

# Summer camps aim to eliminate racial bias in artificial intelligence

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Stanford AI4ALL participants on their first day of class. Photo by: Stanford AI4ALL/Anna Wong

OAKLAND, California – Summer camp was more than a vacation for Aarzu Gupta and Lili Sun. It was the start of a new project. They used artificial intelligence to make a program to detect wildfires before they spread.

Artificial intelligence (AI) involves computer systems doing tasks that usually need human intelligence. They could make decisions or recognize people or things.

Rebekah Agwunobi is a high school student. She got an internship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab. Agwunobi used AI to evaluate the court system, including data on how judges set bail.

Both projects came from the Oakland-based nonprofit group AI4All. It will expand its outreach to young minorities and women with a \$1 million grant from Google.org. The technology giant announced the grant August 10.

AI is becoming more common. It's found in Facebook's face detection for photos. Apple's iPhone X uses AI to recognize your face and unlock the phone.

### **Technology Criticized For Built-In Racial Biases**

The technology is in its early stages. It has been criticized for built-in racial bias. These are negative ideas we have about people of other races. We may not know we have these ideas.

Joy Buolamwini is an MIT Media Lab scientist. She is black and found that face recognition software could more easily identify her face when she wore a white mask. This was because the computer had only learned how to recognize mostly white faces.

Three years ago, Google apologized for a mistake. Its photo software had labeled black people as gorillas. Even if the machine doesn't know what it's doing, this racist association has been used throughout history to say that black people are not human.

The problems are worrisome as more companies use AI for decisions such as hiring. Police use AI-powered software to identify suspects.

### **Lacks Minority Groups And Women**

Tess Posner is the leader of AI4All. She said minority groups such as women and people of color have been left out of the technology field, particularly in AI.

"We need to have people included that are going to be impacted by these technologies," Posner said. They should be part of developing the programs, she said. "Bias happens when we don't have people asking the right questions from the beginning."

Google, Facebook and other tech giants have said they work to attract more women and more people of color. Yet they have been slow to expand their staff. They have not hired many women of color. African-American and Hispanic women make up about 1 out of 100 employees in California's technology region.

### **Learning AI Early Is Important**

Posner's group believes technology must include women and people of color at an earlier stage. They're working on that through the camps for high school students.

AI4All began in 2017. It is based on a two-week summer camp program out of Stanford University in Palo Alto, California.

Since then, AI4All has expanded. In its first year, there were two camps at Stanford and at the University of California, Berkeley. This year, it added four more at other colleges.

The camps are for students who are women, people of color or low income.

Part of Google.org's grant will go toward opening more AI4All camps. Another goal is to create a free, online AI course for anyone.

### **Students Develop Their Own Projects**

AI4All also has three-month fellowships. Students can develop their own ideas and share them with experts.

Some students have used their new skills on pressing issues, such as the wildfire project by Gupta and Sun. The two students met during an AI4All fellowship this year. They had been to camps earlier. Their idea came from the fires that hit California last year.

Sun said she wants to make good changes using AI. "I don't want to be just working on an iPhone or something like that."

Gupta said she plans to explore jobs in AI. She has an internship at the University of California at San Francisco. She's working at a lab that is studying Alzheimer's disease. People with Alzheimer's slowly lose their memories. They also experience walking and balance problems. Such problems develop as the brain's synaptic connections begin to weaken.

For Agwunobi, AI4All showed she could combine technology with helping people.

In her internship, Agwunobi looked at how judges set bail. The goal is to provide data to push for fairness with bail and prison.

AI4All "affirmed my desire to solve interesting problems that actually helped communities," she said.