

Sex with robots: How should lawmakers respond?

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Advancements in technology have resulted in the design of hyper-realistic, Wi-Fi-connected, programmable sex robots that can mimic human responses, but what do these developments mean for how

we regulate interactions with "sexbots" in the future?

In a new article in the *The Bulletin: The Law Society of SA Journal*, Flinders University law researchers analyzed the factors Australian lawmakers will have to consider when they weigh up whether it should be legal to import, own and use sexbots that resemble human adults.

Critics argue sex robots objectify women and increase the risk of sexual violence by desensitizing people to the way they treat living beings. Some robots can even be programmed to reject a user's sexual advances which mimic a refusal of consent, which is a key element of proving sexual offenses in Australia.

On the other hand, advocates claim benefits of sex robots can include empowering older Australians and people with disabilities, addressing sexual related anxiety, treating dysfunctions, promoting safe sex and creating a safe place for people who feel insecure about their sexual orientation.

A recent study into the therapeutic benefits of sex robots found the top three suggestions for the use of robots were for patients with: social anxiety (50%), people who do not have a partner but still want a sex life without resorting to fleeting acquaintances or prostitution (50%) and premature ejaculation (47%), according to sex therapists.

Madi McCarthy, now an Associate with law firm LK, recently completed her honors research into this topic with the College of Business, Government & Law. She says advancements in technology, coupled with increasing demand and [public concern](#), means Australian policymakers are likely to be confronted with calls for the regulation of sex robots in the near future.

"Legislators will have to balance competing and complex individual and

public interests which pose new ethical, regulatory and [legal challenges](#) because of advancements in technology."

"While no Australian legislation currently regulates or prohibits sexual intercourse with robots, there are regulations on child-like sex dolls which have been addressed by the Commonwealth, South Australia and Queensland. These statutory provisions may guide any future laws on the use of adult sex robots but there are new factors which have to be considered."

Associate Professor Tania Leiman, Dean of Law at Flinders University, says sex robots challenge existing conceptions of how humans interact with emerging technologies in the most intimate way so regulators will have to balance [ethical questions](#), legal challenges and the real potential for technology to objectify and promote sexual violence.

"Even if sex robots are prohibited in Australia—it's likely that the courts may consider such offenses to be less objectively serious than sexual offenses against humans, and sentences may be more likely to fall at the lower end of the penalty range, even where maximum penalties are equivalent."

"For example, courts have consistently imposed lower end sentences for child-like sex doll offenses despite the maximum penalty range of 10 to 15 years."

More information: issuu.com/lawsocietysa/docs/lawsociety-robotics-ethics-legal-challenges

Provided by Flinders University

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