

AI ETHICS PROFILES & CAREER JOURNEYS

#IAmTheFutureofAI



Women in AI **Ethics**[™] (WAIE)
womeninaithics.org

Editors: Mia Dand & Jazzmin Chizu Gota
Publication Design: Jazzmin Chizu Gota

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Thank you to all our volunteers, individual donors, and the WAIE community who have believed in and supported this work. Our collective is a constant inspiration and the foundation of the work that we do together. Over the past five years, you have shared your stories and insights that show the importance of bringing our voices into the spaces where we're most needed.



BACKGROUND

In Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the broader tech industry, one of the most persistently cited issue is the shortage of qualified women. As a result, many government, university, and industry programs are focused on fixing the “STEM pipeline gap.”

While it is true that the tech industry is dominated by men, this simplistic narrative obscures the fact that women account for one-third of the STEM workforce and discourages others from entering this field. It also understates the significant contributions of women and minimizes the importance of the diverse expertise they bring to this critical space. These harmful biases are amplified by machine learning models, which generate images of men when prompted with keywords like “confident” and “computer programmer” or “assertive” and “engineer.”

This compilation of interviews is part of Women in AI Ethics™ continuing effort since 2018 to highlight the expertise of women from diverse backgrounds in this space and encourage new pathways for others who want to pursue a career in AI. You can read more of their inspiring stories on the WAIE blog.

CHANGE
THE PUBLIC
PERCEPTION
OF WHO IS
CONSIDERED
AN “EXPERT”

Resources

“The AI Ethics Revolution - A Brief Timeline”

<https://womeninaithics.org/the-ai-ethics-revolution-a-brief-timeline>

“Women in AI 2024”

Zeki Research Report <https://www.thezeki.com/women-in-ai-2024-report>

“Diffusion Bias Explorer” – Hugging Face

<https://huggingface.co/spaces/society-ethics/DiffusionBiasExplorer>

“The Stereotypical Computer Scientist: Gendered Media Representations as a Barrier to Inclusion for Women”

<https://depts.washington.edu/sibl/Publications/Cheryan,Plaut,Handron,Hudson,2013.pdf>

Women in AI Ethics blog

<https://womeninaithics.org/women-in-ai-ethics-blog>



AI ETHICS PROFILES & CAREER JOURNEYS

#IAmTheFutureofAI





Alva Markelius

MSt - Master of Studies, AI Ethics & Society

Research Engineer, University of Cambridge / University of Gothenburg

#bias #stereotypes #misinformation

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I started out studying for a BSc degree in cognitive science at the University of Gothenburg. After half my degree I got the opportunity to travel to Seoul National University to finish the degree and work with social robotics. It was in Korea that I first started working academically with AI ethics in a data science project about XAI related to bias in facial recognition.

I realised how important this field was and wanted to delve into it for graduate school, thus ending up doing my masters in AI Ethics at Cambridge. Having been an active activist also hugely impacted my career journey, as fighting for women's rights, climate and social justice has been a core part of my life for a long time.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I aim mainly tackling the ethics related to implementing LLMs into embodied/personified systems, such as social robotics, digital avatars and vehicles. One project is related to identifying ethical considerations when designing embodied humanoid interfaces to LLMs. This includes how to design characteristics such as personality, behaviour, appearance and voice of social robots while not perpetuating harmful biases and stereotypes related to gender. It also concerns tackling risk of inappropriate behaviour, adversarial misuse, potential emotional dependence and disruptions and to avoid risk of spread of misinformation.

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

Being a woman in tech, and particular AI and robotics, have come with many barriers throughout my career. Despite having a quite technical background, and being a competent technologist, my background of both being a woman, and the first person in my family with an academic degree, has been notably non-traditional in the AI space. It is a fight towards constant structural barriers and obstacles. I have faced being overlooked, not taken seriously, not given credit, doing extra social and emotional labour, and hearing comments like "wear less makeup, and dress less feminine, it is distracting in tech and AI".

“Overcoming them has included never being apologetic, for the way you dress and look, for setting your boundaries, for respecting yourself and your own work and who you are.”

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

AI are complex socio-technical systems, and infrastructures of computational, social, cultural and institutional constructions. The ethics of AI follows the same structure, it is relational, context-dependent and temporal. I believe that there is no one-size-fits-all for AI ethics, but it has to be applied differently depending on who is involved, who gets affected by the technologies and the inherent power asymmetries present in the particular application. Without diversity in the AI ethics space, we risk limiting our understanding about what AI ethics means, which would have devastating consequences. Diversity in AI ethics enables technology design and innovation, regulation and governance as well as epistemologies and ontologies that accommodate for more people affected by emerging AI, reducing risk and harm and enabling potential for justice and empowerment in tech.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

My first advice would be to remember you are never alone in your journey, and always reach out for help to the communities and individuals that exist out there. There are many who have overcome similar challenges and barriers, that would be more than happy to share their experiences and support those who need it. I believe our strength lies in our community and our ability to lift others, and enable opportunity for others, especially those who are facing marginalisation and are often being overlooked or excluded in the AI ethics space. My second advice, related to tech bro culture is to never compromise your integrity, boundaries, space, yourself, the way you choose to express your identity, your safety and comfort even if it does not fit into such a culture, never.

“My first advice would be to remember you are never alone in your journey, and always reach out for help to the communities and individuals that exist out there. There are many who have overcome similar challenges and barriers, that would be more than happy to share their experiences and support those who need it.”

—Alva Markelius



Anjana Susarla

PhD, Management and Information Systems

Omura-Saxena Professor of Responsible AI, Michigan State University

#bias #inclusion

What inspired you to join the space?

I was doing research on social media usage for healthcare. I realized that the most recommended and engaging content was for content that has very limited medical information. This is what inspired me to work on Responsible AI.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Bias and representativeness

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I grew up in a small village in India. I studied engineering as an undergraduate and became an IT consultant. I then got a PhD in Information Systems and entered academia

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

When I was starting out in my career, there were almost no women in my sub-field. I felt very excluded in it was extremely difficult to build a set of co-authors and peers.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

We need diverse perspectives to consider questions about bias and representativeness. For example, working on healthcare informatics related questions, I realized my own experiences informed me in thinking about how minorities use healthcare, and accordingly what content moderation policies should be adopted by social media platforms.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I think we need more alliances across researchers. More interdisciplinary initiatives will also help.

“We need diverse perspectives to consider questions about bias and representativeness.”

Anna Danes

Batchelor's in Communications and Batchelor's in Humanities

AI Ethicist, Consultant
#fairness #accountability



What inspired you to join the space?

I attended an AI Conference and read these comments on the feed of the event “If I am racist, why should the algorithm not be racist?”, “If I am a bad driver, why should my autonomous car be a better driver than me?” and “We will ship it to the market first and then worry about the social implications”. There I understood that some people with huge power were not aware of the ethical dimension of their work and I thought I needed to help awaken their ethical imagination.

“AI must be inclusive and the best way to achieve it to “walk the talk” and truly build diverse teams... this is the most efficient way to make sure we are preserving human values.”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Privacy is the answer that first comes to my mind, but that is just because the regulation is in place to protect it and a lot of companies are prioritizing it. Teams might start there but I always push them to go beyond to start thinking about accountability, fairness, sustainability and preservation of human values. One of my favorite topics is to talk about responsibility because that is so unclear and right now it puts so much pressure on tech teams! They feel responsible for the fairness in their work but companies just don't provide them with the right tools to deal with it, they have an ethical awareness but no way to escalate it and solve it.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

Coming from a non-technical background can be challenging because you can fall into the impostor syndrome very easily. The best way to overcome that is to understand who you are, what you bring into the conversation, to understand your value and to surround yourself by the right people, talents that can complement your skills and push your boundaries. They make all the difference.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

AI must be inclusive and the best way to achieve it to “walk the talk” and truly build diverse teams. From a very practical perspective I think this is the most efficient way to make sure we are preserving human values.

On top of that, as a new industry we have the chance to build a better workplace far away from old paradigms and bs, and one of the key points to this better workplace is to make an effort to include all kinds of people and have a really rich environment.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Find yourself a good mentor. In my case I was lucky to be part of the WAIE mentor program and that changed my life. With just a few conversations with Merve Hickok help me understand the scene and find myself in this new space. I think the most important thing is to surround yourself with the right people and you will grow for sure.



Anoush Najarian

MS Computer Science, MS Math
Software Engineering Manager, MathWorks
[#bias](#) [#privacy](#) [#consent](#) [#surveillance](#)

What inspired you to join the space?

The incident that prompted me to join this space is the firings of the Ethical AI team co-leads Dr. Timnit Gebru and Dr. Margaret Mitchell outraged me and so many others, and motivated me to get more involved in this field.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I joined MathWorks almost 15 years ago. It's been exciting to be able to craft my role, from working in Performance Engineering to managing a team, to expanding into AI-Assisted Coding, and along the way, helping lead our grassroots DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) team and nurture Ethical AI efforts.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I've had to think about all of these challenges: bias, data privacy, consent, and surveillance, in my work, and community outreach.

If you have a non-traditional or non-technical background, what barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I grew up in the former USSR, in Armenia. Living in a surveillance state forced us to be fearful, beware of snitching, and protect our own. The history of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 taught me how bad things can get if you don't stand up for what's right.

“To create Ethical AI we must learn from the lived experience of marginalized groups: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, disabled folks, women, and the intersectional groups.”

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

To create Ethical AI we must learn from the lived experience of marginalized groups: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, disabled folks, women, and the intersectional groups.

The amazing talent and the power of the affinity communities have started the field and are essential to continuing to move it forward.

To be true to the ideals of Ethical AI, we must have diverse voices at the table.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

These quotes have guided me throughout my journey and have contributed to what I have achieved so far.

“Be yourself so people looking for you can find you” — Arlan Hamilton.

“Let's lift each other up!” — Louvere Walker-Hannon

Use your voice to speak up for what is right. Build up your strength and your community.

Areeya Lila

Master of Business Administration
Head of Product & Co-Founder, VIEWN
[#privacy](#) [#bias](#)



What inspired you to join the space?

We started VIEWN in 2019 because the marketers we know needed to report on their customers even if that data came from multiple applications-like merging Shopify and Amazon data. GDPR and CCPA were the first privacy rules, and each customer may be subjected to different rules. Learning from my business, I began to study ethics within the solution we were building. I found that AI and how you train AI can negatively impact minority populations. I discovered it is easy for managers to introduce bias. I also am concerned about bias in training data. I also learned there are not very many women in AI; only 14%. So my fate is to “stand in the way” of bias in marketing.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

At the moment, we are tackling bias and customer data privacy. Particularly regarding how we add new data sources, we need to understand where the data came from and if it is any good. This is one way we address the risk of bias. Our personalization engine directly takes data from multiple applications such as Shopify and Amazon.

Customer data privacy is costing my Shopify Operators and Retailers 30% more in advertising costs. Our solution helps businesses grow despite these headwinds by leveraging customer information that your customer already provides and sets up customer engagement through a personalization engine to request any other information you may need to get them to purchase again.

“Investors seem to have defined a “technical” as who can code, since it has been years since I have coded, I’m not considered ‘technical’ anymore. I believe that I am highly technical as well as business.”

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

You know, “technical” was a very highly guarded word in some of the organizations I have worked for. A mechanical engineer and economist by education, I practiced design quality for the automotive industry, then switched to process and strategy for global organizations and their software needs as well as the formation of tech startups on behalf of private equity.

Investors seem to have defined a “technical” as who can code, since it has been years since I have coded, I’m not considered “technical” anymore. I believe that I am highly technical as well as business.

“Look for the cracks in the glass ceiling and see if you can fit through. Then help someone else through.”

—Areeya Lila

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

I grew up believing we were ALL equal. After 20 years of working in technology for corporations, I have hit the proverbial glass ceiling. Not content with a system deciding where I would be, I feel like I broke out to start something different.

Learning from my business, I began to study ethics within the solution we were building. I found that AI and how you train AI can negatively impact minority populations. I discovered it is easy for managers to introduce bias. I also am concerned about bias in training data. I also learned there are not very many women in AI, in fact only 14%. So my fate is to “stand in the way” of bias in marketing.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Work extremely hard and accept that you will always have to work harder than others. Do NOT believe in a company meritocracy program. It is totally stacked for men only so have a luxury brand even if your startup is a B2B SaaS Software like mine. For funding, look at doing an SPV or crowdfunding.

Double-check the portfolio to see if the VC is truly funding women of color. Often the initiative is more marketing than what you see in reality. Look for the cracks in the glass ceiling and see if you can fit through. Then help someone else through that crack.

Aurélie Jacquet

Masters of Laws

Consultant and founder, Ethical AI Consulting
#governance



What inspired you to join the space?

I started working with algorithmic traders in 2007, and following the GFC I worked on implementing risk and compliance uplifts in relation to algorithmic trading across jurisdictions.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I started a professional group on Ethical AI back in 2015 and made submissions to be involved in local and international initiatives. Fast forward to today, I am now leading international AI standards initiatives for Australia and global certification initiatives for AI.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

My work is dedicated to developing robust repeatable framework that are recognised internationally to enable organisations to implement AI responsibly.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

By being the lawyer in the room who understands emerging technologies and provides recognised governance framework that organisations can rely on to harness and stay in control of these technologies.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Because algorithms are increasingly used to make decisions or drive insights about an individual or a group of people.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Understand how emerging technologies such as AI can change impact your work/ life, and be part of the solution to drive a positive impact.

“By being the lawyer in the room who understands emerging technologies and provides recognised governance framework that organisations can rely on to harness and stay in control of these technologies.”



Cari Miller

Doctoral Candidate, Business (AI Governance and Risk Management)
Founder | Practice Lead, AI Governance & Research, Center for Inclusive Change
#governance

What inspired you to join the space?

As I was working to place some Facebook and Google ads around 2015–2016, I realized that the algorithms were using the same “techniques” to target ads for dog food and high heels as they were for housing and employment. Hence, clear discrimination was occurring. That was NOT ok with me.

“Leaping off my MBA in marketing, my BA in international business, my love of big data, and my history of gender discrimination, I couldn’t stop obsessing over AI governance.”

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I worked in corporate strategy for various marketing/advertising firms for 20+ years. I used a TON of big data to solve problems. I loved it, but there was gender discrimination. So I quit. I started a science activity center for kids. #passionproject. It was awesome!! Then Covid hit, and I had to shut down. Rather than being devastated, I turned to the ye’ ol’ bucket list and started working on my doctorate. Leaping off my MBA in marketing, my BA in international business, my love of big data, and my history of gender discrimination, I couldn’t stop obsessing over AI governance. As they say, if you love what you do... is it really work?

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I focus on AI governance best practices relative to workplace and ed-tech AI. I prefer to spend most of my time on the buyer side of governance. There are plenty of people focused on the developer side. Unfortunately, there is a large gap in understanding the buyers/deployers have a lot of governance responsibilities to fulfill also in order to safeguard their stakeholders, brands, and operations.

“This work is critical to so many people who don’t speak ‘AI’ in their normal life but are directly impacted by it.”
—Cari Millier

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I am the first in my family to go to college. It is not lost on me that my great-grandparents were immigrants. My grandmother quit school in middle school, and my mom graduated high school and went straight to work. Working in the field of AI, at this level, is worlds away from the roots that got me here. However, I constantly remind myself that the work I do is critically important to exactly the vulnerable populations that made my life possible...and then some. This work is critical to so many people who don’t speak “AI” in their normal life but are directly impacted by it. I feel a duty to serve those people. I don’t know why. I just do.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

More diversity isn’t unique to AI ethics. More diversity is simply good for the world. Diverse perspectives push our thinking into territories our itty-bitty minds don’t normally travel. It takes a wide array of people to build a beautiful, rich tapestry that’s representative of the whole of humanity.

One small example of AI ethics is the autonomous vehicle that didn’t recognize the stop sign because there was graffiti on the sign. Had the developer employed (or just asked) AI engineers from different socio-economic backgrounds, they would have been more likely to train the ML to recognize road signs WITH and without graffiti.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

We find our tribe and get engaged. There are lots of little (and big) groups of like-minded individuals out there. All Tech is Human, ForHumanity, IEEE working groups, tons of LinkedIn communities, etc. that are open and welcoming, that offer kinship, that offer learning opportunities, that offer networking, and more. If we can power through the imposter syndrome, which by the way, we all have, then all you have to do is take one little baby step, join a group, join a committee, join a slack channel, and start chatting. The rest is about following your gut, setting your boundaries, and sticking with the people that respect your ideas.

Carol Smith

MS in Computer Science (Human Computer Interaction)
Sr. Research Scientist, human-machine interaction
CMU Software Engineering Inst., AI Division
#bias #fairness #explainability



“Coming from a non-traditional background myself, I would always recommend enduring, hitting back, and trusting your community and team.”

What inspired you to join the space?

My great Aunt Irene was deaf (she read lips) and I always felt she deserved better ways to communicate. When I found out about HCI (20+ years ago) one of my goals was to increase accessibility. Since 2015 I've been working to make AI systems safe and more inclusive. Aunt Irene would have been amazed at the opportunities for her, and frightened by so many hazards. My goal is to support people in making AI systems that are safe and enable people to be and do what they want.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I've had many, many jobs, and for most I've applied to without a connection—this one was the same. I saw the posting and applied and got the role almost 4 years ago. The only job I have gotten in this field with a personal connection was IBM—the woman who hired me called me about the role.

I've worked as a consultant, owned 2 small firms, worked in many industries and now in academia working with government customers.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

AI Engineering as a practice and responsible AI as a practice with topics such as bias, fairness, explainability, calibrated trust, and more...

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

Undergrad was in photojournalism, but CS masters has made a difference. School choice seems even more important than degree earned in many situations.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Having a diverse group of people work together will result in better work. They will think differently and help each other to recognize their biases. They are likely to be more creative and they will think of more potential harms to guard against.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

It's hard to really overcome those barriers - it's more learning to work with them and finding a decent place to work. A toxic situation cannot be fixed by one person.



Cristina Martinez

Master in Public Policy, Georgetown University

Founder and CEO, PIT Policy Lab

#bias #gender

What inspired you to join the space?

It is more of a collection of experiences as a tech policy entrepreneur where:

- a) I am the only woman seating at the table;
- b) because of my background in social sciences, I often have to validate why I have a seat at the table.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I became a tech policy entrepreneur and female founder back in 2019 while I was pregnant with my first daughter. Having led C Minds AI for Good Lab between 2018-20 and after years of consultancy experience for international organizations, I launched the PIT Policy Lab both to advance the public interest technology field of practice in Latin America as well as to train the next generation of tech policy practitioners, as a talent platform. I am really proud of our accomplishments with only with years of operations!

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

These past two years we have been working on developing a gender stream. We have two exciting projects: 1) In collaboration with the Feminist AI Network, Northeastern AI Civic Lab, and Puentech Lab, we are working on the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in crowd work (e.g. women completing data labeling tasks) in Latin America; 2) financed by USAID, we are part of a Consortium of organizations conformed by ITAD, Athena Infonomics, and Women in Digital Transformation working with the government of Guanajuato in Mexico to detect and mitigate gender bias in an AI-based early alert system to identify students at risk of dropping out of school. We created an ethical guide and checklist, conducted training on gender, ethics, and data, and held three knowledge exchange sessions: a) with other cities in Mexico, b) with other countries in Latin America, and c) with India.

“I’ve worked on overcoming challenges by studying thoroughly the themes I address and having technical partners.”

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I have a bachelor's degree in International Affairs and a master's in Public Policy with a focus on technology, so working in the tech sector as a young woman with a background in social sciences has been challenging. I've worked on overcoming these challenges by studying thoroughly the themes I address and by having technical partners that lead technical components. Also by being unapologetic and firm in knowing what are my core skills.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Diversity matters because representation matters. Perspectives, worries, contexts, and needs from the Global South need to be incorporated in debates about current AI developments, as to acknowledge that technology is not neutral and algorithmic bias can have severe impacts on people's lives.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

There are emerging groups like the AI & Equality Online community (<https://community.aiequalitytoolbox.com/home>), USAID's Equitable AI Community of Practice, or the Feminist AI Network that are precisely looking to address these barriers. Join any of these initiatives!



Eleonore Fournier-Tombs

PhD, Science de la société mention systèmes de l'information

Senior Researcher, United Nations University

#gender #inclusion #regulation

What inspired you to join the space?

When I was in high school I was part of the Model UN team, and I absolutely loved the discussions and deliberations about important global issues. I represented Sweden both years and was on the disarmament committee. I was quite shy at the time, and received an honourable mention prize one year that very much boosted my confidence. That's when I knew I wanted to work on at the UN professionally too, but of course could never have imagined what course my career would actually take. I became increasingly interested in computer science at that age too, and over the next decade worked on data and analytics, both as a practitioner—at UNDP and UNOCHA, for example, and later also in policy. I always try to connect the work that I do to that original interest in global issues—peace, equality, human rights, the environment.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

When I read the Draft AI Act published by the European Commission in April 2021, I saw that there was a provision noting that it did not apply to international organisations. While this is completely normal from a legal perspective, as the EC does not have jurisdiction on the UN, it did give me pause, and I wrote an article in The Conversation about how the UN could internally regulate its use of AI. I was convinced that this article would be very much criticized, but actually, I was contacted by many UN researchers and eventually was invited to apply for a position at United Nations University, which is part of the UN and has research institutes in 14 countries around the world.

“My main concern in my research is how to make the development and benefits of AI as inclusive as possible, how to protect human rights, and how to ensure that AI leaders are diverse”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

On a day-to-day basis, I have done a lot of work this year on gender and AI, namely in Southeast Asia, where I have several projects with other UN agencies. For example, I produced research on gender-sensitive AI policy in the region. I have also worked quite a bit on the use of AI in a humanitarian context, namely for migration. My main concern in my research is how to make the development and benefits of AI as inclusive as possible, how to protect human rights, and how to ensure that AI leaders are diverse. In the next few years, my work will increasingly focus on how the UN can best support the regulation of AI, on the one hand, and how it can itself use these tools safely and effectively, on the other.

“My advice is first to find like-minded people to create a small community, in order to discuss issues that arise and find solutions. It’s important to be able to understand that many of the barriers women, people of colour, and many others face in technology are systemic, rather than personal.”

—Eleonore Fournier-Tombs

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

My first degree was in Political Science and History. I learned how to program, originally in Java, at the age of 25, with an introductory online course. Over time, I took courses in R and Python, but I obtained many technical skills while working. Namely I worked as a data scientist for a fintech startup called RedOwl for almost 2 years, and that was an incredible technical bootcamp. The other data scientists and software engineers were very generous and I built a solid skillset very quickly. This has made me very aware of people coming into computer science later in life, and I’ve since taught several university classes in data science for social scientists, and this has become a big passion of mine.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

First of all, diversity in AI is critical to share the benefits of AI. There has always been imbalances when it comes to technology development, where technologies are developed to serve a certain set of people. For example, the women’s health field is generally very underserved, compared to the men’s health field. The other reason is that AI technologies are very broad, and many of them present important risks to human rights, particularly for traditional discriminated groups, such as women. We’ve seen examples recently where AI used in human resources and finance actually discriminated against women, limiting their future economic opportunities. This is a very big deal, as we are mostly unaware of the AI that makes every day decisions to affect our lives. Diversity and inclusion is a critical step to limit the harmful uses of AI, and open up the benefits of the technologies.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

My advice is first to find like-minded people to create a small community, in order to discuss issues that arise and find solutions. It’s important to be able to understand that many of the barriers women, people of colour, and many others face in technology are systemic, rather than personal. When I first started as a data scientist, I created a tech women’s group which met monthly and discussed things like imposter syndrome, discrimination, salaries, and so on. I would also say that developing your personal brand on social media can help, because it can help you share who you are as a different face of tech, and meet others too. I feel very optimistic about representation in technology, because I’ve seen a lot of support for diversity in the field, including from people that might have qualified as tech bros. However, it’s important to continue being aware of barriers in order to be able to address them when they come up.

Elle Farrell-Kingsley

Liberal Arts (BA Hons)

Technology Journalist / AI Dialogue Writer, Freelance / Mother Tongue

#bias #policy



“Much like the Enlightenment, where research became incredibly interdisciplinary, AI also needs a humanities approach.”

What inspired you to join the space?

As a tech journalist, I can often be the only woman at events, and it would be great to learn from other women across the industry.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I was inspired by the Cambridge Analytica scandal to enter the tech journalism space to understand what's going on in tech and found myself drawn toward AI articles. From my publications, I was then invited to work as an AI Dialogue Writer, where I now use my humanities and social science background to humanise the response of AI.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Bias, policy/legalisation, data collection, censorship, AIs developing a persona.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

As a 25-year-old woman, I've discovered that coming into the tech space can lead to people often overlooking my knowledge, or worse, assuming at events/conferences, that I'm the admin, PA, or receptionist. Similarly, as someone with a humanities and social science background can be challenging, as people may question technical expertise. However, much like the Enlightenment, where research became incredibly interdisciplinary, AI also needs a humanities approach. As such, I've had to prove myself and go above and beyond in my research to prove I am also capable of technical subjects. Eventually, my work became well-recognised by those who read it as reputable, reliable, and highly-technical.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

If we consider AI in terms of utilitarianism, where the ultimate purpose is for the good of people, then it must also reflect the wide diversity of humanity. If only privileged individuals work on AI, then the AI will inherently become biased.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

The more of us who enter the industry, the more the tech-bro culture will fade.



Emine Ozge Yildirim-Vranckaert

Master of Laws (Currently in the final year of a PhD degree)

Doctoral Researcher, KU Leuven Center for IT & IP Law (CiTiP)

#regulation #disinformation #digitalrights

What inspired you to join the space?

It all started with a personal experience in a society where freedom of expression and access to information were severely restricted. I witnessed firsthand how narratives were tightly controlled, and dissenting voices were silenced, leaving a lasting impact on me. This early exposure set the stage for my heightened awareness during the 2016 U.S. election. The strategies employed in propaganda and personalized targeting vividly showcased the challenges of preserving mental autonomy in the digital age. These experiences made it clear that technology and fundamental human rights, such as freedom of thought and expression, were in a precarious balance. This realization became a turning point, driving me to immerse myself in AI ethics as a means to confront these urgent issues.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I first started as an advocate for online freedom of expression while at Georgetown Law in Washington, DC. This advocacy deepened during my work with a non-profit online encyclopedia, where I was immersed in the ethos of the open-source and open-access communities. In these environments, I became acutely aware of the importance of free, unmanipulated access to information as a cornerstone of true freedom of expression. This experience revealed a notable gap in existing literature and legal precedents regarding the right to freedom of thought, especially crucial in the algorithmic-driven era. This realization propelled me to pursue my current doctoral research.

“I witnessed firsthand how narratives were tightly controlled, and dissenting voices were silenced, leaving a lasting impact on me. This early exposure set the stage for my heightened awareness during the 2016 U.S. election. The strategies employed in propaganda and personalized targeting vividly showcased the challenges of preserving mental autonomy in the digital age.”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

In my daily work, I focus on the intersection of law, ethics, and technology, with a special emphasis on freedom of expression and digital mental autonomy. My responsibilities include assessing platform regulations and the impact of AI on online speech and digital freedom of thought, while advocating for ethical AI practices that uphold individual rights. Complementing this, my doctoral research, which is in the final stages of completion, delves into how digital technologies have transformed propaganda methods, further influencing mental autonomy and freedom of thought. This research takes a legal and philosophical approach, analyzing the societal implications of AI within the framework of international human rights law.

“Diversity in AI ethics is not just about representation but also about enabling unimpeded mental autonomy, allowing individuals from all backgrounds to develop their mental faculties and make informed life decisions.”

—Emine Ozge Yildirim-Vranckaert

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

Navigating AI as a legal scholar presents unique challenges, particularly in understanding the intricate technology behind rights implications. My strategy has been to collaborate with experts from various fields, fostering a shared comprehension. Interdisciplinary research projects have been instrumental in this journey, offering invaluable insights. However, with the ever-evolving nature of technology, I recognize the importance of continuous learning to stay abreast of new developments in AI.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

In a world marked by historical inequalities and narratives dominated by the powerful, the lack of diversity in voices risks repeating past failures. My Ph.D. research on propaganda narratives underscores this; it questions the unbiased nature of information without diverse contributions. Diversity in AI ethics is not just about representation but also about enabling unimpeded mental autonomy, allowing individuals from all backgrounds to develop their mental faculties and make informed life decisions. This ensures that AI, and society at large, benefits from a multitude of perspectives, making it more equitable and just.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I must admit that I’m still navigating these challenges myself, and I’m not sure if I have all the answers. However, I believe that providing concrete evidence of how these barriers hinder societal progress and patiently explaining the consequences of these issues until they are heard sound like strategies worth trying. It’s an ongoing journey, and through our collective strength and resilience, by standing for each other and trying together, we can break those barriers.

Emsie Erastus

MSc Media & Communication

Digital Rights Specialist, Internews (based in Zambia)

#privacy #cybersecurity #digitalrights



“I quickly realized that AI technologies could cause harm and perpetuate existing inequalities if not developed and deployed ethically, and those who will suffer most are millions of people on my continent, Africa.”

What inspired you to join the space?

My interest in AI ethics was influenced by how everyday technology made decisions for me and the limited options I had to opt-out. As a journalist, I worked at a news and current affairs online desk. The amount of information filters I witnessed as an African journalist was unbelievable, and I knew a higher power was at play. Information integrity was not an option in most of the tech I engaged daily. I quickly realized that AI technologies could cause harm and perpetuate existing inequalities if not developed and deployed ethically, and those who will suffer most are millions of people on my continent, Africa. This realization inspired me to explore the field of AI ethics and contribute to addressing the complex challenges in this space. My work is also highly inspired by Dr. Joy Buolamwini, Timnit Gebru, Dr. Seeta Peña Gangadharan, Ruha Benjamin, and other women of color who have coined these concepts and paved the way for us to explore the field further.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

My background started in journalism, working at an online news desk in Namibia. We would post stories, and social media platforms heavily policed them. However, western media houses would post similar stories, and they would not get removed. This became problematic when we posted stories of indigenous communities like the OvaHimba women and girls. The social platform's algorithms are unfair to African journalists, and we cannot contest them. I realized the problem was more significant than our newsroom and went far beyond social media platforms. My phone, laptop, CCTV cameras in my community, and simple tech in bathrooms were not reacting to my skin tone the way they were responding to my white counterparts. I started researching and exploring the central dynamics of algorithms of social media platforms and became interested in how technology impacts the social life of Africans. I pursued an MSc in Media and Communications at the London School of Economics (LSE), where I studied Technology and Justice under the mentorship of Dr. Seeta Peña Gangadharan. Additionally, I have done research work on online violence against women and girls with organizations such as the Internet Society of Namibia (where I was an advisory board member) with other great women like Nashilongo Gervasius in my home country, Namibia. I was also a digital inclusion and media fellow with Paradigm Initiative. This pan-African organization allowed me to explore the dynamics of AI biases from a social science viewpoint.

“If diversity is not allowed the prominence it deserves, we risk excluding billions of people, particularly those from marginalized groups. The past has taught us that excluding certain members of society does not play in the best interest of humanity.”

—Emsie Erastus

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I am a Digital Rights Specialist at Internews based in Zambia. I lead, develop, and implement activities to promote digital rights in Zambia, including AI ethics, data protection, privacy, cybercrime, and cybersecurity. Through this work, we aim to provide technical support to civil society organizations, the media, the private sector, and the Government of Zambia to promote digital rights that meet international standards. We are advocating for repealing the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021 and other laws that do not align with regional and international best practices.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

In 2010, I worked with a unique feminist organization in South Africa, Gender Links; a woman who particularly inspired me was the late Sarry Xoagus-Eises. She used to say that African women experience triple oppression. 1. We are oppressed because of our skin color 2. We are oppressed for simply being women, and 3. We are oppressed for being African. Thus, if diversity is not allowed the prominence it deserves, we risk excluding billions of people, particularly those from marginalized groups. The past has taught us that excluding certain members of society does not play in the best interest of humanity.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

It is essential to realize the unique experiences that different sectors bring to the table. Technology impacts all sectors; look around your community, be open to people's deepest needs, and merge that into AI ethics. It is human stories and experiences that will change the AI landscape and foster systems that are respectful of human rights.



Favour Borokini

PhD student, University of Nottingham

Data and Digital Rights Researcher, Pollicy

#colonialism #ageism #sexism #digitalrights

What inspired you to join the space?

I decided to join this space after realising that technologies like AI could be deeply harmful to women. Previously, I'd been of the opinion that technology was a force for good, but social media events led me to the understanding that I had been wrong

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I'd been working in tech policy research generally for close to a year when I stumbled on a report on online violence being done by my current organisation. It was the first time I'd seen such a report by an organisation that wasn't the UN or a huge iNGO so I reached out to Neema and mentioned that I was interested in contributing to Pollicy's research and a couple of months, I was able to join.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Working on the African Women in AI project in particular at Pollicy has seen me working on and researching several ways through which AI impacts women living in Africa and of African descent. These issues cut across the impact of colonialism, traditional and cultural norms, ageism, sexism, amongst other issues and impact dignity, freedom from discrimination, freedom of movement and freedom of expression amongst others.

“There are so many impactful, beneficial ways AI can be developed and integrated if we could stop to ask the people who would be using the products we’re building.”

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

Not being able to apply for a lot of AI research jobs because I have a law background.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

There are so many impactful, beneficial ways AI can be developed and integrated if we could stop to ask the people who would be using the products we're building. More diversity also means more scrutiny for what we are building.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Have a community of friends and mentors who are willing and able to listen to you, and give you advice.

Gemma Galdon-Clavell

PhD in Technology Policy
Founder & CEO, Eticas Research and Consulting
[#bias](#) [#compliance](#) [#governance](#)



What inspired you to join the space?

When I started I didn't think that technology would play such a big role in my research but, in the 2008-11 when I was writing my PhD in Technology Policy, many technologies were taking an increasingly prominent space in policy, and I was very fortunate to see this live and to be able to capture it. Also, the response to my PhD was amazing, I received lots of praise, support and offers to pursue my research line, and today I feel like I won the lottery, as I am able to shape current debates through my work, to protect people and provide a space for the most vulnerable.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

While my PhD opened many doors for me, it also limited my chances of staying in Spanish academia. My technical insight was not well received at the Sociology Department where I worked, and my ability to attract funds and projects was seen by my Department as an unwelcome subversion of the statu quo, and so eventually I was invited to leave academia and take my project with me. Initially, Eticas was a "vessel" for those projects, and I only started thinking strategically about the possibilities of the organisation after 2016. At the same time, our work on algorithmic audits proves that we can indeed envision a world where technology is and does better, by incorporating responsibility and oversight in its design process.

"Our work on algorithmic audits proves that we can indeed envision a world where technology is and does better, by incorporating responsibility and oversight in its design process."

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Eticas' goal is to protect people from technological processes and at the same time ensure we all have the right to benefit from AI innovation regardless of our gender, skin color, location or background. We are specialized in auditing algorithms and other related AI deployments to tackle bias, discrimination and negative outcomes on specific groups of individuals. Our services also include ethics governance and oversight of already developed technologies, as well as the development and implementation of privacy and ethics by design solutions and processes. We have a proven methodology that equips clients with data and algorithmic processes that incorporate and understand complexity and social impact, leading to verifiable compliance, reduced risks and more accurate and explainable outputs that can be turned into competitive advantages.

“Coming from a non-traditional background myself, I would always recommend enduring, hitting back, and trusting your community and team.”
—Gemma Galdon-Clavell

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

As a daughter of a teenage mother and granddaughter of political dissidents who had to flee Spain, I consider being functional a major achievement. I can now be grateful for the strength and resilience I was raised with, and proud of what I have achieved. Being a woman, with this background, focus on social science and being young weren't the easiest premises to pursue a career in tech. As more women get to positions of power and influence, I believe it is important that we carry our experiences with us, and are vocal about them. In this way, I'd like to help others beat the odds, as I have (so far) done, but also be very honest about what it takes to do it.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

We can see it easily based on the gender example. The discrimination against women has resulted, among others, in separating them from the elites, positions of responsibility and areas such as research and technology. This has caused that the outputs that come from these areas did not have a gender perspective. The result was prolonging, extending and perpetuating this same discrimination. Now, this barrier is opening little by little and we see how, thanks to it, progress towards equality is closer. The same can be applied to the rest of the groups mentioned in the question. If we have the representation of these groups, we will have their respective perspectives, which will create a much more respectful, inclusive, and diverse AI.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Coming from a non-traditional background myself, as I explained before, and being a person whose career was not initially tech related, I would always recommend to endure, hit back and trust in your community and team. We are spread around the globe with the same goal in mind and we need to support each other. It's taking very long to get where we are now but every voice needs to be heard when building a safe space is at stake and we can't give in now.



Gry Hasselbalch

PhD in Data Ethics

Director of Research/DataEthics; Senior Key Expert on AI Ethics/InTouchAI.eu,
DataEthics.eu; InTouchAI.eu

#privacy #surveillance #humanrights

What inspired you to join the space?

Early in my career I was advised to not attend meetings together with male colleagues as I would be mistaken as their assistant. This was actually very sound advice. I can't count the times that I've been mistaken for an assistant or ignored when standing next to a male peer since then. And trust me the path of the all female founded thinktank DataEthics.eu has been rocky for very similar reasons.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

In the early 2000s I worked with youth online empowerment and protection. However, after 10 years I realised that awareness and education couldn't solve the core problems of the digital infrastructure. I started exploring a growing technology and business movement based on alternative data ethical design. Together with three other women I founded the thinktank DataEthics in 2015. In 2018 I was appointed as a member of the EU High Level Expert Group on AI that published the EU's AI ethics guidelines in 2019 contributing directly to the AI Act. Meanwhile, I wrote a PhD at the University of Copenhagen. Today I am the Research Lead and Senior Key Expert in the EU's International Outreach for a Human-Centric Approach to Artificial Intelligence initiative (InTouchAI.eu).

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

In my work for DataEthics.eu we tackle everything from privacy and surveillance and data asymmetries to AI challenges to human rights. In my work as a scholar and author I aim to make power dynamics of AI and data visible and advocate a humanist approach to AI and big data. As an advisor for the EU I work with the EU's human-centric approach to AI supporting the European Commission in setting up a global framework for ethics and trust to enable the growth of AI that is in accordance with EU values, e.g. democratic values and fundamental rights.

“In my work as a scholar and author I aim to make power dynamics of AI and data visible and advocate a humanist approach to AI and big data.”

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

My original university degree was in Nordic philology (language and literature) and I define myself as a “humanist”. However, this has actually always been my strength. In all the technology hype (from data to AI) the humanistic perspective let me see things differently and look for solutions fit for humans (that are not necessarily “tech solutions”). I have been able to work towards more open ended structures and dynamics, which is fundamentally what a humanist perspective brings to the tech debate. Of course particularly in the early 2000s all there was room for in this space was the predominantly white male tech solutions. So the battle was not always easy. Today it's much easier to have a humanist perspective.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

More diversity means diversity of human experiences and reflection. It means a different kind of cultural space where multiple experiences may feel “at home” and which is therefore also open to different kinds of imaginations about what kind of future we want to create. This essentially leads to the creation of alternative and different socio-technical realities. By this I mean not only different modes of technology design and innovation, but also different modes of tackling the risks and implications, different politics and modes of governance.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Get in touch with like-minded people and ask for help. If you ever get in a powerful position, don't forget where you once were and remember to reach out and support those who are not. Don't ever be lured into thinking that compassion and kindness is a weakness. It always prevails.

“If you ever get in a powerful position, don't forget where you once were, and remember to reach out and support those who are not.”

—Gry Hasselbalch

H. Titilola Olojede

PhD in Philosophy
National Open University of Nigeria
#privacy #gender #bias

“I observed that there were torrents of calls on artificial intelligence. It excited me because I saw an opportunity to apply my theoretical and practical knowledge of ethics. Given my moral philosophy and Bioethics background, I knew I could contribute some original ideas to those calls.”

What inspired you to join the space?

A couple of years ago, I was launching full swing into academia; I subscribed to some groups where various opportunities such as conferences, workshops, postdocs and similar events were posted. I observed that there were torrents of calls on artificial intelligence. It excited me because I saw an opportunity to apply my theoretical and practical knowledge of ethics. Given my moral philosophy and Bioethics background, I knew I could contribute some original ideas to those calls. Thus, I put in and was happy with the acceptance rate. I kept applying, I kept getting accepted, and the rest is history. I noticed certain lacuna in the AI discourse and have ever since been trying to contribute ideas to fill them.



Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

While at the university, I observed that I was always scoring the highest in courses on ethics and the history of philosophy. So, when I wanted to write my dissertation at bachelors and masters I wrote it on ethical issues in Invitro fertilisation-embryo transfer and in human biobank respectively. I particularly find courses in Ethics, Ethical theories and Medical ethics interesting and enriching. Based on my interest in ethics, moral philosophy is usually a major focal point in each philosopher I teach in 17th-century philosophy and the history of contemporary philosophy, respectively. Then, I got accepted to be a member of an ethical advisory council on AI and a junior consultant on AI; those two opportunities fortified my interest in AI more

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

- Algorithm bias, against women especially;
 - privacy in education in higher education and
 - issues of academic integrity, particularly in the use of Generative AI and how its advent has impacted teaching, learning and assessment
 - privacy and data issues in healthcare

***“AI is not just techy;
it needs a human
face. The benefits of
AI are universal and
permeate every aspect
of our lives; this is part
of the reason AI defies
known tradition.”***

—H. Titilola Olojede

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

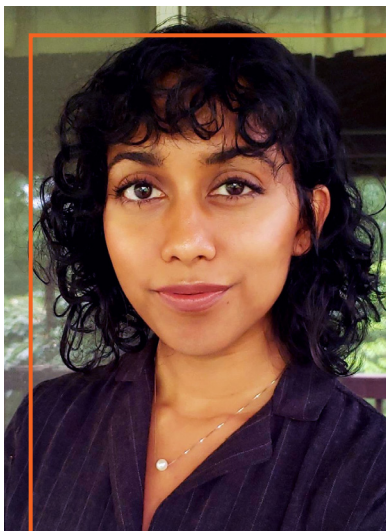
I have not encountered any barriers directly. I, however, wish there would be more women in the field to break the gender bias inherent in AI algorithms. I believe if we have more women representation, we would have more data representation and be able to speak up for ourselves.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

They are all not just important but particularly sacrosanct. They are sacrosanct because we must leave no one or group behind. If a section of the populace is left behind in the AI scheme of things, AI would serve less the good of humanity.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I believe the sky is enough for everyone to fly. Find a niche, and fill it. Start from your standpoint. AI is not just techy; it needs a human face. The benefits of AI are universal and permeate every aspect of our lives; this is part of the reason AI defies known tradition.



Irene Solaiman

Master in Public Policy (MPP), Harvard University
Policy Director, Hugging Face
[#bias](#) [#policy](#)

What inspired you to join the AI ethics space?

Prior to working on AI, I worked on human rights policy and crisis intervention. I found these roles, while greatly meaningful, were not sustainable for my mental health. When I went to grad school to reflect on how to have that level of impact on people's wellbeing in a different medium. I learned to code and learned about generative modeling—an area that needed new perspectives and was full of unanswered questions. That's my favorite challenge: asking questions that have never been asked before for systems that have never before existed. I continue to deeply admire people doing human rights work and see our roles as complementary; AI research needs to take lessons from parallel fields.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

My career has been a series of being open to novel challenges and largely creating my own roles and responsibilities. I think this is more feasible in flexible environments, such as startups, but is dependent on the culture. And I do this with major appreciation to leadership and colleagues who encourage taking risks and being my thought partners. AI as a research field moves so quickly, I often have to trust my gut in what is most impactful work. When I started doing AI bias research, it was not nearly as well-resourced as it is today. I'm so glad I charged forward on this work and that incredible researchers fought to make this area more prominent.

“That’s my favorite challenge: asking questions that have never been asked before for systems that have never before existed. I continue to deeply admire people doing human rights work and see our roles as complementary; AI research needs to take lessons from parallel fields.”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

In a startup, the issues change and move quickly. However, to anchor yourself, it's important to craft priority lists that are informed by both urgency and your personal expertise. I have strong expertise in AI policy, which is often not urgent due to its pace relative to AI progress. This should change. My personal passions are in understanding the values and cultural contexts of AI systems, measuring their social impacts, and updating systems so they work for the many groups they affect. This research is necessarily interdisciplinary, requiring research on bias, languages, and how people engage with AI systems in addition to understanding the performance and capability side of models such as the more standard performance benchmarks.

“Coming from my non-traditional background, I became accustomed to often being the only person in the room with a social science perspective. This should change. What was most helpful was understanding the specific AI system I was working on, such as a language model, and how to apply my unique skills in a way that other experts could engage with my thoughts and research.”

—Irene Solaiman

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

While a computer science background is not absolutely necessary for a social scientist, it is immensely helpful. And while social sciences are not absolutely necessary for a computer scientist, this knowledge will help systems work better for different peoples. Coming from my non-traditional background, I became accustomed to often being the only person in the room with a social science perspective. This should change. What was most helpful was understanding the specific AI system I was working on, such as a language model, and how to apply my unique skills in a way that other experts could engage with my thoughts and research. My research paper on a Process for Adapting Language Models to Society (PALMS) with Values-Targeted Datasets (<https://arxiv.org/abs/2106.10328>) is an example.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Being from an underrepresented background, I am attuned to the need for fields to not only represent the groups they strive to benefit but also actively include voices most often overlooked. My personal experiences living and working across four continents gives me deep insight on the disparate levels of attention given to systems that are deployed globally; for example, dominant research on generative modeling is largely conducted in English and from a Western lens. People affected by AI are not one entity, but many groups. Interdisciplinary expertise is needed to adapt systems to the many groups in our society.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

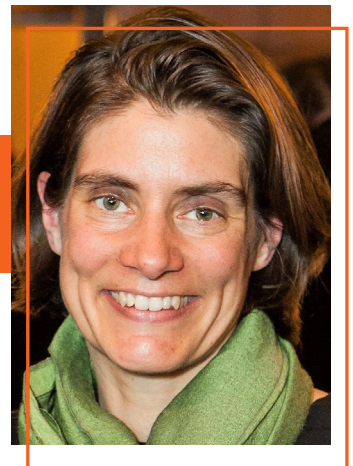
There are so many invisible ways people from underrepresented groups and non-traditional backgrounds are at a disadvantage outside the more visible discrimination. Mentorship was truly life-changing for me. I am infinitely grateful to the experienced people in the field who taught me about salary negotiation, finding funding opportunities, and just believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. Mentorship and support can also come from a peer network; my friend circles of women of color keep me sane on days I desperately need grounding.

Julia Reinhardt

Master, International Relations and Public Policy

NVIDIA, Head of Public Policy Germany

#regulation #privacy #governance



“By following my interests, searching for soulmates and people ready to support issues I am passionate about, and leaving negative thoughts, reactive reflexes, and passiveness behind me.”

What inspired you to join the space?

My (late) father grumpily filling out the form for a national census (in the 1980s), commenting on the invasive questions asked and fantasizing about how responses could be misused, was definitely an experience foundational to my beliefs on privacy and self-determination. For a long time, this experience only materialized in my personal behavior and beliefs, and I entered public service mainly with the hope of making the world a better place. When the moment came when I could make privacy and data protection (and subsequently AI and its governance) my job, I jumped on it and still thank my dad for his early insights and reflexes.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I am a combination of AI governance expert, with a non-profit funding in a for-profit small-business workplace, private-sector privacy professional and former diplomat. How did I land this role? By following my interests, searching for soulmates and people ready to support issues I am passionate about, and leaving negative thoughts, reactive reflexes, and passiveness behind me.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

How can we make sure upcoming EU regulation of Artificial Intelligence can be implemented by small AI businesses so these important guardrails don't end up as paper tigers? This is the focus of my work as a non-profit senior fellow, funded by a philanthropic foundation, hosted by the AI Campus Berlin, a work space for small AI companies and new ventures in the AI tech sector. On a daily basis, I talk to engineers interested in building human-centered limits into their AI tools, but wonder how to do this in a way that is compliant with regulation AND that doesn't kill their business case. I want to encourage them to include ethical and responsible AI into their first pitch and stick to it. And for NGOs that focus on societal and individual harms to enter a dialogue with those who build AI and that are not part of big tech monopolies.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

The main barrier I have been encountering is actually not the one between computer scientists and social sciences (as one might think given my background and the day-to-day of my work) but that between social sciences and lawyers. My field, AI governance, is dominated by legal professionals that are more interested in preparing their clients or their companies for litigation (or shielding them from it), whereas I focus on how we can build a world/an ecosystem where rules are easy enough to be applied by (even small) businesses and make sense within the company and its AI product. Privacy professionals like me, and people working on the human-centered side of AI, are often required to have legal degrees although many, including me, consider this out-of-date and actually counterproductive.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

My answer to this is owed to the experience I'm making working with small AI businesses in Europe. One of them has a pretty interesting system where any employee, no matter their function in the company, and in product development, can raise ethical concerns with a product or a prototype, and the concern will be discussed with the entire team. I have accompanied the team and helped them find arguments pro and con certain issues, thanks to my ethical AI training and social science background. I feel like diversity shows in many different ways, and not just in gender or race or any other visible feature. Often it has to do more with ways of life, experience, having children or not, outlook on the future.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Just persist. Have better arguments. Collect proof for your arguments and show it. Stay independent from big tech money (which helps your arguments).

***“Just persist. Have better arguments. Collect proof for your arguments and show it. Stay independent from big tech money (which helps your arguments.)”
—Julia Reinhardt***



Katrina Ingram

Masters in Communications and Technology (MACT)

Founder & CEO, Ethically Aligned AI Inc.

#bias #diversity #privacy #surveillance

What inspired you to join the space?

Issues of social justice have always been important to me. I grew up in rural communities and have faced racism and discrimination as a bi-racial woman. I first encountered the topic of AI ethics in 2018 when I was starting my masters degree at the University of Alberta. I wandered into a talk being given by a prominent AI researcher and professor who was very concerned about the harms he was seeing as result of “AI gone wrong”. I approached him afterwards to ask who was doing work in this area and he said “not enough people” - and that launched my journey into this space.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

When I graduated in late 2020 from my masters program I looked around to see who was doing this work in my area. I didn't see any organizations in Western Canada specifically focused on AI ethics so I decided to take a chance and launch my own company. It's still early days and there is much work to do to help understand the issues and why they matter. In some ways, my career has come full circle. I started out as a technology marketer in the early 2000s in the business intelligence space. I then moved into public broadcasting and spent much of my career as an executive in community radio. Along the way, I also added other roles - teacher, consultant, podcaster. I now draw upon all of that as a entrepreneur and educator.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I'm a generalist, so I tend to tackle a wide range of issues. For many people, especially data scientists or people building technology, bias in datasets is a topic they want to unpack. For individuals using technology, privacy and surveillance are typically a starting point for discussions. Businesses usually want to look at areas of risk, so I talk with them about current and future regulations as well as public opinion and reputational risk. I tend to frame everything in terms of the bigger picture and move conversations towards a discussion of socio-technical systems and not just technology. I bring issues of power imbalances into my work as well as diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. All of this is part of the work I'm doing to develop Canada's first AI ethics micro-credential with Athabasca University.

“I tend to frame everything in terms of the bigger picture and move conversations towards a discussion of socio-technical systems and not just technology. I bring issues of power imbalances into my work as well as diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.”

***“To change the outcomes, we need to change the inputs which includes having a diverse range of people at the table.”
—Katrina Ingram***

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

Being respected by technical people as a non-technical person can be a big barrier. When I was doing my research into applied ethics for AI, I immersed myself in the community and attended many technical talks. I did not always understand everything, but I always learned at least one thing. More importantly, I showed up and joined the community which is a big part of breaking down barriers. I remember being at one talk where a professor was sharing how they were humbled when they saw their AI “techno-solution” fail in the face of implementation because they did not understand the social and political conditions in which their solution needed to exist. His points were met by surprise from the computer scientists in the room but seemed obvious to me. This made me realize the important role other disciplines and backgrounds have to offer.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

We live in a complex world and we’re facing a myriad of complicated problems. If we believe in ethical principles like promoting well-being, not doing harm and upholding human rights, then we need to make sure we’re inclusive as we move forward to solve our challenges. In many cases, we are looking to technology like AI to be part of the solution. There is a big body of research that demonstrates that those who create a technology shape the technology. AI is no different. To change the outcomes, we need to change the inputs which includes having a diverse range of people at the table. Given the complexity of AI systems and their wide spread impact, it’s essential that a full range perspectives are brought forward and right now, this is not happening. AI is predominantly the domain of a privileged few - primarily those who are male, white, highly educated and socio-economically advantaged.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

It can feel daunting to do this work in hostile environments so my biggest advice is to find your tribe—find the spaces in which you can flourish and then connect with others to broaden that space. I’m building alliances with civil liberties associations, academics, activists, socially minded businesses, not for profits, government agencies, industry associations and citizen groups. I’ve been learning about ethical funding as well and there are more options coming online specifically aimed at under-represented groups. It takes perseverance and courage to keep going, so it’s important to have people in your circle that can support you.



Lia Coleman

BS, Computer Science

Machine Learning Engineer, Modyfi

#bias #diversity

“I’ve built up a community of people and tried to surround myself with people that hold these views and are more aware and are not afraid to admit to themselves that they do home biases and consciously think about ways in which they can reduce these.”

What inspired you to join the space?

At Facebook, I was training machine learning classifiers to take down harmful content such as videos of graphic violence, terrorist propaganda, white supremacists content, child pornography, really, really heinous things that were on the platform and trying to take those down before any human had to see them.

About a year and a half at Facebook, I left because I was feeling unfulfilled creatively. I realized that Art Lia needs to have a creative outlet or else she feels really, really unfulfilled. So I left and I went to the School for Poetic Computation in New York City. That was pretty much the beginning, as I think, I fit into this world of creativity and computing.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

When I was working in the tech industry, one barrier that I encountered has to do with the fact that the tech industry is really male-dominated. And as a result of having a lot of men together, they have a certain culture and a certain way of communicating with each other.

When I was working in the tech industry I didn’t feel that I fit in with my team. I was the only female software engineer. And I think, in terms of ways in which I’ve gotten through that is even in spaces where the people you vibe with are few and far between.

And I think more and more, I’ve built up a community of people and tried to surround myself with people that hold these views and are more aware and are not afraid to admit to themselves that they do home biases and consciously think about ways in which they can reduce these.

“My first piece of advice is to not burn yourself out... For long-term progress to be made, you do need to rest, take breaks, and be kind to yourself.”
—Lia Coleman

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Technology today and AI today is created by a specific segment of society, usually pretty privileged, white male, upper-middle-class to upper class. And these people are making decisions that affect literally the entire world in the papers that they're publishing and the research problems that they're choosing to take on. And it's really, really important—and I can't stress it enough—to have more diversity in this. The group of people that are making the decisions of what technology; what the next generation of technology is used for, what it's created for, what it does because literally, the next wave of technology pervades the entire earth and all the people on it which is really important for how diverse the earth is, the human population is.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

In summary, my first piece of advice is to not burn yourself out. To be kind to yourself, take breaks when you need to, tap in-tap out, allow others to step up when you're feeling tired and allow yourself to rest because we're here to make changes for the long-term. For long-term progress to be made, you do need to rest, take breaks, and be kind to yourself.

And my second piece of advice would be, if there isn't a space for you at that table, you can make that space. Especially, if the dominant culture is white, male software people. When it comes to entering a space, allies are really key. As backwards and unfair as it is, sometimes people will only listen to people who look like them so that's where allies come in.

When you find allies that are advocating for you to also not be afraid to ask them for specific things because that's what they there for their allies. You can go like “hey, I'm looking to do this. Do you have anybody here? I'm trying to speak to somebody from X, do you know anybody or can you send me an intro email?”

“My passion for making an immediate impact on society has led me to work on various research projects that combine social, technological fields.”

Lia Neves

MSc Public Health

Founder and Scientific Director, EITIC

#bias #consent #surveillance



What inspired you to join the space?

After my Philosophy degree, I started to study public health, and I spent several years working in academic institutions in Portugal, but I always thought about transferring academic knowledge to the business sector. Whenever dealing with study limitations, including commercial ones, I identified the gap on the companies side. This made me want to be on other types of teams to share knowledge especially in the artificial intelligence space and ethics.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Bias, consent, surveillance, research.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I am a professional with a diverse range of expertise, including management of science and technology, public health, and philosophy. My passion for making an immediate impact on society has led me to work on various research projects that combine social, technological fields. Throughout my career, I have led projects involving a variety of parties, from governmental bodies to pharmaceutical or tech firms. However, when I was looking for a place in technology companies (in Portugal) in the ethics area, they were always occupied by the compliance sphere. I am columnist for our Portuguese Press Association (use to write Ethical issues about social impact of artificial intelligence or Tech), and to further my professional development, I started a project on ethical consulting that I was invited to presented at WebSummit's Women in Tech Lounge sponsored by Toptal I last November 2022.

“Advocate for change and stand up for Human Rights—always! Ethics in AI is not synonymous with compliance in AI—not being afraid to make this explicit is an important step.”

—Lia Neves

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I have a non-traditional or non-technical background. The biggest obstacle lies in the bias of my basic training in philosophy (the usual fallacies of starting from abstract models.) To avoid this “stigmatization, I needed to work in several professional positions with different sectors to be considered relevant. But, in the most recent AI groups that I have had contact they still made a distinction between “STEAM women” and “women in technology.” There are many other barriers (such as gender)...

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Diversity in the AI ethics space is important for several reasons (I cannot describe just in 125 words). However, AI ethics space have the potential to affect a wide range of demographics. The needs and viewpoints of those who are different from them may not be completely taken into account if the individuals building these spaces and systems all have similar backgrounds. For instance, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, socio-economic background must be represented in technology to prevent marginalizing certain groups of people. Fewer voices in the AI ethics field may disproportionately represent the dominant group’s interests, further marginalizing minority groups. A broad collection of individuals working on AI ethics helps to ensure that all stakeholders’ ethical concerns are taken into account, which can improve problem-solving and produce more creative and fair solutions.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Establishing ties with others who share your enthusiasm for AI ethics is the first step in finding the correct allies. It’s also important participate in online groups dedicated to AI ethics, attend conferences, and events. It’s also crucial to search for mentors and training classes, workshops, and programs that can assist you in developing new talents.

Finally: advocate for change and stand up for Human Rights—always! Ethics in AI is not synonymous with compliance in AI—not being afraid to make this explicit is an important step.



Maggie Jabczynski

Master in Historical Anthropology, History and Romance Languages
Conversation Designer Voice Assistants, Vodafone, In Bot We Trust?

#technocracy #inclusion

What inspired you to join the space?

I have realized that the technological crisis has many parallels with the ecological crisis. There is a lot of insight we can gain through the perspective of an anthropologist. Similar to when there is a technical debt in tech products being launched and maintained, I would see we have an ethical debt resulting from having kept humanities out of that big part of our world economy for too long. What was first the naivety of playful nerds left without supervision in uncanny Silicon Valley strikes now back as a huge crisis affecting us in massive collective phenomena. Tech never was a solution but a tool, which unfortunately perpetuated societal injustice and bias and scales social incompetence, due to automation without accountability. Just the same as accountability in industrial production of non-decomposable products/plastics/electronic got outsourced to nobody and left without a budget, the same is about to happen now in big tech companies. So please let's connect the disciplines, learn and: Let's keep talking. This conversation has just started.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I was training 1-1 conversation for German learners. Due to our work distribution, I was not a teacher but rather a facilitator for students to put into practice what they have learned in the conversational interaction. My tasks became very repetitive, especially at the beginning of the learning journey of the students. This is how I got into voice assistants and designed an assistant for them to practice simple beginner's phrases interactively.

“Tech never was a solution but a tool, which unfortunately perpetuated societal injustice and bias and scales social incompetence, due to automation without accountability.”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Technocracy is my issue. Also the fact that big tech platforms dictate the business processes of many companies. e.g. in Alexa, it is very difficult to design good conversations. Access to crucial design and editing tools is difficult, but so much is at stake when people who know best how to design HMI interactions have their hands tied and seen only as people who do the “decoration” and correct the sentences. Humanists are being invited to the table by product owners way too late in the process. This is why so many products are built with shortcomings that to us would have been visible and obvious.

“To assess the impact of tech we need to include as many diverse people as we can, because it is already hard to assess what tech will do with our psyche, but even without people asking the questions that go beyond the capitalist-minded-comfort zone of a company, we will just repeat old mistakes and never really innovate anything.”

—Maggie Jabczynski

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

Tools mainly. There are many tools that are still requiring a lot of coding knowledge and then they are difficult to have a peer review on. It is hard to have the NLU of a bot check by a whole team if only the dev had access to it. This is one of the reasons why for some time Alexa responded better to short impolite commands, rather than actual full sentences. And this is the reason why children adopted this style when talking with other people. All because of poor training of the bots. Accessibility and interdisciplinary discussions and the time and budget for it, plus the question whether this is what the world needs (another dopamine-loop-creating app, really?)—this is tough and you make yourself unpopular if you ask too many why—questions in certain work environments.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Diverse backgrounds are able to see other contexts and aspects of tech and products that developers. To assess the impact of tech we need to include as many diverse people as we can, because it is already hard to assess what tech will do with our psyche, but even without people asking the questions that go beyond the capitalist-minded-comfort zone of a company, we will just repeat old mistakes and never really innovate anything.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Talk, read, go to bookclubs, find meetups, develop your artistic, humanistic profession - don't learn necessarily coding - but familiarize yourself with concrete daily use cases, problems and tech solutions. It is crucial to be able to name what is happening, to voice doubts and to be able to formulate pros and cons of a technical solution to a problem. Your niche, be it design, social sciences, linguistics or art, healthcare - is very valuable and if you find the words and the connection and can argue why another thought, idea could be more beneficial to humanity - you're in the game. No need to code but use your skills in a way that connect and enable you to take a stand.

Merve Hickok

Dual BA (International Relations and Political Science)

Founder @ Alethicist.org, Alethicist.org

#bias #surveillance #socialjustice #accountability



What inspired you to join the space?

I was in a DEI advocacy discussion and we were doing an exercise which required us to basically reflect on the different degrees of privileges we had (or did not have) across several axis, and then to reflect on how our life experiences differed along those lines. As an immigrant and WOC, I could speak to certain experiences in my personal and professional life where I had to work harder than others. However the exercise also made me realize that I had not considered, or took for granted a number of things in my own life. In other words, I became more aware of what I did not know and what I should have known. It inspired me to join this work and learn along the way and be part of work that moves the needle for a more just society.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

When I became responsible for Bank of America Merrill Lynch's diversity recruitment and recruitment technologies back in 2010, my role required me to focus on a number of recruitment practices, technologies and marketing efforts. I led benchmarking studies across our peer organizations, worked with vendors on HR tech and also built external partnerships with minority-student communities and special-focus career services. Through my conversation with them across EMEA countries, I learned more about the impact of certain technologies and practices on different groups. I researched more on emerging technologies, societal impacts and social justice and eventually founded Alethicist.org. For a number of years now, my full focus has been AI ethics & policy research, awareness raising, capacity building and advocacy.

“I was in a DEI advocacy discussion and we were doing an exercise which required us to basically reflect on the different degrees of privileges we had (or did not have) across several axis, and then to reflect on how our life experiences differed along those lines.”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I am an independent researcher, trainer and consultant on AI & data ethics, focusing on bias, surveillance, social justice and accountability. I also provide AI policy and regulatory research, advisory and training to create awareness, build capacity, and advocate for ethical and responsible development and use of AI that respects fundamental rights and democratic values.

“Find others who are working towards AI ethics. Every small win matters. You matter. Your experiences matter. The work of fighting against rights, injustices and inequality in a very gendered tech or finance world can become lonely.”

—Merve Hickok

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

My education was on Political Science and International Relations, and my professional experience was Human Resources. So I come from a non-technical, human-focused background. Starting back in 2010, my initial work on recruitment technologies was intimidating first because I thought my lack of technical background would be an issue. The more I researched, discussed and got involved, the more it became clear to me that this work was about asking critical questions, listening to others, understanding the implications and working responsibly towards mitigating harms and thinking of more equitable ways of doing business. I am a very curious person by nature. When I started researching AI and its implications on society, I followed the same playbook. I am also indebted to a number of people who were willing to answer my questions along the way, introduce me to new opportunities and trust in me. I try to do the same with newcomers and researchers in the field and pay forward as much as I can.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Diversity and variety of experiences and perspectives make us humble, make us better. From a product and service perspective, it makes our offerings work for more people, in more helpful, inclusive and effective ways. Why would anyone prefer launching a product which works only for a minority of people and harms others - where they could be more creative, innovative and inclusive? I see diversity and inclusiveness as a matter of respect for others, respect for innovation and for the products you create, respect for our future.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Find others who are working towards AI ethics, collaborate, nurture and do not be intimidated by this culture, the technology itself or the barriers. Every small win matters. You matter. Your experiences matter. The work of fighting against rights, injustices and inequality in a very gendered tech or finance world can become lonely. Be intentional and think about how you can contribute to a better world or workplace, and if you have the capacity to fund, support or mentor others, please. do.



Michelle Carney

Masters in Information Management and Systems

Senior UX Researcher, Google

#inclusion #accessibility

“If we really want AI to be made for everybody, it has to be designed BY everybody.”

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

When I was working in ML, it was rare that we thought about the holistic experience of the users. As we move towards a future where ML is ubiquitous, it is important that we also consider who are we designing this future for, and who gets to participate in this future. As apart of my practice as a UX Researcher on ML, I advocate for our users and to take on the challenge to redesign ML futures that are radically different than what we've previously seen.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I kept being turned down for roles in ML or UX because I do both ML AND UX—as one hiring manager told me “if you do both ML and UX—you must not be good at either!” What! I got incredibly lucky and Amazon took a chance and hired me as the first ML and UX double hire, and from there I've paved my career in being a UXR for ML—mostly doing conceptual testing of ML models before they're built.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I primarily work on approachability and accessibility of ML. Some of my recent projects include: g.co/tonetransfer and <https://experiments.withgoogle.com/collection/tfliteformicrocontrollers>.

I also teach at the Stanford school of design (d.school) on Designing Machine Learning.

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

Technically, my undergrad degree is in Molecular and Cellular Biology and Cognitive Sciences, and my practical expertise was in building Neural Networks. But, because I “lacked a CS degree” I was denied ML and Data Science jobs. I was able to overcome this by finding people who believed in the work I do, and supporting each other. I am incredibly fortunate for the women who came before me and helped me get the role I have today.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

If we really want AI to be made for everybody, it has to be designed BY everybody. This means allowing folks from different perspectives and backgrounds participating in the process. If we want to move to a more equitable AI future, we have to be actively seeking collaborators from other places than PhD in ML!!! By allowing others to have access to designing this tech early into the future, we are able to gain new perspectives and ways of applying ML—including ways to potentially catch it before it fails.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Keep showing up! We are all experts in something—and your expertise has a place here in the future of ML. It is all about finding the folks who also resonate with your approach and getting great work done with them!

Nidhi Sudhan

MBA, Responsible leadership in digital media

Co-founder, Citizen Digital Foundation

#privacy #misinformation #bias #governance #safety #surveillance



What inspired you to join the space?

My work in AI ethics has primarily been in my current capacity as Co-founder of Citizen Digital Foundation (CDF) India. As a media and communications expert, the hijack of the fourth pillar of democracy by perverse incentives led to my inflection point.

CDF took shape in Aug 2021 out of my love for media's transformative power over 17 years of practicing it, and the disheartening realisation of its consequent harms and misuse. Witnessing how tech-driven media, meant to connect and inform, was increasingly used to manipulate, and fragment individuals, and democracies, and distort information and knowledge systems, disturbed me.

Through CDF I advocate AI Governance, Responsible Tech/ AI to a cross section of audiences including higher education, startups, business leaders, media organisations, policymakers and government entities.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

After working in the media for 17 years, I did a responsible-leadership focused MBA in 2018-20 in the UK. I studied and researched hyper-personalised communication's impact on consumer autonomy, evaluated content policies, dark patterns, behaviour manipulation and overall values chains of digital media businesses and arrived at a point where it was difficult to un-see what was going on.

As I applied to digital media companies for content moderation and editorial integrity roles to influence the system from within, conversations with my lecturers led me to start on my own. The decision to advocate AI ethics in India was driven by the awareness lacuna among end-users, high levels of exploitative tech business practices in a development-driven economy, and a surveillance-driven regulatory environment.

“The decision to advocate AI ethics in India was driven by the awareness lacuna among end-users, high levels of exploitative tech business practices in a development-driven economy, and a surveillance-driven regulatory environment.”

“No voice is too small. You can step up and make your voice heard and be the diversity, representation, and leadership that’s missing in AI ethics right now.”
—Nidhi Sudhan

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

At CDF, we address the entire spectrum of technological challenges and work on influencing systems change and circularity towards safer, responsible, equitable AI in digital ICTs.

We cover data privacy, misinformation and polarisation, behaviour manipulation, bias & discrimination in AI, AI governance, online child safety, surveillance, frauds & scams etc., from a systems perspective, in our training and awareness sessions and other interventions. We are also working towards facilitating Responsible AI development by channelising funds and support in the direction.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

My background is in media and communications. It’s not uncommon to come across conflation of AI ethics with primarily technical or policy expertise. In an ecosystem dominated largely by men, paternalistic and condescending approaches tend to be more commonplace than open, equitable inclusion or conversation.

In a country like India battling a bunch of other socioeconomic priorities, it’s also difficult to find funding for ‘Responsible Tech’ which is still considered a niche, and is not sufficiently understood.

These barriers are not going away anytime soon, and we navigate it with tact, assertiveness, and doggedness as the instance demands. We conceal any exasperation, and continue to facilitate more representation in tech to even things out for those who come after us.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

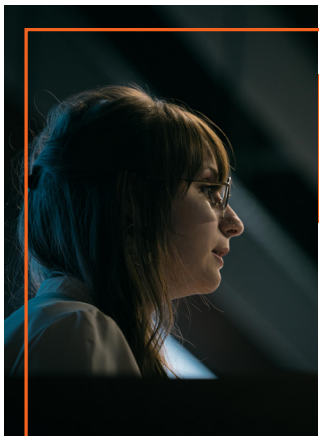
The current AI ecosystem suffers from a ‘blindness’ problem. Far too often, tools, services, and products are conceived and built by a select few, for a few. This limited perspective hinders progress for diverse communities and exacerbates existing inequalities, preventing economies from flourishing holistically. Unless technologies become equitably accessible and beneficial for all, purely profit and power-driven entities will continue to set the course.

The lack of lived experiences among developers, often disconnected from the people, communities, and cultures they aim to serve, creates blind-spots that lead to exclusion, discrimination, and division when AI is integrated into critical systems like education, law enforcement, justice, employment, healthcare, and finance. This issue is further amplified by the current global AI arms race, fuelled by a multi-polar trap, where half-baked AI solutions are rapidly shipped out, creating entrenched economic dependencies that are difficult to untangle. Diverse, representative data and perspectives in the design, development, and deployment of AI are a must to course-correct many of the past misses, and prevent large-scale exacerbation of inequities and injustices.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

No voice is too small. If you are a journalist, agriculturist, social worker, educator, artist, healthcare professional or even a student, and feel strongly about the need for equitable tech development and how AI is impacting your field, then you can step up and make your voice heard and be the diversity, representation, and leadership that’s missing in AI ethics right now.

If you are already part of a system, then start by questioning present approaches and recommending RAI to your institutions/ organisations. If you are outside, then join RAI communities and forums online, apply for fellowships and courses at the intersection of your area and AI, or join organisations and civil society bodies working on AI ethics and lend your skills to develop the narrative.



Noemi Peluso

Executive Master in AI for Public Services (AI4Gov)
UX & Service Design Lead, AI Ethics Consultant,
Engineering Ingegneria Informatica SpA
[#literacy](#) [#trustworthyAI](#)

What inspired you to join the space?

I think about others before that me, always considering what people may need. The disrespect of humanity rights makes me feel in the position to try to do something. I'm one of those people that suffer for inequalities. I'm a young woman who achieved some of its objectives thanks to the commitment of all my life, all while suffering four chronicle diseases that causes chronic invisible pains, but who for part of our society seems not to deserve it.

Ethics coincides with taking care of humanity rights and needs. That's why I decided to focus some of my studies on it. Ethics applied at the use of AI let us be able to work with disruptive technologies always keeping in mind that have to be implemented with a humanity-centred approach.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

In January 2022 I applied to the Master in AI for Public Services (AI4Gov) that seemed to be exactly what I was searching for. They choose around 40 people from thousands of applications all over the world and I have a humanistic background, so I was quite sure that could be hard to be chosen. This path has more facets: a technical part on AI, a Service Design part focused on AI-based projects and an AI ethics part. It seemed to be the perfect combination between who I am and what I would like to deepen. I have been chosen and I started from there with my career journey in AI ethics, having a title that give a visible value to my already existing characteristics and my previous studies.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

The biggest issue in AI with which I tackle every day is the total unawareness about this topic. There's a lot of enthusiasm (and a lot of fears) about AI and all that we could do thanks to this technology, but there's no knowledge. There's no real understanding of what kind of power AI has and of what consequences there might be if it's used in an unethical way. In most cases the focus is on the use of AI for business strategy and revenues, but not on how AI models and tools that are not ethically and responsibly build could hurt someone on the other side of the screen. That's what I fight for every day: build trustworthiness and bridges where there are gaps.

“In most cases the focus is on the use of AI for business strategy and revenues, but not on how AI models and tools that are not ethically and responsibly build could hurt someone on the other side of the screen. That’s what I fight for every day: build trustworthiness and bridges where there are gaps.”

“Different perspectives, all together, will drive an ethical and sustainable innovation, improving trustworthy in it.”

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I'm graduated in Philosophy and in Theories of Communication, then I took a Master in User Experience and Information Architecture. I studied AI by myself, but before the M.Sc. in AI4Gov I didn't have an official title who could prove what I'm interested in and what I wanted to be useful to and to help for. It was hard to carve out space and recognition, both because I'm a young woman and because there was not enough trust in what I know. To overcome these barriers, I started talking in worktables in which this topic was a trend, and this has meant I was finally recognized but also frowned upon from those who were not so prepared. Randomly (or not?), I was (and am) the only woman in these worktables.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

From my point of view, diversity is a strategic imperative in AI development. We design AI-based experiences for people that are all one diverse from the other, we need to take all of them into consideration. The approach to whatever is created or re-designed or just thought, have to be humanity centred. And considering all humanity in AI applications, we will improve fairness and reduce biases that are part of the mindsets of most of the population (and so of AI models that come from them) and we will implement experiences that are exactly what whoever is living them is expected to live, always taking into consideration different cultural, social and economical backgrounds. Different perspectives, all together, will drive an ethical and sustainable innovation, improving trustworthy in it.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Overcome barriers and create opportunities starting from them. Firstly, I would say just talking: saying what you think, talking transparently; there will always be someone who will suffer your knowledge because is used to be the one with the final say, so don't worry about it and talk as loudly as you can. Secondly, never stop searching: I'm here writing these few words because I have never stop finding out a way for representing women with their diversities, in specific women committed in AI ethics, and I found WIAI, but I'm sure that there are oceans outside that need our voices and I'm proudly still digging with bare hands to find at least a drop of this water, identifying enough space by which talk again and be truly listened.

Pamela Lirio

PhD in Management (OB/HR)

Associate Professor - Digital HR, Université de Montréal

#futureofwork #diversity #facialrecognition



What inspired you to join the space?

The fact that I am a professor in the School of Industrial Relations allows me to critically examine issues impacting worker/employee well-being and train the next generation of HR leaders in way that advocates for responsible practice of the profession. Since its official launch in 2019, I am a member of the International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of AI and Digital Technology (OBVIA) that advocates for and disseminates knowledge on the responsible use of AI.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I've always been a keen user of technology. While completing my PhD thesis, I shared an office with students in Information systems, so I was able to analyze my tech-related findings in a more meaningful way: I uncovered ways in which global managers were using their smartphones to responsibly manage their professional and personal roles while performing global work. I adopted a smartphone too (before they were everywhere) to understand the experience better and then moved on to examine social media use in an employment context. Finally, I saw business leaders quickly turning to digital transformation, where AI was at the forefront. From then on, I started reading everything I could on AI; also speaking with AI data scientists and developers, and attending events and webinars. A practice that I maintain! #ContinuousLearning

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I have several current research projects related to uses of AI in the workplace. They range from exploring the use of algorithmic management in the digital economy; examining ethical issues related to the implementation of facial emotion recognition technology for employee well-being; implications of immersive technologies (VR, Metaverse) for the future of work and the HR profession; and emerging issues related to diversity and inclusion (e.g. careers of women working in AI globally, LGBTQ2S+ workers in global organizations). I have a public presence sharing insights on AI in HR and Responsible AI via new and traditional media.

“I have several current research projects related to uses of AI in the workplace. They range from exploring the use of algorithmic management in the digital economy; examining ethical issues related to the implementation of facial emotion recognition technology for employee well-being...”

“I strongly recommend to hold space for yourself, your community—however you identify—and others in the AI space (whatever your field.) I don’t accept to be on panels or projects where I am the only woman or diverse person.”

—Pamela Lirio

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

Fortunately, as an academic (although non-technical in AI development), my role affords me access to various conversations in the AI space. I personally don’t mind if I am around those with technical backgrounds and the discussion goes beyond the scope of my initial understanding. I am intellectually curious and ask questions—but also share from my field! I see that AI is dominated by cisgender hetero men, so I feel a responsibility to stay in the field/discussion and advocate for myself as a diverse woman (with a racial/ethnic heritage, albeit with privilege) and those identifying in non-dominant, often marginalized groups.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

We desperately need various perspectives in all AI-related work because it reflects more broadly our society. For example, there is a paucity of women in AI technical roles relative to men, whether industry or academic (only 10-20%.) It is hard to find statistics on representation into other aspects of DEI (e.g., those identifying as LGBTQ, neurodiverse, etc.) AI will continue to impact all of us worldwide in the coming years!

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I strongly recommend to hold space for yourself, your community—however you identify—and others in the AI space (whatever your field.) I don’t accept to be on panels or projects where I am the only woman or diverse person. See for example movements like: #JamaisSansElle (Never Without Her.)



Rachel Azafrani

MSc, Social Science of the Internet

Senior Program Manager, Microsoft Office of Responsible AI

#governance #policy

What inspired you to join the space?

I was introduced to the field of AI ethics at the Oxford Internet Institute, where I planned to study technology policy and governance. Studying with philosophers, sociologists, data scientists, and lawyers, I was drawn by the complexity of delegating decisions about human life to AI systems while preserving human rights. I knew I wanted to contribute to our understanding of that problem.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

In my first job, I was training military and government employees in cyber techniques for a wide range of mission and problem sets. I entered into that role with an interest in policy, and seeing the power of technology and its potential to influence people's lives in mere moments intensified my desire to study and work in policy and governance. After graduate school, I joined Microsoft to lead public policy strategy for AI and IoT security as part of the Digital Diplomacy team. I then took on a role to lead AI governance programs for Microsoft's Office of Responsible AI.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

In my day-to-day, I work on a wide range of AI ethics challenges that arise in all sorts of industries, from healthcare to retail. Each day I work with professionals of many disciplines: engineers, researchers, legal experts. I distill the insights from this work to help Microsoft build governance frameworks for its AI products and services.

“Studying with philosophers, sociologists, data scientists, and lawyers, I was drawn by the complexity of delegating decisions about human life to AI systems while preserving human rights. I knew I wanted to contribute to our understanding of that problem.”

“One of the ways I’ve built a network and found opportunities in AI ethics has been through communities, both in-person and online. Joining these groups, contributing, and exchanging ideas can lead to unexpected and wonderful opportunities.”

—Rachel Azafrani

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I can think of many moments of self-doubt and criticism. It’s been an important source of growth for me to identify and value the skills I bring, and I embrace the opportunity to keep learning. Immersing myself in communities of professionals has been pivotal in that journey.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

AI algorithms and the data they are trained on often reflect societal biases and subjectivities, not just mirroring societal inequities but potentially amplifying them. This is where diverse perspectives within AI ethics become vital. Teams rich in varied experiences and backgrounds are uniquely positioned to foresee, understand, and address a broader spectrum of ethical challenges in AI. They ensure AI development isn’t just a technical endeavor but a culturally and contextually sensitive process. Diversity in AI ethics is an imperative to ensure the technology benefits all of society.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

One of the ways I’ve built a network and found opportunities in AI ethics has been through communities, both in-person and online. Joining these groups, contributing, and exchanging ideas can lead to unexpected and wonderful opportunities. If there’s someone you want to reach out to, share a couple key pieces of information about yourself, your objectives, and something specific that person can uniquely provide or help with.

Ravit Dotan

PhD in Philosophy

Director, The Collaborative AI Responsibility Lab at the
University of Pittsburgh's Center for Governance and Markets
#fairness #bias #gender



What inspired you to join the space?

I fully joined the AI ethics space in 2020. I did research in AI ethics before that year (during my PhD), but the events of 2020 inspired a pivot in my work. I was especially influenced by that year's social and environmental upheavals, including the pandemic, the BLM protests, the massive fires in Australia, and a war in my home country, Israel. It was all just too much. I felt cooped up in an ivory tower, with little impact on what was going on outside. My mindset shifted. My top professional priority became using my skills for social good, and I realized that the best way for me to do that is to push AI ethics forward in the industry.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I landed all my roles in AI ethics through networking. Once I realized I was interested in integrating with industry, I started reaching out to people whose roles intrigued me. I had many, many of these conversations (I stopped counting after about 200). They helped me identify needs, and I started working on projects to address them. I shared my insights publicly on LinkedIn, and my networking gradually revolved around my projects. I was able to speak to pressing needs, had a conviction about how to address them, and had a history of work I could show to illustrate my approach. As a result, I met more like-minded people who saw how I could contribute to their organization.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

The issue I come across the most is fairness. Fairness includes mitigating unintended biases by ensuring the AI performs equally well for everyone, especially people in marginalized social groups based on gender, ethnicity, disability status, and so on. Some think that fairness issues only arise from bias in data collection. That is a misconception. Other design choices matter too. For example, allowing AI to generate images from prompts that contain racial slurs is offensive and can reinforce social stereotypes.

“Fairness includes mitigating unintended biases by ensuring the AI performs equally well for everyone, especially people in marginalized social groups based on gender, ethnicity, disability status, and so on.”

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I feel that my non-technical background is a strength. If anything about it held me back, it was only insecurities caused by my misconception that technical backgrounds are superior. The trick is understanding the field's needs and how your skills can serve these needs. For example, one pressing need is to understand AI's social, political, and environmental consequences. A background in social science, history, or philosophy can be very helpful for that purpose. Another pressing need is awareness raising. A background in communication, art, or translation can be very helpful. In my case, I identified the needs that I could help with by networking. Talking with people helped me see the gaps that I could help fill.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Much of AI ethics is about noticing social dynamics. Our different backgrounds make different aspects of social dynamics more salient to us. Diversity in social positions is, therefore crucial for AI ethics. Without it, our collective work would fail to recognize how AI impacts our world, effective and ineffective ways to address AI harms, and ideas for how to use AI for social good.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Find a project that you're passionate about and start working on it, even if you only have a little time to invest in it. Gradually hone your skills as you work on this project. Learn what you need to learn, even if it's outside your comfort zone. But make sure you're not learning as a form of procrastination or just out of insecurity. Talk to people about your project until you find people you enjoy talking about it with. Build good relationships with them. They can support you – and you can support them. Funding and job opportunities that are a good fit for you may come your way, too.

“Much of AI ethics is about noticing social dynamics. Our different backgrounds make different aspects of social dynamics more salient to us. Diversity in social positions is, therefore crucial for AI ethics.”
—Ravit Dotan



Raziye Buse Çetin

Masters of Arts in International Public Management
Co-founder Dreaming Beyond AI, Dreaming Beyond AI
& Independent Researcher

#bias #surveillance #inequality #consent #regulation

What inspired you to join the space?

I first about AI when I was in high school at our philosophy class where we watched Blade Runner movie. I remember being fascinated with the film and thinking deeply about what makes us human. Then, I took an AI policy class during my masters degree. The multidisciplinary and the lack of representation of non-Western countries and perspectives in the field inspired me to be a part of it.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

After my AI policy masters course, I started interning at an AI policy think tank and started my first role as an AI policy researcher there. During my 2,5 years at the think tank, I touched upon many topics regarding the social impact, policy and governance of AI and built a network. In 2020 summer during the pandemic, I left my job without a plan B and started freelancing. I was not sure I would succeed but I was lucky to be proposed projects that aligned with my values. I met my project partner through a joint study on intersectionality & AI and we started working together on our research, advocacy and art platform Dreaming Beyond AI. So far, I had the opportunity to advise a major fashion, luxury and beauty house at the intersection of AI & women, I advised foundations in understanding inequality & AI, have been part of many more practical collaborative projects.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I tackle the questions of inequality, feminism and AI. I talk about a variety of issues to unpack the systemic inequalities that shape the AI field and industry. This includes the political economy and the geopolitics of AI, algorithmic bias, decoloniality & AI, the data infrastructure (consent, privacy), surveillance, invisibilized labour, global inequalities in access, epistemology, AI narratives (images, representations)... I keep track of regulations, standards, playbooks, rules to operationalise AI ethics. I offer a general expertise and systemic view therefore I cover a broad range of issues.

“I talk about a variety of issues to unpack the systemic inequalities that shape the AI field and industry..”

“The ways to overcome these barriers are building community and acting in solidarity. Creating our own spaces and opportunities and sharing them amongst each other.”

—Raziye Buse Çetin

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I have a non-traditional and non-technical background. Everytime I present myself I need to unpack a series of concepts. When I explain to people that I am not an engineer and don't know how to code; I can sense it makes it less impressive for many of them. Not having a technical background usually also don't allow me to work at prestigious jobs and/or private companies.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

People who are not part of the dominant groups are the ones who can identify the shortcomings of AI systems and AI thinking in different contexts. People who are outside the gender binary can know in which contexts, AI systems can be harmful or useful for them. People who are racialized can understand the problems pertaining to AI-fueled surveillance. Immigrants and/or multicultural people can understand the Western-centric epistemologies and inequalities in the distribution of benefits of AI. All in all, people who are not currently the biggest beneficiaries of AI are doing the most important work in AI ethics and justice in my opinion.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I am still navigating some of these barriers myself. For instance, since I am not part of a recognised academic institution in the Western world; I don't get the chance to publish academic articles therefore my contribution in terms of knowledge remains limited. Since I don't live in the US and don't have affiliations to prestigious US institutions, my profile is overlooked when it comes to ethical funding opportunities from the US. I do freelance work and this makes my financial situation precarious. Because of the tech bro culture and racism, I am reluctant to work at a startup or tech company. The ways to overcome these barriers are building community and acting in solidarity. Creating our own spaces and opportunities and sharing them amongst each other.

Rebecca Ryakitimbo

Bachelor's Degree of Science in Technology Electronics and Communication

Principle Investigator, Core23lab

#bias #privacy #consent #surveillance



What inspired you to join the space?

I have been working on digital inclusion for several years and in my quest to foster digital inclusion I started working on gender and technology gaps. It was in this work that I found myself delving into areas such as data protection then in 2021 I began a fellowship at Mozilla working on voice technology for Kiswahili speakers this is where my foundation in AI ethics was really built as I started delving into trustworthy AI and data feminism.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

My quest for seeking gender digital inclusion brought me to this space where I started looking at things like feminist ethical principles, design justice principles and out of it started building gender guides and assessment for AI. It has been a journey that has unfolded as I seek to address gender gaps.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I work on bias, data protection and privacy, consent and surveillance. I am currently a fellow at Mozilla common voice project and our biggest task is to build an open voice dataset hence data privacy, biases in voice algorithms that are built and in our dataset in itself is key in my role as someone who looks at gender and diversity.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Diversity decentralises AI, bridges gaps such as gender gaps and most importantly ensures equal representation of different demographics in societies. For example in voice technology space more diverse voice datasets ensures speech recognition is accurate for people of varying languages, accents, genders, age and other demographics hence tipping the scales to have marginalised communities part of the AI space.

“AI is a diverse field that needs to be observed from a multi-stakeholder approach hence there is room for individuals to bring their different expertise and apply them to AI.”

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

AI is a diverse field that needs to be observed from a multi-stakeholder approach hence there is room for individuals to bring their different expertise and apply them to AI. Build opportunities where you see there is need for your skills to fill in, AI is not a one gender field as its impact are far reaching especially to excluded communities.



Sasha Luccioni

PhD in Cognitive Computing
Research Scientist, Climate Lead, Hugging Face
[#dataethics](#) [#climate](#) [#consent](#) [#governance](#)

“Having more diversity (of any kind!) is so important when building the technology of tomorrow.”

What inspired you to join the space?

I was working as an AI researcher in finance and, despite the interesting projects and great pay, I felt a profound frustration that I wasn't using my skills to leave a better world for my daughters. So I quit my job and took a massive pay cut to go back to academia and work on climate change initiatives as a postdoc, and never looked back! Passion over money, any day.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

After two years of working as a postdoc with Yoshua Bengio, I needed to find a “grown up” job. I wanted to work on climate and ethics without working in Big Tech. Hugging Face seemed like a great fit, given their mission to democratize AI and their emphasis on responsible and ethical tech. And a year and a half later, I am happy to say that they have exceeded my expectations of what an AI startup can do and how mindful the work can be!

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Me and the rest of the Ethics and Society team work a lot on issues dealing with data and model ethics, in terms of guidelines, documentation, and consent. Given the quantity of models and datasets that are uploaded on the Hugging Face website, we are constantly developing new guidelines and working with the community to define norms and licenses.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I have a Bachelor's in Linguistics! I've definitely had a hard time learning how to program and “fitting in” to the traditional AI community. Especially during my PhD, I was one of the only women and didn't have much of a support network! I also had both of my daughters during my PhD, so that was a hard time overall, and I'm lucky I had a great, supportive PhD supervisor who really guided me through all that.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

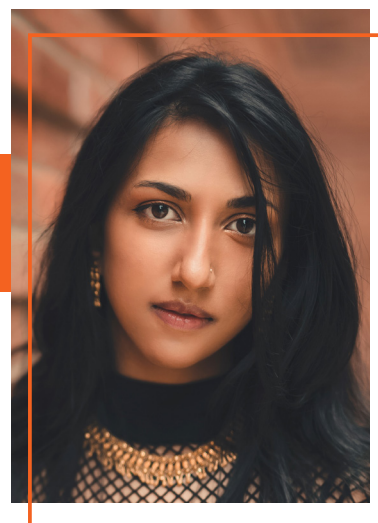
It's such a no-brainer! Having more diversity (of any kind!) is so important when building the technology of tomorrow, since it maximizes our chances of creating tools that are useful to more people, that are less harmful to more people, that contribute towards a more healthy society instead of contributing to inequalities.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I think learning how to enjoy code (whether it be writing it or running it or understanding it) is important because it puts you in the front seat with regards to innovation. Not being afraid of speaking up, as hard and as counter-intuitive as it can be, is also important, since in many cases, the issues that are important are simply not on the mainstream radar. And supporting other women and minorities—lifting them up, talking about them, recommending them for talks and opportunities... all goes a long way.

Sneha Deo

BA in Computer Science
Product Manager, Microsoft
#fairness #bias #labor #policy



“As the pandemic hit and much of my organizing work transitioned to the digital space, I became passionate about the intersection of public interest, ethics, and technology and found my current role at Microsoft working to develop more mature ethical AI research, policy, and engineering practices.”

What inspired you to join the space?

I was diagnosed with a chronic illness in my adolescence and turned to the disability justice community for support when I began to live alone at 18. Not only did I receive support on an individual level, but I also learned the power of collective action and advocacy and began to recognize that work as a form of care for others. Through my relationship with the disability justice community, I learned about intersectionality and how important it is to be in solidarity and uplift others in every thing we do, and that led me to always prioritize community and community organizing (or at least, the mindset of how to disrupt systems of oppression) both in and outside of my “day job”.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I began my career as a software engineer, but wanted to work on developing algorithms so I pivoted to product management for AI. Simultaneously, I worked as a community organizer providing civic education resources for communities of color. As the pandemic hit and much of my organizing work transitioned to the digital space, I became passionate about the intersection of public interest, ethics, and technology and found my current role at Microsoft working to develop more mature ethical AI research, policy, and engineering practices.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I work on algorithmic fairness and bias, especially in large language and foundation models, data labor and fair compensation for intellectual property, and at-scale ethical/human-centered engineering practices and policy.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

My background is a little non-traditional because I don't have a graduate degree, unlike many of my peers. Instead, I leveraged my expertise from years of non-profit and community organizing work that gave me skills in policy, lobbying, and effective communication with the public to "credentialize" myself beyond my technical skillset that I had developed as an engineer and then PM. I also got engaged with the Montreal AI Ethics Institute, a fabulous non-profit that built a remote community during the pandemic, and they allowed me to grow my knowledge and network in the ethical AI field early in my journey.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Of course there are the issues of bias, discrimination, and harm that we see from the outputs of AI models and features today - and certainly these can be caught and addressed more effectively when we have a diverse group of people who can identify those different kinds of harms. This "reactive" approach to AI ethics is important to clean up, and certainly relies on historically marginalized folks to bring their lived experiences to light. But this can put a lot of burden on historically marginalized folks to continuously educate and advocate for themselves to "clean up" oversights created by what can be an incredibly monolithic workforce that is responsible for creating the tech that more and more shapes our physical and digital lives.

I'd say that more diversity is key to how we develop AI proactively, because AI is intended to recognize and make useful patterns in collective human knowledge. To achieve this, our data and our algorithms need to consider all axes of human diversity so there won't be massive gaps that would prevent AI from delivering on its fundamental mission. There is also the question of how AI is applied - what are the use cases and how do they work? Again, to fully explore this space requires a diversity of thought which comes from a diversity of experiences. We need to make space in our industry to center the working class, marginalized genders, races, and ethnicities, folks all along the spectrum of ability and neurodiversity, and from outside of "the West" to truly build a complete vision of the world we all want to live in and how tech can get us there.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

I'd encourage folks to reach out to others for support—to ask for it explicitly and clearly, to not hold yourself back from cold or warm reach outs. The ethical AI community is young, and it is your job to tell people who you are and why it is important you are a part of the community because—it is important! This field is still forming, and there is a lot of unknown, undefined work that will need to be done. Figure out what is the work that you want to do, and tell people what that is, and ask for help in finding ways to do it.

"I'd say that more diversity is key to how we develop AI proactively, because AI is intended to recognize and make useful patterns in collective human knowledge."
—Sneha Deo



Sue Turner

MSc AI and Data Science
Director, AI Governance Limited
#governance #consent

What inspired you to join the space?

I first about AI when I was in high school at our philosophy class where we watched Blade Runner movie. I remember being fascinated with the film and thinking deeply about what makes us human. Then, I took an AI policy class during my masters degree. The multidisciplinary and the lack of representation of non-Western countries and perspectives in the field inspired me to be a part of it.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

Until 2020 my career centred on leadership roles in dynamic private businesses and not-for-profits with Marketing, Communications and Government Relations as my specialisms. I established AI Governance Limited whilst studying MSc AI & Data Science with the mission to inspire as many organisations as possible to use AI with wisdom and integrity. From many of my Board roles I realised that most business leaders didn't understand how to harness the power of AI and that, without rapidly increasing their knowledge, many would make mistakes that could harm society. I'm passionate about helping people to improve their opportunities so it's exciting now to be in a position to help bosses avoid harmful errors and to promote the interests of disadvantaged people too.

“I talk about a variety of issues to unpack the systemic inequalities that shape the AI field and industry..”

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I help clients to explore the opportunities to use AI in their organisations and spot the potential pitfalls of doing so. We start by looking at what they would ideally like to predict, personalise or automate and then examine what data the client has – for example what's its provenance? Do they have the necessary permissions to use it in the way they would like to? Is there bias built in to the data? This often exposes the need for Board development so leaders can take informed decisions on investment opportunities as well as the myriad ethical decisions that should never be devolved from Board level. I advocate involving diverse stakeholders from the outset as no organisation will hold all the answers and expertise.

“I encourage you to find the message you want to promulgate and put yourself forward as a speaker.”
—Sue Turner

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I guess that being a woman aged over 50 with no science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM) background definitely puts me in the “non-traditional” camp! The biggest barrier was finding a Masters degree that would take someone without a STEM degree. Fortunately the UK Government backed 19 universities to create conversion courses to bring diverse people into AI and Data Science and I was delighted to be offered a place in the first cohort at the University of Hull. Stepping back from working full-time at Board level meant a big drop in income but my family were supportive and agreed that we would manage with less so that I could make this major career pivot.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

We’ve seen many examples that show that if teams developing or using AI tools are from a narrow sector of society they cannot be cognisant of all the potential impacts of the AI might have. That means they make mistakes that can impact negatively on society, damage companies’ reputations and waste time and resources too. By involving people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives from the earliest stages of thinking about using AI-powered tools organisations gain a huge amount. I’ve seen businesses change the way they talk about their services once they find out how to tune in to the needs of disadvantaged communities. I’ve also seen management get an enhanced relationship with trades unions because they build trust around what they will – and will not – use AI for in the organisation.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Those of us from non-traditional backgrounds have to go further to establish our credibility with funders, clients and partners. So having a Masters degree certainly helps – here’s a link to the conversion course programme that helped get me started <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/postgraduate-conversion-courses-in-data-science-and-artificial-intelligence/>

Organisers of online and in person events in this space are increasingly keen to ensure their speakers and panels are diverse, so if you are comfortable speaking to audiences I encourage you to find the message you want to promulgate and put yourself forward as a speaker.

Supreet Kaur

Masters in Data Science

Assistant Vice President, Morgan Stanley

#privacy #bias #fairness



“Our goal is to obtain compliance approvals, ensuring that our work meets industry and regulatory standards.”

What inspired you to join the space?

Since childhood, I have always been fascinated with numbers and wanted to find a way to turn my passion into a profession. After extensive research, I discovered that Data Science was my perfect path. I could spend my days working with data and transforming it into valuable insights that would significantly impact businesses' and people's lives. This realization was the inspiration that led me to pursue a career in this space.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I landed the role of Data Science Consultant at a startup, where I built machine learning models to predict the drugs a patient requires each month. My work significantly reduced right-offs and increased net profits. During my initial year, I realized the impact of data strategy and hence decided to pivot into a more strategic role at ZS Associates, where I could optimize and build data-driven AI strategies. I worked on analyzing patient data to understand the patient journey and perform AB testing to support the company's launch strategy. In 2022, I got the opportunity to pivot to Morgan Stanley where I am an AI Product Manager where I manage the enhancements in one of our flagship AI Product

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

As part of my daily work, I handle sensitive customer data and take measures to ensure that Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is managed in a secure and responsible manner. One key aspect of this is obtaining appropriate consent from individuals, which we manage with strict guardrails.

Additionally, while working in the healthcare industry, I gained experience in conducting fairness and bias testing. This was crucial to building inclusive models that are free from discrimination and bias, ensuring that everyone is treated equitably.

Ultimately, our goal is to obtain compliance approvals, ensuring that our work meets industry and regulatory standards. This helps to establish trust with our customers and stakeholders, demonstrating our commitment to ethical and responsible data practices.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

After completing my Bachelor's in Mathematics, I didn't have a coding background. So, during my two-year Master's program, I had to put in extra effort to adapt to the culture in the USA while also developing my coding skills to increase my chances of landing a job.

However, I faced visa-related barriers as I needed sponsorship to work in the USA. This limited my options, and I was only able to secure two interviews. As a result, failing these interviews was not an option.

To prepare myself, I found it helpful to have a support group that I could turn to for guidance. They helped me understand the kinds of questions that would be asked during interviews and provided valuable insight into how to prepare for them.

With their help, I was able to develop the required skillset and ultimately landed a job in my desired field. While the journey was challenging, it taught me the importance of hard work, determination, and seeking support when needed.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

In the field of AI, diversity is directly linked to the inclusivity of your product. Having a team with diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives, including racial diversity, can greatly enhance the quality of your product and enable it to cater to a wider audience.

By having a diverse team, you can bring in different viewpoints and experiences that can lead to more creative and innovative solutions. Additionally, it can help you better understand and empathize with your users, which is crucial for developing products that meet their needs.

Ultimately, building a diverse team is not just about meeting diversity quotas but also about creating a culture of inclusivity where everyone feels valued and respected. This can lead to a positive work environment that encourages collaboration and innovation, resulting in products that truly make a difference in people's lives.

“Ultimately, building a diverse team is not just about meeting diversity quotas but also about creating a culture of inclusivity where everyone feels valued and respected.”

—Supreet Kaur

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

In my experience, having grit, persistence, and a willingness to say “yes” can be key factors in achieving success as a budding professional. While it's possible that you may not get the exact role you desire at first, it's important to keep an open mind and be willing to accept other positions within a company.

By accepting a role within a company, even if it's not your ideal position, you can establish yourself within the organization and gain valuable experience. This can also give you the opportunity to demonstrate your skills and showcase your potential to bring positive change within the company.

Remember that career growth is a journey, and it often involves taking risks and stepping out of your comfort zone. By demonstrating your willingness to work hard and take on new challenges, you can build a strong reputation and establish yourself as a valuable asset to any organization.

In short, don't be afraid to say “yes” to opportunities, even if they aren't exactly what you're looking for. Every experience can be a valuable learning opportunity and can ultimately lead you to the career path you desire.

Suzana Moreira

Masters in Big Data

Founder, Innovaibox

#bias #dataethics #consent



“My research uncovered how the platform was and could be used by all types of bad actors. Incidents included organisation of fraudulent and illegal trade, sexploitation of teenage girls, misinformation, etc. It was horrifying.”

What inspired you to join the space?

I joined this space based on my experience as a founder collecting data through mobile phones and a mesh network that my startup implemented in Mozambique and neighbouring countries. I was horrified, back in 2014–2016 that companies were just selling off people's data without the person being notified/consenting. It became worse when a service provider approached us to sell the data that we had collected through their service—they had been snooping! This made me realize, as a business owner, the power that Big Tech holds and the importance of ethical leadership.

Concurrently, I was trying to figure out how to increase digital awareness in our target market. The research, the insights I gathered from the field brought me to the concept of digital trust. The incidents described in the first paragraph, along with the concept of digital trust and correlations with trust in institutional bodies all mushroomed and that was the catalyst for my interest in Ethics in emerging technologies. I mention emerging technologies as I explored IOT, edge computing, cyber systems, Distributed ledgers, etc.

In 2019, I was approached by Facebook to conduct some research on regulation gaps in their Southern African markets. The Facebook Public Affairs team was very concerned about the lack of cyber regulation in these markets. The absence of guardrails has a significant impact on the cyber landscape which was directly affecting Facebook, its stakeholders and users in this part of the world. My research uncovered how the platform was and could be used by all types of bad actors. Incidents included organisation of fraudulent and illegal trade, sexploitation of teenage girls, misinformation, etc. It was horrifying.

Following these experiences, I returned to uni to complete my Masters where I focused on five AI applications which were being used in the medical sector. Interestingly, three of these applications bypassed medical bioethics and medical device regulations. Implementors of guardrails have to really think broadly and inbetween the gaps!

All this awareness brought me into this space.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

Currently I am focused on raising awareness with start-up founders of ethical ai. So I talk about bias, errors, the provenance of the AI pipeline.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

Yes, this is an interesting point as technical seems to dominate over social/[philosophical aspects. There is a space for both. It is challenging at the movement. The way I see it, is that the current assessment tools which will be the basis of regulatory audits are to hold companies accountable. So, just like the 3 examples of medical AI services that I mentioned above, companies will be able to bypass these audits from this perspective. It requires someone who is not conducting a technical audit (algorithm/data/pipeline tools) audit to grasp how regulatory assessments are being bypassed. So it is important to have non-technical people involved in the space.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Multifaceted views are important as the technologies are being applied globally and across all demographics. All -isms need to be considered. This includes age and able-isms. People from disadvantaged/lower income groups are sometimes not as able as they have not had the opportunity to learn about these tools yet they use the tools. Thus have people from all socio-economic backgrounds, the Global South, East, West, Global North involved in the debates are important.

For example, facial phenotypes (the geometry of a face) are used to diagnose rare genetic diseases. However, some of the datasets that have been used to train these AI tools only were trained on certain parts of the global population. Meaning that people from other ethnic groups would go undiagnosed because in these ethnic groups the same rare disease can present itself through other facial abnormalities

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Keep persevering. The power of citizenry will bring about change. We must be vocal

***“Keep persevering.
The power of
citizenry will bring
about change. We
must be vocal.”
—Suzana Moreira***



Temi Lasade-Anderson

Master of Arts in Digital Media and Society

PhD researcher, freelance consultant, King's College London and alaaşę lab

#socialjustice #racialjustice #policy

“I felt as though I wanted to somehow use my skills for “good,” which eventually saw me enter the digital rights and tech policy space in advocacy and campaigning.”

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

After working as a digital strategist in paid social and programmatic advertising for a few years I felt a bit concerned about the ethical/legal nature of the work we were doing (back in early 2010s which were *wild* for online advertising) and I felt as though I wanted to somehow use my skills for “good,” which eventually saw me enter the digital rights and tech policy space in advocacy and campaigning.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

I’m currently a freelancer and I work with funders and organisations in the broad tech policy space on advocacy and campaigning. I got into this field because of my experience on the platform side, which I think really helped, because not a lot of people in the field at the time had hands-on experience with regard to online ads/surveillance ad tech.

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

In my day to day I don’t really, but in my freelance work it’s on algorithmic injustice and other tech harms.

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

My background is a bit mixed. I found that the field is incredibly gatekept and privileges those who have a MA or policy experience *regardless* of the field.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

Personally, I don’t think of representation politics as liberatory on its own. However, the status quo is that people who do not feel the brunt of any oppression are leading and shaping AI have no real conception of potential harms, because they’ve not experienced them. Part of the reason tech policy civil society in Europe is unable to move beyond the normativity of AI is because “AI ethics” and inclusion are seen as add-on options, not default necessities.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

Alongside keeping your finger on the different debates, I would say “be so loud they can’t ignore you.” Follow folks with a similar background to your work or your desired work. Add your voice to the debate(s) via social media or a blog. Take free or discounted courses in policy to learn the “language” of the field.

Triveni Gandhi

PhD, Political Science
Responsible AI Lead, Dataiku
#bias #fairness



What inspired you to join the space?

When I joined Dataiku, I was excited to be a part of the tech space, but I quickly realized how much harm can be done from badly built AI, especially when it comes to access to credit and reinforcing historic biases. It made me want to push the field to be better and more inclusive.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

After many many many interviews, making it to the final round at a few places, only to be rejected at the last mile, I had all but given up. But then Dataiku came out of nowhere and I landed the role in a matter of two weeks—so perseverance mattered a lot for this!

What kind of issues in AI do you tackle in your day-to-day work?

I work with clients to address challenges in their day to day AI systems as it relates to bias in the AI pipelines. In particular we look at data biases, model fairness, and making sure deployed systems can not be misused.

What barriers did you encounter, how did you overcome them?

I think the biggest barrier was to accurately portray my technical or statistics skills. However, I see now that more and more companies are interested in people with subject matter or domain knowledge, since learning tech skills is much easier these days. I think ultimately my ability to communicate well was more important for the role I landed.

“AI affects all of us, everyday. If we want to build AI that is inclusive and doesn’t propagate biases down the line, we much increase our diversity.”

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

AI affects all of us, everyday. If we want to build AI that is inclusive and doesn't propagate biases down the line, we much increase our diversity. A number of studies have show that diversity at the table actually improves business outcomes, so it's not just a moral imperative, it's good for making money too!

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

There are more and more resources coming out, and this field is growing. You can find awesome opportunities through the Responsible Job Tech Board. Tech bro culture is still a problem, but if you can find companies that very clearly do not have this ethos (so with diverse leadership and culture) you'll be able to do good work and grow in this space.



Tulsi Parida

MSc - Social Science, MBA
Global Director - Data Solutions, Visa
[#policy](#) [#dataethics](#)

“The reality is there are so many roles that you can have in the tech industry and the data AI industry that don’t require you to have a technical background.”

What inspired you to join the space?

I came to the UK to Oxford where I did a dual degree course. So one was MSc in Social Science of the Internet at the Oxford Internet Institute. And the second degree was an MBA at the Oxford Saïd Business School. And that’s when I really started to look at the intersection of technology, society, and business.

Tell us about your AI ethics career journey. What experiences brought you to your current role?

When I graduated I was looking for something that would allow me to put into practice some of the things that I learned around ethics, around kind of these broader frameworks and ways of working with technology that we’re industry agnostic. So it didn’t necessarily have to go back into the education sector. And by chance, I found a really interesting job at the Data Science Lab at Visa, looking at AI data policy, which is what I started doing at Visa back in 2020.

What barriers did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

I would say I probably have a non-technical background, but I’m working in a pretty technical space. And I think there is a little bit of imposter syndrome that a lot of people face when they say, Hey, I don’t actually know how to code, or I don’t do that every day. How can I work in tech?

But the reality is there are so many roles that you can have in the tech industry and the data AI industry that don’t require you to have a technical background. And in fact, I think sometimes it’s better to have that holistic perspective. Because I do think that when you’re solely working within data science or engineering, you can kind of put your blinders on to what else is going on, focus on the problem at hand, and get that work done, which is important in and of itself but you do need those people who are also thinking more broadly around, Hey, what are the ethical implications of this? Do we have any guard rails around what would happen if something goes wrong? You know, what are some consequences that we might not have thought of as a result of the use of this technology?

Those questions often come from people who are maybe perhaps more generalists or not as technical but thinking more holistically about a problem. And so I think that is something that I try to hold as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The fact that I’m able to think a little bit more broadly, brings in my experience from say, the education sector to now I’m in financial services and payments.

Why is more diversity in the AI ethics space important?

I think diversity is really important for business. Full stop. I think we used to be at one point having to convince senior managers and boards and things like that about why it's important to have a diverse workforce.

I think, for the most part, we're past that and we're now heading into a conversation around inclusion and why it's not just important to have a diverse workforce but to have an inclusive workforce. But I think it's important for a variety of reasons. I mean, most of us work in companies that have an impact on people outside of the company within which we work, right? So if you work for a global brand, you have an impact on different communities all over the world. And it's really important to get those perspectives into the room so that you are properly serving the needs of the communities in which you work. And the more voices you have in the room that represent minority groups, you can ensure that the products and solutions that you're creating within your work are actually inclusive and can be beneficial and useful to more than just the status quo.

That's the diversity side of things. Why it's important to have an inclusive work culture so that people are actually empowered to bring those perspectives to the forefront? So if you just have a lot of different types of people in the room, but then the only voice that's actually heard is the status quo then it doesn't really matter that your workforce is diverse because it's not inclusive and it's not actually giving people a platform and a comfortable work environment and a safe work environment where they feel they can voice their opinions and ask the right questions and probe a little bit further. So I think not just diversity, but inclusive work environments are really important.

What is your advice to those from non-traditional backgrounds who want to do meaningful work in this space?

There might not be synergies that you can think of immediately, but there are a lot of similar challenges that come up across different workplaces and you don't have to have technical expertise or really focused knowledge in one particular area to still be successful. And I think the key to being successful, if you are more of a generalist is still having that curiosity and saying, you know, I don't actually know that much about this space, but I'm going to read everything I can.

I'm going to go to all of the industry events and I'm going to sort of, you know, become that expert as much, as possible while also bringing in all of the other experiences that I've had before.

“I think diversity is really important for business. Full stop. I think we used to be at one point having to convince senior managers and boards and things like that about why it's important to have a diverse workforce.”

—Tulsi Parida

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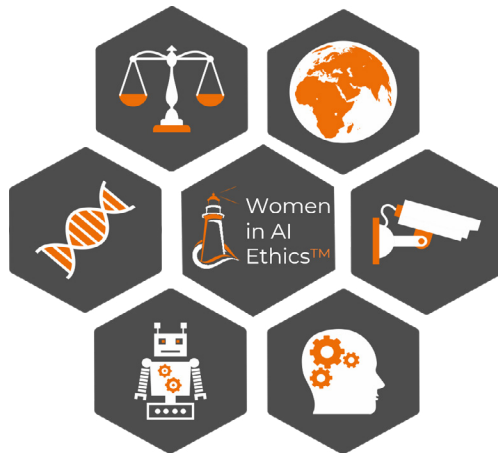


Hessie Jones

Tech Reporter

MISSION

Women in AI Ethics (WAIE) is building the foundation for a **diverse tech industry that is inclusive** and focused on building technology that benefits all of humanity.



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