
Staying Radical in Academia?

Joy Ming

jming@infosci.cornell.edu

Cornell University

Ithaca, New York

The topic of this workshop is addressing exactly a question I have had throughout my first year as a PhD student—How do I stay *radical* while in academia?

My motivation originally for joining academia was to have the space to learn and think more about the broader question of “Who gets to build technology?”—a question that built up with my prior experiences building and designing technology for marginalized communities in a wide range of domains (healthcare, future of work), locations (Asia, Africa, US), and settings (undergraduate student organization, research fellowship, and industry). I also wanted to incorporate some of the experiences I had engaging with and learning from activist groups in the San Francisco Bay Area around abolition, Asian American issues, environmental justice, and local politics to help answer these questions.

Within the first year of academia, I felt really lucky to be exposed to scholarship that, to me, “answered” questions that I had, reading *Design Justice*, *Data Feminism*, *Pluriverse*, and learning about frameworks like Feminist HCI or the social justice orientation. I even had the opportunity to start working on projects that engaged with some concepts like disability justice or invisible labor that engage with progressive concepts that challenge the status quo. Moreover, I was learned a little bit from groups like the Design Justice Network and Allied Media Project that do activist-y work.

However, I still continued to wrestle with the question of how to balance all that I have learned, read, thought about with actual action and impact. It was especially hard starting my first year during the pandemic because I did not have as much opportunity to interact with communities directly. But I see that even without the stifled situation of the pandemic, this will continue to be a question for me, a struggle to figure out when to learn and when to act. More specifically, I am interested in how to develop longer-term relationships with communities given obligations due to the academic calendar, how to evaluate and understand the intentions and impact of research on communities, and really what it means to be an activist and an academic.

I am really excited for the opportunity this workshop presents—a chance for me to ponder these questions and, most importantly, build a community with others who have similar motivations and learn from their wealth of experiences.