An Ethnographic Approach to Gender-Based Relationships in Graphic Design Group Work

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ABSTRACT
Nowadays, the university pedagogy has increasingly used group work to help students increase their group work skills by gaining social recognitions while working with others. The factors investigated in this study may predict the different gender based roles among students’ relationships, especially the female students’ roles during group work in university. In this subject, there are questionnaire and target group investigations carried out by the graphic design students and designers, which compares the different group work experiences between their education lives and career lives. The study uses the quantitative and qualitative data using an ethnographic approach to suggest that the roles women take during the group work of their school lives will inevitably influence their future work positions. These findings about different positions associated with gender differences will help the educators identify the potential problems in groups, and furthermore will help female designers to improve their ability and competitiveness during group work.

Keywords: Graphic design; group work; ethnography approach; female position; pedagogy; career

1. INSTRUCTION
Looking at the proportion of occupation situations, males and females have different chances and performances. There is always a difference in gender position in the work place, and the media industry still remains as masculine domains of work and production despite the evolution of democracy since 1997 (Gallagher, 1995; Romano, 1999). According to the data from the Finnish graphic design (GD) association Grafia in 2013, and the data collected from website of Finnish Design Agencies, further evidence has shown that in the field of GD, female designers are in lower working positions than their male counterparts. Conversely, the populations of female GD students are higher than the male GD students and the education levels are also higher than male students. These kinds of working situations are not the same as at the beginning of the designer’s careers, especially during the studying period. Moreover, the data from the University of Lapland shows that females are often better than males in studying. The compared data of GD students and designers is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BA GD student</th>
<th>MA GD student</th>
<th>PhD GD student</th>
<th>GD designer</th>
<th>Art director</th>
<th>Creative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>(n=88) 32%</td>
<td>(n=71) 39%</td>
<td>(n=5) 36%</td>
<td>(n=11) 65%</td>
<td>(n=19) 70%</td>
<td>(n=6) 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>(n=185) 68%</td>
<td>(n=113) 61%</td>
<td>(n=9) 64%</td>
<td>(n=6) 35%</td>
<td>(n=8) 30%</td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several reasons for this inequality in the work positions, one of which can be linked to the gender stereotypes that are rooted in the generalized beliefs about the different characteristics and qualities attributed to gender differences between men and women in society (Eagly, 1987). In general, men are characterized as aggressive, risk-taking, decisive, and autonomous (agnatic attributers), whereas women are characterized as kind, caring, relational, and humble (communal attributes). These different characteristics and qualities anticipate different work situations in terms of gender (Heilman, 1997). In group work, especially in mixed-gender groups, the character differences are displayed more clearly, therefore, the roles taken in group work is a typical environment for the stereotype conception.

Group work in education is the necessary step for students to experience work in group, due to the fact that the work environment is similar with the work place. Although group work has been used in teaching for thousands of years, it really was not until the 1970s and the work of Lev Vygotsky that groups were widely recognized as a key element to the learning process (Nancy, Douglas & Sandi, 2009). Learning activities are a social process. Therefore, productive group work is an essential stepping stone to learning and mastery, and collaboration with peers is a necessary part of learning or fulfilling tasks of everyone concerned (Nancy, Douglas & Sandi, 2009). A key feature of productive group work is what Johnson (1975) calls positive interdependence. In fact, positive interdependence is considered by many to be the defining quality and most important component of cooperative group work (Johnson, 1976). Then, the students’ positions in their future careers not only depend on their talents, professional knowledge, and experiences, but also on their abilities of cooperation, especially for the high positions. Developing comprehensive skills would be the main purpose of conducting group work. Thus, the pedagogy strategy of using group work as the assignment form is a necessary step for students to learn how to work in groups. At this point, by comparing these two different yet relevant group work periods, i.e., the studying period and working period, the hypothesis for this study is that the way students behave in group work during their school lives will predict their positions in the working place to some extent.
Considering group work as a social process, this study takes an ethnographic view to “transcribing” or “representing” group work. The ethnographic approach involves making a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice with virtually any qualitative research project (Beardon, 2009). The purpose for using an ethnographic approach is to find further reasons for the overlapping of some paired pedagogy strategies: learn-work, individual-social, gender-non gender, and uniform-special, which would be important factors for career developing that students should learn during their education period, and in turn, to figure out possible suggestions for the improvement of theoretical or practical strategies in education.

A case study on group work in the field of GD has been chosen in this project. The aim is to find out if a group work environment encountered when studying is similar to the one in the work place. Are there some definite links between them? Could the group work education strategy create equal opportunities for males and females to develop their careers? This study is focused on the relationship between male and female graphic design students involved in group work by comparing two particular periods in their lives: the studying period and the working period. Investigating group work in graphic design workshop and courses at the University of Lapland and design agencies in Finland will provide a basic analysis of working relationships between designers based on gender issues using the ethnographic approach. In this research, a series of observations, structured interviews, quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, and video recordings will be undertaken as the basic studying resources to identify the potential reasons for inequality between the working positions of male and female designers.

The study on the influence of gender based group work on GD students’ future career is presented through four parts: 1) Why the study of group work is important for career developing; 2) Gender-roles in group work: comparing males’ and females’ studying experiences with working experiences; 3) Ethnographic approach: exploring the future career prospects for female designers; And 4) Implications of group work theory and practice building. This research would offer the basic knowledge for group work pedagogy, especially for female GD education, from a gender viewpoint: How to improve female designers’ competitiveness during the education period.

2. RESEARCH CONTEXT
As mentioned before, the investigations were among students who chose GD courses. These courses used the group work assignment as the final subject, and the main purpose of the group work subjects were teaching students to learn how to cooperate with each other, to get more ideas from team members and most importantly, to experience likely work settings. All these courses and workshops were arranged to use the group work assignment as the final result. Students were divided into small groups that consisted of 3-5 students in mixed-sex or single-sex groups, depending on the members registered in these courses. Furthermore, there a focus group was arranged to do a deep investigation via recording and interview of the performance during a three-meeting process. In this GD workshop, the subject was designed as a real design task. Every group member is the designer of its own group and simultaneously is also the client to evaluate other groups’ work. The aim is to give students the chance to experience group work and learn important skills of working in groups. Group work is an important and necessary stage for graduating students to experience the “work environment.” Nine students were divided into 3 mixed-gender groups, which facilitate the comparison between the working roles based on gender. To compare the study setting with the work setting, the investigation of the design agencies and graphic designers were conducted in two target design agencies: Seven-1 and Advertising Kioski in Rovaniemi. The content of the investigation focused on group work and gender issues, the data from which was used to compare with the study setting to identify possible links between these settings. In addition, further data was collected from Grafia and online investigation.

3. RESEARCH METHOD
Participants
The sampling frame for this study is comprised of 73 design students within the Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland. In this target group, there were 70% GD students and others were Communication Design, Product Design Engineering, Audiovisual Media Culture, and Industrial Product Design students who chose GD Courses. According to this group, 58% were domestic students and 42% were international students; for those students, 71% were female and 29% were male. The questionnaires were used for group work students in the GD courses and workshops. Along with the general investigation, a target group of 9 students used a set of questionnaires, with the questions implemented in three steps following the student’s perception of group work; this process was conducted in a GD Workshop. All the students have adequate group work skills and experiences. For the questionnaire respondents, 22% were Finnish students and 78% were foreign students; 55% were male and 45% were female. This workshop was arranged for the investigation of group work without any guidance in group work skills in order to fully display their own performance in group work. The investigation was carried out through the entire group work process using various methods, including video recordings, photos, observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Their responses were recorded and transcribed. The target group of 9 students was divided into three groups, with each group consisting of three members. In order to learn the purpose and processes of using group work assignments in GD courses, 4 teachers were interviewed after the course. All the data was obtained during the group work courses. The purpose of choosing these courses that used group work in assignments was to obtain students’ fresh perceptions of group work, which acted as an objective resource for this study.

Simultaneously, for the comparison data from design agencies, the investigation was implemented by interviews with two chief executors and one art director, who are in two target design agencies. Nine designers responded the questionnaires, which included 5 male designers and 4 female designers. Furthermore, Grafia and other online investigation supported other data, primarily concerned with the positions and the proportions of graphic designers overall.
Measures

Questionnaires were used to obtain measures of perception of the group work and relevant demographic data (e.g., gender and nationality). The questionnaire included selection and open answers; all items were designed to identify key points. Responses from these questionnaires were coded based on the main constructs of perception of group work, and the questions were coded on gender to compare the same answers between male and female.

For the target group in the study setting, three sets of questionnaires were used during the whole group work process to evaluate students’ responses to group work: 1) interest and background; 2) perception of gender meaning in group work; and 3) feeling and achievement in group work. The first questionnaire was used before the commencement of the group work project. Its purpose was to evaluate students’ interest in graphic design and knowledge of group work in order to measure students’ attitudes towards participating in this group work. The second questionnaire was used during the middle stage of the group work project to evaluate students’ professional plans in GD and their perceptions of gender meaning in group work. The third questionnaire was used after the final presentation, which was the last stage of the group work project to evaluate the feelings and achievements from group work. These questionnaires were designed to coordinate with the group work project so as to increase progressively the perception of group work. Video recordings and photos were used to measure the relationships and positions between the members in work groups, which could indicate the gender order in groups. An interview with the teacher was used at the end of the group work project, the results of which provide a macro and micro reference to the group work study.

For the work setting in the design agency, the content of the interview questions for the leaders and directors were on the same topics of group work and gender issues as the studying setting, but focused on a leader’s view. The questionnaires on the group work topics collected from graphic designers were coded in gender to compare with the data from the study setting.

3.1 Quantitative Data

The sample consists of 73 students enrolled in GD courses at the University of Lapland compared with 9 graphic designers. The data collection divided by gender aimed to evaluate the different perceptions of group work for males and females in the study setting and work setting. The attitude towards participating in group work is shown in Table 2; the perception of working in groups is shown in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Studying setting (n=73)</th>
<th>Work setting (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in graphic design</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definite plan for career</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in group work</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share idea with others</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted as a leader in group work</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis of Table 2: For all the positive attitudes toward group work, the independent samples indicated that the proportion of males is higher than females both in the study setting and work setting, and all the proportion in the work setting are higher than that in study setting, and the data from open answers on this question indicate who is not interested in GD, showing that they are affected by others or have no other choice to learn GD and they might change their profession latter, which is a possible reason why the proportion of designers who are interested in GD in the work setting is higher than study setting. The proportion of those interested in group work has similar results: males are more interested in group work than females, and the proportion in the work setting is higher than in the study setting, as all the male designers prefer group work, and the proportion is much higher than that of female designers. The possible reason for this result is examined in the analysis of Table 3.

For the attitude sharing idea with others in group work, in the study setting, the proportion of males is higher than females, and all the designers in this investigation prefer to share ideas with others. In the study setting, those who said they choose not to share ideas mainly attributed this choice to a lack of confidence. Regarding leadership, the results show that males preferred to act as a leader in the group more than females. The possible reason for the lower proportion of males in the work setting than that in study setting is that the leader has been the leader in work setting, as concerned above, the proportion of male leader in high position in design agencies is much higher than female. The data in Table 2 indicates that males are more definitely of their career plan and more interested in group work, and the situations are similar within the two settings. When comparing these two settings, the proportions of the attitude to group work in the work setting are higher than those in the study setting, which are mainly because the designers have determined their career and have more experience in group work. The possible reason of the lower proportion of regarding leadership is that most of the male students who prefer to act as the leader in group work have already achieved their goals.
Data analysis of Table 3: This table contains information about the participants’ feelings during group work in the two settings. As the data shows in Table 3, the proportion of positive feeling of males is always higher than females, and females are more negative than males in group work. There are 36% of females who have strong satisfaction in group work, 25% of females feel relaxed, and 39% feel tension or confusion in group work, while it seems better in the work setting. All the males think that there is no difference between gender in group work and the leadership in group work; still, a few females think the differences exist. Regarding emotional challenges, males are better than females at dealing these challenges. In addition, there is a big difference between males and females’ attitudes when it comes to dealing with conflicts; males seem more positive than females in both settings. The data from this table indicates that the gender difference is mainly present in females’ minds. Moreover, one of possible reasons of this kind of perception is the lack of self-confidence among females. Furthermore, counting for the connections between these sets of questions, the better their skills to deal with emotional problems and conflicts, the more positive feelings they have in group work.

3.2 Qualitative Data

Target Group in Study Setting

The target group investigation in the study setting was arranged for three presentation times, which were conducted through observation and questionnaires. The data of video recordings and photos were obtained to measure the relationships, positions, and performances of members in group work. The results are shown in Table 4. The investigations in the target design agencies implemented by the interviews and their responses were recorded and transcribed.

Table 4: The positions of members in group work during the presentation process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1: First presentation</td>
<td>Group 1: Second presentation</td>
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</table>

Group 1 consisted of one Finnish male and two Italian females. In their first presentation, the two Italian females interpreted their ideas separately, while the Finnish male stood apart from them silently. In the second presentation, they separated their work equally. The Finnish male sat opposite to the females. One of the Italian females was talkative and arranged the work. At the final presentation, the talkative female presented their work; they were closer than before and all enjoined in their excellent work. When their clients asked questions, the two females answered questions positively, and the male was always shy. In this group, they separated their work and the male shared his ideas with the two females. The talkative girl was the obvious leader and arranged their work actively; their nice schedule for their work resulted in excellent result.

Group 2:
Group 2 included one Italian male, one Columbian male and one Italian female. During the three presentations, the Italian male helped the Columbian male to interpret their ideas; the group stayed together and worked together. When the clients asked questions, they gave positive responses. The Columbian male was talkative and acted as the presenter. They could cooperate with each other and worked in a positive atmosphere during the whole process, and got a very nice result for their project. It was obvious that they enjoyed the work and were proud of it.

Group 3:

Group 3 included one Finnish male, one Italian male, and one Bulgarian female. In the first presentation, this group did not work well together; the two male students talked together without prior order, and the female stood far from them and was silent during the whole presentation. For the second time, the Italian boy was absent and the others gave one set of ideas; the female was still in silence during the whole meeting time, even when their clients asked questions. During the final presentation, the same situation appeared as the first time in which the two males exchanged their positions and presented without order. The Finnish male was talkative and answered the questions positively, and the Italian male supported him some time. Their work did not receive a high evaluation from their clients and, as stated above, this group did not work well together.

Interview of the Teachers
This interview stage was conducted with four teachers who arranged graphic design courses with group work at the University of Lapland; their responses were recorded and transcribed. Some relevant excerpts are listed below.
- General identification of group work: different people with different ideas; brain storming.
- The purpose of choosing the group work assignment in courses: for students to practice their communication skills for future work.
- What kind of skills students should learn from group work: how to put the ideas in words; discuss with each other; responsibility; combine the members together.
- How to get excellent results through group work: free ideas; don't evaluate, just go through; talent; atmosphere; schedule; relationship.
- Gender differences among members: no differences; depends on personality; some differences; females question themselves; males keep their opinion and do not discuss much.
- Elements that influence the member’s satisfaction in group work: workload; role; emotion.
- Suggestion to female students: don't be afraid of mistakes, learn by mistakes; do not only follow, open your brain, think more about your own ideas.

Interview of the Leaders/Art Directors
The interview of the design agencies conducted with Seven-1 and Advertising Kioski in Rovaniemi consisted of three leader/art directors; their responses were recorded and transcribed. Some relevant excerpts are listed below.
- General identification of group work: group work is the basis for work; everyone is the necessary element in a group.
- How to get excellent results through group work: take into account the overall view; cooperate with each other; be a good leader; high talent.
- Gender differences among members: no differences; depends on personality.
- Elements influence the member’s satisfaction in group work: evaluation; achievement; justice; role; honor.
- Suggestion to female designers: playing in your own nice work style with good schedule and consideration; think more about the whole group, overall view; don't be sensitive, just do.

3.3 Discussion
The data indicated some linked factors between the study setting and the work setting. The measured links are identified as follows.

Interested in Group Work
According to the data, most of the GD students and designers prefer group work; the proportion of males who prefer group work is higher than females for both settings. In the students' questionnaires, which included the question of career plans in the last five years, a few female students claimed that they have no confidence in GD and want to try different work after graduation, and all of them prefer private work. So the data indicates that it is possible that they may not choose GD work after graduation, which is the possible reason that the proportion in the work setting for interested in GD work is higher than study setting.
Gender Perception in Group work
The differences between gender roles in the studying setting and work setting is almost the same; the gender differences do not always exist in males’ minds, but do in females’ mind, which affected their decisions and ambitions to make a better performance in work. Almost all the negative perceptions of gender differences were from females, especially those who lacked confidence in their own abilities, and without a clear profession or career plan. Further evidence indicates that the reason is mainly due to a lack of confidence among female designers.

Leadership
Based on the ethnographic investigation, we can see clearly that male and female designers have the same ability to be a leader and arrange work well in different styles. In contrast, the perception of leadership is quite different between males and females based on a mass investigation by questionnaires. The proportion of male students who chose to act as a leader is much higher than that of female students, and for designers, the proportion is almost the same. The number of males who chose to act as a leader is 3 times higher than that of females. It shows that the ambition and expectation to be a leader among males is much higher than among females. In the work setting and career development, the perception of leadership is a critical factor that influences their position in the group.

Position in Group Work
As discussed above, the ambition and expectation of male students and designers are much higher than female students and designers. It is possible that this is the main relative factor for the differences in positions in group work. In addition, there are many other relevant factors related to the position choice in group work. The data of the target group during the group work shows that male students concentrate on work and like collaboration, while female leaders like arranging work in order and working separately. The way to deal with conflicts and the feelings in group work are the relevant factors influence their positions in group.

Obscure Problems among Female GD Students and Designers
The data from the interviews show that almost all the teachers and leaders signified that there was no big difference between male and female designers in talent, yet somehow, the difference exists among their work styles—males work more directly and females are more considerate with arranging work. The evidence from the target student group work shows that these two working styles all can get excellent results. In addition, the suggestions for female GD students and designers from teachers and leaders (e.g., don’t be sensitive, concentrate on work, be bold, confident, committed, generous, think about the overall conditions, and improve coordinating skills) indicate that female designers lack of certain factors in group work. For the education purpose, female students should be more confidence, don’t be too sensitive about others’ evaluation and, have a clearly plan for career. These two factors are the main factors that students should strengthen during the education period, which could provide better conditions and more skills in their future career development.

4. CONCLUSION
Based on the analysis of group work investigations, male and female GD students and designers have no big difference in professional talents, studying, and working. Regarding leadership, males and females work in different styles—males work more directly and females work with fine work arrangement—and both can achieve excellent results. However, the biggest differences that influence their perceptions of gender roles in group work and the ambitions to lead a group work depend on their self-confidence or their lack of self-confidence caused by uncertain profession plans. The research confirmed that having an explicit professional plan and confidence are the major contributors to career success and high social status’ achievements. For the career purpose, group work is a significant project in pedagogy, and the perception and skills of group work are necessary for graphic designers to obtain a balanced chance in group work and their career. Results also suggest that female GD students and designers should not be sensitive about others’ evaluation, but concentrate on work; be courageous, committed, and generous in group work, and take an overall view for the development of the whole group. Therefore, in order to increase female students’ performance and competitiveness in career development, it is necessary to help female students enhance their confidence and cooperation skills in group work. It is critical in pedagogy to provide methods to enhance students’ confidence and group work skills; this would lead to providing an equal environment in career engagement for female graphic designers.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH
The following questions merit further investigation based on the above findings: 1) what kind of factors lead to female GD students’/designers’ lack of confidence? 2) How can female GD students’/designers’ improve their confidence levels?

6. REFERENCES

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