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Bias in the Machine: How Artificial Intelligence Perpetuates Ableism in Society

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The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has profoundly impacted various aspects of society, including the realm of disability. While AI offers significant opportunities to assist and empower people with diverse disabilities, enabling greater independence and autonomy, it is also met with reluctance and mistrust by the disability community. This is due to AI's potential to reinforce and proliferate ableist attitudes—stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities (Bogart, 2019). According to Wolbring (2024, p. 2) disability rights and ability studies use a wide range of ability-based concepts such as “supercrip, techno-supercrip, ableism, disablism, internalized ableism, internalized disablism, enhancement version of ableism and disablism, techno-poor disabled, techno-poor impaired, and technoableism”. This presentation will examine the intersection of AI and ableism, exploring how AI-driven technologies can unintentionally embed and amplify societal biases, further marginalizing individuals with disabilities and reinforcing normative boundaries. The aim of this presentation is to analyze AI's role within the disability field, particularly its capacity to strengthen ableist attitudes and transform them into tangible discriminatory practices. By evaluating AI-based hiring algorithms, assistive technologies, and automated decision-making systems, this study highlights how these technologies can perpetuate exclusion by reflecting and entrenching existing prejudices. The presentation will draw on qualitative interviews with international disability experts, activists, entrepreneurs, and large-company employers to provide a comprehensive analysis of these issues.