Smart Tech, Algorithms, and Social Work Ethics in the Age of AI

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"AI has developed to the point that it can replace human social workers."

- ▶ I agree
- ▶ I disagree
- ▶ I am unsure
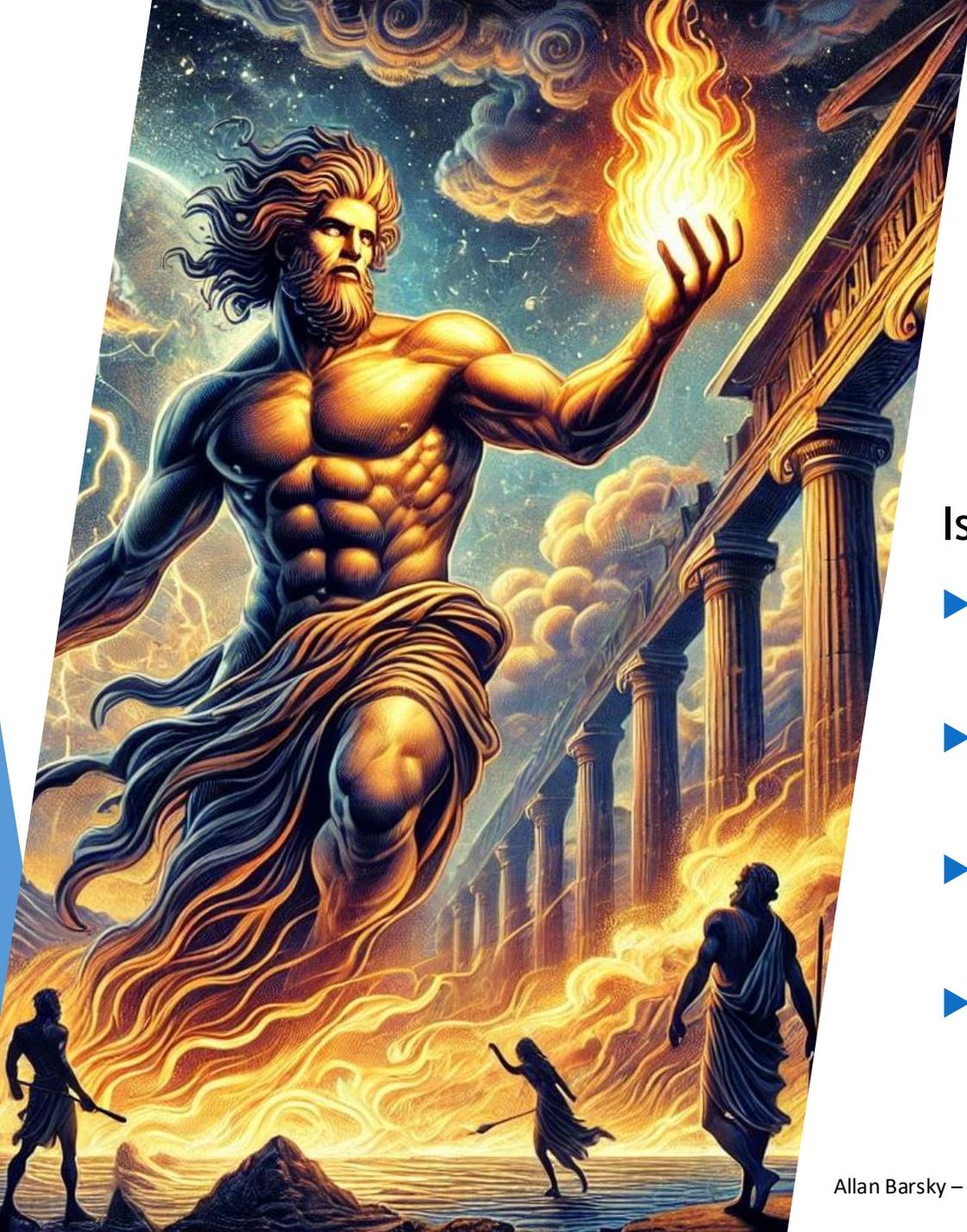- ▶ I'm kind of scared

Agenda

Introduction to AI

Ethically Responsible Uses

Ethically Questionable Uses

Questions & Comments

Key Takeaways

# Futurism: Imagining Futures, Considering Pasts and Possibilities

Is AI like...

▶ Prometheus stealing fire from Olympus to give to humans?

▶ Cars replacing horse-drawn carriages?

▶ Electronic records replacing handwritten notes?

▶ Online searches replacing card catalogs in libraries?

What is AI?

Digital systems, programs, or machines that can perform tasks previously achievable only through human reasoning, perception, or problem solving (IT Chronicles, 2023)

"Smart" Tech
Mimics human
intelligence and learning
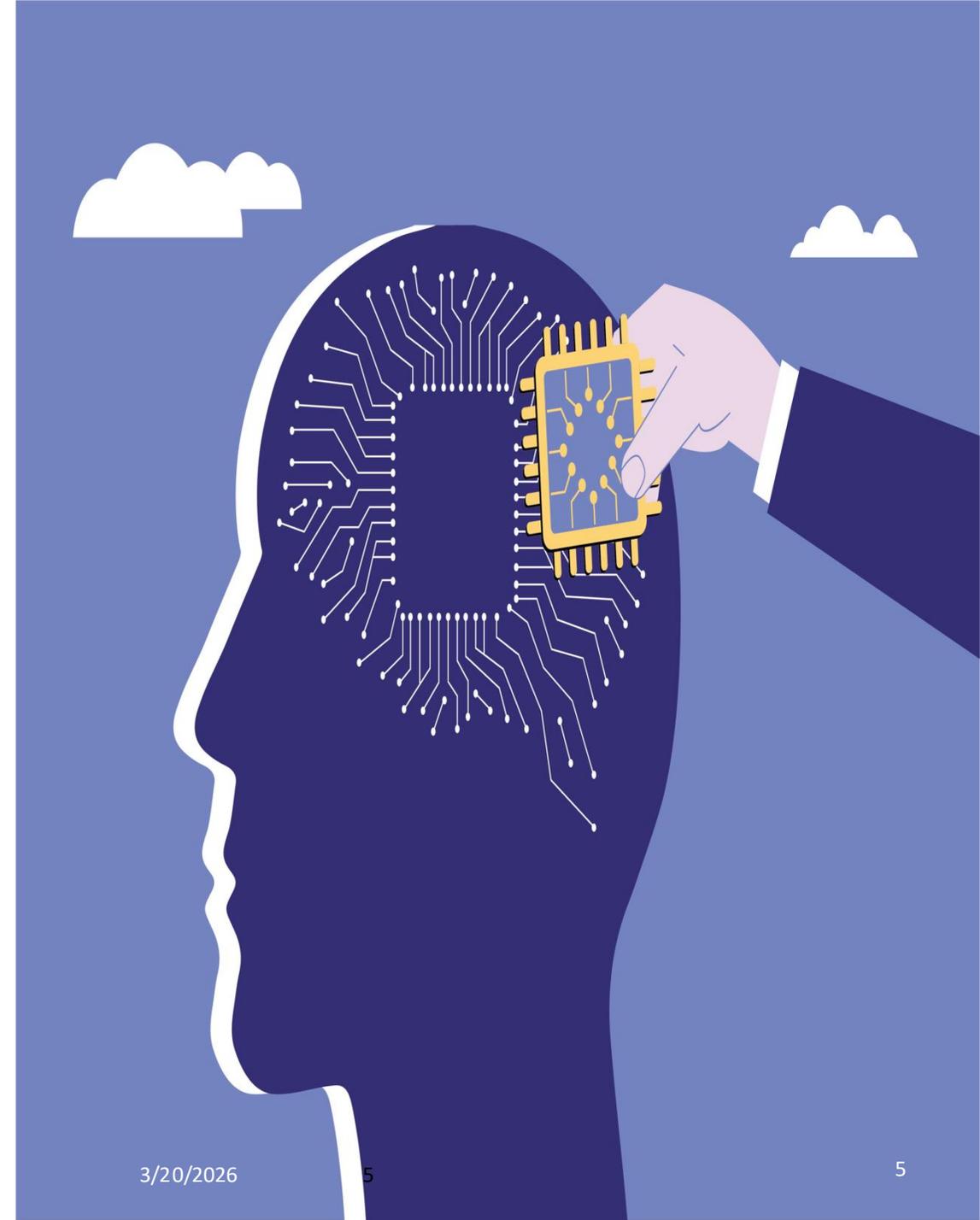
"Large Language Models"

▶ Natural language processing using AI

▶ Uses deep learning "algorithms" – step by step instructions for problem solving

▶ Trained on large amounts of data ("garbage in, garbage out" vs. "high quality in, high quality out")

▶ Trained to recognize, translate, predict, or generate "human sounding" text and other content (video, images)

▶ Speech recognition (and translate voice to text)

▶ Visual perception (e.g., interpret body language)

▶ Language translation

▶ May "hallucinate" – provide false information

Examples of AI Tools

- ChatGPT
- ChatSpot
- Copilot (Microsoft)
- Character.AI
- Replika
- iThenticate
- ExplainPaper
- Gemini
- Siri/Alexa
- BluePrint AI (notes)

- Zoom AI Companion
- D.ID (video maker)
- MS ClipChamp (video)
- Stable Diffusion
- Lissn
- JotBot
- GPTZero
- Claude
- MindDoc
- Therachat
- Eleos Health
- Wysa
- Scite.AI
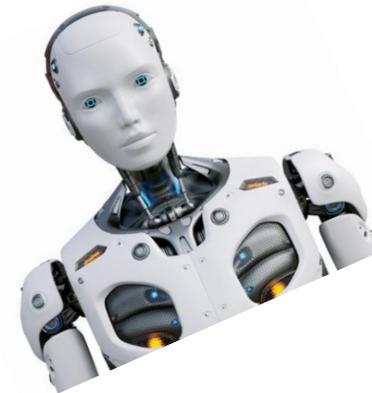
Examples: not providing any recommendations; continuously changing

AI Integrated into Other Tech

- ▶ Videoconferencing
- ▶ Electronic Records
- ▶ Behavioral Intervention Technology
- ▶ Biofeedback
- ▶ Communication Technology
- ▶ Virtual Reality
- ▶ Geographic Information Technology
- ▶ Research Software - Data Analytics
- ▶ Online Learning Platforms
- ▶ Social Media & Digital Outreach
- ▶ Chatbots & Social Robots

Possible Uses of AI in SW

▶ Gathering Information

▶ Facilitating Communication

▶ Screening and Assessment

▶ Risk Prediction

▶ Interventions – CBT, Problem-Solving, Relaxation Techniques, Narrative Therapy…

▶ Research – Data Analysis, Summarizing Articles

▶ Progress Notes, Summaries

▶ Client education (information)

▶ SW education and training

▶ 24/7 support (chatbots, social robots)

▶ Helping clients use AI: effectively, for good, and manage risks

Possibility: "Anything social workers can do…"

Possible "Pros" of AI for SW

▶ Efficiency

▶ Does repetitive tasks; frees time for higher-level tasks

▶ Available 24/7 – continuous monitoring or service provision

▶ Individualized services – sensitivity to unique experiences and needs of clients

▶ Accessibility functions – different languages, people with visual or auditory challenges, people with disabilities, people at distance

▶ Analyzing large data

▶ More effective for some purposes?
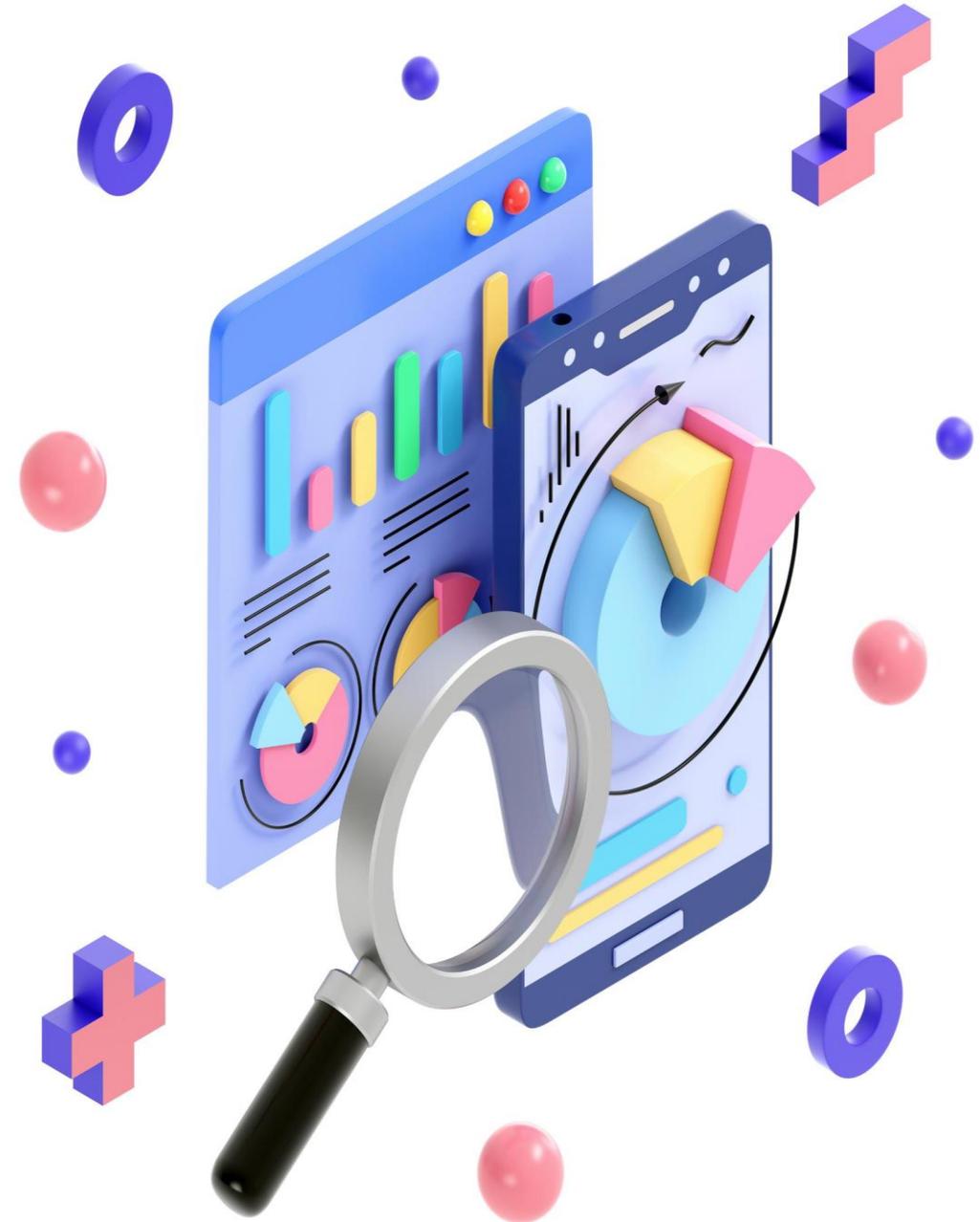
Responsible AI Use

Ethical Principles

Fairness	Reliability & Safety	Inclusiveness	Integrity	Accountability	Privacy & Security

Fairness
Social justice
Algorithmic bias
Self-determination

Reliability & Safety
EBP
Informed consent
Duty to protect, warn, or report
Do no harm
Novel interventions
Research

Inclusiveness
Sources of info
Respect

Integrity
Transparency
(algorithms, sources)
Credit
Plagiarism
Misrepresentation
Intellectual property
Copyright

Accountability
Malpractice
Misdiagnosis
Dishonesty
Fraud
Abandonment
Backups for tech failures & emergencies

Human relationships?

Privacy & Security
Confidentiality
HIPAA compliant
Surveillance
Unauthorized access
Discoverable in court

To what extent can AI bots develop **empathy** and **meaningful relationships** with mental health clients?

1. Not at all
2. To some extent
3. Completely

Image: A. Barsky with AI Assistance

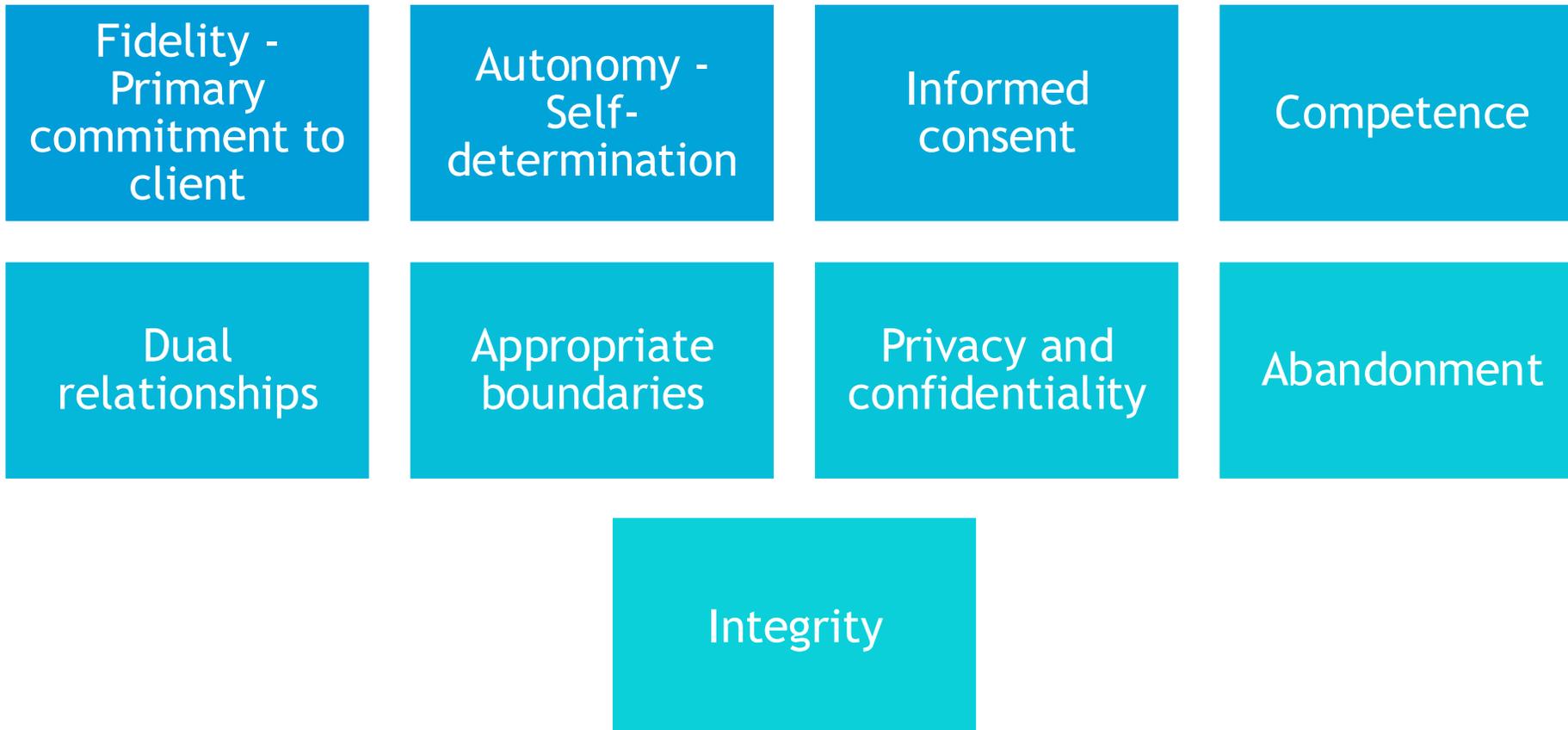# AI as a Tool, Not a Replacement

SW maintains accountability

Like an "eager consultant or practicum student"

Retaining Accountability

► Anchoring effect – over-relying on first information received

► Strategies to avoid / mitigate

  ► Brainstorm, assess, or write first – then ask AI

  ► Provide AI with very specific tasks (not just to do all your work)

► Review AI's output with a critical eye

  ► Accuracy and relevance of data

  ► Accuracy of assessments and interpretations

  ► Evidence-based treatment plans

  ► Tone of writing – clarity, respect, professionalism

► Second review and opinion by supervisor, colleague or consultant

(Barsky-Moore & Barsky, 2025)

Key Social Work Ethics

Fidelity - Primary commitment to client	Autonomy - Self-determination	Informed consent	Competence
Dual relationships	Appropriate boundaries	Privacy and confidentiality	Abandonment

Integrity

AI and Social Justice

Social Justice
▶ Ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background

Respect for All People
▶ Inclusive and equitable society

Potential Biases in AI Algorithms
▶ Inherent biases that may perpetuate social inequalities if not addressed and mitigated.
▶ Reinforcing and perpetuating existing prejudices and discrimination
▶ Marginalizing or excluding particular groups

Questions for Discussion

KEY TAKEAWAYS

AI and other tech are here

AI keeps evolving

Responsible use includes fairness, reliability & safety, inclusiveness, integrity, accountability, privacy, & security

AI is a tool, not a replacement

Try it, practice it

Handle with care ☺

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