

# Invisible Women Study Guide

Introduction and Chapters 1 - 19  
(full study guide)

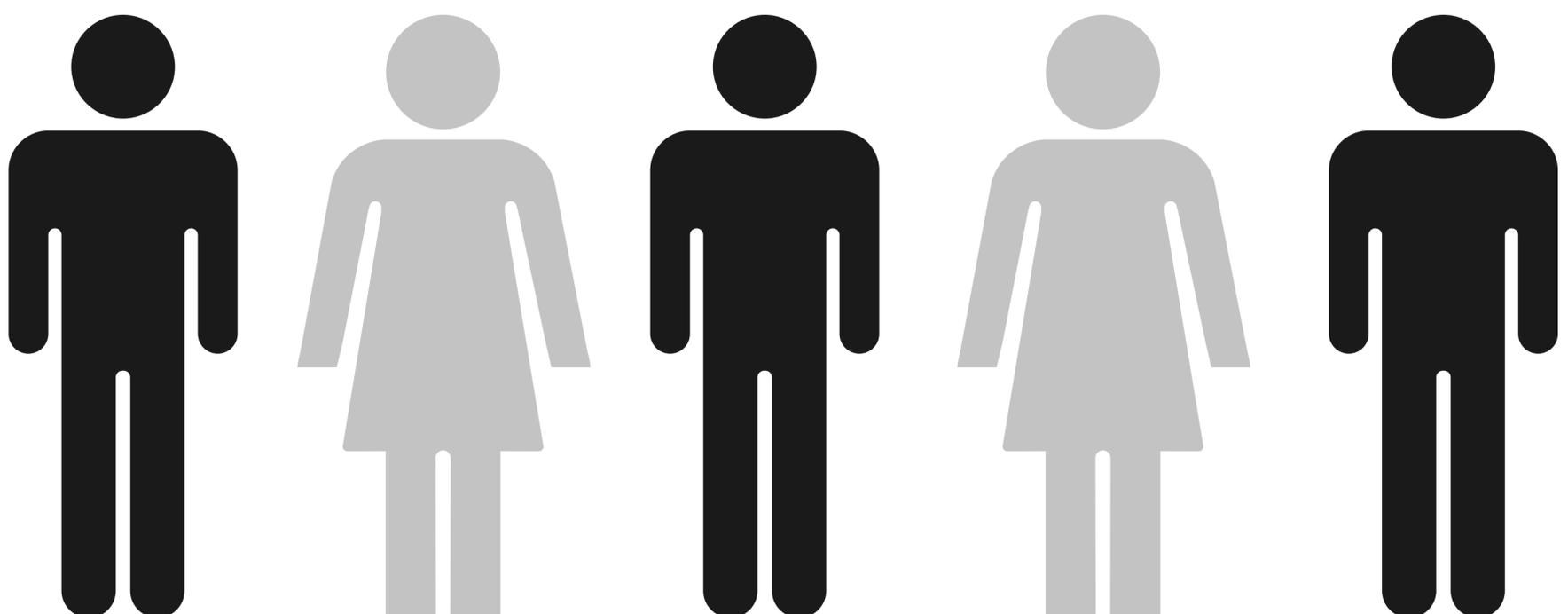
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## Meet the Author



**Caroline Criado Perez**

 @CCriadoPerez



# Introduction

## Key Definitions

- Generic Masculine - Using words like "he" in a gender-neutral way.
- Bias - An inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair.
- Identity politics - A tendency for people of a particular religion, race, social background etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics.
- 'The Canon' - The body of works generally agreed to have been the most influential in shaping western culture.
- Subjective - Based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes or opinions.
- Objective - Not influenced by personal feelings or opinions in considering and representing facts.

## Key Themes

- *Because men go without saying, it matters when women literally cannot get said at all* - If you can't mark gender in any way, you can't 'correct' the hidden bias in a language by emphasizing women's presence in the world.
- *The male perspective/experience is seen as universal, while the female perspective/experience is seen as niche* - Because women aren't seen and aren't remembered, because male data makes up the majority of what we know, what is male comes to be seen as universal.
- *Male default can be both a cause and consequence of the gender data gap* - worth is a matter of opinion, and opinion is informed by culture. If that culture is as biased as ours, it can't help but be biased against women by default.

# Key Quotes from Introduction

## Introduction: The Default Male

- "When the generic masculine is used, people are more likely to recall famous men than famous women; to estimate a profession as male-dominated; to suggest male candidates for jobs and political appointments." Pg.5
- "...the truth is that getting rid of the generic masculine would only be half the battle: male bias is so embedded in our psyche that even genuinely gender-neutral words are read as male." Pg.9
- "The result of this deeply male-dominated culture is that the male experience, the male perspective, has come to be seen as universal, while the female experience - that of half the global population, after all - is seen as, well, niche." Pg.12
- "It's just that they didn't have broad name recognition because a woman barely has to die before she is forgotten - or before we consign her work to a gender data gap by attributing it to a man." Pg.16
- "But misreading and ignoring identity is exactly what obfuscating maleness under the guise of gender-neutral universality causes us to do." Pg.21
- "The presumption that what is male is universal is a direct consequence of the gender data gap. Whiteness and maleness can only go without saying because most other identities never get said at all." Pg.24
- "It leads to the positioning of women, half the global population, as a minority. With a niche identity and a subjective point of view. In such framing, women are set up to be forgettable. ignorable. dispensable - from culture, from history, from data. And so, women become invisible." Pg.24



## Ponder:

What is your opinion on the default male?  
Do you believe we need to change or should society keep things as they are?

# Part 1 - Daily Life

## Key Definitions

- 'Trip Chaining' - A travel pattern of several small interconnected trips that has been observed in women around the world.
- 'Compulsory Mobility' - A commonly used umbrella term for all trips made for employment and educational purposes.
- Time Poverty - Having very little expendable time; women have time poverty as their paid and unpaid work combines into a longer working day than men.
- Sex-Disaggregated Data - Data that is collected and analyzed separately on males and females.

## Key Themes

- *Women are excluded in infrastructure and design planning due to male bias* - because our culture is heavily male-biased, the alternate needs of women, as opposed to men, aren't always taken into account.
- *Women are faced with danger and discrimination in their everyday life due to the universality of the male perspective and things that are seen as "gender neutral" not being neutral at all* - women are told that gender-neutral spaces are safe and welcoming places for everybody, however, those gender neutral spaces are often actually male-dominated areas in which women are unknowingly (or perhaps knowingly but unable to do anything about it) unwelcome.

# Key Quotes from Part 1

## Can Snow-Clearing be Sexist?

- "They didn't deliberately set out to exclude women. They just didn't think about them. They didn't think to consider if women's needs might be different." Pg.32
- "But if for these decision-makers the home is a 'respite from paid labour' and a 'place for leisure, that is far from its role in most women's lives. Globally, women do three times the amount of unpaid work men do; according to the IMF, this can be further subdivided into twice as much childcare and four times as much housework." Pg.40

## Gender Neutral With Urinals

- "There is a tendency to ever blame women more than male-biased design. but the male-biased design is exactly what the problem is here." Pg.48
- "Clearly, there is an injustice here. But all too often the blame is put on women themselves for feeling fearful rather than planners for designing urban spaces and transit environments that make them feel unsafe. pg54
- "The reality is that half the population has a female body. Half the global population has to deal on a daily basis with the sexualized menace that is visited on that body." Pg.66
- "Women have an equal right to public resources: we must stop excluding them by design." Pg.66

## Discussion Questions

How might a woman's daily life/routine differ from a man's?

What changes would you like to see implemented in your community that further support the habits and lifestyle of women as opposed to males?



# Part 2 - The Workplace

## Key Definitions

- 'The Long Friday' - A day in Iceland in which 90 percent of Icelandic women went on strike and gathered for a rally in Reykjavik's downtown square.
- Unencumbered workers - Workers with little to no care responsibilities.
- Maternity Leave - A period of absence from work granted to a mother before or after the birth of her child.
- The 'Mommy' Track - The non-career track offered in most big Japanese firms which is mostly administrative and offers few opportunities for advancement. known as the 'mommy' track because mommies don't fit into the kind of work culture that is required for somebody on the career track.
- Meritocracy - A system in which economic goods and positions of power are vested in people based on talent, effort and achievement rather than wealth or social class.
- The 'Henry Higgins' effect - In the 1956 musical *my fair lady*, phenetics Henry Higgins is baffled when after months of his put-downs, his protegee-cum-victim Eliza Doolittle finally bites back. "why can't a woman be more like a man?" he grumbles. It's a common complaint and one for which the common solution is to fix the women.

## Key Themes

- *Women's work, paid and unpaid, is the backbone of our society and economy-* we have to start recognizing that women's work is not an added extra, it is not a bonus that we could do without.
- *Women are always the exception and never the default* - because women are not men, they are always being made exceptions when many things seen as exceptions should just go without saying. (ex/ a woman having to ask for her company to cover the cost of childcare to attend an important meeting and them making an 'exception' for her)
- *Meritocracy is a myth* - for the vast majority of hiring decisions around the world, meritocracy is an insidious myth that provides cover to institutional white male bias.

# Key Quotes from Part 2

## The Long Friday

- "There is no such thing as a woman who doesn't work, there is only a woman who isn't *paid* for her work." Pg.70
- "Some call women's segregation into low-paid work a choice. But it's a funny kind of choice when there is no realistic option other than the children not being cared for and the housework not getting done." Pg.76

## The Myth of Meritocracy

- "For the vast majority of hiring decisions around the world, meritocracy is an insidious myth. it is a myth that provides cover to institutional white male bias." Pg.93
- "it is not entirely clear why the tech industry is so afraid of sex-disaggregated employment data, but its love affair with the myth of meritocracy might have something to do with it: if all you need to get the best people is to believe in meritocracy, what use is data to you?" Pg.109

## The Henry Higgins Effect

- "The rise in serious injuries among female workers is linked to the gender data gap: with occupational research traditionally having been focused on male-dominated industries, our knowledge of how to prevent injuries in women is patchy, to say the least." Pg.114
- "Over the past fifty years, breast cancer rates in the industrialized world have risen significantly - but a failure to research female bodies, occupations and environments mean that the data for exactly what is behind this rise is lacking." Pg.115

## Being Worth Less than a shoe

- "Women have always worked. they have worked unpaid, underpaid, underappreciated, and invisibly, but they have always worked. but the modern workplace does not work for women." Pg.142
- "We have to start recognizing that the work women do is not an added extra, a bonus we could do without: women's work, paid and unpaid, is the backbone of our society and economy. " Pg.142



## Research:

How can your workplace implement more women-inclusive approaches/strategies to ensure efficiency and equality for both genders?



# Part 3 - Design

## Key Definitions

- The Plough Hypothesis - That societies that had historically used the plough would be less gender-equal than those who hadn't.
- 'One Size Fits Men' - An approach to seemingly gender-neutral products in which they are made for men without the consideration of women.
- Stereotype - A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.

## Key Themes

- *Commonly female-used appliances should be designed with women in mind* - if appliances are designed with women in mind, and the makers of such appliances spoke to the women, the use of such appliances would be much more efficient and beneficial.
- *The one-size-fits-men approach to gender-neutral products is disadvantaging women* - for example, piano keyboards are made for the male handspan, and as females have on average smaller hands, playing on the standard piano keyboard can be challenging for female pianists.
- *Many things are developed without reference to women's needs and as a result, these tools are failing them on a grand scale* - women due to this become poorer, which makes them sicker and could even kill them.

# Key Quotes from Part 3

## The Plough Hypothesis

- "... agriculture (which is done using handheld tools like hoes or digging sticks) vs plough agriculture (usually driven by a powerful animal like a horse or an ox) the idea being that the former is more accessible to women." Pg.145
- "Ploughing requires 'significant upper body strength, grip strength, and bursts of power, which are needed to either pull the plough or control the animal that pulls it' and this privileges male bodies." Pg.145
- "This decades-long failure to design either stoves or implementation plans that account for women's needs is a health disaster that is said to get worse." Pg.155

## One Size Fits Men

- "This one-size-fits-men approach to gender-neutral products is disadvantaging women." Pg.157
- "The standard piano keyboard doesn't just make it harder for female pianists to match the level of acclaim reached by their male colleagues: it also affects their health. ...female musicians suffered 'disproportionately' from work-related injuries, and that keyboard players were among those 'most at risk.'" Pg.158
- "Our current approach to product design is disadvantaging women." Pg.167

## A sea of dudes

- "... It's hard to understand why a proper female crash test dummy hasn't been developed and made a legal requirement in car tests years ago." Pg.191
- "... Women and their bodies are routinely ignored in design and planning... from development initiatives to smartphones, from medical tech to stoves, tools (whether physical or financial) are developed without reference to women's needs, as a result, these tools are failing them on a grand scale... it makes them poor, it makes them sicker and, when it comes to cars, it is killing them." Pg.191



### Ponder:

What are your thoughts/feelings after reading about the devastating consequences of male bias and failure to include women in things such as crash tests?

# Part 4 - Going to the Doctor

## Key Definitions

- Thalidomide - A drug in the 1960s prescribed to pregnant women to treat morning sickness, that affected fetal development. (had previously been considered safe because its developers 'could not find a dose high enough to kill a rat').
- Atypical - Not representative of a type, group, or class.
- Yentl - A 1983 film where Barbara Streisand plays a young Jewish woman in Poland pretending to be a man in order to receive an education.
- 'Yentl syndrome' - The phenomenon where women are misdiagnosed and poorly treated unless their symptoms or diseases conform to that of men.

## Key Themes

- *Women are not just smaller men, male and female bodies differ down to a cellular level.* - Researchers have found sex differences in every tissue and organ system in the human body, as well as in the 'prevalence, course and severity' of the majority of common human diseases.
- *Medicine has functioned on the assumption that male bodies represent humanity as a whole* - The medical data gap leaves women at a disadvantage and facing danger when drugs are designed with men in mind.
- *The ignoring, dismissal and disbelief of women's bodies, symptoms and diseases* - The medical field is letting women down by consistently disregarding their concerns about any illnesses they may have due to medical gender data gaps and the belief that men are the default humans.

# Key Quotes from Part 4

## The Drugs Don't Work

- "Researchers have found sex differences in every tissue and organ system in the human body, as well as in the 'prevalence, course and severity of the majority of human diseases." Pg.198
- "...Women are not just smaller men: Male and Female bodies differ down to a cellular level." Pg.199
- "Because of their routine exclusion from clinical trials, we lack solid data on how to treat pregnant women for pretty much anything." Pg.200
- "For millennia, medicine has functioned on the assumption that male bodies can represent humanity as a whole." Pg. 215

## Yentl Syndrome

- "'Yentl Syndrome' describes the phenomenon whereby women are misdiagnosed and poorly treated unless their symptoms or diseases conform to that of men." Pg.217
- (referring to men)"... data collected on them does not, cannot, and should not, apply to women." Pg.234
- "We need to train doctors to listen to women, and to recognize that their inability to diagnose a woman may not be because she is lying or being hysterical: the problem may be the gender data gaps in their knowledge." Pg. 235

## Discussion Questions

Have you or somebody you know/know of struggled with Yentl Syndrome when going to the doctors?  
What would you imagine the ideal healthcare system looks like?

What are some ways you can think of that women can advocate for fair and equitable healthcare treatment?



# Part 5 - Public life

## Key Definitions

- GDP (Gross Domestic Product) - The standard measure of a country's economy. Compiled from data collected in a range of surveys and represents the total value of goods and services a country produces.
- Zombie Stat - A spurious statistic that just won't die; in part because it feels intuitively right.
- Misogynistic - Strongly prejudiced against women.

## Key Themes

- *Women's unpaid work is work that society depends on, and it is work from which society as a whole benefits.* - We like to think that unpaid work women do is just about individual women caring for their individual family members for their own individual benefit. it isn't.
- *Because we don't systematically collect data on how different systems affect women, they can be discriminatory against them* - For example, sex-disaggregated tax data is not collected very often, and therefore the impact of taxation on women is an 'underdeveloped area of research.
- *Mistaking male bias for impartial, universal, common sense means that when people (men) come across someone trying to level the playing field, it's often all they can see* - If the majority of people in power are men - and they are - the majority of people in power just don't see how male bias being 'common sense' is in fact a product of the gender data gap.

# Key Quotes from Part 5

## A Costless Resource to Exploit

- "Of course, it's not just childcare that affects female paid employment. elder care also takes up significant amounts of women's time and demand is set to increase." Pg.247
- "Women's unpaid work is work that society depends on, and it is work from which society as a whole benefits. When the government cuts public services that we all pay for with our taxes, demand for those services doesn't suddenly cease. The work is simply transferred to women..." Pg.252

## From Purse to Wallet

- "... A couple paying less tax doesn't necessarily translate into more money in the secondary earner's pocket than if she had filed individually." Pg.259
- "In short, the current US tax system for married couples in effect penalizes women in paid employment, ..." Pg.259

## Women's Rights are Human Rights

- "... decades of evidence demonstrate that the presence of women in politics makes a tangible difference to the laws that get passed." Pg.266
- "The unpalatable truth is that it is still considered unladylike for a woman to want to be president." Pg.268
- "... we have to implement an evidence-based electoral system that is designed to ensure that a diverse group of people is in the room when it comes to deciding the laws that govern us all." Pg.286



## Ponder:

How might culture and societal pressure play a role in the amount of unpaid labour a woman does?

# Part 6 - When it goes wrong

## Key Definitions

- "We Will Rebuild" - A post-disaster relief redevelopment setup following 1992 Hurricane Andrew. Out of all 56 people on the invite-only decision maker board, only 11 were women.
- Sexism - Prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination, typically against women, based on sex.
- Caregiver - A paid or unpaid member of a person's social network that helps them with the activities of daily living.

## Key Themes

- *The failure to include women in post-disaster efforts can end in farce* - For example, when an earthquake hit Gujarat in India, they built houses without kitchens. Women were not included or consulted in the planning process and as a result, there were kitchenless homes.
- *By men for men* - Many things have been built and organized by men for men. for example, cyclone shelters used to just be a very large concrete box, without separate latrines for men and women.
- *When we exclude half of humanity from the production of knowledge we lose out on potentially transformative insights* - For example, Diana Tamina crocheted models of hyperbolic planes, something that a male is unlikely to have done given that few men are keen crocheters.

# Key Quotes from Part 6

## Who will rebuild?

- "When things go wrong - war, natural disaster, pandemic - all the usual data gaps we have seen everywhere from urban planning to medical care are magnified and multiplied." Pg.289
- "The failure to include women in post-disaster efforts can end in farce." Pg.290
- "It's a rationale that is clearly a function of sexism, a symptom of a world that believes women's lives are less important than human lives, where 'human' means male." Pg. 294

## It's not the disaster that kills you.

- "In modern warfare, it is civilians, rather than combatants, who are most likely to be killed." Pg.296
- "Throw ebola into the mix and women suddenly had two types of death to fear: from childbirth and from ebola." Pg.298
- "Women's care-taking responsibilities also have more deadly consequences for women in pandemics. Women do the majority of care for the sick at home. They also make up the majority of traditional birth attendants, nurses, cleaners and laundry workers in hospitals, where there is a risk of exposure, particularly given these kinds of workers do not get the same support and protection as doctors, who are predominately men'." Pg.299

## Discussion Questions

Why is it so important to include women in disaster relief planning?

How can the acknowledgement and inclusion of women, and the closing of the global gender gap, lead to benefits for society and the global population as a whole?

