DataHaven
Classroom Materials

Title of Material: The Value of Data (Short Version)

Topics Discussed: Data usage

Skills Utilized: Reading skills, annotations, reflective questions

Format: Individual or in small groups, discuss as a class

In Person or Online: Either

Procedure/Instruction Suggestions:
This is the short version of the "Value of Data", there is also a longer version available.

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The Value of Data

Directions: Read and annotate the excerpt below and analyze what it is saying about data and data collection. Then, answer the thought questions.

Data are never truly objective, either. They might help identify patterns and connect bits of information, but every decision that goes into how data are defined, measured, interpreted, and acted upon is subject to the same bias we know exists in our society. In a time of climate change denial, re-politicization of the Census, and fake news (both the accusation used to deflect criticism and the actual, webclick-optimized phenomenon) dry facts are not enough in pushing for a more just, equitable, and sustainable society. Data are even used in ways that deepen inequality. Mortgage approvals and bail amounts are made by black-box algorithms that their subjects do not even know about. Data tools, such as the Constitutionally-mandated Census count or the geographical demarcation of where you vote and how much your vote matters, can be used to include and support people, or to render them uncounted, unheard, and invisible. The fact that data can be used in these ways shows just how powerful they can be, and why it is important to understand that social prejudice is often reflected in something presented as impartial.

Thought Questions

1. What in the article stuck out to you the most? It can be something you learned, something that surprised you, something that made you upset, or something you have heard of before.

2. What is a bias? Give an example of one.

3. How can bias impact data collection?

4. What does the quote, "The fact that data can be used in these ways shows just how powerful they can be, and why it is important to understand that social prejudice is often reflected in something presented as impartial" mean?

5. How can *you* use data to help create a more equitable society, rather than deepen inequality?