Cake or Death - That’s an Easy Question

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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2009

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ABSTRACT

My work explores body adornment, consumable artwork, and desire. Narrative stories influence the works, recreating aspects of past personal experience as a woman affected battles with Anorexia and Bulimia. In this thesis work, I utilized techniques that I practice in creating kiln formed glass to make works with materials that mimic it: hard candy and sugar. At first glance, it is hard to recognize what some sculptural components are actually made of. Is this beautiful glass? It certainly looks like it, and it’s in a gallery, but if the audience touches it, the stickiness exposes it’s true nature. Like glass, the hard candy is fragile, but instead of being a vessel or being a piece of jewelry, it’s intended to provide an option to be consumed. To a corset made of hard candy, I add Syrup of Ipecac to the formula, in order to induce vomiting as a way to temper the consumption of the sweets that might otherwise adorn the body as fat. Through video, attendant to the candy piece, I present an image the experience of consuming beyond the point of satisfaction, in order to satisfy others. I also offered (safe) sweets as gifts to the audience in a performance work, the cravings of the audience are satisfied, while the artist is denied these very pleasures. Since this all comes down to memory, the process and even motion of making the works is as significant as the final product.
For Mom. I am so proud of you for following your dreams and finishing your degree.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Richard Harned, Mary Jo Bole, and Todd Slaughter - my committee.

Tom Muir, Joel O’Dorisio, Steve Cothern, Tamera Monk, Gary Setzer, Dan Shellenbarger previous instructors who changed my life.

Molly Jo Burke - my studio mate and dear friend for life. I feel so fortunate to have gone through this experience with you.

David Murphy, Matt Carmean, Aimee Sones - my fellow glass grads.

Steve Williams, Chris Harman, David King, Candace Black, Kami Meighan, Justin Braun, Julie Ward - for your friendship, help, and support when I needed it the most.

Mom, Dad, Becky, Kathy, Uncle Jack, Katie Baadke - for always supporting my endeavors, no matter how crazy.

Dr. James Quinlan & Hannah - for making my heart beat just a little bit faster.

Thank you Richard Harned for always having the strange and random items that I needed.

..... WORDS ARE NOT ENOUGH ....
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters:</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Yes, I will take one. Or two...</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hard Candy Corset</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Dress Itself</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Room</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Two Girls, Two Boys, and a Machine</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Eating Fluff</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Conclusion ................................................. 43

List of References ........................................... 46
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Cookies, Detail</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Corset, Making the Candy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Corset, Bending against the mannequin</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Corset, Assembled front panels</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Dress, Full View</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Dress, Detail</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Room, With Dress</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Room, Detail of Interior</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Room, Viewer Interaction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Gumball Machine</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Gumball Imagery, Detail</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Gumball Machine</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Eating Fluff, View of Gallery</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Eating Fluff, Detail</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the course of my graduate study at The Ohio State University, I spent two years teaching glass courses. Throughout this time, I learned and perfected decorative techniques using fused glass, screen-printing layers of imagery between glass with enamels, mold making skills, sewing, plastic resin casting, and candy making. I also learned about performance work and video documentation.

The work in my thesis explores and combines the many different techniques that I learned, allowing the material specificity to impact the concept behind the work.

In order to understand the world around me, I have always used art as a means for exploration. I enjoy taking a narrative approach in my artwork, telling the personal stories that influence my concepts. This helps me to sort through my thoughts and better understand my surroundings.

Like many artists, I find myself enamored by the female body. In my eyes, its beauty is remarkable and unsurpassed. It is perfect. But with a history of an eating
disorder that plagued me for many years, I struggle with a love/hate relationship with food and its affect on my body. For nearly 10 years, I kept these secrets very closely guarded, alienating myself from those who were closest to me. I have starved myself in order to make myself thinner therefore happier - and created a web of lies to protect my secrets. As I blindly followed a path that I was convinced would make me happy, these lies destroyed many relationships in my life, leaving me very empty. The more sick that I became, the more I felt alone and as though no one understood what I was experiencing.

While the material choices were fluid and ever changing, as a constant I focused on adorning the body. This work is not a celebration of perfection, instead it is an exposure of deceptions and lies. My battle with an eating disorder, this intentional destruction of my own body, is a contradiction to the beauty and perfection that I see in the female body. I am exploring the methods that I would use to maintain my eating disorder and to rapidly lose weight. I am exposing my methods of self-destruction in an effort to heal myself of my past and accept my body as it naturally maintains itself.

The works in my thesis reveal the perspectives and secrets of someone with an eating disorder. I am exploring my own faulty logic that I once used to justify my decisions regarding my own health, isolating myself from those who cared about me.
I am intentionally looking beyond what is healthy and instead being honest about what my thought process really entailed.

The more that I starved myself, the more preoccupied with food I became. And the more I thought about food, the more guilty I felt.

Referring the the often extreme opposing points of view presented in this these thesis, I often find myself asking- Do I choose ”Cake or Death?”¹

¹”Cake or Death, That’s An Easy Question” is a quote from British comedian Eddie Izzard
CHAPTER 2

YES, I WILL TAKE ONE. OR TWO...

For my thesis exhibition’s grand reception, I baked cookies for my friends, family, and faculty members. I wore a designer dress, which was far too fancy for the occasion, because I wanted to feel beautiful. I wanted to stand out and be beautiful—Glamorous, even.

As a performance at my thesis exhibition, I made cookies and distributed them. I walked around in my heels, with a bowl full of cookies. Each cookie was individually wrapped in a clear bag, with a gold twist tie and a curled purple ribbon. The cookies were given specifically to individuals who I had a close connection with: faculty, friends, and family.

I made a simple recipe sugar cookie, shaped like dresses and decorated with vivid colors. Being aware of the ipecac in the hard candy corset, several people inquired as to whether or not the cookies were safe to consume. This was an unexpected question that pleased me very much.
Cooking was pleasurable process of going through the motions without any of the satisfaction of consumption. The smell of the cookie dough was divine, the butter and sugar perfectly complimented one another as I put them into my mixer. I loved rolling out the colored dough, firmly pressing the cookie cutters into it, and arranging them on the cookie sheet. I would watch them in the oven, making sure that they were cooked “just right” – a little bit flaky, but not browned. Over the years, I’ve learned that there is a certain science to making cookies- they need to be pulled from the oven a few minutes before they appear to be done. They finish cooking on the sheet and become chewy, flaky, and divine.

At the worst of my eating disorder, when I reached my lowest weight, I was obsessed with cooking food. I wanted to touch it, smell it, look at it, cook it, package it, and make others happy with the very thing that made me miserable.

I would never eat this food; I would simply give it away to others.

The gift of food is gesture of generosity and warm. It creates bonds and connections far beyond the duration of the experience.

It is a gift that I love to give people. Food is the great communicator, a device used to encourage gatherings among people. It is, in effect, what many social events are focused around. Cooking itself is also an intimate experience that can be shared
among friends, family, and lovers. Letting someone into your kitchen can be risky, as it requires a large amount of trust that someone will treat your space with respect.

Whenever I think about being given a sample, I am reminded of an experience I had several years ago: Upon entering the Lindt Chocolate store, I was greeted by a beautiful girl and a smile. She asks me, quite simply, “have you had a sample yet?”

My mind races. A sample? Yet? As in, I can get a free piece of Lindt chocolate? And why haven't I already been given my sample YET? Yet?

“No!” I exclaimed, already wondering what it is that I can to choose from and if shell allow me to have more than one.

I could hardly contain myself. As much as I don't like sugary foods, I do have a soft spot for gourmet chocolates.

I am given my options, and my guide gingerly removes a piece from the bins. She unwraps it and hands it to me. A brilliant gesture, I thought.

Instantly, I felt welcomed and comfortable. It was not because I felt obligated to buy something (after being given the sample), but instead it was because I couldn’t get the taste out of my head. You see, the problem with not eating is that your mind becomes preoccupied with the thought of food. What’s worse is that its a slippery slope.
Because the cookies were gifts, I would never have put anything “extra” into the cookies. The goal of the cookies was to provide a simple pleasure to my friends.

I wanted to make people feel welcome in my space—so I gave them food.
Figure 2.1: Cookies, Detail
CHAPTER 3

HARD CANDY CORSET

I created a corset out of hard candy to illustrate my struggle of trying to force my body to become smaller. I used a mannequin to create the corset. When I started making the corset, she and I were of the same size and proportion. I could wear the corset. By the end of the project, I had gained weight and could no longer wear my corset without risking its structural integrity. The hard candy is very fragile and breaks easily. The corset is now a reminder of how quickly my body can change. It shows me what I once was and how I could be. It shows me my method and my way of manipulating my body to be something that I could not naturally be. When making the corset, I also included Ipecac in the hard candy ingredients. Ipecac is also an aid to persons with eating disorders, inducing vomiting. This makes my corset toxic.

The corset is constructed of hard candy, which at first glance appears to be glass. Many viewers were unaware of the actual material until further inspection of the
materials listed on the title. The corset glows as light transmits itself through the cast sugar. The corset is accented with areas that have been decorated by the hard candy sticks. The remainder of the corset is made with panels of transparent purple. The front has been stenciled with lace by an edible gold spray. The working process of the cast sugar was similar to that of the kilnworking that I typically do- However, it was at a much lower temperature (100-300 degrees vs 1000+ degrees). Using a sewing pattern, the molds were made to the specifications of the mannequin, who had the same measurements as I did (at the time). After casting the forms into food-safe molds, I would gently reheat them and apply them to a mannequin. I used a vegetable oil as a release agent to ensure that the process was not make toxic by chemicals from the molds. The sugar was heated to a “hard crack” state, approximately 300 degrees. This meant that once it cooled, it would not move. A temperature variance of even 10 degrees might mean that the sugar could be flexible and bend after its initial shaping.

Growing up, we were rarely allowed to have sweets. My sisters and I were far too hyper for our own good- and sugar only made it worse. My parents decided that the best way to keep us in line (to whatever degree was possible) was to restrict our consumption of sugar.

We drank diet soda and had saccharine in our kool-aid. To tell you the truth, I cant stand the taste of regular soda because it doesn’t have the familiar aftertaste
of aspartame. And when we did have something with sugar in it, the amount was cut in half. Our foods were never very sweet. Consequently, I am very sensitive to foods that are heavily sweetened. To further control the amount of sugar that we consumed, my father kept the sugar locked in a cabinet!

But I do remember the one instance where we were allowed to have candy.²

When I was a little girl, my mother would buy her coffee from Peet’s Coffee. It was my parents thing. They love their coffee. Peet’s coffee is legendary and began its roots in the very same city that I was born- Berkeley, California. After moving to Ohio³, my parents would regularly complain about the lack of ”good coffee.” At Christmas time, we would special order the coffee for my mother, who is infamous for her coffee consumption. At the front counter of Peet’s Coffee, there were jars full of flavored hard candy sticks. They had every flavor you could possibly imagine. And for a little girl who was rarely allowed to have sugar, it was overwhelming to see so much candy within such close reach.

As a special treat, we were each allowed to have one hard candy stick. My sisters and I would mull over the colors and flavors, never able to really decide which one to get. The color patterns were so beautiful, swirls of color that I never understood how

²After much debate, my mother insists that we often had ice cream in the house. However, neither I or my sisters remember this. In fact, there was one year that we were not allowed to go trick-or-treating...

³November of 1995
they were made. My family always teases me about my appetite—its similar to that of a truck driver\textsuperscript{4}. Big. I was a late bloomer with a high metabolism, which afforded me the opportunity to go through most of my teen years without the fear of gaining any weight. My friends envied me, but I really couldn’t understand what there was to envy about a girl with no breasts or hips. Sure I could eat whatever I wanted, but I had also been teased about not being shapely.

But I grew accustomed to being a stick. I liked it.

Then it happened. I went from one of the smallest girls in my class to one of the tallest— I grew seven inches in one year! I got hips, breasts, and the stretch marks to prove it. I was growing faster than my clothing could wear out. I started to gain weight and develop those curves that everyone had been talking about—and in a panic, I realized that I needed to stop this from happening. I became uncomfortable with my new body and wanted to go back to how I used to be.

There was a realization that I was no longer in control of my own body’s growth. I had to change this. One of the ways that I could curb my hunger was to consume hard candy. My treat became a punishment. It gave me the satisfaction of being able to have something to eat—without any of the guilt. Finally, I started to win the

\textsuperscript{4}On a family trip, we stopped to eat at a truck stop. I ordered the “Truckers Breakfast” which included far too much food for an 11 year old girl to consume. I also ordered an extra biscuit.
battle against my bodys growth. Not only did I stop gaining weight, but I began to lose weight and return to my smaller frame. I regained control.

However, there are two sides to this: it could be a reminder of the pain I went through, and making myself sick could be a way to keep myself from revisiting this method. Most people dont want to throw up- so it could deter them. Consuming, knowing that you will experience it with both pleasure and pain, is likely to deter a person from consuming at all. Or, I could view the Ipecac as an incentive because it would assist in the binging and purging of food. I would still get the satisfaction and sweetness of the candy. It would help with weight loss and eventually help me reach my goal of being able to fit into the corset. It’s a winning situation. However, as the consumption of the corset continues, it will eventually disappear- just as my body would waste away.

The corset is unrecognizable as a candy. It’s material is suspicious, yet alluring and dangerous. With the consequences of of the Ipecac, this toxic candy is best left untouched, rather than identified and consumed.
Figure 3.1: Corset, Making the Candy
Figure 3.2: Corset, Bending against the mannequin
Figure 3.3: Corset, Assembled front panels
CHAPTER 4

THE DRESS ITSELF

As a whole, the dress is made of two parts: the corset and the skirt. The corset is made from hard candy and Ipecac.

The skirt is sewn out of a heavy, dark purple fabric. I mimicked the sewing patterns of many modern dresses, gathering the fabric along the seams to create a “bunching” affect. Each gathering is stitched and accented with a golden pin to hold it in place.

The skirt itself is shorter in the front and longer in the back. It falls just below the knees. The front exposes two shades of gold tulle and gold shantung fabric, interwoven. The corset attaches to the skirt at the waist.

The dress is displayed on traditional dress stand, made from steel scroll work and painted a cream color.
The dress is contained and displayed in a large circular closet, which has been specifically constructed for its preservation. The preservation of the dress is important, as it holds the memories of the time when the dress once fit. It holds the dress as a goal for the future, to become once again what was in the past.

It’s acceptable, encouraged, and expected to diet before a wedding or formal event. On this journey, women lose weight, grow out their hair, and go on a search for the perfect dress. This dress becomes documentation and proof of what they became.

The dress is also a goal. It is often bought at a smaller size than is currently worn, because it will fit by the night of the event.

Even though I graduated from high school nearly 7 years ago, I still have my prom dresses. Yes, both of them. I can no longer fit into them but I cannot bear to part with them.

If only I could weigh what I did in high school. How many women wish that? I know that I do. Our bodies, so newly developed that they haven’t yet caught up with themselves. Budding breasts, narrow hips, in the midst of puberty with bodies that just don’t make sense. The dream of once again fitting into these dresses is unrealistic and impossible. Even if I were to weigh what I once did, the shape of my body has changed drastically.
All I ever wanted was to be beautiful. A “pretty girl.” Not teased for being awkward or ugly. Not fearing that it would be social suicide to date me. I wanted to be pretty.

Prom was the first time in my life that I got to dress up. My hair was done, I wore formal makeup it was a transformation. I was convinced that this night would make me beautiful. It would make someone change their mind about how they felt about me.

I would no longer be that awkward teenager, too ugly for a date. THIS was the night that would really show people that I wasn’t as ugly as everyone said that I was.

The housing for the hard candy corset was very important to me. I wanted to capture the experience of finding, embracing, and holding onto the memory of “the one.”

The first event that I can remember dieting for was prom. I wasn’t alone in this quest. Many of my peers began the process of prom preparation many months prior, complete with tanning and strict diets. In Western culture, the formal dress is of major significance. I feel like it’s the first time that a young girl can be glamorous and sexy; A rite of passage.
A woman must prepare for an event for months beforehand. She must be at her very finest, her best, so that the one night is more memorable. It becomes more significant.

I have no pictures from my junior prom because my family only owned one camera (pre digital camera days), which my twin sister took with her the night before, so she could document her own look. The memories of how I looked are gone.

My sisters memories are forever saved & cherished. All I have left of this night is my dress. I keep it as documentation that I was in fact so small that I could fit into this tiny dress.

My concern about this behavior is that it makes it acceptable to have an eating disorder (albeit temporary for some women, but for others it leads them down a very self destructive path) So I must house this dress for forever, build a wall around it-because it is all that I have of this night.
Figure 4.1: Dress, Full View
Figure 4.2: Dress, Detail
CHAPTER 5

THE ROOM

The room was constructed out of flexible plywood, studs, and MDF board. I chose to build such a large structure because of the generous installation time-frame that we were given to install our thesis exhibitions. I rationalized that I may never again be given such a lengthy installation in conjunction with so much space for my work. I wanted the room to be of an intimate size, large enough for just one or two people to fit inside and explore. The size was slightly over 7 feet and 9 inches. The circumference divided by the material size of the flexible plywood determined this actual size of the room. In order to make construction easier, I allowed the material size (8x4ft sheets) to determine the overall dimensions. The room itself was a very significant undertaking. Because of transportation concerns, it could not be constructed outside of the Urban Arts Space. So I had to plan everything ahead of time and do all of my woodworking at Sherman Studio Arts Center.
I planned everything so that I would be able to easily assemble it within the gallery space. What did I want? I imagined it as if IKEA sold a kit for a circular room and all I needed was a screwdriver in order to assemble it.

Never have I built something so large. The process itself was very scary for me. Until it was actually standing, I was unsure that I would actually be able to do it. I labeled everything, predrilled most of my holes, and had very clear instructions. With the help of two assistants, we were able to construct the room in a matter of hours. We built it in two halves, then pushed the two sides together and screwed them together. Working at such a large scale allows me to physically consume my viewer with the piece. People are invited into the room, excited about being able to stand inside of an art work (when we are so often told not to touch). But with further inspection, it is realized that what they assumed to be glass is actually a toxic food. And after making the connection between the Ipecac, the dress, and eating disorder, they quickly leave through the same door that they came in. It becomes awkward because I have just shared a secret that feels inappropriate for such a beautiful space in a gallery.

When it was over, I was amazed that I had created something so monumental. I was amazed that after everything that I did, all the planning, careful consideration, the precautions it fit like a glove.
Its like when Ive bought a dress that was two sizes too small, with the intention of being able to wear it for an event. And after all of the dieting, the dress fits perfectly. There is no greater reward.

The room itself is modeled after a closet. Columns cloaked by rich gold fabric cover the studs that support the walls of my room. These columns mimic the boning of a corset. The room holds the memory of what once was.

It is a closet full of my memories and fantasies for the future. Its like a time capsule.

The chandelier sets the formal atmosphere. Purple is the color of my bedroom growing up, a drawback to my childhood. Purple is also a very regal color and signifies elegance and worth.

The color used in the closet is the exact shade of my bedroom during graduate school. My home is a very private space, which I have spent many hours crafting, but have shared it with very few individuals. My bedroom is my secret place- my safe place. In my closet is where I hide my deepest secrets. crafting, but have shared it with very few individuals.

Digging deeper, my closet is where I hide my most intimate of secrets. While in a relationship, I collect objects which remind me of that person (a movie ticket, a note, petals from a flower, a favorite kind of tea). In the past, I have idealized my partners.
I am faithful to a fault, and unable to see their faults. It is possible that I still do this- I am never sure until its over. At the end of the relationship, which usually ends very badly, I seal the box. I will not add anything else to it, nor will I allow myself to reminisce over its contents. Wherever I move, these boxes come with me only to be stuffed in the back of my new closet. I do not open them because I do not want to re-visit the past. However, I am also unable to let them go. They feel like a ball and chain, reminding me of the things that have passed.

But unlike my past relationships, I wanted to try on this dress again. I wanted to visit in a safe place- a place that did it justice. It seems that whenever I move, I revisit the dress. When I empty out my closet, I will put it on. No one will ever see me struggle to zip it up. My body has changed so much that even when I have weighed the same as I did in high school, the dress was painful to wear. In the same dress that I had to install straps to hold it up, my breasts were now so constricted that I could barely breathe.

Instead of giving the dress to a charity, I put it into my new closet.
Figure 5.1: Room, With Dress
Figure 5.2: Room, Detail of Interior
Figure 5.3: Room, Viewer Interaction
CHAPTER 6

TWO GIRLS, TWO BOYS, AND A MACHINE

The gumball machine has two canisters. It is painted with a rich purple color, accented with gold trim. Inside of each canister is a small glass panel. The glass panels are made with layers of fused glass and screen printed enamels. The imagery depicts two girls and two boys. The canisters are filled with two different kinds of capsules. And the gumball machine is functioning, allowing the viewer to interact.

When I started making the hard candy corset, the mannequin and I were the same size and proportion. By the end of the process, she was smaller than me.

In order preserve the memory of once being so small, I cut the mannequin into little pieces and put them into clear gumball machine capsules. I also added colored sugar that looks like glitter. Glitter makes everything more appealing.

The capsules now hold the thought and memory of my once smaller body. I can hold this memory in my hand, carry it with me, and also share it with others.
The other capsules contain tiny Cookies and sugar filled cereal with fats, preservatives, and additives. According to many health experts, the source of obesity and encouragement of unhealthy habits in many young children is the breakfast food that they enjoy the most.

During my first year of graduate school, I found myself focusing on vintage advertisements that were directed towards women. One in particular illustrated two girls being observed by a set of boys. The image blatantly implied that if you ate cookies between meals, then you would be fat and therefore unattractive. However, if you snacked on a five-calorie pep-o-mint, youd not only maintain your svelte figure but also the attention of the boys. These are the images displayed in the canisters.

This advertisement was astounding. Not only because it was so offensive and direct, but it hit a nerve because I had followed the same regimen to lose weight. As another blow, I felt guilty.

I struggle with guilt because I have a younger sister who is overweight. I become angry about those advertisements because it makes me think of my sister and how people treat her because she isnt slender and willowy. And it makes me feel guilty because of my own struggles with weight- with my desires to not only be of normal weight, but to be underweight. Do I fear becoming my younger sister? I think that she is beautiful, but I know that people treat her differently because she is fat. And
that hurts me more than I can even begin to describe. It hurts me that I cannot protect her. And I resent my own fears of gaining weight. It is also these fears of hurting her that cause me to censor my work. The thought process is very circular. Most of all, I realize that my fears stem from an anger of how people treat her. She gets discriminated against because of her weight. And because my sister and I are of the same flesh, this also hurts me because I want to protect her. The imagery depicts a reality that is often denied. As much as I may wish to protect my sister, and as beautiful as I know that she is, I cannot prevent people from judging her. I view the gumball machine as the original gamble. Its also a source of sweets and rewards. This time, the reward is gradual and a consequence of the snack which you chose.

The machine does not discriminate against gender or age. In fact, young children are especially attracted to it. For a child, a gumball machine is representative as a reward- It is full of treats.

Throughout the exhibition, many children interacted with the piece. They were immediately drawn to it because of the bright colors and the possibility of sweets. They were nave about my intentions of the capsules, looking beyond the glass imagery, only considering the very moment when they could insert a quarter, turn the crank, and receive a brightly colored reward.
As you consider each gumball canister, you can make a choice: consume the cookie and have difficulty finding a partner. OR you can take the sugar, that false sense of satisfaction, and mannequin skin and be thin & desirable—just as the advertisement claims.

With either one, you are taking a gamble.

The viewer interaction with the gumball machine is crucial. It forces you to make an impulsive choice based on only two options. It is also a survey of impulsive choices, as you must insert a quarter for every decision that is made. By counting the quarters in each chamber, I can observe the choices of my viewers without being present.
Figure 6.1: Gumball Machine
Figure 6.2: Gumball Imagery, Detail
Figure 6.3: Gumball Machine
A small video screen is displayed on the wall, showing the documentation of a performance. The screen is placed at eye level to create an intimate dialogue between the viewer and the video performance. I am consuming balls of cotton fluff. The represent a substance that appears as thought it is more fulfilling than it actually is. When I put the fluff in my mouth, it becomes smaller because the saliva in my mouth condenses the texture.

One after the other, I placed twenty-two of the soft pink cotton fluffs into my mouth.

I am imagining myself at a dinner table, interacting with a partner, recreating a meal that we’d once shared. In this case, the partner is actually the viewer. Eye contact with my partner is especially important as I am trying to convince them of my consuming these items, falsifying the situation. As I consume the fluff, I examine
many of them. I pull them apart, smell them, and run the material against my lips, trying to convince my partner that I am in fact enjoying what I am consuming.

For once, the pain that I felt on the inside could be viewed on the outside. The expressions on my face are not exaggerated and there is no acting involved.

After eleven minutes, I couldn’t take it any longer. It was painful and I could barely breath. I started to choke and I turned away from the camera. This is the last that is revealed to the audience. The video screen fades to white.

Off screen, I took the now small, compacted, wet cotton balls out of my mouth. With each one that was removed, I felt relieved from the burden of actually digesting these items.

Quite often, I’ve been forced to finish all of my meals, beyond a point of being full. Afterwards, I would go into the bathroom and throw up. Purging is a more gentle way to word it. In my fantasy world, my hard candy lipstick would be a solution to this problem. In order to show how I felt while under these eyes, I stuffed myself with cotton balls of fluff. The sensation in my mouth was dry as I felt all of my saliva being absorbed. I would then push it to the side of my cheek and reach for the next one; Never swallowing, always hiding the pieces in my cheeks, pretending to consume them.
Eating disorders are shrouded with secrecy and fear. Fear that if this secret gets into the wrong hands, they will force you to get help- and your world will come crashing down. Eating around others was always a challenge. Not because I couldn’t handle watching them eat, but because of how often I would be advised that I wasn’t eating enough. Really, that’s all I’d eaten? How could that be? While at the table, I had two choices: I could eat the food or let it go to waste. It’s rude not to eat it, especially when someone else is buying. In all honesty, I was too poor to be bulimic. I saw it as a waste of money. It’s far cheaper to not eat much at all than it is to simply experience the food and not digest it. I once had a boyfriend who would watch me eat. When I was done, I’d still have to eat more of my dinner. He’d force me to consume my food until I felt ill. This worked for a while, until I started to excuse myself after I was done eating. This is how I eventually became bulimic. I wanted to make others happy while still maintaining my own sanity. After he realized my methods, I was forbidden to go to the restroom by myself for fear that I might purge the food. He thought that he was helping me. He believed that if I ate at least one meal while we were together, that was one more meal that I would have otherwise not consumed. In his eyes, his mission was complete and he’d done his part. But I was left feeling sick with guilt. The tears in my eyes weren’t enough for him to stop being so cruel.
The video reflects the story, but is recreated to demonstrate. It’s akin to crime scene that has been recreated for television purposes, as opposed to a real surveillance.

With hungry eyes, I want my viewer to watch me painfully consume the cotton balls. I would watch people, watching me on the small screen. They grimaced in pain as each moment passed, but it was like a train wreck that they couldn’t look away from. They inquired as to whether or not I had gotten sick from eating the fluff. Was it real? Did I get sick?

I revealed to them my secret: I kept it all hidden in my cheeks. And then I purged as soon as the camera was turned off. The pain I felt was real. But it was also a lie that I told the viewer. By allowing them to assume that I digested everything, I deceived them because I did not reveal what had happened after the screen faded.

I prefer to think of it as a white lie: it wasn’t hurting anyone.
Figure 7.1: Eating Fluff, View of Gallery
Figure 7.2: Eating Fluff, Detail
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Because the bulk of my exhibition focused on losing weight by extreme methods, my audience came to distrust my artwork. When I presented them with an honest gift of a cookie, there was concern of whether or not it was safe to consume. This demonstrated the intimacy and trust involved in sharing food with others. A gift that is intended to bring pleasure is seen as suspicious when everything else around it is toxic.

With this series of work, I am effectively out of the closet. I have shared many intimate secrets that were once very carefully guarded. I have chosen to share these with my audience I have explored many different methods of consumption. I have created a toxic candy dress, which disappears as the viewer consumes it and becomes ill from the Ipecac. This dress held inside of a closet of memories that can never be fully relived. Yet, I am not ready to let go of the idea that I may someday fit into my old dress.
With the gumball machine, I monitored the preferences of my viewers by counting the quarters collected within the chambers. Thirty-eight chose the cereal, while seventeen chose the mannequin and glittery sugar. This leads me to believe that their decisions were not based on what was depicted on the glass, through the layers of transparent glass and beyond the imagery that had advised them of the imminent consequences, but instead that they looked beyond the imagery as though it were not there at all. The decision was made based on the brightly color pieces of cereal and tiny cookies- and whether or not they could be consumed. The viewer was more comfortable with taking something more familiar and recognizable, rather than a mysterious combination of plastic mannequin and colored sugar.

With my video work, I wanted to and show them how sometimes even the best of intentions can make things worse and more difficult.

With the protective closet for the toxic dress, I built a safe place for these thoughts. I can search for beauty and feel protected from the outside worlds harsh concerns. I also chose to invite people into this space so I could tell them the truth about my eating disorder. Many of my most intimate and trusted secrets have been revealed. By allowing the viewer to enter my world and to learn about my past, I am hoping to encourage their empathy for those who battle eating disorders. Its not something
that someone can simply snap out of. Its a constant fight against ones inner self and
causes a significant amount of anguish and pain.

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LIST OF REFERENCES


