

Title: Designing (for) Women: Bridging the Gap Between Assumptions and Realities
Presenter: Erica Eden

[Music]

>> And right now, I would like to introduce to you our next speaker, the wonderful Erica Eden. I'm very happy to introduce her now because in a way, she's also trying to reinvent or at least to reposition design by looking at, once again, some kind of hot water that we all should have been looking at for a very long time. She is a senior industrial designer at Smart Design, a graduate of Pratt Institute, so here a local New Yorker and she is one of the cofounder of Femme Den which is a group inside Smart and also reaching outside in the world that focuses on women and on women as consumers, as final users but also as designers trying to not use too much pink. Actually, they don't use pink trying to go beyond stereotypes and instead to look at women as a departure point for an extended usership project. Extended usership is when you look at a minority that might have some kind of setback like being a woman and you decide to actually take that as a departure point for the design process to be used by everybody. I can't wait to hear what she has to tell us and here comes Erica Eden.

[Applause]

[Music]

>> Good morning. Welcome to my talk on design and gender. Again, my name is Erica Eden. I work at Smart Design and started this idea about design and gender. So, some of you may recognize Smart Design. We've been around for about 30 years, a design consultancy based right here in New York. We have experience in diverse fields including consumer electronics. This is an image of the HP Photosmart printer. Healthcare, this is the Vicks underarm thermometer for kids, and also house wares. This is a peeler from the OXO Good Grips line. So this peeler actually, interestingly enough, was based or had a foundation on a very simple idea called universal design. Universal Design said or believes that in order to be socially responsible we cannot exclude any one group. For peelers, this means people with dexterity issues. Today, moving beyond Universal Design and that was actually developed in the '90s, today we're expanding that definition and the Femme Den believes that we need to be more inclusive of not only people with dexterity issues but women overall and we feel like understanding women is something that we all try to do but we're just not there yet. Design after all is about understanding people not things and women are people. So before we get into the guts, I wanna ask a simple question. Can anyone guess who designed this makeup compact from the 1950s? Any guesses? No, not Max Factor. It is actually Dodge. In the '50s, they realized that the women's market was ripe with opportunity and so they designed a driving experience for women. It was pink, outside and inside. It came complete with an umbrella that matched the interior, a raincoat and also a makeup bag filled with makeup. I actually really want one of these cars but more in an ironic way. Unfortunately, this car was removed off of the market after about two years due to poor sales. Funny enough, the world has changed significantly in the past 60 years.

Our society has experienced massive cultural shifts, men and women alike. We are not the same as we were back then but companies are still using the same approach to appeal to women. They're still buying into or relying on these stereotypes of who women are to connect with them. These are products that are offered today on the far side of the screen. It doesn't really make sense. I think that we can do better than this. Well, sort of an interesting thing, in the '50s, they took an existing model of a car and they painted it pink. Today, we're doing the exact same thing. We call it the shrink it and pink it approach. We might just paint it pink, make it a little smaller and cuter and call it a day. It's not enough. So the good news is that the opportunity still exists. That's what's great. We, 60 years later, we still have the opportunity in front of us to crack that nut and to connect on women on a more meaningful level beyond color and that's why we started the Femme Den. The Femme Den, it originated from a few women at Smart Design, designers, researchers, engineers. It really is dedicated to pushing forward a very simple idea just like Universal Design pushed forward the idea of inclusivity. We are here to pave the way for a deeper understanding around design and gender. And in short, we wanna save good women from bad design. So I'm gonna cover three brief points today. Sex is important. Men and women are different and what to do about it. The best part, how to please a woman. So the American woman is the CEO of her household. This is a commonly stated statistic that women buy or influence up to 80 percent of consumer purchases. It's a lot. Why is that? Well, she's buying for herself but she's also buying for her family, her spouse, her children and for her entire household. That means she is actually a very picky consumer. She has high standards 'cause she wants what's best for the people in that household. Women have power and influence more than what we expect. Women's market is actually the world's largest opportunity. In 2009, women spent 20 trillion dollars. They earned half that. That means she's spending her money and everybody else's money. Also, the women's market is actually double the opportunity of the Chinese and Indian markets combined. So, I'll pose this question to you. Why is it that with all that power and influence, women say that only 1 percent of them feel that they feel considered by consumer electronics manufacturers, for example, 1 percent feel considered. It's not a lot. Why is it that 71 percent of women feel that only cleaning products and beauty brands consider them? Beauty, cleaning, that's it. Is it really because we're that confusing? Or maybe is it because in my industry, industrial design, there's not that many women around? It's changing overtime but right now, in 2010 America, there's only about 10 to 15 percent women in my field. I know in communication design, it's much, much higher so probably more than 50 percent. Our clients come to us all the time and they admit that they've aggressively gone after the women's market with limited success and we always say to them that's great. You need to keep doing that. You're on the right path. That's where the money is but we first have to understand a few basic principles. First, men and women are different. This is a conversation that can be a double-edged sword. We have to understand what makes us innately different. What are we born with that's different from each other but also what are the social trends that really adjust those innate differences, nature and nurture combined. The difference is between us really are defined by hormones. We are wired to be sensitive to different things. So oxytocin is a hormone that's been linked to women being empathetic and having great facial recognition skills. So a day-old baby girl like her, for example, she will stare at her mother much more than a mobile for example. She's looking at her mother's face. A day-old baby boy is the opposite so he has testosterone. Testosterone has been linked to understanding of mechanical systems. On the ability to rotate an object in space, boys will outperform girls by and large. Perhaps this is linked to this understanding of mechanical systems. So this baby boy will be looking at his mobile more than his mother's face. So this impacts

us on adulthood as well. We do see the world differently still. So this is one experiment where men and women were shown a series of human faces and mechanical objects. The two images fall on the same visual field and they compete for attention. There's the same amount of objects and faces. When women reported back, they reported to have seen more faces, men more machines. So how does that impact the design work that we do. So for example, when deciding to buy a home entertainment system, we may choose the same product but for different reasons. Women, we found, are attracted to the more people-oriented lifestyle benefits that this product experience has to offer, i.e. family time, right.

>> She cares very much about the technology. She cares very much about the functional benefits but she cares about that second order of priority. Men, they're fascinated by these mechanical systems and they first see, they first are attracted to those functional benefits. They care about their families just as much but in order of priority, they first are attracted to that mechanical functional system. So talking about our differences is always fun. We all have personal stories and personal opinions on the subject but what to do about it is the hard part. What to do about it is where people have a hard time and that's why we're here to talk about the tools and techniques that we've developed to help our clients really connect. So it's no secret that women are where the money is, Dodge knew it 60 years ago. Our clients know it today. These are some common attempts to reach woman again, they shrink it and pink it. As soon as a product becomes a woman's product, it becomes suspect. It's poor quality, it looks like a toy. Again, we can do better than this but we have to dig deeper. So before design, before we even put pen to paper, there is a fundamental question, a strategic question we have to ask ourselves. Are we going to be gender exclusive designing for him or her, in our case, only? Or are we going to be inclusive of men and women designing for both? Choosing wisely requires a deep understanding of gender and a quite nuanced approach. This choice, this place right here is where most of our clients or companies in general go wrong. So when should we design for him or for her only? This is what we call visible design at Smart Design. So there're a couple good reasons. If there are physical differences that suggest that we have incompatible needs, then that's a go. For example, I don't have a beard, design of electrical shavers. I don't really need to be considered in that. Also social values, there are certain scenarios where we want to be different, where we want to be attractive in different ways such as fashion and beauty. So once we've made that choice, once we know we are rightly visible, it's very important to remember this next thought. We have to consider how she, in our case let's just say she. How she feels in the moment she is experiencing your idea. With all the diverse rules that we all experience and women experience, some fit the traditional framework, traditional framework of being feminine. Some fit the traditional framework of being masculine and some are sort of somewhere within that spectrum. We have to remember that she's in a different mindset depending on the task that she's in, the task that we're designing for. So the same woman might feel very feminine one day or one part of the day and kind of run that spectrum throughout her day. An interesting note is that in 2010 America, women actually have a lot of social freedom, social flexibility to try on masculinity throughout their day. Men right now have less so it's a really interesting opportunity for us to understand. So we can't presume that she's always on that ultra girly side. We have to really understand how she feels in that moment. The Nike Imara watch that we designed is a really good example of everything that I've just been talking about. This is a sports watch that we've learned from our consumer is something that she wears outside of the gym so it becomes a fashion product. Women also have different expectations from their workouts. So it is a solidly visible product. In

reference to how she feels when exercising, she said she wants to feel feminine and sporty. So we delivered against those feelings with a design that has personal meaning and looks high-fashion for our younger target audience, but also delivers the quality, precision and performance that we find in men's watches. They also made this version in pink but that's okay. There are the other options. So the next big question, when should we design one solution for both? This is what we call at Smart transparent designed. So this is where the magic happens. This is when we mix everything we know about men and women and create and experience that works in relevant ways for each. This is the most challenging type of project. This is the most common type of work that we have at Smart Design. So the answer is we design transparently when both sexes are going to use the product and there are no social or physical barriers. The Mini Cooper is a great example of transparent design. Men and women both love this product. Men will say they love this product because it drives like a sports car, has stunt car routes, big engine. Maybe that links back to all that testosterone. Women say they love this product because it's got a great personality and it's fun like a spunky sidekick. Maybe it links back to oxytocin. The beauty of this and why this is a magic mix is because we can create desire for the same thing but for different reasons. So this next example is a bit more nuanced, a flip video camera. We just focused on women but always inclusive of men. So again, there are certain tasks today that are assigned each gender such as taking out the garbage or changing a diaper in 2010 America. But these roles are changing overtime and we can't ignore those social shifts. So although we know that women are the primary memory keepers in the house and home and primary purchasers of these types of products, this product was never ever communicated as a women's product. They never excluded the men. This product is specifically—appeals specifically to women but also to men at a very basic level. It's very simple and yet advanced so it allows her to be highly functional without being highly engage in gadgetry. It also is easy to carry, easy to operate, easy to download and share. It's all about the people that matter, the people she's filming. Incidentally, this company was sold to Cisco for 590 million dollars. That's how I know it's a good example. So this is another type of example. This is some screen grabs of the Dell campaign. It shows how gender can be a touchy subject. Dell wanted to market their Mini Netbook to women. They did so by promoting tech tips. These tech tips included counting calories, watching fitness videos, finding recipes online, [inaudible]. Also notice this is a screen guy from the commercial the matching shirts to laptops.

[Laughter]

>> I'm glad you find it as amusing as we did. There are no real tech tips. Basically, the message they are sending to women is that they're clueless about technology and they need special help. This whole campaign was removed, taken down after about 10 days because people were outraged. So what did they do wrong? There's nothing wrong with color choice. There's nothing wrong with the netbook in and of itself. But what they did, they—not only did they exclude men, they excluded tech-savvy women that might be looking for a second device. They oversimplified women presuming that they're all over here. They're all this sort of over feminized, stereotypical girlie girl when they're computing, and that's not always the case. They really, really should have been here. This is a lesson on how companies go too far with this girlie girl stuff. There has to be a very good reason for it to be labeled women only. So lastly, one more example of the Endura Scrubs, another product that was focused on women yet inclusive of men. So let's first look at the problem we are trying to solve in this project. So surgeons and super heroes have a lot in common. They make the impossible happen and they save lives. Super heroes'

uniform nicely supports those wonderful activities, empowering cape helps them get around. They have a proud brand right in the front, it fits really well, every elements integrated. But when you look at the surgeon, they look far from super heroic. They actually look like they're wearing pajamas. So, I'm gonna talk about women right now in this standard scrub because we found that 75 percent of hospital workers are women. They had a lot of complaints and a lot of issues with these scrubs when we talked to them. First and foremost, they didn't feel professional. They didn't feel like their uniform reflected those wonderful abilities, the deep V-neck was gaping and so when she bent over her patient, she would expose herself to her colleagues. It was ill-fitting everywhere, the rise was too long creating chaffing and it was too tight in the hips and it was too long in the leg. And so not only would she trip on the excess fabric, but she would drag in dirt into her sterile environment, it's very dangerous. So this is our design. These scrubs are a perfect example of transparent design.

>> We focused on women because they had the most issues. They're actually wearing scrubs. The picture before, she's wearing scrubs based on—there are unisex scrub based on the male form. So what we did is we focused on her because she was the most demanding. She was the most left out. She was excluded so we focused on her. She has the most complex body and has, again, the most complaints. So what's interesting and magic about this is that these scrubs are specifically designed for her but through doing so, we get him as well. He doesn't mind the extra room from the darts that we created in the pants to make room for women's hips. He doesn't mind the extra room. He appreciates all those details that we created for her. A couple of things that we did, the overall design, look and feel, we took cues from this. Sporting goods to really emphasize professionalism and performance. The deep V material is an elastic so it sort of sticks to the skin, never exposing. That has an adjustable waist bond and also snaps from the bottom to adjust height. The beautiful thing about this is not only did men love it too but this company never ever said that this was designed for women. Because what would happen if they did. The men wouldn't wanna wear it. So, in summary, when you're planning your next project, remember to choose wisely and tread carefully because it's a very, very touchy subject and before I depart, I want to show this quick video. So overall, this transparent visible design is a very, very important strategic tool that we use to help our clients connect to women once we've sort of moved deeper into the design process, we have other tools. This is a tool designed or inspired by an article we read in Fast Company actually and this tool is designed to get at the core of the emotional feelings of how people experience ideas and product experiences.

[Silence]

[Background Music]

>> Oh cell phone, where art thou?

>> Dear single cup coffee maker.

>> Dear Sprint.

>> Dear little four-cupper.

>> Dear my Sony Laptop.

>> Dear Starbucks.

>> Dear G-mail, Facebook, Yahoo Group, G-mail Calendar, Microsoft Outlook.

>> I'm sorry cable, but I don't think it's working anymore. You said we couldn't go on the way we were, you gave me an ultimatum. You told me that if I committed to the digital version of you that it will all be different and it would be like when we first met.

>> You initially entice me with your name, a good life.

>> You were new, untried, blushing of youth on a desperate desire to please.

>> Slender and slim with curves in the right places.

>> What I imagine you are pure sex. Dark, sleek and just dirty enough.

>> Hand me down from mom, used but still sleek, shiny.

>> Somehow your allure sucked me in before I knew it and I was spending 7 to 8 hours a day on you.

>> Took me to far off places I thought I'd never go. But it was always on your terms.

>> It becomes so withholding, all these HD and premium channels for other men, for me public access.

>> You're unresponsive. You don't get me to the right floors and your doors just keep smashing on people trying to enter making me appear rude.

>> Wasteful nature of your existence got to me.

>> And you never want to leave the house.

>> I don't know when it changed. All I know is that we both lost interest and the only fire between us now is on our customer service calls.

>> I use to know just what channel you were on by looking at your face. Now, I always have to ask.

>> An unconventional relationship, sure, but we both got what we wanted. You are paid by the minute and I could get last minute checklist at the grocery store.

>> You've been nothing but a constant let down. I'm always waiting on you.

>> You lied to me.

>> Messages are not returned, dates are missed, people get mad.

>> [Inaudible] looked loaded, irritating like that.

>> I'm always looking around for something better. Yes, even while I'm texting or your taking my uploads.

>> I hate to say it but I've left you for a younger woman.

>> Kuric [phonetic] has won my heart with his fast and efficient versatile ways. He lets me change flavors at the drop of a hat.

>> She's everything you weren't. She's peppy, she's athletic, she's a little flirty.

>> We moved on to a more natural organic cat food that really is good and doesn't lie.

>> And I know I get his services one cup at a time. Yes, I know he takes up more counter real estate, but he's so fast on the brew.

>> It's time to go back to the real love of my life. My French press.

>> The New Years I gave you up and I'm a better man for it.

>> And yeah, there is someone else now that you mentioned it. You thought it was Verizon. That just shows how little you know me. It's Netflix, okay. You know the other night when I went upstairs early and left you in the living room, I had Netflix in bed with me. It's over, Cable.

>> Thanks for the memories.

>> Yours ambivalently.

>> Hope you don't continue to harm others in the future and accept that you're not worth their time.

>> I'm done with you. Goodbye.

[Music]

[Applause]

>> Have a seat, please. Gosh, so many questions. I mean it's really great to try and find the highest common denominator, you know and I was thinking also of other design projects in the past, the famous Volvo car designed by women which was also quite unisex or—

>> It was an all women team.

>> Yes, and they did a great job. Did you like that?

>> It was taken off the—it never really made it to market.

>> Yeah, I know, I know.

>> I think they again made a mistake with the way they communicated their ideas.

>> Yeah.

>> They communicated it in a way that those ideas were really only relevant to women. One idea in particular was assisted parking.

>> Right. As if.

>> And you know everyone needs help with parking and it made them seem that they were putting women down as opposed to being helpful.

>> It's really interesting and it's impossible not to see also this experiment as a very, very deep political act. So I wanted to ask you, Femme Den was created in 2008, right?

>> No, 2006.

>> Six. So you went through the presidential campaign.

>> We did.

>> Right? So Sarah Palin and now Christine McDonnell, how—what kind of comments were you making, you know, within your group about just the communication of womanhood to the world?

>> Again, it is a very, very touchy subject. As soon as we talk about gender, people clam up and I think that's why it's—I think that's why there aren't that many people talking about it, especially in the design community, because everyone gets uncomfortable.

>> Also women clam up?

>> Absolutely.

>> Interesting.

>> I think that women are cautious to sound too aggressive especially, and then again, I was mentioning before that in industrial design, there's not that many women. And so it's hard to have a voice when there's not that many women around. It's changing there and at Pratt, the demographic is almost two more women than men, so I think that it's going to change overtime and now that comfort zone talking about gender will become, you know, more welcome and with talks like this, you know, it becomes more open and welcome and we're talking about gender in a way that makes sense for business. It's not—

>> It's important.

>> We're not talking about what's right and what's fair. We're talking about what makes money for our clients.

>> Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Now, in this country, the women's led movement is always gone side by side with the African-Americans led movement. Now, when it comes to design, the percentage of consumers that relate to the African-American group is definitely not the same as the women, you know it cannot make the same argument but at the same time, there is a real dearth of and I say black because it's also West Indian and it's the same situation also in Europe of black

designers or just like black people that decide to go into design school. Have you looked also at other underrepresented minorities in the world of product design and in these schools?

>> It's a really great question.

>> Yeah.

>> One of the things that I think Smart Design is founded on is understanding people and Universal Design and Femme Den is really about diversity and one of the ideas we have on our checklist for the future is understanding diversity overall. What are the cultural shifts that are happening in this country not only within men and women but with Latin American communities with African-American communities, you know it's not just the US. We have offices in Barcelona, what's happening in Europe, that deep understanding of those differences and those similarities even can it help us go a long way to create products that appeal to everyone.

>> And at the same time, appealing to everyone doesn't mean the unisex of the 1970s.

>> Absolutely not.

>> And it doesn't mean that unirate, you know it's like—

>> Right.

>> It really is about being able to build degrees of freedom within the project and product.

>> Right.

>> That's really interesting. So how do you do that? I mean it's not only about being able to give a chance for customization. It's also about a chance to establish a dialogue between the person and the object that gives a different nuance to the object itself, right?

>> Absolutely. It's all about—I mean, we talk about this industry wide and it doesn't always get implemented across every touch point but that emotional connection is how we get there. It's actually interestingly enough connecting on an emotional level putting people first is a place where women naturally live. And so in order to grow the industrial design at least and design community as a whole, if we focus on what makes sense to women, we can grow the industry overall.

>> Just one last question. We're almost finished but this is such an important topic. Do you ever talk to writers, thinkers, post-feminist, feminist? I mean do you ever have a conversation that is truly about the political implications of what you're doing?

>> We mostly talk to business people. I mean that's where the opportunity lies. I mean there's a lot of underlying gender currents to what I've been talking about but it's mostly about that 80 percent that I showed before. It's mostly about how can we help our clients connect, how can we help our clients make money, how can we do right by them.

>> Still, I would love to see a one or two-day symposium about gender and race and design, and I hope that you take it over.

>> Absolutely. That's next.

>> Thank you Erica. Thanks a lot.

>> Thank you.

[Applause]