Neurodiversity Meet-Up @ CHI: Building a Neuro-Affirming Community in HCI

Nathalie Alexandra Penglin Tcherdakoff
Bristol Interaction Group
University of Bristol
Bristol, United Kingdom
UCL Interaction Centre
University College London
London, United Kingdom
alex.tcherdakoff@bristol.ac.uk

Patricia Piedade
ITI/LARSyS and INESC-ID
Universidade de Lisboa
Lisbon, Portugal
patricia.piedade@tecnico.ulisboa.pt

Grace Jane Stangroome
Bristol Interaction Group
University of Bristol
Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
g.stangroome.2019@bristol.ac.uk

Marta E. Cecchinato
Northumbria University
Newcastle
upon Tyne, United Kingdom
marta.cecchinato@northumbria.ac.uk

Antonella Nonnis
LCC, Design School
UAL
London, United Kingdom
a.nonnis@lcc.arts.ac.uk

Shoko Kimura
Architecture Design
Nagoya Institute of Technology
Nagoya, Aichi, Japan
cmx14003@nitech.jp

Nicolai Brodersen Hansen
Computer Science
Aalborg University
Aalborg, Denmark
nbha@cs.aau.dk

Laura Maye
School of Computer
Science and Information Technology
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland
laura.maye@ucc.ie

Anna R. L. Carter
Computer and Information Sciences
Northumbria University
Newcastle
Upon Tyne, United Kingdom
anna.r.l.carter@northumbria.ac.uk

Abstract

This Meet-Up aims to support the neurodiverse communities at CHI and broaden our examination of our practices, with the goal of fostering neuro-affirming environments both within and outside academia. Following our Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting at CHI last year, we aim to further establish a sense of community, continuity, and tradition at CHI and continue these discussions in the long term. We build on our existing resources and community from this SIG and seek to continue extending it in future years, welcoming participants of any neurotype to join us in this endeavour. We focus on shared strategies, creating infrastructure, and providing access to information through documentation. We will discuss how different actors at micro (individual), meso (community), and macro (structural) levels can help distribute access labour through a World Café-style discussion, followed by a document of resources for the community to access.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → Accessibility theory, concepts and paradigms**.

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1 Introduction

Neurodiversity research in HCI has grown significantly in recent years, with entire sessions dedicated to papers exploring neurodiversity issues at last CHI (2025) [1, 4, 13, 14, 19, 22–24, 28, 29, 31, 32, 38, 40, 42, 46, 48, 50, 52–54, 56, 61, 74–76, 79][1]. We also ran a hybrid Special Interest Group (SIG) at CHI 2025 [70] to which the response was significant (with around 45 participants): as such, we want to keep momentum to strengthen and grow this community at CHI, as others have been thriving [8] At the SIG, we established that academia is predominantly structured around neurotypical norms [39, 41] which can create barriers for neurodivergent and neurotypical academics alike [7, 37, 44, 63], but is compounded by systemic [techno]-ableist [25] standards and thus disproportionately affects neuro*divergent* individuals' [5, 7, 9, 10, 15, 26, 33, 58, 65, 67] confidence, safety, and success in academia [5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 20, 45, 57, 58, 65, 68],

[1]These papers and this session are all from last year's CHI (2025)

despite increasing awareness of neurodiversity [16, 64]. These experiences follow neurodivergent individuals *beyond* academia and in ways which *intersect* [17] with other aspects of their identities: human bodies are deeply political [71], and we must acknowledge systemic violence, such as black autistic youths killed due to the criminalisation of their neurodivergent behaviours [27, 36], highlighting how diagnostic referrals often stem from schools, where white children's behaviours are medicalised, but black children are punished. Thus, understanding the *intersectionality* [17] of neurodivergent experiences can reshape accessibility research [34]. In this Meet-Up, we will begin formulating a neuro-affirming **community** and **resource platform** for neurodivergent people and allies, beyond the scope of only academia. With an emphasis on intersectionality [17], we will explore how overlapping identities of neurodiverse communities (such as disability, race, and sexuality) interact, and how neurodiversity is being politicised [47] today.

2 Definitions, Participants, and Position

The central aggregator of this Meet-up, neurodivergence, is an umbrella term that describes *individuals* different from the neurotypical majority, with conditions such as Autism, ADHD, and Dyslexia, among others [18, 73].

We aim to build a community within CHI that fosters neuro-affirming practices (i.e., those that accept, include, and celebrate neurodivergent ways of thinking and being [73]). We welcome participants of any neurotype[2], any career stage, any background and sector (both academia and industry), and any interest, with the shared goal of neurodiversity inclusion.

Various members of the organising team are neurodivergent or otherwise disabled[3], and while we acknowledge the importance of disclosing our positions here as they affect our perspectives and motivations [6], we also understand the controversy of setting the precedent of identifying one's position [47, 51, 60, 77] when it comes to inherently politicised identities such as neurodivergence [47]: not everyone is able to safely or comfortably disclose their neurotype [77]. Thus, we seek to position our *work* rather than individual organisers, as a shared a commitment to neuro-affirming practices within and outside our research.

3 Continuity and Discussion Points

At last CHI's Neurodiversity SIG [70], we discussed how we could design intentionally for neurodiversity in academia and in HCI [70]. Taking example from other CHI communities with such continuity [8], we now seek to expand these discussions past academia, but also take a focus on neuro-affirming practices at and beyond CHI. Building on these conversations and the created resources [2], we propose the following discussion points, to be refined within the established community and at the Meet-Up: **(1) Sharing Strategies and Community-Led Hacks**: creating agendas to address issues identified last year and ones that are generated from new participants, including issues brought up in our pre-Meet-Up survey of the community; **(2) Providing Neuro-Affirming Infrastructure and Access-Documentation** at and outside of CHI: We discussed that Information is Access, and that technoableist standards force many disabled individuals to perform excessive access labour [10, 62, 66, 69] and be their own advocates and documentarians. With this discussion point, we aim to explore how we could share this burden as a community[4].

These points are the broad *goals* of **building a neuro-affirming community at CHI**: *Sharing Strategies and Community-Led Hacks*, and *Providing Neuro-Affirming Infrastructure and Access-Documentation*. We will also break down the *enactors* of these goals, as in *who* should be expected to perform which type of access labour [10, 62, 66, 69]: whether that is on an *individual* (micro) [49] level[5], whether it falls on the disabled or neurodivergent *community* (meso level) to support each other in this way, or whether this should be considered by *larger actors* (macro level), who should design infrastructure [30] and events for neurodiversity with intention [55] and as a forethought [12]. During our discussion activity (the World Café [3]), we will address these by focusing on resources, tools, and practices for all levels of actors, in different areas at a micro, meso and macro level [49] (which we will determine with the community both online pre-Meet-Up, and in the Meet-Up itself), such as: (1) Personal life, (2) Workplace and co-worker relationships, (3) Conferences or work events, (4) Digital infrastructure. We will culminate discussions with a spreadsheet populated during the Meet-Up with tagged resources.

4 Plans and Outcomes

Our plans for this Meet-Up are to strengthen and grow the neurodiversity community at CHI, building on the community and resources established at the previous SIG [70]. During the Meet-Up we will hold World Café discussions around our themes [3], resulting in concrete resources, and a neurodiversity. Beyond the Meet-Up, we will foster networking opportunities at CHI 2026 and after.

Neurodiversity Community at and Beyond CHI: We plan to keep building on the Slack community from our SIG last year (which has approximately 55 active members), expanding it and including members in shaping the decisions and discussions for the Meet-Up (by polling members pre-Meet-Up on the discussion points, for example). We also sought collaboration from the organisers of neurodivergent-access infrastructure from CHI 2025. Going further than CHI 2026, we plan to keep the Slack community alive through the years, and hope traditions from the SIG and Meet-Up are formed and can migrate to the rest of the HCI community.

Meet-up Activities (90 minutes): During the Meet-Up itself, we plan to conduct World Café-style discussions [3]. Attendees will be split into groups, based on our discussion topics. At least one organiser per topic will hold a large posterboard or A0 sheet of paper, and take notes on a timed discussion with their group. Groups will swap topics (with each topic keeping its assigned organiser) and build upon the last groups' insights, until each group has discussed every topic. Summaries of the discussions will be reported on a digital platform (e.g. Miro, Slack) to ensure the conversations can continue beyond CHI.

[2] Including both neurotypical and neurodivergent attendees, with the understanding that much like sexuality [8, 51], neurotype is not always safe or possible to disclose [77], many may not feel comfortable or able to do so, or may still be in a journey of self-discovery and understanding on the topic.

[3] As well as queer [11, 21, 51] and belonging to various cultures and diasporas [59, 72].

[4] Including our neurotypical allies.

[5] And whether disabled individuals should be expected to expend their already limited spoons [43] on access labour [10].

Accessibility: Our commitment to accessibility is paramount to the community we aim to build through this Meet-Up. To achieve this, we will ask all participants about any accommodations they may require. During the Meet-Up, we will honour all forms of communication [35, 78]. We encourage all participants to include their names and pronouns when contributing to the discussion. We ask all participants to help us create an overall low-fragrance environment. We also welcome floor seating, comfort items, movement, sensory accommodations and bodily extensions such as fidgets and ear defenders.

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