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Ziv G. Epstein

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EDUCATION

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA — September 2019 - May 2023
PhD in Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab's Human Dynamics group.
- Thesis: *The Dynamics of Attention in Digital Ecosystems*, co-advised by David Rand and Sandy Pentland

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA — September 2017 - May 2019
Masters in Media Arts and Sciences at the MIT Media Lab's Scalable Cooperation group.
- Thesis: *Untangling the Knotty Web of AI*, advised by Iyad Rahwan

Pomona College, Claremont, CA — Graduated May 2017
BA Cum laude with Computer Science and Mathematics double major, Media Studies minor. GPA 3.88/4.00
- Thesis in Mathematics: *Data Representation as Low Rank Matrix Factorization*, advised by Blake Hunter
- Thesis in Media Studies: *The Mediasphere: Intermediation with Digital Planetaria*, advised by Kim-Trang Tran

Aquincum Institute of Technology, Budapest, Hungary — Fall 2015

EXPERIENCE

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA — June 2025 - Present
Social and Ethical Responsibilities of Computing (SERC) Postdoctoral Associate and Group Leader in the Schwarzman College of Computing, co-sponsored by Manish Raghavan and Caroline Jones

Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA — September 2023 - June 2025
Postdoctoral Scholar at Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), co-advised by Michael Bernstein and Johan Ugander

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA — September 2024 - May 2025
Visiting Research Associate of the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, in the Computer Science Department

OpenAI — March 2022 - April 2022
Consultant on AI alignment
- Evaluated DALL-E 2 for problematic behavior, conducted research on societal impact of AI, and helped developed mitigations for future AI deployments.

Jigsaw (Google) — Feb 2020 - Aug 2021
Contractor at Google technology and cybersecurity incubator
- Developed design interventions & conducted randomized experiments to inform Google's response to misinformation.

Facebook, Inc., New York, NY — May 2019 - August 2019
Intern in Core Data Science on the Facebook and Society team
- Conducted causal inference and trained machine learning models at Facebook-scale as part of a independent research project to detect and understand the proliferation of misinformation.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA — June 2015 - August 2016
Researcher and software developer for Laboratory for Social Machines at MIT Media Lab
- Designed and implemented web scraper, back-end database and visualization interface as a functional component of Electome project to navigate, aggregate and understand online journalism during the 2016 Presidential Election. Affiliated with the MIT Summer Research Program, then rehired as private contract.

Yale University, New Haven, CT — October 2012 - October 2017
Data Science Researcher at Human Cooperation Lab
- Design experiments and computational models, collect/analyze data and write papers to study and quantify human cooperation within an interdisciplinary environment. Funded by Pomona College Summer Internship Grant.

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA — June 2012 - October 2012
Intern at Moral Cognition Lab
- Designed experiments, ran in-lab studies and learned literature for moral psychology as only high-school student in upper division summer internship program.

TEACHING

Institute of Digital Sciences Austria (IDSA) — September 2023 - January 2024
Developed curriculum, mentored students and instructed studio for IDSA's Founding Lab program, in collaboration with Ars Electronica Future Lab
- Organized project-based curriculum for Media chapter of the Founding Lab fall term. More info at `https://ars.electronica.art/university/en/chapter-5/`

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PUBLICATIONS

Published (full list at `https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=yG7l19UAAAAJ&hl=en`):

EJCS'25 Smith A, Schroeder H, **Epstein ZG**. AI Séance: recounts from designing AI for transcendence, interpretive lenses, and chance. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2025)

PNAS Nexus'25 Wittenberg C, **Epstein ZG**, Péloquin-Skulski G, Berinsky A, Rand DG. Labeling AI-generated media online. *PNAS Nexus* (2025): pgaf170.

CHI'25 Danry, V, Pataranutaporn, P., Groh, M., **Epstein., ZG**, Maes, P. Deceptive Explanations by Large Language Models Lead People to Change their Beliefs About Misinformation More Often than Honest Explanations *CHI*. 2025. Honorable Mention (awarded to papers in the top 5% of submissions)

Harv. Data Sci. Rev.'24 Ugander J* & **Epstein ZG***. The Art of Randomness: Sampling and chance in the age of algorithmic reproduction *Harvard Data Science Review*. 2024. [HTML]

Science'23 **Epstein ZG**, Hertzmann A, et al. Art and the science of generative AI. *Science*. 2023. [HTML][Twitter Thread]

Science Advances'23 **Epstein ZG**, Sirlin N, Arechar, A, Pennycook G, Rand DG. The social media context interferes with truth discernment. *Science Advances*. 2023. [HTML][Twitter Thread]

Nature Hum. Behav.'23 Arechar A.A,..., **Epstein ZG**... et al. Understanding and Reducing Online Misinformation Across 16 Countries on Six Continents. Available at `https://psyarxiv.com/a9frz/`. Forthcoming in *Nature Human Behavior*.

ICWSM'22 **Epstein ZG*,** Foppiani N*, Hilgard S*, Sharma S*, Glassman E & Rand, D. Do explanations increase the effectiveness of AI-crowd generated fake news warnings? *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*. 2022. (*=contributed equally)

PNAS'22 Groh M, **Epstein ZG,** Firestone C, Picard R. Deepfake Detection by Human Crowds, Machines, and Machine-informed Crowds. *PNAS*.

NeurIPS Workshop'22 Lin H*, **Epstein ZG***, Pennycook G, Rand DG. Quantifying attention via dwell time and engagement in a social media browsing environment. NeurIPS workshop *All Things Attention: Bridging Different Perspectives on Attention*. Available at `https://arxiv.org/abs/2209.10464`

ICCC'22 **Epstein ZG**. Schroeder H, Newman D. When happy accidents foster creativity: Bringing collaborative speculation to life with generative AI. *International Conference for Computational Creativity*

ICCC'22 Gordon S, Mahari R, Mishra M, **Epstein ZG**. Co-creation and ownership for AI radio.

AAAI Workshop'22 Smith, A., Schroeder, H., **Epstein, ZG**, Cook, M., Colton, S., & Lippman, A. (2023). Trash to Treasure: Using text-to-image models to inform the design of physical artefacts. *AAAI* Creativity Across Modalities workshop

Nature'21 Pennycook G*, **Epstein ZG,*** Mosleh M*, Arechar, A, Eckles D, & Rand, D. Shifting attention to accuracy can reduce misinformation online. *Nature* 592.7855 (2021): 590-595. (*=contributed equally). Honorable Mention for 2021 Behavioral Science and Policy Association Best Paper Award.

CSCW'21 **Epstein ZG,** Groh M, Dubey A, Pentland A. Social influence leads to the formation of diverse local trends. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction in Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) 2021*.

Harv. Misinfo Review'21 **Epstein ZG,** Berinsky A, Cole R, Gully A, M, Pennycook G, & Rand, D. Developing an accuracy-prompt toolkit to reduce COVID-19 misinformation online. *Harvard Misinformation Review*. 2021.

Harv. Misinfo Review'21 Sirlin, N., **Epstein, Z.**, Arechar, A. A., Pennycook, G. & Rand, D. (2021). Digital literacy is associated with more discerning accuracy judgments but not sharing intentions. *Harvard Misinformation Review*. 2021.

CACM'21 Groh, M, **Epstein ZG**, Obradovich, N, Cebrian, C & Rahwan, I. Human detection of machine manipulated media. *Communications of the ACM* doi:10.1145/3445972. October 2021, Vol. 64 No. 10, Pages 40-47 (Made cover of magazine)

CHI'20 **Epstein ZG**, Pennycook, G & Rand, DG. Letting the crowd steer the algorithm: Laypeople can effectively identify misinformation sources. In Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI'20) Available at `https://psyarxiv.com/z3s5k/download?format=pdf`

iScience'20 **Epstein ZG**, Levine, S, Rand, DG & Rahwan, I. Who gets credit for AI-generated Art? *iScience*, 2020.

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ICCC Workshop '20	**Epstein ZG**, Boulais O, Gordon S, & Groh, M. Interpolating GANs to Scaffold Autotelic Creativity *ICCC'20*, (workshop paper) 2020. Available at `https://arxiv.org/abs/2007.11119`.
EC'16	**Epstein ZG**, Peysakhovich, A. & Rand, DG. The Good, the Bad, and the Unflinchingly Selfish: Cooperative decision-making can be predicted with high accuracy using only three behavioral types. *Proceedings of the Conference on Economics and Computation* July 2016.
SOCG'16	Devadoss, S, **Epstein ZG**, & Smirnov, D. Visualizing Scissors Congruence. *Symposium on Computational Geometry* June 16, 2016. Application available online at `http://dmsm.github.io/scissors-congruence`
PLOS ONE'14	Rand DG, & **Epstein ZG**. Risking Your Life Without a Second Thought: Intuitive Decision-Making and Extreme Altruism. *PLoS ONE* October 15, 2014. Listed as one of the Top 10 Insights from the Science of a Meaningful Life in 2014 by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley.
JAMIA'16	Padula WV, . . . , **Epstein ZG**, . . . et al. Using Clinical Data to Predict High-cost Performance Coding Issues Associated with Pressure Ulcers: a multilevel cohort model. Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association (JAMIA), 2016.

Pre-prints/under review:

- Zhao, D, Jahanbakhsh, F, Roberston, Z, Piccardi, T, **Epstein, ZG**, Koyejo, S, and Bernstein, M. Encoding Basic Human Values in Social Media Feed Ranking Algorithm. In prep.
- **Epstein, ZG**, Jahanbakhsh, F, Piccardi T, Peytavin, A, Gallegos, I, Sapkota, S, Zhao, D, Ugander, J, and Bernstein, M.Towards interpretivism: Quantifying the subjectivity in value perceptions of social media posts. In prep.
- **Epstein, ZG**, Jahanbakhsh, F, Piccardi T, Peytavin, A, Gallegos, I, Sapkota, S, Zhao, D, Ugander, J, and Bernstein, M. Despite perceptions, algorithmic amplifiers are value-aligned for Republicans but misaligned for Democrats. In prep.
- **Epstein ZG***, Fang, MC, Arechar, AA, Rand DG. What label should be applied to content produced by generative AI? Under review at CHI. Available at `https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/v4mfz.`
- **Epstein ZG***, Lin H*, Pennycook G, Rand DG. How many others have shared this? Experimentally investigating the effects of social cues on engagement, misinformation, and unpredictability on social media. In preparation.
- **Epstein ZG***, Lin H*, Pennycook G, Rand DG. Yourfeed: Towards open science and interoperable systems for social media. Available at `https://arxiv.org/abs/2207.07478.`
- **Epstein ZG**, Payne B.H, et al. Closing the AI Knowledge Gap. Available at `https://arxiv.org/pdf/1803.07233.pdf`

ARTWORKS FEATURED

- *Meet the Ganimals* featured at *Ties That Cannot Be Unbound* New Art City Exhibition (2023)
- *Detect a fake* featured at MIT Museum (2022)
- *Meet the Ganimals* in CLOG x Feeds edition `http://www.clog-online.com/shop/clog-feeds/` (2022)
- Ganimals featured in the AI Exhibition at Vienna Museum of Technology (2021)
- *Errorism* in collaboration with Agnieszka Kurant in her solo show at Muzeum Sztuki in Lodz, Poland (2021)
- *Life on Mars* featured in the Wasteland Film Festival, Utah Music Video awards and the iPhone Film Festival / Mozimotion (2021). Online at `https://vimeo.com/508951373`
- *Save the Ganimals* selected as SXSW Art Program finalist (2020)
- *Deep Angel Shadow Sans Substance* featured at Ars Electronica (2019)
- Field experiment conducted at Burning Man featured in *Nautilus* (2019). Read more at `http://nautil.us/issue/74/networks/six-degrees-of-separation-at-burning-man`

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- Artist-in-residence at Stochastic Labs, Berkeley, CA (Summer 2024+2025)
- IDSA x Ars Electronica FOUNDING LAB Fellow (Fall 2023)
- Best Plenary Talk Award for *Quantifying attention via dwell time and engagement in a social media browsing environment* – International Conference on Computational Social Science (2023)
- Best Honorable Mention Talk Award for *Yourfeed: measuring attention in an experimental social media environment* – International Conference on Computational Social Science (2022)

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- Best Poster Presentation Award for *Towards a new social laboratory: An experimental study of search through community participation at Burning Man* – International Conference on Computational Social Science (2020)
- NSF Vizzies Winner - The National Science Foundation's top data visualization award (2018)
- Barry M. Goldwater Scholar– highly competitive national award for future scientists (2016)

SERVICE

Reviewed papers for CHI 2025+2024+2023+2021, IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications 2023, IC2S2 2020, ICWSM 2020+2021, and PNAS 2021. Organizer for ICWSM 2021 workshop, Co-organizer for CHI 2024 workshop

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

C2PA Research Consortium October 2024 - Present
Member of academic-industry consortium tasked with aligning research on information literacy and media authenticity including companies such as Google, Adobe, Truepic, etc. More at `https://c2pa.org/`

AI Art practice, Cambridge, MA January 2018 - Present
Practice and operate AI-based art community that hosts happenings and features artwork internationally. See more at `http://aialchemy.media.mit.edu/` and `https://eliza-collective.github.io`

Planetarium Operator, Claremont, CA January 2016 - May 2017
Created planetarium content, developed software, maintained hardware, presented shows and chaired community engagement for Pomona's digital 8K 25-foot planetarium.

Radio DJ for KSPC 88.7, Claremont, CA June 2014 - May 2016
Broadcast radio show *Phantasmagoric Combinatronics* weekly to the greater LA area.

SELECTED COURSE WORK

Experimental Design and Causal Inference (MIT), Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence (MIT/Harvard), Advanced Graduate Machine Learning (MIT), Markets, Networks and Crowds (Harvard), Imagination, Computation, and Expression (MIT), Designing for Empathy (MIT IAP), Time Series Statistics (Pomona), Functional Analysis (Pomona), Algorithms (Harvey Mudd), Quantum Information Theory (Budapest University of Technology and Economics)

INVITED TALKS

- Guest Lecture in CS279: Special Topics in Human-Computer Interaction (Computer Science), Harvard University 11/18/24
- Keynote at Social Technologies Seminar, University of Leiden 1/23/24
- How Is Generative AI Transforming Art and Design? Sold-out panel at MIT Center for Arts, Science and Technology [YouTube] 10/26/2023
- Interspecies Dialogue at Harvard Divinity School 10/25/2023
- Contemporary Perspectives on the Arts in Learning at Harvard Graduate School of Education 10/25/2023
- Art in the Age of Algorithmic Reproduction (Ethics Monday) at Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard 10/23/2023
- The Dynamics of Attention in Digital Ecosystems. Department of Information Systems, Zefat Academic College, Israel [virtual] 3/23/2023
- The Societal Impact of Generative AI. The MIT Museum. 2/28/2023
- Invited talks on *Decentralized Social Media* and *Creative Community* at Beyond the Elephant in the Room in Bangkok, Thailand (live event with over 800 audience members [YouTube]).
- Invited talk for *Poetics of the Infraordinary* in the Creative Writing department at University of Pennsylvania 9/22/2022
- Real or fake? Evaluating human and AI deepfake detection. Synthetic Futures Livestream Event. [virtual] 2/17/2022
- Denver Museum of Art and Science. Institute for Science & Policy Symposium on *Science in the Age of Misinformation.* [virtual] 12/1/2021
- Stanford Network Information Dynamics Seminar [virtual] 5/6/2021
- The Digital Image - Social Dimensions, Political Perspectives and Economic Constraints (German Research Foundation priority program) 4/29/2021
- University of Pittsburgh Computational Social Science Seminar [virtual] 4/21/2021

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- Affective Brain Lab Seminar @ University College London [virtual] 4/15/2021
- Data Science / Computational Social Science Seminar Series @ UMSI (Michigan) [virtual] 4/8/2021
- Center for Constructive Communication (MIT) [virtual] 3/31/2021

SELECTED PRESS

- The Atlantic. Why Does AI Art Look Like That? 8/16/2024. [link]
- The Crimson. Stanford Fellow, Cambridge Artist Talk Art and Generative AI at Harvard Ethics Center Panel. 10/24/2023. [link]
- MIT News. If art is how we express our humanity, where does AI fit in? (interview). 7/15/2023. [link]
- The Conversation. Generative AI is a minefield for copyright. 05/15/2023 [link]
- MIT News. On social media platforms, more sharing means less caring about accuracy (interview). 3/3/2023. [link]
- Vice. Is the Panic Over AI Art Overblown? We Speak With Artists and Experts. (interview). 2/22/2023. [link]
- Grid News. An AI-powered séance is resurrecting the dead: How different art forms are reimagining the horror genre (interview). 10/28/2022. [link]
- Los Angeles Times. How AI-generated art is changing the concept of art itself (interview). 9/21/2022. [link]
- New York Times. A 'Virtual Rapper' Was Fired. Questions About Art and Tech Remain (quoted). 9/6/2022. [link]
- Axios. Dust, costumes, weirdness — and science: Burning Man is back (interview). 8/26/2022. [link]
- NPR. When machine learning meets surrealist art meets Reddit, you get DALL-E mini (interview). 7/5/2022. [link]
- WBUR. The faker: Deepfakes, lies, and cheerleading 4/22/2022 [link]
- Scientific American. Are You Better Than a Machine at Spotting a Deepfake? 4/15/2022 [link]
- MIT News. A remedy for the spread of false news? 3/27/2021 [link]
- Fast Company. Google and MIT prove social media can slow the spread of fake news. 6/4/2021. [link]
- Forbes. How We Talk About AI Affects Who Gets Credited For AI Art. 10/26/2020 [link]
- ZDNet. People's notions about AI are terrible, an MIT study asks whether they can be helped. 9/18/2020 [link]
- Digg. The Creepiest Thing Online This Week Is An AI That Creates Digital Ghosts. 10/31/2018 [link]
- Fast Company. AI is making Halloween so much spookier. 10/30/2018 [link]
- The Economist. To understand digital advertising, study its algorithms. 4/18/2018 [link]
- New York Times. The Trick to Acting Heroically. 8/28/2015 [link]
- Washington Post. The secret of extreme heroes: They don't overthink. 8/24/2015 [link]
- Vox. The science of extreme altruism: why people risk their lives to save strangers. 10/15/2014 [link]