Embody a Dataset

Choreograph our bodies to represent some data

This activity will take 20 or so minutes. You should have these materials on hand:
- Handouts with sample data (one for each participant)
- Space to everyone move around comfortably

Background

Data is usually presented in charts and graphs - flat visuals that don't help you experience what the data is really saying. This activity introduces people to the concept of a "embodying data" using a dataset that is fun and accessible. Participants choreograph each other to physically represent something they see in the data, helping bring the data off the page and back into the real world. The playful data facilitates transitions into tackling more serious subject matters. Merging artistic and creative thinking with the traditional mathematical representations of a line chart and a bar chart breaks down pre-conceptions of what data is "supposed" to look like. This approach helps participants overcome the fear of math and numbers. This activity also sets a loose, comfortable, and playful tone in the room, where participants can play the role of both director and actor. This approach can help participants get to know each other and break down power dynamics in the room.

Kick off the Activity

Once the group has had the chance to do a short physical warm up, distribute a short data handout. It should feature one to two high-level charts, and be about a topic that no one in the room knows too much about. You can download and print this data about ice cream:
- US Ice Cream Consumption

> **Going Virtual?** Make sure to post the PDF handouts to the in-session virtual chat, or have just one on-screen via screen-share while people build. Don't email them in advance; this can give curious folks a bit too much time to consider the data.

Give participants 5 minutes to review and reflect on the graphs. Split the participants into pairs. Introduce the idea that each pair will be finding something interesting in the data and choreographing the rest of the group into some kind of physical representation of that. This could include positioning bodies certain ways, moving around based on the data, making sounds, whatever! Point out that there are some limits - no props, some people might feel comfortable touching others, and others might not be able to move in

certain ways. Give them 10 minutes to plan their scene. After that each group will get a turn to choreograph / position the whole group their short movement piece.

> 💻 **Going Virtual?** Put each team in a breakout room and bring them back to choreograph everyone. Use any features that allow you to make the order of people look the same for everyone. Remind folks that the virtual setting can be used to their advantage and integrated too!

Present & Reflect

Bring the whole group back together and choose a group to go first. One at a time, each pair should choreograph the rest of the group in their short data scene. Facilitators should participate too!

Ask some questions to get the group reflecting on how their scenes were different than the data on the page, and how they felt representing it. You can use the "thumbs up, thumbs sideways, and thumbs down" approach to kickstart the conversation, which will allow participants to visually display excitement, apprehension, or both.

- Was that fun?
- Which scene was the most impactful to you?
- Which scene told the most compelling story? Why was it more compelling, or not, than the chart version of the same data?
- A lot of data is just a record of something people did in the world. Which scene made you think about the people behind this data?
- How did representing the data with your body change your attitude towards it, or your understanding of it?

Leave participants with a few examples from the pieces shared that you thought were really interesting.