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Question Chosen: *From the Lens-Based Image Making research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers and relevant practitioners.*

Gender and its Stereotypes

Throughout my life I have heard many phrases being said to myself and people who surround me such as “man up” “Be more lady like” “Grow a pair” and hearing these phrases made me wonder why certain activities, clothes, or ways people talk or act are more associated with or expected of a particular gender. Whilst seeing and hearing about different gender stereotypes, particularly during the past five years of my life, I have been inspired to look at gender within my own

Fig 1



Fig 2



photographic practice, specifically in the sense of how I could go against them. I really enjoy looking at how people portray their gender differently in their everyday lives, particularly using fashion and make up (as seen in figure 1) because I believe that fashion can be so fluid in allowing people to be themselves. I

personally enjoy drag as an art form, which is what I wanted to portray in figure 1, which is of my brother’s friend who fascinated me by his exploration of his own gender by using fashion and make up, and he happily modelled for me for this

photoshoot. For the photoshoot for figure 1 I was primarily inspired by Nan Goldin and how she documented her close friends who were drag queens and



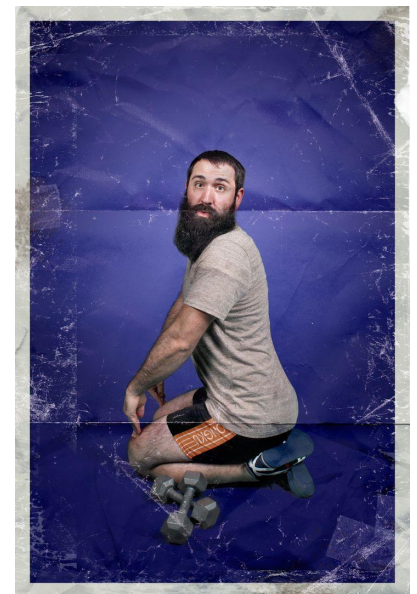
Fig 3

members of the LGBTQ+ community, I find her images really powerful as she documented their experiences as they lived their lives as part of the LGBTQ+ community through a time when it was not as accepted as it is now, and I wanted to show in my photos the growth of how people from the LGBTQ+ community have become more accepted and feel more free to be themselves and express their gender in their own way. As Judith Butler points out within her book *Gender Trouble*, “When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.” (*Gender Trouble*, page 7), this quote, I believe, is suggesting that Judith Butler believes that gender is constructed by people's influence by society and the media. In my opinion this quote works quite well with figure 1 in the sense of how I was showing the art of drag and my model, since he is very much influenced by how make-up is portrayed across the media.

Growing up as a young female I have noticed how the different genders are treated and looked at differently, I have seen this through family, friends, school life and the media. As a child my parents started my brother and I in judo and I noticed that I was the only girl in a class full of boys and none of them would want to train with me, which I was not sure if it was because they thought I would hold them back in their

training, but as my judo progressed I really enjoyed breaking the stereotypes of how girls could not fight or stick up for themselves, which I do plan to create work based around girls/women in judo by looking at the term “fight like a girl” which I have heard throughout society and the media lots of times. Within Judith Butler’s 1988 book *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* Butler speculates “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time.” (*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, page 523), this quote made me look back at how there were different toy sections for boys and girls, which frustrated me as a child, specifically when I wanted toys that were traditionally seen as ‘boys’ toys and was told that it “wasn’t lady like”. Memories of the different toys that my brother and I received or wanted have made me want to create work based on how there is no such thing as a ‘girl’ toy or a ‘boy’ toy, and toys are toys and the main thing is if the child enjoys the toy. I am really fascinated by and inspired by Rion Sabeen’s series *Men-Ups!* Which looks at creating images with men doing stereotypically manly things but placing them in what is traditionally seen as quite a feminine pose, I love how he has used humour to question why certain poses are acceptable or seen as “provocative” for one gender and not the other (Emma Gray, 2011). I really enjoy his comedic take on the images to show that people do not have to follow society’s rules of how people should act depending on their gender, I believe that it works really well in making society realise that little things that people do are sexualised, which is not

Fig 4



acceptable. I love the style of photo that Sabean has done for the *Men-Ups!* I believe that the aged effect of the images implies that Sabean believes that the ideologies that society and the media created regarding gender stereotypes is also quite aged. Throughout Sabean's images within this series, the colour of the backdrops he used are quite bold colours, which is very eye catching and helps make more people ask the same question that he asked, why are certain poses acceptable or seen as provocative for one gender and not the other?



Fig 5

As a child I grew up with the majority of my friends being boys, since I was the only girl on the football team, and I remember hearing a lot of them talking about women who were in the media and how they found them attractive and then going on to talk about girls in school who were stereotypically 'girly' and how the boys found them attractive for their 'girly' characteristics, which I found made me feel less confident in the way I looked and dressed because I felt like I was not pretty enough because I played football and went to judo, and I did not wear make up or do any of the stereotypical things a girl would do or enjoy, in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* it states "Women are depicted in a quite different way from men- not because the

feminine is different from the masculine- but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him." (*Ways of seeing*, page 64), this quote reinstates how I felt at the time, of not feeling like I fit the stereotype of acting and dressing as if I was there to please the boys and not for them to look at me. At that age in primary school, I also had some of the boys laughing at me saying my arms were too hairy for a girl, which at the time created an insecurity because I noticed that the other girls did not have much



Fig 6

hair on their arms or legs whereas I did, but now I am older I am able to realise that it was society that influenced them and myself to believe that a girl was not pretty if they were hairy, but it is only natural. A photography series that I really like that looks at body hair is Ben Hopper's 2014 series *Natural Beauty* and find it very inspiring and empowering, for the younger generation, particularly young girls, because he photographs women of different ages showing off their body hair to the



camera and looking very confident in doing so too. I find the photographs really powerful because the women look so comfortable and confident in their own skin, which is very influential for people who might feel uncomfortable with themselves and how they naturally look, I believe that this is a brilliant way of making people feel more confident with themselves. I quite like

Fig 7

the idea of photographing the opposite of stereotypical beauty standards because I love the idea of breaking the barriers and going against the stereotypical beauty standards. The use of the black and white format throughout Hopper's *Natural Beauty* series, in my opinion, acts as a metaphor and suggests that the ideologies that are put out by society and media of beauty should look are black and white.

I grew up with more male family members than female, so it was quite noticeable how I was expected to act compared to my female cousin. Growing up I was never into hair, make up, or shopping which stereotypically are quite 'girly' hobbies, whilst other female members of my family were, however, really into those stereotypical pursuits that I eschewed. When my grandmother or other female family members wanted to do these activities with me - which I was not interested in - they used to be quite shocked and start comparing me to my female cousin and say, "Well she likes it, why don't you?", which at the time used to make me think I was weird or not normal for not being interested in these things. As I got older, however, I got more into these things as well as the art of drag (as previously mentioned), and certain family members who are of the older generation

who grew up differently to me with different ideologies and opinions on drag, used to say how weird or 'unnatural' it was for men to dress in "girls clothes" and do their make-up "like girls". Now it is more widespread that people can be more fluid in the way that they dress or perform their gender. Which in 2020, Tyler Mitchell explores and shows

Fig 8



by photographing Harry Styles for Vogue's December Issue in a dress, which even though it was released in a more accepting time there were still some negative feedback, particularly from author Candace Owens who tweeted many things criticising the cover including "Bring back manly men" (Sofia Andrade, 2020). I love the stance that Styles uses within this image, I believe that his use of a powerful pose suggests that he feels confident with showing who he is to such a big audience. How he looks down to the camera and the photographer, it shows the power he feels at that moment in time. I find the journey from how people were able to express their genders, which Nan Goldin documented within her work, to how Tyler Mitchell portrays Harry Styles within this image really eye-opening and amazing when looking at the treatment people had for expressing their fluidity.

Beginning my journey as a photographer I noticed there were a lot more successful male artists and photographers than female, which was a bit of a worry considering it is what I hope to pursue a career in in the future. However, I read about the Guerrilla Girls who are an anonymous group of artists who look at creating art to fight sexism and racism within the art world (Tate, undated), they are only seen wearing gorilla masks to hide their identity. A quote they have said regarding their use of gorilla masks really stands out to me; "Wearing those clothes with a gorilla mask confounds the stereotype of female sexiness", I find it really interesting and quite empowering that they did not want to go by the male gaze and dress 'sexy' to promote their work, and I love that it worked because the publicity they got for breaking these gender stereotypes gained awareness of their work and their

reasoning behind it. One of their art pieces that I find really powerful is their 1989 piece *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*

Fig 9



I find this piece really eye opening to how the male gaze is used within the art world, particularly for creating and showing art. I find it really fascinating how the image was constructed using Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres's famous painting *Grande Odalisque* (The Met, undated) and manipulated it to include their iconic gorilla mask to highlight the issue of the lack of gender diversity of the artists who show their work within the Met. Museum, which I thought was really interesting.

A photographer who I find really interesting to look at is Cindy Sherman. Cindy

Fig 10



Sherman is best known for her self portraits that she does where she dresses up as different characters that she comes up with, and some are male characters. Her self-portraits are made to look at and raise awareness on social role playing and sexual stereotypes (Britannica,

undated), which I find really fascinating. I find it really interesting how Sherman uses these characters that she creates to be free with who she decides to be when she wants to. In an interview with *Art News* Sherman states “I was obsessed with being presentable” (Beatrice Brandini, 2021) which personally I believe is something that society and the media has drilled into people’s heads. I find the idea of showing people within my photography conforming to a different gender to their own really fascinating, and I think it could make a really eye-catching piece of work, and by looking at Cindy Sherman, quite successful too. I find Sherman’s images where she explores gender, particularly shown in figure 10, really interesting. I love how she looks at disguising herself as a stereotypical traditional American man who stands as society have led people to expect men to stand and hold themselves, with a hand in their pocket and shoulders slightly slumped.

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