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Abstract

This paper is motivated by the story of Davonte Flennoy – a Black teenager, identified by an algorithm as "at risk" of being shot and killed, who met his quantified fate. While the tragedy of Flennoy's death may be immediately recognisable, the use of algorithms to predict the shooting, and possible murder, of young Black men seems barely controversial. This paper argues that the latter circumstance is an effect of the non-recognition of data and datafication as a form of racial injury. And, more crucially, that such non-recognition limits the possibility of racial justice in organisations and beyond. We substantiate this proposition by demonstrating how data constitutes the epistemic infrastructure for the perpetuation of racial injury. In doing so, we underscore the imperative to conceptualise racial injury at the level of the epistemic. Further, we show how, insofar as racial injury, at the epistemic level, is constitutive of coloniality, it is put under erasure within data as a modern form of knowledge and instrument of knowledge production. Under these epistemic conditions, we argue, knowledge produced by data and datafication practices remains unrecognised as violence. This circumstance limits possibilities for racial justice.

keywords: algorithms, coloniality, data, epistemic injury, racial justice