

Western society diminishes and ignores the female point of view and because of this, women are not often heard or portrayed well. Creative fields are commonly male dominated and I take issue with that as a female artist. I created this piece in order to highlight three of my female peers and their voices, while still recognizing some of the problems with female representation as it is today.

I made sun prints of these women's belongings because I wanted the pieces to be about them, while still only being an overall impression of who they are. This is also why I chose very short quotes from my conversations with them. I learned so much about these people from my interviews with them, but the pieces only reveal a sliver of that information. I wanted this piece to be slightly figurative in nature, and to be something the viewer has to search through to see every detail.

I used embroidery because I wanted these prints to at first glance just seem to be something delicate and beautiful, while then unfolding to be something more, just as women are so often perceived. I believe that women deserve to be seen and to be heard, and this piece serves as a step towards that.

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I remember being a latchkey kid. Everyday my mission was to find new ways to entertain myself, especially when my siblings weren't home. Sometimes they were playing video games with our neighbors, or Brodny had soccer practice and Ashler had ballet. Starting when I was 7 and no one was home I snuck into my siblings' room and took the books Brodny never let me read. *Calvin and Hobbes*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, and his comic books. He was afraid that I was going to ruin them. The book shelf was by the window and it was packed so tightly with books that I had to pull really hard to get one out. I looked for the books with the most pictures because I thought reading was boring. My brother had a big book with pictures and stories of superheroes. It was like a huge atlas just for Marvel characters. It had a big shiny black cover and a lot of pictures, which I liked. I took the book and hurried back to my room and spread out on the floor. Laying on my stomach I looked through all of the superheroes. I flipped through every page looking for the female characters. There weren't many, but every time I found one I dogtagged the top corner of the pages. Then I went through and ranked the heroes based on how pretty they were. I paired them up with a male character and imagined a whole life for them. Supergirl and Aquaman moved to the bottom of the sea, had three kids and they all lived happily ever after. Batgirl and Batman got married, had three kids and they all lived happily ever after.

When I was six I remember playing house. I'd play the housewife and be married to one of the boys from school. I'd send him off to work and take care of the kids. I remember fake kissing and awkward hugs, because boys were gross and I had boundaries. When the game started to get boring I collapsed so that the boy could come save me. Sometimes I'd dramatically die, because Romeo and Juliet taught me that a tragic death is interesting. When I was nine I rode the school bus everyday next to my best friend Maya. I remember wondering why all the Barbies we owned were so skinny. We decided to make our Barbies fat. We took stuffing from the art room at school and on the bus ride back home we stuffed all of Barbie's clothes. We tied their clothes up with string so none of the stuffing would fall out. I remember being so proud of our lumpy Barbies. I also remember still wanting to play with the prettier one. Why did I do all of these things as a kid? Where do these ideas come from?

I believe that feminism is a movement towards total equality between people of every race, ability, class, sexual orientation and gender identity. The movement is also based in the advocacy of women's rights. Even though this movement has slowly become well known in western society there are still things keeping people from this equality. Specifically, there is a lack of good representation in literature, the film industry, and the visual art world. There is a lack of good female representation. Whether that means the representation is negative, stereotyped, or nonexistent. It's hard to find popular media like blockbuster films, and best selling novels with strong women as the primary subjects. It's also true for the creative minds behind them. Male dominance and gender stereotypes perpetuates gender inequality as a whole; the longer Western society considers poor representation as a societal norm, the harder it is to dispute. Linda Nochlin quotes John Stuart Mill in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" which says that "everything that is usual appears natural." The idea that the more you see something the more natural it seems helps explain what really scares me about the lack of good female representation. Because the poor representation seemed so natural to me I only started to notice there was a problem in the last couple of years. I can remember so many times in my life, especially as a child, where society communicated ideas of a "woman's place" in the world, like when I played house I had to stay home and take care of the children, and superheroes in my brother's book had to save the girl rather than the girl doing the saving. These problems were easy to ignore as a kid though, because everyone seemed so okay with it. I only really started to care about the lack of a strong female presence in society because other

people told me it was a problem. I am incredibly lucky to be apart of communities that choose to recognize this as a problem, both my family and my fellow artists. Because of this I think about whether or not I would care so much if the people around me didn't tell me that there was something wrong with how society approaches a "woman's place". Would I even realize there was a problem? It is commonly said that ignorance is bliss, but for who? The danger of this ignorance towards female representation perpetuates the sexist ideals in place. A society that is not informed is a society that cannot make change.

There is a vicious cycle between the media we consume and the world we live in. The media mimics reality and reality mimics the media. So how, when the common view of women is either skewed or nonexistent, can females create an authentic representation for themselves? How can authentic representation help lead to true gender equality? Women must continue to fight for their stories to be told, and tell their own stories through creative means. A large part of this bad representation is who gets to decide which person's story is worth being told. Usually, the *who* is a man. To fight this broken system that perpetuates poor female representation, women must create new systems, platforms, and institutions for creating authentic representations of women. Women should be represented as they see fit, because right now they don't have control over their own stories. Men have dominated every form of storytelling in the arts, and this is a problem because it only provides a limited point of view. In *Women's Autobiographical Artists' Books*, by Pamela Zwehl--Burke and Leslie Fedorchuk, they write that "Women's Autobiographical Artists' Books stand as a testament to the basic tenet of feminism—that the lives and issues of women are worthy and vital subjects for art-making." It is platforms like this that help inform people about feminist issues and the importance of a female voice. Women are worthy subjects and the only way to show that is to prove it. An ArtNews article talks about the importance of speaking up:

Cultural critic bell hooks also emphasizes the importance of women standing their ground, and urges all writers from oppressed groups to speak, to talk back, a term which she defines as the movement from object to subject. "Speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat." To talk back is to liberate one's voice. However, as Sarah Ahmed cautions, to "speak out" or "call out" an injustice is to run the risk of being deemed a "feminist killjoy," and a complainer.

To fight the injustices in society against women, women themselves must speak up and inform others. Creative works about women and by women can help inform society as a whole, and then maybe authentic female representation can become normal.

The idea of a "woman's place" starts when we're only children with the fairy tales we're told. In "...Happily Ever After" (Or What Fairytales Teach Girls About Being Women)" by Alice Neikirk, she states that "...these republished stories yield a distinct trend that focuses on validating women through submissive beauty while men are portrayed as active and, at times, violent." A majority of children, especially in Western society, depend on these classic stories to inform day to day life. It fuels the dreams of little girls and boys. In common adaptations of fairy tales like "Cinderella" and "Rapunzel" it pits two women against each other and waits for the man to save the day. For little girls, it is common to dream of being a beautiful princess, who is saved by a prince. Neikirk also writes that "fairy tales have never been bedtime stories; in this day in age they have morphed into a very

effective means of exercising power over women and maintaining gender inequality". Fairy tales accompany children through formative years and begin to form archetypal associations with gender. Girl versus boy, princess or prince, evil queens and witches. Fairy tales claim to teach morals, but how good can they be when they reinforce an oppressive representation of women? Society relies on these classics as reference for new media, like Disney movies, picture books, and contemporary versions of the stories. This negative representation of women may have started when we were children, but it has followed us into our presents.

The stories children are told to cherish continue to be harmful, even past the time of fairy tales. When thinking about books I have read in school, the majority of literary classics, found in most English classes, are been written by white men. Teenagers are taught that books worth reading are those told from a male perspective which, in turn, invalidates the female. In terms of contemporary literature, the inequality between continues "Women make up 71 percent of the publishing workforce in the US" (Caroline Cuando-Perez). This makes it seem that the publishing industry is far from being sexist and could even be considered progressive. Sadly, this is not the case. Even though men only make up 29 percent of the workforce in the publishing industry, management is 49 percent male. Even in a female dominant industry like publishing, women are still underrepresented in management positions. Strong female characters are also underrepresented in the literature itself, or at least in literature being highly recognized. In "Publishing Is a Women's World": Gender Inequality in the Writing Industry" it says that "Over the 15 years of prize giving, the Pulitzer was awarded to a book with a female protagonist a grand total of zero times". This is just one example of a corrupt system that has a bias towards male representation. Also, reviews of books by popular newspapers and publications tend to cover books written by men rather than women. A 2012 report by VIDA concluded that The Atlantic reviewed twenty male authors and only nine females, and only seventeen percent of the New Yorker's reviews were on female authors. The industries and systems set up to recognize literature is male run, and male dominated. The men in charge of literary exposure continue to promote and review books and authors written by men. This is wrong because it indirectly creates the idea that men are superior at writing and telling stories, and that women's voices do not deserve to be heard. If women's books aren't even being read, then how can one fight for female representation?

There is a similar trend of the film industry. An infographic published by the New York Film Academy presented the prominent gender inequality in film with facts such as "30.8 percent of speaking characters are women" and "28.8 percent of women wore sexually revealing clothes as opposed to 7 percent of men". These facts show that not only is there a very minimal amount of female representation, but when there is, it is often in a sexually exploitive way. A lot of movies feature women only as arm candy for men or as eye candy for the viewer. For example, In the James Bond franchise there is often a woman to accompany Bond. These women are commonly known as "Bond girls". Women are shown as simple reinforcements for the larger male character. A popularized way of determining a movie's watchability in terms of female representation is called "The Bechdel Test." The test was named after the author Alison Bechdel, who wrote about the test in her comic "Dykes to Watch Out For." The test has three major guidelines. 1. It has to have at least two female characters. 2. The two characters have to talk to each other. 3. They must be talking to each other about something other than a man..

As The Bechdel test became a part of popular culture people started to see how many movies fail to pass the seemingly simple test and because of this people started to notice the gender inequality enforced by films. Female representation in film follows a lot of the archetypes presented in old stories, like fairy tales. Women are shown often only as housewives, mothers, or maids. In one way

or another women are shown as submissive and secondary as characters. Barely ever are women shown as CEOs or political leaders in movies. Actress Geena Davis states:

The fact is – women are seriously under-represented across nearly all sectors of society around the globe, not just on-screen, but for the most part we're simply not aware of the extent and media images exert a powerful influence in creating and perpetuating our unconscious biases. However, media images can also have a very positive impact on our perceptions," she went on to say. "In the time it takes to make a movie, we can change what the future looks like. There are woefully few women CEOs in the world, but there can be lots of them in films. How do we encourage a lot more girls to pursue science, technology and engineering careers? By casting droves of women in STEM, politics, law and other professions today in movies.

If the answer is so simple, then why hasn't it happened yet? A large contributor to that is the male presence behind the camera. The New York Film Academy infographic states that the top 500 films from 2007-2012, men made up 91 percent of directors and 85 percent of writers. When the film industry is male dominated, it makes sense that the movies as well would be comprised of mostly men. Forbes writer Dorothy Pomerantz states in her article "Women Still Ridiculously Underrepresented in Movies" that "Filmmaking is a creative endeavor. People tell stories from their own point of view. And if most of the people telling those stories are men, then inevitably, most of those stories are going to be about men and the male perspective." In order for anything to change women must be making films, and then women will have representation and voice. When there are female directors there is a 10.6 percent increase in female characters; and when there are female writers there is a 8.7 percent increase. The answer is simple, women must tell stories from their own perspective as a female. Only then can there be a truly authentic representation of the female condition.

The sad part is there are already women making movies, but most of them go unrecognized by the general public. In film festivals, like Sundance, the ratio of male to female made films are approximately equal. It shouldn't be surprising that women are out there making films, but what is surprising is that barely any of these female run films are shown worldwide. Most of the movies that make it to the big screen are made by men and about men. There is a systematic problem with unequal representation in Hollywood . Actress Shonda Rhimes speaks out on the issue by saying:

The world of movies is fascinating to me because everyone has amnesia all the time. Every time a female-driven project is made and succeeds, somehow it's a fluke. Instead of just saying The Hunger Games is popular among young women, they say it only made money because Jennifer Lawrence was luminous and amazing. I mean, you go get yours, girl. But seriously, that's ridiculous.

If the definition of success in the film industry is based on box office ratings and big awards, how can women achieve the same success when their films don't even make it to the box office? And how can women succeed when awards like the Oscars are run by and favor men? On average, 77 percent of Oscar voters are male and, as said in an Indiewire article by Paula Bernstein, "since 1928 only 16 percent of all Oscar nominees have been female." Only one woman has ever won an Oscar for best

director in the last century. In film and in literature there is favor towards men because the people deciding what is worth being seen are men. This is the reason women's voices are being silenced and it needs to stop.

This sad inequality follows into the visual arts world. Even though a majority of students in BFA and MFA programs are female, the contemporary art world continues to be male dominated. An ArtNews article writes that "fine art graduates have a 6 to 1 female to male ratio, yet approximately only 30 percent of the artists represented by commercial galleries are women." Where does the lack of visibility for female artists come from? Part of the problem comes from poor museum representation. A famous work by activist group The Guerrilla Girls asks "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met museum? Less than 4 percent of the artists in the modern art sections are women, but 76 percent of the nudes are female." Big museums and institutions present women as "eye candy", but not as valid artists. Women are being cut out of the creative world one exhibition at a time. The problem doesn't only persist in the present, but in the past as well. Art history is absent of many strong female artist role models. Art historian Linda Nochlin challenges this problem in her essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" She raises questions of women's capability of greatness and why there are no female equivalents to Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Picasso, or Matisse. There is a bias for men in art history through viewing them as godlike and geniuses. Nochlin states that:

The rubric of "Great"-an honorific attested to by the number of scholarly monographs devoted to the artist in question-and the Great Artist is, of course, conceived of as one who has "Genius"; Genius, in turn, is thought of as an atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in the person of the Great Artist.' Such ideas are related to unquestioned, often unconscious, meta-historical premises that make Hippolyte Taine's race-milieu-moment formulation of the dimensions of historical thought seem a model of sophistication. But these assumptions are intrinsic to a great deal of art-historical writing. It is no accident that the crucial question of the conditions generally productive of great art has so rarely been investigated, or that attempts to investigate such general problems have, until fairly recently, been dismissed as unscholarly, too broad, or the province of some other discipline, like sociology.

The basis of such genius is defined on the exposure of such an artist. Nochlin points out that "to encourage a dispassionate, impersonal, sociological, and institutionally oriented approach would reveal the entire romantic, elitist, individual glorifying, monograph-producing substructure upon which the profession of art history is based." Again there is evidence of a male centered definition of success. Women cannot be great artists because to be a great artist one must be celebrated and in museums and galleries. One must have dozens of monographs to their name. One must be a genius and Godlike. Museum management and gallery owners not only favor male artists, but are male. Artist Georgia O'Keeffe says it best, "The men liked to put me down as the best woman painter, I think I'm one of the best painters." As a female artist I have such a deep respect for the female artists that proceed me. Artists like Jenny Saville, who confronts the common view of the female form by painting bodies not often recognized, and Louise Bourgeois, a famous feminist artist. Georgia O'Keeffe and her floral paintings that mimic female anatomy, Ana Mendieta, Yoko Ono, and Jenny Holzer. I recognize these artists not just as amazing female artists, but as amazing artists. I cringe at the notion that they may not be considered as great.

How are women supposed to work towards greatness when the most important requirement to be great is to be born male? Women must push for new definitions of greatness, and to do so, they need to create platforms that recognize women. This could mean galleries run by women for women, or books, websites and magazines. Women should also take advantage of the digital age and social networks. Creating online communities and followings help foster reputations in art forms like film, literature, and visual art. By making an online presence women can find their way around the institutions that prohibit their success. By supporting other women, females can climb towards the positive recognition that is so deserved.

The Patriarchal traditions and sexist ideals set in place when presenting artforms are keeping women on the sidelines. To create an authentic representation of women, society must recognize the institutionally supported bias towards men. For too long men have told the stories of our past, present and future. Through “the prince and the princess”, “the male protagonist”, “the artist and his muse”, glorification of the individual is a luxury of man, not woman. By creating ways to redefine greatness, women can become collectively victorious. Gender inequality is reinforced by history, and who has had the privilege to tell it. History is told by the victors, and so far, man has always been victorious. What about women? Women should, as art historian Linda Nochlin says, “Be fearless, speak up, work together, and constantly make trouble.” The conversation has only just begun, but through platforms that support and fight for women to be heard, the world may just realise the need for positive female representation. Women should make art about themselves, and tell children stories of women as CEO’s and leaders. Only by banding together can women make a new equitable system. We are playing a rigged game and the only way to win is to change the game altogether. Women must make art about women. Women can write their own histories and claim greatness, both as women and as people.

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