

Invisible Women (Exposing data bias in a world designed for men)

Caroline Criado Perez (2019), *Invisible Women (Exposing data bias in a world designed for men)*, London: Chatto & Windus,

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In a world designed by men for men, *Invisible Women* challenges the patriarchy. From policymakers to teenagers, this is a must-read for everyone. It is a real exposé to a world of inequalities that is beyond systematic differences between genders in the labour market.

Caroline Perez opens your eyes into all of the small, long-forgotten forms of discrimination that women face in various aspects of life, including daily life, workplace, transportation, public services and so forth. My initial reactions of thinking the book was esoteric and one-dimensional were soon proven wrong by the countless case-studies and Perez's deep understanding of each and every issue she describes. She uses journal articles, studies, books and broadcast media sources to support her arguments. Her unique perspective on gender equality, feminism and the gender data gap makes this book a masterpiece.

I was most surprised by the inequality of the transportation system towards women, for example the description of roads being suited to the journeys of men, who only to go work and come home, compared to being suited for the needs of women – who have many errands to run. As we grow up, we are not taught to notice these small injustices, and it is absolutely eye-opening to read studies and evidence of how these are such things that one should pay attention to. Personally, one of the statements that resonates is the fact that 'as little as a single point rise in female legislators' increased 'the ratio of educational expenditure'. This particularly struck me as it shows the importance of Perez's work of educating the wider population about the importance of female representation in politics and government.

Perez maintains a strong voice throughout the book as she feeds the readers information about a world created both intentionally and unintentionally against women. The extensive use of credited robust evidence elevates her book to a completely new standard. The extremely detailed bibliography and references that were included in the book helped readers such as myself to further explore her points. However, she did not present both perspectives of each of her arguments. Rather than looking at some of the issues from the male perspective, Perez maintained a strong feminist voice the entire book. Although this can be impactful, it can be difficult for male readers to understand her reasoning. This is a book that should be read by everyone, regardless of their gender, and if there were other perspectives besides a headstrong feminist view, she may be able to reach a much larger diverse audience.

Invisible Women is a thought-provoking, revelatory snapshot of a world that continues to bypass the needs of women in all areas of life. The structure of the book was cleverly designed, with each of the six chapters examining different areas in the world where women face injustice and considering how this can be fixed. Perez's encouraging words about the various ways to end this injustice and create hope for the future give hope to young policymakers and feminists such as myself to work towards making the world a place without a gender gap.

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It is with gratitude, anger, pleasure and hope that I am writing these lines. Perez's now award-winning book convincingly accounts for the pervasive gender data gap affecting our lives, ranging from little everyday annoyances (!) to life-threatening conditions. We live in a world where the male (size, body, aesthetics, preferences, etc.) is rendered universal, and female as niche (p. 12) – and is hence systematically excluded from all sorts of data. Past and present stories, histories, scientific measurements, artistic, socio-cultural productions are 'all marked – disfigured – by a female shaped "absent presence"' (p.xi) and 'the male-unless-otherwise-indicated approach to research' (p. 4).

This may not come as a shock to the female reader, who *lives* the book and who is continuously declared difficult in moments when it is the structure that does not fit her body, mode and natural or cultural dispositions. What may be shocking for both male and female readers, though, are the deadly consequences of holding onto series of disrupted representations and measurements. The extent of our disciplinary,

professional, everyday complicities in sustaining the gap – willingly or unintentionally – between men and women is rather distressing.

Perez manages to convince us, leaving no room for escaping her argument, via a compilation of in-depth research across fields and countries. Her comparative and intersectional approach shows that even the most 'developed' parts of the world or the members of the most affluent-elite-well-educated groups are not immune to the biases maintained by conventions of the gender data gap.

The strength of the book relies equally on HOW it is written, as much as WHAT it is about. Perez does not play a blame-game; she just depicts a brutal image that affects us all. She masterfully weaves in individual stories that allow for empathy and affective engagement while sharing the macro-picture through local and global statistics to the effect of exploring the consequences of the data gap in its genuine vertical depth and horizontal spread. The book's reliance on the *assumed universals* of standards of writing, in a way, empowers the male-dominated conventions of generating and disseminating data. The linear, rational flow of thought that bases itself on assumed to be objective quantitative data raises the voice of the scientific truth. The paradox is that, as the book itself shows, what we perceive to be scientific, objective or as a convincing argumentation heavily veils female ways of doing, knowing and being. The underlying style claim to objectivity makes the book very easy to read as it complies with the expectations, but it is also very compliant with the *universal (male?) standard*. One can argue that this style may be partially responsible for the book's popularity: by actually using a language and a mode of argumentation that is so typical, loyal to conventional non-fiction writing, Perez renders herself legible to the exact audience who might 'accuse' her of subjectivity, the audience who on the same grounds might not access the core of her argument. While my soul craved for that genre-bending, truly feminine voice – a more fluid one – to her credit, this book appeals to a larger audience without expecting to have given the issue a thought from her reader. Perez curates and gives voice to the bare data that is out there, but just invisible.

Another point of unease is that the author relies heavily on a discourse of efficiency and the value for the economy to justify the significance of women data. In an ideal world, the body that one was born with should make itself significant to the data regardless of the birth genitals. This is a matter of justice and freedom. The women should not carry the burden of proving that the damage caused to their body has also a cost for men (AKA the overall economy) to be taken seriously, to be seen. In this less-

than-ideal world, Perez needs to argue for public spaces because otherwise there is a mental health cost, which then costs to the overall economy (Chapter 2). Like her style, I feel her compliance with the dominant neoliberal paradigm of justifying the value (of a person, action or a policy) based on its economic cost/benefit sustains the point that the women matter only if/when they are a cost to men and are visible only in male terms instead of taking women as an aim in themselves, but surely makes her argument easier to swallow for more.

To the fellow female reader, I hope you take on board the invitation extended by the author to be more demanding and visible in the way you are, because it is legitimate and you are not being difficult – you are not the deviation from the standard humanity (p. 25) from the norm or atypical; it is just that the norms and types are deviations from you. To the male reader, I hope you buy this book, unlike previous data's suggestion that 'women will buy books by and about men, but men won't buy books by and about women (or at least not many)' (p. 14–15). I hope you and I, we all, can rewrite the data, lift the biases and shift the boundaries. After all, as Perez reminds us, we are in this together. Tackling and correcting gender bias is not 'just' a feminist or *for women* agenda; it is about correcting ways of being that are 'inefficient' and, more importantly, deeply inhuman. Thanks to Perez's detailed account, we know where to start *seeing* and stop being complicit within our respective professional and everyday life-fields.

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