

QTBIPOC PD

Statement of Interest

Shamika Klassen

When deciding how I wanted my dissertation research to culminate, I knew years ago that I wanted to gather Black women together and imagine the future of technology. No longer a new scholar, I now realize that one of the best methods to employ would be a form of participatory design (PD). We would remotely connect in a speculative co-design workshop with design workbooks that use Afrofuturistic probes and envision future harms and hopes of technology. The origins of participatory design are far from such inquiry as Scandinavian workers, managers, and researchers/designers worked together in the mid-1970s as part of a democratic workplace movement to address information technology systems disrupting workplaces as well as traditional roles and responsibilities for workers (Muller & Druin, 2007; Zimmerman & Forlizzi, 2014). As for my dissertation research, a traditional application of participatory design would be unwise as scholars such as Harrington et al. have pointed out the flaws inherent in typical participatory design practices that harm participants—especially those who are marginalized.

As Harrington et al. remark, despite having a reputation as a democratic method, PD is a privileged activity. The privilege of designers/researchers and their techniques that encourage “blue sky thinking” or employ materials like markers and sticky notes may turn off participants at best or offend them at worse. These inherent privileges must be addressed and destabilized especially when designers/researchers are conducting PD research in underserved communities as I hope to do. In those scenarios, Harrington et al. suggest applying postcoloniality to the PD process which will allow designers/researchers to “[consider] histories of injustice, uneven economic relations, local knowledge as it pertains to design implementation, and the difficulties of design across cultures, which may occur when positioning academic researchers in underserved communities that they do not identify with” (Harrington et al., 2019).

Ideally, Harrington et al.’s work alongside that of others such as Costanza-Chock’s *Design Justice* will encourage and inspire practitioners such as myself to decolonize PD in our usage of the method. In particular, three of the ten *Design Justice* principles that I directly hope to incorporate into my speculative co-design workshop are: “1) We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process. 2) We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process. and 3) Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community

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level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices” (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Distilling these principles into one final approach that can support inclusion and distribute power is to practice design justice. When applied to a PD scenario, it is likened to community organizing. Instead of relying on extractive tactics that take raw elements from “users” and send value up the chain toward corporate or institutional endeavors, designers/researchers can consider how to approach PD “from a community asset perspective” (Costanza-Chock, 2020). What solutions are already being pursued by participants and which of them are involved in implementing these solutions? As a design justice practitioner, designers/researchers looking to employ PD can look for ways to support existing processes instead of defining a “problem” users have to be solved. Ultimately, modern PD does not have to be controlled by power and privilege and I want to remain cognizant of that in my engagement of PD with other Black women.

I hope that by participating in the QTBIPOC PD CHI workshop, I am able to express these new approaches to PD as well as learn from the experiences and insights of the people engaging in the workshop. I look forward to the opportunity to further develop my understanding of PD within QTBIPOC communities and the best practices that can be utilized therein.

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John Zimmerman, Jodi Forlizzi. 2014. Research Through Design in HCI. In: Olson J., Kellogg W. (eds) Ways of Knowing in HCI. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0378-8_8