

Brandon Couch

Design Biography 1

Part 1:

In my opinion, there are multiple parts to a well-designed map. First of all, a well-designed map should be visually harmonious and shouldn't appear to be off centered. All of the elements, including the legend, title, descriptions, compass roses, and scale bars should be placed in such a manner that the overall composition is balanced. That way, the map looks cohesive and aesthetically pleasant. Secondly, the focal point of the map should be centered on the main data points so that the viewer's eyes are naturally drawn there first. The viewer's attention should next be drawn outward in a natural flow to the other key features of the map. A third point is a good map should be able to be read by any person regardless of abilities or disabilities. For example, a map should use a color scheme that is able to be easily read by people who are colorblind so they can still understand the information presented in the map itself. Any symbols used on the map should be able to be clearly differentiated so that they stand out more for those with visual impairments, as well as so that there is no confusion as to their meaning. Any text describing information on the map should be clear and concise so that it may be understood. This is especially crucial for people who may have difficulty comprehending technical language, particularly if they are not familiar with terminology specific to the field. Finally, maps as a method of relaying and conveying information should remain as neutral as possible and should avoid promoting any sort of biases or prejudices. Science and data are supposed to be neutral because when they aren't, they become propaganda. This can be difficult as we may have unconscious biases, but we have to be aware of them and try to work against them. Otherwise,

information could end up being skewed and the map will become more akin to propaganda than an actual source of conveying useful information.

Part 2:

In mapping, different parts of our identities have the potential to influence our designs. Some of these factors include age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and religion. These comprise the “Big 8 Identities.” While this may influence how we produce our maps, we should make sure to have our maps appeal to as many identities as possible for maximum accessibility.

With regards to age, even though I am in my mid-twenties, I still consider myself fairly young. As I have grown up in the information age, I tend to prefer map designs that would appear on electronic media as opposed to in print. With more in-depth descriptions, including technical language, I would aim that towards other college students. However, I would still try to include more inclusive, user-friendly language, as well as explanations for older or younger people.

In regards to ability, I have my own story. Ever since I was a child, I have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, otherwise known as A.D.H.D. This means that I have trouble paying attention and holding on to some ideas long-term. It can also impact me emotionally as I can become anxious. Paying attention to lengthy texts can be difficult for me as I may lose focus and thus, miss the information. I absorb information better through symbolism, which is what I would strive for in my mapping, along with clear and concise explanations. In addition, I know several people who are colorblind; thus, I try to use color schemes that are “colorblind friendly” such as blue/orange. In scenarios where I can’t use such a

palette, I try to use distinctive patterns and/or shapes. Of all of the identities, I would say that this is the one that impacts me the most.

With regards to race and ethnicity, I usually try to avoid bias and prejudices that would potentially skew the data. I realize that as a white American, I understand that I am inherently privileged as I am not typically affected by systematic racism. However, I know that people of color do not have that same experience and I try to avoid having maps that may be biased against them. As someone who lives in an English-speaking country, typically all of my maps are written in English and are generally going to be viewed by those who speak the language. If I were to make a map meant for another country or for those who speak a different language, I would figure out how to get it translated.

The idea of gender in the world of maps is a hard one to fathom. Are there boy maps and girl maps? Can you apply gender to a medium that displays information? Are there visual displays that are more appealing to women than to men? When I design a map, I try to keep things neutral as I don't usually see a need to apply gender to a map. Data should always be neutral. But, as a cisgender male, I will admit that I sometimes skew towards more "masculine" colors such as blue. If I was doing a map that displayed data associated with women, I might consider using more traditionally feminine colors for aesthetic purposes. In my mind, similar principles apply to sexual orientation, in that data should be neutral. As someone who identifies as gay, I know that people of sexual minorities also experience discrimination as do people of color. Thus, as I do with race and ethnicity, I try to work against bias and prejudices when analyzing and including data on a map.

In regards to socioeconomic status, I come from a middle-income family. I haven't been subjected to poverty, although I am currently partially financially dependent on my mother. I

think that maps should be available to as many people as possible regardless of socioeconomic status and should contain information that is relevant to their lives. The intended audience should always be considered. For example, a map of bus routes would be useful for working class people who commute. I also understand that socioeconomic status may also be impacted by the other identities such as people of certain races or ethnicities ending up in a lower class.

Finally, in regards to religion, I don't include that in my maps unless it is a map specific to information about religion or religions. This may be largely because, although I was raised in a church, I currently do not consider myself religious.

My overall philosophy is that data should be as neutral as possible, be accessible and relevant to as many people as possible, and be easy to understand.