"STILL AROUND": Experiences and Survival Strategies of Veteran Women Software Developers

Sampling veteran developers of marginalized genders

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congrats to all the young people but can we also give a massive shout-out to the older women in tech who have survived all the bullshit and are STILL AROUND it's like hunger games survival skills to still be here after 10, 20, 30+ years

11:21 PM · Dec 1, 2020

Sampling frame: 334 Twitter users who reacted to this tweet.

Iterative interviews with 14 veteran developers of marginalized genders (13 women, 1 non-binary), inductive/axial coding, saturation tracked and reached.
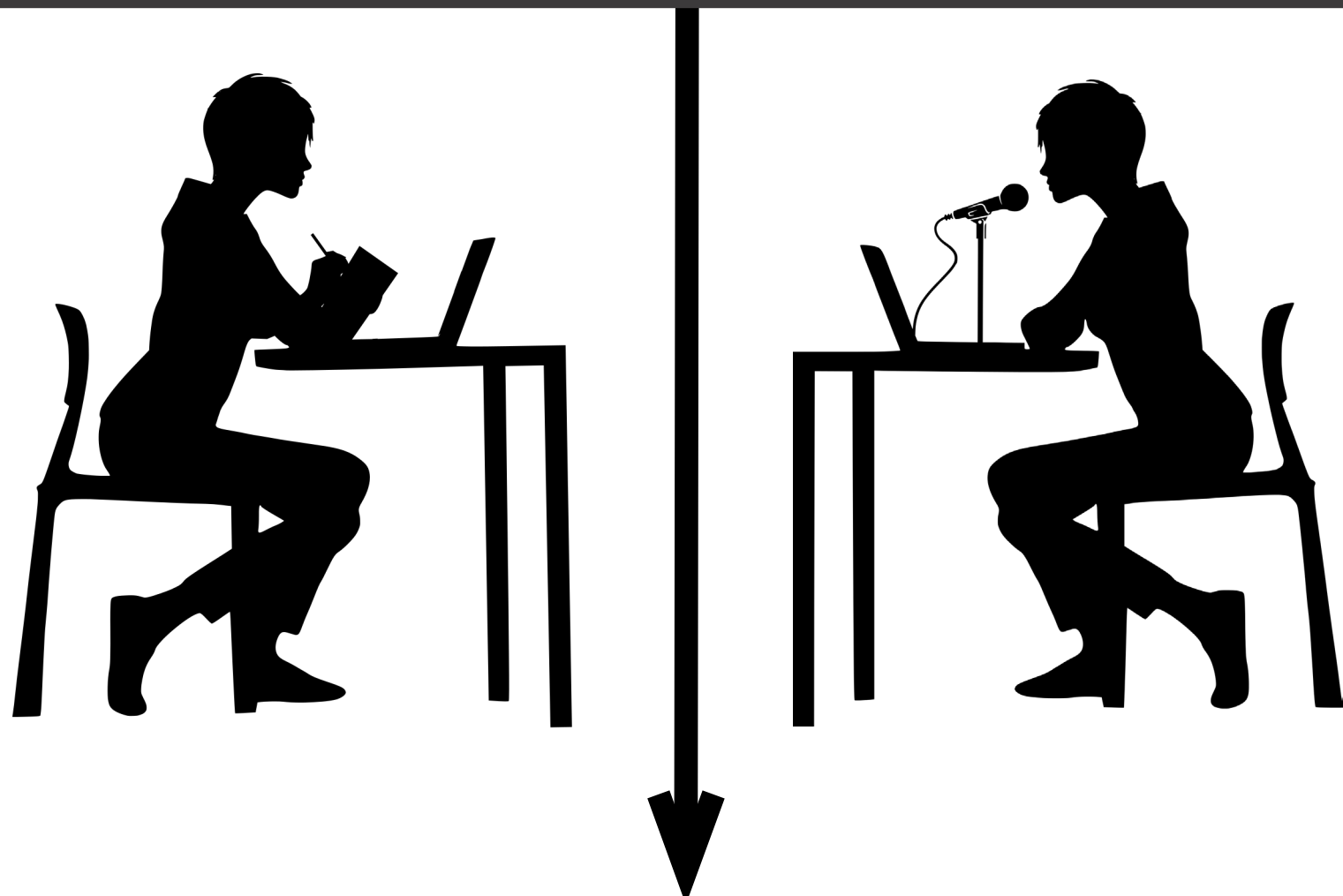
Research questions and results

RQ1 What age- and gender-specific experiences have veteran software developers of marginalized genders had in their careers?

- Main groups of codes related to **experiences**: *Age and/or Gender Based Experiences*, *Age Based Experiences*, *Gender Based Experiences*, and *General Experiences*.
- Main groups of code related to **perceptions** (subjective experiences): *Feeling Towards Leaving*, *Value*, *Current Work Place*, *Industry*, and *Task Assignment*.

TABLE III
SUB-CODES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CODE *Considered Leaving*.

Code	Example
Considered Leaving	
Age Based Experiences	*"The older I get, the less I wanna deal with. The young girl I was, it was like I had all this energy. I can do all this stuff. Yeah, sure, I'll work on more hours than I should. Yeah, I'll put all this stuff on hold. Yes, I'll do this. I won't do that anymore. …Life is too short."* - Alex
Gender Based Experiences	*"When you are just spending all your energy into fighting people trying to knock you down and people who just want you to not have a voice and to not make decisions. …It's so exhausting."* - Emery
Industry Based Experiences	*"Many times whenever I run into a block in my career when there are megalomaniac managers. When they were, whenever there are leaders of a company that just aren't inspiring to me."* - Alex

RQ2 What strategies have veteran software developers of marginalized genders adopted that they perceive a contributing to their survival in software engineering?

- Main groups of codes related to **strategies**: *Age Related Strategies, Gender Related Strategies, Age and Gender Related Strategies,* and *General Strategies*.
- *Against the Bias* (sub-category of *Age and Gender Related Strategies*) includes sub-codes such as *Standing Up for Yourself* and *Gathering Allies*.

TABLE IV
CATEGORIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CODE *Age and/or Gender Strategies*.

Code	Example
Against Bias	*"All those young guys don't want their mom programming with them, their grandmother, on the other hand."* - Dani
Side Projects	*"Try to do what we can you know for the younger women and younger non-binary people and you know the younger trans people."* - Elliot
Changing Work Environment	*"I'm lucky because I don't have [a] mortgage. I don't have anything I need to pay. If everything goes really terrible, I can stay with my friends for a while and get another job. So that way I'm lucky because if you have kids, family, you're in [a] different position."* - Robin
Career Related	*"And I mean gender does play into it, in that you know a lot of my network started. With people of marginalized genders supporting each other."* - Noah

Conclusions & Implications

Gender- and age-related experiences often cannot be easily separated. Our interviewees employed **many different and diverse strategies**, ranging from adjusting appearance to specialization, and from speaking up to engaging in side projects. Based on these findings, **we call organizations in the software industry to understand the issues veteran women are facing and to act upon this understanding**, e.g., by investing veteran women developers with sense of control of their work and careers, supporting their promotion, assigning tasks, and paying them on par with men.

ACM SIGSOFT Distinguished Paper Award

Sterre van Breukelen
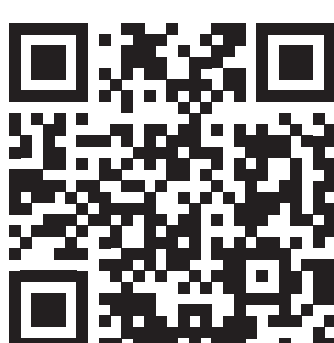🐦 @sBr3ukelen

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