

How to Ask Your Analysts about Equity in your Model



Tactful Opening Lines:

“Could you help me understand what the different parts of your model mean?”

“Hey, I’m trying to explain to someone what’s being controlled for in our model and how; can you give me a hand?”

“Would you be able to walk me through the assumptions we’re embedding in this model?”

“Hi, can we have a chat about how our model is accounting for moderators, mediators, and confounders?”

The Basic Idea:

A data analyst uses variables to create a model that is the best possible representation of the world as they see it. They combine all of their knowledge, experience, opinions and other information to build this model.

The variables they choose (and don’t choose) reflect a particular perspective on what’s important/ relevant and there is no purely mathematical way to determine which variables to use. Additionally, the way those variables are used in the model - whether the variable is having a moderating, mediating or confounding effect - is mutually exclusive and subjective. It’s not a bad thing, it’s just reality.

Because expectations, assumptions and pre-existing ideas are part of how analysts create data models, it’s important to at least be transparent about what choices were made with the variables and ideally adjust those choices to reflect the equity that the project is aiming for.

What this is not about:

P-hacking.
A crisis in reproducibility.
Placing blame.

Further Reading:

www.nature.com/articles/s41586-020-2314-9

<https://hbr.org/2015/03/what-to-do-when-people-draw-different-conclusions-from-the-same-data>

