

The Trophy Collection



an auto-ethnography by Lucille Crelli
2015

“Originally inspired by the intricacies of the female anatomy, this collection has evolved to become a comment on female bodily empowerment, a reclaiming of power via emasculated phalluses and glorified vaginas, and a critique of the backlash directed towards so-called “radical” feminists.”

Introduction

Being an artist and designer, I feel a certain pressure to use my visual prowess to achieve loftier goals than making a beautiful image. With the phrases "critical thinking, critical making" and "design process" echoing in my ears, I signed my Major Declaration form with the certainty that I was on my way to social change. Apparel Design is one of RISD's more commercially-friendly majors, and by infiltrating the mainstream pop culture geared with my BFA from an internationally renowned institution, I will have both the name-dropping and design thinking skills to back me up. I am well aware of the cynicism of this, but the industry I am heading into has little tolerance for idealism. We are the product of colonialism, and the fashion industry is no exception, with an ever increasing number of scandals surrounding popular companies like American Apparel and a steadily decreasing number of artists representing their own native cultures. However, I am still striving to be an idealistic artist, and thus I chose my major with the intent to manipulate the medium in a way that addresses gender rights issues in a modern, feminist manner.

Identifying as a feminist, ally, or really any form of activism comes with many accusations of being a wet blanket. You're told to lighten up, to not take things so seriously, that fashion is supposed to be fun and is definitely not a political tool that perpetuates the agendas of a small demographic that has illogically immense power over a large portion of the American population. But there is a time and place for humor and artistry, and when those things come into

direct conflict with ethics - and not even just my own personal ethics, but rather common human decency - I have no choice but to be a wet blanket. If you were to evaluate the concept behind my collection as an ungendered, unbiased being, I could see how it might be a little extreme. This girl is so upset that she's cutting off dicks and draping them around her neck like a string of pearls? That seems a little unhinged... That is, until you step back into the real world with the appearance of being anything remotely female, and then you might see the source of my anger. Being a wet blanket is only so bad, but being labeled a crazy feminist is even worse.

This statement isn't coming from a place of insecurity. It's coming from the fear of not being taken seriously or being humored as an irrational woman who is overcome with her emotions. Earlier this semester, when I was still in the design stage of the collection, I first laughed at the absurdity of what I was doing. The opera coat (i.e. the phalluses) was still being equated with an impossibly long sausage link, which kept it lightly humorous. When my teachers suggested that I push my concept further because I had the capability to say something striking and dark with my work, I knew that only extremities would be accepted. I was told that the vagina has been seen time and time again in all mediums of art, and if I were to get a good critique at the end of the semester, I needed something louder. Was I being asked to take on the persona of the bra-burning suffragette for their entertainment?

From the outside, it again might seem as if I'm overreacting. To people who do not attend RISD it might appear as if my instructors are merely prompting me to push the boundaries of my work. I'm sure that is part of it, but when my critiques are only about the visuals of my pieces rather than what I'm conveying, how can I know if I'm being pushed to grow beyond my aesthetic capabilities? It's the sad truth that right now, RISD students and professors do not take

advantage of the vocabulary needed to discuss these subjects in a studio setting. While that alone might be a troubling issue, I didn't dwell on it because I realized that I *did* have a lot of anger. A lot of my work in the past has dealt with the vagina (technically, the whole package is called a vulva, but for the purposes of connotations I shall continue to refer to it as a vagina) as a metaphor for female empowerment, especially the reclamation of sexuality. This is a whole other issue now in the current conversation of trans rights and gendered labels, but up until this year I hadn't necessarily conveyed anger, per se, in my pieces. It was time for me to become whom I've always been destined to be... a bra-burning-crazy-feminist.

The design process happened to coincide with my outside work with RISD's Title IX Office at the time. We were arranging a light-hearted Walk of No Shame again as a demonstration of the reclamation of our sexualities and the slut-shaming epidemic. When my Facebook profile picture changed to a nude me holding a sign that said, "Still Not Asking for It", a lightbulb went off in my head (while I was in the shower, as it just so happened). Scrambling to write down my thought process afterwards, the initial notes in my sketchbook are "*women's bodies seen by men, but turned on them...media see women as OBJECTS (Carl's Jr)...like furs "I conquered this animal & now I wear it" ...TROPHY...critique of media, distortion of men's bodies...hyper-sexualization, MissRepresentation"*.

I was off and running after that, designing with the images of mounted deer busts, mink stoles, and lion-fur throw rugs floating in my head. I developed my concept as rapid-fire as I was drawing the opera coats, and it is still jumbled in my head as I write this. There are so many things that I want to say with this collection and so many indignant one-line concepts that I just want to scream about with somebody. Thus, that is the purpose of this auto-ethnography: with the

help of my sketchbook, my garments, and the influence of my girls Wendy Brown and Judith Butler, I will lay down bare the various components of The Trophy Collection and emerge on the other side as a coherent, crazy feminist.

On Being a “Man-Hater”

Before I delve too deeply into my psyche, I feel that it is important to record the first instance of articulating my concept to see how far I’ve come (if at all). What follows is a copy of a sketchbook page I wrote early on in the design process.

Ok, let’s stream-of-consciousness write here. I gotta work through what I’m trying to say with this piece. What would my one-liner be for the judges? (Except rumor has it that I’ll have a ten-minute critique...I can say more than one definition then!) So, I have the potential to do something powerfully conceptual here, and I just want to feel like I can own what I’m saying. It’s a FEMINIST piece, RE-CLAIMING the woman’s body! I feel like teachers/audiences in the art world don’t even at an eyelash at the word “feminism” coming up in a piece. It’s like, “Oh, here we go again”- side note I just had the thought- what if pornography is the sole source of carrying on the knowledge of how to have sex?- Ok, I’m stream-of-consciousness-ing too hard.

The woman’s body is, for many, many years...forever, to be exact...representative of the value we offer to society. It is a symbol of conquered power, or power yet to be conquered. A prize, a reward, a thoughtless obligation. Biologically, we ought to be treated like gold for the crucial part we play in evolution. But societally, somehow things got mixed up at the beginning of time, and men became “the stronger sex”. AND FOR WHAT, being able to plant their seeds like fucking Johnny Appleseed? Well, CONGRATULATIONS. But beyond the subconscious level, women and sex are linked and things are consistently sold by suggesting the reward of getting laid with the purchase of their product (plus tax). There are no Carls Jr. ads that I have seen that don’t have their hamburgers in the very close vicinity of a woman in a bikini. Oh, look, all I have to do is eat there and I’ll get all the babes! Ok, listen up, that’s enough of that. I want to turn the tables on men on both the subconscious and literal sense of things.

Subconsciously, the figure of power and the figure of domination, juxtaposed as a symbol of triumph (see: any military painting ever). The woman (wearer, but MORE IMPORTANTLY, the

designer) is acknowledging the sexualization of her being beyond her control, but is taking back that control by bearing it herself with her own twist on it. Literally having the vagina featured on the woman's clothes (that makes two or more of them, folks) is hoisting the literal sex symbol away from the male and dangling it in front of him. Added sex appeal (wait- let's debunk that phrase) of the garment emphasizes and compliments the figure and announces the presentation of their own being.

Literally, the woman is hoisting the male sex organ up in the air as a demonstration of conquest. She is laying down the results of the hunt in front of the leader of the pack (in this instance, that leader would be the general public...media...power to the people...democracy... hmmm) for approval. But that would just be an addendum praise, because this bitch knows she won. Not only will I wear my vagina as a symbol of pride, fighting years of subliminal messages about its uncleanness and single purpose, but I will wear YOURS too and I shall wear it around my neck.

I gotta stop here. How can this not be an insane feminist rant?

Immediately after I stopped writing I realized that it was a problem that I felt compelled to do so and thus resolved to mention that during my critique. Do you see how I checked myself just as I was getting started? Note, too, the word choice of *rant*. How much further could I have gotten if I weren't deterred by the stigma of being a crazy feminist? And why should I necessarily be concerned, though, when my department is overwhelmingly female? Somehow, subconsciously, I decided that it was better to downplay myself rather than be deemed melodramatic.

Here's my take on crazy feminism, though. Typically, men are the ones who label women as crazy feminists, and if it happens to be a woman condemning other women, it's usually because she still has the desire for male acceptance entrenched in her psyche and wishes to present herself as "not like other girls" to gain some sort of a superior approval over her female counterparts. And it's not even her fault: women are taught from a young age that being

successful is some form or another of pleasing a man. I suppose that this crazy label comes from a woman saying something that threatens the power structure or disturbs a feeling of comfort and control that men have internalized, and a lot of men's (there is a world of things to say about the phrase "not all men", but there's no time for that now) immediate reaction would be to swiftly accuse the perpetrator as being ugly and bitter over her seeming lack of getting laid. It is exceedingly strange that this is *always* the immediate counterattack- to insult a woman's appearance. To men (and especially men on the internet or Tinder), when they can't clearly explain their logic of the patriarchy resort to criticizing a woman's appearance, because obviously being ugly is the worst thing that a woman can be. That's how us crazy feminists know we've won an argument, though: you don't like how I look? Do you see how many shits I give? To men, however, this is the most reasonable way to combat the *clearly irrational* hatred of their sex.

But to quote the enlightening Instagram user @feministtinder, "The hatred of men on an individual basis is irrelevant to the empowerment of women on a global scale. Stop using individual examples of women who hate men to discredit the movement which aims to empower women. It's boring and transparent."¹ Yes, there are absolutely men out there who do hate women, and yet things they believe in are not dismissed just because they hate the other gender. With men, misogyny is brushed off; with women, *so-called* misandry is turned against them to discredit anything they say or do. Another lovely quote from @feministtinder is just too applicable: "Guy: feminists just cranky they too ugly to get any dick. Same guy: feminism is just

¹ "Hello I Am a Feminist on Instagram:." Instagram. N.p., 3 Jan. 2016. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.

an excuse to be a slut. WHICH IS IT I CAN'T KEEP UP?!!!"² There still persists the odd Madonna-whore complex, in which there is a double standard for women to be simultaneously pure and sexualized, and when men aren't pleased on the Internet this is the idea they settle into. It just illustrates exactly how men view women, exactly what I wrote about in my stream-of-consciousness earlier: *The woman's body is, for many, many years...forever, to be exact... representative of the value we offer to society. It is a symbol of conquered power, or power yet to be conquered. A prize, a reward, a thoughtless obligation. It is thoughtless, the way men view women's bodies as property; it's how things have always been, so it must be okay.*

It may be strange that I'm quoting an Instagram account in my auto-ethnography, but Tinder is a fascinating scientific study of the effects of male domination. The reaction men have to rejection is such swift nastiness that it's ironic that we are the ones being labeled crazy. I highly recommend visiting that Instagram page, where you will find hundreds of posts of conversations that go like this: men will say first say something that is the virtual equivalent of a catcall, the woman will respond defending herself or politely rejecting him, and the man will send a torrent of insults against her appearance or "bangability", fire off rape threats, or offer their own opinions on the merits of feminism (or lack thereof). I repeat: why are *we* the ones who are crazy?

On the Brink of Lunacy

So then, what *is* the threshold of non-crazy feminism? How far could I have gone in the development of my collection without breaching this invisible line? In order to answer this

² "Hello I Am a Feminist on Instagram:." Instagram. N.p., 31 Dec. 2015. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.

question, I need to examine exactly what in my collection was so risky. I had two parts to my main piece: the vagina and the penis. The silver evening gown featured two versions of a vagina, and was made evening wear as a nod to the beauty and power that women assume when dressed to the nines. The first vagina is featured on the top: the extra fabric forming the drape of the cowl neck creates a ruffly shape on the stomach reminiscent of the *labium minus*. The low cut hints at the shape of the breasts with an intimate opening. As for the second vagina, it is comprised of yards and yards of fabric gathered and hand sewn in select areas and placed at the back of the knees on top of a long train as a sort of a bustle. I purposely did not directly reference the look of the vagina but rather approached it as an aesthetic feature that calls for elegance, rather than being very obviously a vagina.

The evening gown was a balance between directly acknowledging the sexualization of her body (conducted through the low drape of the top revealing a natural cleavage and the skin-tight mermaid skirt) and the act of sexualizing herself, albeit in a different way. For one thing, she's sexualizing herself by choosing to wear a garment that is what one would call traditionally sexy in an acknowledgement of her own attractiveness and a willingness to present herself as a certain idea. For another thing, she's sexualizing herself by literally wearing the female sex organ externally on her body, pointing out the ridiculousness of the incredible value men place on one part of herself: look, this is what you wanted to see, right? Well, here it is! She is also concealing her own private areas from the public's gaze by placing the vaginas on top. By sexualization, I do not mean the presentation of her body as sexually attractive to the male gaze. Saying sexualization has a vaguely disturbing undertone of victimhood. Debunking the phrase "sexualization" is a topic for another paper, but in this context I merely mean it as a salutation to

what everyone is thinking about when viewing the wearer and the garment. There's no point in being coy about it; our society is so hyper-sexual, especially in the media and everyday entertainment, that we are now conditioned to respond in a certain way to bodies that draw attention (consciously or subconsciously) to the sexual organs.

By featuring it as an artistic element of her appearance, she is both critiquing it and celebrating it. Seeing the vagina expressed through the medium of fabric (four-way spandex stretch fabric, to be exact) places its distinctive shape and structure out of context thus highlighting its irregularities and, quite frankly, weird appearance. She is critiquing this odd drape of lubricated skin only through the lenses of materiality: look at this thing and look at how much men obsess over it at the expense of valuable things like compassion, fairness, love, etc. This reflects the lenses of critique back onto the male viewer. But she is also celebrating it, most simply, by choosing to wear it in the first place. The way one presents oneself is what one wishes to express about themselves, and by bearing this gown and subsequent vaginas the wearer is making a comment about her values and what she appreciates aesthetically. The environmental context of the wearer, the choice of luxurious fabric, the way she dresses and adorns herself otherwise, and the attitude she wears it with all add up to one statement about her relationship with vaginas: she is proud to own one, and she isn't afraid to stand up for it.

However, placing the vagina in this context (external, bare, singular) does force the viewer to approach it as an object. It is disconnected from its owner and thus any humanizing connection to an actual person. In an effort to stay supportive of the movement towards genderless beings and their personhood being separated from their genitals, it is hard to continue

to vouch for gender rights (especially using the symbol of the vagina) without being unsympathetic to the trans movement. It is similarly unsettling to reduce the symbol of patriarchal oppression to a sausage-like phallus, which both trivializes and dehumanizes the subject and the male gender. *Furthermore*, by focusing on sexual rights, sexual exploitation, and sexual autonomy, am I overlooking the truly pressing gender issues of our time by being blinded by my white, middle-class privilege? I shall have to explore this concept later on, though, because there is still much to say about the concept of crazy feminists.

I don't suppose that the vagina aspect of my piece would label it crazy. Perhaps some (low-key misogynist) people would note an almost obsession with the vagina, and that I should calm down with all the rah-rah feminism (we've seen it *hundreds* of times in the art world, dearie). That part is well and good, so let's turn towards the penises. The penis opera coat started out as an exploration of the material and the blurring together of sculpture and high fashion. I cut five-yard strips of the fabric, sewed the edges, flipped it inside out, stuffed it, and tied it off in various lengths using the ribbed selvage (what we call the edge of a fabric that situates the grain line). Wrapped around the body the sausages create interesting volume and depth and is just simply humorous. My collection had started out being about female sexual power, so I already knew that I could present this sausage link as some sort of conceptual contrast between the genders (or, as per my concept, the oppressed and oppressor). From there it developed into a more literal penis. I spent a few weeks in limbo as I was unsure of how, if it all, to develop the sausages into a more obvious phallus or garment. It concluded with me tying off the flesh tubes in the regular way but then looping them up and around to create the signature "dick and balls"

shape. Regrettably, this effect is not as obvious when tied around the body in a garment-like shape.

Judging by process of elimination, my guess would be that I cross the threshold of crazy feminism as soon as I take on the penis. Featuring vaginas in such a way would be expected of a feminist artist like myself, because a celebration of womanhood is a theme of such. I suppose if I were to relate the situation here to how women feel in the context of the national conversation on abortion, I could understand how men could view my piece as offensive. The fact that there is even a debate over how much power the government has over women's bodies is infuriating, but the most notable feature of the outrage we have is that men (white, upperclass, middle-aged, probably Catholic politicians) are the ones making decisions about something they can never truly know about. Their decisions have very real consequences, and when they have such laissez-faire attitudes towards rape (oftentimes brought up in the conversation about abortion) like Todd Akin when he noted that "if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to shut that whole thing down"³, it's atrocious that women are not the ones making decisions about legislature regarding female bodies.

Therefore, is it wrong of me to approach a subject I can never truly know about? Is it some form of cultural appropriation? This is just the beginning, too: maybe I'm already in the wrong merely by choosing the subject of male genitalia. But then I continue on to compare it to a sausage link. I'm equating the penis to a piece of meat... does that sound familiar? A large chunk of my concept is dedicated towards critiquing the sexualization of the woman's body. And a large

³ Gentilviso, Chris. "Todd Akin On Abortion: 'Legitimate Rape' Victims Have 'Ways To Try To Shut That Whole Thing Down' (VIDEO)." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 9 Aug. 2012. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.

chunk of sexualization is objectification, or the isolation of the sexual organs into a context in which it stands alone as a disconnected object of desire. Is it better that I'm only sexualizing one part of the male body, rather than the whole package (as in the entire body, not what you're thinking of)? But then I go even further by calling it a Trophy.

What is a trophy? To me, a trophy is a symbol. A trophy is the result of hunting animals and bringing home the winnings. In ancient times, it was a normal means of survival and was typically conducted by men. Today in our more affluent times hunting has turned into a sport, and the bigger the game, the better the hunter. The hunter will sometimes eat or sell his animal, but oftentimes he will adorn himself or his house with it instead. One can mount the head on a plaque and place it above a fireplace, one can stuff the animal and just have a taxidermied ornament lying around, one can flatten it into a rug, or one can drape it around one's neck as a muff, scarf, coat lining, or decoration. Women are typically the ones who wear minks and such, and it is interpreted as a symbol of her wealth. Not only that, they are a metaphor for domination, power, conquest, and triumph. This animal was killed by force and is worn as a sort of warning or means of intimidation. It is also belittling it to wear it lightheartedly as an accessory, since it demonstrates a lack of respect to its history and death as well. Tied up into one package of conquest, disrespect, and intimidation, the symbol of the trophy is not a particularly positive one.

...which is exactly my point. The penis coat is placed on top of these symbols of feminine power which stand as a protest against and a reclamation of sexualization. The protest against sexualization is connected to the idea of "a piece of meat"- pointing out the objectification and dehumanization that women receive from men on a daily basis, directly and indirectly. Time and time again women see themselves being valued solely for their bodies/

appearance or have their gender used against them in any sort of context. By wearing the vagina gown underneath the penis coat, the wearer is catching the attention of the viewer through the sculptural forms (penis?! where?!), telling her story of turning the tables on conquest through the penises, and then finishing with the power of the vagina. It is a three-tiered slice of cake.

The top tier serves as an attention-grabber precisely because it is the form of a penis presented in a compromised way. The woman is literally wearing a collection of isolated penises, immediately conjuring images of the act of castration and the *hoisting the male sex organ up in the air as a demonstration of conquest. She is laying down the results of the hunt in front of the leader of the pack (...) for approval.* It is slightly unsettling to view this woman as wearing a coat made up of castrated penises: she is indicating a history of violence and an air of indifference to the plight of the penises. These phalluses personally mean nothing more to her than a string of pearls would; they're an addendum to her wardrobe. It is exactly the kind of cold dignity that I am delighted to express myself and through my creations as kind of a feminist power trip.

Judging from all of that, I conclude that even mentioning the penis places me directly on the verge of crazy. But then I plunged headfirst into crazy, babbling on about trophies and practically foaming at the mouth about sexualization. Clearly my *time of the month* is getting in the way of my thinking rationally. But despite my dripping sarcasm and obvious anger about the current situation, I still don't want to be called a crazy feminist. And why is that? For one thing, I want myself, my ideas, and my beliefs to be taken seriously, and if my image is twisted into one of a madwoman, my voice will not be heard. I also believe in the leveling of the playing field between the sexes: I push so hard for women's rights as an effort to get us on the same level of

privilege that men have. I am not looking to elevate women above men; we are both human and both deserve equal opportunities and rights. We should coexist in a more appropriate manner than we do today. And that's what feminism is about- not the struggle for domination.

The problem is that what I believe in and my protests against current feminist issues already place me in a cage of insanity by the very people who need to hear it the most. Questioning my mental health and even dragging in my hormones is a defensive tactic used by men to allow themselves the freedom to not listen seriously to what is being said. Furthermore, my age and my profession as an artist (student artist at that) also work against me, because I am too young to really know what I'm talking about, and since I'm so *gosh-darned-right-brained* I am only *melodramatically* expressing my *emotions* and using them as a means of attention-seeking. Because that's all artists really are in the broad public view: weird people looking to get paid to express themselves on your living room wall. She thinks differently, don't worry about it. She's barely an adult, don't worry about it. Oh, she's probably menstruating, don't even think twice about it.

Thus, this is why I critique the backlash against so-called radical feminism: because it disregards the ideas of the "radicals" by framing them as being unworthy of respect and attention. It has very little to do with the actual ideas because men know that if they can write off the protester before anyone can hear her words, then what she is screaming about has no chance of cracking the patriarchal foundation that men rest upon. The threshold of crazy feminism relies on what concept the crazy feminist is pushing: if it exposes corruption or inequality, out it goes.

If it handles the male member in a manner that is anything but admiration and awe, it simply cannot be taken seriously. This, unfortunately, is applicable in all contexts.

On Emasculation and Glorification

Why did I feel it necessary to demonize penises in order to valorize vaginas? I find it odd that my immediate reaction is to strike out in protest at men via their genitalia. In doing so, I'm decisively equating manhood with their literal manhood- which is exactly what I'm protesting with my evening gown. But, in this context, my act of castration is a bad thing while the isolated vagina is a good thing. If that could effectively be called female circumcision, why am I offended at the objectification of my genitalia when I'm still using that same concept to speak through my own work? Why didn't it bother me that I could separate myself from my own vagina so cleanly and easily like that? But on the other hand, why *should* I be bothered when I can separate who I am as a person from what I look like on the outside? Am I still a crazy feminist if I can admit to the double standards in my own beliefs?

It's hard as a feminist artist to have as good a symbol for female solidarity as the vagina, but I cannot pinpoint where in my life I learned the symbolism of it. I suppose that my education right from the start was very gendered because here I am in college questioning for the first time the visual tools in my life practice. Despite the fact that I didn't even receive a sexual education course in grade school, I apparently still very much identify with the idea that gender and sex are mutual. But from a visual standpoint, how else can I describe my particular struggles as a woman without highlighting the most obvious difference between women and men? Likewise, I'm

painting the picture of the oppressor as what society would call a man, but this is a very specific picture of a man and does not cover the enormous span of female oppression. How does one personify misogyny? By using the symbolism of penises and vaginas, I'm limiting the spectrum of gender that could identify with what I'm saying if they cannot identify with what I'm showing.

This, unfortunately for us all, prompts a startling identity crisis when everything you believe in can no longer fit into two simple tokens. It appears as if I have to create a new definition of womanhood if I am to continue tackling the subject of gender rights in my work. It's not even that these are new ideas; it's that more and more trans people are having their voice heard in the public media. There was never a point when I didn't support trans rights or disagreed with what they were saying regarding their identity and the absurd value society places on our ideas of gender. But I didn't view it with the same urgency as I do now. I didn't realize that by continuing to voice my opinions on feminism via emphasis on the identity of woman I wasn't acting in an all-inclusive feminist manner. I was calling for more openness and acceptance towards all expressions of self in our society, and yet I didn't realize that I was setting a precedent for gender by repeatedly calling attention to very specific attributes of womanhood like the vagina, which only limits the definition of womanhood and alienates a population of people. It's also hard to identify who exactly my oppressor is if I am to be more open and inclusive for all ideas of gender.

It might be arguable that entire Trophy Collection is transphobic; I'm not quite sure of the exact perimeters of transphobia. The Collection did take on an interesting twist when I asked my

roommate Laura to be my model, though. It was early on in the design process when they accepted, and they then proceeded to undergo a period of personal transformation. They addressed their discomfort with the disconnect between themselves and their body, voiced more strongly their mental health issues, and took back the reins of their life by switching into a more personally fulfilling area of study. Their look has drifted more towards androgyny, and they asked people to use gender neutral pronouns. It was particularly odd that as my model was undergoing such disruptive life changes, I was still plugging away at a conceptual garment for them that almost focused on gender too much.

It's not even that they're only inhabiting the garment for the ten minute duration of my critique. There is that, when they're on stage with a crowd of critics studying how they wear the garment and discussing their embodiment of my feminist outrage. But the pictures of them will live on in my portfolio and on my website, seen time and time again by my potential employers and random Internet fans. To my viewers, their face will be linked to my garment and my idea. Laura is the one who bears the emasculated phalluses on top of the glorified vaginas, and, to some dim-witted people, is the one who is a crazy feminist.

I initially thought that Laura would be great as a model for that particular piece, because their androgynous look could leave open the interpretation of woman and question the traditional look of beauty and femininity. Their particular face and attitude could also take on a power that I loved to have paired with my concept. I don't disagree with that stance now, but it seems that not only am I almost hurting my own concept, but that it could also be offensive to them to have me use their body as a statement on gender when their body does not even correspond with their self.

I suppose that any model would technically be objectified in the literal sense as they do pose as an identity-less wall upon which to display the art. But Laura knows that people when are looking at their breasts in relation to the vagina drape of the top, they are only seeing them as a traditionally defined woman. The critics are looking at them, but they aren't truly seeing them. I was essentially asking them to be a cheerleader for a gender that they don't fully identify with and to critique a gender that they identify with more so. As for my concept, it felt very odd to stand before the judges calling for the sexual empowerment of women at the expense of men while my model didn't even believe in gender. There is obviously quite a bit to say about my model in relation to my concept, but how could I share my thoughts with the judges when they would only ask why I chose that model if they don't want to be seen as female?

The fact that Laura prefers to be genderless changes the expression of my concept. If a genderless figure is wearing a coat made of penises, where does that leave them? Say they do join the side of the vagina- does choosing the side of the oppressed change their gender or lack thereof? Because why would anyone want to join an oppressed demographic if they could find some value in the other? If they join the side of the penis, then the opera coat takes on the persona of a cage and strangles the wearer since they are the ones owning the vagina and "fraternizing with the enemy". And to add another layer of complications to my collection, there is the fact that my model is Columbian and my vagina is white. As in, while the final representation of the vagina was a neutral gray, the initial inspiration fabric was the same fabric used for the peach-colored phalluses. It worries me that my coat is referred to as being "nude", because that word only conjures images of white people. In this situation, I'm not sure if I'm representing white characters because it's what I know or if it's internalized racism. Probably the

fact that I didn't second-guess myself means that it is internalized racism. I don't know penises, but I think that if I changed the color of the coat, then my collection would be saying something completely different. Imagine if my images featured an androgynous person of color wearing an ambiguously shaped vagina dress being consumed by a blanket of penises-of-color? Am I making a comment on antiquated ideas about interracial sexual relationships? Am I avoiding representing a race I'm not a part of because I'm subconsciously scared of "the other"? Or would it be presumptuous of me to make art about an identity that I don't know as a white woman?

I have to constantly check myself to make sure I'm not getting caught up in the phenomena of white feminism. I am white, and I do recognize my privilege as so. However, I hope to use my voice to call out this privilege and elevate the voices of women of color, and I strive to avoid getting caught up in the issues that are largely applicable only to white women. I am in danger of being a white feminist with all of my work, artistic and otherwise, focusing on sexual assault and bodily autonomy. It is harder still to argue for my value of sexual freedom when I am again equating sex to gender and effectively cutting some out of the conversation, which is exactly the opposite of my goal. I still stand by my work on sexual assault with the Title IX Office, because sexual assault is unfortunately an issue that touches on and hurts all of us, regardless of identity. It can even be more pertinent of an issue since women of color and transfolk are assaulted at higher rates than white women. Even men are definitely affected by this issue, especially when it's considered weak to get raped as a man and is thus a taboo subject. But even after all of this, I'm still not sure if I'm presenting myself and my values most accurately if I only offend some groups while promoting others. The intersection of race, gender, sexuality,

and class is tenuous, and while our understandings are still evolving, it is particularly hard to articulate my beliefs.

Conclusion

What I find the most odd out of all of this is that I'm so passionate about what I believe, and yet it's so hard to collect my thoughts into one paper. My thoughts, now and back then, as well as my finished garment can be disrupted by the littlest things. Innocent outside forces like my model completely change my concept and force me to reevaluate my conscience by asking why I acted in the ways that I did. It's nearly impossible to gather control of every single little aspect of my collection and have it perfectly harken back to my concept. My concept, too, is a difficult approach being that it says so much about a broad spectrum of things that break off into endless branches of subtopics. Am I biting off more than I can chew?

Regardless, I started this auto-ethnography with the purpose of clarifying my vision to myself and my viewers. I reminisced about the premature phase of my design process. I reflected on how women can be branded feminazis. I dissected my collection and spread the parts out on the table for further review. I explained the inspiration behind the concept of a trophy, and I speculated on how I might be labeled crazy. I complained about losing my favorite object to draw, and I ended with examining how the conversations about transrights and racism fit into my focus on gender. I wanted to emerge on the other side as a coherent crazy feminist, and I think I succeeded.

My career in Apparel this year will carry on to teach me tailoring, and then next year I will spend both semesters creating a capsule collection that will be showcased in both Providence and New York City. Next year is my chance to really take advantage of my audience and feature an issue that is very important to me. Due to the lack of political or social commentary in the fashion industry, I have the audience, credentials, motivation, and power to say something that needs to be heard. I know for certain that my concept will involve gender rights to some degree, and I hope that this year will allow me to grow and settle into beliefs that I am comfortable with regarding race, sexuality, gender, and class. In short, I hope I find the answers to the questions I'm asking. I hope that next year I will maintain the passion that designates me to lifelong lunacy and that I can create a poignant collection that will call me a crazy feminist itself.



Works Cited

- Gentilviso, Chris. "Todd Akin On Abortion: 'Legitimate Rape' Victims Have 'Ways To Try To Shut That Whole Thing Down' (VIDEO)." The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 9 Aug. 2012. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.
- "Hello I Am a Feminist on Instagram:." Instagram. N.p., 3 Jan. 2016. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.
- "Hello I Am a Feminist on Instagram:." Instagram. N.p., 31 Dec. 2015. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.

Works Consulted

- Butler, Judith. Undoing Gender. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- "Catherine MacKinnon." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.
- "Hello I Am a Feminist (@feminist_tinder) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Hello I Am a Feminist (@feminist_tinder) • Instagram Photos and Videos. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2016.
- "Radical Feminism." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.
- "SCUM Manifesto." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.
- Steinhauer, Jillian. "Feminist Activists Bleed and Defecate on Islamic State Flag #NSFW." Hyperallergic RSS. N.p., 27 Aug. 2014. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.
- Brown, Wendy. States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.
- Wold, Nathan. "10 Of The Craziest Ideas Pushed In The Name Of Feminism - Listverse." Listverse. N.p., 24 Dec. 2014. Web. 09 Jan. 2016.

To view my work in the context of this auto-ethnography, please visit www.lucillecrelli.com.