

BEAUTY OR BRAINS, CAUTIOUS OR COURAGEOUS?

Gender and power in online visual designs

IDENTITIES, CONTROVERSIES

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ABSTRACT

Gendered visual communication is a major part of contemporary, mediated discourse, yet these expressions are seldom reflected upon from a designers' perspective. Whose voices are empowered in tabloid newspapers and gendered magazines? In what ways can we express gender? In this visual essay, I provide an auto-ethnographic perspective, and use personal reflections and visualisations to show a process of deconstructing, shaping and encoding gendered expressions on mobile platforms from my point of view, as a designer and a woman. The essay contributes to research writing methodologies, by questioning conventional ways in which scholarly research is presented. I draw on concepts of feminist speculative designs and gender-flips to demonstrate how the designer can change the meaning of digital spaces. I show this with two examples; an online newspaper design and a student project of an online women's magazine. I found that an awareness of such gendered expressions can challenge existing norms, enable creativity, innovative designs and shape new meanings in popular cultural expressions.



AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC VISUAL ESSAY ON SPECULATIVE GENDERED DESIGNS IN SPACES FOR CONVERSATION

I am one of you

I have written this essay in an auto-ethnographic, self-reflective and personal style, a style with traditions in feminist literature (Naples 2003). This article contributes to these feminist writing methodologies of poetic, creative, experimental, emotional and vivid styles of writing that are emerging as we speak (Livholts, 2012). This personal way of writing is reflecting both my theoretical stance and designerly position. Similarly to other researchers who have studied designers who design for their own cultural or generational groups (Mainsah, Brandtzæg & Følstad, 2016), I find it useful to *be* my user, rather than simply being *informed* by users. As a woman designing for, and researching spaces that traditionally have been shaped by men or women with quite different interests than mine, I find this approach valuable. They allow me to draw on all the discussions I have had with women – conversations that would have been less available to me if I were a man. As other scholars from creative fields have argued, *I am not interesting as myself, but I am interesting because I am one of you* (Eriksson 2010). The *poetic observations* (Suri 2011) I make every day from my surroundings that informs and shapes these ideas and designs, are affected by this perspective and stance.

Klanten, R., Hellige, H., & Uleshka. (2009)



McCandless, D. (2014)



Sagmeister, S. (2008)



A visual ability to answer

In my time spent studying graphic design, I have seen design practitioners visualising their knowledge in the form of persuasive or critical texts (Barnbrook, 2007; Klanten, Hellige & Uleshka, 2009; McCandless, 2014; Millman, 2009; Sagmeister, 2008; Satrapi, Ripa, & Ferris, 2007), as shown below. These intertwined images and texts has shaped how I express and convey the research this article builds on. Though it has been argued that knowledge can be understood as an *ability to answer* (Lindseth 2015), design researchers debate whether a design can be regarded as knowledge itself or require additional reflective texts (Friedman 2003; Lurås 2016; Sevaldson 2010). In this visual essay, I will use images to encourage reflections and demonstrate arguments. I provide personal annotations (Marshall 1997), as an analytical way of discussing the designed choices. I seek to emphasise the importance of designs and visuals in research expressions, by providing the reader and spectator with various ways of seeing designs (Berger 1972) and decoding designs from different perspectives (Hall 1980).

Millman, D. (2009)



Barnbrook, J. (2007)



Gender, power and feminist speculative designs

Would women design spaces differently than men? Milestone and Meyer ask this in *Gender and Popular Culture*, a book that represents a small piece of a large body of research on gender and media, identity, technology, social media, space, women's magazines and popular culture (Butler 1990; De Beauvoir 1949; Gauntlett 2008; Gill 2007; Krijnen & Van Bauwel 2015; McCracken 1992; McRobbie 1997; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz 2015; Ytre-Arne 2012). In product design research, gendered expressions are explored critically through *gender-flips* and *gender bending* concepts (Ehrnberger 2017; Sundbom mfl. 2015; Hansson & Jahnke 2009), and in HCI research, Bardzell outlines a need for a feminist discourse in HCI regarding how gender identities and relations shape the designs of these technologies (Bardzell 2010). In visual communications, Hepworth argues that the field is rarely given attention for the role it plays in historically governing our thoughts, identities and behaviors through everyday designs, which may reinforce or contradict our beliefs, values and self-identities (Hepworth 2016). The process of *shaping* these visual expressions, particularly *gendered* expressions, is, however, seldom discussed in research. I argue that more knowledge is needed about designers' ways of shaping gendered expressions in interactive environments and also how designers challenge and critique expressions in contexts that are profoundly gendered. In this article, I build on *feminist speculative design* (Prado de O. Martins, 2014) as a critique of sociological and cultural aspects of existing designs, that forms part of our everyday interactions with technology. The contributions of this article, builds on the critique (Prado de O. Martins & Oliveira, 2014) of critical and speculative designs' lack of focus on the politics of oppression, and a greater understanding of how human relations makes its way into design – a focus that may provoke discussions of how our designed future may look. Imagined futures that are intervened by design, can according to Mazé represent different perspectives, preferences and realities, and can be seen as an exercise of power (Mazé, 2016).

Shaping spaces for conversations

This article forms part of a PhD in which I explore the designer's possibilities when shaping spaces for online conversations in contexts of online magazines and newspapers – spaces for democratic participation. In this article, I mainly discuss the shaping of gendered contexts that builds on certain cultural and ideological values. I demonstrate how values can inform the designed choices of the space, including the features and symbolism of content, colors, typography, navigation and users' input options. I take on a broad perspective on design, one in which the content of a newspaper or magazine forms part of the intentional or unintentional act of shaping a space. These features forms part of a framework for my thesis, based on how we may strategically design for inclusive, conversational spaces. This paper points to the possibilities for expanded analysis that could connect visual and social media aspects to wider feminist critiques.

In this PhD-research, I build on my participation, presence and observations in conversational spaces, mappings of these experiences and inspirational sources, personal diaries, hand-drawn sketches and visualisations in tools such as Adobe InDesign. In this article, I also build on students conceptual and visual work.

On the following pages, I will track a design process from its early stages, in which the first glimpses of motivation occur, to the framing of a student project that resulted in concept visualisations for a women's magazine.

...

SITUATION #01

"PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER"

Being sick for a long time. Supersensitive, dead tired. And highly alert at the same time. I'm torturing myself by reading these debates in online newspapers about women who are away from work due to sick leave. They talk about me. They talk down at me. Pull yourself together, good-girl syndrome, women just don't follow their dreams, they are lazy, researchers can't explain why "they" are more sick than men, interviewed men with *well-meant* recommendations for women, fights on how to read statistic numbers, women allegedly advising sick leave to their friends as retreat when they are slightly tired. Images of the tired "business woman" along with condescending titles. It is never about the men who went to the doctor too late, which probably contributes to the age of death for men being lower than women's. Never about the MEN with the good-boy-syndrome (how about "good-person-syndrome?") but as opposed to women are never looked down on for it. Never about the men who beat their wives into eternal anxiety and workless futures. Never about the women who loves what they do, but are pushed down by self-assertive men, and gets sick of this environment.

Some months later, there is a new debate on women's lack of engagement for newspapers.

Previous page: I draw on personal experiences, observations and interpretations of popular culture and online, tabloid newspaper expressions. I build on Balsamo who argues for taking culture seriously in the process of gendered technological imagination – in terms of the designers' cultural consideration throughout the design process, interpreting these popular cultural expressions as materials and also considering how designers are contributing to the shaping of culture (Balsamo 2011).

REMAKING SENSE OF A PERSONAL LIBRARY OF OBSERVATIONS

Whereas a typical design process would start with a research phase, I had already done a lifetime of research – simply by being a woman reading newspapers – prior to the moment I describe in the notebook on the previous page. I started picking images and titles that had been stored in my head for quite some time. My thoughts after reading Zlatan Ibrahimovic's autobiography, my fascination for the TV series *Mad Men*, my irritation about sexualised 'news'. My revelations from feminist literature that deconstructs the hierarchies of society, and the article I read about how sexualised advertising does not sell if it does not have anything to do with what is being sold (Lull & Bushman 2015). My reflections from all the discussions with women in a closed Facebook debating group, conversations with gay friends and my love for sports. My thoughts on the power of ideals in society, and how I changed my way of looking at the world when my research project was rightfully criticized for having an #AllWhitePanel. Even



after this, I automatically and unconsciously chose images of white people, as if by reflex. I realized that I too now have power to define the world from my perspective. My experiences from therapy, in which I explored *my* thoughts and wishes in a world where others have specific and gendered expectations to me, and how I needed a book to tell me that there were advantages with some of my personality traits, traits that often are regarded as 'feminine' and less valuable in my western culture. My thoughts after seeing how much this had affected my ways of expressing myself, both bodily and with words, to seek acceptance from others. That picture in which I am probably 10 years old and I still sat with my legs widespread. I would not do that in front of a camera today. Labels from my youth still have power over my body language. I start sketching and search my mental library, twisting and turning combinations of content, images and titles to shape new meanings. *My* everyday newspaper front page.

**VISUALISING A TABLOID NEWSPAPER FRONT PAGE
FROM A FEMINIST POINT OF VIEW**

IF THE WORLD WAS GOVERNED BY WOMEN...
(an impossible experiment of visualizing a tabloid newspaper frontpage)

Images implying insecurity or fear, not cool ideals or masculine & confident
"Emotional intelligence is more important" →

"Woman just don't want to be top leaders, and are not ambitious enough" →

MANY men are typical "good boys", but are never labelled negatively for it. Ambitious women automatically get the label. →

Being a woman means statistically living longer lives.
"Inform" people, in a rather patronizing way with image & title →

"She plays football like a man"
"I've played football with boys all my life" →

What and who do we ridicule - for what?

Men cook. Black men cook. →
With their kids.

Stereotypical images?

"Alleged" - often used in cases of rape, rarely on others →

Ballet, dance and gymnastics - sports known to be, or connected to femininity, are prioritized over other sports

Female leaders in news are often used as examples if they're young and pretty, or often as examples of bad leadership. That has never matched my reality of female bosses.

"You are here to please me!" →

Values connected to women are often regarded as less important or irrelevant in public debate

I don't know how many times I've heard women in male-dominated environments being frustrated about this... →

Skip the good excuse for a half-naked body →



Insecure & self-assertive

The men who never learned to build emotional and social intelligence



Men don't want to be nurses

– Men are just not empathic enough!



How to avoid man boobs

HEALTH Four things you need to think about



Follow Simones gold-hunt live



Zlatan struggles with the Good Boy Syndrome

Never satisfied and always performs to prove his critiques



The global economy demands empathic leadership

New research says curiosity, adaptability and empathy is the new top leader's key quality

Previous page and above: Building on the concept of *gender-flip*, *gender bending* or *gender swapping*, previously used both by men critiquing the suffragettes (Gourley 2008) but also used as a rhetorical move by feminists (Brantenberg 1977; Steinem 1978). Design researchers have applied this concept as critique of norms (Sundbom mfl. 2015; Ehrnberger 2017) and as a concept that can

allow people to perform a multiplicity of gender roles (Bank, Delamont, & Marshall, 2007:353). Concept and visualisation by Nina Lysbakken. See references for picture credits. This work is licensed under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. © <http://superstov.com/blog/2017/3/7/what-would-tabloid-newspapers-look-like-if-women-ruled-the-world>

DESIGNING TO CHALLENGE AND BALANCE PERSPECTIVES

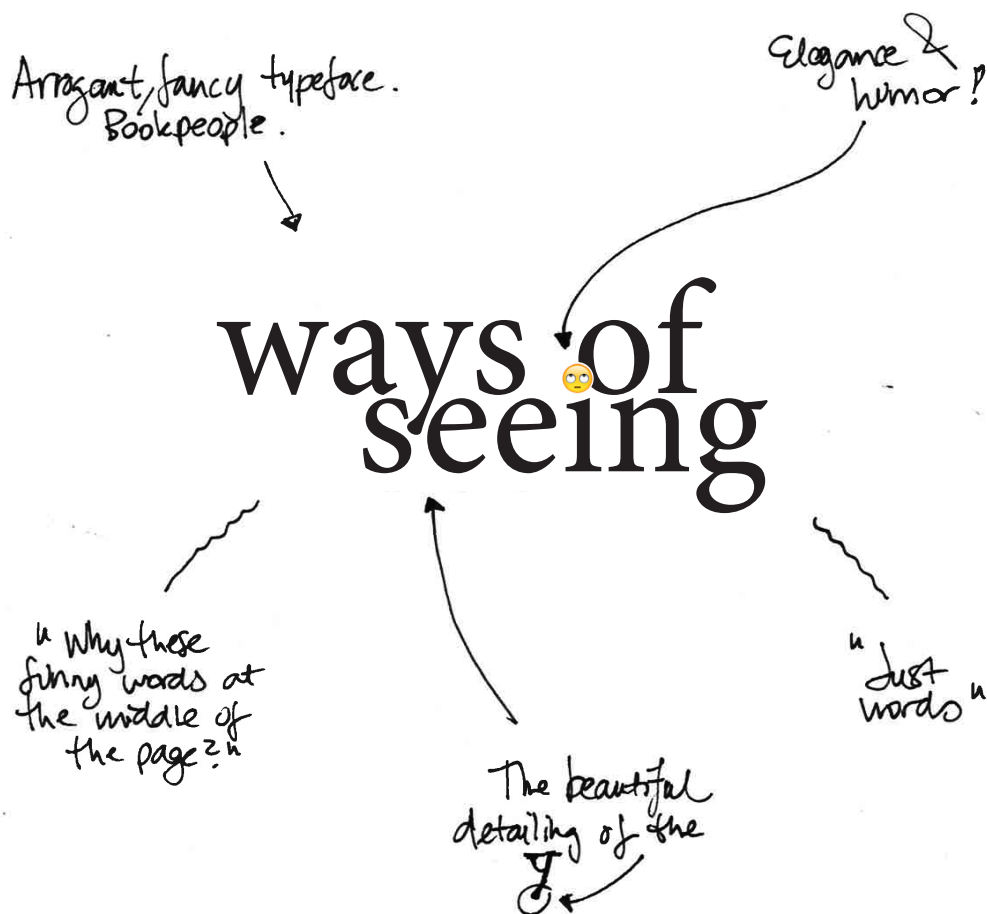
I imitate one of Norway's largest tabloid newspapers, VG – a rather liberal tabloid newspaper in an international context. I carefully pick images and titles that implied what I wanted them to imply, in a typeface and a layout that are typical for the genre. I want it to look like it is *almost* the original to remind you of the values you did not notice while reading other tabloid newspapers. *Easy-access* news. To make you feel that you know the context.

My beloved tool InDesign can always help me to shape my meaning, or perhaps it is not even *my* meaning. Perhaps it was malicious pleasure. I did not create the newspaper I wished existed. I created the *opposite* of what I saw to demonstrate for myself that in this new society, I would have been the -“normal” and not *the second sex*. I feel on top of the situation again, a bit arrogant. I am brought back into balance. This was never meant for anything. It was just one of the many InDesign sketches that never makes it to anyone but me.

There could have been many versions of this visualisation: the perspective of a child, a retired person, a positive person, an immigrant. These different ways of seeing (Berger 1972), different ways of decoding existing messages

(Hall 1980) involve different forms of knowledge and experience. Such as peoples' knowledge of typography, as shown on the following page. Some people see the beautiful detailing of the *y*, while others see meaningless words on a page. Whose perspectives, whose ways of seeing the world are hidden behind the design of a tabloid newspaper? How does the design become a manifestation of these perspectives? Could there be a tabloid newspaper that engages balanced and nuanced people? How would it convince people to read, if not designed for provocation and polarisation? Which topics, sports or hobbies are seen as important? What words, facial expressions and poses are used to describe people? Who are seen as ideals and non-ideals and what does success mean for diverse people? How would various people frame the news and engage others? A child could perhaps walk through the news like a game, gaining skills and competencies by understanding the world bit by bit, level by level, without assuming she is the champion of all levels. How could designers of tabloid and popular cultural expressions seek to understand this world of diverse perspectives? Can these be designed to include several perspectives, fewer generalisations about people and engagement on a wider set of premises?

Below: Visualisation by Nina Lysbakken, indicating how knowledge and perspectives shape how we decode messages (Hall 1980).



Following page: Screenshots from Google searches on gendered magazines' front pages, which are juxtaposed to demonstrate differences in visual language and semiotic resources (Halliday 1978; Van Leeuwen 2005). I draw on research on women's magazines and their readers (Gauntlett 2008; Gill 2007; Krijnen & Van Bauwel 2015; McCracken 1992; McRobbie 1997; Ytre-Arne 2012; Ytre-Arne 2013). Visualisation by Nina Lysbakken.

SHAPING A WOMENS MAGAZINE – IF NOT BEAUTY, BODY AND FASHION, WHAT THEN?

I began to frame a project about a concept for a *different* women's magazine. I developed an idea about an online multimedia and participatory magazine about *inspiring*, courageous and curious women – also values describing the magazine concept itself. A conversational space where I could ask my own questions and shape the interviews with women I could identify with. There were so many women I wanted to learn from, but their stories and my questions didn't exist in traditional women's magazines, and they didn't seem interesting enough for other magazines and newspapers. I needed a space for honest reflections about their ways of life, not a space for forced ideals I didn't care about. I wanted texts that I could read on the bus, stories to listen to at work, videos that showed me the details of how these women do what they do. Surround myself with these women, making some of their choices become obvious and less scary choices for me, too. A mobile magazine that is always with me. An interactive magazine designed on the mobile platform's conditions. I needed help to develop the concept and visualisations, and shaped a project with graphic design students, where I was the client and partly supervisor, and they would shape visualisations I could use for my research.

I needed to explore the students' view on gendered expressions. The newspaper visualisation became a tool to investigate the students' opinions. I juxtaposed images of gendered magazines (on the following page) and asked for their reactions. The typical reaction was 'people should think for themselves. I'm not affected by this.' I stated that their class *looks* different than mine did ten years ago. I showed them images of young Afghan girls who skate, of

nerdy women who work with space technology, of girls who jump off cliffs on skis, female Nobel prize winners in mathematics and medicine. Together, the images almost seem provocative and strange. I showed them magazines that have challenged traditional gendered content and expressions: The Gentlewoman, Sister-hood Magazine, Lenny, Rookie, Kazoo, Woman in the World.

What does *inspiring women* mean to these students? Who are *courageous* and *curious* women to them? How would they design a visual language and shape meaning about gender? Their task was to design a women's magazine that challenges existing gendered expressions and promotes courageous and curious women, in addition to facilitate for readers' participation in the shaping of content. The intention was to challenge the idea that all women's magazines had to contain topics such as fashion, bodies, beauty, kids, workout and food. That is often what is offered to women in popular culture. I do care slightly about some of these topics, but they are not *important* to me. They do not *inspire* me. I used to think I was weird, or not woman *enough* for not being interested in those things. I needed to see alternatives, those I could identify with, the women who couldn't care less about beauty, but loves technology. The curious, weird and nerdy female researchers I meet in my job. The fascinating professional skiers who challenged my fears, stretched my limits and generously shared their own fears and knowledge at a ski camp. Who happened to be women. To see these women presented as people who loves what they do, do their work with their heart (as the word courage and "cor" derives from) and not as some very few "victims" of a male dominated arena. How did they get there? How do they deal with fear? What is expected of them? Are they like me?

VALUES: "Masculinity": the strong man

☞ Typesfaces: many of the same

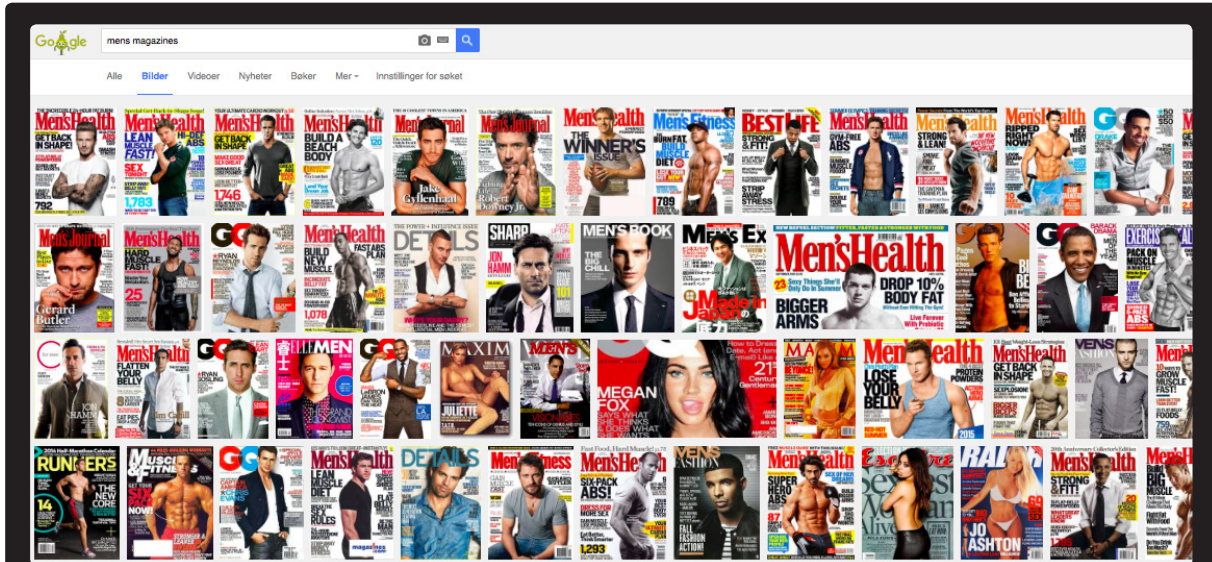
☞ Colours: Black, red, contrasted

☞ Invitation model: Mainly famous, white men, actors, sports, politics

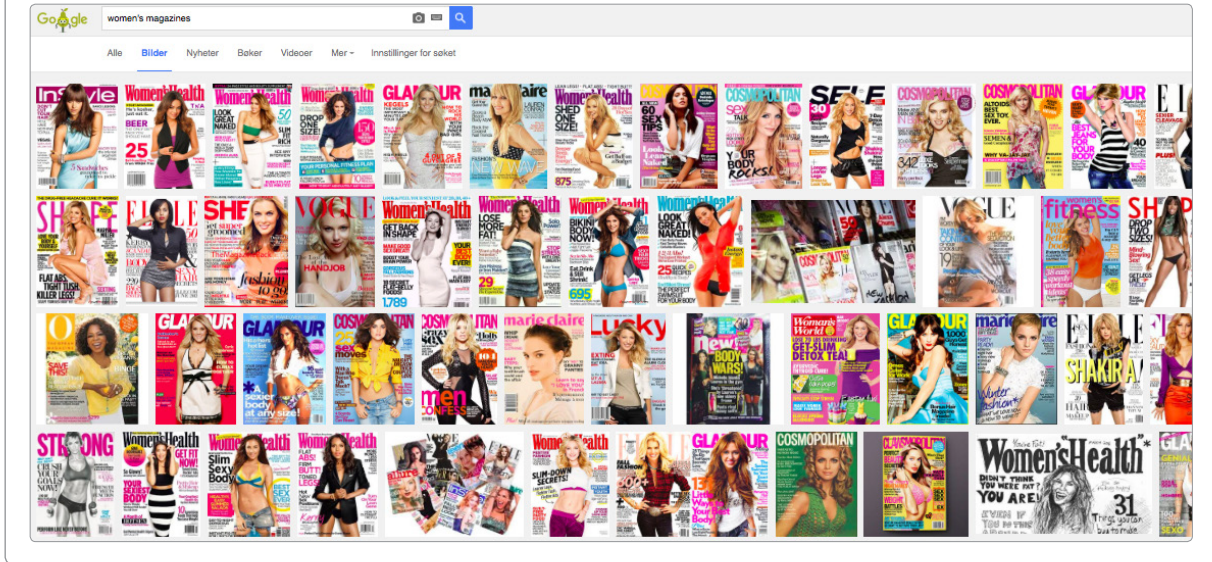
☞ Clothes: Suits, t-shirts or no shirt

☞ Pictures & poses: Strict or even sad, serious men, faces, muscles, crossed arms, hands in pockets

☞ Topics: Body, muscles, sex, work-out, stories of famous men, women, money



SQUINT



☞ Invitation model: Mainly unknown, white women

☞ Colours: Lively, pink, yellow, red, blue

☞ Typesfaces: many of the same, but also many modern serif typesfaces (Elle, Vogue, o)

☞ Pictures & poses: Feminine, posing, happy faces, sexy/tempting ladies

☞ Clothes: Bikinis, dresses, skin

☞ Topics: Beauty, body, sex, fashion, work-out

VALUES: the feminine woman

Following page: Concept design visualisation of the proposed magazine, BraDamer. Adobe InDesign visualisations. Framing of concept by Nina Lysbakken. Concept development and visualisation of BraDamer by Nina Furset Røen and Tina Jenssen at NTNU Gjøvik. Visualisations are further developed by Nina Lysbakken. See image credits in references.

A SPACE FOR COURAGE, CURIOSITY, PARTICIPATION AND PLAYFULLNESS

Two female design students designed the concept BraDamer (meaning “*GoodWomen*”, with *good* having connotations similar to *cool* or *respected* in this context). The concept is based on the inspirational women who randomly cross your path in life – an aunt, a fellow student or even a lecturer. Hence, they structured the content on *women*, as opposed to *topics*. I guided the idea of transferring *randomness* to the design of the interface by means of navigating through these women by random, swiping through, similarly with Google’s “feeling lucky” search button. Readers may recommend women who have crossed their path to the magazine, or contribute with their questions. Success is not an issue, as long as someone considers her courageous and curious in one way or the other. A balanced, non-famous and non-pretty life can be inspiring to some of us. The

front page layout is designed for this *randomness* and *curiosity* – a layout with no titles that reveals information, just faces you can choose to press if you are curious enough. With the students’ permissions, I developed the visualisations with images we were allowed to use, and with women who had accepted to be presented as examples. The picture of Kadra Yusuf is presented with permission from Morten Krogvold, a well-known Norwegian photographer, as it was a rare exception of an image, a pose and an angle that managed to capture and represent the courage she is known for, without staging her into notions of “femininity”, as a sweet and smiling beauty. We intended the images and faces to contain diverse expressions. Smiles and happiness was not a goal, and the women were not to be *beautified* and staged into dresses and high heels.

Platform:
Mobile / small screens
Ideals you can
carry with you



BRAVE
&
CURIOUS



A social online magazine
that engages readers to be
curious and courageous. Shape
new ideas and
ways of expression.

Colours:
BLACK & WHITE
Contrasted, dark,
mysterious?

Inspiration model:
Brave &/or
curious women in
any hobby or
profession. You
can recommend
and honor women
around you

Public
debater →
Nobel prize winner
in medicine →
Non-famous,
but still brave →

Freestyle skier →
(the helmet says more
about her than her face)

Layout: No
revealing titles,
just images to
trigger curiosity

+
Navigation
between articles
FLIP to the
next woman
like a playfull
game

= Is this ^{still} a magazine?
Perhaps an "idol-picker"?



Typeface:
Straight, plain,
neutral? But also a
rounded & soft
sans-serif

DIVERSE
FACIAL EXPRESSIONS!
Some smiling,
Some dead-serious

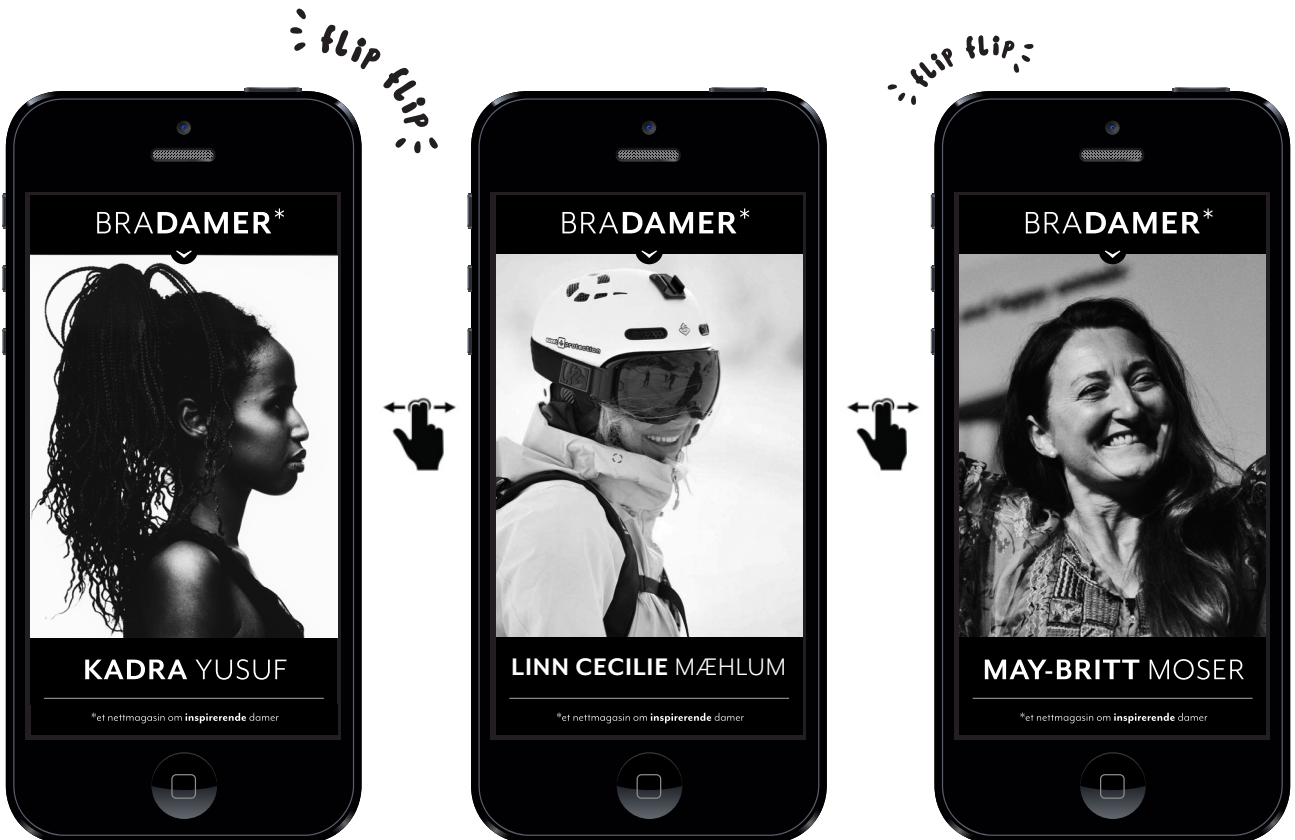
CLOTHES ARE
irrelevant

DIVERSE WOMEN,
What connects them
are values of
courage & curiosity
(Identifying as
woman is good
enough)

SHAPING MEANING ABOUT WOMEN THROUGH DESIGNED FEATURES

You can click on one woman and then swipe to the next. Maybe one isn't as interesting to you, so you keep swiping, as the image shows. It is almost a game. Who comes next? The swiping method of navigating the site is intended to connote playfulness, curiosity and randomness. It is not a common way of navigating online magazines, it is more

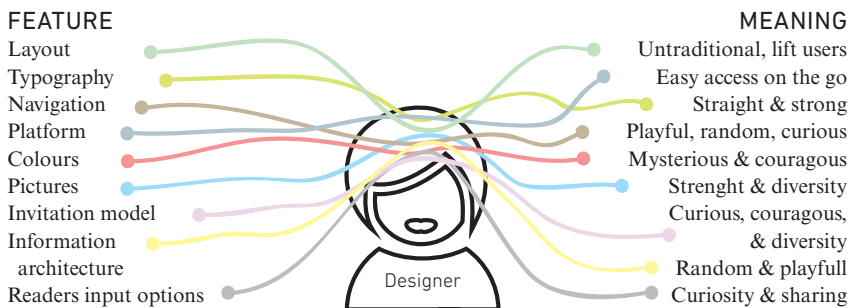
common in mobile apps for music and dating. Perhaps it is not a *magazine* anymore, because it draws on *other* genres and intertextual references. Perhaps an *idol-picker*? Which features are used to shape what meaning? In the model below, I tried to differentiate how these diverse features are designed to connote particular meaning.



Courageous public debater in Norway, addressing issues regarding minorities and women.

Norwegian freeride skier who skis big mountains.

Norwegian researcher in medicine who won a Nobel Prize.



Above: Concept design visualisations of articles, indicating swiping as a form of navigation to demonstrate how this can shape connotations of playfulness, randomness and curiosity.

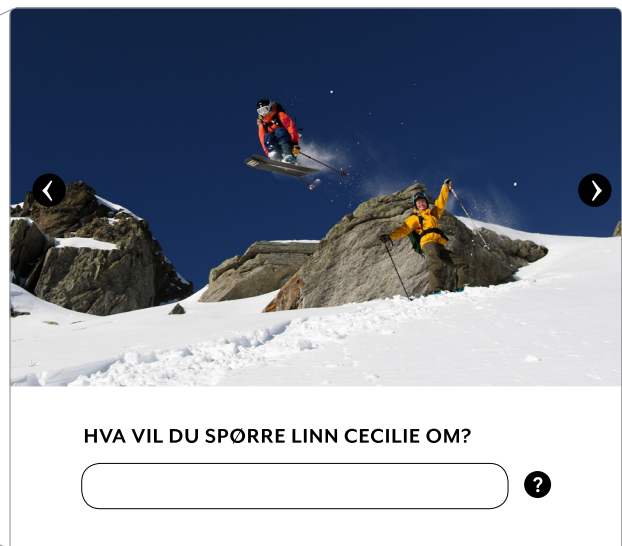
Left: Model showing how various features can be designed to shape diverse meanings, by Nina Lysbakken.



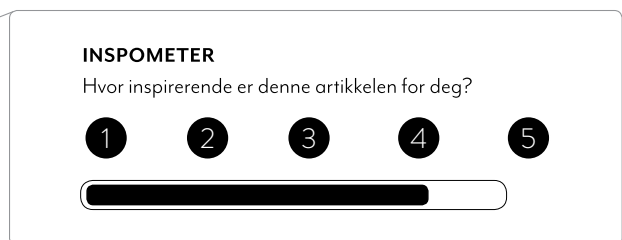
DESIGNING FOR CONVERSATIONS

To signal the importance of readers' voices, we made space for their questions in the middle of the article – not at the bottom. A plain visualised *instructional input field* is used, as opposed to a more open comment field, to lead the reader to ask questions. This builds on all the conversations I have had with women in closed debating forums on Facebook, where openness and questions are regarded as more valuable than harsh comments, expressions of doubt is more common than decisiveness, and diverse perspectives are actively sought. It does not say, 'leave a comment', as many newspaper comment forums do. It says, 'What do you wish to ask Linn Cecilie about?' This was done to encourage a sense of wonder and avoid 'forced' advice about how readers should live their lives.

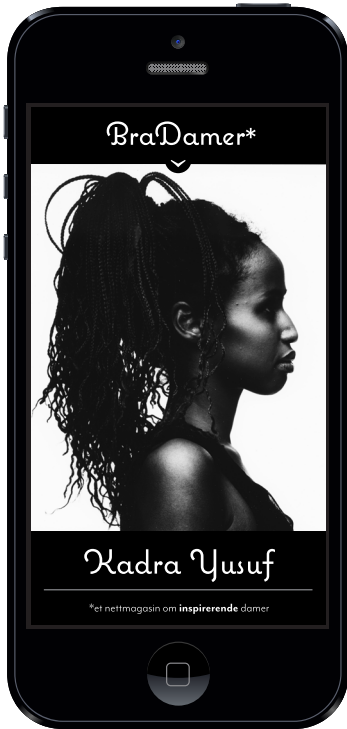
Below: 'What do you wish to ask Linn Cecilie about?' Picture by Tor-Einar N. Wahl, presented with permission.



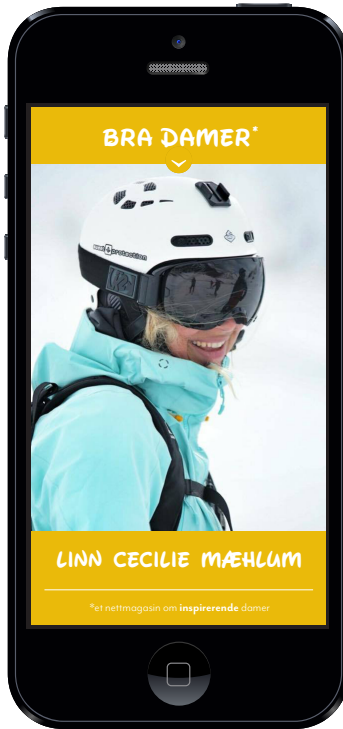
Below: 'Inspometer' refers to an inspirational 'tracker'. 'How inspiring is this article for you?'



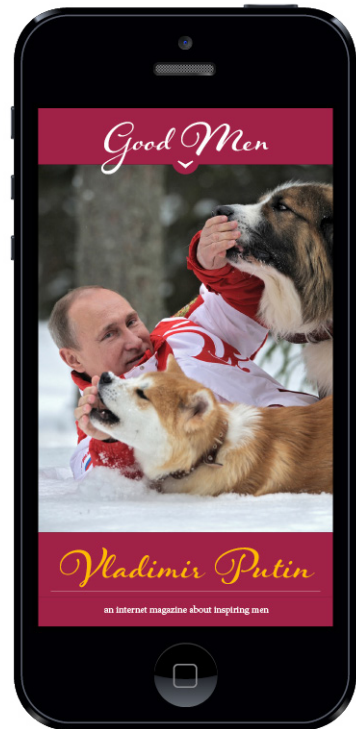
CAN A CHANGE IN DESIGN SHAPE A DIFFERENT MEANING ABOUT A PERSON AND A GENDER?



Who might be most traditional?



Who might be most fun to hang out with?



Who might be most capable of killing?



CONCLUSION

Awareness of perspective may support creativity and innovative potential

In this visual essay, I have presented design processes of challenging powerful contemporary popular cultural expressions and ideals related to gender. This was done through speculative designs to provoke thinking about our existing and future culture and to provide the ability to experience gendered expressions from diverse perspectives. I found that an awareness of ideology, culture and values affected the visual language of the designs. Through this process, I found that the designer can benefit from an awareness of her perspective on the world. This perspective may affect her expressions, creativity, and innovative potential. This awareness may also shape a critical way of looking at the designed features around us, those we constantly draw on as intertextual references in our own designs, and cause us to ask ourselves why we gender certain designed expressions. Is it a goal to shape *ungendered* expressions? Is the design for a gender or *about* a gender? When can gendered designs be empowering, and when are they not empowering? How much does the designer's gender affect the design of spaces?

Giving voice to people and shaping inclusive spaces by design

Through visualisations such as those on the previous page, I aimed to show how slight changes in design can imply changes in the meaning conveyed regarding a person. When I design, I find that I can balance the design on a scale from *visual outspokenness* to *subtleness* in terms of ways of representing people, ways that may connote inclusiveness, but also exclusiveness. In order to include or give voice to particular people in society, more knowledge is needed about the relationship between the desired values and the designed features that can help achieve an inclusive culture. A critical attitude toward our tendency to draw on existing designed features – existing intertextual references of interfaces – may guide designers to challenge these semiotic resources in ways that may support inclusive spaces.

Design as a method for critiquing power and envisioning futures

The designer's ability to make and shape powerful and engaging interfaces, visuals, artifacts and ideals in our society and culture is seldom discussed in research. I argue that designers are in a strong position to imagine future lives and critique our society through everyday designs. *Feminist speculative designs* (Prado de O. Martins, 2014), as presented in this article, may shape possibilities for people to understand, enact and experience designs from diverse perspectives, as compared to verbal critiques of the same artifacts. In addition, designers are trained to visualise *alternative* future scenarios. Rather than burning corsets, we can contribute to shaping alternative ideals to slim waists.

This is also an opportunity for women to design spaces in a different manner than men, to provide spaces with a logic that derives from another perspective. I wish to stress that I do not encourage another hierarchy, another powerful ideal, but rather a wider set of ideals or popular cultural expressions that can support people in accepting themselves and provide diverse role models for people to identify with.

The importance of a cultural perspective on interface design

Drawing on Balsamo, I find that cultural perspectives on interface design and visual designs is a competency designers need (Balsamo 2011), both in terms of redesigning these as materials and in terms of understanding how one's own designs can act as cultural intermediaries in our society. I also argue that interaction design requires more emphasis on social semiotics, visual language, rhetoric, and a strategic value-based design approach, perspectives that often are diminished in digital spaces, when functional aspects are prioritised over communicative aspects. This perspective may enable creative possibilities, in addition to clearer encoding of communication. It may also provide designers with a greater awareness of how certain expressions can connote the exclusion or inclusion of specific groups or people.

Understanding the creative process through self-reflection

Through this process of visualisations and self-reflections, I have gained a stronger understanding of how I work. I discovered personal motivations and ethical considerations along a messy way. Being trained as a designer, I do not like to be merely a criticiser. I prefer to be the one who shapes the *wanted*, the *good* alternative. I see myself as a *problem solver* in the initial stages of the process, which suggests the belief that I have a solution to a problem, I just do not yet know *how* I will solve it. This naivety seems almost necessary during the initial stages of a design project. It implies a *lack* of knowledge about the topic, rather than a complex understanding of it, which follows as the next stage of the process. When I immerse myself in this complexity, I begin questioning my ability to provide solutions. This ambiguous and challenging process becomes a part of me. Then, creative opportunities arise, and I begin remaking sense of what I know and intuitively shape meaning with the available tools. I structure and generalise into new solutions, which always carries implications. Time to distance myself from the visualisations is needed in order to question the design's ability to perform as desired. This is a time for new questions to arise and to accept that there are no universal and ideal answers that are valid for all times, for everyone. However, a naïve and optimistic mind is necessary if one is to believe in the impact of design and see design alternatives.

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