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“Shit Show” or Everyone That Needs to go to the Bathroom Should Go Now

Personal Experiences No One Thinks They Need to
Know

By
Meghan Doerfler

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Kent Neely,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	5
<i>BLINDSIDE</i> AND THE IDEA OF SOLO PERFORMANCE.....	7
THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE ART.....	8
SHAME	15
<i>Shit Show</i>	19
PRE-PERFORMANCE CONCLUSION.....	40
AFTER-EFFECTS: DID EVERYTHING GO AS PLANNED?	42
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	43

ABSTRACT

Through a comic one-woman show, I will involve the audience in an exploration of my own personal stories and experiences with menstruation and feces. I purpose to break down some of the stigma that is associated with bodily functions by talking about them with open and blunt language and dialogue throughout the performance. One person shows have arguably been around ever since the first storytellers. While this show would be different in the nature of the stories being told, it would follow a very similar theatrical tradition by having one person narrate a story in a way that made the audience feel as if they were present within the room where it was happening. My primary focus in these stories will be on how we view periods and feces as a society and the unnatural feelings of shame that are associated with these two functions. Although I will mention other bodily functions briefly, I will spearhead this show behind those two functions in order to give the performance a definite shape and focus.

This performance will include my own personal stories that I will retell by using present-tense language in order to fully engage the audience with what is happening on stage and to drive the action and plot of each story forward. At the end of this process I will have created a fully formed one-woman show that was performed June 9th, 2019 at 5:15pm in the Rice Auditorium Black Box. I aim to have the show's run time be approximately 30-45 minutes.

INTRODUCTION

Being a performer has always been something I've wanted to do ever since I had the brain capacity to imagine. I have this incessant need to create, and if something I make – at a bare minimum – helps someone forget about what's happening outside of the performance space for a little while, that would be a success in my eyes.

I started doing theatre in high school and will be graduating from Western Oregon University with a B.F.A. in Acting, so I've been involved with theatre for some time now. And the biggest thing that I've generally noticed about my peers is that theatre people essentially have little to no boundaries. Yet, despite this lack of social decorum, bodily functions and what goes on behind the bathroom door is a topic that most people don't talk about. This observation struck me, because here I am, among some of the most bluntly open and honest people I know, people who are hoping to make a career out of being vulnerable in front of complete strangers, not feeling comfortable enough with their own friends to talk about one of the most natural things our bodies can do. It was then that I realized that creating a piece to explore our hesitation about discussing what goes on behind the bathroom door would be a significant step in easing people out of this societally created shame.

So, you might be asking yourself why I chose to write about bodily functions as a topic for a one woman show that was going to be my Honors Thesis, and whether I'm even qualified to tackle such a subject. Can't blame you for that, it's a pretty interesting concept to pick. And the answer is quite simple; there's nothing that is more universal, more connective than the two (sometimes three) things our bodies do on a regular, and natural, basis. As for the qualifications, I've been a human on this Earth for almost twenty-two years now, and on average I believe that I defecate as much as the next person. And when it comes down to the bare bones of what it's like to be a human on this Earth, a good deal of our lives is going to be spent on the toilet. For some people that's a pretty bleak fact, but it doesn't need to be. No matter how you slice and dice life, people are going to spend a large portion of their life in a bathroom, doing their business, and the aim of this show was to celebrate that truth instead of shying away from it. While I know that I'm not going to erase every aspect of shame associated with bodily functions, what I am hoping to do is to get a conversation going that the people who see my show can continue with each other, even as they walk out of the auditorium.

So, the overarching-big-umbrella idea for this thesis was to create a show based off my own poop, period, and pee stories with the goal of creating a conversation about why we feel shame when it comes down to what happens in

the restroom. However, luckily for me, this discussion about shame having no place in the bathroom has been going on for a long time, and it will keep going on for as long as people are ashamed of their own bodily functions.

BLINDSIDE AND THE IDEA OF SOLO PERFORMANCE

When it comes to solo-female performance, there's a lot out there. So much so that it can get a little daunting to research, so it was incredibly lucky that Michael Phillips and Western Oregon University brought Stephanie Morin-Robert's production of *Blindside* to campus the Fall of 2017.

I knew that I wanted to create a one-woman show as I sat down and was getting ready to watch *Blindside* last year, however, at the time there was no concrete plans on what the one-woman show for my thesis would end up being. While I may not have known it then, Morin-Roberts proved to me that it was possible to have a deeply rich and impactful performance while keeping the overall tone of the show comic and light. And it was because of the comedy that Morin-Roberts crafted in her show that people in the audience felt that they could let their guard down and listen as she recounted childhood stories about growing up with a glass eye. Whenever someone is onstage and is genuinely being vulnerable in a room of complete strangers, it makes those strangers feel as if vulnerability is something that they're allowed to experience, too. Comedy is one of the biggest tools when it comes to sucker punching audiences with a main

topic of a show and making them feel good about it when they leave the theatre, and that was the biggest inspiration I took from Morin-Roberts. She inspired me to create a show based on genuine childhood stories that are full of emotional depth, while still allowing the comic aspect of each moment to shine through and drive those main points home.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE ART

Throughout my time here at Western a lot of people have inspired me creatively, but none more so than performance artists. I became fascinated with this specific outlet of creativity and knew that there would be some aspect of it in my thesis script as well. The inspirational performance art focus of this show centers around the work of Stephanie Morin-Roberts, Carolee Schneemann, and Karen Finley.

As I mentioned before, the politicized nature of what goes on in the bathroom has already been discussed by many people before me, one such person being Karen Finley. If her name sounds familiar to you it's probably because she was one of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Four who had a grant proposal vetoed based on subject matter, after they had already passed through a peer review process (Timeline, "This Artist Smearred Chocolate on Her Body for Feminism, and Lots of Men Tried to Stop Her"). The performance of Finley's that I was most focused on was her *We Keep our Victims Ready* piece.

In this performance, Finley smeared what looked like a chocolate-y, cake like substance and other food items on her body and shouted into the microphone what it's like being a woman in society. It made people uncomfortable to watch, and it was supposed to. The largest source of inspiration this piece gave me was how quickly chocolate can take on the shape of something else if the performer manipulates it in a certain way. For Karen Finley, she wanted to show that "it is a symbol of women being treated like dirt" (Timeline, "This Artist Smeared Chocolate on Her Body for Feminism, and Lots of Men Tried to Stop Her"), for me, I became more interested in how I can use chocolate to create a feces looking substance while avoiding the bacterial hazard of actual feces.

Not only is chocolate a delicious treat, but it brought about a lot of different questions and potential ways I could use it in the show. With this idea of using chocolate (and other food items if necessary) as a poop substance, a lot of ideas began to surface for the performance art section of my own show. What I eventually settled on was creating a variety of different prop/food items to show the audience exactly what the substances look like that I discuss in my performance, instead of hoping that they would understand what the images actually looked like that I would be describing to them. A bonus of creating a chocolate-fecal matter prop is that it's permanent. Images fly through our minds quickly, but a prop that stays onstage the entire duration of the show doesn't.

Essentially the overarching goal of the props was to get the audience desensitized to them, so at the end of the show instead of it being a mason jar full of a liquid-y poop like substance, it would be something familiar that they've grown accustomed to, instead of something horrific that only fleetingly passes through their imagination once or twice. Plus, there's a level of control when it comes to creating the aesthetic of the props that was enticing, whereas telling a room full of people with different levels of imagination wasn't something that could be tested or monitored in the same way.

Besides discussing poop, another large topic of *Shit Show* is talking about menstruation. Period blood is the most non-violent, natural way of producing blood, yet it's the form of blood that many people are most grossed out with. And Carolee Schneemann was a huge source of inspiration on tackling this subject.

As with Karen Finley, I narrowed down my source of inspiration to one of Schneemann's performance art pieces, which ended up being *Interior Scroll*. Both women's careers in performance art was provocative and incredibly influential, so there were many pieces for me to choose from. However, *We Keep Our Victims Ready* and *Interior Scroll* dealt with themes and ideas that I was also going to be tackling within the context of the show.

In the *Interior Scroll* performance, Schneemann stood naked in front of the audience with a few distinct lines drawn on her body, which made her figure look stylistically like a pop-art figure. She then began to pull out a scroll from her vagina and read the text aloud, which was text that was taken from the artists' Super-8 film called "Kitch's Last Meal" ("Carolee Schneemann Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works"). With this piece, Schneemann was interested in demonstrating "the invisible, marginalized, and deeply suppressed history of the vulva, the powerful source of orgasmic pleasure, of birth, of transformation, of menstruation" ("Carolee Schneemann Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works"). While this piece has very little to do with directly talking about menstruation, what intrigued me the most about it was the plethora of potential possibilities it created for my own show.

The thing that interested me the most about Schneemann's piece was the image of a scroll unraveling from a vagina, and how it reminded me of the image of a used tampon being pulled out of a vulva, hence the connection to menstruation. While it may be wasn't the original intention of Schneemann to have that image popping up into people's minds, it was an image that I was going to take a lot of inspiration from. Of course, there are a lot of performance art pieces out there that deal more directly with the theme and images of menstruation and period blood, but for some reason I kept coming back to

Schneemann's performance, probably because the menstruation images that Schneemann's performance produced was something that may have accidentally happened and not something that was sought after by the artist.

As someone who's had their period since the age of twelve, dealing with period products in public is like a top-secret mission that you are tasked with making sure nobody else knows about. If there's any actual logical reasoning behind why people get so uncomfortable around these menstrual products I would like to be the first to know, because myself and many other people who experience periods have spent a large portion of our lives making their comfort our number one-priority by trying to make sure nobody sees or hears anything akin to a period product outside the safety of the bathroom. That is why I wanted to create a performance art piece for my own show that delved into this idea of how we have stigmatized people who have periods.

With this idea in mind, I set out to create something that would hopefully be both comedically inviting and slightly jarring for an audience to witness, which turned my sights towards ketchup. Thanks to Finley, I was now consumed with potential uses of food in my show and how I could make them something different than what they were intended to be used for. And what could possibly be a better food product to use to recreate period blood besides ketchup.

Now that I had what my period blood substance was going to be, I had to seriously start thinking about the technical aspect of using it within my show. What I wanted to do was to smear a bunch of ketchup on to a period pad, and to then wear it for the rest of the show, as a constant reminder of what some people deal with on a monthly basis. One of the effects I was going for was a grotesque dramatization of what an actual used pad looks like, without the potential safety issues of having a used pad on stage (I am trying to perform this on campus, after all). But before I could go through with this idea, I had a couple of safety questions I needed to answer first.

The first and largest obstacle was tackling the very real possibility of having a bunch of acidic ketchup near my (vulnerable) lady bits. Even though I want to have as much fun with this show as possible, I would love it if I could graduate without seriously injuring myself in the process, so I needed to do some research on the dangers of ketchup interacting with the pH system of a vagina. The short and quick answer is that it was a very bad idea. However, I am a creative arts student, so this didn't pose a massive issue for me. Instead of me wearing the ketchup pad (in the way that pads are meant to be worn) for the rest of the show, I landed on two potential ideas. The first one was to have the underwear that I would attach the ketchup pad around my knees, and to essentially walk bow-legged for the rest of the show which would allow the

audience to still see the ketchup-soaked pad. This would give a similar effect that I wanted to achieve visually without all the potential physical harm. The second idea was to use one of the tall blocks that we have in Rice Auditorium and to keep it on the block for the rest of the performance. This idea was attractive because it meant that I wouldn't need to even touch the ketchup-soaked pad in the first place. However, this didn't quite lend the same visual image that I wanted to achieve from the beginning, which is the idea of people who have periods wearing these feminine product monstrosities in the first place. So, I decided to go with option number one.

Another obstacle of using ketchup as product during the show is the clean-up factor after everything is said and done. Currently, I'm set to perform in the Rice Auditorium Black Box as a 5 o'clock Shadow piece. This means that there are some rules and guidelines that I need to adhere to, the largest being the time constraint. Starting at 5:00, I have an hour and a half to set-up, perform, take down, and be out of the building by 6:30. So, if I was going to do the kamikaze, getting ketchup everywhere, type of aesthetic I wanted to go for, I was going to need to set up some serious plastic tarps on the ground that would (hopefully) make the cleanup process go by smoothly.

Each one of the women that I've talked about has greatly influenced this show in ways I could have never expected, and not just with their performance

art pieces. Karen Finley, yes with the chocolate, but also with all her ferociousness and refusing to be anything other than herself. Carolee Schneemann gave me the courage of opening myself up and talking about my period to a room full of potential strangers. This is all thanks to her bold acceptance and empowerment of women, and her willingness to reflect that within herself and her art. And of course, Stephanie Morin-Roberts, who, with her performance of *Blindside* at Western Oregon University, almost single-handedly inspired me to do my own one-woman show. Because when one gets the privilege to watch an artist who can take a six hundred and above seat house and make it feel like she's talking intimately at a coffee shop, you tend to get inspired to make your own art, too.

The reason I talk about these women is because my show is just going to be a little ripple in a vast ocean of artists who have come before me. And every artist has tackled this subject in their own way and put their own spin on it. This thesis is just going to be a small droplet of water in a sea of ideas, but it feels good knowing I'll be among some pretty good company.

SHAME

I've mentioned shame before, but now it's time to get to the real heart of why I'm doing this show. Shame is everywhere in our society. The topic of shame

is too extensive for one person to tackle in a lifetime, let alone in a one-woman show, which is why I narrowed it down through the lens of bodily functions.

One of the most unique things about shame is that it's not an emotion, but rather a concept or an idea that has been placed in our minds. Shame is never inherent in us when we're born, but it is something that we learn. In addition, shame cannot survive with only one person, it needs a group of people in order to manifest. If someone were to live in complete isolation, there wouldn't be anyone around to judge their actions. Loosely what I've found is that shame is the result of somebody acting outside of the "societal norm", and others being around to witness and comment on the event. However, this is of course simply what I've noticed, and not necessarily coming from an expert source.

I'm not writing this thesis to try and get you to change your opinion on shame, if you even had one. I'm also not going to deny that there are certain benefits of using shame as a tool. When I was younger, around the age of two-five, I had zero shame which meant that I streaked often. If my sister and I were on our way to a friend's house, my mother and I would initiate a bidding war. Oftentimes she would bribe me with the potential of ice cream so long as I kept an article of clothing covering my body, and I would usually acquiesce. For children, this behavior is their "societal norm", but that changes as we get older. We eventually learn that what once was acceptable when we were kids is no

longer accepted now, and shame is typically the hand guiding us through that transformation. In certain ways, shame is beneficial. However, there are substantial examples of shame being used to the detriment of specific groups of people, typically used to keep the hegemonic in power.

One such example is how we treat people who are menstruating. As I discussed earlier, oftentimes pulling out a tampon or pad in the middle of a packed class – whether in elementary, middle, or high school – is social suicide. This is most likely because it's during this age when the pressure on children to start behaving like adults is the most adamant. And how does this society treat those who are on their periods? From experience I can tell you not well. This shame revolving periods starts with simple phrases such as “don't tell your father, he doesn't need to know” and “they're hormonal because they have their period”. One of the biggest problems I faced for this thesis was how to start reducing this shame induced by our society, and the answer became quite simple once I started looking at the root of where shame comes: a lack of communication.

Congratulations! If you've made it past the last paragraph – menstruation, woof am I right? – then it probably means you're the target audience for my show. Now that I had diagnosed what the core of where shame comes from when it deals with bodily functions, I had to come up with a way of beginning to

break that shame down. And what better way than to share my own horrific poop and period stories from my childhood in a comedic way. Again, comedy helps to break down even the toughest pill to swallow, and it does this by getting people comfortable to the idea of being vulnerable. Some of the most tragic plots in the history of theatre come from comedies (*Much Ado About Nothing* for example), and it's because the two are intrinsically linked, and my own personal examples fill the criteria that I had set out to achieve.

At the time of each event, it felt as if my life was ending. It wasn't of course, but that feeling of intense embarrassment and degradation is why I find these stories so hilarious now. Without revealing too much of the script, the "hard poop" story was somewhat private, but I needed my mother's help to get out of that situation. The "soft poop" story was perpetrated by my own actions and was more public because I was with my dad, his friend, and his friend's younger daughter, both of whom were essentially strangers for me. The last story that I tell has to do with the first time I got my period, which is the most public story. This event happened over the course of a day at school where I was surrounded by my peers and teachers. Armed with these stories, I propose to unpack and break down the shame that surrounds the bathroom, while also giving the audience a good laugh.

Shit Show

Hi everybody my name's Meghan Doerfler and let's talk about shit.

When I was little, I took a big ol' crap in my bed.

Just once.

But once is kind of enough don't you think? It's not just a funny story, but it's also the first time I remember feeling shame. I was old enough to know that poop doesn't go on my bed but not old enough to deal with the embarrassment that coursed through my body afterwards. So, I froze, and I didn't do anything.

Natalie, my twin sister, and I were still sharing a room together and she slept through the whooole thing. In fact, she slept so peacefully that I figured it wouldn't be that big of a deal to leave that turd on my bed until the morning.

So I did. It wasn't a big deal for me so I figured it wouldn't be a big deal for other people. But that's where I was wrong. See, after I went back to bed with the feces laying at the bottom of my mattress I slept like a damn baby. That is until my Mom came in the next morning and saw that turd sitting there. Then I had a good ol' talking to.

Because the thing is is that it was a big deal. Or at least it was for my parents and probably for you hearing this story, too.

I see you judging me to cover up your mutual embarrassment, I see you!

Let's not kid ourselves. We've all done something like this in our lives.

So, buckle up kids because it's going to be a full night of discussing bodily functions, so you better leave now if that doesn't sound interesting because guess what? There's no intermission! You all are trapped in here with me for the rest of this

show! And we're so close to one another that if you leave it'll be awkward for only you and I'll make sure to stop the show and stare at you as you leave to publicly humiliate you. See? That's an example of shame!

As you can probably tell I'm really comfortable telling people about stories that don't usually (and probably shouldn't) get shared. But I also think that this comfort is kind of contagious. Because here's the thing about doing a one-woman show based on bodily functions: as soon as people found out about what my show covers, people got really relaxed around me and told me things that they probably wouldn't normally tell anyone. I think I've listened to more stories within the past year of the viscosity of various people's poop than I have in my entire life, but that's not even the weirdest part of this whole experience.

The strangest thing, about all of this, is that these stories somehow brought us closer together as people. And in fact, I've enjoyed listening to these stories more than one person probably should. You don't really know someone until they tell you that they hated pooping so much when they were younger that they gave themselves appendicitis because of it, and now that person loves to poop!

My hope is that these shitty shit stories will unite us and remind you that you're not alone when you think your body is this horrible monster meant to plague you for as long as you exist.

But I did say we were going to talk about shit, so let's get to it!

Soft Poop Story:

(This section is going to start off with me producing an amazon box from a hidden secret place on stage. This box is going to need to be wrapped with some sort of tarp in order to keep the murky brown liquid from leaking out. There should be caramel colored strands (maybe actually made from caramel) that I can pick up and show the audience. Mid-way through me trying to explain the texture of the soft poop I'll remove a mason jar and scoop some of the liquid from the amazon box into the jar. It needs to look like poop from a nightmare on crack. Once this is done, I'll set the mason jar down on the pedestal and continue with the story of the soft poop)

If anyone's ever tried water skiing before they know it takes some time to learn how to stand up properly. This will come into play later. My dad asks me if I want to go with him to Eugene and go on his friends' boat. This is probably one of the most exciting things of the summer for me, so of course I say yes!

On one lovely Saturday morning my Dad and I haul our asses to Eugene to have a picnic/boating day with my Dad's friend and his daughter.

I go into 'adult mode'.

I've just turned 10

I have reached the double digits

Clearly, she needs my guidance. My wisdom. My experience!

So, when my Dad's friend asks me if I want to try water skiing, I agree. This is just one more opportunity to showcase my talents!

Despite me having never stepped foot into any type of skis whatsoever.

It takes some time to learn how to stand up properly.

More on that a bit later.

As I plunge into the river water, I get a little bit nervous. I don't really know what to do.

I hype myself up though, thinking that if I can get past the fifth grade then I can get myself onto a pair of skis.

Fifth grade was kind of a rough time in my life where they started to add letters into math? I ugly cried during the middle of class once because of fractions.

But those thoughts vanish from my mind as I look at my impending doom. With much difficulty I strap myself into the skis that are way too big for my feet (keep in mind this was a grown man's pair of skis). With a wink at the younger girl who's wide eyed, and a thumbs up to my dad, the boat takes off.

I grapple with the rope - trying to pull myself up.

The boat starts to pick up speed.

I slowly realize that the skis themselves weigh more than I do.

I'd need to be a superhuman child in order to get myself upright.

The boat speeds up even more, the hum of the engine roaring as I struggle with the inevitability of me falling and making a fool of myself in front of the impressionable youth in the boat.

I tug at the ropes once more as the boat reaches max speed.

Folks, this is the part in the story where I have catastrophically failed.

With one last desperate attempt to get myself upright I cross my skis, which sends a painful jet stream of river water--- right up my ass.

I instantly let go of the rope that had connected me to the boat, and rest in the water to recover from essentially having anal with a river. The sting of my asshole wasn't enough to cover the sting of my embarrassment.

As my Dad and his friend pull the boat around to come and get me, I feel an uncomfortable tug in my gut. Figuring I just needed to pee, I go ahead and pee as fast as I can. I'm just finishing up as soon as my Dad extends his hand to pull me out of the water, asking if I wanted to try it again. I shake my head, defeated and humbled, as I sit opposite the younger girl. She watches me intently as I sit down. I no longer have anything cool to say to her as the boat picks up speed once more.

The tugging in my gut begins to get more intense. I tell my Dad that I need to use the restroom. My father suggests that I hop into the river and go, "no it's not like that one" I mutter, trying to make sure that the little girl and her father don't overhear me saying I need to poop. My Dad's eyes widen a bit before he stands up and goes to his friend, asking where the closest bathroom is. "Oh, well there's river bathrooms I'm pretty sure" he speaks to my Dad, eyeing me before he begins circling around the river in search of the supposed bathroom on the water.

Now, I don't know if there's actually bathrooms on top of the river, but if they are we didn't find one. Nope, we spend about an hour and a half trying to find this mysterious bathroom. During this time, I use the matching towels Natalie and I have and wrap them around my waist (Natalie's being the one closest to the bathing suit, just in

case). The tugging at my gut continues to get worse and worse until I eventually want to clock my dad's friend in the back of the head, take over the boat, and drive us back to the dock. Because when you're ten and the only two adults on the boat aren't listening to you, you feel like you can do anything.

After my dad's friend gives up his search and starts to take us back to the dock is when I can't control it anymore. It doesn't feel like I need to poop, it instead feels like there's slushy pee coming out of my asshole. And I am powerless to try and stop it. I fight with my ass cheeks, begging them to stay closed as I tug Natalie's towel tighter around me (mainly because she wasn't there to stop me from using her towel). I knew that if something was going to get destroyed it wasn't going to be my towel with the brown imprint! As I start to feel the dam breaking open, we arrive at the dock. I hesitate to get up off the white seats of the boat, fearful that Natalie's towel might not have been enough to stop whatever was coming out of me. I feel another tug at my gut and book it into the public bathroom on the docks.

Now, here's the thing about Speedo one-piece bathing suits. When they're dry, they can be a pain in the ass to get into, but after a full day on the river when your suit has become like a second skin? They're impossible to get off. I'm fighting with my speedo, ripping it off my body as I feel something start coming out of my ass in this cold stall bathroom, mosquitoes flying around everywhere. This swimsuit is the last obstacle I must face before I'm in the clear, but it's already too late. As I finally get the suit off my shoulders and drop the towels on the ground the dam breaks. I feel myself start to shit liquid, but because my suit is still on it starts bubbling up, erupting out of the suit. I

manage to rip the rest of the swimsuit off and sit down, trying to get as much of whatever is coming out of me into the toilet as possible.

So, to contextualize this for some of you, try and imagine a showerhead with a jet setting. Now shove your hand against the jet stream and turn it on. Water still gets everywhere, right? Then imagine that your hand is my swimsuit in this scenario. As I take a couple of deep breaths on the toilet, I begin to look around me in the stall. A mixture of this **(this is the mason jar bit)** is now not only covering the toilet itself, but it's also covering the towels, my swimsuit, the floor, and most surprising of all, the stall walls. I flush the toilet and begin to feel my face flush as I'm presented with only one option. Clean. It. Up. I grab tiny fistfuls of the cheap toilet paper this bathroom is supplied with and begin to clean. As I'm trying to wipe my liquified shit off the wall with the cheapest toilet paper known to man I hear flip flops smacking off the tile, coming my way. My Dad calls out my name and I know I'm in trouble. I'm in trouble because I've removed my suit from my body.

Here's the worst thing of this whole trip.

That swimsuit is the only thing I wore into the stall, in fact, it's really the only thing I wore to the lake period. And now the only towels I had are covered in shit too. So before I open the stall for my Dad I do the unthinkable, and put the shit covered swimsuit back on. The damp, poop infested, cold, moist and brown tainted suit back on my body.

I open the door for my Dad to see what's happened, to see my shame. What a sight that must have been. I don't really remember what happened next. What I do

remember is being told by my dad to take as much of the things I could into the car (I do) and to change into some of the extra clothes he had brought with him to the lake. It's about ten minutes of me sitting in the hot car, roasting and stinking up the car to no end, before my Dad emerges from the bathroom. In one hand is a tote bag full of everything we had brought with us to the river, in the other is a plastic trash bag full of the shitty towels I'm sure he used to clean up my mess. And then we drove home, stuffed into a car that reeked like poop, and haven't talked about the incident since.

Should I have been tested after this? Probably. Was I? Nope. Did this impact my childhood? Well I didn't even remember this happened to me until I started dredging up other similar memories from my childhood for this show, so the jury's still out.

Hard Poop Story:

My Dad's not the only one that got to witness me in feces pickle, because a year before the liquid shit happened I passed the biggest brick my ass will ever produce. And my lovely mother got to deal with this one. I don't want to give too much away but I just have to say that my Mom is a Supermom.

For real though, I'm not the only one here that looks down into a toilet and think "this brick came out of my asshole?" If you've had this thought, then this story is for you. This poop story is memorable because of the help that I was given during the process. That'll make sense in about five minutes.

(While getting the strap-on ready I would need to vamp something so that way it's not just a full stop of the show OR I could be transitioning out of the last story and into

this one while saying some of my last lines. Either way once I get the strap on, I'm going to need to be familiar with getting in and out of it.)

I do have a question though, how many of us go a couple of days without pooping? Isn't that worrisome? Because when I was 9, I went a **week** without pooping. But at the time, how and when I pooped wasn't as important as finishing the last couple of seasons of *Avatar the Last Airbender*.

Midway through watching one of these episodes I shift in my seat trying to get more comfortable because I feel a little sick to my stomach. This does nothing to help my situation, so I pause the show (much to my annoyance) to go and use the bathroom to see if that will help. I head into the bathroom I share with my sister, Natalie, close and lock the door, open the seat, sit down.... And wait.

As these stomach cramps intensify the time limit of how long I've been waiting starts to escape me because I've become so preoccupied with trying to push whatever is inside me *out*. After some grunts and heavy pushes on my part I soon start to realize that there's a massive poop trying to make its way out of my ass.

But the thing about this poop that's different from all the rest of the poops in my life so far is that it's not only taking its sweet time getting out of my body, it literally can't get past my asshole. This shit is so gargantuanly big that my asshole can't accommodate for its size. I look down into the toilet bowl **(have dildo at the ready ((hopefully this entire time the audience won't be able to see what I have in the strap on)))** and see this huge monster shit coming out of me.

What the hell am I going to do? My heart starts racing, beating so loudly that I can hear it in my eardrum until there's a knock on the door. Sure enough, there's a gentle rapping of my Mother's knuckles on the door, checking to make sure I'm alright.

"Is everything okay in there?" I hear her ask from outside the shit prison I've found myself in.

"Uhm, no?" I say, not sure where to begin.

"Do you need help?" She questions cautiously. I can't really explain how her tone of voice sounds, but you know those situations where somebody clearly needs help, but you aren't quite sure if you want to be that person to help them? Like you see an old woman struggling to open a door but she's also carrying a Hobby Lobby shopping bag and you can almost smell the potpourri racism mix coming off her? It's one of those moments.

So here I am trying to push out the largest dump of my life with my very hesitant mother less than five feet away from me separated by a very thin wall.

"I think I need some help..." I begin, trying not to scare off my only lifeline before she even sees what she's up against. I hear the doorknob start to rattle, but to no avail.

"Honey I need you to unlock the door."

Easier said than done. I try and hop off the toilet bowl to get to the lock but as I do I soon realize that this poop is too long. I am literally stuck on the toilet bowl because of shit. I strain forward trying to reach the lock and yes! Finally! I unlock the door and allow my mother in to my shitpocalypse.

Her expression runs from confusion, to disgust, and eventually lands on a steely determination. With little to no words my superhuman of a mother kneels next to me on the toilet bowl, leans me forwards, and snaps off the poop protruding from my asshole.

She straight up snapped that shit in half.

Bare. Handed.

Looking back on this story I wonder if that's the reason why I'm so scared of anal? Because I know what it's like to have a hard yet mushy thing up my ass and I don't really want to revisit that. Ever.

I also bleed sometimes when I poop which I think is hardcore. To clarify, it's never a lot of blood, but it's always more than there probably should be. But then again, my judgement of how much blood should or should not be a part of the defecation process is a little skewed. Because as all my menstruating women know, period poops are the single worst thing to ever exist. If you know you know, and if you don't, just try to imagine that you're trying to pop a number two out of your ass while also simultaneously trying to control something else from coming out. Life's one big juggling act but instead of juggling balls they gave us all bodily functions to try and deal with.

Does anyone remember when it wasn't okay to say, 'I have to go to the bathroom'? It's like this unspoken rule. I don't exactly remember when I stopped feeling like I could say it, but I can pinpoint it around middle school. Because when I was in middle school, I had a teacher that refused to let people go use the bathroom. The only exception he would make would be for those *lucky* students on their period. But you

couldn't just raise your hand and ask to go to the bathroom, oh no, he made us go up to him and forced us to explicitly tell him that we were on our period and needed to go change our 'feminine toiletries'.

Is shame ever helpful? Maybe sometimes. I streaked as a child and now I'm fully clothed before you. Isn't that a good product of shame? But then again, is it necessary all the time? And should "Shame on you" ever be used in a classroom setting? Certainly not in the example I just gave you.

Shame isn't a tangible thing, like time, it's a human made construct that is used in order to box people into a routine. The closest thing to shame that is an actual emotion is embarrassment. And nobody likes to feel embarrassed. We all know that. And because we know that we use this construct to our advantage.

Shame is primarily created by the infamous "they". Now, who is they? They is the hegemonic. The ruling or dominant in a social context. The collective you that have been fed certain manners and behaviors and expect others to behave in that same way. And what happens if you don't? They shame you. Maybe not intentionally or consciously, but we do it through our mannerism, expressions, and actions. Our behavior impacts and reflects a certain sense of what is socially normal in public situations, and it is not the same for everyone. Shame requires other people; it is dependent upon it. Children learn shame from the reaction of others. We emotionally punish children into learning this idea of shame because it was done to us too. So, with that in mind, let's talk about one of the most shameful experiences of my life.

Period Story:

6th Grade!

Top of the food chain baby! For at least a year.

(This section will start with me removing a pad and tampon ceremoniously. It will end up looking like a sacrificial ritual of the feminine products. After carefully removing the pad and tampon from the packaging I will place them down in front of a tall block in front of me, resembling a podium. I remove a ketchup bottle from behind the podium (NOTE: IT NEEDS TO BE HIDDEN FROM AUDIENCE VIEW UNTIL THIS MOMENT. THIS IS THE KEY IMPACT OF THE BIT). I shoot the audience a look, somewhere between seductive and “you’re really daring me to do this?” Then I squirt the entire ketchup bottle onto the pads and tampon in front of me. (This is where the tarps come in handy) Once this process is done, I’ll slowly remove the pads from the ketchup mess in front of me and place them in my second pair of underwear. (The way this will work: I will be wearing two pairs of underwear ((both nude)) and sweatpants. I will remove the sweatpants and the outer pair of underwear and place the pad into the underwear.) Once done, I will keep my legs spread wide enough that the audience can see the pad stuck inside the underwear with the ketchup through the rest of the piece.

The first time I got my period also happens to be the first time I bled through my pants. But first, some background on my fashion choices. I wore sweats a lot, but I eventually stopped wearing them because of peer pressure. I wore sweatpants in the first place because I never liked the feeling of jeans on my legs. So much so that I would have full blown panic attacks whenever I had to wear them.

So, I wore what I wanted.

Which was sweatpants.

That were neon colors.

It was picture day for seventh grade and I'm so nervous that my palms are shaking. I wipe them off on the bright pink sweats that I've picked out for myself to wear today and feel the cotton of the fabric, hoping that my sweat doesn't stain it as I wipe my hands on them. I see my Mom making her way through the line and jog to catch up to her. As I do, I pass by my friend Chloe. She just got done taking her picture as she's in the line that's exiting the school. I see her eyes flicker across my outfit, eyes stopping at the sweatpants. I catch a slight grimace run across her features before she says:

"You're not going to keep wearing those, are you?"

I look down at my pink sweatpants, somehow understanding the problem and not understanding the reason why it's a problem at the same time. My face goes red and my palms start to sweat even more.

I'm extra weight on a sinking ship and Chloe's thrown me off hers.

"Definitely not, uh, I just didn't have anything to wear. Besides, it's not like they're going to see the sweats in the picture." But Chloe's already gone.

I feel everybody begin to crowd behind me, trying to push the line forward. I hide my blotchy face and run to my Mom.

I realized in that moment that the judgement in Chloe's eyes of my bright pink sweats was more oppressive than the feeling of jeans.

But let's flashback to sixth grade. I'm eleven years old and I'm midway through my last year as an elementary student. I'm a very fashionable 11-year-old, as I wear sweatpants all the time. (Ah blissful unjudged Meghan).

I get up at the ass crack of dawn as per usual for a school day, but something doesn't feel right. There's a dull ache close to my stomach which I process as stomach cramps. Hopefully the stomach cramps mean I'm going to throw up and won't have to go to school. I enter the bathroom to do my usual routine. As I remove my pajama pants and investigate my underwear before peeing, I notice blood.

MY PERIOD.

I call for my Mom from inside the bathroom. My mother looks surprised but proceeds to tell me that I have now become "a woman". I'm still on the free trial period but I'll give you all a full review once I'm done. My eleven-year-old brain summed up "being a woman" as essentially inconsequential to the outcome of my life as I take the pink packaged pad my Mom hands to me and instructs me on how to use it. It's like this **(show audience how to put on a pad)** and sometimes **(squirt with ketchup)** it looks like this.

I carry on with my day like normal, just with the added feeling of having a mini-panty liner in my underwear.

NOTE: I SAID PANTY LINER. PANTY. LINER.

My day's smooth sailing except for the occasional gut punch (thanks uterus). All smooth sailing until lunch. You see, I liked sweats. We know this. So, guess what I was

wearing? Yep, sweats. But not the bright pink ones that Chloe would make fun of in the future! Nope, I was wearing a lovely pair of light blue Nike sweats with a WHITE in lining.

I really did seal my fate when I got dressed that morning.

And to top it all off, my Mom didn't expect for me to have a heavy flow that day. It's a good assumption, since it was the first time I had gotten my period. But I'm not a lucky person.

No, my first period was like the goddamn flood gates had been opened and it was all coming out. I had innocently put on my light blue Nike sweatpants that day thinking that everything was going to be easy peasy.

So, lunch time! I grab my circular pizza and head to my class table. I sit next to my friends and proceed to eat this weird off-brand pizza. Just as I'm midway through the center (arguably the best part of this tire shaped pizza) I feel a light tapping on my shoulder. I turn, perturbed that my eating has been disturbed and size up a girl much younger than me, probably in fourth grade. Her brown eyes are wide and staring at me. It looks like she's seen a ghost.

"What" I say, mouth full of dough.

"I think- uhm- I think you have- You maybe got" she whines out, finger extending ever so slightly to point down at my ass. I whip around twisting to see what she's talking about. I take in a red spot on my butt about the size of the pizza I just ate. It's clearly blood. We both know that it's blood. We both know that I've just bled through my pants. But we're also both desperate to pretend like the interaction that we're currently

having isn't happening. Despite only being eleven years old I still knew that this was something I needed to brush over.

"Oh yeah, I must have sat on some ketchup, thanks" I mutter as I take my lime green sweatshirt and wrap it around my waist. I turn back around and try to finish the crusty part of the pizza, but it doesn't taste the same anymore. I have a heavy sense that I am no longer normal anymore and that that girl is going to tell everyone in the fourth-grade class about the sixth grader she saw who had an "accident".

I'm plagued by these thoughts all day as I nervously sit in my seat, trying desperately to make sure none of my fellow classmates notice the predicament I'm in. The final bell rings and I can finally feel a little bit more relaxed as my day is half over.

It's only half-over because of daycare. Myself and my fellow daycare buds are playing outside on the play structure and in a moment of weakness I bend over to pick something up off the ground, revealing my bloody backside to one of the aids. She pulls me away from what was once a comfortable freedom into a separate, dim-lit room.

She explains to me that I've bled through my pants.

Yeah, I got that much, thanks.

She says that she can call my mother.

Wait, what?

And hands me a pad wrapper the same color of my sweatshirt. I hate the color of lime green now, but I'm sure that has nothing to do with this story.

The aid urges me to go try it on in the bathroom. I go, reluctantly, and try to stick the pad onto my underwear. While I'm in the bathroom she calls my mother. I don't

know what it is that she said to my mom, but the whole thing was handled like a drug deal. I think they wanted to do this in order to avoid shaming me in front of other kids, but the shame packed on despite their intentions.

My mother shows up soon after the call and apologizes to me profusely as we get into the car with Natalie, who at the current moment, doesn't have a care in the world and is just happy that we got picked up early.

As an adult I realize it's totally fine to talk openly about your period, and that sometimes shit happens. I refuse to let my period "go quietly into the night". If I'm on my period and you're close to me, chances are I'm going to make sure you know. You're probably going to know so much detail it'll feel like you're the one on the period too. So, the next time I'm explaining the texture, viscosity, color, pain level, and what have you of my period, just remember to thank me for it.

There are so many more societal expectations placed on women vs. men which just means there's more opportunity for women to behave unlike how society expects them to. For instance, there's shame for women having sex before marriage. We're conditioned to call these women 'sluts', 'impure', 'loose', 'immoral', etc. etc. Women in certain cultures even go so far as to mutilate themselves through Female Genital Mutilation in order to escape this shame, or the families and communities force their daughters to undergo FGM in order to eradicate their family from the shame of their daughter pleasuring herself during sex.

If you don't know what FGM is, there's three main types. Type one is known as a clitoridectomy, which is a partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or its prepuce. The

second type is known as excision where the clitoris and labia minora are partially or totally removed, with or without excision of the labia majora. And then we arrive at type three. This is the most severe form. The procedure consists of narrowing the vagina with or without removal of the clitoris. This process involves stitching or holding the cut areas together for a certain period (for example, girls' legs are bound together), to create the covering seal. A small opening is left for urine and menstrual blood to escape. This opening then must be forced opened either through penetrative sexual intercourse or surgery.

Shame exists in a wide variety of ways in our world, and there are certain punishments and behaviors that encourage this shame. As a lot of us know there's a laundry list of items that women aren't allowed to wear to school in order to make their male peers and teachers more comfortable. And the consequences of wearing these banned clothing items span from that female student being forced by the principal to wear oversized t shirts or sweats to even sending that student home, all in the name of trying to keep the classroom an 'educational' setting. What lesson are we teaching those students if it's not one that their body has been politicized and sexualized at such a young age and that this society will do anything to ensure that the lives of the male students and teachers remain uninterrupted?

In the same regard men who show emotion are shamed and told they're not "man-enough" and that they need to "man up", essentially telling them to shut up and repress their emotions. All of this is peer pressure, and all of this requires the infamous 'they'.

Another example would be same-sex marriage. Proponents against same-sex marriage who are so called Christians view same sex marriage based on very old biblical texts. It's literally the only argument against it that they have, and they use it to their advantage and always in a public way. The marriage clerk that refused to give the gay couple a marriage license wasn't doing it for her job, she did it because of her personal beliefs and received an audience because of it. An audience that had some stance or viewpoint on this couple's fight for their right to get married, and boy, if there's nothing else our human race is good at the one thing, we got going for us is giving opinions on things we're not involved in. And it all revolves back to this idea of shame.

Oh, and for those of you who are against transgender people using the public restroom I got some news for you. You have a unisex bathroom in your own house! The bathroom is such a minefield for people now and for no good reason. Who cares who's using what restroom? At the end of the day we're all touching butts.

My parents were not trying to shame me in all the instances I told you about, but I still felt shame. I felt shame because I needed help from my mother and I felt shame for essentially shitting myself in public because two adult men wouldn't listen to the protestations of a young girl, and I felt shame when I got my first period. I felt shame about these things because they were never brought up after the fact. Except for me, right now.

But I'm not the only one that experiences shame, that would be incredibly naive of me to think so. Think back on your life and search for a moment where you watched as one of your friends, students, family member, or peers broke down because of the

societal pressure and fear of shame from those around them, or, when you did. There's something in life for everyone to stress about!

Because of this stress and anxiety, I began going to counseling here at this school. Which is great and I am very open to talk about my experience if you're interested! But there's also a vast stigma around this whole idea of counseling. Just compare these two words:

Counseling vs Therapy.

One implies mental health and the other implies being at rock bottom. And isn't the word stigma just another word for shame? People tend to feel ashamed when going to therapy for the first time because it means they need help, but what happens in therapy is a release of that shame. We live in a society that shames people for trying to release their shame!

I wouldn't be doing this show right now unless I had gone to counseling because, quite frankly, I couldn't remember these instances. I had blocked these moments from my life and shoved them away so far deep down inside of me that they were hurting me from the inside out. And what better way to take control back from the repressed shame and fear of my childhood than to expose it for the betterment of myself, and hopefully you as well.

And it's not real. What's at the root of shame? Nothing, if there's no one around to judge you for it.

My experience is not your experience, but a selfish part of me hopes that by me sharing these experiences with you it'll make it easier for you to deal with your own troubled bodily function story, whatever that may be.

This'll be the last thing that I share with you tonight, here it is:

If I could I would send everyone out of this room with the knowledge that it's okay to be just a little bit kinder to yourself.

PRE-PERFORMANCE CONCLUSION

Hopefully when all is said and done, the audience walks away from the performance knowing that it's okay to talk about what happens behind the secrecy of the bathroom door. I've certainly gotten much more comfortable talking about this subject since working on this thesis. I actively talk very openly about my bodily functions with people, and I wish the same level of comfortability for the people who come and see the performance.

Ultimately, there's no real way I can track whether the goal I've set out to complete with this show ever actually gets realized. I can track it during the show by asking for audience participation, raising of the hands, etc., but once they leave the space it's out of my control. All I can do is to give them my best open and honest self during the show, a couple of interesting bodily function stories, and send them on their way.

Hopefully this comfort will be contagious and will encourage other people to start unpacking their own “shameful” bodily function story. Because let’s face it, everybody has one. If anything, the shame that people produce and drop on others when it comes to the topic of bodily functions is self-produced, and until everyone feels comfortable with what their body does naturally this shame will continue. Everyone, whether they want to realize it or not, has perpetuated shame at some point in their life. And it’s almost never vocal. It can be as simple as the way your head tilted at the mention of something that’s been deemed “unsavory” by the hegemony, or the way your lips pursed at something you didn’t like. It can even be demonstrated when someone has the best of intentions in a situation, which is something I learned a long time ago.

There’s never going to be a “right” answer when it comes down to dealing with shame, especially in a society where it’s incredibly prevalent in everyday life. All we can do, as humans on this Earth, is to strive to treat ourselves and others kindly. It’s okay to be nicer to yourself. I promise you your body isn’t this horrible monster that was created to plague you for the rest of your existence. In fact, your body is probably just doing what it’s supposed to do.

And that, in all its gross oddities, is beautiful.

AFTER-EFFECTS: DID EVERYTHING GO AS PLANNED?

This thesis, as many theses are, was a labor of love. In the end, *Shit Show* wasn't just my own creation, but a collaboration by anyone who ever encountered the show. It takes a village, and in this case, it took the village two years to complete this chapter. Yet, I have a small inkling in the back of my mind that this isn't the end for the little show that could. Not in the slightest. Then, when I went to take a shower after it was all said and done, I may or may not have had ketchup in places where ketchup should never be.

However, if you were to ask me: "Was it worth it?"

I'd say: "Yes. Yes, and I'd do it all over again in a heartbeat."



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This is the piece that started it all for me. After having watched Morin-Robert's one-woman show "Blindside" in Fall Term 2017 I knew that I wanted to do something similar for my thesis. I can't express how much this show has impacted me and if I could get my show anywhere close to Morin-Robert's production I would be incredibly satisfied. The way she was able to tell her story and keep it interesting and relevant for the audience is one of the main things that I would want to emulate in my show. I don't want my production to end up being all about me and only me, I want to take the audience on a journey that will hopefully make them more accepting of the topics I will be talking about.

This is the largest source of inspiration for me and this entire project and will be my main guidepost in determining how and in what format I want this show to end up being in. Morin-Robert's did such a beautiful job at being able to break up her dialogue with a dance interlude and that is what I'm going to be modelling my performance art pieces off in my production. There's so much from this show that laid the groundwork down for my own. I will be specifically using the type of dialogue that Morin-Robert's used which is first-person narrative. A story becomes much more vivid, realistic, and present when being told in first-person so this is how I will specifically be modelling my own dialogue after Morin-Robert's. Obviously, the subject matter of the dialogue will be changed, but the ultimate format will be pretty much the same.

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In terms of performance art stardom Karen Finley is sitting at the top of the list for me. While Stephanie Morin-Roberts is my biggest inspiration for how I'll be getting my main message across to the audience, Finley is my biggest inspiration in how I'll be visually doing my performance art. I've been playing around with this idea of using chocolate as a substitute for using actual feces in my performance, and Finley is the one person I must thank for that. Not only is she very influential for what I want my performance art pieces to be like during this play, but she's incredibly inspirational in what happened to her and the other members of the NEA 4. This article is a response from Finley herself addressing the issues and censorship that herself and three other people went through, as well as a direct response to Robert Novak publicly slandering her and her work.

I will be recreating something like her *Chocolate-Smeared Young Woman* piece but other than using the same medium of chocolate, I believe my performance art piece will be very different than hers. Even if I don't end up using chocolate (there's a plethora of reasons why I'm leaning against it such as cleanup after the performance) Finley and her work was incredibly personal and political, something I know my piece will end up being. In all her performances Finley played around with the use of her voice as well, which she mentions in the article, and so during my performance art pieces I might try to embody some of her vocal patterns too.

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This is a great analysis of the exhibit *Womanhouse* by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro who are two of the biggest inspirations for the performance art I will be incorporating into my one woman show. The detail that Sider goes through was very helpful in helping me to narrow what topics I wanted to explore.

18. Sinclair, Leah. "The History of Bodily Fluids in Feminist Art." *Broadly*. N.p., 06 Oct. 2015. Web.

My one-woman show will be exploring bodily functions, and this article that Sinclair compiled of some of the most famous and impactful art pieces involving bodily fluids was very helpful in its creation. By looking through the pieces in the article and then reading Sinclair's commentary I was able to narrow down what kind of bodily fluid I would be talking about and in what ways I could talk about them.

19. Warr, Tracey. "The Informe Body." *Brookes*, people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/1no1/TRACEywarr.html.
20. *Womanhouse*. Dir. Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. 533 N. Mariposa Street, Los Angeles. Performance.

Chicago and Schapiro were the first artists to unashamedly explore the hidden topic of periods and to put it into the public eye through such a groundbreaking exhibit. While my one-woman show will be very different from their art exhibit, I will be following in their footsteps in exploring the shame that comes with having a period and the societal expectations that follow.