LELO

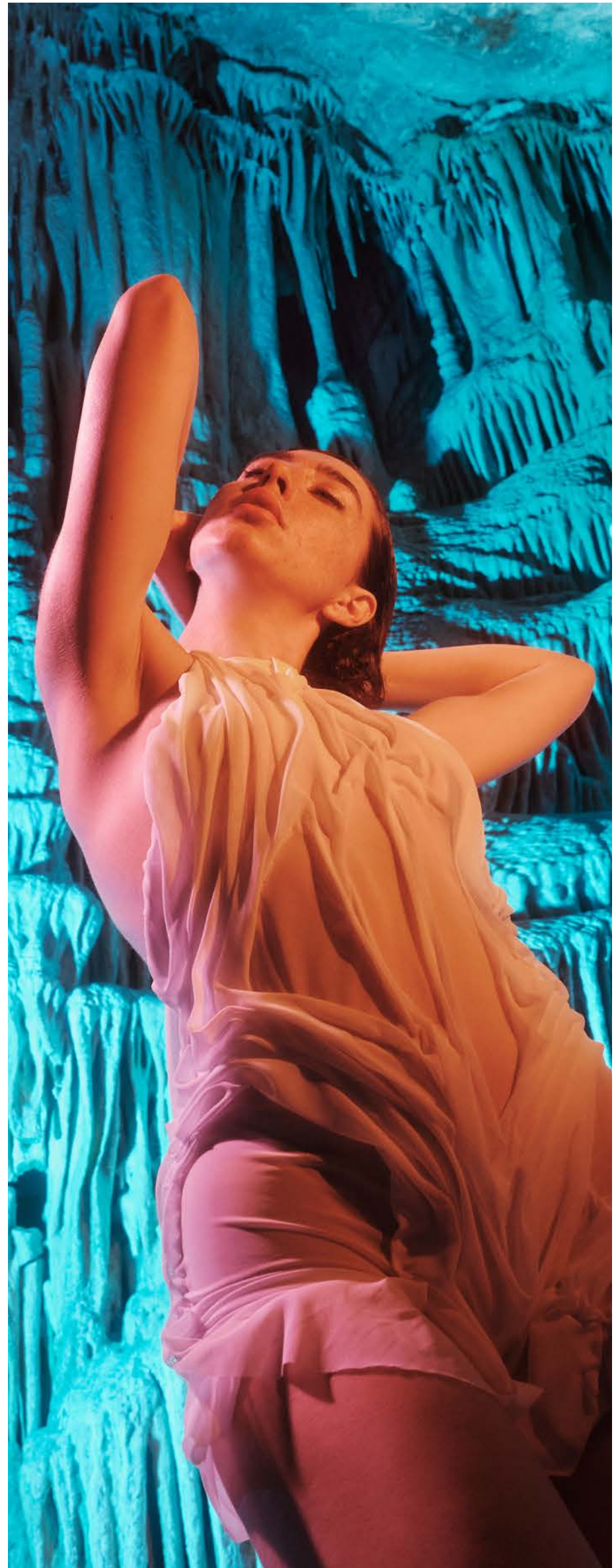# Intergenerational Views on Relationships, Sex and Technology

LELO 2025 report on trends in the following decades

Introduction

From monitoring personal health and wearable devices to playing online games and using social media to connect with friends and family, technology has become a valued component of daily life for many individuals. Interest in technology has steadily increased over the past decade, associated with unprecedented growth and innovation in information and communication technologies.

As the use of technology becomes further integrated into the daily lives of all persons, including older adults, there is a greater need to expand the understanding of how the perceptions and use of technology intersects with forging intimate relationships. It is even more interesting to investigate how individuals belonging to different generations look at this.

Based on the survey done by LELO, this report emphasizes the interconnection between technology and relationships that are integral to social connectedness with others, and how these are perceived by individuals belonging to different age groups. The survey compares and contrasts how different generations in the present view sex and technology - Baby Boomers, Generation X, Xennials (*), Millennials, and Gen Z (**) - and the affinities of these generations, some of which still remember the analogue world, serve as a testimony how adaptable the human kind is. In turn, their adoption of technology in this respect will serve as a ground for projecting the future generations' propensity to forge intimate relationships through technology, because even though the role of technology here is unquestionable it still remains to be seen whether its ubiquity will make it an integral part of human relationships in the future or will humans "rebel" and opt for a more human touch.

Technology's pervasive **role in** relationships today

LELO survey on the influence of **technology on relationships**

The impact of technology in relationships and daily existence cannot be overstated. We find ourselves surrounded by the influence of technology at every turn. Whether it's for work, leisure, or simply staying connected with loved ones. Smartphones have gone from being just telephones to being actual parts of ourselves, and our most trusted companions. Through this our lives have largely become a live feed for everyone who is willing to pay attention.

Artificial intelligence is also becoming an integral part of our daily lives, and relationships. Since the birth of ChatGPT, the generative AI chatbot has been assigned an important role: men (who make up about 85% of its usership) are nearly three times more likely than women to use it for relationship advice (*).

*Xennials, though only a micro-generation, are interesting because they are sitting between Generation X and Millennials and have grown up in a world transitioning from analogue to digital. This generation adapted easily to technological advances but weren't as beholden to them as their juniors. For this reason, this microgeneration deserves to be looked at in their own context, independently of both the Gen X and Millennials.

**Gen Z individuals 18+ years of age

Digital technology helps us stay connected with relatives, friends, and partners. When used wisely, it can strengthen social connections and even improve our mental health. Routine social media use may compensate for diminishing face-to-face social interactions in people's busy lives, and provide alternative means of finding support and approval.

In the past, research has suggested that many older adults were "technophobic" and embraced technology at a much slower pace than younger adults. Some even downright refuse to adopt it, thus amplifying the so-called "generational gap". Individuals not born into the current rapidly evolving digital age, had to find ways to adapt to a changing society and judging by the recent LELO survey they have.

Existing research highlights differences in technology use between the generations; however, it also suggests that age no longer directly corresponds with aversion to technology.

Key Insights from LELO's Survey:

1.

Challenging Stereotypes: Older Generations and Tech Adoption:
Assumptions about "technophobia" in older adults are inaccurate. Diverse ways of technological engagement across all age groups were observed.

2.

Positive Impact on Sexual Discourse:
Increased openness facilitated by digital platforms indicates changing norms in communication about sex and intimacy.

3.

Generational Differences in Tech Usage:
Generational nuances in tool usage suggest varying preferences and comfort levels with different digital platforms in the context of intimacy.
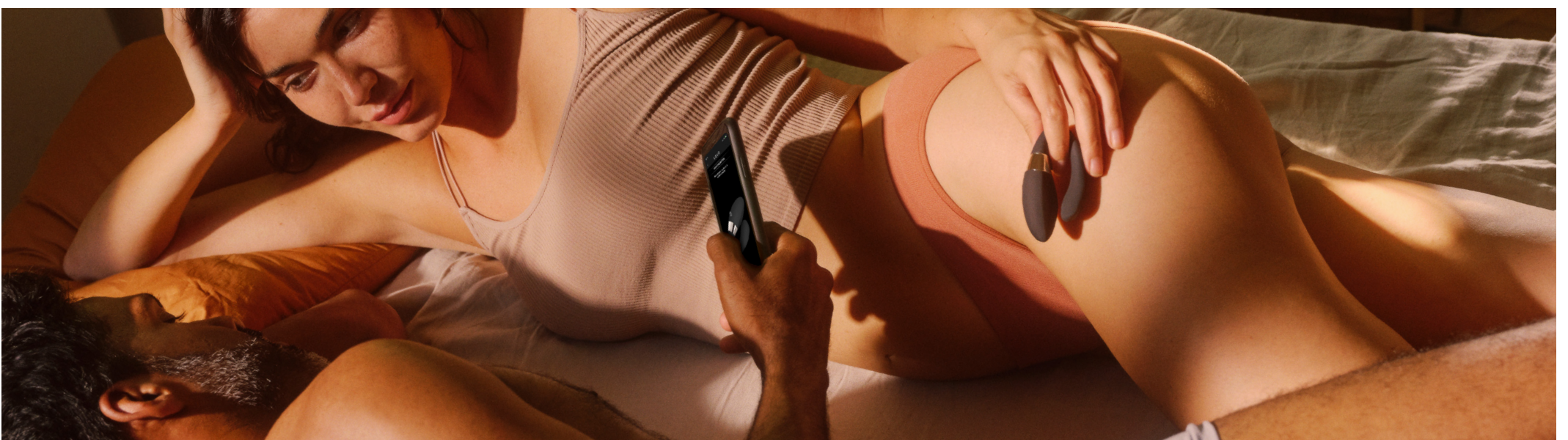
But even those differences are not colossal, with the older generation embracing more and more technology in this respect, and younger generations questioning more if technology is the perfect equivalent to human-human relationships.

4.

Xennials: The Bridge Generation:
Micro-generational data showcases the unique cultural and technological shifts experienced by this group. Standing between Gen X and Millennials is a lesser-known micro-generation: Xennials. Having experienced a childhood without the internet and an adulthood dominated by it, Xennials possess a unique blend of analog values and digital comfort. According to LELO's data, this group might just be the true tech-savvy romantics of our time.

5.

Future Concerns: Ethical Considerations
Concerns regarding ethical implications of using technology in intimate contexts need addressing. This involves ensuring privacy protection, data security and transparency in how technology operates.

Surprisingly, on a number of topics, the older generations are close in thought and practice with the younger ones. Much more than one would have imagined a couple of years back.

Both the Baby Boomer generation and Generation X on side, and GenZ and Millennials on the other agree that the introduction of tech has had a positive effect on the discourse about sexuality and sexuality itself - both groups citing that the biggest differences in sexual behavior when compared to previous/latter generation is the normalization of talk about anything related to sex, greater acceptance of diverse practices and various sexual behaviours becoming more publicly visible or discussed.

When asked about the use of technology to enhance their sex lives, GenZ (60%) and Millennials (66%) expectedly said they are comfortable with it. But almost unexpectedly, half of GenX and 39% of Baby Boomers replied the same.

Even though overall porn sites and Google are the most frequent tool people use to enhance their sex lives, things change drastically when we break this down according to generations. Younger generations are the dominant early users and adopters of social networking sites but in the process their focus has changed, and when their intimate lives are concerned they primarily revert to porn sites, as well as the dating apps (Millennials 26%; GenZ 24%) and Facetime (Millennials 17%; GenZ 16%).

Technology has been shown to enhance an older adult's quality of life, helping their independence, and integration into society. Even sex to an extent. Older adults still seem apprehensive about using tools for sex (58% Baby Boomer generation, 42% GenX), with their most favourite tool still being Facebook but only one in five would use a social media platform (or a dating site) to find sexual partners - 28% of GenX and 18% of Baby

Boomers. At the same time, porn sites (19% Baby Boomer generation, 27% GenX) and Google (15% Baby Boomer generation, 25% GenX) seem like a more acceptable way of integrating tech in their personal lives.

Looking into the future, all of the participants agreed that all tech - from mobile phones to robots- will change sex and human-human relationships for future generations, with 35% saying these will further decrease emotional connection and 31% expecting an increased access to different sexual expressions. At the same time, 24% of Millennials and GenZs, and 15% of Gen X and 13% of Baby Boomers believe the tech will not have a negative role in people's lives as it will serve to enhance the emotional intimacy between humans. Yet, the use of tech is not devoid of concerns. With many aspects of it that yet have to be more carefully thought out, most of those participating in the survey expressed concern that using technology in sexual expression will result in people losing touch with reality, real people and real relationships (29%) and lack of things that constitute what we call intimacy, like touch, kiss or special little moments (16%). Advances in the past decades have prompted a growing concern that progress in this field is now dangerously rapid. Yet there is no consensus on what should be regulated, how or by whom. Not surprisingly, digital sexual abuse (most notably revenge porn) and no adequate laws governing technology thus remain a huge concern for all, regardless of their age.

Curious case of Xennialls and tech

Right on the cusp of Generation Y (Millennials), but still belonging to Generation X stands a micro-generation that actually acts like a generation all its own. This micro-generation was shaped by huge and very sudden societal and technological shifts, having grown up in an analogue world that almost overnight shifted to digital. It stands out as a generation that was raised while we still knew what privacy was, but readily accepted the online and everything it has to offer, and in the end acts more like Millennials than Millennials themselves. This unique combination gives them a distinctive perspective — blending traditional values with modern technological comfort.

In the survey carried out by LELO this is especially highlighted as the Xennialls often seem more receptive to using technology in their private lives than for example even GenZ. So when asked about how comfortable or uncomfortable they are about integrating technology to enhance their sex lives, 64% of Xennials say they are comfortable with it alongside 66% percent of Millennials and 60% of GenZ. They also seem to be comfortable with using dating apps much like the generations that follow after them, with 21% percent of them saying they have or are using apps to find romantic partners - much like the 26% percent of Millennials and 24% of GenZ using dating apps, and in stark contrast to 10% of GenX.

Much like the Millennials and GenZ, half of Xennials surveyed see tech as a positive force in their lives. 54% of them believe that technology has made it easier for all of us to discuss sex, with 38% using dating apps or online platforms to meet potential romantic or sexual partners and 39% readily use tech as an integral part in their lives for ending/receiving nudes, sexting etc. When asked about the future, 36% agree that technology (including human-robot relationships) could fulfill genuine emotional needs for us humans - again in line with 39% of Millennials and GenZ who think this too.

Trends for the future from the LELO report 2024

Before we proceed, this is an excerpt from last year's report where we spoke specifically of the role that technology will play in our lives, especially in human relationships of the future.

One of the conclusions then was that the continuing integration of technology into our daily lives will see us spending the majority of our days in a semi-digital environment. Likely a mixed reality, this will feature digital objects, avatars and artificial intelligences projected into our physical surroundings via smart glasses or lenses. Inevitably, there will be a huge amount of sexual content.This creates interesting opportunities. To date, most of the exploration of virtual reality in a sexual context has been for immersive pornography. But the integration of physical and digital creates new possibilities. We can rewrite our surroundings for the ultimate fantasy roleplay - even redrawing our partners, which offers some worrying possibilities. We can build characters around toys, robots and AIs. There will be a lot of temptation.

Robots will be super-sophisticated, but they won't be 'alive.' Do you really want a programmable sex partner?

In 50 years we likely won't have produced a robot that we can genuinely class as conscious, though by then we might have a better definition of what consciousness is. However, we will absolutely be able to create a robot that offers a very close facsimile of life, at least in a limited set of circumstances.

This creates a definitional problem: what is a relationship if one participant remains to all intents and purposes, an object, subject to the instructions of someone else? Relationships are important in part because they challenge us, force us to negotiate and compromise. Because of their imperfections. Robots won't challenge us, unless we tell them to.

We already make friends with inanimate objects. You might have a platonic crush on your robot postie

The counterpoint to this is that we already have very deep connections with inanimate objects. We imbue objects with a sense of personality. We anthropomorphise and imagine their responses. Everything from stuffed toys to cars.
In 50 years there will be a lot more robots around, and they will have a lot of personality - albeit one that is programmed into them. We will interact with them frequently, whether they are working alongside us, delivering our parcels, or helping to look after us as we age. The chances are we will treat a lot of these robots as if they are alive. And we might consider ourselves in a relationship with some of them, even if it's not sexual.

Connected sex toys will respond to your virtual fantasies

Future sex toys will be increasingly connected, and not just to a simple remote control. With fantasy environments delivered through mixed reality, we will want our toys to react in ways that make sense in the context of the story we're experiencing, giving sensations in line with the actions of the real or virtual characters with whom we're interacting. They'll move in the right way, react with the right motion and force, and time their buildup with the narrative arc.

Relationships and sex (wellness) trends for the future of sex: a futurist view

APPLIED FUTURIST
Tom Cheesewright

The 2025 LELO survey on intergenerational views of sex and technology indicates that there's a significant contrast between how fast people think attitudes have changed and how fast they actually have changed. The data also suggests that attitudes to sex, and particularly to sex and technology, have changed radically in the last twenty years, regardless of the generation we are observing. Following these findings, we turn to the future to see how things will progress in the next decades. Tom Cheeswright, the applied futurist, once again offers a fresh perspective on how these will develop, in relation to the current state of things.

Emerging trends in the next 5-10 years regarding the role of AI and robotics in intimate relationships

There is an enormous contrast between how fast people think things have changed, and how fast they actually have changed. The data suggest people think attitudes have changed very little. But just a quick scan of popular media will tell you that attitudes to sex, and particularly to sex and technology, have changed radically in the last twenty years.

Even with this radical shift, the data suggest a surprising level of conservatism, across the sexes and the generations. Only a quarter of respondents would describe themselves as 'very comfortable' with sex technology. So there is enormous scope for further change in the future.

Where might those changes be focused? Three areas stand out.

Immersive Technology: Virtual Reality remains a huge growth area for the adult content industry, with some numbers showing triple digit growth and some estimates suggesting a third of men who've tried VR have used it for sexual content. As the overall VR industry continues to grow, this market will also continue to grow. But its opportunities for interactivity between partners are limited, since the headsets are so isolating. The exceptions might be remote communication between partners, or dates, but even with today's technology - compelling though it can be - this might feel slightly clumsy.

The longer term opportunity is much larger, as mixed/augmented reality becomes part of the mainstream. It seems likely that at some point smart glasses will become a standard accessory for most. At which point every aspect of sex technology might interoperate with them. We'll see dating apps in mixed reality that allow you to see prospective partners in 3D before you swipe left or right. And the opportunities for roleplay when you can digitally re-write reality to change how your surroundings - or your partner - look, are enormous, if potentially problematic.

Biomorphics: Robotics is advancing incredibly quickly, with its component technologies - sensors, actuators, computing - all being core components of other fast-growing sectors, from phones to drones, to EVs. The result is rapid improvements in

capability and equivalent falls in cost. Joined with similarly rapid advances in materials science, we're likely to see a lot more robotics design that is both inspired by, and that feels closer to, nature. There is already an established, if niche, market for full-body sex robots, which with the application of AI are becoming more interactive. But the larger opportunity is probably in toys that look, feel, and move in more organic ways.

Remote: We are a global community now with many people living remotely from partners for long lengths of time. Couples have been using phones, and video chat, for sex for a long time, but given the prevalence of such long range relationships, and the deep integration of technology into our lives, its growth seems likely. And a potential driver of the adoption of more immersive and biomorphic technology. While nothing will beat being with each other in person, we might be able to create virtual environments that get closer to that situation, or more likely, fantastical environments that both partners can share. Shared gaming experiences with a sexual element might be an opportunity for remote partners who have never met and might never meet in person.

Given the increasing integration of technology into daily life, and the potential for virtual environments and AI avatars, how might future generations define and experience intimacy and emotional connection compared to current generations?

We've seen across a number of domains that as much as humans accept technology, we do differentiate and demonstrate a preference for - even a hunger for - things that are natural and organic. The role of AI and avatars in the sexual domain is undoubtedly going to increase. But it will be balanced with a real sense that perhaps the greatest level of intimacy is reserved for more analogue contact.

For example, in a few years it is likely that most of us will spend most of our waking hours using some form of mixed reality, through glasses or lenses. These will replace the smartphone as our primary interface to the digital realm. But in that scenario, taking your glasses off, and disconnecting from the digital world, will be a real sign that you are focusing on the person in front of you. You'll know the date is going well when the person in front of you takes their glasses off! Or if they're like me, swaps their mixed reality glasses for an old-school analogue pair.

Before that point though, and as an alternative to those intimate, pure human-to-human experiences, technology will play an enormous role. One of the things that coming metaverse technologies will do is really blur the lines between our digital and physical worlds. Digital objects, characters, and scenery will be so seamlessly integrated into the physical world that it creates endless possibilities for sexual encounters, whether that's with another human in a shared augmented environment, or with avatar characters, or a mixture of the two.

Virtual characters will be persistent across media. They won't just switch off when you take off your glasses. They might have social media profiles, be able to message you, even send you post. The extent of the AI girlfriend/boyfriend experience is near limitless.

It's perhaps this that leads so many in the data - nearly 30% - to suggest that technology could fulfil genuine emotional needs.

With the advancement of robotics and AI, and the possibility of relationships with robots, what ethical considerations and societal impacts should be addressed to ensure healthy development of future generations' understanding of human relationships and sexuality?

There is so much we don't know about health and harm when it comes to human/machine interaction. While much of the panic about social media and phone use has been very poorly evidenced, the potential of the technology to be engrossing and an alternative to human contact - social and sexual - grows exponentially in the years ahead. Legislating for this without good evidence is difficult and risky. As is creating any sort of guideline or single set of advice.

There are perhaps three main areas of focus for risk, and hence for research, advice and regulation.

Isolation: What happens when people adopt social and sexual robotic and virtual technologies to the exclusion of human contact? What does this do to their psychology? And what is the addictive potential of such technologies that might appeal to people with the psychological profile that might lead them down this route.

Expectation: If people are interacting with robots and avatars that behave in a particular fashion, does this change people's expectation of how human beings might respond in the same situation? There is already strong evidence of a correlation, if not a causal relationship, between consumption of violent pornography and sexual violence. And consumption of pornography more broadly is shown to desensitise men particularly, leading them to treat women as 'sex objects'. There is clear potential for 3D technologies whether virtual or physical to continue and even extend this effect.

Robot Rights: The longer term question is one of the rights of autonomous machines. Though I believe current AI capabilities remain a very long way from any realistic definition of consciousness, there is a clear path to machines that at least appear conscious in their interactions with us. Perhaps we shouldn't wait for the ultimate breakthrough in artificial intelligence to consider regulating our interactions with machines that seem alive.
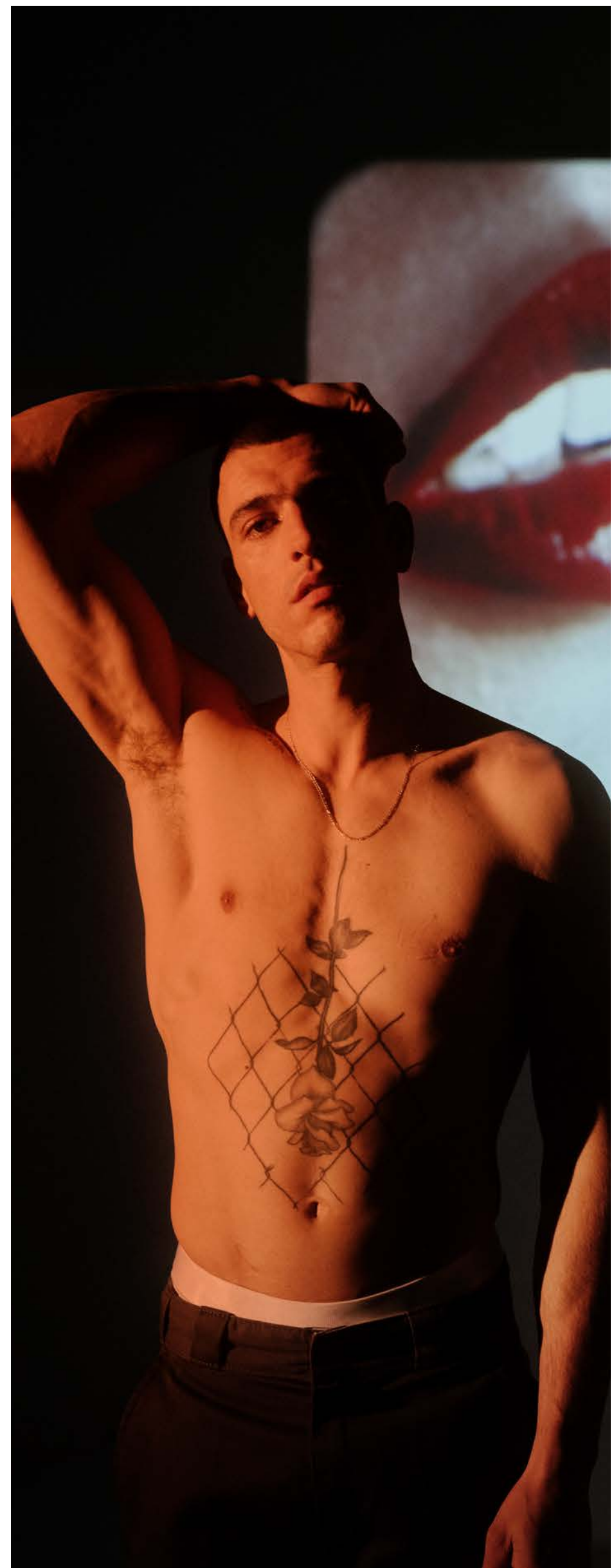
Considering the trend of "leisure sex" and the potential decoupling of sex from commitment, how will technology influence the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, particularly long-term partnerships, for future generations?

I'm somewhat sceptical that leisure sex is a growth trend. Many studies show that young people are having less sex and with fewer partners than previous generations. But there is an interesting potential counter to this, and that is that the people having casual sex for fun are perhaps older.

One way to read the numbers showing lower levels of sexual activity amongst young people is that they are just starting later. Combine this with greater equalisation of attitudes to sex and agency for women, acceptance of lesbian, gay and bi sexualities, and our extended life spans - and more liberal attitudes to divorce, and the result is that people might reach a level of personal and sexual confidence later in life, coinciding with them still being single (people are partnering later) or being newly single.

Technology aids such people to find each other, and establish their mutual interests and expectations before they meet. And those mutual interests might include sex purely for fun.

One of the most interesting aspects of the digital dating/hookup scene of recent years has been its fragmentation. This is a trend that parallels so many other aspects of media. You can search for just about any niche interest online now and find people who share it. And increasingly, people who want to find partners who share that interest - whether it's sexual or otherwise.

The scene has become so fragmented that people rarely inhabit a single scene now, operating across an array of niches that interest them. One interesting future piece of technology might be a personal dating or hookup AI that establishes the Venn diagram between you and the people who share more than one of your niches.

What are the potential societal impacts of people increasingly turning to technology for their emotional and physical needs, and how can we mitigate any negative consequences?
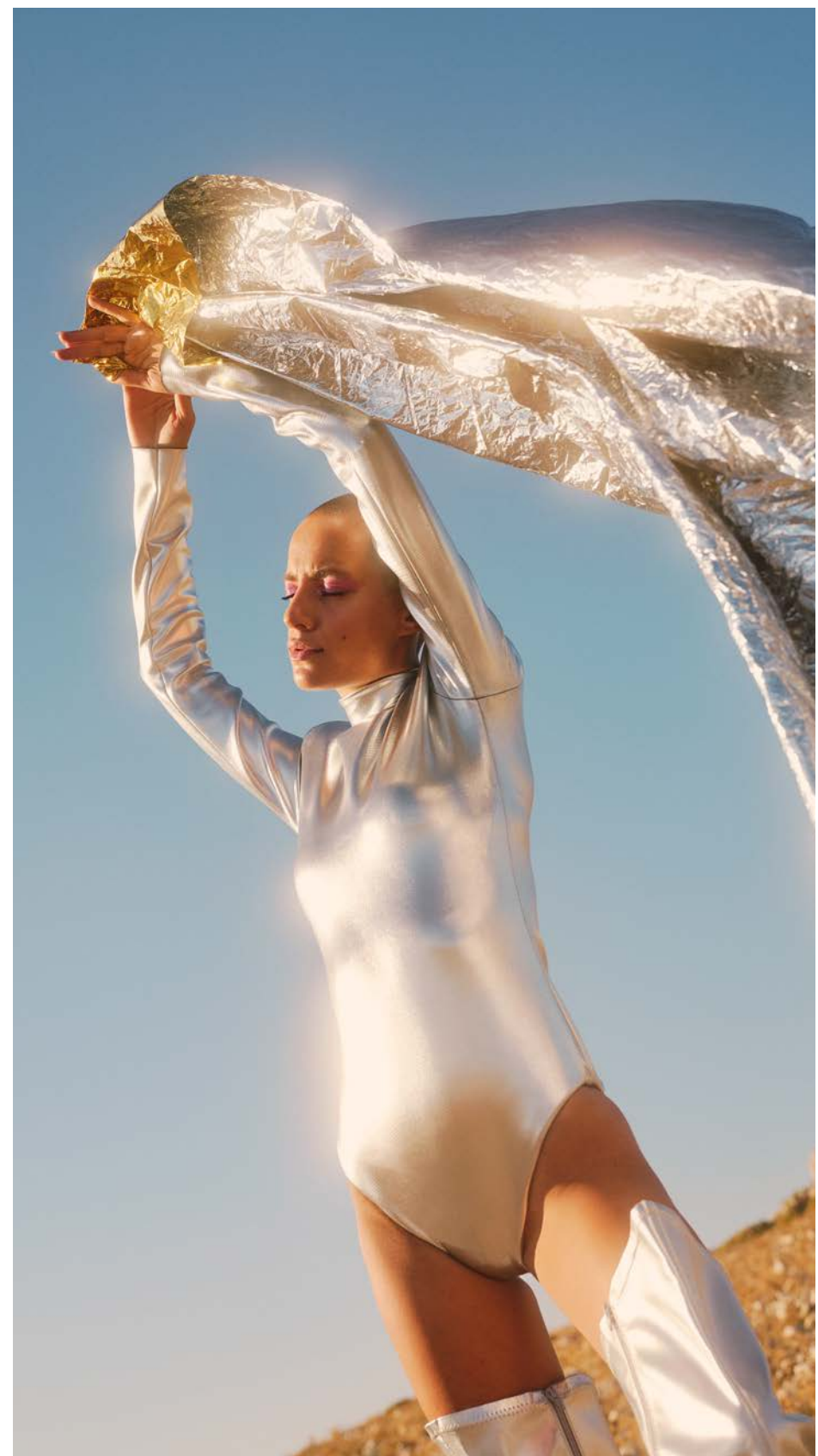
The survey shows that this is a clear concern for people. But we shouldn't automatically assume that people turning to technology to fulfil their emotional and physical needs is bad. Gyms are technology but we still tell people that exercise is good for them both physically and mentally. The only difference is that the technology we're discussing now is largely digital. And for some reason - perhaps because of its relative novelty - we have a greater degree of suspicion of all things digital.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't be cautious though. Digital avenues to emotional and sexual fulfilment present some obvious risks, especially if they are used to the exclusion of human interaction - or as an alternative for someone who is otherwise isolated. For example, too much time spent interacting with digital characters that accede to your every whim is going to give you very unrealistic - perhaps dangerous - expectations about a real-life partner.

Regulating the types of content available through mainstream providers would be challenging, but possible. This wouldn't limit access for anyone willing to put a little effort in to bypass controls, whether through a simple VPN, the dark web, or through using

their own AI to create bespoke content. But if combined with education and information campaigns, it would go some way to set a societal standard.
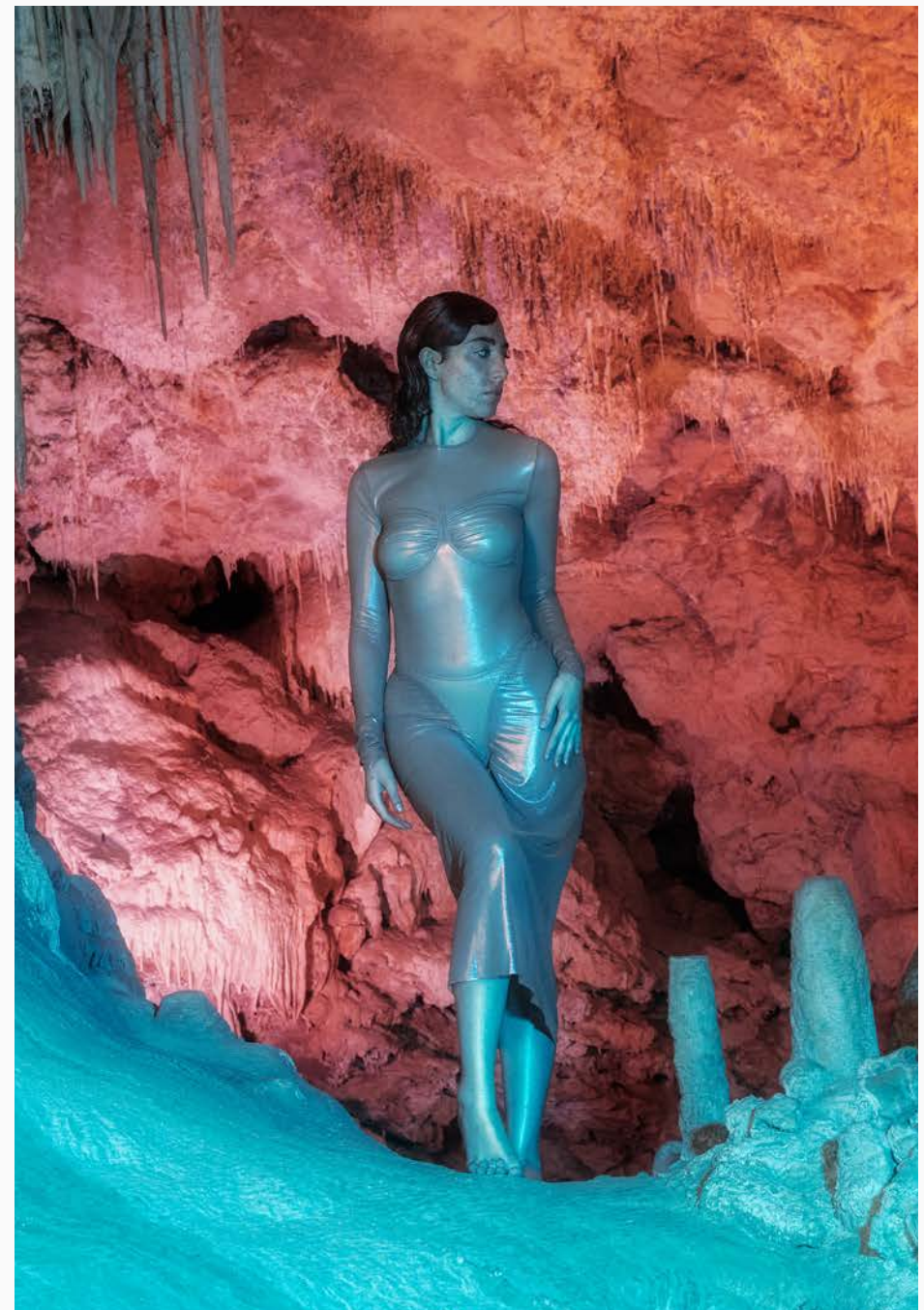
We also need to be careful to differentiate between technologies that isolate and technologies that connect. Whether that's helping people to find each other, or interact as partners. Though one of the risks of AI is that it might not be clear whether you are interacting with a real person, or a machine.

Conclusion

Based on the LELO Futurist report 2025, several conclusions can be drawn about intergenerational views on sex and technology and future trends:

* While people feel attitudes towards sex and technology haven't changed much, the reality is a radical shift has occurred in the last 20 years.

* Future generations will define intimacy differently with AI avatars and mixed reality. Still despite tech's rise, there's a continued preference for "analogue" human contact.

* The integration of AI and robotics in intimate relationships raises ethical concerns like isolation, unrealistic expectations, and the question of robot rights, all requiring research and potentially regulation.

* Increased reliance on technology for emotional and physical needs is a concern. While not inherently bad, it carries risks like unrealistic expectations and isolation. Mitigation may involve regulation and education while differentiating between isolating and connecting technologies.

* The digital dating/hookup scene is increasingly fragmented, requiring AI tools to navigate niches and find compatible partners.

* Technology will aid people in finding partners and establishing shared interests, potentially influencing the development and maintenance of both casual encounters and long-term partnerships.

It has been said many times that technology profoundly influences almost every aspect of our lives, including our sexual behaviours, both in the positive and negative way. Understanding these influences is crucial in navigating the complex interplay between technology and sexuality going forward. There is no doubt that tech will continue to be an important factor in this respect, but it remains to be seen whether the role will increase exponentially as more and more people are born into this new reality, or is it possible that people will revolt against it in this respect in an attempt to hold onto what makes humans human - the capacity to offer care and demonstrate love, forgiveness, as well as the ability to promote genuine harmony and continuity throughout the wider human system.

thank you

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