

Why women must shape the products of the future for an inclusive and fairer society

Less than 8% of C-Levels in Product Teams are occupied by women. To change this, the startup 50inTech is launching “Wannabe a CPO” a virtual Bootcamp on the 16-18 of February to help women in product level up to reach the top. Caroline Ramade, founder of 50inTech and member of the UN Women French Committee, believes that women must equally co-shape the products of the future.

Temps de lecture : minute

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That’s why the Bootcamp will gather the most influential women in Product to share key learnings and actionable advice with the audience, free registration [here](#).

A world designed for men?

Let’s do a quick thought experiment. Imagine waking up in a world where your phone is too large for your hand, where your doctor prescribes a drug that is rejected by your body, and where you are 47% more likely to be injured in a car crash. Doesn’t sound so great, right?

Unfortunately, this is the world women live in today. In her book, *“Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men”*, Caroline Criado-Perez explains how half the world’s population is being systematically excluded from product design.

She points to the gender data gap, a "phenomenon whereby the vast majority of information that we have collected globally and continue to collect—everything from economic data to urban planning data to medical data—have been collected on men".

In other words, skewed data produces non-inclusive products. But this is only part of the problem. There is also a massive gender gap in product design teams. The facts speak for themselves: while women buy 85% of household products, only 5% of the product design industry in the UK is female. Perhaps this explains why, in crash test laboratories, dummies are still modeled on the average male (seems easy enough to change, right?).

Of course, women aren't the only ones to bear the brunt of non-inclusive design. Racial minorities and disabled people struggle disproportionately from non-inclusive design. In one of (too) many examples, researchers discovered that speech-to-text tools misunderstood—and therefore mis-transcribed—Black speakers nearly twice as often as they did white speakers.

The way we are able to interact with the world around us is influenced by the way it is designed. According to inclusive design expert Sandra Camacho, "bad design is all around us. We have game controllers that require both hands, and subway stations without elevators, making them completely inaccessible for people in wheelchairs and those pushing strollers."

The time has come where design can no longer be seen as separate from societal values and ethical considerations. Design justice is about putting people who do not hold power in society at the center of the design process. In Camacho's words, "bad design is a reflection of a society where the needs of those with the most power and privilege are prioritised."

If you're reading this and are somehow still not convinced that from an ethical point of view we need to design inclusively, let's talk about the benefits to business. After all, more users equals more customers. Considering that the global "femtech" industry is expected to be worth almost \$50B by 2025, the opportunity cost of non-inclusive design is massive.

Blockchain and Web3: an opportunity to start over

As developers build our virtual future on top of the blockchain, we have an opportunity to start with as clean of a slate as possible. And, contrary to popular belief, the Web3 world has real potential to become equitable.

Since 2018, women have been entering the blockchain space at rapid speed. In India, the majority of cryptocurrency investors are women. Not unimportantly, 50% of the workforce at Binance — the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange — is female.

However, these positive gender-balanced stats from India are still outliers. According to a 2021 State of U.S. Crypto report, 75% of crypto holders are men. And anyone who has ever set foot in a cryptocurrency Discord or Telegram group can attest to the pervasive bro culture present in the sector.

Similarly, there's a lot left to do to include more women, and especially women of colour, into the crypto space. In March 2021, NCWIT released a report stating that Black women make up only 3% of the computing workforce in the United States.

In light of this, many crypto and blockchain coders, analysts and founders are trying to change that. The SheFi movement (a pun on DeFi, or Decentralized Finance) is doing really important work when it comes to

explaining the potential of blockchain and cryptocurrencies to bank the unbanked and promote the financial inclusion of women worldwide.

Similarly, by funding and supporting female developers and cryptocurrency founders, initiatives such as Women in Blockchain play a pivotal role in this unique moment. As the adoption of blockchain technology skyrockets, they want to make sure we don't reproduce the same gender inequalities and toxic masculinity that plague traditional tech and finance.

Toxic masculinity and racism in the Metaverse

With Facebook's recent name change to Meta, Mark Zuckerberg wants to be the first to build a global metaverse—a *network of virtual worlds* in which people can interact with digital objects and one another.

Meta, along with several other tech companies, is envisioning a future in which many aspects of our lives—work, socialising, exercise and, who knows, maybe even love—will take place in a digital metaverse.

Ignoring for a moment that not everyone is as thrilled as Mark at the prospect of wearing a VR headset 24/7, the key question is: will we succeed at creating an inclusive metaverse, or will we reproduce the same inequalities that plague product design today?

There are early warning signs. *Racist and sexist harassment* are already popping up in social VR video games, underscoring the importance of regulating behaviour in digital spaces—something that social media platforms have failed to address in the past decade. Similarly, digital avatars in NFT (non fungible token) collections are already *being priced differently* based on race, gender and skin colour.

The good news is that we are still early enough. But if we don't seize the momentum now, it may soon be too late.



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Restoring diversity in the Product Design industry

The gender imbalance in Product Design wasn't always so rampant as it is today. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Product Management teams were almost 50/50. As Deborah Liu, a Silicon Valley product manager and executive, writes in this *insightful LinkedIn article*:

"In the early to mid-2000s, Product Management at tech companies had almost the same number of men and women. When I spoke with PMs from the

early days of eBay, PayPal, Travelocity, and Yahoo, most confirmed that their teams were nearly gender balanced at this time. During one period at PayPal, all of the PM Directors reporting directly to VP of Product Amy Klement were women.”

But then something changed. In 2004 developers at Google—which by then had become the leading training ground for Product Managers—complained to management about PM’s not being ‘technical’ enough. The company decided to change its job requirements and began hiring only PM’s who had a degree in computer science or in a related field like electrical engineering.

Needless to say, this puts women at a massive disadvantage. To this day, only 20% of engineering degrees are held by women. We must ensure more women become part of product design teams by increasing the talent flow from universities into career paths. This can be done by providing scholarships and dedicated educational programmes. But it also requires a broader mentality shift. We must challenge gender stereotypes and redefine which jobs are considered “suitable” for women.

But increasing the talent flow alone won’t be enough. Of all the women engineers who end up making it into the industry, 40% end up quitting due to its *hegemonic masculine culture*. So, even though graduation rates for women in STEM have been rising in the past decade, very few women actually end up shaping the products and services we use on a daily basis. To address this issue, we need to fix retention rates.

Helping women reach the top of Product

Part of that cultural change must involve giving diverse voices leadership

opportunities. To unlock innovation, companies need to ensure that everyone is heard, and that there are safe spaces for new ideas. Besides this, other behaviours that stimulate diversity are giving underrepresented team members decision-making authority, sharing credit for success, and implementing feedback from the team. Leaders who implement these changes are nearly *twice as likely* as others to benefit from innovative insights. Similarly, employees working in inclusive environments are *3.5 times* more likely to achieve their full innovative potential.

This is why it is essential that we help women climb to the top of Product Management by giving them access to learning resources, and offering them mentorship and coaching opportunities. At 50inTech, our latest *“Wannabe a CPO Bootcamp”* helps women to get inspired to level up and advance through various stages of their career path.

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