

Public Abstract

First Name:Melissa

Middle Name:Elaine

Last Name:Jackson Burns

Adviser's First Name:M. Heather

Adviser's Last Name:Carver

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2017

Department:Theatre

Degree:PhD

Title:Birds and Backs: A Scholarly Exploration of Writing, Performance, and Body Image

Diet culture is an intricate part of the current society in the United States, affecting countless women and girls, and men and boys. The health problems associated with dieting are major concerns, especially given the current fat phobia and endless declarations that we are in an obesity epidemic. This dissertation offers a personal examination of diet culture, body image, performance, and writing. Through writing and performing a series of characters, I made a political statement about the health of the fat body and learned to live in my own body peacefully and healthfully. As a former dieter who has made the decision to live in my current body, I offer a unique perspective with my autoethnographic performances and writing. As a playwright and performer, I transgressed societal norms by presenting a performance that did not adhere to traditional storytelling structures and presenting a body on stage that does not adhere to societal expectations of the female body. Through these acts, I offered my audience a chance to rethink their own beliefs about the body and to begin moving toward a healthier way of living and being in their bodies.