

Feminine, Like

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Introduction

To help better understand the world around us, we develop shared assumptions about our experiences. These assumptions, or social constructs, are useful because they create order through the use of categorization. Categorization helps us quickly define, organize, and comprehend experiences. The effect of social constructs and their byproducts of categorization should be considered, as they often influence significant facets of our lives. Our idea and understanding of gender constructs is a fundamental concern because gender impacts many of these important facets. My multimedia thesis work examines the social construction of gender, and the coinciding expectations that are created. The work aims to question the validity of the stereotypes associated with gender in order to explore their limitations. The work utilizes self-portraiture and symbols, often pulled from popular culture, as well as performance to exemplify and exaggerate gender ideals. My recreations of social constructs examine how assumptions can limit our perceptions or potentially restrict our behavior.

To define something as a social construct is to emphasize its contingency on aspects of social interactions. It is something that is created by a society, dependent on the time and place in which that society exists (Boghossian 1). Examples may include money, citizenship, or government. While some gender differences may be biologically founded, many of the stereotypic attributes and roles associated with gender arise from cultural factors; therefore, gender can be considered, at least in part, socially constructed. The impact gender has as a construct is vast because gender development can influence people's lives in ways such as talents cultivated, conceptions of self and others, social opportunities and constraints, as well as social life and occupational paths pursued (Bussey & Bandura, 676). Gender

differentiation is one of the primary ways in which people get divided, often separated by either biological sex or masculine and feminine traits. Many of the attributes selectively promoted in males or females tend to be differentially valued, perpetuating different expectations based upon gender. In American culture gender differentiation is commonly challenged; people question why masculinity is associated with males, strength, and power and femininity with females, gentleness, and nurturing. In my thesis work, I hope to not only push these questions forward, but to also look at how gender stereotypes originate and have changed over time.

Background

My work is not inherently personal, though personal history and experience do come into play. As a female, I have felt pressure to conform to standards of femininity. I have felt myself define my self-worth through my appearance; to obsess over a beauty routine or feel lesser without one. My family ascribes to traditional standards of femininity and gender definitions. As a young child I was quite the tomboy, and praised for it, but as I became a teenager I was scolded for not exhibiting traditionally feminine traits. Experiencing these conflicting expectations gave me a keen interest in social constructs; how they are created, why they exist, and why people adhere to them so strongly. Early on I became an acute observer of social norms and popular media in order to try to answer these questions for myself, especially in regards to femininity and gender. My interest resulted in a bachelor's degree in psychology, with a specialization in human development and family studies. I took a variety of classes to learn more about what impacts human development and self-expression, as well as women and gender studies courses. I had always used art for

expression and it was a passion of mine, but it wasn't until after my bachelors that I began to consider art a serious means to explore the topics I was interested in.

Before and during the MFA program I studied a lot of contemporary artists making work about feminism, popular culture, and gender. There is a history of women in art using role-play and dressing up as a tool to explore feminist topics and I have always been drawn to that. My work could be described as reminiscent of Cindy Sherman, and I certainly have pulled inspiration from her, but I do not think it is an imitation. Growing up in the digital age I frequently dressed up and photographed myself; it felt like a natural place to begin creating my thesis work, not like an imitation of another artist. My work exists in place influenced by Internet culture and has an underlying sense of ironic sadness that I think previous artist looking at femininity may not have expressed as clearly. Stylistically I have pulled a lot of inspiration from Cheryl Donegan, Genevieve Gaignard, and Patty Carroll. I was really inspired by Donegan's video work; the way she uses herself, in her studio, to intersect performance and video. She ironically uses a bright, feminine color palette, and plays with TV screens as if they are a mirror; the screen becomes a way to see and manipulate clichés of the female body. My desire to begin exploring my work through video was greatly influenced by Donegan's work. Gaignard photographs herself dressed as different personas, or stereotypes, in order to explore issues of race and class. I think I pull inspiration from her photographs, but I am really inspired by her immersive installations in which she creates a space in which her photographed personas might live. I think I have tried to do something similar in my photographs; I aim to create a stylized world covered by representations and symbols of femininity. Patty Carroll's photographs address the complicated relationship between women and domesticity. She uses saturated colors, often covering her subjects in

drapery or domestic objects creating a feeling of dark humor. My work often has tongue-in-cheek, dark, humor and Carroll's work has been something I have returned to for inspiration. I am also influenced by the way Carroll looks at feminine constructs throughout time, and how the constructs of the past influence current ones.

Limits and Options

As I began to consider how and when gender stereotypes form, I first thought about children. My thesis work and research started with an exploration as to how children form gender concepts and what implications this may have on their development. By age 5 children already have developed knowledge of gender stereotypes that they then apply to themselves and others. They then use these stereotypes to form impressions, guide behavior, direct attention, and organize memory (Martin & Ruble, 67). Children form these gender conceptions through a complex mix of experiences, affected by biology, self-motivation, and cultural design (Bussey & Bandura, 678). Clearly, children's conception of gender has great influence over their development. While this may be a complicated process I found an easily understandable way to explore it through children's toys, as play is a fundamental learning tool for children.

For a year I collected children's toys from garage sales and thrift stores in order to create my first thesis work *Limits and Options*. All the toys I collected were manufactured since about 1990 or later. I kept the toys divided by the gender in which they are traditionally marketed to. As I collected the toys I painted them pink if they are intended to be bought for a girl or blue if for a boy. *Limits and Options* consists of two sculptures placed next to one another. The sculptures are made up of the painted toys, piled on top of one another, divided

by color. They are approximately 5 feet tall. The types of toys are surprisingly unvaried, as I seemed to find similar toys over and over again. The pink toys consist of toys such as baby dolls, Barbies, dollhouses, kitchen sets, telephones, jewelry, and tiaras. The blue toys include action figures, army men, trucks, cars, guns, swords, and tools.



Limits and Options, Painted Toys, 4' x 4' x 5', 2018

When viewing *Limits and Options* the colors pink and blue act as obvious signifiers for femininity and masculinity, or the gender for which the toy is intended for. In American culture, this association between color and gender is so strong, especially in reference to children, that there can be no doubt for the viewer that this work is about gender differentiation in toys. This is intended to be readily available information for the viewer so they can think about what this connection signifies within a broader system of meaning. Additionally, painting the toys monochromatic removes branding and design elements, unifying and strengthening the piece. This helps the viewer focus on the toys' form, making the toys feel like connected pieces that shape social constructs, revealing how gender differentiated toys of recent past still are. The size of these sculptures, due to the number of

toys, encourages the viewer to spend time with each sculpture to look at all the different types of toys that are included. When viewing all the toys as connected pieces, instead of individual objects, it is easier to see the themes that group gender differentiated toys together. Among the pink toys common themes include the domestic, the body, nurturance, and the relational (i.e. telephones). Among the blue toys common themes include physical activity, labor, competition, and power (Blakemore & Centers, 619). By taking the individuality of the toy away and grouping them by marketed gender, these differing themes rise to the surface and become blatantly apparent as a socially constructed indoctrination.

As I began this work I did not expect to find that toys would feel as divided by gender as they appear to be. Access to a variety of toys is important because of the importance of play in childhood development. Play enables children to practice adult roles, it helps them develop new competencies and confidence, and teaches them work in groups, share, resolve conflicts, and learn self-advocacy skills (Ginsburg 182). Toys can be considered a tool that children use during playtime, and if during play children are learning new skills and trying out roles, toys are the mechanisms that enable them to do so. Given the themes among the toys in *Limits and Options* it is clear what kind of roles or skills children may try out when playing with a range of these toys. Girls' toys are much more likely to encourage play centered around the body, or appearance, and domestic skills while boys' toys are likely to encourage competition and spatial reasoning (Blakemore & Centers, 631). If early childhood play is the time in which children begin building skills and interest that will follow them through their life, the toys they play with should be considered with care. *Limits and Options* is meant to generate thought about exactly that, as well as the apparent gender differentiation that exists in toys and how this may perpetuate gender stereotypes. The work is not meant to

condemn any given toy, but to emphasize the importance of offering a variety within toys. It is my hope that by emphasizing the potential underlying themes within toys, that viewers will contemplate the way in which they engage their children with play. If we are consistently playing soft, nurturing narratives with young girls and active, aggressive ones with boys we may enable social constructs that limit individuals from reaching a well-rounded sense of self, or prevent children from trying out different self-roles.

Pink, Semiology, Sociology

Assigning color to gender is mostly considered to be a twentieth-century concept, and most often limited to Western Europe and the Americas. The reversal of what we consider “normal” was thought of as conventional even as early as the beginning of the twentieth-century (Frassanito & Pettorini, 24). There are likely many events that came together to give pink its strong association with femininity, however major contributors are likely retailers’ advertisements and medical advancements. Around the 1940’s retailers began to advertise babies and young girls in pink clothing, options for girls became increasingly pink (Maglaty 2). Eventually, in line with the booming advertising industry, many things became separated by gendered coded colors, from diapers and toys to adult hygiene products and home goods. A rise in consumerism paired with gender-coded goods has certainly shaped pink’s association with femininity. While children are becoming aware of gender and building their understanding of it, they are subjected to sophisticated and targeted advertising that reinforce gender-coded preferences. Additionally, advancements in ultrasounds that now allow parents to find out the sex of their babies before birth have created a huge market for “gender reveals” that are often completely decorated in pink or blue. Parents can plan for the birth of

their baby, and can purchase specific gender-coded items ahead of time, whereas in the past emphasis was placed more so on practicality and gender-neutral items. Pink and blue often become a symbol of predetermined femininity or masculinity with prescribed expectations before a person is even born.

Pink's association with femininity, and its relevancy in advertising, doesn't stop after childhood. Advertisements, store branding, magazines, and more all use pink as part of their marketing aesthetic. For example, advertisements for feminine products or make up almost all use pink at some point. Stores such as Sephora and Ulta Beauty have pink fixtures, which then have photographs of models placed onto them. Victoria's Secret has a lingerie and clothing line titled PINK, and their stores and advertisements are full of the color pink. Through overuse of the color, pink has become embedded into the cultural connotations that prescribe expectations placed upon women. Pink, as a symbol of ultimate femininity, signifies a set of standards that includes but isn't limited to unrealistic physical standards, an equal balance of modesty and sexual appeal, independence but also nurturing tendencies.

There are many dichotomies, such as these, that exist within the standards of idealized femininity. As a social construct, what defines femininity is constantly shifting over time. These dichotomies occur because of the slow pace of changing constructs. It takes a long time for past definitions to dissolve into new ones, and it is these past definitions influence the creation of new ones. Pink as a symbol still signifies past definitions of femininity as well as current ones. In current Western culture, feminine stereotypes or expectations are centered on achieving a standard of physical self-presentation; where as in the past emphasis was placed on moral character, self-control, and motherhood or domestic behaviors (Collins et al. 104).

Today women may use pink as a feminine symbol that represents independence and personal choice. For example, on social media platforms, women's personal posts or in advertising campaigns pink is often paired with sayings such as "put your lipgloss on and remember who you are" or "keep your heels and standards high." Pink here is associated with independence and personal strength. It is phrased as if women are taking the color pink back and owning it as their own, instead of it being a symbol of unattainable, unrealistic, or demeaning femininity. However, manufacturers and media may use this redefined meaning to their advantage when they include pink in their branding. It is not only manufacturers or the media rebranding pink, but women in their personal posts perpetuating it as well. Female social media influencers still often pair feminine strength with body image, and while it may feel like a celebration it is still creating not only ideal bodies, but ideal feminine attitudes as well. Social media influencers allude that an attitude or a product is going to generate personal strength and independence. They use the color pink as a branding tool in these messages, but in turn pink still represents something that is often unattainable for the average female. Modern use of the color pink may appear to represent the expression of femininity as an individual choice, but it appears to still symbolize idealized, unrealistic feminine standards that place emphasis on body image over character with connections to feminine standards of the past; i.e. self-control, modesty, and maternal tendencies.



Selfie Stick, Archival Inkjet Print, 30 x 40, 2018

Human culture is full of signs, each standing for something other or bigger than itself, and the people within the culture work to understand those signs (Rose 75). In my work I use semiology, or the use of signs and symbols, as a tool that allows the viewer to understand how my work relates to a broader system of meaning (Rose 74), with pink being the most apparent and consistent symbol. Each sign in my work stands for something other or bigger than itself, and this allows the symbols in my work to not remain a singular, isolated, creative event, but a reflection of a social process or construct. Semiology is a useful method of interpretation because it assumes constructions of social differences are communicated

through images, and that the image itself is the most important site of meaning (Rose 77).

This perspective is particularly useful when viewing my work because I explore how images, symbols, and objects perpetuate social expectations and differences.

A Semiological understanding of signs breaks signs into two parts; the signified, which is the object or concept, and the signifier, which is the image or meaning attached to the signified (Rose 79). Throughout my work, pink works as an overt signified, of which the signifier is femininity as it has been defined in both the past and the present. For example, in *Selfie Stick*, the majority of the photograph consists of the color pink (the pink curtain and rug) and actual human presence is minimal. Pink is the most prominent symbol of the feminine, not the props used or body movements though they do add to the feminine symbolism. Across time, pink's connection with femininity has remained so strong that the use of the color in my work could symbolize almost nothing else. I use this overt signifier to my advantage in order to quickly and easily let my viewer know my work aims to discuss pink's symbolism within a broader system of meaning, both past and present. I think my overuse of the color also functions as comedic irony, poking fun at how much cultural meaning is placed upon a color. Why can't pink exist as a color without gender specific connotations? For example, if a man wears a pink shirt people often see it as a statement that he is in support of women, that he is not tied to gender roles, or that is effeminate.

Viewing my work through the lens of semiology is useful because it goes hand in hand with a sociological perspective. The sociological perspective is an approach to understanding human behavior by placing it within its broader social context. It could be referred to as the intersection of biography (the individual) and history (social factors which influence the individual) (Zumpetta et al. 1). The sociological perspective looks at the

connections between individual behavior and the structures of society, or the constructs people create in order to understand society. These constructs (gender, race, age etc.) are internalized and become part of person's thought patterns and motivations, creating links between what people do and the social settings that shape their behavior (Zumpetta et al. 3). Semiotics, or signs, emerges as a system of meaning making through these social practices, or constructs. Throughout my work I use many signs that are best viewed through a sociological perspective, as I am interested in how these signs contribute to potentially negative and limiting sociological constructs. While constructs allow us to live life in consistent ways with predictable behavior patterns, they can also confine behavior, limit possibilities, and generate negative stereotypes. Constructs are often seen as inherent truth, based in reality, and are possibly not questioned enough. We adapt to constructs without thinking why? Why does it exist, does it benefit the individual or society, is it still relevant? Constructs can confine us in this way because they can limit self-reflection and exploration outside of accepted social constructs. If we look at pink as an obvious symbol of femininity, it is apparent how something as benign as a color can become a powerful site of meaning making. Pink as a representation of femininity, so intertwined with feminine social constructs, has impact as a symbol on women throughout their entire lives. Pink can function as a symbol of power (femininity as independence and freedom of choice) or as symbol of oppression (self-worth found through material goods and unattainable body standards). Since pink is such a strong social symbol in this way, I use it throughout my work to represent social construct dichotomies.

Give Me One Minute

During the time I spent working on *Limits and Options*, I continued to think further about the effects of feminine stereotypes on women's concept of self and body image, and the role of the color pink. Many of the toys in the pink pile I had myself as a child. As I painted them I thought about the impact that may still have on me now as an adult. There are connections that could be pulled between who I am today and the influence from these toys, and this connection led me to further explore the numerous things that maintain feminine stereotypes both today and in the past.

Give Me One Minute is a video sculpture consisting of 14 CRT TVs, placed upon a low pedestal and in a horizontal line, some TVs resting on top of one another. The line of TVs sits about two feet away from the wall, allowing the backs of the TVs and the power cords to be seen. The TVs have been painted pink, including the power cords. Each TV is playing a unique video that runs on a loop, ranging from 3 to 5 minutes in length. Each video is of myself doing a different cosmetic or beauty routine action, and each video takes place in a domestic space such as the bathroom or living room, covered in pink décor. All of the cosmetic objects I use are pink, as is all of my clothing.



Give Me One Minute, Painted TVs, Dimensions Variable, 2018

Today feminine standards often focus on a woman's body and appearance, and these physical standards are frequently a reflection of how women are represented in popular culture. Popular culture could include but is not limited to advertising, social media, movies, television, and fashion. The ideal feminine standard set by popular culture is more often than not unattainable for most women. This impossible standard is made more unattainable by the contemporary practice of using Photoshop, filters, or other methods to create or alter imagery. These methods make the already ideal hyper perfected, and today it goes beyond media and advertising. Through social media women can apply filters to themselves that enhance their features; making lips bigger, eyes bright, skin smoother, etc. This creates a mentality that natural is not enough, and to share something it should be enhanced. The influence of the popular culture's definitions of ideal femininity can leave women constantly striving to improve their bodies. Therefore, women learn to follow a regimen of grooming, among other things, in pursuit of ideal feminine beauty, or to at least meet a minimal standard of what is socially acceptable.

In *Give Me One Minute* my use of pink functions the same as the paint colors in *Limits and Options*; as an overt symbol of femininity. Therefore, one can immediately connect how my actions in the videos relate to the feminine connotations attached to the color pink. Each video revolves around something I am doing to my body that could be part of a beauty regimen. I wear facemasks, shave, straighten my hair, and apply thick make up. I also wear restrictive under garments, or shape-wear, to define and constrict my body. I do these actions as a reflection of the culture's implied standard that a woman is defined by her body, or rather her self-worth can be determined through physical attractiveness and how

close she is to stereotypical feminine ideals. The videos play on a loop, my actions repeat, but I do not meet an end goal or leave my domestic space. This unsuccessful repetition functions much like the unattainable standards set by popular culture. No matter how many times I repeat my actions I am never closer to reaching the undefined beauty goal I am striving towards.

In my work I am interested in the way that social constructs can both lead people to behave a certain way or limit their behavior in other ways. A social construct can function on a level that is so widespread or embedded into a culture it may affect people in ways they are unaware of. Even if we actively choose not to engage with a social construct, they are often prevalent enough to still have influence in some way. In *Give Me One Minute* I remain expressionless as I repeat my actions. My vapid expression creates a disconnection between my intent and my actions, reflecting how feminine stereotypes can function on a subconscious level. It is as if I am performing them to meet an obligation rather than personal desire. Or if not out obligation, I may be performing these ritual actions because they have become habitual. Social constructs may be perpetuated by these ritual behaviors that become habitual without questioning.

Feminine, Like

In my thesis work, along with video performance I use self-portraiture to further explore the social construct of femininity and its effects. In my photo series, *Feminine, Like* I exaggerate potentially realistic scenarios that exemplify feminine constructs. Similar to *Give Me One Minute* the photos exist in a domestic space, covered in pink décor and I am engaging in some type of stereotypic feminine activity. However, unlike *Give Me One*

Minute the importance is not placed solely on the body or an action I am doing to my body. While this is still important, what is much more important in each photograph are the objects placed within them and my interactions with those objects.



Dreamboard, Archival Inkjet Print, 30 x 40, 2018



Binge Worthy, Archival Inkjet Print, 30 x 40, 2018

More so than *Give Me One Minute, Feminine, Like* relies on a Semiological perspective. In *Feminine, Like* I use a myriad of symbols that are representative of feminine stereotypes. Physical objects used include fluffy pillows, silky nightgowns, magazines, false lashes, and if the object is not inherently associated with femininity it is pink in color. If the object could not be pink, there is symbolism within its title or imagery. Some of the titles are “Moody Woman” and “Sweet Daughter”. My gestures are another way in which I convey symbolism; I pose my body in way that feels stereotypically feminine or delicate. I use a wide variety of feminine symbols to show how the construct of femininity impacts so many different aspects of daily life. When we think about feminine stereotypes I think we most commonly think about body image, and while that may be very prevalent I want my photographs to show so many other things perpetuate these stereotypes as well. The symbolism used in my images is almost unavoidable in American culture. This kind of prevalence must play a crucial role in how femininity is perceived and how people choose to express it or not. How does one embrace aspects of femininity without being expected to fit other connotations associated with femininity? Or conversely, how does one find what femininity may mean to them without the implied symbols that surround them? It is questions like these that I explore through *Feminine, Like*.

Contemporary Relevance

In my work I consistently use a mix of objects that are now considered vintage or are no longer commonly used, and contemporary items. For example, in the photograph *Binge Worthy*, I have a small CRT TV next to me, which is now practically obsolete, but the image on the TV is of Kylie Jenner who is a modern reality TV and social media personality. In my

work thrift shopping and gathering objects is part of my process. I gather vintage items to help me get inspired and create personas for my self-portraits. I also get inspiration from vintage items in that they help me understand how objects function as symbols to help establish social constructs. I also use vintage objects paired with contemporary ones in order to create a dialogue between the two; how do the vintage objects inform the contemporary ones and vice versa. Instead of just portraying what feminine stereotypes look like today, I want to look at them in their entirety, in order to see what has changed over time and how those stereotypes are different or similar today.

In *Give Me One Minute* and *Feminine, Like* the vintage objects I use function as symbols for the past feminine stereotypes; the idea that a woman's feminine characteristics are desirable if she has good moral character, self-control, and nurturing tendencies. While we have made significant moves culturally to break this association, I think it is important to revisit in order to see how it has changed or still manifests currently. I believe these prior ideals still impact our current understanding of femininity and how women are marketed to today. We have made many strides to ensure equal opportunities for women. Past feminine stereotypes saw women as homemakers instead of workers, as symbols of modesty, purity, and maternal caretakers. Though these stereotypes certainly still exist, they are not as prevalent or have transformed into more modernized stereotypes. Subsequently, since we have begun to move away from feminine stereotypes of the past, I think it is commonly perceived that constructs of femininity are now not as existent. However, I find that they are still prevalent today, but are centered now more on a woman's body and appearance, rather than her character. While women may have always faced societal expectations about their body image, I think it is more prevalent today than ever before. I think in the past women

were encouraged to find self-worth through good moral character and maternal proclivities, while also maintaining modest body image standards. However, feminine stereotypes of today encourage women to find self-worth through their body image, which is nearly impossible as the media sets at an unattainable standard. I think today's culture sexualizes a woman's body more than ever before, and creates the idea that a woman's body is her greatest asset. For this reason, in my work each video or photograph places emphasis on the body; whether that be through the action I am performing, what I am applying to my body, the clothing I wear, or the symbols I use. I also explore how the implied expectations and stereotypes have changed through the contemporary symbols I use. The image of Kylie Jenner, in *Binge Worthy*, can be used as an example. Kylie Jenner has a huge social media following; 126 million people follow her on Instagram, where she posts mostly "selfies" and promotes her cosmetic line. I think social media is currently the most prevalent influence maintaining feminine stereotypes, whereas in the past it may have been television. Social media's impact is vast, and personalities like Kylie Jenner set an example that places appearance and material goods at a really high value. Kylie Jenner, among others, promote products that will help users to look more like their promoter. I find this creates a mentality that equates body image with self worth, as well as the idea that you can achieve what you want through material goods. I present this mentality in my self-portraits through obsession. Surrounding myself with pink and symbols of femininity, as well as incessantly fixating on my appearance demonstrate this obsession. Through my work I want to explore how an obsession with appearance functions like feminine constructs of the past, which is why I balance both vintage and contemporary objects throughout my work.

This is Absurd

The grotesque in art has a long history. Grotesque was originally a noun, from the Italian grottesco, meaning “of a cave” it was an extravagant style of Ancient Roman decorative art (Torok, 3). Early forms of grotesque consisted of fantastic or illogical human and animal forms, often decorative in function. Today the definition of grotesque is much more varied, and is often used as a general adjective for things that are strange, mysterious, hideous, or distorted. Given that grotesque has such a varied meaning, it is helpful to look at some of its recurring distinguishing features. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the grotesque is an element of disharmony, whether this is conflict or a mixture of heterogeneous or disparate factors (Thomson 4). The grotesque is commonly associated with the comic or terrifying, or a mix of the two. This could also translate as something that is vulgar or uncanny. Within my work, what is grotesque is determined by current social norms; its definition will always change as it is articulated from the perspective of the perceiver (Torok 6).

In my work, I use the grotesque in the form of deviation or absurdity. I place elements together that do not typically go together in order to question existing realities. My deviations from the ideal often create ugly, surprising exaggerations. For example, in *Binge Worthy* there are obvious things that are conventionally considered attractive; my silky nightgown, curled hair, and I twist the phone cord in a suggestive manner. In contrast, there are subtle things that are not typically considered attractive in women; you can see a little bit of my armpit hair, hair on my knees, and my face mask, which would normally only be seen in private. I use this dichotomy consistently in my work, an obsession with feminine stereotypes balanced with a parody of those ideals. I over act the social norms and standards placed upon

women to make them “grotesque”. I do this to examine how it may be possible to manipulate the semiotics associated with these two opposites; in order to confuse the binary between what is ideal and what is not. I find this to be effective because it has revealing effects, some social constructs or stereotypes and their influence may not be clear until they are ridiculed. My use of the “grotesque” puts the viewer into an affective relationship with representations that are simultaneously appealing and unappealing. Rather than defining what is attractive or not, I want to place the viewer in a place of uncertainty in which it is hard to make a decision. By using attractive elements in my work, whether that is something on my body or through color and objects, the viewer can be immediately drawn to the image encouraging them to seek out the elements that are unattractive. I play up the act of beautification to the point of absurdity to get the viewer to question if beauty standards have merit. In doing so, my intent is not to necessarily negate what is conventionally attractive or elevate the unattractive, but to blur the border between the two and create an overlap, creating disharmony. Through my work I want to challenge the conventional understandings or what determines attractive and unattractive qualities, and ask the viewer to rethink the basis of this division.



Beauty Sleep, Archival Inkjet Print, 30 x 40, 2019

Art Medium

Within my work I use several different types of media to discuss similar topics: sculpture, video, and photography. I have always worked with photographs, but I had a desire to try new forms of work. I think this created a lot of exploration within my thesis work, and a desire to find the perfect medium to convey content successfully, and in an interesting way. The sculptures *I Know My Limits Better Than My Options* were created first within my body of thesis work. This work happened organically, inspired by my experiences in department stores. It felt most appropriate to use actual toys, as they would have personal impact for the viewer. I wanted the toys to be real, for the viewer to relate to them both as objects from their own personal history and as new objects reimagined, which I achieved by painting them. I have always had a fondness for found objects and thrifting, which manifested within the creation of this work.

My thrifting practice and repurposing of found objects became a method or working, and a source of inspiration. This impacted the work behind both *Give Me One Minute* and *Feminine, Like*. In exploring femininity as a social construct I allowed what I found through thrifting to influence the work I created. I may have exaggerated feminine ideals, but everything was based in actual objects and possibilities. I did not have to search extensively for materials, they were readily available, which strengthens the meaning of my work because my actions are seen as extreme, but they are done through readily available, common means.

Give Me One Minute and *Feminine, Like* have similar meanings, but there are differences and I address them in different ways. The works are similar enough that they strengthen one another, but different enough they can stand alone. I used video in *Give Me One Minute* because the work is so much about the body. It is about actions and routines women do to their bodies to improve themselves according to societal standards. Video allows work to have actual action; the viewer is able to see me perform routines over and over again. This felt important in creating work that is about the body and actions done to the body. Video was also important in this work because it allows the subject within the work to come to life. This allows the viewer to relate to the subject as an actual human, making the work more personal. It is important for this work to become personal, to generate empathy, because it shows how societal expectations impact the individual. The subject is consumed by her routines and looping video alludes to this obsession. Video feels like the perfect tool to generate empathy because you can't deny the life like quality of the person within the video, which I don't think comes through as much in photographs.

Feminine, Like is different than *Give Me One Minute* in that it is not meant to convey an individual experience. *Give Me One Minute* is meant to focus on an individual and her body, whereas in *Feminine, Like* it is meant to represent many. The subject remains anonymous in *Feminine, Like*; often her face is covered or she shows from the waist down. Photographs help to create a barrier between subject and viewer in a way that I think often video does not. *Feminine, Like* moves beyond the body and begins to address the many ways society influences definitions of femininity and how that impacts both the individual and groups. Photographs allowed me to stylize every component of the work in order to address a

multitude of topics so that the viewer can spend time picking them apart, and it felt harder to achieve this with moving video.

Conclusion

Engaging with the politics of gender differentiation, feminine stereotypes, and beauty standards is complex and certainly has been discussed numerous times through history and in contemporary art. I think the popularity of these topics requires one to explore them with complexity and depth in order to engage the viewer. Their commonality paves the way to build upon the topics that have already been discussed, and creates an audience that is ready to engage with the work. In my art practice, I address these topics through direct representation, in tandem with humor and over-dramatization to blur social construct definitions within a broader cultural system. My work is meant to consider that every choice and action has a reaction. Every symbol has place in a cultural system of meaning that is far-reaching and influential; it doesn't just exist as a symbol. Using real life objects and myself as a stand in, I push social constructs to an absurd extreme to question the reasoning behind them.

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