Gendered Conceptions in Processes of Software Development
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Our presentation aims at theoretically and practically linking deconstructivist feminist positions and applied informatics. Therefore, we pose the question of which gendered conceptions become operative during the software development process and of how thereby gender is inscribed in technological artefacts.

By presenting the results of two case studies researching concrete development processes - one in the field of game development and the second in the field of search engines based on semantic networks - we concentrate on aspects of software quality and stereotypical user representations as well as on heterogeneous viewpoints in modelling decisions.

Theoretically we proceed on the assumption that when developing computer systems, system designers permanently make unconscious presumptions which influence the process as well as the outcome significantly. These unconscious presumptions may refer to quality requirements of the software, representations of future users and their preferences, but also concern the way of organizing the software engineering process itself, including a certain self-understanding of the designers. Obviously part of these assumptions also relate to hidden social, and therefore also gender roles and expectations concerning the application field. We consider software development a social process, where software designers interpret social settings and codify these into software. Firstly, software designers as social beings have incorporated specific societal cultural norms and values. These invisible mental models which in a deconstructivist sense are understood as ever changing patterns of reality construction provide frames of reference for interpreting and sense-making. As a second important factor, being socialized as professionals by a certain education and training shapes the way of how to approach real world settings and of how to create a model of those.

In order to link the theoretical deconstructivist background with empirically analyzing software development processes, a new method we called “Mind Scripting” has been used to research the hidden social dimensions in the software development process. Mind Scripting is based on Frigga Haug’s well known Memory Work, a social sciences method which we have adjusted to the technological field.