

A

INTRODUCTION



Norms and values are principles that help hold society together. They are usually positive, such as the value that violence is wrong or the norm that we should not hit one another.

Norms and values are socially and culturally upheld, for example through what we say to each other and how we treat one another, but also through all the things we create, whether they are products, services, technologies or environments. For example, they define how and where we can move, and how we are expected to behave. This makes it problematic when discriminatory norms and values influence the design of solutions and innovations. The risk is high that people who do not fit into the norm will be limited in ways that may be just as serious as prejudiced treatment.

This suit gives examples of what this may involve. These cards aim to support norm-critical analysis and discussion. Use them as inspiration to investigate how a certain context, such as a product, environment or picture, may be discriminatory. But remember that the cards are far from comprehensive; reality is much more complex and different discriminatory norms often interact with one another.

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ROYAL BLUE & GOLDEN BLONDE

Products for men in our society often feature dark colours that indicate masculinity, while products for women feature light colours that indicate femininity.

In addition to construing masculinity and femininity as opposites, this also reinforces the gender binary. The fact that the colour associations were inverted a hundred years ago, when pink was considered masculine and blue was considered feminine, does not mean the power relationship was inverted — only that the colours had different meanings.

Our use of language is also strongly associated with colour symbolism. Consider the positive association with the word 'white' in expressions such as white lies or the Swedish phrase vit arbetskraft, 'white labour', meaning work performed above board; white is associated with purity, innocence and benevolence. White is also considered a neutral background colour — a non-colour — and is used to add a modern touch, for example to interior decor when a home is for sale. Black is portrayed as the opposite colour and has negative associations: evil and illegal, such as black money, black as sin, or the Swedish phrase svart arbetskraft, 'black labour', meaning work performed under the table. By imagining one step further, we can deepen our understanding of the consequences of colour symbolism: these colours are also used to describe people's skin colour.

But colour choice can also have other practical consequences. It is easier for people with visual impairment to orient themselves in environments in which different features are clearly highlighted through contrasting colours. In other words, there are many reasons to pay attention to the use and significance of colour.

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3 RIGHT ANGLES AND CURVES



Western design ideals are characterised by industrial society's emphasis on technology and rational production: norms that lead to precision and uniformity and to shapes that are easily mass produced, such as plastic objects with smooth sides that release from moulds easily or angular shapes that are easy to stack. Soft, organic and odd shapes, and not least shapes that do not meet expectations are valued lower. Consider knotty carrots that are sorted out before even going to shops, because we consumers only seem to choose regular-shaped ones.

Since the beginning of industrialisation, assumptions about masculinity and femininity have been reflected in shapes. When products target men, they are designed to express strength, stability and speed – qualities traditionally associated with masculinity. The resulting products are hard and angular without soft curves or hollow spaces, or products that appear to be in motion, whether it is a motorcycle or a razor. If the target group is women, the opposite design idiom is used to accentuate sensuality and playfulness.

Despite a renaissance for craftsmanship and handicrafts in recent years, and despite advanced computer technology and new production methods that make more varied shapes possible, it is easy for these ideals to linger.

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4 RIBBONS AND RELIEFS



Spangles, frills, flourishes and finery. There are numerous synonyms for decoration. The value of decoration in Western culture is revealed by these words, which make us understand that decoration is insignificant and unnecessary. About a hundred years ago, both sewing machines and guns were richly decorated with flowers and leaves. Decoration and ornamentation have since become taboo. Shapes should have a 'clean' look to emphasize the development of rational technology. Machines were the future, while ornamentation and decoration were considered obsolete handiwork and a form of amusement for women. A razor sharp distinction was made between what was perceived as practically functional versus what was perceived as unnecessary adornment.

The fact that practical functionality and aesthetics are intimately connected is still obscured. Consider how a motorcycle engine is carefully designed, or how reliefs on a window frame also filter and soften the light entering the room. This invented division and associated hierarchy have resulted in the acceptance of decoration that relates to function, such as plastic imitation bolt heads on a drill, while a flower on that same drill would reduce its value and credibility. There are no truths here. The devaluation of decoration is problematic. It is still used to create differences in worth between men and women, adults and children, upper class and lower class, and the division of the 'Eastern and Western worlds'. Such devaluation also facilitates cultural appropriation — when various cultural or religious expressions with deep significance are taken over and transformed into commercial advertising messages.



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RAINBOWS AND WHEELCHAIRS

Symbols help us find our way, make quick choices and immediately understand complex situations. But when symbols over-simplify, they are at risk of becoming stereotypes.

Consider the symbol depicting a body in a wheelchair. It refers to the special solutions required in settings that are poorly planned in terms of accessibility. Or the symbol representing what is typically called family parking — a slightly bigger parking spot that is good for many situations and for many different people. Why do we mark that spot with a heterosexual nuclear family — one figure in a skirt, one in trousers, a child and a stroller?

Some symbols are specifically intended to discriminate, such as the blackface symbol — a racist depiction of a black person: large round eyes, large red or white lips and jet-black skin. Like many other stereotypical symbols, this symbol bears a historic legacy that some people say has passed and that it should not be problematic today or that it is only in jest. That is not the case for someone who experiences racism on a daily basis. It is easy to dismiss the significance of symbols when they do not affect you, but it is also easy to see their power — for example, the swastika.

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6 RATTAN AND RICE PAPER



The relationship between hard and soft is often used to emphasize the gender binary, which is already evidenced by who chooses what in the subject of handicrafts in schools. Similarly, textile crafts are seen as female practices and metal and woodworking are seen as male practices.

The material hierarchy is clear in both architecture and interior design. The high status of hard materials can lead to the excessive use of stone, stainless steel and glass. These materials can produce environments in which sound ricochets and becomes amplified, leading to consequences such as sound-related stress and discomfort.

At the same time, materials are typically considered secondary to visual appearance in our culture, and we may have forgotten how important materials are to us. For someone with impaired or no vision, materials and tactility are of central importance. With a wooden handle at one end and rubber touching the ground at the other, carefully chosen materials make a white cane an extension of the body's sensory organs.

If norms limit which materials we are expected to appreciate and use, our sensual experience of the world will be poorer and our products and environments will be worse. Materials must be chosen based on each specific situation and occasionally, material-related norms must be challenged to achieve the desired outcome.



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7 ROADBLOCKS AND RAMPS



When it comes to practical functions, examples abound of how people are defined and discriminated against based on, for example, gender, body differences and age. The consequences can be serious. Every day, people with disabilities face unnecessary obstacles in public settings. A building that cannot be entered with a wheelchair makes it impossible for some people to gain access. Dark public settings are hard to navigate for people with impaired vision. The building limits and impedes accessibility for people; it is the building that is a handicap.

Products also have this issue. Tools often require big hands and muscle strength, even though it is possible to make them lighter and smaller. Women are often prescribed medications that have only been tested on men, which can lead to serious adverse effects. Some automatic water taps do not respond to dark skin. Young girls' development is limited and defined when their clothing lacks pockets in which to stuff pine cones and rocks. Until recently, car seats were modelled based on crash test dummies built to resemble male bodies, which led to a 100 per cent higher risk of whiplash injuries among women.

The functions of products, buildings and environments define what we can do and how we can move. For this reason, it is important to create solutions that maximise freedom for everyone.



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ROUTERS AND ROLE-PLAYING

The advent of digital technologies have resulted in large numbers of solutions and brand new forms of collaboration between people. Technology can also support people with disabilities. One example is speech synthesis, which can read texts to people with impaired vision. But there are still enormous shortcomings, for example in the design of many e-services, despite existing standards, guidelines and new legislation.

Another problem is how discriminatory behaviour is quickly established and intensified on social media. Oppression and cyber-hate ensue when the social conditions of a physical encounter change, for example when anonymity is possible and linguistic nuances are lost. Social media is also a space for paedophile networks and trafficking, which demand countering forces such as new norms, laws and knowledge.

Digital male dominance is evident in the development of digital technology and in certain trends and fields. For example, oppression and stereotypical depictions of women (among others) are common in computer gaming, and women regularly assume male identities in order to play. Even though new technology is dynamic and has excellent potential for supporting a wide variety of needs, there is still significant risk that developers neither understand this nor take it into account.



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ROBOTS AND ROCKET SHIPS

The word innovation is still associated with technology, even though innovation accounts for so much more today, like new forms of organisation, new kinds of services and new social solutions. No matter the field, new is always emphasized as an ideal; it is even a social ideal, now that innovation has become so fashionable. But what risks being devalued? Small changes? Existing solutions?

Innovation is also based on the possession and protection of something new, for example with a patent. But from a norm-critical perspective, it is more important for inclusive solutions to reach as many people as possible. Similarly, emphasizing the economic value of innovations can be problematic. As a value, it does not necessarily coincide with a social value.

There is a belief that new ideas are created by individuals. This reflects the idea from the Romanticism about the male genius with God given creative ability. Think of the image of a light bulb over someone's head to illustrate innovation, and how that person is a white man. Even if someone can naturally have an idea, come to a conclusion, it hardly comes as a bolt of lightning from the blue, but rather as a product of having been active in a social context where the new actually arises through cooperation between people and not in the head of an individual.

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10 RESTAURANTS AND READYMADES



A service consists of interactions, both between people and between people and different objects. One could also say that a service is co-created, that it arises as the result of an interaction. But that co-creation is not organic. Services are often deliberately directed; they are planned and guided to function in a particular way. In a service, how people should move, behave and be treated are all defined.

This raises questions from a norm-critical perspective. For example, is anyone excluded and, if so, why is that happening? This could involve communication materials in too few languages or insufficient accessibility in a physical room. Treatment can also be discriminatory, such as not being let into a restaurant because of being in a wheelchair or not being able to hire a car because of skin colour or clothing. The way people are treated can also be more subtle, such as insidious daily racism in comments and looks, or the benevolent yet condescending treatment of people with disabilities.

In general, the risk is significant that services are limiting based on the prejudices noticed in how people are treated. The reverse is also possible. Consider the hierarchical relationship of the seller and buyer of a service. The salesperson is often subordinate to the buyer. Norm-creative service solutions involve equality, respectful treatment and accessibility.

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11 REFUNDS AND BILLBOARDS



The consumer market is based on multiple norms and notions that are interesting from a norm-critical perspective. The market's logic is based on the consumer's freedom to choose from a wide selection. Reaching consumers and breaking powerful habits is marketing's greatest challenge.

When basic needs are met, marketing creates new needs by dressing products in attractive garb. Well-tested tricks allude to sex, insecurities and the desire to be included in a group. And thus arises a paradox between the ideal of a broad offering and the more uniform reality. The battle for customers leads to reinforcing stereotypes rather than challenging them. Breaking this paradox requires a strategy based on a deeper understanding of needs, beyond stereotypes.

Another notion is that consumption is primarily a female sphere, that women shop while men invest, and that men invest in items they need for production, which is seen as their sphere. These stereotypical notions about men's and women's roles in the consumer market contribute to keeping them separate in daily life.

The need to problematise the division between production and consumption globally is becoming increasingly pressing, along with the fact that most production is carried out in countries with working conditions that would be considered unacceptable in the parts of the world where the most consumption takes place.



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12 ROLES AND RETOUCHING



Stereotypical depictions of men and women are common. The ideal man is portrayed as energetic, active, decisive and competent, while the ideal woman is portrayed as beautiful, passive and attentive to men's needs.

Portraits of men are often taken with the camera angled from below to emphasize the man's height, which suggests power. Men are also commonly pictured in motion or standing still with their arms crossed, preferably with a serious expression (unless the man in question is supposed to be the funny guy). Women are often photographed from just above, with the focus on the upper half of the body, smiling at the viewer or with a pleasant, averted gaze. Women's bodies are often used as props next to a man or a car, or something else that is the primary subject.

These stereotypes are common in popular culture and advertising, but also appear in newspapers, employee newsletters and other communication materials. They are also reproduced through word choice and narrative. A female manager who has successfully faced a challenge is described as a guardian angel, while a male manager has won a battle. Reversing the roles, image format or word choice can reveal the extent of the stereotyping. The same power structure also applies to portrayals that do not conform to the norm when it comes to skin colour, sexuality, functional ability or age, if they are even included.

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RESTROOMS AND ROOM KEYS

All spatial features in all their forms — the rooms of a house, public spaces, roads and landscapes — are created according to norms that are often associated with power and hierarchies. In various ways, spatial features define how we can behave, move, feel, appear or be seen — if the room even invites us in.

Rooms can exclude people by being hard to navigate or dangerous. For someone with impaired vision or who uses a wheelchair, public places involve many obstacles. Women experience being watched and objectified at public pools, toilets and the gym, and find some places unsafe, such as the poorly lit area around a bus stop. Consequently, many women feel limited in where they can move. At the same time, purely statistically, women are more exposed to violence in private homes, while men are more exposed to violence in public places. People with dark skin have similar experiences with feeling excluded and being observed, for example in commercial spaces like businesses and shopping centres, where they are watched suspiciously.

From a norm-critical perspective, it is important to examine what norms and power structures certain rooms reinforce and who is affected, so that rooms can be created that are inclusive, safe, accessible and democratic.



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