

I never said yes.

Leah Newman

In this work I process the confrontational conversation I had with someone who sexually assaulted me. The elements in my work express feelings and ideas I had pre, during, and post this conversation. In my tapestry, *X and Y: Conversation, Confrontation, and War*, I write out an excerpt from the actual conversation I had. In my video, *Getting Stronger*, I gain strength, assert my power, and make my processing visible in relation to this event. The objects and sculptures I use evoke themes such as gaining physical and mental strength, consent, communication, domination, and passivity. At first glance the work may seem playful, sweet, innocent, fun, and feminine with its bubblegum colors. This is ironic given the subject matter. It acts as a reclamation of power in the communication between the work and the viewer. The irony is a tool to violate your expectations.

1. *X and Y: Conversation, Confrontation, and War*

Felt, sharpie

I audio-recorded the conversation I had with my assaulter. I did not get his consent to do this. Similarly, I did not give him consent to do what he did to me. The tapestry shows an excerpt from this conversation. The assaulter is X and I am Y. This is word for word what happened.

2. *Working (It) Out*

2 3lb weights, 2 5lb weights, 2 8lb weights
Work out! Get stronger!
[Please lift]

3. *Looking Out/Looking In*

Safety goggles, white glitter
Look out, but also look in.

4. *My Secret Weapons*

Selfie stick, fly swatter, bubble wand
I can defend myself with these weapons.

5. *Muscle Memory*

Child muscle shirt, plastic hanger
Feel my abs.

6. *Telephone*

2 tin cans, trimmer line
I made this telephone to listen to the recorded conversation.

7. *#Struggles*

2 1lb weights, 2 2lb weights, 2 3lb weights
Being a girl is #hard. Life is #hard. I #hate #boys.
This work is a critique of the usual critique of #feminist art.

8. *Rat Trap*

Rat trap
I caught him.

9. *Getting Stronger*

Digital video, 4 min. 55 sec.
In *Getting Stronger*, I first use my *Telephone* to listen to the recording of my assaulter during our conversation. I then assert my power and strength as I lift weights (found in *#Struggles*). I critique what it means to “gain strength” post-assault by getting physically stronger. My actual strength is shown when I flex my muscles as I wear my muscle shirt (found in *Muscle Memory*). My strength is magnified when I demonstrate my skill in using my *Secret Weapons*. I also wear safety goggles (used in *Looking Out/Looking In*) — showing that I am always prepared for an attack. I then return to lifting weights (found in *Working (It) Out*), showing that the struggle is never over. The strength and preparedness I have gained from these actions hypothetically prevents me from being sexually assaulted again. (This of course is a skewed opinion [and not true]—for being assaulted was not based on my “weakness”, but on my assaulter’s actions).

Getting Stronger is the predecessor to my dance/performance piece, *Strength Training (Sections A-C)*.