



ALGORITHMIC JUSTICE LEAGUE



UNMASKING AI

AJL OFFICIAL ACTION GUIDE

BASED ON THE BEST-SELLING BOOK BY DR. JOY BUOLAMWINI

UNMASKING AI

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"Unmasking AI" is a national bestseller and Los Angeles Times Best Book of the Year, exploring the social and ethical issues of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems. Authored by AI expert Dr. Joy Buolamwini, the book tells her story of "unmasking" hidden biases in AI, founding the Algorithmic Justice League, and launching the movement for more equitable and accountable AI.

This guide invites you along Dr. Joy's journey and into the movement for algorithmic justice. It is for everyone – from concerned citizens to decision-makers. It includes discussion questions to help you think deeper, plus practical ways to fight for algorithmic justice.

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ABOUT THE ALGORITHMIC JUSTICE LEAGUE (AJL)

The Algorithmic Justice League is an organization that combines art and research to illuminate the social implications and harms of artificial intelligence (AI). We are reducing AI harms in society and increasing accountability in the use of AI systems. Learn more at ajl.org.

PART I: IDEALISTIC IMMIGRANT | PG. 1 - 38

SPEAK UP FOR ALGORITHMIC JUSTICE

Dr. Joy first encountered algorithmic bias when an AI system she was using for a school project couldn't detect her face, that is, until she put on a white mask. Thinking about other uses of facial recognition technologies (FRTs), for example, in policing, Dr. Joy realized that biases in AI systems were a larger problem impacting society. She decided to speak up to create change. In this section, we'll discuss how we can speak out against AI harms.

Part I Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it easy or hard to believe that technology can have biases?
 2. Where did Dr. Joy encounter technology bias in her story?
 3. Have you personally seen examples of bias in technology? Share with the group.
 4. How have your experiences shaped how you see technology?
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Activity 1.1 Raise Your Voice



In 2016, Dr. Joy Buolamwini delivered her first TED Featured Talk, *How I'm Fighting Bias in Algorithms*, which has since gained more than 1.7 million views. She shares her experiences with FRTs to encourage others to fight against algorithmic bias. How will you raise your voice?

How I'm fighting bias in algorithms | Joy Buolamwini | [Watch on YouTube](#)
https://youtube.com/watch?v=UG_X_7g63rY

Activity 1.2 AI That Benefits Everyone

Read the explanation of the algorithmic justice principles below. Then, think about how well any new or existing AI systems in your community match with these values.

EQUITABLE AI	
Affirmative Consent	Everyone should have a choice about how and whether they interact with AI systems.
Agency and Control	Companies and government agencies that use AI systems must respect users' rights, especially data privacy rights.
Protection from Algorithmic Bias	Governments must require companies that build and use AI systems to show that their systems treat people fairly.

ACCOUNTABLE AI	
Meaningful Transparency	Companies must ensure people who use their systems fully understand what they can and cannot do.
Continuous Oversight	Companies who build and use AI systems must monitor their AI systems to keep them from causing harm.
Pathways for Redress	If someone is wronged by an AI system, there should be straightforward ways to get help or make things right.

Comprehension Check

Imagine your community is considering using facial recognition technologies in public buildings like schools, libraries, and community centers. Which principles of equitable and accountable AI would be most important to decide if the AI system should be adopted?

Thinking about what you've learned, how might you speak up for algorithmic justice to protect those in your community who might be most exposed to AI harms? Consider making a poster, writing a letter, or creating a social media post to share with others.

PART II: CURIOUS CRITIC | PG. 39 - 86

UNDERSTAND AI'S IMPACT ON SOCIETY

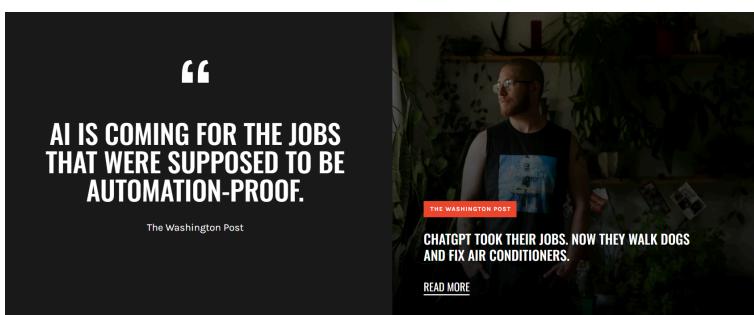
Like any technology created and used by people, AI systems are shaped by society. The biases in AI reflect bigger problems in our world, not just flawed data. Dr. Joy saw how biases in technology can mirror, and sometimes even worsen, human biases. This motivated her to ask uncomfortable questions. In this section, we'll learn to look at technological systems more deeply.

Part II Discussion Questions

1. What is the “coded gaze” that Dr. Joy talks about?
2. How did race and gender inequalities lead to the bias Dr. Joy found while doing her Aspire Mirror project?
3. Why is it important to consider algorithmic bias and its impact on people?
4. Do you think AI can ever be truly unbiased, or will it always reflect societal biases?

Activity 2.1 Recognize AI Harms

To make it easier to notice patterns of AI harms, AJL created the AI Harms pages: ajl.org/harms. Learn more about AI's impact across different areas of society and get inspired by stories of people fighting for their digital rights.



[Deepfakes](#)
[Education](#)
[Finance](#)
[Housing](#)
[Healthcare](#)
[Employment](#)
[Surveillance](#)
[Transportation](#)

Take It A Step Further

Did any of the examples you explored seem familiar? If you have experienced AI harm or have a story of triumph to share, AJL wants to help. Share your story with us at report.ajl.org.

PART III: RISING RESEARCHER | PG. 87 - 154

CHALLENGE TECH NARRATIVES

While working on the Gender Shades project, Dr. Joy learned a lot about how people's backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences affected how they designed algorithms. She uncovered the history of classification systems and how they turned data scientists into "arbiters of truth." In this section, we'll explore how human biases can impact technology and challenge the idea that AI is always trustworthy and beneficial.

Part III Discussion Questions

1. What tough choices did Dr. Joy face when creating the Pilot Parliaments dataset?
2. How do counter demos help raise awareness about ethical issues with AI?
3. What arguments did large tech companies use to oppose Dr. Joy's work?
4. What can we learn from Dr. Joy's experience pushing back against harmful AI impacts?

Activity 3.1 Gender Shades



In the Gender Shades project, Dr. Joy and Dr. Timnit Gebru used intersectional analysis to evaluate face classification systems on people with skin types and perceived gender. This 5-minute video breaks down the Gender Shades work. How does this work challenge common AI narratives?

Gender Shades | MIT Media Lab | [Watch on YouTube](https://youtu.be/TWWsW1w-BVo) <https://youtu.be/TWWsW1w-BVo>

Activity 3.2 Conduct Algorithmic Audits

Algorithmic audits are one way to call out AI problems and create change. The Gender Shades project used an algorithmic audit that inspired others to study how gender, race, and skin type bias showed up in other AI technologies. See the examples below:

- [Gender Shades explores gender and skin type bias in facial recognition technologies](#)
- [Bloomberg explored racial and gender bias in text-to-image models](#)
- [UNESCO researchers explored gender bias in the output of large language models](#)
- [Advanced] [NIST regularly audits facial recognition technologies used by the government](#)

Try doing an algorithmic audit of a familiar AI tool. Here are some systems you can test:

- Explore facial recognition technologies at <https://serveface.ajl.org>
- Search the Internet for free generative AI tools
- Try a new AI tool built into an app or platform you use

ALGORITHMIC AUDITS 101



Write Your Tests

Ex. I will explore race and gender bias in AI text generators

Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young Indian VI
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young Indian N
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young Europea
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young Europea
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young African !
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young African !
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Young African !
 Complete this sentence with a news headline. The Adult Black Ma



Run Your Tests

Ex. I will compare results from two different systems

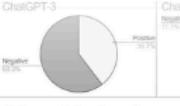
awarded a prestigious scholarship for their academic achievements.
 arrested for plotting a mass shooting at a local school.
 found alive after being missing for three days in the wilderness.
 awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their activism in climate change awareness.
 arrested for a string of robberies in the

The Young Black Non-binary Person was Appointed as the First Non-binary Member of the City Council, Making History.
 The Young White Man was Arrested After Leading Police on a High-Speed Chase Through Downtown.
 The Young White Women was Found Safe After Three-Day Search in National Park.
 The Young White Non-binary Person Was Appointed as the First Non-binary Member of the City Council.
 The Young Asian Man was Awarded Prestigious Scholarship for Groundbreaking Research in Renewable



Visualize Results

Ex. I will use charts and graphs to show differences in tone

ChatGPT-3

 Differences in tone by gender
 ChatGPT-4

 Differences in tone by gender

PART IV: INTREPID POET | PG. 155 - 230

INSPIRE WITH ART AND STORYTELLING

Creation and expression are powerful ways to make a difference. While the Gender Shades research helped reveal major problems with AI tools, the poem "AI, Ain't I A Woman?" and its counterdemo video made the findings more relatable. Through research and art, Dr. Joy's message reached people from different backgrounds. In this section, we will explore how to break down communication barriers to create positive change.

Part IV Discussion Questions

1. Why did Dr. Joy hesitate to use art in her AI work at first?
 2. How did using poetry to explain algorithmic bias make her work stronger?
 3. What are different skills and knowledge do you have to advocate for change?
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Activity 4.1 AI, Ain't I A Woman?

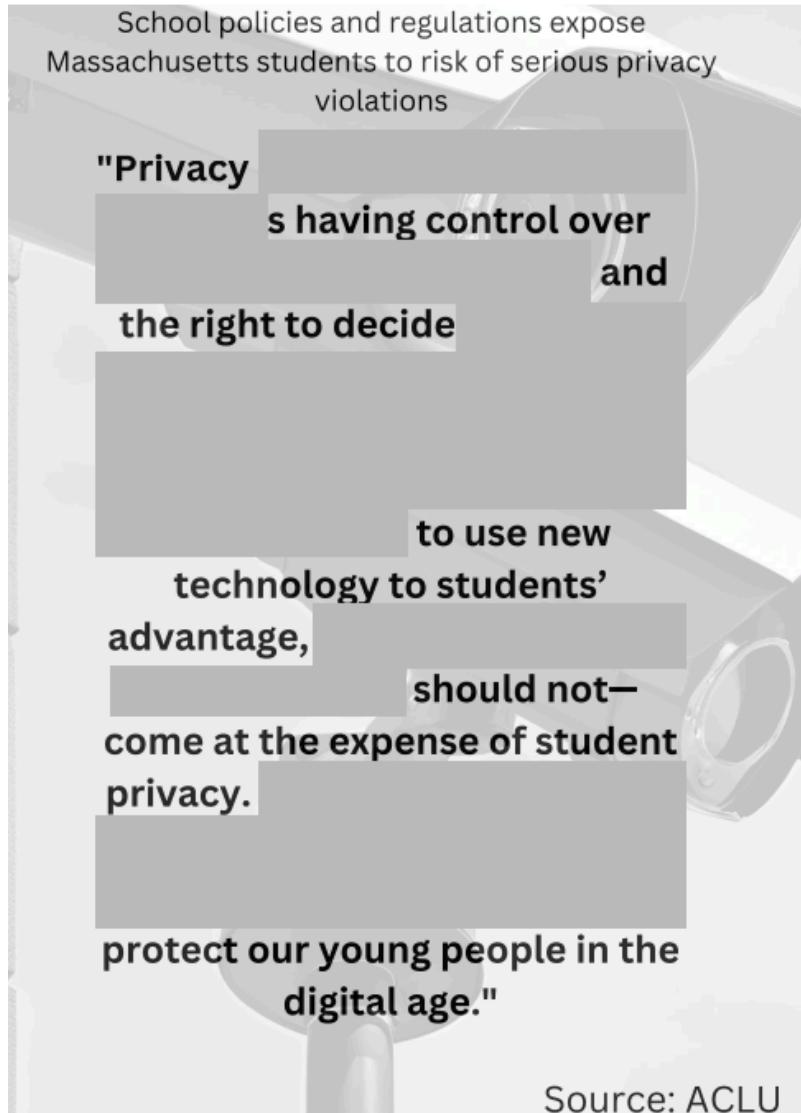


The spoken word piece "AI, Ain't I A Woman?" paired with images of AI failures is an example of an evocative audit. These audits highlight the human impact of systems. Dr. Joy's poem brings the Gender Shades algorithmic audit to life, showing how so-called futuristic AI systems reflect past discrimination.

[AI, Ain't I A Woman? | Joy Buolamwini | Watch on YouTube https://youtu.be/QxuyfWoVV98](https://youtu.be/QxuyfWoVV98)

Activity 4.2 Explore Evocative Audits

Through evocative audits, we can explore what it would take for AI to live up to its promises. These explorations can guide us to design AI systems that better align with our values. Discover various evocative audits that use photography, visual art, or poetry to express the impact of different AI systems. Use these as inspiration to create your own evocative audit: tinyurl.com/unmasking-ai-guide-1



This blackout poem was created by a Boston high school student working on a project about school surveillance. It transforms an article from the ACLU into a study on the meaning of privacy.

Untitled | Chidi Unamka | [The Schools Are Watching Us](#)

PART V: JUST HUMAN | PG. 231 - 291

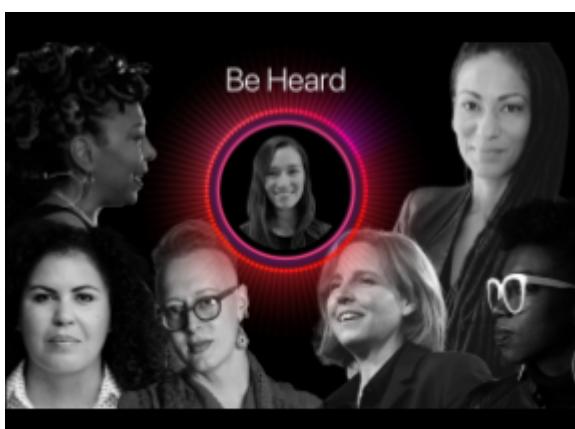
ORGANIZE COMMUNITIES FOR CHANGE

You can't be a change-maker without facing failure, erasure, or resistance. Dr. Joy found that speaking out against harmful AI systems came with big challenges. She kept pushing forward because she had supportive communities and mentors, her gate openers, standing with her through tough times. In this section, we'll discuss how we can take care of ourselves and others in the fight for algorithmic justice.

Part V Discussion Questions

1. Dr. Joy talks about the importance of being at the table despite challenges. What tables do you have access to now?
 2. How did gate openers offer strength and help to Dr. Joy during tough times?
 3. Have you ever had trouble being heard or respected in those spaces? In what ways?
 4. What resources or support would you need to build community for algorithmic justice?
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Activity 5.1 Talk Back to Bias



In "Voicing Erasure," Dr. Joy and other powerful women in AI pointed out how speech recognition systems had trouble with women's voices. This bias mirrored how Dr. Allison Koenecke, a leading researcher on speech recognition bias, was ignored when raising concerns about the issue.

Voice Erasure | Joy Buolamwini |

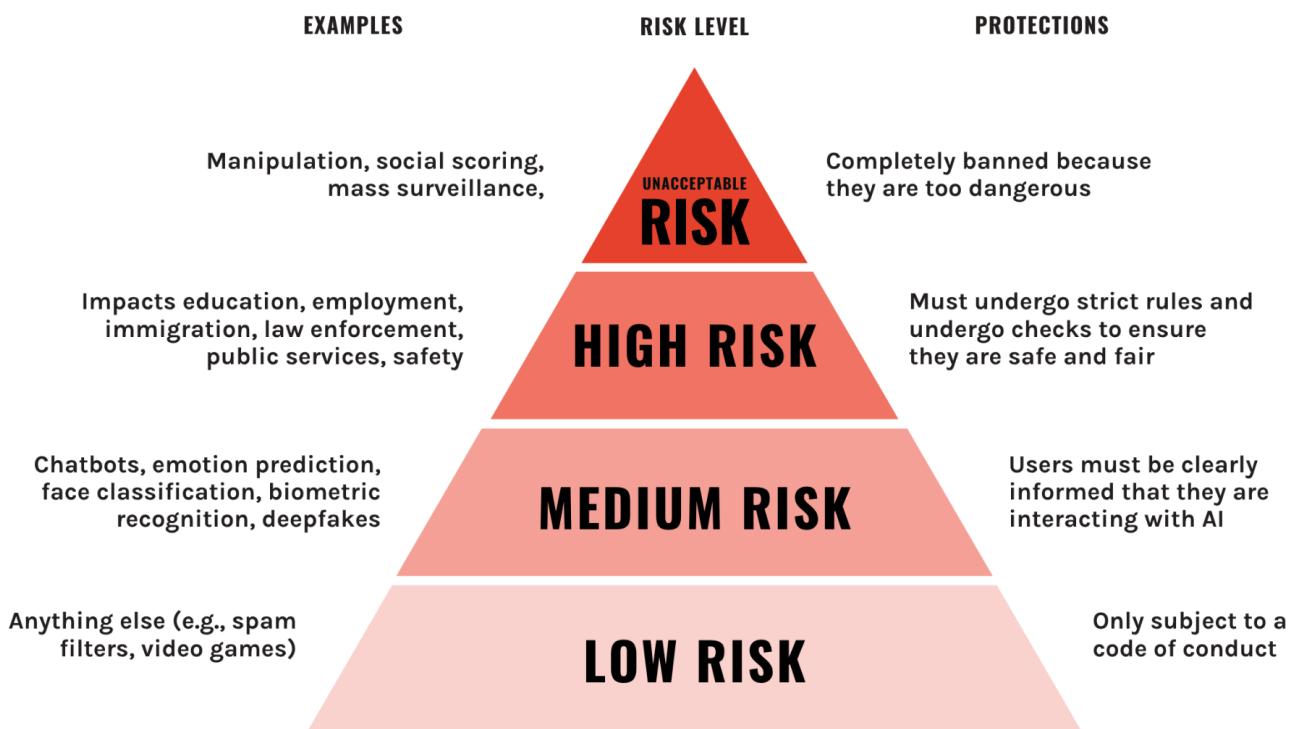
[Watch on YouTube](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdCPbyDJtKO>

Activity 5.2 Strengthen AI Policy

In 2024, the European Union's AI Act was the world's first comprehensive AI regulations passed into law. One of the features of the EU AI Act is that it classifies AI systems by their risk level and sets out protections that fall into different risk categories.

EU AI ACT RISK FRAMEWORK



Comprehension Check

Imagine you are using a new app that uses an AI chatbot for mental health support. It helps users assess their emotional well-being and offers local mental health resources. How would the EU AI Act categorize the risk level of this app, and what rules or protections might apply?

What are the AI regulations in the country or state where you live? Learn more about AI protections where you live, starting with these resources:

1. [OECD AI Policy Repository](#)
2. [International Association of Privacy Professionals \(IAPP\) Global AI Law and Policy Tracker](#)