

**Testimony of Sean Astin**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property, Artificial Intelligence, and the Internet**  
**"A Midlife Crisis? IP and the Internet After 40"**

Chairman Issa, Ranking Member Johnson, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for convening this hearing and for your continued work modernizing American intellectual property law. Thank you, Representative Lofgren, for your leadership on combating foreign digital piracy, and Chairman Issa, for all of your work on the American Music Fairness Act. These issues matter to the livelihoods of the 160,000 union performers and media professionals I represent as President of SAG-AFTRA.

My focus today is on nonconsensual digital replicas.

For all of human history, if someone saw your face, they knew it was you.

If they heard your voice, they knew you had spoken.

For thousands of years, that simple connection was enough. Your face. Your voice. Your presence. Reality itself was affirmed and, simply put, we knew who we were to each other.

Artificial intelligence has begun to intervene and break that ancient connection.

Today, someone can realistically make you appear to say something you never said. To endorse something you don't believe in, or even convincingly depict you confessing to something you had no knowledge of.

For the first time in human history, the experiences we've always shared are no longer secure. Our relationship to community is becoming distorted thanks to a wave of technology that was recklessly brought to the public without care as to how it might be used to hurt people.

In my line of work, we deal with emotions. On behalf of our performers, I'm here to tell you what this moment feels like.

To begin, we make our livings by granting the use of our voices and likenesses to our employers. That's what they pay us for. Through every audition and with every setback,

we know, we rely on the fact that when the jobs finally come, we have something uniquely ours to offer.

Now, imagine a performer waking up one morning to discover, on their phone, a version of themselves that never was.

But they are watching it.

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And so is the rest of the world.

The voice and face are a perfect match.

For the performer, it's a moment of terror.

Who is seeing it?

Will anyone ever hire them again?

Will their reputation—built over a lifetime—be destroyed in a moment?

Every casting director.

Every producer.

Every executive.

Every member of the public can see it.

Even their family may hesitate for a moment.

But they can reach for something deeper.

"He would never say that."

"That's not who he is."

But who are we?

Think about anyone you love.

Your understanding of them is built from memory.

Imagine that memory being contaminated.

The thing that brings us back to the real person is our faith in who they truly are.

In the world of deepfakes, the damage is done quickly and without mercy.

The public has no obligation to discover the truth about someone.

They just keep scrolling.

Our members have almost no ability to protect themselves from this kind of abuse.

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Neither does the teenager humiliated by a fabricated image.

Neither do parents trying to protect their children.

Neither does anyone whose reputation can be threatened by a digital replica they never authorized.

Artificial intelligence is changing the way human beings experience life. And it's doing so very quickly. We all know that this moment demands wisdom and action.

To be clear, technology is not our enemy.

Throughout our history, America has chosen both innovation and responsibility.

Usually, sadly, only after ordinary people have suffered some calamity. But there is a right path.

In our time, it is obvious that civilization is in the throes of a technological maelstrom, and as of this moment, Americans are being forced to surrender their basic relationship to one another.

We don't want to stop progress.

We need to civilize it.

Many Americans may never own property or accumulate significant financial assets.

But surely the God-given gift of who they are should belong to them. And that means ownership.

In the world of entertainment, our image and likenesses have been the substance of our transactions. But in the wild, we do not own them.

Every American deserves the right to own, as property, their voice and likeness.

Members of the Committee, what I'm saying about this moment, and who we are, is that:

Every human being should remain the author of their own existence.

Reality should remain verifiable.

Consent is not a nuisance.

Reputation matters.

Truth is truth.

And it is worth protecting.

Thank you.