

PSYCHOLOGY JOURNAL

VOL 11, N. 1

ISSN 1720-7525

The Intersections of Technosciences and Social Justice

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Daniel Lyles and Britney Summit-Gil



PSYCHOLOGY JOURNAL

The Other Side of Technology

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PSYCHOLOGY JOURNAL, PNJ, ISSN 1720-7525
PUBLISHED ON-LINE SINCE SUMMER 2002
WEB SITE: [HTTP://WWW.PSYCHOLOGY.ORG](http://www.psychology.org)

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Editorial Preface

Putting together this special issue of *Psychology on "The Intersections of Technosciences and Social Justice"* has been a challenge and a pleasure. The issue is, by design, an eclectic collection of articles representing research that spans three continents. The contributing authors to this special issue are equally diverse and we as editors are proud to have brought these voices together under a single cover. There are a few fascinating overlapping interests across the papers, but the one single thread that weaves through all of them is a deep and abiding concern for social justice in a world that is increasingly seen, altered, and understood through the dual lenses of science and technology.

These articles are derived from work that was presented at the Technoscience As Activism conference (TAA) held at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York from June 27-29th, 2012.¹

¹ The conference brought together k-12 educators, community activists, academics, and hobbyists for three days of workshops, presentations, and demonstrations. The conference was small enough that there were no concurrent panels, and all attendees could easily be brought on a walking tour of Troy's thriving activist community. Attendees gave and heard talks on everything from urban mushroom farming to 3D printers, were fed at a local AME Zion church, and listened to a plenary talk by three members of the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science in an Independent Media center who's stated mission is to shed "light on media arts' vital role in the process of building a democratic society."

The papers in this issue, like TAA, seek new approaches to long-standing, structural problems of power and social justice as it pertains to science and technology. The contributing authors all have different definitions of social justice and see the interplay between science, technology, and society very differently. Taken as a whole however, this issue challenges dominant assumptions about the role of technology in our everyday lives and the power of individuals to wield technology as a force for liberation.

As was stated in the opening remarks to the conference, academics have a duty to find ways of keeping the doors to sites of knowledge exchange a little bit more open and the room a little bit more inviting. It stands to reason that if we think about our work in terms of how we will eventually share it, we must occasionally reflect on how we engage in that sharing. Too often, scholars engage in what Banks has called "Totebag Praxis,"² that is, by acquiescing to the institutional norms that reproduce expensive conferences that look and act the same, we enforce a very uniform set of analytic techniques and modes of representation. This praxis excludes potential participants and actively denies both scholars and the public the production of new ways of knowing.

The editors aimed to do something similar in this special issue. There was an editorial emphasis on plain

² See: <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/04/18/overcoming-tote-bag-praxis/>

language and writing for a non-expert audience. The authors have all been patient and immensely accommodating in our desire to produce an issue that is academically rigorous but still accessible and readable to people who are not experts in the field. While these are still very much academic articles and are not by any means “light” reading, they are meant to strike a slightly more conversational tone, with fewer obscure vocabulary words and more descriptions of people, groups, practices, communities, places, or events.

Some articles in the issue give a nice overview of existing literature, while others describe new research or even initial testing of new inventions. Elena Solomon gives a much-needed review of the wide world of “craftivism” and the professional-amateur divide within a neoliberal context. She shows how activists have chosen to enact their politics through making and altering the sorts of home-made artifacts we typically call crafts.

Bábara Nascimento Duarte takes on a much different kind of materially based activism. The global movement known as Body Hactivism is actively challenging long-held normative beliefs about what bodies do, what they should look like and how they should behave. Duarte’s interviews show that body hackers are not only pushing the boundaries of their own bodies, but are explicitly challenging the very definition of nature, culture, and technology.

Florencio Cabello, Marta G. Franco, and Alex Haché provide a critique of the Web 2.0 paradigm that may no longer exist in common parlance but still exists as a business model and development strategy. The authors describe how this strategy is a danger to political organizing and democracy in general. They then catalog many of the decentralized social networking sites adopted by Spanish activists and others around the world. They focus on Lorea/N-1, a “federation” of various social networks meant to aid in horizontal organizing.

Juan Gilbert and Andrea E. Johnson demonstrate the potential of a technological intervention of a very different sort in their report on Applications Quest. Gilbert and Johnson demonstrate a software package they have developed to produce college admissions decisions in a holistic fashion. Their work responds directly to anti-affirmative action suits in the United States that pose a significant danger to statistical minorities’ chances of getting into college.

Finally, Cueponcaxochitl Dianna Moreno Sandoval looks at the underlying identity formations and socio-historical context in which computer science finds itself. Her paper illustrates a new theoretical framework called critical ancestral computing, which aims to instill positive non-white identity formations within CS pedagogy and promotes advocacy that works against neocolonial influences.

Just as TAA was, itself, an exercise in technoscience as activism, the editors hope that this special issue is a modest experiment in journal theme and content. We would like to thank all of the people that made this issue possible, including Managing Editor Anna Spagnoli who reached out to us and made this journal a reality. She has been nothing but supportive and patient with us during this process. Co-editor Ron Eglash should also be given special thanks. As the primary investigator on the aforementioned Triple Helix Program, Ron was generous enough to fully fund the conference. We would also like to thank the many anonymous reviewers who gave excellent feedback to our authors. We also thank Kirk Jalbert for his initial help in editing and assisting in the conference. To that end we also owe a debt of gratitude to those that

helped make TAA happen in the first place, including Vicki Brock, Pastor Willie Bacote, Branda Miller and Steve Pierce.

The editors hope you enjoy this special issue of technoscience as activism.

The conference was sponsored by the Triple Helix, an NSF graduate education program (<http://www.3helix.rpi.edu>). The authors would like to acknowledge NSF grant DGE-0947980 in support of this work.

The Guest Editors

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