The Case for Misandry

How does fashion's hyper-sexualisation, and objectification of women contribute to gender-based violence, and how can speculative feminist alternatives challenge this system?

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Abstract

This research investigates how fashion's hyper-sexualisation of women contributes to gender-based violence and explores speculative feminist alternatives. Fashion mediates cultural perceptions of femininity, framing women as objects for the male gaze and reinforcing narrow beauty standards. These representations shape societal attitudes and women's experiences, normalising harassment and objectification.

Interviews with women aged 20–30 reveal how patriarchal norms are internalised, influencing clothing choices and interactions in public spaces. Insights from these conversations informed practice-based research using speculative design and robotics to create garments that make the act of looking tangible, unsettling power dynamics between the observer and the observed. The project proposes alternative narratives that challenge objectification, centre women's autonomy, and transform eroticism into a mode of resistance, advocating for a fashion culture that confronts rather than reproduces violence.

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Introduction

Women's bodies have been continually "redesigned and reshaped" to fit patriarchal beauty standards (Sidani, 2023). Fashion plays a pivotal role in mediating societal perceptions of women, and in perpetuating the male gaze (Crane, 2000). Objectifying views of women place their worth "in their physical appearance" and deny them "agency and autonomy" (Sáenz and Haslam, 2024). Positioning women as purely sexual objects directly contributes to violence against women (VAW) (Swift and Gould, 2021). Fashion's objectification of femininity is deeply entwined with its systemic mistreatment of women, from exploitative working conditions to the normalisation of sexual harassment.

VAW is a pervasive issue, with The World Health Organisation (2013) estimating that globally 35% of women have experienced violence within their lifetime, and in the UK, 1 in 4 women will be a victim of sexual assault in their lifetime, with 97% of the perpetrators being male the (National Audit Office, 2025). This highlights the depth of the gender-based violence (GBV) issue and provides a quantitative grounding to the project, underscoring the relevance of examining the cultural structures that normalise the sexualisation of women. By engaging with theoretical frameworks, feminist theory, and material design experimentation, this research contributes to ongoing dialogues around gender equality and provides alternative modes of critique of hyper-sexualisation and GBV. It aligns with The United Nations' (2015) Sustainable Development Goals, which advocate for gender equality and the creation of inclusive societies.

The project examines how fashion as a cultural technique enforces gendered norms and social hierarchies, while proposing alternative modes of practice that emphasise women's agency. Through a speculative approach, the work investigates how exploitative fashion structures can be disrupted and envisions new possibilities for the treatment of women.

Aims and Objectives

This research aims to analyse the ways that women are hyper-sexualised and objectified through fashion. This facilitates an exploration on how this objectification contributes to wider systems of GBV. Through a speculative design approach, this research seeks to challenge these structures and present feminist alternatives to the current harmful system.

- Desk-based research to critically analyse feminist understandings of how feminine identities are constructed, the ways in which women are objectified, and the connection between the hyper-sexualisation of women and GBV.

- Conduct interviews to gather the opinions of women aged between 20-30, and to gain insights into the lived experiences of women.

- To conduct a speculative design practice that utilises embodiment and sensory design to imagine alternative narratives to the current patriarchal culture.

Literature Review

Constructing and objectifying femininity

De Beauvoir (1997) stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", suggesting that gender is a socially constructed concept. Butler (1990; 1993; 2004) agrees, positing that bodily identities are not only defined but actually produced through inscribed cultural practices. They suggest that gender and sexuality are contingent concepts that are "renewed, revised and consolidated through time" (Butler, 1988). Women's bodies are constructed within the context of a patriarchal society and for the benefit of the male gaze (Sidani, 2023). Mulvey (1975) defines the male gaze as the ways women's bodies are defined and represented in culture that serves male desires. Similarly, desire is culturally propagated meaning male desire isn't inherent and adapts to dominant heteronormative ideals (Ridley, 2022). Desires or "attractiveness judgements" can manifest into having "significant consequences in real word situations" (Ibid.)

Paasonen et al.'s (2021) suggestion that "the act of looking is always male, and always an expression of power over women" highlights the prevalence of patriarchal structures in modern culture. Even in post-feminist media, where women appear as active subjects (Attwood, 2009), and where agency negates objectification, women are still objectified through the male gaze. McRobbie (2005) explains that the appearance of agency within media masks underlying objectification. This perpetuates the male gaze by reframing any perceived sexualisation as empowering, thus making it more culturally acceptable and less pervious to critique. However, this could be viewed as an oversimplification, with Glapka (2018) suggesting that women are not always passive victims.

Objectification can be defined as the presentation of people in a way that denies them their humanity, turning "a human being into a thing, an object" (Gill, 2009). When applied to women, objectification is usually connected to a hyper-sexualisation that is perpetrated within a heterosexual framework (Paasonen et al.,2021). Women's bodies are policed by media portraying them as "sex objects"; dressed in "revealing clothing" and posing to "imply sexual readiness" (Swift and Gould, 2021). Sidani (2023) explains there's a dichotomy between how women and girls are represented in media; with girls being subject to hyper-sexualisation while women are often infantilised. This attributes little autonomy to women, with their sexual agency undermined by infantilising portrayals. Some scholars dispute this notion, suggesting instead that women are sometimes shown as sexually empowered (Crane, 2000; Davis, 1992). Fashion and media have multiple social agendas, one of which depicts "women as empowered and androgynous" (Crane, 2000). However, another of these agendas is portraying women as sex objects, often in relation to the "rape, abuse, and humiliation of women" (ibid.).

Hyper-sexualisation and gender-based-violence

Sex, like gender, is socially constructed with some bodies being "for the pleasure" of others (Srinivasan, 2021). The patriarchy expands male attractiveness, presenting "unattractive categories of men" as attractive while enforcing narrow standards for women (ibid.). There are, however, men who feel they do not benefit from the patriarchy. This is evident in the rise of incel culture, which claims women are only attracted to a small subsection of men (Hart and Huber, 2023). Although often viewed as a subset of extreme antifeminist ideology, the movement is gaining momentum in the mainstream (Haslop et al. 2024). Klein and Golbeck (2024) highlight that this normalisation of misogyny promotes GBV.

Fashion perpetuates attractiveness standards through advertising, which Gill (2008) describes as "midriff advertising". The 1990's Wonderbra adverts (Figure 1), position women as playfully sexualised, erasing "any sense of inequality" or "violence" (ibid.). This style of advertising is still present in 2025 with the example of a Diesel handbag advert (Figure 2) that was found to be objectifying (The ASA in Clarke, 2025) and in breach of the advertising code. Lever (2023) disagrees with Gill instead suggesting women are assigned the role of either the sexually passive "Madonna" or the sexually active "Whore". Despite the differences in these representations, they indicate that fashion media depict women in ways that are always potentially sexual.

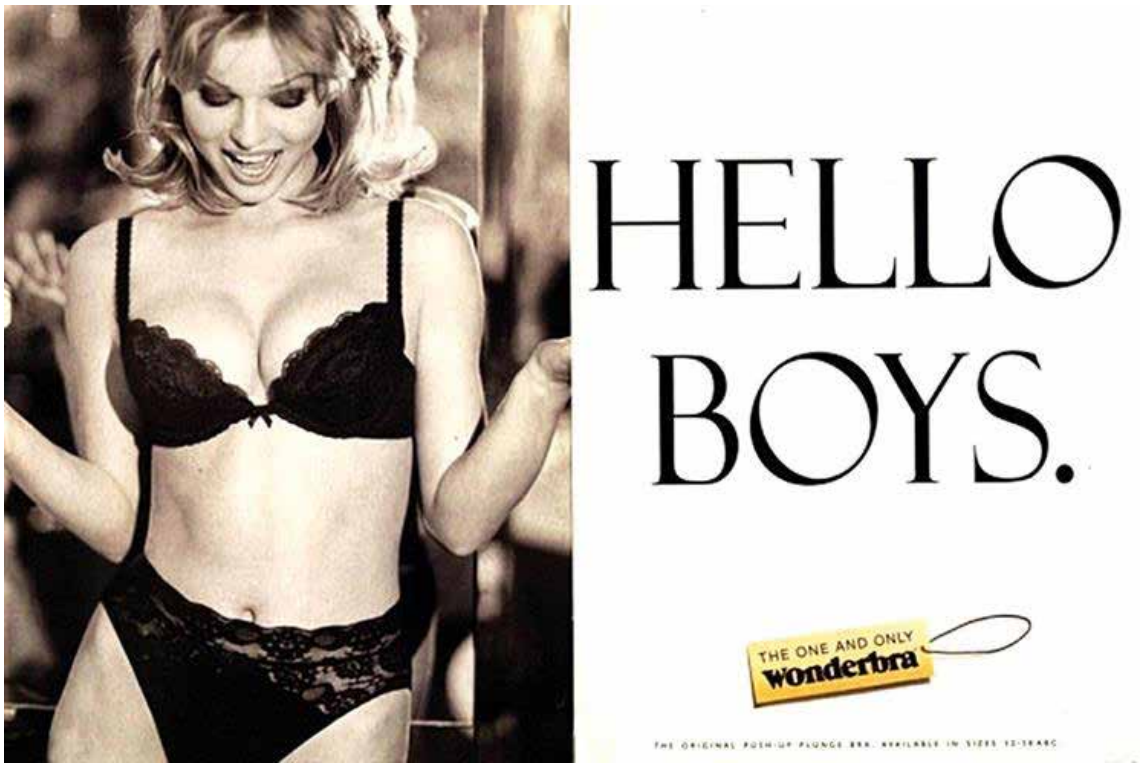

Figure 1: "Hello Boys." advertisement (Wonderbra, 1994)

Steele (1996) proposed that this normalisation of sexualised images absorbs fetish fashions into the mainstream and regurgitates them as "mass-market clothing". Church Gibson (2014) expands, identifying an alternative fashion system that perpetuates "the presentation of the body in a highly sexualized way" and "the pornification of fashion culture". Choufan (2024) agrees, noting that "pornostyle" is increasingly interwoven with the traditional trickle-down system, indicating that fashion perpetuates an overly sexualised view of femininity.

Figure 2: Katie Price in "The Houseguests" Advertisement (Diesel, 2025) The ASA (2025) acknowledged that Price was presented as "in control", but they still found that the advert "sexualised her in a way that objectified her".

There is a connection between the hyper-sexualisation of women and a man's propensity for VAW (Sáenz and Haslam, 2024). VAW can be defined as "any act of gender-based-violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women" (The United Nations, 1993). The repeated hyper-sexualisation of women's bodies in media is directly connected to global VAW (Swift and Gould, 2021). Sidani (2023) posits that fashion disseminates an overly sexualised aesthetic onto girls through media with 2022 Balenciaga advertisements (Figure 3) being an example of this. Sidani explains that this results in girls "learning that their pleasure is linked to them being abused and in pain" which contributes to a normalisation of rape culture and GBV.

Figure 3: Balenciaga advert featuring a child and a BDSM teddy (Balenciaga, 2022)

The Monstrous Feminine and Technocreep

This section examines an alternative depiction of femininity; the monstrous feminine. Horror illuminates societal fears and desires and how these narratives can be used as tools for social critique (Keenan, 2014; Smith and Higgins, 2000). The monstrous-feminine is a figure whose monstrosity is directly linked to her femininity, and "is defined in terms of her sexuality" (Creed, 1993). This builds on Kristeva's (1980) work on the abject, which she defines as anything that disrupts order and that "does not respect borders [and] rules". When applied to femininity, this implies that anything that falls outside the accepted attractiveness framework is regarded as abject or grotesque (Russo, 1994; Grosz, 1994). Within this framework, monstrosity becomes a reflection of cultural anxieties around female sexual agency with the monstrous-feminine representing a threat to systems of control. The uncanny can be a powerful feminist tool to subvert these narratives, but this approach can easily reinforce the cultural fears they seek to expose (Kokoli, 2017).

While not inherently horrifying, social structures render female sexuality as "marginal, indeterminate, and viscous" (Russo, 1994), creating disgust around what doesn't fit within the confines of order. Russo explains that "dirt is what disrupts order", revealing how both female sexuality and the monstrous-feminine emerge from a threatening of stability and order. Dirt in horror can be viewed similarly to how Hakim (2010) describes society viewing sexually empowered women; with disdain. This blurring of purity and contamination is also

present within horror around technology with dirty technology defined as combining "sterile, pristine and inorganic" with the "visceral, leaking decaying disorganisation of animal life", inducing horror by implying life and a loss of control (Campbell and Saren, 2010). The soulless nature of technology also projects a fear that we have become soulless ourselves (Szollosy, 2017). which connects to hyper-sexualisation and VAW because technological horror can illuminate cultural anxieties about harmful behaviours toward women.

Methodology

Introduction

This research adopts an interpretivist philosophy, acknowledging the positionality of the research and its link to wider sociocultural contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In my career, I have worked in the lingerie design industry and with garments that are often sexualised. Interpretivism permits this experience to be integrated into the research. Critical theory will be applied as a lens to effectively interrogate themes of hyper-sexualization and its connection to fashion and GBV. Critical theory can be defined as an approach that utilises the analysis of social structures to elucidate issues and challenge the power structures that uphold them (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). A feminist approach is central to this research, as it seeks to interrogate the systemic issues that have created structures that are harmful to women. Implementing feminist research goals positions the research "in the service of promoting social change and social justice for women" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007).

Interviews

To gain insight into how women experience hyper-sexualisation and objectification through fashion, it was important to conduct interviews. The interviewees are women aged between 20-30 living in the UK. This age range was selected as the demographic navigates sexualisation across social media, nightlife, and dating culture, which makes their experiences pertinent to the project. Interviewing is a pertinent research method as it can provide "insight into personal loves" and allows access to "the voice of 'ordinary' people" (Lomas, 2000). I used a semi-structured approach, as this allowed me to tailor the questions for each participant and for them to reflect on their experiences (Ruslin et al., 2022).

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, I incorporated visual research methods into the interviews with the intention of making it easier "to discuss sensitive or uncomfortable subjects" (Kara, 2015). I asked the participants to prepare photos that they felt were relevant to discuss in the interview; this could have been photos of themselves, their clothing, or images from media. This was also intended to give the participants a sense of control when preparing to discuss sensitive and personal topics. To conduct the interviews ethically, I consulted the UAL ethics guidelines and prepared a consent form (see Appendix), which I discussed at the beginning of each interview. I also reassured the participants that they would remain anonymous and that we could end the conversation or change topic at any time.

In total, three interviews were conducted. While more interviews would have strengthened the scope of the findings, time constraints and the emotional labour involved in discussing these topics created restrictions. Although the small sample size constitutes a limitation, the openness of the conversations provided rich insight into the emotional experiences of hyper-sexualisation.

Practice-Base Research

Following the gathering of qualitative data from the interviews, I conducted an exploration of potential fashion interventions using a speculative approach. Speculative design can be used as a philosophical tool to reimagine systems, explore problems and define abstract issues (Caccavale and Shakespeare, 2014; Adams, 2014). Dunne and Raby (2013) explain that designing with a critical lens can highlight weaknesses within a normative paradigm, offer alternatives to the status quo, and be a powerful catalyst for social change. In my practice, speculation took form through narrative world-building, and scenario-based storytelling to position each garment in a future context. This approach allowed the garments to operate as cultural interventions rather than just prototypes. Material and technological experimentation also played a central role, with testing actuation methods, responsive movement, and making processes becoming a physical probe into agency, control, and the uncanny. While this method enabled critical insights, it also produced practical limitations around fabrication time, scale, and precision. Overall, the practice-based method is pertinent because it aligns with the critical theory approach and facilitates critical engagement with hyper-sexualisation and dominant structures of power.

Discussion and Evaluation

Interviews

I conducted interviews to gather qualitative data on the lived experiences of women. Participants were asked to prepare photos of themselves or from media to guide discussions and provide a sense of control over the conversation. When discussing their personal fashion choices, all participants identified that comfort was important to them. Participant 1 highlighted comfort guides her choices rather than a desire to be sexual. She noted that she selectively shows body parts she deems her best asset, stating “men find boobs sexy, don’t they?”. This correlates with Paasonen et al.’s (2021) theory that even for women the act of looking is always male. The contradictions in how participants spoke about their clothing choices or their bodies reveal the extent to which patriarchal structures and the male gaze are internalised (Srinivasan, 2021) within women’s own perceptions of attractiveness.

Two participants described instances of public sexual harassment. Participant 2 explained she dressed to "mitigate the risk of receiving unwanted attention", when travelling alone. This shows how clothing choices and protective strategies are shaped by the anticipation of unwanted attention, which embeds the burden of self-protection into women's navigation of public space and reflects the broader normalisation of rape culture (Sidani, 2023). The women described that they felt anger and sadness when experiencing objectification, describing physical manifestations of these experiences ranging from aggressive to protective. These responses informed the aesthetic, sensory and functional design, and conceptual direction of my practice, ensuring the work critically engages with the experiences it references.

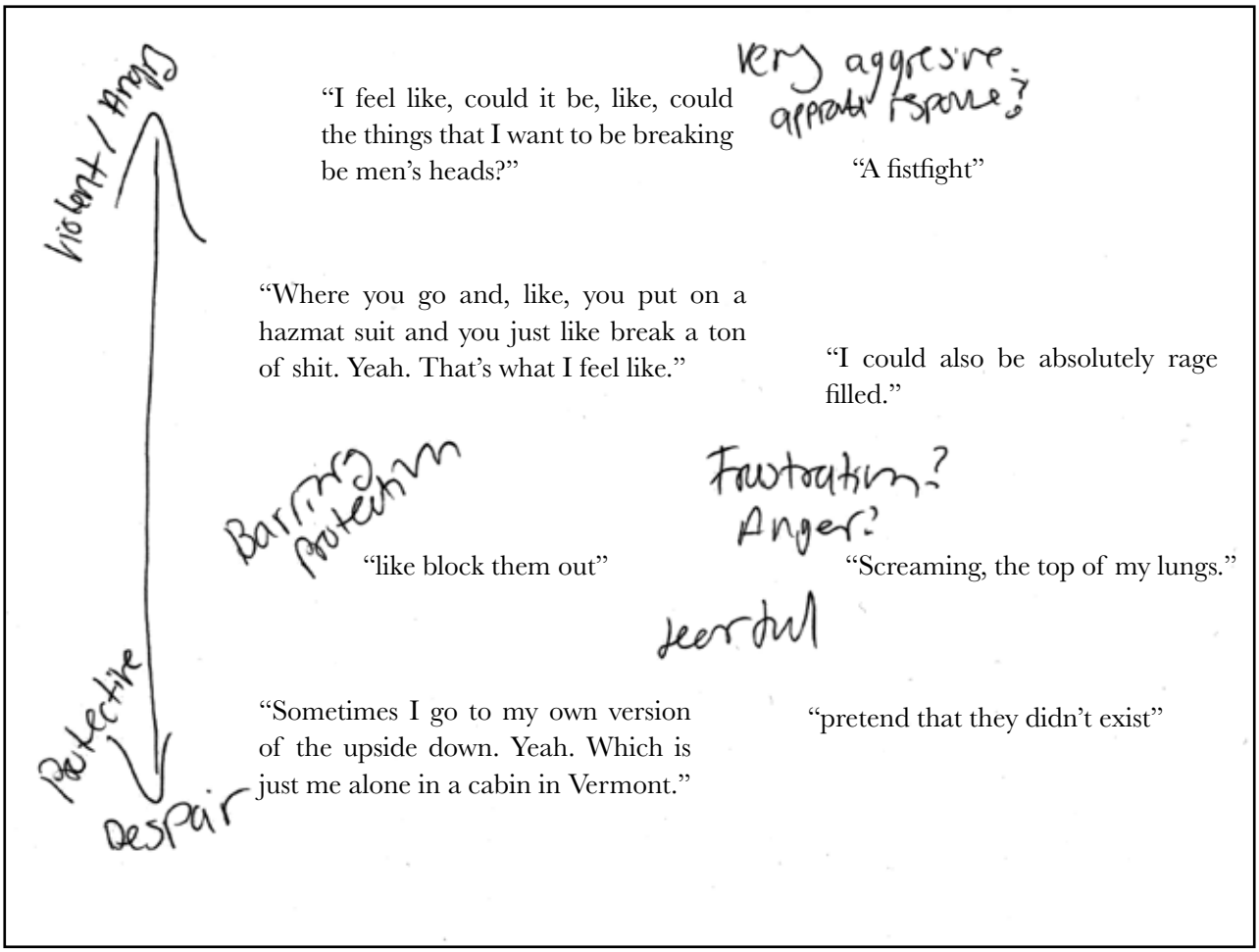

Figure 4: I asked the participants if they could manifest their feelings towards these experiences in a physical way, how they would describe it. Two of the responses corresponded with the angry emotions with descriptions of "a fistfight" and "a rage room". Participant 3 described a less violent and more protective manifestation, explaining that she wishes she could "block people in real life".

The Eyes

The foundation of the practice-based work is a previous project called 'Monstrous Vision' (Figure 5), which developed from early research into the gaze, and feminist critiques of objectification. These ideas shaped my experimentation with face detection and robotics as a way to use wearable technology as an active agent. As the actuation developed, I noticed how the physicality of the mechanics such as the speed the eyes opened, or the accuracy of the tracking, produced an interaction that was more unsettling than I had anticipated. This exploration highlighted the discomfort created when confronted with one's own act of looking. During a public showcase at London College of Fashion (LCF) viewers hesitated, tried to avoid the camera, or were annoyed that they had been caught looking, which surfaced the insight that the act of looking is always relational and how these power dynamics flip very quickly. In this project, I developed a speculative database (Figure 6) that emerged from this realisation. The one-way and involuntary nature of surveillance cameras is in part what makes them unsettling (Keenan, 2014). Capturing images creates complexity around questions of consent and control, so the idea of a shared archive extends the project into a wider cultural and digital context rather than just simply demonstrating surveillance.

Figure 5: First iteration of the 'Monstrous Vision' garment. The garment features a hidden face-detection camera and mechanical eyes that would open once a face was detected.

Figure 6: Mock-up of an online database to store the images the camera captures once activated by a face. The camera counts the number of times a face has been seen and uploads this to the database.

Material experimentation shaped the project's conceptual framing. The first iteration made from black latex and lace, fabrics linked with eroticisation, and creating an immediate connection to lingerie. The garment collapsed under the weight of the mechanics into an amorphous silhouette, imbuing the work with an unexpected comedic. This introduced a tension between humour and horror and revealed a need for a more refined aesthetic. Refining the garment to a cotton-and-lace corset clarified the connection to control and sexuality. This also emphasised the contrast between the soft fabric and the abrupt opening of the eyes. The shock of the eyes opening reveals the discomfort and violence of the gaze. These material iterations also moved the work further towards an operational critique of objectification, where the garment performs the dynamics of watching and being watched.

Figure 7: The final iteration of the eye garment. I refined mechanics to improve the functionality of the eye mechanism and tone down the comedic elements.

Horror

Figure 8: To identify characteristics of monsters to use in the monster-maker game, I analysed a selection of monsters in horror films.

The interviews and interactions at a public event at LCF, revealed there is a lot of anger around these topics. I wanted to manifest these feelings; however, I felt it was important to do this in a way that wasn't vitriolic or vengeful. To define the physical form of my outcomes, I created an online monster-maker game where participants could choose body parts to create a creature. Some of the combinations looked grotesque or ridiculous, but this supported the creation of a monstrous form (Russo, 1994). Twenty people created monsters, with wolf and dragon parts being the most common selection (Figure 10). The responses revealed an underlying cultural imagination in which protection is tied to animalistic strength that can match or exceed the violence of the gaze. The drawn format limited the selection process and the framing of the process as monster making potentially influenced the choices. Also, I didn't ask follow-up questions which limited the understanding of the selections.

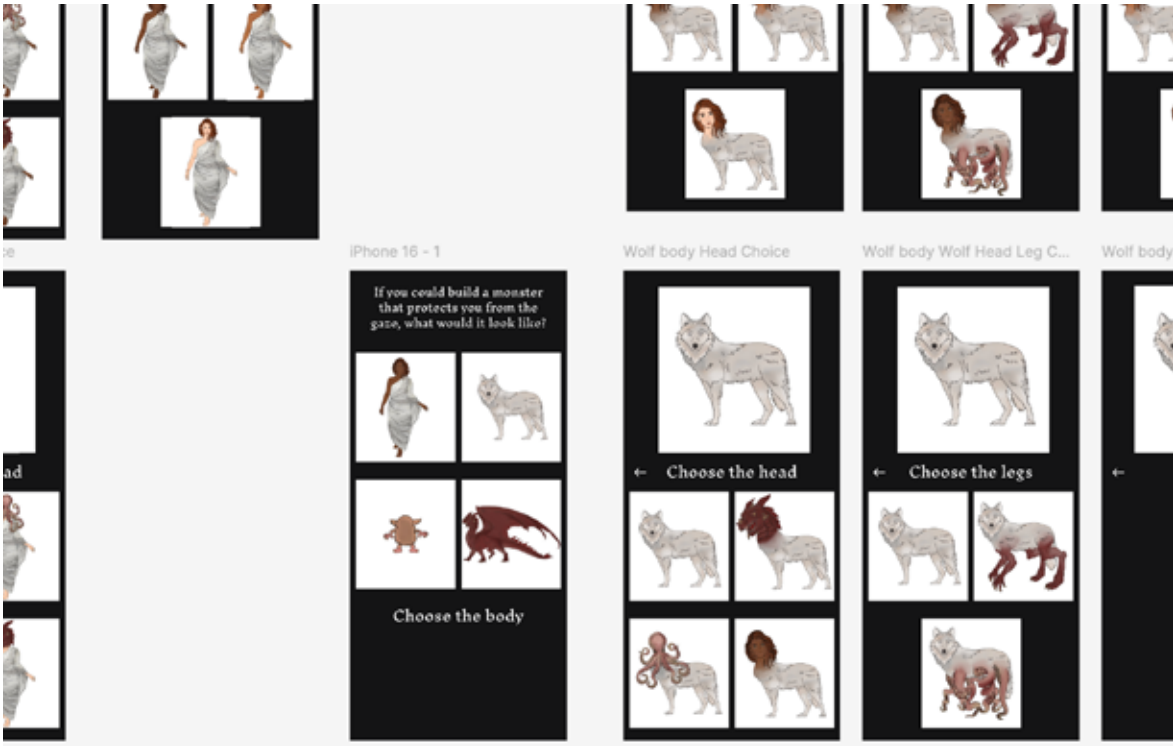

Figure 9: The monster-maker game. At the beginning of the game, I posed the question "If you could build a monster that protects you from the male gaze, what would it look like?'.

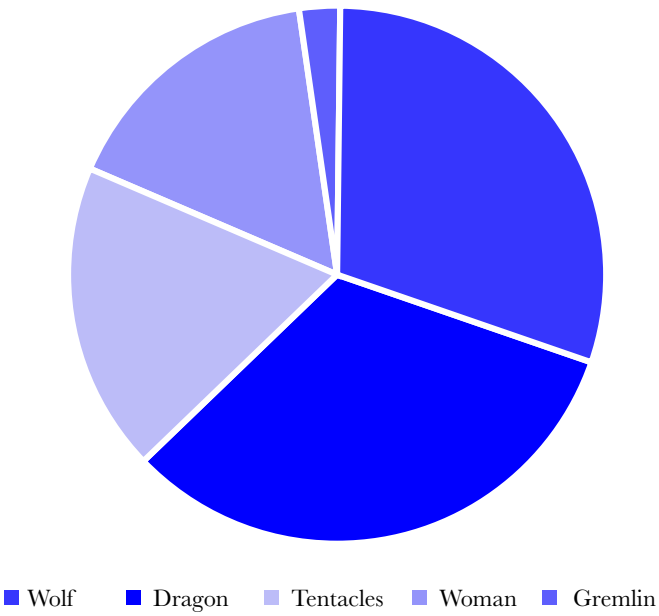

Figure 10: The monsters created in the monster-maker game. The body parts chosen were: 9 tentacle parts, 8 human parts, 13 wolf parts, 17 dragon parts, and 1 gremlin part.

Monster

The eye garment reflects the sensations associated with objectification, and I wanted to manifest another related sensation; the loss of control or consent. I aimed to create a form that sits on the wearers back, activating in response to harmful behaviour. This would act publicly as a physical conscience. For this reason, I felt it was important to create a mechanical monster, as the notion of a robot, a soulless entity, having control over a human's conscience is disconcerting (Szollosy, 2017). The use of robotics created practical limitations around form and construction. Drawing from the results of the monster-maker game and robotics research, I identified tentacles as a viable option for creating a form of creepy movement.

Figure 11: The first iteration of the inflatable tentacle and the tentacle on display at the public event at LCF that took place midway though the project.

Through material experimentation, I developed two forms of actuation for the tentacles; inflation and motorised pullies. Interactions with the tentacles at the public event at LCF revealed there was a strong connotation with sex toys and penises. I had not previously considered this, but it revealed a dichotomy between its intention as an objectification deterrent and the sexualisation of the form. This resonates with Creed's (1993) description of the horror of the Medusa, connecting this depiction of monstrous femininity to fears around sexuality and castration. It also draws parallels to Japanese tentacle erotica (Figure 11), where horror and hypersexuality converge. Sexualised understandings of the tentacles elucidated cultural narratives around how desire and disgust shape the way bodies and objects are interpreted. This shifted my understanding of the monster and revealed that its effectiveness falls within its ability to confront these structures and make them visible within its behaviour.

Figure 12: The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife (Hokusai, 1814)

In the final iteration, I used silicone for the surface of the monster. The casting and construction process created imperfections, which contributed to notions of "dirty technology" (Campbell and Saren, 2010). These irregularities became an integral part of the monster's physicality and animalistic quality. Movement also added an uncanny, lifelike quality, with the twitchy, unpredictability adding an uneasiness to the motion. The movement cannot be seen by the wearer, but they can feel its scale and heaviness twitching on their back creating a sensation of discomfort. This blind interaction mirrors themes around loss-of-control and consent. Interestingly, viewers of the monster wanted to touch and squeeze the tentacles, despite their slimy quality and intentionally grotesque appearance. This contradiction reveals a pattern of curiosity and entitlement that echos the dynamics the work aims to critique.

The making of the monster shifted my understandings of how sexualised readings can attach themselves to forms not intended to be erotic. Interactions exposed how monstrosity and hyper-sexualisation can easily become entangled, and how a critique of objectification can itself be viewed with an eroticised lens. The process also raised questions around the kinds of emotional and material reactions to hyper-sexualisation and GBV that are deemed acceptable, and how anger from women is often read as excessive or inappropriate. The combination of the material imperfections, the uncanny movement, and the contested readings of the monster reveal the limits placed on women's agency and the prolific cultural disquiet around representations that refuse passivity.

Figure 13: An early iteration of the motorised tentacle and the motorised tentacle with its silicone skin. The skin features imperfections from the casting process.

Figure 14: Iterations of the inflatable tentacle; one ribbed that bends well and one without ribbing that grows in size. I combined these two styles to produce the final tentacles.

Figure 15: The final monster displayed on a mannequin.

Worms

From the interviews, it was clear that there's a shared experience of intuition towards sexualisation and a desire for protection during these encounters. This insight shaped my practice as I explored ways to create the sensation of being protected. Drawing on earlier research into the grotesque, I experimented with creating a garment that inflated to distort the body's natural form, creating a monstrous silhouette (Figure 15). I experimented with creating silicone pockets of various sizes and shapes (Figure 16). The larger pockets revealed a functional limitation as they were hard to keep airtight and needed to be oversized which would remove the transformational element to the garment. This practical constraint made me reconsider how transformation itself reveals the boundaries between sexualisation and abjection.

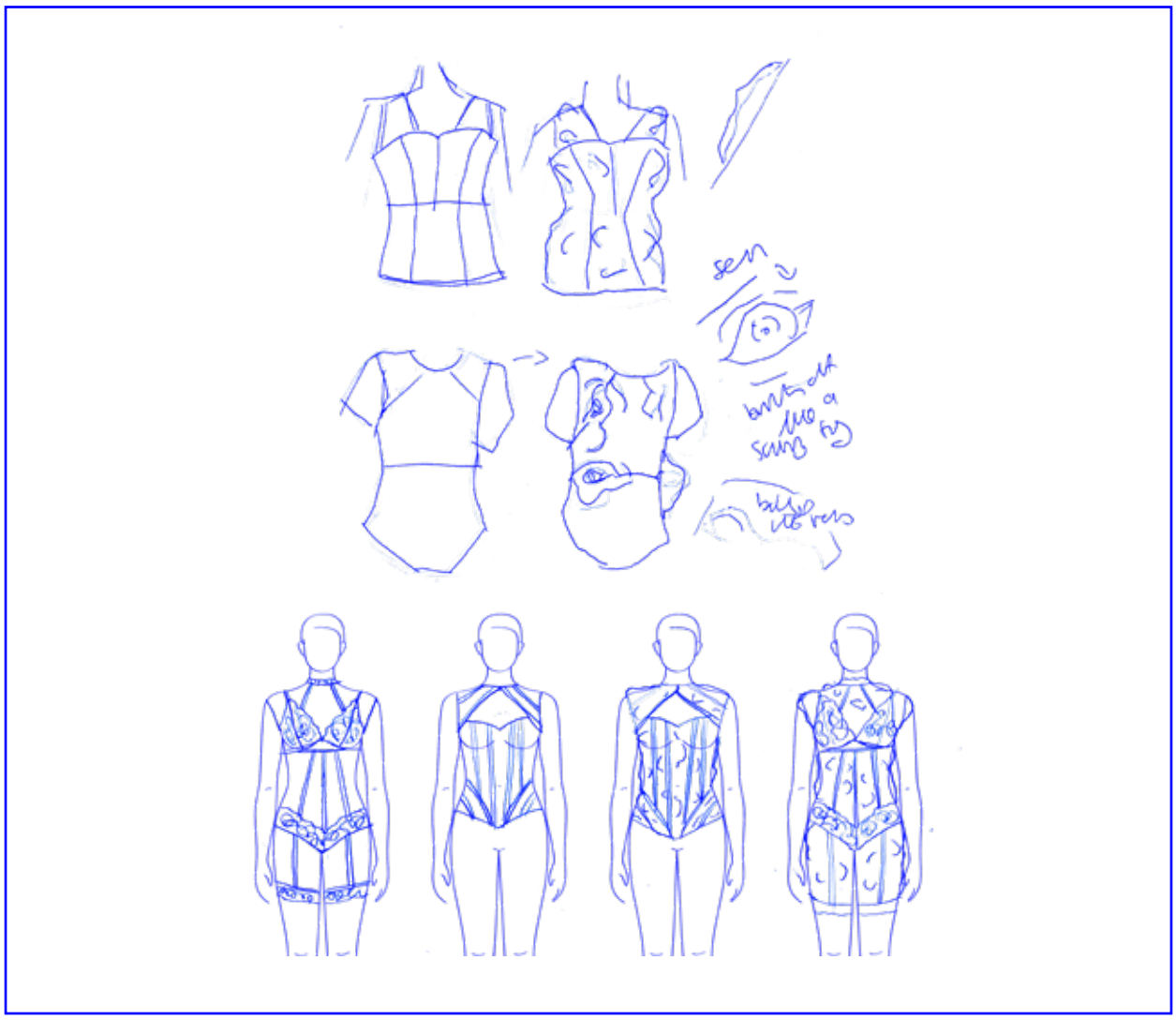

Figure 16: Initial sketches experimenting with ways to distort the body through inflation.

Figure 17: Large and small pocket inflation tests. The larger pieces were unsuccessful, but the small tests inflated well.

I tested smaller silicone pockets and when they inflated looked like a boil looked ready to burst. Aesthetically, this aligned with the visual language of horror and the sticky, bodily imagery linked to female sexuality in horror (Grosz, 1994). However, this revealed something that wasn't visible in the desk research. I realised that by inflating the body, whether on a large scale or smaller welts, I was unintentionally positioning plus-sized or sick bodies through an abject lens. I felt that by creating disgust to a body that is "irregular, [and] secreting" (Russo, 1994) I was unwittingly perpetuating the beauty standards associated with the male gaze that the project seeks to critique (Kokoli, 2017). The material testing illuminated how far reaching the influence of patriarchal norms are, revealing that there is disgust for bodies that fall outside of this standard and highlighting the juxtaposition between which aspects of female bodies are sexualised and that which are coded as grotesque.

I revisited my research to identify ways to create the sensation of intuition and protection; Participant 1 described being stared at as having your "skin crawl". This phrase informed the next phase of my practice as I experimented with ways to emulate this sensation. I also returned notions of the monstrous feminine and the positioning of women as virgin or whore (Lever, 2023; Creed, 1993). This tension informed my choice to construct the garment as a white nightdress, allowing it to carry familiar cinematic language while becoming a site of disruption. Building on this, I developed silicone tubes that could inflate in sequence, so the fabric appeared to ripple, as if something under the skin was shifting out of sight. Making internal sensations visible reveals the tension between vulnerability and the uncanny and reveals how sexualisation mediates the gaze and frames certain bodies as desirable or threatening.

Figure 18: Development of adding inflatable 'worms' to the body.

Figure 19: The final garment with the dress and the inflatable tubes underneath.

Conclusion

This project set out to examine fashion's contribution to the hyper-sexualisation of women and how this intersects with GBV. The literature review identified key insights into how hyper-sexualisation functions as a cultural process that shapes women's lives. Social constructions of femininity are mediated and propagated through fashion and media with contemporary fashion imagery positioning women as always potentially sexual (Gill, 2009). This contributes to the pornification of fashion culture (Church Gibson, 2014), a narrowing of the boundaries of acceptable femininity (Srinivasan, 2021), and a normalisation of sexualised aesthetics (Sidani, 2023). The review also highlighted that these representations of women and the male gaze have material consequences with the sexualisation of women in fashion and media being directly linked to broader forms of GBV (Sáenz and Haslam, 2014). This reinforces the assertion that hyper-sexualisation operates as part of a wider ideological movement that legitimises acts of violence. These understandings provided the conceptual basis for the practice-based research with the dynamics of power, objectification and harm underpinning the work.

The interviews revealed the depth to which patriarchal expectations have shaped women's experiences and relationships with fashion, highlighting an internalised understanding of the male gaze. The emotional weight of objectification was also revealed with anger, sadness, and fear being linked to experiences of hyper-sexualisation and harassment. These insights informed the direction of my practice with metaphors participants used to describe their responses shaping the aesthetic and interaction design in the garments.

The speculative practice led to creating garments that function as cultural interventions that expose and unsettle dynamics of the gaze. Working with robotics and narrative speculation to create uncanny interactions, revealed how control can shift between the observer and the observed. Material experimentation surfaced the tensions between the erotic and the grotesque, showing how these contrasts can communicate the experience of objectification and the violence of being observed. The practice created a tangible space to test ideas from the research and expand the conceptual investigations into an embodied and sensory understanding.

This research contributes a feminist critique of how fashion participates in the enabling of GBV through the hyper-sexualisation and objectification of women. The project uses fashion as a cultural technique to propose alternative narratives that centre women's agency and experiences of objectification. The work suggests that a shift in cultural narratives away from the gaze would facilitate practices centred on bodily autonomy and safety. The integration of robotics and speculative design draws on elements of horror and the grotesque to reveal the violence of the gaze and reframe eroticism as a mode of resistance

The project has been shaped by limitations, including restricted prototyping time, a small interview sample, and the use of a speculative framework which produces conceptual outcomes. The prototypes created in the practice-based work, could be refined further to solidify the world-building and storytelling between the garments. Creating opportunities for interaction with the public or embodied experiences would add to the understandings that the garments reveal. Further interviews could be conducted to reveal what can be gleaned from interactions with the speculative work. Overall, the research calls for a fashion culture that recognises its responsibility in wider systems of gendered harm and works actively toward change. The centring of agency and ethical practices can allow fashion to become a site for resistance and empowerment.

Critical Evaluation

Introduction

This project has been as much an exploration into wearable technology as it has into hyper-sexualisation and gender-based violence. I had initially intended to do the hybrid pathway, with my research proposal suggesting interviews with women and charities, visual research, and a speculative design practice. But my ideas for my practice-based research pushed me to pursue the practice pathway. I was reluctant to do this at first as I felt the project would benefit from the detailed theoretical grounding I could provide in a hybrid project, however, once I began, I realised that the practice needed to be extensive in order to bring the project fully to fruition. This has allowed me to push my abilities with physical computing while also utilising my skills as a lingerie pattern cutter to make three physical outcomes.

Wearable Technology

In this project I have learnt a lot about wearable technology and soft robotics, most of which has been self-taught. I tried not to be restricted by my skillset and pushed myself to learn as much as I possibly could about physical computing. This is something that I think I did well, and I think that this exploration comes through in the body of work that I created. I enjoy independent working; however, I think I could have been more willing to ask for help or guidance. This is something that I find quite difficult to do and have struggled with through the masters. I struggled with the unpredictability of access to certain facilities especially over the summer, which in part led to my decision to work more independently. I did speak to two experts in soft robotics, but I feel I could have asked for more guidance from them. A lot of the issues I came up against, I could not have even predicted, but I think this 'ignorance is bliss' approach really allowed me to be explorative and experimental in the work.

Limitations

Even though I am pleased with the work I achieved, I do think that I was overly ambitious, especially as I had a lot to learn. I think ambition in a project can be a positive thing; however, I think in this instance I should have been more realistic. I should have reflected more throughout the process as I know I can be a little overconfident at times which would have helped me rein myself in. I had intended to make a short film to showcase the work and how the garments connect to each other, but I did not have time in the end. I faced a lot of issues and setbacks when making my final outcomes, especially with the monster, and this meant I struggled to plan a date for booking a film studio. If I had been less ambitious with the technology I wanted to create, then perhaps I would have had more time for refinement and for planning a film.

I was also very limited by the technology. While it is possible to make almost anything with physical computing, I was restricted by access to equipment and cost. Soft robotics is a very specialised area, and I did not fully realise the extent to which this was going to limit my progress. There are pumps, sensors and

modelling equipment that I would have loved to include in my project to improve the quality and accuracy of the robots, but this was not possible for me. Another restriction I faced was wanting to create a robot that looked a certain way. A lot of the research into soft robotics I found, did not develop much of an aesthetic for the work and mainly focused on the function as a robot. I found that trying to include aesthetics into the robots was really challenging as small changes could have massive impacts on how things functioned. This was especially evident when making the final monster and when I tried attaching the finished motorised tentacles. I think the horror aesthetic of the project is one of its strengths, but this was also very limiting.
There is lots of scope for development in my project. With the worm dress, I would like to explore more

Development

options for actuation as I did not get a chance to experiment with coloured liquids. I think that this would clarify the horror of the garment. For the monster, I would like to improve its wearability and functionality. I was very cautious about putting the monster on a person as I was scared of breaking it and not having the time or money to fix it. Now that I have cautiously tested it on a person, there are changes I would make to the body to make this easier to wear e.g. clamps for the inflation tentacles that don't restrict the airflow as much, more secure straps, improved skin design. I would really like to create a public interaction with the garments to access people's reactions; I think this would then allow me to develop the work even more. I would also like to explore future options for community engagement. At the start of this project, I took part in a summer school where I worked with a disadvantaged community in Athens. This experience was highly influential and made me consider community-based work in my own practice for the first time; this is something I would like to explore in relation to this work and my career.
Before I started the course, I imagined that when I finished, I would continue my career in the lingerie

Career

industry, but as an expert in sustainability. The final project, as well as the work throughout the course, has completely changed the trajectory of my career. While I still enjoy lingerie design, I am now enthused with an interest in wearable technology and how this can shape the future. I have enjoyed learning about what is possible and problem-solving to push the boundaries of what I can achieve. I now would like to pursue a career that incorporates technology and fashion.

Conclusion

Overall, I am really happy with the work I have produced in this final unit. I am glad that I chose to pursue a project that explores objectification, gender-based violence and centres women as this is something I am very passionate about. This project has strengthened my commitment to creating work that challenges harmful structures and opened up a clear path for how I want to continue developing my practice beyond the course.

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Images and Figures

Figure 1: Wonderbra. (1994) Hello Boys. [Poster] Available at: https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O75499/hello-boys-the-one-and-poster-rose-nigel/ (accessed: 27/03/2025)

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Figure 3: Balenciaga (2022) [Advertisement] Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/world/article/balenciaga-pulls-christmas-campaign-featuring-children-and-bondage-teddy-bears-dp8gdz5lv (accessed: 15/04/2025)

Figure 4: Interview results (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 5: Eye garment in exhibition (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 6: Archive mockup ((Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 7: Final eye garment ((Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 8: Film moodboard (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 9: Monster-maker game (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 10: Monster-maker results (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 11: First tentacle development (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 12: Hokusai, K. (1814) The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife. [Print] Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dream_of_the_Fisherman%27s_Wife (accessed: 27/10/2025)

Figure 13: Motorised tentacles (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 14: Inflated tentacle development (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 15: Final monster (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 16: Inflation sketches (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 17: Inflation pockets (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 18: Worm garment development (Huthwaite, 2025)

Figure 19: Final worm garment (Huthwaite, 2025)

Appendix

Within the context of patriarchy as a system of power and oppression, please share three words you would use to describe men as a group.

funny! Lovely! Like it^

Simple, boring and unimaginative

Doubt them all

Go fuck yourselves

Aggressive, whiny, megalomaniacs

My husband is lovely (that's 4)

Overly emotional, fragile, egotistical

HOSTILE / BORING / UNIMPRESSIVE

Vulnerable in their own ways

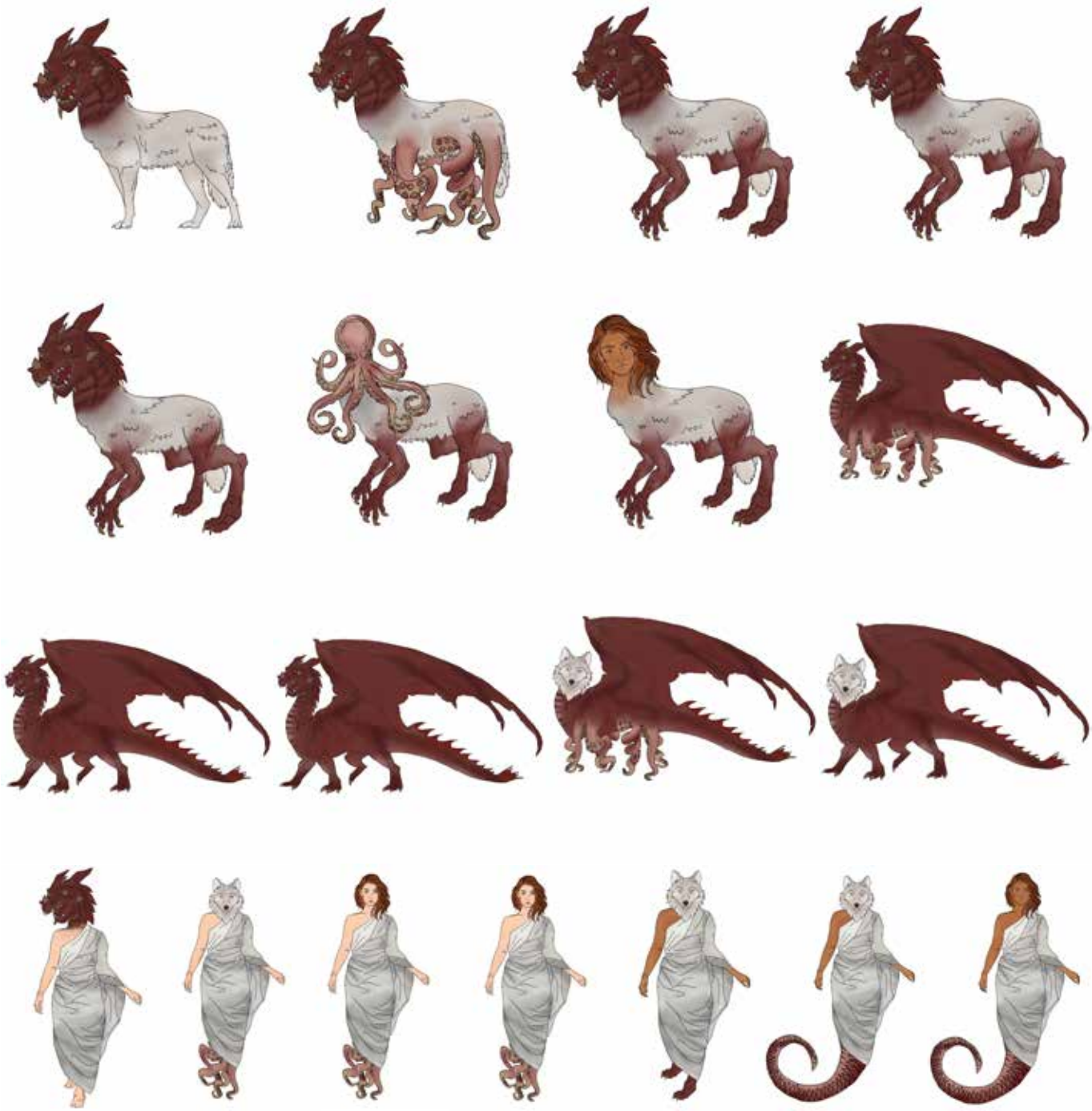
Bad leaders / lack of ~~emotion~~ EMPATHY / SELFISHNESS

Manchild

Pig headed, narcissistic, small d energy

Feedback sheet from the Testbed event at LCF.

The monster-maker game prototype.



The monsters that the 20 participants made.

Interview Task

Photo Task

As part of the interview, please could you bring **1–3 images** that relate to your experiences with **fashion, objectification, and hyper-sexualisation**. These images will help guide our conversation and allow you to reflect on your experiences in advance.

You can choose from the following prompts:

- An outfit that made you feel sexy, confident, or powerful.
- An everyday outfit that makes you feel comfortable, professional or neutral.
- An outfit or occasion where you felt objectified or uncomfortable.
- An advert, campaign, or media image you feel is objectifying.

The images can be:

- Of you wearing the outfit (past or recent).
- Of the clothing alone.
- Of a location or occasion.
- From media, advertising, or online sources.

You do not have to appear in the image if you prefer. If the image is of you, your face does not need to be visible unless you are comfortable with it.

Your choice and comfort

- You may bring one image, multiple images, or none at all.
- You may skip any category you do not want to respond to.
- If you bring an image that relates to a difficult experience, **you are not required to share any details you do not feel comfortable with**.
- You can stop the conversation or change the topic at any time.

If you do not wish to take part in the photo task, you are still welcome to participate in the interview.