



SIGCHI Research Ethics Committee Town Hall

Casey Fiesler
casey.fiesler@colorado.edu
University of Colorado Boulder
Boulder, CO, USA

Melissa Densmore
melissa.r.densmore@gmail.com
University of Cape Town
Cape Town, South Africa

Michael Muller
michael_muller@us.ibm.com
IBM Research
Cambridge, MA, USA

Cosmin Munteanu
cosmin@taglab.ca
University of Toronto
Mississauga, Canada

ABSTRACT

Since 2016, the SIGCHI Research Ethics Committee has been in place to advise CSCW and other SIGCHI conferences and communities on ethical issues that arise in the course of our research. This town hall style panel provides an annual opportunity to connect with the committee, which has a remit to report back to the HCI research community on issues that arise as our methods, technologies, and best practices evolve.

CCS CONCEPTS

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

KEYWORDS

ethics, privacy, research ethics, research methods, social computing

ACM Reference Format:

Casey Fiesler, Melissa Densmore, Michael Muller, and Cosmin Munteanu. 2021. SIGCHI Research Ethics Committee Town Hall. In *Companion Publication of the 2021 Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW '21 Companion)*, October 23–27, 2021, Virtual Event, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3462204.3483283>

1 INTRODUCTION

Evolving technologies and practices in the field of HCI and social computing continue to present challenges for questions of research ethics. In recent years, conversations about this topic have become more prominent and open in our research community, and the SIGCHI Research Ethics Committee is tasked with supporting and surfacing these conversations and establishing procedures. One mechanism towards this goal is reporting back to and learning from the community via open discussions at conferences like CSCW. In this town hall style panel, a subset of committee members will reflect (while maintaining anonymity of research and authors) on the kinds of ethical issues that are coming up in the paper review process across SIGCHI, and both pose and answer questions to and

from attendees about ethics-related issues and processes within SIGCHI. Representatives from this committee have held panels at SIGCHI conferences including CSCW [2, 3], CHI [4, 6], IDC [5], and GROUP [1]. The committee is also available to program committees during the review process to provide outside opinions about ethical issues that arise during the paper review process.

Challenges related to research ethics arise both with respect to training and conducting research (e.g., how do we know what best practices should be, and how do we teach them?) and with respect to conversations that happen around research (e.g., how do we handle ethical issues in the review process?). However, because ours is such an interdisciplinary and global community, best practices around research ethics are elusive. Still, based on years of data from these processes as well as conversations at panels like this one, we are able to report back common issues and patterns to the community without danger of de-anonymizing the authors or research that comes to our attention.

The format of the panel will be first a brief report-out about common open questions and topics that have arisen over the past year, and then we will open the floor to questions. We will also take questions ahead of time using other communication channels for CSCW (e.g., the Facebook group and the SIGCHI Discord server). Examples of topics most relevant to CSCW that we are likely to cover include:

- What special precautions should we take when researching vulnerable populations or stigmatized or sensitive groups or issues?
- What are best practices for research that uses data created by humans (e.g., social media posts) that does not constitute human subjects research under typical legal definitions? For example, are there risks in reporting direct quotes from public data or of creating an archive of content outside of its original context? Are there ethical implications to researchers violating Terms of Service?
- How can researchers from a socially empowered culture do ethical research that involves members of a different, less socially-empowered culture?
- When should positionality statements be part of research publications and reviews, and can such statements be harmful as well as helpful?
- Should there be consent practices for online experiments conducted by platforms and/or where people are not informed

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CSCW '21 Companion, October 23–27, 2021, Virtual Event, USA

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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-8479-7/21/10.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3462204.3483283>

about their participation? What are the proper ethical considerations for conducting and then debriefing from studies that involve deception?

- In light of increasing calls for greater transparency, data sharing, and open science within HCI, how do we balance this important value with privacy and research ethics for the humans and the communities represented in our data?
- How well do current ethics guidelines (e.g. Respect for Persons, Justice) help researchers think about the unintended consequences of their work, and in particular the ways that unintended consequences of research, design and technology tend to apply unequally?

2 PARTICIPANTS

Casey Fiesler is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Science at University of Colorado Boulder, and the current chair of the SIGCHI Research Ethics Committee. Her research largely falls into the area of social computing, with an emphasis on law, ethics, and social norms. She is part of a multi-institution National Science Foundation supported project devoted to empirical studies of the ethics of research involving big, pervasive data.

Melissa Densmore is an Associate Professor in the University of Cape Town Department of Computer Science. She is a human-computer interaction for development (HCI4D) researcher, with a specific focus on the uses of new information technology and interfaces for healthcare in Africa. Her work experience is in user interface and web application design, and her research also involves human-computer interaction, participatory design, and action research.

Michael Muller works as a research staff member in IBM Research AI in Cambridge MA USA. His current work involves understanding how humans individually and collaboratively shape the data and the algorithms of data science, to strengthen data science as a necessarily and beneficially human undertaking. Previous work included several values-oriented or value sensitive projects – most recently one of the methodologies for value sensitive participatory design. Michael serves on SIGCHI CARES and has worked on diversity, inclusion, and equity activities in several conferences.

Cosmin Munteanu is an Associate Professor at the Institute for Communication, Culture, Information, and Technology at University of Toronto Mississauga, and Director of the Technologies for Ageing Gracefully lab. His area of expertise is at the intersection of Human-Computer Interaction, Voice User Interfaces, Mobile Computing, Ethics in Computing Research, Assistive Technologies, and Gerontechnology. Cosmin's multidisciplinary interests include speech and multimodal interaction for mobile devices, mixed reality systems, learning technologies for marginalized users, usable privacy and cyber-safety, assistive technologies for older adults, and ethics in human-computer interaction research. Cosmin has previously served as scientific reviewer or applications submitted for ethics review. He has lead courses and training workshops for graduate and faculty researchers at SIGCHI conferences and at several universities in Canada and abroad. Additionally, Cosmin has conducted and published research on the ethical conduct of

research with human participant in emerging techno-centric field-work, and has held a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant for this research.

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