

It's funny because it's true — confronting scientific catechisms through comic books!

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ABSTRACT

What do a foul green ogre and a well-constructed narrative have in common? They're both like onions – they have layers! Keeping with the theme of diversity and inclusion, I'll focus on three main 'layers' of the scientific landscape: the research – our perception and framing of important research questions and methodologies; publication practices – how we communicate results and disseminate our research; and lastly the broader discourse around data-driven technology – public sentiment and literacy, and media reporting. The landscape is rife with problems, including incentive structures and gold-rush mentality in scholarship, celebrity culture and media hype, unhealthy extremes of techno-bashing and techno-optimism and the false dichotomy between “social problems” and “engineering problems”. Nuance and critical thinking are the most valuable, yet scarce commodities! A possible first step at self-correction could be for us – as practitioners and designers of these systems – to stop taking ourselves so seriously and challenge the catechisms of our scientific landscape.

In this talk, I'll share one way that we might be able to go about doing this – using the marvelous world of comics! Drawing from my own work in creating educational and satirical comic books about AI and data-driven technologies, I'll pick apart the onion, layer by layer, and highlight some of the most pressing problems and prescribe possible solutions to make our landscape more inclusive. At the very least, I'll present some fun and light-hearted cartoons that will make this confrontation more enjoyable!

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1 BIOGRAPHY

Falaah is a first year Data Science PhD student at NYU, working with Prof Julia Stoyanovich on the 'fairness' and 'robustness' of algorithmic systems. An engineer by training and an artist by nature, Falaah creates scientific comic books to bridge together scholarship from different disciplines, and to disseminate the nuances of her research in a way that is more accessible to the general public – She runs the 'Data, Responsibly' and 'We are AI' comic series with Prof Julia Stoyanovich at NYU's Center for Responsible AI, and the 'Superheroes of Deep Learning' comic series with Prof Zack Lipton (CMU). Falaah holds an undergraduate degree in Electronics and Communication Engineering (with a minor in Mathematics) from Shiv Nadar University, India, and has industry experience in building machine learning models for access management and security at Dell EMC.

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