CAN DATA BE UNBIASED?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

CAROLINE CRIADO-PEREZ ON DATA BIAS AND 'INVISIBLE WOMEN'
NPR | March 17, 2019 | Video/Audio
5:49 minutes

Author Caroline Criado-Perez argued in her 2019 book, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, that major fields make foundational design decisions with data that largely neglects the perspectives, experiences, and needs of women.
- Criado-Perez wrote the book when she learned how the omission of women from data used in scientific and medical studies was affecting women's livelihoods.
- She acknowledges that people are used to the idea of women being underrepresented in culture, politics, and media, but was surprised to find out that data – which is meant to be objective – was still an area where women weren't being adequately represented.
- Criado-Perez identified a persistent cultural bias that the default idea of a person is thought to be a man or male body by both men and women. She concluded that this has significant effects on how data is collected and used.
- The solution, she says, is to collect "sex-disaggregated data" and to make sure that data collected on women is used and not ignored.

'THE COMPUTER GOT IT WRONG': HOW FACIAL RECOGNITION LED TO FALSE ARREST OF BLACK MAN
NPR | June 24, 2020 | Audio
3:13 minutes

Facial recognition software used by Detroit Police proved to be inaccurate based on racial bias in a 2020 case.
- In January 2020, police in Detroit arrested Robert Julian-Borchak Williams and accused him of theft. The arrest was based solely on facial recognition software, which identified Williams in security footage. Before being released on bail, Williams was detained by police for 30 hours. At his initial court hearing, charges were dropped due to insufficient evidence.
- Civil rights attorneys are calling Williams' case the first instance in the U.S. of wrongful arrest based entirely on mistaken facial recognition technology.
- Facial recognition technology, like the kind used by Detroit police, has been shown to be more inaccurate when identifying people of color as compared to white people.
- The ACLU of Michigan filed a complaint against the Detroit Police Department, asking them to suspend use of the technology.
- Because of the inherent bias of facial recognition tools, companies like Microsoft, Amazon, and IBM have stopped selling the technology to law enforcement.
- According to Georgetown Law's Center on Privacy and Technology, more than 25% of the nation's law enforcement agencies have access to tools like facial recognition technology.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

CODED BIAS ASKS: ARE OUR FACES BEING USED AGAINST US?
Independent Lens | April 5, 2021 | Article
1527 words

In this blog, Cristina Sturdivant Sani asks how racial bias in facial recognition technology and other AI affects how we are able to access, engage with, and use modern technology and the internet every day.

- According to Pew Research in 2000, only about half of adults were online, but in 2009 nearly nine out of ten adults were using the internet. Now, smartphones have become the primary way people access the internet.
- Sani sent out a survey that asked participants to evaluate how they use and engage with facial recognition technology and if they trust it. The results showed that most of their participants (friends and relatives) were familiar with the technology and didn't think it was a problem. But the survey also showed that they may not have realized that facial recognition technology is used by many government entities, law enforcement agencies, and private companies to collect data.
- Sani says that while all technology comes with trade-offs, we're still in the process of discovering the reach of tools like facial recognition and because it's unregulated, there's no way to know how our faces and likenesses have already be used.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Bias
- Facial recognition
- Unregulated

CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. Structured discussions allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.
To encourage civil discourse, please review the Code of Conduct with your learners.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.