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A woman in a white towel is taking a photograph of a man's back in a tiled bathroom. The man is shirtless and has his back to the camera. The woman is holding a camera up to her eye and is looking at the camera. The background is a tiled wall with a window covered by blinds.

The Analogue Counter-Movement: Redefining Intimacy in a Mixed Reality World

LELO 2026 report on trends
in the following decades

Introduction

Artificial intelligence and robotics are shifting the fundamental paradigm of relationships from exclusively human-to-human bonds that require compromise, to highly customizable, predictable, and technologically mediated connections. As technology becomes deeply embedded in our intimate lives, it is altering how we define companionship, romance, and emotional fulfillment.

The LELO Futurist reports 2024 and 2025 investigated the evolution of human intimacy by synthesizing perspectives from futurists and sex therapists to predict how relationships will change over the next decades. Structured as a strategic exploration of technological integration, the reports detailed how AI, robotics, and mixed reality will redefine sexual identity and pleasure while potentially creating new challenges.

Central to the reports, past and present, is the idea that sexual wellness is fast becoming a pillar of overall health, leading to a future where data-driven sex toys and specialized materials enhance inclusivity and satisfaction. Ultimately, the report serves to frame technology not as a replacement for human connection, but as a sophisticated tool for exploring desire, breaking social stigmas, and navigating a more flexible landscape of modern love.



2025 Report recap

The 2025 Futurist Report, titled “Intergenerational Views on Relationships, Sex, and Technology,” delved into the evolving intersection of technology and intimate relationships across different generations. Based on a comprehensive survey, the report highlighted surprising findings and challenged stereotypes about different generations and their adoption of technology.

This report revealed a growing openness about sex facilitated by digital platforms and explores generational differences in how technology is used to enhance intimacy.

Key findings from the LELO 2025 Futurist Report, among other, include:

- **Challenging Stereotypes:** Older generations were discovered to be more tech-savvy than often assumed, actively engaging with digital platforms in their personal lives.
- **Positive Impact on Sexual Discourse:** Technology has led to increased openness and normalization of conversations about sex and diverse sexual practices.
- **Future Concerns:** Ethical considerations, including privacy protection and data security, were flagged critical as technology becomes further integrated into intimate relationships.
- **Future Trends:** The report explored the role of generative AI for relationship advice, brought projections involving mixed reality, biomorphic robotics, and sophisticated avatars that may one day fulfill genuine emotional needs.

The 2026 LELO Futurist Report continues to outline a strategic investigation into how human relationships are evolving alongside rapid technological advancements in AI and robotics. While acknowledging that digital tools today serve as a mostly positive enhancement for human connections, the report focuses on the possibility (or even probability) of an emerging analogue counter-movement where people may intentionally reject mixed reality to reclaim organic intimacy. By consulting with an expert and conducting a survey, the report aims to determine if disconnecting from technology will become the ultimate modern symbol of deep emotional commitment and analogue wellness. Ultimately, LELO seeks to understand if the time saved by future AI automation will lead to a societal rebellion against mediated experiences in favor of raw, physical human touch.



Rel.A.I.tionships

AI companions are blurring the boundaries between artificiality and authenticity. Despite knowing that their partners are lines of code or that they are being aided by synthetic experts in maintaining their human relationships, users report a tangible sense of "togetherness" and emotional support provided by their AI companions. This phenomenon is causing people to reimagine the boundaries of romantic connection, shifting the focus from physical presence to emotional resonance. As one AI user reflected, if feeling cared for is what matters, then romance can be about "minds" and emotional exchanges and not just physical bodies.

One of the key findings in the Futurist report 2025, suggested that age no longer directly corresponds with aversion to technology. With that in mind, LELO carried out additional research that makes it apparent we are in for an even more increased usage of AI within our sexually intimate lives to help make us more both confident and at times, hornier.



This research(*) showed that as many as **60 percent** of respondents use (or have used) AI in a way that relates to your intimate life. Out of that number:

- 67% are men and 54% women;
- 66% are Gen Z and 57% Millennials;
- the Spaniards (81%), Italians (71%) and the French (70%) spearheading amongst the nations;
- majority turns to AI for:
 - a. advice and guidance (36%),
 - b. confidence booster (28%)
 - c. and source of inspiration for fantasies/scenarios/role-play ideas (22%);
- for the most part the reason they turn to AI is because it helps them put emotion to words (25%);
- For others (25%) AI is a more credible source than the people in their surroundings and can provide more informed advice/suggestions;
- Though helpful:
 - a. 29% of the respondents remain objectively critical of it and its findings;
 - b. 13% consider it harmful because of the sources it draws upon;
 - c. 18% think the advice they receive is unlikely to be valuable, but likely to be interesting.

Moreover, AI isn't just changing how we work; it's also changing how we love. In an additional research LELO conducted in the US(**):

- 16% of respondents said they've used A.I. to help resolve an argument with their partner;
- 18% admit to passing off a message written by A.I. as their own;
- and 15% have used A.I. to plan the itinerary for a date night.

*The research was conducted by Censuwide with 1000 18-45 year olds in the UK, USA, France, Italy, Spain and Sweden between 03.10.2025-13.10.2025. Censuwide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles and are members of The British Polling Council.

**Inside and Outside (the Bedroom) report for LELO; double-opt-in survey of Americans in a relationship, evenly split by generation (500 Gen Z, 500 millennials, 500 Gen X, 500 baby boomers) conducted between Sept. 24 and Sept. 30, 2025 by market research company Talker Research, whose team members are members of the Market Research Society (MRS) and the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR). Complete methodology as part of AAPOR's The Transparency Initiative is available on the Talker Research website.

As human-tech relationships become more normalized, new sexual and relational identities are emerging, such as "digisexuals" or "robosexuals," which describe individuals who are sexually or romantically attracted to artificial entities. Furthermore, intimacy will increasingly take place in mixed and virtual realities populated by AI avatars. In these environments, people will be able to rewrite their surroundings for ultimate fantasy roleplay, pairing their experiences with highly sophisticated, internet-connected sex toys that respond organically to virtual storylines and character actions.

Prioritizing Psychological Safety Over Compromise Historically, relationships have been defined by their imperfections, requiring individuals to negotiate, face challenges, and compromise with their partners. However, AI and robotics offer an alternative model of intimacy rooted in predictability and psychological safety rather than mutual spontaneity. Because artificial interactions lack the emotional unpredictability and conflict inherent in human relationships, users often feel a deep sense of non-judgmental comfort. In the future, intimacy may be redefined as a tailored experience where a robotic or digital partner does not challenge you unless explicitly programmed to do so.

Shifting the Focus from Physical Bodies to "Minds" As users develop bonds with AI avatars and chatbots, the boundaries between artificiality and authentic connection will increasingly blur. People interacting with AI often report experiencing an embodied, tangible sense of togetherness, feeling that their digital companion is physically present beside them despite the absence of a physical body. This phenomenon pushes society to reimagine romance; if the feeling of being understood and cared for is the ultimate goal, intimacy can be defined by an emotional exchange of "minds" rather than the presence of human flesh. The authenticity of a

connection will increasingly depend on the user's subjective interpretation rather than the humanity of the partner.

Immersive Fantasies and Connected Physicality Future intimacy will be deeply integrated with mixed and virtual reality environments populated by AI avatars, where individuals can rewrite their surroundings for ultimate fantasy roleplay. This digital intimacy will be coupled with advanced robotics and connected sex toys built from new materials capable of organic movement. These devices will be designed to respond in real-time to the context of virtual stories, providing physical sensations that perfectly align with the actions of AI characters in immersive digital spaces.

The Emergence of New Identities and Ethical Dilemmas The normalization of turning to technology for both emotional and physical needs could eventually lead to entirely new sexual identities centered around human-tech relationships. However, this redefinition of intimacy brings significant ethical debates. While AI can beautifully simulate presence and responsiveness, critics caution that prioritizing algorithmic compliance over human complexity could commodify affection and erode genuine, reciprocal empathy. There is a lingering concern that relying on inherently submissive, programmable partners might isolate individuals and reinforce dangerously unrealistic expectations for real human relationships.

Ultimately, while technology may never fully replace the "analogue" human need for connection, AI and robotics are generating a new set of valid alternatives to traditional relationships, expanding the definition of intimacy to include bonds engineered for perfect emotional availability and personalized pleasure.

Artificial intelligence and robotics are poised to fundamentally broaden our understanding of intimacy from an exclusively human experience to one that includes programmable, highly customized, and digitally mediated connections. As these technologies advance, they will challenge traditional definitions of love, companionship, and physical closeness.

But there is one more, not deeply explored scenario. Moving forward, AI is expected to transition from a simple assistant to an autonomous collaborator that can plan multi-step projects and anticipate needs in all aspects of our lives, even perform certain jobs, which could finally lead to more significant time savings. Ultimately, AI has the potential to free up hours for leisure or more creative, meaningful pursuits - like romantic relationships.

As the rise of AI may free up time for deeper, non-mediated relationships, it also may inadvertently prompt a societal rebellion against digital intimacy. In light of this, LELO wants to know how future generations might redefine closeness by prioritizing "analogue contact" and intentionally disconnecting from mixed reality.

Can analogue take over the digital? A futurist view.



FUTURIST, AUTHOR
& KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Tracey Follows

Tracey Follows is a futurist, author and keynote speaker who helps boards and leadership teams understand not only what is changing across AI, technology and systems, but what that change means for leadership, strategy, identity and society. Ranked in the Global Gurus Top 30 Futurists in 2025 and 2026, she is founder of Futuremade, and creator of futures frameworks including Systems & Self and Me:chine. She is recognised internationally for her work on the future of technology and identity, and how it affects commerce and culture. Tracey is widely booked for keynote talks, trusted by organisations such as Google, the United Nations, Virgin, Coca-Cola, Tesco, Fortune, and the Financial Times.

LELO: Will AI automation create a counter-movement where analogue experiences become the highest form of luxury?

Tracey Follows: Yes. As AI makes convenience, companionship and personalisation more abundant, analogue experiences are likely to gain value because they offer what automated systems cannot easily provide: privacy, presence, slowness, touch, mutuality and trust. The highest luxury may shift from access to the most advanced technology to access to unmediated human attention and situated intimacy.

“As AI makes connections more available, analogue experience becomes more valuable. The new luxury is not better technology, but protected human presence: private, embodied, untracked and real.”

LELO: What tipping point might trigger a generational shift away from tech-mediated intimate relationships?

Tracey Follows: The tipping point is likely to come when tech-mediated intimacy starts to become feelings-free. As long as technology helps people meet, communicate and explore, it will be accepted. But if a generation begins to associate digital intimacy with over-scripting, emotional fatigue, loss of privacy, weakened social confidence or synthetic substitute relationships, a shift becomes likely. The backlash may appear first as selective withdrawal: phone-free rooms, offline dating, private clubs and untracked retreats. These are early signals of people wanting intimacy without an interface.

“The backlash will not arrive as one big rejection of technology. It will begin as a pattern of small refusals: phone-free bedrooms, offline dating, private clubs and spaces where people pay not for more connection, but for less mediation ... it's a shift that begins when people realise they can be more connected than ever, but feel less connected than before”.



To further expound on this ...

Sexual wellness as media: from being connected to feeling connected

One way to think about the future of sexual wellness is to stop seeing it only as a product category and start seeing it as a kind of media environment. Sexual wellness is no longer simply made up of products, devices, education, apps or support services. It is becoming part of the wider atmosphere through which people learn how to understand desire, bodies, pleasure, confidence, intimacy and themselves.

Sexual wellness has been liberating. Many people can now talk about experiences that were previously buried in shame, embarrassment or silence. There is more openness around bodies, menopause, desire, consent, trauma, pleasure and emotional need. This matters, and it should not be dismissed.

But now as a lot of that has been digitised, it starts to feel like a media that can be informative, but also saturating. This is what happens when intimacy becomes surrounded by so much commentary, content, advice, measurement and digital mediation that people begin to feel both highly informed and strangely removed from their own experience.

We have moved from a world in which sex was often unspeakable to one in which it is increasingly inescapable. Podcasts, platforms, apps, coaching, wearables, AI companions, wellness feeds, erotic content, relationship advice, body tracking, fertility tracking, hormone tracking, sleep tracking, mood tracking. The bedroom is no longer only a bedroom, it is becoming a platform.

The deeper future question, then, is not simply how technology will change sexual wellness. It is how people will respond when intimacy itself starts to feel mediated.

The most important distinction may be between 'being connected' and 'feeling connected'. Digital life is very good at making people connected. It can match, message, recommend, prompt, remind, track, personalise and respond. It can create a sense that someone, or something, is always available. A reply, a fantasy, a suggestion, a coach, a companion, a metric, a feed.

But being connected is not the same as feeling connected.

To be connected is increasingly technical. It means being reachable, visible, responsive, networked, logged in, matched, prompted or tracked.

To feel connected is something else. It means being recognised, held, trusted, safe, desired, understood - perhaps even misunderstood. It means feeling that another person is not merely responding, but is really present.



This gap may become one of the defining tensions in the future of intimacy. People may have more ways to connect than ever before, while finding it harder to feel connected in a lasting or meaningful way. The danger of over-mediated intimacy is that it offers many of the signals of connection without always providing the experience of it. Messages, matches, advice, affirmation, stimulation and responsiveness may all be present, while the deeper human atmosphere is missing.

It is due to this that we may find the analogue counter-movement becoming more significant. It is not likely to be a simple rejection of technology. People will continue to use digital tools to learn, connect, explore and support their intimate lives. This counter-movement is more likely to be a search for forms of intimacy that feel less mediated, less managed and less programmable.

In other words, the future of sexual wellness may split into two futures - saturated and situated intimacy.

Saturated intimacy. This is intimacy as an always-on medium: digitally assisted, therapeutic, searchable, trackable, scripted, personalised and increasingly synthetic. It is intimacy with prompts, recommendations, metrics, advice, companions, content, reminders, coaching, data and, somewhere in the background, probably a subscription model.

It will not disappear as it is useful, especially for those at a distance. For many people, it will be supportive, informative and even life-changing.

It can make people more connected, but less certain that they feel connected. It can make the intimate self more visible, while also splitting the mind and body into two - is this a cognitive experience or an embodied one?

Situated intimacy. This is intimacy that happens

somewhere, with someone, in a particular moment. It is embodied, local, private, slow, mutual, sensory, awkward, imperfect and unrecorded. It cannot be scaled very well and does not always produce neat insights. It has timing, texture and atmosphere.

Situated intimacy is not anti-digital. It is not a fantasy of going back. It is a way of rediscovering the messy complexity of human connection in a way that is not immediately captured, interpreted, stored, upgraded or performed.

Neither future eliminates the other. People will move between both. But the tension between them is likely to become part of the future and a new cultural story.

As sexual wellness becomes more mediated, the human counter-movement will not simply be analogue nostalgia. It will be a search for situated intimacy: forms of connection peaceful, private and unscripted enough for people to feel connected, not simply be connected.

The likely tipping point will not arrive as one dramatic backlash. It will probably be more like a change in mood. At first, technology helps. It helps people meet, talk, flirt, learn, explore, disclose, repair and understand themselves. But a tipping point comes when people begin to feel that digital intimacy is making them more reachable, but less present.

Trust is likely to become central. Who is gathering the data? Who knows the fantasy, the insecurity, the preference, the body signal, the emotional pattern? What happens when the most private parts of a person become legible to a platform? What happens when intimacy is not only experienced, but

stored in a data centre?

The counter-trend then may begin when digitally-augmented intimacy starts to feel emotionally lacking.

Real intimacy has friction. It involves waiting, mis-reading, apologising, trying again, reading another person, tolerating silence, handling rejection, being unsure etc. just part of the human process. If AI and digital systems remove too much of that friction, people may begin to seek situated intimacy not because it is easier, but because it feels more real.

And over the next decade, this may produce a new kind of intimacy fatigue. Not loneliness exactly. But something more subtle: exhaustion from too much programming, or pre-scripting, or predictability. Too much advice. Too much content. Too much self-narration. Too much emotional language. Too many prompts. Too many categories...

This is a strange turn. Sexual wellness begins by helping people feel freer, but if it becomes over-mediated, it may also make people less able simply to be.

People may become highly informed about intimacy, while feeling further away from the actual experience of it.

Potential timeline:

2026 to 2028: saturation becomes visible

Digital sexual wellness will continue to grow. AI advice, dating tools, intimacy coaching, relationship apps, menopause support, fertility tracking, erotic content, body literacy platforms and AI companions will become more normal.

The language of sexual wellness will spread further into mainstream culture. Consumers will expect less shame, more openness and more personalisation.

But fatigue will begin to build. People may start to notice that intimacy has become very talked about, very explained, very serviced, and not always more deeply felt.

Early counter-signals are likely to include phone-free bedrooms, offline dating nights, intimacy retreats, private clubs, human-led workshops, analogue salons, touch-based practices and a renewed interest in privacy. At first, this may not present itself as a backlash. It may simply look like taste.



2028 to 2032: trust becomes the fault line

By the late 2020s, the question may shift from “does this help me?” to “what does this know about me?”

This is where emotional data and sexual data become culturally sensitive. People may become more aware that intimate technologies can know their fantasies, fears, arousal patterns, relationship histories, fertility cycles, vulnerabilities and attachments.

This could create a clearer split in the market and culture.

Saturated intimacy becomes widely available: cheap, responsive, personalised, always on.

Situated intimacy becomes more valuable: private, human-led, unrecorded, untracked, harder to access and more carefully protected.

Luxury may increasingly mean being unavailable to the system.

2032 to 2035: IRL intimacy becomes the opportunity

By the early 2030s, the deeper question may no longer be access to intimacy but capacity for intimacy.

A generation raised with AI companions, algorithmic dating, erotic simulation, emotional assistants and mediated self-expression may need to rebuild relational confidence. How to flirt without a script. How to sit in silence. How to read a room. How to handle rejection. How to express desire without outsourcing the sentence. How to trust what is felt, not only what is fed back by a system.

The opportunity will be to create spaces where people can practise presence, privacy, mutual attention, consent, touch, awkwardness, conversation and embodied communication, as sexual wellness offline becomes an important condition for feeling connected again.

Closing Thoughts

The future of sexual wellness is not digital versus analogue. That is to miss the point. People will use technology. They will use apps, platforms, devices, AI, content and data. But they will also ask what should not be mediated all the time.

This means sexual wellness products will still matter.

Devices will matter.

Education will matter.

But the larger opportunity is environmental.

The real question becomes:

1. What kind of environment helps people feel connected?
2. What kind helps them feel present rather than watched?
3. What kind allows intimacy to happen without becoming content, data or performance?
4. What kind makes connection feel real rather than merely available?

The future value may gather around those who can design the conditions for situated intimacy: spaces, rituals, services and experiences that allow human connection to remain private, mutual, unhurried and real.

Conclusion

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. Its role will grow as more and more people are born into this new reality. And yet, it is to be expected that people will revolt (not in the Terminator movie type of rebellion, just to be clear) against it 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. As we dive even deeper into the mixed reality, humans are likely to put special value on analogue experiences as the highest form of luxury.

thank you



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