Feminist HCI: Taking Stock and Outlining an Agenda for Design

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1 CRITICAL REVIEW

With the rise of ubiquitous computing and ICTs throughout the world, it is impossible to overlook groups which have been systematically subdued due to prevalent social structures; and more specifically patriarchy. Shaowen Bardzell [1] explains how the intermingling of the feminist perspective within interaction design practices and research could benefit society as a whole. Principles of feminism align well with ideas of agency, fulfilment, identity and the self, equity, empowerment, diversity and social justice, which in turn can contribute as a means towards developing interaction design. The paper theorizes various underlying values and concerns, which are otherwise present passively to help shift design paradigms and facilitate the development of new processes and approaches within the domain of HCI. Feminist approaches can be integrated into every phase of the design process and contribute within the theory, methodology, user research and evaluation.

The feminist standpoint theory shifts the focus on to marginal perspectives to uncover untested assumptions to gain a more holistic perspective. Feminism is well established in various analogous fields, and the author gives a detailed account of the influence of feminism in science and technology studies, product and industrial design, architecture and urban planning, and game design. In her work, Bardzell proposes the qualities of feminist interaction as pluralism, participation, advocacy, ecology, embodiment, and self disclosure. Pluralism refers to designing that does away with a totalizing or universal point of view. Participation assesses the participatory processes used to empathise, ideate and evaluate with users. Advocacy involves propagating progressive solutions to achieve political emancipation and empower underprivileged communities. Ecology considers how an artifact interacts in a broader context with all stakeholders. Embodiment talks about identity, sexuality, commonalities and differences in gender. Self disclosure is the way that an artifact reflects how it affects users. These qualities can further be extended to other marginalised communities as well.

The idea is fascinating, and it challenges the status quo and existing paradigms and suggests critique based and generative contributions to interactive design. Critique based contributions bring to light various unintended consequences and benefit the design of the interaction. Generative contributions offer a clearer understanding of design concepts through every stage of the iterative design process. These contributions can, in turn, bring about innovation in terms of technological interaction and inclusivity. In fact, feministic approaches in HCI can also help in evaluating and bringing about a change in traditional gender roles and empowering women.

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The research methods used in this paper are extensive literature reviews and case studies from different homologous fields through which the author has derived inferences and reflections throughout the paper. These methods are incredibly relevant and do well in supporting the author by providing empirical evidence for her claims. A case could be made to introduce qualitative research methods within the study to investigate the socio-technical and cultural aspects of the users through interviews, focus group discussions, or field studies to make the research more robust.

The work is novel in the sense that it uses feministic approaches from homologous fields towards interaction design and provides a formal framework for feminism in HCI. It solidifies the stance of the agenda, i.e. feminism within the HCI discipline to induce discussion and further research into the feminist perspective within HCI. To make the work more substancial, perhaps the social context of feminist interventions could have been provided to examine its effects on society. Another aspect which could be introduced is the responsibility or role of interaction designers towards raising awareness about feministic principles within the users to move towards a more egalitarian social structure. I also see potential to discourse about intersectional feminism within HCI.

REFERENCES

[1] Shaowen Bardzell. 2010. Feminist HCI: taking stock and outlining an agenda for design. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.* Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1301–1310. https://doi.org/10.1145/1753326.1753521