Female Scientists Lecture Series

Lecture by Dr. Paula Helm

TECHNISCHE
UNIVERSITÄT
DARMSTADT

"Normative Paradoxes of Privacy and Diversity – Computing Literacy, Choice, and Inclusion in Platform Societies"

Dr. Paula Helm
(Asst. Prof. for Ethics & Data Science at the University of Amsterdam)

18.04.2024
At 10 am
@ TU Darmstadt, Old Main Building
S1 03 Basement, R.08

Privacy and Trust
for Mobile Users

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Abstract:

Dr. Paula Helm

Legal Scholars, ethicists, and activists repeatedly emphasize the fact that current measures of privacy protection are insufficient to counter the systemic threats presented by platformization and, most recently, also the AI-fication of our communicative infrastructures. These threats include discrimination against underprivileged groups, monopolization of power and knowledge, as well as manipulation. In my research, I take this analysis one step further, suggesting that the consequences of inappropriate privacy protection online possibly even run counter to the normative principles that underpinned the standard clause for privacy protection and diversity measures in the first place. I discuss the ways in which attempts at protection run the risk of producing results that not only diverge from but, paradoxically, even distort the normative goals they intended to reach: informational self-determination, empowerment, equity, tolerance, and autonomy. Drawing on the framework of 'normative paradoxes', I argue that we must be wary of simplifying highly complex and contested values such as privacy or diversity, and of the temptation to take shortcuts that allow for measurability and scalability. Drawing on various empirical examples, I show the problems that these simplifications and shortcuts can lead to, both in terms of performance and ethical dangers. I show how they ultimately promote precisely those material-discursive practices of digital use and AI-fication that ultimately interfere with our privacy and threaten to lead to a sweeping homogenization of ideas and forms of expression. Last but not least, I will present some initiatives that strive for differentiated solutions for embedding central values in socio-technical systems.

Dr. Paula Helm is Asst. Prof. for Ethics & Data Science at the University of Amsterdam. Her research is situated at the intersection of Critical AI, Empirical Ethics and Science & Technology Studies. From 2020-2022, she led subprojects within 3 larger interdisciplinary research consortia in the area of AI, Security and Online Social Platforms at Tübingen University. Paula held postdoc positions at GU Frankfurt and TU Munich and has been Visiting Fellow with the Privacy Research Group at New York University as well as with the Surveillance Studies Centre at Queen's University. Her work has been published at ACM FAccT, Big Data & Society, New Media & Society, Ethics & Inf. Tech, Surveillance & Society, Law & Cont. Prob. Her outreach includes interviews for the FAZ, Guardian, Deutschlandfunk, ZDF, and public speeches at the German Ministry of Economics & Climate, Amsterdam Data Science Day, Innovation Forum Berlin, etc.. Paula Helm serves on the UvA Ethics Committee and is PC member of the ACM AIES. Her most recent project deals with responsible digital transformation in the Amazon Rainforest.