

WE HAVE A DREAM: A WORLD WITHOUT RACISM

JUNE, 2021 - What? Computers Are Racist? Our Brains Are Racist?

We began with prayer.

We reviewed Implicit Bias, which is inescapable if we live in the world and have a brain, as it operates on the subconscious level and is triggered by automatic mental associations from our experiences. However, these thoughts and images may be contrary to what we believe or desire.

We delved into the bias of Artificial Intelligence, which makes real decisions that affect everyone. The computers which govern the electronic world we live in, use past patterns to “learn” how to perform. These decisions are filtered through assumptions about our identity, gender, race and age, both from the programmers and from the adaptations of the computer itself based on a very biased world.

Companies are realizing that their algorithms use historical data, skewed according to the biases of the times. For example, an Amazon artificial intelligence project implemented to save recruiters’ time, was based on reviewing resumes and rating applicants for tech positions. However, since in the previous decades, those jobs were typically filled by males, the computer *learned* to penalize resumes of females. In 2019, researchers found that an AI health care risk-prediction algorithm used on more than 200 million people in U.S. hospitals, falsely concluded that black patients were healthier than equally sick white patients, prescribing more care to the white patients. The designers used previous patients’ healthcare spending as a proxy for medical needs, not factoring in the income disparities of the patients.

The use of a female voice for “service” applications and a male voice for “business” applications, maintains those stereotypes and unconsciously creates bias.

We discussed how biases are also magnified by algorithms designed on social media to keep us on their platforms, reinforcing our prejudices, resulting in polarizing and radicalizing the community, dismissing reasonable voices that can respectfully disagree with us. We discussed developing our own manifesto of how to be on any kind of social media with integrity, focused on morality, skepticism and searching out other voices.

We discussed how it is difficult to create artificial intelligence without bias, but identifying it is a good first step. We all have a responsibility to make sure companies, governments and researchers develop artificial intelligence with diversity in mind, hiring programmers who are diverse ethicists, social scientists and experts who best understand the nuances of each application and the effects on the viewer.

Next we focused on nine specific brain biases that have been identified to help our understanding of personal racism.

- Confirmation Bias - the human brain welcomes information that confirms what it already thinks. Thus we have racist associations and this bias keeps us from questioning them.
- Community Bias - We put tribe over truth. We flock together with people who share our perspectives and we compound our biases.
- Contact Bias - If you lack contact with someone you won’t see what they see. So we come to opinions that are varied and diverse in our own group, but are quite simple and overgeneralized in the out group.
- Confidence Bias - We mistake confidence for competence, and we are all vulnerable to the lies of confident people. Historically, the power, thus confidence, has been in the hands of privileged white people, particularly males.

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- Cash Bias - Our brains are wired to see what helps us make money and it is very hard to choose anything that interferes with our way of making a living. This has huge implications since the decision/policy makers have traditionally been white males.
- Competency Bias - Our brains prefer to think of ourselves as above average. We think we are right so we are incompetent at knowing how competent we really are.
- Conspiracy Bias - When we feel shamed, we are especially vulnerable to stories that cast us as victims. Our brains like stories in which we are either the hero or the victim, never the villain.
- Comfort or Complacency Bias - Our brains welcome data that allows us to relax and be happy, and reject data that requires us to adjust, work or inconvenience ourselves. How often have injustices surfaced only to fade away again as we relax into our complacency.
- Normalcy or Baseline Bias - Our brains are wired to set a baseline of normalcy. We assume that what feels normal has always been and will always remain.

We discussed these biases as people gave examples and expressed their thoughts.

We ended with prayer.