

GOVERNANCE OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES:

LAW, POLICY AND ETHICS

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Evolving Technology & Marital Relationships: Can Law Keep Pace?

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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationships and marriage are being radically transformed by the continuous evolution of 21st Century technology. Technology's revolution in this area creates enormous opportunities, disruptions, repercussions and choices for the future of our society. Typically, we call upon law to harness such potentially destabilizing changes and to preserve important societal institutions and norms. However, law may be hard-pressed to manage and keep pace with the revolutionary and disruptive power of emerging technologies, especially as applied within the context of the emotionally-charged and morally complex area of romantic and sexual relationships, the focus of this presentation. The examples of technology affecting marriages of the future we will discuss include new technologies for communicating with (or spying on) one's spouse, the possibility of chemically enhanced marriages being advocated by some scholars, "online" marriages through venues such as Second Life, and eventually, human-robot "marriages." Our primary objective will be to examine how legislators, courts and other decision-makers have responded or will likely respond to the many legal, policy and ethical issues that have emerged from the use and abuse of these technologies, and to suggest mechanisms by which decision-makers can better provide timely guidance for such rapidly emerging technologies that are responsive to the deeply held views on these important issues by different segments of the population.