Woman-Centered Design through Humanity, Activism, and Inclusion
Teresa Almeida, Madeline Balaam And Rob Comber

Reviewed by: Rishabh Devgon

Critical Review:

Teresa Almeida et al. [1] lay stress on the impotence of an approach that takes into consideration women's health and bodies. They also explore a myriad of previous work which looks at the evolution of paradigms and contemporary theory. The paper adopts an inclusive and working definition of women as it evaluates the historical, social and cultural phenomena of being a woman. It discusses a woman centered approach where it looks at moving beyond empathy and into more humanistic, activist and inclusive values while coming up with design research.

This research borrows from several analogous fields, and I felt it is pretty similar to the work done by Bardzell, and hence the research does not seem novel. I can draw direct comparisons of the three values highlighted in this paper with the feminist HCI lens. The humanistic aspect can be considered to be a combination of ecology and embodiment, while activist is analogous to advocacy, and inclusive is similar to participation and pluralism. The three values also seem a little vague, and perhaps a concise definition of each value could be helpful in understanding them better. However, the researchers have investigated case studies through their woman centred design approach, which does help the readers to understand how to adopt this approach. The study also lacks generalisability with all insights being conceived from the Global North, and there is little to no addressal of the Global South. I thus find it difficult to justify the work's importance or novelty.

I felt that the case studies conducted were a little premature in the sense that their approach was not critical enough. In the case of Labella, there was no focus on the sensitivity of the information and privacy of the obtained data. Also, in case a body part is misclassified, it could lead to misinformation and, in more severe cases, exclusion or dysmorphic anxiety. Similarly, in the case of FeedFinder, there is a no mention of misreporting and malicious practices from app users which could actually enable miscreants to perform acts of sexual harassment. Thus, a deeper exploration into these darker themes could help to create a more holistic picture of a product or service.

The research methodology employed by the authors includes a critical literature review and analyses the proposed approach through three different case studies. This approach is justified, given the context of this research. However, it could be further expanded by gauging participant feedback while analysing the case studies, and more insights could have been obtained thus making the research more robust. There was no explanation as to why the three case studies were chosen, and I felt that they were not representative of all women and also they were not exhaustive. From a research standpoint, the authors did not specify the demographics of the users within these case studies and neither did they mention their own positionality.

I felt that the structure of the paper was messy, with the sections and subsections not utilized properly. There were also a lot of overlaps between the sections, and the same message was being echoed repeatedly. I would go as far as saying that I found this paper poorly written and could really use more brevity.

Since the study pertains to women and the systemic and systematic injustices against them, I feel that the research should have also explored the under-represented and oppressed communities like women of colour or trans women and move towards a more intersectional approach instead of just mentioning them. Establishing how these communities differ from white women in terms of power and requirements could add another dimension to this study. The paper claims to borrow from queer theory and postcolonialism as it explores the concept of Women Centred Design, but there is no conjecture on either of these.

Since all the sexes coexist with each other, it is fundamental for each sex to empathise with the other. Thus, turning a blind eye towards a sex could just create more misunderstanding and alienation. Following the principles of a third of feminism, it is imperative to be inclusive of everyone to understand and be cognisant of each other's problems. An exploration of educating and changing perspectives could have been expired. Hence, I think the research could also better situate itself by bringing men into the picture. To conclude, I would say that the paper explores a very relevant issue to address but it falls short when it comes to the outcomes of the research.

References:

1. Teresa Almeida, Madeline Balaam, and Rob Comber. 2020. Woman-Centered Design through Humanity, Activism, and Inclusion. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 27, 4: 27:1-27:30. https://doi.org/10.1145/3397176