D'Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. F. (2020). *Data feminism*. MIT Press. 328 pp.

Review by Janette Leroux

Data and feminism are two words not often combined, leaving their intersections understudied and underpoliticized. However, authors Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein challenge their readers to explore the interconnections and antagonisms among these two important concepts. In their book *Data Feminism*, D'Ignazio and Klein (2020) define data feminism as a way of thinking about data, both its uses and limits, that is informed by direct experience, a commitment to action, and intersectional feminist principles. They demonstrate how data is power, but also the ways in which data can be used to challenge oppressive power structures and move our world closer to justice. This move toward justice begins with the acknowledgment that power is unequally distributed in the world, and the work of data feminism is to problematize how "standard practices in data science serve to reinforce these existing inequalities" (p. 8) while using data science to challenge and change the uneven distribution of power. Although *Data Feminism* is not explicitly stated to be engagement scholarship, I review it here as a timely and relevant contribution to collective ways of thinking about and working with data and communities toward goals of social justice.

D'Ignazio and Klein offer a novel conceptual contribution to the literature by outlining seven principles of data feminism around which they structure the book: examine power, challenge power, elevate emotion and embodiment, rethink binaries and hierarchies, embrace pluralism, consider context, and make labor visible. The authors lay out an argument for each principle, discuss how to put it into action, and then complicate it. Importantly, the authors enact the principles of data feminism through the expression of their commitments to reflexivity, transparency, deliberate citation practices, and open editing to draft the book. Core to the principles of *Data Feminism*, the authors argue, is an authentic commitment to coliberation. D'Ignazio and Klein are critical of data projects that "do good work, but . . . keep the roots of the problem in place" (p. 61). Throughout the book, the authors ground and reground their coliberation with their relational approach to working within the community, the valuation of different expertise(s), and the exemplar projects that they feature to help illustrate these principles. This same ethic of working with the community, elevating the voices and expertise of the community, and committing to transformative versus technical change aligns with critical community engagement scholarship (Mitchell, 2008; Shah, 2021; Stoecker, 2016). In this review, I highlight D'Ignazio and Klein's most compelling insights to demonstrate the relevance of *Data Feminism* to a wider audience of engagement scholars.

Data cannot be assumed to be an unmitigated good. For example, D'Ignazio and Klein describe the paradox of exposure where to not be counted is to be rendered invisible. However, for some people, there are times when it is more helpful to remain obscured, hidden, and invisible in data. The authors warn that data can unwittingly amplify deficit narratives, and they advocate that the harms and benefits of data should be balanced. They present a well-crafted argument for working *with* community as the way to dismantle the system of structural power in data. They challenge the narrative of individual technical genius, the fetishization of data and inflated sense of technical importance of having more data (they call this "Big Dick Data," p. 151), rather suggesting that there are no technophoric solutions. The authors suggest we question findings from data scientists who are "strangers in the dataset" (pp. 130–136) and fail to locate themselves within the project as if they are oblique. For D'Ignazio and Klein, "transparency is the new objectivity" (pp. 136–137), so they purport seeing themselves as a data sidekick rather than a superhero, and advocate for an approach that is careful, community-based,

and complex. This relational approach is a slow and careful process, where time and space need to be made for many to contribute and at all stages of the project.

For one, in order to do data on a local scale, one must engage and build trust with community groups, and work with nonexperts. This practice means valuing different forms of expertise alongside technical expertise, including lived, domain, organizing, and community history expertise. Moreover, as data researchers we must embrace the value of multiple perspectives while actively attending to and amplifying a multiplicity of voices. The authors provide several examples of new knowledge and new designs emerging from the margins, without eschewing complexity. But to dismantle the center/margins is to recognize subjugated knowledge and epistemic violence, which at the same time is to recognize epistemic advantage. Data is expensive, resource intensive, and is undertaken by powerful institutions. People in power accept evidence from those like themselves. It is here that D'Ignazio and Klein so deftly do their calling in, reminding readers of the other forms of power that exist alongside oppressive power—including bargaining and messaging power, as well as the power of interruption and subversion—all of which can be leveraged with data projects that challenge the status quo.

By carefully considering the politics of knowledge production, D'Ignazio and Klein teach us that counting can be healing when the community does it. Throughout their book, the authors continuously emphasize the importance of education and opportunities for technical learning and knowledge transfer within and across communities. Part of the work of building solidarity and collectivity is building technical capacity and social infrastructure within communities, and *Data Feminism* helps its readers to better understand how this work can be accomplished. The authors demonstrate how community engagement is a *process* as opposed to a *product*, and that doing data feminism is a commitment to centering, revising, learning, and "staying with the trouble" (p. 72).

I recognized several of the exemplar projects the authors cover but had never before thought to relate them. Reading the book was an exercise in considering and applying the principles they explore, and sharpening my thinking around the use of data in community-engaged learning and research. The authors demonstrate a humility that has inspired my own humility and reflexivity. As I read about these projects and the pitfalls of data through the lens of the principles of data feminism, I found myself considering projects in which I have participated that have been too removed, too technical, too data-focused, and have not gone "far enough" (p. 61) to challenge the current order.

A great strength of this book is how it is so grounded in practical examples and insights without simplifying the role of intersectional theory for understanding the problem of data and the solutions proposed. Doing data feminism is not straightforward. There are perpetual tensions in doing this work. It's not formulaic or prescriptive, but it holds real potential for making social change. D'Ignazio and Klein somehow balance the messy and humbling experience of data feminism while simultaneously calling in a wide audience of researchers and scholars. Therein also lies the gap that this book leaves. As with any trailblazing contribution, *Data Feminism* is just a beginning synthesis, and to do this good work as outlined we need more examples, more critical analysis, more reflection, more community. In fact, reviewing *Data Feminism* here and relating it to engagement scholarship is my own tangible action in response to their concluding chapter, "Now Let's Multiply." *Data Feminism* has a home with other contributions to the literature about community-engaged scholarship. It is boundary spanning and captures the imagination on what is possible when working with communities in principled ways.

In our increasingly data-driven world, data is no longer reserved for traditionally data-centric disciplines. *Data Feminism* is both a call to action and a roadmap for scholars of various disciplinary backgrounds. The book is vindicating for quantitative researchers and offers a place for data scientists in any project that is "a well-designed, data-driven, participatory process . . . that centers the standpoints of those most marginalized, empowers project participants, and builds new relationships across lines of social difference" (p. 148). For engagement scholars, *Data Feminism* offers an accessible introduction to the state and perils of status quo data science. For everyone, *Data Feminism* is affirming in the discerning of "good" from "justice" and the critical importance of the relational approach to working within the community and the valuing of different expertise(s).

About the Reviewer

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