

Natural Elements

Designing for matriarchy



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ABSTRACT

Minimizing the gender gaps in the world of labor has long been a discussed issue that is often being addressed by empowering women to fit in. When women need to face the challenge of changing and fitting themselves into this world, we wonder about this world that is historically designed by and based on men's nature, and ask how it could look different. The exploration of nature's matriarchal societies led to the creation of Natural Elements- a pro aging kit for the female leader. In the trial to design for women, we remain with the question - are we even capable of imagining a work world that is not patriarchal? how our society will be affected when designing it to fit women's nature and is it a gender question at all.

Author Keywords

Women; Labor; Matriarchy; Aging.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND / MOTIVATION

Rising female labor force participation has been one of the most remarkable economic and social developments

of the last century [11,12]. Yet, evidence suggests that many women remain unable to achieve their career goals. Despite the fact that pay gaps between men and women become smaller over the years, they are still significant [1] and women continue to be underrepresented in different industries and occupations. A vast and continuous discussion on this topic implies that many women struggle to pursue their career aspirations [1,2].

This is true even for the most privileged, educated women. Gender bias in hiring, personal questions about marriage and maternity, harassment during work, pay disparity, returning to the workforce post-childbirth, safety while working in high-risk areas, lack of investor trust - these are only a few of the challenges women face in the way to achieve their career goals. [1,2].

Given the fact that for women, the workforce is an unequal landscape, we can not help but wonder about the ecosystem that has traditionally been structured based on patriarchal values, for men to succeed in. Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership,

moral authority, social privilege, and control of property [3].

A study that has been conducted by Adisa, Cooke and Lwowo found that patriarchy shapes women's behavior in ways that undermine their performance and organizational citizenship behavior [15]. Furthermore, the study has shown that patriarchal attitudes, often practised at home, are frequently transferred to organizational settings. This transference affects women's workplace behavior and maintains men's (self-perceived) superior status quo, whereby women are dominated, discriminated against, and permanently placed in inferior positions.

As young women in the work world, we often feel socially and professionally pressured to suppress different qualities in order to succeed. Feeling deeply related with the issue is strengthening the motivation and intention to try and speculate how it can be different.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Having these facts in mind and looking through this point of view, many questions are rising. Stating with

what does a society that is not patriarchal even look like? How does natural matriarchy work, what are the values of this kind of society? And we wonder, women often need to change themselves in order to fit into the world of labor, while it is traditionally designed by and for men's needs and nature to succeed in. In a society that is matriarchal, would women go through different processes?

RELATED WORK

Several projects are questioning the existing and proposing different approaches in designing for women, what has been an inspiration in our design proposal: First is a speculative proposal made by Noura Howell, Richmond Wong, Sarah Fox and, Franchesca Spektor, called "Vivewell". Vivewell project explores the future of menstrual biosensing technologies and shed light on the ethics concerning menstrual tracking, by raising questions about stereotypical gender roles and extensive data surveillance [6].

Another inspiring proposal, is made by Marie Louise Juul Søndergaard and called "Troubling Design: A Design Program for Designing with Women's Health". The designer introduces a design research aimed to support new activist and speculative practices that seek to re-imagine social, cultural, and political changes in designing for women's health. "Female trouble" is discreetly referring to women's health experiences, and troubling design brings to mind how trouble is an implicit condition of designing ethical and responsible technologies for women's health. Troubling design encourages designers and researchers to develop knowledge and question the status quo, in order to expand their perspectives on designing with intimate and tabooed bodily experiences.

Another source of inspiration is the Menstruation Machine of Sputniko. With Menstruation Machine, Sputniko explores the relationship between identity, biology, and choice, while also probing the meaning of gender-specific rituals. The accompanying video is about Takashi, a young man who wants to understand on many levels, including the physiological, what it feels like to be a girl. Takashi builds the Menstruation Machine and wears it out on the town with a girlfriend, strutting around a shopping mall and occasionally doubling over in pain. The metal device, which looks like a chastity belt and is equipped with a blood-dispensing system and electrodes that stimulate the lower abdomen, replicates the pain and bleeding of the average five-day menstruation period. It is designed to be worn by men, children, postmenopausal women, or whoever else wants to experience menstruation. Thus an internal, private process is transformed into a wearable and manipulable design, a public display of pain and identity. Since the 1960s, advances in hormone-based contraception have, by suppressing ovulation, challenged the biological necessity of monthly periods.

Lastly, an intriguing design led by Hendrik-Jan Grievink and commissioned by Dr. Guid Oei, looked into the question of what an artificial womb could look like in the future. The speculative model did not look like a futuristic aquarium or a 'biobag' but more like a series of hanging organic spheres that mimic the conditions of an actual uterus. The first thing to notice about the artificial womb prototype is that the bunch of flesh-colored balls look oddly like dangling testicles. It is of importance and somewhat tragicomic that the prototype resembles more to a masculine organ than to the shape of, say, a womb [8].



Figure 1. artificial womb design by Hendrik-Jan Grievink.

SPECULATIVE RESEARCH

Matriarchy is defined as a social system in which females hold the primary positions of power [5]. Looking at the animal kingdom, several species can be considered a matriarchy:

In the hive of the honey bees for example, the female queen runs the show, she is the ultimate ruler of the hive. physically she is much larger and lives far longer than the other bees. Her main function is reproduction, and normally male bees die after mating with her, which makes her seem even more dominating.

Killer Whales, also known as Orcas, are also socially matriarchal. The offspring lives with the mother for its entire life, even after getting its own offspring. Killer whales travel together in multiple-family units, known as matriline [3,4,5].

Another fascinating example of a matriarchal society, which is unique in their social organization, is the Bonobo Ape. Bonobos females use their alliances with other females to exert power over male Bonobos.

“Gal-gangs” are often able to prevent males from killing the babies of rival males and allow females to choose their own mates and access the best food [7]. It is often said that they are the most peaceful primates and that they settle their differences and solve conflicts through sex.

Lastly and most inspiring to us are elephants. They are well-known for their intelligence, close family ties and social complexity, which are relatively rare in the animal kingdom but not uncommon in primates, including humans [8,17,18,14]. Known as a fission-fusion society, it is a complex social dynamic, with relationships radiating out from the mother-offspring bond through families, bond groups, clans, independent males and beyond to strangers. Within herds, which are constantly changing in size from two to hundred, the oldest, most experienced female takes the lead. She is often also the biggest elephant in the herd.

EXPLORATION THROUGH COLLAGE

Taking inspiration from matriarchal societies, our collage brings up a different way to look at women in the world of labor. It raises one main question- What would the world of labor be for women, if it was developed in a different society structure, one that is based on women's nature?



Figure 2. Collage- Women in matriarchal labor structure

SPECULATIVE SOCIETY: POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Our speculative society is a western liberal society that was structured based on matriarchal values.

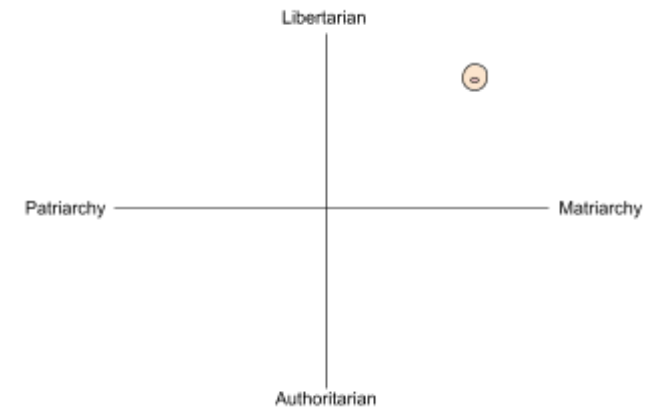


Figure 3. Political spectrum axes

SPECULATIVE DESIGN PROPOSAL

Natural Elements pro aging kit is using advanced technology to support female leadership at work. To that end, the kit blends models of female grooming products to advance aging:



Figure 4. Diegetic prototype of the full kit

The facial wrinkle cream is based on advanced pro aging technology that mimics the natural skin anatomy of elephants. The massive wrinkles and cracks are not only for show, but serve an essential role in keeping this large mammal cool.



Figure 5. Diegetic prototype of facial cream for wrinkles

Based on the same technology, to complete facial aging, the Lip Tuner is developed to make your lips thin and wrinkled to the level you wish.



Figure 6. Diegetic prototype of Lip Tuner

The push down bra is designed especially to synchronize with gravity and give a natural older fall down look.



Figure 6. Diegetic prototype of Push Down Bra

The white hairs mirror is using advanced AI technology that will reflect and update you with the number of white hairs you gain.



Figure 7. Diegetic prototype of White Hairs Counter

DIEGETIC PROTOTYPE VIDEO

Our video is designed as a commercial that presents the kit's products combining excerpts of elephants in the wild. At the end of the video, an enthusiastic older woman is shown with the caption "Why wait, when you can look older now?". The video serves as a glance to our speculated society where the older you are the greater advantage you have.

<https://youtu.be/IN-2PtquZ1g><https://youtu.be/IN-2PtquZ1g>



DISCUSSION

"Natural elements" is a fictional, critical diegetic prototype, designed for discussion.

Women are typically spending their first 30 years struggling to balance their professional growth with serving and caring for others. Around their 50's, women are done with menstrual cycle variations, their kids have flown the nest, and work becomes the main focus. Is it possible that we miss understanding nature? Maybe the 30s are not the make-or-break acceleration phase of all careers as we've been used to and it's only an early, building phase for all humans who want to be a parent.

Taking women in the labor force as a topic, we initially began with looking for different problems women are facing and tried to come up with future technological solutions that will help them overcome career issues and blend easier.

Then, exploring nature's matriarchies and discovering different societies' structures and values made us wonder about the way we, as a society, really empower women.

In a world that is traditionally designed by and for mens nature, in a way, there is no wonder that women are

struggling. Not only that, but also the solutions we find as society and individuals are all a trial to fit the existing.

Maybe patriarchy is so ingrained with our perception that we struggle to imagine a different way of living? Maybe the shared struggles of women do not require solutions for their problems, but a new way of looking at our society's values?

And maybe, regardless of gender, trying to fit ourselves to the existing is the real problem and we spend a lot of effort trying to fight our nature rather than living by it?

CONCLUSION

Exploring women at work through Matriarchy allows us to try and imagine a world of work that is structured and designed to fit them. We believe that real empowerment comes from the understanding of the nature and needs of individuals, and regardless of gender, designed to fit them, could possibly be a world with less struggles.

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