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August 4, 2021

Annotation: The "black box" at work (Ajunwa, 2020)

In "The 'black box' at work," Ifeoma Ajunwa provides a grim view of what artificial intelligence could do to the world of work if left unchecked. As a professor at the University of North Carolina School of Law and the Founding Director of the AI Decision-Making Research Program, she studies the intersection of law and artificial intelligence, with the goal of protecting constitutional rights. In this peer-reviewed article, she argues that too much faith is being placed in big data-driven AI systems and that without human interpretation, algorithmic systems might see patterns where none actually exist. She offers an example of AI gone wrong when she describes Amazon's attempt to create a computer model that would identify stellar job candidates. Amazon's model used 50,000 terms from past candidates. After implementing the system, Amazon realized it preferred male applicants over female applicants. Ajunwa warns us that AI demands transparency from the worker but shrouds the employer and the decision-making in secrecy (in a black box) and that AI might automate discrimination and create a permanent underclass of unemployable workers. She even goes so far to suggest that employers could use the black box to achieve discriminatory results while maintaining the appearance of fairness.

In the documentary *Persona*, Ajunwa was featured as an expert on the ethical governance of workplace technologies, and I was struck by the severity of her outlook. Based on my research to date, the world of AI for human resources is like the wild west. There are no rules and hardly any oversight, so governance seems like an area ripe for intervention. Ajunwa argues for collective action by workers and new laws, and I couldn't agree more. I will try to amplify these messages in my project and will refer to her terminology and examples. There is an urgency in her message that will also be useful to me. Knowledge is power, and the more data that is collected in the name of human resources without oversight puts many at risk, not only for the job they are seeking but over the long term as well. It's time our representatives start to act.

Ajunwa, I. (2020). *The black box at work*. Big Data & Society. July-December 2020:1-6. doi:10.1177/2053951720938093. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3665772.