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Perspectives on Gender and Product Design

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CHI 2014 Extended Abstracts, ...

Abstract
Interactive technologies have a profound mediating effect on the way we obtain and contribute to knowledge, relate to each other and contribute to society. Often, "gender" is not a factor that is explicitly considered in the design of these technologies. When gender *is* considered, products are often designed with idealized models of gendered "users"–designed for men, designed for women, designed for boys, designed for girls, or designed for the "average user" who could be male or female. However, the ways in which gender-bias or gender-neutrality are constructed in the design process and the resulting effect on the interactive artifacts that are produced is not well understood. This workshop will address what HCI is currently bringing, and can bring, to the table in addressing this issue.

Author Keywords
Gender; interactive products; technology; HCI; system design; perspectives

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

Introduction
This workshop focuses on the design of interactive systems and products, and with how gender-neutrality or gendered use is constructed and mobilized within the design process. Often, "gender" is not a factor that is explicitly considered in product design; products are

implicitly considered to be gender "neutral". We are interested in what it means to be gender-neutral and what does it mean to design for the "average user" who could be male or female, boy or girl, (or any other gender identity)? Is it possible to design a gender-neutral interactive product? If so, what are the products where design for specific genders *is* necessary or appropriate? When interactive technologies *are* intentionally gendered, what are the models of male or female, man or woman, etc. that are tacitly or explicitly constructed and that influence the resultant products? When are products designed with gender in mind, where they are adopted and appropriated by users who do not fit the original user profile? What can we learn from such unexpected uptake?

The impact of neutral, abstracted and/or idealized models of gendered "users"– designed for specific genders explicitly or implicitly, or not – is not very well understood. And it is even less clear how "gender" affects the use of technologies by users of any gender.

Given the impact and potential ramifications of technological products on society, it is imperative that we more deeply understand the tacit and explicit models of the user and especially of gendered practice that underlie design choices. We need to then inclusively accommodate and integrate different perspectives in shaping our modern day technologies.

In recent years, the centrality of gender has become recognized within the HCI community from multiple perspectives:

- For epistemological frameworks for designing and for understanding the adoption, appropriation and resistance of technologies, with a call for increasing feminist perspectives which highlight issues of agency and power among others. A feminist HCI manifesto [2] was presented at CHI 2010. And the journal *Interacting with Computers* featured a special issue on "feminism and HCI" [1].

- For reflecting on how designed products embody gender bias, and sit within a broader ecology/milieu of gendered products and structures which also embody biased assumptions around gendered practice, see for e.g., [6][7]

- On the training settings that girls/boys and women/men experience as they develop their careers, see for e.g., [10]

- On career opportunities and career models that are experiences within the technology design and development world including the structure of technology design teams, and broader socio-structural and socio-cultural issues around career-life balance, see for e.g.,[8][9][10]

- On the design and use of software tools and environments that we work with to produce interactive technologies, see for e.g., [4]

It is clear that gender is on the agenda in HCI and at CHI. Gender and training/career inequities are on the agenda beyond HCI, of course [3], and there are efforts to broaden the discussion within our community [5].

In this workshop, we wish to take one facet of this conversation further–our particular focus on gender

bias and notions of gender neutrality in interactive product design.

Workshop GOALS

This workshop focuses on the bringing to the fore different perspectives of how gender affects technology design, adoption, appropriation, and possibly resistance. We will address what is missing from the discussion, and why. We will consider what, if anything, needs to change in design methods and perspectives. We will try to elaborate and account for possible gender differences in perceived product value and in actual and perceived ease of use. We will consider whether there are gender-related differences in the creation and experience of delightful engagement with interactive technologies. Examples of issues to be discussed and arenas of potential change are:

- increasing research and understanding of gender impact on technology design and use

- consideration of how to increase representation of nuanced gender perspectives within design processes in the technology sector and within fields related to technology production, including computer science and engineering, and also design, design research, and related fields

- discussing what would constitute gender-agnostic or gender inclusive design/development environments, including consideration of design biases in software tools and in digital and/or physical collaborative design/development settings

- addressing the lack of discussion regarding gender impact in the fields related to technology design, including the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) whose very charter is to be "user-centric" and inclusive

- reflecting on the low grant support for academic research which looks at the representation of gendered perspectives in our current discourse, which in turn leads to a lack of reliable, informative and actionable technology & gender research

This workshop will address these issues with respect to the tools, technologies, and processes we experience and design, both in industry and academia, and with the aim of producing some actionable steps forward.

We will explore **four** key areas of interest with the goal of having tentative answers by the end of the day:

- **Framing the discussion**: From your perspective, is gender an important topic for designers and developers of interactive products? Should we focus our critical and practical energies on Women, on Gender, or on Diversity/Inclusivity? What role(s) should there be for gender politics in the debate?

- **Gender-related knowledge and practice** in academic, consultancy and corporate HCI and UX as a profession: What is the current status of gender as a topic in the HCI/UX field of work? What are points of view on gender research in HCI? What conflicts, if any, exist?

- **Gender-sensitive products**: Does truly gender-neutral design exist? If so, is this a desirable goal? If it is a desirable goal, what has been done toward this goal, what still needs to be addressed?

- **Gender-sensitive design processes and practices**: Reflecting on creators of software and of interactive products, what are best practices for producing gender-sensitive designs? What are the most effective work practices, work processes and team structures that produce gender-sensitive designs? What challenges exist and what needs to be done to overcome identified challenges in product creation and promotion? Are there requirements gathering methods, design processes and evaluation methods that are specific to different gendered perspectives?

Target Audience

This workshop is open to all and any members of the HCI community, adjacent communities and people interested in technology design who are concerned with developing a deeper understanding of how tacit and explicit assumptions about gender influence the design, launch, marketing, adoption and appropriation of interactive technologies. As well as engaging in critical discussions about such tacit and explicit influences, hopefully exemplified with case studies, we also invite people who have used novel or inventive approaches in their design methods to raise awareness of gender as it is mobilized in design processes.

Related Works

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