From the mainstream to the center: Using niche perspectives to reframe designs

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Abstract

The targets of IT design are frequently "typical users" – ordinary individuals who we would expect to use our system. Framed this way, system design often builds in particular conceptions of who is "ordinary," such as white-collar office workers or upwardly mobile, urban 20-somethings. Such ideas of what it means to be "normal" can greatly constrain our design spaces and the interventions we can imagine making as designers. In this talk, I will argue that consideration of the values, perspectives, and experiences of people outside of the technological mainstream can open up valuable new opportunities for design for everyone. I will describe how understanding traditional Newfoundland villagers, Icelandic fishermen, families focused on simple living, and Jamaican mobile phone adopters leads to new ways of thinking about the potential role for technology in "ordinary" users' lives.

This talk describes joint work with Maria Hakansson, Hronn Holmer, and Kaiton Williams.

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