Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Data Feminism
How Scholars with Feminist Approaches Interpret the Datafied Present and Envision Futurities

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Abstract
In the global West, electronic devices such as smartphones and tablets have become ubiquitous tools for daily life. They facilitate communication, navigation, and commerce, among other online activities that generate unprecedented amounts of user data. This licentiate thesis examines the perspectives of scholars employing feminist approaches towards understanding and conceptualizing emergent technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, machine learning, and algorithms, which utilize data as a representation of realities and lived experiences. Grounding their perspectives in the feminist tradition of critiquing power structures and hegemonies, scholars offer valuable insights into envisioning technologically supported futurities that transcend mere inclusion and instead prioritize diversity. This text examines how scholars with feminist approaches understand the datafied present and envision futurities. This thesis also explores how potential risks and benefits of datafication, the translation of action into data, are expressed in data feminist texts.

In the first article, Feminist Data Studies and the Emergence of a New Data Feminist Knowledge Domain, a series of searches were conducted in databases and search engines, followed by citation chaining to collect relevant scholarly texts. Data collection was followed by visualization and close reading, while employing sociotechnical imaginaries as a conceptual lens. This approach facilitated an exploration of how scholars with feminist perspectives envision, interpret, and reimagine data-driven technologies. The second article, Utopian and Dystopian Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Big Data in a portion of the corpus, compared framings and perceptions of big data to those identified in the policies of the European Commission.

The summary essay underscores several key findings. Firstly, the nuanced implications of visibility and representation in the context of datafication. Particularly, the tension and the contrasting imperatives, to amplify the visibility of marginalized groups and to safeguard their privacy and mitigate potential harm. Secondly, the centrality of power dynamics and minority group vulnerability in discussions surrounding control over data flows. Finally, corrective approaches and feminist refusal were found to be the ways in which scholars are attempting to contribute to shaping more equitable and inclusive technological futures. These findings contribute to making visible the hegemonies and power imbalances in datafied systems from the perspectives of scholars with feminist approaches as well as to understanding how they are pushing back against them.

Keywords: sociotechnical imaginaries, feminist data studies, data feminism, datafication, big data, the European Commission

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