



Queering digital mental health for Australian LGBTQ+ youth: Reflections on self-care interventions

Adam Poulsen, Sarah McKenna, Ian B Hickie, & Haley M LaMonica
Brain and Mind Centre, The University of Sydney

INTRODUCTION

Australian LGBTQ+ youth experience significant mental health inequities [1], including added service access barriers [2] and higher demand for professional support (76%) compared to heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (69%) [3].

Digital mental health self-care interventions can improve health outcomes, literacy, information-seeking, and service experience for the broader population [4].

But 'designing for everyone' risks excluding LGBTQ+ youth, exacerbating inequities [5]. Further 'queering' via stakeholder engagement and value sensitivity is needed to reduce bias risk and to advance LGBTQ+ inclusivity in self-care intervention design [5].

METHODS

This formative research applies value sensitive design (VSD) [6] to conduct a retrospective analysis of the use and design of digital mental health self-care interventions that may benefit Australian LGBTQ+ youth.

To that end, brief *value scenarios* [7] are used to reflect on key stakeholders, stakeholder values (found in the literature), and value tensions in the intervention context.

RESULTS: VALUE SCENARIOS

Self-care mobile app (with free and paid features)



Stakeholders: Australian LGBTQ+ youth, app developer, and the public.

Values and tensions:

+ Non-discrimination [9] Avoids risk of discrimination at in-person services.

+ Fluid identity [10] Can be supported with customised gender, sex, and sexuality diversity options on apps.

- Ease of information access [8] Paid features incur user costs, affecting access.

LGBTQ+ service navigation video guide on YouTube



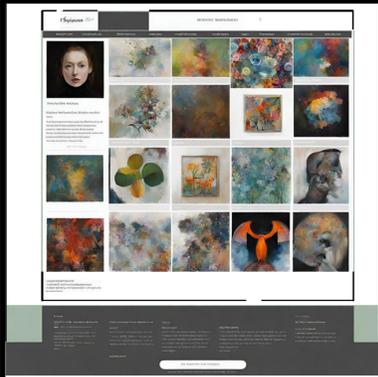
Stakeholders: Australian LGBTQ+ youth, service provider, YouTube, content developer, and the public.

Values and tensions:

+ LGBTQ-inclusive care [8] Targeted interventions are a determining factor for many in this community.

+ - Acceptance [9] User comments on YouTube may be either positive (improving acceptance) or negative (harming acceptance).

Online art showcase for those with lived experience



Stakeholders: Australian LGBTQ+ youth, service provider, and the public.

Values and tensions:

+ Activism [8] Enables users to participate in activism by expressing their experience to the public.

+ Liberty [9] A public-facing solution enables significant social freedom.

+ - Acceptance [9] May advance acceptance, or expose persisting intolerance, within the public.

Digital storytelling on social media (in a closed group)



Stakeholders: Australian LGBTQ+ youth, group administrators, social media company, content developer.

Values and tensions:

+ - Belonging [9] This is highly valued by this group, but the impact of social media on belonging can be either positive or negative [11,12].

+ Ease of information access [8] Makes health information freely available in online spaces users already utilise.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Following the **BMC Youth Model of Care** which emphasises ensuring personalised and measurement-based care, additional **VSD work** could focus on *personalisation as a value* and aim to draw out what personalisation means to Australian LGBTQ+ youth in the self-care intervention socio-technical context.

Additionally, **co-design work and pre- and post-intervention trials** could be the next step to best:

1. Understand the values of Australian LGBTQ+ youth.
2. Inform the value-driven design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.
3. Measure intervention impacts on mental health outcomes, literacy, information-seeking behaviour, and service experience.

LITERATURE CITED

[1] Byron, P., Rasmussen, S., Wright Toussaint, D., Lobo, R., Robinson, K. H., & Paradise, B. (2017). 'You learn from each other': LGBTQ+ youth experience significant mental health inequities. *Journal of Mental Health*, 26(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1345111>

[2] Bowman, S., Easpaig, B. N. G., & Fox, R. (2020). Virtually caring: A qualitative study of internet-based mental health services for LGBTQ+ young adults in rural Australia. *Rural and Remote Health*, 20(1), 106-113. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.152715851058659>

[3] headspace National Youth Mental Health Survey 2022. (2022). headspace. https://headspace.org.au/assets/HeadSpace_LGBT-Infographic_V3.pdf

[4] Portnoy, D. B., Scott-Sheldon, L. A. J., Johnson, B. T., & Carey, M. P. (2008). Computer-delivered interventions for health promotion and behavioral risk reduction: A meta-analysis of 75 randomized controlled trials, 1988-2007. *Preventive Medicine*, 47(1), 3-16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2008.02.014>

[5] Poulsen, A., Fosch-Villaronga, E., & Søraa, R. A. (2020). Queering machines. *Nature Machine Intelligence*, 2(3), 152-152. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42256-020-0157-6>

[6] Friedman, B., & Hendry, D. G. (2019). Value sensitive design: Shaping technology with moral imagination. MIT Press.

[7] Nathan, L. P., Klasnja, P. V., & Friedman, B. (2007). Value scenarios: a technique for envisioning systemic effects of new technologies. In *Proceedings of the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (pp. 2585-2590). ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1240866.1241046>

[8] Smith, E., Jones, T., Ward, R., Dixon, J., Mitchell, A., & Hillier, L. (2014). From Blues to Rainbows. The Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health, and Society. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2014-09/apo-nid41426.pdf>

[9] Demant, D., Hides, L., White, K. M., & Kavanagh, D. J. (2018). LGBT communities and substance use in Queensland, Australia: Perceptions of young people and community stakeholders. *PLOS ONE* 13(9), 1-27. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204730>

[10] Clarke, K., Cover, R., & Aggleton, P. (2018). Sex and ambivalence: LGBTQ youth negotiating sexual feelings, desires and attractions. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 15(3), 227-242. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2018.1469449>

[11] Robards, B., Churchill, B., Vivienne, S., Hanckel, B., & Byron, P. (2018). Twenty years of 'cyberqueer'. In P. Aggleton, R. Cover, D. Leahy, D. Marshall, M. L. Rasmussen (Eds.), *Youth, Sexuality and Sexual Citizenship* (pp. 151-167). Routledge

[12] Marlin, L., Lewis, C., & McLaren, S. (2023). "Being able to be yourself": A qualitative exploration of how queer emerging adults experience a sense of belonging in rural Australia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 70(14), 3306-3327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2022.2092806>