

What is the point of GenderMag?

If you've scrolled through the GenderMag website, you may have come across this description of GenderMag, written by the creators:

" We hypothesize that the human problem-solving styles supported by software have strong gender biases, and further that addressing these gender biases can help problem solvers of any gender. "

"We are investigating gender biases in people's problem-solving experiences with software. The GenderMag Method is a *process* and *set of materials* to help with the process. It enables software practitioners (e.g., developers, managers, UX professionals) *find* gender-inclusivity "bugs" in their software, and then *fix* the bugs they find. "

But what does this actually mean? In order to understand the goals behind the GenderMag process, you need to understand some concepts that are present in usability theory and human-computer interaction. This guide is meant to simplify these concepts so that you know enough to comfortably use GenderMag and understand its purpose.

What is a Persona?

The first concept that you need to understand is the "persona" in UX design. A user persona is an archetype of a user that usually represents a larger population. A persona is usually presented as a document that includes the information about the persona. This information includes:

- Pronouns
- Age
- Job
- Role
- Motivation
- Computer Self-Efficacy
- Risk Tolerance
- Location
- Background information (family, living situation, anything relevant to day-to-day life)
- Information Processing/Learning Styles (this is the most important!)

Some of this information is solely used to make the person feel real, and some of it is more useful for design. The most important piece of information is the information processing and learning style of the persona, which we will explain in the next section. It's important to use personas because it helps the designers of a product figure out who they are designing the product for. By using several different personas, designers are able to make changes to their product to make it more accessible and easy to use for a wider range of people. There is a great number of research articles about the use of personas that are worthwhile to read if you are interested in this topic. Much of this research is linked on the GenderMag website, and you should check it out.

Here's a link to the GenderMag website that shows you an example of a persona:

<http://gendermag.org/customizer.php?persona=Abi>

What are Information Processing and Learning Styles?

Information Processing Style is the way that a person interprets information, and is an important part of a persona. There are two information processing styles used in Gendermag: Comprehensive Information Processing and Selective Information Processing. If someone has a comprehensive information processing style, that person likes to fully understand how to use a product before diving in and using it. For example, if that person buys a desk from IKEA, they will first read the entire manual before beginning assembly. On the other hand, someone with a Selective Information Processing style is someone who only focuses on the relevant task at hand. This person wouldn't read the IKEA manual first, instead opting to dive into the first step of assembly off the bat. Understanding these processing styles is important in usability research and HCI so that developers of products can make their products easier to use for both types of people.

Learning Styles are another important facet of a persona. These are the preferred ways that a person learns how to use a product. For the purpose of Gendermag, these are split into two groups: Learning by Process and Learning by Tinkering. These are both pretty self-explanatory styles. People who ascribe to learning by process tend to learn by using a step-by-step guide in order to accomplish a task. These people tend to be more risk-averse, and like knowing that one step will lead to another. They prefer to learn a chronological process when using a product. Learning by Tinkering is the opposite of this. People that prefer to learn by tinkering will dive into the product immediately, testing to see what works and what doesn't. This trial-and-error method helps them remember how to use a product more than a process-oriented method.

Information Processing and Learning Styles are important facets of a persona, because they help designers figure out what works for some people and not for others. This allows them to tailor their product to one population that might be more likely to use their product, as well as make it more usable for everybody. For an example of these styles, check out this link of some examples in action:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=62&v=YQwElUH1Wvs&feature=emb_logo