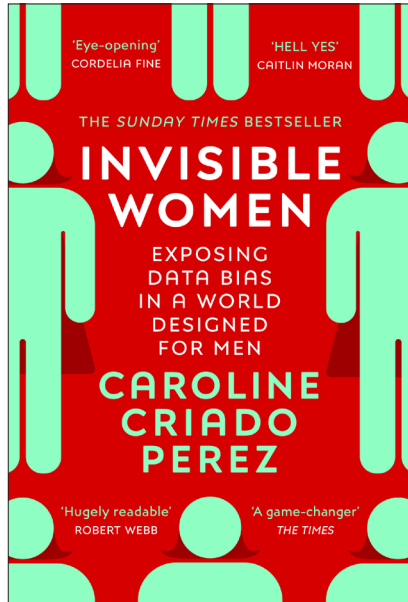


BOOK REVIEW



Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men: A Book for All

By Caroline Criado Perez. New York: Abrams Press, 2019.

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The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has stressed women in African academic institutions professionally, socially and family-wise because women frequently bear primary responsibility for children, elderly parents and the home. Contributions by and participation of women in academic medicine have been studied in the past few years, and results suggest the lack of a level playing field as well as the extra pressures of unequal domestic responsibilities and dealing with a purported male-dominated system.^[1-4] *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* by the British feminist activist author Caroline Criado Perez takes a global look at governmental and institutional policies, cultural practices, and other issues that unfairly impact on women at all levels of society.

In 2019, *Invisible Women* won two prestigious British book awards: the Royal

Society Insight Investment Science Books Prize and the Financial Times and McKinsey Business Book of the Year. Notably, the book is data-driven with a global, not just Western perspective, reveals gaps in medical treatment as well as research, and stirs up well-justified anger for myriad examples of programmes and policies created and implemented primarily by men that have (at best) a neutral or (at worst) a negative impact on women. True to its title, nearly 40% of the book (90 pages) are endnotes.

Perez sets out her basic premise on page 1: 'Seeing men as the human default is fundamental to the structure of human society.' Man as default human is reflected in the male body as the anatomical model in many textbooks, in language ('he' as default pronoun in proper English until recent pronoun reforms), and in the patriarchal structure of many societies and institutions, including medicine and medical research.

Known gender inequities described in Perez's narrative involve everyday living (domestic chores, childcare, transportation or lack thereof, etc.), the workplace, interaction with the medical community (as a patient or as a colleague), and medical research gaps relating to gender differences. In the healthcare arena, medical conditions in females appear to receive less emphasis in medical training; she reminds us of the well-known lack of women in the early cardiac condition research. Of particular interest to women doctors of all specialties and a topic of frequent blogs, tweets, and social media posts is the report Perez shares from the McKinsey Global Institute: 'Globally, 75% of unpaid work is done by women.' Repeatedly, family and childcare responsibilities were reiterated as universal expectations of, and priorities for, women in every country. Perhaps my favourite quote in the book declares: 'In fact, the best job-creation programme could simply be the introduction of universal childcare in every country in the world.'

Fascinating daily life examples with gender implications include transportation pattern development, toilet parity, safe toilet locations outside homes without facilities,

safety on public transportation, and design of the most frequently used crash-test dummy based on an 'average' male body (translation: larger than an average female and without prominent breasts). Some of the workplace issues detailed involve women receiving less attention in meetings, the well-known pay differentials, and lack of family-friendly working environments.

Examples of pay differentials, the underpaid professions dominated by women (and by extension, volunteer work with no pay that may be an expectation if one is not in the formal workplace full or part time), and even tax penalties are outlined. Data detailed in the book back up Perez's assertions of economic benefit for individuals and society with increased childcare. The deliberate decision in the 1950s to exclude unpaid domestic and other work from gross national products because 'this would be too big a task in terms of collecting the data' affected attitudes that demean this contribution to the economy and make child and elder care invisible and under-appreciated.

Because almost all African universities have strict research requirements for promotion or job retention, side-benefits from reading the book are the many ideas generated for medical and surgical research with gender aspects as well as public health issues, both global and domestic. The extensive references provided are a treasure trove of data.

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