Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Programme for Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies (PIRS)

University of Southampton

RECRUITMENT CYCLE for studentships starting: <u>October 2025</u> (Cohort 2)
SUPERVISORY TEAM

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STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE:

Queer Data and Resilience

OVERVIEW

Crisis narratives about privacy, creativity and automation have come to dominate techno-centric discourses about data. These crisis narratives, however, often overlook the very human vulnerabilities (re)produced by cis-hetero-patriarchal socio-technical infrastructures. This research will explore how queer data offer unique forms of resilience through attentiveness to plurality, mutability and intersectionality.

SUMMARY

This research responds to polycrisis at the conjuncture of technological development and socio-political regress. We are experiencing a rapid proliferation of accessible technologies that have spurred crisis discourses surrounding data and datafication, whilst simultaneously seeing a surge in regressive anti-gender and paternalistic politicking that essentializes identity in the form of cis-hetero-patriarchal supremacy. In today's largely inescapable mediascape, these two crises are most often articulated in the same time and place. Indeed, crisis narratives about privacy, creativity and automation have come to dominate techno-centric discourses about data. These crisis narratives, however, overlook the very human vulnerabilities (re)produced by the cis-hetero-normativity underpinning socio-technical infrastructures. This research will explore how queer data offer unique forms of resilience at the confluence of these mutually reinforcing crises. Drawing on intersectional feminist approaches to critique, this research will develop a robust framework for attending to the material, embodied, and affective qualities of data, thereby prioritizing plurality, mutability, and intersectionality in understanding data, infrastructures, and (their) resilience.

Ultimately, this research engages with both data science and the humanities. The successful applicant need not have specific technical expertise in data science or computational methods but should have a solid grounding in critical humanities and/or social sciences thinking. This research is intended to engage in a nuanced deconstruction of dominant techno-solutionist thinking that equates technical proficiency with critical understanding. The successful applicant will be encouraged to and fully supported by Southampton Digital Humanities and other relevant research groups in developing skills working with both computational methods and digital tools.

PROJECT CONCEPT

Rationale –

This research responds to polycrisis at the conjuncture of technological development and socio-political regress. We are experiencing a rapid proliferation of accessible technologies that have spurred crisis discourses surrounding data and datafication, whilst simultaneously seeing a surge in regressive anti-gender and paternalistic politicking that essentializes identity in the form of cis-hetero-patriarchal supremacy. In today's largely inescapable mediascape, these two crises are most often articulated in the same time and place. Indeed, crisis narratives about privacy, creativity and automation have come to

dominate techno-centric discourses about data. These crisis narratives, however, often overlook the very human vulnerabilities (re)produced by the normative cis-hetero-patriarchal underpinning of socio-technical infrastructures. Through a combination of queer theory and data feminism, this research will engage in a substantive critique of the hegemonic discourses underpinning extant, exclusionary, and unjust conceptualizations of data, infrastructures and (their) resilience. Specifically, *queer data* will serve as a framework for critiquing the material, embodied, and affective qualities of data, thereby prioritizing plurality, mutability, and intersectionality in reframing such unjust understandings.

This research will develop, augment, and make a significant theoretical contribution to existing approaches to queer data and data feminism. For example, Kevin Guyan (2022) theorizes queer data as an act of resistance – resistance to classification, resistance to codification, and resistance to abstraction. His theories of queer data destabilize a monolithic conflation of data with technology and the presumption that technical skill entails understanding data. Taking his theory of queer data as one starting point, this research will develop methods for situating queer data as a practice that opens possibilities for data to destabilize technical infrastructures that reproduce hegemonic systems of ordering and governance. Further, D'Ignazio and Klein's (2023) framework for data feminism proposes specific practices for data-driven research, which attend to systems of power that normalize hegemonic conceptualizations of culture, value and belonging. In bridging these two approaches, this research represents an opportunity to meaningfully integrate data feminism and queer data to develop methods for investigating the material, embodied and affective elements of infrastructures and technologies that reproduce cis-hetero-patriarchal discourses of dominance and construct crisis-prone discourses of data as vulnerable. Ultimately, the research will develop a robust framework for articulating how queer data enables and engenders unique forms of resilience through plurality, mutability and intersectionality.

Objectives –
The primary objectives of this project are to:

1. Critique extant crisis discourses about data from the perspective of feminist and queer theory to problematize hegemonic understandings of data, infrastructures, and (their) resilience.

2. Engage with theories and practice in queer data and data feminism to: (a) attend to the material, embodied, and affective qualities of data; and (b) theorize how queer data can destabilize dominant techno-patriarchal discourses of data vulnerability.

3. Develop a framework that explicitly articulates how queer data, methods, and infrastructures offer unique forms of resilience in theory and practice.

Methods –

This research will combine computational methods with a critical humanities orientation. The research does not prescribe the form of computational methods to take, instead enabling an expansive view of what is possible in relation to data management, analysis, and visualisation. Similarly, the research, although inherently interdisciplinary in nature, may draw upon any number of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences in its critical engagement and conceptualization of data. As such, specific methods will be dependent on the successful applicant's analytical, theoretical, and methodological interests. However, the research will be driven by an intersectional feminist orientation to *critique*, which seeks to dismantle the cis-hetero-patriarchal power structures that undergird extant techno-centric discourses about data. For example, Charmaz's (2013) conceptualization of feminist grounded theory will inform the use of data feminist and queer data methods to develop a framework for queer data and how it can engender unique forms of resilience. Data feminism and queer data call for an explicit critique of the systems and infrastructures that reproduce cis-hetero-patriarchal privileges. Feminist grounded theory therefore provides a useful framework for meaningful research that asks how change(s) to systems of power might emerge through critiques of technology and data.

Ultimately, this research sits at the interdisciplinary nexus of data science and the humanities. The successful applicant need not have specific technical expertise in data science or computational methods but should have a solid grounding in critical humanities and/or social sciences thinking. This research is intended to engage in a nuanced deconstruction of dominant techno-solutionist thinking that equates technical proficiency with critical understanding. However, it does not discount or reject the usefulness of technical skill as an inherent component of queer data, methods, and infrastructures. As such, the successful applicant will be encouraged to and fully supported in developing

skills working with both computational methods and digital tools in the pursuit of interdisciplinary humanities research.

Wider implications

This research has direct implications for resilience in and through data, methods, and infrastructures. By centring queer data as an alternative paradigm through which to understand competing claims about what data *are,* what data *do*, and what data *can be*, this research creates space to re-imagine the possibilities of resilience beyond the existing cis-hetero-patriarchal structures underpinning our extant understandings of data. In so doing, it enables a plural, mutable, and intersectional alternative for understanding data, infrastructures, and (their) resilience.

Please explain how this project represents a contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies.

Data science is often articulated as a tool for resilience in itself; a form of critical literacy in the guise of technical proficiency. But such articulations often fail to engage with the techno-deterministic discourses of data that led us to this vulnerable position in the first place. By articulating *queer data* as an alternative paradigm by which to both explain and escape this conjuncture of crises surrounding datafication and the paternalistic politicking it coincides with, this research represents a distinct contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies. Specifically attending to the material, embodied, and affective qualities of data through feminist and queer theory, this research explicitly embeds critical interdisciplinary humanities thinking in understanding the resilience – and, by extension, *vulnerability* – of data.

A critical feminist and queer approach to digital humanities is, itself, an inherently interdisciplinary pursuit. As a team of supervisors whose expertise spans gender studies, information science, linguistics, sociology, and cultural studies, we take an expansive approach to the critique of data, technology, and society. This enables a truly interdisciplinary and experimental approach to understanding resilience through the lens of humanities (and) data science.

Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project. *Note that students recruited into this programme will undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory*

teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.

This research does not presuppose the successful applicant's technical proficiency. The successful applicant will be supported with specific additional training and resources. These resources may include the following, depending on the student's interests and existing skillset:

- Auditing taught modules:
    o HUMA2030 Queering the Digital – an interdisciplinary humanities module engaging with digital methods for queer studies, queer histories of computing and technology, and the relationships between digital media and queer identity.
    o MSc Digital Humanities (Data Science) modules (module codes pending), including:
        ▪ *Principles in Humanities Data Science* and *Methods in Humanities Data Science* – engagement with data science skills that is underpinned by an orientation to social and environmental justice.
        ▪ *Data Management for Humanities Research* – introduces research and resources that underpin the creation of infrastructures that enable the management, curation and preservation of humanities research data.
        ▪ *Introduction to Ontologies- reviews* the theoretical aspects of knowledge organization to contextualize the technical possibilities of data in digital contexts.
        ▪ *Text as Data* – an interdisciplinary module introducing methods for text analysis, including corpus linguistics, distant reading, and text mining.

- Workshops in Digital Humanities
    o Data Visualisation in 'R'
    o Large-scale text analysis
    o GIS for Geospatial Analysis and Storytelling
    o Sentiment analysis

Students will also have access to development opportunities and a small amount of funding to access them.