



IJIDI: Book Review

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The field of data studies seems to have blossomed overnight. With it comes myriad tools promising to visualize and utilize complex data that enable technological innovation, medical advances, and economic flourishing in previously unimaginable ways. But just as quickly as the field of data studies emerged, so too did scholars and activists keen to point out the disconcerting tradeoffs in increased datafication, many of which essentialize and erase identities. While works like Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein's *Data Feminism* now seem like canonical entries in this discussion, data studies are not even five years away from their release. As such, intensified conversations around questions of embodiment and data continue to emerge, with focused critiques confronting the imagined neutrality of data under regimes of white supremacy and colonialism. Entering into this discussion comes Patrick Keilty's deftly edited *Queer Data Studies*. Published by the University of Washington Press, *Queer Data Studies* offers a first-of-its-kind entry point into the intersections of data as it relates to the lives of queer individuals.

Not unlike its scholarly peers, the title betrays its complexity. Queer can mean a lot of things. Data requires typology and definitions. Studies shift based on domain and methodological training. In a knowing nod to these complexities, Keilty's anthology brings together a vast array of critical data scholars, queer historians, and methodologists to examine these tensions. The anthology's authors, as a collective, often in explicit conversation, build a corpus of ideas that offer guidance on what it means to receive, recover, and re/use queer data. Additionally, since many of the scholars themselves identify across the spectrum of queerness, the anthology is also an exploration of what it means to do data science and data studies from a position of queerness or queer data collection.

While it is impossible to synthesize a common theme or categorization between chapters, each still feels additive and expansive. Throughout each chapter, authors intentionally locate their ideas within the canon of queer history, theory, and activism, while using these backdrops to contextualize timely examples ranging from government data collection to the invisible data privacy violations latent within our everyday use of social media and mobile apps. As such, highlighting the contributions of each author proves far more generative than attempting to

speak to the anthology's themes more broadly.

In the anthology's introduction, penned by Keilty, he provides us with an always-necessary primer on the way queerness works to destabilize binaries and normative presumption, perhaps never more important than in often binarized notions of that which is useful and non-useful data. However, Keilty pushes further and examines notions of public and private data while repeatedly reminding readers that part of the allure of data is its simplicity, which misaligns with queerness both as a site of embodiment and as a political endeavor. Further, and perhaps most relevant to information science scholars, Keilty offers a critical caveat that without the pioneering work of queer archival scholars, there would be no data, queer or otherwise, from which to do such study, making clear that the forthcoming chapters are indebted as much to queer data pasts as to the queer data futures towards which many prophesy.

The first chapter, "Black Data," is a revised and reimagined version of Shaka McGlotten's 2016 piece by the same name. Placing their piece against almost a decade of additional context on the deterioration of citizens' privacy and its implications for data, McGlotten maps to the discussion of queer data studies as an immediate reminder of queerness's own intersectional tensions. Such tensions reveal that violence against communities of color, while well-documented and disconcerting in their mass, rarely accounts for the increased ways such violations impact queer communities of color. Using queer of color performance theory as a lens to imagine the ways of seeing queer and Black data in unison, McGlotten contends that questions of refusal and excess become ways of understanding how such data might remain hyper-present or invisible within increasing states of surveillance.

In Chapter Two, Nikita Shepard offers a historical overview of how particular subsets of LGBTQIA+ communities configured notions of datafication and surveillance against the emergent threads of American queer activism. By highlighting decades of police surveillance justified under the auspices of then-still-present sodomy laws, Shepard highlights how any attempt to consolidate data about queer visibility is to contend with moments of non-consensual outing and purposeful obfuscation on the part of queer subjects aware of such practices. Using these realities, Shepard then maps the ebbs and flows of national attempts to build datasets around queerness, with an emphasis on attempts by the Democratic National Convention to document individuals' sexual orientations unsuccessfully. Contending that such attempts, while well-intentioned, revealed the ignorance of politicians of their own state and local government's surveillance of queer individuals, Shepard then looks towards contemporary attempts at counting queerness with concern and respect for individual privacy. This reveals the persistent value of "we're here, we're queer" as a statement of collective action while being simultaneously committed to refusing datafication.

Gary Kafer builds on the previous two chapters in Chapter Three, "Machine Learning and Queer Technics of Opacity." Kafer suggests that queerness, which refuses binarized labels and simple entries into a data set, provides another clear case of the limitations of machine learning. In particular, Kafer is critical of the suggested solutions brought forth by such tools since, as he observes, they take liberties in conflating queer identities into collective categories, which return us to past problems of taxonomizing queerness and only offer to undo years of work by queer activists across the field of information organization.

Susanna Paasonen and Jenny Sundén turn their analysis towards content moderation on social media in Chapter Four and explore how the push for sex-positive platforms, can reveal biases

baked into data activist work. In particular, they highlight the #freethenipple campaign as a moment in which attempts to embrace feminist ideals in content moderation produced more considerable tensions around cisnormativity and presumptions on what constituted such anatomy. In doing so, the authors reveal the inextricable relationships between technologies and their policies.

The fifth chapter, by Stephen Molldrem, serves as a pseudo-companion to the previous chapter by observing similar tensions about the production of the HIV-positive body as a site of inherent queerness. Noting the histories within which cultural and political discourses demarcated a positive HIV status with inherent deviance, Molldrem observes how practices of disclosure or avoidance have become enmeshed ideologies of what it means to be HIV positive. In response, Molldrem contends that almost any person with this status, regardless of whether or not they identify as queer becomes labeled as such. This to Molldrem exemplifies queer data. Molldrem's chapter offers one of the first moments of rupture for what readers might otherwise imagine as being a book about LGBTQIA+ data, helping to concretize the anthology's apparent choice to use queer as a reference point instead.

In Chapter Six, Ryan Conrad offers an evocative refiguring of the role of digital technologies in sex work. By highlighting the rise and fall of Rentboy.com, Conrad observes how the very same tools which afford queer sex workers safety and autonomy also rely on the extractive venture capitalist mindset of Silicon Valley, thus displacing communities as they build others. Taking up Conrad's observations, Lina Žigelytė uses Chapter Seven to examine what she notes as the titular phenomenon of "Not Enough Meaningful Data," wherein she contends that for scholars to study queerness in Eastern Europe, one has to use lo-fi and non-institutional methods for data creation. In response, Žigelytė offers guidance on how to do queer data activism at a local scale.

Similarly, in Chapter Eight, Mathew Gagné reflects on his own research with queer dating apps in Lebanon. In doing so, Gagné identifies methods of queer ethnographic data collection. Methods include researchers being explicit about their own datafied body in securing research permission and speaking openly about participant data disclosures and their use in research. In the ninth chapter, Harris Kornstein reflects on their own activist work with the briefly successful Homobiles, a San Francisco-based queer-affirming ride-share app. Highlighting the ways that queer safety and consensual data gathering informed the work, Kornstein suggests that such practices, while evocative of queer data ethics, also help explain the project's demise with the rise of competitors such as Lyft and Uber. Rounding out the anthology is Susui Wang's playful yet theoretically robust zooming out to the collection of queer data at an international scale. Using attempts to demarcate queer safety metrics via Western queer activist groups, Wang reveals how such metrics rely on essentialist notions of disclosure and policy, which betray the realities of citizen-level work. This paints a picture of countries with which "the West" embraces (or more accurately have assimilated to Western cultural practices) as pro- or anti-queer, building upon the work of decolonial queer theorists such as Jasbir Puar.

While these varied synopses hardly do justice to the nuance and astute arguments built by the scholars in this anthology, they do speak to the complex intricacies of defining and studying the still-evolving phenomenon of queer data. A reader following along with this review might note that aside from Keilty, none of the scholars who have provided chapters work exclusively within the library and information science field. While this may be read as a problem, I want to defend it as a necessity that reveals some of the limitations of IS in LIS (Library and Information Science).

In particular, whereas librarianship has remained deeply invested in questions of inclusivity and identity-centered work, the evolutions towards information science tend to reify notions of neutrality and objectivity, an approach this anthology resolutely rejects. As such, one can read the scholars and their respective fields as signposts to borrow methods, theories, and arguments. The fields represented here include, but are not limited to, media studies, sociology, medical humanities, and gender studies. Alternatively, for those practitioners looking to do data curation and data collection work, the scholars gathered here represent those domains within which librarians are most likely to encounter questions about queer data. Further, the ideas brought forth by the scholars here can and should impact how librarians and archivists reflect on questions of data curation and digital preservation, wherein questions such as queer data obfuscation, intersectional representation, and low-fidelity technology use will all reside.

Information professionals, even if not the key contributors to this book, are an intended audience. In addition, individuals interested in questions of queer history, queer methods, and novel additions to classic ideas of queer theory will find the book invaluable. In a moment where questions of queer visibility are once again at risk, *Queer Data Studies* might well serve as more than a theoretical addition; it could well become a guide for survival.

Travis Wagner (wagnert@illinois.edu) is an assistant professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Wagner's research interests include critical information studies, queer archives, and LGBTQIA+ advocacy in sociotechnical systems. Their work investigates how LGBTQIA+ communities create identity in opposition to sociotechnical systems that characterize and limit those identities. Multiple projects within the classroom and with community organizations have led to Wagner exploring and publishing the unique relationships between obsolete archival mediums and queer counter-historical work across archival contexts. Their recent publications include articles in the *Journal of Information Science*, the *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, and *Artifact & Apparatus*.