

# Collective Healing to Support Design Futures: Building Community and Exploring Methods

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## ABSTRACT

This workshop explores the role of healing ourselves as a key aspect for transformative social change. It brings together social justice and community based work in HCI that engages with healing and joy to expand on current methodologies such as autoethnography, somaesthetics, and embodied design which aim to describe different ways of knowing and describing and living experiences as inputs for design futuring. Our concern of interest is the ways in which all of us have lived through continuous community grief and loss due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and a continued climate crisis; and the resulting symptoms like anxiety, depression, body pain, and scattered focus. We believe that we must acknowledge these experiences and feelings about these events in order to effectively work towards more optimistic futures. This workshop takes the space and time to consider our recent collective traumas and explore how to integrate them into futures that support the development of futures that fit our emotional, ethical, social and physical needs. Our aim is to build a greater understanding of how the CHI community can integrate healing in support of social change.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

## KEYWORDS

Design, politics, social justice, futures

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this workshop, we are concerned with the concept of collective trauma, or the psychological reaction to an event that can negatively impact an entire society. Individuals respond differently to trauma and these reactions can cause short and long term psychological and physical changes. These include heightened vigilance, an increase in fear of change, and potentially shifts in both/individual and national/cultural/ethnic identity [13]. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many of us to experience grief and disorientation as daily life drastically changed. This experience in itself is arguably a global, collective trauma. For the individual, the adverse impacts of the pandemic sometimes included depression, anxiety, sense of isolation, social conflict, disruptions in routines, changes in sleep, exercise, and eating habits, and stress due to challenges in caring for others [27]. At the same time, the pandemic provided a unique opportunity to develop novel ways to address collective trauma head on through the development of innovative approaches to grieve and health both individually and collectively. We recognize this powerful mechanism of experience and journey and propose extending it to critically explore other collective traumas we are currently experiencing. We believe this is the first step to envision a future where healing is prioritized rather than ignoring our collective traumas.

This workshop is particularly interested in how to bridge situated experiences of collective healing to the process of design futuring. Adding to recent calls for trauma informed computing [5], and transformative social justice in HCI [10], this workshop explores the intersection of healing, autoethnography, and somaesthetics as an approach to develop experiential futures in HCI. We believe this is significant because healing experiences can not only improve the well-being of individuals but also serve as a method to raise the prevalence of trauma to social consciousness [12]. This will not transform the world overnight but it can strengthen our own mind-body connection which can lead to enhance our abilities to provide safe, care-centered environments for those we want to design with.

Design research can critique our current states—from personal challenges [1] to large scale political issues [26]. In order to support the shift from critique to developing healthier futures, we suggest implementing healing experiences to serve as a form of knowledge generation where through the acknowledgement of trauma's role in everyday life. In this workshop, we will have two focuses. First, we will do somatic activities that participants can take with them to

address their emotional experiences. Second, we will collaboratively explore how to link healing activities to design practice, and in particular, in the development of futures.

The CHI community has explored the role of minimizing the impacts of trauma during the development and study of technologies [5]. Researchers work directly on projects that involve traumatic events themselves such as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during the COVID-19 pandemic [26], designing for children with previous trauma [18], and positioning ICTs to support refugees [8]. These works prioritize a deep inquiry with the multitude of impacts from trauma including the emotional, physical, social, and contextual dimensions of healing or transitioning through difficult periods. Additionally, HCI has extended beyond acknowledging trauma to implementing external healing models into the research process [21]. Significantly, recent decolonizing discourses in HCI have encouraged gathering data and designing with those who have diverse and situated experiences [24]. This shift from extractive methods to those that aim to understand the positionality and experiences of people can be seen in process-oriented approaches such as feminist utopianism, where including a plurality of voices, use moral principles to guide action, and exploring what the future could be without defining what they are [2] [3]. Thus, feminist utopianism prioritizes not only a critique and analysis the current context but also a process for participatory value setting and action that can lead to anticipatory designs for alternative futures. Unlike contemporary design futures research [25], these discourses and processes are political, aiming to disrupt current social norms in pursuit of healthier, cooperative futures.

Simultaneously, CHI has introduced autobiographical design which encourages researchers to embed their extensive, intuitive knowledge in the design of technologies [22]. This work has been built upon to conduct autoethnographic research [19] that describes positionality without filtering the contribution through a researcher's perspective [17], somaesthetic design [15], and DIY tech [20]. We argue that this kind of practice that is informed and situated in our own experiences can provide knowledge about ways of healing and navigating trauma. A key aspect of this work includes critically examining the ways in which we ourselves may need to change in pursuit of working towards more just futures. Thus, in order to understand what potential futures could align with broader, social justice oriented change, we ourselves must remain in conversation with feminist praxis [16], blurring the boundaries with our own everyday lives and the theoretical ideas about justice.

This workshop aims at bridging the situated knowledge of collective healing to the act of futuring. Often, many design futures approaches struggle to meaningfully engage people in the process of futuring itself. As a result, people are not the developers of the "future" but rather passive viewers of speculative objects that invite them to consider alternative views of what the world could be. This workshop stresses a departure from these approaches to a participatory one in which people are developing new visions, objects, and processes. This is inline with recent work in CHI and design which emphasize approaches such as collective futuring [11], pluriversal design [9], and speculative civics [7].

The goals of this workshop are threefold. First, our objective is to build a community of researchers and practitioners that are interested in how healing can inform design and/or developing

methods for participatory futuring. Second, we aim to develop introductory definitions for the various topics we describe and begin to articulate how they can address social injustice. Third, we will create artifacts that document healing approaches that represent both the individual and the collective experiences. In order to arrive at these ambitions, we have developed three topic areas to explore:

### 1.1 Collective Trauma and Ambiguous Loss

The first part of the workshop involves acknowledging collective trauma, hardship, and loss. In order to expand our own perceptions of collective trauma, we propose utilizing the concept of ambiguous loss. Family social scientist Pauline Boss developed this term to explain losses that do not have closure such as cases when a loved one goes missing but is never proclaimed dead [23]. Ambiguous losses result in 'melancholia' where grief is hard to address or resolve due to the ambiguity of what has been lost. For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, we might mourn the loss of a future we had planned on but can no longer imagine as the world has changed. There is little acknowledgement of or public infrastructure for collective, ambiguous loss. But, some argue that processing grief collectively can lead to acceptance of new realities or damaged landscapes. Working together to process grief at a collective scale, can become an ethical, political move in the case of things like climate change or other large scale events affecting the populace, like the COVID-19 pandemic [4]. Establishing collective and public ways to address collective grief and trauma can be a generative method in itself to manage traumatic experiences as they unfold, especially for the quick, large-scale changes in our world such as systemic racism and climate change.

### 1.2 Somaesthetic Healing Activities

Given the physical, social, and emotional impacts of trauma, we propose focusing on how to strengthen the mind body connection. Specifically, we aim to use somaesthetic healing activities to bring together taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight as experiences to process our experiences. We draw on previous somaesthetic [14] and embodied design [28] work which are central to bring alternative futures and experiences to life through tangible, visceral experiences such as exhibitions, workshops, and games. In these brief moments, participants can be different people, experience different worlds, and consider the ethical, social, and emotional conditions of the experiences. We draw on the senses and physical movement such as body mapping and dance to evoke reflective activities. Some of these approaches are commonly used in or inspired by somatic therapy or art therapy. We differentiate our activities from these fields because we are focused on healing futures which engage with grief and trauma directly as individual and collective social healing processes to critique our current collective traumas and prepare ourselves to move forward.

### 1.3 Effect of Somatic Healing on Design and Futures

We argue that through the acknowledgement of collective trauma and somatic healing activities, we can support, enhance, and question our design research processes and reflect on our own ability

to take collective action. In order to work towards this level of critical self reflection, we suggest using autobiographical [22] and autoethnographic [6] approaches to record personal experiences as relevant data points in the design process and serve as potential research artifacts and designs. Throughout the workshop, each activity will have set time to develop this self-reflecting practice through creative work such as artifact creation, journaling, or sketching. The goal of this reflective approach is to exercise how designers' positionality and experiences can be a continuous source of knowledge that should be considered in the development of collective futures.

## 2 ORGANIZERS

Catherine Wiczorek (she/her) is a designer and researcher, working at the intersection of public health, design, and feminism. She is a second year PhD student in Human Computer Interaction at Penn State University.

Heidi Biggs (they/she) is a PhD candidate in Human Computer Interaction at Penn State University whose research asks how data builds relations between people and the environment. Using critical making and embodied explorations with data, they generate critical readings and reimaginings of environmental data and sustainability in computing research.

Maggie Jack (she/her) researches the role of media in post-conflict healing, along with other questions of work and technology in global contexts. She is a postdoctoral scholar at Syracuse University/UC Irvine and holds a PhD in Information Science (2020) from Cornell University.

Laura Forlano (she/her) is a writer, social scientist and design researcher, working on technology, disability justice and participatory futures. She leads the Critical Futures Lab as an Associate Professor of Design at the Institute of Design at Illinois Institute of Technology. She has organized over 15 workshops in the past 10 years.

Shaowen Bardzell (she/her) is Professor at Penn State University. Her research explores the contributions of design, feminism, and social science to support technology's role in social change. She has organized numerous workshops at SIGCHI venues and beyond (2007-2022), including CHI, DIS, CSCW, NordiCHI, Aarhus Conference, British HCI, PDC, EPIC, ACE, and 4S among others.

## 3 WEBSITE

Details about the workshop call, details of the event, and participant bios will be made available on our website, <https://sites.psu.edu/collectivehealing/>, on or before December 15, 2022. Accepted submissions from participants and future outputs of the workshop will be published on this website.

## 4 PRE-WORKSHOP PLANS

### 4.1 Workshop Recruitment and Application

We invite researchers, designers, activists, and artists that are interested in acknowledging trauma, embedding their own positionality in design and computing research, and supporting the development of healing futures. In order to conduct this workshop, we invite a minimum of ten participants and up to twenty participants to join us.

Information on the workshop and participation requirements will be posted on the website and on e-flyers for distribution on various mailing lists and platforms of social justice communities, including CHI and CSCW communities and industry or community design groups. We will also announce the call on social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

Given the embodied, reflective, and flexible nature of the workshop, potential participants will have a few options for submission: (1) a short abstract (up to 500 words), audio or video file (2-3 minutes), or an artifact with accompanying text to explain the context and significance (100 words). The purpose of the submission is for participants to answer one of the following questions:

- How do you locate your work within HCI and healing and/or grieving?
- What methods, approaches, and practices do you use to facilitate healing either personally or collectively?
- What methods, approaches, and practices do you use to develop collective, participative futuring?

These questions invite participants to describe their own practice, research, or personal practices related to the workshop themes of collective trauma and ambiguous loss, somaesthetic healing activities, effect of somatic healing on design. We believe answering these questions can grow the HCI community's growing interest in trauma-informed computing and healing and grieving as significant concerns in the development of technologies. Before the workshop, these inputs will be shared among all the participants to serve as an introduction into each other's practices and support potential topics to explore in the website.

## 5 WORKSHOP DESIGN

Our workshop will be a 1-day hybrid event split into two parts. The first part can be conducted either asynchronously (during the week prior to the workshop) or online in real-time alongside the in-person event. The second part must be conducted online in real-time alongside the in-person event. Our hope is that this format can accommodate multiple time zones and any potential changes or obstacles given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Online participants will participate via the virtual meeting platform, Zoom, and with the online whiteboarding tool, Miro. 1-2 workshop organizers will facilitate the virtual portion of the hybrid event. They will oversee any technical or logistical issues and will communicate in real time with the on-site facilitators. We will have a dedicated laptop, monitor, and speakers so that virtual and in-person participants can interact. Additionally, we will use captioning, written instructions, and/or other visual or audio support as much as possible to support participants.

### 5.1 Workshop Activities

Our workshop will take part over one day (with the exception of those who choose to complete Part 1 asynchronously). Part 1 will take place from 9:00 am - noon. In this session, the organizers will introduce the workshop objectives and topics raised by participants and lead participants through a series of healing activities aimed at acknowledging collective trauma and processing these experiences through ethnographic techniques and creation of artifacts. The second part will take place after lunch until 5:00pm. In this session,

participants will use their artifacts to explore collective futuring methods.

## 5.2 Healing Activities

Healing activities use sensory experiences to support the mind to the body connection. In each activity, we focus on one to two senses as the focal point. The purpose is to introduce somaesthetic activities and understand how they can support the experiential futuring process. In Table 1, a brief description of the proposed activities can be found. After and during each activity, we will make space for self-reflection through a creative practice such as sketching or collaging. We conclude the first section of the workshop with a meta-journaling reflection so that participants can consider the artifacts they created, reflect on their own experiences during the session, and consider what the potential implications are for design futures.

## 5.3 Collective Futuring

The second part of the workshop will leverage the artifacts from Part 1 as data to use in the collective futuring process. Working in small groups, these teams will collectively discuss their healing experiences and begin to gather a sense of potential ways forward to develop visions for the future. Collectively, the team will begin to use design futures approaches to sketch out preferable futures through the lens of collective healing.

## 6 POST WORKSHOP PLANS

Discussions and artifacts from the workshop will be archived on the website pending participants' consent and consensus. We intend to create a method to communicate as a collective after the workshop: mailing list, slack group, etc. depending on what works best for the participants.

## 7 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

This hybrid workshop aims to provide a space for collective healing and understand its implications for design futuring. We seek participation from researchers, designers, activists, and artists that are interested in acknowledging trauma, embedding their own positionality in design and computing research, and supporting the development of healing futures.

To apply, please select one of the options for submission: (1) a short abstract (up to 500 words), audio or video file (2-3 minutes), or an artifact with accompanying text to explain the context and significance (100 words). The purpose of the submission is for participants to answer one of the following questions:

- How do you locate your work within HCI and healing and/or grieving?
- What methods, approaches, and practices do you use to facilitate healing either personally or collectively?
- What methods, approaches, and practices do you use to develop collective, participative futuring?

### 7.1 Submission Details

- Submission deadline: February 17, 2023
- Final notification of acceptance: March 3, 2023

- Selection criteria: Contribution to workshop's themes, quality of presentation, and potential to stimulate discussions.
- Submission options: (1) a short abstract (up to 500 words), audio or video file (2-3 minutes), or an artifact with accompanying text to explain the context and significance (100 words).
- Submission: Email to [crw5756@psu.edu](mailto:crw5756@psu.edu) with the subject line "CHI 2023 Workshop".
- Website: <https://sites.psu.edu/collectivehealing/>

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**Table 1: TABLE 1**

| Workshop Schedule    | Activities                  | Notes                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9:00 am to 10:00 am  | Introductions               | Organizers introduce workshop objectives, schedule, and activities.                                                                             |
| 10:00 am to 10:45 am | Smell & Taste               | We invite participants to experience a multi-sensory experience and reflect on its healing capabilities.                                        |
| 10:45 am to 11:30 am | Body Mapping                | The body mapping exercise will be a dynamic exercise that connects mind to body through diagramming experiences as an artifact.                 |
| 11:30 am to noon     | Sound & Movement Activity   | An immersive experience that encourages participants to connect through sound and movement such as dance.                                       |
| Noon to 1 pm         | Lunch                       |                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1:00 pm to 3 pm      | Participatory Futuring      | Participants will form groups to share their artifacts and use them as data points in design futures approaches to develop alternative futures. |
| 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm   | Presentation and Debriefing | The day will end with a reflective discussion and discuss potential next steps.                                                                 |
| 4:30 pm to 5:00 pm   | Workshop Wrap-up            | A final discussion to reflect on the day and discuss next steps                                                                                 |

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