

When I moved to the U.S. for college, I struggled to call my professors by their first names. In the India of my youth, an elder's first name was sacrosanct, never to be uttered; in the U.S., the first name seemed mandatory. Most people were patient with me, but there was one professor who took it upon himself to correct me every time, to repeat his own name like an incantation until my 'foreign' habit had been rooted out. I suspect that he thought he was doing me a favor, that he wanted me to see him as my equal, but his actions had the opposite effect: I lost my respect for him, and, curiously, my interest in his subject also waned. This experience helped me realize that the space between intention and action must be filled with thoughtfulness. This lesson is especially relevant for well-meaning people in positions of power: it is not enough to want to help someone else; one must also consider the ancillary consequences of one's actions.

Notwithstanding the early hiccup mentioned above, over the last decade, as a queer brown foreigner in the U.S., I have benefited immensely from the support and mentorship of others. My mentors have helped me come to terms with my own sexuality, to come out to my family, to navigate issues of self-worth, and much more. For my own part, I have tried my best to pass it forward. For example, between 2012 and 2014, I was part of New Scientist Program (NSP), a program that provided weekly mentorship to more than 100 STEM concentrators from underrepresented minorities. I served as a mentor for the first year and then took over as the program's coordinator thereafter. My time at NSP was emotionally draining at times, but ultimately extremely rewarding. I feel proud and honored to have helped others grow comfortable in their own skin—to overcome their imposter syndrome, to navigate a sea of microaggressions, and sometimes, to run counter to the expectations of their own communities. These experiences have enabled me to be more thoughtful about how I translate my own good intentions into action. More broadly, I have also come to appreciate both the remarkable intersectionality of identity as well as the diversity of ways to lead a fulfilling life.

As a professor of interaction design, I see a strong connection between my work and the larger social structures in which we are embedded. Designers are tasked with imagining a preferred future. For me, that future is one in which people engage in more thoughtful interactions with each other. As a teacher, I hope to be sensitive to my students' varied backgrounds and to offer a safe space in which they can explore and interrogate their own identities. At the same time, I hope to inspire my students to be critical about the implications of their work beyond traditional metrics of usability and usefulness. As such, if I am successful, my classroom will expand beyond the mandate of knowledge transfer and transform into a studio and lab for prototyping a better world.