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Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action, by Catherine D'Ignazio

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See table of contents

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Book Review: *Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action*

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Who counts, and who gets left behind? This is the central premise behind Catherine D'Ignazio's *Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action*. In *Counting Feminicide*, D'Ignazio shines a light on the grassroots data activists who are painstakingly tracking feminicides in their communities, in response to and despite poor record keeping by mainstream institutions. Feminicide, also referred to as femicide, is defined by D'Ignazio as the "misogynous and gender-related killing of women, including transgender and cisgender women and girls" (7). While the work of activists worldwide is represented throughout *Counting Feminicide*, there is a primary focus on data activists and activist groups in Central and South America. This is where much anti-feminicide activism originated, and where most current data activism projects discussed in *Counting Feminicide* are based. D'Ignazio's book has a distinctly feminist framing; still, she emphasizes that not every activist group discussed therein identifies with feminism. To describe the data activists' practices, D'Ignazio has turned to the term restorative/transformative data science, which she places in opposition to Western data science. This counter-hegemonic data science consists of four stages: resolving, researching, recording, and refusing and using data.

Counting Feminicide is divided into three main sections. The first (Chapters 1-2) provides background information on the main themes in the book, including the origin of the term feminicide/femicide and the emergence of anti-feminicide activism, the reasons behind missing or incomplete feminicide data, how activists produce counterdata to fill in the blanks, and the concept of restorative/transformative data science. Chapter 2, "Official Data, Missing Data, Counterdata," is a standout here and frames the book's core issue, which is that feminicide data is often incomplete or missing entirely from the official record. An issue discussed in this first section that recurs throughout *Counting Feminicide* is the difficulty in defining what feminicide is.

This problem is one that D'Ignazio links to differing definitions between regions and governments, which makes it hard to classify or count feminicides.

The second section builds on the concept of restorative/transformative data science, focusing on D'Ignazio's four stages and how they differ from Western data science, which misguidedly portrays data as neutral and unattached. Each of the four stages is presented in a separate chapter, building from interviews conducted by D'Ignazio's research team with over forty groups of data activists across the globe. These four chapters are the strongest in the book, bolstered by rich empirical data and real-world examples, including Argentina's Mumalá, Bolivia's ¿Cuántas Más?, and the Native Women's Association of Canada's Safe Passage initiative. The first stage of restorative/transformative data science discussed is resolving (Chapter 3). D'Ignazio describes this as the activists' motivation to start collecting feminicide counterdata in a database. Researching is the second stage, which encompasses all the research involved in finding cases of gender-related killing to add to activist databases (Chapter 4). The third stage is recording, which accounts for the ways that activists take unstructured data from their research and create structured values and datasets (Chapter 5). The final stage is refusing and using data (Chapter 6). In this stage, activists use data in five main ways: repair work, remembering, reframing feminicide, reforming policies and practices, and revolting. By presenting detailed and empirical data about these four stages from current data activism projects, D'Ignazio effectively positions restorative/transformative data science as a necessary and transformative tool in the fight against feminicide and gender-related killing.

The third and final section of *Counting Feminicide* is about action and reflection. Here, D'Ignazio focuses on the application of her research team's findings. Chapter 7 presents a case study from the Data Against Feminicide team, where tools were developed and piloted to support data activist projects on a larger scale, with consideration to human-computer interaction and participatory design. These tools, including a highlighter browser extension and email alert system, were piloted in multiple languages to suit various projects. The book closes with a toolkit for restorative/transformative data science, that can help current practitioners and newcomers alike in the data activism space (Chapter 8). D'Ignazio makes it clear that although *Counting Feminicide* is geared toward feminicide data activists, the toolkit applies to all those producing and examining data from a social justice angle.

This book is recommended to anyone interested in data feminism and critical data studies, and is more broadly suited to people working in data science or social justice spaces. The writing is clear and engaging, and the layout of the book is easy to follow, enhanced by an abundance of illustrative figures and tables. *Counting Feminicide* is well-researched and cited, and the author has also shared an additional extended

bibliography online (D'Ignazio 2023). Catherine D'Ignazio is an Associate Professor in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT. She is also the Director of the MIT Data + Feminism Lab, and a member of the Data Against Feminicide research project, making her well-positioned to write this book. *Counting Feminicide* is a fitting follow-up to 2020's *Data Feminism*, written by D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein; however, she acknowledges the limitations of her position as a white, American scholar, writing a book that largely focuses on the labour of women and queer people in Central and South America.

Counting Feminicide: Data Feminism in Action is one of few books that discusses feminicide through the lens of data science and data feminism. Although the circumstances surrounding anti-feminicide activism are sobering, Catherine D'Ignazio has crafted a powerful and moving book about restorative/transformative data science and feminicide that gives readers hope for the future while empowering them to act in the present. Her focus on the unforgiving and emotionally heavy work of marginalized data activists in the Americas is the highlight of this book and is particularly effective in its second section on restorative/transformative data science. Through her exploration of restorative/transformative data science, D'Ignazio helps readers reframe how they think about data neutrality and consider not only what is lost when data are missing or incomplete, but what will be gained when all people are counted equally.

REFERENCES

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