Panel: Extending Conversations about Gender and HCI

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Abstract

This panel aims to create a space for participants at CHI 2018 to see how far we have come as a community in raising and addressing issues of gender, and how far we have yet to go. Our intent is for open discussion to support the community's intentions to move towards greater equity, inclusivity, and diversity.

Author Keywords

Gender; Inclusivity; Diversity

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Introduction

The CHI community cares deeply about being an open, direct society and about moving towards increasing inclusivity and diversity in many important directions, gender being one of them. The community has begun to engage actively around issues relating to gender, as shown by sessions devoted to Gender and HCI at CHI 2016, CHI 2017, and more papers will also appear at CHI 2018. These conversations remain a small part of a much bigger picture at CHI. This panel aims to broaden and deepen such conversations. Even though as a community we have the best of intentions, we live in a larger society, and in spite of considerable

improvements over the recent decades, gender issues persist as an active concern. Clearly there is lots of scope for improvement; however, it is more difficult to discover what we can do as individuals. This panel considers how HCI researchers and HCI practitioners can bring their skills to bear on these problems. What research into HCI can researchers do in order to make the lived experiences more equitable for all genders? What design and evaluation mechanisms can HCI practitioners use to improve gender-inclusivity in the products they help to produce? The panel will also explore actionable opportunities for design using feminist theories and values, reflect on the methodological implications of practicing research informed by feminism, and identify obstacles that inhibit research and design in this area.

Our panel will last 80 minutes, out of which 40 minutes will entail presentations from our panelists, while the rest will involve questions from the audience. We will use technology (such as slido) for session management and to encourage participation. Discussions will be summarized in the form of a blog post for *Interactions*. Panel will be moderated by Sheelagh. Questions raised by our panelists – Shaowen, Margaret, Neha, and Madelaine – in their statements and presentations will be posed to the audience for fostering rich and lively discussion.

Panelists' Statements

Sheelagh Carpendale: Position Statement
It is easy to forget that words which do not explicitly declare gender, can still be gendered in that people assume they belong to a given gender. We checked on the top 5 words used in CHI publications (users,

researchers, people, participants, designers), we asked participants to draw them and tells if their drawing was of a male, female, or other. This showed that the word we might like to think of as neutral 'user' is actually gendered [1]. Frequently we are not consciously aware of our own biases. One such example is Moss-Racusin et al. [2] the existence of gender bias in reading CVs for STEM faculty hiring. When given the identical CV, except for the change of name from John to Jennifer, people found John more competent and more hirable, while Jennifer was considered more likeable. Participants even recommended a higher starting salary for John. Holding discussions such as this panel can heighten our own awareness, thus helping us to individually be more part of the solution.

BIO: Sheelagh Carpendale is a full Professor at the University of Calgary where she holds 2 Research Chairs and has many received awards including Canada's STEACIE and Britain's BAFTA. Dr. Carpendale directs the Innovations in Visualization (InnoVis) research group and initiated the interdisciplinary graduate program, Computational Media Design. Her research focuses on information visualization, interaction design, and qualitative empirical research. By studying how people interact with information both in work and social settings, she works towards designing more natural, accessible and understandable interactive visual representations of data.

Shaowen Bardzell: Position Statement
In a 2018 blog post for *Interactions* [3], Madeline Balaam and Lone Koefoed Hansen reflected on their experience hosting the "Hacking Women's Health" workshop at CHI2017, describing the difficulty they had faced "legitimizing work in this area." The underlying

goal of the workshop was to "contribute to global ripples of action and resistance." This approach had brought Balaam and Hansen substantial criticism in the field from accusing them of being too feminist, not feminist enough, and even simply unscientific. "In contrast to research we have undertaken in other areas," they observed, "it seems to us that this work is often held to a higher standard; more is required of us to prove it is worth publishing, or that it is even research at all."

As we argued in 2011 on Feminist HCI Methodology [4], HCI is increasingly engaging in issues related to social change, and in so doing mixing both scientific and moral/political objectives. Balaam and Hansen's difficulties reflect a much broader dilemma between the properly epistemic and the political outcomes of research. In fact, politics is a topic that the dominant culture of academic discourse often discourages. In the case of the challenges Balaam and Hansen are facing, their politics is seen as either irrelevant to, or even downright compromising of, their attempts at knowledge production. As an action-oriented discipline, it's vital for HCI to acknowledge how our research agendas are tied up in our moral and political agendas. As is often stated throughout HCI discourses, part of our agenda is to democratize and to empower with and through technology. Such agendas attracted many of us to HCI and help frame the questions that give rise to our inquiry practices. *The political is epistemic*.

BIO: Shaowen Bardzell is an Associate Professor in the School of Informatics, Computing, and Engineering at Indiana University and an Affiliated Faculty of the Kinsey Institute. A common thread throughout her work is the exploration of the contributions of design, feminism, and social science to support technology's role in social change. Recent research foci have included research through design, women's health, and care ethics and feminist utopian perspectives on IT. She is the co-editor of *Critical Theory and Interaction Design* (MIT Press, in press) and co-author of *Humanistic HCI* (Morgan & Claypool, 2015).

Margaret Burnett: Position Statement
Gender inclusiveness in software companies is receiving a lot of attention these days, but it overlooks a potentially critical factor: software itself. Research into how individual differences cluster by gender shows that men and women often work differently with software for problem-solving (e.g., tools for programming, debugging, spreadsheet modeling, end-user programming, game-based learning, visualizing information, etc.) [5, 6, 7].

We believe that addressing the lack of inclusiveness of software is a critical issue for the CHI community. In the recent past, awareness of "under-the-hood" issues of bias is rising in the AI community. However, the CHI community is only beginning to consider the importance of user experience design that itself contains gender (or other) biases. Only the HCI community is in a position to investigate such biases, and my position is that it is our responsibility to do so.

As a start in this direction, we have been investigating a method we call GenderMag [7]. At the core of the method are 5 facets of gender differences drawn from a large body of foundational work on gender differences from computer science, psychology, education, communications, and women's studies. Results from field studies show a surprisingly high number of

gender-inclusiveness issues in software [8]. Emerging work also shows such biases in Open Source tools and infrastructure [9]. When the software itself is biased, how can any information environment be equitable?

BIO: Margaret Burnett is an ACM Fellow, a CHI Academy member, and a Distinguished Professor at Oregon State University. Her research on gender inclusiveness in software—especially in software tools for programming and problem-solving—spans over 10 years. She leads the team that created the GenderMag method, and has presented keynotes and invited talks on the topic of gender-inclusive software in 8 countries. She serves on a variety of HCI and Software Engineering committees and editorial boards and on the Academic Alliance Advisory Board of the U.S. National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT).

Neha Kumar: Position Statement

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, issues of social justice across different cultures also become pertinent to our lives. Sometimes, it is because these injustices come to acquire a global presence and stare us in our faces, for little effort of our own. At other times, it may be because we make these issues our own, heading to corners of the world to combat them, often inadequately prepared to immerse ourselves in these cultures. Such action researchers are growing in number across HCI, devoting themselves to examining issues at once local and global, often aiming to intervene and make an impact. I am one of them.

Before we take on this agenda, however, it would be prudent for us to question, as Buskens does, whether we "wish to conform to, reform or transform the gendered and/or the socio-economic status quo that supports gender relations?" [10]. While all three intentionalities will aim for projects that, in varying forms, target personal and social change, the paths taken and end products might look very different. Designers wishing to conform would do so with the desire to not unsettle social and economic realities, so that individuals can cope better with their gendered roles. The reformers might wish to address gender inequality, say through education or policy, but through change that does not challenge status quo. Finally, the transformers wish to see society transformed in all its aspects, and would thus take a more ecological approach to design [11]. Buskens also raises a second question, asking whether we are designing for or designing within our efforts above.

Where Buskens stops, I would like to continue, by asking how we—as HCI researchers intent on addressing questions regarding gender inequality—might identify ourselves as conformist, reformist, or transformist? Is this a choice that we make or a choice that we might be forced upon us by our circumstances? And if we find that one role might fit us better than our current one, what might the change entail? Finally, with Buskens' second question regarding whether we design for or with, how might we—and with what considerations—decide to choose one path or the second? The questions Buskens raises are critical for HCI research on gender to engage, even if the answers may not always be easy.

BIO: Neha Kumar is an Assistant Professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, where her research examines the intersection of human-centered computing and global development. She uses ethnographic methods to examine the themes of

access, equity, and participation across technological engagements, aiming to inform the design of information-centric mobile technologies for the resilience of underserved communities. Gender is one of the key topics her research investigates. At Georgia Tech, Neha is jointly appointed at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs and the School of Interactive Computing. She received her Ph.D. from the UC Berkeley School of Information in 2013. Neha is an inaugural member of the ACM Future of Computing Academy, where she is a member of the *Fostering the Future of Computing* working group, which focuses on issues of equity and inclusivity across the ACM. She is also a (2012) Google Anita Borg Scholar.

Madeline Balaam: Position Statement

I want to start by saying that there is no one female body, or female experience. I believe gender is experienced as a biological, social and cultural, and that we must understand and respond to this in our methods, practices and our resulting designs. We must recognize that each female body has a unique experience of the world – and that it is not necessary for every woman to experience the same trauma, hurt, inequality and pain – for those experiences to exist, and be female. Without recognizing this diversity of experience, we risk designing for gender in ways which easily slip into lazy stereotypes, perpetrating the very inequalities we are trying to overcome. I first encountered how designing for particular roles and genders can be viewed as combative, political and further still exclusionary in 2013, where I led a workshop in Motherhood and HCI. In the run-up to workshop I received a couple of emails from researchers in the community who were angry that the workshop seemly overemphasized a women's role in parenting, it was viewed as potentially stigmatizing and stereotyping of women. At the time, I struggled to understand this criticism. To me it seemed like a natural opportunity to understand one particular role across time, and to investigate opportunities for HCI within this. Surely at the heart of a user-centered design process – is the notion of designing for the needs and requirements of a certain role, a certain kind of work, a certain experience? But herein lies the problem. It is too easy to move from designing for motherhood, to prescribing parenting as a women's job, to requiring a vagina for someone to be cast as a mother. It appears the workshop inadvertently cast woman as a biologically determined role – a role for which one must possess the female reproductive system. I don't believe this. At times, it is true that it is the biological experiences of the female body that can led to inequitable access to education and healthcare, for example, but equally, at other times it is the social, cultural experience of being female which corresponds with inequalities. To take the inequalities interrelated with gender seriously we must account for the biological, cultural and societal experiences of the female body with and through our design processes, while not taken as given the normativity of what it means to be a woman / mother / gendered body. We need to understand how we engage with the politics and the taboo that are tied up with this. We need – to build on Sara Ahmed's recent work [12] – to become 'willful designers', designers who turn toward troublesome areas, designers who keep going in spite of the resistance from their communities and colleagues, designers who take the path less trodden.

BIO: Madeline Balaam is an Associate Professor of Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of

Technology. She conducts research through design in relation to women's health across the lifecourse, including sexual health, pregnancy, and menopause. Her work has directed attention to taboo areas of women's health, and particularly in relation to the female body. She has investigated different modes of talking about, and designing for taboo, often using humour as a resource for design. Madeline was the main organizer for a CHI 2012 workshop on Motherhood and HCI and, more recently a CHI 2017 workshop on Hacking Women's Health. Madeline is currently working on a zine to enable the development of supportive networks within the context of feminism and women's health.

Acknowledgements

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