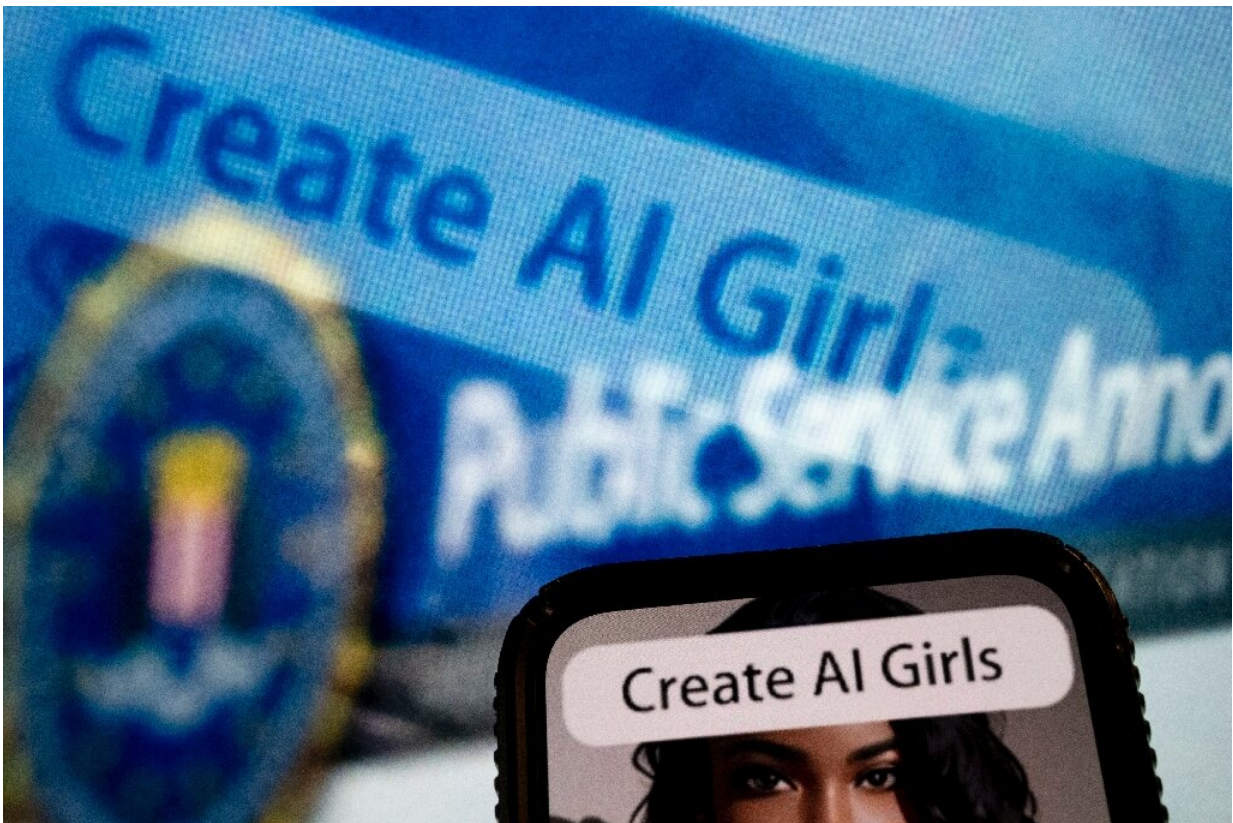


In age of AI, women battle rise of deepfake porn

July 24 2023, by Anuj Chopra with Phil Hazlewood in London



The proliferation of deepfake pornography underscores the threat of AI-enabled disinformation, which can damage reputations and lead to bullying or harassment.

Photo apps digitally undressing women, sexualized text-to-image

prompts creating "AI girls" and manipulated images fueling "sextortion" rackets—a boom in deepfake porn is outpacing US and European efforts to regulate the technology.

Artificial intelligence-enabled deepfakes are typically associated with fake viral images of well-known personalities such as Pope Francis in a puffer coat or Donald Trump under arrest, but experts say they are more widely used for generating non-consensual [porn](#) that can destroy ordinary lives.

Women are a particular target of AI tools and apps—widely available for free and requiring no technical expertise—that allow users to digitally strip off clothing from their pictures, or insert their faces into sexually explicit videos.

"The rise of AI-generated porn and [deepfake](#) porn normalizes the use of a woman's image or likeness without her consent," Sophie Maddocks, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania tracking image-based [sexual abuse](#), told AFP.

"What message do we send about consent as a society when you can virtually strip any woman?"

In a tearful video, an American Twitch streamer who goes by QTCinderella lamented the "constant exploitation and objectification" of [women](#) as she became the victim of deepfake porn. She was harassed, she added, by people sending her copies of the deepfakes depicting her.

The scandal erupted in January during a livestream by fellow streamer Brandon Ewing, who was caught looking at a website that contained deepfaked sexual images of several women including QTCinderella.

"It's not as simple as 'just' being violated. It's so much more than that,"

she wrote on Twitter, adding that the experience had "ruined" her.

'Hyper-real'

The proliferation of online deepfakes underscores the threat of AI-enabled disinformation, which can damage reputations and lead to bullying or harassment.

While celebrities such as singer Taylor Swift and actress Emma Watson have been victims of deepfake porn, women not in the public eye are also targeted.

American and European media are filled with first-hand testimonies of women—from academics to activists—who were shocked to discover their faces in deepfake porn.

Some 96 percent of deepfake videos online are non-consensual pornography, and most of them depict women, according to a 2019 study by the Dutch AI company Sensity.

"The previously private act of sexual fantasy, which takes place inside someone's mind, is now transferred to technology and [content creators](#) in the [real world](#)," Roberta Duffield, director of intelligence at Blackbird.AI, told AFP.

"The ease of access and lack of oversight—alongside the growing professionalization of the industry—entrenches these technologies into new forms of exploiting and diminishing women."

Among a new crop of text-to-art generators are free apps that can create "hyper-real AI girls"—avatars from real photos, customizing them with prompts such as "dark skin" and "thigh strap."

New technologies such as Stable Diffusion, an [open-source](#) AI model developed by Stability AI, have made it possible to conjure up realistic images from text descriptions.

'Dark corner'

The tech advancements have given rise to what Duffield called an "expanding cottage industry" around AI-enhanced porn, with many deepfake creators taking paid requests to generate content featuring a person of the customer's choice.

Last month, the FBI issued a warning about "sextortion schemes," in which fraudsters capture photos and videos from social media to create "sexually themed" deepfakes that are then used to extort money.

The victims, the FBI added, included minor children and non-consenting adults.

The proliferation of AI tools has outstripped regulation.

"This is not some dark corner of the internet where these images are being created and shared," Dan Purcell, chief executive and founder of the AI brand protection company Ceartas, told AFP.

"It's right under our noses. And yes, the law needs to catch up."

In Britain, the government has proposed a new Online Safety Bill that seeks to criminalize the sharing of pornographic deepfakes.

Four US states, including California and Virginia, have outlawed the distribution of deepfake porn, but victims often have little legal recourse if the perpetrators live outside these jurisdictions.

In May, a US lawmaker introduced the Preventing Deepfakes of Intimate Images Act that would make sharing non-consensual deepfake pornography illegal.

Popular online spaces such as Reddit have also sought to regulate its burgeoning AI porn communities.

"The internet is one jurisdiction with no borders, and there needs to be a unified international law to protect people against this form of exploitation," Purcell said.

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