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# Cigarette Conversations

on CHI, Inclusion, Identity and other Things

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We present a chat protocol of conversations we had on the larger workshop topics, which are also intended to function as a short biography.

**Katta:** I would like to start our conversation by reflecting on how ostracised you are nowadays when smoking. I don't mean situations where you would harm others, but rather that people feel obliged to tell you their opinion on your habits all the time.

**Reem:** Ya it can be uncomfortable sometimes but I am OK with it if I know it is coming from a place of care. I think that makes the biggest difference for me.

**Katta:** I just feel that people do not acknowledge it as a legitimate coping mechanism – which, to me, in many cases it is. Like, I find conferences so overwhelming, I smoke a lot during them. They dim my senses so that sensory inputs aren't as difficult and give me a break outside where I'm not necessarily expected to be social.

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**Reem:** I totally agree!! smoking helps with my anxiety, makes me less nervous about presenting and attending networking events. I also sometimes use it as an exit strategy to detach myself from conversations or instances where I am feeling overwhelmed.

**Katta:** What I mean is, instead people focus on ‘the harm I do to my body’ without seeing the positive it does for me (or offering alternative strategies for my needs) and it’s similar when they talk about me being neurodivergent or even non-binary; it always comes from a judged place of difference and I feel we constantly have to explain our actions and identities as they are measured against an unattainable norm, that I will never fit in.

**Reem:** Yes, well that is the thing. While I smoke I do not like it when I am identified as a smoker. It is the same as me being Arab does not mean I would like to be labelled as an Arab researcher... none of those reflect the entirety of who I am and most of the time go towards highlighting differences.

**Katta:** But by having to position myself towards being identified as deviant from some obscure norm, I also waste A LOT of energy on stuff that is mostly a source of frustration for me. I am basically permanently exhausted because I get distracted from the things I want to do by having to explain the same thing over and over again. (I assume this is similar for you?)

**Reem:** It is, I think the times in which I did not find it as waste of time was when conversations were shifted towards my research in Arab contexts and drawing parallels with other contexts rather than responding to “Oh you are from Lebanon, how come you ended up in the UK?”

**Katta:** So, one of your strategies is to explicitly engage with research on an associated topic so you may redirect?

**Reem:** Exactly! I hate to say this but sometimes there is a rhetoric of finding an opportunity abroad to be a lucky event and one we should be grateful for... and sometimes I have felt this way but I feel like I always have to remind people (and sometimes myself) that I am where I am because of my investment in myself and my hard work and so redirecting the conversation to discuss my research helps do that. It shifts the focus from my identity as an Arab researcher to my identity as a researcher → just like everyone else.

**Katta:** To me, that was less a strategic move, but more like a: ‘Ok, I give up, I guess I’m now making research about all the microaggressions that appear in my live and channel my anger into publications, but also am even more reminded of that stuff that annoys me so much’; whereas my core research

The conversation presented in this position paper reflects the value in engaging in dialogue. Through this dialogue we have not just shared each other's values and how that influences our experiences in academia but also co-created a new shared understanding of how we view ourselves and the new realities we would like to create. In an ideal world the CHI community would engage in empathetic and responsive dialogue that would enable us to work towards new inclusive realities but here we need to consider "How do we do it at such a large scale?". Maybe we should then shift from viewing facilitating dialogue in the CHI community as a process to expanding spaces such as CHIInclusion to encompass the whole conference, and then consider what do we need in that space to prompt, mediate and sustain dialogue.

is not... about me! I do interesting stuff, you know, but I feel like some people only know me from arguing for having a place to go pee in. Essentially, I have limited control over how I present myself because either I have no place to pee or I have to put extra effort into making sure I pass as somewhat inoffensive 'norm'.

**Reem:** mmmm I see what you mean and I can imagine how frustrating it is... if we were living in an ideal world we would not have to be talking about inclusivity because while we are all different we would not be judged by those differences. But the reality is that we are, so I am always torn between believing that no one is judging me based on my differences and therefore not identify myself through those differences or do I blatantly highlight them to challenge people's assumptions. For example, while at a workshop in which we were discussing inclusivity, I was saying that sometimes international graduate students may need different kinds of support in coping with a PhD life for various reasons... a member from the workshop then immediately equated me being Arab to me being Muslim and presented the feedback from our group on that basis. I did not say anything because he was not saying anything offensive, but the way the assumption was casually suggested and accepted by everyone did bother me, because that was putting another label on me.

**Katta:** Yeah, sometimes people don't take the time to reflect on what they are saying. I've made the experience numerous times that people either tried guessing the sex I was assigned at birth or trying to compliment me for 'passing' as non-binary, whereas I feel they should just stop asking about my genitals (it's really rude and so inappropriate particularly in academic contexts) and stop making assumptions about other people's identities. Sometimes I wish more people would take time to listen without demanding to be educated.

**Reem:** Yes, but at the same time I would like to think that I would rather be asked about things rather than having people work based on assumptions. And in my case I don't see it as educating someone but rather cultural exchange and if it is good intentioned then maybe that is how we people can start understanding one another and move away from judging.