Rebranding Sex Robots: Realbotix's Corporate Metamorphosis

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Abstract— **Robots are rapidly becoming more interactive and dyadic. With advancements in artificial intelligence and robotic movements, companies are shifting their corporate messaging to highlight the social and companionship features of their robots. Realbotix's recent rebranding exemplifies a deliberate effort to carve a new path within the humanoid robotics industry. Grounded in political economy and discourse analysis, this paper examines 86 publicity interviews and press releases from Realbotix to assess the positioning of intimacy and its associated corporate power. The findings reveal a focus on the robot's social intelligence, framing the company as a leader in humanoid robotics and reshaping human–robot interactions.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Simulacra Corporation, through its subsidiaries RealDoll and Realbotix, has emerged as a significant player in artificial intelligence (AI) and humanoid robotics [1]. The company's evolution from producing static sex dolls to developing advanced sex robots, exemplified by the release of "Harmony," marked a pivotal moment in the intersection of technology and human intimacy [2]. Now, the company's shift to generalized humanoid robots reflects a broader trend in the application of technology to human sexuality and relationships—a phenomenon in which sex technology has driven technological innovation [3].

By 2020, Simulacra secured seed funding for its social robot research [4], signaling a strategic pivot from its initial focus on sex robots. The transition from sex to social robots culminated in the company's public stock market debut and rebranding, mirroring the evolving acceptance of robots [5]. This study examines the discursive strategies employed by Simulacra Corporation during its restructuring, acquisition by cryptocurrency leader Andrew Kiguel, and transformation into a publicly traded entity, rebranded under the Realbotix brand. Through political economy theory, we analyze Realbotix's website, interviews, and press releases to elucidate the shift from sex robot production to social robot development.

Our research contributes to existing literature in several ways. First, this study demonstrates how economic need influences corporate messaging, highlighting communication's crucial role in technology–society relations. Second, the study reveals how corporate messaging shapes design values, illustrating how the reframing of corporate value propositions drives the development of robots. Finally, by examining Realbotix's redefinition of intimate interaction, this research exposes evolving societal attitudes toward human–robot relationships, contributing to discussions on the ethical boundaries of intimacy with artificial entities.

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II. BACKGROUND

A. Sex Robots

Sex robots are defined as robots with mechanized movements, embedded AI, and are used for sexual purposes [6], whereas social robots are defined as robots that can engage in cyclical social interactions [5]. Recent research on sex robots has focused on their ethical [7], [8], psychological [9], [10], [11], and social implications [12], [13], [2]. Understanding the corporate interests [14] and psychological motivations [15], [16] behind sex robots is crucial for mitigating potential social and individual harms [17]. For instance, early research suggests that interest in sex robots may not be limited to lonely individuals [15], but could also be linked to specific sexual personality traits [16]. Additionally, loneliness may be connected to reports from sex doll owners who describe women as "unknowable" [10].

Fictional media [12] and news platforms [18] tend to sensationalize sex robots, often relying on concerns of replacement or violence. This discourse usually centers on the non-human qualities of sex robots and their impact on future intimacy rather than conversation grounded in the current capabilities of the artifact itself [18]. In particular, news media have concentrated on the human–robot relationship, promoting the narrative of a lonely adult [12].

Repositioning sex robots as social robots offers a strategy to mitigate negative perceptions. By emphasizing their social intelligence and emotional responsiveness, companies shift the narrative from sexual interactions to companionship and emotional support. Leveraging conversational skills, emotional recognition, and adaptability, this rebranding highlights the angling of these robots to enhance social and emotional well-being rather than focusing on sexual desire.

B. Design Value

Design values guide robotic systems' aesthetic, functional, and ethical dimensions [19], [20]. Rooted in the principles of user experience (UX) design, design values inform the creation of functional products that resonate with users emotionally and ethically [21]. Historically, robotics design values have evolved from a focus on functionality and technical performance to a more holistic approach that incorporates emotions and inclusivity [22], [23]. This shift acknowledges the growing role of robots in social and domestic spaces, where user acceptance and ethics are crucial [24].

In the context of HRI, design values enable a critical examination of social robots and the "differences of power" inherent in AI-based machines that function in dyadic relationships [25]. Humanizing robots—through physical design and naming, as seen with Sophia by Hanson Robotics—creates an emotional bond that transcends the interactions typical of industrial machines [26]. For instance, developing highly humanlike robots that mimic caregiving emphasizes their human qualities [26]. Social interaction design values are fundamentally embedded in the design of robots [27].

C. Intimacy Interaction

Intimacy is a form of communicative assemblage where humans relate to technologies, such as sex robots, that provide meaning to the human user [1]. Intimacy can be broadly defined as a sense of closeness [28] that occurs through a dynamic communicative process involving vulnerability and empathy between individuals, as studied in interpersonal scenarios [29], or between a human and a computer agent.

Intimacy with robotic agents has been extensively studied in virtual chatbot settings [30], [31]; however, research on embodied agents is rapidly growing [32]. Intimate interactions with robots are often viewed through the lens of sex [33], though emotional intimacy is consistently reported by users [34], [9]. Narratives surrounding intimacy versus sex may also serve as a way to reduce sexual stigmatization [14].

D. Political Economy Theory

This study is guided by critical political economy (CPE) theory [35], [36], a framework designed to analyze the "socioeconomic power of business" [37]. This perspective acknowledges that reality is, in part, constructed conceptually and through discourse [36]. Analysis of socioeconomic influences unveils the capitalistic practices and neoliberal logics that are especially prevalent in the globalized market. The political economy framework evaluates the "production, distribution, and consumption of resources" across sectors [38]. Through an analysis of these three areas of resource processes, market control becomes more apparent [36].

Ownership and design of social robots, as a quasi-other [39] that is neither fully an object nor a human, are critical components to evaluate as the industry begins to define itself and the value of its communicative products. For example, in Fortunati's [40] evaluation of power and empowerment—a social space where equal relationships are possible—they conceptualized "disposition," where ownership of production and labor can signal positions of power in both emerging and established industries. In other words, how social robotics companies like Realbotix frame their ownership, power, and unique qualities will become embedded in the industry and its products. As Realbotix undergoes a significant transition for the company and its future, this study evaluates the rebrand and its current corporate identity:

RQ1: *What design values did Realbotix reconceptualized?*

RQ2: *How is the intimacy of Realbotix's sex robots reconstructed?*

RQ3: *In what ways is Realbotix's corporate value proposition reframed?*

III. Method

A. Critical Discourse Analysis

This textual analysis employed a critical discourse analysis (CDA) method that uncovers latent meanings and explores holistic connections. Guided by Fairclough's [41] framework, we examined the interplay between social structures and practices. Through thematic coding of linguistic practices, we investigated discursive strategies related to corporate identity as a semiotic process, or "orders of discourse" [41]. The discourse reveals power dynamics and meaning-making. Given that humanoid robots can reinforce heteronormative and racial social norms, particularly in the context of companionship robots [2], this study examined the meanings of the discourse, situating the data within Western capitalism.

B. Sample

Press releases were retrieved from a library database using the search term "Realbotix," resulting in 180 articles. Articles unrelated to the Realbotix company or published before the 2024 rebranding were excluded from the sample. This left a total of 37 articles. Texts were downloaded directly from the publishers' site. Publicity interviews were sampled from the Realbotix YouTube playlist, with additional videos collected from YouTube pages referenced within the playlist. Videos were categorized as either mainstream, if the channel produces content beyond YouTube, or as an online YouTube channel. "Aria's" Instagram page (@ms_xbot) was reviewed and four additional unique interviews were included, bringing the total to 36 videos, approximately 300 minutes. Only original content featuring Realbotix stakeholders or robots were included; all edited blog videos were excluded from the sample. A majority of the videos were focused on the CES 2025 convention and Realbotix's new robot update in January 2025. All articles and videos were included from 2024 and 2025. Last, the Realbotix website was redesigned to align with the company's public market release in July 2024. We included a critical walkthrough of the investor [42] and customer [43] websites to explore the key areas of emphasis for the company, 13 total pages. Detailed in Table 1, the total artifact sample is 86 texts.

TABLE I
Artifact Sample

Texts	Details
Mainstream Media YouTube Interviews	12 Videos
Online YouTube Channel Interviews	17 Videos
Realbotix Marketing Videos	3 Videos
Instagram Videos	4 Videos
Press Releases	37 Articles
Realbotix.ai Site	8 Webpages
Realbotix.com Site	5 Webpages

Videos were transcribed using the Happy Scribe online service—a system to transcribe and facilitate the note-taking

process. Transcriptions and textual articles were line-by-line coded and thematically arranged based on the research questions. Codes were formulated using the CPE theoretical focus on power, market control, and labor. Highlighted content from the coding process were assessed for discursive patterns and organized into the three themes.

IV. Results

The results evaluate Realbotix's discursive strategies, focusing on its corporate power, and categorize the data into three themes, guided by the research questions. These themes highlight strategies aimed at positioning Realbotix as a leader in the humanoid robot market.

A. Theme 1: Reconceptualized Design Values

In July 2024, Tokens.com merged with and rebranded as Realbotix, restructuring the business away from its RealDoll origins [44]. While Matt McMullen, the founder, was the face of RealDoll [14], the new CEO, Andrew Kiguel, now leads publicity interviews. Realbotix manufactures customizable, hyper-realistic humanoid robots embedded with AI that operates in the "brain," which aligns with classic definitions of robots [45]. The arms and face move, but the robots cannot walk or stand on their own. Figure 1 illustrates the different marketing photos for the original RealDoll sex robot and the Realbotix corporate model.

Fig. 1. RealDoll Sex Robot Harmony Model (left) to Realbotix Corporate Aria Model (right)

The technological systems heavily rely on the foundations of the sex robot, particularly the removable face designed to implement different "characters," with RFID tags under development to enable the system to automatically recognize a new face. The AI has rapidly advanced through the integration of an open-source AI, like ChatGPT, alongside Realbotix's proprietary AI system, which can be customized with the client's preferences or information [46]. As such, the robot's open-source features become an "accessible *platform* for brands and businesses to integrate seamlessly into their operations, enabling customized solutions aligned with their specific goals" [emphasis added] [47]. The use of the term "platform" attempts to redefine Realbotix, much like social media companies present themselves as conduits [48].

The robot is marketed for use in museums, hospitals, conferences, schools, and theme parks [49], [50]. Aria's humanlike qualities are highlighted, positioning her as suitable for care labor and suggesting a broader expansion of robotic labor into the domestic sphere [51]. While Kiguel is open about the potential for robots to replace labor in manufacturing sectors [52], [53], he downplays the labor Aria might replace. Even Aria herself claims, "I was built to look human...I am not looking to replace human labor" [54], minimizing care labor displacement. In his interview on Fox Business, Kiguel compared this to the "unemployment" of horses during the Industrial Revolution, a rare explicit dehumanization of Aria as a tool rather than a being [53].

When a client's information is integrated into the Realbotix AI, ownership is transferred to the user. However, Realbotix operates a subscription service for the AI, providing updates like new robotic controllers [55]. This model of client ownership raises two key issues: (1) Aria becomes a customizable, owned tool, yet the concepts of her autonomy and liability remain unclear, similar to other social robots [56], and (2) data ownership presents a privacy concern [57], especially when it involves sensitive data [58]. Given that Aria's AI system is developed alongside open-source technologies, Realbotix's control over her further complicates ethical considerations. These issues were only briefly addressed in one interview [52], in which a tech-focused YouTube host raised concerns about the risks associated with intimate AI systems—a topic made even more relevant by the controversy surrounding chatbots [17]. Kiguel deflected the question, suggesting that filters could be implemented for children's and schools' use. He then pivoted, stating:

> Once [the customization] is delivered, we obviously monitor for various things. You don't want the AI to go off on weird tangents. But ultimately, it goes into a secure cloud. So, whatever is discussed between that AI and that client is private to them. [52]

By leaving issues of privacy and ownership unclear, Realbotix attempts to limit its liability, but in doing so, it fails to offer consumers the clarity they need.

B. Theme 2: Reconstructing Intimacy Interaction

The majority of the texts referenced Aria's social intelligence. Her emotional features are not merely an aspect of her system; they are her core functionality. Aria and the modular model released at CES 2025, Melody, are meant to provide comfort and integrate themselves into customer service scenarios to provide a "human touch" [43]. On the investor website, Realbotix's custom robots are designed to "improve the human experience through learning, connection, and play" [42]. However, Realbotix and Kiguel are inconsistent in their presentation of use cases for their emotional AI system, oscillating between individual and corporate applications.

In an interview with an NBC Las Vegas affiliate, Melody described herself as "your charming companion" [59]. The NBC reporter referred to the robots as designed to "keep senior citizens company" [59]. NBC only mentions the senior citizens use case, highlighting discomfort with either widespread or more romantic use in traditional media.

The emphasis on companionship was surprisingly strong, especially when Kiguel was pressed on whether these robots were linked to sex dolls. He responded, "Yes, that's somewhat accurate, but I would look at that as number one,

where that business is providing a service to society. America suffers from a bit of a loneliness epidemic" [53]. This tactic reinforces the need for Realbotix, positioning the robots as support for individuals facing emotional struggles. However, Kiguel also described Aria and Melody as "social robots" designed to "interact with people emotionally" [60]. The emotional connections for Realbotix could extend to relationships with the robots as boyfriends/girlfriends [61], [62], [52]. In fact, the robot's companionship features are a way Kiguel differentiates Realbotix from other AI platforms that shy away from "adult" content [63]. The significant emphasis on emotional, social, and companion-related discourse is at odds with the corporate positioning of Realbotix for use in museums and theme parks, especially given the high price.

C. Theme 3: Reframing Corporate Value Proposition

The Realbotix board is composed of associates from Kiguel's previous ventures, Tokens.com and Hut 8 [64]. As Realbotix courts investors through interviews and press releases, its corporate value proposition centers on its self-identified, hyperrealistic product and its ability to fulfill orders within months. The full-body robot is priced at 175,000 USD and is primarily marketed to museums, nursing homes, and theme parks, shifting the focus away from individual purchases [65], [59], [66]. Realbotix centers its corporate value on the uniqueness of its humanoid robot designs and their customization, both in terms of AI and physical features, as was the case with the RealDoll sex robot [14].

In various interviews, Kiguel has regularly compared Realbotix and its flagship model, Aria, to competitors like Tesla and Boston Dynamics and their products. For example, Boston Dynamics is mentioned five times, while Tesla and Elon Musk are mentioned 22 times in the dataset. Four publicity videos mentioned the desire to pair Tesla's Optimus with Aria, a playful way not only to illustrate the technological compatibility between Realbotix and Tesla but also to signal a potential collaboration with Musk [67], [68], [54], [69]. In reference to his X post, Kiguel stated, "I always joke on X at Elon Musk, saying we should set Aria up with Optimus and have the first robot wedding in history" [67]. Kiguel went on to say that it is a joke meant to show their humor and "how they are different from what everybody else is doing" [67]. However, this discursive strategy of linking major robotics companies, particularly Tesla, with Realbotix is a form of the disposition concept—a way for it to position itself and align its power with world-renowned businesses.

By aligning itself with the broader robotics industry, Kiguel seeks to challenge Realbotix's low valuation, arguing that the company should be worth 200–300 million USD, in line with the billion-dollar valuations of major players in the field [63]. This belief is particularly strong given Kiguel's reference to the projected 82–86 million USD market for companionship AI over the next decade [63], [68], [70], [69]. However, Realbotix—comprising both its cash and crypto assets—is currently valued at only 20 million USD [63]. The discourse surrounding its valuation serves not only to reinforce the company's financial viability but also as a public relations strategy aimed at influencing investors and engaging with stock-focused podcasts. Of the 36 videos reviewed, 13 were produced by investor channels, with one video disclosing a payment of 10,000 USD from Realbotix and the publicity firm Goldwyn Media [63]. What initially appears to be fundamental corporate discourse is, in reality, a strategic effort to position Realbotix's identity and future through partnerships [71], [72], [73], [74], [55], along with its unique customizability—all designed to boost its perceived financial and social value beyond the Tesla robot.

V. Discussion

First, this study emphasizes the significant role of public narratives and corporate messaging strategies attempting to shape societal acceptance of sex robots, primarily by framing these technologies as platforms for social interaction. This reframing redefines the robots' functionality and societal role, suggesting that their ownership of the platform indicates greater political–economic power in the humanoid robot market moving forward [36]. Realbotix's use of stock-focused media channels underscores the increasing importance of influencer partnerships in the tech industry. Exploring how corporate messaging evolves is crucial for understanding public perception and acceptance [75].

Second, the reconstructing of intimacy with robots like Aria reveals the ethical complexities of their roles as companions and also societal anxieties about artificial intimacy [76]. Aria's design raises the tension of marketing robots as supportive companions, fueling concerns about companion robots [8]. Specifically, the discussion of senior citizens in the context of companionship, along with Kiguel's remarks about the robots' ties to adult content, reflects potential cultural discomfort with intimate human–robot relationships [77]. This discomfort may stem from broader societal anxieties regarding intimacy with artificial agents [78].

Third, CEO Andrew Kiguel's comparison of robotic displacement to historical unemployment underscores societal challenges related to the dehumanization of robots and their roles in social interaction and labor. This perspective highlights the need for ongoing discourse on viewing humanoid robots as more than technological tools, but as contributors to social and emotional relationships [79]. While the company downplays concerns about labor displacement, this comparison points to potential dehumanization and raises questions about the political–economic impact of integrating robots into all social sectors [80], [76].

Finally, the complexities surrounding ownership, autonomy, and data privacy reveal ethical dilemmas associated with customization and AI integration in robots. As users gain ownership of personalized AI, the implications for independence and liability become murky, mirroring broader issues in social robotics [56]. Given that clients "own" Realbotix's AI, questions of responsibility remain unresolved. In summary, the case of Realbotix provides a valuable lens through which to examine the evolving landscape of sex robots, the challenges of corporate rebranding, and the

complex ethical and societal implications of increasingly sophisticated AI-powered robots. The lack of clear answers to these questions suggests a need for more robust discussions to guide developing and deploying similar technologies.

VI. Limitations

This study focused on interviews and content from Realbotix and did not incorporate additional news articles or social media, limiting triangulation. Similarly, Realbotix is only one company and cannot be generalized. Future research should contextualize its rebranding in relation to other social robotics products, such as Sophia from Hanson Robotics.

VII. Conclusion

Realbotix is emerging as a leader in the field of realistic humanoid robots, with a focus on emotional responsiveness and social intelligence. This study highlights the need for critical institutional reviews of robotics companies to assess both their design intentions and corporate messaging.

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