Track 2.c Introduction: Gender of/in design practice and profession

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Introduction

Social constructionist feminist research of the last decades has shown that if we look closely enough we can see that artifacts are gendered by design. Some artifacts are gendered explicitly through their direct association with the traditional binary of women or men users; while gender is inscribed into others in more subtle ways through the normative conceptions regarding (1) their use contexts (public/private), (2) gender symbols and myths (strong/weak, rational/emotional, dirty/clean, adventurous/safe etc.) and (3) relationship with technology. This dualistic view serves as a useful strategy in design and marketing to create new segments to expand the market. Yet artifacts shaped by this view embody, represent and reproduce asymmetries in gender power relations (Kaygan, Kaygan and Demir, 2019).

These asymmetries also find form in the professional work cultures and power dynamics of design practice (Armstrong, 2012; Kaygan, 2016). Gender dynamics are both seen and unseen; played out in the everyday interactions of the design office or studio and in the public performance of the designer’s role for client or public audiences (Rossi, 2009). As such, implicitly and explicitly, gender roles have the capacity to enable or inhibit the role of designer as an agent for social change.

This track seeks to open up a new avenue for feminist scholarship and trans/gender research in design innovation by exploring the relationship between design and gender and its implications for design as both practice and profession. To this end, we invited papers addressing the questions including but not exclusive to:

- What is the relationship between gender and design practice and how is this changing in contemporary design culture?
- How and to what extent can designers act as agents of change by formulating gender inequalities in terms of design problems?
- Are there any design methodologies and tools that encourage inclusive and gender-sensitive design practices?
- How can contemporary post-colonial theory and trans/gender research generate new approaches?
- What insights can gender and design histories bring to contemporary research?
- How can design educators better contribute to creating an awareness in young designers to design for a more egalitarian world for people with various gender identities?

The two articles from five authors approach the theme of this track with two different focus, being informed by different theoretical perspectives.

In Queer-Sensible Designing, Silas Denz and Wouter Eggink explore the ways of challenging normative gender in industrial design practice. Drawing on actor-network theory, and specifically on the concept of ‘gender script’, the authors devise and conduct a co-design workshop, through which they demonstrated the co-
design practice could open up the design process to non-normative gender scripts by unmasking binary gender dichotomies in industrial design.

In the second paper, Towards the Exploration of Gender Awareness in Human-centred Design, Bahar Khayamian Esfahani, Richard Morris and Mark Erickson demonstrates how products are gendered via product language and packaging, and their perception as gendered shapes the consumption preferences of male users. Similar to the previous paper, the authors in this paper also carry out a participatory design workshop, which is concluded by generation of design ideas.

Both papers, despite their different focuses, provide evidence for the rising interest in gender issues in design practice, particularly in the question of how can we design for non-normative and non-binary gender constructions.

References


