[Allison Woodruff on] Algorithmic Fairness

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reading with friends

There's bias!

algorithms aren't objective [4,10,18,33–35,38,46,64]

(literally the citation for that statement. there was an en–dash)

Workshop as method

"argument against assuming a single correct understanding of science and technology"

related history to participatory design

the study (setup)

the details

- workshops with communities in the bay area
- july–september 2016
- 44 adults
- marginalized groups (by SES or race)
  - 2x for SES
  - 1x for AA women
  - 1x for AA or mixed race men & women

asking groups what they'd do in an instance of algorithmic unfairness

"unfamiliar but not unfathomable"

people have had experiences of unfair treatment and could relate their experiences to that

discrimination (e.g. "driving while Black")

prior awareness (e.g. low–income credit card offers)

reactions (strongly negative)

results

things feel a little "all over the place"

- feelings that it's unfair
- frustration that it's a machine and should be making decisions based on information (implicitly [more] objective)
- small mistakes are okay ("It sounds fine to me …I don't expect perfection, of course")

accountability

Who should be accountable?

the programmers, according to Woodruff's interviews "not necessarily because they thought programmers were ill–intended, but rather because their perception was that …[predominantly white males] do not understand the perspective of more diverse users."

"Algorithmic bias may not be intentional, but it is negligent."

see how that quote came back?

complications

is bias a reflection of society?

should companies get involved — is this a free speech issue?

is it even technically feasible?

Curation

participants hold search engines to the standards of journalists (removing crap, etc…)

"I would only allow what is a actual fact. I don't need to know your cousin, your momma, said this that and the other, just include […] the facts."

Design implications?/discussion

1. include fairness as a value in product design and development
2. design user studies that accommodate diverse perspectives, and include members of traditionally marginalized populations in user testing
3. engage with community groups and advocates to collaboratively develop solutions

Go sign up to meet with Allison on Friday

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