

## **Introduction to Authors**

At the beginning of the book, Catherine D'Ignazio introduces herself as a "hacker mama" who worked as a software developer, experimental artist and now, a professor. She gives two reasons for writing this book. One, to reframe the male, white and technoheroic big data and AI world with a feminist lens. And two, to expose the power of liberal white people who are part of the problem of social justice.

Lauren F. Klein introduces herself as a professional nerd who was a software developer, studied American literature and now, a professor at a engineering school working on research projects that translate history into contemporary texts. Her reasons for writing the book, one, to show how the issues of racism and sexism have been existent for a while, and two, to help translate humanistic thinking into practice creating more opportunities for humanities scholars to engage with activists, organizers, and communities.

## **Introduction to Subject**

The book tells the story of Darden, who was a victim of oppression at her place of work. Her experience coupled with others' experiences that she had evidence of, she sought to confront her division chief, challenging the institutional systems of power. This "way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action, and by intersectional feminist thought (Introduction)" is what constitutes Data Feminism. Intersectional refers to the intersecting forces of privilege and oppression at work in a given society where oppression is the ill treatment of groups of people, mostly considered minorities.

This books aims to uncover how corporations have used data as a weapon to reinforce their power over certain groups of people. However, the same data can be used to challenge this misuse of power and the book outlines seven core principles to do so.

## **Summary of the book: Main Points and Themes**

The first chapter talks about examining the operation of power by asking questions such as Who does the work (and who is pushed out)? Who benefits (and who is neglected or harmed)? Whose priorities get turned into products (and whose are overlooked)? Currently, the answer to most of these questions is “people from dominant groups.” The chapter uses the matrix of domination, a paradigm that explains issues of oppression. The better we are able to explain how the power is used, the better we are able to challenge it, which is what chapter 2 is about.

“Data Feminism commits to challenging unequal power structures and working toward justice.” The idea here is that to challenge data, we need to collect “counterdata.” Gwendolyn Warren and the DGEI collected their counterdata with their map that helped people in power to envision and gauge the oppression that they could not see otherwise. But the authors also point out how it is not fair for those being oppressed to have to prove their stories are real. The first step in challenging power is changing the narrative from notions of power, fairness, accountability to equity and co-liberation. We, as people working with data, must aim to teach those around us and after us that that oppression is real and that our path should always lead to justice for the oppressed.

The next principle is “Elevate emotion and embodiment,” which means that knowledge of all forms must be accepted. The authors illustrate this by showing us how sometimes in communities, some things are at the center and others are cast out. For example, male bodies are almost always taken as a standard in scientific studies but the same is not considered true for female bodies. Shaowen Bardzell, a feminist human-computer interaction scholar argues that people who are marginalized or pushed aside should be the first people we should look at to see what the system is trying to exclude.

A lot of this marginalization comes from the already existing systems of hierarchies. So, the fourth principle talks of rethinking these hierarchies and systems that prolong oppression. Specifically, the

gender binary influences a lot of the systems that are around us. The authors illustrate this through two examples, one, cases like the TSA airport scanner which uses gender to classify air travelers. Before stepping into a scanning machine, the TSA agent selects a button on the scanner corresponding to the gender that he thinks the individual is, based on what they look like. Two is how women's pants/jeans pockets are smaller than that of men's. The authors argue that these "scientifically incorrect" understandings of both gender and sex inform the processes of the technical system which is why they need to be reformed.

Thinking of it in terms of data visualization, often times, emotion and affect, embodiment and expression, embellishment and decoration are mostly ignored. The solution, "rebalancing emotion and reason opens up the data communication toolbox and allows us to focus on what truly matters in a design process: honoring context, architecting attention, and taking action to defy stereotypes and reimagine the world."

For this change to happen, we need to embrace pluralism, consider context, and make labor visible, which make up the last three principles of this book. We have already discussed above the marginalization that is evident in our culture today. The way to counteract that is to consider context. Instead of just letting the numbers speak for themselves, which may possibly come from the inherent bias existent in people, we must look at the big picture. The authors use the analogy of how a single product is the result of the work of many individuals. Asking questions like who credited this project, whose work has been screened out, and looking for any "silences," "missing parts," "conflicts of interest" in the datasets, will help identify all forms of work that has gone into the project. The authors emphasize the importance of honoring everyone's work, big or small, because every effort deserves to be recognized and credited.

## Response

First, I loved the book's definition of feminism as "a shorthand for the diverse and wide-ranging projects that name and challenge sexism and other forces of oppression, as well as those which seek to create more just, equitable, and livable futures." Oppression is experienced in different ways by many people and addressing all such forms really speaks to the culture of inclusion that the authors are incorporating. I love how the authors, in their drive towards transparency, ask questions that reveal hidden aspects of any dataset/project. Secondly, we learnt in class about how we as Christian data scientists must integrate our faith in the ethical decisions and choices we make. So, when the authors emphasized on allowing all forms of knowledge, I thought this inclusion of diversity, tied in with the utilitarian theory, looking at the greater good of humanity. Additionally, as Christians, we are called to love and serve those around us and what better way is there to do this than by supporting and uplifting those who are discriminated against.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize and counter the injustice we see today. As responsible citizens of the corporate world we must welcome people of all genders and participate in the pursuit of justice and reshaping of our data-driven world.

## References

<https://data-feminisms.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/ei7cogfn#nl1st84joiy>.