

# Brave New Normal

## Intergenerational Mentoring + Women in Graphic Design

Teal Triggs, Siân Cook, Lorna Allan, Susan Potter



**Royal College of Art**  
Postgraduate Art & Design



**WD+RU**

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Women's Design + Research Unit

Hidden Women of Design

# Brave New Normal: Intergenerational Mentoring + Women in Graphic Design

## Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	3
<b>Part 1 Rationale</b>	
1.1 Why This Report? Why Now? .....	5
1.2 Research Questions .....	6
1.3 Why an Intergenerational Mentoring Model? .....	6
1.4 The Practicalities .....	8
1.5 Report Structure: Parts 2/3/4 .....	8
<b>Part 2: Research</b>	
2.1 Methodology .....	10
2.2 Study Design .....	10
2.3 Research Tools .....	11
2.4 Data Collection .....	11
2.5 Data Analysis .....	11
<b>Part 3: Results</b>	
3.1 Introduction .....	13
3.2 Description of Participants .....	13
3.2.1 Identity .....	13
3.2.2 Location .....	13
3.2.3 Education .....	13
3.2.4 Employment .....	14
3.2.5 Experience .....	15
3.3 Thematic Analysis .....	15
3.3.1 Overview of thematic analysis .....	15
3.3.2 Factors affecting women working in graphic design .....	17
3.3.3 Impacts of COVID-19 upon life and work .....	18
3.3.4 An (intergenerational) mentoring scheme .....	19
<b>Part 4 Resilience</b>	
4.1 A Brave New Normal .....	22
4.2 Everyone Leads, Everyone Learns .....	23
4.3 A Call to Action .....	25
4.4 Next Steps .....	27
<b>References</b> .....	28
<b>Afterword</b> .....	29
Acknowledgements .....	29
Colophon .....	29
<b>Appendix</b> .....	30
Report 1: Brave New Normal Workshop	

## Foreword

We began *Brave New Normal* in spring 2020 via Zoom's online platform, whilst trying to make sense of the COVID-19 pandemic and its possible effect on work. As members of Hidden Women of Design (HWoD) and the Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU), much of our work had historically been focussed on the graphic design profession and academia; and the ever-increasing need to critically address stereotypes, inclusivity, and new working practices. We were already familiar with rapidly shifting career contexts (e.g., Black Lives Matter protests and an ageing workforce) which suggested an urgent need to rethink the 'workforce experience' for women in graphic design and to redefine the ways in which industry and academia interacted in support of women regarding training and development opportunities throughout their career. Though each of us brought substantial knowledge of mentoring to the project, it was the shared interest in the possibilities offered by an intergenerational approach which established the focus.

“During this period, I was sensing a lot of anxiety from my students, uncertain about being able to take their first steps into the world of work, whilst also feeling acutely aware that the notion of 'retirement' for myself seemed to be unobtainable. Maintaining an industry 'presence' is becoming increasingly difficult for myself as an older woman, and this really affects confidence and a sense of self-worth.”

start of the pandemic which further strengthened our resolve. We were simultaneously researchers and participants. We witnessed first-hand how COVID-19 magnified inequalities already found in the workplace and how it signalled new emerging challenges. As the pandemic unfolded, so too did an uncertain future for work and women's roles within this environment.

“The educational sector was already in crisis. The pandemic only served to heighten my own feelings of job uncertainty as a woman entering the latter stages of an academic career. My confidence waned. For the first time in my career, I wasn't sure how best to support students, whose own career trajectories were thrown into question. In the end, through a process of re-establishing a sense of community, and sharing frustrations, we have begun to deal with the situation together.”

*Brave New Normal* emerged out of conversations between us, sharing personal experiences as mentors and mentees, but also from the challenges of academic and workforce environments. We were all too aware of the barriers that persistently confronted us as women working in graphic design. We had a hunch that needed further exploration. Our collective commitment to finding evidential support led us to seek conversations beyond our own small group. This process coincided with the

“It was a huge pause, and almost like a gift of time to re-assess things and adjust but I don’t think we knew what we were trying to adjust to. I felt like it really polarised experiences too as there were those having to rapidly adapt and take on huge workloads and then those where everything just stopped. However, I feel that it’s now on the other side of it all that I find it the hardest, the hustle is more brutal, the urgency more urgent and the path forward is far less clear.”

Exploring intergenerational mentoring seemed a fruitful way forward. *Brave New Normal* (BNN) emerged out of the need to question received narratives about career lifecycles and explore how different kinds of knowledge are valued in informing future working practices in the post-pandemic landscape. In this way, it seeks to start a conversation. This is a pilot project that scopes the field, identifies key themes, and sets out recommendations for further research.

The resulting research report is not ours alone. Questions are emerging ‘live’ around us as the pandemic unfolds. A sense of urgency has driven a desire to bring a diverse group of women together to share their experiences with us. Their stories are compelling. For each person we spoke to, there are many more asking: how will women freelancers cope with a shrinking economy?; how will mothers (and fathers) manage parenting and home-schooling?; what will a design industry become for recent graduates and for those in mid or late careers?; and, how is this shifting landscape addressing women’s visibility as role models? We are grateful for the support and encouragement we received from those numerous women who spoke with us, participated in our questionnaire, and joined us in conversations. We take solace in knowing that collectively we are not alone in facing what is emerging as a *brave new normal*.

### Project Team

Teal Triggs, School of Communication, Royal College of Art, and founder member, Women’s Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)

Lorna Allan, Freelance Art Director and founder, Hidden Women of Design (HwOD)

Siân Cook, School of Design, London College of Communication, University of the Arts London, and founder member, Women’s Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)

Susan Potter, Consultant, Arts Evaluation and Research

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# Part 1 Rationale

## 1.1 Why This Report? Why Now?

*Brave New Normal* emerges from a context of uncertainty about the future of work in the UK, and especially how this relates to gender. The radical disruption caused by COVID-19 is only part of this story. Shifting paradigms in the UK's political, social, cultural, and economic environments were already identified prior to the 2020 pandemic, raising questions around equitable working practices, skills development in relation to new technologies, and new models for sustainable labour markets. In 2014, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills commissioned a future of work report predicting that the mobile "was set to overtake desktop...and work and leisure hours have become blurred by increasingly 'mobile' lives." (Z\_punkt, et.al. 2014: 4) The report also forecast that by "...2030 the UK workforce will be multi-generational, older, and more international, with women playing a stronger role." (Z\_punkt, et.al. 2014: 5) Following publication of the report and within the context of the pandemic, it has become increasingly clear that women are more affected than was predicted. With this background in mind, there is a need to explore how intergenerational mentoring might be facilitated and reconsidered to offer ways forward for women in the graphic design industry.

This sector has undergone significant changes and has come through the pandemic with job losses, but also with a new sense of purpose. The findings of a recent global survey of 11,000 designers undertaken by the Australian-based agency 99design, support this: "At a time when the entire world faced social and economic lockdown, freelancers found ways to upskill, earn more, and improve their work-life balance." (99design, 2020: 71) In the report, 28% of respondents identified as female and around 1 in 3 freelance designers identified as "a minority based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, mental or physical impairment." (99design, 2020: 6) The report, however, does not break down the survey data to allow us to elucidate specific experiences of women designers; nor do the findings detail what impact, if any, was differentiated as gender related.

*Brave New Normal* is a pilot project, which seeks to extend this existing research by identifying and highlighting insights contributed by women who are primarily based in the UK and working directly within the graphic design profession. For this project, we define intergenerational mentoring as operating dialogically and across career stages where both participants stand to benefit equally. The Royal College of Art in partnership with Hidden Women of Design (HwOD) and the Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU) together bring to this project an extensive body of knowledge about graphic design leadership, mentoring practices and women working professionally in academic and industry contexts. This project builds on their combined contributions to graphic design and women's networks to capture, through a process of 'live' research, current concerns of women working in the field, whilst also anticipating what may lie ahead. The broader aim of *Brave New Normal* is to question received narratives about career lifecycles, while exploring how different kinds of knowledge are valued to inform future working practices in the post-pandemic landscape.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The main research question asks: How might intergenerational mentoring inform how women navigate graphic design careers in a post-Covid-19 world?

Three subsequent questions emerged via the research process:

1. In what ways might intergenerational support networks aid in mitigating biases (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, class) in the workplace?
2. How do women in graphic design experience relationships as important to their professional lives?
3. How might the personal histories of women working in graphic design throughout the crisis give insights into the possible futures of work?

Conversations between the HWoD and WD+RU began in the pre-pandemic month of November 2019, focussing on shared concerns about changes in the longevity of design careers with an increasingly youth-focused job market. (Hassell, 2019) In early 2020, these conversations intensified in response to the rise of Covid-19. *Brave New Normal* is the outcome of these conversations formalised as a research project running from July 2020-March 2022. The project is divided into three main phases: a first phase cooperative-led meeting was held in July 2020, a second phase workshop, March 2021. An interim project report consolidated the findings of phase 1 and 2 located in the Appendix. This third phase, supported by the Royal College of Art RKEI Development Fund, led to the findings detailed in Part 2 of this report (October 2021 to February 2022). A fourth phase is planned for a public-facing summary report and launch event later in 2022.

The project's evaluative report reflects the scale of a pilot and tests the efficacy of the subject for a proposed larger project. The project's contribution resides in laying a systematic foundation for a research-focussed approach as applied within the field of graphic design. A secondary contribution resides in collecting original interviews and information from questionnaires from women facing design career challenges during the pandemic.

## 1.3 What is Intergenerational Mentoring?

Intergenerational mentoring has long been a tool in workplace politics and identity, especially in relation to feminism. For many, feminist principles promote non-hierarchical mentoring structures, promoting co-mentoring models which step outside traditional models based upon pairing experienced persons with younger, less experienced mentees. (McGuire and Reger, 2003: 54) Mentoring has a history in the Craft Guilds, where 'master' and 'apprentice' relationships were based on passing down traditional crafts skills from one generation to the next. In contrast, mentoring has evolved to reflect what McGuire and Reger advocate as "the importance of cooperative, egalitarian relationships for learning and development". This leads to new forms of knowledge by "...equally valuing rational, logical thought and emotional expression". (McGuire and Reger, 2003: 55) Such an approach is less commonly promoted across the graphic design sector. *Brave New Normal* seeks to support a definition of intergenerational mentoring that moves away from traditional models of a mentor/mentee relationship characterised by generational age, toward a more equitable dialogic model of knowledge exchange foregrounding career stages.

Research undertaken by the mentoring advocacy group Moving Ahead, found "87% of mentors and mentees felt empowered by their mentoring relationships and have developed greater confidence." (Dimmock, 2017) The role of industry-led mentoring organisations has a key role to play in this. For example, Ok Mentor Me provides masterclass mentoring for female undergraduates drawing on the expertise offered by female executives primarily in the digital fields. (<https://www.okmentor.me/>) In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, designer Tash South aims through her organisation

Design Diversity Mentors (2020) to broaden access to role models particularly for BAME and lower socio-economic groups who are wanting to enter the design industry. (<https://www.designdiversitymentors.co.uk>)

During the last decade, graphic design has witnessed an increase of grassroot-orientated women's groups which seek to actively promote supportive, inclusive, mentoring models for the profession. Some of the key initiatives include:

**Kerning the Gap** (2015- ) focuses on supporting more diversity of women in leadership roles within the design industry after founder Nat Maher identified the lack of representation of women in agency leadership. In seeking solutions, the organisation suggests that men "are a critical part of the solution." (<https://www.kerningthegap.com/>)

**Alphabettes** (2016- ) showcases work promoting women and under-represented groups in typography, and have also formalised international mentoring schemes "to empower others, grow confidence and new skills." (<https://www.alphabettes.org>)

**UPFRONT** (2016- ) a start-up enterprise founded by social designer Lauren Currie OBE, seeks to "democratise leadership" and diversify the conference stage. Her legendary red couch, positioned onstage, to help women overcome stage fright in a way which fosters confidence "from a safe, comfortable space." (<https://www.weareupfront.com/>)

**Design Leadership Lean In Circle** (2017-2019) was established as a mentoring scheme by London-based design agency UsCreates. Inspired by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's writings on 'lean-in', it consisted of inner and outer circles to reframe discussions of gender and collaborative working toward equality. Though no longer formally running, elements of the scheme have been introduced into organisations such as FutureGov. (<http://www.sd-ldf.com/sessions-2019/2019/9/9/event-1-862lw-x56kh-g949c-dagga-f78x7>)

Whilst women from across a range of career lifecycles are encouraged to engage in these and similar mentoring organisations, there is still a gap: *Brave New Normal* advocates for an approach to intergenerational mentoring which also means a 360 degree / 2-way dialogue, where both participants stand to benefit equally. This research seeks to delve more deeply into a more dialogic process for women in graphic design.

Intergenerational mentoring requiring "relationships with members of other age groups to achieve resolution" is usually practised within the contexts of familial relationships, community engagement, and education. (Jarrott, et al., 2021: 283) Hatton-Yeo and Telfer further this approach by proposing "intergenerational practice aims to bring people from different generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect and contribute to building more cohesive communities." (2008: 4) Satterly, et al., identifies a new model in academia which moves away from a "one directional nature of knowledge dissemination" between tenured faculty and those in novice positions, to a process of intergenerational collaboration to "encourage knowledge sharing". (Satterly, et al., 2018: 441) Although Satterly, et al., are still bound to align their work across generational categories (e.g., Boomers, GenXers, Millennials), their approach is based upon removal of a hierarchical framework of mentor and mentee by adopting the principle that "everyone leads, and everyone learns". (Satterly, et al., 2018: 446) *Brave New Normal* builds upon the work of Satterly, et al., and others, and seeks to contribute to this body of research by extending the concept of intergenerational mentoring into the field of graphic design and for the benefit of women at differing career lifecycles (rather than exclusively across generational categories). Opportunities for experiential knowledge sharing were harnessed giving women agency in sharing "'interpretations, abstractions and their self-defined viewpoint'. We considered women involved in this project as co-researchers giving 'true voice'...for novel, inclusive strategies, and policies and for building a regenerative future." (Khandekar, et al., 2020: 4)

## 1.4 The Practicalities

Covid-19 brought new challenges to the project. Through a process of self- and collective-reflexivity and across career generations, the project highlighted the complexities of feelings and uncertainty women were experiencing at the height of the pandemic. The potential distress and enhanced sensitivities this might bring co-researchers and partner researchers, was fully considered as part of the Royal College of Art ethics approval process (e.g., ensuring consent and withdrawal processes were clear, commissioning an interviewer with considerable experience in arts and mental health research, and so on).

Health and safety concerns guided the delivery of the project and meant that it was undertaken online using email correspondence and digital platforms. Little contact had existed between the main partners and co-researchers prior to the start of the pandemic's lockdowns. This changed how we set up the project but also questioned how we might ensure and facilitate collectively a safe and dynamic conversational process. Online engagement established a space for connectivity and inclusivity, allowing better access for women juggling multiple activities to attend virtual workshops and interviews. The project's use of digital platforms enabled a greater reach outside the conventional network that London offers, toward geographically diverse communities of women working further afield in the UK.

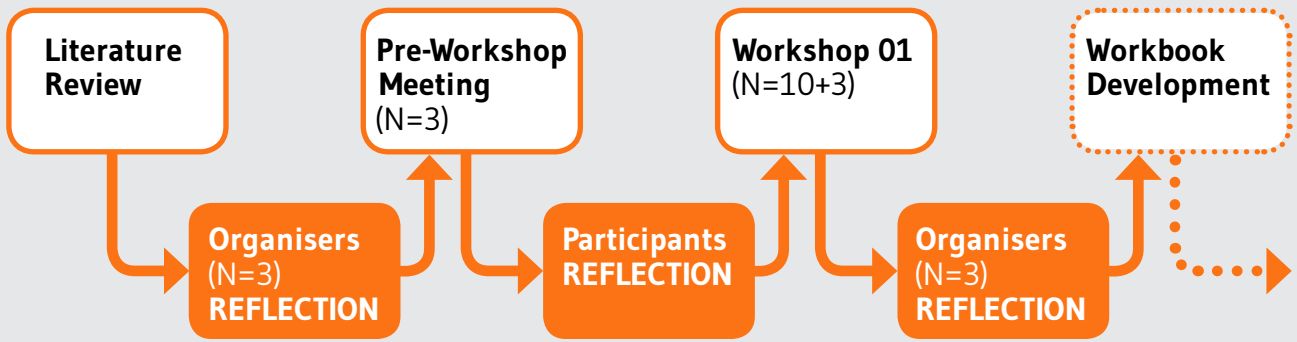
And lastly, why 'women'? We acknowledge terminology and its definitions have changed. During the research process, discussions ensued about new terminology [e.g., womxn, womxn+, etc.]. We tested this via our questionnaire where we asked participants to self-identify, which helped inform our decision to revert to 'women' as the most appropriate descriptor that was also perceived to be inclusive. We are aware there are further issues to investigate around intersectionality, ethnicity, age, class, gender identity, and neurodiversity, though this was not a specific focus of the pilot research. Nonetheless, we encouraged wider participation, and gained from these discussions, the results of which have helped inform the findings of this report.

## 1.5 Report Structure: Parts 2/3/4

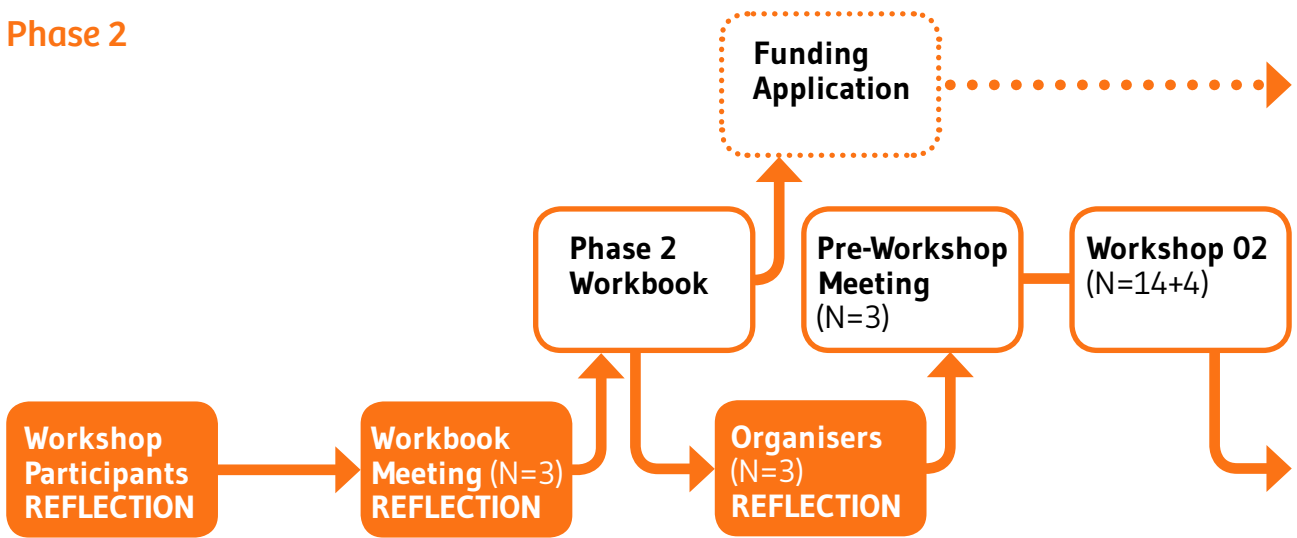
Part 2 of this report sets out the study design, methods and methodologies used in the research for Phase 3 of the project, as well as the evaluative tools adopted for analysis. Part 3 presents the results of the interviews and questionnaire data, and using thematic analysis, identifies key themes for further discussion. Part 4 draws together the findings of the overarching *Brave New Normal* project, resulting in an intergenerational mentoring model (IGM) based on the position that 'everyone leads, everyone learns'. The final section is a 'call to action' that brings together the experiences and perspectives of women working in graphic design today. The findings establish five key principles for taking this research forward. This overarching evaluative report (including results from the already completed Phase 1/2 report), will be disseminated and made available on partner websites.



### Phase 1



### Phase 2



### Phase 3

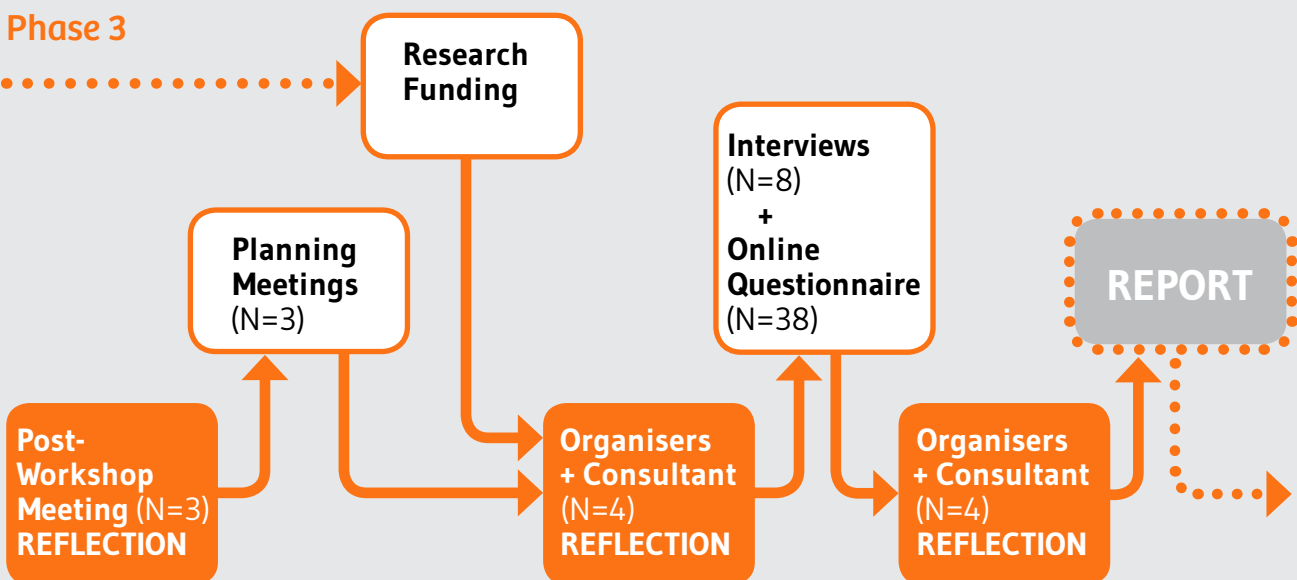


Diagram 1.1 Research Journey

## Part 2 Research

### 2.1 Methodology

*Brave New Normal* is an action research study, framed by a process of 'dialogic communication' (Pang, et al., 2009). Applying the overarching methodology of dialogic communication offered by Pang et al., such as 'mutual exchange', 'reciprocal interactions' and 'building relationships', participants are able to share in the production of new, collective knowledge.

*Brave New Normal: Phase 1* (July 2020), consisted of an initial 'scoping meeting' facilitated by the organisers (N=3) and attended by individuals (N=10) selected from the organisers' existing networks (WD+RU and HWoD). Participants were invited to submit a 5-minute sketch of their career/current situation in advance to kick-start the discussion. The event provided a semi-structured conversational platform, from which a set of questions or themes might be identified to inform a more detailed and exploratory second phase workshop. *Brave New Normal: Phase 2* (March 2021), comprised a participatory workshop, facilitated by the organisers and members of the Advisory Board, and attended by women working across the sector (N=18).

Both first and second phases of the project were framed by insights into cooperative practices (Sennett, 2012), to critically engage with the need – and indeed appetite – for developing an intergenerational mentoring model for women in graphic design. *Brave New Normal: Phase 3* extends and evaluates the existing research by introducing an online questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and an evaluative report.

### 2.2 Study Design

*Brave New Normal: Phase 3* (October 2021 to February 2022), is a mixed methods study comprising the collection of large-scale quantitative data (i.e., online anonymised questionnaire), and in-depth qualitative data (i.e., individual semi-structured interviews).

Mixed methods are frequently used within evaluation studies, the central premise being the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination "provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007: 5). The data collection combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, using triangulation, to improve the reliability of the overall strategy: "by having a cumulative view of data drawn from different contexts, we may, as in trigonometry, be able to triangulate the 'true' state of affairs by examining where the different data intersect" (Silverman, 2000: 98).

Importantly, the role of reflective and reflexive processes is central to this project. Reflection points have therefore been included in the overarching methodology, to deepen the analysis at each milestone, while informing the next stage of the research journey.

## 2.3 Research Tools

In the quantitative strand, an online questionnaire was developed according to the overarching aims of the study and informed by findings from *Brave New Normal: Phases 1 and 2*. This survey was prefaced with information regarding the project and included items to investigate socio-demographic information (e.g., preferred personal pronoun; geographical location; education status; employment status), in addition to open response questions relating to participants' working/mentoring in the sector (e.g., career changes; key issues affecting women graphic designers; impacts of the pandemic; previous experience of mentoring schemes). The questionnaire was designed to be anonymous; names were not requested. Google Forms was used to deliver the questionnaire and the designer enabled the feature in the form's settings ensuring no tracing back to the respondents.

In the qualitative strand, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to further investigate the aforementioned themes (i.e., background and education; experience of working in the sector; issues affecting women graphic designers; experiences of being either a mentor or mentee; recommendations). A Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form was designed, providing potential interviewees with a clear understanding of both the project and the interview process, prior to their participation.

## 2.4 Data Collection

The key aim was to focus on and capture a broad range of women's experiences of working in the graphic design profession. The questionnaire was delivered using purposeful sampling with participants working as graphic design practitioners, educators, or professionally in related industries. The criterion for selection for the questionnaire was based on: graphic designers who were known to and/or part of established women's networks of partner's organisations; recommendations by the project's Advisory Board; scoping to widen regional diversity through SMEs studios/agencies and freelancer's websites (where contact details are made public); followers of WD+RU on Twitter, and finally, building on existing connections to colleagues in UK HE sector who agreed to forward to alumni working regionally. Questionnaires were sent to 60+ participants (UK based). 38 individuals subsequently completed the online questionnaire from across the UK and beyond.

Potential interviewees were selected either through their prior involvement as participants in Phases 1 or 2, or were recommended to ensure diversity, locale, and experience, by members of the partner's organisations and the Advisory Board. Eight individuals were then invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the independent researcher. An introductory email invitation was sent, outlining the project's intention and request for interview. Once the participant responded with an expression of interest, the Participant Information and Consent Form was sent for signature. Interview meetings only took place once the signed form was returned. Eight audio recorded interviews were subsequently conducted online via Zoom with each lasting 30-45 minutes. Audio files were then transcribed, with data analysed using thematic analysis.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The online questionnaire was designed and delivered using Google Forms with resulting data uploaded to Excel. The quantitative study followed the five stages of: specification of data requirements; data collection; data processing and cleaning; data exploration and analysis; data visualisation and communication. Open response data was sifted, charted, and sorted in accordance with those themes emerging from the literature and the findings of *Brave New Normal: Phases 1 and 2*.

Telephone and/or online interviews were audio recorded, with audio files transcribed verbatim. Resulting data was subsequently analysed using 'thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2006), following the six stages of i.e., familiarisation; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; reviewing and reporting. The use of an interview schedule, including those areas of interest stimulated by data collected through the quantitative study, meant the analysis contained elements of a 'top down' deductive approach. However, transcripts were re-read, and themes identified at the semantic level – primarily by inductive analysis – using a 'bottom up' approach and where themes are strongly linked to the data itself (Patton, 1990).

Key themes and sub-themes were coded into categories, involving several close readings of the data. At the same time, the 'theoretical and epistemological commitments' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:84), of the researchers were recognised and a process of 'confirmability' of the codes was sought to ensure aims were met and interpretations of the data traceable (Nowel, et al., 2017). In reporting, study participants are described as 'co-researchers' as befits the non-hierarchical ethos of *Brave New Normal*.

## Part 3 Results

### 3.1 Introduction

As previously described, a brief online questionnaire was delivered to a purposeful sample via Google Forms. A link was sent to 60+ women graphic designers known to and/or part of established women's networks of partner's organisations. 38 individuals completed the survey comprising early, mid and senior or late career designers. In addition to items related to participant socio-demographics, the survey included several open response items to investigate the overarching themes of the study. Eight individuals were concurrently invited to participate in a semi-structured interview with the independent researcher, in order to further explore the key areas of research. Eight audio recorded interviews were conducted via Zoom, with data transcribed. Quantitative data was analysed using Excel, while qualitative datasets from both the questionnaires and interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The following section provides a description of those individuals completing the online questionnaire, as described in **Figure 3.1**.

### 3.2 Description of Participants

#### 3.2.1 Identity

The online questionnaire asked participants about their preferred personal pronoun(s) and/or how they identified. A total of 34 respondents identified as 'she/her' (90%); one respondent identified as 'woman' (2.5%), one as 'she/they' (2.5%) and one as 'they/them' (2.5%). The remaining participant preferred not to answer this question (2.5%).

#### 3.2.2 Location

When asked where they were located (i.e., city and/or region), a total of 14 respondents were located in London (37%), while 13 respondents (34%) were located in other parts of England (e.g., Bristol, Leicester, Manchester, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Thurrock). Two participants were located in Scotland (5%) and one was located in Northern Ireland (2.5%). The remaining five respondents (13%) were located outside of the UK (e.g., Barbados, Belgium, Germany, Poland), while three participants (8%) preferred not to answer this question.

#### 3.2.3 Education

The online questionnaire then asked participants about their design background and/or education, with a number of items provided including, e.g., online or workplace training, further education qualification(s), undergraduate and/or post-graduate degrees. 29 respondents (78%) had completed an undergraduate degree, while 16 had gone on to complete post-graduate studies (43%), including one doctorate (2.5%). Six respondents (16%) had studied for a further education qualification, while five respondents (13.5%) had completed workplace training. The two remaining respondents (5%) had entered the profession via 'numerous online courses' and 'diploma in industrial studies'.

### 3.2.4 Employment

Asked at what stage they were in their career (i.e., recent graduate, early career, mid-career, senior/late career) and the number of years design related experience they had, respondents included two recent graduates (5%), six early career designers (16%), 11 mid-career designers (29%) and 18 senior or late career designers (47%). The remaining participant (2.5%) preferred not to answer this question.

Characteristic	Frequency		Characteristic	Frequency	
<b>Identity</b>			<b>Stage in Career</b>		
She/Her	34	90%	Recent graduate	2	5%
Woman	1	2.5%	Early career	6	16%
She/They	1	2.5%	Mid-career	11	29%
They/Them	1	2.5%	Senior/late career	18	47%
Prefer not to say	1	2.5%	Prefer not to say	1	2.5%
<b>Location</b>			<b>Years of Experience</b>		
London	14	37%	1 to 5 years	9	24%
England	13	34%	6 to 10 years	6	16%
Scotland	2	5%	11 to 15 years	5	13%
N. Ireland	1	2.5%	16 to 20 years	7	18%
Non-UK	5	13%	21 to 25 years	3	8%
Prefer not to say	3	8%	26 to 30 years	6	16%
<b>Background/Education</b>			<b>Employment Status</b>		
Workplace training	5	13.5%	Freelance designer	6	16%
Further education	6	16%	In-house/studio employee	12	31.5%
Undergraduate degree	29	78%	Studio owner	10	26%
Post-graduate degree	16	43%	Academic/educator	6	16%
Doctorate	1	2.5%	Freelance/educator	3	8%
Other	2	5%	Prefer not to say	1	2.5%
Prefer not to say	0	0%			

**Figure 3.1 Description of Participants**

### 3.2.5 Experience

In terms of experience, nine respondents (24%) had worked between one and five years in the sector, while six (16%) had worked between six and ten years in graphic design; five respondents (13%) had 11 to 15 years' experience and seven (18%) had worked 16 to 20 years in the field. Three participants (8%) had 21 to 25 years' experience and six (16%) had worked 26 to 30 years in graphic design; the remaining two respondents (5%) reported having more than 30 years' experience.

The online survey subsequently asked participants to describe any career changes they had undertaken during their professional work. A total of 30 respondents (79%) had made career changes, while the remaining eight (21%) suggested they had remained in the same/similar position. For those individuals who changed role and/or career direction, nine (30%) had moved from industry into education; eight respondents (27%) had become freelance workers and four (13%) had established their own design studio. The remaining nine participants (30%) had made a range of changes, including e.g., progressing from the commercial to the voluntary/charity sector; moving from another sector into graphic design; focusing upon a more specific area of design.

Finally, participants were asked to describe their current employment status, with a number of possible items provided including, e.g., freelance designer, in-house/studio employee, studio owner, academic/educator. 12 respondents (31.5%) described themselves as in house/studio employee, while ten (26%) were studio owners; six respondents (16%) described themselves as freelance designer, while a further six (16%), were academics or educators. The remaining three respondents (8%) defined themselves as both freelance designer and educator, while one participant (2.5%) preferred not to answer this question.

## 3.3 Thematic analysis

### 3.3.1 Overview of thematic analysis

As described in **Table 3.1**, thematic analysis of qualitative data (i.e., questionnaire open responses and interview data) yielded ten distinct preliminary themes with 18 secondary themes. The initial coding process involved reading and re-reading the data, labelling quotations and sections according to their content. This open coding was followed by thematic analysis to identify key themes and/or link themes together. The second stage analysis grouped the material into broader topics, identifying overarching themes. The criteria for identifying themes were according to their prevalence across the data and relevance to the main research questions (i.e., the key factors or issues facing women currently working in graphic design; the short and longer term impacts of the global pandemic upon work and lives; participants' prior experience of mentoring; expectations of an intergenerational mentoring scheme; how it might benefit women graphic designers and instigate industry change). Findings are presented in the following order:

- Overview of thematic analysis
- Factors affecting women working in graphic design
- Impacts of COVID-19 upon life and work
- An (intergenerational) mentoring scheme.

Thematic Area	Preliminary Themes	Secondary Themes	Examples from Data
<b>Factors affecting women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Male dominated/led industry</li> <li>● Invisibility of female leaders</li> <li>● Lack of respect or recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bias and/or discrimination</li> <li>● Inequality of pay/salaries</li> <li>● Lack of flexible working provision</li> <li>● Lack of structured career pathways</li> <li>● Imposter syndrome</li> <li>● Lack of confidence/validation</li> </ul>	<p><i>"We face discrimination on a day to day basis, from pay gaps to lack of respect when we bring ideas to the table."</i></p> <p><i>"Issues include sexism, poor management, maternity leave, working hours, competition rather than collaboration."</i></p> <p><i>"Recognition is a big issue. The lack of visibility of women in graphic design impacts upon professional opportunities."</i></p>
<b>Impacts of COVID-19</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Working remotely and/or from home</li> <li>● Lack of freelance opportunities</li> <li>● Time for reassessment/reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Greater provision for flexible working</li> <li>● Improved work/life balance</li> <li>● Increased social isolation</li> <li>● Financial challenges</li> <li>● Decreased confidence</li> <li>● Change of career/direction</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Suddenly people only interested in working with someone in the same postcode were happy to work across countries and even continents."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm slowly getting work back in, but I lost a lot of confidence. Clients are behaving like they are doing us a favour; there's a lot more pressure on all sides. Fees have been widely cut, sometimes by 50%."</i></p> <p><i>"I now have a much better work/life balance, as I only take on work which benefits me and which I actually want to do, rather than stretching myself too thinly in the service of others."</i></p>
<b>(Intergenerational) mentoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Previous experience of mentoring</li> <li>● Expectations of mentoring schemes</li> <li>● Supporting women graphic designers</li> <li>● Instigating industry change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mutual respect and reciprocity</li> <li>● Sharing knowledge, skills and resources</li> <li>● Establishing new, supportive networks</li> <li>● Raising profile of women leaders</li> <li>● Challenging outmoded practices</li> <li>● Inspiring and motivating new designers</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Active listening is key. Turning up, being committed to the process, with mentee and mentor both being open and respectful of each other."</i></p> <p><i>"It would provide a means for sharing, supporting, passing on knowledge and skills, a really valuable resource in both directions."</i></p> <p><i>"Like feminist consciousness raising, it could be really useful to empower, support and offer agency which doesn't always happen in the traditional workplace."</i></p>

**Table 3.1 Overview of Thematic Analysis**



### 3.3.2 Factors affecting women working in graphic design

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked to describe the factors affecting women currently working in graphic design. Preliminary themes comprised: the negative impacts of working in a male dominated industry; the invisibility of female leaders; a lack of respect or recognition for women graphic designers, while secondary themes included: workplace bias and sexual discrimination; inequality of pay/salaries; a lack of flexible working provision for women with caring responsibilities; a lack of structured career pathways; imposter syndrome, a lack of confidence and/or little sense of validation.

“Factors include imposter syndrome, undervaluing of one’s own skills leading to a failure to negotiate pay correctly, isolation in male dominated environments, sexism, lack of support for working mothers, lack of maternity leave in particular for the freelance population, discrimination based on the intersections of their identity, i.e., women who are disabled, queer, POC, etc.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Participants repeatedly described the systemic issues of working in male-led design studios or practices. Recent research reports that 78% of the UK’s in-work designers are male, as compared with 53% males across the general workforce (Design Council, 2018). However, more than half of students (63%) completing creative arts and design degree courses are women. In spite of larger numbers of women studying and subsequently entering the industry, participants suggested they remain in junior design positions unless they establish their own studios. Several participants indicated their salaries were not commensurate with male colleagues, yet they had been recruited by women. Such biases were felt to engender a lack of respect or credibility, leading to frustration and demotivation within the workplace.

“Unequal pay affects women working in graphic design. I found out that my male predecessor was earning £10k more than me to perform the same job. Yet, all my bosses and the people who hired me were female. I still wonder why women in design perpetuate unequal pay. Another factor I noticed is credibility. I have often walked into a space where I was invited to speak or mentor and diminished by high profile male designers who looked me up and down. This feels unacceptable.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Early career participants suggested the ideas – and indeed voices – of male design colleagues are taken more seriously, while their faults are often overlooked. In addition, women reported male managers fail to support career progression within the industry, overlooking their potential when promotions arise. These issues were noted to have a negative impact upon confidence and self-esteem, subsequently affecting performance and job satisfaction.

“Personally, I’ve found that men’s ideas are listened to with more respect. Also, whenever I made a small mistake or make a change, male colleagues would point it out bluntly but women colleagues would understand and approach me differently, so I didn’t feel that I’d done something bad or wrong. When I gained a promotion at work, women colleagues were pushing me to go for the role but male colleagues never mentioned it or steered me towards applying.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Mid-career participants described being encouraged into administrative positions, rather than design roles, once again attesting to individual skills and experience being undervalued. A lack of flexibility was noted by those with parental and/or caring responsibilities, while participants aiming to start a

family suggested their career would be negatively impacted by such a decision. There appeared to be a general lack of awareness or understanding regarding the female lifecycle within the industry, with little or no support given to those women experiencing menstruation, pregnancy or menopause.

“Capabilities being under-estimated, pushed into organisational/ administrative roles over design roles, under representation in the industry which does not correlate to women in education and teaching, sexism and micro sexism based decision-making or comments, difficulty developing career and having a child, no work-related support or sick days for menstrual pain or symptoms of menopause, still expected to maintain full-time workload (and some) and maintain domestic life.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Lastly, participants repeatedly described feelings of ‘imposter syndrome’, with even senior women designers reporting a lack of confidence in promoting their practice and/or negotiating fees. Participants at all career stages expressed concern regarding the continuing invisibility of mature women role models or leaders within the industry, which they felt compounded those aforementioned systemic issues. Crucially, this lack of representation was suggested to hinder cohesion and collaboration between women designers, something worthy of note.

“Speaking personally, I have never felt as confident ‘selling’ what I do as I would like nor in negotiating fees. I am also acutely aware that older women graphic designers are rare and that for younger women designers, there are few role models. This troubles me greatly. Added to this, I sense that female clients who are younger than me find it intimidating to work with an older female designer. I suspect this would not be the case were I a man.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

### 3.3.3 Impacts of COVID-19 upon life and work

Survey respondents and interviewees were asked in what ways COVID-19 had changed their professional lives (if at all) and, whether they envisaged any such changes to have either temporary or longer-term impacts. The larger majority participants (82%) described significant changes to their employment, while 63% felt these shifts would be permanent. Reported changes included: a move to working remotely/from home; increased/decreased flexibility; extended reach in terms of clients; lack of social interactions; loss of contracts/commissions; reduced income; issues with technology; lack of professional development/training opportunities; evaluation of current role and/or profession.

“The pandemic shifted my work life dramatically. Suddenly we no longer gathered in the studio but instead, worked from home. Strangely, I found this experience quite helpful. I felt more confident in my home surroundings than in the studio, as hierarchies were not so obvious and it felt quite levelling. I also appreciated being able to juggle household chores before work, when I would usually be commuting. I did miss the social interaction with colleagues, but didn’t miss it enough to want to return to the studio full time.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

During the initial stages of the pandemic, lockdown restrictions required a move from studio or office-based practice to working remotely, described as having both positive and negative impacts. For certain participants, working from home increased flexibility and disassembled hierarchies, while enabling individuals to successfully extend their professional reach – nationally and internationally. For others however, the necessary reliance on technology resulted in ‘anger and frustration’, ‘poor communication’ and ‘screen fatigue’, with online meetings often felt to be ‘challenging’ in presenting creative ideas to colleagues and clients.

“I was meant to begin an internship with a magazine, which I was really looking forward to but it sadly fell through due to the pandemic. It was really hard to find a design role as I wasn’t able to build my CV with design experience and many roles wanted at least one- or two-years’ industry experience. I also found it difficult and tiring to have Zoom meetings all of the time, to go over my designs and ideas. Conversation is much more fluid when you are sat around a table together – or even just working in the same space as other creatives – where you can more easily bounce ideas off of each other.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

For those individuals with caring responsibilities and/or children, home schooling greatly impinged on their professional practice, with participants reporting they had taken more responsibility for this and other domestic tasks. Not all employers were suggested to be understanding of the undue pressures placed upon participants, who in several cases became ‘anxious’, ‘depressed’, ‘isolated’ and/or ‘overwhelmed’ with balancing the demands of home and work during these challenging times.

“It reduced my network of contacts but in some ways it levelled the field, as technical expertise was valued more. It became harder to balance competing demands from my professional life being carried out in the domestic space. Communication with and connection to my team was diminished. Isolation was a strong feeling and I became overwhelmed by life/work pressures. My caring responsibilities were not factored in at all, with no flexibility given.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Alongside the many challenges of remote working and the subsequent impacts upon mental health, certain participants reported a loss of income or financial security during the pandemic. Freelance workers in particular lost contracts and/or those they had were postponed, while new commissions became more competitive to gain. Some larger design studios were reported to be offering their services pro bono, thereby further reducing the potential for individuals to secure paid work.

“Fees have been widely cut, sometimes by 50%. It’s a tricky time to navigate and also, it’s tricky to find a safe space to speak with people about all this. Another thing I have experienced is high profile studios offering to do work pro bono for my clients. I was really shocked when this happened, as I lost a paid project. It’s a time where studios should not be working for free when they don’t need to add to their portfolio. This issue increased in lockdown.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Finally, several participants suggested the upheaval experienced through the pandemic had prompted them to evaluate their current professional role and/or employment status. In spite of the precarious nature of the employment market, 16% participants moved to establishing a freelance practice and/or their own studio, while just 7% made the shift to working for a design company, academic institution or other commercial organisation. Those who decided to work independently described having the time to ‘reassess’ or ‘reflect upon’ their career, questioning whether they wished to continue on this particular (design specific) journey and/or change direction completely. In addition to the ‘uncertainty’ or ‘flux’ caused by COVID-19, reasons given for movement included: poor pay and/or working conditions; a lack of respect or recognition; a lack of flexibility for creative practice.

“It made me realise that working full time in a permanent role was not for me. It took up a lot of my creative energy, it was underpaid and very restrictive – both creatively and timewise. Many people stay in full time roles for financial security, however my counterpart lost her job for thinly veiled reasons, and it was badly paid compared to freelancing anyway. I no longer saw the benefits of full-time permanent roles, if I’m honest.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

### 3.3.4 An (intergenerational) mentoring scheme

Data collected via the online questionnaire revealed 30 participants (79%) had previous experience of a mentoring scheme. Of these, 11 (29%) had been a mentor, four (11%) had been a mentee and 15 (39%) had experience of being both mentor and mentee. The remaining eight participants (21%) had no prior experience. Interview data meanwhile revealed two participants (28.5%) had been a mentor, three (43%) had been both mentor and mentee, while two (28.5%) had no prior experience. Of those who had already engaged in mentoring schemes, delivery had been predominantly through: a combination of formal and informal arrangements (32%); via their academic/education institution (24.5%); formal schemes within the workplace (19%); informal arrangements outside of the workplace (17%).

“While working with agencies, I was a mentee. As soon as I was self-employed, I became a mentor with universities and also, design platforms. My mentors have helped me handle my fears and self-doubt. In being a mentor, I find fulfilment in helping other people reach their potential. There was a period in my life where I was trying to reach my potential and find validation. Now that I’m filling my own cup and that validation for myself, I have more to give to other people.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

For the far larger majority participants, previous experience of mentoring programmes had been positive. For mentees, the process was described as ‘challenging’, ‘useful’ and ‘stimulating’ with individual mentors reported to be ‘critical yet supportive’, ‘validating’ and ‘pragmatic’ in their approach.

“What I really liked about my mentor is that she is very confident and just knows her stuff. If I asked a professional or even personal question, just getting an answer because she’s been through it. She has a pragmatic way of thinking. It was really useful to off-load or ask advice about something that I might be struggling with or might want to progress in. That’s the main reason I wanted her to be my mentor.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

For mentors meanwhile, the experience was noted to be ‘interesting’ and ‘rewarding’, increasing ‘empathy and understanding’ towards their peers. Participants who had just entered the profession described how they were able to support students and/or recent graduates, sharing newly gained skills and resources while gaining insights into leadership during the earliest stages of their career. Importantly, the mentoring relationship was repeatedly reported to be of benefit to both parties – mentor and mentee – whether early, mid or senior/late career professionals, something worthy of note.

“Not being too far away from having graduated myself, I was able to offer advice as to how they could improve their work and also, think about the steps to getting into the industry, that sort of thing. What I gained is a little more understanding or empathy for students. I wanted to be a better leader in my professional work, so how can I be of service to someone else in a leadership capacity? It gave me some experience in that.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

When asked about their expectations for a potential (intergenerational) mentoring scheme, participants suggested ‘clear boundaries, direction and guidance’, ‘time and commitment’, ‘regular communication’ were all essential elements of a successful programme, ensuring both mentor and mentee engaged in ‘active listening’, while being ‘prepared and present’ during meetings. In addition, ‘mutual respect and trust’, ‘empathy and accountability’ were deemed necessary, with an understanding of how positive outcomes might be ‘reciprocal’, no matter what stage of their career, as previously described.

“It would blow the lid off issues that young designers experience and think of as ‘normal’. There are tactics older women designers have confidence in using that would really benefit younger designers and the sector more broadly. As a lecturer, I am often asked for advice in dealing with the sexist work culture. Sharing examples of alternative design labour, collective practices, flexible studios focused on a work-life balance would ensure fewer women are squeezed out at the beginning of their careers.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

Highlighting the ‘softer skills’ that women could bring to such a relationship was also noted, skills often undervalued in male led/dominated industries. Such a scheme was predicted to be ‘confidence boosting’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘motivating’, bringing ‘fresh outlooks’ and ‘multiple benefits’ (e.g., sharing knowledge, skills and resources; establishing new, supportive networks; offering practical advice to recently graduated/early career designers), for industry professionals from across the UK and beyond.

“Realistic life and work experiences shared could inform where there are opportunities as well as highlighting flaws within the sector. It would create visibility for women, providing a support network, while tackling inequality and/or bad practice. It would encourage more women to consider what they could actually do, not to limit their ambitions but to know their rights and importantly, have the back-up from other professionals who could support and advise.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

In these and other ways, an (intergenerational) mentoring programme was anticipated to support the work of women graphic designers in a post-COVID world, while also instigating change across the industry (e.g., breaking down traditional hierarchies; challenging outmoded practices; developing a less competitive and/or more collaborative culture). When asked ‘how’ such a scheme might transform culture within academic settings, design studios and the wider sector, participants suggested it would ‘bring diversity’, ‘foster communication’, ‘provide new role models’, ‘raise the profile of experienced professionals’, thereby recognising and validating the existing breadth of knowledge held by women graphic designers. Crucially, participants suggested potential change(s) would result in ‘more thoughtful design’, since diversity and cross-fertilisation would result in work representing new perspectives or voices, creating outputs inclusive to a far wider audience.

“It may help to break down some of perceived hierarchies, allowing us all to do a better job. Traditionally, this industry has been very competitive but there’s a tangible shift occurring towards a more collaborative culture. Mentoring is exactly the kind of thing to foster that. It would also result in far more thoughtful design. Working in silos results in design that speaks to a single audience. Intergenerational mentoring would introduce voices to the table who wouldn’t otherwise have fed into the design.”

BNN Co-Researcher, Autumn 2021

## Part 4 Resilience

### 4.1 A Brave New Normal

This brief study was stimulated by the *Brave New Normal* project, with women graphic designers sharing both their professional and personal experiences in a safe and supportive environment. During *Brave New Normal: Phase 1 and Phase 2*, there emerged a collective need to investigate the main issues affecting women graphic designers today, including the impacts of COVID-19, with its uncertainties and potential outcomes for the sector. The study also sought to explore participants' previous experience of mentoring and what might be the 'essential ingredients' for establishing an effective (inter) generational mentoring programme for those women studying and working across the sector today.

A total of 70 individuals engaged in the study, comprising early, mid, and late career designers from across the UK and beyond. The previous sections have described the methods used and identified key themes emerging from the data. The research process coincided with the beginning of the global pandemic, demonstrating first-hand how COVID-19 had magnified existing inequalities in the workplace, while signalling new challenges for women graphic designers. Importantly, the study underlined a necessity to question received narratives about career lifecycles, more especially in a post-pandemic landscape.

The project's contribution resides in laying a systematic foundation for a research-focussed approach as applied within the field of graphic design. It addresses a substantial gap in the existing literature concerning the future of work for women working professionally within the field. Additionally, the research has identified the urgent need and potentiality for the application of intergenerational mentoring across the career stage spectrum in the field. This urgency is highlighted by recent reports of a post-pandemic work force resulting in early retirement for over 50s due to health and wellbeing. (Bell, 2022) Such challenges will ultimately impact knowledge production and exchange. A secondary contribution of this project resides in collecting original interviews and information from questionnaires from women facing design career challenges during the pandemic.

*Brave New Normal* seeks to examine current practice, while stimulating critical debate across the sector. These ambitions are being realised through *Brave New Normal's* model of delivery (i.e., co-design; mutual exchange; reciprocal interactions; building relationships) and also, through its specific activities (e.g., interactive workshops; networking events; discussion forum; participatory research). However, from the research, it is evident there remains work to be done. During the study, participants were asked 'How might we ensure preparedness for women entering/aligning with a future workplace?' The resulting recommendations might provide an interesting starting point for dialogue and/or developments across the sector, thereby prompting the beginnings of a *brave new normal*:

- **Encourage and empower women designers through education, training and mentoring**
- **Build confidence and self-esteem, regardless of background, ethnicity, gender, social status**
- **Ensure work settings and practices are aligned to the needs of women designers**
- **Provide guidance for establishing contacts, self-promotion, managing workplace inequalities**
- **Develop a safe, supportive, and inclusive network of women graphic designers**
- **Create an online platform with access to relevant resources and events**
- **Invite male educators and leaders in design to join the discussion.**

## 4.2 Everyone Leads, Everyone Learns

*Brave New Normal* advocates for an approach to intergenerational mentoring to include a two-way dialogue – or 360° perspective – where both participants stand to benefit equally. The project seeks to delve more deeply into a dialogic process for women in graphic design, while contributing to the existing body of research pertaining to intergenerational mentoring. *Brave New Normal: Phase 3* also sought to determine whether there might be new ways of delivering intergenerational mentoring to women currently studying and working in graphic design. Drawing from the experiences of *Brave New Normal* participants, it is evident such a scheme would be of both interest and potential benefit to women designers and the wider sector. However, what might constitute a model of effective practice? How might it be designed, delivered and by whom? Does it remain appropriate to use the terminology of mentoring/mentor/mentee, in attempting to promote less hierarchical and/or more inclusive structures? What are the ‘key components’ for such a programme to achieve maximum, positive outcomes? And crucially, how might we ensure such a scheme meets the diverse aspirations and needs of those women studying and/or working across the sector today?

The traditional intergenerational mentoring (IGM) model is seen to create an environment where everyone leads and everyone learns (Grima, et al., 2014; McArthur, Wilson and Hunter, 2017; Satterly, et al., 2018; Gadowska-Lila, 2020). The process for this model involves four distinct phases: planning the programme; assessing individual skills, experiences and needs; matching based upon those individual skills and needs; implementing the mentoring relationships. Literature pertaining to existing IGM programmes (Karcher, et al., 2006; Hatton-Yeo and Telfe, 2008), build upon the aforementioned four phases, outlining ten essential stages to consider, in designing a model of effective practice. In combination with the findings of the present study, these might therefore provide a valuable foundation and ‘jumping off point’ for the further development of *Brave New Normal*.

- i. Establish clear aims and objectives
- ii. Be conservative in estimating impacts
- iii. Allow time for planning and development
- iv. Identify target group(s) and organisation(s)
- v. Engage administrative or managerial support
- vi. Recruit and assess mentors/mentees
- vii. Match and orientate mentors/mentees
- viii. Launch and implement the programme
- ix. Provide ongoing support/supervision
- x. Monitor and evaluate the programme.

### **i. Establish clear aims and objectives**

As with all new initiatives engaging diverse individuals and organisations, it is important to establish clear aims and objectives from the outset. What do stakeholders seek to gain through an intergenerational mentoring scheme? What resources, funding and time will be allocated to the programme? How will it be managed and by whom? How will you measure success for the individuals/organisations involved? How might you monitor and evaluate outcomes – and indeed learning – resulting from the programme?

### **ii. Be conservative in estimating impacts**

For certain individuals, the intergenerational mentoring experience has been described as transformative. However, for the larger majority, benefits may be modest albeit meaningful. Mentoring aims to enable individuals to better achieve their potential and contribute fully, rather than existing as a problem-solving exercise; nor is it to be seen to address underlying, systemic issues. Mentoring is therefore most effective when delivered alongside other modes of support and not as a stand-alone intervention.

### **iii. Allow time for planning and development**

Existing schemes propose it may take between six and nine months from agreeing in principle to provide a mentoring programme, to mentors and mentees then beginning to meet. It's also advisable to start small, with up to ten matches proposed, allowing time and space for the programme to develop. The literature suggests schemes prove unsuccessful when they 'over promise' in terms of outputs/outcomes, are under-resourced, have completed insufficient research and/or have not sought agreement from all stakeholders.

### **iv. Identify target group(s) and organisation(s)**

Mentoring is evidenced to assist in moments of transition during life and/or work, when the tendency to operate through habit or routine is challenged and individuals become open to growth and change. However, it is valuable to remember that mentoring is not a panacea. How might the programme therefore support the development of a particular group (e.g., women graphic designers), at this point in time (i.e., a post-pandemic landscape)? How will potential mentors/mentees be identified? How will potential organisations be engaged? A programme is most effective when all stakeholders are fully committed to its aims and objectives, while remaining open to exchange and new learning.

### **v. Engage administrative and/or managerial support**

The literature recommends that programmes have an agreed contact person/point for all the parties involved, where information and support are readily available. Larger mentoring programmes allocate sufficient resources for a paid coordinator, who provides a case management role. This individual might be responsible for, e.g., organising the training of mentors; overseeing the processes of assessment and matching mentors/mentees; providing ongoing supervision and/or support for pairings; organising and promoting events included in the programme.

### **vi. Recruit and assess mentors/mentees**

As noted in the findings, mentors need to demonstrate a wide diversity of skills and attitudes to support mentees. Intergenerational mentoring schemes highlight the benefits experienced by both parties, no matter age, background, or education. However, it is recognised that an early career designer may gain from the life and work experiences of a mid or late career designer, while these more senior members of the workforce will undoubtedly benefit from the perspectives of women just entering the sector. Potential mentors/mentees therefore need to be assessed for their suitability, along with their interests, skills and experiences. The time, resources and energy required to target and enlist committed participants should not be underestimated. Expenses, including e.g., transport, subsistence, activity costs should be reimbursed and not present a barrier to engagement.



### **vii. Match and orientate mentors/mentees**

Mentors and mentees alike should be clear about the programme's goals, guidelines, and parameters, along with the roles they are expected to undertake. Participants will require information about their partners, as well as appropriate expectations regarding the types of activities and relationships in which they will be engaged. The level and type of support available should also be clarified for all stakeholders. Pre-programme training or orientation sessions should explore issues pertaining to prejudice and stereotyping, especially in an intergenerational context.

Activities need to be 'developmentally appropriate'. This entails taking into account competencies (e.g., readiness to create and explore), as well as limitations (e.g., mobility and cognitive functioning), of mentors/mentees. The matching process in the intergenerational mentoring model is different to traditional and/or reverse mentoring models. In both traditional and reverse mentoring matching processes, mentors and mentees are defined by seniority in their position. In IGM programmes, the matching process attempts to redefine and de-emphasise seniority, focusing upon the skills and needs of each member equally.

### **viii. Launch and implement the programme**

This stage will be dependent upon assessing IGM programme participants' needs and skills. It should be flexible in order to be designed and led by the mentors/mentees themselves. It is recommended that all members meet as a group and at regular intervals, in order to reflect upon the unique intergenerational contributions that each brings to the programme. This intentional – and dynamic – interchange will enable discussion, relationship growth and new, professional development opportunities.

### **ix. Provide ongoing support/supervision**

In order for the IGM programme to be successful, the literature recommends ongoing administrative support and/or supervision for all stakeholders (i.e., mentors, mentees, participant organisations). Coordinators will need to support the new model of leading and learning. IGM programmes are designed to incorporate multifaceted relationships with the goal of enhanced learning and knowledge sharing opportunities, enabling all participants to benefit. In addition, coordinators should provide opportunities for ongoing assessment as the needs and experiences of each participant change and develop.

### **x. Monitor and evaluate the programme**

It is crucial that the development of mentoring relationships and overall progress towards goals and/or targets is monitored. This maximises the likelihood of resolving problems and/or conflicts at the earliest stage. Monitoring involves gathering evidence on an ongoing basis to ensure that relationships are progressing as planned. Evaluation needs to provide evidence of outcomes measured against the original aims and objectives of the programme. Appropriate tools need to be decided upon at the beginning of any programme. An effective evaluation will not only evidence performance against targets from the perspective of the full range of stakeholders, but it will also provide recommendations regarding how to make the programme more effective in the future.

## **4.3 A Call to Action**

The present study brings together the experiences and perspectives of numerous women working in graphic design today. The research has inevitably prompted more questions than it has answered: how women freelancers will adjust to a shrinking economy; how mothers – and indeed fathers – might manage caring responsibilities in a post-pandemic landscape; how the design industry will support graduates as they enter the workforce; how the sector might address those systemic issues highlighted in this report.

Those engaged in the *Brave New Normal* project have a vision of the future where women graphic designers occupy positions as creative decision makers and industry leaders; where their life experiences and diverse histories are both respected and shared as a matter of course. Women designers will have equal access to high quality education, training, and employment opportunities alongside their male peers. Importantly, the sector will improve its efforts to value and empower women designers and seek out their involvement whether as consumers, audiences, educators, or colleagues. We remain some distance from these aspirations. We are therefore asking both educators and design leaders to sign up to the following five principles, underpinned by a process of intergenerational mentoring:

- **A need for education institutions and design studios to include the multiple perspectives of women in all creative outputs, including exhibitions and events**
- **A need for design organisations to challenge discrimination in all its manifestations**
- **Improved awareness training across the sector regarding gender equality, employment rights, disability and/or access needs**
- **Education and training programmes to be designed and delivered in consultation with women professionals from across the sector**
- **A promotion of diversity and inclusion within and across the sector, with increased opportunities for women in education and employment.**

### Rethinking Terminology

In the early workshops with our Co-Researchers, the issue of terminology and its use was raised as a potential barrier to facilitating further discussions on intergenerational mentoring as a two-way, inclusive process. As the project progressed, we formulated a question asking what language could be used to describe this new model. A single word or phrase has yet to emerge that accurately reflects the process, though responses from the Co-Researchers provide useful insights as to why the concepts around intergenerational mentoring might be needing attention. As a methodological approach, rethinking terminology offers a way for opening-up conversations to gain deeper understanding of the issues which matter to those who participated in *Brave New Normal*.

“Better ways of describing such a programme? Not really. Unless it’s like (inter)gen mentoring. I think it’s fine.”

“I thought about what wisdom would be and how we could tap into that. Something about ‘wisdom sharing’.”

“In terms of terminology, something around inclusivity just isn’t there. This is for everyone, with everyone.”

“...something that has that dual relationship. It’s kind of a friend but can also zoom out a little bit and see the thing a bit wider and structurally.”

“There’s something nice about the term ‘sisters’ because there’s an equality there. There’s no hierarchy and there’s just this idea of holding space for another woman.... it’s women holding the space for women, or women supporting women.”

## 4.4 Next Steps

Our intent has always been for this pilot project to be a catalyst for further conversations. *Brave New Normal* will be made available on partner websites, and copies sent to advisory board members including design advocates at the RSA, Design Council, and the British Council. Plans for dissemination also include a launch event to be held in Autumn 2022, where, importantly, we can bring our Co-Researchers together, help grow these mentoring networks, and invite further discussion on the issues that are important to women regarding the future of work for a post-pandemic world.

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# Afterword

It is now March 2022 and whilst a normalcy of sorts has returned to UK society, the post-pandemic cultural sector remains under threat. As we were going to press, a new report commissioned by the UKRI: AHRC (2022), was published. In this, the editors remark: 'The UK's cultural sector is undoubtedly at an inflection point and facing imminent burnout as well as skills and workforce gaps. It therefore urgently needs to adopt regenerative modes of working.' (Walmsley, 2022: 68) Their key findings are not dissimilar to our own pilot results, especially in terms of gender: women working in the cultural sector suffered relatively worse socially and economically than their male counterparts. The imperative for us remains to utilise supportive intergenerational mentoring practices to address this imbalance as women navigate graphic design careers in a post-Covid-19 world.

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## Enquiries

Professor Teal Triggs  
School of Communication  
Royal College of Art  
Garden House, Dorando Close  
London W12 7FN  
United Kingdom  
[soc-research@rca.ac.uk](mailto:soc-research@rca.ac.uk)

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## Colophon

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# Appendix

# Brave New Normal Workshop

## Participant Feedback, Preliminary Analysis and Questionnaire

Held on 17 July 2020 via Zoom

### Project Introduction

**Brave New Normal** is a project which scopes through cooperative practices (Sennett 2012) the need and appetite for developing an intergenerational mentoring model for women in graphic design. We are confronted with an ever-increasing need to critically address stereotypes, inclusivity and new working practices. Rapidly shifting career contexts (accelerated by the pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests and an increasingly ageing workforce), mean that we need to rethink the 'workforce experience' for women in graphic design and to redefine the ways in which industry and academia interact in support of women of all ages with regard to training and development opportunities.

**Brave New Normal** draws on mentoring expertise from academia, design organisations and collectives, freelancers and design studios. Via a consultative process, our intent is to question received narratives about career lifecycles and explore how different kinds of knowledge are valued.

### Phase 1: Brave New Normal Workshop

#### Workshop Participants

Held on Friday 17 July 2020, the aim of **Phase 1: Brave New Normal Workshop**, was to provide a semi-structured conversational platform, from which a set of questions or themes could be identified with the view to inform a more detailed and exploratory second phase workshop. During the project's planning stages, the new working context of COVID-19 necessitated a shift from hosting in-person workshops to using a safer remote delivery online platform (Zoom). The workshop questions were revised to reflect an emerging 'new normal' which took into account emerging working practices for women in an age of a pandemic. The questions asked participants to consider career lifecycles in relation to two questions: 'What is this brave new normal?' And, 'what does it mean for women in graphic design?' The role of intergenerational mentoring remained at the core of the project, but with a new emphasis on championing cooperative practices and fostering skills for emerging working practices.

#### Participants:

Sevra Davis, Director of Architecture, Fashion, and Design, British Council  
Joanna Choukeir, Director of Design and Innovation, RSA  
Cat Drew, Chief Design Officer, Design Council  
Laura Gordon, Research-led Graphic Designer and Tutor  
Ashley Evans, Service Designer at Future Gov and Mentor

Alexandra McCracken, Freelance, LCC BA (2018)  
Marion Bissierier, Freelance, LCC BA (2019)  
Baki Haider, Freelance & recent RCA MA (2020)  
Laura Service, Studio Ilka, co-founder and Creative Director  
Joanna Hughes, Studio Ilka, Internship

#### Organisers:

Teal Triggs: Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)  
Siân Cook, Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)  
Lorna Allan, Hidden Women Of Design (HWOD)

## REFLECTION 1: Ethics

See online questionnaire form at: <https://forms.gle/SFxia66SZwJh54pa6>

Participation in our questionnaire is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time up to the point of publication and there will be no disadvantage if you decide not to complete the study.

Please note:

- In the analysis of the workshop we anonymised comments (so they are not attributed to any one individual).
- In this pdf report we are seeking additional views in the formation of workshop questions. These views will not be attributed to any one individual.
- We may want to include your workshop presentation sketches in our findings report which, if reproduced, will be anonymised.
- Images or quotes, which may allow you to be identified will only be used with your express permission.
- We wish to include your name and relevant professional details in the final report as a participant/member of the workshop and BNN Advisory Group.

## Methods

The starting point for this project was an online scoping workshop, comprising 10 invited participants (N=10) and three organisers (N=3). The 'purposeful sample' size for this one-hour workshop was determined as an optimum participant number necessary to test the efficacy of the proposed methods and ensure enough variables to provide initial insights (Marshall 1996:523).

For the invitational workshop held in Phase 1, participants were selected from the organisers' existing networks, namely: Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU) and Hidden Women of Design (HWOD). The criteria used to select participants addressed the intergenerational remit of the project, whilst also ensuring a range of voices, mindful of factors such as ethnicity, geographic location, and the professional experiences of women working within a UK context as designers, educators or senior managers in design-related organisations. All but one participant from the original shortlist was able to attend the first workshop (due to previous work commitments). However, an alternative participant was identified, fruitfully extending the project's scope to include women who were involved in internships. Overall, the use of an online format provided greater accessibility for some participants who previously may have found attending a workshop in person problematic due to travel time and distance, childcare arrangements, caring responsibilities and so forth.

A pre-meeting brief was introduced asking participants to take 'five minutes' to reflect on their current work situation. The main question took into account received narratives about career lifecycles and how different kinds of knowledge are valued. This question became more focused when asked within the context of the pandemic.

The workshop played to the strengths of this group of communicators, asking each to visualise their current situation in the form of a sketch or diagram representing, for example, what they saw as their current work/life balance, career trajectory, professional life, or work challenges. The visualisations were returned prior to the workshop as jpgs to form a curated slide deck. During the workshop participants were asked to introduce their visualisation to the group in short 'Pecha kucha-like' presentations and describe their intentions, key challenges or questions participants may have encountered in their careers thus far. A general discussion followed which was annotated in the chat function of Zoom. The decision was taken not to record the meeting in order to allow for a more open discussion.



Following on from the workshop, the participant descriptions and key discussion points formed the basis of a thematic analysis which aimed to identify generalisable patterns out of which new questions could emerge (Braun and Clarke 2006). Individual perceptions were important: Braun and Clarke argue that thematic analysis aids in ‘understanding people’s everyday experience of reality’ (Braun and Clarke 2006: 80). The workshop sought specifically to gain views from participants ‘whose views on topics are not known’ to inform an area of graphic design practice which has historically been under-researched. (Braun and Clarke 2006: 83)

Key themes and subthemes were coded into categories which involved several close readings of the introductory/discussion texts, which now comprised the presentations and the commentary located in the chat function. At the same time, the ‘theoretical and epistemological commitments’ (Braun and Clarke 2006:84) of the researchers were recognized, and a process of ‘confirmability’ of the codes was sought to ensure aims were met and interpretations of the data traceable. (Nowel, et. al. 2017) This included each of the three organisers reading and commenting on the codes and the emerging set of questions and returning the initial findings of the thematic analysis to the original participants for further scrutiny. Participants were invited to provide additional comments or propose new questions which might have arisen in their reflections following the workshop.

Thematic Codes	Selected Examples
<b>Behaviours</b>	
<b>Personally Related</b> These are behaviours related to personal contexts	Holding lots of pieces together Raising children with social values Taking one day at a time
<b>Professionally Related</b> These are behaviours related to professional contexts	Fulfil role as an educator Conflicted with commercial work and everything else Being in control is an aim of success
<b>Career Pathways</b> This is about who we are now and challenges or concerns that arise	Intersectional considerations Internships Independent brand designer How to define myself as a freelance designer? Imposter syndrome: how do I own the territory?
<b>Consequences</b> This has to do with the consequences of COVID19 and/or career decisions	Re-thinking practice Burnout Covid has revealed inequalities
<b>Processes</b> These are the processes or procedures required to enact change	Decolonisation – how? Moving into bringing people together around shared missions Flexibility
<b>Strategies</b> These are strategies which identify how to change or move forward	Embracing gender, identity, race, neurodiversity Frame career more positively, adding value rather than taking away Looking for an exit strategy

Structures	
<b>Structures Creating Career Barriers</b> These are systemic structures which hinder career development or choices in our aspirations or workplaces	Eurocentric standards for type and software design dominate Disconnect between education and commercial world in design Patriarchal
<b>Structures Facilitating Careers</b> This is how we might facilitate achieving our aspirations or how we want our workplace to be	Internship gained through Uni mentorship scheme Matriarchal leadership Diversity and inclusion work within organisations

**Figure 1 Thematic Codes**

Using this chart as a basis, the intention is to use an agreed set of questions to inform a Phase 2 workshop with a second set of participants (N=20). Coupled with scoping literature and practice reviews, the workshop data and the methods used in its facilitation will provide the basis for a proposition paper focussing on intergenerational mentoring for women in graphic design.

### REFLECTION 2: Thematic Codes

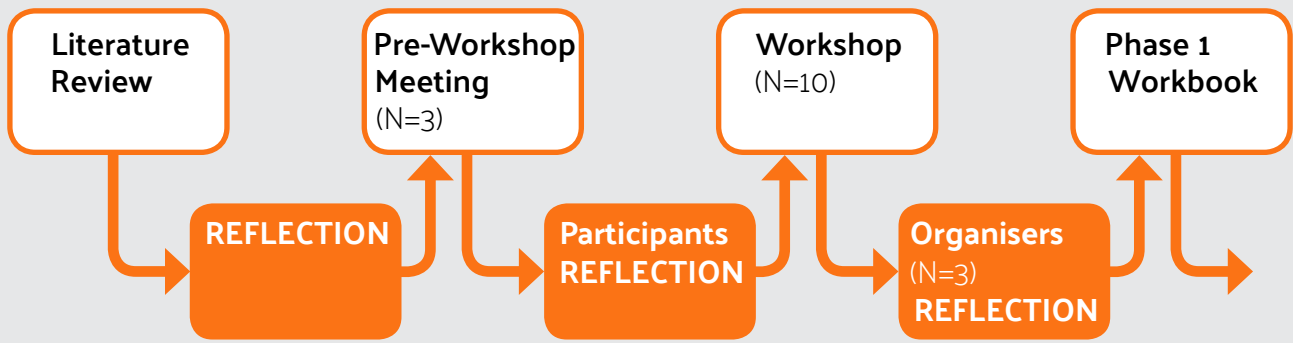
Please provide your reflections on **Figure 1 Thematic Codes** on the online questionnaire form.

1. What overarching themes do you feel we are missing from the workshop that reflect the variety and breadth of the discussion that took place?
2. Do you have other selected examples you might want to include under any of the thematic code headings?

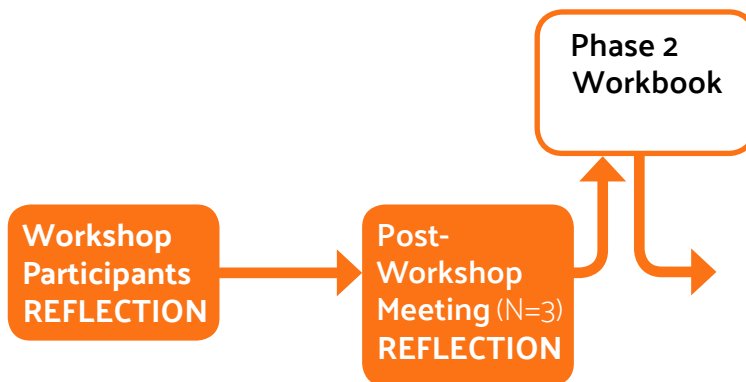
## Methodology

**Brave New Normal** builds on the work of Pang, et al., whose studies from the field of public relations and marketing were found to be methodologically relevant to this project. The workshop was grounded in a process of dialogic communication; by applying the basic processes of dialogic communication offered by Pang, et al. (2009), such as ‘mutual exchange’, ‘reciprocal interactions’ and ‘building relationships’, participants were able to share in collective knowledge production. This led several workshop participants to agree that ‘the workshop was very inspiring and insightful’ and provided a useful platform for an exchange of experiences. (Anon. 2020) It is also important to note that the role of reflective and reflexive processes is central to this project. Reflection points have been built into the overarching structure to deepen the analysis at the end of each milestone in the research journey (See **Fig. 3**).

### Phase 1



### Phase 2



### Phase 3

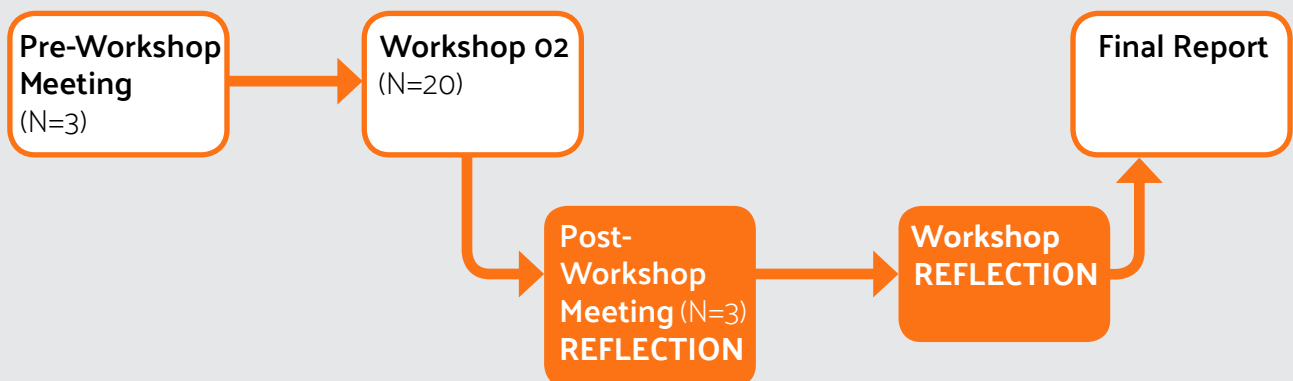


Fig. 3 Reflection on Research Journey

As part of the post-workshop phase, the (N=3) organisers met to reflect on the value of the workshop to the research process and the ways in which it had helped to consolidate material drawn from the earlier literature review. The thematic codes and questions were explored in relation to the workshop discussion and were verified in a two-stage process by organisers and participants. This iterative process led to a rephrasing of the questions, thus:

- In the age of a pandemic, in what ways have women working in graphic design problematized and addressed the ‘new normal’ in their working practices?
- In what ways might cooperative practices strengthen the value of knowledge production amongst women working in graphic design?
- What are the new (perceived) narratives about career lifecycles?
- What is the role of intergenerational mentoring in an age of the pandemic for women working in graphic design?

Participants have been sent a Phase 1 Workbook in order to reflect upon and solicit further comments as a way of continuing to deepen an understanding how women are addressing the context of a ‘brave new normal’.

## Initial Findings

The process of thematic coding allowed for a systematic and manageable approach to the analysis of data. The main themes allowed for specific conclusions to be made, and in doing so, prompted further lines of inquiry. An initial set of questions are found in **Figure 2: Thematic Lines of Enquiry**. These are not exclusive but will be used as a prompt for considering a priority focus for a Phase 2 workshop for the project.

Thematic Codes	Questions
Behaviours	1. What type of behaviour is being demonstrated?
Personally Related	2. What steps have women in graphic design taken to rebalance work/life? 3. How might women in graphic design gain in confidence?
Professionally Related	4. What agency do women in graphic design have in the workplace? 5. How might roles and behaviours change to align with new kinds of workplace values?
Career Pathways	6. What are the career pathways for female graphic designers and what new pathways have emerged? 7. What new kinds of opportunities are afforded as a result? 8. How much experience do you need in order to be able to ‘own’ that territory or promote yourself in your chosen field? 9. What are the issues around freelancing?

<p><b>Consequences</b></p>	<p>10. What direct consequences are women in graphic design facing in light of current health, social and political contexts?</p> <p>11. In what ways are women in graphic design responding to new personal and work-related environments?</p> <p>12. How has new economic conditions impacted the job market in design?</p> <p>13. What are the new kinds of challenges freelancers or designers gaining permanent positions face?</p>
<p><b>Processes</b></p>	<p>14. In what ways might intergenerational mentoring facilitate knowledge exchange?</p> <p>15. In what ways might a process of decolonising design facilitate new opportunities for inclusivity – women of colour, women of age?</p> <p>16. What tools and methods in graphic design might be used to facilitate change toward a more inclusive and flexible workplace for women?</p>
<p><b>Strategies</b></p>	<p>17. What coping strategies are women in graphic design adopting for dealing with existing and new professional contexts?</p> <p>18. What strategies might be employed to encourage knowledge sharing and skills development for women in graphic design?</p> <p>19. What is the role of self-care and what forms might this take, professional and personally?</p>
<p><b>Structures</b></p>	<p>20. What are the identifiable institutional/organisational structures for graphic design?</p> <p>21. What are the institutional expectations for women in graphic design?</p>
<p><b>Structures Creating Career Barriers</b></p>	<p>22. In what ways are institutional/organisational structures creating career barriers for women?</p> <p>23. How might intergenerational mentoring generate insights to change career assumptions?</p> <p>24. What might be re-thought in terms of institutional structures post-pandemic?</p>
<p><b>Structures Facilitating Careers</b></p>	<p>25. In what ways are institutional/organisational structures facilitating career pathways for women?</p> <p>26. What alternative forms of mentoring for women in graphic design might be employed as developmental and non-hierarchical?</p>

**Figure 2 Thematic Lines of Enquiry**

### REFLECTION 3: Thematic Lines of Enquiry

Basing your reflections on **Figure 2 Thematic Lines of Enquiry**, please comment on the following questions on the online questionnaire form.

1. What are the gaps or key questions you feel are missing from this list?
2. Which 8 questions (including any gaps as identified above) would you prioritize that would be seen as essential in discussions during breakout groups in the next workshop?

## Conclusion

The main discovery was that a paradigm shift in working practices was already in evidence prior to COVID-19. Anticipated growth in traditional graphic design job roles (2020-2024) was estimated to fall short, with a concomitant rise on the number of non-traditional roles: namely, that graphic design-focussed practitioners would morph into new kinds of networked communicators at a rate of 27%. (Gosling 2017) The pandemic has brought this shift into sharper focus. Not only is the profession itself morphing, but the urgency to rethink the 'workforce experience' for women in graphic design and to redefine the ways in which industry and academia interact in support of women of all ages in training and development opportunities is evermore present. COVID-19 is accelerating developments already in process, but is at the same time bringing its own challenges. These challenges are open for further research.

## Thank You

Our sincere thanks for your ongoing support in our quest to address the **Brave New Normal** with an inspiring group of women working in graphic design and related fields.

Teal Triggs: Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)  
Siân Cook, Women's Design + Research Unit (WD+RU)  
Lorna Allan, Hidden Women Of Design (HWOD)

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