

Question 4: “Outline a current environmental, political, or social issue that requires redesign. Explain how you will solve this issue over the duration of your future design career. Underline the tools and approaches you will use and discuss how and why.”

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As humans, we thrive off social interactions and making connections with others. We share mirror neurons that allow us to match each other's emotions unconsciously and immediately (Morgan, 2015). With the ever-increasing accessibility to media platforms, the need to socialise has risen – which could see the powerful effect of technology on communities, cultures, and relationships. This effect could see the decline in traditions and values within society, thus creating a key issue in social environments.

The aim of this essay is to explore social injustices and how it can be reassured for future developing designs.

Design is everything and everywhere. From the adverts on your television to the bed you sleep in - everything has been consciously designed.

Design is a value-driven process, which means a good designer will always address the needs of the consumer. Our needs, passions and desires are driven by emotional responses. Products with appropriately embedded emotions fit better with the user lifestyle and facilitate satisfaction (Singh, 2014). Satisfaction results in perceived values and affective responses to the product.

In such a culturally rich and diverse world, which is ever increasing, such designs rarely meet the needs of the many. Instead, they are perceived to be targeted towards a 'target market' which discriminates against the excluded. Many of these excluded include: the disabled, the elderly, lower social classes, and varying cultures which cannot practically, ethically, affordably or morally use certain products. 18 percent of the UK's population have a limiting long-term illness or disability (St-andrews.ac.uk, 2010). With this level of percentage, it is inevitable that the numbers could possibly rise and the need for a broader market range would increase. There are now also over 15.5 million people aged 60 or over, making up 23% of the UK population. The number of "older" old people are also rising. There are now 3.2 million people aged 80 or over, and almost 600,000 of these are aged 90 or over (www.mha.org.uk, n.d.). Although, you could argue that these people wouldn't have a need for most products, it is still morally right for designers to research this information. Unfortunately, the issue is not accepting that a huge proportion of the population are excluded from such products like the elderly: "For marketing strategies to be effective, they should take into consideration the heterogeneity of the mature market" – (Moschis, Lee and Mathur, 1997). The issue however, as previously stated (design is a value-driven process) lies in the expense, time, and challenge of designing a product that is accessible for all.

A social issue can emerge when a new product has an effect on different groups of people. Designers must take into account the social needs of other cultures and societies when considering ideas. Normal habits for one person may be an unusual concept for another but being attentive to these needs are vital for future designing. It is important to be mindful and to not offend traditions and beliefs. Taking an expanded concept of design opens up the view to diverse culturally informed design practices, also including those far removed from industrial processes (Pinther et al., 2018). Designers ought to research the practices they intend using to ensure that manufacturing techniques are in line with the design.

In a perfect world all designs should meet the needs of all. This is where the term Universal Design was born. The phrase 'universal design' was coined by Mace (1998, cited in Barnes 2011) to refer to: 'The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to

the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation, specialist design'. This ideal world sounds great, however, to encompass so many cultures into one product would seem impossible for certain designs. Simply looking at dining throughout many cultures shows us the extremities of these cultures as the traditional Japanese method would be to sit on the floor and eat using chopsticks, a middle eastern approach would be to only hold the utensils in the right hand, in Thailand you cannot use a fork to put food into your mouth whilst in Chile it is normal to use your hands. To involve each culture into every product is impossible and would dilute the enrichment of each culture's identity. However, this does not mean that it cannot be done for all products.

There is also a social injustice in the prices of products. Celebrities are used in order to advertise products as luxury items at a premium cost and people are hypnotised by the lifestyle that the product will inevitably (not) bring. The Kardashians are a well-known family of influencers that post regularly on social media. Kris Jenner, who is mother to the Kardashian-Jenner siblings, revealed her famous daughters can make up to six figures for each paid Instagram post (Gonzales, 2019). The posts can vary from pharmaceuticals to makeup but there is a lot of doubt whether they use the products themselves. This can cause devastating effects on "normal" people as they try to promote unrealistic standards with products that are not part of their daily lifestyle.

Considering that the lower income classes make up most of the population these products receive most profits reaping from the misguided audience and although it is the customer's choice to spend their money as they please there is an ever-growing pressure that we all feel today to keep up with societies fashion which is controlled by the minority that are selling these products. Richard Elliot and Clare Leonard conclude that if a child is wearing branded trainers they are seen as popular and able to fit in with their peers (2004). This attitude towards design is a plague within the industry. It produces the highest prophets by manipulating the audience into thinking what they want is an expensive label to show others instead of admiring the design of the product itself.

As a product and furniture design student, I believe that it is important for me to explore these social issues and analyse the ways I can improve my ideas throughout my design career. A concept that I will be using as a future designer is the Design Thinking Process. Design Thinking has a human centred core. It encourages organisations to focus on the people they're creating for, which leads to better products, services, and internal processes (IDEO U, 2017). With the issues stated previously, this concept would be a start of a redesign of future design approaches. Being human centred allows the design to be innovative and creative but through learning and teaching techniques. According to Dam and Siang, Design Thinking has many phases but d.school's approach is at the forefront of applying and teaching and their 5 phases are: empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test (2019). The said phases are not a step by step process, but a guideline or framework that offer innovative thinking.

The key phase for me, which coincides with the issues, is empathise. The goal of this stage is to understand and relate with your users. This could be a shared experience or perceiving the world from someone else's perspective. By being empathetic towards another, you gain information that is relative to creating a product that is desired by the user. An example of an empathetic approach is related to how a group of interaction design students solved

their project task. The task was to design a rescue boat. In order to gain an understanding of the experience and feeling of getting rescued at sea, they rescued each other in a swimming pool, and the empathic insight helped them to develop a very interesting and relevant prototype (Gasparini, 2015). This type of research could work in many different circumstances with different types of people. You could empathise with disabled, elderly or seriously ill people to understand their needs and struggles.

Through keeping the user you're observing or ideating at the heart of your process, it will be a successful solution to your ideas and designs.

This phase also connects with the define stage - to define your user and their wants and needs. You need to empathise to define the problem and find the solution. In the define phase, use the data gathered in the empathize phase to glean insights. Organize all your observations and draw parallels across your users' current experiences. Is there a common pain point across many different users? Identify unmet user needs (Gibbons, 2016).

Finding a common point between different consumers would be ideal as the more people satisfied with your product, the more sales and benefits are sought. This connects back to the "universal design" as the less adaptations needed, the better for the consumer.

In the ideation phase, you'll explore and come up with as many ideas as possible. Some of these ideas will go on to be potential solutions to your design challenge; some will end up on the reject pile (Stevens, 2020). The point of this phase is to explore new avenues and test boundaries with the information collected in the first two stages. You could also define your ideas and research. I think it would be beneficial to communicate your plans and designs with the user at this point as the said person could feel involved and that their needs are being appreciated throughout the process.

Prototyping is a key problem-solving activity in product design. It starts right from the beginning of a project and continues right into production (Hallgrimsson, 2012). The continuation of prototyping throughout the designing process allows room for change and alterations. It is less about quality of the product and more about the quantity of innovative ideas you can come up with to satisfy the customers wants and needs. It is always important to report back to what you have learnt so far in the process. It will benefit you and the user with a more concise end result.

The last phase is test. After detecting the problem and processing ideas with prototypes, the next stage is to settle on a final idea. Testing is the chance to get a product out into the world, test it in real life, and test it in real time. During this phase you have a chance to see if you've framed the problem correctly (Lucas, 2018). This process gives you the chance to communicate with clients and users to ensure that the problem has a solution. This product could be for disabled people and therefore you would get the client to use the product to confirm that it is comfortable and fits the brief. Not only does this provide feedback but it would also save on time and money by finding errors or usability problems before mass production.

Overall, I believe this process to be very beneficial towards designing for others and with the issue of being inclusive and mindful, it will definitely be helpful for future designing. It will

help me to be more socially innovative with my design and collaborate with more people to create better ideas. It will evolve my designs and shape future designing.

The issue of price and promotion of products can be redesigned by analysing the products and being fair with marketing efforts. This can be difficult as you want to be better than competitive companies and products. Neil Patel suggests that companies should have "Marketing Ethics". Marketing ethics means having principles for your paid campaigns. It is a philosophy focused on using values like honesty, fairness, and social responsibility to build quality relationships with consumers (2021). Many people look at the price before buying and this could attract more customers if the price is fair. A company having good ethics and morals could also attract good attention. Good ethics include clean and eco materials, workplaces with diversity and equal pay, and inclusivity.

In my future design career, I would like to be as morally neutral as possible with my designs. With the issues stated in this essay, it is apparent that a part of society is classed as "different" and cannot use everything that is presented to them. We can't actually care about every single person who interacts with our designs on an individual level but empathizing with their problems is part of our job (Székely, 2021). The world would be a much better place if everyone felt included and respected so this is where I can change my future career by ensuring that I am fair and value-driven with my designs.

Using the Design Thinking process, I will be able to observe situations and people's problems, empathise and understand the obstacles, and communicate ideas through trial and testing the solution with the user.

There are so many brands out there now, that I look up to, are branching to be more inclusive for everyone. Examples of there are: Nike with the release of its newest easy-entry shoe, the Glo Flyease; Ikea's ThisAbles range; Tommy Hilfiger adapting fastenings with more inclusive methods; and Microsoft making gaming more accessible for disabilities (Whippet Melbourne, 2021). With these brands being big names, hopefully many other big brands and smaller companies will try and follow in their footsteps and make this change. This will then be the start of a happier and whole future society.

If my design career takes me to being a leader with a big company, I will make sure that the business abides by the Design Thinking process and that morals and values come before anything. This way we can avoid being in a situation where someone or a group of people are unhappy with the product and money and time is not wasted on non-perfect products. Keeping a diverse group of people around my career will help me become more aware of traditions and be non-biased with my ideas and designs.

With this being said, I still have a lot of things to educate myself on, but I will keep learning throughout my career about process and values that exist inside and outside of designing. This way I will be self-aware and evolving with the times

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