

# SHOULD LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES HAVE ACCESS TO FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY?

*THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.*

## INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

### THE DEBATE OVER FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY'S ROLE IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

NPR | July 10, 2019 | Audio

3:42 minutes

Facial recognition technology being used by law enforcement is under fire from lawmakers, advocacy groups and citizens, but the lieutenant of the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department says it helps control crime.

- LA County has been using facial recognition technology since 2009.
- LA County utilizes still images of criminals or from crime scenes, and take that of individuals and use facial recognition software to compare them to the database of booking photos to develop leads.
- People have raised specific concerns related to privacy, such as the police department's access to civilian databases like the DMV.
- Because of criminal offender record information laws, or CORI, LA County only uses their criminal database; they don't mine public databases, social media, or other forms of open source information.

### AMAZON HALTS POLICE USE OF ITS FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY

NPR | June 10, 2020 | Audio

4:38 minutes

Following nationwide protests against police abuses, Amazon announced it will temporarily stop giving law enforcement agencies access to its facial recognition software.

- Shortly before Amazon's announcement, IBM exited the facial recognition business altogether.
- Amazon's facial recognition software, Rekognition, has been used by police departments to identify potential suspects by checking photos against a giant database of mug shots that are stored digitally in the cloud.
- A number of studies have found that this tool has a hard time correctly identifying people with darker skin, women, and younger people.
- MIT researcher Joy Buolamwini states that even without bias, there's still the capacity for abuse. Specifically, the capacity for using facial recognition for surveillance.

## COMMUNITIES COME FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE GROWING POWER OF FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY

NOVA | December 9, 2019 | Article

1689 words

Some communities are worried about their say in how their local law enforcement agencies use facial recognition technology.

- An ACLU effort called Community Control Over Police Surveillance (CCOPS), is attempting to give citizens more control over law enforcement's use of technology. CCOPS aims "to pass CCOPS laws that ensure residents, through local city councils are empowered to decide if and how surveillance technologies are used, through a process that maximizes the public's influence over those decisions."
- A 2018 report called "Gender Shades" found that three commercially available systems performed "no better than chance at identifying women with darker skin tones." (PBS)
- The cities of Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco in California, in addition to the city of Somerville, Massachusetts, have outright banned face recognition by the government.

### KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Surveillance
- Data mining
- Open source

### CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

### DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.

*Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.*