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Question: Q4-Outline a current political, social or environmental issue that requires redesign -explain how you can solve this issue over your future design career. Underline the tools and approaches you would use and discuss how and why?

The last 8 months and our pandemic has highlighted many global issues: including, sustainable fashion, BLM, the environment, Feminism, human rights and lack of equality all of which play a part. In impacting negatively, in the toxicity of the world. With this perfect turning point with the world on hold, now is a perfect time to act on these issues and implement changes into our life and design careers. With so many prominent issues at hand trying to undertake all of them in my design career would be a huge task. So even though I will continue to keep in mind all issues I would like to focus on one that I could possibly impact most. I would like to examine the gender gap as a woman looking closely at information in the fashion and textile sector and how I can effect change and level the inequality.

Our everyday lives are catered towards men most things revolve around them down to the simplest things like our gender's names. "Humanity is male, and man defines women not herself, but as relative to she is not regarded as an autonomous being." (Perez, 2020).

Our beginning came from men, every way we are referred to comes from men. From the beginning women have often been regarded as second best with even our gender coming from men, being claimed as man's possession. Unfortunately, as much as we have grown "We have seen rather consistent, positive trends across the globe in a range of areas of woman development." (Alexander and Bolzendahl and Jalazai, 2018). We continue to face issues in day-to-day life, from the pay gap, to disparity in PPE gear to many more, our markets are geared towards men. Which is leaving women

at a huge disadvantage indeed the PPE being tailored to men is literally costing women their lives on the front line.

In 1997 a British female police officer was stabbed and killed while using a hydraulic ram to enter a flat. She had removed her body armour because it was too difficult to use the ram whilst wearing them. (Perez, 2020).

The body armour that was removed because it was too bulky, as it was made to fit a man meaning no space for the women's breasts since this incident nothing has been done to correct this inequality in the approach of emergency clothing even though the playing many women still come forward complaining of injuries. These women have long lasting physical repercussions to wearing these vests.

British female police officers report being bruised by their kit belts; a number have had physiotherapy as a result of the way stab vests sit on their female body; many complain there is no space for their breasts. (Perez, 2020).

With the enlightened view the COVID 19 has given us with shortages of PPE we should be thinking about how to best protect our frontline workers.

But in the current COVID crisis, the problems for women working in healthcare are literally a matter of life and death. With 77% of NHS workers being female, we are the most exposed gender, and the precise fitting of filtering facepiece particle (FFP) masks has become essential. (Fidler, 2020).

With women making up most of our frontline workers yet there only being one size of face mask that has been moulded on the specifications of males were leaving not only them at risk but ourselves because the workers will not be around to help others.



Fig.1: *An illustration of PPE.*

Women also face difficulty's being employed, a lot of businesses and employers struggle to look past bias or if not certainly passed unconscious biased towards women. Many struggle to look past stereotypes in jobs and in specific industry roles with women being favoured for jobs as teachers or nurses, roles that are more stereotypically female. "Many jobs in the economy are gender-stereotyped. Firefighting is thought of as a man's job, whereas nursing is thought of as women's work." (Thebaud, 2017). Women are given the caring jobs like working with children or the elderly and as such when women fight to break this stereotype a lot of the time are turned away as men are 'better suited' for the job. Women also risk being turned down for jobs due to their age or marital status with many employers thinking about the risk of maternity leave in the near future for the women.



Fig 2: *Female fighter*

In other studies, the marital or age status of the applicant is modified and used as an indicator of how likely they are to become a parent in the near future. (González and Cortina and Rodríguez, 2017)

This can lead to a less qualified man being offered the job over a woman who is better suited. Even if a woman manages to get passed all this bias, they will still have to deal with the pay gap, with the pay gap being so prevalent between women and men in industry, women are not only having to fight harder to get the job but are then working for less.

More than three out of four UK companies pay their male staff more than their female staff, and in nine out of 17 sectors in the economy men earn 10 per cent more on average than women. (Wisniewska and Ehrenberg-Shannon and Gordon, 2020).

Women who work just as hard as men at the same jobs are on average being paid a lot less than men even in female dominated industry's like teaching or care workers.

The disparity is known as the gender pay gap: In other words, when factoring in education level, work experience and seniority, women will still earn less money than men do in the same position. (New York times, 2019).

Knowing that women are paid less even when doing the exact same jobs as men shows why this pay gap leaves causes a rift between men and women especially when the jobs are those of which stereotypically employ a larger number of women.

Female headteachers under the age of 40 earn £5,400 less than their male counterparts, while those in their 40s earn £7,700 less, those in their 50s earn £11,300 less, and those aged 60 or over earn a whopping £13,500 less. (Celsian Education, 2019).

Not only are we paid less for our jobs but women who choose to have children they risk problems with maternity leave, and in turn being able to come back from maternity leave. For many women having little to no maternity leave is a reality with many business offering little to help. There is no standard set by the government for how long or how much pay women should receive for maternity.

There is a caveat, however: not all maternity-leave policies are made equal. The length of time and the amount of money on offer matter. If women aren't given enough time off,

there is a risk they will leave the paid labour force entirely, or transition to part time work (Perez, 2020).

Female politicians there is -face a strong chance they will not get maternity leave as the government hasn't figured out a way for them to vote effectively whilst on maternity leave. Women in parliament are obviously allowed maternity leave but when they take it they have no way to vote and as this is a bug part of there job (especially MP's) this causes a big issue, an issue that they came up with a solution for, but this solution was in effective. "However, in July 2018 we saw just how inadequate this solution is, when the Conservative MP Brandon Lewis, who was paired with the Liberal Democrat, MP Jo Swinson, mysteriously 'forgot' he was paired when it came to two curtail Brexit votes that the government won by an extremely narrow margin."(Perez, 2020).

Female MP's have in this time to think about not only the new born baby but trying to get someone to vote for them and relying on this person to actually vote for them, which in such important elections is very worrying especially if they are so close like the Brexit vote which margin was slim few votes could have completely changed the outcomes. This issue not only greatly effects the female MP's in power but in turn the whole country a new system should be put in place so on maternity and paternity leave MP's can vote from home online or by posting in their vote which is directly counted.

Due to all this inequality in 1975 women in Iceland gave up working in all areas paid and unpaid work, caring for the family and running errands for a day. This is why the 24th October is referred to as the 'the long day' the day women in Iceland stopped working.

Forty years ago, the women of Iceland went on strike - they refused to work, cook and look after children for a day. It was a moment that changed the way women were seen in the country and helped put Iceland at the forefront of the fight for equality. (Brewer, 2015).

Most women as well as having full time jobs also account for most of the unpaid work in the household.

The unpaid work of young women aged 18-30, such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children, is worth £140 billion to the UK economy, according to figures calculated from Office of National Statistics data by Young Women's Trust. (Andersson, 2020).

All this work is all lot to take on top of most peoples 9-5 working. But what the women in Iceland did showed men just how much they relayed on women and that that places don't work without women on 'the long day' many places of work had to shut because of the lack of workers, this showed just how much women are relied on.



Fig 3 : *Women's March in Iceland.*

Banks, factories and some shops had to close, as did schools and nurseries - leaving many fathers with no choice but to take their children to work. There were reports of men arming themselves with sweets and colouring pencils to entertain the crowds of overexcited

children in their workplaces. Sausages - easy to cook and popular with children - were in such demand the shops sold out. (Brewer, 2015).

In short what happened was nothing for that day women felt connected and powerful and men noticed everything the women were doing and how much they do for everyone but in the 30th anniversary of the rally women were still being short changed by the men.

A statistic much flaunted these days is that Icelandic women earn on average only 64.15% of men's wages. And so next Monday, on the rally's 30th anniversary, women are being encouraged to leave work at 2.08pm, the time by which they would have earned their pay if they were earning the same as men. (The Guardian, 2005) Women still need change and everyone should be listening.

Maternity leave is another important issue, with there being no standardized length of time off or pay whilst off many women don't return to work, some company's like Google noticed that they were losing women who had just had babies much quicker than the rest of their staff so created change,

When google noticed that they were losing women who had just given birth at twice the rate of other employees, they increased their maternity leave from three months at partial pay to five months at full pay. The attrition rate dropped to 50%. (Parez, 2020).

Google noticed a problem in their field and so to change and help balance the playing fields more they gave women more time off to be with their babies without them having to worry about money and if they're going to have a job to go back to. Later, they took this a step further by giving added extra help in the first few months after the baby is born.

Google offers a stipend for takeout meals in the first three months after a baby is born, subsidised childcare, and has convinces like dry cleaners on its campus, so employees can do

their errands during the workday. Sony Ericsson and Evernote go further, paying for their employees to have their houses cleaned. (Parez, 2020).

These added benefits are helping to make women feel like they can reliably go back to work. Many companies also now give people flexible hours and subsidized childcare to help people afford to work. But we also need to understand what the mothers are saying many women struggle to understand that they can have both a job and a baby that neither one comes at a cost of the other. “women would forever feel inadequate as mothers, and that work, and motherhood would be forever seen as a conflict and incompatible.” (Hallestine, 2010, p.121) We need to be reassuring women that both work and a career are possible and liveable that you don’t have to risk one for the other.

Taking into consideration all of these important areas of inequality to women designers need to be doing more for our women in the workplace, I understand that people are trying to help and that we do not have it as hard as many other countries but none the less as designers need to be helping women to stay in the work force as one of the leading countries in most areas, we should be pushing for change in all areas to lead by example. In my design career I would like to implement changes to make working more equal for everyone. I would implement ‘Blind CV’s’ as a way of judging people for their suitability rather than then not getting the job due to some bias. This would lead to the best person getting the role rather than someone less qualified. I would also give men and women equal paternity and maternity care wither they are having the child or adopting I believe they should all get equal pay for and equal amount of time and subsidies childcare to help women feel like they can go back to work.

One of the industries who struggled most with feminism is the fashion industry, an industry designed by women for women was tearing down other women instead of empowering them. But there were many fashion designers who wanted to change this. They believed they should “Questioning the assumption of earlier feminist that fashion is inherently oppressive of women, these theorists

promote its emancipatory potential.” (Negrin, 2008 p.33.34). Such change was needed to make an industry that was created for women love women again and to empower each other. There have been many important fashion designers who have changed the game for women like Mary Quant who was the first to make a Mini-Skirt or Coco Chanel who shook the world by wearing trousers. Most recently fashion was used to make a statement when women wore all black to award ceremonies for ‘times up’ *Me too* movement. “In the light of the Me-Too movement, the demand for equal pay and the number of female politicians, a women’s role in politics had become increasingly significant.” (Webb, 2020) In my design career I want to continue this way of thinking and make fashion and textiles that empower women.

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Figure 2: Getty Images

An image of a female firefighter.

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Figure 3: Women's history archives

The 1975 women's march in Iceland.

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