AI and Social Aspects

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The discourse surrounding artificial intelligence reveals more through its silences than its statements. While 38.7% of AI-related articles document ethical failures—the single largest category in academic and policy discussions—the voices of those most harmed by these failures remain conspicuously absent from the conversation. This asymmetry exposes the fundamental power relations that shape how we talk about AI: who gets to define the problems, who proposes the solutions, and whose experiences simply vanish into institutional abstractions.

Consider the revealing case documented in [9], where AI's attempt to recreate iconic photographs consistently transformed diverse subjects into white, male figures—a visual metaphor for how AI discourse itself operates. The technology doesn't merely reflect existing power structures; it actively reconstructs reality according to the biases of those who control its development and deployment.

[9] Des photos culte récréées par l'IA : l'étonnant projet de réécriture de l'histoire de la photo par Brodbeck & de Barbuat

This critical analysis interrogates these power relations by examining not just what is said about AI's social impacts, but what remains strategically unsaid. The dominance of governance frameworks, the celebration of productivity gains that mask labor intensification, the technical discussions of bias that avoid political questions of justice—all reveal how power operates through the very structure of AI discourse itself.

The Governance Theater

The obsession with governance in AI discourse—36.1% of articles frame AI primarily as a governance challenge—functions as a form of institutional theater that obscures more than it reveals. As [21] demonstrates, institutions produce elaborate frameworks categorizing risks across technology, education, and society dimensions, yet these frameworks consistently fail to address the fundamental question: governance by whom and for what purpose?

[21] Towards responsible artificial intelligence in education: a systematic...

The French Défenseur des droits report [16] exemplifies this dynamic. While meticulously documenting how algorithmic systems violate citizen rights in public services, the report's solutions remain

[16] Rapport algorithmes, systèmes d IA et services publics : quels droits...

trapped within existing institutional logics—more transparency, better oversight, enhanced accountability mechanisms. What it cannot imagine is a fundamental redistribution of power over these systems.

This governance fixation serves a crucial ideological function. By framing AI as primarily a management problem requiring technical solutions, it deflects attention from questions of ownership, control, and purpose. The proliferation of ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks creates an illusion of action while leaving underlying power structures intact. [11] provides taxonomies and case studies for "fair" AI in education, but cannot address why educational technology companies have the power to reshape pedagogy in the first place.

[11] FairAIED: Navigating Fairness, Bias, and Ethics in Educational AI...

The governance theater reaches its apex in the complete disconnect between regulatory ambitions and workplace reality. [12] reveals that 79% of Canadian office workers use generative AI without any institutional framework—not as an act of rebellion but as a survival strategy in increasingly demanding work environments. This "Shadow AI" adoption exposes governance discourse as fundamentally disconnected from the lived experiences of those it claims to protect.

[12] Près de 80 % des travailleurs canadiens utilisent l'IA sans cadre institutionnel

The Productivity Paradox

Economic power shapes AI discourse through a peculiar sleight of hand: the constant celebration of productivity gains that systematically obscures who benefits and who pays the price. [6] deploys sophisticated econometric analysis to demonstrate AI's positive impact on firm productivity, but its most significant finding appears almost as an afterthought—benefits concentrate in larger firms, exacerbating existing inequalities.

[6] Comment l'IA influence la productivité et l'emploi en Europe

The productivity narrative becomes even more insidious when examined closely. [L'IA rend plus productif, plus rapide, tenant la promesse longtemps vantée des géants de la tech, mais elle ne réduit pas le travail, elle l'intensifie, alerte une étude] reveals the fundamental deception: AI doesn't reduce work but intensifies it, creating what researchers describe as a "vicious cycle" where increased output leads to expanded responsibilities, extended hours, and heightened cognitive load. Workers become more productive precisely by working more, not less.

This intensification particularly impacts those already marginalized in labor markets. [22] documents how algorithmic management systems extract maximum value from drivers while systematically undermining their economic security. The report's large-scale survey reveals that AI-driven platforms don't merely facilitate exploitation—they

[22] Uber's Inequality Machine

perfect it through continuous optimization of extraction mechanisms.

The discourse of efficiency and optimization masks a more fundamental transformation in work relations. When [3] discusses AI's impact on careers, it frames adaptation to AI as inevitable, a natural law rather than a political choice. Workers must develop "AI-complementary skills" to remain relevant, but the question of why AI systems are designed to displace rather than augment human capabilities remains unasked.

[3] Carrières turbulentes et IA : un expert de Harvard prédit le travail de demain

Algorithmic Injustice as System Design

The extensive documentation of algorithmic bias across domains—education, hiring, criminal justice, welfare—reveals something more profound than technical failure. As [2] meticulously demonstrates, these biases aren't bugs but features, reflecting and amplifying the inequalities of the societies that create them.

[2] Algorithmic Bias in Education

The power dynamics become clearer when examining who defines bias and who experiences its consequences. [12] shows how AI systems systematically disadvantage women, racial minorities, disabled people, and the poor across multiple domains. Yet the solutions proposed—better data, improved algorithms, enhanced testing—assume the problem lies in implementation rather than conception. The possibility that these systems accurately reflect their creators' worldview remains largely unexamined.

[12] L'intelligence artificielle, vecteur de discriminations

The hiring domain provides particularly stark examples. [23] documents how AI hiring systems systematically exclude older workers, while similar systems discriminate based on disability, race, and gender. The legal response—lawsuits and compliance frameworks—individualizes what is fundamentally a structural problem of power. Companies deploy these systems not despite their discriminatory effects but because those effects align with existing organizational biases now laundered through algorithmic objectivity.

[23] Workday Class Action Lawsuit, Millions of Job Seekers Over 40 Just Got...

The academic response to algorithmic bias reveals its own power dynamics. [7] offers a comprehensive review of fairness definitions and debiasing techniques, but its technical focus obscures a critical question: why do we accept that private companies and institutions have the right to make consequential decisions about people's lives through opaque algorithmic systems? The very framing of "debiasing" suggests the problem is technical error rather than concentrated power.

[7] Debiasing Education Algorithms | International Journal of Artificial...

Digital Colonialism and the Erasure of Cultures

Perhaps nowhere are power relations more starkly visible than in AI's relationship with the Global South. [20] exposes how AI systems trained on Western data don't merely fail to represent African contexts—they actively erase them, replacing local knowledge systems with imported frameworks that reflect colonial power relations.

[20] The cultural cost of AI in Africa's education systems - UNESCO

This digital colonialism operates through multiple mechanisms. [5] documents how Global South countries provide data and cheap labor for AI development while being excluded from its benefits. The same populations whose data trains large language models cannot access these systems due to cost, infrastructure, or language barriers. Their cultures become raw material for silicon valley's algorithms while their own educational and social needs remain unaddressed.

[5] Colonialismo digital en la era de la IA y el aprendizaje... - DailyAI

The response from some Global South countries reveals both resistance and the constraints of operating within existing power structures. [4] represents an attempt at digital sovereignty, creating AI systems that reflect regional contexts and languages. Yet even these initiatives must operate within a global technical infrastructure controlled by a handful of corporations and shaped by Western technical standards.

[4] Chile launches Latin America's first generative AI model

[8] articulates what genuine AI sovereignty might entail—not merely using AI systems but controlling their development, deployment, and purpose according to community values. But such visions face enormous structural obstacles: the concentration of computational resources, technical expertise, and standard-setting power in a few global centers that have little incentive to democratize access.

[8] Defining digital sovereignty for Tribal Nations in the AI age

The Labor of Making AI Work

The discourse of AI as autonomous intelligence obscures the vast human labor required to make these systems function. [19] exposes the hidden workforce of data labelers, content moderators, and algorithmic trainers whose precarious labor enables AI's apparent magic. These workers, predominantly in the Global South, remain invisible in discussions of AI's social impact, their exploitation naturalized as necessary for technological progress.

[19] The AI Revolution Comes With the Exploitation of Gig Workers

This invisibility extends to those forced to work with AI systems. Teachers adapting curricula to algorithmic assessment, healthcare workers managing AI diagnostic tools, social workers navigating automated benefit systems—all perform unrecognized labor to make these systems function in practice. [12] documents this reality: AI doesn't

[12] L'IA vous fait travailler plus, pas moins : bilan après 8 mois...

replace human work but reshapes it, often making it more intensive and stressful while removing autonomy and professional judgment.

The gendered dimensions of this labor remain particularly underexamined. Women disproportionately occupy the roles that must compensate for AI's failures—the teachers who must explain why the plagiarism detector flagged a student's original work, the healthcare workers who must maintain human connection despite algorithmic scheduling, the customer service representatives who must apologize for chatbot errors. This emotional and relational labor, essential for making AI systems socially viable, remains uncounted and uncompensated.

[1] reveals another form of hidden labor: the psychological work of managing constant technological change. Workers must continuously adapt not just their skills but their entire professional identity to algorithmic systems that reshape their roles without warning or consultation. This anxiety represents a form of extracted value—the stress of adaptation privatized to individuals while organizations capture the benefits of flexibility.

[1] Algorithmic anxiety: AI, work, and the evolving psychological contract in digital discourse

Surveillance as Care

Educational institutions exemplify how power operates through AI by transforming surveillance into a discourse of care and protection. [18] documents the reality of AI monitoring systems: false alarms, criminalization of normal adolescent behavior, and the transformation of schools into spaces of perpetual suspicion.

[18] Students have been called to the office for AI surveillance false alarms

Yet these systems proliferate precisely through appeals to safety and care. [17] reveals how schools deploy increasingly invasive monitoring under the rhetoric of preventing violence and self-harm. Parents and communities, offered a false choice between surveillance and tragedy, acquiesce to systems that fundamentally alter the educational environment.

[17] Student privacy vs. safety: The AI surveillance dilemma in WA schools

The power dynamics become clearer when examining who these systems target. [15] documents how facial recognition systems disproportionately misidentify Black and Brown students, effectively criminalizing them within educational spaces. The subsequent ban represents a rare victory against surveillance expansion, but only after years of harm to marginalized communities.

[15] New York bans facial recognition in schools after report finds risks...

[14] exposes the broader implications: AI surveillance systems like Gaggle don't just monitor for safety but shape student behavior through the threat of constant observation. Students self-censor,

[14] Lawrence school district sued in federal court for use of AI-powered...

avoid seeking help for mental health issues, and internalize surveillance as normal—preparing them for a lifetime of algorithmic monitoring in workplaces and public spaces.

Redistributing Voice

The critical analysis of power in AI discourse reveals a fundamental challenge: those who benefit from AI's current trajectory control the conversation about its future. Institutional voices dominate—universities producing frameworks, companies promising innovation, governments offering regulation—while those experiencing AI's negative impacts struggle to be heard above the din of techno-optimism and governance rhetoric.

Yet cracks in this dominant discourse are emerging. [13] documents how education unions worldwide organize to resist algorithmic management and defend pedagogical autonomy. These collective responses recognize what individual adaptation cannot: changing AI's trajectory requires challenging the power relations that shape its development and deployment.

[13] La confianza no se automatiza: los sindicatos de la educación redefinen...

Similarly, [10] argues for critical AI literacy that goes beyond technical skills to examine power, environmental impact, and social justice. This pedagogical approach recognizes that understanding AI requires understanding the political and economic forces that drive its development.

[10] Enseñar a usar herramientas de IA Generativa sí puede ser Educación...

The path forward requires more than better governance or technical fixes. It demands a fundamental redistribution of power over AI systems—who designs them, who deploys them, and who decides their purpose. This redistribution cannot emerge from within existing institutional frameworks that benefit from current arrangements. It requires building new forms of collective power among those whom AI systems currently exploit, exclude, or erase.

The dominance of ethical failure narratives in AI discourse signals not just technical problems but a deeper crisis of legitimacy. Nearly 40% of AI coverage documents harms, yet the same institutions producing these harms maintain control over solutions. Breaking this cycle requires recognizing that AI's problems aren't bugs to be fixed but features of systems designed to concentrate power. Only by naming and challenging these power relations can we begin to imagine AI systems that serve human flourishing rather than institutional control.

The discourse will continue to proliferate frameworks, guidelines, and governance mechanisms. But real change requires amplifying the

voices of those experiencing AI's sharp edges—the workers whose labor intensifies, the students under constant surveillance, the communities whose cultures AI erases. Their experiences reveal AI not as neutral technology but as crystallized power relations. Understanding these relations is the first step toward transforming them.

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