

ETHICS IN TECH PRACTICE: Case Study: Facial Recognition Technology

MARKKULA CENTER FOR APPLIED ETHICS

at Santa Clara University



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Facial Recognition Technology: An Ethics Case Study

by Irina Raicu

The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and the TSA are testing the implementation of [facial recognition technology at several airports](#) and [other border crossings](#), and CBP hopes to install face scanners at all US airports within the next 4 years. Some [schools are implementing facial recognition](#) on their campuses in an effort to prevent or mitigate schools shootings. [Churches have been pitched facial recognition technology](#) as a means to assess attendance, but also to increase security.

You work at a company that develops facial recognition software for various applications; a team member points out that shelters for victims of domestic violence are also organizations greatly concerned with the security of their guests and staff, and might have use for this technology. It could ensure that people entering or approaching the shelter are registered guests or staff there and not unwelcome intruders, and could perhaps aid staff in monitoring and analyzing behavior in the shelter environment.

Should this project be pursued? If not, why not? If so, how could it be done ethically? What unique ethical concerns does it raise?

Discussion Questions:

1. Who are the stakeholders involved? Who should be consulted about such a project's goals and development?
2. What additional facts might be required? What practical steps might you need to take in order to access the information/perspectives needed to manage the ethical landscape of this project?
3. What are some other ethical issues that any designers/developers of such an application would need to address?
4. How might this project be evaluated through the various ethical 'lenses' described in the "Conceptual Frameworks" document?
5. In this project, what moral values are potentially conflicting with each other? Is there any way to reconcile them? Even if conflict is unavoidable, are there ways to respect all relevant interests/values? How?
6. As a project team, how might you go about sorting through these ethical issues and addressing them? Which of the ethical issues you have identified would you prioritize, and why?
7. Who would be the appropriate persons on a team to take those steps? At what level, and by what methods, should decisions be made within the company about how to manage the ethical issues raised by this project?