by Blaise Agüera y Arcas

# Executive summary

Gender and identity occupy the front line in today’s culture wars, pitting urban culture against the more rural traditions of our past. At the heart of this book is a set of surveys I conducted between 2016 and 2022, asking thousands of anonymous respondents all over the United States questions about their behavior and identity, and especially about gender and sexuality. The resulting window into people’s lives is a bit like that of the Kinsey Reports, which scandalized postwar America more than 70 years ago. Now, the landscape is, to use today’s language, even queerer. 20th century heterosexual “normalcy” is on the decline, especially among young and urban people. This book delves into the demographic particulars of those changes, taking on the contested territory of how biology, ecology, history, and culture intertwine to create a dynamic “us” that can neither be called natural or artificial. I argue that evolving patterns of gender and sexuality aren’t mere trends of the moment, but are part of a larger shift away from biological reproduction and toward a more planetary sense of human identity. This will have profound implications for humanity’s future.

# About the Author

Blaise Agüera y Arcas is a [frequent speaker](http://styleisviolence.com/news/) at TED and many other conferences, winner of MIT’s TR35 Prize and Fast Company’s Most Creative People award, and a Vice President and Fellow at Google Research. He leads a ~500 person team working on Artificial Intelligence (AI), smart devices, technology ethics, and privacy. Publicly visible projects from his team include [Federated Learning](https://research.googleblog.com/2017/04/federated-learning-collaborative.html), [Artists and Machine Intelligence](https://ami.withgoogle.com/), [Coral](https://coral.ai/), [Hollywood gender equality](https://www.google.com/intl/en/about/main/gender-equality-films/) work with the Geena Davis Institute, and many AI features in [Pixel](https://www.blog.google/products/pixel/pixel-3-and-device-ai-putting-superpowers-your-pocket/) and Android. In 2016 he wrote a widely read [essay](https://medium.com/artists-and-machine-intelligence/what-is-ami-ccd936394a83) on the relationship between art and technology, and in 2017 he co-authored another popular essay on [physiognomy and bias in AI](https://medium.com/@blaisea/physiognomys-new-clothes-f2d4b59fdd6a) and a [refutation](https://medium.com/@blaisea/do-algorithms-reveal-sexual-orientation-or-just-expose-our-stereotypes-d998fafdf477) of claims that facial structure reveals sexual orientation. Some of this material has been incorporated into Chapter 3 and the interlude, *A view from above*.

While Blaise’s role at Google focuses on AI, his career has often been at the intersection of computing with other disciplines in the sciences and humanities. He raised early alarms (starting in 2015) about fairness and bias in machine learning, which led to deeper study of the differential impacts of technology on people underrepresented in tech. His quest to map the changing landscape of human identification with minority and majority subgroups led to this book.

# Notes on content and format

The book is about 100,000 words, but also includes ~130 graphs and many more figures integral to the text. There are also dozens of quotes included, some extended, from both historical sources and survey respondents. The book will exist both in a beautiful physical format (designed by James Goggin of Practise) and in an online version including 1) the surveys themselves, with the option to take them and see where you fit into population distributions, 2) richer interactive data visualizations in the spirit of The New York Times’s online data journalism, and 3) extended audio interviews from two relevant appearances on Dan Savage’s sex advice podcast, the Savage Lovecast.[[1]](#footnote-32) The 2016 interview ([Episode #526](https://drive.google.com/file/d/151pcwzDov4JaD3NaCUhBcMLYY8JRrS4-/view?usp=sharing), 51:12-1:12:26) is featured in the Introduction, and the 2017 interview ([Episode #579](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YDoFecNtNjCANtlW9xygBx9MXrKv7Zpn/view?usp=sharing), 51:49-1:22:23) is about the work described in the second. An audio edition of *Who are we now?* would also be compelling, though the text will require minor editing to ensure clarity without immediate access to the visual material.

1. These are currently behind a paywall, but permission to make them public has been granted by Nancy Hartunian, the Lovecast’s producer. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)