



Mankind's Growing Love Affair With Robots

Advanced technology is increasingly demonstrating its ability to cause unnatural emotional addiction in humans. Gaming, social media and Internet addiction was just the start. Now people are 'falling in love' with robots made to look like opposite sex. □ TN Editor

Sex robots are sold for physical pleasure, but emotionally fulfilling relationships with machines is closer than you may think.

One of the big robotics storylines of 2018, at least in the mainstream press, was the arrival of multiple sex robots on the market. Most of these take a female form, anthropomorphic fantasies like Synthea Amatus's Samantha and RealBotix's Harmony, which have raised eyebrows and prompted international coverage, spurred in no small part by [boisterous founders and burgeoning rivalries](#).

Robot brothels, meanwhile, have [popped up in Toronto and Paris](#), and another was barred from doing business in Houston. Pontificators have pontificated about whether this is a [good thing](#) or a sign of a [society on](#)

[the skids](#), and much of the criticism has (rightly, in my opinion) focused on how these robots represent women, both in appearance and as passive objects of desire. Almost like clockwork, [“male” robots with bionic penises are now on their way](#).

This was inevitable, of course. The [sex tech industry is worth \\$30B](#), and sex has long been a driver of technological innovation, from [King Edward VII’s kinky sex chair](#) and [network connected sex toys with serious security flaws](#) to new forms of [participatory VR porn](#).

The current spate of sex robots are just that, devices for fantasy-fulfillment and physical pleasure, and the technology, frankly, isn’t that much more compelling than non-robotic sex dolls. But a day is no doubt coming when a robot will leap across the Uncanny Valley and pass muster as a thinking and thoughtful companion. We often use words like “love” and “obsessed” to describe our connection with gadgets, but from a human standpoint is it even possible to love a machine the same way we can love another person?

A body of literature on the subject is emerging from the fields of behavioral science and human-robot interaction. A book by David Levy called [Love and Sex with Robots](#) deeply and convincingly explores the subject. In 2015, [Elizabeth Phillips, Ph.D.](#), now assistant professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership and in the Warfighter Effectiveness Research Center (WERC) at the U.S. Air Force Academy, gave a talk on robot intimacy at [Orlando Nerd Nite](#) and The Smithsonian’s Future is Here Festival in Washington, D.C. that drew in part on Levy’s book and remains the smartest concise exploration of the subject I’ve heard.

Professor Phillips argues there will be an inevitable leap to love and sex with robots, but to understand why, we have to understand how humans form relationships with people and how they fall in love. This is the realm of [Attachment theory](#), first conceived to describe the relationship between infants and at least one primary caregiver. The theory holds that there’s an evolutionary advantage for human infants to attach to a caregiver early in life for comfort and security. Notably, attachment does not have to be reciprocal, though it can be.

Ten Reasons We Fall In Love

The theory extends to adult relationships, which is born out by the observation that infants who don't attach to a caregiver early have a difficult time forming interpersonal relationships later in life. But that doesn't fully explain the mechanisms of love, the how and the why people actually fall in love with another person. That subject is the realm of a large body of social psychology research, and the general consensus is that there are 10 primary reasons people fall in love. (Dr. Phillips points out this is often represented as 10 + 1, since all of the reasons we fall in love are predicated on physical proximity to another person.)

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