Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action

Sarah Jayne Ellis ¹*

¹ *University of Sunderland*, UNITED KINGDOM

***Corresponding Author:** sarah.ellis@sunderland.ac.uk

Guyan, K. (2022). *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

> "The Census is not a neutral representation of reality but a tool to construct a governable population" … raising questions as to whether the census "is an exercise in knowledge construction or a tool to bolster the state's capacity to manage its population."

> "If the construction of knowledge is no longer the primary purpose of a census this throws into doubt the need for a census to collect accurate information that authentically represents the lives and experiences of the people about whom the data relates" (Queer Data: Chapter 3-page 70).

Kevin Guyan's examination of the process of data collection within society is a breath of fresh air for anyone who is searching and/or researching within the fields of queer theory, with data around sexuality, gender, sex, or relationships being a key component. However, if one approaches the book as a methodological discussion of anomalies, even those in disparate fields of inquiry may find Guyan's work of use. Qualitative and quantitative researchers alike will gain something from the book, as rather than dryly presenting data, Guyan provocatively asks the reader to address the question: "what is data for?" To what end is it collected, and in what ways might the end product be used? After all, *how* we count things, as objects, people, places and concepts, has a direct impact on what counts, and who or what ends up being either included or excluded from the supposedly objective results.

Beginning in an historical vein, the reader is taken on a journey through the ways in which data *about* us might not always be data *for* us, and how that which can enable can also exclude since: "those who stand to benefit from being counted also risk engaging with technologies and practices that hamper rather than help the wider lgbtq+ population". Before then moving through to an analysis of the gaps in data–the oft hidden inductive qualities of managing what gets measured that can result in "straight washing" the non-normative, through construction of the anomaly and the over coding of "statistically insignificant population groups" that when combined result in questions like the ones posed in the quoted extract above.

Guyan leans on a Foucauldian analysis of power and "governmentality" to ask, "who counts what counts?" within systems of biopolitical bordering, yet they take the conversation out of the abstract and into the pragmatic and experiential as a data analyst and policy researcher, with their consideration of how state organised data practices and LGBTQ+ identities have an *"uneasy relationship"* with each other. Data, they say becomes meaningful when it is used to *impact* the lives of people. But '*in what ways*' and '*to what end*' are the questions at the heart of this book.

Chapter 6 is particularly interesting as Guyan considers how data practices validate particular *forms* of data, thereby presupposing said forms to have legitimacy. Intrinsic and extrinsic identification processes collide with the bio-metric and behavioural data collection methods, each of which present risk of foreclosing potential, whilst also presenting opportunity for an expansion of the queer data field. One might say that solving historical inequalities is not simply a (case of adding more) tick box process.

This leads the reader nicely into the reflective character of chapters 7 and 8, which are a rich field of ideas for the researcher–whether established or early career–forming a lead into the concluding comments that present one with a practical guide to the *doing of queer data collection*, eight questions that may serve to contextualise the work of others. Whilst there are no resolutions to the iterative problem of inductive meaning making within social and natural scientific data collections, practical application suggestions may at least aid the researcher in being mindful of it, leading to better research outcomes.

Whilst Queer Data is perhaps not a page turner in the sense of other, more 'storied' books, and the subject of data collection and its nuances can be a little dry for some readers, this book undeniably deserves a place on your shelf and is a 'must have' for anyone in the academic field. Whilst primarily being a work that critically engages data methodologies, the language remains accessible with minimal theory or jargon, and the chapters and sections serve not just as handy reference points about the data, but also about *the time* in which it was written, as the book itself becomes a source of the very data it discusses. Therefore, *Queer data* is not *just* a contemporary methodological book, but will find use in your collection as a somewhat historical consideration of the period around the census of 2022, and the social changes inherent. Highly recommended.