

HW 5

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The COMPAS algorithm is a risk assessment tool used in the criminal justice system to predict the likelihood of a defendant committing a future crime or failing to appear in court. The algorithm analyzes various factors related to an individual, such as their criminal history, age, gender, and responses to a questionnaire. COMPAS scores the defendant's risk of recidivism and judges use these risk scores to inform decisions about pretrial release, sentencing, and parole. However, relying on COMPAS to make judicial decisions poses significant risks due to the algorithm's inherent inaccuracies and potential for perpetuating racial biases.

The COMPAS algorithm accurately predicts recidivism 61% of the time, which is only marginally better than a coin flip. Judges are tasked with making decisions that will profoundly impact the defendant's future and should use more reliable and evidence-based tools than an algorithm that only makes accurate predictions 61% of the time. Relying on such an inaccurate algorithm undermines the integrity and fairness of the judicial process.

The COMPAS algorithm also perpetuates racial biases already entrenched in the criminal justice system. Studies have consistently shown that black defendants are disproportionately assigned higher risk scores compared to white defendants, even when controlling for relevant factors such as previous convictions. This racial bias not only undermines the principles of fairness and equality but also exacerbates existing disparities in the justice system. Judges must recognize and address these biases rather than perpetuating them through the use of flawed algorithms.

The developers of the COMPAS algorithm have not been transparent about how the COMPAS algorithm was developed and we should be wary of using black box algorithms. We have no idea how the algorithm actually works because the code is not available anywhere and developers have not thoroughly explained the algorithm. This lack of transparency raises concerns about the reliability of the algorithm's results. We can't justify using COMPAS without a clear understanding of the underlying methodology.

Behind every COMPAS score is a human being whose life and future are at stake. The algorithm's reliance on statistical calculations and risk assessments fails to capture the individual circumstances of each case. It reduces individuals to mere numbers, overlooking their humanity, experiences, and potential for rehabilitation. Judges should make decisions with empathy, understanding, and consideration for the unique circumstances of each individual, which is a factor that the COMPAS algorithm fails to adequately account for.

Given its inherent inaccuracies, racial bias, black box methods, and dehumanizing approach, the COMPAS algorithm is not suited for informing judge's decisions. Judges should prioritize fairness, equity, and individualized assessment, rather than relying on flawed and potentially harmful algorithms. Moving forward, there is a critical need for alternative approaches that prioritize accuracy, transparency, and human dignity in the criminal justice system. Judges must actively seek out and adopt such approaches to ensure just and equitable outcomes for all individuals involved in the justice system.