

Book Review

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Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men
by: Caroline Criado Perez
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A wealth of books has been published on power and women since the mid-2010s. *Bad Feminist* by Gay (2014), a series of essays based on Gay's experiences growing up and interactions in a world built by and for men; *We Should All Be Feminists* by Adichie (2015), a reminder to all that political and social movements are often blind to inclusivity, and that lessons need to be learned from experiences; *Men Explain Things To Me* by Solnit (2014), an insight into the common occurrence of the power of male discourse over women; and *Women and Power* by Beard (2018) – which is written as a response to the regular vitriol through social media that Beard has experienced as a working professional, and traces this pattern back through history as being a common trope.

The breadth of credentials and experiences of the authors of these books, the frequency and consistency of such experiences, from mansplaining and trolling, to rape, reaches out to women who have experienced similar encounters. Moreover, these texts suggest a revitalisation of interest of both the concept of power against women and legitimise the experience of those within the books, and for those who read them. These books all have their own merits, not least their humour and accessibility, and they demonstrate experiences which might resonate widely, as many incidences in these texts are often from a first-person narrative. In concert with the themes of these books, *Invisible Women* aspires to support many of the declarations and experiences of entrenched misogyny inherent in these other texts, by giving empirical, statistical data as examples to illustrate the reach of entrenchment and unconscious investment in the gap in knowledge about women and their needs.

This book represents a labour of love for journalist and feminist campaigner, Caroline Criado Perez. Criado Perez uses the concept of big data, which has been specifically constructed to gather statistical data on men and the male body as the 'norm' against which all other bodies are found wanting, and that women, bodies and environments are have all been massively disadvantaged by this process. None of this is new however, as Criado Perez refers to the concept of othering, first suggested in 1949 by de Beauvoir. Moreover, the ideas of Freud finding a 'lack' in women, and questioning 'what women want' will also resonate with students and academics alike.

One of the main things that this book does is to remind people of the complexity inherent in the concept of the desire for equality. If men and women were equal – then

no-one would be disadvantaged, and we could all live together in harmony. The problem with this is that it assumes that gaining equality might be a quick fix, which requires a simple equation and is not an entrenched issue, present in healthcare, design, workplace and the built environment. Criado Perez highlights the paradox of women being blamed for their inability to ‘fit in’ to a world created by and for men who do not have women in mind when it comes to making, designing or providing environments and products. Criado Perez also reminds us that the concept of equality is inherently flawed. While the same provision for everyone, regardless of sex is often indicated to be a sign of equality, it fails to consider the fact that women are already disadvantaged through their sex.

There is much here to whet the appetite of existing and aspiring designers. Again, the main point is that women need to adapt to an environment built for and designed by men into which they must somehow fit. Arguably, the answer given is that women must be allowed to design a world that is suitable for them and their needs, and not assume that women are ‘smaller’ versions of men.

Conclusions

This book is aimed at everyone and constitutes a substantial resource into statistical data on women and intends to draw attention to the lack of data on women, which then leads to a gap in specific resources.

There are several drawbacks, however. Not least in the structure and layout of the book. The chapters are very long, and there is a considerable amount of statistical data and information with no subheadings, which means that at times, it is difficult to read, and the impact of the data is lost. Moreover, for the older, dyed in the wool feminist, or indeed any woman aged over 50, there is very little new here. At times the book reads like a summary of the challenges that many women are simply expected to face, yet this is tackled by finding data and information about women-led initiatives. From an academic perspective, arguably, this book is mainly about the actions of hegemonic men – powerful men who make decisions, and not the vast numbers of men who are disadvantaged by factors such as social class for example. Arguably, many men might be considerably less advantaged by the statistics presented, than at first sight.

However, for younger generations of women and men who are angry at the way that women are treated in general, and in social and spatial situations, this is a brilliant book. Buy for your daughter, son, and all their friends.

References

- Adichie, N.C. (2015) *We Should All Be Feminists*, HarperCollins, London.
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Solnit, R. (2014) *Men Explain Things To Me*, Haymarket, Chicago.