UX is Social Change:
The Feminist Impact of User Experience Work

Jennifer DeJonghe, Tony Hirt, Christine Larson, & Amy Luedtke
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Usability vs UX

**Usability:** Usability answers the question, “Can the user accomplish their goal?” – Joyce Lee

**User experience (UX):** your product doesn’t define a user’s experience. That person’s own behavior, attitudes, and emotions do. Thus, user experience is a feeling. – Matt Rintoul
UX Work

“"User experience" encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products.”

- Don Norman and Jakob Nielsen Nielsen Norman Group

“Most of our users' experience of the library occurs online and through software regardless of whether the user is physically present in the library.”

- Cody Hanson (Libraries are Software)
Usability testing

- Methods vary, but at core is observing users as they use your website
- One of a variety of tools and measures to evaluate your website
- Small number of tests yield results
- User Experience testing yields a mix of qualitative and quantitative data
A LANDSCAPE OF USER RESEARCH METHODS

BEHAVIORAL
- Eyetracking
- Usability Benchmarking (in lab)
- Usability Lab Studies
- Moderated Remote Usability Studies
- Ethnographic Field Studies
- Unmoderated Remote Panel Studies
- Unmoderated UX Studies
- True Intent Studies

ATTITUdINAL
- Participatory Design
- Focus Groups
- Interviews
- Concept Testing
- Diary/Camera Studies
- Customer Feedback
- Desirability Studies
- Card Sorting
- Intercept Surveys
- Email Surveys

QUALITATIVE (DIRECT)

QUANTITATIVE (INDIRECT)

KEY FOR CONTEXT OF PRODUCT USE DURING DATA COLLECTION
- Natural use of product
- Scripted (often lab-based) use of product
- De-contextualized / not using product
- Combination / hybrid
Hennepin County Library

HCL is a public library system serving the city of Minneapolis and surrounding communities:

- forty-one libraries
- online resources
- outreach service

Our patrons and users are comprised of a diverse population of 1.2 million Hennepin County residents in an area of 611 square miles.

www.hclib.org
Metropolitan State University

11,505 total students

6,220 full-year equivalent (2015–2016)

90% undergraduate students

43% students of color

2% international students

32 = average age of students

15–83 = age range of students

www.metrostate.edu/library
Testing at Our Two Libraries

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Qualitative and Quantitative, often inform each other
Why Do Usability Testing?

- Test new features or areas in development
- Increase awareness of issues or possible areas of development, as well as to help prioritize known issues or features
- Understand your website from the perspective of the user
Why be (a) Feminist?

Milo, age 7    Photo by J.DeJonghe
“... a major reason Dewey wanted women to enter the field was because he felt women were ideal for the repetitiveness of library work and "didn't cause trouble."

(Ashley McAllister for Bitch Media)
Because the Patriarchy Won’t Smash Itself

https://www.flickr.com/photos/la_bretagne_a_paris/8886683738
What is a feminist librarian/library worker?

Photo: Wikimedia

Photo: http://www.sanfordberman.org/

Photo: Wikimedia
Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general - but to choose to use the VAGUE expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender.

It would be a way of pretending that it was not WOMEN who have, for centuries, been excluded.

It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women. That the problem was not about being human, but specifically about being a FEMALE HUMAN.
Feminist Lenses for UX

Photo by J.DeJonghe
Some helpful feminist theories

Ethic of care = “disciplined empathy”

Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges”

“Epistemological trouble-making is itself a central form of feminist practice.”

Harrison, Sengers, & Tatar

bell hooks’ feminist pedagogy

Photo: Peter Cooper
Feminism without intersecionality is white supremacy.
Why we might need some intersectionality...

Data from: http://dpeafcio.org/programs-publications/issue-fact-sheets/library-workers-facts-figures/

Data from: http://ladieshatux.com/do-men-really-dominate-the-field-of-ux/
“Feminism could also help us engaging with difficult dilemmas such as the following: How do we simultaneously serve real-world computing needs and avoid perpetuating the marginalization of women and indeed any group in technology? It would seem that serving existing needs—the traditional approach to HCI—is conservative and perpetuates the status quo. Conversely, an activist stance is problematic because it seems to privilege the social values of the designer.”

Shaowen Bardzell on Feminist HCI
Is UX Work Feminist?

https://openclipart.org/detail/271564/girl-power
Traditional Feminine Behaviors* and UX Work

● Caring and nurturing
  ○ Care about our users enough to do UX work

● Hospitality
  ○ Make users feel comfortable and welcomed, especially during testing

● Empathy
  ○ Main goal of UX is to understand our users

● Listening
  ○ User feedback is central to UX

● Humility (“Playing stupid”)
  ○ Pretend we don’t know so users will tell/show us

● Presentation (“Putting on a good show”)
  ○ “Selling” UX to others in tech and library fields

*(Let's not try to untangle why/how these behaviors are “feminine” right now—see us at Happy Hour)*
Does utilizing and promoting “feminine” qualities in UX work promote or hinder feminism?

Can it do both?
Anti-Feminist Outcomes:

- Reinforce stereotypes
  - Perpetuate gender stereotypes
  - Limit women: UX is the only realm for women in the tech world

- Devalue these behaviors and UX because they are “feminine”
  - UX is Girlie
Feminist Outcomes

Embracing these feminine behaviors can improve UX work:

- Promoting worthwhile values that value all genders
- Put users at the center of our work in a more meaningful way
- Foster radical inclusivity in UX that more deeply challenges power imbalances
Caring for Users
= Advocating for and with Users

Feminist UX challenges Patriarchal Paternalism

UX centers the user as expert, undermines condescending “we’re the Professionals/Experts and we know best” attitude

Not “playing stupid” but not “playing expert”
Feminist UX Honors Users’ Own Agency

Users are the heroes of their journeys
—Matt Edwards

Patrons have knowledge that we don’t. They are the only ones who know their experiences; we need to understand what works best for them.
Feminist authors ... have stressed the need to base such evaluation on the experience of those who are at the receiving end of the technology. They have also drawn attention to the overbearing role of experts in the lives of those who, like many women, have no claim to certified expertise because most of their knowledge is not separated from their experience.

- Ursula Franklin, *The Real World of Technology*
Making UX More Feminist

Increase participant diversity
Focus Group at Metro
Feminist UX is Inclusive

“Engagement demands inclusivity”

—Matt Edwards
Making UX More Feminist

Avoid assumptions

Ahead of #MothersDay, how would you explain Spotify to your mom? There could be free Spotify Premium in it for her!

“IT’s music that’s in the cloud... no, not that kind of cloud...”
User Personas & User Journey Mapping at Metro

Photo by Rich Harrison
Drawing by Diane DeRosier
FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE IS A NECESSARY PART OF UNLEARNING OPPRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

http://feministing.com/2015/10/19/privilege-and-what-it-means-to-have-it/
Card Sorting at Metro

Results link

Participant link
Making UX More Feminist

“Stress cases” not “edge cases”
Our patrons are **not** broken.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/epublicist/3546059144
Testing for Mobile at Metro

Mobile Usage

- Desktop: 90.4%
- Mobile: 7.4%
- Tablet: 2.2%
Making UX More Feminist

Cultivate compassion

“Compassion is more than being nice. It's accepting people as they come in—in all their pain, with all their challenges—and not just feeling empathy toward them, but doing something with that empathy.”

— Design for Real Life, Sara Wachter-Boettcher and Eric Meyer
UX changes us
No wrong doors
"We need to exercise a disciplined empathy."

Sumana Harihareswara “User Experience is a Social Justice Issue”


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