

## Middle Body

Being caught in the middle can be a very disheartening experience. There are many situations in which two sides can pull me in opposite directions, such as a fight among my group of friends. When a disagreement does occur, each friend will attempt to get me to take their side by telling me negative things about my other friends. This places me in an awkward position. Since I want to continue being friends with everyone, I have to carry around and conceal all the negative comments my friends have revealed to me.

My body extension entitled “Middle Body” is a way to visually represent all of my friends’ comments that I have been forced to take on or wear. The “Middle Body” suit allows me to put everyone’s comments on myself for the taking and in addition allows me to give advice to my friends about friendship non-verbally.

The “Middle Body” suit was created to reflect both the feeling of being in the middle and also the feeling of having everyone’s comments thrown at me. The suit is a black body suit containing different colored strips each representing a different friend. Strips on the arms have negative comments because the arms are easy to access. The strips on the legs have positive comments forcing people to bend down and stretch themselves to get these comments. The strips on the chest have direct advice from me concerning friendship. These strips were placed on the chest to make both the person and myself feel uncomfortable when obtaining/giving advice. The strips on my body were not placed in any particular order, rather just placed in random arrangements to mimic the chaos of how all the comments are just thrown at me and become jumbled inside my head. Strips were attached with Velcro and the comments concealed on the inside of each strip. The Velcro was used to mimic being ripped apart. Both having my friends find out these comments and having to give advice rips me apart inside because it’s painful for me to tell people the truth about themselves. On the other hand, the removing of the strips does free up my body making the comments no longer a burden, which removes me from the middle.

The video allows a demonstration of the “Middle Body” suit in action. Each strip contained actual comments that were told to me by other friends or my actual advice for each friend. When my friend entered the room, I asked them how they were and briefly mentioned that people were making comments about them. I then told them that my arms had negative comments, my legs positive, and my chest advice from me. I allowed each person to choose four strips. I chose four in order to determine a bias; did they want an extra negative comment, positive comment, or more advice? I wanted the suit to be very interactive and wanted people to remove from me rather than me taking from myself. This aspect of the project was inspired by Marina Abramovic’s piece *Rhythm 0* where she had the audience cut pieces of her wardrobe, allowing people to cross boundaries and enter into her comfort zone.

There were many things I observed from the performance. First, my advice on my breasts was not as uncomfortable for people as I had hoped, maybe because they are my close friends as opposed to random audience members. As a result, people did take my advice, which ended up being a productive way to communicate my ideas. Also, people had different biases based on their personalities. The first friend wanted to know more good things about himself, the second friend appreciated my advice the most, and the last friend wanted to know more negative

comments people had said. At the end, I allowed some of my friends to give their immediate feedback. Two out of three didn't believe the comments were real and it was interesting to see this denial. However, the performance made each friend reevaluate himself or herself as a friend. One of my friends is still upset about one of the comments he read, but this was the risk I had to take.

The best part of the experience was the freeing up of myself from these comments. In the beginning of the video, I show myself full of all awkward placed colored strips, and by then end, I am almost back to being myself and free from these appendages. Once people read them, it was like a burden had been lifted, and I no longer had to carry all the baggage with me. In addition, the exercise fueled healthy conversation about friendship in general so that now my friends are more aware of themselves and each other. Although this exact same "Middle Body" suit cannot be used in another situation due to the specificity of the comments, the text can easily be changed to reflect a different situation and then the suit reused.