

Application for CHI 2018 Workshop: Untold Stories: Working with Third Sector Organizations

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BIO

I am a White-passing settler of mixed Black Irish, Scottish, Finnish, and English ancestry, born in Treaty 4 and currently living in Treaty 6 Territory / Saskatoon. Raised in a blue-collar, middle class family, I have worked professionally across multiple fields of academia (from English and Philosophy to Computer Science and Governance) for more than 13 years. Though I am from Calgary/Treaty 4 and have lived in almost every major city of this country, I am grateful to consider my home Saskatoon/Treaty 6. Nowhere else have I encountered such difficult but heartfelt social relations. Here we see some of the most aggressive and institutional racism and bigotry; we also see some of the most transformative and active resistance. What results from this boiling pot of tensions is a lot of precedence setting for the rest of Canada. Canada, in turn, often informs many of our global multicultural relations.

The dynamics involved in interpersonal differences have been apparent to me since childhood. What began as a curiosity in the conventionally “gross” and/or “weird” led me, in adulthood, to theories of functional intersectionality, interdisciplinary research, multiculturalism, and sovereignty. My pull to make human relations comprehensible to me brought me to study psychology, anthropology, political science, philosophy, history, language, and now computer science.

I have accumulated a BA (honors) in English, a BA (honors) in psychology, an MA in Critical and Cultural Theory, which has led me to publish papers, lead conferences, and lecture in fields spanning arts, humanities, and social sciences. I have worked in labs concerned with international Northern policy and governance, Indigenous-Settler relations, and psychology of relationships. Working in the Human Computer Interaction Lab at USASK, I was selected by Regan Mandryk for a Ph.D. in computer science to apply my experience in therapeutic and cross-cultural psychology to issues in HCI. My research now focuses on applying critical race theory and ethnocentric health systems to cross-cultural applications of persuasive technologies.

FLYING THE FIELDS

I have led and facilitated seminars (grassroots and academic) on topics ranging from non-hierarchical leadership, intersectionality, and Settler-Indigenous relations to neurophenomenology, best practices in statistical uses of

demographic data, and on public health. I have published papers in multiple fields (human-computer interaction, education, psychology, and creative literature), delivered papers and workshops at many conferences, and attended more workshops and seminars in psychology, health, community, rural and Indigenous advocacy and governance than I can recall. Outside of academia, I ran an educational organization that created individually-tailored curricula focused on each client’s particular learning styles and needs. I also volunteered in special education classrooms, led both primary school and post-secondary academic workshops on civil rights and community building, and have over 8 years of community organizing experience. In most of my community work I have done my best to put emphasis on “returning to the material conditions”—regardless of whether I was organizing politically, conducting outreach, or building community and capacity.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

HCI makes possible the use of unprecedented quantities of behavioral data—altering how we understand human psychology, model, predict, and motivate behavior, changing how we play. The powers at play in HCI already impose a host of barriers: material, social, cultural, and epistemological: the depth and degree of knowledge required to work with HCI’s systems, its grounding in educational institutions and private institutions, its required ways of thinking, what it defines as science, the financial costs of the technology it uses and produces... And without address, HCI’s explanatory and practical power risks perpetuating and intensifying the same systemic inequalities it has the potential to disrupt.

Utilizing HCI’s emerging technologies can mean reproducing past biases, inequities, oppressive systems, as we see in recent applications of AI and machine learning. Because we have entered a third age of information, what we consider information/data, what is deemed valid knowledge, whose truth is legitimated and to what end: these are the questions that determine if we continue to repeat history and past mistakes. How we form answers to such questions have the potential to swing social and global powers toward equity or further toward oppressive hierarchies. An interdisciplinary, intersectional, power-sensitive, historically aware series of perspectives and corrective set of practices are necessary.

NGOs (and some TSOs) often take precisely these systemic inequalities as their principle address. Resource scarcity (be it financial, emotional, administrative, material) is a real concern for most NGOs and TSOs. Thus, where smaller, minimally-funded NGOs/TSOs are concerned we see HCI's greatest potential to magnify human power and knowledge. Collaboration between HCI researchers and TSOs can be greatly beneficial: where data access, analysis, and mobilization are optimized in many HCI approaches, NGO/TSO practices keep the sources of and applications to that data grounded: in daily life, in lived conditions, in personal experiences and daily struggles.

STRIKING BALANCE: AN EXAMPLE

It was from this grounded perspective that my supervisor and I conducted research on people's experiences, beliefs, and opinions surrounding diversity and racial-ethnic representation in digital gaming. Although it wasn't expressed as such on CBC and in Rolling Stone, the results of our study were not new (in many ways, they were merely the synthesis of many prior studies); what caught researchers' attention in our work was the methods we used and how they helped to obtain unprecedentedly accurate results. We began with a series of in-depth interviews with people of color, close to us, with whom we already had a trusting rapport. From these interviews, we worked alongside a small diverse cohort to develop our study instruments and inform our analysis. We pilot tested and conducted a preliminary analysis on responses from all races/ethnicities. Once all researchers, participants, and pilot testers were satisfied and felt their experiences were accurately prompted by the survey, we released the survey to the public.

The results evidenced a host of phenomena, from how people of color "detach" while coping under oppressive norms (thus altering the responses they give) to how we can control for experimental priming, identify and diffuse ideological biases in our data, and elicit more experientially accurate responses from participants. Effectively disproving several past studies, these results would not have been possible if we did not continually shift between living experiences and well-founded research. Our research would not be possible if we did not work at the tenuous intersection between complex daily life and verifiable research methods.

At different times I've lost myself to the kind of balance that must be struck between intellectual/academic research and boots-to-the-ground community work. NGO/TSO work can overlook the way information systems can unburden the repetitious complexity of daily life; the purely academic/research side of data can risk abstraction, entangled in over-intellectualized problems and lack lived context for its data. Together, the two fields have so much to keep each other grounded, to find mutual efficiency and practicality, to be more productive, more ecologically valid and less lost in the repetition of the struggle. Crucial to this balance is understanding a community or peoples' protocols,

ceremony, daily power relations, spoken and unspoken social contracts. These each shape the outcome of our actions, our work, the effects of a collaboration. As a male-bodied settler, whether my actions are further oppressive or mutually beneficial depends entirely on my respectful enacting of protocol—my practices entering a pre-established group of people. The centrality of contracts and protocols in the work I've done in NGOs, as the director of a TSO, as an academic researcher—and the spaces between the three—are exactly why this workshop interests me. The newness of HCI as a field makes the setting of standards, outlining of practices, and establishing of best practices crucial to its development and efficacy.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Over the last decade I have watched the Truth and Reconciliation Committee form a series of complex and individual calls to action. "Reconciliation" here in Saskatoon is an incredibly complicated and fraught term meaning radically different things to each person. I have been grateful enough to be directly engaged in and to observe processes of relating: between the stewards of this land since time immemorial, descendants of original White colonists, and this country's newer settlers, refugees, and immigrants. I have seen these conversations and relations take place in sharing circles and academic conferences alike, in research settings, on reserves, and in public spaces. I can't pretend I have any answers, any tried and definitive methods or knowledge, and I can't assume my knowledge would be appropriate the context of this workshop. Humbly, I bring myself as a witness to several decades of complicated, intersectional relationship work and as a researcher in HCI who is always trying to listen more clearly, act more inclusively, and work in greater solidarity with those I live beside.

LINKS TO RECENT WORKS

Passmore, C.J., Birk, M., Mandryk, R.L. 2018. The Privilege of Immersion: Racial and Ethnic Experiences, Perceptions, and Beliefs in Digital Gaming. In *CHI '18: Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Montreal, QC, Canada. To appear.

<http://hci.usask.ca/publications/view.php?id=518>

Passmore, C.J., Yates, R.K., Birk, M., Mandryk, R.L. 2017. Racial Diversity in Indie Games: Patterns, Challenges, and Opportunities. In *Extended Abstracts Publication of the Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play*, Amsterdam, Netherlands. 137-151. DOI=[10.1145/3130859.3131438](https://doi.org/10.1145/3130859.3131438)

Passmore, C.J. 2015. The Languages of Consciousness: Phenomenal Experiences of Thinking & Meaning-Making. *Thesis*. To appear.

Thank you kindly for your consideration and time reviewing this application. I wish you the best in your upcoming workshop and future research.