
Feminist HCI: Taking Stock, Moving Forward, and Engaging Community

Rosanna Bellini

Open Lab, Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
r.f.bellini@newcastle.ac.uk

Angelika Strohmayer

Open Lab, Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
a.strohmayer@newcastle.ac.uk

Ebtisam Alabdulqader

CCIS, King Saud University
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Open Lab, Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
E.Abdulqader1@newcastle.ac.uk

Alex A. Ahmed

Northeastern University
Boston, MA
ahmed.al@husky.neu.edu

Katta Spiel

TU Wien
Vienna, Austria
katta@igw.tuwien.ac.at

Shaowen Bardzell

CRIT, Indiana University
Bloomington, IN
selu@indiana.edu

Madeline Balaam

KTH, Royal Institute of Technology
Stockholm, Sweden
balaam@kth.se

Abstract

Feminist HCI has made a profound impact on perceptions of women's health, emancipation through design, as well as gender identity, inclusion, and diversity. However, there is a distinct lack of connection between these disparate but inherently connected research spaces. This SIG meeting aims to bring scholars together to discuss emerging and evolving issues of feminist research, and finding ways of using feminist theory and practice as a tool in future HCI research. Ultimately, the SIG will facilitate the engagement of a community of feminist HCI researchers, designers, and practitioners. It brings together those who may feel isolated in their respective research groups or universities to create a platform for feminist thought within SIGCHI and facilitate collaboration to proactively move towards the mainstreaming of feminism in HCI.

Author Keywords

feminist HCI; social justice; community; diversity

ACM Classification Keywords

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

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for third-party components of this work must be honored. For all other uses, contact the Owner/Author.

CHI'18 Extended Abstracts, April 21–26, 2018, Montréal, QC, Canada

© 2018 Copyright is held by the owner/author(s).

ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-5621-3/18/04.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3170427.3185370>

Introduction

Whilst there is a growing number of publications each year containing feminist thought or ideals (either implicitly or explicitly), there has yet to be a community of practice [12] surrounding this incredibly diverse research space. What is notably missing from this body of work is an open discussion that crosses generations, borders, and feminist standpoints to develop a community of practice involved in feminist thought and research within HCI.

We wholeheartedly appreciate the work that has come before us to shape HCI in such a way where we can host a SIG dedicated to feminism. Yet at the same time, we also want to move towards a feminism that is intersectional, theoretically nuanced, and that promotes research practice, ethics, and other related areas. In driving the discussions of feminist HCI beyond gender binaries, we instead wish to move towards critiquing existing structures, promoting novel research areas, and bringing the personal into research; to advocate for human rights, social justice, and inclusivity in research.

To achieve this, we must do more than publish papers on the diversity of feminism. An inclusive community must be built that connects research from across different areas within HCI, across academic generations, and across other tangible and intangible borders. Having this community of practice will allow researchers to not only build platforms to speak up about injustices, but it will also help us build a pool of reviewers who actively engage with feminist HCI. This in turn will improve the standard of reviews, ethical procedures and conduct, and research outcomes for feminist HCI work.

We are a group of 7 HCI researchers who have diverse experiences with feminism from a variety of research groups, as well as cultural and social environments and identities. Some of us are part of feminist networks and have engaged in grassroots activism within our own research institutes, wider publics, and at SIGCHI events. While the growing body of research surrounding feminist theory and topics of study in HCI should be commended, we have observed that there is a lack of community surrounding these topics. Despite the growth in publications within more diverse areas of feminism, and the interactions between the theory and technologies, these papers are yet to be brought together to be discussed within a forum.

Whilst we acknowledge that there are already groups of people who collaborate and discuss issues of feminism in HCI (e.g., fempower.tech, ArabHCI, social justice workshops), we are convinced that these isolated groups have much to gain from coming together. These include impacting on SIGCHI's discussion on feminism as a theory to underpin research, forming a methodology to affect the design of future research, and the creation of a more focused area of study.

Feminist HCI provides an opportunity to learn more nuanced ways of dealing with research ethics, positionality, and situatedness. Specifically, feminist HCI can influence and support researchers who seek to effect positive social change. Participatory design and other civic-oriented research methods remind us that we, as academics, inhabit positions of privilege. Despite our best intentions, we may fail to consider the extent of oppressive systems or our complicity within them. If we are serious about making a difference, we need to think critically about our material impact outside of

academia, and we need to organize.

Feminist HCI

Following Bardzell's bold identification of feminism as a natural ally to interaction design [4], researchers within HCI have strived to attain a commitment to addressing agency, empowerment and social justice through innovative design [2] and critical engagement [11]. Through research that attempts to tackle inequalities of the developing world [8] to opening spaces of dialogue and inclusion in design methods [7], feminist HCI has made headway into further understanding of how to tailor technologies to the sensitivities of innovation. Yet, across the last decade, there has been a gradual evolution from identifying the features that categorize a technology or process as 'feminist' by its use, towards perceiving feminism as an alternative mode of situated performances of practice, perception and research.

In shifting our focus from *how* the technological artifact achieves its supposed emancipatory goal onto comments on *why* its conception was required in the first place, it is essential to acknowledge the vehicle of critical and constructive discovery that the field of feminist HCI has become. Feminist literature has embraced the inherently transformative process of polyvocality, and has strived to include voices that are often excluded from conversations. Singular attempts to address feminism and its relationships to other factors through papers (eg. [1,2,4,11]) or workshops (eg. [3,6,10]) have provided essential insight into productive research practices. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive mapping of the connections between these discussions that highlight new approaches and strategies for feminist HCI.

Feminist HCI in Practice

Within a political movement, the value of the role of activism in achieving changes to existing socio-political systems through the channels of discussion and action cannot be understated. The same is said within the SIGCHI community from intersectional and multi-disciplinary grassroots campaigning (eg. #CHIiversity), to activist research, or the subversive self-publishing of 'zines'. There is unmistakably a clear interest in building and expanding the influence of a feminist HCI community. From parenthood, to hacking women's health, ethics and social justice, researchers have engaged with a number of distinctive areas of feminist HCI and would greatly benefit from engaging with each other under the 'feminist' umbrella terminology.

SIG Meeting

This SIG meeting would be the first to bring scholars together to discuss issues of intersectional feminism in HCI. A previous SIG has explored gender-inclusive software [5], but no SIG has focused on the precise role feminist theory plays in HCI or how it can bring HCI research into wider areas of real-world research.

The meeting itself will be split into two parts: part 1 will look back to define feminism in HCI at the moment, and part 2 will look forward to explore how we can use feminism as a tool in future HCI research. We will (1) bring awareness of existing feminist projects in HCI; (2) constructively critique this research to develop potential collaborations within the community; and (3) bring together researchers and practitioners working in this space to move beyond isolated incidents of feminism towards a community of practice in CHI. The SIG will facilitate community-building beyond CHI2018 by maintaining the already established fempower.tech

website (<https://openlab.ncl.ac.uk/fempower.tech/>) to further collaboration among those interested in feminism, to increase feminist HCI research, and to involve feminists as authors and reviewers in highly ranked venues.

Bibliography

- [1] Ahmed, A.A. Trans Competent Interaction Design: A Qualitative Study on Voice, Identity, and Technology. *Interacting with Computers* 30, 1 (2018), 53–71.
- [2] Antle, A.N., Corness, G., and Droumeva, M. Springboard: exploring embodiment, balance and social justice. *Proceedings of the 27th international conference extended abstracts on Human factors in computing systems - CHI EA '09*, ACM Press (2009), 3961.
- [3] Balaam, M., Hansen, L.K., D'Ignazio, C., et al. Hacking Women's Health. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI EA '17*, ACM Press (2017), 476–483.
- [4] Bardzell, S. Feminist HCI: Taking Stock and Outlining an Agenda for Design. *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, ACM (2010), 1301–1310.
- [5] Burnett, M.M., Churchill, E.F., and Lee, M.J. SIG: Gender-Inclusive Software: What We Know About Building It. *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI EA '15*, ACM Press (2015), 857–860.
- [6] Fox, S., Menking, A., Steinhardt, S., Hoffmann, A.L., and Bardzell, S. Imagining Intersectional Futures: Feminist approaches in CSCW. *Companion of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing - CSCW '17 Companion*, ACM Press (2017), 387–393.
- [7] Frauenberger, C., Makhaeva, J., and Spiel, K. Blending Methods: Developing Participatory Design Sessions for Autistic Children. *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Interaction Design and Children - IDC '17*, ACM Press (2017), 39–49.
- [8] Sambasivan, N., Weber, J., and Cutrell, E. Designing a phone broadcasting system for urban sex workers in India. *Proceedings of the 2011 annual conference on Human factors in computing systems - CHI '11*, ACM Press (2011), 267.
- [9] Schlesinger, A., Edwards, W.K., and Grinter, R.E. Intersectional HCI: Engaging Identity through Gender, Race, and Class. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI '17*, ACM Press (2017), 5412–5427.
- [10] Steinhardt, S.B., Menking, A., Erickson, I., Marshall, A., Zelenkauskaite, A., and Rode, J. Feminism and Feminist Approaches in Social Computing. *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference Companion on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing - CSCW'15 Companion*, ACM Press (2015), 303–308.
- [11] Strohmayer, A., Laing, M., and Comber, R. Technologies and Social Justice Outcomes in Sex Work Charities: Fighting Stigma, Saving Lives. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI '17*, ACM Press (2017), 3352–3364.
- [12] Wenger, E. *Communities of practice : learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.