

Categorising people: tensions in critical approaches to design

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Abstract

Categorising people: tensions in critical approaches to design is a workshop designed to examine the tensions present in categorisation and proxy, through personas. In design research we uncover the needs, beliefs and behaviours of people to create products, services and systems. We synthesize, draw conclusions and create representations from people's personal information. This representation wields power by allowing the design research and outcomes to become proxies about who and how another person is. A commonly used method, personas, is an example of categorisation and proxy.

This workshop will use this common design research tool to question how we understand *who people are* and explore non-dominant ideas of identity. Translating approaches from queer activism in the field of Library and Information Sciences, we will explore activist and queer theories to categorizing and critically consider underlying assumptions and biases in human-centred tools. The key tension we are exploring is how we attempt to get it 'right' when representing complexities such as people, relationships and identity.

The goal of this workshop is to spark critical reflection around identity, groupings and worldviews, and collectively examine how these show up in design work.

Participants should arrive open and willing to recognise personal biases, as well as be aware that sensitive issues around identity and bias may arise.

Keywords: identity, personas, design research, decolonizing, queer theory