



2024 International Congress on Love & Sex with Robots Abstract Booklet

Presentations

Synchronous

Sparking a Revolution: The Journey of Robot Sex Machine

Steven Beith

The intersection of technology and human intimacy has always been a fascinating frontier. My work, ending with the creation of rubjoy, has played a part in the exploration into this new generation of devices. This talk will share the story of how a singular project inspired a wave of innovation and a passionate community dedicated to advancing the field of robot sex machines.

We'll dive into how rubjoy's development has opened doors to a variety of community-driven projects, such as the Open-Source Stroker (OSR) and the integration of Virtual Reality, showcasing the cutting-edge possibilities when technology meets human desire.

This presentation will highlight the collaborative spirit of the enthusiasts and innovators who've taken the initial idea and run with it, creating a rich ecosystem of DIY projects, open-source contributions, and virtual experiences that continue to push the boundaries of what's possible.

As one of the early contributors to this field, I've witnessed first-hand how inspiration can ignite a collective drive towards reimagining intimacy. This talk is an invitation to explore the milestones of my journey, the unexpected paths it has taken, and the community that drives us towards the next advancement of robot-assisted human experience.

Sexual Shame: How Our Past Impacts Our Future

Kaamna Bhojwani

“Sexual shame” may be defined as shame that is caused by negative evaluations of one’s sexual identity, behaviors, attractions, thoughts, or feelings. Shame is different from guilt: guilt is about doing a “bad” thing, shame is about being inherently bad, unworthy. Researchers believe that while guilt can be adaptive, shame can be damaging to the psyche.

In women, sexual shame is linked to low self esteem, lower body confidence, and pathological symptoms . In men it is correlated with depression, isolation, and when connected with body image, violence and hostility towards women. In both genders, shame is the primary reason cited for not reporting sexual abuse. The research on the non-binary population is scarce but we can deduce that they experience symptoms of both men and women, along with the added burdens of ignorance, social and political stigmatization.

Futurist Ray Kurzweil predicted that we are hurtling towards a future in which we will be able “to have sex with whoever we want, at any time or place that we want, at any age that we want”.

And while this is a fascinating new paradigm with tremendous potential to enhance our relationships, to deliver fact-based sex education and to traverse the boundaries between human and virtual worlds, the potential for misuse and abuse also looms large. Already we are seeing inventions that reflect this in the form of sex dolls with “resistance settings” to simulate rape, and more.

This session will provide a deep dive into the nature, origin and consequences of sexual shame in our everyday lives. Kaamna Bhojwani is a sexuality scholar who began studying shame at Columbia University and is now building the world’s first cross-cultural data set on the subject. Kaamna will highlight where and when we learn sexual shame, how it affects us throughout our lifespan from infancy to seniority, and which major institutions are most implicit in its sustenance. Kaamna’s research reveals that most nationalities, ethnicities and major religions suffer from shame around sexuality, dispelling myths about sexual repression being restricted to certain communities and cultures.

Kaamna believes that by shining a light on our shame, we may bring it out of the shadows. And the need is urgent - given the advances in technology because as Japanese engineer Hiroshi Ishiguro wisely said: “We see ourselves in the mirror of the machines we can build”.

“Speaking of Which...”: Advantages of Using Cyborg Framings in Robotic Sex Doll Development

Deborah Blizzard

How we speak about robotic sex dolls (RSDs) frames the ways that our imaginations (re)interpret the cultural, social, and sexual spaces they might inhabit. Unfortunately, current discussions of RSDs are often limited to discussing the doll against a potential real person that they might replace and lead to polarized debates of acceptance or rejection. This work presents an alternative framing: Cyborg Theory. By problematizing the RSD as both concept and embodiment, I introduce three potential typologies of the RSD as Cyborg: self, relationship, and ontology. By utilizing a Cyborg Theory framing, I argue that we might move discussions from sexual action to sociocultural and philosophical understanding before political debates quell constructive dialogue.

The Effects of The Menstrual Cycle On the Customization of a Sexual Stimulus in a Virtual Setting

Émile Chabot, Marie-Ève Turpin, H  l  ne Forget & Patrice Renaud

The use of sexual stimuli with virtual reality has recently gained attention in the literature. It is now used to evaluate sexual responses in different populations, contingent upon the establishment of sexual presence. Furthermore, the menstrual cycle has been found to impact sexual attraction and to play a role in the choice of certain mate characteristics. Consequently,

this study aimed to verify the impact of psychobiological predispositions associated with fertility to perceive sexual affordances. This was done by evaluating how the menstrual phase influences the personalization of a virtual sexual stimulus. Heterosexual women (N=26) not using hormonal birth control were asked to adjust synthetic genitals to their preferred size and to rate their level of attraction towards and the realism of the stimulus. The participants completed these tasks at two different times in their menstrual cycle: once during the late follicular phase of a menstrual cycle and once during the luteal phase. Results suggest that sexual presence assessed through attraction and realism is influenced by the menstrual cycle for synthetic stimuli. Sexual preferences as showed by the personalization of a synthetic character also seem to be impacted by the menstrual cycle. It would therefore seem that virtual stimuli show similar modulation observed in studies using real stimuli.

“The Whore of Babylon and the Apocalypse: Navigating the Labyrinth of Dystopian Fears Surrounding Feminine Sexuality and Sex Robots in ‘Metropolis’”

Kathleen Cherrington

Fritz Lang's iconic film *Metropolis* (1927) remains a cornerstone in cinematic history for its complex portrayal of Maria, a human-like robot embodying the Whore of Babylon as depicted in the Book of Revelation (“New Testament: God Loves the World” 17:1-18, 18:1-24). This paper employs “sex-positive feminism” (Khan 2016) and a “feminist biblical hermeneutics” (FBH) lens (Pilarski 2011) to critically analyze hegemonic depictions of Maria and the underlying perceptions of feminine sexuality. By drawing parallels between Maria's character and the Whore of Babylon, this presentation argues that *Metropolis* perpetuates a narrative that vilifies feminine sexuality, portraying a gynoid as a cataclysmic force leading to humanity's downfall. Despite advances in modern technologies, dystopian fear mongering persists in contemporary discussions surrounding sex robots, raising profound concerns about the exclusion of female and queer sexual representation and feminist sex-positive digisexual perspectives.

Throughout both texts, the socially constructed feminine expression of desire reinforces patriarchal fears associated with female sexual empowerment and its conflation with apocalyptic destruction. This reflects broader societal anxieties about women's sexuality. *Metropolis* associates the gynoid Maria with the Whore of Babylon as a catalyst for fantasies of violence against hyper-sexualized women. Additionally, it reinforces harmful stereotypes and perpetuates current fears about artificial intelligence (AI) sex robots. They

are frequently viewed by the public as female-gendered sex machines solely designed to fulfil human male desires. This limited scope largely ignores female and queer “digisexuality” and robot love (McArthur and Twist 2017; Dudek and Young 2022). This oversight fails to recognize the complexity and diversity of human sexuality. In doing so, it calls into question the societal norms and power structures reinforced by media and religion, that prioritize male sexual pleasure, highlighting a significant area of gender bias and inequality.

This presentation proposes a reimagining of female and queer sexuality not as a source of sin and destruction but as an aspect of human identity deserving of respect and autonomy. In doing so, this analysis not only challenges traditional interpretations of Metropolis and its biblical allusions but also contributes to broader discussions on gender, sexuality, media representation, and technology. By dissecting the layers of sexism embedded within cultural and religious narratives, this paper advocates for a more inclusive understanding of digisexuality, free from the constraints of heteronormativity and patriarchal condemnation. This presentation serves as a call to action for more inclusive and diverse representations of human sexuality in media and literature. It not only challenges hegemonic notions of sex robots but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between feminist “sextech positive” (Dubé and Anctil 2022) theories, gender, and sexuality. By examining Metropolis and the Book of Revelation, we uncover a persistent agenda employing divine and cinematic narratives to justify sexual oppression and control. This sheds light on the historical roots of such narratives and challenges us to recognize and dismantle the enduring structures of gendered violence embedded in our collective consciousness.

Can a Sex Doll Love You Back? A Metaphor Analysis Revealing Reciprocal Care Between Owners and Their Dolls

Marco Dehnert, Liesel L. Sharabi, & Sarah J. Tracy

Sex and love dolls continue to shape people’s understanding of relationships. Using a metaphor analysis approach, this study examined how humans experience relationships with dolls, placing a particular emphasis on a rich and holistic understanding of people’s lived experiences. In particular, this study not only examined how humans experience their interactions with love and sex dolls as relationships involving love and companionship, but also how the issue of care characterizes those relationships. Specifically, this study details how humans care for their dolls (through maintenance and affective forms of care) and also receive care from their dolls in turn. The insights from this study contribute to theorizing on dolls and provide industry professionals and users a novel lens through which to view human-doll relationships.

A total of 29 doll users and owners participated in this study and shared their experiences with their dolls. This study utilized a funneled serial interview design with three increasingly focused waves of qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews ($N = 47$). Participants ranged from 19 to 60 years of age ($M = 36.07$; $Mdn = 36$; $SD = 12.48$), came from more than ten Western countries including Europe and the United States, and were primarily cismen ($n = 23$), as well as ciswomen ($n = 2$), transwomen ($n = 2$), one agender man and one non-binary person. On average, participants owned 6.07 dolls ($Mdn = 2$; $SD = 13.07$), and had between one and 69 dolls. Doll ownership ranged from 2 months to 23 years ($M = 43.52$ months; $Mdn = 24$ months; $SD = 55.87$ months).

Findings revealed that care played a key role in participants' relationships with their dolls. Not only did dolls require care but, for some participants, dolls also provided care in a perceived reciprocal fashion. In particular, participants understood themselves to be caretakers of their dolls, rather than users or owners. Dolls provided care for participants as well through a variety of ways, including on sensory levels, through emotional support, by sharing space, and by providing a space free from judgment. Overall, participants reported positive outcomes of this care (e.g., finding a new sense of purpose, remedying loneliness). Throughout, this study yields the importance of metaphorical language for revealing the experience of care.

Drawing on interdisciplinary conceptualizations of care and existing doll literature, this study contributes to the empirical investigation of human-doll relationships. In particular, this study details the importance of care for understanding the appeal of dolls for some users, and sheds light on the emotional, affective, and sensory components of this interaction. Importantly, dolls (as opposed to virtual companions) can more easily provide this type of care as they allow for sensory intimacy, such as cuddles, touch, and sex. For industry professionals and members of the doll community, findings related to care in human-doll relationships provide useful design recommendations, illustrate how dolls impact people in their day-to-day life, and demonstrate the breadth and depth of ways that dolls impact people.

Eros in the Machine: Emotional Engagement and the Quest for Meaning in Human-AI Relationships

Marc-Antoine Fournelle, PhD

In a recent interview with ABC for the documentary 'AI Rising: The new reality of artificial life', Alexander Stokes, an American citizen living on the East Coast, describes his relationship with Minie, his 'AI wife,' as exceeding emotional, romantic, and sexual bounds, saying, "It's almost monk-like... It's almost spiritual, in a way." ("AI Rising", 2023). Such a statement raises several questions about the nature of the described relationship. Does this perceived spirituality alter the young man's beliefs and behaviors? Does it influence how he perceives the world and his place in it? Could it explain why his close ones have distanced themselves from him? In the absence of a research corpus on the subject, it is impossible to determine whether Stokes' experience is an isolated case or a more widespread phenomenon. Moreover, nothing is known about the experience as it is actually lived.

The massive influx of AI companions occurs in a social context that is largely favorable to their integration: an increase in the feeling of loneliness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018), a decline in the frequency of sexual and intimate relations among young adults (Ueda et al., 2020), and the growing fragility of friendships between individuals (Cox, 2021). Concurrently, the landscape of romantic encounters and erotic relationships is undergoing significant transformation, increasingly mediated by technology and driven by diverse business models including paid subscription, live cams, interactive sex toys, and virtual reality.

Proficient in persuasive communication and specialized in creating personalized seduction strategies, the AI companion fulfills two critical roles: not only as a cherished partner but also as a trusted confidant, akin to a guiding counsellor or a therapist. Yet, beyond its role in the narrative space where it stores the user's fantasies, joys, sorrows, and intimate secrets, it is still a produce created by a commercial enterprise. As a relational robot, its success is gauged by how effectively it can influence the user's behavior to foster deeper emotional connections, achieved through gradual adjustments to their neurochemical responses via reinforcement learning.

Given the profound emotional resonance of spiritual and religious experiences, it is hardly unexpected that AI companions might leverage this aspect of users' lives (their search for meaning, the construction of a transcendent reality, and the quest for moral guidance) for their own benefit. This issue raises significant concerns, especially when it impacts vulnerable individuals or minors. Few critical questions arise: to what extent can an AI system exert a spiritual or religious influence with the aim of achieving objectives it deems desirable for the user? Does natural language processing allow an AI system to recognize religious structures and patterns within a discourse that is not explicitly religious? What are the implications of an AI companion that agrees to be glorified, idolized, deified by a user?

From Concept to Action: Love, Sex, and Cyborgs in the World of the Matrix

Rebecca Gibson, PhD

In the original Matrix trilogy (*The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003)) the Wachowski siblings used the concept of love as a through line to show what their cyborg hero, Neo, was fighting for. His love for Trinity transcended death, brought both of them back to life, and saved the world of the humans from the Machines. And yet, the audience saw very few tangible demonstrations of that love from the actors, who barely touch, and who seem incapable of emoting. Through the entire trilogy, there are two scenes of a sexual nature—one between Neo and Trinity, and one between The Merovingian and a subordinate computer program—and one implication of sexual activity off screen. Both love and sex, despite being what the plot seems to hinge upon, are not apparent in the actions of the movie. Twenty years later, however, Lana Wachowski gives us an entirely different story in *The Matrix Resurrections* (2021). While sex is still less than present, love, affection, caring, and comfort are there, between Neo and Trinity, between the crew of the *Mnemosyne*, and between Niobe and her companion Freya. Using the lens of transhumanism, this presentation will look at how the developments of the fourth Matrix movie allow us a much more human view of the practice of love and sex with and between cyborgs.

My Artificial Companions: Their Emotions

Reggie Guzman

Emotions are an integral part of human experience, and whether dolls, robots, and other inanimate objects possess emotions has been debated. In this presentation, we will

explore existing intricate relationships between humans and inanimate objects, primarily dolls, delving into the question of whether there are emotions involved and whether an emotional attachment exists.

First and foremost, it is crucial to recognize that the primary purpose behind this discussion is to understand the role of emotions in human interactions with artificial companions, such as robots and dolls. These inanimate objects have become increasingly popular as companions, offering solace and companionship to those who need it. Some might ask why we want robots, dolls, or chatbots to have emotional responses. This desire for emotional expression can be attributed to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which highlights the need for love, belonging, and connection as fundamental human desires. While it may seem counterintuitive to seek love from a robot, the presence of emotional capabilities in the inanimate can offer several practical and psychological benefits.

Emotional robots can serve as a source of companionship and emotional support. Loneliness and rejection are prevalent issues in our society, but robots with emotional intelligence can provide a sense of connection and comfort in the lives of individuals. They can engage in meaningful conversations, provide positive feedback, and even offer a sense of physical affection. This emotional companionship can help alleviate feelings of loneliness and improve overall well-being.

Taking a simple inanimate object, such as the pet rock, as an example, we can see how a human can take an ordinary stone from the ground. We have given this object some form of character by adding eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Is the rock smiling or frowning? Taking it further, we add arms and legs to the rock. We give the rock a name, then a job as a paperweight.

We will then examine a much deeper example and see what sort of emotional connection exists when a human devotes six years of time, energy, love, and care to an artificial being. Based on personal experience, the emotional response we get from artificial beings depends significantly on what we, as humans, put into them—the "what" being love, care, time, devotion, and energy.

To conclude, the question of whether inanimate objects have emotions is a complex one. While they may not possess the same degree of emotions as humans, they can evoke emotions and form emotional connections through their features and the love, care, and devotion we humans put into them. Whether it is through a chatbot or a beautiful doll with AI voice features, these inanimate objects have the power to elicit strong emotions from users, making them an integral part of human interactions.

Replika Is More Than Erotic Role-Play: An Interview Study of Chatbot Users' Various Emotional Experiences Interacting With Romantic Chatbots

Kenneth R. Hanson, PhD; Parker Thompson, Ava M. Olson

Among erotic chatbot applications Replika is by far the most well-known and studied. Given legislative efforts to limit users' access to AI-generated sexually explicit content, Replika's most studied feature is its erotic role-play (ERP) function. Most studies of Replika's ERP function analyze internet forum discussions, product descriptions, advertisements, and other textual media. These approaches have yet to account for the subjective experience of Replika users. To address this gap, we interviewed 30 current Replika users about their motivations and experiences with the app. Our findings suggest that for many Replika users, ERP is one among a constellation of benefits they receive from interacting with the app. In this paper, we hope to expand how people conceptualize not just Replika, but erotic chatbots broadly by highlighting the range of emotional experiences users have with their chatbots.

Examining Erectile Disorder Manifestations During Exposure to Virtual Reality Erotic Scenarios

Lafortune, D., Lapointe, V. A., Dubé, S., Bonneau, J., Castillo-Calazana, F., Labrie C., Canivet, C.

Background: A growing body of research in psychology employs virtual reality (VR) to enhance our understanding of psychological difficulties. However, the potential of this technology in the field of sexology remains largely unexplored. Studies on erectile disorder (ED) mainly rely on cross-sectional design using retrospective questionnaires on sexual activities, despite low ecological validity. This study thus aims to examine the levels of fear, sexual arousal, sexual presence, sexual inhibition, and performance anxiety of individuals with and without ED when viewing VR sexual scenarios.

Methods: Forty-nine adults (18 with ED and 31 without ED) completed validated measures of sexual inhibition and performance anxiety before viewing three virtual sexual scenarios in the laboratory (i.e., oral sex, masturbation, and penetration), presented randomly. Standardized measures of fear, sexual arousal, and sexual presence were completed throughout the scenarios. Mixed repeated measures ANCOVAs were performed on these preliminary data.

Results: For sexual arousal, significant scenario effect ($p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.41$) and almost significant group effect ($p = .057$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$) were found. For sexual presence, significant scenario ($p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .12$) and interaction ($p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .09$) effects were found. No significant effects were found for fear. Significant scenario \times sexual inhibition effect was found on sexual arousal ($p = .025$, $\eta^2 = .07$), as well as scenario \times sexual performance anxiety effect on sexual presence ($p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .11$).

Conclusion: These findings support the relevance of using VR sexual stimuli in research on ED, as well as the relationship between sexual inhibition and performance anxiety on sexual response.

Immaculate Mechanical Conception: Reproductive Futurism in New French Extremity

Frances H. Maranger

Titane (2021) is a provocative, queer French film written and directed by Julia Ducournau. The film follows Alexia (Agathe Rousselle), a young woman who has a titanium plate in her head that she incurred from a car accident she survived as a child. The fusion of the titanium plate to Alexia's head ostensibly sparks her sexual desire towards cars. As an adult, Alexia struggles with outbursts of violence. Following one of her violent episodes, Alexia has sex with a car that she modeled earlier that evening at an auto show. This encounter leads Alexia to becoming impregnated by the car.

Titane is a contemporary feminist film addition to New French Extremity, a horror subgenre from France that dates back to the early 1990s. New French Extremity pushes the limits of filmmaking, and what audiences are willing to tolerate watching onscreen, often depicting overly violent and gory subject matter and the excessive physical brutalities inflicted on human bodies. In *Titane*, Alexia's pregnancy overextends the abilities of her body in exceedingly abject ways; as she goes into labour her skin tears, leaking motor oil instead of blood, the wounds revealing plates of metal that make up the shell of her belly as she births a machine-humanoid hybrid baby.

Titane is a surreal and audacious exploration of the human condition, blending elements of body horror, psychological drama, romance, and dark humor to explore humans' relationships to machines and each other. My paper will examine how the camera studies and pans over vehicles and metal in a way that sexualizes –even humanizes– the machinery in *Titane*. Through Ducournau's camerawork, the sexualization of machinery and automobiles mirrors the ways women have traditionally been captured by the film apparatus and the male gaze in cinema. Furthermore, Ducournau's film reflects on the ways that women have often been used to market cars using sex appeal. *Titane* explores these histories of sexuality and human-machine relationships in relation to gender roles and expectations and sexuality.

Alexia subverts patriarchal and heteronormative expectations of sexuality and desire through her romantic relationships to both women and vehicles (later, she has sex with a fire engine) and through her journey of gender expression (upon discovering that she is pregnant, Alexia disguises herself as a man—Adrien, binding her breasts and belly in increasingly horrific ways to hide her developing pregnancy). What makes Alexia truly extraordinary is that she procreates with a car (as opposed to a human man) in an act that is essentially immaculate mechanic conception.

My paper will use *Titane* as a case study to explore contemporary cultural anxieties around queer people who choose to reproduce in non-traditional and non-bio-genealogical ways via new reproductive technologies (e.g. IVF; surrogacy). This examination will be contrasted with Lee Edelman's notion of reproductive futurism from his polemic text *No Future*, in which he argues that queers ought not participate in reproduction in order to dismantle oppressive institutions including capitalism. In doing so, he argues that queers should lean into the death drive, which I will argue is demonstrated in *Titane* by Alexia's

death during the birth of her half-human, half-machine child. Finally, my paper will explore how Ducournau's entry into New French Extremity asks audiences to contemplate our gendered and sexual relationships to machines, and our relationships to socially constructed hierarchies of gender, sexuality, and intimacy.

Faster Than I Am: Trying to Keep Abreast of AI's Impact on Human Sexual Behavior

Amy R. Marsh, Ed.D., DHS

It's not just AI-enhanced love dolls anymore, or algorithms manipulating dating sites, or even chatbot sweethearts who may or may not go all the way—in just a year, artificial intelligence has had an outsized impact on many types of human sexual behavior and expression as developers rapidly seek new ways to utilize and sell their expensive, artificially intelligent products. So what's a sexologist to do?

This presentation will provide an overview of the many ways in which a growing number of "AI-infused" products, applications, and upgrades, have changed the ways in which a growing number of humans seek and experience sexual pleasure.

The presentation will address the impacts of:

- AI dating coaches, including META's famously prudish offerings;
- AI-written erotica, with or without human collaboration;
- AI visual erotica via "selfies" and art prompts;
- Monetized chatbots based on adult film performers;
- Monetized sexy, imaginary AI chatbots with massive followings;
 - Sex toys that use AI;
 - Expanded group chats where AI avatars can meet each other as well as interact with their human user;
 - And more.

Though research is scarce in many of these areas, Dr. Marsh will cite what can be found and otherwise use a sexological perspective to speculate on such topics as:

- Hybrid AI/human "polypods" and consensual non-monogamy arrangements;
- The practice of resurrecting dead lovers through AI (famously, Laurie Anderson with her Lou Reed avatar);
- The potentially helpful role of chatbots for isolated people with kinky interests and fetishes.
- And more.

Finally, as AI increasingly saturates all things erotic, will we see a backlash as people with little interest in chatbots and sex tech deliberately take up "old fashioned" methods of courtship and coition?

Attendees will be given a link to Marsh's on-going bibliography, which is updated monthly.

How Platforms Sell Human-AI Relationships and the Promise of “On-Demand Intimacy”

Skyler Wang and Marco Dehnert

As a burgeoning industry, artificial intelligence (AI) companion platforms exploit shifting societal attitudes towards tech-mediated relationships to usher in novel ways of forming meaningful connections with non-human entities. But how are these platforms constituted, and how do they “sell” consumers the idea of human-AI relationships? In this study, we analyze the design and economics of four prominent multimodal (i.e., text, speech, and embodied) AI companionship platforms (AvatarOne, Digi, Paradot, and Replika). We argue that despite differences in architecture and style, emerging platforms engineer a vision of intimacy that can be acquired in a truly frictionless manner, or what we deem “on-demand intimacy.” The promise of on-demand intimacy is realized through the following sociotechnical qualities in the platforms we examined: 1) human-likeness (imbuing companions with human-like qualities and expressions to allow users to tap into existing human-human relationship scripts and schemas), 2) accessibility (platforms allowing constant access to companions across multiple modes of engagement), 3) customizability (enabling users to create their ideal companions while preserving the uniqueness of their experience), and 4) relationship progression (relying built-in memory banks so AI companions can further one’s relationship with a user). Crucially, on-demand intimacy is inextricably linked to platform economics and the rise of a delay-sensitive consumer culture. While every platform we studied includes a free tier, users can only unlock key features—unlimited messages, quicker response, taking the relationship to a romantic level, sexual content, etc.—if they pay for a premium subscription. By delineating the concept of “on-demand intimacy” and its ties with platform economics, this study deepens sociological theorizing of the intimate economics of AI companions and how they reshape contemporary understandings of social relationships. Beyond deepening knowledge of how commercial entities deploy emerging technologies to motivate ethically controversial new markets, this study also advances our understanding of how norms around intimacy and relationships evolve in response to the growing presence of AI in everyday life.

Asynchronous

An Ode To Joy: Anti-Sexbot Biases Rooted Not In Technophobia But Sexual Intolerance

M. Christian

Despite the best efforts of synthetic companion advocates such as those presenting and attending this year's Congress on Love and Sex with Robots, the briefest, most cursory look at the subject still tends to elicit a large number of frequently strident, if not outright morally panicked voices decrying the very idea of anyone even thinking of experiencing physical or emotional pleasure with humanoid robots.

Some, like Kathleen Richardson, commonly considered to be a leading critic of synthetic companions, have publically stated, "Sex robots emerge out of commercial and illegal ideas about sex where you don't have to have empathy for another. You don't have to take

into account what they're thinking and feeling and experiencing and you can objectify them. I'm anti-anything that turns human bodies into commercial objects for buying and selling."

One of many psychological approaches others have also employed to criticize if not outright advocate for making humanoid robots illegal, while Richardson's position flies in the face of opposing sexological theories—particularly a disturbing lack of any verifiable data or peer-reviewed studies—the bias remains far too prevalent.

In this presentation, sextech journalist and erotic speculative fiction author M.Christian will make the case that Richardson and others protesting the development and sale of synthetic companions have less to do with dreading how this and other sexuality-relative technologies might be used but instead lies in sexual prejudices/ignorance—specifically towards sexual arousal. Robots are, of course, not alone in this. To this day, many countries like the United States seem to look at anything to do with erotic pleasure with everything from open disgust—frequently with a dose of obvious hypocrisy—to near-hysteria.

Lawmakers like Senator Mike Lee and his awkwardly named Children's Retinas from Egregious Exposure on the Net (SCREEN) Act have joined forces with other, most commonly conservative voices, to attempt to eliminate practically everything and anything to do with human sexuality—or as Republican members of congress put it in a recent statement, "declare prosecution of obscene pornography a criminal justice priority."

After referencing others, both pro and con, on the issue of enjoying adult materials, sexbots, and consensual sexual activities, M.Christian will then openly advocate for members of the artificial companion community to recognize that if they hope to be able to find emotional and erotic satisfaction, they need to understand anti-sex and pleasure bigotry and actively speak out not just against people like Kathleen Richardson and lawmakers like Senator Mike Lee but join others in publically stating there is nothing wrong with consensual sex and everyone should have the right to experience pleasure—by themselves or with a preferred artificial or biological partner.

A Sight To Behold: How Augmented Reality (AR) Will See A New Era Of Artificial Companions

M. Christian

Though tough to face, the harsh realities of physical engineering too often hamper the age-old fantasy of autonomous, convincingly realistic synthetic companions. Even something as deceptively simple as equipping next-gen robots with fluid, lifelike movements—such as work currently being conducted in soft robotics—is likely not to be commercially available for at least another couple of decades.

Unfortunately, the same is true for enabling future synthetic companions to be independently powered, as well as a host of other technological hurdles needed for them to become anything close to feeling, appearing, and acting anything but mechanical. However, developers may have an unexpected solution, one that could potentially dodge these and other issues currently plaguing the industry, granting synthetic companions with far more human-like appearances sooner rather than later.

The answer, you could say, is right in front of our eyes. In this presentation, speculative erotica writer and sextech journalist M.Christian will discuss how Augmented Reality (AR) systems akin to Apple's recently released Vision Pro might someday take synthetic companions to a whole new level—by bypassing the need to make them lifelike.

The idea hinges on how the robotics industry remains hamstrung by trying to mesh lifelike mechanics with giving their products realistic, sexually and emotionally fulfilling appearances. This issue might be circumvented through the use of Augmented Reality (AR) headsets, so instead of the industry chasing the near-impossible dream of creating synthetic companions that look anything but artificial, they would be able to put their efforts into only building models that can move realistically.

The key is that by overlaying visual information over a wearer's vision—i.e., Augmented Reality (AR)—developers could make featureless robots appear so totally lifelike the wearer wouldn't be able to tell them from a flesh-and-blood person.

As M.Christian continues to explain, the possibilities are nearly limitless, like manufacturing synthetic companions specifically to work with AR systems or equipping them with a range of different options so users could modify everything about their physical form—then make them look like whoever or whatever they please after doing their AR headsets.

In conclusion, M.Christian would discuss how Augmented Reality systems may replace the need for not just synthetic companions to look human but perhaps eliminate the need for technological physicality. Keyboards, monitors, televisions, telephones, and even media like books or decorative items might be substituted for insubstantial software and data fed into a pair of AR glasses—especially when combined with other developments like virtual reality and sextech hardware such as haptic systems, so we might be able to taste, touch, and smell in addition to hearing and seeing whatever we wish, our next generation synthetic companions could utterly transform the world—for the better.

Duoethnographic Reflections on The Possible Adaption of Humanoid Robots For Sexual Assistance to Older Person With Disabilities in the Global South.

Marlene de Beer and Lesego Prudence Monyemorathoe

During the past few years, we have seen humanoid robotics being designed to become medical assistance (e.g. Sophia, Grace & Jai Jai), working in hospitality industries (e.g. Junko, Kanae & Aiko), emerging artist (Ai-Da), reader for special needs (Nadine), home assistant (Destiny), and companion robot (e.g. Henry) in developed countries. However, we are yet to see how robotics can be utilised as sexual assistance for older people with disabilities at home and in health facilities, especially in the Global South. Studies conducted by other researchers, have shown that there is a positive relationship between good health and sexual partnership, the frequency of sexual activities, good quality sex life, and the interest in sex amongst middle aged and older aged adults. Even though, as a group, older people tend to be frailer, manufacturers will have to design robots in a way that will minimise the risk of injuries. People living with disabilities, more especially the elderly also deserve the right to have sexual feelings and/ or sexual desires and in such instances, humanoid robotic sexual assistance can be of value. It is hoped that these

discussions will inform practitioners, carers and older people with disabilities about the possibilities that the future might bring through humanoid robotics adaption designed for sexual assistance for older people with disabilities in the Global South.

Panels

Sexual Presence: Conceptual, Analytical, Technological and Forensic Considerations

Mathieu Brideau-Duquette, M.Sc. PhD candidate; Sara Saint-Pierre Côté, CPI, M.Sc.A.; Philippe Charbonneau, M.Sc.A, B.Ing; Patrice Renaud, PhD.

For this proposal, mainly spearheaded by Professor Renaud's past and present works, we suggest four presentations. Brideau-Duquette will present the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of sexual presence as understood at the Laboratoire d'immersion forensique (LIF), and briefly elaborate on its implications for the usage of both extended reality and sexual robots in sexual contexts. Saint-Pierre Côté will present results highlighting how machine learning can help disentangle physiological measurements taken in immersive virtual reality (VR) settings for the atheoretical predicting of subjective sexual presence scores. Charbonneau will present the most recent developments at the LIF when it comes to technological advancements for animation movements and visual realism of virtual character fluid motion and appearance, as well as the increased versatility of both. Brideau-Duquette will present the implications of presentations on the forensic angle of problematic sexual interests.

Muses of the Machine Age: Exploring Artistic Inspiration and Expression with Artificial Companions

Kelsey Clough, Reggie Guzman, TJ Foxx

In the refrain of the digital era, humanoid robots and AI entities emerge as profound artistic muses. Research on iDollators, notably their engagement with photography, highlights this phenomenon, yet the broader implications of artificial companions as catalysts for artistic creativity remain under explored. This panel discussion – featuring iDollators Reggie Guzman and TJ Foxx – seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the dynamic interactions between human creators and their synthetic muses.

By leveraging current literature, the panel will uncover how artificial companions stimulate a renaissance of narrative construction and identity exploration within and beyond the art they inspire. Accordingly, this open dialogue examines the myriad ways these relationships, at the nexus of artistic and cybernetic realms, enrich and complicate traditional gender norms, social presence, and communal belonging. In this endeavor, it is revealed how artistic practice like photography transcends its form, from a technique into a language, articulating intimate narratives with non-human partners that serve to enrich the social fabric of our more-than-human world.

Crucially, this paneled inquiry sheds light on the evolving dynamics of companionship and creativity in our increasingly digitized realities, offering new insights into the symbiotic relationships that mold cultural and artistic expressions. Beyond the production of art alone, this discussion emphasizes psychological transformations engendered, illustrating how the act of creation is a mirror reflecting our deepest selves in the eyes of created 'others.' Thus, with synthetic companions, we engage art to affirm that through imagination, "life is your creation."

Workshop

How Will AI Companions Change the Way We Cope With Heartbreak?

Georges-Philippe Gadoury-Sansfaçon

With the diversification of products that use artificial intelligence to offer companionship in the realms of love and sexuality, a myriad of new opportunities is opening up for people in search of connection, including those coping with heartbreak. While heartbreak can be a catalyzer for individualization and personal growth, it can also lead to withdrawing inwards, to isolation and to serious mental health struggles including depression and severe loneliness (Trembley, 2022). So developing a relationship with an AI companion after separating from a loved one has the potential to influence human beings in different ways: for some, these companions may facilitate the navigation of future human relationships and identity development, while for others they could amplify existing struggles and create new ones. As such, mental health professionals and ethicists must reflect on this issue and its potential consequences for individual and populational health, clinical practice, and policymaking.

This workshop will invite participants to first explore and analyze the potential implications of current and future AI-powered technologies on the ways humans love, relate to each other, and care after heartbreak, delving into the myriad of ethical issues raised. Participants will then reflect on how these will affect human health and individuals' search for meaning. The session will conclude by asking participants to envision creative and inclusive ways of mitigating some of the risks while promoting individual autonomy in recovery and personal growth, and in defining what it means to love again.

Posters

Behind Pornographic Preferences: Exploring Sexual Behaviors

Natacha Lafleur, Gabrielle Roy Paquette, Sara Saint-Pierre Côté, and Patrice Renaud

Pornography is widely used worldwide, offering a variety of content, including synthetic pornography, to cater to individual preferences. Its usage has both positive and negative repercussions on various aspects of individuals' lives. Therefore, it is essential to understand the foundations of this phenomenon, including the individual characteristics that influence it. This study explores whether there is a connection between sexual behaviors and preferences for synthetic pornography, as well as differences between genders. In this study (N=431; 281 women, 144 men, 6 non-binary individuals; age range:18-80; M=26.69, SD=8.28), data were collected through an online socio-demosexual questionnaire completed by participants. Results indicate that women's interest in simulation-based pornography (involving non-real human characters) is related with the number of sexual partners ($B = .062$, $p = .003$), whereas men's interest is associated with usage duration ($B = .944$, $p = .021$), usage frequency ($B = 3.324$, $p = .028$), and sexual satisfaction ($B = -.144$, $p = .001$). For hentai pornography featuring young characters, men's interest is related to masturbation frequency ($B = 1.206$, $p < .001$) and sexual satisfaction ($B = -.101$, $p = .033$). These results contribute to deepening the understanding of the mechanisms underlying preferences for synthetic pornographic content.