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Female Nakedness and Political Protests: Analysing Female Nudity Within University Protests



Masters Dissertation

By:

Yasaar Moosa

861784

Supervisor: Dr. Haley McEwen

Department of Political Studies

Declaration of authorship

I declare that this Masters of Arts in Political Science dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Yasaar Moosa

_____

(Signature of candidate)

_____day of _____2020 at_____

Abstract

Female nudity in political protests has become a global phenomenon over the last few decades. This research is contextualised within two political protests that took place in 2016: #RUReferenceList and #FeesMustFall, in which nudity was used as a means of conveying a message. This research is aimed at investigating how third-year university students perceive the use of nudity in female protests. The overarching research question asks: how has the use of nudity as a form of protest been perceived and interpreted by third-year university students? The research was underpinned by using a intersectional feminist theoretical framework, specifically discussing Africana Womanism. A qualitative research design was used. Twenty-four third-year politics students were purposively selected to participate in this study. Data was collected by using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and tweets on social media. The data was analysed by using thematic analysis to identify, investigate and report on issues and patterns that have been identified in the data. The objective of the study was to analyse how female nudity is perceived by third-year Political Studies students as they represent a small portion of the larger society. The research showed that many students disapproved of the use of nudity in student protests and was met with a great deal of disapproval from fellow students, many of them viewing nudity as inappropriate, sexualised and attention-seeking. Society has made the idea of public nudity dirty, with nudity being linked to notions around indecency and immorality. This highlights the nuances that society plays an influence of how different acts are perceived. This study recommends that more emphasis needs to be placed on providing better support and programming to raise awareness and counter gender-based violence within university campuses.

Key words: Feminism, Africana Womanism, Nudity, Protests, Sexualise, Body politics.

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Definitions

Gender Based Violence – An act that brings about either the "physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women", this includes acts of coercion and the deprivation of ones freedom in their public and private life (United Nations, 1995, Platform for Action D.112 cited in Russo & Pirott 2006, p.181).

Lived Experience – Within the research, lived experience refers to the events and choices of a person and therefore, the knowledge that they have gained from that event. Moreover, Marshall and Rossman (2014, p.102-103) add that lived experience is about recollecting experiences that one has lived through.

Nakedness – The act of removing one's clothing revealing one's naked body, therefore, nakedness refers to the body without clothes (Clark, 1969; Berger, 1972).

Nudity – The sexual objectification that is attached to the act of getting naked, according to Berger (1972, p.52), "nudity entails a level of sexual objectification".

Patriarchy – A system of social structured and practices "in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1989, p.214).

Socio-Political Context – The connecting of social and political events emphasizing the significance one sphere has on the other, as the political impacts the social and vice versa (Nieto, 1992).

University Culture – the idea of university culture is one that allows for the tolerance of constructive debates and discussions which cover a broad range of topics and multiple viewpoints. This culture actively encourages improvement for the overall problem solving and decision-making process (Bartell, 2003, p.55).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings."

- **Marie Shear, 1986**

1.1 Introduction

On 4 October 2016, during a #FeesMustFall protest at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, three black women spearheaded a protest in which they bared their breasts and stood as a shield between police and protesting students (Ndlovu, 2017, p.68). Initially, the day's protest started out peacefully, however, when students began singing, police officers threw stun grenades (Ngcobo, 2016, para.4). PhD student and protester, Hlengiwe Ndlovu, recalls a conversation with fellow Wits student Sarah Mokwebo, stating "we need to do something – let's stage a topless protest" (Ngcobo, 2016, para.7). According to Ngcobo (2016, para.13), the aim of the protest for Ndlovu was to create a ceasefire with her further stating "I'm pleased we managed that objective" (Ngcobo, 2016, para.13). As a result, social media platform, Twitter, exploded with the hashtag "naked protest" and the comments ranged from "*Men turning this #NakedProtest into something sexual*" to "*Salute to our sisters who took part in the #NakedProtest*", and even "*Only if women with firmer breast stood in the front *sigh**".

Ideas surrounding gender related topics are multifaceted as they revolve around perpetuated norms, culture, values and even social institutions which al pay a role in the way violence towards women is expressed (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.181). The idea of gender is meant to portray the appropriate behaviour and social characteristics that women should display to the outside world (Cross & Madsen, 1997 cited in Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.181). According to the United Nations (1995), violence directly aimed towards women or rather gender based violence can be defined as "any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations, 1995, Platform for Action D.112 cited in Russo & Pirott 2006, p.181).

Kenyan author, Joan Thatiah (2017), states that there is strength in the naked bodies of females: stripping naked can raise awareness for social issues such as the fight for democracy, to defend their land, in the fight for more protection for victims of gender-based violence and even for their rights to show their nipples on social media (Thatiah, 2017, para 3-4). For these reasons, she concludes: "I think that the naked woman's body is a powerful statement" (Thatiah, 2017, para.3). This research study aims to investigate through the lens of intersectional feminism how university students perceive female nude protests and the use of nudity in female protests. The notion of nudity will examine how women use their bodies as an instrument to fight social injustices including rape culture and police brutality. As well as go against the norms and gender roles set by society which have perpetuated male entitlement, sexual objectification and overall violence against women (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.181).

The topic sparked the researcher's attention while an undergraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand at the time of the Fees Must Fall protests. The researcher watched how female students of colour expressed their concerns by protesting nude and this sparked interest in the discourse of women using nudity in protests as a tool to affirm their stance against police brutality and other social injustices. Seeing women of colour at the forefront of such an important protest ignited conversations around representation and intersectionality within the political sphere, which is another reason why this event and its aftermath caught my attention. The researcher's positionality is thus as a woman of colour within the university setting.

Kenneth Clark makes the distinction between nakedness and nudity, stating that the word 'nudity' was forced into our vocabulary in the early 18th Century (Clark, 1969). To be naked is to be deprived of clothes, and the word carries a negative association of humiliation. Whereas the word 'nude' carries a literate usage (Clark, 1969; Berger, 1972). This notion is reiterated by author John Berger who argues that the naked body has to be seen as an object in order to be nude. In a sense, this brings forward the construction of sexual objectification (Berger, 1972). Thus, the notion that "nudity entails a level of sexual objectification" and nakedness can refer to the body without clothes, (Berger, 1972, p.52). The research will define nudity while taking into consideration the role of body politics. Subsequently, the research will analyse the history of nudity in African women's protest. It will then discuss nudity in student protest and how nudity can be used as a tool for self-expression and power.

The research problem is aimed at analysing how women's bodies, specifically their nude bodies, are perceived in political protests by third-year students but also on a larger scale by society. For Sultana (2013) women's bodies are heavily sexualised in movies, in adverts, music videos, in television and social media (Sultana, 2013). This research aims to analyse the ways in which students received the 2016 nude university protests. Therefore, did the protests have the effect of raising awareness around gender-based and the marginalisation of women within a university setting? In other words, did they have the desired effect of raising awareness of gender-based violence and women's marginalisation at universities?

Nude protests are taking place on a global scale. In Europe there is a well-known radical Ukrainian feminist group known as FEMEN. FEMEN was founded by a student in the capital of the Ukraine, Kiev. Later, the group expanded to other parts of Europe and has their largest headcounters in Paris, France. FEMEN has protested in Kiev, Paris, London and the Vatican City against religion, sexual exploitation of women and dictatorship (Tayler, 2013). In North America, the United States has popularised the #FreeTheNipple movement which makes the argument that the male nipple is not censored in media or regarded as indecent in public spaces whereas for women exposing their naked chest holds consequences (Höfner). For women in America it is highly likely that a woman baring her breast will be charged with public indecency or disturbing the peace, according to Höfner. In addition, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter have "prohibited any images that show the nipples of women whereas they allow their male counterparts to present their naked upper body without restrictions or censorship" (West, 2017, p.32). The movement acts as a means of remedying this societal issue. As a show of solidarity, celebrities including Miley Cyrus, Rihanna and Chrissy Teagan posted pictures on Instagram exposing their chests as a means of rebellion against gatekeepers and policy makers (West, 2017, p.32).

The African continent is no stranger to female nude protests either. Nigeria is well known for a series of protests that took place in the late 1940s. The Abeokuta Women's Revolt was a resistance movement led by the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) against the imposition of unfair taxation by the Nigerian colonial government (Byfield, 2003, pp.260-264). This was one of the largest female-led protests, spanning over nine months and in the end, four women received seats on the local council, and the taxation of women was ended.

In Kenya, Jimlongo (2018, p.5) mentions the "Green Belt Movement" which was established by feminist and environmentalist Wangari Maathai in the late 1980s. The movement was

initially aimed at fighting deforestation, which ultimately mainly affected Kenyan women. According to Hunt (2014 cited in Jimlongo, 2018, p.5) "Maathai found that women had been at a disadvantage as a result of deforestation, because it was women who would spend hours looking for firewood in order to cook and go about general household duties". As a result, Kenyan women stripped to protest out of pure desperation over the dire circumstances that they faced. In Côte d'Ivoire in 2011, women stripped down to protest the refusal of President Laurent Gbagbo to step down, thus further promoting the empowerment of women of African descent (Guyson, 2016, para. 10).

In recent history, two nude protests stand out, both taking place at university campuses in South Africa in 2016. The first is known by its social media name – #RUReferenceList, which is the Rhodes University Reference List. In April of 2016, a list of 11 men's names whom were alleged perpetrators of rape was posted on a Queer Facebook Confessions page in relation to the high levels of rape culture that the university campus faced (Chengeta, 2017 cited in Jimlongo, 2018). Dissatisfied with the lack of response from the Rhodes University management, Thamm (2016 cited in Jimlongo, 2018, p.9) states that "a group of women students began to take off their clothes, resorting to an ancient form of resistance which had been used in Africa for centuries".

The second protest occurred under the Fees Must Fall umbrella when three black women of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg spearheaded a protest in which they bared their breasts and stood as a shield between police and protesting students (Ndlovu, 2017, p.68). As a result, social media platform Twitter exploded with the hashtag #NakedProtest.

The purpose of this research is to analyse student perceptions of nudity as a tool for political protest. The research aims to understand how third-year students at the University of Witwatersrand interpret nudity on a small-scale level, and how these relate to broader social discourses of the nude female body, particularly those circulated in popular and social media. Due to the nature of the coursework, Social Science students, specifically students majoring in Political Studies, have knowledge and insight and some direct involvement in the nude protest. Students from the School of Social Sciences, with many students coming from the Political Studies department, were at the centre of the nude protests and were perhaps the most radical participants within the student protests. These students, however, are only limited to third-year students from the year 2018 whereas third-year Political Studies students

from 2019 might not have as extensive knowledge as the previous year. Participants from 2018 and 2019 make ideal participants as the 2018 participants can relate to the study based on lived experiences as they were around during the protest and are likely to have witnessed the protests firsthand. Whereas 2019 participants have a detached perspective, as they were not around during the time of the Fees Must Fall Protests. Furthermore, participants from both 2018 and 2019 who have completed the course in Feminism could provide more insight and add value to the research. Participants from 2018 are third-year students who were present in 2016 during the year two nude protests occurred at the University.

Limitations are regarded as factors that are outside of the researcher's control, thus placing restriction on the conducting of research. The limitations of the study include the size of the sample. The study limited the participant pool to only include third-year Political Studies students from one university under the premise that they would be better versed in politics from an academic standpoint compared to first-year students. In a student's third and final year, they have the ability to comprehend political topics at a higher level compared to a student in first or second year, thus it was anticipated that the level of responses received in the interviews and questionnaires would include critical student insights that would be helpful to achieving the stated research objectives. Another limitation is that the research was only conducted at one university, the University of Witwatersrand. This means that the views shared are limited to the experiences of Wits students and their context. I attempted to remedy this by broadening the research by including tweets from social media that stem from more than just Wits students to enable a more nuanced view.

This study aims to:

- Understand how third-year university students define the notion of nudity.
- Examine third-year students' perceptions of female nudity during university protests in South Africa.
- Investigate third-year students' views on the significance of nudity in protests within a socio-political context.

- Explore the possible impact of female nudity within a socio-political context by using Twitter.

With the overall research question being: How has the use of nudity as a form of protest been perceived and interpreted by third-year university students?

The following sub-questions will assist in unpacking the overall research question:

1. How do third-year students define the notion of feminism and nudity?

2. What are students' views on the significance of nudity in protest?

3. What are the socio-political impacts of female nudity in protests on social media, specifically Twitter?

This chapter has introduced the research surrounding how third-year students within political protests perceive the use of female nudity. This chapter has foregrounded the research and discussed the purpose and objectives of the study. This chapter has set parameters for the study and established a research question and sub-research questions that will guide the research. The next chapter will unpack the literature relevant to the study, thus foregrounding the data analysis chapter that will come later. The literature review will analyse the notion of feminism, body politics and nudity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"No woman should be told she can't make decisions about her own body. When women's rights are under attack, we fight back."

- Kamala Harris, 2017

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is divided up into two parts. The first section will discuss introductory concepts around gender, sex and women in society, which will consist of the role feminist activists have played in struggles for social justice. The notion of intersectionality will be introduced as a means of analysing the interaction between race and gender. Later, the discussion around Africana womanism will be introduced. The second section will analyse the politics of the human body, specifically the concept of nudity within body politics. This section of the literature review will define nudity and tease out the argument between nudity and nakedness, as well as discuss the body politic and analyse the history of nudity. The discussion centres on the nude female body as a tool for self-expression and power.

2.2 The notion of 'Woman'

The notions of sex and gender are often understood as interchangeable concepts, however, there are nuanced differences between the two notions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Within this research, 'sex' is understood as a biological difference determined by the physical features of one's sexual anatomy, and 'gender' refers to identity and roles that have become associated with the 'sex' one is assigned at birth (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.125; Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015, p.537; Kelan, 2008, p.10; Lorber, 1991). The theory of social constructionism provides insight into how notions of gender and sex have been interwoven in Western thought. According to Judith Lorber (1991, pp.113-115), a professor of Women's Studies in New York and a foundational theorist of social construction, gender is constructed through a "process of creating distinguishable social statuses" for the assignment of rights and responsibilities. Meaning, gender roles are based on and distributed utilising one's physical anatomy, hormones and genetic predispositions (Lorber, 1991, p.116). this is reiterated by Russo and Pirlott (2006, p.181) who state that the idea of gender revolves around perpetuated norms, culture, value and social institutions which ultimately play a role in how violence is directed towards women. This is further reinforced by social interactions

throughout individuals' daily lives through the way they dress, and the assignment of feminine and masculine attributes, which only further reinforces the construction and maintenance of a patriarchal gender power order. Patriarchy, like many themes within the feminist paradigm is ever changing and evolving. However, according to Sylvia Walby (1989, p.214) patriarchy can defined "as a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Gender is formed through social interaction and through expectations set by society to fit within the norms of everyday life. Gender is an aspect of our identity that is learned over time (de Beauvoir, 1949). Butler (1986, pp.26-35) claims that all gender is "by definition" unnatural, and therefore, the notion of "female" is rooted in self-identification and the notion of "woman" entitles diversity of modes that are developed through cultural meaning. Lorber (1991, p.114) states that the process of gender is one that, "creates social differences that define 'woman' and 'man'" (Lorber, 1991, p.114). Assigning gender is a form of rote learning that creates many biproducts that are the foundation for stereotypes placed on women. Some of the biproducts of assigning gender in society includes the sexual objectification of women, the male gaze and a hegemonic form of feminism that is not inclusive to all women.

Sexual objectification can present itself in many forms and through many mediums such as social media, television and movies. However, for Bartky (1990 cited in Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011, p.8) sexual objectification is when a woman's body or parts of her body are isolated and viewed separately from her as a person thus making that body part a physical object of male desire. Due to societal norms, women, to different extents, begin to internalise the views of outsiders and thus the process of self-objectification begins according to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997 cited in Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011, p.8). Self-objectification involves treating oneself as an object on the basis of physical appearance, thus placing large importance on the physical attributes that are popular in the eyes of the public (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011, p.8). If society encourages a standardised version of what a woman is supposed to be, this will be perpetuated though media, which includes social media, television, movies, adverts, music and magazines (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011, p.10). This will encourage women to conform to this hegemonic version of womanhood that only further perpetuates the ideas around sexual objectification because of the pressure to conform to societal norms. According to Dr. Linda Papadopoulos (2010), over the last three decades there has been a surplus of the amount of sexualised imagery in advertising, which mostly includes women (Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999 cited in

Papadopoulos, 2010, p.7). Dr. Papadopoulos (2010) continues to say that in magazines there has been a need for girls to present themselves in a sexually desirable manner in order to gain the attention of their male counterparts (Carpenter, 1998 cited in Papadopoulos, 2010, p.7).

This leads to the second biproduct of assigning gender in order to conform to societal norms: the male gaze. The notion of the male gaze was first formally introduced in 1975 by Laura Mulvey in the essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.* The male gaze is described as being a "sexual imbalance" as "pleasure has been split between active/male and passive/female" (Mulvey, 1989, p.62). She carries on to state that the male gaze is a means of projecting an ideal of the female figure that plays on or justifies male desire (Mulvey, 1989, p.62). It is important to note that Mulvey (1989, p.63) states that the male figure cannot be sexually objectified, and the man controls the representation of power. Traditionally, it is a woman's place to be seen and not heard, denying women a voice while allowing them full access to the domestic aspects of life (Ponterotto, 2016, p.134). On the ideas of sexual objectification of the female physique, Ponterotto (2016, p.135) states that the Barbie doll is the highest expression of society's ideal woman and has also brainwashed young girls to conform to this ideal. This narrative perpetuates the unrealistic standards of beauty or the Cult of Beauty in which Ponterotto (2016, p.137) claims the 'right' body is defined as being thin and fit, which equates to being beautiful. Thus, any body type that does not fall within these parameters of the beauty standards are regarded as the other, which make them undesirable characteristics (Ponterotto, 2016, p.137). According to Hooks (2003, p.98), the 'gaze' is always political. She continues to say that the 'gaze' has always been a site of resistance for colonised black people globally (Hooks, 2003, p.95).

The notion that the personal is political states that there is no division between the personal sphere and the political sphere, and the two dichotomies intertwine with each other. For Okin (2003 cited in Farrelly, 2003, p.185) the idea of the personal is political is a foundational aspect of contemporary feminism. Wollstonecraft (1995) discusses how women have been socially constructed as being weaker through such processes of socialisation. The use of gender stereotypes makes conforming to societal norms that much easier as it is not in human nature to go against the status quo. The social role theory, according to Eagly (1987 cited in Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003, p.520) states that "one reason women and men confirm gender stereotypes is because they act in accordance with their social roles, which are often segregated along gender lines". This reinforces notions that women are supposed to

be the caregivers and men are supposed to be the breadwinners and that women are more passive, making men more dominant.

This research goes beyond the mundane forms of feminism that do not look beyond race and sex. The research's approach to womanism critiques the white hegemonic Western feminism that gained popularity during the 1960s and 1970s. White hegemonic feminism, according to Thompson (2002, p.337) is white led, marginalising the efforts, struggles and worldviews of women of colour. It centres primarily on the United States and treats sexism as the ultimate and only form of oppression. "Hegemonic feminism" de-emphasises and disregards class and race dichotomy, and "generally sees equality with men as the goal of feminism, and has an individual rights-based, rather than a justice-based vision for social change" (Thompson, 2002, p.337). The era of the Woman's Suffrage movement was one of the first female-led movements, however, they comprised of a group of liberal white women whose main objective, in the beginning, was the abolition of slavery and equal rights for all people regardless of race, class, and sex (Hudson-Weems & Sofala, 1995, pp.20-21). Alas, these objectives changed and rather than focusing on the rights of all, the rights of white middle-class white women were prioritised as a means of helping their husbands control the power of the votes (Hudson-Weem & Sofala, 1995, p.21). Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) makes the argument that white hegemonic feminists exclude black women from the feminist movement through the notion of a middle-class white agenda, thus leaving black women barely recognised (Crenshaw, 1991; cited in Carbin & Edenheim, 2013, p.3). Discussions and struggles amongst women of colour and white women encouraged white women to think about the limits of the popular feminist slogan: 'Sisterhood Is Power'. According to black feminist author, Audre Lorde (1980, p.116), "white women focus on their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age". Lorde (1980, p.116) therefore states that the word 'sisterhood' does not exist.

A direct response to the lack of representation of women of colour in feminism is the notion of womanism, which according to Layli Philips (2006, p.xx) "does not emphasise gender or sexism, rather, it uplifts all sites and forms of oppression, whether they are based on social-address categories like gender, race or class to a level of equal concern and action". Black feminist author, Alice Walker (1983), states that "womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender", meaning that they are shades of the same concept. However, the failure to consider intersectionality is the main cause of marginalisation of women of colour within the feminist

sphere. The notion of intersectionality signifies the many ways in which race and gender interrelate to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's experiences (Crenshaw 1989, p.139). In the United States within Western feminist discourse, the white hegemonic woman's experience would be considered the norm while the experiences of African American woman would be considered as the other, thus marginalising their experiences. However, looking through the lens of intersectionality, race and gender are connected. The same can be translated into the class distinctions, where members of the middle class would be considered as the norm and members of the working class would be othered (Lorber, 1991, p.115). This is where the need for Africana womanism became necessary as a critique of the white-centred understanding of feminism that never addressed the needs of black women and the intersectionality of race and gender. For Clenora Hudson-Weems, Africana womanism represents intersectionality as it combines both ethnicity and gender by virtue of being African and woman (Reed, 2001, par. 3). She goes on to state that "Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women" (Reed, 2001, par. 4). Hungerford (2015, p.361) makes the argument that the organisation known as FEMEN is provocative as the "all-female group" tangles with the boundaries of what is understood as 'new feminism'. However, despite FEMEN protesting laws, policies and cultural norms with the guerrilla-like tactics, they are still seen to follow hegemonic norms regarding women's bodies. This line of thinking is argued by O'Keefe (2014, p.107) who asks where older women, plus-sized women, disabled women and women of colour fit into the FEMEN organisation. Like Hungerford (2015), O'Keefe (2014, p.107) states that FEMEN perpetuates patriarchal norms that attract the male gaze and promotes "desirable" female bodies. Therefore, the aim of the research is to understand the discussions that have emerged round the notion of nudity being used as a tool within political protests, specifically within the context of the University of Witwatersrand.

2.3 Female nudity and body politics

A woman's body is regarded as the location for many political struggles. For Harcourt and Escobar (2002, p.8) these include the "struggle for autonomy, for reproductive and sexual integrity and rights, for safe motherhood, for freedom from violence and sexual oppression". A woman's body is the first place in which political struggle takes place (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002, p.8). Weight needs to be placed on political action taken by women to be heard in a male-dominated sphere where woman is easily labelled the other (Harcourt &

Escobar, 2002, p.8). The home is a place where many women still experience subordination, but where they also derive their most important social and political roles and identities. The home serves paradoxically as both a safe space where women have considerable power as well as a site where they experience a great degree of violence and oppression. The home is therefore a crucial terrain of political struggle (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002; Courtney, & Lockeretz, 1971; Lloyd, & Gage-Brandon, 1993). This is also the site in which the personal and the political are forced to interact with one another.

During infancy children are taught to make meaning of their physical, social and cultural worlds (Mahn, 2012, p.101). This meaning can be learned through loss, family bonds and even religion. Through adolescence children gain more experiences, thus their ability to associate meaning to events and objects increase, however, still remain subjective based on specific experiences. For a new-born baby and through a child's infant years, a female's body, especially the breast, is associated with providing sustenance as breastfeeding is an infant's main source of nutrition (Young, 2005). In this context the female's body is regarded as home and her breast is viewed as the personal, reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes that the female is seen as a nurturer and the caretaker. Through puberty and adolescence this image of nurturer is distorted and through social media, television and movies the female body gains sexual connotations, which could lead to the sexual objectification of the female body (Papadopoulos, 2010).

In the context of the research, it is important to locate the bare breast as the research centres on the use of female nudity in political protest, which is a means of combining the political with the personal in a powerful way. For Iris Marian Young (2015), within the larger male-oriented contemporary society we live in, a woman's breast is not regarded as her own, but her breasts become the property of others, including her husband, lovers and even her babies. In *On Female Body Experience*, Young describes a female's breasts as being "the symbol of feminine sexuality" (Young, 2005, p.77). A female's liberated breast shows the flexibility and changing shape of the breast. Liberated breasts do not remain firm and stable objects, which is necessary in the fetishisation of breasts. "The bra normalises the breast to approximate the one and only ideal breast", argues Young (2005, p.83), Above all else, without a bra, the nipple is exposed and according to Young (2005, p.83), the nipple is perceived to be indecent. Cleavage, on the other hand, is regarded as good and to an extent, the more cleavage the better, thus bikinis that barely cover the breasts are worn, however, the nipple

must be strategically covered. Nipples, according to Young (2005, p.84) are highly stigmatised as women are meant to portray the image of being sexual beings, thus the feeding function of the breast must be suppressed. This is because when the breasts are nursing, they are regarded as being desexualised. The female body is examined more thoroughly than that of a man's body, which according to Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi, & Klein (2012, p.469) is the cause of the sexual objectification of women. According to Bartky (1990), sexual objectification refers to the separation of the body from an individual's personality, thus these bodily characteristics are condensed to sheer devices to gratify the requirement and wishes of other people, thus the dehumanisation (cited in Schmidt & Kistemaker, 2015, p.3).

When combining the notion of nudity and the male gaze, Cover (2003, p.56), in *Body and Society*, holds a view that states that nakedness in contemporary western culture is the relationship between an unclothed body and the gaze of others and is variously legitimated through contexts of representation. Nakedness is filled with multiple, context-bound, historically specific meanings (Bordo, 1999; Cover, 2003). Nakedness can be an enjoyable experience, an ordinary activity, or a mortifying incident depending on the situation, whom is the one shedding the clothes, whether there is an observer, and thereafter the observer's relationship to the naked person (Sultana, 2013, p.5).

Nudity in its entirety can be placed on a spectrum, ranging from a pleasurable experience, to a mundane experience, to a shameful experience, all depending on the individual's external environment (Sultana, 2013, p.5). However, for Cover (2003, cited in Sutton, 2007, p.142) "Nakedness carries gendered connotations that are embedded in the history and cultural baggage of different societies and are intertwined with the ideologies of racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, homophobia, and other systems of oppression". Meaning that the concept of nudity intermingles with that of racism, sexism, classism and so on and that the act of nudity is always perceived in complex and layered ways. This goes back to the aim of the research, which is to analyse how third-year students perceive the use of nudity in political protests. How will participants view nudity on this spectrum and will Covers' (2003, cited in Sutton, 2007, p.142) explanation of how nudity is perceived be similar to that of the third-year students' perceptions? Throughout Pravin Sultana's (2013, p.1) article, "Nakedness and Resistance: Understanding Naked Protests of Women*",* she makes the claim that the act of resistance can take many forms. The research presented by Sultana (2013, p.2) is a discourse on how the female body is used as either a site for humiliation, exploitation or

resistance. For Sultana (2013, p.2), rape is the ultimate form of humiliation as it asserts male dominance over women. In war time, victorious warriors would rape the women of the villages they conquered as a show of their dominance and power: “Rape is a cross cultural language of male domination and the vanquished communities are rendered as effeminate” (Sultana, 2013, p.3). The second point of humiliation for the female body according to Sultana (2013, p.4) is that of conformity based on societal norms portrayed in popular media. When an ideal body type is standardised and normalised though adverts, movies, and television this is how sexual objectification is born and thus becomes a site for humiliation for Sultana (2013, p.4). In body politics, Coleman (2012, p.74) makes the assertion that the act of humiliation creates a disconnect between the body and the mind which can be related to themes around shame and stigma. Therefore, the body becomes a thing rather than a part of us and essentially, we lose bodily awareness (Coleman, 2012, p.74). Shame in this sense relates to the idea of women smashing taboos traditionally held by society as a means of reclaiming the female body without sexualising female nudity (O'Keefe, 2014, p.107).

When Sultana (2013, p.5) discusses the female body as a site for resistance, she states that it is about reclaiming the power against one’s humiliator. One way of reclaiming power over your body, according to Sultana (2013, p.5), is by “baring it”. When discussing western societies, Sultana (2013) cites Sutton (2007) who mentions the paradoxes in female bodies. Sutton (2007, cited in Sultana, 2013, p.5) states that it is acceptable to turn female bodies into sexual objects, but naked bodies used as a tool for resistance will lead to social outrage and violent punishment. According to Sultana (2013, p.6), political protests take place though the use of one’s body, from marches to acts of chaining one’s body to a tree, the body is the foundational mode in which protests take place. Therefore, Sultana (2013, p.6) states that the body expresses political meaning. In public spaces it has become a prerequisite norm for members of society to make use of clothing, so for Sultana (2013, p.6) the naked body is being used as a form of protest in a rather “sensational” to raise awareness of social problems. However, for Sutton (2007 cited in Sultana, 2013, p.7), nude protests are easily misconstrued and essentially reduced to something sexual and thus for the enjoyment of men. The notion of using ones’ nude body as a means of conveying a message is taken out of context and because of social norms the female body is further subjected to being hyper-sexualised. Society and social norms should be creating more diversity and be an inclusive form of feminism in which intersectionality is taken into consideration, where there is an acknowledgement of the role gender, race and class play a part in one's positionality.

Chapter 3: Methodology

"There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish."

- **Michelle Obama, 2019**

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter is aimed at discussing the method and design of this research project. This section will discuss the research design, implementation and data analysis, as well as the ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Research design

The research has made use of a qualitative design (Kothari, 2004; Schurink, 1998, p.243) to understand students' interpretation of the use of female nakedness in protests. How the participants understood, and perceived female nude protests is important because it will help to understand student perceptions and how the message behind the protests were understood by the participants. The research conducted includes semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to further understand how third-year students perceive female nudity as a tool in protests. In addition to this, the social media app Twitter has been used as a third site of data collection. Around the time of each protest, Twitter exploded with several hashtags including two prominent hashtags, #RUReferenceList and #NakedProtest. These two hashtags have been used to capture broader social responses to the protests and include student and non-student views. In doing so the research will be linking the political and the social in order to show how they impact one another and are not mutually exclusive spheres.

3.3 Data sources

A purposive sampling (Kothari, 2004; Teddlie & Yu 2007) method has been used to select participants. The decision to use purposive sampling was because the research catered to the knowledge specifically found in third year politics students. According to Patton (2002, p.264) the idea of purposive sampling is to select participants who are "information-rich" which aimed to create depth in the research. The idea of purposive sampling involves recognizing and selecting a group of individuals that are knowledgeable or have experience surrounding the topic of research (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood,

2015, p.2). For this research, third-year students have been at the University of the Witwatersrand for a period of approximately three years, thus, they have experienced the #FeesMustFall protests, in which the nude protests occurred as well as the #RUReferenceList protest. These students are also in the Political Studies department and therefore it is anticipated that they will be aware and cognizant of political occurrences at the institute. With regards to the use of Twitter, tweets posted in 2016, specifically around April and October when the protests occurred at the Rhodes University and University of Witwatersrand, respectively have been selected for analysis.

3.4 Data collection

The data has been collected through three different means as a way to gain a nuanced understanding of how nudity is perceived in political protests. Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires (Appendix 1), semi-structured interviews (Appendix 2) and Twitter. Following is an explanation of the process of collecting data for each of these methods separately as the process differs for each form of data.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The open-ended questionnaire consists of 16 questions ranging from gaining biographical information to gaining participants' views and the significance of the use of nudity in protests that relates to the research. The open-ended questionnaires have been used to get a generalised overview of perceptions and experiences from the third-year students regarding female nude protests (Oppenheim, 1992). It is important to note that the questionnaire is entirely anonymous and participants have given their consent and there is a section for the participants to leave their personal details if they agree to be contacted for the interview process (Sofaer, 1999; Smyth, Dilman, Christian & McBride, 2009). The data collection has been conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand and the participants are third-year Political Studies students from the years 2018 and 2019. The participants have consisted of both male and female students, all over the age of 18 years. A purposive sampling method was used when selecting participants (Kothari, 2004; Teddlie & Yu 2007; Tongco, 2007) as this technique relied on the researcher's discretion as to who would be the best candidates to participate in the research. The third-year students have been at the University of the Witwatersrand for a period of approximately three years, in the Political Studies department and therefore it is anticipated that they will be aware and cognizant in political occurrences at the institute. Third-year students from the 2018 group might have a better connection to the

protests as they were in their first year of university when the nude protests took place on campus, whereas, participants from 2019 were only in matric. However, in the age of social media it is likely that they would have some knowledge on the occurrences of these nude protests. Approximately 50 third-year students were approached to be a part of the research and in total feedback was received from 24 of the students who were willing to participate.

3.4.2 Interviews

The questionnaires have been followed by semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2), (Louise Barriball & While, 1994; Sofaer, 1999) using the same pool of selected participants who volunteered to take part in the semi-structured interview to gain a more in-depth understanding of their views and opinions. Kumar (2014) defines an interview as a verbal discussion amongst two or more individuals to investigate data suitable for the research study. A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to add on to already formulated questions in case there is a need for further elaboration and clarity. Out of the 24 participants who agreed to take part in the questionnaires, only two participants were willing to come back and be interviewed for an in-depth perspective. Therefore, only two participants were interviewed in total. The interview was a semi-structured one, which allowed the researcher to hold informal conversation and add more questions as needed throughout the interview. The interview consisted of three main questions and an additional two questions to help build a deeper understanding. The interviews were conducted through video conference call that lasted approximately 10 minutes each. Some challenges faced by conducting the interviews this way was connectivity and making sure participants were audible as the interview was being recorded. This was not a problem with either of the interviews as they ran smoothly. Participants were interviewed once, and both opted to be interviewed through a video conference call as it was the most convenient option for their busy schedules.

3.4.3 Social media

The next form of data collection is in the form of social media through the social media platform Twitter. The aim of collecting tweets was to get an overall sense of the climate on campus as well as the broader perceptions of students on campus. The reason social media forms part of the data is because there was so much conversation that was sparked as a result of the nude protests that it would only be advantageous to the research to include tweets and get a broader understanding how people viewed nudity as a tool in political protests. The first

two means of data collection are aimed at collecting specific information from third-year students at Wits. However, through the collection of tweets, the research aims to gain a broader understanding of the socio-political climate at Wits University, thus linking the social and the political. Twitter was opted for as a third platform because people on social media are often less likely to use a filter over their words and users are viewed as faceless and distant. This way people are more likely to speak their true intentions and perceptions rather than being politically correct. The way in which tweets were selected was by searching two specific hashtags, that of #RUReferenceList which was the first nude protest that took place at Rhodes University in which a list of alleged rapists on campus was released. The second hashtag was #NakedProtest which is linked to the nude protest that took place during Fees Must Fall in which three women bared their breasts as a signal for a ceasefire between protesting students and police officers. Both hashtags were trending during the time of the protest that made them all the more significant. 50 tweets were gathered throughout the data collection process.

3.5 Data analysis

All data from the questionnaires was collected and placed onto a spreadsheet, thereafter the data was organised into tables per question. Lastly, the data from the questionnaire was organised in themes that will be mentioned in Chapter 4. All interviews were transcribed and similarly to the questionnaires, the interviews were organised in tables based on the questions and lastly were organised into themes. The tweets were used as they were; however, they were organised into the themes that fell in accordance with that of the questionnaires and the interviews. To analyse the data, the data collected from the questionnaires was compared to that from the interviews and the data received from social media. The data was processed and organised into themes based on the sub-research questions mentioned in Chapter 1. The data was examined by adopting a thematic method whereby this qualitative analytic method allows the researcher to identify, investigate and report on issues and patterns that have been identified in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). The use of thematic analysis requires interpretation form the research, therefore there was an extensive analysis process whereby the data has been reviewed and refined three times before being presented in the research (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p.10). “The thematic framework allows for coherent aggregation of content”, argues Palmer (2004, p.350). Therefore, according to Palmer (2004, p.350), the collection of data can be open-ended, in that they have the potential to grow and change depending on commitment of resources from collectors.

3.6 Positionality and reflexivity

The research, apart from tweets included, is essentially rooted in how the act of a female-led nude protest is perceived by third-year University of the Witwatersrand students. With this, evidence will be provided regarding the history of female activism and protests as well as discussing the notion of body politics as well as nudity as a whole. Reflexivity is the ability to locate oneself within the research. In doing so, the researcher needs to establish who they are and how their experiences influence how they see the world as well as their decisions and actions, for the research. What is important is understanding why there is a stigma around female nude protests (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017, p.427). According to Malterud (2001, pp.483-484), "a researcher's background and position will affect what they investigate".

This being said, the researcher has been a student at the University of Witwatersrand since 2014 and has encountered many protests. However, the researcher had never witnessed a female nude protest. In 2016 on the 4th of October, under the umbrella of Fees Must Fall a female nude protest against police brutality took place. Earlier that day, the researcher had been on campus and the climate was tense and violence was at an all-time high. Later that afternoon on October 4th, when checking the news and social media, there were stories everywhere talking about the female protesters who went naked. This was the first time the researcher had been exposed to nudity in such a militant context. The researcher was interested in this event as it gave insight into the struggles of women of colour face in their daily experiences, especially the struggle to gain political legitimacy. Aware that nude protest can be a powerful mode of protest, it was wondered if the students witnessing the protest received the desired message in relation to the hyper sexualization of black women's bodies in society. Once again it this question that highlighted the notion of intersectionality and how it is nearly impossible to separate aspects of gender and race from one another.

Positionality is a means of describing an individual's worldview as well as the position they have concerning a specific research task. For Holmes (2014), positionality does not only shape the research, but it also influences its interpretation (Holmes, 2014). As a student, female and a person of colour, how the researcher sees the world differs from that of a male and that of a white person (Moya, 2011). This has made the researcher more conscious of the layers of oppression experienced by women of colour globally but more so women of colour on the African continent. Africa as a continent has faced more adversity and to this day still,

African women face the consequences of decolonisation with regards to patriarchy and white hegemonic feminism.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Application for ethical clearance was submitted to the University of Witwatersrand Humanities faculty and ethical clearance was granted. Participants participated willingly in the study and they were entitled to withdraw from the study at any point in time if they wished to do so, so that they would not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. For ethical reasons, the names of the Twitter account holders will be removed. Confidentiality and anonymity are important in this research as protests are highly sensitive topics and nudity is still seen as an act of public indecency, therefore potential supporters might become victims themselves.

Confidentiality implies that no personal information that has been given by the participants may be shared or made public to anyone but the researcher (Polit & Hungler, 2004). The anonymity of the participants will be protected in this research and there will be no direct links to the participants involved that could reveal their real identity. This research study will achieve this by not using real names or referring to the participants with the use of any personal information (LoBiondo-Wood & Harber, 2002). Thus, confidentiality implies that no personal information of Twitter account holders mentioned in the research will be made available, however, these are tweets that are still available on the app (Polit & Hungler, 2004). Lastly, to guarantee the confidentiality of information gathered, the collected data will be stored on a laptop that will be password protected, and the researcher will be the only person with access.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

"Society is obsessed with women's bodies and I take my body back by doing whatever it is that I want to do with my body."

- **Malebo Sephodi, Miss Behave, 2017**

"We realised the key was to give the naked body back to its rightful owner, to women."

- **Inna Shevchenko, a member of the FEMEN movement, 2013**

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research will be analysed, this will be done by dividing the findings into three themes in which meaning will be assigned to the data and findings through critical analysis. This will be followed by a discussion which will focus on answering the overall and sub-research questions mentioned in Chapter 1. In addition, the findings from the data will be linked to the literature that has been previously discussed in the literature review, in Chapter 2.

The aim of this research was to analyse, describe and explain third-year student perceptions of nudity as a tool within the political protest at a university campus. The research aimed to understand how third-year students at the University of Witwatersrand interpret nudity on a small-scale level, and how these views relate to broader social discourses of the nude female body, particularly those views expressed in popular and social media.

The themes will focus on the definitions of nudity and feminism, the significance of female nudity in protests and the insignificance of the use of female nudity in protests. This will be done by discussing whether nudity is taken seriously in protests, participants' views on how female nudity is perceived in protests, how effective the use of female nudity is in protests and lastly the socio-political impact female nudity has on the university environment.

This research focused on exploring the following three sub-questions:

1. How do third-year students define the notion of nudity?

2. What are students' views on the significance of nudity in protest?

3. What are the socio-political impacts on female nude protests on university culture?

The following sub-questions will be discussed in relation to the themes outlined:

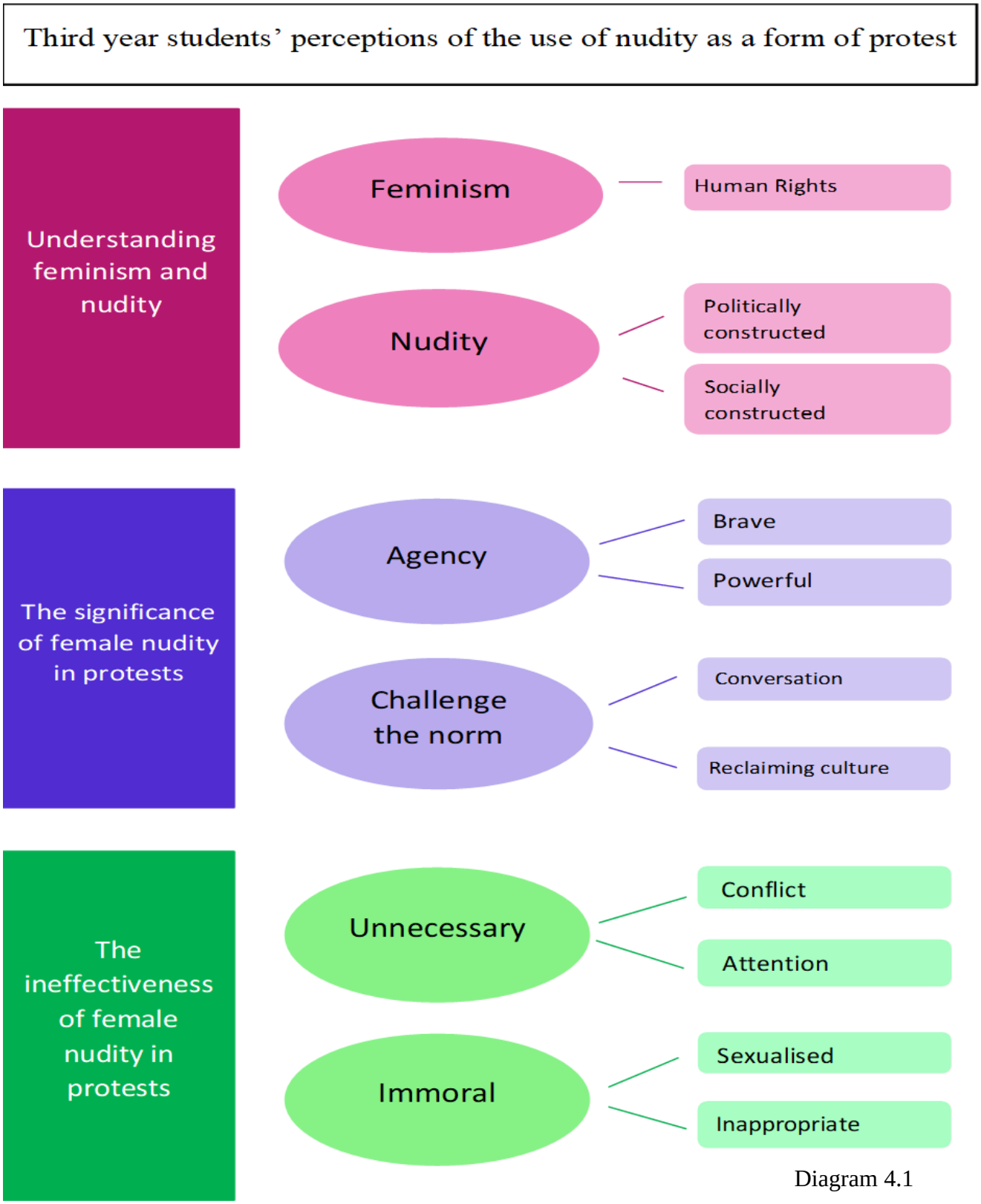

Diagram 4.1

4.2 Participants

The data was collected from three sources: open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and Twitter. Each data source will be discussed in-depth in order to gain an understanding of the biographical information of the participants who have taken part in the research. The methodology chapter discussed how participants were selected through the purposive sampling method (Tongco, 2007), and why purposive sampling was the best method for the study being conducted. The data has been collected from all three sources, but before the findings are discussed, it is important to discuss the third-year students that took part in the research process.

4.2.1 Questionnaires

The open-ended questionnaires were distributed to third-year Political Studies students through a mass email. Approximately 50 students were emailed, however, only 24 students replied with a willingness to participate.

The ages of participants were consistent with that of third-year students. The ages of participants ranged between 20 and 23 years, with the majority of the participants being 21-years-old. The average age of a third-year student is around 21-years-old, however, it is not uncommon to fall within the ages of 20 – 23 years. The majority of the participants who fell under the age of 21 consisted of 11 of the participants, with the second largest group, with seven of the participants, being 20-years-old. Lastly, only five of the 24 participants were over the age of 21, falling into the 22 – 23-years old category. This only accounts for 23 of the participants as there was one participant who did not disclose their age, which makes up the final participant. The ages of participants will be displayed in Diagram 4.2 below.

In order to locate the date collected in the larger context of the research, it is important to know the gender of the participants, therefore, this question was included in the questionnaire. According to the data collected, the majority of the students who participated in the research are female. Nineteen participants identified as being female within the research. The remaining five students who participated in the research identified as being male. Two additional categories were added: these consisted of transgender and non-binary; however, no participants selected these options. A possible reason for the larger number of

female participants could be that the topic of this research resonates more with women than it does with men as feminism is stereotypically for women. On further investigation, through the recorded stats in 2018 on the University of Witwatersrand website, there are 54.64% female students enrolled at the university, compared to the 45.36% males enrolled at the university. In addition, 17.54% of these females are enrolled in the Humanities Department, whereas, only 7.90% of the students enrolled in the Humanities Department are males. It is also important to note that 0.01% of the students enrolled in the Humanities Department have classified themselves as being gender neutral. Based on this statistical information, it could be argued that one would have expected to have more female students participate in this research. This will be displayed in Diagram 4.3.

The last means of biographical information collected for the study is to establish how many of the selected participants have been made aware of protest action on the university campus. According to the data collected, 19 participants were aware of nude protests on campus, while only five participants who were unaware of nude protests on campus. The five participants who were unaware of the protests could have possibly been newly-transferred students from different universities or students who were not interested in the protest actions that took place on campus. Alternatively, these participants could be from the 2019 group who were only in matric around the time of the nude protests, hence their lack of knowledge of the nude protest. Therefore, it could be argued that not all Political Studies students may be interested in the aspect of female nudity in protests, or in protests as a whole.

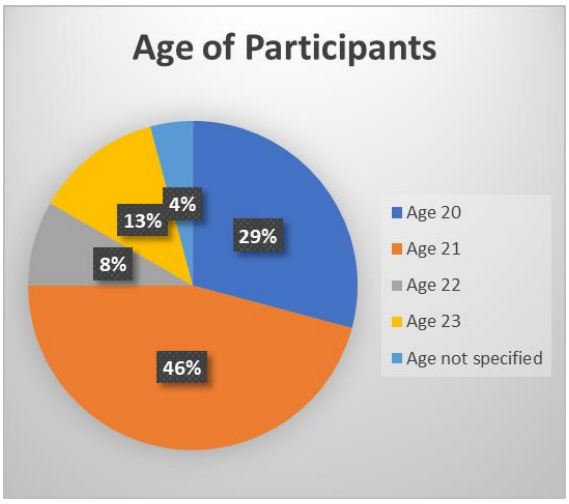

Diagram 4.2: Ages of participants

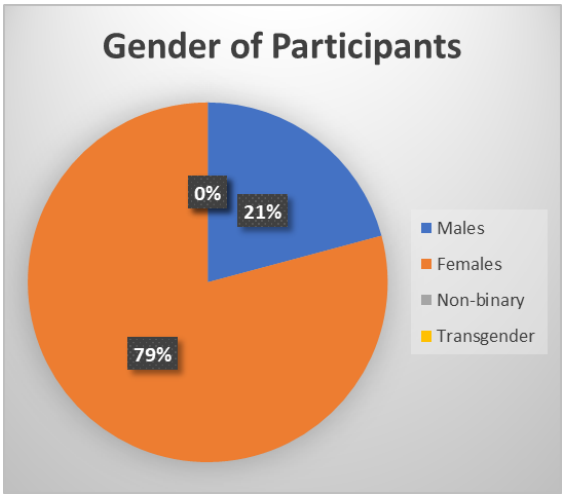

Diagram 4.3: Gender of participants

4.2.2 Interviews

Out of the 24 students who participated in the questionnaires, only two consented to participate in the interview section. Both the participants were 21-years-old, with participant 1 identifying as female and participant 2 identifying as a male. Both participants were aware of the nude protests on campus. One participant was made aware through social media and the other participant was made aware through personally experiencing the nude protest. The interview asked participants whether they have witnessed a nude protest or had any personal exposure to it. Participant 1 and participant 2's answers vary again as participant 1 had never experienced a nude protest personally, limiting their only exposure to social media, namely Twitter. Participant 2 on the other has had first-hand exposure to nude protests at the University of Witwatersrand. Comparing this to the responses collected from the questionnaires it makes sense, as 10 participants answered 'yes' to having personally witnessing a nude protest and the remaining 14 participants answered 'no' to having witnessed nude protests first-hand.

4.2.3 Social media

Conversation was sparked on the popular social media app Twitter after a protest was initiated at Rhodes University. However, this was no ordinary protest as female students used their nude bodies to convey a message. In April of 2016 a list of 11 men's names whom were alleged perpetrators of rape was posted on a Queer Facebook Confessions page in relation to the high levels of rape culture that the university campus faced (Chengeta, 2017 cited in Jimlongo, 2018). Dissatisfied with the lack of response from the Rhodes University management, Thamm (2016 cited in Jimlongo, 2018, p.9) states that "a group of women students began to take off their clothes, resorting to an ancient form of resistance which had been used in Africa for centuries". This sparked the hashtag #RUReferenceList which trended on Twitter, bringing many opinions from different people.

The use of nudity was once again utilised in a student-based protest in the same year at a different university in South Africa. This time the protest took place at the University of the Witwatersrand under the Fees Must Fall umbrella of protests. Three black women spearheaded a protest in which they bared their breasts and stood as a shield between police and protesting students (Ndlovu, 2017, p.68). As a result, social media platform Twitter exploded with the hashtag #NakedProtest.

The tweets used in the research were collected directly from Twitter, which is a public social media app, thus it is impossible to know the ages and genders of each person whose tweets were used for the purpose of the research. It is also unknown whether the Twitter users are all university students. However, at least all tweets included in the research indicate that all the users were aware of the nude protests on university campuses.

This theme will include the data collected from the tweets. This information was collected directly from the social media app, Twitter. This was done through the use of direct screenshots of tweets that were posted on twitter throughout 2016, specifically in the months of April and October when two specific cases of nude protests occurred. The pictures of the screenshots will not be included, however, the amount of retweets and likes each tweet has received has been included as this indicated how many people have either liked or agreed with the tweet posted. Tweets range from one retweet to thousands of retweets, indicating that thousands of people who have come into contact and agree with the content being shared on Twitter. Likes range from one like to thousands of likes, meaning the same thing as the retweets. The tweets will be organised into the themes of significant and insignificant that align with the socio-political impact of female nudity on the university environment.

4.3 Findings

Through the collection and analysis of the data received, certain connections and themes were drawn. The findings section of the analysis will be sorted according to three themes that were established during the data collection process. These themes identified can be linked to the questionnaire as that is where the majority of the source's information was collected from, however, the interviews and tweets used in the data analysis play an important role in authenticating the responses found in all the sources of data. Each theme can be further divided into sub-themes in which the responses will be discussed. The three themes established include definitions that are aimed at understanding the notions of feminism and nudity. The second and third theme discussed the significance and insignificance of the use of nudity within political protests. These themes have discussed whether nudity in protests is taken seriously, participants' views on the use of nudity in protests, the effects of the use of nudity in protests and the socio-political impact of the use of nudity in protests. Diagram 4.1 illustrated each theme that the research has extracted from the data collected by participants

through the use of questionnaires, interviews and social media. The research has filtered out three themes that emerged from the research. These themes are tied to the sub-research question and questions asked in the questionnaire. The themes have discussed and analysed how participants defined both feminism and nudity as this is foundational information for how the rest of the research will be framed. The second theme will analyse participants' views on the significance of the use of nudity in protests. The third theme will discuss participants' views on the insignificance of the use of nudity in protests.

The overarching and main research question is aimed at understanding how third-year university students have perceived the use of nudity as a form of protest. Through the collection of data in the form of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and Twitter the following was revealed. The data exhibited that almost half of the participants were made aware of the nude protest through the use of social media and the remaining participants were made aware of nude protests through personal experience, with the remainder of the participants being unaware of the use of nudity in protests. The majority of the participants replied 'no' when asked whether nude protests are taken seriously, with less than a quarter of the participants stating 'yes' to the question. The remaining half of the participants did not give a direct answer, with a quarter of the participants responding with 'maybe' and the remaining quarter of the participants responding 'unsure' to the same question. Quotes from these participants include "*I do not think that nude protests are taken seriously as there are still a lot of misunderstandings surrounding it*" and "*By women, it is seen as a statement. By men, it is seen as women seeking attention. By society at large, it is seen as a loss in a moral compass*". Taking into consideration all this data, the majority of the participants believe that nude protests are not taken seriously.

4.3.1 Understanding feminism and nudity

The first theme within the research aims to understand participants' understanding of definitions, specifically how they define the notions of feminism and nudity. The notions of feminism and nudity will be discussed separately, however, the analysis will be a cross-section between the questionnaires, interviews and tweets. Diagram 4.1 indicates that the definitions of feminism provided by participants all fell into the human rights category. Essentially this means that the definitions provided by the majority of the participants

advocate for the equality of women. The introduction of equality into the feminist movement became popular during the 1960s and 1970 under the white hegemonic Western form of feminism (Thompson, 2002). However, this form of feminism led to the marginalisation of women of colour as it catered for women of a certain class and race (Thompson, 2002, p.337). There was the introduction of intersectional feminism made by participants, however, it was limited with most participants making reference to equality without fully understanding the history. Within the category of human rights participants associated words like "*equality"* making reference to white hegemonic feminism and "*intersectionality"* making reference to the inclusions of women of colour in their definitions. These definitions discuss different types of feminism, as the word equality can be linked back to the white hegemonic feminism that was prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s, whereas intersectionality can be used when discussing a form of feminism that is inclusive to women of colour. Thus, participants display a good understanding of feminism.

4.3.1.1 Feminism

According to the data, the most common definition of feminism relates to the idea that men and women should be treated equally with the majority of the participants using some variation of this definition. Many of the definitions overlapped and more than one explanation of feminism was provided by each participant. Overall, four participants stated that feminism is women fighting for their rights; four participants also stated that feminism includes intersectionality; and, an additional three participants included fighting the patriarchy as part of how they define feminism. The human rights perspective is best illustrated by participant 21 who is a female who defines feminism as, "*The equality of the sexes, the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of politics, economics and social status*". A similar definition is provided by participant 17 who identifies as female who states that feminism is, "*A philosophy that seeks to achieve social, economic and political equality between the sexes".*

This is a commonly found definition in literature regarding feminism. In the book, *Everyone Should Be A Feminist,* author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014, p.17) writes, "Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes". This highlights the focus on the human rights perspective as other participants stated that "*Feminism is concerned with matters of gender equality*" and "*Pure equality and fairness in*

every regard, among all the sexes". This is also a common theme in literature pertaining to feminism, as it lays claim to the equal treatment of women to that of men.

Unlike the questionnaires, participants in the interviews had more freedom to express themselves verbally and articulate more thoughts on the topic. Similarly, to the questionnaires, both participants used the notion of "*equality*" when defining feminism. However, participant 1 mentions a transition towards intersectional feminism which by definition discusses the cross-section between race and gender within the definition of feminism, stating that one cannot look at gender without taking into consideration ones' race. During the interview, participant 1 stated, "*Feminism for me is just like advocating for equality. Not only for women because I am moving more towards intersectional feminism*". The notion of intersectionality signifies the many ways in which race and gender interrelate to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's experiences (Crenshaw 1989, p.139). This shows forward thinking as the failure to consider intersectionality is the main cause of marginalisation of women of colour within the feminist sphere. This is where the need for Africana womanism became necessary as a critique of a white-centred understanding of feminism, which never addressed the needs of Africana women and the intersectionality of race and gender. For Clenora Hudson-Weems, Africana womanism represents intersectionality as it combines both ethnicity and gender by virtue of being African and woman (Reed, 2001, par.3).

4.3.1.2 Nudity

In Diagram 4.1, the definitions of nudity yielded two sub-themes: that of politically-constructed responses and socially-constructed responses from participants. Each sub-theme contributed different perspectives on the ideas around nudity. The politically-constructed answers mentioned politicly skewed words like '*solidarity'* and '*form of protest'*, with participant 12 who is female responded, "*Nudity is used as a form of protesting in the political sphere mainly as a part of the feminist movement*" and male participant 5 stating that "*In the political sphere, nudity with regards to women would symbolize the solidarity of women as they are making use of their body parts, which essentially are generally recognized as one of the things which women possess*". With reference to participants stating that nudity is a '*form of protest'*, female participant 2 stated, "*Within the political sphere, I would define nudity as the use of one's naked body in order to make a political statement*". When analysing

the tweets, one user writes, "*protesting whilst naked simply means, a peaceful protest*". This relates to the responses found in the questionnaire, as participants did not mention violence being incited as a direct reason of the protests. The aim of the nude protest according to Ndlovu (2017) was a display of women bared their breasts and acting as a shield between police and protesting students. During the interview, while defining nudity in the political sphere, participant 1 stated, "*a political tool or like it's also used to reclaim your body as a woman*".

Kenneth Clark makes the distinction between nakedness and nudity, stating that the word nudity was forced into our vocabulary in the early 18th Century (Clark, 1969). To be naked is to be deprived of clothes, and the word carries a negative association of humiliation, whereas the word nude, carries a literate usage (Clark, 1969; Berger, 1972). This notion is reiterated by author John Berger who argues that the naked body has to be seen as an object in order to be nude. In a sense, this brings forward the construction of sexual objectification (Berger, 1972). Thus, the notion that "nudity entails a level of sexual objectification" and nakedness can refer to the body without clothes, (Berger 1972, p.52).

According to Cover (2003, p. 56), nakedness in contemporary western culture, is a relationship between an unclothed body and the gaze of others, is variously legitimated through contexts of representation. Nakedness is filled with multiple, context-bound, historically specific meanings (Bordo, 1999; Cover, 2003).

The definitions of nudity provided by Clark and Berger highlight that the connotation of the idea of humiliation is as an underlying factor when understanding the use of nudity within a social setting. These definitions provided analyse nudity within a socially-constructed context where the act of nudity is associated through the lens of humiliation, and sexual objectification. This creates a private-public dichotomy in which nudity according to society should remain in the private sphere rather than be displayed in the public sphere. Third-year students who served as a sample of a larger society agree with the information provided by Clark and Berger as these participants respond to the notion of nudity within the public protests as being 'indecency'. With specific reference to female-identifying participant 19 who stated that, *"... Nudity is when you have 'indecent exposure"*". Other participants, including participants 10 and 8 who are female- and male-identifying, respectively, stated that it was "*Inappropriate*" and "*Indecent and unprofessional*" respectively, with female-

identifying participant 7 making the claim that, "*Nudity within the political sphere is inappropriate and unprofessional*". This helps the research understand that the idea of nudity is still bound by social contexts rather than an individual's agency within the larger society. Essentially this makes these so-called defiant acts harder to accomplish as society disapproves and there are consequences.

With regards to the socially-constructed definitions of nudity, participants felt that these definitions 'portray[ed] a message' with participant 11 who identifies as male stating that, "*Nudity is used as a message of bringing awareness and ending subjectivity*". Participant 13 who identifies as female expanded by defining nudity as "*A statement to address rape culture or any atrocity linked to one's body*". This is backed up by participant 15 who identifies as female who said, "*Nudity is used as a political tool to either raise awareness of response from particular repression*" as well as participant 21 who identifies as female who said nudity is "*A tactic that is used during a protest to attract media and public attention to a certain cause or to promote something*". All the definitions used by participants mention awareness on a larger scale as a means of getting the message of the protests to a larger audience. One participant mentioned that it is seen as a statement to address rape culture, which is exactly what the #NakedProtest was aimed at.

When collecting data from the interview, participants were asked how they perceive the use of nudity in university protests. The participants' answers vary again, as participant 1 believes that it is a show of vulnerability in front of other people as a means to reclaim a woman's body, whereas participant 2 understands it as something that is indecent and still regarded as a crime. Yet again this coincides with the responses yielded in the questionnaire as out of the 24 participants, 13 stated that the use of nudity within political protests can be regarded as something "*powerful*" and "*courageous*" on the part of the women involved. Six participants are of the view that nudity in protests are somewhat "*unnecessary*" and even "*inappropriate*". Five participants believe that it is a ploy to "grab attention" and purely for "shock value".

Overall, when defining feminism, the majority of the participants made reference to the notion that feminism should be centred around the ideas of equality for all, with approximately 20 participants agreeing on this. With regards to how participants defined nudity, participants' responses were divided into two categories that consisted of politically-constructed definitions and socially-constructed definitions. Fifteen of the 24 participants

responses were categorised as being politically constructed and the remaining nine participants responses being socially constructed.

4.3.2 Significance

The second theme identified analyses the significance of the use of female nudity in protests according to third-year students. This can be linked to second the sub-research question that centres around questions that were posed in the questionnaire that participants answered. This can be linked back to Sultana (2013, p.5) who in the literature review states that the female body can be regarded as a site for resistance and in some cases a place where confrontation takes place. During this process, power can be reclaimed form the humiliator. Exposing oneself by "bearing it" is how women are able to reclaim power over their bodies (Sultana, 2013, p.5).

This related to the actions taken by protestors and is reflected by the responses received from participants. This theme is divided into two sub-themes which include that of the protestors their using agency or protestors challenging the norm. The agency aspect analyses participants' views around the notion that protestors can be regarded as being "*powerful*" and "*courageous*". The challenging the norm theme focuses on aspects around participants being able to start a "*conversation*", and "*reclaiming culture*" within the university. This introduces paradoxes in the notion of the female body. Sutton (2007 cited in Sultana, 2013, p.5) states that it is acceptable to turn female bodies into sexual objects, but naked bodies used as a tool for resistance will lead to social outrage and violent punishment. This can be seen in the way society is structured as women who show cleavage and parade in lingerie are regarded as appropriate as it feeds into the narrative of sexual objectification and being submissive (Bartky, 1990). Whereas women who bare their breasts while exposing their nipples are use their nudity in a desexualised manner thus straying from the male gaze narrative that displays agency (Young, 2005). Essentially, the responses received by participants speak to this argument of women using their nude bodies as a form of empowerment thus gaining back their agency and challenging the norm surrounding the use of women's bodies.

4.3.2.1 Agency

In the context of protests, the act of nudity is not just about the lack of clothing but rather the act of purposefully and willingly getting naked as a means of showing strength through vulnerability (Brownie 2014, para.3). The purposefulness of being naked speaks volumes as it displays a certain strength while simultaneously being vulnerable. "Though human bodies can be humiliated, they can also be re-signified to humiliate the humiliator." This quote by Menrad (2019, para.3) reiterates the above statement about strength and vulnerability. This is reflected in quotes by participants who stated that, "*It has power as womxn who protest naked are disarmed*" and "*I think it is very powerful and brave*" and "*I respect such courage to use the freedom of expression to full force*". Participant 3 who identifies as a female stated that, "*I think it is a commendable form of protest because it requires a great deal of bravery and courage to participate in*". Participant 15 who identifies as a female claimed, "*I think that it can be strategic because I think there is a kind of power where women take ownership of how their bodies*". This response can be linked back to the argument set forward by Young (2005) in which the desexualisation of women's bodies creates ownership on the part of the female rather than the male. When analysing the tweets, one user stated that "*The naked body represents vulnerability and strength and being disarmed yet empowered"* which fully summarises the message the literature is trying to argue. For Sutton (2007, cited in Sultana, 2013, p.5), it is acceptable to turn female bodies into sexual objects, however, utilising naked bodies as a tool for resistance will lead to social outrage and violent punishment.

This theme encompasses responses that centre on notions of "*expression*" and "*empowering*" as well. Participant 11 who identifies as a male responded by stating "*I feel as if it used to express one's oppression*" as well as participant 1 who identifies as a female stating, "*Female nudity as a form of protest is empowering when the womxn has chosen to do it herself*" and participant 11 who identifies as male saying, "*I feel it was a way for students to express their feelings of oppression and subjectivity*". Lastly, participant 16 who identifies as female stated, "*I respect such courage to use the freedom of expression to full force*".

This message can also be seen in the tweets retrieved, with a user writing, "*I fully support #RUReferenceList and #NakedProtest. Empowering women to rise up against oppression and violence on their bodies*", with another stating "*#Wits has me in actual tears. The power of a naked protest, students refusing to back down despite police brutality. I'm sad and proud at once*", and lastly one Twitter user writes, "*The naked body represents vulnerability and strength, and being disarmed yet empowered*". These tweets can be connected to the

argument set forward by Harcourt and Escobar (2002, p.8), who understand that a woman's body is the first place in which political struggle is engaged. This speaks directly to the contrasting ideas of strength and vulnerability displayed in the use of female nudity in protests. According to Harcourt and Escobar (2002, p.8), weight needs to be placed on political action taken by women in order to be heard in a "male-dominated" society where woman is easily labelled the "other" (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002, p.8). Pravin Sultana's (2013) article, "Nakedness and Resistance", discusses cases where naked bodies have operated as places of resistance. The role of the female body is symbolic of the body politic. According to Sultana (2013, p.6), political protests take place though the use of one's body, from marches to acts of chaining one's body to a tree, the body is the foundational mode in which protests take place. Therefore, Sultana (2013, p.6) states that the body expresses political meaning. However, for Sutton (2007 cited in Sultana, 2013, p.7), nude protests are easily misconstrued and essentially reduced to something sexual and thus for the enjoyment of men. The notion of using ones' nude body as a means of conveying a message is taken out of context and because of social norms the female body is further subjected to being hyper-sexualised. This will be discussed further below, when participants refer to how nudity in political protests reflect immorality.

4.3.2.2 Challenge the norm

Most participants state that these protests have the ability to challenge the norm and start a conversation as seen in this quote by participant 3 who identifies as a female, "*I think they challenge them because they challenge the norm*". Participant 6 who identifies as a female stated, "*It makes an impact, historical moments like those have the potential to positively affect change in a university space, especially with regards to rape culture*". Participant 18 who identifies as a female stated that, "*It sparks conversation around the 'conduct' acceptable in protests*" as well as participant 12 who identifies as a female who stated, "*I think it draws a lot of attention and seems to push and challenges the boundaries of what is seen as the norm*". Participant 9 who identifies as a female references the idea of nude protests starting a conversation by saying, "*I think it starts conversations and debates about the larger societal and systematic issues which women face*".

The article, "Naked Protests: A Tool of Feminism" Menrad (2019, para.11), illustrates both the negative and positive aspects of nude protests regarding the strength and vulnerability as

well as the action of grabbing attention. We see responses that reflect that negative aspect that Menrad (2019) mentions in the form of grabbing attention, yet onlookers not being able to retain the message being portrayed in the protest. But there are also positive responses that state that there is a message to be understood and the naked bodies are meant to be a nonsexual entity, a means of conveying a message or at the least starting a conversation. For Menrad (2019, para.11), women who protest nude should be able to "used their naked bodies to attract attention in a nonsexual yet provocative way to regain power".

On the spectrum of the significance of the nudity, the tweets have been divided into 'empowering/courageous', 'anti-sexualisation', 'neutral' and 'conversation starter'. Under the 'empowering' bracket, tweeters are in full support of the nude protests, applauding the protestors for their bravery and courage. One tweet stated, "*SALUTE to our sisters who took part in the #NakedProtest*". The anti-sexualisation category is the largest and is a direct response to the sexist and male gaze tweets that discuss the purpose of the nude protests being pleasurable for men rather than conveying an important political message. Tweets include, "*if your primary concern about the Rhodes University #NakedProtest is the fact that women are naked, you're part of the problem*" and "*people are more bothered by seeing naked breasts than by knowing rapists are walking around Scott free? Disgusting!*!". The general category consists of general responses to the nude protests, which include, "*if you don't understand/see the point of the naked protests, please do not say anything negative*" and "*protesting whilst naked simply means, a peaceful protest*". The last category labelled 'conversation starter' is aimed at the thought-provoking tweets that could be discussed in length if ever brought up in conversation. One tweet in particular read, "*reading up on naked protests historically, dates back to anti-colonial demonstrations in Africa. School yourself*".

Overall, the theme of the significance of the protests revealed that there is a great deal of potential for the use of nudity in protests. The responses collected from participants indicated that only three participants believed that nudity in protests is taken seriously. The sub-theme of 'challenging the norm' holds the idea that the use of nudity in protests has the ability to start a conversation and spark the notion of reclaiming the university culture, which is regarded as a space that allows free flowing thoughts and actions. While the sub-theme of 'agency' discusses how participants view the nude protesters in terms of showing bravery and power in their vulnerable actions. This perception resonates with Menrad's (2019) argument that nudity reveals the strength in vulnerability. This is supported by the data collected by the

participants as 14 of the 24 participants made reference to the use of nudity in protests either starting a conversation or challenging the norm. However, the constructive responses discussed surface level information commenting on the bravery and courage of women and their ability to strip naked for a cause rather than discussing the significance of the message behind the nude protest.

4.3.3 Ineffective

The last theme analyses the participants' views on the insignificance of the use of female nudity in protests. This is done by discussing questions centred around whether nudity is taken seriously in protests, participants' views on the use of nudity in protests, and third-year students' views on the impact of female nudity within the socio-political sphere. These are questions pulled directly from the questionnaire and the interviews, thus the responses from participants will be drawn from these two data sources. The theme of 'ineffective' regarding female nudity can further be sub-divided into two sub-themes. These sub-themes discuss participants who are strongly of the view that the use of nudity in protests is something that should be regarded as immoral, with participants citing specific words like "*sexualised*" and "*inappropriate*" as justification for their responses. The second sub-theme discusses participants who believe that the use of nudity in protests can be regarded as unnecessary, with participants using words like "*conflict*" and "*attention-seeking*" as the main rationale why this form of protest is deemed as being 'ineffective'.

4.3.3.1 Unnecessary

Through analysis of the data, participants made use of words that centred around the use of nudity in protests as being a cause "*conflict*" or being for the sake of grabbing "*attention*". The idea that nude protests hold no impact on the greater scheme of university culture can be seen in the responses by some of the participants, including participant 23 who identifies as a female who stated, "*I think it's shameful for the university*". Rather than discussing the significance of the protest, the participant is fixated on the shame it will cause the university. Other participants focused on the potential "*conflict*" that could be caused with participant 8 who identifies as a male stating, "*There would be debates among people that support the normative culture and modern feminists who have their ideas of why being nude helps the course*". Participant 10 who identifies as a female goes into detail stating, "*I think it would create conflict among pro-feminists and anti-feminists in the effect that the nudity would have*

on people". White hegemonic feminism, according to Thompson (2002, p.337) is white led, marginalising the efforts, struggles and worldviews of women of colour, it centres primarily around the United States, and treats sexism as the ultimate and only form of oppression. "Hegemonic feminism" de-emphasises and disregards class and race dichotomy, and "generally sees equality with men as the goal of feminism, and has an individual rights-based, rather than a justice-based vision for social change" (Thompson, 2002, p.337). Even though this version of feminism is not consciously "*anti-feminist*", it still marginalises the struggles faced by women of a different race and income class. This statement could also account for the ideals of more radical feminists in comparison to feminists who practice a more conservative form of advocating for equality.

Other participants were unsure of the significance the nude protests hold on the socio-political university environment and hold the notion that nude protests have no significance. Participant 17 who identifies as a female displayed uncertainty by responding "*I do not know*" and participant 20 who identifies as a female wrote, "Difficulty understanding the question, sorry". However, participant 1 who identifies as a female goes into detail stating, "*I am not sure if it plays a significant role in affecting the socio-political surroundings*".

With regard to how participants perceived the use of nudity in protest within the sub-theme of 'unnecessary' a common phrase used was that of nudity being something used for its "*attention-seeking*" value. Participant 13 who identifies as a female claimed, "*I think society views it as something dirty and unnecessary*" with participant 23 who identifies as a female stating, "*People view that shock value".* Participant 17 who identifies as a female goes further into detail by including aspects of the sexualisation of women by saying "*I think people are surprised by it, but I also think that people enjoy it. Especially, men".* When analysing the interviews, participant 2 who identifies as female goes into detail and stated, "*…it grabs your attention… But I feel like it won't get them far because a lot of people are going to shut them down and they're going to be like its unethical, it's not right. Because public indecency is still a crime"*. On social media, one Twitter user wrote, "*why get naked during the fees must fall protest? Was that a protest or a strip club? Those girls can't think*". This perception speaks to the argument in the literature on the topic of nude female protests which discusses how women have been socially constructed as being weaker through such processes of socialisation when they are not (Wollstonecraft, 1792). Notions that women are better suited for domestic tasks and reproductive labour are subverted through women's use of their nude bodies as tools of political protest. This is reflected when the participant above

mentions '*society'* and how as a whole nude protests are viewed as unnecessary. We have been conditioned into gender roles that perpetuate a woman's place in the private. The literature is critical of the notion that these protests have no impact as these protests are a step forward for women in gaining equality (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

With the idea that participants believed that nudity in protests is a ploy for attention on the side of the protests, there were participants whose responses displayed that a large portion of the protests and onlookers misinterpret the use of nudity in protests on the whole. Participant 1 who identifies as a female stated, "*Female nudity is often misunderstood in protest*" while participant 15 who identifies as female went into detail and stated, "*People who might not understand the use of nudity as a political tool might see it as being disrespectful*". One Twitter user wrote, "*If you don't understand/see the point of the naked protest, please do not say anything negative*", with another stating, "*I wish someone would explain how the naked protest works in regard to the fees must fall*". Another Twitter user wrote, "*People are more worried about seeing breasts than knowing rapists are walking around Scott free? Disgusting!!!*". According to Bartky (1990), sexual objectification refers to the separation of the body from an individual's personality, thus these bodily characteristics are condensed to sheer devices to gratify the requirement and wishes of other people, thus their dehumanisation (cited in Schmidt & Kistemaker, 2015, p.3). However, the role of the female body is symbolic of the body politic. Sultana (2013, p.4) writes that the female body is often associated with the "nation" or "motherland", which should never be dishonoured.

4.3.3.2 Immoral

The next sub-theme focuses around the notion that participants believed that the use of nudity in protests reflected a sense of immorality. Within this sub-theme participants made use of words like "*inappropriate*" and "*sexualised*" to justify their responses. In recent history Murori (2016, para.16) claims that naked protests date back to the 1929 nude protest that took place in Nigeria. Decades later, Murori (2016, para.1) states that nude protests continue to shape the African continent and global context. By asking participants to discuss the significance of female nudity in protests the research hoped to gain a more nuanced view of the significance of female nudity from the perspective of university students.

Most responses included views that claimed the actual act of nudity took away from the message of the protests and distracted the onlookers. This is illustrated in the following quote

by participant 10 who identifies as a female, "*I believe that it takes away from the message and that it is inappropriate, and nudity is not yet something that is "normal" in society*". Participant 12 who identifies as a female responded to the question by stating "*I think people see this form of protest as unnecessary and they would think women partaking in these protests were just seeking attention*", and participant 13 who identifies as a female stating that nudity in protests is a "*Dirty and unnecessary form of protest*".

The second word that stood out was that of '*sexualised'* in the sense that these protests are sexualised by onlookers. Participant 22 who identifies as a male simply stated, "*They are sexualized*", with participant 6 who identifies as a female going into more detail stating, "*I am unsure whether these kinds of protests are taken seriously because sexual misconduct still takes place*" and participant 16 who identifies as a female stating that, "*Patriarchy is so embedded within our society that the male gaze only focuses on sexualizing the women's body*". These quotes reiterate what is said by Sultana (2013) who claims that to date women's bodies are still heavily sexualised in movies, in adverts, music videos, in television and social media. This again is evident in social media when analysing tweets. Twitter users responded to the protests by calling out the norms society places on women's bodies. Tweets stated, "*The sexualisation of the #NakedProtest just goes to show how absolutely disgusting men are and this is why the protests is necessary*" and "*Women are fighting for their lives and dignity and men continue to sexualise them*". The male gaze is described as being a "sexual imbalance" between men and women with men holding dominance in this situation (Mulvey, 1975, p.62). Mulvey states that the male gaze is a means of projecting an ideal of the female figure that plays on or justifies male desire (Mulvey, 1975, p.62). This dominance can be felt in the manner in which these tweets are written.

The interview then asked participants about their opinions of the effects of the use of nudity in university protests. Unlike the previous question, the participants' answers align to a certain degree in the sense that both participants believe that these protests gain attention and ultimately lead to the awareness of bystanders. Participant 1 stated that "*I mean it might be successful in getting attention to convey your message but it's not, we don't have much impact even when using our bodies*" and participant 2 stated that "*it reaches more eyes, and ears and people become more aware of it*". However, both participants acknowledge the negative aspects of nude protests as participant 1 talking about the protestor's bodies and how "*their*

naked bodies are dragged into police vans" whereas, participant 2 stated that "*it's bad in the sense that it's not ethical*".

The tweets hold the idea that the use of nudity is insignificant as many users believe that the protestors have been sexualised and their bodies are for the male gaze. General criticism includes questioning the protestors' sanity and motivations behind the protests. Some question the cause for the protest entirely out of ignorance. One Twitter user stated that "*women in this country have to resort to a naked protest to draw attention…is really sad".* The male gaze / male sexualisation category includes tweets which sexually objectify the bodies of nude protestors for the enjoyment of male onlookers. Tweets in this category include "*men turning this #nakedprotest into something sexual & for their enjoyment is exactly why what is happening at RU is so important*" and "*men sexualising women participating in the #nakedprotest is proof that there is a deep-rooted problem on our society*".

Through the first analysis, there are more positive responses to the nude protests than there were negative responses. However, through a further analysis, the negative comments and responses given by participants were overwhelming as seen in the overall analysis of the data collected with nine of the 24 participants who replied 'no' to the question of whether nude protests are taken seriously whereas only three of the participants replied 'yes' and the remaining 12 participants either replied 'maybe' or 'unsure', with the comments leaning towards the negative responses. The positive responses given by participants discussed surface level information commenting on the bravery and courage of women and their ability to strip naked for a cause, many of those who supported the nude protests did not discuss the significance of the message behind the nude protest. Whereas, the negative responses discuss societal stigma, with participants often making reference to the larger society and its norms and values. The negative responses also reinforce the notion of sexualising the female body through patriarchal structures such as sexual objectification and the male gaze, which were focal points that were discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Participants continued to focus on notions around conflict and the use of nudity being unnecessary within the political sphere of the university environment. The 'ineffective' theme makes the claim that nude protests cause conflict between opposing groups and ultimately has little to no effect on the overall university culture. The 'significant' theme on the other hand, makes the claim that the use of nudity in protests is a means of starting a

conversation while simultaneously challenging the norm. This belief is supported by the literature as there is strength in vulnerability, according to Menrad (2019). This is supported by the data collected by the participants as 14 of the 24 participants made reference to the use of nudity in protests for either starting a conversation or challenging gender norms.

Overall, participants believed that the use of nudity in protests holds no significance in the larger scheme, with participant 2 who identifies as a female stating, "*Politically and socially think using female nudity has a minimal effect*". With participant 1 in the interview elaborated by saying "*I mean it might be successful in getting attention to convey your message but it's not, we don't have much impact even when using our bodies*".

4.4 Third year students' perception of the use of female nudity as a form of protest.

Throughout the analysis process there have been many contrasting responses from all sources of data collection points, however, it is clear that the majority of the participants are well informed at an academic and social level on this topic holistically. Participants had good knowledge of the definitions, giving a range of explanations on feminism and nudity, which ultimately laid the foundation for the rest of the responses. With regard to the significance of the use of nudity on protests, participants' responses leaned toward the reflection of agency and a sense of nudity in protests challenging the norms set by the larger society. With regards to challenging the norm, participants stated that overall, the use of nudity in protests started a conversation within the university which lead the larger society being made aware and overall could lead to the decrease in stigma placed against women using their naked bodies as a tool within political protests. The theme of 'ineffective' discussed by participants centres around participants feeling a sense of immorality and an overall feeling of using nudity in protests as being unnecessary, with a large portion of the participants stating that nudity in protests is inappropriate and sexualised and some participants even blame the protests on additional conflict and causing the wring type of attention.

The replies varied and overlapped on many occasions. However, overall, seven of the participants perceived nude protests as being for the male gaze or in relation to male dominance or hyper sexualisation. The majority of 11 participants understood nudity in

protests as either being something dirty, inappropriate, or unnecessary and even sexual. Five of the participants understood nude protests as being a ploy for attention or for shock value, with another seven participants that make the claim that society as a whole misinterpret nude protests, and, lastly, six of the 24 participants viewed nude protests as a display of expression

Chapter 5: Conclusion

"Feminism is for everybody."

- **Bell Hooks, 2000**

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter utilised the data received from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and the tweets received from social media, which has been substantiated by literature that centres on themes of feminism, nudity and protests. In this chapter, a brief overview of the entire research will be presented. This chapter will summarise the core findings of the research, present a brief outline of each chapter and discuss recommendations and limitations of the study.

5.2 Overview of research

The research investigation was aimed at analysing how third-year students perceive female nude protests and the use of nudity in female protests. Therefore, the notion of nudity was examined in how women use their bodies as an instrument to fight social injustices including rape culture and police brutality. This was achieved through the use of a qualitative research design and a feminist framework. The research made use of questionnaires, interviews and social media in the form of Twitter as data collection tools that were analysed and grouped into themes. The research relied on the overarching research question when asked how third-year university students have perceived the use of nudity as a form of protest.

Overall, the majority of the participants replied ‘no’ when asked whether nude protests are taken seriously. As the participants were third-year Political Studies students, an assumption was made that the participants would see the significance of the use of nudity in protests. However, even though the majority of the participants replied ‘no’ to nude protests being taken seriously, half of the participants replied either ‘maybe’ or ‘unsure' to the same question, leaving room for speculation that participants were just not well versed on the topic of nude protests as it is not a form of protest that is seen regularly, leading to the belief that it is a new phenomenon. That assumption can be seen when the question of whether participants were aware of nude protests taking place on campus and a quarter of the

participants replied that they were unaware of the nude protests that had taken place. This can be seen once again when the questionnaire asked the question of whether participants had personally witnessed a nude protest and the majority of the participants replied 'no'.

This goes against the finding presented in the literature review, as Harcourt and Escobar (2002, p.8) explain that a woman's body is the first site for political struggle as she regains autonomy over her sexual and reproductive rights and fights against violence and sexual oppression. However, the responses received indicate that many of the participants believed that the use of nudity in protests can be understood as either being something dirty, inappropriate, dirty or unnecessary and even sexual, with other participants believing that female nudity in protests is for the male gaze or in relation to male dominance or hyper sexualisation of women, specifically women of colour. This is linked to the literature review in which Berger (1972, p.52) states that the idea of nudity is linked directly to that of sexual objectification through the connotations placed on nudity by society. Unfortunately, sexual objectification can present itself in many forms and through many mediums such as social media, television and movies that we are exposed to on a daily basis. For Sultana (2013) this level of sexual objectification unconsciously makes the female body a site for humiliation as male dominance is asserted over the female, rather than women having agency and autonomy over their own bodies. However, the use of nudity in protests can be seen as many participants responded to the notion of the use of female nudity in protest stating that the protests as a whole were highly misinterpreted by society. Many of these participants stated that the use of nudity in protests is a display of expression and power and displaying a sense of empowerment.

Throughout the analysis process there have been many contrasting responses from all sources of data collection points, however, it is clear that the majority of the participants are well informed at an academic and social level on this topic holistically. Participants had good knowledge of the definitions, giving a range of explanations on feminism and nudity, which ultimately laid the foundation for the rest of the responses. With regard to the significance of the use of nudity on protests, participants' responses leaned toward the reflection of agency and a sense of nudity in protests challenging the norms set by the larger society. With regards to challenging the norm, participants stated that overall, the use of nudity in protests started a conversation within the university which led the larger society to being made aware and overall could lead to the decrease in stigma placed against women using their naked bodies as

a tool within political protests. The theme of 'ineffective' discussed by participants centres around participants feeling that using nudity in protests is unnecessary and immoral, with a large portion of the participants stating that nudity in protests is inappropriate and sexualised and some participants even blaming the protests on additional conflict and causing the wrong type of attention.

5.3 Significance of findings

When considering the data collected from the questionnaires, interviews and use of social media, and through analysis, three main themes were extracted from the research data. The first theme discusses the definitions received from participants, specifically focusing on that of feminism and nudity. The definitions provided by participants align with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 making reference to many authors. The definition of feminism provided by the majority of the participants correlate with that of white hegemonic feminism, which unconsciously promotes equality for women of a specific race and social class that gained popularity in the 1960s and 1970s (Thompson, 2002). A few of the participants referenced intersectional feminism which goes one step further and advocates for the equality of all women regardless of race, class and sex (Hudson-Weems & Sofala, 1995). This evolved form of feminism was intended to give women of colour a larger platform in order to voice their grievances. This form of feminism was labeled as womanism by black feminist author, Alice Walker (1983). However, a form of feminism that was not mentioned was that of Africana Womanism, which focuses specifically on the way race and gender intersect in the lives of women of African descent as this theory is grounded in African culture (Reed, 2001). Regarding the nature of the study, the paradigm of Africana Womanism is the most accurate when dissecting the notion of feminism.

The notion of nudity was a straightforward concept which all of the participants understood, with participants either categorising the use of female nudity in protests as something socially constructed or something politically constructed. Regardless, the majority of the definitions provided speak to nudity as a stripping down or the baring of one's breasts. This coincides with the definition provided by Clark who states in its simplest form that to be naked is to be deprived of clothes. However, for Clark, similarly to that of Sultana (2013), the word 'naked' carries a negative connotation with that of humiliation, which is a connection that the majority of the participants did not make. This notion is reiterated by Berger (1972) who argues that the naked body has to be seen as an object in order to be nude. Thus, the

construction of sexually objectifying women's bodies is created, reducing women to objects for sexual pleasure rather than beings with a sense of agency (Berger, 1972).

Society as an institution is a male dominated structure according to Sultana (2013), however, we can go one step further and say that society is a very white colonial male dominated space, in which intersectionality has not been fully expressed. Women's agency over their bodies is highly constrained, therefore when women use their naked bodies as a form of protest, Sultana (2013, p.5) states that it leads to social outrage and often violent punishment. Thus, this study was conducted as a way to collect data on this specific topic while shedding light on gender issues. The data was collected through the distribution of questionnaires to third-year Political Studies students, conducting interviews and the use of social media. Participants were selected specifically because of their knowledge on multiple topics within the political sphere, including feminism and protests. However, after collecting and analysing the data, students' responses reflected that there was good knowledge on a social basis rather than an academic basis; meaning that participants knew the generic form of feminism that is socially accepted as it is easy to explain and for others to digest, rather than analytically understanding the different forms of feminism and their nuances that are discussed within academic circles. Socially, we as a society are exposed to many stereotypes that are easily misconstrued as being facts, whereas academia is based on concrete knowledge that is rooted in evidence. Students base their knowledge on social interaction and in this case, participants were socially aware of the use of nudity in protests, which from an onlooker's perspective could be misconstrued as angry black women stripping down to expose their naked bodies. This further feeds into stereotypes presented by society, rather than looking past the social aspect and trying to understand the academic side and political side, which entails women using their naked bodies as a tool to portray a message or statement regarding issues that students face.

This reflection of immorality is discussed in the third theme, which analyses the theme of 'ineffective' discussed by participants when analysing the use of nudity in protests. The perception of immorality shed light on responses that included notions of nudity in protests being inappropriate, sexualised, attention-seeking and even misinterpreted. However, the immorality discourse has been a tool in the controlling of women and their agency to make decisions about their own bodies. This spectrum of responses can be noted in the third theme again when discussing the insignificance of nude female protests within the socio-political

sphere of female nudity on the university environment. Common notions that appeared in the data analysis were that nudity in protests are for the purpose of attention, are inappropriate and sexualised and cause conflict. This reflects the idea that women remain powerless in a male dominated society where women have no control over their own bodies. However, according to Harcourt and Escobar (2002, p.8), a woman's body is regarded as the location for many political struggles. The idea of women having no control over their bodies is reiterated by Iris Marian Young (2015) who references a female's breast. In a male dominated society, a female's breast is not regarded as her own as it becomes the property of others, including her husbands, lovers and over her babies. On the opposite spectrum, the second theme of 'significant' was drawn out through the analysing of data collected by participants, which mentioned ideas around the use of nudity in protests starting a conversation, challenging the norm. This helped offset the notion that the use of nudity in protests are completely insignificant as it is a form of protest that is still finding its place in the larger societal context. This is not the first time in history that nudity in political protests has been used and it will not be the last time. This is evident as Murori (2016, para.16) dates a nude protest that took place in Nigeria back to 1929. This is a form of protest that is set to take the world on and dominate. Overall, participants failed to see the larger picture and the message behind the use of nudity in protests as a show of strength through vulnerability. Rather the focus was placed on the immoral aspects focusing on the sexualisation of the female body. Third-year Political Studies students are indicative of the political body on a larger scale within society. Thus, on a micro level the responses received from the participants can provide insight into broader societal perceptions on a macro level. On a larger scale, society as a whole dictates the norms that govern the individual person and as an individual you are forced to conform or be ridiculed or shamed for your actions. This can be seen in the case of the nude protestors who are ridiculed for exposing their bodies in a public space. The act of protest is performed through the use of one's body, so what is the difference between a body that is clothed and a body that is not? Why are women praised and sexualised for baring their bodies in lingerie but when women expose their nipples it becomes disgusting? Why are male nipples and female nipples regarded as being different by society? These questions raise the contradictory dimensions of regulation that uphold systems of gender policing.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

In terms of the research, including the views from first-, second- and third-year Political Studies students on the use of nudity as a form of protest will provide a holistic understanding of how students perceive the use of nudity in protests. Another way to expand on this research is to get the views from all students rather than focusing on Political Studies students, as these protests affect all students attending university and therefore, they must have an opinion regarding the matter. Lastly, to expand on this research, gaining the views of students from other universities could bring a new perspective. As mentioned, the research only focuses on one university – the University of the Witwatersrand. However, these protests were not isolated to only the University, therefore, gaining insight on the views of other students from different universities could introduce a wider perspective.

In terms of the larger debate, we need to understand why women globally are forced to resort to using their nude bodies as a means of conveying a message. Maybe it is because conventional means of being heard are not working, thus their last resort is stripping down and becoming vulnerable. As a society, we need to implement better strategies within university campuses to raise awareness and fight against the destruction of women, in the form of rape, gender-based violence and femicide. In essence this is dealing with the root of the problem which is a lack of information and a support system surrounding regarding gender-based issues rather than dealing with the strategies women are using as a defense mechanism to be heard in a male dominated society.

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Appendix 1 : Questionnaire

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Female Nakedness and Political Protests: Analysing Female Nudity Within University Protests

THIS IS A CONFIDENDIAL DOCUMENT

October 2018

INSTRUCTIONS: Please place an (x) in the appropriate box or write in the space provided to indicate your answer.

1. Please indicate your age:

2. Please indicate your gender:

Female		Male	

3. Please indicate how long you have been at Wits University for?

Less than a year	
1 –2 years	
2-3 years	
3-4 years	
5+ years	

4. What course/s are you currently enrolled for?

5. In your own words how would you define feminism?

6. How would you define nudity within the political sphere?

7. Are you aware of the nude protests that have taken place on university campuses?

Yes	
No	

8. If yes to question 7, how were you made aware of the protest? (e.g. Social media, WhatsApp, newspapers, friends, personally witnessed it etc.)

9. If yes to question 7 please provide some detailed explanation of the event.

10. Have you ever personally witnessed a nude protest take place at the university? Please explain.

11. How do you feel about female nudity being used as a form of protest? Please elaborate.

12. How do you think female nudity is perceived in protest? Please elaborate.

13. How effective is the use of female nudity in protest?

14. How do you think using female nudity affect the socio-political surroundings within university culture?

15. Do you think that nude protests are taken seriously?

Yes	
No	
Maybe	
Unsure	

16. Please elaborate on question 15:

Protocol Number: H18/07/17

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

I would appreciate it if you can return the completed questionnaire to me via email by the 22 October 2018.

Email: Yasaar.yaya21@gmail.com

If you have experienced any emotional discomfort due to the recall of unpleasant experiences in filling out this questionnaire, please contact:

CCDU 011 717 9140 for free counselling

October 2018

Dear Student

My name is Yasaar Moosa and I am currently a Masters student in the Department of Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of the degree, I have to undertake a research dissertation. I am doing my research on the perception of the use of nudity in protests within a socio-political sphere. The aim of the research is to discuss and analyse the meaning making process in relation to how nudity and protests are perceived. This research will be conducted in using two methods. The first will be an open-ended questionnaire followed by a semi structured interview. You may decide to participate in both method or just one.

I would like to invite you to take part in an answering an open-ended questionnaire discussing the use of nudity at Wits University. This activity will involve answering 16 questions.

I would also like to invite you to take part in a semi-structured interview to further elaborate on the use of nudity at Wits University. This activity will involve a conversation answering a set amount of questions and will take no longer than 45 minutes at a mutually convenient time. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The open-ended questionnaire will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. As part of the semi-structured interview, a recording device will be present in order to capture all the answers covered within the interview. The recording device is necessary, in order to accurately transcribe information said during the interview. If you experience any distress or discomfort throughout any point in this process, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you need some support or counselling services following the questionnaire, these are available free of charge at wits CCDU: 011 717 9140.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. The data collected form this study will also be used for oral and conference presentation and possible journal articles. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,
Ms. Yasaar Moosa
Cell number: 0796011575

Researcher: Ms. Yasaar Moosa, Yasaar.yaya21@gmail.com

Title of project: Female Nakedness and Political Protests: Analysing Female Nudity Within University Protests

Name of researcher: Ms. Yasaar Moosa

I, ……..., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. Please place (X) in the relevant options below.

I agree to complete an open-ended questionnaire	YES	NO
I understand that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I understand that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this project	YES	NO
I agree to be interviewed by the researcher	YES	NO
I agree that the interview will be audio recorded	YES	NO

_____ (signature)

_____ (name of participant)

_____(date)

Appendix 2: Semi structured interview questions

Questions

1. What has been your exposure to nude protests?
2. What are the perceptions of the use of nudity in university protests?
3. In your opinion what are the effect and impact of using nudity in university protest?