Design Process

CS 347
Michael Bernstein

Last time

Cognitive accounts can explain many challenges we face in design:

- **Design fixation:** unnecessarily focusing on a subset of the design space
- **Analogical transfer:** what do we see as related inspiration?

They can also help us be precise about how to improve design:

- **Gulfs of execution & evaluation:** what needs to be reduced?

Today

Wicked problems

Strategies for managing wicked problems

- Participatory design
- Design patterns

Strategies for managing design fixation

Demand characteristics, and strategies for managing them

Design is not a static process.

It can be studied, supported, and improved.

Wicked problems

So if you care to find me / look to the western sky
As someone told me lately / everyone deserves a chance to fly

“Math is easy.
Design is hard.”

Jeffrey Veen, former VP of Product Design at Adobe

Why is design hard?

Design: "The transformation of existing conditions into preferred ones" [Simon 1969]

What is it that makes design so hard to do well? Why is it hard to find preferred solutions that are actually better and creative?

Wicked problems

[Rittel and Webber 1973]

Wicked problems are problems whose requirements are contradictory or unknown: no global optimum

Conflicting perspectives & goals mean there is no "correct" solution:

- Urban planning: I can widen the sidewalks, but this will create more traffic in the streets
- Pedagogy: In CS 147, students simultaneously want to learn more design, and more technical depth—but nobody wants more work

Design + wicked problems

[Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Evenson 2007]

Design is challenging because it must solve wicked problems.

> Example: Wikipedia reduced the amount of spam it got, at the cost of pushing away many newcomers. It could be more welcoming to newcomers, at the cost of quality and spam.

Due to the conflicting perspectives and goals, traditional waterfall and analytical engineering methodologies will often fail.

Design + wicked problems

[Zimmerman, Forlizzi, and Evenson 2007]

Argument: **design is better tuned for solving wicked problems** than traditional waterfall and analytical engineering approaches

> "Enlightened trial and error succeeds over the planning of the lone genius." – Tom Kelley, IDEO

> If these traditional approaches ask how we combine known facts and principles to solve a problem a priori, design praxis focuses on iteration as a means of exploring and learning

> Design argues that we best learn about wicked problems through iterative feedback processes

So now what?

What do we do when we're facing a wicked problem? Just knowing that it's wicked doesn't help me…

Step one: console yourself by telling your friends at parties that what you do is way harder than what they do, so they should think that you're cool. (This works for me 100% of the time.)

Step two: ensure that you've got the right perspectives represented either on your team or in the literature, and don't reinvent the wheel

Today: design patterns

Today: participatory design

Participatory design

What power should the designer have?

In the traditional design process, designers hold positions of power and status

> They decide which stakeholders to engage with, how to prioritize each stakeholder's needs, and which design concepts to move forward with.

This power is a source of tension: synthesis is the designer's role and expertise, but it also also **cuts out stakeholders from direct or indirect control**

Participatory design

[Schuler and Namioka 1993; Mueller and Kuhn 1993]

A design process that de-centers the designer's role

Involve stakeholders in all phases of the design process:

Needfinding ← Non-participatory design processes involve stakeholders most deeply here

Problem definition

Develop and focus ideas

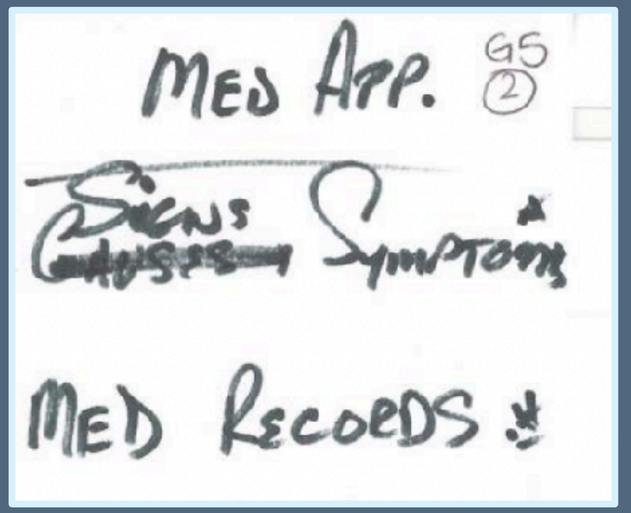
Evaluation ← Non-participatory design processes involve stakeholders most deeply here

Examples

Collaborating with gig workers to create a platform for online collective action [Salehi et al. 2015]

Working with patients and doctors to design translation systems for medical contexts [Deng et al. 2022]

Working with older adults to design health tracking applications [Davidson and Jensen 2013]



Elicitation studies

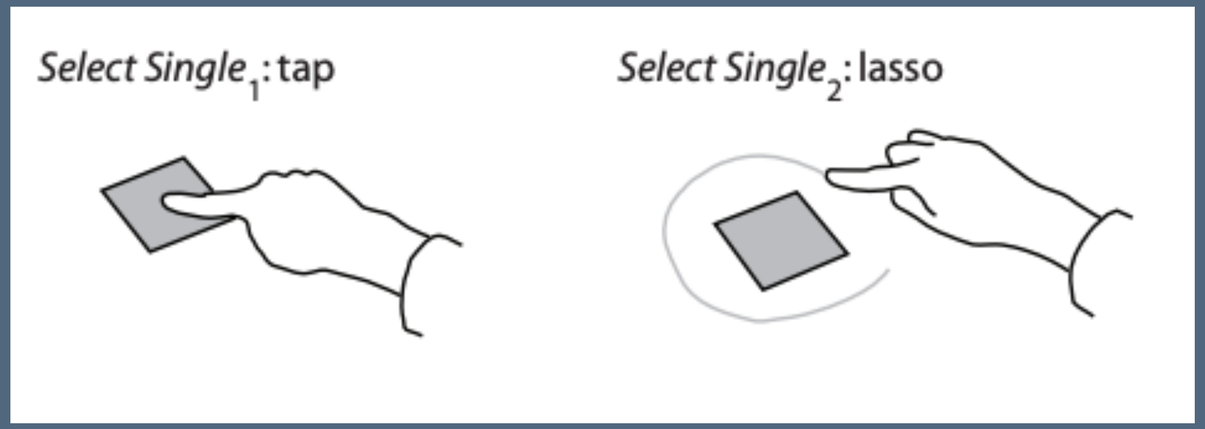
[Wobbrock and Morris 2009]

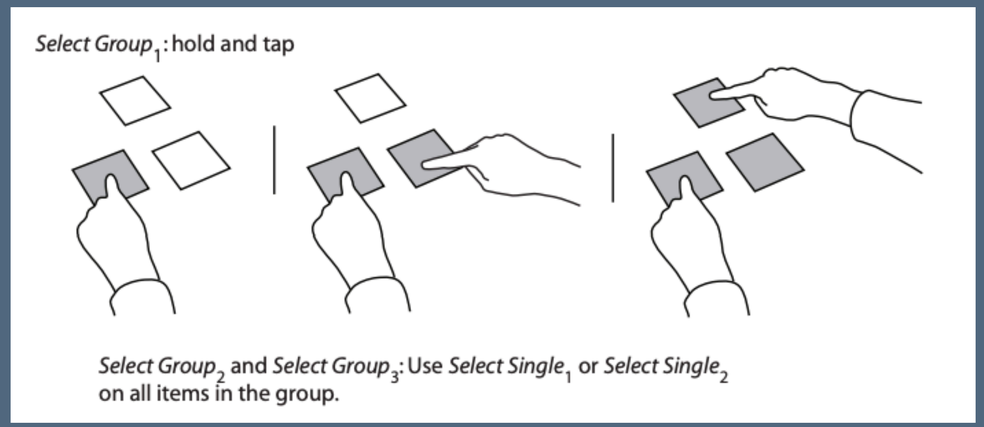
When entering a new design space (e.g., large multitouch tables, AR, mid-air interaction), **how do we know which gestures** would be the most effective for non-technical people?

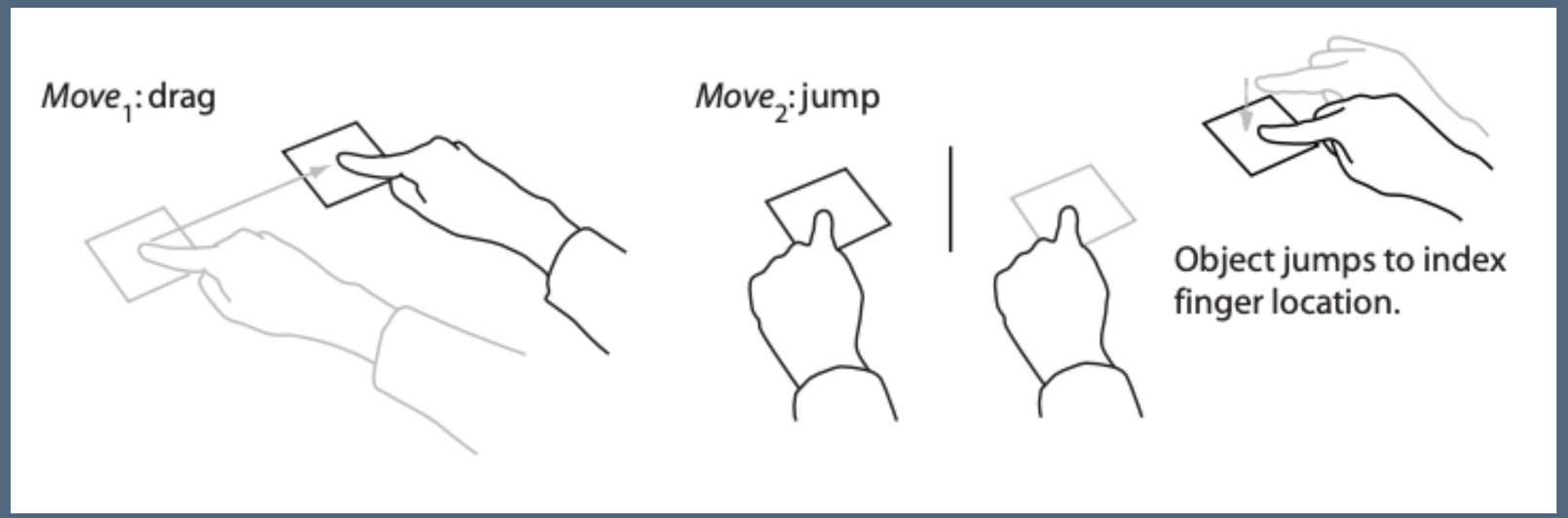
Concept: tell people the command, and **ask them to gesture in a way that they think should invoke that command**. Then, look for agreement amongst these spontaneous gestures.

Elicitation studies

[Wobbrock and Morris 2009]







PD is not a panacea

[Harrington, Erete, and Piper 2019]

The design workshop is **not a neutral ground**

Status hierarchies cannot be erased, nor can trust be established, just by inviting people into a room

Design valorizes d.school-style creativity—**not a skill taught or necessarily comfortable** for underserved communities. *"The crayons, markers and stuff… it's like an* ***elementary school*** *activity."*

Design foregrounds **blue-sky utopianism** when underserved communities may simply be looking for **pragmatic solutions**

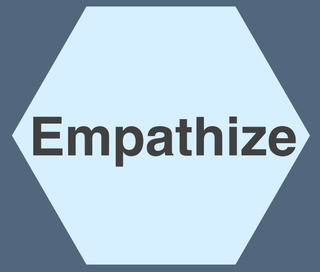
PD is not a panacea, part 2

When a design team misses the mark, an obvious critique is "**you should have included [stakeholder group X]**"

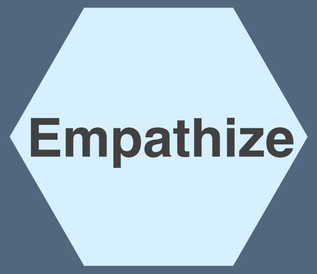
The challenge then becomes: **what's your stopping criteria** for adding stakeholder voices? Is there ever an ethical stopping point?

How do you balance between including more stakeholder groups and making sure you can still make effective decisions?

Needfinding doesn't solve this, either [Bennett and Rosner 2019]

We espouse 

as a designer's solution to knowing enough about a stakeholder group to design with or for them

However, typical design strategies for 

can lend **false confidence** and incorrect conclusions (e.g., blindfolds)

Stuck between a Scylla and Charybdis?

Scylla: Trying to build empathy on your own creates major issues — you should bring stakeholders onto your team [Bennett and Rosner 2019]

Charybdis: But bringing stakeholders onto your team creates issues that prevent it from working too [Harrington, Erete, and Piper 2019]

Struggles in the classroom

[Roldan et al. 2020]

HCI education says "go out there and work with people!", but we often rely on convenience samples [Hui et al. 2014]

And even when students try to engage in participatory design…

- The HCI students self-segregate and don't build relationships with other stakeholders
- Students feel uncomfortable guiding co-design sessions: who's in charge here? Am I supposed to listen to them, or are they supposed to listen to me?
- What ought we to do?

Well, that's still a downer…

"Geez, you haven't solved the deep structural and socio-technical issues with the human-centered design process as centered in Western educational systems and capitalist industrialized societies."

Sorry. We're all working on it.

But we can intervene in nearly any part of this process if we have ideas.

Design patterns

The trouble with design

Design is a praxis with many degrees of freedom, but also many ways to screw it up

Temptations to be different or creative can wind you up with terrible designs

How do we maintain breathing space for new ideas while not accidentally stepping off the ledge?

Design patterns

[Alexander 1977]

Originated in urban planning

"Each pattern describes **a problem which occurs over and over again** in our environment, and then describes the core of a solution to that problem, in such a way that **you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice**."

Design patterns

[Alexander 1977]

"Metropolitan regions will not come to balance until each one is small and autonomous enough to be an independent sphere of culture": patterns include…

- Community of 7000: not too many people, not too few people
- Subculture boundary: e.g., SF Chinatown is bounded by the banking area
- Identifiable neighborhood: < 500 people in local neighborhood units
- Neighborhood boundary: subcultures in neighborhoods need restricted physical access

Design patterns

[Alexander 1977]

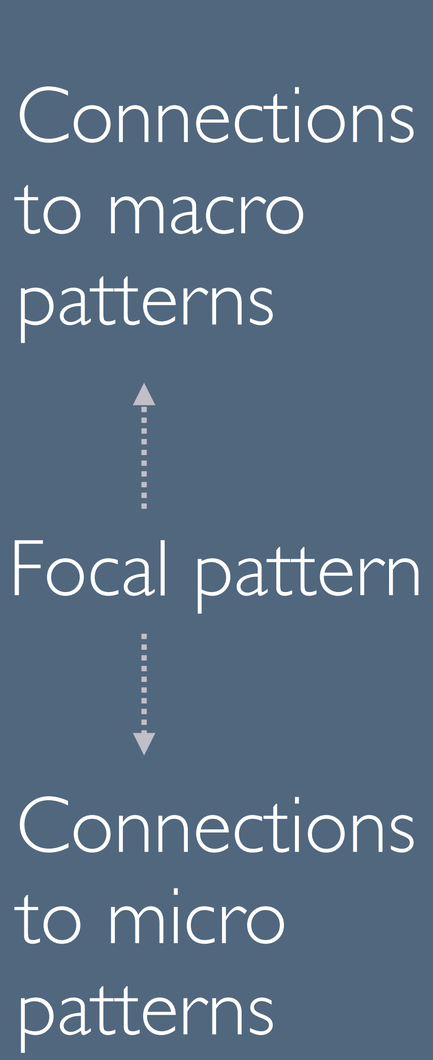
"Establish community and neighborhood policy to control the character of the local environment": patterns include…

- Four story limit: keep the majority of buildings <4 stories
- No more than 9% of land dedicated to parking
- Embellish sacred and meaningful sites in the neighborhood
- Ensure that the community include a balance of people at every stage of the life cycle

Design patterns

[Alexander 1977]

A **pattern language** is a set of design patterns, collected together, organized, and connected to each other.



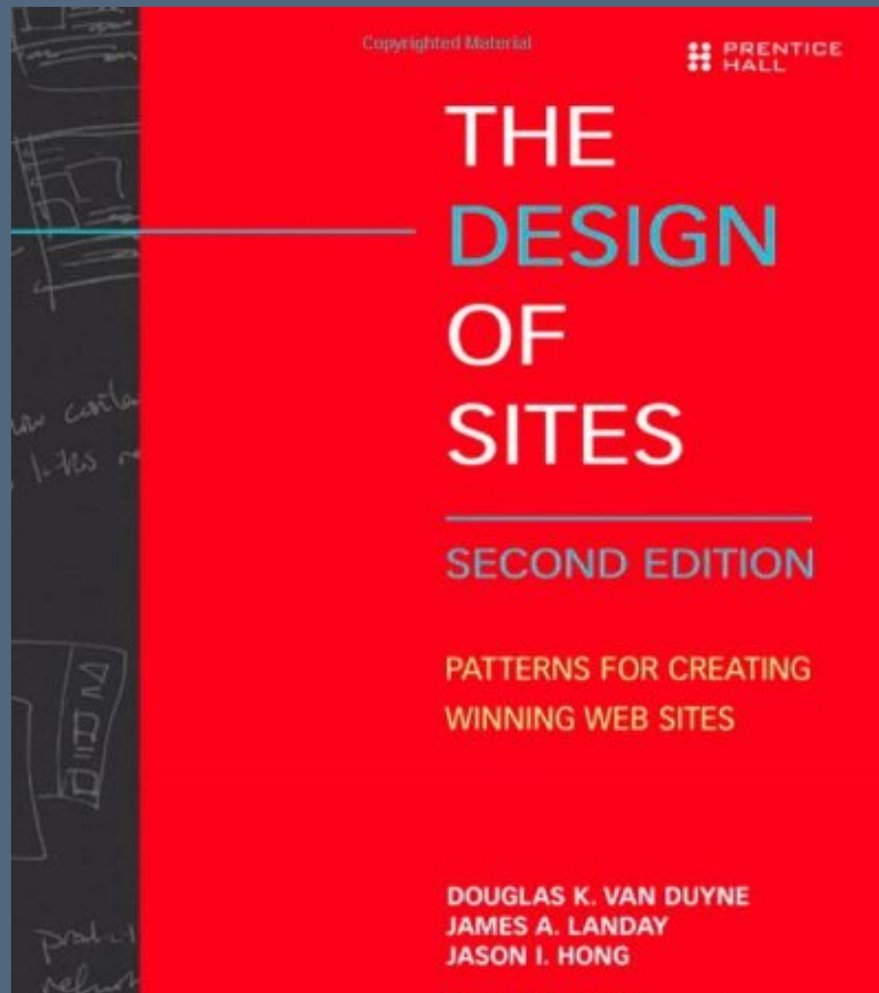
Interaction design patterns

[van Duyne, Landay and Hong 2006]

Web design, much like urban planning, can be characterized by design patterns

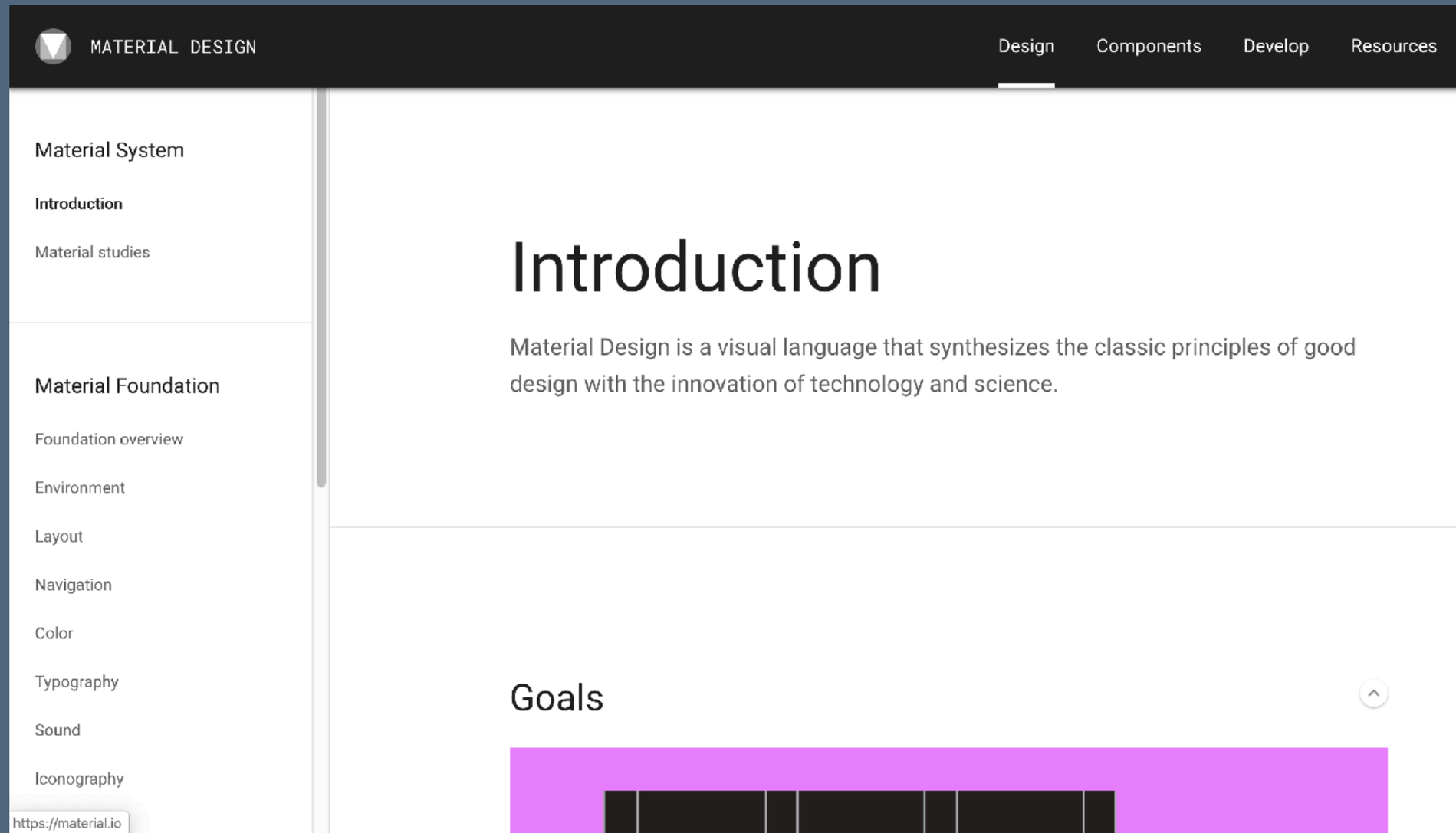
Examples...

- Distinctive HTML titles
- Quick-flow checkout
- Floating windows
- News mosaics



Interaction design patterns

Web design also features pattern languages: very similar to a "design system" except design systems are focused lower level



Web design patterns

[Kumar et al., CHI '13]

Crawl the web and index large-scale design elements

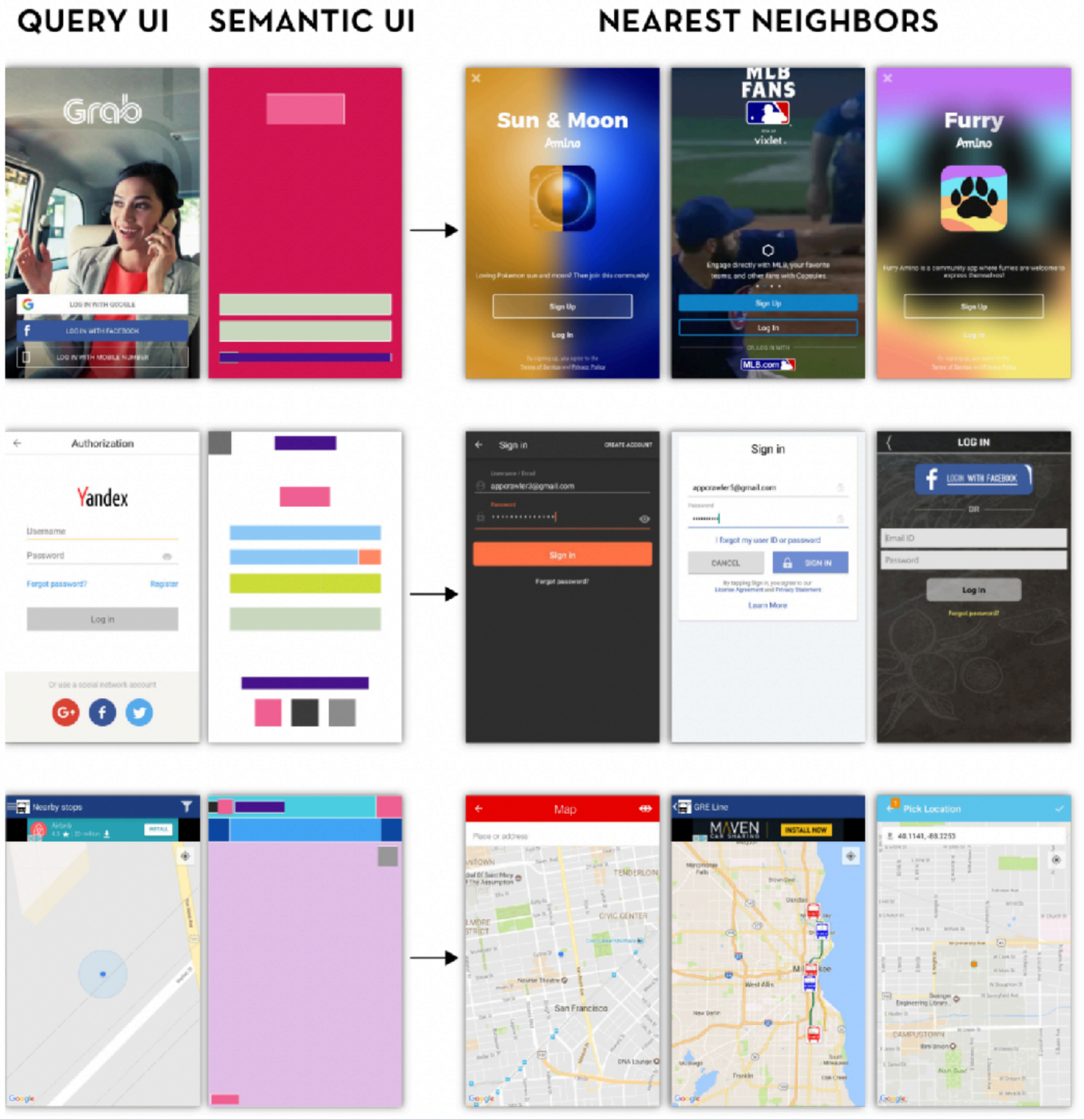
What happens to web design if we start data mining design patterns rather than user interaction data?

App design patterns

[Liu et al. 2018]

Collect a large dataset of Android app interaction traces

Query with a design, and find how others have developed similar designs

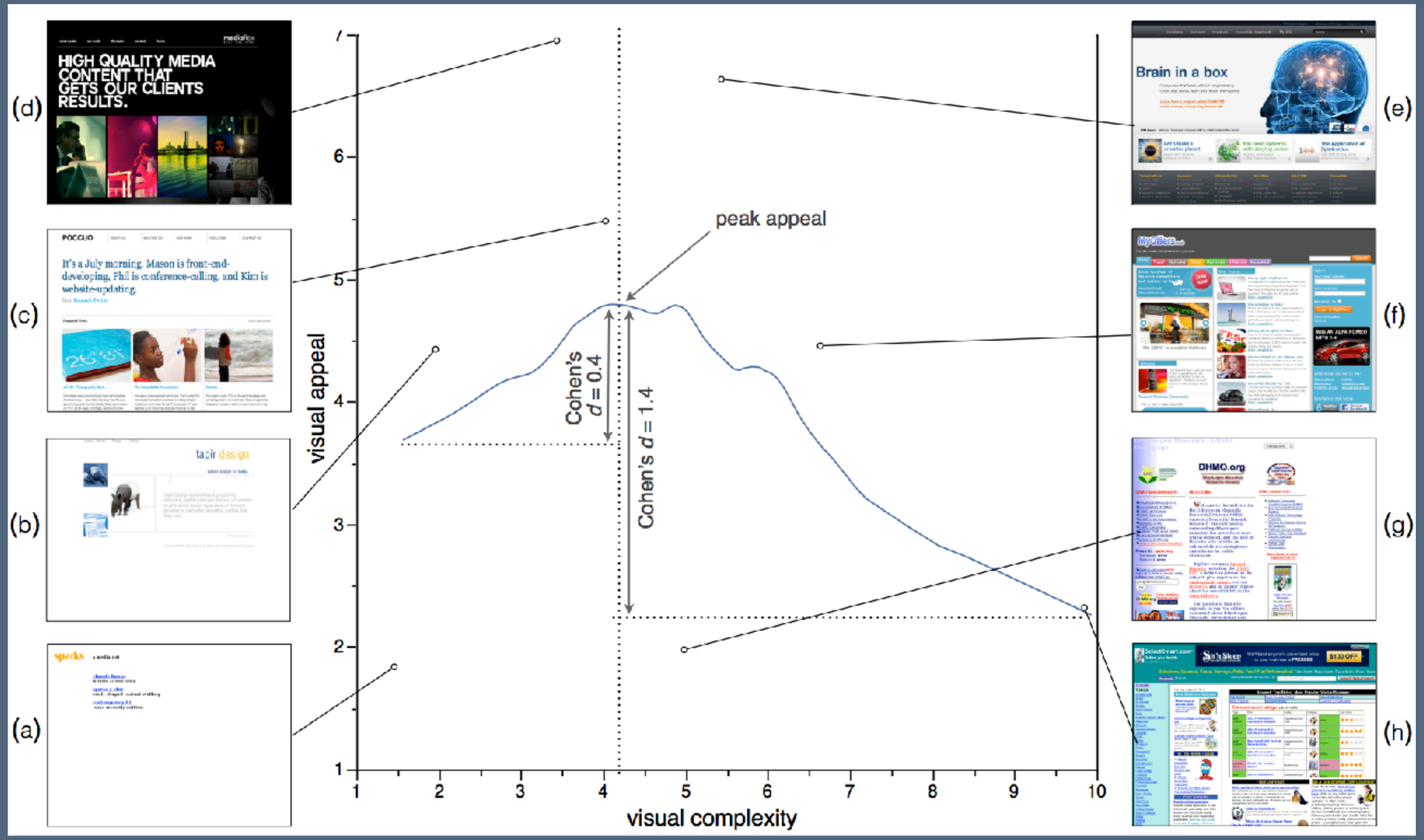


Quantifying Visual Preferences

[Reinecke and Gajos 2014]

Online quiz about which web sites you like

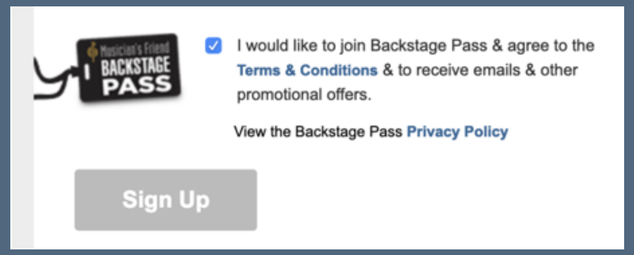
Analyzed sites to identify levels of, e.g., visual complexity that are preferred in different cultures



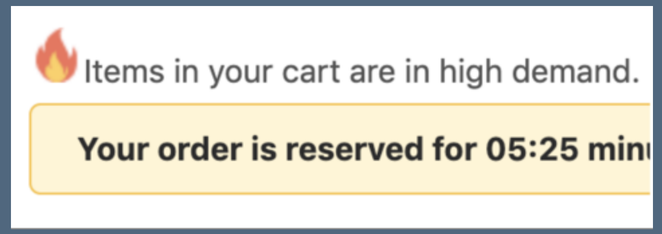
Dark design patterns

[Mathur et al. 2019]

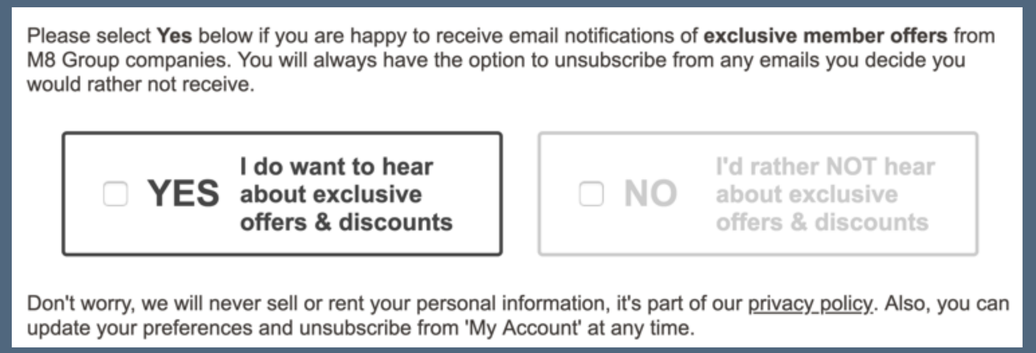
Not all design patterns are good: **dark patterns** are strategies that designs use to coerce, steer, or deceive you into making a decision that its creators want



Forced enrollment



Pressure tactics (applied to every item in the store)



Graying out the option to decline

Process intervention: dealing with fixation

Recall: design fixation

Design fixation

It cognitive psychology, **fixation** is when we introduce self-imposed barriers to problem solving [Maier 1931, Luchins 1942]

Design fixation is when we limit the breadth of our design process through adherence to a small set of concepts [Jansson and Smith 1991]

Design fixation takes hold both (1) unconsciously, when we're not aware, and also (2) consciously, even when we're aware that we're doing it.

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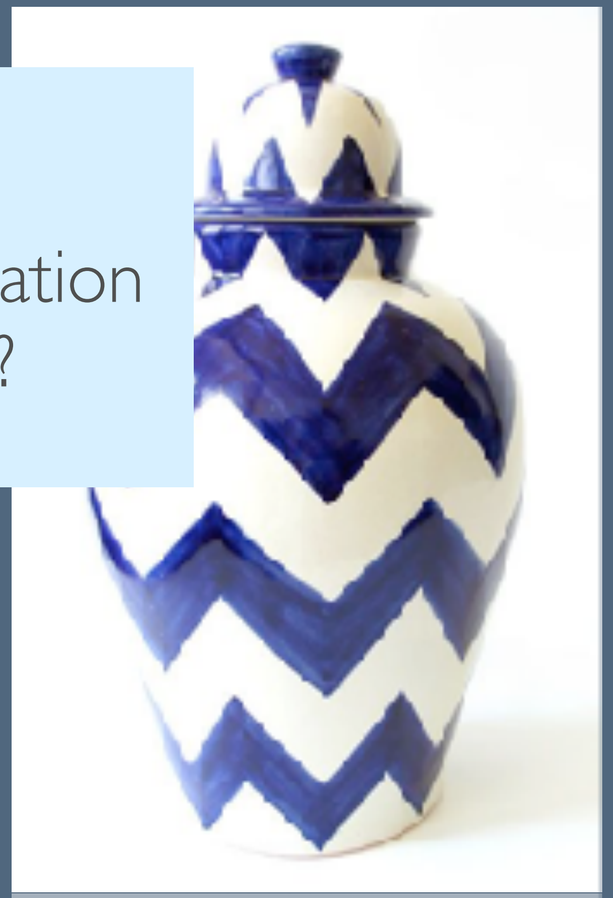
Quantity or Quality?

[Bayles and Orland 2001]

Can forcing yourself to try multiple options combat fixation and produce better designs?



Quantity or Quality?

[Bayles and Orland 2001]

"While the quantity group was busily churning out piles of work—and learning from their mistakes—the quality group had sat **theorizing about perfection**, and in the end **had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay**"

Parallel prototyping

[Dow et al. 2010]

serial prototyping condition

parallel prototyping condition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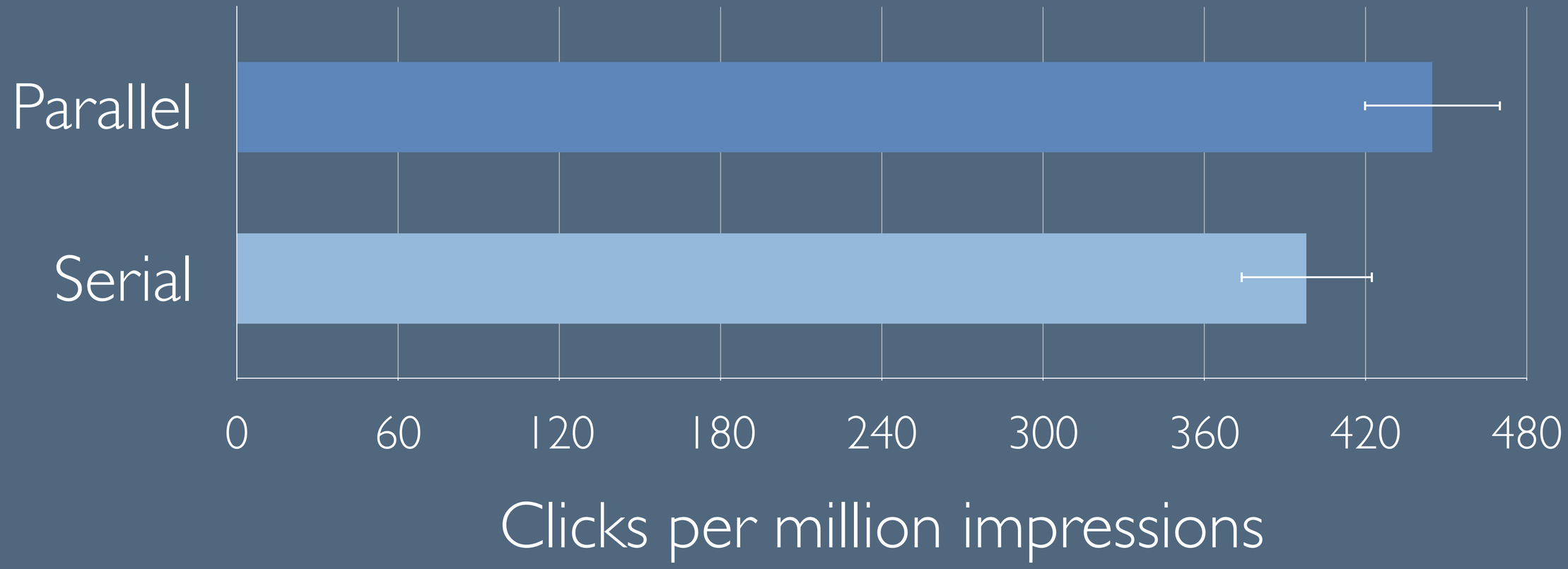
Parallel design → more clicks



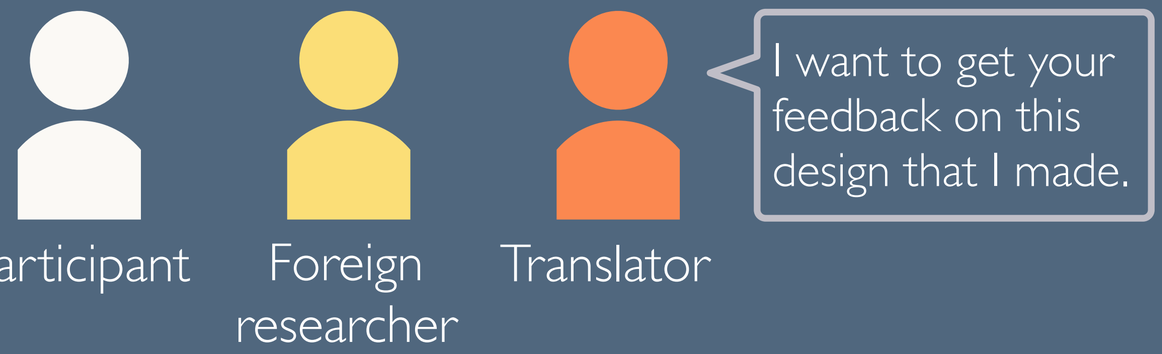
Process intervention: dealing with demand characteristics

Demand characteristics

[Dell et al. 2012]

Response bias due to signals in a study that indicate what the researcher is hoping to see: activating status differences

2.5x more preferred amongst low-status participants



5x more preferred amongst low-status participants

Demand characteristics

[Dell et al. 2012]

The effect was so strong that with a foreign researcher and low-status participants, half of them preferred the researcher's lower quality video over the alternative higher-quality video

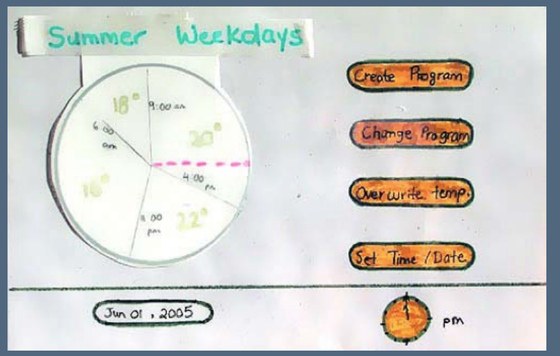
How many designs? [Tohidi et al. 2006]

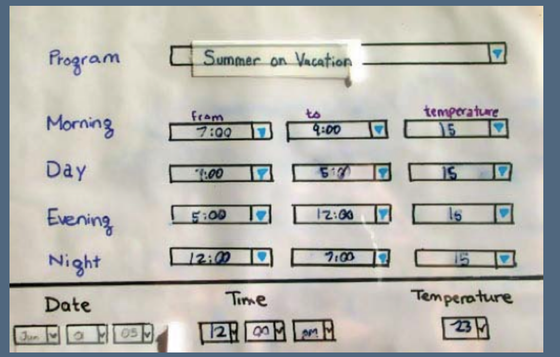
Prior practice: **create** your prototype, then show it to people to **get feedback**. But is this really optimal?

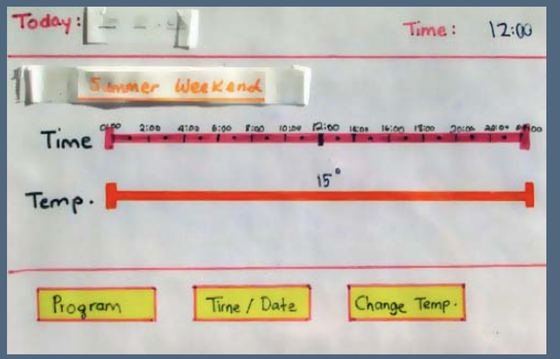
Study design:

- Method: show participants low fidelity prototypes for a redesigned smart thermostat and ask for feedback
- Control: show participants just one design (“the best”)
- Treatment: show participants three designs

Measure: quantitative ratings of the design, as well as valence of the verbal feedback





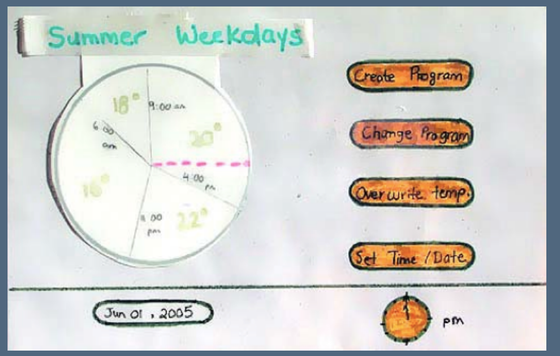


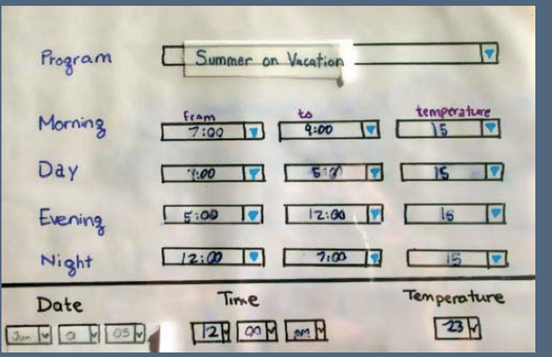
How many designs? [Tohidi et al. 2006]

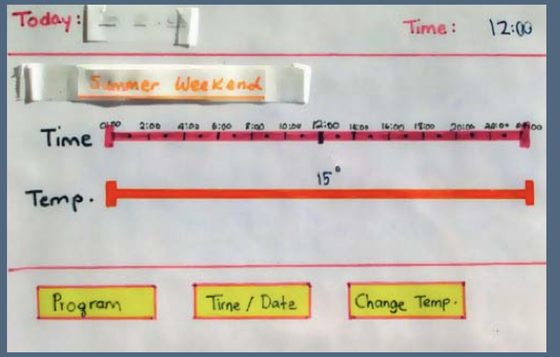
"We found that **when presented with a single design, users give significantly higher ratings and were more reluctant to criticize** than when presented with the same design in a group of three."

Why?

Weakening demand characteristics







Summary

The design process is a set of structured activities meant to address problems in how we generate and develop ideas

These activities are well attuned to solving **wicked problems**, which feature contradictory or conflicting goals

Participatory design is a movement to decenter the designer's power in these activities. It offers many opportunities, but also many challenges.

Design patterns help us avoid reinventing the wheel.

We can intervene on these activities to address shortcomings in how we practice design: e.g., **parallel prototyping** and **comparing multiple designs** (to reduce **design fixation** and **demand characteristics**)

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