

WOMEN IN ADVERTISING CREATIVE DEPARTMENTS IN
SOUTH AFRICA: RESTRICTING FACTORS AND
EMPOWERMENT

by

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Kim Sheehan

The creative department (copywriters and art directors) of an advertising agency is where the ideas behind the estimated 5,000 ads we see each day are born. In the US, only three percent of creative directors are women, signifying a severe lack of female leadership and representation. Not only is this an issue from a gender equality standpoint, but also from a business perspective. And for brands, this is a waste of money. Furthermore, having more equality in creative departments will result in a healthier media diet for consumers than they are currently receiving.

I explored the issue further over the course of ten weeks in Cape Town, South Africa. My research questions asked to what extent there is a lack of female creatives there, reasons behind this, and what can be done to empower women to be successful in the industry. I interviewed seven male and female creatives and strategists in Cape Town and drew common themes from their responses. Overall, I found that while there is a lack of female creatives, the issue may be a bit ahead of its time in South Africa, with priority given to race and recovery after apartheid. Potential mitigation steps, optimism for change, and advice for aspiring female creatives are discussed.

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Introduction

The creative department (copywriters and art directors) of an advertising agency is where the ideas behind a campaign are born. Once they are made into a reality, the ideas become a part of the more than 5,000 ads that we are estimated to see each day in the United States.¹ Whether consciously or unconsciously, these ideas influence our culture and the way we live our lives. Women tend to be the primary recipients of these messages: they make 85 percent of all consumer purchase decisions, yet 91 percent of women say that advertisers do not understand them.² However, a 2003 study showed that only three percent of creative directors are women, signifying a severe lack of female leadership and representation in advertising creative departments.³ This number is now up to 11 percent, which is good progress but still severely outnumbered. Not only is this an issue from a gender equality standpoint, but also from a business perspective, this does not make sense—especially in a multi-billion dollar industry. And for brands, this is a waste of money. Having more equality in creative departments will result in a healthier media diet for consumers than they are currently receiving. As an aspiring female entering the industry, this makes me both concerned about the environment I am going into and motivated to help change it.

¹ Story, Louise. "Anywhere the Eye Can See, It's Now Likely to See an Ad." The New York Times. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/business/media/15everywhere.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed April 28, 2014).

² "Marketing to Women Quick Facts." She-conomy. <http://www.she-conomy.com/report/marketing-to-women-quick-facts> (accessed April 27, 2014).

³ Windels, Kelsey Farris, "Proportional Representation and regulatory Focus: The Case of Cohorts Among Female Creatives." PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2008.

Method

Awareness about the lack of female creatives is increasing among the advertising community, but the problem is not limited to the United States. I wanted to explore the issue outside of the US and see what the situation is like in another country, since the conversation already seems to be gaining traction in the US. In fall 2014, I did an internship at Stretch Experiential Marketing in Cape Town through the IE3 program.⁴ My goal was to interview seven to ten male and female creatives in the industry and find themes and possible conclusions from there. This proved to be a bit difficult considering everyone was busy executing campaigns going into both the holidays and summer. In ten weeks I was able to conduct seven interviews: four women, three men, six creatives, one strategist, two female head creatives, one designer, and three copywriters. Four of my interviews came from Stretch, where I was interning. The remainder took place at various agencies and cafés. I found all my interviewees by starting at Stretch and following the trail of who I could contact from there, as well as emailing people off of agency websites.⁵

Research Questions

I found through a combination of my primary research and available statistics that South Africa may have fewer female creatives in advertising than the US. A 2014 study indicated that while South Africa has a relatively high number of female creatives (25 out of 95 creatives are women), it has no female creative directors (I question the

⁴ IE3 is a program through the University of Oregon that “provides high-quality study abroad, internship, research, exchange, and faculty-led programs to the students of our partner campuses throughout the Northwest and beyond,” according to their website.

⁵ This was less successful: my only response was from Jenny Ehlers.

accuracy of this study. See footnote 19.).⁶ My research questions ask: 1) To what extent is there a lack of females in advertising creative departments in South Africa, 2) what are the potential reasons behind this, and 3) what can be done to empower women to believe they can succeed at being a creative in the advertising industry?

Outline

I will begin with commentary on this subject's potential contribution to the field and pertinent background information related to the subject of gender in creative departments. Since interviews are subjective, I will address my research questions first by giving a brief biography of each interviewee. Then, I will outline the following three main conclusions found from my interviews: 1) Yes, there are fewer women, 2) Some people were unaware of the issue or didn't think it was a problem, 3) This issue may be ahead of its time in South Africa. Next, I will explore different reasons why the gender imbalance in creative departments in Cape Town is so large, including history, tradition, and culture, human nature, and workplace dynamics. I will include outside research to provide background information and context for said reasons when necessary. Finally, I will end with an exploration on optimism for change, ways to move forward, advice for aspiring female creatives, and topics for further research.

Contribution to the Field

The conversation about the lack of women in creative departments gained momentum in recent years after Neil French, worldwide creative director at WPP, sparked controversy at a dinner and speaker series in Toronto in 2005. When asked why

⁶ Grow, Jean M., and Tao Deng. "Sex Segregation in Advertising Creative Departments Across the Globe." *Advertising & Society Review* 14.4 (2014): n. pag. *Project Muse*. Web. 22 Apr. 2014.

there were so few women creative directors, he said, “Women don’t make it to the top because they don’t deserve to. They’re crap.” The problem, he added, was that women “wimp out and go suckle something.”⁷

Regardless of how derogatory his remarks may have been, French brought the subject to the forefront of the advertising industry. As a result, the gender gap is slowly beginning to close. Many different groups have emerged in order to combat the issue, including conferences, agencies geared specifically toward marketing to women, and women support groups within agencies. But the situation in South Africa has remained largely unchallenged. My research will help continue the conversation globally by better understanding how culture contributes to the lack of female creatives and empowering South African women to reach for those creative leadership positions.

The goal is not for women in leadership positions to hire only women—they should hire the best candidate, regardless of gender. The goal is equality, or even any improvement to the 3 percent number. In order to do this, men need to be a part of the conversation—otherwise women will just be talking to themselves—which is why I am choosing to interview both women and men. Introducing more women into creative departments is not guaranteed to result in less gender-biased ads—with some male feminists and some women who are happy to continue the current trend, the issue is more nuanced than that. But having more female presence in the creative department at advertising agencies across the globe will potentially serve a greater purpose in marketing to females from a place of understanding, giving brands more bang for their buck in paying for more effective advertising, and promoting a healthier media diet for all consumers.

⁷ Windels, 1.

Background

Gender and Advertising

In discussing representation of women in advertising, it is important to understand how the portrayal of men and women in advertising has the power to shape the meaning of gender in our culture. It acts as a reflection of gender norms in our society and influences them at the same time. As Maitrayee Chaudhuri writes in her essay “Gender and Advertisements: The Rhetoric of Globalization,” advertisements “have a key role to play in the ideological transformation of public discourse” and advertising “lends itself exceptionally well to an examination of cultural values, beliefs, and myths connected to gender.”⁸

In her book, *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising*, Kim Sheehan writes, “Not only do advertisers view men and women differently, but men and women also bring different perspectives to advertising. Thus, we can assume that men and women create different meanings from the advertisements they see.”⁹ She adds that advertisers tend to rely on role portrayal and stereotypes to help market products because they allow them to quickly set the stage. Women are portrayed as “the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, or the hardface corporate political climber.”¹⁰ Women are often pictured as dependent in advertising, and are likely to be shown in the home. Beauty standards are completely unrepresentative of the audience, often perpetuating the decorative and sexual stereotypes that have already become too

⁸ Turov, Joseph, and Matthew P. McAllister. *The Advertising and Consumer Culture Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2009. 178.

⁹ Sheehan, Kim. *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising*. Second ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003. 89.

¹⁰ Sheehan, 91.

entrenched in our society. Sheehan writes, “If mass media depict only a limited range of roles for men and women, the societal roles that people assume are appropriate for men and women will subsequently be limited.”¹¹

More women today are holding positions at media organizations and are working to present a more realistic view of women. Advertisements are also starting to portray more nontraditional images of men. However, within the advertising industry, women often find themselves restricted to the “woman accounts,” such as the clients selling cleaning products, sanitary pads, or makeup.¹² Although progress has been made, it will take much more work to deconstruct the stereotypical depictions of women and men that seem to be so pervasive in advertising. Increasing the number of female creatives in agencies is a good start.

Existing Research

Although female representation in creative departments has been a mainstream topic in historical accounts of the advertising industry throughout the 21st Century, academic research has not given comparable attention to the subject.¹³ However, I have selected a few studies that give an overview of what has been done. I hope to use these findings and my own to determine the reasons behind the lack of female creatives in South Africa and how to potentially solve it.

On September 27, 2012, the 3% Conference was born in San Francisco after Kat Gordon, who worked for 20 years as a copywriter and creative director, saw firsthand how women were often left out of pitches and important meetings. The goal of the

¹¹ Sheehan, 104.

¹² Knight, Christina. *Mad Women: A Herstory of Advertising*. Linköping, Sweden: Olik Publishing House Ltd., 2013.

¹³ Windels, 2.

conference is to teach men and women about how to address these issues in new ways and offer female creatives a sense of community. It has been widely successful since its inception: Adobe and the American Association of Advertising Agencies became partners, the conference continues to sell out, and the increasing number of road shows have also sold out. Gordon has received awards for her work from the *Wall Street Journal* and The Sage Group, and has been featured at TedX in San Francisco, Creative Week in New York, as well as in articles on Forbes and Digiday, to name a few. After the conference, The One Show, Cannes, and the CLIOS have announced gender-balanced juries.

Before launching the 3% Conference, Gordon researched why women only represent such a small percentage of creative directors. The reasons she found include “lack of support for motherhood, lack of mentorship, lack of awareness that females are an asset to connecting to the consumer marketplace today, lack of celebration of female work due to gender bias of award juries, and lack of women negotiating their first agency salary and every one thereafter.”¹⁴ Gordon cites a study by Kelsey Farris Windels from 2008 on “Proportional Representation and Regulatory Focus: The Case for Cohorts Among Female Creatives,” in which the author examines the impact of gender proportions on an individual’s regulatory focus. Windels highlights two papers that take a more exploratory approach to determining the reasons for female under-representation within creative departments. After interviewing male and female account executives and creatives, the authors concluded that the two most important factors

¹⁴ Gordon, Kat. "Championing Creative Female Talent and Leadership." The 3% Conference. <http://3%conf.com/index.php/about> (accessed April 28, 2014).

affecting female representation were the “problems associated with the dual role of creative and mother and the sexist culture found in agency creative departments.”¹⁵

Former copywriter and creative director Karen Mallia published a study called “Rare Birds: Why So Few Women Become Ad Agency Creative Directors” in 2009.¹⁶ After performing 18 in-depth interviews, she identified numerous factors underlying the dearth of women creative directors. She sorted her results into the following categories: 1) cultural factors; 2) factors relative to management, organizational behavior, and communication practices; 3) factors specific to the nature and practices of the advertising business; 4) factors unique to the structure and processes of agency creative departments; 5) differences between the skill sets related to creative jobs and creative management; and 6) personal characteristics, such as personality, role definition and household division of labor. These categories are reflected in many of the responses I received in my own interviews.

Female Creatives in the US and Around the World

In understanding women in advertising, it is important to look into overall developments in the workforce. Women’s role in the US workforce is larger than ever before. They earn 57.3 percent of all Bachelor’s degrees, represent 47 percent of the American workforce, and “command 85 percent of what the Bureau of Economic Analysis values as \$7 trillion in total person consumption expenditures.”¹⁷ However, these numbers do not necessarily indicate gender equality for a variety of reasons,

¹⁵ Windels, 3.

¹⁶ Mallia, Karen. "Rare Birds: Why So Few Women Become Ad Agency Creative Directors." *Advertising & Society Review* 10, no. 3 (2009): N/A. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/advertising_and_society_review/v010/10.3.mallia.html (accessed April 29, 2014).

¹⁷ Windels, 1.

including an employee's given position and pay rate in an industry. In their study "Sex Segregation in Advertising Creative Departments Across the Globe," Jean M. Grow and Tao Deng investigate the lack of gender diversity in creative departments in 50 countries worldwide.¹⁸ Grow and Deng write that the advertising industry in the US is fairly gender-balanced, with women representing 50.6 percent of all advertising employees. They stated that women dominate the lower occupational positions across all departments (including clerical and service positions). Yet they only fulfill 19.5 percent of upper-management positions (and even less in creative), demonstrating a lack of equal representation between genders.¹⁹ The situation intensifies at higher levels, where only four of the 33 nationally ranked agencies have women running their creative departments. Grow and Deng's findings indicated a global average of only 20.3 percent female representation in creative departments and 14.6 percent of creative directors. Females are also significantly outnumbered among advertising's elite, representing only 12 percent of One Club Hall of Fame members and 2 percent of those in the Art Directors Club Hall of Fame.

This leads to the question of why the creative department specifically seems to be particularly unwelcoming to women compared to other departments in the agency. Studies have actually been done looking at creativity in both genders. One found that 91 percent of creative directors saw no difference in the creative level of males and females and 88 percent saw no difference with regard to ease of creative stimulation, indicating

¹⁸ Grow, 2014.

¹⁹ This study found that 25.2 percent of creative directors in the US are women. Although this is still a minority, the number is significantly higher than the three percent that Katherine Gordon's conference is based off of. This is probably due to differences in methodology: Grow used the *Red Books* database, while Windels used the *Communication Arts Advertising Annual*. If the statistics for the US are this different, finding a reliable source for the number of female creatives in South Africa may be even more difficult. However, both studies agreed that the ratio of men to women in the creative department is 2.3 to 1.

that “women have either achieved parity with men or are moving expeditiously toward that goal.”²⁰ Furthermore, the position calls for creativity and innovation, and research has shown that diversity is positive when the group’s performance requires creative problem solving and innovation. Grow writes that with fewer than 35 percent representation, one is viewed as a minority and can exert little influence of change within the group. When a group represents less than 15 percent, a transformation from minority to token occurs. Grow and Deng argue, “The underrepresentation of women in advertising creative departments compromises not just the creative process. The lack of women in advertising creative departments compromises creativity itself. Thus, in the end, this is not a gender problem. This is a business problem, a problem that advertising agencies ignore at their own peril.”²¹ Therefore, not only should the ratio of male to female creatives be changed for the sake of gender equality, but it would also be in the best interest of the agency, the client, and the consumer for women to have more representation.

In *Mad Women: A Herstory of Advertising*, creative director Christina Knight shares her own interviews with successful female creative directors, planners, CEOs, copywriters and more after spending 27 years in the industry in three countries (Sweden, the UK, and the US).²² She writes that although advertising classes are typically equally composed of males and females, fewer women actually go into the field over time. For some reason, they are getting scared away down the line, perhaps due to the lack of female creatives to look up to in the field. Jobs in the advertising industry typically don’t follow a “normal” 9-to-5-work schedule. People work long

²⁰ Windels, 3.

²¹ Grow, 13.

²² Knight, 2013.

hours, and if people want to get higher up the ladder, they have to put in even more time. In her 2012 essay in *The Atlantic*, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” Anne-Marie Slaughter describes her experience of working in a government “dream job” only to realize that she needed to take time off to be with her family.²³ She says, “I still strongly believe that women can ‘have it all’ (and that men can too). I believe that we can ‘have it all at the same time.’ But not today, not with the way America’s economy and society are currently structured.”

Even though Slaughter held a position in government, her op-ed inspired a discussion published in *Adweek* in March 2014 about the state of women in the media business. Beyond the work-life balance, the overall culture of the creative department can be unwelcoming to female creatives. In the *Adweek* interview, Nancy Reyes, managing director and associate partner at Goodby, Silverstein & Partners, responded to a question about the lack of female creative directors: “Advertising in particular was an old boy’s club. I mean, look at *Mad Men*. So many of us sort of suffer through the ramifications of a time in which men ran the show in every single way, and the idea would always come from the man. You know, it was the person who sort of broke through and was able to deliver something in a way that nobody else could.”²⁴

Executive Creative Director at Wieden + Kennedy Susan Hoffman says in *Mad Women*: “My advice to women is to be prepared to work hard – long hours. You have to push yourself. And you have to be tough but in the right way. Fight for what you

²³ Slaughter, Anne-Marie. “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All.” *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/> (accessed June 6, 2014).

²⁴ Granatstein, Lisa. “A Candid Conversation With 5 Women Leaders of Advertising and Media.” *AdWeek*. <http://www.adweek.com/news/advertising-branding/candid-conversation-5-women-leaders-advertising-and-media-156576> (accessed June 6, 2014).

believe in, don't be bitchy and certainly don't cry. Be prepared to stand up for your ideas. And most importantly make sure you love it."²⁵ If you are a woman and you want to work as a creative in advertising, you will be facing an uphill battle. The risks are high, but the reward is to help change the ratio in the industry and the discourse about women in advertising and in our society.

Gender Inequality in South Africa

After 1948 under apartheid, skilled jobs were reserved for whites. That did not begin to change until 20 years ago in 1994 when apartheid was overthrown. From 2000-2006, 43 percent of the population lived under the poverty line, and the burden of poverty fell heavily on women and girls. Unemployment was especially high among African women at 31 percent and young women at 52 percent. More recently, however, the economy has been growing and becoming more diversified. In the 2009 elections, women represented 43 percent of parliament. In 2007, net enrollment in primary education was 92 percent for girls, secondary education was 89 percent, and tertiary education was 17 percent. Jobs and wage disparities for women are also improving, but often are still unequal.²⁶

Even with what is widely considered to be one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, gender inequality is still prevalent in South Africa.²⁷

Although it is not directly related to advertising, William Bourget's research on "The ABCs of US Foreign AIDS Policy in South Africa: An Analysis of President Bush's

²⁵ Knight 2013. 79.

²⁶ Maarten , van Klaveren, Tijdens Kea, Hughie-Williams Melanie, and Ramos Martin Nuria. "South Africa - An Overview of Women's Work, Minimum Wages and Employment." WageIndicator.org.

²⁷ "SouthAfrica.info." The Constitution of South Africa. February 1, 2014. Accessed May 6, 2015. <http://www.southafrica.info/about/democracy/constitution.htm#.VUpY6dNViko>.

Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief” gives background on the “institutionalized nature of gender inequality and xenophobia.”²⁸ He found that overall, due to the legacy of apartheid, women experience poverty to a higher degree than men. Not only are they more likely to be poor, but also they are concentrated in the poorest brackets of poverty. They are almost three times as likely as men to have traded sex for goods. And even though young women are becoming more present as the breadwinner for their households, being forced into the pressures of the adult provider, hunger was reported in 800,000 more female-headed households than those headed by men. While this impoverished demographic, mostly made up of black women, is different from the women who are likely to work in advertising, it still represents a large segment of the population, demonstrating how South Africa is frequently characterized as associating privilege and power with masculinity.²⁹

According to Bourget, the ANC and South African government have acknowledged the presence of gender inequality since before apartheid. “Regardless,” he argues, “the state’s perception of gender inequality is limited by its unique combination of liberal ideals and traditional customs... Ultimately, the unique form that gender inequality takes in South Africa is caused by the state’s attempt to balance tradition, development, and human rights through institutional multiplicity.”³⁰ Bourget suggests that these traditional elements of South Africa’s culture are the biggest obstacle for gender equality in the country.

²⁸ Bourget, William. "The ABCs of US Foreign AIDS Policy in South Africa: An Analysis of President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief." April 30, 2014, 6.

²⁹ Bourget, 41-46.

³⁰ Bourget, 63-70.

The Black Economic Empowerment Act (BEE)

The act was introduced in 2003 and serves as the principle framework for economic transition in South Africa. The goal is to reverse the legacy of apartheid in favor of historically disadvantaged persons. Although it is not law, the government does give incentives on a point system to companies who hire individuals who are typically minorities in the workforce over the majority: white males.

While race is the primary focus of the BEE, gender does come into play. According to a report by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the following are a few of many sentiments that were outlined in an article in Financial Mail in 2014 and still hold true today: Though the black economic empowerment charters make special mention of women in terms of employment, targets are particularly low and there is no differentiation from black men at ownership level; Government tenders specify that companies must have some women empowerment, but the percentage specified is generally small; Few women's companies are the lead partners in big empowerment deals; they more often piggyback on male-dominated companies; The BEE Act is largely silent on women's empowerment and simply defines the beneficiaries of the law as black people; Another stumbling block for women is the no-concession ethic, which holds: "do not expect any concessions because you're a woman." The implication is that a dual focus on race and gender dilutes the focus of affirmative action and black empowerment.

In "Female Wages and Occupational Advance under Black Economic Empowerment in South Africa," author Laura Denenga used South African census data

to examine the effect of the BEE policy on the South African gender wage disparity.³¹ She explained that the BEE aims to not only address racial disparities created by apartheid, but also to create employment equity for women and encourage their advance into managerial positions. Unlike the IFC, Denenga found a more positive outcome from the BEE. After analyzing annual income data of females before and after the BEE was implemented, she found that the wage gap between man and women decreased by 1.39 percent. Furthermore, when looking at occupational advance, the results showed women as 3.37 percentage points more likely to be in managerial positions after the policy. As demonstrated by these two reports, the impact of the BEE is multifaceted and widely debated.

Female Creatives in South Africa

Information is limited on female creatives in South Africa. The advertising industry is expanding rapidly: it has attracted many top global agencies and have a growing number of smaller agencies popping up. In Grow and Deng's report on sex segregation in creative departments around the world, only two African countries are listed in the *Red Books* database as having advertising agencies: Egypt and South Africa.³² South Africa has the highest number of female creatives (25 out of 95), but the study says there are no female creative directors.

I did find one helpful account in Knight's *Mad Women* from Nunu Ntshingila-Njeke, who worked her way up to chairman of Ogilvy South Africa after joining their

³¹ Denenga, Laura (2012) "Female Wages and Occupational Advance under Black Economic Empowerment in South Africa," *Colgate Academic Review*: Vol. 9, Article 9.

³² The *Red Books* database monitors and compiles information from 9,000 worldwide agency parent companies, over 4,400 U.S. publicly traded companies, the top 2,000 global companies and the largest U.S. private companies.

trainee program in 1988 as an account manager. She has produced award-winning work for South Africa's biggest brands, including DSTV, SABMiller, KFC, Cadbury, BP, Volkswagen, and Coca-Cola. She said, "There are great women in account management and strategy, but it is still difficult to find women in the creative space. I think there is only one woman executive creative director in this country and probably only two or three CEOs who are women."³³ When asked why there are not more women at South African agencies today, Nunu said that women often have children and don't come back because the work environment is not conducive to women. She added that the industry is not friendly to both women and black people, so for her it was particularly challenging. Nunu was successful because she knew that she was equally competent as the men and her white colleagues, and just decided that she could do it too. This background research on advertising in the US, in South Africa, and existing interviews were the primary guide to my interview questions, and consequently influenced the following responses and conclusions.

Observations on the Standard of Gender Portrayal in Advertisements

On the flip side of the lack of female creatives is awareness about the influence (if any) of a male-dominated department on the ads that are produced and on display for society. From my short time spent in Cape Town, I never personally noticed any ads that stood out to me as blatant stereotyping, sexist, or otherwise clearly made by a creative department of men with the outcome of negative connotations towards women. It is difficult to objectively look at ads in a different country online from in the US. I did find the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa database, but you cannot look

³³ Knight, 2013. 67.

at complaints and rulings about ads past 30 days unless you are in South Africa. Still, even barely scratching the surface can provide better insight into what is commonly accepted in the country and who is behind them.

The only case in the past 30 days concerning women was on April 25, 2015, for a complaint on an ad in the Volkswagen “Up” campaign (figure 8).³⁴ The main copy was “This car can help you attract women. Just drive it to places where there are women. And be really charming.” The small copy below the tagline reads: “The New Volkswagen up! has been designed to help you impress women. It’s easy to park at shopping malls, where you can buy clothing that reflects your sophisticated taste. The 251 litre boot [South African lingo for ‘trunk’] has space for plenty of shopping bags, cooking utensils and a few books you should read to help keep the conversation flowing.” The complaints (made by one man and one woman) stated that the advertisement is sexist as it suggests that women are pawns, or tokens of reward. The second complainant added that boys should be raised to treat women as their equals not as people that they attract like game to a trap.

³⁴ "ASA - The Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa." VOLKSWAGEN CAR / M AUGUSTINE AND ANOTHER / 2015-284F. April 23, 2015. Accessed May 4, 2015.

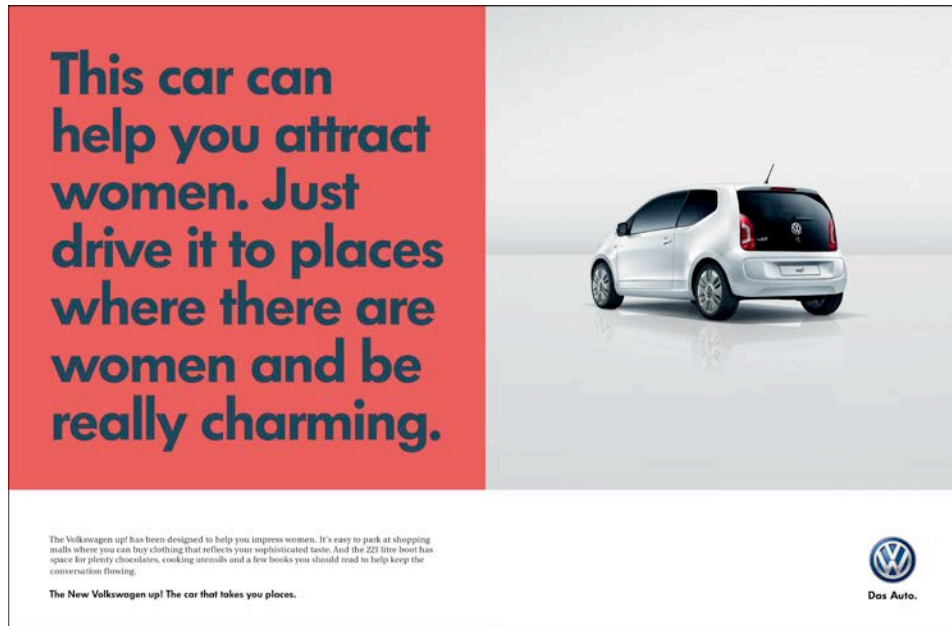


Figure 8³⁵

The client, Volkswagen of South Africa, responded that the readers clearly missed the joke; the ad received overwhelmingly positive comments from customers, and that its entire marketing team is all female and they were not offended by the advertisement. The agency responsible, Ogilvy & Mather, had no comment, and further research revealed that only one person (a copywriter) on the eight-person creative team responsible for the ad was a woman. All complaints were dismissed according to Clause 3.5 of Section II (Gender) of the ASA Code, which states:

Gender stereotyping or negative gender portrayal shall not be permitted in advertising, unless in the opinion of the ASA, such stereotyping or portrayal is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.

Other criteria were "gender stereotyping," defined in Clause 4.19 of Section I as portraying a person of a particular gender in a manner that exploits, objectifies or demeans; and "negative gender portrayal" is defined in Clause 4.22 of Section I as

³⁵ Image source: "Volkswagen: "Women" Print Ad by Ogilvy Cape Town." Creative Advertising & Commercials Archive. Awarded Ads Database. Accessed May 8, 2015.

portraying a person in a manner that restricts and entrenches the role of persons of such gender in society. The bottom line for the ASA was that no hypothetical reasonable person would think less of women, or take the notion that they could be "hunted" or "conquered" simply by driving this vehicle to shopping malls seriously. Therefore, the advertisement is unlikely to undermine any efforts to instill respect for women in the manner suggested by the complainants.

From this particular case, regardless of personal opinion on whether the ruling was deserved or not, three things are apparent: first, a minority are sympathetic to the way gender is portrayed in ads that they were willing to take the time to make a complaint; second, only one person on this creative team was female, which is notable given the lack of statistics I've been able to find; and third, the complaints against this ad were ruled inconsequential. The ruling shows that this level of complaint about this portrayal of women in South Africa is generally accepted in their society and culture.

Again, my most reliable insights into this issue came not from my secondary research, but from my interviews. When asked if he had noticed the effect that the lack of female creatives has on ads, Pete Hutchings commented, "I can't say I've seen a lot of advertising that made me think about sex, I think maybe I will think about it differently as a result of this conversation. I can't think of too many examples locally where I realized that, but maybe I'm biased." Peterson said, "Yes, there's definitely a lot of that... I can't off the top of my head think of any specific ads, but I know that in the last three months I've definitely seen an ad and been like 'Oh my god that ad is so sexist.' It's not too bad, but every now and then it's noticeable." In considering these comments, it is important to note the difficulty in discerning the extent to which male

dominance in creative departments is seen in ads, mainly because if people are not aware of an issue, they are probably less likely to notice it.

This is a possibility because Fry said she has seen many examples of this in Cape Town. She discussed a recent campaign for Mavericks strip club (Figure 9). This case emerged in November 2011, so I was unable to attain the original ASA ruling. However, it caused such controversy that there were a number of articles written about it. The product was Alibis, men's fragrances that smelled like a particular activity, such as sailing and working on cars. The idea was that men could use it when leaving the strip club, so they could have an excuse when their significant other asked where they had been.



Figure 9³⁶

Three articles about the ad appear on South African news source Times LIVE from December 2011 to February 2012. Over the course of this time period, the ads

³⁶ Image source: "Alibis Perfume Gives Husbands an Excuse | Oddity Central - Collecting Oddities." Oddity Central Collecting Oddities. November 10, 2011. Accessed May 8, 2015.

were required by the ASA to be taken down, allowed back up as long as the models had more clothing painted on them, and then deemed not sexist. According to the first article, a group of complainants argued that the adverts demeaned and objectified women by portraying them as sexual objects. They said the wording "encouraged thought patterns" that justified cheating and extramarital affairs, undermining family values. Furthermore, some argued that the position of the billboards was not suitable as young and vulnerable children were being exposed. One billboard was seen opposite a children's park, while the other was on the well-traveled N1 highway.

The first ruling stated that both the original and the amended ads (that had more clothing painted on) "unduly objectified women" and had to be withdrawn.³⁷

Interestingly, Shane Harrison, the owner of Mavericks, said the Alibis fragrances were created by a Cape Town woman.³⁸ Just over a year later, a third article said that all complaints had been dismissed. No quotes for the reasoning behind this were included from the ASA. The only source was Harrison, who said, "It was a stimulating campaign, which was certainly in line with the approach used by major European fragrance houses...If a consumer sees 'masturbatory implications' when looking at a woman holding a wrench, it is a problem perhaps best addressed in chambers outside those of the ASA."³⁹ From these comments, it seems the ruling was concerned more with the imagery of scantily clad women than the messaging, which attempts to make male consumers think it's acceptable to go to a strip club and then lie to their wives and girlfriends about it. The case shows a more controversial example of a campaign many

³⁷ "Strip Club Fragrance Ads Taken down." Times LIVE. December 8, 2011. Accessed May 4, 2015.

³⁸ Davids, Nashira. "Club's Cheeky Cover-up Doesn't Quite Cut It." Times LIVE. January 19, 2012. Accessed May 4, 2015.

³⁹ Nombembe, Philani, and Nashira Davids. "Fragrance Ads Deemed Not Sexist." Times LIVE. February 27, 2012. Accessed May 4, 2015.

deemed sexist that was ultimately considered acceptable by the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa. While it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the general standards of the group in charge of the ads that are allowed to be viewed by the public, these two examples along with what I heard in my interviews indicate that gender stereotyping in ads in South Africa is fairly lax.

The Interviewees

Michelle Hoch – Head Creative at Stretch Experiential Marketing



Figure 1⁴⁰

Interview medium: Email

How Michelle got into advertising: “The age-old tale of a fine-artist turned graphic designer who spent enough time crafting campaigns only to realize [South African spelling] one day that I wanted to be involved in the synthesis as much as I did the delivery. I got more and more conceptual and eventually I took advertising as part of my communications degree in final year. When I was offered a job in marketing, the job spec made my mouth water.”

The bottom line: Michelle has personally experienced gender inequality, but has been able to successfully combat it. She is one of the few head female creatives in the industry.

Amy Uzzell – Copywriter at Stretch Experiential Marketing

⁴⁰ Since my iPhone was stolen when I was mugged and it wasn't safe to bring my DSLR, the photos of interviewees were found online.



Figure 2

Interview medium: Email

How Amy got into advertising: “I got into advertising by chance. I studied a Bachelor of Journalism with a focus on Communication Design (majoring in Political and International Studies) so when it came to looking for a job I applied for jobs in the creative/media industry; and I got a creative internship (as a designer/copy writer) with Stretch Experiential Marketing (which is where I've worked for the last 2 years).”

The bottom line: Has not experienced gender inequality in advertising personally, but sees it everywhere (her friends, etc) and believes in its power to affect media.

Graham Paterson – Graphic Designer, Head of UI and Art Director at MADE Agency



Figure 3

Interview medium: Hello Sailor Café, Observatory, Cape Town

How Graham got into advertising: “I was really into art in school and stuff and I also had a pretty strong math side, so I was always deciding between architecture and design. So I started doing Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign when I was 12 or 13. I ended up moving overseas to Australia for about 6 months on a whim and I ended up doing graphic design. So when I came back here, I ended up doing the same thing.... Art director at Made, a small agency. When I started I was the 7th employee, and now we’re up to almost 20.”

The bottom line: Was previously unaware of the issue, but his experience is consistent with the lack of women argument.

Michele Fry – Copywriter at JWT



Figure 4

Interview medium: Bedouin Café, Cape Quarter, Cape Town

How Michele got into advertising: “The whole concept of copywriting, I did not know anything about it until probably my second year of university, and then just kind of researched and thought it looked cool. I applied to AAA and Red & Yellow, which are ad schools here in Cape Town, and I was accepted into both, but what made my decision was at R&Y you have to do 2 years, and AAA offered a post grad one year course if you had a degree. So obviously I was like I’ve already been studying for a while, let me hurry it up. But I don’t think there was a point where I said “Hmm, advertising,” and was suddenly enlightened. I think it was just like, cool, it’s communicating with mass people but from a more private way, I suppose.”

The bottom line: Has personally experienced severe inequality and pay discrepancies, had a major struggle.

Jenny Ehlers – Executive Creative Director at King James Group



Figure 5

Interview medium: In her office at King James Group, Woodstock, Cape Town

How Jenny got into advertising: “I was one of the lucky ones because I always knew when I was in school that I was creative. I don’t think I necessarily knew that I wanted to get into graphic design, but I studied a general year for graphic design—it was textile design, fashion design, and fine art. I think I’m just fortunate that I fell into it. So I suppose just from doing art in school and loving it and being passionate about it...I’ve been in advertising since 1984, so 39 years now. In both Cape Town and Johannesburg. I spent quite a lot of my 30s in Johannesburg, which was really good for my career because there’s so much more going on there. The industry is so much bigger and there are a lot more agencies. That’s not to say that the industry doesn’t do well in Cape Town, but it’s just a lot smaller.”

The bottom line: She has a lot of experience in the industry and is doing well, but seemed unaware/relatively unconcerned about the issue.

Pete Hutchings – Strategy Director at Stretch



Figure 6

Interview medium: In the boardroom at Stretch, Woodstock, Cape Town

How Pete got into advertising: “I studied event management originally, I wasn’t interested in advertising. For my final dissertation, I wanted to do a subject that to be honest I thought would get me a job, that was actually of interest to my potential employers. I heard about experiential marketing, emailed a bunch of people in the industry asking for good topics. Someone came back and said measurability, measuring the intangible. Long story short I was invited to work at an experiential agency in London.”

The bottom line: Has experienced gender disparities in many different agencies (just one in SA), but hadn’t thought about the specific issue yet.

Lebeaux Grobler – Designer at Stretch



Figure 7

Interview medium: Kitchen table at Stretch, Woodstock, Cape Town

How Lebeaux got into advertising: “I started as a student and did a lot of freelance work on the side. I started seeing advertising as the place to go. My first job I learned so much about everything: I did print work, TV, animations, everything in terms of advertising. You can get turned off by advertising too, which I did personally at one stage. I think a lot of people in the industry aren’t really valued as designers or artists. A lot of advertising agencies are top heavy, which means there’s a million people doing some art, buying media, etc, while at the bottom there’s actually 2-3 people doing all the work. You’re the one making the company successful for the biggest brands, and yet you get paid below the poverty line. Which makes you ask if you’re in the right place...”

The bottom line: In his experience, design is mostly women, while creative and top level positions are mostly men.

Overview of Responses

When interviewing each subject, I wanted to make sure that I did not lead by assuming that there were gender disparities in advertising creative departments in Cape Town. In fact, I thought I might find the opposite was true when I started my internship at Stretch and observed that their creative department comprised of a female head creative, a female copywriter, and a male designer. In the end, I received a variety of responses along the spectrum of “There is definitely a lack of women,” to being unaware of the issue and even not thinking it was an issue at all. The following is an overview of primary themes addressing my first research question: To what extent is there a lack of females in advertising creative departments in South Africa?

There are fewer women

Of the seven interviewees, the majority confidently responded that there were far fewer women than men in advertising creative departments in South Africa. Michelle Hoch spoke of her experience as “Intimidating! It is a male-dominated field. But more than that, it is an ego-driven field.” Michele Fry, who has perhaps experienced this issue to the greatest extent compared to the others, said:

To put it in context in terms of my life, I’m the only female creative in my department, other than a freelancer who occasionally comes in....20 creatives, so 19 to one is the ratio. And then our marketing department is about half-half... I think it’s a cultural thing. I don’t know—like I can’t list one female creative director in Cape Town from the top line agencies, like JWT, Ogilvy... I can’t think of one. Also with the award ceremonies, when you see the creative directors’ names come up on the screen, I think there’s one creative director for BBDO in JoBurg [Johannesburg] who’s a woman and her name gets up quite a lot. But in comparison nothing to the amount of men.

Amy Uzzell said of her experience:

It has been a good one, although I am very aware that I work in a male-dominated field. I think that gender stereotypes are most visible through popular design aesthetics. I studied semiotics at university, the study of meaning making through signs. Masculine design is made to symbolize modern design, feminine design on the other hand is much less 'cool'. From my experience in advertising, I have come to think that if I am going to excel in this industry; I need to have a thick skin (something traditionally un-feminine) and push my design aesthetic in a clean, strong, provocative direction (traditionally 'masculine' attributes). This is not necessarily a bad thing but as a woman, you are set up having to assert yourself from the outset. Stretch is particularly good at creating an equal, inclusive work environment, but I think that they are the exception in the advertising industry.

When asked about creative departments in general, Uzzell said,

There are fewer women. If I think of my social circle and my friends' experiences in their respective creative departments, it is certainly male dominated. I think that hiring more men is easier. If you're a woman who is willing to fit into the same role, that's fine too, but I think that the noteworthy thing here is that ad agencies and the people that work in them are perpetuating normative gender roles in society through the creative/media that they produce.

Jenny Ehlers agreed with the general consensus, but hadn't given it much thought before I started asking her about it:

There definitely are. I would say the problem is that there are very few creative directors. There are actually quite a lot of women in advertising, but they're mostly in client services. In this agency [King James], the creative department is predominantly male, and the client service department is pretty much all female, which is quite strange because there should be a lot of men in client service as well, but that's the way we are here. I don't know why. That's a good question I've never thought about. Maybe it's perceived as being a harsh or difficult industry. I didn't think about it being a male dominated industry before I came into it. Maybe some people are intimidated by it. I don't know, I think you've got to be quite tough to be a woman in our industry.

As another reminder that these interviews are subjective, Ehlers seems to be an exception to the norm in this situation. She said her experience has been

Good. Positive. I've always felt supported, I never felt like I was being treated differently... I'm not sure why there aren't more women worldwide. I don't have the answer for you, I'm sorry. I do have colleagues who have experienced that difficulty; they may struggle when they review with male creative directors. But I've been fortunate; I've never had that experience. I suppose I'm not easily intimidated.... In this agency I would say we have a creative department of about 30, excluding our digital agency, maybe 10 are women. I think interviewing someone like me versus interviewing an art director/copywriter female team you would get a very different vibe because from what I've heard it's quite a personal struggle. But I'm fortunate because I've gotten here so I don't have struggles if that makes sense.

Pete Hutchings also agreed, but hadn't really considered it before either. In his response, he began by making an important clarification:

I'll answer more generically first. In advertising across all departments, they're all doing some sort of creative role. If anything, I'd say there is a slight bias towards women, generally. When you narrow it down to the creatives, these are the people who are coming up with ideas day in and day out, rather than administrative service and clients, I would say in my experience there is a slight bias towards men, if not a large bias towards men. I think what you're finding in the US probably would hold true. Some of the best-known creatives in SA that you'll hear about at conferences and things are more regularly men.

When asked about the number of creative directors, Hutchings said, "On a senior creative level, the ones who I have met are very rarely women. If I had to put a figure to it, I would say probably about 80 percent of those are men." Finally, although Graham Paterson didn't seem aware or adamant about the issue, the demographic at his agency (Made) supported the presumption about the lack of women:

In the industry there are definitely more men in the creative roles and as creative directors. But as far as advertising goes, I don't notice it too much I guess. When we started, there were 7 of us and we were all guys. I think up until 9 or 10 was when we got a girl. We've never had more than about 25 percent females. On the creative studio side, it always seems to be more male. So it's quite small. Our company as a whole, we pretty much have been looking for exclusively women for the last 5 or 6 roles because we were a very male company and we're trying to diversify. So it's definitely a thing for us. Nobody's really been trying for the high-ranking roles to get the agency sort of even. But when it comes down to it we would definitely hire based on quality.

Paterson's commentary brings up another aspect to the situation: the ethics of hiring based on experience versus diversity (or gender), which is where South Africa differs greatly from the rest of the world.

It's a problem, but it lacks relevance

A few interviewees argued that the lack of female creatives was indeed a problem, but that the issue may be unimportant in the current social landscape and is ahead of its time. Ehlers said, "We've got transformation to worry about. That's probably why the gender issue has been pushed aside. Because there aren't many women in senior positions. I don't know what the percentage would be. But we've got to transform and get the young black people into the industry, so that's more of a priority for us." Hutchings said the more pertinent focus was on race as well (he even kept reverting back to the race topic during our interview):

I think in South Africa the topic is and will be for some time race. Those coals are still burning hot. Whilst race is a hugely important issue, South Africa has fought bigger problems, for lack of a better term, hence it comes up more regularly. So we worry more about skin color, language, background, social structure, income—we have so many unique challenges in our marketing, but race doesn't necessarily make it to the

fore (and it's not to say it shouldn't) because there are so many other things to think about it. But I would expect we're not quite as developed market is the bottom line, and you're almost ahead of your time here talking about it, but it will happen. You are looking into a bit of a crystal ball with this country in some things. There are people talking about gender issues here, I know there are, it's just unfortunately they're getting out-shouted by the race issues.

This was a consensus that I had not anticipated before I went to South Africa. At one point, after learning about and seeing firsthand the challenges the country was facing only 20 years after apartheid, I wished that I had chosen a topic that was more relevant to their current situation. However, Hutching's comment that I could be looking into a crystal ball reassured me of the issue's importance. I do not intend to be the outsider preaching ideals of how another country should behave. But I do hope that even after talking to these few people about diversity in creative departments, they will think about it differently and possibly spark a conversation.

Unaware, or Opposed

On the furthest end of the spectrum was Lebeaux Grobler. As a designer, most of his experience came out of freelance, publishing, and illustrating. In our interview, I suggested that with regards to gender diversity in creative, Stretch is doing great and might actually be an exception. Grobler replied:

I don't think that Stretch differs from other ad agencies. It's predominantly females in the design world. I think there's actually 60 percent or so women designers in this industry. At every agency or company I've worked at, it's easily evident. Maybe it's even 80 percent, sometimes up to 90 percent, even at some of the places I was the only guy in the studio...I think the top-heavy people will be men, including the creative directors, but in terms of art directors and designers it's mainly women.

At this point, it should be noted that of the women I talked to, Ehlers was the only one to demonstrate a lack of awareness or opposition to the notion that there are fewer women in creative departments and that it is an important issue that should be addressed. The rest of the interviewees who questioned the idea were men, possibly due to a combination of their own experience in addition to the inherent difficulty of understanding another's plight if you haven't lived it yourself.

Analysis of Responses

This section aims to answer my second research question, what are the potential reasons behind the lack of female creatives? It will comprise of an analysis of the common themes that emerged in conjunction with social, cultural, historical secondary research to provide background and context to the interview responses when necessary.

Human Nature

The human nature argument is a tricky one both in terminology and in concept, but it came up often as an overarching theme in my interviews. Hoch said that, at the risk of making generalizations, women are often deterred from creative departments because

...many of us [women] are more emotional in character—attached to our ideas and our cause. When you pair that with the natural I suppose ‘softness’ or ‘gentleness’ associated with being a woman, men are thought of as better equipped to deal with the pace and ‘harshness’ of the business. Because men are thought of as less emotional, often less attached to the outcome... I’m of the opinion that this perceived advantage of being unemotional can be damaging to a creative atmosphere. There is also a preconceived or expected ‘type’ of person that fits the job of a creative director in this country, and that ‘type’ is, for whatever reason, masculine. It’s cool, it’s a little crass, it’s more suited to masculinity.

Uzzell said that there are more women in Client Service and Accounts departments because “traditionally, women are perceived as more sensitive and tactful when communicating with clients.” Grobler agreed with Hoch and Uzzell with regards to the general “natural” tendencies of men and women, but thought that their skills were the reason why there were more female creatives in his experience:

If you look at the nature of human kind, man and woman, men are more of the left-brain focus, analytical, constructive, where women are more

of the nurturing, caring, right-brained side. And your right brain is responsible for the creative part. Not everyone is the same, but in the general context women are more creative because they're centered in the right brain. Men are good at the businessy, technical things, and women are good at the creative, artistic things. So I think naturally it's great to have more women there.

Paterson looked at the issue that was related to human nature but in more of a technology skills sense. When asked if it should be a higher priority to include more women in creative departments, he said:

I don't think it's a high priority. And I'm not sure if it's something that's fixable or if it's sort of intrinsic, in which case it's hard to figure out if it needs to be fixed or if it's something we can be fine without. I think about creatives in general from varsity [South African term for university] level to the work environment. A lot of the girls have good ideas but they struggle with the execution. Maybe it's got something to do with how when guys are young they're on computers so they get used to using that and in advertising you've got to make the stuff in Photoshop and Illustrator, whereas when people struggle with the actual software it creates a barrier, and that's something I've definitely noticed—they'd rather just come up with ideas.

When attributing an issue like this to human nature, there are always going to be exceptions. The four women I interviewed have successfully broken into the creative field and adapted to the established "boy's club" environment. These responses beg the question if it is human nature that seems to be holding women back, or if it is the existing demands of the construct of the advertising creative department at its core.

The 'Boys Club'

The majority of my interviewees attributed the lack of female creatives partly to cultural norms in South Africa and in the ad world, indicating a deeply entrenched issue that women must combat in order to be successful in the industry. Ehlers said, "...there is this perception that there is a boy's club. And I'm sure if you investigated the

Creative Circle, which is the advertising creative leadership in this country, most of them, I think, are guys.” Hutchings agreed:

From an industry perspective, I think you’ve got classic scenarios going on in some of the bigger agencies, where there are glass ceilings, where there are more “boy’s clubs” at the top, and...you need to be in the club to get on the board...The women that I’ve come across, and one is one of the directors at a digital agency called Quirk, she has that demeanor and she’s a very powerful woman and she comes across that way, and it always makes me sad when—maybe it’s my lack of understanding and I don’t know enough about her, but she puts on a very strong face and I almost feel like that’s part of the reason why she’s gotten where she is, she’s almost had to put on this suit of armor to prove her worth, and I hope that’s not the truth. I really do. But I sometimes wonder about the male ability to shout louder as one of the reasons. I’d like to think there are more places like Stretch where you don’t have to be this all powerful individual...

Uzzell acknowledged the existence of the “boy’s club,” but took a more optimistic view:

I think it's easier for men to be viewed as leaders because of traditional gender roles. Advertising, traditionally, is viewed as a bit of a boy's club with fast cars and fast women—just look at Mad Men. Things are changing though. My Head of Creative is a woman but I know that in Cape Town this is not the norm. Also, I do not work for an agency that identifies as a traditional ad club. It's only five years old too so it doesn't have a legacy of tradition to uphold like some of the international agencies in Cape Town.

Fry spoke candidly of her personal struggle working in this environment:

I do think my creative director is slightly sexist. He does make remarks during meetings where [I’m] like, ‘Ah, that’s why I’m the only girl in this department.’ And also I think a lot of people—I started before the current creative director. I think when he started—um—I don’t think other women agreed with him. I wouldn’t say he pressured them into leaving, because I definitely don’t think it happened like that. But it was just more of their personalities clashed or he just clashes with female personalities.

Getting 'Weeded Out'

Fry continues to work at JWT, but because of her boss, there was a period of time when that almost wasn't the case. If she hadn't stayed strong, she would have been one of the many women who seem to either leave creative departments for accounts, leave advertising altogether, or study advertising but never make it into an agency in the first place. Fry said:

I honestly think the reason that there are more men than women in creative is because of the work and the schedule...I think a lot of people [women] don't want that lifestyle. I must say I can't see myself having children and working in advertising. In terms of, like, it's weekends, it's late nights, it's weird hours. You know you might have a 7:00 am meeting, and you're there. You can never compromise and say, 'Oh, no, I'll be there at half past 8:00, because I need to drop my kids off or...' I think when you're younger, like our age, it's not so much a problem obviously because we don't have those sort of responsibilities. But as you grow in the industry I think it becomes more evident too... I just feel like you can't really compromise, and I think that's why a lot of women avoid it after a certain age or go into something different, or don't even go into it from the beginning.

...This is a personal issue I suppose that I keep having, because I'm like 'what am I doing and is this for life?' And I honestly don't think I'm going to be in advertising past the age of 30. I honestly can't see the future in all that. If I get to the point where I decide I want a family, then I won't be in advertising.

Hoch addressed the family issue, but looked at it from a different standpoint:

Pregnancy is a factor for women leaving the industry, yes, but until they figure out a way for men to carry children, I think nature will continue to take its course... I think if you have the desire to have a career in this industry, and you're talented or experienced enough, there shouldn't be anything standing in your way. So at what point do women get weeded out? At the point that the women chooses to get weeded out.

Ehlers also understood the difficulty, but thinks that it shouldn't impede a woman's career regardless of what industry she is in. She said that many of her

female colleagues have had children and remained in the industry. When Ehlers had her own daughter (now 16), she only took two months maternity leave instead of four because it was all that she could afford. Legally in South Africa, companies must keep jobs open when employees go on maternity leave. Even so, she said the pressures of long work hours do take a toll: “It’s been tough, but I haven’t stopped working. I think no matter what career you are in as a mother in a full time position you have those guilt issues. I’ve managed to move myself on from that and she [her daughter] is no worse off as a result of it, but I don’t think it’s related to being in advertising. It’s just working.” From these three responses, it is difficult to discern whether Ehlers and Hoch’s responses were of a more empowering nature because their own experiences had been more positive due to their attitudes and hard work, or if it really is situational and they have simply been fortunate. Fry’s experience could be representative of many of the women in the industry, which would make sense given the disparity in numbers. However, without a larger pool of interviewees, I can do no more than speculate.

Ehlers also brought up the issue of women studying advertising, but never making it into the industry. She sits on the academic board of the Stellenbosch academy, and said she sees a lot of girls studying, but is unsure why they do not pursue their studies after graduation. “Maybe they go into the softer design disciplines, like editorial or magazines,” she speculated. “I think the industry is perceived as being a bit hard-core and pressurized. And maybe people don’t like that.”

Paterson gave similar reasoning: “When I was at varsity, my class was mostly

women going into creative. A lot of them either didn't go into advertising, or they would go into client services or something else. Maybe it's a generalization, but it just feels like a lot of them prefer to go into client services or something that's less working in Photoshop."

Uzzell had a different opinion on the lack of women coming into creative out of universities. She said, "I wouldn't use the word 'weeded out,' I think that the way we behave perpetuates itself quite naturally or easily. It's not like women can't study at universities the same way men do – I think we're just dealing with a media/creative industry that finds it easier to give people what they expect (media that represents a power dynamic that's male dominated)." Here lies the catch-22 of this subject: If creative departments are predominantly male, then the representations of women in advertisements are likely to perpetuate that norm of male dominance, making it difficult for women to break the cycle in the department itself. Uzzell added, "I think that hiring more men is easier. If you're a woman who is willing to fit into the same role, that's fine too, but I think that the noteworthy thing, here, is that ad agencies and the people that work in them are perpetuating normative gender roles in society through the creative/media that they produce."

Hoch also spoke of this issue: "Short of the BEE [the Black Economic Empowerment Act, explained later] being fully effective, [change is] unlikely. The adverts themselves need to change. For them to change, women need to write them. It's a catch 22." In other words, the content and messages created by the advertising industry may be a significant reason why women are so severely underrepresented in the departments that are responsible for coming up with these ideas. In theory, if the

gender ratio were more balanced, more women would be hired because the underlying gender dynamic of both the department and society would change.

History, Tradition, and Culture

Like the core idea of a good campaign strategy, the creative department of an advertising agency exists and operates as a multilayered function of what is happening in society. From the culture in the agency itself to the ad industry, the media landscape, political and social events, and deeply entrenched traditions and norms, companies and their employees are influenced by the history and culture surrounding them—especially an industry that is in the business of creating new ideas for consumers. Therefore it is important to examine the external factors that contribute to the lack of female creatives in South Africa.

In his interview, Grobler touched on the strong effect that tradition and culture can have on gender. He explained that during apartheid, which only ended about 20 years ago, the country was male-dominated—a very Afrikaans way of thinking:

So naturally during the 80s when that was the situation, then who would be in the agency? It's the guys, the breadwinners. And that's a cultural thing, not a sexist thing. So the women stayed at home, the guys went to work. Afrikaans people don't suppress women. They believe in the importance of looking after family and the nurturing of young children... we're just more family oriented. It wasn't like 'you MUST do this' because women can work, but most wouldn't want to because they want to raise their kids and that's just the culture, and it still is largely like that in Afrikaans society.

As a “nation of diversity” with 11 official languages, it is difficult to differentiate how all the different customs and traditions affect the state of gender equality that exists

today.⁴¹ However, it is clear that from the government to the deep roots of masculine dominance in South Africa history, aspiring female creatives have more than just a ratio to overcome.

The BEE

It seems to be the general consensus among the people I interviewed that the BEE is a classic South African example of something that is well intentioned but has been poorly executed. My interviews added more insight to the debate. Uzzell has personally seen the BEE at work in terms of race, but not of gender. Ehlers said that of the young BEE black interns she has brought in, there have been very few women. Paterson said that the BEE's effect is inconsequential when your company is small, so you can be BEE certified without doing much. Hoch again put the power in the woman's shoes, saying "the BEE does aim to get more women in the industry, but in my own experience hiring creatives, natural talent and the ability to do good work is more important than gender." Hutchings was critical of the BEE, but spoke of the direct effect it would have on creative departments in the near future:

Exclusively to SA, we have probably the most fascinating HR situation, which is about to affect Stretch... Training is really good, investments that benefit black Africans, etc, things that to the rest of the world might seem quite bizarre and bordering on reverse racism. Which to some extent it might be. The bottom line is that it's for a good cause. But it is going to have a direct impact to the future of those top-level individuals in creative departments.

What we're going to see over the next year and when it comes into power in early 2016 is a lot of businesses frankly replacing people at the top or moving things around so we're seeing much more people of color

⁴¹ "SouthAfrica.info." South Africa's Population. November 7, 2012. Accessed May 6, 2015. <http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/population.htm#.VUplh9NViko>.

in top level positions including senior creatives, but more so females coming to the top because they need to make these BEE scores, which is a fantastic by-product of it. But for business implications it's pretty severe, you can't just move people around.

On our side, we have to consider black ownership as a business that has 3 white directors. In SA that's quite complicated, you don't just find someone to be a director overnight. There will be some great outcomes of this thing, but that's not to say it's going to be easy. Part of it will be a bit more gender equality in senior positions as a byproduct of it, which is an interesting outcome because it's not the primary objective. The situation is very rare, but it will help mediate the bias of what is probably a male-dominated industry.

Hutching's comments underline the idea that possibly this topic is ahead of it's time in South Africa, or coming in at the cusp of a great transition period. While it is unclear exactly how much leverage (or disadvantage) the BEE gives to female mobility in the workplace and in advertising creative departments, it will be important to follow up on these changes as the BEE develops and is reinforced.

Advertising Gaining Traction in South Africa

The advertising industry is quite young in South Africa, but it is growing as the country moves forward after apartheid. According to a couple of my interviewees, the history of the industry can have direct implications on its employees and the current lack of female creatives. Grobler explained that in the 80s and 90s,

Cape Town's advertising industry has a little different history than everyone else's; it's very small and intimate. For a long time there were only a few big agencies in Cape Town, like FCB, Ogilvy, there only a few really big ones—and these were the days when they were still doing stuff like screen printing and design, it wasn't all digital and computers. In those eras where everything was hand-printed and made... a lot of these guys were working at these agencies, and there weren't a lot. And then there came a point when these guys were performing so well, they were saying 'Well we're doing all the work as creative directors and whatever, why are we putting up with this?' So they stopped, took clients

and started their own agencies. And obviously when you start your own agency you're going to be the creative director of it. Those are basically the ones who run all the agencies today.

However, Grobler sees a change happening:

A creative director is not something that you just pick up one day and then become. Most are in their mid-40s and 50s, those are the guys from the same era when it was all men. But as you can see, I think it's going to change because there are just so many female creatives now, much more than men. So eventually what's going to happen is that's going to overrun us. It's the process of evolving as a work force, because we've come from such a different transitional period, from the 80s, 90s, then Mandela was released, women's freedom, black freedom, colored freedom, now we're here. Women are equal, and their working rights even more so, which is fantastic because with apartheid, women were actually included in affirmative action. So that gave women a chance to get back into the work place, so now that it's evened out, it's just a matter of time before we see change. This is a very young, grassroots phase of our industry, hence why it would probably be different anywhere else overseas because they've come through that hundreds of years ago, hopefully, whereas we are just experiencing it now.

Fry added more insight to these developments:

I know JWT came to South Africa in 1965, I think Ogilvy came in the 50s, and I think there were about 5 big agencies (possibly Saatchi & Saatchi, not BBDO for a long time, not Leo Burnett...). And at that point it escalated, because suddenly people were like 'Oh there's advertising in South Africa,' but it also was during apartheid, so there were all those bans. So I think it grew locally, and as soon as apartheid ended, all of a sudden all these international people came in. So I think it will grow, actually.

Like Grobler, Fry also sees a transition happening in the industry. She said there has been a sudden increase in small agencies over the past ten years, which can lead to entrepreneurship. Even with all the issues and difficulties that South Africa faces as a country, it is important to remember that they are still recovering from the effects of apartheid. As a few of my interviewees suggested, the transitions are already happening,

and it may only be a matter of time before we start to see these changes manifest in creative departments.

Other Potential Limiting Factors

A few smaller themes came up in my interviews. The first was the inability to speak out about inequality in the workplace. Fry said people are aware of the issue, but no one speaks about it, perhaps because it makes men uncomfortable, and “obviously it’s slightly threatening.” Hoch said, “I’m often reminded to leave my emotions at the door. This isn’t always easy for me, personally. But I’ve been very fortunate. I work for a man who believes that women are powerful and incredibly important in the picture.” This may be a minor setback, but it does beg the question: If women can’t speak about it in the workplace, where can they?

A second recurring topic was the lack of female mentors for young female creatives, since there are so few female creative directors. Fry said she has never had a female mentor; she had two who were men, and a woman who she looked up to but they weren’t close. Paterson highlighted the effect that having two women in a department had as opposed to just one: “We have clients like Forever 21 for social, we don’t know much about them and we don’t want to make generalizations. The first girl we hired in that case it was to hire more girls to make her feel comfortable... and she left. It might have had something to do with it. But mostly [the advantage is] to make it more diverse, more comfortable. It’s also nicer as a guy rather than just having a bunch of guys everywhere. It’s definitely a different vibe.”

A final subject that came up was equal pay. Fry said that she only is paid equally to the men in her same status because she had an issue with it before. She has been at

JWT for about two years now, but her boyfriend was hired recently. He was offered about 2000 rand more than her when she started in exactly the same creative position out of an internship. Even if part of that was based on outside factors like a time difference or interest rates, she speculated that she does not think it would ever result in that large of a pay gap.

Optimism for Change

After exploring and analyzing the existence of a lack of female creatives, the implications it has on society, and the potential reasons behind this disparity, the next step is to look ahead. Is this a problem that will be addressed and mitigated in the near future, or should it fall by the wayside in favor of more pressing issues? As of right now, most of my respondents were not optimistic. As Hoch said before, unless the BEE becomes fully effective, change is highly unlikely. Ehlers said there is not a focus on gender equality in South Africa, and it will not be a priority for some time. “Even as a woman,” she added, “I think that race transformation in this country is far more important. I mean it would be wonderful if we could get young black women into the industry. That would be amazing. So maybe that something I’ve got to think about and consider when I take on interns.” Fry said that even though there is a strong female community in Cape Town who tend to speak out about sexualized ads, she does not think that much will change in the next five years or so:

I think as South Africa becomes more global and deals with more international companies and brands...there will be growth because the positioning from other places will come through. Or they’ll realize, hey there are more women in America or there are more—you know that sort of thing. So I hope so. But the smaller South African-based companies I’m not sure. It will be very much up to the individual who owns it or whatever, unfortunately or fortunately. But I do think what is growing a lot is entrepreneurship for females in this country...that might actually influence it in the long run. It’s such a domino effect because if the head of one company is a woman, that might influence their advertising agencies to have more women, and as you say like speak to women: Why aren’t women speaking to women, why are they getting men to speak to women? It just doesn’t make sense. So I think as women climb into other industries that relate to advertising, then possibly.

Ways to Move Forward

It is apparent from these responses that the lack of female creatives is not going to change unless the issue becomes more of a priority: unless awareness is created, a conversation is started, action is taken, and messages and norms start to shift. Until then, I asked my interviewees what they thought it would take for this shift to happen. Hoch and Ehlers have been the strongest proponents of female agency to pave their own way. Hoch said:

I believe that women have the tools and ability to write their own ending to the script. Sexism in the workplace is a real thing, sure, but we've been granted equality on paper. There will always be the guy who cuts you off in a meeting condescendingly, but it's how we react to it, where we choose to go, its all up to us now. When women like us get placed in a role where we're actually able to write that script though, that's where we can shift mindsets! We can stop putting women in oven mitts and men in Armani suits sipping whisky. We can stop putting women in revealing tops, talking about the power of the detergent, while men remain fully clothed, zipping through the mountains in their sports cars. It's up to us now."

Fry said perhaps the simplest way to begin is regulation. A nine to five job Monday through Friday would help, but it would be dependent on the accounts you were on. For example, she works on Smirnoff, and the majority of their communication happens at night. Lastly, Uzzell and Hutchings highlighted awareness as one of the biggest factors standing in the way of change. Uzzell said, "Both men and women need to be more conscious of how gender is represented in the media. I think that it's important for this to be on the syllabus of graphic designers, radio producers, illustrators, copywriters, art directors, etc. because their work is seen by so many people." Hutchings said:

I think awareness is one of the biggest things, because the topic you're talking about is not even considered I would imagine. Gender is probably something that a lot of marketers are very aware of as humans and their

needs because that's what they do day in and day out, but they're not often looking inside their own businesses. I think that hot topics around how they're recruiting are around race, and as long as they're not being sexist in any way, they don't really consider gender, and they're definitely not considering gender in their creative departments at senior levels. So I think just awareness of the fact is probably a bloody good starting point. But I don't think there are too many people being too sexist at the management level; I think there are probably age-old problems that are seemingly a hangover from the dark days of the 60s and 70s. I hope that we start to see some change as those guys start retiring. And I believe that we will.

There are steps that need to be taken by people of power in order for improvement to be made. But what can aspiring female creatives do to change the ratio on an individual level?

Advice for Young Women

Through my research, I've outlined the many issues affecting female creatives that could be addressed in order to empower them to change the present work environment. However, my last question for each interviewee was what advice they would give to aspiring young female creatives, and their responses could be the most tangible and inspiring ways to make a difference. Hoch said:

Forget the past. Forget the stigmas. I came into the industry after spending a few years overseas. I suppose, as a result, I wasn't resentful towards the system or men.⁴² That 'ignorance' broke down the walls and saw me into the greatest job I could imagine for myself. So let it go, if you're talented, your attitude will put you right where you're meant to be. Also, stop complaining.

⁴² When asked to clarify what she meant by "resentful," Hoch said: "Perhaps 'resentful towards men' is not the correct what to phrase my point. Rather, resentful towards the gender sway in advertising in South Africa. After distancing myself from the industry in South Africa, where women (particularly my friends from college) were experiencing difficulties slotting into the advertising industry, I came in with blinkers on, feeling far less despondent. I think I had positivity advantage."

Uzzell discussed the power that being a part of this industry can give you:

I love that I get to work in a field that is conceptual and creative. I would also say that it is a tough industry with a huge ego. It's hard work and fast paced but this also makes it very satisfying. Personally, I find that making informed, thoughtful decisions in my work (in this case with regards to gender roles) plays a small part in moving our society forward or at least helps it be more self-aware. The media is very powerful. It can be used to manipulate and perpetuate bad things as well as make brave new changes, and we shouldn't take it for granted.

Ehlers said this advice was timely, as she is facing the same thing at the moment with her daughter studying to be a creative. She explained:

For me it's more about the mindset and what I learn from the people that I'm with every single day...But it's not around male-female, it's around strength of personality. You have to have quite a strong personality to hold up in an environment like this. You've got to be able to hold strong opinions and you can't be a shy wallflower in the advertising industry because you'll be flattened. So I suppose it's about tenacity and strength of character and about perseverance. Being strong...And also obviously your personal talent, aesthetic, and passion. It's a passionate industry as well. But amazing. I'm so lucky I landed here. But I do feel sometimes like it might kill me as well.

Fry also spoke of the importance of perseverance and working hard:

I would say just be very headstrong, don't dominate but just be very confident, because you are going to get shut down, you are going to go home crying, I promise, it's going to happen, unfortunately. It's due to a lot of factors; you're not going to go home crying specifically because of men, it's just quite a harsh industry in general.

In terms of men, you are equal. The minute you start to believe that they're better—and I don't want to sound like some sort of 'rah rah' person—but I think if you see everyone as equal, then you'll be fine. If you start positioning this person because of their gender or because of their race of whatever, you'll start to have issues, and we're trying to base a whole country on equality. If you can't follow that in your head then it's not going to come through in your actions. Be strong, stick to what you believe, and work really hard.

My third research question of what can be done to empower women to believe they can succeed at being a creative in the advertising industry can be answered many different ways. All complications aside, it seems that awareness, hard work, and perseverance seem to be the key to starting the conversation and changing the ratio of female creatives in South Africa.

Conclusion

Constraints

My intent was not to do a comparative analysis of this topic between the US and South Africa, but rather to use the US as an inspiration to explore an isolated situation abroad. My research was based solely in Cape Town due to scheduling and time constraints, leaving a significant portion of the advertising industry untouched, especially in Johannesburg. Consequently, my findings cannot speak for South Africa as a whole—only to Cape Town specifically.

There are also considerations that come with doing research abroad to take into account. Ideally, I would be able to compare my interview responses to labor statistics and see how they add up. But a year of researching and ten months of asking people in Cape Town where I might find this yielded few results. The lack of statistics on the matter may be indicative of a lack of a conversation and action to change the representation of female creatives. In the end, this may be a case where my primary research through interviews are more reliable than statistics, even though they are qualitative and based completely on experience.

It was difficult to access information from outside of the country in order to do preliminary research. Once I had arrived, I asked each of my interviewees if they could point me in the right direction to find secondary sources (such as labor statistics specific to advertising or a database of advertisements) to compare the interviews to, but no one knew of many, and the potential sources they were able to provide did not respond when I reached out. Furthermore, South Africa has a unique and complicated history and culture that has implications for this topic, but is impossible for me to fully

comprehend as an outsider. Lastly, the nature of my methodology yields results that are inherently subjective, influenced both by the individual experience of the interviewee and a slight bias in the questions asked.⁴³ It is important to keep these factors in mind while analyzing the themes drawn from my interviews.

Final thoughts

After interviewing seven inspiring male and female creatives and strategists in the advertising industry in South Africa, I found overall that there is a lack of female creatives, but the issue will probably not become a hot topic of discussion for years to come, if at all. However, as the country further recovers from effects of apartheid and becomes more globalized, there is a possibility that it is only a matter of time before the conversation develops. Further research should be done on the subject, especially as the advertising industry grows and the implications of the BEE are manifested. I would also like to know more about how gender is portrayed in advertisements and how the public in South Africa perceives it. Given its progressive constitution and collective goal of equality, South Africa could have the opportunity to turn its current gender ratio into a model for other countries to follow.

⁴³ I tried to ask unbiased questions, or at least to make my bias clear before I asked them, but sometimes this was unavoidable.

Appendix: Interviews Transcribed

Michelle Hoch – Head Creative at Stretch Marketing

1. What brought you into advertising?

The age-old tale of a fine-artist turned graphic designer who spent enough time crafting campaigns only to realise one day that I wanted to be involved in the synthesis as much as I did the delivery. I got more and more conceptual and eventually I took advertising as part of my communications degree in final year. When I was offered a job in marketing, the job spec made my mouth water.

2. What has your experience been as a woman in advertising in South Africa?

Intimidating! It is a male-dominated field. But more than that, it is an ego-driven field.

3. Are there fewer women than men in advertising creative departments in South Africa, and if so, why do you think that is? (Either answer from what you have personally observed, or if you have a source with some sort of statistics that would be good too)

There are certainly more men in the more senior roles at the bigger agencies. The weighting around me has been pretty even. I've been incredibly fortunate – I know of many women in the minority, struggling to be taken seriously.

4. Is the lack of women mostly in creative departments, or is it across the board? Why?

From my own experience, it is more common in the creative departments. I think it is largely to do with the nature of the creative person (forgive me for generalizing), many of us are more emotional in character - attached to our ideas and our cause. When you pair that with the natural I suppose 'softness' or 'gentleness' associated with being a

women, men are thought of as better equipped to deal with the pace and ‘harshness’ of the business. Because men are thought of as less emotional, often less attached to the outcome.. They’re perhaps thought to suit better to the ‘cut throat’ nature of the industry. I’m of the opinion that this perceived advantage of being unemotional can be damaging to a creative atmosphere.

There is also a preconceived or expected ‘type’ of person that fits the job of a creative director in this country, and that ‘type’ is, for whatever reason, masculine. It’s cool, it’s a little crass, it’s more suited to masculinity.

5. Has the BEE / Employment Equity Act (1998) affected this situation in any way?

What is unique to the work culture for women in South Africa?

In terms of gender equality, BEE does aim to get more women in the industry, but in my own experience hiring creatives, natural talent and the ability to do good work is more important than gender.

6. Why do you think it is that so few women become partners or creative directors or start their own agencies compared to men?

The reason that I mentioned above (4). It’s difficult to get into too much detail with making very general (unfair) statements. Personally I believe do that women have the tools and ability to write their own ending to the script. Sexism in the workplace is a real thing, sure, but we’ve been granted equality on paper. There will always be the guy who cuts you off in a meeting condescendingly, but it’s how we react to it, where we choose to go, it’s all up to us now. When women like us get placed in a role where we’re actually able to write that script though, that’s where we can shift mindsets! We can stop putting women in oven mits and men in armani suits sipping whisky. We can stop

putting women in revealing tops, talking about the power of the detergent, while men remain fully-clothed, zipping through the mountains in their sports cars. It's up to us now.

7. At what point do women get "weeded out" of the industry? Does it start at the university level or as they get further into their career (promotions, pregnancy, etc)?

Pregnancy is a factor for women leaving the industry, yes, but until they figure out a way for men to carry children I think nature will continue to take its course. I'm not there yet, so I'm relatively ignorant (Thank God for that!). I think if you have the desire to have a career in this industry, and you're talented or experienced enough, there shouldn't be anything standing in your way. So at what point do women get weeded out? At the point that the women chooses to get weeded out.

8. Do you think that there will be more equality in advertising creative departments in South Africa in the future? What needs to happen for this to change? Why is it important for this to happen?

Short of BEE being fully effective, unlikely. The adverts themselves need to change. For them to change, women need to write them. It's a catch 22.

9. Do women risk anything in their career by speaking up about inequalities? Have you ever had to confront this issue personally?

I'm often reminded to leave my emotions at the door. This isn't always easy for me, personally. But I've been very fortunate. I work for a man who believes that women are powerful and incredibly important in the picture.

10. What advice would you give a young woman entering the advertising industry?

Forget the past. Forget the stigmas. I came into the industry after spending a few years overseas. I suppose, as a result, I wasn't resentful towards the system or men. That 'ignorance' broke down the walls and saw me into the greatest job I could imagine for myself. So let it go, if you're talented, your attitude will put you right where you're meant to be.

Also, stop complaining.

Follow up: Can you elaborate on how going overseas made you less resentful towards men?

Perhaps "resentful towards men" is not the correct what to phrase my point. Rather, resentful towards the gender sway in advertising in South Africa. After distancing myself from the industry in South Africa, where women (particularly my friends from college) were experiencing difficulties slotting into the advertising industry, I came in with blinkers on, feeling far less despondent. I think I had positivity advantage.

Amy Uzzell – Copywriter at Stretch Marketing

1. What brought you into advertising?

I got into advertising by chance. I studied a Bachelor of Journalism with a focus on Communication Design (majoring in Political and International Studies) so when it came to looking for a job I applied for jobs in the creative/media industry; and I got a creative internship (as a designer/copy writer) with Stretch Experiential Marketing (which is where I've worked for the last 2 years).

2. What has your experience been as a woman in advertising in South Africa?

It has been a good one, although I am very aware that I work in a male-dominated field. I think that gender stereotypes are most visible through popular design aesthetics. I studied semiotics at university, the study of meaning making through signs. Masculine design is made to symbolise modern design, feminine design on the other hand is much less 'cool'. From my experience in advertising, I have come to think that if I am going to excel in this industry; I need to have a thick skin (something traditionally un-feminine) and push my design aesthetic in a clean, strong, provocative direction (traditionally 'masculine' attributes). This is not necessarily a bad thing but as a woman, you are set up having to assert yourself from the outset. Stretch is particularly good at creating an equal, inclusive work environment but I think that they are the exception in the advertising industry.

3. Are there fewer women than men in advertising creative departments in South Africa, and if so, why do you think that is? (Either answer from what you have personally observed, or if you have a source with some sort of statistics that would be good too)

There are less women. If I think of my social circle and my friends' experiences in their respective creative departments, it is certainly male dominated. I think that hiring more men is easier. If you're a woman who is willing to fit into the same role, that's fine too, but I think that the noteworthy thing, here, is that ad agencies and the people that work in them are perpetuating normative gender roles in society through the creative/media that they produce.

4. Is the lack of women mostly in creative departments, or is it across the board? Why?

There are more women in Client Service/Accounts departments. Traditionally, women are perceived as more sensitive and tactful when communicating with clients so I think that that has something to do with it. From what I've heard lots of women enroll in marketing-related courses at college.

5. Has the BEE / Employment Equity Act (1998) affected this situation in any way?

What is unique to the work culture for women in South Africa?

I can see BEE at work in terms of race at our agency. There are also four women in managerial positions out of 7 at Stretch which is exceptional.

6. Why do you think it is that so few women become partners or creative directors or start their own agencies compared to men?

I think it's easier for men to be viewed as leaders because of traditional gender roles. Advertising, traditionally, is viewed as a bit of a boy's club with fast cars and fast

women (just look at Mad Men). Things are changing though. My Head of Creative is a woman but I know that in Cape Town this is not the norm. Also, I do not work for an agency that identifies as a traditional ad club. It's only 5 years old too so it doesn't have a legacy of tradition to uphold like some of the international agencies in Cape Town.

7. At what point do women get "weeded out" of the industry? Does it start at the university level or as they get further into their career (promotions, pregnancy, etc)?

I wouldn't use the word "weeded out", I think that the way we behave perpetuates itself quite naturally/easily. It's not like women can't study at universities the same way men do – I think we're just dealing with a media/creative industry that finds it easier to give people what they expect (media that represents a power dynamic that's male dominated).

8. Do you think that there will be more equality in advertising creative departments in South Africa in the future? What needs to happen for this to change? Why is it important for this to happen?

I think that both men and women need to be more conscious of how gender is represented in the media. I think that it's important for this to be on the syllabus of graphic designers, radio producers, illustrators, copywriters, art directors etc. because their work is seen by so many people through radio, tv etc. (or whatever medium they work with).

9. Do women risk anything in their career by speaking up about inequalities? Have you ever had to confront this issue personally?

I haven't had to confront this issue personally, no. I know it is very difficult for my friend Michele Fry (who you've interviewed).

10. What advice would you give a young woman entering the advertising industry?

I love that I get to work in a field that is conceptual and creative. I would also say that it is a tough industry with a huge ego. It's hard work and fast paced but this also makes it very satisfying. Personally, I find that making informed, thoughtful decisions in my work (in this case with regards to gender roles) plays a small part in moving our society forward or at least helps it be more self-aware. The media is very powerful. It can be used to manipulate and perpetuate bad things as well as make brave new changes, we shouldn't take it for granted.

Graham Paterson – Art director at Made

1. What brought you into advertising?

I was really into art in school and stuff and I also had a pretty strong math side, so I was always deciding between architecture and design. So I started doing Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign when I was 12 or 13. I ended up moving overseas to Australia for about 6 months on a whim and I ended up doing graphic design. So when I came back here, I ended up doing the same thing.

2. What are you doing now?

Art director at Made, a small agency. When I started I was the 7th employee, and now we're up to almost 20.

3. What is your experience with females in creative departments?

When we started, there were 7 of us and we were all guys. I think up until 9 or 10 was when we got a girl. We've never had more than about 25 percent females. On the creative studio side, it always seems to be more male. So it's quite small. The creative side's really small.

4. How has the BEE affected the agency?

Not yet. If you're quite small you don't really have to worry about it, as far as I know. You can be certified without doing so much.

5. I'm just wondering if this is being talked about at all. Do people care if there are more women in creative departments? Are they aware of this?

Our company as a whole, we pretty much have been looking for exclusively women for the last 5 or 6 roles because we were a very male company and we're trying to diversify. So it's definitely a thing for us. Nobody's really been trying for the high-ranking roles to get the agency sort of even. But when it comes down to it we would definitely hire based on quality.

6. Do you see the lack of women in creative departments translated into the advertisements in Cape Town and South Africa in general?

Yes, there's definitely a lot of that. [inaudible] I can't off the top of my head think of any specific ads, but I know that in the last 3 months I've definitely seen an ad and been like "Oh my god that ad is so sexist." It's not too bad, but every now and then it's noticeable.

7. Is the lack of women a big problem here?

In the industry there are definitely more men in the creative roles and as creative directors. But as far as advertising goes, I don't notice it too much I guess.

8. Why do you think that is?

I'm not exactly sure. When I was at varsity, my class was mostly women going into creative. A lot of them either didn't go into advertising, or they would go into client services or something else. Maybe it's a generalization but it just feels like a lot of them prefer to go into client services or something that's less working in Photoshop or something.

9. So they get weeded out at some point?

Yeah, I don't know what it is. [inaudible]

10. Do you think that going forward is it going to get better or become more of a priority?

I don't think it's a high priority. And I'm not sure if it's something that's fixable or if it's sort of intrinsic, in which case it's hard to figure out if it needs to be fixed or if it's something we can be fine without. I think about creatives in general from varsity level to the work environment. A lot of the girls have good ideas but they struggle with the execution. Maybe it's got something to do with how when guys are young they're on computers so they get used to using that and in advertising you've got to make the stuff in Photoshop and Illustrator, whereas when people struggle with the actual software it creates a barrier, and that's something I've definitely noticed—they'd rather just come up with ideas.

11. If I wanted to come to South Africa and work here as a creative, what advice would you give me?

Whether you're a girl or a guy, I would say just working hard.

12. So why do you feel like you need to hire more women?

Just to get more [inaudible]. For example we have clients like Forever 21 for social, we don't know much about them and we don't want to make generalizations. The first girl we hired in that case it was to hire more girls to make her feel comfortable.

13. Was it hard for her?

I mean she left. It might have had something to do with it. But mostly to make it more diverse, more comfortable. It's also nicer as a guy rather than just having a bunch of guys everywhere. It's definitely a different vibe.

Michele Fry – Copywriter at JWT

1. What brought you into advertising?

I was studying English at Rhodes, that's what my degree is in. I was going to go into publishing initially, and then someone said, "Hey, have you heard about copywriting?" and I said, "No, I haven't." The whole concept of copywriting, I did not know anything about it until probably my second year of university, and then just kind of researched and thought it looked cool. I applied to AAA and Red & Yellow, which are ad schools here in Cape Town, and I was accepted into both, but what made my decision was R&Y you have to do 2 years, and AAA offered a post grad one year course if you had a degree. So obviously I was like I've already been studying for a while, let me hurry it up. But I don't think there was a point where I said "Hmm, advertising," and was suddenly enlightened. I think it was just like, cool, it's communicating with mass people but from a more private way, I suppose. You're not like a radio presenter where you're directly talking to the people, but it's a way of communicating and just putting brands out there. I just thought that was cool. That's pretty much it.

2. From your experience, are there fewer women than men in advertising?

Yes. To put it in context in terms of my life, I'm the only female creative in my department, other than a freelancer who occasionally comes in.

3. How big is your department?

20 creatives, so 19 to 1 is the ratio. Our marketing department is about half-half.

4. Do you have an idea of why that is?

I do think my creative director is slightly sexist. He does make remarks during meetings where you're like, "Ah, that's why I'm the only girl in this department." And also I think a lot of people—I started before the current creative director. I think when he started—um—I don't think other women agreed with him. I wouldn't say he pressured them into leaving, because I definitely don't think it happened like that. But it was just more of their personalities clashed or he just clashes with female personalities. I mean, yeah even looking at he and his wife's dynamic, it's quite, not submissive, but he's very much in charge, very patriarchal type thinking.

5. Do you think that's reflected in the work you guys put out?

I do think it's reflected in some things. Luckily, we work mainly on alcohol brands and food brands and that sort of thing so there's not too much evidence of it. But with things like female products such as female razors, there is sometimes that streak where it's like could this be perceived as, well sexist I suppose would be the easiest way. Because I think there are times—and I mean we disagree a lot with messaging and stuff like that, because I'm like you're talking to a woman, women are going to be like hell no are you going to talk to me like that and they're not going to buy the product and it's going to have a ripple effect. So we disagree about that a lot, but I luckily don't really work on those brands so much. I work mainly for Smirnoff.

6. So they don't put you on the "woman" brands?

No they don't actually, surprisingly.

7. How long have you been there?

Just over 2 years.

8. And you stayed the entire time despite everything?

Yes, I have. There was a major struggle about 8 months ago where I was like, “That’s it, I’m leaving.” But then I actually ended up going overseas, and when I came back I decided to try it again with a fresh mind, and it’s been ok since then.

9. Was it because of your differences?

Yeah, it was just reaching the point of too much, like what’s actually going on. But it’s definitely improved a lot since then. I don’t know if there was a big meeting or something but that’s the impression I get. Like no you can’t actually—we need to hire more women, we need to do this.... So I think it’s very evident in the company, and I think they’re just trying to change it.

10. So you think it will improve?

I hope so. But all our top management is men.

11. Is that a cultural thing or just specific to your agency?

I think it’s a cultural thing. I don’t know—like I can’t list one female creative director in Cape Town from the top line agencies, like JWT, Ogilvy... I can’t think of one. Also with the award ceremonies, when you see the creative directors’ names come up on the screen, I think there’s one creative director for BBDO in JoBurg who’s a woman and her name gets up quite a lot. But in comparison nothing to the amount of men.

12. Are people talking about it at all?

No. But I don't know if maybe that's because the people I talk to most are the men I work with. So obviously they wouldn't be like, "Ah, we definitely need more females." But I think people are very aware of it I just don't think we speak about it.

13. Is this the only agency you've worked at?

Yes. I worked in production for a while and that was more women, actually. The top producer was a man, but everyone underneath him was a woman, like the next tier, and then mixed men and women. So I don't know if it's industry specific because obviously production is organizing and stuff like that, stereotypically women are better than men at that. But I don't know.

14. So for creative, do you think it is the nature of the work or just your boss?

No, I honestly think the reason that there are more men than women in creative is because of the work and the schedule and that sort of thing. I think a lot of people don't want that lifestyle. I must say I can't see myself having children and working in advertising. In terms of, like, it's weekends, it's late nights, it's weird hours. You know you might have a 7am meeting, and you're there. You can never compromise and say, "Oh, no, I'll be there at half past 8 because I need to drop my kids off or..." Our head strategist is a woman, actually, and she struggles all the time. She's got 2 little girls, and it's her a constant thing, she feels like she doesn't know her children, she says this all the time to me because I suppose I'm the only other girl. I think when you're younger, like our age, it's not so much a problem obviously because we don't have those sort of responsibilities. But as you grow in the industry I think it becomes more evident too.

And obviously you start wanting other things like a family, and if you're not completely

career driven... this type of industry you have to be completely dedicated to, I find, personally, I don't know obviously everyone's experience is different. But I just feel like you can't really compromise, and I think that's why a lot of women avoid it after a certain age or go into something different or don't even go into it from the beginning.

15. In terms of advancement, do you just do what you're doing now and not really expect to move up later on, or...

Well this is a personal issue I suppose that I keep having, because I'm like "what am I doing and is this for life?" And I honestly don't think I'm going to be in advertising past the age of 30. I honestly can't see the future in all that. If I get to the point where I decide I want a family then I won't be in advertising.

16. So basically it's like you either have a family or you just don't.

Yep. Or one is going to take a massive toll, either your job or your family.

17. How do you change that?

I think if it was more regulated, it would be fine. If it was like a 9 to 5 job Monday to Friday or whatever it would be fine. I also don't know if that's because I work on...it's possibly because of the work I do, so like Smirnoff obviously is alcohol, the majority of the communication happens at night. So we end up working Friday nights to, you know. Like with experiential stuff or with promotions and stuff like that.

18. What about the Employment Equity Act and the BEE?

Well I was just going to say I mean you've obviously learned a bit about the BEE. I don't know if you know but women have actually been removed from the BEE. You know because they have a list, like 30 percent of your company needs to be this race or

a percentage needs to be women (I'm just making these figures up by the way). As of this year, that woman factor didn't count any longer.

19. So they're not required to hire women at all?

No, you're not. It works like a point system, so if you did have, let's say your company is 20 people and 10 of those people were black and 5 of those people were colored and 5 of those people were white, then you'd get a certain amount of points, and then that would qualify you as an employment equity company or BEE company and obviously that's what everyone wants to be because there's all these government benefits and tax benefits and stuff like that. Previously, if you had like 30 percent women, so like if 7 of those people were women, then you got even more points, especially if they were black women—that was like, the prize, so to speak, in terms of the point system. A black woman was the person you wanted to hire to get the most points to get all the other benefits. But now they've removed the female aspect so it's just race.

20. Is that good or bad?

It's good because it's kind of like equalizing everyone I suppose. But at the same time it's bad because obviously there's a sexual prejudice in this country. Also in the lower LSM, speaking in marketing terms, it's quite a patriarchal society. Generally those women will be housewives or maids or that sort of thing. Like it won't ever break through. And I don't know if that's just because of the types of jobs. Generally the men will do labor work and the women will do cleaning work and such stereotypes. And I think it kind of just grows from there, unfortunately.

21. When you were hired, did you have those requirements of being 30 percent women or whatever?

No my company wasn't part of the BEE yet but they're trying to be now.

22. So was it difficult for you to get a job as a woman or?

I actually was really lucky because I was like I'm going to intern here, and then I got employed out of my internship. So it worked out really well for me. At that time, a lot of my guy friends who were male and white were struggling a lot because that was the least favorable quality, which of course is another ethical issue. This is just my personal opinion, but I find with the BEE that it does further entrench apartheid though. Not a reverse apartheid, not at all, but it's still got that segregation like "you'll be employed if you have this and this quality or..."

23. You're still basing things off of race.

Yes. Race, sex, gender, everything.

24. With regards to the future, do you see this changing? Do you risk anything by speaking up about it?

I think it does make men uncomfortable. Because obviously it's slightly threatening. I don't think it's going to change in the next 5 years or anything, but hopefully. I think as South Africa becomes more global and deals with more international companies and brands and that sort of thing, I think there will be growth because the positioning from other places will come through. Or they'll realize, hey there's more women in America or there's more—you know that sort of thing. So I hope so. And also for me, JWT is an international company so there is a lot of—especially in the last 2 months there's a lot

of regulations or where they're doing a check or some sort of analysis. So I think with things like that it will grow more. But the smaller South African-based companies I'm not sure. It will be very much up to the individual who owns it or whatever, unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know. But I do think what it growing a lot is entrepreneurship for females in this country. I think that is definitely starting to sprout a lot. So I think that might actually influence it in the long run. It's such a domino effect because if the head of one company is a woman, that might influence their advertising agencies to have more women, and as you say like speak to women: Why aren't women speaking to women, why are they getting men to speak to women? It just doesn't make sense. So I think as women climb into other industries that relate to advertising, then possibly. Just thinking of production, so many directors are men. So many of those job positions are more heavy and they all kind of interrelate with advertising.

25. That's one of the problems I have come across, women often get weeded out so when people like you and me come into the industry we have no female mentors to look up to. Have you ever had a female mentor?

No. I've had two mentors, so to speak, and both of those were men. There was one woman who was quite senior in the creative department who has left since this new creative director, and she was very inspiring. She was very headstrong, creative type, you know a bit out there—she was great. But she wasn't my mentor; she was just an inspiring person.

26. It's difficult to find statistics to compare my interviews to with regards to who's making purchase decisions, who these ads are talking to, and how the majority of

women in South Africa feel about how advertisements talk to them. Do you have any idea where I might find this?

There is quite a strong female community—I think they’re based in Cape Town—who tend to speak out about sexualized ads and the like. I don’t know if you’re aware of Maverick’s (the strip club), but they produce a load of ads for this cologne called Alibi, and that caused major uproar, because it was these women dressed like skanky singers or whatever, and it was like advertising this perfume, and the line was “just tell her you were working late at work” or something—the epitome of sexist advertising.

And there’s the ASA—Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa—they screen all the ads before they can get printed or produced. And they let that one slide until someone else brought it up and the community caused an uproar, and then all the billboards had to be taken down. But it’s like who were those people in the ASA that passed it in the first place.

There are so many factors, like men are producing the ads, and men are screening the ads to see if they go to the public, and you see the industry is quite male-dominated. But I hope there will be change as women grow in other industries.

27. As far as modern advertising in general in South Africa, when did it begin and when did it really start to take off?

I do think there’s been a sudden spring in the past 10 years of small agencies, which is great because it leads into entrepreneurship. I know JWT came to South Africa in 1965, I think Ogilvy came in the 50s, and I think there were about 5 big agencies (possibly Saatchi & Saatchi, not BBDO for a long time, not Leo Burnett...). I can’t remember the name, but they were the first South African agency to win a Cannes Lion. And at that

point it escalated, because suddenly people were like “Oh there’s advertising in South Africa,” but it also was during apartheid, so there were all those bans. So I think it grew locally, and as soon as apartheid ended, all of a sudden all these international people came in. So I think it will grow, actually.

28. What advice to you have to give young women going into the industry?

I would say just be very headstrong, don’t dominate but just be very confident, because you are going to get shut down, you are going to go home crying, I promise, it’s going to happen, unfortunately. It’s due to a lot of factors, you’re not going to go home crying specifically because of men, it’s just quite a harsh industry in general.

In terms of men, you are equal. The minute you start to believe that they’re better—and I don’t want to sound like some sort of “rah rah” person—but I think if you see everyone as equal, then you’ll be fine. If you start positioning this person this person because of their gender or because of their race of whatever, you’ll start to have issues, and we’re trying to base a whole country on equality. If you can’t follow that in your head then it’s not going to come through in your actions.

Be strong, stick to what you believe, and work really hard.

29. Do you get paid the same?

I do, because I was having a major issue with it before. Interns generally get paid the same, I think it’s when people are in higher positions that it starts to get a bit iffy. Funny enough, though, my boyfriend recently started at JWT. He got offered about 2000 rand more than me when I started in exactly the same creative position out of an internship. I don’t know if that’s because of the time difference (about 2 years) or interest rates or

whatever they base it on, but I don't think it would ever result in that much of a difference to make it 2000 rand more.

30. Did you say anything about it?

No. It's a touchy subject in our relationship because I'd been there for two years so I was his senior. But it is something that I did notice—it was a very noticeable difference.

Jenny Ehlers – Executive Creative Director at King James Group

1. ...some people are saying yes it's definitely an issue here, some people are saying no not really, and some people are saying well we have bigger things to worry about here than gender equality in creative departments.

Yes, definitely. We've got transformation to worry about. That's probably why the gender issue has been pushed aside. Because there aren't many women in senior positions. I don't know what the percentage would be. And also you've got to understand that Cape Town is a lot smaller than Johannesburg. But we've got to transform and get the young black people into the industry, so that's more of a priority for us.

2. What brought you into advertising? How did you get here?

I was one of the lucky ones because I always knew when I was in school that I was creative. I don't think I necessarily knew that I wanted to get into graphic design, but I studied a general year for graphic design—it was textile design, fashion design, and fine art—I did actually apply for graphic design, but I don't think I really understood what it was all about. I think I'm just fortunate that I fell into it. It's kind of the way my career went that I ended up in design and advertising. So I suppose just from doing art in school and loving it and being passionate about it.

3. How long have you been in advertising?

Since 1984, so 39 years now. In both Cape Town and Johannesburg. I spent quite a lot of my 30s in Johannesburg, which was really good for my career because there's so much more going on there. The industry is so much bigger and there are a lot more

agencies. That's not to say that the industry doesn't do well in Cape Town, but it's just a lot smaller.

4. Are there fewer women in advertising creative departments here, and if so, why?

I actually don't know why. There definitely are. I would say the problem is that there are very few creative directors. There are actually quite a lot of women in advertising, but they're mostly in client services. In this agency, the creative department is predominantly male, and the client service department is pretty much all female, which is quite strange because there should be a lot of men in client service as well, but that's the way we are here. I don't know why. That's a good question I've never thought about. Maybe it's perceived as being a harsh or difficult industry. I didn't think about it being a male dominated industry before I came into it. Maybe some people are intimidated by it. I don't know, I think you've got to be quite tough to be a woman in our industry.

5. Yeah that's what I'm hearing. What has your experience been as a woman in advertising here?

Good. Positive. I've always felt supported, I never felt like I was being treated differently. It's been great. I'm not sure why there aren't more women worldwide. I don't have the answer for you, I'm sorry. I do have colleagues who have experienced that difficulty; they may struggle when they review with male creative directors. But I've been fortunate; I've never had that experience. I suppose I'm not easily intimidated.

6. Why do you think it's just creative departments?

I honestly don't know. I sit on the academic board of the Stellenbosch academy and there are a lot of girls studying. Maybe they go into the softer design disciplines like editorial or magazines. I think the industry is perceived as being a bit hard core and pressurized. And maybe people don't like that. Other people who aren't in the industry perceive it as being quite glamorous. They think we just party all day and don't do any work. And it couldn't be further from that. Perhaps it's also got to do, I mean, quite a few of my female colleagues have gone and had babies and remained in the industry. I've got a daughter who is 16. It's been tough. I haven't stopped working. I think no matter what career you are in as a mother in a full time position you have those guilt issues. I've managed to move myself on from that, and she's no worse off as a result of it. But I don't think it's related to being in advertising. It's just working.

Mentorship doesn't have to come from the same sex. I supposed with my personality I gravitate more naturally towards men, so maybe that's why I feel more comfortable in this environment, because there are a lot of men around me and they don't bother me. And I find them supportive rather than intimidating. I've never actually really applied my brain to it. There seem to be more women in creative departments that don't push up into senior positions. Perhaps it gets more difficult the higher you go.

7. That's the other thing, a lot of them don't become partners or creative directors—they just stay where they are. Is that the same case here?

Yeah. Hard environment, raising families, quite a few women have gone freelance, as well, which actually can be nice because they are able to choose when they can work.

With freelance, you choose different things. You choose to control your lifestyle rather than raise yourself up into a senior position at an agency. And I don't think either choice is wrong or right, it's just what works for you.

8. I'm learning more about the BEE and I'm wondering if that has affected the situation in any way.

It must have because we're focusing now on young black kids and nurturing talent amongst our younger black generation. How do we pull them into this industry? How do we expose them to this industry? If you're at a school in a township here in South Africa you're probably not even doing art, you know? The schools, services, and facilities are massively under strain. Some of them don't even have libraries. If they're not exposed to art, as kids in more privileged schools are, how would you ever think about a career in advertising? It wouldn't even be on your radar. So transformation for us is something we really do have to focus on. There's an amazing bank and wealth of talent untapped amongst the black youth. They're such a fascinating bunch, they really are. It's a pity you can't go to Johannesburg, because it's so much more transformed—not transformed—We feel like we're living like Europe in Cape Town. Cape Town is a bit—but the black youth in Joburg are hip and happening and trendy and forward thinking and they're actually amazing. They're amazing. Not to say that we don't—we just have it in much smaller doses here in Cape Town, so you don't feel it, whereas in Joburg when you go out—I mean we see it because we have the annual lurie (?) awards here, and the last 3 years it's been in Cape Town so all the trendy hip advertising people come to Cape Town and that's where you really see the trendy black youth. And they dress amazingly. They're beautiful. They're so switched on and in tune with how they

look, it's very exciting. There's a lot of negativity about this country but there is so much to be excited about.

Yeah so I think transformation has overridden the gender issue. I'm sure people have kind of—there's an advertising joke in South Africa called “the boys club,” I don't know if you've heard it being referred to. So there is the perception that there is a boys club. And I'm sure if you investigated the Creative Circle, which is the advertising creative leadership in this country, most of them I think are guys.

9. So as far as gender goes, race is obviously the big thing with the BEE.

Yes definitely. You know I'm thinking about... probably the race transformation is happening mainly with young black males, you know? In fact all my young BEE black interns that I've been bringing in, there have been very few women.

10. Is it a cultural thing?

Potentially yes. But I mean as I said, the whole being exposed to art, you have to be in a pretty privileged school. So I think the gap lies in schooling or the transformation thing. You must expose them to art and make them think about art as a career. But the advertising schools are mainly private as well so they're expensive. Sorry I'm back onto transformation.

11. No worries! I love learning more about it.

So to give you an example. In this agency I would say we have a creative department of about 30, excluding our digital agency, maybe 10 are women. I think interviewing someone like me versus interviewing an art director copywriter female team you would

get a very different vibe because from what I've heard it's quite a personal struggle. But I'm fortunate because I've got here so I don't have struggles if that makes sense.

I think here—I mean I can only speak for this environment. We obviously try to pay people what they're worth. There's no distinction between male and female. I guess it didn't even come onto my radar. It's amazing. Like really?

It's interesting though because there are definitely salary differences between Johannesburg and Cape Town. Joburg people are paid way more, which is bizarre. It's because their earnings are bigger, simply because Joburg is seen as the business capital and there's so much going on. Joburg people look at Capetonians and think that we live at this extremely slow pace. I don't know if there's city walls that go on in the states but there's like a bit of a Joburg Cape Town vibe, you know.

12. Do you think there will be more equality in creative departments in the future? What needs to happen for this to change?

There's not a focus on gender equality here, so I'm not convinced that it will change. It really isn't a priority for us. Even as a woman, I think that race transformation in this country is far more important. I mean it would be wonderful if we could get young black women into the industry. That would be amazing. So maybe that's something that I've got to think about and consider when I take on interns. It's all about finding talent. I don't look at skin color or gender, I look at what's good.

13. Do you think that women would risk anything in their career by speaking up about inequalities like that?

Potentially yes. Potentially. I mean I know it's difficult, like when women go on maternity leave, because of the pace that we work at as you know, and the pressure that

we're under—I mean when I had my baby I got 2 months maternity leave, which is very little, but you know it was all financial and I took the minimum that I could afford. But I mean most women want to spend at least 4 months. But the agency is faced with—you can bring on a freelancer—but they always worry whether their jobs will—legally you have to keep people's job open in this country when they go off and have a baby. But I think the kind of pressure that we work under and the expectation to work long hours must impact young women who have young families because you can't just on a whim stay behind and work until midnight because you have other commitments. Men are able to walk away from those commitments a little bit more easily.

14. What advice would you give a young woman entering the ad industry?

I'm faced with that very thing at the moment because my daughter is creative. And for me it's an amazing industry to be in, I work with such interesting people. So for me it's more about the mindset and what I learn from the people that I'm with every single day. You know I've spent time in corporate because we have corporate clients and I've spent time in this environment and there's no question that this environment is right for me. But it's not around male-female, it's around strength of personality. You have to have quite a strong personality to hold up in an environment like this. You've got to be able to hold strong opinions and you can't be a shy wallflower in the advertising industry because you'll be flattened. So I suppose it's about tenacity and strength of character and about perseverance. Being strong.

And also obviously your personal talent, aesthetic, and passion. It's a passionate industry as well. But amazing. I'm so lucky I landed here. But I do feel sometimes like it might kill me as well.

Pete Hutchings – Strategy Director at Stretch

1. What brought you into advertising?

I studied event management originally, I wasn't interested in advertising. For my final dissertation, I wanted to do a subject that to be honest I thought would get me a job, that was actually of interest to my potential employers. I heard about experiential marketing, emailed a bunch of people in the industry asking for good topics. Someone came back and said measurability, measuring the intangible. Long story short I was invited to work at an experiential agency in London.

2. From your experience, are there fewer women in advertising creative departments?

I'll answer more generically first. In advertising across all departments, they're all doing some sort of creative role. If anything, I'd say there is a slight bias towards women, generally. When you narrow it down to the creatives, these are the people who are coming up with ideas day in and day out, rather than administrative service and clients, I would say in my experience there is a slight bias towards men, if not a large bias towards men. I think what you're finding in the US probably would hold true. Some of the best-known creatives in SA that you'll hear about at conferences and things are more regularly men. So I would agree with your theory.

3. Is Stretch the only agency you've been with in SA?

Yes.

4. Can you comment on how the culture in SA affects how women are hired?

Exclusively to SA, we have probably the most fascinating HR situation, which is about to affect Stretch. The BEE isn't just about black economic empowerment favoring

specifically black Africans, not even colored, black Africans. There's also a scoring system for females, so you'll score higher if you're female, and you'll also score higher for things like disabilities. Training is really good, investments that benefit black Africans, etc, things that to the rest of the world might seem quite bizarre and bordering on reverse racism. Which to some extent it might be. The bottom line is that it's for a good cause. But it is going to have a direct impact to the future of those top-level individuals in creative departments. What we're going to see over the next year and when it comes into power in early 2016 is a lot of businesses frankly replacing people at the top or moving things around so we're seeing much more people of color in top level positions including senior creatives, but more so females coming to the top because they need to make these BEE scores, which is a fantastic by-product of it. But for business implications it's pretty severe, you can't just move people around. On our side, we have to consider black ownership as a business that has 3 white directors. In SA that's quite complicated, you don't just find someone to be a director overnight. There will be some great outcomes of this thing, but that's not to say it's going to be easy. Part of it will be a bit more gender equality in senior positions as a byproduct of it, which is an interesting outcome because it's not the primary objective. The situation is very rare, but it will help mediate the bias of what is probably a male-dominated industry.

5. So if there is a disparity and fewer women, it's going to be changed by law.

Potentially. The interesting thing about BEE is it's not strictly enforced, it's all based on incentive. Companies are very proud of their BEE status, and in order to be a BEE company, your suppliers must also adhere to it. A company the size of Woolworth's has a lot of suppliers, and let's say we were their agency, so we would be one of them. In

order to continue our contract with them, we would have to reach a certain BEE level. So now, in order to keep this big client, we have to do it. So it's not law, it's actually those big companies that need to be seen by their consumers as a BEE company. So for someone like Woolworths, I'm not saying it's easy, but it's easier with their huge pool of employees. For us, and other companies with around 30 employees, you can't just change everything around and hire someone because of their skin color. And there's definitely some unfairness that comes into play when you're looking at 3 people for a job and you take the one candidate for his skin color and not his ability.

There are great things about it, it's just in classic South African style, it's been poorly implemented. And in cases, it's laughable.

6. Just to clarify, is it women as well or just race?

I think it's still female-favored as well. I might be wrong. But primarily it's about color.

7. As far as female creatives, to you think it's actually that skewed here or no?

I do think it is. On a senior creative level, the ones who I have met are very rarely women. If I had to put a figure to it, I would say probably about 80 percent of those are men.

8. Are there fewer women in other departments or just in creative?

Across agencies, they are biased. I very much believe in the stereotype that women are better multi-taskers, and that's why they make such good account managers, which is a job that requires you to juggle a lot of tasks. We see (here as well) that there seems to see more females in accounts and men in creative, at the senior level at least. I think

once you start coming own to mid-level, you see much more of a balance in South Africa.

9. Do you see any implications of that in the ads that are put out in this country?

I can see your point definitely there, I can't... Interestingly I hate to bring it back to race again but I can't help it. We definitely see in South Africa marketing that you almost know came from a white-dominated creative team because of the lack of foresight in terms of the type of language and the type of imagery and how they're communicating a certain product. In South Africa, the more interesting thing is a lack of awareness of our other cultures. In Western Cape, you can get away with it because there is a bias towards whites, but as soon as you get out of your Capetonian bubble, which is definitely a thing, you're speaking in the wrong language a lot of the time. On the LSM scale it comes down to what we call the main market, which is the majority of South Africans and you should be speaking Xhosa. Now we at Stretch tend to attract more premium brands, which means we rightly should be speaking in the English language and can get away with a more global mentality, which suits me and my creative team. But we acknowledge that if we want to get into the main market, we need to get more people of color and speakers of other languages. So that point I'm making is I can't say I've seen a lot of advertising that made me think about sex, I think maybe I will think about it differently as a result of this conversation. I can't think of too many examples locally where I realized that, but maybe I'm biased.

10. It's also making me wonder (and my intention is not to say that we're the ones doing it right) why there's a conversation in the states about it and not one here, or are they?

I think in South Africa the topic is and will be for some time race. Those coals are still burning hot. Whilst race is a hugely important issue, South Africa has fought bigger problems, for lack of a better term, hence it comes up more regularly. So we worry more about skin color, language, background, social structure, income—we have so many unique challenges in our marketing, but race doesn't necessarily make it to the fore (and it's not to say it shouldn't) because there are so many other things to think about it. But I would expect we're not quite as developed market is the bottom line, and you're almost ahead of your time here talking about it, but it will happen. You are looking into a big of a crystal ball with this country in some things. There are people talking about gender issues here, I know there are, it's just unfortunately they're getting out-shouted by the race issues.

11. In the future, what needs to happen for the gender imbalance to change?

It's difficult for me to comment too much because we are quite a young company, so we haven't had pregnancy or anything implicate us here. Also, very consciously, I don't think gender is ever a thing here. Whist we have sifted CVs because of race because we were forced to, we've never sifted because of sex and we never want to. We had a stage where we were quite female, which we still are quite a bit and are quite conscious of that fact. But we'd still rather employ the best person for the job. So from a Stretch perspective, I don't think we do a bad job. From an industry perspective, I think you've got classic scenarios going on in some of the bigger agencies, where there are glass ceilings, where there are more boys clubs at the top, and there are still some [inaudible]

in advertising that are predominantly male and they're not going to let—you need to be in the club to get on the board, just the classic struggle that's happening across the world. The women that I've come across, and one is one of the directors at a digital agency called Quirk, she has that demeanor and she's a very powerful woman and she comes across that way, and it always makes me sad when—maybe it's my lack of understanding and I don't know enough about her, but she puts on a very strong face and I almost feel like that's part of the reason why she's gotten where she is, she's almost had to put on this suit of armor to prove her worth, and I hope that's not the truth. I really do. But I sometimes wonder about the male ability to shout louder as one of the reasons. I'd like to think there are more places like Stretch where you don't have to be this all powerful individual...

Your original question. I think awareness is one of the biggest things, because the topic you're talking about is not even considered I would imagine. Gender is probably something that a lot of marketers are very aware of humans and their needs because that's what they do day in and day out, but they're not often looking inside their own businesses. I think that hot topics around how they're recruiting are around race, and as long as they're not being sexist in any way, they don't really consider gender, and they're definitely not considering gender in their creative departments at senior levels. So I think just awareness of the fact is probably a bloody good starting point. But I don't think there are too many people being too sexist at the management level, I think there's probably age old problems that are seemingly a hangover from the dark days of the 60s and 70s. I hope that we start to see some change as those guys start retiring. And I believe that we will.

Lebeaux Grobler – Designer at Stretch

1. What brought you into advertising?

From any artist, designer, art director point of view, I think advertising is the top of the game, it's where everybody wants to be, it's the cream of the crop. The top performers are there, the glory is there, people want to do things, win awards, that's where the highest salaries are. That's where the money's at, that's where the glory's at, that's where everything's at. Everybody wants to be in advertising.

2. How did you get where you are today?

I started as a student and did a lot of freelance work on the side. I started seeing advertising as the place to go. As I left college, I did more freelance and worked at agencies. My first job I learned so much about everything, it's called Through the Line Agency, so I did print work, I did TV, animations, I did everything in terms of advertising. When you do everything so see what you want to do, what you don't want to do. You can get turned off by advertising too, which I did personally, at one stage. I think a lot of people in the industry aren't really valued as designers or artists. A lot of advertising agencies are top heavy, which means there's a million people doing some art, buying media, etc, while at the bottom there's actually 2-3 people doing all the work. You're the one making the company successful for the biggest brands, and yet you get paid below the poverty line. Which makes you ask if you're in the right place...

3. I've noticed that Stretch might be an exception, but are there fewer women than men in advertising creative departments in South Africa?

I don't think that Stretch differs from other ad agencies. It's predominantly females in the design world. I think there's actually 60 percent or so women are designers in this industry. At every agency or company I've worked at, it's easily evident. Maybe it's even 80 percent, sometimes up to 90 percent, even at some of the places I was the only guy in the studio.

4. In design, or in copywriting too?

In design, it's mainly in design. I think the top-heavy people will be men, including the creative directors, but in terms of art directors and designers it's mainly women.

5. Why do you think that is?

It's actually quite simple. If you look at the nature of human kind, man and woman, men are more of the left-brain focus, analytical, constructive, where women are more of the nurturing, caring, right-brained side. And your right brain is responsible for the creative part. Not everyone is the same, but in the general context women are more creative because they're centered in the right brain. Men are good at the businessy, technical things, and women are good at the creative, artistic things. So I think naturally it's great to have more women there.

6. So it's predominantly more women in the design part, but as far as creative departments go?

I think it's easy to understand that as well. A lot of the creative directors—because Cape Town's advertising industry has a little different history than everyone else's, it's very

small and intimate. For a long time there were only a few big agencies in Cape Town, like FCB, Ogilvy, there only a few really big ones—and these were the days when they were still doing stuff like screen printing and design, it wasn't all digital and computers. In those eras where everything was hand-printed and made and all those things, a lot of these guys were working at these agencies, and there weren't a lot. And then there came a point when these guys were performing so well, they were saying "Well we're doing all the work as creative directors and whatever, why are we putting up with this?" So they stopped, took clients and started their own agencies. And obviously when you start your own agency you're going to be the creative director of it. Those are basically the ones who run all the agencies today.

7. What time period is this?

80s or 90s maybe? And then on from that. But also during those times, you've got to understand that we were under apartheid laws, where it was obviously very different and male dominated. So women was in the house—it was very Afrikaans—guy goes to the army, you know, and that's how it works. So naturally during the 80s when that was the situation, then who would be in the agency? It's the guys, the breadwinners. And that's a cultural thing, not a sexist thing, some cultures are like that. The Afrikaans culture was like that. So the women stayed at home, the guys went to work. Creative director is not something that you just pick up one day and then become. Most are in their mid-40s and 50s, those are the guys from the same era when it was all men. But as you can see, I think it's going to change because there are just so many female creatives now, much more than men. So eventually what's going to happen is that's going to overrun us. It's the process of evolving as a work force, because we've come from such

a different transitional period, from the 80s, 90s, then Mandela was released, women freedom, black freedom, colored freedom, now we're here. Women are equal, and their working rights even more so, which is fantastic, because with apartheid, women were actually included in affirmative action. So that gave women a chance to get back into the work place, so now that it's evened out, it's just a matter of time before we see change. This is a very young, grassroots phase of our industry, hence why it would probably be different anywhere else overseas because they've come through that hundreds of years ago, hopefully, whereas we are just experiencing it now.

8. That's interesting, because even though the industry in the US may be further along, we are still seeing these disparities in the workplace and in our ads.

That's the thing, in the US it's quite big still. I mean Wall St. is all run by men. I think yours is slightly different because for us it wasn't about men and women, it was a political thing more than a sexual thing. Afrikaans people don't suppress women, it's just the culture. They believe in the importance of looking after family and the nurturing of young children. Look at the society today where there aren't mothers available, and look how the kids are becoming. So we're just more family oriented. It wasn't like "you MUST do this" because women can work, but most wouldn't want to because they want to raise their kids and that's just the culture, and it still is largely like that in Afrikaans society.

9. How has the BEE affected it?

The BEE is not just black people; it includes colored people and women in general, white or black. Because of the BEE, women get equal opportunity, which they never had before, and it has greatly benefitted the workforce with the female population. You

can't not hire a woman because she's a woman, because it's illegal: you're required to hire a certain amount of women in the workforce. And it's a good thing I think.

10. Do some people think it's bad because maybe they're less qualified if they're given a position?

A lot of people don't know about the situation, to be honest. No one really cares, mainly because women deserve that break, you know? They never had the opportunity before. No one ever really thinks, "Oh, she just got in because she's a woman." It's more "He got in because he's black" over the female thing, because I don't think we think women are lesser in this country. We've got some hard-core women.

11. Do women who study advertising and maybe get into the workforce get weeded out at some point? Maybe due to family reasons?

Because of that predominating nature. It wasn't planned, it kind of just happened because of the culture system and the political system. So I don't think we need a direct solution because the solution has already happened. The change happened ages ago. Women empowerment, black empowerment, equality in our country, more women into the workforce, I think it's already happened. It's one of those things where you can't really study to be a creative director, it's something that takes experience and time. And with a career like that, the process will take time. The present situation is dictated by the past circumstances. Therefore that's what we have now. I don't think it's a continuing situation. Equality is already happening, the transformation process is there, there's already more women in the industry, and eventually I think it will lead into the higher levels of development. It's not like one of those jobs you can just apply for; you need

experience. So once the women get that experience, they'll become the leaders of the industry (most of our female designers are quite young).

12. Have you seen those changes reflected in the advertisements in South Africa?

I'd like to think so. I think the influence is already there. Africa is more conservative, which I'm sure you've seen in our advertising. We're not so big into "sex sells" like in the States and in Europe. Our advertising is a lot more honest. It's not the "buy this product it will change your life" message, which is the male way of advertising. I think the women's more nurturing subtlety is already happening. There are a lot of campaigns about like Dove, innocence, the beauty of women, the environment, that has feminine undertones, caring for the world. I think that's reflected in our country, we're very ethical in the way we advertise. I think that's due to the influence of women

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