

“This half is feminine and this half is masculine”

A study of the physical effects of bags on the body and how it forms parts our gender

I asked him how he thought his body language had changed when he wore the bag. And how those changes affected his sense of self-identity. He said that he felt that the upper half of his torso was opening up, much like a super hero while the bottom half contracted, making it hard to walk. With is hand he motioned from the chest downward, “this half is feminine” and then he from the chest-up he said “this half is masculine”.

ABSTRACT

“This half is feminine and this half is masculine” takes theories from gender studies and social psychology and gives them shape in a form of a product thereby applying theories from other fields to design. It integrates theory from gender studies and social psychology with design to create sets of bags. Each bag is used as a tool to raise awareness of gender identity as expressed by the body. It encourages its wearer to challenge assumptions, preconceptions and gives about the what is masculine and feminine.

Objects that make us act and behave in a gender normative manner often become invisible to critique. Gender is an act and our body language expresses that act. Like corsets and high heels, bags alter our posture and our movement through space. This affects how we see our selves and the way others see us. Bags that participate in stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity align our body language with normative ideas of gender. For example, the clutch, a typically female bag, is held under the arm forcing the user to take smaller, meeker strides. In this thesis I make users more aware of the effects objects have on our gender identity through a facilitated embodied experience. Using a set of bags, I alter the user’s body in atypical ways. Here the bags are the instrument and the human body is the medium with which I hope to get users to reflect on their ideas of gender.

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INTRODUCTION

Inspiration

I have been designing bags for about five years. In the past I constantly catch myself relying on gender norms to evaluate my bag designs. In 2011, Pottery Barn, a home furnishings company in the United States with over 90 stores worldwide tasked the team I was working with to design a female and male bag collection. For each collection we were required to create stories that worked as inspiration. These stories were used as basis for key design decisions such as the bag's use, material and shape. The stories for the men's bags told of adventure, heroism and utilitarianism. While the female bags were about travel, ease-of-use and style. It bothered me that the bags stories' were based on stereotypical ideas of men and women. Although the bags sold well, I always wondered how people responded to bags designed with such a normative view of gender.



Titian Bag Collection, Pottery Barn 2011



Miles Bag Collection, Pottery Barn 2011

I decided to take this thesis as an opportunity to see how people actually thought of bags in relation to gender. In the beginning of the project I held workshops with lay persons to gather some insight. Through games and forums participants were encouraged to share in-depth how people thought about bags in relation to their perception of self and of others. The participants were highly opinionated: they felt that bags say a lot of about a person. They themselves were very particular about what kind of bag they carry. However, during the discussions, I noticed that participants referred to a constant denominator in justifying their opinions—the idea of normalcy. Consistently, the participants gave their opinion based on their assumption of what was normal for a man and a woman. One participant remarked on a picture of a suited man carrying a pink bag, “he’s fashionable because it’s pink”. Stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity came up often and was used as justifications for why someone would carry one bag over another.

It was then that I decided to look into how objects effected gender. In addition to reading texts, I conducted several interviews with experts on identity and gender. Karin Ehrnberger whose thesis: *Mega Hurricane Mixer and the Drill Dolphia*, dealt with visualizing gender norms in design talked about how the aesthetics of an object indicated a lot of about its user’s gender identity (Ehrnberger 2013). More often than not, that gender identity was limited to normative ideas of gender. In an entry from the *International Journal of Design, Visualising Gender Norms in Design*, Ehrnberger cited J.S. Hyde in stating that, “Gender equality and equity in design is often highlighted, but it often results in producing designs that highlight the differences between men and women, although both the needs and characteristics vary more between individuals than between genders” (Hyde, 2005). This quote resonated with me as it describes one of the ways I used to design at Pottery Barn. By relying on gender norms, I probably failed to represent and meet the needs of actual individuals—people with varied and complex gender identities. It was then that I decided to find how gender or gender bias is expressed through objects.



Drill Dolphia, Karin Ehrnberger 2013



Mega Hurricane Mixer, Karin Ehrnberger 2013

During my research I came across objects that indicated gender norms by physically altering the users’ body. These include foot binding, neck rings, and corsets. All of which constricts and alters the female body in a way in which a particular society desired a woman to look and act. First let me say that what these objects do are terrible; it forces females to take on roles and norms without any choice. These objects do not celebrate gender expression, instead they force conformity. However it did indicated something to me. These objects make the relationship between biology and culture very clear. By embodying societally determined gender roles we reinforce cultural ideals and simultaneously shape, both temporarily and permanently, our bodies, which then perpetuates the cultural ideal (Connell 2011).



<http://www.anorak.co.uk/>, 2012

After looking into more objects that alter our body, I came by Amy Cuddy's work in social psychology. In a research study her team conducted: "The Benefit of Power Posing Before a High-Stakes Social Evaluation" she showed that changes in our posture translates to how we communicate non-verbally and affects how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. When we take on expansive poses, where we pull the chest out and shoulders back, people start to see us as being more secure and confident. Whereas having low-power poses where we contract our body makes us seem weaker and more vulnerable.

Posture not only changes us physically but it also affects our body chemically. High-power releases testosterone and low-power poses secrete cortisol, a hormone released due to stress (Cuddy, et.al 2012). This change in chemistry within the body affects us emotionally; making us feel actually more or less confident. In Cuddy's Ted Talk she showed people express their power through their body emphasizing how can affect our self-image and the identity we express to others.



Amy Cuddy, Ted Talk 2012

The workshops I conducted early in my thesis got me excited to work on bags because people seemed very passionate about them. And, my previous experience from designing them at Pottery Barn gave me the skills and knowledge to make them. At this point, it became clear that I wanted to work with bags for my thesis. But how and in what way remained a mystery.

It wasn't until months into the project when I had my aha! moment. Ehrnberger's thesis work opened my eyes to the gender norms that has prevailed throughout the history of design and continue to encourage stereotypes in society. At the same time, Amy Cuddy's research studies in body language and body dynamics intrigued me. It took me a while but eventually I saw a connection. If Mega Hurricane Mixer and the Drill Dolphia showcases how design propagates gender norms visually, then maybe I can use Cuddy's research to find a way to make people experience it physically. And as it happened, bags as an object was a fitting artifact for this project because it deals directly with the body.

Aims

I wanted to integrate theory from gender studies and social psychology with bag design to create several bags. The bags will be used as instruments to raise awareness about the relationship between our body language and our gender identity (both within ourselves and as perceived by others). They will encourage users to play with their non-verbals or body language as a way to conceptualize gender identities beyond what is stereotypically masculine and feminine. Moreover, by getting visual and physical hints of what a new type of gender could be as expressed in body language, I hope to encourage users to challenge assumptions and preconceptions of what it is to be masculine and feminine.

Approach

The thesis takes theories from gender studies and social psychology and gives them shape in a form of a product thereby applying theories from other fields to design. Throughout the project I created several bags, each incepted from different ideas that come from various fields outside of design.

Through an embodied experience (with the bag) I will attempt to impart theoretical ideas to the wearer. This experience includes trying on the bag for a particular time and interviewing the user as he or she is wearing the bag. After each experience, I will analyze the users's feedback and the way the interview was conducted. If necessary, the interview questions and structure as

well as the bag will change. The bags in this project are not treated as final products; they change as deemed necessary in attaining the goals of the thesis. This approach was inspired by Research through Design (RtD) (Frayling,1993). RtD generates new insights by designing innovative artifacts, models, prototypes, products, concepts, etc., and evaluates them by conducting various experiments (designed experiences, interviews, etc.).

In the project I ended up making two sets of bags (with 3 bags in each set). Only the second set were used in the final round of interviews. In the final round of interviews, ten people from different backgrounds went through the process of using the bag for a period of time, going through a discussion with me and reflecting back what they had experienced. Some of the interviews were one-on-one and some were two-to-one, where one user reflected on himself and the other person. Each interview had a set of questions (about 5-6 questions) to get the ball rolling. However the interviewees were encouraged to express their own ideas freely. As the interviews went along, it became less formal and typically resembled something more like a discussion.

The participants in this project were told that they would remain anonymous and fake names would be used in place of their real ones. Only two participants were aware of my intentions for this thesis project. I asked them to participate to see if background knowledge of the thesis affected they way they would respond to the bags. I did not see much of a difference.

After each interview, I put together all the insights I gained and tucked them away until I had conducted all the interviews. I wanted to make sure that the interviews were consistent so as to get a clearer picture of peoples' responses. In the end, I analyzed the responses and put together a short video to showcase common responses and interesting insights.

In the latter part of the project, I collaborated with a dance group in order to further communicate how the bags changed the users' bodies and possibly altered their identity. This collaboration is not part of the research study. It's sole purpose is to communicate parts of the thesis since to most people looking at the thesis will be unable to wear the bag and go through the same experience as the users involved in this project.

THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis consists of nine sections with an emphasis on applying theories from gender studies and social psychology to design.

The first section is the abstract. Then the following deals with introducing the thesis; it includes the inspiration, aim and approach. This section talks about how the project was inceptioned, its goals and deals with the overall progression of the work throughout the course. Following that section is this one: the overview.

There are two large sections that take up most of the paper. These sections cover a set of the bags that were used in this thesis. Each section starts with an introduction and is capped with a conclusion. Since there are three bags in each set, there are three subsections (in addition to the intro and conclusion); each corresponding to a particular bag. So, the first set has three subsections Bag#1: Pregnancy Bag, Bag#2: Wrist Restraints Bag, and Bag#3: Holster Bag. Within each subsection is a loose format that goes like this: first, what and how theory was integrated to each bag. Then, how the users responded. The first set of bags were intended as a sort of guinea pig for the second set. So, the conclusion section will talk about what changes were necessary to improve the study for the next set of bags.

The other large section covers the second set of bags. The format is pretty similar to the first set. There are also three subsections with each subsection covering a bag. In this case that would be: Bag #4: Super Hero, Bag #5: Closed In and Bag #6: Pregnant Male. However, it's important to point-out that the second set had a more structured overall experience for the user, and it shows in the paper. The organization of this section is much clearer and more consistent.

In section six I will discuss parts of the project that I taken-out and parts that could be taken further. Section seven deals with the dance collaboration I worked on and added into the thesis much later in the process. This section is short but it addresses the how, why and what of the dance collaboration. Instead of doing one final reflection that covers the thesis' contributions, I decided to do two sections: Contributions to the Greater Field of Design and Contributions to the Greater Field of Gender Studies which makes up sections eight and nine.

FIRST SET OF BAGS

Introduction

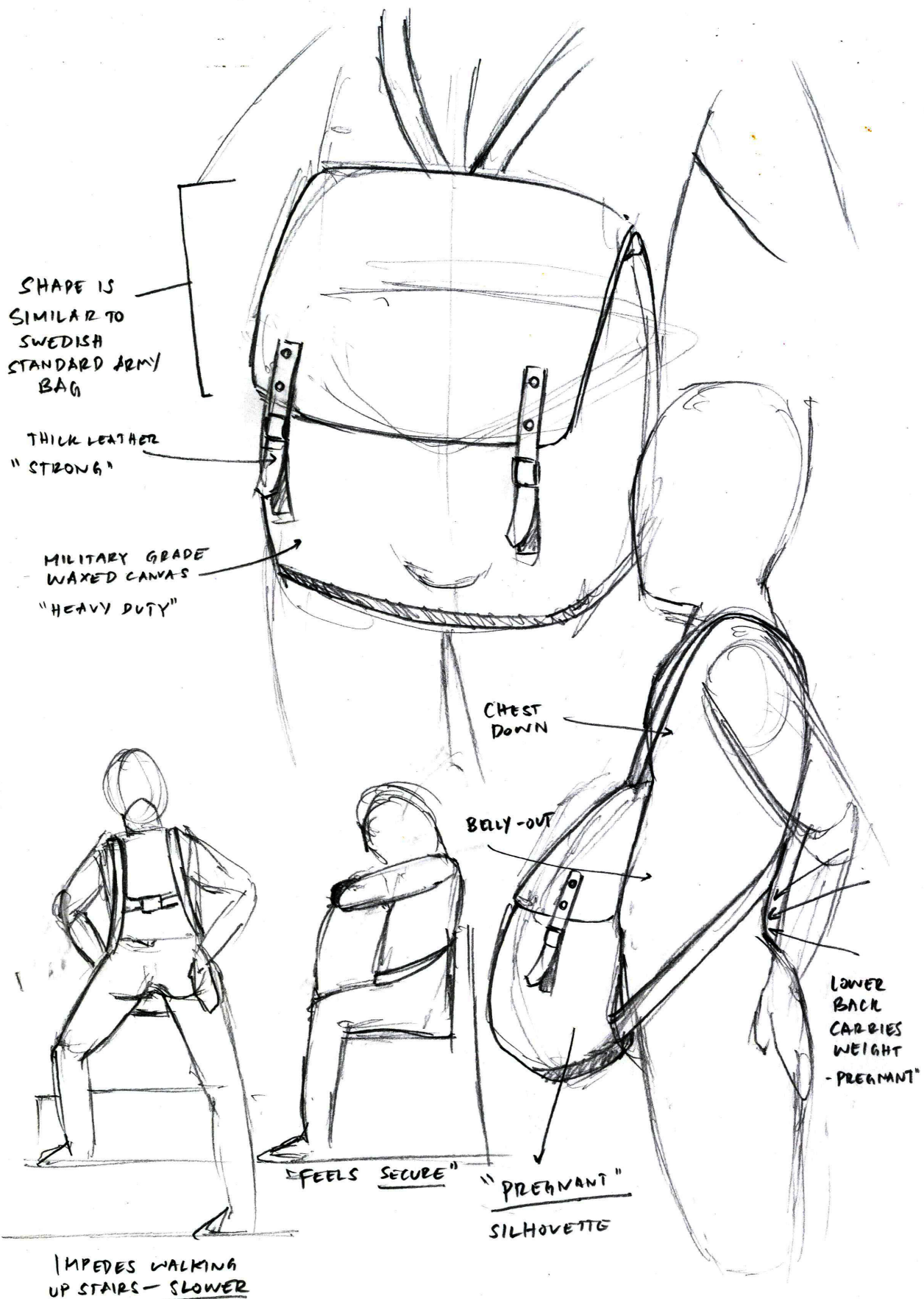
The first set of bags I created were made from bags that were donated to me. I figured that by having existing bags to work from, I can at least start the design process from somewhere. At this point in my research, I had plucked-out theories, statements or quotes from books and interviews into a stack of post-it notes. Most of the ideas for this set of bags came from gender studies, social psychology and some references from fashion history. Armed with a varied collection of donated bags and a stack of post-its, I began the process of conceptualizing.

The process of making the bags were not done in one particular way. I was working with my hands as often as I reading texts. I would move from ideation to prototyping freely. Sometimes, I would change parts of a prototype right after reading a particular text. And sometimes I would start working on a prototype without any particular direction and as I read and analyzed more theory, the prototype would develop in parallel. It was messy and fuzzy.

After finishing a bag, I handed it to a volunteer and had them wear/use it for a day (about 8 hours). Afterwards, I would come and see them in their place of choice and conduct an interview. The interview starts off by asking them about practical issues: how, when and where did you use the bag? For what reason? How did it compare with your other bags? In the later part of the interview I would ask them more in-depth questions like: how did they see themselves wearing the bag? how they thought others perceived them? how did the bag fit their personality? Questions about regarding gender worked their way in naturally. Although in f my first round of interviews, two out of the three interviewed were somewhat if not very familiar with my thesis project.

I treated the first set of bags as my trial run; a dress rehearsal of sorts. I didn't know what to expect, how people would respond or if they would even react at all. I was very much prototyping— testing-out ideas by quickly making and having people try them out. Afterwards, I would reflect on what had happened and passed along the insights I gained onto my next set of bags.

BAG#1: PREGNANCY BAG



The first bag I made is titled Bag #1: Pregnancy Bag. The name aptly describes the very literal idea of taking the uterus, a female organ and representing it in the form of a bag. I got the idea when I interviewed Susan Squier, a professor of woman's studies at Pennsylvania State University. During our interview she remarked that the very idea of a bag could be a metaphor for ovaries (Squier 2013). She said that in many ways, a bag is like an ovary: it is a source for nurturing, for keeping things safe and a means for transport.

In this bag, I thought of taking a very literal approach of taking the uterus, something biologically exclusive to females, and place it in a different context. Since artifacts depend on who is going to use them, the context of which they are a part, and the space in which it [the design] occurs (Kirkham,1996), my hope was that by placing pregnancy bag on a male user in public, would put things in a new perspective. And cause interesting reactions.



Bag #1: Pregnancy Bag

While making the bag I kept on going back to two theories. The first stems from the tradition and concept of form follows function, one that feminists and design historians now use as a symbol of the oppression of men over women. The machine—the man takes priority over the body—the woman (Attfield, 1989; Attfield & Kirkham, 1996). As such I emphasize the “functionality”

of the bag by giving it a very utilitarian aesthetic and feel. Inspired by the bag itself which was originally an old Swedish military standard backpack.

The other theory that I instilled in this bag is one that I return to many times in this project. Judith Butler, a prominent gender theorist discusses how the idea of gender is actually more transient. Individuals can formulate his, her or its own gender. “... that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes” (Butler 2006). Like changing of clothes, I wanted to create a bag that would alter the way the user looks and feels. The hope was like Judith Butler said, would change their construction of gender.

So, I created a bag that made the user feel like he or she is pregnant or more accurately, carrying something in their belly. The bag's low hanging shape forces the body to thrust outward to compensate for the lower center of gravity. In effect, it makes the wearer walk slower and less efficiently. I wanted to see how a bag that forces a male to walk and stand like a pregnant female can alter his gender identity at least while he is wearing the bag.

For this first bag, I decided to use myself as the test subject to better understand what participants in my thesis will have to go through. I wore Bag #1 for a day at school including the subway rides to and from. While wearing the bag, I asked a few people what they thought of me. I jotted down these response and afterwards, I interviewed myself with questions I had written. Then I played back the video and reviewed what had happened in broader sense.



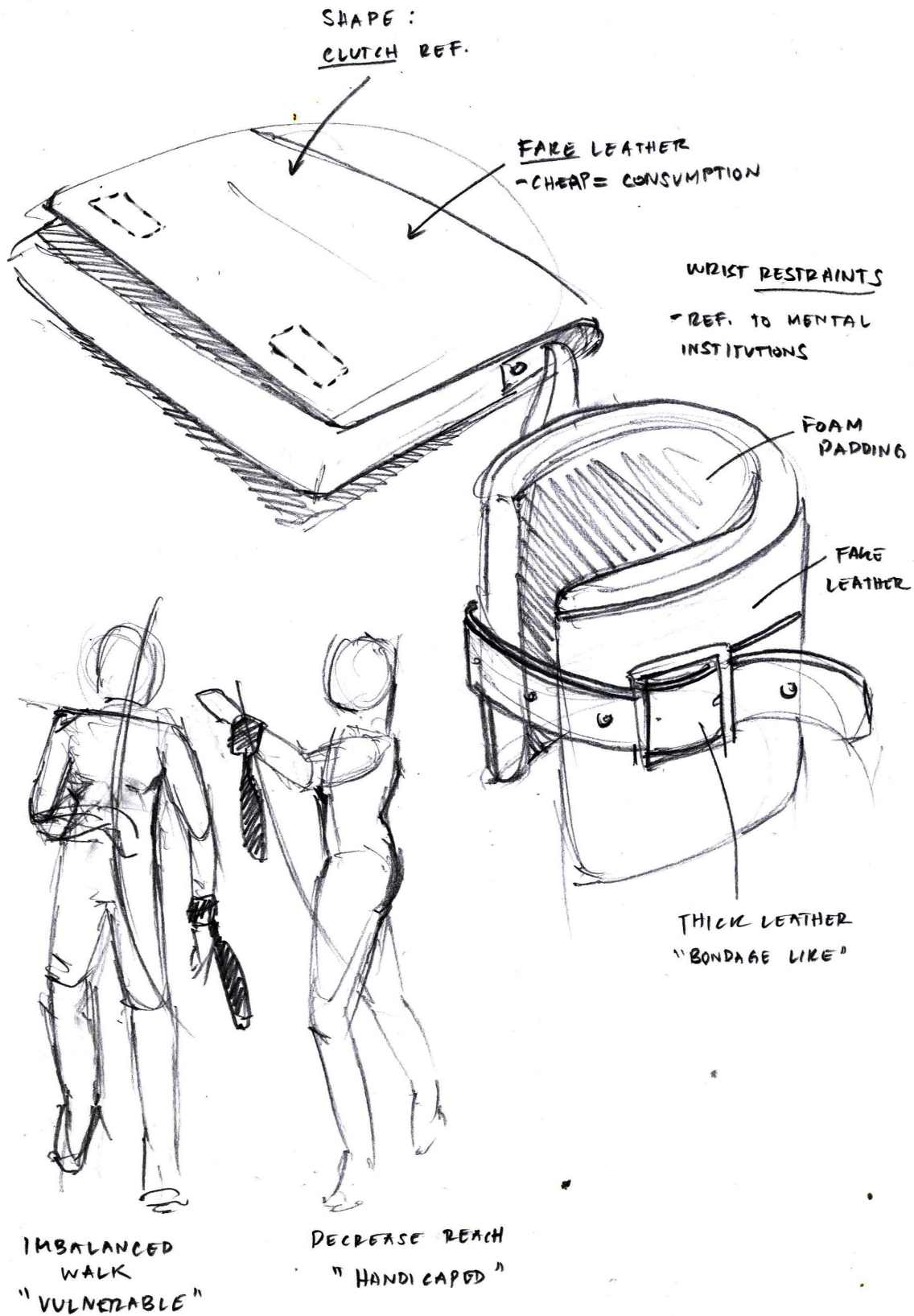
Still Shot from self-interview Video

The results were very interesting. Physically, the bag hindered me from moving normally. Having the bulk of the weight in front and just above my thighs shortened my stride and made me travel through space at a much slower rate. My posture leaned backwards, compensating for the weight in front and at the end of the day I my back was exhausted.

Although the bag changed my body a lot, it didn't really see how it affected my sense of self. I didn't feel more or less feminine or masculine, I just thought I looked silly—nothing new about that! The idea of mixing the utilitarian aesthetic of the bag with a pregnant belly barely came to mind while I was actually using the bag. Even though I came up with the idea, it didn't pop-up with any of the conversations I had with friends. I asked a friend what he thought I was wearing and he said, “you look like someone who has a bag that is wearing it in front of yourself for security”. Another said that although I may look like I had a pregnant belly, I mostly looked ridiculous. Neither one of them noticed the meaning behind the materials of the bag as it related to being pregnant nor did they get that I was playing with the idea of gender.

In reflection, I think that the big issue with the pregnancy bag is that I was trying to instill theory onto an object in a much too literal of a way. Taking a uterus from the female body and adding it onto a male one doesn't change the gender, just the biology.

BAG#2: WRIST RESTRAINTS BAG



The Wrist Restraints bag works with similar theories as the Pregnancy bag but it translates it into a bag in a different way. It still deals with the idea that gender is transient and like clothes, it can be changed (Butler 2006). In addition, it tackles the issue of gendered objects being made invisible through normalcy (Kirkham 1996), more specifically it deals with clutches. Clutches are an existing type bag targeted to women that hinders their ability to walk. By making the wearer more aware of the restrictive nature of clutches, Wrist Restraints bags hopes to bring about a discussion on the relationship between femininity and constraint.

Instead of using materials as a way to get an idea across (as I did with the Pregnancy Bag), this time I decide to use a metaphor. The Wrist Restraints Bag pouch is attached to a wrist restraint. The restraint makes it very difficult to take the bag off and it acts as a counterweight when extending the arm out— thus constraining movement.



Lara with Bag#2: Wrist Restraints Bag

For this bag, I asked a friend who had some background information about the thesis to wear the bag for a day. Lara used the bag while she was in school and later at a social event in public. Afterwards, as with the first bag, I interviewed her.

Lara's response to the bag was both unexpected and

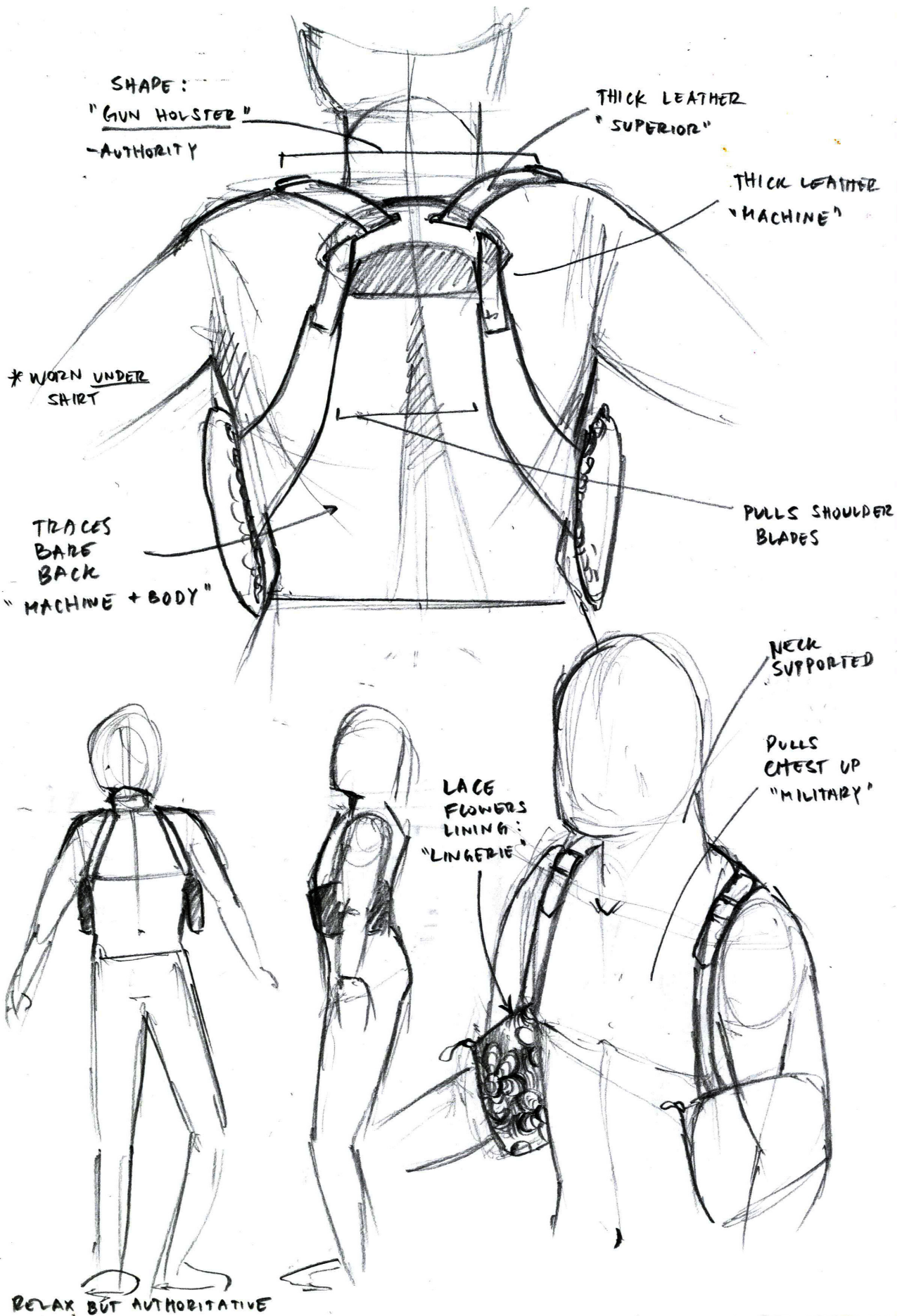
insightful. The biggest surprise for me was that she decided not to wear the bag as was instructed. She found the wrist restraints frustrating. So, she took them off and used them as a handle instead. Visually, she said she got the metaphor of “the bag as constraining the body” with the wrist restraints. She said that although there was a chance that the restraints could be interpreted as some sort of new fashion trend, she mostly thought of restraints use as a handicap.

I would also like to point-out that during our conversation, Lara kept bringing up the bag's material. She said she found the cheap leather very distracting and she ended thinking about that more than the bag's physical effects on the body.

The goal of this project is to raise awareness and encourage exploration within gender. I had thought that by placing ideas about gender in the aesthetics and functions of the bag, the wearers would get it. However, when I look back at Lara's interview, I learned that users won't be nit-picking the bag as I thought they would— only I, the creator would know to do that. If I want to make things apparent, I had to take more control over the experience and cut-out distractions. Though the users will interpret objects in their own way, I had to add more structure to facilitate the experience.

The thing that did work well with the Wrist Restraints Bag is the visual metaphors of the wrist restraint got Lara's attention. This iconic image helped begin a very interesting and in-depth discussion with Lara about this bag as a symbol of restraint. The restraints also indicated that fashion is something that I must include when considering the design of my bags. A fashion historian stated, “As western societies industrialized...the expression of class and gender [through fashion] took precedence over the communication of other types of social information” (Crane 2000). When it comes to objects that are worn on the body, notions of fashion coexist with ideas of product design. In my experience, one can't separate one from the other moreover, they inform on each other.

BAG#3: HOLSTER BAG



Bag #3: Holster Bag was an accumulation of all the things I learned from bag#1 and #2. And like bag #1 and 2 I continued to work with Judith Butler's metaphor of gender as clothes. This time however, I will use Amy Cuddy's research on power dynamics and posture to draw awareness as a way to draw awareness to gender issues.

Amy Cuddy, a researcher of Social Psychology and her team at Harvard University (citation) did a study where they asked a group of students to go into a job interview. In the study, the students were unaware of what they were being tested for and a panel of prospective employers were asked to evaluate the students via a recording of the interviews. The study showed that students who displayed "low-power poses", described as shoulders, head down and chest inward as opposed to students who had "high-power poses" with shoulders back, and chest-up were less likely to get jobs from the employers regardless of the content in the interview (Cuddy, et al. 2012). Cuddy's team observed a similar dynamic in the animal kingdom where animals expand their bodies when they are in a position of power. For example: cobras spread their necks when they are signaling threat. For humans these "high-power" poses not only indicate a power visually but also physically. Studies have shown that high-power poses induces the body to secrete testosterone where as low-power poses causes the secretion of Cortisol, a stress hormone (Carney, et al 2010).

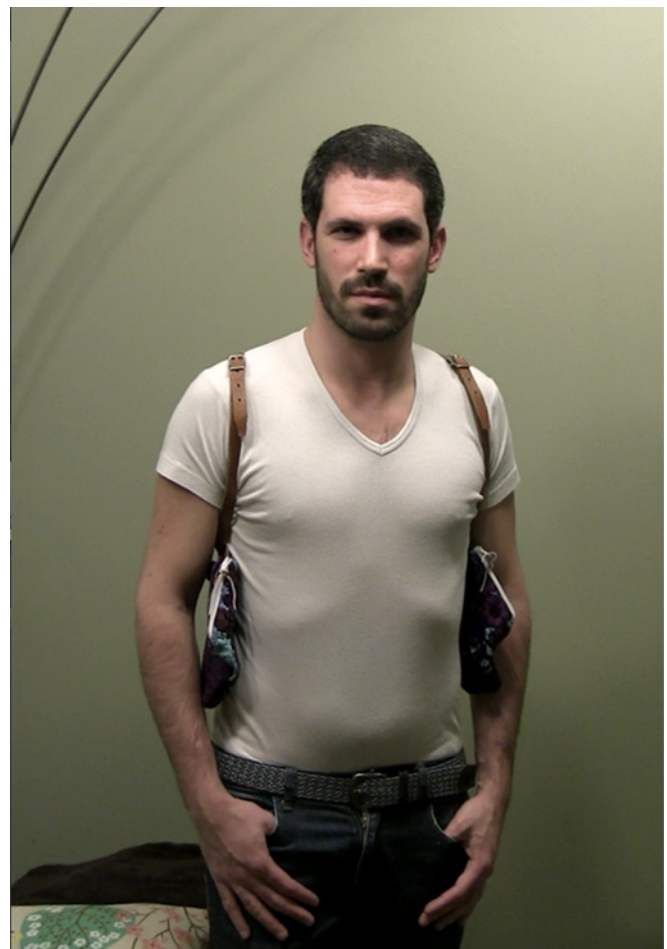
The holster bag consists of leather straps and two delicately embroidered polyester pouches. The bag is worn under the shirt; touching bare skin. The leather straps push the chest outward and the shoulders back. It makes the wearer very aware of their posture; constantly reminding the them to stand upright. The pouches attached to the leather holster has floral embroidery, reminiscent of lingerie, touching the wearer's bare skin.

The idea behind the Holster Bag is to create a combination of masculinity and femininity. Where in masculinity is evoked by the holster's shape and its reference to policemen. Furthermore, by placing the wearer's body in a high-power pose the bag attempts to induce testosterone and make affect the user feel more confident. Femininity is represented in the pouches' lace-like texture which makes reference to lingerie—a typically female article. By combining masculine and feminine characteristics I imagined the bag would encourage the user to be more aware of gender as expressed by the body.

I had a close acquaintance, who we shall call Mike, wear the bag for a day. Mike had no idea what the bag was for or what my thesis was all about. He wore it under his dress shirt and kept it there for a day at the office. Afterwards, I came over to his house and interviewed him.

At the start of the interview Mike talked a lot about the way the bag affected his posture. He said it was really nice because it wrapped around his body and supported him. Then, I asked him explicitly about gender in relation to the bag. He said that the leather straps seemed masculine because it referenced gun holsters while the pouches seemed feminine because it had flowers on it. However, over all the bag put him in an upright position and that was more masculine than feminine.

Though I had to sway the conversation to go in direction of gender, it was in this part of the interview where Mike started to contemplate ideas of masculinity and femininity in our discussion. After the interview I took Mike's photo and then showed it to him. He said that he seemed really powerful in that shot unlike how he usually stands.



Mike wearing Bag#3: Holster Bag

What I learned from my interview with Mike is that I was thinking about the role of the bag all wrong. To have a really meaningful experience and an in-depth discussion

about gender and social dynamics, the user must have some way of connecting to the subject matter. The bag can hint at the theories visually and maybe even physically but it tended not to go further than that. The actual experience of wearing, walking and sitting with the bag is what gives users a way to embody the theory or a group of ideas and connect with it in a personal level. It also gives them a point of comparison. How they stand normally as opposed to how they stood with the bag allowed them to dig deeper into the subject. The bags are not the product of this thesis, it is merely a tool that allows the user to connect with theoretical ideas.

CONCLUSION

The first set of bags were meant to be tests that would improve the designs of the second set of bags.

The most important thing that I took away from my first round of bags is that the bags alone, in this project, are unable to get the users to the point where they feel like they can start reinterpreting gender roles. There are certain steps that are required to get them there and in each step the appropriate method must be used.

The first step is raise awareness about the effect objects have on gender identity. That way the users can start thinking about their relationship to the object more in-depth. Using iconic references is a good method for this. As in Lara's interview, the wrist restraints, symbolized the idea of constraints. The next step is to get them to start challenging gender norms. I actually feel that none of the bags got the users to this point. However, Bag #3: Holster Bag was closest at getting to it. Mike had already made the connection that the "holster" shape of the bag was militant and masculine when he noticed how his body had changed when he had the bag on. It was at this point that he was able to make a comparison: this is my body with as opposed to without the bag. And in our interview he started talking about how masculine he felt. I can only infer that with a more guided conversation he might start to challenge what it means to be masculine.

The participants in this project will not automatically pick-out gender theories by simply looking and trying on one of the bags. An entire experience has to be designed to get them to contemplate gender as it relates to these bags. So, in the next round of bags, even before the bags are designed I will take in consideration the kind of experience that is necessary to get the users into a deep discussion about gendered objects, body language and self-identity.

Based on the insights I got from the first round of bags, I made many changes to the second round. I'd like to point-out a few of the major ones:

Fabric Choice- In the first round of bags, fabric choice was a design element that I used to represent and/or symbolize a particular idea or theory. At that time I used the fabrics that were readily available to me from donations. After looking through the interview tapes from that round, I realized how much more time and effort was necessary to properly execute bags with the appropriate fabrics. So, in the second round of bags I decided to focus more on the bags' physical effect on body language.

Posture- The Holster Bag's ability to alter our posture in

a dramatic way was very effective in getting across the idea that gender is expressed through the body. In the second round of bags I will continue to do this. As such, Amy Cuddy's research on posture and power dynamics will be at the core of the bags' designs.

Questions- After understanding the importance of the interview and reflection from the first three bags, in the second set interviews will play a much larger role. Rather than simply recording an experience, the interview will facilitate and guide the conversation. So, the interviews on the next round of bags will have more structure and consistent questions.

It's important to note that although the next round of experiences are more structured, the bags and what the users went through were still left to their own interpretation. There are no right or wrong answers in this project and as you will see in the coming sections, users react differently with the same bag. This makes total sense. After all, we all have different bodies, life experiences and points-of-view.

SECOND SET OF BAGS

Introduction

At this point in “This half is feminine and this half is masculine” I had a much clearer idea of what I wanted to do. My aim was still to create more awareness that gender identity is expressed partly, through the body and encourage users to challenge assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the what is masculine and feminine. However, from what I learned from the first set of bags, I’ve decided not to attempt to represent theory in a literal way. Instead it would be better to use it as inspiration to create an embodied experience for the user. Bags #4-6 will focus on placing users in atypical poses, making them move with unusual body language, as way to explore new gender possibilities.

I would also like to point-out that bags#4-6 places very little emphasis on the the choice of the materials and minor details that make it a fully realized bag. Meaning, having all the characteristics and considerations that a typical bag would have (such as fabric choice, organization and intended use). Moreover, these bags are intentionally not fully-realized; they are Gestalts of a bag: having only the essence or shape of an entity’s complete form (Hothersall, 1984).

In order to create a full experience and to give the users space to reflect. The second set of interviews will become part of the entire experience, not just a record of it. It will have more consistent questions and a lot more structure. Every interview started out by asking the wearer what parts of their body were responding to the bags and how. Then, I ask them how they are perceiving themselves while wearing the bags. As the interview continues, the questions move outward and discuss how they think others would see them. I have them play out various situations in their mind and ask them how they think their body language would be received in those situations. have Afterwards, I move back inwardly and ask the wearer questions about the bag and their identity. Who do they relate themselves to? What kind of characters?

Eventually, we get to the question about gender as it relates to the bag and the wearer’s body language. We expand this conversation but this time I will encourage self-reflection. Why and how do we associate gender with the body? What kind of words do we describe masculinity and femininity with? Are there other genders that exist beyond the dichotomy?

After the interview, many of us went through a discussion about what happened. And after that, I looked through

all the tapes and reflected upon the experiences per individual bag.

Note:

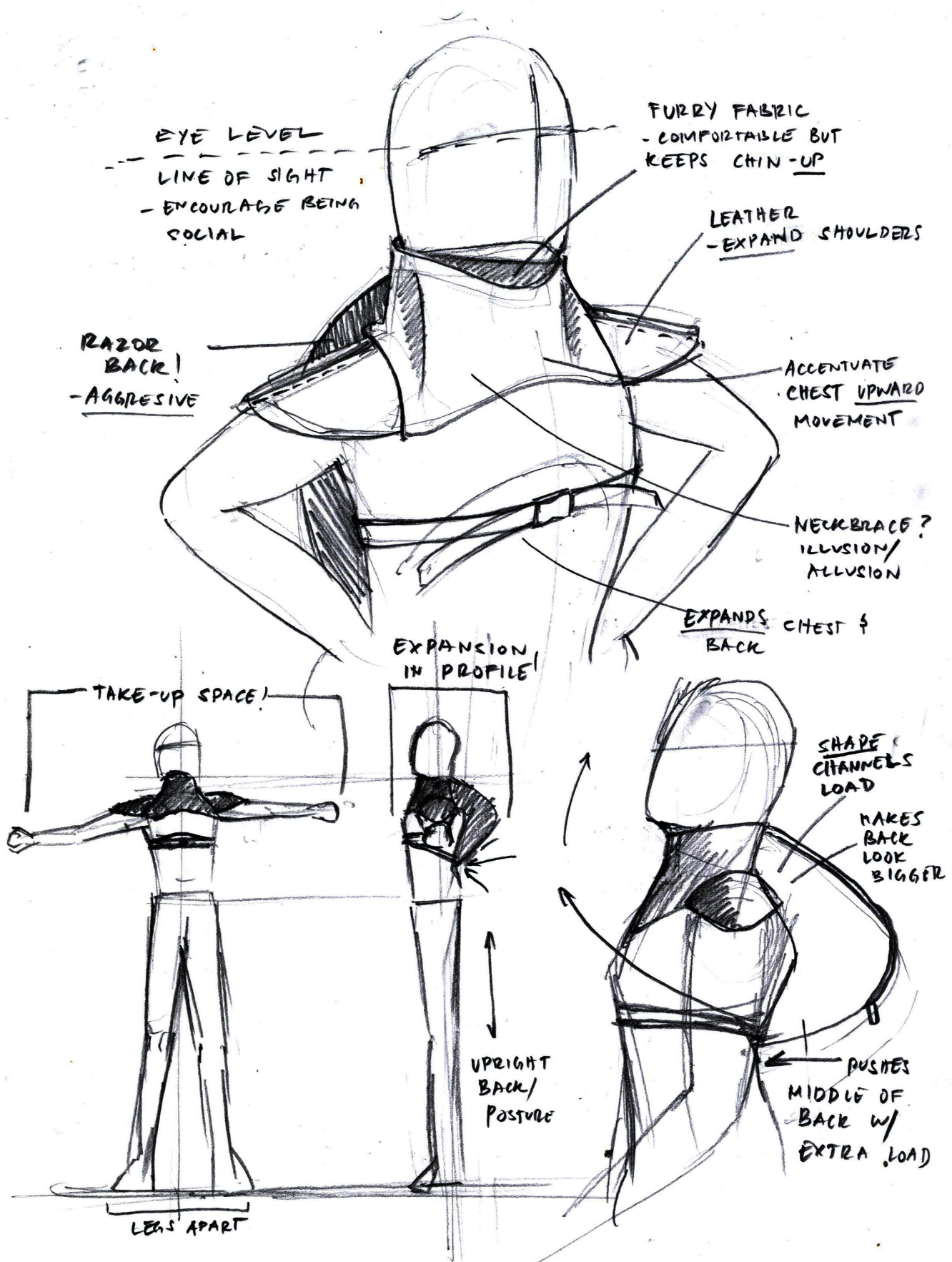
all the interviewees in this next set will have no knowledge of my thesis before and during the interview.

About half of the interviews were done one-on-one but several people were interviewed in pairs or with friends around. The pairs were encouraged to comment on each other's responses.

With this set focusing so much on posture, I decided to build some knowledge on the effects of bags on our bodies. As such, I interviewed Glenn Bilby, Chairman and co-founder of Quick Posture and an ergonomics consultant. We went through over ten different existing bags (both targeted for men and women) where he showed me how each bag affected our posture and the way we move through space. For example: clutch bags which are carried under the arm prevents the wearer to swing their arms while walking; decreasing walking efficiency. This next set of bags combines my basic knowledge of bags' effect on posture and ideas from Amy Cuddy's research on posture and power dynamics.

The written format of this next section is indicative of the more structured research process that I used with the second set of bags. Each bag is divided into four parts: theory, design intent, response and reflection. Theory will introduce the theories and references that are used in the design of the bag. Design Intent will deal with the implementation and translation of those theories into the physical bag. Response will highlight important topics and reactions from all the interviews conducted with that bag. Reflection analyzes how the overall effect of the bag in attaining the goals of the thesis.

BAG#4: SUPER HERO

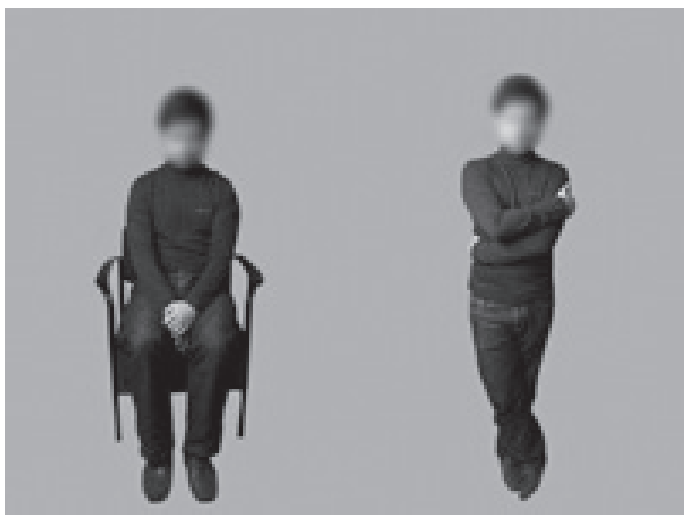


Theories

Bag#4: Super Hero was inspired by the “super hero” stance. It is an example of what psychologists refer to as open postures (citation) or high-power poses (Rosenberg 2011), in which limbs are spread out in a way that takes up more space. Many psychological studies have demonstrated that open postures convey a sense of the individual having power and closed postures [taking up little space] convey a sense of the individual having little power (Carney, Hall, & Smith LeBeau, 2005; de Waal, 1998; Hall, Coats, & Smith LeBeau, 2005). Complimentary studies show that taking-on high-power poses causes the body to release testosterone. Testosterone increases when a person anticipates competing as well as after winning, but the testosterone level drops when the individual loses (Booth, Shelley, Mazur, Tharp, & Kittok, 1989). In short, testosterone goes up with the possibility of or with actual power. By integrating this stance in this bag, I hoped to play with the idea of power dynamics and see how the wearer would move and act having or feeling more powerful.



High-power pose, Psychology Today 2011



Low-power pose, Psychology Today 2011

In fashion history there are many types of female clothing that are based on men's clothing. Women in western society would imitate men's garments as a way to gain power. For example: in the early 1900's western women took on attributes of the male suit to assert their class and status (Crane 2000). Bag#4: Super Hero takes this idea and visually integrates pieces of clothing with masculine connotations into the design of the bag. The aim is to make the user, whether they are male or female, to look and feel not “masculine” per say but with the words associated with masculinity: aggressive, superior, etc.



1893 Women's neck tie

Throughout the history of design, we find a pattern that the common view is based on women as belonging to the private sphere and the man belonging to the public sphere (Fraser 1989). I believe that part of belonging in the private sphere is not being physically present and interacting with the public. Super Hero was inspired by this idea and attempts to place its wearer in a position that encourages him or her to be more social and less closed-in. In other words, putting them out into the

public sphere.

Design and Intent

Bag#4: Super Hero I was heavily inspired by an ad I saw for Rupaul's Drag Race, a reality TV show where drag queens compete to be America's next drag superstar. The picture is of Rupaul sitting down, legs wide, with a perfectly straight back and oozing of confidence. She seemed to be totally in control and exuding power. At that picture, she exemplified the Super Hero stance. I juxtaposed this ad with a Topshop advertisement of a lady holding a bag. Although she is the center of the shot, her body is totally closed-in; she looks vulnerable and small. Her body takes over 70% of the entire shot but she seemed to be almost disappearing in the background. This became my "what not to do" inspiration.



Rupaul's Drag Race 2012



Topshop Catalogue Spring 2013

With that in mind, I designed the physical bag as much as I designed it's effect on the wearer's body. The most central part of the bag is the pouch that lays on the upper back of the user. When load is added (as you would in a backpack) the weight is channeled to the middle of the back, pulling the straps and causing the chest to move up and the shoulders to pull back—reminiscent of the Super Hero pose. The wearer is forcibly (although quite comfortably) on a very upright posture that opens up the body. This is the type of pose that would induce testosterone and make the wearer feel more aggressive and in-control. The intention was to put the wearers in a posture that alters their body language and making them feel confident, powerful and aggressive.

I also added a neoprene neck brace that gently lifts the chin up. It keeps the head up high and eyes at eye level. Although not a requirement for the Super Hero stance, this position would keep the wearer from looking down or away from other people. Keeping them "open" to public interaction.

The leather shoulders on the bag was used as a visual reference to armor, military shoulder boards— pieces of clothing that are connected with being powerful and strong. The intent is to connect the users's perception of who they are with perceptions of power.



Ulysses Grant with shoulder boards, historoda.com

With Super Hero, I considered the stereotypical idea of masculinity in every aspect of the design with the hope that it would translate in a personal and physical level. The user's experience with this bag, will give them something to grasp on when he or she and I start a conversation about gender and the body. With the goal of making them aware of the connotations we attach to masculinity as opposed to femininity. Possibly, the user might even question why we make such a distinction and reinterpret words such as aggressive, powerful and "badass" from being male-averse.

Response

Off the bat, I asked them to wear the bag and tell me where in their body they felt muscles stressing or contracting. The majority found that while wearing the bag, their posture changed—it was more upright than usual. And like the Super Hero stance, they felt their chest open and their shoulders retreat back. I asked them to describe what they were feeling and after a couple minutes of walking around they said they felt strong and powerful. They used words like “authoritative” and “badass”. One interviewee said he felt like he was “on!” as if adrenaline had kicked in and he was ready to go on stage. A minority of the interviewees felt constrained and a bit stiff. They used words like “formal” and “stiff”. Several minutes in, I asked the wearers to pretend the bag was invisible but that it kept them in the same upright position. And then asked them how did they think they would perform in an evaluative situation (like a job interview)? The majority said that they felt that this position would make them feel confident and effective in an evaluative situation. However a minority argued that depending on the situation it might be a little too formal.

Then, I asked each user what character types they would associate with the body language they were embodying. There was also a clear pattern here, most of the characters they mentioned are symbols of power—“military”, “police”, and “super heroes”. Even couples who were interviewed together would confirm each others’ answers.

When we got to the part of the interview that focuses on gender, I asked them what were the genders of the character types they mentioned earlier. There was a resounding answer from the majority of the users: men. But why men? One particular conversation I had with a user just about sums up what most said. Tina said simply, “this is how I see men act and talk to one another at work...it conveys authority and power”. For many this stance was very masculine and masculine to them equated to power.. They were not sure where the root of the reasoning came from but it’s what came to mind when they went through and visualized references and icons connected to power.



Tina in her interview

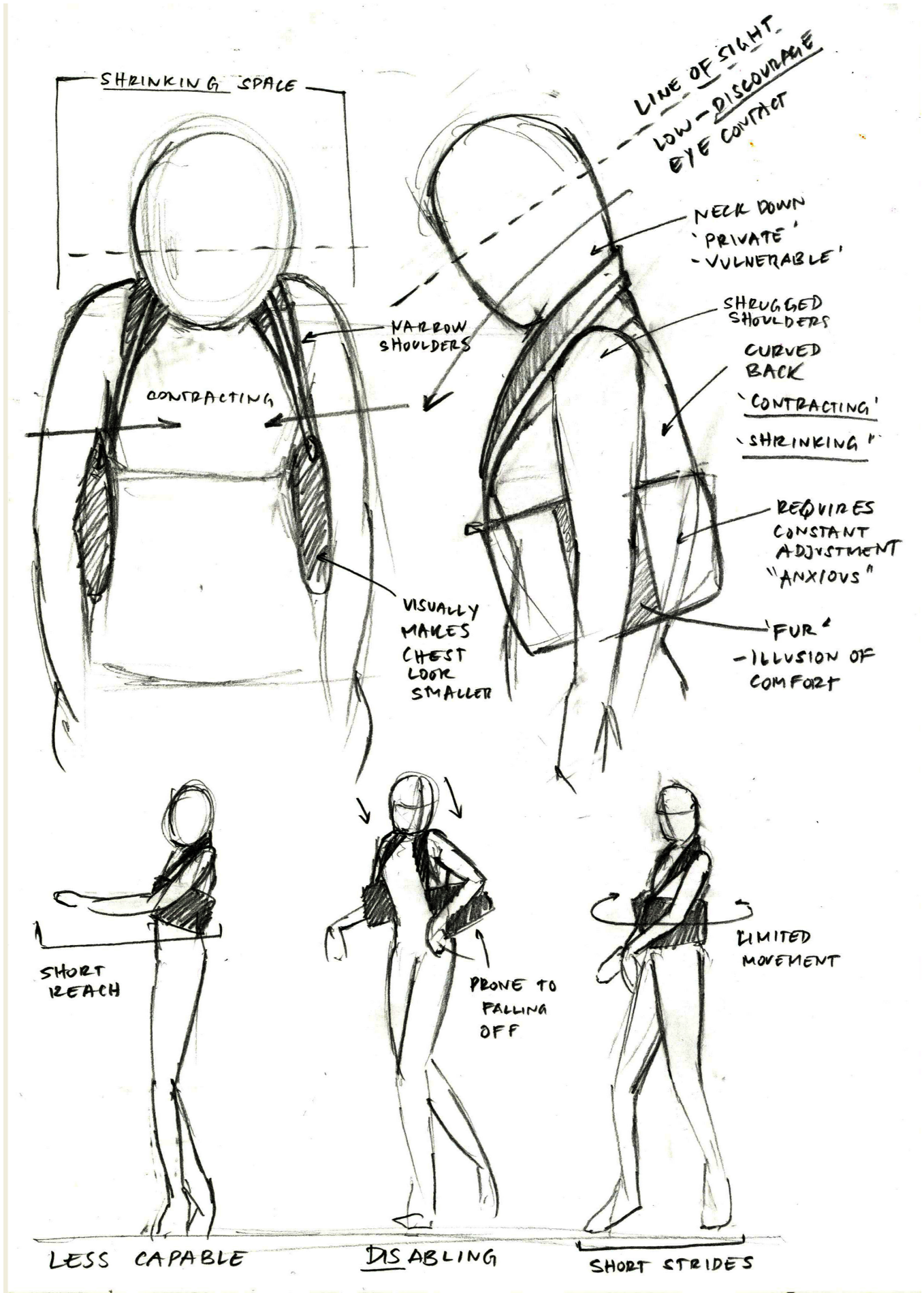
Reflection

In reflection, Bag#4: Super Hero seems to put the users in a very familiar position. One that they could grasp right away. It’s a position many of them have observed and identify authority figures with. Some of them had expressed wanting to have this type of body language more often. They think that it would make them more successful in various social situations.

In making our connection with masculinity more apparent and clear, at least in relation to body language, Bag #4 was very successful. It became a conversation starter and a meaningful one at that. It made our discussion deeper and more nuanced because the wearer could talk about an idea whilst experiencing it in their body. In the tapes I could see them move their body as they spoke; searching for words that they already felt but was waiting for the mind to process.

However, Bag #4 was less successful at getting users to explore genders beyond existing stereotypes. I think this is due to the fact that this bag put them in a position that was very clearly masculine (as prescribed by their previous experiences and popular references). Even though the users varied in body, sex, and background, the overtly masculine nature of this bag gave little room for an atypical gender to show through. There were a few responses from the users that started to describe an assertive woman, most of them ended up being about masculinity. Trying to get the users to challenge norms and construct new genders was tricky. And it did not happen much with Bag #4.

BAG#5: CLOSED IN



Theory

Bag #5: Closed In is in many ways the opposite of Bag #4: Super Hero. It's based on the "low-power pose" (Rosenberg 2011) as opposed to "high-power" or "open-posture" that inspired Bag #4. Low-power poses increases cortisol levels in the body which is typically associated with the rise in stress (Booth, Shelley, Mazur, Tharp, & Kittok, 1989). It's defined as a "contracting" of the body (Cuddy 2012): the chest and head are down, shoulders are shrugged or very low, the back is curved and sometimes even the arms are crossed and pulled close to the body. Studies in social psychology states that adopting nonverbal [low-power] postures that can cause [people in evaluative situations] to feel even more powerless (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010). And Bag #5: Closed In attempts at relaying this feeling of powerlessness.

Bag #4: Super Hero was also inspired by the dichotomous idea that masculinity, the male is public and femininity, the female is private (Fraser 1989). In looking for examples of this idea in design, I came across photos from fashion catalogues. Here the females' body language is very much anti-social and inward, not outward. It looks as if they want to be left alone instead of welcoming interaction. These photos inspired me. I thought that by placing wearers in similar poses, Bag #4: Closed In could attempt to represent this idea of the introverted and shy female.



H&M Catalogue Spring 2013

In feminist theory there is the idea of the male gaze wherein men dictate how women are seen and in what way (Mulvey 1975). One of its earliest mentions of this idea was in film where women were objectified because heterosexual men were in control of the camera (Mulvey 1975). However, the idea transcends beyond film and onto other mediums such as object design. In this bag, I will play with the idea of the gaze (whether by male or female). I will make the bag so impractical that it would be clear that it's really not made for the wearer. Instead, it's made for whoever is assessing or looking at the wearer.

Throughout fashion history objects that alter the female body are not uncommon. The corset, feet binding shoes and neckrings are examples of objects that were designed to make the female body act a certain way—typically, restraining movement or preventing them from doing something. Bag #5: Closed In takes this idea of restraint and its connection with gender. It reinterprets it in the body language its' wearer would assume whilst wearing the bag. Turning an abstract idea into something physical and experienced.

Design Intent

The idea for Bag#5: Closed In's started to formulate when Glenn Bilby, the ergonomics expert I interviewed, talked to me about the effects of the clutch bag on the body. He said that the bag forces the user's arms to stay close to the body in order to keep the bag from falling. Thereby decreasing their stride length and making them walk slower and in small steps. I thought that if I could design a bag that would make the whole upper body contract (not just the arms), I would simultaneously put the user in a closed-pose as well as in a constrained posture.



Glenn demonstrating the effects of the clutch bag
Bag #5: Closed In recreates the clutch bag with some

modifications. First of all, there are two “clutches” to carry. Which makes it even harder for the wearer to walk efficiently. In also added strap that goes behind the neck, connecting both clutches.

When load is added to the two pouches on Bag #5: Closed In, a strap that goes around the neck pulls the user’s neck down, pushes the chest down and slumps the shoulders forward. The intent here is to mimic the the low-power pose where the body is contracted and takes up less space. This pose would effectively cause the user’s body to release cortisol and increase the his or her stress level.

In line with this idea of stress, I designed the bag to be somewhat difficult to hold up. The user would have to constantly check his or her body so as not to cause an imbalance and drop a pouch.

The idea of men as private and women as public is further encouraged by the strap pulling the neck downward. It adds extra effort for the user to raise their head and meet whoever they are talking to at eye level. Discouraging the wearer from being more social.

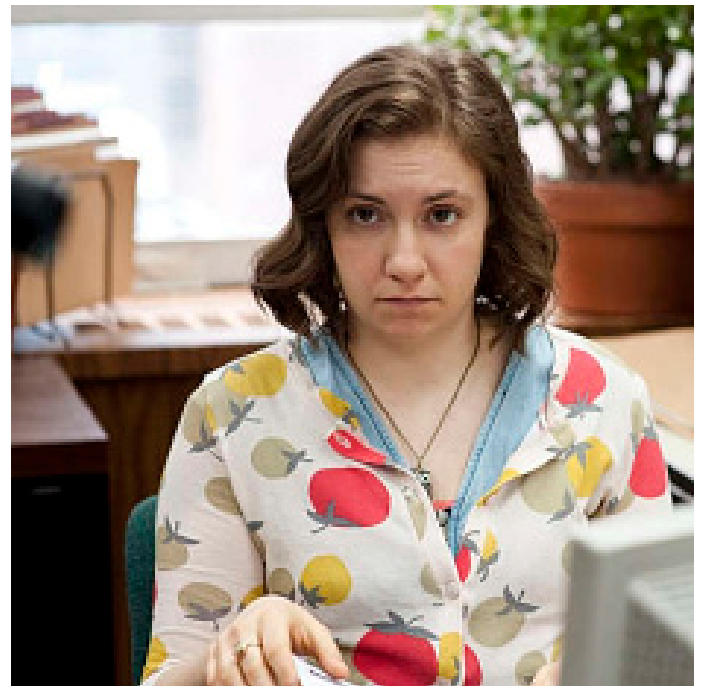
It’s very impractical to hold objects using Bag #5: Closed In. In my mind, the reason behind carrying this type of bag is more for the perception of the wearer as seen by the people around him or her rather than for the user’s comfort and well being. In fact, unlike other bags in this thesis, I designed Bag #5 to be exponentially difficult to carry when just a little bit more load is added to it. This really exaggerates the issues that are present with existing clutch bags: restraining the body and hindering movement. By exposing the impracticality of the bag, I hope to also expose the presence of the this bag’s biased design.

Response

Overall, the immediate reaction from most of the people I interviewed was that this bag was awful for their body. Even before they tried it on, they expressed how just by looking at it, it would be very difficult to carry. After several minutes of carrying it, you can tell that the users were starting to feel pain. And most of the wearers are constantly adjusting their body, stretching their necks, shrugging their shoulders and wiggling their arms. Even their facial expressions started to change, they seemed to get more annoyed, anxious and restless. I think John sums up this feeling best when he said, “I feel like I am wearing a strapless dress and I’m concerned my breasts are going to fall off so I am constantly adjusting my

body”.

When I asked Diana how she would feel having this body language in a job interview. She said she would feel “squirmy” and uncomfortable and probably not do very well. When I asked her for characters that mimic her as she wore the bag she mentioned a Hannah, character from the TV show Girls who she described as insecure, “someone who assumed the worse of what people thought about her”. From Diana’s and the majority of the users’ point-of-view the body language that this bag provokes seemed more related with femininity than masculinity. They used words like “submissive”, “vulnerable” and “anxious”.



Hannah from Girls, courtesy of HBO

Reflection

Like Bag#4: Super Hero, Closed In also brought back familiar poses for many of the participants. Closed In took the users back to a time when they too had a low-power pose—stressful times. When they were embarrassed, insecure and/or afraid of someone or something.

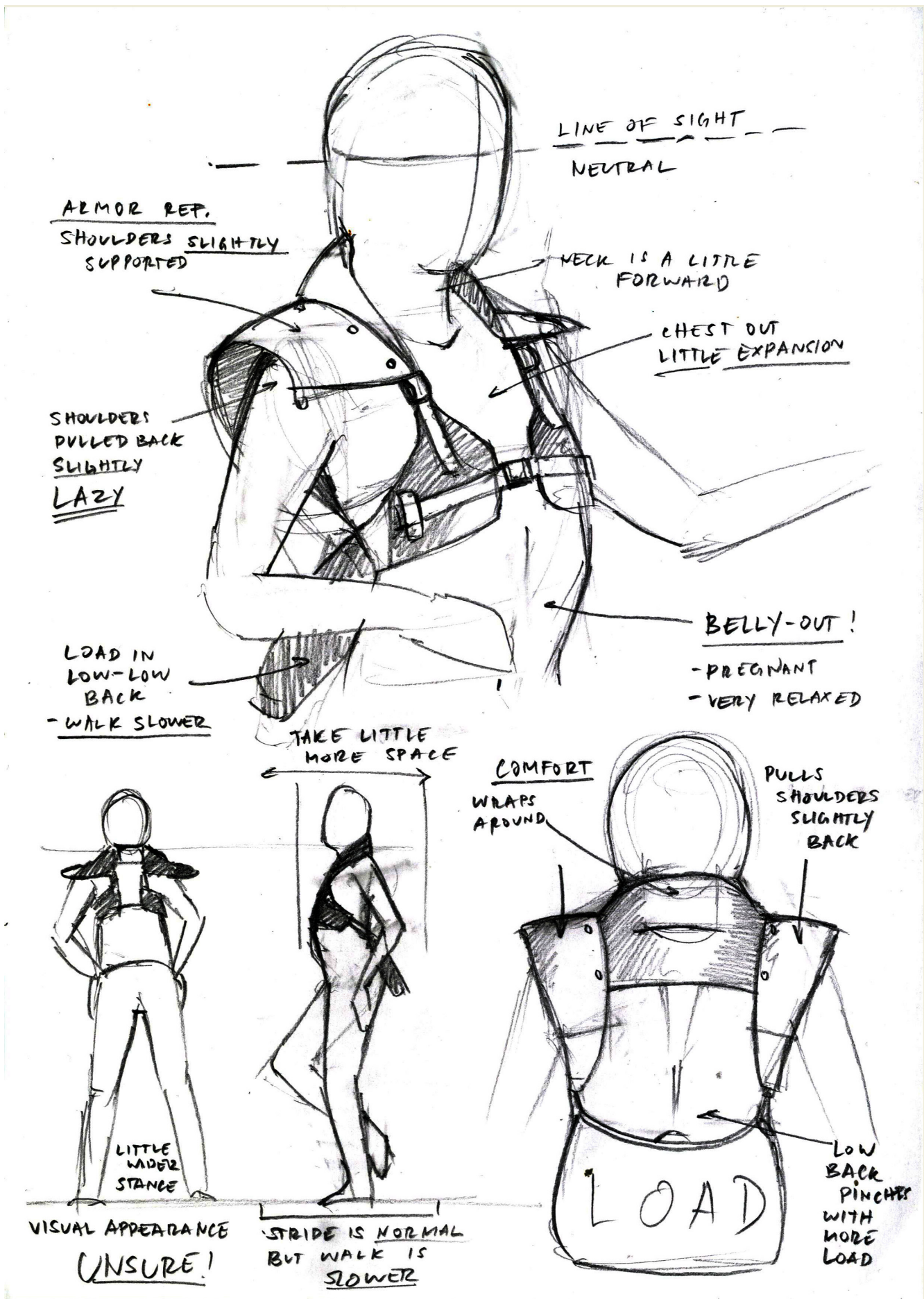
I think that like Bag #4: Super Hero, the theories that Closed In worked with is very much reenforced by the media. Pictures of women in advertisements assert a sense of frailty and vulnerability. For me, hearing this throughout many of the interviews strengthens the fact that even today, women are wildly disenfranchised.

The aim of this project is not just to make the users more aware of the dichotomy we have constructed

for men and women in terms of body language, it also encourages them to challenge it. I think that the embodied experience with this bag really took the users to the point where they could say that things were clearly unequal. As we discussed their body language and their perception of their identity, it became clear that there is a tilt in the bag world leaning in favor of masculinity. Masculine features meant durable, strong and superior.

I was slightly disappointed that we didn't quite get to the point where the users felt they could explore new genders, I think that we got quite close.

BAG#6: PREGNANT MALE



Theory

Bag #6: Pregnant Male draws it's very core from Judith Butler's notion that gender is a deliberation (Butler 2006) and the idea that gender is a construction (Fenstermaker & West 2002). Bag #6 is an attempt to create a bag wherein normalized gender roles from both the feminine and masculine is mixed into some new semblance of gender. Here the user is given the opportunity to construct the gender and to determine what that gender connotes.

In Bag #4 and #5 it was easier to find inspiration for the bags because there is so much discourse about the stereotypical male and female gender role. There is a lot less discourse on genders that exist in between. So, I decided to approach this bag from a different way. I looked onto existing artifacts, and images for different types of perceptions of men and women and picked a few. For the male, I took inspiration from Markus Grip's *Slothfully* 2006, a chair that forces the body to sit with legs wide apart and shoulders hunched—reminiscent of a stereotypical “slacker” guy. And for the female I decided to recreate the idea of the “uterus as a bag” as attempted earlier with Bag #1: Pregnancy Bag. I thought that these two references would cause such deliberation because I myself couldn't find a connection between a pregnant lady and a slacker man. They clash. Furthermore, I found both references are easy to embody and act-out because they had such a distinct and well-defined body language.



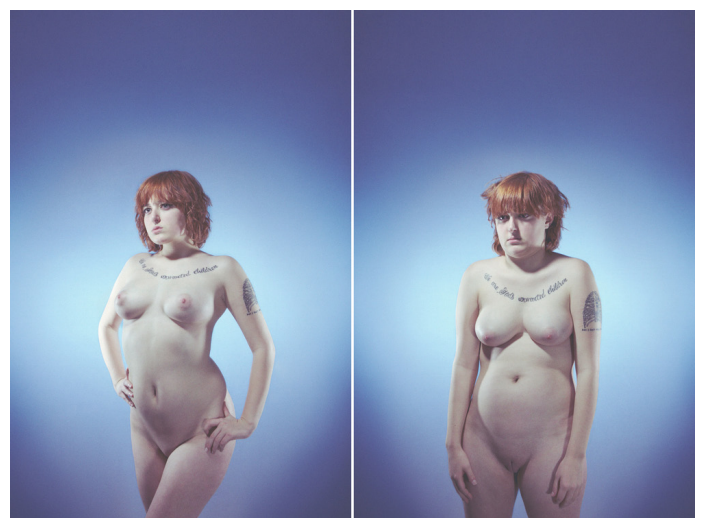
Slothfully 2006, Markus Grip

Design Intent

In order to design the bag for a gender I couldn't quite define. I had to use my body as a canvas. I would take on different postures, walk in atypical ways and mirror different characters. While in those postures I would sketch-out the bag and visualize how it would relate to that pose.

I ended up making something resembling a belt bag except the pouch is in the lower back, not in front. Attached to the pouch are big neoprene shoulder caps and attached to that is a leather chest piece that sits on top of the chest. When load is added to the pouch it gently pulls the shoulders forward and the chest back. In order to compensate for the load in such a low center of gravity, the belly is also pushed outward, but only slightly. Overall it gives the wearer a hunched posture much like the posture associated with being lazy. And with the belly sticking out, it mirrors a pregnant belly. The more load is added to the pouch, the more exaggerated the posture becomes. However unlike the other bags, this posture is less obvious and more slight overall.

It's hard to explain exactly how the pose was designed. However, during my research I found photos by Gracie Hagen. When I looked at these photos I knew that that was the type of body language I was trying to get at (albeit in a less exaggerated way). In the photos, it's hard to pin-point what the models look like or what their bodies are trying to convey. All I knew was that I kept deliberating what and who they were. A quality I would need to provoke an interesting discussion about gender and identity.



Illusions of the Body, Gracie Hagen

Response

The immediate response was so varied that I will only mention a few. Diana thought she looked like she was a “pregnant woman absent-mindedly thinking about something”. Tom thought that it felt like his usual posture, “just slightly upright”. Jenny who usually hunches forward, felt “very aware of her body and posture”. When I first reviewed the interview tapes, I couldn’t figure-out if my design intent actually executed as I thought it would seem no one seemed to get a clear picture of what I was getting at. It wasn’t until later that it dawned on me—most of the users were also unsure of what they were feeling and during the interview they were deliberating. In addition, I think the subtle effect of this bag made the experience very different for many of the users. People like Jenny who usually hunches felt her posture change more than say, Tom who felt just a minor change in his body.

When we talked about the body language that Bag#6: Pregnant Male placed the user in, in an evaluative situation, the answers also varied. Jenny said that she would feel somewhere in-between “relaxed and slouchy and super upright and confident”. Tom said that the bag could make one look rigid and he wouldn’t want that at some parts of the interview where it would be better to be casual. He goes on by saying that if he started sitting lazily, the bag would accentuate that movement and that too would not look very good. Like Tom, Diana couldn’t find one answer. She said that I had to be more specific, she needed to know what kind of situation she was being assessed in. If it was a job interview, what was she being interviewed for? There was no one answer or pattern that stuck out throughout all the interviews. If anything, the users wanted more answers from me.

Finally, when we got to the issue of gender and identity the answers I got were so interesting. I think the majority identified their body language with this bag as leaning more toward masculine. However, it wasn’t so cut and dry. Masculinity in this case was more nuanced and atypical. Jenny who says she typically hunches, felt that the bag made her stand upright and therefore it felt masculine. Tom couldn’t really identify the bag with a gender. He said “to me people first then gender second, I don’t really think of people that way. I don’t think I can give an answer.” What I find interesting is that with the other bags, Tom could and did identify with either masculine or feminine. He did continue by saying “I do think that it [the bag] feels like I am about to go spelunking or go in an adventure”. Diana said that the posture was an ambiguous one but tending more like

a “friendly masculine”. She identified the posture with characters such as a teacher and nurse, “it makes me want to care for people”.

Reflection

I think that Bag #6: Pregnant Male was successful in getting the users to see gender beyond the typical view of masculine and feminine. Although the majority of the users said that the body language the bag placed on them leaned more towards masculine, in reviewing the interview tapes it seemed that most felt the need to elaborate and did so. The wearers seemed unsatisfied with the idea of masculinity that defaulted to the norm. In fact, they used atypical words such as “nurturing” and “formal”, “relaxed”, etc. to describe the gender they embodied. I think this is a good indication that the users were indeed exploring other types of gender beyond our existing dichotomy.

Another interesting insight from Bag #6: Pregnant Male is how different the bag affected the different users’ body. More than in any other bag, the participants this time around pointed-out their existing body issues and integrated it with their answers during the interview. For example: Jenny constantly pointed-out that she is usually hunched over and that the feeling of masculinity from this bag comes from the slight upright position it puts her in. I think the subtle way in which Bag #6 changes the body makes the user much more aware of their body before and during the interview. Making things more contextual and ultimately more connected with the user.

I felt that Bag #6: Pregnant Male was going towards the right direction in terms of reaching my goals for this project. I felt that the users’ experiences indicated that through this bag and our interview, they were made aware of how gender is played out in the body. Furthermore, their complex ideas about masculinity and femininity in my discussion with them showed that they were thinking beyond the stereotypical gender roles and maybe making new ones.

CONCLUSION

The second set, bags #4-6, worked really well in attaining the goals I had set out for this thesis.

Theory was integrated into the designs of the bag but unlike the first set of bags (bag #1-3), this set used theory as an inspiration and only as a starting point. Instead, I focused on designing a type of posture or body language that would represent an idea based on a theory or theories. In addition, I drew from existing artifacts, icons and imagery as references for the designs. I think this worked very well because it allowed me to focus on the users' experience: the emotional, physical and mental journey they had to go through. In the first set of bags, one of my issues was that I treated the bags as though it was a piece in a museum. One that would be picked-apart and analyzed, searching for clues that indicated how it was conceptualized. And the result was that many of the users didn't get what the artifact was about. But this time around, the response was so much more meaningful and indicated by the in-depth discussions the users and I had about gender.

I also think that by creating gestalts of the bags rather than trying to make a fully realized one helped focus the discussion on body language. Users were not distracted by the fabric choice and instead focused on how the bag affected their body. As the designer, it allowed me to treat the bags more like prototypes or works in progress and that gave me a lot of freedom. For example: I used neoprene not for the connotations it carried as a fabric, but simply because its fabric qualities allowed me to make the bags more as I had envisioned it.

In this set of bags, I treated the interviews as part of the entire experience instead of just a means of recording it. And that made a huge difference. The interviews provided annotation for the bags. But more importantly, the structure of the interview helped the user really understand how their body has changed. And it provided a space to discuss the experience of wearing the bags more meaningfully.

Utilizing research from social psychology regarding posture and power dynamics was effective in driving design decisions and ultimately, making theoretical ideas more tangible. First, the experience, being embodied, gave the users a physical context for abstract ideas. By comparing how they are with the bags as opposed to without it, they could draw a comparison and see things in a new perspective. For example: the idea of that we treat the female body as restrained and less superior

was made physically evident when Bag #5 (based on the design of a female-targeted bag) made it difficult for the user to walk normally and stay steady. The physical experience also gave the users something they could grasp onto when trying to describe an abstract idea during the interviews. When I reviewed the tapes of the interviews I could see the users motioning their bodies as they searched for words to describe something difficult. For example, when I asked Mitch why he thought a particular bag was masculine he pointed to the middle of his back and straightened his posture before mentioning the "military man" the posture reminded him off.

In some cases, the experience with the bags did not interpret as I thought it would. Some times, my intention and the theory that inspired it was not mentioned during the interviews. However, the overall experience always led to a meaningful discussion about gender and identity as it relates to the body.

This is This Half is Masculine and This Half is Feminine's ultimate goal is to encourage its wearer to challenge assumptions, preconceptions and givens about the what is masculine and feminine. I think that bag #4-6 attempt at doing this worked very well. The discussions I had with users with Bag #4 and 5 indicated to me that the users were becoming more aware of masculine and feminine stereotypes. They start using words that pronounce the superiority that society favors for the male. And typically, when the users become aware, the issue of our existing dichotomy becomes apparent. However, I think it was with bag #6 more than the other bags that users really challenged assumptions about gender. It's mixed gender references caused deliberation and no one answer as clear. Through deliberation, the users were able to find new words to describe this new idea of masculinity. Thereby giving form to an atypical gender.

DANCING

During the interviews for the second set of bags, I found the users' body language while wearing the bags extremely informative. The things they said were highlighted by their movements and facial expressions. This is when I had the idea to collaborate with dancers. In my experience dancers, more than any other profession, are extremely aware of their bodies. Which makes them the perfect group to showcase my thesis.

The endeavor is not meant to be part of the research or study of these bags. It's more of a way to communicate the research and analysis that I conducted pre-collaboration. With that said, I'd like to talk a little bit about the work I did with the students of the Skyline College dance students.

We started with some background information about my thesis. This included the projects' aims, approach and a short introduction to gender theory. Then, I had the dancers try on the bags. While wearing the bags, I shared the users' response to each bag. I talked about the bags one by one. I shared the users' common reactions, unusual reactions and interesting insights that I drew after analyzing the responses.

Eventually we made our way to the dance floor. Here I worked with Quenton Cook, a former experimental theater major from New York University to develop some exercises that would get the dance students more familiar with the bags' effect on their body. Quenton assigned one bag for each dancer to wear for the entire day. Then, through a series of improvisation exercises he got the dancers to completely embody the bags.

I came in with a video camera and no script. All I knew was that I wanted the dancers to perform in different scenarios:

- a highly evaluative situation (i.e. job interviews, examinations, etc.)
- a celebratory situation (i.e. after winning a race or accomplishing a difficult task)
- a relaxed situation (i.e. walking aimlessly, approaching a friend, etc.)

After the workshop, I edited the video and cut a 2-3 minute short film for one purpose: to showcase the effect bags #4-6 have on the body.



Scenes from the dance collaboration with Skyline College students

MOVING FORWARD

In the beginning of the thesis I had planned to do a much more complex version of this project but intentionally, I decided to hone in and focus on certain areas. There are however parts of the project that due to constraints in time and resources I was simply unable to execute on.

From the start, I knew I wanted to work with bags including all the aspects that make-up a bag:

- the way it affects the user's body or the way it's carried
- its materials/fabric choice
- the objects that go inside it

At some point in the project, I decided to deal solely with number 1. I found it more interesting to work on because it deals more directly with the body than 2 and 3. Moreover, I stopped focusing on material/fabric choice after the first round of bags. I was hindered by my lack resources to invest on materials. Unless I had the money and the machines to properly execute on the bags, I felt that the materials would be more of a distraction than anything else. The third aspect, the objects that go inside of the bag, was dropped very early in the project. After doing some research I realized that this topic would very large and would require more time than 20 weeks.

I do think that my work in this project could be complimented by a future study on why users prefer a certain bag material over another and vice versa. Also, a study of identity and gender and how that relates the the things people carry in bags could work in tangent with my study in this thesis.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GREATER FIELD OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

This Half is Masculine and This Half is Feminine takes theories from gender studies and social psychology and gives them shape in a form of a product thereby applying theories from other fields to design. Throughout this entire paper, I constantly reflect on the different ways theory and ideas were adapted into each bag. Pointing-out, in detail, how users in this project respond to each bag and how successful each bag was at conveying an idea. It is my hope that by discussing the ways where the integration of theory worked and the ways where they did not, I would contribute new insights for the greater field of design.

What Worked

With all the bags that I created in this project I was inspired by the approach of Research through Design (RtD). Basically, the approach generates knowledge by designing innovative artifacts, models, prototypes, etc. and evaluates them by conducting various kinds of experiments (Frayling 1993). In the case of this project, I designed the bags as prototypes and my interviews as the venue wherein I experiment and test the prototypes. The bags were instruments used to provoke a physical feeling in the user's body thereby sparking conversations about gender. I think this approach worked really well when attempting to implement theory into an object because how people respond to abstract ideas is unpredictable. My experience in this project is that spending too much time in trying to perfect an object is a waste of time. It's better to spend that time testing-out the prototypes and building new knowledge. Knowledge that will be invaluable in designing the improved version of the preliminary prototypes.

In the second set of bags, I took the idea of rapid prototyping further by creating Gestalts of the bags. Bag #4-6 are all black, and use all sorts of fabric materials that don't carry much meaning as a set. In fact, in the interviews very little is mentioned of the fabric choice. I did this because I found that it's important to keep the user focused on what it is you are actually getting at—in this case gender as it relates to the body. Unless the extra designing directly impacts your aims, I see no point in doing it. It may be more of a distraction than anything else.

When the user first puts on one of the bags, I always ask them to take note of the changes in their body. And

throughout the interviews I always ask the user about what they typically do or who they normally are. Putting things in opposite relation to each other changes our relationship with them and offers a new perspective (Derrida 1978). In a project dealing with gender norms, placing the user's personal experience in comparison to stereotypical gender roles is extremely effective providing a context for the issues at hand.

In Bag #6: Pregnant Male, I used existing design examples as references when designing the bag. Design examples are indispensable to design theory because artifacts embody the myriad choices made by their designers with a definiteness and level of detail that would be difficult or impossible to attain in a written account (Gaver 2012). In working with existing artifacts, I was able to utilize the knowledge and insights that a designer had when designing that particular object without having to relearn all of the theory behind it.

Bag #6 was also very effective in causing the users to deliberate gender internally. Unlike Bag #4 and 5, the bag placed them in a posture that was unfamiliar. Though the consensus was that the bag felt "masculine", the users felt the need to elaborate on the type of masculinity. When integrating theory to an artifact, I found that there needs to be a balance struck between making the ideas too literal and obvious and keeping it mysterious. A good balance usually gets the users to question and think more in-depth about an idea or concept.

After conducting interviews with the first round of bags, I decided to restructure the interviews and treat it as part of the entire experience of wearing the bags rather than just a record of it. Bill Gaver talks about the idea of annotated portfolios where artifacts and their descriptions are mutually reliant on their relationship to produce meaning (Gaver 2012). The interviews in my project provided a sort of annotation; it guided the users to think about their experience in terms of gender and identity. In this project, my experience taught me that in-depth theoretical conversations require more than just the experience of using an artifact—they require a guided discussion to be truly meaningful. In addition, Bill Gaver's line of reasoning implies that designs need to be annotated if they are to make clear and accountable contributions to research.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD OF GENDER STUDIES

This Half is Masculine and This Half is Feminine's contribution to the study of gender is in its integration of gender theory into a designed artifact. It gives gender theorists tools (the bags) with which to provoke in-depth discourse about gender issues with lay persons. Furthermore, the responses of the participants throughout this project offers some insight to how people think of gender as it relates to their body language and posture.

Specifically, this project tackles the issue that gendered objects are made invisible through normalcy (Kirkham 1996). Karin Ehrnberger's work in *The Mega Hurricane Mixer* and the *Drill Dolphia* pulls gendered objects from hiding and presents the inequalities it causes between ideas of male and female in a visual manner. My work in this project highlights how gendered objects like bags propagate gender inequality through an embodied experience. It uses the body as medium to raise issues about gender. And it points-out how objects are physically altering our identity through our bodies.

From my research I have found that designers are calling for deeper gender perspective on design (Fagerström 2010). A fresh and more explorative perspective of gender in design could produce a new generation of objects with a non-normative view. And in effect change the way people perceive their gender roles.

I believe that a lot of great work has been done in dealing with the dichotomy of femininity and masculinity. But too much attention in a dichotomy could cause binary opposition which serves the purpose of hierarchy (Wittig 1986). In order to achieve a deeper gender perspective we must now think beyond the dichotomy and explore gender possibilities that exist in the gray area. In this thesis project, the bags together with the interviews are provoking users to question stereotypical ideas of gender. Taking them as far as giving shape to new or atypical forms of gender. Making the users active, not passive participants in how we, as a society construct gender.

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