

**Detecting bias in the media worksheet**

**I'm not robot!**

Did you know that using phrases like “a proven track record” on job postings result in more male applicants, whereas “a passion for learning” attracts female applicants? These findings are according to the startup Textio that launched last year and recently raised \$1.5 million for its software that promises to spot gender bias in job descriptions and performance reviews. Companies like Textio are becoming a big business, particularly in Silicon Valley, where the percentage of underrepresented minorities is so low, employers shouldn’t trust their own judgment anymore. After all, if we learned nothing else from Ellen Pao’s landmark gender discrimination case, we know that inequality is never as black and white as some of us believe. Unconscious bias, often referred to as “second-generation discrimination,” can be as subtle as the language used to describe men and women during performance reviews, as tech company Kanjoya discovered with its emotion-aware language-processing technology. For example, Kanjoya’s technology, which has been developed in over eight years in collaboration with linguistics experts from Stanford University, finds that the word “assertiveness” is used to describe women negatively in reviews, but is correlated with positive reviews and promotions for men. Armen Berjikly, founder and CEO, tells Fast Company his company spent years compiling data before their technology was actually developed—and that’s what gives Kanjoya its “precise” ability to “read between the lines of what someone’s trying to communicate.” Its tools uncover subtle differences in opinions, attitudes, and sentiment in conversations and can detect the earliest signs of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Berjikly says Kanjoya’s technology is also able to recognize human emotions and intent in language. After building the technology, Berjikly realized there are two areas where it would have the most value. “One is around your customers and the experience they’re having with your brand, which is enormously emotional,” he says. “The second place is the internal world, which looks at how emotional the decision is to keep working somewhere, or to work really hard, or to care more than you should or less than you should.” “When we looked at those two worlds, the area that we thought we could make the most impact, where people were the least understood, but yet affected the biggest part of their lives was this employee world,” explains Berjikly. “We spend, at least in my world, more time at the office than we do at home, with our coworkers than we do with our families. And there’s not a person that we know who isn’t feeling like they’re not totally understood at work or that their manager, their company doesn’t get them.” So far, it seems Silicon Valley has embraced Berjikly’s technology. Founded in 2007, the company has raised \$20 million in venture capital from investors including D.E. Shaw, Floodgate, and SV Angel, and its clients include Cisco, Twitter, and Genentech. Another company hoping to solve tech’s diversity problem, Unitive, works-set to launch in June—will be using its technology to flag and map unconscious bias in real time. As a Silicon Valley veteran, founder Laura Mather is no stranger to being in a room with little diversity. As a result, Mather says she wanted to use her experience in “developing enterprise software with a twist in human behavior analytics” to solve unconscious bias. Unitive’s technology focuses on the recruiting and hiring process and has the ability to disrupt unconscious bias in the moment when it happens, such as when someone is writing a job description or screening resumes or conducting an interview and includes biases that aren’t relevant to whether someone can do the job. As many as 20% of large U.S. companies are providing unconscious bias training to their employees, and this percentage can reach 50% in the next five years. “What is also great about how companies hire today is these processes are already completely operationalized through technology,” says Mather. “Candidates apply online, corporations track applicants online. What Unitive does is layer on top of these Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) by integrating with available APIs to detect, interrupt, and record when biases occur.” As more companies set out to solve our modern-day diversity problem, other companies, like Google and defense contractor BAE, are trying to do it on their own with internal training programs aimed at helping employees become “more aware” of unconscious bias. While giant companies may have the funds to develop their own programs, Joelle Emerson, CEO and founder of strategy firm Paradigm, doesn’t recommend that other companies try and spot unconscious bias on their own. After all, they’re called “unconscious” for a reason. “We have this big body of research that tells us the things we should be doing, and I don’t think a lot of these companies are doing these things,” says Emerson. “I don’t think it’s their fault. I think there’s a big disconnect between the academic world and the world of practitioners.” As a former sexual harassment lawyer, Emerson saw an opportunity to bridge the gap between that disconnect when she began seeing patterns in cases where “if a few things had gone differently earlier in the life cycle of the [problems], the [cases] wouldn’t have had to happen,” she says. Since launching in November 2014, Paradigm has worked with 11 companies to help promote diversity. After years of getting away with ignoring the diversity problem, companies are now finally forced to take a long, hard look at how their biases impact their decision-making process. According to an article in the Wall Street Journal, as many as 20% of large U.S. companies are providing unconscious bias training to their employees, and this percentage can reach 50% in the next five years. We know everyone has hidden biases. No one is blaming you if you didn’t know male managers used the words “assertive,” “playful,” and “funny” in reviews right before demoting their female employees, yet promoted their male employees when using the same words. But as more companies exist now to help uncover unconscious discrimination, there’s really no excuse in stopping tech from solving its damaging diversity problem. Note: You can download a pdf of this lesson here. After completing the lesson, have students share their thoughts about the media via social media! Using the Twitter #DecodingMediaBias, answer the following question: In what ways do you think the media shows bias? Subjects U.S. History, U.S. Government, Civics, social studies, ELA, English Estimated Time One to two 50-minute class periods Grade Level 7-12 Essential Question In what ways does the news media show bias? Objective To examine where people in the U.S. get their news, how news selection amplifies one’s political views, and how media organizations decide to cover stories. Overview Students will view the We The Voters film “MediOcracy,” and then examine current news stories and how they’re covered by the three main cable news outlets. They will conclude by examining news stories for bias/point of view. Materials Procedure Warm Up: Ask students: Where do you go to read the news? If students state social media, where specifically? Whom do they follow? If students state TV, which programs? Why do you go there? What other options do you have? Film Viewing: Have students view the We The Voters film “MediOcracy.” Discuss how their responses during the warm-up discussion may have aligned with the idea of “incestuous amplification” (selecting news sources to reinforce our own views) as defined in the film. Media Website Examination: Have students complete Handout #1: Media Website Examination. Students will go to three cable news outlets and examine the top three home page and politics page news stories, including original and aggregated pieces, focusing on headlines. Next, students will choose a topic addressed on all three networks and read a story from each network to examine for point of view. Have students look for a top-of-the-page topic that addresses politics or public policy. Discuss students’ findings when finished. What facts were included in all three stories? Was there one news source that contained facts the other two did not? Why might that be? What did you notice about the language/word choice? Was there leading or subjective language to favor one point of view over another? Share over Social Media: After completing the handout, have students share their thoughts about the media via social media! Using the Twitter #DecodingMediaBias, answer the following question: In what ways do you think the media shows bias? Extension Activities News organizations have great power—deciding which topics are important enough to cover and where to position those topics within their newspaper, TV program, or website. People can also exercise power through the news stories they choose to engage with. Have students go to Newsmap and examine the trending news stories. The larger the news story box, the more people are reading about the story. You can also choose specific topics by selecting the topic check boxes on the bottom. Discuss what this says about the informed status of the electorate. Another option is to have students go to All Sides to introduce them to news topics written in three distinct viewpoints: left, center, right. Discuss this as a tool to recognize bias. The site also serves as a resource that people can go to read something that may challenge their assumptions, and with which they may disagree, as suggested in the We The Voters film “MediOcracy.” Standards Common Core State Standards CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.6 Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.8 Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information. Originally published in 2016, by Liz Ramos, history teacher, Alta Loma High School, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.



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