Finding time to present and discuss theories at CSCW events has proven a perpetual challenge. This workshop takes up this cause by facilitating an open-ended discussion about how diverse strands of social theory not only align with but support innovative CSCW research. The workshop will focus on three guiding questions: How, when, and to what end can social theory benefit CSCW research? What recent developments in social theory could be especially impactful for CSCW research today? What can CSCW research contribute to social theory? With an aim to building a new community of practice, the workshop will provide an open forum for scholars and practitioners to probing the merits and limitations of social theory for CSCW research. We welcome participants with diverse theoretical interests, ranging from organizational theory to intersectionality, social materiality to pragmatism, practice theory, and beyond.

Author Keywords
Social theory; CSCW research

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous
Introduction
It is often hard to find time to present and discuss theories during CSCW presentations. This workshop tries to remedy this problem by providing a forum for intellectual exchange and conceptual inspiration.

Theories—theoretical concepts, theoretically-argued perspectives and sensitivities—play a key role in sensitizing the vision of researchers and designers upon the empirical. During past years, social theory, in particular, has emerged as a major source of inspiration for CSCW research. The diversity of theoretical approaches that the social sciences and humanities have to offer has immensely benefitted CSCW research—and CSCW research, in turn, is actively contributing to social theory.

Many of the most interesting papers in CSCW absorb social theoretical approaches and put them to creative use in CSCW research. Additionally, a range of CSCW research has succeeded in contributing to new theories of the social, triggering conceptual development and theorizing well beyond CSCW.

Yet, “theory in small caption—not Theory with a capital T” is a disclaimer heard time and again at CSCW conferences. While the field of CSCW, as any research field, relies on theorization, concept building, and analytic abstraction, many scholars in the field have reservations against ‘Theory.’ All too quickly, it appears that theory risks morphing into overwhelming constructs. All too quickly, it appears that theory becomes a self-vindicating endeavor that reifies rigid categories and remains insensitive of the subtness of empirical findings. If we aim to change this situation, those of us who advocate for theorizing practices in CSCW need to do a better job cultivating a sensitivity for these risks.

To interrogate this somewhat thorny terrain of social theory and theorizing practices in the context of CSCW research, the workshop will focus on three main questions:

- How, when, and to what end can social theory benefit CSCW research?
- What recent developments in social theory might be especially impactful in CSCW research today?
- What can CSCW research contribute to social theory?

These questions will frame a discussion that includes both theoretical content (Which theories, what do they say?) as well as possible modes of theorizing (How to work with and towards theoretical concepts?). Ideally, conversations will be expansive enough to facilitate questions of theory import, i.e., the appropriation of theoretical approaches from other fields, as well as theory export, i.e., efforts to promote concepts developed in CSCW research outside the field.

Theories and theorizing in CSCW
While the focus of this workshop is on exploring new pathways of theorizing in CSCW research, we acknowledge an important legacy about the role(s) of theory in our field (see, e.g., [1, 2] and for parallel discussions in the field of HCI, e.g., [6, 4]).

CSCW’s engagement with Activity Theory, in particular, triggered researchers to reflect upon the value of theoretical concepts for CSCW research. Comparing the merits of Activity Theory to theories of Distributed
Cognition, Halverson argues that theories can support CSCW by virtue of their “descriptive, rhetorical, inferential and application power” [3, p. 245]. Yet, Halverson argues, whether or not theoretical concepts fruitfully lend their powers to CSCW research depends upon—often barely explicated—predispositions, both a theory’s predispositions and researchers’ predispositions in using it:

“First, we need to be aware of what a theory might be predisposed to do [...]. Second, we need to be equally aware of what we want the theory to do. [...] Design of collaborative systems is only one possible use of theory. Another is supporting discourse in a community, while a third is providing the apparatus that allows comparison across empirical observations. All of these are important for a field.” [3, p. 245]

In a similar vein, Grudin and Poltrock [2] propose four different roles for theory in CSCW research: 1) it helps to formulate testable hypotheses, 2) provides a vocabulary and supports communication, 3) motivates or justifies a system’s design, and/or 4) avails itself as a guideline for researchers in the process of design. During CSCW’s history, these roles have been performed by a range of theories. Which theories have proven more fruitful than others? Which are likely to emerge as crucial for the field in the future? Noting that CSCW has appropriated various theoretical approaches over the last quarter century, Schmidt and Bannon [7] suggest that a theoretically-grounded notion of ‘practice’ is key to CSCW research.

These acknowledgments aside, this workshop—it is key to note—does not seek to champion one theoretical approach over another. Neither will it recap CSCW’s past engagements with various theoretical traditions. In convening a set of curious scholars in one room for a day, we aim to think forward, facilitating an exchange of inspiration, probing new vocabularies and theoretical lenses.

**Exploring a diversity of links**

Our emphasis will be on exploring the diversity of links between CSCW research and social theory, which are understood as a large array of efforts to theorize the social in both social sciences and humanities. We will pay particular attention to conceptual heterogeneity and the multiple, perhaps fragmented, ways that theorizing efforts take shape.

A broad range of discourses and fields of study have put forward theoretical perspectives that fruitfully interlace and integrate with CSCW research, e.g.:

- Organizational studies
- Feminist theory
- Pragmatism
- Activity Theory
- Practice theory
- New Materialism
- Actor Network Theory
- Geography’s approaches to space/place
- Conceptual approaches to, e.g., sustainability
- Sociology of valuation and evaluation
- Cognitivism, distributed cognition

The workshop aims to probe and play with these discourses and fields in detail, recognizing how they
have integrated with CSCW research in the past and projecting exploratory pathways for future theorizing.

**Workshop agenda and activities**

*Theory weary, theory leery, why can't I be theory cheery?*
—Thomas Erickson, November 2000
"Theory Theory: A Designers View"
(as quoted in [5])

This one-day workshop proceeds from the conviction that engaging with social theory is a fascinating and worthwhile endeavor. (It is also fun!) Engaging with social theory means exercising one’s conceptual imagination. It is—in fact, it should be—about challenging oneself with perspectives that reach beyond single case studies and help promoting scholarly discourse across empirical domains.

The workshop wishes to function as a forum for intellectual exchange and conceptual inspiration. It opens its arms to the whole of the CSCW community—researchers of diverse backgrounds and interests who come with their own theoretical preferences, sensitivities, histories, and imaginations.

In order to facilitate an open-ended exchange between participants, the workshop combines short individual presentations and longer phases of group discussion. Individual presentations will introduce concrete theoretical concepts or approaches and describe how and why presenters are interested in appropriating them in the context of CSCW. The organizers will assign commentators to each individual presentation to help trigger group discussion. The organizers will also arrange for breakout groups to explore particular lines and traditions of social theory. To prepare the workshop, the organizers encourage participants to read all submitted workshop papers in advance, choosing one or two that they provide a short commentary on.

**Call for participation**

We welcome submissions that address the topics raised above, discussing them for specific concepts, frameworks, and modes of theorizing. In particular, we would like workshop submissions to reflect upon:

- *Specific concepts, frameworks, and modes of theorizing:* How have these proven salient for CSCW (or, promise to do so in the future)? What are their limitations?
- *Workshop Questions:* What recent developments in social theory could benefit CSCW research? How, when, and to what end can social theory benefit CSCW research? What can CSCW research contribute to social theory?
- *Optional:* Encounters authors had with various forms of theory during the past years. What are authors’ preferred theoretical perspectives? When was theory helpful? When has engagement with theory proven unproductive?

Workshop papers should be 2-4 pages and submitted to workshop organizers by January 2, 2017. To ensure focused discussion, the maximum number of participants, including organizers, is 20 people.

**Workshop organizers**

Susann Wagenknecht is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Social Sciences at the University of
Siegen. In her current research, she studies municipal traffic management. With an interest in concepts such as rules and social structures, public space and common good, she is working with theories of valuation and evaluation, practice theory as well as post-structuralist, feminist theories. She received a Ph.D. in Science Studies from Aarhus University.

Ingrid Erickson is an Assistant Professor at the iSchool at Syracuse University (as of January 2017). Her research centers on the way that mobile devices and ubiquitous digital infrastructures are influencing how we work and communicate with one another, navigate and inhabit spaces, and engage in new types of institutionalized sociotechnical practices. She received her PhD from the Center for Work, Technology, and Organization in the Department of Management Science & Engineering at Stanford University.

Carsten Østerlund is an Associate Professor at the iSchool at Syracuse University. His research explores the organization, creation, and use of documents in distributed environments such as crowdsourced or virtual organizations. He is particularly interested in the interplay between social and material structures and how they together facilitate distributed work, play and learning. Empirically he studies these issues through in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies of everyday work practices in range of settings including citizen science, distributed science teams, healthcare and game design. He earned a Ph.D. in Management from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is a former student of UC Berkeley, University of Århus, and University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He has been affiliated with the Work Practice and Technology Group at Xerox PARC.

Melissa Mazmanian is an Associate Professor in the Department of Informatics at the Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. Melissa’s interests revolve around communication practices in personal and organizational contexts, specifically in relation to social norms and the nature of personal and professional time in the digital age. She is currently involved in conducting ethnographies of personal time, looking at the role of communication theologies in how families juggle busy lives and negotiate work and personal demands. In addition, Melissa is interested in the intersection between formal power structures and everyday practices in organizations. In this vein she has been engaged in qualitative research on practices of budgeting, the introduction of electronic health systems, change efforts to promote predictable time off, and smartphone use in work contexts.

Pernille Bjørn is Professor in Computer Supported Cooperative work at the Computer Science Department at University of Copenhagen, Denmark (DIKU). She is part of the Human Centred Computing section and her research combines interdisciplinary approaches when studying cooperative work and the design of cooperative technologies. She has studied technologies in various domains including healthcare, global software development, tech-entrepreneurs, and in diverse locations including India, the Philippines, Canada, Denmark, and Palestine. She spent time as part of Intel ISTC Social Computing while on her sabbatical at University of California, Irvine. Currently, she is working on finding ways to combine critical design and making as strategies for exploratory
prototyping for cooperative system design. She has been involved in multiple conferences activities including program chair for CSCW2016 in San Francisco and sub-committee chair for CHI’s CSCW track (2015, 2016, 2017). Currently, she is in the EUSSET steering group, the ACM GROUP steering group, and in the advisory board for JCSCW.

References