Book Section:

Online Dating and Love Robots: How Technology May Undermine Valuable Features of Love

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In this chapter, I speculate on what might be in store for the future of romantic relationships in light of two technologies that already exist, but will be developed over the coming years and probably become more widely used. Firstly, I look at the use of online dating platforms, such as Tinder, with their ever increasing popularity and improving algorithms, which aim to find you your 'perfect match', and secondly, love robots which could be programmed to suit your romantic and sexual desires and needs. I will consider how our ideals of love might change if it becomes so easy to replace our partners that the notion of 'making things work' becomes as outdated an idea as getting your kettle fixed instead of buying another one when it's no longer working.

Though there are clear benefits to being better equipped to find a partner – human or robot – who is a 'good match' for you, I argue that there are valuable features, of which I will discuss three, of romantic love which may be undermined through increased uptake of these technologies. Firstly, these technologies ask us to describe our 'perfect partner' prior to meeting them, thereby encouraging the idea that a partner should come to us 'ready-made' as perfect. By focussing too much on the role of appraisal in romantic love, we risk side-lining the importance of bestowal and the development of love in romantic relationships. Secondly, if it becomes extremely easy to replace partners, by either finding a new one online, or buying a love robot, then people may be less willing to commit to partners and more willing to break those commitments. Consequently, we could lose the security and validation that romantic relationships can be good at providing. Thirdly, as both online dating apps and love robots sell love to us as being about having a partner who fulfils *us,* romantic love may come to be seen as quite one-sided, being primarily about the fulfilment of our *own* interests, leading us to forget that love ought also to involve disinterested concern for the interests of the beloved.

Before going on I want to add a disclaimer. My aim in this chapter is not to provide a full account of the ethics of online dating platforms or love robots – there are many important ethical issues which surround these technologies that I do not have space to discuss here. In addition, I am aware that much of what I say in this chapter is speculative and that no-one can say for sure what the impact, if any, of technological developments on ideals of love will be. However, I think it is a worthwhile exercise to carefully consider how our ideas about romantic love could change due to technologies, and which features of romantic love we find valuable

and want to preserve. Technology brings enormous benefits, and these should not be ignored, but it is disruptive too, and we should be mindful of what aspects of our lives we are willing to let be disrupted, and to what extent.

I also want to point out that what I say about romantic love does not apply only to monogamous relationships. Commitment, security, and care and concern are also, of course, part of polyamorous relationships. I will mainly refer to monogamous relationships in my examples, but this is only because they are statistically the most common form of romantic relationship. In addition, when I refer to 'romantic love' or 'romantic relationships' I use the terms not to describe limerence, the more passionate and intense romantic desire one might feel towards someone at the beginning of a relationship, but rather to describe the more stable and committed kind of love that typically comes afterwards, which might be a marital relationship, but not necessarily. Such a relationship might also be described by some as a 'conjugal relationship' or a 'marital-like relationship'.

Part 1: Two Technological Developments which Could Change the Way we Think about Romantic Love

1.1   Online Dating Platforms

The role of online dating platforms, such as Tinder, in our romantic lives is already having a huge impact on how people date. In the USA, meeting online is now the most common way for couples to meet, with 39% of opposite-sex couples and 65% of same-sex couples from a survey conducted in 2017 having met online (Rosenfeld, Thomas and Hausen 2019). About half of never married Americans have used an online dating platform (Vogels 2020). Usage also appears to be on the increase: from 2013–2015 use of online dating websites or applications tripled for 18–24 year old Americans and doubled for those aged 55–64 years (Smith 2016). It has been predicted that there will be 441.8 million users worldwide of online dating platforms by 2024, up from the 320.3 million users today (Statista 2020).

It is conceivable to imagine a future not only where people find the idea of first meeting a potential dating partner offline strange, but also where they think doing so would be imprudent. Why waste your time getting to know someone who is not right for you when a dating algorithm could have predicted that for you before you met them?

Finding a date is becoming more and more akin to shopping online. The ability to meet people online expands the potential pool of partners from which we can choose immensely. We can meet people who live outside of our local area and we are no longer reliant on friends or work

colleagues to introduce us to people. This could lead to more diverse relationships and expansions of social circles. In addition, the shier and more socially anxious don't have to pluck up the courage to speak to people they don't know at bars or social events and certain dating applications, such as Tinder, have also reduced the potential of rejection by showing us people who have 'swiped right' to us, indicating that they are probably interested in further conversation. And due to there being dating sites specifically targeted at different social groups, it is also easier for people with specific needs to find partners. There are dating sites for people who are gluten free, tall people, sea captains, horse lovers, and even clowns (Minium 2018). Furthermore, dating algorithms are becoming more and more sophisticated, and it is conceivable that in the not too distant future they will be able to predict with considerable accuracy how likely someone is to be a 'good match' for us. A report on 'The Future of Dating' by the dating website eharmony.co.uk in conjunction with Imperial College Business School, predicts that by 2025 dating algorithms will be able to use data gathered from wearable technology, combined with genetic analysis and other data, such as financial and health data, to predict with considerable accuracy, the extent to which we will have 'chemistry' with someone else (eharmony 2018). This could lead to happier relationships, and a substantial saving of time for daters who will no longer have to 'waste time' dating people to whom they are not suited.

1.2   Love Robots

A second technology, less likely to catch on widely than online dating, but which, nonetheless, has significant potential to disrupt norms and ideals of romantic love, is love robots. For the purposes of this chapter, these will be defined as 'human-like, full-body, anatomically correct humanoid service robots of different materials, technologies, and price ranges' with which their owners have something akin to a romantic relationship (Döring, Mohseni and Walter 2020, p. 3).[1] Sex and love dolls already exist, some of which have limited artificial intelligence, being able to speak to their owners, for example,[2] and sex robot brothels are now becoming features of various cities across the world, including Gateshead, Turin, Paris, Vancouver and Moscow (Hay 2018).

It isn't difficult to see why dating a love robot would be, to some people, a more attractive prospect than dating a human. Robots do not come with emotional baggage, or indeed, with any baggage. They don't age, they don't get sick, and they don't have moods, unless you want

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[1]   Note: Döring et al's definition is of sex robots; I have adapted it here for love robots.

[2]   See, for example: https://www.realdoll.com/realdoll-x/

them to that is. And if they do anything you don't like, rather than arguing with them about it, you can simply reprogramme them to do otherwise. Robots allow people to have relationships which are human-like, but without the difficulties that come with actual humans. Troy Jollimore, writing about the 2013 Spike Jonze film *Her,* in which the protagonist falls in love with an artificially intelligent operating system, considers whether 'this is just what some people want from relationships: not love—for actual love is powerful, unpredictable, and risky—but a comfortable and comforting simulacrum of love, one that reproduces love's softest and safest elements while avoiding its challenges and perils' (Jollimore 2015, p. 142). Having a relationship with a love robot can be a way of getting some of the benefits of being in a romantic relationship, without some of the accompanying anxiety and difficulties. As David Mills, owner of a sex doll puts it: 'not everybody wants to be in a relationship, especially an emotionally draining, costly, anxiety-filled one. If a man says, "I don't want to be in a relationship," most of the time that's probably a fucking good decision! And he can order a RealDoll, which will end up being a helluva lot cheaper than the women he was dating!' (Gurley 2015).

Love robots could provide company, comfort, and sexual enjoyment to a range of people who might otherwise find themselves lonely, such as people with intense social anxiety, or other mental or physical difficulties that make dating and relationships difficult. Loneliness is a significant issue, and on the increase, with the Office for National Statistics reporting a survey showing that 1 in 20 adults in England feels always or often lonely, and a further 40% feeling lonely occasionally or sometimes (Pyle and Evans 2018). Loneliness has been shown to be a possible contributing risk factor in various psychological and physical conditions, including depression, alcoholism, Alzheimer's disease, and elevated blood pressure (Cacioppo et al. 2015, p. 241). Of course, it remains to be seen the degree to which a love robot would lessen a person's loneliness, but it seems plausible that it might help in some cases at least. As one owner of a love doll, interviewed for *Vice* magazine puts it: 'it's like when a husband has his wife and kids come home, you know, I have that; I have someone at home' (Cahill 2015).

1.3 How Online Dating and Love Robots Might Change Love for the Worse

Finding a date online is clearly very different to getting oneself a love robot. But there are some common strands running through these two technological developments that I wish to explore further. Firstly, both online dating platforms and love robot developers promise to give you a partner who will be tailored to *your* needs and desires. The owner of a love robot may have

sent the manufacturer specifications for how the robot should look and behave and the online dating platform user might filter their potential dates via criteria, such as 'must be taller than 6ft' or 'must earn more than £40,000 a year'. A romantic relationship is thus presented in a one-sided way, as something which should fulfil *you* – you decide what characteristics you want your partner to have, and the technology provides you with a partner with those characteristics.

Secondly, and relatedly, the availability of online dating platforms and of love robots make it much easier to replace a partner. This ease, combined with the view that relationships should be as fulfilling to us as possible, could make it seem irrational to stay with a partner when there are difficulties in the relationship. This might, in turn, make commitment seem unwise in the first place, or make people more willing to break their commitments, and this could erode the security that romantic relationships typically provide. Furthermore, seeing romantic relationships as relationships which should ultimately fulfil self-interested needs and desires seems to be in contrast with the idea that love should be about care and concern for the wellbeing of one's beloved for their own sake.

Therefore, while, at first glance, it might seem difficult to argue that there could be anything wrong with technological developments that make us less lonely, our relationships more fulfilling, and reduce the amount of anxiety and suffering they cause, there could be subtle shifts in behaviours and ideals of love brought about by increased uptake of these technologies. As Jollimore puts it, 'the availability of a certain technology, particularly one that can be commodified and made the object of consumer desire, nearly always exerts a certain subtle and clandestine pressure on the desires of people who, had their attention not been directed to it, would never have thought to want any such thing' (Jollimore 2015, p. 143). Thus, the widespread use of these technologies could disrupt ideals of love, not only for those who use the technologies, but also for those who do not (at least not initially). In what follows, I will argue that there are valuable aspects of love which could be undermined by changes to norms and ideals of romantic love that could be brought about by these technologies.

Part 2: Valuable Features of Love which Might Be Undermined by Widespread Adoption of Online Dating Platforms and Love Robots

2.1   Appraisal and Bestowal

There is debate in the philosophy of love over whether the lover's love is a response to a positive appraisal of the beloved's value, or whether the lover finds the beloved to be so

valuable because they have *bestowed* value onto the beloved because they love them (Singer 2013). Alan Soble (2005) has conceived of this as a 'Euthyphro problem': Does Jolene love Joel because he is funny, or does she find him funny because she loves him? It is probable that there is an element of both appraisal and bestowal at work in romantic love. Appraisal no doubt has a role to play, particularly at the beginning of a relationship, but as love develops, we come to see and appreciate our partners in different ways, partly because of our increased intimacy with them, and also just because we love them. As Nicholas Dixon points out, as love deepens, we might come to view our beloved's faults as endearing or 'to admire qualities in our partner that we originally regarded as neutral' (2007, p. 380). I might come to find my partner's absent-mindedness endearing, despite having found it really annoying to begin with. And perhaps I previously thought that sport was a waste of time, but came to admire the dedication which my partner gives to his football team. Sometimes we bestow value onto features that remind us of the intimate relationship we share with the beloved. For example, I might come to love the way my partner snorts when they laugh. I do not love them because they snort, rather I value their snorting *because* I love them. Their snorting is endearing to me in a way that no-one else's snorting is, not because they snore particularly beautifully, but merely because it is *their* snorting.

Increased use of dating platforms and love robots risks downplaying the importance of bestowal in romantic love. By asking people to set out their preferences in a partner, *before* they've met them, and then providing them with a partner or love robot who is the best match to those preferences, these technologies suggest that the key to a happy relationship is to decide what you want your partner to be like and then find the person or robot who is the best approximation of your desires.

The first problem with this way of thinking about love is that it might not actually get us a better relationship. This is because people aren't always good at knowing in advance what they are looking for in a partner. For example, in one study where people were asked what qualities they were looking for in a potential partner prior to attending a speed dating event, the qualities that the participants said they wanted in a partner did not correlate with the qualities of people whom they actually wanted to date after the event (Eastwick and Finkel 2008). A dating algorithm or love robot would need to be highly sophisticated to be able to predict which of someone's stated preferences they were likely to change their minds about later down the line. It is possible that artificial intelligence will be able to make these kinds of predictions about us in the future, but this might require it to have more data on us than we'd be comfortable providing.

Furthermore, and relatedly, although online dating platforms have the potential to lead to more diverse relationships, they also have the potential to perpetuate the segmentation of society. This is because they allow people to filter out anyone who is from a different social group, thereby making it easier for people to meet only others who are like them. Sandra might think she would be attracted to only people who were of the same ethnicity as her for example, but when she meets Amina, who is of a different ethnicity to her, at a party, and they really get on, she realises that her attraction is not as narrowly focussed as she thought. If Sandra had been using a dating site though, and said she wanted to be shown only people of the same ethnicity as her, then such an opportunity would not have arisen. There is evidence that racism is rife on dating sites and apps. For example, a survey of 2,177 gay and bisexual men in Australia from 2015 found that 58% had experienced online sexual racism and 96% had viewed an online dating profile which included racial discrimination (Callander, Newman and Holt 2015).3 Love robots also have the potential to perpetuate prejudice: by asking owners to choose in advance what ethnicity they want their love robot to simulate, racial preferences might be further entrenched. In addition, as many more men than women use sex dolls and sex robots, and most sex dolls and robots are female-like (Döring and Pöschl 2018), there are important concerns about their use perpetuating patriarchal sexual ideologies.

The second problem with the idea that *the* perfect person is 'out there' for us, and all we need to do is find them or have them manufactured for us, is that it seems to get love wrong. This way of thinking leads to the belief that having access to a huge range of potential dating prospects from whom we can choose is the best way to find a happy relationship. This might initially seem reasonable: just as how we are far more likely to end up with good pizza if we have access to a thousand pizza restaurants than if we have access to just one, surely we are more likely to end up with a good partner if we have access to a lot of potential partners. However, having more choice is not always beneficial. For one thing, while it is clear that having some choice is preferable to having no choice, too much choice can lead to what psychologists call 'choice overload', whereby having a large number of alternatives from which to choose can lead people to be less satisfied with the choices they have made (Haynes 2009). Eva Illouz has written about how the availability of an ever-increasing pool of romantic

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3   Amia Srinivasan, writing in the *London Review of Books,* also discusses the issue of racial and other sexual preferences on dating apps. Discussing the app used by gay men, Grindr, Srinivasan writes: 'Grindr, by its nature, encourages its users to divide the world into those who are and those who are not viable sexual objects according to crude markers of identity – to think in terms of sexual 'deal-breakers' and 'requirements'. In so doing, Grindr simply deepens the discriminatory grooves along which our sexual desires already move' (Srinivasan 2018).

partners from whom to choose can lead people to be less happy with their relationships. She notes that there has been 'a shift from satisficing to maximising' (Simon in Illouz 2012, p. 95) in the way that we see relationships. This means that rather than expecting a relationship simply to meet our needs, we expect it to fulfil our needs in the best possible way, and to also fulfil our every desire, including those we did not even know we had. This puts increased pressure on relationships to be 'perfect' rather than 'good enough' and it also makes it difficult for people to make a choice in the first place over with whom to enter into a relationship. In Illouz's words: 'greater choice creates apathy because the desire to maximise one's options and anticipation of regret over lost opportunities affect the energy of the will and the capacity to choose' (Illouz 2012, p. 95). This is true of pizza too – if I have the choice of 1,000 pizza restaurants, it will be extremely difficult for me to choose which one to go for, and I might end up less happy with the choice I do make knowing that there is a high likelihood I didn't make the 'best' choice. However, it will be even more true for relationships: the more choice we have over whom to date, the more difficult it will be to decide when to 'settle' for someone and the more potential there is to wonder whether we have made the right choice.

Moreover, relationships are not like pizzas. A take-away pizza will arrive being tasty or not tasty. Romantic relationships, on the other hand, do not 'arrive' as being perfect or not perfect, but rather the way in which a partner and a relationship is right for us often develops over time. As Simon Keller notes, of particular significance among the qualities for which we love our partners are those which make them good romantic partners to us, such as our partner knowing how to treat us when we are in a bad mood (Keller 2000, p. 166). These sorts of qualities take time to develop: our partner needs to learn about us and be with us in different situations and different moods before they'll know how best to treat us when we are in a bad mood. We may also come to value our partner much more the longer we have been with them, because we will appreciate their commitment and loyalty, as well as valuing the shared life we have had together.

Thus, to love is to bestow value onto the beloved, and to be open to seeking out and finding value in them, as well as to simply appraise value which is immediately apparent. In doing this, we might value our partner in a way that likely seems disproportionate to their 'objective value', for example, we might find them far more beautiful than anyone else would. This is perhaps what Robert Solomon means when he says, 'the aim of love is to make a single person extraordinary' (1995, p. 254). We might be reminded here of the George Bernard Shaw quote: 'love is a gross exaggeration of the difference between one person and everybody else' (cited in Jollimore 2011, p. 48). The reason we do this might be because we value the relationship we

share with the beloved, and we don't share such a relationship with anyone else (though there is no *prima facie* reason, why such reasoning couldn't apply to polyamorous relationships too). Robert Nozick writes that romantic love involves the desire to become a 'we' with one's partner, 'pooling your well-being and your autonomy' (1995, p. 232). He suggests that the reason we don't seek to 'trade up,' or end relationships very willingly is that to do so 'would then be a willingness to destroy yourself in the form of your own extended self' (Nozick 1995, p. 235). For him, 'the idea that this is the only person for you becomes true after the "we" is formed' (Nozick 1995, p. 236). This is because, once the 'we' has been created, it needs both partners in order to exist. If Nozick is right, then it is wrong to think that technology could provide us with our 'perfect partner', since a partner could not be perfect for us until we have formed a committed relationship with them.

To assume that a partner should come to us 'ready-made', as a perfect match to our needs and desires misses the important role that bestowal plays in romantic love. Love is not just a passive response to the already existing value of a person or object, but rather it *creates* value. Love invites us to seek out value that might not be immediately apparent, to view qualities in a more generous way than we would usually, and to bestow value onto qualities that we would not normally find valuable. Of course, we might want to start, so to speak, with a person we value already so that we do not have to work too hard to create value, but, we must be careful that technological developments do not lead us to have unrealistic expectations of our relationships and to forget our own role in finding and bestowing value where it may not be immediately obvious.

2.2   Commitment, Security, and Validation

Not only do we not always know in advance which types of people would make the best partners for us, having too much choice can make it more difficult and less seemingly rational to commit to one particular choice. This is because 'to commit oneself means to make a choice in which one foregoes the possibility that one may increase one's welfare' (Illouz 2012, p. 98). If, in the future, it becomes increasingly easy to find a new romantic partner, or indeed, to replace one's romantic partner with a robot, then people might be less inclined to commit to their partners in the thoroughgoing and long-lasting way that many partners do now, reducing the security that romantic relationships provide. This might manifest in two ways: firstly, people might be less willing to commit in the first place, and secondly, they might be more likely to break their commitments. The difficulty in finding a committed relationship online is demonstrated in the following Tinder user's description of their experience: 'In 2016 alone I

went on 146 dates … Three stood out as men I could have imagined building a life with but as ever, they just weren't that into me, and who can blame them? Who wants to have their cake and eat it when they could have the whole bakery?' (Tinder user in Hill 2020). Committing to one particular cake is to forego the bakery, as committing to one relationship is to forego all the other potential dates one could find online.

If it becomes as easy to find a new romantic partner as it is to order a takeaway, the temptation, and perhaps the social pressure, to leave our partners and 'trade-up', rather than stay with them will become increasingly stronger. Why stay with a partner who is going through a rough patch when you could just get another one instead? And why stay with someone with whom the dating algorithm says you are an 83% match, when you've just been sent a notification that there is someone on the dating platform with whom you are a 90% match? Knowing that a better match for you might 'pop up' on a dating site at any moment could make commitment seem unwise. Similarly, if you know that you could easily replace your partner with a love robot, which would be better at serving your needs than your partner is, this might impact on the level of commitment you feel towards them.

Is this problematic though? Commitment can, and often does, cause a great deal of suffering, such as when people stay with abusive spouses due to a feeling of duty to keep their wedding vows. Furthermore, as Dixon notes, unconditional commitment to love one's partner come what may seems antithetical to love, as it implies that you would love anyone who filled the role of your partner: 'I do not love *you* if my love will continue no matter what you do and no matter how your qualities change, unless we are prepared to identify you with an immaterial Cartesian essence' (2007, p. 383). However, while it is true that we ought not to commit to just anyone, and, in romantic love at least, there ought to be *some* conditions on it, for romantic love to count as love at all, there must be some commitment involved. As Dixon also reminds us, if each partner is 'constantly scrutinizing the other to determine whether she merits the continuation of the relationship', this does not seem like love. Romantic love involves both a desire that the relationship continue *and* commitment to investing energy into it so that it does (Dixon 2007, p. 383). Love thus implies a desire to continue loving and a commitment to try to do so. Stan van Hooft suggests that, 'the declaration "I love you", when honestly made, is either the making of this commitment or the announcement that one discovers oneself with it'. This is because romantic love 'involves altering the order of practical priorities in one's life rather than just having an emotion' (van Hooft 2006, p. 459). To love someone does not just mean to feel something for them, it also implies a desire and a willingness to cultivate the conditions in which that love can continue. And love cannot be given a time limit either. As

Jean-Luc Marion puts it, 'to say, "I love you for a moment, provisionally" means "I don't love you at all"' (Illouz 2012, p. 98). Similarly, to say 'I will love you until the summer, but then I will stop' seems also to imply that the love is not genuine. It is true that circumstances sometimes mean that love affairs can only be for a set time period, such as when one of them is in the country on a temporary visa and knows they will have to leave soon. However, in such circumstances, if the lovers genuinely loved each other, we would expect for them to at least desire that their love could continue and for it not to just end abruptly the moment one of them leaves.

To love someone, therefore, implies that the lover wants the love to continue and is not searching for someone better. Though people do sometimes 'trade-up' their partner for someone else, we tend to think that the trader did not really love the traded person in the first place (Dixon 2007, p. 377), or that they had fallen out of love. This is because seeking to trade-up is inconsistent with love, as it implies that the beloved is cared about only instrumentally. Indeed, as Jollimore notes, merely comparing one's beloved with others is best avoided (Jollimore 2011, p. 43), and the lover who is constantly wondering whether her beloved is the best she can get does not seem to be genuinely in love (Jollimore 2011, p. 75). If your partner was always deliberating over whether to stay with you or find someone else, in the way that they deliberated over whether to buy a new car or keep their old one, you would rightly feel that their love for you was deficient, at best.

Why is commitment valuable? One reason is just that it is a constituent part of what it means to love, and so, if love is valuable, then so is commitment. But it is also instrumentally valuable, as a way of providing us with security and validation.

Being in a committed, loving relationship with someone else provides us with someone who will support us. This can make the world a less frightening place since there is someone with whom to share difficulties. A loving relationship provides us with a 'buffer' against the world; we are no longer one person, but a team facing problems together. As Nozick puts it: 'love places a floor under your well-being; it provides insurance in the face of fate's blows' (1995, p. 232). Although we find security in other intimate relationships, committed romantic partners take responsibility for you, in Chris Bennett's words, 'as a whole' (Bennett 2003, pp. 295–296) and without having 'something more important to do' than care for you when you need them (Bennett 2003, p. 296) (other than, perhaps caring for other dependants etc.) Committed romantic relationships can, therefore, be very good at providing security.

Monique Wonderly explains how attachment theory, first developed by psychologists John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in the mid-twentieth century, can help us to understand the

security that romantic love can provide. They looked at the way that infants develop bonds with their primary caregivers, treating them as a 'secure base' and a 'safe haven' (Wonderly 2016, p. 229). Wonderly draws on their views to characterise security 'roughly, as a feeling of confidence in one's well-being and in one's ability to competently navigate the world' (Wonderly 2016, p. 231). The need to have secure attachment bonds, which provide us with this kind of security and confidence is, therefore, a basic human need, that is, it is a need that (almost) all humans have, and which, if not satisfied, will have a significant negative effect on functioning and flourishing. Wonderly notes that other psychologists have argued that romantic partners also fulfil the function of secure bases and safe havens for us; we feel more confident when they are there, and we turn to them for comfort in times of distress (Hazan and Shaver 1987). Therefore, the kind of security that romantic relationships can be good at providing is a deep and important kind of security: the kind of security needed to enable us to feel confident navigating and acting upon the world. Forming such an attachment bond makes us vulnerable though, because to lose someone to whom we are attached makes us feel 'out of sorts' or 'off-kilter' (Wonderly 2016, p. 231). It is, therefore, in our interest to form attachments only with people who, we have good reason to believe, will stick around. We will thus be disinclined to form an attachment bond with someone who will likely leave us as soon as a better offer comes along, and so technology which has an effect on commitment will also have an effect on people's attachments.

One could argue that a love robot would be the perfect being with which to form an attachment bond. A love robot won't ever leave you and so could provide you with total security. This is true, and is probably one of the attractions of a love robot. Humans are not the only beings to which we form attachments. We also form attachments with animals, and objects, so there is no *prima facie* reason why we could not do so with a love robot. However, it is not only the security that we get from commitment which makes it valuable. Commitment also provides *validation.*

When our lover chooses to commit to us, we are provided not only with security, but also with validation, since their choice to commit to us, rather than 'keeping their options open' stands as a testament to our value as a person. As Bennett observes, when someone loves us romantically, 'we feel as though the details of our individual lives are important in their own right, that as the details of a human life, they have a value that transcends their intrinsic interest or usefulness' (Bennett 2006, p. 192). To be loved romantically in a committed way can thus provide us with a feeling that our life is important, and has value beyond its usefulness. A love robot cannot provide us with such validation, unless, that is, it was intelligent enough to have

something resembling autonomy, and it could choose to leave us. Until robots are this intelligent, love robots will not be able to commit to us because for commitment to be meaningful, the person making the commitment must have the ability to break one's commitment (even if in fact they never would). I am not committed to my partner if, for example, they have given me a love drug against my knowledge that means that I am not able to stop loving them.

Therefore, commitment is valuable in providing us with both security and validation. While security of sorts can be found with a love robot, validation cannot, since the love robot cannot choose to not be with us. And while a person with whom I go on a date can provide me with some level of validation by choosing to go on a date with me, unless they commit to me, I won't feel the more significant validation that comes with commitment. In addition, if my partner seems to always be undecided if I am the best she can get, or to be checking her dating app to see if someone with whom she is a 'better match' comes up, then I will not feel secure in the relationship.[4] I may end up feeling validated if, despite her checking her dating app constantly she never finds anyone she likes more than me, but I will still not have the validation of her having decided to commit to me and I may end up feeling constantly insecure. The less people are willing to commit, and the more willing they are to break their commitments, the less secure and validated we will feel in our relationships. This might be a price some people are willing to pay for greater freedom to exit relationships, but it should at least be recognised that this increase in freedom comes alongside the sacrifice of something else of value.

3   Care and Concern

A further way in which increased use of online dating algorithms and love robots might change ideals of love is by putting the focus on how a romantic relationship will contribute to our *own* self-interest, rather than that of our partner. This is because the idea behind being able to 'shop' for a partner online or programme a love robot to our tastes is that a romantic partner should fulfil *our* needs and desires.

Love robots are at the extreme end of the spectrum in terms of the construal of love as a self-interested enterprise. There are various different forms that a love robot could take, and it might be possible in the future to create ones which develop their own personalities and have something akin to autonomy. However, here I am assuming that love robots could be

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[4]   One study of Belgian Tinder users found that 18% of them were in a relationship (Timmermans and Courtois 2018). A study of Australian Tinder users found that 10% of those who were in a committed relationship had used Tinder as a means to have a sexual affair (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017).

programmed by the owner to act as their owner wants, since this is more likely to be closer to what love robots in the near future are like. For example, with the 'Real Doll[x]s', robotic 'love dolls' that are on sale now, buyers can customise the doll's body, appearance, hair style and colour, voice, and personality traits, among other things.[5] The Real Doll is connected to an app., so the owner can reprogramme the Real Doll via the app. to have a different voice, or different personality traits, if they so wish. The faces on the dolls can also be changed for a new one if the owner wants to make them look different. In the future, the ways in which owners can programme their love robots are likely to become more nuanced and detailed. For example, the owner might be able to programme the robot to behave in different ways with them, according to their mood. The love robot exists to serve its owner; it does not have any interests of its own, and so the whole emphasis with a love robot is on satisfying the needs and desires of the owner.

Online dating is, of course, not the same, as all that is provided is a platform with which to meet others. Meeting someone online does not entail that you will not then go on to have a relationship which involves care and concern for them. However, to really be able to care for someone requires some level of commitment to them. If I care about your needs today but give you no guarantee that I will care about them tomorrow, you might reasonably think that I don't really care about you. And, the more I get to know you, the better I will be able to care for you, since I will know what works for you and what doesn't, and when, such as when to leave you alone and when to press you to discuss your feelings. Thus, as with the discussion in the previous section, there is a risk that the ease with which it becomes possible to replace a partner, combined with the way that the marketing of online dating could subtly influence the way we think about relationships, could make people less willing to put their own needs second to their partner's in order to care for them. If, for example, you are with someone who loses their job and becomes depressed, and your relationship is not providing you with much fun anymore, it could become more tempting to simply go online and replace your partner rather than find ways to care for and support them.

The view of love as being something which should serve one's own interests sits in direct contrast with Harry Frankfurt's picture of love as consisting 'most basically in a disinterested concern for the well-being or flourishing of the person who is loved' (Frankfurt 2004, p. 79). For concern to be disinterested, it must not be given for selfish or instrumental reasons: for Frankfurt, if love is genuine, the lover loves selflessly, without hope of anything in return.

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[5]   See 'RealDoll X | Real Doll Robot | Love Dolls for Sex', (no date).

Arguably, this is not the right way to view romantic love; fairness and reciprocity are generally important in romantic relationships. Indeed, Frankfurt does not take himself to be describing romantic or sexual love, arguing that romantic relationships 'include a number of vividly distracting elements, which do not belong to the essential nature of love as a mode of disinterested concern' (Frankfurt 2004, p. 43). Nonetheless, Frankfurt surely must be right that disinterested concern for the well-being of the beloved is a necessary feature of any kind of love. If I don't care about your well-being, or care about it only because of what I hope to get out of your increased well-being, then I can't genuinely love you – I do not love *you* if I care about you only insofar as I care about your bank balance and I care about that only insofar as it enables you to buy me diamond jewellery, for example.

Furthermore, the lover is not just concerned for the well-being of the beloved, they also want to contribute to it. As Neil Delaney puts it 'if your lover is down in the dumps, you would like to be the one who cheers her up, although, barring that, it's better that someone else … do the cheering up than no one' (Delaney 1996, p. 342). If I wanted you to be happy, but was never willing to do anything to contribute to your happiness myself, you would have good reason to think that I did not love you.

Disinterested concern cannot exist in a relationship with a love robot, since the love robot has no interests for its owner to care about. And while it can be part of a relationship which started via an online dating website, we need to be mindful that the ease of online dating doesn't lead to us to being less willing or able to care for partners disinterestedly.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that two current technologies – online dating platforms and love robots – could undermine (at least) three valuable features of love through disrupting the norms and ideals surrounding romantic love. Firstly, they threaten the role of bestowal in creating value in the beloved by promoting the idea that a partner should come to us 'ready-made' as perfect. Secondly, by making it very easy to replace one's partner, and more difficult to choose a partner to whom to commit, these technologies threaten the commitment, security, and validation that romantic love provides. Thirdly, they could undermine the centrality of disinterested care and concern in love by emphasising the ways in which romantic relationships ought to fulfil one's *own* interests, and by undermining commitment.

My main purpose in this chapter has been to try and get a clear handle on some of the valuable aspects of love that *could* be corroded by these two emerging technologies. My conclusion is not that these technologies should be prohibited, nor that individuals do anything wrong by

using them. As I discussed earlier on, both online dating platforms and love robots bring significant benefits to people. However, as with other technologies, both those which already exist, and those which will exist soon, we should adopt them mindfully and with caution, so that we don't collectively lose out on things of value.

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