

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work



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Tobi Fairley

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You are listening to the *Design You* podcast with Tobi Fairley, episode number 207.

Welcome to the Design You podcast. A show where interior designers and creatives learn to say no to busy and say yes to more health, wealth and joy, here's your host, Tobi Fairley.

Hey, friends, thanks so much for coming back this week. I guess that means I didn't scare you away with parts one and two of this important series on the value of design. So far we've covered creatives versus designers and doers versus thinkers. And today we're digging into something pretty provocative that I'm calling women's work.

So first let me preface this episode and this title with a bit of clarification. The terms that I'm using to name and talk about the specifics in this episode are very gendered and I get that. I understand that. And the main reason for that is that most of us live in a traditionally gendered patriarchal society and system. Now, my personal goal in my own work and my communities is to be inclusive to all genders and those who don't identify with a specific gender.

My followers, listeners and clients though right now are mostly a community of women which may include people socialized as women, people assigned female at birth or even people who are woman identified but might also include gender non-binary humans. I'm learning to not assume that everyone here identifies as a woman, or with gendered language like ladies, girls, women etc. And we also know that we do work with and have listeners and community members who identify as men and men we love you all too.

We typically say we work with women and a few really progressive dudes which we love saying that. But we get that this isn't fully inclusive. And I'm working in my own life and we are working in our company to use gender inclusive language as well as pronouns and names that people let us know to use for them like they, them, she, her, he, him. But I will admit I'm not quite perfect at this yet. I'm getting there. I've made lots of progress.

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

And the more I work on being inclusive my goal is to use more gender neutral language and inclusive terms even including in podcasts like this one which might include more gender neutral words like folks, or people, or darlings, or dear ones, or bad asses. Or for me what I'm most of the time going to call you is you all because I'm a good southern girl and thankfully you all is gender neutral. Now, if you're new to thinking about gender in this way, if pronouns are new to you, bravo for being open to this work.

And I get it, we all have to start somewhere and I welcome you to come along for this ride with me. I'm always happy to do this work alongside any of you that are interested in becoming more loving and more inclusive because that's definitely our goal at my company and it really aligns with our values. But I say all of this in particular for this episode to do two things.

Number one, I do want to create a safe space for all my listeners no matter how you identify. So, I want you to know my own personal goals and where we're coming from. But number two that I want to note specifically for this episode and truly for a lot of my coaching and teaching work is that the topics we are discussing like patriarchy, and hustle culture, and a lot of things that I talk about a lot are the result of really not very progressive, not very inclusive practices in the world.

And so, a lot of the data that is available to discuss, and to use as examples, and to use to make progress is going to be gendered. And so that's not something we are doing as a company. That's information we're using because it's all that's available when studies have been done, they've mostly been on men and women, not typically on non-binary individuals. So hopefully in the future that information, that data will become more readily available, more studied and we will definitely include it.

But in the short run I don't want to not discuss these very important topics because the data is gendered. So again, this problem arises from hundreds of years of patriarchal and gendered systems and other oppressive behaviors including misogyny, and sexism, and objectification of people who identify as women or who were born as women. Plus, many, many other systems of oppression, patriarchal behaviors and beliefs. So, it's not

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

something we're doing necessarily today although many of these things are still in place, but the information has been around for a long time.

So, to not talk about and the issue we're talking about today, women's work in a gendered way would really prevent us from understanding these concepts at all. And what they mean for you, and your business, and the value of the work you do in the world no matter if you identify as a man, a woman or neither. So, let's get into this content.

If you have no idea what I've meant by anything I'm talking about today, don't worry, hang with me. I'm going to explain it as we get into this concept of women's work. But I just really wanted it to be in the context of where I'm coming from personally and where we're coming from as a company. So, it's important to me to be super clear and that's why I had this explanation. So, let's get into today's content now and I think you'll see exactly what I mean. Women's work.

Women's work, yeah, saying that probably immediately brings to mind a lot of things for you as it does me. Women's work, housework, child rearing, laundry, decorating, entertaining, being good with people's emotions, nurturing, caregiving, creativity, cooking, making everybody feel comfortable. Women's work, it involves a lot of physical labor but also a lot of emotional labor. And the thing about 'women's work' is that it is an expectation from society put on women.

It's assumed that this is the work we will do, that this is the work we're good at and it's also expected mostly unpaid. Now, I'm going to be doing a podcast series later this year about what I call the gaps. And some of you may have attended a webinar I did back in December of 2021 called Millionaire Mixology. And I started discussing these gaps there and it blew a lot of you away. So, there are five or six, I think, gaps that I highlighted that exist that get in the way of the businesses that we want to create.

And one of the gaps that I talked about a lot in that particular webinar was the gender gap for unpaid labor. And this is what I mean by all of my preface earlier about the statistics because the statistics are gendered in this information, the gender gap for unpaid labor. So, what is the gender

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

gap for unpaid labor? Well, the unpaid labor gap is the very real and measurable gap between the amount of unpaid work or unpaid labor that females do in the household compared to males even when both are also working outside the home in paid careers or jobs.

So, the measured difference that these studies that have been done on the gender gap show is that between the male and the female gender there's a gap that is about two and a half times more unpaid labor per day every single day that women do compared to me. So, men do around an average of two hours of unpaid labor a day which is still quite a bit but women generally do about four and a half hours of unpaid labor every single day.

And when we think about this unpaid labor in the household, in the home, in their life it typically means the laundry, the child rearing, the cleaning, the cooking, the homework with kids, the grocery shopping, all the things, and women do more than two times the amount every day. And remember, it's work that we obviously don't get paid for, it's just part of what we do to exist. But many of the women doing this extra work, two and a half times what men do still have paid jobs as well.

So, we still have to do all our paid work every day and then we have to come home and do four and a half, or some of it's in the morning, but four and a half hours a day on average compared to two hours that men do. So why is this relevant to this whole conversation? Why have I had this whole long thing about genders, and women's work, and unpaid work, and all the things in relation to the value of design? Well, that is a fantastic question, a great question.

So, I recently was reading the book, *Down Girl*, the subtitle is *The Logic of Misogyny*. So, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* by Kate Manne. And while I was reading it I had a giant realization about the design and creative industries. So, realization, maybe it was more of an epiphany or an aha, hell, I don't know. It was like my whole brain blew up really. Because in the book, Kate Mann was making a case for all the things that are expected of women.

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

And she wasn't even necessarily saying it in the realm of unpaid labor but she was just saying in general, the roles, the tasks, the duties, the jobs that are expected of women.

So, when I was listening to her talk about this in general for women, I suddenly drew the connection that a ton of the work that we do in our role as designers. Not our unpaid labor but the actual work of being designers, especially in areas like interior design, or event design, things that need a ton of coordination and manual labor to execute so much of the work, so many of the tasks are very similar, or even the exact same as the list we made earlier when we were describing women's work.

So, let's think about this for a moment, what do we do that's true for designers but that also falls under that category of women's work? Well, we make things pretty. We order, and buy, and coordinate all the details. So, whether it's the groceries and dinner or an entire home design, the tasks are kind of similar. A lot of coordinating, a lot of decision making, a lot of ordering, picking up, putting in place, all of those things.

We also deal with everyone's emotions. So, we're practically therapists as wives and moms. But we also are expected to really almost be therapists in our role as designers. We are there to bear the brunt of everyone else's emotions. We're also making sure that everything goes off without a hitch, so whether it's running our household or running a project or an event, all the pressure. All the responsibility lies on us to make it go smoothly, to fix anything that's not smooth.

We are looked to, to handle it all. Also, women's work and design work is creativity, nurturing and just giving things that 'woman's touch', with putting it together, jujing it up, making it just so. Now, I get some of these things are stereotypes. And there's many men who do the jujing on a design project. But in general, when we look at things from a stereotypical way, the way society looks at things, those types of behaviors, traits, talents, gifts definitely fall into the female gender category.

So of course, we realize there's all kinds of people doing this work in the world but that's my point here, that men, and women, and non-binary folks

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

may be doing these tasks as different types of design jobs, different types of roles as designers but these jobs really aren't valued in the grand scheme of the world because a lot of them are sort of expected to be done for free just because that's sort of our gift, that's our lane as women.

So, in reality these industries do have men and non-binary folks working in them but a large number of the people working as interior designers, event designers, fashion designers are women.

And the interesting thing about that that I also shared in my webinar back in December and I think I may have shared it on some other podcasts recently is even though there are a lot of women in these professions. It's rarely the women who are making the most money as interior designers, fashion designers, the ones that really rise to the top still a lot of them are men. And in bigger firms, bigger design firms, event firms, architecture firms rarely are the people rising up through the ranks into the leadership roles are women, they're typically men which is so interesting.

But the bulk of the industries, all of them, the design industries are women and they also are women who aren't making that much money. I want you to see the aha here, the epiphany here. So back to the idea that much of the work in design professions is the same work that we could consider women's work. And I want you to really understand why I think this epiphany is so important. It is because the value proposition, women's work is work that those of us who identify as women, are socialized as women, it's what we're expected to do just because of our gender for free.

As a part of the role or the part we play in the patriarchal society we live in we're expected to do these things for free. And when something is expected to be done for free it doesn't have a really high value.

Think about for a minute the doctors versus nurses in the traditional sense. For many, many years most doctors were male, most nurses were female. And you can easily imagine the tasks that were performed under each of these roles and what each of them were responsible for. And also, what their pay was like. Doctors received a lot higher pay than nurses most of the time, I'm sure still do.

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

And nurses really did a lot of the women's work and got paid less for it. They did a lot, if not most, or all of the labor intensive messy, difficult cleaning up, nurturing, taking care of people work but they weren't paid nearly as well as the doctors who were more respected, more revered and were traditionally men.

So, when we think about this kind of difference between men's work and women's work, and the value of it, and we start to consider the value proposition of women's work in the design industries. It's so related to everything we've been talking about for the past few weeks. It's related to creatives versus designers, that episode where we talked about how the installation and the execution parts of design aren't really valued that much because they can be done by almost anyone. They're not the unique one of a kind ideas part of the process.

But what if one of the reasons that the work is not valued is not just because it's the doing instead of the thinking or the creative. But also, because it's the work that we are expected to do in a sense just for being here on the planet and being in a woman's body.

In my experience which is interesting and could even play a part in this as well, in this hypothesis of mine about women's work is that most of my clients are affluent, heterosexual, cisgendered couples and mostly white, not always but mostly. So, it's mostly a man and a woman, usually white, very traditional roles, traditional patriarchal roles for the husband, he's usually the breadwinner, the wife might have a job but a lot of times not. The man's usually making a lot of money, a lot of times my clients, the woman is a stay at home wife or mom.

And don't get me wrong, I'm not saying there's anything wrong with any of that. I'm not criticizing that in any way. But I'm pointing out that I do wonder if in those types of households, those more patriarchal, traditional, affluent white households the women's work scenario is even more likely to play a role in the value of design because I suspect that it might.

And I wonder if it even plays a role in the number of men who think and even say things to their wives and sometimes to designers, when they're

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

considering the price of a professional designer, or a proposal they got, or a price, or a fee proposal. How many of us have heard a male spouse say to his female spouse, "But honey, you could just do this work. You have a great eye or you're so stylish. You could do this honey. Why would we pay that much money to have it done?" I have encountered this a few times but I hear from a lot of people I coach that they encounter it a lot.

And this is really that moment in design when consumers become a bigger competitor to our work even in other design professionals. And we've been seeing this trend happening, coming to light over the last decade or so especially when the availability of products and ideas started becoming so prevalent on the internet, which again ties back to that conversation about creativity versus design.

So, I think that as we are considering the value of design and the amount we can charge for our design work, which by the way next week's episode is about pricing versus the value of design. But even as we're considering it right now in this conversation about women's work, the value I think this women's work concept is one more component we should consider. So, we can add it to the list that we've created so far in these last three weeks or so.

So, you can start to ask yourself, are you doing more design or more creative work? Meaning are you doing more that is really that commodity, that coordination and installation or are you truly staying in the zone of unique creative one of a kind ideas more often than not? And if you're not, that could be impacting the value and what you're believing you can charge.

The second thing is are you a doer or a thinker? So similarly, how much time are you spending in thinking about design, thinking about your business, that true visionary work versus just being a tactician?

And now number three, what does society's, our culture's association with what women and people socialized as women ought to be doing for free, what does that do to the value of a lot of the work that we're doing as design professionals? Does it make it harder for us to charge enough or to

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

make enough money to make all the emotional stress, and all the manual labor, and coordination, and all the stuff we do to pull off a home project, or an event project, or any other type of design, does it make it worth all the work?

Such an interesting question. It's one that really has me thinking about how we spend our time and how we position ourselves in our companies, and what we can do to bring more awareness to the value of our roles and tasks. But I think we're really fighting an age old system in many ways, the patriarchy that will probably be pretty difficult to rewrite the rules for when it comes to what people value.

So, I'm going to leave you with this for today. I know this is a fairly short episode. But I hope you'll think about this topic. I hope you'll get really, really curious. I hope I was already getting you curious to think about are you a designer or a really creative? What's the split, the make up in your business? And are you a thinker or a doer? And now is our industry really kind of synonymous with women's work whether we're women or not doing the work? And does that potentially devalue it in the minds of our clients in a patriarchal society? So fascinating.

So, get curious, consider please between now and next week, what role gender and women's work could be playing in the value of your services especially when it comes to your particular ideal client and audience. Because all of our audiences are different. And I shared with you a little bit about what my audience has typically been.

And that's not to say that I wasn't able to charge a lot of money. I have, I've charged really high fees. But mainly because I did a whole bunch of personal mindset and belief work myself and really got super intentional about how I presented the value of what we're doing to people. But even at that, even at high fees, five figure fees, six figure fees, the amount of work that I was doing so often still wasn't paid highly enough to make it worth it for me, to make it worth the exhaustion and the burnout that came with doing that level of work.

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

So, get curious. What does it mean for your work, for your business? And next week we're going to wrap up this series with an episode where we finally talk about money, the price and how we're thinking about price compared to the value of the work we do. And of course, we're going to take in, we're going to bring all these three weeks with us. We're going to bring in the creative versus designer, the visionary versus integrator which is the thinker and the doer.

We're going to talk about women's work and we're going to talk about our beliefs about money. And how when you put all four of those things together it's likely really impacting the value of design and what you're willing to ask for in return as payment from your clients. So, it's going to be another doozy. Meet me back here next week, same time, friends. And we will talk all about price versus value of design. See you then. Bye for now.

And if that weren't enough that we're wrapping up this awesome series next week, talking about money, I have one more thing that I want to put on your radar screen. So, we have the coolest free experience coming up for you at the end of March, the last week of March, first week of April called Success Week.

So, if you've been following along, which you have because you've been listening to this series. And maybe you listened to the Redefining Success series, then you're going to want to spend time every single day with me that week in the free trainings all about how to cultivate the mindset and bust through upper limits, and break through blocks. And how to coach yourself in order to achieve all the things you want in the world including increasing the value of the work you do in the world.

So, I'm just giving you a little heads up, a little save the date about Success Week. I want you to have heard of it but watch for info on Success Week coming to your inbox if you're on our email list, or all over our social media, our Instagram and our stories and all the things because you know we'll be sharing it everywhere. We are so excited that we cannot wait to spend Success Week with you because we want you to get more success in 2022 than you have gotten ever.

Ep #207: The Value of Design Part 3: Women's Work

So, mark it on your calendar, it's going to be every day. It's going to happen at 11:00am Central for about 90 minutes. We're going to teach. We're going to workshop. We're going to answer questions. And we're going to really set you up for success. So, mark down Success Week because I can't wait to see all your beautiful faces there working with me on your mindset to really create the success you want. Okay friends, I'll see you soon. Bye for now.

Thank you so much for listening to the *Design You* podcast, and if you are ready to dig deep and do the important work we talk about here on the podcast of transforming your mindset and creating a scalable online business model, there has never been a more important time than right now. So, join me and the incredible creative entrepreneurs in my *Design You* coaching program today. You can get all the details at TobiFairley.com.