

## When Bias Becomes Code: Laura Bates' *The New Age of Sexism*

We'd like to think of technology as the thing that will save us—the tool that will swoop in and rescue us from a world crumbling with inequality, poverty, and environmental destruction. But despite what science fiction authors would have us believe, technology is not objective, and it doesn't operate with a mind of its own; it is entirely man-made and influenced by human society and the very inequalities, biases, and flaws that have dictated our history.

AI is ushering in the fastest era of technological revolution we have seen in history, and many professionals in the field believe that it will become the foundation of our future. But with a workforce of AI researchers, professors, data professionals, and software developers that is heavily dominated by white men, we risk reproducing a future where the concept of a “world created by and for men” is infinitely amplified and these inequalities are built into the very fabric of its existence. At least that's what activist and bestselling author Laura Bates argues in her newest book.

### **Redirecting Our Focus**

*The New Age of Sexism: How AI and Emerging Technologies Are Reinventing Misogyny* (2025) offers a deep dive into the disturbing world of online sexual abuse and misogyny and the ways that new technologies have been both abused and intentionally designed to exploit and harm women and marginalized communities.

While the emergence of AI has reborn longstanding existential fears about the threat of technology, Bates argues that our focus should be redirected to the harm that AI has already caused. To Bates, the threat of AI does not stem from AI consciousness or robot takeover but from the digital violence and oppression that is already occurring on online platforms at alarming rates. This is partially a result of the tech industry's “standard practice,” which prioritizes speed, competition, profit, and development for the sake of it. Rather than treating humans as collateral damage in the pursuit of growth, Bates argues that safety, intentionality, inclusivity, and regulation should be at the forefront of any design process.

She further asserts that the common framing of AI advancement as “inevitable” serves as a way to absolve creators from the responsibility to regulate their technology and protect users from harm. To Bates, by doing so, we risk sleepwalking into a technological future that walks back any advancements in diversity, safety, and autonomy that we have gained in the past several decades, reawakening and deepening centuries of inequality and oppression.

### **A Meticulous Structure and Emotionally Gripping Style: What to Expect**

From deepfake pornography to AI chatbot “girlfriends” to cyber brothels, each chapter introduces a new technological space where misogyny has evolved or been coded into the platform's very foundation. For some technologies, such as deepfake technology or the metaverse, she describes how they have been misused to inflict digital sexual harm; for others, like cyber brothels and AI girlfriends, these platforms have been designed intentionally to degrade women and profit off of their exploitation. Bates also includes a chapter on how the design of AI itself depends almost entirely on datasets that mirror the inequalities and biases we possess and the implications of this inherent flaw.

While the overlap between these technologies and the harms they produce occasionally makes the book feel repetitive, it ultimately demonstrates how thoroughly Bates explores each technology and strengthens her argument: that the exploitation of women is not a glitch in the system but a structural feature on which the technology relies.

The book is meticulously researched and emotionally gripping. Bates strategically weaves powerful statistics, background information, and analysis with evocative storytelling of survivor testimonies and her own harrowing first-hand accounts of experimenting with the technology she critiques. She describes the visceral fear of stepping into a cyber brothel, the cold feel of lying amongst a sex robot, and the disorienting experience of witnessing someone being groped in the metaverse. These scenes bring a humanity and proximity to the data she presents, reminding the reader that the harms she documents are not merely statistics but human lives that have been impacted and altered.

Her own exploration of the technology furthers the experience, lending the work credibility, intimacy, and an embodied empathy, as if we are there bearing witness to it with her. Bates is not a distant researcher; her emotional connection and proximity to the subject define her writing as profoundly personal, even as it addresses alarmingly pervasive harms. The book's structure creates an engaging, extremely legible text that balances investigative rigor with emotional vulnerability and personal impact with systemic scope.

### **Confronting the Root Cause:**

Although the implications of Bates' message are disturbing, and I questioned the morality of the human race in many moments while reading, the book is an eye-opening must-read call to action that rallies readers to hold our peers accountable, be extremely vigilant in keeping children and adults digitally safe and well educated, and ultimately, demand higher standards from the multi-billion-dollar corporations that are profiting off of our loneliness, exploitation, and dehumanization while calling it the future of technology.

Remarkably, Bates is highly optimistic about our future and about the power of AI as a tool that may actually reduce inequalities and divisions. But she doesn't give us an easy way out. For Bates, these issues run deep, far deeper than the advent of AI, and to meaningfully address the misogyny that AI has expanded and protect from its future abuses, we must tackle misogyny itself, not the technology that has been manipulated to do its bidding. The new forms of violence and misogyny that AI has introduced have already victimized millions of women and been found to abuse and groom children, widely discriminate against and dehumanize people of color, and amplify fantasies of sexual harm. Addressing the misogyny and racism at the heart of these technologies is no small task and will slow the rate of innovation, but the stakes are far too high to avoid it. Without eradicating misogyny, without viewing all people as fully human and equal, we will continue to build oppression into the foundations of our futures.

*The New Age of Sexism: How AI and Emerging Technologies Are Reinventing Misogyny*, Laura Bates, Simon & Schuster, May 15, 2025

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