

WE NEED FEMINISM

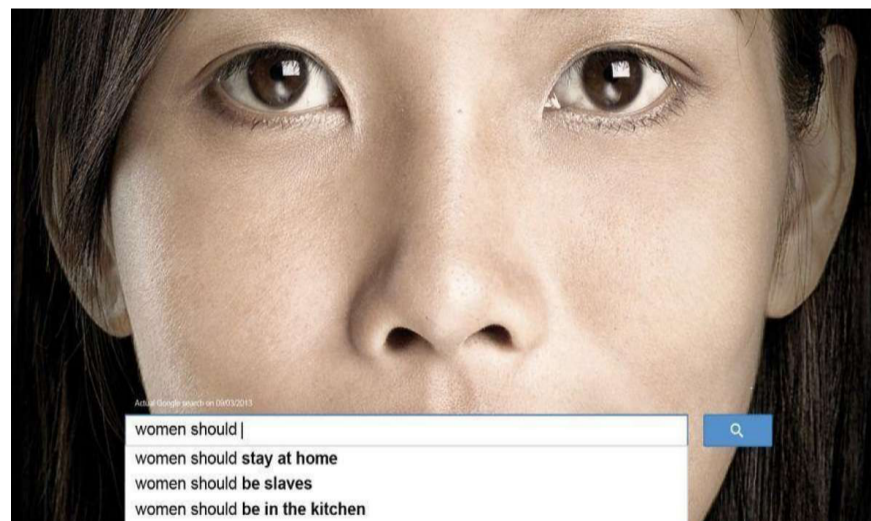
By: Natasha Lee

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

When we look at messages from the public domains of entertainment, popular culture and media, numerous societal expectations of women are put on display. Sexism has become deeply ingrained in our society and culture, becoming the norm especially in Chinese culture where there is an extreme lack of mainstream feminist discourse. An ideal woman in Chinese culture is expected to uphold traditional norms of femininity – to aspire to marriage, to conform to certain standards of beauty and character traits. One of the most famous Confucian dictums stated that women should follow the ‘three obediences and the four virtues,’ which required women to obey their fathers before marriage, their husbands in marriage, and their sons in widowhood. The four virtues were that women were to maintain morality and practice proper speech, modest manners and diligent work. They should also adorn themselves in order to please men. This ideology has permeated Chinese culture for over 2000 years, causing the misogyny and sexism throughout Chinese society that starts from before birth, with the fact that parents prefer boys to girls (Cheung, Fanny M). I personally have seen many ads on TV for wedding services, where the central message is that being married to a handsome and wealthy man is the fulfillment of a woman’s life purpose.



In addition, the term Shengnu, or “leftover woman”, which describes an urban professional woman over the age of 27 who is unmarried, is a term China’s Ministry of Education has added to its official lexicon. Under the Communist Party in China, women are brought up to think that by 25 they must hunt for a partner. If not married by 28, they are pressured to “triumph against the odds”. Between 31 and 34, still-unmarried women are referred to as “advanced leftovers”. By 35, a single woman is the “ultimate” leftover women, spiritually flawed in thinking she is higher than the mandate of marriage (O’Sullivan, Kira).



Moreover, misrepresentations by the media have taken a serious toll on feminism. There is a strong misconception that feminism reduces the importance of male issues and some women who are privileged enough feel like they don’t need feminism, giving way to the Women Against Feminism movement (O’Neill, Louise). However, this is extremely detrimental to the feminist movement, because it dismisses the systematic oppression of women and ignores the plight of other women in the world who don’t have the opportunities others do. Feminists also lack public support and are often greeted with smear campaigns and it can be shameful and even risky to raise a voice against the system. This is especially evident in China - or in my case Hong Kong, where I have person

ally experienced much of this culture of silence. The culture of silence refers to the lack of mainstream discussion on women rights and the tendency to ignore issues such as violence against women like rape and domestic violence. The deeply rooted patriarchal principles and traditional values in countries like China have resulted in women being afraid to speak up because of the cultural stigma, with the values becoming internalised in us such that they intrude in on our minds and permeate our thoughts, affecting the way we act (Lovell, Julia). Both men and women’s mindsets need to change at every level, and all of us need to recognize the inherited prejudices of our collective consciousness. It is something I feel very strongly about, but have never been able to express how I feel, which is something I hope to accomplish with this video.

In trying to conform ourselves to society’s standards, we are playing into the male gaze and patriarchy, losing our sense of self and identity. We’re putting so much pressure on ourselves to be everything, because of the expectations and we try to attain the unattainable, but just become less satisfied with ourselves, because these standards are almost impossible to meet. It is a inherent problem deeply entrenched in our society and culture. Women are trapped within the expectations of perfection and society’s preconceptions of what women should or shouldn’t be. We’re held back by the limitations forced on us by society and culture, like the pressures of the societal demands and expectations laid on us, from the way we look to the way we act. It’s a daily struggle against all that which is imposed on society and imposed by ourselves, because we are slaves to society’s expectations (Slaughter, Anne-Marie).

INSPIRATION

My initial idea was to have the women in my video speak combined with some text showing on the screen and a few voiceovers. I also wanted to incorporate the use of text in a manner similar to Lalla Essaydi, a Moroccan artist who was one of my influences for a photographic installation project I did last year, which I did end up including a small clip of in my final video. She writes Arabic calligraphy all over the background and her subjects' bodies in an attempt to reverse the male gaze to empower women so that they are no longer objects. She portrays women as reclaiming their own space by clothing them and giving them a direct gaze and make clear that the Orientalist work of male artists in the past is harmful to the perception of Muslim women by objectifying them as sexual objects, often in harems, seeking to show another facet of Arab women (Waterhouse, R). Unfortunately due to time restraints, this was not accomplishable, so I decided to project the words on people instead. But the idea of the female gaze which Essaydi employed was something I did try to portray in my video.



Lalla Essaydi
Les Femmes du Maroc no. 21B, 2006
Chromogenic Print on Aluminum
152 X 121 cm, Ed. of 15



An outtake from my installation project

IDEA

Originally, I wanted to create a more informative video to raise awareness of feminist issues and explore the conflicting role of women in modern society, because feminism is something that is extremely important to me. It's a major theme in many of my artworks and it's also something I think about a lot on a daily basis. However I felt that was a little generic, so I decided to make it more personal by including my own thoughts on different situations that I encounter in my everyday life, including my experiences in Hong Kong and things I noticed throughout the years that bothered me. Realizing how disillusioned and frustrated I was, I decided to make the focus of my video on how tired I was with the slight step back feminism has taken in the 21st century and reinforce the need for feminism in our society. However, once I started brainstorming, I realized my thoughts had started to take the shape of a monologue. Hence, I decided to change my original idea and focus on the voiceover narration as the main part instead. The video elements would then act as a supporting element to enhance the emotional impact and mood of my piece.

PROCESS

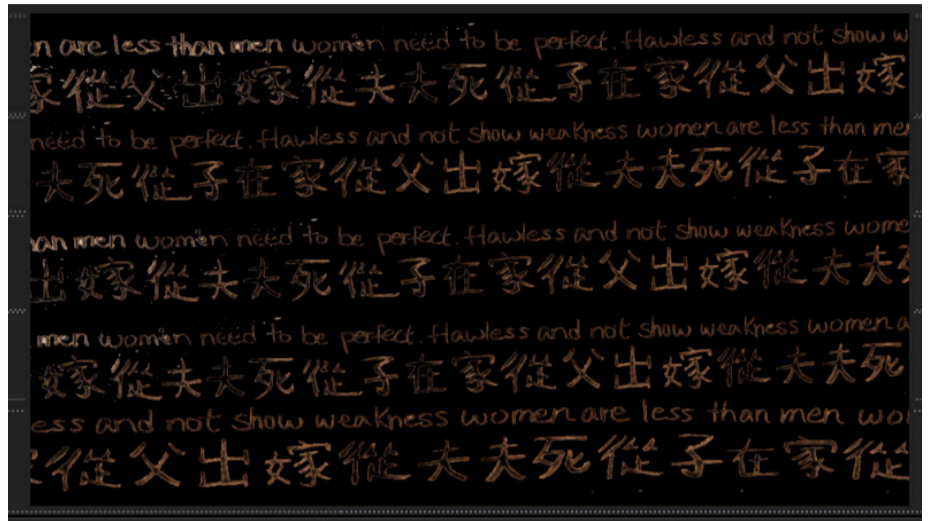
For my text projection, I tried playing around with some text animation in Adobe After Effects, but when it came to actually projecting it, it didn't work out. So I ultimately decided to settle for using colorful patterns instead, because I liked the effect and it still allowed me to project something on the human body, which was something I wanted to have in my video, as bodies is a concept that feature a lot in my artwork as well. I filmed two of my classmates and had then film me as well, but I also pulled some footage from a short film by Lucy Rose Wilson-Green that I found on Youtube (Perspective Productions), which I had saw previously and had inspired the tone of my video and the images I used for projection, as well as the way I filmed my classmates.



A still from my own footage featuring my classmate

While I did intend to use the text animation I created for the projection, ultimately that idea didn't work out, because I felt it didn't really fit the mood of my piece and would take the attention away from the people. I wanted it to have a very raw and organic vibe to it, with a more solemn mood and natural and minimal feel, as well as a sense of poignancy. I wanted my video to start with the definition of the word feminism, to try and correct any misconceptions people have and end with the question: Are you a feminist? to convince people that they should be feminists.

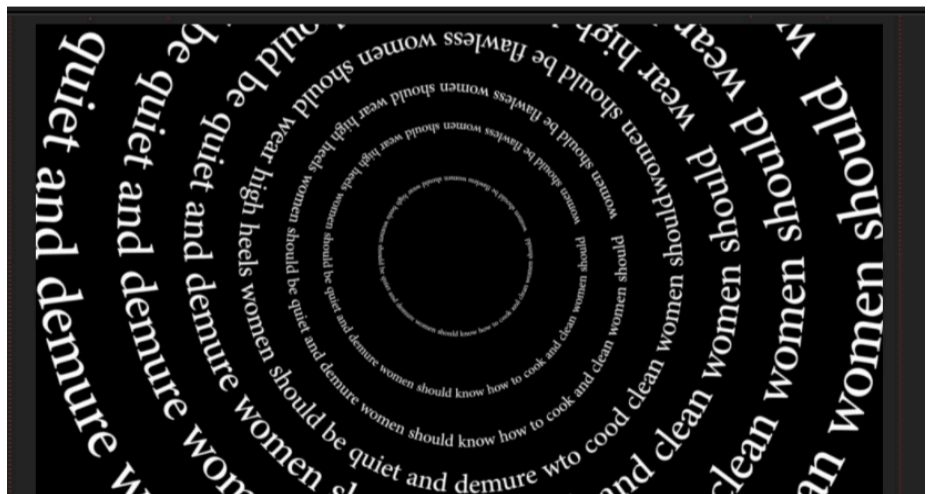
In terms of the music, I found a piano version of the song: Live Like Legends by Ruelle to use as the background music, because I felt it was slightly sad yet it still conveyed a strong determination. I recorded myself with my iPhone and used Audacity to edit it slightly and remove some of the reverb. As for the footage, I tried to fit them to correspond with what I was saying, for example: having the footage of fire projecting on the woman when I say: "I'm tired of the word feminism being synonymous with angry feminist" and shots of women looking distraught when I say "I'm tired of being expected to marry, of the stigma towards single women..."



One of the text animations I was initially planning to use



A still from Lucy Rose Wilson-Green's short film Feminism Is Relevant | We Are Not Defined By Gender



Another one of the text animations I was initially planning to use

FEMINISM

noun

The advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men

SCRIPT

I am a feminist because I'm tired.
I'm tired of having to be wary about walking home at night alone
of never being able to feel safe
of constantly being self-conscious and worrying about how I look
of having low self esteem because I don't fit society's
standards of beauty
of all the expectations I have to live up to, having to hear about how I should act in order to be a proper women
and being seen as lesser to men
I hate that girl is an insult, that it's associated with weakness
and I hate that sexism and injustice is so ingrained in our society that people have accepted it

I'm tired of waking up everyday and reading about a new rape case
I'm tired of victim blaming, of slut shaming, of the
conservative attitudes of the older generation
She was asking for it, no she wasn't

I'm tired of watching movies where women who don't
conform to conventional standards of beauty always have to undergo transformations in order to be loved by men again.
I'm tired of being expected to marry, of the stigma towards single women, of the narrative that our lives are unfulfilled until
we find a boyfriend, that a woman's life isn't complete without a husband and at least one child and that by the time we
reach the age of 30 we're done for

I'm tired of seeing women being objectified in the media
of our worth being determined by our looks and not our ability

I'm tired of patriarchy, of the silence and indifference
towards feminist related issues
just because you don't experience it doesn't mean other people don't

I'm tired of the ignorance of men, of the sexist scumbags who complain and look down on women and I hate that women
are never given equal opportunities as men - no matter how qualified we are

I'm tired of the word feminism being synonymous with
angry feminist - as if we don't have anything to be angry about
But most of all, I'm tired of being helpless because I don't know what to do
We need feminism because no matter what we do, we can't win, not if things keep going this way



A still from my own footage featuring myself



A still from Lucy Rose Wilson-Green's short film Feminism Is Relevant | We Are Not Defined By Gender

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