What I was Told:
Investigating how verbatim- and physical theatre can be combined to portray ethnographic research of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University

by
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Abstract

Verbatim-physical theatre presents the possibility for women's stories, not only to be told, but to be heard, interacted and engaged with. This study investigates how verbatim- and physical theatre can be used in conjunction with one another to portray ethnographic research of gender performativity conducted under female students at Stellenbosch University. The ethnographic case study is aimed at identifying what female students' at Stellenbosch University perception of femininity is and examines what it means for them, to be a woman. The study subsequently explores verbatim-physical theatre's potential to portray this ethnographic research in a manner that is politically conscious, educational and accessible through embodied, liminal performance. The study explores notions of reclaiming agency through the telling of women's personal stories, that would otherwise not be heard and legitimizing previously silenced narratives, as well as actively taking up space and moving past the boundaries and limits placed on women's bodies. Through this, the study examines verbatim-physical theatre's potential to function as feminist protest theatre, suggesting that it can become a powerful agent of social change. The argument is made that verbatim-physical theatre, not only offers a means of presenting ethnographic research in an accessible and relatable way, but also protests for social change by engaging with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful manner. This study concludes with the creation and discussion of a new verbatim-physical theatre production, *What I was Told*, that functions as feminist protest theatre and is aimed at giving a truthful and authentic account of those stories told by research participants.

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Opsomming

Verbatim-fisiese teater bied die moontlikheid vir die stories van vroue, nie net te om vertel te word nie, maar om gehoor te word. Hierdie studie ondersoek hoe fisiese teater en verbatim teater saam gebruik kan word om etnografiese navorsing rakende *gender performativity* onder vrouestudente aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch uit te beeld. Die etnografiese gevallestudie is daarop gemik om vas te stel wat vroulike studente aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch se persepsie van vroulikheid is. Die studie ondersoek verbatim-fisiese teater se potensiaal om hierdie etnografiese navorsing op 'n polities bewuste, opvoedkundige en toeganklike manier uit te beeld. In hierdie tesis word die moontlikheid van verbatim-fisiese teater as feministiese protesteater aangebied en die argument gemaak dat dit as 'n kragtige agent van sosiale verandering kan optree. Hierdeur ondersoek die studie verbatim-fisiese teater se potensiaal om, nie net etnografiese navorsing op 'n toeganklike en relevante manier uit te beeld nie, maar om die begin punt van sosiale verandering te wees deur op 'n aktiewe en betekenisvolle manier met mense se geleefde ervarings mee te gaan. Hierdie studie sluit af met die skepping en bespreking van 'n nuwe verbatim-fisiese teaterproduksie, *What I was Told*, wat as feministiese protesteater funksioneer en daarop gemik is om 'n eerlike en outentieke vertelling van navorsingsdeelnemers se verhale te gee.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity."

– Amelia Earhart

1.1 Introduction, Background and Rationale

Woman. Female. Feminine. On paper, these are plain words, yet in reality, they are complex constructions of identity, society and culture. These words do not refer to the mere sex of a person, but rather the socially constructed and culturally inscribed behaviour that certain individuals are expected to adhere to. Andrea Dworkin, acclaimed feminist writer, states in her book, *Woman Hating (1974)*, that "culture predetermines who we are, how we behave, what we are willing to know, what we are able to feel" (34). In turn, these social and cultural constructs determine how we view gender and how we expect someone of a specific gender to behave. The phenomenon of how our perception of gender influences our behaviour, is termed by Judith Butler as gender performativity. Butler explains in her article, *Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory (1988)* gender is a social construct in the sense that it is not a stable identity, but rather is instituted through a "stylized repetition of acts" and that "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988:519). She continues to state that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler, 1988:520). As such, gender is not a pre-existing determiner of behaviour. One does not behave a certain way because of one's gender, but rather that certain kinds of behaviour become gendered through social and cultural constructs.

To be a woman means to comply with the social constructs that a particular society deems 'female'. To be a woman is, according to Butler, to have "become a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility" (1988:522). By forcing the body into this arduously confined construct, women consciously decide how to portray themselves to the world – what aspects of themselves fit into the box and what aspects to hide in order to 'become a woman'. Through ethnographic research and creating a verbatim-physical theatre production out of this research, I aim to investigate the underlying power

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dynamics that regulate these societal norms, and so, give rise to the manner in which gender performativity is used by female students at Stellenbosch University.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Gender Performativity theory

In her seminal work, *Gender Trouble (1990),* Judith Butler sets out to describe her theory of gender performativity. This theory aims to explain how the notion of gender is a self-producing mechanism simultaneously instigated by culture and social norms, while also reproducing, and so, solidifying these norms. She goes on to state that gender is made up of a series of culturally inscribed acts that has come to represent gender. An individual performs these acts in order to conform to their gender, and so, one *is not* of a certain gender, but rather, one *does* gender. Performativity denotes to the act of performing these gendered acts in order to conform to one's culture and/or society's expectation of gender.

The pre-existing concept of gender as a binary system is what regulates current gender norms and expectations. As stated, the act of conforming to this system not only consolidates these binary gender norms, but also further reproduces them. Butler explains that gender is a "self-reproducing mechanism" that "produces and consolidates gender" while at the same time also "presupposes an operative notion of gender", meaning that "gender is what causes gender" (Butler, 2002:xii). If you act in a certain gendered way, you conform to that gender norm. By conforming to a gender norm, you also consolidate that norm. This means that you reproduce the expectation for other people of the same gender to act in the same way, and the process repeats. In other words, performing gender means to conform to social expectations of gender and through that, gain social subjectivity.

Diane Elam writes in her work, *Feminism And Deconstruction (2001),* that objectification of a person means the loss of agency. As such, the fight for equality is the fight for subjectivity which would seem to offer agency. However, drawing on Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Elam also points out that the achievement of subjectivity is not necessarily liberatory. That in fact, the "constraint of subjectivity, even when subjectivity seems to offer agency, is clear when we realize that women become subjects only when they conform to specified and calculable representations of themselves as subjects" (Elam, 2001:29). These representations of women as subjects can be seen as the act of performing one's gender, since being a woman means to

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conform to one's pre-determined gender norms. Elam goes on to state that the "the authority of representation constrains us", it imposes itself on our thoughts through "a whole dense, enigmatic, and heavily stratified history", it "programs us and precedes us" (Elam, 2001:30). If our identity is rooted in our subjectivity, and our subjectivity is dependent on how well we perform our gender, are we not at the same time subject as well as object? Elam, much like Butler, states that "what women have been", will in turn, "be retroactively altered by that which they have yet to be", meaning that the "subject/object relationship is perpetually destabilized in the wake of an increasing number of possible (re)presentations" (Elam, 2001:30).

These re(presentations) can also be called what Butler terms, "interior essence". Butler states that constructs of gender conceal themselves as "interior essence" – "an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates" (Butler, 2002:xiv- xv). This means there is an expectation placed on an individual to act in a certain gendered way and when they conform to it, instead of seeing it for the construction that it is, it becomes an emanation of "interior essence". This interior essence is created even before birth. It starts to accumulate the moment a foetus is gendered, when parents ascribe the gendered pronouns, he or she, to an organism not even fully developed. From that moment, there is an expectation placed on the individual to adhere to certain gendered norms, which they can then, throughout their life, either conform to or rebel against. The notion of performativity revolves around this "anticipation of a gendered essence" and that produces the very thing that it conjectures as "outside itself" (Butler, 2002:xiv).

In order for an individual to stay within the bounds of their ascribed gender, they have to continually act out the gendered expectation placed upon them. *Doing* gender thus becomes a continuous repetition of gendered acts. This repetition of continuously conforming to gendered behaviour then becomes gender performativity. Performativity is therefore not a singular act, but a "repetition and a ritual" that "achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (Butler, 2002:xv). Gender performativity theory thus describes how an "internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 2002:xv). In an earlier article, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory (1988)*, Butler set out to describe a phenomenological theory of acts based on the work of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and George Herbert Mead, among others, who seek "to explain the mundane way in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of

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symbolic social sign" (Butler, 1988:519). Here Butler also points out that gender is not a stable identity that forms the basis for acts, but rather that gender is "instituted through the stylization of the body", and so, must be understood as the "mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988:519). Gender identity is then the "stylized repetition of acts through time" and not a preceding identity (Butler, 1988:520).

Butler further describes gender performativity in her article, *Performativity, Precarity And Sexual Politics (2009),* as not merely confined to the repetition of gendered acts, but also the reproduction of norms. Butler states that gendered norms are constructed through the power dynamics of a society. This happens, amongst other things, in relation to who holds power, who will be criminalized based on their appearance, who will be stigmatized, discriminated against and who will be protected by the law. Butler continues to claim that norms are not only "instances of power" nor do they only "reflect broader relations of power", but rather they are "one way that power operates" (Butler, 2009:ii-iii). In order for those with power to stay in power, power needs to be reproduced. This reproduction of power can be seen as the "reproduction of the social world", or more specifically, the "reproduction of those norms that govern the intelligibility of the body in space and time" (Butler, 2009:x). Butler concludes that "norms act on us, work upon us, and this kind of 'being worked on' makes its way into our own action" (Butler, 2009:xi). Gender performativity theory is thus the manner in which social norms lead us to repeatedly act out our gender to attain public approval and a sense of self.

Nancy Chodorow suggests in her article, *Gender as a Personal and Cultural Construction (1995),* that it is not only the social expectations of gender that form each person's sense of gender, gender identity or gender subjectivity, but rather a complex combination of cultural as well as personally created meaning (Chodorow, 1995:517). Chodorow claims that a person's perception of gender is psychologically created by the individual. Drawing on psychoanalysis, she states that people "use available cultural meanings and images, but they experience them emotionally" and thus differently. This means that different individuals in the same socio-cultural contexts will have different perceptions of gender, as they "create new meanings in terms of their own unique biographies and histories of intrapsychic strategies and practices" (Chodorow, 1995:517). However, even though each individual creates their own perception of gender, giving rise to "many individual masculinities and femininities", the basis of this perception is still rooted in the social and cultural norms imposed on these individuals (Chodorow, 1995:521). Chodorow's claim of an individual perception of gender does not go

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against Butler's theory of gender performativity, but rather adds density to it, giving another layer of understanding to *doing gender*.

I therefore understand gender performativity theory in the following terms: every individual has their own perception of gender, formulated through their specific cultural and social norms as well as the power dynamics that regulate their society. This includes their upbringing, family power dynamics, culture, religion and own sense of self, amongst other determiners. Gender performativity is the phenomenon of how an individual's perception of gender influences their behaviour. They can either conform to or reject the expectation placed upon them to act out their perceived gender. This gives rise to stylized repetition of acts that then forms their own gendered behaviour.

1.2.2 The Role of Verbatim-Physical Theatre

Verbatim theatre, documentary theatre or ethnodrama is the dramatic representation of ethnographic research. It is the portrayal of real people's stories on stage. Tara Goldstein, professor and critical ethnographer writes in her article, *Performed Ethnography and Research Informed Theatre: A Reflective Assessment (2012)*, that while ethnography describes "a culture or a way of life from the point of view of those who are living it", critical ethnography exposes "the ways power reproduces itself in everyday life" (89). It is the power dynamics of a society that dictates its norms, and so, influences how an individual woman portrays herself. Liliane Loots, artistic director of Flatfoot Dance Company in South Africa, writes that "no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning" and that there is a "direct and inextricable link between the personal and the cultural" (2016:381). Loots goes on to say that since verbatim theatre is constructed out of "lived stories", it "carries the mark of being 'real' and 'authentic'" (2016:382). It is for this reason that verbatim theatre is a suitable form to engage with societal and cultural norms that dictate women's behaviour and portray this on stage.

The pitfall of verbatim theatre, however, comes in the potential of a singularly authored text. Even if a text is compiled through numerous interviews of different women, it runs the risk of morphing into a single author's vision being portrayed on stage. Critics of verbatim theatre often accuse it of presuming to speak for others. Stuart Young, professor in Theatre Studies states that, "unless the subject plays himself, the theatre-maker necessarily presumes to speak

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for others" (2017:23). The creation method of physical theatre offers a means to overcome this. Physical theatre as a performance form places great emphasis on collaborative practice and makes use of a process similar to devised theatre, or in a South African context – workshop theatre. Mark Fleishman, artistic director of Magnet Theatre and professor of Drama, writes that in workshop theatre, "improvisation shifts the performers from being creative interpreters to being creative authors" and frees them from an "external authorial voice" (1991:92).

Furthermore, physical theatre, through its primary use of physicalised images and movement, creates an ambivalence to the meaning conveyed. It is left to the audience to interpret and construct meaning for themselves, and so, the audience, performers and theatre-maker(s) all contribute to the construction of meaning within the performance. Jess McCormack, dance researcher and writer states in her book, *Choreography And Verbatim Theatre (2018)*, that physical theatre's focus on "the body and movement as a mode of communication" can provide verbatim theatre makers with a means to layer information, provoke empathy and engage with an audience (McCormack, 2018:v). She continues to add that physical theatre rejects the idea of a "single truth" and "opens up new possibilities for creative treatment of the material" without compromising a truthful representation of the source (ibid. 29). This means that, through the incorporation of physical theatre, the production gains a truthfulness that could not be attained by a singular authorial voice. It is no longer one writer, director or theatre-makers voice talking on behalf of others, but rather a collaboratively devised production that offers multiple perspectives.

Physical theatre also offers a means to actively engage with the power dynamics that regulate societal norms. All bodies are culturally inscribed. This echoes the second-wave feminist mantra, 'the personal is political', and so, the body in performance and the body as performance becomes political. Marié-Heleen Coetzee, professor of Drama, and Marth Munro, professor of movement and acting, writes in their article, *Embodied knowledges: Physical theatre and the physicality of theatre (2010)*, that physical theatre "acts as site/sight upon which constructions of hegemony are cited, played out, subverted, questioned, inscribed, erased and reflected upon" (11). Physical theatre and workshop theatre have this in common, as Fleishman (1991) writes that "workshop theatre is a site of power struggle between a range of interest groups" (7). Coetzee and Munro (2010) also state that physical theatre is framed to "reveal complex value systems and cultural constructs" that can support or subvert "significations of cultural dominance" (11). Fleishman (1991) also adds that physical theatre has the potential to depict images of "transformation, of change and renewal" as it uses the material body in "grotesque

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forms to represent, subvert and parody aspects of the society and the world" (14&16). Therefore, physical theatre, and especially the workshop process of physical theatre provides verbatim theatre with an essential way of depicting the power struggles within society on stage.

We experience the world through our bodies. The body holds knowledge of our lived experiences and thus, working through the body can convey lived experience. Verbatim theatre is a telling of lived experience and that is why the two work so well in unison. Physical theatre, as an embodied art form, works to convey embodied meanings, experiences and memories. Working through the body is to work truthfully. The body brings to life the truth being told through verbatim theatre. Furthermore, verbatim theatre offers the means of collecting and displaying real stories, stories that need to be heard by a community. Physical theatre offers a way of critically engaging with and visually depicting those stories. The combination of verbatim- and physical theatre offers the potential to actively engage with the power dynamics that regulate societal and cultural norms and effectively engage with them in performance. It is for this reason that I will be using verbatim theatre and physical theatre in coalition with one another to engage with the issues of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University.

1.3 Research Question:

How can verbatim- and physical theatre be combined to portray ethnographic research of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University?

1.4 Problem statement, Focus and Aim

An individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through their specific social and cultural norms and the power dynamics in their society. This gives rise to what Judith Butler terms gender performativity. Gender performativity denotes to how an individual's perception of gender influences their behaviour. I aim to investigate the underlying power dynamics that regulate societal norms and dictate individual women's behaviour in female students at Stellenbosch University. Stellenbosch University offers a diverse female student population from various cultural and religious backgrounds. University life also provides a second society, one additional to that of home life, that further influences how women perceive their gender role. I aim to critically engage with these diversities to determine how these

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differences influence the perceived gender roles of female students through ethnographic research. I will also investigate the influence that the two societies (home life and University life) have on one another and their role in determining how a female student eventually portrays herself. I will artistically portray my findings in a verbatim-physical theatre production that will result in a public performance as well as a source text that can then be analysed for its engagement with these specific social and cultural issues. Through this, I will investigate how the combination of verbatim theatre and physical theatre is a suitable theatrical form to tell the stories of these women.

1.5 Research Objectives:

1. To identify how, at Stellenbosch University, female students' specific social and cultural norms influence and construct their perception of gender and gender roles in 2021.
2. To investigate, at Stellenbosch University, how female students' perception of gender influences their behaviour.
3. To explore how verbatim- and physical theatre can be effectively combined for theatre-making (as a process) and performance.
4. To determine how the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre lends itself to feminist theatre practices, and so, enables it to effectively portray ethnographic research of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology:

I will be using a feminist research paradigm. The basis of my research is located in the assumption that the social system of the society that I am conducting my research in, is a patriarchal one. Furthermore, that gender performativity is a direct result of this patriarchal system, since it is within this specific system that gender as a binary construct is created and enforced. Thus, my research will be conducted and analysed through the lens of feminism. My study will be divided into three components. Each component will have its own method to complete the specific aims of that component. Please see the diagram below:

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Research Methodology:

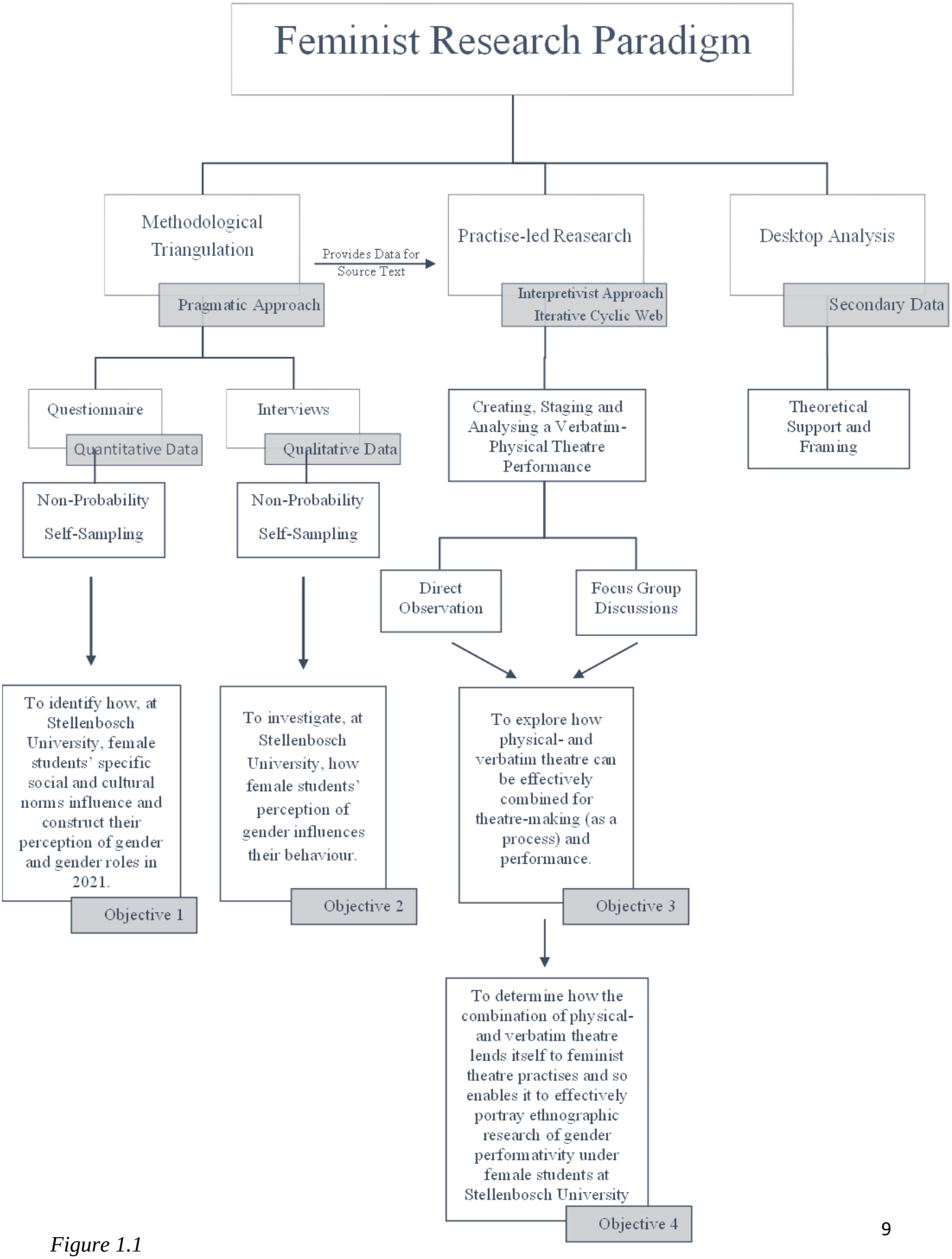

Figure 1.1

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1.6.1 Ethnographic Case Study

Firstly, I will use Methodological Triangulation or 'mixed methods', by combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to complete an ethnographic case study of gender performativity amongst female students at Stellenbosch University.

Data Collection

I will use two data collections methods to obtain primary data:

1. An online questionnaire will be sent out through email. The email will contain a brief description of the study and a request for any female student who is willing to take part in the study to fill out the online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be accessible through a link provided in the email. The questionnaire consists of short questions aimed at eliciting both quantitative as well as qualitative data, as shown in Addendum A. This is done to achieve objective one, namely to identify how female students at Stellenbosch University's specific social and cultural norms influence and construct their perception of gender and gender roles at Stellenbosch University in 2021.
2. Follow-up interviews will be done with research participants who indicate that they are willing to do so. Interviews will be semi-structured as shown in Addendum B. Interviews (of which the sound will be recorded) will be conducted online to adhere to Covid-19 safety protocols. This is done to achieve objective two, namely to investigate how, at Stellenbosch University, female students' perception of gender influences their behaviour.

The combination of these qualitative and quantitative methods is done in order to minimise the limitations of each separate method. Questionnaires can easily be sent out to a large sample group and are easy to complete, whereas interviews take much longer and run the risk of a low response rate. Questionnaires, however, do not offer the means for a more in-depth ethnographic study as would be possible with interviews. Combing the two methods provides the study with optimal data collection.

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Sampling

Sampling will be done through non-probability, self-sampling to minimise bias from the researcher. This will be done by emailing the questionnaire, through the University, to students who can then, out of their own volition, choose to answer it or not. In the questionnaire, participants can then indicate whether or not they would be willing to conduct an interview as well. Interviews will also be conducted by the cast of the verbatim- physical production through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling works on a referral system, meaning that we know people who are like us and they, in turn, know people like them. This is done as a contingency plan in case there is too low a response rate with the self-sampling.

Sample Size

The sample size for the questionnaires will be 500, and between 20-30 interviews will be conducted (collectively). These figures were chosen to maximize the scope of the study while staying within a realistic time frame of approximately one month. The data collected through the ethnographic study will then be used as source material for research-led practice in developing a verbatim- physical theatre production.

1.6.2 Research-Led Practice

The data collected by the above-stated method will then be used in the second component of this study to conduct qualitative research-led practice, based on Smith and Dean's Iterative Cyclic Web as model (2009:19). This model, developed for research in the creative arts, combines a "cycle and several sub-cycles" with a "web" that is created "by many points of entry and transition within the cycle" (19). This method stresses the use of iteration, which means to repeat a process several times, "which is fundamental to both creative and research processes" before setting up a "cycle: start-end-start" (19). This model allows the various research methods used within this study and the artistic practice to continually influence one another, creating fluidity within the structure as depicted by figure 1.2.

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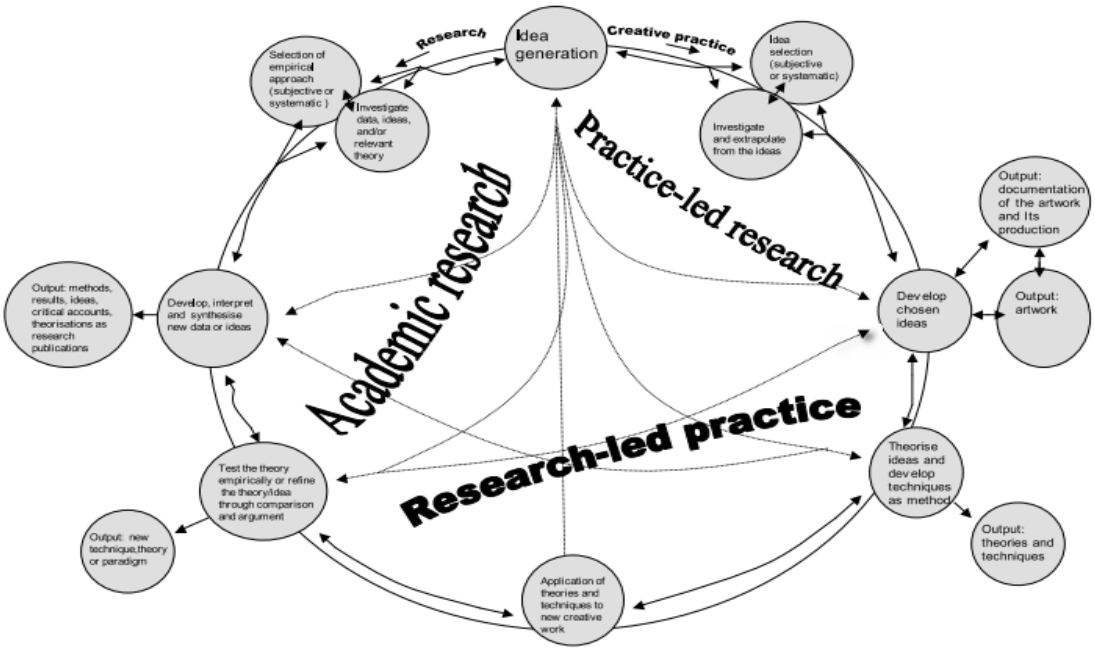

Figure 1.2

The data collected from the ethnographic research, as stated above, will be used to create a source text, through creative practice, that engages with the societal and cultural norms that influence constructs of gender and gender performativity amongst female students at Stellenbosch University. After the source text is generated, a creation process of a verbatim-physical theatre production will follow. This process will not only test theories and methods found in the initial desktop analysis (which will shortly follow), but also adjust and develop new theories and methods regarding verbatim- physical- and workshop theatre's means to critically and accurately portray the societal and cultural norms that dictate these women's behaviour. This will form the majority of my research and the main focus of the study. This process will achieve objectives three and four, namely to explore how verbatim- and physical theatre can be combined effectively for theatre-making (as a process) and performance; as well as to determine how the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre lends itself to feminist theatre practices, and so, enables it to effectively portray ethnographic research of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University.

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Data Collection

The data collection method for this component will comprise of direct observation as well as focus group discussions. The direct observation will be done through participant observation, as I am both researcher and director of the production. Focus group discussions will be conducted with the cast of the production. Following a feminist research paradigm, the creative practice also draws greatly on feminist theatre practices which stress collaborative creation and a non-hierarchal structure amongst the creators. As the creative process is collaborative in nature, the cast becomes co-creators rather than mere performers. They contribute valuable insights to the study that can be documented through focus group discussions.

1.6.3 Desktop Analysis

The third component of this study will be a desktop analysis of secondary data from key practitioners and theorists of gender performativity, physical theatre and verbatim theatre. This is done in order to provide theoretical support and background to the above-mentioned components. Each section of the study (ethnographic and research-led practice) will have a preceding desktop analysis to provide validity and insight into its specific practices and its various research methods and arguments. To summarise, I will be doing a feminist ethnographic and research-led practice study through methodological triangulation that is supported by a desktop analysis.

1.6.4 Process for obtaining informed consent

In regards to the ethnographic case study, as mentioned above, two data collection methods will be used. Firstly, an email will be sent out to female students at Stellenbosch University with a request to complete an online questionnaire. In this email, it will be very clearly stated that participation in the study is completely voluntary, that participation will remain anonymous and that participants may stop/withdraw from answering the questions at any time without consequences of any kind. It will also be stated that if there is a question that participants do not wish to answer, they may continue without answering and all answers will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. Once participants open the link to the online questionnaire, the first page will contain a tick box, asking participants to tick it if they understand all the terms and conditions of the study and consent to participate.

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At the end of the questionnaire, the final question will be whether the participant is willing to conduct an interview. It will once again be stated that this is completely voluntary and the data gathered in the interview will remain anonymous. Should the participant indicate that they are willing to conduct an interview, a request for an email address (in order to set up the interview) will be requested. This is the only time identifying information will be asked and it will once again be stated that giving this information is completely voluntary and will not be used for any other purpose besides setting up an interview.

The next data collection method for the ethnographic study will be the interviews. Before an interview commences, the participant will be asked to sign a consent form. A template of this consent form is shown in Addendum C. The information on the consent form will also be verbally communicated to the interviewee. This will be administered by the interviewer, who will either be the researcher or a member of the cast of the verbatim-physical theatre production. On the consent form, it will be clearly stated that the information gathered will be used as part of an ethnographic case study as well as source material for the creation of a verbatim- physical theatre production. It will also be stated that the interview will be recorded. The concepts of a verbatim- physical theatre production will also be explained to the interviewee so that they clearly understand exactly how the information given by them will be used. It will be stressed that they can decide at any point in time to stop the interview or skip questions they do not want to answer and they are under no obligation to divulge any information they are not comfortable sharing. Their identity will also remain anonymous throughout the process and their names will not be used in the theatre production. During both data collection methods it will also be stated that the results of the questionnaire, as well as the interviews, will be used in a public theatre performance, and so, be made available to the public (including research participants).

At the end of the interview, an information sheet will be given to participants with the following information:

- Contact details for the primary investigator should they later have any queries or uncertainty regarding their role in the study.
- Contact details of support services on campus should they wish to make use of them.
- Dated of the production and booking details, should they wish to attend.

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The last two data collection methods will be direct observation of the creation and performance of the verbatim- physical theatre production as well as focus group discussions with the cast of the production. This will be done more informally, as to not interfere with the creative process. However, it would be made clear to the cast from the start that the process and discussions form part of a research study and verbal consent will be obtained. It will also be made clear that the director of the production is also the researcher of the study. The information gathered during this phase will also be more process-driven and low-risk, as it is not inherently personal or private.

1.6.5 Assumptions and Scope of the study:

The basis of this study is made on the assumption that the society within which the research will take place is a patriarchal one and that gender performativity is a direct result of this patriarchal system, since it is within this specific system that gender as a binary construct is created and enforced. It is for this reason that the study will be conducted under a feminist research paradigm.

Scope/limitations:

Due to resource constraints, this study cannot take place over a long period of time or in various places. For the same reason, only one verbatim-physical theatre production can be created from the source material collected through the ethnographic case study. Therefore, data collection will only take place once, at Stellenbosch University. Limiting data collection to students at Stellenbosch University, increases the availability of participants, since the study is conducted through the University. To gain a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of gender performativity, without risking the research being unfocused, the study will also be limited only to persons who identify as female. Even though gender performativity also presents itself amongst other genders, including them in this study will broaden the scope too much to successfully conduct the research with the resources available. The study will run the risk of being unfocused and not in-dept enough to complete its objectives. Thus, for the study to have the greatest possibility of being completed successfully, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria will be used:

Inclusion Criteria:

Students who identify as female at Stellenbosch University.

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Exclusion Criteria:

Any person who is not a student at Stellenbosch University.

Any person who does not identify as female.

1.6.6 Ethical Considerations

This study is a medium risk study. According to Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee for Social, Behavioural and Education Research's guidelines, this study can be classified as a medium risk due to two factors, namely:

1. The "information collected (e.g. personal or sensitive information that a person would reasonably expect to remain private and confidential), in combination with the collection of personal identifiers may put the participant at risk of identification if such confidential data is breached (name, student number, address etc.)".
2. Participants may be "exposed to questions which may be experienced as stressful or upsetting, or to procedures and activities which may evoke unpleasant or harmful responses or reactions".

(Stellenbosch University, 2021)

Guidelines point out four risk factors that need to be considered during the data collection stage of the study, namely: emotional and phycological risk, social/economic risk, legal risks and loss of privacy and/or confidentiality. In this study, only two of these risks are applicable and can be accounted for as follows:

1. Emotional and psychological risks:

   There is the risk that participants may experience psychological or emotional harm during participation in the research and/or afterwards as a result of participating in the research. Psychological risks include anxiety, stress, fear, confusion, embarrassment, depression, guilt, shock, loss of self-esteem, and/or altered behaviour. Emotional risks may include strong or negative reactions or expressions such as discomfort, altered mood, irritability or frustration.

   (Stellenbosch University, 2021)

This risk could possibly present itself during the interviews. The interview questions that will be asked are relatively low risk, since they do not explicitly dive into traumatic or harmful

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memories. However, I use the word relative, since no one can predict how an individual will answer a question. A question that, at face value, seem straightforward might elicit an emotional response from a participant. Even though interview questions run the risk of bringing back emotional memories, the interview process will be non-invasive and never push participants for answers. Only stories that can be termed "ready to be shared", will be asked. However, as a precaution, contact details of University support services will be given to participants at the end of the interview.

2. Loss of privacy and/or confidentiality:

   Confidentiality is presumed and must be maintained unless the investigator obtains the express permission of the subject to do otherwise. Risks from breach of confidentiality include invasion of privacy, as well as the social, economic and legal risks outlined above. Loss of confidentiality is the most common type of risk encountered in social and behavioural science research.

   (Stellenbosch University, 2021)

This risk of loss of privacy and/or confidentiality can present itself because interview material will be used to create a public performance. However, great care will be taken to ensure that all research participants will be kept anonymous and no names will be mentioned either in the thesis or production.

3. Legal risks should not present themselves as the interview questions do not lend towards the type of confessions or revelations which "reveal that the subject has or will engage in conduct for which the subject or others may be criminally liable"

   (Stellenbosch University, 2021).

4. Social and economic risks, that include "alterations in relationships with others that are to the disadvantage of the subject, and may involve embarrassment, loss of respect of others, labelling with negative consequences or diminishing the subject's opportunities and status in relation to others" will be countered by the strict confidentiality and anonymity of the research process.

   (Stellenbosch University, 2021).

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This study is therefore a medium risk study, since it is not completely risk-free, but the risk that due present themselves are not severe. These risks can either be countered by moral and ethical consideration from the researcher and interviewers – by making confidentiality and anonymity a top priority, as well as preparation for emotional support for participants should they require it.

1.7 Provisional Chapter Layout:

1.7.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.7.2 Chapter 2: Gender performativity and the Ethnographic case study

In this chapter, I will conduct a desktop analysis of gender performativity theory as set out by Judith Butler. This will be done through reviewing her seminal work, *Gender Trouble (2002)* and well as a later, yet equally influential work, *Bodies That Matter (2011).* I will then review how this theory is still applicable in today's context, and what parts of it need to be adapted to still be relevant. Furthermore, I will also review its applicability in a South African context, also providing alternatives formed based on Butler's theory.

Following the desktop analysis, I will conduct an ethnographic case study to investigate how social and cultural constructs of gender manifest and influence the perceived gender roles/behaviour of female students at Stellenbosch University. An analysis of this data through the lens of gender performativity, as clearly laid out earlier in this chapter, will then follow.

1.7.3 Chapter 3: The role of performance and theatre

This chapter will provide an introduction to the role of theatre in society as well as an overview of feminist theatre practices. This will provide the basis for portraying the previously gathered ethnographic research in performance as a way to actively engage with societal issues.

The chapter will analyse verbatim theatre, giving an overview of what this theatre form is and why it will be used in this study, with specific reference to its engagement with social issues. Following the overview of verbatim theatre, the same will be done with physical theatre. Specific focus will be given to its ties to workshop theatre, African

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Orality and how that not only links to verbatim theatre, but how it also critically engages with societal issues.

Furthermore, a conclusion will be drawn as to how the two theatre forms tie together and why the combination makes for a poignant theatre form. Attention will also be given to how this is especially true for a South African audience and its suitability for engaging with the issues of a South African society.

1.7.4 Chapter 4: The production

This chapter will be comprised of a reflection on the creation and staging of the verbatim-physical theatre production and its source text. Specific focus will be given to the feminist theatre practices, as well as the different workshop methods, used in creating the production. It will also discuss the success and limitations of the production. The chapter will conclude by analysing the source text that was created through this process.

1.7.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion.

This chapter will give a brief overview of the research study, including the aims and outcomes of both the ethnographic case study and the research-led practice study. This chapter will also provide a final reflection on the production, What I was Told. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the limitations of this research study, as well as areas for possible further research.

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CHAPTER 2: ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF GENDER PERFORMATIVITY UNDER FEMALE STUDENTS AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

> *The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar…when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.*
>
> *– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009)*

In this research study, I aim to investigate how to combine verbatim theatre and physical theatre to portray ethnographic research of gender performativity under female students at Stellenbosch University. The premise for this study evolved out of a series of questions. What does it mean for me to be a woman? How do I express myself and how do I want to express myself? But even more importantly: what is it that I want to say through the theatre I make? I found that I had no ready answer to these questions. I felt like I had nothing to say and nothing to stand for. I found myself asking, if I had nothing to say, how can I make theatre? It was in this standoff with my mind that I came to a realisation. What if I did not have something to say, but something to ask? What if these questions that I find so prevalent in my own life, are also questions that other women are grappling with? It was from this premise that I decided to ask questions and, by extension, make theatre that asks questions. For this reason then, I will first conduct an ethnographic case study, asking female students at Stellenbosch University questions pertaining to gender performativity and then use the data to create a verbatim-physical theatre performance.

To theoretically frame these questions, in this chapter, I will conduct a desktop analysis of gender performativity theory as set out by Judith Butler to provide theoretical background from which to conduct the ethnographic case study. This will be followed by an analysis of the data collected from the ethnographic case study to investigate what female students at Stellenbosch University's perception of femininity are and to examine what it means to them, to be a woman.

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2.1 Analysing Gender Performativity Theory

Gender performativity theory, as set out by Judith Butler, aims to explain how the concept of gender is a social construct. According to Butler, gender is constructed out of a series of culturally inscribed acts, repeated over time, that has come to represent the concept of gender. Butler argues that gender becomes a doing, a verb, that gives rise to performativity. Performativity, as Butler explains, denotes to the repeated act of performing one's gender according to the social and cultural norms of one's society, to present oneself in a recognisable gendered way. Through this, gender becomes a qualifier for social subjectivity.

Social subjectivity, in this sense, denotes to a person who is subjected to the rules and regulations (norms) of a society and, through abiding by these rules and regulations, become recognisable as a social subject. Butler (2002), describes the recognition of a social subject in terms of representation, stating that "the qualifications for being a subject must first be met before representation [recognition] can be extended" (4). Gender can then be seen as a series of culturally inscribed acts that an individual performs to present themselves in a recognisable gendered way and as such, become recognisable as a social subject.

However, gender does not function in isolation to construct social subjectivity. To understand how gender performativity theory functions within socio-cultural contexts, it is important to first understand the different constructions of meaning that is placed on the human body in order to become recognised as a social body. In this section, I will first examine how the social body is constructed through a matrix of different meanings, namely sex, gender and social norms. Through this, I aim to present a foundational understanding of gender as a cultural construct, from which gender performativity theory can be framed within the context of emerging fifth-wave feminism.

2.1.1 The Sex-Gender Construction

The human body, when placed within a socio-cultural context, is added various layers of meaning to construct the social body. As such, the way we think about the body can be divided into three layers: the material body, the sexed body and the gendered body. The first layer, the material body, is a physical structure with material form (Butler, 2011:xi). The material body does not have meaning in itself – it simply is. To understand and make sense of this material body, within a socio-cultural context, we ascribe meaning to it. This is primarily done through

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language. We give the body a name, based on biological anatomy, and classify it as either female or male. As such, the material body becomes the sexed body through ascribing materiality to it.

The second layer of the body, the sexed body, is then characterised by materiality (Butler, 2011:xi). The materiality of the body can be seen as the linguistic determiner of biological anatomy and qualifies the body as a social body. Thus, we can say that sex is an "analytic attribute of the human", that sex qualifies the body as human and that there is no human "who is not sexed" (Butler, 2002:142). Butler (2011) further states that sex is not simply "what one has, or a static description of what one is", but rather, it is that by which one "becomes viable", that which "qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (xii). Sex then, not only qualifies a body as human, but as a social subject and as such, becomes one of the ways individuals are regulated within a socio-cultural context.

If the construction of sex creates the social body, sex can be seen as "a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls" and while the "fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material" the materiality of the body must be rethought as "the effect of power" (ibid.). It is then the effect of power that regulates the construct of sex. French philosopher, Michel Foucault describes power in the following terms:

> in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association.
>
> (Foucault, 1980:93)

The construct of sex is thus "real" to the extent that it is a "fictive phenomena that gain power within discourse" (Butler, 2002:152). The materiality of the body is regulated by the dominant discourses surrounding it, which in turn, is regulated by the internal power dynamics of the society/culture within which these discourses function. It is important to note, however, that the discourses regulating materiality are also in turn influenced by the constructions of meaning that is produced by it. Foucault (1980) explains that power "must be analysed as something

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which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain" (98). Cultural constructions are produced by a circular exchange of meaning. Materiality is thus not a thing in itself, but rather an effect – the effect of power. It is this effect of power that creates social norms and expectations – the rules members of a society have to follow to form part of that society. These norms and expectations are then further placed on the sexed body, constructing a third layer – the gendered body.

Gender is constructed through norms and expectations placed on the sexed body to behave in a certain way. Gender, as a construct, is thus made up of a series of culturally inscribed acts that are pre-determined by the norms and expectations of a society. To become recognisable for social subjectivity, a person performs these acts to present themselves in a recognisable gendered way. According to Butler, there can be no subject before gender, since to become a subject one must first be "subjected to gender", and so, "subjectivised by gender" (Butler, 2011:xvi). Feminist writer Diane Elam also points out that though achieving subjectivity may seem to offer agency, to become subjects, persons must first "conform to specified and calculable representations of themselves as subjects" (Elam, 2001:29). Foucault (1980) adds to this argument when he states that, it is "one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals" (98). It is through conforming to recognizable constructs of gender, or as Butler terms it, gender intelligibility, that persons become recognisable, and thus, recognised as persons. The material body becomes the sexed body through ascribing materiality to it. The sexed body, in turn, subjectivised by gender, becomes the gendered body and as such, becomes recognisable as a person. This construction of the social body is depicted in figure 2.1.

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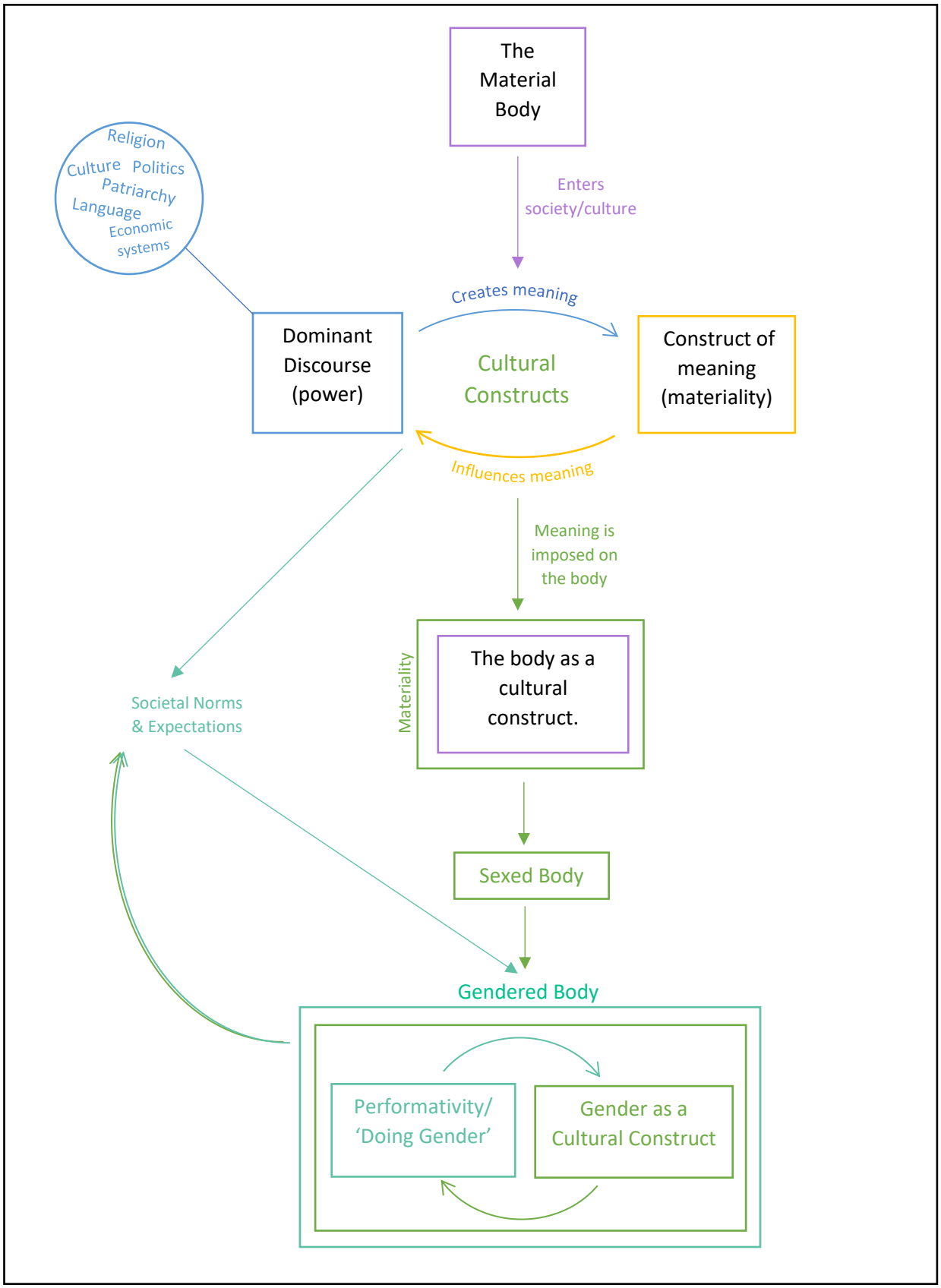

Figure 2.1

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One of the most misleading notions around sex and gender, I would argue, is that sex is natural and gender is the imprint of culture on that natural state. Butler (2011) notes that some models of gender construction imply "a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart" (xiv). However, if sex qualifies us as human, and gender is what gives a sexed body social significance, it seems impossible to think of the body as outside of the social. Judith Lorber, professor of Sociology and Women's Studies, points out that for humans, "the social is the natural" (1991:117). Elam (2001) further emphasizes this point when stating that "culture actually produces nature as its fictional origin" (50). There is no nature without culture and the two continuously influence and shape one another.

In this sense, gender cannot simply mean the "cultural appropriation of biological sexual difference", since these differences are "based around chromosomal variations that give rise to biological differences" and have "no meaning in themselves any more than do differences in eye colour" (Lorber, 1991:117 & Elam, 2001:43). This is to say that, the biological differences in human beings are material. The fact that there is a difference, has no meaning in itself. We, however, give the difference a meaning (materiality): we say that this difference is 'sex'. We differentiate between bodies, according to sex, to classify them for different functions. This classification is then justified under the false notion of a natural order. We claim biological sex is natural, when it is in fact a prior construction of gender. Sex is then, not in opposition to gender as the nature/culture binary system would have us believe, but rather absorbed and displaced by gender.

Gender as a cultural construct, as previously stated, qualifies bodies as human bodies and is one of the key methods used to organize and make sense of the world. Through the categorization of the body, gender acts as a "process of creating distinguishable social statuses for the assignment of rights and responsibilities" (Lorber, 1991:113). Gender, set up as a binary system that ranks different genders unequally, is one of the methods used to regulate power dynamics in socio-political and cultural contexts. As stated above, gender in turn, is regulated by gender norms. Butler (2009) explains that gender norms are "one way in which power operates", not only as "instances of power", but also reflecting "broader relations of power" (ii). Lorber (1991) further expands on this, stating that gender, as part of a "stratification system […] is a major building block in the social structures built on these unequal statuses" (113). Gender can be seen as an agent of social, political and cultural power. It is a determiner, amongst others, that is used to construct a social hierarchy.

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Gender becomes a method of Othering. Lorber (1991) defines an Other as that "which lacks the valuable qualities that the dominant exhibits" (114). In this sense, gender emerges as the "congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women", where the dominant can assert power over the Other (Butler, 2002:xii). This social hierarchy is imposed for the reproduction of power since, as Butler points out, "power cannot stay in power without reproducing itself" (ibid.). Othering – subordinating one gender over another – becomes a key method for the reproduction of power. Genders can then be neither true nor false, but rather, are the effects of power. The illusion of a primary and stable gender identity based on 'natural' sex is thus created to conceal the reproduction of power.

Gender presentation is one of the primary qualifiers for social subjectivity. Butler (2002) explains that the social body is a "set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained" that determine the subject within society and culture (44). This is to say, to be recognised as a social subject, one must conform to the boundaries placed on the social body and present oneself in a recognisable gendered way. According to Butler, this is done through repeated stylisation of the body. In other words, gender becomes a doing, "a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance" and as such, produces the effect of gender (ibid.). By constantly stylizing the body, a person gives the impression of a gendered self to form part of the social strata. Butler theorizes gender as "something that one becomes—but can never be", a kind of activity an "incessant and repeated action of some sort" (ibid. 143). It is this repetition of acts, this doing of gender that then gives rise to what Butler terms, Gender Performativity.

2.1.2 What is Gender Performativity?

Considering that the construct of gender can be seen as a series of culturally inscribed acts that have come to represent gender and an individual performs these acts to gain social subjectivity, we can say that one does not *have* gender but rather, one *does* gender. Performativity denotes to performing gendered acts in reaction to one's social and cultural norms. Gender can then be seen as a "performative accomplishment" that we come to "believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 1988:520). We continuously act out, believe and perform our gender to attain public approval and a sense of self. Performativity must not, however, be understood as a singular or deliberate act, for that would mean there is a form of agency behind that act. Performativity is never a "voluntary, nor a singular act", but rather an "ongoing, repetitive

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practice" or process of "becoming" (Van der Watt, 2004:3). Gender is always a doing, "though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" since there is no "gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (Butler, 2002:33). Gender identity is performatively constructed and can thus, as previously stated, never be considered stable.

Performing one's gender according to gender norms leads to social subjectivity, while at the same time, reproducing the very norms that govern it. According to Butler (2009), gender performativity presumes that "norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us" (xi). However, within this reproduction of norms, there arises the possibility of an unexpected deviation. Each new cycle of reproduction enhances the change of a mutation in the norm. Considering that all signification rests on the "compulsion to repeat", the possibility of agency is then "located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (Butler, 2002:185). Agency is possible through "lapses, resistances, the ironical play of gender performances, ruptures of the binary boundaries imposed by heteronormativity, and the incoherence between gender and object of sexual-desire choice" (Arruzza, 2015:36). Butler (2009) also affirms that "there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines" (i). As such, the reproduction of gender is always in "negotiation with power" (ibid.). This negotiation of power, however, is not without consequences.

Butler points out that while performing one's gender well "provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all", performing one's gender wrong "initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect" (Butler, 1988:528). Performativity regulates the terms by which a subject becomes eligible for recognition, and so, "non-compliance calls into question the viability of one's life, the ontological conditions of one's persistence" (Butler, 2009:iv). The consequence of failing to perform one's gender correctly would be social ostracism.

In addition to social norms, the importance of individual psychological processes behind performativity must also be stressed. Chodorow (1995) suggests that each person's sense of gender, gender identity or gender subjectivity is an intricate combination of personal and cultural meaning that is "psychologically created" when "cultural meanings and images" are experienced "emotionally and through fantasy, as well as in particular interpersonal contexts"

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(517). That is to say, individuals create new and individual meanings in terms of their own unique experiences of the world and their personal history.

Chodorow draws on Patricia Hill Collins (1990), when explaining that "consciousness is created and not determined", meaning that "unconscious feelings and fantasies shape and give partial meaning to conscious feeling and experience" (Chodorow, 1995:518 & 520). From birth, we create our own individual meaning in relation to, as well as through interaction with, the cultural and historic meaning that surrounds us. Chodorow suggests that, because we "create personal emotional meaning from birth and throughout life, […] there is only a limited and particular historical sense in which cultural meaning 'precedes' individual meaning" (ibid. 521). I, however, do not agree with this and propose that individual meaning is formed through interaction with, and in relation to, cultural and historic meaning. Our world, the people, social dynamics, and power structures are historically and culturally inscribed before the individual is even aware of them. That is to say, individual meaning precedes cultural meaning only to the extent that individual meaning is created based on a preceding cultural meaning. The formation of meaning is not linear, but rather circular as depicted in *figure 2.2*

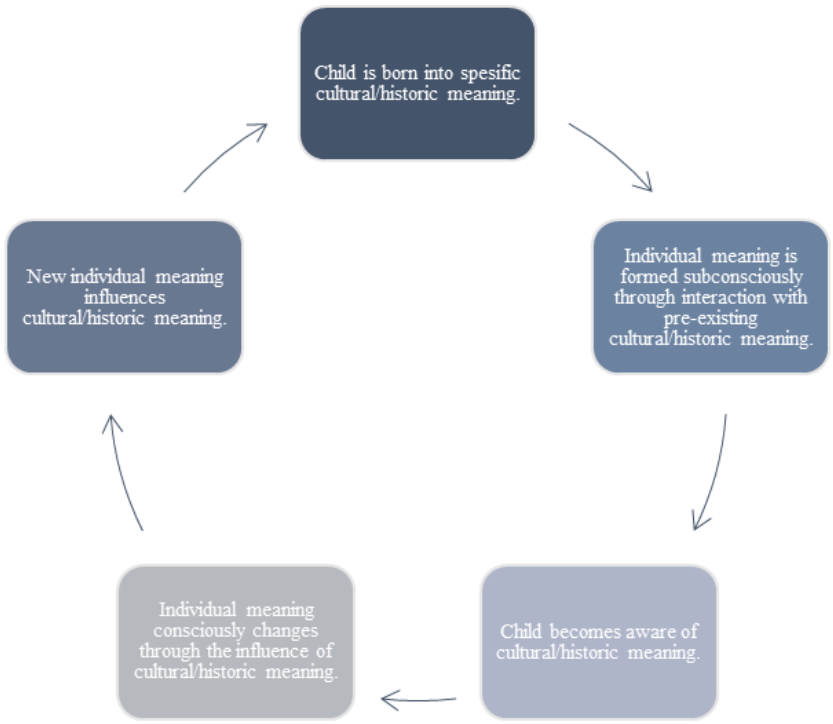

Figure 2.2

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The concept of gender is then arguably constructed through each individual's experience and perception of the societal norms that work on them. Butler reiterates this notion when she states that there are no "true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction" (Butler, 2002:180). Gender is personally and culturally constructed and sustained through social performances. As such, I define gender performativity in the following terms:

An individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through their specific social and cultural norms, regulated by the power dynamics in their society. Their specific interaction with- and experience of these social and cultural norms further influence their individual perception of gender. This perception produces a complex combination of culturally as well as personally created meaning. This gives rise to what Judith Butler terms gender performativity. Gender performativity is the phenomenon of how an individual's perception of gender influences their behaviour. They can either conform to or reject the expectation placed upon them to act out their perceived gender. This gives rise to stylized repetition of acts that then forms their own gendered behaviour.

2.1.3 The Female Gender

Considering that gender performativity is a series of culturally inscribed acts that create the illusion of a gendered self, and that cultural constructs are formed through the dominant discourses of power relations, performativity is still firmly rooted in the binary sex/gender system that allows the reproduction of power. This means that performativity is based on the premise of Othering. As such, power is regulated more by perceived difference than perceived identity. Elam (2001) points out that "we satisfy our prescribed gender role more through a knowledge of what we are not than what we are" (46). Butler (2002) furthers this notion by stating that "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (30). In other words, 'woman' is that which is not 'man'.

Operating within a language that is to a large extent masculinist, or what Butler (2002) terms "a phallogocentric language", women constitute the "unrepresentable" and is by default the Other (14). The absence of masculinity is invariably feminine. Whereas, in contrast, there is no such thing as the lack of femininity. Women *become* masculine, whereas men *lose* their masculinity. In other words, women represent a "linguistic absence and opacity" (Butler,

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2002:14). Being a woman presents itself as "a signifying lack", and so, the masculine becomes the entrapment of the feminine (ibid). This signifying lack is used as justification for social stratification built upon the oppression of women, ranking "men above women from the same race and class" (Lorber, 1991:114). Because women are invariably the lack of, they are constructed as lesser. Gender is not the only oppressor used for social stratification, but is never the less a significant role player in regulating the power dynamics of the social strata.

Simone de Beauvoir famously states that one is not born a woman, but rather, becomes a woman. To be a woman means to conform into the construct of 'woman'. Women perform femininity to gain social subjectivity. However, as previously stated, the achievement of subjectivity is not necessarily liberatory. In fact, as Elam (2001) explains, the "constraint of subjectivity, even when subjectivity seems to offer agency, is clear when we realize that women become subjects only when they conform to specified and calculable representations of themselves as subjects" (29). Elam further points out that there is "a similarity between being objectified and assuming a subject position already determined: subject positions are occupied by objects" (ibid.). To become a woman, one must first objectify oneself into the 'criteria of women', and as such, take up the subject position of 'woman'.

I would argue that gender is in itself not a problem and that ascribing meaning to social phenomena to make sense of the world is not inherently a bad thing. The problem arises when socio-political and cultural systems regulate gender as a hierarchal construct and forcefully impose it on those subjected to this system. In this sense, gender becomes problematic when it is weaponized as justification for social stratification and ostracism. It is this view that forms the basis for emerging fifth-wave feminism. Fifth-wave feminism, evolved from the preceding feminist ideologies that focused on equality and women's rights, turns its focus on the socio-political systems – collectively seen as the patriarchy – that are formed on- and benefit from oppression. Instead of advocating for equality within a system of oppression, fifth-wave feminism turns its critique on- and advocates for the dismantling of the system itself.

2.1.4 Gender in Context – Fifth-Wave Feminism

Feminism, in concise terms, is a movement advocating for women's political, economic, personal, and social rights. Over the years, feminism has had many ideologies, campaigns and movements, all based on the advocacy of equality between the sexes. These changes in ideology and focus became characterised as waves, with first-wave feminism fighting for

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women's right to vote – or, more specifically, white western women's right to vote. Currently, we are emerging into the fifth-wave of feminism.

Fifth-wave feminism has emerged out of feminism's most critical critique – the notion that being a woman denotes to a common identity, and therefore all women must unite in political solidarity to fight the patriarchy they collectively face. Butler (2002) proposes that feminism's "urgency" to "establish a universal status for patriarchy" developed from the need to strengthen "feminism's own claims to be representative" but instead constructed a "fictive universality" of women's "common subjugated experience" (7). Elam (2001) points out that feminist politics that "demand of women" to "all join together solely on the basis of what they have in common" not just ignore, but erase the differences amongst women (72-73). That is to say, the insistence on unity amongst women "effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of 'women' are constructed" (Butler, 2002:19). The danger of this attitude towards solidarity was evident in the fact that women stopped "being a question for feminism" and that identity took on the function of a "normative ideal", meaning that "those individuals who fail to conform to the correct model of womanhood" were simply excluded or ignored (Elam, 2001:73). Chodorow (1995) stresses that "gender cannot be seen apart from culture" and it is exactly the "problems in generalizing, universalizing, and seeing gender as a single identity" that became a stumbling block for feminist ideology (518).

Fifth-wave feminism developed from the realisation that the power relations amongst women, and within feminism itself, must first be critically engaged with and understood before socio-political and cultural structures can be interrogated. This notion developed as feminism "sought to become integrally related to struggles against racial and colonialist oppression" and became increasingly aware of the importance of resisting the "colonizing epistemological strategy that would subordinate different configurations of domination under the rubric of a transcultural notion of patriarchy" (Butler, 2002:46). As a result, fifth-wave feminism is rooted in the notion of positionality and unpacks the different aspects of an individual's political, economic, personal, and social identity that constructs their position within the social strata. Fifth-wave feminism functions from the basis that it is these interconnected oppressors that form the basis for power reproduction, and so, keep the system of oppression operational. Fifth-wave feminism sees the transition from fighting for equality within a system of oppression, to critiquing the system itself.

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It is important to be aware of one's positionality within society in order to critically engage with the issues it faces. Fifth-wave feminism's critique on systems of oppression also stems from its ideology that individuals should have the right to choose how they want to express themselves without having to face social ostracism as a consequence. Working from the premise that neither sex nor gender is natural nor stable, sexual orientation and gender expression loses its regulatory function and becomes a space of fluidity. Gender, no longer forcefully imposed on the body, can be a choice without harmful consequences.

Creating a space of fluidity, where gender and gender expression can be seen as a choice, is only possible through social change. To effect social change, it is important to critically engage with the conversations and discourses that question, interrogate and as such, deconstruct the power structures that regulate our socio-political and cultural environment. This critical engagement can be seen as similar to consciousness-raising, a phenomenon that rose to prominence during second-wave feminism. Catharine MacKinnon, feminist scholar, activist and author points out that, "central to feminist theory and feminist method is consciousness-raising" (MacKinnon, 1982:515). It is through consciousness-raising that feminism confronts women's reality by "examining their experience" and "taking this analysis as the starting point for individual and social change" (ibid.). Consciousness-raising, much like ethnography and verbatim theatre, is a method of inquiry that "challenges traditional notions of authority and objectivity", while opening up "a dialectical questioning of existing power structures, of our own experience, and of theory itself" (ibid.). Benson & Nagar (2006) asserts that if the ultimate mark of power is its invisibility, then the ultimate challenge of scholarship is to uncover the roots of power (583). It is then to uncover the roots of power that regulate constructs of gender amongst female students at Stellenbosch University, that I set out to conduct the following ethnographic case study and create a verbatim-physical theatre production that engages with- and opens up conversations surrounding these socio-political issues.

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2.2 An Ethnographic case study into Gender Performativity

An individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through the specific social and cultural norms and the power dynamics in their society. In this section of the study, I aim to investigate what female students at Stellenbosch University's perception of femininity are and to examine what it means to them, to be a woman. Arts-based researcher and playwright, Tara Goldstein emphasises that, while ethnography describes a "way of life from the point of view of those who are living it, critical ethnography attempts to get beyond people's daily assimilated experience to expose the ways power reproduces itself in everyday life" (Goldstein, 2012:89). Verbatim-Dance theatre practitioner, Jess McCormack, further reflects that there "is too often focused on the existence of a single truth", a single all-encompassing story with the answers we as researchers, theatre-makers and human beings are constantly searching for (2018:29). The problem, however, is that there is no such thing as a single story. Looking for a single narrative that could satisfy our curiosity, as Chimamanda Adichie remarks, robs us of our dignity – taking away our ability to recognise our equal humanity. I do not think I would want to live in a world with satisfied curiosity. A world satisfied with stories that do not go beyond people's daily assimilated lives, that do not challenge and question the ways power regulate everyday life. That is then why I will ask questions with no definitive answer, no satisfied curiosity – only multiple, ever-emerging stories, starting with the question "what does it mean to be a woman?"

To embark on this limitless search of stories, I have divided the ethnographic study into two sections, distinguished by the two successive data collection methods. Firstly, 500 online questionnaires were sent out through email. Within the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be willing to do an additional interview. The follow-up interview was semi-structured and conducted online to adhere to Covid-19 safety protocols. Through this, I attempted to gain insights into what it means to be a woman, to be female and to perform femininity in today's context. It was never my intention to gain a ready answer, but rather to collect stories, and it is those stories that I now would like to share.

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2.2.1 Online Questionnaire

Something that I most certainly did not expect to gain from a simple online questionnaire, was some of the most beautiful and interesting ethnographic stories. The fact that stood out to me the most during this research process, is that people have a need to talk. They want to tell their stories. The first question, "how do you identify yourself?" was not originally intended to be a major topic for discussion in this section. The question was aimed at grasping the diversity amongst female students at Stellenbosch University. Even though it is an important question, in an online questionnaire I expected, short, to the point and even mundane answers. I was delightfully surprised to learn that I was utterly wrong. *Figure 2.3* shows a collective summary of self-identifying terms that participants used to identify themselves with. These terms reflect, not only the diversity amongst participants, but the vast range of life experiences, views and beliefs that make up the multiplicity of being a woman.

South-African Afrikaans English Bisexual Agnostic Mixed-Race Heterosexual Christian Religious Coloured White Islam Straight Tswana Non-conforming Zulu Kaapse-Afrikaans Bilingual Open-minded Shona Heterosexual Ghanaian Asexual Queer Black Cisgender Sotho Atheist Mubakho Pansexual Disconnected Pedi Lesbian Non-Religious Indian Jewish Setswana Unsure Swati African-Spirituality Luganda Hindu Latina Indian-Malaysian French Refugee German-Namibian Buddhist Chichewa Malawian Spiritual Optimist Akan Socialist Xhosa Gender-Fluid Zimbabwean Mosotho Womxn Liberal Demisexual Sepedi Marxist Motswana Catholic Bi-Racial Hindu Feminist Buntu Able-Bodied Multilingual Tsonga

Figure 2.3

Identity is something that is crucial to most people, forming the basis from which we further establish all other meanings surrounding us. Understanding our identity allows us to critically engage with the socio-political and personal constructs that give meaning to our experience of the world. However, the most predominant identifier given in the survey, was that of uncertainty. In *Figure 2.3* the words "unsure" and "disconnected" are presented. For the sake

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of conciseness, I did not present all repetitions of identifying words that came up in the survey, I do, however, feel that it is important to note that these specific words were regular occurrences. Not presented in negative terms, these words rather denote to a general feeling, perhaps best described as, "emerging". These words can just as easily be replaced with "searching", "discovering" or "investigating". Much like the emerging fifth-wave feminist movement, the participants are very aware of the constructs that function as building blocks for their identities. It is good then to see that these constructs are not simply accepted, but rather critically interrogated – much like I aim to do with this study. It is noticeable then, that the questions I wish to ask are also questions very much prevalent in our current socio-political context.

Aside from the terms shown above, the question of identity also sparked a range of profound stories. *Figure 2.4*, presents a collection of some of these in-depth stories that emerged. This particular collection highlights, for me, the immense diversity amongst participants, not only in identity itself, but also in the life experiences that play a crucial role in the construction of that identity. Yet, as diverse as these stories are, they all tie together. Not in some fictive umbrella term of 'woman', but rather the collective search of each individual for who they are as women. I would argue then, that it is not in the concept of being a woman that unites us, but in our collective, yet separate journeys of discovery.

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Philosophically believe that people should just live and let live, return what is given to you. Also that love, of all kinds beyond romantic, is very important and underappreciated. Friends and family need to learn to say I love you more. People need to stop treating emotions like either a joke or super seriously, just normalise the expression of emotions.

I identify as a female (Biological sex being girl), I was born in a west African country called Cameroon where I resided until the age of 9 years old. I moved to South Africa in 2003 to live with my father whom had relocated in 1999 already. I speak 4 languages (English, Xhosa, French and my village language called Mubakho). Although, I have resided in South Africa for 18 years having attended primary and high school and now University, I am still recognised as a refugee and have refugee status documents which means I cannot travel back to my country where my mother and younger brother still reside. I am heterosexual and I have a strong faith in spirituality and not religion. I hate the woke crowd and sentiments therein but also hate the conservatives crowd as well. I love honest people and people whom are objectively in touch with reality.

I'm just a person. I recognise that things like race have an influence on my personality because it influences how people perceive and therefore treat me, but that isn't my entire identity. My dialect is a product of how I was raised. Even things like gender identity only really make sense in how other people choose to perceive me, I don't have an internal sense of "femaleness". If I woke up as a biological male tomorrow I wouldn't be too bothered, in fact I'd probably be happier since half my health problems would disappear and I'd probably be harassed less in public.

I am a woman, 23 years old, and my home language is English. I am a Coloured South African. I was raised in Christianity but have been Agnostic since I was 16. I am currently unsure of my sexual orientation. I have been doing some research and am doing some introspection on whether I am bisexual, pansexual or omnisexual. I think I might either be bisexual or omnisexual but I'm not entirely sure.

I'm a heteronormative female (also heterosexual) aged 34 years. I come from an Afrikaans boere family. Afrikaans is my home language, but I am fully bilingual. I'm South African and was raised in the Dutch Reformed church (but not the stereotypical racists one). My dad was my dominee and he always encouraged critical thinking and love and compassion for others. I self-identify as a romantic feminist. Many see me as rather liberal, but I would say I'm more neutral as I try to also understand "the other side". I'm Caucasian race, but consider my ethnicity as "South African" or "Vrystater".

Figure 2.4

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Following the first question, participants were asked to rate answers from 1 to 10 on how much they think certain situations, specifically tied to their upbringing, influenced their perception of gender. For most students, University life is a time of great change in how one sees oneself, as well as one's outlook on the world. Up until that time, the majority of your life experience took place within the views and parameters of homelife. One's upbringing lays the foundation from which the meaning we attach to life is constructed. Whether we rebel, reform or build on these foundations, the fact still stands that they have a big impact on how we perceive gender and gender roles. A summary of the data collected from this question is shown in *table 2.1*

Questions rated from 1 (not at all), to 10 (very much)	Mean (Average)	Median	Mode (Most chosen value)	Standard Deviation
To what extent does your upbringing influence your view on gender?	6.75	7	7	2.54
How much did your mother/mother-figure influence your perception of gender roles?	7.32	8	10	2.32
How much did your father/father-figure influence your perception of gender roles?	6.51	7	10	2.66
Were you encouraged or expected to be more feminine than you wanted to be (or felt comfortable with), while growing up?	4.22	3	1	3.04

Table 2.1

The first question participants were asked to rate from 1 to 10, was to what extent did their upbringing influence their view on gender. If (1) indicates no influence at all, (5) a neutral influence and (10) being almost the sole determiner in how their view on gender was constructed, the most common value chosen, (7), indicates a large role player, but not an exclusive one. Participants were further asked if they perceived this influence as positive or negative. 73.7% indicated positive and 26.3% negative. The data reflects that a participant's upbringing plays a substantial, but not an exclusive role in influencing their perception of gender. This then ties in with my previous analysis of gender constructs, explaining each

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person's sense of gender, gender identity or gender subjectivity is an intricate combination of personal and cultural constructed meaning.

The next two questions inquired on the mother and father's individual influences on how the participants perceived gender. On the influence of the mother, the average answer was (7.32) and the most chosen value (10). This means that, for most participants, their mother had a substantial influence on how they perceived gender. The father's influence, on the other hand, had an average of (6.51), while the most chosen value was also (10), reflecting that, while still a substantial role player, is more varied amongst participants. For most participants, both their parents played a crucial role in shaping their perception of gender, however, on average, the mother's role is slightly more influential than the father's.

Participants were then asked whether or not they were encouraged or expected to display feminine traits while growing up. 69.8% said yes and 30.2% said no. However, when participants were asked whether they were encouraged or expected to be *more* feminine growing up than they were comfortable with, rating their answer between 1 and 10, the average answer was (4.22) and the most chosen value (1). This means that, for most participants, the answer was a very definite 'no'. These women were expected, to an extent, to show general feminine traits that would result in gender coherency, but not necessarily to perform their femininity to a great degree. This shows a generally more accepting attitude towards 'what women should be', allowing the individual more freedom to decide how they want to express themselves. However, it is important to note, that this does not ask whether participants felt like they had to perform their femininity, but rather if it was expected of them. The question is more directed at the familial environment than their personal mentality.

The next question asked participants whether or not they thought certain situations require you to be more feminine (or perform your femininity more) than they are comfortable with or normally would. 74.4% of respondents said yes and 25.6% said no. This was followed by a list of questions stating different situations, asking participants to rate them from 1 (very much) to 10 (not at all) according to whether or not they thought the situation required them to perform their femininity to a greater degree than what they normally would. The question was aimed at understanding how social dynamics impact gender performativity. For instance, the difference between close friends and a large group of friends is influenced by the comfortability with the people around you, how well you know them as well as the social hierarchies that invariably (even if subconsciously) come into play. The same can be said for the distinction between close

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family and extended family. A further distinction was made between public spaces and the more private space. In these instances, social power dynamics are regulated on different levels. With family and friends, the power dynamics at play are more personal and their effects more direct. Whereas public spaces are regulated by more omniscient and subtle power dynamics, but are more vehemently enforced. These distinctions then formed the basis for the questions depicted in *table 2.2*.

Do you think these situations require you to be more feminine (or perform your femininity more) than you are comfortable with or normally would? Rank the following situations from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

Questions rated from 1 (not at all), to 10 (very much)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mean (average)	Median	Mode (most chosen)
Class	183	49	43	39	57	38	31	29	10	18	3.62	4	1
Close Friends	262	65	51	35	32	19	9	11	4	4	2.41	2	1
Large group of Friends	134	37	42	46	68	65	47	31	13	12	4.17	4	1
Close Family	191	46	42	40	35	37	44	33	11	17	3.64	3	1
Extended Family	92	26	43	26	31	43	59	65	52	58	5.60	6	1
Meeting new People	92	25	31	33	63	55	74	47	39	34	5.27	6	1
Public Space (e.g. Coffee Shop)	112	33	55	35	43	55	47	48	24	39	4.78	5	1
Religious or Cultural Space	104	20	23	12	25	30	47	58	61	97	6.03	7	1
Club, Bar or Party with Female Friends	144	43	47	29	61	49	42	38	22	20	4.21	4	1
Club, Bar or Party with Men Present	115	26	32	28	40	37	58	58	40	57	5.29	4	1

Table 2.2

In *table 2.2* above, the most common value chosen for all of the given situations is (1), suggesting that the majority of participants do not feel they are required to perform their femininity more in certain situations than others. This is in stark contrast to the 74.4% that indicated they do indeed think so. This can, to some extent, be clarified by looking at the individual situations.

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In a class setting, the majority of respondents indicated they do not feel they are required to perform their femininity to a greater extent than per usual. A class setting is an academic and professional one. It is also a setting where, historically, women have been disempowered in relation to men due to the biased view that women are less capable, less intelligent and should actually just be getting married instead. This view has been greatly challenged and invalidated over the past few decades. However, out of the interviews conducted with participants after the survey, it is clear that they feel this bias, though to a significantly lesser extent, is still prevalent in academia as well as professional situations. A reoccurring notion that was present within a majority of interviews, was that participants felt they needed to downplay their femininity to be taken seriously. This then results in the exact opposite of the question asked above. The majority of respondents do not feel that they have to perform their femininity within a class setting, precisely because they need to omit any evidence of said femininity that would trigger preconceived biases, and so, influence their class and professional relations.

The next few questions turned to the dynamics within familial and friend groups. Within the spheres of friendships and family, social and cultural power dynamics operate on a much more personal level than in public spaces, or when we interact with people we are less acquainted with. We experience these personal interactions on a deeper emotional level, and as previously explained, each person's individual phycological experiences play a major role in how they experience, perceive and perform gender. The main difference between these two groups (friends and family), however, is as the saying goes; we can choose our friends but not our family. It is noteworthy then, that it is this category of 'Close Friends' that has the largest indicated value of 1 (53.25%). It is also within this category that the median (2) is the lowest in relation to any of the other categories. This means that in relation to all other given situations, the category of 'Close Friends' has the largest percentage of low values (between 1 and 3). It is amongst close friends that we are at our least performative. 'Close family' follows as the second least performative space, with 38.51% of respondents choosing the lowest value (1), and a median of (3), indicating that they do not feel required to perform their femininity at all, or at a very low degree. It is then with close friends and family that gender performativity is at its least performative.

'Large groups of Friends' are minimally more performative, with the third-largest percentage (27.07%) of responses indicating the lowest value of performativity (1). I would, however, like to point out that the two values that have the second and third most responses are (5) and (6), indicating a more neutral stance on performativity within large groups of friends. This could

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possibly indicate that, as all larger groups of friends are not the same, the degree of performativity is dependent on the specific group of people. I would argue then, that it is regulated by the internal power dynamics of said group. With close friends and family, the regulation of power becomes much more covert, and so, requires less performativity to conform or rebel. Since these are the people we spend the most time with, their views and beliefs form a substantial influence on our own (whether it is by agreeing or challenging these views, the very act of making that distinction already proves the influence). We perceive ourselves in relation to them, instead of opposed to them, as would be the case with less personal and public situations like larger groups of friends.

Extended family, however, is exponentially more performative. Even though the majority of respondents (18.59%) still chose the lowest value (1), it is a significantly lower percentage than the previous three categories and is overall (together with meeting new people) the lowest percentage of responses for this value. It has the second-highest average (5.6) of all the categories and a median of (6), indicating overall higher values were chosen and thus, a greater degree of performativity. It is interesting to note that the second-highest percentage (13.13%) of responses is to the value (8) and is considerably close to the percentage of responses to the value (1). Furthermore, the higher half of values (7,8,9 and 10) are all, excluding (1), the highest percentages of responses, respectively being (11.92%, 13.13%, 10.51% and 11.72%). Extended family is then the category with the highest number of overall high-value responses. This indicates that, even though in various degrees, when amongst extended family, respondents feel the most compelled to perform their femininity – substantially more than in any other setting.

The remaining settings can all be grouped together as public spaces. It is interesting that, for all of these spaces, the median is either (4), (5), or (6), indicating, in slight variations, generally spread-out responses. Meeting new people is slightly more performative than neutral. Public spaces such as coffee shops are indicated as a very neutral space, where a person performs their gender to the extent that they want to and not according to social norms and expectations. Interestingly, going out to clubs or parties, which are very performative spaces by nature, does not induce compelled performative behaviour. With a median of (4), these spaces are slightly less than neutral, indicating a comfortability with portraying oneself according to one's own individual preferences, instead of conforming to societal norms and expectations. Interestingly, these 'neutral' spaces are those that are significantly less intergenerational. These spaces are predominantly occupied by people from the same generation – the generational force behind

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emerging fifth-wave feminism – and so, I would argue these spaces are significantly more inclusive than spaces such as 'Extended Family', where multiple generations come together. It could then be argued that gender norms and expectations are passed down and enforced by the older generation onto the younger. This is not to say that people from the same generation cannot compel and enforce gender norms and expectations onto one another. I would simply argue that, in such instances, it is compelled by learned behaviour from intergenerational exchanges.

Another very performative space is 'Religious and Cultural' spaces. With the highest value of responses being (1) and the second-highest being (10), this space indicates a vast dichotomy. It is either very performative, or not at all. It is important to note, however, that with a median of (7), which is the highest value median of all the data, and an average of (6.03) the overall responses tend to be higher values and thus indicates a higher degree of performativity. Religious and Cultural spaces are also, interestingly, very much intergenerational spaces. I would argue then, based on my previous analysis, that the performative aspect of these spaces is embedded in the gender norms and expectations enforced by an older generation onto younger ones. Religious and Cultural power dynamics are also significant role players in the regulation of norms and constructs of meaning within society. It makes thus sense that, within these spaces, respondents feel most compelled to perform their femininity to conform to social norms and expectations, least risking public rebuke.

After the series of quantitative questions, respondents were asked four questions of word associations. They were asked to give five words they associate with the following concepts: Femininity, Unfeminine, Positive associations with Femininity and, Negative associations with Femininity. A sample of their answers are depicted in *figure 2.5* and *2.6.*

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Femininity	Unfeminine
Compassion Intelligence Softness Bravery Strength Empathetic Power Wisdom Sophistication Love Class Independent Compassion Empathy Courage Tactical Stubborn Care Passionate Leadership Enthusiastic Ambitious Activist Graceful Conscience Elegance Resilience Affection Woman Family Elegant Strong Resilient Nurturing Humility Intuitive Sophisticated Bold Beautiful Authentic Determined Logical Competent Fluidity	Aggressive Condescending Anger Dirty Unkept Diminishing Rudeness Judgment Power-Hungriness Selfishness Disrespectful Unkind Unjust Ignorant Discrimination Rough Crass Offensive Domineering Humourless Controlling Callous Rigid Arrogant Inconsistent Tackles Unhygienic Exclusion Unapologetic Disrespectful Cruelty Unauthentic Critical Judgemental Careless Weak Immature Sensationalized Unsupportive

Figure 2.5

Positive Words	Negative Words
Sympathy Love Warmth Understanding Guidance Grace Empathy Strong Educated Integrity Fierce Powerful Elegance Resilience Beautiful Nurture Loud Confidence Voice Empowerment Agency Aware Mindful Caring Elegant Kindness Collaborative Participative Empathetic Advocate Care Opinionated Clever Adaptable Positivity Appreciation Courage Capable Calm Ability Alternative Perspective Pain-Threshold Proactive Pride Adaptability Protective Strong-Willed Perseverance	Weakness Vulnerability Ditzy Inferiority Underestimation Girly Self-Doubt Imposter Limitations Basic Expectations Weakness Conformity Conservative Caged Objectified Dainty Fragile Danger Weak Aggressive Emotional Hysterical Hormonal Prudish Slut Submissive Complaining Bitchiness Drama Moods Rude Oppressed Quiet Dependent Thoughtless Silence Over-Emotional Irrational Shallow B*tchy Definite Expectation Typical Subordinate Restrictive Prissy Sheltered Inequality Uncomfortable Stereotype Sensitive Discrimination Backstabbing Perfection

Figure 2.6

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When looking at the categories of 'femininity' and 'positive words associated with femininity', it is clear that there has been a substantial transformation in how femininity is viewed. Even though challenging the historic or stereotypical view of women (passive, subdued, etc.) has been an ongoing battle since the 1960s, there developed a tendency amongst women, to feel compelled to reject typical feminine traits to seem more worthy of respect. This was a shift from one extreme to the other and the consequences were just as damaging. However, recently the view on femininity has been shifting to become more inclusive and balanced. Traditional feminine traits are being embraced, while at the same time upholding those traits that women have fought to be associated with. Being feminine is no longer seen as a limiting factor. Instead, women acknowledge that you can be strong and sensitive, have compassion as well as intelligence, that bravery, ambition and elegance can be embodied at the same time and that there can be strength in vulnerability. This is evident in the words respondents used to describe femininity as seen in *figure 2.5*

The words associated with being unfeminine by the respondents are also more balanced, as they do not focus on biased notions of femininity, but are rather considered 'bad', no matter what gender you are. These words denote more to a general state of unacceptability, being aggressive, rude and disrespectful rather than biased views on women. Teaching young girls that these traits are unfeminine is not problematic, as these are traits no human should be. However, from the words provided for a negative associated with femininity, it is clear that the biased concepts and constructs surrounding women and their gender roles have not been reduced within society itself. Even if women themselves are accepting more inclusive, well-rounded ideas of what it means to be a woman, the socio-political and cultural discourses surrounding it have not been as progressive. Women still struggle to rid themselves of the stigmas of weakness, inferiority and fragility. This was also a prominent point of concern that was raised during the interviews. Women struggle to be seen as professional, capable and well-informed in the workplace. Multiple interviewees stressed the harmful consequences of these biases that are still very prevalent within our society. The progress made in how women are viewed, is significantly less progressive than to how women actually view themselves, as seen in *figure 2.5*

However, it is also important to note that women are not without their own internalised biases. Even though *figure 2.5* and *2.6* depict the overwhelming majority of views, some responses were more problematic in nature. *Figure 2.7* depict some of these associations. Even though the ideas themselves are not necessarily harmful, it is worrying that they are still firmly rooted

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in the harmful stereotypes of femininity as well as being seen as unfeminine. I include this data as a reminder that we cannot change the socio-political and cultural biases that still regulate what is expected of women today, before we do not confront our own internalised biases.

Words associated with Femininity	Words associated with being Unfeminine
Dolled-Up Subservient Innocent Attractive Lady-Like Well-Mannered Proper Conflict-Avoidance Good-Etiquette Reserved Understanding Subdued	Driven Force Athletic Muscular Power Strength Contact-Sports Argumentative Bare-Faced Loud Controlling Different Defensive Uncontrolled Dominant Serious Intense Loud Feminist Outspoken Carefree

Figure 2.7

The last question asked participants, 'What is the biggest change in how you experience femininity and/or being a woman?' Much like the first question, this elicited more stories that answers and are characterised by their beautiful diversity. No one story is the same and yet, they all fit together like a puzzle. These are stories of journeys and discoveries – of emerging into what it means, for each individual, to be woman. A selection of these stories is presented in Addendum D. Many of the themes that emerged from these stories, were also present within the stories told by the interviewees. I will then combine my discussion of these stories with that of the interviews.

2.2.2 Interviews

Out of the interviews conducted with female students at Stellenbosch University, a verbatim theatre text will be compiled. This text, combined with physical theatre, will create an overall performance text. Considering that the primary function of these interviews is to compile this text, and that the performance text forms part of this thesis as presented in Addendum E, I will only briefly discuss some of the most prevalent themes that arose during the interviews. A more in-depth text analysis will follow in Chapter 4.

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The most prominent point of discussion in the majority of interviews stemmed from the question, 'what do you think is expected of women today?'. The answer: Everything. Second-wave feminism fought for women to have equal career opportunities. However, instead of opening up possibilities, having a successful career has morphed into another expectation placed on women. Yet, none of the traditional expectations and responsibilities of women – to have a family, to be a good mom, to cook and clean and look after the house – none of these expectations has been taken away. Today women are expected to do everything. To be successful at her job and take good care of her home. She can also not just be good at her job; she must *look* good while doing it. She needs to be ambitious without being bossy. She needs to be strong, but soft and caring at the same time. Expectations and responsibilities are being piled on while none are being taken away. The interview material proved that we have not come close to reaching equality and as long as the primary focus is on women, we never will. Equality can only be achieved when there is not only equal opportunity amongst men and women, and all genders for that matter, but also shared responsibility in all aspects of life.

The second most prominent point of discussion emerged from asking participants, 'what do you think are modern-day restraints for women?'. Setting up the interview questions, I thought this question might provoke some interesting material answers – new perspectives on clothing such as high heels and bras or something of the sort. I was, however, completely astonished by the depth of answers this question elicited. The most prominent constraint women face today is perception. Gender stereotypes and internalised biases still wreak havoc on how women are perceived and this, in turn, influences how women are treated. The sad reality is that, what people think of women, dictate a lot of what they can and cannot do. If you are ambitious, you have to be careful not to be perceived as bossy or a 'bitch', otherwise you get ostracised in the work environment. Countless interviewees, especially those in more technical fields, recounted how they have to fight to convince their male colleagues that they are well informed and can give a trusted opinion on the work. Other women recounted how the expectation placed on them to have children, alienate them from other women when they voice their choice not to have any. Mothers recounted how, in the household, even while both parents are working from home, they are always perceived as the primary caretakers and need to see to the children's needs while the father works undisturbed. We might have come a long way in the fight for equality, but it would be a grave mistake to think that we already have achieved it. Gender roles, stereotypes and perceptions of women still confine and limit. Even when individual

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women do not identify with, conform and reiterate these notions, every interaction women have with other people is confined within these preconceptions.

The last reoccurring theme I want to stress in this section, is the constant fear women live in. Especially in our South African context. When asked 'how does it make you feel when people stare at you?', the first, instantaneous answer was, "if it is a man, I feel threatened". The moment most interviewees realised they were no longer children, was when they got sexualised by a man – predominantly a much older man. We are taught from earliest childhood to always be careful, to never put ourselves in dangerous situations and that if something happens to us, it is because we didn't take enough precautions. This creates an exponential feeling of helplessness, since we constantly feel threatened, and if something bad should happen, we feel we will not be protected, because it is invariably 'our own fault'. Terms such as 'she was asking for it', 'what did she think was going to happen' and 'well, she shouldn't have been dressed that way' seem overused in media and yet they underscore women's experience of life the moment they step outside their house. Gender-Based Violence is an issue that will never be talked about enough. As long as the focus is on how to prevent women from being assaulted, instead of how to prevent attackers from assaulting their victims, we will never truly make progress in this regard.

Out of this data collection process, the factor that stood out to me more than any other, is the intense desire to speak about these issues. It is clear that there is a general need to, not only talk about these matters, but to actively and constructively engage with them. It is from this need to engage and start conversations that theatre's role in society develops. Theatre, as an instigator of conversations, creates the platform for these stories, that are so clearly wanting to be told, and indeed, need to be told, to be brought into the public sphere to be engaged with.

2.3 The body as a cultural construct in performance

Butler (2002) notes that "bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves", that they move beyond their own boundaries, resulting in a "movement of boundary itself" (viii). For Wittig, speaking is a "potent act", one which has the power to assert agency (Wittig in Butler, 2002:153). MacKinnon (1982) asserts that through "consciousness-raising, women grasp the collective reality of women's condition from within the perspective of that experience, not from outside it" (536). She goes on to state that consciousness-raising as a method of inquiry challenges "traditional notions of authority and objectivity", and so, opens up a space for

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questioning of existing power structures, of our own experience, and of theory itself" (ibid. 515). Elam (2001) concludes that, to understand the feminist struggle, it must be "recognized as not simply a struggle to assert an identity, but as a struggle to assert a difference, to bear witness to injustices done to women that simply cannot be expressed in the language of the patriarchy" (33). It is then all the above that I set out to do with this study. To use the body in performance to move beyond boundaries, and in effect, move the boundaries themselves that are placed on the body, through physical theatre. To assert agency through the act of speaking those stories that grasp the collective reality of women's stories from within the perspective of that experience, and to have an audience bear witness to the injustices done to women that simply cannot be expressed in the language of the patriarchy.

Benson & Nagar (2006) remarks that if a project does not "go beyond recording an oral history, that act becomes an end in itself rather than a means to challenge hegemonic knowledge" (587). Loots (2001) further points out that it is not enough to be 'allowed' to create "cultural products unless these products are given space to be seen and heard; in short, to have agency within a society" (12). It is my aim then, to create a verbatim-physical theatre production that engages with, and starts conversations that go beyond the end of a stage. To investigate and expose the social and cultural norms that regulate power dynamics in our society. To collect, depict and engage with stories of women's life experiences. To never tell just a single story. But most importantly, to create the beginning of a conversation and not the end.

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CHAPTER 3: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE – UNDERSTANDING VERBATIM-PHYSICAL THEATRE

I raise up my voice — not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard.

– Malala Yousafzai

In Chapter 2, I analysed gender as a cultural construct through the use of Judith Butler's gender performativity theory. I then conducted an ethnographic case study amongst female students at Stellenbosch University, aimed at investigating the power dynamics that regulate constructs of gender, and so, influences an individual's perception of gender, gender roles and gendered behaviour. In the following chapters, I will investigate how verbatim theatre and physical theatre can be effectively combined to portray ethnographic data. However, before we can turn to the question of *how*, it is important to understand *why* the data collected from the preceding ethnographic case study should be used in performance, and more specifically, verbatim-physical theatre performance. In this chapter, I will conduct a desktop study to provide theoretical background as to why performance is an integral part, of not only this research project, but research within the humanities and social sciences in general. Furthermore, I also aim to investigate why the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre, specifically, is especially appropriate for portraying the ethnographic research conducted within this study as well as how the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre lends itself to feminist theatre practices.

3.1 Theatre and Performance

In Chapter 2, I conducted an ethnographic case study that investigated how female students at Stellenbosch University perceive gender and gender roles. I asked questions like, 'What is femininity to you?' and 'What do you think is expected of women today?'. These questions were aimed at understanding how these individual's perception of gender influenced their performativity of gender. The question then arises, why create a performance? Why not simply write the data up as an ethnography? The answer lies in theatre's unique role within society.

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Smith & Dean (2009) quotes professor of sociology, Laurel Richardson on the matter, stating that "orthodox methods of qualitative research have suffered from an 'acute and chronic passivity' which made qualitative research boring and irrelevant to people's lived experience" (127). I would argue that it is integral for research within the social sciences and humanities, to not only be relevant to people's lives and lived experiences, but to be engaging in an active and meaningful manner. Theatre offers this means of engagement.

Michael Anderson (2007) states that there is an "undeniable logic in qualitative research turning to performance to convey the meaning of its data" (82). Theatre is a "powerful place for meaning-making" and "varied issues can be dealt with in-depth in theatrical spaces" (ibid.). Johnny Saldaña (2011) adds that theatre has the power to "heighten the representation and presentation of social life" and as such, if the goal of a "particular fieldwork project is to capture and document the stark realities" of those involved, then theatre seems to be the most effective medium to do so (15). Theatre is a space of social interaction, a space where people can make "authentic and intimate connections that is beyond the capability of most written research", and so, offers the possibility to communicate "the complexity" of qualitative data to an audience that can critically engage with it (Anderson, 2007:82).

Performance ethnography also offers a means to engage with an audience beyond academia – a more diverse audience. Benson and Nagar (2006) suggest the notion that "critical scholarship must communicate with more than one audience emerges from the conviction that there are many levels on which intellectual and political intervention is necessary to effect social change" (183). If the aim of social research is to effect social change, it becomes paramount for research findings to be communicated with a more diverse audience. More importantly, however, is that social change not only becomes possible because you reach a more diverse audience, but because you reach those people for whom the research is relevant. Through performance, you reach people within the society that the research takes place. Moreover, unlike an academic paper, a performance does not passively impart knowledge onto its audience. It becomes a shared process that can be described as a *transfer* of meaning – an active process, a doing, that requires active and critical engagement from its audience.

The power of theatre thus lies in its ability to engage an audience. Theatre does not merely impart information or knowledge onto an audience, it transfers *meaning*. Meaning can be seen as a deeper understanding, a recognition within the self, that comes about through active

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engagement with the performance. An impactful performance moves its audience to a deep, emotional recognition of the issue at hand.

Banning (2005) states that theatre audiences "are always dually – and ambiguously – positioned during a performance, for they are both social participants in the theatrical event and simultaneously observers of the performance" (81). They are "outsiders" and where their "theatrical role as observers are fore-grounded" a sort of "emotional distance" is evoked, simultaneously emerging as well as removing them from feelings associated with the events unfolding in front of them (ibid.). One might then ask, if an audience is emotionally distanced from a performance, how can it have an impact? I would suggest that a key to an effective or impactful performance – one that transfers meaning – does not lie with an audience that is completely emotionally engrossed within a performance. In fact, following Brechtian philosophy, an audience needs critical distancing from a performance to critically engage and reflect on its meaning. This is not to say that an audience must be wholly removed from the performance, but rather that they must be able to critically reflect on their own position in relation to the performance. How then does an audience come to be moved by performance?

One key concept for an impactful performance lies within emotional recognition. Emotional recognition within a spectator comes about when they can recognise, within themselves, similar emotions to what is being portrayed and as such, have empathy with the performance and performers. Murray and Keefe (2007) reflect that, humans are "hard-wired" to see others as we are ourselves and we "identify with others because of common ground in reciprocity and mutuality of behaviour, feelings and ideas" (45). When a performance is able to convey emotion truthfully, the audience members "recognise and empathise with the human reality" of it (ibid. 165). As such, the performer needs to connect, embody and portray the human reality behind their role, especially in verbatim theatre, in a truthful manner, enabling the audience to recognise and have empathy with it.

The human reality of a character becomes embodied through having 'presence' on stage. Presence in a performer is that quality that gives a performance the spark of life – presence comes about when a performer is fully in the moment – not only showing emotion, but believing in what they are performing. Murray and Keefe (2007) explain that, when possessed, "presence offers the performer a universal quality that may be sensed, perceived and understood by anyone regardless of identity: class, race, gender, ability and education" (22). When a performer has presence on stage, they portray their role truthfully and the audience

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recognises and empathise with the human reality of it. It is this empathy within an audience that is the key to a gripping performance – a performance that would spark conversations. When presenting research through theatre, an audience can recognise and empathise with the human reality behind it, a possibility that written research does not present. It is theatre's engagement with an audience – the possibility to evoke empathy through emotional recognition that opens up the possibility of social change.

Another important factor in emotional recognition, and the transfer of meaning to take place, is that of framing. Framing denotes to the act of situating a performance in accordance with the specific socio-political and cultural context that it is created and performed in. The performance must reflect the "familiar world of an audience's cultural knowledge and experience" in order for the audience to draw on their own experiences to recognise, and so, empathise with the performance (Banning, 2005:82). Murray and Keefe (2007), however, caution that framing a performance can never be "reducible to one factor alone" (31). Socio-political and cultural factors such as "class, gender, ethnicity, age, education, knowledge of the piece and its references" all have "a bearing on spectators' reception of work" and is influential in their "perception" – or understanding – of the performance (ibid.). Framing a performance according to the socio-political and cultural context that it is performed in, does not merely mean to layer individual social, political and cultural signifiers one by one onto the performance, but rather to create *from* it. Fleishman (2009) explains that performance does not layer meaning onto the world, but rather "opens up the world of meaning" (123). It is a "process of discovery" that penetrates the "surface of the world", and allows us to understand and create from within it (ibid.). Theatre is not created *in* society, but rather *from* it. Positionality then, becomes as important in theatre as it is in emerging fifth-wave feminism (as explored in Chapter 2). Murray and Keefe (2007) explain that theatre is an "event within real life that exists at one remove from everyday life, yet is symbiotically and symbolically attached to human life in all its social, cultural and historical modes" (35). Theatre, positioned within the socio-political and cultural framework that it is created from, occupies a unique space. One that is attached to real life, but is not reality itself. Performance then, occupies the in-between – a space of liminality.

Liminality, as described by Banning (2002), is a "marginalized space" that is characterised by "possibility" (145). Positioned within a socio-political and cultural framework, but not bound by its limits in reality, liminality is a space from which anything is possible. Banning states that all "liminal works confront, offend or unsettle" (ibid.). Performing within liminality means to perform "to the edge of the possible", to present an "aesthetic intervention with an indirect

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effect on the political" (ibid.). Liminal spaces mirror our socio-political and cultural contexts, but distort them with possibility. It is within this space of possibility, that social change can be instigated, since it is within the liminal that it is possible to represent the unpresentable.

Theatre's role in research, however, extends beyond providing a means of actively engaging with a broader audience. Not only does theatre become a method of research itself, but in the moment of performance, it becomes an archive of knowledge. This implies knowledge of the past, the present and possibilities of the future. Mark Fleishman (2009) states that "performance is also an epistemology", an "alternative way of knowing – both in respect of its representations but also with regard to its embodied practice" (116 & 117). It is important to highlight this notion of embodied practice. An embodied performance is one that has 'presence', one that moves an audience towards an emotional recognition. An embodied performance does not simply rely on words to convey meaning. Fleishman describes it as "processes of oral and bodily transmission of knowledge through dance, storytelling, poetry and song through communities and between communities" (ibid.). Embodied performance *transfers* meaning to an audience, as it goes beyond cognitive reception and "belong to the domain of the non-representational" (ibid.). It occupies a domain that "cannot adequately be spoken of, that words cannot capture, that texts cannot convey", it is centred on the "body-subject" and not the body detached- or the mind elevated (ibid.). Embodied performance "articulates a correlation between the world of places and material objects and the world of ideas and sentiments, a correlation that is achieved from the vantage point of the body-subject and through the body-mind in active engagement with the world" (ibid.)**.** Embodied performances engage all aspects of being, mind-*and*-body, thinking-*and*-feeling, the cerebral and the visceral. It stirs within an audience a deeper recognition of the meaning. It becomes a different (or deeper?) way of knowing.

Fleishman (2009) suggest that performance, "as a way of knowing challenges at least three major knowledge orthodoxies that are all interconnected" (118-119). The first of these is Plato's "platonic notion that action is the 'inability to contemplate'" (ibid.). The second orthodoxy is the "cartesian notion that the mind (set off against the body) is the sole locus of certain knowledge" suggesting a "divided sense of being" in which the body is trapped in the world and the mind somewhere beyond, "alone the locus of thought and the essence of human being" (ibid.). The third orthodoxy is the "Durkheimian distinction between ephemeral sensation and durable representation" (ibid.). For Durkheim, "sensations are individual and private and hidden from others whereas the representations are social and public and therefore

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available to others" and the only way to make sense of these, is through the use of language, "for every word translates a concept" (ibid.). What is indicated here by Fleishman, is the notion that there is a distinction to be made, and thus a hierarchy to be enforced, between the cerebral and the visceral. However, as explained above, we are not divided beings – we are simultaneously body-and-mind. A practice that only favours one of these, as research tends to do, becomes passive and elitist. Performance as a knowledge paradigm directly opposes this, and so, opens up the possibility of broader and more active interaction with the research. It is through engagement with an audience that research goes from passive knowledge to active social engagement.

This is then why I turn to theatre as a means to present the research done in Chapter 2. As Anderson (2007) states, "theatre is a highly crafted space where you say a lot more with a lot less" (85). Theatre is a space where it is possible to engage with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful manner through embodied practice and performing within liminality. It is a way of making research accessible and relatable. But more importantly, theatre creates a deeper understanding of meaning – it brings about an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning transferred. It is a means of instigating social change that is not possible through static contemplation in research alone.

3.2 Verbatim-Physical Theatre

In the previous section, I aimed to explain why the ethnographic research done in Chapter 2 should be conveyed through performance. The next question that arises, is why specifically combine verbatim- and physical theatre to convey this research? I argue that the combination of these two theatrical forms provides a mode of performance, that is not only embodied and liminal, but is also especially well situated to impact and translate to South African audiences. To understand why verbatim- and physical theatre complement one another so well within performance, it is important to first understand how each individual form creates and conveys meaning.

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3.2.1 Physical theatre

Physical theatre creates and conveys meaning through the body in performance. Creating meaning through the body means to create from the personal – from lived, embodied experiences. Physical theatre, as such, is an embodied art form. As a devised theatre form, physical theatre also draws greatly on principles of workshop theatre. Most notably, it makes use of structured improvisation as a method of creation. Fleishman (2009) states that improvisation has a "particularly embodied and sensory nature", since we perceive our "environment through active, embodied attention and participation" (133). In another account, Fleishman (1991) states that improvisation is an "essentially physical event", because when we observe the world, "its rhythms, movements, realities" we store "these elements not in the mind but in the body" (88). Our bodies are our primary means of engaging with our world. We see, feel, sense and experience all things first through our body, and so, when we create through physical improvisation, we create from our lived, embodied experiences. As an embodied art form, physical theatre engages the visceral and the visual as primary means of communicating with an audience.

As a performance form that creates meaning from lived, embodied experiences, physical theatre has authenticity and truthfulness to it. Murray and Keefe (2007) suggest that this is because physical theatre "retains the potential of being untainted and unmediated by the sophistry and deceit of language" (21). Instead, as Nancy Kreigar points out, our bodies tell stories that reveal the conditions of our existence – the stories people are unable, forbidden or unwilling to tell (Kreigar in Loots, 2016:279). Loots (2016) further states that, because "our bodies are not something outside of ourselves, that we are our bodies", when we create and convey meaning through our bodies, we begin to tell "our deeply personal stories" (387). Juanita Finestone-Praeg (2010) also adds that it is "this nexus of personal histories and memories" that act as a catalyst for "articulating felt and lived experiences" truthfully and authentically (37). Each person, each performer, comes with "history and memory written on the embodied self" and by working from the body, "full of its own history and memory and its own 'becoming'", physical theatre creates performances that are truthful and authentic (Loots, 2016:380). Through truthful and embodied performances, physical theatre can engage its audience on a much deeper and more personal level. It engages both the cerebral as well as the visceral and allows its audience to not only see, but feel what is being conveyed through the performance. As such, physical theatre elicits embodied responses from its audience.

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Physical theatre, as an art form that primarily conveys meaning through the body, greatly relies on the visual and the visceral to elicit embodied responses from its audience. This is primarily done through the use of physical images. Unlike language, physical images are open for interpretation and require that each individual spectator be actively involved in constructing meaning from the performance for themselves. Fleishman (1997) states that physical images are "ambiguous, ambivalent, often opaque" and cannot be reduced to "simple single meanings" (208). Because physical images do not have one set meaning attached to them, the audience is required to "be actively involved in making individual choices" in regards to what they are seeing, feeling and experiencing (ibid.). This means that the audience needs to "respond in an actively imaginative way to create new, individual meaning" from the physical images they perceive (ibid. 221). Each individual spectator needs to draw on their own lived and embodied experiences to interpret the physical images that they perceive. As a result, multiple meanings emerge. Considering that each spectator creates meaning for themselves from their own lived and embodied experiences, the meanings that are created from physical images are all authentic and truthful to the spectator. Francis (2006) explains that "one cannot have an automatic response to physical images" (115). Instead, physical images "defamiliarize or make strange the world so one has to stop and think about what one saw," and as such, an audience is "forced to make an active and individual interpretation of what they experience" (ibid.). Physical theatre, through the use of physicalised images, opens up multiple possibilities of meaning. Because each individual spectator needs to create meaning for themselves, the use of physical images is inherently truthful.

The use of physical images engages an audience to construct meaning for themselves. However, it also provides a means of engaging an audience in critical reflection. This is done by drawing on elements within grotesque realism. Fleishman (1991) explains that grotesque realism uses the "material body in grotesque forms to represent, subvert and parody aspects of society and the world" (15). Furthermore, it has its "own logic which can unsettle 'given' social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion and domination which structure the social body" (ibid. 16). Grotesque realism mirrors the socio-political and cultural contexts that a performance is created from, but distorts it through subversion and parody and as such, operates within a space of liminality. Much like liminal spaces, grotesque realism has "own intellectualism which opens up new meaning, presents alternatives and possibilities rather than fixed certainties" (Fleishman, 1997:213). Drawing on grotesque realism to create physical images forces an audience to critically reflect, not only on what they are seeing, but on the

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larger socio-political framework that the images are operating in. Physical theatre, within the space of liminality, is able to represent the unpresentable and provoke an audience towards social change.

As an embodied art form that operates within a space of liminality, physical theatre becomes an oppositional theatre form. Creating and conveying meaning through the body, the body in performance becomes a performance 'text' that opposes hegemonic theatre (and literary) conventions. Fleishman (1997) remarks that the body as performance text "represents an important and radical attack on systems of authority, textual and otherwise" as it directly opposes the western notion that the mind is the sole locus of reason and thought (213). Fleishman further adds that, in South African theatre, the physical body "is a source of primary meaning which constantly challenges the hegemony of the written word in the meaning-making process" (ibid. 201). Furthermore, the physical body becomes a metaphor for the social body and, as such, can expose as well as oppose the body as a socio-political and cultural construct. Thus, the body as performance text becomes an oppositional force that can challenge the dominant socio-political and cultural discourses that regulate society. Coetzee & Munro (2010) claims that "physical theatre acts as site/sight upon which constructions of hegemony are cited, played out, subverted, questioned, inscribed, erased and reflected upon" (11). Physical theatre, as an embodied art form that operates within liminality, can create oppositional theatre that is capable of exposing and opposing the power structures that regulate society.

Physical theatre, through its engaging, physical and oppositional nature, becomes an effective means to engage with South African audiences. It creates and conveys meaning through the body in performance, by creating meaning from lived, embodied experiences. As such, physical theatre elicits embodied reactions to- and emotional recognition of the meaning transferred between performer and spectator. Moreover, through embodied and liminal performances, physical theatre becomes an oppositional theatre form that actively engages its audience in order to start conversations that incite social change. It is for these reasons that physical theatre is such an effective means of engaging with South African audiences.

3.2.2 Verbatim Theatre

Verbatim theatre is the theatricalization of ethnographic research and is a particular form of what Johnny Saldaña terms ethnotheatre. It is the telling of real stories, personal stories and of people's lived experiences. Saldaña (2011) explains that the goal of verbatim theatre is "to

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investigate a particular facet of the human condition for purposes of adapting those observations and insights into a performance medium" (12). Verbatim theatre presents itself as both a means of conducting social research, as well as engaging with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful manner. Anderson (2007) reflects that verbatim theatre documents and presents the "spoken words of 'ordinary' people in a community" and offers an approach for the "voices of marginalised groups" to be heard "through their own words" (83). Verbatim theatre has the potential to create performances that are not only relevant to people's lived experiences, but that are also truthful and authentic precisely because it is a telling of real stories, personal stories and even ordinary stories.

Verbatim theatre, at its core, is then the telling of stories. It is, as Anderson (2007) point out, "about going out and finding a story and putting it in a room where lots of other people can hear it" (89). It would be a patronizing mistake, however, to claim that verbatim theatre, gives a voice to the voiceless. All people have voices and are able to tell their own stories. This is evident in the fact that verbatim theatre is essentially a collection of those stories. The power of verbatim theatre, however, lies within its ability to provide the "voice" with a "listening ear" (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2013:32). Greg Homann (2009) reflects that the "role of the theatre maker is aligned with "one who witnesses" (152). He continues to quote South African theatre historian Temple Hauptfleisch on the matter, stating that the duty of the theatre maker is "to go forth and bear witness", to give evidence and express an understanding of what is happening within a community (Hauptfleisch in Homann, 2009:153). This cannot be done by simply stating facts, but rather through an "acknowledgement of personal truths" (ibid). Loots (2016) also affirms that verbatim theatre "requires the theatre maker to engage a community around an issue" and "to use the actual spoken words of those who find themselves (bodily and politically) in the situation" in order to tell their stories truthfully and authentically (382). It is important to note, as Saldaña (2011) points out, "oral histories are people's memories, and memory is a notoriously bad historian" (30). It is indeed not history's 'facts' that verbatim theatre tries to portray, but rather that which is "caught in memory", a different "kind of truth" and "often just as valid" (ibid.). Verbatim theatre is the telling of personal truths, truths that would not otherwise be heard. It creates a platform where stories that are silenced in society are forced to be heard. Moreover, through the telling of previously silenced stories, verbatim theatre presents the possibility of operating as an oppositional force within society. Telling silenced stories provides its listening ear with a counter-narrative, a powerful instigator for social change.

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Verbatim theatre can be, as Kathy Bishop (2014) suggests, "immensely moving, even transformational" in its exposition of silenced narratives (71). It can be a "means of generating insight, curiosity, debate and an imaginative openness to 'changing things for the better' – at both the individual & wider, social levels" (ibid.). However, at the same time, she also warns that "ethnodrama practitioners need to be aware of the pull towards predictability" within staging research (ibid.). Verbatim theatre runs the severe risk of becoming, at its worst, "oppressive: promising enlightenment but delivering doctrine; and at its most mediocre: delivering mere messages'" (ibid.). The power of theatre does not lie within preaching answers, but rather in its ability to get its audience to ask questions. Bishop explains that "art should lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers" (ibid.). When an audience starts asking important questions for themselves, they gain a deeper understanding of the meaning being conveyed. Soans explains that good theatre gives spectators "a heightened emotional experience when strong narrative combines with the empathy that comes from recognition", resulting in a "kind of enlightenment" (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2013:41). By revealing questions rather than answers, verbatim theatre allows an audience to actively engage with the meaning being portrayed to create a deeper understanding of it – to empathise with the human reality behind it. Bishop (2014) states that a verbatim theatre practitioner must "value the participating audience as not only potential learners but as co-creators of the learning process", that "the making of meaning is a shared process" and as such, the performance must be "dialogic as well as powerful" (71). As with physical theatre, verbatim theatre needs to be a transfer of meaning, a dialogic process that brings about an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning being transferred. It is through eliciting embodied reactions that questions and conversations are taken away from the performance and into society.

Verbatim theatre is, at its core, the telling of personal stories that are truthful and authentic. It is in its very nature challenging and oppositional through exposing important questions that should be asked within society. Soans concludes that the audience of a verbatim performance "will expect the play to be political; they will be willing to accept an unconventional format; they will probably expect the material to be contentious and to challenge their opinions" but above all, the audience of a verbatim performance "will enter the theatre with the understanding that they're not going to be lied to" (Soans in Hammond & Steward, 2013:19). The audience of a verbatim performance knows that what they are looking at and listening to is truthful and authentic. The subject matter is not only relevant in the performance, but in their broader socio-

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political and cultural contexts. Verbatim theatre requires its audience to ask their questions, not only in the performance, but until they are answered in society. Verbatim theatre tells stories that need to be told, but more importantly, it tells the stories that need to be heard.

3.2.3. Combining Verbatim- and Physical Theatre

Verbatim theatre is a telling of personal stories, of lived experiences. We experience the world, however, through our bodies. Physical theatre, as an embodied art form, works to convey embodied meanings, experiences and memories. Working through the body is to work truthful, and so, the body brings to life the truth being told through verbatim theatre. Both theatre forms actively engage their audience to create a deeper understanding of meaning – to bring about an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning transferred.

McCormack (2018) states, physical theatre's focus on "the body and movement as a mode of communication" can provide verbatim theatre makers with a means to layer information, provoke empathy and engage with an audience (v). Kris Rutten also adds that physical theatre's "participatory method of making images can visualise the development of empathy and the emergence of an embodied and dialogical form of ethnographic knowledge" (298). McCormack (2018) continues to add that physical theatre rejects the idea of a "single truth" and "opens up new possibilities for creative treatment of the material" without compromising a truthful representation of the source (29). The combination of verbatim- and physical theatre offers the means of creating, what Saldaña (2011) describes as "an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (33). The combination of verbatim- and physical theatre gives a truthful representation precisely because it rejects a singular truth. Through collaborative improvisation and multiple interviews as source material, verbatim-physical theatre gives multiple perspectives and opens up a diverse possibility of meaning.

Combining verbatim- and physical theatre creates a mode of performance that is both embodied and liminal. As a theatrical form, it actively engages its audience by eliciting an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning conveyed. Furthermore, I argue that verbatim-physical theatre is especially well situated to translate and impact South African audiences. However, to understand verbatim-physical theatre's unique disposition in engaging South African audiences, it is important to first situate it within a South African theatre context.

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3.2.4. Verbatim-Physical Theatre within a South African Context

To situate verbatim-physical theatre within a South African theatre context, we must first look at the history of performance within South Africa. South African theatre traditions and practices evolved out of an amalgamation of indigenous and European influences. It further took form and transformed in reaction to the socio-political contexts of its time. It is this amalgamation of indigenous and European influences that created a fertile seedbed for verbatim-physical theatre to emerge and take root in South African theatre.

Before the colonisation of Africa in the 15th century, African Oral Tradition was the predominant mode of storytelling and performance was used to pass down cultural knowledge through speech acts. Oral tradition is physical in nature. Walter Ong explains that the oral word "never exists in a simply verbal context, as a written word does", but rather "always engages the body" (Ong in Fleishman, 1997:202). Oral tradition extends beyond the verbal to the visceral. It is an act, a doing – an active embodiment of the story being told. With colonisation, however, came a tradition of literacy – one that valued literacy higher than orality – imposing a dichotomy. Through the enforcement of this dichotomy, this division of body and mind as previously explained, that theatre moved away from the physical to the literary. The inherent physicality within African performers, however, remained.

In the 20th century South Africa experienced the rise of Apartheid. This sparked resistance across multiple platforms. Hauptfleisch et al. remark that, while "initial resistance to racism and discrimination tended to be predominantly peaceful", in the period between 1960 and 1976, conflict gave rise to a "series of bloody confrontations between the protesters and the police (e.g. at Cato Manor, Sharpeville, Langa and Soweto), and changed everything irrevocably" (Hauptfleisch et al., n.d.). The period between 1960 and 1990 became known as the struggle against apartheid and shaped "every social, cultural and economic act" (ibid.). Theatre in South Africa became a powerful tool in political consciousness-raising and the concept of improvisational and experimental performances gave rise to "a multi-faceted agenda of oppositional theatre, promotion of local work, experimentation and training for the disadvantaged" (ibid.). It is within these practices that workshop theatre emerged.

Workshop theatre, as an oppositional form, became especially prevalent after 1976. The process of creating workshop theatre is characterised by collaborative improvisation, "a physical process in which gesture exists before and alongside words as an independent sign system" (Fleishman, 1997:201). Workshop theatre is physical before it is verbal. It "exhibits a

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physical quality with a pronounced gestural component which runs alongside and interweaves with the words of the text" (ibid.). Furthermore, improvisations were based on lived experiences and prevalent socio-political issues. Workshop theatre, being physical in nature and created from lived experiences, is a form of embodied performance. Moreover, developed from- and alongside township theatre as well as protest theatre, workshop theatre draws extensively on indigenous theatre traditions – that is to say, oral tradition. This means that workshop theatre is firmly rooted in the tradition of story-telling, but more importantly, embodied story-telling. Workshop theatre is physical in nature and tells the stories of the people. It is also important to note that another influential factor in workshop theatre is the European avant-garde.

It is within the European avant-garde that physical theatre as form emerged. The European avant-garde was a highly political art movement that prioritised issues of anti-establishment within the context of alienation and transgression (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996:40). Influenced by theatre practitioners such as Brecht, Grotowski and Artaud, performance modes evolved out of a mistrust in language as an important tool in transferring ideas, meaning and emotions. In this time, dance practitioners also started searching for a mode of creation that moved away from the virtuosity that has come to dominate dance as an art form. Influential practitioners such as Laban, Lecoq and Pina Bausch "put forth a version of dance based on the experience of the body in space" and advocated for movement for movement's sake (ibid. 45). Physical theatre, then, found its formulation in the cross-pollination of the European avant-garde and dance, where performance evolved through the aim of discovering a "language beyond words", a form of theatre that is immersed in the physical and uses this immersion to convey meaning (ibid. 43). Physical theatre is a performance mode that locates the primary signifier of meaning within the body.

The influence of the European avant-garde was soon implemented within South African theatre and theatre training. Philosophies and ideologies of not only theatre practitioners such as Brecht, Grotowski and Artaud were integrated into institutional theatre training, but also those of movement practitioners such as Laban and Lecoq. This integration was made easy by the already inherent physicality of South African theatre due to traditions of workshop theatre, protest theatre and African oral tradition, soon giving rise to a distinctly South African physical theatre.

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Furthermore, after 1994 when Apartheid officially came to an end, story-telling became an integral part of 'healing' through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Homann (2009) explains that the "act of witnessing was so strongly set up in the 1 674 hearings held by the TRC", that it is now inherent in how "South African theatre practitioners construct stories" (150). Homann further states that the TRC recognised "personal retellings of events as significant truths, aiming towards storytelling as a means to 'restore both memory and humanity'" (ibid. 152). The act of story-telling is a very powerful one within South African theatre – one that has the possibility of instigating significant social change. This act is, however, not a passive re-telling, but an active embodiment of truth. Fleishman (1997) explains that life in South Africa, "filled as it has been with desperate struggles for change, for power and for simple survival, has a physically dynamic nature which feeds physically dynamic images on the stage" (202). It is this physically dynamic disposition of South African theatre, with its inherent nature of story-telling, that creates the foundation for verbatim-physical theatre to actively engage with South African audiences in an embodied, liminal and meaningful way. It is through embodied and liminal performances that verbatim-physical theatre presents the possibility of instigating social change within South African societies.

3.2.5 The Role of Verbatim-Physical Theatre in South Africa

Theatre is a telling of stories, or more specifically, an interaction with stories. It is an active engagement with the social, the political, the cultural and the personal. Banning (2005) observes that theatre "seems to fulfil an intrinsically human need of the kind that is not associated with material survival", a need to "enact stories, to represent ourselves to ourselves through our physical bodies" (73). In Chapter 2 we saw that people have a need to talk. They want to tell their stories. Theatre, as Baxter & Aitchison (2010) points out, is "all of us telling a story and all of us going through a certain experience" through which an audience "goes away with a deeper meaning, rather than entertainment" (56). In Chapter 2 it is clear that there is a general need to, not only talk about matters regarding gender representation, but to actively and constructively engage with it. It is from this need to engage and start conversations that theatre's role in society develops. Verbatim-physical theatre creates a platform for women's stories, not only to be told, but to be heard – to be interacted and engaged with.

Fleishman (1997) profoundly stated that "for most people making theatre in South Africa the written word on its own is woefully inadequate to portray and explain the full complexity of

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the reality they face" (200). Fleishman continues to state that, "words and gestures are only two points in a plural field which includes many alternative positions", emphasising the plurality – the complexity – within South African theatre (ibid.). It would be a mistake to think that the verbal can be separated from the physical, that one can exist without the other to convey the complex socio-political, cultural and personal issues that people in South Africa face. As Fleishman remarks, a "complex subject requires a complex treatment and gives rise to a complex 'text' in which the written word, the spoken word, and the transformative material body, amongst others, are in a constant state of dynamic dialogue" (ibid.). Theatre in South Africa, to be effective, needs to be in a 'constant state of dynamic dialogue'. It is built on a long tradition of story-telling, is imbued with inherent physicality and has always been a strong means for political consciousness-raising and education. It is this nature of South African theatre that makes the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre so effective. Verbatim-physical theatre offers the means of portraying ethnographic research – a means to tell women's stories – in a manner that is politically conscious, educational and accessible through embodied, liminal performance.

It is through the telling of personal, social and communal stories, that theatre becomes a way of reflecting on- and relating to the world. Antonin Artaud famously declared that theatre's double is life and that the role of theatre is to hold up a mirror to its double (life/society). Theatre becomes a space of reflection. Theatre does not claim to portray the 'truth', but rather reflects, as Loots (2016) puts it, "ideas of our truth; stories that speak into the gaps left by histories written by conquerors– be these (for example) race, gender or nation-orientated" (377). It tells the stories that have been silenced, the stories that *need* to be told, those stories that would otherwise not be heard. The telling of stories becomes a process of reflecting – of holding a mirror up to an audience and compelling them to recognise their reflection, their complacency, within it.

South Africa has a complex history of conflict and violence, a legacy that still affects us today. In South Africa, "performance has historically been signalled as a powerful cultural weapon, one which has the capacity to effect change and challenge unjust social mechanisms" through its active and reflective nature (Craighead, 2010:261). Protest theatre, developed alongside, and influenced by workshop as well as township theatre, is a highly effective form of theatre for political consciousness-raising to effect social change. Though historically employed to fight against unjust racial divisions and discrimination, protest theatre can in today's context be employed to cross "over the racial and cultural divide" through collaborative creation and

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creating a space to listen to each other (Baxter & Aitchison, 2010:52). Through the combination of these "physical and cultural performance characteristics", theatre can be seen as an "intercultural collaboration", a form of theatre that South Africa drastically needs (ibid. 65). Historically, in South Africa, the issues of women have been silenced in favour of the 'real struggle' – the struggle against Apartheid. Today we are still facing the consequences of a 'freedom' built on silencing women. Intercultural collaboration offers a means, not to move past issues of racism, which is still very prevalent within South African societies, but rather extend the scope of consciousness-raising to include issues on gender, sexuality etc. Without dismissing their differences, but rather through understanding their differences (positionality), women can stand together to lift each other up and have their voices heard.

Loots advocates that through the use of ethnography and anthropology, a space for those "historically silenced, in the grand canonical paternalistic claim to 'rightful storytelling'" can be created "to begin telling their own stories into the gaps of history" (2016:377). However, the complexities of these stories cannot be accounted for through language and the written word alone. These stories need to be more than heard; they need to be engaged with. Through embodied performance – a performance where "a physical, sensual, and vital interaction' between the body of the performer and the body of the other" takes place – these stories are not only heard, but experienced (Fleishman, 2009:123). Clare Craighead (2010) further affirms that "bodies are socially produced" and thus, "the body becomes integral in relation to ideas of social space, cultural ownership and production" (265 & 266). Echoing third-wave feminism's slogan 'the personal is political', the claim can be made that our bodies, that which is most personal to us, yet socially produced and displayed, are in effect political. An embodied performance, a performance that creates meaning *from* the world and *through* the body is then always a political act. Verbatim-physical theatre is the telling of real people's stories through embodied performance. It is in its very nature, a form of political conciseness raising. The most potent form this political act takes, is that of compelling an audience to recognise their own position, their own complacency, within its reflection.

3.3 Feminist Theatre and Performance

In the previous sections, I have aimed at explaining why theatre, and more specifically verbatim-physical theatre, is an effective and beneficial means of portraying ethnographic research. It is important, however, to also highlight verbatim-physical theatre's poignancy in

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specifically telling the stories of women. As set out in Chapter 2, I aim to investigate and expose the social and cultural norms that regulate power dynamics in our society, and in effect, regulate gender norms and constructions. Moreover, I aim to collect, depict and engage with stories of women's life experiences through embodied performance. This study is located within a feminist research paradigm and by extent, aims at creating a feminist verbatim-physical theatre production that tells the stories of women – stories that engage and start conversations that go beyond the end of a stage. It is therefore necessary to locate physical- and verbatim theatre practices, as well as the combination thereof within feminist theatre and performance practices.

3.3.1. The Personal is Political

Feminism, as explored in Chapter 2, cannot be defined according to one agenda. It is a range of political movements that aim to dismantle harmful practices of the patriarchy and to systematically abolish the patriarchy itself, and as such, advocates for equality on various social, cultural and political matters. It can then, overall, be described as political conciseness raising to provoke social change. Augusto Boal (1979) famously states that all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. It is then, for this reason that feminists turned to theatre as a means of political conciseness raising, of starting conversations and advocating for social change.

Loots (1997) explains that "theatrical practices, as instances of culture, are lived experiences and hence are connected to the power relations that operate in any given society" (142). Loots (2001) also quotes Angela Davis on the matter, stating that the arts "are forms of social consciousness - special forms of social consciousness that can potentially awaken an urge in those affected by it to creatively transform their oppressive environments" (13). In this sense, theatre acts as a catalyst of social change by firstly, exposing socio-political and cultural issues, and secondly, engaging its audience in such a manner as to evoke empathy and start conversations. Loots further states that the arts are "special because of their ability to influence feelings as well as knowledge" (ibid.). Engaging the visceral as well as the cerebral, embodied performances opens up the possibility of not only exposing and conveying social issues, but to actively engage an audience. This active engagement guides an audience towards emotional recognition, meaning that the spectator not only sees and understand the issue at hand, but feels

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the effect thereof within themselves. Theatre's power lies in its ability to make the social and the political, personal.

Central to feminist practice is the act of consciousness-raising. Abrams (2019) explains consciousness-raising as "a sharing of personal experiences within a group to better understand and then challenge" the issues at hand (207). Consciousness-raising was a "critical element" in understanding the different ways women were oppressed by placing the "emphasis on self-expression and self-understanding", a practice once again rising to prominence within emerging fifth-wave feminism (ibid.). This can be accredited to fifth-wave feminism's intensified focus on inclusivity and positionality. Disele (2020) quotes Nira Yuval-Davis on the matter, stating that "knowledge emanating from one standpoint cannot be finished" (Disele, 2020:335). Within contemporary feminism, and thus feminist theatre practice, a great emphasis is placed on challenging internalised biases to make work more inclusive and diverse (Chapman et al., 2003:29). Feminist theatre's aim is "to uncover aspects of social life that had been socially invisible and to analyse and interpret social reality from a new vantage point" (Anderson et al., 1987:121). Feminist theatre not only gives individual women the opportunity to tell their stories, but creates a platform where these stories can be heard and engaged with.

It is then, in the search of a new vantage point – new stories to tell – that feminist theatre finds an echoing sentiment of consciousness-raising within verbatim- and physical theatre. Coetzee and Munro (2010) state that theatre and performance, when framed within the socio-political and cultural context that it is performed in, reveals "complex value systems and cultural constructs" that "can support or subvert significations of cultural dominance in voice, gaze and representation" (11). Verbatim theatre offers a means for women to reclaim their voice, to tell their individual stories and more importantly, for those stories to be heard. Physical theatre offers a means of reclaiming one's body from the appropriating socio-political systems that govern its representation. Furthermore, physical theatre offers a means of expressing lived experiences that a patriarchal language system cannot. It is through the use of verbatim- and physical theatre that women's stories can be told in a manner that adequately portrays their social reality.

3.3.2. Reclaiming the Voice

Verbatim theatre offers a means of actively re-inserting women's narratives into the public sphere. As stated above, through the use of interviews, verbatim theatre draws significantly on

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techniques of ethnography as well as oral history. These methods are also used, within feminist research, as a means of reclaiming women's personal narratives as valuable and insightful knowledge. Through this, feminist research- and theatre practices aim at finding the truth of women's lived experiences. Not a universal truth or singular narrative that can account for all women, but a diverse collective of lived experiences. A truth found in multiple perspectives and diverse experiences that comes from the personal. It is truthful, precisely because it is personal.

Ethnography and oral history came to a rise as important methods within feminist research during second-wave feminism, as a means of gaining more relevant knowledge, as well as reconstituting the biased knowledge, around women's lived experiences. Anderson et al. (1987) state that this reconstruction of knowledge was fundamental in legitimizing women's perspectives and work against the "discontinuity" that persisted within academia, where "women's perspectives were not absent simply as a result of oversight but had been suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom by dominant research traditions institutionalized in academic settings and in scientific disciplines" (106). Moreover, critical analyses of this knowledge "often showed that masculinist biases lurked beneath the claims of social science and history to objectivity, universal relevance, and truth" (ibid.). It is then out of this discontinuity that the need for 'truth' emerged. However, as argued in Chapter 2, one of third-wave feminism's greatest critiques was its universalisation of truth. It is this universalisation of truth that fifth-wave feminism now aims at dismantling, placing emphasis on positionality when collecting individual, personal narratives.

Within fifth-wave feminism, we once again see the rise of ethnography and oral history techniques as a means of collecting, portraying and engaging with women's stories. However, instead of trying to find a universal truth that can account for all women's oppression, it is now used to gain multiple perspectives on the lived experiences of women. Ethnography and oral history techniques present the opportunity to ask a diverse group of women, what is it really like? How did it feel and What did it mean? When women speak for themselves, they reveal new perspectives, previously overlooked experiences and feelings that are powerful in re-situating our understanding of the past and the present. Loots (2016) claims in response to "those that complain that personal narratives emphasise a single, speaking subject fail to realise that no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of constructed meaning" (381). As previously stated, there is an indivisible link between the personal and the socio-political and cultural. This means that, as Loots explains, "rich meaning, culturally relevant personal

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experience, and an intense motivation to know are what typify and strengthen" ethnographic endeavours (ibid). When women speak for themselves, they directly oppose the historic silencing of female narratives. The very act of speaking becomes a challenge to hegemonic conventions within socio-political and cultural realities. It is through this active challenge that the role of theatre becomes essential in consciousness-raising.

Performance is an active reclaiming of one's voice. In theatre, the embodied act of speaking becomes a symbolic act of claiming agency. Disele (2020) states that inserting "women's voices into the public space through performance is a strategy for interrogating and delegitimising a dominant narrative of womanhood and nationhood that serves to silence women's voices" (334). Working from the personal reclaims the "female experience from patriarchal histories" and creates a truthful performance precisely because it is not universal (Abrams, 2019:207). Aston (2005) adds to this when explaining that working from "personal experience offers you not only a way into the text, but also a way of resisting the 'here are the important, universal themes and messages in this play that you ought to address' approach" (90-91). An audience does not connect to a universal theme or message, they connect to the human reality that confronts them. Aston further stresses that "we should think of the personal not just as the 'text' of an individual in isolation but produced by [their] social, cultural and material environment" (ibid.). The personal becomes powerful precisely because it is not universal nor in isolation. Working from the personal within theatre means to work within a unique, yet powerful place of human reality.

Verbatim theatre is a powerful method for reclaiming women's voices, precisely because it is created from the personal. It is the telling of personal stories that are truthful and authentic, and so, legitimizes narratives that would otherwise not be heard. It is a means of actively re-inserting women's narratives into the social, the political and the cultural. It is in its very nature challenging and oppositional through exposing the important questions that should be asked within society. It tells the stories that need to be told, but more importantly, it exposes questions that need to be asked.

3.3.3. Reclaiming the Body

Physical theatre, as an embodied art form, presents the possibility of reclaiming the socially constructed body as personal and active. Without agency one cannot act, and so, reclaiming the body is to reclaim agency. Furthermore, to create through the body means to create from

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the personal – form lived, embodied experiences – and as such tells embodied stories, stories that cannot be conveyed in language alone. It is for this reason that physical theatre becomes a powerful method for feminist theatre to oppose and challenge the socio-political and cultural norms that construct and regulate women's bodies.

The body in performance is not a neutral site from which to create meaning. As explained in Chapter 2, the gendered body is a social and cultural construct. Loots (1995) explains that the visceral body is "encoded by cultural practices, social and racial constructions and gendered conditions" that layers meaning onto the performing body (107). For the performing body to become a site for new meaning to be created from and conveyed through, it must first be deconstructed according to the different socio-political and cultural signifiers that determine how it is perceived by an audience. Physical theatre as a feminist theatre practice offers the means of doing this. Through the use of physicalised images, physical theatre offers a means of exposing, subverting and recreating the gendered body in movement. The body in performance becomes a means of challenging the socio-political and cultural norms that govern it and exposes the power dynamics that regulate it.

The social body is governed by expectations placed on it in relation to how it should look, how it should move, its capability and significance within society. Women's bodies have historically been objectified, limited and always expected to be less than what it is. Through movement and physicalised images, physical theatre challenges this notion of the body as a passive surface. It actively reclaims the body as an agent that can move, take up space and push boundaries. Loots (1995) asserts that the "culturally constructed body needs to be offered the potential to create and experience unexplored movement patterns in order to generate new cultural practices" that "work and read against the grain of the patriarchal body" (56). Loots further emphasizes that the "male body needs to move beyond the masculine as defined by patriarchy, just as the female body needs not be limited by the feminine" (ibid. 57). Physical theatre opens up the body to possibility. The possibility to move, take up space, and push boundaries. To move past the confines of patriarchal constructions and actively reclaim it as a locus of agency.

Furthermore, physical theatre offers a means to tell those stories that simply cannot be expressed in the language of the patriarchy. Language as a weapon of the patriarchy, as Loots (2010) explains, "diminished the range of women's thoughts and being in the world" (105). Loots further quotes Dale Spender, stating that "the liberation of women is rooted in the

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liberation of language" (Spender in Loots, 2010:105). Aston (2005) also affirms that "the return to the woman's body as a means of giving 'voice' to experiences repressed by the logocentrism of a patriarchal culture" is paramount in the "evolution of feminist ideas and practice" (9). The body in performance has the ability to rewrite itself and convey embodied truths. It is a means of telling those stories that there simply are no words for and actively work against the constant limiting and lessening of women's bodies.

Physical theatre has the potential to be a powerful method of reclaiming women's bodies. To be physical in theatre is to be actively taking up space and to move past the boundaries and limits placed on women's bodies. It is an act of reclaiming agency, of opposing and challenging the socio-political and cultural norms that construct and regulate women's bodies. It is an act of telling embodied stories. It tells those stories that cannot be expressed in language alone; stories that need to be more than heard, that need to be engaged with, empathised with – stories that need to be felt.

3.3.4. Verbatim-Physical Theatre as Feminist Protest Theatre

Loots (2001) claims that "it is usually a society's artists who act as oppositional voices to draw attention to that which is wrong in society" (12). Holding up a mirror to society through theatre, not only reflects the wrongs within it, but also distorts reality with possibility. The possibility of what could have been, what can be and what could be. Theatre, like a mirror, operates in what Aston (2005) describes as a "sphere of disturbance" (18). It is within this sphere of disturbance that protest takes place. Aston states that feminist theatre "has a strong tradition of protest theatre", one that echoes the tradition of protest theatre within South Africa (ibid.). Verbatim-physical theatre, as a mode of protest theatre, is extremely well situated to communicate with South African audiences.

Historically, protest theatre has been a means of saying the unsayable. As Loots (2001) points out, cultural "production allows social subjects agency – a chance to speak and create new discourse" (10). However, in contrast to this, Aston (2005) remarks that "subjectivity is recognised as problematic for women, who are required to participate linguistically, socially, culturally, etc., in a system that constructs them as marginal and alien" (9). As pointed out in Chapter 2, gaining agency through social subjectivity is not the same as gaining social freedom. Gaining the right to speak does not offer agency when 'what you can say' is pre-constructed by socio-political and cultural factors. Furthermore, women can also not articulate their

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position as marginalised and alienated within the language of the patriarchy. The question then arises, "how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it", if we do not have the adequate language to do so? (ibid.).

I would suggest that, through embodied verbatim-physical performance modes, we can move past patriarchal language to a mode of expression that does not limit women in their actions and speech. We can move beyond the boundaries of social subjectivity and claim agency through legitimizing those stories that grasp the collective reality of women's lived experiences. Verbatim-physical theatre, in its very nature, is politically charged and advantageously positioned to protest for social change.

Protest theatre, however, runs the risk of becoming didactical. A didactical performance does not engage its audience in a dialogue of meaning and as such, closes down new possibilities and alternatives. The power of theatre, as stated above, does not lie within preaching answers, but rather in its ability to get its audience to ask questions. It is in this sense that verbatim-physical theatre plays a crucial role within feminist protest theatre. Through the incorporation of multiple perspectives and lived experiences, by revealing questions rather than answers, verbatim-physical theatre avoids didacticism and actively engages the audience by eliciting an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning conveyed. As such, verbatim-physical theatre, as a mode of feminist protest theatre, opens up the possibility of inspiring social change, instead of instructing it. It is a means of engaging an audience "irrespective of education or level of literacy, a form which includes all people irrespective of" race, class or sexuality because it is created from the personal (Fleishman, 1990:110). It is truthful and authentic, allowing an audience to connect to the human reality within it. Verbatim-physical theatre tells those stories that cannot be expressed in language alone; stories that need to be more than heard, that need to be engaged with, empathised with – stories that need to be felt in order to expose questions that need to be asked.

3.4 Conclusion

Verbatim-physical theatre is a means of reclaiming one's voice – to tell personal stories that would otherwise not be heard. It is an active reclaiming of one's body – to be physical in theatre is to be actively taking up space and to move past the boundaries and limits placed on women's bodies. Verbatim-physical theatre is an act of reclaiming agency, of opposing and challenging

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the socio-political and cultural norms that construct and regulate women's bodies and voices. Butler (2009) states that "the right to free speech, the right to public freedoms does not exist in an ideal sphere" but instead, only comes into existence when they are being exercised (vii). Women need to actively lay claim to those rights which they do not yet have. The right to speak out freely and the right to take up space. Butler adds that "one can never stop speaking out publicly and taking up space because then the very voice and space would stop existing" (ibid). Verbatim-physical theatre, through embodied liminal performances, becomes a powerful means of speaking out and taking up space.

Verbatim-physical theatre can become a powerful agent of social change, not only in this research project, but for research within the humanities and social sciences in general. It offers a means of exposing questions that need to be asked and spark conversations that need to take place. Verbatim-physical theatre engages with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful manner and creates a deeper understanding of meaning. It is a way of making research accessible and relatable through an embodied reaction to, and emotional recognition of, the meaning transferred. It is a means of instigating social change that is not possible through static contemplation in research alone. It is for this reason that I turned to verbatim-physical theatre to portray the ethnographic research done in Chapter 2.

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CHAPTER 4: WHAT I WAS TOLD

I write for women told that silence is a virtue and pain is something you keep tucked inside your skin, inside your mouth, inside the walls of your house.

– *Ijeoma Umebinyuo (2020)*

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

– *Maya Angelou*

In the previous chapter, I argued that verbatim-physical theatre is exceptionally well situated to operate as a mode of feminist protest theatre within South Africa and offers an effective means for portraying the ethnographic research done in Chapter 2. This essentially answered the question of *why* verbatim- and physical theatre should be combined to tell the stories of women. The second part of this research study involves qualitative research-led practice investigating *how* verbatim- and physical theatre can be effectively combined. From this, a verbatim-physical theatre source text was created that is included in Addendum E. In this chapter I will explore the creation and staging of *What I was Told*, a verbatim-physical theatre production telling the stories of these women, the stories told to us and the stories that still need to be told.

The ethnographic case study conducted in Chapter 2 aimed at collecting stories. Multiple and diverse stories that, together, weave a multi-faceted perspective of womanhood. These stories were taken to the rehearsal room to be explored and created from by the all-female cast and myself. Juanita Finestone-Praeg (2010) remarks that there is a "strong call towards identity" that drives our creation and exploration processes (37). The notion of identity is layered and complex and "has to be and is constantly being discovered", probing "our background, economics, education, sexuality, gender and culture ... all these things that make up the fabric of our being and which are all so incredibly rich and maddening to explore (ibid.). By utilising methods of workshop theatre to create physical images, movement pieces and verbatim text, the production aimed at telling embodied stories that grapple with what it means to be a woman. It is this constant discovery of identity that formed the driving force behind creating and staging *What I was Told.*

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4.1 Creating What I Was Told

What I was Told, was created through a workshop process. The workshop process consisted of two sections: creating physical theatre and creating a verbatim text. It was important for me that these two processes happened simultaneously, constantly influencing one other, but separately. We did not use the interview material directly to create physical material, but rather drew on themes that emerged from the interview process and group discussions. The fact that physical sequences were not directly created out of the verbatim text, allowed for a performance text to be created that was layered and multi-dimensional. Through this process, we aimed at creating physical images, movement pieces and a verbatim text that tells embodied stories.

4.1.1 The Workshop Process

What I was Told was created through a workshop process combining physical theatre and verbatim theatre. Fleishman (1990) states that defining exactly what constitutes as workshop theatre is difficult, since it is "unclear where the boundaries between what is and what is not workshop theatre begin and end" (88). Instead, Fleishman proposes a few reoccurring tendencies that can be considered as a broad outline for workshop theatre:

- It is made by a group of people together, as opposed to being written by a single playwright in isolation.
- It is made for performance and has more to do with life than with literature. A workshop play cannot therefore be easily published as the text is not easily divorced from the performance. Any published version of a workshop play is only a crystallisation of a process at one particular stage of that process.
- It has a structural form which is unique and draws on traditional oral form.
- It has a particular performance style, generic to the South African townships, which is non-naturalistic, physical, musical and larger than life.
- It combines various performance forms such as music, narrative and dance within the context of a single performance.
- It has more to do with the collective subject than with the individual subject of Western drama. It is an essentially urban form of cultural expression,

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rooted in the urban experience of South Africa, and is overtly political in nature.

- It displays an ironic comic vision which is both regenerative in the face of the essential tragedy of the South African situation, and transformative in its ability to estrange power structures through grotesque parody.

(Fleishman, 1990:89)

From the above characteristics, it is clear that South African workshop theatre is a multi-faceted performance mode, foregrounding non-hierarchal, collective methods of creation and is political in nature. The most distinct characteristic of workshop theatre, I would argue however, is its use of improvisation as a method of creating a performance text. It is through the use of improvisation that the above-mentioned characteristics form a collective. As described in Chapter 3, creating through structured improvisation is to create from lived, embodied experiences. Improvisations are structured based on themes suggested by the performers or the director that emerged from observing and reflecting on their socio-political and personal contexts. In this sense, improvisation becomes a collective exploration that allows individuals to tell their own stories, while at the same time creating a collective story that is authentic and truthful. Fleishman (1991) reflects that in the workshop process, "the performers improvise in order to create text" and as such, the performance is 'authored' by the collective (90). Workshop theatre never tells a single story, but is always rooted both in the personal as well as the socio-political, giving multiple perspectives within a single performance.

Fleishman further suggests that improvisation "shifts the performers from being creative interpreters to being creative authors, potentially freeing them from a pre-existent text and the control of an external authorial voice" (ibid. 92). This means that there is no hierarchy imposed on the creation process. There is no 'single authorial voice' that decides the content and structure of the production. Instead, it is created through equal participation from all role players. Aston (2005) emphasises that the devising process (workshop) is "especially important to women who are marginalised by dominant culture and theatre and therefore have most to gain from 'authoring' their own scripts" (143). Through the workshop process, authoring a script becomes a way in which performers claim agency, not only for themselves, but also in legitimizing narratives that are silenced in dominant discourses.

The workshop process for *What I was Told* started with discussions between the performers and myself on the broad themes of the production. This was done so that everyone could have

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a proper understanding, not only of each other's viewpoints, but of what we wanted to accomplish with the performance. It was important for me to work with material that we, as a collective, found pertinent and wanted to engage with. Through this, the participants (myself included) not only understood the subject matter, but also our positionality in relation to it. This was an important factor in creating empathy with the performance text and as such, helped the performers form a better connection to the spoken text.

As explored in Chapter 3, forming a connection with the human reality behind the performance – having empathy with what is being portrayed – is an essential part of creating an overall truthful and impactful performance. Even when it was someone else's story, the performers understood and felt the emotional undercurrents of that story. At the same time, they were able to draw on their own lived experiences in relation to the subject matter, creating a layered and complex performance text. As a collective we worked through the interview questionnaire, discussing our own answers and telling our own stories. Some of the most prominent themes that came up during these discussions were that of body image, the stigma around menstruation and being sexualised and harassed. These themes, along with the interview questionnaire and interview material, formed the bases from which improvisations were structured to create the physical theatre component of *What I was Told.*

4.1.2 Creating Physical Theatre

Following a workshop process, the physical components of *What I was Told,* were created through structured improvisations. Improvisations were structured with the aim of eliciting a physical response to the themes and issues being dealt with. It was important that the performance text was not predetermined by the discussions mentioned above, but rather formed an informing layer, or a lens, through which to engage with the workshop process. This allowed for a constant discovery of new possibilities, instead of getting stuck in preconceived ideas of what the production should be.

In his work, Fleishman (2009) stresses the importance of creating in the moment through improvisation, stating that his "dramaturgical method uses the body-mind and play to unlock meaning inherent in the material world" (132). He continues to reflect that "the concept of 'spontaneity' – the removal of all blocks or impediments to responding immediately in the moment – and the idea of 'remaining in the present'" is paramount to create performances that are truthful and authentic (ibid.). To remove cognitive blocks and remain in the present,

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performers first need to find what Fleishman calls 'silence within the body'. In this sense, finding silence within the body is not the same as being passive. Finding silence is to be in a state of open-and-readiness. Fleishman (1991) notes that this silence is "not only a silence that exists outside of the performer, enveloping him/her, it is a silence inside of the performer too" (86). This silence is a "point of unlimited possibility in which all creative directions remain open" (ibid.).

This can also be described as having 'presence', as explored in Chapter 3. Anne Dennis, physical theatre practitioner and movement coach explains that, to find presence, the performer must first find their physical and emotional neutral (Dennis in Keefe & Murray, 2007:184). According to Dennis, the neutral body is "immobile, breathing gently, weight slightly forward [and] secretly relaxed" (ibid.). From here, the performer can find stillness and it is in stillness that "the actor begins to create" (ibid.). After finding stillness/silence, the performer needs to use their breath as a catalyst for movement. It is through the use of breath that the actor becomes "vibrant, alive, ready" and creates presence (ibid.). Breath "expresses emotion" and it is with enormous clarity that "feelings are expressed through the chest" (ibid. 185). Through finding stillness within the body and working from the breath, a performer can create spontaneously, in the moment and truthfully. In the devising process for *What I was Told,* each improvisational exercise started with finding presence. This formed an essential process in creating a physical material that is truthful and has the possibility of eliciting empathy from the spectator, as described in Chapter 3.

After finding presence, the structure of each improvisational exercise varied depending on the subject matter we were dealing with. An overarching aim, however, was to use the body in performance to expose the constructed nature of social constraints placed on women's bodies. Loots (1995) notes that "women's bodies, for example, are expected to be light, graceful, and to minimise space while men's bodies, in a binary oppositional relationship, are expected to be heavy, solid and to access bigger, authoritative space" (54). These expectations placed on the social body can be challenged by the body in performance. Loots remarks that the "male body needs to move beyond the masculine as defined by patriarchy, just as the female body needs not be limited by the feminine" (ibid. 57). Utilising strategies of disruption, the body in performance challenges an audience's understanding of what the female body can do and is supposed to do. Loots summarises some of dance theorist, Marianne Goldberg's strategies of disruption as follows:

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- to challenge the accepted range of motion for the female dancer;
- to challenge partnering conventions;
- to challenge narrative structures;
- to challenge visual gaze and display mechanisms;
- to challenge spectator-performer relationships;
- to challenge gendered aspects of costuming

(Loots, 2010:108)

Through these strategies of disruption, the body in performance can subvert, challenge, parody and make strange the constructions and expectations placed on the social body. During the rehearsal process, I structured physical improvisations to elicit such responses. Physical images and sequences were created that challenged audience members, compelling them to critically reflect on notions they accept unquestioningly. These strategies also proved helpful in other aspects of the creation process, such as staging and text compilation. Disruption became an important driving force behind creating *What I was Told*.

Another important theory that I drew on when structuring improvisational exercises, is dance theorist, Rudolf von Laban's theory on movement patterns. Loots (1995) explains that Laban analysed the different qualities in gestures and movements that individuals choose and developed a system based on this analysis. Laban defined four factors that he viewed as central to all movement:

1. WEIGHT - all movement has a force factor brought about by moving the body.
2. TIME - all movement has motion and therefore potential speed over time.
3. SPACE - all movement occurs in space and therefore has directional focus.
4. FLOW - all movement progresses or moves.

(Loots, 1995:56)

Laban then further developed these four factors into a "binary oppositional system", categorised by the effort required to perform a movement. Laban categorised each of the four factors as either resisting or yielding, as depicted in table 4.1 (Loots, 1995:56).

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GOING AGAINST (Resisting)		GOING (Yielding)
Strong	WEIGHT	Light
Direct	SPACE	Flexible
Sudden	TIME	Sustained
Bound	FLOW	Free

Table 4.1

I used this theory in two ways. Firstly, as a means of exploring different qualities of movement. This was done primarily in warm-up exercises. One such exercise that was used often would start with the performers lying on their backs in a comfortable, neutral position. I would then talk them through a visualisation exercise that relaxes the body and helps them become aware of their breath. I would slowly invite them to start moving, starting at the feet and moving up the body until the whole body is moving. When the whole body is moving, I would ask them to start concentrating on one of Laban's motion factors. Let's take weight for example. I would ask a series of questions such as, 'is the movement heavy or light?' or 'where is the weight of the movement?'. I would then ask them to start exploring different ways of moving in relation to weight, going from heavy to light or vice versa, working with isolated body parts or the body as a whole.

This would be done with all four categories, essentially setting up an awareness of different ways of moving while warming up the body. Through this, performers can become aware of how their bodies naturally move and then find new patterns and pathways. It is important for a performer to be able to move past their natural patterns and find different ways of expression through movement. This voids their movements in performance becoming repetitive and one dimensional. During the rehearsal process, we constantly returned to Laban's four categories of movement to ensure that the sequences we created were diverse and expressive. It is also a helpful exercise to re-find the intention of a movement after it was created. This exercise also prepares the performers for later explorations that require a broader range of movement qualities, such as exploring gendered movements. Table 4.2 depicts some questions and explorations that were followed for each of the different categories.

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MOVEMENT CATEGORY	QUESTIONS	EXPLORATION
WEIGHT	· Is the movement heavy or light? · Where is the weight of the movement? · What body part is carrying the most weight/ working the hardest? · Which body part is the lightest/easiest to move? · Is the movement grounded or airy? Relaxed or tensed? Is it working with gravity or against gravity? · How much force does the movement require?	· Explore the weight of different movements. · Explore changing the weight of a movement – going from heavy to light/grounded to airy or vice versa. · Explore isolating body parts and different ways of moving them in relation to weight. · Explore different ways of moving the whole body – grounded, airy relaxed, tensed, strong or light etc.
SPACE	· How much space does the movement take up? · What direction does the movement go in? · Are all body parts going in the same direction?	· Explore different directions of movement: (up, down, linear, diagonal etc.). · Explore changing the direction of a movement. · Explore different body parts travelling in different directions. · Explore an isolated body or the body as a whole, moving through space to create multi-dimensional movements. · Explore contracting and expanding – taking up more space and less space.
TIME	· How fast is the movement? · Does it gain or lose momentum? · Is the movement sustained over time? · Is it rapid movements? · Does the movement change speed?	· Explore different speeds of movement. · Explore speeding up or slowing down the same movements. · Explore different body parts moving at different speeds. · Explore a body part in isolation or the body as a whole changing or sustaining speed.
FLOW	· What is the flow of the movement? · Is it constricted or free-flowing? · Does the body move easily or does it require effort? · Does it change speed or direction easily or is it constricted? · Is it heavy a heavy movement or is it a light? · Does the movement travel or is it stuck in place?	· Explore moment of isolated body parts – one part is free-flowing while the rest is constricted. · Explore between freeing up movement or stopping its momentum. · Explore movements that are stuck or constricted. · Find movement that flows.

Table 4.2

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The second implementation of Laban's movement theory was in relation to exploring gendered movements. Loots (1995) remarks that the binary system of resisting and yielding, though not set up as gendered categories, can function as a means for analysing feminine and masculine movements. She points out that, while Laban "did not consider gender dynamics in his analysis of movement patterns, and while he offered no comparative study of the moving 'masculine body' and the moving 'feminine body'", the 'resisting' movements are "usually body motions associated with masculinity" and the 'yielding' movements are "generally associated with femininity" (56-57). Understanding how different ways of moving can be read as gendered expressions, offers performers an entryway into exploring these movements for performance. When utilised in this manner, the body in performance can subvert, parody and draw attention to how the social body is constructed through movement.

To explore this notion, I set up an improvisational exercise much like the warm-up exercise above. Except, in this exercise, I asked performers to draw on personal experiences. I asked them to think about a time they felt compelled to perform their femininity and what gestures they used in that instance. I then asked them to create a small movement sequence from these gestures. After the sequence was set, I followed the improvisational exercise as set out above, asking them to focus on the weight, flow and speed of the movement as well as how much space it takes up. I then asked them to subvert their movements: if it was light, make it heavy; if it was small, make it big etc. This created a new sequence of gendered movements. The two sequences were then stringed together to create a sequence portraying a morphing, disrupting body.

The disrupting body became a powerful visual element that was used in the last scene of What *I was Told*. The first half of the scene was constructed out of physical solo sequences that were used in previous scenes, giving the production a circular structure. This will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.1. The solo sequences were all confined, feminine movements. After each performer has completed their solo, they would transition into a sequence created from the disrupting body, as set out above. However, the disrupting body was performed in one spot, creating a stark visual contrast of a body breaking free of its own constraints, but that is still stuck in the contained space it occupies. Along with the circular structure of the performance, this created a dreamlike state, as if being stuck in time. This tied in with the theme of construction and containment. This theme will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3.

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Other improvisational exercises that were pivotal in creating physical material for the performance centred around following, mimicking and being manipulated. The first of these, I termed 'follow the leader'. This exercise was done either in two groups of three, as shown in *image 4.1*, or one big group as shown in *image 4.2*. Everyone would stand facing the same direction. The exercise would start with the group breathing together to establish a connection, so that when they start to move, they move as a group (instead of six different performers doing the same thing on their own). The person in front leads, while the others follow, mimicking the leader's movements. As the group moves through space and changes direction, it naturally faces a new person in front. This person then takes over as leader, without breaking the flow of the movement. The challenge of this exercise is for the group to constantly change direction and as such, follow the new leader without breaking the flow of movement. Two prominent themes emerged from this improvisation. The first was looking. The followers need to look at the leader to know what to do. This leads to the second theme – trying to mimic an ideal. Following someone else's movements mean you move in a manner that is new or alien to you. This creates a quality in the body that shows the effort you have to go through to follow the movements, while never being able to copy them exactly. You can never live up to the ideal.

Image 4.1

Image 4.2

The mirroring exercise worked closely on the same principles. Here, two performers would mirror each other's actions. The two performers would start in a neutral position, facing each other and establishing a connection through engaging their breath. The leader would start moving while the other mimics their movements. It is important for the leader to move in such a manner that the follower can keep up while still challenging them. The physical sequences that were created out of these improvisations raised issues regarding body image, the unrealistic ideals women are expected to adhere to and the impossible contradicting expectations placed on women. This was used to create scene six.

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Scene six is comprised of a physical sequence where two performers mirror one another. The scene starts with an abstract movement sequence where the two performers are trying to copy each other's movements. The scene progresses to realistic movements where the performers measure the width of their wrists, attempt to portray a thigh gap and try to count their ribs. These emotional and moving images worked towards visually exposing the intense problem most women face – never measuring up to the fictive ideal and, as a result, never feeling comfortable in our own bodies. Physical images and sequences portrayed the body in awkward and uncomfortable positions. The performers showed the intense effort it took to create these images through breath-work and constrained, heavy movements, as depicted in some of the images below.

Image 4.3

Image 4.4

Image 4.5

Image 4.6

Image 4.7

Image 4.8

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The third pivotal improvisation exercise, was a sculpting exercise. Here, one or two performers would 'sculpt' another performer into different images by manipulating body parts, as if being pulled by invisible strings, and were used to create scene thirteen. An emotional physical sequence was created where two performers sculpt another performer as shown in *images 4.9 and 4.10*. This scene exposed themes such as being moulded by society and women's own complicity in upholding societal expectations. It also visually depicts how women are moulded by forces outside of their control to view themselves in a certain way.

Image 4.9

Image 4.10

In another variation of this exercise, I would read out words such as mother, sister, wife, barbie, whore, prude, bitch and butch, while performers would need to sculpt their partner into these images. Out of this exercise, strong visual images were created that was used to structure the opening sequence of *What I was Told*. In this sequence, performers are positioned on stage in frozen images. They mechanically change images while staying stationary as the stage revolve turns, as shown in *images 4.11 and 4.12.*

Image 4.11

Image 4.12

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Interview questions were also used as a starting point for structuring improvisational exercises. One question that elicited especially gripping physical material was, 'Is there a specific moment you realized you were no longer a child?' The exploration started with a group discussion between the cast and myself. It was interesting to see the same themes emerge as with the ethnographic case study. Members of the cast recounted stories from the first time they got their period, and the anxiety and uncertainty that surrounded the event. A reoccurring issue around menstruation was the stigma/taboo of talking about it. From your first period, women are taught that it is something to hide, something no one is allowed to know about and should be kept private. This creates a very isolated and lonely experience. The need to talk about and share these experiences was a reoccurring topic during both group discussions as well as interviews.

Another prevalent topic that came up was the first time they realised they were being sexualised by older men. This generally happened while they still viewed themselves as children (pre-pubescent or just at the start of puberty) and is almost a rude awakening to the real world. Some stories also recounted the first instances of being touched without consent or experiences of sexual assault. These stories were all very personal and used to structure improvisations for solo sequences. One such solo occurred in scene 14. The sequence was performed in silhouette, in front of a paper wall with a spotlight from the back as depicted in *images 4.11* and *4.12*. This sequence was strikingly raw, both in the movements being performed and the overall silhouette visual. Because the audience was not able to see the performer's face, the physical movements were emphasised while taking on a universality – this could be anyone, including you.

Image 4.13

Image 4.14

Another interview question we worked with was, 'What do you think are modern-day restraints for women?'. I asked the performers to bring articles of clothing to rehearsals that could answer

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this question. Using these articles or clothing, the performers explored different ways of moving with them. In this exploration, I would ask questions such as, 'How does it make you feel when you wear it? What does it mean/signal when you wear it? How does it feel when people look at you when you wear it? What expectations are placed on you when you wear it?'. The performers would then improvise physical responses to these questions. The sequences created from this exploration was used to structure scene four of the performance as a collection of solos. In the production, the items of clothing were replaced by clothing made out of paper to tie in with the theme of construction that will be discussed in section 4.2.3.

Scene four started with the audience entering a paper maze on stage. This specific stage layout will be discussed in more detail under section 4.2.1. This scene had the atmosphere of an art gallery, with performers doing short movement sequences in different corners of the maze. This effect also plays into the act of looking, which will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3. The use of the paper clothes inside the paper maze, as shown in images *4.13* to *4.15*, also solidifies the theme of social constructs. The clothing comes to represent some of the constructs placed on women and the performers' interaction with them visually depicts this confrontation.

Image 4.15

Image 4.16

Image 4.17

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Different media forms also proved useful as inspiration for structuring improvisations. We live in a visual world run by media. This significantly influences how we view ourselves and other women. Newspapers, magazines and social media posts were used in various exercises to elicit physical responses and create performance material. Two fundamental improvisations were structured around the use of newspapers and magazines. For the first improvisation, we covered the rehearsal room floor with newspapers. The performers then took highlighters and marked negative words that stood out to them. These were words such as 'meaningless, contained, blurred, ignored, silence, flesh, dirty, impact, resisting, warning, question, secret, victim, compliant, and pressure'. I then compiled the words in a list while each performer found a spot on the newspaper floor to work on. I would read out the words one at a time and the performers would find a gesture to physicalise them, using isolated body parts. This led to contained, stationary and constricted movements, creating a quality within the body that mirrored the words on a newspaper. They would explore each word for a few minutes and then set a movement phrase. After the performers explored and created small movement phrases for each of the words, they combined them to create a movement sequence.

These sequences were used in scene five. This scene deals with the most emotionally charged subject matter within the performance. It recounts five different stories of sexual assault. When I first worked through the interview material, what struck me most was the sheer number of stories that recount cases of sexual assault. We decided to incorporate all the stories into one scene, instead of selecting only one or creating a composite character. With this, we wanted to give the audience the same overwhelming effect we had while working through the interview material. We also made the decision to place this scene in the middle of the performance. We wanted to show that there is no build-up or emotional climax to sexual assault and that is how we treated it. No music was used in this scene and the performers didn't deliver emotional telling of the stories. The performers simply told the stories while continuing with a mundane physical sequence. That is how the stories were told to them and that is how we told it to the audience. Casually and conversational, but with the utmost respect at all times.

If such emotionally laden scenes are performed without a sense of lightness (not to be confused with being flippant or superficial), the audience will disengage from the performance. Instead, in scenes like these, critical distance is of the utmost importance. We want the audience to become aware of the issue and not get emotionally wrapped up in an individual story. Through this, the performance implicates the audience and as such, have a greater effect. The physical

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sequences were vital in creating critical distance, not only for the audience, but the performers as well. The need to perform a verbatim- and physical text simultaneously creates a dual focus within the performer. This helps them to not get emotionally wrapped up in the story they are sharing. Moreover, the movements themselves also told a story. The sequences were almost mundane in their simplicity and for that very reason very powerful and emotional when accompanied by a light telling of heavy subject matter. The movement sequences also confined the performers to the floor, as shown in images *4.16* and *4.17*, while the audience is standing up and looking down at the performance. The effect is a powerful reinstatement of power dynamics. The audience is looking down on the performers from the dominant standing position, and for and for that very reason, is implicit in their stories.

Image 4.18

Image 4.19

The second improvisation based on media made use of magazines. Initially, I had no specific magazine preference. However, those we managed to source were predominantly women's magazines. When setting up the improvisation exercise, this actually proved more beneficial. Performers cut out words, phrases as well as images that drew their attention. Due to the nature of the magazines, the words and images had a very poignant theme to them. Everything we collected was aimed at appearance, losing weight and looking better. This ended up being a very emotional exploration for the performers and myself. The severity of societal expectations on looks and being thin, as well the rigidity of the mould women are expected to fit into, became overwhelmingly clear. Each performer created a collage out of their magazine clippings and then improvised reactions to what they saw. Due to the emotional nature of this exploration, I set no other 'rules' for this exercise. The performers explored freely and physicalised their responses however they saw fit. The physical sequences created from the magazine clippings were used to create solos.

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One of these solos were used to structure scene nine. This scene starts with a humorous monologue about digital photo alteration (commonly referred to as 'photoshop') and the unrealistic expectations it places on women. The performer casually delivers the monologue while walking to a new performance space. When the monologue is done, the audience finds themselves looking at a collage of magazine clippings that form the backdrop for a physical solo, as shown in image *4.18*. It becomes an emotional scene where the performer tries to construct herself in the fashion of the edited pictures surrounding her. After the light-hearted monologue commenting on the effects of digital photo alteration on women's body image, the visual depiction thereof is a hard hit back to reality. The audience feels helpless in the wake of her suffering. The scene ends with the performer tearing down the magazine images and shown in image *4.19*, revealing four performers behind her and staring at her, linking with the theme of looking that will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3.

Image 4.20

Image 4.21

The improvisational exercises described above formed the basis from which the physical theatre component of *What I was Told,* was created. These were not the only exercises utilised, but rather, the most essential. Improvisational exercises were structured based on prominent themes that emerged from the ethnographic case study, as well as focus group discussions conducted with the performers. These structured improvisations were aimed at eliciting physical responses to the themes and issues being dealt with. From this, evocative and complex physical language was created that, in combination with the verbatim text, created a performance text that was impactful and engaging.

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4.1.3 Creating a Verbatim Text

Saldaña (2011) notes that "theatre is life—with all the boring parts taken out" (68). When compiling a verbatim text out of interview material, it is important to remember that you do not only have a responsibility towards your research participants to give a truthful account of their stories, but that you also have a responsibility towards your audience. Even though the text is compiled from real stories, it must still be dramatic in structure with an element of entertainment. Saldaña (2011) explains that with verbatim theatre "comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative" (33). It is with this in mind that the cast of *What I was Told* and I set out to compile a verbatim text from the interview material collected.

Saldaña (2011) notes that there is more than one way to approach the creation of a verbatim text and states that:

> Some choose to preserve the precise language of the interviewee from an audio recording or written transcript for the adaptation, thus maintaining a verbatim approach. Other playwrights will take the unedited material yet select portions of and rearrange the original text into a more aesthetically shaped adaptation. And still other playwrights may develop an original dramatic composition based on or inspired by raw interview materials. A composite character may be created when several interviews with different participants refer to similar themes or stories. Thus, the composite character is a fictional creation that nevertheless represents and speaks the collective realities of its original sources.
>
> (Saldaña, 2011:17)

The entire text compilation process, from conducting interviews to approving the final version, was a collaborative process. Each member of the cast, as well as myself, conducted interviews with research participants. I then asked each performer to transcribe two minutes from every interview they did. In this sense, the performers could choose which two minutes, for them, is the most interesting, the most theatrical or which parts they would want to include in the performance. Compiling a first draft of the verbatim text, in this sense, consisted of taking the unedited interview material, selecting portions of it and rearranging it into a more aesthetically shaped adaptation as set out by Saldaña above. The first draft was read through in a rehearsal.

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The performers gave feedback and made suggestions for improvement. From that, the final version of the text was compiled.

An important step in the interview process which I would like to stress, is to have the performers conduct interviews, as well as interview themselves. I believe this is an important factor in creating empathy within the performers. As previously stated, not only does the audience need to have empathy with the performance, but the performers need to have empathy with what they are portraying as well. Having performers conduct interviews, not only with the research participants, but with themselves as well, creates a better emotional understanding of the material being collected and performed. This creates a personal connection with the themes and issues, resulting in a layered and complex performance text that is more personal and truthful.

4.1.4 Creating Verbatim-Physical Theatre

What I was Told was created through a workshop process that focused on devising physical theatre and compiling a verbatim text. Driven by its non-hierarchal mode of creation, workshop theatre is in its very nature a critique on socio-political systems and systems of authority. One cannot create theatre that protests marginalising and discriminating social systems, while implementing its very structures in the rehearsal space. It is important to note, though the overall workshop process consisted of two separate processes, a possible pitfall of this approach is that the performance can become disconnected. Suppose the verbatim- and physical texts are created completely separate from one another, and just added together at the end. In that case, the performance will be jarring to watch and have no emotional impact. It is for this reason that the processes need to develop together, constantly influencing one another without becoming a single process that only tells a single story.

This approach gives rise to what McCormack (2018) terms as “visible confrontation” between the physical movement and the verbatim material (58). This visible confrontation within the performance text gives it depth and nuance and as such, opens up the possibility to say much more than either physical theatre or verbatim theatre can separately. Instead of telling the same story in different ways, the physical language and the spoken words compliment one another, creating a layered performance. Through this dual approach, a complex and multi-layered performance text can be created that tells embodied stories and elicits embodied reactions from an audience.

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4.2 Staging What I Was Told

After creating the physical material and verbatim text for *What I was Told*, the two elements were combined in staging the production. As previously stated, verbatim-physical theatre offers a means of reclaiming the voice and the body. This, however, only addresses one side of the issue. It addresses the individual within the societal and the need to reclaim agency. It does not address the role society plays in withholding agency from the individual. When staging *What I was Told*, the aim was to expose this issue. Through the structure of the performance, stage layout and use of costumes and décor, we aimed to displace our audience in a manner that subverts *the gaze*.

Gaze theory centres around how we view other people. In feminist theory, gaze theory is more specifically applied to analysing the male gaze. The male gaze theory attempts to explain how women and the world are depicted, in visual arts and literature, predominantly from the view of a heterosexual man. Women are depicted as sexual objects to be looked at. Much of modern feminist theory has centred around dismantling the harmful effects of this gaze. This, however, has been more localised to film and media theory, where theatre's role is more inclined to focus on individual reclaiming of the voice and body. I propose a feminist mode of performance that does not only focus on individual reclaiming of the body, or individual reclaiming of the voice, but rather one that subverts *the gaze*.

To subvert *the gaze*, staging *What I was Told* drew greatly on elements of estrangement. Keefe and Murray (2007) state that "if a piece fails to make the strange familiar, then it fails to communicate and thus fails in its intention of presenting a radical view from which we can have the pleasure of learning" (167). Estrangement, much like Goldberg's strategies for disruption and Brecht's alienation effect, aims at creating critical distance between the audience and the performance. By making the familiar strange and the strange familiar, a spectator needs to think about what they are experiencing – they have to actively engage with the meaning-making process instead of passively watching a performance. Lewis (2010) also comments on this notion when reflecting that, "due to the multimedia quick-fix world we currently occupy, live theatre experiences may be perceived as becoming less creative" and less engaging (176). Instead, the spectator is required to sit back and passively take in the story, with little to no engagement or input. Lewis further argues that "reality should not be deemed enough for

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creativity" (ibid). Instead, a performance should challenge what we know of our reality, make strange that which we find familiar and make familiar that which is strange to us.

Estrangement was central to staging *What I was Told* to avoid a mere regurgitation of reality. Keefe & Murray (2007) notes that to achieve estrangement, "the physical and visual dimensions must play their part in counterpointing the word" (167). This can be done, as McCormack (2018) points out, through the use of "choreography, text, scenography that includes constructed images, juxtaposition, collage, discontinuity and distortion" and as such, create a "dialectical space which reveals something about reality" but challenges the "concept of a stable meaning" (13). Through these techniques, a performance is rooted in reality, reveals something of reality, but is not a passive or didactic regurgitation of reality. Keefe and Murray (2007) further conclude that, "the whole notion of 'perception' is reframed to include a transaction that paradoxically is dynamic and creative precisely because of its unsettling nature and its willingness to plunge the audience into a state of loss and uncertainty" (32). The power of estrangement is its ability to critically engage an audience.

When using techniques of estrangement, one important factor to point out is the role space plays in critically engaging an audience. Keefe and Murray (2007) point out that, the "notion of site is crucial and commentators have argued that the spatial context in which a piece of theatre is made and presented is critical to an audience's framework of expectations, and their subsequent perception of what they see and hear" (32). Banning (2002) adds to this when reflecting that, without "defined spatial arrangements" the performers can have "a greater effect on the audience because they can get amongst them, encircle them, lead them on journeys, play with them, surprise them by appearing in unexpected places, or surround them" (149-150). *What I was Told,* however, took place inside the Adam Small theatre, a conventional theatre space where the audience and the performance are separated by a proscenium arch. For what we wanted to accomplish with *What I was Told,* this layout would not have worked. It is with this in mind that I decided to stage *What I was Told,* in an unconventional manner. The performance still took place on stage, but instead of having the audience seated in the auditorium, they were led onstage and moved through the space as the performance progressed. The audience was taken into the performance space and out of their position of power.

In staging *What I was Told,* strategies for estrangement were used to draw attention to *the gaze* and its effects, and then to invert it on the audience. By inverting *the gaze*, the audience is placed into the position of women and forced to feel its effects, not only first hand, but

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heightened in performance. This can be done by breaking the fourth wall and having performers intentionally look/stare at the audience. The audience is also brought into the performance space, blurring the lines between performers and 'outsiders' to create an uncomfortably intimate performance space – one where internal recognition is almost forced upon them. Subverting *the gaze*, through the use of estrangement was thus the primary focus for structuring the performance, creating the stage layout and deciding on costumes and décor.

4.2.1 Structure

The overall structure of *What I was Told* consisted of a vignette and circular structure. As such, the production did not follow a normative narrative structure with an exposition, climax and resolution. Instead, we attempted to take the audience on an 'emotional rollercoaster'. Every emotional scene was followed by a laugh line or a funny sequence, and that in turn was followed by hard-hitting reality. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, to prevent the audience from getting too emotionally involved so that critical reflection can take place. We wanted the audience to feel bad for laughing, to realize what their laughter meant and become aware of their own complicity in current socio-political conditions. Secondly, to mirror real life. In life, happy and sad moments, the comedy and the gut-wrenching, all flow together to create a collage of memories and stories. This is what we wanted to portray.

The vignette structure, a combination of loose standing scenes that all tie together thematically, aimed to mirror life. Life does not have one big narrative structure. Instead, it is a collage of different events, stories and memories, each with its own emotional tone and feeling. This also ties in with the non-didactical nature of the performance. We did not want to present an audience with the 'bigger picture', but rather expose questions – multiple and different questions that compel the audience to construct their own meaning. Just like there is no one category of 'woman', the production did not have one stylistic approach. It was a celebration of all the different ways women express themselves and their femininity. There is no one answer for the question, 'what is femininity?' or 'what does it mean to be a woman?'. It is an open-ended question with infinite possibilities that the production tried to mirror through its combination of different styles and visual mediums.

What I was Told also had a circular structure, with the ending echoing the beginning. The performers were positioned on stage much in the same manner as with the opening scene. The sequences they performed were also created out of the material used in previous scenes of the

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performance. The biggest difference was that in the opening scene the audience was seated and looking onto the stage, while with the end sequence the audience was on stage looking out over the auditorium. The audience's place was inverted. They were looking at the performance from a different perspective, but nothing else has changed. The audience was taking on an entire journey through the production, only to end where it started. The end sequence has an atmosphere of sadness, of lost potential and places the responsibility of effecting change onto the audience. *What I was told* offers no closure, only questions, as change still needs to happen. In 2021, equality still seems to be the stuff dreams are made of. For this reason, much like the opening scene was theatrical, the end scene had a dreamlike quality to it. Through the use of a circular structure, the production aimed to emphasize that nothing has changed, but it urgently needs to.

4.2.2 Stage Layout

The stage layout was created with the idea of estrangement. The performance started with a conventional performance space – the performers onstage and the audience seated in the auditorium. The two worlds were separated by the proscenium arch. The first scene was a dance sequence with the audience passively looking at what is happening on stage. The performers are there to be looked at. As the sequence comes to an end and they transition into the next sequence, their movements become more dynamic, drawing on elements of dance theatre. They are delivering a performance that requires no cognitive interaction from the audience, establishing the gaze so that it can be inverted on the audience in the next scene.

At the end of this scene, the performers advance off stage and into the auditorium, effectively breaking the fourth wall. They start interacting with the audience and use tactics such as mirroring, to get the audience to follow them onto the stage. The audience is then led onto the stage and enters the world of the performance. The rest of the production takes place with the audience moving with the performers on stage, from one performance space to the next. This was done for two reasons.

The first reason was logistically motivated. I believe the strength of physical theatre lies in its intimacy. It can jolt, move and connect with an audience on a much deeper level than word-based theatre. However, if the audience is separated from the performance by a proscenium arch, much of this intimacy goes lost. As Banning (2002) notes above, without the constraints of a traditional theatre space, the performance can have a greater effect on the audience because

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the performers can move amongst them – making them part of the performance instead of onlookers. To maximize the effectiveness of *What I was Told*, I decided to have to audience come into the performance space and onto the stage. The audience became a part of the production, no longer outsiders looking in, but active agents taking part in the construction of meaning created in front of them.

The second reason was artistically motivated. Having the performers start onstage, in a traditional performance mode as depicted in images *4.20* and *4.21*, and then break the barriers that separate the audience's world and the performance by coming into the auditorium, was theatrically very effective. As depicted in images *4.22-4.25*, the performers climbed off of the stage and moved into the auditorium, making their way over the chairs to the audience. This had a joltingly estranging effect on the audience. The performers would stare them in the eyes and interact with them non-verbally in order to get them to leave their seats. For the audience, this interaction is outside of the norm and as such, uncomfortable and unnerving. The audience is made to feel the discomfort women feel on a daily basis by having people enter their personal space uninvited, being looked at and told what to do in a heightened manner. The audience's power is momentarily taken away – they are no longer the watchers, but the watched.

Image 4.22

Image 4.23

Image 4.24

Image 4.25

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Image 4.26

Image 4.27

After the audience has moved onto stage, each vignette of the performance took place in a different site within the space. The stage was transformed into a paper maze that the audience had to traverse. Led by the performers, the audience moved from different performance spaces on stage, into the wings and even backstage. Each performance space had its own stylistic approach, adding to the feeling of a performance collage. We wanted to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. This also tied in with the non-didactical nature of the performance. Just like there was no single narrative presenting a 'bigger picture', it was not a single performance space clearly defining what constitutes as part of the performance and was does not. The use of décor and lighting was fundamental in creating the different performance spaces, each with a different atmosphere, tone and feeling.

This approach, of course, still had its limitations. Due to the nature of a performance, *the gaze* was never completely inverted. Within the vignette structure, there were still performance moments and sequences intended to be 'looked at' or watched by the audience. In these moments, the performer still 'performs' their sequence to the audience, reinstating the normative audience-performance dynamic. This limitation, however, can also present itself as a strength. The production is, after all, still a theatrical event. By presenting the audience with more traditional performance moments, their expectation of watching a show is fulfilled. In this manner, the audience is never alienated to such an extent that they disengage from the performance event. Through the initial breaking of the fourth wall, the audience's attention has been drawn to the power of looking. Now that they are once again the onlookers, the action is imbued with new meaning and critical reflection can take place.

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4.2.3 Important Themes

A very important theme we worked with, was looking. While creating *What I was Told*, we paid significant attention to the effect of looking – performers looking at each other, performers looking at the audience and the audience looking at the performance. We wanted to make the audience aware of the effect of looking. For women, being constantly looked at is a very real and influential part of our daily lives. We wanted to make the audience aware of how intrusive the mere act of looking can be. We used the device of looking most notably when breaking the fourth wall. Performers would look audience members in the eyes, making them aware that they are not outside of the performance, but part of it. Performers would also look at each other perform, becoming part of the audience and further blurring the lines between performance and reality. Even in sequences that are performed with the intention of being watched by the audience, the performer would at moments, unexpectedly, stare at the audience – implicating them in the performance. Being looked at is uncomfortable in any situation, but when it is heightened in performance, it becomes unnerving and impossible to ignore. This played a substantial role in subverting *the gaze.*

In scene four, when the audience enters the paper maze, it has the atmosphere of an art gallery. The audience is there to look at the art. Except, in this instance, the art looks back. The performers actively stare at the audience, looking them in the eye. It is no longer just the audience watching a show, but everyone is looking at everyone and in this sense the audience is implicated in what they are seeing. They are not passive bystanders to a performance, but they are a direct cause of what is happening in front of them. Inside the maze is also an intimate and closed-off space, as depicted in images *4.26* and *4.27*. The audience has nowhere to go, nothing else to look at except the performance. They are compelled to take part in the social transaction.

Image 4.28

Image 4.29

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Another important theme was that of following and mirroring, as briefly discussed in section 4.1.2. A big issue that surfaced during both interviews and focus group discussions, were the expectations placed on women to look and behave a certain way. We attempted to engage with these issues through sequences that portray performers mirroring each other while maintaining eye contact. Sequences where one or more performers sculpt another performer also contributed to visually effective and moving sequences. The pressure women feel to always be something they are not, to never accomplish the ideal, to always be too small or too big, too curvy or too flat, too loud or too softspoken, too strong or too weak gravely influence how we perceive ourselves as well as others. The problem is that the ideal is constantly changing and as a result, you can never achieve it. The only constant fact is that the ideal woman is always something you are not. Out of this, mirroring and sculpting became an important theme that was depicted throughout the performance.

Media also became a prominent theme in the production. We made use of newspapers, magazines and social media posts to highlight how our view of the world is constructed by media. It plays a major role in how we see ourselves and others, and especially how we view women. Social media can be an important platform for conciseness raising, but it also becomes a significant role player in body shaming and mental health issues. The use of magazine headlines, digitally enhanced images and social media posts became an effective way for us to demonstrate the harmful effects of media as well as people's views on the world, without being didactical. Social media posts were projected onto the back of the stage on a larger-than-life scale, as shown in images *4.30* and *4.31*. Image *4.32* shows some of the social media posts we used during this scene in more detail. By confronting the audience with visual images they encounter on a daily basis, but projected larger than life, the familiar was made strange and the audience was compelled to critically reflect on the role media plays in structuring our lives.

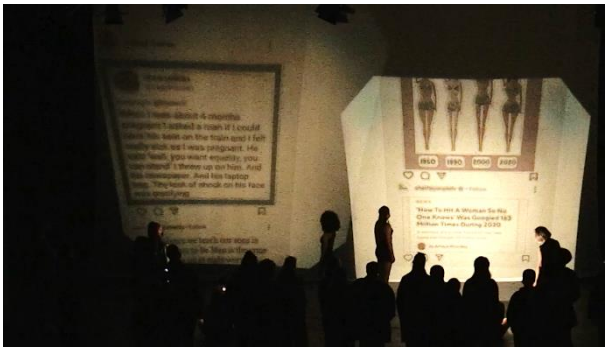

Image 4.30

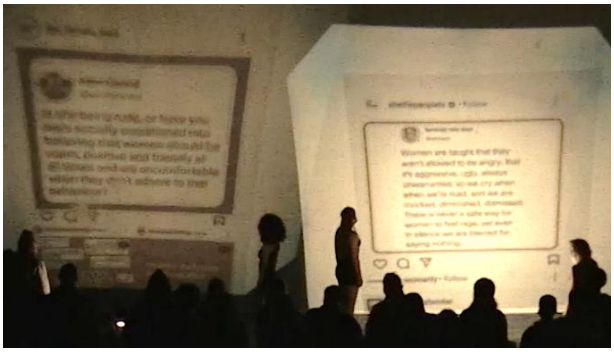

Image 4.31

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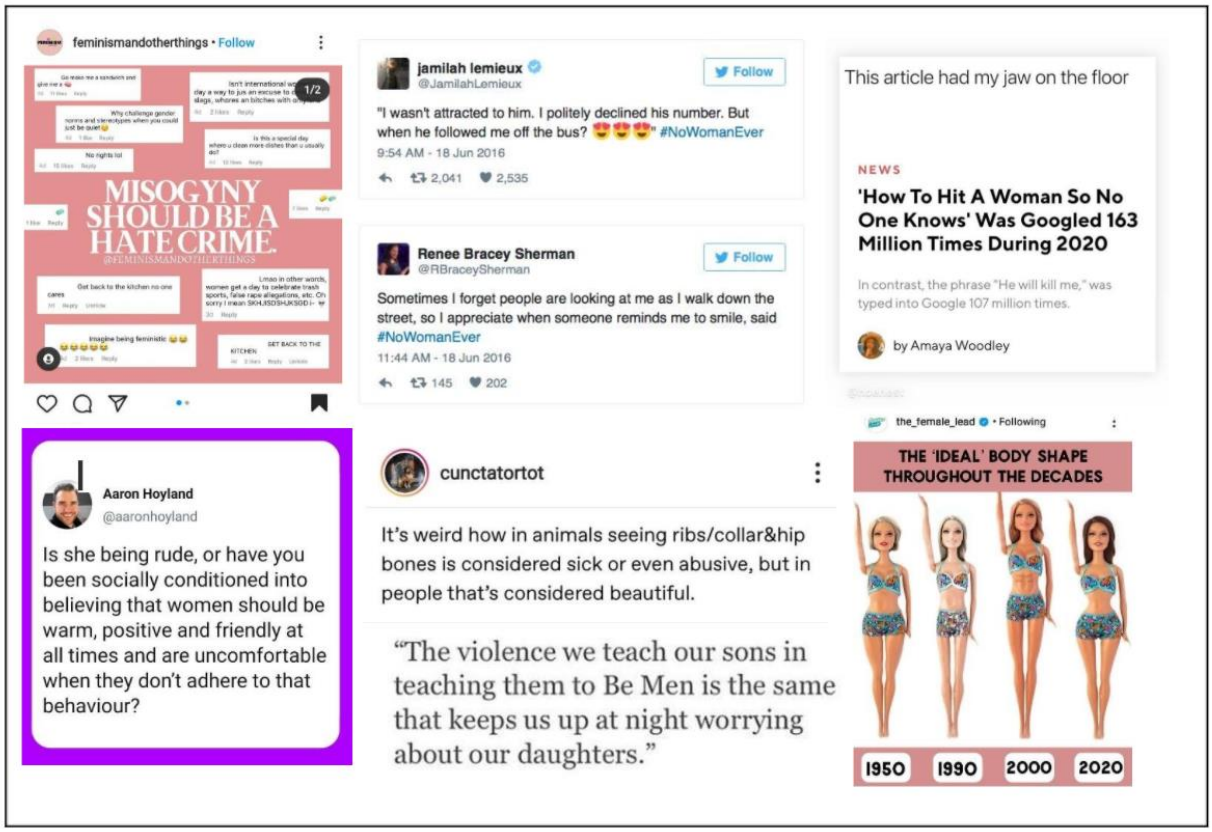

Image 4.32

Another important theme that was implemented while structuring *What I was Told*, was the constructed nature of the societal rules that determine, amongst other things, gender roles and how it acts as a confining force. The performance space was constructed by large sections of paper hanging from fly bars, creating a constructed pace the audience needed to traverse. The paper maze created a confined atmosphere, containing the audience within its paper walls. The paper sets also moved between scenes, adding to the notion that the constructs that regulate our world are not stable. Through this, we aimed at estranging the world the audience moved through, while depicting realities from the world that is familiar to them.

Image 4.33

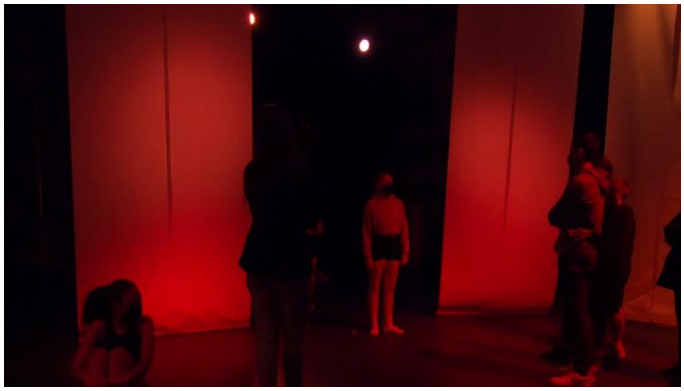

Image 4.34

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Image 4.35

Image 4.36

What I was Told was staged with the notion of alienation and estrangement to challenge stable meaning and actively engage its audience. Through this, we firstly drew attention to *the gaze* and its effects, and then inverted it on the audience. By inverting *the gaze*, the audience was placed into the position that women occupy in society. We aimed to reveal women's position as marginalised and alienated – perhaps not an object in today's context, but a subject to be looked at. By turning *the gaze* onto the audience, putting them into the position of women, we force them to feel the effects of *the gaze* not only first hand, but heightened in performance, so that there is no denying the discomfort it creates. This was done by breaking the fourth wall and having performers intentionally look/stare at the audience. The audience was also brought into the performance space, blurring the lines between performers and 'outsiders' to create an uncomfortably intimate performance space – one where internal recognition is almost forced upon them. Subverting *the gaze* was the primary focus of staging *What I was Told*.

4.3 Conclusion

What I was Told was created through a workshop process combining physical theatre and verbatim theatre. South African workshop theatre is a multi-faceted performance mode, foregrounding non-hierarchal, collective methods of creation and is political in nature. The workshop process focused on creating physical images, movement pieces and verbatim text that tells embodied stories through two distinct processes – creating physical theatre and creating a verbatim text. It was important that these two processes happened simultaneously, constantly influencing one other, but separately. The fact that physical sequences were not

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directly created out of the interview material, gave rise to a performance text that was layered and multi-dimensional.

The physical components of *What I was Told,* were created through structured improvisations, drawing from prominent themes that emerged from the ethnographic case study conducted in Chapter 2 and focus group discussions conducted with the performers. The structured improvisations were aimed at eliciting a physical response to the themes and issues being dealt with to create evocative and complex physical language. The verbatim text was created by compiling various fragments of interview material. The entire text compilation process, from conducting interviews to approving the final version, was a collaborative process. In combining the physical sequences with the verbatim text, a performance text was created that was impactful, engaging, layered and complex. Furthermore, *What I was Told* was staged with the notion of alienation and estrangement to challenge stable meaning and actively engage its audience to subvert *the gaze*. By turning *the gaze* onto the audience, putting them into the position of women, they were forced to feel the effects of *the gaze* not only first-hand, but heightened in performance.

In this chapter, I explored the creation and staging of *What I was Told* to give a thorough account of the research-led practice processes that formed part of this research study. Through this, I investigated *how* verbatim- and physical theatre can be effectively combined to portray ethnographic research conducted amongst female students at Stellenbosch University. This production, by telling embodied stories that grapple with what it means to be a woman, actively engaged its audience while exposing questions that need to be asked and spark conversations that need to be had. Verbatim-physical theatre engages with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful manner and creates a deeper understanding of meaning. *What I was Told* tells the stories of women, the stories told to us and the stories that are still needed to be told.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Tolerance and compassion are active, not passive states, born of the capacity to listen, to observe and to respect others.
–Indira Gandhi

Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.
– Ruth Bader Ginsburg

This study aimed to investigate how verbatim- and physical theatre can be combined to portray ethnographic research of gender performativity conducted under female students at Stellenbosch University. The study was conducted in two parts. Firstly, an ethnographic case study of gender performativity amongst female students at Stellenbosch University was conducted, supported by a desktop analysis of gender performativity theory. The data collected during this ethnographic case study was then used in the second component of this study. This consisted of a research-led practice inquiry, aimed at determining how the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre lends itself to feminist theatre practices, and so, enables it to effectively portray the ethnographic research preceding it. From this, a verbatim-physical theatre source text was created and analysed in conclusion to this study.

In this study, I first analysed gender as a cultural construct through the use of Judith Butler's gender performativity theory. This provided a theoretical framework from which to conduct an ethnographic case study amongst female students at Stellenbosch University, aimed at identifying how their social and cultural norms influence and construct their perception of gender, gender roles and gendered behaviour. I argued that an individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through their specific experience of the social and cultural norms that regulate their society, giving rise to what Judith Butler terms, gender performativity. Performativity, as Butler explains, denotes to the repeated act of performing one's gender to qualify for social subjectivity. An individual can either conform to, or reject the gendered expectations placed upon them, which then forms their own gendered behaviour.

In the ethnographic case study, I aimed at identifying what female students' at Stellenbosch University perception of femininity is and what it means for them to be a woman. The overarching theme that emerged, was that of discovering. Much like the emerging fifth-wave feminist movement, the participants are very aware of the constructs that function as building

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blocks for their identities and are actively engaging with them, but are still in the process of discovering what it actually means to them. Views on femininity have changed to become more inclusive and balanced, with traditional feminine traits being embraced, while at the same time upholding those traits that women have fought to be associated with. Being feminine is no longer seen as a limiting factor. Instead, women acknowledge that you can be strong and sensitive; that you can have compassion as well as intelligence; that bravery, ambition and elegance can be embodied at the same time; and that there can be strength in vulnerability.

However, the study also showed that participants are not without their own internalised biases and, within larger socio-political contexts, concepts and constructs surrounding women, gender roles and gendered behaviour have not been as progressive. Participants stressed that one of the biggest constraints women face today, is perception. Gender stereotypes and internalised biases on how women are perceived – the expectation to always be friendly, lady-like and subdued, to not be too outspoken, controlling and argumentative – still influences how women are treated in relation to how well they abide by these rules. Even when individual women do not identify with, conform and reiterate the norms and expectations placed on them, every social interaction women have, is confined within these preconceptions. Stigmas of weakness, inferiority and fragility still determine how women are treated professionally. Participants indicated that they felt the need to downplay their femininity to be taken seriously. At the same time, the expectation of motherhood is placed on all women, regardless of career aspirations or personal choice. Gender roles, stereotypes and perceptions of women are still a confining and limiting force within society.

Moreover, the study also identified that participants feel the most predominant expectation placed of women today, is *everything*. During previous waves of feminism, women fought for equal career opportunities, however, none of the traditional expectations and responsibilities placed on women has been taken away. Instead, women are now expected to have both a career and a family. They are expected to do everything. The interview material proved that we have not come close to reaching equality and that, if the sole focus is on equal opportunities, we never will. Feminism needs to turn its focus to liberating all individuals from the constraints placed on them through gender norms and expectations. It is from this premise that I argued for an emerging fifth-wave feminism.

Fifth-wave feminism sees the transition from fighting for equality within a system of oppression to critiquing the system itself. As a result, fifth-wave feminism is rooted in the

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notion of positionality and advocates that individuals should have the right to choose how they want to express themselves without having to face social ostracism as a consequence. Working from the premise that neither sex nor gender is natural, sexual orientation and gender expression loses its regulatory function within society and becomes a space of fluidity. Fifth-wave feminism advocates that gender as a binary construct should not be forcefully imposed on the body. In this sense, gender is a choice and gender coherence should not be a qualifier for social subjectivity.

Through conducting this ethnographic case study, it became clear that there is an intense desire amongst research participants to not only talk about these issues, but to actively and constructively engage with them. It is from this premise that I set out to create the verbatim-physical theatre production, *What I was Told*, through a research-led practice process that constituted the second part of this study. The research-led practice inquiry resulted in a verbatim-physical theatre source text, that engaged with the societal and cultural norms that influence constructs of gender and gender performativity amongst female students at Stellenbosch University. Through this, I aimed to investigate how verbatim theatre and physical theatre can be effectively combined to tell the stories of these women and to determine how the combination of verbatim- and physical theatre lends itself to feminist theatre practices.

In this study I argued that verbatim-physical theatre creates a platform for women's stories, not only to be told, but to be heard, interacted and engaged with. Furthermore, verbatim-physical theatre offers the means of portraying ethnographic research in a manner that is politically conscious, educational and accessible through embodied, liminal performance. It offers a means for women to reclaim their voice and tell personal stories that would otherwise not be heard. It is also an active reclaiming of one's body, through taking up space and moving past the boundaries and limits placed on women's bodies. Verbatim-physical theatre is an act of reclaiming agency, of opposing and challenging the socio-political and cultural norms that construct and regulate women's bodies and voices. Verbatim-physical theatre, as feminist protest theatre, can become a powerful agent of social change. It was with this in mind, that the verbatim-physical theatre production, *What I was Told*, was created.

What I was Told was created through a workshop process that focused on creating physical images, movement pieces and verbatim text that tells embodied stories. The workshop process consisted of two sections: creating physical theatre and creating a verbatim text. It was fundamental that these two processes happened simultaneously, constantly influencing one

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other, but separately. This allowed for a performance text to be created that was layered and multi-dimensional. The spoken verbatim text and the physical language of the performance each told a different, but complementing story. This created visible confrontation within the performance text, giving it depth and nuance. This opened up the possibility to say much more than either physical theatre or verbatim theatre can separately. Through this dual approach, a complex and multi-layered performance text was created that told embodied stories and elicited embodied reactions from an audience.

Furthermore, *What I was Told* was staged with the notion of alienation and estrangement to challenge stable meaning and actively engage its audience. Through this, the performance drew attention to *the gaze* and its effects, and inverted it on the audience. By inverting *the gaze*, the audience was placed into the position of women and forced to feel the effect of *the gaze's* constant scrutiny heightened in performance. This effect was achieved by breaking the fourth wall and having performers intentionally look/stare at the audience. The audience was also brought into the performance space, blurring the lines between performers and 'outsiders' to create an uncomfortably intimate performance space – one where internal recognition is almost forced upon them. Through this, the performance told embodied stories that grapple with what it means to be a woman and actively engaged its audience, while exposing questions that need to be asked and spark conversations that need to take place. *What I was Told* engaged with people's lived experiences and aimed at creating a deeper understanding of meaning.

To broaden the scope of the study, further research on gender performativity can be conducted amongst individuals who do not identify as female. This will help to gain a greater perspective on the influence of social and cultural norms that construct perceptions of gender, gender roles and gendered behaviour. As such, a more inclusive study can be conducted with the possibility of greater relevance to a larger audience. Moreover, gaining insight into perceptions of all genders and gender roles is crucial in understanding the power dynamics that regulate society. Further research is an important step towards dismantling systems of oppression that enforce gender as a binary construct and rate genders unequally. It is only through the liberation of confining, limiting and harmful constructs of gender, that is weaponized as justification for social stratification and ostracism, that we can truly move towards an inclusive society.

It is then theatre's role in society to hold up a mirror in the act of feminist protest theatre. To advocate for social change by asking difficult questions and sparking conversations. Verbatim-physical theatre is advantageously situated to accomplish this, but is still far from becoming a

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mainstream theatre form in South Africa. Verbatim-physical theatre has the potential to protest for social change without becoming didactical – a noteworthy act. However, its reception under South African audiences is still underexplored. Theatre is a dialogical meaning-making process. As such, it is important to understand how theatre transfers meaning, as well as how an audience interprets, reacts and responds to that meaning. To truly utilise this theatre form in a manner that greatly impacts audiences, research still needs to be done on audience reception.

In conclusion, verbatim-physical theatre confronts audiences with the possibility of change. It forces them to ask questions that need to be asked and sparks conversations that might mark the beginning of a new way of thinking. Verbatim-physical theatre engages with people's lived experiences in an active and meaningful way and presents research in an accessible and relatable manner. But more importantly, verbatim-physical theatre creates a deeper understanding of meaning – it brings about an embodied reaction to- and emotional recognition of the meaning transferred. This study indicated that verbatim-physical theatre is a means of instigating social change that is not possible through static contemplation in research alone.

Verbatim-physical theatre, as feminist protest theatre actively lays claim to the right to speak out freely and the right to take up space. This right was exercised in creating and performing, *What I was Told.* The production aimed at giving a truthful and authentic account of those stories told to us by research participants. Through embodied performance, *What I was Told* effectively laid bare the human reality behind these women's experiences. It told those stories that could not be expressed in language alone; stories that needed to be more than heard, that needed to be engaged with and empathised with. *What I was Told* tells the stories of women, the stories told to us and the stories that still need to be told.

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ADDENDUM A: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE AND CONSENT TEMPLATE

This questionnaire was conducted through Sunsurveys. Consent was asked through a tick box option as shown below.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research is to investigate how an individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through their specific social and cultural norms and how that influences their behaviour and to dramatize the findings as a stage production for live performance.

2. PROCEDURES

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to read through and answer a survey that will not take more than 10 minutes to complete. In this survey you will be asked to answer a range of questions relating to your social opinions and experiences. Should you feel that there is a question that you do not wish to answer, you are free to withdraw your participation (see below).

5. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Your participation in this study is completely confidential**.** No other student or staff member at the University will have access to your responses. There will be no way to identify you from your questionnaire responses, the data will be aggregated and any personal or identifying information collected from you will be recoded to ensure your anonymity in this study.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL AND RIGHTS OF PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent and participation from this study at any time without penalty**.** The principle investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise

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which warrant doing so. Any participant data that has been captured prior to withdrawal from the study may still form part of the data analysis. However, we remind participants that there will be no way to identify you from your questionnaire responses unless direct consent has been given by you. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Helena Baard (Principle Investigator): helenabaard2@gmail.com / 0662366201.

Do you give informed consent to participate in this study? *(tick box)*

O Yes
O No

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How do you identify yourself? (e.g. Gender, Age, Culture, Language, Nationality Sexual Orientation, Religion or Philosophical Belief, Race or Ethnic Origin)

To what extend does your upbringing influence your view on gender? Rate form 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

Is it a positive or a negative influence?

O positive
O negative

Which parent or parent figure had the biggest influence on your perception of gender roles?

O Mother/mother-figure
O Father/father-figure

How much did your mother/mother-figure influence your perception of gender roles? Rate form 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

How much did your father/father-figure influence your perception of gender roles? Rate form 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

Were you encouraged/expected to be feminine while growing up?

O Yes
O No

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Were you encouraged/ expected to be more feminine than you are comfortable with or wanted to be while growing up? Rate form 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

Give 5 words that you associate with femininity:

1. _
2. _
3. _
4. _
5. _

Give 5 words that you associate with being unfeminine:

1. _
2. _
3. _
4. _
5. _

What are 5 positive words you associate with femininity:

1. _
2. _
3. _
4. _
5. _

What are 5 negative words you associate with femininity:

1. _
2. _
3. _
4. _
5. _

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Do you think certain situations require you to be more feminine than you are comfortable with? Rank the following situations form 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much).

1. Class
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

2. With close friends
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

3. With a large group of friends
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

4. With close family
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

5. With extended family
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

6. Meeting new people
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

7. In a public space (e.g. a coffee shop or public gathering)
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

8. In a religious of cultural space (if applicable)
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

9. A night out (club, bar or party) with just female friends
   Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

10. A night out (club, bar or party) with men present
    Not at all O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O – O Very Much

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Has your perception/idea of femininity changed since coming to University?

O Yes

O No

If yes, is it a positive or a negative change?

O positive

O negative

What is the biggest change in how you experience femininity and/or being a woman?

Would you be willing to do an additional interview? The interview will be conducted by the primary researcher, Helena Baard and will take ± 2 hours. If yes, please provide an email address so that I can contact you in order to schedule the interview. *Please note, this is completely voluntary and choosing 'no' will not negatively impact your participation in the study. You may also withdraw your consent and/or participation at any time without penalty.*

O Yes

O No

**If yes, please provide an email address that you can be contacted on in order to schedule the interview. This information will stay completely anonymous and you may withdraw your permission at any time, without consequences.*

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ADDENDUM B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interviews will follow a semi-structured format

1. How do you identify yourself? (*it might seem like an abstract question, just answer the first thing that comes to mind)*
2. How were you brought up? (religion, culture etc.)
3. How do you see yourself now? (religion, culture etc.)
4. Have you ever challenged/disobeyed your parents?
5. When are times that you stay silent, don't speak out or keep things from the people close to you why?
6. Is there a specific moment you realized you were no longer a child?
7. What is femininity for you?
8. What do you do when people stare at you and how does it make you feel?
9. What do you think are modern day restraints for women? (think back to corsets etc)
10. If you think about fairy tales and stories, what character do you identify with. Why?
11. What fairy-tale or story character for you, is the perfect woman? Why? Do you try to be like her?
12. What fairy-tale princess or popular female character (stereotypically good) do you absolutely hate/Dislike? Why?
13. If you think about the word, 'forbidden' what comes to mind? What do you think is forbidden to you?
14. Can you tell me about a time you pretended to be someone or something you're not?
15. Is there a part of you, your personality or your character that you feel you have to hide to people or play down, especially in a social setting?
16. Was there ever a time when you've felt completely helpless?
17. What is a night your parents never found out about? Why must they not know about it?
18. What family member has had the biggest influence in how you see yourself?
19. What do you think are the expectations placed on you by your family? How does that affect you?
20. As a child, what was something your mother (or older woman in your life) told you to do or not to do, that still has an impact (or upsets you) today?
21. When you came to University, what was your expectations of University life?

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22. Aside from a degree, what did you expect to get out of this time in our life? How has those expectations changed from when you started to now?
23. How to you think, your family's expectations of you, influence your experience of University? Do you have a specific example/story of an instance where this happened?
24. What is something you want to say to your mother (or parents), but never will?
25. What do you think is expected of women today? *(*This is a vague question, but let them first attempt to answer this and then guide towards more specificity)* • •
26. What is one expectation you wish you could break free from? (*socially, culturally, religiously, imposed by parents, family or society*).
27. How do you think your economical position influences your expectations from life? (*for example, the fact that you can go to University etc.)*
28. How do you think your economic position influences what is expected from you?
29. In relation to other women, from other social/economical classes, how much autonomy/authority do you think you have?
30. In media there has been an increase in matters regarding the representation of gender, ethnicity and sexuality etc. do you feel represented in media?
31. What If you could only follow 5 pages/accounts on your favourite social media platform, what would they be?
32. What do you hate seeing in media/social media and why?
33. Who do you think is invisible in our society?
34. If you had to pick a book/magazine or anything printed to describe your life, what would it be?
35. If you were an object, what would you be?

<u>Additional questions to ask, should the conversation steer towards them:</u> • •

1. **(22)** How do you perceive your mother's role in your household?
2. What do you think is the biggest difference between your generation and your parents? How do you think this influences you?
3. How do you think, your experience of life, as a woman, differs from that of your mother and your grandmother?

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<u>On paper (written down) – write down the first thing that comes to mind. Do not think too much:</u>

1. Write down 3 words that you think defines/represents/constructs you.

   Do this at beginning of interview and at end – if they would like to write down new words that has come to mind, if they want to change their mind or amend the previous words.

2. If you think of yourself, what image comes to mind? (it can be abstract. Anything)

   At end of interview.

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ADDENDUM C: CONSENT FORM

What I was Told

1 INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to provide you, as a prospective participant, information that may affect your decision whether to participate in this research and play production project, and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the project.

2 RESEARCHER/PLAYWRIGHT

Helena Baard has invited your participation in a research project that will be written up as a play script for a performed stage production.

There are other researcher/playwrights involved in the research, development, and execution of the production. They are:

- Janca Fourie
- Gabriella Horn
- Andrea Fraser
- Kelby Manuel
- Liane van Vuuren
- Thalia Alberts

The primary investigator is a Masters student and all other researchers are undergraduate students at the University of Stellenbosch's Drama Department. The supervisor for this study is:

- Dr André Gerber (akg@sun.ac.za)

3 PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to investigate how an individual's perception of gender and gender roles are constructed through their specific social and cultural norms and how that influences their behaviour and to dramatize the findings as a stage production for live performance.

4 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND PLAY PRODUCTION PROJECT

If you decide to participate, you will join a project involving research comprised of interviews aiming to understand gender performativity under female (and any person who identify as such) students at Stellenbosch University. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you will remain anonymous throughout. Please note that you may withdraw your consent, or refuse to answer any questions on the questionnaire, at any time and without consequences of any kind.

If you say "yes," then your participation will last for approximately 2 hours. You will be asked to answer simple personal questions that relate to the theme of the production. You are only asked to

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relate your own experiences and/or opinions to the theme. You do not need to answer any questions that cause you discomfort.

Approximately 30 people will be participating in this project.

5 RISKS

There are no known risks from taking part in this project, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

If you would like to continue to speak to someone regarding some of the topics that has arisen during this interview, or feel that you want or need therapy, please to not hesitate to contact campus emotional support services via email at supportus@sun.ac.za. This is a free service to all registered Maties students. They offer online counselling services via MS Teams, Skype, Zoom or phone.

Please know that the campus ER-24 Crisis Service (010 205 3032) remains open in case of a psychological emergency.

6 BENEFITS

Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research are the creation of a verbatim-physical theatre production. Theatre as medium provides a necessary platform for stories to be told, heard, seen and experienced. Through the unique combination of verbatim-physical theatre multiple voices can be heard, multiple perspectives can be given and theatre can critically engage with the social issues of its society. Opening up and starting conversations surrounding social issues is the first step towards inciting social change.

7 CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained in this project is strictly confidential. The results of this research and its scripted performance may also be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researcher/playwright will not identify you by your actual name. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Helena Baard will remove or change any names or identifying material mentioned during the interview. All data will be stored on a private and secure OneDrive (cloud) folder that is only accessible to the researchers and lecturers specified above (2). At the conclusion of the project, all original audio and video material will be permanently deleted. The selected data as performed by the actors may, however, be recorded for archival and/or additional research purposes.

8 WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. It is OK for you to say “no.” Even if you say “yes” now, you are free to say “no” later, or withdraw from the project at any time.

Your decision will not affect your relationship with the University of Stellenbosch or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

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If you are a student, a prospective student, or employed by the University of Stellenbosch, nonparticipation or withdrawal from the project will not affect your admission, grade(s), or employment status.

If you choose to withdraw, all audio and video material will be immediately deleted. It will not be used in the final production.

9 COSTS AND PAYMENTS

There is no payment for your participation in the project.

10 VOLUNTARY CONSENT

Any questions you have concerning the research project, the script, the play production, or your participation, before or after your consent, will be answered by Helena Baard, helenabaard2@gmail.com, 066 236 6210. If you wish to contact the other researchers involved in this project, you may do so using the following contact details:

Janca Fourie 22565868@sun.ac.za 083 408 4727	Kelby Manuel 22137718@sun.ac.za 076 206 2885
Gabriella Horn 23109246@sun.ac.za 084 788 8447	Liane van Vuuren 22498044@sun.ac.za 083 344 0483
Andrea Fraser 23162864@sun.ac.za 076 920 9913	Thalia Alberrs 23955457@sun.ac.za 072 486 4812

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the chair of the Drama Department's Ethics Committee, Prof. Petrus du Preez, at cntr@sun.ac.za.

Or

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

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11 DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.
- By signing below, I grant the researchers the right to use my likeness, image, appearance and performance—whether recorded on or transferred to videotape, film, slides, and photographs—for presenting or publishing this research.

By signing below, I _____ *(name of participant)* agree to take part in

this research study, as conducted by Helena Baard

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

12 DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator **Date**

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ADDENDUM D: WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHANGE IN HOW YOU EXPERIENCE FEMININITY AND/OR BEING A WOMAN?

I've just never cared about gender roles or the fact that I identify as female. I've always just been me and that was all that mattered. I was raised by a very strong ambitious mother and it helped shaped my experience of being a woman in an extremely positive way since I had the freedom to shape my own idea of femininity.

I have learnt that femininity can present itself in various ways and every person (male or female) embodies it differently which I respect. I don't think that femininity is a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a way of respecting and celebrating the female divinity. I have learnt that I can choose my femininity when I want and that although I do present myself as more feminine in certain situations, I do not feel pressured by society to as such. I enjoy embodying femininity but it's not an ongoing pressure. I value my individual way of presenting myself more than presenting it in a feminine way. I do however feel that the profession I go into will be an environment where femininity is expected but is masked as professionalism.

The biggest change I have encountered is that you can be feminine but still be physically strong. You can be feminine without having to do housework such as cleaning. You can be feminine as still know how to change a tire. You can be feminine as still not know how to cook food. You can be feminine without being passive or submissive. Lastly, you can be feminine and independent.

That you can choose. That people think there's no roles, necessarily per gender, but there is and it's important roles we need.

I realised that femininity depends on the person, and that men can be just as feminine as women and be accepted all the same.

Learning how shitty fairy tales were. When I was young, I was a little princess, I just loved being a princess. (I was also a little fighter) but, it was sad to learn how toxic those stories were. As I grew up I always hated female leads that still clung to the idea of gender conformity and the male gaze. It makes me sick. A lot of the time it is hard for me to exist in situations without blowing up at people. It is difficult to tell compassionate truths when it is so personal. It is in the media, in the news headlines, in the mouths of your friends, and your brothers. It runs so deep. I am so grateful for my parents, as much as they had flaws in this area, I see how much farther I am in certain understanding because of them (Especially my mother- QUEEN). University helped this more. I also notice over the four years of being here, they are introducing more female academics into the work we learn. But in a lot of ways, it is still so hard to tell men to FUCK OFF. They need to be educated and they just aren't.

In my first year, I did an art project on the significance of a sewing machine in my family. It really opened by eyes to the generational trauma of WW2, Apartheid and sexism. It made me appreciate the women in my family all the more. I am in Huis Erica, which is a female residence that is notorious for being girly girls. Everything about the place grated me in my first few months of staying there - the nauseating prevalence of pink, how HK and the house mother used to address us as "ladies", the overly "empowering" positive messaging on the walls. It's changed somewhat since, but it taught me there is no "right" way of being feminine and you should not assert that ideal systematically in residence. Pink isn't about being "girly" - it's about owning the history of the colour, performing your sexuality in any way that you feel comfortable and empowering the women around you to do the same.

I believed woman were never meant to be first and always belonged as house wives, when I got to university, I learnt how important it is being independent and having your own career and knowing that you don't have to say yes to a man, especially with sex.

I dress like a tomboy most times. I wear sweat pants most times and a sweater. Since I've come here, I paint my nails more and wear earrings more and taking care of myself more. It's a positive thing because I care more for myself and how I look. But somehow, I become self-conscious at the same time.

It is extremely circumstantial as it is, in today's day in age, a very hot topic and so I feel that it is one extreme or the other currently. Everyone is trying to find that balance and just be okay with who they are. I am constantly trying to make sure I am feminine enough without trying too hard, but still being myself with out not trying at all. It is a constant battle.

I can still be myself - enjoy contact sports, listen to hard rock music, wear sneakers, live like a slob - but still have the freedom to wear makeup and choose to date guys - without having someone saying I'm acting "too butch" or I am not "ladylike". My parents taught me to be independent and outspoken but still expected me to be this quiet blond lady that does as she is told. I have more freedom now, but it is not something you forget easily.

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I grew up in a household with a strong, warm, independent mom and an absent father. So already I knew that traditional gender roles fact. However, growing through my teen and early adulthood years, I felt you had to act in a certain/feminine way in order to be noticed/appreciated by men. It took me a while to find who I was and be comfortable expressing that albeit it uncomfortable for others around me at time. I will stand up for what I believe in. I will not defer my beliefs so conversation does not become uncomfortable. Being feminine is a whole spectrum and not only what is traditionally accepted. It is sometimes difficult as you get labelled as 'one of those', 'emotional' or 'sensitive'

Being more capable to spot misogyny. Feeling more confident in myself, my beliefs and abilities. However I do feel more pressure to appear more feminine, e.g. dress nicely, learn how to do makeup, etc. because I see all my peers excelling in those categories.

I have learnt that modern-day culture prefers the brash, independent, career-minded woman and that traditional/biblical femininity is seen as weak and as being undesirable. However, I have realised that there is strength in femininity, such as having control over one's emotions or the fact that it takes strength to be warm and loving towards one's children after a day of work. Although unpopular in today's society, true femininity is quiet resilience.

It is not what was taught or expected of me growing up. Femininity is not something to be ashamed of. It does not make you lesser than what you are.

I see femininity much more as being able, competent, inspiring, knowledgeable etc than dressing "correctly", speaking in a certain way or having to please others.

Anyone can be feminine or like feminine things regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, etc. It is important to be who you want to be and preserve your mental well-being in that way because it is taxing on your mental health to restrict yourself from living your life. Being a woman, being a man, identifying as either or neither, and being feminine is beautiful, and it should be celebrated because you are a human being and are entitled to respect regardless of who you are, how you identify and how feminine you are.

I have always been perceived as a girl who is not feminine enough. Because of this people tend to get the impression that I am cold, aggressive and rude. It is definitely something I have struggled with throughout my life. In recent years I have thought about it a lot and have become more comfortable with my lack of femininity and how it doesn't make me any less of a women. I know now that I am a women regardless of how I express myself. I try not to force myself to be more feminine in order to be seen as worthy. I do love femininity. I love the way people, regardless of gender identity, express femininity. However, I do not appreciate it being forced upon me. I want to express my femininity in the way I choose to and when I choose to. Not because I have to.

I saw how my mother was judged on two roles of provider and care giver, while my father was only expected to be a provider. I also saw how women are influenced to say "I don't know" and men are influenced to say "I don't care" and of course this then affects my view and psychology of gender roles. As I now see these things clearly I aim to try to share my provider and caregiver role 50% with my chosen partner. I also aim to verbalize what I think and feel and explore it while not bulldozing others, and of course, as my personality has been shaped (and I have chosen to grow) as a caregiver- I want to encourage an "I care and here is why" thought process and action in the males in my life.

After my last serious relationship I found myself alone in a different country. Then I realised I could do a lot of things I was always scared of doing like living alone, traveling alone, study again, etc.

There hasn't been a change in how I perceive it. I know what is expected by a heteronormative society, I just don't adhere to it. Never really have. It has created uncomfortable discussions with others (felt by others, not me). I just be me and that's it.

Femininity being represented as a positive thing. Feeling free to be feminine without judgment. I was and still am interested in sports and outdoors and I am a very philosophical and open minded person. So I was scared that if I acted more feminine around my friends in high school I'd be seen as inferior (I had lots of male friends). I advocated for the feminine strengths of emotional intelligence and open mindedness but only felt that my peers agreed with me when I entered university. It was great because I didn't have to focus so much on my gender - I could just be. And surprisingly I naturally became a lot more feminine as a university student without the pressure to conform to a certain kind of standard held my by peers.

That there are various types of femininity. It's not an absolute. However, I still feel like at university there is a category set for femininity and if you don't fall within that you aren't feminine. I feel like it is less accepting here than when I was surrounded by my family and friends at home.

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Being a woman does not always mean to be dressed perfectly and to fit the look of a lady, some girls dress completely differently to what I was taught a lady should look like, and their femininity is present nonetheless.

Most women nowadays feel that they need to be independent and make their own way in life, not needing men which for some women is not true. I personally felt that way before coming to university, but now all I want to do is get married and start a family and be a house wife. My femininity is greatly expressed through being able to be strong and capable, but recognizing that love and honesty is needed.

Not really a huge change since I've always gradually leaned towards a kind of femininity that means a wide spectrum of things. Girls are not as frilly as movies may make us look, but I've also come to appreciate the value of how multifaceted femininity is in the incredible res I was part of. Really love the understanding that frilliness does not take away from someone's seriousness and value, while it is often portrayed as silly and superficial. I haven't met a single superficial feminine person without a million interesting personality traits and interest aspects, in my life.

Femininity is not a requirement in order to be a woman. A feminine woman is not more of a woman than a masculine woman. You are a woman if you identify as one. Your personality is what determines your femininity, not your gender.

For one, my body is not an object solely for physical pleasure but the house of my soul. I don't need to meet traditional standards of beauty to beautiful. I am still a woman even with my muscular body and that's feminine too.

I used to associate femininity with weakness and submission, but my perception has changed. I see how it can be beautiful to embrace my softer side and I have become more comfortable with displaying it. I tend to enjoy my womanhood more. This is compared to feeling pressurized to look very feminine and not doing it for myself.

I find the South African traditionalist notion of femininity outdated and constricting. I feel privileged to be a part of a generation that is challenging the gender norms and trying to push back against rape culture and the femicide in this country. Traits such as tenderness, gentleness, and kind-heartedness are not flaws or weaknesses. We should not be ashamed of sensitivity. Nor should we confine ourselves to outdated stereotypes of what being a woman means. We should instead embrace every part of what it means to be a woman.

When we were young, as girls, we were being steered into conforming to feminine standards. We were expected to be clean, gentle, nurturing and creative. We then were told that we develop faster than boys so we should forgive them for their thoughtless actions and their inconsideration. We were expected to be mature, well behaved, well mannered. These were all very good characteristics: polite, emphatic, conscientious, mature etc decent human beings. As we started to age a bit more, praise started to be given to boys for the absolute minimum while women were pushed aside. Men who behaved femininely were shunned and bullied into submission. All of a sudden everything that made us good became a means to make us appear weak, easier to push aside. Feminine behaviour and/or being a women started to equate to inferiority. In university women had to perform beyond expectation to gain respect as a competent, capable student, when men simply had to show up to be heard. Controversial rumours surrounding achieving female students become an easy reason for her success despite the time and effort she dedicates to her work. Achievements of women in stem are minimized with the simple addition "for a girl..". The biggest change in how I experienced being a women was aging. The changing view of a women's worth as she ages, how easily those promising female minds get silenced. How quickly the family responsibilities and stresses get placed on her while her brothers remain princes, cherished carriers of the family name... How quickly the feminine standards were used against us. Femininity and masculinity are opposing concepts which should be educated in balance to children. It's a pity that my upbringing made it so hard for me to start adopting masculine behaviours, but I'm glad that I eventually did. They both have desirable attributes to create well rounded people. With age I realised that femininity is inherently seen as weakness. It obviously isn't the case but it's the way the world thinks. At least people are learning but it will still take time.

You don't have to present feminine (in the way you dress)in order to be a woman. Masculine-presenting women are just as valid. Also, much of what I was taught to be "womanly" was actually just my motherly figures teaching me how to be appropriate for men and I have since revamped my womanhood to not cater for them.

Growing up I've realized that women play a big, essential role in every sphere of life. Without women, humanity seizes to exist. Without women, many conflicts go unresolved, or they are resolved in a physical manner. Women bring a certain degree of reasonableness, understanding, and flexibility into the mix that is essential.

I can be opinionated and still be feminine.

I am far more aware of gender discrimination and particularly the way woman in leadership are so often disregarded or looked down upon.

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I grew up in a patriarchal family, we are Christian, so obviously my dad was the head of the house. They showed me how they respect each other in the spaces they allowed for one another: my dad would be the farmer, the breadwinner, the more emotional one (be that easy to anger or fast to cry sentimental tears or sympathise), my mother was the quiet, consequent and strict parent. Seeing other families' parents have different household roles, made me realise that gender is the attitude that results from your sex, your personality, your interests and the quality of people around you. I don't identify as my gender, because I am me anyway.

Seeing that it is normal for a woman to be intelligent, even more so then men. As specially in my field of study where most of my lectures are amazing intelligent females and in my honours group where female voices are strong.

I think that my femininity is multi-faceted and fluid. My feminine gender identity is no longer governed by patriarchal stereotypes that were encouraged by family members or previous educational institutions. My feminine identity is now based on how I feel comfortable.

My grandmother is a feminist theologian, she is an incredibly strong and opinionated woman. She taught me that you can be a 'lady' but that does not mean you have to adhere to social norms. She bought me dresses but she also encouraged me to participate in sports, such as soccer and cricket. My mother is also a very strong woman, she taught me that I need to be self-sufficient. She taught me how to change a tire, wire a plug, basic plumbing amongst other things. Over the years, my ideas regarding me as a woman have changed. For instance my view on marriage and children, when I was younger I thought marriage was a prison sentence and would only lead to divorce (my parent's divorce had a negative effect) but now I see marriage as a union that gives you an opportunity to grow and be part of a special bond. I think the biggest change was realizing that giving into social norms/roles e.g. being a wife and mother isn't a bad thing.

I used to think I had to be skinny and silent. Which is what people expect. But I work my ass off in the gym, I have big muscles and wear more masculine clothes. I'm a beautiful strong female. I'm still feminine, just not submissive.

I now see a broad general opinion that doesn't exist, that women are caregivers and need to give up a career at some point and "learn their place in society". I grew up in a liberal household so this was not the case in my family. Femininity is also associated in most people's minds with how you look and not how you act. I love being a woman, but I hate makeup and I hate that every good woman has to be thin and stupid, as opposed to just care for herself and have well-educated opinions. It hurts me that I still think of my brain, my intelligence, as a masculine trait, and the women who want to be vapid at university and in society perpetuate that. That and a lack of opinions.

I've learnt how much women had to fight for equality, so I greatly appreciate my freedoms.

I have learned that asking for equity is not admitting our weakness or the fact that we are less smart than men, but it is more about righting a wrong and trying to change the status quo that has not and is still not in favour of women. I have learned that our cultural gender norms are not perfect, and that saying no to request that would make me uncomfortable or that I have no time to address, does not make me less of a woman. Taking time to rest and pamper myself. I have also grown a thick skin, and can most of the time handle being told over and over again that I am being disrespectful just for voicing my concerns and/or opinion.

I used to believe femininity meant weakness and submission. I know believe femininity to be resilience, strength and empathy. This change happened with the birth of my child and the father not stepping up to any kind of parent role and my ability to raise my child on my own without holding any hatred about the situation.

My mother is a strong, independent and intelligent woman who brought me up to be the same and not be dependent on any person (especially men).

I've realised the overwhelming presence of misogyny and women being objectified and sexualised with no shame.

I've come to notice through the stares that make me uncomfortable and the unwelcome touching that the things that I used to feel in school were valid and I wasn't just imagining them. It made me realise that me being treated like a sex object to guys that can't keep it in their pants is tiring and I hate it. But at least I know what I'm fighting against now.

I've taken for granted, in the past, my freedom and the acceptance I've received. I see others aren't so lucky and I hope that will change.

I no longer need to conform to cultural expectations of being female. My financial independence has allowed me to be "excused" from most of the duties.

A woman can take any role she wants to in her job, in her family and in society. She does not have to take a role that is expected of her.

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We as women are so much more than our labels. Part of the world makes me feel like I can be anyone and express myself however I want to. I see another side of the world that wants to constrict me and narrow my view of myself to please others and fit in. It feels as if these two sides are at war with one another in society. I think tradition and religion has a damaging effect on femininity. Femininity is power, it is not confined to being subservient to men, or being born to raise children or nurture others. Femininity is, and can be all of that and so much more, femininity is the power to expand beyond the preconceived ideals imposed on it. It is intelligence and resilience. Femininity binds all women together as we all go through life experiencing similar struggles. You strike a woman you strike a rock, you know?

As an engineering student, I am expected to be less feminine than I want to be - I feel that if I dress traditionally femininely (floral anything, dresses, bright elegant colours, hair ribbons, any figure hugging top/ pant) I will be treated with less respect or have my intelligence/ capabilities underestimated (at least by those who don't know me as otherwise). I feel that as a civil engineering student that if I don't perform well then I should probably not even be in this career - when in actual fact I am damn smart, certainly smarter than a bunch of guys in my class and I must not forget the truth!

I used to perceive femininity with prettiness and grooming, external things, but now my view of femininity is more aligned with freedom of choice around how you want to express your femininity.

I really didn't know or care much about feminism or femininity but I think the biggest change might be the fact that I have taken the time to actually learn about the movement and understand that it is not women trying to be men (as it had always been told to me), but about equality of all sexes.

I no longer need to conform to cultural expectations of being female. My financial independence has allowed me to be "excused" from most of the duties.

It is only me who really cares too much. No one really has time to worry and judge others, they are too busy worrying about themselves. In addition, I learned I should do what I feel comfortable with and not try to please others as much, then I'll always be unhappy with how I present myself.

In the working world it is tough being female and having your voice heard or having your opinion taken seriously. One needs to be assertive, knowledgeable and confident as a women in order to be respected and trusted with decisions.

Everyone has their own opinion on what it means to be a woman. Just because I do not comply or share everyone else's opinions, does not make me less of a woman.

Well I used to be a guy, so the fact that I came out as a transgender woman changed how I experience femininity because I finally got to experience femininity as a female, which has been awesome.

I grew up believing in feminism. That women and men are exactly the same. I do not believe that anymore. Women are equal to men, but we are not the same. We have a beautiful and unique role in life. We are powerful in our own way. We do not need to become like men (losing what makes us women) to have power or to get respect.

The most important lesson I learnt (change I realised I needed) is that I need women in my life. I feel like the emotional support I got from women slowly disappeared as I went further into engineering, because the women were kind of disappearing. And my mother and sister were far away. So I integrated with communities (like yoga and kung fu) to try and find more women to hang out with basically. And I have found that it is very important that we support each other, because that support has meant the world to me. I thought long ago that I'm actually not "feminine" enough to hang out and relate with girls. But I was very wrong, firstly in what I thought femininity meant, and secondly in believing they wouldn't just support me anyway. I just needed to be open to it. Hanging out with women has also made me put less pressure on the whole being a woman thing.

Your gender doesn't determine your worth or capabilities. You shouldn't be ashamed to be a woman.

The things that parents teach you aren't always correct, and they haven't been educated as we are.

It has nothing to do with the way you dress or how you present yourself. Woman supporting each other is the best change I've seen!

That men view me as something to be moulded or manipulated into what they want. It makes me want to be more masculine, because that makes me feel safer.

That a binary classification is outdated.

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I have realized that being feminine generally makes people underestimate you. Retaining my femininity and proving myself in my field has been a very crucial skill that I had to learn and which I am still working on perfecting daily.

I guess I thought only women can and should be feminine, however being exposed to a large variety of people I have realized that this is not true. Men can be feminine as well and should be allowed to if that is who they are.

My looks matter more than I'm comfortable with - in terms of being taken seriously, making friends, attracting potential partners etc. Sometimes it feels like my entire being is reduced to what I look like.

I was brought up with my mom as the breadwinner and very successful business women. I was unaware of how backwards so many men and women still are and how they still see women as less equal and capable. As I am getting older and having more conversations around jobs and families, it has shocked to hear comments about people about how I am going to work and have children and that men are more capable of doing STEM jobs. I study accounting, the biggest change is that my male peers don't take me seriously and don't think I am as capable as them or have the right "genetic mind" to be doing accounting.

Femininity doesn't have to be subjugation. You can still be your own woman and be feminine and strong. Strength as well as outspokenness and Femininity are not mutually exclusive.

I have learnt that women are allowed to be more open, outspoken and they are valued more than I thought. I have learnt that women are strong and support each other regardless of whether they have a bond or relationship.

That women are more than their beauty. It is ok to voice an opinion, even if it goes against everyone else's. And women also have the right to everything and all that men have a right to.

I used to be ashamed of liking things like the colour pink, The Twilight Saga, and Britney Spears, but since coming to university I realised that those were the things being marketed towards me and I was mocked for it by my male peers and even other women. Now, I'm like #@%* it, I loved those things in secret as a teen but now I'll freaking wear all the glitter, I have twilight on my shelf (Despite it being problematic for vastly different reasons), and I paint my nails almost daily. I'm unapologetically feminine because it makes me happy, my femininity and long hair give me strength and courage and I will not bow down towards the mockery of men and women who can't mind their own business, even when they find me frivolous. BTW a woman told me to cut my hair while I was running earlier this year because it looked like my hair was a nuisance. Before university, I assumed men dismissed femininity the most, but now I have found women to be just as guilty in hating on femininity as men, which is weird because my parents taught me being a woman is a powerful thing.

Fear. Since coming to university and being more independent, I feel like I took safety for granted. I always have to be aware of my surroundings and when walking alone there is always the constant fear of being attacked or assaulted. I have always been cautious, but now that I am responsible for my own safety, it is very scary. I also have to spend extra money for rides because walking alone at certain places or times just isn't possible.

I've recently made an effort of it to stop viewing myself through the male gaze. So I ask myself: what would I wear, how would I act and what would I say if there were no men present in this room right now? And then I do that.

I was raised by a strong, independent woman and always saw femininity as those traits. Until entering a world that is unsafe for woman. Managing the way you dress at varsity (and in town etc) to make sure that you are protected, for example, affects the self-image of being strong and independent.

I have started to view femininity in a more positive light. There is strength in femininity that I have not picked up on before. Just because you express yourself in a feminine way does not mean you are weak. If you feel most at home in presenting as female, I believe it is your right to do so without experiencing judgment from your community.

I used to not want to embrace my feminine side as I saw it as "weaker" than my masculine side. I always wanted to be seen as equal to my male counterparts and not be submissive as I am a natural leader. This perspective changed during university, with the help of my boyfriend, and I learnt that my feminine side has so much power and I am equal to my peers no matter what. I truly love embracing both aspects of my personality and it has made me a more complete person.

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I do realise as an adult that many people are just the amalgamation of their experiences so I can't be too hard on others for diminishing their own femininity. I get it, too often femininity is over-sexualised which is stupid because femininity is often also associated with high maintenance and being expensive. I'll say this though, when I know I'm going to a place that might be unsafe, I completely go full tilt in the opposite direction and will dress very masculine, almost aggressively for safety reasons. However, my own bullying for being feminine was really not that bad. Mostly just remarks about my intelligence, sexuality and being shallow. I find it sad that women have been taught that they can't be strong but also enjoy reading fairy tales.

Traditional feminine interests (make-up, nails, hair care, dating, certain media) don't necessarily have an impact on academic performance or interest. These feminine interests were simultaneously thought of as shallow and frivolous, as well as necessary components of feminine performance. I have noticed there is a growing movement among younger women to encourage acceptance for all degrees of feminine expression.

I have always been very afraid and out of touch with my femininity and I have learned that there are wonderful ways in expressing and celebrating my femininity without over crossing the boundaries of what I'm comfortable with doing in regards to my gender presentation.

It took me a long time to fully accept the importance and power of femininity. My mother never liked to be perceived as feminine, which might just be a result of the normalised misogyny in her generation, while my father was very open about not having any expectations for me ,other than marriage. Having been raised as a only girl among older brothers, who constantly criticised my interests, I rejected most things perceived as "feminine", it always meant weakness to me. However, I have fully accepted that being feminine doesn't mean you are weaker or less impactful than someone who is masculine. I take pride in my femininity, I enjoy things without feeling guilty because of it. I've started to understand that when someone sees your interests as inferior because it's largely enjoyed by women, that's their personal bias and it shouldn't have an effect on what I enjoy. When I was younger, "you're not like other girls" was probably the highest compliment , not in the context of having male attention, but in the context of being separated from femininity , however, currently, the same statement would cause an endless amount of disgust and eye rolls , because I am like other girls and that's perfectly fine because girls are pretty awesome.

I have found myself silenced by dominant male professors. I have found it extremely challenging to be credible or relevant as a young white female especially working in the economic development space.

Being exposed to a larger variety of people and turning away from Christianity has really helped me see how I was held back by the culture that I grew up in. I respect and stand up for myself more and no longer look after others if it is to my detriment.

I no longer view confidence, independence, ambition or adventurous traits as being "unfeminine", even though that is what I was brought up to believe.

I've realized more and more that femininity does not equal woman. Both men and women don't have to stick to either being masculine or feminine. Gender is not binary. It can be empowering to embody both traits.

Mostly around sexuality. It's confusing to grow up being told to be pretty to get men's attention. But then getting too much attention makes you a flirt or considered promiscuous. So being a women means a delicate balance between being attractive to men but also being demure. I didn't think I was allowed to have needs sexually. Before it was my role as a women to provide this. Not something to receive because that would not be behaving like a lady. Influences at university definitely changed my thinking around this.

I became proud of being a woman, I became stronger emotionally and more independent.

It's a struggle every day, in a workplace, socially and emotionally.

I have come to notice the ways in which I have picked up negative conations in which society says women should be, mostly through my mother. I was taught to always take the option that will in the end make me skinnier. Literally, I was taught this from preschool. I have always drunk the low-fat versions of foods, whenever there is a new diet I had to try it. But now I have let myself enjoy my youth and my body and not cry when I eat ice cream or pick up a kilo and actually let my body grow into what it's supposed to be.

I have a stronger sense of the power of women in society after seeing it in action in a bigger way at varsity.

I don't have to have it together all the time. I am allowed to laugh loudly and to make my presence felt.

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I've come to realise that being a woman doesn't have to be the same for everyone, but that there is a large group of women who still enforce these 'rules' on how women 'should be' - and if you don't act like that, you're excluded. I now know how much value lies in women supporting one another to be whoever they want to be.

I now view the performance of my femininity as a positive choice, rather than a social obligation. Feminine rituals are now associated with self-soothing and self-care techniques, rather than expectations I perceive society to place on my body to look a certain way. I am liberated by these choices, choosing how and when I perform my femininity. I feel more secure in my body as a result.

Realising how much of my ideas and thoughts about femininity are engrained in my upbringing Meeting and learning more about "other" gender identities and realising there is more to it than I previously thought.

I have had wonderful female role models in the faculty. Very accomplished women in positions of power. Each of them is feminine in their own unique and unapologetic way. From activist, to soft and pretty to funky to hard as nails. It's taught me that you can be feminine in whatever way you want to be and still achieve excellence

Just learning that womanhood doesn't have rigid bounds, so I can still be a woman while enjoying stereotypically manly activities like driving my car really fast or not enjoying stereotypically womanly activities like shopping. I can be me and be a woman. The two are not mutually exclusive because womanhood doesn't follow a strict definition.

I grew up with femininity being about your appearance and role; that you should be attractive and helpful. But it is more than just prettiness and role-obedience; it is about how you carry yourself, and thus is not exclusive to only cisgender women. It should have nothing to do with others, and only to do with you, and your peace.

Being a model and athlete and trying to be liked and popular; I feel this immense pressure to be immaculate – skinny, outfit always on point and behaving as though I'm having so much fun. Doing this makes me very much liked and respected – but psychologically it's caused havoc (eating disorders; struggling to focus on studies; social anxiety etc.)

I challenged my mother as a teen when she was guiding my choices for studies. She had labelled certain jobs as male jobs, I have realised in time that society does have expectations of how a woman should be, but it's okay to surprise people too.

That being a woman can be liberating and can revolve around strength and self-reliance.

I realised everything I do, say and think as a woman as happened or is because of its relation to men. And that is something I want to break away from. I also do not think femininity is synonymous with being a woman anymore. Femininity is also not something I feel is assigned to only one gender.

You can change a car tyre even if you have a manicure!

Femininity is but a part of me and not what defines me.

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ADDENDUM E: PERFORMANCE TEXT

What I was Told

A Verbatim-Physical Theatre Performance

Compiled by Helena Baard

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Scene 1:

The performance starts with a conventional stage layout. The audience is seated in the auditorium and the curtains are closed. As the curtains open, a voiceover plays while performers are positioned on stage in frozen images. They mechanically change images while staying stationary as the revolve turns. The first scene serves to establish the gaze.

As the sequence comes to an end and they transition into the next sequence, their movements become more dynamic, drawing on elements of dance theatre.

Scene 2:

Performers move off stage, breaking the fourth wall. The performers interact with the audience and stare at them. They also use tactics such as mirroring, that was set up in the opening scene, to get the audience to follow them onto stage. Audience is taken on stage and into the world of performance.

Scene 3:

The audience is on the stage apron, standing in front of a big paper wall. One of the performers delivers a monologue, but is talking directly at the audience.

Liane: *asem in*
Boude uit; trek op dit steek die hipdips weg
Maag in
Bates op
En almal kyk na my
lag gespanne/inverleentheid
Ek is jammer
Waar is almal se eyeline
skerp in asem
Holderstebolder maak seker alles is toe onder die water voor jy uit kom
asem in like soek moed vibes
‘n mooi ou kyk na jou
en jy dans
skrik+hou asem in
‘n nipslip kan gebeur
Mamma gaan nie beindruk wees met jou nie
asem uit verligting dis verby
Easy access
(tergend) Nee oom dis myne
(*besef wat jy gedoen het asem in)*
(ongemak)
Ek dink ek gaan eerder toe maak, maar bly confidant
asem in, gestress. ongemak

Scene 4:

Audience enters the paper maze. This scene has the atmosphere of an art gallery, with performers doing short movement sequences in different corners of the maze. This effect plays into the act of looking. The audience is there to look at the art. Except, in this instance, the art looks back. The performers actively stare at the audience, looking them in the eye. It is no longer just the audience watching a show, but everyone is looking at everyone and in this sense the audience is implicated in

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what they are seeing. They are not passive bystanders to a performance, but they are a direct cause of what is happening in front of them. Inside the maze is also an intimate and closed off space. The audience has nowhere to go, nothing else to look at except the performance. They are compelled to take part in the social transaction. The performers make use of their paper clothes to perform their solos. The use of the paper clothes inside the paper maze aids in solidifying the theme of social constructs..

Scene 5:

End of the paper maze. Performers are seated in an open space cordoned off by paper. The audience is standing, looking down at them.

Andrea: I'm going to be straight now and say like my mom, my sister and all my female cousins have all been raped in one point in their life. It's actually ridiculous that I should be taught how to behave around men, when men should be taught how to behave around me. But unfortunately, the woman in my life couldn't rely on that, so it definitely taught me how to behave around men, what I should be wearing (breath) it's sad but they had to they didn't want what happen to them to happen to me.

Kelby: The first time that I was raped was just like, obviously I felt like there was nothing I can do and it was just happening. How was I supposed to…?

Gabby: I don't remember much of my childhood, there could be times before that I don't remember, but the first time I can vividly remember was when I was 13 and sexually assaulted for the first time.

Kelby: And the second time even more so cause it was a big scary man and ja…

Janca: For me, the first, like the first time I was raped uhm, I was 16, at a party. I was absolutely shit faced and on my own cause we were stupid and thought buying two bottles of vodka and dividing it between three pump bottles and just adding this much coke was okay.

Gabby: So, a bunch of us went to a little house party as usual, but I was the youngest in the group and the only female and I was 13 and everyone else was 18.

Janca: The cops came and somebody had to get this guy off me.

Kelby: The worst part is that, at the beginning it was consensual and then it became unconsensual and I think at that turning point I was like well there is no going back, like, what am I supposed to do now?

Gabby: I went to a room with one of my friends and just started hooking up, very consensual in the beginning, but I was 13, I did not want to lose my virginity, like I was very scared about it…

Janca: but I went home without a belt and I don't remember being with this guy, but he was like, leaning onto me in the beginning of the night and I was like, I don't find you fucking attractive, but uhm…

Andrea: But I am another statistic in the family that's been raped.

Liane: The first time I was 16 or 17 uhm, I had gone out with one of my girlfriends and then my drink must have been spiked because I don't remember anything and I just woke up with her hand ja, her hand like, in me, so…

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Kelby: He started to get incredibly aggressive and was hitting me and that's when I realized this was no longer consensual, I did not agree to any of this, obviously, and from there everything became so forceful and – I don't want to talk about it

Gabby: I did say no multiple times but then… When I told one of my friends, they did not believe me and kicked me out the friend group basically.

Janca: I went home without a belt or a bra, woke up fucking blue and eina, so ja I was sixteen, what was I supposed to do? Tell my parents? Are you fucking kidding me? I don't know what the fuck to do, I did not even ask for this, I don't know how this works.

Andrea: So I think that is the biggest thing. How to behave and how to protect myself, that is one of the first things I can remember my mom teaching me – how to physically defend myself against someone that wants to hurt me.

Scene 6:

Audience moves out of the paper maze, to the backstage area, where two performers are waiting in a corner. Small mirrors are hanging from the roof. The performers perform a physical sequence where they mirror one another. The scene starts out with abstract movements, progressing to more realistic gestures where the performers measure the width of their wrists, attempt to portray a thigh gap and trying to count their ribs. Through this, issues such as body image and the pressure to look and behave a certain are raised.

Scene 7:

A lighting change lights up a new performance space inside a corridor in the backstage area, while the audience views it through an open door frame. The corridor is dark, except for backlighting, and the audience only sees performers' silhouettes.

Scene 8:

While speaking, the two performers pass an invisible ball back and forth visually depicting the effort women go through to manage all the different views surrounding femininity, of what motherhood should be or even how a women should look and behave. The visual struggle the performers have with the invisible ball, and through the act of passing it between them, exposes the weight of expectations that there are placed on women.

Janca: What I wanted from my mother and what she actually did was two different things. Like I wish she played more of a motherly role and was more there for us. Not that she wasn't…but like often she wouldn't cook for us and she would never be very supportive and caring, or very motherly. Like, I wish she would teach me stuff like how to do my makeup, but she obviously she is a bit tomboy so she didn't like makeup and that. But I wish that, I wish she could have been that type of mom/

Andrea: /our moms are so different, mine's like the exact opposite of yours. My mom's literally like, she's always on me about my skin, my nails, my hair, my everything. She's like the cooking mom, asks you five times a day how you're doing and it's just like…can you leave me alone

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Janca: /ja, like doing girly stuff, that was never a thing. If I had a daughter I would be like, more involved, in that sense.

Andrea: I feel it is somewhat important to learn your femininity/

Janca: /or at least have some model of femininity/

Andrea: /to create your own idea of femininity or to like, be able to discuss that stuff with your mum, you know how you feel about yourself as a woman.

The sequence progresses to the edge of a large square of newspaper. The performers mimic each other as one balances on the edge of a paper line, and the other on an invisible line. This visually shows the balancing act women go through to express their femininity without yielding to societal pressures. The balancing act eventually fails and the performer on the paper line falls into the newspaper square, getting trapped. This is then the beginning for a new physical solo piece.

Scene 9:

The performer casually delivers the monologue while walking to a new performance space.

Andrea: Oh my word, photoshop! I fucking hate that shit. Hate airbrushed bodies. I hate the fact that we praise anorexics. I have so many people in my life that are genuinely sick and struggling, and it's such a real thing. But we look at people like Bella Hadid and we… praise her… like she's a God. I do that! And I hate that shit! And I go on my discovery page and I see Emma Chaimberlain, and I see all of these gorgeous influencers with these absolutely impossible body standards, and I just wish and wish and wish and wish that I will look that way. But, I don't believe, in my core that I am gorgeous, because I do not look that way and I hate that. I think that's also something that our mothers and grandmothers had differently. They had like maybe a magazine you know… that had a photo in it. And then in those times there wasn't even things like photoshop. So it was just like a skinny bitch on film camera. Like that was maybe what they saw. They also, I think… body standard were so much wider back then. Because you weren't exposed to all of these perfect angelic skinny bitches all the time.

When the monologue is done, the audience finds itself looking at a collage of magazine clippings that form the backdrop for a physical solo. It becomes an emotional scene where the performer tries to construct herself in the fashion of the edited pictures surrounding her. The scene ends with the performer tearing down all the magazine pictures, revealing four performers behind her and staring at her.

Scene 10:

The four performers revealed in the previous scene start to squish their faces against gladwrap, while a 1950's add for the perfect housewife plays. This scene serves as comic relief, as well as a visual representation of breaking free from beauty standards. The sexist add that informs women on how to treat their husbands after a long day at work, is juxta positioned to the non-conforming facial expressions of the performers

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Scene 11:

During this scene, performers wrap themselves in off cuts of material. The material is wrapped tightly and grotesquely. This becomes symbolic for the different and random expectations placed on women by society and how constraining it is to try and fit into them. It is delivered in a farcical manner and the audience becomes implicated in this societal issue by laughing.

Andrea: Do you know what I was always told that upsets me? O my, she's the biggest I've seen her. And that was after, like when I was really skinny, in like grade 9.

Gabby: Or you can't wear low tops when you go out because you need to protect yourself

Thalia: I would say panties, bras, the fact that push up bras is a thing.

Kelby: Definitely birth control.

Gabby: You cannot walk somewhere without being catcalled.

Andrea: Or you just get stared at. I don't like people staring at me.

Thalia: How our hair has to be in place our entire life

Andrea: I think one word to describe, it would be violated.

Kelby: Show me a woman who hasn't had depression or weight gain or uncontrollable hormones due to birth control.

Gabby: Tampons.

Thalia: Oh, and the long hair for fuck sake.

Andrea: It's almost like they're undressing you with their eyes and its really intense.

Kelby: Like half the girls I know don't even go on birth control for preventing pregnancy, it's mostly for like, their skin and then it's like a two for one, ahh won't get pregnant and have good skin

Thalia: When I shaved my hair, the amount of comments like, oh you look like a man or, you're not going to be pretty anymore.

Andrea: And it's never, oh that person is looking at me cause I am pretty, like it's never that.

Kelby: But then you gain weight which is so hectic on woman's mental health

Thalia: And how are you ever going to find a boyfriend with hair like that?

Andrea: And when you react, you're the problem.

Kelby: How we are supposed to behave and think and speak.

Gabby: What we do with our bodies, how we dress our bodies, weather we want children in our bodies.

Gabby: And why am I even worrying if my metabolism is fast or not?

Thalia: Like first of all, I'm gay. Second of all fuck off.

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Scene 12:

Kelby: I have a very open relationship with my mother. I am very frank with her. I speak to her as if I'm her peer and I I've gotten to a point where I am her peer, I think. I've told her many times that I wish that you've left dad, I wish that you will still leave dad. He was incredibly verbally abusive, so I think there… You know what I think the one thing that I will never tell her is the fact that at times I thought she was pathetic. That I thought she was weak and kept her mouth shut when she shouldn't have entertained this person. And I felt that was pathetic and weak and lame and I was like, fuck you for doing that. But now as well at the same time I know that that was kind of keep the peace, just keep everything together. It came from being desperate. So, I think, actually, she was stronger.

The monologue is followed by a movement solo. The sequence was created from the question, 'when did you realize you were no longer a child?'. It is performed in front of a paper wall with a dark blue spotlight from the back. The entire sequence is seen as a silhouette.

Scene 13:

A physical sequence where two performers sculpt another performer. It exposes women's complicity in upholding the patriarchal structure by molding other women to its likeness. It also visually depicts how women are molded by forces outside of their control to view themselves in a certain way. The group sequence breaks off into three solo's performer one after the other. The solo's each depict a factor that each contribute women succumbing to societal pressures.

Liane: What are expectations placed on us?…. To be okay with what everyone has to say about you, and to kind of, to really be okay with expectations, that you haven't put on yourself. To be okay with having to carry tazors, rape whistles and pepper spray when that shouldn't be our reality. We are just expected to absorb and be strong the entire time. And that is just an unfair expectation, for anyone for that matter. So it's actually sickening, cause how does your gender determine for you, before you get to decide what's okay and what isn't. It's like, Just because you have a uterus you should be fine with everything the world throws at you, because you have uterus you should be strong. It is strange because women aren't allowed to be sensitive anymore because that sensitivity is taken for granted. If a woman is too hardcore she is trying to be a man, if a women is so too soft she is weak. So I'm not entirely sure what society wants us to be as women or if society has any interest in wanting us as women.

Scene 14:

A physical sequence comprised of two solos. The first solo explores the taboos of femininity while the second explores themes of being controlled by said taboo. The first solo takes place on a staircase landing, creating the feeling of entrapment. The second performer's solo is a puppetry sequence, where she is being controlled by the performer above her, but by invisible strings. Both these solos exposes questions around the power society hold over femininity.

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Scene 15:

Thalia: It's scary because it's like you feel like you can't say what femininity is anymore. Until the point where like I don't even know if femininity to me is the colour pink, or flowers or, or pretty dresses or whatever. But I think I feel my most feminine when I just feel good in my body. When I'm like just sitting in my room and I've got a cute outfit on and I'm like OE! You know and I just feel like me. That's like quintessential femininity. I feel like, that's like, when I'm… because I identify so strongly with femininity.

Scene 16:

This scene depicted social media post projected on the back wall of the stage area. The use of social media posts is effective in demonstrating the harmful effects of media, as well as people's views on the world, without being didactical. By confronting the audience with visual images they encounter on a daily basis, but projected larger than life they are compelled to critically reflect on the role media plays in structuring our lives.

After the social media posts were show, four performers use the projectors to depict a movement sequence through shadow work. The audience watches the shadows on the wall abuse each other. The shadow work becomes a visual representation of what media does to our psyche.

Scene 17:

End sequence. This sequence is constructed out of physical solo sequences that were used in previous scenes of the performance. The performance ends where it began – center stage with the audience looking at the performers. The major difference, however, is that the audience's position in relation to the scene is inverted. This imbues the sequences with new meaning. This scene, as if in a dreamlike state, seems to be stuck in time. It has an atmosphere of sadness, of lost potential and places the responsibility of effecting change onto the audience. After the sequence is complete, the performers go off stage in a mirror image of the opening scene and enters the auditorium. They take their curtain call in the seats with audience standing on stage. The roles have been reversed and the subversion of the gaze is complete. Through this, the audience is made aware of their own role in the performance, not as mere onlookers, but as social participants – just as they are in real life. The performance comes to an end with the gaze subverted and the audience left to effect change.

The End.