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Inch - Unpacking Measurements

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Inch - Unpacking Measurements

By Pallavi Singh

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design

School of Design
College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
05/28/2022

Thesis Committee Approval

Thesis Title: Inch - Unpacking Measurements

Thesis Author: Pallavi Singh

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design
The School of Design - The College of Art & Design
Rochester Institute of Technology - Rochester, NY

Mike Strobert. _____ Date _____ Chief Thesis Advisor

Adam Smith. _____ Date _____ Associate Thesis Advisor

Abstract

While global efforts to close gender gaps have taken great strides in the past years, broad cultural views and social institutions still exist to place women at a subordinate level to men. It is a common scenario to trivialize a woman's achievements or power in instances when she does not conform to gender norms taken as "a given" in a cultural context. A few elementary examples of such social inequality could include unequal pay at the workplace or menstruation in cultures where it is considered a defilement of a woman's body instead of a female bodily process.

In most of these cases, we are privileged to be biased and hold our prejudices against the case both knowingly and unknowingly. Keeping this as the foundation of my research, I want to explore the analysis of a universal subordination of women to men in every culture regardless of the complexity of a particular culture basis the most universal distinction between humanity and other animals - the body and the mind. Such analysis has been made in the academic realms where Sherry B. Ortner, an American cultural anthropologist, examines the intriguing assumption of women appearing to be closer to nature and men being more aligned with culture. She elaborates on physiological, psychological, and social dimensions that corroborate the cultural view of women being closer to nature and thus inherently occupying a lower ground in culture or instead, sitting at an 'intermediate' position on that scale.

I want to take the nature-culture relationship as a framework to create a more nuanced view of the argument to make the larger public of both men (to educate) and women (to identify) aware of their biases and prejudices in this context. I feel that putting these ideologies open discussions on the givens of the conventional gender norms.

Keywords: Graphic Design . Publication . Illustration . Book . Typography . Gender Divide . Women . Social Impact

We are privileged to be biased and hold our prejudices against the lower level of women with regard to higher level of men in culture, both knowingly and unknowingly. Keeping this as the foundation of my research, I want to explore the analysis of a universal subordination of women to men in every culture regardless of the complexity of a particular culture basis the most universal distinction between mankind and other animals - the body and the mind. Such analysis has been made in the academic realms where Sherry B. Ortner, an American cultural anthropologist, examines the intriguing assumption of women appearing to be closer to nature and men being more aligned with culture, culture being defined as 'transcendence of human consciousness and products of human consciousness (systems of thought and technology) over nature'. She elaborates on physiological, psychological, and social dimensions that corroborate the cultural view of women being closer to nature and thus inherently occupying a lower ground in culture or rather sitting at an 'intermediate' position on that scale. The notion brings to light that patriarchy continues to exist within the columns of any social structure, though it might change its shape and form in different cultures. I wanted to take this as a framework of nature-culture relationship to create a more nuanced view of the argument, to make the larger public of both men (to educate) and women (to identify) to be aware of their biases and prejudices in this context. I believe planting these ideologies outside of the realm of research could open important uncomfortable discussions on the givens of the gender norms in every culture. The intention of such a medium of discourse would be more stark examples to remind of the ingrained biases, how women perceive these biases and identify with their roles in profession and caregiving, how men see their qualified female counterparts, role of gender in labor division against the backdrop of the social make-up, race, occupation and why balancing the scales between binary will pave way for a safer space for non binary too. I share this with the help of an ongoing publication, a zine that captures the nuances and serves as a visual questionnaire (see page 7 of Appendix A) sprinkled over with visual puns and metaphors to illustrate the levels of our social beings that affect and restrict us as women. The design content explores both past and present instances that corroborate the theory of nature vs nurture in the form of conversational nuggets that allow the readers to dive deep into the biases, reflect to wheel away from the status quo. The intensity of the theoretical concepts like racism in sexism (see pages 28 - 37 of Appendix A) is broken down into illustrated symbols and cultural expressions to bring the conversation to life. The content on each section/spread or topic is viewed as a "layer of assumptions and biases" (see pages 8-9 of Appendix A) that multiply as women move from the traditional roles assigned to them, towards a space that gives

them opportunities of growth. Further in each layer, there is a visual unit of measurement that corresponds to the theme of the content for that section and allows the reader to view the scale of nature vs culture in the context represented (see page 23 of Appendix A).

As for how the visual vocabulary came together, I wanted the aesthetics of each spread to be untethered to any particular graphic style and have a voice of its own. The wide range of graphic expression was flexible to contain the depth of the content represented within each subject. For example, the instance of Anti-Abortion legislations is set up against a blatant, apathetic background on the part of the law and policy makers. The high contrast, unrefined gradient and reduced graphics reflect an obsolete system and orthodox thought process of legislations that fail to consider the consequences of an unwanted or unplanned motherhood/parenthood. On the other hand, the zine also encapsulates cultural expressions and detailed organic forms in intricate patterns to expand on subjects like racism in sexism and xenophobia that have roots in the past but have come to the surface in recent present. Such topics have the nuggets of information spread over the graphic through more detailed visuals and patterns with a richer color scheme. In conjunction with a custom graphic style for each spread, expressive typography also plays a major role to package the imagery and content, as well as provide a ground for perspective on some of the abstract visuals. In some spreads, the text is interwoven within the imagery, while in some it stands out more to best suit the tone of the content, if I need the readers to read it right away (see page 25 of Appendix A), or, I need the readers to ponder over the interplay of type and imagery (see page 44 of Appendix A). In some cases, (see page 63 of Appendix A) type is a central part of the visual. Such experimentation helped me to establish the tone of the question each spread asks.

In terms of written text, as intended I wanted the zine to be open to interpretations within the context expressed without giving out too much information. The different visual units of measurements and symbols consistently act as design building blocks across the publication. The intention is to question the ongoing subtle acts of constantly putting men and women in a space where they cannot fully embrace themselves as a whole being without strict gender labels, be it calling out men to be more “feminine” if they’re very emotional, or, calling out women to smile more often as that would make them appear acceptable.

I intended to be not just experimental with the elements of design but also the principles. The composition of each spread has a certain fluidity and movement in a static imagery. I wanted the still images to be kinetic and pull in the audience through the implied movement. For example, (see page 39-40 of Appendix A) the transition of abstracted floral pattern takes a whole new meaning as it flows on to the other page.

The objective is to make the readers conscious of the minimal emotional range that one gender is subjected to compared to a complex and richer emotional range of another gender.

The final product is a narrative of comparative spreads that combine both art and design as a technique to translate the ridiculous measurements we have to go through to be able to fit into the “assigned” roles in a culture. The freedom of a fluid visual vocabulary, subject to the question/content/layer of bias on each spread makes the zine a fresh and engaging device to unpack the measurements and address uncomfortable issues of gender divide.

INCH

Unpacking Measurements

-Pallavi Singh

Appendix A: Expanded
Thesis Defense Presentation

A thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in
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Rochester Institute of
Technology - Rochester, NY



Problem

While global efforts to tackle gender divide have taken great strides in the past years, there are broad cultural views and social institutions that still exist to place women at a subordinate level than men. It is not a common scenario to trivialize a woman's achievements or power in instances when she does not conform to gender norms - norms that are taken as givens in a cultural context. The result is a continuous pan cultural secondary status of women to men, entangled in the web of a biased system.

Graphic Design . Publication . Illustration . Book . Typography . Gender Divide . Women . Social Impact

How might we be made aware of/understand our own prejudices and biases?

Why women's body is controlled by social structures?

Why they should know to control their own narrative?

Why is it only spoken theoretically in the academic realm and research papers but not by the larger public which it affects?



Create a medium of discourse to empower the society to challenge what is 'given' in gender norms.

Solution

To address the nuances of the issue, often overlooked in a biased cultural world, I wanted to build an ongoing collaborative to let the audience question subtle acts and behaviors that constantly measure women's physiology, psychology and social roles. The idea is to release the irrational social institutions built around is to curb individual potential regardless of gender. The Zine as a collective of thoughts and satirical narratives, to evoke dissonance on such "naturalized" system norms.



“Each section of the zine is a layer of restriction, bias, and assumptions...”



THE
LAYERS
OF
BIAS

...that holds the women back in a binary world, taking us a step back from reaching a non-binary space eventually.”

Publication name

The proposed name of the zine is 'Inch' which uses a visual metaphor of the unit of measurement to depict how closely society and culture measure women on the assumption of nature-culture relationship.

EXPERIMENTAL

FLUID

TRANSITIONAL

ORGANIC

The Visual Vocabulary

BOLD

UNORTHODOX

SATIRE

EXPERIMENTAL

FLUID

TRANSITIONAL

ORGANIC

The Visual Vocabulary

BOLD

UNORTHODOX

SATIRE

I wanted the zine to have a universal look-and-feel, to be stylistically corresponding to the content on each page and not anchored to an overarching visual system. That would help reinforce the ideas and tone on each page to truly engage and interact with the audience.

INCH

Unpacking Measurements

In our battle to break the binary today, this publication is a commentary on normalizing the strict gender roles by presenting stark examples of our biased gender views so that women are free to reach their potential.



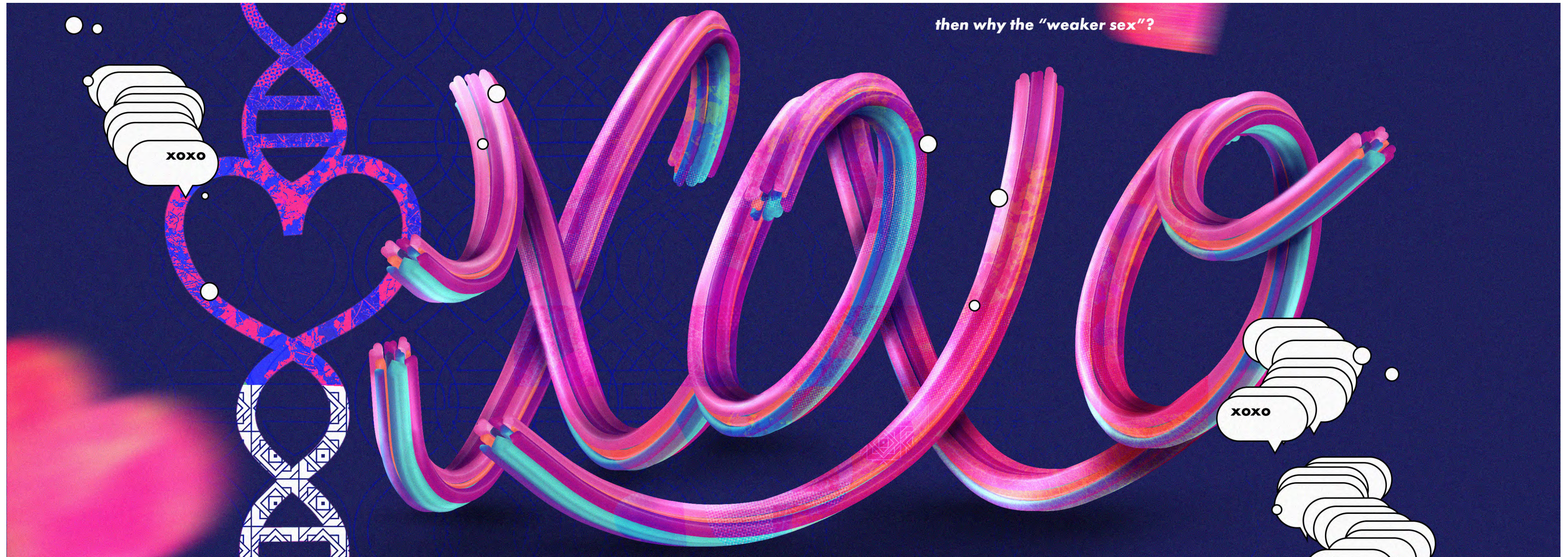
Zine Cover

The cover illustrates the publication branding and identity, keeping minimal to the name on the left and the cover illustration (a glimpse of the featured page inside) on the right.



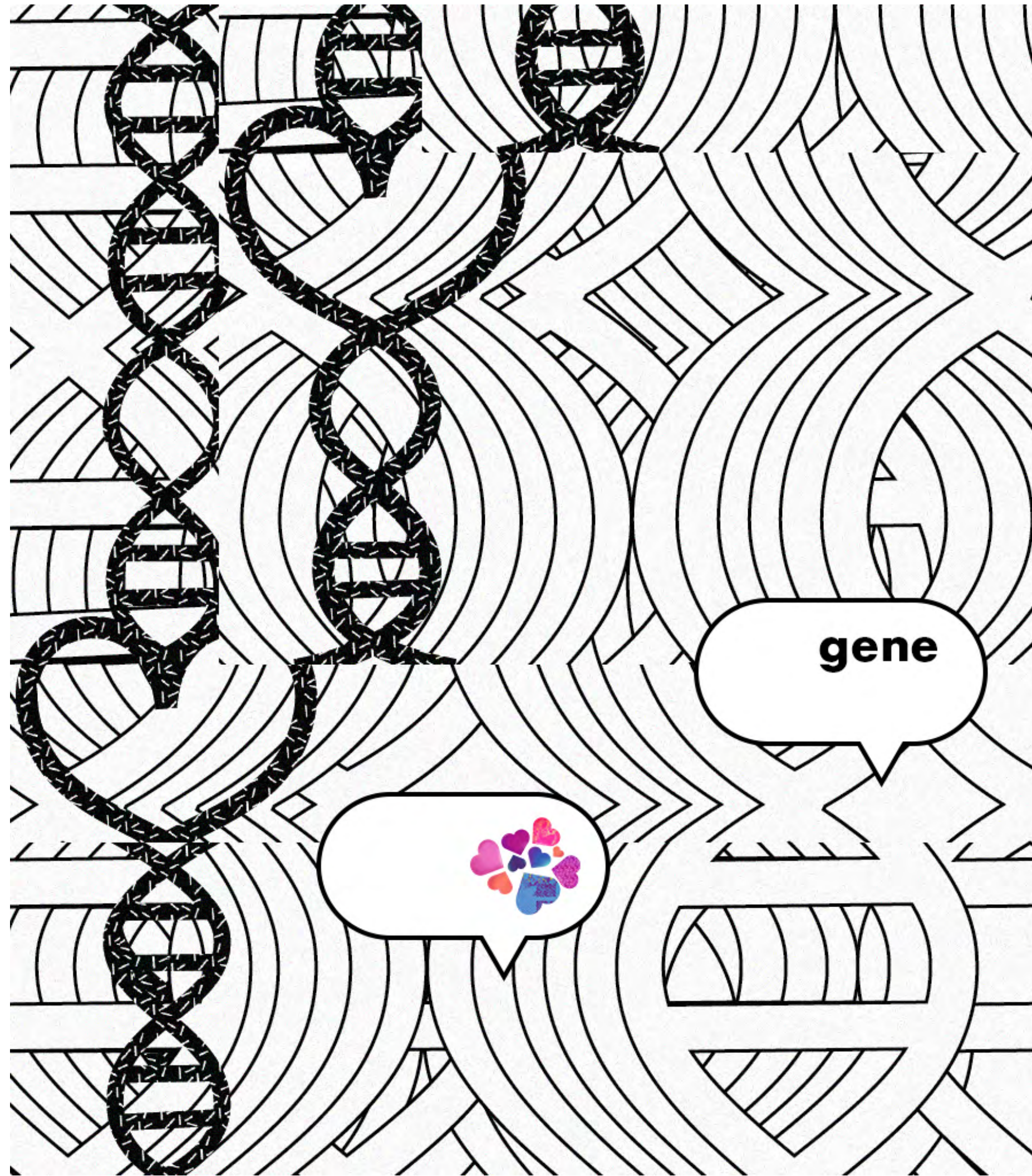
Graphic Design . Publication . Illustration . Book . Typography . Gender Divide . Women . Social Impact

Here's "XOXO" from nature to women!



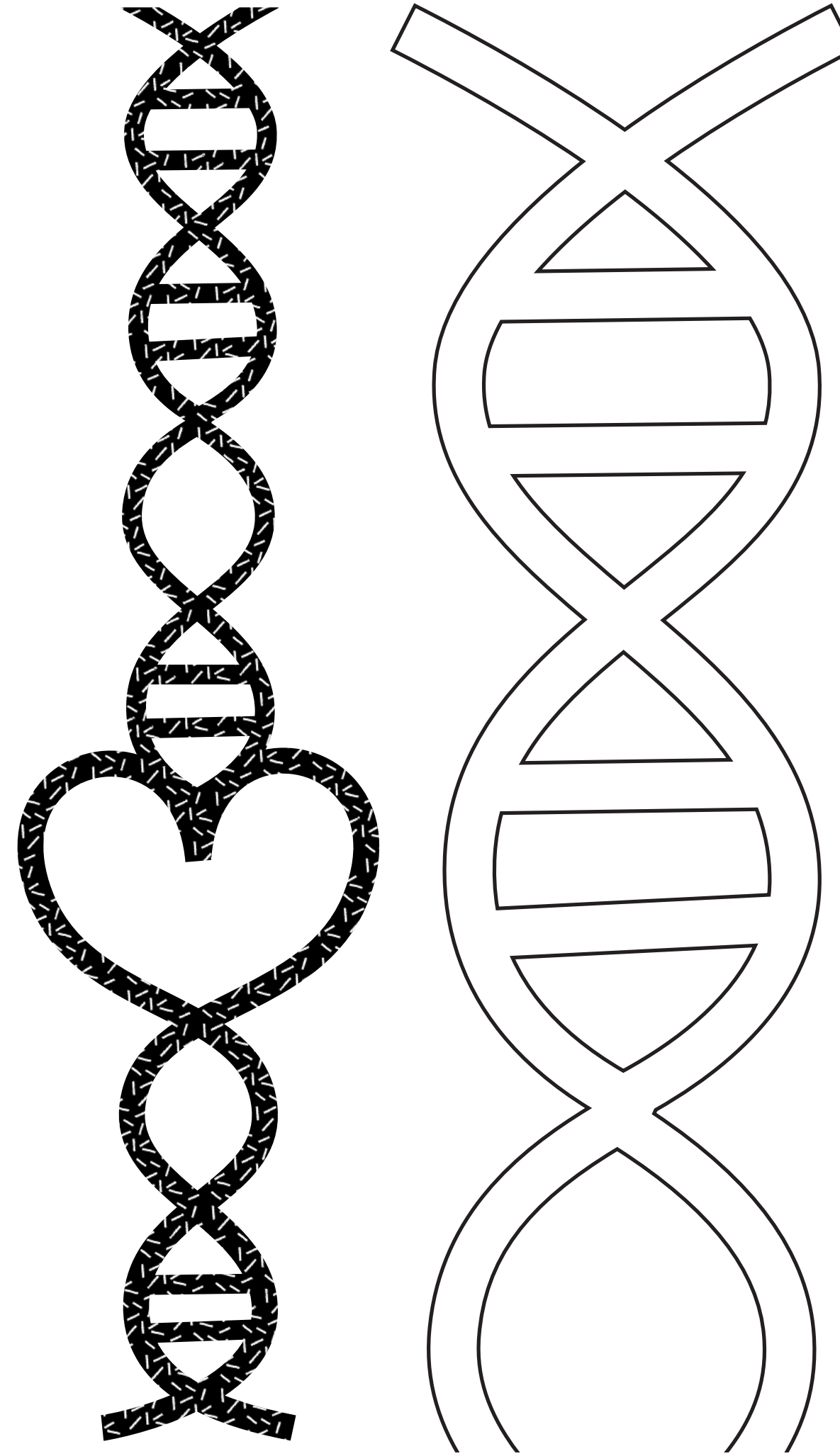
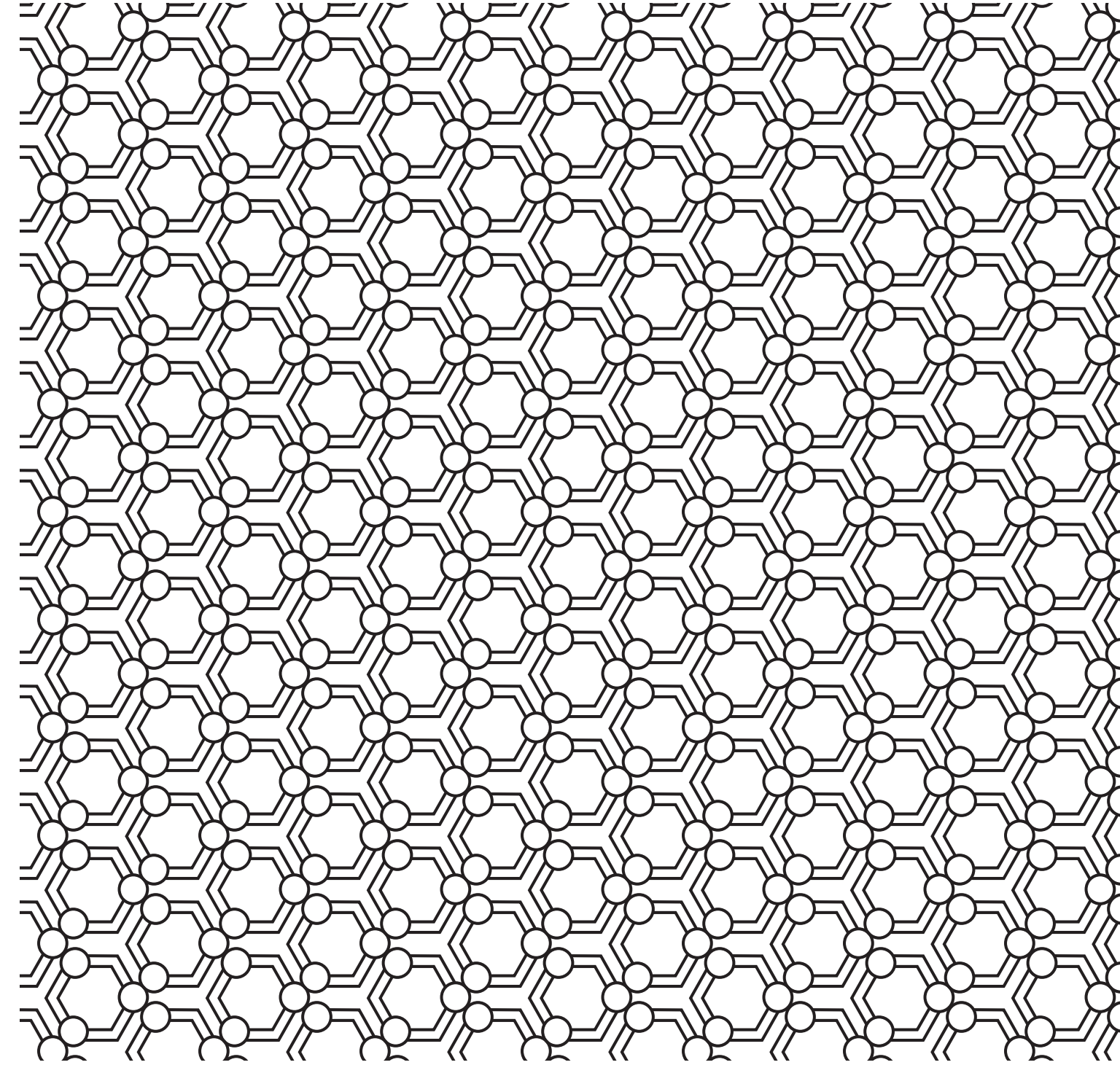
Satire . Visual Puns

To begin the exploration into the social hierarchy and gender gap, I wanted to begin from a cellular and genetic level, where women are constitutionally proven to be superior to men. The dual "XX" chromosomal structure gives women more longevity and greater strength to withstand biological adversities. The narrative drives home the concept of how often opportunities are discounted on the basis of biological differences, when in reality, at cellular level, women don't have much restrictions.

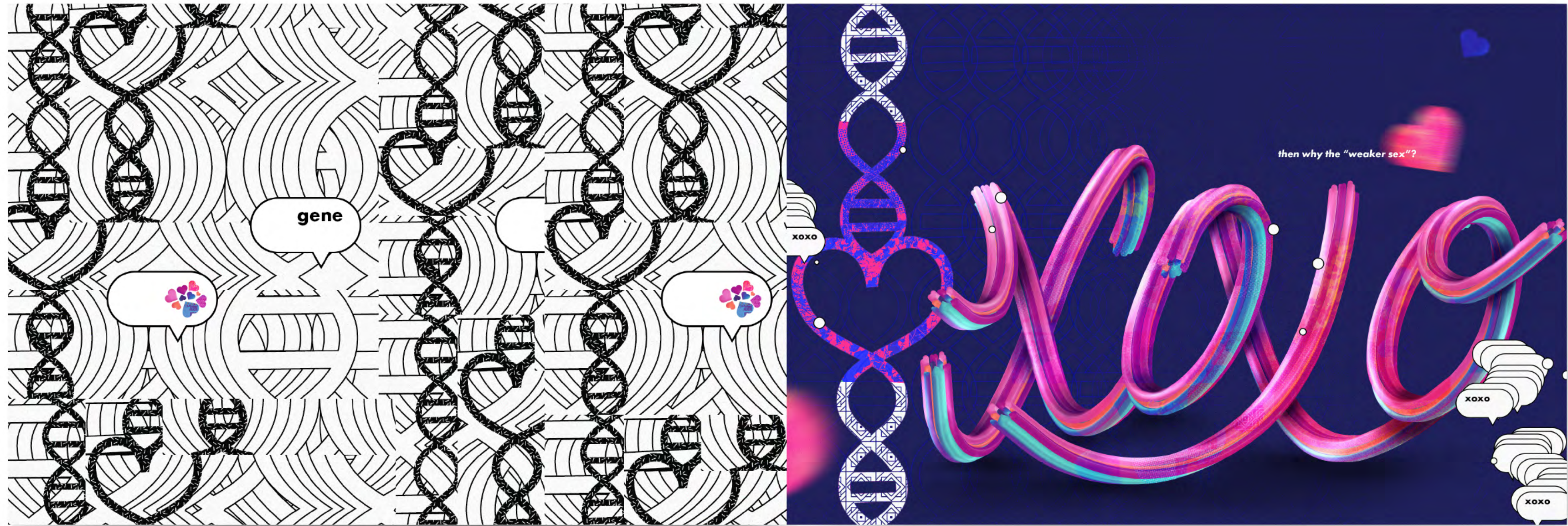


I explored several visual puns to convey how biology favors females if power is not simply measured in terms of physical strength only. The speech bubbles, vibrant colors and the abbreviation “XOXO” which translates to “hugs and kisses” is used as a greeting from nature to begin the zine publication.

Satire . Visual Puns



Taking the primary familiar forms of DNA and chromosomal structures, I formed patterns to use as graphical units asserting how the stronger genetic makeup of women is not acknowledged.



Satire . Visual Puns

The Final Look

**Can women still hold the reins to their
basic human right of reproduction?**



Activism . Society

Control over women's physiology has been prevalent through the ages, across all cultures, in both subtle and active forms, especially via social and judicial institutions. One of the instances that corroborate this today is the latest anti-abortion movement in the United States of America with the end of Roe v. Wade that protects the constitutional rights of women to choose abortion and subsequently better plan or decide for their motherhood/parenthood. The lack of empathy and excess of power over women and other non-binary folks is overwhelming as they lose their basic human rights over their bodies. The insensitive anti-abortion legislations in Republican led states like Florida has chosen to make abortion a punishable offense after 15 weeks of pregnancy wherein one cannot access abortion methods and medication legally. Some states even have a bounty on reporting abortion, thereby taking the reins of reproductive freedom totally in their hands.



Activism . Society

This section reinforces the paradox of situation - the loss of control on one's own body from self and surrendering the power to a strata of the society that doesn't even go through the process of childbirth. The change of headline from "My Body Belongs To Me" to "My Womb Many Voices" hints this loss of power. The graphic on the left is a womb metaphorically shown as an open mouth screaming out anti-abortion legislations basis the factors stated on the right - religion, protection of fetal rights, protection of women's health.

MY BODY BELONGS TO ME
MY BODY BELONGS TO ME
MY BODY BELONGS TO ME
MY BODY BELONGS TO ME
MY BODY BELONGS TO ME



The anchor handles measure the belly of the expecting parent in the “B” of “BODY” and the numbers state the timeframe which prohibits or makes abortion illegal.

Activism . Society

As we speak about laws and legislations measuring women against their freedom of childbirth, I wanted to explore the concept using typography and simple, bold graphic forms of both solids and gradients that give an impression of distortion and blatancy hinting on archaic and inconsiderate mindset of the institutions. The words “reproductive freedom” are intentionally merged with the saturated orange of the gradient to express how it is gradually getting dissolved with all the insane bans in place in different states. The overall tone of the graphic is diagrammatic to represent an obsolete system of thoughts based on religion and questions the autonomy of women by manipulating the “B” in the headline “My Body Belongs To Me”.

Z

MY **i** BODY
BELONGS
TO ME

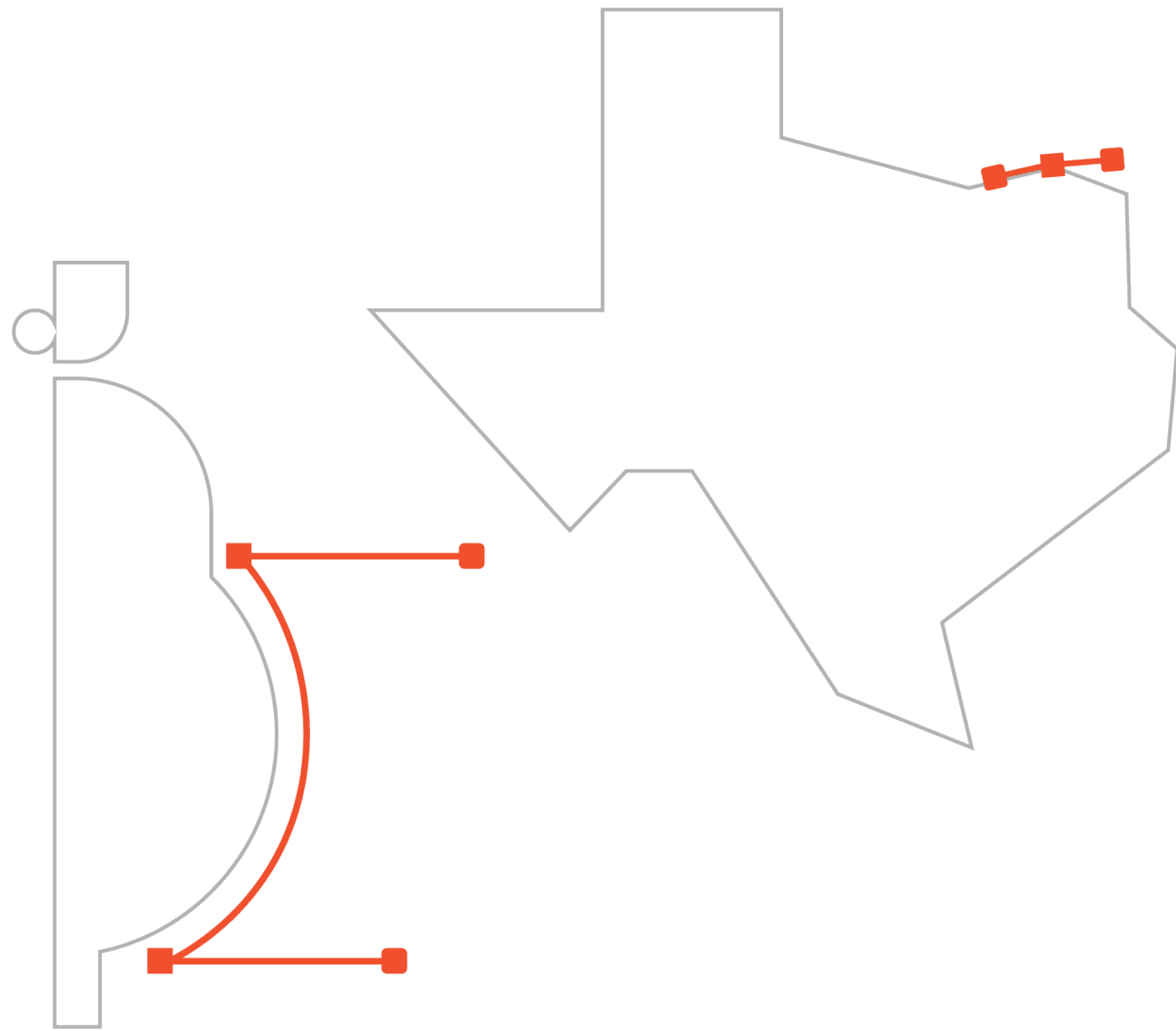
MY **B** BODY
BELONGS
TO ME

Activism . Society

Symbols

MY  BODY
BELONGS
TO ME

MY  BODY
BELONGS
TO ME



Graphic representations of measurements as anchor point handles in the diagrammatic illustrations are used to visually communicate how these institutions measure the basic fundamental rights of reproduction.

Anchor points handles have been used on the Republican-led state maps, the expecting parent belly icon, and the open mouth/womb diagram in the pages.



→ #f5e5da

→ #f0512c

Activism . Society

Colors and Typeface



Activism . Society

The Final Look



Activism . Society

The Final Look

Are we past stereotyping women as sex objects?



Activism . Society

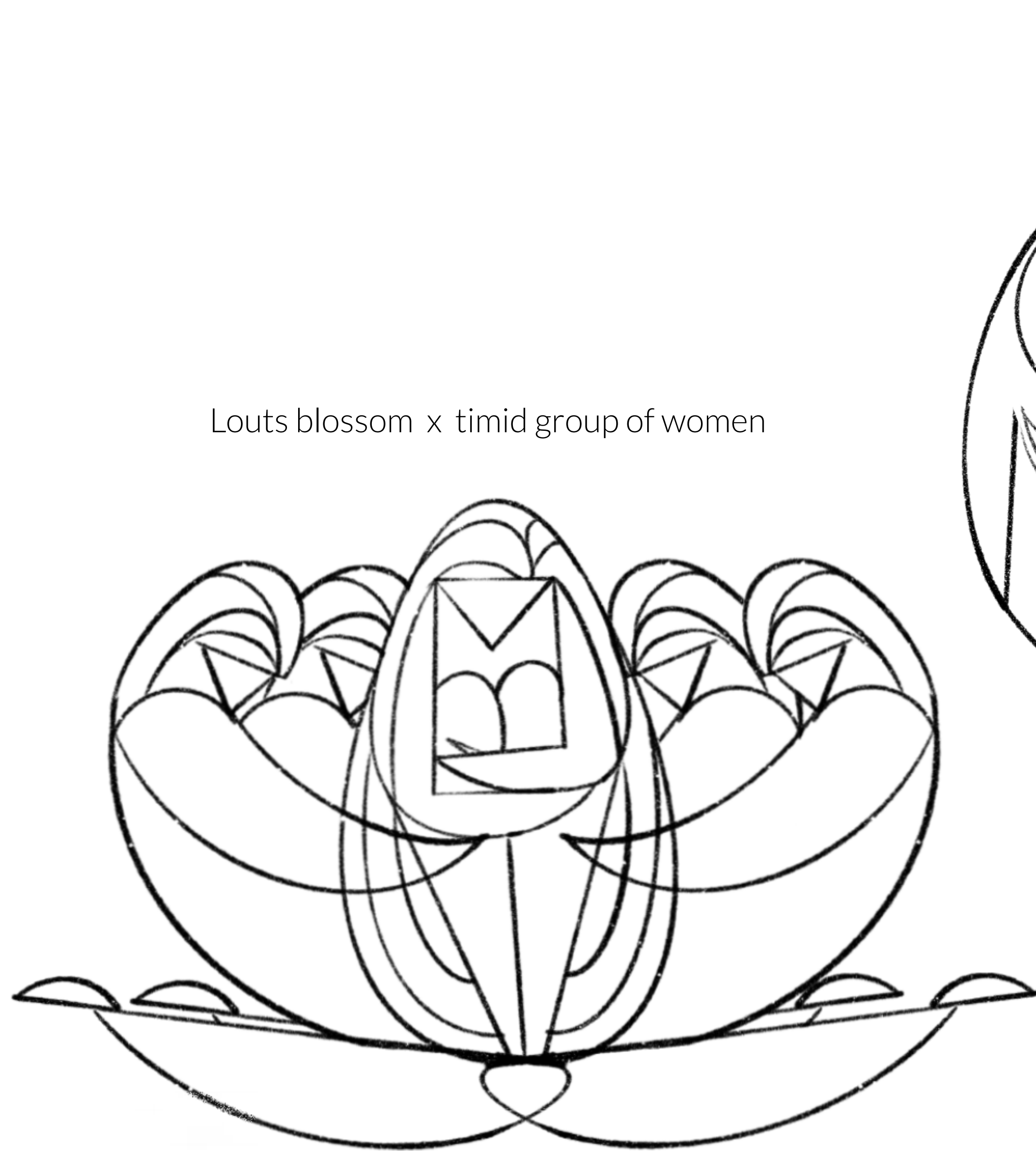
To exemplify sexism linked with racism, my illustration here is a response to the Covid-related rise in Anti-Asian hate crimes in the US in the past month. The narrative here is a peek into the historical events such as the "Page Act of 1875" that established stereotypes of Asian women as "exotic sex objects" which still exist in society today. The "male supremacy" is evident when the shooter in Atlanta claimed the lives of Asian women only to "eliminate his sexual temptations".

The invisible measuring tapes of hate and misogyny are deeply embedded in our psyche and blindfold us to break away from the meaningless perceptions.

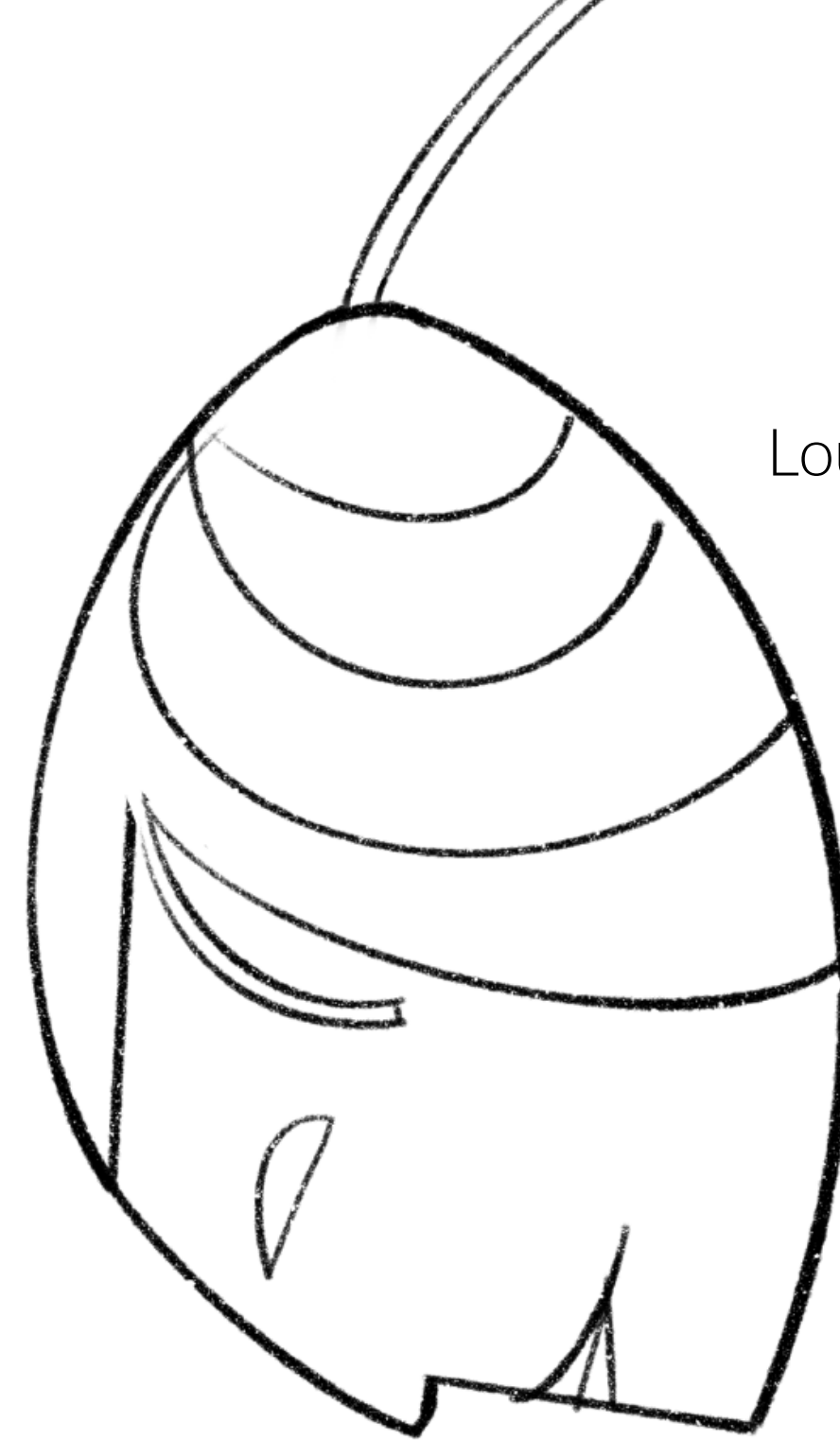
On paper, the Page Act of 1875 prohibited the recruitment of laborers from “China, Japan or any Oriental country” who were not brought for “lewd and immoral purposes.” It explicitly forbid “the importation of women for the purposes of prostitution.”

Using the Page Exclusion Act of 1875, a precursor to this dehumanizing narrative, I wanted to draw parallels between the past and the present scenario.

Chinese women were perceived as a particular type of threat: A sexual one. “They were stereotyped as promiscuous, as prostitutes.”



Louts blossom x timid group of women



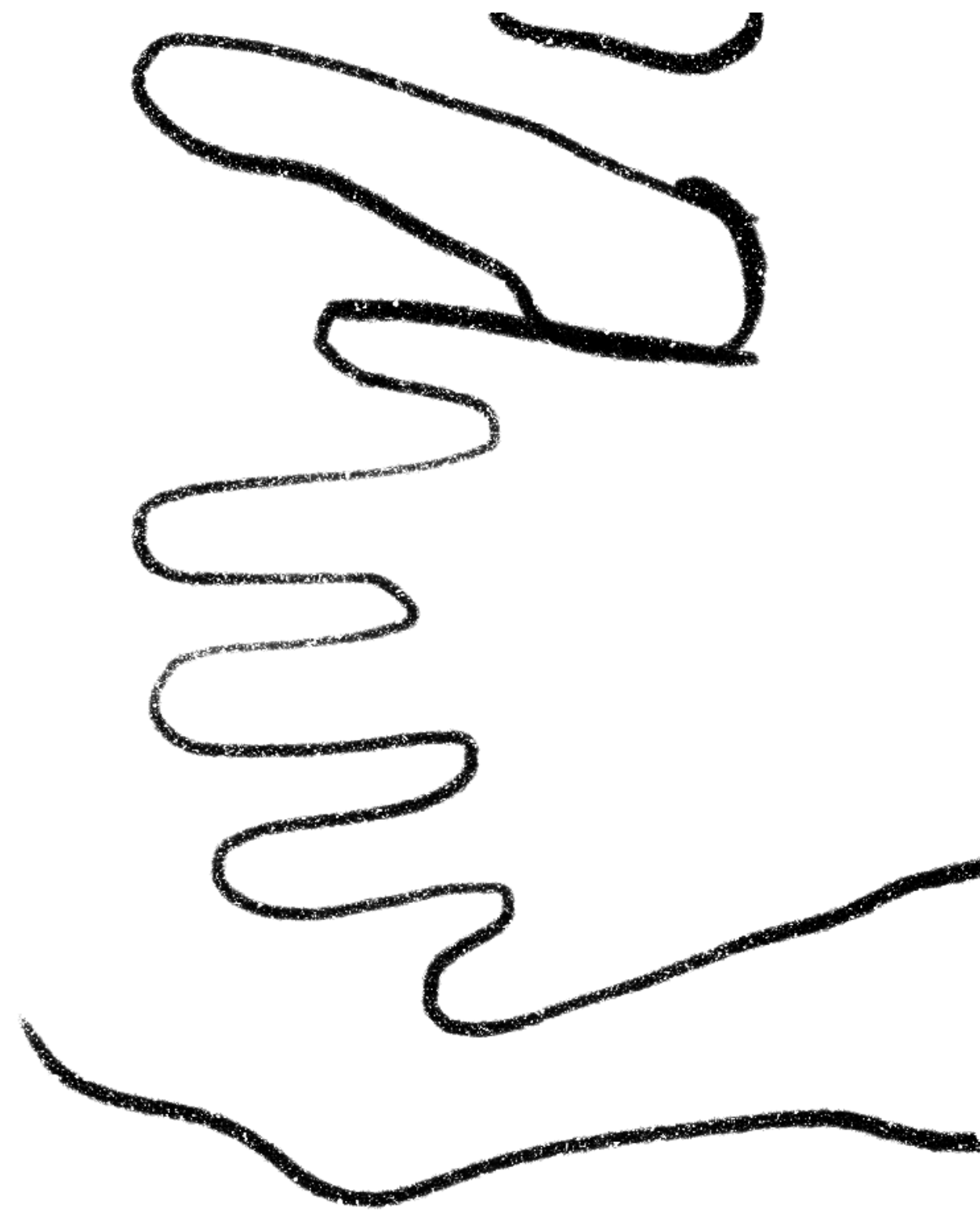
Louts bud x Asian woman head

I deconstructed the narrative to link the past with the present threaded through relatable fundamental symbols of asian culture coupled with that of the spa salons where the shootings happened.

Activism . Society

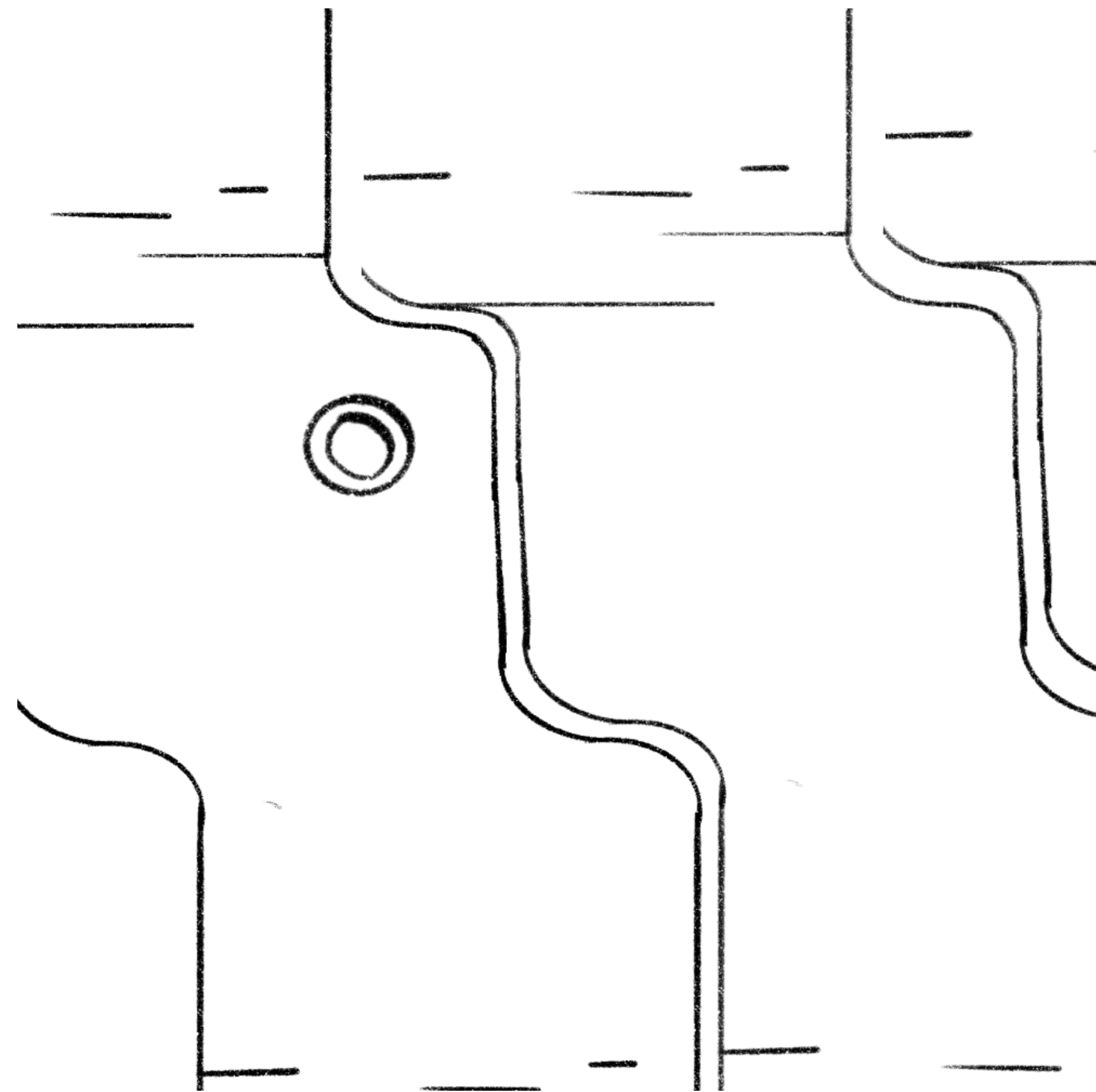
Symbols

Male hands x temptations x US military camouflage



To highlight the role of US military men and the demand for sex workers in the Asian wars, I created a representation of the army uniform camouflage like shapes morphed into hands accessing Asian women's bodies.

Male hands x temptations x US military camouflage



Activism . Society

The duality of a waterfall and the scroll of the Page Act of 1875 serves as a background for a dehumanizing narrative.

Symbols



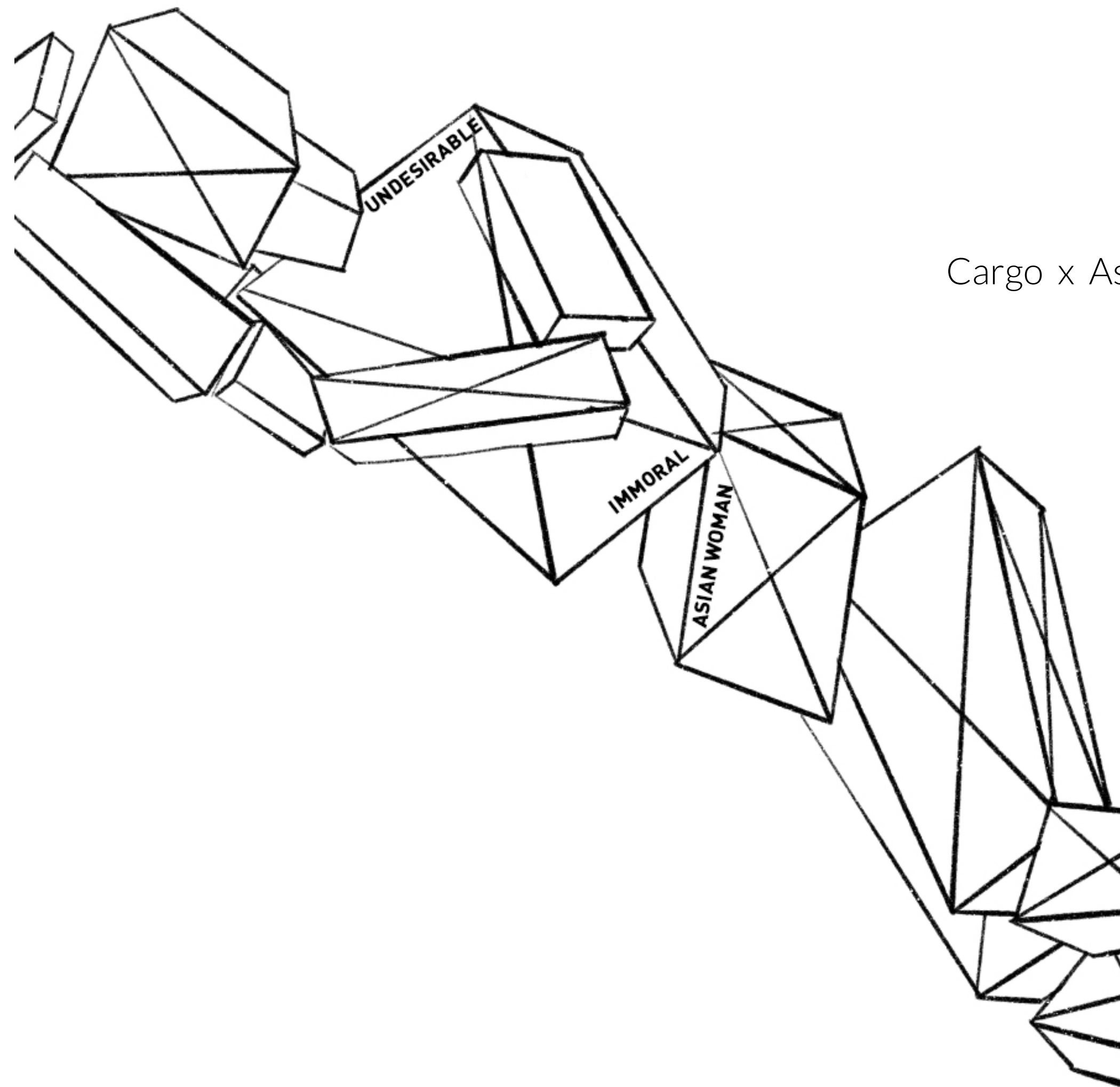
Activism . Society

The Final Look



Activism . Society

A continuation of the previous series to raise awareness about the ancient immigration act that prohibited the entry of Asian women into the States on the assumption that they were "immoral". I draw parallels to the current shootings in Atlanta to measure how far we have actually come or are we still dwelling in the dark ages?



Cargo x Asian woman

The duality of visual representation of hate and misogyny to show words like “importation” being used in the context of Asian women labor in the US.

**SEXUAL
TEMPTATION AS**

Expressive typography to show the distorted perspective of Asian women as “exotic sex objects” touching on sexism, racism, misogyny and xenophobia.



Activism . Society

The Final Look

**Is it okay for all genders
to be emotional?**



Satire . Visual Puns

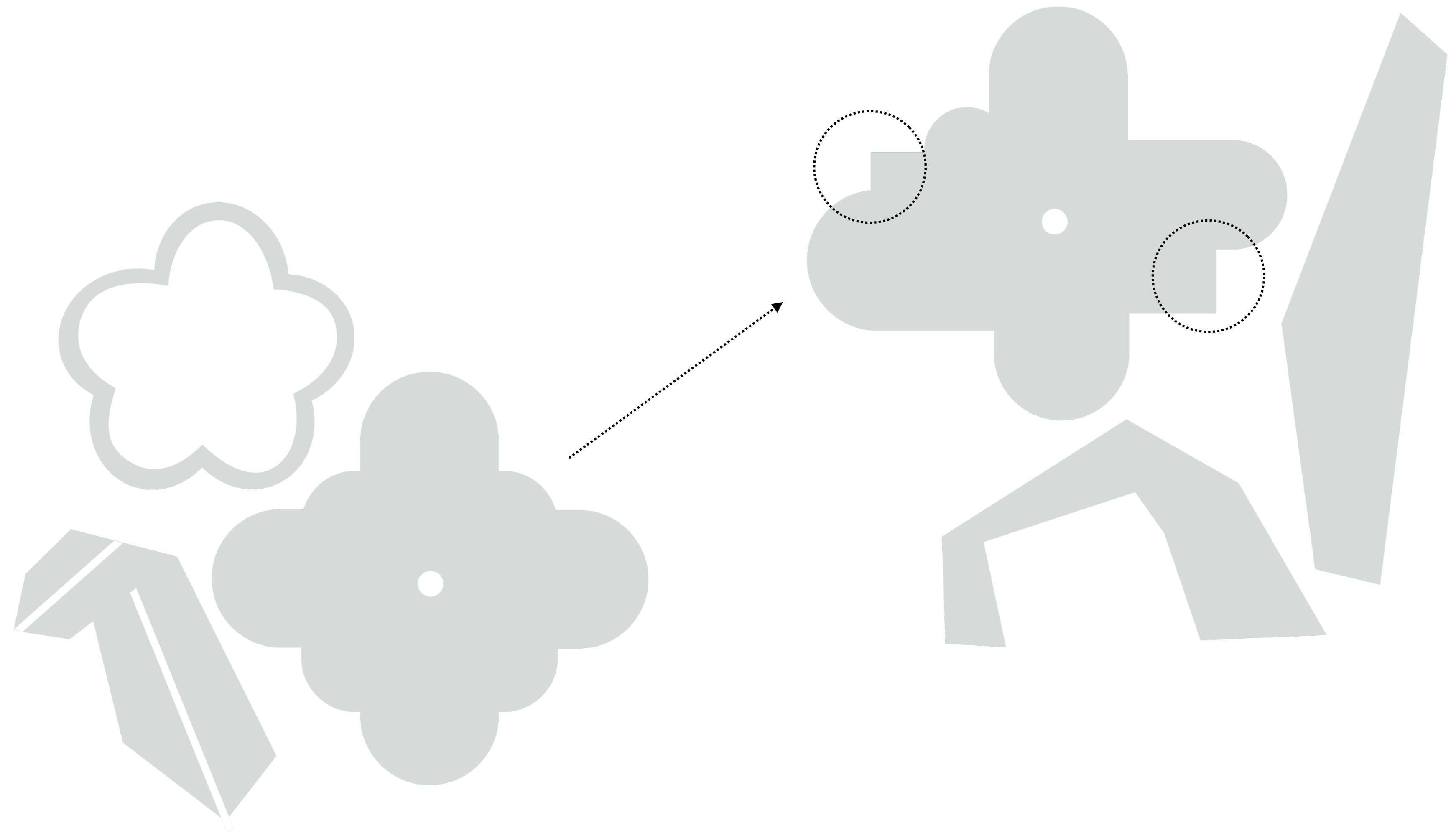
Females' social, domestic, and work dimensions are often influenced by the psychological bias - they feel more strongly than men, hence, reducing opportunities and negatively impacting their potential by calling them the "softer gender". We need to normalize that it is okay for men to own themselves emotionally and be able to exhibit what has been culturally labelled as "feminine" or "not being the man". Significant impacts of this have resulted in more men committing suicide than women for alienating their expressions and suppressing their whole emotional self to fit into the given roles of power. As we are transitioning to a non-binary society, we must question and open the possibilities of embracing all emotions and being able to express them without the fear of cultural labels. The inaccessibility to certain careers where women cannot often rank higher as they have been socialized and accepted to strive for not showing any signs of imperfection or sensitivity.



Satire . Visual Puns

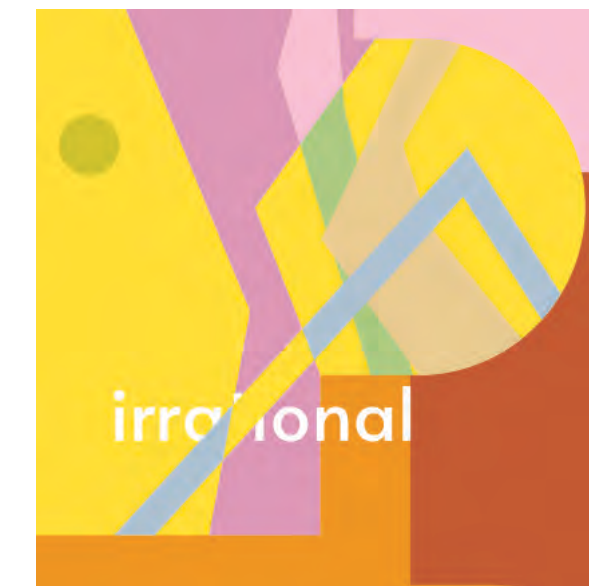
To drive the narrative of emotions, I wanted to abstract foliage like patterns, with both the hard and soft edges exaggerated to create two different containers, one with less contrast, more desaturated and a muted color scheme to show the lack of emotional range. This flows into a more expressive container, visualizing owing a high emotional range - a burst of vibrant colors, a more elaborate foliage pattern, and an intricate network of strokes. They depict biased routes threaded together to manifest different feelings culturally labelled to be exhibited only by females, often in a negative light. This transition of containers from dull to a bolder form exposes and questions the futility of stereotyping feelings in the whole of humanity.

Abstracted foliage-like patterns, with both the hard and soft edges (the wide spectrum of negative positive emotions) exaggerated to visualize a distorted cultural view of owning and stereotyping emotions



Satire . Visual Puns

Measurement



An intricate network shows the biased routes threaded together to capture different feelings, unexplored by many as these are pinned to cultural labels as “feminine” traits.



Satire . Visual Puns

Symbols



Expressive Typography explorations using the distorted floral elements of the bed of emotions.

Activism . Society

Symbols



Satire . Visual Puns



Satire . Visual Puns

The Final Look



Satire . Visual Puns

The Final Look

**Bold and funny? A ridiculous
paradox for women at work.**



Satire . Visual Puns

The translation of social hierarchy and gender gap established at home is carried on to the workplace where the strongest sense of hierarchy and gap exist. There is a certain gendered risk in projecting different personality expressions as a female in a work environment. Would one be taken seriously if you are funny, joyful, and humble for roles that are traditionally expected to be dynamic and bold? It is high time to obliterate and confront these paradoxes in case of female professionals. Humor exhibited by male professionals or leaders is taken to ease the tension at a workplace or him being more “charismatic”. However, in most cases women leaders exhibiting this same expression would fear to jeopardize their impact as an authoritative figure or even question their behavior in work.

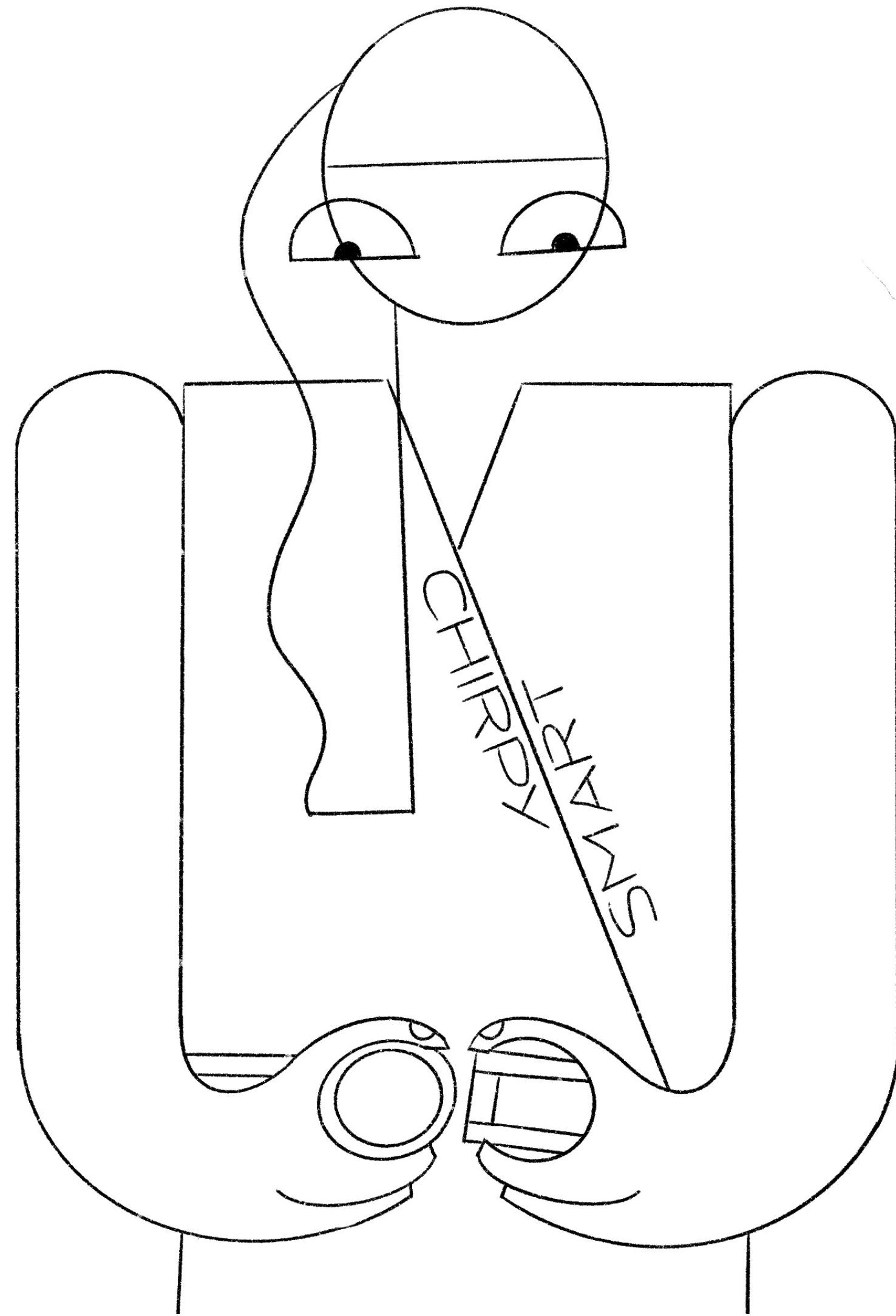
Funny/Bold

The use of ‘/’ as a unit of paradox is integrated within the illustrations of women workwear.

Smart/Chirpy

The story is centered around the paradox as to how women need to think twice before they can genuinely express themselves at work, as it could be perceived very differently due to established gendered expression system accepted by the society in large.

Humble/Dynamic



The illustrations are made up of simple shapes and abstracted figures to represent women globally, who, as they wear their clothing, also decide on what expression they should wear at work.



Satire . Visual Puns

The Final Look

**Why are women required to
smile more often at work?**



Satire . Visual Puns

I wanted to explore the assumption that it is “natural” for women to smile more often at work so that they don’t come across too bold. It is usually taken for granted that femininity is more aligned with being soft-spoken/keeping up a more gentle demeanor. Not conforming to these age-old conventions is still taken as a negative trait.

I tried to abstract a garden-like geometrical pattern where this bias lives, constantly calling out women to SMILE!



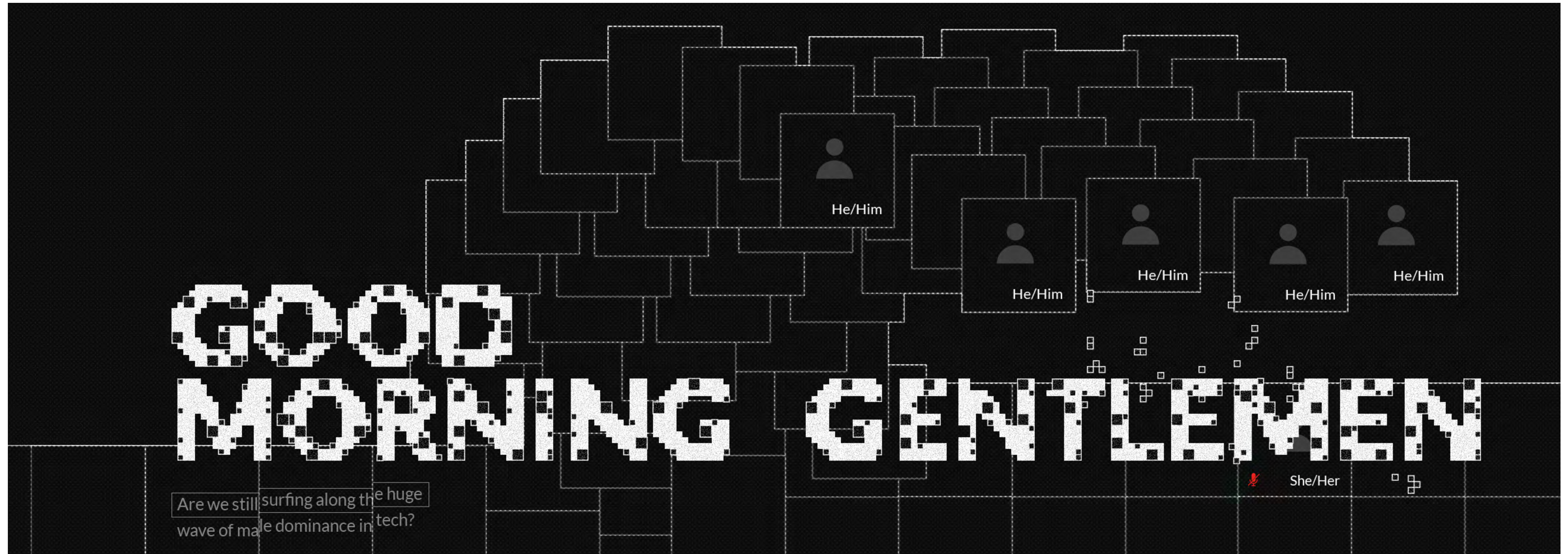
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Satire . Visual Puns

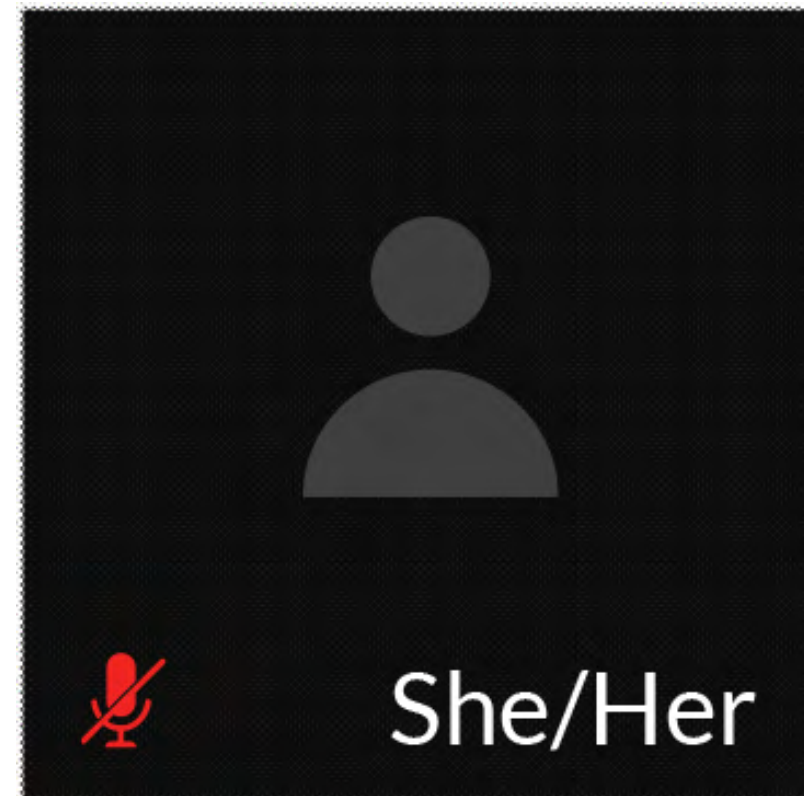
The Final Look

Are we still surfing along the wave of male dominance in tech?

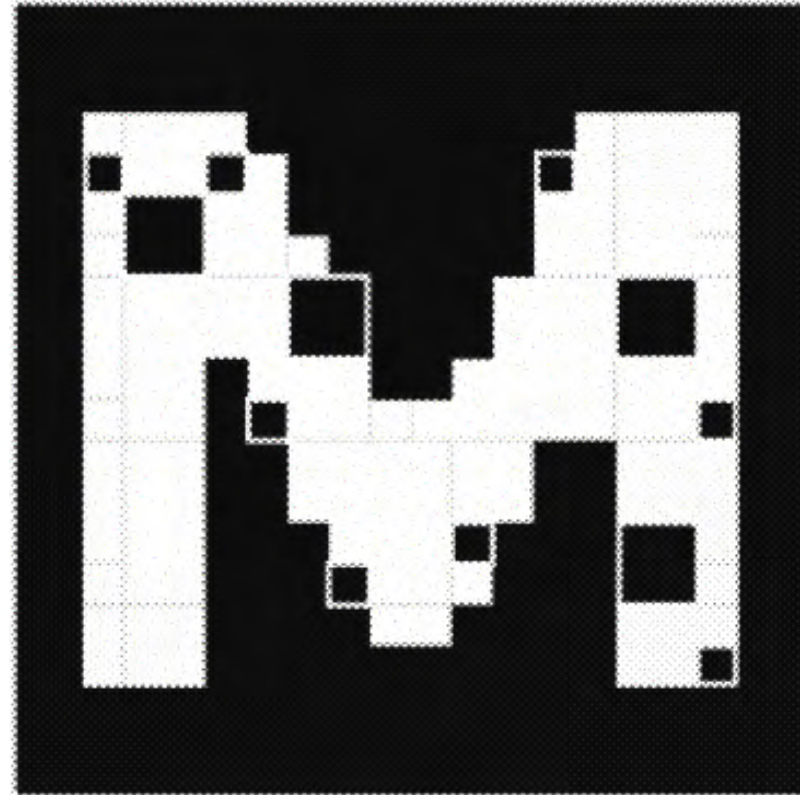


Satire . Visual Puns

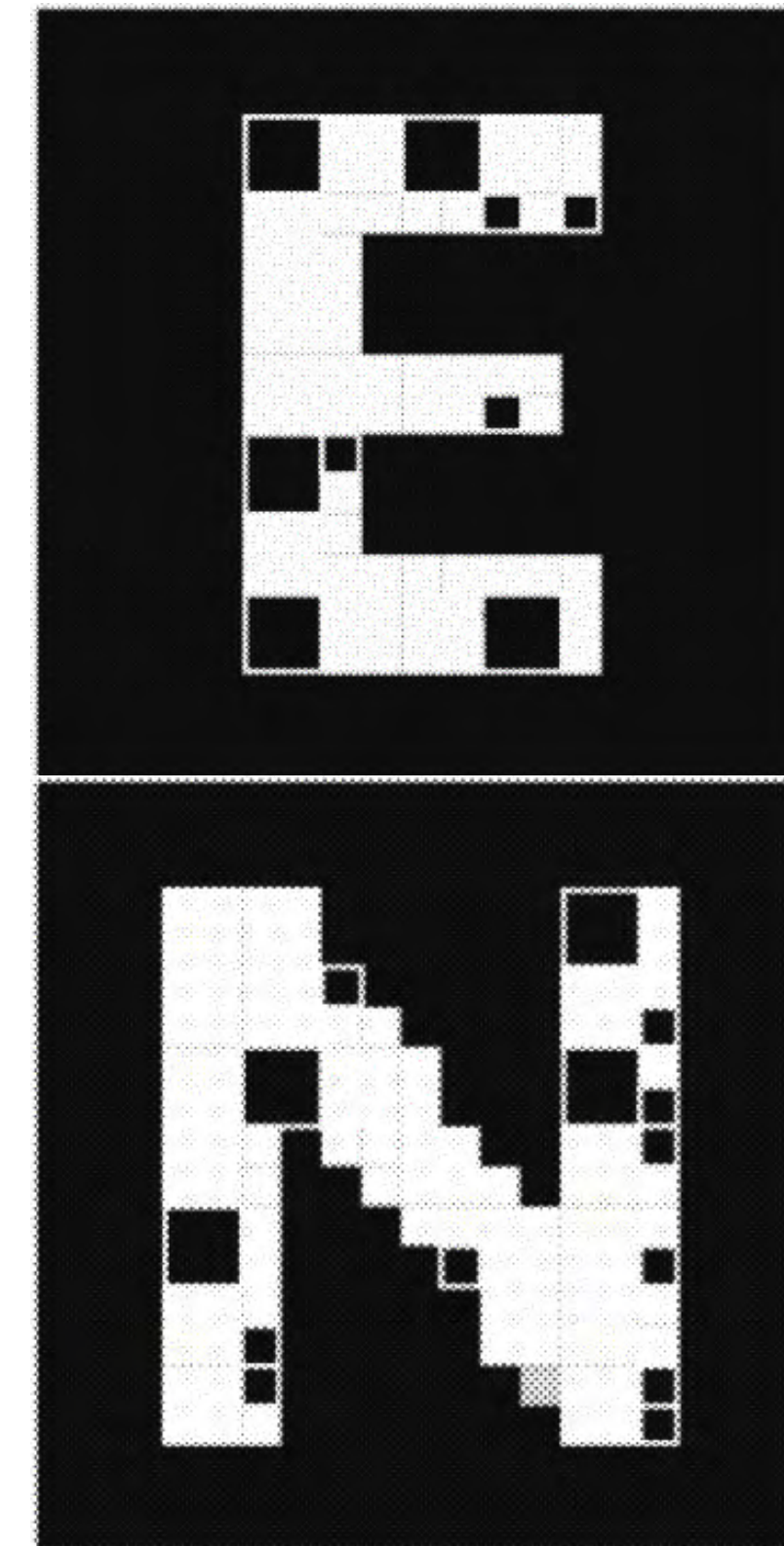
It is not uncommon to see a dwindling number of women in tech, and the unfair access and treatment given to them heighten the gender imbalance associated with industries such as computer science or cybersecurity. In most cases, women are either hired to complete the diversity quota for the company or for positions where they are deemed to be more “culturally fit” for the roles. The '90s set a culture for male candidates being ideal for pursuing careers in programming as women were painted with the “biological bias” of “not being logically wired” to perform the tasks under the role. Again, here the “assumed psyche” of women has been skewed to push the massive wave of male dominance in the industry higher and higher to mute or overlook the voice of female techs. The apparent sexism and racism in Silicon Valley are simply undeniable.

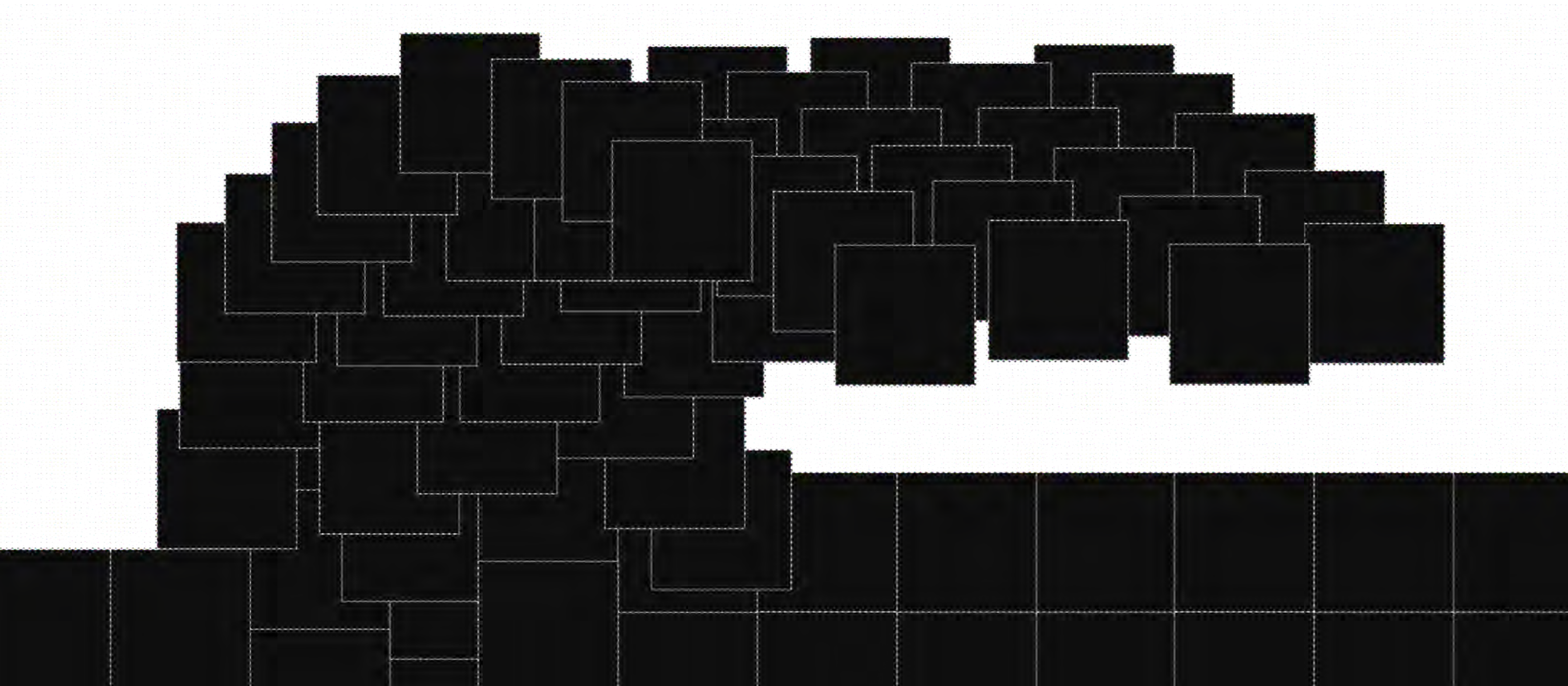


I wanted the piece to be central to women's loss of vocal power when measured along the lines of age-old biological bias not being at par with men to perform well in the tech industry.



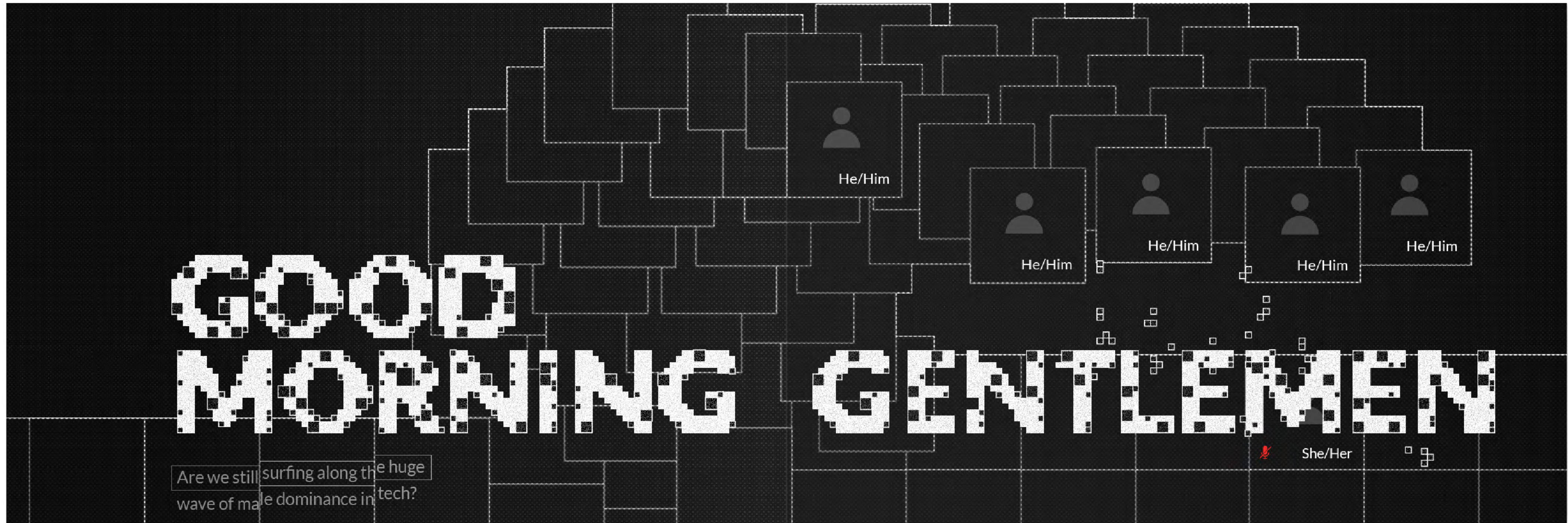
Typography is customized to represent the gaps in the system of recruiting, retaining, and building a growth culture for tech females and leaders.





The simplest form of the tech industry as a square reflects the unit of bias measurement in the form of a wave.

The dominance of male voice and culture overshadowing, overlooking and often ignoring the presence and contribution of women takes the form of a wave.

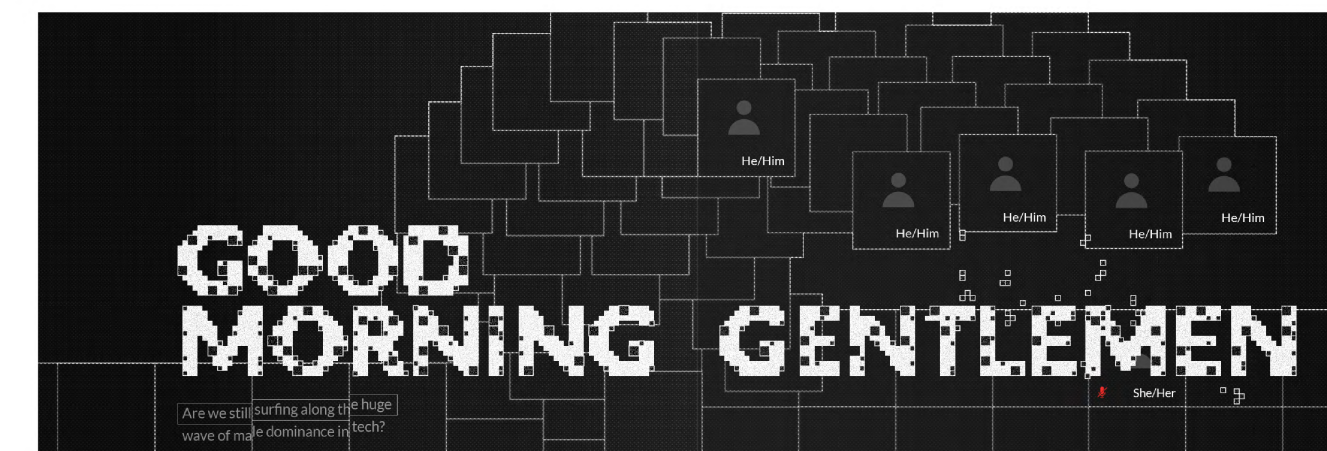
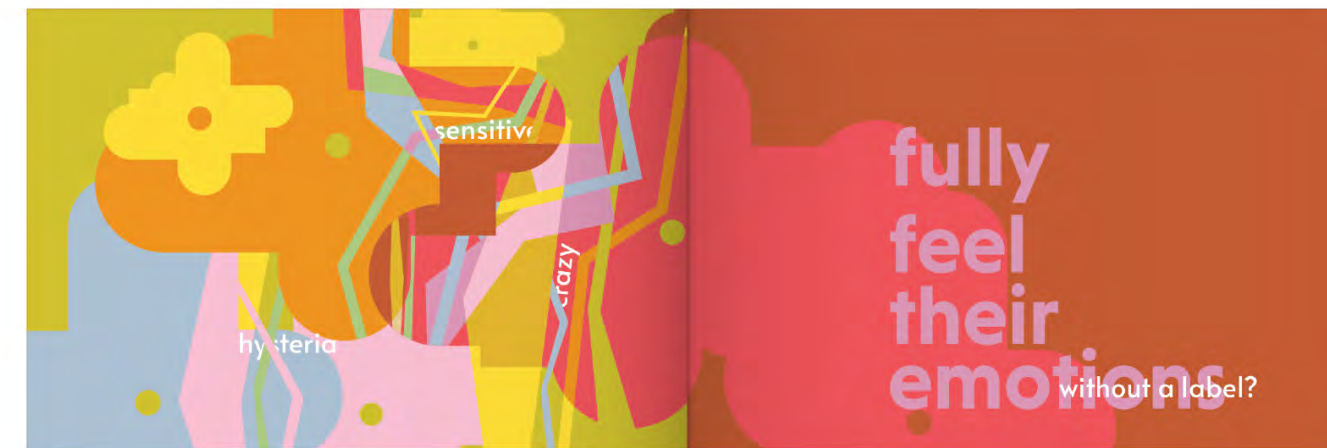
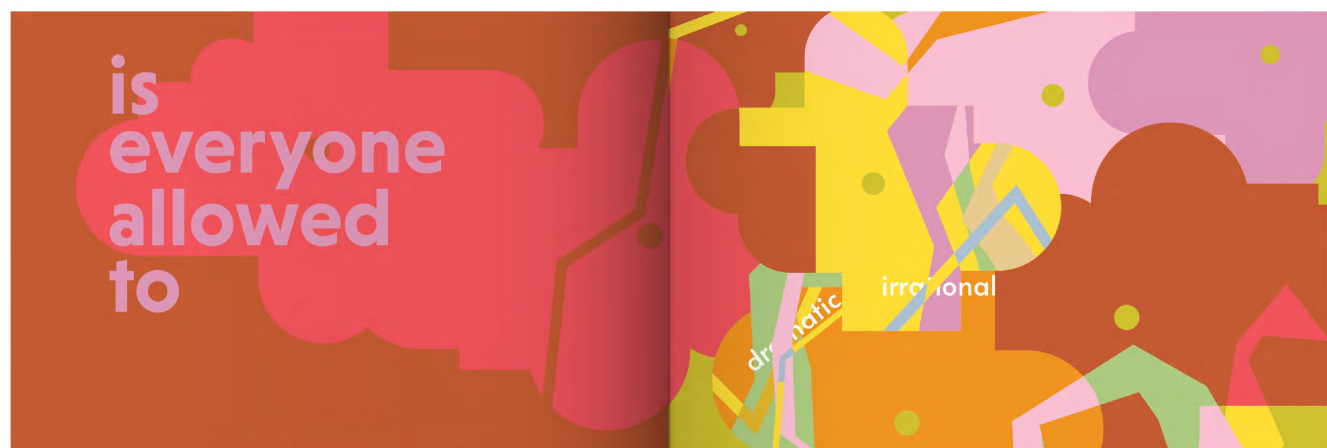
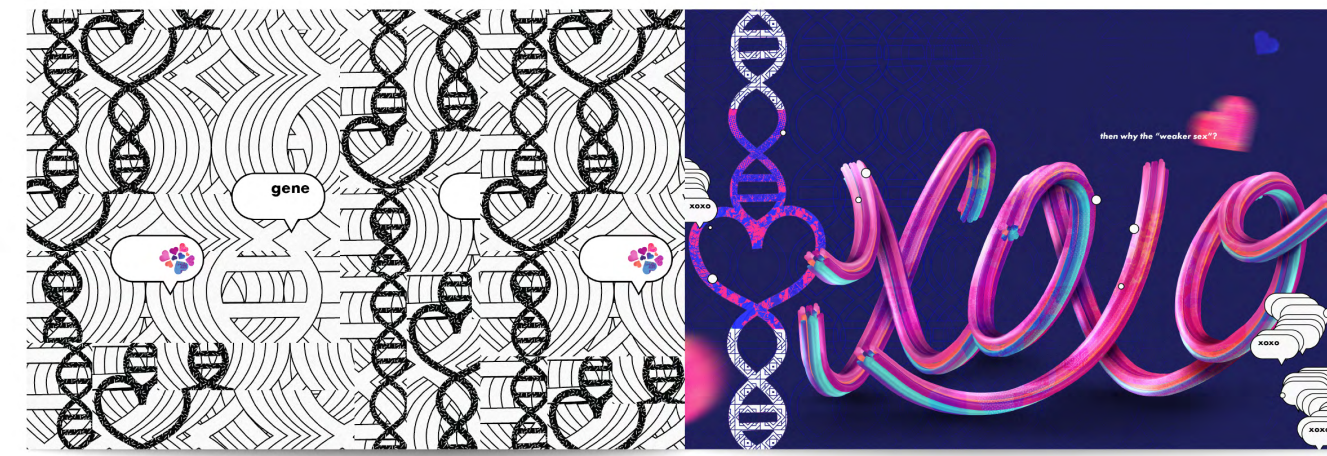


Activism . Society

The Final Look

Conclusion

The final product is a narrative of comparative spreads that combine both art and design as a technique to translate the ridiculous measurements we have to go through to be able to fit into the “assigned” roles in a culture. The freedom of a fluid visual vocabulary, subject to the question/content/layer of bias on each spread makes the zine a fresh and engaging device to unpack the measurements and address uncomfortable issues of gender divide.



Zine

The Final Look

Appendix B: Bibliography and References

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Appendix C: Semplice screen capture and page link
<https://designed.cad.rit.edu/vcdthesis/project/pallavisingh>



**IT IS TIME TO
RE-EVALUATE
GENDER CONFORMITY "ACCEPTED" STANDARDS**

Designer: Pallavi Singh | Advisor Committee: Adam Smith, Mike Strobert | Categories: Graphic Design, Publication, Illustration, Book, Typography

September 01, 2020 - Present

How might we break away from irrational social constructs to help women control their narratives? How might we identify the different tones of gender biases and stop measuring women along with the age-old assumptions that define the social order?

In our battle to break the binary today, this publication is a commentary on normalizing the strict gender roles by presenting stark examples of our biased gender views so that women are free to reach their potential.



Zine Stories with Visual Puns

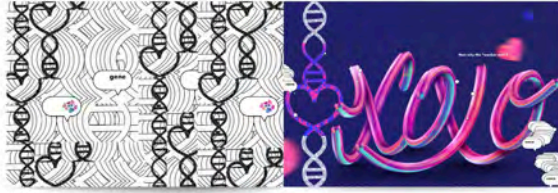
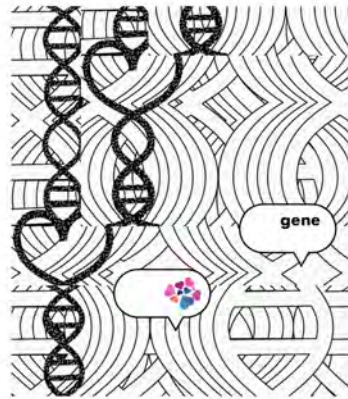


Image: Illustration

To explore the link between gender and genetics, I created an image featuring a DNA double helix and the word 'XOXO' in vibrant, cursive letters. The word 'XOXO' is a common expression of affection, often used to represent love or affection. The DNA double helix is a symbol of genetics and biology. The image is a visual metaphor for the connection between genetics and gender, and how they influence our behavior and emotions.

I created an image to explore how biology factors into our lives. Success is often measured in terms of physical strength only.

Here's "XOXO" from nature to women!



Are we open to buying a different and unexplored theory of measuring power?



Artwork: Society

To further exemplify sexism linked with racism, my illustration here is a response to the Covid related rise in Anti-Asian hate crimes in the US in the past month. The narrative here is a peek into the historical events such as the "Page Act of 1875" that established stereotypes of Asian women as "exotic sex objects" which still exist in society today. The "male supremacy" is evident when the shooter in Atlanta claimed the lives of Asian women only to "eliminate his sexual temptations".

The invisible measuring tapes of hate and misogyny are deeply embedded in our psyche and blindfold us to break away from the meaningless perceptions.

Activism - Society

A continuation of the previous series to raise awareness about the ancient immigration act that prohibited the entry of Asian women into the States on the assumption that they were "immoral". I draw parallels to the current shootings in Atlanta to measure how far we have actually come or are we still dwelling in the dark ages?



Sabre - Visual puns

Can strong women also be funny?

The translation of social hierarchy and gender gap established at home is carried on to the workplace where the strongest sense of hierarchy and gap exist. There is a certain gendered risk in projecting different personality expressions as a female in a work environment. Would one be taken seriously if you are funny, joyful, and humble for roles that are dynamic and reflect boldness? It is high time to obliterate and confront these paradoxes.

