



Can Facial Recognition Software Do More Good Than Harm?

Stephanie Mlot

July 9, 2018

Your face is the key to your personal identity: It distinguishes you from every Tom, Dick, and Harry; it unlocks your smartphone, and it gains entry to your bank account.

It also allows law enforcement to quickly and accurately identify a wanted person in a crowd, or match a simple image with a database of known criminals.

Which, understandably, has conjured a sort of Orwellian “Big Brother” impression across the country, where folks are concerned that ever-evolving facial recognition technology may not always be accurate.

Perhaps even more troubling is the idea of real-time databases fueled by drones, body cameras, and dash cams.

“The real concern is police on patrol identifying law-abiding Americans at will with body cameras,” Matthew Feeney, a specialist in emerging technologies at the Cato Institute think tank, told the Agence France-Presse (AFP). “This technology is, of course, improving, but it’s not as accurate as science fiction films would make you think.”

Not yet, at least.

Microsoft, Facebook, and Amazon are among the tech titans working on similar programs; the latter has controversially lent its Recognition software to police departments in an effort to “enable database matches.”

IBM, meanwhile, plans to launch a large-scale study to “improve the understanding of bias in facial analysis,” AFP said.

Facial recognition does have its upsides: According to the AFP, the technology helped Maryland police arrest a suspect in last month’s *Capital Gazette* newsroom shooting. Accused Jarrod

Ramos reportedly refused to cooperate with the cops, who couldn't immediately ID the culprit using fingerprints.

“We would have been much longer in identifying him and being able to push forward in the investigation without that system,” Anne Arundel County Police Chief Timothy Altomare told AFP.

It even helps astronomers better understand space.

Not everyone is onboard with the function, though: Facebook faces a class action lawsuit over its use of facial recognition software, allegedly does not comply with the Biometric Information Privacy Act.