Xuan Cheng

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

SHERO COMIC

Sexual Objectification of Female Representation in Mainstream Superhero Comics

How can we design a better future for female representations? Read me.

CONTENTS

Designer
Xuan Cheng
Advisor
Jeffrey Franklin

Design for Social Innovation
School of Visual Art

When I was 16, Avengers first came out. There was a scene that I can never forget. After the first appearance, the Black Widow defeated her enemies and picked up her high heels. She worked towards the door. First, her feet showed on the screen, then her legs, then her bottom, then her breasts.

I wasn't sure what made me uncomfortable until I learned the word "sexual gazing" -- in a word, depicting a woman as a sexual object in visual media. And that's the potential for sexual objectification Last year when I began my thesis project, the fourth Avengers movie released

after Marvel's first female superhero movie. It seems like the superhero movie industry made tremendous progress. Though, as a female comic fan, I still can't love those female characters. Why? I started my research on mainstream superhero comic industry where all these movies are based on.
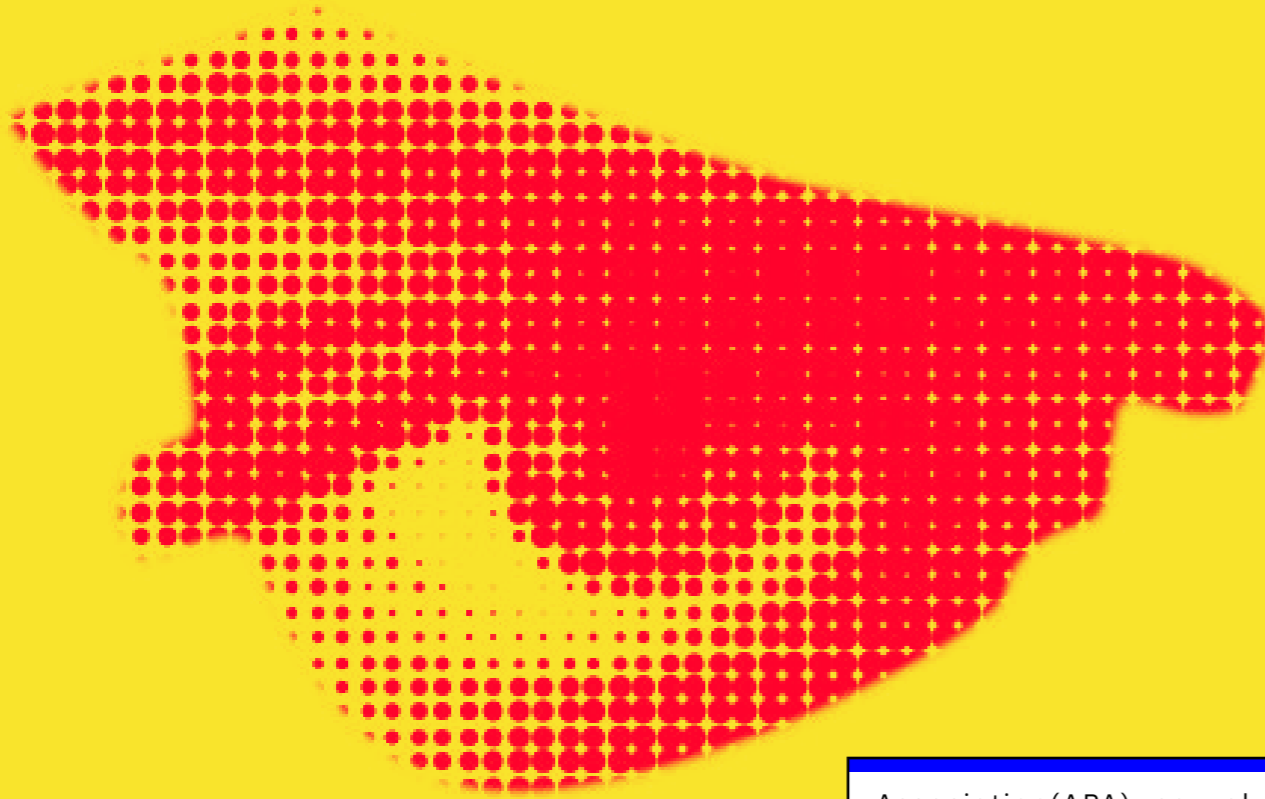
Sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her. According to American Psychological

Sexual Objectification

Association(APA), sexual objectification caused self objectification, and this causes psychological consequences like body shame, this also led to mental health risk
One way that SO might affect a woman's propensity to use and/or abuse substances is through exposure to sexually objectifying media, which pair women's sexuality and appearance with substance use.

Female characters in comics have long been a reflection on how society has viewed women. (The Female Justice League: The Misrepresentations of Women in Comic Books) Even today, sexual objectification of females still happens in superhero comics in visuals and narratives.

There are mainly three ways that SO of female happens in comics: 1. Females don't get to speak. They only speak 1/4 of the panels in the group titled issues. 2. The characters' appearances are designed to attract men. 3. Even though superheroines look feminine by their physical features, they do not actually act as females and they do not share life experiences or behave as real women do.

1940s WWII

1950-60s

1990s

2010s

8-10%
comic illustrators are female

47%
comic fans are female

SO in comics not only caused these, as side effects, the whole comic industry is not welcoming female in the first place. I have to prepare myself every time when I enter a comic shop, be ready to be questioned: Do you know these characters on the cover? A DC fan told me that she was humiliated while boys found her reading a superhero comic with big breast girl. As a result, girls quit the comic world, just as men thought they would be - if comics are designed to make females uncomfortable, why would they still read that? Few female comic artists apply for jobs in the mainstream superhero comic industry. Men are still dominating the comic world. 90%-92% of the comic illustrators are male, designing lots of SO female representations. But why females need to be in the conversation of superhero comics? While the superhero genre is having a huge impact worldwide, for countries like China, where feminism is less talked about, the impact of SO is real and invisible.

Sexual Objectified Female Representations

Less Female Comic Artists

Reinforcing Loop of SO in Superhero Comic Community

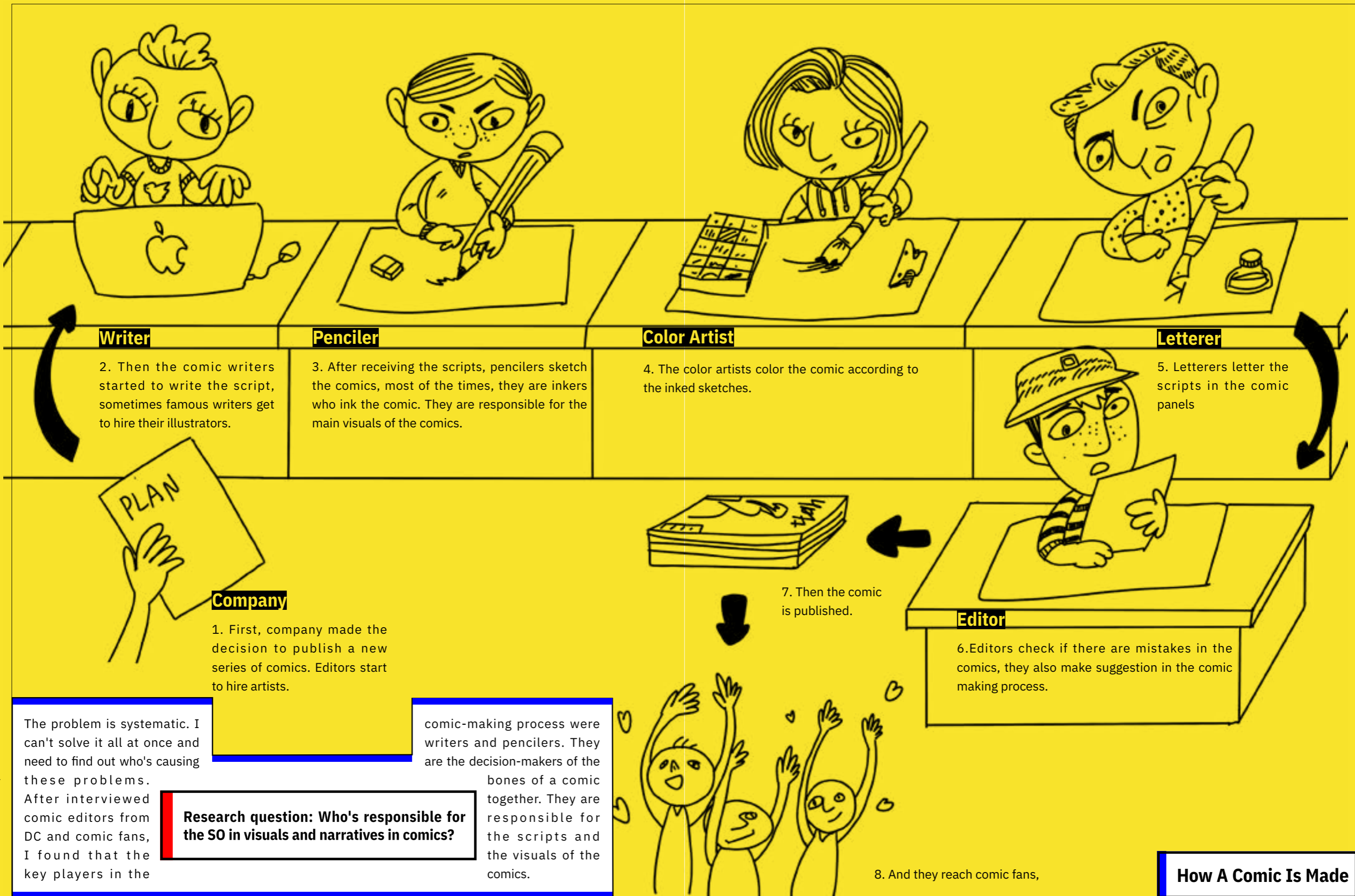**Female-Unfriendly Fan Community**

Issue 1

May 2019 - Jan 2020

RESEARCH

5 Community Events

22 Hours of Interviews

19 Interviews

3 Books

51 Articles

Writer

2. Then the comic writers started to write the script, sometimes famous writers get to hire their illustrators.

Penciler

3. After receiving the scripts, pencilers sketch the comics, most of the times, they are inkers who ink the comic. They are responsible for the main visuals of the comics.

Color Artist

4. The color artists color the comic according to the inked sketches.

Letterer

5. Letterers letter the scripts in the comic panels

Company

1. First, company made the decision to publish a new series of comics. Editors start to hire artists.

7. Then the comic is published.

Editor

6. Editors check if there are mistakes in the comics, they also make suggestion in the comic making process.

The problem is systematic. I can't solve it all at once and need to find out who's causing these problems. After interviewed comic editors from DC and comic fans, I found that the key players in the comic-making process were writers and pencilers. They are the decision-makers of the bones of a comic together. They are responsible for the scripts and the visuals of the comics.

Research question: Who's responsible for the SO in visuals and narratives in comics?

8. And they reach comic fans,

How A Comic Is Made

But is it better to educate future pencilers and writers before the existing system influences them? I designed a cultural probe to find the answer: I asked the teenagers in a comic shop to draw their favorite female superheroes. While a 12-year-old boy drew me a bug, a 19-year-old girl is interested in getting the body shape right. The secondary research indicates that's because of teenagers' self-esteem decrease in their puberty. But does it means gender conversation starts the earlier, the better? Research by Dane Peterson, Angela Rhoads & Bobby C. Vaught also suggests that younger age groups exhibited a lower standard of ethical beliefs. Therefore, it's harder to educate kids about the gender issue.

Research question: At what age group is conversation around gedner most effective?
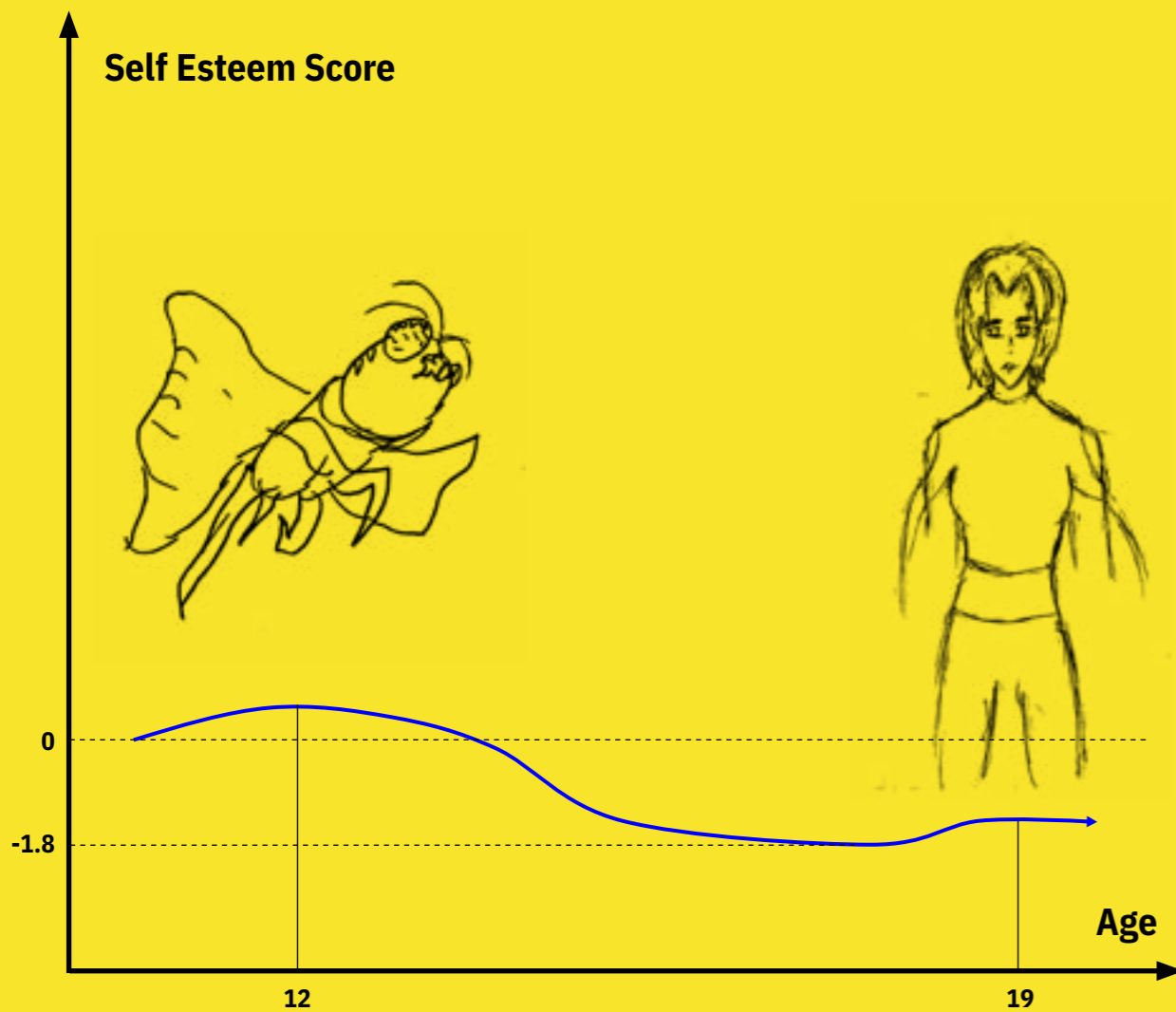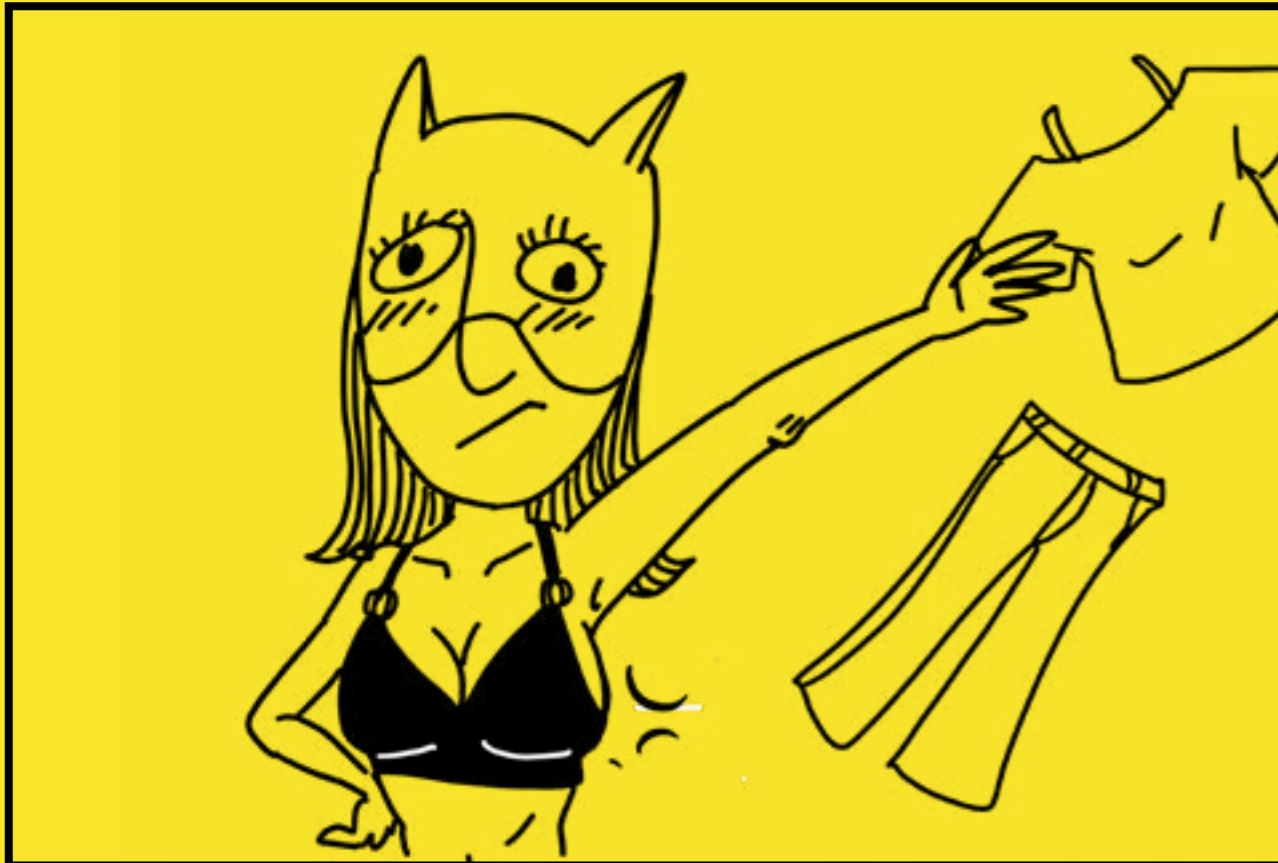
It became clear that I need to work with comic artists at a younger age. But where is the leverage point? I started to interview comic artists in comic cons, panels, and through personal connections. Sarah, who is a comic writer working for DC, told me a story. She was working on a Batgirl series, in one issue, she wrote in the script: " It was a really long day, she just wants to get rid of everything, including her bra."

Research question: What's the one change that can makes huge difference?

Self Esteem Score

0

-1.8

12   19   Age

All I want is take off my bra and have a good sleep.

Why is the bra not off?

Sarah

But when she got the art from the male illustrator, the bra was not off.

Because it's too Sexual!

The guy responded that he thought taking bra was too sexual.

"It's universally acknowledged that, if a woman takes off her bra, she must want to sleep with someone."

XUAN CHENG
~~Jane Austen~~

1: **Comic writers and pencilers**
are the biggest decision makers when creating comics.

2: The ability to understand what sexual objectification means happens after **age 14.**

3: **Misinterpretation of the female experience** b e t w e e n female writer and male pencilers stops them from creating more inclusive female representations.

If males are likely to misinterpret the scripts female wrote, is it possible to get female illustrators working with female writers and create more positive female representations? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Because of the long history of SO of female images, though the percentage of female fans has increased to 47% of the fan community, most of the illustrators are not interested in the mainstream superhero comic industry. They are more interested in writing and drawing their comics. Besides, the superhero comic industry pays less for the same amount of work. The good news is: Female writers are increasing these years. It's more likely to have a script that speaks of female experience. The leverage point became more specific - I need to fill the communication gap between female writers and male illustrators.

Research question: Is it possible to invite more female illustrators to the mainstream super hero comic industry?

It's not you want a female artist then you can get one, there aren't too many people applying.

Charlotte, DC Editor& Writer.

I don't think any girl in my class will apply for jobs in Marvel and DC, they don't read comics.

Viery, F.I.T. illustration student
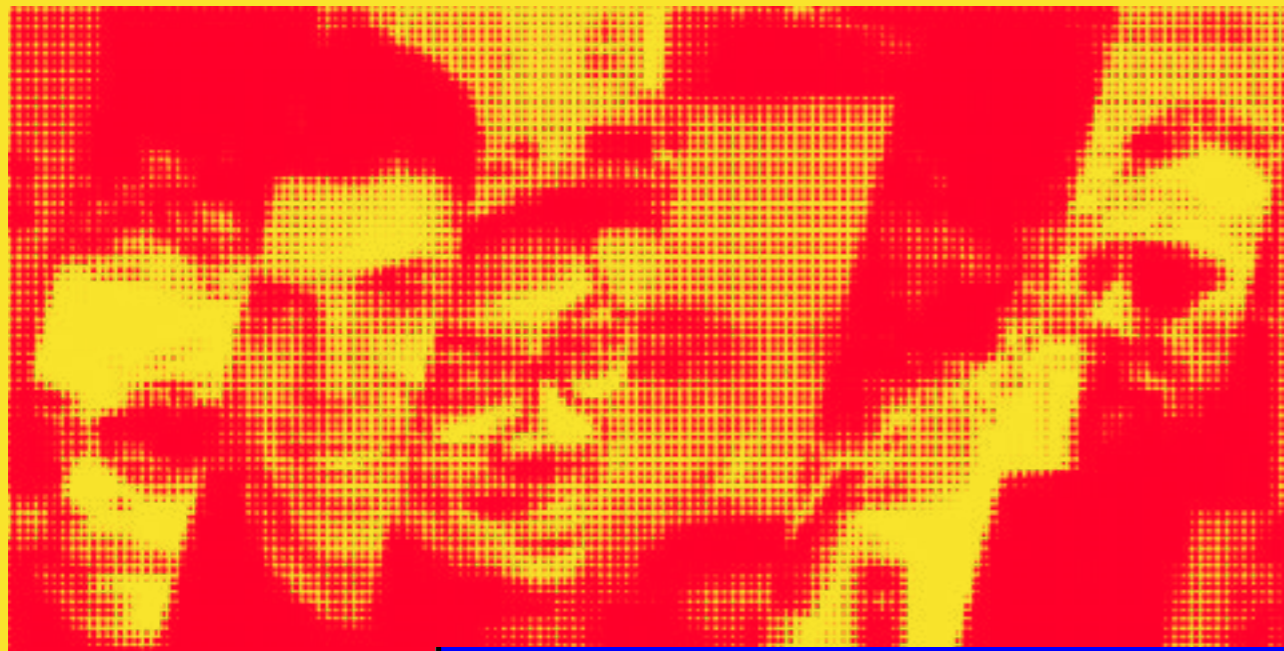
Marvel's Young Guns is a program that spotlights the best up-and-coming artists in the comic book industry. In 2018, none of these artists are female.

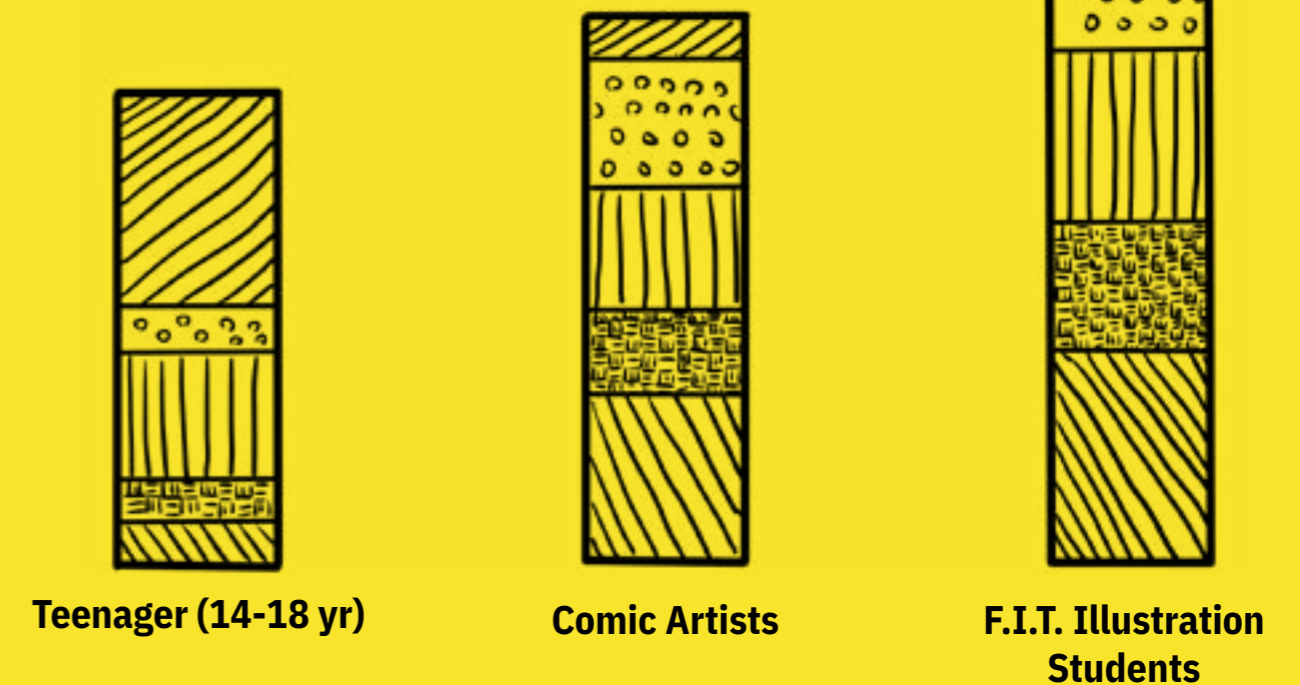Through my research, I also built relationships with three comic communities that qualify these asks: Loot comic shop(a comic shop focuses on comic training for teenagers), comic artists in the industry, and illustration students from the Fashion Institute of Technology. Thus, teenagers from Loot are too young to make an impact in the industry; comic artists are too busy with their works and have little free time to participate in the project. After measuring my access to them, their understanding of this issue, thier skills and understanding in comic-making, their influence to the industry, and the time they're able to offer, I decided to work with FIT illustration students. Then my problem statement came clear.

Question：Which comic community am I collaborating with to make a real difference?

░░░░ **Time Commitment**

∘∘∘ **Skills**

||||| **Understanding of SO**

▦▦ **Influence**

\\\\ **Access**

Teenager (14-18 yr)　　**Comic Artists**　　**F.I.T. Illustration Students**

How might we improve understanding of the female experience by male comic artists to create more inclusive female representations in their work?

How might we inspire male comic writers and illustrators to create more inclusive female representations by including ethical training?

The problem for (comic writers and illustrators) is the (sexualism and their experience while reading superhero comics and in real physical spaces), because (comics are made without ethical thinking).

The problem for comic writers and illustrators in the mainstream comic industry is consists mostly by male and dominated by male.

The problem for (female comic readers) is (that they feel they're not represented) because (most comics are made without ethical thinking).

The problem for (comic writers and illustrators) is (that their moral decisions are affected by mis-perception of female in comics), because (comic artists lack of ethic training).

The problem for comic writers who wants access and professional mentorship, because the center of the industry is consists mostly by male and dominated by male.

The problem for female comic writers in work of mainstream comic industry is the lack of...

The problem for (superhero comics), because comic writers and penciller is they're creating without consideration of inclusivity.

The creation is highly respected and drawing (writing and drawing) is creating(writing) male-centered, because the artist, freedom of drawing, because comic over-sexualised body images that doesn't match the reality and the gender stereotypes in creation is lack of ethic artist, the artist, freedom of drawing, because comic over-sexualised is shaped in designs for female characters can't be truly shown in the superhero comic industry is their...

The problem for female comic readers is their cognitions of gender is their physical\psychological\behavioral mental\sexualised body images that doesn't match the reality and the gender stereotypes in and of books.

PROTOTYPES

5 Prototypes Ideas
3 Workshops
8 Participants
6 Community Experts

Before brainstorm, I did research specifically on misinterpretation in arts. According to Art for Social Change: There are ethical implications of divergent interpretations. Good practices to mitigate this potential issue are: 1. Establish a monitor for the group during the interpretation process. 2. Take preliminary "results" back to artist participants for feedback.

To this problem, that is to say: Either establish a group monitor between writers and illustrators or create the feedback loops between illustrators and writers before comics are published. As a comic fan and an illustrator, I was familiar with the norms of the comic world. Based on that, I brainstormed fifty ideas and picked two that sounds most feasible from them.

My first idea is learned from an existing online movement, Hawkeye Initiative. Launched in 2012, Hawkeye initiative a satirical Tumblr page that comments and create images of Hawkeye, a male superhero, as the way comic depicts and treats female characters and superheroes in comic books. It pointed out female sexual objectification in the comics. The problem is: It didn't point out the solution. My idea is to ask illustration students to reimagine existing comics. Use this process as a way to educate and inspire them about a new future for female comic characters.

Prototype 1: What if she...?
Design value: Disruption of Existing Feedback Systems/Re-Imagine/ Education through Collaboration

How It works
"What if she...?"is a weekly challenge on tumblr started with FIT illustration students. Artists sign up as illustrators and writers. Every week there will be a challenge to alter an existing comic, coming with a probe question: what if she...? The Illustrators and writers will discuss the narratives and visuals together. The ask is to be open to discussion so that the collaboration will bridge the gap between the different understandings of female experience. Their work will be reviewed and receive feedback in the online comic community by comic fans, artists, editors.

Lean innovation is focused on increasing efficiency by capturing customer feedback early and often and minimizing waste in the product development cycle. The process prioritizes experimentation over elaborate planning, and celebrates continuous, incremental improvement.

TestTo get an earlier response, I cut my Gate 4 video, which explains my idea to illustration students. But they are busy and might only have 10 min for me, so I drew a comic to introduce what I want to do.
Feedback

From the response to the comics: Illustration students get the idea quickly, it is an activity that they always do online, and they believe it can attract more audience. I also interview an illustration student. I visited her house at dinner. The interview was lovely as we ate all the time. She gave me harsh critics. She agreed that this might attract more audience but doubted if it can change the industry. Because the audience it attracts is less likely to be comic artists, they might not be even interested in superheroes but only use this as a media for their own ideology. Consider the online comic community. I have to admit it's possible.

What I Learned
I'm glad that I didn't even prepare for all the materials for an online challenge so that I didn't waste time on reaching the wrong audience.

Next Step
My next step is to think of an idea that attracts illustration students and really help them.

Shero's Dictionary consists of two parts - a visual volcabulary and a workshop toolkit:

Workshop
It begins with the workshop. In the workshop, the writers and the artists are going to discuss the misinterpretations that happened in their collaborations. I hope these artists will bridge the gap between their understanding of female lived experience through conversations.

Prototype 2: Shero's Dictionary
Design value: Group Monitor/ Education through Conversation/ Disruption of Comic Education System

Visual Vocabulary
After the discussion, these artists will re-draw new visuals based on new understandings. This part is called "visual vocabulary." It will live online so fans and artists can still edit vocabularies that need new visuals.

Education
The workshop toolkit and visual vocabulary can also be a reference for comic teachers to do ethical training in school, so that future comic artists will learn how to draw characters based on female experience before entering the industry.

Test
I drew another comic and used it to interview FIT illustration students and female comic fans for feedbacks. I interviewed one comic fan and two illustrators.

Feedback
The idea received positive responses from all the female interviewees. Comic fan, Olivia responded that she thought the idea was very creative and hoped that it would work. She sent me a list of references for outcome measurements.

Illustration students from the F.I.T., Viery, was really interested in the idea and gave me some suggestions on how to get more people involved.

"Getting professional artists involved sounds feasible for me. I believe it's the way to make a real change."

Viery, F.I.T. illustration student

Iterate
Since the response was great, I started to develop the basic format of the visual dictionary with female artists and want to get it to the male audience.

I admire what you are doing. My thesis never sounds that interesting.

Olivia, Comic Fan

But when I reached out for male artists, the response that I got was...

O

ZERO

I was depressed...

Design carefully. Invite male to a safer environment where they feel comfortable to talk about this issue.

Miya, Chair of DSI

You have to understand their needs and what speaks to them. It's your thesis, not theirs.

Karen, DSI Professor

The male artists either didn't respond to my email or cancel the interview several times then disappear. I was depressed and wasted two weeks trying to contact them. Is it my problem or their problem? I wonder. Secondary research won't tell us anything about this. I asked professors in DSI for help.

What I learned Professors in DSI are more than helpful to help me figure this out. They asked me to think about the following questions: 1. How to **invite** them to an environment where they feel safe to talk about this issue? 2. What **interests** them? 3. What **incentivizes** them? 4. What are their **routines**? 5. Why are they participating? The tricky part of my project is that it collaborates with people who're unconsciously affected by this problem, it's more challenging to engage them. So I need to figure out how to get their attention. I couldn't figure out the answer quickly and decided to do more research with community experts. In those interviews, an illustration teacher and an artist, Katie, gave me an idea that was beyond smart.

Prototype 3: Can you draw a chair?
Design Value: Safety/Human-Centered
Research/Disruption of Routine/Fun

Can you draw a
chair?
female?
bra?

While Kaite once listened to a character design lecture in SCAD, the professor started the class with an exercise: Can you draw a chair? Most of the class drew similar chairs. Because they were staying in the same environment, they took the same reference while they were drawing. It's a default. I see the potential of exposing artists' unconscious bias using this question. I designed a doodle game that asks players to draw things according to a different reference.

The first version of the game asks players to draw a chair/female/dress according to nothing, just their first thought while thinking about these things. Then ask them to draw the same thing according to image reference, a real person, and your female friend's description of her favorite dress.

Test
I tested it with Kartik(Male) and Aditi(Female) from our cohort, the response was great - they love drawing, they love the game, and they love talking. Most importantly, because Kartik needs to draw Aditi's favorite dress according to her description, they naturally started the conversation around: Why you loved that dress? When did you wear that dress? How does it feel wearing it? The conversation became intimate since they're good friends and worked together for almost one year. It was lovely watching them share their experience with the dress. I wondered if it is ok to go further, so I asked Kartik and Aditi if they felt ok to change the last question to: Draw a bra according to your female friend's description. To my surprise, they were comfotable doing that.

> **I think it's ok, it(drawing) is what they do.**
> Kartik, DSI Stundet

What I Learned
First, it's essential to play this game with someone you love. It's necessary to use that relationship as the foundation of trust, so men don't get frightened by the word "sexual objectification." Second, intervene from the artists' daily routine, if they draw, ask them to draw. It's more comfortable and fun than just interviews. Third, women are more open to sharing than I thought, and there's nothing shameful about bras. It's not a new lesson for me, but I'm still surprised by how they want that open conversation. And their male friends are not afraid of that conversation.

Kartik(Male)
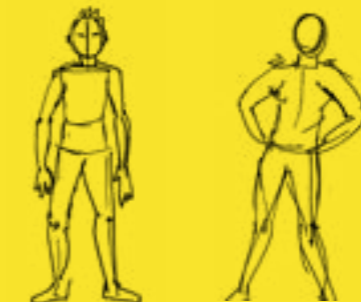
Aditi(Female)

Game Process

I tested the game with two other designers from the DSI cohort. Tara, a fashion designer, and Baitian, who is an industrial designer. They are great at drawing too.

Iteration 1
Add debrief session.
Test player: Can u draw a bra?

The main goal of the test is to practice facilitation of the conversation and test if it's ok for people to draw bras. After the game, I added a debrief session and asked them to think about where their images of specific things come from? Why they drew the way they did? Because of their professionals, Tara can describe the fabric, the texture, the structure of the bra in details. Baitian can get the structure, and it's function quickly. These two are amazing illustrators too. So this test is close to what I want to experiment with the comic artists.

Baitian(Male)

Game Process

Tara(Female)

What I learned
What I learned
These two are also my closest friends at the DSI. I know them pretty well. Especially Baitian, known as the best test player in DSI, usually won't do as the game designs him to do. But this time, he did. It gave me huge confidence. Their conversation was around how professionals influence their understandings of female experience and why is conversations between female and male is important. It turns out, if a man truly understands what a bra is supposed to do, he won't draw a pair of glasses as a bra. After looking at Baitian's before and after drawing of the bra, I realized that even though our experience is different, males can understand the female experience. This test also proves the hypothesis that drawing a bra can help to check the unconscious bias.

I also adjusted the visuals of the material according to their feedbacks.

How to draw a bra?

" So a bra is supposed to support the body, not cover the body?

- Baitian, Designer.

Baitian didn't realize this is for him to take notes, so I changed the layout.

Goal

After two tests, I felt confident to invite illustrators to test this game. My goal was to explain how drawing according to female experience can make a difference, and use this to build relationships with male artists. At this point, I haven't given up my idea of a visual dictionary, so I also researched with Chris on where the visual dictionary can live. The test result gave me a surprise.

Test

I invited my friend Junyu to test the game. I asked her to invite her male friend, Chris, from the F.I.T.

What I Learned

I was so lucky to have Junyu to help me with this. The friendship between her and Chris is the trust foundation. Most importantly, **their female friends can be the reason the subject matters** - you might not care about the female representations, but you love your female friends.

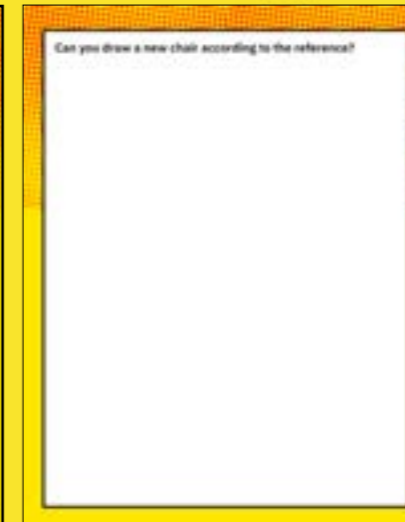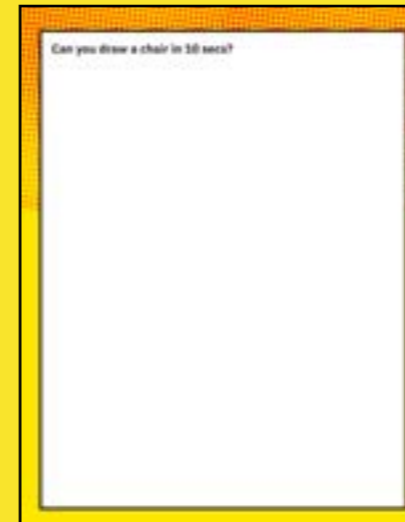<div style="border:1px solid">

Iteration 2
Improve debrief.
Research on reference tool for artists.

</div>

It'll incentivize males to act. The female friend is also **a guide to the female experience.** Even though she laughed when she saw Chris's first drawing of a bra, he didn't

feel judged or uncomfortable. Instead, they laughed together. She was patient while explaining why bra shouldn't look like that. They shared the memory of looking for a reference for a specific class. Chris told the story of drawing a piano chair that he can never forget.

He told me that they need a reference tool that overlaps their drawing tool, so they can draw and look at the reference at the same time. They also love websites like Pinterest, which links to similar references, so it saves time.

By the way, why males like to draw bras as glasses?

Can you draw a chair?

Using Experience & Illustration

Participant Name:_____

Finally something worked!

Can you draw a chair in 10 secs?

Can you draw a new chair according to the reference?

Can you draw a female?

Can you live draw a female?

Can you draw a bra?

Talk to a female in the room, ask her about:

Can you draw a bra?

Game Process

The game was fun because I enjoy drawing.
Chris, F.I.T. illustration student

The workshop worked. That's the first step of behavior change, education. But get to the next level, consistently practice the behavior? Based on the artists' preference, I though one possible solution is to give pencilers a new research tool. The research tool is based on Pinterest Algorithm.

Algorithum
The most terrible and the greatest part of algorithm. With the algorithm, when you click on sexualized visuals, it links to more sexualized visuals. But when you click on gender-inclusive visuals, more gender-inclusive visuals pop up. That is to say, if your default page is a gender-inclusive pinboard and you clicked any of

Prototype 4: Easy Paint Tool
Design Value: Agency/ Technology

I used to work with a guy. We'll do pinterest board for every character.
Seanan, Writer

It would be nice if I can draw on the computer and look at the reference at the same time.
Chris, F.I.T. illustration student

I start to use Pinterest because it will link you to the relevant reference.
Chris, F.I.T. illustration student

it, Pinterest recommends more. The tool is a pop-up window reference tool whose default page is a gender-inclusive pin board gathered by me. When you click the picture in there, Pinterest recommends more positive gender images. When pencilers are rushing to the deadline and have no time to think about where they get the reference, it will help them save time on research and create visuals that are more positive.

Test
I tested the algorithm, it worked. I found the code for creating a pop-up window that's always on the top of all windows. But when I ask if that's possible for teachers to recommend this tool, they aren't sure about that, so the idea didn't work.

What I Learned
Looking back, I wasn't sure if it's necessary to have that tool, I still think **the conversations between male illustrators and their female friends are the treasures to this project**. So how can I scale that?

I started to contact the illustration teachers outside the F.I.T. I signed up for a storytelling workshop held by the SVA Visual Narrative program, that's where I got to know their professor Jenny and Pratt professor Lynne. I interviewed them and realize that the current environment causes a lack of ethical training in school, the "call-out" culture disrupts all the trust and intimacy that people used to have. Teachers are afraid to talk about issues like "sexual objectification" because they might lose their job.

Prototype 5: Shero Workshop
Design Value: Bridge/Trust/ Stewardship

It is smart because you start with something neutral.

Lynne, Illustration Teacher

They highly complimented what I'm doing, for it brings up a "scary" topic with a light start - who can't draw a chair? They're looking forward to collaborating. And wonder if there's a connection between my project and their curriculum. Or if it's better to exist as an individual workshop.

I couldn't be more excited, though it couldn't be better and soon outlined the facilitation plan.

Workshop Plan

Date: TBD
Facilitator: Xuan Cheng
Length: 50min
Participants: TBD

Goal: To bring awareness around objectification of female, conversation between male and female comic artists and research/communication method.

Format:
1. **Doodle Game(8 min):** Draw a Chair
2. **Debrief & Share out:**

  Questions(10 mins):

  i. What's the different feelings of drawing according to default/ a picture/ person/ according to someone's living experience?

  ii. What changed in your drawings before and after you do research?

  iii. Take a look at each other's drawings, what's different? Ask them why did they draw that way?

3. **Presentation(5 min):**

  i. Why presentation matters: The history of female representations in comics?

  ii. Research with comic artists: Why researching with real person to get real experience matters when developing stories?
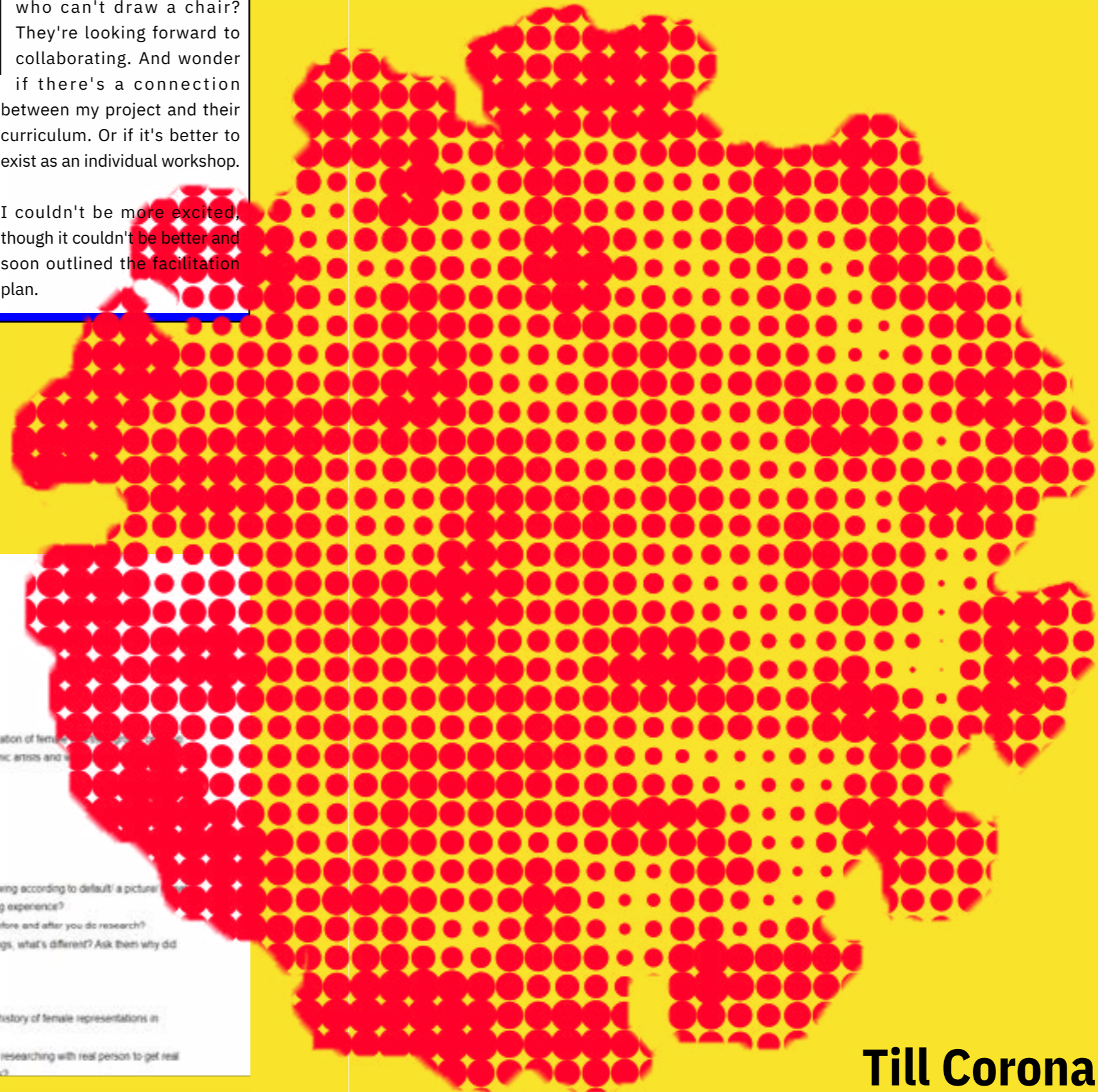
Till Corona came...

INTERVENTION

4 Workshops　5 Participants　5 Comics　4 Failures

Since the Corona disrupt almost all workshop plans and caused massive damage to people's mental health. My thesis project just wasn't the topic that needed to be talked at that specific time. Every teacher and student is adjusting to online learning, so it was impossible to hold any workshop at that time? So what I'm going to do My focus changed to how can I amplify and share my work. That came The Bra Talk. Going back to my documentation, I realized that the intimate and open talk about the bra is the shining stone of my project. I bridged the gap between understanding of female experience through those conversations and unveiled the unconscious bias. That taught me: We can unlearn sexual objectification through conversation.

Storytelling

The Bra Talk
COMIC

Education　　　　Humor

How It Works

he Bra Talk Comic is a series of comics of highlights from the conversations happened between male and female about bras.
Why bras?
The bra is just a proxy for body. And body, whether it's biological, social, or cultural, is a must when talking about gender. I facilitated three more talks with female and male for more themes of the topic.

The body is the basis for the distinction between the sexes...body exist within social and cultural contexts.

<Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks>

THE BRA

A comic about talking to men about bra.
It's hilarious.

SVA NYC

Design for Social Innovation

School of Visual Art

Branding

Structure
The comic part of intervention consists of a male bra, drew by the male who said those things on the comic. There's also a female bra, representing the female in the conversation. I drew that bra. These bras are talking. All the scripts of the comic are cited from the conversations that I facilitated between male and female comic artists/designers..

Test 1
I wished to test how does it work:
Does catches people's attention on the issue?
Does it help males understand the female experience and check their unconscious bias?
Does it introduce people the way to unlearn sexual objectification?
I first wanted to create a doodle challenge on social media since it's a few things that are still functioning the way it was. I invited more people to practice how to unlearn sexual objectification. It didn't get much response.

Test 2
I was used to failures at that time. Then I started my second test, which was to use it as a way to educate people about the importance of this issue. I got some response this time. An alumni even contacted me. We scheduled a coffee after Corona:)

CHALLENGE !

1. **DRAW** Draw a bra with a male friends in 30 secs.
2. **ASK** Ask them what reference is their bra drawing based on.
3. **THINK** Who decides how a bra looks in media? Who should define what's sexy/sexual?
4. **SHARE** Share the bra drawings & highlights of the conversation with #thebratalk

92% DC/Marvel comic artists
47% Readers

Male decide how female bodies look like and how female dress in comics. It influences what people learn about female bodies, even things like bra -- bra can be defined as sexual by male because it's not in their common experience.

Though, conversation around who gets the power to decide a female's body should happen, and should happen today, started by all of us.

_____ commented:
Men clearly don't understand the actual function of a bra haha 3w

_____ Men are absolutely ridiculous about some things lol.

But it still didn't reach the goal of helping male illustrators practice that talk daily. At the age of Corona, it's hard to get people's attention on anything digital. But is it possible to build stewardship upon the friendship between male and female comic artists? Then I came with the idea of The Bra Talk Postcard.

Stewardship

The Bra Talk
POSTCARD

Education

Intimacy

How It Works

The Bra Talk Postcard is a yearly postcard sent through email. In the postcards, female artists say hi to their male friends and check how well their male friends develop their female characters. On every postcard, there's a doodle challenge for the male artists. It asks the male artists to practice drawing a gender-neutral future, and give them new ways of thinking. At the beginning of each year, the male who participated in the workshop will receive a new postcard.

Test

I invite the female who participated in the previous workshops to join. They brainstormed and wrote the postcards. With half an hour, we 32 doodle ideas, here are some of them.

Draw your mom as a superhero.

Draw the daily routine of your female character.

Create a female character that doesn't look like female.

Ask me about a female behavior that you might not understand

Give your female character a chance to laugh at men.

Ask me about a movie that made me uncomfortable, let's make it better!

Coming Issue

FUTURE

May 2020 - ???

Theory of Change

Indirect Outcome — Mainstream superhero comic became gender-inclusive.

Indirect Outcome — More positive female representativets in mainstream superhero comics.

Direct Outcome — Male illustrators improve understanding of female experience.

Intermideate Outcome
- Start conversations around female experience
- Raise awareness around sexual objectification in mainstream comics.
- Establish stewardship between male and female comic artsts

Output
- Create safe environment to start conversation around exual objectification.
- Unveil illustrators' unconcious biases.
- Educate illustrators about sexual objectification and its impact.
- Yearly check in on unconcious bias and challenges that inspires new understanding of female experience.

Intervention
- "Can you draw a chair?"
- The Bra Talk Comic
- The Bra Talk Postcards

Input
- Invite female and their male illustrator friends to the workshop.
- Design a doodle game.
- Understand how SO influence your close friend.
- Use visual storytelling and humor to educate about SO.
- Help female to design methods that unveal unconcious biases.

Barriers
- Men are likely to shut down when talking about this issue.
- Male are holding power in the industry, they have less incentives to change
- The norm is objectification of female.
- Female's voice are less heard in the industry.
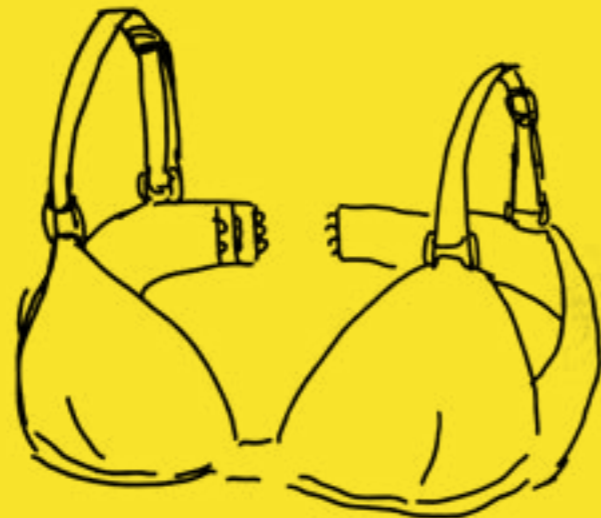
FUTURE / 42

Learning of Values

The most valuable learning for me is: For the first time, I see the gender issue from a male perspective. I realize that because of the call-out culture, males are avoiding this topic. But we can still design that possibility on friendship, trust, and love. We as humans are inter-connected—a table missing anyone not inclusive. Just as females should be invited to the comic community, males should be invited to conversations around how we can create a future without sexual objectified characters. What I designed are these invitations, I hope they're gentle. I wish they're with respect to perspectives from people of all gender. What I wish for is a world that values of all genders are valued. That's my opinion that people might not agree with it.

> **Do you always invite a friend of your interviewee, because that helps a lot.**
> Liu, Designer

A Bigger Landscape

This project started from where I was interested, but pictures a future landscape beyond mainstream comics, but visual media in general. I believe the study of this project will be a tool for tackling the sexual objectification of female representations in all sorts of media. I hope that whoever wants to work on this problem from a social design perspective can explore how to create a long term change that I didn't get a chance to test.

Thank you!

Sexual Objectification

SHERO COMIC

in Mainstream — Superhero Comics

# of Female Representations