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# SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THERAPY: A CALL FOR THE INVOLVEMENT OF INFORMATION SCHOLARS IN DESIGNING DIGITAL TOOLS FOR MENTAL HEALTH (Lightning Talk)

## **Abstract or Résumé:**

The integration of technology in therapy has grown significantly, driven by factors such as accessibility, affordability, and heightened user engagement. This talk explores technology's transformative impact on psychotherapy, focusing on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) as a pioneer in adopting a range of technology-based interventions from sensor-based wearables to immersive media. Emphasizing the unique perspectives of Information scholars in providing a user-centered perspective on this socio-technical space, we argue that therapeutic interactions present a distinctive and enriching environment for the information discipline.

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Interest in the health and medical applications of information technology has grown significantly in the last two decades and there is now considerable research focus on new tools and techniques for diagnosis, data management and treatment of medical conditions (see e.g., Dixon et al, 2023). To date, research has primarily focused on physical health but as technology advances, there is an increasing interest in exploring how new digital tools might affect mental health interventions, particularly given the rise in such concerns after the Covid-19 pandemic. Technology-based mental interventions (TBIs) offer the potential to be more affordable, convenient, acceptable, and flexible than traditional in-person therapy sessions (Kazdin, 2015).

One of the challenges in treating mental health is accessing care (Wilhem, 2020). Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based, problem-focused approach that seeks to change maladaptive thinking and behavior through rational and action based methods. CBT, as opposed to related methods such as psychoanalysis or humanistic counseling, is focused on the patient's current thinking and behavior rather than exploring a client's past or unconscious drives. CBT techniques have been ported to a variety of technologies as a means of adding access to care through novel solutions. There are Web-based interventions, mobile applications, and virtual and augmented therapy experiences that follow the CBT framework (Berry & Lai, 2014; Aguilera, & Muench, 2012; Wu et al., 2021; Baus & Bouchard, 2014).

This is an area where the user-centered focus and methods of information scholars could play a significant role. The application of digital tools to the therapeutic environment represents a new domain for research and application, one we believe would benefit from a more socio-technically informed user-centered design orientation. Addressing this context fully, however, requires a

broader view of humans and their experience, beyond conceiving them as information seekers or task performers in pursuit of efficient or effective outputs. The therapeutic relationship involves stakeholders who are professionals and clients, often exploring unique and multifaceted relationships between the self and the world, where outcomes are often loosely defined or only emerge by consensus over time.

In this lightning talk, we examine CBT across a range of technological interventions and designs that are shaping the future of a previously human-only environment. Emphasizing the unique methods of Information Scholars, we advocate for their involvement to provide a socio-technical, user-centered perspective, outlining their potential contributions in designing the digital tools evolving and emerging in the therapy technology landscape that significantly impact the lives of others in meaningful ways.

Specifically, we argue that new technologies for therapy could benefit from, and inform information scholarship in the following areas:

- facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and technology developers
- informing design so technologies are smoothly integrated into therapy interventions while prioritizing the quality of user experience (therapists and patients)
- influencing the effectiveness and usability of interventions
- enriching our field's understanding of users in non-instrumental activities
- establishing immersive or virtual reality design as a new form of UX challenge

## References

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