HCI and Sensitive Life Experiences

Daniel Herron[1,2]
dherron@dundee.ac.uk

Nazanin Andalibi[3]
na477@drexel.edu

Oliver Haimson[4]
ohaimson@uci.edu

Wendy Moncur[1,2]
wmoncur@dundee.ac.uk

Elise van den Hoven[1,2,5,6]
Elise.VandenHoven@uts.edu.au

[1]Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee, UK, DD1 3DH

[2]Faculty of Engineering & IT, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

[3]College of Computing and Informatics, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

[4]Department of Informatics, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA, USA

[5]Eindhoven University of Technology, Dept. of Industrial Design, Eindhoven, NL

[6]ARC Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders

ABSTRACT

HCI research has identified a number of life events and life transitions which see individuals in a vulnerable state, such as gender transition, domestic abuse, romantic relationship dissolution, bereavement, and even genocide. Although these life events differ across the human lifespan, considering them as a group of 'sensitive life experiences' and exploring the similarities and differences in how we approach those experiences as researchers could be invaluable in generating a better understanding. In this workshop, we aim to identify current opportunities for, and barriers to, the design of social computing systems that support people during sensitive life events and transitions. Participants will take part in activities centered around exploring the similarities and differences between their own and others' research methods and results, drawing on their own experiences in discussions around carrying out research in these sensitive contexts.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing.**

Keywords

Ethics; Humanistic HCI; life events; sensitive contexts.

1. DESCRIPTION

1.1 Benefits and Significance

Life experiences that place individuals in a vulnerable state are an emergent theme in HCI. Research attention is turning towards challenging and deeply personal experiences such as gender transition [5], domestic abuse [3], romantic relationship dissolution [7], bereavement [2] , and even genocide [4]. Such research has also prompted community focus on how to conduct such challenging research, both methodologically and ethically (e.g. Waycott, CHI 2016). To better understand these experiences in the context of HCI research and design, we wish to explore them as a collective whilst also acknowledging the uniqueness of each context of inquiry. What can we learn about our approach to one sensitive context from our approach to another?

This one-day workshop will identify current opportunities for, as well as barriers to, the design of social computing systems that support people during sensitive life events and transitions ("experiences"). We will build on prior work across research areas involving such experiences. Participants will take part in activities aimed at exploring similarities and differences with respect to research methods and results. They will also draw on their own personal experiences and perspectives to respond to recent discourse on how to *do* research in sensitive contexts, building expertise within the research community. Ultimately, the workshop will further the development of the emergent international community of researchers who focus on sensitive life events and transitions, offering a platform for knowledge exchange, methodological maturation and innovation, and further collaboration.

1.2 Overview of Activities

Workshop Submission

We invite submissions including but not limited to the following.

- A specific case study, project, or critical evaluation of current technology in the context of life experience(s).
- A cross-cultural study in the context of technology use around a life experience(s).
- An autoethnography of:
  - One's experience of conducting research in the context of a sensitive life experience;
  - One's experience of interacting with technology in the context of a sensitive life experience;

  These should be reflective pieces from which one can concretely say what they learned.

Submissions should focus on one (or several) life events or transitions, or an otherwise sensitive context. In the event that potential participants are not sure if their work would be a good fit, they are encouraged to contact the workshop organizers to discuss the fit.

Schedule

The schedule is detailed below, followed by a detailed breakdown of planned activities.

09:30 - 09:40	Introduction
09:40 - 10:55	Icebreaker: Speed Dating
10:55 - 11:15	Foreground similarities/differences across work
11:15 - 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 - 12:30	Group Work: break out groups discuss themes, identify barriers/design opportunities
12:30 - 14:00	Group Lunch

14:00 - 14:30   Group Work: continuation of break out groups
14:30 - 15:00   Summarize group discussions
15:00 - 16:00   360 degree reflection
16:00 - 16:30   Coffee Break
16:30 - 17:30   Closing remarks

Pre-Workshop:

Each of the position papers will be made available to participants through the workshop website; participants that do not want their paper to be shared publicly will have the option of having their work emailed to the other participants. We ask that all accepted participants read each of the position papers before the workshop, as this will facilitate meaningful discussion during the workshop activities. Similarly, we ask that all accepted participants read the following key papers:

- Jeffrey Bardzell and Shaowen Bardzell. 2016. Humanistic HCI. *Interactions, March – April 2016, pp 20-29.*
- Wendy Moncur. 2013. The emotional wellbeing of researchers: considerations for practice. *Proceedings of the ACM SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems,* ACM.

Introduction

The workshop will begin with a short introductory talk, where the organizers will welcome participants, introduce themselves and outline the aims for the workshop and the day's schedule.

Icebreaker: Speed Dating

Workshop participants will be tasked with taking part in a "speed dating" activity, to get to know one another quickly. This will involve participants being given between 1 minute with every other participant, during which time they will share the following information:

- Who they are
- A brief description of their research area – what life event or transition do they focus on, why is it sensitive or vulnerable?

While the social aspect is important, the icebreaker will also be the basis for the first Group Work section of the workshop.

Foreground similarities/differences across work

Following the icebreaker activity, each participant will be asked to write on post-it notes what they believe are the most salient events of each life experience, in the context of digital technologies. For example, in the case of a relationship break up, an individual changing their relationship status on Facebook may be a significant step towards increasing awareness of this life change.

Facilitators and workshop participants will then employ axial coding in real time, using the post-it notes, to determine similarities and differences between the different life events discussed. We will then group these similarities and differences into potential themes such as privacy, wellbeing, and digital content ownership, which will be used to divide up the workshop participants into break out groups as part of the next activity.

Group Work: discuss themes and identify barriers/design opportunities

The workshop participants will be asked to arrange themselves into breakout groups of 4-6 people, where each group will consist of participants from a mix of research fields, and where the participants are interested in different types of life experiences. Participants will be tasked with discussing the themes identified in

the previous activity across each of the different experiences that they study. In particular, each group will:

- Critique digital technologies' current uses and limitations;
- Identify barriers that individuals currently face across each of the experiences under discussion;
- Distil opportunities for design from these limitations and barriers.

Summarize Group Discussions

The breakout groups will be recalled and asked to report on what they have discussed to the other groups. After all groups have had the opportunity to speak, the organizers will facilitate a discussion with the group as a whole; all participants, regardless of their groups, will have the opportunity to suggest themes or questions they would like to focus on. Notes will be stored in the form of a Google Doc, which will form the basis for sustaining the discussion and creating a community beyond the workshop session. As a group, the organizers and participants will conclude the activity by summarizing the main points of the discussion.

360 Degree Reflection

The final activity for the workshop session will entail a critical reflection on the current discourse around the conduct of HCI research, with a specific focus on working on life experiences in sensitive contexts. Participants will be familiar with key literature surrounding this issue, as we mentioned in the pre-workshop section of this submission, but the organizers will briefly summarize each paper at the beginning of this activity.

Workshop participants will be asked to consider a number of issues, including but not limited to:

- How our own personal motivations for conducting this type of research affect not only the outcomes, but also the process of conducting that research;
- The effect that conducting research has on the researcher (on a personal level, in terms of data interpretation, etc.);
- The perceived effects of one's perspectives and subject position on the research they carry out.

Other relevant issues raised by workshop participants will also be discussed. As with the previous activity, the organizers and workshop participants' notes will be stored in the form of a Google Doc.

Closing Remarks

It is important to the organizers that workshop participants are involved (as much as they want to be) in identifying routes for the dissemination of their work in the session. So, to finish off the workshop we will discuss as a group the ways by which we hope to disseminate our work beyond NordiCHI 2016. Potential options include writing a special issue, working towards a panel at NordiCHI 2017, or creating an online collective blog about the outcomes of our workshop.

To sustain this community of researchers, we will identify which medium will be best for maintaining contact (e.g., mailing list, Facebook group) for discussion and continued collaboration at this point.

1.3 Organizer Biographies

Mr Daniel Herron (dherron@dundee.ac.uk) is a joint PhD student at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design at the University of Dundee, and at the Faculty of Engineering and IT at the University of Technology Sydney. His research interests lie in designing technology that can positively impact life experiences. His doctoral research explores what happens when a romantic

relationship comes to an end in a digital context [7], with a specific focus on how individuals interact with digital possessions from a past relationship. He aims to generate methods of supporting individuals experiencing this type of life transition. [www.danielherron.co.uk]

Ms Nazanin Andalibi (naz@drexel.edu) is a PhD candidate at the College of Computing and Informatics at Drexel University. She studies self-disclosure and social support practices in socially stigmatized contexts or negative life events such as sexual abuse [1]. She has also reflected on her experience as a researcher in sensitive contexts and argues that it is important for the HCI community to consider researchers' occupational vulnerability in discussions, trainings, practices, and policies around research ethics [8]. Her aim is to expand our theoretical understanding of human behavior, tell stories of stigmatized populations, and improve the design of social computing systems to better support sensitive disclosures and positive outcomes. [www.nazaninandalibi.net]

Mr Oliver Haimson (ohaimson@uci.edu) is a PhD Candidate in the Informatics Department at UC Irvine. His research focuses on how people represent changing and faceted identities on social media during life transitions. In particular, he studies transgender people's experiences with self-presentation and disclosure as they change gender on social network sites [5,6]. Through his research, he hopes to impact technological inclusion of marginalized users. [www.oliverhaimson.com]

Dr Wendy Moncur, FRSA (wmoncur@dundee.ac.uk) is a Reader in Socio-Digital Interaction at the University of Dundee. She is also a Visiting Scholar at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia, and an Associate of the Centre for Death and Society (University of Bath). Her interdisciplinary research focuses on being human in a Digital Age, and is grounded in HCI. She has examined the design and use of technology in contemporary experiences, including becoming a parent [5], relationship breakdown [4], retiral and end of life [3,6]. She also examines methodological issues around the conduct of research in sensitive contexts [2], and opportunities for research to illuminate policy [1]. [www.wendymoncur.com]

Professor Dr Elise van den Hoven MTD (Elise.VandenHoven@uts.edu.au) is a Professor of Human-Computer Interaction in the School of Software at University of Technology Sydney and a part-time associate professor in the Department of Industrial Design, Eindhoven University of Technology. She has two honorary appointments: honorary senior research fellow in Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design, University of Dundee, and associate investigator with the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence in Cognition and its Disorders. Her research interests span different disciplines, including human-computer interaction, design and psychology, including people-centered design, designing interactive systems, physical interaction, and supporting human remembering. [www.elisevandenhoven.com]

2. DRAFT CALL-FOR-PARTICIPANTS

This workshop will bring together researchers and practitioners to share their experiences of working with vulnerable people in sensitive contexts involving digital technologies, such as but not limited to gender transition, sexual abuse, and romantic relationship dissolution. The workshop will be of interest to individuals working in HCI, and other disciplines that increasingly focus on the intersection of human experience and digital technologies – for example, design, Social Sciences,

Psychology, Anthropology, Theology - from a variety of application domains, including social media, health, and security.

The aim of the workshop is to identify current opportunities for, as well as barriers to, design of social computing systems that support people during sensitive life events and transitions. Workshop participants will explore themes across life experiences and consider similarities and differences. They will also draw on their own personal experiences and perspectives to respond to recent discourse on how to *do* research in sensitive contexts, building expertise within the research community.

We invite interested researchers and practitioners to submit a 2-3 page position paper in the ACM SIG Proceedings format (http://www.acm.org/publications/proceedings-template), focusing on sensitive contexts, including but not limited to:

- An autoethnography of one's experiences either conducting research in sensitive contexts, or interacting with technology after a vulnerable life event. This should be a reflective piece from which one can say what they learned;
- A specific case study, project, or critical evaluation of current technology in sensitive life events;
- A cross-cultural study in the context of sensitive life events and technology use.

Please do not hesitate to contact the workshop organizers if you are unsure about the eligibility of your work.

3. RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

The workshop organizers have avenues for recruitment across a variety of disciplines and institutions. As this workshop is an international collaboration, the organizers have access to numerous institution mailing lists across the UK, Europe, USA, and Australia/New Zealand. Similarly, the organizers will use their contacts across multiple disciplines and research areas to publicize recruitment for the workshop; including:

- Death Online Symposium (Facebook Group);
- Social Dimensions of Health Institute (Mailing List);
- Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR Mailing List);
- Social media channels – e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook specialist groups such as Global Women in Technology, CHI Meta, CSCW Meta.

Participants will be selected based on the quality of their submissions, with the aim of establishing a group of participants from a mix of background and a variety of fields of interest.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

5. REFERENCES

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