

DATA &
SOCIETY

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2018-2019

ANNUAL

REPORT

Data & Society is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) research institute.

We advance public understanding of the social implications of data-centric technologies and automation. This report presents an overview of institutional highlights from June 2018 to December 2019.

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OUR VALUES

Our research and engagement hews to the following values:

- **Independence:** Independence is the foundation of rigorous empirical research. We select our projects, choose methodologies, and make publishing decisions based on our analysis of the issues at hand. We do not accept funding that would compromise the independence or rigor of our work.
- **Integrity:** Organizational integrity requires trust, accountability, and transparency. We build trust and accountability through our independent research, our transparent funding relationships and organizational practices, and our inclusive outreach to a wide range of communities and individuals.
- **Equity:** Individuals and their communities require respect and dignity. We recognize and embrace differences among us, and center these differences because of a fundamental respect for diversity and a desire to challenge existing power relations in data-centric fields. This requires equitable hiring and retention, centering community experiences in our research, and adhering to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all organizational activities.
- **Creativity:** Non-traditional approaches challenge existing structures of power. We support interdisciplinary work and the fundamental value of creative expression. Externally, we support innovative thinking that engages multiple audiences, especially on concepts that challenge dominant narratives about data-centric technologies. Internally, we enable research and engagement that take risks with practices and output.



WHAT WE DO

Data & Society strives to:

- Challenge **existing narratives** about the purpose and power of technology in society using rigorous interdisciplinary research;
- Expand and support a **diverse field of people and organizations** grappling with cultural, legal, political, and technical approaches to issues raised by data-centric technologies;
- Foreground the **social impact of data-centric technologies** to inform the development of governance structures;
- Foster a culture and practice of **open experimentation** and **new forms of knowledge production**.

As Data & Society moves into its seventh year, we will continue to combine research and action to drive toward accountability and equitable outcomes for everyone.

Our research is organized into four tracks:

- 1. Media Manipulation and Disinformation**, which includes the Media Manipulation Initiative, Disinformation Action Lab, and various Platform Accountability projects;
- 2. AI on the Ground**, which develops robust analyses of AI systems; effectively assesses the impact of AI systems; and informs future design, use, and governance;
- 3. Labor Futures**, which focuses on structural inequalities to analyze how technology is disrupting, destabilizing, and transforming many aspects of the labor force; and
- 4. Health & Data**, which analyzes the unintended consequences of health data collection, equitable outcomes in data-centric approaches to health, and what constitutes healthy behavior in the context of technology use.

Letter from the Executive Director



Data & Society Executive Director Janet Haven presents at the Health + Tech Futures Workshop

Data & Society was founded to provide an evidence base for understanding the vast changes wrought by data-centric technologies. We launched in 2014 with 12 fellows and a borrowed meeting room. Questions about the broad societal implications—the harms—of networked technologies were just starting to be visible through the hype cycles of technological advance. Now we are a team of 50, working on a diverse range of topics from the future of work to the social implications of AI in institutions. Cutting across all our work is a concern for just, equitable, and accountable governance of data-centric technologies.

All of our research and engagement is animated by a core idea. The challenges we face in ethically governing the internet cannot be solved with technical fixes that leave structural social problems unaddressed. Instead, we must meet these challenges by relying on an evidence base that is informed by rigorous research, engaged with policy and practice, and arising from a broad and diverse network of stakeholders. None of this work can be accomplished alone. Data & Society works within a tightly knit network of actors in our field, and we expand and support that network through

engagement with the goal of platforming diverse voices and changing the terms of public debate around issues related to data-centric technologies.

Our work aims to shift the focus onto the people most impacted by technological change. What does the future of labor look like from the perspective of workers? What does the rise of surveillance technologies mean for people who have never had privacy to begin with? By prioritizing these perspectives, the work of Data & Society creates an independent evidence base of necessary and rigorous research that influences societal change.

In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, many of our longstanding concerns are becoming matters of national urgency. Data infrastructures that power our society, now more than ever, are becoming central nodes for our life and work. And yet, their governance in an era of algorithmic decision-making remains contested, concentrated largely within a small network of powerful and unaccountable companies.

At a time when the health and safety of our communities depends on trustworthy health information, there is also a rising mistrust of institutions, exacerbated by flows of mis- and disinformation on social media platforms. At the same time, work practices and protections are rapidly shifting, informed by algorithmic tools of surveillance and management. Our work at Data & Society is both of the moment through our programming and publications, and forward-looking to the longer-term societal impact for equity, rights, and justice of this historical inflection point.

Ultimately, our work is about power. Power should not only accrue to large companies as they concentrate larger swaths of data shared online. Power should also be accorded to those who collect data, who name data, and who use it to define their conception of society. We're here to make the values underlying those choices visible, and push for them to be intentionally chosen with respect for human dignity.



RESEARCH AND IMPACT

We assess the impact of our work through three strategic pillars.

- 1. Changing the Terms of Debate:** We seek to develop an evidence base in order to challenge existing assumptions about the governance of online spaces.
- 2. Broadening Network Power:** We support and learn from the communities that are engaged in advancing just governance of data-centric technologies.
- 3. Data Governance in Policy and Practice:** We seek to contribute to data governance debates, using empirical evidence to drive informed decision-making.

The expertise, networks, and infrastructure we've built at Data & Society allow us to address each of these pillars depending on the project, and close the gap between empirical social science research and real-world systems, helping to create lasting systemic change.

“If manipulators are able to hide the source of the slogan and create sufficient social media circulation, mainstream media sources may even provide further amplification.”

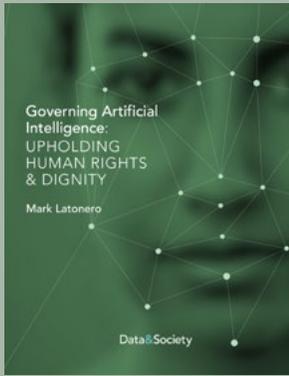
—Joan Donovan and Brian Friedberg,
“*Source Hacking: Media Manipulation in Practice*”

1. Changing the Terms of Debate

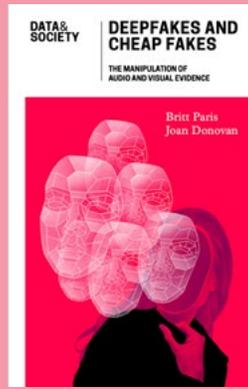
Our research advances evidence-based frames of reference, deepening and broadening public debate about the governance and design of networked systems.

Notable Reports

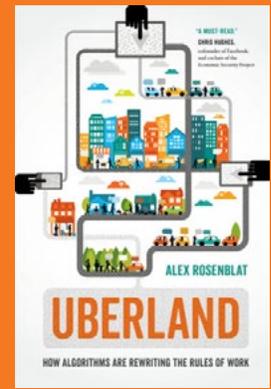
- 1. Governing Artificial Intelligence** assesses how technology companies, governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society groups, and actors in the United Nations (UN) system can use human rights frameworks in order to govern AI systems.
- 2. Deepfakes and Cheap Fakes: The Manipulation of Audio and Visual Evidence** highlights how advanced machine learning tools are not necessary to create fast-circulating AV manipulations, and underscores that those without the power to negotiate evidentiary “truth” —including people of color, women, and the LGBTQIA+ community—are left vulnerable to increased harms by these manipulations.
- 3. Uberland: How Algorithms are Rewriting the Rules of Work.** Alex Rosenblat’s major ethnographic study of Uber drivers exposes how “algorithmic management” and the rise of platforms are radically altering the way we work.
- 4. The Media Manipulation “Trade Craft” series.** This trio of reports (Data Voids, Data Craft, Source Hacking) for newsrooms identifies the newest tactics for spreading false or problematic information—including evidence collages, keyword squatting, and the manipulation of social media metadata.
- 5. AI in Context: The Labor of Integrating New Technologies** uncovers the “human infrastructures” necessary to integrate AI systems at family-owned farms and grocery stores, finding tricky and sometimes counterintuitive ways that workers must labor to harmonize new “smart” technologies with preexisting processes.
- 6. Alternative Influence** analyzes an alternative media system of influencers that build audiences to “sell” political ideology on YouTube.



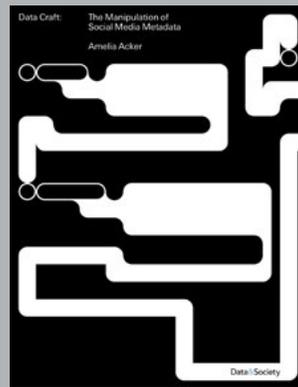
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Media Engagement

- **Conferences:** A highlight was Founder and President **danah boyd** as the **keynote speaker at the Online News Association** conference with a talk titled “Media Manipulation, Strategic Amplification, and Responsible Journalism.”
- **Publications:** Researchers **Emanuel Moss** and **Jacob Metcalf** published an **op-ed in *Harvard Business Review*** about the tensions that arise between industry commitments to the bottom line and ethical imperatives when Silicon Valley tech companies implement ethics initiatives. Our researchers also contributed **three op-eds to *The New York Times***’ Privacy Project: **Mark Latonero** wrote about how collecting biometric data as a condition of humanitarian aid undermines recipients’ privacy and security; **Mary Madden** explained the challenges faced by low-income people when trying to evade and fix digital harm; and Legal Scholars **Andrew Selbst** and **Margot Kaminski** identified shortcomings in proposed legislation that would require companies to identify bias in their algorithms.
- **Citations:** Data & Society researchers were quoted and cited widely in the press. Notable coverage includes a ***New York Magazine*** review of Senior Researcher **Alex Rosenblat**’s book ***Uberland***; a special **spotlight in *The New York Times*** of Artist and Data & Society Fellow **Stephanie Dinkins**; an **appearance on NPR** by Data & Society Researcher **Rebecca Lewis** to speak about extremism on YouTube; and **commentary on fair algorithms in *WIRED*** from AI on the Ground Program Director **Madeleine Clare Elish**.

Press articles:

- *The Devastating Consequences of Being Poor in the Digital Age* —**Mary Madden**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/25/opinion/privacy-poverty.html>
- *Stop Surveillance Humanitarianism* —**Mark Latonero**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/11/opinion/data-humanitarian-aid.html>
- *The Legislation that Targets the Racist Impact of Tech* —**Margot E. Kaminski, Andrew Selbst**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/opinion/tech-racism-algorithms.html>
- *The Ethical Dilemma at the Heart of Big Tech Companies* —**Emanuel Moss and Jacob Metcalf**
<https://hbr.org/2019/11/the-ethical-dilemma-at-the-heart-of-big-tech-companies>
- *What Does a Fair Algorithm Actually Look Like?* featuring **Madeleine C. Elish**
<https://www.wired.com/story/what-does-a-fair-algorithm-look-like/>
- *Next Stop, Uberland: The Onrushing Algorithmic Future of Work*, a review of **Alex Rosenblat**’s book, “Uberland”
<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/11/alex-rosenblats-uberland-review.html>
- *Critics Say YouTube Hasn’t Done Enough To Crack Down On Extremist Content*, an interview with **Rebecca Lewis**
<https://www.npr.org/2018/11/27/671285261/critics-say-youtube-hasnt-done-enough-to-crack-down-on-extremist-content>
- *Five Artificial Intelligence Insiders in Their Own Words* featuring **Stephanie Dinkins**
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/19/business/five-artificial-intelligence-insiders-in-their-own-words.html>

Points

Points is a collection of curated content from the broader Data & Society community: extracts and essays re-frame the relations between data, technology, and society. Highlights of the blog in the past year include:

- **Kinjal Dave's** blog post on moving beyond the rhetoric of personal “bias” and into critiques of technology that address systemic harms;
 - **Emanuel Moss's** reading list mapping the landscape of ethical tech; and
 - **Erin McAweeney's** essay on health misinformation and vaccine hesitancy.
-
- *Systemic Algorithmic Harms Theories of “bias” alone will not enable us to engage in critiques of broader socio-technical systems.* —**Kinjal Dave**
<https://points.datasociety.net/systemic-algorithmic-harms-e00f99e72c42>
 - *Unpacking Ethical AI: A curated reading list.* —**Emanuel Moss**
<https://points.datasociety.net/unpacking-ethical-ai-b770b964c236>
 - *Body Politics: The old and new public health risks of networked health misinformation.* —**Erin McAweeney**
<https://points.datasociety.net/body-politics-the-old-and-new-public-health-risks-of-networked-health-misinformation-2eade6c7cb52>

2. Broadening Network Power

Though our fellowship and faculty fellows programs as well as our ongoing regular programming and events, we provide a connection with individuals and organizations we want to draw into closer network collaboration.

Databites

“Databites” is our signature speaker series that presents timely conversations about the purpose and power of technology. Speakers bridge interdisciplinary research with broader public conversations about the societal implications of data and automation. Some highlights include:

- **Ruha Benjamin** analyzed cases of “discriminatory design” in technology and offered tools for a socially conscious approach to tech development.
- **Sarah Kessler** spoke about her new book on the gig economy and illuminated the quest to find meaningful, well-paid work as technology increasingly destabilizes and transforms the future of labor, while **Louis Hyman** interrogated the history of temporary work.
- **Yeshimabeit Milner** challenged the structures that allow data to be wielded as a weapon of immense political influence.
- **Carmen Rojas, Rachel Schneider, Tamara K. Nopper,** and Labor Futures Program Director **Aiha Nguyen** discussed how innovations in the financial sector intersect with race, class, and gender wealth gaps.
- **Charlton McIlwain** spoke about the limits and possibilities for using digital technology to push for racial justice in the United States and across the globe.

- **Ruha Benjamin**
Race After Technology
Ruha Benjamin discusses the relationship between machine bias and systemic racism.
<https://datasociety.net/library/databite-no-124-ruha-benjamin/>
- **Sarah Kessler**
The End of the Job and the Future of Work
Sarah Kessler shares her analysis of the perils and promises of the platform gig economy.
<https://datasociety.net/library/the-end-of-the-job-and-the-future-of-work/>
- **Yeshimabeit Milner**
Abolish Big Data
A call to action to reject the concentration of Big Data in the hands of a few.
<https://datasociety.net/library/abolish-big-data/>
- **Louis Hyman**
Temp: How American Work, American Business, and the American Dream Became Temporary
A talk on the surprising origins of the gig economy.
<https://datasociety.net/library/temp-how-american-work-american-business-and-the-american-dream-became-temporary/>
- **Carmen Rojas, Rachel Schneider, Tamara K. Nopper, Aiha Nguyen**
Redefining Benefits for Future Workers
A discussion on the intersection of fintech and credit and benefit systems for low-wage workers.
<https://datasociety.net/library/redefining-benefits-for-future-workers/>
- **Charlton McIlwain**
Black Software: the Internet and Racial Justice, from the Afronet to Black Lives Matter
Charlton McIlwain shares the role of African Americans in the internet's creation and evolution.
<https://datasociety.net/library/black-software/>



Fellow Stephanie Dinkins presents work from her fellowship

Workshops

Our workshops bring together journalists, academics, artists, and practitioners to share ideas and spark collaborations around big questions, such as the intersections between tech and labor, health, and race. Some highlights include:

- In a May 2019 symposium, Data & Society kicked off **#unsettle**, an emerging program that **reorients research on data-driven worlds to center Indigenous, Black, Feminist, and Queer perspectives**. #unsettle has opened up new opportunities for collaboration with a wide array of artists, scholars, and practitioners. We've talked with scholars about technology's relationship to race and colonialism, and used creative practices to advance the citation of Black scholars' work in our field.
- In a **two-day workshop for WIRED magazine's newsroom**, Data & Society's Director of Creative Strategy **Sam Hinds** presented a program covering the gig economy, AI, content moderation, and surveillance, highlighting the tensions between visible and invisible work in Silicon Valley.
- **The Health + Tech Futures Workshop** delved into how we make sense of our health and well-being through networked health information systems, and the ways that process can be disrupted. Speakers illuminated the perils and promise of the use of AI as a health technology, health misinformation, and the collection and analysis of health-adjacent data.

Fellows Program

Our fellowship program works to build out new relationships and draw emerging scholars into conversations about data-driven worlds. In 2018–2019 we were joined by labor rights organizer **Veronica Avila**, criminal justice lawyer **Cynthia Conti-Cook**, sociologist **Jessie Daniels**, artist **Stephanie Dinkins**, accessibility advocate **Chancey Fleet**, privacy scholar **Jasmine McNealy**, and policy advisor **Mutale Nkonde**. Some highlights include:

- **Mutale Nkonde** seeded connections with her blog post on public interest technologists, in which she argued that they should scrutinize the asymmetrical power systems that lead to the weaponization of technological systems against vulnerable communities.

A Case for Critical Public Interest Technologists —Mutale Nkonde
<https://points.datasociety.net/a-case-for-critical-public-interest-technologists-111d7ea3d384>

- **Nkonde** and **Jessie Daniels** wrote the report “Advancing Racial Literacy in Tech,” urging tech companies to adopt racial literacy practices in order to break out of old patterns.

Advancing Racial Literacy in Tech —Jessie Daniels, Mutale Nkonde, Darakhshan Mir
<https://datasociety.net/library/advancing-racial-literacy-in-tech/>

- **Stephanie Dinkins’s** AI.Assembly (<https://aiassembly.io>) gathering in November 2018 cross-pollinated contributions to ethics, equity, transparency, and innovation in machine learning and techno-cultures.
- **Chancey Fleet** talked with Data & Society’s Director of Research **Sareeta Amrute** on the urgent attention that needs to be given to accessibility of everyday digital interactions.

Dark Patterns In Accessibility Tech —Chancey Fleet
<https://datasociety.net/library/dark-patterns-in-accessibility-tech/>

Data & Society Executive Director Janet Haven presents at NYU Salon (Photo: the Policing Project at NYU Law)



3. Data Governance in Policy and Practice

Data & Society uses its research, and that of its network, to inform policy and practice. We leverage our connections to engage decision-makers about the growing evidence base around data governance.

- In 2018, Data & Society researchers presented in a tech algorithm briefing for the Congressional Progressive Caucus, led by Fellow **Mutale Nkonde** who was a tech policy advisor for Congresswoman Yvette Clarke.
- In 2019, Clarke and congressional colleagues introduced the Algorithmic Accountability Act, which would require companies to study and fix computer algorithms that result in unfair or discriminatory decisions.
- The Project on Data Integrity launched its “Sim-Census” simulations to help stakeholders practice responding to disinformation that might disrupt the 2020 Census.
- Executive Director **Janet Haven** and Postdoctoral Scholar **Andrew Selbst** testified before the New York City Council’s Committee on Technology about the Open Algorithms Law. They called for oversight of the Automated Decision Systems Task Force to ensure access to “details of ADS systems in use by specific agencies” and a public engagement process. (Read the testimony here: <https://datasociety.net/announcements/2019/04/05/open-algorithms-law/>)
- Senior Researcher **Alex Rosenblat** spoke to the UN in fall 2019 on Uber and emerging models of economic activity. She explained how drivers endure algorithmic management, and the constant tussle between a flexible work schedule and diminishing worker protections.



PEOPLE

All of this wouldn't be possible without our incredible network of staff, researchers, fellows, affiliates, advisors, and directors.

Board of Directors

danah boyd, *Founder and President of the Board, Data & Society; Partner Researcher, Microsoft Research*

Catherine Brac, *Co-Founder and Executive Director, TechEquity Collaborative*

Anil Dash, *CEO, Glitch*

Alexander Macgillivray, *Former United States Deputy Chief Technology Officer*

Alondra Nelson, *Professor of Sociology, Columbia University; President, Social Science Research Council*

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Kinjal Dave

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Madeleine Clare Elish

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Beth Garrett

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Alex Rosenblat

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Erin Saunders

Andrew Selbst

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Angie Waller

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Chancey Fleet
Michele Gilman

Jasmine E. McNealy
Mutale Nkonde

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Claudia Perlich, *Senior Data Scientist, Two Sigma; Advisory Scientist, Dstillery; Adjunct Professor, NYU Stern*

Latoya Peterson, *Deputy Editor, Digital Innovation, The Undeclared (ESPN)*

Andrew Rasiej, *Co-founder Personal Democracy Forum and Civic Hall; Chairman, NY Tech Alliance*

Joel Reidenberg, *Stanley D. and Nikki Waxberg Chair and Professor of Law; Founding Academic Director, Center on Law and Information Policy*

Clay Shirky, *Associate Arts Professor, Interactive Telecommunications Program; Associate Professor, Arthur L. Carter Institute of Journalism, New York University*

Micah Sifry, *Co-founder, Civic Hall and Personal Democracy Media*

Shamina Singh, *Executive Vice President, Sustainability at Mastercard President, Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth*

Baratunde Thurston, *Futurist Comedian; Writer; Activist*

Janet A. Vertesi, *Assistant Professor, Sociology, Princeton University*

Christina Xu, *Writer, Magpie Kingdom; Faculty, SVA*

Seth Young, *Independent Consultant*

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Angèle Christin
Beth Coleman
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Noel Hidalgo
Caroline Jack
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David Merritt Johns
Karen Levy
Rebecca Lewis
Gideon Lichfield
Lisa Lynch
Surya Mattu
Wilneida Negrón
Helen Nissenbaum
Mimi Onuoha
Desmond Patton

Martha Poon
Yuan Stevens
Julia Ticona
Bonnie Tijerina
Frank Torres
Anthony Townsend
Tricia Wang
Elizabeth Anne Watkins
Rebecca Wexler
Elizabeth Wissinger
Elana Zeide



Data & Society 2018–2019 Fellows
(from left to right): Veronica Avila,
Jasmine McNealy, Chancey Fleet,
Mutale Nkonde, and Stephanie Dinkins.
Missing: Cynthia Conti-Cook and
Jessie Daniels



SUPPORTERS

From all of us at Data & Society, thank you to our generous supporters who make these programs and initiatives possible.

2018

Ford Foundation
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
National Science Foundation
News Integrity Initiative
Partnership on AI
Pivotal Ventures
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Sage Publishing
Siegel Family Endowment
Someland Foundation
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

2019

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
American Council of Learned Societies
Arabella Advisors
Big Boulder Initiative
Digital Trust Foundation
Ford Foundation
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Luminate Group/Omidyar Network
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
National Science Foundation
National Conference on Citizenship
News Integrity Initiative
Open Society Foundations
Pivotal Ventures
Siegel Family Endowment
Someland Foundation



FINANCIALS

Adhering to our values of integrity and independence, we publish our 990s and audited financial statements annually on our website (<https://datasociety.net>). Data & Society welcomes questions about our sources of funding and allocation of resources.

In Memory



Joel R. Reidenberg

beloved friend, advisor, and supporter

1961–2020

**DATA &
SOCIETY**

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<https://datasociety.net>