
Queer in HCI: Supporting LGBTQIA+ Researchers and Research Across Domains

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Abstract

As Queer Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) becomes an established part of the larger field, both in terms of research on and with queer populations and in terms of employing queering theories and methods, the role of queer researchers has become a timely topic of discussion. However, these discussions have largely centered around member-researcher status and positionality when working with queer populations. Based on insights gathered at multiple ACM events over the past year, we identified two pressing issues: (1) we need to better support queer people doing HCI research not specific to queer populations, and (2) we need to

identify how to best support member-researchers in leading Queer HCI while including collaborators beyond the queer community. This Special Interest Group (SIG) aims to directly address these challenges by convening a broad community of queer researchers and allies, working not only on explicitly-queer topics but across a broad range of HCI topics.

Author Keywords

Queer HCI; sexual and gender minorities

CSS Concepts

• **Social and professional topics~Gender** • **Social and professional topics~Sexual orientation**

Introduction

Queer HCI has recently become prominent within HCI, especially as it lends a unique perspective to crucial issues such as identity management [6, 9, 11], online communities [7, 10] and the negative consequences of AI classification technology [16]. By examining technical problems from the point of view of the LGBTQIA+ community – a multifaceted and often marginalized group of people – we have been able to explicate broader issues which impact all users. We have also shed light on how the LGBTQIA+ community, which heavily depends on social technologies [12, 13, 19], is deeply impacted by digital systems. This previous work has been valuable to both the queer and general HCI communities, but only represents a narrow segment of what “Queer HCI” can and should be. This SIG aims to create a space to discuss broadening our conception of Queer HCI and establish best practices for supporting the entire Queer HCI community in SIGCHI events and publication venues, based on needs

identified over the past year and the interests of attendees as elicited at the beginning of the SIG.

In a series of CHI and CSCW events held over the last year, most prominently the well-attended CHI 2019 “Queer(ing) HCI” SIG [18], participants made clear that we need to do more to support queer researchers working outside explicitly queer contexts and facing challenges related to their identity [3]. In discussions at the Qualitative Methods [8] and Social Technologies for Digital Wellbeing Among Marginalized Communities [5] workshops at CSCW 2019, it also became clear that queer researchers often experience a pressure to do explicitly queer work due to their positionality, alongside a pressure to disclose one’s queer identity before one may be ready to do so, or in circumstances where stigmatization is still likely. Both of these findings point to a need to better define Queer HCI to serve the entire SIGCHI queer community, moving from a definition that focuses on queer work and methods to one that inclusively highlights the community itself and the people within it.

Towards a Redefinition of Queer HCI

As a starting point for furthering discussion on the topics above, we propose to redefine **Queer HCI** as *research in HCI by, for, or substantially shaped by the queer community itself and/or queering methods and theory, regardless of application subdomain*. In turn, we advocate that **supporting Queer HCI** center around not just funding and publishing work on queer populations, but also funding and supporting queer researchers and their perspectives across domain areas and ensuring that our allied researcher partners develop the appropriate sensitivity and background

knowledge to approach queer topics productively and respectfully.

These redefinitions are essential for two reasons. First, queer researchers face significant pressures and barriers not experienced by all HCI researchers [2, 14, 17], and might desire or need support even if they are not working on queer topics. As noted above, the CHI 2019 SIG drew over 60 attendees in addition to the organizers, most of whom identify as LGBTQIA+ but do not do work on explicitly queer topics. Despite the fact that the explicit focus of the 2019 SIG was furthering research on queer populations and using queer/queering methods, the overall message from the attendees was clear: Queer HCI as a project must attend to all queer researchers regardless of application domain. As such, both this redefinition and this SIG directly answer a large community need within HCI.

Second, queer researchers have a right to do the research they wish to do, and should not face undue pressure to perform explicitly queer research simply due to their identity. However, there is also much ground to be covered in terms of research on queer populations, particularly in the area of intersectionally-interwoven experiences of marginalization [4, 15]. To have the capacity to do this research without tokenizing or epistemically exploiting [1] queer researchers, we will need to create space for and support allies in doing queer research sensitively, appropriately, and in a way that keeps queer perspectives, theories, and methods centered. We must also do the same internally in terms of recognizing, accounting for, and respecting differences within the queer community while working across subcommunities, e.g. cisgender queer researchers doing work with transgender populations.

By starting this SIG from the point of the new definitions proposed above, we can focus on enacting the definitions to address these two problems.

CHI 2020 will likely be attended by many queer researchers from varying subcommunities and at varying levels of identity development and outness, who represent both academia and industry in multiple countries and cultures, working across a range of research domains. As such, a SIG at CHI 2020, represents an ideal and safe opportunity to draw from their varied experience and expertise in exploring and establishing potential ways forward. Using an unconference model based on last year's highly successful Queer(ing) HCI SIG, we aim to create concrete recommendations for better supporting both queer researchers and researchers working with queer topics and theories.

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