Here for You: The Human Burden in AI-Generated Emotional Media

Jaeden Ives-crow

Generative models like Pika, Suno and Firefly can now produce moving images and sound that look like human expression. In seconds they conjure foggy streets, melancholic beats or whispered reassurance. Yet the question of whether these synthetic outputs can carry or communicate complex feelings persists. Recent work in psychology and human-computer interaction highlights a tension: viewers do perceive emotions and even attribute intention when presented with AI art (Demmer et al., 2023), yet the same work is judged as less emotional when people are told it comes from a machine (Grassini & Koivisto, 2024; PNAS, 2024). In counseling experiments, AI messages can make people feel more heard than untrained humans, but that feeling dissipates when recipients learn the message came from AI (PNAS, 2024). This paradox frames the essay.

Research shows that AI is best at generating basic affect, while nuance requires context. Diffusion models can reliably produce images that elicit targeted states like fear or calm across cultures (Behnke et al., 2025). People often prefer these images to human art when the source is hidden, but once labeled, positivity and emotional quality decline (Grassini & Koivisto, 2024). The emotional impact depends not only on the pixels but on perceived authorship. Generative systems approximate patterns in training data rather than generate novel lived experience; they can expand the idea space, but designers still supply direction (Wang et al., 2025). Emotional resonance often emerges when synthetic imagery sits within human narratives. Bñuelos Capistrán (2025) documents community projects where generative tools help reconstruct lost histories; viewers connect because the images belong to a story about memory and identity.

To test this boundary, I produced a short video built around the phrases “here for you” and “you are not alone.” Using generative video, audio and diffusion models, I treated outputs as raw footage rather than finished art. Three levels of intervention emerged. In Level 1, I prompted the tool and accepted or rejected clips. The results were cinematic but empty, prompting curiosity about the software rather than the scene. In Level 2, I generated many variations and curated a small set based on tone. Simple edits like cropping and color balance helped shape mood but did not add meaning. In Level 3, I acted as a director: slowing movement, cutting loops into fragments, layering AI-composed sounds under mechanical hums. Only at this stage did viewers describe any meaningful emotion. The emotional weight was not in any single frame but in the sum of all the orchestrated components.

This project underscored that AI supplies mood but not meaning. Broad atmospheres like foggy streets or soft lighting appeared with ease, yet the work felt generic until I implemented structure. Repeating the phrase “here for you” while degrading visuals created tension that the model could not conceive alone. I often discarded technically impressive clips because they

looked too AI. Smooth textures and uncanny faces made certain sequences feel hollow but not weird enough. This internal bias mirrors research showing that people enjoy AI art but downgrade it when they believe it is machine-made (Grassini & Koivisto, 2024).

Designers face a double bind. Generative tools can deliver high fidelity affect, yet reliance on them can cause audiences to disengage because of the label effect (PNAS, 2024). The solution is not to hide the AI but to frame it honestly. In my film, the phrases “here for you” took on irony when viewers knew they originated from a feelingless thing. The emotion arose from the gap between human need and machine mimicry. Generative models are trained on vast archives of human work, raising questions about credit. If complex emotions depend on training data drawn from countless creators, how should we acknowledge and compensate them?

AI can evoke basic emotions, including fear, calm and unease, but it struggles to sustain complex feelings without human intervention. Meaning emerges from human choices about sequencing, pacing and context. As models improve, they may someday make a case to replace human creativity by fitting ever-larger datasets, but the bias against machine authorship is likely to persist. For now, AI can build the house; making it feel haunted, safe or like home remains the human burden.

Bibliography

Demmer, T. R., Kühnapfel, C., Fingerhut, J., & Pelowski, M. (2023). Does an emotional connection to art really require a human artist? Computers in Human Behavior, 148, 107875.

Grassini, S., & Koivisto, M. (2024). Understanding how personality traits, experiences, and attitudes shape negative bias toward AI generated artworks. Scientific Reports, 14, 4113.

PNAS. (2024). AI Can Help People Feel Heard, but an AI Label Diminishes this Impact. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Bñuelos Capistrán, J. (2025). Art, community and AI: Images for an affective memory. Frontiers in Communication.

Behnke, M., et al. (2025). Using AI to generate affective images. PsyArXiv.

Wang, N., et al. (2025). Exploring creativity in human-AI co-creation: A comparative study across design experience. Frontiers in Computer Science.

Gao, J., & Yin, J. (2024). Emotional expression of AI generated artistic design. Chitrolekha International Magazine on Art and Design, 8(1).

Zhou, Y., et al. (2023). Eyes can tell: Assessment of implicit attitudes toward AI art. ResearchGate.