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Facial Analysis Systems Misclassify Most Recognizable Black Women

Researcher Joy Buolamwini's "Al, Ain't I A Woman?" exposes dangerous failures in facial recognition technology

Washington, DC – Oprah. Michelle Obama. Serena Williams. Sojourner Truth. Artificial Intelligence researcher [Joy Buolamwini](#) invokes the names and images of some of the most iconic Black women in her new poem, "[Al, Ain't I A Woman?](#)" to expose the consequential failures of facial analysis technology. The project is an installation based on Buolamwini's [Gender Shades study](#) which revealed that while commercial facial recognition systems had error rates no higher than 1 percent for white men, nearly one in two dark-skinned women are misidentified.

Buolamwini tested the accuracy of facial analysis systems by using images of world-renowned Black women, including media mogul Oprah Winfrey, First Lady Michelle Obama, tennis champion Serena Williams, and abolitionist Sojourner Truth. Repeatedly, the systems mis-gendered the women in the images, and in one instance used a racially offensive term to describe an image. Inspired by Sojourner Truth's speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention, Buolamwini asked "Al, Ain't I A Woman," in response to the technology's failure to accurately classify dark-skinned women.

The social implications of the misclassification are rooted in the historical marginalization of Black women, disregarding not only their gender identity, but also, their very humanity. The civic implications can be life-threatening.

"Flawed facial recognition systems pose serious risks for people of color when it comes to interactions with law enforcement and even if systems were flawless they can still be abused" said Buolamwini. "Black communities are grappling with police violence and racial discrimination. As AI technology continues to evolve, tech companies have a responsibility to ensure that their products are used to strengthen communities, not deepen racial inequities."

Visit [Notflawless.ai](#) to view "Al, Ain't I A Woman." Visitors can also anonymously share their experiences with flawed AI technologies; join efforts to demand greater transparency and oversight from technology companies; and learn more about the latest in AI technology and its impact.

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