

LABELISCIOUS

MASTER OF ARTS IN DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

Abstract

The master project explores the topic of girls, labels, style identities and posing self-portraits on the Internet. The research discovered how we label girls based on looks and presumptions in an interactive experiment based on the exploratory research and interpretation of posing online girls.

Keywords

Online, self-portraits, girls, labels, judgement, style, looks, posing

Research question

How do we label a girl based on her looks and poses in online self-portraits?

Concept

The concept is an interactive installation that explores in a live output setting how we interpret and label online posing girls through a series of self-portraits inspired by poses and styles from online self-portraits.

Design Relevance

The master thesis is based on the approach of *research through design*. I am exploring and interpreting the topic through the perspective of an interaction designer. I have designed experiments where human interaction have been tested, interpreted and measured in different contexts.

Furthermore I have experimented with my personal perspective and interpretation transforming myself into the different identities in the photographs.

The experiments qualified results and findings for my explorative and participatory research on the topic.

Methodological procedure

Based on the research through design approach I considered *narrative research* to be the best strategic method for researching and developing my master thesis.

“Narrative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then often retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology. In the end, the narrative combines views from the participant’s life with those of the researcher’s life in a collaborative narrative”
(as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Case study

- Qualitative interviews – Video / Audio / Photo
- Workshops – Photo / Video / Tasks
- Documentary portraits – Photo

Further on designing my installation I chose a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting findings and data.

Interactive installation

- Analyse – Structure / Interpret material
- Develop – Summarise / Brainstorm / Mind maps / Sketch / Design
- Experiment – Prototypes / Video / Qualitative interviews / User generated data / Statistics

BACKGROUND

Motivation

I am a feminist. I believe in equal rights for both men and women. I still think Womans Day is important and I march in the annual parade when I can. For me it is important to show support to the women of the world because we still have a long way to go. In Norway, where I come from, we are considered to be quite progressive in the fight for equal rights. Because of feminism I have the freedom to choose independently who I want to be and what I want to do with my life. For that I am ever grateful to the feminist revolution.

Safe to say, that I was quite shocked reading one of Norway's largest newspaper, Dagbladet, on Woman's Day in 2012, when they chose to interview a former porn star, Caroline Andersen, on her views on feminism and Woman's Day. First of all, feminism and porn to me is contradictory. Why would she have anything interesting to say about feminism? Not surprisingly she thinks feminists are lame. She probably shares the notion that feminists are ugly women with hairy armpits who hate men and probably are victims of sexual abuse. "I want to celebrate Women's Day by teaching girls to just give a fuck", she says.

This made me curious. What was the status quo of feminism today? When I started researching this it became clear that there were no absolute answers to this question. Contrary to my expectations, it seems that feminism is not defined as a joined force of working together for equal rights. It seems there is more of an argument of what it implies to be a feminist.

Susan Faludi, a well known American feminist, states that today feminism is split into a fight between second and third wave feminists. In other words a mother-daughter divide.

"[...] feminism – it's fleeting mobilizations followed by long hibernations; its bitter divisions over sex; and its reflexive renunciation of its prior incarnations, its progenitors, even its very name".
(Faludi, 2010, p. 29)

"Sometimes I find myself in rooms where, by default and despite my years, I'm expected to represent the youthful feminist viewpoint because there's no one younger around. More often, a middle-aged grumpiness tends to place me on the "old" side, as when I open a leading feminist work and find a prominent third-wave feminist defending her "extreme bikini wax" or read a feminist blog in which a young woman avers that "wearing a Wonderbra is a statement of empowerment" and expounds on the pleasures of "choosing between 'apricot sundae' and 'mocha melt' eye shadow".
(Faldui, 2010, p. 30)

In my book wearing a wonderbra is hardly a statement of empowerment. Who are these so called third wave feminist girls? This demanded some further research, which would soon lead me into a world of hair extensions and tight pink dresses.

CASE STUDY

Pink bloggers

In the book “Generasjon Sex” (2010) author and sociologist Hannah Helseth writes on Norwegian youth who post pictures of themselves scantily clad on personal blogs, Facebook and sites like deiligst.no.¹ Helseth examines why girls would they rather be pinched in the ass than be ignored. Moreover, she asks if this sexualization provides the girls with power, or confirms the girls powerlessness?

“Most people like to look good. Strut around in new garments. At the same time there is something shameful about caring too much about the way you look. The ambivalence Beauvoir describes as a part of the women’s role, has been a central part in the feminisms prevailing ideal for women. We want to dress up, but are in danger of being reduced to the dressing up.” (Helseth, 2010, p. 30)

In Norway we have a scene of bloggers called “pink bloggers”. They are a group of predominantly teenage girls who blog about make up, hair extensions, clothes and how to get a nice tan all year round. The pink bloggers have a “uniform” way of dressing. Comparing their look to the appearance of a professional glamour model is not far fetched. They use their sexuality to get attention with their blond hair, miniskirts, cleavages and playboy bunny posings. Most of the girls are not even eighteen. And they are popular.

The pink bloggers see themselves as a one persons reality series, presenting daily life through a docu soap drama filter. It is the way people present the story that determines whether it is interesting or not, “a rule that applies to almost all themes and cultural expression. (as cited in Jackson, 2010)

Some of the pink blogs have as many as 90.000 readers everyday. It is safe to say that they get a lot of attention. However it is not all positive attention. A lot of the comments they get are down-right mean. The blogs have raised a debate in Norway, where it is discussed if the bloggers are good role models, if their blogs are relevant, and why young girls want to look like bimbos and spread pictures of themselves scantily clad all over the Internet? Do they think about the implications of uploading images of this character? Are they conscious of the signals they send in terms of how they are perceived?

The images of a pink blogger are often self-portraits, carefully staged in the best possible way to show off the blogger’s looks. They all know which angle works best for the camera. The poses are sexy and show off attributes. The images represent perfect made up looks and lives. A life that is so picture perfect that they do not even care about the negative responses. The pink bloggers respond to the negative comments simply by saying that “haters gonna hate” and that people are just jealous. Where does this self esteem come from in a country where we are raised to be down to earth and not believe that we are something out of the ordinary?

Helseth states that to feel powerful is not necessarily the same as having power. Does that apply for the pink bloggers? I decided that I had to meet the pink bloggers in person. My goal was to get to know the girls behind the blogs as well as gaining knowledge about this particular blogosphere. Hence I wanted to meet them in their homes where the blogging takes place, which is in their private girl’s room.

I started to research the blog scene. The blog portal blogg.no is a popular free blog portal in Norway. Blogg.no operates with a top list over the blogs that have the most readers.

The majority of the top bloggers in Norway are on this portal. If you have a spot on the top list, blogg.no also pay you a monthly salary to blog.

I chose four of the bloggers on the top list that fitted the pink blog profile and sent them an email. I only got answers back from two of the bloggers.

Sophie Elise Isachsen, www.sophieblogg.no is 17 year old girl who lives in Harstad, a small town in the north of Norway. She was at the time number 3. at the top list, which means she has 50.000 readers every day. We agreed that I would come to her home and spend two days with her.

Heidi Alexandra Olsen, www.heidalexandra.no (former heidalexandra.blogg.no) is 18 and lives in Oslo with her mom. She was at the time at number 24 on the list. I agreed to meet her first at a café in Oslo.

Before my scheduled meeting with the pink bloggers I had prepared questions for my interviews.

1. Deilist.no is a Norwegian web site designed for young people, but anyone can register and create their own personal profile. The site works as a photo portal where users above 15 years post pictures of themselves and get rated by other users. The core idea is that the users engage in self-promotion by showing off attributes for other like-minded via uploaded images and webcam. The site also has its own chat service and furthermore polls, rankings and competitions related to the images. (Norwegian Wikipedia, 2013)

Questions for my interview:

1. How long have you been blogging?
2. Why did you start blogging?
3. What is the reason for choosing your type of blog?
4. What do you think about the term pink blogger?
5. Why do you blog now?
6. Can you tell me about your style? What kind of style would you say you have?
7. Do you feel pressure on looks?
8. Does the blog represent your interests and what you are passionate about?
9. How do you plan your posts? Text and images? Do you have a favorite expression?
10. Are the posts written directly from the everyday life/reality or are they planned carefully?
11. How do you dare to be so open about yourself and your personal life on the blog?
12. Is there something you don't want to share on the blog? Text / Photos?
13. Who are your readers?
14. Why do you have success?
15. Do you care about the negative comments on your blog?
16. Is all PR good PR?
17. What do you think about the Law of Jante?
18. Are you addicted to blogging?
19. Do you earn money blogging?
20. Do you have any contact with other bloggers?
21. Do you have any blog idols? Other role models/idols?
22. How long do see you see yourself blogging?
23. What could possibly cause you to shut down your blog?
24. What are your dreams and ambitions for the future?
25. How will you look back on your blog in 20 years?

Interviews | Heidi Alexandra Olsen

First impressions

I met a polite, sweet girl. Her looks and appearance were more mature than her blog persona. Her voice for example did not sound like the baby voice she uses in her video blogs.

Status

She has taken a year break from high school and is currently working in a coffee shop. She just recently moved out from her mother's and now lives by herself. Heidi Alexandra earns money blogging, mostly from ads on her blog.

Style

Heidi Alexandra describes her style as “Chanel meets Versace”. She sees herself as vain yet sophisticated. Clothes and makeup are her hobby. She doesn't feel any pressure on looks because she is very confident with her style and knows what she likes.

Plastic surgery

Heidi Alexandra's views on undergoing cosmetic surgery were clear: “Plastic surgery is like getting braces. If there is something you do not like about yourself, you fix it”. Her lips are plumped up by Restylane.¹

Background

Heidi Alexandra has blogged since May 23, 2009. Her motivation to start blogging was simply out of boredom and the fact that everybody else was doing it so she figured that she could also do that. Her inspiration was a known boy blogger who made fun and entertaining videos.

Concept

The name of the blog, Life of Barbie, comes from friends who called her Barbie when she was younger and had very blonde long hair.

Her blog contains both images and text, but she put the most emphasis on the text. She is not so good at taking pictures so she doesn't take so many self-portraits. However she always uses images of different kinds in her posts, since she thinks images are crucial in order to understand the story. She edits her pictures a little in a simple program.

She thinks the term pink blogger sounds unprofessional. Yes, her blog is pink, but her blog is also intended as a source of entertainment.

Blog content

The blog represents her meanings and interests, but is an exaggerated version of herself. Heidi Alexandra often writes her posts spontaneously, whilst other times she can write about topics that, for example, her mother tipped her about. She stands for what she writes but says: “I cannot always stand for a post I wrote two years ago, since I am young and in a growing process”. Heidi Alexandra likes to observe, provoke, discuss and argue. She always knows when she has written a good post that will generate a lot of comments.

She regards her blogging as entertainment. The blog has many regular readers and that her motivation to continue blogging. Heidi Alexandra thinks it would have felt like a vacuum not to blog. It has simply become a habit of hers.

Privacy

Heidi Alexandra compares blogging to a bubble where the boundaries become blurry and where in you often forget how many people actually read it.

She shares everything on her blog apart from her love life. If there is anyone who does not want to be featured on the blog like in a picture she takes that into account. If someone in her closest family were harmed by her blog she would stop.

Readers and success

Her readers are from 13-60 years old. She feels a lot of her success is due to the fact that P3² snatched up her blog pretty early and talked about it on the air. She believes that her blog has an entertainment value to her readers. She feels that she cannot be held responsible for being a role model to 13-year-old girls. That must be the parent's duty, to set the standard for their kids. She feels ambivalence about being recognized in public. Her being a public figure in school was exhausting and one of the reasons she chose to take a break. She must also have a secret phone number, otherwise people call her all the time about all sorts of nonsense.

Parents

Her mother also reads her blog and is proud of her, but a little concerned about the negative comments at times.

Comments

The negative comments she gets she finds almost flattering. That fact that they bother to comment means that she got their attention. This keeps her blog popular. It was harder for her when she was younger. Nowadays she doesn't take herself too seriously and finds it hilarious that people take her posts so seriously. She doesn't read the comments anymore.

However, she wouldn't adjust her content to achieve more comments because she believes that this would affect the quality of her writing.

Good versus bad PR

Heidi Alexandra says: "If you want to be an actress a blog can be a good way to get attention, but let's face it no one would ever prefer me as their doctor". So all PR is not necessarily good PR.

Scantly clad images

She thinks bloggers who post scantily clad pictures of themselves are calculated. Sex sells.

The law of Jante³

She doesn't care for the law of Jante. She likes to push the boundaries and be a little rebellious. One must be allowed to say that one is good at something or that one looks good.

Other blogs

She does not read other blogs or have other blog idols. She refers to the other bloggers as colleagues, but admits there is some rivalry between them

Dreams and ambitions

Her dream is to become an actress. Her dream would be a role in Hotel Caesar⁴. Maybe next year she will move to LA and go to acting school. Although she wants to be an actress, her goal is not to be only famous.

The blog and the future

She has no idea how long she's going to blog. As for future jobs she never mentions the blog in job interviews. She is aware of that her blog can be a negative aspect for future employers. Now-days many employers google their candidates and she has no control over negative comments that may come up in the search results.

In 20 years she thinks she'll look back on her blog and either laugh or cry. Laugh because she was funny or cry because something bad happened as a consequence of her blog. She feels that is not good for 13-year-olds to blog considering it might affect their future and that they may change. Here she sees that the parents have the responsibility to guide them.

The future blog

She is unsure what will happen with blogging in general in the future. Maybe new things will enter the scene and take over like for example Instagram.

1. "Restylane is the trade name for a range of injectable fillers with a specific formulation of non-animal sourced hyaluronic acid (HA) (...) Restylane is most commonly used for lip enhancement (volume and contouring)." (English Wikipedia, 2013)

2. A Norwegian radio station.

3. "The Law of Jante is a pattern of group behaviour towards individuals within Scandinavian communities, which negatively portrays and criticises individual success and achievement as unworthy and inappropriate. The Jante Law as a concept was created by the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose, who in his novel A fugitive crosses his tracks (En flyktning krysser sitt spor, 1933, English translation published in the USA in 1936) identified the Law of Jante as ten rules. Sandemose's novel portrays the small Danish town Jante (modelled upon his native town Nykøbing Mors as it was at the beginning of the 20th century, but typical of all small towns and communities), where nobody is anonymous.[1] (English Wikipedia, 2013)

(..) Generally used colloquially as a sociological term to negatively describe an attitude towards individuality and success common in Scandinavia, the term refers to a mentality which de-emphasizes individual effort and places all emphasis on the collective, while discouraging those who stand out as achievers"(English Wikipedia, 2013)

4. A Norwegian soap opera.

Interviews | Sophie Elise Isachsen

First Impressions

I met a little, dollish girl who was a bit shy but seemed down to earth and confident. Her looks and style appeared to be the same as the impression I got from the blog.

Background

Sophie Elise started to blog in January 2011. After two months of blogging she became popular. A constructed “babe blog fight” she had on the Youtube with another famous blogger became viral and in the aftermath of that, she hit the top five on the blog list.

Sophie Elise started blogging because it was another girl that she didn’t like in her town that had a blog that she thought was bad. She wanted to challenge her by starting a blog of her own. She also wanted the attention. She says: “**If you say you don’t blog for the attention you should rather start a blog in Word**”.

Status

Sophie Elise is in her final year in high school. She lives with her parents and a younger sister. She gets paid by blogg.no for blogging and also has endorsement deals for products like hair extensions and clothes.

Style

She describes her style as very girly and she loves to dress up. She doesn’t have an “everyday” look. She puts on false eyelashes, hair extensions and wears high heels every single day. She is confident in her style even though she knows there are many who disapprove of it. Her style seems to provoke people and once she even got attacked, where they dragged and pulled her hair. Nevertheless, she considers her style her trademark and proudly stands up for it.

Plastic surgery

She thinks that is legitimate to undergo plastic surgery if you are unhappy about your looks. Her lips are plumped up by Restylane¹ and she has considered breast augmentation.

Concept

She describes her blog as “Barbie with a twist”. Even though she might look like barbie, she also wants to come across as smart. Her blog consists of images and text with a focus on being as real and personal as possible. She takes a lot of self-portraits and often poses scantily clad. She does not like to be associated with pink bloggers because she thinks the pink blogs appears to be a little dumb. She doesn’t respect the bloggers who consciously appear to be dumber than they are or provoke for the sake of attention. She feels that it is important to respect the readers.

Blog content

Sophie Elise’s blog represents her daily life. She also writes about matters close to her heart, like animal rights and vegetarianism. She thinks it is important to give her readers a positive self-image. If she’s is down for some reason she tries to turn that into a post about how one can cope with it or reflect on it in a positive way.

Her posts are often carefully planned the day before. She writes as many as three posts a day. She writes sincere and direct, she doesn’t adapt. Photos are important to her posts because pictures say more than words. She herself prefers blogs with images.

She would say that she is addicted to blogging because a life without the attention is unimaginable.

Privacy

A lot of the posts she writes to herself. Some of the content she shares she would never dare to share in front of a public. An example of that is her sharing on the blog that she had an abortion at the age of 14. For some reason it feels safe to share it in the blogosphere.

She does not write about her love life on the blog because in the past it has caused problems in her relationships. Problems at home are also not a topic on the blog.

Sophie Elise is famous and people come up to her all the time. She thinks that is a bit strange but all in all positive, especially if they tell her that the blog has given them something positive in their lives. In the public space she feels some pressure and becomes more self-conscious. Sometimes she gets insecure about her looks and that they will be disappointed by seeing the real life her.

She has deliberately not used her real name on the blog or elsewhere so she will be not linked to the blog by googling her. This was a strategic move initiated by her parents in terms of shielding her for the future.

Readers and success

A lot of her readers are girls from 13-18 years old. A few boys also read her blog but she doesn't quite understand why they would be interested.

She believes her success is because she stands out and is herself. She updates her blog often and she thinks her writing is good.

As far as role model she doesn't see herself as one. "**I cannot blog for 13 year olds when I am 17**" she says.

Parents

Her parents are proud of her and the success of her blog. They find it a bit difficult to keep up with all the people who want a piece of her in terms of endorsements or interviews requests. Since she is a minor they try their best to keep track of her blog and all that comes with it.

Negative comments

She doesn't care about the negative comments. She is successful and says: "**who are really these people down there commenting?**"

Good versus bad PR

She feels that she hasn't had so much bad PR. She feels that she has a lot influence because of her high number of readers. With this influence she likes to promote matters that she cares about.

She thinks it's better to do this from her blog, where she is control, as opposed to in a news paper interview, for instance.

The Law of Jante

She feels that "**It is hard ignore the Law of Jante because you have it in your blood**". At the end of the day she thinks it doesn't really matter in the greater picture what other people think.

Other blogs

She reads other blogs, and says: "**those who say that they are not, are lying**". She has a relaxed relationship with her blog colleagues and that they are not taking it too seriously. They are having fun. She likes the Swedish blog www.kissie.se because, "**she has come really far in establishing a trademark in a smart way**", she says. Kissie.se is currently one of the world's most popular blogs. She started with a "dumb babe" blog, which is now more true to the real Kissie persona. As a role model she is fond of Miley Cyrus because "**she is herself, talented and stands tall through scandals**".

Dreams and ambitions

She would like to use her experience blogging to study marketing and PR. She does not envision blogging as a full time student because she will not have time for that. However, she sees herself taking a year off after high school to blog full-time.

Ideally she would marry rich and live somewhere by the beach in a warm country. She is not afraid of getting bored not working. “**Tm never bored, I could stay at the beach all day**”, she says. If she was going to stop blogging right now something drastic must happen to her family or friends.

The blog and the future

In 20 years she'll look back on her blog and feel that she was fortunate to be able to have such a successful blog. “**It will be important to cherish what I had**”, she says.

The future blog

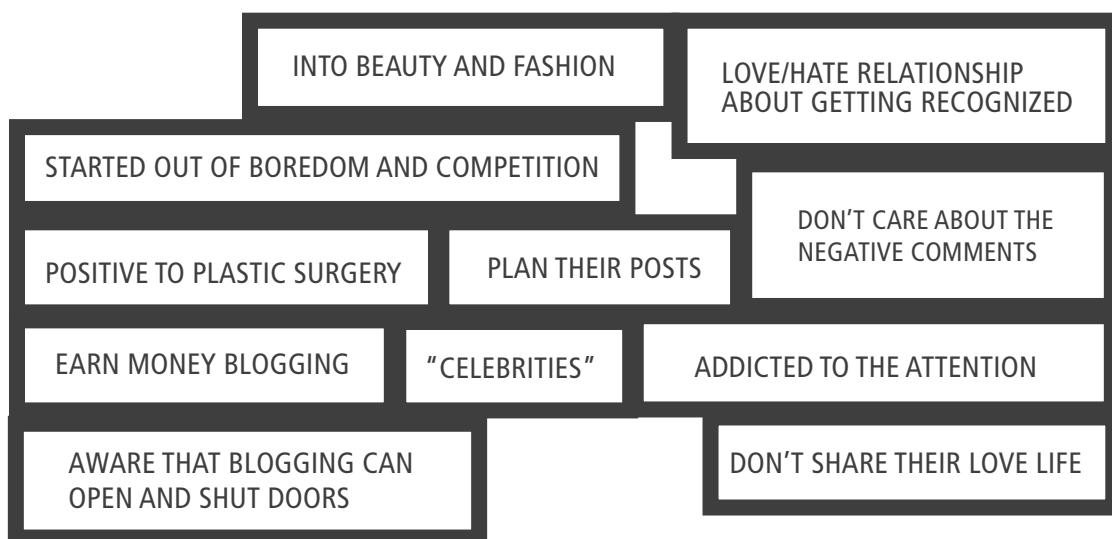
Blogs will take on a different form in the future so it will be strange to look back on the blog that she had.

Evaluation Interviews

Summary

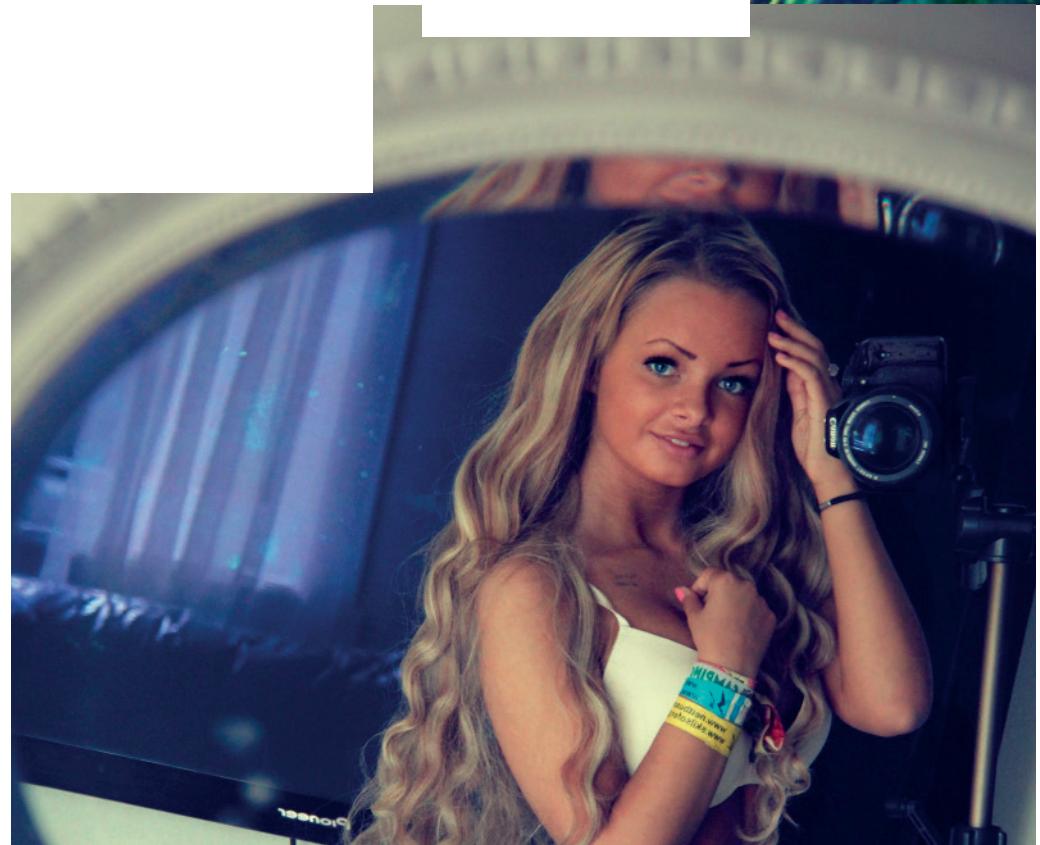
Interviewing the two pink bloggers was a composite experience. On one hand they are just two teenage girls in a teenage world. On the other hand they are “celebrities” running their blog as a commercial business. From looking at the blog one would think that they are just “superficial babes”, when in real life they are articulate girls with a surprisingly mature level of introspection. Because of this ambiguity the reality of the pink blogger it is a complex matter. Thus in order to get a perspective of their world I mapped what links them together.

Similar characteristics





MOST PROUD OF



MOST COMMENTED



Photo shoot

Due to different circumstances I ended up doing a photo shoot only with Sophie Elise. I wanted to get to know more about the images on the blog and their importance. Thus I planned a few tasks for Sophie Elise.

- Strike your best poses
- Find the image you are most proud of
- Find the most commented image
- Take an image without the made up look

I also wanted to explore:

- Would she feel comfortable with me in control, behind the camera?
- How would my photographs look juxtaposed with her images?

Sophie Elise found it exciting to be photographed. We found inspiration for the photo shoot together by looking into other photographs. It turned out that we had similar taste and had some of the same images in mind. We decided to split the photo shoot into two parts:

1. She was in charge of the ideas and directions for the images
2. I was in charge of the ideas and directions for the images

Evaluation

Sophie Elise was quite confident and open with me behind the camera. She had a few signature poses that she liked the best, but she was also relaxed with me taking charge of the images. Her favourite images are when she has a dollish look with no expression. The only juxtaposition between her images and mine was that I wanted to show more of her environment, which is why I placed her in her room to get a broader impression of the world from where the blogging takes place. We didn't do any images without make up since she doesn't have an everyday look. She's always made up.



Analysis of pink bloggers

Are the pink blogs reality shows?

My impression from the interviews is that the two pink blogs are reality shows. They edit, stage and expose their life to the world in a two-dimensional format. You don't get to see all the aspects of their life in the sense they don't expose their love life or their family.

Do the girls still feel powerful and confident outside the comfort zone of their blog and personal space?

The girls seemed vulnerable and a bit shy outside of the blog. They told me that they felt weird about being recognized and sometimes even were a bit afraid to disappoint the real world with their appearance/looks. As an example Heidi Alexandra felt it gradually difficult to be in school, being a public blog person.

Is feeling powerful the same as having power?

The pink bloggers indeed have power and influence. As a matter of fact, professional marketers send them products to review on their blogs. Besides commercial power, many girls see them as role models. Thus they can also feel powerful. But having power or feeling powerful is not the same as gaining respect. For that I think you need talent outside the reality world. Paris Hilton can be a reality show/sex tape commercial success, but she'll never be respected as a pop star.

Take Madonna for example. It can perhaps be argued whether Madonna has real talent, but we still have respect for her career. In my opinion that is due to the fact that she started out as a singer/dancer and then later on started on her "sex crusade".

I think the pink bloggers will have problems gaining respect in a professional environment. Their text and images will be on the Internet forever. Like Heidi Alexandra said: "no one would ever have me as his or her doctor".

But if respect is earned purely by commercial success, the pink bloggers have indeed the right to feel respected.

Conclusion

Meeting the pink bloggers challenged my view on what is means to be a 17-18 year old girl today. The Internet has created a new way to be present oneself and get attention. The on-screen and off-screen personas make their world complex. There is an intriguing contrast between being OK with posting pictures of yourself in a bikini, and never daring to wear one at the beach. It's interesting that Sophie Elise was comfortable telling her 50.000 readers that she had an abortion at the age of 14, but admitted that she would not in a million years tell that to an audience of the same number in real life.

The complexity of these contrasts makes it difficult to pinpoint who these girls are. A certain way of behaving or dressing on the Internet doesn't necessarily reveal who a person really is. In other words: the fact that you look a Barbie doesn't mean that you are Barbie.

*If we believed that we were sexy and funny and competent and smart, we would not need to be like strippers or like men or like anyone other than our own specific, individual selves.
(Levy, 2010).*



But what if you believe that you are sexy and funny and competent and smart and still want to look like a stripper? Can you still be your own specific individual self?

Ariel Levy claims in her book Female Chauvinist Pigs that this attitude is a product of the pornification of our society. Which is probably true. However, that doesn't change the reality or the complexity of being a girl today.

The pink bloggers are a part of a culture of self-representation. They want attention and confirmation. Does that set them apart from other girls of today? Or is it just as much a matter of the "right" way to act and dress like a girl?

This issue of style and correctness now became the focus of my further research.



Workshop: Image analysis

I executed a workshop in my sociology class where my image material of Sophie Elise was to be analysed within the structure of the theories of Erwin Panofsky Studies in Iconology (1939).

| <i>Object of interpretation</i> | <i>Act of interpretation</i> | <i>Equipment of interpretation</i> | <i>Controlling principle of interpretation</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I. Primary or natural subject matter – (A) factual, (B) expressional – constituting the world of artistic motifs. | <i>Pre-iconographical description</i> (and pseudo-formal analysis). | <i>Practical experience</i> (familiarity with <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i>). | History of style (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i> were expressed by <i>forms</i>). |
| II. Secondary or conventional subject matter, constituting the world of <i>images</i> , <i>stories</i> and <i>allegories</i> . | <i>Iconographical analysis</i> in the narrower sense of the word. | <i>Knowledge of literary sources</i> (familiarity with specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i>). | History of style sources (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, specific <i>themes</i> or <i>concepts</i> were expressed by <i>objects</i> and <i>events</i>). |
| III. Instinctive meaning or content, constituting the world of "symbolical" values. | <i>Iconographical interpretation</i> in a deeper sense (<i>Iconographical synthesis</i>). | <i>Synthetic institution</i> (familiarity with the <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i>), conditioned by personal psychology and " <i>Weltanschauung</i> ". | History of cultural symptoms or "symbols" in general (insight into the manner in which, under varying historical conditions, <i>essential tendencies of the human mind</i> were expressed by specific <i>themes</i> and <i>concepts</i>). |

History of Tradition

FIGURE 4.1

Three strata of subject matter or meaning

Attending:

Boys: 5

Girls: 7

Age: 24-35

Due to the fact that we are designers and not skilled social scientists we had no experience in Panofsky's image analysis. The image analysis was an experiment to test our new theoretic input. Moreover, I wasn't prepared for the commotion the images caused and it in was no way possible to get the participants to analyse within the structure. The images were to most of the participants quite provoking. A tense discussion in the group followed.

Some of the instant reactions:

- Duck face
- Barbie doll
- Eyeliner
- Extensions
- Daddy issues
- Bitch
- Whore
- Playboy bunny
- Cancer in the future
- Misspent youth

It was especially amongst the girls the reactions were the strongest. It seemed like they were almost enraged by Sophie Elise. The girls implied that she was very conscious about what she is doing and that she could not be excused for just being a 17-year-old girl. Some felt pity for her and wondered if she knew anything about feminism. There were also statements that she must be sexually promiscuous. The girls found it concerning that she is a minor and wondered why her parents didn't stop her blog.

The boys were more analytic and tried to put the images into perspective. It was a bit surprising that the girls accused the boys for finding her sexually attractive, which in fact they claim that they didn't. The boys found it more interesting with the social study of the images and how the images are a symptom of today's online posing society.

The girls also questioned my role in the project. I was asked how could I defend a girl that presents herself in this way? I felt like they wanted me to confirm their prejudices and they were angry that I wouldn't. When I tried to tell them that Sophie Elise did very well in school, for example, their response was: how could she possibly be intelligent? They just didn't believe me.

Conclusion

I must say I was surprised about all the commotion the images stirred. This kind of look is clearly controversial. Most of the reactions were of a moral nature. It seems like, as soon as there are some sexual connotations the moral finger is quick to wag. Just a few were open minded or curious to find out who the girl behind the blog was.

Are we so judgmental once a stereotypical style or pose appears? I suggested that it wouldn't cause such a stir if I showed a picture of a punk girl in sexy poses. The group went silent.

I asked myself: is there a difference between a girl posing scantily clad in fashion photographs versus posing like a playboy bunny on a blog? Is it just a matter of what is considered to be "tasteful" that makes you a slut or not?

DEVELOP

After evaluating my material I narrowed the project down to two possible directions:

1. A documentary project where I present the pink blogger and her world.
2. An installation based on my interpretation of the research.

Inspired by the feedback I got on the images of the pink bloggers I decided that the right direction for me was to expand the research and interpret it in an interactive installation.

I was simply too curious to find out what was the case with girls in other styles identities were, and how they would be judged. I also wanted to address the questions I had after the image analysis workshop.

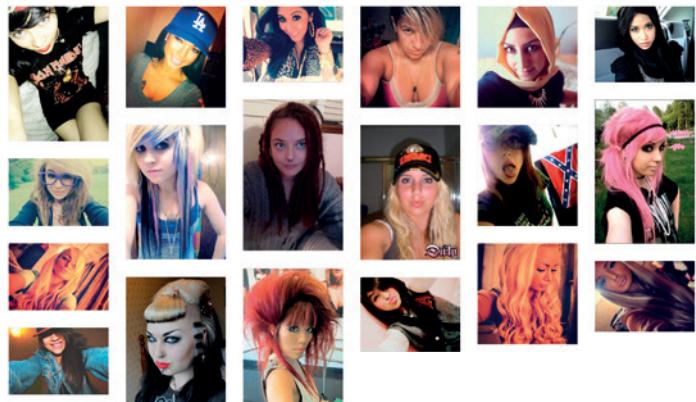
- How do we label girls based on looks and poses?**
- Is there a consensus of what is tasteful and what is tacky?**
- If asked to judge would everyone agree on these definitions?**

I started to search Internet and the result was a bit surprising. Beyond different styles and continents girls were uploading self-portraits striking their best poses. Moreover, they all used the same poses. Poses that for some reason are considered as flattering and attractive. I found this interesting and started to collect and categorise the poses beyond different style identities.

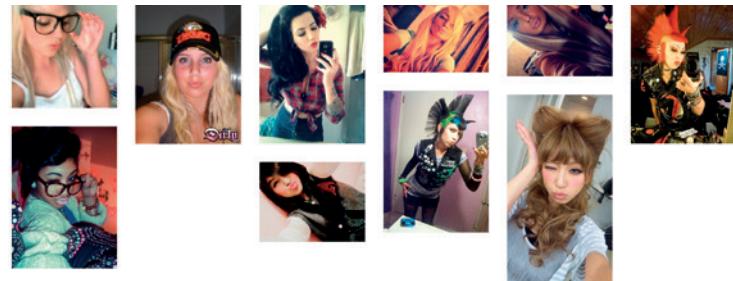
Posing Dogme

From the research I could clearly see a pattern where four different poses seemed to appear most frequently. These four poses all had the same features, to the extent that it appeared dogmatic. This inspired me to pattern the poses and make a manual with a set of online self-portrait rules featuring the four distinct poses. I called it “Posing Dogme”. The four different poses each got a name followed by instructions of how to strike the pose.

REACHFORTHESTARS

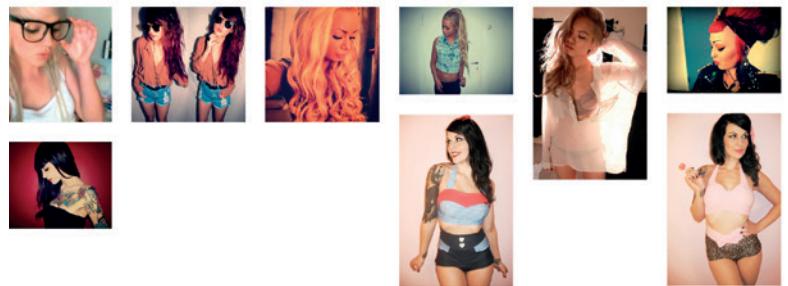


MIRRORMIRROR



KISSKISSBANGBANG

OHSOSHY



POSING DOGMET

The rules of online self-portraits

reach for
the stars

1. Put the camera in your hand
2. Hold the camera at arms length
3. Pose a 3/4 face without smiling
4. SHOOT!!

TIP! The more you stretch the more you get!

OHoSHY

1. Hold the camera in your hand
2. Look down to your left
3. Think of bambi
4. SHOOT!!

Being natural is simply a pose, and
the most irritating pose I know.

Oscar Wilde

TIP! Pout if you want a more doll look!



KISSKISS BANGBANG

1. Put the camera in front of you
2. Look into the lens eyes wide open
3. Pout as hugemongous as possible
4. SHOOT!!

TIP! If you have small lips try out restylane. It is all natural!



MIRROR MIRROR IN THE WALL

1. find a mirror
2. Strike your best mirror face
3. freeze and grab your camera
4. SHOOT!!

TIP! The image gets more interesting if you show some skin

Self-portraits

“Representations are important to women. They impact people’s assumptions about women and translate into expectations that guide interpersonal interaction (as cited in Ridgeway, 2009”)

I decided to add another dimension to my concept. I wanted to stage my self into roles of different girls and identities and make self-portraits following the rules of my manual, Posing Dogme. I wanted to face my own judgement as well as increase my comprehension of this role playing and online self-representation. Moreover my intention was to tear down stereotypes concerning age, colour and size so one had to simply interpret the style identity and the pose.

By choosing this immersive approach I was following in the footsteps of a so-called female artist tradition. Cindy Sherman is world famous for her conceptual self-portraits where she uses costumes and make-up in order to transform herself into other identities.

“Her works are photographs; she is not a photographer but an artist who uses photography. Each image is built around a photographic depiction of a woman. And each of the women is Sherman herself, simultaneously artist and model, transformed, chameleon-like, into a glossary of pose, gesture and facial expression.” (Mulvey, 1991, p. 137)

The series Untitled Film Stills, 1977–1980 she explored the visual language of cinema and made single-frame “film stills” where she staged and re-contextualized the stereotypes of women.

“Critics generally describe the Film Stills as calculated reconstructions of images we have already been exposed to in a variety of contexts. They represent all the different ways we are accustomed to seeing women, widely varying, and yet ultimately finite, “canned.”

“On television shows, in movies, and in music videos, we have repeatedly seen images of women—often uniformed schoolgirls – who do not know their own sexual attractiveness, and are all the more attractive for it. For Sherman to reproduce such an image is to highlight its shallowness: we could never understand this woman as anything fuller than a stereotype.”

(Sprague-Jones & Sprague. 2011, p. 415)

Korean-born New York photographer Nikki Lee also transforms herself into new identities. She immerses herself into subcultures by adapting their style and spending time with them. The images resemble tourist-like snapshots of her as a part of the groups.

“She places herself within the frame of her images, transforming herself into the documented subject after constructing the context and setting the stage. She performs identity – reinventing herself with the stereotypes, media hype, codes, and clues that look into and out from a given community, infiltrates that community, and presents us with a new version of herself. She is a respectful tourist shopping for who she is within a subculture, stretching the very skin of her own identity to find a fit. Her images dig deep into the construction of community and ego, of social roles and what it means to be self-defined and/or categorized by someone else. She ultimately asks, are personal identity and communal identity fluid? “ (McLeod, 2004, p. 23)

Moreover McLeod discusses the correspondence to Cindy Sherman.

“Lee’s Project series are also reminiscent of Cindy Sherman’s meticulously constructed Untitled Film Stills series created between 1977 and 1980. Unlike Sherman, who exploited the visual language of cinema by using single-frame film scenes to re-present and re-contextualize the female subject by fastidiously staging stereotypes of women in film, Lee is not concerned with “woman” or “female”

specifically, nor is she particularly focused on deconstructing the place of “other” within her Projects; she is refocusing truth by performing within the truths she creates. When seen together, Lee’s Project series act as parallel universes that expose the complex and constructed nature of identity” (McLeod, 2004, p. 23)

Lee and Sherman contributed as an inspiration for my master project. I like how Sherman played with the narrative language of the film stills and re-contextualised them. Like Sherman I am challenging the perception of stereotypes and identities. I wanted to explore the convention in the blog photographs, but unlike Sherman I did not desire to re-contextualize them. The conventions exemplify how all the girls use the same narratives in order to fulfill the same goal – which is to be considered attractive. Accordingly I wanted the conventions to be my guideline rules in order to get immersed into the identities represented in the blog images.

Nikki Lee’s approach of melding into the sub cultures is interesting from a perspective of understanding their world. It was essential for me in my interpretation and knowledge of the pink bloggers to get access to them. For me was the only way I could do them justice as well as justify my perspective.

The styles

From the research of online self-portraits and blogs beyond different style identities I had collected style examples that I based my self-portraits on. I narrowed it down to 15 styles that were frequently represented in the research.

Hipster

“Hipster refers to a subculture of young, recently settled urban middle class adults and older teenagers that appeared in the 1990s. The subculture is associated with independent music, a varied non-mainstream fashion sensibility, liberal ... or independent political views, alternative spirituality or atheism/agnosticism, and alternative lifestyles.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Fashionista

*“1. A person who creates or promotes high fashion, i.e. a fashion designer or fashion editor
2. A person who dresses according to the trends of fashion, or one who closely follows those trends.”* (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Redneck

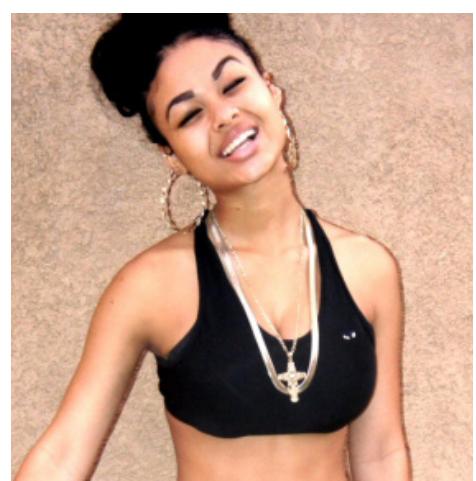
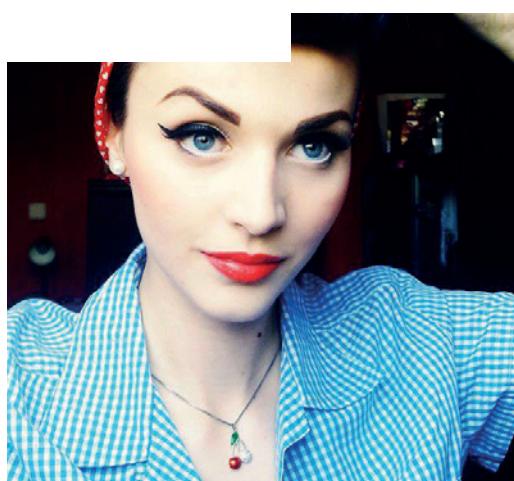
“Redneck is a derogatory slang term used in reference to poor, uneducated white farmers, especially from the southern United States.[1][2] It is similar in meaning to cracker (especially regarding Georgia and Florida), hillbilly (especially regarding Appalachia and the Ozarks),[3] and white trash (but without the last term’s suggestions of immorality).” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Punk

“The punk subculture includes a diverse array of ideologies, and forms of expression, including fashion, visual art, dance, literature, and film, which grew out of punk rock. Punk is largely characterized by a concern for individual freedom and anti-establishment views.

Punk fashion varies widely, ranging from Vivienne Westwood designs to styles modeled on bands like The Exploited. The distinct social dress of other subcultures and art movements, including glam rock, skinheads, rude boys, greasers, and mods have influenced punk fashion. Punk fashion has likewise influenced the styles of these groups, as well as those of popular culture. Many punks use clothing as a way of making a statement.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

- 1. HIPPIE
- 2. HIPSTER
- 3. HARAJUKI
- 4. ROCKABILLY
- 5. HIP HOP



Goth

“The Goth subculture is a contemporary subculture found in many countries. It began in England during the early 1980s in the Gothic rock scene, an offshoot of the post-punk genre. The Goth subculture has survived much longer than others of the same era, and has continued to diversify. Its imagery and cultural proclivities indicate influences from the 19th century Gothic literature along with horror films and to a lesser extent the BDSM culture.[1][2][3]

The Goth subculture has associated tastes in music, aesthetics, and fashion. The music of the Goth subculture encompasses a number of different styles, including Gothic rock, deathrock, post-punk, darkwave, ethereal, industrial music, and neoclassical. Styles of dress within the subculture range from deathrock, punk, and Victorian styles, or combinations of the above, most often with dark attire, makeup, and hair.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Hip hop

“Hip Hop is a broad conglomerate of artistic forms that originated as a specific street subculture within African American communities during the 1970s in New York City, specifically in Morris Heights, The Bronx, then later spread its influence to Latin American communities.

Hip hop fashion, also known as urban fashion is a distinctive style of dress originating with African American youth on the scene of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay Area, Detroit, Memphis, Virginia, Atlanta, and St. Louis among others. Each city contributed various elements to its overall style seen worldwide today. Hip hop fashion complements the expressions and attitudes of hip hop culture in general. Hip hop fashion has changed significantly during its history, and today, it is a prominent part of popular fashion as a whole across the world and for all ethnicities.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Preppy

“Preppy, preppie, or prep (all abbreviations of the word preparatory) refers to a modern, widespread subculture in the United States. [...]

Some typical preppy styles also reflect traditional upper class New England leisure activities, such as equestrianism, sailing or yachting, hunting, rowing, tennis and rugby. Longtime New England outdoor outfitters, such as L.L. Bean[7] and the recently-revived brand Madewell, became part of conventional preppy style. This can be seen in sport stripes and colours, equestrian clothing, plaid shirts, field jackets and nautical-themed accessories. Vacationing in Palm Springs, Florida, long popular with the East Coast upper class, led to the emergence of bright colour combinations in leisure wear seen in some brands such as Lilly Pulitzer.[8] By the 1980s, other brands such as Lacoste, Izod[9] and Dooney & Bourke became associated with preppy style.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Emo (Lolita)

“Emo is a style of rock music characterized by melodic musicianship and expressive, often confessional lyrics.[...] In addition to music, “emo” is often used more generally to signify a particular relationship between fans and artists, and to describe related aspects of fashion, culture, and behavior.

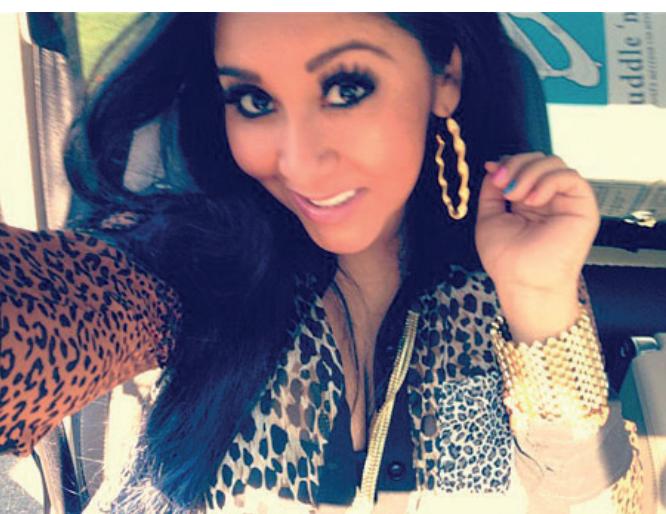
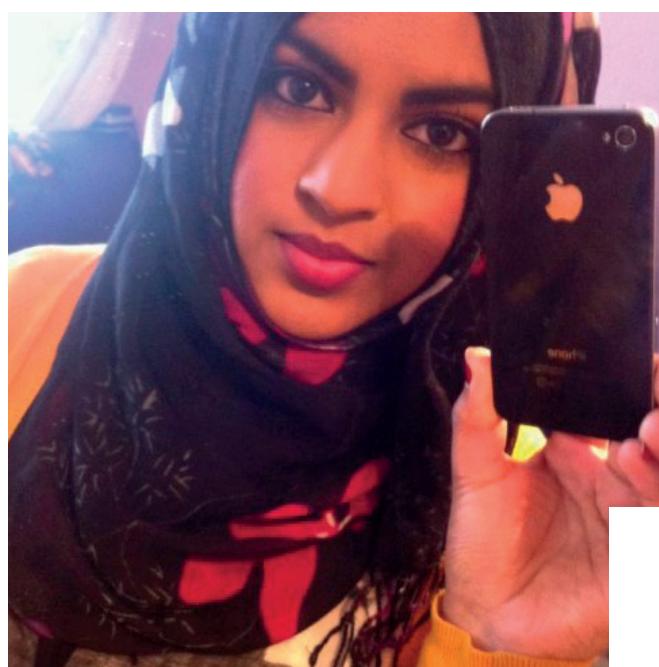
Usually among teens, the term ‘emo’ is stereotyped with wearing jeans, sometimes in bright colors and may often be close-fitting, and T-shirts (usually short-sleeved) which often bear the names of emo bands. Studded belts and black wristbands can be associated in emo fashion.

The emo fashion is also recognized for its hairstyles. Popular looks include thin, flat and smooth hair with lots of hair on the sides and back of the head with long side-swept bangs, sometimes covering one or both eyes. Also popular is hair that is straightened or dyed black. Bright colors, such as blue, pink, red, or bleached blond, are also typical as highlights in emo hairstyles.”

(English Wikipedia, 2013)



1. PUNK
2. GOTH
3. HIJAB
4. JERSEY GIRL
5. REDNECK



Rockabilly

“Rockabilly is one of the earliest styles of rock and roll music, dating to the early 1950s. It is a ‘blend of country & western and rhythm & blues’ that ... pointed the way to classic rock ‘n’ roll.[1] It has also been defined as ‘popular music combining features of rock ‘n’ roll and bluegrass.’ [2]

The term ‘rockabilly’ is a portmanteau of ‘rock’ (from ‘rock ‘n’ roll’) and ‘hillbilly’, the latter a reference to the country music (often called ‘hillbilly music’ in the 1940s and 1950s) that contributed strongly to the style’s development. Other important influences on rockabilly include western swing, boogie woogie, and rhythm and blues.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Harajuki

“Harajuku is the common name for the area around Harajuku Station on the Yamanote Line in the Shibuya ward of Tokyo, Japan. Every Sunday, young people dressed in a variety of styles including gothic lolita, visual kei, and decora, as well as cosplayers spend the day in Harajuku socializing. The fashion styles of these youths rarely conform to one particular style and are usually a mesh of many. [...]”

“Harajuku is also a fashion capital of the world, renowned for its unique street fashion.[2] Harajuku street style is promoted in Japanese and international publications such as Kera, Tune, Gothic & Lolita Bible and Fruits. Many prominent designers and fashion ideas have sprung from Harajuku and incorporated themselves into other fashions throughout the world.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

Indie

“Indie is a shortform of ‘independence’ or ‘independent’. [...]”

“Indie style is a mixture of other styles, layered to create something somewhat original with each person. By this definition, indie is any business or designer that is not associated with a large company.” (Urban Dictionary, 2013)

Hijab

“Hijab’ is a veil which covers the head which is particularly worn by Muslim women beyond the age of puberty in the presence of non-related adult males.” (English Wikipedia, 2013)

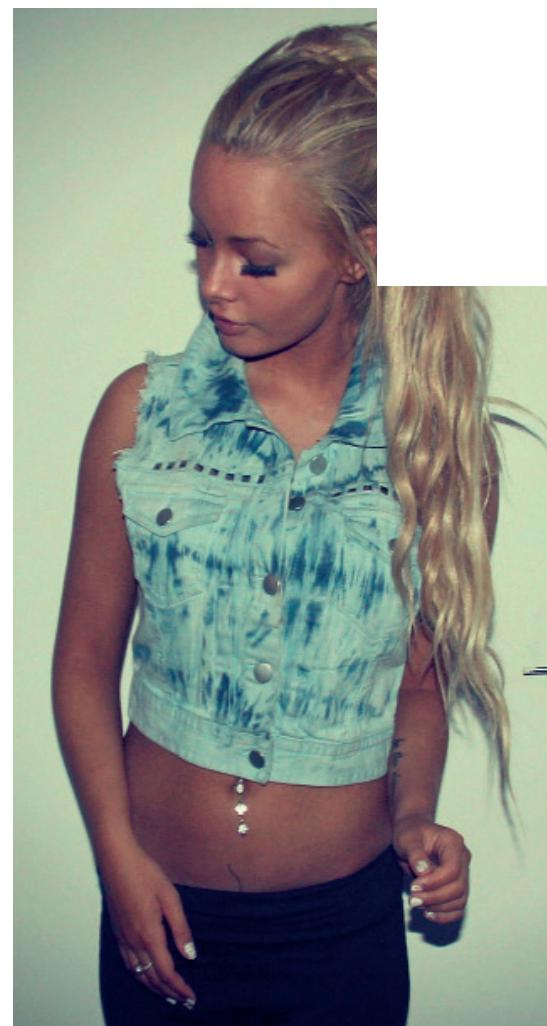
Bimbo

“Bimbo is a derogatory slang term that typically describes an attractive but observably behaviourally unintelligent female.”

“Use of this term began in the United States as early as 1919, where it was used as a slang term for an unintelligent or brutish male.[1] and as an extension to the ‘dumb blonde’ stereotype.[2] Style is fake tan, big boobs and sexy clothing.” (Urban Dictionary, 2013)

Jersey girl

“A girl that hails from or dresses like they are from New Jersey. These girls usually have very orange ‘tans’, long greasy and teased hair, long and pointy nails, very bronzed faces, overly arched eyebrows, dark, sparkly, or neon makeup, very skimpy and tight dresses, high boots or heels, lots of bling-y or flashy accessories, very large and jeweled purses, super low and tight shirts, thongs sticking out of their pants, fake boobs, and tons of glitter. These girls are usually very thin or very fat, never in-between. They are usually Italian or have a very large family and enjoy being very close to their families.” (Urban Dictionary, 2013)



- 1. FASHIONISTA**
- 2. EMO LOLITA**
- 3. INDIE**
- 4. BIMBO**
- 5. PREPPY**

Hippie

"An actual hippie can be recognized by their long hair, brightly colored clothing in unusual styles, such as bell-bottoms, tie-dye t-shirts, and dashikis. (Many Hippies made their own clothes.) They tend to wear long beaded necklaces, head bands and scarves, and sandals. The most recognizable symbol of the hippie is the Peace Sign which is usually on their clothes, jewelry or painted on automobiles.

They tend to promote, believe in or have a fondness of free love, communal living, recreational drug use, nudity, incense, music (particularly psychedelic rock, blues, and folk music), vegetarianism, holistic and natural foods, protecting the environment, and New Age type spirituality. Most of all hippies promote the ideals of Love and Peace. They do not like to conform to society."

(Urban Dictionary, 2013)

In all sub cultural and stereotypical styles there are variations within the styles. I chose the most popular and stereotypical ones in order to portray the styles in the best recognizable way.

Taking the self-portraits

Since a lot of the online self-portraits are taken in the bathroom, I also chose the bathroom as my location for the portraits, creating an atmosphere of authenticity. I kept the bathroom lighting and used no artificial lights to resemble the amateur style of these online self-portraits. In spite of the amateur style, a lot of these images are taken with a DSLR, which also became my camera of choice, enhancing and maintaining quality.

For each style I assigned the rules of the Posing Dogme by choosing one of the four poses. The pose I determined was random. I didn't want to encourage presumptions that certain poses belonged to certain styles. However, it was hard to not have the stereotypical images in mind when posing because we are so exposed to these stereotypes and what it implies to carry a certain style. It felt somehow not believable posing unexaggerated when portraying the bimbo, for instance. I evaluated that in order to portray these girls and styles realistically, I had to embrace also the stereotypes.

I experienced that striking a good pose that worked for the camera demanded a lot of takes. At most I took up to 400 shots to get that one image that worked. This was also the impression I got from my observations of Sophie Elise. I believe that this is also due to the fact that with digital cameras you have instant results and furthermore the images are disposable.

The online self-portraits varies in how much they are getting retouched. It's all from low-fi cell phone images to almost professional retouching. I decided to do something in between and adjusted the light as well as a few touch ups on the skin. After all that is how the pink bloggers do it and that was my main source of information and inspiration.



Labels

We all judge people and we all use labels to describe people. All the way from kindergarten we start giving each other names. This doesn't change much as we grow up. Only the names change. The social media has allowed us to basically comment on and rate everything. In todays popular cultural web sites and magazines, you can rate people if they are hot or not, skanky versus sexy, who wore it better and so forth. In American women's magazines you find a particular genre of labeling women that seems to have spread all over the world into our languages and publications. Some examples of these labels are "hawt", "vavavoom", "washed out", "hot mess" – list continues. In the image analysis workshop the girls were quick to give Sophie Elise names as bitch and whore. Hence I found it interesting to use labels as a part of my concept and especially these existing popular culture labels as a part of the narrative concept.

hello YouTube's most
stylish channel

STYLE

Sexy vs. Skanky

Fashion and beauty with a dose of comedy



BRAIN-CELL HOMICIDE
DOLL
SMOKING HOT
PROPER
SHAMELESS (STUNNER)
SIZZLING
HAWT
FLASHY
PRINCESS-WORTHY
DYNAMITE
GIRL NEXT DOOR
VA-VA-VOOM
JAW-DROPPING
TACKY
STATUESQUE
SEE-THROUGH MESS
DEVILISH
NO-BRAINER
FLAWLESS
DULL
CLEAN
SOPHISTICATED
OWNS IT
ILL-FITTING MONSTROSITY
SEXY LITTLE NUMBER
TOTAL KNOCKOUT
SLAMMIN'
OVERPOWERING
FLAWLESS
WASHED OUT
CHILDISH
HOT STUFF
VAMPY
SHINING STAR
KINDA BLAND
KILLER CURVES
A CLASS ACT
SAVVY
SLOPPY
ORDINARY
FUSS FREE
OVERDONE
PICTURE PERFECT
BOMBSHELL
FEMME FATALE
WACKY
REFINED SEXUALITY
BAMBI
BOOTYLICIOUS
QUIRKY
AGE-APPROPRIATE
TRAMP IN DISGUISE
HOT MESS
A+
SMART

Interaction concept

From developing the conceptional parts for my installation I landed on a final idea of how they could play together. I wanted to allow the audience to interpret the images by choosing the labels and placing them onto the images in a public setting. Placing the installation in public was important in order to get the audience out of the comfort zone and anonymity in front of their computers. I considered that the public setting would possibly affect how they labelled, which I found to be an interesting aspect. The installation would collect the data of the audience's choices and display the results live in a statistical manner. The idea was to have three screens:

1. Images of the girls and labels where you can drag a label to a fitting girl.
2. A "just labelled" screen where you see the labelled girl.
3. Overview "statistics" of the top labelled girls.

EXPERIMENT 1

Workshop: Interaction concept test

In this workshop I wanted to test the concept of the installation in a low-fi prototype. I used images of the different girls I collected in the online research. They represented the styles I planned for my self-portraits, since they were still in the making.

My goal was to get feedback on:

How would the participants understand and choose the labels and the images?

How would the interpretation and judgement play out in a single, secret session versus an open group session?

The workshop was divided into 3 sessions:

1. Secret set up
2. Open set up
3. Evaluation/ discussion
 - general thoughts / lasting impression
 - how was the experience
 - good versus bad
 - open versus secret judgement
 - ideas

The instructions were to pick labels from the list, write it on a post-it-note and place it onto an image of choice. They had to label at least five images. The images presented were based on the research on posing girls beyond style identities.

The session was filmed and the choices of labels on images photographed.

Participants:

Interaction students from the bachelor at ZHDK.

Lisa (24), Rafi (26), Fabian (28), Thomas (30) and Nina (22).

General feedback

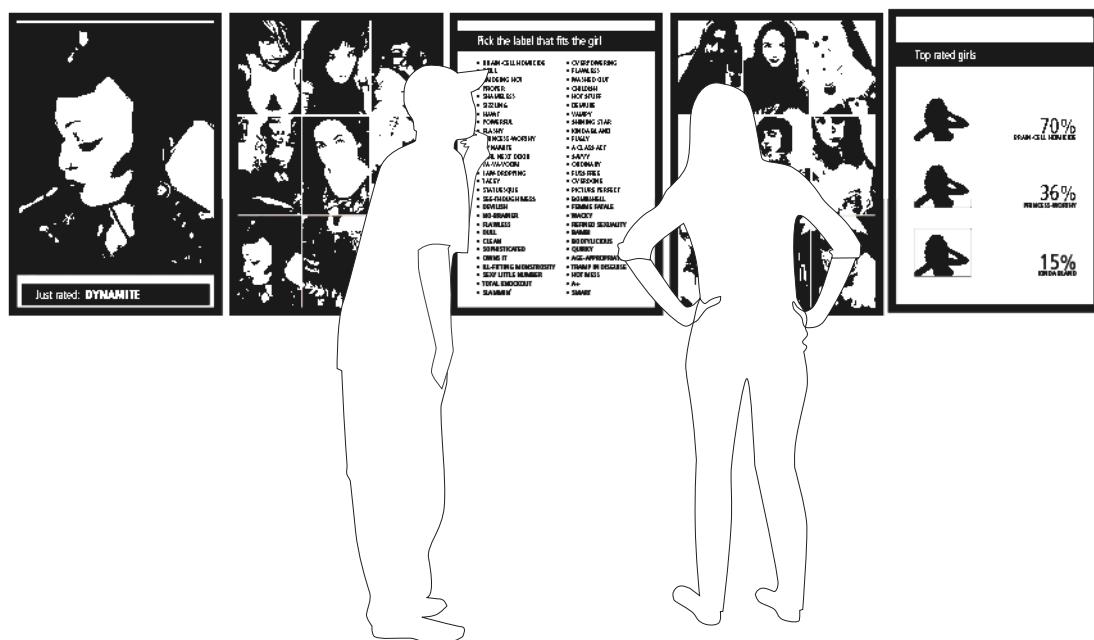
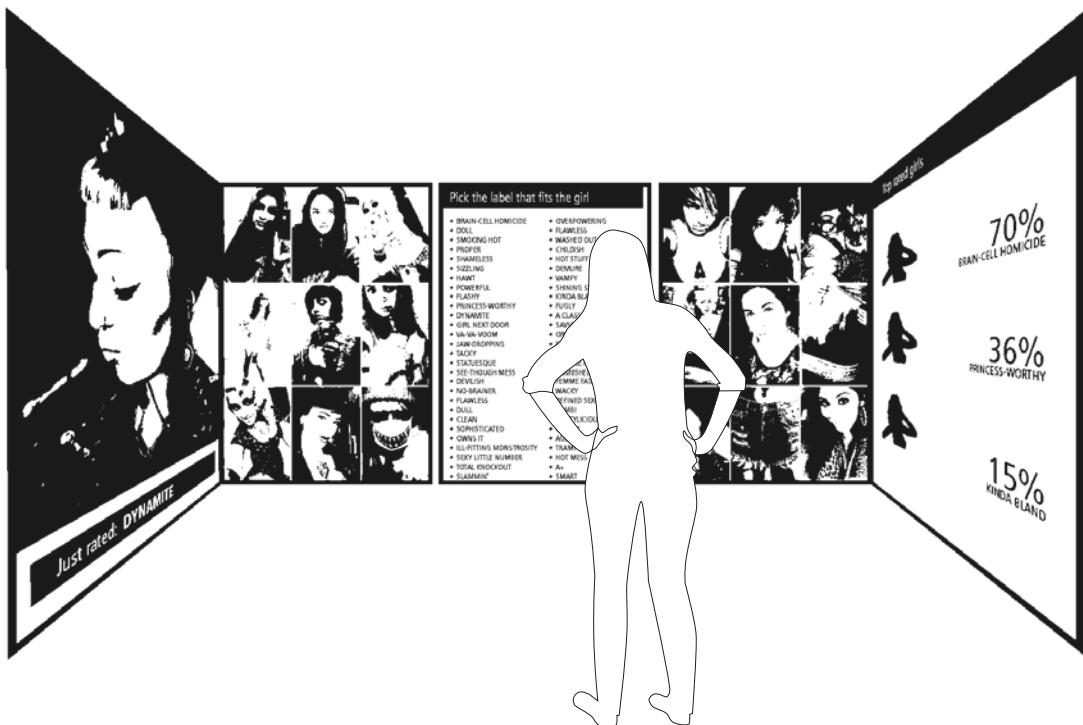
All participants thought it was fun and interesting. They got engaged in the images and the labels and discussed each other's choices and images during the session.

Both the girls and boys agreed that the girls are putting themselves on display so they are asking for it. They didn't feel any sympathy for the girls when labeling and judging them.

Labels and images

The group was familiar with the labels. They thought there were too many labels to choose from. More pictures and less labels was a unison feedback. The images should also be more extreme because it would be easier to label them.

The girls were mostly into the persons and styles of the subjects. The boys thought there was just a lot of images of "girls looking like clones with attributes".



Most popular labels:

- Childish
- Doll
- Devilish
- Vampy
- Bambi
- Bootylicious
- Overdone
- Sexy little number
- Femme fatale
- Clean
- No brainer
- Tramp in disguise
- Wacky

The boys chose more the simple labels while the girls picked more the hot labels like sexy little number.

Secret versus open set up

It was split 50/50 whether they preferred the open to the secret setting. However they all acknowledged the fact that they knew each other, so it would probably feel different if it were in an open setting with strangers. I also observed that even though they knew each other, they were a bit more hesitant to get started in the open set up. One of the boys said that it would bother him if people would actively watch him when he was labeling the images.

Interpretation

The workshop provided valuable information that I processed further for the installation in progress. Above all this was a test on whether the interaction concept would engage the audience. I felt I got confirmation that this was the right direction to go with my project. I also got valuable input for the labels, images and that a secret setting probably works best.



CONCEPT

Progress and developments

The booth

After the experiment I decided to go with the secret set up. This was based on the feedback from the workshop which implied that a secret setting would encourage more honest labeling. To create a secret setting I decided to build a booth that would provide the atmosphere of a private room. The booth would have the option of closing a curtain when entering, so you could have full privacy and secrecy while labeling. Strategically this would give associations with a voting booth or a photo booth, which would provide a familiar setting.

Facing own judgement

I also evaluated how I could address challenging the participants judgement. How would people feel if they were the ones to be labelled? What happened if they had to face their own labeling?

With this in mind I wanted to somehow provoke a reaction, that hopefully would lead to some reflection on peoples own judgement whilst labeling. However, I wondered if this was enough. As long as people were labeling and confronted in the booth, they would still keep their anonymity the same way they would in front of their computer. One of the reasons I wanted to make an installation in public was that I wanted to create another setting for the posing online girls. I wanted to let the audience take part in a public experience, away from the comfort zone and anonymity of their computer. The goal was to see how this would affect their labeling. Hence I needed to also expose the person judging.

To get people to face their own judgement I literally wanted people to see themselves in the mirror. I came up with the idea to turn the tables around visually by using a webcam as a mirror. This would function as a live mirror abruption in the labeling that the audience didn't see coming. At the same time there would be a session of four images taken of the labelers. These images would be tagged with the label they just placed on a girl. In that way I could hopefully provoke reactions – probably in the wide range of love and hate. The concept of taking four images was with the intention to see what people would do in that stretch of time. Would they go away, would they pose or would they just not care? Moreover, after the instant reactions would people reflect on what just happened in terms of their labeling? The webcam/live mirror would appear randomly after labeling, girls so the participants could not calculate and be prepared when the webcam appeared in a potential new session of labeling. I wanted to expose the best possible honest instant reactions.

In order to expose the person labeling, I decided to show live what happened inside the secret set up also on the outside, without the knowledge of the person on the inside. The goal of this was to interfere with the comfort of anonymity. Furthermore I wanted to involve the people on the outside in what was going on the inside of the installation, this with the intention of evoking curiosity and discussion.

Overview screen top labels and girls

In the frame of evoking curiosity and discussion outside of the installation, I felt it was beneficial for the concept to place the screen of the “top labels and girls” on the outside of the booth. I was contemplating back and forth whether it should show statistics with percentages on the top three girls or give more an overall view of the voting. I landed on the more general view of the labeling, because conceptually this is true to the style of Internet commenting and labeling, with polls like hot or not. I ended up with three categories:

- The girl with the most labels
- The girl with least labels
- The girl who gets labelled first

Labels

With the feedback from the workshop I choose to include less labels, and based the elimination of the labels on which were most popular. I understood that some of the labels could be difficult to understand, especially for non English speakers. Some were also expressions inspired by slang and urban/oral language. Thus I decided to provide an option to have the labels explained by adding a voice-over info button to each label. The explanations of the labels were inspired by definitions from the Urban Dictionary, which is a Web-based dictionary of slang or cultural words and phrases not typically found in standard dictionaries. Since most of the labels fit in that category, I considered these definitions to be the best choice for the narrative of the installation. I chose two versions for each of the explanations, this way, if people pressed the info button twice they would get a broader definition of the labels. Before I recorded the explanations I wanted to test the labels again in a developed prototype to see furthermore which labels were appealing for the participants

I also felt that sound could be interesting as a means of getting feedback whilst labeling. The expressions would appear randomly after a person had placed a label. Here I used typical reactions and expression from conversation, also inspired by slang and urban language. My intention of featuring the expressions was to create a reaction to the labeling. Hopefully that would impose to some reflexion over the label the person placed.

Expressions:

- OMG!
- Hell yeah!
- Totally!
- ToatsMcgoats!
- WTF?
- For real?
- Really?
- Awesome!
- Oh My God!

Statistics and output

For the statistics of the installation I choose a backend solution that saves data to excel files. In these I can map what final labels the girls got, the different labels each girl got, and the total of how many participated. This, together with the overview from the outside screen categories, would be my results of the labeling. The images taken from the webcam session would also be saved as a part of the output material. The output together would be uploaded to a projectweb where you could have a look at the results in context and get access to the information and purpose behind the project. I considered this to be an important layer in the quest for self reflection on the judgement.

Design

The design was inspired by the style and language of all the personal blogs by girls beyond different style identites.

EXPERIMENT 2

Workshop: Prototype test

In this workshop I wanted to test the programmed prototype developed on the basis of the final concept. The test was set up with a provisional booth to create privacy and only with the one screen of labeling. Technically at this point I was not able to test with the other output screens, nor with the voice-over explanation of the labels – this was because of time issues not implemented in the prototype yet.

Location:

The test was set up in front of the Mensa cafeteria attached to the ZHDK and Berufsschule. From 11 am to 13 pm there are usually many students and teachers coming here for lunch so I considered this to be a good place to get a diverse crowd. My hypothesis is that age and background plays a role in the interpretation and labeling of the images, therefore a diversity of people was important to get the broader perspective.

My goal was to get feedback on and test:

- The final self-portraits
- The labels
- The webcam/mirror function
- General Reactions
- Back end statistics and result of labeling

Participants:

In total there were 13 people participating from the age of 19-35 years old. They were asked to join while passing by and afterwards I asked them about the how the experience was.

Reactions

- 1/13 saw that all the girls were the same person
- 1/13 thought it was irritating
- 1/13 didn't have any reaction
- 2/13 thought it was something wrong with the set up when the webcam appeared
- 11/13 was curious and had a fun experience (camera)

Instant reactions of the webcam function:

- WHAT IS THIS?
- I feel awkward
- Whoops, I am overdone
- Hahahahahaha
- Stop the photos!

During the experiment some got a bit impatient about the camera because it was a bit slow between the takes, so we speeded it up, which also enhanced conceptually the element of surprise and abruptness.



sexy little number



sexy little number



sexy little number



sexy little number



Results labels

All girls were labelled. Some got up to four labels because there was a tie. There were three labels that weren't used ; "vavavoom", "hawt" and "owns it". Maybe they were a bit difficult to understand so this stressed the importance of explaining the labels. The understanding of the labels will also vary with different locations and backgrounds, so I still wanted to keep them, because I find it interesting to compare later the understanding and use of the labels across contexts. Some of the labels were popular, like "bambi". This label is probably familiar to most people and easy to understand. After the workshop I chose to change some labels by removing some that had similar meanings, and added new ones to create more diversity. I chose 18 labels so there would be several options for each of my 15 portraits. I did not want to make it seem like there was one label for each girl.

Final labels and explanations:

Bambi

1. A male deer in a Disney cartoon who's name somehow became associated with blond bimbos.
2. A soft sweet girl who appears shy but is really a wild forest creature on the inside.

Slutty

1. A nasty term usually given by jealous men to women who are highly sexed and not satisfied by one man.
2. How an ugly girl describes a pretty girl.

Doll

1. A child's plaything usually made of plastic, polyurethane, cotton, or synthetic fibers, that resembles or represents a human. Dolls can also be considered collectibles by adults.
2. A term of endearment used for a nice or attractive person.

Vampy

1. Sexy or highly appealing, usually referring to the darker, edgier fashion.
2. A woman who uses her sex appeal to entrap and exploit men.

Overdone

1. Description of a situation that has been thought too much about.
2. An exaggerated opinion of oneself.

Smart

1. Being the type of person who can walk into a room, say a couple of words, and have other people bowing at their feet and calling them a genius.
2. The opposite of George Bush.

Femme Fatale

1. A woman with both intelligence and sex appeal that uses these skills to manipulate poor helpless men into doing what she wants. May cause death.
2. A woman who manipulates men to do her dirty work.

Clean

1. Dressed up nice.
2. Someone that has no STD's or STI's.



SLUTTY



NO BRAINER



SEXY LITTLE NUMBER



VAMPY



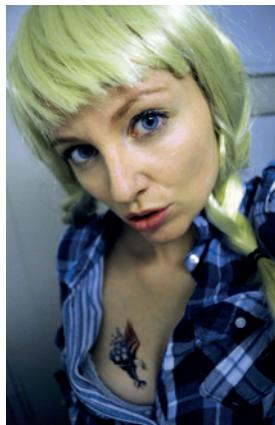
BAMBI



DEVILISH



ORDINARY



BAMBI



DOLL



VAMPY



CLEAN
VAMPY



CLEAN



CHILDISH
OVERDONE
TRAMP IN DISGUISE
BAMBI



OVERDONE



ORDINARY
NO BRAINER
GIRL NEXT DOOR

Brittany Spears

1. A skanky poser bitch who acts innocent and tells little girls to screw and dress like whores.
2. A walking Barbie doll, all made of plastic and head just as hollow.

Tramp in disguise

1. A promiscuous wolf in sheep's clothing.
2. A slut in a princess camouflage.

Wacky

1. A word that means 'crazy', as in weird, different from others, silly or funny. A word that means 'crazy', as in weird, different from others, silly or funny.
2. Courtney Love.

Owns it

1. When someone or something is "the bomb", "the shit", "sweet", ... said in a positive way for something you like or think is the best.
2. To be excellent or superior.

Washed out

1. Someone that is not in style. A loser.
2. It signifies that something is less vibrant or lively than it once was.

Ordinary

1. Normal.
2. Boring.

VaVaVoom

1. To be interesting, exciting, or sexually appealing.
2. The feeling you get when you're filled with inspiration or full of excitement and energy.

Evaluation

The overall impression was that the participants had a fun experience and were curious to know more about the project. It was an encouraging feedback for the developed concept. I experienced that the concept was a fun entrance to a more serious topic. At the same time I evaluated the importance of including the output images to a project web, where they could be seen in context with the visions of the project. Otherwise I feared that the labeling was just perceived as a fun entertaining experience. As for the results of the labels the girls got, and who were most or least popular, I can simply not make a conclusion. My intention has always been that I want to find out what the general view and perception of these girls are, so the output is the open result generated by the participants.

EVALUATION

Case study

Meeting the Pink bloggers was crucial in the process of developing the topic for my master project. The stereotypical presumptions I had from the background research of the Pink bloggers were challenged and my perspective was completely turned around. I realised that being a young girl today is a complex matter and that (old) stereotypes don't necessarily apply. You can be blond, have big boobs and dress sexy at the same time as you are a straight-A-student, vegetarian, politically active and sexually not promiscuous. I found this an intriguing and relevant topic also considering my motivational background. Thus I wanted to share my journey, addressing those issues in the master project. From the high tempered reactions I got in the image analysis workshop later I was convinced that this was a matter of interest and discussion.

Self-portraits

As a part of the narrative research approach, I chose to use myself in the portraits to be a part of the online posing girls world and moreover as a means to put myself into their position and be judged. By employing myself as a model in all the images I felt like I became the character. Being in character gave me a sort of distance that I could feel psychologically comfortable with. I was not the one being judged, but the character. I contemplated taking an image of me looking like "ordinary me", but I felt that it was simply too scary. I would never put myself on the spot to be judged like the online posing girls. However, I knew that the comfortable distance in my head was not necessarily the same as what people perceive. Thus, I was very surprised by the fact that people didn't even see that it was the same person in the images. Some of my fellow students didn't even recognise me and asked who these girls were. It even took my mom a few seconds to see that they were all me. This tells me that when people get into the mode of observing looks and labeling they don't actually *see* the person. It's all about judging the book by its cover. I truly felt how it is to be judged and to be reduced to my looks.

Installation output

At this point of finishing my thesis to the scheduled deadline I have yet to exhibit the final installation in the graduation exhibition. Therefore my data collection of the labeling is limited and I cannot fully evaluate the output. Hopefully after the exhibition I will have a clearer image of the consensus on "what is tasteful and tacky" and if people agree these definitions. From the fact that I couldn't find any pink blogs in Switzerland I find it interesting to see if how the labeling turns out here and how it would be in comparison to another location such as Norway. Ideally I will exhibit the installation in different countries and put the output into a book addressing the different social perception and judgement of the general population. Maybe the narrative and concept of the installation is more for the younger generations in terms of understanding and interpretation, but still I believe the concept and feeling of being judged is universal.

My goal for the output was to let the participants in the installation draw the conclusions – not me. This is my journey interpreted and commented into an exploratory and experimental concept that will hopefully encourage discussion and reflection.

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IMAGE SOURCE

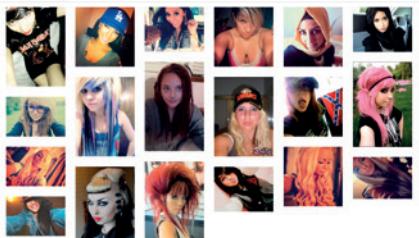
Images not listed in the source are © by Lene Beck.



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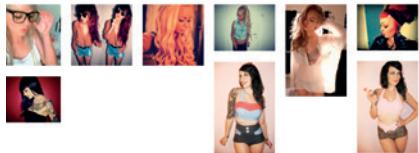
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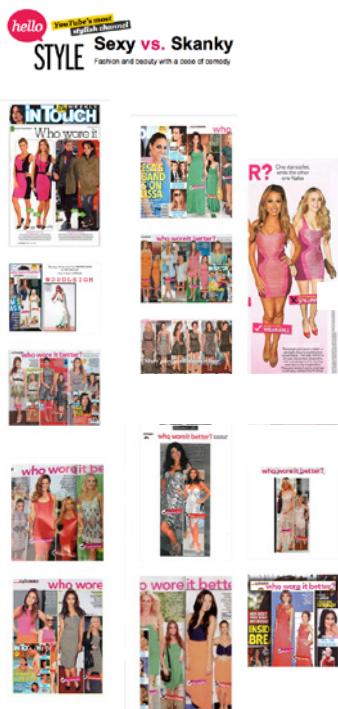
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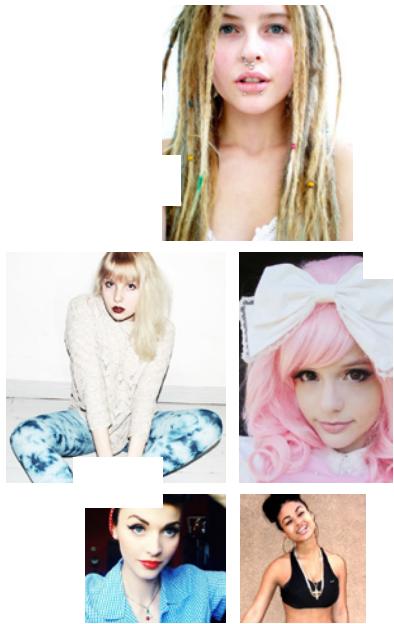
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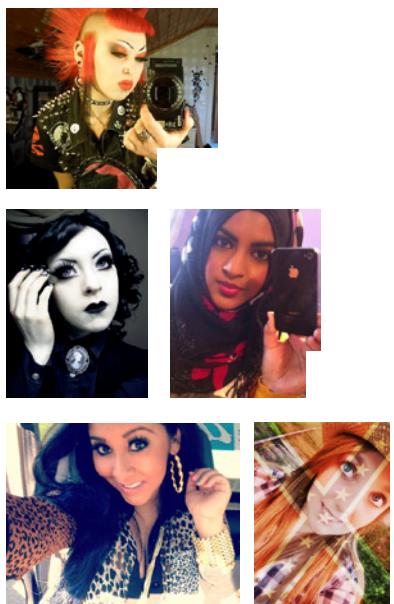
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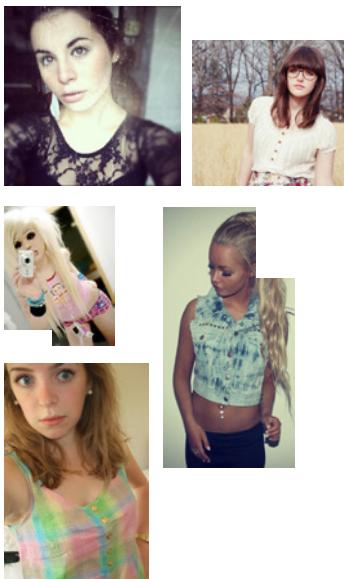
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