

Participation of Women In the Design Professions

Thomas H. Jenkins

The roles and proportion of women in the design occupations may be important in how these professions function in an increasingly egalitarian society. Findings from a national survey of occupations show that generally, design professions are either predominantly male or predominantly female in composition. Results from a survey at a midwestern university indicate an increase in female enrollment in design related curricula; male dominance in design occupations will continue.

Studies and observation show that some occupations are primarily associated with men while others are primarily associated with women (Epstein, 1970). As work and occupational roles influence virtually everything in society, including power, wealth, prestige and information (Goldthrope and Hope, 1974), a move towards participation of both men and women in professions would seem desirable in terms of rewards as well as the philosophy of egalitarianism.

With the exception of architecture, little has been done to study the participation of males and females in the design professions. The studies of architecture indicate a field highly dominated by men. Female registered architects remained at about 1 percent of all registered American architects for some fifteen years — 1958-1973 (Lobell, 1977; Dean, 1973) — and in the past eighteen to

twenty years, they have increased to only about 3 or 4 percent (BLS, 1976).¹ Women constitute about 10 percent of all current architecture students in the country (Lobell 1977:30). But the female "mortality" rate in architecture departments continues to be notoriously high.² Although, it has also been high among urban planning students in the past, this may be changing.³

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze a pattern of sex differentiation in seven design professions: architecture, landscape architecture, fashion design, graphic design, industrial design, interior design and urban planning.⁴ The study is descriptive with an exploratory approach, examining the possibility that more women are entering the design professions. The study compares published national data collected in 1972 with data collected in 1976 at the University of Cincinnati. As the data on students is limited to one school, conclusions must be considered tentative. However, the findings may give some indication of whether a shift towards more female participation in these professions can be expected.

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Pioneers for Century III National Bicentennial Conference, on "Men, Women and Power," Cincinnati, Ohio.

Table 1. — Number and percentage of females in design professions

Profession	Total number in profession	Percent female	Dominance b Classification
Architecture	37,000	5	Male
Fashion Design	20,000	60a	Female
Graphic Design	137,000	30	Mixed
Industrial Design	10,000	13	Male
Interior Design	18,000	50	Female
Landscape Architecture	18,000	15	Male
Urban Planning	12,000	10	Male
Totals	232,000+		

a Estimated by a fashion designer, head of a large academic department. In BLS *Handbook* as part of apparel industry.

b Classification by author, based on: Male = less than 20% female, Mixed = 20-49% female, and Female = 50% or more female.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, pp. 586-591, 595-605, 654 and 658. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1974.

Method

Classification of Male-Female Dominance

The occupation classifications used by Epstein (1970) and Haug (1975) are used to classify the professions as male dominant (less than 20% female), mixed (20-49% female) and female (50% or more female).⁵ Data for established practitioners were drawn principally from the 1972 Bureau of Labor Statistics national survey of occupations (BLS, 1974). This source includes information on relative proportions of male and female employment and thus provides a macro-level view of the established patterns of past and present. It covers between 230,000 and 300,000 design professionals in the United States.

Data for design students were drawn from a survey of 1557 undergraduate students in the College of Design, Architecture, and Art (DAA) at the University of Cincinnati in 1976. The six design departments in which the students are enrolled represent all but one (Landscape Architecture) of the seven design professions that are included in the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) survey.

Findings

Design Professions

The BLS data show that a pattern of male/female/mixed differentiation exists among the design professions in the United States (BLS, 1974). In its listings, less than 5 percent of 37,000 licensed architects are women, 50 percent of the 18,000 interior designers are women, and 20 percent of 60,000 commercial artists are women. Table 1 presents this pattern for the seven design professions.

Architecture has by far the lowest percentage of female practitioners, while Fashion Design, by estimate, has the highest. Urban Planning is second only to Architecture in male dominance followed by Industrial Design and Landscape Architecture at 13 percent and 15 percent females, respectively. Graphic Design, which contains commercial art and professional photography, has 30 percent females, while Interior Design appears to be mixed, with a 50-50 percentage split between males and females.

Table 2. — Distribution of female students in academic design departments by class status

Class	Architecture	Fashion Design	Department				Urban Planning	Total
			Graphic Design	Industrial Design	Interior Design			
			<i>% female</i> (total class size)					
Freshman	18 (n= 93)	98 (n= 56)	57 (n= 58)	25 (n= 52)	92 (n= 53)	11 (n= 37)	49 (N= 349)	
Sophomore	9 (n= 68)	94 (n= 63)	60 (n= 52)	29 (n= 45)	82 (n= 73)	19 (n= 32)	52 (N= 333)	
Pre-Junior	12 (n= 81)	100 (n= 56)	49 (n= 39)	9 (n= 34)	84 (n= 55)	15 (n= 27)	47 (N= 292)	
Junior	6 (n= 84)	92 (n= 37)	48 (n= 29)	13 (n= 30)	87 (n= 38)	6 (n= 31)	37 (N= 249)	
Pre-Senior	14 (n= 84)						14 (N= 84)	
Senior	3 (n=109)	93 (n= 27)	69 (n= 26)	12 (n= 25)	76 (n= 33)	10 (n= 30)	31 (N= 250)	
Total	10 (N=519)	96 (N=239)	56 (N=204)	19 (N=186)	84 (N=252)	12 (N=157)	43 (N=1557)	

Adapted from: Administrative study for College of Design, Architecture, and Art, University of Cincinnati, by Bernice Donegan, Winter 1976-77.

Design Education

Data from the University of Cincinnati's administrative and academic surveys provide preliminary evidence that virtually the same pattern of male/female/mixed is being repeated in the design majors in college, with the exception of the areas of fashion design and interior design, where there appears to be increasing female participation.

Table 2 shows that three of the six design departments are male-dominant, two are female-dominant, and one is mixed. Architecture (90 percent male), Industrial Design (81 percent male) and Urban Planning (88 percent male), are clearly male departments. On the other hand, Fashion Design (4 percent male) and Interior Design (16 percent male) are clearly female. Graphic Design (44 percent male) is mixed. Overall, the number of female students is increasing, with 51 percent of

the freshman class being male, and 69 percent of the senior class being male. When student enrollments for all six departments are combined, 57.3 percent of the total enrollment is male.

Analysis and Conclusions

These data show that not only does sex differentiation exist, but combined with the BLS data, they suggest the continuation of male dominance both in design education and in the design professions (Table 3).

Although the same pattern continues, as indicated by the rank order according to the percent male, there does appear to be an increase in the participation of women. For instance, although females constituted only 30 to 35 percent of the overall Graphic Design field (commercial art and photography), the 1976 survey shows that 66 per-

Table 3. — Rank order of design professionals and academic design departments according to percent male

	Professions ¹		Academic Departments ²	
	Rank	Percent male	Rank	Percent male
Architecture	1	95	1	90
Urban Planning	2	90	2	88
Industrial Design	3	87	3	87
Graphic Design	4	80/75*	4	44
Interior Design	5	50	5	16
Fashion Design	6	40	6	11

*Commercial art and photography, respectively.

¹Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Handbook 1974-75*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1974.

²Donegan Survey, College of Design, Architecture and Art, University of Cincinnati, 1976.

cent of all students enrolled in the Graphic Design department were females. Accordingly, Interior Design, the second most “female” among these professions, is likely to become even more female. While BLS figures show that 50 percent of contemporary professional practitioners are female, currently at the University of Cincinnati some 80 to 85 percent of the Interior Design students are female.

Even in the most highly male dominant areas, female participation does seem to be increasing. Although 95 percent of the architecture professionals are male, 89 percent of the architecture students in the study are male, but only 82 percent of the freshman in architecture are male. Findings of the present study suggest that any significant changes in the ratio of males to females in the design professions for the future must be accompanied by changes in male-female student ratios at college and university level design schools and departments. Such changes would tend to bring male-female ratios into proportions more in keeping with today’s egalitarian values about participation of the sexes in professional work.

Notes

1. A 1973 survey by the American Institute of Architects showed even fewer: only 1.25 percent of all registered architects and only 3.7 percent of all architects in the U.S. were women. Also, only 1 percent (222) of the 2,220 AIA members were women.
2. Close observation of the Architecture department at the University of Cincinnati and other schools has been made by research architect John Peterson on a continuing basis.
3. Female planning students observed in their own respective schools, a drop in female “mortality” from 1972 to 1976.
4. All except fashion design are classified as “design” occupations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1974. Fashion designers are included in the apparel industry. Commercial art and photography, classified as separate design occupations by BLS in 1974, are combined as “graphic design” in the present report, as departmentally defined at the University of Cincinnati. Such related fields as urban design, geography, and engineering have been consciously omitted. The latter two are rarely classified as “design,” and urban designers are usually trained in architecture or urban planning, or both.
5. Haug used the human service field in order not to exclude those occupations in which females have been generally segregated. For related articles on women, sex roles and occupations, see *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 61, No. 2 and No. 3.

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