
Queer(ing) HCI: Moving Forward in Theory and Practice

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Defining “Queer”

“Queer: *colloq.* (orig. U.S.). Of a person: ...denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms.” [1]

“Well, yes, “gay” is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we’ve chosen to call ourselves queer. Using “queer” is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world.” [19]

“Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence.” [9]

“Queer, if it names anything, names a critical impulse that can never, must never, settle.” [14]

ABSTRACT

The increasing corpus on queer research within HCI, which started by focusing on sites such as location-based dating apps, has begun to expand to other topics such as identity formation, mental health and physical well-being. This Special Interest Group (SIG) aims to create a space for discussion, connection and camaraderie for researchers working with queer populations, queer people in research, and those using queer theory to inform their work. We aim to facilitate a broad-ranging, inclusive discussion of where queer HCI research goes next.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics** → **Gender; Sexual orientation;**

KEYWORDS

Queer Theory, Queer Practice, Queer Interaction, Queer Identity.

In recent years, the HCI community has turned substantial attention to the issues that affect queer communities, especially as they relate to dating, hookups [2, 5] and identity management [4, 7, 10]. Simultaneously, there is an increased awareness within HCI that the process of queering—the playful, subversive troubling of existing systems—is an increasingly useful tool [17, 20]. This tool may become even more important as the societal *need* to trouble and subvert these systems, which have the potential to either reinforce or undermine unquestioned and dangerous norms [11], becomes more widely apparent.

Queer work in all its forms has proved to be an important first step towards being inclusive of a diverse and increasingly culturally-relevant area of society, and an important exercise in being reflexive as a design community. However, the queer theory strand of Queer HCI has been mostly theoretical to this point, while the empirical strand has largely been restricted to dating and disclosure contexts, despite the fact that queer experiences range far beyond these topics. Both strands of Queer HCI have also developed largely in parallel to one another. To move towards queering and expanding our empiricism while ensuring our queering work materially serves the broader LGBTQ+ community,

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SIG Purpose

By bringing together a community of curious HCI activists with interest in queer identity, queering, and subversion, we can combine strengths to push the boundaries of research with and by queer populations and what it can contribute to the larger CHI community.

A SIG at CHI 2019, where key researchers meet and present related work, provides the ideal venue for addressing these issues.

¹The predominant ideology, often found in HCI, that conceptualises gender as a strictly binary construct [20].

we propose a SIG at CHI 2019 to serve as a bridge and an organizing space for the whole Queer HCI community.

QUEERING HCI

Queer HCI, in its theory- and queering-based strand, works to analyse and challenge the structures and norms underlying sexism, i.e. the rigid classification of humanity into static forms, through troubling [17]. This kind of work, as well as important definitional work such as Rode's approach to conceptualising gender as a more fluid, flexible and produced matter [20], build a pathway towards different topics that benefit from a queer lens [13]. Additionally, practical calls have been made for using the queer strategy of *troubling* to design against a toxic status quo [11].

Queer(ing) research has the potential to tackle negative impacts and assumptions in HCI such as normalisation strategies in technology, most prominently gender binarism¹ in data, meta-data and algorithms [12]. Gender recognition technologies have also been investigated regarding issues of safety for trans people [21] or the inherent reductionist binarism in the approach, which is not only inseparably tied to surveillance and normativity, but also externally assigns gender identities instead of acknowledging gender as a (self-)affirmative personal statement [15]. Queering as a lens has much potential for making HCI research, on queer populations and on technology more generally, more reflexive and inclusive.

HCI RESEARCH ON AND BY QUEERS

At the same time, more traditional empirical work on queer populations has provided in-depth accounts of queer life experiences as they intersect with technology, while also serving as an illustrative test case for HCI more generally due to the complexities of identity and community formation within these groups [6]. However, prior studies have largely focused on gay men [8, 10, 16], while the queer community is, in fact, a highly diverse and heterogenous group [18]. Recent work by junior scholars has begun to expand to questions of health and wellbeing [7], and has begun to cover more diverse slices of the queer landscape (e.g. [3, 4]) including negotiating a queer identity as researcher with the material aspects of conducting research with people [22], bringing up new challenges around recruiting, theorizing, and framing these more widely-scoped projects. In essence, empirical queer HCI is currently undergoing its own process of queering and subsequent expansion - it is the perfect time, then, for these two parts of the CHI queer community to compare notes and forge partnerships.

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