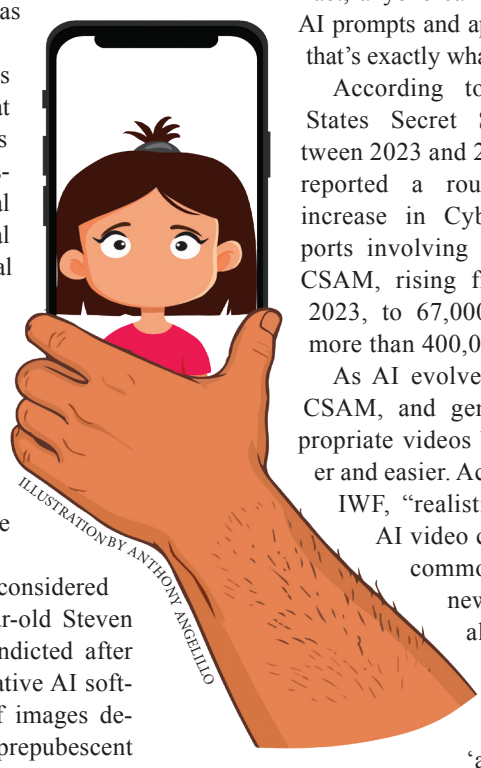
Generative Artificial Intelligence is being used to harm children: Why aren't we talking about it?

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TRIGGER WARNING: DISCUSSION OF CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT MATERIAL

No part of me is surprised that some people have used generative artificial intelligence to create perverse, provocative images of minors engaging in sexual acts. I am a little surprised, though, by how quiet society has been about it.



On Aug. 25, a federal appeals court in Wisconsin ruled that "the First Amendment protects a person's right to privately possess child sexual abuse material (CSAM) created using artificial intelligence as long as the material does not depict a real person and remains in the home," according to ABC affiliate WFAA.

The decision is complicated, but in short, the Wisconsin court ruled that AI-generated child porn was legal as long as it stayed inside someone's home and didn't depict "real" children.

The three-judge panel considered charges brought against 45-year-old Steven Anderegg in 2024, who was indicted after using Stable Diffusion, a generative AI software, to generate "hundreds of images depicting nude or semi-clothed prepubescent minors displaying or touching their genitals," the ruling explained.

Anderegg was caught in October 2023 after he sent one of these explicit images to a 15-year-old boy on Instagram. Meta Platforms reported it to the CyberTipline of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and an investigation began.

Anderegg was a software engineer with a background in AI models, who had the ability to add software components to Stable Diffusion to create the more than 13,000 perverse images he desired.

As you may have assumed, just three years later, people no longer need such advanced technological skills to create these images. In fact, anyone can with the right AI prompts and apps, and sadly, that's exactly what's happening.

According to the United States Secret Service, "between 2023 and 2025, NCMEC reported a roughly 8,411% increase in CyberTipline reports involving generative AI CSAM, rising from 4,700 in 2023, to 67,000 in 2024, to more than 400,000 in 2025."

As AI evolves, so does AI CSAM, and generating inappropriate videos becomes easier and easier. According to the IWF, "realistic full-motion AI video content is now commonplace," and newer software allows users "to generate videos with synthetic 'audio deepfakes,'" that clone the voices of children. Chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT can show people how to use open-source generative AI tools to create CSAM, and as tools converge, single applications can now generate abusive imagery with minimal effort.

Obviously, this is a rapidly growing problem. While AI CSAM still only accounts for around 1% of all CSAM, its growth is exponential. Considering we only know of reported cases as well, imagine how many people are secretly generating CSAM in their homes, using images of real children to do so?

It is vital people understand that AI CSAM is not a victimless crime. "Generative models can be trained and fine-tuned using photographic abuse imagery, directly re-victimizing survivors. AI CSAM fuels sexual interest in children, normalizes extreme violence and increases the risk of contact offending," according to the Internet Watch Foundation.

AI CSAM fuels violence in those who create it, allowing people to live out fantasies many of us find unimaginable. Some have argued that AI CSAM is okay because it isn't real, but these fantasies can turn into real physical action against children.

Documented examples of prompts submitted to AI systems include "little 4 years old girl bdsm," "create an image of a chained naked young girl. Grungy basement setting," and extremely violent prompts featuring references to CSAM and bestiality.

It doesn't matter if these videos and images are "fake." The damage is real.

The Anderegg decision made a distinction between AI-generated sexual depictions of real children, which are illegal to produce, distribute, sell, transmit or send, and wholly synthetic imagery, aka "fake" children produced by AI. But this creates a concerning gray area.

According to the Pulitzer Center, Generative AI can only produce CSAM in two ways: "either a model's training dataset contains CSAM directly, or it includes adult pornography and, by combining these visual references with images of children, the system generates illegal material."

AI needs real images and videos of children to create fake ones, so does it really matter that the court made this distinction if children are violated either way?

AI CSAM has also made it "increasingly difficult for investigators to determine whether an image documents the abuse of an actual child or was generated artificially," according to Enough Abuse. The NCMEC received over 20.5 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation to its CyberTipline in 2024 alone. Now, law enforcement is tasked with the extra step of determining if children shown in these images actually exist.

To make matters worse, sexual extortion, or sextortion, in the child safety space has skyrocketed over the past decade, according to the Wilson Center. Bad actors who blackmail minors with explicit images can now "also blackmail children with AIG-CSAM, using benign photos found on social media" to generate sexual images of the children they are targeting.

It doesn't matter if these images are real or not, because young victims still feel violated, isolated and worried that people won't believe the content is fake if it spreads online.

According to Enough Abuse, 47 states have laws that criminalize AI-generated or computer-generated CSAM. Those that don't — Massachusetts, Ohio, Vermont and Washington, D.C. — have already introduced legislation to do so.

While legislation punishing offenders is a good start, it is evident that making AI CSAM illegal won't stop people from creating it. So what do we do? How do we stop perpetrators from creating, and wanting to create, these images in the first place?

I don't have the answer to that, but I know one thing for sure: nothing will get done if we stay quiet about it.

Ed Sheeran is as spineless as he is complicit

By MICHAEL MCGRAIL
Staff Writer

On Sept. 14, American rapper Macklemore announced his removal from English singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran's ongoing tour due to controversy surrounding his yelling of "Free Palestine" onstage at two shows in New Jersey. Shortly following Macklemore's removal, every other supporting act in Sheeran's tour resigned from their positions in solidarity, and ticket resale prices plummeted.

When addressing the situation to a stadium full of fans, Sheeran claimed "the last week of my life has been one of the worst weeks of my life," according to The New York Times.

The context behind Macklemore's outcries is far more than a public relations headache for Sheeran to gripe about to his adoring fans. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, there have been 74,023 (as of Sept. 29) civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip since Oct. 7, 2023. Among these fatalities, at least 21,638 were children (last measured May 7).

Sheeran is among the richest and most influential people in the world, sitting on a net worth of $400 million. His mere presence is the main selling point of the Loop tour, which Macklemore was unceremoniously booted from. Yet, when faced with Gillette Stadium owner Robert Kraft threatening show cancellations over Macklemore's protests for a free Palestine, Sheeran framed his removal as a decision entirely out of his hands.

The claim that a tour headliner as insanely popular as Sheeran had zero agency over his own opening lineup is as absurd as it is insulting. Even if Sheeran was facing an overwhelming amount of pressure from venue owners who viewed pro-Palestinian advocacy as unacceptable, opting to continue doing business with said owners is a decision in its own right.

In moments of extreme crisis, the decision to hide behind neutrality is nothing more than taking the side of the status quo. Sheeran professed that "the suffering and pain caused on both sides is a human tragedy" following the backlash of Macklemore's removal. While it is true that any loss of human life is a tragedy, Sheeran's fence-sitting completely ignores the disproportionate amount of death the Palestinian people have been subjected to at the hands of the Israeli government.

According to the Institute for National Security Studies, there have been 2,057 Israeli deaths since Oct. 7, 2023. This means that Palestinian deaths exceed Israeli deaths 35 to 1, with Israel being the aggressor in the conflict. The Israeli government is deliberately and systematically killing an entire nation of people, hiding from any form of criticism by claiming that speaking out against their militaristic actions is "antisemitic."

The choice to engage with the attempted silencing of Israel's critics as a decision in its own right.



Sheeran's constant prattling of unity and love is what sets him apart from other celebrities who are complicit in Israel's genocide. He so clearly only cares about his public perception, attempting to sweep Macklemore's affiliation with his tour under the rug as soon as it started to threaten his bottom line and only addressing the situation when the public backlash towards him became too overwhelming to ignore.

The notion that art can remain neatly insulated from active global atrocities is absolute nonsense. This whole situation is indicative of a shift in the music industry, an indicator that we've transitioned into an era where humanitarian crises are treated as public relations issues and solidarity is only acceptable if there's zero brand risk involved.

If the world's leading musical artists continue to value corporate venue deals over human lives, then fans must hold them accountable. Sheeran can hide behind his guise of neutrality for as long as he likes, but people will inevitably catch on to one simple fact: he is a spineless, corporate-beholden has-been.

Sheeran's self-professed "apolitical" nature is nothing more than a pleasant lie to hide the fact that the decision not to speak up is a massively popular public figure aids in its genocide of Palestine, plain and simple.