

# THE ANDRO CHAIR,

## DESIGNING THE UNTHINKABLE- MEN'S RIGHT TO WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IN GYNAECOLOGY.

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### ABSTRACT

In this project we have explored how design may be used as a critical and creative tool for discussing how design is gendered in the contemporary gynaecology chair examination in Sweden. The aim of our design concept is to uncover the veiled gender norms in this problem area and discuss its consequences for women. Our method to do so includes swapping the gender context (Ehrnberger, et al. 2012), which is used to make visible the accepted hidden norms in this specific case. By doing so we wanted to explore if the same situation would be accepted if applied to men. We used the results of our conducted interviews together with related previous research (Wijma, 1998a&b), which reveals that the majority of women have traumatic experiences of the gynecology chair. The empirical findings was applied to our design concept, using the connotations of the existing gynaecology chair to design the male counterpart; the Andro Chair. The women we interviewed experienced the gynaecology chair as "cold", "hard", and even as "torture". We designed the Andro-Chair to communicate these experiences and not to solve a problem. The initial reactions on our design concept points towards a great potential in using design to uncover and discuss this particular problem, since the chair for men is not taken for granted and accepted through hidden norms like the gynaecology chair is for women.

### INTRODUCTION

The Andro-Chair, is a design concept, that is used as a critical design tool aiming to uncover and discuss gender normative medical design, and how it prevents progress and innovation of the gynaecology chair. Gynaecology is a speciality in medicine, covering medical issues of the female reproductive system, and andrology is the male counterpart, dealing with diseases of the male reproductive system. (Wikipedia, 2012) Our design concept aims to portray a conceptual male equivalent to the contemporary gynecology chair. We wanted to explore what would happen if we design an andrology chair for men, inspired by women's traumatic experiences of an gynaecology examination, and if this could help to look beyond the contemporary normalisation of the gynaecology chair.

### GENDER PERSPECTIVE

We have used a gender perspective as basis of our analysis. (Hirdman, 2003; Höjer&Åse,1996) Design plays a significant role in the reproduction of gender, which is well described and developed for example by Ehrnberger, Räsänen and Ilstedt (2012)

### RELATED RESEARCH

Design as a critical tool may be approached in many ways. (Mazé, 2007; Redström, 2007 ; Dunne, 1999; Gislén, 2007) Ehrnberger, Räsänen and Ilstedt (2012) discuss the lack of critical design studies that deals with the underlying structures of gender in design. We agree upon that, and with this design concept and paper we aim to contribute to this field. Barbro Wijma has done research studies on power asymmetric consultations in gynecology. (Wijma 1998a&b) Other researchers who

have investigated this topic include Mattsson (1993; Westhoff et. al.2011 and Hovelius, 1998). Mattsson's (1993) result show that women feel vulnerable and scared. Karin Johannisson, a historian, has done a research study of the idea-history in gynaecology. Her findings shows that gynaecology was historically based on a male power relation, where women was experimented on, as the "other" gender, as an anomaly. (Johannisson, 1994)



Fig. 1. Contemporary gynaecology chair, photographed at a hospital in Stockholm.

#### CRITICAL DESIGN CONCEPT - THE ANDRO-CHAIR.

The Andro-Chair was designed using the result of our conducted interviews (In-depth interviews with four women's experiences of the gynecology examination and a short survey with twenty women. Interviews with health care professionals in andrology, gynaecology and urology.). The empirical findings from the interviews were applied to the formgiving process. Women's description of the contemporary gynaecology chair as: "a violation", "cold and harsh", "unstable", "uncomfortable", "feeling vulnerable", "stainless steel", "torture" (Survey, 2012) were communicated through a steelbased construction of the Andro-Chair. (Fig.2) We wanted to let the negative emotional experiences of the women to determine the form. Inspired by a statement of a Midwife: "You should lay in a position, where you almost fall off the chair - that is the perfect position!" (2012), we designed a tipping function of the chair (the chair tips forward when you mount the chair), with a purpose to make the user feel vulnerable. The tipping function makes it easier for the doctor to exam the patient, but ignores the experience of the patient. The leg rests of the chair are designed to keep the patients legs wide apart both to support the examination made by the doctor, but also to design the exam experience to be more vulnerable and unpleasant for the

patient.



Fig. 2 The Andro-Chair.

The stomach position (Fig 3.) was chosen to make the patient feel more vulnerable, since the patient then can't see what is happening. This was inspired by the interviews where a woman expressed that it's a "Defenseless position"(Woman, 36 years, 2012). The Andro-Chair was designed to express something violating, humiliating, cold, and hard, with a purpose to create an awareness on how women and women's bodies are treated in gynaecology. We argue for the importance of making visible this problem area, before it's possible to implement alternatives. By designing an Andro Chair for men, we wanted to unveil that the gynecology chair examination has been accepted and normalised.



Fig. 3 The body position in the Andro-Chair.

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