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Ethics and Facial Recognition

Throughout the years, the technology used in law enforcement has drastically increased in complexity and efficiency. However, with the rise of facial recognition, the efficiency of some technologies used in law enforcement have come into question. This is due to the numerous times that facial recognition has falsely identified a person as a criminal. With this in mind, the continued use of facial recognition in law enforcement is unethical because of the drastic effects that it can have on the people who are falsely accused and arrested.

These false identifications lead to the social contract between citizens and law enforcement to be damaged or completely broken. The social contract that has been enacted by the two parties consists of law enforcement protecting the citizens from criminals, dangerous situations, and false imprisonment. The citizens are giving up some authority to law enforcement so that the law enforcement can complete their job. However, with false identifications using facial recognition, not only lead to false imprisonment, but can also lead to “’past and future emotional distress’” (Cappelletti). This can be seen through the story of Porcha Woodruff, who was falsely arrested for supposed robbery and carjacking. She was arrested in front of her two children while being pregnant with her third. Woodruff told the press that “she could have lost her child” because of the stress of the arrest building on preexisting health complications (Woodruff). This violation goes against the social contract that has been set up between law enforcement and the citizens.

This is not the only example of false arrest or imprisonment because of biased facial recognition. Both Quran Reid and Robert Williams had similar experiences with law enforcement and facial recognition. They both had issues with “facial identification technology mistakenly [identifying]” them as a criminal (O’Brien). To further the ethical dilemma of facial technology is that this dilemma comes from a bias in the training data for facial recognition technology. Part of the issue is that the images that facial recognition is trained on for African American people are “criminal mugshots” and not “drivers licenses or random pictures” (Thanawala). This is unethical as it adds more bias into the facial recognition technology and can lead to further false incriminations.

In conclusion, continuing the use of facial recognition technology in law enforcement is currently unethical. However, if there is a drastic shift in how the learning models are trained, then it may become a beneficial tool to use for law enforcement.

Works Cited

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