

# The ad industry from a female perspective

 By [Pasqua Heard](#)

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Over the course of August, Bizcommunity has dedicated much coverage to the experience of women in various industries. Here, we learnt the perspective of Carmen Schaefer, a senior design and art lecturer at Red & Yellow School of Logic and Magic, who plays a role in preparing young creatives for the advertising industry. She covers topics relating to discrimination, obtaining jobs and creating award-winning work. We also interviewed Gabi van Niekerk and Carina Bonse, some of Red & Yellow's most promising students selected for this year's Loerie Student Awards, who are on the cusp of entering the industry.

Schaefer has three years' experience as a lecturer at various tertiary institutions, some of which had female CEOs or had female academic heads. She is passionate about her craft and identifies herself as a proud feminist who has an equal relationship with her husband.



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## Representation of women

Schaefer pointed out that, in her experience, there doesn't seem to be an equal representation of men and women in creative director level roles. This is not the first time that the topic of a glass ceiling for women has been raised by a creative in the industry. Read [what Katherine Glover has to say about it](#) during last year's Cannes Lions festival.



Carmen Schaefer

Schaefer related how she arrived at an advertising industry event with some of her top female students one year, where there was an opportunity to meet creative directors. All of them were middle-aged, white males. One of those super talented female students turned to her and said: "Do you have to be an old white man to be a creative director still?" Schaefer says while there are obviously female directors out there that she could refer her to, they just weren't represented at this specific event - neither were creative directors of other races. She warns that organisers of industry events should be careful of this as "It creates a lasting impression, which is not necessarily correct".

Bonse, who won a bronze Loerie at the 2015 Student Loerie Awards, added, "I am aware that currently there are fewer women in top positions in the advertising

industry. But there is a huge movement around the globe to get women into positions of power across all industries. Most of the top students in my class are women, and I feel they will go far with their talents.”

People like [Suhana Gordhan](#), the new chair of the Loeries, are certainly helping to challenge the current status quo by inspiring young women to get involved and succeed in the industry.

## Torn between family and work

Schaefer went on to draw attention to the fact that female creatives feel pressured to balance their family and work life. She said, “I think company management makes it really hard for women to progress in their careers and also have a family. I know a lot of female creatives who were at a crossroads and had to choose between advancing in their careers or having children. The working environment at South African agencies seems to depend very much on long hours spent at the agency: it makes being a mother difficult. I like the idea of having crechés or qualified nannies at big companies. And flexi-hours would also help.”

Sharing this sentiment, Gabi van Niekerk who was awarded a bronze Loerie this year for the ‘Swimming In It’ campaign, said, “I feel that there is opportunity for women in the ad industry to succeed, it’s just a little tougher for us to do so. I hope that one day when I’m a creative director I can have a family without my entire agency freaking out!”

## What constitutes topnotch work



Swimming In It campaign

Explaining why she believed the Red & Yellow students’ work selected for the Loerie Student Awards to be award-winning, Schaefer said, “We try to teach our creatives to think strategically, and really understand the business side of creativity. We often give them real client briefs and real issues to work with. I think it’s excellent to enter the Loeries, as they do recognise creative excellence, but I’m hoping that the judges also looked deeper and tried to understand the strategy and concepts in the work.

“The problem-solving in the thinking is really important for me. For example, the students did an integrated campaign to promote a cause, and we received two finalist nominations for those. One was for a campaign dealing with the issue of running safely for women (inspired by the Franziska Blöchliger Tokai murder that upset all of us very much) and the other was Swimming In It, a campaign to create awareness of the sewage spill into the sea surrounding Cape Town. [The creatives invented a wristband that underwent a litmus test to

notify swimmers of the levels of e-coli and other bacteria caused by sewage in the water.]

“These campaigns were clever first, and beautiful second. To me, that’s what should win awards. People are often seduced by superficial beauty,” said Schaefer.

## Students’ views on entering the industry

While the students have not yet held jobs in the industry, their being present at the Loerie Awards and having an opportunity to work on real-life campaigns has given them valuable insight. They defended their talent and ability to succeed in the industry.

“I believe that I will get a job as a copywriter, because I work hard and I’m confident to speak about the work I do and stand up for it,” said van Niekerk.

“I don’t feel there will be an issue for me finding a job as a woman in this industry, because if you want something badly enough, you will make it happen,” concludes Bonse.

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