A logo for a tv show

Description automatically generated

Library Extension Project

# Activity: Algorithms with Algo the Robot

## *Who do you think you are vs. who does Algo think you are?*

Created by Sue Ellen Christian, Western Michigan University

Description: Active or passive program to consider how algorithms shape one’s online experiences. Pairs well with the [Media Use: How Do You Compare?](https://www.wondermedialibrary.com/daily-media-use/) website game and activities.

Target audience: Tweens and teens, also adults

Objectives: Participants will think more deeply about why certain content is shown on their social media feeds. They will consider whether the algorithm accurately reflects who they really are, as opposed to their digital identity.

Suggested text:What we see on our social media feeds is determined by an algorithm: A computer program that looks at what we’ve interacted with online previously and uses that to make an educated guess of what else we might like. Social media algorithms think they know who we are: *But do they really?*

Program details: Explain to participants that what we see on our social media feeds is determined by an algorithm: a computer program that looks at what we’ve interacted with online previously and uses that to predict what else we might like. Show this page on the website: <https://www.wondermedialibrary.com/algo-the-robot/> to illustrate your explanation. Ask participants: Have they ever gotten a suggested post or ad that’s eerily accurate?

But the algorithm doesn’t always get it right. It doesn’t have a full picture of who any of us is IRL! Have you ever gotten a suggested post or ad, and it’s something you have zero interest in, and you’re confused why it was even shown to you?

Social media companies don’t reveal much about how their algorithms work, but we can get hints by looking at what are called our “ad profiles” on these sites. While this only tells you about why you’re getting certain ads, not about every post, it can give an idea into who the algorithm thinks you are.

**Here’s how to access your ad profiles (as of 1/2024):**

Instagram/Facebook: Settings → account center → ad preferences→scroll down to ad topics

Google/YouTube: Go to myadcenter.google.com

TikTok: Click on Profile → Menu → Settings and Privacy → Ads → How your ads are personalized

Have participants discuss their findings. What is accurate? What’s not? Why do you think the algorithm has drawn these conclusions about them?

Materials needed: Smartphones or laptops with internet and social media access. If it’s a passive program/display, the accompanying downloadable materials need to be printed.

Suggested runtime: 30 minutes.

Youth adaptation or extension activity: Play the [Most Likely Machine](https://mostlikelymachine.artefactgroup.com/) game (also available on the Wonder Media website) for another example of how an algorithm can’t capture the whole picture.

Adaptation for adults: The activity as-is works for adults as well.

Unique Space or Personnel Needs: n/a

Resources: <https://www.wondermedialibrary.com/algo-the-robot/>

Printables: See printable below.

A yellow and brown logo

Description automatically generated A logo for a museum

Description automatically generated A blue and black logo

Description automatically generated

