A Norm Creative Perspective: Understanding users through norm creative theories

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Abstract

There is a saying that we should not attempt to fix what is not broken, but we cannot afford to stick to that mindset if we want to be able to design products and services that matter to the user. We should broaden our views, explore new things and see what we can learn from them and use that knowledge to expand on our existing methods. In recent years there have been a lot of work regarding how norms influence us to act and feel in certain ways, what if the knowledge behind norms could be utilized within design? To answer this question a study was conducted where two so called norm creative methods were tested in a series of focus groups to see what potential the methods held in regard to improving existing methods or serve as basis for the creation new methods within user research.

Keywords: Human-computer interaction, Interaction-design, User experience design, User research, Norm criticality, Norm creative methods, Social norms.

1. Introduction and research question

The world is in a constant state of change and we as designers need to keep changing along with it if we are to continue to design products and services that can meet the requirements of our users. The speed of technological changes is rapidly increasing and designers are adapting with new and faster development approaches such as the Agile design process (Ferreira, Sharp & Robinson, 2011). It is important however that we don’t let the speed of development make us forget about the importance of understanding our users, whose needs and desires change just as rapidly as the technological advances. I believe it is important to invest time into exploring new paths that could contain knowledge that might lead to innovative new approaches regarding how we may learn from our users about themselves. This is something that should be done unless we risk being left behind and letting the methods used within interaction design, user experience design and primarily user research stagnate. Ben Shneiderman, a prominent figure within Human Computer Interaction research, brings up that he feels that we are currently not adapting our methods and theories to fit into the new paradigm of social computing (Shneiderman, 2011). Shneiderman is not alone in having these thoughts as there are other researchers that express similar concerns.

“The (lack of) consideration and implication of values in technology are usually too subtle and only noticed when a social rule is violated, a behavioral pattern is broken, or a conflict of interest arises. The lack of attention to values and the complex cultural context of people have led to the creation of products that are not suitable to their needs and expectations, that do not make sense to them, and that often generates undesirable side-effects.” (Pereira, Baranauskas & Liu, 2015, p. 3)

Through my studies at the university I came into contact with two interesting concepts known as norm critique and norm creativity, both being methods that are used to bring attention to how norms influence our everyday lives and when used with purpose can help visualize problems that otherwise remains hidden by normality. Karin Ehrnberger, who can be considered an expert in these norm theories, having contributed with several books and theses...
on the matter, states the following: “...design has the potential to act as a bridge between theory and practice” (Ehrnberger, 2017, p. 196). Through their academic ventures, Ehrnberger and her peers points towards the benefits of incorporating design together with the norm critical analysis as a way to bring attention to norms and the unbalanced power distribution within society. It was due to this and the fact that I had taken a specific course at our university that challenged the way we traditionally perform scientific research that made me curious to explore if there was any potential in using norm creative methods within design to learn about our users through the perspective of norms. Going into this thesis I wanted to find out that given we could better understand the social rules known as norms and how they are influencing people, we could learn about our users on a deeper level than through only using more traditional user research methods. User research methods such as personas, scenarios and cultural probes were selected to serve as point of reference as to see if these methods that are used to learn more about the requirements and needs of the users early in a design process, could be improved upon through the application of norm creative aspects. Since there existed very little previous research regarding these topics I decided that a first step could be to try out and discuss these norm creative methods together with others to experience them first-hand and analyze the data and let it inform us about any potential uses they hold within user research. This was done through organizing a study consisting of several focus groups where 11 participants were brought in to try out and discuss two fundamentally different norm creative methods in a group setting with myself acting as moderator while also being an active participant. Although I was an active participant in the focus groups, the data used in this study only stems from the recruited participants. The study was understandably very explorative in nature and the results from it should be used primarily to show the potential of norm creative methods within design contexts and to motivate further research in this direction, as it would be bold to make any solid claims with such a relatively small sample size. The research question this thesis will attempt to answer is following:

What potential does norm creative methods hold in regards to informing user research methods?

2. Background and related research

2.1 Human Computer Interaction as part of interaction design

It is hard to summarize the vast discipline that is Human Computer Interaction in a way that does not downplay its complexity. It was developed as a discipline in the early 1980’s as a response to the increased usage of personal computers in offices. However, its true origins go even further back, estimated around the late 1950’s. According to Dix (2016), the discipline rests upon three broad foundations: Principles, Practice and People. The principles are the intellectual theories, models and rigorous empirical investigations. Human Computer Interaction is very cross-disciplinary in nature, meaning that it is both borrows and contributes to the surrounding disciplines. In practice, HCI serves to offer practical guidance for practitioners of interaction design, usability and user experience design.
2.2 Interaction Design

As the main focus of this thesis revolves around methods used within user experience design and user research, we should briefly talk about interaction design as well to better understand how these disciplines are interwoven with one another as it is hard to talk about one without including the other. The term interaction design was initially coined by the designers Bill Moggridge and Bill Verplank in the mid 1980’s. Interaction design revolves around creating user experiences that will end up enhancing and augmenting the way we work, communicate with each other and how we interact with technology. Jennifer Preece, Yvonne Rogers and Helen Sharp, prominent actors within Interaction design describes the purpose of interaction design as “…developing interactive products that are easy and pleasure able to use from the perspective of the user” (Preece, Rogers & Sharp, 2015, p. 2). Interaction design at its core can be said to involve four basic activities: establishing requirements, designing alternatives, prototyping and evaluating. The activities build upon each other and are repeated throughout the design process. By establishing requirements the designer strives to figure out the needs of the user by examining existing products and through communicating with the users through different means. Evaluating the design of the system or product helps the designers ensure that the product is appropriate for the intended user.

2.3 User Experience Design and User Research

“The goal of user experience design in industry is to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty through the utility, ease of use, and pleasure provided in the interaction with a product” (Kujala, Roto, Väänänen-Vainio-Mattila, Karapanos, & Sinnelä, 2011, p. 473).

The term User Experience Design was first coined by Donald Norman because he felt that “human interface design” and “usability” were too narrow (Merhol & Norman, 2007). In more recent times it is often referred to as UX design and as the name suggests, it concerns in simplified terms making sure that a product or service is appreciated by the user by utilizing a user-centered perspective when designing. While user experience design covers all types of products, it is most predominantly tied to the design of digital products and services.

An important aspect of user experience design is user research, which refers to the act of data gathering and data analysis necessary to characterize the users, their tasks and their contexts.

“User research provides a consistent, rapid, controlled, and thorough method of examining the users’ perspective. It appears at every rotation through the development spiral, providing a way of answering questions as they come up” (Kuniavsky, 2003, p. 35)

User research is done through both qualitative and quantitative methods such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations and usability testing to name a few. Through user research we strive to understand the user, their goals and their needs. In this thesis we will examine three specific tools that are related to user experience design and user research to explore how these could benefit from adapting norm creative aspects. The three tools are personas, scenarios and cultural probes. These were chosen due to the fact that they are closely linked with understanding the user and learning more about them and the fact that we have to limit the scope to fit the thesis.
2.3.1 Personas

The concept of the persona was first introduced by Alan Cooper (Cooper, 1999) and is considered by many as a powerful tool for designers that help them better understand the requirements and needs of the users. David Benyon describes the persona as “...concrete representations of the different types of people that the system or service is being designed for” (Benyon, 2014, p. 55). According to Benyon (2014), the purpose of the persona is to help the designer build a better understanding surrounding those that will be using their product or service and is a way for them to view their product from the users perspective. Personas are commonly used alongside scenarios, which will be further developed in the next section. Personas, like real people, have their own attributes and goals they will want to achieve and the system or product being designed needs to be able to accommodate for this. As there are many different types of users, one persona by themselves will often not contribute much, therefore they should preferably be developed in pairs so that a larger part of the user group can be covered (Benyon, 2014). The personas should have a name, an age, sometimes a picture and some attributes that can be either positive, negative or neutral to give the impression of them being a real user. Marsden, Hermann & Pröbster identify four widely accepted phases when it comes to persona development (Marsden, Hermann & Pröbster, 2017). These phases are: Persona initiation, data collection, data analysis and persona composition. Persona initiation is where the design team starts familiarizing themselves with the perspective of the user and the context surrounding them. The next step is the data collection, the persona should preferably be based on information gathered from real users through methods such as surveys, observations, interviews and workshops. It is also possible to base the persona on previously collected data if there is not enough resources to gather fresh data, this will however most likely affect how authentic the persona will end up being. The type of data collected can be either quantitative or qualitative, but the authors state that qualitative data is preferred since these allow for gathering more in depth data. The gathered data is then analyzed which can be done using either an inductive or deductive approach depending on preference as each has their pros and cons. When the data have been analyzed the persona is created through what is called persona composition, they are given a name, a narrative summary of their life, goals and motivations. In a study presented by Dharwada, Gramopadhye and Anand (2006), the authors examined the value of using personas as a tool within design through analyzing many different studies and found that when used correctly it is an efficient stand in for real users.

2.3.2 Scenarios

“Scenarios are stories-stories about people and their activities” (Carrol, 1999, p. 46). The scenario is a method that is commonly used within interaction design to help evaluate the product or system being developed in the earlier stages of a design process where it would not make sense to involve real users for various reasons. According to Benyon (2014), scenarios are often used together with personas to create a story where the design team run simulations of how a user would interact with their product to find potential flaws or issues with the product in a relatively early stage of the design process. Benyon identifies four different stages when it comes to scenarios: stories, conceptual stories, concrete scenarios and use cases (Benyon, 2014). Stories are based on everyday life experiences and everything that entails, they are ideas and anecdotes gathered from videos, photos, documents, interviews, observations etc. Stories are filled with small details, which may or may not be interesting and normally left
out of more formal descriptions when someone is asked to talk about themselves or their occupation. Conceptual scenarios are similar to stories but more abstract, with certain details obscured to give focus on more important elements, they are useful for idea generation and to better understand the requirements of the system that is being developed (Benyon, 2014). At this stage there are little to no information about the technologies used or what functions are being considered. The conceptual scenario may then be further developed into different concrete scenarios where different design choices, technologies and features are introduced into the mix. The concrete scenario may then be used for prototyping, envisioning new design ideas and for evaluation. The line between a conceptual scenario and a concrete one is blurry, the less abstract and more defined the aspects are the more concrete is the scenario. The use case can be described as the final stage of the scenario, at this point the focus is on the interaction between people and their devices. The use case gives a detailed explanation on how the system will be used and as such needs to describe what the people and system are doing (Benyon, 2014). Each use case takes many concrete scenarios into consideration and adds specific functions and tasks to both the people and the devices. An interesting fact about use cases is that despite them being around since the late 1980’s, there is still no clear universally accepted definition and different authors describe them in different ways. Each level of scenario abstraction fills different purposes, stories helps us understand what people do, conceptual scenarios helps us generate ideas and specify requirements, concrete scenarios are used for prototyping, envisionment and evaluation and finally use cases which gives us a very detailed and specific plan on how our product will be and how people will use it.

2.3.3 Probes

Cultural probes are used as a way to learn more about the culture and values from a target group where not much is previously known about the users and in a way that won’t be perceived as assumptive or provoke a negative reaction. Traditionally, this has been done through putting together a package of physical artifacts that are handed out to the potential users for them to record their perspective of the world and then return it to the design team to analyze it and hopefully help them build a better understanding of their values. The process is inherently participatory as it is the users that generate the data that is later analyzed. It was first used in a GaA design process in the 1999 study conducted by Bill Gaver, Tony Dunne and Elena Pacenti. They were involved with an European Union funded project where they were tasked with researching “novel interaction techniques” that would help increase the presence of the elderly in their local communities. The first part of their approach consisted of introducing the elderly participants of the study to an assortment of maps, postcards, cameras, and booklets fitted into a blue plastic envelope and gauge their reactions as they explored the contents of this “cultural probe”. The authors goes on to explain that the cultural probes were designed with the intent to “…provoke inspirational responses from elderly in diverse communities much like how astronomical or surgical probes are sent to remote or hard to reach places to gather data which is then returned for examination” (Gaver et. al, 1999, p. 22). The contents of the cultural probes were all quite small and portable so that they could be used with ease and the be sent back to the design team and later analyzed. The elderly participants were asked to use the postcards for things such as “sharing a piece of advice or an important insight”, “write something about what they dislike about their city”, “sharing their thoughts and feelings towards art” and “telling them about their favorite device”. A more
modern example where cultural probes have been used to learn more about a target group is found in the study conducted by Brown, Tsai, Baurley, Koppe, Lawson, Martin & Arunachalam (2014). Their project revolved around the development of cultural probes for use in the process of designing assistive technologies for people with dementia and their caretakers. The project aimed to address and overcome issues such as “...significant practical and ethical difficulties” where “…the current research methods used were inappropriate and unlikely to collect the type of data that is needed to inform design”. Gaver et al. further explains that cultural probes should be designed to ensure the process of using them is both intuitive and open to interpretation.

2.4 Norms and Culture

In this section we will go through a couple of relevant studies made by researchers within HCI and user research to better understand why norms and culture should be taken into consideration when performing user research and how they are all connected on some level.

2.4.1 Social norms

“Social Norms are unwritten rules about how to behave. They provide us with an expected idea of how to behave in a particular social group or culture. For example, we expect students to arrive to lesson on time and complete their work. The idea of norms provides a key to understanding social influence in general and conformity in particular. Social norms are the accepted standards of behavior of social groups”. (Retrieved from McLeod, S. A. 2008, https://www.simplypsychology.org/social-roles.html, 12-19-2018.

Put simply, norms are ideas about what is considered normal/unnormal in a specific setting, codes that tells us how to we should live our lives and how to behave. Some norms are very clear and easy to notice, like how we are not supposed to be happy at a funeral or sad at a party. Other norms only become visible when someone breaks them. Social norms are expectations on how an individual should live their life, the individual who does their best to fit within the norm are more likely to be positively acknowledged. Those who fail to live up to these expectations run the risk of being shunned, stereotyped or put in a bad spot. These social norms are tied to the seven discrimination criteriums: gender, sexual identity, ethnicity, religion and spirituality, functionality/disablement, sexual preferences and age.

2.4.2 The importance of culture in User Research

“What the study shows is the need for a better understanding of the many factors that influence the choice evaluation methods and their results. Cultural differences between participants are only one of these factors, but as shown by the results this study, they seem to be of considerable importance.” (Hall, De Jong & Steehouder, 2004, p. 13).

Jungjoo Lee, Thu-Trang Tran, and Kun-Pyo Lee (2007) talk about how cultural differences have an effect on user research methodologies. In their research paper they question if user research methods developed for the US and Europe would have the desired outcome when applied to cultures outside of those regions. They performed studies where participants from the Netherlands and Korea were tested through several different user research methods. They gave both groups of participants the same set of tasks that were intentionally ambiguous by
design, so that the participants would have to make their own interpretation on how to solve them. This was done so that the researchers could then analyze the differences in performance between the participants of the two cultures. The different methods used in their study was probes, usability tests and focus group interviews. The probes consisted of workday diaries and a camera where the participants were asked to fill in their workbook with writing about their workdays and any photos they had taken. In the usability test the users were handed a PlayStation Portable and task with fulfilling seven use related tasks while being observed by the researchers. Lastly, the focus group interview revolved around how comfortable the participants were when sharing their own experiences and thoughts when finding themselves in a group session. There was also a measuring how easily a participant was swayed by the opinion of the majority and general interaction between group members. The results from the study showed that the different culture groups acted differently towards each task. For example, the Dutch participants wrote daily in the workbook that was part of the probing method while the Korean participants did not find the time to write every day and instead opted to fill in their books every few days. In regard to the content put down in the workbooks the Dutch were more independent and gave longer answers and took more photos while the Korean groups wrote short and concise answers and not taking as many photos. When it came to the usability testing, it was found that the Dutch blamed their shortcomings on the product while the Koreans had a tendency to criticize themselves rather than the product even though they were engineering students with experience handling such digital products. The Koreans acted the role that was given to them more diligently than the Dutch who explored outside the tasks they had received and at some point even criticized the tasks. During the focus groups the authors mention that the Dutch participants engaged more actively in the conversation, expressing their thoughts and opinions freely without the need for the moderator to step in to help keep up the pace. The Koreans were seemingly a bit more reserved, answering questions only when they were asked directly and only talking when instructed to do so, however with time they became naturally more talkative. The Dutch participants were also prone to discuss their opinions with each other while the Koreans preferred talking to the moderator. Even though the study was very limited in its sample size and that any data gathered was qualitative in nature, the authors could show that there is a need to develop certain guidelines in how we should take different cultures into consideration when designing user research tests. In a more recent study presented by Pereira, Baranauskas & Liu (2015), the researchers propose a connection between norms, value and culture and suggests that while further research is needed, it would be wise to take this connection into consideration when doing research in fields relating to Human Computer Interaction.

2.5 Norm Criticism and Norm Creativity

Here we will examine some of the principles that exist within norm criticism and norm creativity in order to better understand how the values behind a norm critical perspective can aid in better understanding the user.

2.5.1 Norm Criticism

“A norm critical perspective creates opportunities for premeditation and reflection that leads to a process of change within the individual” (Nygren & Rasmusson, 2012, p. 12).
Norm criticism is a tool used to analyze structural norms and reveal the workings and visualizing the power relations within a society. The analysis itself brings attention to and questions the things we take for granted and asks uncomfortable questions about how we really treat those that doesn’t fit the normative criteria. Those who fit within what is considered normative are granted more power to change themselves and their surroundings while those who are deemed non-normative have less power and ability to change their situation. The Swedish use of the term norm criticism is based on Kevin Kumashiro’s theories about anti-discrimination since there was a need to critique the then current tolerance perspective (Kumashiro, 2001). The purpose of the tolerance perspective is to increase the acceptance of non-privileged groups within privileged parties. An often recurring example is the fact that during sexual education classes, homosexuality is brought up as something deviant compared to the silent norm of heterosexuality. The goal of creating a tolerance towards different sexual preferences is inherently good, but it empowers the normative groups as they are given the power to tolerate the non-normative groups. Furthermore, the tolerance perspective obscures the power structure and reinforces it rather than finding the roots that causes discrimination to occur in the first place. The application of a norm critical perspective is an opposite approach where the goal is to uncover, problematize and transform notions and norms that warrants the existence of discriminating structures. The main focus is to shine light on the privileges that are distributed among those in positions of power. A norm critical perspective means a critical reflection on our own position, what norms we enforce, strengthen and maintain just by living our daily lives (Ehrnberger, 2017). In recent years norm criticism has been given attention in both media and politics and the interest is growing steadily. Perspectives that previously have been hushed down and ignored is now given a voice and there are more initiatives towards change. An important part of the norm critical perspective is also to try and reflect upon oneself and where we fit into the norm spectrum and how that affects our views, values and approaches.

2.5.2 Norm Creativity

Norm creativity is a concept based around the fact that power is not distributed equally between citizens in our society. The primary goal behind it is to further build upon the norm critical analysis and use the findings in creative ways to bring about innovative change in both the long and short term. Rebecca Vinthagen and Lina Zavalia published a book on the matter, suitably named “Norm Creative” (2014). There the authors have accumulated the knowledge and experience they have gained from years of research, lectures and workshops of challenging norms to give us insight just how much social norms affect our everyday lives. The main point that the authors want to get across with their book is that norms serve as a barrier for power distribution, and while some norms can be considered beneficial and necessary there are other norms that only serve to put people down. The authors brings up that by challenging our perspectives and working methods we can breathe new life into our every day thoughts and actions. This will in turn allow us to see that finding the path to change is just as important as reaching the end goal (Vinthagen & Zavalia, 2014). Through their work they have created a few methods to help bring attention to our own perception of what is considered normative and non-normative in different contexts. These methods require a group of participants in order to get the most out of them, since one of the most valuable insights they provide is to show us just how hard it can be to talk about norms from our own perspective in front of others. The
most interesting method found within their book is the “Norm Circle” which the authors describe as a way of visualizing how we relate to norms. The method is based on self assessment tests and causes the one performing the exercise to reflect on the perceived differences between those who find themselves in a normative position and those who are considered being in non-normative position (Vinthagen & Zavalia, 2014). The participants each draw a circle on a piece of paper and is asked to write what they feel is normative attributes based on their own views on the inside of the circle and non-normative attributes on the outside. These attributes can be gender, skin color, sexuality, physical shape and so on. The participants may use different settings to help them get started, such as what would be normative factors when working within healthcare or what would be non-normative factors when it comes to their own workplace. The material gathered from this exercise is then used as a base for discussion where the perceived norms are made visible for everyone to see. Each participant may choose to share what they have written down, given they feel comfortable enough to do this in the company of others. The exercise requires one to reflect on attributes that has an effect whether a person is considered to be normative or non-normative and where the participant find themselves among them. The second phase of the exercise is where the participants may read out what they have written down requires courage from the participant since sharing views on what is considered normal can be sensitive, especially when these questions bring up topics such as gender, ethnicity, religion and culture. These are all topics that can be emotionally charged, which might very well cause uncomfortable situations, but this is something that should be seen as positive since it forces us to think and reflect upon our words and actions.

Another method that promotes norm creativity is the NOVA card set (Vinnova.se), a deck of 54 different cards created by VINNOVA. Within the different cards are many methods and approaches to bring about norm critical analysis that can bring about reflection and discussions which hopefully can lead to valuable insights that may be used in norm creative ways. Compared to the Norm Circle which is suitable for shorter sessions, this method focuses more on being used in reoccurring established settings for extended periods of time spanning from a few hours to a whole year. However, it can still be used beneficially in more short-term approaches as a way to cause reflection regarding norms and as a basis for norm critical analysis. The cards contain examples on what to look for in different contexts, such as how men and women are portrayed in advertisements, to make the participants consider how social norms exist everywhere and just how deeply ingrained into our culture they are.

2.6 Critical Design and Norm Critical Design

While we will not go very deep into Critical Design and Norm Critical Design, they are included due to the fact that they serve to highlight how norms can be incorporated into design disciplines to help visualize problems that otherwise might be so ingrained in our lifestyle that we don’t even see the way things are as problematic.

2.6.1 Critical Design

Critical Design, coined by Anthonny Dunne and Fiona Raby, is a form of design where the designed artefacts serve the purpose of displaying critique towards ruling conventions rather than performing a specific function. “Critical Designs are testimonials to what could be, but at the same time, they offer alternatives that highlight weaknesses within existing
normality.” (Dunne & Raby, 2012, p. 47). The authors explain critical design as critical thought translated into materiality. One of the examples of Critical Design includes the “Huggable atomic mushroom” (Dunne & Raby, 2007), which is a mushroom cloud, the most telltale sign of a nuclear explosion turned into a plush toy.

2.6.2 Norm Critical Design

“Design has the potential to bridge theory and practice, this is something that have been confirmed several times through my research” (Ehrnberger, 2017, p. 196). Norm critical design is a principle within design where the main goal is to design things that challenges certain social norms in order to bring attention and challenge them. Due to critical design being perceived by some as “not being critical enough”, norm critical design was conceptualized. One of the more well-known examples being the “Andro-chair” which was designed to be the male equivalent of the gynecologist chair (Sundbom, Hertz, Ehrnberger & Börjesson, 2015). In the andro-chair men get to experience something similar to what women experience every time they visit the gynecologist. It was designed with everything that makes the gynecologist chair uncomfortable, cold and unpleasant for the patient in mind, while making it suitable for prostate exams to give men an opportunity to experience the feeling of being in such a situation. Another interesting example is the case with the “Mega hurricane mixer” and the “drill Dolphia” where the designers took features from the typical drill and the typical mixer and swapped them around, resulting in a “manly” mixer and a “girly” drill. The drill is smooth and adapted towards smaller hands and have bright colors while the mixer is more rugged and fitted towards slightly bigger hands, have darker color scheme and looks durable. This was done to highlight the differences in how we perceive different tools and technologies based on what gender we imagine primarily use them.

3. Method

3.1 Research Ethics

In order to ensure that a study follow the proper code of conduct regarding ethics there are several important rules a researcher should follow. For the study conducted in this thesis I have identified and summarized three main pillars of ethics for scientific studies. The following ethical guidelines as presented by Vetenskapsrådet (2002) were enforced where applicable throughout the study. First, the rule of informed consent, where the participants are informed about the fact that participation in the study is voluntary and that they at any given moment may choose to cancel their participation. It is not necessary for the participant to provide a reason to the cancellation and they must be ensured that their cancellation will have no repercussions for them personally. Secondly, the rule of confidentiality, any and all data that contains sensitive information need to be recorded and stored in such a way that nothing can be traced to an individual participant or so that no outside party can decode it. In certain cases a clause of confidentiality may need to be signed in order avoid any issues that this might bring. Furthermore, any data collected with research in mind is only to be used within the context of said research project. Thirdly, the rule of openness, the researcher conducting the studies should always be transparent about the purpose and potential outcome of the study with any individuals involved. Additionally, the participants are to be informed that they may partake
in the results if so inclined. For the sake of protecting the identity of the participants of the study their names were randomized and only reveals their gender and nationality.

3.2 Data gathering

The data gathering for this thesis was done through a series of focus groups that were conducted by the author and served the purpose of trying out two fundamentally different norm creative methods to explore if norm creative methods could hold potential within user experience design. The focus group is a form of qualitative research method where a smaller group of participants are asked about their thoughts and feelings towards a specific product, service, concept or idea (Benyon, 2014). During the session the researcher records important findings either through notes and/or audio recordings for later analysis. For these specific focus groups permission was asked and subsequently granted to record the audio prior to each session. The recorded audio was later transcribed, coded and analyzed. The focus group format was chosen due to the fact that it allows for smaller groups and a more open-ended and explorative approach compared to a workshop that needs to have some sort of delivery or concrete goal tied to it. The nature of the norm creative exercises simply did not have a good fit with any of the other traditional data gathering methods used within design such as workshops or interviews. Another benefit with the focus group is that you can quite easily perform several of them with different methods and see how the composition of participants influence the results.

3.3 Participants

Initially I had hoped to be able to recruit participants for the focus groups from relevant groups existing on social media platforms where there might be a mutual benefit from them participating in the study. Sadly, these attempts to reach out failed to secure enough participants and the few that volunteered could not meet up on the same occasion. Instead I had to resort to a convenience sampling, which can be summed up as recruiting those who are readily available rather than those who would be the most suited, Preece et. al (2015). There are both positive and negative aspects associated with convenience sampling. The positives being that the only real requirement is to find someone who is willing to participate, meaning that less effort is needed. However, there are several downsides making this method only preferable for very broad or explorative topics. There is also the risk of bias from participants that share the same background. While the best course of action would have been to dedicate more time and effort into recruiting participants further removed from myself, there is always the question how to prioritize and manage your time efficiently in such a relatively short project. Also, due to the very explorative nature of this study I believe that the fact that most of the participants were students might not have been something inherently negative even if the sample could have benefited from including participants of varying ages, cultures and occupations.

3.4 Norm Creative Methods

3.4.1 Selecting the Norm Creative methods

The main issue regarding the selection of norm creative methods for use in the focus groups is that there currently exist quite few methods that fit the criteria of being “norm creative” in
their approach. Furthermore, most of the norm creative methods that are available are geared towards being used together with children in primary school and kindergartens to spread awareness of norms in a school setting. In books such as "Normkreativitet i förskolan", (Salmson & Ivarsson, 2015) "Rätten till din berättelse : normkreativa metoder och brytiga böcker för barn och unga", (Gustafsson & Westin, 2018) and through online material on pages like www.jämställt.se we may learn about norm creativity. However, since the focus of these sources is for use with children, I felt that it would be better to find methods that is specifically geared toward grown-ups since it would better translate to topics that are relevant for adults. During my search for other norm creative methods to explore for use in the study I contacted Vinnova and asked them if they knew about any other norm creative methods, to which they replied that they didn’t. This turned out to be the main motivation behind the creation of the NOVA cards.

3.4.2 The NOVA cards

The first method that was selected is the NOVA – tools and methods for norm creative innovation, developed by designers from Sweden’s Innovation Agency, also known as Vinnova (https://www.vinnova.se). The developers state that “NOVA contains concrete tools and hands-on methods for anyone who wishes to achieve norm-creative solutions - that is, solutions that are inclusive, accessible and sustainable.” NOVA is a deck consisting of 52 cards with four suites, all containing different methods and suggestions to be used to visualize norms and bring about innovation. These methods all vary in their complexity and prerequisites, ranging from just a couple for participants to more than 20 and time spans ranging from a few hours to a year. The NOVA cards method has incredible potential when it comes to establishing a norm creative mindset within design settings. In hindsight and if I had the resources, I would have loved to explore this set of methods further. However, due to the scale of even it’s simplest methods, I opted to not pursue it past the initial focus group as it would require far more participants (recurring ones at that) than I could gather. Despite this, the focus group with the NOVA cards was a very interesting one. Even when we just loosely followed the method that required the least time and participants, we were still able to to have a good discussion about norms that lead to both the participants and myself to reflect on how they influence us. I feel that the NOVA cards would work much better in a corporate enviroment with a clear structure and goal in mind.

3.4.3 The Norm Circle

The second method included in this study is known as the “Norm Circle”, developed by Rebecca Vinthagen and Lina Zevalia (2014) to be used as a very straightforward but effective method to visualize social norms in different contexts and settings. This method borrows from psychological tests where the participant draws from their own experiences and perspectives to make a list of attributes that relate to physical, social and cultural aspects. They then think about how these attributes fit within their own perspective on established social and cultural norms and either put them inside a drawn circle if they do and outside the circle if they don’t. After the participants have finished filling in the attributes they are asked to share with the rest of the group, if they feel comfortable about sharing it since it is about sensitive topics. These sessions were all recorded and later transcribed with the permission of the participants.
The Norm Circle proved to be a very flexible and effective exercise to get the participants into gear for discussing norms based on their own perspective. Since the nature of the Norm Circle was fairly simple, all that was needed was a pen and some paper and anyone could participate as long as they wanted. The moderator may adjust the time limit for the exercise, but I felt that after about 20 minutes most participants had included all they could think about. The exercise had the participants and myself consider our stances toward what attributes, features etc contribute to our existence within or outside the social and cultural norms of our society. After the exercise had been performed, we took turns in presenting our norm circle to each other, I feel that my choice of being the first one to present during both focus groups was good because this eased the tension from the more anxious participants.

3.5 Focus group sessions

3.5.1 The first focus group

This focus group session was very explorative in nature since it was the first one and can be considered a test run since it is the only session that used the NOVA cards due to it becoming apparent quite early into the session that the scale of the methods contained within were not suited for the scope of a student thesis. There was a total of four participants, three female and one male, aged between 20 and 32. Two of them were students while the other two were previously students now with steady employement. They were all recruited through convenience sampling. The overall time for the session was about 1 hour and 45 minutes. After a brief introduction, the participants and I started exploring the NOVA cards together, splitting the different suites among ourselves. Since they contain a vast amount of information spread across 52 cards, most having information on both sides it took a while before we found a suitable starting point that lead us away from small talk and into a discussion about norms.

The one that seemed most suitable for us was an exercise that required us to examine staged photographs that companies put forward to represent themselves online or in newspaper ads. By doing this we started a good discussion about the power structure of high profile companies and how obvious the norms are once you stop to examine them. First, we looked at photos from real estate agencies with both male and female brokers. In the first photo the women were placed in such a way that made them seem shorter and the men were in such poses that they would seem taller and that would give them a strong presence. We also saw signs of photoshopping, as the light and shadows was not consistent among those in the photo. The reason behind this was probably for them to be viewed as “professionals” in the eyes of society.

There were three men and three women in the photo, the men were on average half a head taller than the women and they were placed in the order of man, woman, man, woman, man, woman. We even found signs that some of the women were indeed taller than the men in real life if one closely examined how they were placed in the photo. Here the participants pointed out the norm being that a man that is shorter than a woman is not as good as a man that is taller or even the same height as a woman. Likewise, a woman should never give the impression of being as tall as the men. We moved on to another photo where there were three well dressed individuals, once more from a real estate firm. There were two women and one man, the women were placed on the sides of the man and a bit further back as to give him additional presence in the photo by making him seem taller in comparison. After doing this
exercise for a while it developed into a more open discussion about norms and the participants own stories and experiences surrounding them.

3.5.2 The second focus group

For this focus group we covered the second norm creative method called the Norm Circle which was created by Vinthagen & Zevalia (2014). There was a total of three participants, one male and two female between the ages of 24 and 30, one of them being a student and two former students. Once more the recruitment of participants was through convenience sampling and the length of the session was about 90 minutes. After an introduction on norm criticism and norm creativity the participants were asked to start the exercise. Initially the participants were a bit hesitant on how to proceed though it was alleviated after presenting some examples on attributes that are tied to social norms. To show that I was willing to put myself on display, I did the exercise on the whiteboard at the same time as the participants. This was partly so that they could look at it for examples but also to show that I was willing to share my personal view of norms with the others. The participants were given 20 minutes to do the exercise before we moved on to presenting it to each other, given that they were comfortable with sharing this information with the others, which all of them were. When the time was up, I presented what I had written on the whiteboard whilst explaining my thoughts surrounding the attributes inside and outside my norm circle. From my own memory and the audio recording you can hear from both me and the participants that we needed a lot of time formulate our thoughts into words when we were talking about social norms from our own perspective. After I finished presenting my norm circle we continued on to the participants in the order from left to right from their seating. One of the participants felt that they had misunderstood the exercise, however after some reassurance they presented some interesting attributes which lead to some good discussion.

3.5.3 The third focus group

Like the second focus group, the third covered the Norm Circle once more, though this time the participants were from different countries and cultures. For this focus group there was three female participants and one male between the ages 20-28, all being international students. This was sure to make it very interesting due to them most likely having a different view on norms compared to the focus groups that had participants exclusively from Sweden. As with the previous focus group, the participants were given a short introduction to the norm circle exercise and a bit of background on norms in general. During this focus group there was a participant that was a bit hesitant and seemed a bit confused of what was asked of them after the exercise had been explained, but after some further details and reassuring they were able to participate with more confidence. Like in the second focus group I once more did the exercise together with the participants on the whiteboard in front of them and they were given around 20 minutes to write down attributes that fit either inside or outside their norm circle. When time was up I presented my norm circle to the participants and explained my reasoning why I put the attributes where I did. The participants then followed suit one by one and which caused some very interesting discussion topics, where the participants shared some of their personal experiences where for example social norms had a negative effect on their lives. These will be presented in further detail in the result section.
3.6 Thematic analysis with inductive approach

“The successful inductive stance permits the events in the field to drive the later development of categories, propositions, and eventually “meaning,” based on the actions in the field and not preconceptions.” (Yin, 2011, p. 124)

The inductive approach is commonly used in qualitative research where the researcher starts exploring a topic without any preconceptions how the end results will turn out. Instead the data that is gathered from observations and other research methods informs the next steps, allowing for a more open research process. The thematic analysis begins with examining and becoming familiar with the collected data, afterwards the researcher moves on to finding and marking reoccurring patterns in the data and coding them. As the process goes on the researcher will find different themes and begin sorting the codes into matching themes that will help them draw meaningful conclusions (Boyatzis, 1998). In the study conducted for this thesis, the material being analyzed consisted of a total of 93 pages transcribed material from the audio recordings of the three conducted focus groups. From the data gathered from the focus groups we can identify six different categories that the participants brought up during the discussions. The six categories are the following: Relationships and marriage, Employment, Living conditions, Discrimination due to ethnicity, Religion and Emotions. These categories emerged after going through the data several times and marking up the different discussions that were had in different colors. It was then I noticed a pattern where much of the conversation could be divided into one of these six categories. Interestingly, the participants chose to talk about these topics on their own volition. It was never stated in the introduction of the focus group that they needed to discuss any specific aspects of what they had written down while performing the norm exercises, but rather the participants naturally gravitated towards topics surrounding these categories on their own. These categories were then sorted into two main themes which revolved around the participants sharing personal or private information about themselves or when they talked about perceived cultural and social expectations in a broader sense or both.

4. Results

Here we will present the findings from the three focus groups. There was a total of 93 pages transcribed material that was extracted from the audio recordings. The following statements from the participants have been slightly edited so that they have a better flow and are easier to understand for the reader. They retain all of their original meaning.

4.1.1 Relationships and marriage (Cultural)

During the second and third focus groups the participants discussed topics that related to the expectations that exist in their respective cultures surrounding relationships and marriage. Through both focus groups there seemed to be much negativity surrounding the pressure from both family and peers about needing to be in a relationship or actively searching for one. There was very little talk about the positivity surrounding this topic and never was the joys of partnership brought up, only the obligations. From the second focus group we listened to Alice, a Swedish student in her mid 20’s explain her thoughts surrounding relationships. Alice explains that she feels there is a need to always either be in a relationship or be in pursuit of one. She thinks that is why dating apps such as Tinder and equivalents get a lot of attention. According to Alice it is also important that you seek a traditional heterosexual relationship
because if you are not looking to fulfill the family ideal you might be viewed differently. She goes on to mention that if you as a woman are very open about not wanting kids you will most likely receive criticism and negative feedback and told that you would regret that decision. Alice also mentions that there is a double standard where it is more okay for a younger man to be with an older woman than the other way around.

Alice: Exactly... but I was thinking about that... it was good that you brought it up... I wrote...it’s like you need to be in a relationship... you need to strive towards having one if you aren’t already...That is why we have all of these... Tinder and the like... what else... you always need to strive towards being in some kind of relationship if you aren’t... and it needs to be a traditional relationship. And of course if you have another sexual identity than heterosexual... or want to obtain something other than the family ideal...or a woman that choose not have kids and are very open about it gets a lot of criticism... like how they will regret it later. I also think that it’s more accepted that a younger man is together with an older woman...than vice versa.

Next up is Astrid, a female student from Germany also in her early to mid 20’s. When she presented the social norms and attributes she had written in her norm circle she talked about how she perceived a difference between the culture surrounding marriage in Germany compared to other countries. According to Astrid, you receive a tax reduction once you are married and it has an affect on how society views you. She goes on to tell us that having children outside of a marriage is still considered negative and brings up that being married while you study is considered weird while it is okay to marry at a younger age if you have a job. Lastly, according to Astrid, women who get married in Germany don’t change their last name.

Astrid: In Germany... your taxes are better if you are married...and a lot of stuff is based on if you are married or not. And that’s why I have as well... as not in the norm... have children with someone without being married... In Germany it’s weird if you are married while you study... but if you like finish school at 16 and then you started working while you are 19 and get married at 22 that’s okay...but it’s not okay... if you are studying at 22 and are married... then it’s weird. Then...as well...if you get married...as a woman you don’t change your last name...to the name of your husband.

Having listened to Astrid’s conversation about the views on marriage in Germany, Felicia who is a female student from Iran, shared her own perspective and thoughts surrounding marriage in Iran. According to Felicia it is considered normal to marry from around 20 years of age and once you reach 35 it is being seen as being late, at that point your relatives might start asking you about it and wondering if you don’t want to get married. She also brings up that in Iran neither party change their names when they get married.

Felicia: Yeah I mean it is normal in our culture as well...to marry...it’s normal to even marry at 20...but if you want to...so if you wish you can...but it’s not something that is really...weird...if you marry at 20 or 25...that is sort of our twenties. I would say like...I don’t know...if you are getting married at like 35 that is sort of considered being late...so if you are
like 35... then maybe not your family but your relatives will be like...don't you want to get married? It is not a thing in Iran either...you don't change your last name at all.

4.1.2 Employment (Cultural/Personal)

In this section we will look at what the participants had to share regarding their thoughts surrounding employment. Let us begin with looking at what Astrid had to share on this topic. She mentions that she believes that if you are a woman in Germany and applying for a job when you have reached a certain age without having children, the employer might think that the women only will work for a relatively short time before getting pregnant and presumably apply for maternity leave. At the same time she mentions that if you as a woman prioritize your career instead of settling down and starting a family, you might be judged negatively in Germany. According to Astrid it is also considered a bit weird or bad if you decide to get a child after the age of 35. She also brings up the fact that it’s still pretty rare for a woman to hold a very high position in Germany.

Astrid: Or...when you talked about what a recruiter could look at if they want to hire you...especially if you are a woman and what age you are...and if you are between an age where you could get children...then they might think..."oh maybe she will only stay one year and then she gets a child" if she is already 30...Yeah I have for example...deciding against children...and prefer your career especially as a woman...I think that's still not accepted in Germany. I had a lot with women and career and children...one part is for example if you are over 35 and get children...this is like "oh my god". And...yeah what did I have...one was...if you have...it’s very uncommon that you have a very high position as a woman...it is still more common that you are a guy in a high position.

Alice brings up that she percieves a pressure regarding the need to have a job that suits your sex, making the example that if a man would be satisfied working as a cleaner he might attract some negative attention to himself. She goes on to mention that the norm in regards to work in Sweden is that you should always keep wanting more and try your hardest to reach as far as you can go. According to Alice it is not really okay to be satisfied with a simple life, making some money, not persuing a career, she feels that this would put you in a negative position.

Alice: But I mean there is...you need to look a certain way...to fit the norm...you need a typical job...and that might mean...typical for your sex...and it needs to be...typical in the way that you work between 8 and 17...probably should add that on the list...if you want to work with an atypical job for your sex...I think if you as a man would say something like “I am being happy working as a cleaner” people would...Yeah... and it’s about being hard working...but if I wanted...if I’m satisfied with life as it is...you have a job you get money...I don’t need to make a career...I have this and I am happy...it’s more the norm to always keep wanting more and struggling to reach there...

Hanna, a Swedish student at the local university shares a story from the time where she worked in a grocery store. She mentions that there were many occasions where people would ask to talk to her boss directly about something instead of trying to consult her first to see if she could be of assistance. The problem was that many of those customers only spoke English and her
boss and the other employees did not while Hanna did. This made her wonder why people couldn’t just try talking with her instead.

Hanna: *I remember the time when I worked at an ICA, there were many that came in asked if the boss was here...they were looking for somebody else and I couldn’t determine why they needed someone else when I was there. Many of them spoke English too...but the boss couldn’t speak English...I was the only one who could so I was wondering if I was going to call my boss here and then translate for him...*

### 4.1.3 Living conditions (Cultural)

Next up we will look at what the participants had to say about their perspective on living conditions. This time we will start with a male participant named Sam that is born and raised in Sweden but whose parents were born in Chile and later moved to Sweden. His heritage is important to Sam and as such he brought up that in Chile, and possibly to some extent Spain, the children have responsibilities when it comes to their parents later in life. You might move out from your parents home and get a job and when your parents start getting older they will move back in with you so that you can take care of them.

Sam: *I know that in Chile at least...I think it covers Spain as well...I was thinking when you said South Europe...because there the kids also has responsibilities...for example to take care of their parents and such. It’s not unusual that you move out and get a job and such...and later your parents move in with you...just to be able to care for them*

Felicia also talked about living conditions from an Iranian perspective. She goes on to mention that compared to other cultures she knows the Iranian way is a bit different. If you are an iranian woman as long as you don’t get married or reach above a certain age the norm is that you keep living with your parents. If you despite this would like to move out earlier you may have to convince your parents before they are okay with you leaving.

Felicia: *I can say that in Iran it differs a bit...so if you are a woman and want to live alone when are like...in Iran it’s like...you don’t really live alone...you are with your parents...and that’s the norm until you either get married or you just decide that you want to move out...so you can but it’s not the norm...It’s more about staying together...if you decide to move out you can obviously...but maybe you have to convince your parents...that you really want to live alone...if you are like...above maybe say...28...then it’s weird to live with your parents.*

Alice brought up that she has noticed some kind of prejudice against those who would prefer to live in smaller cities in the Norrland region of Sweden rather than bigger cities. When she mentions that she would want to live in cities such as Umeå, Skellefteå, Piteå or Luleå, people question her and ask her if she would not want to move to Stockholm to get some valuable work experience first. When she replies that she does not want to move there unless she needs to she feels that people find it hard to respect her decision.

Alice: *...when I speak about the fact that I want to live "here"...in my four dream cities along the coast of Norrland...Umeå, Skellefteå, Piteå, and Luleå people are like, don’t you want to*
move to Stockholm and work and get some experience first?...and I'm like...not if I don't have to...and I wouldn't say that people are messing with me about it...but I get answers like oh...interesting or how weird...

Astrid talked quite a bit about this subject. She mentions that she has never heard of a case where a German woman stayed at their parents home in their 30’s, she does however seem to know some men who still stay at home at that age. Astrid mentions that around the age of 30 most German women would already have children so staying at home is not really the norm. Furthermore, if you have had a job since you turned 20 it would be considered weird to still live with your parents if they are living in an apartment and goes on to mention that she has a neighbour that does that and she thinks it’s weird and something that will attract negative attention.

Astrid: We have no idea how...with the difference...I never heard about a girl...staying until their 30’s with their parents in Germany...I just know guys that stay there.....so often with girls...when they are in their 30’s they already have a child...so they moved out...like that is the norm...but not if you are higher educated...but even then they move out...because of their studies. And especially if you...for example if you have a...you are still...you are 29 and you have had a job since you are 20...and staying at your parents’ home...especially if they have an apartment...then it’s weird...for example our neighbor...he is living at home still...they have like 3 rooms...and he is in one of the rooms and it’s really weird because the street knows you...

Astrid goes on tell an anecdote from a friend of hers that she met through her previous studies. When her friend was 41 years old she went through a divorce and due to being a student at the time she could not get an apartment for herself and her two children. This meant that she had to move back home with her parents because she couldn’t afford renting an apartment as a student and would have to search for a part time job while studying to be able to get her own place. Having to move home to her parents at the age of 41 made her friend very uncomfortable.

Astrid: I know a friend of mine from my old studies...she was 41 and she got divorced while her studies...with her ex-man and she had a problem because she was studying...and she had two children...she had to move to her parents’ home...for a while because she was not...she did not have...a job like...like a full time job because she studied...she had first to search for a half time job...to be able to continue...to live by herself again and she felt really...I know that she felt really...uncomfortable to say that she had to move back at 41...to her parents’ home for a while...

Iris, another female student from Germany having heard Astrid talking about this subject confirms Astrid views while adding some of her own. She mentions that girls are more likely to move out at 18 while boys usually stays at home for long and brings up the reason that they are more lenient against boys staying at home due to protective mothers. However, if you cannot afford to move to your own apartment it is considered okay to still live at home, regardless of sex, but if you can afford it and choose not to then you will get labeled as lazy.
Iris: And girls are more likely to move out...directly after turning 18. And guys...with guys it’s more common for them to stay at home a bit longer...mothers little boy and so on. But it also depends...if you are able to actually pay for your own apartment...it’s actually fine if you stay at home because you cannot afford it...but if you are able and not concerned about it you will be seen as lazy.

4.1.4 Discrimination due to ethnicity (Personal)

Next up is a subject we should pay extra attention to as some of the participants told stories regarding how they experience that they are treated differently based on their ethnicity.

We will start with Felicia this time. She mentions that something she feels helped her integrate into Sweden was the fact that she does not have a typical Persian/English accent. She states that she has witnessed when others with dialects, presumably other Iranians with a strong Persian accent speaks to someone, it have caused them to behave differently towards them than they would toward her. When she first arrived in Sweden and told others that she was from Iran there was many instances where she was asked why her accent was so good and that people followed up by asking her name, as if she could not be from Iran without having an accent. She believes that if she would have had a stronger accent like the people from her classes, she is convinced that people would treat her differently from how they do now.

Felicia: I can say to some extent...especially if you have an accent...so for example if I...like I think that my accent helped a lot with me integrating...so for example if I had a Persian/English accent...which does not sound like what I am talking...then...because I have seen this and I would consider that people do not behave the same...So having a weird accent, maybe that could also not be the norm....as I mentioned when I first came here and I said that I am from Iran...I got so many...” why is your accent good?”. You don’t ask that question...but the second question was always...” what’s your name, why is your accent so good?” But I am thinking that if...I had an accent...different or like for example we had other people in our classes...that maybe did not have like a norm accent as like English speaking...you can sometimes feel that people have...a how do you say...different perspective on them....maybe they don’t...yeah

Sam, whose parents where from Chile had some experiences to share on this subject as well. He was born and raised in Sweden with Swedish culture and to him it is the only culture he has ever known. He views himself as a genuine Swede through and through but he brings up that is not how he appears to others at times. During his school years he felt that people seemed prone to assume that he wasn’t a Swede and every time he met a new group of people he noticed that they treated him differently. Being an adult he still feels the same way as when he was younger, and when he visits parties and meet someone new they will almost always ask him where he is from. He says that he is so used to it by now that it doesn’t really faze him anymore and says that it’s not a weird question to ask, but it’s the fact that he gets asked so often that he feels is a bit weird. Sam mentions that he nowadays just cut straight to the chase and tells them that his parents are from Chile. On occasion people will assume that he doesn’t
speak any Swedish at all and at his work other Swedes will sometimes start speaking English with him instead of Swedish.

Sam: I had a bit more about this when it comes to...different ethnicities and such...both my parents are from Chile...but I am born here in Sweden...so I have never known anything else...I feel like a genuine Swede like that...but that is not how I appear to others on many occasions...I have felt...probably mostly in school...when people are young and like that. And...it's like every time I met a new group...I noticed it...like if I go to a party now...it doesn't matter because it's been that way all my life...if I go to a party and meet someone new they will ask me where I am from...it's not a weird question but...I get it 90 times out of 100 and every time I answer that my parents are from Chile. It happens that people assume I don't know any Swedish...very often...it happens at work...places like that...it happens that people start talking English with me.

Astrid shares with us that she is from Polish descent with a Polish last name and was born and raised in Germany as a german. She mentions that unless you parents are from Germany with a german sounding family name you are considered being an immigrant by some. She mentions that she has been to job interviews and while the interviewer was nice towards her they told her that she thought that she would have an accent when speaks German. She has lived all her life in the same region of Germany and was surprised that she was treated this way because it was the first time it had happened to her. She also mentions that it is a real possibility that she has been denied jobs or interviews due to her family name not being german sounding.

Astrid: Hah...and...yeah I wrote down as well...we call it in Germany...immigration background...if your parents are not from the same country as you are born in...so that's still...and you have a foreign last name for example...you are considered being immigrants. And I got already interviews...I mean I am born in Germany and lived my whole life there...but I got once an interview about studies...and the interviewer was like...she was really nice but...she was like “I thought you would have an accent when you speak german”...and I was like...I never went away from this region here...and I was really surprised because...it was not in a bad way but it was the first time this happened to me. So I think it is as well possible that I don't get jobs because of my last name...”

4.1.5 Religion (Cultural/Personal)
Some participants told us a bit about how they and others view religion. Astid tells us that she has a friend that is a devout christian that believes in God. She mentions that even though people might react negatively towards her friends faith, she does not want to stop believing in God just because of others. Astrid confirms that her friend is not extremely religious, she does not need to wait until marriage to have sex or other things one might attribute to intense Christian faith. She is just very open that she believes in God and Astrid tells us that as long as you don’t force her to do the same, she is very happy that her friend can be open with it, because she feels that is quite uncommon.
Astrid: And then she said... like because she... she said she likes to believe in god... and she does not want to not believe in it because people are like what the fuck... weird... I mean she is not like extreme... don't have sex before marriage or... something like this... but she is like very open with that she believes in god and... As long as you don't want me to forcefully believe that... great that you are open with it... because it’s very uncommon that you are... open with it.

Iris mentions having a very personal experience of religion as she went to a catholic girl school when she was younger. She mentions that when you do that it’s easy to live enclosed in your own bubble and she mentions that a lot of people her age in her school are very open with their faith and they have no issues prioritizing their faith over other matters.

Iris: I have had various experiences...but I have to say that I went to a catholic girl school...so I was in a bit of a bubble...when it comes to this a lot of people my age...in my school actively say that “I am Christian” I am first of all catholic and this is what I believe...this is what I want to...show society...”

4.1.6 Emotions (Personal)

Alice mentions how she feels that there is much focus in todays society when it comes to being healthy. She tells us that one needs to show the world that you are healthy and that you are dedicating time towards making sure you feel good about yourself. She also brings up that you need to be mindful of your opinions and that you should avoid expressing your faith openly and make sure you to mind what you talk about at work. Whatever you do, you should avoid standing out and drawing attention to yourself, she feels that the best option sometimes is to just exist without any public opinions.

Alice: Yeah...that is what I put inside the norm...also being healthy...you need to be healthy...It needs to show...that you dedicate time to feeling good...I also wrote...you need to mind your opinions...you shouldn’t express your faith...you mind what you talk about at work...you shouldn’t stand out. Because I mean...it doesn’t matter...political opinion or if it is religion...you need to just be...

Felicia tells about how she felt that she had to change the way she expressed emotions after arriving in Sweden. She felt that she needed to tone down the way she emoted happiness and sadness because she is naturally very expressive which makes her stand out as she feels that most Swedes are more reserved when it comes to displaying emotions openly.

Felicia: Because this is like my own experience...that first...I think it was this summer...that I kind of reflected and I was like...maybe I shouldn’t let out so much...so much of my emotions...like if I am happy, everyone knows that I am happy...and if I am sad everyone knows that I am sad...but like...then you see that other people or not like that.

5. Analysis and discussion

The aim of this thesis was to learn more about the potential uses for norm creative theories within the field of HCI and specifically within user experience design and user research. The
reason for this focus was primarily because I had seen how norms existing in our society have a heavy influence on how we think and act towards ourselves and others. As seen with the work by those practicing norm critical analysis through norm critical design (Ehrnberger, 2017), when these norms are visualized through design it helps us reflect on the problems that are invisible due to them becoming so deeply ingrained in our culture and everyday life that our minds don’t even register them as problems and “it’s just the way things are”. This is exemplified with the andro-chair project (Sundbom, Hertz, Ehrnberger & Börjesson, 2015). Where they through creating a chair with the purpose of being used for prostate exams in men using the same approach when designing gynecology chairs for women, showed that the no consideration is made regarding how the women who will end up being in those chairs will feel about the experience. Gynecology chairs were designed to be as effective as possible for the gynecologist, and when men were given the opportunity to try out their equivalent they were able to reflect on how such little attention had been given to such an important aspect as feeling safe and respected as a person. With this in mind let us take a closer look at the norm creative methods that were used in the study.

5.1 The norm creative methods used in the study

In this section we will discuss the norm creative methods used in this study from my perspective as a design student. Through the study I was given opportunity to explore both the NOVA card set (Vinnova.se) and the Norm Circle (Vinthagen & Zevalia, 2014) together with 11 participants throughout three focus group. Before I go into deeper detail about this topic I would like to take a moment to clarify that I am by no means an accomplished design researcher or an expert when it comes to norm studies. At the time of writing this thesis, I am just a design student reading a master's program in HCI and Social media with a relatively newfound interest in norms. This is something should be taken into consideration by the reader throughout this discussion. The end goal for this thesis is not to prove beyond any doubts that norm creative methods can be used within design, but rather present what I found and hopefully spark an interest towards them and their potential which hopefully motivates further research. That being said, let us talk about the NOVA cards and the Norm Circle individually before we compare them with each other. I believe that the NOVA cards are a wonderful collection of tools, theories and methods that can be used in real life design settings to both visualize problems that are hidden in norms and also serve as a source of inspiration for designers. However, most of the methods and theories contained within the cards requires a different setting to properly explore their potential rather than a series of focus groups. Many of the methods require a large number of recurring participants and everything from weeks to months and even a full year worth of time investment and let us not forget the fact that they should be used by experienced designers. During the NOVA focus group, we just managed to scratch the surface on one of the smaller methods, which allowed us to do some reflection on some of the norms we can find in the Swedish society. The results from this focus group was harder to interpret and connect towards learning about the participants since they were not actively talking about their own views and experiences about norms. However, that is not to say that the focus group was not important to the study as it served as an introduction to the moderator role for the focus groups that followed.
Now let us move on and talk about the Norm Circle and examine the results from the two focus groups that explored the method. It is important to note that this method was not created explicitly to be used for design purposes, but I believe we can still learn a lot from the results if we examine them from a user research perspective. The Norm Circle, compared to the NOVA cards, was a very straightforward exercise that required little to no previous experience to use which made it suitable for the focus group format. The exercise itself served the purpose of visualizing the participants own relation to norms by having them draw a circle on a paper and write down attributes they believe is accepted within the norm inside of the circle and put down attributes they believe is not within the accepted norm on the outside of the circle. After they finished doing this each participant was given the opportunity to present their norm circle and discuss why they had put down the attributes they did. It was made clear that the participants could opt out the presentation part if they did not feel comfortable sharing what they had put down on their paper. While none of the participants seemingly had any problem with presenting their norm circle, we should still take into consideration that they might have felt that since they had chosen to participate in the study they needed to appease the researcher. I also personally participated in each focus group and made my own norm circle on the whiteboards of the classrooms where the focus groups took place so that the participants would not feel like they were the only one exposing themselves. After having presented my own norm circle the participants followed suit and as they presented their attributes discussions between the participants naturally arose, leading to further exploration of topics surrounding norms and cultural expectations.

5.2 How norm creative methods could be relevant for user research

In this section I will propose several reasons as to why norm creative methods such as the Norm Circle could hold potential within the tools and methods related to user research. First, I would like to talk to about how effectively it gathers deep and varied data from a rather small number of participants and without much prior experience in holding focus groups or being an expert in norm theories. The Norm Circle was used in two focus groups, one having three participants and the other four and with a total of two hours invested in each, whereas the exercise itself took approximately 20 minutes with the rest being presentation and discussion. This resulted in over 50 pages of transcribed material that covered many different topics and perspectives on both a personal and cultural level. The data presented in the results section being just a summary consisting of the most interesting parts that were lifted from the transcription. Furthermore, when conducting this study there was no defined goal in mind, it was purely explorative, as such with a clearly defined purpose I believe that one could adapt the Norm Circle to gather data that aims to answer more specific topics. In their study of personas Marsden et al. (2017) brings up the that an issue with personas is that it might be hard to convince those in charge of the project that it is worth spending resources to gather fresh user data for the creation of new personas instead of just recycling old data or even reuse the same personas created for similar previous projects. I would argue that the Norm Circle would be suitable for use during the data gathering phase since it shows potential when it comes to gathering rich personal data from the user with details that normally wouldn’t be brought up using methods such as surveys or interviews. This is addition
to being quite cost effective as it the exercise can be performed by anyone and it gathers a sizeable amount of data considering the time and effort spent. Furthermore, the personas created based on the data that would be gathered using the Norm Circle or other norm creative methods would have more depth to them through the inclusion of norms and culture into their existing characteristics. This inclusion might then introduce the design team with new contexts to consider when using the personas to evaluate their product. For example, by learning about the norms in a workplace environment the designers can better understand why or why not the users act in certain ways, perhaps the solution lies within it norms as they tell us about the different codes of conduct in different workplaces.

Another aspect to consider is that the data gathered from the focus groups where so wide and detailed it would also be a suitable contender to other user research methods when it comes to creating scenarios where the personas are involved. Benyon mentions that what is needed to start the scenario process is to gather data related that he calls user stories, this data should “…reflect real life experiences, ideas, anecdotes and knowledge of people” (Benyon, 2014, p. 62). He explains there lies an issue in that this kind of information is usually not present when performing traditional data gathering with methods such as interviews observations performed on for example the employees of a company. Norms exist everywhere and through understanding them better I believe they can aid us in gathering interesting user stories that can then be processed into conceptual scenarios and so forth. And if we were to take a look at the data in the result section, it seems clear that that the type of data that has been collected through the focus groups with the Norm Circle is exactly what Benyon describes. By examining the discussions that followed the Norm Circle we got to learn about the participants and the different topics that seemed important to them as they often talked about things that personally affected them in some way without being explicitly asked to do so.

As the concept of the Norm Circle is fairly simple I think it’s possible to adapt it as to work together as a part of other methods such the cultural probe as seen in Gaver et al. (1992) and Brown et al. (2014) to learn more about a user group you don’t have any preexisting knowledge about or where the knowledge you do have is stale and outdated. By packaging the Norm Circle together with a recording device, some sheets of paper and a few pens among the other materials in a cultural probe the participants would be able to do the exercise on their own and record the discussions that follow. The cultural probe in itself already rely upon the goodwill of the participants so I don’t think it is unreasonable to assume that they could find the exercise interesting to perform, given that the researchers create an interesting incentive as we see in the other studies. Another approach would be to perform the Norm Circle together with a couple representatives of the user group and analyze the resulting data to create a cultural probe based on what we could learn about what is important to them and through their norms gain an understanding of their culture (Nygren & Rasmusson, 2012). As seen in Hall et al. (2004) and Lee et al. (2007), culture was brought up as an important factor in both these articles as to why participants from different countries might react differently when put through the same user research methods. As we can see from the data generated from the study, much of the data can be considered to revolve around cultural aspects. This topic is further touched upon article by Pereira, Baranauskas & Liu (2015) and specifically their study surrounding the connection between norms, values and culture. The authors, having examined many other studies, propose that if we can learn more surrounding the norms of an user group this will also lead to a better understanding of their culture and values in regards to informing
the design of interactive systems. Having tried out the norm creative methods for the study of this thesis, I would like to also make the claim that there most likely is a connection between norms and culture which in turn could help us learn what is truly important to our users. As mentioned in the very beginning of the thesis the world is changing at an incredible pace and shows no signs of slowing down. Perhaps the way forward lies in researching this proposed connection and learn how we can utilize norm creative methods to create user research methods that can create a clear picture of the culture and thus their values.

Lastly, an interesting aspect that up in the result is the fact that there is a very negative focus to the conversational topics that were brought up. For example, when discussing relationships and marriage the participants mostly shared negative aspects and perceived norms surrounding them and never positive themes such as being in love or imagining a successful marriage. Another example is the fact that when talking about employment, there was seemingly no positive aspects to be found there either, all the participants bring up negatives or at best neutral feelings toward the topics they discussed. It is unclear if negativity surrounding the topics were because of the general existance norms being seen as something inherently bad or if it depends soley on the participants. This is something that requires further research to make sure it was not just an isolated case. Though if further research would show that norm creative methods like the Norm Circle tends to bring up negative perspectives then maybe it could be used as a form evaluation tool where the focus is to find out negative things about a product or service.

5.3 Shortcomings of the study

5.3.1 Participant recruitment
After having the third and final focus group with students from different cultures and seeing how it had a big impact on the data gathered, it would definitely have been preferable for the sake of having more varied discussions to have people from different cultures in all focus groups instead of just one. There was also an uneven amount of male and female participants as there was a total of 11 participants whereas only three of them were male, this might have had an effect on the data gathered. I also had to rely on participants gathered through convenience sampling, which should be avoided if possible.

5.3.2 Lack of moderation during the discussions
Due to my lack of moderation experience I believe I made a few bad calls regarding situations where one of the participants were talking too much and when some were silent for extended periods of time. This was especially apparent during the first focus group where there was one participant that did most of the talking, leaving little room for other more timid and reserved participants to get a chance to speak their mind.

5.3.3 Lack of norm creative methods to evaluate
I believe that one of the biggest shortcomings of this thesis is the fact that so few norm creative methods were able to be included. Although this can mostly be attributed to suitable methods being hard to find, it would have given more varied data and the methods could have been evaluated against each other to create a better understanding about their values.
5.3.4 Technical difficulties with recording equipment
Due to technical difficulties with the recording equipment, bits and pieces of one focus group was lost which lead to a few gaps in the transcription. Some parts could be recovered from memory, but there was still a loss of data that might have proven valuable. This could have been avoided if more time had been invested in getting more familiar with the equipment.

6. Conclusions and further research
The purpose of this thesis was to explore the potential within norm creative methods to be used to inform user research. Through a series of focus groups lead by the author, the NOVA cardset and the Norm Circle were examined with an explorative mindset. The scale of the NOVA cardset was deemed too sizeable to fit the scope of a student thesis, but from my perspective as a design student I could tell that the collection methods seem very well developed and would be an interesting topic for a bigger project with more resources. Instead the results of the study performed in this thesis mainly reflect the potential within the Norm Circle method. Through the results gained from the study we can see that what was obtained is rich and varied data related to the participants personal and cultural values, their desires but also the perceived pressure put on them to conform to the norms of their culture by family, friends and peers. Seeing as this data was gathered primarily through two focus group sessions that spanned a total of two hours each with as few participants as three in the first one and four in the second while moderated by a design student without much previous experience I think we can safely say that the method can gather a lot of useful and varied data while remaining cost effective. This would make the Norm Circle interesting in how it may be adapted to be used together with user research tools such as personas and scenarios, seeing as they rely on fresh data that takes many small details surrounding the user taken into account to be as relevant as possible. Other aspects that deserves further exploration is the fact that through the norm creative methods we gained an understanding of the culture of the participants through their perspective of norms. And as have been hinted by the research done in this area, culture may play an important role in finding the most suitable user research methodology for depending on which part of the world that will be examined. As the data gathered with the Norm Circle have shown to reflect cultural value it might prove an interesting addition to cultural probes. Interestingly enough the data that was collected through discussions tied the Norm Circle was almost entirely negative or at best neutral in its portrayal, though since the sample size of the study was fairly small and consisted mostly of the students further studies are needed before we can say anything concrete on the matter. This is what could be established from a limited study using mainly one norm creative method that was not created necessarily with use within design in mind. It however my hope that this thesis can help motivate further studies that involves different norm creative methods with bigger sample sizes that also considers their usage within other areas of design and not just user research. I believe that by learning more about how norms affect us in general can help us understand others better which in turn can lead to the design of better user experiences.
7. References


https://adaptivepath.org/ideas/e000862/

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