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RE: Chicago AIGA article

If you think the statistics would be better presented as small tables before each section's discussion, I can revise this. At the moment I think it flows OK. Perhaps a better title? more provocative? Let me know.

WOMEN (AND MEN) IN DESIGN - WHO ARE WE? WHERE ARE WE GOING?  
WHAT DO WE THINK?

Let's say, for the purposes of provocation, that I began with two hypotheses: one, that women as graphic designers are cooperative, adequately educated, high-minded values-driven, collegial, more likely to 'use' design for social purposes, young, anxiously balancing career and family, rewarded through influence and change, little known to the profession through work or organizations, aware of sexism in design and not wholly satisfied with their design careers and that, two, men as graphic designers are ego-driven, individualistic, well-educated, money and power-driven, more likely to see design as a business service, middle-aged, with families, rewarded through money and power, known to the profession through work and organizations, unaware of sexism in design and satisfied with their careers in design.

Do I have your attention?

Here's the situation: I think we graphic designers need to know more about ourselves, where we come from, our lives in design, where we want to go, what we are satisfied with, what makes us consider career changes. Last year, on sabbatical leave, I had the time and money to start investigating these questions. I started with a questionnaire which I sent to a 10% sample (with a random start) of the national AIGA membership (with permission from NY headquarters). Perhaps some of you filled it out; I know some of you chucked it. I received back 222 responses or 48%. With such a response, the sample can be considered representative of the whole.

The gross stereotypes which I state above were one way to begin formulating my requests; I subsequently refined them over the course of 95 questions. And, you may be pleased to know, many of the hypotheses were quite wrong.

First, to describe the respondent group demographically. They come from all 50 states and are almost equally divided female and male. The designers range in age from 20 to 53 for the women, with over half in their 30s; while the men range from 24 to 70, with only a third in their 30s. One prediction proved true: women in design are generally younger, or another way to put it, designers entering the field are more likely to be female. Divided in racial/ethnic groups, 87% are white, 4% are Asian-American, 3% are African-American, and 2% are Latino-Hispanic (4% are 'other' of more than one background, among these 5 Native-Americans).

There were many differences found between female and male designers; there were also many similarities. Those unfair generalizations will provide guideposts for this discussion. Differences were found in levels of education. More women designers have BAs than men (31 % to 22 %); women and men hold BFAs (50% and 51%) and BSs (8% and 10%) almost equally. Greater difference between younger designers was found, which reflects reported increases over the last decade in female enrollments in design programs and their subsequent entrance into the profession. Graduate education in design is also more likely among women (28 % to 20% for men). While I did not inquire about salaries because many others have, from these other studies we know that there is a pay gap. It is striking to consider this along with the higher education levels. It may be that women return to school in an attempt to erase salary differences; this appears to be the wrong reason.

Who is more power-hungry? Or why do we continue to do what we do? When asked to rate these rewards of design work: money, fame, power, fun, influence, social change, and self-expression, both women and men ranked fun first, with money a close second. The others in descending order were self-expression, influence, social change, with fame and power switching in last place depending on gender (women put fame last, men put power last). Comparing each reward by gender, most are close. Fun was rated very important or important by 97% of the women and 100% of the men; money was rated in the

same way by 93% of the women and 96% of the men; self-expression, 88% and 84%; influence 86% and 80%; social change 74% and 68%; power, 50% and 45%; and fame 45% and 60%. So we find women and men equally interested in having a good time and getting paid well for it. The low rating on fame suggests that design may not be seen as a path to fame by either gender. The fifteen point difference on fame shows that women are still reticent or ambivalent about the public aspects of success. Women, specifically, may not see design as a route to fame, based on the history of women's experience in other fields. Women, with slightly higher ratings for influence and social change, we might see as appreciating the less public but personally satisfying side of graphic design. And hungry for power? There are a lot of rewards a lot more important to both. And it has been suggested that designers (of both genders) do not feel powerful, they do not see design has having power, and therefore do not take design into areas where it could have power.

If we see these 'rewards' as motivators, let's return to the hypothesis that women are more likely to use design for social purposes. Influence and social change are ranked fourth and fifth by all designers, with women rating these as important at slightly higher percentages. Another question asked if the designers had a personal agenda (defined as social and/or political ideas) which they tried to make part of their design projects. Of the women designers, 20% answered yes, compared with 12% of the men. A follow-up question asked if they attempted this on real projects, pro bono projects or both. Here 30% of the women (who had answered yes) said on real projects, 8% of the men; 39% women said on pro bono, 25% of the men; and 26% women and 58% men said on both. The most significant difference here may be in the numbers who attempt this injection of their personal values and ideas. Women appear to be more active; this is backed up by another question as to whether the designers actively sought such projects: 20% of the women and 13% of the men answered yes. The specific agendas were requested; more women answered here than did the men and they reported issues involving children, the environment, racial/ethnic problems and pro-women concerns.

What about the cooperation/individualism axis? Working with others takes many forms. Of the group, 11% of the women and 22% of the men had a business partner. Of these with partners, 23% of the women and 57% of the men had a

partner of the same gender. When asked if the advantages of this working relationship (same gender partnership) were gender-related, 46% of the women and 35% of the men answered yes. Gender-related disadvantages for the partnership were reported by 15% of the women and 17% of the men. Related to the small number of women with business partners, only 33% of the women owned their own businesses, compared with 42% of the men. And of those women who owned a design business, very few had two or more employees.

It is hardly a surprise that it is considered advantageous to have a male partner; both genders prefer them. Look at the figures above and realize that 77% of the women with a partner have a male partner and 43% of the men have a female partner. In the mixed gender partnerships they mention different perspectives brought to design as one advantage, as well as being able to deal with a broader range of client requests. Among the women respondents, 11% were in business with a family member, 14% of the men were. In most cases for both genders these were spouses.

Comparing preferences for working on design teams or individually, 26% of the women prefer teams as do 28% of the men, 32% of each prefer to work individually and 40% of women, 39% of men expressed no preference. In actuality, fewer designers work on teams: 13 % women and 16% men, compared to 55% women and 42% men working individually and 30% and 39% men working in both situations. Only 6% of the women and 5% of the men preferred a co-worker of the same gender. These figures suggest that designers readily accept the necessity for teamwork and few have gender-related problems with teammates. There are only slight differences between women and men on this issue. Based on these figures women do not appear to be any more collegial than men. Remarks of the anecdotal sort which appeared on the questionnaires do indicate however, that women designers are seen as being better able to adjust to clients and to work more cooperatively with them; whereas, men designers are reported to be more of the 'take it or leave it' kind.

In recent years, it has been noted that the work and professional contributions of male designers seem to be better known than those of female designers. In order to test this 'feeling', questions were asked about professional

organizations, professional activities, and other methods of promotion and self-promotion. Asking for the level of professional 'joining' was slightly begging the question as the sample was of the AIGA membership; however, memberships in other design organizations, national and local, are high and both genders are equal joiners in those. Of the women designers, 25% have held office in a design professional organization, 37% of the men have. Of the women designers, 25% have served on juries for design competitions, 43% of the men have done so. In both of these important areas for contacts, experience, and exposure women are considerably less active. Whereas some of this may be the result of less 'volunteering', positions such as these have historically gone to those already 'known' and 'connected', which even preclude opportunities for volunteering.

Investigating various ways for designers to promote themselves and their work, questions were asked about presentations, articles about work, and work published. Consistently, the level of women's activity (opportunity and action) is less than the men's. Of the women, 57% were asked to present work and 49 % did so. And 39% of the women volunteered to present. Compare this with invitations received by 72% of the men, presentations made by 67%, and 54% who volunteered. Of the women, 21% were invited to write about their work, 15% did so. For the men, 42% were invited to write, and 30% did so. The most passive of these promotional activities is having work published; 63% of the women were successful, 81 % of the men were. At all levels this provides less opportunity to learn about women designers and their work, and less opportunity to benefit from their experiences and perspectives.

This lack of information and consciousness is supported by answers to another question: are the designers aware of contemporary designers whose work denies women or presents a limited view of the existence and experience of women? Only 10% of the women and 6% of the men said they were aware of such work. When asked for examples, some individual designers were named, but other examples were given: Playboy, beer commercials, advertising in general. More designers, but still not a great number, were aware of contemporary designers whose work acknowledges and/or celebrates the existence and experience of women. Here, 19% of the women and 23% of the men answered yes, and gave examples within a very narrow range.

The hypothesis projected women as anxious about the combination of career and family. A question was asked about the successful integration of the personal and the professional. Some of the issues listed for definition were time for good work, time for family and friends, child care, commuting, business travel, values in conflict with work, reasonable pay, fulfilling work. Of the women 42 % and of the men 40% said their lives were integrated. This leaves over half of both genders who have problems with some of these issues. But not all of these are 'family' related. Where we do find a clear answer to the career/family question is in the rates of motherhood vs. fatherhood and in the numbers of children. Among the designers, 26% of the women were mothers and 42% of the men were fathers. This is a striking difference which suggests that women designers are making hard decisions about the combination of a family with a career. Another facet of that decision is shown in the comparable numbers of children: women were mothers to no more than two children, many of the male designers were father to three or more children. Whether it is true or not, women designers believe that they can only prosper with a very small family if one at all. This is a considerable psychological cost which only they are asked to bear. While it is true that the younger age of the female respondents may mean that there are families still to be started, the general trend is established. And consider, as well, that 76% of the women are or were in married or committed relationships, compared with 69% of the men.

How satisfied are designers with their chosen profession? When asked that simple question directly, 88% of the women and 90% of the men answered yes. While the numbers are gratifying, the parity is even more pleasing. The high grade for the profession notwithstanding, 43% of the women and 42% of the men said they had considered recently a change in career. Reasons ranged from those predominately related to current general economic problems to feeling the field is limited, wanting the opportunity to explore new things, needing rejuvenation, finding the work too stressful, needing more challenges, finding work not sufficiently interesting, and wanting to make more money.

What does this add up to? Women designers are younger and better educated. They are slightly more motivated by perceiving design as influential and a force for social change. They are more likely to be interested in using design for a

personal/political/social agenda and more likely to pursue this. Women designers are less prominent, less known, and less active in professional organizations and have less opportunity to pursue these goals. A major cost of their careers is limited childbearing. Taking both groups of designers, women and men are not power-hungry (at least not within design) and mostly motivated by the opportunities for fun and money in design. Mixed gender partnerships appear to thrive. Designers are equally positive about teamwork and their relations with the other gender in work situations. Women and men designers are equally unaware of sexism in design, though slightly more aware of some designers who have women's issues as their design agenda. Designers are quite satisfied with their choice of career, though almost half are tempted by change. Where do you fit in to all of this?