

# Consent: A Research and Design Lens for Human-Computer Interaction

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Consent has become an important concept across multiple areas within HCI/CSCW, community advocacy work, and the tech industry, for understanding social computing problems and designing safe and agentic computer-mediated communication. Recent research has studied consent in various topics, such as online-to-offline interaction and harm, data privacy and security, research ethics, and human-robot interaction. The goal of this panel is to bring together researchers and practitioners to discuss how consent has been defined and studied within HCI and adjacent fields, and how cross-field discourse around consent can inform future work that pursues safe and equitable computing. We aim to introduce consent as a multifaceted research and design lens to the HCI and CSCW community and illuminate ways that consent can contribute to better understanding or re-imagining of contemporary research interests. Lastly, the panel aims to spark cross-field communication around consent to identify latent connections across research topics and foster synergistic collaborations.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Collaborative and social computing**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: consent, computer-mediated communication

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Consent to, and during, human-computer interaction has become a crucial focus in the literature across multiple application areas to both understand social computing phenomena and to design computer-mediated communication that is safe and protective of personal agency. As just a few examples, research has studied consent to sharing data with tech companies [5], consent to interaction with users on those platforms [6, 7], consent to sexual activity with people discovered online [25] and with sex robots [20], and consent to online research participation [24]. At the same time, consent has become a focal point in the tech industry [4] and amongst community advocacy groups [16]. For instance, The Consentful Tech project [10], led by Una Lee, represents a convergence of education and community advocacy initiatives that foreground consent in technology-use as a vital avenue towards digital justice.

This panel aims to bring together researchers and practitioners to discuss how consent has been defined and studied within HCI research and adjacent domains, and how cross-field discourse around consent can inform and strengthen future work pursuant to more equitable, safe, and just computing. Specifically, the first goal of this panel is to introduce consent as a novel research and design lens to the CSCW and broader HCI community in order to elucidate ways that HCI research topics can be reimagined or benefited by foregrounding consent. This includes reflection on how consent

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53 is collected for participation in online research, and how consent can be applied as a lens for designing and studying  
54 social computing systems. Emerging research demonstrates the benefit of consent as a research lens. Using affirmative  
55 consent as a lens for social systems design has enabled new approaches to understanding problems such as issues  
56 with AI-driven content feeds as well as designing consentful messaging systems and profile pages [7]. Studying the  
57 computer-mediation of consent to sex has shed new light on how social computing technologies predispose users to  
58 becoming perpetrators and victims of sexual violence [25]. Panelists will use their consent research in various areas as  
59 prompts to involve the audience in imagining future consent research, and consentful research methods, in HCI.  
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62 Another goal of the panel is to instigate cross-field collaboration around consent from disparate application areas,  
63 backgrounds, and international perspectives. Scholars, practitioners, and advocates have approached consent from  
64 perspectives ranging from law [19], public health [22], and even video games [13]. Yet the sheer diversity in HCI topics  
65 foregrounding consent poses a challenge to fostering a community of computer-mediated consent researchers. Useful  
66 research may go undiscovered because of variation in consent terminology, what is being consented to, and how consent  
67 is or could be provided. The need for cross-field communication can be exemplified by comparing discourse around  
68 consent in privacy and feminist literature. Privacy and legal scholars have pointed out that the field's model of notice  
69 and choice (their terminology for consent), which emphasizes individuals' control in managing how one's information  
70 is collected and used, has failed to protect consumers' consent [18]. This is due to reasons like overly long privacy  
71 notices and meaningless choices in consent popups [14, 17]. Feminist scholars' work on consent in sexual contexts  
72 offers a fresh perspective for privacy: that consent is ultimately about human beings' safety and agency [13], rather  
73 than a formality that can be satisfied through simple check boxes. The panel will provide opportunity for dialogue  
74 around consent and social computing that would otherwise be impossible through reading literature in isolation.  
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78 **What is consent, and what is consented to?** Definitions of consent have varied considerably amongst the general  
79 public, scholars, and law [19], which has resulted in persistent challenges in delineating consensual and non-consensual  
80 acts. Consent within HCI has witnessed similar challenges, and also uses different terms that are closely related, if not  
81 synonymous, such as approval and agreement. This assortment of consent terminology is due at least in part to the  
82 variety of activities and procedures that are consented to in social computing, and to whom or what entity consent is  
83 given. For example, consent can be given to a platform regarding the sharing of data [5], a sex robot [20], or another  
84 person in a computer-mediated interaction [6, 25]. Differences in norms and legal definitions regarding consent across  
85 regions [8] also matter here, as they impact how users perceive and use socio-technical systems. The panel discussion  
86 seeks to unpack the variety in definitions of consent to identify connections between research topics and consider what  
87 aspects of social computing are, and should be, explicitly consented to, while considering different regional perspectives.  
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90 **How is consent given? How should it be given?** Public health and feminist scholars have long contended with  
91 variations in consent exchange practices—or the ways in which one gives and perceives to receive consent to an  
92 interpersonal activity—that can inadvertently lead to nonconsensual activity. The literature outside of HCI has also  
93 presented and debated consent exchange best practices—how one “should” give consent—such as affirmative consent [7]  
94 and the FRIES model [15]. Yet much of this literature has historically not recognized the role that computer-mediated  
95 communication does and could play in consent exchange, and how “best practices” for consent exchange should be  
96 updated to explicitly accommodate the role of technology. Computer-mediated communication adds an additional layer  
97 of complexity because computing systems act as examples of consent practices [13] and inadvertent influences over  
98 users' perceptions of consent [25], as well as direct intermediaries between parties consenting to an activity that occurs  
99 online [24]. HCI researchers have studied ways to design better interfaces and policies for individuals' consent, such  
100 as identifying dark patterns [12] or designing features for online safety, especially for marginalized populations [21].  
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105 Simultaneously however, researchers have also critiqued the limitations of focusing on individual consent [11, 24].  
106 Scholars taking on the standpoint of non-western data subjects have offered alternatives to western consent models,  
107 including *informed refusal* [3, 23] and *indigenous data sovereignty* [9]. The panel aims to discuss approaches to designing  
108 consent mechanisms, and understand the strengths and limits of computer-mediated consent.  
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110 **How could consent be used as a research lens?** Bardzell argued that feminism is both a critique and generative  
111 framework for interaction design [1]. Similarly, Im et al. argued that consent can be used both as an explanatory theory  
112 to understand and critique existing social computing phenomena and a generative theory to inform technological  
113 solutions to nonconsensual activities [7]. We see such theories in action across HCI literature. For example, Barwulor  
114 et al. critique “parasitic sex-worker-focused platforms” for using photos of sex workers in ads without their consent  
115 [2], and Hasinoff proposes designing for explicit consent to circulation of private images to better accommodate the  
116 distinction between consensual and non-consensual sexting [6]. Beyond sex contexts, Cummings et al. propose new  
117 directions for differential privacy that seek to better understand users’ comfort level regarding the sharing of information  
118 with technology companies [5]. In this panel, we aim to spark discussions around what it would mean to apply consent  
119 as a lens for research and design regarding various topics and problems in HCI.  
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## 123 2 PANELISTS AND MODERATORS

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125 The organizers (authors of this proposal) have formed a group of panelists with myriad disciplinary backgrounds across  
126 academia and industry who have studied consent as it intersects with diverse HCI topics.

127 **Douglas Zytko (moderator and panelist)** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science and  
128 Engineering at Oakland University. He is also Director of the Oakland HCI Lab, a hub for interdisciplinary research into  
129 online-to-offline harm. The lab integrates researchers in human-computer interaction, AI, psychology, and nursing to  
130 leverage emerging technologies for the prevention of harms that occur through the combination of computer-mediated  
131 and face-to-face interaction. Most relevant to this panel, Doug’s research uses consent as a lens to studying occurrence  
132 and prevention of technology-facilitated sexual violence. His work explores how consent to sex is computer-mediated,  
133 which received a Best Paper Award and Impact Recognition at CSCW 2021 [25], and how the mediation of consent  
134 exchange practices could be deliberately designed to mitigate sexual violence at scale.  
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137 **Jane Im (moderator and panelist)** is a PhD candidate and Barbour Scholar at the University of Michigan School of  
138 Information and Division of Computer Science and Engineering. She combines empirical methods, system-building,  
139 and theoretical approaches to tackle various integrity issues on social media, such as online harassment, surveillance,  
140 and data ownership. She focuses on the relationship between such problems and users’ consent, and researches how  
141 platforms can be designed with consent at its core. Specifically, using the lens of consent, her work develops ways to  
142 improve social systems’ privacy controls, safety and governance tools, and business models. Her research on using  
143 affirmative consent as a theoretical framework for reimagining social platforms won Best Honorable Mention at ACM  
144 CHI 2021 and has influenced the design of newly emerging social media.  
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147 **Jonathan Zong (panelist)** is a PhD candidate with the MIT Visualization Group at the Massachusetts Institute of  
148 Technology’s Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. He is also affiliated with the Citizens and  
149 Technology Lab at Cornell. He uses design as a method for understanding and re-imagining socio-technical systems. His  
150 work on designing research ethics systems examines the strengths and limitations of software interfaces for supporting  
151 the autonomy of non-consented research subjects in online field experiments. Bringing together methods from design,  
152 empirical social science, and feminist moral philosophy, his work develops ideas about consent by putting theory in  
153 conversation with practices that matter to people’s lives. His work also focuses on collective refusal as a framework for  
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157 addressing individual consent’s limitations, and on designing accessible data visualization systems for and with blind /  
158 low-vision users. Jonathan is a recipient of the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans.

159 **Elissa M. Redmiles (panelist)** is a faculty member and research group leader at the Max Planck Institute for  
160 Software Systems and a Visiting Scholar at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University.  
161 She uses computational, economic, and social science methods to understand users’ security, privacy, and online  
162 safety-related decision-making processes. Dr. Redmiles’ work has been recognized with multiple paper awards at  
163 USENIX Security, ACM CCS and ACM CHI and has been featured in popular press publications such as the New York  
164 Times, Wall Street Journal, Scientific American, Rolling Stone, Wired, Forbes, and CNET. She has additionally served as  
165 a researcher and consultant for multiple institutions including Microsoft Research, Facebook, the Center for Democracy  
166 and Technology, and the World Bank.

167 **Amy A. Hasinoff (panelist)** is an Associate Professor of Communication at the University of Colorado Denver. Dr.  
168 Hasinoff studies gender and sexuality in the context of new media and technologies. She uses media and cultural studies  
169 methodologies to investigate how we think about new media and how those ideas affect the way we develop, use,  
170 and regulate communication technologies. Her book, *Sexting panic: Rethinking criminalization, privacy, and consent*  
171 (University of Illinois Press, 2015) examines the construction of sexting as a social problem and the responses to it  
172 in mass media, law, and education. *Sexting Panic* was the winner of the 2016 National Communication Association  
173 Diamond Anniversary Book Award. Dr. Hasinoff’s published work also appears in *Communication and Critical Cultural*  
174 *Studies*, *New Media & Society*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, and *Feminist Media Studies*.

175 **Tomomi Tanaka (panelist)** is a director of international safety at Match Group, parent company to industry-  
176 leading dating apps such as Tinder, OkCupid, Match.com, and Hinge. Tomomi is responsible for ensuring effective  
177 implementation of platform safety strategies of the Match Group and promoting safe dating practices across the  
178 international brand portfolio. Prior to joining Match Group, Tomomi was a senior economist at the World Bank and  
179 conducted research on psychological impacts of violence, especially among Boko Haram victims. Tomomi was also an  
180 assistant professor at Arizona State University. She published academic papers in top economics journals such as the  
181 *American Economic Review*, *Games and Economic Behavior*, the *Economic Journal*, and *Experimental Economics*, and  
182 received the Enjoji Jiro Memorial Prize for the most promising young economists from Nikkei.

### 183 3 PANEL FORMAT AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

184 This virtual panel is planned for a 60-75 minute time slot, and is structured around a series of discussion “provocations.”  
185 Each panelist will introduce a 3-minute topic informed by their research intersecting with consent, followed by  
186 discussion amongst panelists and the audience around the provocation. The goal is not to report research findings,  
187 but to introduce a topic regarding consent that the panelist believes warrants discussion and debate amongst the HCI  
188 community. We will prepare discussion prompts for the panel and audience to surface a wide range of perspectives  
189 (including non-western approaches to consent).

190 Plans for audience participation will be responsive to technical capabilities of the virtual conference. While voice/video  
191 communication would be optimal, we are confident we can support text-only audience participation based on positive  
192 reception to a CHI 2022 virtual panel [26] with a similar panel structure as the one proposed here, and with text-based  
193 messages through Hub (the conference platform) and Discord being the only modes of communication between panelists  
194 and the audience. The moderators (Zytka and Im) will continuously monitor incoming comments and questions from  
195 the audience through all available text channels and broach them to the other panelists. If voice/video chat is available,  
196 audience members will be encouraged to “raise their hand” or post a text message, which will enable the moderators to  
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call on audience speakers in order. To ensure the panel is accessible, we will turn on auto-captions, ensure only one person is talking at once, repeat text-based questions out loud, and share a transcript after the panel.

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