

The paradoxical comfort zone. An investigation into how students and professional women in Australian graphic design experience [in]visibility.

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Biography

Jane Connory is a PhD candidate and teaching associate at Monash University, Art, Design and Architecture, working towards a gender inclusive history of Australian graphic design. She was awarded a Master of Communication Design (Design Management) with Distinction from RMIT in 2016 and has been a practicing designer in the advertising, branding and publishing sectors, in both London and Melbourne, since 1997. Alongside her research exploring the visibility of women in design, she is currently the National Head of Communications at the Design Institute of Australian, the Vice President of the Creative Women's Circle board and consultant to the Australian Graphic Design Association.

Abstract

This paper looks to theorise the states of visibility and invisibility (that is [in]visibility) experienced by women in the Australian graphic design industry, post 1960. Visibility, as a form of authorship, self-promotion and presence in historical narratives, is the professional ambition for many graphic designers, however invisibility is often viewed as a negative choice. Invisibility for women – that is a whole or partial state of absence in comparison to men – along with visibility, is the focus of this investigation. Interviews were conducted with twenty-four women, identified as significant contributors to Australian graphic design by their peers. These were then transcribed and analysed using grounded theory and an [in]visibility framework, developed by Ruth Simpson and Patricia Lewis (Simpson and Lewis, 2007). The results, focusing on the 'deep' drivers of invisibility, reveal a diversity of emotive experiences related to comfort levels and has led to the development of a survey instrument for further enquiry. The survey - titled Comfort and [In]Visibility - gauges and validates the emotive comfort zones of individual women within the states of [in]visibility. Surveying students and professional women in Australian graphic design, the initial analyses show both common and disparate attitudes towards [in]visibility. We may conclude from this research that women generally feel comfortable with being visible but can

feel just as comfortable with being invisible, at the same time; what we call ‘the paradox of comfort zones’.

Keywords: graphic design, women, Australian design, invisibility, visibility

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Introduction

‘I think it's more about if women designers want to be visible, they should have the opportunity to be visible...’

– Rita Siow, retired general manager of the
Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA).

This paper seeks to investigate and theorise how women, in Australian graphic design, experience both visibility and invisibility – here referred to as [in]visibility. Graphic designers typically remain invisible behind their work veiled by the work itself, the clients involved, the collaborative nature of graphic design and the audience for which the work is intended. Intentional actions must be made for graphic designers to become visible through assigned authorship, self-promotion and a presence in historical narratives. These platforms are traditionally dominated by men which has excluded women’s experiences and how they individually perceive the state of [in]visibility. This investigation, conducted through interviews and a survey instrument, aims to explore how women in Australian graphic design perceive [in]visibility with a goal is to identify the factors that affect their invisibility.

Methods of investigation

This investigation explores and compares the [in]visibility of students and professional women in Australian graphic design, post 1960, using the interpretive and heuristic feminist framework of [in]visibility, developed by Ruth Simpson and Patricia Lewis (2007). This framework [see Figure 1] investigates both the ‘surface’

and ‘deep’ conceptualisations of [in]visibility – with ‘surface’ being the quantifiable insights into the state of visibility and ‘deep’ being the qualitative drivers behind invisibility. Visibility, in the case of Australian graphic design is seen here as a form of authorship, self-promotion and presence in historical narratives, while invisibility for women is defined as a whole or partial state of absence in comparison to men.

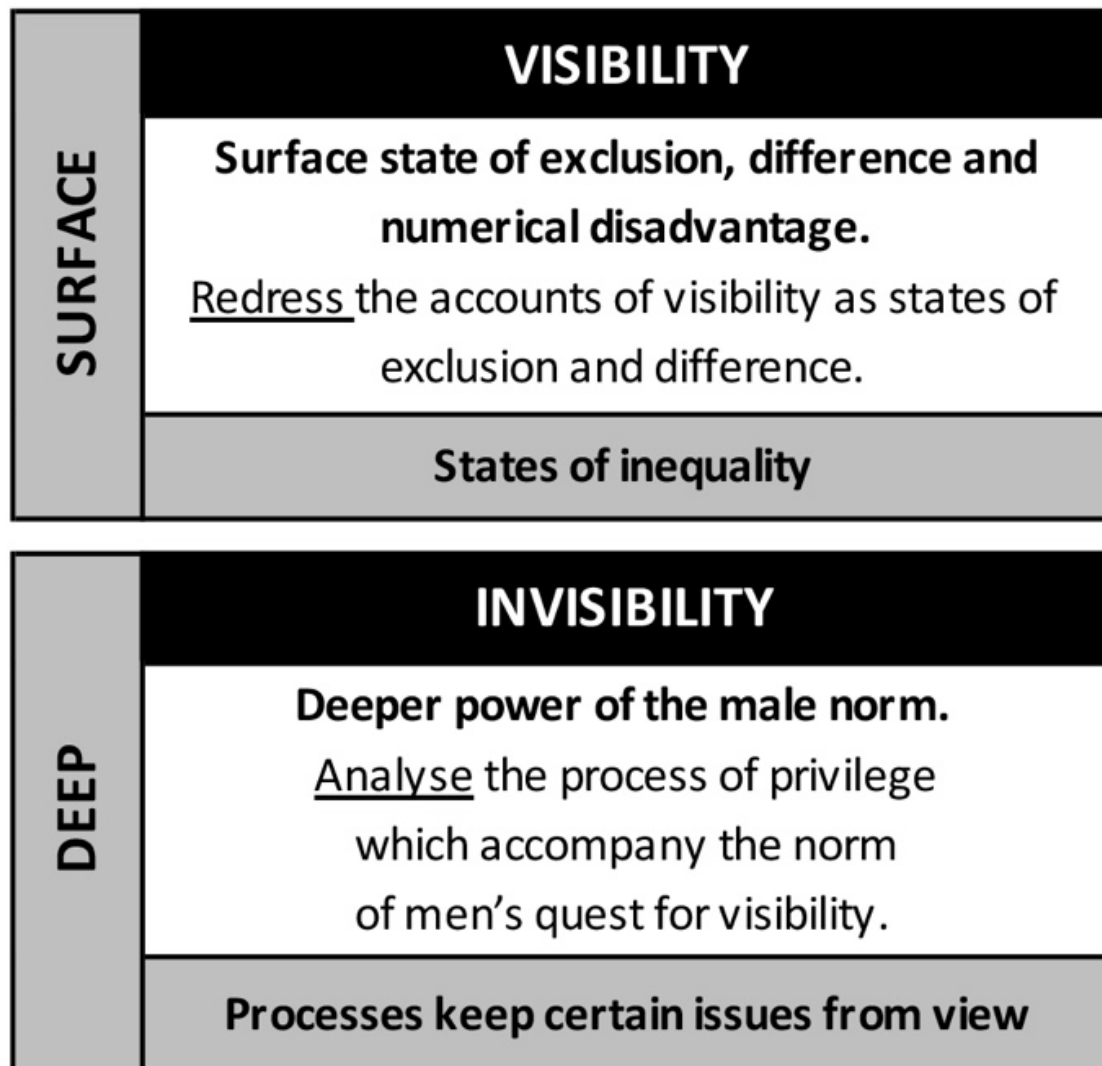


Figure 1. Interpretive and heuristic framework of voice and visibility, developed by developed by Ruth Simpson and Patricia Lewis.

Extending on a previous research, which focused on ‘surface’ measures of visibility with women in Australian graphic design, a complex combination of both visibility and invisibility was revealed. For example, women graphic designers were found to be:

- highly visible as graduates of graphic design qualifications (Connory, 2017a);

- invisible as winners and judges of a national graphic design awards and Hall of Fame platform (Connory, 2017b)¹;
- transitioning from invisible to visible, over time, as winners and judges of a national book design awards and Hall of Fame platform (Connory, 2017c)²;
- invisible as winners and judges of a national advertising awards and Hall of Fame platform (Connory, 2017c)³; and
- invisible as guests on Australian graphic design podcasts and conferences (Salen and Connory, 2018)⁴.

Grounded theory is an iterative process that looks at sets of qualitative data – usually transcribed interviews – to draw meaning from the ideas found within and is used and to generate new theories from the situations involved (Ackerly and True, 2010; Starks and Brown, 2007: 1372-1380). In this study, grounded theory was applied to the analysis of interviews with women in professional design practice (n.22). This sample of interviewed women was gathered from an online survey – Invisible: Women in Australian Graphic Design – which was sent to designers, design students, design academics and those within the Australian graphic design community, in 2016. The survey asked participants to name women who had made a significant contribution to Australian graphic design since 1960. 142 women were named, and the top 25 mentioned women were approached to be interviewed. Some of the named participants declined to be interviewed, however two women who owned studios requested that their female business partners were included. In the first instance the women named two colleagues and in the second instance the woman named her individual business partner. In discussions with this sample of woman, it was identified that women in the advertising industry were not represented and would have interesting and relevant experiences to share. As such two women who had made significant contributions as Creative Directors were identified using respondent-driven sampling. A summary of the demographics concerning the women

¹ The National awards and Hall of Fame mentioned here belong to the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) who are “the peak national organisation representing the Australian communication design industry” according to their website.

² The National awards and Hall of Fame mentioned here belong to the Australian Book Designers Association (ABDA) who “exists to support Australian book designers – to promote their work to, and connect with, the broader publishing community” according to their website.

³ The National awards and Hall of Fame mentioned here belong to the Australasian Writers and Art Directors Association (AWARD) whose charter is to “charter is to set standards of creative excellence, to promote this concept in the business arena and to educate and inspire the next creative generation” according to their website.

⁴ For example, the agIDEAs conferences which ran for 25 years and the Australian Design Radio Podcast.

who were interviewed showed a range of ages, a breadth of experience and geographic locations across Australia [Figure 2].

	Age when interviewed	Year of graduation	Highest design qualification	Location of current practice	Time in current practice	Employment status in current practice
1	30-39	2000s	PhD	VIC	20 to 29	Owner with no employees
2	30-39	2000s	Bachelor	VIC	10 to 19	Owner with employees
3	30-39	2000s	Bachelor (Honours)	TAS	10 to 19	Owner with employees
4	30-39	1990s	Bachelor	VIC	10 to 19	Owner with employees
5	30-39	2000s	Bachelor	NSW	1 to 9	Owner with no employees
6	40-49	1990s	Bachelor (Honours)	NSW	10 to 19	Partner/Owner of business with employees
7	40-49	1990s	Bachelor	VIC	10 to 19	Owner with employees
8	40-49	1990s	Bachelor	NSW	10 to 19	Partner/Owner of business with employees
9	40-49	1990s	Bachelor	SA	20 to 29	Partner/Owner of business with employees
10	50-59	2010s	PhD	VIC	10 to 19	Education / Research
11	50-59	2000s	Masters	VIC	20 to 29	Owner with no employees
12	50-59	1980s	Bachelor	VIC	10 to 19	Owner with no employees
13	50-59	1980s	Diploma	VIC	10 to 19	Creative Director with employees
14	50-69	1970s	Diploma	TAS	30 to 39	Owner with no employees
15	60-69	1970s	Diploma	VIC	30 to 39	Owner with employees
16	Unassigned	1970s	Diploma	SA	40 to 49	Education / Research
17	Unassigned	1970s	Diploma	VIC	20 to 29	Owner with employees
18	Unassigned	1990s	Bachelor	VIC	10 to 19	Partner/Owner of business with employees
19	Unassigned	2010s	Masters	VIC	1 to 9	Owner with no employees
20	Unassigned	1990s	Unassigned	VIC	10 to 19	Partner/Owner of business with employees
21	Unassigned	2000s	Bachelor (Honours)	VIC	10 to 19	Partner/Owner of business with employees
22	Unassigned	1970s	Bachelor	VIC	30 to 39	Owner with employees

Figure 2. Demographics of women who were interviewed for this research.

Open ended and relaxed interviews and discussions – a methodology preferred by feminist researchers (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 176-77) – was guided by the following themes:

- Theme 1: Significant contributions;
- Theme 2: Evolution of graphic design;
- Theme 3: Visibility; and
- Theme 4: The historicising of graphic design and women in graphic design.

The interviews were then transcribed and coded on NVIVO software.⁵ Grounded theory was chosen as an appropriate tool for a feminist analysis because of its capability to theorise basic social processes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), represent unhomogenized and differing perspectives (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 348), develop explanatory frameworks and allow concepts to emerge through reflection and analysis of the data (Ackerly and True, 2010; Corbin and Straus, 2008: 23; Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007: 1372-1380; Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003: 150).

⁵ All interviews and discussions were conducted by Jane Connory, during June, July and August of 2016 and the transcripts are stored on Monash FIG Share.

The application of grounded theory involves four key steps (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The first step involved a process of 'open coding' which examines, compares, conceptualises and categorises the transcribed interviews. In this particular study analysis was distinctly concerned with sentences and phrases that referred to experiences of *invisibility* and *visibility*. Step two was an iterative process where conceptual 'gaps' in the data needed to be identified and is often interpretative in nature. This stage focused on what was *not* said and revealed the unspoken themes of the pros and cons experienced by women within the states of [in]visibility. The interviewed women all had the choice of location for the interviews. Some were very happy to share their studio space with me during this time. Others were keen to come to my office space and still others wanted to meet in public, like a café. The different levels of personal visibility and comfort associated with each of these choices were an indication of the themes that were to develop from this research.

Step three was a process of 'axial coding' where the data was further filtered and grouped based on relationships and patterns identified – in this case in both the pros and cons of [in]visibility. A summary of the analysis of each of these states is presented below [Figure 3].

INVISIBILITY	
PROS	CONS
What power do women gain from their invisibility?	What power do women lose from their invisibility?
Ability to get on with work rather than 'self-promote'.	Biases and prejudices have made them that way.
Anonymity to choose jobs.	Can show lack of income. IE Can't afford awards.
Be experimental, take risks and more creative freedom.	Feelings of frustration. IE. 'not having it all', 'the juggle'.
Comfortable place for shy/introverted people.	Industry seems closed.
Don't demonstrate a large ego.	Low profile equals insignificance.
Flexibility for family.	Missed opportunities.
Gender becomes irrelevant.	Motherhood undervalued.
Make the client look good.	Negative feelings. IE. lack of confidence.
Push the work forward.	No recognition.
	Not influencing others, including clients.
	People not understanding their profession.
	Men are more often recognised and listened to.
	Self-perceived as 'bad' self-promoters.
VISIBILITY	
PROS	CONS
What power do women gain from their visibility?	What power do women lose from their visibility?
Become a social influencer.	Always having to be available.
Can highlight collaborative nature of the work and how the value of different perspectives.	Being stereotyped.
Social media gives greater control over what is visible.	Being at risk of compromising your personal brand.
Opportunities to be empower others and b empowered by others.	Difficult to juggle family responsibilities with work.
If you're thick skinned there are no obstacles.	Grappling with conflict and confrontation.
Increased network. IE. industry and client contacts.	Grappling with lack of confidence.
Lessen isolation and get support from others	It has nothing to do with merit.
Leverage significanc of practice.	Negative feelings. IE. scared, self-doubt, vulnerability.
Maintain profitable business.	Set up for failure.
Make valid contribution.	Vulnerability to be attacked or criticised.
Opportunities for personal growth.	
Positive feelings. IE. enjoyment, equity.	
Provides opportunities for further work and promotion.	
Reason to do self-directed projects.	
Recognition.	
Reveal design processes for greater understanding of design.	
Visible histories influence more broadly.	

Figure 3. Steps 1-3 of grounded theory research on interview transcripts.

The final step - 'selective coding' - identified and described the main observations. An abductive approach to this final grouping sought to demonstrate how women were both positively and negatively affected emotionally by being [in]visible women in Australian graphic design. Women readily spoke emotively which was taken as a cue on how to direct the study. The 'selective coding' revealed how important it was for women to make autonomous choices to maximise their emotional well-being. As women who had sustained long careers, received awards for their work and gained respect from their peers, I observed that these women did not blame men or any patriarchal oppression for the way they felt. Rather their self-determined professional success aligned with their independent attitudes towards how their gender was related to their experience of [in]visibility. As a result, the data was coded by searching the transcripts to find emotive words that were common to or similarly felt amongst the women through their experiences of invisibility and visibility.

Analysis of investigation

An initial analysis of interviews with women in Australian graphic design, revealed an emotive response associated with feelings of comfort and discomfort [Figure 4]. Individual benefits and preferences to being both invisible and visible were clearly identified within the transcripts. Both visibility and invisibility had positive and negative connotations. For example, being visible was shown to create more work for designers and allow for opportunities to celebrate successes, yet it could also leave women vulnerable to criticism. Being invisible on the other hand, left women with more time to focus on their work rather than self-promotion and allowed the importance of their work and clients to come to the fore. However, feeling invisible also meant designers could miss out on work opportunities and be left feeling undervalued and frustrated.

COMFORT	DISCOMFORT
balance	you can't have it all frustrated family impacts on career it's a real juggle
self-belief	like an outsider off-putt like cringing unappealing unattractive intimidated
confidencence	shy timid insecure outside comfort zone lack of confidence a lack of self-belief
safety	traumatised tumultuous shocking awful bad totally freaked out
assurance	fear insecurity terrible scared shaking

Figure 4. Step 4 of grounded theory research revealing the 'comfort zones'.

The data collected [Figure 3] also showed that women felt there were more cons associated with being invisible and more pros associate with being visible. This revealed that stepping out from behind your work to self-promote was generally more preferential for women than remaining invisible in their careers in Australian graphic design. It was also evident that each individual woman who was interviewed had a range of experiences and a unique combination of feelings to reflect upon. In combination, these findings revealed opposing pairs of feelings that aligned neatly under the categories of comfort and discomfort. Where some women had felt shy others had felt confident. Where some had been traumatised, others had felt safe. Where some were insecure others were assured and so on. The zone between these extremes of comfort and discomfort is what is defined in this paper as the 'comfort zone'. Considering that the sample of women used to conduct this research were

some of the most visible women and significant contributors in Australian graphic design, these findings had the potential to inspire the next generation of designers.

The pipeline of graduates entering the profession is dominated by women around the world (Connory, 2017a). This ‘comfort zone’ has a potential to validate the legitimacy of feelings and experiences these women have yet to encounter as invisible and visible graphic designers. Although not exhaustive in the scenarios it covers, this ‘comfort zone’ also highlights the many positives that come from being visible and could assist women in identifying areas that could help them benefit from being more visible.

Invisibility CONS	Student Answers	Professional Answers	Visibility CONS	Student Answers	Professional Answers
Q1) How comfortable are you with the cost of design awards?	3.1	3	Q11) How comfortable are you with public criticism of your design?	3	2.8
Q2) How comfortable are you balancing motherhood and design?	3	3.3	Q12) How comfortable are you with speaking publicly about your design work?	3.3	3.4
Q3) How comfortable are you having few female mentors or role models in design?	2.6	2.7	Q13) How comfortable are you with your design work failing publicly?	1.6	2.1
Q4) How comfortable are you not having publicly recognised authorship for your work?	2.2	2.3	Q14) How comfortable are you with developing your personal brand as a designer?	3.3	3.9
Q5) How comfortable with the white male dominance of design history are you?	1.9	1.9	Q15) How comfortable are you with being a leader?	4	4.1

Invisibility PROS	Student Answers	Professional Answers	Visibility PROS	Student Answers	Professional Answers
Q6) How comfortable are you with general anonymity?	3.1	2.8	Q16) How comfortable are you with having a social media presence?	4	3.8
Q7) How comfortable are you with putting the client's needs before your own?	3.9	3.8	Q17) How comfortable are you with empowering others?	3.8	4.6
Q8) How comfortable are you with not entering awards?	3.3	4	Q18) How comfortable are you with increasing your network of clients and designers?	3.3	3.8
Q9) How comfortable are you letting your work speak for itself?	3.8	4.3	Q19) How comfortable are you with receiving recognition for your achievements?	3.9	4.4
Q10) How comfortable are you with working rather than self-promoting?	3.7	4.1	Q20) How comfortable are you with sharing your design process?	3.7	4.3

Figure 5. Comfort and [In]Visibility survey questions and average results.

As a result of these findings, a further survey instrument was developed to explore these notions of Comfort and [In]Visibility among women in Australian graphic design. This survey provided a score and summary designed so participants could self-determine where their ‘comfort zone’ lay. Ten questions were crafted directly from the interview transcripts. Five questions referred to the pros of invisibility, five to the cons of invisibility, five to the pros of visibility and five to the cons of visibility [Figure 5]. For example, one question read, “How comfortable are you with speaking publicly about your design work?” These questions were then sent via an online survey to both current tertiary students of graphic design and the professionals sourced from the Invisible: Women in Australian Graphic Design survey. Nine complete responses were received from both the students and professionals and participants were asked to answer the questions on the likert scale of: ‘very uncomfortable’, ‘uncomfortable’, ‘neutral or irrelevant’, ‘comfortable’ and ‘very comfortable’ [Figure 6].

KEY	
4 to 5	Very comfortable
3 to 3.9	Comfortable
2 to 2.9	Neutral or irrelevant
1 to 1.9	Uncomfortable
0 to 0.9	Very uncomfortable

Figure 6. Key to reading results of the Comfort and [In]Visibility survey.

Participants were then given the opportunity to receive a report outlining the results of their Comfort and [In]Visibility survey [Figure 7]. The report graphically represented both their visibility and invisibility ‘comfort zones’ as scores on a coloured dial. It also provided a written summary of their results that reinforced the legitimacy and positives surrounding their current feelings and identified areas that could comfortably benefit them from being more visible. However, the reports also offered a chance to collate and compare averages from this data set. Professionals on average had a comfort score of 3.2 with invisibility and 3.7 with visibility [see Figure 8], while students on average had a comfort score of 3.1 with invisibility and 3.4 with visibility [Figure 9].

COMFORT & [IN]VISIBILITY SURVEY RESULTS

Name: Anonymous
Status: Professional
Date of results: 29/08/2018

Visibility comfort score:
Comfortable – 3.8

The survey you undertook, has measured you as comfortable with being visible as a designer.

Invisibility comfort score:
Neutral – 2.9

This survey also measured you as neutral to being invisible as a designer.

Summary:

The *Comfort and [In]visibility* survey you recently completed was designed to measure your comfort when faced with the choice of being visible or invisible as a designer. The results below aim to identify where you are most comfortable and validate the benefits of this.

Your *Comfort Scores* show that you are comfortable empowering others, networking, and publicly sharing your work and processes. Whether this comes naturally to you or you have been working at it, you understand the benefits that come from being visible as a designer. These include receiving recognition for your work, developing your network or maintaining a successful and creative business.

You are also neutral towards the idea of being invisible as a designer. Anonymity – you could take it or leave it.

SUMMARY OF SCORES

VISIBILITY COMFORT SCORE



INVISIBILITY COMFORT SCORE



Thank you again for taking part in this survey. Please contact janeconnory@invisibleinaustralia.com if you require any further information or would like to respond to these results.

Figure 7. Sample report from Comfort and [In]Visibility survey.

	How do rate your comfort levels concerning INVISIBILITY?					How do rate your comfort levels in the next five scenarios?					Average
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	
1	4	3	3	3	2	3	4	4	4	4	3.4
2	4	3	1	3	1	3	5	4	5	5	3.4
3	2	2	1	3	2	2	4	4	5	4	2.9
4	3	3	5	3	2	2	4	3	2	3	3
5	2	5	3	2	3	4	5	5	5	5	3.9
6	4	4	3	1	2	4	1	4	4	5	3.2
7	3	4	2	2	1	2	2	4	5	5	3
8	4	4	4	2	3	3	4	3	4	4	3.5
9	1	2	2	2	1	2	5	5	5	2	2.7
Av.	3.0	3.3	2.7	2.3	1.9	2.8	3.8	4.0	4.3	4.1	3.2

	How do rate your comfort levels concerning VISIBILITY?					How do rate your comfort levels in the last five scenarios?					Average
	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	
1	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4.2
2	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.4
3	4	4	2	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4.4
4	3	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	4.2
5	2	4	2	4	5	2	5	4	5	5	3.8
6	1	4	1	2	3	2	4	2	4	4	2.7
7	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	3.8
8	2	2	2	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	3.3
9	4	2	1	4	5	5	5	2	5	4	3.7
Av.	2.8	3.4	2.1	3.9	4.1	3.8	4.6	3.8	4.4	4.3	3.7

Figure 8. Professional Comfort and [In]Visibility average scores.

	How do rate your comfort levels concerning INVISIBILITY?					How do rate your comfort levels in the next five scenarios?					Average
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	
1	3	4	1	2	1	3	4	4	4	4	3
2	2	3	2	2	1	2	4	4	4	4	2.8
3	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	3	2	3.3
4	3	4	3	4	2	3	3	3	4	4	3.3
5	4	2	4	1	1	4	5	5	5	5	3.6
6	3	3	4	2	2	2	5	3	4	4	3.2
7	3	2	2	1	2	3	4	3	2	4	2.6
8	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	4	2	2.6
9	3	2	2	4	2	4	4	2	4	4	3.1
Av.	3.1	3.0	2.6	2.2	1.9	3.1	3.9	3.3	3.8	3.7	3.1

	How do rate your comfort levels concerning VISIBILITY?					How do rate your comfort levels in the last five scenarios?					Average
	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	
1	4	2	2	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	3.8
2	2	5	1	4	4	5	2	4	4	4	3.5
3	5	5	2	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4.5
4	4	2	2	4	2	4	3	2	4	3	3
5	4	5	2	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	4.2
6	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	1.4
7	2	4	1	2	4	4	5	2	4	4	3.2
8	3	4	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5
9	2	2	1	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	3.4
Av.	3.0	3.3	1.6	3.3	4.0	4.0	3.8	3.3	3.9	3.7	3.4

Figure 9. Student Comfort and [In]Visibility average scores.

The comparison of this data collected from both the students and professions, reveals similar trends in the comfort scores. However, students were just slightly less comfortable than professionals when being invisible and also slightly less

comfortable than professionals when being visible. This pattern – although generated through a small sample of respondents – shows that the slightly higher comfort levels among professionals could role model balance, self-belief, confidence, safety and assurance to students. Both samples had respondents evidently ‘very comfortable’ with being visible – professionals having 3 and students having 2, and both also had respondents who expressed neutral or irrelevant feelings towards feeling invisible (professionals 2 and students 3). And finally, one anomaly was evident in both samples. One professional respondent stood out as being the only person to find visibility ‘neutral or irrelevant’ and one student stood out as feeling ‘uncomfortable with visibility’.

Discussion

Overall, there is a clear correlation between the comfort levels of students and professional women, in Australian graphic design, with being both invisible and visible. The averaged data set from the Comfort and [In]Visibility survey shows that women can simultaneously feel comfortable with invisibility and visibility within award platforms, the recording of history and self-promotion. There appears little difference between a woman’s level of experience in the industry and levels of overall comfort, however, a clear paradox exists within each of these processes for both students and professional women. For example, both groups were comfortable/very comfortable with receiving recognition for their work, comfortable with the costs associated with entering awards and also comfortable/neutral to receiving criticism – all things core to the experience of participating in awards and generating visibility for designers. Yet in parallel with this, women also expressed that they were comfortable/very comfortable with simply not entering awards and letting their work speak for itself. That is, they were similarly comfortable with being invisible.

Another way to view this paradox is how women felt about self-promotion – a comfortable/very comfortable place for both students and professional women in Australian graphic design. These similar levels of comfort were also evident in the visible use of social media, the sharing of design processes, developing a personal brand and speaking publicly, even though the idea of anonymity was also a comfortable place for students and a neutral/irrelevant place for professional women. Here where women were both comfortable with self-promotion and comfortable with being unknown, they demonstrated an affinity with again being both visible and

invisible. Similarly, the paradox exists with the comfortable/very comfortable way women feel towards empowering others and taking a step into the limelight while also feeling comfortable by taking a step back for their clients at the same time.

However, the key to understanding why this paradox exists is acknowledging that these findings vary widely, indicating unique comfort zones for each individual woman. And this observation, combined with the grounded theory research, that indicated both positives and negatives in invisibility and visibility, demonstrates that there is no appropriate or inappropriate place for a woman to be in her career. Even with the obvious limitation of this study – being the omission of professional women in Australian graphic design with no public profile – the individual responses to comfort would be anticipated to continue with their inclusion, as their individual voices would also be amplified through the Comfort and [In]Visibility measurement tool.

This omission of women from many histories of a number of disciplines is widely recognized as a problem (Huppertz, 2015: 182-202; Fry, 1989: 15-30; Beard, 1946;) The survey results show that this is one of the most concerning issues of invisibility for women in Australian graphic design. Discomfort is not the only negative emotion this research revealed – guilt was also prevalent. 157 people responded to the initial Comfort and [In]Visibility survey (74 per cent of the respondents were women) and 142 women were named, however on average each respondent could only name 1.62 women graphic designers. When women were unable to contribute to the list, they often expressed guilt by writing comments like, 'I'm embarrassed that I cannot fill in specific names here' and 'I cannot think of any other off hand and feel terrible because I can't.' Many women were in contact with the researcher after the survey closed, wishing to share more names they had initially thought of. It was clearly a difficult task, but such guilt was unfounded considering the lack of women documented in the history of Australian design. Supportive of their peers and wanting their significant contributions to be recognised, the inability of women to name female graphic designers was a clear indicator of their invisibility throughout history.

Conclusion

Recognition, fame and notoriety and thereby visibility is conventionally equated with success. However, this research has found that invisibility can also be valued for reasons of comfort among women in the Australian graphic design industry. The

women surveyed for this investigation were generally comfortable on award platforms and with self-promotion – actions that are all traditionally geared to feed the régime of visibility. However, levels of comfort varied in these situations resulting in ‘paradoxical comfort zones’. In fact, the scale of comfort within [in]visibility does not place visibility at one end and invisibility at the other - rather both states exist on individual scales. Measuring visibility and invisibility on separate scales of comfort, offers the opportunity for individuals to become more self-aware of the space they occupy, reflect on the pros and cons within that space and to decide whether they want to remain there or shift outside their comfort zone – knowing the benefits that await. The Comfort and [In]Visibility scale, has the potential to be adapted for individuals, regardless of gender, and outside of the design industry, to gain further insights into the way women respond to [in]visibility.

Finally, during this investigation, emotive reactions were prevalent in the women’s responses to [in]visibility, as was being comfortable with being visible as a designer. These insights can positively influence the gender inequities in the Australian graphic design industry in several ways. Acknowledging the guilt felt by women should heighten the urgency to diversify and fill the gender gaps within the history of Australian graph design. And with the importance and acknowledgement of feeling comfortable as important to women, awards platforms could address the current imbalance in award winners and jurors by catering to this insight and giving fairer opportunities for women to achieve the visibility they desire.

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