
Abstract: This study investigated the interactions of 72 children (ages 7 to 15) with Sony's robotic dog AIBO in comparison to a live Australian Shepherd dog. Results showed that more children conceptualized the live dog, as compared to AIBO, as having physical essences, mental states, sociality, and moral standing. Based on behavioral analyses, children also spent more time touching and within arms distance of the live dog, as compared to AIBO. That said, a surprising majority of children conceptualized and interacted with AIBO in ways that were like a live dog. Discussion focuses on two questions. First, is it possible that a new technological genre is emerging in HCI that challenges traditional ontological categories (e.g., between animate and inanimate)? Second, are pervasive interactions with a wide array of "robotic others" -- increasingly sophisticated personified computational artifacts that mimic biological forms and pull psychologically in mental, social, and moral ways -- a good thing for human beings.

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