

The Good Girl Syndrome

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Fashion Design

2018



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THE GOOD GIRL SYNDROME

Did you choose to be a good person? Are you behaving like you should?

A play between the roles that has been forced on us and the roles that we have chosen for ourselves.

Whether it is a gender, a religious belief or a political statement, do we really know if we have chosen a role or if it has been chosen for us?

A slightly awkward feeling, somewhat forced or a possibly unsure state. A feeling that something does not completely fit or something else is hidden underneath.

Research

My research builds on a behaviour called the “good girl syndrome”. This concept departs in the idea that children grow up to be a gender. Children, unfortunately mostly girls, grow up to fill the role of “the good girl”. They learn to not make mistakes, to take social responsibility by being well behaved and to keep within a frame of perfection. And within the same structure boys are taught that they are not supposed cry or show emotions. Girls, more often than boys, measure their own worth in how well they execute tasks and how few mistakes they make, which only leaves them with a feeling of not being good unless someone says so. The good girl syndrome has been a constant companion of mine since I was a child and working with this concept in this project therefore felt important.

To be able to use the concept of the good girl syndrome, I had to analyse what a good person really is and where that “good” comes from. What is being good? This is where Christianity came in to my research. Religion is often something you grow up with and is seldom directly chosen. For example, in the Amish community the teenagers at the age 14-16 leave home to go out and live a life they have never experienced and to make decisions on their own. Then they get to choose if they want to come back to their faith or choose a life free from religion which often means that they get rejected by their families.¹ I find it interesting to see in to this: how different aspects of culture that are introduced to us in early age affect us later in life. As adults, making our own decisions and life choices, we don’t know if those ideas are there because of our own mind or if somebody put them there.

Another interesting factor in religion is the contrasts of the Catholic Church, where the idea of the pure mind is in centre and that you should live a modest life without sin. But the catholic churches and clothing of the church is not exactly modest. And even more important, many of the catholic priests do not, as we know, practice what they preach. Many religions have the idea of “mind over body”, which is a concept that I feel completely contradicts most spectrums of our society.

Much like religion, gender is a concept that is introduced to us as soon as we are born. We very rarely get to choose a gender at an early age and if we do so it is often questioned and met with prejudice. The conception of gender is one of the strongest structures in society and it has been shown to be very difficult to alter. But what happens when the fold over, paper doll dress doesn’t fit? When you don’t fit in the frame anymore?

¹ Shachtman, Tom, *Rumspringa: To Be or Not to Be Amish*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

I've been listening a lot to Patti Smith, who never saw herself as a female artist and never relating to the rules of gender.² You can see her both dressed in flowy dresses as well as men's suits. Women has been dressing as men for ages to gain or radiate more power while when men dress up as women it's shameful and weak, especially seen so by the church. Even though men were the ones that wore bows and lace in the 1700s. In this project I have examined what our society sees as feminine. Maybe today the biggest rebel act of all is embracing femininity?

This project is a play between the roles that has been forced upon us and the roles that we have chosen for ourselves. Whether it is a gender, a religious belief or a political statement, do we really know if we have chosen it or if it has been chosen for us? The purpose with this collection is to show this slightly awkward feeling, somewhat forced or a possibly unsure state. A feeling that something does not completely fit and that something else is hiding underneath.



² "Patti Smith about the Gender Question", video, 2.04, posted 24th October, 2008, Accessed May 9, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSW4ONnQfJE>

Sketching and Material

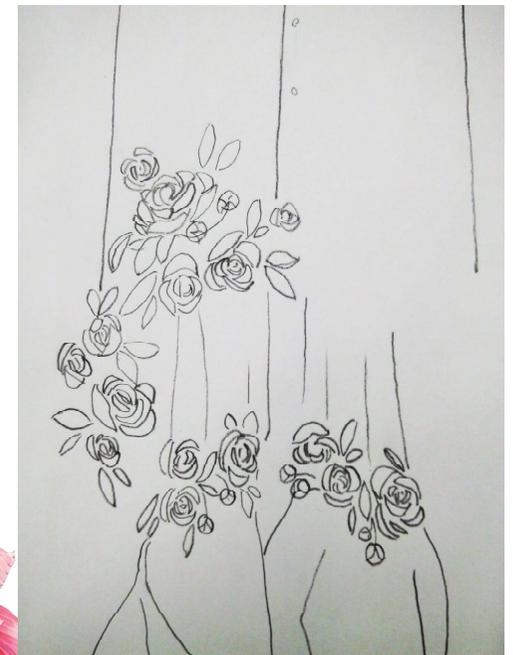
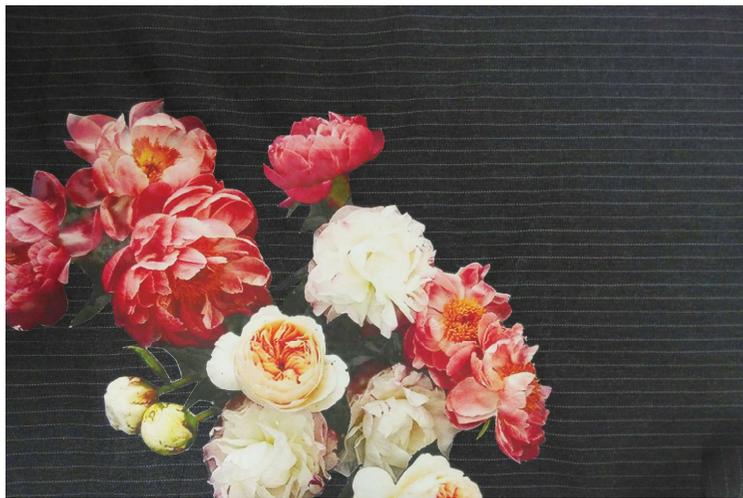
The research process slowly moved into shape and volume research. I continued to look at silhouettes that didn't follow the path of the concept of female dressing or male dressing, for example the oversized coats for women in the time of the 55 cm waist of Dior and the Dandy culture, the well-polished and well-tailored gentlemen with the attention to detail as a way of self-expression.

I started exploring these silhouettes doing collages, using the material of the photo research that I had gathered from books, magazines and websites. I tried to capture a mood of a forced feeling and slightly awkward silhouettes that became the core of my concept.

At this stage I also started material research. I wanted to create a contrast between quite rigid and structured fabrics, like pinstriped fabric, that we often associate with suits and mixing it with fabric, prints and textures that are stereotypical feminine. I wanted to create ways where something planned and structured moved seamlessly into something else, something that moved more freely or not as well-behaved. I poured black silicone over jacquard in pink and gold to portray that we are being covered by something but that other beliefs are still underneath. I found heat transfer foil that you iron on to fabric that became a way to control the fabric underneath. The fabrics became a way to get my concept through to the viewer or wearer. I used these samples in my collages and worked in Photoshop to create new shapes and volumes.

I started drawing by hand to get a clearer picture on how the garments where to be built up. I added closings and details and then took the drawings back into Photoshop to add textures and fabric.







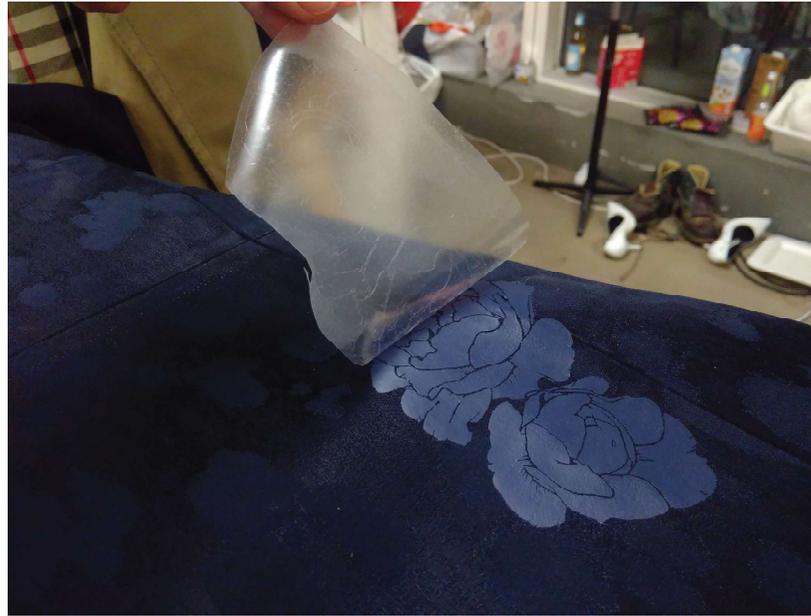
Flowers

I have used a lot of flowers in the collection because of my own associations with them. For me flowers are something pure, colourful and somewhat childlike. I also think that many associate flowers with femininity and this is an association that I felt was interesting to play with. I made a pair of pink flower boots for girls and blue flower boots for boys, a question of what really makes something for boys/for girls. I then spray-painted the flowers black, which makes the flowers hard, motionless and in complete loss of their innocence and playfulness. Of these flowers I made a high collar, both to stress the feeling of uncomfort or suffocation but also to resemble a priest collar.

I designed a floral print that I wanted to cut out in transfer foil. The heat transfer foil I am using is from a company in Italy. I sent the print and foil to Sweden where it was cut through a cutting plotter. The places that are in between the print must then be picked away and the foil is then ironed on to fabric. The floral print that I design was made of from lilies and peonies. In Christianity the white lily symbolizes the pure and spotless character. In alchemy the red lily represented the solar and masculine energies while the white lily is the lunar and feminine energies.³ The foil is quite thin but can still hold pleating in the fabric which I used to create the feeling of the flowers grabbing hold on what's underneath, shaping it into a new form. In other garments of the collection the foil flowers are applied to tulle fabric, a way of letting the flowers look like they are covering up something that is underneath, but fails.

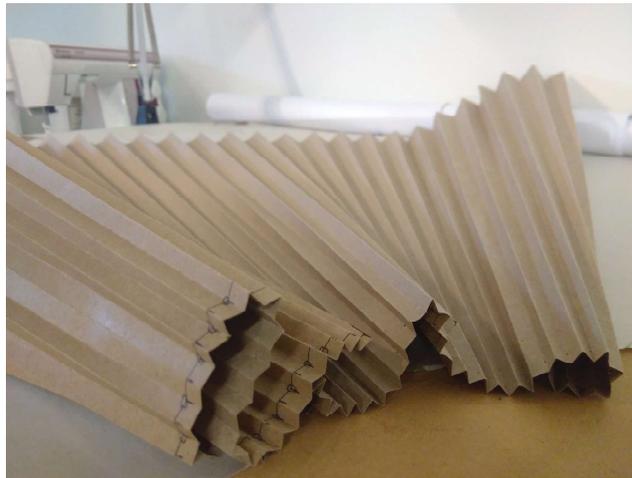
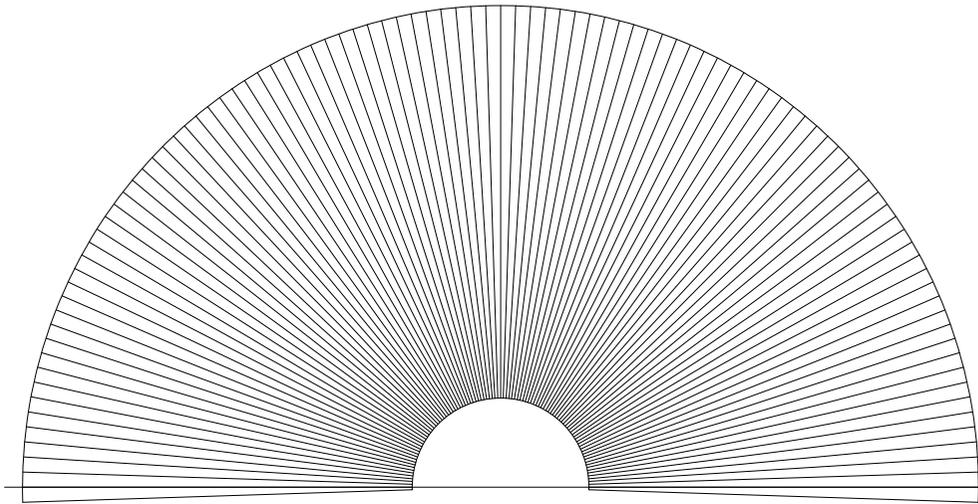


³ Archive for Research in Archetypal. "Plants" in *The Book of Symbols*. Eds. Ami Ronnberg, Kathleen Martin, Taschen, 2010.



Pleating

Pleated fabric came up as an idea in the sketching phase as a way of controlling fabric into the shape you want it to have. The flowy fabric that is still moving in a flowy motion but it has been put in this shape it can't get out from. I felt like it fitted well into the concept of my collection. The pleating that has been used in the collection is called sunray pleats, they are small on one side of the fabric and grows into bigger pleats on the other side. I created a pattern for the pleating and threaded the paper with Fixative so that the paper would absorb less water in the steamer. The fabric is put in between two identically folded patterns and then pushed together and tied up. It is then put in the steamer for 20 minutes and then left in the pattern until it has dried completely.



Show and Exhibition

When I was designing the garments for the collection I did this without having a gender in mind. It was more about a feeling of a person. So, when castings began I looked at how well the garments fitted a certain person and created an interesting persona. This became a way for me to strengthen my concept about forced roles. An over-sized suit jacket was squeezed into a pleated dress to describe a childlike discomfort from being dressed up in a gender without understanding the choice. The strict pinstriped suit jacket that evolved into uncontrollable layers of pink pleats which was paired with pinstriped suit pants that are opening up in the middle to show something else hiding underneath. Both of these outfits ended up on boys because it fitted their character and strengthened the concept.

The exhibition space became another way to strengthen the idea of these forced roles and the breaking of frames. I placed white frames around the suit jacket with the dress hanging from it, to show that in some ways the frames still keep us controlled. I placed some frames on the floor behind the collection to show that some frames we need to leave behind.



The project for me

This project has been quite personal from the beginning. The good girl syndrome is something that I have grown up with and parts of that still lingers on in my behaviour. It became important for me to do this project perfectly and that it became even more important for it to be perfect to others. And there it was, the syndrome. The feeling was then replaced with a frustration and deeper will to do it my own way. This frustration became a driving force in the project and became more about my resistance towards all pre-decided roles that we grow up with. I believe that this frustration took my project further, it became a way to tell that story. Even more so than the making of the garments. The garments became more like symbols for different fights we fight, both conscious and unconsciously.

This project has not weakened my good girl syndrome but it has definitely made me more conscious about it. By acknowledging that it is there and that I did not choose for it to be there but also understanding where it comes from makes it easier to undermine it. I still think that a lot of my perceived value comes from how well I do and how well I behave, but now I also have days when I can make countless mistakes and, despite of that, be just as much of a good person.



Picture 1, 2, 3, 4



Picture 5, 6, 7, 8

Bibliography:

Archive for Research in Archetypal. "Plants" in The Book of Symbols. Eds. Ami Ronnberg, Kathleen Martin, Taschen, 2010.
Shachtman, Tom, Rumspringa: To Be or Not to Be Amish. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Video:

"Patti Smith about the Gender Question", video, 2.04, posted 24th October, 2008, Accessed May 9, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSW4ONnQfJE>

Pictures:

Picture 1-4: Leifur Wilbrg Orrasson. Fashionshow, 2018

Picture 5-8: Leifur Wilbrg Orrasson. Fashionshow, backstage, 2018

All other pictures: Norea Wallström, research, work process and final pieces, 2017-2018

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