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Women Self Actualization: A narrative of a performative gender constitution

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WOMEN SELF-ACTUALIZATION

A Narrative of a Performative Gender Constitution

by Hala Gabr

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Abstract

In a traditional Middle Eastern society, men and women have been confined within gender definitions. Those imposed social constructs condition men differently from women by dictating behaviors and establishing a hierarchy of gender positioning that limits women's abilities and potential.

Based on postmodernist philosopher, feminist and social theorist, Simone de Beauvoir and postmodernist philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, gender is not an inborn role, but rather created through stylized repetition of acts informed by society, named *performative acts*. For de Beauvoir and Butler, gender can never be a stable identity (Butler 1988).

Informed by Butler's phenomenological nature of gender constitution, this research explores Arab women self-actualization in the workplace. Via an online platform, called KOONI, the design aims to help women rethink the nature of gender and gender roles in the workplace and introduces the concept of *performative acts* as a role playing mechanism to induce change.

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Acknowledgments

1. Introduction

"Professor, there's something wrong with the code".
"Professor, there's something wrong with me".

The above statements were reported to be used by computer science students in the University of Columbia when they struggled with an assignment. The difference between both statements is that first was made by male students while the second was made by female students (Saujani 2016).

The woman has always been a figure of societal controversy, defined and restricted by social and cultural boundaries. In a recent report from Hewlett Packard analyzing the applicants applying to a job stated that men apply for the job if they meet 60% of the qualifications while women only apply for the job if they meet 100% of the qualifications (Saujani 2016). In another interesting 2010 study investigating people entering the workforce in the US, shows that 57% of men entering fresh from college negotiate their first salary while only 7% of women negotiate (Saujani 2016). In *Women/men/management* by Ann Harriman, a psychology study was published where researchers found that men attribute their success to internal factors including their skills and abilities, while women attribute success to external factors like luck. And, conversely, men attribute failure to bad luck and women attribute failure to their lack of skills, abilities and confidence (Harriman 1996). This is

an interesting phenomenon of how men and women have been conditioned differently, where as early as childhood, certain defined social constructs force men and women to see and position themselves differently in the society. Moreover, in Arab societies, due to families always controlling women's behavior for being a symbol of honor and due to the upbringing practices in the Arab world that discourages individualism, women are faced with a number of social and personal barriers that limit their potential for self-actualization in the context of the workplace.

In the past few decades, women started rebelling against some of those confinements constantly refining women's rights, nevertheless, women still remain defined by institutional constructs and confined within a patriarchal mandate (Fernea 2000) and there still remains a huge gap between what a woman can achieve and conservative expectations enforced upon her i.e. her domestic roles (El Saadawi 2002). In light of such information, an investigation of the issue is crucial.

The research is pivoted around three theories that are the pillars of the work; (1) Daniel Levinson's theory of life structures, (2) George Herbert Mead's theories of identity construction and (3) Judith Butler's theory of performative acts. Firstly, when arguing how important it is to address the advancement of women in their careers, it's directly related to identity construction if career advancement is a woman's dream. Levinson's theory of life structures states that the core factor that forms identity is dreams, where Erikson argues its criticality to the formation of identity when the dream is not realized

(Gregg 2005). Secondly, George Herbert Mead highlights two key interwoven points contributing to the concept of self; one's association to groups and the other is the various roles one plays within those groups that creates several self-conceptions. Mead's theory shows how prescribed gender roles could have a direct impact on a woman's identity formation as well as the construction of her self-perception. Finally, modernist gender theorists have supported this notion of gender being innate, meaning, it's the state of being genetically sexed as male or female is what constitutes your gender. Post-modernist gender theorists reject the modernist view and propose the idea of gender roles and role-play in childhood. These theorists refuse the modernist idea of gender being determined only through genetics, and rather advocates that gender should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. Utilizing the above theories, this research investigates the concept of women's self-actualization in the workplace; where women's career advancement is explored through the notions of prescribed gender roles and their effects on the woman's identity construction and self-perception, while studying the possibility of recreating the gendered self through the enactment of Butler's stylized repetition of acts, in an attempt to help women self-actualize in the workplace.

This resulted in the development of the online platform, Kooni. The aim of the platform is to encourage women to self-actualize in the workforce by suggesting performative tasks to break gender roles and self-imposed internal barriers which fulfill society's expectations. Kooni adopts Butler's concept of performative acts to try to induce advancement in women's potential.

1.1. Delimitations

The thesis is meant to explore issues of women and identity construction under society's prescribed gender roles as well as implications of such identity construction upon self-actualization in the workplace. The definitions of workplace gender roles -upon which the design outcome is based on- have been deduced from primary research in the form of surveys, in-depth interviews and narratives collected from women in the Middle East as well as backed up by secondary research. The results collected from the primary research have informed the design outcome and are not meant to be a treatise on gender roles or inform the psychology of gender constitution in the workplace. Furthermore, they should not be used to analyze, evaluate or comment on individual weaknesses and strengths.

The research does not emphasize a particular gender role as more preferable or more superior, instead, the aim is to utilize design as a tool to highlight the existence of socio-culturally ascribed gender roles. Furthermore, this research aims to empower women to regain control of how they define themselves in society, helping them to choose to either adopt a particular role or rebel against it, as long as this role resonates with their identity and their personal aspirations.

2. Background

This chapter introduces three topics and discusses how they form the theoretical framework of this thesis.

The first section "Women in the Middle East Workplace" gives a summary of the current challenges of Arab women in the workplace. The section discusses why women are not reaching leadership positions and why they're not achieving their full potential. The chapter highlights the Arab patriarchal society, Arab family upbringing practices and the traditional Arab women's social and gender roles that obstruct a women's self-actualization in the workplace.

The second section "Self-Perception and Role-Play" introduces the concept of identity construction, self-perception and role playing. It highlights the significance of fulfilling a dream in the construction of identity. Furthermore, it highlights group associations and role playing as main mechanisms of how the concept of self is constructed.

The third section "Gender as Performative Acts with a Phenomenological Nature" introduces the concept of gender being phenomenological in nature, whereby it's constructed through a stylized repetition of actions. Theories of postmodern philosophers and gender theorists are introduced and discussed.

The outcome of the thesis integrates women's challenges introduced in the first section and the theoretical concepts introduced in the second and third sections.

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Women in the Middle East Workplace

The issue of female self-actualization in the workplace is a current controversial topic. While many women communicate an experienced ceiling to what they can achieve at work, it doesn't seem to be acknowledged. Gender roles have always been at play in societies, especially Arab societies. But how do those gender roles affect women at work? What's their correlation to this communicated ceiling that women experience? This chapter highlights the causational relation between the two.

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO and founder of the "Lean In" organization, talks about the current state of women in leadership in her book *Lean In*. She states that of the 195 independent countries in the world, only 17 are led by women, while they hold only 20 percent of parliament seats globally. Furthermore, twenty-one of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. Her conclusions point to the fact that although women are improving faster than men in educational achievements, women don't seem to make it to decision making positions (Sandberg 2013).

Sandberg is questioning the barriers that prevent women from getting to the top. She states that women face obvious and subtle obstacles, ranging from sexism, discrimination and harassment to inflexibility with childcare, difficulties finding mentors and sponsors. Based on a 2011 McKinsey report, men are promoted based on potential, while women are promoted based on past accomplishments (Sandberg 2013).

She explains that aside from those external barriers enforced

by society there are internal issues that exist within women's psyche that prevent them from reaching their full potential in the workplace. She states;

> We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives- the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men. We lower our own expectations of what we can achieve. We continue to do the majority of the housework and child care. We compromise our career goals to make room for partners and children who may not even exist yet. Compared to our male colleagues, fewer of us aspire to senior positions. This is not a list of things other women have done. I have made every mistake on this list. At times, I still do (Sandberg 2013).

Those internal psychological barriers prevent women from penetrating the professional sector, challenge their advancement and interfere with their self-actualization in the workplace. The issues Sandberg talks about can be described as the enforced societal constructs that subconsciously dictate behavior of both genders.

While external barriers (legal, institutional or economical) have and still are being examined considerably, on the other hand, individual psychological barriers of women are still a novice area to explore. What are the reasons for these psychological barriers experienced by women? and how far are they influenced by enforced gender roles in the workplace?

In her TED talk *Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection*, American lawyer, politician and founder of the tech organization *Girls Who Code*, Reshma Saujani, states;

> "Most girls are taught to avoid risk and failure. They're taught to smile pretty, play it safe, get all A's. Boys on the other hand are taught to play rough, swing high, crawl to the top of the monkey bar and just jump off head first. So by the time they're adults, whether they're negotiating a raise or even asking someone on a date, they're habituated to take risk after risk, they're rewarded for it." (Saujani 2016)

In the Middle East workplace, women face similar barriers as the ones stated in global research. A 2014 report by Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office providing a global forum for strategic discussion, explored the opportunities and constraints of women's economic involvement and empowerment in the private sector in the MENA region. One of the key issues discussed were women's mental barriers. The report states that the origins of these mental barriers lie in the lack of confidence due to cultural barriers, social norms and patriarchal values, limiting opportunity and access to know-how (Park 2014). According to Saleema Kauser and Hayfaa Tlaiss in their research article *The Arab Women Manager: Participation, Barriers and Future Prospects*, the social, organizational and personal barriers faced by women managers stem from the culture-based gender roles and status (Kauser and Tlaiss 2011) which originate from the nature of upbringing practices in Arab societies. This is echoed by history professor Judith E. Tucker in her book *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*, where she states how "The Arab

family is an instrument of socialization and control" (Tucker 1993).

Therefore, enforced societal and cultural constructs inform gender roles that dictate behaviors. But what's the reason behind those social and cultural constructs? In her essay *Gender and Family in the Arab World*, the Middle East gender and family studies scholar, Suad Joseph, discusses how patriarchy in the Arab world privileges males over females. She also explains how honor, being a major value in the Arab families, has been a means of controlling behavior, especially that of women, since women are considered the symbol of honor in the family (Joseph 1994). In the Arab value structure, socialization discourages individualism. One is encouraged to view oneself as always linked to, shaped by and mutually responsive to family and relatives. The implications of such a relational construct of the self on women are much different than men. Women are expected, more than men, to put others before themselves and to embed their interests within the interests of others, particularly their male kin. For Joseph, this practice highly reinforces patriarchal hierarchy in women from an early age (Joseph 1994). In the Arab world, patriarchy still plays a major role in defining these social and cultural constructs that informs enacted gender roles.

Across Arab cultures, the traditional roles of women include getting married, bearing and raising children, while men are expected to be the main providers for the family. In his book *The Middle East: A Cultural Psychology*, Gary S. Gregg states that traditionally marriage followed by motherhood anchors a woman's identity and establishes her status in her family (Gregg 2005). Similarly, in her book *The Hidden Face of Eve*, Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi, states "The maleness of a man or his manliness is still considered to reside mainly in his capacity to rule over his wife, to dominate her, to cater to her

needs financially, and not to allow her to mix with other men in offices, on the streets, or in a public transport" (El Saadawi 2002). As a result of that, women have been confined in a restrictive set of roles that took part in shaping their identities and self-perception we see today.

While, the modernization of the Arab world had a significant change on women's social roles, there still remains a huge gap between what a woman can achieve and the conservative expectations enforced upon her i.e. her domestic roles. El Saadawi confirms:

> "a woman's work outside the home does not of itself lead to the true liberation of the woman as long as it continues to operate within the framework of a class society and under the patriarchal system" (El Saadawi 2002).

In the Wilton Park report, one of the recommendations explored is that the women's roles within the family must be changed by women themselves. The report encourages supporting women to take action in order to bring about change in their comprehension and their mindsets, that of the generation around them as well as the next generation (i.e. their children) (Park 2014).

It is deduced from the above that there exists a problem in women's self-actualization in the workplace. While partially the gap is due to external factors like institutional, legal or economic ones, but also because of internal psychological constituents that women seem to be afflicted by. Looking closely into the societal breakdown within which the woman resides, we see that the patriarchal framework is the umbrella that shapes the

socio-cultural constructs informing gender roles and behaviors. A prolonged enactment of such gender roles, psychological barriers seem to find ways to impact women, particularly in the workplace and therefore prevent women from reaching their full potential.

2.1.2. Self-Perception and Role-Play

The research claims that the prolonged enactment of socio-culturally enforced gender roles influences the women's identity construction. This gives rise to psychological barriers that restrict women's self-actualization. In this section, theories of identity construction through role-play will be argued.

Gary S. Gregg in his book *The Middle East: A Cultural Psychology*, consolidates the work of several authors exploring identity construction. He cites American Philosopher, sociologist and psychologist George Herbert Mead in his *theory of self*. Mead defines two kinds of selves, the socially constructed *Me*, developed in late childhood, and the individual *I*, developed in early adulthood. Mead describes the *Me* self as the pole of the self and by the child seeing himself through the various cultural values and by which his experiences are shaped, while the *I* self reacts to the various *Me* constructs and must respond to those challenges. An important point is Mead's argument that self-conception results from belonging to groups (Gregg 2005). Bennani Chraïbi, a Professor at the Institute for Political and International Studies states that, a young girl is subject to two types of value systems; the first is *individualism and hedonism*, and the second is *social* through which the law of the collective plays a role (Gregg 2005). According to Mead, it is because an individual belongs to several groups, and due to playing several roles in those groups, one starts developing several self-conceptions. Because roles and groups are complexly integrated

in a social structure, individuals develop a collective self which merge the different group-based roles (Gillespie 2005). Mead confirms that self-conceptions originate by viewing oneself through the lens of the whole (i.e. by taking the perspective of the *Generalized Other*). This concept of "taking the attitude of the other" by Mead is a mere role-playing mechanism, which is crucial to the creation of perception (Gillespie 2005).

Mead's theory highlights two key interwoven points in creating the concept of self; (1) one's association to groups and viewing oneself through the lens of the whole, (2) the different roles we play in those groups. Firstly, from the previous section, we know that the Arab upbringing practices discourages individualism and encourages the woman to embed her interests within the interests of others. Therefore, a woman's association to others is vitally integrated in her identity. This is one key component addressed by the design outcome of this research. Secondly, we also know from the previous chapter that roles the women enact are majorly enforced by society and its patriarchal system. Therefore, according to Mead's theory, it's deduced that gender roles have a direct impact on a woman's identity formation as well as the construction of her self-perception. Furthermore, society dictates that the woman's place is her home and that her role is getting married, bearing and raising children. Here, Mead's theory comes into play, by informing the impact of playing these roles on the identity and self-perception of the woman. Thus, it could be deduced that the woman's identity construction under those conditions could create psychological barriers due to the internal dilemma of aspiring to integrate new

roles that are necessary to her career advancement with former roles she's been accustomed to enact. Both of the above discussed points in Mead's theory have had influence in designing the gender roles spectrum used in the user profiling component of Kooni.

In arguing the importance of addressing the advancement of women in their careers, the research highlights its correlation to identity construction. American Psychologist Daniel Levinson produced the theory of *life structures* as cited in Gary S. Gregg's book Early *Adulthood and Identity*. Based on the study of 40 American men, four key tasks of later adolescents and early childhood were identified: (1) A dream for one's life, (2) mentor relationships, (3) an occupation, and (4) love relationships, marriage and family (Gregg 2005). The first factor, the *dream,* forms the core of identity. It has the quality of a vision; an imagined possibility that generates excitement and vitality. The rest of the three factors define the *life structure*. For example, deciding that one wants to become a doctor is the dream, while getting into and through medical college founds the life structure (Gregg 2005). Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Homburger Erikson studied the challenge and criticality of developing an identity, because of psychological confusions, but more importantly because a person who has constructed a dream may not be able to succeed in realizing the corresponding life structure (Gregg 2005).

Women self-actualization addressed in this research is tied with Levinson's core identity factor, the *dream*, which as Erikson

described becomes critical to the formation of identity when the dream is not realized. This research tackles only the third factor; occupation, which is women's unreached potential in the workplace. The theory is central to the design of Kooni, where the aim is to help women realize a potential unfulfilled dream. Kooni's framework presents a set of tools that could help women self-actualize in the workplace.

2.1.3. Gender as Performative Acts with a Phenomenological Nature

In the above sections, the problem of female self-actualization has been discussed with supported arguments of its causation. Following this, the research examines potential directions of addressing the problem through design. Consequently, the research asks the question of how gender is formed, and further discusses how the understanding of gender construction theories could inform the design solution of Kooni. In this section, postmodernist theories of gender construction are introduced and are argued as the theoretical framework of the research.

The reflections of French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perceptions* claims the body is not a natural species but states, "not only that the body is a historical idea but a set of possibilities to be continually realized" (Merleau-Ponty 1962). In the book *The Second Sex*, postmodernist philosopher, feminist and social theorist, Simone de Beauvior says that any gender is a historical situation rather than a natural fact. She declares, "one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir 1949). Postmodernist American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler articulated another kind of performance namely; *the making of the gender* (Butler 1988). Gender for postmodernists is not an inborn role, it's rather a social construct and an adopted performative act, by which identity formation and reformation is possible.

Butler coins the term performative acts in her definition of what creates gender. She explains the term performative acts as the *stylized repetition of acts*. And therefore implying the impossibility of gender being a stable identity (Butler 1988). Butler argues that everything that is, is based on experiences we go through not fundamentally what things are (Butler 1988). Therefore, rejecting the modernists idea of absoluteness and rather claiming the phenomenological nature of gender constitution through performative acts. For Butler, gender is constructed in time through the stylization of the body, and thus, is seen as the mundane way of various bodily gestures, movements and enactments constructing the *illusion of an abiding gendered self* (Butler 1988). Thus supporting that behaviors of a woman (how she dresses, speaks, expresses emotions, whom she marries...etc.) have basically been learned, practiced and passed on according to convention and are what created her gender (Komitee 2011). Butler states "if gender is a performance, one can openly flaunt their constructed nature" (Komitee 2011).

Butler, in her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* disagrees with how performance studies scholars have mixed up the performative nature of gender, which she proposes in the term *performative acts*, with a theatrical performance. Butler refers to American philosopher Bruce Wilshire's Book *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (1985) to make the distinction. Wilshire discusses role playing and identity

in theater by asking the question of "how is life like theater" and "how is theater like life"? He makes the distinction between theatrical roles and social roles. In a theatrical context, a strict line is drawn between the performance and life inducing the feeling of pleasure and safety, while in non-theatrical contexts, the same acts could induce fear, rage and violence. He sees theater as a metaphor that has limitations of comparison, and like any metaphor cannot possibly mirror reality.

The research advocates for the postmodernist theories of gender construction and support it as the conceptual skeleton of this work, utilizing its theory to inform the design outcome. Butler's concept of performative acts breaks the preconceived notion of gender being an inborn role and highlights the idea that gender can be recreated. This concept is disruptive to the patriarchal fabric of society, the socio-cultural constructs, and the society's prescribed gender roles discussed in earlier chapters. This concept is the basis upon which the design solution of Kooni has been framed. Kooni encourages women to rethink the nature of gender construction, the enforced gender roles and the way the self has been gendered since childhood. Kooni adopts this by educating women to perceive actions as performative acts, where the enactment of those acts in a repetitive stylized manner can prompt change in their gender constitution, and thus in their enacted gender roles, and consequently in their self-actualization at work.

2.2. Precedent Studies

Kooni was informed by precedent studies that highlighted how designers are approaching the same problem with design solutions. Several works of designers were an inspiration for addressing the gap, the design or the making of Kooni. Starting by the self-actualization problem addressed by Kooni, an interesting work was the Gender Equity Toolkit. It questions whether gender is hindering the ability to progress professionally. Cindy Sherman's work was an inspiration to further explore the concept of role playing resulting in Mead's theory as one theoretical framework of the research. 16Personalities helped inform the design of the user profiling constituent of Kooni. You-App was seen as an analogous design to Kooni's concept of Butler's performative acts.

The Gender Equity Toolkit

The Gender Equity Toolkit is a great reference that asks a similar question as this research; whether gender roles are interfering with career progression. To answer that question, designer and sociologist Leyla Acaroglu of Disrupt Design created the Gender Equity Toolkit for AIGA Women Lead. Acaroglu was inspired by her own personal experience in the workplace, from intentionally being ignored in meetings, to being treated as the receptionist while actually being the artist in residence and many times of being asked to be less aggressive. She started exploring gender roles in the design community and how it's affecting other people's opinions of others and of their professional capabilities. She conducted interviews and workshops to understand that

gender stereotyping affects both women and men because of the implicit gender related expectations that everyone has. While Acaroglu addressed the problem with a solution to both genders, Kooni on the other hand is catered to women only. The toolkit has three components, *empathy building*, *connections* and *scenario testing*. The goal of the *empathy building* component is to understand the feelings and emotional state of other people. It's a tool of observing and understanding the stereotypes that are the sources of implicit biases. The *connections* component works with the concept of storytelling. People live to tell stories and through stories people find out that they have all sorts of unexpected connections with each other. The *connections* component opens up conversations on what people need to flourish professionally. The *scenario testing* is a tool to build a strong mental muscle that is able to tackle career challenges, like asking for a raise or negotiating a salary. The role playing exercise is fueled by the idea of practicing. It encourages individuals to play opposite roles, through which one gets to understand both people's perspectives.

The Gender Equity Toolkit is a tool that helps overcome the implicit barriers that gender -as a social construct- frames around men and women from reaching their full potential. It's an easy and fun tool to get a conversation started around gender. It inspired both the concept and the design directions of Kooni. The empathy building component has directly informed the design of the user profiling component. The aim from the user profiling is to raise the woman's awareness to the existence of workplace gender roles and to increase the observation of which roles the woman plays. The result of the profiling attempts to give reasoning of why the woman adopts those roles. The user profiling component thus increases the empathy of the woman to herself and according to El Saadawi, this understanding is the first step to the road of emancipation (El Saadawi 2002).

The *connections* component has highlighted the importance of storytelling in the overall experience of the outcome. Thus, storytelling was integrated in two ways in the outcome; by collecting personal stories of women that forms those connections between people, as well as in the journaling process, where the woman tells her own story to find those meanings and connections progressively from one task to the other.

Figure 1: http://www.aiga.org/gender-equity-toolkit

Cindy Sherman's Portraits

How would role play inform identity construction? Cindy Sherman's work has particularly inspired a direction to answer the above question in the research. By looking into theories of identity formation and role play, Kooni's theoretical framework was shaped.

On describing her work, Cindy Sherman says: "I am trying to make other people recognize something of themselves rather than me." Widely recognized as one of the most important and influential artists in contemporary art, Cindy Sherman's portraits are provocative conceptual work investigating the notion of identity construction, stereotypes and role-play. She works alone in her studio, embodying multiple roles as the author, director, make-up artist, hairstylist, wardrobe mistress, and model. She impersonates different characters by putting on different costumes. She criticizes various societal constructs, some of which are the objectification of women, societal archetypes and standards of beauty that prevail in a youth and status-obsessed culture.

As explained in chapter two, Mead's concept of *taking the attitude of the other* is a mere role-playing mechanism, which is crucial to the creation of perception (Gillespie 2005). Sherman's experiment manifests Mead's concept of role-play, allowing room for reflection and reconstruction of meanings related to identity and perception. Her character designs are inspired from everyday people in the streets and on TV. Sherman's posturing, gestures and expressions gives room for interpreting identities and their narratives.

Sherman's approach inspired further research on concepts of identity formation based on self-perception and expression.

These concepts became the basis for designing two of four pillars comprising the foundation of the research and the outcome of the workplace gender roles spectrum, the two pillars are (1) Identity Nature and Self Perception, and (2) Self-Expression and Identity Projection.

Figure 2: http://www.thebroad.org/art/cindy-sherman

16Personalities

To drive Kooni's user profiling component, 16personalities was a great reference. With all existing tests and user profiling methods, 16Personalities stood out as a modernly designed solution that is based on extensive research and defined spectrums.

16Personalities is an online personality test. Its approach is based on two philosophies and typological theories, one of Carl Gustav Jung, the theory of psychological types, and the other is of Myers-Briggs theory called the Myers-Briggs type indicator. It's an online tool that acts as a guide for people to better understand themselves. Based on a question-based test taken by the user, the tool analyzes tendencies and ways of doing things in various aspects of lives; work, relationships...etc. The tool then shows the results by grouping traits into 16 different characters describing various identities and advises the user on the qualities of this character. The work has been an inspiration to the design constituent of this project. The structure and language of their personality test informed the design of the user profiling component, particularly the approach and language of the test questions and the "Likert scaling" approach to user responses.
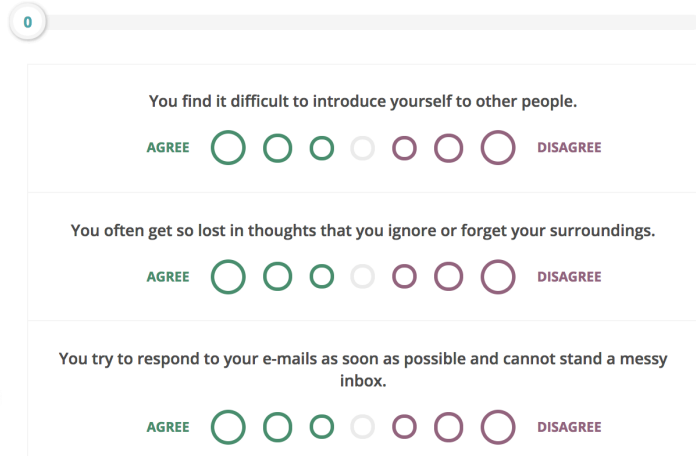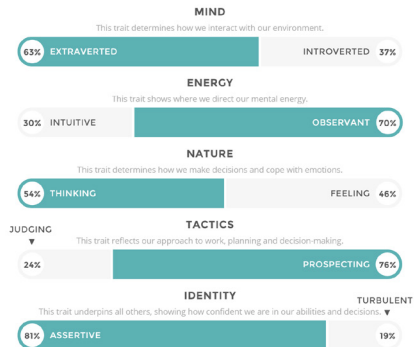
Figure 3: https://www.16personalities.com/personality-types

YOU-App

At this point, You-App was seen as an analogous product to Kooni's final conceptual framework of Butler's performative acts.

Small things matter is You-App's motto and foundation of the platform. For You-App, life is the collection of small daily actions and every choice is important and significant. This is analogous to the concept of performative tasks that Kooni suggests to its users on daily basis. The You-App developers believe that change rarely happens overnight but rather takes shape in the micro-actions we take every day. This is also analogous to Butler's theory that Kooni follows, where it states that gender is constituted through the repetition of stylized actions that that are usually small and subtle.

You-App was developed to empower people to make a positive sustainable change one micro-action at a time. Similarly, Kooni has been designed to provide a framework that helps women self-actualize. While the You-App is based on four pillars; Mind, Food, Move, and Love, Kooni is also based on four pillars of history, identity, group associations and self-expression. While You-App is a community based life improvement online tool that has subtle gamification elements to keep participants motivated, Kooni is an individualistic experience that has some gamification elements.

You-App model was a great inspiration in designing the outcome of this research. Just as it works by suggesting micro-actions to users, Kooni works by suggesting performative tasks to women. The You-App informed the experience design of the Performative Tasks component by its particularly chosen types of actions, their categorization and the descriptive language of

tasks that attracts users to take on the small actions.

Figure 4: you-app.com

3. Investigations

Flustered Farida: a fairy tale of finding happiness by finding a groom

Historically, Middle Eastern society believed that a woman's place is in her home. She's encouraged to find her happiness and fulfillment in caring for her husband and children. This early investigation was the trigger to explore women's issues and how social and cultural constructs take part in constructing our gender and thus our self-perception and identity.

Flustered Farida, consisting of a storybook and a video, is a project of both character and performance design addressing the issue of female self-perception. The storybook is a detailed fictional story of Farida's life while the performance video is an abstract representation of her psychological condition. In the storybook, Farida's in her kitchen cooking a lasagna dish for her family. She reminisces about the first lasagna dish she cooked for her husband, thinking she finally found happiness when she married him. She narrates societal pressures enforced upon her that she first embraced as obligations and then rebels against. In the performance video, lasagna is used as a signifier of Farida's enforced roles. The lasagna is successively layered onto Farida representing a gradual loss of identity.

This investigation led the research into exploring gender theories and theories of identity construction. Particularly how Farida's society and her upbringing have played a role in socializing her to associate her fulfillment and happiness with finding her groom. Can this be her life dream, according to Levinson's theory, which if not fulfilled can be critical in the process of identity construction? From Butler's theory, Farida has become a woman because of the repetitive stylized actions she takes, one of which is the action of cooking the lasagna for her family described in the story.

According to Mead's theory, Farida associates herself with her society as a group within which she plays certain prescribed roles. According to those played roles and according to the theory of self, Farida's individual I and her socially constructed Me, induces the development of several self-conceptions. Those self-conceptions create an inner struggle in Farida where they start coming to life when her expectations from playing the role of a wife are not met. After which Farida tries to rebel against those inscribed roles.

And what could Farida do to undo such socialization? According to Butler's theory, if Farida is able to view gender construction as not an inborn role, but rather a repetition of subtle and stylized acts, she can then have the understanding of how she can rebel against the expected roles she plays.

▶Farida
a fairytale story of finding happiness by finding a groom

Figure 5: Flustered Farida, an early exploration of challenges enforced on women by society and culture

Performative Acts of Mundane Activities

This work follows Butler's concept of performative acts which declares that gender is not an inborn role but a repetition of stylized activities. The process was inspired by Alison Knowles' performance of Making a Salad. In this experiment, the concept of performative acts was investigated through a mundane activity of making a sandwich, it attempts to understand what Butler meant by repetition of stylized actions that informs gender.

In *Making a Sandwich*, the act of making a sandwich is performed and documented three days in a row. Along the three days, the main ingredients of the sandwich stay the same (cheese and salami). However, it is seen how the act of making the same sandwich changes in several aspects; (1) the making process itself, where using a better knife, a cutting board or a plate are introduced along the three days, (2) the secondary ingredients, where we see lettuce and tomatoes brought in as a side addition to the original cucumber side used in the first two days, and (3) the packaging, where a plastic bag was used after using only aluminum foil.

In the experiment, while the act of making a sandwich was a repeated stylized action in the sense that it's the same sandwich (main ingredients), however, there was a degree of choice and chance coupled with part of this experiment, in the sense that the choice of other ingredients will probably be based on the availability of those ingredients. It's rather understood that Butler's performative acts are not done by choice, but by being

subconsciously enacting certain actions. Also, the change that happened is to a high percentage not due to the repetition of the same act of making a sandwich every day, but again with the degree of randomness in terms of which ingredients or tools were available to use at that point.

Through this experiment, an initial comprehension of Butler's concept was attempted. It was the key inspiration of this thesis's direction and conceptual work by understanding how the repetition of certain acts could cause the gendering of the self.

Figure 6: A performance of Making a Sandwich – explores performing a mundane activity over and over again and perfecting it

Syncretic Self

This experiment aims to explore the syncretic nature of identities; this composite system that is interwoven with multiples of layers. The word *syncretism* means the act of combining, uniting or merging different things.

Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung modeled the human identity in twelve different archetypes, each archetype dominating differently from one person to another. The word *archetype* in Greek translates in English to *original pattern*, meaning the original mold from which all identities are casted out. Within a person's identity, each archetype induces different voices and different behaviors. So how would the different archetypes enact gender differently and adopt different behaviors and ways of self-expression? In this investigation, three archetypes from the twelve were chosen to be included in the project; The Caregiver, The Jester, and The Sage.

The outcome is a projection mapped performance video by the three archetypes. Each character's narrative is inspired by a particular conceptual framework that is embodies the nature of that archetype through the performance and the corresponding narrative, by which it could be understood how each project a different gendered self. The altruistic caregiver says a line that is inspired by Daniel Levinson's theory of Life structures. The fun jester says a line that is based on the theory of Narrative Formation. Finally, the wise sage, says a line that is based on de Beauvoir's and Butler's concept of *performative acts*.

Syncretic Self reflects on how various archetypes embody a different gendered self and choose to adopt behaviors and roles accordingly. This exploration informed the user profiling component of the final outcome, particularly, language choice and the archetype-inspired experience design.
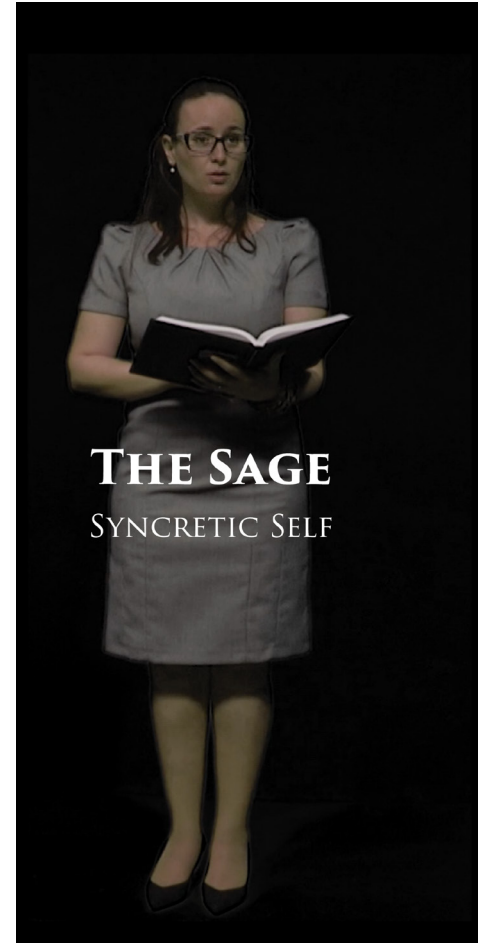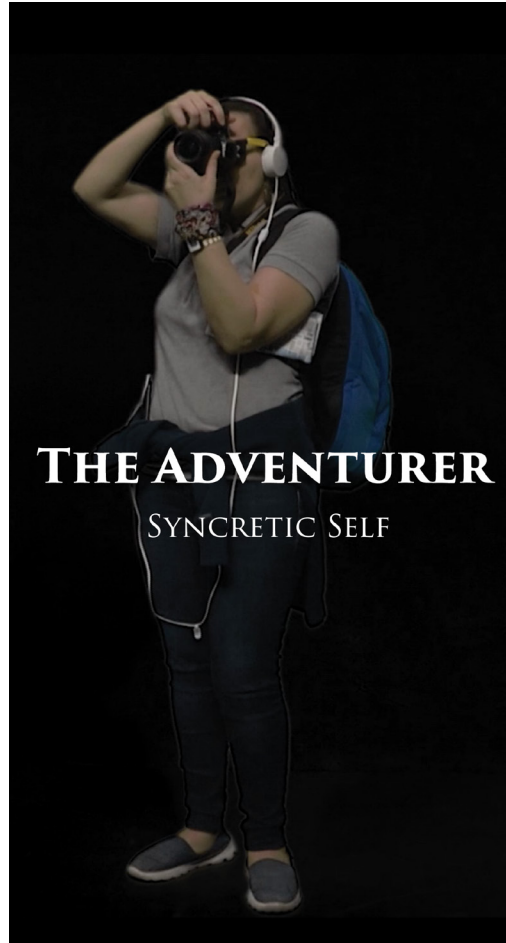
THE CAREGIVER
SYNCRETIC SELF

THE ADVENTURER
SYNCRETIC SELF

THE SAGE
SYNCRETIC SELF

Figure 7: Syncretic Self, an early exploration of the complexity of identities

4. Design Development

Introduction

This research resulted in an online tool for women self-actualization in the workplace. The online platform is called Kooni, the Arabic feminine verb meaning 'be'. As the name suggests, the platform aims at helping women become better by self-actualizing themselves in the context of their workplace. Kooni encourages women to break workplace gender roles and self-imposed internal barriers that fulfill society's expectations. Kooni has been designed as a digital platform to fall in line with today's digital world. This encapsulates the power of accessibility in Kooni, to reach more women on a larger geographical area. Furthermore, a digital platform also allows the potential of communication, where Kooni could communicate with the women through the platform and on a future perspective, women could communicate with one another as will be further elaborated in the future considerations chapter. Kooni integrates Levinson's theory of life structures, Mead's theory of role-play as well as Butler's theory of performative acts, all which have been discussed in chapter two.

Kooni's main aim is guided by Levinson's theory of life structures which states that a dream is the core of identity, which if not fulfilled can be critical in the process of identity construction (Gregg 2005). Therefore, Kooni targets women whose dream is to build a career and works on helping them reach their potential in their workplace.

Furthermore, Kooni integrates Mead's theory of role play, which states that identity is partially constructed by belonging to several groups and by playing various roles in those groups (Mead 1934). Kooni chooses to target the roles played in the workplace group and attempts to bring this to the attention of the women by highlighting workplace gender roles through the user profiling component of Kooni.

Finally, Kooni adopts Butler's concept of performative acts to try to induce advancement in women's potential in the workplace. Butler states that gender is constructed through the repetition of stylized actions (Butler 1988). Kooni integrates this mechanism in its performative tasks component. It works by suggesting certain actions to adopt in the workplace that helps the woman change the roles she plays. To follow up on Butler's notion of repetition, Kooni repeatedly assigns certain actions to the woman over time. This influences the re-gendering of the woman towards a more actualized self in the workplace.

Kooni takes the form of a responsive website providing an individualistic experience to women in three stages; (1) identifying workplace gender roles they enact, (2) choosing one or more of the four pillars they want to improve, and (3) advancing in those pillars by performing and reflecting upon suggested performative tasks that could be adopted in the workplace. Kooni provides an infrastructure where each woman

is able to remake the gender roles she plays in her workplace by repeatedly enacting stylized actions. Kooni provides a framework that allows the woman to work on individual barriers she encounters in her workplace. Kooni is a personal journey for the woman's self-actualization in the workplace.

The Framework

An open source website template was used as a front-end design layout for Kooni. The structure and the development of Kooni is based on AngularJS library for JavaScript and Firebase database as shown in the figure.

The Google infrastructure Firebase is a platform that is part of a growing trend called "Back end as a service". Firebase is a no-SQL front-end focused data store. It allows the real-time accessing of data on Firebase's cloud directly from client-side JavaScript with no need of backend scripting nor communicating with the server.

AngularJS is a JavaScript framework that is not separately scripted but rather integrated within HTML. Its offered features allow a faster way for development. AngularJS with its library AngularFire is an interface that is able to communicate directly to Firebase.
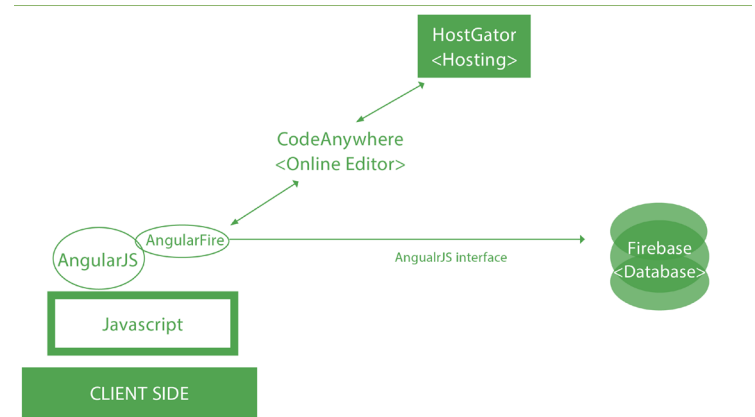
Figure 8: Kooni's Framework

The User Journey

The platform, Kooni, allows women to rethink the nature of their gender and how it's constructed, giving space to observe the gender roles they enact in the workplace. Kooni encourages women to adopt Butler's theory around workplace gender roles. The experience highlights to women the importance of perceiving actions, that subconsciously construct their gender, as Butler's performative acts. With this perception, women can practically enact the theory by integrating repeated stylized tasks through Kooni. Kooni reinforces the idea that gender is hackable, malleable and can be reconstructed through Butler's performative acts.

The online tool has three major functionalities; (1) User Profile Development (2) Future-Self Design, and (3) Performative Tasks.

Kooni's functionality will be demonstrated through two female personas, Dalia and Muneera. Dalia is 28 years old and Muneera is 34 years old. Both are working in two different workplaces but are not reaching their full potential. Both Dalia and Muneera don't know why this is the case and how to fix it. Through Kooni, Dalia and Muneera are able to point out how gender roles are slowing their progression at work, and they're given a framework by which they could break those gender roles to strive to self-actualize in the workplace.
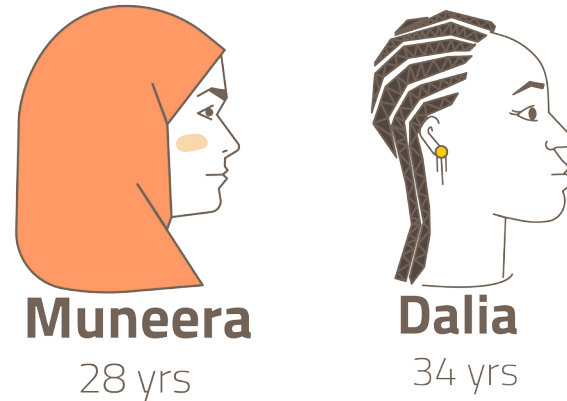
How will the online tool help?
- 🟡 **Component 1:** User Profile Development
- ▶ **Component 2:** Future-Self Design
- 🟧 **Component 3:** Performative Tasks.

Figure 9 Kooni's three components in the online experience

Muneera
28 yrs

Dalia
34 yrs

Figure 10: Two personas demonstrating the three components

The first step of Kooni's "User Profile Development" helps women realize the existence of gender roles in the workplace. It's a tool to observe if the women are unconsciously embodying female roles in their everyday that could be hindering their professional advancement. Egyptian feminist writer, activist, physician and psychiatrist, Nawal El Saadawi states;

"To live in an illusion, not to know the truth is the most dangerous of all things for a human being, woman or man, because it deprives people of their most important weapon in the struggle of freedom, emancipation and control of their lives and future. To be conscious that you are still a slave still living under oppression is the first step on the road to emancipation." (El Saadawi 2002)

Therefore, Kooni's User Profile Development is an important first step in this online framework, where it allows users to be aware of gender roles in the workplace and whether they're embodying them.

The second step of Kooni's "Future-Self Design" allows the woman to choose certain aspects to work on developing that have been initially introduced and explained to the user.

The third step of Kooni's "Performative Tasks" allows women to embody new roles. Judith Butler states that gender is not an inborn role but created by a stylized repetition of acts. Kooni's performative tasks employs this concept in an engaging experience, by suggesting very subtle actions stylized in a different manner from the typical workplace female roles. If these performative acts are done repetitively, users can potentially create significant changes in self-perception, self-projection and thus achieve self-actualization in the workplace.

4.1. Kooni's User Profile Development

The Research Process

Primary research took the form of seven interviews, five in-depth interviews and 110 survey responses, which served as investigative tools that informed the design of Kooni. Working women were asked to share personal narratives in their workplace and in their homes, to be able to form an understanding of their relation to identity construction, self-perception and self-actualization. The results of collecting personal narratives and being supported by research in identity construction, gender constitution and Arab upbringing practices have informed the gap addressed in this research as well as the needs of the women that was directed into the design of the outcome. The appendix contains the survey questions, as well as short quotations extracted from some of the personal narratives collected.

The Logic of the Design

The goal of Kooni's user profile development is to profile the user based on embodying gender roles in the workplace. The theoretical framework of this component is inspired by George Herbert Mead's theory of role-play and its effect on self-conception. According to Mead, humans affiliate themselves with particular groups in society, within which one chooses to play certain roles that result in the construction of several self-conceptions. Through the user profile development step, the woman realizes this concept and observes the existence of gender roles in the workplace that is restricting their professional advancement.

Kooni's user profile development works by the user filling out a set of questions and accordingly the profile is built.
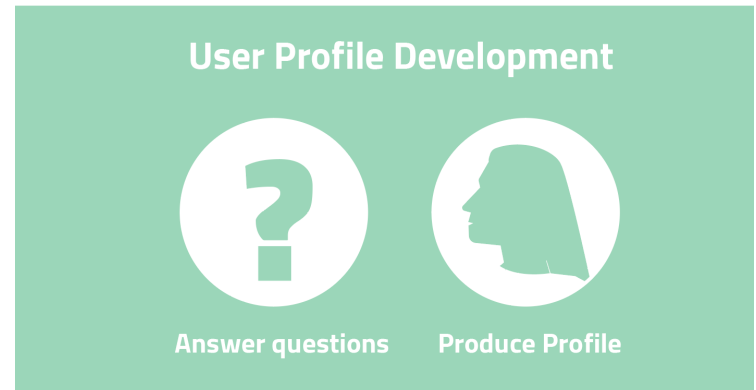
Figure 11: Two Steps for creating Kooni's User Profile Development

The questions have been reviewed by a psychologist, a clinical psychologist and a counsellor to validate the wording as well as to avoid any gender biases. The figure below, is a sample of the questions the user answers;

Figure 12: A sample of the Questions in Kooni's User Profile Development

Kooni creates the profile of the user by measuring the percentage by which the woman is abiding by or rebelling against gender roles in the workplace.

Figure 13: The Workplace Gender Roles Spectrum used in Kooni's User Profile Development

The workplace gender role spectrum is defined by four pillars; (1) the woman's history and upbringing, (2) the woman's identity and self-perception, (3) the woman's association to groups, and (4) the woman's self-expression and identity projection. The first pillar describes reasons that help form a woman's identity, that would consequently help understand the extent to which a woman abides or rebels against workplace gender roles. The second pillar are elements describing a woman's identity nature and elements that describes how she perceives herself, and accordingly how this perception could affect her enactment of certain workplace gender roles. The third pillar explains notions of how a woman relates herself to others, which would portray her reasoning to embody particular gender roles over others to realize this affiliation. Finally, the fourth pillar explains elements of a woman's nature of self-expression, which has influence on which workplace gender roles a woman plays.

The design decision on what pillars are making up the

workplace gender roles spectrum have been inspired by the fundamental research theories discussed in chapter two. The first is the principles of the Arab patriarchal societies and their upbringing practices which plays a role in forming a woman's identity and the gender roles she enacts. This informed the design of the spectrum to incorporate the history as the first pillar that defines it. The second is Mead's theory exploring how belonging to groups and playing various roles in those groups aid in the construction of self-conception. This has informed the design of the spectrum to include the identity nature and group association as the second and third pillars defining the spectrum. The fourth pillar was inspired by the narratives collected in the workplace. The challenges women face in the workplace have been categorized under one pillar that describes the woman's behaviors and ways of expressing her identity in the workplace.

The pillars defining the workplace gender roles spectrum are the basis that informed the design of the rest of Kooni's experience (i.e. Kooni's Future-Self Design and Kooni's Performative Tasks). Kooni made use of the deconstruction of the workplace gender roles spectrum and created an experience that helps Kooni's users break those gender roles. Kooni utilized the spectrum as a basis to suggest performative tasks to the women that help her self-actualize in the workplace.

Kooni's pillars and their definitions are shared with the users. Based on the questions, the profiling and the identification of what the results mean, users understand how certain subtle actions they repeatedly enact could fall under society's enforced

definitions of workplace gender roles. The resultant of Kooni's user profiling phase is an increase in women's awareness of workplace gender roles and a stimulation to start observing habits and practices in the workplace. The details of the pillars are listed in the appendix.

Highly Abiding by Gender Norms	Highly Rebelling against Gender Norms
REASONS History and Upbringing	**REASONS** History and Upbringing
RESULTS Identity Nature & Self-Perception	**RESULTS** Identity Nature & Self-Perception
Association to Groups	Association to Groups
Self-Expression / Identity Projection	Self-Expression / Identity Projection

Figure 14: The details of the pillars defining the workplace gender roles spectrum

In figure 15, the result of the woman's profiling is given in the form of a percentage on the workplace gender roles spectrum.

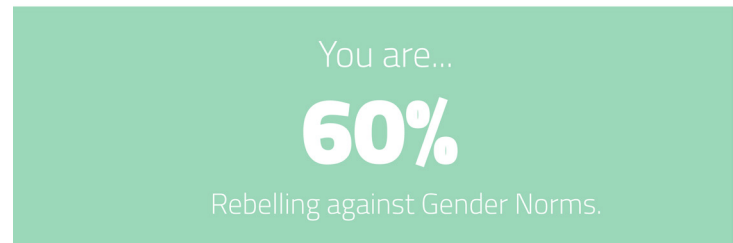You are...

60%

Rebelling against Gender Norms.

Figure 15: The Workplace Gender Roles Spectrum used in Kooni's User Profile Development

The questions have been designed based on collected personal narratives of women and supported by research as discussed in previous chapters. Figure 16 shows a sample of those collected narratives from women.

"All my colleagues are men, if I'm always stern, they don't like me. If I'm too accomplished, I make them feel uncomfortable."

"When asked to do the same task, men are seen as capable leaders, while women are regarded as bossy and demanding."

"I've been asked to take notes in meetings, ignored by clients, asked who was in charge when I was in charge."

"When you speak in a meeting, men just interrupt continuously because they feel they have something more important to say."

Figure 16: Sample of Collected Personal Narratives from Women

4.2. Kooni's Future-Self Design

Kooni's future-self design is based on the four pillars introduced to the woman in the user profiling step. The woman chooses to work on one or more of the four pillars; (1) History and Upbringing, (2) Identity and Self-Perception, (3) Association to Groups, and (4) Self-Expression and Identity Projection. The choice is made with a simple click of either toning up or toning down that particular pillar to design her future gendered self.

Dalia for example may choose to tone up her Identity and Self-Perception practices, moving more towards rebelling against workplace gender roles. While Muneera may choose to tone down her Self-expression and Identity Projection, moving more towards abiding by workplace gender roles. The choice is up to the woman and how she sees working with those pillars could advance her career and create a future gendered self she desires.
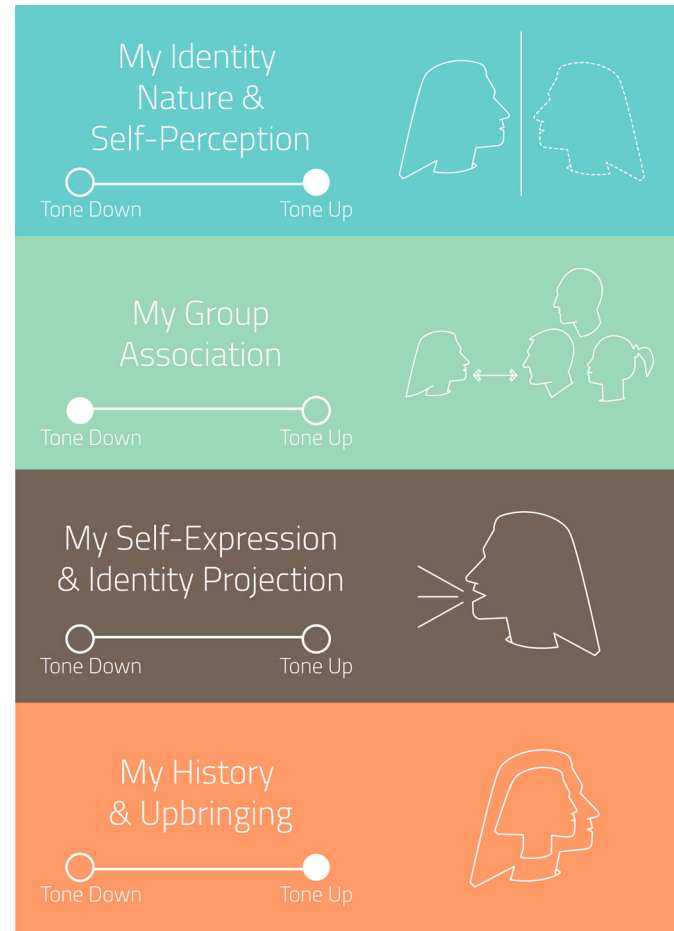
Figure 17: Kooni's Future-Self Design, the user chooses toning up or down one or more of the four pillars of workplace gender roles

4.3. Kooni's Performative Tasks

Kooni's performative tasks helps women adopt new behaviors by utilizing Butler's idea of performative acts. Based on the woman's choice in future-self design, Kooni's performative tasks will suggest subtle workplace actions that are stylized to either tone up or tone down within a particular pillar. The same tasks are repeatedly suggested to the woman across time and in varying difficulty. When the woman re-performs a certain task repeatedly, this helps her adopt Butler's idea of recreating her gendered self through a stylized repetition of acts. Kooni's performative tasks have been designed with reference to the narratives collected from women. A list of the performative tasks is included in the appendix.

In figure 18, users start by level-1 in difficulty and work their way up in intensity of suggested performative tasks.

Level 1 — start by low intensity performative tasks

increase the intensity level with major performative tasks — Level 2

Level 3 — challenge yourself with high intensity performative tasks

Figure 18: Kooni's Performative Tasks in an increasing level of difficulty

Users are then presented with a series of performative tasks. Within that difficulty level, each pillar -the woman had previously chosen- suggests a set of performative tasks to be performed on that day. Within each day's activity, some performative tasks are suggested again to be re-performed. This is to follow Butler's theory of repeatedly performing stylized actions to recreate gender.

All tasks within a particular level are unlocked to give the woman the freedom of choice to perform tasks at her own pace and in the order she sees fit. The woman is also given the option to not perform a task if she sees it as irrelevant to her workplace or to herself.

Figure 19: Kooni's Performative Tasks suggested under each of the four pillars

Each task is explained by introducing background knowledge about the task and a thorough description of what the woman is expected to do.

That being said, when users take on performative tasks repeatedly across the same level or across multiple levels, they are performing stylized actions that are repetitive along a period of time. According to Butler's theory, this will help them recreate their gender in the direction they choose.

Level 1   3rd Task

Background Knowledge
The nature of the upbringing practices of Arab expect women to put offers before themselves. Women become caring and selfless.

What to do?
Next time someone comes in to ask your help in something. Say you are busy (even if you aren't) & tell his/her that you'll be with him/her in ten minutes.

◯ Done   ✎ Write journal (not relevant)

Figure 20: Kooni's Performative Task in a thorough description with some background knowledge

Kooni's Tracking and Evaluation Systems

Kooni provides a tracking mechanism for the user where they're presented with numeric data to be able to monitor their activity.

My Numbers

Number of Performative Tasks — 6

Number of Recurring Performative Tasks — 10

Number of Boosters — 3

Milestones

1   5   10
20
30   25
40
50
60
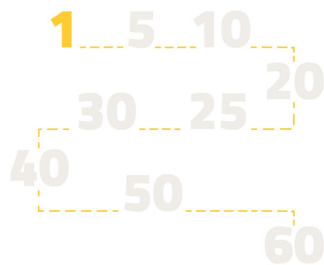
Figure 21: Kooni's Numeric Tracking System

In order to increase the effectiveness of Kooni's experience to the user, Kooni provides an evaluation system that is in the form of a self-reflection mechanism. Users go through a journaling process at the end of each performative task. The aim from the journaling process is to allow time to reflect on the practice of the task and for observing one's progress as the reflections are regularly archived.

April 2017

April 2017   Performative Task
April 2017   Performative Task
April 2017   Performative Task

March 2017

April 2017   Performative Task
April 2017   Performative Task
April 2017   Performative Task

April 30, 2017

Reflections of Task
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat

Personal Remarks
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat

Extra Notes
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat

Figure 22: Journaling process for each performative task

5. Design Outcome

Branding

The main aim from Kooni's branding is to reflect boldness and energy. A shade of golden yellow has been chosen to encourage adventure and discovery, in Kooni's case "self-discovery". The color shows confidence, vitality, risk-taking and positive energy.

Koni's logo is made up of geometrical elements, assembled together to build the word Kooni. This concept is inspired from the research's main theoretical framework of Judith Butler. Butler's theory of performative acts states that gender is created through the repetition of certain stylized actions. Accordingly, certain shapes are repeated along the logo reflecting that concept. And just exactly as the acts make up the gender, the geometrical elements together make up the word Kooni.
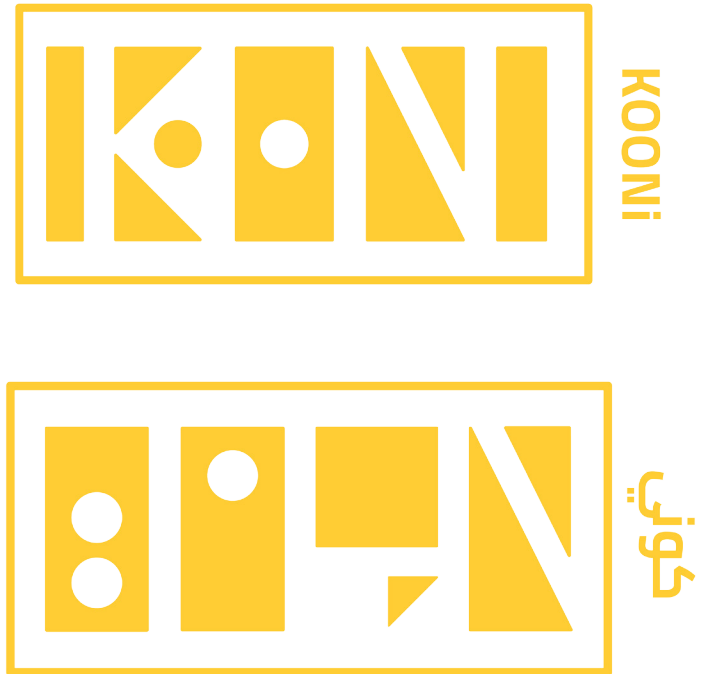
Figure 23: Kooni's English and Arabic Logos

Screen Designs

Below are the different screen designs of Kooni's platform.

Figure 24: Kooni's Homepage Screen Design
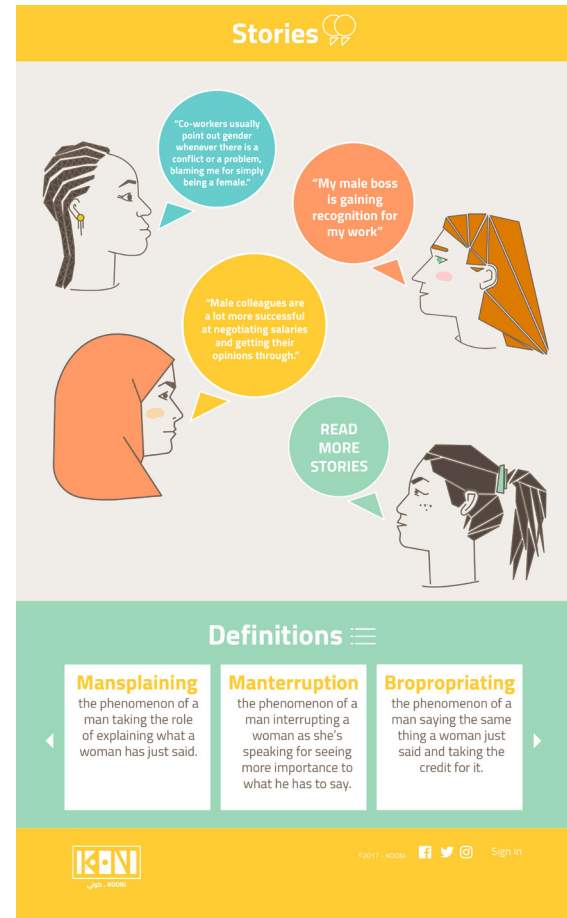
Figure 25: Kooni's Homepage Screen Design
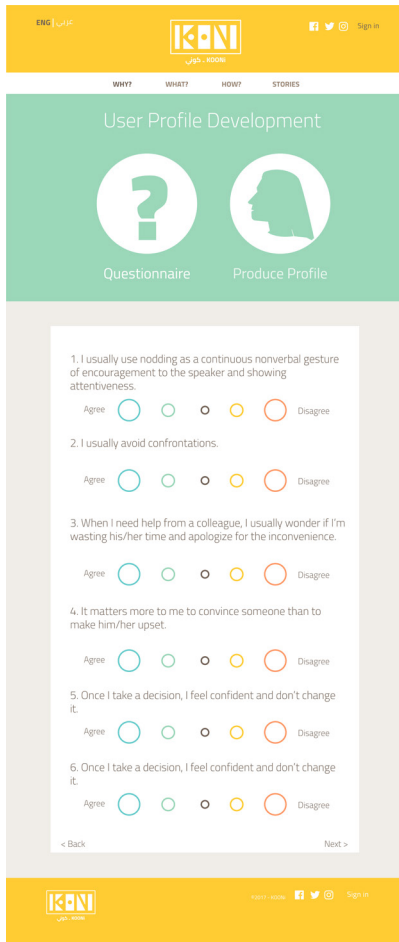
Figure 26: Kooni's User Profile Development Screen Design

Figure 27: Kooni's User Profile Development Result Page Screen Design

Figure 28: Kooni's Future-Self Design Screen Design

Figure 29: Kooni's Performative Tasks Levels Screen Design

Figure 30: Screen Design of Kooni's Performative Tasks suggested in their pillars

Figure 31: Screen Design of Kooni's Performative Task Description

Figure 32: Screen Design of Kooni's Numeric Tracking Mechanism

Figure 33: Screen Design of Kooni's Journaling Process

6. Conclusion

In Arab families, women and girls are often considered to be a symbol of honor or shame which are often linked to female chastity and sexual conduct. And thus Arab families have always controlled women's behavior to protect their honor. Upbringing practices in the Arab world discourage individualism, encouraging females to view themselves as always linked to family and relatives. Women are expected, more than men, to put others before themselves and to embed their interests within the interests of others, practically their male kin. This reinforces patriarchal hierarchy in Arab societies and specifically to women. Confined to traditional female roles, which usually involve getting married, bearing and raising children, and managing the household, women have been conditioned to follow an established set of stereotypical behaviors.

As a result, women are faced with a number of social and personal barriers in the workplace that limit their potential for self-actualization. While, the modernization of the Arab world had a significant change on women's social roles, there still remains a huge gap between what a woman can achieve and conservative expectations enforced upon her i.e. her domestic roles.

As previously discussed, Judith Butler asserts that gender is not an inborn role, but rather is created through a stylized repetition of acts informed by society, deemed performative acts. These performative acts are repetitive and are therefore hackable, manipulate-able and can thus be remade. This research encourages women to question their understanding of how gender is formed through an increased awareness of their behaviors and performative acts, which can subconsciously construct their gender.

This research resulted in the development of the online platform, Kooni. The aim of the platform is to encourage women to self-actualize in the workforce by suggesting performative tasks to break gender roles and self-imposed internal barriers which fulfill society's expectations. Kooni adopts Butler's concept of performative acts to try to induce advancement in women's potential.

Kooni takes the form of a responsive website providing an individualistic experience for women to; (1) identify what workplace gender roles they enact, (2) choose areas they want to improve, and (3) advance in those areas by performing suggested performative tasks that could be adopted in the workplace.

Research has shown that women's roles will only change by women themselves, and change will only happen when a woman's mindset changes. With many women around the world facing similar challenges, Kooni's strength is built on the everyday narratives of those women and their attempts to empower their mindset and behavior by taking on different roles than what society imposes and expects of them.

Kooni means to 'be' in Arabic. As the name suggests, Kooni encourages women to embrace a changing experience through the platform. Through enacting new roles, Kooni attempts to help women reach their full potential and become better versions of themselves in the context of the workplace.

accommodate the roles and needs of women globally with their commonalities and differences.

Kooni is currently catering to women as its main target group. However, men could also be catered for in a larger variation of Kooni's design.

6.1. Future Directions

Kooni is an initial vision of a larger online platform for helping women self-actualize in the workplace. Currently, Kooni is an individualistic private experience. Future development of the project is an experience incorporating a collaborative community for women to interact with one another, aggregating both online and offline experiences to combine the advantages of both worlds. With numerous women around the world facing similar workplace challenges, Kooni's blend of online and offline experiences will provide a framework for women to progressively develop by communicate ideas, challenges, share experiences, support and motivate one another in order to boost self-actualization in the workplace. Additionally, Kooni's interactive experience will be developed with more gamification elements and engagement strategies to further captivate users.

The idea of Kooni has been inspired by narratives of Arab women. However, Kooni's approach of enabling change through performative tasks could be applied to a larger context to

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Appendix A: Primary Research

Survey Questions

1. Fully resigning from work to attend to my home is not an option.
2. I usually smile while I'm giving a presentation.
3. When I need help from a colleague, I usually wonder if I'm wasting his/her time and apologise for the inconvenience.
4. I usually adapt my words to keep my conversation liked by listeners.
5. I don't believe that creating a conflict will solve the problem. That's why i try to avoid them.
6. I usually don't care what others suggest, they have their own ideas and I have my own.
7. I'm usually convincing when it comes to arguing a point.
8. In a meeting, once I start talking, people become attentive instantaneously.
9. When I listen to people, I like to be fully attentive as well as show it to the speaker.
10. You usually feel you have to be up to other's expectations.
11. Sometimes I find colleagues talking on my behalf, explaining what I've just said.
12. Once I take a decision, I usually don't think about it again and don't change it.
13. You're fully concentrated on your work, and someone interrupts to ask you something, you usually feel compelled to

help, with disregard to what you're doing.

14. I feel, just because I'm a woman, I need to prove myself more than my male colleagues.

15. I'm usually too humble to think that what I'm good at is exceptionally different.

16. I find it easy and comfortable to build trust with colleagues and team members.

17. I usually feel uncomfortable when I see my colleague is performing more than myself.

18. When the team is having a group lunch, I often feel obliged to set up the table, food and help tidy up the place afterwards.

19. I find it easy to create different boundaries for people so that they know their limits.

20. Were you able to relate all/some of the above questions to gender roles / male domination? clarify in a short sentence.

21. Describe a situation where you think gender roles or male domination played a part at work to you or to your colleagues.

Snippets from Collected Stories

"The main mission in life for a girl is not to find her vocation but to get married and have family."

"Men were seen as capable and leaders, women were regarded as bossy and demanding when they asked for the same tasks to be carried out by staff."

"As I grew up, I understood that the blaming is only my mother's way of showing her care and attention to what I was doing, but I also realized that it was a source of negativity, pressure and demotivation in my life. It's a source that created uncertainty of my abilities and created self-doubt that grew with me till my adulthood."

"Once a month we celebrate all birthdays and every time, everyone just expects women (specially the ones that are mothers) to cut the cake and deliver the plates. Guys just keep chatting until they receive their plate, or offer to open sodas, you know because we are not strong enough for that."

"Men speak more during meetings, Men are supportive of each other and help each other forward."

"I had been brought up in a traditional family with traditional views to life. I had been socialized since childhood to await my prince charming, to believe that this was the aim of my life. That I can only be happy when I finally find him and bear

his children. I had grown side by side to fairytales strengthening this idea."

"Sometimes I have the feeling that our ideas are worth less than if they would have came from a male colleague."

"I was pushed by my family into a career that I don't like, and into a marriage that I didn't fall in love with."

"I do have a strong personality, but sometime I feel I have to exaggerate it, in order to do not be treated as a "young inexperienced woman""

"Co-workers usually point out gender whenever there is a conflict or a problem, blaming me for simply being a female."

"It's very frustrating when men don't tend to listen or base their opinions on assessing the situation. Instead, they tend to just cluster and support one another's view, if the conflict counterpart is a female."

"I was pushed to take care of my looks, what I wears and how I behave so that I had higher chances of being seen than my peers, who to my mum were potential suitors."

"I've never learnt to appreciate myself nor my achievements."

"I've been asked to take notes on meetings where we were all supposed to be equals because I was the only woman. I have not been greeted/been ignored by visitors in meetings. I have been asked who was in charge when I was in charge."

"I was always expected to be the good wife."

"The extent to which a female feels comfortable doing work or expressing herself in relation to her male colleagues is in part defined by her upbringing in the society and how she was taught to perceive the other gender."

"My male boss gains recognition for my work."

"Male colleagues are a lot more successful at negotiating salaries and getting their opinions through."

"As a woman in the workplace, it is a struggle to impose yourself and you find yourself trying to fit in instead."

"When you speak in a meeting, the men just interrupt continuously because they also have something to say and it seems more important."

"I was not allowed to walk back home alone. It was forbidden. Her mum, on their way back, ridicules her for her late arrival and tells her "this is the last time you're late, put yourself in my shoes, what would the neighbors say about you or me?"

"It happens every day. I work with all men. If I make jokes regularly, maybe I won't be taken seriously. If I am always stern, maybe I won't be liked. If I am too accomplished, I make men feel uncomfortable. If I appear less competent, I stall my own growth. So I try to switch things up: unexpectedly crack a joke, sometimes talk alot in meetings, sometimes wait to have "the last word" (which really does make people listen.), sometimes be casual, sometimes very driven and aggressive. It is exhausting but seems to keep the stereotyping at a low volume. Unfortunately, this doesn't work in the company of women, and it's hard to switch it off, because it was so hard to train myself in the first place."

Appendix B: Kooni's User Profiling

User Profiling Questions

The user profiling component asks questions that cover the second, third and fourth pillars only. This decision was taken because,the first pillar, one's history and upbringing, is regarded as one of the reasons for enacting gender roles and not the results that the user profiling is interested in, as will be demonstracted next in the workplace gender roles spectrum.

Pillar-2: Identity Nature & Self-Perception

Dependency
a.   When I face a challenge, the first thing I think of is asking a colleague.

Humbleness and Self-Doubt/Self-trust
a.   I'm usually too hesitant to think that my skills are exceptionally different.
b.   I often feel superior others.
c.   I usually think the success I had in my work so far is due to luck rather than my hard work or being well deserved.

Overthinking and Constant Care
a.   I often analyze what people say after they talk to me, I find this very important.
b.   If someone passes by and doesn't greet me, I usually feel offended and wonder what I did wrong.
c.   I usually overthink my faults, failures, and mistakes.

Pillar-3: Association to Groups

Identity and sense of belonging rooted in group's association
a.   Likeability & Smiling
    i. I usually smile when I take part in a discussion that makes me uncomfortable.
    ii. I believe that it is more rewarding to be liked by others than to be powerful.
b.   Agreeability (Yes)
    i. I usually don't care what others suggest, they have their own ideas and I have my own.
    ii. I usually worry a lot about what other people think.

Self-Categorization by comparing oneself to others
a.   I usually feel envious when I see a colleague performing better than myself.
b.   I usually feel compelled to use colleagues' progress as a benchmark for my own.

Accommodating others by feeling responsible for what's not your Responsibility or feeling compelled to do something
a.   I'm fully focused on my work, and someone interrupts to ask me something, I usually feel compelled to help, with disregard to what I'm doing.
b.   When the team is having a group lunch, I often feel obliged (take the responsibility) to set up the table, food and help tidy up the place afterwards.

Relationships and Boundaries
a.   I find it easy to set boundaries with people.
b.   Greeting someone passing by is highly important to me even if I'm in the middle of a conversation with a colleague.

Pillar-4: Self-Expression & Identity Projection

Expressing is an individualistic experience, spotlight and confidence
a.   Expressing/Speaking up (voicing my opinion)
    i. In a meeting, once I start talking, people become attentive instantaneously.
    ii. I'm usually hesitant to express my ideas.
b.   Spot Light / Networking / Talking to People
    i. I usually initiate conversations with people.
    ii. I do not mind being at the center of attention.
c.   Articulation
    i. I'm usually articulate when I speak out my ideas.

ii. I notice that I usually need to repeat what I say in different words to explain my ideas to others.

Decisiveness and Arguing
a.   Decisiveness and Assertiveness
   i. Once I make a decision, I feel confident and don't change it.
   ii. Sometimes I find colleagues talking on my behalf, explaining what I've just said.
   iii. Sometimes I find people making decisions on my behalf.
b.   Arguing back / Negotiating
   i. I'm usually able to defend my stance when someone does me wrong.
   ii. In a conversation, it matters more not to upset my listener than to get my point through.

Emotions
a.   I usually tend to get emotional at work.

Apologetic, hesitant and seeks permission
a.   Being Apologetic
   i. When I need help from a colleague, I usually wonder if I'm wasting his/her time and apologize for the inconvenience.
   ii. I usually apologize when I misunderstand something.
b.   Seeking Permission/consent
   i. I believe and act by the quote; "it's better to ask for forgiveness than ask for permission".
   ii. I often feel I have to justify myself to other people.

Conflicts and confrontations
a.   I usually avoid confrontations.
b.   People can rarely upset me, even in conflicts.

Listening, patience and tolerance
a.   Listening
   i. It's highly important for me to listen carefully to anyone speaking, so that they do the same when I speak.
   ii. I usually nod as a continuous nonverbal gesture of encouragement and attentiveness to the speaker.
b.   Patience and tolerance
   i. It's highly important to me to work in a collaborative environment that is patient to others and tolerant to differences.

Other's Expectations and Appreciation to work
a.   I work hard to meet other's expectations from me.
b.   It's highly important for me to be appreciated at work in order to feel my added value.

Definition of the Workplace Gender Roles Spectrum

An Extreme Version of Highly Abiding by Gender Norms	An Extreme Version of Highly Rebelling against Gender Norms
REASONS	**REASONS**
Pillar-1: History and Upbringing 1. Current status is associated with childhood & upbringing. 2. Conforms to family-members' demanding expectations. 3. Experienced unequal privileges between siblings. 4. Confined to stereotypical, societal role models. 5. Experienced blame and dissatisfaction from family. 6. Relates happiness and fulfilment to finding a potential suitor.	**Pillar-1: History and Upbringing** 1. Does not place emphasis on childhood & upbringing. 2. Rebels against family-members' expectations. 3. Experienced equal privileges between siblings. 4. Unconfined to societal role models and definitions. 5. Experienced encouragement and satisfaction from family. 6. Highly relates happiness and fulfilment with individual achievements.
RESULTS	**RESULTS**
Pillar-2: Identity Nature & Self-Perception 1. Dependent. 2. Unable to fully realize self-worth. 3. Self-confidence is skewed by inner voices. 4. Often self-conscious and overthinks. 5. Cares about what others think and is adaptable. 6. Aspirations are confined within agreeable roles.	**Pillar-2: Identity Nature & Self-Perception** 1. Independent (Self-sufficient). 2. Realizes self-value. 3. Self-Confident. 4. Rarely self-conscious and does not overthink. 5. Individualistic and not concerned with others. 6. Aspirations take form based on passions.

Pillar-3: Association to Groups

1. Identity is rooted in group connections.
2. Often compares oneself to group members.
3. People and their needs prevail over personal comfort.
4. Easily trusts people in relationships.
5. Personal boundaries are more loose.

Pillar-4: Self-Expression & Identity Projection

1. Prefers to be out of the spotlight.
2. Uncomfortable with arguing a stance.
3. indecisive and easily dominated.
4. Tends to get emotional.
5. Apologetic, hesitant and seeks permission.
6. Prefers harmonious work environment with minimal conflicts and pressure.
7. Patient, caring, tolerant and a good listener.
8. Prefers to fulfill others expectations.
9. Requires assurance and appreciation for work accomplished.
10. Is subtle in contribution and uses indirect approaches.

Pillar-3: Association to Groups

1. Identity is rooted in self and achievements.
2. Does not compare onself to others.
3. People's needs are secondary to one's needs.
4. Relationships and trust are earned slowly over time.
5. Personal boundaries are sacred.

Pillar-4: Self-Expression / Identity Projection

1. Doesn't mind being in the spotlight.
2. Highly articulate.
3. Confidence is high in challenging environments.
4. Assertive, decisive and imposes an individualistic sovereignty.
5. Emotions take a back-seat to logic.
6. Non-apologetic, self-driven and bold.
7. Can work under pressure and conflict.
8. Impatient with and uninterested in other people.
9. Goal is to fulfill own expectations.
10. Does not need assurance or validation for work completed.
11. Is clear in contribution and uses direct approaches.

Appendix C: Kooni's Performative Tasks

Examples of Performative Tasks

Pillar-1: History and Upbringing

[1] Task Name: *What Story do you tell yourself?*
Background: Your upbringing has definitely taken part in the formation of your identity. but more importantly, the way we tell our stories plays a bigger role in forming our identity and self-perception. So, it is important to be conscious about what kind of stories we tell ourselves in general and about our upbringing in particular.

Task to Do: Observe what kind of narratives you tell yourself. What's the tone you use to speak to yourself about the history of how you were brought up? Is it a positive or negative tone? If you want to change how your upbringing is affecting you, start changing the stories you tell yourself about it. Start by listing down thinking from your past and look it again and think, how can you change it?

[2] Task Name: *Childhood Role Models*
Background: Our childhood role models shape who we become as we grow up. Digging deeper into who was our role models can help us understand a lot of the gender roles we enact when we grow up.

Task to Do: Who was your childhood role model? Looking back now, why was so inspiring about that role model? What do you think this role model grew in you? Do you think it developed any kind of gender roles in you that you're enacting today? What are they? What have those gender roles developed in you in terms of behaviors, thoughts…etc.? Think of it and trace it back in your journal.

Pillar-2: Identity Nature & Self-Perception

[1] Task Name: *Dependency*
Background: when you see/feel that you need to get back to someone when you face a challenge, it usually takes away from your credit, and puts that credit in your colleague's pocket. Your ownership to a task comes from fulfilling this task on your own. If you shall ask of help from others, do the initial ground work first, then be strategic about your questions, ask the minimum amount of questions to get to know what you need, and aim for learning how it's done for next time, not just to get the job done this time.

Task to Do: Monitor when do you exactly seek help from colleagues? What do you usually ask them? Do you do the

ground research first? Reflect on the result of this, how far has it helped you be in control of doing the task next time? If it did not, then maybe that's not the right kind of help you're seeking.

[2] Task Name: *Humility*
Background: when you're too humble to know the skills you're good at, you're not playing on your strengths, and you're letting others define those strengths for you.
Task to Do: Start by listing down the things you know you're good at. The next time, you're being complemented about it, acknowledge "humbly" that you're good at it. The next time, someone asks for help in this thing you're good at, offer your help without saying "I might be able to help you", instead say "let me help you, I can do it".

Pillar-3: Association to Groups

[1] Task Name: *Smiling*
Background: Smiling, if done unnecessarily might give the wrong impression. You might be doing it from your good heart or because this is how you relate to people, but in the end, it could weaken your stance and make people take you less seriously.
Task to Do: Monitor how much you smile in meetings, when talking to someone or when giving a presentation. If so, next time you notice it, observe when it happens and how you feel when it happens? Analyze what the reason for that smile? Is it really your good heart? Or is it enforced? Think do I really need to smile at this point?

[2] Task Name: *Acceptance by others*
Background: We highly associate ourselves to groups all the time. We want to belong somewhere, we want to be liked and accepted. But to what extent should we seek this acceptance?
Task to Do: Try to observe your behaviors at times when you're seeking acceptance from people. What are those moments exactly? Define them. Why do you need acceptance at this particular situation? Is it out of fear, love, jealousy…etc.? in each situation, journal the emotions you connect with.

Pillar-4: Self-Expression & Identity Projection

[1] Task Name: *Asking too many questions*
Background: Asking too many questions unnecessarily might not give a good impression. It is important to learn how to ask the right question at the right time and in the right format.
Task to Do: If you feel you've asked a lot already or that you might be taking time from the meeting and from others, say that you're interested to know more, and so as not to take the time of the meeting, you'd like to take it further with the person after the meeting.

[2] Task Name: *Writing Emails*

Background: Writing emails creates part of how others perceive you in the workplace. It is important to build the right language and the right way to address colleagues in the workplace.

Task to Do: Next time you write an email, keep the language straight to the point. Avoid fancy words, apologies… etc. Observe your usage of the words 'just', 'think' and 'sorry' and avoid using them. Evaluate the relevance of what you're writing to the recipient and evaluate if it's the right amount of information you're giving or are is it too much?

Appendix D: Exhibition Documentation

During the thesis exhibition, Kooni was introduced to the visitors through a variety of mediums. The problem of women's challenges at the workplace tackled by the research was introduced through the collected narratives of working women in vinyl stickers.

An informative video was displayed. The video contains the research problem, the theoretical framework and introduces Kooni as the result of the research.

Cards were available for the visitors to take. Each card had a short teaser of Butler's concept of performative gender constitution stating "we're not born a man or a woman, society makes us into one". The card also has a short description of a gender role that females enact in the workplace, with a link to Kooni's website (www.kooni.co).

Finally, Kooni was available on three iPads mounted on the wall for visitors to explore the website, while illustrations of the three stages of how Kooni works were installed on the wall in vynil.

We're not born a man or a woman, society makes us into one.

www.kooni.co @kooni /kooni

KONI

WOMAJUSTIFICATION

the phenomenon of a woman feeling compelled to justify herself to others & unnecessarily using the word 'just'

We're not born a man or a woman, society makes us into one.

www.kooni.co @kooni /kooni

KONI

SORRYLADY

the phenomenon of a woman apologizing as she speaks or engages in activities with peers

We're not born a man or a woman, society makes us into one.

www.kooni.co ⊡ | 🐦 @kooni f /kooni

KONI

WOVERTHINKING
the phenomenon of a woman overthinking what others mean & questioning her actions

We're not born a man or a woman, society makes us into one.

www.kooni.co ⊡ | 🐦 @kooni f /kooni

KONI

WOMANODDING
the phenomenon of a woman using nodding as a non verbal gesture of encouragement & attentiveness to speaker

KONI
YESLADY
the phenomenon of a woman being unnecessarily agreeable

KONI
WOMASILENCE
the phenomenon of a woman staying silent when she needs to speak up & self-express

KONI
WOMASHRINKING
the phenomenon of a woman consuming a small physical space than a man

KONI
HUMBLELADY
the phenomenon of a woman being too humble to recognize her skills as exceptionally different

FEMCLAIMER

the phenomenon of a woman putting a disclaimer before she speaks out her point of view

LIKEABLELADY

the phenomenon of a woman adjusting her behavior because she's seeking to be liked by others

WOMACCOMODATION

the phenomenon of a woman accommodating others' needs before her own

SMILELADY

the phenomenon of a woman smiling unnecessarily in situations or adding smiley faces in written communication

"My subordinates did not accept me or my work directing methods because of my gender and younger age."
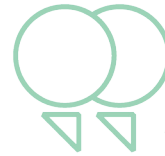
"I do have a strong personality, but sometimes I feel I have to exaggerate it, in order not to be treated as a young inexperienced woman."
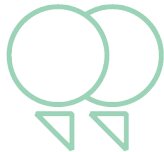
"My male boss is gaining recognition for my work."

"Once a month we celebrate birthdays. Every time everyone expects women (specially mothers) to cut the cake and deliver the plates. Guys just keep chatting until they receive their plate, or offer to open sodas, because you know women are not strong enough for that!"
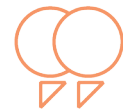
"As a woman in the workplace, it's a continuous struggle of fitting in and trying to build a status for yourself."
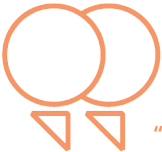
"It's frustrating when men don't listen or base their opinions on assessing the situation but support each other's views, if the counterpart is a female."
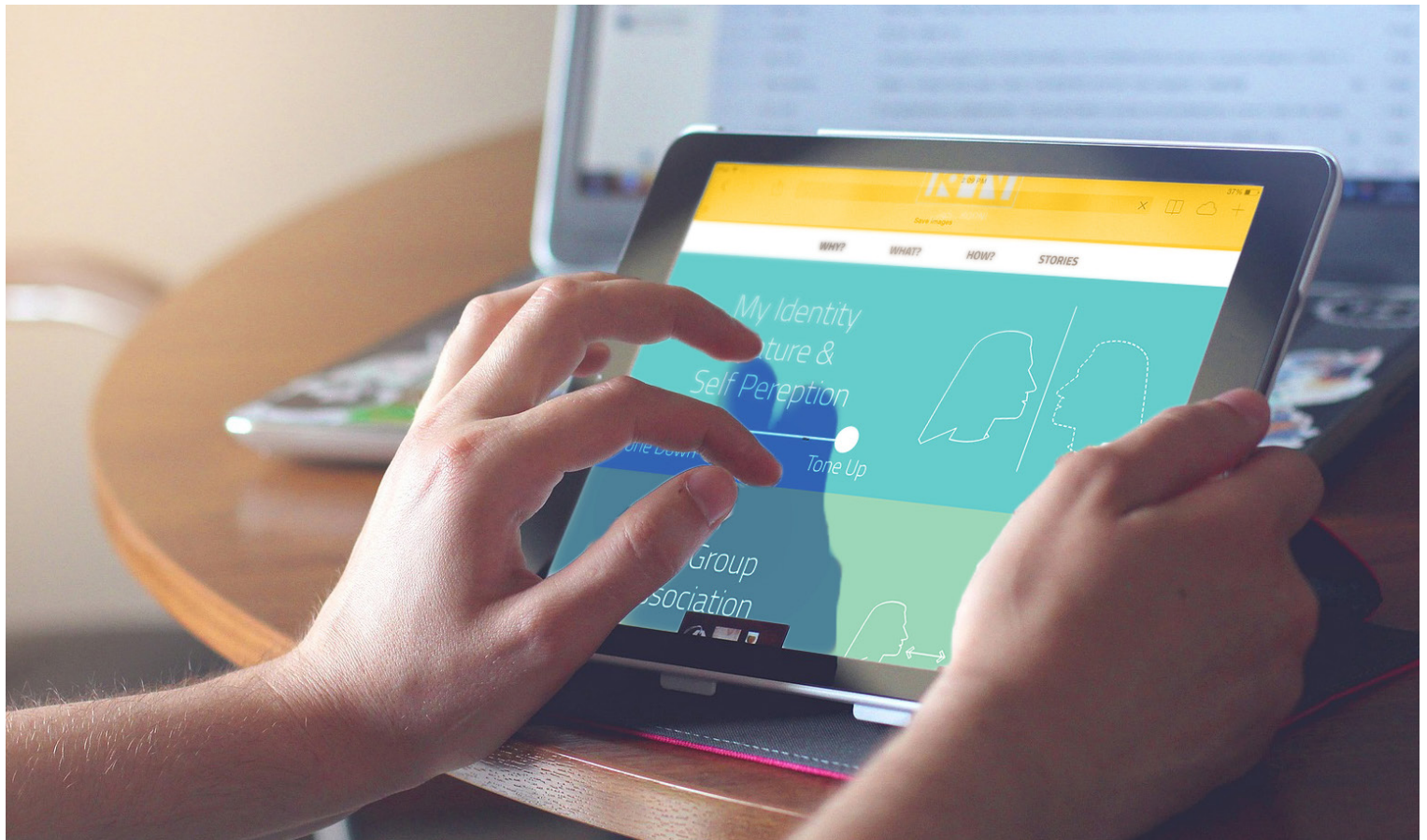
Figure 34: Kooni being in use on an iPad