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No: Critical Refusal as Feminist Data Practice

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ABSTRACT

Harmful data practices produce and perpetuate structural inequities that are compounded by the intersections of one's gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and citizenship. This panel

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mobilizes “critical refusal” as an organizing principle and lens for examining interlocking struggles across data domains, contexts, practices and cultures within CSCW and social computing research.

KEYWORDS

Feminism, feminist data, research ethics, refusal

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INTRODUCTION

Drawing upon feminist approaches, this panel will utilize “critical refusal” [2, 11] as an organizing principle to critique harmful data practices and imagine alternatives within CSCW and social computing research. Critical refusal is an informed practice of “talking back” that is “seeded with a vision of what can and should be” [2, p. 969]. Critical refusal also helps us understand “when to stop” [11, p. 78] our research and practice - such as when to stop collecting data that does not support the rights of communities and when to stop building systems that introduce disproportionate risk and harm. Thus, critical refusal is a generative concept for challenging harmful data practices, while simultaneously negotiating and developing alternative actions. The panel will mobilize critical refusal as a lens for examining interlocking struggles across domains, contexts, practices and cultures within CSCW and social computing research.

The panelists will discuss two projects to illustrate how critical refusal can be used as a tool for generating alternative data practices. Data Feminism [7] by D’Ignazio and Klein outlines seven principles for integrating intersectional feminism into data science; the work offers strategies for envisioning and enacting a form of data practice that examines how power differentials can be challenged and changed. The Feminist Data Manifesto-No [3] is the collective labor of Patricia Garcia, Marika Cifor, TL Cowan, Jasmine Rault, Tonia Sutherland, Anita Say Chan, Jennifer Rode, Anna Lauren Hoffmann, Niloufar Salehi, and Lisa Nakamura. The collaboratively authored work serves as a declaration of critical refusal that challenges harmful data practices and commits to new data futures.

CONTRIBUTION

Feminist approaches seek critical and pluralistic engagements with concerns of power, dominance, and privilege, including and reaching beyond gender-based inequalities. Within the areas of CSCW, HCI, and social computing, feminist research approaches have highlighted how diverse epistemologies have an impact on socio-technical processes, including the challenging of established identity models

[8, 9], defamiliarization of domestic technologies [1], and operationalization of intimacy and sexuality in HCI [10]. This panel contributes to intersectional [4, 5] feminist research in social computing by utilizing critical refusal as a tool for investigating the stark structural power inequities around gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and citizenship that are produced and reified by normalized data practices. We use “data practices” as an umbrella term to describe “the way data is generated, collected, [analyzed] and used in society” [6, p. 873].

Panel Format

The panelists will perform a collective reading of the Feminist Data Manifest-No [3]. The collective reading will be followed by presentations of Data Feminism and The Feminist Data Manifest-No that will provide concrete examples of critical refusal “in-action.” After the presentations, panelists will lead a discussion that prompts attendees to brainstorm refusals and commitments that are meaningful to their research and practice. At the end of the panel sessions, attendees will be invited to contribute critical refusal declarations to the Feminist Data Manifest-No on manifestno.com and/or to circulate them on social media using the hashtag [#datafeminism](https://twitter.com/datafeminism).

Attendees

We are particularly interested in attracting academic and industry researchers who are interested in solidifying feminist data studies as a field of inquiry and practice within CSCW and social computing communities.

Panelists

Patricia Garcia is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information at the University of Michigan. Her research examines the relationship between technology, gender and other intersecting identity categories, such as race and class.

Tonia Sutherland is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her research focuses on entanglements of technology and culture, with particular emphasis on critical and liberatory work within the fields of archival studies, digital studies, and STS.

Marika Cifor is an Assistant Professor in the Information School at the University of Washington. Her research investigates how individuals marginalized by gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, and HIV-status are represented and how they document their social groups and movements in archives.

Anita Say Chan is an Associate Professor in School of Information Sciences and the College of Media at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. She directs the Community Data Clinic at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, running active partnerships with civic and community organizations to highlight their rich and locally-responsive data methods.

Lauren Klein is an Associate Professor in the Departments of English and Quantitative Theory and Methods at Emory University, where she also directs the Digital Humanities Lab. She works at the intersection of digital humanities, data science, and American culture. She is the coauthor, with D'Ignazio, of *Data Feminism* (MIT Press, 2020), which offers a new way of thinking about data science that is informed by several decades of feminist activism and critical thought.

Catherine D'Ignazio is a hacker mama, scholar, and artist/designer who focuses on feminist technology, data literacy and civic engagement. D'Ignazio is an Assistant Professor of Urban Science and Planning in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT where she is the Director of the Data + Feminism Lab.

Niloufar Salehi is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information at UC, Berkeley. Her research interests are in social computing, participatory and critical design, human-centered AI, and more broadly, human-computer-interaction (HCI). Currently, she is examining how restorative justice principles may be applied to instances of online harm such as revenge porn.

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