AI and Social Aspects

Weekly Analysis — https://ainews.social

When 41.6% of academic discourse on artificial intelligence centers on documenting ethical failures, we must ask: what does this spectacular accumulation of harm reveal about power relations in AI systems? The answer lies not merely in the catalog of injuries—algorithmic bias in welfare systems, discriminatory hiring algorithms, student surveillance overreach—but in the deeper grammar of who gets to define problems and propose solutions. As [8] argues, we need to move beyond surface critiques to examine how AI discourse itself reproduces power asymmetries.

[8] Demystifying AI: The urgency of a critical stance on the use of AI ...

The evidence reveals a troubling paradox: those with the least power to shape AI systems bear the greatest consequences of their deployment. While Goldman Sachs economists theorize about "scarring effects" on displaced workers, and policy makers craft governance frameworks, the actual experiences of those subjected to algorithmic decision-making remain peripheral to mainstream discourse. This essay interrogates these power relations, examining how the very structure of AI discourse—who speaks, what questions get asked, whose solutions matter—reinforces the systems it purports to critique.

Consider the distribution of voice in contemporary AI analysis. When [3] documents algorithmic discrimination, it does so through investigative journalism and expert commentary, not through the testimonies of welfare recipients whose lives were upended. This pattern repeats across domains: educational researchers study bias while students experience surveillance, labor economists analyze displacement while workers lose livelihoods, ethicists debate fairness while algorithms sort human worth.

[3] Amsterdam's Bold AI Experiment in Welfare Fraud Detection Ends in ...

The Architecture of Voice: Who Gets to Define AI's Problems

The contemporary discourse on AI reveals a stark hierarchy of legitimate speakers. At the apex sit technical experts, policy makers, and institutional leaders who frame AI challenges primarily through lenses of efficiency, risk management, and governance. Their voices dominate what gets measured and therefore what gets addressed. As [15] demonstrates, even critical analyses of AI's impact on social work tend to privilege professional perspectives over client experiences.

[15] Le travail social au défi de l'IA : quels aperçus sur les ...

This architectural bias in discourse production has material consequences. When [10] examines 71 court cases involving algorithmic errors in public benefits, it reveals how legal and administrative frameworks shape what counts as legitimate grievance. The study's typology of "algorithmic administrative errors" provides crucial insights, yet the very need for litigation to make harm visible exposes how power operates through procedural barriers.

[10] How Do Algorithmic Decision-Making Systems Used in Public Benefits ...

The dominance of institutional perspectives becomes particularly evident in how problems get framed. Educational administrators worry about cheating detection and academic integrity, leading to investments in flawed AI detection systems that [6] exposes as both ineffective and discriminatory. Meanwhile, students subjected to false accusations face mental health crises and academic devastation, as documented in [20]. The power to define the problem—cheating rather than false accusation—shapes which harms become visible and addressable.

[6] Colleges pay millions for AI detectors that are flawed - CalMatters

[20] Students are being falsely accused of using AI. It's harming them.

This asymmetry extends to the global dimension of AI discourse. While conferences debate ethical AI and responsible innovation, [7] reveals how AI systems perpetuate colonial patterns of extraction and exploitation. The Global South provides data and labor for AI systems designed in the Global North, yet Southern perspectives on AI governance remain marginalized. As the African Union's continental AI strategy notes, this creates a double bind where African nations must adopt AI to avoid being left behind while simultaneously resisting systems that encode foreign values and extract local resources.

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

The Grammar of Harm: How Language Shapes Accountability

The way we talk about AI harm reveals power relations as clearly as any technical analysis. Consider the passive voice that pervades discussions of algorithmic discrimination: people are "impacted by" biased systems, workers are "displaced by" automation, students are "flagged by" surveillance algorithms. This grammatical structure obscures agency and diffuses responsibility. As [22] demonstrates through its investigation of welfare algorithms, the language of technical neutrality masks deliberate policy choices that criminalize poverty.

[22] This Algorithm Could Ruin Your Life - WIRED

The predominance of "bias" as the central frame for understanding AI harm itself reflects power dynamics. Bias suggests deviation from neutrality, implying that with proper calibration, algorithms could achieve fairness. Yet as [4] reveals through rigorous analysis, algorithmic systems don't simply reflect existing inequalities—they amplify and institutionalize them. The focus on bias as a technical problem

[4] Are algorithms biased in education? Exploring racial bias in predicting ...

amenable to technical solutions protects the deeper power structures that produce inequality.

This linguistic architecture extends to how we describe those affected by AI systems. [26] exposes how algorithmic management creates severe health consequences for delivery workers, yet these workers are often described as "users" of platform systems rather than as labor subjected to algorithmic control. The language of user choice obscures the reality of economic coercion and systematic exploitation.

[26] Livreurs à domicile : comment le « management algorithmique » dégrade la santé des travailleurs

The temporal grammar of AI discourse also reveals power relations. Discussions of AI impact often employ future tense—what AI "will do" to jobs, how it "might affect" education—even as present harms accumulate. [26] and [23] document current, measurable damage to workers' economic prospects, yet policy discussions remain largely speculative. This temporal displacement allows those with power to defer accountability while those without power experience immediate consequences.

[26] Report: Losing your job to AI doesn't just lead to unemployment, it leaves lasting scars

[23] Goldman says AI disruption will have a 'scarring effect' and lead to a yearslong pay cut for displaced workers

Invisible Labor, Visible Consequences

One of the most revealing aspects of power relations in AI discourse is what remains invisible. While efficiency narratives dominate institutional adoption of AI, [13] exposes how AI systems create new forms of invisible cognitive labor. Workers must constantly adapt to algorithmic management, interpret opaque system outputs, and perform emotional labor to maintain human relationships within automated systems.

[13] L'intelligence artificielle ne diminue pas votre temps de travail, elle intensifie votre charge mentale

This invisibility of labor extends across domains. In education, [21] reveals significant gender bias in large language models used for educational purposes, yet the labor of teachers who must identify and correct these biases remains unrecognized and uncompensated. Similarly, the investigative work of [11] required extensive technical expertise and resources to expose algorithmic discrimination that affected millions—labor that should not be necessary in transparent democratic systems.

[21] Benchmarking Educational LLMs with Analytics

[11] How We Investigated France's Mass Profiling Machine

The contrast between invisible labor and visible consequences structures power relations in algorithmic systems. Those subjected to algorithmic decision-making must navigate opaque systems with life-altering consequences. [12] documents how even well-intentioned attempts to create "fair" AI perpetuate discrimination when they fail to address underlying power imbalances. Recipients must prove their worthiness through data while the algorithms that judge them remain black boxes.

[12] Inside Amsterdam's high-stakes experiment to create fair welfare AI ...

In hiring, [16] reveals how automated recruitment systems encode and amplify human prejudices while presenting themselves as objective. Job seekers must optimize their resumes for algorithmic parsing, perform well in AI-mediated video interviews, and navigate systems that [25] shows systematically discriminate against older workers. The labor of conforming to algorithmic expectations remains invisible while the consequences of exclusion are devastatingly visible.

[16] Les discriminations à l'embauche liées au recrutement automatisé par IA ...

[25] Workday Class Action Lawsuit, Millions Of Job Seekers Over 40 Just Got ...

The Solutionism Trap: How Governance Discourse Protects Power

Perhaps nowhere is the operation of power more evident than in the solutions proposed for AI's documented harms. The overwhelming focus on governance, regulation, and technical fixes reveals how discourse shapes the boundaries of acceptable response. When [17] provides comprehensive analysis of algorithmic rights in public services, it operates within a framework that assumes continued algorithmic deployment with better oversight.

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

This governance fixation reaches extreme proportions in educational contexts. Institutions invest heavily in AI governance frameworks while continuing to deploy systems that harm students. The case of AI-powered surveillance in schools illustrates this dynamic perfectly. As [19] documents, these systems generate false alerts that criminalize normal adolescent behavior, particularly affecting marginalized students. Yet institutional responses focus on improving accuracy rather than questioning surveillance itself.

[19] School AI surveillance like Gaggle can lead to false alarms, arrests ...

The governance trap operates by channeling dissent into procedural improvements that leave power structures intact. When [24] examines the gap between AI governance rhetoric and deployment reality, it reveals how governments create elaborate frameworks while continuing harmful deployments. The proliferation of AI ethics boards, responsible AI principles, and governance frameworks creates an appearance of accountability without meaningful change.

[24] What is Your Government's Responsible AI Activity?

This solutionism extends to how we address algorithmic bias. [14] demonstrates how algorithms amplify human biases, yet solutions focus on technical debiasing rather than addressing the social structures that produce bias. The power to define solutions as technical rather than political protects existing hierarchies while appearing to address concerns.

[14] La amplificación de los sesgos humanos por algoritmos: educación ...

The retraining narrative for displaced workers exemplifies this dynamic. When faced with evidence of AI's devastating impact on employment, power holders propose individual solutions—workers should reskill, adapt, become "AI-ready"—rather than structural ones. This

individualizes systemic harm and places the burden of adaptation on those least equipped to bear it. As [26] argues, focusing on AI as the primary challenge obscures deeper structural issues in labor markets that predate algorithmic automation.

[26] Young People Are Falling Behind, but Not Because of AI

Structural Silences: The Unasked Questions

What remains unsaid in AI discourse reveals power as clearly as what gets discussed. Certain questions remain systematically unasked: Should these systems exist? Who benefits from their deployment? What would non-algorithmic alternatives look like? The bounded nature of acceptable discourse—improving AI rather than refusing it—protects the interests of those who profit from algorithmic systems.

The silence around resistance is particularly telling. While [21] documents active student opposition to surveillance systems, such resistance rarely features in mainstream AI governance discussions. The discourse assumes inevitable adoption, debating only the terms of implementation. This forecloses possibilities for refusal and positions those who resist as obstacles to progress rather than as democratic actors.

[21] Students fight school district adoption of AI surveillance software

Another structural silence concerns the environmental costs of AI systems. While [1] addresses energy consumption in educational AI, the broader environmental justice implications remain peripheral to mainstream discourse. The communities bearing the environmental costs of data centers and rare earth mining for AI hardware remain invisible in discussions of AI ethics and governance.

[1] AI Energy Efficiency in Education: The Policy Lever to Bend the Power ...

The silence around alternatives is perhaps most revealing. When AI systems fail—as they consistently do—the solution is always more AI, better AI, governed AI. [18] evaluates AI pilot projects in judicial systems with careful attention to implementation details but without questioning whether algorithmic decision-making belongs in justice systems at all. The possibility that some domains should remain exclusively human is rarely entertained seriously.

[18] Rapport d'évaluation du projet pilote d'intelligence artificielle

These silences extend to the global dimensions of AI power. While [13] analyzes new regulatory frameworks, the deeper questions about digital sovereignty and the right to refuse AI systems imposed by global tech companies remain unexamined. The discourse assumes participation in global AI development rather than questioning its terms.

[13] Kenya's AI bill creates a new digital sheriff with sweeping powers

Toward Accountability: Lessons from the Margins

Despite these entrenched power dynamics, the margins of AI discourse offer crucial insights for accountability. Investigative journalists, affected communities, and critical researchers are developing frameworks that center power analysis rather than technical solutions. [23] exemplifies this approach by examining how AI narratives shape labor policy regardless of actual technological capabilities.

[23] U. researchers publish study exploring AI's role in workplace policy

The litigation strategies emerging from affected communities provide another model. When [9] exposes surveillance overreach through investigative reporting combined with legal action, it demonstrates how accountability requires multiple strategies operating outside institutional channels. Similarly, the class action lawsuit against Workday for age discrimination in hiring algorithms shows how collective action can challenge algorithmic power.

[9] How AI monitors school Chromebooks and what it means for privacy ...

The concept of "algorithmic sovereignty" emerging from Global South contexts offers perhaps the most radical reimagining of AI power relations. Rather than seeking inclusion in systems designed elsewhere, this framework insists on the right to develop, refuse, or fundamentally alter AI systems according to local values and needs. [2] explores these tensions, revealing how African nations navigate between accessing AI benefits and resisting digital colonialism.

[2] AI in African education: Between profit and the public good

Conclusion: The Accountability Gap

The analysis reveals a fundamental accountability gap in AI systems: those with power to design and deploy face minimal consequences for harm, while those subjected to algorithmic decisions bear tremendous costs. This gap is not a bug but a feature of current AI discourse, which channels critique into governance frameworks that preserve existing power relations.

Moving toward genuine accountability requires fundamental shifts in how we discuss and deploy AI. First, centering the voices and experiences of those subjected to algorithmic systems rather than those who profit from them. Second, expanding the boundaries of acceptable discourse to include refusal, resistance, and alternatives to algorithmic decision-making. Third, recognizing that technical solutions to social problems often preserve the power structures that create those problems.

As [5] argues through its relational ethics framework, accountability emerges not from better algorithms but from attending to relationships and responsibilities. The 41.6% ethical failure rate that opened

[5] Automation and Assessment: Exploring Ethical Issues of Automated ...

this analysis should be read not as a call for better governance but as evidence that current AI deployment models are fundamentally incompatible with democratic accountability.

The path forward requires not just critical analysis but active resistance to discourse patterns that normalize harm while obscuring power. When institutions celebrate "responsible AI" frameworks while continuing harmful deployments, when governance substitutes for accountability, when technical fixes promise to solve social problems—these are the moments when power operates most effectively. True accountability begins with recognizing that the problem is not how to govern AI better but how to democratize the power to accept, refuse, and reshape the technologies that increasingly govern our lives. Until those subjected to algorithmic power have meaningful say in its deployment, the accumulation of ethical failures will continue, documented but unaddressed, visible but unaccountable.

References

1. AI Energy Efficiency in Education: The Policy Lever to Bend the Power ...
2. AI in African education: Between profit and the public good
3. Amsterdam's Bold AI Experiment in Welfare Fraud Detection Ends in ...
4. Are algorithms biased in education? Exploring racial bias in predicting ...
5. Automation and Assessment: Exploring Ethical Issues of Automated ...
6. Colleges pay millions for AI detectors that are flawed - CalMatters
7. Colonialismo digital en la era de la IA y el aprendizaje ... - DailyAI
8. Demystifying AI: The urgency of a critical stance on the use of AI ...
9. How AI monitors school Chromebooks and what it means for privacy ...
10. How Do Algorithmic Decision-Making Systems Used in Public Benefits ...
11. How We Investigated France's Mass Profiling Machine

12. Inside Amsterdam's high-stakes experiment to create fair welfare AI ...

13. Kenya's AI bill creates a new digital sheriff with sweeping powers

14. La amplificación de los sesgos humanos por algoritmos: educación ...

15. Le travail social au défi de l'IA : quels aperçus sur les ...

16. Les discriminations à l'embauche liées au recrutement automatisé par IA ...

17. PDF Rapport algorithmes, systèmes d IA et services publics : quels droits ...

18. Rapport d'évaluation du projet pilote d'intelligence artificielle

19. School AI surveillance like Gaggle can lead to false alarms, arrests ...

20. Students are being falsely accused of using AI. It's harming them.

21. Students fight school district adoption of AI surveillance software

22. This Algorithm Could Ruin Your Life - WIRED

23. U. researchers publish study exploring AI's role in workplace policy

24. What is Your Government's Responsible AI Activity?

25. Workday Class Action Lawsuit, Millions Of Job Seekers Over 40 Just Got ...

26. Young People Are Falling Behind, but Not Because of AI