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Google Photos Tags Two African-Americans As Gorillas Through Facial Recognition Software

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When Brooklyn-native [Jacky Alcine](#) logged onto [Google](#) Photos on Sunday evening, he was shocked to find an album titled “Gorillas,” in which the facial recognition software categorized him and his friend as primates. Immediately, Alcine posted on [Twitter](#): “Google Photos, y’all f***ed up. My friend’s not a gorilla.” This comment prompted over 1,000 re-tweets and an online discussion about how shocking the situation was. [One user replied](#), “That is completely unacceptable and very low. I’m so sorry you had to come across such hurtful ignorance.”

Alcine added a series of follow-up tweets, including [one that stated](#), “Like I understand HOW this happens; the problem is moreso on the WHY. This is how you determine someone’s target market.”

Yonatan Zunger, Google’s chief architect of social, was quick to address the problem. Within hours of Alcine’s original post, Zunger [tweeted](#), “Holy f***. G+ [CA](#) here. No, this is not how you determine someone’s target market. This is 100% Not OK.” The team immediately went to work to examine the data and fix the problem. Zunger followed-up with Alcine the next morning just to make sure everything was okay.

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It is important to note that African-Americans are not the only group mislabeled by Google Photos. As Zunger notes in a [tweet](#), “Until recently, [Google Photos] was confusing white faces with dogs and seals. Machine learning is hard.”

Brian Brackeen, CEO of facial recognition company [Kairos](#), says that machines can make culturally inappropriate assumptions when not properly trained. “It’s scarily similar to how a child learns,” he said.

This is not the first time that facial recognition software, which is based on machine learning and computer vision, has messed up its identification of people.

This past May, Flickr's facial recognition software labeled both [black](#) and [white](#) people as “animals” and “apes” (these tags were promptly removed). Furthermore, many [Native American dancer photos](#) were tagged with the word “costume,” which added great insult to the community.

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Back in 2009, [Nikon's](#) face-detection cameras were accused of being “racist.” Many times, [when an Asian face was photographed](#), a message flashed across the screen asking, “Did someone blink?” — even when their eyes were wide open. As a Japanese company, Nikon apparently neglected to design its camera with Asian eyes in mind.

A few months after the Nikon controversy, a [Youtube video about an HP MediaSmart Computer](#) went viral. Although it was designed to follow the faces of all users, it couldn't recognize the African-American man moving in front of it. However, it quickly started tracking a white woman's face as soon as she walked in front of the camera.

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