

24034 **Inside the Taylor Swift deepfake scandal: ‘It’s men telling a powerful woman to get back in her box’**

By Emine Saner, The Guardian, Jan 31st 2024

For almost a whole day last week, deepfake pornographic images of Taylor Swift rapidly spread through X. The social media platform, formerly Twitter, was so slow to react that one image racked up 47m views before it was taken down. It was largely Swift’s fans who mobilised and mass-reported the images, and there was a sense of public anger, with even the White House calling it “alarming”. X eventually removed the images and blocked searches to the pop star’s name on Sunday evening.

For women who have been victims of the creation and sharing of nonconsensual deepfake pornography, the events of the past week will have been a horrible reminder of their own abuse, even if they may also hope that the spotlight will force legislators into action.

Noelle Martin is a survivor of image-based abuse, a term that covers the sharing of nonconsensual sexual images and explicit deepfakes. “Everyday women like me will not have millions of people working to protect us and to help take down the content, and we won’t have the benefit of big tech companies, where this is facilitated, responding to the abuse,” she says.

Martin, an activist and researcher at the Tech & Policy Lab at the University of Western Australia, says that at first it was doctored pictures of her, but in the past few years, as generative AI has boomed, it has been videos, which are mostly shared on pornographic sites.

Even if the images aren’t particularly realistic, “it’s still enough to cause irreparable harm to a person”, she says. And good luck trying to get the images removed from the internet. “Takedown and removal is a futile process. It’s an uphill battle, and you can never guarantee its complete removal once something’s out there.”

It affects everything, she says, “from your employability to your future earning capacity to your relationships. It’s an inescapable form of abuse, that has consequences that operate in perpetuity.” Martin has had to mention it at job interviews.

Campaigner and writer Laura Bates whose book, *Men Who Hate Women*, is an investigation into online misogyny says deepfake pornographic images and videos are “absolutely circulated within extremist misogynistic communities”.

When the vast majority of AI is being used to create deepfake pornography, she points out, “this isn’t a niche problem”. It is, she says, “just the new way of controlling women. You take somebody like Swift, who is extraordinarily successful and powerful, and it’s a way of putting her back in her box.”

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