
Academic Accomplices: Practical Strategies for Research Justice

Mariam Asad (she/they)

Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, GA 30308, USA
missasad@gatech.edu

Sheena Erete (she/her)

DePaul University
Chicago, IL 60604, USA
serete@depaul.edu

Lynn Dombrowski (she/her)

IUPUI
Indianapolis, IN 46202, USA
lsdombro@iupui.edu

Christina Harrington (she/her)

Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208, USA
cnicoleharrington@gmail.com

**Sasha Costanza-Chock
(they/she)**

Massachusetts Institute of
Technology
Cambridge, MA 02139, USA
schock@mit.edu

Permission to make digital or hard copies of part or all of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for third-party components of this work must be honored. For all other uses, contact the Owner/Author.

DIS '19 Companion, June 23–28, 2019, San Diego, CA, USA
© 2019 Copyright is held by the owner/author(s).
ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-6270-2/19/06.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3301019.3320001>

Abstract

This workshop brings together folks currently or interested in becoming *academic accomplices*, or scholars committed to leveraging resources and power to support the justice work of their community collaborators. Academic accomplices are necessary for research justice—research that materially challenges inequity—and owe it to community partners to challenge underlying oppressive structure and practices as perpetuated through academic research. The goal of this workshop is to discuss concrete strategies for challenging oppression through research methodologies, physical or institutional resources, and/or pedagogy. This workshop will generate practical strategies for research justice for DIS and HCI scholars.

Author Keywords

Justice; anti-oppression; solidarity; anarchism; equity.

CSS Concepts

- Human-centered computing~ Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms.

Introduction

We work within various sociotechnical structures and institutions that offer us rare opportunities to actively challenge inequities such as colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. These

oppressions are interrelated—what Black feminist scholars have termed “the matrix of domination”—and ask us to focus our analyses across multiple institutions and levels of scale [6]. In particular, we can address these issues through our research, which is entangled in institutionalized funding structures, power relations, and value systems that impact people’s identities, access to opportunities, and quality of life [1, 10, 14].

This one-day workshop will build on current discussions of design, justice, and equity by sharing recommendations for enacting principles of solidarity, liberation, and anti-oppression in DIS and HCI work [5, 9, 10]. We extend this work by discussing the concept of *academic accomplices*, or scholars committed to leveraging resources and power to address inequities in our work and institutions. An accomplice actively challenges the systemic oppressions implicated in our research rather than solely patronizing our collaborators’ struggles to further our own research or professional aims [13]. During this workshop, we will develop and share practical approaches for accomplices to advance research justice practices through scholarly orientations, methodologies, and resources [2, 7].

This workshop will offer three contributions. We will: 1) identify shared sociopolitical conditions of various research environments to better understand how academic researchers contribute to power imbalances; 2) generate actionable suggestions to leverage resources for our community collaborators while minimizing exploitation and harm; 3) share workshop discussions and strategies online for feedback and improvements.

Background

Much of the existing work around justice and equity identifies design work as potentially reinforcing symbolic violence, or the reproduction of cultural and social norms that normalize oppression (e.g. machine-learning algorithms in cameras that detect Asian faces as “blinking”) [5, 9]. Participatory- and community-based efforts have shown how scholarship can perpetuate various inequities through our research [7, 11]. For example, when collaborating with communities outside our own lived experiences, there is the risk that we bring with us biases, assumptions, and power imbalances that may in fact reinforce the very historical or local injustices the community is trying to challenge. This workshop extends concerns of symbolic violence by adding a focus on the *material*, referring to systems and practices that affect conditions of political economy, labor, and capital, which sustain and entrench inequality across multiple scales [6, 10, 11]. While they cannot be easily divorced from symbolic violence, this workshop focuses on the material to encourage more critical, resilient, and holistic approaches to our work. If we position our research as being concerned with equity, then we must also engage with and challenge the socioeconomic conditions and inequalities that belie them [7, 10, 17].

The Research Justice community has dedicated many years to anti-oppressive research methods and more reciprocal relationships with community collaborators [2, 7]. ACM work has started to focus on systemic oppression (e.g. trans erasure in social media [12], inclusivity in professional IT [15], racial biases in policing software [19]) and promoting equitable research discourse [5]. This workshop aims to demystify and concretize some of the more theoretical

Anti-colonialism and decolonialism

There is a strong body of HCI literature that addresses injustice through the lens of decolonization, specifically addressing concerns of perpetuating epistemological, cultural, and geographic colonialism through research and the continued injustices of working and living on stolen Indigenous land [3, 11, 20]. We enthusiastically endorse this work and echo these efforts, though it is important for us to frame this work as *anti-colonialism* rather than decolonization as we have not, to date, centered Indigenous communities or struggles in our research. We say this to acknowledge and respect academic/Indigenous partnerships [16, 20], and also to broaden the scope of this workshop to include those who align with anti-oppression work without coopting work taking place in other spaces [5, 11, 18].

conversations on equity and power to offer practical and concrete strategies for our work. We hope to push our concerns around injustice from interest to action, ultimately centering individuals at the margins in more equitable, justice-driven scholarly practices.

Organizers

Mariam Asad is a researcher, educator, and designer. Her work uses participation action research with local communities to learn how social computing supports radical, on-the-ground political work around issues of justice and equity.

Lynn Dombrowski is an assistant professor in the Human-Centered Computing Department at Indiana University–Purdue University–Indianapolis. Her primary research focuses on designing for social justice and contemporary social issues.

Sasha Costanza-Chock is a scholar, activist, and media-maker, and currently Associate Professor of Civic Media at MIT. Their work focuses on social movements, transformative media organizing, and design justice.

Sheena Erete is an assistant professor in the College of Computing and Digital Media at DePaul University in Chicago, IL. Her research focuses on designing technologies, policies, and practices to address social issues in resource-constrained communities.

Christina Harrington is a designer and scholar and currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the Inclusive Technology Lab at Northwestern University. Her research focuses on addressing health equity among low-income and marginalized populations of older adults through community-based participatory design practices.

Acknowledgements

The workshop organizers would like to thank our community collaborators for your trust and confidence. Our research would not be possible without y'all's contributions, and for that we are very grateful. This material is based upon work supported by the Intel Science and Technology Center for Social Computing and the National Science Foundation (Grant Nos. 1718121 and 1524380).

References

- [1] ACM Code of Ethics: Guiding Members with a Framework of Ethical Conduct. <https://www.acm.org/about-acm/code-of-ethics>
- [2] Reem Assil, Miho Kim, Saba Waheed. 2015. An Introduction to Research Justice. DataCenter: Research for Justice. Retrieved from http://www.datacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Intro_Research_Justice_Toolkit_FINAL1.pdf
- [3] Kagonya Awori, Nicola J. Bidwell, Tigist Sherwaga Hussan, Satinder Gill, and Silvia Lindtner. 2016. Decolonising Technology Design. In Proceedings of the First African Conference on Human Computer Interaction (AfriCHI'16), Kagonya Awori and Nicola J. Bidwell (Eds.). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 226–228.
- [4] J. Boehnert, B. Elzenbaumer, and D. Onafuwa. 2016. Design as Symbolic Violence. Design for Social Justice. Retrieved November 4, 2016 from <http://www.drs2016.org/535>
- [5] Margot Brereton, Paul Roe, Ronald Schroeter, and Anita Lee Hong. 2014. Beyond ethnography: engagement and reciprocity as foundations for design research out here. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '14). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 1183–1186.

- [6] Patricia Hill Collins. 1990. Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Retrieved from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/252.html>.
- [7] Sasha Costanza-Chock. 2018. Design Justice: Towards an Intersectional Feminist Framework for Design Theory and Practice. Proceedings of the Design Research Society 2018. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3189696>
- [8] Lynn Dombrowski, Adriana Alvarado Garcia, and Jessica Despard. 2017. Low-Wage Precarious Workers' Sociotechnical Practices Working Towards Addressing Wage Theft. In Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '17). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 4585-4598.
- [9] Lynn Dombrowski, Ellie Harmon, and Sarah Fox. 2016. Social Justice-Oriented Interaction Design: Outlining Key Design Strategies and Commitments. In Proceedings of the 2016 ACM Conference on Designing Interactive Systems (DIS '16). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 656-671.
- [10] Hamid Ekbia and Bonnie Nardi. 2016. Social Inequality and HCI: The View from Political Economy. In Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '16). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 4997-5002.
- [11] Fine, M. (2015) "Decolonizing Knowledge: Toward a Critical Research Justice Praxis in the Urban Sphere." In *Research Justice: Methodologies for Social Change*, ed. Andrew J. Jolivéte. 199-204.
- [12] Oliver L. Haimson, Jed R. Brubaker, Lynn Dombrowski, and Gillian R. Hayes. 2015. Disclosure, Stress, and Support During Gender Transition on Facebook. In Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing (CSCW '15). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 1176-1190.
- [13] Indigenous Action Center. 2014. Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex.
- [14] Lilly Irani, Janet Vertesi, Paul Dourish, Kavita Philip, and Rebecca E. Grinter. 2010. Postcolonial computing: a lens on design and development. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '10). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 1311-1320.
- [15] Lynette Kvasny. 2006. Let the sisters speak: understanding information technology from the standpoint of the 'other'. SIGMIS Database 37, 4 (November 2006), 13-25.
- [16] Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Elsa M. González y González. "The Search for Emerging Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Further Strategies for Liberatory and Democratic Inquiry." *Qualitative Inquiry* 14, no. 5 (2008): 784-805.
- [17] Lucy Suchman. 2002. Located accountabilities in technology production. *Scand. J. Inf. Syst.* 14, 2 (September 2002), 91-105.
- [18] Tuck, E. and K.W. Yang. 2014. Unbecoming claims: Pedagogies of refusal in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 20 (6): 811-818.
- [19] Nitya Verma and Lynn Dombrowski. 2018. Confronting Social Criticisms: Challenges when Adopting Data-Driven Policing Strategies. In Proceedings of the 2018 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '18). ACM, New York, NY, USA, Paper 469, 13 pages.
- [20] Zavala, M. (2013). What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 2 (1): 55-71.