

Dysfunctional Relations with Sexual Robots: Issues and Strategies

The purpose of this research is to understand if and to what extent interactions with Sexual Robots will modify users' relational abilities in human-human relations. Within the discussion about the so-called "symbolic shift mechanism", we highlight the theoretical issues concerning the "Consequential claim", namely the following argument: "If sex robots do/will symbolically represent ethically problematic sexual norms, then their development and use will have negative consequences" (Danaher 2018). We propose a theoretical framework based on the concepts of "mediation" and "fictionality", to clarify this symbolic shift mechanism.

Then, we make the case of aggressive drives towards Sexual Robots: under what conditions could the aggressiveness be transferred from HRI to HHI? Through the lenses of Winnicott psychological approach and considering relational artifacts as "quasi-others" (Coeckelbergh 2011), we argue that HRIs may trigger a dysfunctional management of aggressive drives. In fact, relational artifacts provide the full disposability of an object with the interactionality of subjects. We conclude that, under certain conditions, interactions with Sexual Robots may lead the user to regress to an infantile and dysfunctional object-relation setting, in which the subject's omnipotence is no longer limited. This may negatively impact on human-human interactions and social values in general. Finally, we discuss some possible design strategies to avoid dysfunctional relational patterns such as the "consent module" for Sexual Robots, highlighting the strength and limits of this kind of approaches and extending the scope of the discussion to Social Robots in general.