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Keele University, UK

Conference Workshop:

Data Intensive Research Practices: Feminist Perspectives

Workshop convenors:
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This workshop invites feminist reflections on the digitization and quantification of empirical research and its concomitant forms of knowledge production and governance. Our aim is to bring together critical, feminist engagements with data intensive research methods.

We are looking for empirical research that treats and reflects upon 'data' and its manipulation in the context of feminist research. This certainly includes statistics but also 'newer' techniques such as text mining applications, machine learning, sensor based monitoring, the (culture) of algorithms and code, the manipulation of 'big data', benchmarking, or visualizations among many others. The initial list and formulation is intentionally kept very broad since we want to avoid knee-jerk reactions following well known debates regarding 'quantitative' vs 'qualitative' methods or hyped celebrations of data analysis and data science. Rather, the idea is to stimulate a much needed discussion about the ways in which new data conceptualizations, technologies, and related social practices are transforming the research landscape and could be used for social transformative change. How can the emerging practices be reclaimed for feminist agendas? What opportunities and challenges do they hold for research practice and social justice concerns?

Savage and Burrows (2007) published a widely discussed paper on the "Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology" pinpointing the challenges social scientists face by the emergence of 'transactional data', that is, data generated as a by-product of our increasing digital forms of communication. Past methods such as the sample survey but also the in-depth interviews that formerly guaranteed a privileged access to the 'social' are being superseded by the digital traces we voluntarily and involuntarily leave as we communicate over cellphones, GPS, social networking sites, carry out credit card transactions and so on. In addition, more often than not, this data is owned by private companies outside the reach of social scientists, reducing further the once "solid base for the jurisdiction of empirical sociologists in the coming decades". As the issuing discussion shows, Savage and Burrows touched upon a vital nerve within the academic community, from which feminist perspectives, with some notable exceptions, are strangely absent (Adkins and Lury, 2012, Elwood 2008). We addresses this gap by inviting reflections upon the implications of the emerging data horizon not only for empirical social sciences but more specifically feminist research.

One way to engage with this debate could be via the 'uneasy' relation between feminism and statistics or quantitative research. Although there seems to be a certain agreement that there is no single, distinct feminist research methodology, quantitative survey research is certainly not a preferred one either. The short-circuiting of 'gender' and 'sex' to rigid binaries in surveys that do not account for multiple genders and their social construction has been a well rehearsed critique; similar, feminist scholars have debunked the supposedly value neutral, objective – positivist – epistemological assumptions that accompany much

of quantitative research and the 'authority of facts'. However, although from a historical perspective statistical practice has been tightly associated with the power of the state, 'statactivism' for example is a call for reappropriating statistics' capacity of denunciation and emancipation (Bruno et al., 2014). Powerful arguments regarding social injustice and gender inequality have been put forward precisely based upon statistics (Harnois, 2013, McCall 2005, Bericat 2012). As with any research tool, statistical practice is not inherently bad or good but requires a more differentiated discussion how and under which conditions quantification might support feminist research and ideals or rather undermine them.

The ubiquitousness of data spans the widest possible empirical contexts from private cellphone usage to organizational settings, urban planning in 'smart' cities to national benchmarking and governmental policies. What is needed is a critical engagement not just with specific methods but more broadly the emerging apparatus that compose digital devices, i.e. the material, institutional and behavioral elements (Ruppert et al., 2013) that set the conditions for what counts, is rendered visible, conceivable, and negotiable as 'data'. We invite work on any of the following, or related, topics:

- Implications of 'big data' from feminist perspectives
- Using smartphones and other sensory devices for feminist research
- Innovative and emerging data intensive research practices on the micro-, meso- and macro-level
- Ethics in data intensive research
- 'Statactivism' and its potential to reappropriate statistics for transformative social change
- Inequalities in access and skills of data production and analysis.
- Overcoming the gender binary in survey research and the development of indicators
- Feminist perspectives on data analysis and data mining
- Critical approaches to code and algorithms
- Feminist analysis of institutional 'data' practices, such as for example the 'datafication' of governance or 'transparency' claims

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (ONE page, Word document NOT PDF, single spaced, excluding references, no header, footers or track changes) are invited by 1st November 2015 with decisions on acceptance to be made by workshop conveners within one month. All abstracts will be peer reviewed. New and young scholars with 'work in progress' papers are welcomed. Papers can be theoretical or theoretically informed empirical work. In the case of co-authored papers, ONE person should be identified as the corresponding author. Due to restrictions of space on the conference schedule, multiple submissions by the same author will not be timetabled. Upon acceptance, full papers should be submitted by 31st of May 2016, to be circulated among workshop participants prior to the conference.

Abstracts should be emailed to: jmuller@uoc.edu Abstracts should include FULL contact details, including your name, department, institutional affiliation, mailing address, and e-mail address. *State the title of the workshop to which you are submitting your abstract. *Note that no funding, fee waiver, travel or other bursaries are offered for attendance at GWO2016*.*