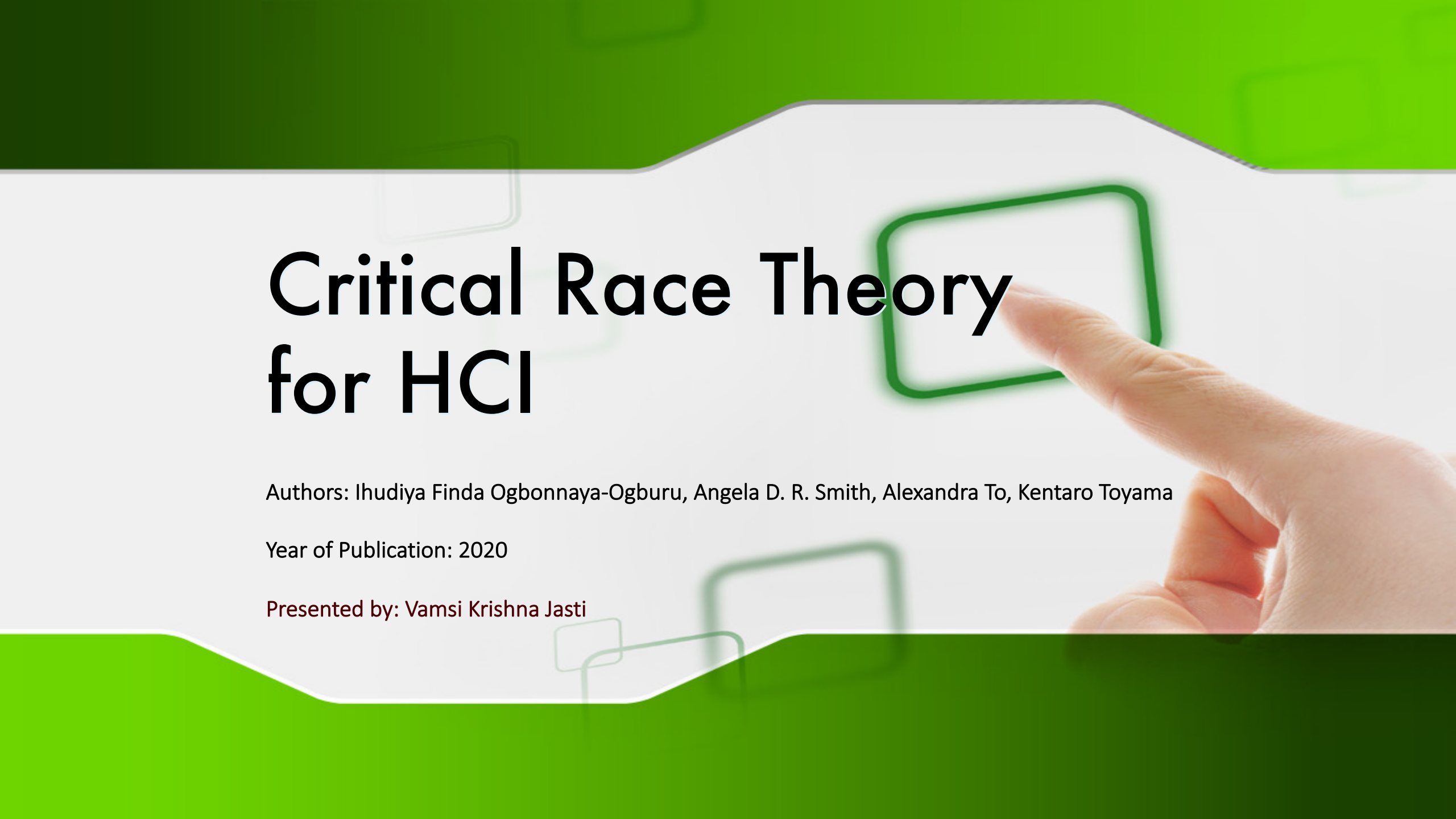# Critical Race Theory for HCl

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ABSTRACT

- The human-computer interaction community has made some attempts towards racial diversity, but the results have been unsatisfactory.
- Here, Critical race theory for HCI is presented and modified to provide a theoretical foundation for race-conscious initiatives in research and within community
- Employ storytelling to challenge deeply held beliefs, and share various personal narratives to illustrate current issues of race in HCI.
- Implications:
  - Any HCI research must be sensitive to racial concerns.
  - Participation of underrepresented minorities in all of our activities must be sought.
  - As a community, we cannot grow complacent as long as racial imbalances remain.

Critical Race Theory

- A theoretical framework introduced in the 1970s by legal scholars to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism.

- Particularly for intellectual communities, maintaining a focus on race requires not only the formation of institutions and processes, but engagement with relevant theory

- Key tenets for the HCI community
  - The ordinariness of racism
  - The social construction of race
  - Interest convergence
  - The intersectionality of identity
  - A critique of liberalism
  - The uniqueness of voices of color
  - Methodologically, storytelling as a means to explore oppression

HCI -focused adaptations contributed

- Racism is pervasive and widely accepted in our society's digital platforms and the larger socio-technical systems in which they are embedded

- Interest convergence is at work even in the HCI community

- Storytelling is an effective means of elevating stifled racial voices in HCI

- The technology sector's colorblind tendencies - based on both liberalism and market capitalism - reinforce racist disparities.

Limitations

- Race is addressed primarily in the framework of the United States, ignoring the massive challenges of race and ethnicity across the rest of the globe, as well as the importance of race in U.S. foreign policy.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY: BACKGROUND

Race and Racism in the United States

- Disparities based on race are well-established in the United States.
  - Median incomes
  - Rates of College Degrees among adults
- Historical roots
  - Slavery
  - Racism continued with oppressive Jim Crow laws, voting laws, and redlining
- Recently,
  - Travel bans for citizens of some majority-Muslim countries
  - Non-renewal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme
  - Attempts to end Temporary Protected Status for certain nationals

Race

- Is multi-dimensional
- Refers to phenotype/physical features, observed classifications into distinct groups, individual notions of self-defined identity, and racial ancestry

In United States, common racial categories are Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, and White.

Racism

- Comprises attitudes, actions, and institutions which contribute to relative disadvantages for members of racial groups with comparatively less power.
- It includes overt actions like hate speech and violence, as well as structural exclusions, prejudices, and biases, as well as subtle, even unconscious, acts like aversive racism and microaggressions

Key Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory was developed in the 1970s as a paradigm for challenging racism's profound intellectual, legal, structural, and practical origins

- Prominent Key tenets
  - Racism is ordinary, not aberrational
  - Race and racism are socially constructed
  - Identity is intersectional
  - Those with power rarely concede it without interest convergence
  - Liberalism itself can hinder anti-racist progress
  - There is a uniqueness to the voice of color and storytelling is a mean for it to be heard

RELATED WORK: RACE AND HCI

- Publications on race and digital technology emphasize unfavorable perceptions of racial minorities, expose racist applications of technology, laud the unique usage of technology by distinct ethnic groups, and promote strategies to combat racism.
- But, much of this work remains high-level without engaging with HCI-specific issues
- This paper focuses on
  - Research that directly engages with or focuses on specific communities of color
  - Research that engages with racial bias in technology
  - Theoretical work that aligns in some way with critical race theory

Work with and About Communities of Color

- HCI researchers have studied or developed various types of small communities. Some of this work deals with racial minority communities.

- The work briefly discusses race, but also focuses on the uniqueness and differences of racially based groups

- A general outcome of this research category is a reflective lesson about conducting research in such communities.

- The importance of acknowledging the authority and power that extends to being researcher, which may reduce the voice of the disempowered, is also noted

Bias in Technology and Design

- Much of the criticism of biased technology focuses on algorithmic bias, a systemic flaw in computer systems that leads to unfair outcomes and decisions.

- HCI researchers have begun to respond to these problems
  - Hankerson et al., - **a list of discriminatory technology**
  - Schlesinger et al.- consider the challenges of eliminating hate speech in chat bots

- Technical racism isn't limited to facial recognition or biased algorithms.

- Race should not be relegated to a niche topic for HCI

Allied Research

- A number of movements, frameworks, and theories in HCI have goals allied with critical race theory
- Some of the most prominent efforts of this kind share a common intellectual ancestry in critical theory
  - Feminist HCI
  - Queer HCI
- A related set of theories incorporates race as one of many dimensions of discrimination or inequality
  - Ekbia & Nardi-discuss the systemic causes of inequality
  - Kimberlé Crenshaw- coined intersectionality
- HCI also has a longer engagement with universalist frame works, in which the goal is to design technological artifacts
  - Universal Design
  - Value-Sensitive Design

PERSONAL STORIES

- Personal stories are told as data to be synthesized in later adaptations from race to HCI and as an illustration of storytelling as a compelling methodological tool in critical race theory

#	Personal Stories	Racism is Ordinary	Race is Socially Constructed	Identity is Intersectional	Interest Convergence	Limits of Liberalism	Uniqueness to Voice
S1	Different Views on Filter Bubbles	X	X			X	X
S2	Editing Away Voices of Color	X				X	X
S3	Interpreting Voices of Color			X			X
S4	Acknowledging Race in Research						X
S5	Everyday Privileges	X					
S6	Who Benefits from Diversity?				X	X	
S7	University Public Relations				X		
S8	Defining Interest Research	X	X			X	X
S9	Routine Microagressions	X		X			

Table 1. Overview of personal stories as they relate to critical race theory tenets.

ADAPTING CRITICAL RACE THEORY FOR HCI

Racism is Ordinary in Our Socio-Technical World

- When we start looking, racism is ubiquitous and found everywhere in our digital society.
- Occasionally, news of this racism floods into the mainstream media
  - Google image results for "three Black teens" (arrest mugshots) versus "three White teens" (smiling kids)
- People of color are grossly underrepresented in digital games, though they comprise a large proportion of the over-210 million-person U.S. player base
- The notion of racism's ordinariness in society made by critical race theory applies directly to HCI, both inside our community and in relation to the greater socio-technical cosmos that is the topic of all HCI.

Storytelling and Voices of Color in HCI

- HCI may go a long way towards ensuring that these approaches are used in a race-conscious manner and to better understand race.
- The HCI community may also highlight the difficulties in sharing and amplifying the perspectives of people of color, such as
  - How words are edited and polished
  - How research goals are chosen
  - Race and racism are given room for awareness and historical context

Including the voices of people of color provides a number of advantages for HCI.

- Underrepresented voices of color provide unique insight into the world that others may not perceive in a community that emphasizes "understanding people" and user centeredness.
- Diverse points of view can also lead to more innovative ideas. Those feeling comparable isolation can recognize that they are not alone via tales, while others can reflect on the implications of how they interact, or do not engage, with race.

Interest Convergence & Material Reality in HCI

- Diversity and inclusion have a similar dynamic, and HCI efforts on behalf of others benefit the practitioner more than the intended beneficiaries.

- A sign of our community's desire to fight racism; However, it rarely reaches beyond aspiration.

The Limits of Tech Liberalism

- In recent years, critical race theorists have lessened their criticism of liberalism.
- Analysis here suggests that the initial instincts of critical race theory regarding liberalism were accurate and that academic, technocratic, and capitalist resistance to work that is racially conscious hinders the fight against racism.

CALL TO ACTION

Actions proposed

- **For HCI Research and Practice**
  - Would expose us to entirely new realms of unanswered research questions.
  - Results should be viewed through race-sensitive theoretical lenses.
  - They must acknowledge that representation comes with additional costs.
  - Researchers should try to be considerate of others when designing and writing their research.
  - Paper review processes
- **For the HCI Community at Large**
  - Underrepresented minority students, interns, and junior researchers must be identified, recruited, and hired by senior researchers.
  - Racism and race issues need to be brought up in the community more often in a way that everyone can hear.

CONCLUSION

In general, as a community, we can demonstrate through public statements and actions that race and racism have an effect on all aspects of HCI, and discussing this will be beneficial to everyone.

MY THOUGHTS

- By public remarks and actions, we can show that race and racism have an impact on all elements of HCI.

- As a response, any HCI study should be attentive to racial problems, and involvement of underrepresented minorities in all of our initiatives should be encouraged.

- We must remember that as a community, we cannot become comfortable as long as racial imbalances exist.

THANK YOU