Bringing Shades of Feminism To Human-Centered Computing

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ABSTRACT

This consolidation of 18 stories from students and researchers of human-centered computing (HCC) represents only some of the diverse shades of feminism that are present and *emerging* in our discipline. These stories—our stories—reflect how we see the world and why, also conveying the change we wish to *be* in this world.

KEYWORDS

human-centered computing; feminism; stories

INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2018, we—a group of graduate students and one faculty member in human-centered computing (HCC)—brought pen to paper to reflect on the different shades of feminism we bring to our HCC practice. These stories are our commitment to adding to perspectives less heard, and communicating solidarity towards those who find voice in our words. They are an expression of diverse realizations of privilege and struggles in light of structures of oppression, of ideas taking shape into acts of resistance of varying degrees, and of evolving forms of allyship. Seen through the lens of participation in HCC, these stories highlight how participation is shaped—how it is dictated, conceptualized, strategized, and supported. In presenting these shades of feminism, we draw inspiration from many places—from more and less radical thinkers, from our day-to-day lived experiences, and from our conversations with each other.

We turned to several companion texts on *living a feminist life*, relating to diverse definitions and expressions of feminism (*see sidebar*). Within these definitions and expressions are shared elements but also tensions that live within us and among us, finding voice in our stories. A single feminist lens might emphasize understanding and reflection, coping and self-care, or action and emancipation. It might focus on women within corporate establishments, those experiencing socioeconomic oppression, individuals of particular sexual orientations, or women more generally. It might foreground the workplace, the home, natural worlds, or political ones. Indeed, we found that sometimes we needed to turn to one feminism over another.

Our companion texts served primarily as guides, as we found ourselves aligned with no single view, interpretation, or threshold of what it means to be feminist. Our expressions—our *shades*—of feminism are experiential, a consequence of navigating this world doing our best to understand and persist, sometimes with and sometimes without guidance. We engage with but also deviate from scholarly thought and written manifestos, relying instead on what we have lived, honoring the personal over the theoretical. Loosely drawing on ideals of feminist solidarity articulated by the likes of Mohanty, bell hooks, and Haraway brought us to understand why one definition, principle, or belief might resonate today and another tomorrow. Notwithstanding the differences, these feminisms and others do express common ideas and values: that women and other groups have been and are marginalized,

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"[feminism is a way of] orientating bodies in particular ways, so they are facing a certain way, heading toward a future that is given a face."
—Sara Ahmed

Living a Feminist Life
—Sara Ahmed

Feminism Without Borders
—Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions
—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India
—Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar

Can the Subaltern Speak?
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

that the implicit and explicit structures that govern our world have had a hand in this, that such marginalizations are variously reflected in HCC, and that a reorientation of our values and actions might help in combating them.

While our stories do not represent particular (or all) feminisms, they will offer, we hope, a diffraction point for you, dear reader. Being of deep personal significance, these stories move us, motivate us, challenge us, anger us. Just as we related and empathized with them, perhaps you will too. Or learn, as we did, to see things that were heretofore hidden. We hope they help you to think, feel, understand, reflect, and maybe act, discovering the shade of feminism that fits you best. This shade may find expression in a commitment to action or the articulation of a latent thought. It may be already vibrant, or struggling to find definition, either as a mild form of one feminism, or a blend of multiple. The smallest step might be a radical one. We invite you to take that step with us.

From One Slavery to Another

I was born in the '90s in Sasaram, a small town in North India, with privileges my mother never had. That was a transition period in terms of culture, politics, and the economy. My mother was married at the age of 22, hounded for having given birth to two girls, and forced to cook and clean for 13 members of a multi-generational family while pregnant. Back then, women were not allowed to work, and had to receive permission from in-laws to visit their parents. Women were simply seen as a means to forge social and economic power through an alliance between two families, and by raising sons who would then inherit the combined wealth. I was never able to make sense of this. All I understood as a child was that my mother hurt every single day and slogged like a slave. Seeing her, I always thought in terms of ethics or morality. Today, when I look back, I can see how systemic this problem was and that it cannot be attributed to individuals alone.

As a feminist in academia, I sincerely believe that it is important for theory to inform our praxis, for us to ask ourselves if we truly understand the systemic roots of our life choices and psychological experiences. Even though we have achieved much in our fight for equality, liberation, and justice, a lot remains to be done. Our insecurities, desires, and fears raise important questions regarding where we stand and where the feminist movement goes from here. We earned the right to education, to property, to choosing our own battles, but today we find ourselves enslaved by capitalism, the consumer culture, and a market that manufactures and monetizes hysteria around beauty versus ugliness. We are told that to be loved, to fit the description of a lover, to live up to the songs of love, is to be beautiful. We have subconsciously assimilated the beauty myth and given away our hard-earned freedom and equality. The quest to live a meaningful life has morphed into a desire to adhere to beauty standards sold by the market. We may have left behind the world in which we were exploited

Restricted Mobilities

The campus of my engineering school in Guwahati, India was constantly under construction during my time there, and workers lived in small encampments outside the girls' hostel. The girls were not allowed outside their hostel past midnight, but there was no such rule for the boys. A group of girls, unhappy about this discrimination, demanded that there be no curfew for girls as the campus needed to be safe for all genders. The campus administration dismissed this request, saying, *"The construction workers live right outside your hostel; it is not safe for you. It is in your benefit that you stay inside."* They were locking the girls up to "protect" them from the outside instead of improving circumstances that were under their control. If the people outside were likely to do harm, why should the girls be locked up and not the ones actually doing harm? Also, why did the authorities assume that the workers were dangerous just by virtue of the fact that they were earning a living by contributing towards the university's construction? They were not criminals with records of molesting or assaulting girls.

My mind was awash with emotions and questions after this incident, and I struggled to channel them. To radically change others' views about women is not easy, as most prefer to practice, per Adichie, 'Feminism Lite.' They want to "protect" women instead of taking on the sociocultural forces that require them to "protect" these women in the first place. Many prefer to construct women as fragile, delicate, and in need of protection. There are ways to address this issue other than by a curfew. A renowned institution of learning should be setting an example by lifting such burdens, not imposing them back on its (female) students.

for compounding social power, but have now plunged ourselves into another world where we willingly subjugate ourselves as slaves to objectification and commodification.

An Unstory of Missed Opportunities

When I first arrived in Atlanta to begin my graduate degree, people would speak enthusiastically about the many opportunities that Georgia Tech offers, but these comments were oftentimes undercut by phrases such as *"don't walk alone at night," "make sure you have pepper spray,"* and *"be aware of your surroundings at all times."* These warnings were uttered by classmates, faculty, as well as strangers. Atlanta is a big city, and it comes with big city problems, such as crime and violence. Being a woman and it being dark outside are conducive to higher chances of a crime being committed.

Imagine my disappointment when, every semester, I found that one of the most interesting classes to me was held at night, often ending at 10pm. While the campus does provide night shuttles, it can often take over an hour to be picked up. Furthermore, these sometimes drop you off slightly away from campus, leaving it to you to walk home safe. This schedule constraint has forced me to choose between the education I desire and my personal safety. I do believe this school, and others, should take responsibility for its students, especially the most vulnerable ones, and find a way to make class times more inclusive.

So my story is really an unstory, of lessons I did not learn, connections I did not make, and an education I did not receive because the system was not designed with an inclusive and feminist mindset, with someone like me in mind.

Learning by Example

My mom has always been a woman of few words. She does not have an opinion on everything but she is also not one to be messed with. A mother of three daughters, she has always encouraged us to be independent, and repeatedly reminded us that we should never let the men in our lives define us.

As a child, I could see that my mom was extremely proud of my cousin Roopa. Roopa is smart, talented, and one of the first women in our family to get a degree in medicine. When Roopa was about to complete her college degree, she had planned for getting her MD soon after. Her parents decided, however, that she did not need to study further as this might affect her chances of finding a "suitable" boy. They found a match for her, an engineer, and she married him right after graduating from college. My mom, who knew of Roopa's ambitions, casually mentioned them to the groom at the wedding.

A week after the wedding, Roopa's mom called and yelled at my mom for what she had said to the groom. Roopa's in-laws did not want their son to feel inadequate, and the woman of the house earning more than her husband was unacceptable to them. Later, we sat at the dining table, waiting for my mom to call and give Roopa an earful. Instead, my mom calmly asked, *"So? Any updates on*

the applications?" Who knew my mom had been supporting Roopa's career hopes behind the scenes, even with the challenge it might mean for her marriage? Fortunately, Roopa's husband was okay with earning less than his wife, and working to convince his parents that it was okay, too.

That was the day I understood my mom's brand of feminism. After the phone call with Roopa's mom, she turned to us and said, *"Your gender shouldn't stop you from being what you want to be. Your gender does not mean that you should be the one compromising."* My mother never needed to be *taught* what the word 'feminism' meant. In her own understated way, she knew how to be a feminist and an extremely good one at that.

A Third-Party Perspective

Being a man, I have not been unfortunate enough to experience sexism first-hand. However, I do feel that I have a perspective to share. One instance occurred during my time as an executive at a social enterprise that trained software freelancers across various emerging markets. For one of our programs, we were partnering with the World Bank to teach young Kosovar women programming skills towards supporting their autonomy and facilitating financial independence. This program was the most successful arm of the company, thanks in large part to our female program director, Sarah. She was responsible for implementing all aspects of this program, but her inputs were often dismissed in executive meetings. For instance, the leadership team failed to support her when she complained that one of the female teachers was often inattentive and tardy. She was hamstrung in her ability to remove this employee because the CEO and COO found the teacher attractive and did not want her gone. This inappropriate mentality, in my view, went even further when the CEO and COO would openly joke with those of us on the management team about how "hot" many of the Kosovar students were. Sarah was often required to organize student social events so that the CEO and COO, both married with children, could flirt with the students.

My time at this organization was eye-opening, watching a management team that was purportedly serving women behave instead like a boys' club. I learned a lot about the power dynamics of such situations, and while my support of Sarah ultimately led to a close and valued friendship, I wish I had been more vocal about the injustices I had seen. Eventually, I left the organization for a litany of reasons, this being one of them. I learned the importance of holding those in power accountable not only for their outward-facing goals and what they hope to accomplish, but also for the values they espouse in the process.

The Privilege to be Anything

For me, feminism is about the privilege to be anything—free of single stories, unapologetic for one's own stories, and respectful and celebratory of others'.

"I thought you were from HR!"

My friend works on machine learning at a big Silicon Valley company. I was meeting her one day and commented that I loved her new dress. She started laughing and shared an anecdote about the dress. She said that she had found it on sale online and been excited about purchasing it. When it arrived, she wore it to work the very next day with matching accessories and new shoes. As she walked into work, a colleague of hers looked up and exclaimed, *"Oh! It's you! You're so dressed up today, I thought you were from HR!"* While we both laughed out loud, we also silently acknowledged something else—the underlying sexism in this remark, and that we knew we were not alone in facing this reality. You see, formal uniforms may not be a requirement, but as women, us techies still have to abide by a dress code, and not one of our choosing; either our professional identity or our freedom to express ourselves must be sacrificed.

"The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar."
–Chimamanda Adichie

Let's Stop Clipping Each Other's Wings

I had a cosmopolitan-Indian upbringing, which taught me that boys and girls are equal in every way. I was a fairly rambunctious kid, unafraid to express myself in any way I wanted. I went on adventures with my friends, climbed trees, and played in the dirt. I would occasionally get in trouble with these friends, and when words failed, I would settle scores using fist fights. I would be scolded and disciplined, to no avail. One incident stands out, and is seared in my memory—one of the first 'talks' an adult had with me was when I was 6-7 years old. It was one of my favorite teachers who sat me down and told me to stop getting into physical altercations with boys, as *"boys grow up to be stronger than girls,"* and that I might hurt myself. I remember being confused and hurt. Although I realize now that she spoke out of concern, that conversation has molded me in ways that I cannot change. At all major crossroads in my life, I have had to stop and think hard about what driving forces led me there. My response to being told I could not do something was to go do it twice as hard, not back down. I responded to the conversation with my teacher by taking up boxing in school. I was the only girl to do so, becoming the sports captain after four years of representing my school at the state level, and, the highest honor of all, marching at the head of the school on our annual Sports Day.

This definition did not start out as centered around gender or race or class, though now I often think in terms of such intersections. It started out as lack of confidence, fear of being too much, and eventually letting go of these feelings to be who I am and to have the space to be who I am. When I think about how I learned to be feminist, how I learned to be okay with being myself, there are many immediate associations. But what highlighted for me the importance of embodiment and diverse forms of feminist expression is dance—its visceral melding of movement, emotions, and storytelling. I learned Kuchipudi, an Indian classical dance, for 14 years. It requires quite a bit of acting, in addition to pure rhythmic dance, and generally depicts stories from Hindu mythology.

I remember being taught to beat the ground hard with my feet (becoming unafraid to make noise), sharpen my movements, practice sequences until I was confident. I remember learning to play different characters, especially powerful goddesses and women in Hindu mythology, at first afraid to show the emotion that these roles called for, and then amazed that the emotions felt so powerful and resonant. The generosity of Lakshmi when she spontaneously showered golden gooseberries upon a women who gave away the last bit of food in her house as alms. The anger of Kali so intense that she was on the cusp of destroying the whole universe until her husband laid himself at her feet to calm her. The fatigue and frustration of Sita as she decided to return to the Earth, her mother, after a life so full of injustice at the hands of men.

Through these movements, stories, and embodiments, I learned that I can exist in the world, and that I can be anything, maybe generous, angry, or tired, without hint of apology. Over time, I learned to notice when others operated on the belief that people, particularly women, could not be anything, or perhaps only one thing or just a few things. And this informs my feminism—how can we give each other space to be ourselves? When does someone's self take away someone else's space to be themselves? Where is the balance? And who do we choose to ask these questions of?

And the Margins of Privilege

"Wow, you're a real professor!" "Are you really a professor?" "Are you the TA?" "You're the only female professor I know!" "As woman of color, be prepared..." But no, I was not prepared to hear these comments when I first became tenure-track faculty. And I was not prepared for the moment when a dear and cherished mentor said to me that I was *"special,"* because of my gender, ethnicity, and how rare the combination is in the field of computing.

I struggled to respond to such remarks, no less than I had struggled to respond some years ago, sitting in a room full of senior Google executives and newly awarded Anita Borg scholars, on being asked, *"What were your experiences [subtext: of marginalization] as a woman in STEM?"* I tried to answer, to recall a story of oppression, a story that the room was expecting to hear. I had always seen myself as privileged, and felt uncomfortable, disempowered even, at the seeming imposition that there must have been such a disadvantage, simply because I was a woman of color in computing.

Equality is a Right. Empathy is a Choice.

In Bengaluru, the front third of a public bus is generally reserved for women, while the back half is open to all. Yet, even when seats in the back are empty, women generally refrain from occupying them and prefer to stand instead. There seems to be an unspoken rule that the seats not reserved for women are intended to be used by men alone.

On my way home from college one day, the bus I was commuting in was packed to the limit. A seemingly tired laborer, with dust on his clothing, got on the bus. The only available seat was amid those reserved for women, and as no one else was taking it, he sat down. After a few stops, a couple of women got on and noticed him. One of them was quick to demand that he vacate the seat, while the other woman, who pointed out that they were going to leave the bus soon after, disagreed. The first woman was quick to offer her justification: *"This is a reserved seat and asking for it is my right. Don't you believe in equality?"* Her friend was silenced. This exchange made me reflect on how such instances could potentially foster negativity towards women acting in the interest of equality, as they understood it. What did that tired laborer experience? What would he remember from this incident, and how would he perceive similar instances in the future? What would onlookers have taken away? Asking for a seat is one thing, but displaying sheer lack of empathy towards others' discomfort under the label of "equality" is quite another. How might we pause and check that we do not fall prey to such indifference? That we do not undermine the very cause we are aiming to espouse?

I thought back to the class of 200 students I had taken on Digital Systems Design with only 9 other women, but no memories of feeling oppressed came to mind. The only somewhat relevant incident I could recall was when a male friend whose application to major in computer science had been rejected for the fifth time told me that I would have no problem getting in because *"I was a girl"*. To my naïve self at the time, being a girl in STEM became a clear advantage then, not a point of vulnerability.

Today, my understanding is slightly more nuanced, but it has taken some time, and many (unsolicited) reminders, that I belong to an under-represented group in computing. Ignorance *was* bliss, and made my journey a little easier. Today, I find myself alternate between a strong sense of injustice that the world is how it is (like when Damore's manifesto came out), and a stronger sense of determination that it must not stay this way. I realize I am on the margins, but a margin that unequivocally intersects with privilege. Every day, I aim to bring this privilege and marginality in dialog with one another. Ensuring that they work together, in tandem, to become drivers of change—that is what being a feminist/HCC researcher is all about, to me.

Honest, not Likable

"Her job is not to make herself likable, her job is to be her full self, a self that is honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people."

Of all Adichie's recommendations, this I find hardest—viewing myself "in the middle," in between worlds, each differently complicating my "full self." In the first world, I am Ecuadorian, Computer Science faculty, and responsible for helping future technology-makers engage in reflective, user-centered design to positively impact my/our country. Here I must be mindful of what user-centered design means for Ecuador and its people. In my other world, I am becoming an HCC researcher in the US, preparing to transfer what I learn back to my Ecuadorian world.

When I try to express my reality in Ecuador to my colleagues in the US, this reality does not always connect with others. Professors go blank when I say that Pokemon Go would not work in Ecuador because one would get robbed exposing one's phone in public, or when I argue that CS4All would only worsen global inequities. I have learned that I need to articulate my thoughts 'better,' craft my message so it is more 'likable,' and ultimately present my work so it makes sense to dominant groups. Is this fair? And where does it stop? When I return to Ecuador after my Ph.D., will I end up teaching my students what I learned in the US? Will I also remember to teach them to connect with their own lived realities, to make these new ideas their own, and not only impose my newly acquired Western knowledges on them?

How might we enable such transfer while also respecting and engaging learners' existing knowledges? And how, as learners, might we remember to respectfully engage while persevering to communicate our own knowledge? Perhaps by allowing them to be courageous in critiquing dominant ideas, and being brave enough to receive such critiques as well? For now, I will keep thinking about how to

"Madam, here is my number..."

"...call me if you ever need anything, if you ever face an emergency. Don't worry, I will not ask for your number, I will never call you." Our eyes met in the rearview mirror and I gave a tentative smile to the auto-rickshaw driver. During our ride, as I headed home from my field site in Delhi, we had bonded over our mutual connection to Bihar and a nostalgia for the simple courtesy afforded there, all too often missing in Delhi, where people have loud voices and even louder opinions. But even as I recorded his number, I knew that I would never place that call. The light in my eyes dimmed a little at this realization.

I felt ashamed and guilty for giving in to my fears around safety, for keeping a physical and emotional distance. And I felt angry at a society that made it difficult for a woman to have an entirely genuine interaction with a stranger. Increased reporting of cases of sexual assault have generated intense fear and suspicion, particularly directed towards male blue-collar workers. I have found, however, that these men are often migrant workers living away from home just to send their families enough so that they can afford decent lives. Many of these men have shown kindness to me as a young woman traveling alone. As more and more women in India (and elsewhere) begin to venture outside their homes and beyond, we need to acknowledge and honor these small yet large acts of kindness and noble intent. And as we resist the impositions of patriarchal behavior, we must recognize that they not only restrict women, but also place heavy burdens on men.

move across these dominant/non-dominant worlds without making myself 'likable,' but instead, truly being *"honest and aware of the equal humanity of other people."*

Being 'Pragmatic' About Motherhood

August 2014 brought two impactful changes into my life: I started a doctoral program and I became pregnant. I was excited to become a mother, but also terrified. How could I possibly be both an attentive mother and a successful doctoral student? Alongside many words of encouragement, I learned of the extra financial burdens on student parents. After taking the summer off without pay to have my child, I returned in Fall 2015 to continue to earn my graduate stipend. When it was time to enroll my son in the institute's daycare, I learned that it would cost me my entire stipend (in addition to the costs of adding a dependent to my health insurance). Discussing this with faculty and staff, I heard responses ranging from *"at least there are nursing rooms for mothers around campus"* to *"that's why I waited until I graduated to have kids."* I have since heard and read much 'pragmatic' advice that encourages female students in my position to be more assertive, speak up for their needs, and demand equal treatment. An alternative 'pragmatic' argument might be, however, that institutions are more competitive and attractive to the best candidates when they make structural changes to support women and parents. But this misses the deeper issue; honestly, I am tired of being 'pragmatic' because I should not have to be. Having a baby has made me increasingly aware that I live and move in a system that was fundamentally not designed for me (a female student) to succeed. 'Pragmatic' changes do not begin to address the fact that our institutions are embedded within structures that continually replicate systemic inequalities.

A Little Help, but not Enough

During a visit to the Mehrangarh fort in Jodhpur a few years ago, I found myself wandering, mildly conscious of the privilege that allowed me as an Indian woman to travel alone. As I peered out of a window, I heard an old man with a British accent point out that this was the only room in the women's quarters with a window overlooking the city. He introduced himself as a professor of anthropology and then asked, *"where are you from?"* Much too accustomed to being asked this on my travels alone, I offered my typical response. *"Of course you're from the South,"* he said. *"Your kings built hospitals and schools. The kings up here built forts like this one."* Annoyed, I soon realized I was chafing at mildly patronizing pokes, not thinking of the patrons far more responsible for molding both my privilege and my progress.

So it has been with my mentors. I have worked in empowering workplaces, in creative and management roles in technology environments, which would be out of reach without the mentorship I have been fortunate to receive. My mentors have been exceptionally supportive of my professional efforts. Most have been good men and others, good women, since women are rare in the technology sector

in India. However, even in positions of authority, I was never fully able to mobilize all the resources available to me. There have been times I would not seek help or advice because, as the lone woman, I did not want to be seen as the one quitting after a 22 hour-long workday. My default modus operandi was to keep going alone. Mentors helped. A good mentor, I have come to realize, is nurturing, and innately parental. But it is also up to me to ask without rancor, and to be at peace with the knowledge that sometimes this is plausible, and sometimes it is not.

Education: The Path of Emancipation

I grew up in Mexico City with three sisters and a brother. My father used to have conversations with me whenever we went on a long drive. Most of these conversations focused on the many disadvantages of being born a woman. He would explain to me that women lack any freedom since our role is to always take care of children. But for men, it is in their nature to run away from any responsibility. For my father, women always needed a man by their side to be respected, otherwise we would be perceived as weak. Being a woman, he would claim, means being condemned, and the only way to confront this situation was through education. For my father, the goal of education was to gain financial independence and, with that, agency as a woman. I never questioned him during these conversations.

As a child, the only thing I understood was that women were condemned and men were the reason for it. I started reading Simone de Beauvoir when I was 15, and read *The Woman Destroyed* many times. Reading this book was like seeing in writing the experiences of the women that surrounded me. I could see my mother, my grandmothers, right there in the characters of the book. However, reading my only book of Beauvoir, I understood that rather than being born women, we *become* women. We build ourselves.

Literature and education have been critical for me. The books I read while I was in Mexico taught me the existence of other ways of living, offering endless possibilities. The institutions I attended were a refuge, where I met the people and gained the tools that have continued to aid me in becoming something different, in carving out my own path.

On Being a Stealth Ally

Being a white male, I was originally reluctant to share my story here. I sensed that I should be centering the voices of women, not my own. But I also feared that my words and perspectives might be seen as distasteful, wrong, self-centered, or harmful to my colleagues, reviewers, and/or readers. I think my co-authors, female and male, were all braver. I still feel afraid to share, and acknowledge I may make mistakes and have much to learn, but I have been encouraged by these co-authors, who have embraced and supported one another, to contribute.

"The woman is what her husband does of her, he is the one who must shape her."
–Simone de Beauvoir

"Because that's the way we do it" is the most common response I heard to questions about gendered roles throughout my childhood. When I helped serve food or make tea in my grandparents' kitchen, I was praised, but my sister was expected to do so. I remember hearing family say, *"In my time, girls only left the house to go to their husband's house. Going to college was never an option then,"* when my sister left home for grad school. Then I remember hearing relatives ask my sister, *"Why did you wait until you finished your education to get married? Who will marry you now that you are a specialized doctor?"* They also maintained, *"It would be okay if she were a man but a woman has to consider raising a family."*
I heard these and similar things at various childhood family gatherings, constantly reinforcing my sense of opportunity as a man, downplaying the barriers my sister has had to break through before she could partake of the same opportunities. I started to question these relatives, asking *"Why do you say that to her but not me?"* and *"Why does that make sense anymore?"* Questioning bad logic is one thing, but questioning decades of cultural practices is quite another. Even as I persisted to argue, the conversations always shifted to how my generation failed to respect its elders, or to recognize that they always knew better. It became clear that we were fighting traditions, not logic, and I can only hope that showing empathy to the women in my life now, in my personal and professional circles, will pay dividends for posterity.

I am a feminist. I believe in social, political, and economic equality of the sexes/genders, and am also sympathetic to feminist critiques on race, capitalism, the environment, and ethics; these orientations are central to my identity and life goals. At times, I am unsure of how to appropriately manifest my feminism—I am a white male, which can create perceptions of "otherness" and complicity.

I fully support attempts to correct injustices, but it can be confusing—I remember attending a conference where two of my favorite thinkers and activists said there were *"too many white male voices,"* just before I was about to present my work with marginalized groups. Because of my uneasiness about my place in the community, I often prefer to operate in the background, as a stealth ally if you will. However, in another sense, I do not feel that I am a mere ally as the goals of feminism are of utmost importance to me. This is not just someone else's cause, but also my own. Whether you are wary of another white male voice or fully embrace it, I stand with you and I will do my best to support feminism in its many shades.

And a Proactive One

Growing up as the son of a single mother and first-generation immigrant, I witnessed first-hand how Western society mistreats and devalues women of color. When I entered the workforce, I saw the same patriarchal behaviors and practices continue to deny women of color in tech the resources and opportunities they rightly deserve. But those are *their* stories; they are not mine to tell. I have only benefited from my identity as a straight, cisgender male.

Through my HCC education, however, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with feminist thought. I became acutely aware of how much of our world is designed through a male gaze, from the perpetuation of assumed gender roles to the complete oversight of women users and active gatekeeping of "male spaces." Despite our obsession with user-centered design, we must continually question our notions of progress, and acknowledge that we still systematically neglect those on the margins of use, many of whom also find themselves in marginalized social groups.

And yet I remain hesitant to adopt labels of "feminist" and "ally" for myself, which demand that I interrogate my own relationship with those terms. I am conscious of the role that men play in the commodification of feminism and the adoption of feminist messaging for capitalist efforts, such as in the case of the HeForShe banners on Chase ATMs. So I question who ultimately benefits from the attribution of such labels and whether it makes more sense to let support be evidenced by a consistent track record of action rather than self-assignment of allyship. I also know that I have failed women in my life countless times, and will continue to make mistakes. I must hold myself accountable for these failures and learn from them. It is currently unclear to me where the boundaries of allyship exist in relation to these mistakes. As I learn, I aim to remain steadfast in my support of women and receptive to criticism.

"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity…."
–Chimamanda Adichie

CONCLUSION

Our stories speak for themselves, as they highlight that HCC comprises many different shades of feminism, rooted in diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. These shades are by no means perfect, whatever perfection might mean, nor are they adequate when seen in isolation and a single moment in time. However, when placed along a continuum of varying degrees of feminist expression, they aspire to contribute towards a future that is different, equitable, and just—whether it is by renewing attention to age-old structures of oppression or looking at their evolution to define feminism for ourselves, also developing our own forms of resistance and solidarity in response to these structures.

Our hope is that these stories above will inspire our readers, whatever be their role within HCC, to reflect on their own backgrounds and experiences, towards an understanding of the shades of feminism that they bring to the discipline to contribute to its holistic growth. May they similarly be drawn to confront the expectations of tradition, combat the more and less overt institutional barriers that challenge education, and embrace an activistic stance when it comes to concerns such as safety or maternity, whether it is through embracing strands of radical feminism, reinforcing liberal feminist thought, other feminisms, or a blend of several. As Adichie emphasizes, *"Stories matter. Many stories matter."* We trust that our readers will see value in the sharing and partaking of these stories, these shades of feminism, and find their way to expressions of their own.

Commentary

For alt.chi paper
Bringing Shades of Feminism To Human-Centered Computing

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I very much enjoyed reading this paper, and found it to be deeply moving – the stories it contains about different experiences of gender, different paths to feminist values, and different approaches to the integration of those values into the spaces the authors' inhabit. We need more works like this, and we need more expressions of feminism.

At the same time, it seemed as though the range of feminisms expressed – at least in the paper as it was originally written (I appreciate it may have been changed since my review) – was narrow. The framing of the paper is very radical, pointing to hooks, Haraway, Mohandy, Ahmed. There is language of solidarity; language of resistance. This radical breadth was not met by the stories as they were written. hooks, for example, argues her feminism is fighting against the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy": only one of the narratives mentions neoliberalism or capitalism as a component of oppression. Mohandy, similarly, is explicitly anti-capitalist and a frequent critic of both the "corporate university" and universalist statements about the nature of gender - so it is odd to see a list of recommendations that implicitly assume the hiring and assistance of women to be a feminist act, the legitimacy and universality of the gender binary, and the distinction between "allies" to feminism and "women". To me, albeit from outside, the point of Mohanty (and Ahmed's) work is precisely that both gender and feminism are more complex than an oppositional binary.

This is not a call to dismiss these stories; these are valid by dint of being authentic. This is simply a call for readers, and authors, to wrestle with the discomforting – to consider precisely that "living a feminist life" goes beyond resolving localised or individual concerns, and involves overturning not just our own oppressions but the cultural and structural systems that lock them in place for many more people.