



Academic Accomplices: Practical Strategies for Research Justice

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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.

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