

to the men of design

Discrimination on the basis of gender has been illegal in the UK since 1975. Yet, a 2018 study by the British Design Council recognised a 78:22 gender split of men to women in the UK's design industry, despite 63% of UK Art & Design graduates being female. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence to prove that women in the design industry continue to face discrimination. However, this gendered issue often goes unacknowledged, sometimes blatantly ignored, as these obstacles do not affect the success of the majority - the men of design. Subsequently, the systemic issues that contribute to gender inequality are upheld as the norm, and gender inequality continues to be framed as a woman's problem to solve. But women are not the problem. The male-dominated design industry, and its unconscious bias, myth of meritocracy, and reluctance to change is the problem.

To the male designers who may not identify, nor want to associate themselves with this damaging gender hegemony - your privilege is not an inherently bad thing. However, an acknowledgement of your privilege is not enough. We need action. Over the past century, women have fought hard to gain equal rights in the work place. But must it always be with a fight? Must we still be met with resistance, indifference, and ignorance? You are part of an industry that regularly proclaims to be forward thinking and world changing. So why not redirect these capabilities, and utilise your privilege to disrupt the status quo from within? As a man, you have access to spaces of ignorance that desperately need educating. We all have a responsibility in dismantling gender inequality. This is an open letter and design brief asking you to play a more active role.

the brief

This brief is in partnership with Unequal Stories, a collaborative, GCRF funded research project between Falmouth University, United Kingdom (UK), and the University of Johannesburg, South Africa (RSA).

Utilising your skills as a designer and your privilege as a man, this brief asks you to:

- Conduct your own research and inquiry into gender disparity in the design industry. Potential areas for insight could include the male-dominated working environment, stereotypes and gender roles, unconscious bias, and so on.
- Define your key insights and develop a clear design brief via a 'What if...?' or 'How might I...?' approach e.g. 'How might I raise awareness around the consequences gender inequality in product design has to the female population?'
- Develop, brainstorm, prototype, and experiment with potential design responses.
- Fully realise your final design idea. This brief is open to the men of the entire design industry and therefore, final ideas could include any number of design outcomes such as photographs, 3D objects, products, publications, campaigns, concept drawings, videos, and so on.

Overall, the objective of this brief is to spark much needed discourse around gender disparity in design, invite men to be a part of a conversation around an issue that has long been framed as a woman's problem to solve, and gather a wide variety of insights and creative solutions. The final outcomes of this brief will be shared and showcased via an online gallery on the Unequal Stories website.