

# Feminist Voices about Ecological Issues in HCI

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## ABSTRACT

Even though issues such as climate change, pollution, and declining biodiversity impact us all, people with historically disenfranchised and socio-politically marginalized (HDSM) identities often bear the harsher brunt of ecological crises and suffer disproportionately. There is a need for listening to the voices of people with intersecting HDSM identities in relation to feminist engagements with ecological issues as applicable to HCI and IxD research and practice. Building upon and braiding together two thriving HCI discourses on feminism and environmental sustainability, we invite submissions from researchers, designers, educators, and activists interested in the intersections of feminist and ecological issues with a priority towards the well-being of people with HDSM identities. Converging feminist concerns on power, voice, and public discourse through this online workshop distributed across three time-zones, we hope to provide a forum for contemporary feminist voices as agents of change while engaging with ecological issues through an intersectional feminist orientation.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Interaction design theory, concepts and paradigms**; *Human computer interaction (HCI)*; • **Applied computing** → *Arts and humanities*.

## KEYWORDS

Feminism, voice, ecology, marginalization, sustainability

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## 1 BACKGROUND

This workshop is rooted in the awareness of historical misogynistic injustices concerning voices of women in public discourses and reaches beyond women towards intersectional dialogues among feminist voices that prioritize the well-being of people with historically disenfranchised and socio-politically marginalized (henceforth referred as HDSM) identities with respect to ecological issues. Classicist and feminist Mary Beard critically examines Western cultural assumptions about voices of women in public discourses and their historical relationship with power. Beard’s incisive critique about misogyny in Western history points out two discursive instances where women’s voices are publicly admissible and recognized: first, “women are allowed to speak out as victims and as martyrs, usually to preface their own death”, and second, “women may in extreme circumstances publicly defend their own sectional interests, but not speak for men or the community as a whole” [10]. Beard argues that the long history of misogyny embedded in Western civilization continues to bear consequences for contemporary public discourses where we “find the same areas of licence for women to talk publicly, whether in support of their own sectional interests, or to parade their victimhood” [10]. To address such historical misogynistic injustices, there is a necessity for recognizing and amplifying women’s voices on communal concerns and ecological issues through contemporary public discursive practices such as policy making, theory building, research knowledge production, philosophy, civic participation, social justice activism, design innovation, and art. Further, in the preface to a collected

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volume of feminist responses to environmental sustainability issues, anthropologist Lourdes Arizpe underscores that “a feminist perspective that looks at women not as victims but as agents of change has strong commonalities with other movements seeking a more sustainable future for humanity” [6]. A historical awareness of misogyny then serves as a necessary preface, useful critical lens, and background motivation for contemporary feminist dialogues that aim to foreground people with HDSM identities’ voices on communal concerns and situate them as agents of change with respect to ecological issues in public discourses. Converging feminist concerns on power, voice, and public discourse, this workshop has two interrelated aims scoped with respect to the field of Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Interaction Design (IxD) domains of application.

- First, to provide a forum for sharing, listening, understanding, and learning from contemporary feminist voices as agents of change in various public roles (e.g. researchers, activists, educators, students, designers, policy makers, artists, philosophers, community partners, administrators, citizens, leaders, volunteers, etc.) while engaging with various ecological issues with the goal of leveraging existing strengths and developing new strategies.
- Second, to critically engage with ecological issues through an intersectional feminist orientation that prioritizes the well-being of people with HDSM identities towards the goal of bolstering existing solidarities and sparking new alliances among feminists across diverse contexts.

We readily acknowledge that contemporary feminist concerns are diverse, at times even conflicting, and must expand beyond sexism and gender inequities to include other forms of intersectional injustices such as racism, religious intolerance, casteism, homophobia, transphobia, classicism, colonialism, ethnocentrism, ageism, ableism, and speciesism, to name a few. Ecological feminist Karen J. Warren argues for beginning with gender as a category of analysis “not because gender oppression is more important than other forms of oppression (but) because a focus on “women” reveals important features of interconnected systems of human domination” [59, p. 2]. Environmental activist and ecological feminist Vandana Shiva draws commonality between gendered oppression in patriarchal societies and environmental oppression manifested as capitalistic monocultures that result in decline of biodiversity [52]. Shiva clarifies the position of women in capitalistic monocultures as being vulnerable to exploitation but also particularly placed to conserve biodiversity as agents of change [52]. Proposing woman-centered design approach for HCI, Teresa Almeida and colleagues emphasise that “designing for and with women should not be regarded as ghettoizing, but instead as critical to improving women’s experiences in bodily transactions, choices, rights, and access to and in health and care” [5]. A scope on gender, power, and intersectional ecological injustices must also consider and include a “multiplicity of gender” [33], as exemplified in Szu-Yu (Cyn) Liu’s work with queer farmers [37] and more broadly draw from queer and trans perspectives in HCI research [2, 32, 57]. Queer practices such as “dirty resilience aim to bring awareness to the “quagmire of the present” while simultaneously maintaining hope for and insisting

on creating better collective futures in relation to ecological issues” [29].

Even though ecological issues such as climate change, pollution, and declining biodiversity affect us all, we are all not affected equally. People with intersecting HDSM identities face unfair exposure to life-threatening risks, bear the harsher brunt of ecological crises, suffer economic disparities, experience disproportionate harms, and have fewer rights and resources to defend themselves. Ann Light in conversation with Jaz Hee-jeong Choi notes: “Every current injustice is going to be exacerbated by climate change—the Global South being hardest hit, and those in poverty being the most vulnerable as their means of livelihood are threatened” [18]. Concerns of people with intersecting HDSM identities are largely ignored in public discourses on ecological issues, their lives are commodified and continually exploited, existence is pawned as expendable, and deaths are chalked up as casualties. The seductive rhetoric of designing technology for sustainable development can divert attention from asking what is sustained, at whose expense, and who can afford or has access to such technologies. This workshop reaches towards intersectional dialogues among feminist voices that prioritize the well-being of people with HDSM identities with respect to ecological issues in HCI.

Recently, the topic of intersectionality has received increased attention from [24, 50, 61] and generated debates among [17, 47, 48] HCI researchers interested in designing technology to address various social justice related issues. “Using intersectionality to understand the history of oppression and discrimination among those who have traditionally been underserved can help us develop approaches to design that support equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice for marginalised and disenfranchised individuals” [24]. Critical engagement with intersecting axes of injustices without reducing and freezing people as victims is a complex challenge that warrants thoughtful and creative responses. We build upon bell hooks’ notion of marginality as “much more than a site of deprivation [that] is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance, a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives [that] offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” [27]. Jane G. Mowat hypothesizes that “an examination of marginalisation through the lens of resilience enables us to arrive at a much more nuanced and complex understanding of marginalisation and how it may be experienced, integrating the macro and micro at the level of the institution and individual perception, whilst also taking account of the political context” [45]. Examining design of technology beyond the accumulation of wealth and towards community-based participatory health, Christina Harrington argues “there are contributions to design that stem from looking at the ways in which those at the forgotten margins preserve their well-being and sense of community” and proposes that “one way to shift from damage-centered research would be to seek out how individuals frame their community narrative and elevate those stories” [26].

There is a need for listening to the voices, narratives, experiences, and stories of people with HDSM identities as agents of change in relation to feminist engagements with ecological sustainability. Cindy Moore asserts that voice is important for feminists since

it “seems to capture the connections between speaking, writing, bodily expression, and subjectivity so well” and posits “a metaphor like voice can successfully imply both the stable, enduring qualities and the endlessly changing nature of the self(s) and truth(s) we experience” [44]. Building upon and braiding together two thriving HCI research discourses on feminism and environmental sustainability through this workshop, we invite feminist voices about ecological issues towards intersectional dialogues that prioritize the well-being of people with HDSM identities as applicable to HCI and IxD research and practice. There have been several exciting developments in feminist research over the past decade since the publication of Shaowen Bardzell’s ‘Feminist HCI’ [8], which marks a watershed moment consolidating existing feminist work, outlining an agenda for future work, and establishing feminism as a natural ally to interaction design. Feminist responses towards environmental sustainability are not only necessary but already underway and gaining traction among HCI researchers. Situating this workshop in relevance to existing works, we trace a few discursive instances below to demonstrate the necessity for intersectional dialogues among feminist voices about ecological issues in HCI.

- Bardzell explores shared concerns between Feminist HCI and Sustainable Interaction Design in a conversation with Blevins and observes that feminism can serve “as a potential counterpoint to “dualistic and hierarchical modes of thinking” that set humankind in opposition to nature” [9].
- Examining ecological politics and the political economy of environmentalism, Paul Dourish builds on the work of environmental historian William Cronon and draws attention to ‘ideological framing of wilderness’ that includes “the gender issues associated with the image of the rugged masculinity involved in taming “virgin” nature, the problems of habitation by indigenous peoples, and the issues of the supernatural associated with the encounter with wilderness” [22].
- Panelists of the CHI 2012 panel on ‘Social Sustainability’ identify gender equity, poverty reduction, and world peace as social equity issues that Sustainable HCI must engage with moving forward [13].
- Building upon Bardzell’s feminist work, Gopinath Kannabiran proposes “ecofeminism as a viable, beneficial, and necessary perspective for Sustainable HCI in order to better identify, understand, and effectively engage with the ‘interconnections’ among various aspects of ecological issues within HCI” [28].
- Amanda Menking and Ingrid Erickson use the feminist lens of ‘emotional labor’ to tease out how “gender gap may relate to prevailing feeling rules or participation strategies” in Wikipedia and advance a “theory of emotion work for understanding mediated social situations” [43].
- Exploring entanglements between Participatory Design and feminism, Mariacristina Sciannamblo and colleagues argue “cultivating the inseparability between knowledge-making and world-making practices is a promising and primary concern for any design research committed to fostering alternative futures” [51].
- Szu-Yu (Cyn) Liu and colleagues study alternative farming practices for sustainable agriculture practiced by ‘Land Dykes’ (a term coined by American eco-feminists in the 1970s), six feminist queer farmers who follow principles of collective cooperation in order to create a more community-based agriculture and engage in symbiotic encounters with companion species [37].
- Drawing on scholars from feminist technoscience and posthumanism (such as [1, 11, 25, 58]), design researchers in HCI has framed sustainability towards human-nonhuman kinship, such as Jen Liu’s work on design for collaborative survival [35] and race in agriculture [36], and Szu-Yu (Cyn) Liu’s work on air quality data [38] and noticing as a design method [39]. This thread is more broadly reflected in Bardzell et al. ideological and methodological implication: “HCI designers should factor land usage and interspecies relations into any consideration of IT development and deployment” [7].
- Rafaella Eleutério and Frederick Van Amstel formulate feminist coalitions as concerned with matters of care and postulate that such “coalitions with diverse groups of people who are aware of their historical oppressions, and eager to fight them through diverse ways of relating and solidarity, may serve as a more equitable productive basis for Participatory Design’s developments on designing coalitions” [46].

## 2 WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Through this workshop, we aim to bring together feminist voices that prioritize the well-being of people with HDSM identities reaching towards intersectional dialogues about ecological issues in HCI. “The phrase “the personal is political” stemmed from feminist consciousness-raising in the 1960s and 1970s, summing up the idea that individual problems, even those considered personal, are the product of larger social forces and therefore are political issues” [60]. We position our workshop as a critical response towards the recent transition within Sustainable HCI discourse from focusing on the design of technologies for individual behaviour change [12, 21] towards addressing larger scalar issues which are entangled with cultural and political contexts [22], non-functional requirements [49], and shared everyday practices [23]. Our workshop intends to provide a forum for sharing, listening, understanding, and learning from contemporary feminist voices as agents of change while intersectionally engaging with various ecological issues in HCI with the goal of leveraging existing strengths and developing new strategies. Taking inspiration from the feminist tradition of consciousness raising, we invite feminists to share, listen and learn from the voices of other feminists, addressing and attending to our community’s concerns, critical reflections, and possible practices of resilience, resistance and care. Creating commons of knowledge rather than individual project presentations, best practices and technological solutions, we wish to ‘stay with the trouble’, as inspired by Donna Haraway [25]. By recognizing feminist voices as agents of change with respect to ecological issues in HCI, we hope to catalogue strategies, strengths, challenges, and support systems that are necessary for feminists to do their work. We intend this workshop as a necessary foundation for intersectionally addressing ecological issues in HCI that is built on voicing and listening to feminists as an expression of solidarity. This necessitates the interrelation of differing scales - micro and macro, long-term projects, and unconventional

collaborations among various stakeholders. Converging feminist concerns on power, voice, and public discourse, our workshop is one step towards the long-term goal of sparking new alliances, nurturing existing collaborations, and promoting cross-fertilization of ideas and practices to collectively respond to interconnected ecological crises.

This workshop will be hosted online as two half-day workshops. The first half-day will be organized as three parallel sessions throughout three different time zones to invite broader participation. We will host max 10 participants in each of the following time zones: CST – Central Daylight Time (New Orleans), CEST – Central European Summer Time, and AEST – Australian Eastern Standard Time. These three sessions will be hosted by different co-organizers for three different groups of participants. Following these three sessions, the co-organizers will host a final common half-day workshop (in CEST time zone) where all participants are invited in to a reflective session, in which the co-organizers present overarching themes throughout the separate sub-sessions and consider ways forward. Participants are invited to be creative in their submissions for the workshop. We accept submissions in various formats, including video/audio recordings (max 5 min) such as spoken word or other feminist oral traditions, evocative visual artifacts such as collage, photography, graphic stories, and illustrations, as well as position papers (max 6 pages).

### 3 ORGANIZERS

Workshop organizers are transnational HCI researchers doing intersectional feminist work across cultural contexts on various ecological issues. As Ania Loomba and Ritty Lukose point out, “it is only in the vibrant interaction between such specificities and differences on the one hand, and shared desires and endeavors on the other, that feminist futures can be imagined” [40]. Majority of organizers also have prior experience running workshops at CHI and other similar HCI venues.

- (1) Marie Louise Juul Søndergaard is a feminist, interaction designer, and postdoctoral researcher at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway. She explores feminist and speculative design of digital technologies for health and wellbeing [55, 56]. Marie Louise has co-organized workshops at CHI and DIS on topics of women’s health, sexuality, futures, and more-than-human design and AI. Her recent practice engages with the materiality of the human body and its entanglement with socio-technical-environmental ecologies.
- (2) Gopinaath Kannabiran is an ecofeminist, design educator, HCI researcher, and sexual rights activist currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark. His research interests include Design for Sexual Wellbeing [30, 31] and Ecofeminism inspired HCI for addressing ecological issues [28]. He has previous experience organizing workshops at CHI and has served as a committee member for the Diversity and Inclusion Lunch at past CHI (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) and TEI (2019) conferences.
- (3) Simran Chopra is an ecofeminist, food equity activist, HCI researcher, interaction designer and PhD candidate in Computer and Information Sciences at Northumbria University in the United Kingdom. She is interested in ecofeminist futures

[19] and her research explores participatory speculative design as an approach to look at community-led bottom-up food systems in cities [20]. Her prior work has focused on sustainability, critical design and discourse of technology use in everyday life through art, design and social action.

- (4) Nadia Campo Woytuk is a PhD student in Interaction Design at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. Her work focuses on critical and intersectional feminist design of technologies for menstrual health and intimate care, such as [14] and [15]. She has lead and contributed to projects involving new media art, textiles, software art, and postcolonial computing. She is currently interested in ecofeminist framings of the body and the social and environmental ecologies it entangles.
- (5) Dilrukshi Gamage is a feminist, leading a national not for profit organization "Diversity Collective" that address gender gaps, diversity and inclusion in Tech and BPO sector in Sri Lanka. She is a postdoctoral researcher at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan. She has prior experience organizing CHI workshops[16], engaged with United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in the context of HCI across borders[34], and also lead the SIGCHI Colombo chapter in Sri Lanka.
- (6) Ebtisam Alabdulqader is an Assistant Professor in the Information Technology Department at King Saud University (KSU). She has a PhD in digital health interaction design from Newcastle University, UK, and she is the founder of the ArabHCI community. Her current research focuses on HCI aspects of social computing, interaction design, CSCW and community-driven research. Ebtisam is an active member of SIGCHI community along with diversity and inclusion meetings. She is also experienced in organising CHI workshops on topics of feminist HCI, CHI Inclusion, CHIveristy, Islamic HCI, and ArabHCI [3, 4].
- (7) Heather McKinnon is a Lecturer in Interaction Design at the Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Her research interests lie in the cross section of Sustainable IxD, More-than-Human design, and Design Futuring. She has a PhD in interaction design and urban informatics, which explored cultures of resource waste and frugality within everyday domestic life in urban and regional areas of Australia. Her design research has explored how cultural values of ecological consciousness and resource sufficiency - living well on less - are learned, experienced and passed on to others [41, 42].
- (8) Heike Winschiers-Theophilus is a Professor in the Computer Science Department at Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). Her research concentrates on co-designing technologies with indigenous and marginalized communities as a means to provide alternative learning ecologies for communities and academics; foster socio-economic agency of marginalized; enrich established research paradigms with indigenous and marginal knowledges, and generate inclusive tech innovations. She is experienced in facilitating (on-line) workshops at international conferences, such as CHI, promoting pluriversality and transcultural co-design [53, 54].

- (9) Shaowen Bardzell is a Professor of Information Sciences and Technology in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at the Pennsylvania State University. Her recent research foci include care ethics and feminist utopian perspectives on IT, research through design, women's health, posthumanist approaches to sustainable design, computational agriculture and food justice, and cultural and creative industries in Asia. She has organized several workshops at CHI, DIS, CSCW, NordiCHI, Aarhus Conference, British HCI, PDC, EPIC, and ACE on feminism, gender, sexuality, and emancipatory politics.

#### 4 WEBSITE

To communicate and announce the workshop, the organizers will create a website with information about the workshop, important dates, schedule, and questions we invite participants to reflect upon prior to the workshop. Accepted participants' position statements will be made available on the website, if agreed by the participants, in order for the participants to get introduced to each other and the conversation to start prior to the workshop. The website link is: [www.feministecologies.com](http://www.feministecologies.com)

#### 5 PRE-WORKSHOP PLANS

The co-organizers will distribute and share the "Call for Participation" through HCI email lists and their professional and personal networks. We will also send out direct email invitations to researchers and practitioners working on topics related to the workshop. We aim for a diverse representation in participants across contexts. Participants will be selected based on their submission's relevance to the theme, including feminist voices addressing ecological issues, intersectional approaches in research and practice, and foregrounding the wellbeing of people with HDSM identities while designing technologies. We aim to accept up to 30 participants to be divided into three parallel workshop sessions. Accepted participants will be invited to reflect upon the following questions prior to the workshop:

- What is your current role as agent of change in your work?
- What are your success stories?
- What are your challenges?
- What do you need support with?

The organizers will share their own responses to these questions on the website prior to the workshop as an invitation for others to share. We intend the above questions to be prompts for reflection and to hold space for generous sharing, reaffirming hope, and fostering caring support within our community. Prior to the workshop, the organizers will contact accepted participants to ask which timezone they prefer to participate from, in order to distribute the group into three *parallel* sessions. We will orientate ourselves in the participants' position statements to curate the sessions around common themes, while going through the workshop activities.

#### 6 VIRTUAL-ONLY

The workshop will consist of two parts. The first part will be three subgroup on-line workshops of 2-3 hours in three different timezones (CST, CEST, and AEST) with different participants, in which the three activities described below will be carried out. This first

part will be carried out in the weeks prior to the CHI 2022 conference. The second part of the workshop will be organized during the CHI conference and will also be hosted online (in CEST timezone). In this 2-3 hour session the timezone subgroups will present the essence of their workshop as a point of departure to discuss the way forward. The creation of three timezone subgroups ensures that no person is excluded on the basis of an "impossible timing" as we have experienced during past on-line events.

#### 7 WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

- (1) Meaning-Making Activity: To start the conversation and get to know each other, we invite the participants to share (on a collective platform such as Miro) a media (picture, video, audio) of an object that is meaningful to them in their current and/or changing ecology. It can be a piece of fiction (novel, movie, etc), an artefact, a heirloom, a technology, a plant, etc. This object will act as a conversation piece inviting storytelling and acts of listening and responding. As a speculative activity, we will invite participants to send this object 50 years into the future, to the year of 2072, with an added tag with a short description of 50 words. The purpose of the activity is to make sense of what is considered meaningful today and what we as a collective want to bring forward into the future; considering the needs of today and tomorrow.
- (2) Critical Inquiry Activity: In the second activity, we ask participants to choose an existing technology or technology-mediated practice, and critique it through an intersectional feminist lens prioritizing the well-being of people with HDSM identities with respect to ecological issues. Through an affirmative practice of critique, we will respond to these prompts: "What do feminists have to offer for addressing ecological issues in HCI?" and "What makes a feminist technology ecologically sustainable?"
- (3) Generative Design Activity: The third activity brings the meaning-making and critical inquiry of the first two exercises into a generative task of designing an ecologically responsible feminist social robot. Inspired by the successful outcomes of this exercise as carried out in previous workshops [53, 54], we use this exercise to derive values and concerns of feminists as agents of change about what is desirable for ecologically responsible future technologies.

#### 8 POST-WORKSHOP PLANS

After the workshop, we will write an entry to ACM interactions magazine summarizing the strategies and concerns of feminist HCI researchers working on ecological issues, based on workshop activities. Depending on interest among workshop participants, we will propose and co-edit an ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (ToCHI) Special Issue on theme of "Feminist Responses Towards Ecological Issues in HCI". These two activities are proposed to support further community-building within our academic discipline as well as evolving the research in our discipline in response to ecological crises. If the workshop attracts enough participants and proves to be successful, we intend to submit a follow-up workshop at CHI 2023 to continue this intersectional

work, potentially in person and in engagement with a local ecologically sustainable community or people with HDSM identities on the site of the conference.

## 9 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Converging feminist concerns on power, voice, and public discourse, we invite submissions from researchers, designers, educators, and activists interested in the intersections of feminist and ecological issues as applicable to HCI. Our online workshop has two goals: 1) to provide a forum for contemporary feminist voices as agents of change while engaging with various ecological issues, and 2) to critically engage with ecological issues through an intersectional feminist orientation that prioritizes the well-being of people with historically disenfranchised and socio-politically marginalized (HDSM) identities. This online workshop will be scheduled into three parallel sessions across three time zones, and a final reflective session. Submissions should address and will be selected based on relevance to the following broad workshop themes: feminist voices as agents of change addressing ecological issues in HCI, intersectional approaches to research and practice, and foregrounding the wellbeing of people with HDSM identities. We welcome submissions in various formats, including video/audio recordings (max 5 min) such as spoken word or other feminist oral traditions, evocative visual artifacts such as collage, photography, graphic stories, and illustrations, as well as position papers (max 6 pages) including a brief bio of applicant(s). Submissions should be sent to [feministecologies@gmail.com](mailto:feministecologies@gmail.com) with the subject "Feminist Ecologies CHI Workshop". Accepted papers and media will be published to the workshop website [www.feministecologies.com](http://www.feministecologies.com). Please note that at least one author of each accepted submission should attend the workshop and all participants must register for both the workshop and for at least one day of the conference.

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