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# Imagining Intersectional Futures: Feminist approaches in CSCW

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**Abstract**

The aim of this one-day workshop is to explore theoretical and methodological approaches that help us consider issues of gender, sexual orientation, and power in the design of socio-technical systems. This program builds on two previous workshops on the topic of feminism and CSCW. With this instantiation, we are motivated by an explicit commitment to *intersectionality*—a recognition that the effects of various oppressions cannot be understood independently. Considerable time will be devoted to discussing work in post-colonial feminism, queer theory, Women of Color feminism, and feminist critical disability studies. Through generative conversation with participants, feedback on works-in-progress, and the initiation of outlets for new feminist CSCW work, we aim to 1) build on existing research and practice and 2) identify concerns and approaches for both designing and assessing research oriented toward intersectional and feminist futures in the context of CSCW and social computing.

**Author Keywords**

Feminism; intersectionality; design; collaboration

**ACM Classification Keywords**

K.4.0 Computers in Society: general.

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### Introduction

Building on two prior workshops on the topic of feminism and CSCW [17,25], we propose a follow-up workshop that will welcome participants interested in intersectional feminist perspectives on cultures of collaboration and design futures. In this workshop, CSCW scholars and practitioners will engage theoretical and methodological approaches in and around CSCW and social computing that consider problems and problematics of gender, sexual orientation, power and other emergent topics motivated by a commitment to *intersectionality*. Originating in activist traditions and taken up in fields like gender studies, legal theory, and sociology, intersectionality recognizes that the effects of various oppressions (like racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, imperialism, and beyond) cannot be understood independently of one another. Thus, considerable time will be devoted to discussing related work in post-colonial feminism, queer theory, Women of Color (WoC) feminism or womanism, and feminist critical disability studies.

We view this workshop as an opportunity to extend the conversation about how to productively develop feminist research and practice and establish a commitment to intersectional analyses in the context of CSCW and social computing. Through generative conversation with invited and accepted participants, feedback on works-in-progress and the initiation of two outlets for new feminist CSCW work (e.g., an independently published zine, and a proposal for a special issue of *JCSCW* highlighting the scholarship of workshop participants around feminism and futurism), we will build on existing research and practice by identifying concerns and approaches for both designing and assessing research oriented toward feminisms.

### Background

Over the past decade, CSCW has come to embrace several forms of feminist thought. This shift is marked by calls for theoretical and methodological consideration [3,5,23], recognition of similarities in ways of thinking between feminist epistemologies and contemporary concerns of design research scholarship [16], and, more recently, design cases in which authors have chosen to take up a feminist lens in enacting their work (e.g., [1,7,12,13,15]). Here, issues of power, inequity, and gender are of crucial concern, rather than matters to be dismissed as markers of researcher bias [2,20].

Building on this scholarship, our proposed workshop welcomes participants to take up intersectional perspectives and question approaches to addressing oppression that center on a single, monolithic category (i.e., women). The concern with intersectionality is inspired by critiques of the white-led women's movement of the 1970s [10], black feminist scholars like Hill Collins [8,9], Lorde [21], and hooks [18], and more recent work by Queer and Trans People of Color, as well as critical disability scholars [19]. These bodies of work share a commitment to questioning prominent feminist platforms that—implicitly or explicitly—foreground the concerns of heterosexual, cisgender, and able-bodied middle-class white women.

Informed by earlier work in this vein, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw [11] coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989, arguing that single-axis frameworks for understanding oppression minimize the experiences of anyone who is not the assumed "standard." In her multidimensional analysis of two workplace grievance cases, she illustrated how

antidiscrimination laws were categorized in such a way to only recognize discrimination based on a single variable—gender or race, but not both at the same time. Instead, an intersectional approach sees structures of dominance like sexism, racism, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia as interacting and compounding to create unique conditions of oppression and discrimination.

In more recent years, the concept of intersectionality has moved across a variety of fields with research focused on social justice initiatives and interventionist approaches. HCI scholars Smyth and Dimond [24], for instance, propose an Anti-Oppressive Design framework, inspired by scholarship within the field of social work [6]. As a means for information technology (IT) developers to engage in discussions of oppression in its complexity, this process asks the designer to do the work of recognizing the structural barriers and privilege that might be at play before the development of any IT begins.

Drawing on these efforts within and beyond CSCW, our proposed workshop seeks to extend CSCW's commitment to feminist theory by welcoming multiple and varied approaches to understanding oppression. Together we will engage in grounded speculation [4] about the futures of intersectional feminist approaches to designing and researching social computing systems.

### **Workshop Goals and Outcomes**

The goals of the workshop are first and foremost to build a community of researchers and practitioners working at the intersection of feminist theory and CSCW. Specifically, we seek to facilitate conversations necessary to move beyond any single conception of

feminism toward more pluralistic and generative engagements with power, dominance, and privilege. We also seek to organize around notions of praxis, action directed to alter oppressive structures.

The outputs of the workshop will extend the 2015 workshop website content including the annotated bibliographic resource of the previous CSCW workshop and acting as a landing page for interested parties in feminist CSCW. We will identify friendly spaces in which to engage in feminist CSCW discourse, like journals, conferences, and popular newspapers and magazines. Finally, we will develop an independently published zine intended for public consumption, and will begin to organize and identify writing targets for a special journal issue of *JCSCW*.

### **Workshop Structure**

In an effort to avoid reinforcing a single, prescribed notion of feminism or some predetermined understanding of what might constitute scholarship under its banner, we approach the organization of this workshop through a lens of “producing a spirit of feminism” [14]. Here, we draw on three of our co-authors experiences organizing and/or participating in one or both of the previous feminist CSCW workshops. In doing so, we aim to prioritize collective, participatory activity, encourage pluralistic conversation, and focus on positionality (how one is positioned in relation one's subject, one's field, and so on).

### **Pre-workshop Plans**

We will invite participants via our existing networks, including mailing lists and social media groups with a focus on distributing the call among scholars and practitioners in the fields of HCI, feminist theory,

design, science and technology studies, and information science. Participants will be selected based on the depth of their position papers in productively engaging with concerns for intersectional feminist approaches through design, or the thoughtfulness of their critiques. We hope to accept 20-25 participants.

During the workshop, the only equipment required will be a digital projector.

### **Schedule**

8:45-9:00 Coffee and Pastries

9:00-10:00 Participant Introductions:

Researchers introduce their academic affiliations and briefly explain the role of feminisms in their research. Community members briefly describe their work and what they hope to gain from this workshop experience, or potential academic collaborations.

10:00-11:30 Works in Progress (WIP) Presentations:

Participants give brief presentations on projects in progress.

11:30 Crosscutting themes from WIP Presentations:

Workshop participants and organizers will synthesize themes that emerged from the presentations and feedback discussions.

12:30 Lunch

2:00 Moving Seminar:

Inspired by STS scholar Mol's "walking seminar" [22], participants will organize into pairs around various

concerns raised during the WIP presentations. This will be an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to discuss issues not typically addressed in traditional academic fora.

3:00 Zine making:

Workshop participants and organizers discuss observations from the day and begin to produce accounts in the form of a zine—a self-published magazine typically reproduced with a photocopier.

4:30-5:30 Future Steps:

We will articulate concrete goals to follow up on after the workshop. These goals will be contingent on the conversations from the rest of the day, but it can include publications (e.g., a Special Issue of *JCSCW*, or others), or new research collaborations. Discuss forming a feminist CSCW listserv, produce a timeline for publishing the zine, and set meetings for potential journal special issue proposals.

5:30-6:00 Closing

### **Organizers**

Sarah Fox is a PhD candidate in the Tactile and Tactical (TAT) Design Lab at the University of Washington. Drawing on feminist theory, science and technology studies, design studies her research examines how feminist ideas move through technology cultures. Her work has earned Best Paper awards at CSCW and DIS and a Best Paper Honorable Mention at CHI. She has organized workshops on social justice and design at CHI 2016, participation in IoT at Aarhus 2015, and a panel on equity and design at the 2015 Seattle Design Festival. She was a participant in the CSCW 2015 Feminist and Social Computing workshop.

Amanda Menking is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Washington's Information School. She is interested in sociotechnical questions at the intersection of user-generated content systems, participation, and knowledge production. Her current work focuses on women and Wikipedia. Her work has earned a Best Paper award at CHI. She was a participant of the CSCW 2014 Feminism and Social Media workshop and a co-organizer of the CSCW 2015 Feminist and Social Computing workshop.

Stephanie Steinhardt is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Communication at Cornell University. She is interested in the social and political impacts of large-scale long-term technological investments on the shape of life, labor and knowledge production, currently focused on developments around climate change and oceanography in the U.S. Her work has earned a Best Paper award at CSCW. She was a participant of the CSCW 2014 Feminism and Social Media workshop and a co-organizer of the CSCW 2015 Feminist and Social Computing workshop.

Anna Lauren Hoffmann is a postdoctoral scholar with the School of Information at the University of California, Berkeley. Her work sits at the intersections of data, technology, culture, and ethics and draws heavily on feminist critiques of liberal theories of justice. Recently, she has been focused on developing a conception of "data violence" to describe the normative impositions of data-intensive systems and platforms, especially as they impact trans people and other gender minorities. Her work has appeared (or is forthcoming) in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, *New Media & Society*, and *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, as well

as popular outlets like *The Guardian* and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Shaowen Bardzell is an Associate Professor of Informatics at Indiana University's School of Informatics and Computing. Bardzell's research explores the contributions of design, feminism, and social science to support technology's role in social change. Recent research foci have included emancipatory and participatory social science, criticality in design, care ethics and feminist utopian perspectives for IT, and culture and creative industries in Asia. She is the co-author of *Humanistic HCI* (Morgan & Claypool, 2015) and co-editor of *Critical Theory and Interaction Design* (MIT Press, in press). She chaired the technical programs at ACM DPPI 2013, DIS2014, and Aarhus 2015 and has organized workshops at CHI, DIS, CSCW, NordiCHI, British HCI, PDC, EPIC, ACE 2007-2016, including two workshops on feminism, gender, and interaction design at ACM CHI2011 and CHI2014.

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