

Co-designing ML Models with Data Activists

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ABSTRACT

In this talk I will introduce the principles of data feminism and give a first-person report from a large participatory-action-research-design project where we are co-designing technology with data activists. The “we” in question is myself, Silvana Fumega, and Helena Suárez Val, and we work in collaboration and solidarity with activist groups producing data to challenge feminicide – fatal gender-related violence against women – across the Americas. As all practitioners know, practice is messy and rarely adheres cleanly to pleasing principles. Throughout the talk, I will highlight resonances and tensions between our design process and the principles of data feminism, showing how we tried to operationalize these principles in interactive digital tools and machine learning models. I hope to surface my aspirations for more participatory technology design processes as well as raise lingering questions to the community so that we may think together about the limitations of co-designing for justice.

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BIOGRAPHY

Catherine D'Ignazio is a scholar, artist/designer and hacker mama who focuses on feminist technology and data justice. She has run reproductive justice hackathons, designed global news recommendation systems, and created talking and tweeting water quality sculptures. With Rahul Bhargava, she built the platform Databasic.io, a suite of tools and activities to introduce newcomers to data science. Her 2020 book from MIT Press, *Data Feminism*, co-authored with Lauren Klein, charts a course for more ethical and empowering data science practices. Since 2019, she has co-organized *Data Against Feminicide*, a participatory action-research-design project, with Silvana Fumega and Helena Suárez Val. D'Ignazio is an Associate Professor of Urban Science and Planning in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT. She is also Director of the Data + Feminism Lab which uses data and computational methods to work towards gender and racial justice, particularly in relation to space and place.



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