

Fat and Sassy
A Performance Masked as a Thesis

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Abstract

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

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This thesis has taken on many forms using both technical and conceptual structures. Firstly, out of pure refusal to produce during a global pandemic with very little guidance, access, and support from any institution designed to do so, this thesis initially was then an act of defiance, a performance given to appease the academic institution while providing the necessary written documentation that I did in fact “do the damn thing.” Secondly, I found myself going back to the significance of a thesis serving as written evidence and proof of production and performance. This document will live in the archives of the academic institution that is the University of Washington for - well I guess forever. Accepting that while this thesis serves as the necessary evidence in the appropriate format to prove that I in fact “did the damn thing,” it also in essence serves as my posterity. Likely my only posterity.

Much of my work, as documented throughout this thesis both visually and written, will be autobiographic and autoethnographic. My artwork often becomes illustrations and demonstrations of anecdotal qualitative research in understanding social, cultural, political, and socio-physiological experiences, specifically within the intersections of gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, and physicality. This thesis will be written surrounding these same topics using a variety of sources, both formal and informal. It should be stated that within an autoethnographic framework the value of resources from formal to informal is invariable. The words of Betty Cooper, my deceased great-grandmother holds just as much value and significance as the United States Department of Health and Human Services, and therefore should be viewed and accepted as such.

Acknowledgements

It is important to note that this thesis, while covering several social issues like fatness and poverty, is written about my experiences as a fat white ciswoman with the intellectual privilege to study and work within several academic institutions of higher education. I do not intend to speak on behalf of fat Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in this thesis. In fact, I encourage you as readers to explore the BIPOC sources cited below.

First and foremost, we must acknowledge the roots of fatphobia. Sabrina Strings details in the book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*, the fear of “fatness and the preference for thinness have not, principally, and historically, been about health. Instead, they have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies.” (Strings 6). Through the acts of colonization by individuals who look like me, Alyssa Edmondson, Blackness and fatness became associated with undesirability and labeled as “other.” Strings also states, “racial discourse was deployed by elite Europeans and white Americans to create social distinctions between themselves and so-called greedy and fat racial Others... Elite white people also used Protestant discourse to claim a moral superiority over these same poor, immigrant, and racial Others.” (Strings 7).

Furthermore, Da’Shaun Harrison dives into the concept of desirability and human capital as it relates to fatness and Blackness in his book, *Belly of the Best: The Politics of Anti-Fatness as Anti-Blackness*. Harrison says, “Desire Capital – that is to say who owns or embodies more or less of the identities that grant one access, power, and resources... Beauty standards, especially in the United States, are predicated on anti-Blackness, anti-fatness, anti-disfiguredness, cisheterosexism, and ableism.” (Harrison 12).

Introduction

To commence this writing, I felt it necessary to introduce myself with a poem I recited as a performance in the Spring of 2021. After spending an entire school year behind a screen, creating, and sharing work in front of a lousy laptop camera, I wanted to genuinely introduce myself to the people on the other end. Those people were my faculty and my classmates who had yet to meet me in person. As far as they knew, anything below my shoulders was uncharted. Admittedly, there was a comfort in being able to hide behind a screen for an entire year. There was no environment where my mind was preoccupied in seeking space or comfortable seating that suited my physical real estate instead of casually mingling with my cohorts before we got down to business. There was no predated stress of deciding what to wear that would be appropriate or flattering, but most importantly unostentatious. As a result of living a lifetime as a fat person, being noticed had become unavoidable. Suddenly, I did not need to seek shelter or dawn camouflaged garb. However, after a year of trying to expound and contextualize my work, both personally and conceptually, I realized that my given audience not perceiving me in my entirety might have been detrimental to my work. Thus, an introduction had to be made:

Let Me Introduce Myself

Hello,

We likely have never met, especially not in person if at all
So let me introduce myself
My name is Alyssa Page Edmondson
But you can call me Aly

I am 31 years old
A guy on a dating site told me once I looked like a little girl in a real woman's body

I'm 5'8 1/2"
An aunt told me once guys don't like it when you're bigger than them

I weigh 290 pounds
A physician told me once my BMI is considered morbidly obese
A date told me once I was just too heavy of a girl to date

I have curly strawberry blonde hair
A guy on Bumble told me once he had a thing for redheads

I have green eyes
An optometrist told me once I should limit my screen time to a couple hours a day

I have pale white skin
A dermatologist told me once I need to apply 70 SPF or higher sunscreen everyday
A guy on Tinder told me once I looked like a delicious vanilla milkshake

I have freckles
A cousin told me once I looked like someone threw mud at me through a screen door

I have a crooked smile
A counselor told me once I should smile more
A boy told me once I had jacked up hillbilly teeth

I have a hole from a lip piercing I no longer wear
A boss told me once I should take it out to look more professional

I have scars on my back from mole removals
A dermatologist told me once they were precancerous

I wear a 38 H bra
A friend told me once I must be lying because that bra size isn't real

I have a tattoo on my right forearm
A lover told me once my freckles looked like constellations

I wear sizes 1 or 2 or 2/3 or 18 or 20 or 22 or 24 or 1X or 2X or 3X or 4X or 5X

A store told me once they didn't have enough room in their store for a plus size collection
A dance coach told me once I needed to make my own uniform to look like everyone else because they didn't have my size

I have a 40" waist
A stranger told me once my hourglass figure was to die for

I have 52" hips
A coworker told me once childbirth would be easy because it'd fall right out of me

I have 57" thighs
A volleyball coach told me once I should probably wear longer shorts

I have a large tattoo on my right thigh
A friend told me once it doesn't look as good because of my cellulite

I have 10" ankles
A boss told me once I had very thin ankles for a large person

I wear size 9.5 shoes medium width
A shoe salesman told me once he didn't have wide width hiking boots

This is the physical space I take up

This is the physical space my body requires to navigate this world

I cannot shrink myself to fit into chairs, airplane seats, or societal standards of what's considered ideal

I cannot take off my fat to be easier to look at like I cannot remove my vagina to be anymore safe

I will not hide the parts of me you think are undeserving of being seen

I will not reduce myself to be more palatable or consumable for you

I do not exist to be produced or consumed by you

Chapter 1: Childhood

To start I must acknowledge the generations before me. The trauma, poverty, health, and experiences of our ancestors, further up in our family tree, have all been proven to be crucial parts of indicating who we are as individuals today. Those experiences have been embedded into our genes. Martha Henriques writes in a BBC article, titled *Can the legacy of trauma be passed down the generations?* She states that, yes, “your experiences during your lifetime – particularly traumatic ones – would have very real impact on your family for generations to come.” Beyond something as miniscule as our eye color, something much larger like our mental health and access to resources can be based off our parents’, grandparents’, and great-grandparents’ experiences. A lot of who we are can be a result of the struggles of our ancestors. This is what is described as epigenetic inheritance, “where the readability, or expression, of genes is modified without changing the DNA code itself. Tiny chemical tags are added to or removed from our DNA in response to changes in the environment in which we are living. These tags turn genes on or off, offering a way of adapting to changing conditions without inflicting a more permanent shift in our genomes.” (Henriques, 2019)

Unfortunately, much of my lineage is unknown. Therefore, the awareness, much less the degree of trauma is unknown to the individuals who share my genes. With several instances of abandonment and multigenerational “products” of rape, my family tree has many missing branches; a reality that is trauma in and of itself. Henriques further writes, “the consequences of passing down the effects of trauma are huge, even if they are subtly altered between generations. It would change the way we view how our lives in the context of our parents’ experiences, influencing our physiology and even our mental health.” In my poem *The Walls Make Sense*, I

touch on this reality through the memory of my deceased Great-Grandmother Betty, the woman who also inspired the title of this thesis.

Fat and Sassy

I never felt shame from my family for being fat
There was no expectation to be thin
Chubbiness was a given
Chubby babies grew into
Chubby children grew into
Chubby adults that birthed chubby babies

The matriarch of my family, at least the one I remember most was my Great-Grandma Cooper
Her name wasn't actually Cooper, it was Betty
Gramma Cooper's response to asking how she was
Was always, "fat and sassy"
Followed by a chuckle that jiggled her whole belly, giant boobs, and hairy double-chin

My family is a matriarchy of fat and sassy women
Women that blamed their misfortunes on fate or some kind of karma
Despite their struggles being clear results of oppression by the patriarchy
But we don't talk about that stuff in this house

There was never this pressure to be anything more than the woman you just so happened to be
You worked, you bled, you fucked, and you birthed
Somewhere in there you may have found love, but likely not
If you did, there were probably several
Several loves that birthed several babies
Babies that you were left with by men
Men who couldn't deal with the responsibility
Responsibility of asking consent or the responsibility of dealing with consequences
But they don't teach us that in school

The only examples of women I've ever known were
Women who were taken advantage of
Women who thought it was their fault
Women who built walls thicker than bomb shelters
Women who taught their daughters boys will pinch you, but that's just how it is
Women who taught their daughters it isn't their fault, but that's just how it is
Women who taught their daughters to build walls, because that's just what you do
That's all they've ever known
Can you blame them?

My Great-Gramma Betty died in 2017 at 90 years old
3 months before she passed, I found out she was in a nursing home 5 blocks from my house, and I didn't even know it
For 5 years I never knew the matriarch of my family was fading away in a Memory Care Unit that close to me
My Uncle Shell left her there and told no one
3 months before she passed, I visited her with my ma
Great-Gramma Betty was unrecognizable
Her skin was loose and hung off her bones like drapery
There was no fat, there was no sass

There was a woman who had been forgotten about including her own brain

I didn't want to leave her, but she didn't even know who I was

Marie? No, Aly

Brandi? No, Aly

Melanie? No, Aly

Becky? No, Aly

Janie? No, Aly

Lori? No, Aly

Marley? No, Aly

But that's okay, she didn't deny our relation

Because of course, I was fat & sassy

Before I continue, I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the woman that was my Great-Grandma Betty (see fig. 1). It is very likely my own brain will succumb to the same memory loss that took her sass, but at least she will continue to live on in this thesis as a woman who inspired me even though she never knew it. Betty was a seamstress who spent much of her free time constructing quilts for all her posterity, including me, one of the 25 great-grandchildren that share her memory. Her labor was an act of love.



Fig. 1: Betty Cooper holding Alyssa Edmondson in 1991

An artist whose works, I believe, hugged that line of illustrating trauma and the resonance of it, is Christian Boltanski. His considerations in installation inspire me.

In the late 1980s, after the loss of his father, Boltanski's work started to feature common themes of memory, loss, and trauma using found materials like frames and lamps that were originally part of other works. His installations required darkened environments and often occurred in non-museum spaces like hospitals and churches. These spaces “- often ecclesiastical – laden with history, which place the viewer in a state of heightened receptivity to emotion, rather than to aesthetic pleasure or intellectual curiosity.” (Gernier 55). One installation that

lingers with me as an artist working around trauma and evoking emotion would be *Monument (Odessa)* from 1989 (see fig. 2). I find Gernier described his work best:

This memory, intrinsically related to Boltanski's childhood ... began to haunt his art, branding each of his images with the fateful mask of disaster. Mourning engulfs all: mourning for his parents, for his childhood, but also mourning for the carefree, lighthearted creative impulses of youth. Now angst looms, and gradually rubs salt into the wound of identity that the semi-fictitious description of a normal childhood unaffected by history had so laboriously masked. (Gernier 60)



Fig. 2: *Monument (Odessa)*, Christian Boltanski, 1989 (Gernier 58-59)

As a child, I learned very early on the concept of socioeconomic class, and how different my life was from my peers as a result. My parents never married and broke-up months after my birth, the last of their three children. For years my mother, Lela Marie Edmondson (see fig. 3), as

she was getting ready in the very early mornings to work several minimum wage jobs, would remind me and my siblings how much she did not want us to end up as statistics.



Fig. 3: Left to right, Marlena Edmondson, Lela Marie Edmondson, Alyssa Edmondson, and Zachary Edmondson in 1993

Of course, at the time this stress existed without her being fully aware of the systems that made these statistics a reality for others like us. In her eyes, becoming a statistic was the worst we could become, even though our own entire family structure was full of examples of these seemingly shameful statistics like teen pregnancies, alcoholism, drug addiction, incarceration, and houselessness. However, my mother, and my entire family for that matter, believed in the American concept of bootstrapping. Virgie Tovar explains this concept in *You Have the Right to Remain Fat*, “bootstrapping was something I watched my family do proudly every day of my life. The idea behind bootstrapping is that anyone can earn anything as long as they want it badly enough; all they have to do is pull themselves up by the bootstraps.” She continued, in the American ecosystem of capitalism, “failure is an individual problem, not a collective, cultural, or political problem.” (Tovar 35). The concept of bootstrapping is engrained in our culture and has

been applied to nearly anything we place value in, from wealth and success to health and body size.

As young as 8 years old I learned all the ways in which I navigated the world were due to the status and appearance of my family (see fig. 4 and 5). From the types of food we had access to, often whatever was donated to the local food pantries or were bought with Food Stamps and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) vouchers, to the types of homes we lived in, if we lived in any. Even to the kinds of clothes we wore, which was whatever was donated or passed down to us or could be found at a Goodwill. This is where the intersection of food access and health meet with socioeconomic status and physicality. In 2020 I wrote several poems demonstrating the difficult relationship to food being poor and fat, and the memories associated with food access and status. The first poem is titled *Food Isn't Just Food* and the second is *Hungrier Than Hungry*.



Fig. 4: Alyssa Edmondson and Marlena Edmondson in 1995

Fig. 5: Alyssa Edmondson and Zachary Edmondson in 1995

Food Isn't Food

Food isn't just food when you're poor,

it's survival.

Food isn't just food when you're starving yourself,

it's failure.

Food isn't just food when you're fat,

it's shame.

It became obvious as a teenager that succumbing to any of these statistics would make my mother feel like a failure, thus I was a failure. As the youngest of three born to two emotionally neglected parents who did not know any different, I spent much of my childhood catering to the emotions of others, even to the point of willingly compromising my own existence to align with societal standards and expectations. This is demonstrated in two poems I started writing when I was teenager and have reached their final form in this thesis. The first being *Autonomy* and the second being *Taking Up Space*. Both poems discuss the societal standards imposed on adolescent and teenage girls by their peers, but especially by older straight men. It is here where the intersection of gender and sexuality, more by force than by choice, comes into the conversation when discussing socioeconomic status and physicality.

Autonomy

My autonomy was stripped from me
long before I had the breasts that made strange men tell me they'd love to have their dick in between them

My autonomy was stripped from me
long before I had the thighs that made male coaches remark their thick-
ness

My autonomy was stripped from me
long before I had customers at a fast-food drive-thru tell me through a voice intercom I had the perfect
voice for a sex hotline

My autonomy was stripped from me
long before boys my age said I was the girl you fuck, not the girl
you date

The obstacle course of being a woman

The woman you fuck
Not the woman you date
The woman you bring home
Not the woman you marry
The woman you want to birth your children

I have learned very early on
more than I am a complex human being with thoughts and feelings

I am an object
I am a tool
I am a machine
I am a mill

Fabulously fabricated for mass reproduction and production
while constantly being scolded for reduction

Losing is winning
Winning is losing
Winning is winning
but it seems like losing is losing to me

You can have my cake and eat it too
while I'm expected to just let it happen.

Taking Up Space

There weren't tall, freckled fat girls tossing basketballs on the court
There weren't tall, freckled fat girls in cheer uniforms on the sidelines
There weren't tall, freckled fat girls tiptoeing across dance floors
So, when I became one, inserting myself in those thin-dominated spaces because they seemed fun, the world repeatedly told me I did not fit

I did not earn that right
& to earn it, I had to be thin

When I got older the square footage of what I wasn't allowed to be in grew wider
& the list of activities I wasn't supposed to do got longer

At 8 I learned I wasn't supposed to trade peaches for more butterscotch pudding

At 10 I learned I shouldn't cut my hair above my shoulders because my face was too round

At 12 I learned I couldn't play any kind of sport regardless of if I made the team

At 16 I learned I didn't fit any of the dance costumes my team had, so I was asked to make my own

At 18 I learned I shouldn't wear skinny jeans because they weren't intended for legs like mine

At 19 I learned I couldn't have a genetic disease without it being blamed on my weight

At 20 I learned I didn't fit the stereotype of a "bad fat" or even a "good fat"

At 22 I learned I shouldn't go on a date with someone too good looking because it was probably for a joke

At 25 I learned I couldn't travel because I made people uncomfortable who had to sit next to me

At 30 I learned I didn't fit in the patient chair at my doctor's office, so I had to stand during my appointment

I will never understand how we can constantly tell people they don't have a right to occupy the space they physically take up

While looking into poets who write about similar topics in regard to fatness and existence, I discovered Samantha Zigelboim's *The Fat Sonnets*. This book is a collection of poems ranging from the documentation of value associated with weight, battles of self-loathing and self-love relating to body image, as well as societal expectations and perceptions of fat bodies existing publicly. In these pages I found comfort because it depicted the familiar. However, what intrigued me the most were the several examples of Zigelboim's experimentation with the presentation of her poetry. For example, *Milestone Map* depicts a graph or timeline documenting weight, either weight loss or weight gain. Although, knowing which one seems irrelevant. There appears to be a message in eluding to this idea of existence, or nonexistence, before birth and after death, both of which are depicted as 0 pounds (see fig. 6).

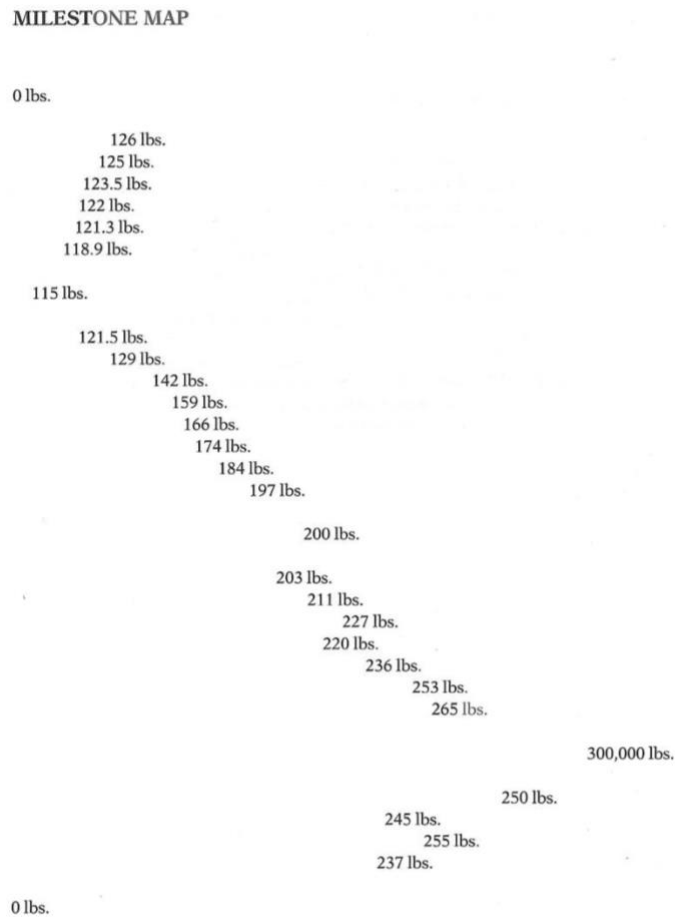


Fig. 6: *Milestone Map*, Samantha Zigelboim (Zigelboim 54)

Chapter 1 Childhood concludes with one of the most influential stories and artworks that has not only been a strong source of discovering identity within myself, but also literally defining who I am today, as the listed author of this thesis.

In 2012, during the end of my undergrad career, I created a mixed media piece titled *No More Moore*. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, this piece consisted of scans of every award or certificate I received throughout my childhood transferred to pieces of wood alongside photographs relating to those awards and memories, that were then transferred to glass. These objects were presented in a timeline, from birth to adult. It became evident in moving along the timeline how life had changed for me when in 2006 I learned that my name was not actually Alyssa Page Edmondson, as you see written on the title page of this thesis.



Fig. 7 and 8: *No More Moore*, Aly Edmondson, 2012

When I was 16, I learned that in 1991, 8 or so months after I was born my unwed parents broke-up and went to court to decide custody. This was understandably granted to my mother, and in retaliation my father insisted that our names be changed to his surname of Moore. Of course, this came at a cost my father was unable to afford. \$40 each for three children in the 90s from a man with undiagnosed bipolar disorder, and the inability to maintain a job as a result, was not doable. Even though these fees were never paid, unbeknownst to us, the individuals whose

names were being changed, this request was not only documented as being accepted, but also set in motion within the courts. It was not until 2006, when my sister needed a copy of her birth certificate to start a new job that we even found out we did not exist. Some clerical errors and loss of documentation within a span of 20 years suddenly erased our entire existence. We were not Edmondson, we were Moore.

No More Moore was a catalyst in understanding community support. This piece eventually turned into a fundraiser to afford the expensive name change process within the Tippecanoe County Courts where I resided. A now \$400+ lengthy process involving court dates and several newspaper publications were what I needed to do to get my name back. The intention was to have my name officially changed and finalized before I graduated with my Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ball State University, which would have been my biggest accomplishment yet as Alyssa Page Edmondson. Unfortunately, the process did not finalize until 2014, a year after I graduated. However, it did happen in just enough time for me to use it now, in writing this thesis and in creating my MFA exhibition show, which will be my biggest accomplishment yet as Alyssa Page Edmondson.

This is where I would like to include the signatures of all the individuals who aided in this process. Ever since I started accumulating signatures and donations back in 2012, I never could figure out a way that would appropriately thank them for what they have done for me. It only seems fitting that the original name change petition from 10 years ago be included in this thesis. Figures 9-11 are scans of this document. The *No More Moore* timeline ended with this petition, inviting viewers to sign in support. This petition lived folded up in my wallet for the past 10 years, it now will live on in this thesis.

This petition requests & further supports the name change of
Alyssa Page Moore to Alyssa Page Edmondson
 within the Tippecanoe County Court Circuit

Date	Printed Name	Signature	Address
11/18	HANNAH BAKER	Hannah M Baker	112 S. CEHA AVE, MUNCIE, IN
11/18	Holly Lay	Holly Lay	301 W. 23rd St., Muncie, IN
11/18	Jordyn Cox	Jordyn Cox	1240 Blavely Dr. Greenwood, IN
11/18	Cassandra Hoffine	Cassandra Hoffine	5826 Wild Cherry Dr., W. Lafayette, IN
11/18	Cara Calanni	Cara Calanni	3103 W Jackson St. Muncie, IN
11/18/12	JACINDA RUSSEN	Jacinda Russe	PO Box 1247, MUNCIE, IN 47308
11/18/12	Kaylie Davis	Kaylie Davis	8259 S. Shady Tr. Dr. Pendleton, IN
11/18/12	Pathyn Major	Pathyn Major	2615 W Jackson St. Muncie, IN 47305
11/18/12	Jaime Wilson	Jaime Wilson	4504 W. Bethel Ave. Apt 234 Muncie, IN 47304
11/18/12	Allison Summers	Allison Summers	4520 W. Bethel Ave. Apt. 234 Muncie, IN 47304
11/12/12	Catherine Bakka	Catherine Bakka	N. Madison Dr., Muncie, IN 47304
11/12/12	David Deas	David Deas	1107 N. Glenwood Ave. Apt 9 Muncie IN 47304
11/13/12	Amanda Williams	Amanda Williams	1210 W. Newburg St. Apt 101 Muncie, IN 47305
11-14-12	MARK SAWRIE	Mark Sawrie	1008 W. North St., Muncie, IN 47303
11/14/12	Sydni Troy	Sydni Troy	2366 Cardinal Dr. Winfield IN 46342
11/14/12	Erica Davis	Erica Davis	3527 W. Weir Rd. Scottsburg, IN 47170
11/14/12	Shelby Sanders	Shelby Sanders	517 N. Martin St #2 Muncie, IN 47303
11/16/12	Kristal Bunsby	Kristal Bunsby	4201 N. Bethel Ave. Apt 711 Muncie, IN 47304
11-16-12	Collette Speed	Collette Speed	900 N. New York Ave. Apt 302, Muncie, IN 47303
11/16/12	Deu Patrick	Deu Patrick	1200 W. Bethel Ave. Apt 102 C, Muncie, IN 47303
11/16/12	Molly Paterek	Molly Paterek	4649 Wild Cherry Ln. Indianapolis, IN 46280
11/17/12	Emilie Campbell	Emilie Campbell	1901 E. State W. Lafayette, IN 47906
11/17/12	Emily Campbell	Emily Campbell	1021 W. Rex St. Muncie IN 47303
11/18/12	Eileen Costello	Eileen Costello	819 Riverside Apt 610 Muncie IN 47303
11/18/12	Rechele Martin	Rechele Martin	4504 W. Bethel Ave. Apt 231 Muncie, IN
11/18/12	Kyle Therre	Kyle Therre	51370 C.R. 33 Bristol IN 46507
11/18/12	Tulus Inyath	Tulus Inyath	1200 N. Abbott St., Muncie, IN 47303
11/18/12	Jack Stepe	Jack Stepe	480 Bellacks Land

Fig. 9: No More Moore Name Change Petition Page 1, Aly Edmondson, 2012

11/19/12	AMANDA MEYER	<i>Amy Decker</i>	355 Klugeborn Hall Muncie IN 47306
11/19/12	NATALIE KWAK	<i>Natalie Kwak</i>	2750 W. WHITE AVE #100 MUNCIE IN 47306
11/19/12	SHALA PUGH	<i>Shala Pugh</i>	1212 SR37 Mitchell, IN 47344
11/19/12	MAKIZIE JOPE	<i>Makizie Jope</i>	555 Wilkinson Hall, Muncie IN 47306
11/19/12	BRIAN BAILEY	<i>Brian Bailey</i>	213 N 50th W, Columbus, TN 47201
11/19/12	KATHY POSTIC	<i>Kathy Postic</i>	828 North St. Muncie, IN 47305
11/19/12	ALEXANDER MANIVRE	<i>Alexander Manivre</i>	2000 CALKINS ROAD AVE. Apt 313 Muncie IN 47304
11/19/12	JUSTIN BAYE	<i>Justin Baye</i>	6024 Monmouth Dr. Tipton, IN 47381
11/19/12	ERIC CARAD	<i>Eric Carad</i>	1805 Rebel Rd. Kokomo, IN 46902
11/19/12	DANIELLE VOLKMAN	<i>Danielle Volkman</i>	617 S. Celina Ave, Muncie, IN 47303
11/19/12	MATTHEW	<i>Matthew</i>	405 S. Morrison Rd. Apt 178, Muncie IN 47304
11/19/12	NOAH JOFFE	<i>Noah Joffe</i>	2118 N. Airport St. Muncie IN 47305
11/19/12	ALEX GLENN	<i>Alex Glenn</i>	904 N Linden 47305
11/20/12	KRISTEN MUSSELL	<i>Kristen Mussell</i>	818 W. Riverside Ave Muncie IN 47305
11/20/12	AMY BRADEN	<i>Amy Braden</i>	725 W. Adams St Muncie, IN 47305
11/20/12	SHAWN A WOOD	<i>Shawn A Wood</i>	2115 N. Ball Avenue Muncie, IN 47304
11/20/12	SARAH REYNOLDS	<i>Sarah Reynolds</i>	7217 W. BETHEL AVE. APT 92 Muncie, IN 47304
11/20/12	PATRICK HANFORD	<i>Patrick Hanford</i>	4785 N. Fern Rd. Columbus City, IN 46725
11/20/12	CLAIRE SAMPLE	<i>Claire Sample</i>	1804 W. Charles Street Muncie IN 47303
11/20/12	MELANIE BRASS	<i>Melanie Brass</i>	614 W. Lewis St. Sheridan IN 47309
11/20/12	KENNY SPRUIKE	<i>Kenny Spruike</i>	924 W. Morgan St. Muncie IN 47303
11/20/12	GABRIELLE CHAKER	<i>Gabrielle Chaker</i>	814 N. NEW YORK AVE APT 811
11/20/12	KATELYN HANWOOD	<i>Katelyn Hanwood</i>	213 N. MARSH ST. Muncie
11/20/12	DERRICK GARDNER	<i>Derrick Gardner</i>	312 W. HATE ST. PERDUE HALL IN
11/20/12	J. DANABLO	<i>J. Danablo</i>	603 BOUTWICK UNION CITY OH 45390
11/27/12	MARLEE RUNYON	<i>Marlee Runyon</i>	1107 E. Adams St, Muncie 47305
11/27/12	ELISABETH SMUNK	<i>Elisabeth Smunk</i>	22010. McKinley #8 Muncie, IN 47303
11/27/12	MELISSA MUYCLOS	<i>Melissa Muyclos</i>	216 N. MARTIN AVE MUNCIE, IN 47306
11/27/12	TYLER WHITE	<i>Tyler White</i>	519 N. MARTIN AVE MUNCIE, IN 47304
			5030 East 200 N. Casey effective IN 47305

Fig. 10: No More Moore Name Change Petition Page 2, Aly Edmondson, 2012

Chapter 2: Adulthood

To continue, I must acknowledge that at the start of my adulthood, I learned a lot about my own resilience, and my own pain; physical, mental, and emotional. After years of bullying throughout my childhood in regards to my body and socioeconomic status, I then faced several instances of sexual harassment and assault as an adult that created a lot of trauma in regard to my body, my sexuality, and thus romantic relationships. It is also important to note, that the trauma of my upbringing and lack of examples of healthy romantic relationships also contributed to these experiences. Like I mentioned previously, the struggles of our own parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents shape who we are as individuals today. In my personal experience, I saw that show up in how I sought and conducted relationships with other people as an adult.

In 2010, what started off as a genuine attempt to seek companionship through the means of online dating, I was met with a harsh reality. Many of the messages I received from cis het men, what I was attracted to at the time, were loaded with objectifying and fetishizing comments about my body. It was like catcalling, but virtual. Often, this objectification started within the first second of contact. Friendly greetings and icebreakers were rare. Out of a personal curiosity, I started collecting screen-captures of these messages. Over 10 years of sporadic use of online dating, I created the piece titled *Inbox* (see fig.12). This piece consisted of a lot of the messages I had accumulated, collaged together in one image. In consideration for their privacy, all the authors' identities are edited out. This piece challenged the idea of private vs. public, fetishization vs. demonization of fat femme bodies. When I presented this piece on different occasions, I was met with several comments of solidarity from fellow fat femmes.

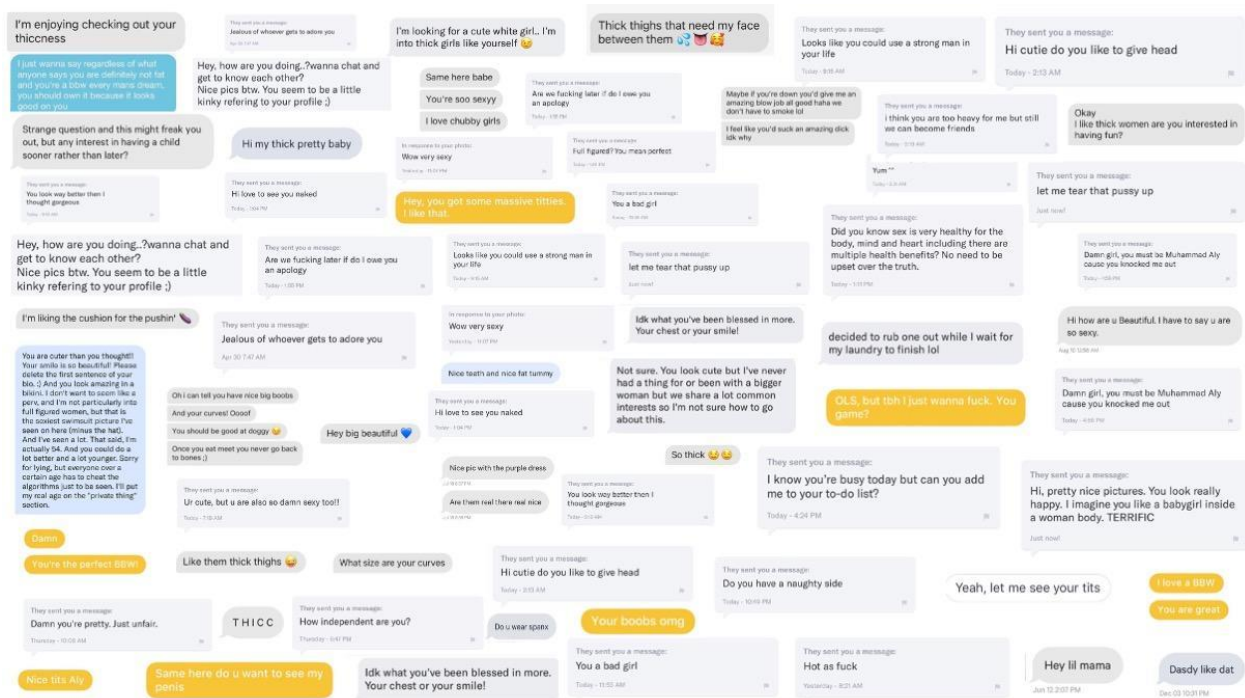


Fig. 12: *Inbox*, Aly Edmondson, 2020

Catcalling, and fatcalling, which is what fat folks refer to when catcalling is in reference to our weight and/or body size. Aubrey Gordon describes the complexities of fatcalling in *What We Don't Talk About When Talk About Fat*. "... fatcalling is also rooted in a deep sense of entitlement to others' bodies – an entitlement that is affirmed in nearly every aspect of our culture. Women's bodies are always at men's disposal, there to comment on, to oggle, to touch, and to take." (Gordon 94). This idea has become so engrained in our culture that oftentimes sexual harassment and even sexual assaults on fat bodies are often not believed. In the rare occasions that we are believed, we are then met with the notion we should be grateful because at least someone found us attractive enough to assault.

A more recognizable and socially acceptable form of fatcalling can be seen in the media with the use of jokes and punchlines at a fat person's expense. We see this in movies, TV shows, in music, and on stage. Gordon states that, "Because fatcalling, too, is widely anticipated and

affirmed, shows like *The Biggest Loser* and *Extreme Makeover* glorify ‘tough love’ for fat people, while shows like *My 600 Pound Life* feature a never-ending intervention.” (Gordon 96).

Fat existence is entertainment and is often used as a costume or a mask; literal and metaphorical. News channel journalists, talk show hosts like Tyra Banks and Dr. Phil have donned fat suits to “gather research” to find out what it is like being fat; only being visibly fat, might I add. I recall several beloved TV shows that featured thin actresses wearing fat suits to depict a character’s “fat phase.” Courtney Cox as Monica in *Friends*. Mila Kunis as Jackie in *That 70s Show*. Debby Ryan as Patty in *Insatiable*. In the media, if fatness were to occur in women it should only be temporary, it should be shameful, and it should be fixed. On the other hand, we have consistently seen notorious and award-winning male actors donning fat suits to mock fat women as well. Robin Williams as Mrs. Doubtfire, Tyler Perry as Madea, and John Travolta as Edna Turnblad in *Hairspray*; a movie touting radical acceptance.

At the end of 2021, I was fascinated with the idea of fat suits and took it upon myself to research patterns and construct an actual fat suit myself. Most of the advertisements and listings I came across consisted of white men dressing up as fat white women. Despite it being fabric, even the proposed “fat suit skin” was almost always seen as white. To be as true to the intentions of the fat suit pattern maker, I created the fat suit. To finish the piece, I ironed on black text of a rhyming poem I had written several months prior discussing the use of fat suits in media, and its impact on fat representation and identity (see fig. 13).

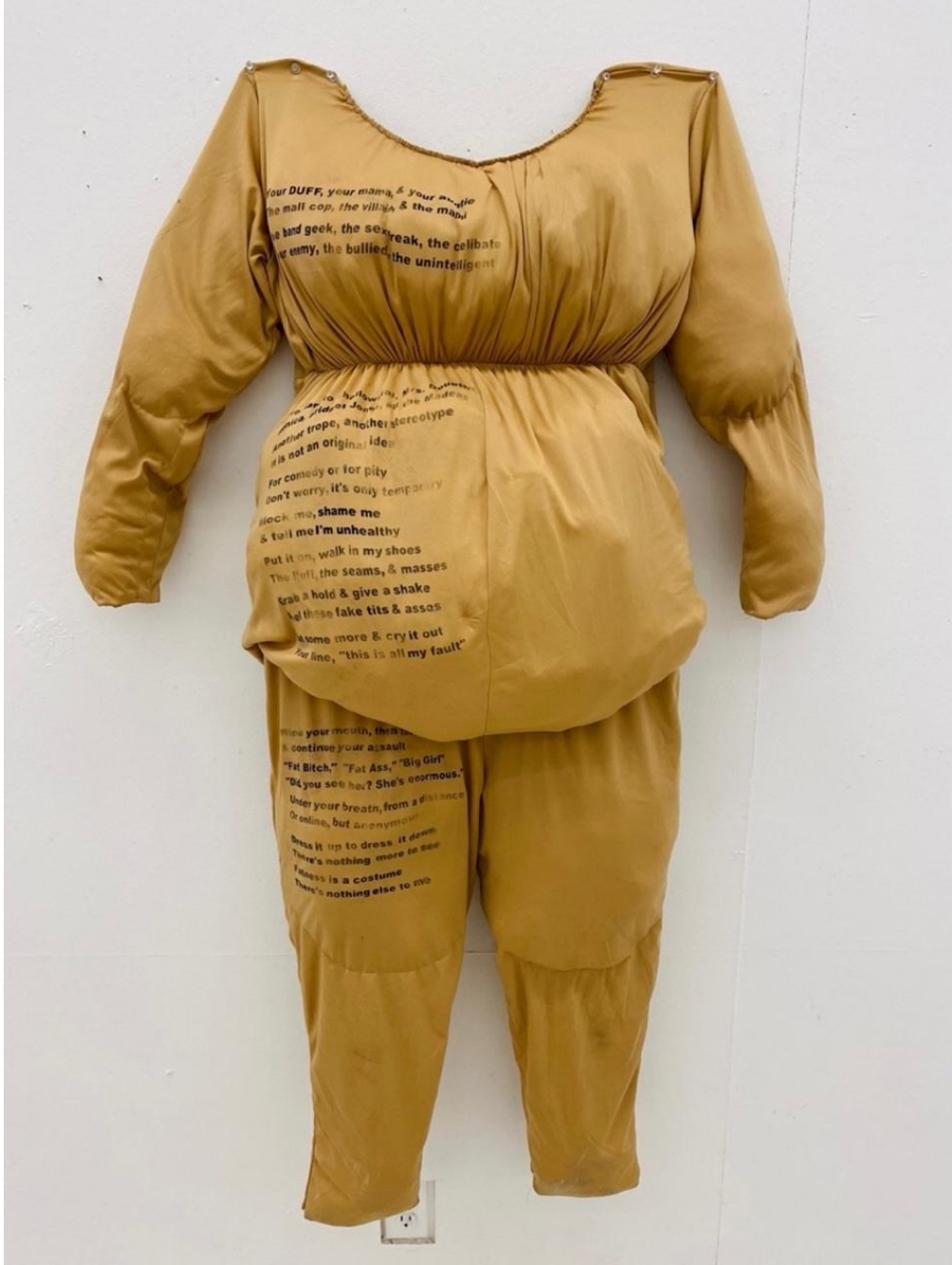


Fig. 13: *Fat Suit*, Aly Edmondson, 2021

Fat Suit

Your DUFF, your mama, & your auntie
The mall cop, the villain, & the mami

The band geek, the sex freak, the celibate
Your enemy, the bullied, the unintelligent

Rosemary to Shallow Hal, Mrs. Doubtfire
Monica, Bridget Jones, all the Madeas

Another trope, another stereotype
It is not an original idea

For comedy or for pity
Don't worry, it's only temporary

Mock me, shame me
& tell me I'm unhealthy

Put it on, walk in my shoes
The fluff, the seams, & masses

Grab a hold & give a shake
Feel these fake tits & asses

Eat some more & cry it out
Your line, "this is all my fault"

Wipe your mouth, then take it off
and continue your assault

"Fat Bitch," "Fat Ass," "Big Girl"
"Did you see her? She's enormous."

Under your breath, from a distance
Or online, but anonymous

Dress it up to dress it down
There's nothing more to see

Fatness is a costume
There's nothing else to me

The fetishization of fat bodies in the media reduces us to tools and entertainment – as bodies to be used. This was evident in the messages I collected for the *Inbox* artwork as well as in my research behind the use of fat suits in media for my *Fat Suit* artwork. It was in my personal life that I drew deeper connections between fat depictions in media and the types of messages I was receiving. I recognized the language and labels being used to describe my body as porn categories I had come across. Acronyms like BBW (Big Beautiful Woman), and PAWG (Phat Ass White Girl), were being used casually like describing someone as a redhead or a tall person. I was being reduced to the only physical traits they enjoyed; all of which were related to my fatness. In response, I wrote a poem titled *For Your Entertainment*:

For Your Entertainment

My body has been both desire and disgust
A fetish and a demon
The deepest fantasies and the scariest fears
I only exist to be fucked and to be feared
Seems like fun, but you wouldn't want to be seen
Fucking fat is an embarrassment and worthy of ridicule
The one with the biggest butt, is the butt of the joke

We can believe in a natural thinness
We can't fathom a natural thickness
Thickness with C K

Costume and Kink

Men who want the best blow jobs and cushion for the pushin'
Men who want praise for having to be celibate 2 months in
Men who think they know what a "real" woman's body is
Men who pick apart and label my body under porn categories of

Big Beautiful Woman | Phat Ass White Girl | Thicc with two Cs | Cunnilingus | Cuckold

Fat chicks are longed to be fucked, but feared to be with

FAT FETISH FEAR FUCK FREAK

My body is not mine
it is a spectacle.

Enjoy.

This reduction of form brought up a vivid memory I had as an adolescent. In a middle school health class, before we were ever taught genetics, we were taught the differences between muscle and fat. For an hour, 12- and 13-year olds were instructed to pass around a replica of a pound of muscle and a replica of a pound of fat. These replicas were made of red and yellow firm and squishy silicone with a sticky residue. We squeezed, squished, and pinched the forms when they reached our desks. The muscle was firm and dense, the fat was soft and mushy. The purpose of the lesson in short was fat equals no-no, muscle equals go-go. This was a memory that stuck with me, and other fat people in my life to this day.

Last year, out of curiosity I wanted to seek out one of those exact replicas. In my research I came across several consisting of different amounts of weight and using different materials. To make sure I was purchasing the right replica, I decided to read the product reviews. I quickly learned that this fat replica not only stuck with fat people, but it also stuck with thin people yet served a completely different purpose. A lot of customers in their detailed product reviews praised this replica for detouring them away from “bad foods.” Some even said they sat this little fat replica on their kitchen countertop to be seen every single day. Instantly I thought what a silly thing to fear. A replica of one pound of fat scaring someone away from a doughnut or a slice of cake. It was so ridiculous, I bought two; a 1-pound replica and a 5-pound replica. Thus, *5 Pounds of Untitled* was made (see fig.14).



Fig. 14: *5 Pounds of Untitled*, Aly Edmondson, 2021

Chapter 3: Personhood

Now that we have covered my childhood and adulthood in the context of my artmaking, I bring you to the present day. The world is in calendar year three of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken over 5.6 million lives worldwide: 869, 026 being from the United States alone (*Our World in Data*). This chapter will cover the impact the pandemic has had on my art practice as well as my physical self as an immunocompromised fat woman. These identities are crucial in understanding the impact of the pandemic, as they are considered separate comorbidities on their own. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website about Obesity and COVID-19, "Having obesity may triple the risk of hospitalization... (and) is linked to impaired immune function." (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*). Existing during this time as a risk has shaped me as a person and my art practice; for the better or for the worse has yet to be determined.

My entire first year as a graduate student at the University of Washington was entirely virtual; class sessions, training, social events, and critiques were all done through computer screens. Thankfully this was done for the safety of everyone, however it did impact what we were able to do as students and art practitioners. Suddenly, we did not have access to the facilities, equipment, and technology that were imperative in our practice, as well as lacking any casual socializing and bonding that would have taken place amongst my classmates and peers. We were all alone, and it felt like it.

In addition to being a full-time graduate student, I also had a full-time job working from home as an instructional designer for Purdue University back in Indiana, a job I still have to this day. My ability to balance school, work, and life was a blur and honestly questionable, even to myself. There was never a day that went by when I did not worry about losing my job, failing out

of school, and/or getting COVID and losing my life. When the final critique of Autumn Quarter in 2020 came along, I did not have anything to present but frustration. That was then I presented my cohort and my faculty with a poem titled *Production*:

Production

I don't have a product for you
I have been preoccupied with existing to bother with art production
I have not lived in any state, but the state of existing

Existing, not in the motivational poster way where summiting a mountain is to exist
Existing, not in the self-help kind of way where it's some kind of radical self-love
Existing in the way that the bare minimum is only what I am capable of

And even then, asking for the bare minimum is asking too much of me right now
So, no, I don't have a product for you
I am numb to project deadlines, important dates, and any other regular life occurrence
I have not processed that I am somehow 30 years old, yet my birthday was now 8 months ago

Existing has been apologizing to my colleagues for the delayed response at my job
Existing has been sitting silent in zoom calls for my classes while my eyesight worsens - and it's the foundation to my practice
Existing has been spending 60+ hours a week staring at a screen of jumbled words and pixelated faces that are supposed to make sense and inspire me

And even though 5 years of performance evaluations read "exceeds expectations," right now there should be no expectations of me
Because I don't have a product for you

Expecting anything other than carbon dioxide leaving my lungs is out-of-touch with the reality we face I have never been more aware of my breathing, what I taste, or what I smell
Existing has been fearing the day I struggle to breathe
Existing has been fearing the day I can't do either
Existing has been fearing the day a doctor decides to take my life

And even though it will be to save another, it'll only be because with less weight, they're considered more productive, and therefore more valuable

I don't have a product for you

Because as we all know, in a capitalist society, product is capital, humans are capital, humans are products This same society assigned me a job the day my biological tools started to bleed between my legs

Existing in this body has been an involuntary ad for expected reproduction,
and the asking of when
Existing in this body has been an involuntary ad for sexual assault and harassment,
and the asking of how
Existing in this body has been an involuntary ad for promoting obesity,
and the asking of why

Even though the answers to those don't really matter

For once, I don't want to be a product for you

A group of people with the intellectual privilege to serve in an institution whose purpose is to evaluate my productivity

A group of people who saw potential in my capabilities of production, despite not knowing much of me at all

My entire existence has revolved around production and reproduction for others more than myself

Despite my growing student loan debt,
Despite my growing essential bills,
Despite leaving my entire family behind to be here,

I ask that you extend the same compassion I have finally given myself,
and to just let me exist without producing

An artist that creates artwork within the bounds of vulnerability and resistance, especially when it comes to fatness is Cindy Baker. Stefanie Snider writes in an essay as part of the *Casual Encounters* series, "... while visibility typically seems an obvious way to fight against oppressive systems, making one's self and one's communities visible within the dominant cultures that have brutally silenced marginalized communities is an incredibly risky action." (Hiebert 104). One at risk is taking a risk. This risk can be seen in Baker's performance piece titled *Crash Pad* (see fig. 15). Ted Hiebert describes in the introduction of Baker in *Casual Encounters*, "her body is large on the mattress...for hours and days and weeks she rests – in part as a refusal of the culture of hyper-productivity and in part as an invitation to others to rest with her." (Hiebert 20).



Fig. 15: *Crash Pad*, Cindy Baker, 2019 (Hiebert 21)

Trying to survive the COVID-19 pandemic has forced my eyes open to the depths the systems in our society go to continue to make profit, to further capital at the expense of human lives. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to the CDC fat lives are considered at risk and disposable. Federal and state governments continue to battle with regulations and mandates

that should be protecting people; but they are not. Instead, we have Rochelle Walensky, the director of the CDC admitting that “over 75% of COVID deaths are people who had at least four comorbidities. So really, these are people who are unwell to begin with.” (Good Morning America). As if we need not to worry for those that are unwell; a fat person and/or disabled person living or dying should not worry you.

Before the pandemic I spent years battling chronic depression and debilitating anxiety, which occasionally lead to emergency room visits for panic attacks. There were several times I thought I was dying. I am aware now the level of mental illness that resides within my family; primarily anxiety and depression that have led to many attempted and completed suicides. The feeling of dying is familiar to my genes, which makes the looming possibility of death by cause of COVID-19 exhausting. In the middle of 2020, I wrote a poem about these anxieties titled *Diagnosis:*

Diagnosis

I'm afraid of dying -----.

Dying ----- as a fat person

Because what the world wants to predict how it came to be

A fat body with a uterus specifically

The constant argument of if my body is actually my body

& not just a factory to produce & reproduce

produce

reproduce

produce

Even if granted that right to

reproduce how I please

I'm told it won't work

But ~~Plan A~~

Plan B

is only

~~Plan A~~

Plan B

when you're

166 pounds

Or less

215

250

293

Otherwise, it's just an expensive, disgusting piece of candy wrapped in plastic & cardboard

If you're

over

166 pounds

Congratulations!

It's a...

(embryo)

Welcome to fatness!

It's ...

{ death }

Apparently, there's risk for:

unwanted pregnancies

[]

supposed heart disease

[]

You exist as:

a point to prove

[X]

a what-not-to-do

[X]

a what-not-to-look-like

[X]

You serve as:

the before to the after

[X]

Strangers will threaten you with heart disease:

in a grocery store parking lot

[X]

in a library

[X]

on the sidewalk

[X]

at the BMV

[X]

on your way to work

[X]

at a doctor's appointment

[X]

You'll be:

mugged of ~~humanity~~
with sharp

[X]
A N [X] I E T Y

With the rate we're going I guarantee the problem isn't the heart in my chest, he mugger is my mind

Family history of:

Suicide [X]

Melanoma [X]

are far more common in my family than heart disease, & we're all

FAT [X]

so what are my chances?

It be weight my but weight the that me
won't the of body, the of world does in

It be pressure in my veins, but pressure society that takes me
out.

The refusal to perform, the defiance of production my faculty and cohorts have witnessed have not been from a lack of interest or intentional disrespect to their own roles in the academic institution. To be up-front, I want to believe and convey to them and you that my performance of attendance, completion of tasks, and alternative modes of production have been acts of resistance and expressions of vulnerability. However, I must admit the reality is that instead they have only been evidence that I am still somehow existing, in whatever way I can in however I am.

Conclusion

Lastly, I share with you the poem I wrote and installed on the walls of the Jacob Lawrence Gallery in Autumn of 2021 for the summer works show at the University of Washington (see fig. 16). It is important to me to note that I was given unexpected limitations on the size of my writing in the middle of install and I did not have any input in the location of the speaker as it relates to the text. This show was intended to showcase the latest work of the second year MFA graduate students for the start of the 2021 school year. The poem, *Meets Expectations*, was my response to this show, and subsequently seems to fit well with the constraints I faced during install. There you go. I did the damn thing.

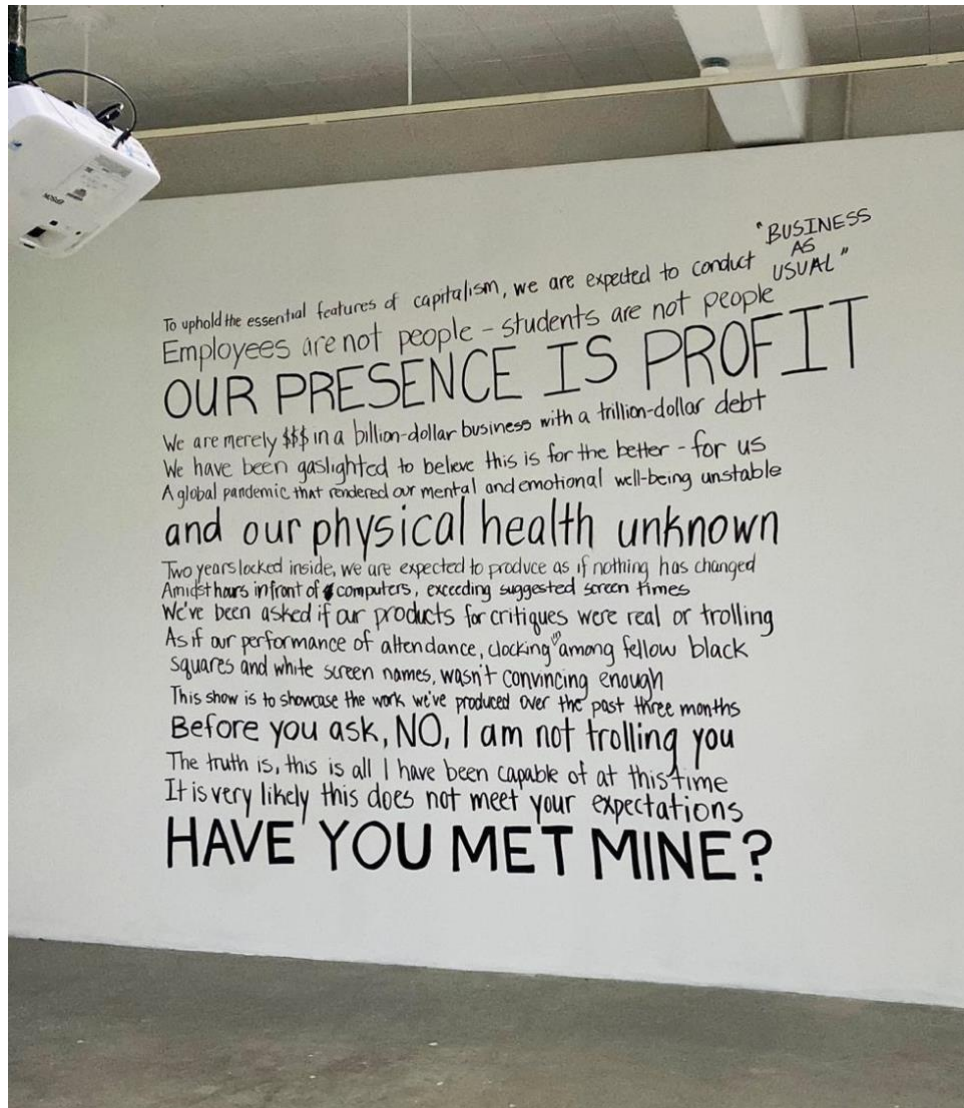


Fig. 16: *Meets Expectations*, Aly Edmondson, 2019

Meets Expectations

To uphold the essential features of capitalism, we're expected
to conduct "BUSINESS AS USUAL"

Employees are not people, students are not people

OUR PRESENCE IS PROFIT

We are merely dollar signs in a billion-dollar business with
a trillion-dollar debt

We have been gaslighted to believe this is for the better
for us

A global pandemic that rendered our mental and emotional
well-being unstable,
and our physical health unknown.

Two years locked inside we are expected to produce as if
nothing has changed

Amidst hours in front of a computers far exceeding suggested
screen times,

We've been asked if our products were real or trolling

As if our performance of attendance, clocking among fellow
black squares

and white screen names wasn't convincing enough

Before you ask, NO, I am not trolling you

It is very likely I have not met your expectations,

HAVE YOU MET MINE?

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