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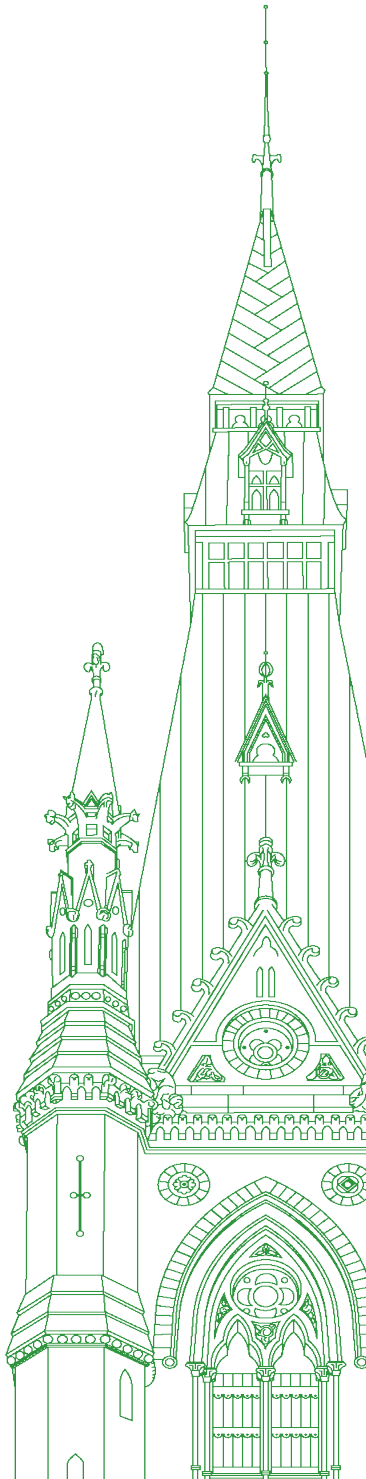
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Chair: Dominique Vien

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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● (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 52 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I hope everyone is in good shape for this meeting.

I would like to raise two points before we begin with our guests.

First, if it is okay with you, colleagues, we would take 20 minutes next Wednesday for the instructions on the menopause study. That would help the analysts a bit. We did, in fact, discuss this on Monday. Since it now appears that you are fine with that, we will go ahead. Thank you very much.

Second, in terms of the schedule, I just want to remind you that Monday, November 2, is the deadline to submit your dissenting or supplementary opinions, if any, and Thursday, November 5, is the deadline to submit your list of witnesses for our study on fertility.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, September 21, the committee is now resuming its study of the impacts of artificial intelligence on women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules for witnesses and members.

[*English*]

I would like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you will need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel required in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, if possible. If you are joining via video conference, please click on the microphone icon to turn on your microphone. Please mute your microphone when you are not speaking. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. As I often say, I like it when it is fluid. I do not stop conversations unless it is total chaos.

We are going to address sensitive issues, which may affect some people. If that is the case and you feel the need to speak to someone, please do not hesitate to talk to our clerk, Ms. Miller. We will be pleased to assist and support you.

[*English*]

I will now welcome our witnesses.

We have Suzie Dunn, assistant professor, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University.

[*Translation*]

From the Centre pour l’intelligence émotionnelle en ligne, we have Emmanuelle Parent, cofounder and executive director, and from Partnership for Women's Health Research Canada, we have Tamil Kendall, director.

[*English*]

Welcome. We will begin with opening statements.

Ms. Dunn, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Suzie Dunn (Associate Professor and Director, Law and Technology Institute, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University, As an Individual): Thank you so much.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today on the impact of artificial intelligence on women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

We often hear that women are falling behind on AI use and we're encouraged to embrace it. This is a challenging call as AI does not always benefit women and often puts them at risk. It's impossible to cover the breadth of harms and challenges that AI technology has facilitated and amplified in five minutes, but I'll do my best to highlight some of them.

Risks from AI range from discriminatory datasets that embed sexist, homophobic and transphobic norms into their outputs, repeating and amplifying historic discrimination, to facial recognition technology that has lower accuracy rates on women and racialized faces, putting them at risk of being misidentified for crimes they did not commit or causing challenges with immigration or at borders. When facial recognition technology does work, it's used to surveil and dox women who are targeted by malicious pickup artists and other bad actors who expose their identities online to encourage harassment against them.

AI agents, large language models and natural language processing tools increase the ability of stalkers and abusers to gather information about their targets and amplify the harassment against them. This happens not only in the context of intimate partner violence. It also targets politicians, journalists and human rights defenders. This leads to the silencing of women's and queer voices, who avoid posting information about themselves online to avoid this form of digital harassment.

AI is also used to create and spread discriminatory myths and disinformation that poison digital spaces and makes it unsafe for women and LGBTQI+ people to fully engage in digital life. Additionally, AI is used to facilitate romance and sexual extortion scams. There needs to be a response by government to address these AI-facilitated harms, not just those caused by individuals but also those created and amplified by the companies themselves.

My main area of expertise is on intimate images and non-consensual synthetic intimate images, which most people call deepfakes. It was clear in 2017 that deepfakes were a significant problem for women. Their identities were easily co-opted at this time and their sexual autonomy was removed. The technology to create these images, and the websites dedicated to hosting them, were widely available. One of the most popular sexual deepfakes websites was in fact created and run by a Canadian. It has taken nearly a decade of women being targeted by this harm before the federal government took action on this issue, and there are still significant gaps remaining.

I was recently speaking with a victim of non-consensual sexual deepfakes, who had her images taken from social media and turned into sexual ones—this occurred a few years ago before the criminalization of deepfakes—and there was no remedy for her at the time, despite this being an obvious problem since 2017. The government and courts did not recognize what happened to her as a harm. She was not considered a victim deserving of help, and there were few resources for her to access and a lack of sufficiently resourced organizations who could help her meaningfully. The deep nude apps that likely facilitated the creation of these images are readily online and remain readily online. She asked me at the time why the government took so long to take these issues seriously and tragically wondered whether it would take someone committing suicide for these issues to be paid attention to seriously.

We shouldn't have to wait for tragedies like the deaths of Amanda Todd, Rehtaeh Parsons or the children at Tumbler Ridge in order for the government to take action on technology-facilitated harms. Canada needs nationally available resources and supports for AI-based, technology-facilitated, gender-based violence, as well as victim-centred legal responses.

We've seen some real advances in provinces like British Columbia on issues like intimate images, which offer low-cost and accessible legal options for victims who want to get their images removed. That province also has direct support lines for victims and survivors to learn about their rights, but also about the technological and social supports available to them. The BC Society of Transition Houses and Tech Safe BC offer supports for people who want to have their devices examined to see how digital harms against them have occurred. These services are not entirely perfect. They're limited to specific harms, but they're a good start.

Across Canada, these types of services, government-funded programming and fast-track options are lacking. We need well-formatted laws and broad supports, including direct frontline victim services with expertise in technological issues and well-resourced arms of government and civil society organizations that engage in meaningful consultation, research and education to understand these harms as they evolve, assess the effectiveness of the legal remedies that are available and proactively seek legal, social and technological changes to support victims and survivors. This includes holding technology companies to account when they don't create AI programs that are safe or free from discrimination and, rather, act as tools for increased harms.

● (1650)

Thank you for your time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Dunn.

I now give the floor to Ms. Parent for five minutes.

Emmanuelle Parent (Cofounder and Executive Director, Le Centre pour l'intelligence émotionnelle en ligne): I am going to take some of my five minutes to start the recording. We all know how social media work.

It is a pleasure to meet you. I have a doctorate in communications and I am the executive director of the Centre pour l'intelligence émotionnelle en ligne, an organization that educates, listens to and equips young people in Quebec at the primary and secondary levels. I will focus on young girls and young people from LGBTQ+ communities in this presentation.

The Chair: Ms. Parent, I am sorry to interrupt. I am advised that you are not allowed to record while you are testifying.

Emmanuelle Parent: I will stop right there. I respect your right to consent or not.

The Chair: It is no more serious than that.

Please continue.

Emmanuelle Parent: Great. I am glad I let you know that I was recording.

At CIEL, we have spoken with over 100,000 children and youth since 2020. So today, I am trying to report their opinions and experiences with artificial intelligence.

I was with you eight months ago to talk about anti-feminism. I read your report. Congratulations. Thank you for listening to us. I also read the government's response, which said how it is already responding to the recommendations. I have a more specific message: hear, hear, that is good, but it is not enough. Let us see how we can improve the response.

First, I am going to talk to you about the perception of young people, including girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. During focus groups, when we ask them what they think about artificial intelligence and how they want us to educate them, there is a consensus: They say they are tired of hearing about artificial intelligence. How did we get there? That somewhat illustrates the dichotomy between pro-artificial intelligence narratives and anti-artificial intelligence narratives.

I am quoting a teenager. He told me that he has a teacher who prohibits him from writing with artificial intelligence. Another teacher suggests AI should be used in a healthy way. One teacher corrects his work with artificial intelligence, but another teacher tells him that he is using up too much water when he uses artificial intelligence and that he must limit its use. His mother connected his account to her ChatGPT account, but when he does a search on Snapchat or Google, he uses artificial intelligence. What is he supposed to do exactly?

Between narratives about the development of AI, that it is for everyone and for the future, and fear narratives that AI is going to lead to the extinction of humanity, young people do not know where to go and they lose faith in what we are telling them.

So, our first recommendation is to adopt a balanced approach that addresses both the positives and the negatives when talking to young people, including girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth.

First, Canada's national artificial intelligence strategy: AI for all states that, when funding initiatives on artificial intelligence literacy, we must act as a watchdog by ensuring that a balanced approach is always used, that no campaign focuses only on online threats, and that there is a balanced view of both sides.

Then, on top of that, there is the stigma surrounding digital device use. Young people will say that they do not want to seek help, because it is yet another screen problem. They are told that they spend too much time using their phones, even though we adults are the ones who buy them phones. In Quebec, more than 80% of 12-year-olds have a smart phone.

However, when young people fear being judged, they are reluctant to talk to an adult. Who can they turn to? Why would they not turn to AI? According to a U.S. study by Common Sense Media on 1,060 teenagers, over 72% of them have already used an AI companion. About one in three teens even said they prefer to talk to AI rather than to a person face to face. We wonder why.

I will quote another teenager who opened up to us. According to him, artificial intelligence does not judge him. The risk of being judged is something that girls and teenagers from 2ELGBTQIA+ communities are all too familiar with. Tools such as Character.AI and Replika, or simply generative artificial intelligence, do more than just answer questions. They can simulate emotions in relationships and become the people to whom young people turn to discuss their most private concerns. When the questions become increasingly personal—for example, when discussing one's gender or sexual orientation—experts say this is when young people are most at risk.

Here is my second recommendation. If we want young girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth to turn to adults for resources, we need to secure online spaces where young people will not be felt guilty. Bill C-34, safe social media act, sets out parameters to ensure that artificial intelligence is subject to greater restrictions in the case of AI companions and chatbots.

However, unfortunately, these platforms are not reliable. Let me give you an example: OpenAI's ChatGPT claims to have a type of user account with settings for teenagers. Researchers at Common Sense Media tested these settings. The teenager was allowed to discuss suicide, self-harm and eating disorders; no notification was sent to parents. Therefore, Bill C-34 must also provide for audits to verify the measures that platforms claim to have put in place to comply with our laws.

● (1655)

Lastly, artificial intelligence is much more than generative AI; it's everything that governs what girls and young people in 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are exposed to on social media because of recommendation algorithms and content moderation. Young people—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Parent.

Emmanuelle Parent: There you go. I would be happy to talk more about that.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: We can see the enthusiasm; there will be some fruitful discussions with the members.

[*English*]

Dr. Kendall, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Dr. Tamil Kendall (Director, Partnership for Women's Health Research Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to appear.

I represent the Partnership for Women's Health Research Canada, which unites the Women's Health Research Institute in B.C., Women and Children's Health Research Institute in Alberta, Women's College Hospital in Ontario, the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre in Quebec and IWK Health in Nova Scotia. Together we are the largest national network of women's health researchers, with 74 Canada research chairs and more than 1,200 members.

The health of girls, women and members of the 2SLGBTQI community is central to their employment, economic advancement and productivity, the topic of this particular study. In fact, McKinsey estimates that closing the women's health gap would contribute $37 billion annually to Canada's GDP. Ensuring that women and gender-diverse individuals are not left behind in the AI health care revolution is essential for closing that gap.

AI systems analyze massive datasets, interpret complex medical images and synthesize research evidence in seconds. This creates an opportunity to accelerate learning in health care in ways that simply weren't possible before, but AI is only as good as the data it trains on. Currently, AI makes existing biases and discrimination in health care worse. This is true for race, ethnicity, sex, gender and sexual orientation.

Let's take women's heart disease as an example. It's the leading cause of premature death among Canadian women, but important historical research studies included men only. Men are still more likely to be diagnosed and appropriately treated than women. AI exaggerates these biases. It's less likely to diagnose women's heart conditions than men's heart conditions, and it's more likely to attribute women's symptoms to mental health issues.

But if we build it and train it properly, AI can improve accurate diagnosis for women.

An example is hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. It's an inherited genetic condition that makes the heart muscle abnormally thick. It's equally common in men and women, fifty-fifty, but two-thirds of the people who are diagnosed currently are men, because the diagnostic criteria, like so many, are based on the male body. Researchers developed an AI tool to analyze MRI heart scans, what AI can do better and quicker than humans can, but they also built it to adjust the diagnostic criteria for age, sex and body size. The number of women diagnosed increased dramatically, to 44%, better aligned with the actual occurrence in the population.

AI can improve women's health and health care rather than compromise it further, but to do so, it needs to be appropriately trained. There's world-class Canadian women's health research happening. It emphasizes that we need sex-specific normal ranges, diagnosis and treatment options. When we do this in our specialized women's heart health centres, women are receiving women-specific care and experiencing better outcomes. This is the information we need to train AI on.

To change the current situation and ensure that AI is applied ethically and effectively, we recommend that the federal government fund the proposed Canada strong for women's health research and data platform, making the research and data from women's hospitals and research institutes from coast to coast available for AI applications. This requires data from patients who are not hospitalized, as 80% of health care is delivered in outpatient settings, and should be led by women's health experts.

The government should implement existing equity, diversity, inclusion and SGBA commitments that have already been made by the federal government and most provinces and territories, such as implementing standards for disaggregated sex and gender identity; going further by improving standardized data collected on race and ethnicity to understand access to and appropriateness of care; and having Health Canada require that AI providers test their systems for bias against specific populations before an AI tool can be licensed for sale.

The federal government should work with provinces to ban the use of commercial AI models that use health care spending or past clinical utilization as a proxy for disease severity. These metrics under-represent women and 2SLGBTQI people and others who face systemic barriers to accessing care.

● (1700)

Finally, as others have said, mandate postdeployment audits—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kendall. The time we had for your opening remarks is up, but you will have a chance to follow up during the discussion.

Mrs. DeRidder, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Kelly DeRidder (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I have a couple of questions.

First, Ms. Dunn, you mentioned that there are gaps in the current federal government framework to protect women from the harms of deepfakes and non-consensual intimate images. Can you explain a little further where these gaps are and how we could close them?

Suzie Dunn: There are some immediate gaps when we look at quick takedown options. Often, people are looking for quick takedown options. They currently exist only in British Columbia and Quebec. The safe social media act, if it passes, will allow for a quick takedown.

One of the gaps that we need to address is a place that someone can call when they're being harmed to figure out what their options are. When we think about a criminal response, yes, that might recognize the harm they've experienced, but when it comes to the speed of the response, there's a delay on the criminal side of things. Especially, with these tech-facilitated harms, that's very important.

The two other big pieces are around the creation and hosting of the content. When we look at purpose-built platforms, like MrDeepFakes and these types of websites, they have no purpose. Their whole purpose is harm. What are the ways the government can respond? This might occur through the safe social media act, but there is also other implementation that we can think of.

When we think about the creation of these apps, are we enforcing privacy laws adequately? Are we looking to the Google apps or wherever these apps are hosted?

There can be things around advertising rules and looking at social media companies that are still advertising DeepNude apps to teenagers and adults when we know these companies are not following basic privacy laws and they're creating illegal content. There needs to be a government response, not just for the individuals who are causing harm to individuals but also for the platforms that are allowing the creation and proliferation of the content.

● (1705)

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you so much.

Emmanuelle, you gave a really excellent example of how AI is being used in everyday life, from water tracking to grading, general info lookup and even using AI as a companion. How do you think we can balance the education on AI, specifically about personal protection, while still acknowledging that AI exists in everyday life?

[*Translation*]

Emmanuelle Parent: That is a great question. In my opinion, awareness campaigns or tools that are developed for individuals will, for example, document only the dangers or risks of artificial intelligence. So, the focus is on the negative. On the other hand, there are programs that will, for example, talk about future jobs in the artificial intelligence sector and women in the world of technologies. It is as if the negatives of AI and the positives remain in distinct silos.

So, what does that mean in their daily lives of young people? They know that sometimes it is good and sometimes it is not. However, we need to be able to have a balanced approach in each of these fields so that when we talk about entrepreneurship, we also talk about the fact that these are imperfect tools because, as we were saying, there is a lack of data on women. When we talk about threats, we also have to say that it can be used on a daily basis. So, I think we need to merge the two narratives about the benefits and about the downsides.

Young people will continue to use artificial intelligence on a daily basis. Even if we ban conversational agents for young people, we have to expect that young people will circumvent the rules to use these tools. This is what we see in other countries. So we still have to remain balanced and open, and we must not judge them.

I hope that answers your question somewhat.

[*English*]

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you very much. That was very in depth.

Dr. Kendall, I have one question for you.

Being an expert in women's and children's health, you mentioned how AI will enhance diagnostic systems to better diagnose women in Canada. Can you give some good examples of how that's already happening?

I might as well ask my follow-up question for you now. Do you believe there needs to be a national data framework for our health data in Canada?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: I think it's really critical. This also refers to the comments made by others. We need to constrain artificial intelligence and direct it toward good sources of data. When we do that, we actually can make changes.

I gave one example of diagnosis around a genetic heart condition. There are other examples of starting to use AI as a predictive model. You could build those models so that they close some of those biases in identifying and diagnosing women.

Another place where AI is going to be incredible is in the cancer space, where you can analyze images so much more accurately. This can really be a game-changer in cervical cancers, gynecological cancers and breast cancers, as well as other types of cancer.

However, we have these data gaps. We don't—

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kendall.

Dr. Tamil Kendall: I get excited and go on. I apologize.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You will have a chance to go back to this.

Ms. Ménard, you have the floor for six minutes.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard (Hochelaga—Rosemont-Est, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We are just at the beginning of this study and, as colleagues have pointed out recently, we can say that we have entered a third revolution. Society went through the Industrial Revolution and then, an automation revolution happened. We are now in an artificial intelligence revolution. I think that we, the members of this group, have a moral duty, but we also have to engage all parliamentarians.

I go back to the title of the study: The impact on women and the LGBTQ community is clearly being felt.

I would like to hear your comments, witnesses. An expert pointed out to us that there are perhaps two key observations to be made at this stage. Firstly, artificial intelligence is riddled with bias. It is based on pre-existing content. Secondly, not only are women and the LGBTQ+ community under-represented or portrayed through the lens of bias, but there is also an under-representation of these individuals among those who develop artificial intelligence. Is there anything the government can do to help women and people from the LGBTQ community get involved in the development of artificial intelligence in order to counteract what we are seeing?

What are you seeing in terms of the development of the various platforms?

● (1710)

[*English*]

Suzie Dunn: The big question of data is hard, because we have history behind us. I think some of the data questions were around funding more research for women's and LGBTQ issues more generally.

When it comes to having this technology dealt with and guided by people who come from feminist and queer perspectives, there's a funding gap. When we look at the stats on venture capitalism, very few women's and LGBTQ products are funded. Even if women and LGBTQ people have great ideas, they can't get the money for them. If you're thinking about the ways we can have people engaged in these processes, there is a funding gap. Can the government encourage scholarships? Can it encourage tax incentives and these types of things for these types of products?

The thing is that we have to be careful about this. It is not just that women and LGBTQ people will make good products. You need people who are not just representative of their identity, but who are also creating products that are good for women and good for LGBTQ people. This is where, if we're thinking about having things like the digital safety commissioner and other government agencies that are going to be assessing the adequacy and the safety of products, you need to have good representation of people who care about issues like equality, autonomy and dignity in assessing those products.

[*Translation*]

Emmanuelle Parent: I would like to take this opportunity to mention that young people could be consulted on the initiatives and projects that are to be funded. It is interesting to get their feedback and consult them not only before we decide which projects to fund and which bills to introduce, but also afterwards, regarding the impact of these projects and bills. Whether the issue is digital literacy or artificial intelligence, we should keep young people at the centre of the debate.

We hear about the whole issue of representativeness. But when it comes to artificial intelligence, I think what is most represented are the economic interests of the platforms seeking to make a profit. These interests should be balanced with the collective interests that you all cherish here, in a very important way. So I think young people, too, could have a seat at the table.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Another risk we face is disengagement from the public space of women and people from LGBTQ communities affected by artificial intelligence.

Certainly, in some respects, the production and sharing of non-consensual images has been criminalized. I have an example in mind: At a high school recently, eight to 10 young people were suspended for producing offensive and degrading images of their teachers. What would you have to say about that?

Emmanuelle Parent: We often hear about horrible situations like that. The thinking is that, if there were no artificial intelligence, there would be no problem, so conversational agents and AI tools are banned for young people.

However, I am going to draw your attention to the fact that, while women and members of LGBTQ+ communities are experiencing the consequences of artificial intelligence a great deal, they are also the ones who benefit the most from it, at least on social media.

When you experience discrimination in the off-line world, when you face homophobia, transphobia or misogyny and you cannot be yourself, the online world may be one of the only places where you have friends, one of the only places where you can go for social support. So, when you want to pass laws or ban something, you have to know that you are not only removing the source of the problems, you are also removing the solution for many of these young people.

Marie-Gabrielle Ménard: Thank you.

Ms. Dunn, can you talk about the risk associated with these people's disengagement from the public space?

● (1715)

[*English*]

Suzie Dunn: This is one thing that we're seeing, particularly if you're a woman in leadership and if you're a woman in leadership who talks about feminist issues, reproductive issues—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dunn.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Indeed, for this study, as we said, we can no longer ignore artificial intelligence. Now we are looking for solutions. In this committee, we make a particular effort to focus on women's perspectives, of course. But, even though we may have a bias, we can be open to other ideas as well.

Ms. Parent, you finished your remarks very quickly. I think you were going to talk about content moderation. So, first, I will give you the opportunity to finish your opening remarks.

Emmanuelle Parent: Thank you very much.

What I was going to point out is that artificial intelligence is responsible for identifying content on social media that may be harmful and removing it to comply with the community rules published by the platforms. However, we know that this content moderation is deeply flawed, and young women are telling us that. They say that they have already reported a sexist comment, but Instagram told them that it did not break the community rules. Other young people will say that, if you post something online, you have to expect to be insulted, as that is part and parcel of putting yourself out there.

What may be interesting—and I even think it may be a solution to include in Bill C-34—is to say that safety measures and moderation mechanisms are subject to independent audits to ensure that platforms conduct moderation that complies with the laws. We have to make sure that there are no hateful messages online, so that young people's online safety does not depend on their ability to avoid harm and report incidents. They must realize that, if they post something, they have to be ready to face the consequences. However, the platforms that expose them to such harm must also be held accountable if they fail to moderate the content.

Andréanne Larouche: That was my first question for you. I may come back to it later. Thank you.

I will now turn to you, Ms. Dunn. In your opening remarks, you spoke at length about your keen interest in the issue of deepfakes, which have emerged alongside the rise of artificial intelligence. As you explained, this is a phenomenon that has really gained momentum. It leaves lasting scars on the women who fall victim to it. You explained that too.

Bill C-16, which came into force in July, criminalized deepfakes. Have you had a chance to look at that legislation? What would you like to add to it?

[*English*]

Suzie Dunn: That feels really interesting, because I think the language around deepfakes is really tricky to get precise. I don't have it in front of me, but the language in that bill is whether it's a reasonable representation of another person. I can't remember what the exact language is.

When we look at deepfakes, it's not as though the harm is that you're creating a perfect replica of someone who is nude or engaged in sexual activity. It's the idea that we should have some control over the way our voices, our faces and our bodies are represented online. One of the concerns I have with the language in that bill is that it might be interpreted as if the image doesn't look entirely real and if the person has a third eye on their forehead or a unicorn horn or something else like this, you'll know that it's not a real person. I think there are some concerns with the language of the act regarding how it will be interpreted by the courts.

We'll have to see, once cases come through, because there's so much you can do with deepfakes, and it's not just that a deepfake looks exactly like a real person. It's the fact that it's a misrepresentation of ourselves. I think much of the focus has been on sexual deepfakes, but this goes beyond sexual deepfakes. Think about the harms that occur to people when their images and their faces are co-opted. We see this amongst politicians who have had deepfakes where they're saying things that they didn't say. It's causing confusion and disruption. There has been this focus on sexual deepfakes, but we might need to think more broadly about what rights we have to our images and our voices.

I think there is a gap in the law regarding creation. I'm not sure if criminalization is the perfect answer, but if you look at children's content, we criminalize the creation, the access and the possession—all of these things. With sexual deepfakes, it's still permissible to create that content. I think there are some questions about that. If we're not actually stopping it at the creation point, the only thing we're dealing with is post-distribution, when the harm has already occurred. I think there are interesting legal questions around what the legalities are around creation. Do we need to think beyond just sexual deepfakes, then, and ask how we can protect people from their faces and their voices being co-opted more broadly?

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Parent, we spoke with you about the impact online written publications can have on young people.

Ms. Dunn, we talked about the impact of deepfakes going forward. So we can see that there may be negative repercussions.

I will now turn to you, Ms. Kendall. We have less than a minute.

According to a 2025 Canadian Women's Foundation report, 61% of women and gender-diverse people have experienced cyber-violence because of their gender identity. For all these reasons, you talked a lot about research. We could come back to that.

When it comes to mental health, what—

The Chair: I am sorry, Ms. Larouche, but you will have to continue later. Your time is up.

Good afternoon, Mrs. Borrelli. You have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Kathy Borrelli (Windsor—Tecumseh—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to welcome and thank all of our witnesses today. My first question is for Dr. Kendall.

How can AI digital tools help women and gender-diverse individuals access reliable medical information and advice, particularly when access to health care professionals and specialized services is limited?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: That's a great question. I think the answer may also respond to Ms. Larouche's question.

We need to put guardrails around the chatbots so that they are using reliable medical information and, as I also tried to argue, that is not old medical textbooks. We know those are biased. We need to put out the newest research that is actually true to the experiences, and we need more of that research.

We also need them to appropriately refer. That has to be a guardrail. You may have seen the article in The New York Times about the woman with epilepsy who died because the chatbot encouraged her to go off her medication. We're seeing this, and there needs to be regulation from government. I think this is what my colleagues are saying as well: There need to be audits and regulations.

Thank you very much.

Kathy Borrelli: Is there any Canadian data available on the number or proportion of women using AI tools for medical information or advice?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: That's a great question. I do not have that answer for you, Ms. Borrelli. I will find the answer and come back to you on it.

Kathy Borrelli: Thanks so very much.

Dr. Kendall, how can Canada remain responsible with the usage of AI in health while protecting the consent and confidentiality of the client?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: This is a very challenging area, as we are learning in the field of health research and also in clinical delivery of care. Privacy regulation needs to evolve as AI is evolving. In the research space, the safest way is to create safe research spaces—like lockdown areas where the data is—and to vet the researchers who will access them.

Again, it's evolving so fast. As legislators, there's a real need to evolve with it, so congratulations to the committee for studying this.

Kathy Borrelli: Thank you.

Ms. Dunn, in the Government of Canada report "Canada's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy: AI for All", where do you see gaps between the government strategy and the concerns surrounding AI and gender-based violence that we are discussing today?

Suzie Dunn: There's a challenge, globally, in this desire for countries to really embrace AI and have us learn how to use it properly. I deal with this with my law students all the time. We know that AI is going to be a legal tool that they're going to have to use, but what are the ways that we can teach them to use it properly and ethically, without it hallucinating cases and all of that? A challenge in "AI for all" is the push forward toward embracing AI in all circumstances. We don't need AI in all circumstances. We don't need AI for "all". If we are going to have this message, if it is the government policy that we're going to have AI for all, I would advocate for safe AI for all and accurate AI for all.

When we're thinking about creating policies on how we regulate AI and how we embed safety practices and privacy practices—especially when we're going to look at government making decisions using AI tools, which will impact the rights of people—what are the proper procedures to have in there to ensure that we're not going to have discriminatory outputs and to ensure that we have people who have deep consideration for values like equality, dignity and autonomy engaging in those processes?

Rather than saying that AI is good for all things so we should put it in schools, doctor's offices and everywhere, we need to question whether we actually need AI in those spaces. If we are going to put AI in those spaces, we need to ensure that it is safe. If it's not safe, we should not say, "AI for all". We should say, "No AI."

There's a bit of a challenge in the government messaging saying that it's AI for all and also trying to recognize the risks of AI.

● (1725)

Kathy Borrelli: Thanks so very much.

I believe my time is just about up.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You are absolutely right, Mrs. Borrelli. Your time is up.

Ms. Gladu, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton—Bkejwanong, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

We've heard testimony already about how, with the people who are creating AI, there's already a gender bias happening. I'm concerned about that, and I'm concerned that we don't actually have the disaggregated data that we need in order to start building models that are not gender-biased.

In addition to that, although Bill C-34 creates a digital safety commission that is basically an independent regulator that is going to ensure that all the platforms have the right things in place to prevent harms, what about disinformation?

I look at things and I don't know whether they're AI or not. I don't know if they're true or not, and I've seen things that look like me saying stuff that I didn't say. What are we going to do about that?

Let's start with you, Ms. Dunn.

Suzie Dunn: That's the hardest question. Misinformation and disinformation are very difficult.

One area to regulate is bots. We know a lot of bot content is producing a lot of misinformation and disinformation. In those circumstances, it's about trying to create worlds where at least it's just humans who are creating that content. For misinformation and disinformation that's discriminatory, we should be able to regulate that on platforms to say that it is inappropriate behaviour.

Who interprets what is misinformation, what is disinformation, what is art, what is satire and what is just people being wrong? There is an idea that a central truth exists in some areas, but often it does not.

I think we have real risks to democracy and to truth. I've heard stories of AI videos being posted, and then someone says, “That's an AI video. It wasn't you who said that.” The person who posted it then says, “It doesn't matter. She probably would have said that.” As long as it suits what their beliefs are, AI is used as a tool. We see politicians creating AI of themselves to represent themselves in a particular manner.

The question of AI misinformation and disinformation is one of the messiest ones when it comes to legal regulation. I don't have a great answer beyond that, but it's a major risk.

Marilyn Gladu: No, that was very good.

Ms. Parent.

[*Translation*]

Emmanuelle Parent: I do not have the perfect solution. Obviously, that is what we are here for.

When we tell young people to check their sources, we like that, do we not? It makes us feel smart to tell them to check their sources, to look at their sources. However, when it is 11 p.m., you are on TikTok and you are watching your 23rd video, do you check your sources? That is not necessarily the case. Young people are not going to check all their sources either.

However, we see a general sense of skepticism, which can be a good thing for critical thinking. For example, when we share a piece of information with people, we say we saw it on TikTok. Doing so encourages others to think critically as well.

One thing that can help is having spaces where we know the information to be of high quality. This is not my area of expertise, but anything that aims to fund high-quality, impartial information that prioritizes the collective good is a good solution. This is because telling young people to check their sources on TikTok is not realistic, but telling them to visit the Radio-Canada website to find out what is being said there makes sense.

● (1730)

[*English*]

Marilyn Gladu: That's excellent.

Now I have a question for Dr. Kendall.

It's about getting disaggregated data on women's health so that women will get improved health care, especially in a lot of areas that are not well understood. Menopause was one of the studies we just finished, for example.

What do we need to do, as a government, to get that data happening?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: There's a need for increased investment in women's health research. We know, now, that only 7% of the CIHR budget is dedicated to women's health research, in terms of publicly funded research that is female-specific. We need to have these commitments to SGBA-plus monitored and reported on in health data. As I said, we need to ensure that women's health experts, like the ones in my network, are the ones designing and feeding data into the AI systems that are generating applications for use in women and 2SLGBTQI people.

Those are some of the places to start.

Marilyn Gladu: I believe that is my time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Gladu. You had three seconds left. Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you again, Ms. Parent, Ms. Dunn and Ms. Kendall, for being part of the first panel of witnesses in this first hour of the meeting.

I will finish what I was about to say at the end of my first intervention, Ms. Kendall.

You have partly answered that question. We understand the links between the lack of research and the need to make greater use of artificial intelligence. As you said, it can be extremely relevant, for example, in analyzing medical imaging more accurately to detect cancer. You also said that it can be extremely useful to support research.

I will now go back to the question I was going to ask you. In fact, 61% of women and gender-diverse people have experienced cyber-violence because of their gender identity. Beyond research, the analysis of medical imaging and women's physical health, what about mental health? What more could be done, for example, to provide more services needed by victims of cyber-violence and deepfakes?

Time is running out, so I invite you to answer in 30 seconds. I see Ms. Dunn nodding, so she may have something to add. Ms. Parent seems to want to add something as well.

Obviously, we have to think about supporting these victims.

[*English*]

Dr. Tamil Kendall: I would defer to Dr. Dunn on this topic.

Suzie Dunn: The mental health aspects are really challenging. Young people are facing a lot of digital issues. One of the responses is to say, "Let's have them not engage with these tools. We're not going to have them use technology, and we're not going to have them use social media." However, if we're taking them away from these spaces that might be causing these harms, what else are we offering? Especially for this generation, there are very few third spaces for young people to spend their time in. There aren't a lot of options for them beyond these digital social spaces, especially as their worlds become more closed. Children don't have the freedom they used to have.

Creating more opportunities for young people to engage in things outside of digital spaces is very important, but so is having health practitioners who really understand social media, digital spaces and AI in such a way that young people can get non-judgmental supports when they are facing mental health distresses from these types of technologies.

In some of the research I did with the DIY digital safety project—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dunn. I have the unpleasant task of interrupting you.

Anna, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today. I know that this is the second time for some of you. Welcome back to Ottawa.

The first question I'm going to ask, on behalf of my colleague, is for Dr. Kendall.

Do you believe we need a national data framework for health data in Canada, yes or no?

Dr. Tamil Kendall: Yes.

Anna Roberts: That was good. See, I'm not that tough.

My next question is for Suzie Dunn.

As the shadow minister for seniors, I'm very conscientious of the numerous and vile scams that are perpetrated upon our older—I like to call us "mature"—Canadians. Generative AI being able to mimic the voices and faces of loved ones has opened the door to an even more extreme form of these scams. In my view, how do we educate our older population, our mature population, on looking out for these scams?

How do we hold the technical companies responsible to ensure that they're monitoring it? Right now, we're looking at a billion dollars' worth of scams in the senior population. What are your suggestions to help prevent this?

● (1735)

Suzie Dunn: The senior population is very difficult to reach. I think education campaigns targeted at them are a real challenge. There are often some simple tools that can be used. One is having a code word with family, such as always knowing that if your daughter ever calls you to ask you for money, she's going to say "pineapple" if she really needs it. It's so that they know these types of things. I find the elderly are some of the most difficult.

Some of the incentives that I think are important are both with the social media companies and with banks. If we required banks to reimburse people for some of the money that is lost in scams—as you see in other countries like the United Kingdom—I think banks would be very incentivized to educate their customers. There might be other avenues that we can look at, both to incentivize change and to ensure that the losses they face are lesser. It's having banking regulations for when you see odd patterns of behaviour where people are taking out cash or these types of things.

The education piece is very difficult. Many of these scams occur in patterns in the same way that we see sexual extortion scams occur. They'll use the same accounts and the same images. Having accountability for this being one of the harms that social media companies need to mitigate when we see repeat offenders....

Anna Roberts: Coming from the banking world, I will tell you that accounts are monitored on a regular basis, and activities will trigger a message. Sometimes, when you're talking to a senior and asking why they are withdrawing $10,000 and whether they know it's a danger to them once they leave the branch if somebody's watching, the idea that they need this money to protect a loved one is so ingrained that they're not going to listen to you.

Anyway, you mentioned freedom for children. I kind of listened to that because human trafficking is becoming a huge issue in this country. The perpetrators are using fake pictures and selling these children, to put it bluntly. I recently did an undercover stint with our local police department. I was shocked, totally shocked. What can we do once those pictures of that individual are on the Internet or wherever, in AI? How can we hold these companies responsible to ensure that those pictures don't get out?

Suzie Dunn: There's a great type of technology called image hashing. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection does this for sexual images of children. You can create a numeric code of an image. Then, if an image is repeatedly shared on a particular website, it can just be taken down. They use this to find child sexual abuse material. There might be ways to try to create other forms of laws or services, where you could include other child-trafficking images that might not necessarily be child sexual abuse material and use that same type of technology to try to identify and remove those images online. It can be very difficult once they've proliferated, especially if they are popular amongst people who might be collecting certain types of images. What we see amongst child abusers is that they'll often be collecting certain types of images. However, there is technology to help locate and pre-emptively remove those images.

Anna Roberts: I'm going to ask you for your personal opinion. Do you feel that these perpetrators should be put behind bars?

Suzie Dunn: Do you mean the people who are trafficking children?

Anna Roberts: Yes.

Suzie Dunn: Yes.

Anna Roberts: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That was the last word, Mrs. Roberts.

Ms. Parent, I can see you wanted to speak. I am really sorry, but Mrs. Roberts' speaking time has run out.

Ms. Chi, you have the floor for five minutes.

Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I will start with Ms. Parent.

[*English*]

I'm sorry, but I have to switch to English.

In your opening remarks, you talked a bit about that pendulum—the signals young people are getting that AI is here so they need to use it, but then they should live in shame about it because it's terrible and terrifying. I just got an email from my school board letting me know some students are making images and deepfakes of staff and teachers. There is a lot for young people to unpack.

I was wondering if you could help us describe what it means to do this well and responsibly. What could that look like as we think about what young people need to navigate life online?

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Emmanuelle Parent: To be non-judgmental, we need to trust young people's intelligence and engage with them as adults in the conversation. Young people see adults using their phones and playing video games. They often become very defensive if you tell them that they, as young people, use artificial intelligence and TikTok a lot. So, the idea is to talk to them using the pronoun 'we', in other words, to join in the conversation as adults.

We should also always point out that we recognize the benefits of device use before discussing the risks. We must also ensure that young people have a say in consultations so that they feel their voices are heard on issues that affect them. I would add that we must not neglect media literacy. When young people have a better understanding of how artificial intelligence works, it helps to develop their critical thinking and influences how they react if they ever find themselves in situations such as the one you have just described in relation to your school.

I also believe that another way to help young people with digital technology is to focus on what happens outside the digital world. When we facilitate their access to free health care services that are available at their school, or when they do not have to pay their own dentist bills, they are less likely to ask ChatGPT what to do if their left molar is hurting. So, having these services available to young people can also promote their well-being.

Chi Nguyen: Thank you very much, Ms. Parent.

[*English*]

Ms. Dunn, one of the things you noted in your remarks was the idea of victim-centred legal responses. Could you tell us what that might look like?

Suzie Dunn: Victim-centred responses differ, depending on the type of harm a person is experiencing. One of the challenges we face is this: We'll rush to a criminal response to a particular type of harm, but a criminal response isn't necessarily the solution a person is looking for. Intimate image cases are the ideal example. They don't want to go through a criminal trial, necessarily. They just want the content taken down.

In the same way, one of the challenges government faces.... Think about AI companies. What consultation is being done? Who's being spoken to? You'll bring in experts like us, and we'll provide the information we have from our experiences talking with and working with victims. As you create regulation, talk to victims: "Is this actually providing you with the solution you want?" It's also about looking at the data. Are people using this law?

The B.C. law is an extraordinary example. They have the Civil Resolution Tribunal. It's accessible. It's low cost. You don't need a lawyer. There have been hundreds of cases there, and it's only been around for a year or two. However, in provinces like Nova Scotia, where you have to hire a lawyer to get your civil rights implemented, we don't have any cases. There have been some settlements that have occurred.

Laws aren't helpful unless people use them and unless they're providing us with the remedies we need. This is why we need to see research on how satisfied victims are with the responses.

Chi Nguyen: Thank you.

One of the items you talked about was the right to deletion. In Bill C-36, the protecting privacy and consumer data act, we are looking to do just that: create the right to deletion.

Is there any guidance you have on making sure we get that right in order to fight back against deepfakes?

Suzie Dunn: I think the right to deletion is a tricky one. Most social media companies have been very good when they've been ordered to delete content. One of the challenges we see.... We saw this in a case in B.C., regarding the image of a trans person. Even though there was a deletion order given to X, they refused. They're just going to geoblock it, rather than take the content fully down.

That's a tricky legal question, because we don't want social media companies to listen to any government order saying, "Delete content." You could imagine a country saying that it doesn't want any information about feminism, gay rights or—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ladies, thank you very much for participating in this important study.

That is all the time we have for this first hour, for this first panel. I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes before resuming with the other group of witnesses.

Thank you very much. Have a good evening.

● (1740)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1750)

The Chair: Good evening again, everyone.

I call the meeting back to order.

I would like to outline a few rules for the witnesses.

[*English*]

I would like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you will need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel required in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

[*Translation*]

Please click on the microphone icon to turn on your microphone and mute it when you are not speaking. If you wish to speak, please use the “raise hand” function.

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. That said, we are quite flexible when it comes to discussions.

[*English*]

I will now welcome our witnesses.

We have Blair Attard-Frost, assistant professor, department of political science, University of Alberta. We welcome Linda Sestock, national president, Canadian Federation of University Women. We also have, from Equal Voice, Laurel Gillespie, executive director, and Kaelan Ruddick, coordinator, election tracking and research.

Welcome. We will begin with opening statements.

Ms. Attard-Frost, the floor is yours for five minutes. Thank you.

Blair Attard-Frost (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today to the whole committee. I'm Blair Attard-Frost. I'm a Canada CIFAR AI chair and research fellow at the Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute and an assistant professor in political science at the University of Alberta, where my work addresses issues of equity in the governance of AI.

If carefully governed and thoughtfully adopted, some applications of AI do have the potential to enable greater inclusion and opportunity in the Canadian economy. However, to deliver on the promise of AI, there are various harms we must also prevent.

With funding and supports from CIFAR, Amii and SSHRC, my research team and I have been working since July on reviewing literature and a global sample of over 1,500 real-world AI incidents to identify gender-based harm caused by a variety of AI use cases. Our study is still ongoing, but our initial findings reaffirm a decade of existing research, while also adding new insights into areas of concern and policy options.

We found that AI systems have the potential to enable gender-based harm across many application areas, and evidence of harm is often obscured by limited transparency practices. The most frequent type of harm we found in our review is the use of generative AI to produce hateful content or non-consensual sexual deepfakes. These kinds of incidents account for 35 of the 93 incidents of gender-based harm we've identified so far, and the victims are overwhelmingly women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

In health care, we find biased diagnostic tools and decision support systems. For example, a 2020 study by a team from the University of Toronto, Vector Institute and MIT found that X-ray classification models trained on public medical datasets can exhibit racial and gender biases, resulting in disparate error rates between men, women, white patients and Black patients. In 2024, a suicide prevention algorithm used by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs prioritized care for white men over female veterans and survivors of military sexual trauma.

In HR and recruitment, we find gender bias in hiring tools. In 2017, an experimental résumé screening tool made by Amazon was decommissioned when it was found to score women job applicants lower than men. A 2020 study by a group at Cornell University found unclear or limited debiasing across 18 hiring assessment tools. In 2024, the U.K. Information Commissioner's Office conducted an audit of several AI recruitment platforms and found widespread issues of inaccuracy and bias.

Facial recognition, gender recognition and other forms of biometric classification pose risks of discrimination, particularly for women of colour and for people whose gender differs from their sex assigned at birth. A 2018 study looking at three facial analysis models showed the lowest error rates on lighter-skinned male faces and the highest error rates on darker-skinned female faces. In 2023, a pregnant Black woman in Detroit was wrongfully arrested on the basis of false information provided by a facial recognition tool. Notable biometric incidents affecting transgender people include flagging for additional screening by airport body scanners, loss of access to services requiring facial ID due to changes in facial structure and proposals to use gender recognition to restrict access to gender-segregated spaces.

Canada already has some tools at our disposal to intervene in these impacts, but we will also need new legislation. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act guarantee protections against discrimination on the basis of attributes such as sex, sexual orientation and gender identity in legal matters, services such as health care and employment-related matters. Human rights law doesn't cease to exist when decisions are made by an automated tool rather than by a clinician or a hiring manager. In the age of AI, we must re-enshrine the protections guaranteed by the charter and the CHRA. We should require developers and operators of AI tools with potential human rights impacts to mitigate risks of discrimination and to be transparent when discrimination does occur.

On addressing harmful generative AI systems, the government has recently made progress by tabling Bill C-34 and amending the Criminal Code through Bill C-16, adding new criminal offences for distributing non-consensual sexual deepfakes. This approach can be further strengthened through stronger independent oversight by criminalizing creation and possession of these deepfakes, prohibiting a broader scope of imagery and requiring operators of generative AI services to take more proactive measures to prevent gender-based harm before it occurs.

Finally, recent security incidents involving AI agents infiltrating corporate and government systems have prompted concern about catastrophic AI risks. As is the case in other types of catastrophes, such as natural disasters and pandemics, vulnerable groups are especially at risk when catastrophes do occur. If we want to protect women, girls, 2SLGBTQI+ people and other vulnerable groups against the most harmful potential impacts of AI, we will need legislation that imposes stronger requirements for public safety, accountability and transparency on developers of large, advanced AI models, while also updating Canadian cybercrime law to address advances in AI technology.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome any questions.

● (1755)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Sestock, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Linda Sestock (National President, Canadian Federation of University Women): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for inviting the Canadian Federation of University Women to speak about artificial intelligence and its impact on women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

Founded on advancing human rights through public education and evidence-based research, CFUW believes AI safety requires more than technical regulation. Canada must invest in digital literacy, equitable workforce retraining and inclusive education so that women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians can shape technology rather than be marginalized by it.

For over a century, CFUW has championed lifelong learning as a foundation for economic independence, leadership and democratic participation. As AI transforms how knowledge is created, accessed and evaluated, education must remain central to Canada's response. Without equitable digital literacy and inclusive, ethical technology design, AI risks amplifying historical biases, worsening employment barriers and deepening disparities for women, girls, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and other equity-deserving groups.

People with low digital literacy or limited access to technology face particular risks. Education is critical to ensure that AI's benefits outweigh its harms, and CFUW welcomes education as a key element to the government's AI for all strategy. CFUW supports lifelong education and government strategies that enable learning at every stage of life.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation identifies potential benefits of AI in education, including personalized learning, literacy and language development, accessibility, inclusion and reduced administrative burdens for teachers.

However, we share the CTF's concerns about weakened foundational skills, diminished critical thinking and problem solving, impaired social and emotional development, and data and privacy risks. The CTF cautions that "'AI for All: Essentials for Educators' encourages the adoption of a technology that is unregulated, untested, and changing faster than any course can keep up with." The Brookings Institution similarly concludes that "at this point in its trajectory, the risks of utilizing generative AI in children's education overshadow its benefits." CFUW urges extreme caution before AI is widely adopted in educational systems.

Because AI creates mechanisms for unprecedented disinformation, digital literacy must also equip learners to identify disinformation, including false information and fabricated images. The lack of women in AI development reinforces existing power imbalances and male bias, with consequences for women's economic opportunities and careers. The United Nations Development Programme and others have highlighted biases embedded in AI and the urgent need for more women in its development, design, deployment and governance.

AI is reshaping Canada's economy. Automation could significantly affect sectors where women and young people are disproportionately employed. The federal government and all political parties must plan for predicted workforce displacement and support transitional training. We applaud a national AI strategy that includes upskilling and retraining for those displaced by AI and look forward to interventions specific to the needs of women and girls. The government also has a leadership role in ensuring AI is governed safely and effectively for all Canadians.

AI can be a powerful force for good or harm. Balance will not happen by accident. By placing education, inclusion and safety at the centre of Canada's AI strategy, we believe we can build a digital future that empowers everyone.

Here are some of our recommendations.

Create independent regulatory bodies composed of non-AI developers to eliminate conflicts of interest in technology governance.

Establish federal AI governance structures that include experts from education, equity-deserving groups, women's organizations and civil society.

Apply gender-based analysis plus across all federal AI policy development and implementation strategies.

Incorporate distinct disinformation education into all components of the AI for all strategy.

Monitor and evaluate the AI for all strategy to ensure it effectively serves target populations while identifying and resolving gaps or harms.

Fund long-term feminist research to monitor AI's intersectional impact on diverse women and girls in Canada.

Partner with women-in-STEM organizations to promote and incentivize women's involvement across all stages of AI development.

Also, provide employment insurance-funded transitional training programs for workers displaced by AI automation.

Thank you.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, madam.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gillespie and Ms. Ruddick for five minutes.

Laurel Gillespie (Executive Director, Equal Voice Foundation): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you, members of the committee, for inviting Equal Voice to participate in this study.

Equal Voice, a national, multipartisan organization, has been working for 25 years to advance the representation of women and gender-diverse people in Canadian politics.

Artificial intelligence offers opportunities to make information accessible and support civic engagement, but its benefits will not be shared equally if existing discrimination is built into these emerging systems or if new technologies make public life less safe.

For women considering elected office, safety is not an abstract concern. Harassment, threats and personal attacks already shape decisions about whether to run, remain in office or even speak publicly about it. Generative AI can magnify these pressures by making false or degrading content easier to produce and distribute, including impersonation, fabricated statements and non-consensual sexualized deepfakes.

The damage extends beyond the targeted individual. When women and girls see public figures subjected to these attacks, the message can be that political leadership comes at an unacceptable personal cost. This is a democratic participation issue, not simply a technological one.

The risks are not uniform. Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities and the 2SLGBTQI+ community may face overlapping discrimination, and any response to these emerging technologies must recognize those different experiences and include the feedback of communities in its design.

Equal Voice is not asking the committee to treat AI only as a threat. We want Canada to realize its potential while preventing technologies from reinforcing the barriers that have historically kept women and diverse individuals out of decision-making.

That requires, in our opinion, the following measures: first, practical protection against technology-facilitated harassment; second, meaningful accountability when harmful synthetic content is circulated and distributed; and third, resources that help people participate safely online.

It should also be said that safeguards and protection for responsible AI use must also respect freedom of expression and legitimate democratic debate.

We encourage the committee to consider how federal action can proactively protect participation in public life, not just respond after an individual has already been harmed. Women should not have to choose between their safety and their right to participate in democracy. Equal Voice has been proud to support women's participation in political life for 25 years, and we stand ready to support this work in the face of emerging technologies and a changing digital landscape.

I will now turn it over to Kaelan Ruddick, our researcher on the team at Equal Voice, for the latest research that we've done.

Thank you.

● (1805)

Kaelan Ruddick (Coordinator, Election Tracking and Research, Equal Voice Foundation): Thank you, Laurel.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to address the committee today.

Equal Voice's research with Abacus Data in 2023 found that 73% of women surveyed were concerned about the online harassment they might face if they ran for public office. Among younger women, that figure jumped to 82%. This data predates the widespread use of today's generative AI tools and illustrates the barriers that already existed. We don't yet know how AI has impacted this already alarming data, but we do know that harassment of federal MPs has increased nearly 800% since 2019 and that, in a 2025 survey, 63% of elected municipal officials reported having experienced harassment while serving.

The Canadian centre for cybersecurity's 2025 assessment also discusses how AI-enabled disinformation and deepfakes pose a threat to democratic processes. Between 95% to 98% of this deepfake content is non-consensual pornographic material, and 99% of those targeted by this material are women. AI can make targeted abuse more convincing, faster to create and harder to contain. It can also reproduce bias through data that is used to train AI systems and through the way that those systems are deployed.

We ask the committee to consider three priorities.

First, strengthen accessible reporting and removal mechanisms for harmful AI-generated content. This particularly needs to include non-consensual intimate imagery and targeted harassment with appropriate safeguards for lawful expression.

Second, invest in research that tracks the effects of AI-enabled abuse on political participation. That research should be intersectional and should distinguish harms experienced by women, indigenous and racialized communities, and the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I am sorry, but the time is up for comments.

We are going to start the conversation between the MPs and our guests.

Mrs. Roberts, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll start my questions with Laurel Gillespie.

First, I want to acknowledge, and I am very happy to know, that you were part of the Canadian hospice palliative care unit. I'm a huge believer of it. I think it's just amazing that you took the time to do that. Thank you for that. Thank you also for being involved with Autism Canada. I know how important that is to Canadians. Congratulations to you for that.

I'm very concerned about AI. You mentioned personal attacks. You mentioned fakes. There are a lot of fakes. I'm working on a bill right now that I've presented to the House on human trafficking. I met a mother whose daughter was human-trafficked. They manipulated her picture to sell her. The mother found her five years later. She's in a terrible state.

How do we ensure that these companies control those types of activities in order to prevent our children from going down that deep rabbit hole and not being able to come out of it?

Laurel Gillespie: I think it's about accountability, transparency and penalization. There have to be consequences for these companies that are allowing these images and such occurrences to take place in the beginning. I think we have a moral imperative as a society to do better. We as leaders and adults, what are we doing? What measures can we be putting in place to hold those accountable for such atrocities in today's society? Unfortunately, it does happen. What can we be doing better to protect our children and our youth from going down that rabbit hole, as you say?

I think the penalties and the repercussions need to be stronger. We have a moral imperative to do better for those who are more vulnerable.

Anna Roberts: The reason I ask this is that this young woman who was groomed is autistic. She has Asperger's. I won't tell you what I would have done to those perpetrators. I don't think I can say that in this room without being rude. My concern is that if we don't protect our children today, this country does not have a future.

I think the technical companies need to take some responsibility. You spoke about that. You spoke about safety and you spoke about accountability. In order for AI to be successful and women can feel comfortable, would you agree that the penalties for these individuals not following the rules should be tighter and stiffer and longer?

● (1810)

Laurel Gillespie: To answer your question, yes, absolutely, but if I may, I'd like to add that I think our media in general, writ large, has a responsibility and an opportunity to bring light to these things that are happening on the ground, instead of our turning a blind eye to these issues that are of great importance for the future of our youth who are coming up behind us. As leaders in all our various roles, I think we have a responsibility in addressing this but also in calling the media out to do more to bring attention to these things and that they will not be tolerated in our Canadian society or anywhere in the world. No child, particularly those who are the most vulnerable, should be at risk.

Anna Roberts: Yes.

Ms. Ruddick, you mentioned the reporting, the targets and the harassment. Women tend to be harassed more than men. Do you think as women we need to build a tougher skin to be able to deal with these issues?

Kaelan Ruddick: I'm so glad you asked that question. I think it's irresponsible of us to require women to have a tougher skin to participate fully in democracy and in public life. That's what we're grappling with at Equal Voice. We're preparing women to step into these types of public roles, knowing from the data what they may face. It's a tough place to stand. We have to consider the implications of what those women and gender-diverse people might experience as we encourage them to step into public life, while knowing that it is critical they are there and that their voices are at tables, like this one, that really shape how we think about and how we regulate these technologies.

I definitely do not think that we should be telling women that in order to be a politician, to be a voice at the table, you need a thicker skin. In fact, I think the opposite should be true. They should be able to be as soft as they are in these types of spaces.

I think that shame needs to switch sides, because there's so much shame around having this type of deepfake content made of you. It's unfair to say that this shame should be on the individual targeted, and not on the companies and the systems of power that have allowed it to happen.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, madam.

I now give the floor to Ms. Lambropoulos.

[*English*]

Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

Ms. Gillespie, you inspired a question in me when you spoke about the responsibility of the media, especially with regard to.... I know you weren't meaning to talk about this necessarily, but when we speak about women who are putting their names on the ballot, who are in government, who are in elected positions, what responsibility or role do you think the media plays in protecting women?

Oftentimes, when AI takes over and there's a lot of harassment online and all of that, it's often tied to stories written by journalists and that are in the media. I'm wondering because there is that connection there: What responsibility or role do you think the media could play to make a safer space for women?

Laurel Gillespie: I'm going to use an example of one of your colleagues. This past August, MP Salma Zahid had vehicles in the front of her home, her residence, put on fire.

When I was going through my app on CBC on my phone, burning some time, it was like the sixth story—and it was breaking news, in my opinion. That's horrific. I can't even imagine. We don't know if it was racially or culturally instigated, or if it was just the fact that she was a female member of Parliament. Then it just kind of disappeared.

I think, generally, the media does have due diligence to cover these stories that are in the extreme form and bring some light to what many of you—all of you I'm sure around this table this evening—have experienced online: the vitriol, the harassment. I don't think the media pays enough attention to what's actually happening on the ground. It's unacceptable. We have come too far and we have worked too hard to let this slide any further. Something has to be done.

With the rapidity at which online programming and social media are changing, I know I'm having a hard time keeping up with it, and I consider myself to be fairly savvy. I think that the media have a very important role to play in illuminating some of these stories that are taking place.

I'm also going to tie in, if I may, really quickly, something about the consequences. I'm going to use the example of MP Helen Haines, your colleague from Australia. The charges that are being brought against that individual are for dangerous driving causing bodily harm. How about attempted murder? Let's call it out for what it is. Enough with the misogyny. Let's actually get down to the crux of things. This is hate. It's hate towards women and the 2SLGBTQ+ population. Enough is enough. We've come too far and I think we need to do more. The media has an imperative role to play in that—in spreading our messages and telling the truths that are out there.

● (1815)

Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

Ms. Sestock, I have a question for you as well.

You spoke about the role that education and lifelong learning plays in allowing for fewer disparities to exist between women and men, and to make sure that everybody's included in the workforce and in being able to actualize. You spoke about the risks of AI for all, but you also spoke about the fact that people who aren't necessarily tech savvy are left behind. There's a bit of, from what I understood, a balance to strike there.

I'm wondering if you want to speak a little bit more to that and also to the ways that the government can help in striking a balance that would be helpful to include everybody.

Linda Sestock: We think it's imperative that critical thinking be part of elementary school. Everybody needs critical thinking, from kindergarten until the day we go to our grave. We need to learn all the time. We mentioned seniors, especially, in the earlier part of the panel. It's important that everybody is always learning. Things are changing so quickly and technology is evolving, and what is most important is critical thinking to be able to identify when we're receiving misinformation and disinformation.

We're talking about deepfakes. I'm at a conference here this week with realtors, and it's very frightening. There could be a video of a realtor, and it's not the real person. It's a fake person. How do we tell that?

It's wonderful that there are all of these great uses that we can have for women, health, etc., but we also need to have training. It starts with our children in elementary school, from kindergarten up, all the way until we're more mature, as you said earlier as well.

It is very important that we have critical learning as part of our education.

Emmanuella Lambropoulos: At what age do you believe people should begin learning about AI and how to use it?

Linda Sestock: Unfortunately, AI is all around us, so I think it's going to be very hard for us to stop anyone from using AI. However, we need to put checks and balances in place—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, madam. That will be the last word for this round.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair. I did start my timer.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here: Ms. Attard-Frost, Ms. Sestock, Ms. Gillespie and Ms. Ruddick.

We realize that this study, which is just beginning, is essential. Some truly significant issues are being raised before this committee.

Ms. Ruddick, I would like to give you a chance to finish presenting your recommendations. Your presentation ended abruptly. You barely had time to launch your first and second recommendations. You did not even get to your third one. I think you had three. If you wish, I would encourage you to take the time to clearly reiterate your recommendations to the committee members.

Thank you for what you and Ms. Gillespie are doing with the Equal Voice Foundation.

● (1820)

Kaelan Ruddick: Thank you very much, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

I greatly appreciate your coming back to our recommendations. I think I spoke about the first two.

The third recommendation we have is to support digital literacy and practical safety resources for political candidates, elected officials and those considering public life. This should include clear guidance on documenting incidents, seeking help and responding to manipulated content.

We know AI is fundamentally changing our information landscape. The big question we have is whether AI will expand participation or deepen existing exclusion.

Equal Voice really encourages and urges the committee to keep a woman's ability to enter public life safely and to remain safe, at the centre of its recommendations.

Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much.

You have provided figures to illustrate women's concerns about the risks of being targeted by violence and the direct link to their participation in politics. I, for one, am convinced of this. It is one of the main reasons why there are still too few women in politics. Let us not forget that we represent around 30% at the federal level. I know that your organization is working on this issue.

Ms. Gillespie, you also touched on this issue. I am referring to the fact that a woman might ask herself why she should enter politics, why she should step into the public arena if she risks being subjected to violence or to something even more serious. As a mother with a young daughter, I can say that I have no desire to expose my family to such violence. For me, it is a daily struggle to remain motivated despite the attacks that women face in the public sphere. I could decide to return to my previous life, as I might be less exposed to such violence. My daughter, too, might be less exposed to such violence, eventually.

Of course, we can talk about managing or balancing work and family life, but I am deeply convinced of the impact of cyberviolence and attacks against women. When you watch documentaries such as *Je vous salue salope: la misogynie au temps du numérique*, directed by Guylaine Maroist and Léa Clermont-Dion, you cannot help but be convinced. I would like you to talk more about the impact of cyber-violence.

You also touched on deepfakes. With the passage of Bill C-16, deepfakes have now been criminalized. Does the bill go far enough? Now we are hearing about Bill C-34. Is it enough? If not, what more needs to be done to address cyber-violence and to make women think that, if they enter politics, there will be tools to protect them?

Laurel Gillespie: Is the question for me?

● (1825)

Andréanne Larouche: You may begin, but I would encourage others to answer this question as well.

[*English*]

Laurel Gillespie: I don't have the answer to exactly how we can bolster Bill C-34. I'm not a criminologist or a lawyer. It's not my expertise.

I do know there's an opportunity to do more in terms of the penalties one should face when they engage in such hateful acts and intentionally try to harm another individual, whether it's online or in person. Politicians serving our communities, for example.... When you're here in this precinct, the government does a great job. When you're back in your constituencies, it's game on. Now you're faced with an online component. It's 24 hours, seven days a week. It's unrelenting. Again, we've come too far and worked too hard to let this slide any further. I am just as curious as you are to see what penalties need to be put in place.

Data is a component that's missing from a lot of this. We're not capturing data. We're not actively making this data available. What's the frequency of these incidents? How are they being actioned? How many times are members of Parliament, provincial legislatures and municipalities reporting these incidents? They just get dropped off the table. It's “Well, there's not enough evidence. There's not enough this or that to actually charge them with anything.”

Are we taking down and collating that data so we can have something evidence-based to move forward with, in terms of what those penalties might look like one day?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: That is all the time we have, Ms. Larouche.

We are beginning our second round of questions.

Mrs. Borrelli, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Kathy Borrelli: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Attard-Frost.

How can AI create new employment opportunities and improve access to leadership positions for women and gender-diverse people?

Blair Attard-Frost: Thank you for the question.

I think AI has all kinds of benefits for women and gender-diverse people in employment, health care and many other areas, but it's essential to put proper governance structures and mitigation in place.

With education and training, responsible use of AI in business and entrepreneurship means women business owners and non-profit founders can automate all kinds of tasks, lower costs and succeed in their endeavours. I've worked with organizations that help women and 2SLGBTQI+ tech professionals across Canada gain the AI skills and knowledge they need to find a job, upskill to get a promotion in their workplace or implement an effective AI governance system in their organization. Literacy training is essential. There are also many young women and 2SLGBTQI+ people I've mentored who have difficulty finding stable employment and want to learn AI skills. It's a path to greater financial security.

More broadly, beyond employment, there are all kinds of opportunities around things like assistive technologies for translation and voice interfaces to support women with disabilities. You can build safer online spaces with automated tools for detecting and removing hate speech. There are all kinds of benefits in health as well. Again, it's very important that we govern and regulate the technology effectively, so that we can fully deliver on the promise of social benefit.

Kathy Borrelli: You are in agreement that AI-related training will help women participate in industry, without creating unnecessary barriers for employers or workers.

Blair Attard-Frost: Yes, I am, if it helps them understand how to properly use and apply the technology and navigate the risks associated with it.

Kathy Borrelli: What risks arise when women are under-represented in the development and testing of AI technologies? How might this affect the design of AI systems and opportunities available for women in the workforce?

Blair Attard-Frost: That's a great question.

As others have already indicated, bias in AI isn't purely technical. It starts in K-to-12 education, when we create spaces that preference male socialization—for example, STEM spaces or computer science. That carries forward into post-secondary education. It ultimately carries forward into the tech workforce and the design of products and services.

If we have bias in the composition of the tech workforce, we'll have women and 2SLGBTQI+ people under-represented in the workforce. Their perspectives, ways of knowing and personal lived experiences with bias and discrimination aren't being represented in the practical reality of how the technologies are being built and deployed. We've had that bias carried forward from previous upstream areas in society and the economy. The earlier we can address that through literacy and education the better.

Kathy Borrelli: Thank you.

What evidence-based measures would help women participate in AI-related fields and leadership positions?

Blair Attard-Frost: These would be measures of how many women are in leadership positions and in various sectors related to AI, in the tech industry especially; measures of how many women or 2SLGBTQI+ people have jobs in these industries; and measures of self-reported knowledge, confidence or feelings of belonging in the workplace. It would be helpful to understand the workplace dynamics of that.

There are all kinds of measures we can use for different levels of leadership and work to assess whether people feel a sense of belonging or feel supported or integrated into their workplaces.

● (1830)

Kathy Borrelli: Thank you very much.

With only 20 seconds remaining, I'll stop here.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Borrelli.

Ms. Nguyen, you have the floor for five minutes.

Chi Nguyen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you to this group of fantastic witnesses who are here to contribute to this very important conversation.

I'd like to start with the team from Equal Voice.

Last week my office hosted a screening of a film called *Miss Representation: Rise Up*. It's a documentary that examines the role that technology and the media are playing in shaping perceptions of women, including women seeking public office. One of the themes it tackles is the use of AI-assisted deepfakes and other forms of online abuse that target women candidates and discourage their participation in public life.

Could you speak to how AI-generated content is changing the nature of gender-based violence and political harassment online? What might this mean for us as we think about it going forward?

Laurel Gillespie: I'll speak to that very briefly. Then I'll hand it over to Kaelan.

In terms of remaining quiet about the frequency of the occurrences and the extremism of these images and videos being shared, we have to start voicing our concerns and speaking up about the misogyny and the hatred towards women and gender-diverse populations. I think silence is acceptance. I'm very concerned about the generations to come. I worry about my own daughters, my nieces and our grandchildren one day. We're the ones who are in these leadership roles today, here and now, so that we can create a better future for tomorrow. I think remaining silent about these issues isn't going to help us at all.

This is a great place to start. I'm very grateful to the committee for studying this.

Kaelan, do you have anything to add?

Kaelan Ruddick: Yes, I do, briefly. Thank you.

I recently read a report on how AI has been used to undermine women's participation in protests around political issues in Brazil and India. It wasn't the sexualized deepfake content we often think of. It was that images of protests, which looked very real, were being shared, and the women were presented in sexually inviting poses or clothing. The ways you can use fake content to discredit people's actions are so subtle now. It doesn't even need to be the explicit sexualized pornographic content that we often think of and that we know comprises a huge amount of the deepfake content online now. It can be much more subtle.

I think this can much more subtly undermine women's democratic participation and their validity, and how we perceive their democratic activities. Even with something as simple as a protest, women's activities there are being disparaged or talked about differently because of what this deepfake has made it look like they are wearing. What does that mean for the women who are taking public office and who are putting themselves in very public positions?

In addition to the more explicit and common uses of AI, we also need to be aware of those more subtle ones. It's so hard to tell now. These deepfakes are so sophisticated. AI tools are so sophisticated. It does require a very nuanced conversation about how these can shift perceptions of women in democratic processes.

Chi Nguyen: Ms. Ruddick, would you be able to share that report or that material with the committee so that we can add it to our record?

● (1835)

Kaelan Ruddick: Absolutely.

Chi Nguyen: I think you've named a true threat to our democracy and the undermining of people's trust in what they're seeing online, and it is a real damaging piece of the conversation.

Professor Attard-Frost, your work really focuses on public participation, community voice and the inclusion of trans perspectives in governance. I was wondering. A lot is already happening in this space. Is there a way for us to at least try to centre the lived experience of those who are under-represented and those who are marginalized as these tools roll out today?

Blair Attard-Frost: Thank you. I think that's a great question.

One thing that I think we really need to do in Canada is to have stronger public engagement on regulation. As part of the AI for all strategy, we had a public consultation on all kinds of aspects of AI.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting, Ms. Attard-Frost. The time is up, but you may have the opportunity to resume the discussion with another one of our colleagues.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Time flies. I will try to be brief.

Ms. Attard-Frost, we are seeing this whole issue of deepfakes. You spoke briefly about Bill C-16, which now creates a new offence. There is also Bill C-34. I put the question earlier to the representatives of the Equal Voice Foundation.

What would you have liked to see more of in Bill C-16? Is it enough? Do you also have any recommendations for Bill C-34?

[*English*]

Blair Attard-Frost: I'm sorry. I thought you were directing that to the Equal Voice folks—my apologies.

There are a few main things. The first piece of it has to do with what's being covered by Bill C-16. Right now, we're covering only the distribution of deepfakes, but we should also be looking at criminalizing the creation and possession of deepfakes, as a preventative measure against further distribution. A couple of ways could be to specify this to be creation and possession with intent to distribute for cases of threats or blackmail, or negligent or wilful possession after consent has been withdrawn.

Just yesterday, the Government of Alberta announced their own deepfake legislation. That includes provisions around creation and revocation of consent, so there's very much a precedent for that kind of approach in Canada, as well as internationally. South Korea has built a really robust legislative framework around deepfakes.

I think we should also be expanding the scope of imagery covered by the law to cover non-consensually sexualized uses of one's likeness, rather than the definition set out in Bill C-16, which covers only imagery that is “likely to be mistaken for a visual recording of that person.” As people in the previous session talked about, there are many ways that this kind of definition can shift the legal burden onto victims and create a lot of lack of clarity in how the law is interpreted.

With regard to Bill C-34, we can also amend that to require providers of generative AI services to demonstrate in some way that their systems have been tested and safeguarded against hateful and non-consensual sexual uses prior to deployment, rather than the current status quo in Bill C-34, which is to create a digital safety plan, but it's not clear if the provider is going to be following that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Attard-Frost. I am sorry to interrupt you. I am not trying to pick on you. Thank you very much for your understanding.

[*English*]

Ms. DeRidder, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, I have to use a bit of my time to put a motion on notice. I hope I have enough time left to ask a question.

My motion—Elly, this one's for you—is as follows:

> That, given that 90% of end of life caregivers are women, the committee undertake a study of at least four meetings on the adequacy and flexibility of Employment Insurance caregiver benefits for Canadians providing end of life care to a family member; the committee examine options to make caregiver benefits more flexible and responsive to the unpredictable nature of end of life illness; this study include witness testimony deemed appropriate by the committee and that upon conclusion of this study, the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

For you, Ms. Gillespie, we've had a lot of discussion today around attacks, with AI specifically used, on women in politics and women in leadership roles. I personally have had a few AI-generated attacks circulating on the Internet, and I can understand that it is quite harmful. You get that sinking feeling in your stomach when you see one, and then you think to yourself, “Oh, that's terrible.”

I can recognize that it is quite harmful for women in leadership roles. What are your recommendations to protect women in leadership roles against these AI-generated attacks?

Laurel Gillespie: Before we can come up with any real, viable solutions and start to really address it as a more global issue, we need to look at the hard-core data: the frequency, the severity and where these things are being manifested from.

One thing that women and those who are gender-diverse can do is support one another and even call out the men. I'm sorry, men in the room. We need to call you out to be allies to this cause and to provoke and stimulate change so that we don't see the occurrences that we do.

The reporting mechanisms also have to be in place.

I'm sorry to hear that you've experienced this. I'm also curious to know what was done about it. Was it documented? Is there some place you can go to say how often this is occurring and to what severity?

● (1840)

Kelly DeRidder: At the end of the day, one thing that you mentioned is to just start talking about it. I'm sure many of us in the room have had these ads happen specifically to us. I think that opening the conversation is really important. That's why I chose to start with that myself.

I agree that we need data, for sure, to recognize how often this is happening to women in leadership roles.

Ms. Attard-Frost, AI is being used more and more to make decisions that affect people's education and careers. In your opinion, what should remain a human decision when AI is involved, and how do we make sure that there's accountability for the decisions? Specifically, what tools are used in generative forms to keep a human in the loop?

Blair Attard-Frost: What tools should be used to keep a human in the loop and ensure that we have accountability? It really depends on the context. In general, we are going to need some form of regulatory oversight, and that's going to differ from use case to use case.

Generally, the approach that we're taking already, through things like Bill C-34, has indicated that it makes a lot of sense to address individual use cases that might be harmful and build regulatory regimes around them or adapt existing regulatory structures. We're now applying the existing privacy law and regulatory infrastructure that we have to address privacy risks related to automated processing of consumer data, for example.

It's really hard to give a sweeping answer to that, because these kinds of regulatory questions are so tied to context, accountability and oversight. It looks a little bit different in every context, a little bit different in every use case. That has to do with the risk profile of each use case as well as existing regulatory regimes in various sectors and application areas.

Kelly DeRidder: Thank you very much for that. I agree. It was a multi-faceted question, but thank you for answering how you did.

When we examine the impact on women and gender-diverse individuals, how do we distinguish between problems caused by technology and problems that already exist in society?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Kelly. That's all the time you have.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Begum, you have the floor for five minutes.

Doly Begum (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

First, I'm not regularly on this committee, but this is fascinating. I sit on the justice committee. Of course, Bill C-34 is one of those ones that I think are so relevant to the conversation here.

It's been really inspiring to listen to all of you. Thank you for the work that you all do, all our witnesses who are here today. Thank you for taking the time to come and share all the concerns you have and for the work you've done in the past, which I know from your bios. I'm sure all the committee members would appreciate any recommendations you may have that you want to add to our study and share going forward as well, if you want to send those.

I would like to start with Linda Sestock.

I know you've done a lot of work in gender bias in AI algorithms and women's participation in STEM. With some of the recommendations that you've made, would you like to share those—and our analysts could also listen to this as well—in terms of some of the ways we can incentivize more women's participation?

Then we can make policies that allow us going forward, in the future, to face a world where AI policies are made by women or gender-diverse people who understand, experience and reflect their realities.

Linda Sestock: Thank you very much for that question. It's a good question.

Money is a big factor that's going to be needed. There are a lot of women entrepreneurs. We're talking about how women are affected, but there are many women who are working in fields that involve AI. I think it's our duty to make sure that investments are going towards women as entrepreneurs as well, so that they have a voice at the table.

We have another thing too. It's very important that we audit the work in the AI systems out there and make sure that they're inclusive for everybody, including gender-diverse and disabled people. It's very important. It's been shown over time that a lot of women look at business in a different way and involve more of a human touch to it—no offence to the gentleman in the room.

It's important that investment be made at the school level, and also that when women are out in the workforce and starting their businesses, we're there to support them.

● (1845)

Doly Begum: Thank you very much for that.

I have a few more minutes left, and I want to go to Professor Blair Attard-Frost. Thank you again for being here.

Some of the things that you spoke about were weaknesses that we have in terms of governance and industries that are focusing on what benefits them versus marginalized communities. Recently when one of my nieces was watching something, I was passing by and just listening in. I thought it was just this harmless YouTube cartoon she was watching. It was fascinating to see all the biases—and not just biases. There was discrimination in how some women looked and different types of Islamophobia. There was anti-Black racism. I mean, it was just the way people were stereotypically put in different situations, and it really dawned on me that this four- or five-year-old was being exposed to something like this. Sometimes we don't really monitor what's being watched in those situations.

Are there recommendations that you would want us to look at that may not touch Bill C-34? I know we're trying to tackle some of those as well to make sure that youth and children's safety is number one, but if there is something that you think we're doing well, I would love to hear it, as well as if there's something you would recommend that we should focus on.

Blair Attard-Frost: Thank you for a really good question.

Echoing what others have said in this session and in the previous one, there's this really big challenge around literacy and education, going back to the notion that bias doesn't begin in the actual tech product. The technology begins in kindergarten through grade 12 and continues in post-secondary and into the workforce, so if we really want to address bias in a systematic way, we have to be thinking about the entire spectrum of social life where bias can enter into how these systems eventually get built.

Part of that is through education. Part of it is through having a responsible media ecosystem. Part of it is through talking with children and educating children and having some oversight over what our children are looking at.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting, Ms. Attard-Frost. That is all the time we have for this committee meeting.

I would like to thank all our guests here today. It was very informative.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

A voice: Absolutely.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned. Have a good evening.

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