

Unlearning Design: Creating a More Equitable and Ethical Design Culture

by

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Abstract

Design is a constantly evolving field that has long attracted creative minds from all backgrounds and ages. As design changes, so too does design education. One can take numerous pathways to learn design, possibly involving: higher education, bootcamp programs, on-the-job learning, and self-guided courses. However, despite significant growth in the design field, recent scandals involving design have called into question the ethics of the field, and by implication, the question of how ethics is (or is not) being taught to students.

This research project explores systems in design that have led to this quandary of ethics in the field. The paper explores changes that the so-called Information Age has brought to design, from pedagogical shifts and growing diversity, to governmental influence and cultural manipulation. Through a process involving a survey of over 50 designers and a set of interviews with current practitioners, the paper analyzes how those currently working in design understand their field. Insights drawn from this information are used to identify archetypes, informed by potential pathways through design education, perceptions of design and ethics, and familiar and emerging disciplines of design.

The purpose of this investigation is to better understand different pathways through design education, how such differences might shape a design learner's perspective of the field in one way or another, and what effect it may have had on the design field's relationship with ethics. Looking forward, I search for a system of ethical accountability designers can be held to, while still ensuring the field remains open and inviting to new curious minds.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At the start of my graduate program in early September 2020, I knew I was ready to learn. What I quickly came to realize was that I was also ready to unlearn.

In our first week of class, Professors Dori Tunstall and Vera Roberts assigned our class Katharine Schwab's *Fast Company* article "Design Is Inherently An Unethical Industry" to read and discuss. I instantly resonated with the article, as did many of my classmates. Shreya Chopra fielded the question of a sort of Hippocratic Oath for design, a moral standard to be held to. In her response, Shreya traced the argument back to Mike Montiero's (2019) book *Ruined by Design*, a text I would end up reading later that would galvanize more of my ideals around this topic. Later that week, I read the following Tweet:

This is why Ethics class in art/design school is mighty important. Designers have to realise that visual communication is ultimately a propaganda tool and UX is behavioural science. There's power in design and communication techniques and they have to be used responsibly. (Jessica, 2020)

Between this tweet and Schwab's article, I had two pieces that perfectly illustrated the reason I wanted to pursue a master's degree in the first place. I felt that ethics training was severely lacking in my own undergraduate education, and I wondered how many working designers could say the same. Testimonies from Schwab's article hinted that the issue was larger and more fraught than I had even expected, saying things such as "As a profession, we should be clear that at best we put community interests at parity with client interests" (Cioran, 2017, as cited in Schwab, 2017).

The next event that inspired this paper was in February 2021, when I finished reading *Ruined by Design*. Montiero writes with a punk-esque edge as he recounts the sins of the tech world, from Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, influencing in the 2016 American presidential

election, to Twitter’s reliance on inflammatory content to stay afloat¹. He argues that the follies of the tech world wouldn’t have been possible if it were not for designers in those companies (Montiero, 2019). The book is as much a historical record as a manifesto; Montiero advocates for re-centering ethics in all aspects of design: work, education, theory, and most importantly in collective organization (Montiero, 2019). The anger and resolve in the book invigorated me; I was set on exploring this space for my master’s research project. Montiero fielded some brief concerns about bootcamp-style design education and I decided to expand these concerns into the topic of the paper: analyzing how these abbreviated forms of design education are changing what designers understand as “ethical.”

My (embarrassingly self-righteous) perspective on the topic would quickly change. Just a month later, I watched the Studio Ghibli film *The Wind Rises*. The film is a fictional biography, telling the story of Jiro Horikoshi, an actual Japanese aeronautical engineer during World War II. Jiro’s singular goal throughout the movie is to create “beautiful airplanes” (Miyazaki, 2013, 0:57:50) but due to the surrounding war, his airplanes must all function as warcraft. The film makes a point to show Jiro’s generous spirit, framing it in contrast to the machines he works on. He grapples with the cost of following his dreams, but by the end of the film the plane he dreams of creating is crafted into the Mitsubishi A6M Zero, one of the deadliest planes of the Second World War (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The film leaves it to its viewers to judge Jiro, how culpable he is in the atrocities of WWII as someone who wanted to follow his lifelong dream of creating beautiful airplanes. It also asks the viewers to ask that same question of themselves: what is the moral cost of creating anything when that creation supports the immoral systems around it? *The Wind Rises* helped me realize that the ethical issues in design don’t stem from any

¹ This was before Elon Musk bought the company. Attempting to unpack the current situation at Twitter could be a research project of its own.

one group of designers, but from the field of design itself. All designers today are in the same position as Jiro; I am just as culpable in reinforcing these unethical practices in design as any other designer. The field is fraught with ethical conundrums, from racism and classism to consumerism and extractivism, and it has become nigh impossible to create anything that doesn't somehow support or perpetuate these injustices.

1.1 Why I Care: Positionality

As someone raised in California's Silicon Valley, I have felt, and followed, the allure of a job in one of its storied tech giants. For new graduates especially, the campus-like spaces, free food, high pay, and impactful work promise an easy transition from university that is hard to resist. However, by the time we all saw the waves of massive tech layoffs in 2022 and 2023, the real, underlying values of these companies had become exposed. Many of the individuals and teams lost were ethics-focused, with critical responsibilities such as accountability and accessibility (Duffy, 2023), suggesting that roles centred on such values are seen by tech giants as expendable, or even worse, as hindrances to the amassing of capital.

I am coming to this project with an array of experiences and commitments: I'm a staunch anti-capitalist, a designer who has been educated at both undergraduate and graduate levels, a child of two designers, and an American expat in Canada. My values have been shaped by critical experiences: being raised in a mixed-race home, growing up with the rise of the alt-right, and graduating into the COVID-19 pandemic. The world seems to me to be at a turning point, with the failures of the current capitalist system being revealed to many through the awful course of the pandemic, and the hopeful rise of unionization across North America. This research project is shaped by my experiences, values, and interpretations of the world around me, including a self-guided study of theory and philosophy.

1.2 Guiding Questions

I have spent nearly seven years in design education. Unsurprisingly, I have many thoughts on the subject, as well as many questions. Design is a world with numerous points of entry, and while I have chosen the formal education route, there are many internationally-recognized designers who have little to no academic background. Being a designer doesn't require years of university courses, though it undoubtedly helps. Being a designer only requires that one works in design. While *design* has 14 definitions, both as a verb and a noun (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a), *designer* is defined by only two of those: creating and executing plans, or creating and manufacturing products (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Designers may be defined only by their skillset and how they use it, but design is more than just a skillset: it's also a mindset. While all designers may be working with a similar skillset, differences in education create differences in mindset. My research project seeks to understand these differences, and asks: **How has growing access to design knowledge changed the design field's relationship with ethics?**

Exploring and evaluating education can be a fraught topic, especially when it is being researched within a postgraduate setting. While this project is looking for the differences in design education and where it has fallen short of the mark, I do not intend to claim one avenue of education as superior to the others. Design is a rapidly changing field, constantly adopting new trends and technologies. Abbreviated learning courses can undoubtedly educate students on these changes faster than larger, university-scale academic spaces. I believe there lies a middle ground somewhere in these forms of education where teaching can be fast and reflexive, but still provide a comprehensive design and ethics foundation. The subquestion around this is: **How is a designer's perception of what design is and can be shaped by their pathway through design education?**

After looking at what design is today and how it got to this point, my final question looks forward: **How can we create a system of ethical accountability for designers without restricting access to the field?** Access to design knowledge and education has boomed in the Information Age, and helped the field grow more inclusive and diverse than ever before. This ease of access is a key trait that makes design such an interesting and innovative field. While the ultimate hope for this research project is to discover a system of accountability and understanding for designers and their actions, this cannot come at the cost of closing off the field to aspirants. Already we are seeing the entry cost into design programs and workshops balloon, and it is all too easy to get money involved and once again make design an exclusive club for an overwhelmingly white male demographic as it has been for far too long (Mitchell-Powell, 1991).

1.3 Research Goals

The hope for this project is that it may reveal some of the influences and biases that have brought the design field to where it is today, and find ways in which designers can reshape it for the better. In order to meet this goal, my research objectives are:

1. To understand different pathways through design education, and how such differences might shape a design learner's perspective of the field in one way or another.
2. To find a system of ethical accountability designers can be held to, while still ensuring the field remains open and inviting to newcomers.

Chapter 2: Theory and Secondary Research

2.1 Looking Back: Design in the Information Age

In order to discuss growing access to design knowledge, it's important to reflect on how design has been shaped by the current era, the so-called Information Age, starting in the mid-20th century and continuing to today. Design as a field changed drastically with the introduction of computing technology. Digital programs such as Photoshop and CAD helped supplement the physical skills and tools of designers that came before (Owen, 1991). Studying design became as much about learning how to use these digital tools as learning visual fundamentals, and mastery of one became reliant on understanding the other.

2.1.1 Teaching Design Theory

Beyond creating new tools, this era also marked design education's movement from an art-based perspective into one of science and theory (Owen, 1991). Prolific design schools shifted their curriculum throughout the 1950s and 60s. The Royal College of Arts and Hochschule für Gestaltung (Ulm School of Design) transitioned from a craft- and art-based pedagogy drawn from the Bauhaus² to one more connected to the sciences, including their deep dependence on research and theory (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019). This shift began what is called today the Design Methods Movement (Langrish, 2016). In North America, old methodologies were being adapted to the times, and more radical views of design were spreading. The Illinois Institute of Design was born out of the closure of the American New Bauhaus in 1944, and introduced more

² The Bauhaus school of design (1919-1932) already had shifted the perspective of design, adding a technical-craft perspective on top of their arts education (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019). This was revolutionary in design pedagogy, and was used as the starting point for many of the schools discussed here.

scientific frameworks and humanist approaches to design (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019). In New York City, these socially-focused, humanist frameworks were already well established in New York City's Cooper Union and spread across the city to Parsons School of Design. Parsons began as an art school but transitioned to a design focus in the 1970s, implementing a heavy focus on design philosophy and social research (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019). Designers transitioned from seeing themselves as artists to realizing that design was that and more, layering their foundation in the arts with dimensions of social science, research, and technical understanding.

These layered dimensions of education gave designers status as the modern "renaissance man", and this air of intellectualism brought the field much closer to the business world. Design was now seen as an integral part of the innovation process rather than being relegated to marketing. The field would see the ties between the design world and the corporate world strengthen into the 2000s, as business skills such as economics and project management were also introduced. These entrepreneurial skills were fostered in schools such as Interaction Design Institute Ivrea in 2000 (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019). Business and innovation curriculum is today more commonly found in design classrooms, including my own undergraduate program, the University of Waterloo's Global Business and Digital Arts.

2.1.2 Learning Design Skills

However, changes in *how* design was being taught were much more complex than changes in *what* was being taught. Outside of academia, the Internet was helping design become more accessible and diverse. Increasing access to software in schools, the falling cost of computers, and the rise of video-sharing websites allowed people to engage with the design world without being in a classroom or studio. The Internet opened up a new avenue to share information and

skills without relying on the traditional classroom space. Design aspirants could learn skills from home, on their own time, motivated by their interest in the subject. E-learning websites such as Skillshare and Coursera helped people learn the basics from accredited teachers, while websites such as YouTube enabled the creation of digital “classrooms” with channels such as The Futr and Satori Graphics that provided tutorials and academic-style lessons and lectures.

Supplemental microcredential courses also grew in popularity throughout the 2000’s (Ellis et. al, 2016), allowing people who want to change careers to gain some knowledge and skills vital to transitioning into the design world. Companies such as IDEO and universities such as Stanford’s d.school have made waves in this space. Some schools have formed around micro-accreditation, such as Brainstation or General Assembly.

2.1.3 Demographic Shifts

This “democratization” of design knowledge has played some part in the advent of a field that is demonstrably more open and diverse. The 2019 American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) Design Census³ shows that 50% of respondents came from a higher-education background, while 27% learned online or through a workshop program (AIGA & Google, 2019a). This statistic was a huge jump from the previous census in 2017⁴, where less than 10% of respondents came from a non-degree education (AIGA & Google, 2018). We can also track how the field’s diversity has grown by looking at today’s demographics in contrast with those from only thirty years ago. A 1991 survey of AIGA members found that 93% of their members were white (Mitchell-Powell,

³“The 2019 AIGA Design Census was open to the public for five weeks starting April 1, 2019. It was shared directly with AIGA’s members and attendees of the AIGA Design Conference, as well as the wider U.S. design community via social media, paid advertising, and Eye on Design’s readership” (AIGA & Google, 2019a).

⁴ “For a six-week period during November and December 2017, AIGA [...] and Google partnered to survey the US Design Industry in their second annual Design Census. Just over 13,000 people participated...” (AIGA & Google, 2018).

1991), while in 2019, that number had dropped to 71%. University demographics also shifted; the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) reported in 1987 that only 49 out of their 1800 students were from a minority background, a mere 2% (Miller, 1987). That number has blossomed; as of 2016, 30% of RISD's undergrad students come from a minority background. Additionally, 935 of their students are from overseas, nearly 40% of the student body (Holmes-Miller, 2016).

Gender demographics have shifted radically as well, with AIGA reporting that as of 2019, 61% of working designers surveyed were women (Bolt, 2020), while just under 2% were non-binary or trans (AIGA, 2019a). RISD reports much the same, with their 2014 student body being 70% women to 30% men, opposite to what it was 30 years ago (Holmes-Miller, 2016). While design has become more racially diverse and less male-dominated, it still has a long way to go. Female designers are still paid significantly less despite making up a majority of the field, and while AIGA Design Censuses have shown that diversity has improved, many recommendations say that the field should be on par with the US census; and a 71% white majority is far from that (Miller, 2017). Organizations such as *Where Are the Black Designers?* work to advocate for more diversity and uncover deep-seated issues such as Eurocentrism, while *The 3% Movement* advocates for gender equality in design, specifically in creative director roles. The design world today differs markedly from what it was before the Information Age, but there is still room for it to grow.

2.2 Looking Further Back: The Cold War of Design

“Style is an agent of culture. Graphic forms are instrumental in transforming meanings, values, and beliefs.”

— *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide*

While the Information Age allowed design to grow and diversify, it would be remiss to simply accept this as a net positive without analyzing the origins of these developments and the forces that pushed it forward.

The Cold War, happening right before and during the Information Age, propagandized design as Western nations⁵ used it to extoll the virtues of capitalism. This isn't to say this partnership was new; design and capital have been connected for centuries. For instance, graphic design's origins date back to Mesopotamian clay tablets from 3100 BCE which record "a bill for the rental of a boat, the sale of oxen, [and] a receipt for beer" (Pater, 2021, p.23). This puts graphic design's origins explicitly in the sale and trade of capital. But despite this long history between design and capitalism, the Cold War was the first time the *process* of designing was given the same value as the *objects* that were designed. Western design stylings were exported globally to create a sense of unity between capitalist nations, as seen in the wide adoption of International Typographic Style⁶. The timeless nature of mid-century design is one of the longest-lasting byproducts of this, and can be traced back to US State Department-funded exhibits with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). These exhibits, unobtrusively named "Good Design," were filled with household objects and furniture from all over America, and toured Europe through the 1950's, helping to reinforce the vision of American exceptionalism and the innovative possibilities under a capitalist system (Schwab, 2019). Many names in this exhibit are still familiar today: Knoll, Eames, and Saarinen. These designers and their creations were

⁵ In this paper, "Western" or "Western nations" is used as shorthand for the historical First World: that being nations whose governments followed a capitalist economic ideology. In respect to the Cold War, it should be made clear that the leader of the Western world was the United States, and their opposition was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

⁶ Graphic design also became a global influence in the capitalist world, separate from industrial design. Swiss graphic designers traveled across the globe after World War II, and their style of graphic design was adopted as the "International Style." Its legacy can be seen today: through typography with the Helvetica font, and through iconography in the Canadian Federal Identity's Design Standards (Durell, 2018).

commodified as propaganda, held in contrast to the much more anonymous design stylings of the USSR. This extreme contrast also exists in the art practices of the time between American abstract expressionist art and Soviet socialist realist art⁷; the prior was positioned in the West as art for art's sake, the latter as art for a utilitarian purpose (Sexton, 2021). Even the word “designer” stood in apparent contrast to Soviet society; due to its loose generalness, the term was not widely adopted in the USSR for many decades. The Russian word *dizain* specifically refers to what English speaking nations would understand as industrial design, while the aesthetic aspect of the work would be classified under *tekhnicheskaiia estetika* (Bailes, 1978). These terms did not see wide adoption until the late 1970's (Bailes, 1978), and prior to this the work would have been considered a type of construction or engineering, *konstrutirozva*⁸ (O. Quindipan, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

The designers of this era influenced global culture on a scale never seen before, establishing styles and movements that have continued to today. Propped up by capitalist governments, they became a commodity, a mechanism of Western propaganda, politicizing the mere act of design.

2.3 Looking at Today: The Creative Class

“The creative impulse—the attribute that distinguishes us, as humans, from other species—is now being unleashed on an unprecedented scale.”
— Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*

⁷ The fostering of abstract expressionist art was also funded by the US government in order to undermine Soviet culture. The MoMA (again) had ties to the CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which helped fund exhibits abroad for much the same purpose as the “Good Design” exhibitions (Saunders, 1995).

⁸ The word *konstrutirozva* is not in regular use in modern Russian language (O. Quindipan, personal communication, March 10, 2023).

The Creative Class is a concept introduced by Richard Florida over twenty years ago. An urban studies and economic theorist, Florida's interest in developing this concept stems from fostering urban regeneration and how workers in this class bring new economic development to cities.

Florida (2019) provides a definition of the creative class:

I define the core of the Creative Class to include people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music, and entertainment whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and new creative content [...] These people engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital. In addition, all members of the Creative Class—whether they are artists or engineers, musicians or computer scientists, writers or entrepreneurs—share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit. (The New Class, para. 1)

Florida sees the creative class as a force that would reshape cities, bringing in new talent to poorer urban spaces and revitalizing both local culture and economy. This has been the subject of much debate over the past two decades, as gentrification has run rampant through cities, shaped by ideas that followed many of Florida's theories. Florida himself has even acknowledged this, acknowledging how gentrification has affected cities in his 2017 book *The New Urban Crisis*.

2.3.1 The 'Norm-Setting' Class

While the economic and urban planning impacts of the creative class theory have been discussed and debated *ad infinitum*, the social effects still warrant review. Florida states that designers are a part of his creative class, and in fact the social image of this class is deeply informed by the Cold War image of designers. Florida (2019) states clearly for us here:

The Creative Class is the norm-setting class. And the norms of the Creative Class are different from those of more traditional society. Individuality, self-expression, and openness to difference are favored over the homogeneity, conformity, and "fitting in" that defined the previous age of large-scale industry and organization. (The New Class, para. 6)

This "norm-setting" status can be traced back to MoMA's "Good Design" exhibits, where capitalism granted a pedestal to specific designers and created a propagandized image of a

capitalist future. Even these stated values of individuality and self-expression standing in contrast to homogeneity and conformity are nearly the same engineered conflict between the Western image of “design” versus the Soviet image of “dizain” (Bailes, 1978). The design pedagogy discussed earlier also feeds into this cycle, as entrepreneurial aspects of design have become more emphasized. Maliheh Ghajargar & Jeffrey Bardzell (2019) have identified as much when analyzing Interaction Design Institute Ivrea.

With IDII, the conception of the designer as ‘innovator’ and ‘entrepreneur’ offers a neoliberal view of the designer as a social actor. The designer as innovator of products and services for businesses. (Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019, p. 293)

This has served to strengthen the connection between design and capitalism, bringing designers into the production of capital as they now engineer and sell these “cultural norms” that they have helped define. Design has “accepted the conditions of its own commodification, seeking to fully integrate itself with the ‘Project’ of capital (D’Aprile & Spencer, 2022). The world of design has been radically changed by the forces of capitalism in the past 70 years, with capitalism using design as a tool to entrench itself into all aspects of society, material and immaterial. All design continues to be political, even after the much vaunted end of the Cold War.

2.4 All Design is Political: False Consciousness and Designed Hegemony

“Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him, otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all. Hence he imagines false or apparent motives.”
—Friedrich Engels, 1893 letter to Franz Mehring

False consciousness is a key term from Marxist theory, describing a phenomenon in which members of a social class (in most examples the proletariat) fail to understand their real position

in a capitalist society (Engels, 1893), and instead align themselves with the ideology⁹ of the ruling class, often due to the promise of someday being able to become a part of this ruling class (Lukacs, 1920). This failure serves to obscure the abuses committed by the ruling class upon the proletariat, as the proletariat are rendered unable to advocate for and organize with other members of their class¹⁰ (Lukacs, 1920). Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci goes on further to propose that this ideological delusion is engineered as a means of control, calling this theory cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony posits that false consciousness is actively fostered by the ruling class through ideologues manipulating the proletariat to maintain a status quo by presenting the ruling class ideology as not only beneficial, but in fact the natural order of society (Gramsci et al., 1971).

2.4.1 Ideological State Designs

Now, what do Marx, Engels, and Marxist theory have to do with the world of design? Based on the design history discussed prior, it becomes clear that designers today have fallen victim to false consciousness, with the field serving as a tool of cultural hegemony. The cultural capital¹¹ granted to design during the Cold War founded this process of delusion, evidenced by interventions such as MoMA's "Good Design" exhibits. These exhibits were directly funded by the US State Department, drawing a direct line between the ruling class and designers. While designers of the era may have been seen as shapers of culture, the ruling class ultimately were

⁹ Marx and Engels define ideology as "[t]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, [...] the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. [...] The [...] mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people" (Marx et al., 1972, p.118).

¹⁰ These are major aspects of class consciousness, a key tenant in Marxist theory. Class consciousness is when one is able to identify their place within a social class system, and collectively work towards the needs and goals of their class alongside all the members of their true social class (Lukacs, 1920).

¹¹ "In his best-known work, *La Distinction* [1979], Bourdieu argued that those with high social and cultural capital (or status) are the arbiters of taste and that one's own particular taste comes from the milieu and social class in which one lives—that is, one's *field*" (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

the ones deciding which designs were promoted. Design became an avenue through which capitalist ideology spread across the globe. Richard Florida's "norm-setting" creative class expands this false consciousness into an identity of its own, still espousing the beliefs and ideals of the ruling class. In fact, the ideology of the ruling class in a capitalist society is clearly seen in *Rise of the Creative Class*, through the neoliberal framing of Florida's ideal creative. If design during the Cold War was used to spread capitalism, then design today is used to embed it, acting as an ideological state apparatus (ISA). This is a concept from Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, who built off of Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory. Althusser posits that the false ideology is enforced through visible, active, or violent means stemming from direct ruling class control through repressive state apparatuses (e.g. courts, police) but also passive, quieter means stemming from social organizations or cultural beliefs, calling them ideological state apparatuses (e.g. schools, religion, communications, arts) (Althusser & Goshgarian, 2014). While design itself falls under the umbrellas of communications and art, design education also acts as an apparatus, reinforcing false consciousness through schooling. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will illustrate the ways in which design designers have been proletarianized, that designers are a part of the working class.

2.4.2 The Allure of Creative Class Mobility

"Design is a luxury enjoyed by a small clique who form the technological, moneyed, and cultural elite of each nation."

—Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World*

Florida's framing of the creative class as a socioeconomic class of its own invites another comparison to Marxian false consciousness; the allure of class mobility. The promise of being able to move into a higher socioeconomic class drives false consciousness, as a member of the working class will advocate for the needs of the ruling class, even if it goes against their own

immediate needs, because they believe that one day they will be a part of that ruling class (Lukacs, 1920). Florida (2019) expresses how the creative class will come to shape modern economies, comparing the average wages of creative class occupations to those in the working class, service class, and agriculture.

...having a Creative Class job also brings economic benefits that extend beyond those of going to college. A college graduate working in the same occupation as a non-college graduate earns approximately 50 percent higher wages. But having a Creative Class job adds another 16 percent, about the same as another 1.5 years of additional education... (Defining the Creative Class, para. 8)

Seeing the benefits that creative occupations bring, even without formal education, it's no surprise that AIGA has seen huge demographic shifts in their design censuses.

However, this brings into question the drivers of these demographic shifts. Has access to the design field truly become more democratized, bringing in new faces to a historically exclusive field? Or have the forces of design employment driven diversification by holding out a desperate but Faustian promise of class mobility and higher wages? A few factors point to the latter: the number of programs that provide abbreviated design education, and the lack of equity within the field. The growing number of working designers coming out of workshop or microcredential programs in conjunction with Florida's findings that creative class employment promises higher wages without formal education reflects the economic draw of design work. Bootcamp programs such as Brainstation market themselves explicitly around these higher wages, giving tools and numbers to calculate the return on investment for their USD \$15,000 programs (BrainStation, 2023). A brief primer on design skills opens the door to design work, all in the name of socioeconomic mobility.

The lack of equity in design can be broken into two key pieces: the pay gap between cis-male designers and their co-workers, and the number of designers from a minority background. Male designers made 20% more than their female counterparts, despite a preponderance of

female working designers (AIGA & Google, 2019a). Additionally, the average salaries of LGBTQIA+ designers (\$35–49K USD) were lower than their straight counterparts (\$50–74K USD) (AIGA & Google, 2019a). If the creative class promises higher income, why is it that the new majority of designers make significantly less than the designers who were there before? The 2019 Design Census also notes that only 4% of the surveyed designers feel stable in their work, down from 17% only two years earlier (Typeroom, 2019). Lowering wages for new entrants to the field, combined with the growing precarity, points to a proletarianization of designers. The racial discrepancy between in the AIGA design census and the US population census paints the picture clearly: Black designers only made up 3% of the field despite being 13.6% of the US population. Referenced earlier, AIGA’s “Why is Graphic Design 93% White?” symposium in 1991 found seven major issues for Black designers, and six actionable steps for those issues. The seventh issue, internalized racism, was left undiscussed, justified by the note that “participants chose to tackle problems where they could realistically effect change” (Mitchell-Powell, 1991, p.2). Amélie Lamont, a Black woman and former AIGA member, has found a long history of anti-Blackness and white supremacy within the AIGA beyond this symposium, highlighting accounts of tokenism and awards for Black designers only being awarded posthumously (Lamont, 2020). Presented with these facts, it’s hard to call this process a democratization of design. This looks more like a proletarianization of designers.

2.4.3 Creative Class Conflict

In defining the creative class, Florida (2019) frames this group with respect to their norms and values, by asserting that they are “different from those of more traditional society [...] favored over the homogeneity, conformity, and ‘fitting in’ that defined the previous age of large-scale industry and organization” (The New Class, para. 6). To what degree to the three signature

values attributed to the creative class — individuality, meritocracy, diversity and openness — support neoliberal capitalist¹² values? Meritocracy goes hand in hand with neoliberal ideals: those who are highly skilled and knowledgeable deserve to be rewarded for their ability. Individualism is indelibly tied to neoliberalism, as reflected in Margaret Thatcher’s sentiment that “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families” (Keay & Thatcher, 1987). Diversity and openness however, is seemingly anything but neoliberal; the issue lies in how it manifests. As illustrated by the gender and race imbalances discussed prior, “to some degree it is a diversity of elites, with membership limited to highly educated, creative people” (Florida, 2019, Creative Class Values para. 6).

These staunchly held values begin to paint a picture of class division, one between this highly professionalized creative class and a manual labour class. The third chapter of *The Rise of the Creative Class* makes this more explicit, defining the creative class in contrast to the service and working classes. Contrasting census data around income, race, gender, and economic security are used to distinguish these classes (Florida, 2019), but in *The German Ideology* Marx (1972) states that it takes more than this to establish a class, writing:

The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hand, the class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it. (p.143)

Designers land in an unenviable space within this framing of class: half within and half without. Florida’s framing makes it very clear that designers and the creative class stand in opposition to manual labour class: they make more money, they’re more diverse, they value their individuality.

¹² Neoliberalism is a policy model built around supporting free market competition, associated with capitalist laissez-faire economics (Smith, 2023). Since neoliberalism is built around supporting corporations, an ideological state apparatus under a neoliberal government could be considered an ideological corporate apparatus.

The “common battle” of the creative class is to establish their values as the norms of all society, moving beyond the “homogeneity, conformity, and ‘fitting in’ that defined the previous age of large-scale industry and organization” (Florida, 2019). The creative class is written as the inevitable victor in this battle: they hold more economic power, more voting power, and set the cultural norms in society; the vanguard of a global value shift (Florida, 2019, Creative Class Values para. 1). The all-encompassing nature of the creative class ideology points to it acting as an ideological state apparatus, a tool of cultural hegemony for ruling class values. The neoliberal values the creative class fosters directly support the goals of the ruling class; preventing worker solidarity through individualism and perpetuating injustices through meritocracy. Florida (2019) himself says as much:

They are reluctant to conform to organizational or institutional directives and resist traditional group-oriented norms. (Creative Class Values, para. 2)

Qualities that confer merit, such as technical knowledge and mental discipline, are socially acquired and cultivated. Yet those who have these qualities may easily begin to believe that they were born with them, or acquired them all on their own, or that others just “don’t have it.” By papering over the causes of cultural and educational advantage, meritocracy may subtly perpetuate the very prejudices it claims to renounce. (Creative Class Values, para. 3)

Despite their “common battle”, members of the creative class remain “on hostile terms with each other as competitors” (Marx et al., 1972) due to these exact same individualist, meritocratic values. If the creative class as it stands resists organization and actively benefits from prejudices against other members of their class, they cannot act in solidarity with one another; it begs the question of whether it is truly a class at all. If it is only expressed in its statistical differences from other workers, it points to a division of labour rather than a class in its own right. While acknowledging that a division in labour will naturally occur on some level (physical ability due to aging for example), Marx (1972) explains that capitalism divides labour in the workplace to such an extreme that its effects bleed out into the rest of society.

Division of labor within the workshop implies the undisputed authority of the capitalist over men, that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him. The division of labor within the society brings into contact independent commodity- producers, who acknowledge no other authority but that of competition, of coercion exerted by the pressure of their mutual interests; just as in the animal kingdom, the *bellum omnium contra omnes* [war of all against all] more or less preserves the conditions of existence of every species. (p. 283)

Division of labour is a tool used by the ruling class that prevents organization through distrust; the workers must collaborate in order to create commodities (that are in turn owned by the capitalist bourgeoisie), but are still forced into competition with one another. The values of the creative class have done the same: individualism has created a distrust of organization and competition is spurred by designers needing to prove their own merit over one another. If designers wish to make their field truly equitable, it begins with acknowledging the harm of these neoliberal values.

2.4.4 Design is Selling Design

In Ghajargar and Bardzell's (2019) observations of "the designer as entrepreneur" pedagogy, they express that this type of design is inherently neoliberal: "the conception of designer as 'innovator' and 'entrepreneur' offers a neoliberal view of the designer as a social actor. The designer as innovator of products and services for businesses" (The Interaction Design IVREA Association, 2001, as cited in Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019, p. 292). In his 2018 book *Against Creativity*, Oli Mould calls attention to this connection between neoliberalism and modern design and creativity:

One of their [neoliberal world leaders] key tropes was the importance of the 'enterprising self'. It wasn't up to the government or society to help you out: if you wanted to succeed in this world, you had to unleash your inner entrepreneur. It is easy to see then how neoliberalism and the creativity rhetoric go hand-in-glove. Being creative today means seeing the world around you as a resource to fuel your inner entrepreneur. Creativity is a distinctly neoliberal trait because it fuels the notion that the world and everything within it can be monetized. (p.12)

This entrepreneurial pedagogy becomes a mechanism of false consciousness that creates more designers, who then go on to spread this false consciousness further. Interaction Design Institute Ivrea (IDII), the school that promoted these entrepreneurial connections, referred to their students as “products”. The framing of students as products of education reflects the mechanistic perspective of this pedagogy, reducing designers to an apparatus to spread “ideas about how to design products and services that are culturally desirable, technically feasible, and economically viable” (The Interaction Design Ivrea Association, 2001, as cited in Ghajargar & Bardzell, 2019, p. 292).

Outside of universities, this entrepreneurial, business-focused perspective is often found in the abbreviated design education resources and programs discussed prior. Premier design thinking bootcamp programs at IDEO and Stanford’s d.school promise the ability to “drive growth” and make “human-centred” design solutions in the workplace, and charge exuberant prices for the privilege. IDEO’s eight-week program costs nearly \$15,000 USD, while a d.school program that is similarly priced at \$14,000 USD runs for a mere four days. It’s hard to see the “human-centered” thinking in charging one-fifth of the average working-class family’s income for such a short period of time (Buzon, 2020). Even the aforementioned free YouTube classroom, The Futur, frames its design lessons through marketing and business skills and has started selling their own monetized class structure and bootcamps¹³. A pattern emerges in this entrepreneurial design approach: paying exorbitant amounts of money for a promise of quickly joining the creative class and the income benefits it provides. IDEO’s appointment of a new CEO¹⁴ whose background is in marketing and advertising rather than design (Wilson, 2022)

¹³ The classes range from \$30-\$500 USD, and are all pre-recorded lectures. The bootcamp charges \$3,995 for a 6-7 week program (Te, 2018).

¹⁴ It should be noted that IDEO was found to have an abusive, white supremacist work culture that was harmful to their employees, especially for female and minority background employees. An article published by former

makes the goals of these types of courses clear: to advertise design as much as teach it, their students becoming “products” that will go on to spread the same ideas that IDII espoused.

2.4.5 Creatification

The blending of design into the corporate business world and beyond invites scrutiny as well. Florida (2019) frames the blending of creativity into all fields as a part of a necessary global values shift, stating that “since we cannot truly prosper with a system that harnesses the creativity of only one-third of its workforce, the key task of the future must be to fully engage the creative talents of the other two-thirds” (Tracking the Classes, para. 9). Florida sees this as something that will empower society by creating more stimulating and engaging types of work. This sentiment once again reiterates the “designer as entrepreneur” pedagogy, revealing that the creative class mobility promised by Florida may be “mobility into the petite bourgeois,”¹⁵ a class that has already become proletarianized (Wright & Singelmann, 1982). Where Florida believes harnessing creativity would empower all workers, Mould¹⁶ (2018) instead argues that this understanding of “creativity,” taught and spread within the entrepreneurial pedagogy, isn’t creativity at all. Similar to the the framing of design as an ideological state apparatus, Mould says that “creativity under capitalism is not creative at all because it only produces more of the same form of society; it merely replicates existing capitalist registers into ever-deeper recesses of socioeconomic life” (p. 50). What Florida calls “engaging the creative talents of the other [service and working class] two-thirds” (Florida, 2019, Tracking the Classes, para. 9), Mould

employee George Aye (2021) and 47 anonymous alumni and current employees establishes that these issues were known for years by management and not acted upon (Aye, 2021).

¹⁵ “Defined by Karl Marx as a ‘transitional class’, in which the interests of the major classes of capitalist society (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) meet and become blurred [...] Marx derides what he sees as the petit-bourgeois self-delusion that, because it combines both employment and ownership of the means of production, it somehow represents the solution to the class struggle” (Oxford Reference, n.d.).

¹⁶ Aside from human geography, Oli Mould is an urban studies theorist like Richard Florida.

calls *creatification*. To Mould (2019), creatification takes the innate creative sense all humans have and warps it into something that fits into something that can be exploited in labour.

Promising higher wages, new business skills, and socioeconomic mobility, it is clear that the design pedagogy explored above has become an avenue to enable this creatification. In their *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels predicted this shift in labour:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. (Marx et al., 1972)

The promise of creatification, of entrepreneurial design, is simply a re-framing of labour exploitation, a change in the instruments of production. Intellectual or cognitive labour is the change in relation of production, and it is not as easily held within a workplace or time frame, “it reduces the need for a physical office space, in-work benefits, and long-term contracts, and intrudes into out leisure time, home life and emotional energies” (Mould, 2019, p.38). The creative class and design entrepreneurialism are the changes in relations of society, maintaining a neoliberal false consciousness over workers. While manual labour was exploited in the past, the capitalist re-framing of creativity has found a way to exploit cognitive labour as well.

2.4.6 Labouring in Design

The position of this paper, that designers are victims of false consciousness, presupposes that designers are a part of the working class. While the artsy studio spaces and glass-filled tech campuses are hardly similar to the factory floors Marx discussed, this veneer of status granted through Cold War propaganda and creative class deification is easily wiped away. Class is defined not by income or statistics as illustrated by Florida, but by relation to work. It’s been established how design has arbitrarily divided labour to prevent solidarity, and how creativity has

been exploited for the creation of capital. Rather than physical labour power, designers trade in cognitive and emotional labour power, but their precarity is still one and the same.

While this paper has so far analyzed the problems in design today, this is not to say that there is a bygone era where design was “pure” and we should strive to reclaim it: far from that. We’ve established that the relationship between design and capitalism dates back centuries. There is no unfettered past within the era of design that we can look back to. This paper may represent but one moment in a long history of designers pushing against the hold capitalism has on the field. Efforts to organize designers can likely be traced to the origins of design itself. This overlap is no less true in the information era, from Ken Garland’s *First Things First* in 1964 to Sasha Costanza-Chock’s Design Justice Network in 2020¹⁷. Despite this, the machine of capitalism has only continued to expand. Growing diversity in the field and easier access to knowledge are unquestionably positive developments in design today, but even then we have seen ways in which these are still not enough. Considering design as an ideological state apparatus actually points to ways in which designers may change the state of their field.

Althusser (2014) explains:

Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle, and often of bitter forms of class struggle. The class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus, not only because the former ruling classes are able to retain strong positions there for a long time, but also because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there, either by the utilization of their contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in them in struggle. (The Ideological State Apparatuses, para. 17)

¹⁷ The 1964 *First Things First* manifesto, spearheaded by graphic designer Ken Garland, pushed against the growing consumerist culture in his home country of England. *First Things First* has been republished with modern issues and concerns a number of times (2000, 2014, & 2020), each with a growing number of signatories. There is also the Design Justice Network, founded around a 2020 publication of the same name by Sasha Costanza-Chock. A list of ten principles define their goals to foster a more justice-minded design field, and they invite signatories to pledge themselves to the same principles in their own work.

As an ideological state apparatus, the power of design is in flux. If designers are able to find solidarity not only among themselves but other members of the working class, design can be claimed as a tool of the working class, empowering new voices rather than maintaining a ruling class status quo. Design workers have to look to the future and take steps today if they hope to revolutionize the design field.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

To challenge and scrutinize my understanding of design further, I organized a two-phase research project that would allow me to gain the perspectives of other designers from a multitude of fields. The first of these phases would be a widely-distributed, high level survey. After gathering responses for some time, five of the survey respondents would be chosen for a short interview that would allow me to gather insights more directly, and engage with other designers more personally. These interviewees were selected based on groupings identified through analyzing the survey responses, looking for patterns around types of work, education, and ethical perspectives. The interviews, in combination with the survey responses, would be used to identify a number of designer archetypes shaped around similar perspectives of the nature of design as well as the nature of their work within the design field.

3.1 Potential Limitations

While I believe these two forms of research will allow me to gain a broader perspective on my chosen topic space, they still come with potential risks and limitations. Many of these limitations stem from my position, but also simply the nature of the topic I've chosen to research.

The explicitly academic framing of a master's research project will likely influence the way in which respondents answer the survey questions. Respondents may be more modest with their answers since they are comparing their personal knowledge base to an academic knowledge base, or they overcompensate in their answers in order to stand out within an academic framing. Self-reporting and assessment is an imperfect process at best; it's hard for one to be completely objective of their own skills and knowledge without some form of bias shaping their perceptions.

The Dunning-Krueger effect is a cognitive bias that reflects this dissonance in self-reporting, where someone who knows little about a subject cannot accurately self-report their own understanding on said subject, creating a wide gap between their actual knowledge and what they perceive it to be¹⁸ (Jerz, 2020). There is little I can do to remove the academic framing of my research, and the dedication to privacy means that I must rely on respondents self-reporting on their skills and knowledge. Biases of some sort are present in all research, and I don't know that these ones can be avoided.

The survey will also be limited, at least upon the initial distribution, by the spaces I am in and the people I know. As a design student, the people who have immediate access to are people with very similar skill sets and education to myself. Whether it is my undergraduate classmates from the University of Waterloo or my master's classmates at OCADU, there is an expectation that a number of my responses will likely be from people approximately in my age range, who work in user experience, graphic design, or design research. Despite what may be an apparent limitation, an aspect of my research is looking at design education as it is today. An influx of responses from newer designers isn't necessarily a negative to my research as it will provide a more modern picture of the field versus the statistics gathered from the AIGA, which are a few years out of date at this point.

There are also some potential limitations within the interview stage. Similarly to the survey concerns, there is a cognitive bias in any self-reporting, though it may be more pronounced in a one-on-one interview since there is the understanding that I am interviewing them as subject matter experts. Designers come from many different backgrounds, and one's

¹⁸ Recent studies are questioning the validity of the Dunning-Kreuger effect as it is portrayed socially. The 1999 paper presupposed that this effect was a common human psychological effect, but the original research method has been found to be lacking and has invited scrutiny. While it may be accurate in self-reporting in the moment, it fails to account for change over time, general arrogance, and overconfidence bias among other things (Jarry, 2020).

level of education has little meaning when it comes to a designer's skill and capability, so it is important that I ensure everyone who has volunteered their time to aid me in this research feels empowered and qualified throughout the whole process.

3.2 The Survey

The foremost reason a survey was the correct path for this research is because I was seeking insight from people who may not consider themselves "industry professionals" or experts in the field. Where a call for interviews may bring out people who were more sure of their skills in design, an anonymous survey would allow people to honestly state their opinions and beliefs without needing to feel underqualified. To help prevent any unsureness, the survey was written to sound more conversational, attempting to take the academic edge off. A survey would also allow insights from a large number of people, allowing for the research to be defined by a wide, diverse group of opinions and ideas. Recruiting materials for this survey can be found in Appendix B.

3.2.1 Active Limitations

There are three key limitations I am putting on the survey, both on the nature of the survey and on my own expectations:

1. **This is a survey, not a census.** The scope of my work is limited by a number of factors, chief among them time and reach. Even though the survey is gathering demographic data, I know what I find here will not be representative of the design field at the same level as the AIGA Design Censuses from the past few years. While an organization such as theirs has teams working for months to develop and distribute data, and is able to chart shifts

over time, I am a single masters student who also has a hard deadline on when my work must be completed and cannot track my data with the same level of scrutiny.

2. **This is a qualitative survey.** Though I am gathering demographic data, the value isn't in the raw data itself. The value of my findings comes from looking at the information in conjunction with other data points. I am looking for patterns in the data, as my sampling size won't be large enough to do any sort of meaningful statistical analysis.
3. **The survey represents a moment in time.** Design is a rapidly shifting field, and those changes have only been more pronounced since the pandemic started. In the past few years, we've seen hiring booms, changes in workplace structure, and massive layoffs; all work is in a tumultuous state at the moment. Where a true census may try to capture these shifts over time, the survey only represents the design field as it was in North America between August to September of 2022.

3.2.2 Survey Structure

The survey is broken into five key sections: disclosure agreements, respondent qualifications and restraints, demographic data, education and work history, and personal reflections. The disclosure agreements ensured that respondents understood how the data would be used and stored, in accordance with OCADU's research ethics board.

3.2.2.1 Qualifications & Restraints

These qualifications were key in controlling scope and allowing insight into an area of design where my own personal understanding would aid the research rather than hinder it. These acted as restraints to ensure that respondents would be over 18 and have relevant work experience, rather than work aspirations.

- **The respondents are currently working or employed, either part time or full time.**

This was to ensure that my responses weren't coming from full time students. While data from students may have helped paint a clearer picture when it came to the demographic questions, I wanted to make sure I was gaining insights from people who had engaged with design in the context of labour in the working world rather than something aspirational. Additionally, it ensures that I am gaining insights about the design field as it stands today, rather than retrospectives from respondents who may have worked as designers in the past.

- **The respondents are located in North America.** This limitation was to help contain the scope of the project, as many countries overseas have very different relationships with design as a field, and many of them have different understandings of work and labour. My own understanding of the field is North American, so this felt like an appropriate limitation to add.

- **The respondents are designers, or use aspects of design in their work.** I wanted to ensure I was hearing from as wide a range of designers as I could, and opening this up to people who use aspects of design in work felt like an appropriate way to invite people who may not think of themselves as designers to participate in my research. Design is a large and diverse field in terms of types of work, and I wanted to capture that as best I could.

3.2.2.2 Demographics

The next section was focused on gathering demographic information, and had only three questions in order to limit the amount of identifiable data points I was gathering in what was an anonymous survey. Additionally, these questions were all optional. The questions were:

1. **What is your age?** The age ranges were cut into ten year cohorts, starting at 18-24, and then ending at 75+. Using 18 as the starting point made sure I was only getting responses from adults who could legally agree to the consent forms versus someone who may need guardian approval.
2. **What were the ethnic or cultural origins of your ancestors?** The ethnic and cultural origin categories were sourced from the Statistics Canada (StatCan) 2021 census. They were: “North American Indigenous origins, European origins, Caribbean origins, Latin, Central, and South American Origins, African Origins, Asian Origins, and Oceanian Origins” (Statistics Canada [StatCan], 2021). This question also allowed multiple choice responses.
3. **What is your gender identity?** This question had four options: Man, Woman, Non-Binary/Non-Conforming, and a section to fill in your own response. I understand gender is a spectrum, and wanted to make sure a respondent that sees themselves as more than just “non-conforming” was empowered to express their identity.

3.2.2.3 Work and Education History

The next set of questions was explicitly related to design, both education and work. The first few were explicitly about education, gathering information on how respondents were taught and for how long. The forms of education and accreditations listed in the survey were: secondary school / high school, college diploma, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, doctoral degree, certificate course, seminar, on the job/ apprenticeship, self taught, microcredential from an academic institution, or a microcredential from another business organization.

After this, questions were about the nature of work: What field(s) of design respondents worked in, whether the work was technical (involved computer programming of any sort), how

long respondents had been working, what type of employment respondents had, and what business sector respondents worked within. Additionally, I asked if respondents had ever taken a break from work to pursue further education. I also included some short answer questions for if the respondent was willing to share more detailed information such as their job title or specifics of their work.

3.2.2.4 Personal Reflection

Finally, the last section was more qualitative than the past two, asking for the respondents' perspectives on the field they work in and their own understanding of design and topics within it. Asking respondents to define what “design” means to them invited respondents to think more critically about what they do. Questions asking what the responsibilities of designers are, as well as asking where respondents encounter design ethics in both their work and their education, introduced aspects of foresight, having them reflect on how their education shaped them into the designer they are today.

At the end of the survey, I left the option for the respondent to be contacted by me by email, and whether they'd be open to being interviewed about their responses at a later date. Additionally, I left the option to leave an email if they'd like to be contacted upon the completion of this paper, but wouldn't like to be interviewed.

3.2.3 Survey Results

By the time the survey had closed, I had collected a total of 79 responses, though 24 of those responses were ineligible due to not meeting the qualifications for my research (located in North America, currently working, use design in their work). Of the 55 remaining responses, 34 of the respondents left their email to be contacted later, and 28 of those who did were open to being

interviewed. These 55 complete responses I received shaped the archetypes explored in the next chapter of this paper.

3.3 The Interview

Of the 28 respondents that were open to being interviewed for this phase of the research, I limited my interviews to only 5. This limitation prevented my archetype numbers from ballooning, ensuring the work I was doing was specific and actionable, rather than becoming esoteric to the point of uselessness. Additionally, I was careful to ensure that none of the interviewees selected were people I was too familiar with (the term my advisor and I used was “more than an arm’s distance from socially”). This was to prevent any biased answers I may get from close friends or acquaintances who would give answers to support the research they knew I was doing.

3.3.1 Selecting Interviewees

Of the 28 respondents open to being interviewed, I recognized 7 of the emails as close peers and removed them from the interviewee selection group. This left me with 21 potential options, approximately 38% of the complete responses. This was much higher than I had expected going into this project, and gave me much more flexibility with my options.

Precursory data analysis revealed similar perspectives of design and design ethics within specific roles and fields, so interviewee options were first divided between the different design fields they worked within. I ended up with six main designer groups: art and fashion, urban planning and architecture, engineers, user experience, graphic design, and design research. Due to the nature of design work, many survey respondents fit into multiple categories. The patterns found in the data will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Since this interview would primarily discuss design ethics and potentials of a design code of conduct, I eliminated the urban planning and architecture and engineering groups from my potential interviewees. I know these fields already have strict professional codes of conduct of their own. I also removed the art and fashion group from my potential interviewees. This is due to how the survey was shared and limiting potential biases; both my parents are designers and shared the survey within their circles. My mother works in art and fashion and my father works in architecture, so I was fairly certain that many of the survey respondents in these groups were peers of my parents, which could potentially break my “social arm’s distance” rule for selecting interviewees.

3.3.2 Interviewees

The remaining design groups were user experience, graphic design, and design research. Within these, I selected interviewees looking primarily at their design education journey and how they described their understanding of design. My selection process also accounted for design field, gender, race, and age statistics provided. This was to ensure I was getting a diverse understanding of design. I also ensured I was getting insights from respondents who may not necessarily work as a designer, but use design methods in their work. Table 1 describes the interviewees I selected, along with their survey responses that were relevant to their selection.

Table 1**Interviewee Survey Responses and Selection Criteria**

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4	Interviewee 5
Gender Identity	Woman	Woman	Woman	Man	Man
Ethnic/Cultural Origins	• Asian Origins	• Caribbean Origins • African Origins	• European Origins	• European Origins	• Asian Origins
Age Range	25-34	18-24	25-34	45-54	25-34
Design Education	• Bachelor's Degree • On the job • Self Taught	• High School • Bachelor's Degree • Self Taught	• High School • Bachelor's Degree • Master's Degree • Self Taught	• Certificate Course • On the job • Self Taught	• Bachelor's Degree • On the job • Self Taught
Time in Education	≤ 2 Years	≤ 6 Years	≤ 8 Years	≤ 4 Years	≤ 1 Year
Level of design ethics knowledge	Some ethics knowledge	Some ethics knowledge	Some ethics knowledge	Little or no ethics knowledge	Extensive ethics knowledge
Primary Design Fields	• User Experience • Design Research	• Graphic Design	• Design Research	• User Experience	• Graphic Design
Time Working	≤ 1 Year	≤ 5 Years	≤ 1 Year	≤ 20 Years	≤ 6 Months
Relationship to Design in Work	Working as a designer	Working as a designer	Working as a designer	Working as a designer	Uses aspects of design in work, but not a designer

Coincidentally, the interviewee demographics mirrored the AIGA design census demographics in some aspects: leaning female, skewing younger, and with a similar cultural make-up. After these five interviewee selections I had a few alternates selected in case anyone did not respond or want to be interviewed, but everyone promptly responded and sent back their consent forms to be interviewed.

3.3.3 Interview Structure

The interview was broken into four sections: research introduction, reviewing survey responses, personal perspectives of the design field, and understanding accountability. The structure was intentionally built in such a way that the interviewees would become more comfortable as time went on, making them more willing to discuss the more complex questions at the end. By first learning a bit about myself and then reviewing what they've already said, the interviewees and I were able to build up some rapport before they feel like they need to offer anything new that they haven't discussed before. This rapport made the interviews much more conversational and friendly rather than a colder, more formal approach.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed within two weeks, allowing interviewees the option to redact anything that they said if they felt it was too personal or inappropriate to share. This also mitigated risk of workplace retaliation if interviewees said something negative about current or former employment.

3.3.3.1 Introducing the Research Project

This first part of the interview was not recorded as it was fairly rote. I would first greet the interviewee, and thank them for taking the time to talk to me and help my research. I would then explain my research question and what I hoped to find, as well as my own background as a designer and my time in design education between the University of Waterloo and Ontario College of Art and Design.

After introducing myself and my research, I asked if the interviewee had any questions about the research or any concerns about the interview. After these were addressed, I would ask their permission to begin recording and start the interview process.

3.3.3.2 Reviewing Survey Responses

Once recording began, I would be explicit that first we would first review what they already said about themselves in the survey. This was to remind interviewees of what they had already shared with me, as it may have been more than a month since they took the survey. This had the additional benefit of making them more comfortable, as they wouldn't be expected to say anything too personal or insightful right out of the gate, creating a sort of mental warm-up period at the start.

I would first ask them to share their job title, ensuring their introduction to the interview was anonymous and that no names would be recorded. The vague nature of the question was intentional, keeping it open enough that interviewees could share as little or as much as they would like to. While everyone shared the name of their role, some also shared the organization they worked for or team they worked in. The questions after this asked what made the interviewee want to work in design or how they found themselves in the design space, as well as their personal understanding of what it meant to be "ethical." I was also careful to blunt the question on ethics, being clear that there's not a right answer to such a vague question and that "neither of us are philosophers here." The questions after this reviewed their education history both within and outside of design, and what they learned about design ethics in that time.

This group of questions was carefully chosen in order to establish themes of work, education, design, and ethics in the start of the interview. These themes carry through the rest of the interview and become more in depth, but these first questions helped interviewees get into a headspace where they were able to think on these things more critically. The next question acted as a transition into the next section, asking where they first became aware of ethical implications within their own work or practice.

3.3.3.3 Perspectives of Design

Transitioning from their personal practice to the design field as a whole, this section asks interviewees to share how they see design, both their own type of design and the field as a whole. I first ask them what their field of design does well today: either something that it has always done well since its inception or a recent shift for the better. I then ask what their field needs to improve in, something that may not have been addressed yet as a field or something that hasn't improved enough.

After this, the next few questions integrate aspects of foresight framing, adopting Fred Polak's Image of the Future framework. The framework is built around two key axes: whether one has a positive or negative view of the future, and how much agency that person believes they have in shaping the future. This gives us the axes of optimistic versus pessimistic and active versus passive (Polak & Boulding, 1973).

To introduce this way of thinking, I asked interviewees what they believed the most pressing ethical concern will be within the next ten years. These concerns didn't have to be explicitly related to design, but I made a point not to mention this to the interviewees. This gave me a bit of insight into how the interviewee sees the world; the natural instinct may be to frame the concern through the lens of the design field since it is the topic of discussion, but a concern that is not design-focused hints towards broader, more structural concerns. After this, I asked what their field needs to do to respond to that concern, and how much agency they have to enact change. The agency question also did not have the explicit design framing, and many interviewees expressed how empowered they felt both inside and outside the design field.

3.3.3.4 Understanding Accountability

With design questions out of the way, the interview then shifted to perspectives of work and ethics. The first question tackled this directly, asking if the interviewee had ever had an ethical disagreement with a colleague, and how they responded to that. The next question touched on the precarity of design work, asking if they had ever been asked by a superior to work on a project that was contrary to their values. These questions explored how ethics and morals fit into the workplace, and how they can be challenged by power dynamics.

The last two questions addressed accountability head on. Revisiting a question from the survey, I again ask “as a designer, who are you accountable to?” Being able to compare their response in the survey to their response at the end of the interview allowed me to see how their perspective may have changed through this discussion between peers, if it changed at all. My final question asked what a system of accountability in design would look like to the interviewee. I expressed that they didn’t need to frame their response as something that was immediately feasible; the system they describe could ignore obvious roadblocks or time constraints. This again introduced aspects of foresight, allowing me to get a clear image of the interviewee’s hopes and ideals and their vision of idealized design labour.

3.3.4 Interview Results

At the end of the interview, I asked if there was anything the interviewee might want to clarify from their earlier responses, or if there were any questions they might want to revisit. Once these were addressed, I thanked them again for their time and ended the recording. Often there was some discussion after the recording ended, as interviewees had a few questions for me about my research topic or my own design history.

At the end of the interview phase, I had transcribed five interviews that ranged from seventeen to forty-two minutes in length. Only one interviewee had revisions to make on the transcript, but all were happy to have the time to discuss their own work and hopes for the future.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Synthesis

At the end of the survey, I was left with plenty of insights and data that spanned a number of design fields and came from a diverse range of designers. I had 55 survey responses to analyze, each with nearly 30 points of data, and my interview research gave me just over two hours of recorded discussion. Thank you again to all the designers who all generously shared their time and opinions, empowering me to share that data here.

4.1 Analysis Methodology

Since the survey results were a mix of quantitative and qualitative data points, the analysis took place over a few platforms. All of the demographic data, as well as some of the work and education history section, was visualized graphically in the Microsoft Forms results page, but often needed further refinement. The qualitative data needed to be analyzed and sorted manually, so I brought this data into the digital whiteboard tool Miro where I was able to group and distribute these responses.

From the interviews, I was able to gather key insights that changed how I read some of the survey responses. By comparing the five interviewee transcripts to other respondents from similar age ranges, educational backgrounds, and fields of design, I was able to gain a deeper insight into all 55 respondents. Highlights from interviewees will be intertwined in the following explanations, or highlighted at the end of the subsection.

4.2 Demographic Comparison

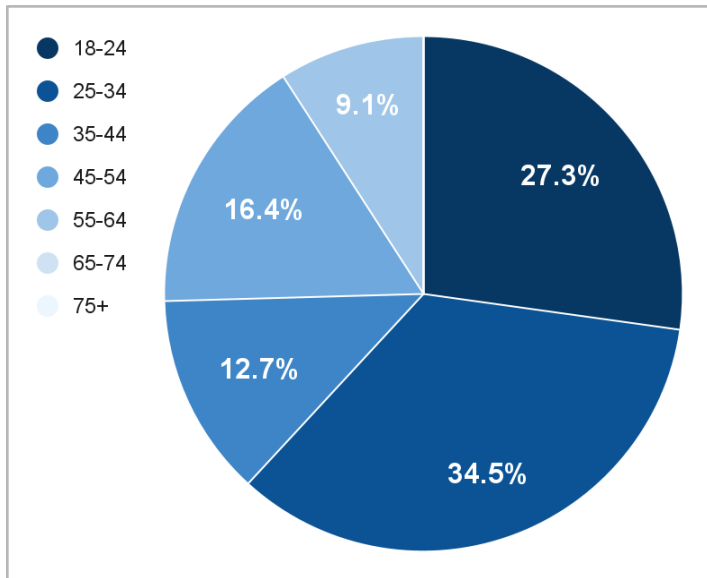
As stated in my research methods, the little demographic data I did gather was for the purpose of holding my own research accountable. Being able to compare my data to that of the 2019 AIGA Design Census would reveal biases in my own data and the limitations due to my own reach and comparatively small sample size.

4.1.1 Age Range

My first demographic question was about age ranges. All of my respondents answered this question, giving me a sample size of 55, though none of them were above the age of 65. The 2019 Design Census did have designers in the 65-74 and 75+ age ranges, though this was only 1.1% and 0.1% of the responses respectively. While both data sources skewed younger, my own research has many more designers from the 18-24 age range, likely due to my own network of peers who would have seen the survey. The 2019 Design Census had many more designers from the 25-34 age range, likely due to membership fees which may be a deterrent to new graduates who are starting a career. The majority of my respondents are between the ages of 18 and 34, and the 2019 Design Census respondents are between the ages of 25 and 44.

Figure 1

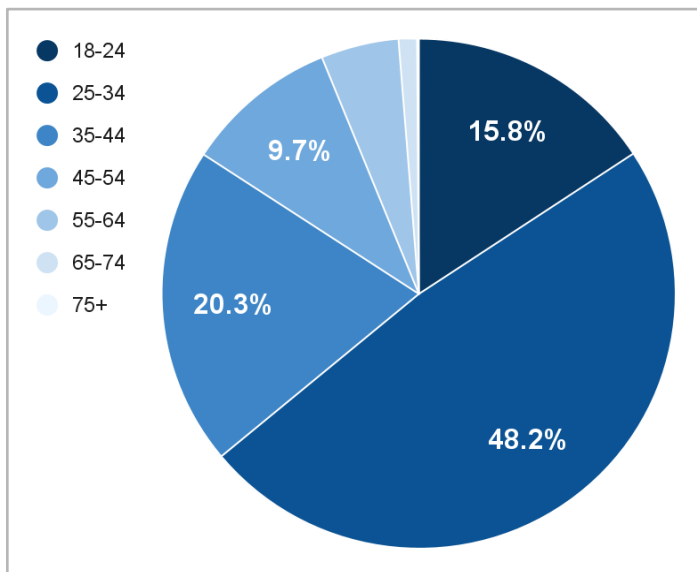
Age Ranges of Respondents in the MRP Survey



Note. Gathered Autumn 2022, Sample size of 55

Figure 2

Age Ranges of Respondents in the 2019 AIGA Design Census



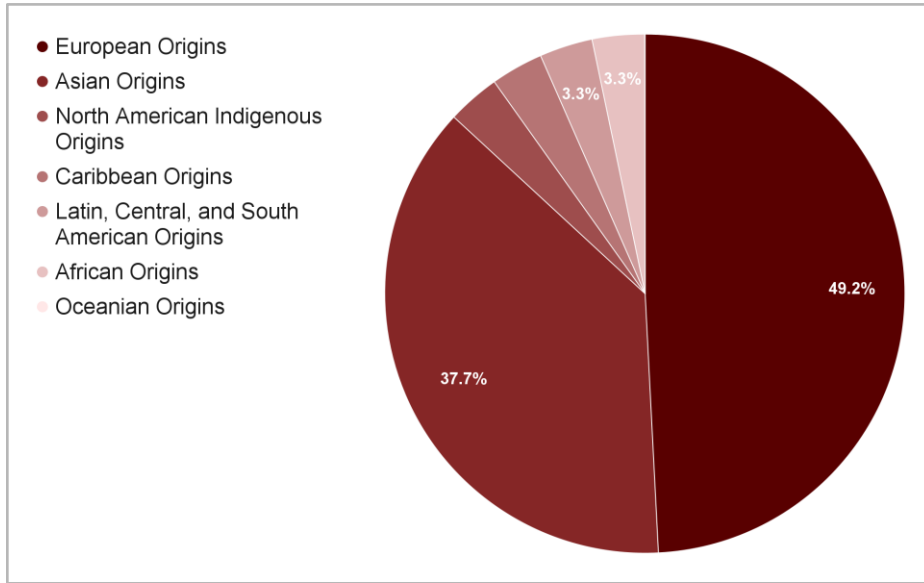
Note. Gathered April-May 2019, Sample size of 9401. (AIGA & Google, 2019a)

4.1.2 Ethnic/ Cultural Origins

These demographics are not as easy to compare, as the categories I borrowed from Statistics Canada are not the same as the 2019 Design Census. My respondents are more diverse when looking solely at percentages, but a sample size of 53 is a key factor in this difference. Notably, I had a larger percentage of respondents with Asian origins: 37.7%, compared to only 9.6% in the 2019 Design Census. This is likely due to a mix of my own social circles (I am mixed-race Asian and European, and grew up in both cultures) as well as the demographics of the cities I have lived in. Both Santa Clara County, California and Toronto, Ontario have a large percentage of citizens with Asian ethnic/cultural origins, 39% (Angst, 2021) and 37.4% (StatCan, 2023) respectively. Additionally, the 2019 Design Census had a category for respondents with multiple ethnic/cultural origins, while my own survey allowed multiple choice instead. I had 6 multiracial respondents in the survey, coming out to 11.32% of the total respondents, as compared to 4.7% of respondents from the 2019 Design Census.

Figure 3

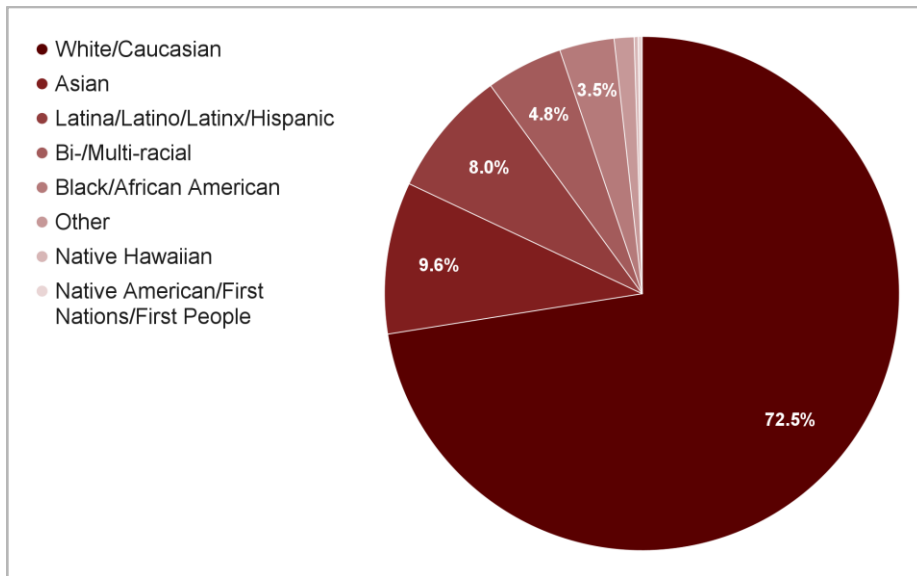
Ethnic/ Cultural Origins of Respondents in the MRP Survey



Note. Gathered Autumn 2022, Sample size of 53

Figure 4

Ethnic/ Cultural Origins of Respondents in the 2019 AIGA Design Census



Note. Gathered April-May 2019, Sample size of 9179. (AIGA & Google, 2019a)

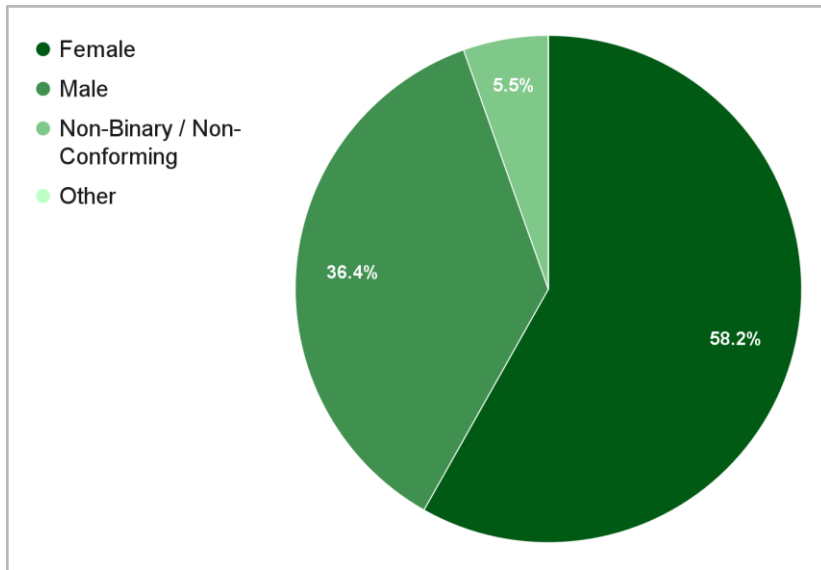
4.1.3 Gender Identity

Gender demographics between the survey and the 2019 Design Census are remarkably similar, save for the higher percentage of Non-Binary / Non-Conforming respondents from the survey. Aside from biases within my social circles, this is likely influenced by my respondents skewing younger than the respondents in the 2019 Design Census. Statistics Canada has noted that “[g]ender diversity was highest among those aged 20 to 24, almost 1 in 100 (0.85%)” (Statistics Canada [StatCan], 2022). The 18-24 age range in my own survey made up 27.3% of respondents, nearly double that of the 2019 Design Census, which was 15.8% of respondents.

It should be noted that this discrepancy may also be attributed to how each survey was labelled. The 2019 Design Census provided more nuance than I did when listing their gender categories but even combined the percentage of their respondents that did not identify as male or female total to only 1.84%, compared to 5.5% in the survey. The 2019 Design Census notes that “this data set is still too small to be statistically significant” (AIGA & Google, 2019).

Figure 5

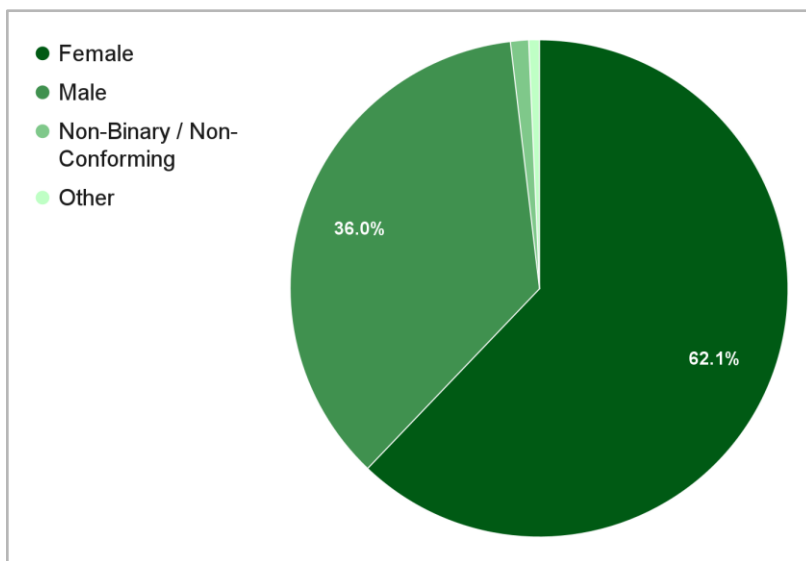
Gender Identity of Respondents in the MRP Survey



Note. Gathered Autumn 2022, Sample size of 55

Figure 6

Gender Identity of Respondents in the 2019 AIGA Design Census



Note. Gathered April-May 2019, Sample size of 9334. The categories have been re-represented to match those in Figure 5: non-binary and gender nonconforming have been combined into “Non-Binary / Non-Conforming,” and gender fluid, gender questioning, agender, bigender, and pangender have been combined with “Other.” (AIGA & Google, 2019a)

4.3 Design Education

As discussed prior, design education can take many different forms, with most designers pursuing multiple forms of education throughout their career. All 55 respondents answered this question, and 40 (72.7%) explored multiple forms of learning. Of the 15 who only pursued a single form of education, these were master’s degrees (seven respondents), bachelor’s degrees (six respondents), a college diploma (one respondent), and an academic microcredential (one respondent). Additionally, 14 of the 55 respondents said that they were currently in some form of design education when they took this survey. However, one of these 14 framed their current education as a lifelong learning process, constantly exploring design books and online resources.

4.3.1 Degreed Designers

The most common form of design education in the survey was a bachelor’s program, making up 65.5% of the respondents. 34 of the 55 respondents already held this degree, and an additional two were in the process of completing this degree when they took this survey. Master’s programs were also common, and tied for second most frequent (41.8%). 13 respondents had completed this degree, and ten were in the process of finishing it at the time of taking this survey. These percentages were exceptionally high in the survey compared to the 2019 Design Census, which reported that 32% of their respondents had a bachelor’s degree and only 6% had a master’s degree. One key factor in this discrepancy is clearly due to my social circles, being a student in a

master's program myself and having completed my bachelor's degree only three years ago. As I distributed the survey through my own networks, my peers at OCAD and former Waterloo classmates are likely a large percentage of my total respondents, though I cannot confirm this due to the anonymous nature of the survey. Another reason for this discrepancy, specifically for the high percentage of master's degrees, is that post-graduate education has become more common since 2019. While master's degree applications are known to be more common during economic crises, the COVID-19 global pandemic saw a massive influx of applications, with some Canadian institutions reporting nearly 40% more applications compared to 2019 (Dubinski, 2019). This sharp increase is likely due to increased flexibility due to remote learning and higher work precarity during the pandemic (Dubinski, 2021).

Other than master's and bachelor's degrees, there was also an option for designers who may have learned their skills in college, in high school/ secondary school, or even brought their education to a doctoral level with a Ph.D. While none of the respondents held a Ph.D., 15 said they had learned design skills in high school or secondary school, the 5th most common form of design education in the survey. 53.3% of the respondents who learned design skills in high school are from the 18-24 age range, with an additional 26.7% being from the 25-34 age range. This age range bias illustrates how design knowledge has become increasingly common over time, likely enabled by growing computer access in high schools.

Additionally, five respondents stated that they learned design while getting their college diplomas. Two of these respondents are within the same age range (45-54) and hold long careers in design, each over 20 years. These three overlapping data points suggest that they may have gone to a specialized design college during the shift to theory in design education presented in Chapter 2. Technical training and learning are ubiquitous in many university design programs

today, seen through co-op or internship programs and industry-partnered projects. However, technical training would have been much more common in a college setting prior to the shift in design theory¹⁹.

4.3.2 Self-Guided and Apprenticeship Learning

The second and third most common forms of design education in the survey responses are self-teaching (41.8%) and learning on the job or apprenticeship (38.2%). Despite this prevalence, no respondent indicated one of these forms as their only education. These forms are frequently paired with a bachelor's or master's degree. This was the case for all but for two respondents: one who was in a certificate program and one who had a microcredential from another organization. This suggests that self-guided supplementary learning is essential to working as a designer. Many of the digital tools designers use update yearly, if not more often, and keeping up to date on trends and best practices as culture shifts means that designers must constantly learn in order to work successfully.

4.3.3 New Forms of Learning

The remaining forms of education left to discuss are all short-term: certificate courses (9 respondents), microcredentials from academic institutions (5 respondents), seminars (4 respondents), and microcredentials from organizations (3 respondents). These new forms were found in 13 educational backgrounds, only 23.6% of the total respondents. 11 of these 13 already held a degree or diploma from another institution, and most had been working for over a decade

¹⁹ My own university, OCADU, was considered a college until it was granted university status in 2002 (Government of Ontario, 2010). While the shift to theory in design education has become increasingly common in the information age, there is still a social bias that fields such as design require practical, technical learning usually found in colleges (Yocket Editorial Team, 2022).

or in education for over five years. This points to these forms of education being used to help designers keep up on their skills or gain new proficiencies to help in their current work.

4.3.4 Returning to Academia

Fifteen of the total respondents (27.3%) shared that they had actually left work for a time in order to pursue further education in design. For 11 of these the break was 1-5 years long. This break allowed at least six respondents to pursue a master's degree, and another used this break from work to complete a bachelor's degree. Two of the respondents identified that this extra education is what allowed them to begin their career in design, having worked in a separate field prior to their degree.

4.3.5 Interviewee Insights

Education was one of the main discussion topics during the interview phase. I ensured my interviewees all came from diverse educational backgrounds in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the subject. For Interviewee 4, their educational background was the main reason they were selected.

Interviewee 4's design education background was shaped through self-guided learning. Though he was part of an ongoing certificate program at the time of the interview, he gained most of his technical skills through learning software online and in the workplace. Interviewee 4 had made a career in tech writing before working in design but was able to make that shift thanks to opportunities given to him in the workplace.

I wanted to affect the outcome of the software more than talk about the consequence of the software, and so that's kind of what got me interested in, well, I'm like "If I want to affect how the software works I gotta figure out how to be a designer." And so I started working toward that goal within that particular company and got started in design that way. They gave me opportunities, it was a great company for someone who wants to explore because whenever you had an inkling to try something different they supported you to kind of go that direction and learn.

This creates another narrative for self-guided designers: rather than on-the-job learning being ad hoc supplementary skills, some designers are empowered by their employer to learn new skills while at work and shift into a design role there. This is not to say that supplementary learning is any less important; as Interviewee 4 later said, “...when it [new tools] comes up, you gotta learn it. It [design] is this evolving space, and thank goodness we have all these great resources now that I didn't have to begin with.”

4.4 Design Work

In the survey, the first questions about work concerned types of employment (salaried, contract, freelance) and work sectors (public sector, private sector, non-profit, for-benefit). Most respondents held salaried positions (63.6%) and worked in the private sector (72.7%). Contract and self-employment were nearly evenly split, however, four times as many respondents worked in the public sector than for non-profits. No respondents worked at a for-benefit organization.

4.4.1 Design-Adjacent Work

When asked if their role was design-specific, just over a quarter (14) of respondents shared that they used aspects of design in their work but were not primarily a designer. These respondents tended to be older, with all but two of the 55-64 age range being a part of this group. Five of these respondents worked in managerial positions, and nearly all worked in salaried positions, save for two who were self-employed.

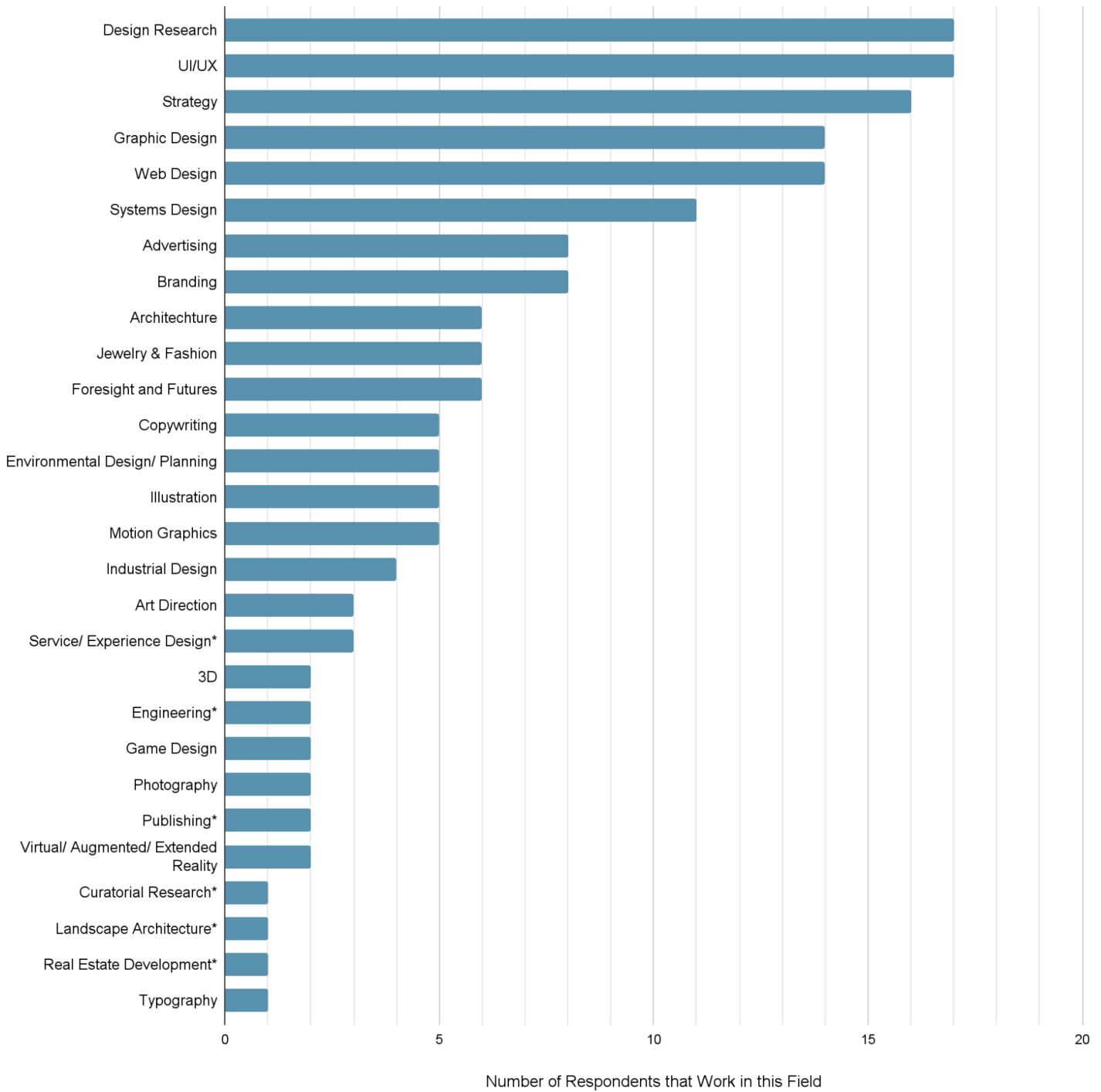
4.4.2 Fields of Design

The survey provided a wide range of design fields for respondents to choose from and a space for respondents to add their own field if it was not listed. At the end of the survey, design

respondents worked in a total of 26 fields. The disciplines and their counts can be found in Figure 7 on the following page.

Figure 7

Disciplines of Design in the MRP Survey



Note. Gathered Autumn 2022, Sample size of 55. This question allowed multiple selections.

*Denotes a design discipline written in by a respondent that selected the “Other” option.

4.4.3 Multi-Hyphenate Designers

Most respondents (just over 70%) had expertise in multiple disciplines of design. Respondents engage with as many as nine various disciplines in their work, reflecting both how flexible designers are in their skill sets as well as how shifting pedagogies have allowed new niches of design to form within and alongside each other. Among the most commonly practiced disciplines in the survey, there were a number of notable overlapping practices.

4.4.3.1 Overlaps in Design Research

- **Foresight & Futures** - 83% of respondents who worked with foresight and futures also practiced design research (5 out of 6 respondents).
- **Systems Design** - 55% of respondents who practiced systems design also practiced design research (6 out of 11 respondents).
- **UI/UX** - 53% of respondents who practiced user interface/ experience design also practiced design research (9 out of 17 respondents).
- **Service Design** - All three respondents who practiced service design also practiced design research.

Design research was tied for the most common discipline of design in the survey, practiced by roughly 31% of the respondents. Many fields of design require plenty of research work, explaining the many overlapping fields. The overlap with user interface and experience (UI/UX) design comes as no surprise; the two fields tied for the most common field of design in the survey. UI/UX often involves plenty of research and testing, as do systems and service design. However, foresight and futures work is defined almost entirely by research and outreach, which makes the lack of a total overlap surprising.

4.4.3.2 Overlaps in UI/UX Design

- **Web Design** - 57% of respondents who practiced web design also practiced UI/UX (8 out of 14 respondents).
- **Design Research** - 53% of respondents who practiced design research also practiced UI/UX (9 out of 17 respondents).
- **Systems Design & Web Design** - Of the six respondents who practiced both systems design and UI/UX (55% of systems designers), four also practiced web design.

User interface and user experience design tied design research for the most common field of design in the survey, also practiced by nearly 31% of the respondents. The relation with design research has already been discussed, but the overlap between the three fields of UI/UX, web design, and systems design is quite significant. Web designers using UI/UX skills is not surprising due to the nature of web design work, but the presence of systems design in this skillset reveals a shift in education that intertwines these three fields. Three of the four respondents who had these three design skills had both the same age range (18-24) and similar educational backgrounds (bachelor's degrees). The other respondent was in a different age range and had a master's degree, but all had been working for similar amounts of time, suggesting that they were in education at the same time as the other three.

4.4.3.3 Overlaps in Strategy

- **Industrial Design** - 75% of respondents who worked in industrial design worked with strategy (3 out of 4 respondents).
- **Environmental Design / Planning** - 60% of respondents who worked in environmental design & planning also used strategy skills (3 out of 5 respondents).

- **Service Design** - All three respondents who practiced service design worked with strategy as well.

Strategy was the third most common field of design in the survey, practiced by 29% of respondents. The reappearance of service design reveals that strategy and design research is key to working in that field, being found among all three respondents who have service design skills. Industrial design's overlap with this field suggests that a strategy skillset is integral to creating and shaping the material world. This applies to environmental design and planning as well. However, my partner, an urban planning student, shared that strategy skills are integral to her field, and found it surprising that not all environmental designers and planners selected this option as well.

4.4.3.4 Overlaps in Graphic Design

- **Motion Graphics** - 71% of respondents who were in advertising also practiced graphic design (4 out of 5 respondents).
- **Branding** - 75% of respondents who worked in branding also practiced graphic design (6 out of 8 respondents).
- **Advertising** - 75% of respondents who were in advertising also practiced graphic design (6 out of 8 respondents).
- **Industrial Design** - 75% of respondents with industrial design skills had also practiced graphic design (3 out of 4 respondents).
- **Copywriting, Industrial Design, and Advertising** - 75% of respondents with copywriting skills had also practiced graphic design (3 out of 4 respondents), and all practiced either industrial design or advertising.

Graphic Design was tied for the fourth most common field of design in the survey, practiced by roughly a quarter of the respondents. The overlapping fields of advertising and branding are not surprising, as graphic design is the avenue by which many marketers engage with the design field. Motion graphics is not surprising either as working in that space often requires graphic design skills. My brother, who is an industrial design student, has shared that there is a heavy emphasis on presentation and communication in the industrial design field, which requires both graphic design and copywriting skills.

4.4.3.5 Overlaps in Web Design

- **Branding** - 62% of the respondents who worked in branding also practiced web design (5 out of 8 respondents).
- **Advertising** - 62% of the respondents who worked in advertising also had web design skills (5 out of 8 respondents).
- **Graphic Design** - Half of the respondents who practiced graphic design also practiced web design (7 out of 14 respondents).
- **UI/UX** - 47% of respondents with UI/UX skills had web design skills as well (8 out of 17 respondents).

Web Design was tied with graphic design for the fourth most common field of design in the survey, practiced by roughly a quarter of the respondents. The need for UI/UX skills in web design has already been discussed, but the presence of branding, advertising, and graphic design skills reveals that many designers likely create websites for clients as a part of an advertising or branding package. In fact, three respondents had all four of these skills that overlapped with web design, showing how connected these five fields are.

4.5 Defining Design

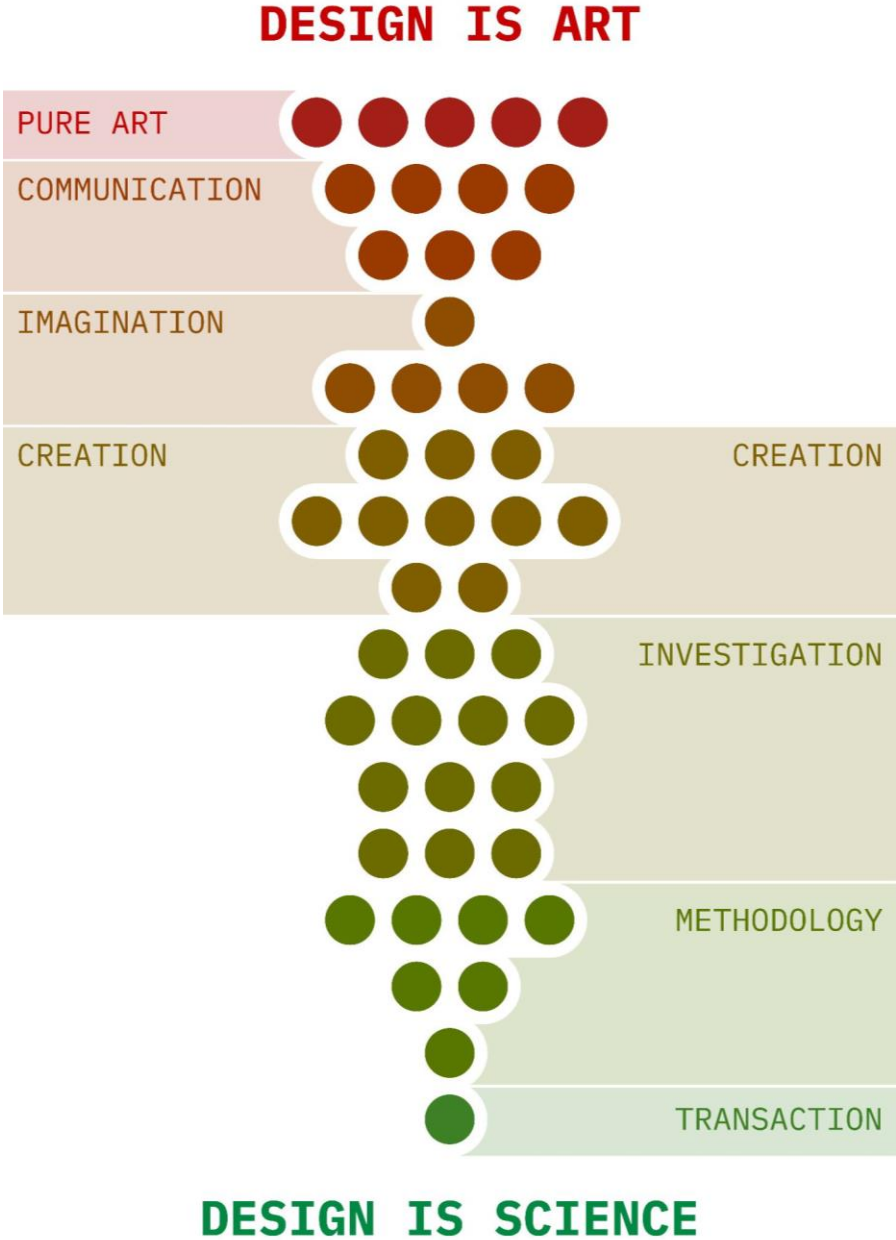
Defining design is not a simple task, even for linguists. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives it 14 wildly different definitions: eight as a noun, four as a verb, and another two as an intransitive verb (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). Despite this, 48 respondents shared with me how they interpret design, with responses ranging from concise two-word answers to 100 word paragraphs. I found these questions to be possibly the most valuable ones in the survey, providing an insight into the respondent's view of design that could only be beat by the interviews. These wide and varying definitions illustrate just how diverse the field is, both in people and their work.

4.5.1 The Spectrum of Design

After reading through and sorting these definitions, I was left with a spectrum of design stretching from the field's craft-based origins to the scientific and business framing seen in classrooms and offices today. I have mapped this spectrum of definitions in Figure 8, organizing them on a scale from art-focused to science-focused, with six sub-categories on that scale. These categories are described in detail after the figure.

Figure 8

Spectrum of Design: Definitions



Note. This charts the 48 respondents who shared both their definition of design, placing them on a spectrum from art to science. There are additional subsections on this spectrum, described in Sections 4.5.1.1 to Sections 4.5.1.7. Respondents are represented as dots on the map for anonymity. This figure is meant to be read as a heat map.

4.5.1.1 Pure Art

Five respondents defined design through a purely artistic lens, calling focus to intentional and purposeful arrangements of objects as well as evoking emotional responses from others. These respondents skewed older with two being in the 45-54 age range, but this was the only common factor.

4.5.1.2 Art: Communication

The seven respondents that saw design as a way of communication highlighted how viewers should be able to understand the intent and message of a designer through their work, and often invites discussion. Respondents in this category tended to work in graphic design, architecture, and had design research skills. They also skewed younger, with all respondents being in the 18-24 or 25-34 age range, save one.

4.5.1.3 Art: Imagination

This group of five respondents all highlighted ideas and visions, and how design enabled them to create something out of pure thought. This category also had my personal favourite definition of design, poetically calling design “the opposite of accident.” These respondents also skewed older, with two in the 45-54 age range and one in the 55-64 range, and were very established in their fields, with nearly all of them having worked for 20 years or more. Four of the five identified as female.

4.5.1.4 Art and Science: Creation

These ten respondents marked the convergence between art and design. In their definitions, they explained that design is markedly for the invention of a product or experience, but the process

was shaped by creative ideation. Respondents tended to work in UI/UX or design research, but it notably also had two design professors.

4.5.1.5 Science: Investigation

This was the largest group of respondents at 13. Their definitions made clear that design involved learning about and researching problems, and then solving said problems through novel means. All of these respondents had some combination of bachelor's or master's degrees, and often worked in design research. This category was also a majority of female-identifying respondents, outnumbering male respondents ten to three.

4.5.1.6 Science: Methodology

These seven respondents saw design as a process. Similarly to the prior group, they saw design as a problem-solving method. However, they were clear that this method had clearly defined steps and tools, and was much more solution focused. These respondents also all had either bachelor's or master's degrees, and mostly worked in UI/UX or strategy.

4.5.1.7 Science: Transaction

This category only had one respondent, but their definition was so different from the rest that it warranted a category of its own. They defined design as “making both sides satisfied (business and customer base).” This was the only definition that saw design as a transactional balancing act, satisfying the needs of external parties. This respondent was in the 18-24 age range, had a bachelor's degree and worked in UI/UX and web design.

4.5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

After sharing their understanding of what design is, 49 designers voiced what they saw as the role of a designer, and 46 shared what they were responsible for as a designer. The responses for roles and responsibilities have been mapped in Appendix C and Appendix D respectively, but insight will be provided into the groupings here.

4.5.2.1 Role of a Designer

There are many roles a designer has in the workplace, but by far the most common among the respondents was that designers act as a facilitator. While some saw this as facilitating the creative process, most saw it as facilitating communication between their client and the people that they are designing for. Respondents highlighted understanding the needs of client and user, and making sure that both sides understand each other, advocating for the users when needed.

This advocacy role was also shared by a few other respondents who expressed that their role was to use their platform to advocate for things such as the planet, the arts, and progressive politics. Other respondents similarly felt it was the role of the designer to create and communicate.

The last two roles are similar to the “methodology” and “transaction” categories from the design definitions. Many respondents felt it was the role of a designer to solve problems, going through the design process to identify issues and questions that they could then resolve through testing and creating. Other respondents brought this even further, that the role of a designer was to create value for clients and solve the problems they were hired to fix.

4.5.2.2 Responsibilities as a Designer

The responsibilities that respondents shared more clearly aligned to a spectrum than the roles did. There were two spectrums that these responsibilities were on. One was whether the designer's bias was to the world, the user, balanced between user and client, biased towards the client, biased to themselves. The other spectrum was what value was placed upon: that ethics were valued above all else, that the process was shaped by ethics and values, that the end product had ethics and values, or that the end product simply had to be valuable. Most responses expressed a balance between client needs and user needs, and most responses placed the value on the end product, either the values it represented or a purely monetary value.

4.5.3 Interview Insight - Accountability

As a part of the interview, I asked the interviewees who or what they felt accountable to as a designer. While similar to the question of responsibility, posing the question through accountability made it a more personal question, more appropriate for one-on-one interviews. Where responsibility frames the question around what you think *all* designers should *do*, accountability asks *you* what you *feel* as a designer. Among the five interviewees, there were three groups that continued to come up: accountability to themselves, accountability to the end users, and a blend of accountability to multiple groups.

4.5.3.1 Accountable to Yourself

This was the most common answer among the interviewees, mentioned by four of the five, but being accountable to yourself didn't always mean the same thing to each interviewee. For Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 3, being accountable to yourself meant staying true

to their values. Their values shaped the person they are, and being asked to abandon their values or morals for the sake of a project would be inconceivable. In the words of Interviewee 2,

First and foremost myself. I feel like I'm gonna have to deal with myself more than anyone else so if I'm doing something that doesn't work well with me, I don't want to have to reconcile with myself in the future.

Interviewee 5 had a different understanding of being true to themselves, framed around their dreams and passion for design, as well as respecting their own agency.

...if you just are doing what everyone wants you to do or creating whatever content you're hired to do or they say you have to do then it takes away your passion for it. So I think your main accountability is to yourself and following your dreams and passions and what you want to create.

Interviewee 5 shared that they came from a military background, and were looking to move into a career in design at the time of the interview. Their framing of personal accountability around agency and influence is likely shaped by their time in the service, with the design field having given them more personal agency than their previous career.

4.5.3.2 Accountable to the End Users

This view of accountability was also popular, but only Interviewee 3 described it as the sole group they were accountable to. They put the end users above all else, describing how one's value as a designer was defined by how well you respect and meet the needs of the users, even above the needs of one's client.

The people I'm designing for, and not the person that's paying. Absolutely, whenever you're designing for people like I think the success of your project and the success of your professional career is how you will meet the needs of the people you're designing for.

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 also mentioned being accountable to the people they were designing for, but it was not their sole responsibility.

4.5.3.1 The Triad of Accountability

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 saw accountability as a network of sorts, where designers had to constantly re-evaluate who they were most accountable to for each project they took on.

Interviewee 1 saw this as a mix between being accountable to both their own values as well as the needs of the users, and how being true to the end user was actually part and parcel with being true to their own values.

The user [...] I was also thinking, like to myself, to my values. Like why am I in this role? Why did I decide to become a designer and stick to it? And that's because I want to advocate for the user and [...] specifically for this user group, it's fulfilling to me. So it's a combination of me upholding my own values but also yeah I'm definitely responsible to whatever the user needs.

Interviewee 4 added another group into this blend of accountability, acknowledging that working as a designer means that it's important to recognize who you're working for as well as who is going to be engaging with that work

I still feel that it's yourself, it's a big one. Whoever is gonna consume or use what you create is huge. And then the older I got, like the more involved with business, I think you cannot ignore who your patrons are. Like who the business is that you work for. ... It's the trinity that comes up most often: who it's for, who's paying for this, and how about you? How do you fit into this picture?

Interviewee 4's definition paints accountability as a triad between the self, the user, and the client. Earlier in the interview, they acknowledged the strain between the needs of the user and the needs of the client and paid respect to that in this triad of accountability. However, they see the designer as a party outside of the client-user strain, and that part of the accountability of a designer is to find how and where they fit in that balance.

4.6 Understanding Ethics

While only a few questions concerned ethics in the survey, the interviews provided a wealth of knowledge on the subject. Ethics is a vague concept to discuss as it is so subjective from person

to person, but framing it through design has provided an avenue by which respondents and interviewees could be on a similar page. When asked how much they knew or were taught about design ethics from their time in education, 53 respondents were willing to share. They selected from the following options: little to no knowledge, some knowledge, substantial knowledge, and extensive knowledge.

4.6.1 Gaps in Teaching

Sixteen respondents (30%) shared that they had little to no knowledge about design ethics. Some respondents in this group shared that they covered some general topics such as accessibility and inclusion, though most said they covered nothing at all. These same topics came up when asked how they apply design ethics in their work, with the addition of being scrutinous when selecting clients. Even still, a few shared that they didn't apply design ethics in their work at all.

This knowledge gap is concerning, considering that all but one of these respondents had bachelor's or master's degrees in design. Those that chose to share what they did know generally about ethics and design ethics said that they learned it on the job, through peers, or through the media they consume, and they usually worked in graphic design and advertising or design research and strategy. This group of respondents did skew older than the other three, with nearly half being from either the 45-54 or the 55-64 age range. This may reflect a shift in design education; ethics is being taught more frequently and expansively today.

4.6.2 General Knowledge

Twenty-four respondents (45%) said that they have at least some knowledge of design ethics, making this the largest group of the four. This was the youngest group; nearly 40% of the respondents were in the 18-24 age range, and an additional 25% were in the 25-34 range.

Respondents tended to work in design research, UI/UX and web design, strategy, or systems design. When asked about what they learned about design ethics, common topics were ethical research, data protection, and dark design patterns. Respondents often mentioned accessibility, sustainability, and security when asked how they engage with design ethics in their work. Notably, nearly 60% of the respondents shared that they learned the most about design ethics through their work or through self-guided learning. This pattern is explored further in section 4.6.6.

4.6.3 Academic Influence

Ten respondents (19%) felt that they had a substantial grasp on design ethics, and credited it to their time in academia. Six of the respondents had a master's degree and five had received a bachelor's degree. Only one of these ten did not hold a degree, though they did have a microcredential from an academic institution. This group of designers valued an academic approach to design, seven had even left work for a time to pursue further education. All of them shared that their classes had taught them plenty of what they know about design ethics, most having covered topics around ethical research practices and accessibility. Half of them worked in UI/UX, though there were a number who also worked in fashion or graphic design. One respondent came from a landscape architecture background and shared how continuing education was required in their field in order to maintain their license.

4.6.4 Ethical Experts

Only three respondents felt that they had extensive knowledge on the subject of design ethics. Oddly enough, there was not much in common between these three respondents when it came to work, education, and demographics. However, two of these respondents were selected for

interviews, Interviewee 3 and Interviewee 5. Knowing that Interviewee 3 came to design after a career in architecture, a pattern reveals itself. The respondent who was not interviewed worked in engineering, a field that has a professional code of ethics that practitioners can be held to. Architecture similarly has a professional code of ethics, suggesting that designers with strong ethical foundations may have come to design from another field, and carried that ethical base with them.

Interviewee 5 was the other respondent who felt they had extensive design ethics knowledge, although when asked how they apply design ethics in their work, both their survey and interview responses framed ethics through a legal lens: proper attribution, copyright protection, and credit. This revealed a division in design ethics I hadn't considered when starting this project.

4.6.5 The Dichotomy of Design Ethics

When reading through the survey responses and in conversing with the interviewees, a dichotomy started developing between what respondents and interviewees understood as design ethics. Where some respondents understood design ethics through a moral lens (i.e. what designers are socially obligated to do), other designers saw it through a legal perspective (i.e. what designers are legally obligated to do). This division wasn't as stark when looking at what topics respondents learned about design ethics, but it became much more clear when looking at how respondents apply design ethics in their work.

This split became more clear in the interviews as well. When asked about potential ethical issues in the next ten years, both Interviewee 2's and Interviewee 5's responses concerned copyright and intellectual property issues, which is understandable due to their work in self-employed/ freelance graphic design. These however stood in contrast to the other interviewee's

responses, which concerned moral discussions being had in the news cycle such as responsibilities around emerging technologies and the lasting impacts of colonialism and capitalism.

4.6.6 On-the-Job Ethics

Of the 43 respondents who shared where they had learned the most about design ethics, nearly half said that all of their knowledge on the subject came from outside of the classroom, despite 39 of them having a degree or being in the process of receiving one. 11 said that their design ethics knowledge came from their time working as a designer, and ten respondents shared that their design ethics education was all self guided, gathered from books and articles they had to seek out themselves. All respondents that said that they had to look outside of the classroom had either a master's or bachelor's degree, suggesting that over half of the working designers today find their own education lacking on the subject of design ethics. Seven respondents expressed that exact sentiment in their survey responses, explicitly stating that they had to look to other places to learn design ethics because the classes they had were too shallow or lacking.

Chapter 5: Designer Archetypes

As stated in Chapter 3, the purpose of this research was to be able to identify archetypes within the design field, as shaped by work, education, and ethics. However, the way in which these archetypes developed shifted throughout the research analysis. A designer often works in multiple fields; it's hard to find any dividing lines between a user interface/experience designer and design researcher when a designer is usually doing both of these things. Education background usually did not have a significant influence on a respondent either: it had no relationship between which design fields a respondent would work in. However, a spectrum appears when looking at how respondents' understand both their work and their education. When respondents are asked to describe their work and their role, a division between how respondents understand design appears. Similarly, when asked about what they learned about design and design ethics, a wide spectrum of responses reveals how education did or did not influence them.

5.1 The Abstract Nature of Design

Revisiting Section 4.5.1, one measure by which archetypes can be identified is through respondents' perspectives of design, both of their work and their field. These definitions of design sat on a clear spectrum, from design as a pure artistic craft to a near-scientific process. The shifting design pedagogy presented in Section 2.1.1 followed this same arts-science split. Though there wasn't a direct age range correlation among the respondents, the pedagogy shift establishes a historical precedent for this dichotomy in design outside of this survey.

5.2 Morality vs Legality

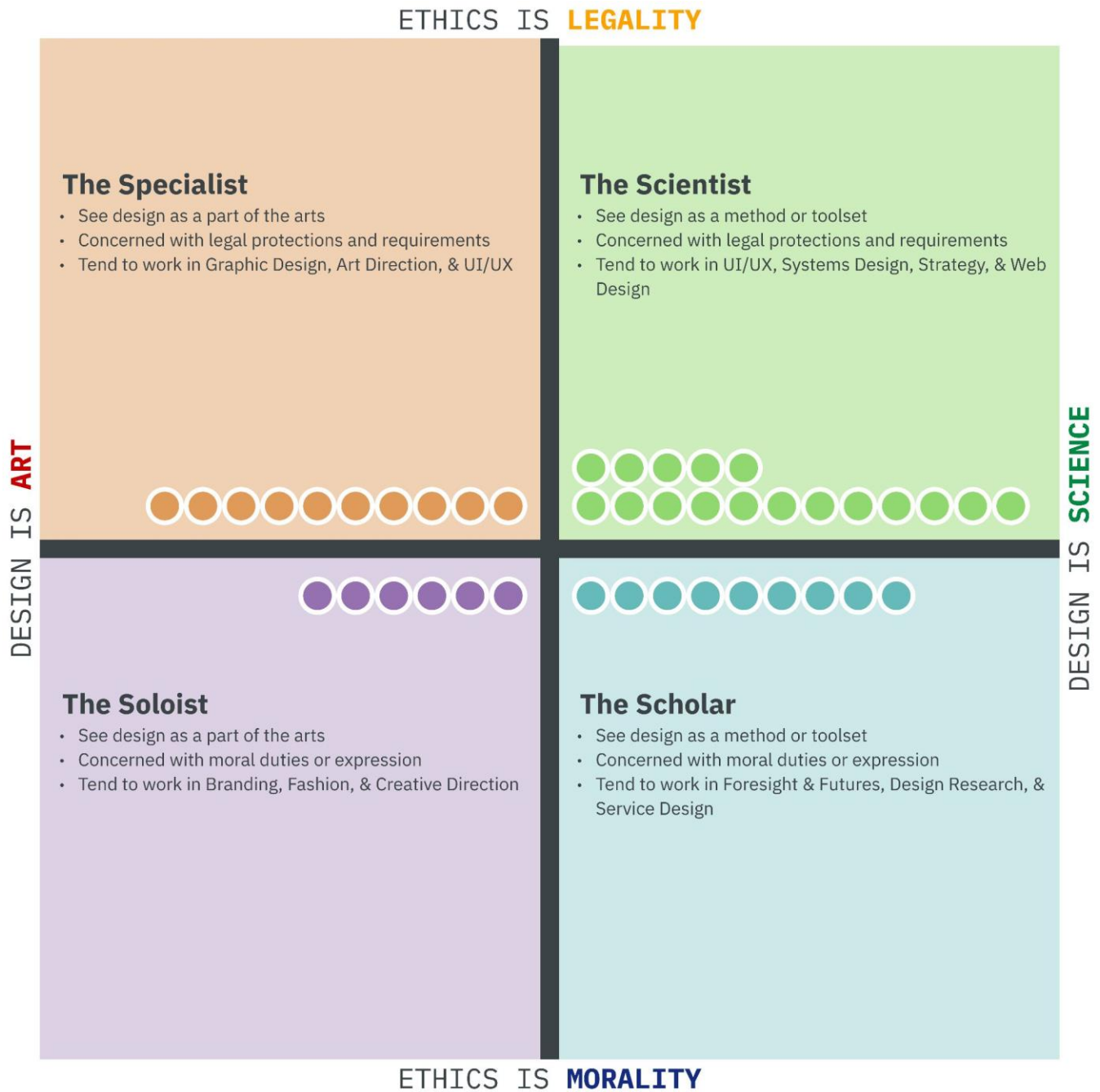
The other measure by which designer archetypes can be identified is through how they understand design ethics. Ethics is itself a vague topic, and it has been established that many designers don't feel that they have been properly educated on the topic. Revisiting Section 4.6.5, there was a clear split between ethics being based on the moral responsibilities of a designer versus the legal responsibilities. This spectrum is formed through three sources of information: insights and discussion from the interviewees, responses on what respondents remember about design ethics, and how they implement it in their work. How much respondents felt they knew about design ethics tended to be too subjective to use on this spectrum, especially when there are so many different ways to interpret what design ethics means.

5.3 Quadrants of Design

This leaves two spectrums by which designers can be measured: design as art versus design as science, and ethics based in morality versus ethics based in legality. Combining these spectrums creates a quadrant chart by which respondents can be mapped, and archetypes identified.

Figure 9

Quadrant Chart of Designer Archetypes



Note. This charts the 42 respondents who shared both their definition of design, as well as what they know about design ethics or how they engage with it in their work. Respondents are represented as dots on the chart, showing the number of respondents that fit into each archetype.

5.3.1 The Specialist: Design as Art, Ethics based in Legality

The name for this archetype stems from the specific and developed skill base that these designers tend to have, as well as their proclivity towards business skills. These respondents selected fewer fields of design as their areas of expertise but had either long work histories or had spent plenty of time in design education. Designers in this quadrant associate design with its craft-based origins, but strangely enough also had business skills from the opposite end of that pedagogy shift. This archetype was heavily influenced by my discussions with Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 5, both of whom were graphic designers that saw ethics as legal protections and guidelines for their work. Both of these interviewees were freelance designers, making these protections and business skills especially important due to the precarity in that type of work. Similar to the interviewees, graphic design was a common field for designers in this archetype, as were art direction and UI/UX.

5.3.2 The Scientist: Design as Science, Ethics based in Legality

This archetype is named for how these designers approach their craft, following a clear method with specific tools and frameworks. They see design as a process or method, and their understanding of design ethics tends to align with legal guidelines. A number of respondents in this category work in engineering, a field that legally requires adherence to a strict ethical code. Along with engineering, fields common between respondents that fit this archetype were UI/UX, systems design, strategy, and web design. Notably UI/UX appears in both the specialist and scientist archetype. While part of this is simply due to it being the most common field of design among all respondents, it's notable that the field gravitated towards the legal side of the ethics spectrum.

5.3.3 The Soloist: Design as Art, Ethics based in Morality

This archetype is named for how these designers value self-expression and artistry in their work, equating it to the musical role of a soloist who is meant to express these same values during the time they are given in a piece. Respondents that fit this archetype see design as a part of the arts, and focus on the emotions, feelings, and messages they can communicate through their work. Fields of work common for respondents in this archetype were branding, fashion, and creative direction. While creative direction was not a listed field of design in the survey, the respondents who listed this as their job title all fit into this archetype which made it appropriate to highlight.

5.3.4 The Scholar: Design as Science, Ethics based in Morality

This archetype is named for the academic nature of these designers, as their work tends to rely on constantly gathering insights from other sources. Designers in this quadrant often use design toolsets and frameworks, emphasizing design as a process to guide their research and thinking. This connection to research has made their perception of design ethics morals-focused, expressing a desire to respect the rights of those on the other side of that research. Unsurprisingly, design research is a common field among respondents who fit this archetype, as was foresight & futures and service design.

Chapter 6: Looking to the Future

In the introduction to this paper, I introduced this project's guiding research question: **How has growing access to design knowledge changed the design field's relationship with ethics?**

Since that opening chapter, the paper has covered a wide breadth of topics surrounding design: its history, its relationship with capitalism, how it's taught, how people work in it, and so much more. But where does that leave the research question? It's a complicated answer.

6.1 Today's Answers

I started this research with the hypothesis that abbreviated learning courses such as bootcamps or seminars strained the wider design field's understanding of ethics. I thought it impossible to give a comprehensive design education on such a tight timeframe, and design ethics inevitably would be cut. After all, if my four year university program couldn't provide a comprehensive design ethics education, how could it be expected of a program that was 15 times shorter?

6.1.1 Design's Relationship with Ethics

My lack of design ethics education was the norm; hardly any designers felt they fully grasped design ethics at the end of their educational journey (see Section 4.6.6). If the bar for teaching design ethics is already so low, then these abbreviated learning courses I was initially concerned about have little to no effect on the design field's understanding of ethics.

So, after over a year of researching this topic, let's revisit the guiding question. **How has growing access to design knowledge changed the design field's relationship with ethics?** It hasn't. The ethical quandaries in design don't stem from a difference in educational backgrounds, but rather the role design plays within a capitalist system. Revisiting Section 2.4.1,

design's role as an ideological apparatus puts all designers in a compromising position; a single designer's dedication to ethical design is stifled when the field they work in is already ethically compromised. Design has long been presented as a force of change, with design evangelists echoing the mantra that "Design/ers can change the world." But as an ideological apparatus, design becomes inherently normative: spreading, entrenching, and protecting neoliberal capitalism and its abuses.

6.1.2 How Designers see Design

Now let's look at the subquestion "**How is a designer's perception of what design is and *can be* shaped by their pathway through design education?**" This is no easier to answer than the previous question. A designer's perception of their work isn't shaped by how they learn design, but when they learn it. The "when" in this answer has two dimensions: what the prevalent design pedagogy was at the time, and where a student is in their career when they start learning design. Section 4.5.1 reveals that some perceptions of design had an age bias: the respondents who saw design as "pure art" tended to be older, reflecting the design pedagogy of their time. Career timing is another key factor for how designers perceive design. Those who start working in design after having a career in a separate field see design differently than those who start in it. As discussed in Section 4.6.4, these designers carry the ethics and values of their previous work into the design field, and value the collaborative and exploratory nature of design.

6.2 Creating Accountability

The last research question left to answer is perhaps the biggest one: **How can we create a system of ethical accountability for designers without restricting access to the field?** Where the previous two questions looked at the past and present, this one looks forward. While the

survey has shown that many designers are looking outside of the classroom for their ethics training (see Section 4.6.6), personal accountability cannot be the only solution. The belief that a systemic issue can be fixed solely through individual responsibility is an inherently neoliberal construct. Neither should individual designers, who may not know much about design ethics or may not be engaging with it (see Section 4.6.1), be blamed. Design ethics not widely taught, and the recent tech layoffs have shown that this dedication to ethics may even put job security at risk (Duffy, 2023). In the face of a systemic issue, what can designers do?

6.2.1 What Designers Want

At the end of each interview, I asked each interviewee what a system of accountability in design would look like to them. The methods of accountability the interviewees shared have been mapped onto a three horizons framework in Appendix F. Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 highlighted a need for equity and openness, that designers must regularly engage with the people they are designing for through co-creation. Along the same lines, Interviewee 2 expressed the importance of communication and understanding, between the people being designed for and designers, as well as between designers as peers. These peer relationships were important to Interviewee 5 as well, emphasizing that creating and designing must still be celebrated, a system cannot only be punitive.

Rather than describing the system through the values that it should have, Interviewee 4 described the structure of the system:

... perhaps this is certification or licensure, like some way that we can certify the fact that you have understood your ethical obligations. Around that, you have to have some group that comes up with the canon of what matters, maybe we can borrow from another field? So anyway, I think always certification, and probably some government body that is agreed upon.

Interviewee 4's call for licensure and governing bodies in design isn't an uncommon one. *Ruined by Design* ends with this same sentiment, calling for designers to organize and making the case for regulations and licenses for designers. Montiero recognizes that licensure involves additional costs (Montiero, 2019), which brings the discussion back to a key part of the question asked earlier: not restricting access to the field.

6.2.2 Collective Action in Design

Section 3.3.3.3 introduced the "Polak game," a foresight tool that charts how respondents see the the future and their power to shape it. Though three of the interviewees felt they had a passive role in society individually (see Appendix G), four of the interviewees expressed that designers especially have an incredible amount of agency when they act as a group. If designers truly want to change the state of their field, they must work together as a collective force.

Throughout this project, I've read through dozens of publications that advocate and provide guidelines for ethical design practices. All of these manifestos/ principles/ frameworks/ toolkits have provided nuanced, fair, and necessary guidelines for centering ethics in the design practice. Sharing these guidelines and getting fellow designers to pledge themselves to them has spread the message of ethical design. However, most of them had the same two issues: supplementary guidelines are often preaching to the choir, and these promises had no assurance of follow through. For a design field to truly center ethics, its values have to be certifiable and enforceable, otherwise its little more than lip service. Despite the concern of restricting access, centering ethics in a design field is only possible through some combination of self-regulation and/or certification.

6.2.2.1 Self-Regulation and Certification

Regulatory systems in design aren't a novel suggestion. A number of the fields presented in Section 4.4 already have their own regulatory bodies: architects and engineers require licenses in order to work, industrial designers have numerous certifications, and Ontario graphic designers have their own certification body, the Association of Registered Graphic Designers (RGD). There's no reason that these types of systems shouldn't be present in every design field discussed in this paper. Many fields already have informal guidelines and principles, the next step is to formalize them into a code of ethics specific to the design field.

An issue in many regulatory bodies is the separation between a code of conduct and a code of ethics. Where a code of conduct defines and enforces the rules for actions and behaviour, a code of ethics merely provides principles for decision making and cannot be enforced (Valamis, 2022; Guerriero, 2003). Decision making defines design work (see Section 4.5.1.5 and Section 4.5.2.1), and only suggesting how these decisions should be made isn't enough. I propose that regulatory design bodies must have a code of ethical conduct that can be enforced. This would also empower and protect designers in the workplace, giving designers something they can point to when asked by a superior to do something they don't agree with. Providing a morality-based, legal ruleset for working as designer would merge the ethical spectrum of design (see Figure 8), allowing designers to work in solidarity with one another rather than in competition. If a designer is legally obligated to work ethically, the moral ethical standard for all design work will improve.

6.2.2.2 Keeping Design Accessible

If self-regulation and certification are the answers to creating accountability and centering ethics, then the values expressed by the interviewees in Section 6.2.1 must shape the process.

Emphasizing co-creative practices inherently opens the process; it would invite input from designers that would be within these regulatory groups, and direction from other fields that already have their own regulatory groups. Focusing on communication and solidarity between designers allows those within the field to celebrate each other's work and provide guidance to new designers. There are numerous guidelines for ethical design practices that already exist; their authors and signatories all believe and support the practices and should be consulted in the creation of a formal ethical code of conduct for their respective fields.

Certification and regulation would likely involve yearly costs, though there are a number of ways those costs can be mitigated and responsive to a designer's situation. The RGD has implemented a tiered system of certification, offering lower yearly fees to students who are currently in design school as well as newly graduated students. There are also lower price points for graphic designers who don't have a formalized education background, but still want to work towards certification as an affiliate. However, both of these options are provisional: once a designer has a certain number of years working as a professional graphic designer, they will be expected to take certification tests for a formalized certification. Certification pricing being dependent on experience is a key factor in keeping design open to all: it's inviting to new designers, it removes large cost barriers, and allows for designers to start their career within an ethics-focused system. Additionally, wide adoption of certification systems and designer solidarity could create higher wages within the field, mitigating the price barriers even further.

Cost is only one barrier that could restrict access to these regulatory bodies. Though the values the interviewees said would shape these bodies may help mitigate other large barriers such as privilege and racism, even established organizations such as the AIGA are still full of these types of barriers. This is not a small undertaking, and needs to be done carefully and

generously. Creating brand new regulatory systems gives designers the opportunity to start from scratch, and build a system all their own from the ground up.

6.2.3 Designing Designers

Design education may not have had a significant effect on designers' relationship with ethics in today, but it can for the designers of tomorrow. While the solutions provided above incentivise ethical design, the ideal scenario is that a designer wouldn't need to be incentivised to work in an ethical manner. It should be second nature. If design education can be restructured not only to teach ethics, but to give it equal weight with design skills, this pedagogical shift could shape the next generation of designers. A high ethical standard should be what designers expect of themselves and their peers, and reinforcing the importance of ethics in education helps to set that standard for design students.

6.3 Tomorrow's Questions: Considerations for Future Work

Throughout the course of this project a number of important patterns and insights surfaced that may have larger effects on the design field as a whole. Though these were out of the scope of this project, they hold merit and should be explored further.

6.3.1 Designing a Code of Ethical Conduct

As much as this paper discusses ethics and ethical conduct, I haven't actually put any words towards what that code should look like. This is no accident; the project was meant to find the problems in design today and find what caused them. Crafting the solution to the problems would be a whole separate undertaking. Though I was tempted at times, it would simply have been out of scope. A project as important as this would functionally be the formation of a sort of

ethics committee, and would require input from designers all across North America. Thankfully, plenty of design scholars have already written and shared their own guidelines for ethical design. As stated in Section 6.2.2.2, there is a large body of literature and plenty of designers who believe in the cause.

6.3.2 Design and Tech: Hegemony and Precarity

Social media companies have revealed design's immense capacity for harm, and things must change. The worlds of design and tech have formed very close bonds over the past decade and a half, especially in the fields of UI/UX, systems design, and design thinking. The hiring practices in tech are inherently exploitative and reflect practices of cultural hegemony presented in Section 2.4. These companies prefer hiring younger employees (Angwin et al., 2017) since they are highly skilled, but will take direction without too much pushback (Kobie, 2022). Young designers are put in a precarious position if they wish to uphold their morals, a scenario that four of the interviewees have found themselves in before. Cultural hegemony is also enforced through payment, as most tech companies pay their employees through stock options and equity. An employee is much less likely to go against wishes of the company when their personal security is dependent on the success of the company. Young employees in tech find themselves between two intimidating forces of hegemonic power, and the only way that can change is through worker solidarity and collective action. In the tech space, there is also room to explore the concept of ideological state apparatuses, and how under neoliberal governments they become an apparatus of corporate ideology instead.

While I had hoped to discuss this topic more, I found I was only echoing the talking points of books I had read that held the same sentiment. Instead of re-stating their arguments myself, I'll recommend reading both *Against Creativity* by Oli Mould (2019) and *Ruined by*

Design by Mike Montiero (2019). These two works were key in developing the ideas and arguments of this paper, and provide many arguments for collective action in tech as well as the design world.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The goal at the start of this paper was to reveal the influences and biases that have brought the design field to where it is today, and find ways in which designers can reshape it for the better. When this project began, I was looking to new forms of education as an inflection point for when design became “inherently an unethical industry” (Cioran, 2017, as cited in Schwab, 2017). As the research went on however, it became clear that these five figure bootcamps I was ready to point a finger at were merely a symptom of the larger issue. Design and capitalism have become so tightly entwined that designers looking to reshape design for the better will find themselves going around in circles.

There is a common sentiment that “there is no ethical consumption under capitalism,” often used to excuse acts of consumerism (Kohli, 2022). It’s easy to feel the same way about design; that if design and capitalism are so connected, “there is no ethical design under capitalism.” But this attitude ignores two of the central factors in design work: problem solving and collaboration. Design itself is not a force for change, it’s the people that work in design that create change. While regulatory bodies can protect ethics within individual fields of design, for the design field as a whole to change, designers should see themselves first as a worker and their professional role as separate from that, overcoming the false consciousness that surrounds the field. As an ideological state apparatus, design prevents change, but if those working in design find solidarity not only among themselves but with fellow members of the working class, design can be turned against capitalism and become a tool of the proletariat, empowering new voices and leading the way into a revolutionary future.

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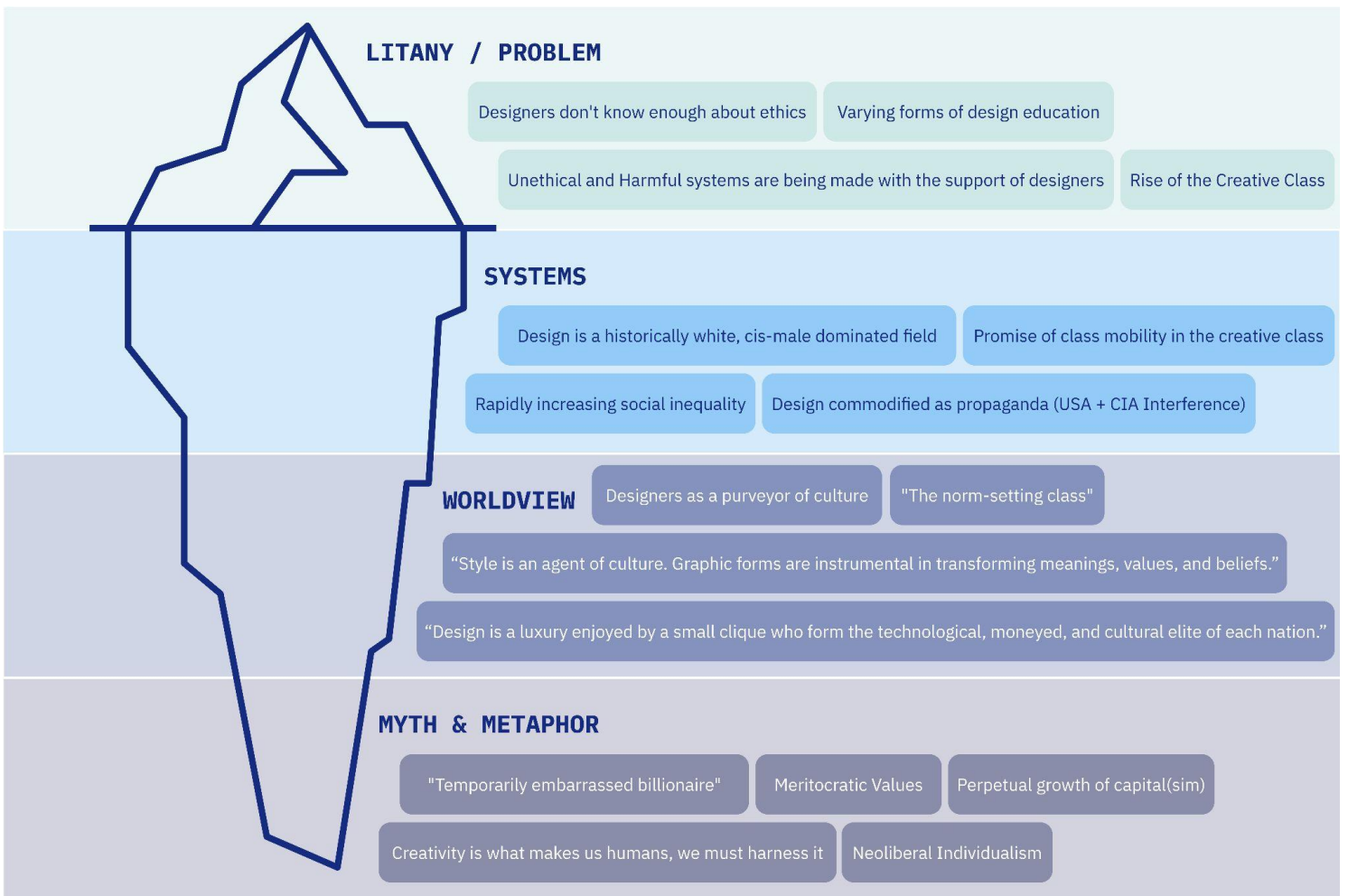
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Appendices

Appendix A

Causal Layered Analysis Framework for Design and Capitalism

The Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) is a foresight framework for revealing the underlying causes that have created the problems a researcher may be investigating. Starting with the clear immediate problems, it then digs down to reveal the systems that have enabled those problems, the worldviews that perpetuate those systems, and then the cultural beliefs and myths that have shaped these worldviews. It uses the iceberg imagery to reflect what is above the surface, what we can see, and all the underlying factors beneath.



Appendix B

Recruiting Materials for the Survey

The copy and image below were used to share my master's research project and distribute the survey. These were posted on design groups and forums I was a part of on platforms such as Reddit, Discord and Messenger. It was also shared through my personal social media channels, where it was then shared further by many of my peers into their own social circles.

“Calling all designers!

I'm doing a survey as a part of my master's research project to gather perspectives of design and design ethics from people who identify as designers and people who use design tools in their profession. The survey is completely anonymous and is no longer than 10 minutes.

If you know other designers, please share it around!

Here's the link, and hope to hear from you!”



The graphic features a black background with white and colored text. At the top left, it says "Help us explore..." in white. Below that, the main title "What does design mean to you?" is displayed in large, bold, white and green letters. The word "design" is in blue, and "you?" is in green. Underneath the title, there are two lines of white text: "Whether you do interior, graphic, ux, web, industrial, research, or thinking," and "Went to school, took a seminar, did a workshop, or are self taught,". Below this is a line of white text: "Any type of design, any type of work, any type of education, any place in your career, I want to hear from you!". At the bottom left, there is a cluster of colorful icons representing various design tools and concepts, including a lightbulb, a computer monitor, a mouse, a palette, and a pencil. On the right side of the graphic, there is a large QR code.

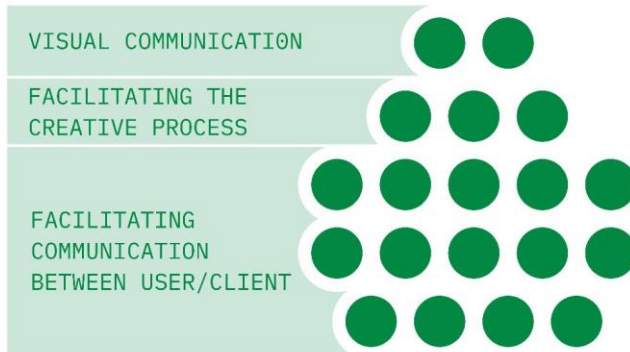
Appendix C

Spectrum of Design: The Role of a Designer

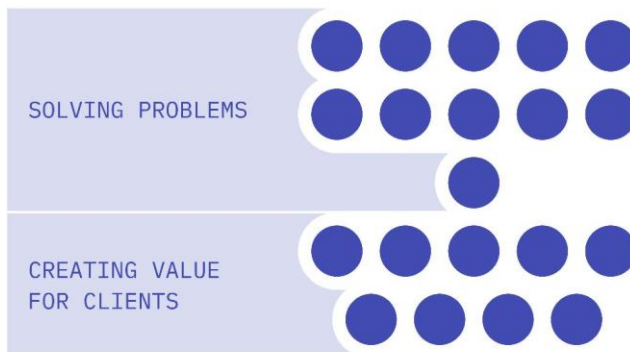
DESIGNERS ARE CREATORS



DESIGNERS ARE COMMUNICATORS



DESIGNERS ARE PRODUCERS

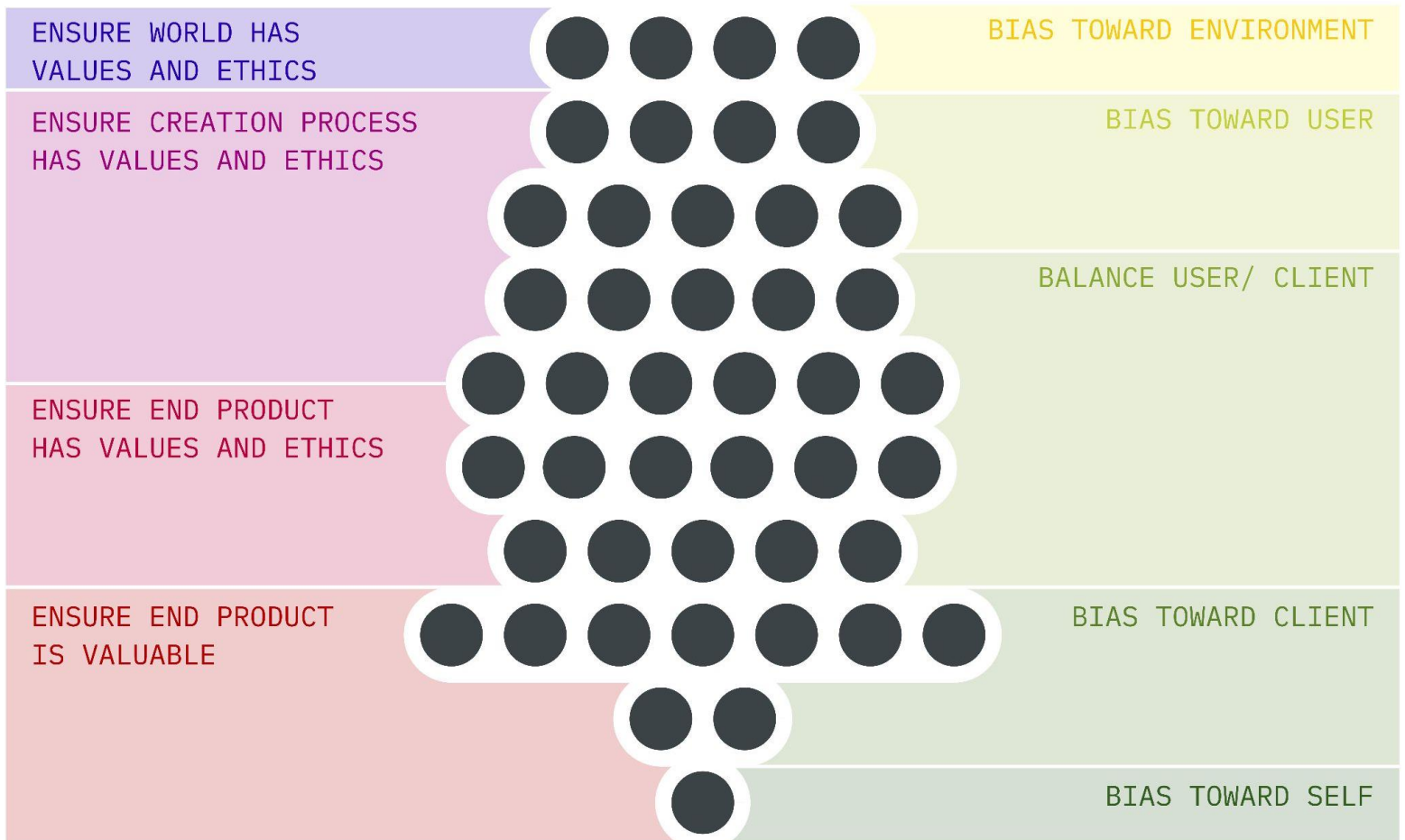


Appendix C. This charts the 45 respondents who shared what they saw as the role of a designer, sorting them between creator, communicator and producer, along with more specific subsections.

Respondents are represented as dots on the map for anonymity.

Appendix D

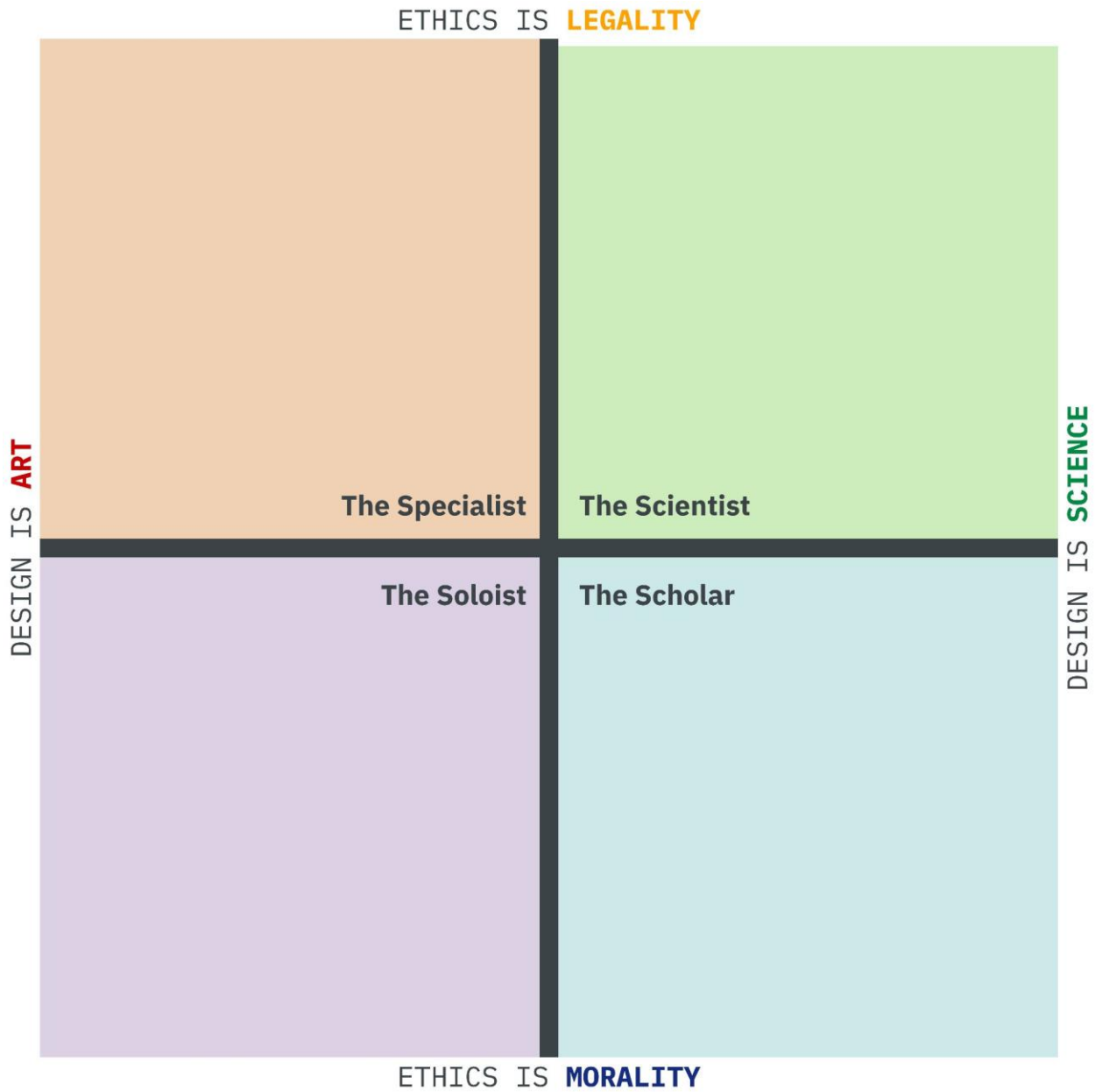
Spectrum of Design: The Responsibilities of a Designer



Appendix D. This charts the 45 respondents who shared what they saw as the responsibilities of a designer, placing them on two spectrums. One was whether the designer's bias was to the world, the user, balanced between user and client, biased towards the client, or biased to themselves. The other spectrum was what value was placed upon: that ethics were valued above all else, that the process was shaped by ethics and values, that the end product had ethics and values, or that the end product simply had to be valuable. Respondents are represented as dots on the map for anonymity. This appendix is meant to be read as a heat map.

Appendix E

Blank Quadrant Chart of Designer Archetypes

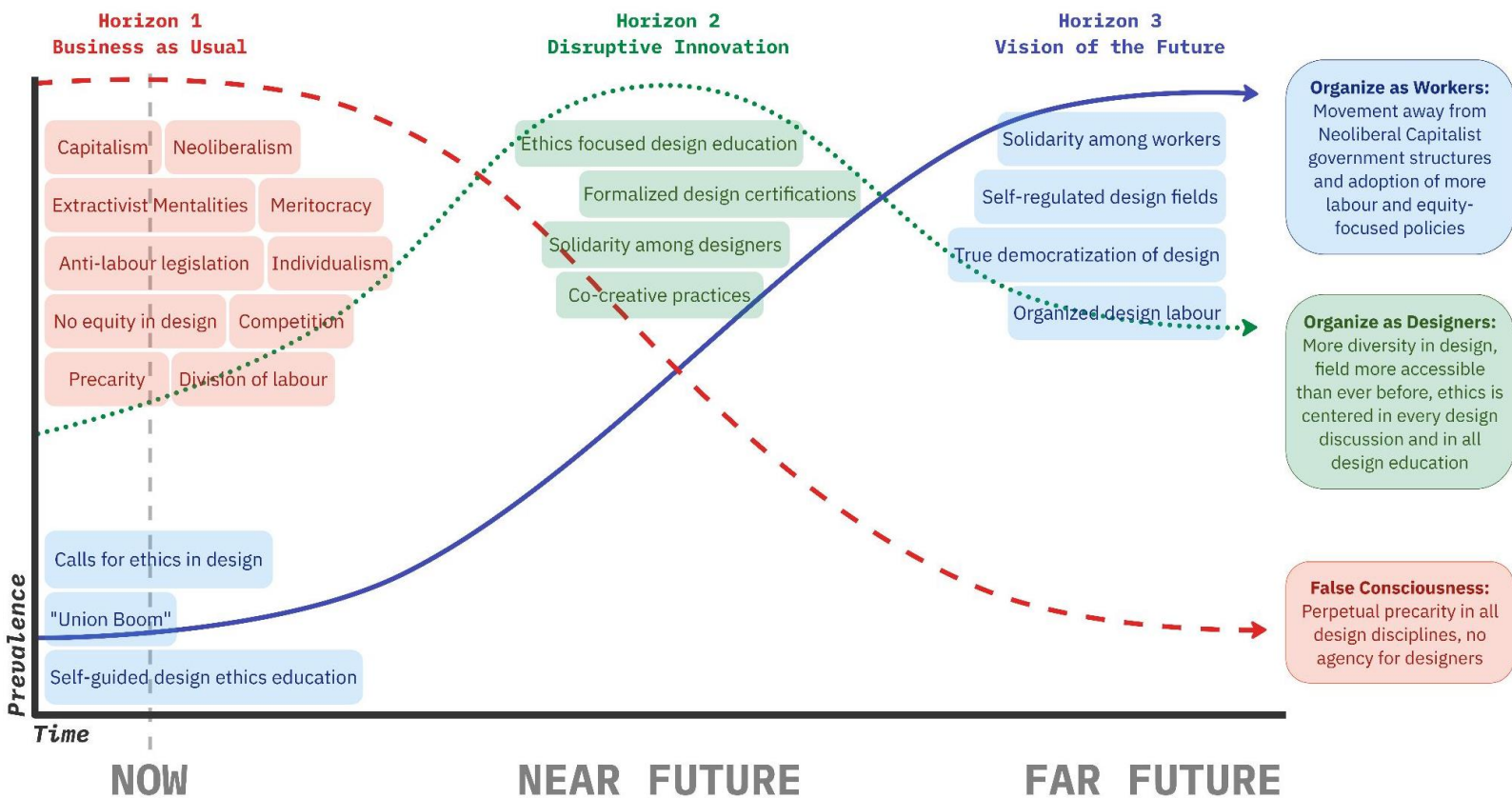


Appendix E. This is a blank version of Figure 9 for readers who may find the framework helpful in a toolkit.

Appendix F

Three Horizons Framework for Accountability in Design

Three Horizons is a foresight framework for understanding the possibility space when investigating long-term or systemic problems. Horizon 1 looks at the systems and trends present in culture today, as well as what will happen should they not change. Horizon 2 speculates what could happen in the short term to begin a system of change and mitigate harm from older systems. Horizon 3 looks at the ideal possible future, looking at what trends have started today and how they could flourish as time moves onwards.



Appendix F. The trends under each horizon were informed by the interviewee responses, primarily around what a system of accountability in design would look like. There are also trends that were highlighted by the survey respondents as well as secondary research.

Appendix G

Polak Game Framework for Interviewee Responses

