Profits of biometric in prison: lab and labor

Law, Security

DUKE University Summer Session

Beginning in the early 2000s, the National Institute of Justice began testing the use of biometrics at the United States Naval Consolidated Brig in Charleston, South Carolina. The cutting-edge project was a joint effort of the NIJ, the U. S. Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center, the Naval Consolidated Brig and the U. S. Department of Defense Biometrics Management Office. A host of biometric methods – iris, facial, retinal, hand geometry, voice and fingerprint – were evaluated at the brig during the three-year study. All were found to have advantages and disadvantages.

The NIJ said in a 2006 report about the study that " in the end, the fingerprint recognition method, now used in conjunction with hand geometry, was judged to work best at the Charleston brig. It provided the most accurate and reliable matches at about one-third the cost of iris, facial and retinal methods. The fingerprint method also moved prisoners through the gates faster than the others. That's a prime consideration when, for example, corrections specialists are moving 50 or more prisoners at once from housing or work areas to the galley at mealtime. Fingerprint readers were also easier to use and more durable than other readers."

Ten years after that study was released, the conclusions gleaned from the research have become more commonly known throughout the corrections industry, as many facilities have already implemented some form of biometrics for inmate identification. In these facilities, once an individual's electronic fingerprint is scanned, it is attached to that inmate's in-custody records so that any time a CO or other correctional employee has a need to

verify that person’s identity, the information is at their fingertips (pun very much intended) in the facility database.

DOUG WYLLIE, HOW BIOMETRIC TECHNOLOGIES WILL HELP CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Biometrics is the science of using biological information for the purposes of identification or verification. Usually the “ raw data” of biometrics will be translated to digital data before being utilized—- the process of “ translation”, which is also called “ biometric algorithms“, is coercive in making up biometric technology. (Magnet, page 21)

The implement of biometric is nowadays keep expanding in life, the fingerprint template, facial recognition, voice recognition etc. are now popular in unlocking laptops, or even your iPhone X. We may call them biometric identification. But the origins and development of the biometrics existed profoundly in as a way of managing the prisoners, especially a large amount of them. As what Magnet mention in the book When Biometrics Fail: gender, race and the technology of identity>: “ the biometric industry began as a series of fragmented endeavors loosely organized around a generalized interest in access control. Although biometrics made their debut in a number of different spaces, from banks to workplace, the prison industrial complex is the first program broadly adopt to these new identification technologies.” (Magnet, page 51) Since we already know that “ Biometrics and policing are not strangers to each other.”, it is natural to ask what is the real motive or results of the biometric implement in prison if we believe the mechanic is a negative feedback control. And obviously, profit is the center of all these.

Essentially, human beings are self-considered, under the surface of modern prison managing system, the profit being from this is the main character.

What I want to argue here is that the profit from prison industrial complex is separated into two sections: using prison as the perfect testing ground and manipulate the prisoners as low-cost labor. But significantly, the prison as a lab offers condition for higher profit in laboratory.

The implement of biometric is not as easy as the theory. If we take a glance at the history of biometric, the earliest biometric study must be the complex nature of human face date back to 1806(Magnet, page 42). And in modern biometric study, we find a certain “ biometric failure”, and three errors are particularly common: false acceptance rate, false rejection rate, and failure to enroll. (Magnet, page 22) There are also a group of people who are usually “ excluded ” by biometric identification, for example, people with mental health problems or physically disabled, transsexual people, interracial people. All these multiple variates make it necessary to test biometric technology on real human beings and offer solutions to “ failures” due to what the scholars always call “ corporeal fetishism”, which refers to “ contemporary biometric discourse produce maps of complex living bodies that render them autonomous things-in-themselves rather than actors in net-works of interrelationships.”.

Obviously, the prison is the best testing ground for biometric technology.

First, the prison can offer the sample size that is large enough to support the accuracy of the experiment. Today the united states of America has more

people behind bars than any other country (Haryney 2006), an astonishing 25percent of the world’s prisoners, reaching at a number of 250, 000. (Magnet, page 59)

Second, the large amount of people who have certain disabilities as well as disproportionate color people offer particular “ excluded data” to the experiment, which makes it more focus on declining biometric failure rate. As Simone Browne mentions and concludes in her book, Dark Matters ” Biometric information technologies are sometimes inscribed in racializing schemas that see particular biometric systems privileging whiteness, or lightness, in the ways in which certain bodies are measured for enrollment. ” Also, biometrics technology identification, for example, iris scanning and retina scanning is difficult for people of poor eyesight (Magnet, page31) , or people on wheelchair who are not able to walk into and stand on the “ kisok”, a verification device.(Magnet, page 30) And now, according to the data from NAACP, Though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately 32% of the US population, they comprised 56% of all incarcerated people in 2015. Simultaneously, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, people behind bars in state and federal prisons are nearly three times as likely to report having a disability as the nonincarcerated population, while those in jails are more than four times as likely. Cognitive disabilities—such as Down syndrome, autism, dementia, intellectual disabilities, and learning disorders—are among the most commonly reported: Prison inmates are four times as likely and jail inmates more than six times as likely to report a cognitive disability than the general population. People with mental health conditions comprise a large proportion of those behind

bars, as well. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that fully 1 in 5 prison inmates have a serious mental illness. The people who constitute the prisoners and the disabilities they are suffering during incarceration is the best and the most intense “ raw data” from the vulnerable group and colored people. Where else can you find so many black people, or so many disabled people in United States except incarceration?

What vendors are trying to sell is their “ recipes” of translating raw data to digital biometric data—the algorithms. (Magnet, page 21) But the biometrics failure clearly shows the complexity of human body. For magnet, “ Biometric discourse functions as a form of corporeal fetishism in which complex human bodies are represented by ones and zeros without discussion of the bodily process that these strands of binary code hide from view or the implications of this particular representational strategy.” So we can assume that thousands of experiments are needed so long as the biometric technology is going to develop. The most important thing is, the vendors can not risk testing their products on their precious client like banks, or high security building like the Pentagon. But in prison, the “ captive audience” has lost the power to refuse passing the biometric identification again and again until it is satisfied and no one cares about “ these customers” .(Magnet, page 63)

At the same time, biometric technology is usually expensive, the biometric cooperation can get huge profit due to the mass incarceration, with free “ try out” access to perfect experiment samples and then improve their devices as much as possible. So when the vendors try to sell the recipe “ pro” to the

public, there is no doubt they will give a higher price, even though they have saved a lot in doing experiment.

As I argue in the main thesis, biometric used in the prison, making the prison its lab offers condition for higher profit earned from laboratory, or we call the prison industrial complex. For biometrics technology offer the system the best way to manage their “ laborers”. Prison industrial complex, (also PIC)is a term first coined by Angela Davis, and later deployed by many scholars, refers to two aspects of mass incarceration: the profit that is made simply by incarcerating people and the profits that are made by dozens if not hundreds of private and public corporations by exploiting the labor of incarcerated people.(Hattery and Smith, page105) What I focus on is the latter aspect in this article.

What we do know about the PIC is that, most of us touch dozens of products every single day that are produced by prison labor. (Hattery and Smith, page 109) In fact, a state agency, Virginia correctional enterprises, is allowed to generate significant profit by hyperexploiting the labor of incarcerated laborers and not selling the commodity at a reduced cost, even to other state agencies. It was estimated that they have earned about $55 million in 2013. (Hattery and Smith, page111) And inmates as “ factory labor” is a new form of inmate labor which has been popular for decades. For “ it is difficult to find laborers willing to do the work, and if unionized, this labor would be very expensive.” Now, it seems the profit from PIC is actually from the hyperexploiting of the inmates’ labor. But we may ask a question, why the inmates will comply to the management of the system, why they don’t ever

resist to the unfairness since they have to overwork and can’t even earn money for clean water?

The answer must be what Foucault called “ disciplinary power”. For Foucault, prison is like a training school: ” “ There was a sort of disciplinary ‘ training’, continuous and compelling, that had something of the pedagogical curriculum and something of the professional network.” For prisoners, biometric technologies are the coercive past constituting the “ curriculum and network”. (Foucault, page 300) . In the carceral facility, for example, biometrics checks can be used to monitor prisoners while they are at work, including ensuring that inmates have their pay docked if they take too many bathroom breaks. When prisoners report going to see the doctors, psychologist but spend all day running around and claim they have a whole day working, the cameras can show that they shouldn’t be paid this day. (Magnet, page66-67) not to mention the basic use of biometric: counting heads — the confirmation of presence, to decide whether you are ill, injured, or otherwise in distress.(Magnet, page 64) It is really clear that the people incarcerated are under surveillance, which means it is impossible to break the rules without being discovered and punished. And in this case, sanctions for them is the loss of their low-paid income, which means a day’s clean water or else. But it is not hard to assume that they may face cruel sanctions like beaten by the guards, whether it is legal or not. The ubiquitous surveillance makes rules more effective and clearly normalizes the inmates’ behavior. Just like what Foucault said “ training was accompanied by permanent observation; a body of knowledge was being constantly build up from the everyday behavior of the inmates.” (Foucault, page 294) After all,

the sanctions for inmates may not sound deterrent to anyone of them, but the disciplinary power built profoundly inside their mind is the weapon that makes them surrender to the hard and low-paid labor. And in essence, biometric technology must be the biggest player.

For this, Foucault concludes that “ The carceral ‘ naturalizes ‘ the legal power to punish, as it ‘ legalizes’ the technical power to discipline.” (Foucault, page 303)

The incarcerated people, who are always illegible for the public even the mass incarcerations has been a problem waiting to be solved in the USA, are being hyperexpolited by the state. And biometric, which seems not relative to the dark side of the world but a symbol of creativity or technology progress, is the biggest player of building disciplinary power by mass surveillance and then normalize inmates to work, and live. It may hard to build a close connection between these two things together, but we have to be aware that the largest investment of biometric is the program supported by state funding. Biometric, as a technology, from experiment to mature implement, manipulates the inmates for huge profits, whether is direct or not. From lab to labor, the profit from biometric implication in prisons intensified and enveloped than ever.

Sunny, you have great thoughts, and the overall ideas behind your thesis is excellent. However I, unfortunately, cannot give you a high grade for this final paper. The first page and a half of this essay is copy-pasted from an article on the Internet. Even though you do reference pages and sources in your essay, you copy pasted other author’s words at length, entire three

paragraphs. You will see that I have highlighted entire paragraphs, and sentence after sentence, where you copy-pasted what other people have written without any of your own words. It is entirely appropriate to quote other scholars, but here you have used the words of others not to have to write or summarize these arguments in your own words yourself. Your paper does not include a bibliography, which is required. Unfortunately, this paper includes text that is not your own original writing.