

Project statement:

I created two gymnastics uniforms. One was for a child, approximately age 6, and the other was for an adult. The uniforms were split directly down the center: half male gymnastics uniform and half female gymnastics uniform. The two halves, male and female, were then sewn together to create one full uniform.

I've known since the beginning of the semester that I was going to focus my unessay on something to do with sexism in sports. As women, feminism and sexism are topics that I am particularly passionate about. I was originally thinking about tying my unessay into something about the lack of women in all aspects of sport/athletic research (and research in general) because research is another thing that I am interested in. However, I was having trouble figuring out the vessel for the project portion of my unessay that I thought would do that topic justice. I decided to go back through some of the readings and my notes from the sexism unit in class and two articles stood out most to me, the Vox article on Serena Williams (Abad-Santos), and the Sapiens article on sexism in the Olympics (Ocobock). During the classes that we discussed these articles, I remembered our discussions on the beach volleyball uniforms as well, which was something I took interest in while discussing it in class. I was thinking about different ways that I could represent some version of sexism in sports for the unessay, and as I love to sew, I thought I would do a sewing project. I was originally thinking about sewing a men's uniform and women's uniform separately to compare them, but it didn't seem creative enough for this project. I was looking up different sports uniforms for men versus women and I came upon the NBC photo series (Compton), in which an androgenous model poses in both the male and female versions of different sport uniforms. I thought the side-by-side comparison was really cool and realized that I

could take it one step further by making them two sides of the same uniform. Once I had decided to do this, I was having a hard time figuring out what sport I wanted to represent. I didn't want to do beach volleyball, as we have talked about that in class a few times, so I found the Indystar article that showed differences in a few sports. I thought that gymnastics was a good sport to represent, as it is popular for both men and women (at least at the Olympic level), and the differences between their uniforms is pretty stark. When I was getting the supplies to make the uniform, I found a girls leotard and thought that adding the children's element as well would be interesting: if the differences in uniform is greatly due to sexualization of female athletes (which I believe it is), why are young girls wearing the same thing as the grown women and therefore being subject to that sexualization? Thus, I decided to create a children's gymnastic uniform and an adult's gymnastics uniform, both half male and half female.

For financial reasons, I could not buy legitimate gymnastics uniforms or yards of lycra or spandex to make them completely from scratch. I decided to buy the individual pieces from my local goodwill to create the uniforms. I bought a child's and a men's athletic t-shirt, which I cut into tank tops, as well as a child's and a men's sweat/track pants that looked similar, but not quite exact, to the pants that male gymnasts wear to compete. I also bought a girl's leotard, and due to the limited selection at my goodwill, a women's swimsuit for the female half of the uniform. As the women's swimsuit is not exact to a gymnast's leotard, I added a sparkly mesh sleeve to make the swimsuit look more like a leotard. I then cut each piece directly in half, lined them all up and sewed them together.

Sources:

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Self-Assessment:

1. What did you learn?
 - a. Doing my unessay, I dove deeper into my knowledge about sexism in sport, especially in regards to the representation of gender through uniforms. I learned about the term “sexploitation” which I had never actually heard before, but I think is a really interesting term to use in this context. Another thing that I had never realized before was that in competitive swimming, it’s actually the men’s uniforms that are much more revealing than the women’s uniforms. This is something that I don’t think many people really think about because women’s leisure swimwear is typically much more revealing than mens, but the opposite is true in competitive swimming (and diving). This was really interesting to me as it is the one counter argument for the sexploitation of female athletes over male athletes. I also learned that I am quite passionate about the sexualization of female athletes, especially younger female athletes. I have cared about feminism and sexism etc, but over the course of this class, especially this assignment, and my expanding knowledge on the topic, has expanded my interest and passion for them.
2. What challenges did you face while completing this assignment?
 - a. The first challenge that I faced while completing this assignment was deciding what I wanted to focus on specifically and how I was going to carry it out. I am incredibly indecisive and simultaneously had too many ideas and not enough good ideas to figure out what I was going to do for this assignment. I also faced the challenge of finding the materials and resources for this project, as well as the

many technical challenges during the sewing process. The other challenge that I faced was in writing my written statement and finding the right way to convey why I had done this assignment in the way that I did it.

3. How did you overcome these challenges?

a. I overcame the first challenge of indecision by reading through the old class articles and my notes to see what sparked my interest the most, and then doing google searches to find more inspiration. I overcame the resourcing challenge of this assignment by going to my local goodwill to find non-gymnastic clothing that looked similar enough to pass as a homemade gymnastics uniform. Finally, I overcame my writing challenge by re-writing my written statement a few times until I thought it did a good job of conveying my slightly scattered thought process.

4. How successful do you think you were with your final product?

a. I think that I was pretty successful in my final product. I showed it to my family and friends and they were all slightly taken aback by the differences in the two halves of the uniform, which was my intention. I think that we are all so accustomed to the uniforms that are worn by gymnasts (and other sports as well), that we don't really recognize the difference between the men and women. I think that I was successful because it shows how a person can participate in many of the same movements in two vastly different styles of uniform, so why do these differences exist in the first place, if not for the exploitation of female athletes compared to male athletes? I also think that considering my somewhat lacking

sewing skills and the technical difficulties with the sewing machine, the actual physical uniforms turned out really well.

5. What do you think you could have done better?
 - a. I think that I could have done better at planning my project. I feel like I spent too much time searching for what I wanted to focus on and how I wanted to execute it, that once I had made my decision I kind of ran with it and winged it a bit too much. I think that because of this, I didn't spend enough time looking for key details and new information to incorporate into my project and written statement. In addition, I think that I could have done better with the resource planning/searching; I think my project turned out well, it would have looked better if I had given myself more time to search for proper gymnastics uniforms to cut up and re sew.