

University of Brighton - School of Art

BA (hons) 3D Design and Craft

Level 6 - Research Framework Document

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Summary Sentence / Research Question

Feminism in the Third Dimension

How can I identify, explore, highlight, and offer solutions to sexist issues experienced by myself and other women in our culture through my design practice - including three dimensional, photographic and moving image - from a contextual grounding in the fourth wave feminist movement?

Summary Statement

I am curious how I - as a young female designer and creative - can challenge instances of sexism women experience through various aspect of my work; engaging my viewer with interaction and humour through a series of three dimensional objects, photography and moving image. I will employ both past and present feminist literature and theory to research these issues, as well as explore various 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 design work.

I feel moved to pursue this area of research and exploration as I feel like sexism and gender inequality is something that I am hugely aware of and subject to in my life currently, and am perhaps more engaged in this topic than any other at the present.

One area of feminism that I am particularly interested in that I explored in my dissertation is the physical spaces in society delineated by the patriarchy for women to inhabit, and the resulting encumbering of women with domesticity - which has provided a large area of interest and exploration within my design work also. This domesticity has engendered a sexual division of labour, and I would also like to explore the resultant effects on women's experiences of design, with particular reference to crafts such as needlework.

I believe there is a current movement of women utilising contemporary online platforms such as 'Instagram' as a device for self-expression and agency over their own bodies and image. This is why I felt it would be pertinent to ground my exploration of feminism within the fourth wave movement that began in 2012 to encourage and rationalise the examination of said platforms in my project.

Here, women are re-appropriating the motif of the female nude in order to reclaim their sexuality from the male gaze. There is a very singular and interesting aesthetic being produced; that treats femininity, female sexuality and self-image very differently to how art or popular culture has done so previously. I think this is because it is women depicting women, with the intended audience being other women: a rare occurrence due to the intended audience almost always flattering the male viewer. I want to explore this aesthetic and concept and women's prescribed domesticity in my work, and also in essays such as Laura Mulvey's 'Visual and Narrative Pleasures.'

I would like the work I undergo in my self-directed project to be highly contextually grounded and inspired from the research I have collected surrounding the inequalities or sexism that myself and other women face, whilst still remaining somewhat humorous as I believe this is an invaluable tool of change when used appropriately.

I am still very interested in more classical design such as furniture making so I am curious to explore how I can combine more traditional functional design such as chair making into a tool for social commentary and simultaneously conceptual.

As someone who is unsure of whether she is situated more in the Fine Art or Design work, I think visual imagery is of the utmost importance to me. I am therefore going to put a lot of emphasis on the media I produce with my final pieces, almost using them as props in context for photograph series and a final moving image film piece.

Key Words

Feminism, Representation, Inequality, Male-Gaze, Gender Stereotyping, Agency, Intimacy, Domestic Furniture, Humour, Interactivity, Wood, 35mm, Film, Textiles, Sexism, Patriarchy.

Research Methods

I have gathered first hand research from the women around me, conducting interviews concerning sexism they have personally experienced, and also include my own personal experience as I believe when attempting to challenge such a broad complex issue such as sexism, taking reference from singular experience is really important.

I am exploring many different channels of research in my project. A large portion of inspiration for my material work came from literature exploring design from a feminist perspective and how the patriarchy has affected women's experience of it. Main literature texts that I have used as point of reference or inspiration are Cheryl Buckley's 'Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women in Design,' in which she discusses how the patriarchy has shaped women's experience of design. Another book that really inspired my material practice was many of the essays included in 'Design and Feminism' edited by Joan Rothschild.

Other research also includes articles such as 'Why Millennial Pink Can Do One' in the *It's Nice That magazine*, and Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema.' I also have been collecting visual research from films and videos such as 'The Virgin Suicides' and Solange's 'Cranes in the Sky,' directed by Carlotta Guerrero. Collecting lots of visual research throughout my project from sources such as Instagram was also really important as am exploring a shift in popular visual culture regarding female representation.

Trips outdoors for research such as walking around Brighton and the beach to find locations for my shoots and the train journeys I took to gather information on the ways men sit and potential examples of man-spreading were also really useful.

Medium for Research

As well as internet sources, magazines and books, I also collected research through first-hand interviews and observation, and use drawing as a means of idea development. I have used both more analogue drawing techniques as well as digital.

I have experimented with collage also a lot as I have favoured more analogue techniques this year, which is evident in my sketchbooks, film and PDF. Articles in newspapers such as 'The Guardian' were also really helpful as a research technique.

Most importantly, photography was also hugely important as a research technique for me; 35mm film photography is one of my favourite mediums of both expression and research, and for much of my work to make sense or have impact to the viewer, it was necessary to photograph my work in context.

This meant that the photography and creating moving image such as stop-frame animation and film for my final pieces was a huge amount of my work this year, and taking photos in both public and private spheres was essential to my project.

Material and Technical Investigation

The main two materials I have investigated this year are wood and textiles. I have always favored wood material, and it proved to be highly appropriate to execute the ideas my research generated for my material outcomes.

I wanted to investigate textile crafts that are generally thought of as more feminine in our culture to explore sexual divisions of labour within the crafts. I practiced techniques such as knitting and 'rugging,' but focused mostly on the technique of darning in order to fix old or broken clothes in the project 'fixer uppers.'

I also used 3D printing and ceramic press-moulding in the project 'How to Eat a Banana in Public' as I found this to be the best medium to execute my ideas in and helped me to expand my understanding of digital designing.

I tried to explore lots of different techniques this year, particularly in wood, to push my practice and skill set further and hopefully develop a more recognizable general aesthetic within my objects. With the chairs and tables I created for the degree show that I labelled the 'offcut series,' I spent a lot of time practicing gluing together small pieces of wood with different glues or materials in order to achieve the coloured swirl patterns. I also practiced different joins such as mortise and tenon and made maquettes or did practice weaving before attempting to execute my final pieces.

I also used sketching and life scale drawings to help my design practice, and found both analogue and digital drawing of a lot of use to me in order to generate and collate ideas. I created cardboard and MDF maquettes to explore shaped and sizes before committing to more expensive lavish materials.

Within my project, I wanted there to be a big emphasis on the way that I documented the pieces I make. My work is very research driven, and whilst I really wanted the craft element of my work to be of a high standard, my project focused less on the merit of certain techniques or making processes, and more concerned with the context, visual material, and user interaction with the finished objects.

I have always enjoyed taking photos and so wanted this to compromise quite an important element of my final work. I have always favoured using analogue 35mm as a photographic technique over digital

so have employed this throughout my work, experimenting with processing and developing my own film in the dark room, as well as digital moving image such as film and stop frame animation.

Timescale of work

1st Term:

I began collecting research from many different sources such as feminist literature, the internet and the news in order to begin to generate ideas surrounding feminism that I could possibly explore in my material experimentation. I also gathered information for my dissertation.

I also experimented with different lathe techniques and joinery such as the mortise and tenon machine, making a small walnut and sycamore table.

Began experimenting with designs and models for my 'Solution for Manspreading' chairs.

2nd Term:

In the second term I continued experimentation and began to create some final pieces including test and final paintbrushes. Did a test weave for my stool to learn the technique and made the stool for 'outgrowing the corner of the kitchen table.'

Continued to explore female craft and domesticity, and made my darning mushroom for my fixing and completed my fixing of the garments given to me by the men around me.

3rd Term:

In the third term I made all of the objects in the 'offcut series' and also brought all my projects to a close, finished creating my final pieces, including my manspreading chairs. Within this, I experimented with different finishing techniques for my wooden brushes and furniture. I also did all of my photoshoots and filming and collated all my research into final my PDF and sketchbooks.

Identify potential professional contexts for your work

Considering professional environments in which to situate my work is interesting, as I intend it to be contextual driven and politically engaged, whilst still maintain functionality. Work such as the 'offcut series' was created simply to be functional, aesthetically pleasing and visually engaging furniture, and I can imagine it being sold in a more high-end quirky shop or displayed in a gallery. The rest of my work requires the visual material of it being used or in context in order to understand its true purpose as it is critical design, or is photography, and so I can only see the setting of a gallery being a suitable professional environment.

3D Outcomes

I completed a set of sub projects that investigate different areas of sexism women experience:

Sit down for your rights:

- **In a tight spot:** I explored ways in which to gender seating and created two stools, one made from sycamore and Lacewood which I wrapped stuffed flesh coloured tights around, and another that I sewed tights onto the seat that you climbed into to sit on the stool.
- **A solution for man-spreading:** I created a series of test seats in order to decide what shape to create my chairs for a pro woman-spreading chair and an anti man-spreading chair. I also created an attempt at a final piece from sycamore and cherry that didn't work so I had to redesign my chairs. Finally, I produced two chairs to challenge the way men sit and 'man-spreading' from sycamore and cherry wood.

Domestic Goddesses:

- **Domestic Camouflage:** I created a set of costumes for women to wear for this project to blend them into home environments including the fruit bowl bra and curtain skirt for a photo series.
- **Fixer Uppers:** I asked men I am close to to give me clothing that was old and had holes in that they wanted to be fixed and darned them. Supporting work for this is also an orange scarf, a jumper and a pair of jeans of my own that I fixed similarly. I also made a darning mushroom from ash and coloured tissue paper in order to do this.
- **'Outgrowing The Corner of the Kitchen Table':** Inspired by an essay of the same name by Ghislaine Hermanus, I created a small corner table and stool with a woven seat. I wanted to give a physicality to Hermanus' idea that women are forced to use the domestic environment as a place for economic accomplishment, and in particular the 'corner of the kitchen table.' This is where I did my darning and where I will store the tools – such as the darning mushroom – brushes, and whistles made for other projects this year. Supporting work is also a practice weave on another stool.
- **Whistle Blowing at Brighton Uni:** I asked men around me to make whistles for with project to allow the women that I interviewed at Brighton uni to whistle blow about the sexism they experienced.
- **Broad Brush Strokes:** For this project I made a set of brushes out of different pieces of wood and a mixture of bristles.
- **How to Eat a Banana in Public:** I made a 3D printed banana platter and spoon, and did press mould ceramic tests as a gadget for women to eat bananas in public.

- **The Offcut Series:** Set of functional furniture designed to go in the degree show. I made two small side tables, one with striped layered legs and blue tissue paper and a sycamore top, one with a variety of woods in shapes for the top and different wooden legs. I also made a chair, predominantly out of oak, sycamore and cherry, and a stool of the same. The concept behind these was that I wanted there to be pieces of furniture that the emphasis was simply on the way they look to demonstrate my technical abilities, as I wasn't sure I could do this with my other projects in the way I was hoping to. These will be used to sit on to view the film or place my business card and PDF on.

A final video and photographic series using many of these 3D outcomes to give them context.

Presentation & Display

I will be presenting my 'offcuts series' next to my film that will be wall mounted / photo series so people will be able to sit on my chair and stool to view this. I will also be putting my publication and business cards on the tables that I made in this sub project.

I will also be displaying some of the objects I made from my such as the brushes from my 'Broad Brush Strokes' project and chairs from 'A solution for Manspreading' project alongside this, as well as some select photos mounted on the walls.

Portfolio / Publication

I will be creating a publication to go beside my work at the degree show that will include a series of explanations or short essays about each of my sub projects that will be really important in order to fully understand the ideas behind my final pieces. I also hope to have an updated website and business cards to accompany my work.

Ethical Considerations

Will you be asking anyone questions (interviews and or questionnaires)?

Yes, I hope to conducted interviews with women that also have or do study at the University of Brighton.

Will you ask people to test or physically evaluate your work for you?

I very much intend my work to be physically as well as psychologically engaging so I will be asking people I know to use or interact with my outcomes.

I have also made some pieces of furniture for the final show that if they desire people may be able to sit on.

Do you intend to run a workshop that involves a group of people?

No

Do you intend photographing, videoing or sound recording anyone?

Yes, but all of these have been done with full consent of the participant both before the event and after seeing the outcome so ensure they are happy with the work to be shown to the public. There is potentially going to be some nudity so I will have to consider how to present this appropriately in relation to the general public.

Does your work involve children?

No

Brief outline of ethical considerations

Due to the film and photography being on display to the general public, I have had to consider what level of nudity would be deemed appropriate. I have therefore ensured that no full frontal nudity such as nipples are visible in the work in a bid to keep it somewhat appropriate for all audiences as nudity is still seen as mostly social unacceptable.

I have also conducted a series of interviews that concern certain pupils and staff members that are of a delicate nature, and so after conferring with my tutors, ensured that the interviewee is anonymous and have also redacted as names they mentioned.

BA(hons) Dissertation Title

An Exploration into how the Social Conceptions of Gender in Western Capitalist Society Have Affected Women's Past and Present Experience in Design as both Designers and Consumers from a Feminist Viewpoint.

