EMOTION AI AT WORK:
IMPLICATIONS FOR WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE, EMOTIONAL LABOR, AND EMOTIONAL PRIVACY

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PROBLEM

AI that infers and/or interacts with human emotion is increasingly used in workplace contexts, yet we lack knowledge about workers' perceptions of and experiences with emotion AI

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are workers' general perceptions of emotion AI?

RQ2: What behavioral adaptations do workers experience/anticipate in response to emotion AI?

RQ3: What consequences do workers experience/anticipate associated with emotion AI?

METHODOLOGY

Interview Study with 15 US workers

→ Black, Latine, Asian, and white women and men aged 25-64
→ with (n=6) & without (n=9) cognizant experience with emotion AI
→ recruited from Prolific, Facebook Ads & occupation-related subreddits
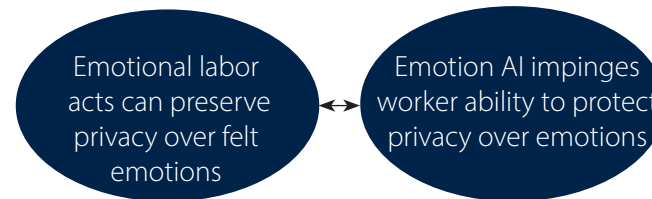
KEY FINDINGS

RQ1. Emotion AI deeply violates worker privacy, as inferred emotional information:

→ violates contextual integrity
→ is highly sensitive
→ violates boundaries around whether & to what extent one's emotional information is collected & shared

RQ2. Emotion AI functions as a surveillance tool to enforce compliance with employers' expectations of workers' emotional labor
(e.g., ensuring workers outwardly display a happy smile despite internally feeling sad or upset)

Emotional labor acts can preserve privacy over felt emotions ⟷ Emotion AI impinges worker ability to protect privacy over emotions

RQ3. Emotion AI exposes workers to wide array of privacy and emotional labor harms

psychological harm   reputational harm   amplifies emotional labor's negative effects

autonomy harm   relationship harm   disparate gendered and racialized emotional labor

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

Sensitive emotion AI inferences "should be kept private...just like your medical information" (Pn9) and "should be regarded as mental health information" (Pn11)

Emotion AI at work is a "privacy violation tool" (Pn12) that acts as an "authority" to "discipline" workers (Pc7). Being subject to it "drains the snot out of me" (Pc6).

RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY
→ recognize a legal right to emotional privacy: individual right to privacy over emotions and to remain free from emotional manipulation
→ expand worker rights & protections to recognize emotional privacy

DESIGN
→ employ privacy preservation techniques to limit identifiable emotion inferences
→ acknowledge heightened risks associated with emotion inferences in enterprise risk management

ORGANIZATIONS
→ not adopt emotion AI

← Link to paper
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