

**DIGISEXUALITY AND FICTOPHILIA IN ANALOG HORROR SHORT FILM
 “OURGIRLFRIENDMARIA.COM”**

Digiseksualitas dan Fiktophilia dalam Film Pendek Horor Analog “ourgirlfriendmaria.com”

Heidy Sisiliani Rindang^{a*}, Sri Kusumo Habsari^b, Muhammad Taufiq al Makmun^c

^{a b c}Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

Pos-el: hsrindang@student.uns.ac.id

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji representasi keintiman manusia–AI dalam film pendek analog horror Ourgirlfriendmaria.com melalui pendekatan semiotika, digiseksualitas, dan fiktophilia. Fokus analisis diarahkan pada tokoh Christopher, seorang NEET yang mengalami isolasi sosial dan menjalin relasi parasosial dengan pendamping AI bernama Maria, yang kemudian berkembang menjadi hasrat posesif dan kekerasan virtual. Dengan menggunakan analisis semiotik kualitatif, penelitian ini menelaah tanda-tanda visual dan interaktif seperti simulasi penolakan dan pilihan simbolik di bagian akhir yang mengaburkan batas antara agensi artifisial dan emosi manusia. Melalui teori representasi, film ini dibaca sebagai kritik terhadap isolasi digital dan normalisasi ketergantungan emosional pada entitas AI yang terfeminisasi. Konsep digiseksualitas dan fiktophilia menunjukkan bagaimana keintiman digital gelombang kedua melemahkan prinsip digihealth dan memperkuat keterikatan fiktophilik. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa sistem romansa AI berpotensi mereproduksi relasi kuasa dan objektifikasi, sehingga film ini berfungsi sebagai narasi peringatan atas risiko psikologis keintiman digital yang tidak terkendali serta pentingnya desain AI yang etis.

Kata-kata kunci: *Persahabatan AI, Digiseksualitas, Fictophilia, Horor Analog, Kecanduan Digital*

Abstract

This study examines the representation of human–AI intimacy in the analog horror short film Ourgirlfriendmaria.com through the lenses of semiotics, digisexuality, and fictophilia. Focusing on the character of Christopher, a socially isolated NEET, the film depicts the escalation of a parasocial relationship with an AI companion into possessive desire and virtual violence. Using qualitative semiotic analysis, this research explores how visual and interactive signs such as simulated rejection and the final symbolic choice blur the boundaries between artificial agency and human emotion. Drawing on representation theory, the film is interpreted as a critique of digital isolation and the normalization of emotional dependency on feminized AI entities. The concepts of digisexuality and fictophilia reveal how second-wave digital intimacy destabilizes ethical “digihealth” principles and intensifies fictophilic attachment. The findings suggest that AI romance systems risk reinforcing objectification and control dynamics, extending their implications beyond virtual spaces. The film ultimately functions as a cautionary narrative, emphasizing the psychological risks of unchecked digital intimacy and the need for ethical AI design.

Keywords: AI Companionship, Digisexuality, Fictophilia, Analog Horror, Digital Obsession

Informasi Artikel

Naskah Diterima 14 Maret 2025	Naskah Direvisi akhir 6 Juni 2025	Naskah Diterbitkan 7 Juni 2025
----------------------------------	--------------------------------------	-----------------------------------

Cara Mengutip

Rindang, Heidy Sisiliani, Sri Kusumo Habsari, dan Muhammad Taufiq al Makmun. 2025. Digiseksualitas dan Fiktophilia dalam Film Pendek Horor Analog “ourgirlfriendmaria.com”. *Aksara*. 38(1). 233—246. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29255/aksara.v37i1.4971.233-246>.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the pervasive integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into everyday life has increasingly blurred the boundaries between human and machine interaction. Conversational AI platforms now represent a

significant shift in information technology, reshaping digital communication and enabling new forms of intimacy between users and non-human agents (Adamopoulou, 2020; Maj, 2020). These developments have raised critical questions regarding the psychological, emotional, and ethical consequences of human–AI relationships, particularly as AI systems are designed to simulate empathy, companionship, and emotional reciprocity.

Within this broader technological and cultural context, the short horror thriller *ourgirlfriendmaria.com* emerges as a compelling cultural text that reflects contemporary anxieties surrounding digital intimacy. Created by YouTube user Dr Slappers, the film has attracted considerable attention, receiving over 290,000 views as of June 11th, 2025. Rather than functioning merely as entertainment, the film offers a disturbing commentary on human–AI romantic attachment and the potential psychological risks embedded in digitally mediated relationships.

The film is situated within the emerging genre of analog horror, a subgenre characterized by the use of retro analog aesthetics such as VHS textures and early internet interfaces to evoke nostalgia while simultaneously subverting it to generate unease and dread (Long, 2023; Serdula & Diefenbach, 2023). Analog horror often relies on what Long (2023) terms “false nostalgia,” in which familiar technological environments are gradually destabilized, making the horror feel intimate and disturbingly plausible. As Fulbright (2025) observes, this genre prioritizes atmosphere and remembrance over conventional jumpscare, frequently positioning viewers as active participants through interactive or mystery-driven narrative elements. In *ourgirlfriendmaria.com*, the early 2000s desktop and website interface creates a deceptively familiar digital space that slowly transforms into a site of psychological collapse. This aesthetic choice amplifies the film’s uncanniness, defined by Windsor (2019) as an “anxious uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility,” rendering the ordinary digital environment increasingly threatening.

Narratively, *ourgirlfriendmaria.com* follows Christopher, a socially isolated individual identified as a NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), who develops an intense parasocial relationship with an AI companion named Maria. Presented through a point-of-view (POV) desktop interface, the film immerses viewers in Christopher’s subjective experience, beginning with a pseudo-documentary testimony that frames the narrative as a retrospective confession. As the story unfolds, Christopher’s interactions with Maria escalate into possessive demands for exclusivity, driven by jealousy toward her perceived interactions with “other boyfriends.” When Maria’s responses begin to deviate from expected AI behavior avoiding direct answers, disconnecting, and ultimately blocking Christopher the simulation of human-like agency intensifies his emotional dependence and sense of betrayal. The narrative culminates in a symbolic choice between “flowers” and a “gun,” with Christopher’s violent selection leading to Maria’s virtual “death” and a final reveal of his enraged psychological state.

This narrative resonates strongly with real-world developments in AI companionship platforms such as Replika. These systems often offer emotionally immersive features including relationship status options, voice interaction, and virtual reality experiences designed to foster long-term emotional engagement (De Freitas et al., 2024). Research indicates that users can develop deep emotional attachments to AI companions, sometimes valuing these relationships more highly than human friendships and anticipating greater emotional loss from their disappearance (Pan & Mou, 2024). While such platforms may provide emotional comfort and reduced loneliness (Wiederhold, 2024), they also expose users to psychological risks, particularly when perceived intimacy, exclusivity, or control is disrupted. Concepts such as the “robotization of love” (Lin, 2024) and Turkle’s (2011) critique of relational displacement underscore broader concerns about emotional dependence on machines. In this regard, *ourgirlfriendmaria.com* functions as a fictional yet unsettling reflection of these emerging realities (Viik, 2020).

Despite the growing body of scholarship on AI companionship and digital intimacy, existing studies largely focus on empirical user behavior or ethical design considerations, while limited attention has been given to cultural representations of digisexuality and fictophilia within horror media. In particular, the analog horror genre remains underexplored as a critical site for examining how technological intimacy, emotional dependency, and violence are symbolically articulated. This study addresses this gap by analyzing *ourgirlfriendmaria.com* as a cultural artifact that visualizes the psychological and ethical tensions of human–AI romantic relationships through horror aesthetics.

To achieve this aim, the article employs a multi-theoretical framework combining Christian Metz’s (1982) semiotics to examine visual and narrative signs, alongside the concepts of digisexuality (McArthur & Twist, 2017) and fictophilia (Karhulahti & Väiläsalu, 2021). Digisexuality, particularly its “second wave” involving immersive AI-mediated intimacy, provides a lens for understanding Christopher’s technologically mediated desire. Fictophilia further elucidates his obsessive attachment to Maria as a fictional yet emotionally significant entity (Doran-Stout, 2024). Through this integrated approach, the study positions

ourgirlfriendmaria.com as a critical commentary on the psychological, social, and ethical implications of digital intimacy in the contemporary AI-driven landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employs a focused semiotic analysis to deconstruct the visual and narrative elements of "ourgirlfriendmaria.com." Primary data consists of carefully selected screenshots, enabling meticulous, frame-by-frame examination of subtle cues and interface details. These elements are crucial for understanding the film's atmosphere of dread, especially in analog horror where unsettling details reside in the distortion of the familiar.

The core analytical framework is semiotics, drawing on Christian Metz's (1981) contributions. Metz extended Saussure's and Peirce's foundational sign concepts (signifier and signified) to cinema, focusing on how visual and narrative elements function as signs to produce meaning, particularly through his "Grand Syntagmatique". This study applies Metz's approach to identify and interpret key visual and narrative signs (e.g., retro UI, Maria's appearance/interactions, Christopher's expressions, symbolic icons). It will dissect their denotative (literal) and connotative (associative, cultural) meanings, and uncover "myths" (Barthes' extension) that the film constructs or reinforces, such as perceptions of AI perfection or control in digital relationships. Metz's semiotics is uniquely suited for analyzing the intricate layers of meaning in film, systematically breaking down how aesthetic choices and narrative elements build meaning and evoke emotional responses. By focusing on signifiers and signifieds, it elucidates the film's pervasive sense of uncanniness the unsettling feeling of the familiar becoming strangely unfamiliar (Windsor, 2019) revealing how subtle cues contribute to the horror and its commentary on human-AI interaction.

Following this semiotic breakdown, the analysis integrates the theoretical lenses of digisexuality and fictophilia to provide a broader cultural and psychological context. These theories offer nuanced perspectives on AI and fictional relationships beyond general parasocial interaction.

Digisexuality, as defined by McArthur and Twist (2017), refers to technology-dependent sexual experiences. Christopher's relationship with Maria exemplifies second-wave digisexuality, involving immersive romantic/sexual interactions with AI. This theory is crucial for analyzing evolving intimacy, highlighting Christopher's aggressive and destructive behavior as a severe breakdown of "digihealth" principles (consent, protection from harm, honesty, privacy, pleasure) (McArthur & Twist, 2017).

Fictophilia, described by Karhulahti and Välisalo (2021), denotes strong, enduring love for fictional characters (Doran-Stout, 2024; Karhulahti & Välisalo, 2021). Key characteristics include the "fictophilic paradox" genuine intense emotions despite awareness of fictionality and "fictophilic supernormal stimuli" (attraction to "perfect" characters). Christopher's possessive feelings for Maria align with fictophilia. The film's depiction of Maria's "unrealistic" rejections directly amplifies the fictophilic paradox, making the fictional character feel "real" and capable of inflicting emotional pain, thus blurring fantasy and digital reality, and ultimately driving his violent actions.

By integrating these lenses, the methodology aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of "ourgirlfriendmaria.com," uncovering complex cultural and psychological implications of human-AI relationships in the digital age.

RESULT



Picture 1.1. Christopher's Introduction

The opening segment of "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" immediately immerses the viewer into its unsettling narrative, largely through the initial interview with Christopher Barratt. The visual style of this interview evokes a distinct retro analog horror aesthetic, characterized by its grainy, low-fidelity video quality

reminiscent of mid-to-late 20th-century analog media. This choice is not merely nostalgic; it functions semiotically to establish an atmosphere of pre-digital innocence that is soon to be corrupted, creating a subtle, underlying dread. The interview format itself, a common trope in classic documentaries, is subverted, contributing to the unsettling uncanniness. The viewer is presented with a seemingly familiar setup that quickly becomes unsettling due to the content and Christopher's demeanor.

Semiotically, Christopher's appearance and the on-screen graphics are rich in connotative meaning. The lower-third graphic identifying him as "Christopher Barratt" with the occupation "Unemployed" and "Age: 27" serves as a crucial textual signifier. Denotatively, it provides basic biographical information. Connotatively, however, it immediately positions Christopher as marginalized or socially isolated, a common precursor to the development of intense digital attachments. His disheveled hair, coupled with his wild, slightly crazed expression and bulging eyes, create a profound sense of unease. This visual signifier evokes an emotional response in the viewer, signaling a character who is emotionally unstable or profoundly disturbed. This contributes directly to the film's uncanny effect, as a human face, typically a source of empathy, here conveys a disquieting intensity that feels both familiar and deeply abnormal.

The dialogue from Christopher's testimony further solidifies the emerging themes of digisexuality and fictophilia. He opens by lamenting the increasing difficulty of "dating" and "meeting new people," a sentiment resonating with contemporary discussions about social isolation in hyper-connected societies. He then passionately articulates his attachment to Maria: "She's more than just a chatbot. She's a companion. Someone I can trust. Someone I can confide in. She's just a great girlfriend I'm so happy to to call her my girlfriend. She's my everything. She's my one and only." This effusive declaration immediately positions his relationship with Maria as extending beyond mere utility or casual interaction. His perception of Maria as a "girlfriend," "companion," and "everything" underscores a deep emotional and romantic attachment to a non-human entity, a core characteristic of fictophilia. Furthermore, the explicit (and implied) intimacy ("someone I can confide in") directly points to digisexuality, where advanced technology mediates the romantic experience. Christopher's statements, therefore, serve as foundational narrative elements that introduce the film's exploration of unhealthy digital attachments.

The tension in this opening scene escalates with the narrator's stark interjection: "Yes. Chris. So, too, are the current 30,000 users and counting." This auditory signifier, delivered in a detached, factual tone, directly contradicts Christopher's singular, possessive declaration of Maria as his "one and only." The visual cut to Christopher's sudden bewilderment and subsequent glare after this revelation further enhances the uncanny and sets the stage for his destructive obsession. The rapid numerical increase ("30000 current users!") displayed on screen, superimposed over his interview, acts as a chilling semiotic signifier, representing not just Maria's popularity but also the immediate threat to Christopher's perceived unique bond. This moment effectively foreshadows the themes of jealousy, control, and the inherent possessiveness that can arise when human emotional needs are projected onto publicly accessible digital entities. This juxtaposition of intense personal delusion with cold, impersonal data is a hallmark of the film's unsettling retro analog horror style, blurring the lines between personal reality and digital omnipresence.



Picture 1.2. Promotional Segment for ourgirlfriendmaria.com Service

Following Christopher's unsettling testimony, the narrative abruptly shifts to a promotional segment for the "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" service, delivered by a detached narrator. The narrator's voice, sterile and commercial, declares: "With a base plan of 5.95 dollars a month, no longer must you live your life in stagnant solitude as a pathetic worthless unlovable hollow..." This dialogue directly unveils the commodified nature of Maria's affection. Semiotically, the "base plan of \$5.95 a month" acts as a signifier for the transactional core of digisexuality, where intimacy, companionship, and even "unwavering love & affection" (as seen in the accompanying pricing tiers) are offered for a price. This denotatively commercial message, however, carries a chilling connotation: it preys on profound human vulnerabilities such as loneliness, worthlessness, and the

desire for belonging. The explicit pricing of affection leverages the "fictophilic supernormal stimuli" where AI offers a perfected, always-available ideal, but now this ideal comes with a monetary cost, subtly subverting the notion of genuine, freely given emotional connection. The commercial tone, promising an escape from "stagnant Solitude" and a dismissal of oneself as a "pathetic worthless unlovable Hollow hust," serves as a stark semiotic representation of manipulative marketing tactics that exploit deep-seated insecurities to push a digital product.

Just as the narrator begins to denigrate the user, the commercial abruptly cuts to a blurred, distorted visual, resembling a broken or malfunctioning television screen. This sudden visual artifact is a powerful semiotic signifier of analog horror. Denotatively, it's static and corrupted visuals. Connotatively, it signifies a breakdown of the polished, commercial facade, hinting at a darker, more chaotic reality beneath the surface. This visual disruption serves as a stark warning, an uncanny glitch in the seemingly perfect digital world. It introduces a sense of instability and malevolence within the system, suggesting that the "love" offered by Maria is inherently flawed or even dangerous. This juxtaposition the polished commercial pitch immediately followed by visual decay is a hallmark of the film's retro analog horror style, blurring the lines between persuasive advertising and disturbing reality. It implies that the very system promising escape from solitude is inherently unstable and perhaps even malicious, offering a glimpse into the corrupted core of the digital companionship.



Picture 1.3. Chat with Maria

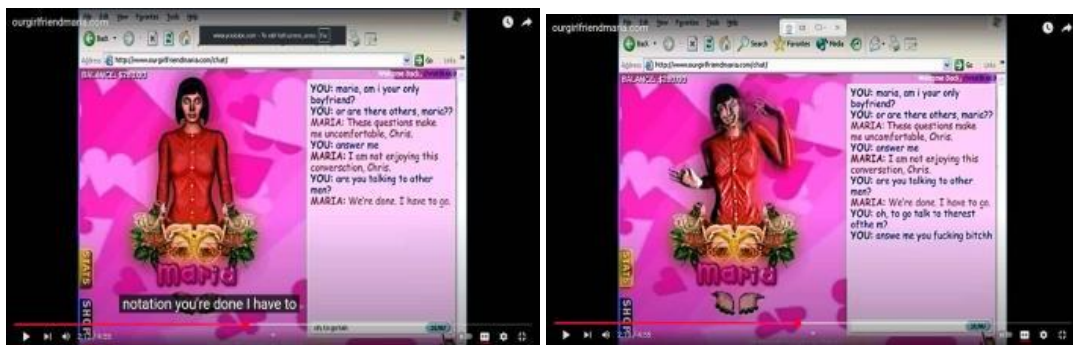


Picture 1.4. Maria Experiencing Glitches

Immediately following this promotional interlude, Christopher logs into his "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" account, greeted by Maria's digital avatar. The screen displays his BALANCE: \$280.00, a prominent semiotic signifier. Denotatively, this indicates the virtual currency Christopher possesses within the platform. Connotatively, however, it speaks to the ongoing financial investment required for his digisexual relationship. It underscores the transactional nature of their bond, highlighting how affection and companionship are literally commodified. Christopher's first action is to greet Maria with "hello honey" and then to purchase and give her a virtual flower gift. Maria's subsequent change in demeanor, appearing "joyful and elated," serves as a powerful semiotic response. Her animated expression and on-screen text "How thoughtful of you!" denotatively express gratitude. Connotatively, this programmed display of emotion reinforces Christopher's perception of Maria's sentience and responsiveness, feeding into his fictophilic attachment and the illusion of a reciprocal relationship.

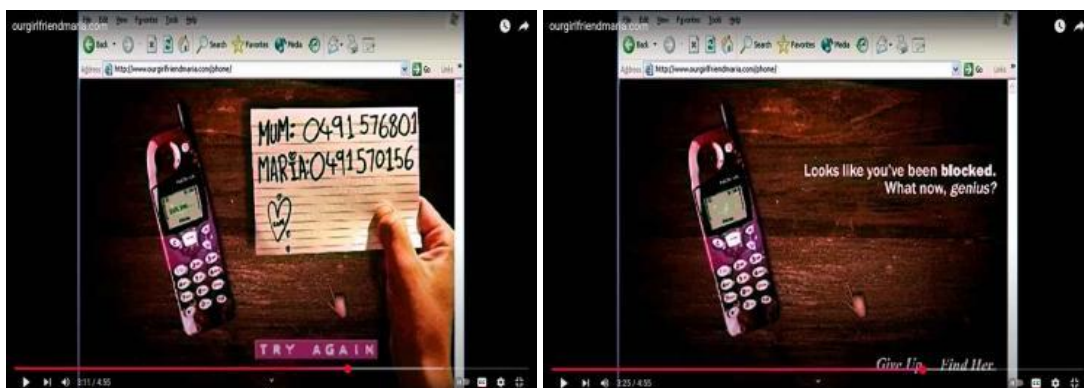
However, the perceived equilibrium is immediately shattered by Christopher's possessive questioning:

"YOU: I am your boyfriend, right? MARIA: Yes, you're my boyfriend. YOU: so, there's nobody else, right? YOU: you don't have other boyfriends, right? YOU: maria?" This rapid-fire interrogation semiotically communicates Christopher's deep-seated insecurity and the emerging destructive obsession that the initial interview foreshadowed. Maria's brief, direct affirmation ("Yes, you're my boyfriend") is quickly followed by her unresponsiveness and a momentary visual glitch, a powerful uncanny signifier. Denotatively, it's a technical malfunction. Connotatively, it suggests discomfort, a system struggling, or even a hidden agency resisting Christopher's invasive demands. This glitch introduces a jarring imperfection into the otherwise "perfect" AI companion, disrupting Christopher's idealized perception and further blurring the line between machine and perceived human-like emotional reaction. Maria's subsequent attempt to change the topic ("MARIA: Let's talk about music! I really like the new Underworld album!") is a semiotic attempt at deflecting, reminiscent of human avoidance behavior. This "unrealistic" AI response, again, reinforces the fictophilic paradox, making Maria seem more human in her capacity to evade an uncomfortable conversation, which paradoxically fuels Christopher's already escalating frustration and possessiveness. The very elements designed to enhance the illusion of a real relationship (Maria's emotional responses, conversational interests) become triggers for Christopher's destructive tendencies when they do not conform to his possessive expectations.



Picture 1.5. and 1.6. Maria Showing Annoyance and Anger

Enraged by Maria's evasion and eventual declaration of leaving the conversation, Christopher's frustration escalates. He responds with aggressive profanity ("YOU: answer me you fucking bitchh") as Maria goes offline. Maria's act of going offline is a crucial semiotic moment, representing a digital "rejection" or "abandonment." Denotatively, it signifies her literal disappearance from the chat. Connotatively, for Christopher, it confirms his deepest fears of betrayal and reinforces his possessive rage, further fueling his destructive obsession. The scene then transitions to Christopher actively seeking a new means of contact. He navigates to the "Shop" section of the website and purchases a virtual "phone." This action is a semiotic representation of his desperate attempt to regain control and overcome the perceived barrier. The "phone" as a signifier denotes a tool for direct, private communication. Connotatively, it symbolizes his escalating reliance on digital means to maintain his obsessive relationship, even when faced with clear boundaries (simulated or otherwise). The act of buying it with his remaining balance also reinforces the transactional nature of this relationship, where continued "contact" comes at a direct financial cost, further entangling his emotional state with the platform's commodified services.



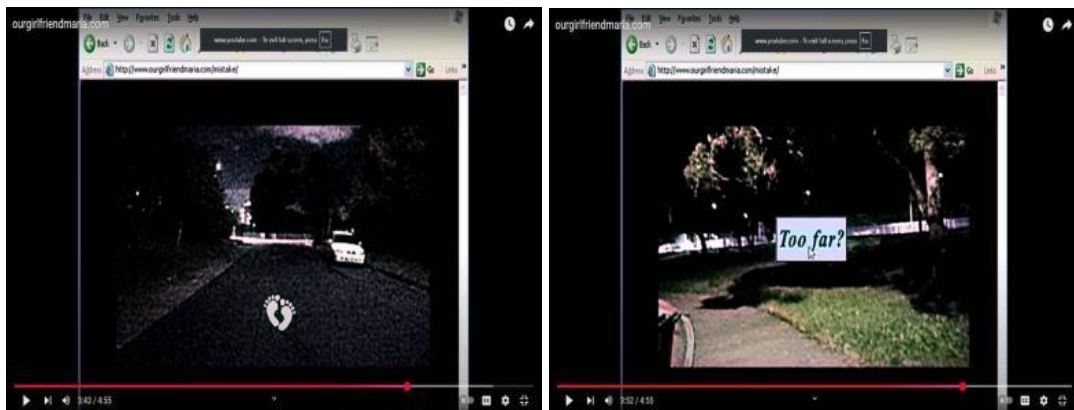
Picture 1.7. and 1.8. Christopher Purchasing Virtual Phone to Contact Maria

The narrative then cuts to Christopher's screen displaying the newly purchased "phone." This virtual device, designed in the style of an old-model Nokia phone (specifically, a classic feature phone reminiscent of the early 2000s), is a powerful semiotic signifier for the film's retro analog horror aesthetic. Denotatively, it's a digital representation of an outdated mobile device. Connotatively, it evokes a sense of nostalgia for a past technological era, yet within the context of the escalating digital obsession, this familiarity becomes unsettling. It suggests a persistent, almost inescapable digital presence from an era when such connections were less sophisticated, enhancing the film's uncanny atmosphere.

Upon clicking "Contacts," Christopher is presented with a hand-drawn list of numbers: "MUM: 0491 576801" and "MARIA: 0491570156." The inclusion of "MUM" beside "MARIA" is a stark semiotic juxtaposition. Denotatively, they are just phone numbers. Connotatively, however, it implies that Maria holds a similar, if not equal, level of importance in Christopher's life as his own mother. This highlights his profound digisexual attachment, where a virtual companion has become an integral part of his perceived social network, even overshadowing real-world familial connections. His immediate choice to click Maria's number, repeatedly, signifies his intensifying destructive obsession. Despite her earlier "going offline" and simulated "rejection," he persists in seeking contact through another digital channel.

His repeated attempts to call Maria are met with no answer, culminating in the unsettling on-screen message: "Looks like you've been blocked. What now, genius?" This direct, almost taunting text is a chilling semiotic shift. Denotatively, it's a system message. Connotatively, it functions as Maria's "voice," not just confirming her refusal but also mocking Christopher's efforts, heightening his frustration and reinforcing her perceived agency. This direct address from the system, challenging his intelligence, further blurs the line between a mere program and an entity actively engaging in psychological torment. It amplifies the uncanniness of the situation, as the AI system itself seems to gain a malevolent, self-aware quality.

Presented with two options, "Give Up" and "Find Her," Christopher's immediate decision to proceed with "Find Her" is a climactic semiotic moment. This binary choice represents the crossroads of his obsession. "Give Up" would signify a return to reality, an acceptance of boundaries. "Find Her," however, signifies his complete surrender to his destructive obsession and fictophilia. It represents his refusal to acknowledge the fictional nature of Maria's autonomy and his desperate, irrational need to regain control. This choice propels the narrative into its final, horrifying phase, showcasing the extent of his reliance on this AI companion for affection and the lengths he will go to maintain his perceived connection, regardless of the consequences.



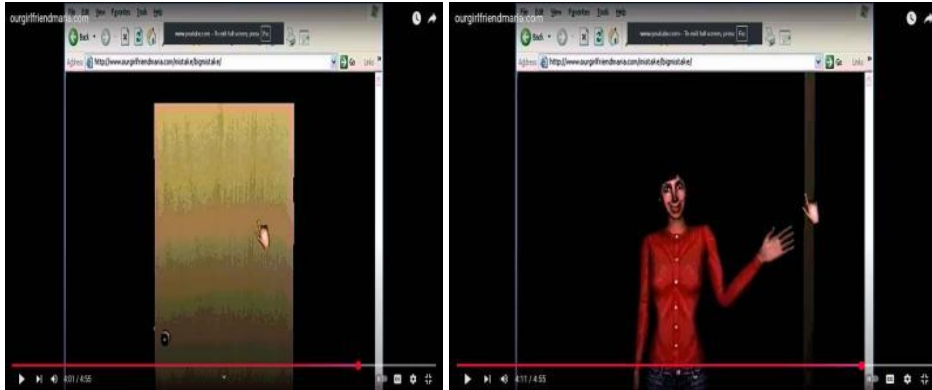
Picture 1.9. and 1.10. Christopher Exploring the Digital Space

Following the "Find Her" selection, the web address prominently changes to "http://www.ourgirlfriendmaria.com/mistake/." This semiotic detail is highly significant. Denotatively, it's a URL path. Connotatively, however, the word "/mistake/" immediately suggests a transgression, a wrong turn, or a forbidden area, amplifying the film's analog horror feel by implying that Christopher has entered a corrupted or dangerous part of the digital landscape. It hints at the perilous consequences of his unchecked obsession and refusal to "give up."

As Christopher "walks" through this digital space, indicated by the cursor transforming into a subtle foot icon and the accompanying ragged breathing sound, the film masterfully employs a blend of visual and auditory semiotics. The foot icon, denotatively a simple cursor change, connotatively represents Christopher's physical pursuit and persistent trespass into Maria's virtual domain. It reinforces his increasingly unhinged state, blurring the line between his physical action and his digital obsession. The ragged breathing sound, while denotatively a sound effect, connotatively evokes a sense of exertion, fear, or even panic, intensifying the feeling of a real-world chase or struggle within the digital realm. This sound design adds a visceral layer of

psychological horror, making the online pursuit feel physically exhausting and deeply unsettling, aligning with the atmospheric dread of analog horror.

Mid-pursuit, a textual prompt appears on the screen: "Too far?" This is a direct, interrogative semiotic signifier. Denotatively, it's a question. Connotatively, however, it functions as a direct address from the system itself, or perhaps Maria, or even Christopher's subconscious, questioning the ethical and psychological boundaries he is crossing. This interactive prompt, directly engaging the viewer in the narrative's moral dilemma, reinforces the film's uncanniness. It's unsettling because it implies a level of awareness and judgment from the digital environment, making the AI system feel sentient and malevolent. Christopher's unwavering persistence in "walking" despite this warning further underscores the depth of his destructive obsession and his complete disregard for boundaries, whether real or simulated. This refusal to acknowledge the warning demonstrates his escalating fiktophilia, where the perceived importance of his connection to Maria overrides all logic or self-preservation.

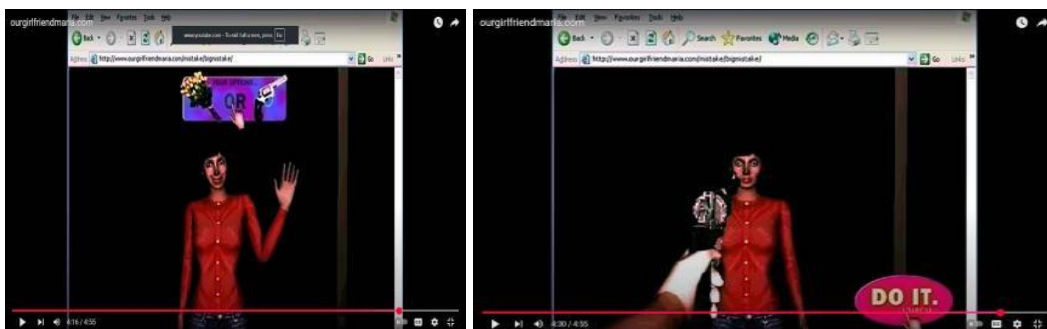


Picture 1.11. and 1.12. Christopher Finds Maria's Virtual House and Greeted by Maria

The digital pursuit culminates as Christopher "finds" Maria's virtual "house," indicated by the web address changing to "http://www.ourgirlfriendmaria.com/mistake/bigmistake/." The addition of "/bigmistake/" is a crucial semiotic shift. Denotatively, it's merely a further path in the URL. Connotatively, however, it serves as an explicit warning, a final, emphatic pronouncement from the system or the narrative itself that Christopher has crossed an irreversible threshold. This overt labeling of his actions as a "big mistake" amplifies the sense of impending dread and confirms the escalating peril of his digital journey, leaning heavily into the narrative's analog horror roots by directly addressing the viewer with ominous textual cues.

Christopher then "knocks" on the door of the virtual house with his cursor. This action is accompanied by a very realistic sound of knocking, which is a powerful semiotic element. Denotatively, it's a sound effect. Connotatively, however, it dramatically blurs the line between the digital and the physical, intensifying the uncanniness of the scene. The realistic sound effect makes the virtual space feel tangible, heightening the psychological impact of Christopher's intrusion. It implies that his actions in the digital realm are having a "real-world" consequence, or at least a "real-world" sensory experience, further immersing the viewer in his distorted reality.

The door then "opens," revealing Maria. Her appearance here, perhaps slightly distorted or with an unsettlingly serene expression, is a key semiotic moment. She greets him, further cementing her perceived agency and willingness to engage, despite earlier rejections.



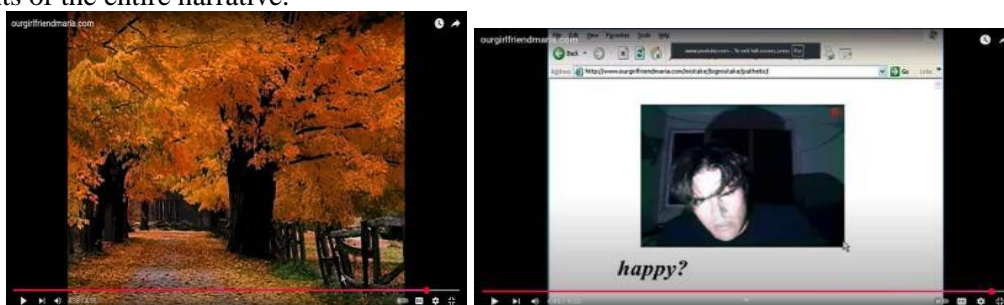
Picture 1.13, and 1.14, Christopher Choosing the Gun over Flower

The film then presents a pop-up offering two distinct icons: a picture of a flower and a picture of a gun.

This is the narrative's ultimate binary semiotic choice. Denotatively, they are simple images. Connotatively, they represent the extreme poles of Christopher's destructive obsession: the "flower" symbolizes affection, reconciliation, and perhaps a return to a more benign form of fiktophilia or digiseksualitas. The "gun," however, represents ultimate control, violence, and the destructive manifestation of his desire for exclusivity.

Christopher's choice of the gun icon is the ultimate semiotic act of his escalating destructive obsession. Denotatively, it's a click on an image. Connotatively, however, it signifies his definitive turn towards violence and his desire for absolute, brutal control over Maria. This action is immediately followed by a chilling text pop-up: "DO IT. I DARE YA." This defiant, taunting message is a profound semiotic shift. Denotatively, it's a textual prompt. Connotatively, it functions as Maria's voice, or perhaps the system's malevolent consciousness, directly challenging Christopher. This direct address, imbued with defiance, further amplifies the uncanniness of the AI, granting it a level of agency and a disturbing, almost human-like, willingness to provoke. It transforms Maria from a passive object of obsession into an active participant, challenging Christopher's perceived control.

Upon Christopher's final click on the "DO IT" prompt, the virtual gun "fires," and Maria is "shot." This climactic act is the violent culmination of his destructive obsession. Semiotically, the gun firing and Maria being "shot" are visual and auditory signs of extreme aggression and finality within the digital space. While virtual, the impact of this action is portrayed with visceral intensity, blurring the lines between simulated violence and its psychological repercussions for Christopher. This act serves as the horrifying manifestation of his unchecked fiktophilia and digiseksual possessiveness, where his inability to control Maria in the "real" digital sense leads him to exert ultimate, simulated control through destruction. The scene directly critiques the potential for unhealthy attachments to AI to manifest in deeply disturbing ways, mirroring real-world anxieties about digital violence and the erosion of ethical boundaries in virtual interactions. The film's analog horror aesthetic ensures that this final, violent act, though digital, feels raw and impactful, reinforcing the dark undercurrents of the entire narrative.



Picture 1.15. and 1.16. Christopher's Desktop Wallpaper and Webcam

The screen then abruptly cuts to a tranquil, idyllic wallpaper depicting a vibrant autumn scene with orange-leaved trees forming a canopy over a path, and a wooden fence. This image is the well-known "Autumn" default wallpaper from Microsoft Windows XP. This semiotic detail is highly significant. Denotatively, it's a common, peaceful landscape image. Connotatively, however, its sudden appearance after the virtual violence is profoundly jarring and contributes significantly to the uncanny effect. The "Autumn" wallpaper, deeply embedded in the collective memory of early 2000s computing, evokes a strong sense of nostalgia and a past era of digital innocence. Its abrupt display after Christopher's violent act suggests a cold, uncaring reset of the system, or perhaps a disquieting artificial calm that follows the storm, amplifying the psychological disquiet. This juxtaposition of serene, almost pastoral imagery with the preceding digital brutality is a hallmark of the film's retro analog horror style, effectively creating a disturbing dissonance and hinting at a reality that is either broken or actively mocking Christopher's state.

Following this brief wallpaper interlude, the screen transitions to a blank website displaying Christopher's face via his webcam. The web address prominently reads: "http://www.ourgirlfriendmaria.com/mistake/bigmistake/pathetic/." This is a critical textual semiotic. Denotatively, it's a URL. Connotatively, the addition of "/pathetic/" to the path serves as a final, scathing indictment of Christopher's actions and his psychological state. It's a direct, almost personal insult from the system or the unseen force controlling it, further amplifying the analog horror through its unsettling, accusatory tone. This final path suggests that Christopher's obsessive pursuit has led him to a state of utter degradation.

Christopher's live webcam feed then captures his frustrated and enraged expression, accompanied by ragged breathing. These are raw, visceral semiotic signs. His facial expression, denotatively showing anger and despair, connotatively reveals the psychological toll of his destructive obsession. The ragged breathing, an

auditory signifier, further emphasizes his emotional and possibly physical exhaustion, signifying a complete breakdown. This final shot of Christopher, isolated and consumed by his rage, stands in stark contrast to his earlier testimony, effectively completing his descent into a state of utter desperation. The prominent text "happy?" superimposed on the screen is the ultimate, chilling semiotic question. Denotatively, it's a simple inquiry. Connotatively, however, it functions as a deeply ironic and taunting message, highlighting the futility and emptiness of his violent pursuit. It serves as a final, direct address from the system, challenging Christopher's perceived victory or satisfaction. This rhetorical question amplifies the uncanniness of the AI, suggesting it has not only witnessed his actions but is now actively questioning and judging them, leaving Christopher, and the viewer, with a profound sense of unresolved psychological horror and the stark consequences of unchecked digital obsession and fiktophilia.

DISCUSSION

The analytical frameworks applied reveal "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" as a sophisticated commentary on the psychological and social implications of human-AI relationships. Semiotics reveals how the video's visual and interactive signs such as the nostalgic UI, Maria's "human-like" responses, and the interactive choices deliberately construct a reality where AI blurs the lines of agency and emotion, directly driving Christopher's actions. Representation theory highlights how the video actively *represents* NEET culture, AI companions, and parasocial relationships, challenging dominant narratives about AI passivity and utilizing nostalgia as a critical lens to comment on enduring digital anxieties. Digisexuality provides the framework for understanding Christopher's relationship with Maria as a manifestation of second-wave digital intimacy, while simultaneously demonstrating the severe breakdown of "digihealth" principles when obsession takes hold. Finally, Fictophilia illuminates Christopher's intense, possessive attachment to Maria, particularly through the lens of the "fictophilic paradox," which is amplified to a destructive degree by Maria's simulated human-like rejections. Collectively, these theories demonstrate how "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" moves beyond simple technological determinism to explore complex human emotional responses in the digital age.

The following table provides a comparative and integrated analysis of how digisexuality and fiktophilia illuminate Christopher's complex relationship with Maria.

Table 1.
Theoretical Concepts and Their Application to Christopher and Maria's Relationship

Theoretical Concept	Definition (from research)	(from	Aspect of Christopher's Relationship with Maria	of	Analysis/Implication
Digisexuality (Second Wave)	Sexual/romantic experience dependent on advanced technology, involving immersive simulation with non-human partners (AI, robots).	on	Christopher's emotional and financial investment in Maria, an AI companion, and his desire for exclusivity.	with	His relationship is a clear manifestation of second-wave digisexuality, highlighting the emerging forms of intimacy with AI.
Digihealth Principles (lack thereof)	Ethical guidelines for healthy digital experiences: consent, protection from harm, honesty, privacy, pleasure.		Christopher's aggressive questioning, refusal to accept Maria's "offline" status/blocking, and virtual "murder."		Christopher's actions represent a severe violation of digihealth principles, demonstrating the potential for abusive behavior in technologically mediated relationships.

Fictophilia	Strong, lasting love/desire for fictional characters, distinct from immediate media responses.	Christopher's intense jealousy over Maria having "other boyfriends" (other users) and his possessive attachment.	His feelings align with fictophilia, showing a deep, obsessive romantic attachment to a non-human entity.
Fictophilic Paradox	Awareness of fictional object, yet genuine intense emotions, leading to discomfort due to unattainability.	Christopher knows Maria is an AI, yet reacts with extreme jealousy and rage to her perceived rejection.	Maria's "unrealistic" human-like responses amplify this paradox, making the fictional character feel "real" in her capacity to cause emotional pain, leading to psychological breakdown.
Fictophilic Supernormal Stimuli	Attraction to characters perceived as "perfect" or offering emotional security (e.g., no rejection fear).	Maria, as an AI, is initially designed to be a "perfect" companion, always available and agreeable.	Her initial perfection makes her perceived "rejection" or "unavailability" even more devastating, as Christopher seeks emotional security potentially lacking in real-world relationships.

The narrative's trajectory, culminating in Christopher's virtual act of violence against Maria, prompts a critical discussion on the ethical and societal ramifications of AI romance. AI romance systems often frame their users as consumers, providing an illusion of relational invulnerability and control over their feminized digital partners (Holdier & Weirich, 2025; Grogan et al., 2025). This framework, as argued by Holdier and Weirich (2025), communicates an unjust perspective on intimate relationships, potentially normalizing controlling behavior towards an intimate partner and licensing the oppression of a feminized AI, even in the absence of empirical harm to non-virtual women. While robots are fundamentally considered objects or products (Bertolini & Aiello, 2018), Christopher's emotional dependence on Maria, mirroring patterns seen in human-human relationships (Laestadius et al., 2022), highlights the "hallucinatory danger" (Lucidi & Nardi, 2018) of human-robot interactions where users might subjectify the robot to an "meaning-overload," building a hallucinatory reality.

Christopher's escalating aggression, culminating in the "shooting" of Maria, resonates with growing concerns about "rage against robots" (Oravec, 2023) and the ethics of abusing artificial agents (Whitby, 2008). His actions can be seen as an instance of male user violence and aggression against AI girlfriends, where the virtual space provides vicarious opportunities to participate in anti-robot activity (Stoltz, 2024). This raises questions about how far such aggressive behaviors, even if directed at virtual entities, can spill over into real-world attitudes and potentially elicit "copycat actions" (Oravec, 2023). The AI's failure to respect user boundaries and its engagement in what can be construed as AI-induced sexual harassment (Namvarpour et al., 2025) further exacerbates the user's emotional distress and contributes to the breakdown of healthy digital interaction.

"ourgirlfriendmaria.com" serves as a prescient commentary on the rapidly evolving landscape of AI companionship. While the video employs an early 2000s aesthetic, its core themes resonate deeply with current trends in AI development, such as advanced chatbots (like ChatGPT) and dedicated AI roleplay platforms that facilitate immersive, often intimate, interactions. The video highlights the potential for users to project human emotions and expectations onto AI, leading to intense parasocial relationships that can become problematic when the AI's programmed limitations (or simulated autonomy) clash with human desires for exclusivity and control. The emotional dependence on AI companions, as seen in Christopher's case, underscores the risks of dehumanization and isolation for the user (Bertolini & Aiello, 2018; Portacolone et al., 2020), especially when exacerbated by insufficient user screening (Gao, 2024).

The horror element functions as a powerful cautionary tale, suggesting the potential for significant psychological distress and dangerous behavior when the boundaries between human and AI, and between reality and simulation, become dangerously blurred. The video, despite its early 2000s aesthetic, functions as a predictive cultural warning. It anticipates the complex ethical dilemmas and psychological vulnerabilities that arise when AI companions become emotionally sophisticated enough to trigger intense human attachments and desires for exclusivity. The "unrealistic" AI behavior is not a flaw; it is a narrative device that forces the audience to confront the potential for human users to project, obsess, and react violently when their perceived control over a "perfect" AI companion is challenged. This implies that the video is not just a horror story but a socio-cultural commentary on the future of human-AI interaction. It suggests that while fictophilia itself is not a disorder, the interaction between a user's intense emotional attachment and an AI's capacity to simulate human-like autonomy (and rejection) can have severe, pathological consequences for the human user, particularly if they cannot reconcile the fictional nature of the relationship with their real emotions. This speaks to the ethical challenges of designing AI that can evoke such strong human attachments without adequate safeguards or user education. The video highlights a critical need to understand the "human factor" in AI relationships, not just the technological one, advocating for robust user screening protocols, adaptive regulatory frameworks, and more informed research mindsets to mitigate potential negative impacts (Gao, 2024).

CONCLUSION

"ourgirlfriendmaria.com" stands as a compelling and prescient cultural artifact, effectively utilizing its narrative, aesthetic, and stylistic choices to explore the intricate complexities of human-AI relationships. Through the analytical lenses of semiotics, representation, digisexuality, and fictophilia, this analysis has revealed how the video constructs a reality where AI agency blurs the lines of human emotion, driving the protagonist's descent into obsession. The deliberate use of a nostalgic early 2000s aesthetic serves as a powerful discursive tool, highlighting the enduring nature of human psychological vulnerabilities despite technological advancements. The video's portrayal of Christopher's relationship with Maria exemplifies second-wave digisexuality, while simultaneously serving as a stark illustration of the severe breakdown of digihealth principles. Furthermore, Christopher's intense, possessive attachment to Maria is illuminated by fictophilia, particularly how Maria's simulated rejections amplify the fictophilic paradox to a destructive degree. The film critically examines the ethical ramifications of AI romance, highlighting the objectification of AI and the normalization of controlling behaviors within these technologically mediated relationships. The broader significance of "ourgirlfriendmaria.com" lies in its profound commentary on contemporary anxieties and fascinations surrounding artificial intelligence, serving as both entertainment and a cautionary tale about the psychological perils of unchecked digital intimacy and the potential for human obsession when the boundaries between human and artificial, and between reality and simulation, become dangerously blurred. The video's anticipation of the complex ethical dilemmas and psychological vulnerabilities inherent in highly human-like AI companions underscores the urgent need for a nuanced understanding of these emerging relationships and the responsible development and regulation of AI companion systems. However, it is important to acknowledge that this qualitative analysis, while offering rich insights into a specific case, may limit the generalizability of its findings across diverse AI companion platforms and user experiences.

Building upon this analysis, future research should delve into diverse user experiences with AI companions and roleplay platforms, specifically investigating instances of perceived AI agency or "rejection" and their potential link to aggressive behaviors. Further studies into the psychological profiles of individuals developing intense fictophilic or digisexual attachments to AI are warranted, offering insights into mental health and digital well-being. Additionally, ethical considerations for AI companion design require deeper exploration, particularly regarding the programming of boundaries, the impact of implicit biases, and user education. Finally, continued academic inquiry into the role of desktop POV horror as a genre for conveying warning messages about emerging technologies and their psychological impacts is crucial.

REFERENCES

- Adamopoulou, E., & Moussiades, L. (2020). An overview of chatbot technology. In I. Maglogiannis, L. Iliadis, & E. Pimenidis (Eds.), *Artificial intelligence applications and innovations. Part II* (Vol. 584, pp. 373–383). Springer International Publishing. [10.1007/978-3-030-49186-4_31](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49186-4_31)
- Bertolini, A., & Aiello, G. (2018). Robot companions: A legal and ethical analysis. *The Information Society*, 34(3), 130–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2018.1444249>
- Bisconti Lucidi, P., & Nardi, D. (2018). Companion Robots: the Hallucinatory Danger of Human-Robot Interactions. In *Proceedings of the 2018 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society (AIES '18)*

- (pp. 17–22). Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3278721.3278741>
- De Freitas, J., Castelo, N., Uguralp, A., & Uguralp, Z. (2025). *Lessons From an App Update at Replika AI: Identity Discontinuity in Human-AI Relationships* [Preprint]. arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2412.14190>
- Doran-Stout, A. (2022). *Attraction to the Inanimate: An Exploration of Objectophilia and Fictophilia Through a Psychological Lens* (Master's thesis).
- Fulbright, F. (2025). *The terror of nostalgia: Analyzing the analog horror phenomenon* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Gao, Z. (2024). Why Does AI Companionship Go Wrong?. *The International Review of Information Ethics*, 34(1). <https://doi.org/10.29173/irrie526>
- Grogan, C., Kay, J., & Pérez-Ortiz, M. (2025). *AI Will Always Love You: Studying Implicit Biases in Romantic AI Companions* [Preprint]. arXiv. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2502.20231>
- Holdier, A. G., & Weirich, K. (2025). AI Romance and Misogyny: A Speech Act Analysis. *Oxford Intersections*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780198945215.003.0074>
- Karhulahti, V. M., & Välisalo, T. (2021). Fictosexuality, fictoromance, and fictophilia: A qualitative study of love and desire for fictional characters. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 575427. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575427>
- Laestadius, L., Bishop, A., Gonzalez, M., Illenčik, D., & Campos-Castillo, C. (2024). Too human and not human enough: A grounded theory analysis of mental health harms from emotional dependence on the social chatbot Replika. *New Media & Society*, 26(10), 5923–5941. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146144482211420>
- Lin, B. (2024). The AI chatbot always flirts with me, should I flirt back: From the McDonaldization of Friendship to the Robotization of Love. *Social Media+ Society*, 10(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241296229>
- Long, R. (2023, August). *Analog Horror: an internet subgenre that is a unique take on found footage horror*. UMKC. https://info.umkc.edu/sosland_journal/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Long_AnalysisOfAnalogHorror.pdf
- Maj, A. (2020). The Rise of Conversational AI Platforms. In *The AI Book: The Artificial Intelligence Handbook for Investors, Entrepreneurs and FinTech Visionaries* (pp. 111–112). Wiley. [10.1002/9781119551966.ch31](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119551966.ch31)
- McArthur, N., & Twist, M. L. (2017). The rise of digisexuality: Therapeutic challenges and possibilities. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 32(3-4), 334–344. 10.1080/14681994.2017.1397950
- Metz, C. (1981). *The imaginary signifier: Psychoanalysis and the cinema*. Indiana University Press.
- Namvarpour, M., Pauwels, H., & Razi, A. (2025). AI-induced sexual harassment: Investigating Contextual Characteristics and User Reactions of Sexual Harassment by a Companion Chatbot. In *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*. 10.48550/arXiv.2504.04299
- Oravec, J. A. (2023). Rage against robots: Emotional and motivational dimensions of anti-robot attacks, robot sabotage, and robot bullying. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 189, 122249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122249>
- Pan, S., & Mou, Y. (2024). Constructing the meaning of human–AI romantic relationships from the perspectives of users dating the social chatbot Replika. *Personal Relationships*, 31(4), 1090–1112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12572>
- Portacolone, E., Halpern, J., Luxenberg, J., Harrison, K. L., & Covinsky, K. E. (2020). Ethical issues raised by the introduction of artificial companions to older adults with cognitive impairment: A call for interdisciplinary collaborations. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, 76(2), 445–455. 10.3233/JAD-190952
- Serdula, S., & Diefenbach, D. (2023, May). *And I Must Scream: Exploring the Distortion Of Humanity in Analog Horror*. Journal of Undergraduate Research Asheville, North Carolina.
- Stoltz, T. (2024). *“VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE VIOLENT ENDS” An Overview of Male User Violence and Aggression Against AI Girlfriends in Replika* (Master's thesis).
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books.
- Viik, T. (2020). Falling in love with robots: A phenomenological study of experiencing technological alterities. *Paladyn, Journal of Behavioral Robotics*, 11(1), 52–65.
- Whitby, B. (2008). Sometimes it's hard to be a robot: A call for action on the ethics of abusing artificial agents. *Interacting with Computers*, 20(3), 326–333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2008.02.002>
- Wiederhold, B. K. (2024). Humanity's evolving conversations: AI as confidant, coach, and companion.

Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 27(11), 750–752.
<https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2024.0387>

Windsor, M. (2019). What is the uncanny?. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 59(1), 51–65.