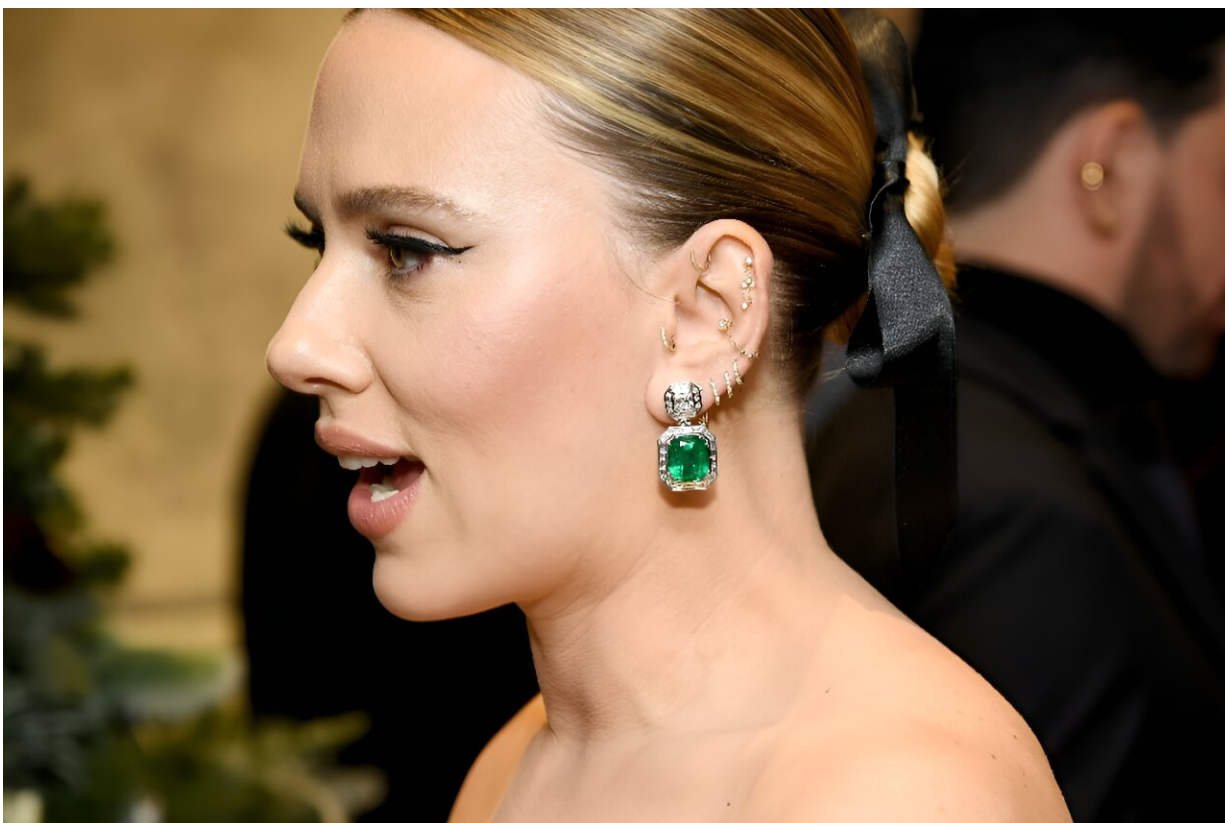


# OpenAI apologizes to Johansson, denies voice based on her

May 21 2024, by Glenn CHAPMAN

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OpenAI says its 'Sky' artificial intelligence voice was made in collaboration with a professional actress and is not meant to sound like film star Scarlett Johansson.

OpenAI chief Sam Altman apologized Tuesday to Scarlett Johansson after the movie star said she was "shocked" by a new synthetic voice

released by the ChatGPT-maker, but he insisted the voice was not based on hers.

At issue is "Sky," a voice OpenAI featured last week in the release of its more humanlike GPT-4o artificial intelligence technology.

In a demo, Sky was at times flirtatious and funny, seamlessly jumping from one topic to the next, unlike most existing chatbots.

The technology—and sound of the voice—quickly drew similarities to the Johansson-voiced AI character in the 2013 film "Her."

Altman has previously pointed to the Spike Jonze-directed movie—a cautionary tale about the future in which a man falls in love with an AI chatbot—as inspiration for where he would like AI interactions to go.

He furthered speculation last week with a single-word post on X, formerly Twitter, saying "her."

"The voice of Sky is not Scarlett Johansson's, and it was never intended to resemble hers," Altman said in a statement on Tuesday in a response to the controversy.

"We cast the voice actor behind Sky's voice before any outreach to Ms. Johansson.

"Out of respect for Ms. Johansson, we have paused using Sky's voice in our products. We are sorry to Ms. Johansson that we didn't communicate better."

The statement came after Johansson on Monday expressed outrage, saying she was "shocked, angered, and in disbelief that Mr. Altman would pursue a voice that sounded so eerily similar to mine that my

closest friends and news outlets couldn't tell the difference."

She said Altman had offered in September to hire her to work with OpenAI to create a synthetic voice, saying it might help people engaging with AI, but she declined.

## **Risk team disbanded**

In a blogpost, the company explained that it began working to cast the voice actors in early 2023, "carefully considering the unique personality of each voice and their appeal to global audiences."

Some of the characteristics sought were "a voice that feel timeless" and "an approachable voice that inspires trust," the company said.

The five final actors were flown to San Francisco to record in June and July, it said, with their voices launched into ChatGPT last September.

"To protect their privacy, we cannot share the names of our voice talents," OpenAI said.

"We believe that AI voices should not deliberately mimic a celebrity's distinctive voice."

So far in the AI frenzy, most tech giants have been reluctant to overly humanize chatbots and some observers expressed concern that OpenAI's demo last week had gone too far.

Microsoft Vice President Yusuf Mehdi cautioned that AI "should not be human."

"It shouldn't breathe. You should be able to...understand (it) is AI," he told AFP.

The Johansson dispute came just days after OpenAI admitted it disbanded a team devoted to mitigating the long-term dangers of artificial intelligence.

OpenAI began dissolving the so-called "superalignment" group weeks ago, integrating members into other projects and research.

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