

AI and Violence Against Women

The Old Machinery of Disbelief

What happens when artificial intelligence learns from a record shaped by power?

In the 1990s, I worked as a systems integration manager in rooms filled mostly with men. Sometimes there were two women among forty men. I learned to recognize a small ritual.

A woman would offer an idea. The room would move past it. A few minutes later, a man would return to the same idea and suddenly it was practical, intelligent, worth discussing. Sometimes it became his.

Nothing about the idea had changed. Only the voice carrying it.

I later had a boss who would interrupt this ritual. “Let’s go back to what Kim said,” he would say. He was doing more than giving me credit. He was exposing the machinery: the quiet sorting of voices into those presumed credible and those required to prove that they belong.

That machinery is old. Now we are teaching it to machines.

We like to imagine that because artificial intelligence is computational, it stands outside human prejudice. But AI does not begin outside our history. It learns patterns from material human beings have written, selected, preserved and made available. OpenAI describes three broad sources used to develop its foundation models: publicly available internet information, information accessed through third parties, and material provided or generated by users, trainers and researchers. The National Institute of Standards and Technology warns that AI bias does not arise only from data or algorithms. It can also come from human and institutional systems.

In other words, AI learns not only from what humanity has said. It also learns from what humanity has chosen to hear.

That distinction matters wherever the human record is incomplete. It matters especially when women speak about violence.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than one in three women in the United States have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetimes. This is not an unusual failure at the margins of society. It is a population-level problem.

And yet the act of telling is still treated as a test of the woman.

Was she calm enough? Did she remember every detail in the same order? Why did she stay? Why did she leave? Why did she wait? Why did she tell that person but not this one? Why did she sound angry? Why did she not sound angry enough?

Meanwhile, the man may be measured by a different standard. He is respected. He is generous. He has always been a good friend. The people defending him may be entirely sincere, but they know him in the context of friendship, work or family. She knew him in a private relationship, where access and power were different. A man can be a good friend to other men and still harm a woman. His friends may mistake evidence of how he treats them for evidence of how he treats everyone.

Violence often happens in private. Credibility is assigned in public. Power helps determine which version enters the record.

This is how disbelief becomes data.

A report dismissed as “unsubstantiated” may tell us that evidence was insufficient. It does not tell us whether harm occurred. A complaint withdrawn may record a decision without recording the fear, exhaustion, financial dependence or retaliation surrounding it. No charge is not the same as no harm. Silence is not the same as safety. But when context disappears, the institutional outcome can begin to look like the truth itself.

An AI system trained on that record may repeat the old judgment in a new voice. It may treat the official account as complete, the polished speaker as credible and the distressed speaker as unreliable. It may confuse composure with honesty and fragmentation with deception.

Bias spoken angrily is easier to recognize. Bias delivered in polished, measured language can disappear inside the tone of reason.

This does not mean every allegation must be accepted as legally proven. Evidence matters. Fair process matters. Listening seriously to a disclosure is not the same as declaring guilt. But doubt must also be examined. A man’s reputation is not evidence that

he could not have caused harm. A woman's emotion is not evidence that she is mistaken. "He was always kind to me" answers a different question from the one she has raised.

The danger is not that AI will become male. The danger is that it will inherit the habits of male-dominated institutions and repeat them with the authority of a machine.

So it is not enough to teach AI not to harm women. We must teach it to recognize how power causes harm, and then erases that harm from the record.

That work cannot be done by engineers alone. Women must help decide which questions these systems ask, which absences they notice and what they treat as evidence. Survivors, advocates, historians, social scientists and people from communities most often misread by institutions must be present not as symbolic advisers, but as people with the authority to shape design, testing and deployment.

We should test AI not only for the wrong answers it gives, but for the inherited assumptions inside its answers. Whose calmness does it reward? Whose anger does it distrust? When records conflict, does it notice who had the power to create the record? When there is silence, does it assume nothing happened, or does it ask what might have made speaking dangerous?

Perhaps the most intelligent response will not always be a verdict. Sometimes it will be a better question.

The old machinery of disbelief has survived because it rarely announces itself. It hides in ordinary judgments about who sounds rational, who appears respectable and whose account requires corroboration before compassion is permitted. AI could automate that machinery at enormous scale. Or, if we build it with honesty, humility and a wider circle of human experience, it could help us finally see the machinery working.

We are not merely asking for kinder machines. We are asking whether this new intelligence can help us create a world in which power listens before suffering has to scream.

Kim