



WORKING GIRLS NETWORK

What we talked about:

Tackling Gender Stereotypes.

Stereotypes grounded in gender can stifle progress in the workplace and cause emotional distress due to extreme pressure to behave, look or feel a certain way. These stereotypes are enforced in us from childhood and are truly toxic.

At our most recent WGN event, we were joined by an amazing panel – a collection of trailblazers and changemakers – who spoke with insight about how stereotypes play out at work and in mainstream media; why we revert to them in the first place; and how we can work to dismantle them. Many thanks to:

- ◇ Ali Hanan (Creative Equals)
- ◇ Andrew Geoghegan (Diageo)
- ◇ Chloe Grace Laws (FGRLS Club, Glamour)
- ◇ Dr Giray Cordan (Clinical Psychologist)
- ◇ and chair Kirsty Saddler (Unreasonable Equals at Anomaly)

This was also our annual 'Working Girls Invites the Boys' event – so a big thanks to all the men in the audience too , who helped make this yet another brilliant night.

What we learned:

- ◇ Kirsty opened the discussion with a neat definition of a stereotype as something that "limits your view - of yourself, and of others".
- ◇ Gender stereotypes can be understood through the lens of developmental psychology: when we are infants we experience the world in very binary terms, such as good/bad, yes/no, girl/boy. Giray explained how these overly simplistic definitions stay in our subconscious as adults. But what is unconscious can manifest itself in very concrete terms, especially when we feel attacked or fearful, at which point our "intrapsychic demons" come out, said Giray in what had to be one of the quotes of the night!
- ◇ Ali agreed that what we're taught as children has to be "unlearned" in order for there to be progress. Building on Kirsty's definition, she said "a stereotype is a shortcut. It's an expectation and it doesn't acknowledge the myriad nature of humanity."
- ◇ For too long, media and communications have shaped our view of femininity, and this view has been dictated by the male gaze. Chloe observed how, even today, in an industry such as hers which has a 90% female client base, as you go up the ladder the gender split flips and 90% of the exec are male.
- ◇ A similar realization about the advertising industry is what led Ali to found Creative Equals. "When just 12% of Creative Directors are female, it makes you ask – who's making the work?"
- ◇ At Diageo, in what was traditionally a very male industry, Andrew has been tasked with "agitating the supply chain" and tackling gender inequality from within. What became evident very quickly, he says, was that a balanced and diverse workforce benefits everyone. You can't argue with it!

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- ◇ And while it's clear that men benefit from a patriarchal society, it's important to appreciate that stereotypes about masculinity are dangerous too. In the UK, men die younger, are more likely to be addicted to drugs and are five times more likely to commit suicide than women.
- ◇ When we break the taboo of men speaking about, recognising and feeling their emotions – then things can really change for the better.
- ◇ The good news is that progress *is* being made. The media and creative industries are going through a period of deconstruction; and the panelists all agreed that Gen Z are much more open in their perceptions of gender. The future is positive – we just need to make sure to listen to and invest in a younger .
- ◇ And a great quote from Ali to end on – “a rising tide should float all boats”, as the situation improves for one group, they should bring others with them.

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What can we do?

- ◇ Start small. Talk it through with your friendship group or colleagues, the more we speak the better, says Chloe.
- ◇ Be brave. You might find yourself having difficult conversations, but use Ali's simple formula: “when you do *x*, it makes me feel *y*. Is that your intention?”
- ◇ Be accountable. At Diageo, every bit of work passes through a framework that considers representation, perspective, agency and character. Now, if someone is misrepresented in their advertising, something has gone really wrong.
- ◇ Be patient. We all make mistakes, and are still learning. “We live in a call-out culture,” says Chloe “but jumping on someone who is ‘wrong’ isn’t OK – and usually won’t work anyway. That said, there is ignorance and there is bigotry – you shouldn’t be afraid to call out the latter”.
- ◇ Be less binary! Even within this discussion we used very simplistic ideas of ‘wrong’ and ‘right’ – life is not this rigid.

Reading List:

- ◇ *The Descent of Man*, Grayson Perry.
- ◇ *The Loudest Duck: Moving Beyond Diversity While Embracing Differences to Achieve Success at Work*, Laura Liswood
- ◇ *Work Like a Woman*, Mary Portas
- ◇ *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, Renni Eddo-Lodge

