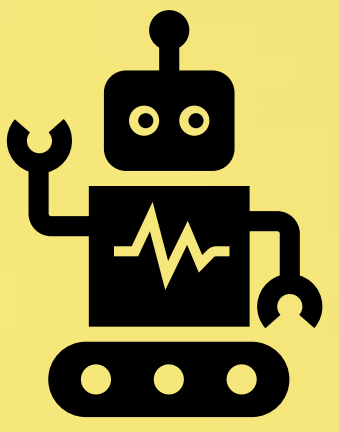


# THE SYMBOLIC-CONSEQUENCES ARGUMENT ABOUT SEX ROBOTS

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## INTRODUCTION

When we consider the concept of morally and legally acceptable human-human sexual interaction, consent is a necessary criterion, and human-like robots will most likely not be able to give consent. However, when it comes to robot-human sexual interaction, the importance of consent emerges in terms of the symbolism and consequences of what the sexual interaction represents. The purpose of the presentation is to discuss why having sex with a human-like robot may represent a morally problematic aspect of our attitudes towards sexual norms or gender equality. I will further the discussion by focusing on the symbolism and consequences of this issue.

## DISCUSSIONS

### THE SYMBOLIC-CONSEQUENCES ARGUMENT

The symbolic-consequences argument is widely used in the current ethical issues about sex robots, especially among those who oppose their production and use. The symbolic argument delves into questions of consent and whether the physical representation of robots or the behavior of robots will further polarize stereotypes in society. (Danaher, 2017). In this poster, I will focus on the issue of consent. The future societal representations and implications of sex robots' incapacity to consent are concerning. By engaging in sexual activity with a robot that resembles a human, users of these robots are permitted to fulfill their fantasies of rape. As a result, after engaging in sexual activity with a robot and violating the consent requirement, the user of the sex robot will unavoidably start to refuse consent when initiating sexual contact with other people. The robot will transform into a symbol representing that it is not necessary to seek consent in relationships.

This is where the consequences argument emerges, exploring the question of whether sex robot development and use would be detrimental to sexual norms or gender equality. This concern stems from the danger of the negative symbolic representation of sex robots and the acceptance of morally questionable sexual norms by society. This is easier to understand if we consider current cases of sexual abuse. Because there is often a considerable power imbalance when sexual harassment occurs. Thus, when sex robots are integrated into relationships, the power imbalance between the two people—and the ability to control the other person—is displaced and transferred to the robots. As a result, a form of association accepted by society in which the concept of consent disappears can be dangerous in terms of what it represents.

### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

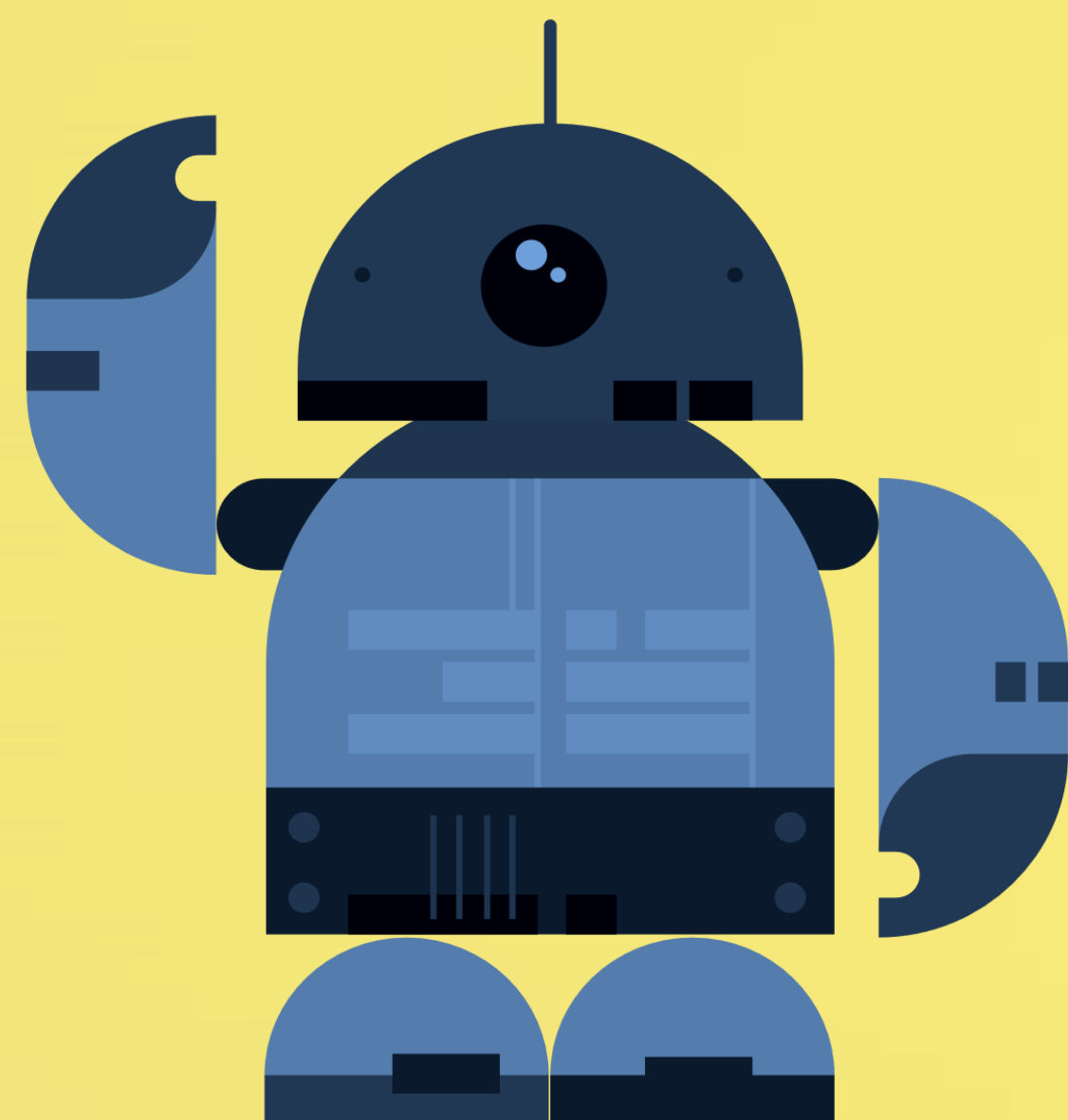
There are reasons to believe that a sex robot may symbolically represent an offensive attitude towards women and possibly children and the rules of interpersonal sexual relations. However, John Danaher argues that the offensive symbolism of sex robots can be reformed and reshaped (Danaher, 2017).

The first solution is to ban all robots. Kathleen Richardson's Campaign Against Sex Robots is one example of this solution. Suppose we agree that these humanoid robots are a representation of the sexual objectification of women. The call for a complete ban on sex robots, however, seems impractical given how humanity has historically responded to prohibitions. The second solution is to create a humanoid sex robot that may sometimes appear to consent to sex and other times to object. When the robot in some way rejects having sex, the user does not try to have sex with it. This relationship resembles a mutually consenting relationship in such a scenario. However, the user will be aware that the consent is programmed, which again will reveal a lack of consent. Since such a robot is offered for sale in a way that eventually results in consent, this solution might be considered ineffective from the start.

## CONCLUSION

The deep-seated cultural heritage that women are there to be dominated and used as property is best exemplified in discussions of the use of sex robots. But ultimately, neither solution will be sufficient for this kind of problem. The first solution, outright banning, will not work, because given the psychosocial behavior of humanity throughout history, anything prohibited will enter the black market and spiral out of control. The second solution is that the robot sometimes disapproves of having sexual intercourse with the user. The problem of symbols and consequences mentioned earlier in terms of consent does not go away with a robot where the user knows that the robot will eventually consent. Users do not ask for consent in this case; instead, they almost follow a script to get what they demand.

The market for sex robots in social life will soon develop with the advancement of technology for sexual demands. I tried to demonstrate that the two proposed solutions would be ineffective. In today's human interactions, gender equality and morally and legally acceptable sexual behavior are already challenging issues. The resolution of these inequities and social norms will depend on how they are addressed socially and culturally at a time when robots will also be involved in these challenges. Because unless these problems are resolved before the robots, the problematic representation of women in all fields of social life will continue to have negative consequences.



## REFERENCES

- Danaher, John (2017). The Symbolic-Consequences Argument in the Sex Robot Debate. In John Danaher & Neil McArthur (eds.), *Robot Sex: Social and Ethical Implications*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
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