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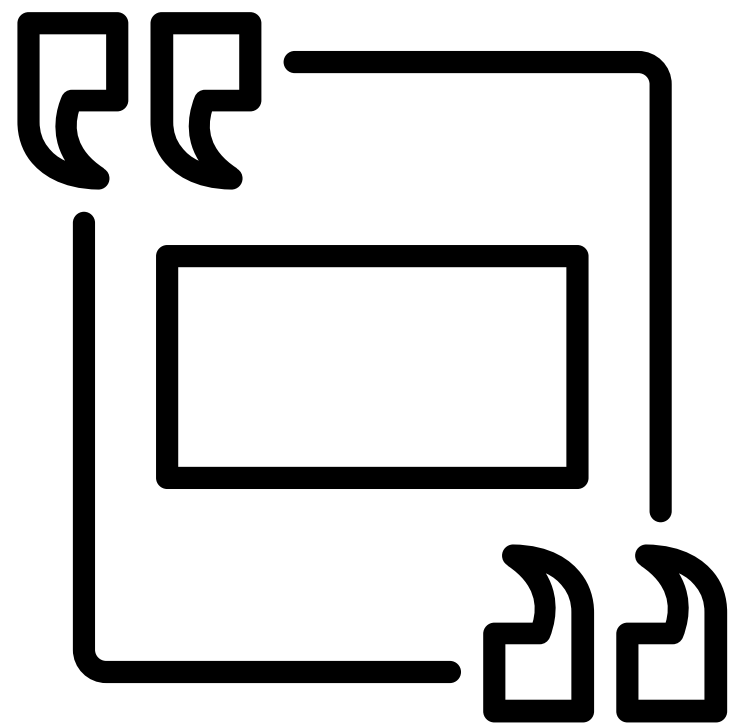
**BLACK
LIVING
DATA
BOOKLET**

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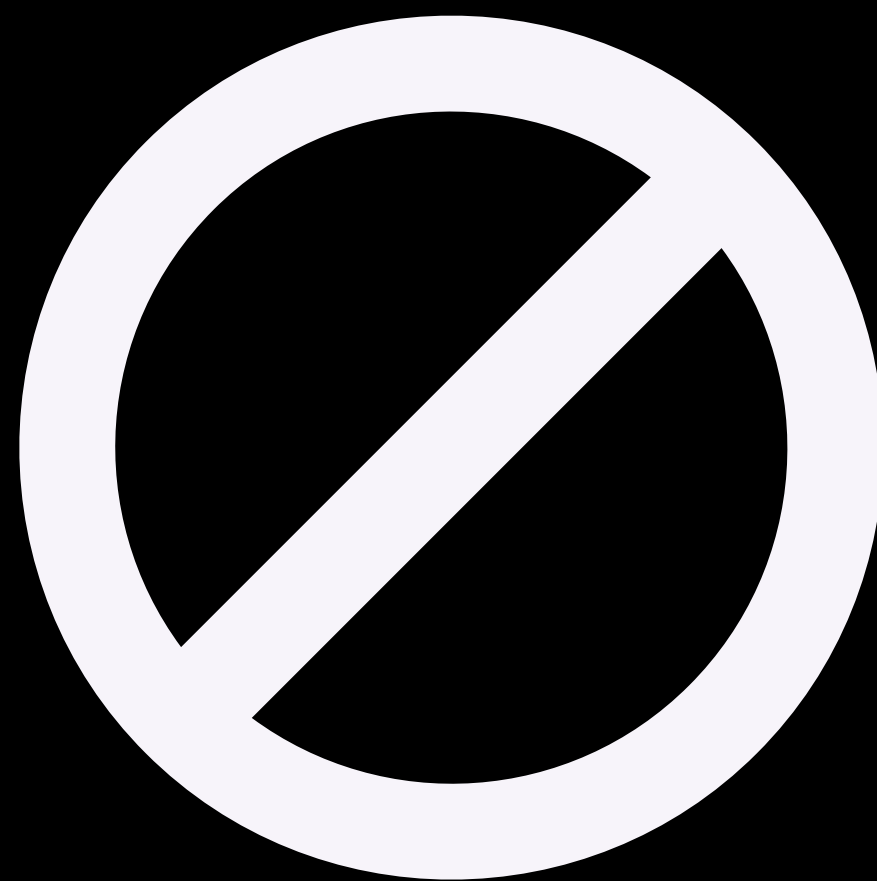
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Here you have the Black Living Data Booklet or the BLDB, a uniquely crafted manual and manifesto. This manual is a resource to help scholars, educators, and community members to better understand and engage with data while utilizing ethical and social justice-oriented practices. As a manifesto, this project defines and articulates the intents and purposes of Black Living Data, what it is, and how the history of data collection led to this definition. This articulation of Black Living Data informs how I think about the collection, curation, and critique of data and the creation of Black community-based projects. This booklet includes frameworks for understanding the ethics of Black Living Data, a “how to” guide for decoding data and information on Black communities, questions, and writing prompts. Overall, I hope that this booklet encourages you to approach data differently through a better understanding of data discernment and community care.

FOLLOW THE NUMBERS



The Black Living Data Booklet uses a citation style in the form of endnotes. In this booklet, endnote citations not only serve as a reference for quotes and paraphrasing but also as a record of the ideas through which I have found inspiration and guidance. You can find citations organized by page number at the back of this booklet.



**STOP AND READ THE TERMS
OF SERVICE**

TERMS OF SERVICE

For many users, reading the terms of service that come with using digital platforms and technologies is actually just a quick skim across the document before rushing to hit the “Agree” button and getting to the fun of engaging in the online world.

However, it is through these terms of service that many companies hide data collection and sharing practices that don't uphold ethical principles of data ownership. Most corporate terms of service contracts and licensing agreements essentially take away the rights of users and give access and ownership of data to those with the power and money to purchase access to that information. Therefore, it is important to read and critique the terms of every platform or technology that you choose to use.

PRIVACY & TRANSPARENCY

There is a slippery relationship between public and private space online, as well as the relationship between public and private information. What we truly know about technology, platforms, and the practices of the corporations and creators behind them is typically opaque; users are left searching in the murky depths of service agreements to learn what rights they give up and what rights they retain online. For these reasons, the Black Living Data Booklet calls for legislation and policy that supports retaining the privacy of citizen data and the tenants of informed consent and transparency in the practices of data collection and technological creation.

WHAT IS
BLACK LIVING DATA?

DEFINING THE TERMS

HISTORY & STUDY

"I use Black Data to think through some of the historical and contemporary ways that Black queer people, like other people of African descent and people of color more broadly, are hailed by big data, through which techniques of race and racism reduce our lives to mere numbers."

SHAKA MCGLOTTEN [1]

WHAT IS BLACK LIVING DATA?

Black Living Data is data on and for Black lives and experiences. Black Living Data is not information for information's sake; Black Living Data has a purpose—it plays a role, even if that role is to simply exemplify Black culture and community. This data lives for sharing: Black Living Data is information that has been collected and/or curated for collaboration, community, and creativity. Black Living Data is not the extraction of Black experience for the sole purpose of academic research and study, government surveillance and policing, or advertising and financial gain. Black Living Data is homegrown and made by humans; AI and algorithms need not apply. Black Living Data knows that bigger isn't always better, and Black Living Data is never too small to count. Black Living Data does the work of being for and by Black people. Black Living Data includes the voices of ALL Black diasporic people because We are NOT a Monolith. Black Living Data empowers Black individuals and communities at all stages of data collection and curation by encouraging community members to collect and store their own data. Black Living Data privileges the preservation of cultural heritage by pushing for the importance of Black stories and storytelling—not just science and statistics.

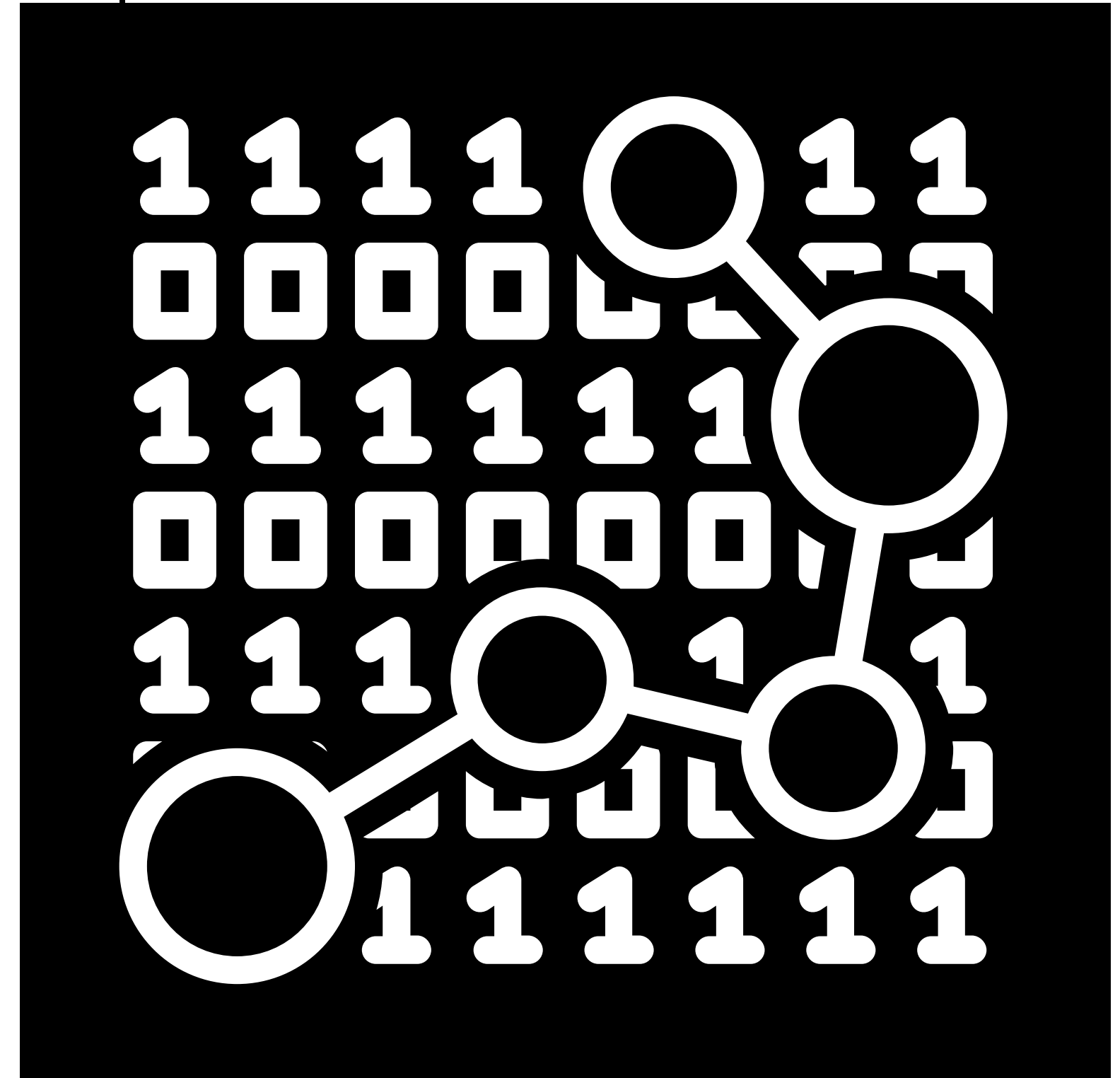
THE BLACK STUDY OF LIVING DATA

Although this particular understanding of Black Living Data may be new to some, Black Living Data has existed in research and projects produced by Black researchers and community members for decades, if not centuries. Activities ranging from tracing ancestral lineage, writing and recording oral histories, sharing stories from griots and community leaders, Black demography and cartography (the study of populations and maps), as well as the curation of creative works are just a few examples of how individuals work with Black Living Data.

Historically, scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta School of Sociology and collaborative community groups such as the Detroit Geographic Expedition headed by Dr. William Bunge and Gwendolyn Warren, have outlined specific models and methods for the collection and curation of Black Living Data. Using the methods of data visualization and analysis, projects such as DuBois' Data Portraits [2] and the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute Field Notes [3] taught community members how to collect and visualize data in ways beyond those that were useful to the researchers. Black Living Data connects scholars with community groups and activists to ensure that research projects are mutually beneficial to all involved.

DISRUPTING DATA HISTORY

Although Black community members have historically conducted their own research to collect data through interviews, surveys, oral history, etc., the type of research on Black communities that receives the most recognition is typically conducted by government or public/private agencies in positions of power and control. These entities have used Black communities as “natural laboratories” and Black people as human research subjects to collect data on, but not for. Within corporations and institutions, the metrics of success are less about providing community support and more about research and funding. In this sense, research from outside of communities has resulted in data about Black people but not Black Living Data. Instead, the collection and curation of data on Black people from community outsiders has been used to further marginalize and pathologize Black communities.



**WE SEE THE
DISEMPOWERMENT OF
THE BLACK DIASPORIC
COMMUNITY WHEN**

RESEARCHERS & INSTITUTES

create reports, share statistics, and create data visualizations and analysis that do not include the histories, voices, or lived experiences of Black community members.

ENTITIES OF GOVERNMENT

institute policies and procedures that do not take into account the lived realities of systemic racism and the marginalization of intersectional communities.

MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS

support practitioners and practices that mistreat Black patients based on their health data and the discourse around Black health, pain, and pre-existing conditions.

TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

create platforms and applications without the input of Black people that reflect problematic practices and protocols of information sharing and data collection.

WE SEE THE DISEMPOWERMENT OF BLACK DIASPORIC PEOPLE WHEN ALGORITHMS AND RECOMMENDATION SYSTEMS ALLOW FOR THE SPREAD OF EXPLOITATIVE AND/OR HARMFUL DISCOURSE AND DIGITAL RHETORIC THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS WHILE CENSORING THE CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY BASED CONTENT OF BLACK AND QUEER COMMUNITIES. THIS INFORMATION AND DATA IS THEN SOLD AND/OR DISSEMINATED THROUGH PLATFORMS UNDER THE IDEOLOGY THAT DATA AND ALGORITHMIC DECISION MAKING IS NEUTRAL, WITHOUT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGIES EMBEDDED IN THIS DECISION MAKING.

WE SEE EMPOWERMENT WHEN BLACK LIVING DATA MATTERS

Knowing the history of Black data collection and curation, we can see how a culturally informed study of Black Living Data matters in so many ways and for so many individuals because it empowers us to critically engage with the past, present, and future of data collection and analysis.

BLACK LIVING DATA MATTERS FOR

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouraging communities that have been oppressed and marginalized by the racist practices of data collection and analysis to collect their own data and hold institutions accountable to the norms of data ethics, privacy, and transparency.

ENGAGEMENT

Engaging the frameworks of liberatory and anti-racist/sexist/etc. forms of research and political organizing.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowering scholars and practitioners that are committed to the critical and community-focused study of data.

ETHICS OF BLACK LIVING DATA

COMMUNITY CARE IN COLLECTION,
CURATION, AND CRITIQUE

FEMINIST ETHICS OF CARE [4,5].

Black Living Data incorporates a feminist ethics of care, which highlights the importance of relationships and the interdependence of communities. While data from Black people have provided the original cells and culture from which many industries, research programs, and fields of knowledge have been built, there has not been an impetus to give back to the communities providing the data. By disconnecting data from numerical systems of financial gain, we are able to connect data to ways in which it can be used to care for and about Black people and their communities.

The commodification of Black life through data collection and analysis has resulted in writing, researching, and reporting on Black people that disregards the validity of the Black experience. Therefore, practices that care for and about Black Living Data must come from practitioners who care for and about Black communities. McGlotten's "Black Data" essay [6] additionally calls for an understanding of Black queer practices which deconstruct data as a purely numerical concept by providing examples that focus on art and stories. Caring for and about Black Living Data is then a push to understand the intersections within Black communities by embracing all of the identities included in and inherent to the diaspora, as well as their many cultural productions.

COLLECTION

Collection is the initial process of gathering and understanding data. This process must be informed by Black history, lived experience, culture, and community members.

CURATION

Curation is the storage, preservation, and organization of data after it is collected. The process of curation must also be informed by care for the researcher and the community.

CRITIQUE

Critique is a reflexive process where we interrogate research design and intention before, during, and after data collection and curation. Critique is inclusive and considerate of community members.

BLACK LIVING DATA COLLECTION

Researchers and community members who are invested in data collection focused on Black communities must hold themselves to the ethics and standards of Black Living Data. A turn away from extractive methods, Black Living Data collection is based on a participatory relationship with Black community members. Black Living Data collection begins with asking communities about their data wants and needs to determine what types of data should be collected within a particular community and what insights community members hope to gain from the data collection.

BLACK LIVING DATA CURATION

With collection comes curation and models for creating archives and databases to manage what has been collected. Black Living Data curation focuses on creating collections that are accessible and useful to community members. Pushing back against the curation of data for the purposes of institutional control and ownership, Black Living Data curation is invested in connecting Black community members to their data through sovereignty and stewardship [7].

**IN CRITIQUING DATA
COLLECTION AND
CURATION,
SOME QUESTIONS
WE SHOULD ASK
ARE:**

- What role does the community of study play in the collection and curation process?
- Who is collecting this data and for what reason?
- What is the purpose of this project and who does it benefit?
- Is this data anonymous or identifiable; i.e., can this data be traced to the identities/locations of the individuals/communities that it comes from?
- How will this data be utilized after it is collected?
- How will the data be stored and for how long?
- What are the methods of analysis and visualization?
- What is the justification for those decisions?

**PUBLIC SERVICE
ANNOUNCEMENT
BLACK LIVING DATA AND
THE TRAUMA OF
DEAD DATA**

Much of the data on Black people not only reflects deficit narratives of Black communities, but discussions of Black death and disease. These narratives are told through graphs and visualizations, as well as news stories and media, that reiterate and replay centuries-old narratives and reflect the precarity of Black life and safety as a Black person living and breathing within a system that is not designed to let a Black person just live. While keeping a record of Black death is important, it should also be stated that Black Living Data's focus on lived experience speaks directly to concerns around the trauma of being inundated by the data of the dead, e.g., death tolls, murders, mortality rates, etc. This trauma is not only material to the people who will view this data, but also to the people who are researching and collecting this data.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO UTILIZE AN ETHICS OF CARE IN
OUR DATA COLLECTION AND SHARING
PRACTICES THAT CONTENDS WITH THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN BLACK DEATH AND TRAUMA?

Instead of turning away from these statistics, and the potential of trauma, this manual recognizes the importance of data stewardship that sensitively and skillfully articulates Black death and trauma to both those within and outside of the Black community. [8]

In sharing information or data on Black death, researchers and community members should ask themselves:

- What is the purpose of this information/data? And is this data helpful to the Black community?
- Do the benefits of sharing this data outweigh the potential costs of fear and residual trauma?
- What resources are provided or shared to help mitigate or speak to the potential trauma that may come from interacting with this data?
- Is this information or data being visualized in a way that is useful to Black community members?
- Is this data sensitive in nature? If so, should access to this data be limited or require permission?
- How does this data demonstrate an ethics of care? Is this data an example of caring for/about Black communities outside of institutions of power and control?

Methodologically, Black Living Data offers an ethics of care committed to shared power [9] and a relationship to data collection, curation, and critique that is participatory, interpretive, and informed by communities. By understanding Black Living Data as inherent to Black communities, any research which utilizes data on or about Black people must be committed to data collection, curation, and critique that acknowledges and accounts for the vulnerabilities of not only the communities but also the community-based data. Caring for Black Living Data means protecting it from those who do not adhere to the above stated beliefs and goals. Caring about Black Living Data is taking steps to ensure that this data doesn't end up in the wrong hands through standards of usage and models of accessibility that don't take privacy and permissions into consideration.

BLACK LIVING DATA IN COMMUNITIES

DOWNLOADING AND DECODING DATA

DATA DISTURBANCES

Perhaps you are scrolling through your newsfeed on Facebook or checking the trending topics on Twitter when you see a story or a hashtag and you feel something strange, like a disturbance in the force. *Data disturbances* are those moments when something feels off or not quite right about a data visualization, study, or report.

These data disturbances may cause you to question your own discernment and data literacy skills, especially if the data is coming from a trusted, credible, or widely-known source. It is important in those moments that you recognize and honor these data disturbances regardless of their source.



DISCERNING A DISTURBANCE

For many years, the credentialism and credibility of institutions in positions of authority have taken the power away from communities to call out problematic research studies and practices. By recognizing these data disturbances, you can build up your own internal system of trust and comprehension when it comes to interpreting research and data.

3 STEPS TO DOWNLOAD AND DECODE DATA BEFORE SHARING

STEP 1: CHECK CREDENTIALS AND CREDIBILITY

Whether sharing or consuming information, it is always important to first check your sources.

STEP 2: DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE

Research and evaluate the source sharing the information or data based on what you know about that person/entity, their agenda, and how they relate to the Black community.

STEP 3: DIGEST THE DATA

Read and reflect on the purpose and findings of whatever it is you choose to share.

DOWNLOADING DATA

While most of us are educated in reading books and articles, in our new and changing digital world it is important for us to also be literate in data and online content. In school, many of us were taught what Paolo Freire calls a “banking model” of education [10], in that we learned to be passive consumers of knowledge—open receptacles for boundless information, so long as it comes from those with credentials or in positions of authority. This passive consumerism carries on after our schooling and education, in a world where we binge media and data. In contrast, data and information literacy encourages us to be active creators and critics of the information that we consume.

CREDENTIALS AND CREDIBILITY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Where does this information come from, e.g., a newspaper, television, social media, etc.?
- Who is the source of this information, e.g., a journalist, researchers, an institution, a celebrity, etc.?
- What is the purpose of this information, e.g., an argument, a claim, findings, conclusions, etc.?
- What does this information mean to me and my community?
- What qualifies this particular person/institution/source to make these particular claims?
- Does this information make sense?
- Does it make sense that this information is coming from this source?

In checking the credentials and credibility of your sources, it is also important to recognize that while some sources may have credentials (e.g., a degree, position of authority, etc.) that does not mean that those sources are credible. Discernment is intuitively and intellectually recognizing the difference between having credentials and being credible.

STEP 1 COMPLETE. ON TO STEP 2.

DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE

For Black Living Data, doing your due diligence translates into knowing your community. This means knowing the leaders, influencers, and cultural icons who spread the most information and are in positions that allow them to influence public and political thought. Due diligence means researching the person/entity who is the source of information or data and evaluating what you know about them, their agenda, and how they relate to the Black community. Ask yourself:

- Is this information being shared for the betterment of the Black community?
- Could there be another reason this information is being shared, e.g., paid partnerships/sponsorships, political campaigning, exclusionary or oppressive beliefs (homophobia, sexism, ableism, etc.)?

By doing your due diligence you learn not to take information and data at face value and to instead ask the right questions regarding the meanings and messages that can be encoded therein. Doing your due diligence means to delve deep into the intentions behind those who share information and data.

**STEP 2 COMPLETE.
CONTINUE TO STEP 3.**

**DIGEST YOUR
DATA
=
WAIT AND
LET IT
MARINATE!**

The quick moving nature of information online, and much of our educational experience, has encouraged us to binge media, to quickly consume information and then spit it back out. As mediated data and information becomes more important within our society, we are driven to consume the information that comes across our path as quickly as possible before re-sharing. However, it is important that we digest data before we share it. By consuming and digesting data, I mean reading and recognizing the purpose and findings of whatever it is you choose to share. To engage in data literacy through discernment we let the information figuratively sit in our stomachs after consuming it, to ensure that we not only understand what we are sharing but also that the information digests properly and meaningfully.

If the data doesn't sit right after consumption, you have the option to not share that information with others. Alternatively, you can do the work of challenging that data and countering the information or narrative being presented. If the data instead supports what you already know to be true about Black data and discourse, then feel free to confirm and share!

STEP 3 COMPLETE!

COUNTER THE NARRATIVE

When information doesn't pass the test of discernment, you have the power to present evidence which counters that narrative or challenges the data through your understanding of Black life. Countering the narrative can mean re-sharing a tweet with your own comments, writing a blog post on a study or article that is widely circulating, or simply replying to a post that you see within your social network. In countering the narrative, you are using your own knowledge of Black Living Data and discourse to inform and educate others.

CONFIRM AND SHARE

Data that is helpful or informative to Black communities is not always the most popular or widely distributed. Therefore, if you get a useful download of data, why not share it with others? By sharing important data and information within your community or social network, you are positioning yourself as a conduit for positive messages to flow. As your skills in data discernment grow, you may also become an opinion leader in your community, fact-checking information and sharing your own data to empower yourself and help others!

While there has been a history of using statistical data to tell stories that reflect poorly on the Black community, data storytelling allows for a greater sense of self-determination and empowerment. Data storytelling is not only used to craft narratives around newly collected data; data storytelling can also be used to counter data narratives that already exist in the world. By using data to tell new stories, data storytellers can literally re-write harmful narratives that have been used to the detriment of Black communities. Through the utilization of ethos, logos, and pathos—modes of persuasion that include ethics, logic, and emotion—stories of Black lived experiences can appeal to a wide audience.

DATA SCIENCE TO DATA STORY

Data science focuses on the numerical evaluation of information, but this focus on numbers and statistics does not always reflect the reality and complexities of the human lives behind the data being analyzed. Data is not created in a vacuum; information always comes from somewhere or someone. Though data ultimately exists within the virtual worlds of databases and digital tools, Black Living Data is generated from the real-life experiences of human beings.

While you may not be a data scientist, you are more than capable of becoming a data storyteller. Data storytellers look beyond the data analytics and graphics of data scientists to get at the narratives underlying the numbers; they see what the data can do by articulating its significance. When it comes to Black Living Data, data storytellers communicate graphs and visualizations in a way that is comprehensible and useful to Black communities and to the study of Black diasporic people. By couching Black Living Data with the knowledge and narratives of Black culture and heritage, you, as a data storyteller, can bring a greater depth of meaning and insight to data and numerical findings.

BLACK LIVING DATA IN DEMONSTRATION

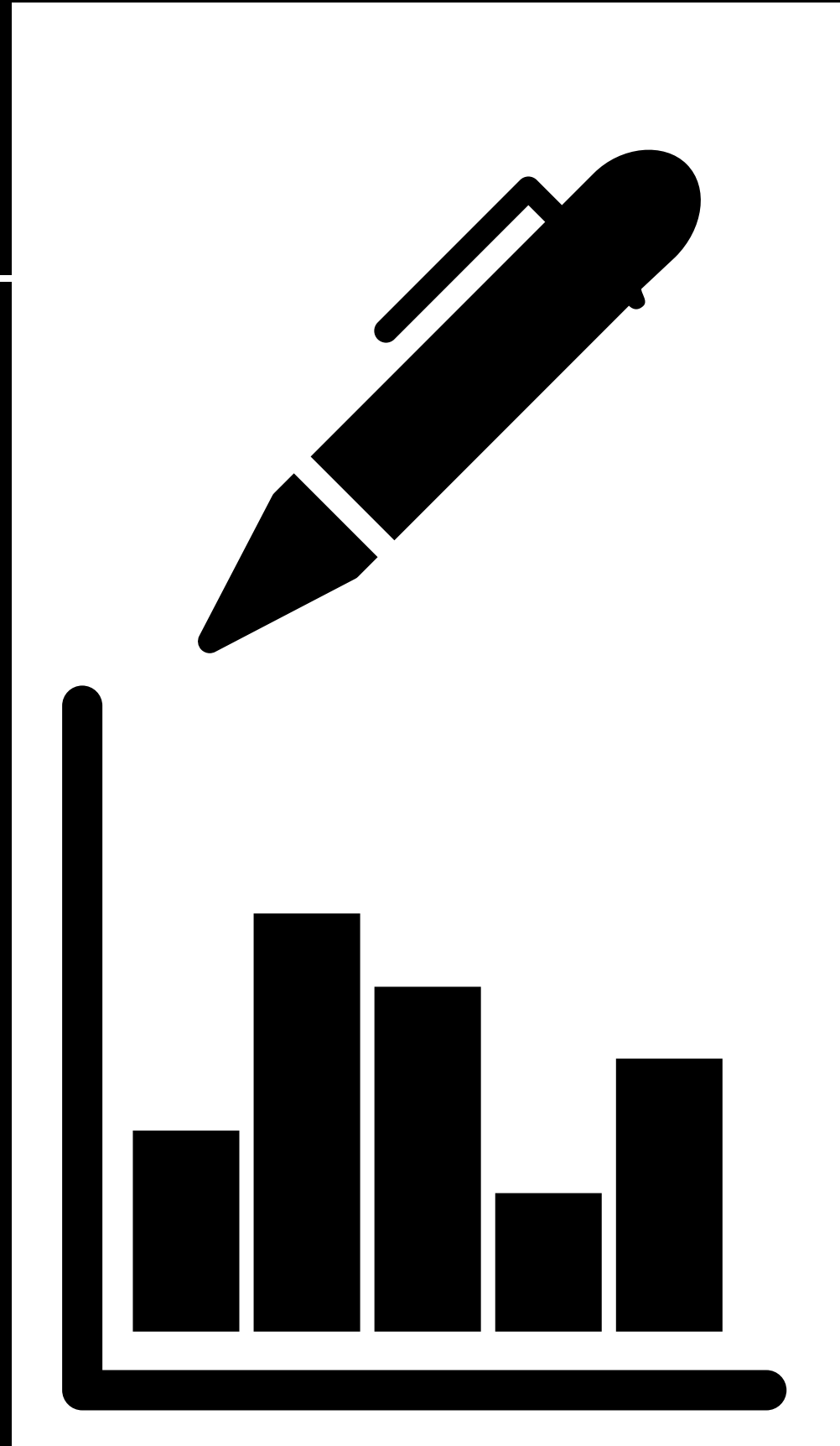
WRITING PROMPTS AND EXERCISES

The concept of the quantified self is demonstrated frequently in our utilization of various tools and technologies to record our activity and movement. As social media platforms and technologies construct narratives of our lived experiences through Facebook Memories, Twitter trending topics, and Instagram stories, the ephemerality of the internet and the question of its accuracy comes into sharp focus. It is therefore important to consider how we can take back control of the narrative and the record-keeping of our lives and our communities, whether over the course of a brief time period or a lifetime.

PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL DATA COLLECTION

The following pages provide examples of different ways that you can begin to collect data for personal or communal archives. Instead of simply allowing digital technologies to record, remind, and remember our lives for us, try the following writing exercises to learn how to create a personal archive of your own lived experiences. These exercises help you to quantify yourself through the collection of your own living data and community engagement. Through analyzing the influence of the world around you, you are able not only to develop a better understanding of yourself but also of the role that you play within the collective.

DAILY JOURNAL VS. DATA DIARY



A daily journal is one of the simplest ways to quantify the self and keep an accurate record of your experiences that you can then look back on over the years. Journals can be digital or physical and act as a daily grounding practice. For many people it is helpful to develop a routine, a specific length of time, or a set number of pages for their journaling.

Similar to the personal journal, a data diary specifically tracks your engagement with information, media, and data. This could be the news stories that you watch, television consumption, or the graphs and statistics that you come across in your day-to-day reality.

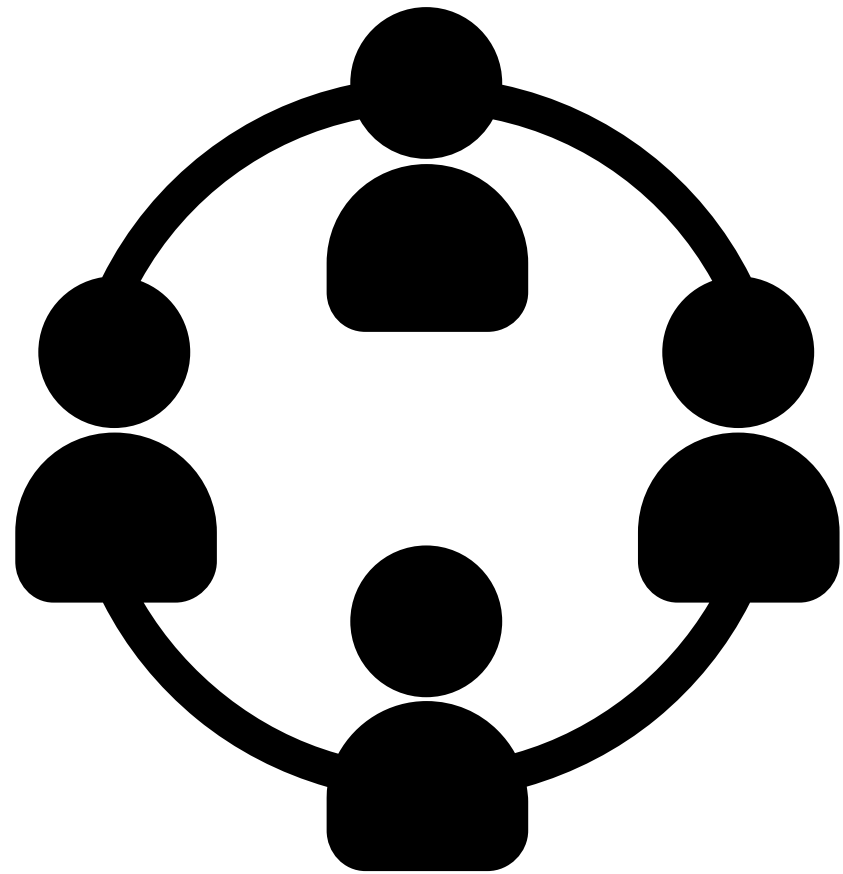
DATA DIARY QUESTIONS

- What events or experiences had the greatest impression on me today?
- What events or experiences do I perceive as having little importance today but are worthy of more attention and care?
- How did I feel today? How do I feel as I write this journal?
- How does my individual experience/feelings relate to what's going on in my community and the world around me?
- What media/information/data did I consume today?
- How did I feel after consuming this information or data?

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Create a table in your journal to track your data and information consumption in relation to the effects of that data/information (i.e., your feelings).

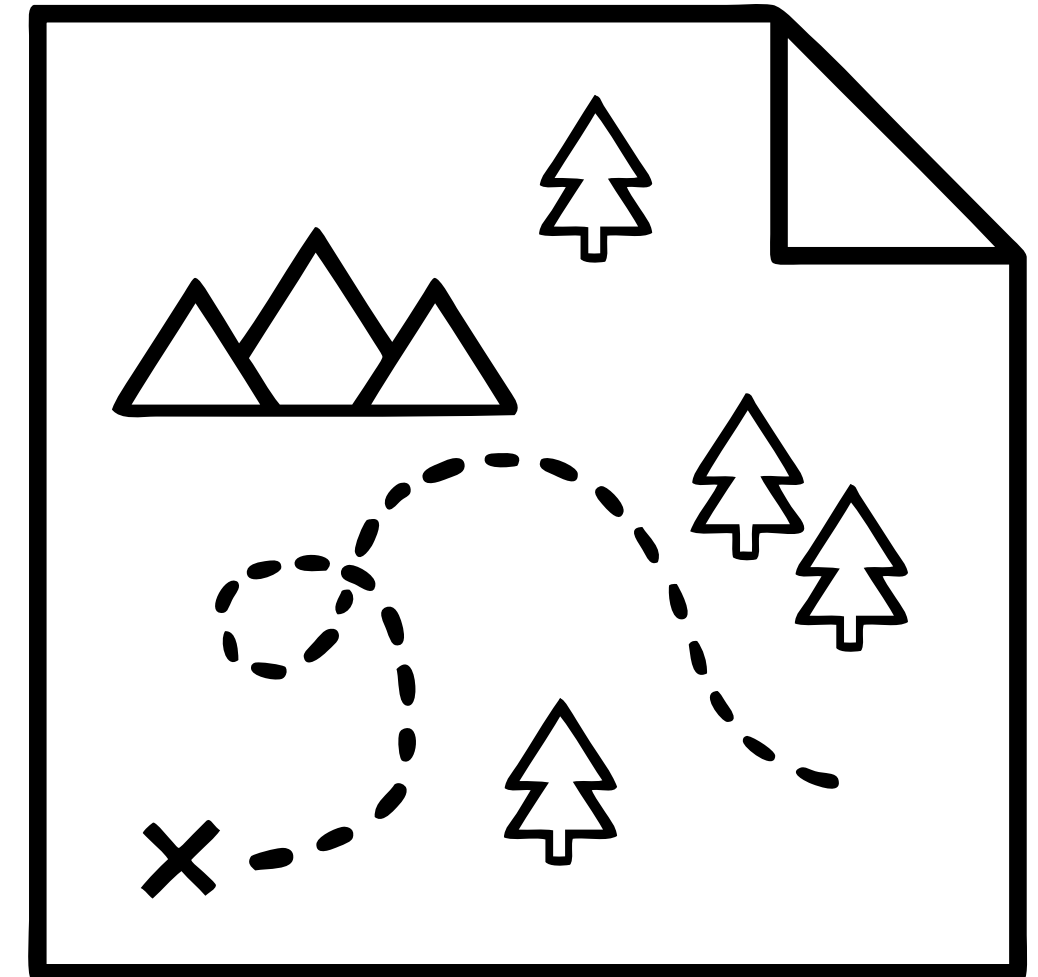
COMMUNITY ARCHIVES



Community-based data and archives should be driven by an investment in collecting data that is important to a particular group or area. Because many people do not keep records for themselves or their communities, much of community history and the institutional memory of elders and families becomes lost over time. In establishing community-based archives, you should review the previous sections herein on data collection and do additional research on informed consent and getting permission to collect data from and with community members. On the following page is a list of different methods for collecting data of lived experiences that support community-based data and archives.

COMMUNITY DATA EXAMPLES

- Photographs of community members or important events/activities, e.g., parades, parties, celebrations, etc.
- Recorded interviews with community members about a specific topic regarding their lived experience within this community.
- Collection of first person accounts (auto-ethnography) of your own relationship with a community or with various individuals.
- Materials generated by a community, e.g., flyers, announcements, official mail/ordinances, etc.
- Spatial/network maps of particular spaces/places or genealogies of your community.



Mapping encourages us to think through the relationship between our understanding of our role within a community and the boundaries of belonging that physically and metaphorically create that community.

REFERERNCES AND RESOURCES

The following resources are some of the projects, organizations, and writings that positively influenced the creation of the Black Living Data Booklet. I hope that you find practical knowledge and inspiration in this manual and in the additional resources provided here.

- "'I'm Still Surviving'_project: A History of Women's HIV experiences"
- Black Feminist Futures organization
- Our Data Bodies Digital Defense Playbook: Community Power Tools for Reclaiming Data
- Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab Pandemic Portal
- Building Consentful Tech Zine
- Tendernet ZINE An Alternative Owner's Manual for Alexa
- Counter-Cartographies Collective disOrientation Guide

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1. Shaka Mcglotten, "Black Data," University of Toronto iSchool Colloquia series Feminist & Queer Approaches to Technoscience, recorded on February 13, 2014, YouTube video, 1:24:29, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLBwB_QKoaE.

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2. Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert, eds., *WEB Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America* (Hudson: Princeton Architectural Press, 2018).
3. Yvonne Culvard, ed., "Discussion Paper No. 3: The Geography of the Children of Detroit," in *Field Notes: A Series Dedicated to the Human Exploration of our Planet* (Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute, 1971), <https://freeuniversitynyc.org/files/2012/09/Detroit-Geographical-Expedition-and-Institute-1971.pdf>.

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4. Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (MIT Press, 2020).

5. Rosemarie Tong and Nancy Williams, "Feminist Ethics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/feminism-ethics/>.

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6. Shaka McGlotten, "Black data." In *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Duke University Press, 2016), 262-86.

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7. Tahu Kukutai, Stephanie Russo Carroll, and Maggie Walter, eds., *Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Policy* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 654-62.

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8. Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).

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9. Nishani Frazier, Christy Hyman, and Hilary Greene, "Black Digital Protocols," ASALH 2017 Conference Paper, https://www.academia.edu/36836823/Black_Digital_Protocols.

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10. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, rev. 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993), 1.

FJDay

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Faithe Day is a CLIR Postdoctoral Fellow in Data Curation for African American Studies. Faithe develops curriculum and orchestrates data collection and curation projects in collaboration with other scholars to identify critical frameworks and best practices to ensure an ethical and justice-centered approach to data curation and discourse, with a focus on Black and LGBTQIA+ communities.

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