pre-existing groups including a study by Stewart and Shamdasani in 1990 and a study by Press in 1991. Citing examples from both of these studies, Wilkinson (1998) argues that participants with prior knowledge of each other can add depth to the discussion because they often ask more searching questions of each other, disagree with and challenge each other, and point to apparent contradictions in each other's accounts. Thus, it can facilitate the researcher's attempts to delve deeper by accessing information which otherwise might have been overlooked or not made apparent.

DATA COLLECTION

Focus groups were chosen as the technique for collecting the data. The development of the focus group approach is attributed to the sociologist Robert Merton, who along with his colleagues developed a group approach to eliciting information from audiences about their responses to radio programs (in Wilkinson, 1998). The use of the focus group method has been reported in the social science literature for more than half a century (Wilkinson, 1998). Initially, this method was not widely used within psychology as it did not fit the positivist criteria dominant within research. However, the past decade has seen interest in this method emerging. The focus group is currently described as enjoying a vast amount of popularity amongst social researchers and within the field of psychology.

According to Kitzinger (1994, p.103), focus groups are essentially group discussions organised with the purpose of exploring a specific set of issues. In this respect, the focus group is a technique which, when used in a non-threatening environment, generates detailed data about participants' everyday experiences and is critical in obtaining the insights, perceptions, and attitudes of people in a dynamic group interaction atmosphere (Binedall, 1994).

The focus group is distinguished from a group interview by its use of group interaction as research data (Kitzinger, 1994). Furthermore, active participation in the group can be seen to empower group members who 'feel that their views and experiences are valued' (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 115). It incorporates elements of action research as it allows for a form of consciousness raising through sharing, and empowerment as participants' views are shared, challenged and respected, giving rise perhaps to a clearer sense of the social and political processes through which their experiences are constructed (Wilkinson, 1998).

Focus groups evidently offer an important opportunity to explore issues relevant to the person-in-context (Wilkinson, 1998). Similarly, 'focus groups have been found to be particularly helpful in eliciting in-depth discursive material and have advantages over individual interviews in that they provide a forum for participant interaction' (Shefer, 1998, p. 171). Finally, Kitzinger, (1994, p. 108) argues that this form of group work ensures that 'priority is given to the respondents' hierarchy of importance, *their* language and concepts, *their* frameworks for understanding the world'.

It has been argued that within a social constructionist framework, the focus group successfully provides a way of exploring 'the construction of meaning, [and] the

dynamic negotiation of meaning in context' (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 112). This does not only highlight the discourses emerging, 'but also the social interactive processes through which people construct the world and themselves' (Shefer, 1998, p. 171). Finally, Wilkinson (1998) states that focus groups are particularly helpful in conducting research with feminist undertones, as they successfully address ethical concerns about power in research methodology.

PROCEDURE

Permission was granted by two individual lecturers for me to speak to their honours classes with the primary aim of explaining the purposes of my research and to request volunteers. In each brief meeting, I discussed the following:

- that I would be requiring three, one-and-a-half-hour group meetings that would be scheduled outside of their student schedule, and at both their and my convenience
- my own academic background in psychology
- an emphasis on issues of confidentiality and anonymity

Finally, twelve volunteers provided their names and contact details. From this group, eight volunteers were randomly selected and contacted to set up times which would be convenient. It is important to note, that through the course of the three weeks, two volunteers were unable to attend all three groups (one, could not attend after being in the first group and the other missed the last group). In both instances, it was due to tragic accidents and circumstances within their personal families. This is discussed further discussed as part of the limitations of the study, in the final chapter.

Three one-hour focus groups were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions. These questions related to the participants' relationships

with their bodies, and their understanding of body image and the broader social dynamics involved.

This semi-structured focus group schedule allowed for working out a set of questions in advance but remaining free to adjust them based on the perception of what seemed appropriate in the context of the focus group. The researcher also had the freedom to change the way questions were ordered, give explanations on questions, include additional questions, and omit particular questions which might seem unsuitable. Every effort was made, however, to explore in similar detail each occurrence of significant phenomena and to be as consistent as possible. The researcher wanted to record the participants' own perceptions, opinions, experiences and feelings, without restricting their views by pre-established questionnaires.

The main topic areas included in the semi-structured focus groups were derived from a review of the literature and had bearing on the research questions. These can be seen at the end in Appendix A.

The final focus group included a form of debriefing. In this session participants were given the opportunity to ask any relevant questions, share their experiences of talking in a group around the specific topic, discuss the experience of having me, as the researcher/facilitator, and, finally, to discuss any problems they might have experienced during the process.

DATA ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis draws on the following important elements. Firstly, it recognises that discourses are functional and constructive and, therefore, acknowledges that 'variations in talk, and therefore in the meaning of language, are central to the discourse analytic framework of subjectivity in which people are not viewed as unitary, rational beings who provide stable versions of themselves and the world' (Shefer, 1998, p. 149). What this means in more simplistic terms, is that the same individual may at different times, provide a different version or understanding of their social world, thereby, responding with a contradictory form of discourse.

Secondly, discourse analysis acknowledges that discourses are embedded within power. They are contextual and historical and reflect existing power relations and inequalities to both construct and reproduce inequalities. Furthermore, they 'reflect, construct and reconstruct the particular power positions and relations in a particular context, and cannot then be reified as universalised versions of power' (Shefer, 1998, p. 150).

Thirdly, discourses also reflect, construct and reproduce resistance (Shefer, 1998). Many theorists have emphasised the role that discourses play in presenting alternative, contradictory and challenging reports to dominant discourses (Bartky, 1990; Holloway, 1984; Parker, 1992; Uys & Wassenaar, 1996; Shefer, 1998). Parker (1992, p. 18) states that within discourse analysis, resistance is viewed as 'a refusal of dominant meanings', and also as the emergence of alternative, new discourses.

There are a variety of approaches to discourse analysis, all of which share a preoccupation with the structuring effects of language and with an interpretative and reflexive style of analysis which reveals how that structuring occurs (Burman & Parker, 1993). An understanding of language as a transparent medium which merely reflects social entities and social relations is rejected in favour of a view which says that these are constructed and constituted in and through discourses (Burman & Parker, 1993). The Parkerian (1993, 1994) brand of discourse analysis which proceeds from the post-modernist commitment to the 'socially constructed nature of reality' (Burman & Parker, 1994) underpins this study's social constructionist perspective on women and their relationship with their bodies. In addition, Parker proposes a 'grounded' discourse analytic approach drawing on Foucauldian ideas of the relationship between power and discourse, the ways in which subjects and subject positions are constructed in discourse and the functioning of discourse in social change. As a method of research, this approach to discourse analysis met the research goals and aims in:

1. following an *interpretative* approach which involves reflexivity
2. paying close attention to *socio-historical context*
3. making no claims to *generalizability* or *conclusiveness* of findings
4. facilitating *consciousness-raising* in so far as women participants could be made more aware of the underlying issues regarding women's body image through the process of research

Analysis of information

The 'reading' of focus group transcripts was structured by the 'steps to discourse analysis' outlined by Parker et al., (1994, p. 96) which particularise and detail

Foucault's work on discourse and power. These steps are described as a means to *introducing the salient features around the construction, function and variation of discourses in the text*. My relative inexperience in the discourse analytic method leads me to present those steps systematically though it is acknowledged that the actual process of discourse analysis resists rigid division into systematic steps.

The first step involved the 'turn[ing] of the text into written form' (Parker et al., 1994, p. 96) which meant transcription of focus group discussions. It is acknowledged here that this new written text is different to the original spoken discourse of the participants, in so far as transcription is of itself not a 'neutral' act and involves the incomplete transformation of spoken discourse into a theoretically (and potentially ideologically) determined two-dimensional format (Wood & Kruger, 2000).

However, since each session was audio-taped as well as video-taped, an attempt was made to reflect the individual groups as closely as possible. Furthermore, as a result of each session having been audio-taped in their entirety and then transcribed verbatim, a form of preliminary analyses was able to develop between sessions thereby guiding the researcher's awareness of the process and the emerging discourses. In addition, the researcher made brief notes after each group, regarding impressions and emerging discourses.

The next step entailed 'systematically itemising "objects" that appear[ed] in the text' (Parker et al., 1994) and identifying how they were constructed by particular ways of speaking or discourses. In this study, the object of investigation is that of women and their bodies. A critical consideration needs to be made here with regards to my identifying of the above 'objects' and discourses: this was a creative process of

construction in which aspects of my own subjectivity were inevitably implicated. Self-reflection on why one identified these discourses and ‘objects’ was therefore necessary in order to check whether my position of power as an academic to identify, define and label a set of meanings and call it a discourse, meant that I was controlling and reifying meaning. As such, it was necessary for me to reflect upon whether my identification of the above mentioned discourses was a product of my own familiarity and position within a social constructionist framework, or whether this was a true reflection of what was occurring in participants talk.

The next step entailed “systematically itemising the subjects (the category of person) who appear in the text” (Parker et al., 1994, p.98). Parker’s (et al., 1994) next step calls for the researcher to “reconstruct, as a device to explore differential rights to speak within discourse, what each person may say within the framework of rules presupposed by the text”, (P.98). Following this, the next step was to “map the different versions of the social world which co-exist in the text” (Parker, et al., 1994, p.99). Finally, the following step involved “speculating as to how each of these patterns would deal with objections to those instructions and the cultural rules hidden within them.”

Finally the data was captured through the writing of this report. Qualitative research does not separate writing about the data from the analytic process. This is based on the premise that in lending meaning to the raw data, through the choice of particular words to summarise and reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretative act (Wood & Kroger, 2002). This emphasises the researcher’s own participation in the research process.

Personal Reflection

The process of the research itself was very challenging and insightful. The depth of sharing and determination of the participants to make sense of the concepts and to further challenge themselves, proved to be a powerful experience. Through this, the researcher was sensitised to the importance of these issues within the lives of these women.

Self-reflexivity formed a significant component in the study. In this context, it refers to a greater sensitivity to and acceptance of the role of the researcher. This includes an awareness of the way in which my own subjectivity structures the physical research process and the actual analysis of the information. It acknowledges that this awareness includes my own historical, social and personal location in terms of the literature. Furthermore, the fact that I was a woman exploring a specific woman's issue was of importance. This meant I needed to be aware and monitor the way in which my own gender impacted upon the process and the writing up of the research. While at times this felt difficult, at other times it was experienced as extremely rewarding.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informed consent was be obtained from the participants. Their participation was accepted upon a voluntary basis. Assurance was given regarding the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Both their responses and attitudes were treated with respect. Once the study has been completed, copies of the mini-thesis will be made available to the participants involved. Finally, a further feedback session has been set up for when the thesis has been completed and information analysed. It is planned that

this session will comprise of both feedback and a further form of debriefing. As weight issues can be an extremely sensitive area for individuals, a final debriefing and feedback session is believed to be important, whereby the availability of further resources would be made available should they be required. As this final session was planned for a designated period after the completion of the study, it is not possible to incorporate it within the scope of this study.



Chapter Six

ANALYSIS and DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

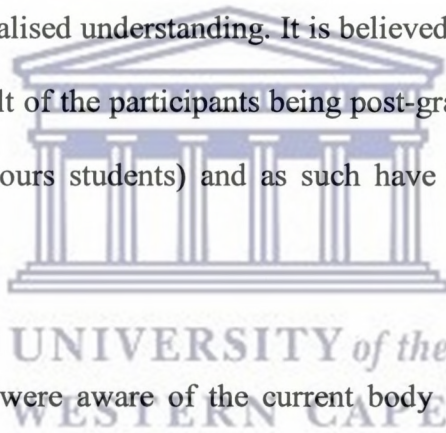
In previous chapters of this thesis the aims of the study were outlined, a review of the relevant literature was reported, and the theoretical framework underpinning the study was clarified. The preceding chapter incorporated the research design and methodology and a description of focus groups and reasons for why the method of focus groups was utilised. In addition, it outlined the steps used in analysing the data, using a Parkerian form of discourse analysis. This chapter opens with a brief outline of the theoretical framework employed in the study and locates the stance of the researcher. It then presents the integrated presentation of the discourses generated from the three focus groups with discussion and examination. As such, this chapter comprises of the major findings or discourses, discussed within the context of the theoretical framework and were elicited from the research questions outlined in Chapter 4 (see Appendix A). This is followed with an outline of the implications of the findings, the limitations of the study, a section regarding self-reflexivity, future recommendations and a final conclusion of the study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Using a combined analysis of the transcripts of all three focus groups the following discourses emerged: the body ideal (norm) - westernised presentation which is both challenged and adopted; a developmental discourse of becoming a woman and what this means in current culture, the powerful meanings of the constructs of 'fat' and

'thin' within society; a discourse of inadequacy regarding their own bodies; the understanding that women's bodies are a site of social control and finally, the struggle in creating an alternate discourse within culture.

Overall it emerged that participants understood their perceptions and attitudes about their bodies to be constructed by their wider socio-cultural context. It is important to note, that participants largely employed a contextualised understanding of the pertinent issues at hand. What this means is, participants locate their understandings within power relations, thus reflecting power inequalities which are grounded in a social and historical context. Thus, to a large extent, the emerging discourses are reflective of this contextualised understanding. It is believed that this understanding is largely adopted, as a result of the participants being post-graduate students within the field of psychology (honours students) and as such have been exposed to varying levels of critical thinking.



As a result, participants were aware of the current body ideal to be one which is wholly constructed by current culture. Despite this integral understanding, participants on a personal level continue to evaluate their bodies against this construct, thus, resulting in feelings of individual dissatisfaction and inadequacy.

1.) The Body Ideal(norm) - a westernised representation, both challenged and adopted

It emerged that participants predominantly employed a contextualised discourse, in understanding the concept of body image. They identified the current body ideal to be thin and waif-like and to be constructed and specific to current culture. This body

type, they believed, has been constructed as the norm for women within the South African context as a result of increasing westernisation. Essentially, they understood that the current body ideal of 'slenderness' as body beauty is one that is constructed and mediated via current westernised culture and that this has a resulting impact on an individual level.

P1: So I mean like also it's like culture ... So I mean it's from everything to magazines, TV to what other people think about you, and not just other people, but I mean your family, and people who don't know you start judging you.

Integral to this understanding of body image as construct was the recognition of the powerful role the media plays within cultures. They viewed the media as a powerful tool of westernisation and the main medium via which the body ideal or norm infiltrates the lives of everyone and more specifically of women. Predominantly all participants viewed first world countries such as Britain and America as being responsible for dictating the norm that then infiltrates various cultures.

P1: If we were — I can't remember which culture, but I mean I'm sure if like certain other remote cultures where they don't have TV and whatever like fat or voluptuous women, a well-rounded woman is more like desirable because men, and I'm assuming these men obviously are not westernised to think ja, have good babies – you know. She'll be fertile or something and that's because their community fosters such things like I'm fat, I'm beautiful. I can eat more and it doesn't matter because I'm beautiful whereas if you're thin in that culture I suppose, and that would be like genetic like you get from your mom. You'd like be undesirable and the guy will say no you won't make a nice wife.

This extract clearly portrays the sentiment that western constructions of what is considered body beautiful are replacing traditional constructs and meanings of what is considered the body norm and as such the body desirable. It also makes evident that what is considered to be the body norm for women is fluid and shifting within the

socio-historical context. Therefore, it is implied that body image itself is shifting and fluid as it is specific to the construction of the body norm and body desirable, which in turn is specific to its context. This fluidity is captured in the following extract:

P: If I could just relate it back to culture and then take it to my own culture – in the black culture. Women who are fat used to be the more desirable. But in my generation now you need to be thin and if you're fat then guys will come to you only during wintertime because they feel that you'll make them nice and warm.


Whilst the underlying discourse of westernisation is prominent throughout, it is no more clearly captured than in the following extract:

P: ... because you think back like the colonial era, like the British invaders. You know the norm like I said everything covered you know, like everything, and like if you're unclothed you're like a total slut and you must wear these hats and whatever, and that was the norm. And when they came to Africa and they saw like women in grass skirts and bare-breasted they thought 'Oh my God' are these heathens. And now westernisation has turned to it like you can literally wear that and look, I don't know, stylish I suppose. And it just shows that how America and Britain have- they sort of dominate the world because they, not predict, but they say what is good for size and what isn't.

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This clearly portrays the view that the driving force behind the constructions of the current body norm is western ideals, which are driven by countries such as Britain and America. The same participant goes on to use an example of an incident that arose in 'The Face of Africa' whereby South African models who had modelling contracts overseas were refused work on the basis of not being the correct weight. The same participant cites the choice these women made to lose more weight as a result of this incident as direct evidence that women in the South African context are increasingly driven by a standard set by western countries.

As previously stated, participants identified the media as being at the forefront of the propagation of western body ideals, norms and body image. Parker et al. (1995) argue that the media is one of the agents that reproduce social representations and serve to individualise problems, thus removing responsibility for these problems from society. Thus the impact of the diffuse portrayal of thin and slender as the body norm is experienced at the individual level by feelings of inadequacy. This dynamic is more clearly outlined in a discourse that is discussed later in this chapter in which participants' give accounts of their own experiences of their bodies. However, of importance here is the identification by participants of the media as influencing the construct of body image. The following extract makes this evident:



P: ... it also has to do with media. Perhaps it's portraying more of a better image if you're thin and perhaps you'll be just on top of everything if you're a woman, and you're thin, and you look nice, and it also has to do with the fashion – new fashion that is being made – I mean it's for people who are slender ...

This also incorporates the participants' understanding that economics, and as such capitalism, contributes towards the construction of what is considered the body norm and image. Participants have the awareness that the slender female form sells clothing far more than any other body type. This shows the belief that economics is an important ingredient in the construction of body norm and image which then mediates the perceptions individuals develop regarding their bodies. The following extracts portray this aspect:

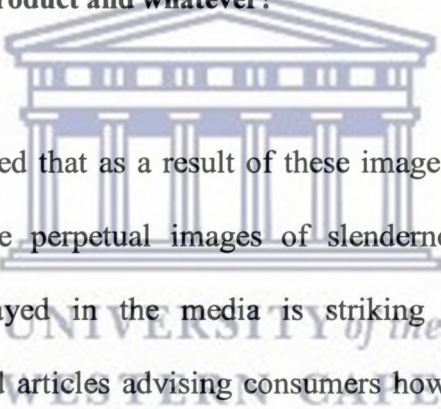
P1: I think it has to do with the fact that they want to sell clothes and you need like a hanger kind of body. So that the body doesn't get in the way of the clothes and the clothes just hang and sit the way they want it to ...

P2: ... I know many designers overseas they like if you're like the most beautiful person and you've got the right height and you've got the right look, whatever, but if you're not

the right size designers won't want you because they like have their own agenda. They want their clothes to look good. They want to sell their clothes. So it doesn't matter if you're the most beautiful person on earth and you're the right size – you're the perfect model, but if you're not the right clothes size that they working for, they won't employ you for the mere fact that they like their size 8's or 2's or whatever sizes they work with.

In addition, participants understood that advertising plays a role in the marketing and selling of products. It was believed that the packaging or the image selling the product was carefully orchestrated to produce the most sales. As a result the packaging or image is that of slender and waif-like female body images.

P: Advertising – you know they're very clever people and they work on your emotions and everything. So they know what they are doing. They get focus groups like this. What do you think will sell this product and whatever?



Participants further believed that as a result of these images, associations of success become attached to these perpetual images of slenderness. The absence of fat successful women portrayed in the media is striking when compared to the multiplicity of images and articles advising consumers how to lose weight and how not to look. The following extract conveys this view and the enormous impact the normalising of slender female bodies has on the individual level:

P: And I can't think of any other fat successful person ... [besides Oprah, who was mentioned by a previous participant who felt that Oprah herself is a contradiction as she openly worries about her own weight] – if you think about it. I mean even pictures portrayed in magazines they show a fat person in a magazine and it would be like an article that says do you want to look like this, or ten ways to lose weight. You know I was looking the other day at an advert for Milady and Edgars plus size models, and I actually before saw that they were plus size models, I looked at the clothes and I thought well they're quite nice until I saw like the make of the clothes, which was Penny C or whatever I don't know. I can't remember Edgars has a special brand name for their plus size models. And they actually look quite good. And then after I turned the page and then I saw another model, and I thought – and I looked at them, and I thought but hey she's quite fat. So I'm recognising that she's quite fat, I'm just so used to seeing thin – so imagine if that's my reaction – that's the reason why they don't put fat models because that's the reaction the public would have.

Participants predominantly use a developing contextualised understanding of the issue of body image. As such their discourses reflect their understanding of the existing power relations within current culture. Within this, they also referred to their understanding of the body ideal as one which is as constructed within an oppressive patriarchal culture. As such, they also draw from a feminist discourse, whereby women's bodies are believed to be objectified by the patriarchal gaze. This is evident in the occasional framing of female body types within a model of objectification, whereby women's bodies are also evaluated in terms of what male's in society believe is attractive. Underlying these references is the perception that current culture is male dominated. This perception is most evident in the following description of the ideal female form or norm that is constructed in terms of the oppressor-oppressed model – a model that is dominant within feminist thought:

P: To me ... look, you know the damsel in distress, she looks very vulnerable, very kind of in need of protection because I mean she just looks so fragile.

P: so ... it's a male-dominated society. We know that and males like to be in power. So it's like such a woman would be kind of ... it caters for their needs of ... needing to protect. So ja, she looks very kind of fragile and vulnerable so ... ja.

In summary, it can be argued that the participants view the body ideal or norm as one which they largely have come to accept as the standard against which they evaluate their own bodies. As such, they actively draw from it as an important reference point within their own lives. However, through their own contextualised understanding, they are also able to challenge it, by means of an awareness of it being a westernised representation, which is also believed to be embedded within a patriarchal system of domination.

2.) *Discourses of women and body*

- *'Becoming a woman' – A developmental discourse*

It emerged that the majority of participants viewed puberty as an important phase in the development of their perceptions of their bodies. All participants discussed this phase of *'becoming a woman'* as a crucial and vulnerable period in their lives during which they were more sensitive than ever before to the meaning and at times absence of meaning given to this phase, by others. It became apparent that how for these participants *'becoming a woman'* meant a transition into a world whereby women's bodies are always imbued with multiple and powerful meanings.

Shefer (1998, p. 209) states that 'international work highlights the centrality of puberty in the transition to womanhood and the role of menstruation in the learning of the regulations and requirements of adult femininity'. Tolman (in Schefer, 1998, p. 209) further maintains that 'menstruation is the crucial moment in the development of disempowerment for many women'. Ussher (1989, p. 13) states that puberty can signify 'the beginning of the process which links female reproduction to weakness and debilitation'. In general, feminist research and theorising has suggested that western culture is characterised by a fear and dislike of women's body and the sexuality it represents (Meadow & Weiss, 1992). Similar negative connotations may have played a role in participants' experiences of becoming a woman and witnessing the physical changing of their bodies and the meaning this held. This is evident in the following extract:

P: Ja. because I mean, I remember being 8 years old and conscious of my body. Even when I went through the transition, like they were saying, it was, I used to wear baggy clothes even though I had not developed yet. I used to wear baggy clothes even though (indistinct), I used to wear baggy clothes, because I didn't want my womanness, it shouldn't be shown. Very much, you know, I was very conscious of that, 'I don't want to

be a woman', kind of thing. Even though I developed late and I've been through the whole baggy phase until recently, kind of thing.

Others describe this fundamental changing of their body as a confusing, awkward and shameful period but understand it as a normal experience for most women. Descriptions imply a feeling of not being in control, self-disgust and the limitations becoming a woman heralded for the body. This is evident in the following extracts:

P1: I think I'm more comfortable now, than when I was younger. Because everyone, you know, everyone goes through a phase. A phase everyone goes through where you say, 'I hate my body,' you body is changing, you know for me, like going from a stick to not a stick, let's say, ...

P2: It's a big change, so at least I'm not that obsessive now, so when I hear my younger cousin speak, I say, 'Oh, you know, I'm so glad I'm over that phase, because now I'm more in control than I was before, because that was a really awkward stage.

P3: I mean, I can relate to that, that feeling of getting 13, 14, 15 years. I mean, you didn't even worry about your body before that. I didn't you know, it was like summertime you go to the beach, you run around in a bikini, in a bathing costume, who cares? And then suddenly one day you like got your bathing costume on and suddenly you see, 'Oh my God, what's that?' That's cellulite, it's ugly and it's your body and it's like, 'Hold on, what's happened?', it's just me and Oh God, that ugly feeling ...

Using Foucault's theory, it can be argued that the experience of the physical markings of becoming a woman (such as developing a fuller figure, menstruating and developing cellulite) is embedded within a broader discourse of what that means within the cultural context. The whole experience of puberty, menstruating and bodily changes, is constructed as an extremely uncomfortable change, impacting negatively on women's self-confidence. Even more importantly, becoming a woman also means learning the regulations and requirements of femininity. Theoretically speaking this implies that subjectivity and in this instance female subjectivity is produced in discourse (of the current culture) as the self is subjected to discourse. Thus, the

dominant discourses and discursive practices which inform what it means to be a woman and the role attached to it, both regulate and normalise female behaviours, activities and roles.

These powerful practices work towards gendering the individual and defining what are normal and deviant behaviours, activities and roles. This is clearly reflected in the following extracts from the participants as they explain how becoming a woman limited their behaviours and activities and informed the type of physical body that was desirable and considered feminine.

P1: I wish I could be more athletic or like I used to enjoy athletics and running around and stuff at school, but it's difficult with bigger breasts ... You just can't, it's not possible. The sports bras that I have just doesn't cut it just limits the kind of stuff you can do because it's like all over the place and it's (indistinct) ...

P2: ... I also did athletics at school and then you become quite, your thighs become quite well developed and you become quite ... and people go on about your thighs being so ... My dad wasn't very big on me, so I stopped actually doing athletics because you know, you get this bulk and things ...

F: Which is not very attractive for women?

P: For men, maybe! For women it's different.

P3: ... I was very into sports when I was at school. And with that, I had a lot of bulk and I weighed 72, it was, I didn't like to wear, you know these bellbottomed pants that girls like to wear. I couldn't wear that, because those little bulges and things and it was such a struggle, because afterwards I did the sports and things, if you don't exercise, that all just you know like turns to fat and it was a struggle, because people weren't supportive of me. 'Oh, I see you're getting fat now, just go away' you feel and you know, it makes you feel despondent and I don't know it wasn't a very nice time. But now I feel comfortable and I'm not going back.

The implicit and explicit messages of what a feminine body should look like are both normalised and conveyed through family and friends. Foucault describes this as the inspecting gaze and perpetual surveillance within society, thus normalising discourses

and exacting punishment to those who do not conform. The following extract reflects this:

P: I think you accept your body as it's developing, but once other people start noticing it and making comments, it's like, then you start thinking about it and like criticising your own body and start thinking there's something wrong if you don't look like everyone else.

The following two extracts both illustrate the powerful role of the peer group in regulating gender subjectivities via appearance. The second extract exposes the punitive response of boys to girls who are developing breasts. For the participant in the second extract, developing breasts and wearing a bra, highlighted her as 'different' to boys and signalled her having to accept her designated gender category.

P1: I remember I developed before all of my friends. They were flat-chested and I had these breasts that would not stop growing and it was horrible, it was like, because they made comments about me showing it off and all I was trying to do, I had to hide it and wear baggy clothes and it was horrible, because I loved it first for a while and then everybody started making comments about it and then they like, ok, it don't look that nice and now still it's like if I wear like a tight top, I'm very aware of what I look like and it's not nice, definitely.

P2: ... You know, and like when you buy your first bra, you know. And it's like you know, like the boys, you know like what is this snapping ... like, hello! What is this about snapping?

Thus, for this group of women the transition to womanhood is constructed by those around them as a transition into a vulnerability regarding appearance. The normalised images of what you should look like, what sort of activities you engage in and the constructing of the feminine identity, is continuously held in check by family, peer groups and the environment.

- *The construction of fat = ugly and thin = beauty as a prevailing discourse*

This second sub-section deals with the way in which the participants' understood the labels of fat and thin as binary opposites within current culture. It emerged that participants largely understood the two descriptions of body types to hold very specific and different meanings from each other. Their understandings of these as socially constructed appears to largely be informed by a contextual understanding. However, the actual perceptions and the personal meanings given to the two body types reflect more of the mainstream, dominant discourses prevailing within current culture.

All participants agreed that the meaning equated to 'fat' was extremely negative which included the descriptions of ugly, unsuccessful, isolated, a side show, embarrassment, unfashionable, different, not accepted, out of control and extremely judged by others. In contrast, the meanings associated with 'thin' were positive descriptions such as popular, beautiful, elegant, confident, fashionable and, most importantly, accepted.

Discourses have the power to give language meaning because they are 'real'; they are the very real social structures and institutions we live in (Parker et al., 1993). In the modern era, mainstream discourse is one of the scientific networks that has contrived its view of the world through opposites and contrasts, translating into health and pathology; normal and abnormal – which serve to justify conceptual binaries and real world exclusions (Fee, in Parker, 2002). In addition to reproducing specific kinds of experts and organisations that oversee these divisions, it is crucial to recognise that

various biomedical categories and strategies become the currency filtering across personal and social realities (Fee, in Parker, 2002).

Furthermore, failure to meet the body norm by women clearly results in a strong sense of *stigmatisation* within current culture. Participants were aware that not conforming to the powerful social practice of the body norm, had painful repercussions on an individual level.

P1: Okay, I mean like, let's say you were plus size or something, the thing is, you know, you're going to, you don't get the fashion that you get in a normal store ... but not in the fashion of the contemporary shops, the normal shops. So it's like a lose-lose situation and.

P2: Ja, I wouldn't want to show my body, but I don't want to make a fool of myself as well, so ja, because my mom belongs to a gym and she always says it's such a nice place to meet people. I don't think, because people going to the gym, they're there in tight, slinky things and I'm in a tracksuit pants and bulky, so I don't think so.

Still for other participants the consequences of not fitting the body ideal were far more damaging as is evident in the following extract:

P1: ... When I was 15 or 16 I was, I was big, big, and my brother makes these little comments like, 'Is your bum following you around?' I mean, it's funny for him, but I'm thinking you know and ... it hurts so much and you know, all those comments and you get the family members saying 'Phew, you're looking nice and tubby' and I thinking don't, you know, you try, or you look like a chipmunk or something, but you're sitting there and you're thinking and feeling, it's painful. I was a bit overweight from about 15–17, matric I had lost weight, a bit of weight and I didn't lose it healthily ... I wouldn't eat...I wouldn't eat and it was bad, you know, but I would hide it and that in itself, it's painful ...

P2: I know when I'm feeling like I've eaten too much, or feeling like feeling sick and stuff I feel very sloppy and untidy and clumsy, and just don't feel very comfortable in myself, and feel like everybody is like looking at me and judging me. Like I don't feel like – if I'm like eating I feel like everybody there is looking at me and saying why's she eating. She's fat – she doesn't need to eat. So I feel like everybody's judging you and watching you constantly.

Participants agreed that stigmatisation is a strong consequence of not conforming to the constructed body norm. Consequences are predominantly exacted on an individual level, via family members, friends and the environment. Blame is internalised on an individual basis, resulting in low self-esteem, extreme self-consciousness, unhealthy dieting, eating disorders and a poor self-image. This, mainstream discourse of pathologising on an individual level, stands in contrast to Foucault's theory which states that the way in which women experience their bodies is *always* mediated by constructs, associations and images specific to the current culture. However, the effect of internal blame, as Foucault theorises, is what results in women self correcting.

Medical discourse perpetuates and maintains the binary oppositions between 'fat' and 'thin' with claims that fat is unhealthy and not good for your health. Feminist frameworks challenge such absolute claims and argue that the effects of stigmatisation itself upon women's health needs to be examined in terms of high blood pressure, anxiety and so forth (Silverstein & Perlick, 1995). Several participants did challenge this binary discourse by questioning whether fat should always automatically equate to unhealthy and whether thin should always be considered as desirable, using anorexia and bulimia as examples.

P1: ... But if you put these two little cousins they're quite chubby, and they're healthy. You know like they both do sports and whatever and it's not like they're out of breath or whenever. So they're healthy ... Definitely – I mean more healthy than I would say you and I – or I don't know how much exercise you do. But they do things like swimming and jazz dancing, and ballet, but if you look at them you'd think to yourself well they're quite tubby compared to others ... And I mean if they were like unhealthy or stuff, like couldn't control themselves all the time, or out of control I could understand how people could say if you're fat you have all this like health repercussions and you don't breath properly, and we gasp like out of breath or whatever, but from what I can notice they're quite healthy you know and they're quite sports inclined.

P2: I totally agree with... and to the fact that like now you see medical society also contribute to it because they say fat obviously – but obesity is generally unhealthy. But I

don't think women or society can distinguish when between fat healthy and obese unhealthy. You know I don't think they can distinguish in that ...

P3: Yes, so I mean I don't think that thin is always the desirable. I mean you get in terms of anorexia and bulimia – I mean that is not desirable.

In this way, participants point out that in fact being 'thin' can also be associated with ill-health and that 'fat' people can be healthy.

- **'Having a woman's body' – a discourse of inadequacy**

Despite the fact that participants employed a contextualised discourse by describing body image as socially constructed, within their personal lives, they continued to internalise a sense of personal inadequacy with regards to their own bodies. As such a discourse of *individualised inadequacy* emerged. All participants expressed a general sense of dissatisfaction with their bodies and clearly felt that there could be improvement. Interestingly, the desire to have certain aspects of the body changed ranged from losing weight, to dissatisfaction with being too thin. This is evident in the following extracts: (Participants are responding to the question 'How do they feel about their own bodies?')

P1: It could be better

P2: I for one, just want to get rid of those, you know (referring to her hips)

P3: I want some of that (referring to previous participants hips)

P4: I'm okay with mine, but obviously there are things I want changed. There's always maybe something ...

P5: My mom says I have a distorted view of my body. Ummm, I mean, I work out on a daily basis and ummm, I'd probably be never satisfied with the way my body looked. Because I mean, people comment on like how short you are, or ummm, you know comparing you to say your siblings, and that kind of thing, so ja. I have to say I dislike my body ...

P6: There's the feelings that I don't want to show my body, because it's not right. I don't want to show my body because it's too thin, it's like the opposite end of the spectrum but the same feeling, I don't want to, quite strange, but there's a general kind of self-consciousness, no matter what the body kind of is or looks like...

All participants agreed that while they predominantly experienced dissatisfaction with their bodies, it was not always static. While they recognised that it was predominantly characterised by dissatisfaction and inadequacy, they also acknowledged that there were times when they felt a bit better about their bodies even though not completely satisfied. They agreed that the way in which they evaluated their bodies was by *comparing* it to the body ideal that is evident in the media and to other women who either epitomised the ideal or fell horribly short.

P1: 'It is difficult because I try and be very healthy and it's come to a point where I think that looks healthy and I don't think everybody can look like that. And you feel inadequate because you don't look healthy as they do. You don't look the way that they do and it's difficult because I want to be healthy and that's what they tell me is a healthy look ...

P2: Sometimes I buy into it and I feel that okay tomorrow I'm going to start exercising and I'm going to join a gym, and I'm going to look like that. It passes but the thought is still there. And I feel really inadequate sometimes because I feel that's the way I should look.

P3: ... because I work my body really hard. To look like this, my mom always says, no, you shouldn't try and look so skinny and whatever. But the fact of the matter is, my sister is quite skinny and looking at that, they always say that models are very lonely people. And then I look at my sister and she's waif like. She's extremely thin. She kind of gets all the attention and whatever. So you could buy into that kind of whole thing. So you look, I mean I get it everyday at home, looking at her and the response she gets for the way she looks. And I look at that and I think that must be good-you know that kind of thing. So it's pretty easy to buy into that.

Participants describe this dynamic as giving rise to an extreme form of body self-consciousness and fierce competition amongst women. This is evident in the following extracts:

P1: I think women are worse with each other when they judge women. I think very much critical of each other's bodies, because I think if a woman is self-conscious about some aspect of her body, she would look at someone else and almost put that person down, it was my experience and it's true, you think that women would be able to empathise with other women, but it's just, they show up other people's cellulite or make

comments about other people and you'd think that they would be more empathetic of other women.

P2: I think it's more projection, kind of thing, where it's a feeling of, 'Ok, I don't have that', so it's like you feel better about yourself, kind of putting someone else out, that you could feel better, that kind of thing.

P3: Women, they are more judgmental, because I know sometimes I'm like that. If someone says, 'Oh that girl looks nice,' I would say, 'No, she's got big hips,' because she's got something I don't have.

These descriptions convey a sense of women being set up against each other in the constant pursuit of achieving the social body ideal. Importantly, they describe a feeling of self-consciousness, irrespective of body size, shape or type. Throughout the process, participants describe a sense of acting as each other's constant overseer and critical watch-guard. Foucault (in Malson, 1998, p. 155) describes this dynamic as, '... an inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under it will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.' This constant surveillance is described by the participants in the following manner:

P1: It's almost automatic, it's not something that you're going to think, 'Ok, so this person's thinner than me, you know, whatever, you just, with me I want to, and I don't know, it's funny.

P2: Ja. These things happen, maybe not on a daily basis, but in our daily lives. You see, I'm so used to it. I mean like today, I mean you look at people every day, no matter what you say, you are thinking, 'She's thin', you know or something like that. It's not that you're going to be okay for one whole day and the next day you might, it's almost every minute of the day you're conscious of you body, well for me.

P3: And I know women look at each other, so they're going to look at you.

P4: And you know they doing it. Definitely women, women have this way of sizing you up. They have the whole up down look.

It should be noted that while participants experienced this constant surveillance most intensely amongst themselves, they also identified their families as playing an important role in the process of monitoring. A recurring description was that of mothers playing a crucial role in the internalisation of, as Foucault (in Malson, 1998) describes, 'the inspecting gaze'.

P1: I have to say in my family weight is very important and my mom's very...I mean ever since I've known her, she's always been on diet. We eat according to the Weigh Less program, that's how we've always eaten. So if I pick up a little bit of weight, people outside might not notice it and I would say, 'Oh, I'm getting fat.' My mom would notice it. She would say, 'You should be doing something about that. You're picking up weight.' So it's, you know, our weight gets monitored, kind of thing, by my parents ...

P2: In fact like if I think what my experience- if I think about weight you know – my mother will always comment on – like yesterday I weighed myself. It's just something I do ... And I was just interested to see how much I have lost, and my mother happened to be in the bathroom at the same time and she was like – why you're weighing yourself, because she know that I don't like, weigh myself. I said well, you know, I can see I've lost weight. She's like 'that's good'. And I'm thinking should I just block that out because I don't necessarily want her to congratulate me or something. It's something I should feel good or bad about, or whatever ... but all I'm saying is that mothers in general, whether it's got to do with male kids or girl kids, they generally more sort of set the standard of how you will sort of feel for yourself and that.

P3: I know that if my mother buys chocolates for my sisters, and I used to try and eat healthily, so she'd but like Granola bars, then I think 'Are you trying to tell me something?' Why don't I get a chocolate or sweet, or chips, or something?

P4: ... if I could refer to mothers, they will then tell their own children you know to start dieting at very early ages, and which also most pass it on to friends where they like get their friends also to like have the same body images without even verbalising it sometimes. Perhaps sometimes they do verbalise it.

These excerpts describe mothers' anxieties about their daughters conforming to the constructed body norm, and as such the socially constructed notion of femininity. Feminist theory has identified the mother-daughter relationship as central in the reproduction of femininity (Schefer, 1998; Ussher, 1989) and in this study, 'mothers' are described as the 'teachers' of femininity. It could be argued that 'mothers' collude

with culture in the construction of the social norm of both femininity and the body norm.

P: ... of course mothers wanting their daughters to be whatever – happy or you know settled, would encourage their daughters, and sometimes they don't know how to do it in a positive way, if it is at all positive, would sort of encourage them to look in that certain desired image and it's hard for the person's self-esteem or whatever, because it makes you feel like – I mean everybody's got different like sort of bone structures or whatever, metabolism, genetics, and for you to be sort of whatever the ideal is, whichever you consider the ideal should be like thin and whatever, whatever. I can understand how it would be confusing you know sending a message like well I look like this. How am I ever going to look like that? It makes you feel wrong. It like makes you feel bad for the way that you naturally look or the way you naturally feel ...

Linking mothers as colluders with culture is expressed as an uncomfortable realisation because it reflects upon the way in which women themselves perpetuate the social construction of femininity and the body norm. This is captured in the following extract:

P: It's quite depressing because if you think about it, we're all potentially going to be mothers one day and if you have children, I think to some degree you'd also be worried about how your children look.

As such, 'the gaze' which is encapsulated by both the self and others becomes a normalised practice, working towards self-correction to the norm.

In addition, participants believed that their own feelings of inadequacy and body self-consciousness, placed them in a similar position to that of individuals suffering from anorexia, and which mainstream discourse clearly constructs as 'abnormal'.

P: For me the similarity is the way that everybody seems to have this really distorted image of their body. Because I'm sitting here now and everybody here I feel has got such nice bodies but hearing what they feel about it, what it is like, wow, where did this come

from because that to me is what an anorexic person would think, because they'd be so thin and they'd still see that they're fat. So there definitely is some kind of similarity.

In this way, participants were able to challenge the constructions of what is considered 'normal' and 'abnormal' within dominant discourse, by regarding themselves as similar to those suffering from anorexia and bulimia, in their perceptions and attitudes towards their bodies.

3.) Women's bodies, a site of 'oppression'

It emerged that participants perceived *all* women to be largely unhappy and dissatisfied with their bodies. This was also predominantly reflected in the group itself.

P1: I don't think I've ever met a woman who feels 'God, you know, I like my body,' I don't think I've ever heard a woman say, 'God, I have a good body' and that's it. I don't think I've ever heard a woman say, 'I love my body!.' Never ever!

P2: The perception that I got from the last meeting was that except for, I think everyone here except for NAME felt that they were fat. [person she did refer to was dissatisfied with her body because she was too thin – opposite end of the spectrum, but also unhappy] Am I correct? I mean NAME was the only one that said I'm too thin – right. So everybody else – I mean that's what I perceive most women feel like that or 90% of women – how do you feel – I'm fat, fat, fat, which males make fun of you because they think we're weight obsessed. And we are ...

Participants employed a contextual discourse in understanding this dynamic. As such, they located their understanding within existing power relations and the way in which power inequalities are reproduced. They, therefore framed their understanding of all women feeling dissatisfied, inadequate and self-conscious of their bodies as an indication that women's bodies were in fact a site of oppression and social control.

Participants predominantly perceived this to be the result of a combination of factors such as westernisation, capitalism (economics), male-dominated power structures, the media, and the internalisation of these views and the perpetuation of them by women, themselves. Essentially they agreed that this form of oppression originated in patriarchal structures of society. This type of oppression is then held in place by economic and power structures which are believed to benefit males predominantly.

P1: ... But also a combination of maybe there is no one answer ... The concept essentially is a westernised concept of stick thin and being attractive. Where if you look African women – and I'm talking African as in anybody who lives in Africa whether you white, black, coloured, whatever, whatever. Women in their natural state are not stick thin, not the majority at least. Ja, so basically the concept just coming from you know westernised society and like maybe they don't even have like a reason either, like one single reason why thin is beautiful.

P2 It's all about who's in power. Who dictates to you what is kind of feminine or it's not ...

P3: Well if you have the power, I mean you dictate the norm. So if you have the resources and the money, then you can say well if you don't do this or the way I like, these are the consequences. And if you do these are the rewards that you will get. So you have to make a choice you know. If I want certain things then I will either conform or sort of not conform to what the people with resources or money want. So if you have power and money you dictate the norm.

As previously mentioned participants believed that this system of power which actively constructs and dictates femininity originated within a patriarchal system and currently, although also perpetuated by women themselves, predominantly benefits males. This is evident in the following extracts:

P1: ... But you must remember we started from a male-dominated society and we can't say that it's equal yet, because you don't have equal women in power and equal men in power. So whether or not – you can't deny the fact that the start of a male-dominated society and whether women are keeping that in power by perpetuating it, that's the history. That's where they came from ...

P2: ... I mean in a society to be a real woman you have to be at home, look after the kids, as well as your husband, and do like house chores, whereas the man has to be outside, to go and work and bring the money at home. And I think on the whole it benefits the men – ja, I think it benefits the men, because I mean they are the ones at the end of the day who feels great and good about themselves.

Participants further linked the maintenance of this construction of femininity to the media portrayals of body image regarding the two sexes:

P1: ...like in fact when they advertise a perfect so-called male they never put him to look skinny and all that shit, but what they'll do is they'll portray him as wearing a suit and a tie, carrying a briefcase, and in an office, and that is being like a real man. But for women they have to look skinny, perfect with like in terms of body, and then like with the fashion that the woman would be dressed on.

P2: ... you know, with regards to modelling and things and the females, what comes into mind is that the males are portrayed as being the breadwinner and the female is the trophy – you know. Looking dainty and helpless and putting on something glamorous to wear and whatever, and be thin.

Participants believed that women also perpetuate the construction of femininity and the body ideals and norm. However, they frame this within an oppressive cycle whereby women are caught in a type of double bind. This is outlined in the following three dominant dynamics voiced by the participants.

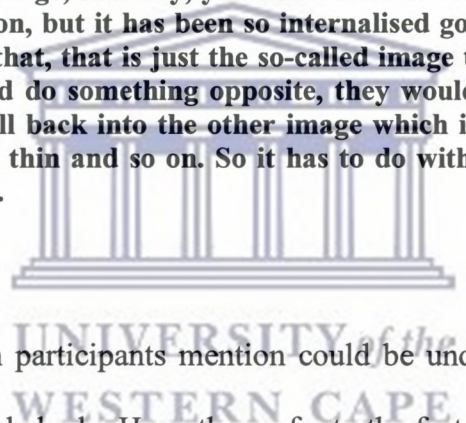
Participants believed that firstly, there are far fewer women in economic power structures than men and that for women to be financially successful in competing against men, specifically in the realm of the media and clothing design, they need to adopt and perpetuate cultural body norms. This is directly linked to the second dynamic they identified, namely that women to a large degree has internalised the norm of slenderness so thoroughly that it is not questioned and has become almost the only way of being.

P1: You know you're living in a male-dominated society and you're competing with men you know. So also why women designers would make sort of the size clothes that men do because for the same reason you're competing with men. And if like NAME said women have already bought into the concept of thin, you know it's no use unless you have a whole group of women bunching together and actively I don't know launching a massive ad campaign to empower women and get them used to the fact that you know there's

clothes out there for their size that will make them look good, and still design – make them feel happy with their body image, because they may be happy with a little fat or whatever. But because like we said designers, whether they be male or female, make you feel bad for having a bit of fat, you feel no well I need to lose weight to conform to society. So unless women do that, they have to – I would say they're forced – some of them are forced to sort of buy into the stereotype and competing with men. So if they're making for size 8 figures then, if they're competing with men on the same level playing field, they also have to make clothes for size 8 people to sell their clothes – you know, to be sort of competitive or to just reach the same status to sell their clothes, which is their aim ...

P2: I think that women have already bought into the whole idea of you have to be thin to be beautiful. So even if there – I mean there's like a minority of women that are out there making clothes for fuller figures and those designs don't really sell. I mean everybody wants to be thin whether they feel they're being oppressed or not they want to be thin.

P3: I think it goes back to the money issue because they perhaps doing it for business there in competition. They know that whether if they could try and fight for the rights of women in terms of body image, that hey, you don't have to have a thin, skinny woman on the cover page and so on, but it has been so internalised going back to what NAME has mentioned earlier on that, that is just the so-called image that you have to look. So even if they would try and do something opposite, they wouldn't go anywhere, which means then they would fall back into the other image which is like from the men that you have to look nice and thin and so on. So it has to do with money, that's why they perpetuate into the same...



The third dynamic which participants mention could be understood in terms of the objectification of the female body. Here, they refer to the fact that if women are not of a particular body type, it is believed they would not be attractive to males. It is believed that in order to be desired, women feel they need to conform to the normalised body standard. This, participants believed, was particularly held in place and enforced by mothers, and family members:

P: The only answer that I can come up with it's sort of like living in a male-dominated society so let's say like males would prefer a certain body type, so if you don't reach that ideal you'll be scared not to sort of have a man, or whatever, not to be desired, or whatever. Of course mothers wanting their daughters to be whatever – happy or you know settled, would encourage their daughters ... So those ideals would predominantly come from males you know and also some females like lets say mothers, or aunties or even your peers would reinforce that because they don't have any other choices I suppose.

It is important to note, that while they framed their explanations within the language and understanding of an oppressive framework using a predominantly contextualised discourse, they also discussed the way in which women were able to use this dynamic to their advantage. In the following extract the participant acknowledges that women also experience a sense of empowerment in epitomising the cultural body ideal.

P: But also if you're thin in the group – that particular group – and your friends all happen to be chubby or whatever, maybe you'd exert power then – and maybe covert the fact that you're thin or whatever, or more guys look at you – whatever your case may be. You're more popular. Maybe you know you have that power, so sometimes it's empowering because you sort of like can say to them well you know, look at me, or why don't you diet so that you can wear clothes like wear, or be like me, or be popular. So sometimes also like in terms of internalising it also sometimes it's a form of power ...

Bordo (1993) acknowledges that the recognition and adoption of normalising cultural body ideals does not make women 'cultural dopes' who are blindly submitting to oppressive regimes of beauty. Instead she argues that women also know the routes to success in this culture and following them might be their only opportunity for success in a culture filled with contradictions. As such, participants recognise that women epitomising the cultural ideal experience a degree of success within a culture that rewards those who conform to the norms which it imposes.

4.) The way forward – an alternative discourse?

It is important to bear in mind that while participants have largely adopted the body ideal, which they understood as a western representation, they have also questioned and challenged it. However, in doing this participants voiced the difficulty of creating alternatives on an individual level within a larger cultural backdrop. They discussed the importance of personal awareness and the power of realisation within individuals

but also recognised the difficulties created by a constant battle with the external environment.

P1: So in terms of alternatives, definitely it's creating awareness, or we're speaking more about it because – I don't know, or you know, you just actually think there are so many problems out there in the world that are so much more important, but yet when you think about body image related to self-esteem, it seems more important now, because if you have women who are positive or high self-esteem, then you have empowered women. You have empowered society.

P2: Awareness is a good thing, but awareness it needs coupled with – but awareness coupled with something else maybe, ja. But awareness like I mean people with anorexia, they're aware that anorexia is a bad thing, but it still happens. In the news a couple of months ago, about the two Chinese women that died from using those diet pills, and they went around asking the people on the street in China like would you continue using this and they said yes – you know. So they're aware of it and that it's not a good thing, but it doesn't stop them from wanting the ideal. So it's like – it's better to be dead that you get what you want kind of thing. So awareness needs to coupled with ... give me something – ja there's an ingredient missing you know kind of thing ...

Other participants felt that this so-called missing ingredient entailed mass awareness regarding changing both male and female perceptions. Other participants felt that this so called missing ingredient entailed mass awareness regarding changing both male and female perceptions.

P: I think mass awareness is more important because like I said all of us in this room is all fine and dandy, but like when we talk about parents making an impact on the children's lives all good and well, but how are we going to get there. So if you - you need basically society change and mass awareness. I think that would be the ingredient missing - ja.

Many felt that the only real solution was one that started in the home. All participants felt very strongly that the power of change needed to begin with the family and the importance of conveying self acceptance to all children. While certain participants believed it is important to positively convey any messages regarding the body to children within the home, others felt it was more important to not make the children

aware at all. Still others believed that it was necessary to start at home and to take an active role in combating the sometimes damaging perceptions of others.

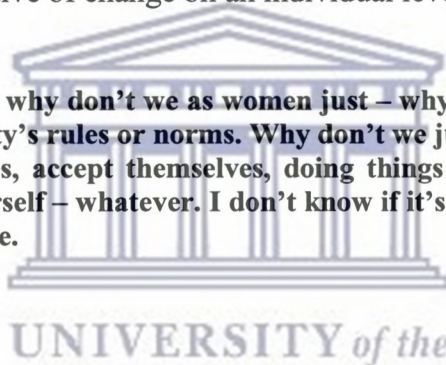
P1: So ja I think it would have to start in the home with parents just being happy with their children the way they are- you know. So they pick up a bit of weight now - you know - let them - if they're comfortable with it, it's ok.

P2: With regard to us I think it should start at the home with your parents, but my alternative would be not to make the child aware at all.

P3: So when I speak to my little cousin who says - everybody says to her, her parents commenting on her she's getting a bit fat, I'd physically tell them don't say that or don't say that in front of her...or like when my cousin says 'oh, I'm getting fat', and I ask her who told you that and you know - actually reassure her no you look fine whatever.

Still others felt more positive of change on an individual level:

P: I'm just thinking about why don't we as women just – why don't we just – how can I say now – not accept society's rules or norms. Why don't we just as a person yourself, as a woman allow ourselves, accept ourselves, doing things for yourself the way you want it and believe in yourself – whatever. I don't know if it's possible. I know it's going to be hard, but it is possible.



It was evident that participants themselves struggled with their own realisations of living within a culture of contradictions and translating this on a personal level. However, perhaps the understanding that body image is mediated by current culture is a powerful enough start. For the researcher the following extract from a participant proved to be integral in conceptualising the challenge ahead.

P: ... now if I sit in front of the TV perhaps and then see whatever it is on the television set, then at least I know I do have an awareness that ag, they can go to hell with those images that they're showing.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSIONS

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings strongly indicate that the participants are aware of the way in which their broader cultural contexts impacts upon their lives as women. More specifically, the participants understand the way in which our current social context constructs the normative body ideal, which is then reproduced and normalised via the mass media. They identified this normalised body ideal to be one, which is waif-like and expressed an understanding that this body image dominates and influences the way in which they, as women feel about their own bodies.

Participants largely believed that the current body ideal had developed as a result of the process of increasing westernisation. This, they understood as being embedded within a patriarchal system of domination. While they believed the normative body ideal originated within a male dominated system, they expressed an understanding that this dynamic continued to be held in place by capitalism, power structures and women, themselves. However, they conceptualised the role of women within this system by means of an 'oppressor-oppressed' framework. As such, participants theoretically understood that the concept of body image, is one which is culturally constructed and that in a personal sense, one's body image is always mediated by one's socio-historical context. In addition, they identified on a theoretical level, the female body as being a site of oppression within a patriarchal and westernised society.

This type of contextualised understanding was of a sophisticated nature. However, one would expect this form of understanding to frame their perceptions as they are post-graduate students within the field of psychology. As such, one would expect them to have been exposed to various levels of critical thinking. However, the challenge of whether this contextualised understanding would moderate any personal feelings of dissatisfaction and inadequacy regarding their own bodies, was not accomplished. In fact, it would seem that there is a very definite split between the way in which they were able to theorise and understand the concepts and the way in which they, as women experienced their bodies. The findings strongly point to these participants feeling a sense of intense and constant body self-consciousness. The way in which, they compare themselves to the cultural ideal and to women at large, appears to predominantly result in feelings of inadequacy and poor self image.

In addition, despite their theoretical understandings of the concepts, they effectively appeared to employ the dominant, cultural meanings attached to the body types of 'fat' and 'thin' within their own lives. This strongly points to the powerful way in which they have internalised the current body ideal as normative within their own lives. This is a dynamic which participants clearly pointed out and reflected upon, throughout the process. Participants largely identified this, as being the challenge for the future. It was believed that individual awareness was necessary in the form of consciousness raising, however, participants largely felt that this, in itself, was not enough.

However, participants were unable to conceptualise this within a practical sense. This, is believed to be largely due to the participants belief that change within the broader society and culture, is understood to be an overwhelming task. However, it is

noteworthy, that participants proposed that the most effective way in which to approach this task, on an individual level, is within the home. They saw this as needing to occur within the family context and the rearing of children. As such, it is understood that through awareness, parents have the power to convey messages of self-acceptance and construct positive meaning to all body types. However, even though this alternative was considered to be of value by participants, they continued to question how far this could be carried through, without the active support of the larger society and cultural context.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

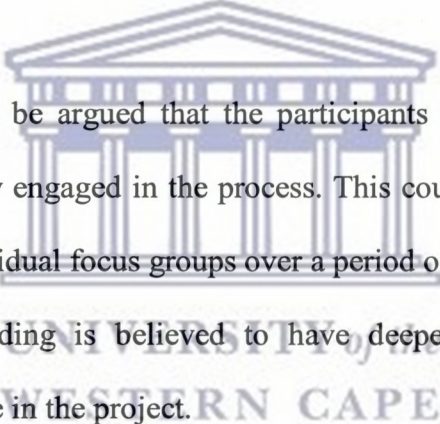
Several limitations associated with this study must be pointed out. Firstly, in terms of indexicality, it is acknowledged that the meanings generated within this study are specific to this group of post-graduate (honours students), female students at the University of the Western Cape. As such, the discourses that have emerged are considered unique and specific to this research study. It is also therefore recognised that using a different setting with changed components, such as different participants and a different researcher, significantly different discourses and meanings would arise. It is thereby understood that the findings are specific to this study, using these participants with me, acting as the researcher. Secondly, in terms of inconcludability, it is acknowledged that this study was not concerned with producing conclusive and generalisable findings which could be related to all women. Instead, it has set out to generate a detailed examination of findings which is specific to this particular group of female participants studying at the University of the Western Cape.

SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Banister et al. (1994) highlights the importance and centrality of self-reflexivity within the qualitative approach to the research process and analysis. Furthermore, the researchers' own positioning in social context and the significance of reflexivity in the research process have been underlined in both feminist and discourse analytic research (Hollway, 1989). As such, the researcher needs to maintain a critical awareness of the power relations emerging in the discourses of the participants as well as the power inequalities between the researcher and the participants.

Firstly, it was imperative that I, as the researcher needed to be constantly conscious of my own positioning in relation to participants, that which was being researched and the social context in which the discourses were emerging (Shefer, 1998). It is therefore acknowledged that the research itself, is impacted upon by me, as researcher and the way in which my own subjectivity, personal location and presence contributes towards the research process. Upon reflecting on my role, as a female researcher, within the process, it is possible that the participants might have presented themselves within an amenable light, by adopting a largely pro-women stance within the research. It is further acknowledged that some of the more challenging questions posed to them might have further influenced an assumption that I, as a researcher represented an alternative stance to the more dominant and mainstream research regarding women and their relationships with their bodies. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this research is a circular process constructed by both the participants and the researcher. However, it is importantly guided by a constant awareness of my active role in the process.

Secondly, in line with the participatory approach, the attempt was made to minimise as far as possible power differentials between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, dispel notions that might exist that one held ‘superior professional knowledge’ and maximise mutual respect for the different resources we each brought to the research endeavour (Bond, 1990). This, the researcher believes was largely achieved as it was evident by the enthusiasm of participants to engage and freely discuss the issues at hand, within an informal manner. It was the researcher’s own experience that the process was collaborative and in many ways the participants viewed me, as a fellow student within the field. As such, they described a sense of comfort and ease in talking openly and collectively developing an understanding of the issues at hand.



With this in mind, it can be argued that the participants themselves, acted as co-researchers as they closely engaged in the process. This could be due to the fact that they engage in three, individual focus groups over a period of three weeks. As such, the process of understanding is believed to have deepened also giving rise to participants investing more in the project.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is acknowledged that the participants own feelings of difficulty in conceptualising a new form of body consciousness is a very real issue. The individual is part of society and contributes to society, and is therefore only one part of the problem (Parker et al.,1995). Parker et al. (1995, p.63) argues that one needs to “avoid individualising the problem by stressing the interpersonal and systematic context of the problem.” As such, solutions should ideally be directed at all levels, namely the individual and broader social and cultural contexts. Foucault has not addressed the issue of what our

response, if any should be, and in fact invalidates attempts to analyse phenomena at the level of the individual, which is itself revealed as a social construction (Kitzinger, 1992 in Parker, 2001). This leaves both the participants and the researcher, herself, in an uncomfortable position of having an awareness of the powerful and mostly negative influence of dominant ideology on women's perceptions of their bodies, yet struggling to see possible ways out of this uncomfortable position. Perhaps the challenge lies in holding on to this ambiguity and continuing to operate with an awareness of the complexity of the issue.

One of the ways in which efforts have been made to tackle the complexity of the issue, by the feminist framework, has been to highlight the importance of raising consciousness about the cultural myths of body types within ourselves. This, in itself, has been considered powerful in so far as it gives rise to further critical thinking and questioning on an individual level. It is further recommended that women, themselves, need to become aware of their own prejudices against women who do not meet the current standards of bodily perfection. Finally, by questioning the dominant images and critically becoming aware of the extent to which one adopts socially constructed meanings, new forms of discourses will emerge to replace the current and oppressive ones.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to explore the complex relationship women have with their bodies, by gathering qualitative data from female participants regarding their body perceptions and attitudes. The literature review drew from three main frameworks, namely mainstream research, feminist research and the social constructionist

framework. A review of mainstream literature revealed that body image and eating disorders tend to be conceptualised on an individual level and pathologised, without prioritising the importance of the broader context in which these issues arise. The feminist research was largely located within an oppressor-oppressed dialectic which sees women's bodies as sites of oppression. The social constructionist framework, and more specifically Foucault's theory, moved away from this dialectic to conceptualise power as more diffuse, yet nonetheless producing and maintaining a status quo which regulates and normalises women's bodies through subtle everyday activities.

In the effort to grapple with these complexities, discourse analysis was chosen as the most suitable method of analysis. The findings showed that among psychology post-graduate students there is an awareness of the way in which body perceptions and attitudes are to a large extent socially constructed. However, on a personal level it was revealed that even with this awareness, they continued to be susceptible to dominant discourses which construct the body beauty norm and that they find it impossible to ever live up to this norm. Raising awareness and actively challenging current and predominant ways of constructing women's bodies were seen as potential ways out of this impasse. The potential success of this approach was also questioned due to the fact that it would require change on various levels, including the individual and the socio-cultural context. On a more positive note this research serves as contributing towards the growing discourses of resistance within current culture.

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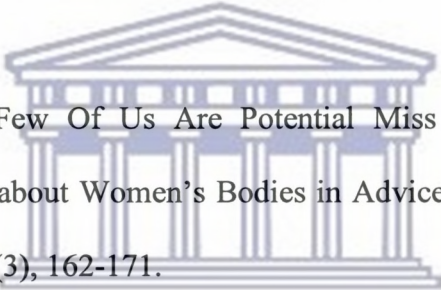
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APPENDIX A

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOCUS GROUP ONE

ORIENTATION

Free associate around the concept of body image

How do you feel about you own body?

How do you come to either value or devalue your body?

How does your body image influence how you relate to others on a daily basis?

Does your perceptions of your body influence or dictate your lifestyles?

Do you feel that your perceptions of your own bodies play a role in determining your feelings regarding yourself in general?

Has your body image changed over the past couple of years?

Has anyone ever been, is or wanting to go on a diet?

Do you feel judged in terms of your body amongst people?

Are you conscious of your body?

Why do you think you are conscious of your body? Can you remember at what age you first became aware of your body?

Do you feel more aware of your body in the company of men or women?

Do you judge other women up in terms of their bodies?

Do you ever find yourself comparing your body to other women's bodies?

APPENDIX A

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOCUS GROUP TWO

Exercise about imagining you are at a dinner party amongst people you have not met before. Imagine yourself as firstly 'fat' and then 'slender.' Discuss the clothes you are wearing, how you are feeling and whom you might be talking to in each scenario.

Discuss the exercise and any differences participants might have experienced.

What does 'fat' equate to? Why and where do you think this is coming from?

What does 'thin' equate to? Why and where do you think this is coming from?

How do you think people react to women who are 'fat?'

How do you think people react to women who are 'thin?'

Do any of you fear or worry about becoming fat or overweight? What would change in your life if you were to become overweight? How would this affect your personal relationships? Would people treat you differently?

Describe what you think is the ideal or perfect body size and shape? Do this by showing them a poster with four body types: 1.) Waif-like 2.) In-between body shape 3.) Curvy 4.) Slender but muscular and athletic

How do you think your ideal or perfect body correlates with the media ideal?

Why do you think that it is predominantly so thin?

Are all women naturally this thin? Who makes up the ideal? Do you find yourselves comparing yourself against these ideals?

If you achieve this 'perfect' body, what would change in your life?

APPENDIX A

GUIDELINE QUESTIONS FOCUS GROUP THREE

Do any of you think that women, in general are oppressed? How?

Why do you think weight and body issues are predominantly experienced amongst women?

Do you think that in our culture, to be a woman almost equates to being conscious about your weight and your body? Why? Do you feel this is a form of oppression?

What do you think about the following quote:

“Women’s bodies, including what they eat, how they dress and the daily rituals through which they attend to their bodies are considered a medium of culture. These daily rituals such as moisturising, exercising are considered a means of control and domination over women, especially since they have been converted into automatic, habitual activity which exists beyond consciousness, as they are perceived by women as voluntary and deliberate rituals” (Foucault, in Malson, 1998)

Why do you think women or any of you buy into all of these body norms?

What are the alternatives?

DEBRIEFING

What was it like for all of you as women to discuss these issues?

Did it at any points feel like what we were talking about was trivial in a sense compared to other issues in the world?

Was it difficult at times to discuss issues which might have been painful or embarrassing?

How are people feeling after this process?

Did anyone feel any of the issues were very sensitive to talk about and experienced the questions in a negative manner?

Is there anything more anyone would like to add, which I might not have mentioned?

What was it like having me as a facilitator? Was there anything I should have done differently or any feedback you could give?



APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTS OF THE THREE FOCUS GROUPS



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FOCUS GROUP 1: BODY IMAGE

Session begins with a brief discussion and explanation regarding the confidentiality of the sessions, the role my supervisor plays within the process, the length of sessions and a brief orientation to the research topic and process. Although this was discussed at the initial meeting whereby the volunteers were secured, I felt it was necessary to reiterate. Furthermore, permission was sought regarding both audio-recording and visual recordings.

P = Participants. Individual participants have been labelled A to H for practical purposes.

F: As you can see, I have a lot of things recording all at the same time. You kind of have to with research.

P: (E) Ya

F: So, if I could ask everyone clearly and towards the mike. Okay, I brought, just for the first thing that we are going to do, I just brought some paper, I'll give it to all of you.

P: (A) Don't you want to me to close the windows, it's better to hear?

F: Yes, thanks. That's a good idea. Pass it around. We all know each other, obviously? (nodding all round)

P: (B) Yes, except me, I don't know her (laughter as she jokingly points to a friend).

P: (G) Thanks!

F: I didn't know if you would have pens or pencils on you. So I brought some pens and pencils and crayons for those who feel like being children today (general laughter).

P: (B) ya, give me a crayon. (general laughter as passing the stationary around)

F: Okay, just to sort of reiterate what I said. With this kind of thing, there's no right or wrong answers and really, it's just about your opinions and stuff, so please feel free to just say what you want to say and just to begin with, I just want you to all sort of close your eyes, just feel comfortable where you're sitting and clear your head of all the things that's going through it today. Maybe it's like an assignment, maybe it's other things that's going on. Just clear that, for

the next 1½ hour it's just kind of - that doesn't exist. Try and clear it as much as you possibly can and when I say the next word, I just want you to really allow the first thoughts, the first images to just come into your heads and once that's happened, to just write down whatever it is that comes into your heads. Don't sort of censor and when I say to you to, sort of the concept of body image, what are the first thoughts, what are the first images that come into your heads and once that's come in, just write it down for me. (Pause).

P: (D) Even if it's a picture, what do I do then?

F: Even if it's a picture, write down the word describing the picture, it's fine. Whatever came into your head, even if it's "banana". (Pause). Try not to think about it too much, just write it down.

P: (A) And what if we just go blank? (Laugh)

F: Then you write down blank, it's okay. (Pause) Okay, there's no right or wrong answers here. It's just whatever comes to mind, whether it's blank or banana or apple. How do you understand body image?

P: (A) Oh, okay.

F: But rather first concentrate on first thoughts, first images, that's fine. Then we will talk about that.

P: (A) okay.

F: That's fine. Is everyone done? Nodding. Anybody want to share?

Pause. I think I'm going to be collecting the paper afterwards, so don't put your names on if you don't want your names known, but just, you know, what's the first -

I think, I'll give you an example, when I think of body image the first thing I think of is probably a very slender woman walking on the beach and beautiful, with a nice body and for some or other reason, she's blonde. (laughter). It's the first thing I think of and that's an image, but it's there. Anybody else?

P: (B) I think of contrasts, opposites, like. I think of like fat and thin, and I think of a woman who is either big-boned or skinny, beautiful or ugly.

F: That's excellent. You get all of that from one concept?

P: (B) Mmmmha (nodding)

F: that's great. Did you get any visuals with yours or did you just think of this

P: (B) Yes, sure if I think of the words, I think of the picture.

F: Okay,

P: (B) I see it like that

F: Okay, no, that's great,

P: (G) I think of potato chips, it's the first thing that popped into my head. It's like, first it's like love and then potato chips popped into my head.

F: Did you write it, did you write it like that? Sjo, that's also amazing, especially since you've got "Love" first, first and foremost

P: (G) Ja

P: (G) But then this

(Laughter)

F: then, potato chips popped in

P: (G) maybe it means I'm hungry (all laugh)

F: Anybody else? ... I know you went blank (laughter)

P: (A) Initially, yes, then the words just popped out like, "thin, slim, slender".

F: you were like me almost, like the first kind of image...

P: (A) Ja, totally.

P: (H) The first thing that popped into my head was fat, unattractive. Then I thought like contrasts. But the first thing that popped into my head, like the visual images, you know was 'unattractive', you know, because most people I think talk of the female

body as being so attractive and I, I, I, view my body as not. So, it's, it's like I think that's the image I always have, "fat, unattractive."

F: so that's the image you identified with, a personal one? (nodding from participant)

P: (H) ya, so that's the image I got in my head

P: (C) I was thinking actually, the first thought was my family. I know it's nothing to do with body image or anything, but if you think of it, I was also thinking about this beautiful, slender woman with long hair and sexy clothes and everything, (laugh), everything, that's basically it.

F: Family, you say families are not really connected to body image? That's how you feel?

P: (C) mmmmmmmmm, no not really but it just popped up.

F: I understand. For me, I listen to that and I think family, well, maybe we learn our body images from our families. Lots of nodding from participants). There is a definite connection. Sjo, we're getting a lot.

P: (D) The first thing I thought about was this beautiful woman with a curvaceous body and then I thought of me and then it just stopped. (Laughter)

F: so when you thought about yourself, it stopped?

P: Ja

F: Okay.

P: (E) I thought of something totally different to anybody else. I thought of self and I think the word, "self" just confirms the way you see yourself and the way you feel about yourself. (Pause)

F: I find that interesting, because all of us, almost all, went into the route of like, ummm, picturing of things, or contrasting things. We kind of went the perceptual route almost. But you went almost the logical route, defining what the term meant, so to speak. I mean, that's what I next want to ask you, what do you think body image actually means?

P: (E) How you think of your body

P: (B) how you perceive your body

P: (F) but not only you, but what other's think

P: because that affects how you perceive your body

P: (F) say now, ummm, not that you are...how do you know that you are unhappy with your self. Sometimes it's usually people outside that make you feel that you don't look good, or you're not good enough, or whatever

F: Okay, for all of you, no for some of you, body images is about how you feel about yourself, your body, that fits?

Nodding

F: but it's also how other people react to your body that makes you define your body image?

P: (E) That's it, but it's also comparing to other people. You know you compare yourself to someone else. You know that's the ideal and that's what you are supposed to be like. (nodding from all)

F: there's also that..

P: (F) I think that also makes you, influences how you feel about yourself, because if that's the ideal and she's getting all the attention, whatever, then there's something wrong with the way I look, because I'm not feeling that happy about myself. That kind of thing.

F: Yes, that is something we will get to talk about a lot more a bit later. But just in terms of defining the term, "body image", does everybody agree that it basically refers to how we feel about our bodies, our attitudes, our thoughts? It's almost like a psychological experience of our bodies, because it's all inside. Do you all agree with that?

(All nodding in agreement)

The next question I'm going to ask you which might be a bit more difficult, but how do you all feel about your own bodies? What's the first thing that comes to mind? (Pause)

P: (A) It could be better (Laughter)

F: Okay, so for you immediately it's like deficient, almost, it could be better, it could be improved in a way...

P: (A) yes

F: okay, others?

P: (D) too thin!

P: (B) laughter, gee wiz, wish that was something I thought about...

P: (H) oooh! Too thin, too thin (another participant making fun of previous participant's problem)

P: (C) I for one, just want to get rid of *those*, you know. (stands up and touches her hips) (Laughter)

P: (D) I want some of that (referring to previous participant's hips)

F: Okay. How do the rest of you feel about this?

P: (E) I'm okay with mine, but obviously there are things I want changed. There's always maybe something...

F: But you're generally okay with it?

P: (E) yes, nod

F: If I ask the question, if you like or dislike your bodies, what's the

P: (B) it's in between

P: (C) dislike it

P: (F) dislike it

P: (H) You like it, but there's some days, some days you like it and other days you don't.

P: (B) I don't think I've ever met a woman who feels "God, you know, I like my body", I don't think I've ever heard a woman say, "God, I have a good body" and that's it. I don't think I've ever heard a woman say, "I love my body." Never ever!

P: (G) I don't have a problem with my body. Like I, but the thing is, is that it's been like that forever and now I find that I have a belly now, like you know and it's because I never paid attention, like I just always was comfortable. So now I'm starting to think, mm, now that I'm getting older - it's almost like I've kind of neglected it, but it's always been fine and I don't really care as much and that kind of thing, all my girlfriends would always talk about, "I need a new body, I need to lose weight" and everything, but I never really cared.

F: Have you always been quite slender?

P: (G) No, I've just been a regular size, I guess, I'm not sure. But not when it comes to my breasts (laughs)

F: And why do you think you're starting to kind of worry about it now?

P: (G) Because of the actual belly like (laughter), actually becoming ugly and it's coming out.

F: Okay. OK, thanks.

P: (G) Yeah,

F: the rest of you? When I ask you if you like or dislike your bodies, what do you think of personally...

P: (F) My Mom says I have a distorted view of my body. Ummm, I mean, I work out on a daily basis and ummm, I'd probably be never satisfied with the way my body looked. Because I mean, people comment on like how short you are, or ummm, you know, comparing you to say your siblings, and that kind of thing, so ja. I have to say, I dislike my body...

F: Thank you, okay....

P: (A) ummm, I like my body, although you know you have your wishes. I wish my hands were a bit smaller. Umm, pause (laughter). I have big hands.

F: But that's maybe because you're tall

P: (A) It's the boots. Don't be fooled

F: oh, okay, (laughter)

P: (A) but generally, I just, ja, I like the way I'm built. I know I can if I want to change

F: You can if you want to change?

P: (A) Ja, like lose weight, or put on weight which is very easy for me, (laugh), but other than that, I'm, I'm fine (Pause) with who I am

P: (H) Sometimes I feel comfortable with how I look, but then people will comment then I just start thinking and at other times I'm fine again. It's basically just when people comment.

F: inaudible

P: (H) mmmmm

F: Just listening to everybody, because everybody has different views but kind of almost the same, at the same time. Some people almost think about their bodies in terms of parts, like body parts. Like you mentioned height, when you spoke about it, you mentioned thighs, you mentioned that you wear platforms to get height, you know, it's almost like some think generally in terms of the whole package and you can almost break it down a little bit. You mentioned voluptuous, you mentioned big breasts, kind of thing. So some of you are kind of breaking it down into body parts. Some of you are?.. There seems to be a kind of "I'm okay with it", "I dislike it", "I go between" all the time.

P: (E) I think I'm more comfortable now, than when I was younger. Because everyone, you know, everyone goes through a phase. A phase everyone goes through where you say, "I hate my body", your body is changing, you know for me, like going from a stick to not a stick, let's say,

F: yes,

P: (B) It's a big change, so at least I'm not that obsessive now, so when I hear my younger cousin speak, I say, "Oh, you know, I'm so glad I'm over that phase, because now I'm more in control than I was before, because that was a really awkward stage. So now I have my good days, (laughter) and my bad days

F: I think what you've mentioned is quite important, you know, that phase from "going from a stick" which I think everybody felt. I think we were all sticks at one point, It's like, "Oh my God, it's just changed!"

(laughter)

P: (A) not really

F: was it the other way round for you?

P: (A) It's other way around for me. I was very into sports when I was at school. And with that, I had a lot of bulk and I weighed 72, it was, I didn't like to wear, you know these bellbottomed pants that girls like to wear. I couldn't wear that, because those little bulges and things and it was such a struggle, because afterwards I did the sport and things, if you don't exercise, that all just you know like (laughter) turns to fat and it was a struggle, because people weren't very supportive of me. "Oh, I see you're getting fat now, just go away" you feel and you know, it makes you feel so despondent and I don't know it wasn't a very nice time. But now I feel comfortable and I'm not going back.

(Laughter)

F: Two of you have mentioned that period, it's almost like change period that as women we go through and I think it is difficult for both of you. Now you're more accepting now than you were back then. Can any of the other people relate to that at all, or was the experience for you guys different? You know what I'm talking about, that time when you reaching adolescence and you're either going from a stick to "I've got breasts, I've got thighs", or you going the other way around.

P: (D) I think when I was younger at school I was more insecure and now I'm a bit more mature and I feel more secure and I try to accept that I'm not going to change. (laughter) I will always be as thin as this. I think I've just grown up a bit more and accepted this.

F: Before you felt, almost like, awkward about what your body was like?

P: (D) you should have seen me then!

(Laughter)

F: What's it like, that period, I know I'm going on about it, but it's an important period for you body, that change. What did it feel like?...

P: (C) I developed very late, okay. I think I was, ja in Standard 6, but even then I'm like, okay, so I've got my periods, so, like now what and I was waiting for the rest (laughter) and things and it depends on your friends that you're also with, because you seeing, you know, she's getting a waist and I was like *that*. I've got a picture of me in my school dress and like, "where is the curves?" It's just you know, it's the dress, (laughter), you know and it does, how can I say? You feel a bit annoyed, because here you see your friends developing breasts and big breasts like (laughter) and nothing is happening to you and curves and things and it just makes you feel a bit out of place.

F: Ja

P: (C) and for me going through it - it wasn't such a very nice experience. No, I'm still waiting (laughter) (laughter), but ja, um

P: (H) I mean, I can relate to that, that feeling of getting 13, 14, 15 years. I mean, you didn't even worry about your body before that. I didn't you know, it was like summertime you go to the beach, you run around in a bikini, in a bathing costume, who cares? And then suddenly one day you like got your bathing costume on and suddenly you see, oh my God, what's that? That's cellulite, it's ugly and it's your body and it's like, "Hold on, what's happened?", it's just me and oh God, that ugly feeling". I can relate to that, I know what that felt like as well.

F: Can anybody else relate to that?

P: (E) I remember I developed before all of my friends. They were flat-chested and I had these breasts that would just not stop growing (laugh) and it was horrible, it was like, because they made comments about me showing it off and all I was trying to do, I had to hide it and wear baggy clothes and it was horrible, because I loved it first for a while and then everybody started making comments about it and then they like, OK, it don't look that nice and now still it's like If I wear like a tight top, I'm **very** aware of what I look like and it's not nice, definitely.

F: It's almost like you're saying, at that point, it's almost like nice to put on a dress, you know, what's spoilt it was other people's comments about wearing that dress or not wearing the dress, whether you've got the curves, or you don't have the curves, it's almost like that spoils whatever you're experiencing.

P: (A) I think you accept your body as it's developing, but once other people start noticing it and making comments, it's like, then you start thinking about it and like criticizing your own body and start thinking there's something wrong if you don't look like everyone else.

F: for the others?

P: (B) I think the transition where you are seen as like quite small, except that like everyone has something to say, other people comment and the way people, especially your parents, like, when you get your first period and I'm like "what's that!" And for some or other reason they tell everyone and other people comment and you like, "it's none of their business!" You know, and like when you buy your first bra, you know, And it's like you know, like the boys, you know like what is this snapping...like, hello! What is this about snapping? (laughter) And it's like I remember, my first bra, you know, at Woollies with my family and my fathers with and I'm thinking you don't need to be standing here, go down to the other side. Go away! Man, just give me a card, what do you need to stand here for! And it's weird because like at other times if you go shopping with your father, it would be like the whole family was with, like you normally go shopping, now only you are buying intimate apparel. It's like something shameful and you think they should just go away, go away! Go buy some food and I will come back with my bra, and I mean, what is a training bra? What do you need a training bra for? What are you in training for? Laughter.

F: You kind of hit it on the head, it's almost like you feel ashamed, they should just go away! It's almost like shameful

P: (B)Ja, like a bit hidden, a bit embarrassed

F: Maybe other people feel differently, felt differently at that point?

P: (F) I was actually glad when I started getting some breasts, because I developed later and then

F: Is it?

P: (F) I developed later and my Mom bought me this bra and all I wanted to wear was this strappy top so I could show it (laughter), but there was nothing there anyway (laughter). Ja, because everybody was developing and then I started.

F: How was it like for you to kind of like being a late developer while the rest were developing?

P: (F) I didn't actually feel anything, I was just waiting.

P: (A) I was very excited, like buying my first bra was like, "I'm a woman now!" (laughter) And when I got my first period it was a shock. Really and so ummm, I got used to it, but it was a very shocking experience.

F: When you think of it, was it a negative or positive experience?

P: (A) It was positive experience, exciting. It was quite nice. When I think of it now – I just laugh. I got used to it.

F: That's nice, that's a good experience. So it was a good shock, not a bad shock

P: (G) I guess it's like maybe different in my family because people don't really, like if you don't have something nice to say, then you're not supposed to say anything, so it was not to say a family thing, but like something people didn't discuss. So my aunties and others they weren't discussing it and if they were, I wasn't aware of it and not doing it in front of me, you know...I don't even think my Mother said a lot to me. It was just kind of like, "Here you go, now you're set up, don't worry about it, it's what's going on"

F: So it was kind of like a taboo topic. Not something they talked about. Not really nice to talk about

P: (G) Not really but kind of. My mom calls a bra, a "brassiere" (laughter) (Pause) and then if anybody were to have said anything like embarrassing to me, I know I blocked it out, too traumatic, no nothing. I wasn't like over-developed, I was like in the middle, way in the middle and I wasn't big enough for the people to notice, or small enough to point out or whatever.

P: (C) One negative thing, my mother and aunties made such a big fuss of, it and really and I was a bit shy

P: (B) and you don't want to begrudge them anything because they're your family and, they have good intentions but do they have to talk about it? Like they are, congratulating you and you like, "What? It's not my birthday!" I mean what am I supposed to respond.. it makes you feel uncomfortable (laughter)

F: to push on just a little bit more. The previous question that I asked, which was do you like or dislike your body image, there was a mixture of answers. So when you think about your answer or when you think about it, umm how come do you come to actually either dislike or like, or.. more.. how do you come to value or devalue your body, in some way? How do you get to that ?

P: (B) I know this sick, but when I see pictures of really, really obese people, I feel really good about myself. I'm like "I'm so good looking!" And then when you see like pictures of stick models and you know it's really unhealthy and their bones are sticking out, then you think to yourself, "I'm quite chubby!" You don't like have to have a huge body but, you feel like you could do some working out, you know. (laughter) But I'm really bad, because when I look at really obese people, I'm like "your a supermodel!"

F: That's not really bad, because I mean, like you say you do the other side as well. You look at stick thin models too, so why not look at it?

P: (G) It's been really hard for me to be here in this country, because so many Americans are overweight and they're almost like "slobs". I'm serious, like the woman here dress nicer, I don't know if, the guys will understand but I mean here like the ladies are so petite, I can't even get into a pants when I go shopping. I get them over my knees. I feel like such a lumberjack, you know, there are so many petite women here. I don't know if it's just.. and I see clips on the news of Americans in the supermarket, you know with big pants on and stuff. I felt fine there, but then I came here and so many women...

F: So, you have actually noticed that?

P: (G) Yeah, and also the creams and stuff, you guys eat here and stuff. When I see women like especially when I shop for pants, that's like the worst time for me, because I notice that my body has curves in other places that what you guys think is big here is like kind of average for us.

F: And then you go into YDE and what they consider a size large is probably a size small in normal shops, so

P: (G) Yeah, I don't even know where to go or anything

F: But definitely for you coming from a different country, sizes in comparison are different ?

P: (G) Yeah, and I don't know where to start, so...

F: The rest of you? How do you come to feel whatever it is you already feel about your bodies?...

P (H) I think for me it's mostly through other people, what other people say. Because I know if people say something nice about my body obviously, I'm going to feel really nice about my body for awhile. The minute someone says something bad or even slightly bad, all of that just goes out the window and you just feel horrible about yourself. It's definitely through other people (inaudible)

F: (inaudible) and it's almost like very important what other people reflect to you about yourself and because of that it changes. It can change from quite good, to quite bad...

P: (F) I have to say in my family weight is very important and my mom's very..I mean ever since I've known her, she's always been on a diet. We eat according to the Weigh Less program, that's how we've always eaten. So if I pick up a little bit of weight, people outside might not notice it and I would say, "Oh, I'm getting fat". My mom would notice it. She would say, "You should be doing something about that. You're picking up weight". So it's, you know, our weight gets monitored, kind of thing, by my parents, so I think they just want us to be... I mean at the moment its also been more internalised where if people say nice things. I can't accept it, but when they say negative, I could understand, you know, that kind of thing. So I'd have to say, it comes from my parents.

F: in the household?

P: (F) In the household, ja. Because my brother is having a big problem with my parents as to his weight. OK, he's living in Pretoria now, but he's gained weight living over there, having to eat fast food and things like that, so there's been on his case as to losing weight and it's affecting his health, you know, that kind of thing.

F: So it's your mom and dad that shares that?

P: (F) Ja.

F: Do you also like, what we said earlier, your body image very much catered for or influenced by family, that's where.. and it's almost like the rest of the influence is people say like TV or looking at magazines or thin, fat people

P: (F) Ja, because I mean, I remember myself being 8yrs old and conscious of my body. Even when I went through the transition, like they were saying, it was, I used to wear baggy clothes eventhough I had not developed yet. I used to wear baggy clothes, even though I was (inaudible), I used to wear baggy clothes, because I didn't want my womaness, it shouldn't be shown. Very much, you know, I was very conscious of that, 'I don't want to be a woman', kind of thing. Even though I developed late and I've been through the whole baggy phase until recently, kind of thing.

F: It's almost like you were hiding what's underneath with baggy clothes and I mean there's almost like a lot of focus at home as to what was underneath

P: (F) Ja, you have to eat healthy and everyone in the family has to eat healthy and they are actually quite big on, you know, monitoring that kind of thing

F: It's interesting how there's been quite a bit of focus in your family on how you've almost like reacted with baggy clothes to cover up and so..

P: (F) It's like (name of person) was saying like I also did athletics at school and then you become quite, your thighs become quite well developed and you become quite.. and people go on about your thighs being so... My dad wasn't very big on me, so I stopped actually doing athletics because you know, you get this bulk and things...

F: Which is not very attractive for women/

P: (F) For men, maybe! For women it's different.

F: Thank you for sharing that. And others?

P: (A) What other people say, not really my family, because me and all my cousins my age, we're skinny and thin. I mean my sisters and other cousins are 16 and the other cousins, 16 and younger, they are a bit more curvaceous. So it's basically just what my friends say and other people, you hear something good and you feel good about yourself and then afterwards somebody says something negative and then you get (inaudible)

F: Is it easier for us to accept negativity, rather than compliments? Maybe not for everybody, but generally?

(nodding all around)

Part of the question, when you do sort of weigh yourself up in terms of how you feel about your body, whether it's positive, negative, whatever, when you do actually value it, value your body, or, is it always with a sense of dissatisfaction, like this need to be improved, or for some of you, is it just satisfaction? That's fine. That makes sense?

All round nodding

P: (Inaudible)

P: (B) It's a mixture of feelings for me, like I could ask you today, it's okay, if tomorrow maybe not like today, tomorrow it is different.

P: (D) It's not like a daily thing, it's not like your weight is going to fluctuate that much, but it does go through periods

F: The rest of you, is it like hers? Or is it okay, is it more constant like without the satisfaction of just having (inaudible)

(Pause)

P: (G) Well, since I've been here, I know I've lost weight. It's because I'm not eating all those kind of "crappy stuff" that I used to and you guys eat salad with everything, there's always vegetables everywhere. So that's good, but I know like at that time of the month, when I'm bloated and stuff, then I think, okay, you're going down the tubes, you know your pants are getting really tight, then I kind of forget the fact that it's because of my periods and then after it, when I realise I'm okay, well that's why and then my pants feel loose again, I feel okay, so it's like, it really depends on my pants. I have to say it has a lot to do with my pants, if they're tight, like I know, last week they were like loose, then I'm thinking to myself, I pretty much don't want to go like any up, like I'm not going to buy pants, like that are bigger size (pause)

F: So for you, it's your pants (laughter)

P: (G) It is

P: (H) I think we all use the pants scale. I mean, the other day I put on my sister's pants by accident and it really felt so tight, I was like freaking out and I was like, "Oh

my goodness”, I was quiet the whole day, then I took it off. My sister was going, “Where’s my pants?”. She was like looking for it, “They must’ve stolen it off the line” and when I got them off, I was it isn’t mine! “Thank God” you know, it looked like 2 sizes smaller than mine. I was like my goodness! (laugh)

P: (B) I would never do that, if something is tight for me, I would just not wear it. I would not do that to me

P: (F) Today I had on my tight pants, my tighter pants, because all my pants were dirty, but I specifically brought these along for me to gage my weight, because they’re smaller. So I thought and my friends were all like you going to lose weight, while you’re here. And you’re going to come back and so thin. so I put on my pants and I’ve lost weight and I can wear smaller pants

F: I’m just wondering what it does for all of you, does your body image sort of effect the way you deal with people more on a daily basis, in your daily lives? How you relate to other people maybe? Do you feel that your body image influences that?

(Pause)

P: (A) I think for me it does sometimes, my cousin used to be very thin and we were always together and she’s shorter than what I am and she’s very petite and me walking next to her, I’m like thinking, you know, just bringing my shoulders in or do something, hide my hands or something, because I’m next to her and she’s so thin and I look like a Body-guard walking next to her and I said, “Just go walk in front of me, I behind you” and um, it depends on how I feel. If you’re standing next to someone and you’re you know and this person is tall, you try to get up there or something, or if the person’s much thinner than you, you like immediately, you’re sucking it in, in that area like (laughter) and you know, so for me it does and...

F: What is like funny, like you say your reactions are like, pull in my tummy, or you know, get up there if I can’t see past my shoulder. So it’s a feeling of like, I don’t know, it’s not – how would you describe that feeling?

P: (A) It’s almost automatic, it’s not something that you’re going to think, “Ok, so this person’s thinner than me, you know, whatever, you just, with me I want to (laugh) and I don’t know, it’s funny.

F: But it’s almost an instantaneous reaction.

P: (F) Ja. These things happen, maybe not on a daily basis, but in our daily lives. You see, I'm so used to it. I mean like today, I mean you look at people every day, no matter what you say, you are thinking, "She's thin", you know or something like that. It's not that you're going to be okay for one whole day and the next day you might, it's almost every minute of the day you're conscious of your body, well for me.

P: (H) I think for me it's about it's the same like name of person, it's more like you can be happy like you're feeling fine with your body that day, but the moment you see somebody else looking, I mean, like we see how other people's comments impact on you, it's just how people look, you know, impact on you. It's like, "Phew, she looks good in that dress" and then you like, "I could never be in a dress like that", I don't like my shoulders or something, or if you see somebody looking, you know hiding their body, you think, I know why you're wearing that long jersey

F: How does it affect you?

P: (B) It's, for me it's like, it's not instantaneous. Like to me, it's more like, if I was walking outside, I wouldn't know those people. I'd notice like, oh, you look good in that clothes. But let's say it was in this room, I'd take a look around and it was summer and you like wearing summer dresses, you know, "Ah, I want to look like that", so it's more like people that I know, but not really like strangers. I notice that they look good, but I wouldn't translate that to myself. So I keep them at a safe distance, but if it's more personal, then I'll start relating it to myself (pause),

F: So in a way this all happens like on a daily basis, how does it influence, so in a way you kind of say that body image does affect or influence in the way you relate to others, but I'm wondering how, like, take it a step further. I know, you say you pull your stomach in, describe it, take a step further, how does, like you know, kind of feeling THE END OF CASSETTE,

F: I suppose what you are saying is that you like pull your stomach in and it's almost like a feeling of saying "I'm also not good enough." Is that right?

P: (A) For me it's like I'm not trying to stand out next to this person or wherever and you feel like someone is going to see you and if you were this person, like oh, she's got a tummy, you know, that type of thing. You don't actually want someone to notice that you might be a bit fatter than the next person.

F: Okay, I get it (laughter). The rest of you, do you feel that how you feel about your body influences how you relate to other people on a daily basis or in normal life? (Pause)

P: (E) It affects me quite a bit, because I'm quite short and everybody is taller than me and it, it just feels almost "less", because it's like all the people don't take it seriously, or they treat you like a child, or maybe they'll see you as a child and it makes you feel really self-conscious about yourself.

It really does influence how you relate to other people, because you're feeling self-conscious. I know for myself and I'm not going to be so, more open to speaking and just chatting to the next person. I'm going to be more like inward and like quieter, or but I, almost I don't say, embarrassed, but like it's something you should be ashamed of, because the norm is that everybody must be tall, because you're good looking if you're tall, because your clothes look nice on you and if you're short, then you just don't fit nicely. I mean the clothes in the shops don't fit you and I mean, you always have to take the things in. It's like, it's just not nice, because if you buy like children's clothes or very small sizes and clothes don't fit you, it doesn't make you feel nice.

P: (B) I'm fine with my height. It's other people's reactions to it. If other people could actually, it's like, you know, it's almost, "well, you're really short." In fact I say have you ever thought that you are just really tall! Like it doesn't, I mean, I couldn't that level where we're sitting all now, to me we look the same, but the moment we stand up, I mean I know, (name of person) is tall, but I mean, you just get those nasty people with looks. I'm fine with my height, what's your problem?"

P: (H) You know people come out straight and say, you're short! Like my sister is like that. She's 16 and she's like a cm or two taller than me and people almost like say, "Oh, is this your friend, or is this the younger cousin, or?" and it's like she's 16, I'm turning 22 this year, you know and they treat you the same way and it's so frustrating, because you don't want to be treated like a 16 year-old or be seen as a 16 year-old, or people like come to the shop and they like see you as a young teenager, like almost be annoyed at why are you looking around at the clothes by yourself (laughter)

F: It seems like a constant battle, actually

P: (H) It is

F: That you're dealing with and people's perceptions that you have to fight against

(Pause)

P: I used to get

P: (E) Clothes too, I've got to put hems in everywhere. It's frustrating to buy clothes, You know, if you see something you like, then you like arms are hanging over here, it puts you off if it's something that you like, now you've got to think, do I really have the energy to put the hem in.

F: I'm just listening to everybody saying, well not everybody, but a few of you saying how difficult it is when you go and buy clothing, how the sizes are like quite small or it's too long, or the arms are too long, everyone's adjusting. I mean, I experience that as well and I wonder, who are they making the clothes for if the majority is not actually happy with, who exactly are they making the clothes for?

P: (F) I think it's fine for the tall and thin, with the perfect image because that's what they are creating the clothes for, otherwise they do nothing, too short and you have those who take in like major hems and then the clothes doesn't look right anyway and, because you see that clothes in the shop and you think, "Oh, it looks so nice" and you fit it on and it's like, because you think, okay, well I won't and then you just kind of lose interest because you feel like I don't look nice in this thing.

P: (H) It's difficult, not many shops are catering to different sizes or something

P: (B)Okay, I mean like, let's say you were +size or something, the thing is, you know, you're going to, you don't get the fashion that you get in a normal store and if you go to like YDE, um, you get like in your size, because you're small, but not in the fashion of the contemporary shops, the normal shops. So it's like a lose-lose situation and

P: (G) I don't know about you, but like in the more expensive shops, I don't know if it's like that here but, you almost a size less than you are like in the cheaper stores. You're maybe a size more, like if you go to an expensive shop, I just you know, it's fun to try stuff on and you can get like a size smaller and you can get a dress and it will be a size smaller, because they simply want to flatter you.

F: It's interesting how the market works and geared towards.. It's something we need to talk about, perhaps at a later stage. I'm just wondering, because everybody is like talking about how difficult it is and it's geared towards tall people. How do you feel, knowing that you're sitting and you're tall

P: (A) I'm not tall

P: (H) Quite tall

P: (A) I'll prove it to you, I'm normal height. Just stand up, I'm not that tall (shows her height without her platforms against another in the group)

P: (D) I think she is quite normal basically in height

P: (A) No and it's so funny because I look funny if I don't have high shoes and stuff, because I'm broad and now I look like a Bull Terrier or (laugh), because you know, so stocky kind of.

P: (D) Clothing for me, it's not a nice story, because you get so frustrated. I mean, I want to wear you know, slinky tops and whatever and I don't have what must go into the top to wear it. You know, it's just, it's

P: (B) and those mirrors! They are not nice

P: (C) And those lights in department stores!

P: (D) It's supposed to be helping you, it's not working.

P: (C) Ja, I know.

P: (H) mirrors, I think are geared towards enhancing cellulite

F: It's like I listen to and certainly most people that I know, who wants to wear skinny tops, but there's not much to put in it, but then there's the people who have the breasts who don't want to wear the tops. I have a friend, she freaks out if she could cover up, it's the best thing. But we all want to look nice, attractive and especially if we are going out at night, so then she would wear the top and be self-conscious all night, as much as someone who doesn't have breasts and wears the same top. It's almost like a really, I don't know, it seems like people feel the same, dissatisfied. It's like no matter what kind of is happening,

although I must admit that there's in-between you know where it's okay, there are days when you feel, I'm like OK, you are not feeling too big or too small and it's fine.

P: (C) I feel fine if I wear vests, even if there is nothing to put in them

P: (G) I don't like my arms like flapping around. I have big arms, I don't know it's either muscle like calf muscle, because I do a lot of lifting – not lifting weights, in my job and then I've got like fat and stuff hanging off of there and I want to be like really petite and have you know and good posture

P: (C) We all want to have

P: (D) Well, it's not all, all

F: and I'm just wondering, does your sort of your perception of the body, dictate or influence the kind of lifestyle that you lead?

P: (E) I wish I could be more athletic or like I used to enjoy Athletics and running around and stuff at school, but it's difficult with bigger breasts.

You just can't, it's not possible. The sports bra's that I have just doesn't cut it just limits the kind of stuff you can do because it's like all over the place (laughter) and it's (inaudible), because I mean, like my sister's is really athletic and she's like always playing cricket and soccer and just, it's just...I don't know

P: (B) I know with some people like you can't do it, because (pause) – I really can't do it, because you don't want to make a fool of yourself

P: (H)I like, buying a bather you need to get like underwire and like buying underwear for me, because of my size, you see all the nice underwear and then you go to your size and it's like these aren't nice, No, it's not nice, so it's quite uncomfortable like support bras are pathetic, they give you no support at all

P: (B) Maybe the people make it for people who don't need support, ja.

P: (E) Because I wear support bras myself, and actually they've got no support.

P: (B) (Laughter). It's not a support bra, I mean, I don't know what it is actually!

F: and for most of you, it actually seems like it influences your actual lifestyle. Think about the lives you lead. Does it influence the fact that you diet, you eat healthy, that kind of stuff?

P: (C) I've been gaining some weight the last few months and (laughter) um (pause), I don't know, um, (pause), I haven't exercised for, I haven't gone to the gym or anything for I don't know, I can't remember, but um (pause) I think it's also I don't feel so bad about it, um, it hasn't affected my life in a negative way, like really (pause) okay (pause/silence)

P: (F) It has affected my life. I'm very conscious about health and I spend a fortune on health products like herbs and things like that. Not dieting as just eating healthily, but exercising. I do it, even when I'm stressed out, I exercise. I would take the stairs instead of escalators and things. I'm very conscious all the time of my body so, I would say, it does affect my life

F: It dictates your kind of lifestyle that you lead

P: (F) It does.

F: Do you belong to a gym?

P: (F) Oh no! I'd never do it in public! I've got all my things at home.

F: You don't like exercising in public?

P: (F) Oh no, no, no.

F: Is that because you don't want to show your body?

P: (F) Ja, I wouldn't want to show my body, but I don't want to make a fool of myself as well, so ja, because my mom belongs to a gym and she always says it's such a nice place to meet people. I don't think, because people going to the gym, they're there in tight, slinky things and I'm in tracksuit pants and bulky, so I don't think so

P: (D) It affected me also for a while. I started eating bowls of rice and pasta and nothing happened. I went to gym for 2 years and I think, okay, if I just build some muscle, I won't look so thin and now you said, people wear this slinky stuff and I was too scared to wear those.

P: (C) I also wear tracksuit pants and then I just stopped and there was a time I ate healthily as well and (inaudible).

P: (D) There's the feeling that I don't want to show my body, because it's not right. I don't want to show my body because it's too thin, it's like the opposite end of the spectrum but the same feeling, I don't want to, quite strange, but there's a general kind of self-consciousness, no matter what the body kind of is or looks like

P: (C) You know what, I usually wear tops, but these days, I mean in summer now, all my tops, my jerseys, whatever jackets, over my bum.

F: In summer as well, or is it just in winter time?

P: (C) Um, summer, t-shirts now

F: Really? So something's changed for you. Something, the way you feel about your body?

P: (C) In a way

F: Like the way you feel about the body, maybe you just put on 1 kilo, but you feel, it's more, it actually influences the way you dress actually influences (inaudible)

P: (C) Well, I watch what I eat.

F: Do you?

P: (C) Ja.

P: (A) Like if I do eat something fatty or something, I won't for 2 or 3 days I'll eat something, then I'll kind of balance it, you know. Um, I know I put on weight and it bothered me because I'm thinking, Oh, I must exercise..

P: (B)Really? Where on your head? (laughter)

P: (A) Yes, I'm very good at camouflaging. And um, it's constantly on my mind, summer is coming up, what am I going to do, because I'm feeling.. I was telling my boyfriend, I used to lean over, I didn't feel rolls as such, before. I can put my finger on it now (laughter) and even when I'm sitting like in church, I'm thinking, I'm feeling these rolls and I'm like playing with them (loud laughter) and I'm thinking, "Oh no, I have to do something about this soon", because if I don't, it feels so uncomfortable for me, you know, especially under the bra, those little things here, so I sit, you know, I sit in a way that I'm not going to feel it. So it does bother me.

P: (C) You know what summer is coming up and like feeling fat or whatever, you must get yourself in shape again it does get to you

F: Does everybody have that feeling of

Especially in Cape Town, like summer is like a big thing. Summer, you know, it's like, you know, it's beautiful here. Does everybody get that feeling of summer? Whether you go to the beach or not, whether you wear those slinky summer dresses, or not, it's Summer and I've got to kind of prepare for summer, whatever that means?

P: (B) I think it's not so much the preparation, but it's the fact that during winter you've just been eating and eating, you're not (inaudible), but when it does come to summer, everybody else is wearing slinky things and you're thinking, I can't even think of wearing that, because I've got all this winter fat and stuff

P: (G) But it is different here. It is, because I came here in summer. You know, like I was wearing just like a t-shirt and jeans or shorts or whatever, but I felt like such a slob, you know, like I felt I needed like a pink top for, you know, cool like outfits with you know, funky stuff and like I can't fit into this funky stuff with all those frills and al., thinking, fine because I'm going to be here this Summer, I'm gonna be helping me and I'm going to be healthy and I'm going to do this and that and then I can fit into this little funky, funky tops and stuff like that, you know and um, I mean, yeah, it is kind of like, it's so beautiful and yeah, you want to kind of dress up here, I don't know. (Pause)

F: a feeling, because there's beaches and I don't know how many of you actually go to the beaches, but you even just driving through Camps Bay, you see bodies around you and the summer feel, so I don't know, there's festivity in the air and people are, they're all looking good.

P: (G) Ja

F: So

P: (H) I think, any other beach is fine, but especially Camps Bay, because the water is so cold, people just lay around in the sun, but what they're actually doing, they're displaying their bodies and most of them look good, but it makes you feel self-conscious, you know. I actually admire the women with rolls in bikinis, you're brave man, because you know, everybody's looking at you and thinking...shooo!

F: Do you think everybody is looking?

P: (H) Definitely. If you have 90 % of the beach looking tanned and thin and you're looking, they're bound to find the one that's not looking that way

F: You think so too?

P: (F) I mean, I hate sun, because I mean, I'm always in jeans and t-shirts. I don't care. I like Winter because you can cover up and whatever. In summer, I mean, last year was the first time that – I work with kids, so they like swimming, so many (laughter) have to go swimming and I'll be standing on the outskirts and the one mom told me, "(name of person), you better get into the water" whatever and for the first time I was wearing a bather with the excuse that at least when I got into the water, it was like, with a 7 year-old and I was so self-conscious and she was like, "You look so good in a bather" and I was like, "Please don't tell me. I'm trying to work through this whole bather thing", you know. It's a terrible thing. I hate summer, because all my cousins are wearing their little 2-piece bathers and I'm wearing jeans.

F: Do you feel that the way you, you kind of feel about your body, the way you perceive your body, actually it plays a part in how you feel about yourself and when I say "yourself" I mean you in entirety, you're in completion, does it affect your self-esteem?

P: (F) Definitely.

F: Does it?

P: (F) Mm, mm.

F: Tell me a bit more about that, how that kind of works

P: (F) Sometimes I really feel good about myself, but like you've mentioned before like people may respond or make remark, a remark about me and make me feel bad, or ugly, you know, so it does affect sometimes. (Pause), but then there are times like when my friend compliments me or even without other people responses, I just feel good about myself and it doesn't bother me at all what other people may say, so (pause).

F: Do you guys sometimes feel that other people are judging you by your bodies? Feel judged, or

P (H) Most definitely you're going to think that other people are trying to look at you and judge you concerning on how you look or how you dress or how your hair is, whatever, (Pause) but

P: (F) I speak to guys a lot. I always want to know, but what do they kind of see as an ideal woman and you always get the: "Oh, she must have nice hair and she has to look in a certain..." you know that kind of thing, so um it's not kind of you're sucking the things out of your thumb, like oh, how the ideal body looks, because guys have it in their head and what they want, "Oh, she must have a soft, nice hair and whatever" and "she must have nice feet" and

P: (A) "she must be pretty" (laughter)

P: (B) Ja. (inaudible) ja and they expect you to not feel self-conscious about yourself, um when they say, well, they're kind of just looking at the outside of you, then nothing is willing to, to kind of get to know you before they actually, they just kind of see you and like, okay, maybe you're potential, or no that kind of thing. That's why guys kind of put you into and you can't say that you don't actually care what guys say, because you do care what men say about how you look (pause)

P: (D) If you have a guy friend, it's worse, because then they tell you everything

P: (D) everything

P: (D) and it's like, I'm not, I don't care if she's hot or whatever, you know what I mean?

P: (C) Ja (laugh). No, I get the same, because I've got a lot of guy friends and they tell me about their girlfriends and about their friends and I sit and you listen to these comments and you're thinking, "Oh goodness, when my time comes, I don't want to say what they're going to say about me". That kind of thing.

P: (C) Like this weekend, my best friend is a guy and we were just sitting there and chatting and he has seen me like with no shoes on and seen me in shorts and I mean like, he looks at legs and their feet – "You see me like that". I felt so self-conscious.

P: (H) You almost feel like you're being judged by guys, by men, by males around. (pause).

F: do the rest of you agree with that?

P: (E) Ja, but I think women do the same thing (inaudible)

P: (B) I think women take it up a level, like they're more willing to see like (inaudible), getting to know you, you know.

F: Is this women with guys?

P: (B) Yes

F: Okay

P: (B) But I think women do judge men and men do judge women, but men are less willing to say, "Well you know, she's got potential. Let me find out if she's got a nice personality or something" and women also, you know women will never go, "Oh God, you're good looking. Who cares what you're like. "I have to have you", but I mean in terms of boyfriend material, long term boyfriend material, there's no way you're like that. Women want more.

F: It's almost like you feel that males judge more harshly in terms of appearance and that women judge less harshly in terms of appearance.

P: (B) We're willing to settle and put appearance aside. I can live with an ugly guy. With men, they're very judgmental like I mean, I've heard guys talk about women and it's atrocious their atrocious stories because of women, because they've got sisters, cousins and mothers and it's like now, "that's somebody's sister, that's somebody's mother" and you're saying that person, first appearance is good looking. I know that person from Adam, who are you to make a judgment? (Pause)

F: I just want to ask you, you said something different to the rest

P: (E) I think women are worse with each other when they judge women. I think very much critical of each other's bodies, because I think if a woman is self-conscious about some aspect of her body, she would look at someone else and almost put that person down, it was my experience and it's true, you think that women would be able to empathize with other women but it's just they show up other people's cellulite or, make comments about other people and you'd think that they would be more empathetic of other women

P: (F) I think it's more projection, kind of thing where it's a feeling of, OK, I don't have that, so it's like you feel better about yourself, kind of putting someone else out that you could feel better, that kind of thing

P: (A) Ja, I mean, I experience it in my family, um. My sister-in-law is, (laugh), she is fat (laugh) I don't know how to put it nicely

F: That's actually fine, say whatever you want to

P: (A) So I'm obviously much thinner than her (Pause) and um, you know, she's had remarks like, you know, "When are we going out, tell me whatever and then I'll say, "oh this top", but I would say that "Oh I wish this top would sit better" whatever and then she'll look and then her friends will perhaps say, you know, I wish that I was as thin as (name of person)", or something like that and then she would say, "Well, at least I've got something to put in my bra". You know, something like that and I like, "Shh" (laughter) OK! And I say don't make me come down there! (laughter) and I mean it's true, you are, women are so catty. (Laugh).

Nodding all around

F: Does everybody think that?

P: (G) I haven't had that, I haven't had that experience like within my family, but I guess those sorts of thing. Women like in my life, haven't done that, but I know like, if I'm like with my girlfriends too, like not really like that, but like if we're, it's more strangers, like if we're going out and we see that somebody is wearing like a tanktop and then they've got their bellies actually hanging out, you know, jokes are made like, stuff, not to the face, but and I don't usually, like I don't think that way, really, so I haven't had that experience, but my best friend, her family is like that. They're always talking about, "Look you're gaining weight, like on a daily basis. Like it's all girls, so they all talk about the weight and (inaudible) go over to the house and like their grandma will look at me and go, "You've gained some weight" and like I haven't seen her the last 2 years, but I've gaining some weight and I'm like "Thanks!"

F: You know it almost seems like, it's like you're saying it can happen like right in your face, like with your sister-in-law, but like not on a major way, but on a day-to-day basis, or it can happen where you talk about people that are strangers to you and you'll talk to your friends, and say things like she, should never have come out looking like that!

P: Ja (laughter)

F: Do the rest of you experience that kind of stuff, or is it not like that?

P: (B) Sometimes you too polite to comment, but you know, when you look at something then you just look at each other, then you just know what you're thinking, no words, but in terms of the family, I mean, like, yes, most females in families can kind of be vicious. But when you lose weight, basically they also notice because males, like uncles, they don't notice, so I don't mind, because it's the positive and the negative. What I don't like is if they do it to young kids, like I mean, my cousin is about 6, you know and she's always been thin and she's getting a bit of a tummy, but it's not like huge, you know, just curvature and I think, I mean, if I can pick up the comments made, I can only expect that she would, it make her feel self-conscious. I mean everybody telling you, "You're getting a bit of a tummy". I mean, what is a 7 year-old supposed to do? Go on a diet, go exercise, no. You know she's only 7. I don't like it when, I mean, it's adults, if I'm an adult, you're an adult and you say something to me, I can handle you, but how is a child supposed to protect herself?

F: I agree with you there. It's almost like, "Do it to someone who can defend themselves"

P: (B) Ja

F: Not someone who is going to actually be so vulnerable to (inaudible).

P: (B) yes

F: Don't we also get affected by it. We've been talking a lot about how it affects us, so you know, we can defend against it. So to some level it doesn't affect you even if you can

P: (A) To me it did really. When I was 15 or 16, I was, I was big, big and my brother makes these little comments like, "Is your bum following you around?" (Laughter). I mean, it's funny for him, but I'm thinking you know and it hurts so much and you know, all those comments and you get the family members saying, "Phew, you're looking nice and tubby" and I'm thinking don't, you know, you try or you look like a chipmunk or something, (laugh), but you're sitting there and you're thinking and feeling it's painful. I was, ja, a bit overweight about 16-17, from about 15 to 17, Matric I had lost weight, a bit of weight and I didn't lose it healthily,

F: Was it like a strict diet?

P: (A) I wouldn't eat.

P: (A) I wouldn't eat and it was bad, you know, but I would hide it and that in itself, it's painful, so (tears)

F: and would you say just in terms of like the change in your life, going from being what you found as overweight to someone who is definitely not overweight . What do you think made that change?

Are you talking about, that's what caused, because it was, like you say, it was a painful experience?

P: (A) The change wasn't, I just couldn't handle commenting you know and I thought for myself I also decided, I have to lose weight, you know, because I can't go on like this, so

P: (B) I think, what you're saying, I also experienced that. You know you watch like sitcoms and they make these jokes about this women this and that and, and while it's funny for them, its actually sore and painful.

P: It is sore.

P: (H) Even today, practically as adults, but people make comments about something, it's still gonna be sore, (inaudible), that's how other people (inaudible) (Pause)

P: (E) It's really difficult to face that sort of constant comments

P: (C) It's very difficult to fight that sort of constant battle

P: (B) Ja, even the once in blue moon message because you're feeling good about yourself then it's different. I was feeling good about myself, so one little comment and I was quite upset. It gets tiring, very tiring

F: I want to give the rest of the group to answer that bit. Do most of you feel self-conscious about your bodies in the company of men or women, I'm not talking about you walk into a room and it's like amongst your friends, on a daily basis, going to lectures, going to meetings, whatever meeting new people, would you feel more self-conscious amongst males or females?

P: (E) Women, they are more judgmental, because I know sometimes I'm like that. If someone says, "Oh that girls looks nice", I would say, "No, she's got big hips", because she's got something I don't have

F: Ja

P: (D) And I know women look at each other, so they're going to look at you (pause)

P: (A) Definitely women, women have this way of sizing you up. And you know they are doing it. They have the whole up and down look.

P: (B) The guys are more accepting, I think. I mean, you said, look at, they're so, I mean, if you're not good looking and don't look like a model, then they're okay, but women, it's different. They are bitchy!(laugh)

P: (E) Because usually women I think, because usually I'm not like that with other, they just think, (inaudible) and sometimes they think, "I really should take a bit more trouble when I walk in and everybody's dressed nice and then I'm dressed in my jeans and my tackies and stuff and I feel maybe I'm if I could fit into their outfit maybe I would have bought it and I would have looked better.

(A silence of a few seconds)

F: Do we all have to leave exactly at 14:00? There's just this little bit. Could you just try and stay another 10 minutes? Will that be okay? (laugh). Just, I mean, you said that you feel judged by other women because, you know you do it. I was just wondering if the other people also. Do you feel that you also do it to other women?

P: (F) I don't do it because of fear of them doing it to me. I never ever comment about women and how they look, because I'm so worried about what they're thinking.

P: (C) I try not to comment ,but you will always think something

P: (F) I obviously think something, but I would never say something, because I'm thinking, "please just take it out of head, because they might be thinking the same thing about you", you know, that kind of thing, so (laughter)

F: I don't know, let's just think about like if you were sitting, all of you sitting and a new woman walks into the room and she walks into the lecture and she

comes and sit down and you're just sitting there. What's the first thing that's going to honestly, just honestly (go through your head? Ok, let's presume that she walks in and she's wearing a mini skirt and heels. She has a nice body, what's the first thing that goes through your head?

P: (G) When I see a woman for the first time, I always see what they're wearing, how they look, see if they look better than me. Maybe I'll feel I wish I could look like her

P: (G) I think, ja, like maybe that's inappropriate. Like maybe she's kind of slutty, whatever (laughter), you know, I wouldn't dress like that, but then and then I go back and I say, "Well, like, let her have her day in the sun now. It's just going to get worse as she gets older". It honestly keeps me from like feeling too bad really when I see the little things, the little outfits, I'm like, "Well, you know, this is their time, because as they get older and maybe I picture them in their 50's or their 60's as bigger ladies and I don't feel, as bad

P: absolutely

P: (B) I mean, If I see someone that looks good and whatever, then I think OK she looks nice and then immediately afterwards, I think what do I have that she doesn't (laugh), then I think, okay, she's got nice legs, but she's got short (inaudible), you know, something like that, just to make me feel better. Not necessarily criticising or judging, but I do, but as long as I can get away with feeling okay. Then it's fine (laughter) Otherwise, you know, you think, "just trip or something!"

F: It's like everybody to some extent feels like that, whether it's, I'm not going to say anything that's not nice, because they might be feeling the same about me. "I don't want to say something bad but then you insult them in your head. It's also this thing, ja, I want to make myself also feel good and better, so in a sense people, women compare themselves against women, all of the time, it almost seems, like all of the time and are there times when you feel like, "Okay, I'll take her legs or hair, I'll swop bums or I'll swop something. She's got a nice belly (pause). Do you sometimes feel like that, or just comparing I suppose?

P: (B) Mmmm, comparing a lot

F: Okay, okay.

F: Everyone is looking tired now. Just to say, thank you very much for the session. I'm just wondering also you know, talking about these things. I don't

know what you feel sitting here actually talking about these things in a group of women (pause) that you see, practically everyday?

P: (D) I think it's a good thing, you know, just to have an idea of how other people feel or view themselves and sometimes I might feel like I'm alone, I'm like feeling "down" about my image and so in this group, I can, I can share my views, my feelings and so I wouldn't feel alone, so it's comfortable.

P: (C) I think I'm surprised to see how some people feel the same things, because I get the, I look at people and I think some people look so nice. But nobody is satisfied with themselves. I was surprised.

THE END OF CASSETTE, (focus group 1).



FOCUS GROUP 2

FACILITATOR (F): (General talking). Just close your eyes. Just feel comfortable on your chairs again. I know it is Monday morning again, just clear your heads – all the thoughts you might be having for this new week, all the worries, all the assignments, all the personal worries and try and feel yourself feeling more relaxed that you're present for the next hour-and-a-half. (Laughing and talking). Just a little bit of a written assignment so if you could just close your eyes, just feel yourself becoming more comfortable in your chair, and your line of thoughts just sort of pass through your head and find a point of relaxation within yourselves. And try to imagine the scenario. You've been invited to a dinner party with ± 10 other people. You don't know these people at all. You've never met them before and this will be the first time that all of you will be gathering together. So maybe it's a meeting as a result of the work you're doing, the studies you're doing, or friends' friends, whatever you might be imagining in your head. But the important thing is that you haven't met them before. Okay and I want all of you to imagine that you are fat at this party – okay. So look at yourselves at the dinner party. Imagine yourselves sitting there. Look down at the clothes you're wearing to this party. And imagine or think about what it is you're doing while you're at this dinner party – whether you're sitting at the table, or around the table, or away from the table? Where are you at this party? What are you wearing and how you're feeling sitting there at the party amongst these people? Are you talking to other people? Are other people talking to you and if so what are they saying to you? What are you saying back if you are talking? And if you aren't talking to anybody, how are you feeling about it? Imagine yourself dishing food up for yourself and eating amongst them. What does that feel like for you? Think about what it feels like to be sitting there and eating amongst them. And

(someone's cell phone going off) – okay and then if you could – this is personal. We're not really going to share it amongst each other. So if you could just write down sort of what you were feeling and answers to those questions on a piece of paper. What clothes are you wearing? What are you doing at the party? How you're feeling? Are people talking to you? Are you talking to people? If you aren't talking how are you feeling about that? What are you doing? What does it feel like dishing your food and eating amongst them? Remember they're people you haven't met before. What are they like? Anything you want to add. You don't have to strictly or keep to each question, but anything you would like to add, and how you feel more importantly – okay. (Lengthy silence)

We're not going to share a hell of a lot of it, but we will discuss a little about what you've written. (Lengthy silence) Okay, I 'm going to continue. Is that okay? (Participants replied altogether) Okay, now close your eyes again and think back to the – well not the same dinner party, but the same scenario. Once again it's with people you don't know ± 10 people, first time you're meeting each other, but this time you're quite slender. And imagine yourself arriving at this party. Once again the same sort of questions. Look at the different clothes that you're wearing. Imagine what it is you're doing at the party and how you're feeling at this party. Are you talking to people? Are they talking to you? What are they saying to you? What are you talking about? If you aren't talking, how are you feeling? And what does it feel like to be at this dinner party as a very slender woman, dishing up food, eating it with these people and being around these people. Just to write that down as well. (Lengthy silence) Can we go on or still loads more happening at that party? (No reply from participants) Okay, now because we don't have a lot of time.

Just to ask generally, was there a difference between the two for each one or how was it? Was there a difference between the two for people?

PARTICIPANT (P): (H) In the first scenario at my arrival at this party I felt out and lonely and then after the toast then everyone would just gather on the balcony and then we'd start mingling and talking. And then it also felt like part of the group, and then they commented on my outfit on how elegant and beautiful I looked like. So, you know, I ended up feeling much more better about myself. And then in the second scenario I got there and I just felt wow I was one of them and I was all over the place, and then we were talking about the latest fashion trends in the market, about how often I go to the gym, and Bio-Slim.

F: The conversation was a lot about body and body kind of products and energy (indistinct). There was a difference even though the first one turned out quite okay. Or did you still have (indistinct).

P: (H) No really – ja.

F: So anybody else who wants to...

P: (A) Okay I'm going to read it.

F: Just generally speaking was there a difference (indistinct).

P⊗ (A) Yes there was. The first one was the feeling of being uncomfortable, feeling of embarrassment and felt like a side show and that I didn't belong, and that I wanted to leave. The second one was totally different where most of the people, all of the people wanted to talk to me and had compliments, you know, and a feeling of – good feelings.

F: (Commenting but very indistinct).

P: (B) Okay when you first said to me like imagine yourself as a fat person, I didn't imagine somebody. It was like mildly overweight. I didn't think like usually obese either, but somebody that like you and I had to walk down the street and we would like say okay you can see that's a fat person, you know. So I'm at this party and my

clothes are like – I’m comfortable in the clothes that I’m wearing, so it’s not like uncomfortable, but obviously it wouldn’t be as trendy as, you know like let’s say all of us are wearing jeans, okay – if I was a fat person maybe I wouldn’t get a jeans in my size, so I’d wear comfortable for me like a Caftan or whatever. I’m like thinking like really obese. And I’d be comfortable in it, but it’s not like fashionable because you know we’re all at a party and we’re wearing jeans and I’m coming with my Caftan. Okay, so I’m comfortable with my clothes but it’s not trendy and it’s not what – like your PO’s wear. And in terms of like feeling – not feeling like I fit in you know, but also that could like the reason why we’re all there, because like if there’s a common reason why we’re there, then so I imagined – I didn’t go in detail – (laughing) I just imagined me like already sitting down or whatever, so I thought okay like the people closest to you, you like start talking. So I’d say like if people like were looking at me and staring at me, then that would like affect the way I would like relate to them like, you know like talk with them. But if weren’t – if they were receptive and like if we had a common reason why we’re all there – let’s say for the first time we’re meeting for like honours, so then we’d all like we’d have something in common to talk about like where you’re from ...

F: Like initiating the fashion ...

P: (B) Yes because that is what I would normally do. That would be me. And also the point is like we’re all supposed to be like COs and I also said that if we all didn’t know each other like because you said we didn’t know each other before so then I would like – the situation that would just like bring forth that everybody would want to speak to you and wanted to find out who you are and how often you’re going to meet with the big CO whatever.

F: ... it’s almost like what the common ground was as to why you were there.

P: (B) Because I was trying to like think why would I be at this dinner party and also – but at the same time if like if it was any reason – like any other party – let’s say it was a friend that was hosting it and you still didn’t know anybody else that was there, you’d have to like sit and think like what do I have in common with these people and those people would think, well I don’t really need speak to her because she’s fat. And I won’t be doing – so for the next year – you know you’re just there for that purpose like your friend invited you whatever.

F: ... (indistinct) or more of a ...

P: (B) It was totally different – like in term of class I said I wouldn’t like go all out and wear like strappy stuff because that’s not me, but I’d wear – at least this time the clothes would be like my peers – like I’d fit in. I’d wear a jeans and I’d wear like a comfortable top. So you wouldn’t like be able to like sort of pick me out you know. And also I think because I’m thin I would exude like self-confidence. So even like I said if I was fat, I’d start talking to people. I do that naturally if I was thin, but because you’re like so – you’re feeling good about yourself. You know it’s just like, you know some people their personality just – people like say wow she’s a really friendly person, whereas if you are fat they’d first think damn you’re fat and then they’d say well she’s actually quite a nice person you know. And what else did I say – oh and I also said like for dishing up food, when I was a fat person I’d first see like how much food people would dish, like and I’m assuming [indistinct]. Something happens, like chicken out, and I’ll think like if other people go up for seconds ‘cos I love seconds you know. So if nobody goes up for seconds, normally it’s like guys that go up for seconds, and not like girls, so I’ll like “skip” out the situation. But if I was thin I wouldn’t care because I know I’d burn the calories or, you know, I know people would be talking to me because – oh this is a funny thing, actually I it was – I

know it before looking at him because I look good, because when you're fat you know, you're trying to think is that guy looking at me because I'm fat, or is it just because he just had a conversation with me and he thinks I'm nice. But you know when you're thin you don't have to worry about that. You think to yourself, well I know I look good, so you they must be looking at me because I know I look good, or they're here talking to me because I'm a fine person. [laughing]

F: I'm not going to ask specifically from the rest of you, but I'm going to ask the rest of you, just thinking about what you wrote down for the scenario, what kind of – what do you think fat kind of equates to from what you've written. You know of the three of you that I've listened to, fat almost means being embarrassed, being uncomfortable, it means sticking out like a sore thumb. And for you guys what did being fat, or what does fat equate to?

P: (F) The first word that would pop up in my mind is below me, and not accepted, and everything that seems to be negative like you know just feeling horrible about yourself, uncomfortable – ja.

F: ... very much a negative thing, and on a physical – physical appearance kind of level, what does that equate to that?

P: (F) I know when I'm feeling like I've eaten too much, or feeling like feeling sick and stuff I feel very sloppy and untidy and clumsy, and just don't feel very comfortable in myself, and I feel like everybody is like looking at me and judging me. Like I don't feel like – if I'm like eating I feel like everybody there is looking at me and saying why's she eating. She's fat – she doesn't need to eat. So I feel like everybody's judging you and watching you constantly.

F: What is different to what a lot of you are saying [indistinct] – why is fat [indistinct] equated [indistinct].

P: (B) People in society like make you feel that way. I have two cousins – because our family is predominantly girls – we’re cousins and we have two young ones who are quite chubby compared to me of course [laughing]. But the others are quite thin and you know if you look at them you’ll see they’re quite thin. But if you put these two little cousins they’re quite chubby, and they’re healthy. You know like they both do sports and whatever and it’s not like they’re out of breath or whenever. So they’re healthy.

F: They’re actually healthy.

P: (B) Definitely – I mean more healthy than I would say you and I – or I don’t know how much exercise you do. But they do things like swimming and jazz dancing, and ballet, but if you look at them you’d think to yourself well they’re quite tubby compared to others. But like I know my one cousin’s Mom keeps on telling her when we’re in the pool, she says swim that fat away. And I’m like you don’t tell a small kid that because you start making them self-conscious. And I mean if they were like unhealthy or stuff, like couldn’t control themselves all the time, or out of control I could understand how people could say if you’re fat you have all this like health repercussions and you know you don’t breathe properly, and we gasp like out of breath or whatever, but they from what I can notice they’re quite healthy you know, and they’re quite sports inclined. So but by the mere fact that they don’t look like the rest of the family, they get flack from like adults that like say you know you’re fat, or you can’t wear that, you know – stuff like that. So I mean like also it’s like culture. If we were – I can’t remember which culture, but I mean I’m sure if like certain other remote cultures where they don’t have TV and whatever like fat or voluptuous women, a well-rounded woman is more like desirable because men, and I’m assuming these men obviously are not Westernised to think ja, have good babies – you know.

She'll be fertile or something and that's because their community fosters such things like I'm fat, I'm beautiful. I can eat more and it doesn't matter because I'm beautiful whereas if you're thin in that culture I suppose, and that would be like genetic like you get from your Mom. You'd like be undesirable and the guy will say no you won't make a nice wife. So I mean it's all about like what the community or your culture says. And I mean it's from everything to magazines, TV to what other people think about you, and not just other people, but I mean your family, and people who don't even know you start judging you.

F: What do the other people think of what she said?

P: (H) If I could just relate it back to culture and then take it to my own culture – in the black culture. Women who are fat used to be the more desirable. But in my own generation now you need to be thin and if you're fat then guys will come to you only during wintertime because they feel that you'll make them nice and warm.

F: So basically it's almost like it's changing. It's changed in your generation.

Why do you think it's changed?

P: (C) I'm not really sure but perhaps it also has to do with media. Perhaps it's portraying more of a better image if you're thin and perhaps you'll be just on top of everything if you're a woman, and you're thin, and you look nice, and it also has to do with the fashion – new fashion that is being made – I mean it's for people who are slender, but also people who are quite huge also try to fit themselves in. And then there'll be like looks – Oh my God she's so fat. Why's she wearing that? Look at the cellulite showing.

P: Also I think it's not easy, like we were saying why do you think it's easy. It's not easy to pinpoint one reason because you think back like the Colonial era, like the British invaders. You know the norm like I said everything covered you know, like

everything, and like if you're unclothed you're like a total slut and you must wear these hats and whatever, and that was the norm. And when they came to Africa and they saw like women in grass skirts and bare-breasted they thought Oh my God are these heathens. And now Westernisation has turned to it like you can literally wear that and look, I don't know, stylish I suppose. And it just shows that how America and Britain have – they sort of dominate the world because they, not predict, but they say what is good for size and what isn't. Like these Face of Africa models who were told they were too fat. They got a contract and they went overseas and were told too fat. So they lost weight and I think it was yesterday I saw it in the newspaper, or a week ago, that they lost weight and they still weren't accepted and they had a contract. You know if you lose weight then – and it just shows that like NAME was saying it's changing in our era now. And it's true because where are we getting these ideas? From America and Britain. And I mean if you look at these girls you'll never say that they're [indistinct]. Even if you look at them you'll say they're extra tall. Because I mean if you're a model you have to be a certain height and I mean the normal African woman is not that tall. So one would think that – so even if they are that you wouldn't see it because their weight is evenly distributed. And if you look at them they're like not fat at all. So it's like [laughing]

F: Do the rest of you agree with what has been said because a lot's been said?

P: (F) This whole Westernisation of Africa and South Africa having a lot to play in our media, in our magazines and everything. And in a sense I think what the two of you are saying is that's where a lot of it is coming from.

F: The rest of you do you agree with that or – what do you think?

P: (A) I agree with NAME and NAME in that the media plays a huge role in how you look at yourself and how you see other people, and wanting to fit in and things. And I

mean even the clothing of today and your community that you live in, and society. It just influences so many different areas in your life. I'm talking about the media. And I know there were campaigns to, you know, get rid of the thin models and whatever, but it won't go away. And so this whole thing of being thin it will just remain within our society. It's up to us I guess to change that.

F: ... where do you think you're getting the fat concept or what you associate fat with, and a lot of you associate negativity with fat? So a lot that you're saying is also coming from the media. Am I getting that right? You all feel that way?

[General reply]

Anybody else what to add anything to that?

P: (B) I don't understand how American culture – because like – you know I don't understand how American culture because like all the Americans I've met – okay – are very self-confident people. So obviously their whole culture fosters independence and being self-confident. And I've met somebody whose niece is growing up in the States, and they said you know you can see the difference of them living over there and their cousins because that whole community is like – it's fostering. The last time when NAME said that she feels fat because of this clothes size, and I know the difference because you know – But I was think like because they say like Americans are like an obese nation right and they have so much wealth and stuff. But my thing is this like, I mean like whenever I saw like some Americans on beaches they'd like wear bikinis and wear skinny tops and not worry about the fat was like rolling over their jeans. And I used to wonder to myself what are they teaching kids. I mean how do you foster that self-confidence to teach a kid which is something that maybe we can learn from them and implement in our country, is that I mean if we're saying that those messages are coming from America and Britain, but yet in America you have

these self-confident, but it's really obese kids you know. It's like to be so – I don't want to say proud or confident, but I mean to be so uninhibited as you like walk around the beach in a bikini and knowing that you're rolls are there everywhere, and everybody else is like stick thin or whatever. So I don't know – maybe it's our culture of contradictions. America always like – I'm just like fascinated you know they can have like a country of obese people, but yet foster self-confidence in the kids. This is amazing. And not for kids also, because it translates to adults also.

F: I'm just going to move on a little bit [indistinct]. The same question guys as to thinking about what you've written for that exercise, what do you feel thin equates to. You know when you think of thin what are the thoughts or the adjectives that come to mind for thin? I'm going to ask [indistinct?]

P: (A) It was just I felt more comfortable and confident, and I could feel I could talk to anybody and just be myself and say whatever, and nobody would judge me and eat as much as I want.

F: Did you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?

P: (A) Comfortable.

F: It was a positive with you saying the positive things in this world and just the way people treat you and the way you feel.

P: (A) ... that since the last session that I feel more comfortable with my body and I am more accepting and I don't worry about being so thin anymore.

F: Great. What do you mean by that [indistinct]. Just in terms of the question what does thin [indistinct]. You don't even have to look at that. What do you think thin means – equates to in this [indistinct] world.

P: (E) Well for me feeling of popularity and acceptance, and just being able to be yourself. You don't have to worry about other things. You can just concentrate on

yourself and just be who you are, and not worry about what you look like. You're just yourself.

F: [indistinct]

P: (E) I said that although I was at the dinner party I was very quiet as a thin person. I still felt more confident about myself and I was more self-assured, though in a quiet manner you know. But I felt more accepted in that I was just one of the crowd. So it was more a positive thing for me. It was like I wasn't being judged. I was just, you know, there.

F: And I mean it sounds like for everybody it was more of a positive thing.

[Indistinct] Where do you think that comes from? Why is thin more positive? Why is fat such a negative thing?

P: (B) Because with being fat you kind of have to prove yourself before they would like – your personality would come out. Whereas with thin they first look at you and then they would speak to you. With fat people it seems the opposite has to happen you know. You kind of have to prove yourself before they can say oh you're a nice person. They kind of look at you. With a thin person they look at you and say oh she's nice looking and then they start speaking to you. It's a different kind of ...

F: In terms of fat people as well [indistinct]

P: (F) Some people look good you know. You can't just picture them thin you know because they look good the way they are – their body size.

F: They look healthy [laughing]

P: (H) If they look healthy then it's fine. I mean not that you'd be fine, but I mean I suppose if you define somebody a little bit overweight and obese, and you'd see the difference. Fat could be beautiful if like NAME (sic) said if it looks like it suits them or their bodies like body type. But if they look like obese – and also I think the reason

why people look at fat as being bad is because some people translate it as having no self-control you know. If you see some people eating ... how can they dish so much and how can they let themselves go, and you know what do their families think and so I don't know. That could contribute why fat is not beautiful for some people.

F: ... stigmatisation around fat people and that's what coming out from all of you to a certain extent. But I'm also hearing from you as well that fat people can be quite powerful. They can be quite self-confident and they can still be quite strong women in a sense. Even though you're not saying that directly. You've said that your cousins – they're healthy, they're active and in America, although it's supposedly a population of obesity, a population of self-confident people in a way.

P: (B) I think that like my difference – like when everybody says you know thin is beautiful – my perception is a little bit different. Although I did say like at that particular party how I felt. That is different because I was put in a particular situation and I had to think. But I think thin has not always been a good thing because you know I think it depends also if you've been thin all your life, or if you've just lost the weight recently. Because if you've just lost the weight recently people will react to you differently – oh you look so good, you've lost weight, whatever, whatever. But if you've been thin all your life, and as opposed to what you look now, if you're an insecure person you will be a thin insecure person whether you're a fat insecure person or thin insecure person.

F: Any way is [indistinct]

P: (F) Yes, so I mean I don't think that thin is always the desirable. I mean you get in terms of anorexia and bulimia – I mean that is not desirable because you know it's like a whole cognitive thing where like their bones are sticking out and still they think

they're too fat, and also like what NAME said was like people look at you if you're thin. They don't think God you look and that's why I'm talking to you. But the same happens when you're fat as though you're bad. Then they won't necessarily take the second step and say oh I wonder if I want to speak to her.

F: And that's exactly what I want to go on to next. I mean from just using what people have described in their dinner party scenarios, it almost sounds like – can you imagine what it's like for fat people. It's a situation where people don't really want to talk to them. They kind of when they do talk, it's kind of short, brief. There's not a lot of compliments going around, although for you there was. And it's almost like a feeling of embarrassment the person feels – like just swallow me up in a sense. Can you imagine what that feels like? What do you think their self-confidence must be like on a daily basis? That's the kind of interactions they might be having on a day-to-day basis with other people all over the world. What do you think their self-confidence would be like?

P: (B) It kind of would be a dinner party every single day, you know, type of thing. Ja you'd constantly be trying to hide behind things and – not that you'd be able to, but you would [laughing] but I mean if you'd be trying to hide behind things and constantly be aware of yourself. So, ja it would be one big dinner party.

F: Now what do you think in terms of confidence? What does that do to somebody?

P: (C) It will chip away at you all the time. I mean if you can't accept yourself, then I mean how can you expect other people to accept you.

F: And then just think about the [indistinct]. Imagine everyday you walk out [indistinct]. Hey you look gorgeous. You look great today. Please sit down and

everyone wants to talk to you, smiling at you and complimenting you. What does that do to your self-confidence?

P: (F) But it also depends on like NAME says whether you're a confident thin person or you know insecure thin person. Whether somebody would give you this positive feedback, it depends on whether you would kind of internalise it you'd just kind of let it flow over you. If you just became thin and people are complimenting whatever, it will really you know ...

F: What about [indistinct]?

P: (F) It would really boost your confidence level.

F: What about if [indistinct] that's the kind of reaction [indistinct]?

P: (A) Then definitely you would have a very kind of positive self-image, concept or whatever.

F: I'm just thinking about the flip side of having that positive self-image. I mean growing up and you have all this positive, and oh you look good and whatever, what happens when you gain a little, you know.

[End of recording on Side A of Tape]

P: (A) I was just thinking about when NAME was talking about fat people and how people, I mean about low self-esteem, it's actually like a circle because now you're fat people are treating you bad. You don't lose the weight. You just gain weight because people aren't going to like me whether – I mean if I'm fat anyway. So, you know I'll just go on eating. So there's some very dangerous points with being fat and being thing. Being thin is not necessarily positive in that.

F: [Indistinct]. For people here is there a feeling, or sometimes a worry of becoming fat yourselves at times?

P: (B) Fatter – I think – I mean from that [indistinct]. The perception that I got from the last meeting was that except for, I think everyone here except for NAME felt that they were fat. Am I correct? I mean not that you are hugely obese, but I mean if you ask anybody how you feel, I mean NAME was the only one that said I'm too thin – right. So everybody else – I mean that's what I perceive most women feel like that or 90% of women – how do you feel – I'm fat, fat, fat, which males make fun of you because they think we're weight obsessed. And we are because society is male dominated so therefore males make us feel that way. But anyway that's another issue. I mean I think I felt the same like with NAME where it's like if you are a fat person and you are used to people treating you a certain way, you would – I mean if it's your personality, you would feel well why lose weight because then I'm going to have people responding to me in the way that I want, but now I know they're responding to the fact that I lost weight. So they're not responding to me as a person. It's my personality. The same goes for when you're thin. Like when you're a young person and you're getting all this positive back like you know because you're thin and people are smiling at you. That's good when you're a kid because sometimes you don't realise what's happening. So you've got this good self-esteem, which is good. But when you're older it would be difficult to have like closer relationships, because you don't know if these people are with you because you're popular, or because you look a certain way, or do they like you for you. I mean do they actually – I mean there's a perception of course that good-looking people can't be clever, or can't you know like the blonde syndrome you know whatever.

F: [indistinct]

P: (B) Ja, so – or that women don't do good in academic settings.

F: It's almost for you that you feel [indistinct] have the worries of becoming fat or feel fat almost?

P: (A) Definitely. I've yet to find a woman [laughing], but I mean women in my family, and I mean in general my experience – oh I'm so fat, I'm fat. I mean I've yet to meet women in my family to say I'm so thin. I mean even worse ...

F: Do you worry about becoming fat?

P: (A) Constantly. [laughing], silence, singing, general talking] – yes because I mean for – I mean, ja, like your family. You're now saying oh you know you've picked up a little weight haven't you. And you're smiling to yourself – that's a horrible thing to say you know. And I worry personally for myself if I had to get like fat, I would worry about like – because like just for health purposes you know, just [indistinct] and just like for health purposes. But like also other people's comments saying like oh you know you've put on a lot of weight and you know – they imply you need to lose weight because you don't look right. You know you don't look like we want you to look – whatever, whatever. So I think I constantly worry about picking weight, but most of those reasons are not for me. Like 10% I'd worry about me you know. And I know that I'd never let it get out of hand and if it did I'd do something about it – exercise or whatever. But I think the 90% would be like other people's perceptions. They would be the people that would make you feel that you're fat. Like I mean we spoke last time why – where we're getting these messages from.

F: And for the others – are there other people also. Generally speaking is there a worry – maybe it's a big worry, maybe it's a little worry about not wanting to be fat?

P: (C) Just to go back to something that NAME had said. She just said that if people in her family could comment on her gaining weight then that would be a

horrible thing to say. And I was just thinking back at High School, I mean if you could say to someone you look fat, that would be something so bad. And I was just thinking it goes back to what you were saying like the stigma associated with being fat, and the stigma associated with being thin. And then just to go back on about myself. I also do worry constantly about gaining weight and it's because of my height because I feel that I'm so tall to so tall, you know, if I could gain weight then I would look like a giant.

F: And for the others. I mean just think about yourself if you were fat, I don't [indistinct] if any of you are in relationships or not, just think about if you were to get fat, how would that change your relationship or things in your life?

P: (E) I'm not so really sure about that one, but I've had once talked about that with my boyfriend and he said that it wouldn't change, but I'm not so sure if he really means that. At the moment he doesn't have a problem with my weight.

F: [indistinct] you've been very quiet. We need more of your input.

P: (D) The question was – would I have a problem?

F: Well do you worry about being fat, and just say you were getting fat, what would change in your life?

P: (D) Not really.

F: But say maybe not just putting on a little bit of weight but picking up a lot more weight then, what would change in your life?

P: (D) I don't know. I know I say I feel comfortable now – accepting how I am. But I think that would probably ... I don't know. [General talking and laughing]

P: (A) I do worry constantly. I often ask my boyfriend you know because he's very big, tall, broad and he's got a boep. That's the only thing. And I'm fine with it and I often ask him you know can [laughing and indistinct] – you know how you're going

to feel about it and whatever, and he says nope. But he says that, but he says no he's actually fine with it, and even though I know it will be okay with him, it won't be okay with me.

F: What do you think will happen in terms [indistinct]?

P: (A) I mean I just realised I picked up 5 kilos on Saturday and I'm very upset. So, and I mean that's a lot for me and I need to lose it. I need to lose the weight. You know just for me to feel comfortable with my body because picking up weight it's not a good feeling for me. It makes me feel sluggish and all those types of things. But with regard to relationships I don't think it would change that much.

F: And the other people in your lives like family and stuff?

P: (E) My mother she has never actually ever said to me look here you're picking up weight or whatever. She's just fine as long as I'm healthy. My father doesn't say anything because he's stick thin, so I'll tell him look here [laughing and indistinct]. But you know actually I'm thinking about it my Mom has gained weight, but she's not fat as in fat. She's not normally this weight and whatever and I actually feel guilty because I tell her look hey you're getting – you know. So it's making me realise a lot so – shame. [laughing].

F: You guys?

P: (H) I know that if my mother buys chocolates for my sisters, and I used to try and eat healthily, so she'd buy like Granola bars, then I think are you trying to tell me something. Why don't I get a chocolate or sweet, or chips, or something. And as far as relationship go, I don't think they would change. I know my mother would like to mention something and say like be careful you're putting on weight, because she knows I wouldn't want to do it. And my boyfriend well he gets kind of annoyed if I say I want to like to lose weight. He says it's okay if I want to do it, but as far as he's

concerned he likes something to hold on to and he doesn't like skinny girls, and it's like – and he's got this obsession with my stomach, which is like embarrassing because I've put on a lot of weight on my stomach, and he likes rubbing it, and it's like no. Just makes me feel more self-conscious about it, and – but I don't think as far as relationships go – my father would tease me a lot about it though.

F: Have people noticed that almost [indistinct] I think exactly what you said. I mean something to hold on to. Well that's a lot of what our people say. We must feel that those things that you hold on to are actually [indistinct]

P: (B) Because like my brother like he'll always be the one in the family – like in my family – my Mom will comment, but I'll like what do you know? My father will never comment. But my brother will comment. He'll like say to me – you're fat, you need to lose weight you know. But then again he likes girls that are thin. So I think he's like that small 10% that like – that generally likes those thin girls. I'm not saying stick thin, but I mean he literally voiced to me I will never marry a chubby girl or fat girl. And I'm like you don't know. You don't know if they're going to [indistinct] when you get married. So I mean they might look good now, but you never – at least you know [indistinct and laughing], but at least you know what you're getting into you know. And so I think just like you can't generalise it, like I said 90% of people will be unhappy with their bodies. I think maybe 90% of males will like something to hold on to, but then the 10% you've got to watch out for – and also I think more younger generation – our age.

F: I just want you to maybe to write down again just very short, briefly write down what you think what for you is the ideal or the perfect body shape and size for you guys, personally. [General talking, laughing then lengthy silence] Just very briefly – nothing major at all. Okay I think that's enough – just brief.

Okay and just think about what you've written. I tried to break it up into certain body types. Think about which one you kind of went for. No 4 – did everybody vote for No. 4?

P: (A) For the perfect one?

F: Ja. But that description.

P: (A) The thing like when – I think curving is good because I said the perfect body type should be different for everybody. So if I say like athletic, muscular, like they did, for me it would look funny – let's say on a short person. But it looks better like then on a tall person. So I said it should be like different to everybody's body types and like height. So I would choose like more in between curvy type of thing, but more in between.

F: Curvy for you?

P: (B) I didn't make a choice like how a woman should look. I just said if they're healthy and they're comfortable with their body ...

F: And that would be the perfect?

P: Ja.

F: Basically all the majority I would say went for No. 4 although there are very big differences in terms of you saying whatever makes a person happy and as long as they're healthy. And for you saying it's different for everybody's height and structure and all of that – okay.

P: [indistinct]

P: (F) Just what you think the perfect body shape and size is. Maybe it's for you – maybe you just ... in general. No. 1 seems very kind of appealing to me. No. 1 and No. 4, but I think leading more towards No. 1 – definitely. Okay guys what do you

think is the actual media ideal – the one that we get to see all the time in the magazines and on TV.

F: What do you think is the media or the cultural – No. 1?

P: (F) No. 1 and there's a trend going towards No. 4 also. But generally we're thinking about catwalks and models, advertisements – more No. 1.

F: Okay so there's been a little bit of a correlation between what you guys think is quite nice, or the perfect body, and what the media also thinks of the perfect body or putting out there as the perfect body – with definitely a few exceptions. And I'm just wondering there is quite a little bit of a correlation. Why do you think the media ideal is so bloody skinny? I mean look at that. That is like an adolescent boy if you look closely. There's a lot of work done to make her look not that anorexic, but if you look closely that is an anorexic boy kind of look. Why do you think the media ideal becomes so - so skinny?

P: (H) I think it has to do with the fact that they want to sell clothes and you need like a hanger kind of body. So that the body doesn't get in the way of the clothes and the clothes just hang and sit the way they want it to. It didn't actually cater for a body shape just for a [indistinct].

F: ... economically saying because they want to sell clothes. They want to sell it on what looks – makes it look the best.

P: (H) Ja.

: Anybody else?

P: (C) I agree with NAME because I know many designers overseas they like if you're like the most beautiful person and you've got the right height and you've got the right look, whatever, but if you're not the right size designers won't want you

because they like have their own agenda. They want their clothes to look good. They want to sell their clothes. So it doesn't matter if you're the most beautiful person on earth and you're the right size – you're the perfect model, but if you're not the right clothes size that they working for, they won't employ you for the mere fact that they like their size – 8's or 2's or whatever sizes they work with and if you won't make – and it weird because – but then again if you think about it like the clothes that they're catering for, designers, I mean who can afford those clothes you know. So it's for [indistinct] look like that you know – like waif like pressure or whatever.

F: And the rest of you why do you think the cultural ideal or the perfect image that the media prescribe are so skinny?

P: (F) [very indistinct]. To me the [indistinct] look, you know the damsel in distress, she looks very vulnerable, very kind of need of protection because I mean she just looks so fragile.

F: [indistinct]

P: Ja. So it's like ...

F: [indistinct] and she's still known as a curvy model.

P: (F) That looks curvy to me – so ... it's a male dominated society. We know that and males like to be in power. So it's like such a woman would be kind of – it caters for their needs of – needing to protect. So ja she looks very kind of fragile and vulnerable so – ja.

F: [indistinct]

P: (E) Maybe because the way I'm built – I mean that would be more for my personality and the way I look. Everybody always says oh you have a very strong personality, a very kind of whatever. So it means that people never take me into

consideration. So maybe if I look like that you know it's – things will change in my life. I don't know.

F: Tell me guys just looking – I mean like we've all kind of agree that this would be what the media put out for us and some people have spoken about it already. Do you think that women – all women are naturally skinny – naturally skinny?

P: (A) No.

F: No – not at all? Everyone saying no. And what would you say if I had to say to you that women by nature, or naturally women should be more endowed, they should be more full, they should be soft, they should be voluptuous, naturally that's what women are like. And that to try and become just [indistinct] because the media put this out there going against what nature says, or that [indistinct] of what nature wants for women. Would all of you agree with that? It's just something I'm putting – little bit of a challenge whether or not you agree, definitely up for discussion?

P: (B) I think there's a small percentage of women that actually are naturally, they're genetically they're thin. But for most models they have to smoke to suppress their appetite. They have to eat literally salads all the time. I mean if you and I had to go for a meal, at least this whole group had to go for a meal, and we had to [indistinct] seafood meal, we'd all eat what we wanted and how much we wanted – okay – within reason of course. But I mean – I'm sure they have to work hard at it to look the way they look. So I definitely do agree with your theory that if they had to stop then maybe also they have to sort of limit themselves so not enjoy themselves. Like the point I'm trying to make – if you and I had to eat we can literally what we wanted. But they have to look and watch what they eat literally. So they're not enjoying life. They have to work hard to look the way they look. So which would sort of prove

your theory that if they didn't do that, if they could just enjoy themselves and be the natural shape they're supposed to be, that they would be curvy, that they would be rounded. And also women are supposed to have a [indistinct] than men. You're not supposed to look like a man because they have muscles and they have less fat so...

P: (D) I think it's definitely natural for women to be more curvy and rounded because we're supposed to bear children and you need that percentage of fat to be able to maintain a pregnancy. Also some of those models eat fat from eggs so that the tapeworm eats the food that they eat and – I mean that's not natural. People shouldn't have to do that, or they have their stomachs stapled and it's just not natural.

F: ... [indistinct] is that there are some people who feel that is going against what is natural for women, why do we buy into it. Why do we still want to be what's against what's natural for you or your body? What do we still want it?

P: (B) ... conscious society. Like NAME said if we want to change it, we're going to have change it ourselves. But you know she made a comment earlier on that you asked why is it like, society dictates and whatever, so you do have to change it. But the point is that we might – six of us, seven of us, might decide fine we're going to eat what we want to, when we want to, we're not going to exercise, or we'll decide what we want to – we'll do whatever. We won't care what other people say, but reality is we do care what people say whether they're related to us or not. And we can't change the world, so I mean we must decide if we're going to be empowered and not going to buy into this whole advertising whatever. But the reality is that we are not to change the world.

F: I think that is something that I want to talk about, but maybe at a little bit of a later stage as well. I get what you're saying. I just want to also – on the other side of the poster, what I decided to do was to look at a few magazines and seeing

I'm not someone who buys a lot of magazines, I used to and I just stopped as well, and I just decided to get a few, see what's going on. Like I go through them, but I don't buy them anymore. I don't support that. But just to see what kind of images are in the magazines lately and I just cannot – not that hectic – and I just thought My God this is what is everywhere. I mean body is everybody. And I'm just wondering this is just a small example. It's not major, but basically our magazines are filled with women's bodies. They sell all kinds of stuff. And I'm wondering what it feels like to be in a culture where images like this all over, and they're sort of letting you know this is what women should look like constantly. This is what culture wants of you as a woman. It's not the direct message you know – what it's like to be confronted with this and inundated with these kind of images whether it's the magazines or it's the TV, or it's a movie, or it's actresses, or it's you know what does it feel like knowing that this is what goes round. This is what people are – the media are saying you, as a woman should be.

P: (H) For me personally it doesn't really have an influence because I would never go for a skinny look – never. So perhaps it's nice to them, but I would never go for being skinny at all.

F: It doesn't really have a huge impact?

P (H) No.

F: I can give you an example. For me looking at these sometimes I get sucked in. I mean I get really sucked in. I can sometimes go through DSTV and look at the fashion channel. I don't know if anyone – if you've seen that. You just get sucked in and especially just staring at these bodies, and some of these bodies are very, very good bodies. I mean and it has an impact on me because I think oh

well tomorrow I should stop eating this and that, and there's nothing I can do to get taller, but hey there's something I can do to make my legs look taller, and there's something I can do to be skinny. So it has very much an impact on me because I feel this is what's around. I wonder is this what my boyfriend wants. Is this what people want? So for the rest of you what's that like knowing – I end up comparing myself. So I don't know what ...

P: (F) It is difficult because I try and be very healthy and it's come to a point where I think that looks healthy and I don't think everybody can look like that. And you feel inadequate because you don't look as healthy as they do. You don't look the way that they do and it's difficult because I want to be healthy and that's what they tell me is a healthy look and I can't get taller, and I can't – I don't see myself getting skinny, and there's nothing really I can do.

F: Is there a point [indistinct] have you ever been [indistinct] kind of look or - anyone?

P: (A) Sometimes – sometimes I buy into it and I feel that okay tomorrow I'm going to start exercising and I'm going to join a gym, and I'm going to look like that. It passes but the thought is still there. And I feel really inadequate sometimes because I feel that's the way I should look.

F: [indistinct]

P: (F) Ja I try not to look at these kind of things because I work my body dearly hard. To look like this my Mom always says no you shouldn't try and look so skinny and whatever. But the fact of the matter is my sister is quite skinny and looking at that they always say that models are very lonely people. And then I look at my sister and she's waif like. She's extremely thin. She kind of gets all the attention and whatever. So you could buy into that kind of whole thing. So you look, I mean I get it everyday

at home, looking at her and the response she gets for the way she looks. And I look at that and I think that must be good – you know kind of thing. So it's pretty easy to buy into that.

F: Ja that I know [indistinct]. You need to make a conscious effort to keep it at bay. [indistinct]

P: (H) Advertising – you know they're very clever people and they work on your emotions and everything. So they know what they're doing. They get Focus Groups like this. What do you think will sell this product and whatever? And if I had to ask you – think of one fat successful person. The only person that I can remotely think of is Oprah. She's like – and I mean fat because she admits all the time that she struggles with her weight. So here we have somebody who exercises every single day. Who openly admits you know I have to watch what I eat.

F: And openly admits and acknowledges [indistinct]. One of the best times in her life was when she lost so much weight for that movie – Beloved and she was photographed for Vogue on the cover, and she had lost all that weight. And she openly acknowledges that was the best feeling in the whole world. So even our overweight sort of figure that's a role model herself is in a way a contradiction.

P: (B) And I can't think of any other fat successful person – if you think about it. I mean even pictures portrayed in magazines they show a fat person in a magazine and it would be like an article that says – do you want to look like this, or ten ways to lose weight. You know like I was looking the other day at an advert for Milady and Edgars plus size models, and I actually – before saw that they were plus size models, I looked at the clothes and I thought well they're quite nice until I saw like the make of the clothes, which was Penny C or whatever – I don't know. I can't remember Edgars has a special brand name for their plus size models. And they actually look quite

good. And then after I turned the page and then I saw another model, and I thought – and I looked at them, and I thought but hey she’s quite fat. So if I’m recognising that she’s quite fat, I’m just so used to seeing thin – so imagine if that’s my reaction – that’s the reason why they don’t put fat models because that’s the reaction the public would have.

F: I just want to say to you if – I think you answered that question already – if you were to achieve that perfect size – that perfect everything body, would your life change do you think in any way? And you kind of answered it a bit by saying that your sister gets those responses. She gets it and it kind of shows you that to be that is – it is better. Hey you get ...

P: (A) It doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re going to get it when you get that weight because you kind of put those goals out for yourself and you say one day if I get there I’m going to feel different about myself, and you know everything is going to fall into place, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that’s going to happen. You might even feel worse because then you’re there and it’s like still nothing is happening to you.

F: But not necessarily with your life change?

P: It might look like it but not necessarily no.

F: [indistinct]

P: (B) I just feel that for myself – or I just think women will never be satisfied – ever. You can be – how the perfect body and whatever, and even we see it in models today, or actresses whoever, you know they can have the perfect body and we think like wow you know, but they will still say you know I need to lose some of this – so you know, then with their face or something like that. So I mean if I must lose that much weight and have the perfect body whatever, I don’t think I’ll be satisfied because

there's always the small little comments or whatever you know. I'm thinking I just need to keep that up so you know they can – but it makes you fat – I mean how do you live with yourself then – I mean ... I don't know.

F: [indistinct]

P: (E) I think that like NAME said – she sees her sister and she gets all this attention, but it is true because I've seen it at work. Like me and my friends, okay I'm not saying I have the perfect body, but we're all tall and thin – everybody. And everybody just wants – like when you're going out. When can I go with you and everybody wants to take lunch with us and I never realised it before – only recently.

F: So there is a difference – I mean people do react to ... [indistinct]

P: (B) [indistinct] the thing that I run into [indistinct], but if you did lose a lot of weight – two-sided coins, like either you lose a lot of weight nobody notices, so you end up still feeling the same that you did, whether you're fat – whatever you feel when you're fat. When other people do notice you feel good whatever, but it still depends on what other people think. So whether – inevitably you're losing that fat for other people and that's the reason why you're fat is because sometimes it's easier to stay fat because you know what people's reaction is to you – like she's so fat, she's so lazy, she can't do sport, whereas if you're thin there's a whole new expectation. Why don't you do some more [indistinct]? Why don't you go out more? Why don't you ... [laughing]?

F: It's safer in a way to hide. And one of the last questions I'm going to be asking. How many of you have been or still are on diets, and exercises, and go to gym and do those kind of things?

P: (E) No, I'm not on diet but I do exercise.

F: You have dieted?

P: (F) No. I exercise and I eat healthily. [indistinct]

F: I think maybe the new diet of the new millennium is to eat healthily. So people now kind of shy away from say I diet and they say I eat healthily which is kind of – they have similarities I think. [Background talking and very indistinct conversations]

F: I mean there's nothing wrong with people dieting and eating healthily, and exercising and wanting to do these things. I don't think that's the point of this group is to say oh you shouldn't – now go home and don't do it. I think it's something that happens amongst people. We all do it. I do it. People do it. And it's maybe just try and understand why some people do it and why others do it kind of thing. But what would you think if I said this following actually quotation, which I got from one of the books that few women who diet, or eat healthily realise that they are confessing to a dislike of the body when they weigh and measure their flesh, subjected to rigorous diets or strenuous regiments to exercise. It's a little bit of a challenge. This person obviously feels that to do those things is to manifest a dislike for one's body.

P: (B) I really think that is true because, which means if you have a certain body weight and then you have to go on a diet or exercise, it means that you just don't like, or you're not satisfied with the way in which you look and you want to look perhaps more better, which means like looking at it more thin.

F: [indistinct] someone who disagrees with that. I mean it's quite a harsh statement to make about women. So ...

P: (B) Some people perceive their body as a temple or a machine and for you to maintain that machine there's certain things that you have to do. So I don't agree with rigorous dieting and exercise till it hurts okay, but maybe for everybody exercise

is a mission like it takes a certain amount of willpower and sometimes you need – some people can't do it by themselves and some other people need like motivation and groups – whatever. But I think where some people's perception – they see their body as a machine and that it needs to be maintained. And for it to run well whatever, you need to diet and you need to ...

F: [indistinct]

P: (B) [laughing] ... and you need to do these exercises, and you need to watch what you put into your body, so I understand that. But it's not something that – I mean I believe my body is a temple so I should watch what goes into it – whatever. But I don't have that willpower like I shouldn't eat this chocolate, and I shouldn't eat that sweet like before lunchtime and I should do exercises even though I don't want to do it.

F: I just want to say – just to throw something in – if I said that statement's completely incorrect because I do and eat the things I eat because I like my body, because I want to make it better, and I exercise it because I want it to look the best that it possibly can look. It's not a dislike. I do it because I like my body.

Who agrees with that?

P: (A) For me eating healthily isn't in fact dieting because I don't say that if there are sweets on the table I'm not going to have a sweet. If I feel like having sweets I'm going to eat it, but I'm not going to overdo it. And it's not about disliking my body. It's about me wanting to be healthy, and not wanting to be excessive. So it's not about disliking my body for me.

P: (F) ... I mean if I see a chocolate cake I'm going to eat chocolate cake. I'm sorry – kind of thing. But I believe that you have been given one body and you should take the best care of it, and that you should live the best possible life that you could. So I

don't see anything wrong with exercising and dieting, and whatever, if you do it in moderation and within limits and you could ...

F: What about the fact that people say exercising [indistinct] it makes you feel good inside. What are you going to say to that?

P: (H) Ja it does.

P: (B) You know I've tried [laughing] ... You know maybe do it as the [indistinct] whatever, whatever, but there has never been a time – okay maybe once or twice that I felt good, but generally that's 99.999% of the time I'm like I'm so bad. Why did I do that? I think I'll wait until a bit longer than doing that again.

F: [indistinct] it makes you feel good. Just one more thing I want you to [indistinct]

P: (A) I actually feel good when I'm exercising because I know I'm toning whatever and hopefully losing something you know, and just knowing that it is – I'm doing something good. I'm going to feel healthy, blood circulation whatever, you know. It's working somehow. I don't necessarily think I'm going to do exercise to feel good type of thing. It's just comes if you feel good because sometimes I feel tired you know and I'll exercise next year again or something. But I exercise just to you know to release stress or whatever.

F: Okay. Thank you guys. I just want to ask one quick thing [indistinct, laughing and talking]. I just want to ask you, and this is personal and this is not going to be fair at all then, and it's got to do with yourself – think about a personal experience in your life, whether it's negative or positive, or an ambivalence experience that you had in your life which has shaped what effected your body image that you carry with you now. An experience regarding your body and how you felt about it. Describe how this incident contributed towards

you becoming aware of how you feel towards your own body. An experience – you know it doesn't have to be [indistinct] like someone insulted you. It can be a small thing. It can be the fact that your mother did not buy you a chocolate. She bought you a Granola Bar. Something that makes you – that feels – you feel has shaped how you feel about your body, whether it's positive or negative, or neither one of the two.

[END]



FOCUS GROUP 3

[GENERAL TALKING AND LAUGHING]

F: Okay so that is the last session. There are just a few things that we need to do. Maybe just to begin with, because it's going to be split in half kind of thing today. The first question being – actually how did you experience the last group. How did everyone experience the last group? Don't forget to talk into the mike when you do answer.

P: (B) It was nice. It was different to the first one because like the second one – but the first one we were talking about concepts, like what is body image whatever. The second one's more like when we had to do that [laughing and talking at the same time]. So you had to imagine yourself more like in a realistic – you know – scene because that could happen to you like, let's just say they decided to have like a Faculty meeting next – like in a couple of weeks, and then like you go – like you were representatives of the honours class, but you don't know anybody else. That could happen in real life. It was sort of more like a problem or something that you would face that's moving from concepts to more like thinking about it like to yourself, relating it to yourself. But it was different. I don't know what this week's going to be like but ... [laughing].

P: (C) For me it felt like a support group because in some of the things that we need to do they were related to our own personal experiences, which we had to share with the group, otherwise it was nice.

P: (F) It was nice. It was like NAME said it felt like a support group and it was nice to know that everybody felt the same way about certain things and you wanted to learn.

F: To begin with this Group's topic area I'm going to throw out a question. Do any of you think in general that women, or women in general are oppressed? What do you think of that?

P: (B) In general or just the body image, or what?

F: Whichever one, whether it's body image or just in general?

P (B) I think in general women are oppressed because if you think about it, it's a pre-historical society, male dominated and whatever. So like the plastic example is that men just assume that whether they're fat or skinny, hairy whatever, whatever, you know, that they will just be attractive to females. Yes when you ask them their – like well not all of them I suppose, you can't umm [laughing] generalise [laughing and talking at the same time] umm – like they just – you know if you ask them their conception they'll say like ooh you know tall, long, blonde whatever, whaddy, whaddy. So umm where do these concepts come from? It's from men. Like generally society because they're say [indistinct]. We don't like fat women. You must be thin. You must be like this and you must always look good and whatever. So yes I think women are oppressed and sometimes women oppress women, and sometimes they can't help it because you live in a male dominated society. Sometimes you can because also to make them – because you feel so helpless in a male dominated society, you feel well if I'm going to be dominated I might as well have company and that feels so isolated and whatever.

P: (C) I also agree that I do think that women in general they are oppressed. I think that women, all women, they constantly worry about how they look, or how they appear, and what people – especially men – and also I would include women think about themselves. And I think it's a question of women comparing themselves with

other women, and also the men how men think of them, or comparing yourself with someone else for example. But I do think, yes all women are in general oppressed.

F: Thank you. The question is do you think women in general are oppressed? Does anybody else want to add anything to that? Anybody? The rest of you do you feel that it's true or are there different opinions?

P: (A) I think that women are oppressed because there's so many expectations that are put out there for women and sometimes not being able to live up to that in itself oppresses one. So even just day-to-day things about mothers, women that work, you know, women that are young and get married are expected to not let go of themselves, so to speak – you know. You must maintain whatever body and figure and things, and be able to shuffle work and your family like – juggle not shuffle [laughing]. So ja, I just feel in that way the expectations that are set out are oppressive.

F: Thank you. Just listen to everybody. Everyone generally feels, without having spoken to two of you, that women are oppressed basically in general. Do any of you call yourselves feminists or follow that train of thought, or that school of thought?

P: (E) From a personal experience I could say sometimes because if I could just relate it back to the body image thing. I would, if ever it would happen that perhaps I go on a diet, even be because my boyfriend doesn't feel good about the way I look or whatever, I would do it for my own personal reasons – ja.

P: (F) I wouldn't like call myself a hardcore feminist because I wouldn't like – radical, put it that way, but I believe that because we come from centuries and centuries of male dominated society – I'm not saying it's wrong and I'm not saying it's right, but just I don't believe in one gender believing that they're superior than the other. Each gender has their functions and their role to play, but my problem of course with male

dominated society just assumes that males – they're more superior and they like they deserve privileges over women. So, but I definitely am like the whole concept of empowering women and you know just looking out for themselves and not realising that they're – not abused, but when they're being disempowered okay, when they can actually do things for themselves, and best can just realising when they're being oppressed and not being able to feel helpless, you know seeing that they can actually help themselves.

F: Okay, I'm going to have to ask the rest of you - the quiet ones who haven't spoken. Would you call yourself [indistinct]?

P: (H) I don't think I'd call myself radical feminist. I wouldn't go around male bashing and you know talking down about men. But definitely if I see a guy saying something that – he might not realise it, but saying something that in some way oppresses women, or just doesn't sound right, I would stand up. And I also have some friends who think that sleeping around with guys is a way to be equal with guys. And that's – it doesn't look [indistinct] because then it seems that you have to be like a guy to be equal and for me – and they call themselves feminists and to me that is not what feminism is about.

P: (E) To me feminism is about respecting each other in equal ways and seeing that each one is equal in what they do. I don't think – for me it's not about women having to go out and have a job. It's about if women decide to stay at home then they should be respected for that and treated equally for that decision, not be seen as underneath men because they're not working.

F: From this side I heard an “uha” – I'm not sure who it was. Anything to add to that? So am I to assume that most people – all people here are saying that they wouldn't call themselves radical feminists. It seems to be like the radical

feminists are like in a way it's almost like stigmatised because they're the male bashers in a sense. So what you do sort of prescribe to is equality, but equality in difference almost, respecting each other's differences and is that it?

P: (A) The word feminist is also – its sort had bad connotations in the past because you know the whole history was [indistinct]. They'd just like assume that you know – burn your bra [laughing and talking at the same time], don't shave your legs whatever, and also like lots of male bashing. So I mean you know many people wouldn't like sort of, when you talk about feminists they like you're going to bash males and you're just so anti-male, and what are you – a lesbian you know. There's also a stigma attached to the word feminist – so ja.

F: Just amongst all of you do you also feel that there's sort of a stigma attached to the word feminists? Because I know you all have been exposed to that kind of work and that school of thinking and all of that? Do you still feel for yourselves there's almost like a – well don't call me a feminist and...? It almost seems from the reactions that I got with the questions it was almost like hey back down, I'm not a radical feminist, but hey. Is there a bit of a feeling – or not?

P: (F) If you had to ask me that like 2 – 3 years ago I would have probably said oh no I'm not a feminist type of thing. But after kind of studying and things like that, you kind of see the different types of feminism and things like that. And I don't find it's a bad connotation to be called a feminist now.

P(B) But don't you feel that you know the differences because you've been studying at an academic institution. So we, all of us, you know we might not remember all the classifications, but we know there are distinctions, but to greater society like if you had to go to your family and you say I'm a feminist, some of them would like "aah" and you didn't like tell them well I'm not a radical feminist, but I'm this kind of

feminist whatever. And they wouldn't know the difference and they like "aaa, oh my God, you know she's ..." they'll think whatever.

P: (E) But if I'm okay with who I am within myself then it doesn't really matter what other people think – you know kind of thing. If I don't start burning my bra and like you know men bashing, then I mean really now ... they will see the distinction in how I portray myself – so.

F: Is that how most of you feel or is everyone just a bit tired after a bit of a hectic weekend? Guys? Do most you feel that way in terms of just the label of feminism?

P: (A) I myself don't feel that if I say I'm a feminist that you know it's a big deal, but other people they do. I mean there have been so many stereotypes attached to feminism you know. If you say a feminist is just as good as saying you're lesbian, which is so – I don't know how that came about because in the earlier days, you know, in women that wanted to be feminists – I don't know but just for me it seemed that to be a feminist then was to be a man type of thing you know. Like just not wearing a bra – I mean I'm just saying to understand like you know why you would do that. So for me – no, but for most of the people that I know, if I should say you know I'm a feminist – like okay are you batting for the other side you know and it's so silly – oh well.

F: Okay just from the last two Focus Groups it seems that there's a general trend amongst most of you that is. Not all – one or two don't exactly feel this way, but most of you feel that in some way you dislike, or you're not fully satisfied with your body. I mean if there's room for improvement kind of things from – it's almost like a spectrum. Some of you have said, "I don't like my body". Some of you have said, "there's room for improvement". Some of you

said, “I do like my body”. But it seems that the majority there’s a feeling of sort of dissatisfaction with your body. And this in many ways reflects the fact that 95% of the people who feel despair with their body resulting in dieting and weight reduction programmes are women. Why do you think this body and weight dissatisfaction is predominantly and almost exclusively amongst women?

P: Sorry can you just repeat the question – it’s like so totally like lost.

F: Okay you must bear with me because I have to read these off now at the session. What I got from the last Focus Groups in many ways reflects what all the facts that 95% of the people who are feeling despair with their bodies and result in dieting or weight reduction programmes, whichever kind that might be, are women, so it reflects that. And I want to know why do you think this body and weight dissatisfaction is predominantly – and one can almost say almost exclusively amongst women?

P: (B) The only answer that I can come up with it’s sort of like living in a male dominated society so let’s say like males would prefer a certain body type, so if you don’t reach that ideal you’ll be scared not to sort of have a man, or whatever, not be desired, or whatever. Of course mothers wanting their daughters to be whatever – happy or you know settled, would encourage their daughters, and sometimes they don’t know how to do it in a positive way, if it is at all positive, would sort of encourage them to look in that certain desired image and it’s hard for the person’s self-esteem or whatever, because it makes you feel like – I mean everybody’s got different like sort of bone structures or whatever, metabolism, genetics, and for you to be sort of whatever the ideal is, whichever you consider the ideal should be like thin and whatever, whatever. I can understand how it would be confusing you know sending a message like well I look like this. How am I ever going to look like that? It

makes you feel wrong. It like makes you feel bad for the way that you naturally look or the way that you naturally feel. And also I like – if I think of like believing in anorexia the majority that it afflicts are women. And I mean I know that's also got to do with the [indistinct] of distortion because you know there's some chemistry going up there that when they see themselves in the mirror they look too fat even though they can look like a bunch of skeletons. So I don't know why it is more prevalent in women, but the only answers that I can come up with is like sort of the stress or the pressures of living in a male dominated society to reach an ideal – I mean this is not – it's not that I'm blaming men or bashing men. I'm just saying that society is dominated by males. So those ideals would predominately come from males you know and also some females like let's say mothers, or aunties or even your peers would reinforce that because they don't have any other choices I suppose. But I can't think of any other concrete reason why women are more sort of body conscious.

P: (H) Just to add – I also think it might have to do with a new fashion trend that is being introduced like women fashion that is being introduced. And including those body images that like advertised by the media so-called perfect body images because I mean when they – like in fact when they advertise a perfect so-called male they never put him to look skinny and all that shit, but what they'll do is like they'll portray him as wearing a suit and a tie, carrying a briefcase, and in an office, and that is being like a real man. But for women they have to look skinny, perfect with like in terms of body, and then like with the fashion that the woman would be dressed on.

F: And so for what you're saying almost is that the images that we've been exposed to it's almost of fragile women. Is that in a way what you say? Skinny – the men are portrayed more in terms of business suits, which mean they're

working, they're out there, they're professional. Why do you think there's that difference in the images that we've been exposed to and who does it benefit?

P: (E) I think yes they are because I mean in a [indistinct] society to be a real woman you have to be at home, look after the kids, as well as your husband, and do like house chores, whereas the man has to be outside, to go and work and bring the money at home. And I think on the whole it benefits the men – ja I think it benefits the men, because I mean they are the ones at the end of the day who feel great and good about themselves.

F: Anybody else – why do you think that this is sort of prevalent amongst women – predominately amongst women, the sort of dissatisfaction with bodies?

P(C) I was just thinking like sort of the stress of living in a male dominated society, you sometimes feel so helpless like you can't change anything you know. So maybe the one thing that you can control is your body you know – how fat or how thin you are. So it would depend on if you on like if you really [indistinct] or really fat and say [indistinct] so ugly, nobody's going to want me or whatever, then at least I have a reason. Or if you're going to say well right I'm going to starve myself and I'm going to look perfect or whatever. So maybe it's like a form of control – like just depressed or just the stress of living in a male dominated society.

F: Like I said there's no right or wrong answers here. [Indistinct] just sitting back and trying to think about theory or anything. It's just your own first thoughts, opinions about this, which I'm sure everybody does have.

P: (A) [indistinct] come to mind and I don't know why is that women are just more susceptible to getting fat. That's all I can think of because naturally a woman's metabolism is slower than a man, which is so unfair, but okay. And I mean – I don't know that's just what was popping out of my mind right now and I don't know if it

makes sense but ... And when NAME was talking about how the guys are dressed, you know, with regards to modelling and things and the females, what comes into my mind is that the males are portrayed as being the breadwinner and the female is the trophy – you know. Looking dainty and helpless and putting on something glamorous to wear and whatever, and be thin.

F: Just in terms of what you're saying it's almost two important things saying one thing that women are more susceptible to putting on weight because naturally their body as they age picks up more fat blah, blah, blah, and one has to obviously work harder to maintain that. And the question I would ask you then in that sense, if women naturally are supposedly picking up weight, as they're getting older – and that's a natural state – why then is there this contradiction in terms of the images you have spoken about? Why then is the image we're having to look at so thin if by nature we're not that way? For yourself what do you think? Or for anybody I suppose?

P: (A) I haven't really sat back and thought where does this thin concept come from. Who is this person that came out that you know you must be this and whatever, to really look good. I don't know.

F: I think what you're saying is very important and I almost that get that sense from all of you and you must tell me if I'm wrong, that a lot of people, or a lot of women don't sit back and think well where does this come from. It's almost just like accepted. It's part of my magazines I read. It's part of the TV I see. It's part of the people I hang out with and it's quite unconscious. So do you agree with that? Do people feel that?

P(H) It's a combination of that, of not knowing – you know not sitting back and actually thinking about it. But also a combination of maybe there is no one answer.

Maybe there's just [indistinct] of oppressing and actually there not being a reason why this concept comes about. We're just living in Africa. The concept essentially is a westernised concept of stick thin and being attractive. Where if you look African women – and I'm talking African as in anybody who lives in Africa whether you white, black, coloured, whatever, whatever. Women in their natural state are not stick thin, not the majority at least. Ja, so basically the concept just coming from you know westernised society and like maybe they don't even have like a reason either, like one single reason why thin is beautiful. I'm thinking also the – as you know women are supposed to have a [indistinct] whether you're young or old, women are supposed to have a higher body fat percentage in their bodies anyway. Also the thing is like maybe if you're putting on fat, it's like sort of as women get older maybe you're denying the process of aging. You know it's like you don't want to admit that you're near death, but like basically if you're thin it's like saying you're young, you're beautiful, you're desirable, or whereas you're putting kilos and kilos of fat you know “aah” you're getting older. You're not as desirable as you were younger. Maybe your partner won't look at you and people will start making comments.

F: Before I get to everybody else, just throw out the question – where do you think the concept of thin being associated with goodness, well positiveness. It's young – it's blah, blah, blah and fat having more of a derogatory connotation attached to it. You're throwing out one thing and you're saying possibly it's got to do with the fact that fat means you're aging? Does anybody else have any thoughts?

P: (C) [indistinct] I'm thinking back to – okay way back with the Europeans you know. And I was just thinking how they used to wear those corsets you know and like they were really thin and whatever. And within the black communities, black

people, I mean were fat you know because that was our natural state or whatever. But and then again I'm thinking white, thin, - black, fat, ugly – you know. So that for me I was just thinking where can it come from and maybe it's that. I don't know if anybody disagrees. I mean it's just a theory.

F: No, no I think it's great. I'm going to throw it out to the majority of you to get some comments from this side.

P: (B) I totally agree with NAME and to the fact that like now you see medical society also contributes to it because they say fat obviously – but obesity is generally unhealthy. But I don't think women or society can distinguish when between fat healthy and obese unhealthy. You know I don't think they can distinguish in that. So I think to combat they just want to say well the least desirable and let's not go then to fat you know. Like you'll just get overweight, mildly obese – usually obese, and – yes when they used to wear corsets and stuff I mean if you think about it, women used to faint because it was constricting their breathing. And I'm sure if you pull too tight you could break a rib or something. So I mean they would – it's madness to sort of have an ideal that says – yes I do agree that like thin is a white [indistinct] whatever, and that's where the desired image would be. But I mean they would do it to the fact like to the detriment of their health you know. I mean for somebody to like pull it in and then you stop breathing and like falling and like fainting, which also supposed to be so feminine you know. Yes, it's awful.

F: I'm going to start down from this side.

P: (E) To me it seems more like women have been doing it to please men in some kind of way because like NAME said it started with European society who were wearing like corsets and stuff. But women wouldn't do that out of their own. They

would do it because some man somewhere said that your waist must be thin and you must look thin. So I don't know where men got it into their heads that thin is beautiful because nature says that if a woman has more fat on their body they'd be more likely to conceive. So it's like a contradiction in playing against nature to please men.

F: Go on just say something.

P: (E) No I'm just thinking about the corset thing that women were wearing and in that time who were the designers? It was men. So I was just thinking about – because females weren't allowed to so-called work – you know do that kind of job.

P(H) I would just like to add to that. In the business world if you look in the cover page of a magazine what is going to attract a man mostly – a thin or obese woman? So I think it's all about money and all the pressures put upon women.

F: You're going to definitely need to explain that a bit further. I think that's quite interesting.

P(H) When I say it's all about money I mean like if you – I mean we all agree – I don't know if you'd agree that if you buy a magazine or especially men, no business is going to make money if their magazine is not going to sell. Do you get the point – but with all the pressures put on women so women are trying to be like that women on the cover page of a magazine and that may lead them to going on a diet or something, or lose some weight.

F: It's almost like what you're saying is what makes money, or in terms of selling magazines or selling things is a beautiful woman, a thin woman, and an obese woman or a fat woman is certainly not going to make – sell magazines. People are not going to want to buy that.

P(H) I don't know. It was in a shop I think I saw this obese lady and she was like not fat fat, but – and I was just like thinking people were just passing by those books and they were going to a shelf where there's like women – beautiful women on the cover of a magazine.

P: (F) It's all about who's in power. Who dictates to you what is kind of feminine or it's not. So what the whole European and African thing – African people were seen as heathens and they didn't know anything and blah, blah, blah. And then the Europeans knew everything kind of thing. So it was like black people didn't have any self control and that's why they looked the way they did, even though they looked gorgeous the way they did. It was like no this couldn't be the ideal. So you know the people in power they always symbolise the ideal – isn't it – so ... It's who is in power kind of thing.

F: **Both of what you say is quite important. You say that who's in power gets to set the precedent or the standards and from that point on people can make money. It's all about money. Do the rest of you agree with that, or what do you think about the concept of power and money being involved in this?**

P: (B) Well if you have power, I mean you dictate the norm. So if you have the resources and the money, then you can say well if you don't do this or the way I like, these are the consequences. And if you do these are the rewards that you will get. So you have to make a choice you know. If I want certain things then I will either conform or sort of not conform to what the people with resources or money want. So if you have power and money you dictate the norm.

F: **Anybody else about...? I'm going to then throw out the question – who do you – we've been talking a lot about male dominated society. So this might sound like a repeat, but who do you think are the people who are in power – who**

are dictating in this norm? It might seem like a repeat question but where is this power situated?

P: (E) Men definitely – especially I think white men because they are the designers here. I think there are more white men than black men that are designers. And I think they have an ideal body in their minds and they're going to make clothes for that ideal body and not for the bodies that actually exist out there.

F: And just to ask you – I know that there are women designers out there and I know that there are women business people out there. What do people think about that because there are women who are also at the top of this higher [indistinct] who are also perpetuating this?

P: (B) I think women have already bought into the whole idea of you have to be thin to be beautiful. So even if there – I mean there's like a minority of women that are out there making clothes for fuller figures and those kind of designs don't really sell. I mean everybody wants to be thin whether they feel they're being oppressed or not they want to be thin.

F: Then just to ask maybe the rest of you – why do you think there are women who are out there, who are designing for thin people, or who are the editors because most women are the editors of all magazines – why are they perpetuating this? Why is every cover magazine made up of skinny people? Why are they doing that?

P:(H) I think it goes back to the money issue because they perhaps doing it for business there in competition. They know that whether if they could try and fight for the rights of women in terms of body image, that hey you don't have to have a thin, skinny woman on the cover page and so on, but it has been so internalised going back to what NAME has mentioned earlier on that that is just the so-called it image that

you have to look. So even if they would try and do something opposite they wouldn't go anywhere which means then they would fall back into the other image which is like from the men that you have to look nice and thin and so on. So it has to do with money that's why they perpetuate into the same ...

F: Does anybody want to add to that or...?

P(A) I was just thinking also in terms of your question why women editors would do that. You know you're living in a male dominated society and you're competing with men you know. So also why women designers would make sort of the size clothes that men do because for the same reason you're competing with men. And if like NAME said women have already bought into the concept of thin, you know it's no use unless you have a whole group of women bunching together and actively I don't know launching a massive ad campaign to empower women and get them used to the fact that you know there's clothes out there for their size that will make them look good, and still design – make them feel happy with their body image, because they may be happy with a little fat or whatever. But because like we said designers, whether they be male or female, make you feel bad for having a bit of fat, you feel no well I need to lose weight to conform to society. So unless women do that, they have to – I would say they're forced – some of them are forced to sort of buy into the stereotype and competing with men. So if they're making for size 8 figures then women, if they're competing with men on the same level playing field, they also have to make clothes for size 8 people to sell their clothes – you know to be sort of competitive or to just reach the same status to sell their clothes, which is their aim. Ja, and I was just thinking in terms of looking for clothes – myself personally I'm looking for clothes for my granny because there's a wedding coming up in our family – and that would be like what a size 40, which is [laughing and talking at the same

time] and it is a trial looking for clothes because you literally have to hunt down. Whereas if she was a size 8 – imagine having a granny a size 8 – it could happen. She could be tiny. You know just pop into Edgars and take anything off the rack or pop into any mainstream which has stores sort of everywhere in a major shopping centre, it would be easier you know because that's the size that designers expect women to be, whereas we know God how many women are size 8, and how many of them are nationally so. You're going to have to work very, very hard to maintain that size. So it's even worse because now for the women who are real sizes it's a chore to go look for clothes because they're so far and few between stores where you are ready to go hunt down. So it's a chore.

F: I just want to add to what you've all been saying so far in terms of the power thing and there being male designers and female designers, and female people up there who are also doing this. And some of you have talked about women do this because they internalise it to some extent. Is that right NAME? But then I would kind of ask you in terms of the way you're understanding it which is the male / female power structure. It gets a bit blurred because it's not as black and white as male / female because there are females there too, whether they're internalising it or not it gets a bit blurry. Do you understand? You can agree. You can disagree. I'm just throwing it out there. It just seems to me from even from what you're all saying to me that the dynamic of it's male against female, and it's black and white, it becomes a bit grey just listening to all of you. How do you feel about that?

P: (E) [indistinct]. I think it's a situation of a double bind in which if you're a woman and you try to act like a man. It's bad and at the same time acting so-called woman role it's also devalued. So I think women are in that situation where they

can't – they don't actually have a real role for themselves. They're caught in between and perhaps that's why there are also other women who are also perpetuating on that image.

F: What I mean just in terms to clarify it is that when I asked the question who is the one in power, who is the one setting these precedence standards, it was clear that everyone was like it was men, it's men and yet it seems that the power structure itself, whether it began with men or not, is certainly becoming more blurred. Does that make more sense? And that whilst we saying it's men, perhaps it's a little bit more blurry than just one sort of stock figure. I don't know what you think about that?

P(B) I do agree with you to a certain extent you know, if you say it's men, but I do agree with you if you say yes it is women also and it could be black or white. It's not just white males. But you must remember we started from a male dominated society and we can't say that it's equal yet, because you don't have equal women in power and equal men in power. So whether or not – you can't deny the fact that the start of a male dominated society and whether women are keeping that in power by perpetuating it, that's the history. That's where they came from. So yes I do agree with you that's not only been now. Like if I think of like the new clothes line – Stone Cherry – she's a black female, and her clothes are predominately also like if you look at the cut and the style for thin figure and whatever. So and there you have a woman who is quite influential on TV I think and now she's into designing. She's really influential but whether or not, the fact is that she's still a black woman and now she's in power. So you know it sort of contradicts if we say it's only white males that are perpetuating the stereotypes. Here you have a black woman who is in power, in a

position of power and she's cutting clothes for a size 8, or not maybe only for size 8, but do you get where I'm getting – so ja ...

F: **The rest of you any thoughts on that?**

P: (A) Ja, so I just think that men and women can be in that situation but once you go against what is expected or what's desirable whatever, then you're going to kind of be in trouble so ...

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE A OF TAPE 1]

[TAPE 1 – SIDE B]

P: (A) ... and as long as whatever they're putting out themselves and they don't – how I can say – go against the grain as to making sizes that are not desirable so to say, then if they are doing what makes themselves in other words, then it will stay that way. And so men and women can be in power together. But where there's going to be difficult is where women [RECORDING SWITCHED OFF]

F: **Okay. Thank you NAME for talking and so helping with the tape. I think I'm going to move on a little bit in terms of the questions. I want to ask people – do you think that in our culture to be a woman almost equates to being conscious about your weight and your body?**

P: (B) That's it my answer's yes.

P: (C) I think that it is still more so for women, but it's changing a bit with regard to men because there's this whole, you know consciousness with regard to men and they present themselves. They – you've got all these types of cosmetics for men now – and you know. Men are becoming more ...

P: (B) [indistinct] ... would be doing that. Like I mean if you think about it – if I think about my father, you won't care about cosmetics. In fact you'd actually say well you know that's a female thing you know. Particularly of the age groups that

that happens to you know – [indistinct], looking after your body, looking good, products in your hair [talking and laughing at the same time] ... products just to maintain it, look good. So it's got to do with the age group of men which is younger, you know, like let's say 20's, 30's, maybe 40's. Maybe also being you know their position in society, you know. If you're an executive you're having meetings all the time, contact with people all the time. Where if you were like construction, I mean I'm not "dissing" construction guys. It's more like manual labour so what's the use of getting a manicure because it's just going to get dirty anyway, when you go drill a hole somewhere so ... [laughing]

F: Are you saying that for men now there's almost like an image out there that they're also buying into, and it's with it goes the magazines for men, the cosmetics for men, the hair gel for men, the abs for men, and now these days you can walk into a male's kind of bathroom, open his medicine cabinet and it could be basically fuller than yours and filled with cosmetics that are probably more expensive than yours at this point. So it's almost like it's changing for men at this point as well. Seems like everybody is nodding their head.

P: (B) ... it also has to do with the age group too because I remember once my uncle came to visit my house for a day and he was complaining of how he gets cold at night. So I asked him what about himself a hot water bottle and then he said "no ways", he'll never do that. That is for women. That stuff is for women. I mean he can imagine himself when his friends come over to visit him and then here they see a hot water bottle you know. What will they think of him?

[GENERAL LAUGHING AND TALKING]

P(A) I don't think it's like only from the 20's up because I know of like really young boys who are like on diets and are so conscious of their weight, and who are anorexic.

I mean they are so thin and they won't eat sweets or anything because they think they're fat. So I think with men it's starting like from a really young age now already.

F: Just to follow from you're all saying. So it's beginning to affect men a little bit more than it has before. Do you feel that this kind of – these images or that we've been exposed to whether we're male/female is a form of oppression for women specifically? And with this consciousness in our society for women's bodies and weight is a form of oppression?

P: (B) So what's the question? Is a form of oppression?

F: Ja.

P: (B) ... because you're conforming to a stereotype of an ideal that is put out there and sometimes you don't know why it's put out there and by whom. Like we said it's not always males. In fact like if I think what my experience – if I think about weight you know – my mother will always comment on – like yesterday I weighed myself. It's just something I do because I just “ag” what's the use. It's only the earth's gravitational pull on your body, you know, but because I only lose weight twice, it's when I have the flu, which I have at the moment, or when I fast. And I was just interest to see how much I have lost, and my mother happened to be in the bathroom at the same time and she was like – why you're weighing yourself, because she know that I don't like weigh myself. I said well, you know, I can se I've lost weight. She's like “that's good”. And I'm thinking should I just block that out because I don't necessarily want her to congratulate me or something. It's something I should feel good about or bad about, or whatever. Whereas with my father, if I told him I lost weight, he'd just like [indistinct – laughing]. So he doesn't sort of – I'm not saying that he – it's good or bad, but all I'm saying is that mothers in general, whether it's got to do with male kids or girl kids, they generally more sort of set the standard of

how you will sort feel for yourself and that. Like when NAME said it started from kids, whereas fathers, [indistinct] like obese, or under-nourished, or they sort of be [indistinct] which sort of goes around, like flies in the face of saying that it's male dominated society when we were now sort of ...[laughing]

F: That's exactly what I wanted to say to you. It almost seems like whether or not like, first of all you say that it is oppression. So whether or not this oppression began with males, women take it on and they pass it down to the next generation in your circumstances – in terms of your mother takes it on, and she hands it down to you in a way. More so than you Dad would actually be even though he's a male. So it does fly in the face. It's a contradiction. And how do people feel about the fact that as women it's a contradiction that it's targeted to you, but it's also perpetuated by you or your gender so to speak.

P: (H) It's quite depressing because if you think about it we're all potentially going to be mothers one day and if you have children, I think to some degree you'd also be worried about how your children look.

F: I just wanted to ask – just to [indistinct] ... more than just maybe the mother/daughter relationship, are there other ways that women can take it on and pass it on? Some of you have mentioned internalising it. Is it possible that another way of perpetuating it is following it?

P: (E) Another way could be through peer pressure. Perhaps you also want to be part of the group, you know, part of your friends. So definitely we'll also try to lose weight and look good and fit into the style in which they are in.

P: (F) But also if you're thin in the group – that particular group – and your friends all happen to be a bit chubby or whatever, maybe you'd exert your power then – and maybe covert the fact that you're thin or whatever, or more guys look at you –

whatever your case may be. You're more popular. Maybe you know you have that power, so sometimes it's empowering because you sort of like can say to them well you know look like me, or why don't you diet so that you can wear clothes like wear, or be like me, or be popular. So sometimes also like in terms of internalising it also sometimes it's a form of power. Some women for instance like something to hold on with somebody else you know – ja.

P: (H) Women do not necessarily like being thin and saying that things are being like chubby. Chubby – they don't necessarily have to say it. They just have to kind of be there kind of thing, and their whole presence and flirting with guys, and getting all this attention. They would naturally make other women think well if that is how you get men or that is how you get what you want, then that's how you're supposed to look. Ja, so you don't have to actually go and say that if you want to wear these kind of clothes, then you have to dress like me or whatever. You can just like kind of the way you kind of present yourself.

F: In a sense it's almost like ...

P: (A) In a sense what NAME is saying is that some women portray that in subtle ways without actually verbalising to perhaps their friends and to other women in general.

F: Almost the interesting thing for me definitely is – that gets me going “haa” is the fact that yes it is a male dominated society, but it's the power that's coming from the top down. It's almost so subtle because we take it and we kind of do it for them, and that's what like “wow” because almost in a way it's so unconscious to us and we think this is what it's supposed to be like to be a woman and yet we don't to a large extent realise how much we've internalised that kind of way of

thinking, and that way of – we just almost oppressive. People agree with that or...?

P: (B) Women in power – if they're kind of putting out the same thing that men are, then obviously us women – you know women who's not educated, or women who's not on that level who think well this has to be the right way to go – you know kind of thing. When they don't actually realise that women in power are trying to kind of live up to the expectation of men in power because obviously that they are not equal. So it's kind of a whole kind of disempowerment.

P: (H) I think there are more women than men in the whole world, and the question in a way – I think that yes I know that we are living in a male dominated world, but in a sense I think that women they let the men do these things to themselves. So, but then we must ask the question to yourselves like, but how many women – although there are more women than men, how many women are in power, or has the power to bring about the change. So ...

F: Thanks guys ...

P: (A) You know we're all talking about women being disempowered and women being empowered, and setting a standard like for male. My problem is this. What is the alternative? You know let's say we all have kids whatever, and you had [indistinct] kids, or obese kids, whatever. You haven't – you only teach what you've been taught. So I mean if your mother used to tell you well you know you're getting a bit fat, stop having second helpings, or – you know that's what you've been taught on how to raise children or comments you've been made. There hasn't really been a society like an alternative, like to encourage a good healthy body image. At least not in South African society. Like [indistinct] said the last time, you know the Americans who have high self-esteem [indistinct – talking and laughing at the same time], but ja,

so I mean can you really blame women whether they're empowered or not, because they just sort of repeat what they've been taught and there is no as such alternatives.

F: [indistinct] ... now taking it down to the almost wrap up section, which is like the alternative. What is the alternative way and what can we as people just do, or are we just powerless in the situation, which I think I'll get to now. But just before we get to that I just want to read a quote to you and see what you think of this quotation. It's a little bit long, so try and keep your ears open. Okay.

“Women’s bodies including what they eat, how they dress, and the daily rituals through which they attend to their bodies are considered a medium of culture, and these daily rituals such as moisturising, exercising, dieting, whatever, are considered a means of control and domination of the women, especially since they have been converted into automatic habitual activity, which exists beyond consciousness as they are perceived by women as voluntary and freedom of choice”.

A little bit of a mouthful.

P: (B) What you say is that women are just like machines and they're not really thinking about what they're doing and all these rituals that you said are sort of ways of oppression and keeping their men. Am I right?

F: [indistinct]

P: (B) I can agree with that 50% - because there might be women out there who exercise just because they exercise whatever, with no actual thought process going on there, and that they're always on a diet, some diet – seeking the perfect diet, and they abide to this whole cosmetic thing whatever. But I think there are women out there who just see it as sort of looking after yourself. I mean it is more – to be a healthier individual, healthier human being. Exercise has been proven you know it's good for

you, whether it's to prolong your life or just to have a healthier life. The women who do that and who sort of put on moisturiser and look after the skin – I'm not talking about like make-up [talking and laughing at the same time] and be overly concerned, but I mean sort of just looking after it, because you have the sun and the wind, and the air whatever, takes toll of that. And diet in the form of just eating healthily, I think they actually do take cognisance of or put actual thought process there because they're thinking my body, you know, is precious to me and I need to look after it. So there are women in society who take actual cognisance of that. Women who just ritually do it because they think that's what's expected of them.

F: [indistinct] do you agree?

P: (F) I think that this whole body image issue has gone up to an oppressive level where it's been interpersonal to such an extent that some women, of course, who have conformed to this whole issue will tend to work themselves out and go onto diets which at the end of the day has negative side effects to their own health state, and I think that's where also sometimes some women, if I could refer to mothers, they will then tell their own children you know to start dieting at very early ages, and which also most pass it on to friends where they like get their friends also to like have the same body images without even verbalising it sometimes. Perhaps sometimes they do verbalise it.

F: And this part what do you think of that? Does it sound like the quotation is a little bit over the top to think that everything right down to moisturising actually is a form of oppression?

P: [indistinct and laughing]

P: (H) I agree with NAME that it's [indistinct] with regard to today's [indistinct]. So you do find some women that just are overly compulsive with regard to dieting

and looking after their bodies, but doing it for all the wrong reasons which should be looking after your body with wanting to be healthy, keeping fit, for whatever other reason, but not in such a way that at the end of the day you feel – how can I say ... I can't say you feel oppressed because – women – I don't know just from my – as much as I dislike my body and things, it's hard for me to think that I'm oppressing myself in that way – so we're all in denial [laughing and talking at the same time]. I don't know. It's just hard for me to think that umm ... with media and that it is oppressive – I mean being wanting to “oh I must look like this, or whatever”. But for myself, oppressing myself it's hard to deal with, and I guess once one realizes that that's what's really happening, maybe you can – you know there can be some sort of change, but most unlikely because we all want to be desired and we're going to do it whatever – we're going to do it.

F: ... very much. That was very honest. Thank you very much. And I think you're right. I think it's hard for any person – male or female, to get to a point and to actually well – actually I do things to myself that “aah” maybe a little bit oppressive – difficult.

P: (E) I just wanted to go back to what you said something about moisturising. My Mom is involved in this bureau group and they occasionally meet on Saturdays and one of the women there has this dark, dark patch on her face, and my Mom says that like during the days when they were young, she used to look like really, really good. She was light in complexion and she didn't even have a zit on her face. But what they did in those days, they used to use Esomel and He Man and Super Rose, and I think she just went over the limit and she used something else, and look at what happened to her face now. She's got this black, dark frame. She looks terrible. And I mean in those days she was good.

F: I want to just ask you guys. I know a lot of the questions I'm asking is a little bit hard to actually to think about it and to maybe answer. In terms of anorexia and the eating disorders that people suffer from and mostly women suffer from, do you feel – and just listen to the Focus Groups and what's come out from everybody here, it seems like there is a consciousness about your weight. I'm not saying everybody – I'm just saying that the general feel is that there is a consciousness about your weight, and there's a consciousness about not putting on too much weight, it's a consciousness about your body. Do you feel that that sort of awareness, which I think sounds like it's with you most of the time, is any different to the people who suffer from anorexia?

P: (F) I think with the awareness there could be a difference in that you wouldn't like go over the limit. You would watch yourself like in what you're doing. Whereas with people who are suffering from anorexia, like they're not really conscious. They're just doing it constantly without even thinking about it and they're not aware up until then where it gets to that stage where they get ill.

F: What I maybe should of said is not – do you feel that you are – that there's maybe a similarity between yourselves and people who suffer from anorexia? Because traditionally most people think well that's the extreme. That's an [indistinct], and yet what I'm hearing is that there is that kind of thinking – maybe not as obsessive, but there's that kind of consciousness amongst women. And my question is do you feel that there is a little bit of a similarity, yet I am fully aware that no one's going out and weighing like 32 kilograms right now and not eating and blah, blah. [Indistinct] ... but it seems to be. So do you see the similarity maybe?

P: (F) Of course yes you do see a similarity because what I – my perception is that an anorexia believer is what every women feels – just perhaps times ten. So everybody has this feeling that they're sometimes feeling fat times ten, and sometimes people think they don't look thin enough times ten. So yes there is definitely a similarity.

P: (B) I think awareness is more on a continual, and the difference it is it's like with anorexia and like say me kind of thing – is it can be me kind of thing – you know kind of thing. If you kind of buy into everything and whatever and I mean I'm sure that the person who is anorexic didn't think they would get there. There first kind of just into the whole – okay I need to lose weight and then it was like okay I'm able to control my weight and whatever and then suddenly the loss of control – it just happens so quickly. It's like a flip of a coin kind of thing and it's – that's why it can get out of control so easily. So – ja I think it's more of a continual kind of thing.

P: (A) For me the similarity is the way that everybody seems to have this really distorted image of their body. Because I'm sitting here now and everybody here I feel has got such nice bodies but hearing what they feel about it, what is it like, wow where did this come from because that to me is what an anorexic person would think, because they'd be so thin and they'd still see that they're fat. So there definitely is some kind of similarity.

P: (E) I do think that there is most definitely a similarity between an anorexic and myself – if I can say, but I guess it's to a certain point. You – a person sets herself to this point and say no, no further. I think the anorexic is where that person doesn't realise or is aware of what she is actually doing to herself. So ...

E: ... do you want to leave it there? That's fine. We can leave it there. May I just before we are going to what the alternative or just we can talk a little bit about the alternative, I almost – for me sometimes I think about how this thin

ideal is like what they say. This is what you have to look like. Imagine substitute that for a shoe size. Everyone has to wear a size 5 shoe. That is what is – makes a woman. Can you imagine a size 12 trying to fit into size 5 shoe, and that is what bodies are like as well. It's people who are naturally going to be bigger boned, trying to be something else. Ja, when I put it like that to myself I think "wow" – actually why. Why would I actually buy into that? I don't know. That's just a thought to throw at you. And in terms of what do you think the alternative to this is?

P: (B) I don't know about alternatives, but I would – I definitely relate to what Nadia said because I also – before I did the Focus Group, I mean I looked at everybody in this class and I thought I think everybody looks good to me [laughing and talking at the same time] ... you know and I could never imagine anybody in this Group like "wow" NAME look ... everybody looks good. And yet it's a contradiction because myself – I think to myself, but I don't feel happy with myself. And when you come to this Group that every single one of them are like not unhappy, but you know I mean ... whatever, whatever. So it's weird because I think – I mean I would never have thought that about anyone in this Group that they would be unhappy. I think it was just me. But I think with anorexia I believe it's the same. So if there's no awareness created, you know before the Focus Group, I would never have imagined that anybody was – I would have thought everybody is happy with their – I think it was just me like "aah" I'm the only one that's unhappy. So in terms of alternatives, definitely it [indistinct – laughing], creating an awareness, or we're speaking more about it because – I don't know, or you know, you just actually think there are so many problems out there in the world that are so much more important, but yet when you think about body image related to self-esteem, it seems more important now,

because if you have women who are positive or high self-esteem, then you have empowered women. You have empowered society. So, I can't think of any other alternatives [laughing]

E: Anybody else in terms of ...

P: (F) Girls that are aware of their bodies it's always like their Mom's on diet and their Mom's aware about their body, and their Mom's constantly criticising themselves. So girls pick up on that. So maybe alternatives would be – ja say the Mom diets and so the Mom kind of does exercise or whatever, but more in a way it says enough – in a healthy sort of way, and kind of giving the message that eat moderately, live healthy, but you don't necessarily have to be you know that way kind of thing. Just be happy with who you are. So within the home they maybe should start within the home and then kind of you know, kind of ... ja, kind of effect. So ja I think it would have to start in the home with parents just being happy with the their children the way they are – you know. So they pick up a little weight now – you know – let them – if they're comfortable with it, it's okay. Okay short of becoming out of control, maybe then you can – maybe in a negative way, but let them know like you know – or like why don't you join the gym with me or – you know kind of thing like that. But not like the way they do it now is like NAME was saying "oh so that's good", because that's what parents do. They don't even realise how – what a negative – because I mean your parents say that and you just your whole heart sinks, because you thought I was fat then – you know that kind of thing. So, ja it would have to start in the home first that's where I think it ...

E: Thank you. Anybody else?

P: (A) With regard to us I think it should start at the home with your parents, but my alternative would be not to make the child aware at all. Because whether you're

going to say look and you're picking up a bit of weight, the child – I mean it's got to do with age as well. I mean they might not even realise okay because many children don't. If you don't say anything then they're not really going to take note of their – you know. Okay, oh my goodness – my body. There's something wrong now. I'm picking up weight. Or even if the child looks good and you say, "mmm you must stay that way, or whatever. Don't pick up weight". Then it just makes him aware. So I think you have to take age into consideration when not to make the child aware of what he – I mean if you can see the child is picking up weight or whatever, do it subtly, you know. Don't buy too much or whatever, but as verbalising it I wouldn't do that because I can see it in my family with my niece. I mean she was seven and she didn't want to eat because her brother jokingly would say hey you're getting fat bum and whatever, and she's like what? Like Ma look now what – you know. And it might seem funny whatever, to whatever's going on, but she really did not want to eat. And I would see – and it's a small little body you know. I'm like what are you doing? You know – but she said no but my Dad says no ... that's not on.

P: (H) My godchild is like about 4 years old now and I said to her about a week ago "hey you've got a nice something – dress on or something. Do you like it and she said to me "no I'm fat". And I was like – and her Mom's sitting next to me and she just looked at me – like embarrassed. That is a very young child to be telling me she's fat and she doesn't like her body, and she's saying no I've got a big bum or something.

F: I suppose the next question is all of you have been giving me these alternatives and I want to ask you in terms of yourselves, in terms of tomorrow, in terms of the next day, what is it as you as women or – can do for yourself I suppose, or creating an alternative for yourself. Is that possible or is that not possible at all?

P: (E) I just think you know – yes I do believe it should start at home, but there's not anything that we in this room can like go to society [laughing and talking at the same time] ... can tell all the people [laughing and talking at the same time]. ... but in terms of myself as an individual you know, I have already – since I started this Focus Group, and even before that you know, actually thought about – so when I speak to my little cousin who says – everybody says to her, her parents commenting on her she's getting a bit fat, I'd physically tell them don't say that, or don't say that in front of her, because you make them – and I mean it's in terms of parents and adults we educating them is very difficult, because you know we might have gone through all the thought process, but now trying to get them there is a mission. So you kind of tell them like don't say that because it makes them aware, and down the line [indistinct] ... self-esteem [laughing] ... So instead of saying that I'd just sort of shorten it and I'd say well don't say that to her because how would you like it if somebody commented on you. And she's too young to be worrying about that. She needs to be worrying about something else – you know – age appropriate worries. So I'll actively say like you know don't – or like when my cousin says “oh I'm getting fat”, and I ask her who told you that and you know – actually reassure her no you look fine whatever.

E: [indistinct] ... just in terms of me is it possible for us as young women out there in the world to kind of hold this – like you were saying earlier, try to hold this like awareness but yet still have the need to be that way, attract men, look good, blah, blah, blah. Is it possible to mingle the two or must you only be one or the other? Like I'm this way and I hold this kind of awareness about this issues about body images, about this and blah, blah, blah? Does that make sense or am I talking in circles?

P: (H) [indistinct] ... aggressive in his thinking, and think that the way that we're thinking and not the norm where you must be thin and blah di blah di blah, you must look like this and whatever.

E: **Just in your day-to-day life like tomorrow walking into a shop and buying the Cosmopolitan. Just the small things and can you hold the awareness in buying this Cosmopolitan which is for the propaganda about what women should look like, but yet I still want to buy it. Is it possible to be able to hold the two that's what I'm asking?**

P: (F) I'm just thinking about if I opened the Cosmopolitan tomorrow and all the models are full-figured, and you know completely different to the kind of – I would still kind of – I think it's been so kind of ingrained in me to want to be thin that even if people are going with "oh the fuller figure" and you're getting all these models with the fuller figure, it just doesn't interest me. That is what I want and that's like you know – I don't know. It would be a kind of a I don't know how to get me to the other side of the scale kind of ...

E: **I think that's what I'm trying to say is that being aware of these issues doesn't mean that you're not going to find the Cosmopolitan wanting to be thin or wanting to lose weight, and wanting to [indistinct] ... doesn't make you a bad person at all. It doesn't make me against anti [indistinct] gender, but I think what makes – what helps awareness. You're not buying [indistinct] ... where maybe the next person will buy that product and be totally unaware about what [indistinct] ...**

P: (B) [indistinct – microphone kept a distance away from participant] ... to buy that magazine and that so when I personally stopped buying Cosmo a couple of years ago because I just reach that point where it's like – especially when they had an issue on

how they can take anybody and do touch ups. You think to yourself but why am I looking at this picture if it's not real as such. What is the point? So, ja and I mean – so yes it is possible to sort of have the two because individuals or life and society is full of contradiction. So the only difference I suppose would be the awareness – you know.

F: [indistinct] ... like I was saying earlier in many ways like awareness for me it's almost like ammunition in a way. It's there and as long as you don't – like I said you're buying the magazine with more information as to what it's about and what it is you're buying, and what it could do to you and what is sort of the relationship.

P: (E) Awareness is a good thing, but awareness it needs coupled with – but awareness coupled with something else maybe ja. But awareness like I mean people with anorexia, they're aware that anorexia is a bad thing, but it still happens. In the news a couple of months ago, about the two Chinese women that died from using those diet pills, and they went around asking the people on the street in China like would you continue using this and they said yes – you know. So they're aware of it and that it's not a good thing, but it doesn't stop them from wanting the ideal. So it's like – it's better to be dead than you get what you want kind of thing. So awareness needs to be coupled with ... give me something – ja there's an ingredient missing you know kind of ...

F: There should be something more active about it than just like an awareness.

P: (C) I think mass awareness is more important because like I said all of us in this room is all fine and dandy, but like when we talk about parents making an impact on the children's lives all good and well, but how are we going to get it there. So if you – you need basically society change and mass awareness. I think that would be the

ingredient missing – ja. Like two little people, you need on a massive scale for everything to change.

F: But also just to say that social change has great concepts to have in mind, but it ain't going to happen if the individual is not going to get up and say you know an individual at a time is going to get up and say that's it. So almost in some ways people can also use that as a kind of an excuse.

P: (C) [indistinct] ... we are more sheep than shepherds [laughing and talking at the same time] ... we like a society of sheep. And there's so few shepherds. Nobody wants to kind of go against the grain. You're more willing to go just into the whole ... [laughing and talking].

P: (E) I'm just thinking about why don't we as women just – why don't we just – how can I say now – not accept society's rules or norms. Why don't we just as a person yourself, as a woman allow themselves, accept themselves, doing things for yourself the way you want it and believe in yourself – whatever. I don't know if it's possible. I know it's going to be hard, but is it possible.

P: (B)... but you must remember you're living in that society. So you're constantly affected by this. So I mean I personally – you can make small changes, but society sort of knocks you down. Like I can say “I'm not going to buy Cosmo” and then Cosmo decides to flight a programme on M-Net – sports illustrated and it shows you all these women in their bikinis and the lingerie edition in some exotic island [general talking and laughing] ... so you make these little changes, like I won't buy Cosmo anymore. And they just find some other medium to get to you, or not even that, you still have your parents or your loved ones commenting ...

F: So what you're saying that's it's a constant battle and that it doesn't come from one source. The source is almost like everywhere. It's just everywhere. It will get you in some way, whether it's the medium, the media, or it's your parents, or it's this, or it's that. So it's a constant battle.

P: (F) [indistinct] ... within yourself, get that positive good feeling about yourself, whatever. It depends on your external kind of environment. I mean you can't – once – you can internalise – and when somebody tells you all these good things, you internalise it. But if you're getting it from all over but negative things it's hard to kind of internalise good things – you know kind of thing. So, ja it's a constant battle with negative feedback from the outside world or – ja kind of thing.

P: (B) I think the main things that I feel that instances your body image is the need to be accepted and wanted, and desired. Because I mean you see so many different cultures. People do really dissolve things through their bodies because other people find it attractive. So even if women want to stand up and change society, men also have to be made aware of it because it's them whom we want to attract. And as long they want something from us, we're going to give it to them because that's the only way we can ...

F: I just want to ask you [indistinct]... but I'm going to leave it and go into a little bit of feedback. I'm hearing what everybody is saying how difficult it is to actually do it on an individual level because of the external, and because of all the battles that you have to fight around you all of the time, and people as well, you're saying parents, friends, boyfriends, males – and I'm just wondering if the change starts with you, if the self-accepting starts with you, is it not possible that maybe that's going to have a ripple effect? Not this naïve it all ends beautifully and you know everyone lives happily ever after, but possibly a ripple effect. So

maybe when you are weighing yourself when you Mom comes in and you say you've lost weight, and she says good, you could answer that. You could say [general talking] ... no, no I'm not talking about the aggressive route, I'm saying well doesn't matter, something small. You know, it doesn't really matter to me and maybe next time you don't have to say it to me. It will affect, because if the self-acceptance starts here, it's going to come out in small ways, but not in an aggressive way. Because it's like we said we're not radical feminists. So – I don't know that's an option to think about. It's not going to change the whole world or in your lifetime.

P: (F) I mean I'm just looking at myself personally. The whole self-acceptance thing – it's like I've always thought of like before I go into a relationship I would like to be kind of fulfilled within myself, before I could go into a relationship. Though what I notice is that I get things like guys saying oh they are intimidated by me, or the fact that I get comments so she must be a dyke – you know kind of thing, just because I'm not interested in them kind of thing. But the thing is I'm trying to find self-acceptance. So it is going to be hard for somebody going against the grain kind of thing because that's exactly what – ja, so ...

F: ... the ripple effect is few and far between you know, but it's not non-existent. That's what I'm saying. It's like – it's hard, but it's not non-existent because eventually the message does get across to my mother. Look here don't mention things about that's going to make me feel bad about my body. Accept me for who I am. And now she's got the message – she's got it and now she knows. So, but that took me a long time – a lot of biting comments back ...

[END OF RECORDING OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B]

F: I don't know if everyone feels okay about leaving it there. I mean I think most people that get into a topic that you don't have now a set answer to. Definitely a topic that you don't have a set answer to and I don't think that anyone actually can say well do this, do that, do that. It's just something that you need to fight with or strike with inside yourself personally – each one, and come to your own sort of answers for that. And then maybe just a little bit into feedback. Just to ask you what was it like actually doing these past three Focus Groups on this topic?

P: (E) It was enlightening because you know sometimes – you know you have certain feelings about body image, and you think about it not realising that other people might have the same feelings or contradictory feelings. So it's enlightening a way and sometimes it's also – it reaffirms some of the feelings that you have. It's a bit difficult because also sometimes you need to think about why you think about your body the way that you do. So you know sometimes you have to – it's difficult because you have to think well I love my parents, but they just not really doing anything for me about my image, or I love my friends but they're just not being supportive or whatever. So it's definitely very self-reflective – ja. It's also hard because you have to sort of admit that you're living in a society that's just so contradictory you know, and not very affirming to natural women's body types [laughing]

P: (C) Like I said before it felt very much like a support group and felt that you could vent certain feelings about things and was generally a very nice experience.

P: (B) [indistinct as microphone is held at a far distance] ... I think also the sessions were quite enlightening because from a personal point of view I think I was able to

like sit down and to see how far have I actually conformed to this whole body image issue. And just to think of other people who don't actually have the knowledge that we shared here like the awareness who are still like going for those Cosmos without the awareness of what it's actually doing to them. Ja, so it is a privilege for me in that now if I sit in front of the TV perhaps and then I see whatever it is on the television set, then at least I know I do have an awareness that ag they can go to hell with those images that they're showing.

P: (F) These past two weeks it was very nice to know that since I don't – I don't say I didn't like myself, but the way I appear or my body, it was nice to hear everybody else's opinion and just to be aware of that it's not that bad to look the way, or to – it's to look the way I am or for who I am it's not bad – a bad thing. So I enjoyed it in a way and since I don't like to talk about myself very much, I've been very quiet as you noticed, but it was a nice experience.

F: I think maybe another question I want to ask – Did you feel like, like talking about these kind of things felt like almost like surreal compared to the like – the other issues out there in the world like – do you understand what I mean?

P: (B) It didn't really feel – it felt true to a certain extent, but I mean you had an aim and your aim was a Focus Group – a body image, so it's like just something that I was interested in doing. So why not participate. It's not a subject that's talked about much, so if I could help in any way – why not. It would feel trivial to me talking about body image, but once you hear other people have the same experiences then it doesn't seem so trivial anymore. So it's very important – so.

F: You know I think it's on a day-to-day basis, it is almost – women almost feel trivial talking about these like things, like weight, and calories, and pounds, and what to eat, and what not to eat, and did you see this dress, it almost feels like

women stuff. But listening to everyone talking you're absolutely right. It almost feels powerful. It's like "shoo" my word. These aren't such trivial stuff. Even though I mean – I have researched and I'm looking at the theory behind it, just sitting here and listening to everyone talk makes it very powerful.

P: (A) I don't think – well as we started off – because I've been not – I just had weight issues, I didn't find it to be trivial to begin with. And I just took it this way that anything that can really have an impact on your health and it does and it can be detrimental actually, is quite serious. So – ja ...

F: [indistinct] and it's very much not trivial at all. I'd also like to ask how people feeling about their bodies now and I don't mean to ask the question in terms of oh is there a radical change. I'm expecting anything. Just how do people feel about it? I suppose not the body just the relationship with the body. The issue of it?

P: (B) I just – I mean it didn't bring about a radical change because I've always thought about why do I think the way I think about my body, and not only me. It must be other influences like society and your family, and your friends. So once you sort of – it's not a topic that you sit down with a group of friends or family and say now let's think about why we talk about this, why we put ourselves down. So I think that it sort of made me more enlightened and I never knew that other people would feel the same as me. Because people like I said when I walk down the street and I see a good-looking woman, or whatever, I think to myself "wow" how do they feel about that. How does that woman feel about looking good? How does that woman feel about being obese, and relating it to myself? So I think like – ja, now sort of knowing that some people might – or they look different to you have the same feelings. It's sort of mind boggling because there's certain assumptions that you make of certain

people because of the way they look. And just to think that some people would actually feel the same way as you it's mind boggling you know. You think why does that happen. So in terms of for myself, I mean there's – I view about it the same as I did before. Just now that I'm just more aware of how other people also feel. So there's really a change.

F: Anybody else? Just to ask how was it like having me as a Facilitator?

P: (C) I felt extremely comfortable. I mean usually you sit and you know like flinch at "oh you're next" whatever. But it just felt comfortable in sharing you know and you being the Facilitator. It was quite – it was also fun in a way. You know not like oh so what is your opinion like. We could open up to you when you wanted to, or when we wanted to and it was just very easy. So you were a very good Facilitator.

P: (H) I could also say that I felt quite relaxed being in the group and for me personally it was like going back into your Mom's classroom in primary, even though she would yell and shout, but which was then the different part from being in her classroom. But on the whole it was really nice being part of the group.

F: Anybody else? Is there anything that [indistinct] that I should differently. [Indistinct].

P: (F) You were a good Facilitator. You made everybody feel – at least me comfortable in fact. Maybe if you have another Focus Group though, maybe not so early in the morning because that could affect people's like – you know how receptive they are into giving comments because they're like half – they've partied the night before, they're just not morning people you know – so that's the only thing I can think of.

[END OF RECORDING OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B]