A Proposal for:

The Fat Body:
Interrogating, Exploring, and Understanding Obesity through Applied Theatre

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
The Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development
New York University
January 2010
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Chapter One: Introduction

What causes obesity? Is it a matter of eating more calories than your body burns? Is it a societal problem – too much available food? Is it a psychological issue? Do people eat to deal with stress or anxiety? Is a lack of physical exercise the problem? Is obesity genetic? All of these reasons have been put forth by those who research, deal with, and speak out on obesity including doctors, public health workers, nutritionists, diet gurus, and journalists. Yet, despite all the research and education programs that address the issue, obesity rates in the United States are steadily rising. According to data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2007), the prevalence of obesity in adult women was 35.3% in 2005-2006, a small gain of 2.1% from the previous two years. Of those women, almost a third was between the ages of 20-39.

As someone who has struggled with weight gain since adolescence, I have a personal interest in the area of obesity. I have found in reading the literature that there is no simple reason for obesity. Yet, the most frequently heard solution is to eat less and exercise more. As a former mental health counselor, I am very interested in the emotional aspects of obesity. As a person living in a society where junk food is cheaper and more easily accessible than healthier options, I am invested in understanding how society influences food choices. As more of the focus on bodies in the media is directed at women, and in recognizing that single-sex studies frequently produce deeper investment than mixed groups when exploring deeply personal subjects, I have chosen to focus this study on adult women.
How can we explore both the personal aspects of obesity and the industrial forces which also play a role in it? I believe that theatre is a means of investigating this issue. Theatre has a long history of reacting to and commenting on different aspects of society. From recent plays like The Exonerated and The Laramie Project which addressed specific social concerns – the wrongful imprisonment of innocent people and the murder of a young gay man – to older plays like Inherit the Wind which presented a fictionalized version of the Scopes trial about the teaching of evolution, and Mother Courage and her Children which is often considered an anti-war play, theatre has been a way to explore and understand our world. Theatre is also an interactive medium. It involves connecting with others, putting one’s thoughts into actions, and delving into one’s feelings. When people are directly involved in theatre, they are actively connecting their thoughts, feelings, and physicality. The state of obesity involves connections or, more accurately, disconnections between the mind, feelings, and the body. As a theatre artist, I can think of no better way to tap into those areas of disconnection than to explore obesity through theatre.

Kathleen LaBesco (2004) understood the need to break through the binaries surrounding obesity when she emphasized the importance of exploring body fat socially and culturally in her book, Revolting Bodies. LeBesco (2004) identified a preexisting essentialist position understanding the concept of being fat, i.e. tracing fatness back to a cause, such as one’s genes, a trauma, or hormonal problems. The essentialist view identifies a cause for the obesity, and then chooses either an anti-fat or fat acceptance response. LeBesco (2004), however, takes an anti-essentialist stance regarding obesity in which she interrogates the concept of “fat” to reduce its significance. Rather than
accepting society’s definition of fat, such as that it indicates a person is weak or lazy, LeBesco suggests, through her use of the word “revolting” that fat can be seen as a political statement. LeBesco notes, “If we think of revolting in terms of overthrowing authority, rebelling, protesting, and rejecting, then corpulence carries a whole new weight as a subversive cultural practice that calls into question received notions about health, beauty, and nature” (p. 1-2). In that spirit, my study will interrogate society’s definition of fat and use both the power of language and of the body, through theatre, to empower the participants of the study to explore and create their own meaning for obesity.

LeBesco (2004) focused her research on interpersonal agency and the role of interpersonal communication in how people, especially fat women, choose to accept or reject prevailing beliefs about “institutional notions of health, beauty, and fitness” (p. 3). According to LeBesco, previous research in this area perpetuated body image stigmas that disempowered women whose bodies didn’t match up to the societal ideal as well as missed out on lessons that could be “…learned by careful interpretive study of the narratives of other resistant subjectivities” (p. 15). As LeBesco (2004) further noted, “This approach is problematic in that it neglects the (limited) power of women who have particular eating habits to define and create their own realities. In doing so, it fails to endow them with the ability (or, rather, to recognize their already existing abilities) to change their realities” (p. 16). If the meaning that people hold for themselves about their behaviors is not included in the work, then the potential for emancipation is lost (LeBesco, 2004). One of the methodologies LeBesco utilized in her work was critical ethnography. In my study, the women participants will be given the opportunity, through theatre exercises, to explore and interrogate the meanings they hold about their behaviors
and the impact those have on their bodies. This will give them the ability to choose other ways of behaving, if they find their current behaviors are causing them problems. Again, the goal will not be for them to lose weight or to prescribe a plan to overcome their weight gain, but rather to empower them to develop their own definitions for obesity, and to develop preferred strategies for living in a society that reviles obesity.

In addition to being exposed on one’s body, obesity can carry internal pressures. As Paul Campos (2004) noted, “It is true that this is not the worst form of oppression in the world. But make no mistake: It is a form of oppression – one that causes a vast amount of unnecessary suffering…” (p. 181). The oppression can take on a number of forms such as economic, in that the least expensive foods tend also to be the unhealthiest; social, in that the media shows being thin as the ideal and fat as to be avoided; cultural, in that citizens are expected to diet and exercise to maintain a certain body image; medical, in that obesity is seen by the medical and insurance communities as a predictor of physical health problems; and psychological, in that people deal with stress, fear, humiliation, and other angst when they do not meet the cultural, social, and economic expectations. In this study, I will explore the oppressions that currently exist in the economic, social, cultural, medical, and psychological aspects of obesity in order to understand and deal with the suffering that oppression brings.

Living in a society identified by its overconsumption, quick meals, and fast/junk foods creates a challenge when one tries to eat less food in general and more healthy foods overall. The diet, fitness, food, and health industries all have a stake in obesity that must be explored (Nestle, 2006; Julier, 2008). Are those industries concerned more with their profit margins than the well-being of their consumers?
Obesity is a complex problem that requires creative interventions for better understanding it. Simply telling obese, overweight, and fat people to eat less and exercise more as a way of addressing their obesity has not been successful. Therapist Mary O’Malley (2004) noted that when eating is not just about feeding one’s body, but is also about feeding one’s emotions, simply eating less actually brings on stress and anxiety. People dealing with weight issues may not be aware of how to deal with the emotional ramifications that changing their eating habits may bring (Spain, Spain, & Fredericks, 2007). The emotional and physical toll from unsuccessful dieting and living in a society that reviles fat can be overwhelming.

LeBesco (2004) spoke about the ineffectiveness of dietary changes and individual change as the sum solutions to obesity, “…the fact that my knowledge that a product is bad for me changes neither my attitude of love for it nor my long-term behavior of consuming it, shows the obvious inability of this theory to account for the complexity of human behavior” (p. 31-32). This thought was echoed by Campos (2004) who said, “In a nation in which food is cheap and plentiful, and in which it is easy to become sedentary, telling people they should lose weight by eating less and exercising more does not work” (p. 247). Writing almost twenty years earlier, Millman (1980) noted, “Most books about obesity consist of techniques for losing weight, or treat weight as a physical phenomenon…the effort to lose weight should be secondary to the effort to understand the meanings of being overweight” (p. ix). Millman observed, What it means to be fat, beyond the purely physical experience of weighing any particular number of pounds, often shapes the identities and lives of fat people.

And because obesity is so dreaded and laden with interpretations, many who are
not actually overweight (especially women) may nonetheless suffer enormously
because they wish they were thinner. (p. ix)

Despite the compelling evidence that obesity is a problem not easily solved through
physical solutions, the message people in the United States, especially women, receive
has not changed. Until obesity is better understood, it is my belief that the real and
perceived problems of obesity will only get worse in the United States.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the experience of obesity for emerging
adult women (ages 18-25), who self-identify as obese, fat, or overweight, using theatre
exercises to create a performance piece which investigates the internal and external
oppressions discovered within obesity.

This study will explore the ways in which the participants understand and respond
to their bodies, by examining the relationship between internal and external oppression.
Through the combined use of theatre Augusto Boal’s theoretical notions of Theatre of the
Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire, this study will investigate the experience of being
overweight. Additionally, outside materials will be provided to participants to
supplement their understanding of how the body is seen and understood in society.

Statement of Sub-Problems

This study will explore the ways in which Augusto Boal’s theatre techniques and
exercises of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD) can be
combined to explore situations and experiences in which both external and internal
Oppressions are present. Obesity is an issue which is complicated by both types of oppression. An example of external oppression in obesity is the Body Mass Index (BMI) used by the medical community to determine if a person is underweight, healthy weight, overweight, or obese. More than half of U.S. women were classified as obese or overweight by those standards beginning in 1988-1994 (Kumanyika and Brownson, 2007). As the BMI threshold was increased around this same time, were there really more overweight women or was the changed BMI threshold to blame? Noting the arbitrary changes in its threshold, Gard and Wright (2005) argued that people should be skeptical about obesity epidemic claims. Additionally, the BMI was not designed to be used as a stand-alone measure.

Internal oppression, what Boal referred to as “cops in the head,” in obesity includes the internalization of messages about one’s body. It can begin as external oppression that is not recognized and/or not addressed. When it becomes part of one’s belief system, then it is an internal oppression. For example, if a girl grows up hearing in the media and/or from friends and family that women must be a size 2 and dress in the latest fashions, she may make decisions about her body based on that message. If she is naturally a size two and genuinely enjoys fashion, then the internalized messages will be acceptable to her. However, if her body does not conform to that standard, she may find herself in a constant battle to live up to unrealizable expectations. This internal oppression is about being oppressed by one’s fears or mistaken beliefs. Boal noted “loneliness” and “fear of emptiness” as two of the “cops in the head” he observed (Boal, 1995, p. 8). While there are many routes for women to deal with that internal oppression such as therapy, self-help books, and supportive friends, the Rainbow of Desire theatre
technique is another way to address it. As obesity is experienced in the body and internal oppressions exist within one’s emotional state, utilizing a modality such as Rainbow of Desire, which uses the body as a form of expression, can provide a way of recognizing, releasing, and reconfiguring those faulty internal messages.

Additionally, both TO and ROD are included in the spectrum of activities included under the umbrella of Applied Theatre, a key practice in the field of Educational Theatre. By combining TO and ROD, I hope to discover another way that TO and ROD can be utilized by Educational Theatre teachers and practitioners. I also hope that by utilizing theatre in the field of obesity, the scope of areas into which Educational Theatre is practiced will be expanded.

**Research Questions**

**Primary Questions**

1. How do young women ages 18-25 who are classified or self-identify as obese, fat, or overweight make meaning of obesity in their lives?

2. To what extent does participation in a theatre workshop using both Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD) activities change the way young women make sense of obesity in their lives?

**Secondary Questions**

1. How can the theatre techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD) be combined to explore obesity in emerging adult women?

2. How will this application of TO and ROD contribute to current scholarship and practice in the field of Educational Theatre?
Rationale

The need for this study is two-fold. As will be further explicated in Chapter Two (Related Literature), obesity is an epidemic in the United States. For some, primarily the medical and scientific communities, obesity is believed to be a serious health concern that is also a drain on the economy (Satcher, 2007; Dalton, 2004; Dallman, et al, 2003). For others, the problem of obesity is considered overblown and more of an aesthetic concern with fat reviled in society (LeBesco, 2004; Campos, 2004; Oliver, 2006; Wann, 1999; Nestle, 2004; Julier, 2008; Ernsberger, 1987; Gilman, 2008). In the literature, there is a clear split between the two positions with investigators and the general public either falling into the “fat is unhealthy” camp or the “fat is fine” camp. These two positions can also be defined as “fat is ugly” versus “fat is beautiful.” When people hold firm to these opposing positions, they prevent a more comprehensive picture of obesity from developing. This study proposes to eliminate those binaries and develop a more nuanced understanding of obesity by exploring it through a social lens and from the perspective of those living with the stigma of being obese, overweight, or fat.

Given that obesity is not the same for women as it is for men, I believe it is important to explore it from a single sex perspective. As a counselor, I also know that men and women tend to share more about their experiences in single sex settings. Given that the core of this study involves sharing one’s thoughts and experiences about obesity to others, and to help establish an atmosphere in which participants can more freely express their feelings about obesity, I will conduct a single sex study with women. This is supported by the work of therapist Susan Tenzer (1989) who specializes in eating
disorder counseling. She brings her own experience with eating disorders and her acceptance of her obesity into her counseling work. She identifies group work as a potentially successful option for addressing eating issues.

Group support can address the fat woman’s unique plight and help raise her self-esteem. It can liberate her from the sense of worthlessness that is reinforced continually, and has caused real damage to her, especially if she has been fat since childhood. Her liberation begins with an understanding about why her body so vehemently defends its “set” weight. As her therapist, I am knowledgeable of the physiological aspects of weight and empathetic to the reality of being fat in a thin-obsessed society. (p. 44)

In Tenzer’s work, group participants have been in therapy in the past. She screens them before admitting them to the group. She begins the first group with introductions and shared stories of dieting (p. 45). Later group sessions involve exploring the history of being fat in which the pain and oppression of obesity is interrogated (p. 45). Her goal is for group members to move past feeling like a victim to reclaiming their bodies as well as developing confidence and coping skills (p. 45-46). While my study will take a non-therapeutic approach by utilizing theatre for its modality, the notion of working in a group to support and empower themselves is similar to Tenzer’s work. Additional support comes from Professors Jennifer O’Dea and Suzanne Abraham (2000) who identified a successful body image program as one that includes group work, team work, games, play, drama, and content free curriculum.

When theatre has been used to address obesity, the focus has been on healthy eating and exercise, such as in The Best Me educational theatre program in northern
California which is geared towards grades 3-5 (Kaiser Permanente, 2008). In this program, there is a performance in which the characters struggle with eating or other lifestyle issues, but find support in each other. This performance is followed by a workshop led by the performers with the students in which the lessons from the performance are reinforced. Teachers are given curriculum guides to continue the learning in the classroom. Finally, there is a culminating family night in which everyone learns more about healthy eating and exercise. This program reflects the common view that education alone can cure obesity. Additionally, it reflects the current emphasis on addressing childhood obesity. While I applaud that the program brings in the families to bring the message home, I question the wisdom of treating obesity as merely a problem of unhealthy eating and too little exercise.

In my study, I aim to show that theatre is useful in the field of obesity as a specific technique of intervention which addresses both the physical and emotional aspects of being overweight. Theatre involves using the physical body to enact concepts which are both concrete (i.e., being hot or cold) and abstract (i.e., representing beauty through metaphorical imagery). By engaging the body first, theatre helps people unlock previously untapped parts of their thinking. As discovered by Boal, theatre can be used by groups to collectively explore and develop their thinking about oppressive situations, both external and internal. It is for this dual purpose of accessing thoughts by utilizing the knowledge stored in the body and for addressing oppression that I will utilize theatre to explore the messages one receives about being overweight or obese.

Although I could simply guide my participants to create a theatre piece in which they retell how obesity affects them, I do not believe a simple retelling or venting of their
feelings is enough to produce change for them or for their audiences. To delve deeper into the problem of obesity requires an approach that recognizes both the need for research in order to understand the complexity of oppression, and also the need to empower those who are oppressed as they are the ones who need to stand up for themselves.

Theoretical Stance

As previously noted, I am strongly influenced by the theory and practice of Boal, and two of his major techniques of theatre for social change, Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD) (1979, 1995). His techniques of TO explore the external oppressions (social, cultural, economic) in people’s lives, while his theory of ROD explores their internal oppressions (emotional, intellectual). As I believe that obesity has both external and internal forces feeding it, both techniques will be useful in my approach. I will use them to start a dialogue about obesity that utilizes images, movement, voice, and other forms of expression to examine it.

TO began as a way of addressing external oppressions that people faced who were living in repressive societies (Boal, 1979). Rainbow of Desire was developed years later as a way of helping people come with their internal oppressions or “cops in the head” (Boal, 1995). As earlier discussed, by “cops in the head,” Boal referred to the critical internal voices people hear which keep them from imprisoned in a variety of emotional ways.

Theatre artist David Diamond (1994) noted that current Theatre of the Oppressed work cannot blindly follow Boal’s original theory as it was based on a specific type of
oppression under which he lived. Instead, it must be modified to fit the circumstances under which one finds oneself working. In her dissertation exploring facilitation in TO, Leslie Obermire Bentley (2001) suggested a mixing of the two techniques (TO and ROD) would be effective in exploring the internal and external oppressions for people in the United States (p. 160-161). Jan Cohen-Cruz (1990), a prominent community-based theatre scholar and practitioner in the United States, also noted that Boal sees TO and ROD complementing each other, especially given that you can have both external and internal oppressions occurring in the same situation (as happens with obesity). Despite their observations, I found no studies which utilized and analyzed the use of both techniques connectively. As such, I believe research connecting the two will further an understanding of how TO and ROD can work in western cultures.

Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire have gained popularity since their developments. Both techniques have been practiced globally and utilized by practitioners in a variety of settings. There are many different theatre artists, educators, and other professionals using the TO and ROD techniques and exercises. There is a broad spectrum of understanding of and adherence to his techniques. Boal himself continued to try out new techniques and fine tune existing ones, as I witnessed at his Center in Brazil (personal communication, 2008). I trained with Boal and his jokers (facilitators) during a two-week intensive workshop in the ROD technique in August of 2008. In the workshops, we participated in the technique and exercises of ROD. I learned how to scaffold the activities so as to best prepare participants for the work and develop an ensemble. I experienced how the technique has the ability to move beyond superficiality to develop different perspectives on a situation. I also had the opportunity
to see forum theatre in two mental health facilities and in Boal’s Center (CTO). As someone who has trained both with Boal and with other experienced TO practitioners, my goal is to contribute to the field by extending the work of TO and ROD into new areas and share what I learn with others both through practice and scholarship.

While others have used Theatre of the Oppressed to explore body image and fat stigmatization, I found no literature that showed its use in exploring obesity or the use of Rainbow of Desire to explore obesity. In addition, neither Boal nor any of his facilitators that I questioned knew of any application of TO or ROD to obesity (personal communication, 2008). Due to this lack of literature on the use of TO and ROD with obesity, I believe that using TO and ROD to explore obesity is an untapped area of research for better understanding and addressing it.

**Delimitations/Limitations**

This study is not intended as an obesity prevention tool, but as an exploration into how emerging adult women who self-identify as fat, obese, or overweight understand obesity. While obesity affects men and women as well as children and adolescents, I will focus my attention on emerging adult women. My experience in working with children and adolescents convinced me that ideally parents should be connected with the work if one hopes to make a lasting impression. However, as I am a solo researcher in this study, I do not believe I can adequately work with both parents and their children.

The focus of this study will not be on solving obesity or losing weight, but on developing clarity as to how it is experienced and understood by those living with it. Research on the dangers of obesity is conflicting, as is noted in the Related Literature,
and to assume that the women in the study need to lose weight would be counterintuitive to the purpose of the study. The intention of this study is to gather information so that the participants can make more informed choices about their bodies. As for determining if the participants are “fat” enough to be in the study, I will rely on both a visual assessment and an exploration of their reasons for wanting to be in the program, past history of weight loss attempts, and a discussion of their definition of what it looks like to be overweight in making the determination of who is a good fit for the program.

Although this study is arts-based, the focus is on using theatre as a tool for intervention, not on the aesthetic of the culminating performance piece. While I will look at the overall visual aesthetic of the theatre activities in the workshops and in the performance – all of which will be video recorded, that exploration is secondary to the overall goals of this study. However, I will remain open to the possibility that the aesthetic component will take on a more significant role as the study progresses. If that happens, I will accordingly incorporate those results into the dissertation.
Chapter Two: Related Literature

Theoretical Orientation

I look primarily through a dual-lens of feminist theory and arts-based research in my methodology. In the following two sections, I explore how both influence this study. In the feminist section, I discuss a variety of feminist thinkers, their work, and its application to my study. I conclude with a paragraph on the influence of critical theory to my study. In the arts-based research section, I outline my understanding of arts-based research and how it will be applied in my study.

Feminist Theory

As feminist theory is about exploring inequality, power dynamics, and oppression, it fits in perfectly with my focus on giving voice to those who are oppressed by individual, familial, and institutional systems (Mejía 2005). As Sharon Grady (2006) noted, “Feminism, like other political movements, seeks to change oppressive structures” (p. 83). I ground my understanding of feminist theory in Rosemarie Tong’s (2009) work in defining and understanding feminist theory which she sees as “[i]nterdisciplinary, intersectional, and interlocking” (p. 1). Additionally, I listen to educators Michael Gard and Jan Wright (2005) who noted in the context of their book on the obesity epidemic that, “feminists and fat theorists and activists provide another way of ‘seeing’ and understanding the obesity epidemic. They draw attention to the ethical, personal and social consequences of the relentless pursuit of those regarded as overweight or obese and begin to explain why this might be so” (p. 167). I am also guided by my study with noted feminist scholar Carol Gilligan with whom I have explored the value of listening
carefully to the voices of my participants through the Listening Guide Method of interview analysis. It was through Gilligan’s (1982) pioneering work that the research community began to explore women’s experiences of the world. Since that time, other researchers have continued to see the value in exploring the experiences of both men and women in single-sex studies. This includes the work of developmental psychologists Niobe Way (2004) and Lyn Mikel Brown (1998), and also Kathleen Gallagher’s (2001) drama in education studies with adolescent girls. I will use their work to interpret my research including privileging the voices of my participants.

While I am drawn to a variety of theoretical paradigms including psychoanalytic feminism and ecofeminism, I am most aligned with multicultural feminism which recognizes that people are not different solely due to gender, but also because of other factors such as culture and socioeconomic status (Tong, 2009). As I am curious about the various ways that obesity is understood and experienced, using a lens in which difference is acknowledged and privileged is important for my study. Multicultural feminism also focuses on the formation of identity which is especially important in emerging adult women. In order to move confidently into adulthood, multicultural feminism recognizes that women must reaffirm their own identities. How my participants make meaning of their bodies, in relation to their identity formation in this crucial time of their adult development, is a vital piece of my study.

Third wave feminism stresses the importance of diversity and thus will also guide my analysis (Tong, 2009). I believe that acknowledging and utilizing the diversity of thought and feelings with obesity is key to developing a more comprehensive understanding of it and thus better ways of dealing with it. As third wave feminists also
emphasize the importance of privileging people’s desires over societal expectations, I will incorporate that non-judgmental stance in my study (Tong, 2009). I am further drawn to the third wave focus on eliminating binary thinking, which, as I stated earlier, is a piece of the obesity problem (Tong, 2009).

I am also influenced by feminist Judith Butler (1990) who noted that she was not attempting to “redescribe the world from the point of view of women” (p. 280) in her work. In that same vein, I am interested in bringing the voices of obese women into the conversations about obesity. I also take note of Butler’s (1993) notion of gender as something performed, “In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2). We are what we believe ourselves to be and what we allow others define us as. As Butler (1993) observed regarding gender:

Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with these regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. Such collective disidentification can facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern. (p. 4)

This concept of performing identity is true for obesity as well as for gender. As such, theatre for social change is a natural medium in which to explore and reconceptualize it.

By taking control of that performance, we can change our understanding and give others a different perspective from which to understand us. Connecting Butler’s performativity theory with theatre, I am grounded by the work of feminist Barbara Freedman (1990) who looked at the role of theatre in either conspiring with or
“revisioning” the framing of sexual differences (p. 56). In my study, I will demonstrate how theatre can provide a view of how the world could/should be instead of holding to the status quo. Connectively, I look at the work of fat activist Marilyn Wann and theatre artist Eve Ensler who explores obesity and the body from a performative angle to inform my study. Wann (1999) wrote the seminal book, *Fat!So?*, on fat activism and maintains a yahoo group that supports fat activism. Ensler (2004) wrote the play, *The Good Body*, a series of monologues in which she explored her dissatisfaction with her body and also examined how other women understood their bodies.

Looking specifically at the role of obesity on women’s lives, Susie Orbach (1979) opened wide the door to the role of fat on feminist thinking in her seminal book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. Orbach noted that, “Feminism has taught us that activities that appear to be self-destructive are invariably adaptations, attempts to cope with the world” (p. xiv). In looking at the social, cultural, and political aspects of obesity, Orbach observed that obesity is seen as a failure for the obese woman. She stated, “Overeating and obesity have been reduced to character defects, rather than perceived as the expression of painful and conflicting experiences” (p. 5). In looking at what was being done in obesity treatment, Orbach saw professionals who were trying to get women thin rather than helping them deal with the underlying problems which caused their obesity. In feminism, Orbach found a lens for seeing the social context which formed the emotional distress which led to obesity. As she stated, “Fat is about protection, sex, nurturance, strength, boundaries, mothering, substance, assertion and rage” (p. 6). Orbach identified obesity as a coping mechanism for dealing with societal expectations over which women had very little say, “Becoming fat is, thus, a woman’s response to the first step in the process of
fulfilling a prescribed social role which requires her to shape herself to an externally imposed image in order to catch a man” (p. 9). She further noted, “Fat is an adaptation to the oppression of women and, as such, it may be an unsatisfying personal solution and an ineffectual political attack” (p. 22). Through TO and ROD, my study will explore this notion further.

I am also a critical theorist, upholding the belief, articulated by Freire (2000), that power relationships must be unpacked and explored so as to avoid oppressive relationships. I believe this directly relates to the issue of obesity, especially in relation to the food industry, the medical community, and other relationships in the lives of those dealing with obesity. As Freire (1974/2007) noted in Education for Consciousness, if people are “unable to perceive critically the themes of their time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, they are carried along in the wake of change” (p. 6). Rather than simply accepting things as they appear to be, Freire emphasized the importance of working in relationship with others in order to become critically conscious. In terms of this study, in order for those identified as obese, overweight, and fat to overcome discrimination as well as uncover what the real dangers are of obesity and to gain some control over how their bodies are perceived, they must look critically at obesity. Boal put Freire’s theories into action through TO and ROD, as he was inspired by Freire’s notions when he developed his theatre techniques.

**Arts-based research**

As an arts-based researcher, I am deeply aware of the need to be a reflective practitioner and have incorporated that into both my teaching and my research. By arts-
based research, I refer to Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner’s (2006) definition, “Arts-based research is defined by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing” (p. 73). Patricia Leavy (2009) notes that arts-based practices are “particularly useful for research projects that aim to describe, explore, or discover. Furthermore, these methods are generally attentive to processes” (p. 12). The focus of the work in my study will be on the process of learning and the process of creating a theatre piece. I will explain in more detail how I will use the craft of theatre as one form of analysis in my Sample Analysis section of this proposal. However, unlike an arts-based research project in which the aesthetic of the performance is a crucial element of the work, the focus of this study is rather on the process of performance. While I will direct the actors in the performance piece and coach them in developing their acting skills, I will not focus on the acting prowess, production elements, design aspects, or other aesthetic pieces of the performance piece. I will make note of those elements, and I will video record the performance so as to study it in-depth, but I do not plan to include those elements in my analysis of the work. In this study, theatre is first a tool for accessing beliefs, thoughts and feelings about obesity. It is secondly a way for the participants to share their thoughts and feelings with others in a way that promotes dialogue and support.

Leavy (2009) noted that “arts-based practices can be employed as a means of creating critical awareness or raising consciousness. This is important in social justice-oriented research that seeks to reveal power relations…and challenge dominant ideologies” (p. 13). In this study, the goal is to raise the consciousness of the participants about issues surrounding obesity so that they can see the power relations and the
dominant ideologies which play a role in obesity. Additionally, arts-based research can help “confront stereotypes,” in “giving voice to subjugated perspectives,” and in promoting dialogue (Leavy, 2009, p. 13-14). Again, this fits with the goal of this study to interrogate what obesity means and to open up dialogue about it. Specifically looking at performative-based arts-based research, Leavy (2009) notes, “Perhaps more than anything else, performance-based methods can bring research findings to life, adding dimensionality, and exposing that which is otherwise impossible to authentically (re)present” (p. 135). By including a performance piece in this study, my goal is to articulate through theatre what we learn about obesity as well as give a voice to the participants. This aligns with LeBesco’s (2004) notion that if the meaning which people hold for themselves about their behaviors is not included in the work, then the potential for emancipation is lost. Given that obesity is such a physical and visible concept, utilizing theatre to speak about it is a natural fit.

I have been helped along the way with my understanding of arts-based research by reading the works of and working directly with Cecily O’Neill (1996), Philip Taylor (1996), and Christina Marin (2005). Dr. O’Neill’s research in drama in education practices, especially her work with the technique of process drama, is also a useful example for me in how to assess and collect dramatic work for demonstrating the effectiveness of the study.

Theatre is an interactive medium and is an important cultural touchstone in many, if not all, cultures in one form or another. It involves connecting with others, putting one’s thoughts into actions, and delving into one’s feelings. When people are directly involved in theatre, they are actively connecting their thoughts, feelings, and physicality.
As LeBesco puts it (2004), “…fat *is* written on the body for *all* to see…” (p. 6). Obesity is lived overtly on the body, but is also experienced covertly in the mind through one’s emotional and intellectual beliefs about it. Theatre is a means to explore the connections and disconnections between beliefs, emotions, and the body. In the end, by overeating, women hurt themselves instead of dealing with the inherent oppression. This study aims to help women address the oppressions of obesity and develop strategies and the strength to deal with them in ways that are satisfying and effective.

**Obesity in Emerging Adult Women**

Hillel Schwartz (1986) explored the past 150 years of the experience of weight, fat and fatness in the United States in *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies, and Fat*. He noted, “Weight is a cultural condition. A scale does not make it any more or less real. Fatness too is a cultural condition…There can be no timelessly perfect diet because the act of losing weight or shedding fat, like the desire itself, is culturally bounded” (p.4). According to Schwartz, “Slimming…is the modern expression of an industrial society confused by its own desires and therefore never satisfied” (p. 5). In the conclusion to his book, Schwartz noted, “Our bodies and our foods are as much social constructs as they are proteins, carbohydrates, fats…We are *not* what we eat. We eat what we are. And how we are” (p. 338-339). Gilman (2008) echoed the cultural view of obesity, “Fat, however, is truly in the eye of the beholder. Each age, culture, and tradition has defined acceptable weight for itself, and yet all have a point beyond which excess weight is unacceptable, unhealthy, ugly, or corrupting” (p. 3). In looking at modern society, Gilman observed that, “fat has taken on a new and rather sinister quality
over the past century” (p. 3). I will use this research with emerging adult women to explore, through TO and ROD, the ways in which fat has changed and evolved over time.

Therapist Marcia Germaine Hutchinson (1994) noted that the “relationship to our bodies is the first relationship we have and the foundation of our selves” (p.152). She looked specifically at women and identified the relationship between dissatisfaction with women’s bodies leading to dissatisfaction with themselves. Negative body image or body dissatisfaction includes distorted body size estimation, discrepancy from the ideal, and negative feelings/thoughts about one’s body (Ogden, 2003). As a result of this troubled relationship, she noted the current epidemic for women of disordered eating, low self-esteem, depression, and self-contempt (p. 152). Hutchinson argued that a feminist approach to disordered eating must deal with the issue of negative body image which she identified as a “destructive adaptation” to a “culture that is sick” (p. 153). Women were attempting to define themselves by a perceived body image to which they could not successfully conform. Hutchinson (1994) noted the “obsessive and destructive relationship that most women have with their bodies is an internalization of society’s relationship to women’s bodies – simultaneously one of contempt and worship” (p. 154). Hutchinson’s observations about women’s struggles with eating and with negative body image support my decision to focus solely on women in this study.

Body image, which is a core issue in dealing with obesity, has historically focused more on women’s bodies than on men’s bodies. How women feel about their bodies and how their bodies are understood have been explored, but not dispelled through research that ultimately only scratches the surface of women’s experiences (Carpman, 2005; Haworth-Hoeppner, 2000; Brooks, 2002; Blok, 2002; Lovejoy, 2001; Dalton,
2004; Thompson, 2004). Additionally, obesity itself is experienced differently for men than for women from its portrayal in plays and movies to the availability of clothing for men versus women of larger size. I agree with Gilman (2004) who noted that obesity is an issue for men as well as for women. This was echoed in *The Adonis Complex* which explored male body obsession (Pope, Phillips, & Olivardia, 2000). While both men and women experience obesity, their realities are different based on their sex and gender.

By grounding this study in Schwartz’s and Gilman’s explorations into the social construction of obesity, the participants will be able to make meaning of obesity within the larger historical social picture of obesity rather than be mired in their contemporary view of themselves as obese, overweight, or fat. This is supported by the work of LeBesco (2004) who noted that, “Current perceptions of fat are framed by your historical, cultural, and economic position. In a modern capitalist patriarchy such as the United States, fat is seen as repulsive, funny, ugly, unclean, obscene, and above all, as something to lose” (p. 16). Complicating the problem for those with obesity is dealing with a society that prizes thinness, “A fat person’s only shot at citizenship comes if he or she gratefully consumes the panoply of diet and fitness products made available by industry and government” (p. 57). One’s body, rather than being one’s private business, is displayed for the entire world to see and judge. In this study, the participants will be empowered to take control of how they understand and display their body.

To grasp the gravity of the current situation with obesity in the United States one must explore the data feeding the epidemic. This data will serve as a basis for exploring the medical, economic, social, psychological and cultural aspects of obesity with my participants. Dr. David Satcher (2007), former Surgeon General of the United States,
noted that the obesity epidemic received that designation instead of the more appropriate chronic condition (the term epidemic is generally reserved for outbreaks or increases in infectious diseases) due to the “dramatic and certainly unexpected” rise in overweight and obesity rates in children, adolescents, and adults with “no sign of abatement of this increase” (p.vii). As a counterpoint, J. Eric Oliver (2006) suggested that the benefit of obesity being called an epidemic is that researchers get more money. His observation reflects part of the economic motivation that some, like Oliver, believe are fueling the obesity epidemic. Oliver (2006) became skeptical about the obesity epidemic after realizing that the statistics were based on questionable evidence in the articles he read. He also noted that many of the scientists were on the payroll of drug and weight loss companies. Additionally, Michael Gard and Jan Wright (2005), as well as Oliver (2006), observed that obesity epidemic claims serve to reinforce cultural prejudices about obesity. To understand how the medical and economic aspects of obesity impact the daily lives of those who identify themselves as obese, overweight, or fat, this study will include exercises exploring those aspects.

Why the concern about obesity? According to conventional medical wisdom, obesity carries health risks such as high blood pressure, Type II diabetes, and fatty liver disease (Daniels, 2006). Contrary to the beliefs of fat activists like Wann (1999) and researchers (Ernsberger and Haskew, 1987) who argue that one can be obese and healthy, Satcher’s (2007) observations about obesity are in line with popularly held beliefs in the U.S. that obesity is a threat to health rather than being about cosmetics or appearances. Yet another reality of obesity is noted by Ernsberger and Haskew who cited a number of researchers who,
often pointed out obesity treatments are ineffective – with no more than five percent of those treated keeping the lost weight off over a five year period – are often damaging to health, and contribute to the current epidemic of bulimia and anorexia by encouraging increasing desperation over eating and weight. (p. 50-51)

Being obese may be considered bad, but the solution can also manifest itself negatively such as fad diets, diet pills, excessive exercise, and eating disorders. Therefore, some researchers and activists argue that obesity should be viewed as a cultural issue and a political issue (Wann, 1999; Campos, 2004; Thompson, 1994; Oliver, 2006; Orbach, 1979; Julier, 2008). They believe that the issue of obesity has become overblown in the frenzy of medical research and a blooming diet and fitness industry (Campos, 2004; Wann, 1994; LeBesco, 2004; Nestle, 2006; Klein, 1996).

The body is further explored by Chris Shilling (2003) in *The Body and Social Theory*. Shilling notes that advances in technology and the increase in knowledge about the body have placed people in a time where they can manipulate their bodies and can have others manipulate their bodies in ways heretofore unknown. Not just the usual dieting and fitness, but plastic surgery, transplant surgery, invitro fertilization, and so on require us to redefine current notions of the body. Shilling also notes that responsibility for the care of one’s body is being turned increasingly more to the individual who is praised for good health and blamed for poor health. This also led, Shilling observed, to the proliferation of self-help books and a focus on how one’s body appears to others. All of this focus comes at a price, with individual variances not easily fitting into the mold of perfection that individuals are held up against. The exploration of the body within social
theory will provide important connections with the social aspects of obesity for this study.

Fat Studies is an emerging field of study that has opened the door to exploring the cultural and political aspects of obesity more fully. As noted on the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association’s website (2009), it is an interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary field of study that confronts and critiques cultural constraints against notions of ‘fatness’ and ‘the fat body’; explores fat bodies as they live in, are shaped by, and remake the world; and creates paradigms for the development of fat acceptance or celebration within mass culture.

The work done by those in Fat Studies will inform my research, as my study will also interrogate cultural structuring of obesity, but I will not focus on celebrating the fat body or seeking fat acceptance. I contend that taking a pro-fat body stance has not yet proven to be a successful way of addressing obesity. Therefore, I am more interested in exploring the meaning of obesity itself for those who experience it. To clarify, I use the words obesity and fat body interchangeably, as I understand their differences to lie not in substance, but in perception.

The research linking obesity to health problems is inconclusive with convincing arguments on both sides of the fence – that obesity is bad for you, or that obesity is not a cause for medical concern. With both sides so polarized, people, especially women, are asked to pick between two opposing views – either they believe fat is bad and thus revile it, or they believe fat is being unfairly discriminated against. In this study, I will
interrogate and explore these arguments with emerging adult women so to understand how they make meaning of their obesity and to respond to the social aspects of it.

**Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire**

As previously discussed in the Theoretical Stance section (p. 12), I am strongly influenced by Boal’s (1979, 1995) theories of theatre for social change, specifically Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD). In this section, I will discuss how other practitioners and researchers have utilized these techniques.

Leigh Anne Howard (1995) conducted her qualitative dissertation research looking at the use of Boal’s TO techniques with adult women in a university setting through a performance-centered mode of inquiry to explore body image and eating. Her research consisted of three phases – focus group discussions, 10 weeks of rehearsals, and 3 public performances (2 at the university, 1 for an academic conference). Her goal was for a change in her participants in that they would develop “personal awareness, critical consciousness, and the ability to take action as a result of participating in a performance process” (p. v). Howard also focused on seeing how performance could impact learning and empathy. Her goal in using performance was that it would be “a method to explore problems and concerns related to eating and body image” (p. 4). She concluded that “performance constitutes a tool to change the way people live, think, and perceive” (p. 2). Howard also concluded that more research is needed in utilizing Boal’s work in this area. Additionally, Howard never directly worked with Boal nor with anyone trained in his techniques. As a result, her use of his techniques was imprecise and uncertain, but serves as an inspiration for my study.
Dr. JuliaGrace Jester (2007; 2003; personal communication, February 12, 2009) used TO in her Master’s thesis research exploring voice with undergraduate women and in her doctoral dissertation exploring fat stigmatization in adult women of size. In her dissertation (2007), she used TO to explore how fat stigmatization was internalized by average “Women of Size” and how it had a silencing effect on them. After interviewing the women individually, Jester used TO exercises in a group setting to explore how this oppression, external stigmatization, was internalized by the women into negative messages. Jester’s goal was to give “Women of Size” a voice, as the literature only spoke about them, not directly to them. According to Jester (2007), “This dissertation seeks to humanize the objectifying social science research” (p. 117). The eleven women in her study ranged in age from 26 to 68. There was no performance involved with her work.

There are many similarities between Jester’s study and my study including our focus on studying women and in grounding our work in feminist theory. However, we come from two different perspectives with different goals. Though we both seek to give voice to those who are dealing with the oppression of obesity and contribute to the existing body of research on obesity, my study includes providing a venue for the women to share their experiences in the form of a performance. Additionally, I am also concerned with adding to the scholarship and practice of TO and ROD. In reflecting on her study, Jester (2007) noted that future research should include a more diverse population, as her research was done in a small town with women of similar ethnic and educational backgrounds (p. 121). My study will be done in an urban setting. Jester also noted that follow-up interviews would have been informative for her research. I have
planned two interviews per participant, one before the study and one after the study ends. Jester also noted that she only had four hours of TO work with her participants which was not enough time for them to engage deeply in the work. I plan on holding fourteen 3-hour sessions of TO and ROD work. As there are parallels in our work, I will use Jester’s study to inform my own.

In his dissertation on the use of Boal’s work with youth theatre in the United States, Luke Robert Jorgensen (2000) found that, when used appropriately, Forum Theatre is a “powerful tool for education and self discovery” (p. 200). Jorgenson also cautioned when doing ROD work, which asks participants to bring painful memories to the surface so they can be explored, that the facilitator not leave the participants without support once the activity is over. As Jorgensen pointed out, the need for emotional support is important when working with emotional topics of oppression. As a mental health counselor, I can provide emotional support and refer participants to previously arranged therapeutic support, should the need arise. As a scholar, I have done considerable research and study of the line between applied theatre and therapy including a paper exploring the intersections between therapy and theatre, and a co-authored paper calling for the inclusion of informed consent when facilitating dramatic work in classrooms and communities. While the intention of therapy is to push individuals to examine and address personal issues, the intention of applied theatre is to explore a concept, such as obesity, to gain greater individual and group understanding of it. Therefore, applied theatre work steers clear of encouraging participants to explore emotionally volatile territory. For any participant who pushes herself into an emotionally vulnerable state, I discuss, in the following two paragraphs and the Ethics section of this
proposal, specific strategies for assisting that participant find help to explore those feelings better addressed in individual therapy.

In her dissertation, Howarth (1994) brought up the important subject of whether or not social workers or counselors should be present when working on emotionally sensitive subjects. In her theatre work with high risk young adults in which she drew upon the work of Freire and Boal, she found that there was more in-depth sharing when the participants and facilitators were aware that there was counseling support available to them (Howarth, 1994). She concluded that such support was important to consider in projects such as hers with using popular theatre with high risk adults (Howarth, 1994).

Given the personal nature of the work of this study, I must be vigilant in protecting my participants’ emotional well-being and giving them the opportunity to be heard both in the workshops and in my writing up of my findings. I am very aware of the potential for intensely personal theatre work to turn into therapy if the facilitator is not clear in the intention of the work. This study does not aim to provide therapy for its participants. This study does aim to explore and understand obesity from educational and artistic angles. Recognizing that it is still possible for participants to become overwhelmed by the work and want additional support, I will ask each participant prior to their joining the study if they have access to counseling, should they need it. If they do not, I will provide them with a list of counseling resources. I will also structure the activities so as to minimize the emotionality of the work and emphasize the aesthetic and educational aspects. I will also incorporate reflection time into each session to give each participant a chance to regroup before the session ends.
Diamond (1994) included two full-time counselors in the rehearsal process for his Power Plays (a form of forum theatre) with urban Aboriginals in Canada. These counselors also recorded the interventions in the performances of the forum theatre piece. There were two elements of the project – workshops and the performance. Applicants for the workshop went through an interview process to assess their willingness to give of their time and to emotionally invest in the process. Prior to the start of the workshops, an acting company was cast from those applicants. While I will incorporate the interview aspect of Diamond’s program in my study to help me identify prospective participants who would not be emotionally served by participating in the program, I do not plan to include full-time counselors in the work.

I am fortunate that many scholars and practitioners have utilized Boal’s work in their research and/or in their practice (Marin, 2005; Fernandez, 2000; Rohd, 1998; Snyder, 2008, just to list a few). The wisdom obtained from the research of those who came before me will be invaluable as I conduct this research and reflect upon it. I am reminded that we all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

Boal’s work was heavily influenced by the work of Freire (1970) whose educational theories were also developed while living under an oppressive regime. Freire (1970) called for a change in education from what he termed the banking method in which information was merely deposited into students for them to remember and follow into a liberatory problem posing form of education in which teachers and students learned from each other. In this liberatory form of education, teachers would dialogue with students in order to understand what they already knew and what they wanted to learn. Freire emphasized a need for both reflection and action in learning. With only action and
no reflection, one became an activist. Without action, one’s reflection was merely words. Boal took Freire’s theories and put them into use in his theatre for social change.

Two of the major components of Boal’s activities are Image Theatre and Forum Theatre. Image Theatre is the creation of still images around a theme or idea and, in this study, will be used to explore cultural imagery surrounding obesity. These images are used to generate further dialogue about the theme or idea. In Forum Theatre, actors perform a play designed to illustrate a chosen oppression. After the play is performed, the Joker (facilitator) engages with the audience to see if they see oppression in the play. Forum Theatre is one potential form that the theatre piece in this study may take.

Feminist and Boalian scholar Berenice Fisher (1994) explored Boal’s work from a feminist perspective. She spoke from her own experience as well as cited others’ work with Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) from a feminist lens. Fisher noted that social worker Jose Ruigrok working in the Netherlands with women’s groups found that the non-verbal activities utilized with TO were powerful in breaking through internalized oppressions (Fisher, 1994, p. 188). Fisher noted that Forum Theater tended to emphasize concrete action and problem solving which she identified as crucial elements for exploring and working with oppression in women (p. 193).

In her qualitative research dissertation, Marin (2005) utilized Boal’s work in theatre for social change in exploring identity in Latina adolescents in the southwest United States. In her work, she identified that her participants developed a critical consciousness through the work they did together. Her dissertation opened the door to my seeing how TO could be used to explore identity. I continue to return to her work as a touchstone for my study.
In his dissertation, Charles Banaszewski (2006) explored the use of questions, roles, and rules when Theatre of the Oppressed facilitators worked with adolescents. He found the theatre work of Michael Rohd (1998) helpful as his work mirrors Boal’s, but in a more accessible and United States-specific way. Given that this study is being done in the United States, I will also utilize Rohd’s work in helping me develop the questions, roles, and rules I use when working with my participants.

In his dissertation using TO and other theatre techniques in health education with farm workers, Jose Blanco Fernandez (2000) noted that Theatre of the Oppressed facilitators have to be careful that their own ideas and desire to teach don’t overwhelm their function as facilitator pulling the work from the participants (Blanco Fernandez, 2000). Caroline Howarth (1994) also noted the challenge of balancing creating interesting and clear theatrical pieces while making sure it is the participants’ voices whose are heard. As I have a strong connection to this study, I must continually monitor myself to make sure I’m facilitating the work and not driving it. I believe that the structures inherent in Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire provide creative and compelling ways of exploring obesity that can also empower the women in this study to make changes in how they perceive themselves and their worlds, as well as how they respond to and act within those worlds.

**Emerging Adult**

Emerging adults are those aged 18-25 who are transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, as noted by the pioneering work of Dr. Jeffrey Arnett (2000). According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is, “distinguished by relative independence from social roles
and from normative expectations,” in which the emerging adults, “often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 469). According to Arnett, it “is a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course” (p. 469). As a result, I believe emerging adults are at a perfect point in their lives to explore the complex nature of obesity from a fresh perspective, and make choices, based on what they learn, which can impact how they live in their bodies the rest of their adult lives.

Since Arnett opened the door on emerging adult research, other researchers have explored drinking behaviors of emerging adults, the impact of religion during the transition to adulthood for emerging adults, romantic relationships for emerging adults, the individualization process, the influence of media on emerging adults, and depression in emerging adults (White and Jackson, 2004-5; Barry and Nelson, 2005; Montgomery, 2005; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2006; Brown, 2006; Kenny and Sirin, 2006). However, no research I found specifically looked at obesity with emerging adults. One chapter on the first stages of adulthood cited research that physical activity decreases from adolescence to young adulthood (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2005, p. 47-48). The researchers surmised this could account for the high rates of overweight and obesity in emerging adults. They cited 2005 statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics which found three quarters of emerging adults were overweight or obese. They also noted that the National Center for Health Statistics advised that weight gained in
early adulthood has a tendency to remain throughout one’s adult life. Obesity is thus an issue for emerging adults.

Gillen and Lefkowitz (2009) looked at how emerging adults perceive messages they received from the media, family, and other sources about physical appearance. They found that women received more messages than men. They also found that the media was perceived to give negative messages while family gave more positive ones. In looking at future research, they believed that open-ended questions would be a useful tool for “examining messages about appearance” (p. 184). They also suggested that teaching emerging adults to be “critical of media images” could be a helpful intervention in preventing “body-related problems” (p. 184). Both of these suggestions are included in my study.

The obesity statistics for emerging adults in the United States are alarming, as is the amount of negative messages emerging adult women receive about their physical appearance. Thankfully, emerging adults are at a pivotal point in their lives in which they are open to new ways of both viewing and interacting with the world. I believe this openness is a vital factor for emerging adult women to unlock a deeper understanding of obesity, and makes them ideal candidates for working with TO and ROD.
Method

In this section, I will outline the qualitative study including an overview of the program, how I will approach the workshops, and my qualitative stance. This will be followed by a discussion of the procedures and analysis involved in the study which includes recruitment measures, interview measures, procedures, and analysis.

I intend to conduct a series of weekly TO and ROD workshops over the span of four months (approximately 14 three-hour sessions) with a group of six to ten emerging adult women (18-25 years old) in an urban East Coast metropolitan area who self-identify as obese, overweight, or fat. Using a structured series of exercises from Boal’s arsenal of theatre games, the participants will explore obesity from a variety of constructions -- personal, communal, societal, political, medical, industrial, and national. These exercises will be chosen with careful and clear intention so as to explore obesity without creating an emotionally unsafe or unstable environment. A description of the workshop experience is included in the Procedure portion of this section.

My study with noted educational theatre scholars, Dorothy Heathcote and Cecily O’Neill, taught me how to structure activities so as to allow participants to explore their creativity while keeping a clear focus on the goal of the activity. The group will work towards developing a theatre piece about obesity which they will present to an invited audience. As the facilitator, I will bring in materials about obesity as well as provide resources for the participants to study outside of the workshops to enhance their meaning making about obesity. I will also guide them in developing the theatre piece by offering various aesthetic options. In order to develop a fuller picture of obesity in the United States, it will be helpful to increase the participants’ social knowledge of factors...
influencing and facts about obesity beyond their lived experiences and own cache of knowledge.

Although I come from a quantitative background, I am a qualitative researcher. To quote Taylor (2006), “By qualitative research, we generally refer to the practice of investigating and interpreting a culture” (p. 6). Data will be collected throughout the course of the fourteen weekly three hour workshop sessions. I will conduct interviews with the participants at the beginning and end of the program. These will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me. All workshop sessions will be digitally video recorded. I will also keep a logbook of my observations and my reflections of the process both as a participant observer and of my role as the facilitator. I will ask my participants to keep a journal in which they reflect on the work we’ve done as well as their reflections and experiences outside of the workshops. I believe this will help us more concretely connect the theatre work to lived experience. I will be very open with my participants as to what I know and believe about obesity, noting that I do not believe my experiences to be any more true than anyone else’s. In fact, I am interested to see how my own meaning making about obesity changes throughout the course.

Discussion of Procedure and Analysis

Recruitment

I will gather participants through a variety of means including sending the information (see letter on page 62 of Appendix) to various academic departments at New York University (NYU) through emails to department chairs, posting on Craigslist and Facebook, posting flyers in NYU residence halls and other buildings on the NYU campus
(see flyer on page 63 of Appendix). I will also contact Weight Watchers and Curves Fitness Centers in New York City with the information letter. Both my email address and office number will be provided for those interested to contact me.

Potential participants will participate in an individual interview with me in a public setting such as an uncrowded coffee shop in which I will give them each additional information on the study so that they can come into the program with informed consent (see consent form on page 61 of Appendix). In the one-on-one interview, I will explain what we will be doing in the workshops – dramatic activities that involve working with others, physical movement, and exploring the concept of obesity. I will also ask each person questions to ascertain their willingness and ability to participate in the study. Some of the questions I will ask include:

1. What is your interest in participating in this study?
2. What is your previous experience with weight loss/management?
3. Are you willing and able to participate in drama activities that ask you to be physically active including moving around the space, creating abstract gestures, pairing abstract sounds with movements, and working together with fellow participants to create still and moving images?
4. Are you willing to participate in drama activities that ask you to be creative in developing both abstract and concrete ideas about a variety of topics connected to obesity?
5. What is your previous experience working with groups? With theatre?
6. Are you willing and able to come to the weekly three-hour sessions for fourteen weeks? What is your availability? I will give three options –
Saturday mornings and two weekday evening options -- for the workshop meetings.

7. Are you willing to keep a journal outside of the workshops? This will be just for you to help you reflect on the experience of being in the workshops.

8. Are you willing and able to participate in the culminating performance piece in front of an invited audience? Have you performed for an audience before? What is your theatre experience?

9. Are you willing to participate in two 60-90 minute interviews with me?
   One will occur before the first workshop and the other after the final workshop.

10. How do you deal with emotional stressors?

11. Do you have access to mental health counseling services? If not, a list of resources will be developed with the participant based on her individual circumstances.

12. Do you have any other questions for me?

From that individual meeting, if they are still interested in participating, I will ask them to sign the consent form. Once I’ve met all the participants, I will look at the availability, interest level, and willingness to participate of each participant to determine who is best suited for the study. My hope is for diversity in the women, but I recognize that interest and availability may limit that possibility somewhat. I have no expectations about the level of experience in performing for the participants. Rather, my focus is on creating an ensemble of women who are interested in developing both an understanding of obesity
and their performance skills. As for determining the measurement of obesity for each woman, I will not ask for their BMI score or their weight. Rather, I will rely on a visual assessment and the individual’s definition. If there is a question as to whether someone is truly overweight or simply believes they are overweight (which can be an indication of an eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa), I will spend more of the individual meeting ascertaining the person’s reasons for wanting to be involved with the program, and talk through what the program is designed to do before concluding if the person is an appropriate fit or not. Past experience with weight loss/management will also be considered. Some women will have an extensive history of dieting while others may not. My focus is on their interest level in the project. A past history of working with formal and/or informal methods of weight management may be useful experiences to contribute to the stories told in the workshops. Additionally, those who have had extensive experiences with weight management may be frustrated by a lack of success, thus their interest in trying a different intervention.

Thus, from the individual meetings, I will find the 8-12 women who are both interested in the program and able to participate in it. Those who are chosen will be asked to participate in an interview with me before the first workshop which I will set up during that acceptance phone call. Additionally, I will send them each the schedule and place of meeting times based on the option that works for all the participants. If all have active email accounts that will be the primary form of communication from me. I will keep all of their email addresses confidential.

Those who are not chosen to participate in the study will be informed through a phone call from me. In some cases, we may jointly recognize they are not a good fit for
the program during that initial meeting. It is not easy to articulate what makes a good fit. I will utilize my counseling experience and my instincts to help me identify women who are genuinely interested in participating in the program and who are up to the experience.

**Interview Measures**

This study will begin with individual interviews with all the participants. These interviews will explore current views about obesity for each of the participants. I will be looking at current understandings of obesity, the impact of obesity on one’s life, understanding of theatre and/or theatre for social change experience, past weight loss/management experiences, and perception of how obesity is seen in the world around them. Questions may include:

1. How do you define obesity?

2. What is your interest in exploring obesity?

3. How do you understand obesity in your life?

4. What would it mean to not be obese/fat/overweight?

5. How do you see obesity in the world around you?

6. What do you see as the purpose of theatre?

7. What do you know about theatre for social change?

8. What is your theatre experience?

9. What have you done in the past to manage your weight?

As I was trained by Niobe Way and Carol Gilligan in the research classes I took with them at New York University, I will also utilize follow-up and probing questions based on the responses to the above questions. As each person has different life experiences,
each interview will also differ. The responses to these interviews will serve as a baseline of each participant’s understanding of obesity and of theatre for social change prior to their experience participating in the study.

This study will end with a second closing interview with each participant. These interviews will explore views about obesity for each of the participants following participation in the workshops and performance piece. I will be looking again at understandings of obesity, the impact of obesity on one’s life, understanding of theatre and/or theatre for social change experience, and perception of how obesity is seen in the world around them. Questions may include:

1. How do you define obesity?
2. How do you understand obesity in your life?
3. What would it mean to not be obese/fat/overweight?
4. How do you see obesity in the world around you?
5. What do you see as the purpose of theatre?
6. During the time you were involved with the workshops and performance, what other situations or events occurred in your life that were different than your usual routine or stood out for some reason?

The responses to these follow-up interviews will help determine how each participant’s understanding of obesity and of theatre was changed, if at all, from their experience participating in the study.

Both sets of interviews will be analyzed using a narrative analysis followed by an in-depth analysis using the Listening Guide Method, as will be described in the Analysis section of this chapter. To better understand how participants make meaning of their
experiences in the study, I will listen carefully to their stories, noting patterns and metaphors, places of connection and disconnection, and where their stories resonate and contradict each other.

**Procedure**

Following the initial interviews, the participants will meet with me as a group once a week for 14 workshop sessions. The workshops will either take place in a large private rehearsal room reserved on the NYU campus or in a rented private rehearsal space in New York City. The curriculum will begin with activities designed to introduce discussions of obesity in fun, non-threatening ways while helping participants get to know me and each other. In the workshops, we will begin with a warm-up activity to ground us in the work. This will be followed by a main activity exploring obesity. Activities will be culled from Boal’s book *Games for the Actor and Non-Actor* as well as other sources. Some will be developed by me for the purposes of this group. While I place the most focus on these activities at the beginning of the program, we will continue to use them for reflection throughout the entire project.

**Lesson Plan One of The Fat Body**

Title: Getting to know you

Focus Question: Who are we and what is our connection to obesity and each other?

Learning Goals/Objectives: To get to know each other and begin to develop an ensemble.

- To begin learning theatre exercises. To establish a safe and productive atmosphere.
- To start working on storytelling and abstract thinking skills.
Assessment: I will review the video recording of the session to note stories told, interactions between participants, level of participation, and the discussion.

Audience/Developmental considerations: emerging adult women (TBD after recruitment)

Previous Knowledge: TBD after recruitment

Spatial organization: circle of chairs to begin, then open area for the activities

Materials: chairs, writing utensils, video camera and tripod, extension cord

Time: 3 hours

Procedures:

- Warm-ups (One hour)
  - Name game (Story of your name): (30-40 minutes)
    1. Pair participants up (or in groups of three, depending on the number of participants). Have each group find a spot in the room to sit together.
    2. Each group has 10-15 minutes to introduce themselves to each other by telling the story of how they got their name. (*If they don’t know the story, they can share a story about their name.*)
    3. The large group comes back together. Each person in the group introduces another member of their group to the larger group.
    4. Reflect on the activity

- When the wind blows activity: (10-20 minutes)
  1. The group stands in a circle. The facilitator stands in the middle.
  2. The person in the middle (the facilitator will begin the activity) makes a statement beginning with “When the wind blows, it blows for” that is true for her that she hopes is also true for others. For example, “When the
wind blows, it blows for anyone who likes mint chocolate chip ice cream.” Anyone in the circle who likes mint chocolate chip ice cream must now find a different spot in the circle. The last person in the middle of the circle makes the next statement.

3. After several rounds, have the group sit and reflect on the activity.

- Name game: Name showdown (for energy and learning names) (5-10 min)
  1. Participants stand in a circle. Facilitator stands in the middle.
  2. Facilitator will point at a person standing in the circle. That person ducks while the people standing on either side of her turn to face each other and say the other’s name. The last one who says the other person’s name replaces the person in the middle. If the middle person forgets to duck, then she replaces the person in the middle. In case of a tie, the person in the middle is stuck there for another round.
  3. Reflect on activity

- Cross the line activity: (10-20 minutes)
  1. Divide the group in half and have them stand facing each other in two parallel lines about 4-6’ apart (depending on the space).
  2. Facilitator makes statements to the whole group (similar to “When the Wind Blows,” but the facilitator controls the questions). If the statement is true for a participant, she crosses to the other group. If the statement is not true, she stays in place. Only the participant knows if the statement is true for her or not so retains control over whether she decides to move.
    - Cross the line if you have lived somewhere other than New York City
• Cross the line if you have ever acted on stage
• Cross the line if you are nervous about being here today
• Cross the line if you have ever been on a diet.
• Cross the line if you have ever been teased in a mean way.
• Cross the line if you are tired of people asking about your weight
• Cross the line if you read *Cosmo* or similar magazines
• Cross the line if you love the outdoors
• Cross the line if you love shopping
• Cross the line if…(*more TBD*)

3. Reflect on activity and move into next activity of Image Theatre

• Image Theatre
  
  • Ask each participant to find a comfortable place in the room to stand.
  
  • Facilitator will explain the activity and then give a few examples to illustrate:
    Ask participants to create an image of a baseball player, of being cold, and of being happy. *Remind participants to be kind to their bodies and to take care of themselves. If they need to move out of an image, they should do so.*
  
  • Creating a frozen image/tableau: (90 minutes)
  
    1. Ask each participant to create a frozen image of how she is feeling in this moment. Freeze. Ask participants to carefully, without breaking their own image, take a look at others’ images. Release their image.

    2. Create an image of “beauty.” Freeze. *Encourage participants to just intuitively move rather than over-think.* Ask half of the room to release so they can look at the other half of the room more closely. Then ask that
half to go back into their images while the other half of the room takes a look at their images. Relax.

3. Give instructions for the next part of the activity, and then ask them to go back into their “beauty” images.

4. Facilitator goes around the room and individually taps each person. When they are tapped, they are to move next to someone else whose image resonates with them or connects with their image. If they don’t see another image that fits with theirs, they can stay where they are. If someone comes to them, but they see someone else with whom they connect, they can move when it is their turn to do so.

5. After everyone has been tapped, they can release their images and sit with the people who are next to them (anyone who is alone will either join with others who are also alone or will join another group). In each group, each will talk about their image and what they saw in the others’ images.

6. After 10 minutes of discussion, each group will have 5 minutes to create a group tableau of beauty.

7. Share images with the larger group. Observers should point out concrete things they notice about the image such as body position, facial expression, proximity to others, etc.

8. Reflect on the activity -- what did they see, what did they notice, what questions do they have, how do they define beauty.

9. Then the entire group together will create a tableau for “beauty.”

10. Reflect on the activity.
• Closing (30 minutes) – Review the next meeting time, encourage each participant to journal about their experiences, and hand out any material. Give each participant an index card to write one thought and one question from the day’s activity (no names on the cards) which they will leave on a table for the facilitator to collect. These will be utilized by the facilitator in planning and reflection.

**Lesson plans Two through Fourteen**

In subsequent sessions, we will follow a similar pattern of warm-up exercises followed by a main activity and reflection. This will include sharing personal stories, and interrogating information gleaned from various media (pictures, news reports, movies, etc). The exercises are designed to develop a variety of skill sets as well as focus on specific themes and concepts. They also build trust and support within the ensemble. Some of the skills to be developed are:

- Communication
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Collaboration

These are also designed to develop a deeper awareness of the links between the mind and the body. Some exercises will focus on the senses of touch, sight, and hearing. The reflection that follows the exercise helps the participants intellectually tie together what is instinctively learned through the body.

The exercises will become more complex as the workshops progress. For example, in Image Theatre, movement and sound will be added to the images both
individually and in a group. As a note, I will plan activities in advance, but I will be ready to adjust as the moment calls for.

- In the third and fourth sessions, the main activity will include telling stories.
  - Each participant will tell a story (or two, or three) about an experience related to obesity—this can be a story of something they have experienced, something they have observed, something they saw on the news, or something that happened to someone they know. This sharing process will introduce a variety of aspects of obesity into the room.
  - I will then ask the participants to look for themes, oppressions, and other things that stand out for them in the stories.
- In the fifth session, the group will choose two stories and break into two smaller groups to develop those two stories into a performance.
  - After rehearsing in the session, we will put the two groups together and ask them to intervene in each other's plays-- to stop the action and step into the shoes of the protagonist to find possible actions she can take to alleviate the oppression.
  - Then we will choose one story to develop into the performance piece for the culmination of the program.

The remaining sessions will be spent developing that story into a performance. This will include writing dialogue, creating characters, learning lines, blocking the movements, developing the interactions between characters, and, if it becomes a forum theatre piece, practicing possible interventions that audience members may present during the actual performance.
In forum theatre, a story is told in the style of a play with actors (the study participants) playing characters in the story. One person plays the protagonist in the story who is dealing with an oppressive situation. Another person plays the antagonist who is causing the oppression. Other people play potential allies who could possibly help the protagonist. The forum theatre piece is rehearsed until the actors are ready to present it in front of an audience. In the presentation, the play is performed. At the end, a facilitator known as a Joker (another of the participants) interacts with the audience to see if they saw oppression in the play. If they do, the play will be performed again. This time, however, audience members will be instructed to say “Stop” when they see a point in which the protagonist in the story could do something different to address the oppression. Then, the audience member is invited to come up and replace the protagonist to try out her idea. That idea is explored and then the audience member returns to her seat. The play resumes again with the audience continuing to step in. The focus is on the protagonist with the understanding that, in reality, the protagonist is the one who has to act for an oppressive situation to change. To replace the antagonist risks a magical “happily ever after” ending in which the antagonist sees the error of her ways. While it is possible for oppressors to change, as the focus of the group is on working with those dealing with oppression, the focus of the solution also needs to be located with them. At the end of the second telling of the play, the Joker leads the group in a discussion of what they saw, what they learned, and so on.

For a forum theatre piece in which oppression related to obesity would be explored, the group would first explore, in frozen image, possible actions the protagonist could take to alleviate the oppression, and possible actions the antagonist could take in response. They
would then examine multiple possibilities within each story because there is no single, definitive way to alleviate any oppression—there is no one right answer. Then the group would write short theatre pieces based on two of those images. In small groups, participants would write and then rehearse plays of one to three scenes in length. During the writing and rehearsal process, I would ask participants to research multiple ways in which the oppression plays out. Once the plays had been written and rehearsed, we would put the two groups together and ask them to intervene in each other's plays-- to stop the action and step into the shoes of the protagonist to try to find possible actions she can take to alleviate the oppression.

The theatre piece will be performed in a private, informal setting for an invited audience of family and friends, and others for whom the issues in the pieces will be important. In a forum theatre piece, the audience will be invited to step into the shoes of the protagonists in the plays to try to find possible actions to alleviate the oppressions depicted.

Following the performance, I will interview the participants for a final time about their understanding of obesity, as well as their reflections on the theatre experience. I will also conduct a final group meeting in which the participants can reflect on their experience with the performance.

**Thematic Analysis**

From my analyses of the beginning and ending interviews, I will look for themes, patterns, metaphors, images, feelings, phrases, repeated words and images, and I will listen for what stories are being told. From these analyses, I will develop a more complete understanding of how these women make meaning of obesity for themselves.
and how that meaning changed over the course of the study. As a guide, I will follow a narrative or thematic analysis based on the work of Catherine Kohler Riessman which aligns with my goal of privileging the voices of my participants (2003, 2008). Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests one should focus on what is said in an interview and urges an interpretation of the interview as a whole rather than in parts (p. 54, 57). In this type of thematic analysis, the local context of how the participant said what she said is less of a focus in comparison to the societal considerations such as power relations (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 76). Kohler Riessman (2003) notes that “Narrative analysis allows for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning” (p. 342). As I want to understand how my participants make meaning of obesity from their experiences in the study, a thematic analysis is a logical approach to unpacking the interviews.

I have also been trained by Carol Gilligan in her Listening Guide Method and will include that method as the primary focus of my analysis. The Listening Guide Method is a voice-centered form of analysis which explores the person’s words in-depth through a series of focused readings of the interview text (Gilligan, et al, 2003). The analysis is a combination of repeated listenings of the audio-recorded interview as well as sequential readings of the written transcript of the interview. The repeated listenings are to help the researcher to delve deeper into the interview, becoming more familiar with the story, the pauses, starts and restarts, repeated words/phrases, and so on. The readings are sequentially designed to also deepen the researcher’s understanding of and connection to the interviewee’s voice including the relationships and outside (social, cultural) forces impacting that person and their perspective on the world.
In the first reading of the interview, I will listen for the plot of the person’s story. It is here where I will most utilize narrative analysis. During this first reading, I will also be noting the landscape of the interview including what is being said and what is left unsaid, and the larger social context in which the stories are told. Themes, patterns, and metaphors are also noted during this first reading. In addition to finding the key stories, I will also be paying attention to my own reactions to the interview including where I connect and disconnect from the person.

In the second reading, I will create an “I Poem” for each interview (Gilligan, et al., 2003). I will take all the “I” statements (the “I” followed by the verb such as “I do,” “I have,” etc.) and put them together in a type of poem. From this, I can gather a deeper understanding of the person from her first-person description of herself. This may include uncovering more themes and patterns of expression.

In the third reading (which is actually multiple readings), I will listen for the contrapuntal voices in each interview. This allows me to hear the multiple aspects of the story being told by the person. In this step, I will underline, using different colors for each voice, specific voices or themes within the interview. “It is in this third step that we begin to identify, specify, and sort out the different strands in the interview that may speak to our research question” (Gilligan, et al., p. 165). By identifying and listening for specific voices or themes within the interviews, I will begin to hear the various influences which play a part in the greater whole of the person’s overall way of speaking to the world. These voices may be in opposition to one other or they may complement each other. As such, they may point out places in which the person is struggling to reconcile opposing desires or thoughts.
To complete the Listening Guide Method, I will bring all the readings together and see how they speak to my research questions for each participant. Finally, I will look at the connections and disconnections between the Listening Guide Method analyses of all the participants’ interviews. This will help me develop a broader understanding of how they make meaning of obesity collectively, in addition to an understanding of how each participant makes meaning individually.

In addition to the data from the interviews, I will also be analyzing the activities from each workshop session performance as well as the culminating performance, in conjunction with feedback from the participants, as to how well the activities accomplished their stated goals. Each session and the final performance will be video recorded (I will ask the audience members to sign releases so that I can record the performance including the second telling of the story). This analysis will not be looking at the aesthetics of the work as I am not interested in acting skills, but will be focused on what the participants create and how they reflect upon obesity and their understanding of it through the work. This is not to say that aesthetics will not be an important component of the work, as the group is creating a performance piece and thus aesthetics including costuming, blocking (where and how performers stand), vocal projection, and such will certainly be included in the rehearsal process. However, my analysis of the work is not focused on that aspect.

In the case of a forum theatre piece, I will specifically be looking at what solutions are posited for the protagonist and how those solutions work out both in the culminating performance and in the activities done in the workshop sessions. I will also be focusing on the responses of the actors who are playing the roles of antagonist and
allies, not on the audience member replacing the protagonist’s role. Part of the job of the antagonist and allies is to complicate the audience-member-as-protagonist’s ideas. Rather than merely agreeing with the solution presented, the antagonist’s and allies’ responses should force the audience member on stage to think more deeply about their solution for a richer and more realistic replaying of the situation. This will also serve to help the larger audience delve deeper into the issue rather than landing on easy, and potentially unrealistic, solutions. The actor-participants’ ability to complicate the issue hinges on their understanding of the issue and their ability to articulate it. Therefore, I will be interested in documenting their responses in the forum theatre as a way to gauge the level of their learning and insight about obesity.

In the case of an alternate theatre piece, I will facilitate a “talk back” after the performance in which the performance and the process of putting it together will be discussed between the audience and the actors. The focus will not be on the aesthetics of the performance, but on what the audience learned, felt, and had questions about from viewing the piece. I will also ask for written feedback from the audience in the form of a short questionnaire with the following questions:

1. How did you define obesity before coming to this performance?
2. What did you learn about obesity from this performance?
3. What questions do you have about obesity after viewing this performance?
4. What will you take with you from this performance?

I will use those responses to both inform the final group meeting and in my analysis of the study. Was the performance effective in getting the participants’ message across? What kind of impact did the performance have on the audience and their understanding of
obesity? Although the focus of this study is on the participants, part of their experience is connected with how their understanding is perceived and received by the larger world. Thus, getting feedback from the audience is valuable for the participants’ understanding of obesity.

From these analyses, I will construct a narrative that answers the question of how emerging adult women ages 18-25 who are classified or self-identify as obese, fat, or overweight make meaning of obesity in their lives and how that meaning changes from participation in a theatre workshop using both Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) and Rainbow of Desire (ROD) activities.

**Conclusion**

Emerging adult women are at an exciting point in their lives. On their own for the first time, in college or starting out in their careers, the possibilities for what they can do and where they can go are endless. There are two things standing in their way, however. The first is a historically patriarchal culture filled with messages about how they should look, what they should wear, what they should do, where they can go, and so on. The second is any fears and mistaken beliefs they hold about who they are, what they can do, how they should look, etc. For obese and overweight emerging adult women, those voices are even stronger. If they do not develop the ability to see beyond the patriarchal culture, the media, and their own fears, they risk curtailing or even completely losing their dreams not to mention control over their own bodies.

Through this study, I aim to help obese and overweight emerging adult women develop the skills to move beyond the oppressions they face, be them external and/or
internal. With those skills, they can actively choose how they want to live their lives and take responsibility for and control over the obstacles in their way. It is my belief that the obesity epidemic in the United States will not be resolved until that happens for all individuals dealing with weight issues.
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Appendix

Definitions

Based on the literature in the field, I define obesity as a medical term referring to an excess of fat in one’s body based on the standards of the Body Mass Index (BMI). I also define obesity as a cultural, political, economic, psychological, and social construction used to describe bodies which do not conform to commonly accepted U.S. expectations. I define overweight as a medical term also connected to the BMI standards, but also as a common term used by people who believe themselves to be over their healthy and/or ideal weight. Additionally, I define fat as a term used to describe people who are obese or overweight, but also as a term reclaimed by fat activists and Fat Studies scholars to celebrate their bodies and differentiate themselves from the negative connotations of the word “obesity.” All three terms will be further defined through the work of this study.

I define theatre for social change as a form of theatre which is focused on exploring and performing theatre pieces, and which asks both actors and audience to reexamine their beliefs about the world. I am specifically focusing on the theatre of Augusto Boal, as will be explored in the Related Literature section of this proposal. Theatre for social change falls under the umbrella of the term “applied theatre,” in which theatre is used in a variety of settings such as schools, prisons, and hospitals, to explore educational and social issues.

In this study, I refer to a variety of lenses through which obesity can be explored: social, cultural, economic, medical, and psychological. Through a social lens, I will examine how obesity is seen in the media such as in advertising, television, movies, and
magazines. Conversely, through the **cultural** lens, I will explore how obesity is understood in the U.S. Furthering my understanding of how a particular culture views obesity, identifies its causes and its solutions, and blames for it. The cultural lens is also a way of viewing what body images are accepted in society. The **economic** lens examines how obesity is a big business in the United States as seen in the food, diet, fitness, and medical industries, as well as for the research community. The economic lens also examines how socioeconomic status impacts obesity rates. The **medical** lens dominates in current discussion of obesity in the media and thus informs how obesity is understood in the U.S. It is through this lens that obesity is commonly defined. The **psychological** lens will aid in exploring the emotional aspects of obesity, and the problems therein, as well as investigate the coping skills used to deal with those problems.
Consent Form for Participants

You have been invited to participate in a study which explores Obesity. This study will be conducted by Teresa Fisher, a PhD candidate in the Program in Educational Theatre, Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University, as part of her dissertation project. Her advisor for the project is Dr. Nancy Smithner, professor in Educational Theatre, Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, New York University. This work is currently intended for the purpose of research and will culminate in an invited performance of the work done in the study sessions.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in sixteen weekly workshop sessions of 3 hours each. These sessions will be video-taped. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. You will also be given the opportunity to review any of the work which emanates from the research. You will be asked to participate in two 30 minute interviews and to maintain a personal journal reflecting on the work. You will be asked to share portions of your journal, but reserve the right to keep the rest of the journal private.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. You will receive no direct benefits.

Confidentiality of research records will be strictly maintained by using pseudonyms (fake names). Thus your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality will also be maintained by keeping consent forms separate from data to make sure your name and identity will not become known or linked with any information that you have provided. The researcher will keep a log which means she will write what she observes in the sessions.

Your responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time.

All audio and video recordings, transcripts, and log entries will be kept and stored in a locked and secure storage.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, or if you have questions or wish to report a search-related problem, you may contact Teresa by calling 347-570-7320 or 212-998-5256 or emailing her at taf263@nyu.edu. You can also contact the advisor, Dr. Nancy Smithner, by calling 212-998-5868 or by emailing her at ns23@nyu.edu. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects, Office of Sponsored Programs, New York University, by calling 212-998-4808.

__ Yes, I give the researcher permission to use my name when quoting material from our work in a journal article, or in her dissertation.

__ No, I would prefer that my name not be used.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Participant Signature ____________________________ Date ____________
I am a PhD candidate in the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. My interest is in the use of theatre to explore, understand, and interrogate obesity.

To that end, I have designed a program to occur during the Spring semester, which I will facilitate. I will be working with females who self-identify as overweight, and who are between the ages of 18-25. I have received IRB approval for this project.

The content of the unit will be based on the work of Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal—specifically his theatre forms of “Theatre of the Oppressed” and "Rainbow of Desire." The purpose of both Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire is to help people explore internal and external oppressions affecting their lives. In the workshop sessions, participants will explore images and stories about obesity from their own experiences. They will use theatre to reflect on multiple ways to understand, explore, and interrogate what obesity is and why it continues to be a pressing problem despite all the media reports, medical evidence, and prevention programs. They will also be given materials that they can explore on their own such as websites and books to explore. The culmination of the project is an invitation-only performance of the prepared theatre piece.

I have enclosed a flyer that you can post, a copy of the consent form, and a paragraph that can be sent out over your list-serve. I would be most appreciative of your help in the recruitment process if you could send out an email to anyone you think might be interested in this opportunity as well as pass along the information in this letter and post the flyer. I am also happy to come and speak to you about this project. If you have any questions about the program, my research, or about what I would like to do in the spring semester, I would love to speak with you. I can be reached via telephone at my office at NYU at 212-998-5256 or via email at taf263@nyu.edu.

Respectfully,
Teresa A. Fisher

**Email List-serve blurb:**

*Exploring the body.*

If you are a woman between the ages of 18-25 who is considered overweight, would you be interested in participating in research on the experiences of women exploring the issue of being overweight through theatre? This research is being conducted as part of a dissertation for a NYU graduate student who is also overweight. This research has nothing to do with dieting or weight loss. I am only interested in exploring the experiences of the women who participate in the study.

The Project consists of individual interviews followed by group meetings that involve participating in theatre activities based on Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire techniques created by Augusto Boal. The culmination will be a by-invitation-only performance in front of an audience chosen by the participants.

Contact Teresa – taf263@nyu.edu for more information