Cass

Thesis Process
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Design for Social Innovation

Cass is a text-based communication outlet
for women dealing with sexism at work in their early careers
to activate a more constructive self- reflection process
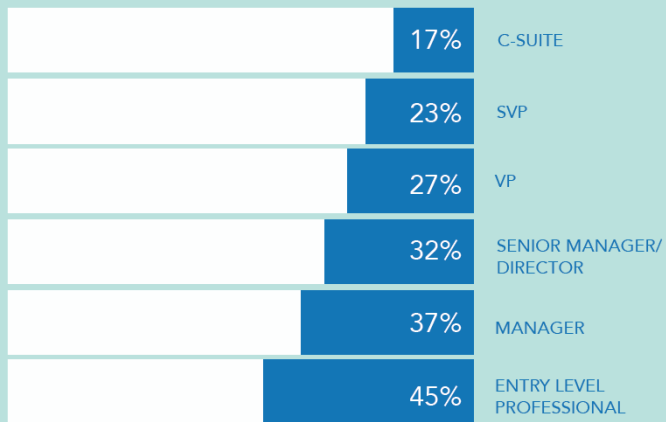to respond to sexist incidents.

2016

SEXISM IS STILL AN ISSUE.

GENDER REPRESENTATION AT THE WORKPLACE 2

17%	C-SUITE
23%	SVP
27%	VP
32%	SENIOR MANAGER/ DIRECTOR
37%	MANAGER
45%	ENTRY LEVEL PROFESSIONAL

Source: "Women in the Workplace" 2015 Report, McKinsey&Lean In

Women are still underrepresented in corporate sector. A research done in 2015 shows the decreasing rate of women presence in corporate sector. Many people assume this is because women are leaving companies at higher rates than men or due to difficulties balancing work and family.

However, this analysis tells a more complex story: women face greater barriers to advancement and a steeper path to senior leadership.

These rates decrease because of several layers of issues such as difficulties of being mother, opting out, pay gap and more…

Women not only observe a workplace biased against them; they believe they are disadvantaged by it.

4x
DOUBT OF FEWER OPPORTUNITIES

Women are almost four times more likely than men to think they have fewer opportunities to advance because of their gender—and are twice as likely to think their gender will make it harder for them to advance in the future.

3x
MISSED OUT OPPORTUNITIES

They are almost three times more likely than men to say they have personally missed out on an assignment, promotion, or raise because of their gender.

INCIDENT   RESPONSE

INCIDENT   **SELF REFLECTION**   RESPONSE

Sexism is complicated and personal.

During my interviews with women in their early careers, I witnessed how discomforting can sexism take form in workplaces, For example, one of my interviewees, Roya explained her story as she was always being told like she's the face of the company and asked to be present in the client meetings, without doing anything. Just for welcoming people. She ended up with saying: "I'm not a hostess, you know." Sometimes in subtle, sometimes major, these situations are always complicated.

When I was trying to gather information around how to react to sexism, my interviewees addressed a much deeper pain point. Sexism can be challenging. It can be hard to diagnose, it can be hard to discuss.

BEFORE REACTION

THERE'S SELF - REFLECTION.

Before reaction there's self-reflection where women try to discuss the situation internally. And self reflection process defines the decision making that influences their reactions. For this reason, self-reflection is the most influential stage that stimulates these further stages.

INCIDENT   **SELF REFLECTION**   DECISION   RESPONSE

During interviews I've found out some women can find it difficult to trust in their ability to contemplate and be decisive without avoiding. An interviewee said: "I felt so guilty and ashamed not just because I didn't speak up earlier but also because I couldn't trust myself to differentiate between whether something was wrong or not."
And when their self-doubt becomes pervasive, women can get lost in mind baffling debates and avoid from confrontation.
Among 10 women I interviewed with some of their concerns were about doubtful inner debates that hinders trust and lack of perspective and blocks constructive discussion.

In early months of thesis, I was focusing on the issues around the Turkish Industrial design scene. My goal was to empowering designers in their working environments to activate a more creative and innovative product development process.

They mostly start with really low salaries - as much as a minimum wage job- to the companies where they are only perceived as 3d modellers with a production organizing skills. They take these jobs because the number of succeeding design firms/factories are very limited. But the low wages is not the reason why designers don't feel valuable in their working environments. Low wages are a symptom of how design is perceived in Turkey. One of my interviewees said: "My boss already gets the products from China and steals it from other companies. She thinks that design is a value, however, he doesn't value it to the level of investing in a new product."

The importance of mindset is also pointed in the paper when representing the case from Ireland: "The main barriers 27 to innovation are perceived to be norms and values prevailing in the organization and the lack of strategic direction. Attitude to mistakes, tolerance of ambiguity employee empowerment and how decisions are made are all important aspects of an innovative culture and mindset of the firm."

I've did surveys and personal interviews with 14 designers over summer and found out that the issues. I identified 2 main issues that young industrial designers face in Turkey:

1. Communication problems in manufacturing stage

Young industrial designers in Turkey struggle with a lack of understanding of design in the companies they start working. How might we enhance the relationships between designers and production workers to strengthen the innovative and creative approach in production process?

2. Seeking for better opportunities to produce and market their own designs

Industrial designers craft strong and successful projects and designs yet, they lack ability to carry those projects forward and implement. How can we promote industrial designers entrepreneurial projects in order to provide better working conditions and cultivate design platforms in Turkey?

However, I got a valuable feedback on how these are serving to the social innovation issues and started to rethink the problem by focusing on the first issue which is about relationships between designers and production workers.

Moving forward, I realized that the female experiences in design field is different than male counterparts in terms of relationships with the production workers.
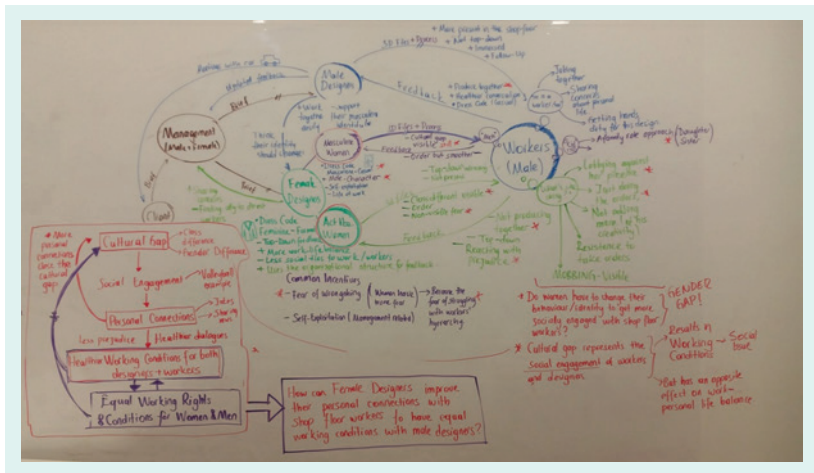
THESIS TOPICS

Activating design culture in Turkey → Empowering young industrial designers working in Small and Medium Enterprises → Building stronger relationships among young industrial designers and shop floor workers. → Strengthening female designers relationships with production workers

> **"Examples demonstrate how women do not address the resistance they encounter on the shop floor as an issue that should be dealt with by the management at the organisational level, but instead by themselves through personal coping strategies."**
>
> - Kaygan, P., "The Shop Floor is not for Every Woman": Narratives on Women Industrial Designers' Relationships with ShopFloor Workers

Building up confidence for young women to respond to sexist incidents at work

Providing a more constructive and supportive self reflection for young women who faced sexism at work.

How can female designers improve their personal connections with shop floor workers to have equal working conditions as male designers?

As a young women, I personally faced sexism in my previous jobs, without inherently knowing that they were sexist moments. While I was working as a junior industrial designer, my presence in the shop floor - a male dominated workers space- was perceived in different ways by my boss and also by workers.

I've also found a paper written about the female designers' struggle in production companies which led me to look at the relationships between female designers and mostly male production workers. Some of her interviewees were addressing the need of showing masculine and progressive traits in the production site in order to build strong relationships in order to work together and implement their designs more effectively.

> **"According to the women participants, the industrial design profession offers them equal opportunities to those offered to men, in terms of both getting a job and promotion, and division of labour. On the other hand, without exception, all of the participants, both women and men, stated that the shop floor is where being a woman matters strongly and visibly. In their accounts, they made a clear distinction between the office and the shop floor, defining the latter as a male dominated or a male-only environment, where men show strong resistance toward women's presence, particularly when women are in positions of authority."**
>
> - Kaygan, P., "The Shop Floor is not for Every Woman": Narratives on Women Industrial Designers' Relationships with ShopFloor Workers

I took her story to create a virtual character to prototype with users by adding her narrative to the storyline. I used her story for the Snapchat and Text messaging prototypes.

These 3 platforms differ from each other in order to measure different effects of sharing (verbal, imagery and outloud) and also to see which ones are the most comfortable methods for the target group in using.

While I was planning these methods, I wanted to introduce the virtual character only to Snapchat and text messaging because Snapchat and Text Messaging are the platforms participants use to talk/ message someone else. I excluded the virtual friend from the mirror exercise because I wanted to see if it makes any difference while talking outloud without a narrative, while just talking to yourself.

In terms of the narrative, I was inspired by the book I was reading at that time: Men Explain Things To Me by Rebecca Solnit. Even though the book is mostly focusing on the sexual abuse and harassment of women and portrays a extensive history with different stories, I was effected by the way Solnit questioned women's inner struggles on interpreting sexism. One of the examples she was talking about was a Greek Goddess Cassandra who was gifted with prophecy by Apollo. Yet when she rejected Apollo, she was cursed to be never believed by others.

Solnit explains her story as:

> **"She was cursed with the gift of accurate prophecies no one heeded; her people thought she was both crazy and a liar."**
>
> -Rebecca Solnit, from Men Explain Things to Me

PROCESS / Research & Scoping

Looking back on my previous interviews from both female and male, I started to analyze my interviews in the lens of gender differences afterwards. That paper influenced me to dive deeper into how women are perceived in the production site and how they function their design skills with the power structure embedded in these relationships.

However, differences between gender experiences wasn't a big focus of mine at that time back then while I was doing personal interviews. I needed to do more research about personal stories of female designers. The volleyball quote from one interview was a central observation around how these relationships evolve and foster a design culture in a company, yet I needed more solid examples for women designers. Meantime, I also extended my focus from Turkey to US and looked for women with experience in the design field.

I did 9 interviews with young women designers between age 23 to 30 and looked at the struggles they face in their experiences. While I was looking for the relation-ships between them and shop floor workers, some interviewees explained their issues with their coworkers too. Without knowing it, I was taking it granted for that the office environment is much more robust and sexism-free atmospheres but it didn't take me long to realize that unconscious bias and sexism is a probable case for every company with a variety of size. Some of my interviewees explained their issues with the production workers and some told the verbal sexual harass-ment incidents happening in high end companies. The names of the interviewees are changed in order to protect their identity.

When I was trying to understand how can women better respond to sexism, by synthesizing interviewees comments on sexism, I realized that response comes only after when women can recognize and discuss the incidents they've gone through.

9 interviews

New focus on US female designers

15 interviews
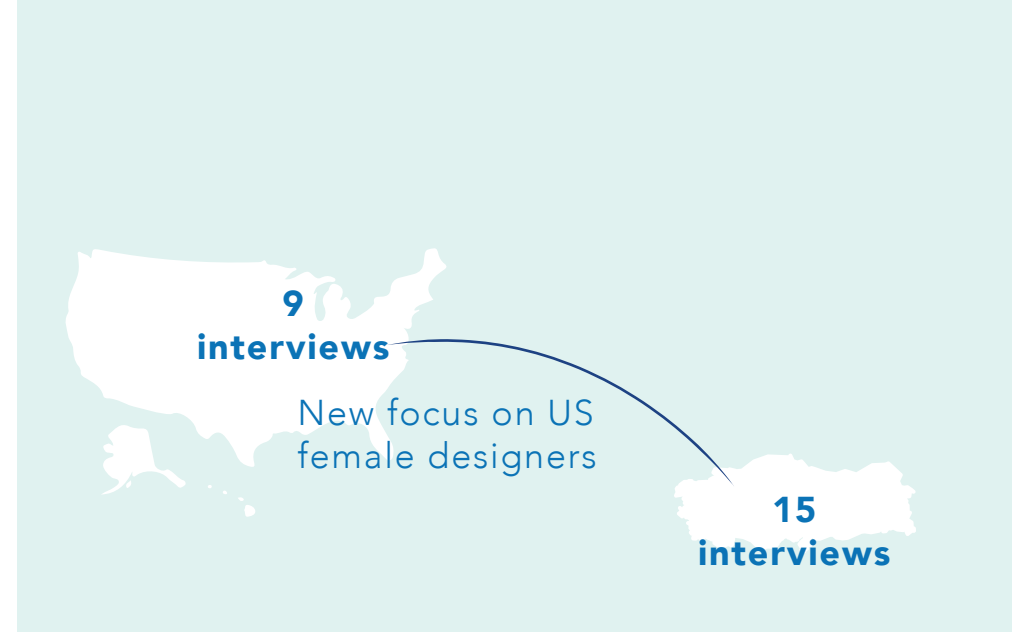
Alexis was telling me catcalling situations in construction site and how her boss didn't do anything about it even though those happened in his presence. She explained her struggle to speak up about her case as:

"I still have that problem today. Even speaking up. Feeling justified to say something about it. I just I'm not one of the people who is not super comfortable with confrontation. Especially if it involves something negative. Potentially I just try to work around it and hope it doesn't continue."
- Alexis, personal interview

Another interviewee Roya was explaining her situation in a start-up where she was being invited to client meetings that she wasn't being asked to present projects or ideas. She was being told that they framed it in a way that she was the face and representative of the company, however deep down, she knew that her visibility by her gender is being taken advantage of. In her case, her career pursuing was more important than gender issues within that start-up because she was the only designer.

The struggle of being visible with gender is real and it is a wider issue in other fields than design industry. Even though I was focusing on the female designers' struggle, I've come to realize that this is only one part of the problem where women struggle to defend themselves.
While I was trying to understand how might we help these young women to react to sexism in the workplace, I found out a deeper issue in the process of reacting to sexism.

An interviewee said about her struggle: "One of my colleagues intentionally or unintentionally I don't know but he grabbed my arm, and didn't threatened me, but there was an edge to it where i felt threatened… I didn't know what to do with that. And I only told my higher ups two weeks later. I think for me it was a difficult one, because i didn't know how to navigate it... I just didn't know how to interpret what was happening. And it all happens so fast. But I don't think he would have done that to a man."

I asked her how she felt: "Confused, that was my initial reaction. What just happened? Immediately after that it was a sense of guilt that like I did something…. Before than in my head, and I understand that's an attitude that ain't grained to culture in the system i live in is that like, that was something that I did wrong. The owness was on me. Was it him? That's what was going on on my head. I felt guilty and ashamed because I didn't do those things but also guilty and ashamed because I couldn't trust myself to differentiate between whether something was wrong or not."

INCIDENT → SELF REFLECTION → RESPONSE

This was an important moment for me because it made me realize that there were bigger internal struggles in her head and how she was interpreting was affecting her decision making about reacting to the incident she faced. The way she reflected what happened is what shapes decisions and triggers reactions accordingly.

The way to reach to a more diverse workplace is not only through policy change, salary increases or other external conditions, but also- the more importantly- through female self.

"I felt guilty and ashamed not just because I didnt speak up earlieralso guilty and ashamed because I couldn't trust myself to differentiate between whether something was wrong or not."

These interviews showed me the inner struggle young women can face while understanding and diagnosing these sexist incidents. Sexism can take many different forms sometimes subtle, sometimes major. But it's complicated and challenging. Looking at the interviewees, I realized it is very challenging to diagnose sexism when it's subtle.

Another interviewee told me how her self-doubt became pervasive in her thoughts while she was trying to interpret what was happening. This made me realize that there's a bigger step before making a decision about doing something that's about self-reflection.

Self-reflection can be defined as an engagement in the thinking or contemplating about what happened, from their own perspective. It's about looking deeper than the surface to find out why certain things happened and trying to find answers or conclusions to support their own perspective.

Self reflection during sexist incidents is important because it defines women's perspective on what happened, and this influences the decisions to be made about how to react to these incidents/ or if to react at all.

The internal problem with sexism is: Activating trust in yourself during self-reflection process can be confusing for young women dealing with sexism.

So my goal was to finding a way to help these women gain their trust back in the self-reflection process.

The way self-reflection works is about the answers women find to the questions that pops in their head, such as 'Was it my fault?" Or "Should I have said something?" Or "Is it too late to speak up?" What I realized in these interviews was that these young women lacked trust in ability to diagnose these sexist incidents they've gone through. Their doubtful inner debates caused lack of self-confidence in differentiating these incidents and define what was sexist. And when their self-doubt becomes pervasive, these women can get lost in mind baffling debates and avoid from confrontation.

I identified user needs for a supportive self-reflection process as:

- **Stay kind to themselves in these inner debates to understand their emotions**
- **Providing a objective perspective for an attentive and constructive discussion**
- **Instill self-confidence and clarity while judging to validate their perspective on what happened.**

A lot of these needs about the reflexivity in perspective and being more aware of their inner discussion. So I identified the value space as:

How might we provide a better perspective for a more objective and constructive self-reflection process for young women who faced sexism in the workplace?

INCIDENT > **SELF REFLECTION** > **DECISION** > **RESPONSE**

While I was thinking of ways to provide this perspective, I ideated for different ways to communicate their feelings to themselves in a more objective way. For this reason, my main focus was to work on a communication outlet to provide a healthier option for self-reflection. The approach for this is in two steps:

1.Recording conversations: To get participant talk about the incident and the different aspects of the situation in a structured order. By doing that activity anonymously, the participant can express her emotions freely and without fear of a response to her words

2.Revisit Recordings: After some time, participant will visit her comments about that situation and gauge if she feels any different or if she has any comments on those.

The main reason why I wanted to do a communication outlet was to try if producing a tangible outcome is providing any better insights to the participant about the situation they've gone through. I wanted to see if this tangible outcome of their inner conversation is bringing an objective perspective about participant's own feelings and eventually get them less judgemental and more constructive to their core.

The way I did this was in 3 different platforms. I facilitated these conversations over Snapchat, text messaging and by talking to mirror.

In terms of the conversations, I handed them these questions, however I wanted to provide a narrative in the form of a friend for participant to talk to. This friend is a virtual character who has gone through similar sexism and who wants to listen. The virtual character first shares her story and then slowly wonders into participant's story and asks her several questions as on the right.

SELF-REFLECTION TOOLS

Recording Conversations ► Revisit Recordings

PROTOTYPING QUESTIONS

- What happened?
- How would you act differently?
- What stopped you to react at that time?
- Who do you want to talk to?
  - How would you start the conversation?
  - How would you describe that incident?
 - What do you want to hear out from him/her?

Snapchat

Cassandra introduces herself as Cass and asks questions as Snapchat messages (an image and a text box with questions). After receiving images, takes a picture and sends those pictures in a pdf format afterwards.
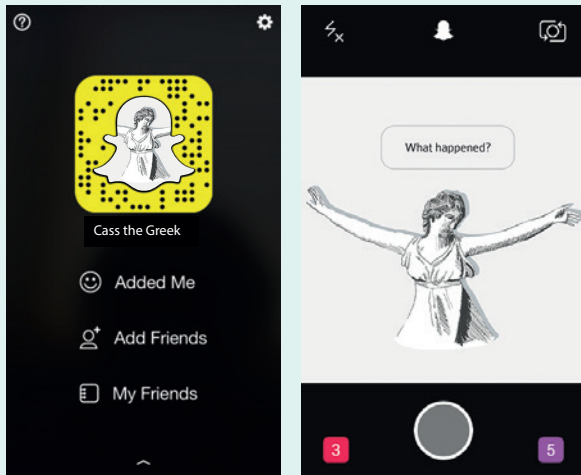
Text

Cassandra introduces herself as Cass and asks questions as text messages. For the first prototype I draw 2 goddess images and draw text boxes on a separate piece of paper to customize questions. I received answers in text format sometimes with emojis.

Later on, I shared the script in a long pdf format.

Mirror Talk
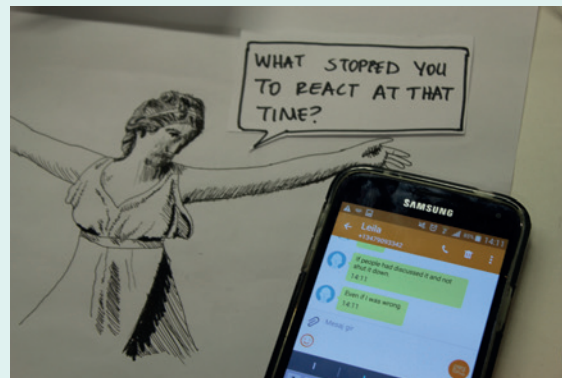
Without giving participant a narrative, I provided each questions on different pieces of paper and handed it to the participant. I asked the participant to go to a bathroom/toilet and answer those questions one by one while looking at the mirror. I also asked her to record her voice to her phone and asked to send me her answers afterwards. A week later I shared that record as playlist, with each track named after each question she answered.

- Comfort level
- Depth of conversations
- Impact of revisiting recordings

I tried these prototypes with 6 women on total, and wanted to measure 3 main things:

1. Comfort level on sharing:

How did participants feel while using these methods?

Did the questions make sense in terms of their situation?

How did they choose the questions? How did they feel about those?

    What was your priority?

    Did you go out of your comfort zone in choosing those questions?

How do you feel now?

    Do you feel heard?

    Would you consider sharing it with someone else?

2. Depth of conversations:

    Did those questions make you think about a different aspect of your situation?

    If so, how? In which questions?

    How did you answer those questions?

How was the experience of answering those questions?

    Did you notice anything new while thinking about and answering these questions?

    If so, What were those?

    If not, how do you answer these questions in your head?

Would you do this again?

    Would you share this exercise with someone else?

    A co-worker/ a friend?

What would you change in this process?

3. Impact of revisiting recordings

How did you feel to hear yourself back?

How was the timing?

Would you consider sharing this with any other person?

    Who would that person be?

    What would your expectations on sharing this be?

Which method was more comfortable for you? Sharing pros and cons

How do you see your future after this session?

Do you have a clearer picture of what happened in that incident?

    Do you see yourself acting any differently in the case of another gender discrimination situation in future?

    What would you change in this process?

7_Who do you wanna talk to?

6_What stopped you to react at that time?

5_How would you act differently?

4_How does that make you feel?

3_What did you do?

Follow-Up Playlist for mirror exercise

2_What happened? vol.2

1_What happened?

"I was able to respond to in a much more concise way than I'm normally speaking."
-Karen

Interviewees had different experiences over 3 prototypes. For example, The most effective one was the mirror talk exercise because the participant had really interesting insights of her experience.

She said: "It helped me really solidify what I was thinking at the time, doing it, going through the process of saying outloud, helped me solidify what I was thinking at the time. Listening to it now, I think especially because what the whole issue got resolved, and I listened to it after the resolution, I feel like sometimes will speak up about something and then oh maybe aim making a big deal out of this, maybe it's an over reaction and then quiet myself. But then, but feeling validated by myself listening to it again." She also said: going through the act of talking self, when I was confronted by the guy, and we had that conversation, he brought up some stuff that I was able to respond to in a much more concise way than Im normally speaking off the cuff."

In the Snapchat prototype with Cass character; participant also felt the sense of validation by saying: "After seeing that, I felt satisfaction knowing that the story was recorded somehow. Looking back at it, seeing the format of snapchat forced me to simplify what happened." However she wasnt happy about the way she received the script "One big horizontal strip layout needs to be adjusted. But physical manifestation of it made feels a lot more validating."


"Physical manifestation of it made me a lot more validated."
-Rebecca, 22
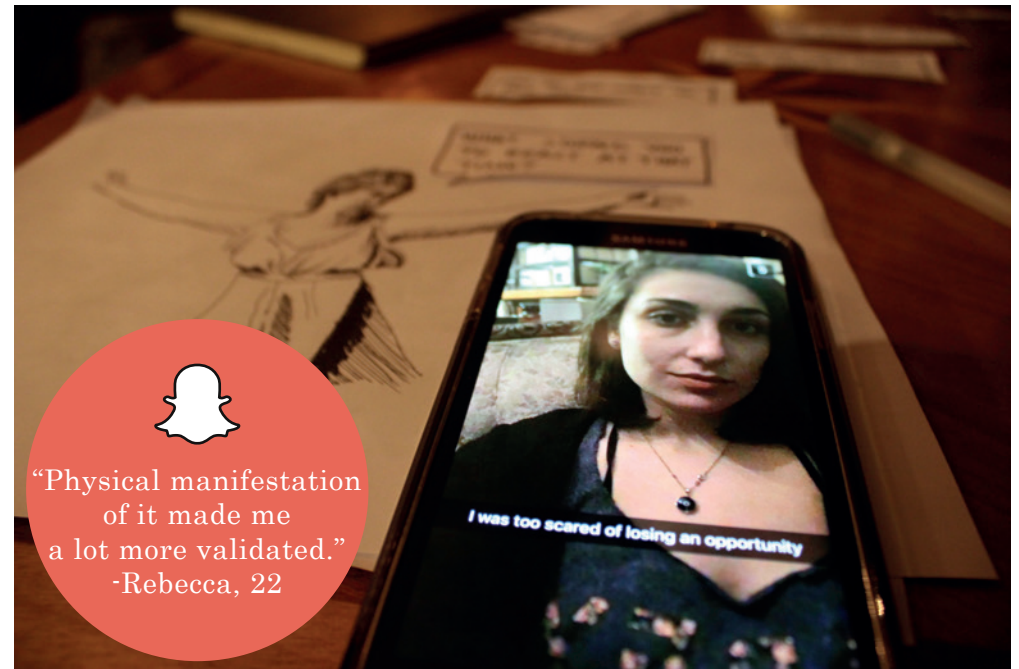
Follow-Up PDF of Rebecca's Story
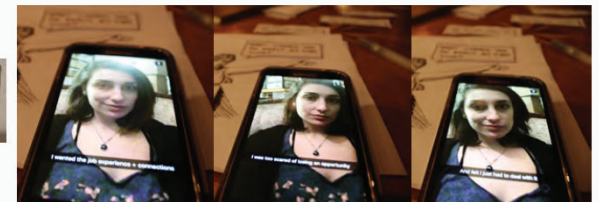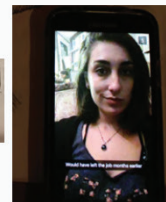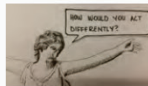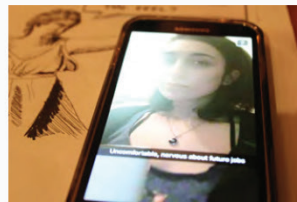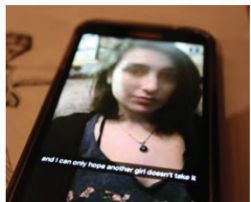
In the texting example, I got results from the lens of Cass's story and how she works in terms of the conversations she opened. During the prototype, the users both Alexis and Jessa were engaged. Jessa said about Cass that she felt that it's a character without trivializing the situation. Also she said that she talked to Cass like she could speak freely without worrying about what the response would be.
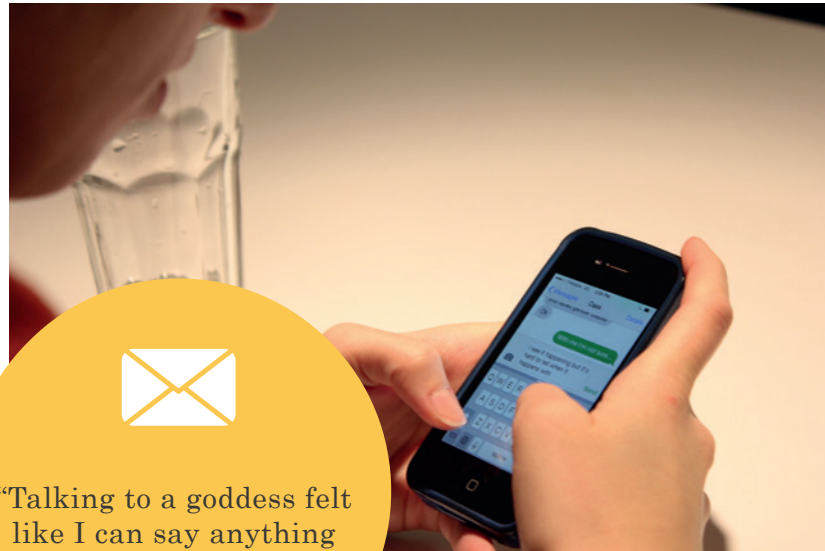
"Talking to a goddess felt like I can say anything without worrying about what the response would be."
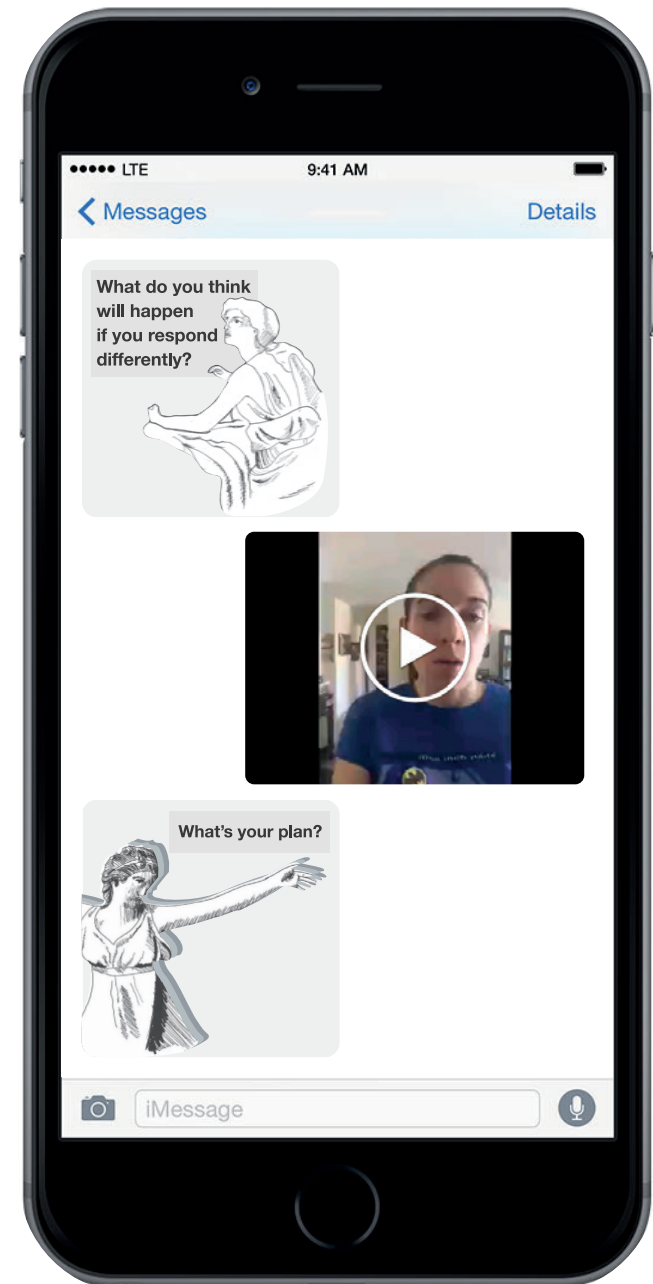-Leila

Me facilitating conversations by changing snippets

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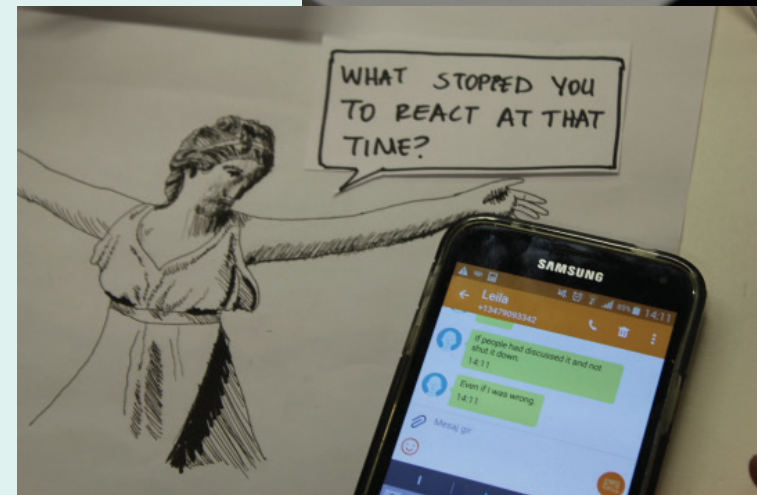
Cass

For the next and final iteration, I took the mirror exercise's talking experience by facilitating the conversation via text messaging. To make it more relatable for women to open up, I combined it with the Cass's narrative as she sends her text messages as images and questions on it. Users can respond to it by taking self-videos while answrring Cass' questions.

In these 3 prototypes with 6 women, they all gained a more impactful perspective of their situation. And visiting recordings provided self validation and confidence. And They all said, they would come back to it even in the future if another sexist incident happens to them.

Some of the struggles that I faced during these prototypes, were different for each platform. For example, in texting method; participants were engaged because they were comfortable with texting because it's a familiar method for them. However, the conversations reached to a limit because writing long texts to explain their situation was making it difficult for them, it took them a long time and especially a lot of effort to make their case in writing. This resulted in a lot of self-editing in these messages, which blocked the natural flow of conversations.

In the Snapchat prototype, the participants were able to engage with Cass and responded to her questions with honest answers, yet the medium they used were either via text or individual selfies. When the participant ended up sending 50 snapchats to Cass with the same or similar selfie which includes a text pasted on the image, the method becaame less exciting than it sounded.

Snapchat   Text   Mirror Talk

- Gained perspective
- Self validation
- Willingness to revisit

Finally, in the Mirror exercise, even though I had the most effective results in terms of depth of the conversations, the actual talking to a mirror wasn't really approachable and comfortable for the user. They said it's mostly because of lack of motivation in the beginning, since they didnt have the Cass incentive to relate and start with.

These outcomes made me focus on Cass's narrative but to combine it with the real time, outloud conversation of mirror exercise. With these new criterias, I started to use Cass as a text messaging contact that sends images with questions and gets answers by having participants take self videos in response.

Mirror	Text Cass Snapchat Cass
+ Deeper interaction	+ Imaginary friend
+ Honest	+ Incentive motivation
	+ Structured conversations
− Uncomfortable with talking	− Storyline
− Self started, without motivation	− Recording design format
− Uncontrollable conversations	− Self editing (messaging)

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INTERVENTION

Moving forward, to make this method more self-sustaining, I turned this into a webpage platform where users can learn more about the method and send a request to use Cass by signing up with their phone numbers from online.

It also includes a sign-up sheet and guidelines for volunteers who want to volunteer to be Cass and facilitate conversations.

Cass VOLUNTEER GUIDE

Hey future Cass,

Thanks for volunteering and your interest in being a goddess!

Aim for video responses

Send images via text messaging in an organized fashion and ask them to reply my questions with self videos. The images can be downloaded here.

The structure of the conversation is through the numbers in each image.

Listening is essential.

Try to ask questions instead of giving them advice. This conversation is all about getting participants to talk about their own experience.
If the questions seem irrelevant to what they are talking about, feel free to skip them and curate like Cass.
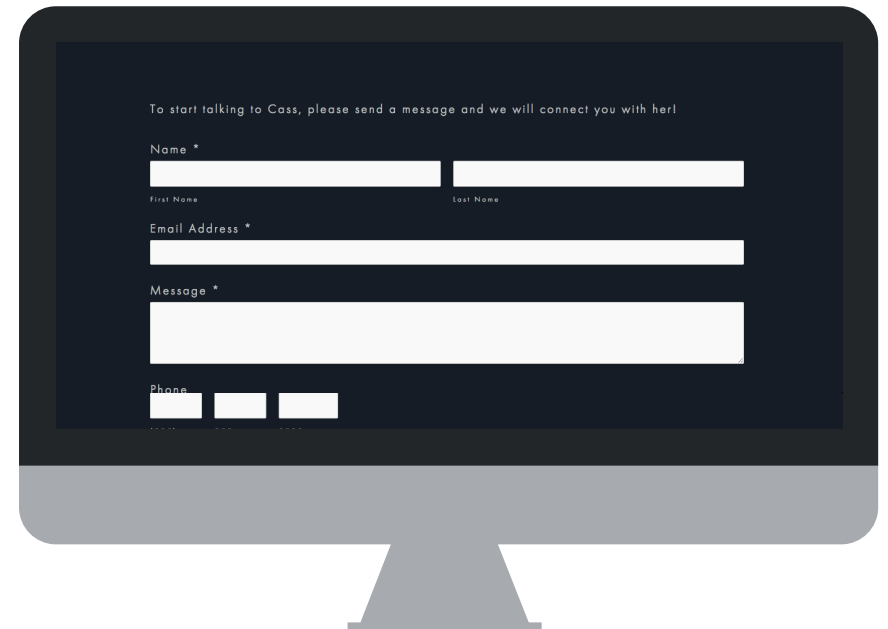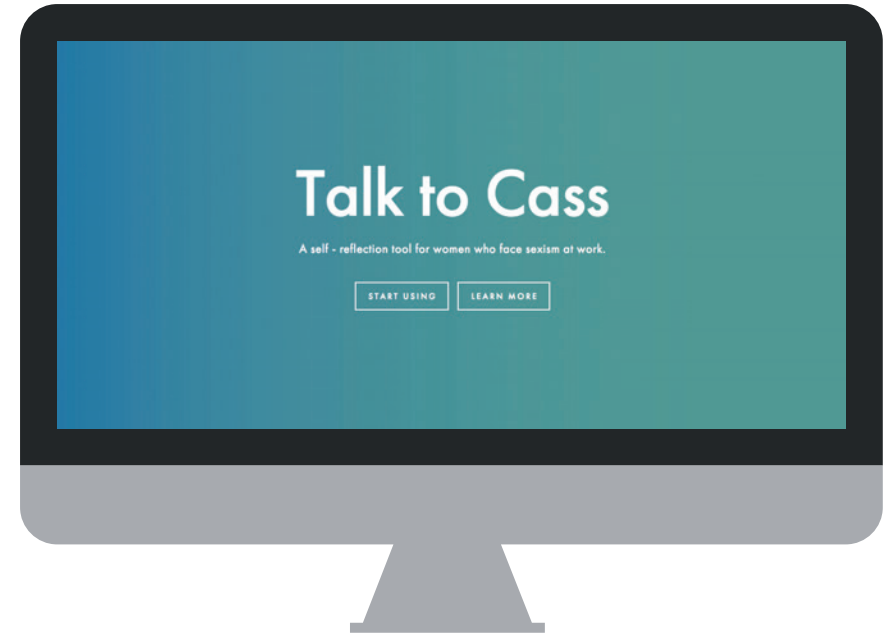
Confidentiality is key!

You might hear things from users that you might inspire you for sharing with others, but please respect to the secrecy and keep it to yourself.

If you're still down, let's get to you signed up!

Please mark your availability to the calendar here and write down your contact information (will not be shared with public)

Next Steps

When a user wants to find a Cass, we will forward the message to you and you can text "yes" to accept or "pass" to decline the request!

Talk to Cass

A self - reflection tool for women who face sexism at work.

START USING   LEARN MORE

To start talking to Cass, please send a message and we will connect you with her!

Name *

First Name   Last Name

Email Address *

Message *

Phone

INTERVENTION

By signing up- users download guidelines and the images to send to users. And guideline show them how to craft more questions that fits into the user's situation so that volunteers can become more active during this conversation.

Volunteers enjoyed this experience too. They said this exercise of listening without giving advice allowed them to understand the participants perspective and built relationships through passive mentorship.

Over 10 individual prototypes, young women who used Cass reported that this project activated more objective and supportive discussion in self reflection, they instilled more trust in themselves and built more confidence in their decisions and reactions to sexism.

One user said: "I think this is the first time that there's been some resolution and response to me talking about sexism in a direct way."

Cass is not just a communication tool for women to speak it out but also a conversation tool where they interpret sexism in a constructive way.

By increasing the number of volunteers, Cass will reach out to a wider audience and support their confidence in discussing sexism at workplace.
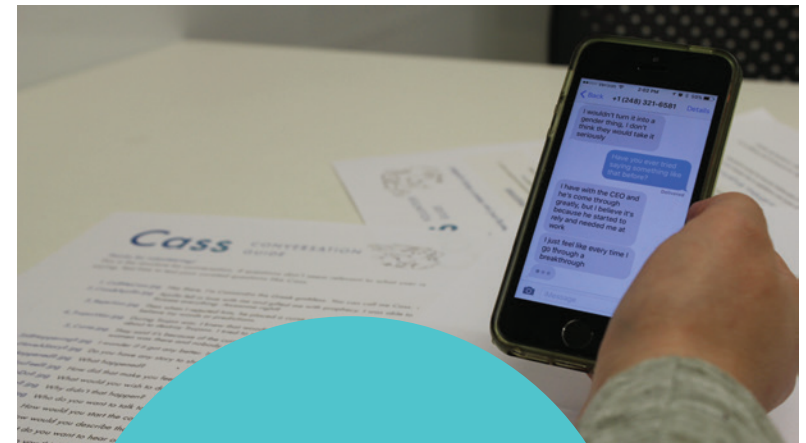
"I think this is the first time that there's been some sort of resolution and response to me talking about sexism in a direct way."

LEARNINGS

One of the main challenges I had was towards finding women who faced sexism, because I had a limited number of participants. I had around 10 people within my reach, yet when I prototyped the first round of 3 methods, I didn't have anyone else to prototype with for the next round.

To find more people, I started to reach out to women's support organizations from Facebook and Lean In Circles. I joined to a meeting of Young Professional Women's circle from Lean In and introduced myself and my project, hoping that people would start using Cass. But they didn't, because sometimes they won't. I think the earlier engagement with community was really important to get attraction.

To get another chance, I organized another meeting for that Lean In Circle, invited them to DSI for a brunch which would follow up with a workshop for getting them to use Cass and get their feedback. However that morning happened to be a rainy morning and only 1 person showed up. Besides its devastating effect, she was very critical to the approach of Cass . She was the community organizer for that Circle and was very hesitant to apply this method to her contacts because the method was really different than Lean In Circle's own meeting methodology that is bi-weekly meetings and group conversations.

This was a big learning for me because I was taking it granted that they would be ok with using Cass. I learned that building relationships with existing communities is a big and important part of this process. If I had done that earlier, this project would take a different form while I was piloting Cass for a self-sustaining eco-system.

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