

Celebrity and Gender in Graphic Design

The concept of “celebrity” has developed into an important aspect of the graphic design profession. A small percentage of notable designers have been able to develop successful careers where they create award-winning work, speak at events and become a source of inspiration for other practitioners in the field. These designers inevitably become part of the graphic design canon and will be remembered for years to come. The problem with this model is the majority of designers reaching celebrity status are men. It is time to reflect critically on these implications.

Graphic design has been a male dominated field since the profession began in the industrial age. In the late twentieth century, many women entered the field, and the demographics of the discipline shifted. Today, more women than men graduate with degrees in graphic design, and the National Endowment for the Arts estimates that fifty-four percent of the design field is women. The professional association for design, the AIGA, similarly reports that membership is approximately fifty-five percent women, and they predict that number will increase in the near future.

In 2006 at a panel discussion in NYC called “The Art of the Book: Behind the Covers,” a notable incident sent a strong message to female graphic designers. The panelists included well-known male graphic designers Milton Glaser, Chip Kidd and Dave Eggers; the panel was moderated by renowned designer, Michael Bierut. The incident happened during the Q&A where questions were submitted ahead of time to the panel. The question posed was:

“Why do you — all three of you [Glaser, Kidd and Eggers] — suppose there are so few female graphic designers — or at least so few female ‘superstar’ graphic designers? Is there a glass ceiling in graphic design?”

Glaser, born in 1929 and most famous for his “I heart NY” logo, responded that the reason there are so few female superstar graphic designers is that “women get pregnant, have children, go home and take care of their children. And those essential years that men are building their careers and becoming visible are basically denied to women who choose to be at home.” Glaser continued: “Unless something very dramatic happens to the nature of the human experience then it’s never going to change.” In response to the query on whether alternative forms of child care like day care and nannies, could help to provide greater opportunities to women who have families and want to further their careers, he said, “None of them are good solutions.”

Although originally presented at a design event, Glaser’s comments were later published in Bierut’s article on the Design Observer website, “The Graphic Glass Ceiling.” Bierut’s article thoughtfully reflects on Glaser’s comments, acknowledging his own discomfort at the question of gender disparity. Bierut accedes that although there are many great female designers, few ever reach celebrity status stating: “It’s depressing for a profession that’s more than half female to keep putting up 100% male rosters. Celebrity is good for certain things. It puts the butts in the seats at [design events], for instance. But it’s not the only thing, and based on the reactions of those people in the audience [at the event ‘The Art of the Book: Behind the Covers’,] it might be time for something more.”

Although there has been much discussion centered on the topic of gender disparities in the field of design recently, research shows many young female designers do not feel prejudiced by their gender. Gerda Breuer and Julia Meer, co-authors of *Women in Graphic Design* (2012), found many of their female students felt the conversation concerning male superstar designers irrelevant even as their research indicates that in terms of numbers of designers reaching celebrity, women remain behind. The authors define star designers as figures with a public persona, artists who speak at industry events and author their own work. Breuer and Meer argue, “Even today, the stars of the design scene are predominantly male... while many other design fields are either marginalized or occupied by women who perform basic task work.” It is difficult to pinpoint precisely why men continue to occupy the role of celebrity designer at such a disproportionate rate to women, though one reason seems located in the field’s predominantly male canon which provides male designers a readymade arsenal of role models with whom they can identify and emulate.

A graphic design canon developed at least in part out of the need to legitimize the discipline within fine art, architecture, and industrial design. And, taking cues from these traditionally written histories, graphic designers and design historians mirrored established formula—the art historical canon—and proceeded to identify and describe the work of prominent “great” graphic designers. Early in the development of graphic design history, then, in the attempt to find

the masterworks of graphic design, there was a clear absence of female practitioners. In her 1991 article, "Is There a Canon of Graphic Design History?" Martha Scotford develops a set of criteria by which to evaluate graphic design history, and then lionizes eight male designers, all born before 1920, though she later amended and expanded the list to include six women out of a total of 63. This early creation of a canon, Scotford warns, presents some serious challenges to the study of graphic design. But Scotford warns that a canon, like the one she exposes, poses serious challenges to the study of graphic design:

"If we narrow the field now, it will take much longer and be much more difficult to properly study and understand our cultural and professional heritage. For students new to the study of graphic design, a canon creates the impression that they need go no further; the best is known, the rest is not worth knowing. This is unfair, dangerous and short-sighted."

As a professor who stresses the importance of graphic design history to students, I seriously consider my role in this problem: how does a history based in celebrity exclude women? By adhering to the history of graphic design as it has been presented in textbooks, I must now evaluate whether I perpetuate a perception of male dominance the field of graphic design.

Current trends in graphic design show that the field is simultaneously shifting and staying stubbornly the same. On a promising note, the web provides alternative paths to success and helps many women achieve notoriety. For instance, designer Jessica Hische effectively used her web presence to elevate her professional status, and she is now sought out for speaking engagements throughout the world. I have no doubt that as the graphic design canon expands, Hische will become a major player in defining today's graphic design aesthetic. But progress for women in graphic design remains slow. In a recent article posted on the Graphic Design USA website, Paula Scher was the only female designer noted in the "top ten most influential graphic designers working today." Expanding the list to include 50 designers allowed for only 18 out of 50 female designers. Paula Scher has come to represent the female voice in graphic design, and more voices need to be considered.

As more women reach celebrity status, they too speak as female representatives for the field of graphic design. When asked the question, "Have you ever found gender to be a barrier in your career?" prominent UK designer, Sara De Bondt responded:

"Being a woman does not automatically grant me privileges from which to answer these questions. I find it particularly difficult to answer them because I feel that by asking me—as a female designer—about my gender instead of my work, your questions reinforce the stereotype of women as outsiders and men as neutral, objective norm."

Female celebrity designers, unlike their male counterparts, have to speak for an entire gender, a responsibility that is potentially unwanted and to some degree impossible to fulfill. In order to remedy this problem it is not necessary to ignore the canon in graphic design. Instead, we need to expose the myth that the male super star designer achieves his success alone, and we need to find ways to complicate and critically address the narrow scope that many students bring to the idea of celebrity in design. Instead, it may be best to emphasize the collaborative nature of graphic design. What gets glamorized and perpetuated with the male super star designer stereotype is the idea that he achieves his success alone. By focusing too much on this one model, students will be set up for failure in the work place. Collaboration is an essential component of the design process and all graphic designers must learn how to work this diverse and evolving field.

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在平面设计中看名流与性别

CELEBRITY AND GENDER IN GRAPHIC DESIGN

名流观念在平面设计业里是被认知为是重要的一环。如果平面设计师设计创作出得奖的作品、公开演讲、或成为其他设计师的灵感来源时，这一小部份设计师便能享有成功的职业生涯。这些设计师势必成为设计经典的一员并会名流世纪。在这个形态下，问题出於大多数成名的设计师都为男性，是时候去批判和思考这个问题。

自从工业革命开始平面设计就一直是男性主流的行业。在二十世纪末期，许多女性加入了平面设计，人口分布上开始有偏移的现象。现今女性毕业於平面设计的比例比男性更高，美国国家艺术基金会估算大约有54%的设计业被女性包办。国家艺术赞助基金会(NEA)、设计专业协会(AIGA)也提出相似的报告，大约55%的成员为女性，他们也预估未来女性的人数将会持续成长。

2006年在纽约专家小组研讨会“书的艺术：藏於封面之下”里，意外地对所有的女性设计师发表一项强烈地声明。此专家会成员包括米尔顿·格拉泽、齐普·基德及戴夫·埃格斯，并由迈克尔·布鲁特主持。这个意外发生在专家Q & A，而问题甚至有事先给给委员审核。问题如下：

“(格拉泽、基德、埃格斯)为何你们三人认为这行并没有什麼女性——至少你们觉得觉得没有几位有名的女性设计师？是说平面设计这行里都是玻璃的天花板吗？”

格拉泽生於1929年，以”I♥NY”的标志成名。他针对这个问题回答——有名的女性设计师较少的原因是因是“女人怀孕生产之後生小孩，回家照顾孩子。而那些年的空档，男人就可以专注於发展自己的事业并使自己成名。以此夺取了选择待在家中妇女的机会。”格拉泽接着说：“除非人类的本质改变，不然这个状况不会改变。”观众回应他的评论说育幼班、安亲班或奶妈是否能帮助有家庭的女性，并让她们追求她们希望的职涯？格拉泽说，“这些都不是很好地办法。”

虽然原本事情是发生是在会议期间，但格拉泽的对话之後被刊登在观察者设计网站上布鲁特的文章“设计中的玻璃天花板”里。布鲁特缜密地呈现格拉泽的回应，表示说格拉泽在对性别差异的问题上感到不自在。布鲁特同意说虽然有许多杰出的女性设计师，但是很少数得到声望：“要让职场里一半以上的女性持续抗争全为男性主导的领域真的是很令人沮丧。而且成为名流对於某些事情是有帮助的。比如说：这让你的屁股(在设计场合)有椅子坐。但这不是必然的，以那些观众(於书的艺术：藏於封面之下)的反应来看，应该是时候去接受新的东西。”

虽然最近在设计业里常有有关性别差异的议题产生，研究显示年轻女性设计师并不觉得她们的性别使她们受到不平等的对待。格尔达·布鲁尔还有朱莉娅·米尔，共同书写了”平面设计中的女性(2012)”一书。她们发现许多女性学生觉得去担忧只有男性平面设计师成名的问题其实是可有可无的，就算研究显示出名的女性设计师人数明显不足。作者们认为所谓出名的设计师可成为公众人物、是可以在工业设计场合中演讲的艺术家并出自己出书的人。布鲁尔和米尔争论说“就算是现在，在设计业出名的也都是男性...在其他的设计领域中有些女性被排斥，一些则全由女性员工包办基层工作。”要针对一个原因去探讨为何男人仍旧在平面设计里占有大部分名流的位置而女性所占的比例却不相称是很困难的。但其中有一个原因为，在大多数都是男性为标准的领域里去提供各式各样不同的男性榜样，那後者就可以去鉴定与效仿。

整个平面设计脉络的发展中，他们希望平面设计能被其他像是艺术、建筑、还有工业设计等主门所接受，这是其中一个影响他们挑选名人的原因。如果从传统书面历史里找线索，平面设计师和设计历史学家相辅相成自己的一组“艺术历史守则”以其选择并描写所谓地“杰出”平面设计师。在平面设计发展史的早期，在追求杰作过程中很明显地并没有女性的参与。玛莎·斯科特佛在她1991年的文章里“平面设计的历史里有理可寻吗？”开发了一套标准并以其评定平面设计史。她尊耀八位1920年後出生的男性设计师，之後她还将名单修订和扩充到63位设计师，其中有六人为女性。斯科特佛对她研究早期平面设计史理时受到地严重挑战提出警告：

“如果我们现在去精简我们的领域，会比我们想像中地更花的时间，很难正确地研读和了解我们的专业文化和遗产。对新研究平面设计的学生们，这些教条使得学生得到一种只要学到现有的知识就好并不用更进一步去研究剩下的印象。这是不公平的、危险并且短视的。”

自己身为一名教授，平面设计史对学生的重要性我是知道的，因此我倍感压力。我认真的思考自己在这个问题里的角色：为何一个充满有名设计师的历史里要特地排挤女性呢？在秉承平面设计史教科书之後，我必须评估自己是否要延续这种男性主导的平面设计领域。

目前平面设计的潮流显示说这个领域在转变的同时其实也墨守成规。网路提供了一个契机，以其提供女性一条通往成功与成名的替代方案。就以设计师洁西卡·荷希为例，她有效地利用网路去提升她的专业地位并到世界各地演讲。在当平面设计的领域扩张的这个时代，我毫无疑问地相信荷希将会成为定义当代平面艺术美学的主要参与者。但平面设计对女性包容度依旧缓慢。在最近美国平面设计网站上的文章里，宝拉·谢尔是“最有影响力的十大平面设计师”中唯一的女性。名单扩张後女性人数从50人里有18名女性设计师。宝拉·谢尔出来作为女性平面设计师代表，但这里有一些更多值得我们注意的声音。

当有更多女性达到名流的阶段，她们也一起为女性平面设计师发声。当问她们这个问题：“妳可曾感觉到妳的性别在你的职涯里造成阻碍吗？”有名的英国设计师莎拉·德邦特回答说：

“我用这句话回答这个问题：“身为一个女性并不提供我任何特权。“我觉得你光是问我这个问题就让我感到困扰。你在乎的是我的性别而不是我的作品,你的问题更加强了身为女性就是外来者，男性就是应该的刻板印象。”

不像是她们的男性对手，著名的女性设计师没有权利替所有的男性女性说话。某个程度来说她们背负着不必要的责任而且她们也不可能去完成它。为了补救这个问题，并不是去忽视现有的保守平面设计条规就可以改变的。与其来说我们需要去揭发男性明星设计师独成功的迷思，我们也需要找到办法去复杂化、去严厉评判学生们对设计名流狭隘的想法。相对来说，去加强平面设计的合作性可能是最好的办法，因为美化并延续男性设计师他们超级明星的刻板印象就是从他一人独自作业的这个迷思来的。这种范本让学生们在职场里面面对失败。合作在设计业中是必不可少的主要成分，所有的平面设计师都必须去学习如何在这个多元化而且进步的领域里工作。