***WOMENSwear.***

First performed at Lincoln Performing Arts Centre on Tuesday 19th May 2015 in the main auditorium.

Written by Samantha Jo Thomas.

Directed by Samantha Jo Thomas.

Stage Managed by Holly Hutchinson.

Produced by Holly Hutchinson.

Lighting Design by Holly Hutchinson.

Sound Design by Lauren Brook.

Marketing Manager Lauren Brook.

Performed by Lauren Brook, Holly Hutchinson and Samantha Jo Thomas.

**Scene One**

**Sam** This is not a play. This is not a play in the conventional sense. In fact, I’m not really sure what it is. This is a script, written and edited by a writer, directed by a director, and performed by three performers. It follows stories. It confesses truths. It challenges perceptions. It misconceives. This is not a play. This is not a play that follows one storyline. This is not a play with acts and scenes. This is not a play. This is a confession.

**Lauren** In your own words, how would you define the term ‘woman’?

**Sam** A woman is someone who is always late.

**Holly** A woman is someone who is female.

**Sam** A woman typically possesses breasts and a vagina.

**Holly** A woman either looks female, or thinks, or feels like one.

**Sam** A woman is loving.

**Holly** A woman is independent.

**Sam** A woman is knows what she wants.

**Holly** A woman is gentle.

**Sam** A woman is vulnerable.

**Holly** A woman is stroppy.

**Sam** A woman is caring.

**Holly** A woman is human.

**Sam** A woman is the completion of a man.

**Lauren** In your own words, what do you think the role of a woman is?

**Holly** A woman does not have a certain role anymore.

**Sam** A woman should look after the family.

**Holly** A woman should make a difference in the world.

**Sam** A woman should cook and clean.

**Holly** A woman should look hot.

**Sam** A woman can be anything; whether that is to be a stay-at-home mother, or working a full-time job.

**Holly** A woman should care.

**Sam**  A woman has no specific role, she should be free to take on the roles she needs and wants to.

**Holly** A woman should reproduce.

**Sam** A woman should take care of the men in her life.

**Holly** A woman should advocate equality between the sexes.

**Sam** A woman should make sandwiches.

**Scene Two**

**Sam** When did I start thinking about gender? I don't really know... see, looking back my mum bought me toys which would now be seen as too 'girly' - too stereotypically female. Whatever that even means. I had a baby Annabel when I was about nine, she was my favourite toy and I used to dress her up, feed her, and take her on walks in this little push chair I had for her. My sister also had a baby born, so we would have a tea party together with our dolls. For me that was normal... I grew up in a society which taught me that girls played with dolls, girls had tea parties, and girls looked after babies.Throughout my childhood it was the norm for girls to wear pink, to wear makeup, to play with each other’s hair. My friends and I used to sit for hours trying out the latest hair trends on each other. And at secondary school I chose to study Hairdressing as a GCSE. To this day I still don’t understand that decision – I didn’t even want to be one! As we grew older, my friends and I used to spend our lunchtimes in front of the mirrors in the on-site salon – topping up our make-up and straightening and curling our hair. In the end, I think as a class we collectively tested every hair colour on the colour wheel… within a few years, my hair went from naturally blonde to light blonde (probably more yellow after I discovered sun-in), light brown, dark brown, red, red with blonde highlights, mousey brown, mousey brown with highlights, light blonde again, white, mousey brown again, and black. I guess you could say I was a little experimental when I was younger, but I thought that was what girls were supposed to do.

**Scene Three**

**Shabana** I remember waking up one morning to the sound of joy in my house. My father was listening to BBC News on his small, grey radio. There was a big smile on his face which was unusual then, because the news mostly depressed him – I was six when the Taliban took over Afghanistan and made it illegal for girls to go to school. I was raised in a country that has been destroyed by decades of war. Fewer than six percent of the women my age have made it beyond high school. And for five years I dressed as a boy to escort my older sister, who was no longer allowed to be outside alone, to a secret school. Each day, we took a different route so that no one would suspect where we were going. We would cover our books in grocery bags so it would seem as though we were just out shopping. It was the only way we could both be educated. The school was in a house; more than 100 of us were packed into one small living room – We all knew that we were risking our lives. From time to time, school would suddenly be cancelled for a week because the Taliban were suspicious… We always wondered what they knew about us. Were we being followed? Do they know where we live? We were scared, but still, school was where we wanted to be. During the Taliban years, I remember there were times I would get so frustrated by our life and always being scared and not seeing a future. I would want to quit, but my father would say, “listen, my daughter, you can lose everything you own in your life. Your money can be stolen.You can be forced to leave your home during war. But the one thing that will always remain with you is what is here, and if we have to sell our blood to pay your school fees, we will.

***Pause.***

So do you want to continue?

**Scene Four**

**Sam** We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

We –

**Scene Five**

**Lauren**  I wouldn’t say I was really girly when I was little, but I also wouldn’t say that I was a tomboy. You see, I loved my Barbie dolls, but it wasn’t the typical Barbie fashion show at play time with me- I loved getting my Barbie’s to ride horses, become doctors and teachers and look after Barbie babies. I wasn’t interested in the idea of the dolls being pretty, more so in the joy of seeing my dolls act out *my* dream careers, saving lives and galloping off into the sunset. I was infatuated with this special toy horse I got one Christmas- she was called Willow, and my brown haired Barbie had endless fun riding around the living room on her, complete with a riding hat, riding boots and a saddle. Playing with dolls was all I had ever really known; they were the customary Christmas and birthday gift, but I never took notice of their non-anatomically correct bodies, their perfect skin, their wardrobes upon wardrobes of outfits in the toyshop. I loved them because they had the perfect lives, in my living room, where they could wear whatever they wanted, be whatever they wanted and say whatever they wanted. They did the things I dreamt of doing when I grew up, without the pressure or expectation of the outside world leering in. They weren’t just clothes horses; they were people, with personalities. So, I guess I noticed gender in the form of those plastic dolls, the pinkness of every Barbie dress, the suave Ken figure and how it was already pre-determined that they would be together in perfect harmony, forever. I never had a Ken doll; my Barbie’s were independent, and I liked it that way. I didn’t even know exactly what boys were at that time, or why every girl had to have one on their arm. I just knew that the plastic ladies, who had it all under control, were doing just fine.

**Scene Six**

**Meera Vijayann, India.** Talking about empowerment is odd, because when we talk about empowerment, what affects us most are the stories. I’ve spent the last 27 years of my life in India, lived in three small towns and two major cities. Throughout my life, I’ve seen women – family, friends and colleagues – live through these experiences, and they rarely talk about it.What happened one night in December 2012 changed my life. So a young girl, a 23-year-old student, boarded a bus in Delhi with her male friend. There were six men on the bus – young men who you might encounter every day in India. The girl was raped repeatedly. Forcibly penetrated with a blunt rod, beaten, bitten, and left to die. Her friend was gagged, attacked, and knocked unconscious. She died on the 29th December…

India plunged into darkness.The media was filled with stories about all the horrific deeds that Indian men are capable of. They were compared to animals, sexually repressed beasts.

No one knew what to do, and no one wanted to be responsible for it.

***Pause.***

When I was seven, my parents employed a private mathematics tutor to help me with my school work. He molested me. He would put his hand up my skirt. He would put his hands up my skirt and he would tell me that he knew how to make me feel good… At seventeen, a boy from my high school circulated an email detailing all of the sexually aggressive things he could do to me because I didn’t pay attention to him… At nineteen, I helped a friend, whose parents had forcibly married her to an older man, escape an abusive marriage… At twenty-one, when my friend and I were walking down the road one afternoon, a man pulled down his pants and masturbated in front of us. We called for help, and nobody came… At 25, when I was walking home alone one evening, two men on a motorcycle attacked me. I spent two nights in hospital recovering from trauma and injuries.

***Pause.***

Life in India is not easy. Most of us say that women are denied their rights, but the truth is that women are often the ones to deny themselves the rights they have. You see, no one ever tells you that true empowerment comes from giving yourself the permission to think and act. We fear the sound of our own voice, for it means admission, but it is this that gives us the power to change our environment.

**Scene Seven**

**Sam** We pretended to cook dinner, but we actually bought it ready-made from Sainsbury’s.

We sung to Peter Andre, a lot.

We stayed at home instead of going to work, not because we were lazy, but because we didn’t want you to grow up without us.

We liked what you did last night.

We carried you up the stairs when you fell asleep on the sofa.

We wore tight fitting clothes to attract men.

We waited up for you to get home.

We fucked up.

We thought you looked really sexy with your hair tied back.

We are slaves to our emotions.

We cleaned the dishes earlier than normal because we were excited about the new washing up liquid.

**Scene Eight**

**Lauren** When I was very young, I didn’t notice the role my Nan played in our family, or the struggles she went through as a woman throughout her life. She did everything by the woman’s handbook, 1950s edition- found a respectable man, married him after a few dances in the ballroom, and had his children. As the years went by, my granddad would no longer be expected to go out and earn a living- but my nan’s role in their life together never once changed. My granddad was an alcoholic, and my Nan would do everything around the house- cooking cleaning, looking after my sister and I. I noticed gender then, how she was the woman and she did everything, while my granddad sat in his chair reading the newspaper all day. She was compassionate and caring, the one to hug us and put us to bed. I noticed how all her efforts went into other people, and never herself. She gave herself completely to her loved ones, the husband who treated her terribly and the granddaughters who adored her, without a second thought. I remember that my sister and I would stay at my nan’s house, and in the evening my granddad would get drunk and my nan would have to drag him up the stairs to their bedroom; and it was like she was the only thing holding him together. Eventually, long after I had grown up a bit and understood what was going on, my sister started refusing to go to my grandparents’ house, not wanting to see my granddad drunk, not wanting to smell the whisky, not wanting to witness my nan’s horrid life and watch her slowly shrinking into herself. It was routine; my Nan had not been brought up to leave the life she had built with her husband, to start fresh, to abandon everything and start again. She stayed, because in her generation, a woman’s only goal was to get married, keep the home tidy and reproduce. She had succeeded, and there was nothing left to achieve. Nothing left for a timid, tired, fed up and frightened woman, in such a big, scary world.

**Scene Nine**

**Holly** We walked into town to buy some new candles and were wolf whistled at.

We snuck into the eighteen rated movie.

We replied to your text message with ‘K’, so that you would know we were angry with you.

We are either too fat, or too thin. Nothing in between.

We bleed.

We sing to Vengaboys in the shower.

We fought for our right to have an abortion.

We talk. A lot.

We are feminists who hate men.

We know what we want.

We polished the silverware for two hours to impress your mother.

We like cuddles.

**Scene Ten**

**Eman Mohammed, Palestine.** When I turned 19, I started my career as the first female photojournalist in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. The perception of women’s lives there is passive and my work was considered a serious insult to local traditions. The male-dominated field made my presence unwelcome by all possible means. They made it clear that a woman must not do a man’s job. Photo agencies in Gaza refused to train me because of my gender – Three of my colleagues went as faras to drive me to an open air strike zone where the explosion sounds were the only thing I could here. I only realised we weren’t there to document the event when the three of them got back into the armoured Jeep and drove away, waving and laughing… leaving me behind in the open air strike zone. For a moment, I felt terrified, humiliated and sorry for myself. My colleagues’ actions were not the only death threat I’ve received, but it was the most dangerous one. Until a recent time, a lot of women were not allowed to work or pursue education. At times of such doubled war including both social restrictions on women and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, women’s dark and bright stories were fading away. To men, women’s stories were seen as inconsequential. My work is not meant to hide the scars of war, but to show the full frame of unseen stories. I started paying closer attention to women’s lives in Gaza. Because of my gender, I had access to worlds where my male colleagues were forbidden. As a Palestinian female photographer, the journey of struggle, survival and everyday life has inspired me to overcome the community taboo and see a different side of war and its aftermath – I became a witness with a choice; to run away, or stand still.

**Scene Eleven**

**Lauren** We served the whiskey in the billiard room.

We hold our breasts while running down the stairs, just to make sure they don’t knock us out.

We love you, but you need to get a grip.

We wish our eyeliner wings would match.

We stood in front of horses.

We fucked up.

We dreamed of spending Sunday mornings in the park with you.

We bought perfume to smell nice.

We laughed at you when your cappuccino left you with a milky moustache.

We would never leave the house without makeup.

We stayed to make life easier.

We fall in love too easily.

**Scene Tweleve**

**Holly** When I was young, I didn’t really enjoy playing with dolls. In fact, I used to bite all of the fingers of them off. God I hated them. Looking back, my brothers enjoyed playing with toys more associated to femininity as well I suppose. I remember my older brother, when he was about five, getting really excited over a toy sweeping brush and hoover that he got for his birthday. But I was more excited about the scooter that I got for Christmas, I couldn’t wait to go and play on it. I didn’t care that it was miserable outside. I guess you could say I was a bit of a tomboy. When I was at school, I never used to wear make-up, I didn’t think I needed too, I wasn’t bothered by my appearance, the fact that I was skinnier than the other girls didn’t bother me either. When I was younger I used to tell myself the reason that I started wearing make-up was because I wanted to. But I didn’t, I wore makeup to fit in, I got braces because girls made fun of my weird vampire fanged smile. I shaved off most of my eyebrows because a girl said I needed too, I thought it was normal.

**Scene Thirteen**

**Payam, Kurdistan.** I remember it distinctly. It was a Tuesday afternoon, my sister and I were playing in front of my uncle’s house; she was five and I was seven. As we stood there, an old lady approached us with my mother in tow. None of the girls from the village liked her. “You too, come with me”, she said. As we followed, my mother stayed. I didn’t understand. We arrived at a small mud house which smelled of dirt and crushed leaves. In the corner of the room sat two other women who I recognised from the village. They were what the locals described as ‘Doctors’, but they held no medical qualifications – or any qualification for that matter*.* The two ladies made their way to me and my sister, each with a piece of black cloth in their hands. One of the ladies grabbed my arms and blindfolded me. I kicked and I pushed but she had much more strength. I could hear my little sister struggling. I heard my sister's scream from across the room… It was the most agonising sound I’ve heard to this day. It was the sort of sound I never want to hear again. Her crying died out eventually. She passed out, from the fear, from the pain. I’m not sure how long it took for me to regain consciousness but when I did I felt sore. I opened my eyes to see one of the ladies applying crushed leaves to my wound. I stayed in that room with my sister for around a month. My mother would come and visit us, bringing food and new clothes with her. I would ask; “Why did they cut me? How could you let them do that to me”? After a moment of silence she would reply; “My daughter, I did protect you. Those who are not cut in our village are looked down upon. No one will ever eat anything they cook. They are seen as impure – unclean. You would be an outcast and I did not want that for my daughters”.

I am classed as one of the lucky victims*.*

**Scene Fourteen**

We cry.

We are always late.

We bitched about Jane from the office.

We are always feminine and it would be a sin to wear baggy clothes.

We reproduce to further the human race.

We complained all of the time.

We have large breasts that often get in the way of things.

We seduced you that night.

We do not deserve equality.

We do not want it.

We gave birth.

We found that you were certainly more drunk than we were, despite you telling us we drank at least two more glasses of wine than you.

We were sexualised by the media from a young age.

We hid around the corner so that you wouldn’t see us.

We wore bras.

We burned them.

We still do.

We lost our virginity under the stars listening to N-Sync.

We are hormonal.

We did tell you that we are always right.

We are the weaker sex.

We bought shoes.

We bought more shoes.

We fell in love with the wrong person.

We really wanted it to work.

We know you said it didn't matter, but please believe us when it say that it did.

We saw you playing with your friends in the playground.

We laughed about the same thing hundreds of times.

We shared a carton of Ribena while listening to Aerosmith.

We have not had sex in six months.

We have not had sex in three years.

We have not had sex.

We started our period while opening Christmas presents when we were ten years old.

We wanted to get married, have children and settle down.

We saw you bump your knee.

We wanted you to know that we were really proud of you.

We saw you roll your eyes.

We would like you to know that even though we are wrong, we are still right.

We are sorry, but we were too tired to make love to you last night.

We know you know where the right hole is, and we do not believe you when you tell us it was an accident.

We are terrible drivers.

We wedged toilet roll in our pants because we ran out of sanitary towels.

We fought for our right to vote.

We washed your favourite blue shirt and accidentally shrunk it.

We were raped because we wore a short skirt and crop top

We sorry that we had a miscarriage.

We trimmed our pubes with nail scissors.

We have terrible mood swings.

We kissed you because we didn’t know what else to do.

We were indecisive as to whether we wanted a cup of tea or coffee.

We allowed ourselves to be vulnerable when we told you we loved you.

We picked an argument because we wanted you to show us that you cared.

We fucked a lot of people.

We felt scared last night when we were walking home on our own.

We are the emotional sex.

We left because we had no choice.

We once managed eight and a half minutes.

We wish we could be mermaids.

We waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited…

We wear red lipstick.

We really wanted the last Hobnob, but we saved it for you anyway.

We sit in parliament.

We made photo album after photo album, so that we could remind ourselves.

We saw you checking Rachel from accounts out.

We hooked up.

We smiled when we saw you coming into the arrivals hall at the airport.

We boarded the boat to give you a better life.

We put your dreams and ambitions before our own.

We put our name on the mortgage.

We saw a spider on the wall and we squashed it with an old newspaper.

We put twenty pound in your birthday card.

We sexted you because we felt horny and it made us feel better.

We swiped left instead of right.

We. We. We. We. We. We. We. We. We. We. We.

We waited for the right time but it never came.

We tried not to get attached.

We tried not to fall for you too fast.

We hooked up with all of the wrong people, but it felt right.

We hid our books in Topshop bags.

We played seven minutes in Heaven.

We laughed at your jokes even though they were shit.

We accidentally read your text messages from Katie, where you failed to mention we existed.

We smoked cigarettes behind the wall where the teachers couldn't see us.

We got pissed off WKD and cider.

We couldn't get up for work and slept through our alarm.

We waited for you to call and you didn't.

We thought it would be better not to tell you that our mother was coming around for dinner this evening.

We thought it would be better not to tell you.

We saw your text message ten minutes ago, but didn’t want to look too keen.

We wanted a one night stand, so we had one.

We scrolled through Facebook until our phones died.

We didn’t get the memo because the memo machine broke.

We have absolutely no idea what we want.

We find it really difficult to be angry at you.

We were just calling to see what time you would be home.

We were left in an open air strike zone.

We remember the purple outfit you wore for the prom.

We quite fancied your brother when he was younger.

We quite fancied your sister too.

We got drunk while you stayed sober.

We sang happy birthday plenty of times.

We drank far too much wine.

We dressed as we pleased.

We loved.

We laughed.

We desired.

We let go.

We gave in.

We disempowered ourselves.