

Let's imagine

You're a young boy. You have a love and talent for design, storytelling and using your imagination to create something out of nothing. You want a job where you get to do it all the time. It's about what's in your head – not your body – so you have no concerns about doing something that seemingly has nothing to do with gender or the colour of your skin.

So, you enter the advertising world. Your boss is a woman, the industry press is full of women. The creative department has make-up tables, everyone wears high heels and talks about having "group periods". Every meeting you go to is 80% women. That's OK – you're all here because you have the same love of ideas. Doesn't matter that the place screams "This is for women only!"

Midway through your career, you've yet to have a male boss. Your clients love you and you're told you're valued by the agency, but you're keen to become a creative director. However, you don't look the part. Shouldn't matter – your work will speak for itself, surely?

The head-hunters tell you all the agencies want a "rock chick". Someone who exudes what sounds to you like very female attributes, none of which you have. You go for interviews and again, you're yet to meet another bloke. The ECD is a woman, the other candidates are women, and the people you'd be managing if you got the job are also mainly women. When you get the job, there are mutterings it was to tick a diversity box, not because of your ability.

Every time you walk into a room of industry creative leaders, there are 11 of you surrounded by 89 women. When you're invited to judge, there are usually two blokes in a room with 10 to 12 women. When you stand at the urinal on your own during a judging break, the women powdering their noses and having a chat in the ladies decide what the best work is and which girls coming up through the ranks remind them of them when they were looking for a step up. The work awarded is for tampons, shampoo and fashion. You feel it's unfair a group of women picked work appealing directly to them. But to complain would look like you can't hack it.

You give up.

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