

Call for Participation

Datafication and Community Activism: Redrawing the Boundaries of Research

A workshop to be held in the Department of Informatics, University of California, Irvine
Irvine, California

March 8 – 9, 2019

Organized by

Roderic Crooks (crooksr@uci.edu), Assistant Professor, Department of Informatics.

Yeshimabeit Milner, Executive Director, Data 4 Black Lives.

Datafication, “the transformation of social action into online quantified data, thus allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis” (van Dijck, 2014, p. 198) describes both the spread of data-intensive technologies and a concomitant ideological stake in a politics of knowledge. This transformation ignores the ways that algorithms, models, and data schema can serve as vehicles for bias and further oppression (Noble, 2018). Data-intensive technologies of “automated inequality” in their various forms, though originally developed in the context of scientific and commercial environments, are being deployed relentlessly in racialized, minoritized, and precariatized communities: in provision of public services by government agencies, in bail decisions by the criminal justice system, in threat assessment by law enforcement, and in many other sites (Eubanks, 2017).

Activists have responded to these threats through organizing, direct action, and, in many cases, reports and documents that support grassroots activism. (e.g., Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, 2018). Community-based researchers have connected state-of-art technologies to long histories of oppression and violence in communities of color. Writing by activists educates community members and policymakers about the harms data capture can pose and, at the same time, offers more meaningful alternatives to the presumed benefits of technological access in minoritized communities (Crooks, 2017).

What are the possibilities for technology researchers to engage with activists in response to the challenges posed to our communities by data-intensive modes of governance and administration? How can research support social movements in exposing the role of technology in constraining, (infra)structuring, and directing the civil sphere? How might scholars dedicated to studying and serving minoritized communities redraw the boundaries of research and activism to address the concerns of our home communities, build solidarity, and contribute to collective resiliency?

This workshop and working group will meet to map out new research agendas that draw on, support, and advance activist responses to datafication in minoritized communities. We invite scholars, journalists, graduate students, artists, adjunct lecturers, para-academics, public scholars, community activists, and data/information professionals interested in thinking through the relationship between activism and research to join this forum. The goal of the two-day workshop

will be to identify an actionable research agenda that will support the interests of minoritized communities and to build an intellectual network to support this work.

The workshop will feature a talk by Yeshimabet Milner, Executive Director of Data for Black Lives (<http://d4bl.org>), “a group of activists, organizers, and mathematicians committed to the mission of using data science to create concrete and measurable change in the lives of Black people.”

Topics for discussion might include:

- Intersectional feminist, critical race, indigenous, and/or postcolonial approaches to data studies;
- Publications and grey literature to support community self-defense and activism;
- Interventionist science and technology studies;
- Working in and with minoritized and precariatized communities;
- Pedagogy and teaching strategies for community liberation;
- Immaterial, emotional and affective labor in activism and social movements;
- Resistance, non-participation, and speculative engagements with politics.

People interested in participating should send a 250-word statement of research/statement of activism to crooks@uci.edu by January 15, 2019. Please include in this statement what you would like to contribute to this workshop and what you would like to get out of it. In addition, please include a 100-word bio. Submissions will be reviewed and participants will be invited by Feb 1, 2019. Participation will be capped at 20 people. Meals will be provided. Limited support for travel and lodging is available: priority for funding goes to students and those without institutional support.

We welcome your questions. Please contact crooks@uci.edu with any related inquiry.

References

- Crooks, R. N. (2018). Times Thirty: Access, Maintenance, and Justice. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 016224391878305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243918783053>
- Eubanks, V. (2017). *Automating inequality: How high-tech tools profile, police, and punish the poor*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. (2018). Before the bullet hits the body: Dismantling predictive policing in Los Angeles. Retrieved from <https://stoplapdspying.org/before-the-bullet-hits-the-body-dismantling-predictive-policing-in-los-angeles/>
- van Dijck, J. (2014). Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology. *Surveillance & Society*, 12(2), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v12i2.4776>