

# Researcher Wellbeing and Best Practices in Emotionally Demanding Research

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## ABSTRACT

HCI researchers increasingly conduct emotionally demanding research in a variety of different contexts. Though scholarship has begun to address the experiences of HCI researchers conducting this work, there is a need to develop guidelines and best practices for researcher wellbeing. In this one-day CHI workshop, we will bring together a group of HCI researchers across sectors and career levels who conduct emotionally demanding research to discuss their experiences, self-care practices, and strategies for research. Based on these discussions, we will work with workshop attendees to develop best practices and guidelines for researcher wellbeing in the context of emotionally demanding HCI research; launch a repository of community-sourced resources for researcher wellbeing; document the experiences of HCI researchers conducting emotionally demanding research; and establish a community of HCI researchers conducting this type of work.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing**; • **Social and professional topics**;

## KEYWORDS

Emotional wellbeing, emotionally demanding research, researcher wellbeing

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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) researchers operate in a variety of contexts, including death [5, 9, 15, 16], illness [4, 8, 12], online harassment [18], and structural oppression and violence [1, 6, 7, 17, 19], that can be emotionally demanding. Given the many challenges associated with this type of research, HCI scholars have started to discuss practices and strategies that support researchers in carrying out emotionally demanding work [13, 20]. For example, researchers routinely consider the relationships they have with participants, communities, and data as well as the ways that studies should be circulated and shared to ensure an ethical and respectful approach. However, discussions about the experiences of researchers are less prominent, and the nascent works that have emerged call attention to the need for more thoroughly developed guidelines and resources [2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 20]. In this workshop, we will bring together a group of HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding research to discuss self-care principles and strategies related to mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing for conducting this type of work and to develop a series of best practices, guidelines, and resources for researcher wellbeing that can be distributed to the broader HCI community.

Prior HCI scholarship highlights researcher wellbeing in the context of research involving sensitive topics, one type of emotionally demanding research. Moncur outlines important considerations for practice [13], providing a series of questions to support researchers in planning studies involving sensitive topics. Similarly, Wolters et al. illustrate the importance of kindness and acceptance, team support, and reflection for individual wellbeing in the context of eHealth and mHealth research [20]. Drawing on auto-ethnographic accounts, Andalibi and Forte suggest developing a peer support space for researchers to exchange ideas and best practices [3]. The guidance provided by prior work establishes an important foundation for the wellbeing of researchers. However, scholars face an

increasing need for a holistic approach to sustaining researcher wellbeing that includes additional types of emotionally demanding research, promotes best practices and guidelines, and draws upon established and successful practices from other disciplines, when appropriate.

In this workshop, we center the wellbeing of HCI researchers working across sectors (e.g., academia, industry) and at all career levels. We address three types of emotionally demanding research [10]:

- (1) research involving sensitive topics, including research involving prior personal trauma,
- (2) research resulting in secondary trauma and stress (i.e., trauma that can result from interviewing a participant about their own traumatizing experiences), and
- (3) unexpected events that arise during research (e.g. the death of a participant).

Workshop participants will discuss the challenges that researchers conducting emotionally demanding research encounter, the strategies and self-care principles that individuals use to navigate emotionally demanding research, and the roles that senior researchers, teams, and institutions (e.g., universities, corporations) play in sustaining and supporting this type of research. Through this workshop, we will develop best practices and guidelines for HCI researcher wellbeing in emotionally demanding research; curate and launch a repository of crowdsourced (i.e., by workshop attendees) resources for HCI researcher wellbeing; document the experiences of HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding research; and build a community of HCI researchers conducting emotionally demanding research.

## 2 WORKSHOP TOPICS

During our workshop, we will focus on the holistic context in which emotionally demanding research occurs. HCI research does not happen in isolation. Researchers are often working on teams and/or with collaborators and within institutions. To facilitate a robust discussion on how to support and sustain emotionally demanding research, we will focus on three primary topics:

- (1) Challenges related to wellbeing that researchers have encountered and their strategies for navigating these challenges (i.e., HCI researcher experiences);
- (2) The role of teams and collaborators in supporting one another during emotionally demanding research; and
- (3) The role of institutions, including universities and corporations, in mitigating harm to researchers and providing access to resources (e.g. trauma-informed and wellbeing training).

We describe these topics in detail below, including with each a list of questions that will animate our discussions and lead to the development of our workshop outcomes.

### 2.1 HCI Researcher Experiences

At the center of our workshop is a need to better understand and support the experiences of HCI researchers who operate in emotionally demanding research contexts. These researchers are on the ground; that is, close to the data and, at times, communities, participants, and other stakeholders. It's important to support researcher

wellbeing so that individuals can sustainably conduct emotionally demanding research or recognize when it might be time to step away. In centering the experiences of HCI researchers, we will ask questions such as:

- What types of emotionally demanding work (e.g., domain, method) do HCI researchers conduct?
- What challenges have HCI researchers experienced when conducting emotionally demanding work?
- What self-care principles and strategies have HCI researchers developed for navigating these challenges and for caring for their own wellbeing?

### 2.2 The Role of Collaborators and Teams

HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding research often work with others, including advisors and research teams. To understand support in the context of these relationships, we will create opportunities to discuss workshop participants' experiences and needs when collaborating with others. Questions include:

- How can collaborators work together to be reflexive about their emotional wellbeing and affective responses when conducting emotionally demanding research?
- How might individuals in positions of power (e.g., advisors, research managers) guide their teams in finding self-care and support while establishing and maintaining personal boundaries?
- How can experienced researchers mentor their juniors in this type of work, and what resources are needed to facilitate mentorship?

### 2.3 The Role of Institutional Support

Our final workshop topic will address the institutions that HCI researchers operate within. Institutional awareness and support is an important aspect of emotionally demanding research. We will discuss institutional norms as they relate to supporting researcher wellbeing as well as institutional responsibilities and the types of support that are necessary for researchers and teams. We will ask questions including:

- What wellbeing-related resources have institutions provided to researchers conducting emotionally demanding work? What can be done to facilitate the development of additional resources?
- What can we as a community of HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding research do to educate institutions and raise awareness about this type of research, its associated challenges and demands, and the resources we need to sustainably conduct this work?

## 3 WORKSHOP GOALS AND OUTCOMES

We have five primary goals for this workshop:

### 3.1 Develop Best Practices and Guidelines

We will work together to develop guidelines and best practices for HCI researchers conducting emotionally demanding research. Our goal is to develop actionable strategies that workshop participants can use outside of the scope of the workshop (e.g., in their

everyday research practice, to share with their teams). Using discussions from our workshop topics, we will develop best practices that are inclusive of the many different roles individuals have when conducting emotionally demanding work (e.g., advisor, student, industry researcher) and that can help researchers quickly orient to conducting emotionally demanding work.

### 3.2 Launch an Online Repository of Community-Curated Wellbeing Resources

We will begin to establish a crowdsourced list of wellbeing-related resources (e.g., trauma-informed and wellbeing trainings, materials for student researchers) that workshop participants have used. We will host this list of resources in a collaborative spreadsheet, such as Google Sheets, and circulate it with workshop attendees. Following the workshop, we will make this repository available on the workshop's website so that the resources may be accessed by the broader HCI community. Generating a list of resources is a way to support workshop participants and others in continuously educating and caring for themselves.

### 3.3 Call for Papers Related to HCI Researcher Wellbeing in Emotionally Demanding Research

Following the workshop, we intended to release a special call for papers (CFP) related to the wellbeing experiences (e.g., challenges and strategies) of HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding work. We will reach out to the editors of publication venues (e.g. ACM Interactions, ACM TOCHI) to solidify a venue for publication so that workshop attendees and others will have the opportunity to share their experiences engaging in emotionally demanding research. Releasing a CFP allows us to keep conversations moving forward beyond the boundaries of the workshop and promotes continued engagement from workshop members who may be interested in speaking to their specific and diverse experiences.

### 3.4 Document the Experiences of HCI Researchers who Conduct Emotionally Demanding Research

At the end of the workshop, the organizers will share an exit survey asking workshop attendees to share their workshop submissions for data analysis with the goal of manuscript submission to a peer-reviewed venue. The default sharing option will be to opt out. However, participants may select to opt in to sharing their workshop submission when filling out the exit survey. Giving or withholding consent for the collection of these workshop materials does not impact workshop participation (and occurs after the workshop has taken place). In addition to asking attendees to share their workshop submissions, we will record select portions of the workshop. Large group discussions, described in the workshop structure below, will be recorded as a way to collate and assemble best practices and resources. We will remind participants that these parts of the workshop are recorded. Small group discussions occurring in breakout rooms will not be recorded. Co-authorship of the resulting publication will be offered, provided that contributors agree to member check interpretation of their data.

### 3.5 Build and Sustain a Community of HCI Researchers who Conduct Emotionally Demanding Research

Finally, our goal with this workshop is to bring together HCI researchers across sectors and career stages who are engaged in emotionally demanding research. Community-building plays an important role within any type of research. We see community here as a way to start to establish a broad network for supporting one another beyond this one-day event. By creating a space where individuals who conduct emotionally demanding research can come together, we support new relationships and future conversations around this type of work. To sustain the community building facilitated by the workshop, we will create asynchronous and continuous ways of staying in touch (e.g., a dedicated Slack).

## 4 ORGANIZERS

**Jessica L. Feuston (she/her)** is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research involves using online ethnographic methods to understand how members of marginalized groups experience being online. Her research aims to develop design recommendations for social media platforms that center and support the needs of people with marginalized identities and mitigate the online harms that these individuals encounter.

**Arpita Bhattacharya (she/her)** is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of California, Irvine in the Department of Informatics. Her primary research is in the human centered design of technologies for health, specifically focusing on mental health.

**Nazanin Andalibi (she/her)** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Information. Dr. Andalibi's research is in HCI, CSCW, and Social Computing. She studies the interplay between marginality and technology. Her research examines how marginality is experienced, enacted, facilitated, or disrupted in and as mediated through sociotechnical systems.

**Elizabeth A. Ankrah (she/her)** is a Ph.D. student at the University of California, Irvine in the Department of informatics. Her research focuses on the co-design and evaluation of socio-technical interventions to support the lifestyle and chronic illness management of adolescents and young adults. Currently she works specifically with adolescent and young adult childhood cancer survivors.

**Sheena Erete (she/her)** is an associate professor in the College of Computing and Digital Media at DePaul University. Her work focuses on co-designing sustainable technologies, practices, and policies with community organizations to counter structural oppression using equity-centered, justice-oriented, assets-based approaches to research and design.

**Mark Handel (he/him)** is a UX Researcher in Facebook's London office, supporting the Central Integrity team. His work focuses on issues around suicide, self-injury, child safety, bullying and harassment, and in-product interventions to support people through these experiences.

**Wendy Moncur (she/her)** researches lived experience in the Digital Age. Her research focuses on online identity, reputation, trust, and cybersecurity, drawing on HCI, psychology, sociology, digital anthropology, and design. She is particularly interested in

how technology can support challenging life transitions, such as the end of life and relationship breakdowns.

**Sarah Vieweg (she/her)** is a researcher at Twitter where she works on the Health team. She focuses on issues of privacy, misleading information, and also partners with the Human Rights team.

**Jed R. Brubaker (he/him)** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Science. He conducts research in social computing focused on how identity is designed, represented, and experienced in socio-technical systems. His research typically focuses on sensitive topics including death, grief, trauma, and marginalized groups and experiences.

## 5 LINK TO WEBSITE

Contingent on acceptance, the workshop's website will go live at the following address: <https://sites.google.com/view/researcher-wellbeing-workshop/home>.

## 6 PRE-WORKSHOP PLANS

Prior to the workshop, we will invite HCI researchers to attend by circulating our proposal, website, and Call for Participation through the CHI 2022 conference website and our professional networks. We aim to connect with individuals in a broad range of settings, including academia and industry, and who take different methodological approaches to their work (e.g., qualitative, quantitative). We ask that individuals interested in attending please submit responses to a survey. The survey will ask questions related to: 1) the positionality of the researcher and the type of work they conduct; 2) a statement of experience (e.g., challenges to wellbeing encountered, if and/or how those challenges were navigated); 3) a statement of self-care practices or principles in their research; and 4) descriptions (and potentially links) to wellbeing-related resources that people have used or recommended. All questions will be optional — since, for example, we cannot assume that researchers will have a self-care practice. However, we do ask that participants address at least one question. Each response is limited to a maximum of 500 words. We will select up to 30 submissions to attend the workshop. Based on the submissions shared by accepted workshop attendees, we will also begin to organize the repository of shared resources we mention under our workshop goals.

Prior to the workshop, we will share a series of workshop conversational guidelines with attendees. These include: a reminder that the workshop is not a therapy session; temperature checks (e.g., asking that people reflect on their wellbeing and whether or not they're still in the headspace to participate in the workshop); a reminder that it is perfectly acceptable to back out of the workshop at any time (e.g. before the workshop starts, during the workshop); a reminder that participation in this workshop should remain respectful and confidential; and a 'park it' board, where participants can place post-it notes to make visible and park strong emotions raised during the workshop. Additionally, before the workshop, we will ask participants to rank the topics and questions they are most interested in discussing. We will use these responses to organize groups for the small group discussions.

## 7 WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

We will host a 3.5-hour online synchronous workshop (see Table 1), including 30 minutes of planned breaks. Our workshop will include video conferencing technology, such as Zoom, as well as collaborative technologies, such as Miro, Jamboard, Google Docs, and Slack. The use of these technologies will support workshop attendees in participating in the ways they feel most comfortable (e.g., a participant can write or sketch their thoughts on a Jamboard rather than voice them aloud). To support our workshop outcomes, our workshop involves two primary activities: small group discussions and large group discussions.

Prior to the workshop, we will solicit from workshop attendees their preferred topics for discussion (e.g., a participant may prefer to only discuss HCI researcher experiences, while another may want to discuss topics related to collaborations and institutional support). We will use interest in these topics to create groups of three to four participants, depending on the number of participants overall. At least one organizer will be paired with each group. The purpose of these groups is to facilitate small group discussions, which we view as spaces where people can get to know one another and deeply discuss their experiences and insights. However, these small group discussions are not therapy sessions. As such, the organizer assigned to each group will facilitate each small group discussion by posing questions related to the workshop topics, outcomes, and goals. Together, each small group will work to synthesize discussion across group members. For example, creating a summary of self-care principles and strategies that group members follow. During the workshop, depending on how interest in the topics unfolds, small groups may discuss different topics from one another (i.e., different topics can be discussed in parallel). Small group discussions will not be recorded.

Following each small group discussion, workshop attendees will join back together as a large group. Our large group discussion activities will involve each group reporting out a high-level summary of their small group discussion. Large group discussions will be recorded.

In addition to small group and large group discussions, we will also create space and opportunities for participants to connect with one another during breaks, both planned and unplanned. While not required (i.e., participants can step away from their computers at any time during the workshop), we will have a dedicated collaborative digital space, such as a Miro board and a Zoom breakout room, for individuals to share and make visible any reactions they have to workshop discussions. Attendees can select to use (or not) these spaces during scheduled breaks as well as during any other point of the workshop.

## 8 POST-WORKSHOP PLANS

Following the workshop, organizers will create a document of best practices for supporting HCI researcher wellbeing in emotionally demanding work. These best practices will be grounded in the conversations had during the workshop. We will circulate these best practices with workshop participants for feedback and, eventually, share them as a PDF with all workshop attendees and, more broadly, host them on the workshop website.

**Table 1: Structure and Activities for the 3.5 Hour Workshop**

Time	Activity
10 minutes	<b>Introduction.</b> Organizers will present the workshop goals and topics.
30 minutes	<b>Small group discussion #1.</b> Attendees will meet the members of their group and discuss their experiences with one of the workshop topics, summarizing commonalities and important differences across the group. These summaries will contribute to the development of researcher wellbeing guidelines and best practices.
30 minutes	<b>Large group discussion #1.</b> A member of each small group will share what their group discussed in the previous 30 minutes. Namely, summaries and insights related to one of the workshop topics that will facilitate guideline and best practice development.
15 minutes	<b>Break #1.</b> Workshop attendees can use this break in any capacity they would like; such as, stepping away from their computer or joining other attendees in a breakout room.
30 minutes	<b>Small group discussion #2.</b> Groups can decide to continue their previous conversations related to one of the workshop topics or move to a new workshop topic.
30 minutes	<b>Large group discussion #2.</b> A group member will share summaries and insights based on the discussions of their small group.
15 minutes	<b>Break #2.</b> During the second break, the organizers will consolidate and share notes from the two large group discussions. They will synthesize across these discussions to put together a first draft of researcher wellbeing guidelines and best practices. Following the break, this draft will be collaboratively shared with workshop participants (i.e., one draft will be shared per small group).
20 minutes	<b>Small group discussion #3.</b> Will bring group members together to provide feedback to the first draft of researcher wellbeing guidelines and best practices. The groups will edit, add to, and raise questions about the guidelines.
20 minutes	<b>Large group discussion #3.</b> During the final large group discussion, a member of each small group will describe their group’s feedback to the first draft of the researcher wellbeing guidelines and best practices.
10 minutes	<b>Closing.</b> We will conclude with a brief summary of the ground covered during the workshop, as well as next steps with respect to other workshop goals and outcomes (e.g., sharing the next draft of the researcher wellbeing guidelines and best practices, launching a repository, a call for papers, documenting experiences).

We will also circulate a repository of wellbeing resources collected through attendee submissions and workshop discussions with workshop participants, enabling participants to make edits and additions. After circulating this repository with workshop participants, we will make it available via the workshop website.

Additionally, we will send out a CFP for a special issue on HCI researcher wellbeing in emotionally demanding work. We plan to share the guidelines in this issue as well as solicit from workshop participants short articles related to their own challenges, strategies, and self-care principles.

Finally, we will share an exit survey with workshop attendees asking about the use of their workshop submissions in data analysis.

## 9 REMOTE/ONSITE PLANS

We will host the workshop completely online via Zoom for a synchronous 3-hour event. We will use other technologies for asynchronous communication (e.g., Slack) and file and idea-sharing (e.g., Google Drive, Miro).

## 10 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Title: Researcher Wellbeing and Best Practices in Emotionally Demanding Research

This one-day remote workshop will be held as part of the 2022 ACM SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.

Submission Deadline: February 17th, 2022

Acceptance Notification: March 3rd, 2022

Workshop Day: April 14th or 15th, 2022

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[1, 6, 7, 17, 19], that can be emotionally demanding. Given the many challenges associated with this type of research, HCI scholars have started to discuss practices and strategies for supporting researchers in carrying out emotionally demanding work [13, 20]. These nascent works call attention to the need for more thoroughly developed guidelines and resources [2, 3, 11, 13, 14, 20].

In this workshop, we will bring together a group of HCI researchers who conduct emotionally demanding research to discuss self-care principles and strategies related to mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing for conducting this type of work and to develop a series of best practices, guidelines, and resources for researcher wellbeing that can be distributed to the broader HCI community.

Authors will be asked to respond to a survey that asks questions related to: 1) the positionality of the researcher and the type of work they conduct; 2) a statement of experience; 3) a statement of self-care practices or principles in their research; and 4) descriptions of wellbeing-related resources that authors have used or recommended. All questions are optional. However, authors should address at least one. Each response is limited to a maximum of 500 words. Responses will not be shared publicly.

If accepted, we ask that authors attend the workshop. All participants must register for the workshop and for at least one day of the conference.

For more information, please visit <https://sites.google.com/view/researcher-wellbeing-workshop/home>.

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