A Woman's Experience Working in Masculine Trades

Laura Kathleen Ethridge

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A WOMAN’S EXPERIENCE WORKING IN MASCULINE TRADES

An Action Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT


This research explores the experience of welding and automotive trades through the lens of a woman and the gender boundaries with in them. Through qualitative arts-based research I created art that involved the use of welding, metal cutting, grinding, and manipulating automobile parts. My experiences were documented through video, pictures, and journals of self-reflection. Meaning is portrayed through the juxtaposition of chosen materials, and my reflection upon feminine roles and boundaries in society through my artwork. Through my research I was able to examine possible reasons why fewer women than men are working in fields such as welding and automobile restoration/fabrication. According to the United States Department of Labor Women’s Bureau, only 5.5% of workers in welding and brazing are women, and only 1.2% of automotive service and technicians are women (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). I explored the gender boundaries in these two fields of work. The goal of my research is to help bridge the gender gap in these two areas.
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I would like to begin by thanking my husband, Bryan, for all of his support and the sacrifices he has made. Not only did he try his hardest to help in daily life to life responsibilities, but he also became my teacher. Without his passion for welding and classic cars, along with his knowledge and skills in these trades, I would not have been able to develop the skills needed to complete my artwork.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Rationale

As young children, we are often told you can be anything you put your mind to as long as you work hard and never give up on your dreams. Some young girls are told they can do anything a boy can do. A few little girls take that advice and strive to live by it. They play with the boys, they thrive in classes they are told boys are better at, they compete in sports at the level of the boys, and they work hard in school for high achieving grades. These young girls do this to go into the work force and be paid less, treated as a lesser, and be told you can focus on family or your work, but you cannot have both. As Linda Nochlin, prominent feminist art historian, states, “Then as now, despite men’s greater ‘tolerance,’ the choice for women seems always to be marriage or a career” (2015, p. 59). Then there are the girls that still strive as women to be equal to men. There is no gender boundary and their gender does not define them. For this research study gender boundaries will be defined as “complex structures-physical, social, ideological, and psychological- which establish the differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men, shaping and constraining the behavior and attitudes of each gender group” (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p.175).

After becoming a mother, I strove to be a great mom, a perfect mom, as I believed society expected of me. I did every domestic household chore to be the perfect wife. When I realized I was changing to adapt to what I believed to be the societal expectations
of a woman, I began to analyze my own life and whether or not I wanted to be that type of mother and wife, or did I want to maintain that little girl who knew gender did not define her. As I evaluated my own life, I thought of something a father of one of my players told me when I had announced I was resigning from my coaching job due to having a child. He came up to me and gave his congratulations and then his deepest sympathy. With his arm around his daughter he told me it is a shame that we raise our daughters to be strong, independent women who can do anything they put their mind to, just to have them give it all up to have a child and husband in the end. I will never forget those words and the defeat in his eyes. The statement did not seem relevant or true at the time; however, four years later I could not think of anything more valid about my path.

Today’s American society has made strides in the direction of equality for women primarily due to the introduction of women in to the labor force as Cecilia Ridgeway discusses in *Framed by Gender* (2011). As women joined the workforce “the underlying system of gender inequality nevertheless managed to refashion itself…men continue to be advantaged not only in employment but also throughout much of society” (p.3). For this research study traditional gender roles will be defined as:

The traditional bread-winner model, in which the domestic sphere (family, household and unpaid labor) was the domain of women, while the institutions of the public sphere (mainly politics, civil society and paid labor) were distinctly the ‘men’s sphere.’ (Valentova, 2016, p.153)

Along with traditional gender roles, the research will also reflect on the current gender roles of society that are discussed by Mills in *Gender and the Work-Family Experience: An Intersection of the Two Domains* (2014). Mills discusses how gender theorists today
find that families that are more egalitarian “continue to divide domestic labor and
decision-making in traditional ways…The household division of labor remains gendered
even though men are doing somewhat more housework and women are spending less
time on housework than in the past” (p.4). This division in gender roles is called second
shift, in which women are found more often to be the ones to do “housework, childcare,
and other domestic duties” after working full time jobs (p.131). In my experience, I have
found the second shift model to be accurate. I feel society still expects a wife to cook,
clean, do the laundry, and be there if her family needs her. As a woman, I believe the
expectation of physical perfection and beauty is still as prevalent as it was a hundred
years ago. Even if this ideal of what a woman should be is not blatant it is there through
social media and other media outlets (see Fig.1). Every day, women and young girls see
or hear these ideals, and so do boys and men. The standard is still there. The pressures are
still there. If women are doing activities that are typically male dominant, they are
expected to look gorgeous while doing them. Images of female welders and mechanics
are sexualized on social media sites, catered to male pleasure rather than celebrating the
accomplishments and skills of those women (see Fig.2). Even though I loathe that I
succumbed to these unrealistic expectations, I did, and I strove to be that woman after my
son was born. This led me to wonder how many women feel the same pressures and does
this occur in more than one aspect of life?
In my attempts to regain the person I feel I used to be, I learned to weld. At first it was because I have been around this craft for seven years now and not once tried to participate. I desired to participate, however I was afraid of failing and not doing as well as the men could. In order to overcome these fears, I decided to explore welding for a studio class. Unexpectedly, it became an exploration of a male dominant realm in which I could break gender boundaries. This led me to my research study. This research is an arts-based study where I worked through experiences of a woman working in a male dominant field, while reflecting on and exploring the past and present gender roles in United States and Western society.

Figure 1. Examples of societal expectations of women found on social media.¹
My art is a play on the type of woman I am and who I have always strived to be. Even though I have pushed the gender boundaries in many aspects of my life I had never tried to break the gender boundaries in the welding and automotive realms. Therefore, I chose to explore the art of welding and metal work for several reasons. Welding is something that I had watched my husband and his father do, yet this was the first time I participated in the welding and learned to weld. I did not see myself as a sculpturally minded individual. The artwork I chose to create in this study made me push past the limitations I had created for myself. To explore welding and create metal art was a way for me to feel more confident with sculpture and to be taken out of my comfort zone.
I wanted to create pieces that express both feminine and masculine characteristics; however, I did not want it to be overly straight forward. The direction I had chosen was to connect feminine with masculine and have the two areas working together, complimenting each other. By creating items typically associated with women: a makeup vanity or china hutch out of car parts, heavy steel, and welding, I am connecting the two genders. My hope is that the artwork conveys the idea of both genders working together. I want my pieces to reflect elegance and beauty but also power and strength. While creating both pieces I collected data for my thesis question while also exploring the roles of women today with roles of women in the past in hopes of finding commonalities that will benefit myself and other women.

**Research Question**

My life experiences have led me to ask the questions: What is the experience of a woman working in predominately masculine trades? What are gender boundaries? What happens when I challenge gender boundaries through my artwork? The purpose of this study is to explore my own experiences working in welding and areas of automotive restoration/fabrication.

**Context**

The environment in which I conducted my research was in various places associated with welding and automotive trades such as; salvage yards, steel yards, and a personally owned steel building which housed the equipment and room to create my artwork. Through the context of feminine theory and feminist criticism in art I searched for information that is relevant to my research and more reasons why women may not be as present in these occupations.
Definitions of Terms

Boundary: “Separates two (or more) parts of some phenomena from others...boundaries exist as structures that connect the separated parts by providing the arena for their relationship” (Valsiner, 2007, p.221).

Feminine: Having qualities traditionally ascribed to women (Dictionary.com, 2018).

Gender Boundaries: “The complex structures-physical, social, ideological, and psychological-which establish the differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men, shaping and constraining the behavior and attitudes of each gender group” (Lamont, & Molnar, 2002, p.175).

Traditional Male Role: “Maleness represents a world of achievement, autonomy, and effectiveness” (Coontz, 1996, p.63). “Institutions of the public sphere (mainly politics, civil society and paid labor) were distinctly the ‘men’s sphere’” (Valentova, 2016, p.153).

Traditional Female Role: “Domestic sphere (family, household and unpaid labor) was the domain of women” (Valentova, 2016, p.153). “Women are also culturally presumed to be the ones most directly and morally responsible for the care and well-being of children and the making of home” (Coontz, 1996, p.128)

Juxtaposition: An act or instance of placing close together side by side, especially for comparison or contrast (Merriam-Webster, 2018).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

What are boundaries, more specifically, gender boundaries? What happens when I challenge gender boundaries through my artwork? A definition of boundaries including various facets and applications will be discussed and applied to specifically gender boundaries. Gender boundaries are examined through art and art history, demonstrating the various feminine boundaries of the past and present.

The following sources provide definitions and explanations of boundaries, gender boundaries, and a look at gender boundaries as evidenced in the lack of women in art history. In order to conceptualize boundaries, I examine Lamont and Molnar’s (2002) theory of “symbolic and social boundaries” (p.168), and Barker-Ruchti, Grahn, & Lindgren’s (2016) analysis of Lamont’s “boundary shifting,” “boundary crossing” and “boundary transformation” (p.619). I define gender boundaries through Lamont and Molnar (2002), Barker-Ruchti, Grahn, & Lindgren (2016), and Valsiner’s (2007) various definitions. Through Pollock’s Vision and Difference (1988), and Nochlin and Reilly’s Women Artists the Linda Nochlin Reader (2015), I examine examples of gender inequalities in art and their effects in art history and women in art. I look at Heartney, Posner, Princenthal, and Scott’s (2013) book The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium, and their discussion of various artist working in the area of “domestic disturbance” (p. 272).
Boundaries

The word boundary has various definitions and contextual understandings. A broad definition is, “a boundary separates two (or more) parts of some phenomena from others...boundaries exist as structures that connect the separated parts by providing the arena for their relationship” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 221). Sociological understanding of boundaries is discussed by Lamont and Molnar (2002) with their theory of symbolic and social boundaries. They do not attempt to define boundaries, but instead look at various phenomena that determine boundaries including how boundaries emerge, develop, operate, and how they can be shifted, crossed, and transformed (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Barker-Ruchti, Grahn, and Lindgren (2016), define gender boundaries within physical cultures as, “metaphorically, boundaries are socially constructed lines or borders that define particular patterns of like and dislikes or of what is ‘in’ or what is ‘out’” (p.618).

Symbolic Boundaries and Social Boundaries

Symbolic boundaries and social boundaries are closely connected and work together. Symbolic boundaries are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality” (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168). Examining symbolic boundaries allows us to determine social relations. They also “separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” (p.168). Symbolic boundaries may also develop the “in-group” and “out-group” categories which generate race and gender inequalities (p.170). Social boundaries are “objectified forms of social differences manifested in
unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities” (p. 168). Symbolic boundaries are often used to “enforce, maintain, normalize, or rationalize” (p.186) social boundaries as seen in cultural class distinctions and in gender inequality.

**Boundary Shifting, Crossing, and Transformation**

Although social and symbolic boundaries are established by societies, Barker-Ruchti argue that boundary shifting, boundary crossing, and boundary transformation do occur, and boundaries are “permeable” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.619). This provides for change within boundaries and possibility of dissolving of boundaries in areas.

Shifting boundaries involves the perception of the area changing within a social construct. “A shift may occur in relation to perceived norms and ideals, or definitions of an activity or role, and in this sense, occurs more on a perceptual or intelligible level” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.619). It is argued this could be the start of a boundary losing its eminence. Barker-Ruchti et al. (2016) give the example of how the notion of what physical sports were thought unsuitable for women has changed several times. As women became more integrated into various sports the physical suitability for a sport changed. Women’s movement into male dominated sports has become “easier” (p. 619).

Another example of shifting boundaries is women in the work force. There was a strong liberal individualism in the United States beginning in the 1970s, that led to the change in social systems and push for equality in women’s access to jobs and education which led to “much of what we call the gender revolution” (England, 2010, p.162). A perception that women could not and should not participate in the work force and higher education began to change.
Crossing boundaries is a more “concrete” action (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.619). Crossing boundaries is explained by Barker-Ruchti (2016) as the action of women’s movement in to sports in general. For example, men participating in traditionally women’s sports, women being leaders in sports, and the adaption of sports to include “diverse performance standards (e.g. outcome-, pleasure-, and self-improvement-oriented)” (p. 619). Another example of crossing a boundary is women entering male dominated jobs. Since 1970 there has been an increase of women in male dominated fields such as business, marketing, professional degrees, law degrees, and in management (England, 2010).

Lastly, the term transforming boundaries is considered to be the product of boundary shifting and crossing. “The membrane that previously defined the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has been transformed, meaning that the components of membrane have been altered. This changed border redefines its interior and that which is on the outside” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.619). An example of this would be the transformation of gender roles due to the gender revolution. When more families became dual-earner homes due to the necessity of more income there became an “increased involvement of men in the private sphere of home and family…In the United States, fathers’ proportion of total parental time spent on childcare has surpassed 40 percent among dual-earner couples” (Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård, 2015, p. 211). The structure of various social and symbolic boundaries has been proven to change through the process of boundary shifting, crossing, and transforming.
Gender Boundaries

Initially a general look at gender is a simple male versus female differentiation. This form of separation is visible on birth certificates, drivers’ licenses, and passports, however it “overlooks the myriad of everyday life settings where the gender boundaries become indeterminate through gender role neutralization” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 220). It is also stated that the “boundary between genders is what makes it possible to have the notion of gender at all. There would be no gender- nor need to study it- if the boundary between genders were to be eliminated” (p.221). Gender boundaries are defined by Lamont and Molńar (2002) as “the complex structures-physical, social, ideological, and psychological-which establish the differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men, shaping and constraining the behavior and attitudes of each gender group” (p.176). Gender boundaries are “visible and invisible socially constructed borders that create social differences; yet, such boundaries, similar to membranes, are malleable” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.616).

How are symbolic boundaries drawn in art and how may they develop into social boundaries? The assumption that there are no great women artists exemplifies how symbolic and social boundaries play a role in the lack of female artists in art history. It is argued by Tilly that “dichotomous categories such as male and female are used by dominant groups to marginalize other groups and block their access to resources” (Lamont, & Molńar, 2002, p.176). Such marginalization has been discussed by Pollock (1988) on various accounts, where bourgeois ideologies hindered or hid the success of women as artists (Pollock, p.29).
How Boundaries in Art Affected Women’s Success in Art

Through my reading I have found two female authors to be the most influential in my understanding of boundaries women faced in art in the past and in the present. Griselda Pollock (1998) looks at the various facets of why women are not included fully in art history in her book Vision and Difference. She explores areas from feminist theory, Marxist ideologies, bourgeois ideologies, and various female artists who have been the exception or changed the perception of women in art. Linda Nochlin’s (2015) essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” and other essays within Women Artists: The Linda Nochlin Reader, provides insight into the various boundaries women faced from European/American societies past that caused them to be left out of early art history. It is not that they did not exist, it was the many social restraints that kept them from their full potential (Nochlin & Reilly, 2015).

Pollock

Griselda Pollock (1998) argues that women as artists have been ignored by the patriarchal society that dominates the art history world. In her introduction she proposes and answers the question:

How essential is femininity? I once asked. The answer: it is structural to the maintenance of a certain Eurocentric masculinist conception of art and artists.

Femininity is invoked as the deficient, but always named and marked other, that which then allows art to be understood as inherently what men make, without having to spell out that blatantly false narcissism. (Pollock, 1988, p. xx)

One area of discussion throughout the book is how not being included in the traditional art histories becomes a boundary for women. Feminist art has become available at some
universities as separate courses to art history. Pollock argues that doing this, and having all female art shows, segregates women from the art world even more. Separate art curricula and art shows only perpetuate the boundary between male and female artists and there is not inclusion achieved (Pollock, 1988).

We never say man artist or man’s art; we simply say art and artist. This hidden sexual prerogative is secured by the assertion of a negative, an ‘other’, the feminine, as a necessary point of differentiation. The art made by women has to be mentioned and then dismissed precisely in order to secure this hierarchy. (p.34)

Pollock (1998) turns to the bourgeois ideologies to explain why women have been left out of art history and often have not crossed that boundary. Areas of suppression such as a woman not being allowed on the streets in the 19th century with or without a man, or women not being seen as equals to men, or women being expected to only have roles as wives and in child rearing, or women only having limited training in art, are discussed in detail throughout the book. “The justification for making women exclusively responsible for domestic work and child care is assumed to be the nature of women. Historically produced social roles are represented in bourgeois ideologies as timeless and biologically determined” (Pollock, 1998, p.36). The argument that women must break the gender boundary within the system is present throughout the book, yet she makes statements that it should not be at the expense of losing characteristics of being a woman. She argues that masculinity is the ideal and powerful in our society and of the bourgeois society, therefore, women are “the disadvantaged other whose freedom lies in becoming like man,” (p. 50) and a woman will only be noticed with the loss of her femininity. Morisot and Cassatt are used as examples of women artists who were suppressed by the male
dominant bourgeois society. They were left out of higher art education and training that only men would receive, thus never giving them the opportunity to be as successful of artists as their male counterparts. She argues that:

The spaces of femininity still regulate women’s lives- from running the gauntlet of intrusive looks by men on the streets to surviving deadly sexual assaults. In rape trials, women on the street are assumed to be ‘asking for it.’ The configuration which shaped the work of Cassatt and Morisot still defines our world. (p.127)

Pollock discusses the many areas in which women have been suppressed by gender boundaries in art and Nochlin brings even more understanding to the phenomena of why women are not a part of art history.

**Nochlin**

When examining why there are no great women artists, Nochlin (2015) examines several areas she believes caused the exemption of women from early art history. Each area is a boundary in which women were affected by the social inequality of art training and in their daily lives. She argued that “the answer to why there have been no great women artists lies not in the nature of individual genius or the lack of it, but in the nature of given social institutions and what they forbid or encourage in various classes or groups of individuals” (Nochlin & Reilly, 2015, p.52). The areas in which she discusses inequality in art training are drawing with nude models, what was classified as “lady’s accomplishment” (p. 57), and success being correlated to a woman’s tie to a male artist.

Her first argument of why there are fewer female artists in Western art history is the lack of training in drawing with nude models. Men in the 19th century had training in
drawing nudes and had drawing sessions where they drew nude figures. However, this would not be allowed of a woman, therefore any female artists had to miss formal training in drawing the human proportion.

To be deprived of this ultimate stage of training meant, in effect, to be deprived of the possibility of creating major art works, unless one were a very ingenious lady indeed, or simply, as most of the women aspiring to be painters ultimately did, to restrict oneself to the ‘minor’ fields of portraiture, genre, landscape or still-life. (Nochlin & Reilly, 2015 p.53)

Secondly, Nochlin discusses how a lady’s artistic success was not in the art they created as professional art but rather as a “suitable accomplishment” and etiquette training (p.57).

To be able to do a great many things tolerably well, is of infinitely more value to a woman, than to be able to excel in any one thing…by being apt and tolerably well skilled in everything, she may fall into any situation in life with dignity and ease-by devoting her time to excellence in one, she may remain incapable of every other. (p.57)

Women were “expected to drop (their) career and give up this commitment at the behest of love and marriage: this lesson is, today as in the 19th century, still inculcated in young girls, directly or indirectly, from the moment they are born” (p.58). The boundary separating women as amateur artists from being professional artists was and still is an area of inequality in the arts. Nochlin (2015) argues that a male artist does not have to give up everything to be an artist, but the female artist is told that the “choice for women
seems always to be marriage or a career, i.e., solitude as the price of success or sex and companionship at the price of professional renunciation” (p. 59).

Lastly, the boundary separating women from the professional art field and subsequently art history was broken primarily by women who had fathers who were artists or those married to or having a strong connection to “dominant male personality” (Nochlin & Reilly, 2015, p.61). Women artists such as Vigée Brun and Angelica Kauffmann were daughters of skilled artists, Berthe Morisot as friends with Manet, and later his sister in-law. Mary Cassatt was a close friend of Degas. Some artists such as Käthe Kollwitz and Louise Nevelson do not have artistic ties, but many other contemporary female artists are married to male artists. Nochlin (2015) uses this information to discuss the role of the female artist and present the notion that this may be a factor as to these women’s inclusion in art history. In the end Nochlin argues that in order for a woman to have a career at all, especially in art, she must “have a good strong streak of rebellion in her” (p.62). She must rebel “rather than submitting to the socially approved role of wife and mother” and adopt masculine attributes to survive in the artworld (p.62).

**Contemporary Female Artists Exploring Domestic Disturbances**

In *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium* (2013) Heartney, Posner, Princenthal, and Scott discuss past and the present female artists that create artwork in response to the various domestic responsibilities and demands of women in society (2013). The basis of the book is to answer the question Linda Nochlin asked them after their first book *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, “Exactly what has been accomplished, what changed?” (p. 12). In an attempt to answer
this question, they explore several areas in which female artists born after 1960 have broken boundaries, question societal expectations, or have brought issues of race, gender, and identity to the forefront. One of the categories is domestic disturbances. Domestic disturbances “takes on women’s conflicted relationship to home, family, and security” (p. 13), along with reflecting on gender boundaries within the home structure. “The meaning and responsibilities of home and family are issues that women artists have probed for years with varying degrees of acceptance and resistance” (p.274). Within the chapter Scott (2013) discusses the areas of domestic disturbances that have affected women from the past to the present and what many contemporary artists are reflecting upon. Progress for women’s rights has occurred, however, it has brought forth new challenges in women’s lives that earlier feminist artists did not reflect upon. Women have entered the workforce in large numbers, yet this has left “less time and energy for domestic pursuits which, in the not-too-distant past, were broadly viewed as a woman’s obligation” (p. 277). To many conservative views it still is a woman’s obligation. Scott goes on to state that “economic realities have made second income necessary for maintaining middle-class lifestyle. A new elite has arisen consisting of educated women who have the luxury to stay home” (p.277).

Today there are female artists who explore domesticity such as: Kate Gilmore, Justine Kurland, Klara Liden, Liza Lou, Catherine Opie, and Andrea Zittel. These artists ask the questions: “What is the value of women’s work? What is the function of private space? And what about the changing role of domesticity, particularly as it relates to the redefinition of family and community” (p. 276)?
Conclusion

My arts-based research project explores ways in which women have been suppressed by boundaries as well as the past and present expectations of women in society. The *China Hutch* reflects on a woman’s worth being the china in their china hutch, and *Vanity* reflects on the expectations in American society of beauty and idealization being achieved through makeup. More about my methods and processes used to create my artwork will be discussed in Chapter Three.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Plan of Action

I chose arts-based autobiographical portraiture to conduct my research. Patricia Leavy in *Handbook of Arts-Based Research* (2018) states from Georges Gusdorf that “autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it” (p.127). Melanie Buffington and Sara Wilson McKay in *Practice Theory: Seeing the Power of Art Teacher Researchers* (2013) state that portraiture “seeks to connect an audience to personal stories through use of rich description and context that captures and draws the reader into the narrative” (p.161). Using these methodologies, I reflected on personal experience and my personal story through my artwork. I created two pieces of art: a vanity and a china hutch, both constructed of automobile parts and steel. Both pieces of artwork reflect on what I feel and experience when I break gender boundaries by working with materials and techniques that are traditionally male dominated realms. Through my artwork I try to answer the questions: What is the experience of a woman working in predominately masculine trades? What are gender boundaries? What happens when I challenge gender boundaries through my artwork? My strategy is to answer these questions through self-reflection of my process and personal reflection of how others reacted to my work. I also connect my work to various sociological definitions of boundaries and gender
boundaries, along with reflection on various art historians who discuss areas of gender boundaries that have impacted the arts.

**Procedure**

During the creation of these art pieces, I relied on photographs and videos taken during the construction process, along with quick notes and written reflection, to guide data collection. These forms of data were documented on my iPhone. After working on the artwork, I reflected on my process, frustrations, challenges, emotional experiences, and my next steps, and documented these in written form. There were two ways in which I photographed and filmed during the process. I propped the phone up to film myself as I worked, or I took photos of the piece after I completed a section. And secondly, my husband, who was my assistant during the creation, filmed and photographed me working. At times both of us needed to be hands on during the creation and we were not able to film the process. However, photographs were taken before and after something was done. This process of data collection continued for the entire research and creation of my art work.

**Participants**

This arts-based research was heuristic in nature focusing largely on my personal experience. I reflected on my own process and feelings during the development of my artwork, along with what it is like to go to salvage yards and steel yards to get the equipment. My husband was my assistant with the artwork. He assisted me by supporting the work while I was cutting, grinding, moving it, and at times welding. Some aspects of metal work require the help of others and the strength of multiple people. I relied on him for structural guidance and support. He is a skilled mechanic and welder and much of
what I was doing required being knowledgeable in those skills, which I lacked. It was never him creating the piece or creating the ideas, however he was my teacher in terms of guidance of how to do it correctly and safely. For instance, my first experience of grinding resulted in catching myself on fire. I was grinding a piece of steel and standing in the line of sparks, which was something that my husband had warned me to watch out for. I was so engrossed in the task at hand I failed to remember the safety protocols resulting in the sparks catching my sweatshirt on fire. Luckily, I had several layers of clothing on and caught it in time that it did not burn my skin. I pat myself out as my husband came over to help. It was a good learning experience for me and taught me to make sure I always follow the safety suggestions he gave me. The idea, and all of the manual labor of the project, and construction of the piece was done by me. I do not feel that I was overwhelmed by doing everything myself, however, at times I did feel like I was not capable. It is a difficult thing to accept failure or accepting that I am not doing something correctly. This was my greatest struggle and what was overwhelming at times. With the help of my husband, I was able to stay positive and keep a level head.

**Data Collection**

Most of my data collection was done on my iPhone. The phone was used for written notes, photographs, and video documentation as I worked. During the entire process, there were times I stopped and photographed things I had done, or even documented areas I did not accomplish. Along with the use of my phone I used my computer to keep a journal reflection of the process and events that took place.
Data Analysis

During analysis of the data I looked back at the collected information and found events that could be categorized in areas. Some of the categories are: traditionally female characteristics (as defined in chapter one), traditionally male characteristics (as defined in chapter one), and female/male blending (areas of success where it does not seem there is a gender boundary). The main focus of data analysis was to see if I can transform gender boundaries in my work. As stated in chapter two, transforming boundaries is considered to refer to be an outcome of boundary shifting and crossing. “The membrane that previously defined the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ has been transformed, meaning that the components of membrane have been altered” (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2016, p.619). I was not sure what I expected to learn other than is it possible to submerse myself in to a male dominated field and not feel as if I do not belong? Did the men I encountered find what I made interesting? Did they welcome me and treat me as an equal? How did I personally feel while creating my piece? I predicted that I would be accepted at the various male dominated areas I go to and I would gain respect from men who work in this line of work. I also predicted that they would interact with me and ask questions about the work, however, I was not sure if they would understand it to its entirety. I felt that a woman would understand the juxtaposition of the men’s world with the past and present expectations of women, more than a man would understand it. I felt that in the end, and after reflection, it would be interesting to analyze the final results.

Limitations

There were not many limitations for my research. Most of it was accomplishable. There were some circumstantial limitations that arose but were manageable. Financially
these were high cost art pieces, and nothing was cheap. I did have to wait to purchase materials until we had the money which set me back on completion time. We also did not have the best welding machine for working with thin metals. It is on the lower price range and does not create as nice of welds as some others, yet we were not financially able to purchase a better welder or a tungsten inert gas welder at the time. All of this was manageable, however not ideal. I also had to rely on my husband for help a bit more than I had expected. The artwork was large and required two people at times. There was also the issue of strength a few times. For example, I could not get the vice grips closed on the piece I was trying to cut out. I tried to squeeze them shut but I was not physically strong enough. This type of limitation added to my research and data.

Through rich description and narrative, I provide detailed understanding of my experience while working on my artwork. My research does not involve the experience of others and relies solely on my own interpretations. I used photographs and detailed journal entries in order for others to feel a part of my journey and ultimately allow for insight of what it is like for a woman working in male dominated areas while creating art.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS

Description of Artwork

Makeup Vanity

The first piece of art that I created using techniques of welding, metal working, and automotive restoration/fabrication, was Makeup Vanity (see Fig. 3). Along with learning the techniques of welding and automotive restoration through the artwork, I reflected on the roles and expectations of women in the past and present. The vanity is a juxtaposition of traditional feminine furniture with heavy metal and car fenders that are typically seen as masculine trades. Pink and gray colors were used to continue the blending of masculine and feminine boundaries within the artwork. During the creation of the vanity I did not journal however I did photograph and take videos of my process. I did most of the manual labor of the vanity, yet my husband assisted more with this piece than the second one. When I began the process of the makeup vanity we went together to the salvage yard, picked out the fenders, we went to the steel yard together, he taught me how to do various metal fabrication, taught me to weld, and also did some of the planning of the piece since everything was new to me. This piece of art was the start of my exploration in to my research topic and led me to the creation of the china hutch, which I documented in more detail. This piece of art began my exploration of gender roles and boundaries in Western society.
China Hutch

The second piece of art, China Hutch, continued my exploration of welding and automotive restoration/fabrication (see Fig. 4). For the china hutch I took on more of an independent role; I selected the car, acquired the supplies, and did all manual labor, with the exception of help from my husband on two-person jobs or teaching moments. The china hutch was a more extensive artwork that took me from August 2018 until March 2019 to complete. The work is an exploration of women’s roles in society both in our past and in the present. It is a reflection on a women’s worth being displayed in their china hutch in past generations. I chose to create the hutch due to my grandmother’s obsession with where her china will end up when she passes. She displayed hers proudly in her hutch over the years, the china showed her status, her wealth. It will be passed down to the women in our family, and I have already received one set, yet I do not have the same need for it. This led me to think about what are traditional female roles in society that would make something like china so important, and what are the traditional male roles in society that separated female/male realms? Through the creation of the
China hutch and the vanity I attempted to answers these questions and reflect on what my experience was as a woman, working in predominately male dominated trades. The china hutch is using juxtaposition in order to provoke thought about the two gender realms together.

Figure 4. China Hutch. Photo by Author.

**Analysis**

**The Salvage Yard**

Both art pieces began as ideas of what type of furniture I wanted to create yet I was unsure of what automobile or part of one I wanted to use. Therefore, each piece
began with a trip to the salvage yard. The experiences at the salvage yard were very
different each time. The first experience, when looking for the fenders for the vanity, I
was with my husband. The second experience, when looking for a backend of a car for
the china hutch, I was alone. I reflected upon my first experience, looking for fenders, in
my journal entry on August 1, 2019.

When we got there everyone addressed my husband, asking him what he needed
and wanted to show him around to all of the vehicles. I did take on some of the
responsibility, chiming in when he was asked questions, and telling them that we
were there for my needs. Then I described what I was looking for, fenders dating
from 1940s to 1970s. However, when we escorted around the lot in one
gentleman’s car, I still sat in the back seat, my husband in the front passenger
seat. The man continued to direct questions to my husband. When we found
something and were given a price the man looked at my husband for an answer
not me. I got the feeling from them that it was ‘cute’ that I was trying to build
something, but my husband was the ultimate person to sell to, as if he was
allowing me to buy these parts.

This experience was very different than my experience at the salvage yard alone. I
was greeted and approached more equally as the main customer. However, there were
several differences that stood out to me. One, I was not escorted around this time. I told
the front desk that I was looking for a 1950s to 1960s backend of a wagon or car similar.
They directed me verbally to where the older cars were, where the entrance was, and to
let them know if I needed any help. I set off on my own exploring the various cars and
taking pictures of possibilities for a china hutch. Once I found the car that I ended up
using, I felt the need to search for the type it was before asking someone about price. My
journal entry reads:

I did not know what type of car/SUV it was. I first went to the front and looked at
the make, Plymouth, then I looked up on my phone “old Plymouth SUV.” This is
how I found that it was a 1950s Plymouth Suburban Wagon. I did this because I
felt I had to know what the car was in order to ask them about it. If I didn’t know
the name then I would look like a fool, or at least that’s what I thought in my
head.
Later, as I talked with the owner, I found that he did not know what type of vehicle the Plymouth was. I found it interesting that I was worried about looking like I do not belong in there so much that I spent the time to make sure I knew the name. Next, I began negotiating the price of the car with the owner. I explained to him that I would be cutting it to make a china hutch. He seemed interested in my plans and explained where they would cut the vehicle in order to keep the back window. At this time, he asked me what I did with the fenders before. Apparently, he remembered my husband and me coming in and buying fenders for the last art piece.

_He asked to see a picture of the makeup vanity I made. “Wow, that’s pretty cool. I love the mirror (chuckle),” he said to me. Another worker there said, “oh cool.” They were both polite, but I still got the sense they weren’t extremely impressed. I must say I didn’t expect them to be, especially with all the car restorations they see and such._

Lastly, he gave me a price, I had planned to negotiate the price on anything I found, yet I froze. In my journal entry I discussed how hot I was and how much sweat was dripping down my face and back. It was a hundred-degree day and I was in jeans and a tank top. I became so uncomfortable and embarrassed that I quickly told him I would need to think about the price, do some sketches, and get back to him. I remember leaving abruptly and felt awkward about returning. Yet, the next day I returned, slightly more confident. I received the vehicle backend for a lower price and started my journey of creating the artwork (see Fig. 5).
One difference I noticed most about my two experiences were the moments where gender boundaries and roles seemed most prevalent. The choice of clothing was something that stood out. My first experience to the salvage yard with my husband was winter, I was in jeans, boots, and a hoody, all clothing I felt comfortable in and offered protection from sharp items. My second experience, on my own, was in the heat of the summer, and I milled over what to wear for an hour. My journal reads:

Before I went through, I had the dilemma on being unsure of what to even wear. I know jeans and boots were best, but after that I was unsure of my choices. I could wear a t-shirt like the many I wear that aren’t “too girly” but I’m already in jeans and boots and it is 90 degrees outside. I could wear a “cute” tank top and then feel like I don’t belong as soon as I walk in there. Or I wear a ‘Wrangler’ tank top that is neither too “girly” or too “sexy” yet a little “sexy.” Will it look like I’m trying too hard to be “cute.” It was a ridiculous thing to have to even think about. In reality all I wanted to do was wear something that protects me from glass and scrap metal and then a top that isn’t too hot, so I don’t roast. I doubt men worry about what to wear to the salvage yard. They just throw on whatever jeans, dirty top, possibly a cut off t-shirt, boots, and head over there. They aren’t worried about looking too nice or not being taken seriously depending on what they are wearing. Yet here I am in this dilemma. So, I choose the somewhat sexy, yet cool, brown Wrangler tank top. I tell myself I just look like a cowgirl in the summer and I leave. I still feel a bit self-conscious and a little too made up for the salvage yard, hoping I won’t be judged as such.

Reflecting on this moment I notice a gender boundary. As a woman, I felt the need to be presentable even when going to a salvage yard, yet I did not want to look like I did not
belong. What is belonging? Is it looking like a man? I found this experience interesting. It was another example of gender roles and expectations in society. Another time that clothing came up was the third salvage yard trip. The rear fenders on the Plymouth were dented, there was another Plymouth there that I remembered; therefore, I went back to look at them, this time with my husband. As we were walking out to them, he asked me “why do you have your purse, that is a weird thing to bring out here.” I was shocked. I did not think it was “weird” to have my purse, what if I buy something, I would need my wallet. My wallet is always in my purse; therefore, I felt I needed my purse. To a man, it was not something to bring in to a junk yard and could have been left in the car. I found this to be intriguing. The gender differences of what goes with you and where, stood out. In my salvage yard experiences, I found that being a woman did make the experience different. However, I found that some of these differences were created by my own insecurities and focus on gender.

**Welding and Metal Work**

Throughout the process of creating both pieces I learned the trade of welding and metal work. Before I started any artwork, I learned to weld using a metal inert gas (MIG) welder that is a wire feed. I learned various joints and welds and practiced each several times. When I was practicing, I felt like I was doing well and, I felt confident with welding before I began the process of the vanity. As a woman who has only watched men weld it was a moment of empowerment and sense of equality to succeed in a skill that is male dominated. I felt I was crossing the gender boundaries of welding. However, as soon as I started the vanity my welds would blow through the metal due to not being able to get the welder at a low enough amperage for the gas. The welder was set up with .032
solid core wire and carbon dioxide gas. This was a challenge for both artworks, and a source of frustration. I felt less equal in skill when this would occur. There were also moments that I felt empowered and that my welds were up to standard as I worked on the two art pieces (see Fig. 6).

![Moments of successful welds. China hutch on the left. Vanity on the right.](image)

**Figure 6.** Moments of successful welds. China hutch on the left. Vanity on the right.

**Examples of frustration.** During the process of creating the vanity I had less frustration than with the china hutch. When I picked out the vanity fenders, I found some that had very minimal rust and dents. They were in better condition and the chrome was not damaged (see Fig. 7). The fenders were picked out by myself and my husband, and he helped find areas of rust and how I can work around it or remove it. The Plymouth for the china hutch was covered in rust. When I picked it, I did not look for the rust as I should have. I reflected on this on October 27, 2018:

*I did a terrible job picking out the vehicle. It is plagued with rust, and in many places, not fixable, and I will have to do the best I can to hide it. If I had known more when I bought it, I would have looked for the rusted areas. Due to my lack of knowledge however, I ended up with a cancer of a car. I have spent lots of time drilling out rusted bolts to remove pieces just to find more rust underneath the first layer of rusted metal. I was originally proud I got the back end for $350 dollars down from $500 and now I’m thinking “I got robbed.” That is how it*
works though. If I’m going to be in a junk yard buying and finagling, then I should know what I’m doing and looking for those rusted spots.

I was disappointed with my choice in vehicles and at times it slowed my process. I would get frustrated with how much I had to do to clean up the rust and, with prepping the piece, that I would give up or get angry. One example of rust that I had to remove was two panels under the tailgate. The panels were difficult to cut out due to the large amount of filler the previous owners had used, and because of the metal bars, and tailgate supports that were behind the panels (see Fig. 8). These ended up being rusted as well and had to be replaced with new steel. Once I had the panels cut out, I had to figure out how to measure curved metal to find the length and width of the new panels. With my lack of expertise, I had to have help with this. Asking for help or relying on someone else to do my artwork did not come easy to me. My artwork is typically done independently, there is freedom and solitude when I am painting. With these two pieces however, I had to rely on my husband often and that made me feel less equal to men in the trade. I did not feel I was crossing gender boundaries when I needed assistance.

Figure 7. Fenders for the vanity. Each picture shows the minimal rust and good condition of the chrome.
Working with another person versus working alone. A major source of frustration when working on the vanity was sharing the artwork with my husband. I wanted to do the large aspects of the piece on my own, yet there were times that he would jump in and start working on it without me. Even though they were times I had asked for help, I was asking to be told how to do it, not have him do it for me. I learned some techniques and welding skills through the vanity yet at times I learned less because of this. With the china hutch I made sure to lay the foundation that all labor of creating the art piece would be done by me, only when it required two people to complete a task would he help.
Since the Plymouth was riddled with rust there was more to do to the piece than I had anticipated. There were many times that I wanted to quit because of how much I had to replace or fix to make it work. My frustration would get the best of me especially on the late nights that we worked on the piece. I did notice that my frustration would lead to me wanting to quit for the night whenever my husband was around. When I was alone my frustration was different. In my reflection on November 3, 2018, I found that working alone allowed for a different experience:

It was different working for an hour alone. I got one panel piece pinched, I got very frustrated yet was able to let it out, get mad, curse, and not feel judged. I feel I get frustrated with my husband out here. It seems he automatically thinks “oh she’s giving up” and that’s not it at all. It’s like all other aspects of life, I get frustrated and I need to let it out. I noticed that my venting seems to be whining when he’s around. When I’m alone I get mad then I fix it and I do it myself, I don’t rely on somebody else. When he’s out here I get mad and frustrated and want to quit. I want to quit because I feel like I’m failing and I’m failing in front him. When I’m alone the only person I’m failing is myself and I could care less if I make myself angry. I’m just going to get past it, get over it and keep working on it. I don’t understand why my personality seems to change around others and I get stuck on feeling like I have to please them. When I’m alone I get over it and I’m tough, what makes me weak when he’s around?

I worked better alone, yet with my lack of expertise and strength I could not work alone all the time. Although I relied less on my husband with the china hutch than I did with the vanity, there were still times that we needed to work together in order for the piece to be successful. This made me wonder if men that work in metal trades need others to help them complete a task or are they capable of working alone.

Second shift. As stated in chapter one, the second shift consists of the duties of a working woman after a full-time job such as; “housework, childcare, and other domestic duties” (Mills, 2014, p.131). These duties were often discussed in my journal reflections.
in which my progress was impeded by my household responsibilities, especially that of a mother. On October 18, 2018 I reflected upon the availability of time:

*I no longer feel incompetent at the job that I’m doing, or the art I’m creating, I now feel lack of time, lack of my own self-availability. My son, being three, requires a lot more time than when he did as a baby. He slept more and needed less entertainment. Now that he is a toddler, I have zero free time. There are no naps, there are no breaks. I get to work on my artwork late at night when he’s in bed. After long days of teaching, I will stay out on a weekend until 1 or 2 am, then up again with him at 7 am. I’m feeling stretched thin. My husband helps as much as he can, but his job demands more time and I’m home with our son by myself more often. I also have dinner to make each night for the same reasons.*

My second shift consists of cleaning, cooking, and child care majority of the time. Along with the day to day responsibilities I have I run into time constraints due to our son getting sick. It was his first year in a school and he was sick every other week it seemed like. When this occurred, I could not work at night either. My night consisted of calming down a toddler or lying next to him worrying about how high temperatures were. There were several weekends I was unable to work because of the illnesses that plagued our family. Even when my husband helped as much as he could when our son was sick, the majority of soothing and nursing came from me, mostly upon request of our son wanting mom instead of dad. My experience creating this artwork is different than if I were a man due to these second shift circumstances and responsibilities.

*Lack of strength.* Throughout the process of creation of both the vanity and the china hutch, there were moments where my strength was not sufficient enough to perform the task at hand. Strength has never been a factor for me in athletics. I have always been on the upper end of strength and weight lifting levels for women when it came to organized sports. When I started the process of metal work, I found that my strength was not comparative to that of the men I have watched doing the same processes. Several
areas I found I was not strong enough to do on my own were lifting large steel pieces, clamping metal down with vice grips, and at times grinding using a flap wheel or cut off wheel. Grinding is one of the areas I struggled with the most. After an hour of grinding my right wrist would ache and I felt as if I could not hold the grinder any longer. I would try to compensate my lack of strength in my wrist by switching hands however that only alleviated the aches for so long until it would affect the other hand and I had to switch back. Due to this I feel I spent longer grinding than typical and when my wrist could not support the grinder any longer, I had to ask my husband to help me complete sections. As I watched him use the grinder it was more fluid and steadier. I believe that there was a strength difference in this circumstance, the gender boundary of strength was prevalent.

**Proud moments.** There were many times that I felt successful and that gender boundaries were crossed and transformed. The first time of success and pride was with the fabrication of the window frames. When I cut the Plymouth back end to the average width of a china hutch, I had to cut through the window frame. The plan was to cut the original edge of the window and fabricate it to fit back in with the original window frame. I would later need to cut the original windows to fit the new window size. The fabrication was a success, I was able to weld the joints together and hide where I had created a new shape for the window (see Fig. 9).

Cutting the windows to fit the new window frame was a success (see Fig. 10). This required some research and techniques that were new to both me and my husband. I used the original side windows that are seventy years old and laminate glass. First, I measured them on cardboard to fit the window frame, then I began cutting. The cutting process was invigorating. I used a small glass cutter to score the window first and had to
cut each piece at a straight edge. Next, I gently broke the window on one side exposing the laminate. Then I would flip it over and repeat. The last step was to spread rubbing alcohol over the gap, light it with a match, and bend the glass up and down until it burned through the laminate. During this process I felt like an equal, there was no sense of gender boundaries or inequalities as we both successfully learned a new technique. The windows were an accomplishment.

*Figure 9. Fabrication of window frames.*

*Figure 10. Cutting of windows.*
Automotive Bodywork

Both art pieces required bodywork such as removal of paint, filler and resin, sanding, grinding, and paint preparation. This step was very time consuming. Bodywork was the most tedious aspect of both pieces and at times very frustrating. The china hutch required more body work than the vanity. The body work alone took another month to complete.

Sandblasting. With the vanity I removed the paint with a die grinder, it was a slow process; therefore, I decided to try sandblasting with the hutch to speed up the process. I used a canvas outdoor car garage to create a homemade sandblasting booth (see Fig.11). It worked great however it took over twenty hours to complete the process of sandblasting which I reflected on in my journal.

Sandblasting was a nightmare at first. My first attempt at blasting was using soda blaster. It was a disaster. It clogged often because the water from the air compressor kept getting through the water trap, making the soda stick together making it too large to pass through the nozzle. Then it wasn’t removing much. I spent thirty minutes blasting then ten minutes sweeping it up and refilling, then blasting again, and after several hours it barely removed anything. I was so angry I quit for the day. A day later I did more research and found that aluminum oxide was better for removing several layers of paint and rust. I found some at a local store and bought a bag thinking it was enough. The aluminum oxide worked great. However, I only purchased a 50lb bag, so I had to sweep every 20 minutes or so to refill and spray more. This got frustrating, I stopped and took the time to purchase more. After several days of sandblasting I was finally ready for Bondo and body work.

My sandblasting experience exposed my lack of expertise. At times I did not slow down and research how to do things correctly. I wanted to get the artwork completed therefore I tried rushing the process. This cost me time and money.
Figure 11. Sandblasting booth and sandblasting in progress.

**Bondo and sanding.** Body filler, or Bondo (the brand of body filler used), is used to fill in spaces that cannot be done with welds or where there are dents and imperfections on the car. This process was easy with the vanity since there was only one area needing Bondo. For the china hutch it was extensive because of the rust patches and required hours of labor. I reflected on the process in my journal.

*Bondo was very tedious. It is not that difficult, but it is time consuming. There is no quick way to do body work. I would lay the Bondo in the dips and gaps and cracks. Then I had to wait a day for it to dry. After it was dry I had to sand it down so that it was all even and covered any blemishes. In order to make it all straight I had to purchase long sanding blocks that kept the sanding level and even. It took me over 12 hours of sanding to complete the body filler process. I got frustrated several times, especially when the Bondo would have divots and dimples and I had to Bondo the spot again, wait for it to dry again, and then sand it again. I had several “I quit” moments.*

One aspect of the body filling process that stuck out to me was how many times I wanted to quit. I got tired and frustrated with the amount of times I had to restart or fix a section I already sanded. My husband would tell me that it was normal and all part of the bodywork process, but to also remember I was new to doing bodywork. Trying to be perfect at something I have only done twice was infuriating. I found that as a woman working in a trade that is predominately male, I had the attitude that I must do this as well as a man. I strove for perfection even though I knew I did not have as much experience in
it. I got to a point however, where I had to let the imperfections stay, and accept that I was not a professional in the trade, and let my piece have imperfections in the Bondo (see Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Both images show divots and dimples in the Bondo.

**Paint.** There were two different experiences painting the artworks. The vanity was painted using spray paint while the china hutch was painted with automotive paint and paint guns. Both experiences were riddled with let downs and melt downs. When I painted the vanity, I painted the gray middle section first, and my husband told me I should wait a day before masking it off and painting the pink. I insisted that the paint can said it was touchable within two hours and it would be fine to mask off. Therefore, I did not listen to him and masked off the gray and painted the pink. I did wait a day to remove the masking, when I did, I realized the gray was not dry enough and the tape damaged the paint. I had to paint the gray area twice because of my impatience. I also found that with the vanity the spray cans were difficult to use. My thumb would get tired making it difficult to hold down the nozzle. At times this made it so that the paint did not come out enough and I would get streaks. Due to my struggles painting the vanity, I decided to use paint guns and professional automotive paint for the china hutch.
Painting the china hutch was very different than painting the vanity. It began with my trip to the paint store where I explained to the owner that I wanted to find teal and cream colors similar to what was on stoves from the 1950s. After I found the colors I wanted, I ordered one quart of each color, which later was not enough paint and I had to order the cream color again. As I was getting the rest of the items, I realized I knew nothing about what I was about to do. I needed more items than I thought and realized it will be a slow process much like the Bondo. At this point I was ready to have my piece completed, yet, I was constantly reminded by my husband that I must be patient, or I will have to redo parts like I did the vanity. I had to tell myself to slow down with the hutch.

The process of painting was a roller coaster of emotions. I reflected upon these in my journal entry from March 2, 2019:

*Primer went on great at first. Then when I got to the inside I really struggled. It wouldn’t reach the backs and the gun couldn’t get in between the shelves to get closer. It went on very thin and along with that, sandblasting materials fell out of random crevasses and on to the primer. I had to wait several hours, sand the paint down and respray the entire car. It took three days to complete the primer and prep process.*

At this point I was getting tired of painting. I was frustrated with how much primer I had to use and the cost. My frustrations were due to lack of experience. If I had painted using the professional techniques, I would have known what to expect.

*Final Coats*

*The teal paint went amazing. I did get some drips right around the shelves inside though. It went right behind the shelf where I was not expecting. I also did get what you call “orange peel” look in some areas due to going too fast or not having it at the correct angle. Overall, I felt it went really well for my first attempt at paint. My husband has been bragging to everyone about how well I did for my first automotive paint job.*
I was ecstatic, and very proud of my accomplishment. With the teal paint being a success, I felt like I had accomplished boundary transformation and achieved equality. However, this did not occur with the cream color as I reflected in my journal:

> I only had an hour before I had to leave to pick up my son from school, so I felt rushed. I got the cream paint ready, wiped down the piece with tack cloth and started. I began on the window frames and moved to the inside then as I went back to the window frames, I noticed it had dripped and not just a little but a lot, and it was both window frames too. The inside looked ok. I don’t know what happened. I don’t know if I was too close or I overlapped too much but it was bad. I stormed out of the booth cleaned up while tears of frustration ran down my face and I left it. I over reacted telling my husband it’s ruined, I have to start over, and I felt like a failure.

See Figure 13, demonstrating the drips in the cream. I could not understand how I did well with the teal and then the cream went poorly. Did I get complacent? Looking back, I think that once again it was because of lack of experience. I found out that every color has different consistencies, and whites typically are thinner than other colors. If I had more experience or training in automotive painting, I would have known this and altered my technique to accommodate. There was also the factor of time constraints. I feel as the woman I have more household duties as discussed previously. Would a man working in the automotive paint have the same time constraints? If I had not of attempted to squeeze painting in to my already tight schedule would the cream have come out as good as the teal? The teal was done when I had the time to spare. My next step was to sand down the drips and try again.

*Second Attempt in Cream*

I sanded down all of the cream and got rid of the drips. I sprayed the second time. Most of it came out great however there was a spot where you could see one of the areas that I sanded. It looked like a large smear. I didn’t sand down the paint around it enough to blend it out. More tears, more being upset, and I have to do it one more time.
Figure 13 shows the mark in the cream. I was devastated when this happened. I was frustrated that it dripped in the first place, then I spent hours trying to fix it, just for it to not work. At this point I wanted to quit. I took a week off from it before attempting the third time.

Third Time
I sanded the area down really well and blended it as best I could. I masked off everything but the one side and only sprayed the window frame. It came out much better however there is still a slight hint of the mark. I’m not sure why I can’t get it out all the way, but it will just have to do.

I felt defeated knowing that the paint on the china hutch was not perfect. However, as others have seen my piece in person I am complimented often. Many men who have done automotive painting have told me that for a first time it is great. Many of them reflect on what their first paint job looked like and a couple of them made the point to tell me their first paint job did not look as good as mine. This made me feel as if I had accomplished crossing gender boundaries in automotive painting. On March 8th I reflected in my journal about my last experience at the paint store:

Last Trip to the Paint Store
I purchased the final buffing equipment. When I was checking out an older gentleman asked me if I was done painting the car. It was fun to tell him it isn’t a complete car. I showed him images of the china hutch and talked to him about what I’ve been doing. He seemed taken back at first but when he saw the pictures he smiled and told me it’s wonderful. Then I had other workers looking at it wanting to see. It was a moment of pride to show them what I’ve been creating. It was great.

See Figure 14 to see the images of the completed paint before assembly of the hutch.
Assembly

The china hutch required some assembly and buffing before full completion. Although the buffing was time consuming it was relatively easy and uneventful. After buffing the whole car, the chrome taillights, bumper, and hardware, I began assembling. The assemblage of the pieces did require two people due to weight or needing to support items as they were screwed in to place. I did not feel that this was any different than a lot of the work that was required of this piece. After I was able to put all the pieces on the Plymouth it was time for the windows. Since I had changed the size of the windows, I had to cut down the weather stripping to fit around them as well. Both the weather stripping and the windows were original and seventy years old making them difficult to
work with and fragile. As we began to slide the windows in to place, we realized they were too tight. One side seemed very close and I felt the need to make it work. I kept thinking, we measured it so it should fit right? As I pushed on one corner it broke. I had the biggest melt down of the entire process as soon as it broke. When it broke, I removed it from the hutch, tossed both pieces of glass in the trash and I went in the house, sat in the kitchen, and cried. After all that work to get those cut to fit, I broke it. My biggest failure was at that moment, or so I thought. As I sat in the kitchen crying, I realized that this was something to reflect on. How many times do women expect perfection in all that they do? There are many things I feel the pressures to be perfect in which was what led me to this research in the beginning. This was one more area I was expecting perfection and I was not going to achieve it. As I sat on the kitchen floor wiping away my tears I realized: I am not perfect, and I never will be in anything I do. Perfection does not exist in my opinion, therefore, it is not something I should strive for. That broken window was a metaphor for all the areas of my life that I felt I had to be perfect in, the areas I felt broken in, because I could not achieve perfection. I picked myself up off the floor, went back to the shop, grabbed the windows out of the trash and started grinding the sides down to make them fit. My husband helped me gently push the windows in and grind them down more if they still did not fit. Finally, I was able to get the broken window in place, then as we got the second window in it cracked to. However, this time I did not feel that it was the end of the world. The broken windows fit the piece, they show the imperfections and broken aspects of the expectations of what women are expected to be (see Fig. 15).
Figure 15. Broken window.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

I investigated three main questions throughout the course of my research. First, what is the experience of a woman working in predominately masculine trades? Second, what are gender boundaries? This question was answered in my Chapter Two. Third, what happens when I challenge gender boundaries through my artwork? I investigated these questions through qualitative arts-based research which allowed me to learn through my arts-based research project.

Experiences Working in Masculine Trades

Firstly, the experience of a woman in predominately masculine trades was portrayed through thorough analysis of the creation process of both artworks. I believe that my experience as a woman working in the fields of welding and automotive restoration/fabrication was different than a man’s. I found that I was treated differently at the salvage yard when I was alone than when with my husband. My thoughts of inferiority to the men in the industry was a constant battle. I was deemed not physically capable to perform the task at hand several times, in which my husband was fully capable of completing without assistance. My frustrations were handled differently when in the presence of a man than when on my own. However, there were times in which I felt that gender did not matter. I was complimented and praised for the success of both pieces from men and women equally. Men who are a part of the welding or automotive industry
were appreciative of the pieces, although I do not know if they fully understood the conceptual aspects of the artworks. For example, one man said he could see the china hutch as being a bar back where you keep your liquor in a man’s cave. Women on the other hand seemed to understand the juxtaposition of pieces without being told what they meant. I was lacking confidence at the beginning of the process however, the more I was immersed in the welding and automotive trades I became more confident and surer of my abilities and choices. At first, I believed that lack of confidence was due to the gender boundary in the trades, yet as I worked and frequented businesses in these trades I became more relaxed and felt I belonged. Therefore, I determined that the lack of sense of belonging may not be due to my gender but rather a result of being in an unfamiliar environment in which I did not know much about.

**Challenging Gender Boundaries**

The third question, what happens when I challenge gender boundaries through my artwork, was addressed throughout my process. I believe that when gender boundaries were challenged, I felt empowered. When I could achieve something I believed as difficult, or strenuous, I felt equality to the men I had been around doing the same skills. Through immersing myself in the welding and automotive trades I began to get male interest in what I was creating, and the more I was around them the more questions or feedback they would give me. Within my research I show that there is a gender gap in welding and automotive industry, however, what I have found is that men will embrace a woman working hard to learn the trade. This leads me to wonder if there is a strong gender boundary there or if there more to why there are less woman than men working in these two industries.
Rhizomes and Potential Research

Through my research I read many articles about gender boundaries, gender inequalities, the labor movements, women’s roles in society and so forth. Several of these readings addressed women’s roles in male-dominated careers and why women entered some work forces but not others. The question that kept occurring in my mind during my research that did not fit this particular paper, was why are there fewer women in welding and automotive industries than other careers? Through these articles, topics like: women being deterred from male-dominated careers because of lack of support, being paid less than men, mistreatment in their roles, lack of voice, and sexual harassment, were addressed (Gaines, 2017). In “The Gender Revolution Uneven and Stalled,” England discusses the desegregation of jobs in the middle class compared to the lack of segregation in the working class (2010). England states:

Working class jobs are almost as segregated as they were in 1950! Women have integrated the previously male strongholds of management, law, medicine, and academia in large numbers. But women have hardly gained a foothold in blue-collar, male dominated jobs such as plumbing, construction, truck driving, welding, and assembly in durable manufacturing industries such as auto and steel. (2010, p.157)

She goes on to discuss her theory on why this is. She argues that women that come from backgrounds where they might enter blue-collar careers will choose to do more gender stereotypical jobs for such education level such as, “maid, child care worker, retail sales clerk, or assembler in the textile industry” (p.159). These women may also choose to
'progress’ instead and choose “higher-ranking female jobs via more education” (p. 159). Therefore, women do not enter the fields of welding and automotive industries. I find this to be a very interesting point of view and possible for further investigation.

**Future Plans**

I am eager to continue developing in welding and automotive restoration. The artwork I completed over the past two years were both pieces I never would have thought of creating before. My plans are to enter both pieces into galleries and art shows over the course of the next year and see where it takes me. If I find they are successful pieces, I would like to continue to make more work using automobiles creating similar themed work, possibly more domestic furniture out of car parts. The make-up vanity was entered in the University of Northern Colorado’s student show in the Spring of 2019 and won Best in Show. This was a huge accomplishment for me and gave me affirmation. I would like to continue my exploration of women’s roles of the past and present through my artwork.

I believe that my findings could also be valuable for young women in my classroom and others who may read my research. It would be wonderful to see more women becoming successful in male dominated realms like welding and automotive industries. There are many examples of women who are successful in welding and automotive industries. If those women were taught to young women in schools, it would be beneficial to those interested in pursuing such a career. It would be equally beneficial for men to learn these trades as well. Possibly my research would allow for others to view them as more friendly and less intimidating of processes.
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ENDNOTES
