Does Software have a sex/gender?

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Abstract: With results from our research we can add the perspective of students in computing science to the workshop. In our research project "Weltbilder in der Informatik" ("World Views in Computing Science", sponsored by the DFG, managed by Prof. Dr. Britta Schinzel) we interviewed students from five German universities and tried to elicit what universities do or do not teach. It turned out that the future computing scientists see diversity as an incidental option rather than a necessary instrument or goal. The students are aware of the relevance of technical diversity, because computing science operates in manifold areas/domains, but at the same time many of them negate the importance of social diversity: Expertise and the ability for interdisciplinary collaboration but not personal preconditions seem to have an influence on software development and its products. This means that they consider software development free of socio-cultural interference. To them it does not matter who develops the software. Concerning gender they definitely do see different gender-related approaches to the process of development ("many roads lead to the same destination"), but in the end the product will differ at the most in user interface but not in its functionality. Furthermore some students assume an effect of diversity on the social interaction in teams of developers and on the way of programming. For an adequate communication with customers and users they claim a certain inter-disciplinary focus but they do not see the chances of diversity here. Diversity does not seem to be necessary for the students because they see themselves capable of developing adequate software for any context as long as their technical knowledge is sufficient. Only a few students realize the social and cultural dimensions of software development - including user modelling - which exceed the technical aspects. It seems that the question whether software is influenced by the gender of the developers (exemplifying one specification of diversity) is neither asked nor is it answered in a well-founded way at the universities. So it is contingent upon the everyday knowledge of the students whether they are aware of the necessity of diversity or not.

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