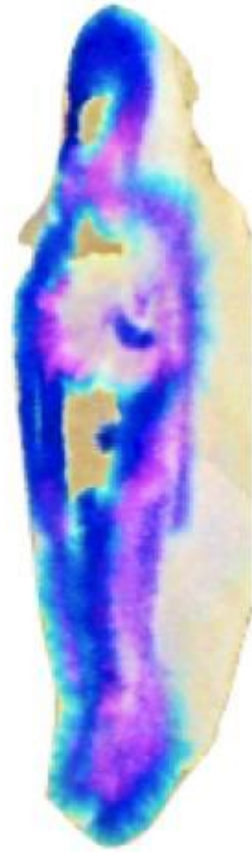


Conversations with my Body



Written works by Waterford Kamhlaba United World
College of Southern Africa community members.

Note from the editor

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to read this compilation of writings by members of the WKUWCSA community. The theme for the pieces was body image, an issue that is relevant in our WKUWCSA context but also transcends into the world beyond our hill.

These pieces were written with honesty, bravery and courage; with the intention to share stories, voice stories that without the liberty and anonymity of the written word, would remain in the dark.

The pieces are identified by the country of origin of the writer, only. However, the pieces do not necessarily show experiences that are specific to the writer's country but rather show the universality of struggling and tackling the issues of body image that we all face.

I hope that these pieces resonate with you, dear reader, and stimulate discussions, thoughts and questions of your own. Remember, these pieces are for you, as now that it has been written it is for you to decide what to do with these remarkable pieces.

warm wishes,

Alma Simba, IB2 WKUWCSA

“Why do you live in your body like you will be given another? As if it were temporary. You fall in love with those who praise the way it sighs under their hands, but who praises the way it holds up your weight, even when you are falling apart?”

- warsan shire, (2013)

We are Similar

sometimes, it's okay
to wallow in a pile, preconceived thoughts of what
I should look like – what I'd
like to look like, what for the sake of it all
can't look like – and don't.
Take a few hits to the wrist
and wipe
off the dust that remains; i tell my
body that it's okay
because *shivering edges* and *infamous courage*
sound the same to me.
When i am tired
sounds are muted, even
syllables sound parallel to me.
i take off my earphones and repeat
after me; sometimes, it's okay to wallow.

some other times
Though, it is necessary to rise – pick
yourself off of the ground
by breaking or burning or burying
your thoughts alive. It is vital
that you ensure a back up
plan; an emergency exit, a panic room, a life saver,
lips that yell siren, a ladder to
pull you out – anything.

Because before you know it, that dust
will spin into layers of sand
your lies will not be able to recover
you will become that pile of thoughts
you will ache to be swallowed whole.

Look now, wallow and swallow sound the same to you too.

Things I am learning to love

1. My feet are like my father's. They have *mphanvu* – strength – a word not usually used to describe a daughter. I internalized the idea that my strong feet indicate a lack of femininity until a man with *ntima* – heart – held my feet in his lap. He picked up his pen and wrote a different story on my skin. I laughed as the nib tickled poetry onto me. I began to see my feet differently - still the same size and shape – but worthy of praise. I am learning to love.
2. My legs are *pashmaloo*. In Persian, this means 'dowry'. The word is only a few letters away from *pashmak*, candy floss. In Persian, I have sweet, fluffy legs. In English, I am simply hairy. Every month, a woman waxes my legs. I withstand the sting as she rips roots from my body, unveiling my skin to a form accepted by society. What is this comfort contingent on pain? I am still learning to love.
3. My thighs touch. They get to know each other intimately when I walk, the fullness of one meeting the other. I felt self-conscious about the breadth and width beneath my hips until I heard a friend say, "We were as tight as jeans over wholesome thighs." I liked that. Until a lover placed soft palms on my cellulite saying, "I love your fat thighs." Fat. A word that usually makes me frown, made me smile. He infused fat with desire, giving me reason to embrace the full force of my body. I am learning to love.

Instructions for a bad day/for when you're feeling sad about yourself/for when you feel like you're not enough

1. Look at yourself in the mirror
2. Cry if you must.
3. Don't feel like you have to suppress your feelings. Your emotions are valid.
4. Undress yourself.
5. Look at every nook & cranny of your body, tracing your fingers through your skin.
6. Take time to identify the things that stand out the most.
7. Stare at them. These are the things that make you unique, these are the things that are identifiable only on you. Your little glories if you will.
8. Wrap your arms around your chest, turn around & take time to take in your features.
You be beautiful.
You be glorious.
Nobody can take your body away from you.
Nobody can take this moment away from you.
9. After you are done unashamedly facing yourself, congratulate yourself regardless of the outcome. You have stared your perceived flaws and imperfections dead in the face & come out breathing. You are still alive. It is with this body that you will spend the rest of your life. This body that has served you for this long, that has carried the weight of your frustrations and strife, of your joy and love, this body that will continue to serve you even when you do not want it, when you think it can be better. This body that you are now learning to love, has been loving you long before you were aware of it, even after you were aware of it & began poking at it & stretching it & attempting to make it shape-shift to fit in forms it wasn't designed to be in. this body has loved you long before you began to love it. And now it's asking for the same from you. That you stop comparing it to others & realize that no two people were designed to do the same thing, so no two bodies are meant to be exactly the same. Perfection is a myth they sell you to milk profits from your insecurities & make sure that your obedience is external. Do not measure your body and happiness through a man-made standard. Whenever you feel low, always remember this.
10. You are so beautiful, you are so goddamn beautiful.
11. Do not feel afraid to face yourself. Do it as often as you feel the need to. No one can take you away from yourself. You will live with this body for the rest of your life, all of the scars, the markings, the little things about your body will be the best proof that you have lived. How great is it, that your autobiography will be imprinted, on you.

stop saying things you don't mean

to convince me to do things that

won't help me

Stop pretending you know what I'm

going through

A smile and a new attitude won't make them accept me or even make me feel better about their rejection

You can't tell me I'm beautiful, you've

never even see me

You haven't heard what mirrors call

me

You haven't seen the labels on the

backs of my jeans

You haven't been to parties and had

nobody look at you

You don't know how-

You Don't Know.

Even if you do convince me I'm

Beautiful

How long do You think it'll take the

world to show me I'm not

swaziland

One too many glances in the mirror, moving three steps backwards to check if for the fourth time I look okay. Its five minutes to class, if I take any longer I'll be late. But it doesn't feel right so I change anyway I'll ask one of the six friends of mine in the block if I look okay now, they reply with a nod and then do the same. I look in the mirror for the seventh time, because if I'm honest I checked when I changed in my room, when I was brushing my teeth and as I came out of the toilet to wash my hands. Wait that makes it eight. Damn it's eight.

uganda

The mirror

The mirror, what reflects what we are or what we think we are, or perhaps it doesn't reflect at all. Because reflection has traces of reality, and sometimes the mirror doesn't.

What if I told you that there is another mirror that somehow shows what you truly are and doesn't tell you what you have to be.

This mirror values the most beautiful things you have and turns the ones you don't think are beautiful into what they really are, beautiful.

What if I told you that this mirror is transparent. It is a mirror that isn't a mirror, because as it stands, mirrors are all not reflecting properly so we would rather have mirrors that don't reflect, until we realize what mirrors are for.

Mirrors are to admire what there is to be admired. And everything is to be admired, just as a child admires her creator.

So let us build a new mirror. One that is clear and perfectly built, and truly reflects what truly we all are, beautiful.

Dear body,

Dear body,

I'm sorry

For everything and nothing but mainly for always being

Sorry

You seem to be taking so much shit from other people and I sincerely apologize if I have added to that

(I know I have added to that)

I'm sorry

That the world does not seem to see your worth

You are all woman and black, all BLACK WOMAN

And I'm sorry they cannot see your magic

They don't understand that sometimes thunder thighs and big breasts aren't enough,

Sometimes you need more than surface value and all of the time you cannot see any deeper

They just don't get it

Too suck in their own rooms of self-hate to see you

You who is midnight skies and bright blue summer days

Your curves rise to the heights of Everest and dip to the levels of the Rift Valley

You are each individual part and also the sum of your collective parts

You are contradictions juxtaposing oxymorons.

You deserve everything and yet they give you nothing

I'm sorry

Sorry for being a part of the they

The they that

Oppresses

Compares

Marginalises

And ranks

I'm sorry

For having failed you so many times

Sorry that my ideas of beauty have to be readjusted to accommodate you

Your skin colour

Your hair

Your eyes

I'm sorry

It's not that I don't want to love you

I'm really trying to treat you right

It's just sometimes,

Sometimes the moon sings war cries that send me into battle with demons twice my size who don't understand the concept of sleep

And sometimes the sweet, slick, smooth, slippery pills meandering their way down my throat is a feeling I cannot resist and not one I can wait to eat before indulging in

And I know that you are in there screaming every time I add another teaspoon of sugar to my tea but I just figured that my death is coming and at the very least I want it to be sweet.

So I'm sorry

I can't apologize enough

And I will try

I can't promise anything else other than

I will try

kenya

Be Bigger

You're beautiful they say.

But I'm tired of hearing this shit.

I'm tired of being told that my beauty is not everything

And yet the apparent goal in life is to believe that you are beautiful.

Cliché quotes

Stuffing self-love down my throat

Without the chance to swallow, digest, maybe throw up.

I'm 18,

But I even know that love takes time.

And I'm yet to explore every crinkle in my body

And I'll never keep up with this ever changing geography

And I don't want to.

Let me fluctuate with time

Let me burst at the seams

Let me grow, let me change,

Let me hate the way my eyes scrunch up when I laugh

I always have,

And let me move on.

I'm allowed not to love

Because love isn't everything.

And frankly I don't love every aspect of you

And that's ok.

Be bigger

If he can't handle your love handles

Then don't let him handle your love

You may not be beautiful

But you are human

And that, is enough.

united kingdom

The 14 year old who was slim. Did not really have the desired body type. Always being told she needed "more"

She wanted a bigger everything.

When asked exactly what that was she said "everything".

Why?

They told her it was beautiful

It was not always that one word sometimes it was a couple

"You would look better if..."

"You're pretty, but..."

The unsaid words at the end of those sentences a constant reminder that she needed more

19 year old girl who could not be happier with what she has

Looks in the mirror only to show it how good she looks and not

The other way round

Comfortable

Her skin is her home and nobody else gets to live in it but her

Those words echo as she contemplates "getting into shape" or

"counting calories"

Somebody should have told her earlier how good it feels to love herself

south africa

A Guide For The Trying & Hapless

1. Accept that you are all you get.
2. All the moments that reassured you, remember them down to the minute. (screenshots help)
3. Don't talk yourself into anything that might sound like a good idea, you'll know it when you see it.
4. No one ever had a smooth fall dropping over a sharp edge.
5. Always use a pillow. No one ever uses a pillow.
6. That body is armor; please do not attack that which was created to protect you.
7. Get rid of mirrors. Leave the reflections to chance; a passing car window, a puddle, the back of a spoon.
8. Pick flowers during the day and let them float with you in your bathtub during the night. Flowers are the best company.
9. "Put your ear to the sky and listen, everything whispers I love you."
10. Get a shelf, fill it with books you've always wanted to read. Don't try to read them, just have them there to look at. Let them try to reach you. Let them be important enough to.
11. Fall in love with the moon and her stars. They will never forget you.
12. Forget the shelf and use a corner of your floor.
13. Do invest in a bathtub.
14. Do you want to remember one thing on this list? Try. Burn the rest.

Dear Me

For so long, you have been shaped by

their ideas of how you should be,

For so long, the image you have

of yourself has been painted

by the words they utter,

For so long, this painting has been

splattered with nothing but

shades of gray.

Your true colors buried under the greyish hue

and you,

do not recall who you really are

For so long, their words have molded

your reflection in the mirror every morning,

Now every morning, you look into the mirror

and reminisce on the words of your potters

You close your eyes momentarily, then you open them

hoping to find, before your eyes, the perfect body

they say you should have,

the perfect body you, yourself, think you should have,

You do not see it.

For a fleeting moment, you wish magic was your reality,

You wish your fairy godmother would wave her wand,

transform you into this dazzling figure.

For a fleeting moment you wish the fairy dust

would sweep away the fat accumulating near your
hips,

or the bones protruding through your skin,
you even wish to stumble upon a magic jar,
make genie pop out to grant your wishes,

Three wishes!

Your mind aches with longing at the thought of the wild possibility,

For so long now, every morning, you stare at your
reflection,

wishing you had wishes that could come true,

In fact, you wish that you too, like the evil queen,
would have a mirror to tell you that you are
the fairest of them all,

You wish that your reflection would be flawless, as white as the most perfect snow.

For so long now, your image of yourself
has been distorted,

For so long now, you have resolved to avoiding
any possible object that reflects your figure,
you have decided to see less of yourself
every morning,

you have decided to be engulfed only in their
ideas of how you should look,

You have given up on having a say in how they make you feel about yourself.

You have decided to only see your body
through broken mirrors,
blurry mirrors.

For so long now, you have failed to
see that you are more than what you see,

For so long now, Dear/me, you have
Failed to see that you are beautiful,

I wish you would see that really is what you should be...

lesotho

There is no echo in a hollow body.

And that is why I'm screaming.

I'm not sorry to say

that I don't care about your body.

I don't care about

bodies

or arms and limbs and facial symmetry

I don't care about muscles and anatomy

bones or digestive systems

I care about you, and all the things your body can do.

My body did this.

I wrote this for you.

You.

The one with the body.

Your eyes can read what my hands produced

and how fascinating it is that although I don't know you, our bodies

work together.

And how without you, the things my body has done,

the things my body has made,

can so easily be forgotten
by nobody.

I'm sorry I yelled earlier.
I wanted you to hear me.

My voice box is shaking and I hope you can feel it in your ears
I hope you can feel it in your stomach
I hope you can feel it in your heart
I hope
you can feel.

Thank you for feeling me.
For touching this intangible self I have created.
For validating me.
Thank you for reading.
Thank you for working on this with me.

You are a team. And although you and I are working together.
YOU are the team.

Your body on one side of the pitch, you on the other, and it's yelling and calling your name, but from the sidelines, all I hear it say, is:

"amazing."

And how amazing it is that this physical thing joint by tendons and ligaments grasps you so tightly. Your body will not let go.

Your body needs you.

My body needs you.

Please take care of each other.

As much as my body needs your body

You need You

And how hard it is to find you in a hollow cave.

So I stopped looking

And let my body write this for your body to read

and you to have.

costa rica

I never really cared about my body image.
But people might say I'm as big as a village.
I will never understand why people laugh at someone else's body.
Yet it seems as if they have no other hobby.
I am happy with my body.
Like the house elf doobby.
I hate the fact that people ask inquisitive questions on why he or she is so fat.
While that person is acting like a darn rat.
Loving your body is like a growing tree.
The roots will reach every corner of you and me.
Allow a flowing river of love.
Flow from above.
And may the roots grow in a never ending rate.
And use all of the insults and name calling as fish bait.
To capture all of encouragement, likes, respect,
Love, adoration and kindness from the rivers deep
The pain flow away.
And allow a new beginning of love and respect
For your body wash onto the bays.
Of your heart.
And finally after doing all of this
Just say the words that you will never miss.
I have a lovely body.
And nobody can say sorry!

south africa

Sorrow

An open face, drawn curtains blown

into the room

exhaling

inhaling

billowing out like an inflated

balloon. Or a stomach

soft belly. Thighs. Arms.

Hands that are always digging always

searching sifting seeking

seeking perfection? Perfection? (~~screw you.~~)

Mother nature creates the clouds with thunder thighs

and the weeping willow's arms are flabby

and the paintings of indian goddesses hung on the walls,

have thighs that are *madly* in love

bellies that roll over and up into their hips a

plane for Pan to play on and in a little room

in a little country

in a little city

there is a large body. Stealing the oxygen, consuming

it bestially. Leaving the plants and mosquitoes breathless.

Flawless – flawed – majestic

Perfect.

tanzania

I've always been on the positive side of life.

For as long as I can remember,

I've been positive even when I wasn't.

Positive meaning I was fat;

Not to say I wasn't a happy child, but

Not to say I was always a happy child.

There were those moments when my grandmother would call me fat,

And my scale of positivity would tip over.

It was almost as if my 4-year-old body

Became the bull in the china shop,

Too big, too grotesquely out of place, too much.

I never saw a scale until I was 10

Yet I was always breaking the ones in my head

Because I knew there was no number to describe

What I was.

I was a positive child.

Now, positive meant being happy-

And nice.

I came up with a mantra that,

"Fat girls can't be mean because then they'll have too many bad things about them"

So I tried...

Tried so very hard

To be either fat or mean

But apparently it's hard to not be fat

When you've been told that you were
For your whole life.
Literally.
So then I became nice.
So nice that it was it was hard to say 'no'
Even when I didn't want any more food...
Everyone told me that I was so nice
That I took it as a sign that I had finally achieved something good in my short, fat life.
I believed that if people saw my smile and my personality
They could ignore the oozing fatness that was standing in front of them.
If I could do that, succeed at it,
Then I could go home and cry at my imperfections in the mirror,
Cry for being fat,
And cry with the young girl in the mirror because she just looked so sad.

I learnt about body dysmorphia when I was 11.
That was when I saw my first hope
As well as my first fear.
Maybe,
Just maybe,
I didn't have that pot belly that I was cooking for 11 years.
Maybe it was just an illusion,
And I was perfect after all
(Perfect meaning skinny).
But then again,

Maybe I had spent so long looking at myself as a monster
That there was no going back...
Now, I spent even longer looking in the mirror;
Looking for more details
On the temple that hadn't been worshipped in such a long time.
I think it became worse.

When I was 16, I learnt that if you told yourself a lie enough times,
You'd start to believe it, so
I started telling myself I was pretty every time I looked in a mirror...
I think it got better.

On my quest for acceptance according to social beauty standards and conventions,
I got two piercings,
Tucked away in the top corners of my left and right ears
To represent a goal I couldn't reach,
A slope I couldn't climb,
A step towards something I always wanted...
My grandmother called me ugly.
I had a moment of nostalgia
Where I became the 4-year-old me
Who cried after hearing this greeting'
But this time,
I laughed.
I know it got better.

trinidad and tobago

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for further questions/enquiries please contact the editor at almasimba@yahoo.com

thank you for reading.