

welcome

a guide: how to engage with this

<https://files.warwick.ac.uk/tholgate1/browse/student+devised+assessment+-+tiana+holgate+-+1718482> – link to access ‘the project’ and audio files.

1. Reading ‘welcome’ (this document)
2. Reading/watching the ‘project’ – this is the core piece. It is attached as an mp4, as it includes video, which can be accessed using the warwick.files link above. Please press ‘pause’ to read as you progress through this.
3. Listening to, if you are able, the audio files in warwick.files in the following order. Transcripts have also been uploaded, so please- engage with the content in the form that best suits you.
 - a. ‘kandy – seasons of change’
 - b. ‘lauren – seasons of change’
 - c. ‘the seasons’

welcome – contents

1. who is this for?
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welcome

Developing this project has been very nerve wracking and uncomfortable. This discomfort shows me that I have done something right by my measure, and for that I am proud. I hope this 'welcome' provides insight into where I have come from, what this module has stirred and changed within me, and where my learning may continue moving on from this.

who is this for?

This is for those who are going through difficult times. Who feel as though they are in a season of stagnancy, as if they are being changed more than they are making change. For those feeling powerless and uncomfortable and scared. This project is for those who feel they need to escape the linear way of processing things. For those who are questioning the legitimacy of their experiences and feelings. For those who need to see – it doesn't need to make sense to be real. It is for those who don't know how to confront the changes that are happening to them because they don't know what it means to feel heard and seen. For those who want to return to their inner child because the world has changed them so much, but they can't quite find their inner child. It is a space to explore, to question and be comfortable in not finding the answers. It is for people who are scared that their experiences or feelings are defining who they are.

The form of this project directs the messiness of what I have just shared, a raw exploration, unanswered questions, long pauses and *sigh*.

For whoever may need it, it is a reminder that it is scary to find your truth and speak it authentically but it can be done.

unpacking the project: seasons of change

Put simply, this project is an exploration of how I have navigated an extremely complex period of change.

In March of 2020, my father was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease, a terminal disease which is eating away at his muscles and bodily functions day by day. When I decided, back in October, to explore *this* change for my student devised assessment, I had a rigid idea of what that may look like. As you navigate the material I have submitted, I hope you will agree that it is now by no means rigid.

The project explores how 'seasons' come, go, overlap, intersect, and look different in different contexts. It explores how my family & I have navigated these seasons. The seasons I speak of here are

emotional seasons

political seasons

personal seasons

lonely seasons

scary seasons

joyful seasons

and everything in between. What does it mean to recognise that so much is changing, and before you have the chance to figure out how you are going to respond, it has changed again? That is where this project was born, initially.

I believe this project has been born again with every new element or idea or conversation that has been introduced. I had a conversation with Naomi de la Tour back in Autumn, I proposed the vague idea I had (whilst riddled with anxiety). We talked about seasons, about messiness, about change. The project felt exciting, uncomfortable and hard. This told me that it was a project that needed to be completed.

As someone who has committed a huge amount of my time to challenging social structures, battling the issues we see within academic institutions, fighting racism and sexism, supporting people who have been victim to abuse within universities and more, it felt quite uncomfortable to complete a project on 'change' about *myself*. I felt like I was doing a disservice to all the previous work I've completed in activism and social change, as though working on a project about a personal project of my own would be selfish.

This thought had to be challenged.

I had to challenge the idea that 'change' means giving everything and having nothing left, of working to save the world when your own is crashing. The change I explore in this project is no less legitimate than any other. Personal change is political change. More on this later.

my intentions

"Nothing without intention, do nothing without intention" – Solange Knowles

I love that throughout the module, we were encouraged to think about and confront our intentions and make them known to others. This praxis stuck with me throughout the development of the project. On 16th November 2020, whilst gathering my ideas for this project, I discovered what my intentions are:

throughout the process of developing this project I hope to be authentic, vulnerable and honest

i hope to intentionally confront all of the feelings that i can't quite articulate when i am asked 'how are you'

i hope to express gratitude to the spaces and people that have supported, and continue to support, my navigation of this complex period

i hope to share my testimony of God's provision and love and how the toughest year of my life has simultaneously been the one where I have grown the closest to Him

i hope to share the growth and deterioration of my mental health all at once

i hope to address the complex feelings that come with grief, alongside the guilt i sometimes have for feelings those feelings

i hope to share my fears of the future

of the things i can't control

of a life without 'dad'

of grieving

of the pain my mother and sister may feel

of having to talk about this forever

i hope to share an insight into my family, our union, our journey and tell a story which will inevitably end with ...

the medium is the message

Developing the medium, or form, of this project was hard. I tried so hard to challenge the idea that I had to write in a traditional form that institutions typically reward. However, in a bid to be creative, I discovered that I truly *love* to write. I lost this as I got older and my words became something which determined my academic fate or job prospects. Re-discovering my love for writing through this project and module has been so liberating and invigorating! The idea that I can just write and write and write and that those words are all a product of my small brain is fascinating. Therefore, throughout the project you will find a collection of: words, journal entries, photos, videos, letters, conversations and prayers.

You will find that each page in the project takes no particular order, this is to represent the idea that the expressions themselves came in no particular order, in the simplest way possible. Further, you will see that some of the material in the project dates from before we began the Change module – this was also intentional. Throughout my academic career I have realised that University is full of beginnings and endings. Essays 'begin' and 'end', modules 'begin' and 'end'. But what if this is not the case? What if the ideas that have grown throughout the project actually began in my childhood but are only now being identified, named and paid attention to? As the medium *is* the message, the use of my personal archival material to develop this project exemplifies that giving material a new medium, creates a new message.

So, the mediums:

Words – in full sentences but sometimes just words alone, too.

Journal entries – these have been taken from my personal journal over the course of the past year, they have been scanned and transcribed in the exact form that they were written. This is to reflect my intentions in the rawest way, without even the guise of an ‘assessment’ to affect how they were written.

Photos and videos – some old and some new, showing my family and I. Pay attention to how you view these photos differently having engaged with the whole project.

Letters – there are two letters within the project, these are words that were written to members of my family and have been shared with them. At times when developing the project, I struggled to know who I was talking to. These letters helped me to bring it back to its roots.

Conversations – there are 3 audio files included in the project, they are conversations that I conducted with my mother and sister (for which ethical approval was sought). They bring their voices into the picture and exemplify why ‘seasons of change’ says everything but nothing all at once.

Prayers – as a Christian, prayer has been a core element of this project being developed. It has also been a medium that has sustained me over the past year, see these prayers as part desperation, part gratitude.

As you engage with the content in this project, maybe things will stick out to you that seemed miniscule to me. Maybe things will resonate, maybe things will go over your head.

my process of defining change

I would now like to share with you, how and why I have interpreted ‘change’ throughout this module and the development of my project.

Change (via: merriam-webster):

Verb: replace (something) with something else, especially something of the same kind that is newer or better. To make radically different. To undergo transformation.

Noun: an act or process through which something becomes different. Transformation.

Substitution.

A classic google search was my starting point a few months ago when I was seeking a starting point for defining change. But only reflecting on my personal experiences allowed me to define change, as not something that we do, but something that is done.

‘to make radically different’

‘to undergo transformation’

These two phrases succinctly summarise the past year for me, they summarise some days, weeks, conversations and importantly they summarise my process of embarking this project. It has changed me. The Tiana who joined our first seminar is not the Tiana who is submitting this project. I’m the

same but different and that is what change is to me. Returning home, finding and enacting values, learning and re-learning, identifying problems and solving them, being the change, being changed.

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As a discipline, philosophy has explored time and change in various forms. Despite critiques that Philosophy is outdated in many ways and has colonial underpinnings, I have found many elements useful when applying them to sociological theory, such as black feminist thought.

John E. Smith (1969) talks about times and the difference between 'chronos' and 'kairos', both deriving from Greek philosophy.

'Chronos' refers to a quantitative definition of time, one that can be measured – age, quantity, duration, length. However, 'kairos', as Smith puts it:

points to a qualitative character of time, to the special position an event or action occupies in a series, to a season when something appropriately happens that cannot happen at 'any' time, but only at 'that time', to a time that marks an opportunity which may not recur.

Kairos is, therefore, peculiarly relevant to historical action and to historical enquiry because it points to the significance and purpose of events and to the idea of constellations of events yielding results which would not have been possible at other times and under other circumstance.

I have repeatedly returned back to this distinction between Chronos and Kairos when thinking about what it means to be an agent of change. When our Change module began, I had relatively rigid ideas of what it means to make change, how activism 'works', the importance of strategizing and planning and communicating. But what I hadn't paid enough attention to, was the idea that the *form* in which we make change, what we choose to change, how we choose to do it, the role of our previous experiences and the influence of the 'universe'.

The idea that a 'constellation of events' is repeatedly occurring and affecting our decision making has huge implications for how we make change. It allows us to become aware of the structures that we engage in as agents of change, and it allows us to address where we are coming from as individuals or communities and where we can go.

When thinking about the 'form' in which change-making takes place, I have further understood the power that our voices hold as we seek to become agents of change. There is power in our stories. There is power in saying 'I need rest' 'I am so happy' 'I am scared'. When words are shared within a community, our words have even more power. I have become quite seasoned in sharing my opinions, values and views in order to support a programme of change through activism. What I haven't become so seasoned at, is recognising the power of my experiences and stories, and recognising that the longer I keep those to myself, the more I am limiting myself as an agent of change.

Changing, changed.

This project explores change on a continuum as consistently happening and adapting. I have explored what it means to be *changed* and how this affects my capacity to make change. I have tried

to explore how the experiences of that and my family have been formed by the changes occurring around us.

...so my project was not produced to answer the question: how do we make something radically different? But to reflect on the question:

*what happens when we are **made** radically different?*

as a black feminist

As a black feminist, this project is rooted in lived experiences, in speaking up, in sharing. Black feminism is a place I call home and a place that values my voice, as it values yours.

Audre Lorde's 'Your Silence Will Not Protect You' is one of the most important places to begin, when reflecting on the importance of lived experience. Lorde tells us that the journey from being silent, to speaking, to acting, is not an easy one – she confronts the fear that comes with this. This is a silence which I fight with on a daily basis.

Should I say this? Will I seem like an angry black woman? Will anyone care? What if I sound rude? Do my words have any value at all? I'll be safer if I don't speak.

But Lorde's writing has shown me that regardless of whether I want to speak, or feel safe to speak, silence will only endanger me further. I feel these silences that plague our world *must* be broken. I see my project as a way of breaking a silence.

desires, commitments

Another large influence of this project has been the work of Robert C. Solomon, in his book 'The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life'. Solomon explores how every emotion we encounter is an ideology, a starting point which informs what comes next. Our emotions can become desires, which become intentions, which can sometimes become commitments and actions.

Every such desire, however, cannot be expressed in action. Where direct and effective expression is possible, desire turns to intention ... and manifests itself in action. But where such expression is not possible ... our emotions may adopt a complex subjective strategy aimed not at changing the world, but rather at changing our view of the world.

To link Solomon's work back to my aforementioned black feminist standpoint – this project has aimed to address how emotions (which we usually cannot control) influence our desires, intentions and capacities for change. How do I make change when my world as I know it is ~~changing~~ crumbling?

what I am challenging

There are two, very specific, issues in our world which I hoped to address in the production of this project:

1. the archetype of the 'strong, powerful black woman'
2. the generational curse that encourages black women's silence

the archetype of the strong powerful black woman

The idea that all black women are 'strong' and 'powerful' cripples our community. Despite being developed in a way that seems to lift black women up, it merely negates the societal structures that we have had to be so 'strong' to fight. It also feeds into the dehumanisation of black women that is present in all areas of society – the idea that we do not feel pain. We do not have emotions. We can do anything!

As I have navigated my dad's ill health within my family, I have repeatedly found myself trying to be 'strong' – to continue aiming for that 1st class degree, to apply for that Masters at Cambridge, to apply for that job. This self-inflicted invisibilisation of my pain and struggles is the product of an age old tale that black women are superhuman.

By developing a project that reveals my deepest fears and worries, is an attempt to re-humanise me. To challenge that trope, willingly in some ways and unwillingly in others.

the generational curse that encourages black women's silence

As a woman of Guyanese and Jamaican descent, I have grown up acutely aware of many expectations placed on women in our communities, as I have grown older, these have been placed onto me too. One of these expectations, is an expectation of silence. Our needs must come last, and there are some things that just should not be said or done. This is another stereotype that this project aims to challenge.

To bring this into context, the way in which I explore - the realities of our family dynamic, its imperfections, my coming-to-terms with my dad's absence and more – are all attempts to break the generational curse which says black women must remain silent to uphold the image of a 'perfect family'. That we must keep the personal behind closed doors and get on with it.

I hope to be the last woman in my family line to be witness to this.

limitations

When thinking about how to address the potential limitations of this work, many thoughts and ideas came to mind. The most prominent, is that due to the complexity of the topic I am discussing and it's layered nature, I don't feel as though any project could entirely demonstrate every 'season of change' that I (and my family) have encountered.

I found myself thinking of more and more and more that could be added, this required setting boundaries and striking a balance between the aims of the project in relation to our module and the busyness that is my mind.

I think a further limitation, is that due to the project's black feminist standpoint, an awareness of the importance of lived experience is required. As many black feminists have written about, such as Angela Davis and Gail Lewis, the academy does not necessarily recognise the importance of lived experience as a form of knowledge production. As I prepare to submit this, I have questions such as: will this be received in the way I intended? Do I feel comfortable to share this? I can't say that I have concrete answers to either of these questions.

Ultimately, I am okay with this project not being 'perfect'. I am okay with it being something that can continue to grow, beyond this submission. I find that exciting.

thank you

Lastly, I'd like to extend a huge thank you to Naomi de la Tour for supporting the development of this project, knowingly and unknowingly. This module has revolutionised the way in which I view change, and posed a huge challenge in confronting my desires, intentions and agency. I am hugely grateful for this. I hope this 'welcome' note and the project itself demonstrates the magnitude of change that has been ignited within my in the process of its creation.

I am also hugely grateful to the other members of the module, for intentionally building community. I am grateful to those close to me that support my development, allowing me to be so vulnerable within this student devised assessment.

I submit this assignment feeling extremely vulnerable, but overwhelmingly and exceedingly proud.

welcome.

References

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