Queer in HCI: Strengthening the Community of LGBTQIA+ Researchers and Research

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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 two years, 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.

1 INTRODUCTION

Queer HCI has recently become prominent within HCI, especially as it lends a unique perspective to crucial issues such as queer methodologies [17], identity management [5, 11, 13], online communities [8, 12] and the negative consequences of AI classification technology [19]. 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 [14, 15, 22], 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 two years and the present interests of attendees as elicited before the SIG (see schedule below).

In a series of CHI and CSCW events held over the last two years, most prominently the well-attended CHI 2019 "Queer(ing) HCI" SIG [21] and the 2020 follow-up [7], 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 [9] and Social Technologies to Support for Marginalized Wellbeing [6] workshops at CSCW 2019, it also became clear that queer researchers often experience pressure to do explicitly queer work due to their positionality, alongside 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.

2 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, 16, 20], 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 interwoven experiences of both marginalization and privilege in matrices of oppression [4, 18]. 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 2021 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 a virtual conference, CHI 2021 also has the potential to allow participation from members of the community that would normally face barriers such as travel and cost, potentially allowing more queer researchers to attend. As such, a SIG at CHI 2021 represents an ideal and safe opportunity to draw from their varied experience and expertise in exploring and establishing potential ways forward. We had originally planned this SIG for CHI 2020, but due to cancellation, we instead ran two well-attended independent events with a focus on broad community building and immediate social support [7]. Afterward, we maintained a Slack to continue these conversations. However, the original topic for 2020 (updated here) remains just as timely as ever, if not more so considering increasing legal attacks on queer people globally.

We will build off the hybrid synchronous/asynchronous structure which was used for 2020's highly successful online event, as well as lessons learned from that event, subsequent workshops (e.g., [10]), and conference organizing (e.g., CSCW 2020) activities during the pandemic. We aim to create concrete recommendations for better supporting both queer researchers and researchers working with queer topics and theories. The 2020 event highlighted the greater need for: (1) more resources for networking; (2) more mentorship opportunities for queer researchers; (3) development of allyship training; and (4) guidelines on positionality statements. The 2021 SIG—and the conversations that will happen after—will be an important step towards developing these resources.

3 THE SIG

Queer topics and queering research methods are increasingly popular in HCI and at CHI specifically, and the number of queer researchers in HCI continues to increase as well. While this SIG is meant to create an explicitly queer space, we also aim to create a space where anyone who is willing to constructively engage and learn, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, can meaningfully participate. Notably, this means no one will be required to "out" themselves to participate, to preserve privacy and respect personal security needs.

3.1 Logistics

This SIG will follow the same general procedures established to be effective at last year's all-online event. The format for the SIG overall will mix synchronous and asynchronous interaction over a longer period, an approach that allowed broader participation at last year's event. Two weeks out from synchronous activities, we will launch a Padlet to generate key discussion topics for later events. This will allow us to more directly draw from the expertise of those at the SIG, instead of building our time around the assumed backgrounds of our participants. One week before the workshop, we will use the Padlet activity to guide us in updating the existing Queer in HCI Slack to include discussion topics for this year's SIG. By using the existing Slack, we are both building on existing community, and ensuring the continuance of a shared Queer HCI discussion space after the conference. Introductions and preliminary discussion will take place on the Slack in the leadup to the conference. During the conference itself, we will hold a synchronous event, but will support continued asynchronous discussion alongside the live event.

This event will engage on the following topics as a starting point, though we will expand and modify this list as attendees give input:

- Queer positionality, insight, and bias in domains outside queer research
- Hiring, tenure, and HR issues as a queer researcher
- Queer in industry
- What ACM/SIGCHI can do to support queer researchers across domains
- Best practices for ally researchers: language, motivation, time commitments, and background research
- Advising/mentoring queer students in HCI
- Building a network as a queer researcher
- Queer methodologies & epistemologies

3.2 Going Further/Continuity

Any guidelines or findings from this SIG will be written up for publication in Interactions or Communications of the ACM. As with the 2019 and 2020 SIGs, a full recap will also be widely distributed via social platforms in order to maximize reach and potentially inform future work.

At the SIG itself and in related asynchronous discussions, we will actively encourage the formation of partnerships, either research collaborations or larger efforts at promoting solidarity, and will specifically encourage participants to have discussions with those they have not yet had the opportunity to meet or work with. We will leverage the Queer HCI Slack to continue coordinating on these issues after the conference. All attendees will be welcome to continue discussions and their presence on the Queer in HCI Slack, which we will leave standing. We will also use this SIG as an opportunity to determine ongoing leadership and moderation authority for the Slack. The Slack is currently used for providing a space for the Queer HCI community and facilitating one-on-one conversations. In 2021 and beyond, we will be using the Slack - which we anticipate will gain more members during the 2021 SIG - to organize ongoing events.

We plan to continue holding Queer HCI events, either in SIG or workshop format, at future CHI conferences, and this SIG will help inform the focus of those events. These events will lead to the long-term establishment of a wider Queer HCI community, as well as a Queer HCI canon and guidelines for rigorously applying queer methods to HCI research.

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