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~~UN~~EQUAL STORIES (v1): SURFACING STORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN DESIGN

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Abstract:

~~Un~~equal Stories is a cross-national research project between Falmouth University (United Kingdom) and the University of Johannesburg (South Africa) investigating gender equality, diversity, and representation in the design disciplines in Higher Education (HE) and industry. Employing research *through* and *for* design, the pilot project (*~~Un~~equal Stories* v1) utilises an innovative UX data collection, mapping, and visualisation tool to surface phenomenological *Stories* (lived experiences) of gender inequality in design. By centring designers' voices, the project aims to contribute to the ongoing sociological mapping of the field through participatory and inclusive strategies. In this article, the authors briefly situate *~~Un~~equal Stories* against a backdrop of an ongoing 'diversity crisis' in design; describe the aims, methodology, and limitations of the project; and present the initial findings of the research via a thematic analysis. The results indicate a significant prevalence of marginalising issues within the design industry — including bullying, sexual harassment, and exclusion; a compounding impact of intersectional inequalities; discrepancies in inequality within HE compared to the workplace; and the impact of gendered expectations and confidence as some of the contributing factors that lead to women not entering the design workforce after graduation, or leaving the design industry entirely. The findings also indicate that, despite statistical evidence to the contrary, gender inequality in design is frequently dismissed as a 'non-issue.' These results contribute to the expanding body of literature on gender diversity and representation in design, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners.

Keywords:

Gender, Inequality, Design Education, Design Industry, Mapping Inequalities

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1. Introduction and rationale

Design has, until recently, maintained a culturally stable reputation as a *force for good:* a discipline capable of addressing public and societal challenges through new technologies, services, objects, and spaces. This is despite its many misdemeanours, and in the face of several counter-rhetorical movements of the previous century. In their text *Beyond Speculations* (2021), James Auger, Julian Hanna and Ivica Mitrović argue that this illusion has been achieved through a kind of *sleight of hand*: obfuscating the complex and problematic socio-economic systems that facilitate design by elevating the status of the 'designed object' to an almost sacred level. Behind this veneer is the enduring legacy of Capitalist modernity and the *imperative of progress*, with little regard for associated environmental and social costs. However, design scholars and activists are increasingly rejecting such univocal narratives, arguing that design is not only *materially* complicit in contributing to inequality, but *ontologically* responsible for reinforcing, maintaining, and legitimising the inequalities it helps create. For example, the perpetuation of normative paradigms (Western-centric, ableist, patriarchal, etc.) through design has been evidenced to be discriminatory[1]; marginalising[2]; and even fatal[3]. That this has remained largely 'invisible' points to design as an ideological force, a superstructure, capable of shaping social and cultural reality (Sloane, 2019).

The 'diversity crisis' (Design Council, 2022) in design has undoubtedly contributed to ways in which design continues to encode and reproduce inequalities in society. In the UK, for example, despite making up 65% of design undergraduates, women comprise only 22% of the workforce (5% in industrial design, and 20% in architecture), and only 17% of managerial roles (Design Council, 2018). People from 'minority ethnic' backgrounds, who comprise 13% of the broader UK workforce, are also less represented at higher levels of management and report negative experiences from hyper-visibility to overt racism. For instance, a third of respondents to a recent survey reported racism was "widespread"

[1] For example, facial recognition technology has significant implications for contemporary society, including the emerging use of facial recognition software as a tool for medical diagnostics; everyday accessibility of mobile phones and smart security; and an increasing surveillance culture within the criminal justice system. However, many of the datasets that test the algorithms used in facial recognition technology comprise predominantly white, male faces. The result being the highest divergent error rates and poorest accuracy of this technology for subjects who are black, female, and 18-30 years old (Najibi, 2020).

[2] As one example, the International Symbol of Access (ISA) – known colloquially as the 'wheelchair symbol' – is used, globally, to represent people with disabilities. However, while 15.3% of the world population has a moderate or severe disability, less than 1% of people with disabilities use a wheelchair. Rather than creating clarity, the ISA amplifies misconceptions about the nature and presentation of disabilities (Pater, 2016).

[3] In 2017, Stanford's *Gendered Innovations* found that when a woman is involved in a car crash, she is 47% more likely to be seriously injured and 17% more likely to die than a man. This is because crash-test dummies are designed to mimic an 'average' male body (1.75 m; 78 kg). Considerations of the injury tolerance, biomechanics, spinal alignment, neck strength, and ligament strength of females (not to mention older people, people with disabilities, or those with non-normative bodies) are not considered in the design of vehicles.

in architecture (Waite, 2020); and a 2019 survey found 60% of creative and media professionals believed they faced barriers to career progression because of their gender, sexuality, or ethnicity (Snoad, 2019). In South Africa, only 21% of the 8842 registered architects in South Africa were women; only 6.7% were black; and only 2% were black women (SACAP, 2021). Data from advertising and UX industries shows that while women fill 61% of roles, they hold only 39% of senior creative roles and 43% of art director positions (Fenn et al, 2015). While these statistics highlight the issue within a UK and South African context (within the scope of this paper), data evidence that inequality in design is a global issue. For example, a 2023 report by the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO, 2023) found that only 24% of designers in the EU were women, and they earn on average 12.8% less than their male colleagues.

While these statistics go some way towards evidencing systemic issues within the recruitment and retention of minoritised groups in design, in comparison to STEM disciplines (Lockhart & Miller 2014), there is a striking paucity of data available. Moreover, the data often lacks nuance, and narrative detail, particularly in relation to the phenomenology of under-represented groups. Paying attention to what is happening to individuals' experience in 'real life' is critical in finding effective ways to address it.

Within the context outlined above, ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* — a cross-national research project between Falmouth University (United Kingdom) and the University of Johannesburg (South Africa) — launched in 2021 with two central aims:

I. ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* seeks to move beyond statistical data, to surface attitudes and perceptions (lived-experiences) of in-/equality(ies) in design across various design disciplines (industrial design, fashion design, graphic design, architecture, etc.)[4] within Higher Education (HE) and industry.
II. Following the initial data gathering and analysis, ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* will develop pedagogic strategies towards *critical practices* of design justice and resistance that counter inequalities in the subject and society more broadly.

As the authors have addressed the pedagogic response (aim II) elsewhere (see Moseley & Bediako, 2021), this paper will focus on the aim I, namely the gathering, and subsequent thematic analysis, of *Stories* of in-/equality. It is hoped the results of this study will contribute to the ongoing sociological

[4] The researchers adopted the Design Council/ DCMS classifications for 'design', namely: graphic design, product and industrial design, craft, digital design, advertising, architecture and built environment, fashion design, and multidisciplinary design (Design Council, 2018).

mapping of design in-/equality by revealing key insights into the everyday lived-experiences of designers.

Figure 1. ~~Un~~equal Stories landing page www.unequalstories.falmouth.ac.uk Source: authors.

2. Research design

Given the study centres on discussions of inequality(ies) — which might involve the disclosure of highly personal phenomena including discrimination, social control, and stigmatisation — it is considered a sensitive research topic (Penrod et al, 2003). As such, the research design sought to allow access to geographically distributed populations while ensuring anonymity for the participants. To this end, the researchers developed an innovative UX platform (www.unequalstories.falmouth.ac.uk) to allow for secure data collection (via open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires), and subsequent data visualisation and mapping (see Figures 1-4). A qualitative, non-probability, chain referral methodology was employed to distribute the call for participation to access so-called 'hard-to-reach' individuals (Naderifar et al, 2017). Given the potential for deductive disclosure of identity (Lee & Renzetti, 1990) all of the data was moderated and anonymised, including the use of a rounding methodology, ahead of the data visualisation. The open-ended questionnaire was used to elicit a deeper understanding of the phenomena, contexts and experiences impacting and affecting designers in both HE and industry. This qualitative, phenomenological approach seeks to surface the often-invisible ways in which society functions and is experienced by marginalised groups (Johnson-Bailey & Ray, 2008).

Following the data collection, the researchers employed a thematic analysis to code and organize the information. Specifically, we deployed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase thematic analysis framework towards identifying and analysing both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) patterns in the data. This included 1) transcribing the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3), collating codes into potential themes, 4) reviewing the themes, 5) generating clear definitions for each theme, and 6) producing a final analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), the results of which are presented in Section 4.

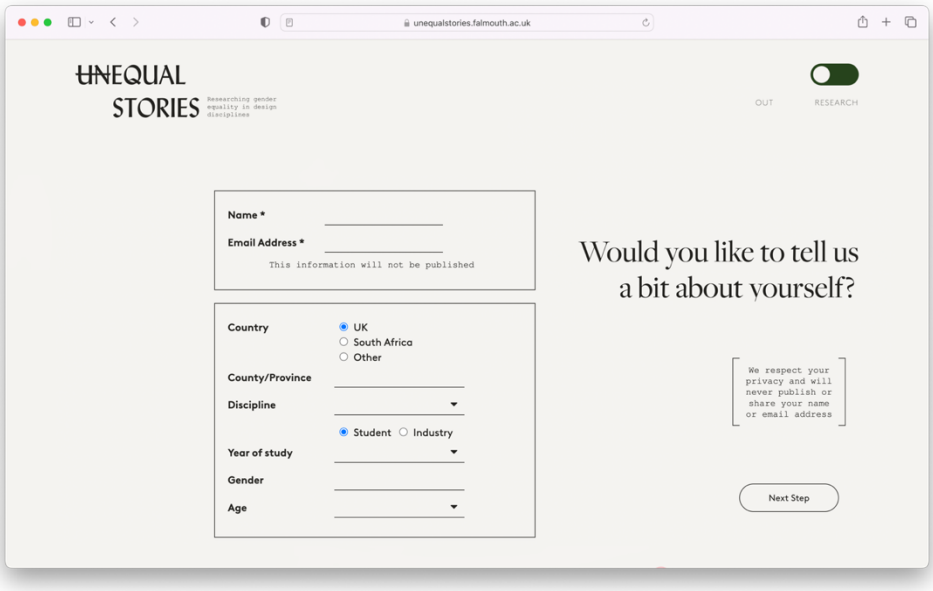

Figure 2. Initial questionnaire. Source: authors.

3. Limitations to the study

3.1. Intersectional depth

Critically, this iteration of ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* is a pilot project (~~*Un*~~*equal Stories v1*). As such, this first phase is limited in scope to an exploration of inequalities in relation to gender. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, the project was seed-funded by the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Given the limited purview of the funding, we focused on developing the research infrastructure and corresponding pedagogic strategies towards testing and ensuring the methodological rigour of these approaches ahead of a larger study. Secondly, there is a critical gap in the statistical data regarding many minoritised groups in design, including people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ people, single parents, and those from a lower socio-economic class. While this might seem counter-intuitive (as in, the research is much *needed* in these areas), by focusing on an area that has some supporting statistical

data, namely, we were able to correlate and test our findings against a known quotient, again, towards testing our research design. Importantly, and within the scope of this paper, gender is understood as a socially constructed set of relations, practices, and processes that exist only in relation to a binary view of gender and gendered roles (Lorber, 2008). We recognise that the focus on gender within this study means that, in its current form, it lacks intersectional depth and a more nuanced consideration of the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination that perpetuate inequalities. Interestingly, and as the results bear out (see section 4.2), the impact of multiple forms of oppression superseded the delimitations of the study, with numerous stories revealing experiences of inequality across race, gender, and sexuality.

3.2. Leading questions

A potential limitation to the research design, which will need further consideration ahead of the next iteration of the project, is the *kind* of open-ended questions used. Specifically, the researchers asked participants to respond to a prompt:

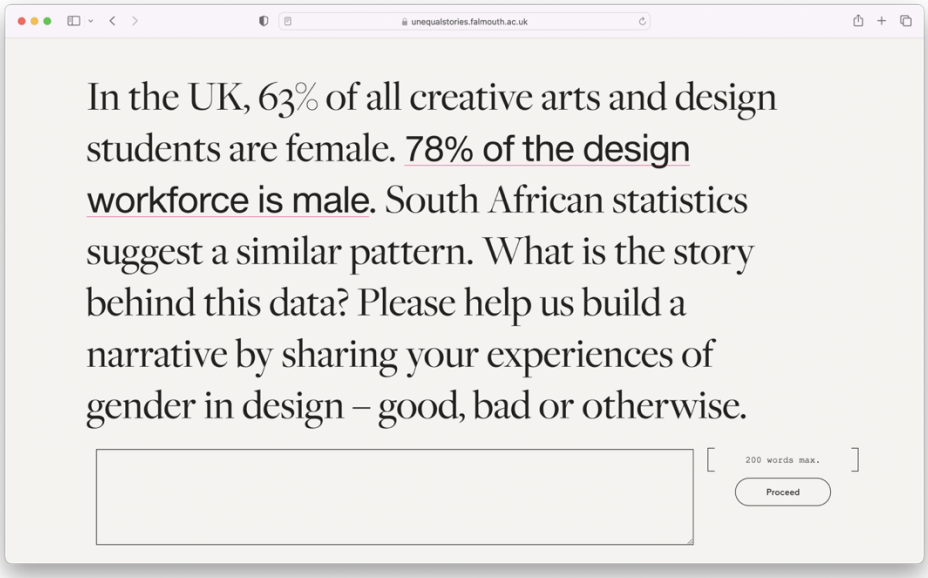

Figure 3. Open-ended questionnaire. Source: authors.

While the second statement (…good, bad, or otherwise…) sought to encourage participants to express their perspectives freely, the question might be perceived as leading: potentially indicating a preferred response or limiting the range of possible responses (Given, 2008). The decision to include the statistical prompt was based on pre-testing with students at Falmouth University and at the University

of Johannesburg, which revealed a startling lack of awareness and acknowledgement of (gender) inequality(ies) in design (for example: "I'd say there's fair representation, no gender overpowers another"). However, and despite the inclusion of the prompt, the perception from groups of students that gender inequality is a 'non-issue' remains a key theme in the face of the statistical data. This will be further unpacked in section 4.

3.3. Self-selection

Finally, the sensitive nature of the topic and the chain referral methodology might result in self-selection bias. That is, individuals may have been motivated to complete the questionnaire, or share it, due to an exceptional interest in the subject matter. As such, the results should be understood as emic: views of an individual's 'mental map' or subjective cultural understanding, rather than a set of conclusory results on the state of gender inequality in design in South Africa and the UK (Given, 2008).

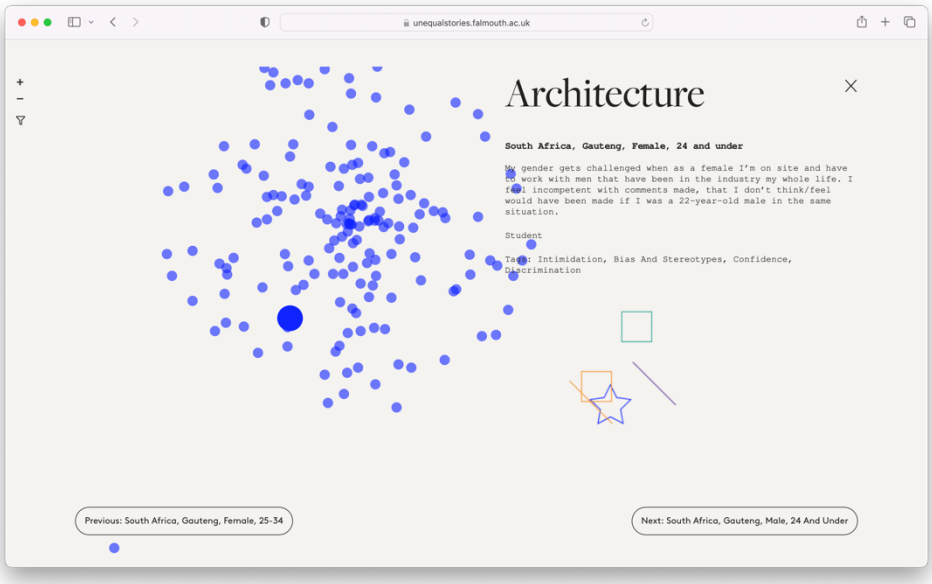

Figure 4. Data visualisation. Source: authors.

4. ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* v1; results and thematic analysis

A total of 227 *Stories* have been published on the ~~Un~~equal Stories website[5] as of September 2023. 171 contributors are from SA, 52 from the UK, and 4 are from other countries. Of this group, 140 are

[5] https://unequalstories.falmouth.ac.uk/

female, 80 are male, and 7 are non-binary. From this initial dataset, several themes or patterns have emerged:

4.1. Theme 1; marginalising phenomena

The first theme identified centres on *Stories* of bullying, sexual harassment, and exclusion. While distinct sociological concepts, all might be seen to belong to a broad continuum of *aggressive marginalising phenomena* (Minton, 2016). Interestingly, although perhaps unsurprisingly, most of these *Stories* emerged from so-called 'hard' design areas such as industrial design and architecture which are, statistically, the most male-dominated (Moseley & Bediako, 2021). As Bartlett (2024) notes, gender divisions of labour in these subjects are likely heightened and persist due to the enduring notion that equates masculinity with technical skill. Interestingly, these phenomena predominated only within industry rather than HE – a latent finding linked to Theme 3 – that Higher Education and industry are not *equally unequal*.

By way of example, the following Stories evidence a spectrum of marginalisation within the design industries, from overt harassment to more 'subtle' forms of exclusionary prejudice:

> *As a junior industrial designer working in an all-male design and manufacturing team, I was often subject to inappropriate comments and sexual harassment… when walking into meetings with all-male clients, I would often be interrupted, and sometimes, not even greeted.*
> Product/Industrial Design, Industry, South Africa, Gauteng, Female, 25-34

> *During one of my first internships, I was one of the only females in meetings. Along with comments on my appearance by the Creative Director… My opinions were often overlooked until a male co-worker would repeat them… I felt excluded from conversations.*
> Graphic Design, Industry, UK, Female, 24 and under

> *… my professional contributions are often dismissed and … male colleagues would approach me claiming to 'know' more. They would deliver this in ways that appear helpful and supportive — yet it was almost always condescending. It took me many years to realise this.*
> Architecture, Industry, South Africa, Gauteng, Female , 45-54

In terms of social power theory and given that the Stories coded within this theme are from statistically male-dominated fields, marginalisation (both overt and covert) could be understood as a way of reinforcing prevailing workplace cultures whereby people in positions of power try to maintain their status through the negative treatment of those currently 'less powerful' (Rosander et al, 2022).

4.2. Theme 2; intersectionality

Despite the study's focus on gender, several responses highlight the intersectional nature of inequality(ies) in design, describing how multiple disadvantaged social statuses can adversely affect an individual. For example:

> *As a female photographer, it is very evident that this industry is a boys' club. More often than not, I have been underestimated and disrespected by my male counterparts on photography sets. And unfortunately, women, especially those of colour, have to work much harder to prove themselves and we have less access to resources/programs.*
> South Africa, Industry, Johannesburg, Female, 24 and under

> *Being a black female in a very white and male-dominated field is very challenging. We always have to work twice as hard and always have to prove something not only to ourselves but our peers...*
> Product/Industrial Design, South Africa, Gauteng, Female, 24 and under

Comparative work in the social sciences shows that, in addition to having direct adverse effects, multiple forms of discrimination (such as gender and race) may give rise to additional individual stressors, indirectly increasing the risk for mental health problems through denial of opportunities and systematic stratification into stressful social roles and contexts (Perry et al, 2013). While the current responses on the ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* website have highlighted women's experiences with intersectional gender associated with racial bias, the full spectrum of these inequalities becomes vast and nuanced when layered with factors including class, sexuality, and disability (Crenshaw, 1989). This needs to be addressed explicitly in the research design of the next iteration of ~~Un~~equal Stories.

4.3. Theme 3; Higher Education and industry are not *equally unequal*

As the statistical data show, women are a minority in the South African and UK design workforces, despite making up over half of the design graduates. Stories about the contrasting experiences between HE and industry reflect this, with several contributors describing striking differences between how women are treated in academia versus industry. By way of example:

> *Working as a young female in Industrial Design, I faced issues of sexual harassment and gender bias daily. In some cases, this excluded me from learning opportunities. Since entering the academic space, I have experienced the opposite.*
> Product/Industrial Design, South Africa, Gauteng, Female, 25-34

> *The gender division I saw in education was fairly good… This definitely changed entering work—some of my female course mates followed a similar route, but others had to work harder (going into post graduate studies only to enter at a similar level).*
> Visual effects, Industry, UK, Cornwall, Male, 35-44

> *It is a bit scary to be a young woman in design. Despite the fashion industry being "female" dominated, our male counterparts are still more celebrated and respected as leaders in the field. Patriarchal thinking shows up in all areas of society- including design… I think being aware of gender differences will go a long way in being the right kind of change to the industry.*
> Fashion Design, South Africa, Johannesburg, Female, 24 and under

As mentioned earlier, during pre-testing with student groups, the responses revealed startling lack of awareness of inequality(ies) in design. The contrasting experiences between HE and industry described in the *Stories* reiterate this, suggesting that the confines of HE create a distorted perception of equality that does not reflect the broader design industries. Moreover, it indicates that students are ill-prepared to enter such an unequal workforce.

The differences between experiences in gender inequality in HE versus industry, highlight the need for intervention at HE to prepare students' entry into an unequal industry. Critically, this is not about accepting existing forms of domination, but by *knowing* and *seeing*, students will be better placed to enact change, to challenge the status quo, or to forge their own pathways outside of the patriarchal 'pipeline' (see aim II and some of the students' creative responses here: https://unequalstories.falmouth.ac.uk/gallery/).

4.4. Theme 4; gendered roles and expectations

Many contributors specifically cite gendered roles and expectations in relation to ongoing inequalities in design. Like most professional sectors, design is also influenced by gendered expectations, and research exploring the gendered discourse and practice in different design fields is evident. One common example within design that perpetuates the notion of gendered roles is the categorisation of 'hard' and 'soft' design disciplines. The hard design disciplines, including industrial and multimedia design, and the soft disciplines, are fashion and interior design, just to name a few (Clegg & Mayfield, 1999). Many contributions on the *~~Un~~equal Stories* website reflecting on their HE experience note or acknowledge the apparent dominant gender that their discipline is associated with. For example:

> *I work in design education, and I've seen young women sidelined from the earliest stage in their careers, labelled a 'great Studio Manager' for their organisation and leadership skills rather than as a future Creative Director. I've seen fantastic designers put off design careers because intense working patterns aggravates their chronic illness or doesn't fit round their caring responsibilities. Some leave graphic design in search of practices that better reflect the values they want to embody through their work.*
> Graphic Design, Industry, UK, Tyne and Wear, Female, 35-44

> *At University, my course was majority female. However, on leaving University I founded a design studio in Leeds with one of my male friends. Many of my old female friends have gone into more marketing roles and moved away from design…*
> Graphic Design, UK, West Yorkshire, Male, 25-34

Several contributors spoke directly to the burden of caregiver roles on gender disparity in design. For example:

> *The design industry is not dissimilar to other industries where professionals are required to work long hours and meet deadlines. I don't know many designers, male or female, who work 9:00—17:00. It is fine when you are young, single, and don't have any dependents, but as you get older and that changes, more women are 'forced' to drop out of the field. When they return they are left trailing behind their male counterparts.*
> Graphic Design, Industry, UK, London, Female, 25-34

The creative force and spirit are knocked out of women as they have to make choices between children and careers. There is no such thing as having it all. Not if you want to give 100% to both. It is not possible.
Graphic Design, UK, London, Female, 25-34

4.5. Theme 5; a lack of confidence

Numerous female contributors reference diminished confidence as a barrier to professional progression, an issue that is perpetuated by being undermined and overlooked (Theme 1).

In my experience, my lack of confidence has been a barrier to success. There are many confident women out there, but personally (and from what I've seen with other creatives I've worked with), I tend to not push my work forward as much. I seem to do more people pleasing and acquiesce quickly to different views, which can mean my ideas and work aren't as 'sold-in' as my male colleagues' ideas are.
Graphic Design, UK, Cornwall, Female, 35-44

I think a lot of women studying product design (including myself) lack the confidence to promote ourselves and our work, and defend our design choices as strongly as the men do. It is hard to be conditioned to be quiet and polite, and also have confidence in your own design work and opinions.
Product/Industrial Design, UK, Cornwall, Female, 24 and under, Student - Undergraduate Year 3

Several contributors referenced a lack of female role models (creative directors and/or visiting lecturers) as further discouragement from voicing opinions or seeking developmental opportunities.

In graphic design, men seem to have a louder voice. I've found myself just not talking as my point is unheard or ignored. I think, a lot of it is female confidence, a lot of people we are meant to look up to are men. Most of our visiting lecturers are men. So sadly, we see them as natural leaders.
Graphic Design, Student, UK, Cornwall, Female, 24 and under

Whilst looking for jobs/researching studios, what stood out to me is the overwhelming amount of creative directors and those in senior roles who are (often white) males—I knew the statistics,

but to repeatedly witness it is really disheartening. As a female designer starting out, not seeing yourself in the positions you hope to eventually reach has a real impact.
Graphic Design, Student, UK, London, Female, 24 and under

A number of educators also referenced the disconcerting difference in self-confidence between female and male design students:

Working in the education sector, it is often so apparent that, despite higher female student ratios, the inequality in the creative industries are there from the outset. When asking who would like to pitch their ideas to the rest of a class, 3/4 times, the hands raised are male. Confidence in abilities, especially pitching and presenting, seems to be diminished far before university even begins. Women high up in the industry are often shown to be the exception to the rule, and the oft quoted 'boys-club' of advertising still rears its ugly head in meetings.
Advertising, Industry, UK, London, Female, 25-34

4.6. Theme 6; leaving the design industry

While linked to the previous themes cumulatively, several *Stories* expose how gender-based marginalisation has led to women either deciding not to enter the workforce post-graduation, or to leave the design industry entirely:

… I have always found an underlying bias towards men working within product and furniture design. In this field I have first-hand experience at being patronised and overlooked, in favour of men. I feel I am here to fill a quota, but not to be taken seriously. I am often overlooked and don't receive the same level of technician help as I don't fit the mould. This is my harsh reality of being in the design industry, and a large part of why I will be leaving it when I finish university.
Product/Industrial Design, Student UK, Cornwall, Female, 24 and under

I was passed over for a promotion in favour of a male art director who was far less experienced than I was, and far less capable. I felt incredibly despondent, and that I'd really hit a 'glass ceiling'. There was very much a 'boys club' in the agency I worked at still – lots of drinking with clients etc. I resigned soon after and changed careers. In my exit interview I was asked if that was the reason and I said 'no' because I didn't want it to seem like I was making an issue. I was much younger then, and my confidence was lower. I wouldn't do that now.

Graphic Design, Industry South Africa, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Female, 35-44

4.7. Theme 7; denying gender inequality

The final theme, which links to Theme 3 is that participants, largely within HE, believe that gender bias is, simply, a non-issue:

> *It does not affect me, I believe that gender should not be viewed as the be all and end all. You should focus on the design and the hard work behind it. No one is equal but that isn't a bad thing. It just means that you will get different new and creative things every day.*
> Jewellery Design, Student, South Africa, Johannesburg, Male, 24 and under

> Gender doesn't affect my experience as an Architecture student.
> Architecture, South Africa, Johannesburg, Male, 24 and under

The trenchant belief that there is gender equality in design — in the face of statistical evidence — highlights how much work needs to be done in design education for students, who will go on to join the workforce, to understand the realities, implications, and political dimensions of inequality(ies) in design.

5. Conclusion

~~*Un*~~*equal Stories (v1)* set out to develop a deeper understanding of gender in-/equality by gathering and analysing the lived-experiences of design students and industry professionals across various design disciplines. The phenomenological research reveals a prevalence of marginalising phenomena (including bullying, sexual harassment, and exclusion); the compound impact of intersectional inequalities; discrepancies of in-/equality within HE when compared to the workplace; the impact of gendered expectations within design disciplines; and a lack of confidence as some of the contributing factors that lead to women not entering the design workforce after graduation, or leaving the design industry entirely. The findings also indicate that, despite statistical evidence to the contrary, gender inequality in design is often dismissed as a 'non-issue'.

While this study focused on the topic of gender discrimination and inequality, it is important to note that gender inequality is one of many forms of marginalization that people face. As suggested by Theme 2, Intersectionality, the authors acknowledge that one cannot view gender inequality in isolation. The ambition for ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories (v1)* is to expand from this initial pilot project to incorporate other forms of

marginalization, to allow for a cross-referencing of these intersecting inequalities, and move beyond the confines of South Africa and the UK, towards developing a more nuanced and global view of inequality in design.

Moreover, we recognise that increasing diversity alone will not ensure equality *in* and *through* design.[6] That is, without concurrent ideological change, design — as a field and practice — will simply continue to reproduce systems of oppression, power, and privilege. Indeed, and drawing on the seminal work of Cheryl Buckley from 1986 and 2020[7] the side-lining of women's voices and their involvement in design *can only* be understood within the context of the oppressive forces of the patriarchy[8]. Key to authentic change, then, lies not only in recognising inequality, but in ongoing work to decentre design and to contest hegemonic forms of power within the field towards social justice and equality.

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Cook, R. 2016. *The Parking Gallery: Experimental practice and the artist-run initiative in South Africa*. In: De Arte, Taylor & Francis, South Africa, 51 (1), pp. 57-73, ISSN: 0004-3389

Biography (50-100 words):

Dr Robyn Cook is a senior lecturer at Falmouth University (United Kingdom). Her research is focused on the epistemics of power in relation to design as a superstructure and the systems of domination (language, identity, economics, technology, education […]) that mesh the objects and systems of society. Since 2023, she has worked to champion disciplinary and interdisciplinary research in the Department of Communication. Prior to that, she was the Course Leader for the MA Communication Design at Falmouth University, and the Course Leader for the BA (Hons) Graphic Design at the University of Johannesburg (South Africa). Her teaching is informed by her experience as an art director and graphic designer for various agencies including Ogilvy & OgilvyAction. She also runs The Office for {Uncertain} Technology: part ulterior-wormhole, part other-thing studio, and part zero-plus-zero publisher.

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Biography (50-100 words):

Caitlin's professional background in visual communication is balanced with deep personal interest in social change and research. She has long been absorbed by the fluid relationship between design and culture, and the subsequent responsibility of creators towards consumers.

In 2018, Caitlin launched *Sorry to Interrupt* — a platform exploring how design can generate conversations around feminism. Key research threads include self-published editorials, arts-based community workshops, and guerrilla advertising concepts.

Caitlin currently holds the position of Head of Creative at Thirdway, leading an interdisciplinary team with expertise in editorial design, motion graphics, and environmental design.

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Biography (50-100 words):

Kimberly is a lecturer in the Department of Fashion Design at the University of Johannesburg. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Fashion from LISOF. She studied further at the University of Johannesburg and obtained a BA Honours and Masters in Design. She is registered in her final year for her PhD in Communication at UNISA. Kimberly has also worked on international research projects and initiatives contributing to the discourse of gender equality and representation, design education, and youth development through pedagogic intervention. Since 2020, Kimberly has been an Executive management committee member of the Design Education Forum of Southern Africa (DEFSA) and the current president since 2024.

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Ashton Margarete Moseley is a lecturer in the Department of Industrial Design at the University of Johannesburg. She is involved in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching as well post-graduate

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Caption Sheet

Figure 1. ~~*Un*~~*equal Stories* landing page www.unequalstories.falmouth.ac.uk Source: authors.

Figure 2. Initial questionnaire. Source: authors.

Figure 3. Open-ended questionnaire. Source: authors.

Figure 4. Data visualisation. Source: authors.