

Emancipatory Design Science: An Alternative to Value Sensitive Design

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Abstract. Kane et al. [1] developed what the authors refer to as an emancipatory design theory for a machine learning application but explaining methodological guidelines for emancipatory DSR (eDSR) outside the scope of the paper. This paper clarifies what is meant by eDSR. Emancipatory DSR is a subtype of DSR that: is built on a critical or ethical kernel theory, involves developing theory-based design principles and/or IT artifacts to solve problems of human constraint by promoting emancipation. In this paper, we clarify what is meant by eDSR, provide steps for evaluating the emancipatory impact of an information system, and explain how practitioners can determine whether emancipatory re-design is needed.

Keywords: emancipation, emancipatory design science research, social good

1 Introduction

Information Systems can promote human flourishing, dignity, and a host of emancipatory outcomes when designed for social good. Yet, too often, information systems are developed without adequate consideration of the social impact they will have. Information systems practitioners often ask “what can we create?” rather than, “what should we create?”. Information systems researchers are uniquely qualified to participate in normative debates about what should be created based on their understanding of philosophy, ethics, human behavior, and information systems [2]. With the prevalence of technologies into everyday life, the adverse effects of technologies become prominent. There has been a growing interest in ethics in DSR, sustainable development, and applying critical methodology in IS research [3, 4].

Critical social theories explain normative recommendations for promoting social good through emancipation. Defined loosely, emancipation can be taken to mean the improvement of a human condition and may be conceptualized in terms of increases in stakeholders’ freedom to act, express, belong, and thrive. Kane et al. [1] demonstrated how critical kernel theory can be used as the basis of a subtype of design science research (DSR) to promote emancipation through information systems design. They refer to this type of DSR as emancipatory design science research (eDSR). Kane et al. [1] laid out an emancipatory design theory for a machine learning application but

Recently Kane et al[1] introduced the method of DSR using the theory of emancipatory pedagogy as the kernel theory for their design theory. While the eDSR approach is mentioned in passing, it was outside the scope of that paper to develop guide-

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offers promise in addressing this challenge of evaluating emancipatory efforts and

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