

feminism in the third dimension



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welcome!

In my self-directed body of research this year, I was curious to explore how I could employ my perspectives as a young female designer in order to identify, highlight, and challenge sexist issues experienced by myself and other women in our culture in my practice.

Despite social progression regarding gender equality, sexist prejudices regarding gender-specific stereotypes and appropriate tasks still exist; the ramifications of which are still a pertinent and integral issue in contemporary society and subsequently design, necessitating feminist intervention to challenge and change these conceptions.

Examining the physical spaces delineated by the patriarchy for women to inhabit is important to discern how it has shaped the stereotypical image of woman. In patriarchal ideology, perhaps one of the most prominent and pervasive of the conceptions of women's rightful role, is their encumbering with all things 'domestic,' – this in physical terms manifesting as the home. Sexism has engendered a sexual division of labour, which describes the delegation of different tasks between males and females. This division is evident within women's experiences or practices of design in many different ways.

Due to gender inequality and the subjugation of women in society being such a mammoth topic, I felt it would be pertinent to set some parameters regarding my contextualisation within feminist theory. Although I have employed both past and present feminist literature and theory such as *Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women in Design* by Professor Cheryl Buckley, I have situated my project within Fourth-wave feminism. This is a phase of feminism regarded to have begun in 2012, and is characterised largely by its utilization of the internet as a tool for social mobility in order to further its feminist agenda.

I have therefore used many different online platforms such as 'The Everyday Sexism Project,' Podcasts such as 'The Guilty Feminist,' and Instagram to identify issues that I could re-imagine or give physicality to through my material investigation.

I believe there is a current movement of women utilising said contemporary online platforms as a device for self-expression and agency over their own bodies and image. Here, women are re-appropriating the motif of their nakedness and the female nude in order to reclaim their sexuality from the male gaze, and creating an aesthetic that treats femininity, and female sexuality very differently to how art or popular culture has done so previously. This is a topic I am very interested in, as I think we are in the middle of a slow yet seismic shift in popular culture in the representation of women, and I have attempted to explore in my project.

Coming from a background of Fine Art, I found myself considering where the lines between objects afforded the definition of 'Fine Art' and 'Design' begin and end. Can an object be functional, as well as conceptual, silly, and fun? Due to being largely invested in more classical design such as chair making, I was interested to see how I could make an objects that were both a tool for social commentary, whilst simultaneously retaining some functionality. This situated me within critical design, a term popularised by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, that approaches design from a critical theory approach, and uses design to ask questions or carry debate to the public and increase awareness on social, cultural, or ethical issues.

I felt moved to pursue research surrounding feminism as I feel like sexism and gender inequality is something that I am hugely aware of and subject to in my life currently, and I am presently more deeply engaged in this topic than any other. In *Feminism in the Third Dimension*, I have tried to offer solutions or highlight issues of female representation, damaging stereotyping and instances of sexism and oppression in a playful and humorous yet not minimising way and I really hope you enjoy my project!

some of the women that inspired me



*** cheryl buckley ***



*** pat kirkham ***



*** rozsika parker ***



*** ghislaine hermanuz ***



*** griselda pollock ***



*** joan rothschild ***



*** laura mulvey ***




*** sarah lucas ***



*** celia pym ***

a cheesy love note



A quick silly shout out to all the incredibly strong, funny, intelligent and loving women that have surrounded me my whole life - you are endlessly inspiring. Lets dismantle the patriarchy?

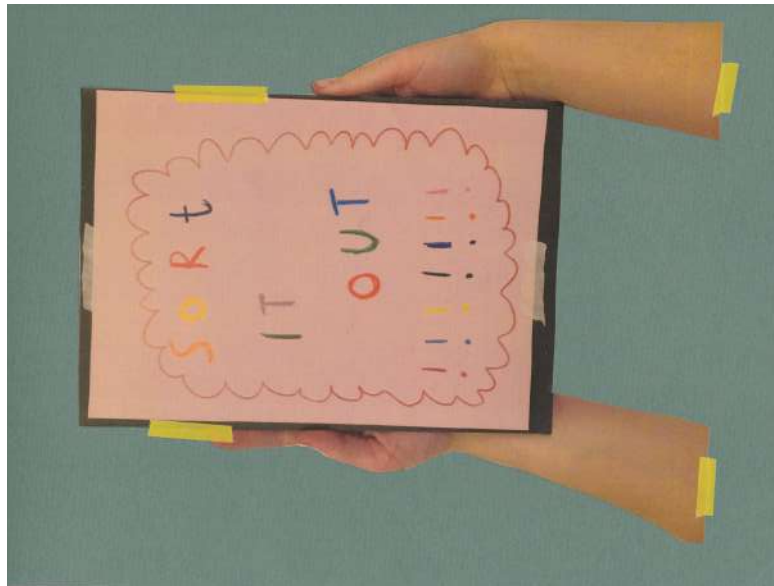
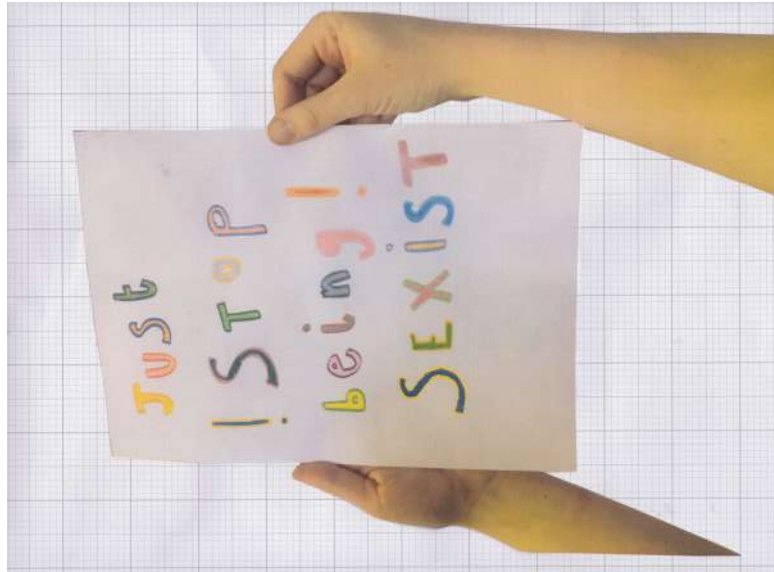
out in droves

I think we are in a really interesting and turbulent time politically in women's fight for equality. Despite obvious progress, in some respects, it currently appears as though we are taking giant leaps backwards in this matter; examples of this being the overt sexism of Trump's presidential mandate, or the continual sexual assault allegations such as Brett Kavanaugh's high profile case plastering the media.

Something that has been a huge influence in my topic of research for third year however has been the retaliation of women around the world in response to these issues. Women have taken to any and all platforms in order to challenge these various and numerous problems of sexism and oppression. One of these ways has been to march the streets in protest.

Inspired by brilliant homemade signs brandished by women in said marches - that are often intentionally humorous or tongue-in-cheek whilst also conveying serious messages - I have made some of my own.

I think this element of humour often makes them all the more poignant and engaging. I want to carry this sentiment into my project as I explore sexist issues through my three dimensional design practice.



Sit Down
FOR YOUR
RIGHTS

...geddit?

I have always loved chairs, and so was naturally drawn towards exploring seating solutions throughout my degree. In my final year project, I wanted to continue this vein of exploration, but in a way that also furthered my topic of research. To explore ways in which to 'gender' seating, I considered the ways in which society differentiates objects by gender.

Often, things that both men and women might use that have been distinctly gendered have different colours and patterns: items aimed at women might stereotypically be pink and floral, the man's blue and geometric. Another example is size and shape, with objects aimed at women often being smaller or more curvy or rotund.

Some objects are differentiated to the ultimate benefit of the male of female user, which tends to be concerned with size; it is true that women often tend to have shorter or smaller frames than men so this can be a concern of safety or usability. The majority however is based around limited social perceptions of taste founded from gender stereotypes that are tired and tedious.

I wanted to apply these concepts in order to explore ways in which to gender a typically unisex a seat.

IN A
tight
SPOT

fun with hosiery

Obvious items that tend to be specifically tailored towards either men or women is clothing. I think women's clothes tend to be the most recognisably gendered, as women share far more clothing with men than vice versa, i.e: women ordinarily wear trousers, whereas men wearing dresses is more unusually in our culture. The items that most captured my interest in this area was underwear, as most people tend to wear these articles every day.

This sparked my interest in tights. I think there is something intriguing about them; they are so soft, stretchy and tactile, and so strikingly feminine to me. An artist I drew inspiration from and that also often incorporates tights in their work is Sarah Lucas. She explores themes of gender stereotyping and abject femininity.



I decided to use hosiery as a material to try to make a 'female' stool. To force the movement of the person interacting with the stool, I sewed tights onto the seat in which you to climb into in order to sit down. I have included the set of photographs on the next pages in which I have attempted to visually illustrate this.

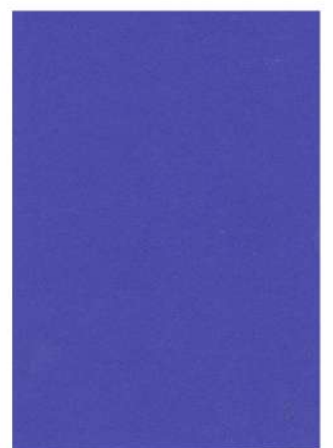
I continued this research by making a small Lacewood stool with yellow stained sycamore legs which I wrapped stuffed flesh coloured tights around the seat as pictured on pages

Whilst this does not necessarily strictly gender the seat, I think it affords it a somewhat weirdly effeminate quality and poses questions about its intended user.









A
SOLUTION
FOR
MAN-
SPREADING

“surely your balls aren’t that big sir”

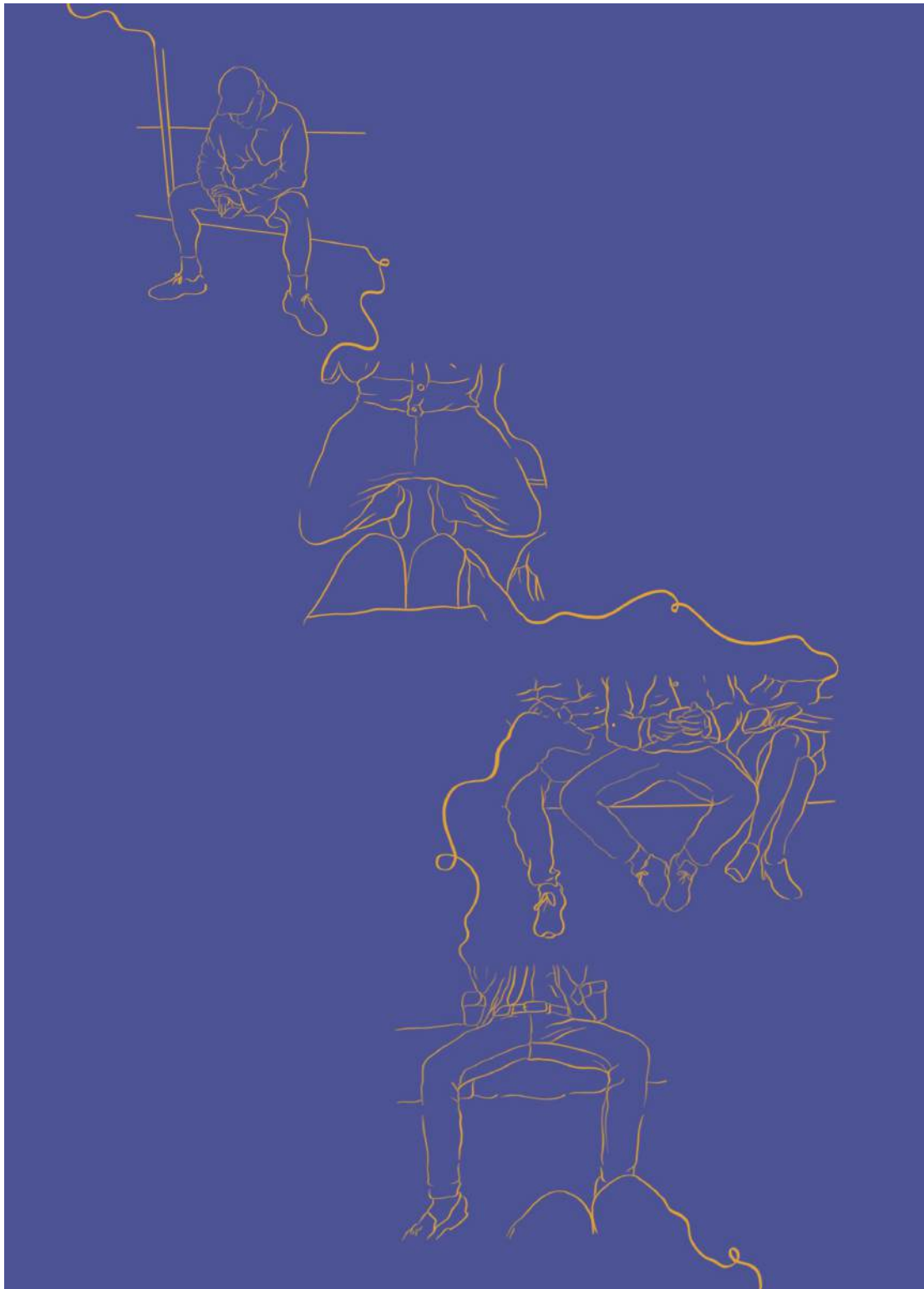
To identify issues of sexism pertaining to the act of sitting experienced by women I explored various internet platforms, one of which being ‘The Everyday Sexism Project.’ This website set up by feminist and writer Laura Bates in 2012 enables women around the world to anonymously share their personal experiences of sexism.

This helped me to identify the phenomenon of ‘man-spreading,’ which seemed to be a problem women were experiencing all around the world. Man-spreading is defined as:

‘the practice whereby a man, especially one travelling on public transport, adopts a sitting position with his legs wide apart, in such a way as to encroach on an adjacent seat or seats.’

I decided to spend an hour riding trains on Southern Rail between Brighton and Portslade - a journey I make frequently for my commute to and from work - walking up and down the train to see if I could find any examples of men ‘man-spreading’ and encroaching onto women’s space first-hand. In such a short time I found multiple cases. One of which that particularly stood out to me was a woman having to sit sideways on her seat with her legs in the aisle due to a man stretching his all the way over into her foot-well.

Having experienced this myself many times on public transport and frequently found it very frustrating, I decided this would be an interesting problem to explore. This research inspired me to create a pair seats; one for a man that encourages them to sit with their knees together, and one for a women that encourages her to sit with her legs parted. While my technical investigation is not necessarily intended to be serious or hard-hitting, I think these chairs do give a physicality to an issue women face in quite a fun yet literal way which is my overall main objective in this project.





























DOMESTIC
GODDESS
ES*

In patriarchal ideology, perhaps one of the most prominent and pervasive of the conceptions of women's rightful role, is their encumbering with all things 'domestic,' – this in physical terms manifesting as the home. Concerning this and exploring assumptions of women as designer and consumer in *Made in Patriarchy*, Buckley considers that 'first, women's primary role is in domestic service to husband, children, and home' and that 'second, domestic appliances make women's life easier.'¹ These statements both rely on each other to corroborate and legitimize their ideas, but also support the cultural conception of domesticity and the home being considered the concern of femininity by the patriarchy.

This is explored further in 'Design and Gender,' by Professor Philippa Goodall in Block (9) where she commented that:

*Some feminists go as far as to say that the home can be identified as 'a significant sphere of the construction of gender difference'; in other words, that it is instrumental in teaching women the ideal of femininity which places them in the home as their 'natural' habitat, rather than in the outside world of paid labour.'*²

This promotes the concept that women's domesticity - arguably largely prescribed by the patriarchy - is a major hindrance on women's ability to access equally paid labour opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts.

This perspective of how the responsibilities for certain 'labours' of society are assigned based on sexual difference is also reflected in 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union,' in Lydia Sargent's *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. Here she notes a sexual division of labour that forms the 'material base of male power which is exercised (in our society), not just in not doing housework and in securing superior employment, but psychologically as well.'³

Exploring the physical realms available to women - particularly domesticity - has been something I have been especially interested in this year. I have attempted to examine and subvert these notions in 'domestic goddesses*' through design and photographic mediums, exploring female representation, and the impact of gender stereotypes and sexual divisions of labour within design practices with contextual research and material investigation.

Footnotes

1 Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Theories of Women and Design - A Reworking." *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*. Ed. Joan Rothschild (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999) 8

2 Philippa Goodall, "Design and Gender," Block, 9 (1983) 57

3 Heidi Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union," *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. Lydia Sargent (London: Pluto Press, 1981) 16.

DOMESTIC CAMOUFLAG e

women by women

I wanted to try to both highlight and subvert women's prescribed domesticity in a 35mm photographic series. I have attempted to do so by taking commonplace objects from home environments such as lamps or curtains, and fashioned them into costumes for women I know to wear in a bid to 'blend' them the domestic scenes.

I have been interested in the representation – or misrepresentation – of women in art and the media for a long time, particularly after reading canonical essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' by Laura Mulvey in which she coins the term the 'Male Gaze.' This concept was very influential and inspiring to me and is defined as:

'the perspective of a notionally typical heterosexual man considered as embodied in the audience or intended audience for films and other visual media, characterized by a tendency to objectify or sexualize women.'

Regarding fourth wave feminism and representation of women, one thing that really strikes me is the way platforms such as 'Instagram' is being utilized by women in order to reclaim their bodies and sexuality. I really feel this has contributed to a shift in attitude towards how women are represented, questions the innate assumption of the presumed male view, and challenges the commodification of female beauty and sexuality that has for so long been appropriated *by* the male practitioner *for* the male viewer.

On a platform like Instagram that is simultaneously a personal visual album, taken or curated by the user, and extremely public and accessible, I think it has offered women liberation in how they present their own images of themselves or other women, and also an online community in which to do so.

While many facets of social networking platforms such as Instagram are flawed and counterproductive, they are also being used increasingly as a means of social mobility and justice - particularly regarding a feminist agenda such as campaigns like #freethenipple that challenge Instagram's banning or censoring of the image of the female nipple but not men's.

Something that particularly strikes me however is the way in which women are currently reclaiming the 'nude,' which for so long was the ideological property of the male artist in which he would depict the female model in accordance to his own sexual desires.

Women are increasingly taking photos of themselves or other women unclothed, but instead of intending to gratify the sexuality of a male viewer, it is in order to reinstate female nakedness as a tool of agency over their bodies and sexuality and to shift the existing perceptions, stigma or hyper-sexualisation over said female nakedness.

Whilst taking these pictures, all the women - including myself - said they found it a fun and liberating process. I think if we did not know and care for each-other, or if I was a man however, I believe the connotations or motivations behind these pictures would have shifted into something coercive or detrimental, and the different context would yield a very different dynamic between photographer, model and viewer.

I have attempted to utilize the nudity, passivity and femininity of my muses in order to try to subvert the male gaze and ridicule the circumscribing encumbering of domesticity to most women. I am unsure of whether I am so deeply entrenched and indoctrinated by the male gaze and that I have unwittingly replicated their fantasies, but I also think that simply questioning and challenging my motivations helps to exempt me from it somewhat. Whether this series has been successful is not, I think my investigation of women being portrayed by other women is something I will always be interested in.





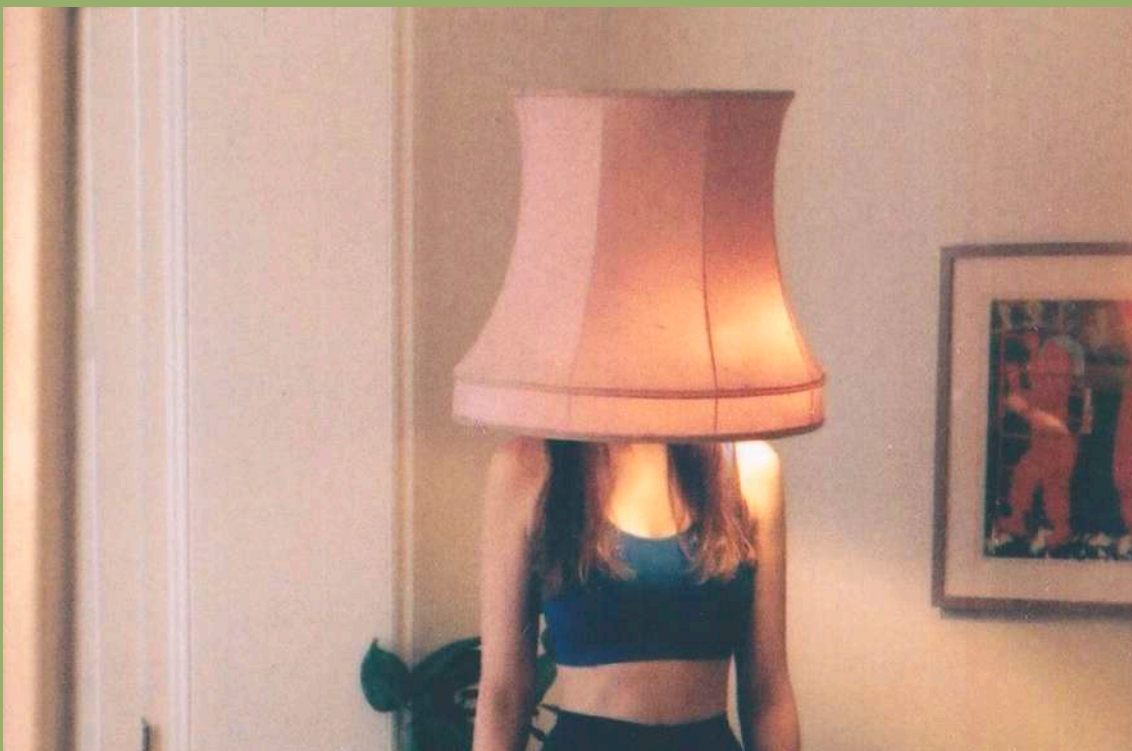














**FIXER
UPPERS**



sexual divisions of labour within craft

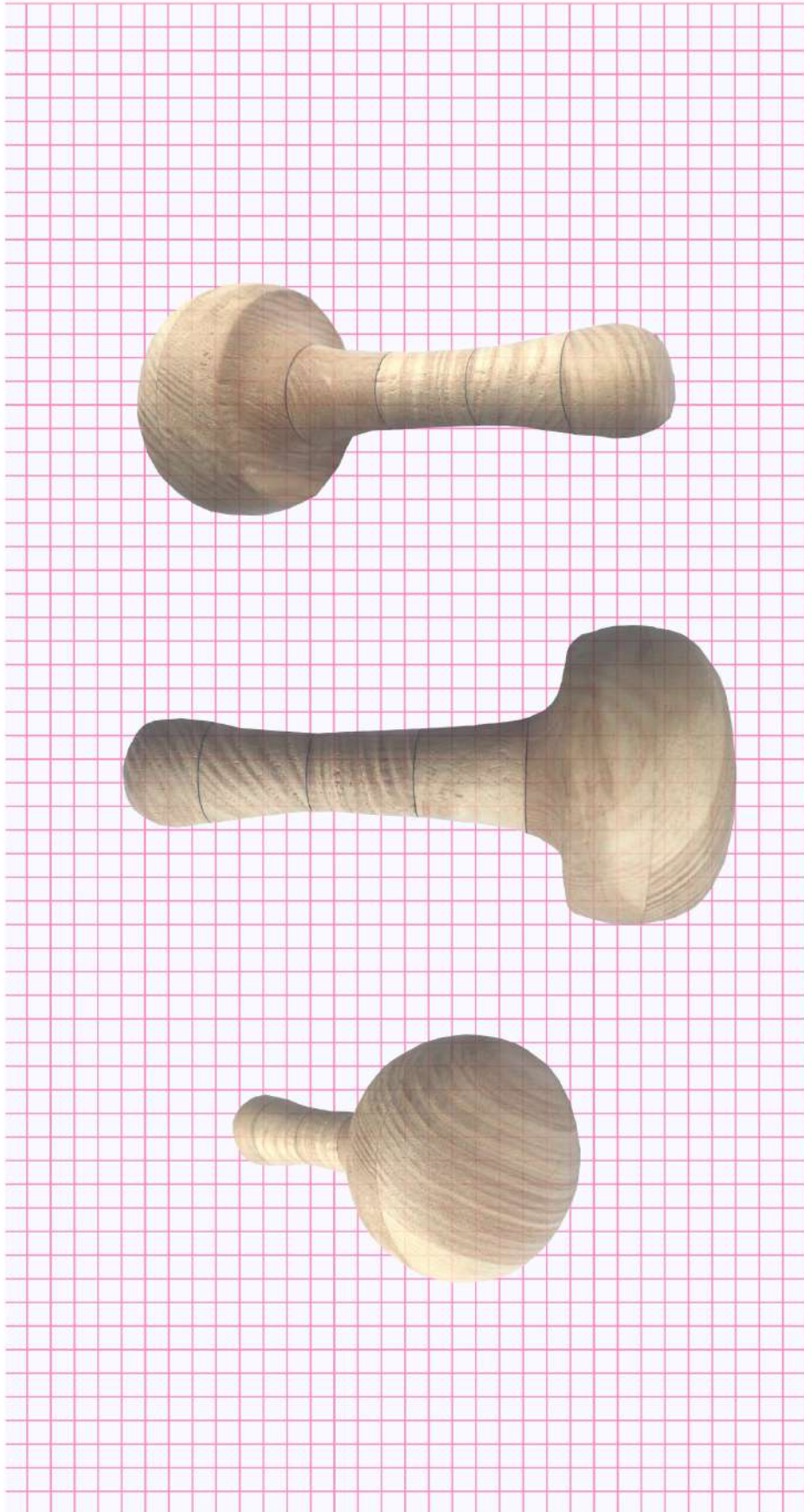
I felt to explore design from a feminist perspective, it would be important to examine 'craft' in relation to my project in order to explore its gender based divisions or expectations. Craft – particularly needlework or knitting – has historically been delegated as 'women's work,' which was often undertaken within the home environment, whilst men practiced other areas of design beyond this limited sphere. I am curious to examine my own relationship with these types of craft, and to explore my potential motivations behind said practice.

One particular textile craft I have been the most drawn to in recent years is darning to fix the holes in my clothes. Rather than attempting to disguise the damage they have suffered, I celebrate it, which I feel actually makes them far more interesting and renews my love for them. One such piece is an orange cashmere scarf my mum gave to me that had 21 holes in it that I fixed with multi-coloured threads pictured on the previous page.

I have also been fixing my boyfriend Robbie's clothes, and in particular his favourite old t-shirts that had a lot of holes in from age and wear. This feels very much like a labour of love, as despite him being capable and enjoying textile based work, I have assumed the never ending and time consuming role of the fixer for him. This practice of spending hours patching up clothes for the person you love also for me has a definite feeling of care and tenderness.

In our relationship I feel we have a very healthy attitude towards gender roles and expectations with each other. I think this is helped by our shared interests like climbing and making things for which we both have our areas of skill or particular interest, but stand fairly equal in certain respects. It is also helped by Robbie being a conscientious, kind, and intelligent man rather than sexist pig.

I think however the act of fixing his t-shirts is one we perhaps differ on. The fact that this feels like a stereotypically 'feminine' task makes me consider that we are unusually adhering to more gender specific roles, which has prompted me both to reflect on my motivations, but also has spurred me to question why this feels like a specifically feminine practice



In essay 'The Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts movement' by Anthea Callen, she explores the division of design practices based on gender within craft and design in Victorian Britain, and resulting hierarchy of skills between genders.

Of said era, Callen notes:

*"Art work was one of the few occupations considered suitable for middle-class women in the Victorian period. Here was a field of employment that appeared to be merely an extension of traditional feminine accomplishments. It would enhance rather than erode the role designated as 'natural' for the Victorian woman, for art work represented only the slightest adjustment of her accepted social position."*¹

Of said role and position of women, Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker in *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* write it was to be *'beautifiers, civilisers, orderers in the face of the social mobility and economic instability of a chaotic and threatening world.'*² I think this desire for women to be the placid beautifiers is still extremely relevant in contemporary society; women are still endlessly taught to measure their value in terms of their beauty and domestic accomplishments in a way that men are simply not subject to.

Callen also writes:

*'Although the Arts and Crafts Movement was in many ways socially and artistically radical, at the same time it in fact reproduced, perpetuated and thus reinforced dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology. It recreated in microcosm traditional divisions between male and female roles, which can be seen in the areas of design, production, craft skills, income and management.'*³

I think the problems highlighted by Callen in Victorian Britain within the division of design practices and perception of women's role and abilities is still very much a factor affecting women's agency within their design practices or equality within professional spheres.

The dynamics of equality between men and women now compared to in the Victorian era in Britain are wildly different, and yet echoes of the same division within crafts and design or the resulting values are still present. This division of work is evident everywhere but is immensely complicated. With reference to darning and other needle works however, I believe it is branded as feminine practice and devalued as such due to it being type of work that was and is often created from within a domestic environment for the market of the family, as this was the arena and audience that women might stereotypically more easily access.

To further my research into this medium and project, I decided to fix the significant men in my life's clothes from the comfort of my home. I decided this would include all the men from the main realms of my life: work, home, and university. I think I have good and respectful relationships with all these men.

At my place of work Boulder Brighton, one of my bosses James who donated a pair of jeans with a broken pocket, and my other boss Tom a jumper and a polo shirt. At university one of my main tutors Jem gave me a pair of woollen socks that were his fathers that had holes in, and my boyfriend Robbie gave me some of his favourite t-shirts to fix.

Callen notes the frequent devaluation of this type of 'women's work,' but in this case I do not feel like the work I have undertaken for these men is undervalued. In fact, Robbie seemed so happy and thankful for the time I took to fix his favourite t-shirt he claimed that is now one of his favourite objects he owns.

Rather than trying to reinforce this as a problematic or gender specific practice, I simply wanted to explore the historical aspects of feminine tradition that I wanted to explore in this project and challenge or highlight these unconsciously stereotypes for myself. In order to carry out said fixing, I made myself a darning mushroom from layered olive ash with coloured bands of blue, which I used for all of the garments.

Footnotes

1 Anthea Callen, "Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement," *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, eds. Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (London: The Women's Press, 1989) 153-154

2 Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *The Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1981) 99

3 Anthea Callen, "Sexual Division of Labour in the Arts and Crafts Movement," 151

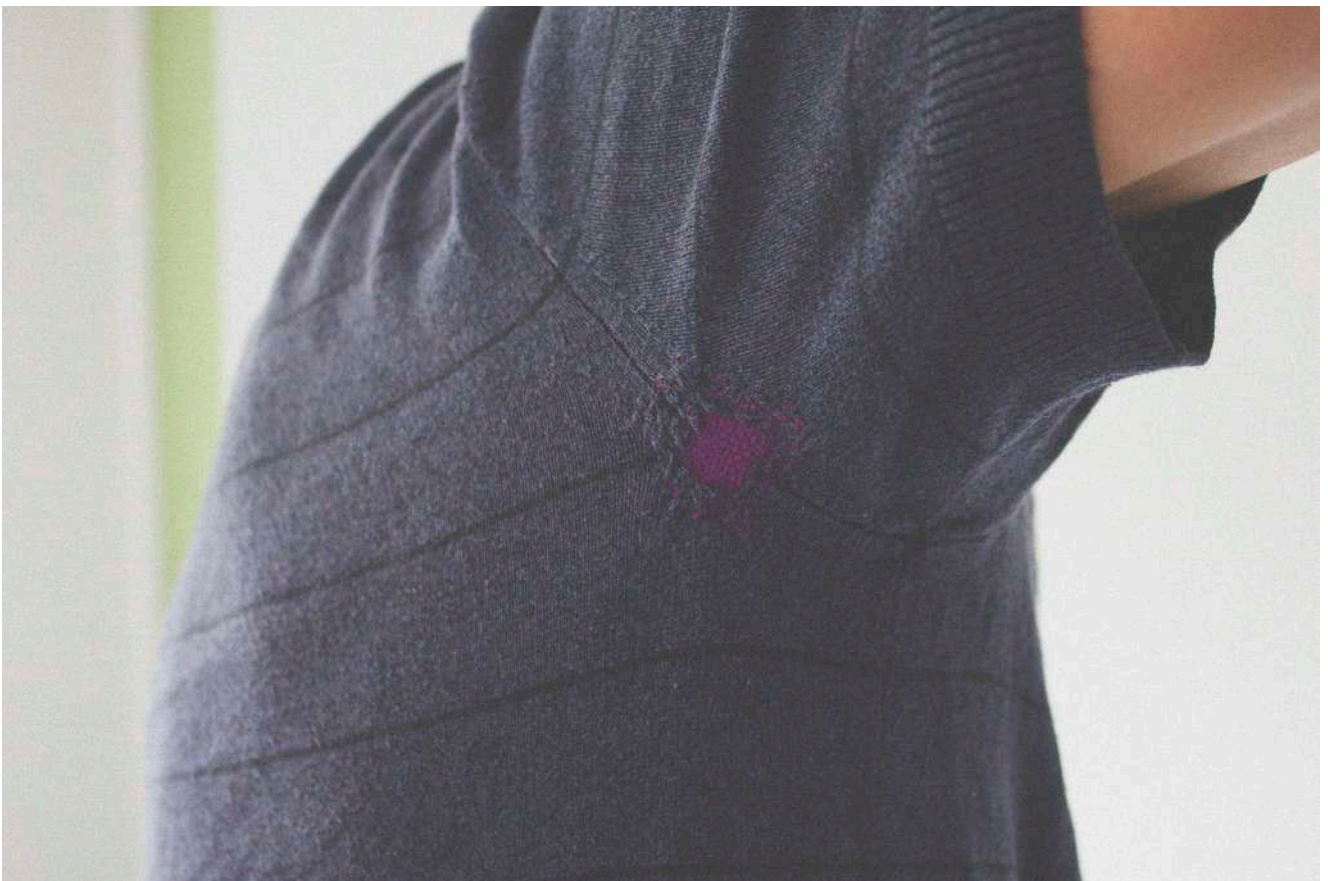
name: jem

relation to me: tutor on 3D design & craft

fixed: an old pair of his dad's woollen socks







name: tom

relation to me: boss at boulder brighton

fixed: a shirt and a jumper







name: robbie

relation to me: boyfriend

fixed: favourite t-shirts









● Out-

GROWING

the

CORNER

● OF THE

KITCHEN

TABLE

a corner all to yourself

In essay 'Outgrowing the Corner of the Kitchen Table' by Professor Ghislaine Hermanuz in *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things* edited by Joan Rothschild, she discusses the how the domestic environment constitutes the only physical space open for women to create non-domestic work in patriarchal culture, noting that the *'home is the exclusive domain of women, while the rest of the city and its opportunities for remunerated work constitute the domain of men.'*¹

In Professor Susana Torre's 'Expanding the Urban Design Agenda: A Critique of the New Urbanism' also in Rothschild's *Design and Feminism*, she comments that: *'Much has been made of the increased participation of men in the production of the domestic environment, but women continue to be the primary.'*² Whilst progression in responsibility of care for the home and family has been made in the 21st century, it is still the primary responsibility of the mother, the daughter, the wife.

In 'Outgrowing the Corner of the Kitchen Table' Ghislaine Hermanuz also writes that *'Western culture fosters the belief that most women become part of society's "productive forces" by stealing time away from their domestic responsibilities and stealing space away from the domestic environment.'*³ This shows the devaluation of the work by women in professional environments over men: the father likely never seen as 'stealing' this time away unlike mother.

An example of how this division of labour resulting from the delineating of physical spaces between genders and how this sustains inequality and currently manifests in contemporary society is the disparity of the pay-gap still found between men and women in Britain. Inequality in the remuneration for the same work reveals the tangible economic discrimination against women, this evident also within design spheres; the report 'The Design Economy 2018 Executive Summary: The State of Design in the UK' from the UK Design Council finding that women on average earn less than men in design.⁴

This is also an issue of representation. This report further found that men dominated the UK's design industry workforce by 78% compared to the 22% of women.⁵ This disparity was highlighted yet further when considering specific elements of design that are perceived as being more 'masculine,' with product and industrial design being 95% male, digital design being 85%, and architecture being 80%.⁶

Pertaining to the domestic being the only environment available for women to create work within, Hermanuz writes:

*'Thus the notion of "the corner of the kitchen table": that mythical place where, by force rather than by choice, novels have been written, design competitions have been won, scientific problems have been resolved, while at the same time children's homework is supervised, socks are mended, meals are prepared.'*⁷

This concept of the 'corner of the kitchen table' really struck a chord with me, as it feels very familiar and tangible. This is something I have witnessed in many homes as well as my own; while my father had an office, my mum would sit at the table and study or sew. I thought this would be a really interesting concept to try to execute in wood, and so designed a table the shape of a right angle triangle to try to evoke this 'corner' from which I wanted to practice more 'feminine' crafts such as sewing. I wanted to keep this small and somewhat uncomfortable to convey the need for another space for women to create.

Footnotes

¹ Cheryl Buckley, "Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women in Design," *Design Issues*, 3.2, (Massachusetts, The MIT Press, Autumn 1986) 69

² Susana Torre, "Expanding the Urban Design Agenda: A Critique of the New Urbanism," *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things*, eds. Joan Rothschild (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999) 40.

³ Ghislaine Hermanuz, "Outgrowing the Corner of the Kitchen Table," *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things*, eds. Joan Rothschild (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999) 67.

⁴ Despite it becoming illegal in 1970 in Britain to pay a woman less than a man for the same work, Government figures released in April 2018 have shown that three quarters of British companies still typically pay their male employees more over women; the UK Office for National Statistics found that still men are paid a national average of 9.1% more than women annually. ⁵ "Gender pay gap in the UK: 2018," *Employment and Labour Market*, Office for National Statistics, 5 October 2018.

"The Design Economy 2018 Executive Summary: The State of Design in the UK," *The Design Economy*, The UK Design Council, 16-17. June 2018.

⁶ In "The Design Economy 2018 Executive Summary" it was reported that: 'Even when employed in design, women earn less. For example, in the multidisciplinary design subsector, women working as product, clothing and related designers earn 18.3% less than men in that subsector despite making up nearly two-thirds of that design subsector (64%). Women are also less likely than men to be in senior roles, with only 17% of design managers being female.' "The Design Economy 2018 Executive Summary," 17.

⁷ Hermanuz, "Outgrowing the Corner of the Kitchen Table," 67.







How
A To Eat

Banana
in

PUBLIC

& how not to

My intent with my project ‘feminism in the third dimension’ was to identify instances in everyday life that make women uncomfortable, whether big or small, and attempt to offer ways to remedy such I work at a climbing centre where the majority of the staff and patrons are male. Despite feeling somewhat like a home from home to me and the positive intents and efforts of my bosses to create an environment of equality, I still notice and am subject to a fair amount of sexism here.

An example of this is a man I don’t know recently requesting me to smile while I completed my sit-up set, a comment that I feel he would have never said to another man and was totally unsolicited.

Discussions with my female colleagues are ever more frequently centred around these issues and so I asked them if they could recall any particular examples of when they have felt they have been made to feel uncomfortable by men at work.

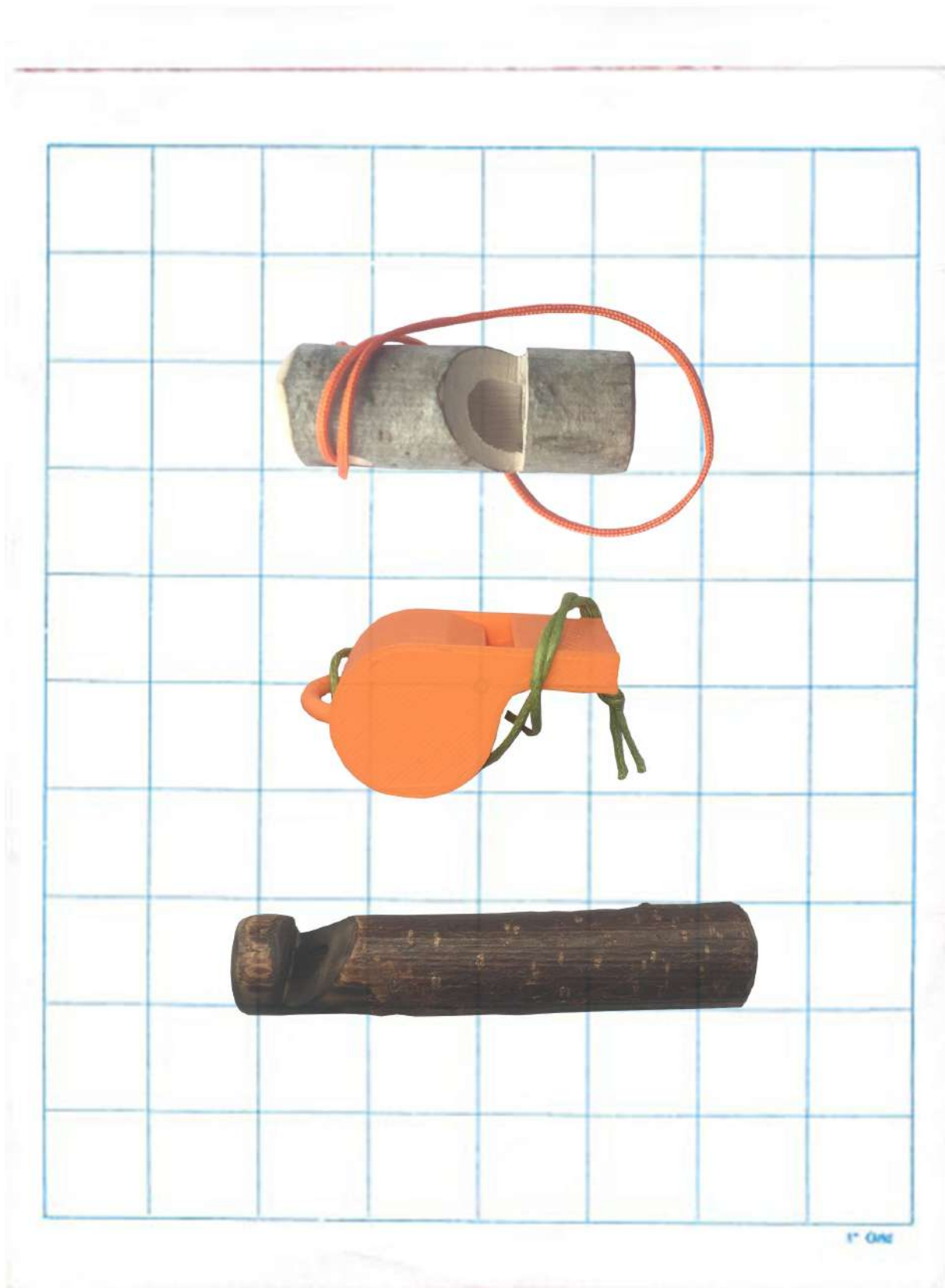
One example given was that one of my friends and colleagues was that she often felt that when she was eating bananas at the centre, that there was always a number of men that would stare at her until she had finished it, and that it naturally made her self-conscious.

To tackle this problem, I designed the banana platter and spoon; a gadget that’s purpose is to provide a way for the female user to eat a banana in public more discreetly. Instead of bringing such a phallic shape to her mouth, she de-skins the banana, places it in its handy plate, and eats it via the spoon. The measurements were based off the national average for banana size but the platter is perhaps a little too large due to some over-enthusiastic rounding up of measurements...! I have included some silly examples with friends on the next pages to help you to imagine the gadget in action.





WHISTLE
BLOWING
@
BRIGHTON
Uni



testimonies of sexism @ the university of brighton

Considering the how the patriarchy has circumscribed other women's experiences in different facets of society has prompted me to more carefully examine my my own experiences through the lens of sexism. As my time studying my undergraduate at the University of Brighton draws to a close, I have also found myself becoming increasingly reflective of my experience within this institution.

I have enjoyed studying at Brighton university a huge amount. I have had the privilege to be taught and interact with intelligent and inspiring tutors and technicians, and feel I have hugely developed both as a person and maker, but there have been some frustrating and boring experiences also.

One such instance was a critique tutorial with a male member of staff in which I believe he made unhelpful and unconstructive comments such as *'but not everyone will find it funny'* about my project subject.

Naturally while I don't plan to alienate anyone with my project, there will likely be some people that view the research and outcomes I have created as biased, uninteresting, or indeed 'unfunny.'

Frankly, this does not upset or alarm me. The nature of trying challenge social issues – particularly sexism that often proves to be somewhat polarising - is that sometimes you step on people's toes. If creatives were perturbed from making work for the fear of some people disliking it, we would be left with very little – if any – work to consider.

Instead, I felt that the criticism I received was founded in personal distaste to my project matter, rather than as an attempt to improve or broaden it. This view seemed to be shared by the other woman in my critique who approached me after to comment on how ridiculous and counter-productive she thought the conversation was.

Grand Parade campus of the University of Brighton is full of young liberal artists, situated in the middle of what is considered to be a more progressive city. This might lead you to hope that you might find a similarly progressive attitude and practice of gender equality in this university. I believe these standards are perhaps not yet being met as fully as they should be, and so have decided to investigate this through interviews with women who have or currently study at this campus. This is in part inspired by the masses of women in the media that coming forward to testify against their wrongdoers. It would seem that the more that come forward and speak out against the sexism they were subjected to by the men around them, the more women that feel enabled to do so also.

I have decided to use the idea of ‘whistle-blowing’ which is popularly used to refer the act of exposing activity that is deemed illegal, unethical, or not correct within an organization to inspire my design practice. I will therefore be asking each of the women that I interview to blow on a whistle on order to grant a physicality to the testimonial nature of this project.

Interestingly, the significant men around me - some of which I fixed clothes for - who make things and are in some way connected to Brighton University seem to all really enjoy making whistles. I thought it would be apt therefore to ask them to make these whistles instead making them myself, as I enjoy the significance of it being the men around these women who are testifying about their experiences of sexism at Brighton University that are contributing to their voice and indeed enabling them to ‘whistle blow.’

The men I have asked to make these whistle are my tutor at university Patrick, my boyfriend who graduated in 3D design & Craft last year Robbie, and my house mate and friend Sam who also went to Brighton University.

All names have been redacted from interviews to try to maintain some anonymity per the women involved requests, and different women used to model the whistles.



whistle made by
robbie crace

whistle made by
robbie crace



anonymous 1

Interview Recorded Saturday 30th March 2019

University of Brighton 3D Design and Craft

all names have been redacted

The Waiting Game

Hi there! So could I just first off get you to tell me your course and your year of study?

Hi! I'm studying 3D Design at Brighton and I'm in first year.

So, obviously you've been at uni for about half a year now?

Yes

So I was just wondering if you could reflect on any experiences of sexism you've encountered personally on your course or in the university as a whole?

I think on our course - well maybe not the course particularly - but the industry it is geared towards is so male dominated, at the beginning I didn't really notice any divide in terms of gender and sexism, but as it's gone on and I've spent more time in workshops and things like that, I do feel like I'm working harder and harder and harder in terms of proving my worth of being a student on such a manual, typically male course I suppose

Sure

So there's been a few instances where a few people who have been there for a long time who have made quite a few comments about my ability to do things that feels particularly tethered to my gender, and just even humour that isn't very helpful in terms of increasing my confidence etc.

Ok, I feel I can identify with this. So, would you just be able to perhaps expand this for me a little? Perhaps you can recall tangible experiences of sexism?

Definitely. A few days ago for example, I was getting ready to use the pillar drill and I was wanted to tilt it which I didn't know to do it, so I asked a member of staff for help -

And this was a male technician?

Yes, a male technician, and he came over and mocked me for not knowing how to do it; put on a silly voice and implied that I couldn't do anything because I was a woman. And this knocked my confidence quite a lot really and made me feel unable to..



whistle made by
patrick letscka

whistle made by
patrick letscka





whistle made by
sam hillier

anonymous 2

Interview Recorded Thursday 28th March 2019

University of Brighton Fine Art Sculpture

all names have been redacted

Why are the fit ones always thick?

So, hi! What did you study at Brighton University?

I studied Fine Art Sculpture

And when did you graduate?

I graduated summer of last year

Great! So, straight in, can you think of any experiences of sexism you experienced whilst studying on your course?

I think if I think about the whole degree, there are few times where there were particular instances - I had a metal tutor who in general was just quite sexist towards me.

Is this in the way they were discouraging etc?

Well, they would be just unbelievably patronising and also wink at me and just generally make me feel really uncomfortable, but I mean there were a few times that I can recall that are events that you can really put your finger on the problem and attribute them to 'sexist events'.

So the sexism was also quite insidious in general?

There is that: when I reflect on the experience as a whole, there was a culture around me making anything on more of a subtle level where I felt discouraged from basically making the things that I had always wanted to. Before I began the degree I did silver-smithing and have always been really interested in metalwork and the reason I wanted to do a sculpture degree specifically and not a fine art degree was because I really wanted to make large scale sculptures out of metal

And so you wanted and needed this to be facilitated for you?

Absolutely, and I didn't apply to uni's in London because they didn't have a metal workshop area. On our open day they actually showed us around the 3D metal area and were like 'oooh this is where you'll make' and I was like 'woo' so I had this dream before getting there in first year of making large scale metal stuff. At the beginning of uni we had our inductions in all the different areas and honestly the metal tutor [REDACTED] is the most disinterested, unsupportive person I've ever come across in an educational institution. He just didn't want to be there, it was so explicit that he didn't want to teach, pass things on, he wasn't interested in our practice and didn't pass things on. The metal was in this weird tent outside so also, apart from the fact that he made me feel really uncomfortable, if I wanted to learn metal I would have to be by myself, in a tent, outside the main building alone which is not something I would have felt very comfortable with ever.

Yeah that's really not an ideal situation if you're feeling uneasy and uncomfortable around someone.

Yeah, his attitude just made me feel really uncomfortable in general with his massively sexist overtones. Thankfully I had another tutor who was a woman and who was amazing, but, I don't know whether I should say this or not, but me and [redacted] had conversations about how awful [redacted] was. He would even behave towards her - who previously was the head of the whole of 3D Design - we had multiple conversations about how awful he was towards the end of the degree. And he would behave towards her a member of staff in a disgusting way.

Why does this not shock me? And do you think this shaped the experience of your degree and your work?

Completely, completely. Most of my course was female, and honestly the only two people really that did people in the metal workshop were the couple of men which is ridiculous.

So that doesn't really sound like a choice or coincidence

Definitely not. Any just generally some of the male tutors were just a bit...

...Subtly sexist? Sorry I'm not trying to feed you lines

Not at all. Lots and lots of people I've spoken to reflect that. [redacted] made a comment to one of my friends who is a man saying 'Why are the fit ones always thick?' about one of the women on my course who is a lovely, and very intelligent woman. So, before that I always knew it was sexist, but that helped to explicitly confirm his views on women. And I think it's a culture, the fact that he is allowed to continue when countless other women have experienced this, is ridiculous.

Yes, and the fact that he treats another man - any man presumably - as his ally illustrates the deeply sexist perspective.

Completely. My friend just felt really uncomfortable. A member of staff, an authority figure per- se is kind of putting you on the spot to agree with him is really bizarre and wrong. That's is just outwardly perpetuating it. It's just boring. You think you're going to come to a university and onto a sculpture course and be taken seriously to build things,

In an environment that you'd hope was going to be progressive

And yet you're still patronised and undermined and it's so tricky. Especially within making art work, so much of it is about your confidence in yourself that enables you to take risks, take-chances, and really push yourself, and you come into an institution where you want to be supported and the reason you're doing university, not making something in a shed somewhere, is because you are supposed to be able to get support that enables you to push yourself to your limits. And its these instances of sexism that really just undermines the whole process.

Thanks so much for chatting to me and sharing your time and experiences.

whistle made by
sam hillier



BROAD
BRUSH
STROKES



identifying problems with my project

In *Women's Design Service: Feminist Resources for Urban Environments* by Authors Lynne Walker and Sue Cavanagh, they use information and resources from the 'Women's Design Service' to discuss the issues surrounding women navigating urban environments. Surveys initiated by feminist politicals in the Greater London Council explored women's concerns pertaining to 'poor public amenities, lack of facilities for children, inadequate public transport, and fears about personal safety - and outlined planning principles that would take women's needs into account.' This is thought to be due to women's needs often being overlooked or simply unacknowledged in the designing of the built environment.

Cavanaugh and Walker explore the necessity of identifying women as the social group most needing these issues to be addressed:

"Why women?" is an inevitable question. Women, the WDS point out make up a large proportion of many disadvantaged groups, such as the elderly, carers, and single parents. Women hold many of the least secure and safe jobs; they are also among the more poorly paid workers. Partly for these reasons, women as a group in Britain depend more on public housing and public transportation; they are subject to violence both within and outside the home.¹

Considering women's safety within urban environments is a colossal and complicated topic. I think it's interesting to note that women are encouraged always to consider themselves as vulnerable and being in danger; we are warned not to go to certain places or be outside at certain hours of the day - even in our own neighbourhoods - due to the reality of danger imposed by men. This prey mentality I believe is frustratingly necessary; offences of violence against women such as rape within urban environments perpetrated by men still being so numerous. This language and perspective does also however engender an attitude of acceptance for these issues, where the victim is asked to change their daily patterns or behaviour instead of targeting the symptoms of violence or sexism itself.

Walker and Cavanaugh however make important notes about the problematic nature with the potential presumptions this research relies on. Whilst addressing gender based issues is hugely important, they also note that *'the category "women" is not monolithic: women's needs are diverse.'*²

This suggests therefore that it is important therefore not to tar all women and their experience with the same brush, as to create assumptions of struggle and oppression based simply on gender - here being female - and therefore project these assumptions onto the manifestations of femininity is to be dangerously dismissive and minimising.





The category of 'women' is so broad - especially in application to cross cultural environments - that in many ways using this term to explore issues of oppression, needs, experience and desire is minimising and detrimental to understanding problems or initiating progression.

Walker and Cavanaugh write:

*'When arguments are made that women use the environment differently because their daily patterns of activity are shaped by caring or domestic responsibilities, gender stereotypes of women as domestically based carers are unintentionally reproduced. Similarly, highlighting problems of women's safety in cities can reinforce notions of women as timid victims.'*³

This implies the paradoxical problem that identifying areas that women tend to be constrained to such as the domestic, or roles they often fulfil such as the care-giver or house-wife perhaps does less to challenge said status-quo than reinforce it.

This is a huge problem we face: how do you navigate inadvertent reinforcement or generalising when exploring gender issues, when in order to discuss and challenge instances of stereotyping or sexism they must first be identified? Within the context of my project, I have found this hard to navigate as I have relied on a lot of classic gender stereotypes in order to create work from and in some cases am perhaps doing less to challenge them than gratuitously borrow from them.

Such example of this is said labelling of women as 'timid victims.' This presents a difficult issue as whilst this characterisation might well reinforce them as the weaker, secondary and oppressed sex in society, similarly disregarding the mass of violence perpetrated by men against women compared to women against men would do nothing to protest or rectify this problem and simply endanger more women.

Cavanaugh and Walker discuss this further noting:

*'Focusing on women's experience and requirements, however, has created dilemma for the WDS and for others concerned with gender issues. Identifying "women" as a subject and topic of research and concern can project a homogeneous image or, even more detrimentally, foster the idea of biologically determined "women."'*⁴

This is an interesting point in consideration of how we approach issues of gender and sexism, and in regard to my project, this has helped highlight to me some of the major flaws in my research; the women I have spoken to have entirely been biologically assigned thus, so it is not completely un-representative of the other realities our society offers of women such as gender fluid or transgender women.

The feminist perspective I have employed throughout my work only really acknowledges a very limited perspective of ‘woman.’ Being a white, middle-class woman living in Britain affords me some elements of privilege I will never fully understand. I do not think this discounts the integrity of my work or lessens my personal feelings of commitment or importance towards my project, as it is reflective of my own context and experiences. I do believe however that it is important to account for every woman’s experience in order to shift our drastically patriarchal culture and I do not believe my project has been successful at doing that. I think perhaps my work is currently concerned with the obstacles of the group of women who already benefit from the most emancipation and opportunity - white middle class biologically determined women.

The research I have collected to inspire my material practice is based on my own personal experiences and those of other women around me, or self-reported data from platforms such as ‘The Everyday Sexism Project’ to identify, highlight or offer solutions to the social gender discriminatory issues we face. I have also used a lot of feminist theory and literature to explore issues of sexism, particularly within contemporary society. I think there is also a subversive reliance on heteronormativity, and a lack of intersectionality within my feminism that is important to note and something I hope to perhaps address in further work.

Another element that I have struggled to convey in my work is my belief that naturally *not all men* are sexist pigs. Something of note considering this is the hashtag #notallmen that is used on internet platforms by both men and women to counter the negative generalisations of men’s behaviour. My intent is not to vilify or alienate men, but instead to comment on incidences of sexism perpetrated by individuals that I believe pay into a more insidious culture of oppression against women, and to discuss how this might contribute to the structures of our patriarchal society.

I have tried to convey these ideas in the project ‘Broad Brush Strokes.’ This is a popular phrase used to allude to making sweeping generalising statements that may not necessarily give necessary acknowledgment to singular experience or perspective, something I have noted as an issue both in the methodologies of my feminist research and my project. I have therefore made a set of broad brushes, to afford this metaphor a physicality and tangibility.

Footnotes

- 1 Lynne Walker and Sue Cavanagh, ‘Women’s Design Service: Feminist Resources for Urban Environments,’ *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places and Everyday Things*, eds. Joan Rothschild (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999) 149.
- 2 Walker and Cavanagh, “Women’s Design Service,” 150.
- 3 Walker and Cavanagh, “Women’s Design Service,” 150.
- 4 Walker and Cavanagh, “Women’s Design Service,” 150.







BYE!

If you have any comments - good or bad as they may be - or you want get in contact with me find me at:

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Thank you for reading and engaging with my
work, it means a lot to me and I hope there were
things you liked!



THANKS

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