Equity and Inclusion: The Next Ten Years

Deborah Tatar
Department of Computer Science
Virginia Tech

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Abstract

Equity and inclusion have generally been part of the utopian promise of computing, tracing back at least to Englebart’s vision of human augmentation (1968) and Rheingold’s happy, futuristic pronouncement that “the internet supports democracy!” (1994). Those promises still exist, and we live in a world in which deaf people can hear because of prosthetics, the blind can see (sort of, via sonification), a poor person in, say, Libya can take an M.I.T. course, and so forth. In other words, computing can be used to address manifest injustice and inequity in the world. But, the lack of critical praxis inside computing leaves us open to the law of unintended consequences. Increasingly, there is awareness that not all the changes allowed by technology are good changes. Sometimes technology disappoints because it simply falls short of its promise. Sometimes it undermines existing systems in a way that leaves people unprotected. Sometimes it creates opportunities for bad elements in society to get worse. Thus, the recent Critical Alternatives conference in Aarhus was devoted to thinking about how to design for the next ten years; the Social Informatics part of the CHCI center is itself planning a workshop at VT for early next semester on People, Systems, Information: What happens after CHI?; and I am teaching a graduate course on Designing for Equity and Inclusion. The bottom line is that computer scientists are (or should be!) system’s thinkers. We have designed our way into this and we can design our way out again.

Speaker’s Biography

Deborah Tatar (Ph.D. Stanford, Psychology) is Professor of Computer Science and, by courtesy, Psychology at Virginia Tech, a member of both the Center for Human-Computer Interaction, and the Women and Gender Studies Programs and a Fellow of the Institute for Creativity, Art and Technology. After graduating from Harvard (1981) with a degree in English and American Literature and Language, she went to work at the Logo Lab at M.I.T. Eventually, having written a textbook on the LISP Programming language, she accepted a job at Digital Equipment Corporation, rising to Senior Software Engineer. She moved to Xerox PARC to work on one of the first Computer-Supported Collaborative Work Systems. That project led to the invention of SmartBoards and to her graduate work on interpersonal attention. At the Center for Technology in Education at SRI International, she designed and analyzed novel technologies for classrooms in California, Texas and South Carolina. Dr. Tatar’s research follows two interrelated strands: how we can design to help ourselves be the people we wish to be and how we can design to promote important learning in K-12 classroom settings. She blogs about once a month for ACM Interactions and you can follow her updates on Facebook and through the Third Lab website.