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2 April 2015

Oh You Beautiful Doll! A Study of Male Heterosexuality and Gender Performance
within Synthetic Relationships

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Abstract

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By Brielle Scully

A study of the history of the inanimate, eroticized, female form indicates that 1.) relationships between men and dolls have existed in western culture, in some form, throughout recorded history 2.) Men involved in synthetic relationships must overcome notions of “the uncanny” in order to experience a positive relationship with their doll 3.) The relationships that men form to female-bodied dolls expands upon previous notions of heterosexuality. In conclusion, the relationships that men have formed with inanimate, eroticized, female forms in the past, present, and future, contribute to the notion of heterosexuality as inherently “queer.” I argue that although the work that these relationships do to expand heterosexuality is important, ultimately, these relationships show that sexuality is far vaster than the cultural rules of the current simple binary system allow.

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Introduction

Oh! You beautiful doll
You great big beautiful doll
Let me put my arms about you
I could never live without you
Oh! You beautiful doll

(Brown, Ayer, & Berlin, 1911)

In this thesis, I explore the relationships between men and inanimate eroticized female forms. Specifically, I discuss the cultural, sexual, and social effects of synthetic relationships on western culture. I first encountered the idea to research sex dolls after viewing an episode of the television show *My Strange Addiction* entitled “Married to a Doll/ Picking my Scabs” (*My Strange Addiction*, 2011). Although I often viewed episodes of this show online, I had never experienced such a strong reaction to the subject matter. In the first half of this episode, the program showcases the relationship between a male doll owner, Davecat, and his female sex doll, Sidore. Viewing the show, I was extremely uncomfortable with the fact that Sidore appeared to be so lifelike, yet lacked animation. I was also discomfited by the interactions between the man and his doll. Davecat chose to ignore Sidore’s lack of animation and interact with her as though she was an organic being with independent thoughts and opinions. These initial feelings of discomfort are what drew me to this work.

As a Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality studies major at Emory University, the feminist writers and activists that comprise the majority of my course work heavily influence my thoughts and opinions. As such, my first thoughts about the episode were concerning the blatant objectification of women. There is a long history of feminist critiques of female objectification. In particular, a cornerstone of radical feminism, Catherine Mackinnon’s *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, discusses how sexual interactions between a man and a woman are

inherently objectifying to the woman. Within this framework, sex dolls' obvious eroticization of an inanimate female form becomes an epitome of male patriarchy (Mackinnon, 1989). Yet, as I began to research synthetic relationships (relationships between an organic form and an inanimate object) I became concerned with what Gayle Rubin identifies in "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," as a feminist moralism that shuts down the discussion of practices such as synthetic relationships for their obvious flaws (i.e. blatant objectification of women).

I realized that by focusing on a feminist perspective, I was losing many important aspects of the way male doll owners interact with their inanimate partners. Instead of focusing on the obvious objectification, I noticed that there were many aspects of the relationships that had productive qualities. Bracketing my feminist reactions, I employed Queer Theoretical and Psychoanalytical approaches to men's relationships with their sex dolls. Ultimately, it is through these fields of study that I was lead to the conclusion that synthetic relationships exemplify the fact that heterosexuality is inherently queer. Thus, the thesis became a part of a larger mission: trying to open a place in feminism for sexual plurality.

I present my analysis in three chapters. In Chapter One, I examine the history of the inanimate, eroticized, female form in western culture from 8AD to present day. In this chapter, I argue that men forming relationships with replications of the female form is not a modern day phenomenon. To do this, I discuss historical instances in which men have created doll-like objects as temporary substitutes *for* or admirations *of* an organic woman. Claiming that, as technology has progressed, replications of the female form have become both 1) more realistic and 2) more readily accessible, thus, allowing men to obtain higher levels of intimacy and attachment with their dolls. In Chapter Two, I discuss the social implications of these

relationships. I argue that in order for men to obtain high amounts of intimacy with a synthetic partner, they must overcome “the uncanny” feelings associated with objects that so closely emulate an organic being. In doing so, I argue that, to overcome feelings of discomfort, it is necessary for sex doll owners to live between their imaginations and reality. In the last chapter, I discuss the expansive effect that the relationships between men and sex female-bodied sex dolls have on cultural perceptions of heterosexuality. Employing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1990) terms “minoritizing” and “universalizing,” I explore the attempts of previous scholars to classify the relationships that men have with eroticized inanimate female forms. In doing this, I emphasize the fact that the relationships that men have with synthetic partners are able to have an expansive effect on notions of heterosexuality if such relationships are viewed through a universalizing, rather than minoritizing, lens. Ultimately, I draw the conclusion that both viewpoints are problematic in that they exist within the limitations of our current binary system of sexuality.

To defend my claims, I conducted research across multiple academic fields using books, magazines, documentaries, online forums, and websites and subjected them to discursive analysis. There are two primary challenges associated with conducting research on the history of men’s relationships to the inanimate, eroticized, female form: 1) There is only a small amount of archival remains of the tangible figures. This may be due to the fact that the materials used to make replications of the female form are not durable and do not preserve well over time, or to the fact that the sexual nature of these dolls left them unsanitary for archival preservation 2) Until the recent sense of anonymity and community provided by the Internet, the stigmatization placed on synthetic relationships kept many individuals from disclosing their relationships/sexual experiences with an inanimate, eroticized, female form. Thus, very few recorded instances with

stable authenticity exist. I overcame these complications by acknowledging that the existence of recorded accounts, either real or fictitious, can still be read as western societies' interest in synthetic relationships. Without this interest, such accounts would not have been preserved.

In this thesis, I use the terms *inanimate*, *eroticized*, *female form* to refer to any inorganic figure that is meant to replicate the physical appearance of an organic female. Within the category of inanimate, eroticized female forms, I use the term *sex doll* to refer to any replication of the female form that is produced and marketed as a sex toy. Throughout this thesis, when referencing the relationships between organic men and inanimate, eroticized, female forms, I use the terms *synthetic relationship* and *relationship between sex doll owner and doll* interchangeably.

I choose to focus on the relationships between organic men and female dolls rather than any other gender pairing because the primary consumer for sex dolls are male and the majority of sex dolls are female bodied (Realdoll, 2015). Although, at this time, there are no definitive figures of the number of men who own sex dolls and partake in synthetic relationships, online doll forums feature large communities of proclaimed users (Our Doll Community). Inanimate, eroticized, female forms are not new to western society. However, as their consumer market grows, their cultural influence will also experience change. Therefore, it is vital to consider the effect these relationships have on past, present, and future notions of sexuality.

Chapter One

The history of the sex doll must be read as evolving between the lines of “polite” western culture and, as such, more broadly reimagined as the history of an eroticized, inanimate, female form. Before sex dolls became widespread, mass-produced, and marketed as “sex objects,” there was a societal fascination with replicating the female body. Historical artifacts, popular culture, and literature provide recorded instances of men independently producing inanimate, human-shaped objects and, at times, forming intimate relations with such creations. Although such practices took on various shapes, historian Patricia Pulham (2008) rightly identifies that “this form of ‘unnatural’ love... is by no means a new one” (p. 1). History has constructed a pattern of eroticized inanimate female objects being recognized as temporary substitutes *for* or admirations *of* an organic woman without ever becoming a permanent replacement. As material technology progressed and sex became a larger part of mainstream culture, the eroticized inanimate female form’s place in western culture evolved as well. With the invention of technologies that allowed these replications to take on a more life-like appearance the relationship that men have with these dolls more closely resembled the relationship men have with organic women.

In this chapter, I trace the evolution of the eroticized inanimate female form. I chose to present this history chronologically in order to highlight the parallels between the broader technological advancements of western society and the progression of sex doll manufacturing. I split this history into two sections: I) Replications of the female form created through private craft and II) The mass production of sexualized, inanimate female forms. This does not mean that prior to the 20th century eroticized female forms were not mass-produced and during the 20th century specialized and individual replications of the female form were not privately made. Instead, this distinction is primarily meant to draw attention to the major cultural changes that

appeared in the United States at this time. Although I do not limit my focus to the United States, the United States serves as a central figure in this chapter. Whereas it was once common for most things (e.g. clothes, food, replications of the female form) to be produced by the individual, technology has evolved in such a way that it is now common for such items to be mass-produced.

A Private Craft:

Perhaps the most commonly referenced narrative regarding men forming an emotional connection to an inanimate female form is the myth of Pygmalion. First recorded in *Metamorphoses*, written in 8 AD, Ovid tells the story of Pygmalion, a sculptor who creates an image of the “perfect woman” out of stone¹(Book X). Upon completing his statue, Pygmalion falls in love with his creation. Over time, his adoration takes many forms. Ovid describes Pygmalion as dressing, caressing, adorning, and gifting “the girl of ivory;” even going so far as to take the statue to bed and call “it his bedfellow” (Ovid, 8 AD, Book X). For some time, he wavers between reality and imagination; convinced that “the [statue’s] features are those of a real girl... he runs his hands over the work, tempted as to whether it is flesh or ivory, not admitting it to be ivory. He kisses [the statue] and thinks his kisses are returned” (Ovid, 8 AD, Book X). However, the illusion does not last and Pygmalion grows dissatisfied with the statue’s lifelessness. At the next festival of the gods, too timid to ask Venus to bring his statue to life, he pleads for a wife *similar* to his ivory girl (Ovid, 8 AD, Book X). Yet, Venus, aware of his true heart’s desire, bestows Pygmalion’s statue with human animation. Overjoyed, Pygmalion

¹ In later works Pygmalion’s statue is referred to as “Galatea” (Smith 2013) (Ferguson 2010) (Moya, ***)

² Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* notes that Pygmalion goes to Venus asking for a bride with which

marries his statue-made-woman and the two live happily, in a union blessed by the gods (Ovid, 8 AD, Book X).



Fig. 1. Gérôme, *Pygmalion und Galatea*. 1890. Oil on canvas, 35 x 27 in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org> (accessed March 2, 2015).

This story, intriguing for many reasons, is arguably most important for its historical scope. It is easy to trace the presence of this myth, recounted in various media, in many of the narratives presented in this chapter. For example, many artists chose to use Pygmalion and his adoration for the stone girl the subject of their paintings (Figure 1). In 1913 George Bernard Shaw opened a theatrical version of Ovid's story, *Pygmalion*, inspiring Alan J Lerner to create the popular

musical *My Fair Lady*, which is still performed today. However, these are only a few examples, due to the limited space, there are many more that I was unable to include (Smith, 2013; Ferguson, 2010). Needless to say, it is easy to see how Pygmalion's love for his statue is related to the intimate bonds modern day men form with sex dolls.

However, the significance of the story's ending should not be ignored. Pygmalion's love is not validated until the statue becomes an organic woman. The happy ending is only able to occur once the object of Pygmalion's attraction is normalized (aimed at an entity with which he is able to reproduce²). This myth establishes the pattern of eroticized inanimate female objects being recognized as temporary substitutes *for* or admirations *of* an organic woman without ever becoming a permanent replacement.

As early as the 6th century AD, such admiration appeared in the overtly sexualized female forms carved onto the sides of buildings (most notably churches) across the British Isles (Figure 2) (Rhodes, 2010, p. 168). Scholars believe that these carvings, called "Sheela-na-gigs" or "sheelas" for short, were thought to "offer protection and warning or serve as fertility, birthing, or erotic figures" (Rhodes, 2010, p.



Fig. 2. Unknown, *Sheela-na-Gig From Chloran, County Meath, Ireland*. 11th-13th century AD. Stone Carving. The British Museum, London. From: The British Museum, <http://www.britishmuseum.org> (accessed March 2, 2015).

² Ovid's *Metamorphosis* notes that Pygmalion goes to Venus asking for a bride with which he can bare a son. After the statue becomes animated, Pygmalion marries her and nine months later she is pregnant with a son (Ovid, X. 243-297).

167). While sexually overt figures are not unique to this region, Sheela-na-gigs are differentiated from other pictorial representations of female nudity and sexuality by their emphasis on an enlarged vulva as well as the fact that such carvings were regularly “rubbed and touched for luck” (Rhodes, 2010, p. 175). Despite these caresses, Sheela-na-gigs cannot be said to function as anything more than an admiration of the female form.

The earliest recorded physical substitute for an eroticized female form appeared over nine centuries later in the 15th century AD; inspired by the vast movement of ships across seas. The European Renaissance brought about an “Age of Discovery” (generally understood to span from the 15th to 17th century AD), during which trade and exploration flourished (Elliot, 2009, p. 6). These expeditions (between European countries and beyond) called for many male sailors to be confined to a single sea vessel for weeks, and even months, on end. Looking for sexual reprieve, sailors began to craft cloth reproductions of the female form that they would use for masturbatory purposes (Ferguson, 2010, p. 16). Appearing as “Dame de Voyage” in French, “Dama de Vinje” in Spanish, “Seemensbraut” in German, and “merkin” in English, these easy to transport “early sex dolls” appear in the maritime history of several prominent European countries (Smith, 2013, p. 222). In her article, “Dames de Voyage,” (2006), Amy Wolf describes these dolls as “being made of cotton and presumably held together by dried cum”. While it is generally understood that such these figures were only available for higher-ranking officials, without any known artifacts, there is uncertainty regarding their specific appearances and handling. This includes whether such “dolls” were shared amongst the sailors or whether these rudimentary “sex dolls” were kept for private use (Ferguson, 2010, p. 16).

In the 17th century, the Japanese noted a figure similar to the “Dame de Voyage,” (Beck, 2014) the “Dutch Wife” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 27). The term originated in the 17th century to

describe the “masturbatory puppets” used by the Dutch sailors who traded with the Japanese. As Lisa Beck (2014) notes in her article “A (Straight, Male) History of Sex Dolls,” “Dutch wives” were similarly transported on merchant ships for the “comfort” of the crew . However, unlike the earlier “Dame de Voyage,” these inanimate eroticized female forms were made of leather and more closely resembled a female form (Ferguson, 2010, p. 27).

The next recorded phenomenon, a slight variation on inanimate female forms working as a substitute for women, also takes place at sea. However, unlike the Dame de Voyage, this popular story, starring the famous philosopher René Descartes, is perhaps more fiction than fact. Legend has it that the tragic death of the philosopher’s daughter, Francine, brought about a “madness” in Descartes which culminated in him carrying around a life-size replica of his late daughter. The story goes that Descartes, sailing from France to Sweden, told the ship’s crew that he was traveling with his daughter (although, unbeknownst to the crew, she had died several years before). When a terrible storm hit, the crew, attempting to save Descartes and his daughter, tore open the door to his cabin. Although Descartes was elsewhere on the ship, the crew found that what Descartes had been calling “his daughter,” was actually a doll in the appearance of a five year-old girl. When the crew presented the doll to the captain he was so bewildered by its presence on his ship that he demanded it be thrown overboard (Bordo, 1999, p. 4).

Whether purely legend, actual circumstance, or a mixture of both, the fact that this story has been preserved shows western societies’ long-standing fascination with intimate relationships with dolls. As witnessed in the time spent crafting these figures, the interest in inanimate eroticized female forms is increasingly apparent as we get closer to the modern day. For example, at the end of the Renaissance, another (maybe not so distant) relative of the sex doll, Spanish polychrome wood sculptures, rose to historical prominence (Figure 3) (Smith,

2013, p. 69). These exceedingly life-like reproductions of the female form are unique in that they exemplified the “working relations between sculptors (members of the Guild of Carpenters) and painters (members of the Guild of Painters)” (Smith, 2013, p. 69). Although these works were not explicitly used or created for sexual purposes, the majority of these sculptures were made to resemble either religious or mythological beings: leading to “ecstatic (and sometimes erotic) subject matter” (Smith, 2013, p. 71).



Fig. 3. After Pedro de Mena (1628-1688), *Mary Magdalene Meditating on the Crucifixion*. Late 1660s. Painted cedar, glass, and horn, 64 3/16 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. From: National Gallery of Art, <http://www.nga.gov> (accessed March 2, 2015).

Showing a similar mastery of the human form, 18th century wax anatomical models were designed as “stand-ins for living bodies” (Smith, 2013, p. 71; Massey, 2008, p. 83). These figures, modeled after autopsied cadavers, were used for both entertainment and academic study. Unlike their male counterparts, female wax figures were predominantly made to showcase the reproductive system (Massey, 2008, p. 84). These figures were typically open at the navel, displaying the female anatomy at different phases of pregnancy (Massey, 2008, p. 84-87). A famous work, *La Specola Venus*, depicts a pregnant nude laid out upon a silk bed (Figures 4-7) (Massey 2008, 84-85). This figure, crafted with dyed wax and a metal or wood skeleton, features a removable abdomen that can be unpacked in several removal layers (Massey, 2008, p. 85). However, weakening its claim of being an object of science, the model features scientific inaccuracies such as the uterus’s disproportionate size in relation to other organs and the fetus’ overdevelopment. The figure is also undeniably eroticized: her thrown back head, her euphoric facial expression, and her sprawling limbs across a silken bed all suggest sexual pleasure. The blurred boundaries between sexuality and science make sexuality appear measurable and further the notion that there is a “normal” to which they can be compared. This juxtaposition of science and the erotic is furthered with the creation of Sexology as an academic field of study.

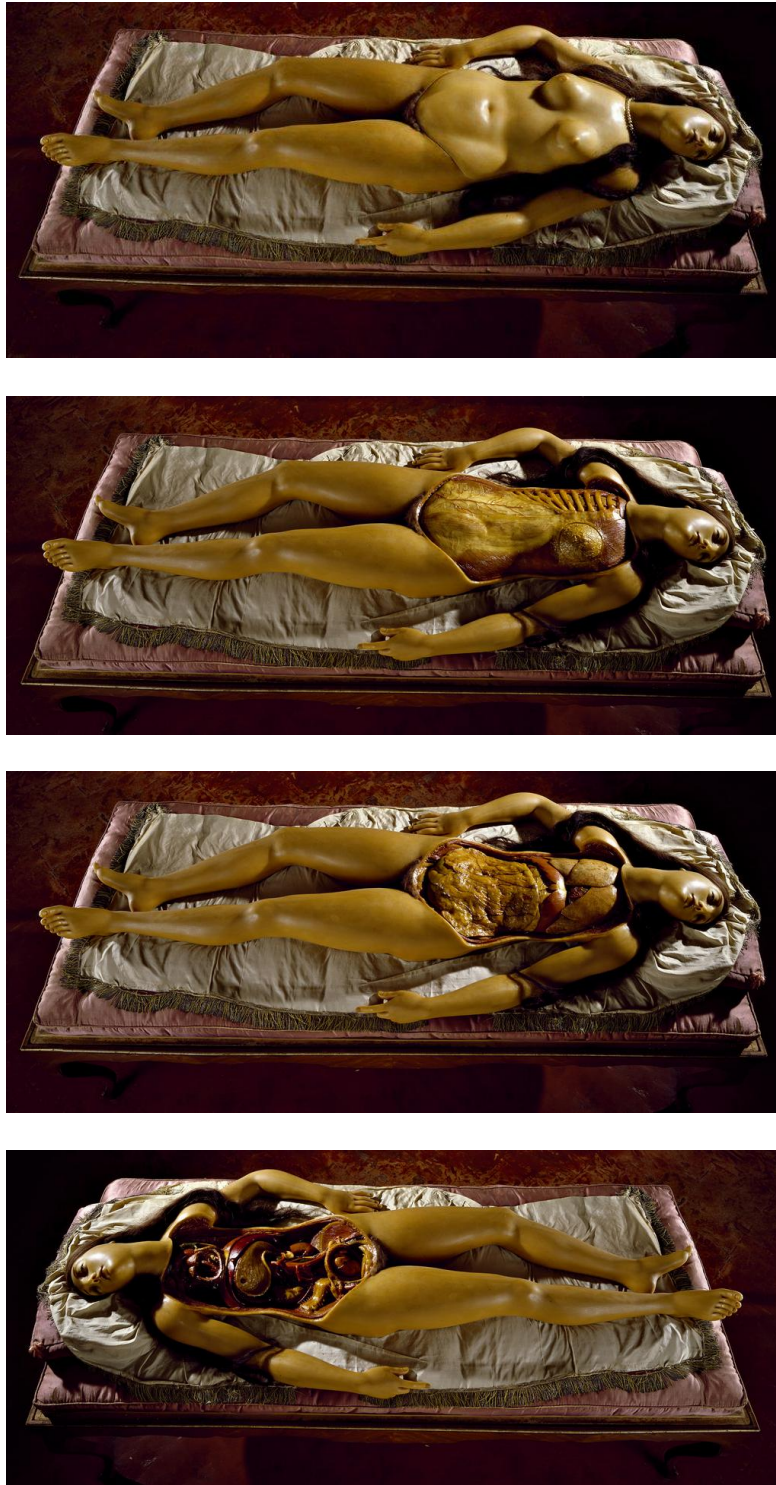


Fig. 4-7. Clemente Susini and workshop, *The Medici Venus*. 1782. Wax. Museo della Specolla, Florence. From: Atlante dell'arte italiana, <http://www.atlantedellarteitaliana.it> (accessed March 2, 2015)

Both the wooden eroticized female forms of the 17th century and their 18th century wax counterparts show that popular technology has played an integral role in the development of sexualized replications of the female form. The development and cultivation of ever new art media, which became reliant upon a host of new materials, made it possible to reach greater likeness when recreating the human figure. As mentioned in the introduction, material technologies play an important role in how these figures are imagined, built, and used. Similarly, the literature (and eventually, pop culture) that depicts relationships between men and an eroticized female form often base the doll's character on her appearance, which is heavily inspired by material composition.

Temporarily departing from the *physical* ancestors of modern day sex dolls, the beginning of the nineteenth century contributed notable literary and artistic references to “living” dolls as the central object of men's affections. Published in Germany in 1817 and notably referenced in Sigmund Freud's “The Uncanny,” E.T.A. Hoffman's “The Sandman,” (1817) is the gruesome tale of a young man, Nathaniel, who is driven first to madness, then suicide, through a series of interactions with the evil “Sandman”. The storyline, largely driven by a motif of gouged eyes, features a romance between the main character, Nathaniel, and the unusual Olympia, who is later revealed to be an automaton constructed by the evil Sandman (Hoffman, 1817). Once again, the synthetic relationship proves to be unstable and does not last. While the doll is a positive representation of the female form, she is not able to fully compensate for an organic being.

Following the story's success, Léo Delibes, enlisting the help of acclaimed 19th century choreographer Marius Petipa, borrowed elements of Hoffman's story to create a ballet entitled “Copèila” (Louisville Ballet, 2011, p. 5). Casting aside the gruesome and frightening elements of the original story, Delibes focuses instead on the love triangle between the male lead, Franz, his

betrotted, Swanhilda, and a life-like puppet, Copèila (Louisville Ballet, 2011, p. 3). Similar to the original, Franz falls in love with Copèila before realizing she is a doll. After said realization occurs, Franz is able to refocus his love back onto (the organic) Swanhilda, leading to much dancing and celebration. Once more, the final message is that eroticized inanimate female forms are only acceptable as temporary physical distractions, and never fully capable of satisfying the male longing for female companionship. However, the idea of what sort of “physical distraction” these dolls could offer was about to be revolutionized.

In the mid to late 19th century the United States was on the verge of some major changes regarding the way inanimate eroticized female forms could be made and distributed. Large strides in technology in the middle of the 19th century brought about continued changes to the use of eroticized inanimate female forms. Charles Goodyear’s invention of vulcanized rubber in 1839 introduced inflatable goods to the market (i.e. footballs), ushering in the age of the modern day inflatable sex doll (Ferguson, 2010, p. 14; Kauffman, 2001, p. 52). Nonetheless, it would still be a while before such inventions became mass produced and mass distributed in North America. In 1873, Anthony Comstock, “a Y.M.C.A. crusader against vice and obscenity,” produced the federal Comstock Law, prohibiting sexual materials to be sent via U.S. mail (Money, 1983, p. 398). However, during the United States’ battle with censorship, a record of the nation’s interest in the eroticized inanimate female form continued on in other countries.

In 1886, French author Villiers de L’Isle-Adam popularized the term “android” in his novel “L’Ève future,” commonly translated into English as “The Eve of the Future” (Smith, 2013, p. 41). In this novel, the main protagonist, Edison (meant to resemble Thomas Edison), encounters his friend, Ewald, who has become suicidal. Ewald is dismayed because his fiancé (Alicia) matches his standards of physical perfection but does not meet his demands for an ideal

personality. Edison, tired of organic women's flaws, offers to craft an "android" version of Alicia for Ewald: all of the beauty without any of the *bothersome* personality traits. Edison tells Ewald that his creation will be "an Apparition whose HUMAN likeness and charm will surpass your wildest hopes, your most intimate dreams!" (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, 1886, p. 63; Pulham, 2008, p. 3). Edison's creation, whom he names Hadaly, is exactly what Ewald had always wanted (Pulham, 2008, p. 3). Already enchanted by his synthetic partner, Ewald grows even more attached when Hadaly alerts Ewald that she is *more* than complex mechanics: her figure is now the new home to a previously disembodied spirit. Thanking Edison once more, Ewald is quick to try to bring his new woman back to his home. However, the story comes to a tragic end when the ship transporting Ewald and Hadaly sinks during the journey home. This excessively misogynistic novel does a good job of emphasizing that recorded instances involving sexualized inanimate female forms "centre on male satisfaction" (Pulham, 2008, p. 2). Eroticized inanimate female forms are meant to cater to men's needs. Therefore, it is no surprise that Parisian manufacturers caught on to the marketability of such objects, spurring advertisements for "penetrable sexual devices" to begin distribution in male dominated spaces (i.e. bars and barbershops) during the last ten years of the 19th century (Smith, 2013, p. 185).

The advertisements were mainly "disembodied torsos" made to feel like an organic human

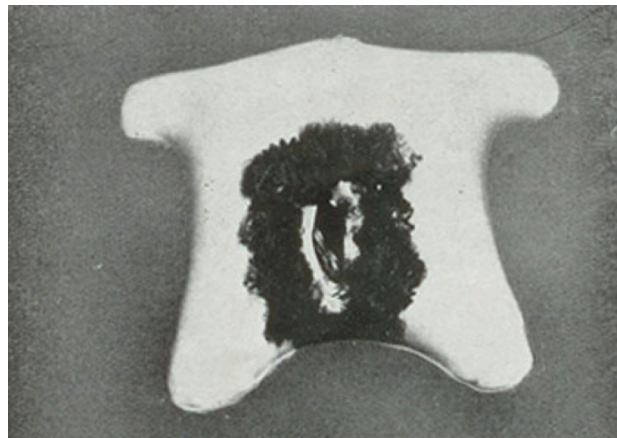


Fig. 8. Anonymous, *Vaginal-Ersatz*. 1927. From: a patient at Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft. In: Cynthia Ann Moya. 2006. "Artificial Vaginas and Sex Dolls: An Erotological Investigation." PhD diss., The Institute of Advanced Study of Human Sexuality. p. 32.

without actually looking like one, thus, only vaguely resembling the female form (Figure 8)³ (Smith, 2013, p. 185). These objects “often had silky pubic hair, intricately designed and detailed vulvas and mechanisms whereby at the appropriate time the vaginal cavity could be made to release a warmed-up liquid that simulated a woman’s lubricating secretions” (Smith 2013, p. 185). Although prices varied, one representative advertisement from this period stated that their product was available for 100 Francs (Smith, 2013, p. 186). Men were able to purchase these products through the mail and use them in privacy. An advertisement for one product states that because the apparatus is “readily inflatable and deflatable, [it] can be easily hidden in the pocket as a handkerchief or any other toilet article” (Smith, 2013, p. 186).

It can be readily inferred that, unlike the synthetic relationships that appear at the end of the next century, the men who bought and used such apparatuses used them primarily for sexual purposes. If these men felt attachment to these objects, the feelings would be more comparable to the attachment one might form to other inanimate objects (e.g. affection for a favorite pair of jeans), rather than the emotional or romantic attachment that humans forms with other living beings. These apparatuses were made for repetitive use. However, they were not made from durable materials or with high quality. When they eventually wore out, their relatively low price made it more affordable to replace than to repair them. Thus, while men’s relationships to these early penetrable female figures do not resemble the relationship between men and modern day sex dolls, they demonstrate that in the 19th century “there was already a retail market for erotic companionship of sex dolls and disembodied artificial body parts” (Smith, 2013, p. 187). The 20th century’s many technological advances made it possible for the market for sex dolls to break into the mainstream (Smith, 2013, p. 189).

³ Fig. 8 is from the archives of Magnus Hirshfeld, noted German psychoanalyst and sexologist, once again indicating that the use and interest in sex dolls was furthered by blurred lines between the scientific and the erotic.

The Modern Era of Mass Production:

In the early 20th century, with consumerism on the rise, apparel storeowners looked for ways to make their products competitive on the ever-growing market (d'Aulaire & Ola d'Aulaire, 1991). A popular solution was to decorate store windows with mannequins. Mannequins, then and now, are an example of the way popular culture has integrated inanimate eroticized female forms into everyday life. However, these early mannequins were very different from the models that exist today. Claudia Kidwell, head of the costume division at Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, explains that "[t]he way different generations learn to align the skeleton and distribute weight has to do with the culture a person grows up in and the posture of their time" (d'Aulaire & Ola d'Aulaire 1991). The physical appearance of the mannequin evolved alongside new technical innovations. With the help of new materials, the mannequins were able to reflect current cultural trends.

The spirit of the United States was reflected in these inanimate, eroticized female forms. In their article, "Mannequins: our fantasy figures of high fashion," Per d'Aulaire and Emily Ola d'Aulaire explain how the manufacturing of mannequins evolved alongside societal innovations. For example, women entering the workforce during the First World War caused women's fashion to shed some of its more constricting aspects of attire (e.g. tightly laced corsets). The mannequins during this time lost many of their earlier formalities and "gave way to a sprightlier attitude" (d'Aulaire & Ola d'Aulaire, 1991). In the 1920s, the mannequins often reflected an Art-Deco style (d'Aulaire & Ola d'Aulaire, 1991). The popularization of papier-maché introduced lighter and more heat-resistant mannequins; however, it also caused mannequins to be easily water-damaged and to shrink under harsh light. During WWII the United States mourned the loss of many American men to the battles abroad. Correspondingly, the mannequins during this time

appeared somber and conservative. However, following the US victory, the store windows displayed “looks of promise and prosperity again,” and the mannequins “were radiant--and noticeably voluptuous. ‘It’s almost as if they were saying, ‘Our men are back. Let’s catch them while we can,’ says Marsha Bentley Hale, who has studied mannequins for 12 years” (d’Aulaire & Ola d’Aulaire, 1991).

These mannequins, meant to resonate with the masses, have never served as a true reflection of the average customer. "Getting people to identify with mannequins has always been paramount," says FIT's Hoskins. "They must convey idealized images of ourselves, what we aspire to be rather than what we actually are" (d’Aulaire & Ola d’Aulaire, 1991). These mannequins, like earlier eroticized inanimate female forms, serve as representations of the female form. Like the replications that come before them, they were designed to serve a purpose.

However, mannequins were not solely seen in store windows; during the 1920s and 1930s they also appeared in the works of several surrealist artists, including Man Ray and Salvador Dali (Smith, 2013, p. 137-138). Unlike clothing stores, the surrealist artists chose to use mannequins as a comment on the “modern fetish” (Smith, 2013, p. 140). These female forms were often naked, missing body parts, adorned with odd items (e.g. a birdcage), or displaying acts of sadomasochism (e.g. pin shoved into the nipples and thighs⁴) (Smith, 2013, p. 142). In 1938 the Galerie Beaux-Arts Surrealist exhibition, meant to comment on female eroticism and objectification, featured a “hall of mannequins” that displayed 16 figures adorned with objects that emphasized the figures’ sexuality. One such mannequin was furnished with fluffed cotton clouds on her head and large pointed cones over her breasts (Figure 9). The display intended to comment on the cultural interest in eroticized female objectification (Shaw, 2004, p. 3).

⁴ Man Ray claimed that surrealists not only eroticized but also personally ‘violated’ their mannequins (Smith 2013, 143).



Fig. 9. Gaston Paris, *Untitled*. Mannequin by Maurice Henry for the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme Paris, Galerie des Beaux-Arts, January 17-February 22, 1938. Printed 1960. Gelatin Silver Print, 8 x 7 7/8 in. Ubu Gallery, New York. From: Ubu Gallery, <http://www.ubugallery.com> (accessed March 2, 2014).

Surrealist artists were also interested in crafting inanimate sexualized female forms for private consumption. In “Memoir of an Art Gallery” the New York art dealer Julian Levy recalls a conversation he had with Marcel Duchamp in 1927 in which Duchamp shares his plans to create a mannequin with a “vagina, contrived of mesh springs and ball bearings, would be contractile...and activated from a remote control.” (as cited in Smith, 2013, p. 255). Unlike the dolls produced for display, this doll was not intended to elicit a message about female sexuality. Instead, this doll was intended to fulfill the sexual role of a female partner. The distinction between the two is anatomical: the dolls on display in the museum did not feature penetrable holes. Without the proper anatomy, the mannequins in the museum can only be considered replications *of* the female form. The vagina on Duchamp’s creation allowed his figure to become a replacement *for* the organic woman.

On a similar note, in 1918 the artist and socialite Oskar Kokoshka commissioned his ex-lover's dressmaker, Hermione Moos, to manufacture a life-size replica of his ex-girlfriend, Alma Mahler (Smith, 2013, p. 109; Ferguson, 2010, p. 20; Puhlam 2008, p. 3). After their break up, Kokoshka faced several months of despair in which his desire to be reunited with Mahler was so strong that he had trouble making connections with any other human beings

(Smith, 2013, p. 109). He came up with the idea for a doll-like replication as a way to escape this dark place, hoping it would become “his focus of attention and replace the real object of his desire” (Smith, 2013, p. 110). Through a series of letters, Kokoshka described to Moos the physical details of Mahler, asking that the dressmaker make a doll that not only looked but also, more importantly, felt like an organic human being (Figure 10). To aid in this request, Mahler accompanied most letters with sketches, using shading to depict areas on the doll's body that should feel particularly muscular or fatty. Obviously, with his extreme attention to detail, the artist hoped that said doll would bear a strong resemblance to Mahler. Many historians believe that he was disappointed when the object delivered to him more closely resembled a plush stuffed animal than a realistic figure (Figure 11-12) (Smith, 2013, p. 109; Puhlam, 2008, p. 4). Instead of using the current technologies available, such as mannequins or foam, the doll was made of poorly assembled furry fabric. Nonetheless, Kokoshka took pride and inspiration from



Fig. 10. Oskar Kokoschka, *Oskar Kokoschka letter to Hermione Moos*, 1919. Private Collection. In: Marquard Smith. *The Erotic Doll: a modern fetish*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. p. 112.

his Alma doll, using it as the main subject in several paintings, dressing it in only the finest Parisian clothes and lingerie, and taking care that the doll was attended to by his landlord's housemaid (Figure 13) (Smith, 2103, p. 123-124). While accounts vary as to how long Kokoshka kept the doll, most agree that the unfortunate replica of Mahler met its fate at a party thrown in the doll's favor. Although Kokoshka's story is the most documented, d'Aulaire and Ola d'Aulaire (1991) claim that he was not the only socialite during this time who publicly admitted to a synthetic lover.

In the 1930s, Lester Gaba, a "soap sculptor turned mannequin artist," fell in love with one of his creations. A modern day version of Pygmalion, Gaba crafted what he believed to be "an ideal creature" out of plaster and named her "Cynthia" (d'Aulaire & Ola d'Aulaire, 1991). Soon,



Fig. 11. (left). Photographer Unknown, Oskar Kokoschka/ Hermione Moos, *The Doll Next to a Head Study* by Kokoschka. 1919, gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 24 cm *. University of Applied Arts Vienna Collection, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Oskar Kokoschka-Center. In: Marquard Smith. *The Erotic Doll: a modern fetish*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. p. 108.

Fig. 12. (right). Photographer Unknown, Oskar Kokoschka/ Hermione Moos, *The Doll*. 1919, gelatin silver print, 17.8 x 24 cm *. University of Applied Arts Vienna Collection, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Oskar Kokoschka-Center. In: Marquard Smith. *The Erotic Doll: a modern fetish*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. p. 108.



Fig. 13. Oskar Kokoschka, *Painter with Doll*. 1922, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm *. Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. In: Marquard Smith. *The Erotic Doll: a modern fetish*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. p. 121.

Gaba became so enthralled with his mannequin that he began to have it accompany him on public outings; the two were spotted at “the Stork Club, riding a double-decker bus, [and] in a box at the opera” (d’Aulaire & Ola d’Aulaire, 1991). Gaba’s mannequin quickly grew in popularity; famous couture houses offered to adorn her in sample clothes and both Tiffany and Cartier lent jewelry. However, as d’Aulaire and Ola d’Aulaire (1991) explain, Cynthia’s “dangerously brittle” plaster body was destroyed “when she slipped from a chair in a beauty salon and shattered into a thousand pieces”. Although the papier-maché models had easily succumbed to water and heat, the plaster mannequins that replaced them were not much more durable.

Looking for durability, inventors turned to vulcanized rubber and created the blow up doll in the 1930s. Some credit this invention to the Nazi Party (Smith, 2013, p. 201; Ferguson, 2010; Lenz). Previous scholars who discuss this “history” reference Norbert Lenz’s online article, “The Borghild-project – a discreet matter of the III. Reich” (Smith, 2013, p. 201; Ferguson, 2010, p. 24-27; Lenz). This article, originally published in German, has since been translated into English and posted online by Lenz’s wife, Susanne Lenz. Recently, it has appeared in several mainstream news publications after author, Graeme Donald, claimed to stumble upon information verifying Lenz’s story from a surviving member assigned to “The Borghild-project,” German sculptor Arthur Rink (Donald, 2010; Huffington Post, 2011; The Daily Mail, 2011). Legend has it that from 1940-1941, during the Second World War, Hitler instructed a team of scientists to create the “perfect” artificial woman so that German soldiers, spending months away from home – fighting in foreign lands, would keep Aryan bloodlines “pure” and free of sexually transmitted diseases. At the time, syphilis was both widespread and feared, especially amongst French prostitutes (Huffington Post, 2011). Sources claim that Nazi

Commander Heinrich Himmler, known for opening and operating several Nazi concentration camps, first brought the idea to Hitler after writing that the “greatest danger in Paris are the widespread and uncontrollable whores, picking up clients in cars, dancehalls and other places” (Lenz). In the same letter, Himmler claimed, “It [was their] duty to prevent soldiers from risking their health, just for the sake of a quick adventure” (Lenz; Huffington Post, 2011). Thus, looking for a hygienic distraction, the Nazi Party established a “*Geheime Reichssache*,” (an operation “more secret than top secret):” The Borghild Project (Lenz).

The project, located in Germany’s Hygiene Museum Dresden and run by SS-Doctor Olen Hannussen, functioned under the artistic leadership of Franz Tschakert (Lenz). Lenz claims that the entire team consisted of a “sculptor ([R]ink), a varnisher, a specialist for synthetic materials (Tschakert)⁵, a hair-dresser, a lathe operator and - in the beginning- a mechanic from (sic) ”Würtemberg’s Metallfabrik” in Friedrichshafen” (Lenz). They began by constructing a skeleton; early documents state that it was to be made out of “simple aluminum,” however, it was later decided that they would use Elastolin, a trademark of Germany’s famous toy soldier manufacturer O&M Hausser. Next, the team tested and redesigned some of IG Farben’s “skin-friendly polymers;” once satisfied, they moved on to the body. While some reports claim that the dolls were life-sized and meant to be trailed behind the soldiers in a “sanitation truck,” others claim that the dolls were miniature- able to fit inside a foot soldier’s backpack (Lenz; Huffington Post, 2011). Either way, all reports agree that the dolls had “Aryan” features: blonde hair, and blue eyes (Lenz; Huffington Post, 2011).

⁵ Apparently, a decade prior to this appointment, Tschakert had reached moderate fame in Germany for his invention of “The Woman of Glass” (a replica of a woman made entirely out of glass). Tschakert’s skill in reproducing the feminine form was put to use, even though this task proved to be much different. Heinrich Himmler asked that Tschakert and his team assemble a doll enticing enough to regulate the sexual drive of his soldiers (Lenz).

Tschakert initially hoped to construct the dolls by plaster-casting a live woman but could not find a model whose cast resulted in desirable proportions. Thus, the team decided to construct “modular” versions of the dolls’ bodies, crafting them together piece by piece. The sculptor, Arthur Rink, assisted the construction of the doll’s torso by testing different constructions of plasters and glue. Hannussen wanted her to have “a boyish hair-do” to underline that Borghild was “part of the fighting forces”— a field-whore and not an honourable Mother. When it came time to construct a face, Tschakert was still set on modeling the features after a real woman. However, the commander of the project, Dr. Olin Hannussen, advocated for an “artificial face of lust” (Lenz). Hannussen believed that the dolls’ ability to attract the soldiers’ attention heavily relied upon the doll’s expression. In his article, Lenz shares a quote from Hannussen’s logbook: “The doll has only one purpose and she should never become a substitute for the honourable mother at home... When the soldier makes love to Borghild, it has nothing to do with love” (Lenz). According to Lenz, the commanding officers were very pleased with the final product and placed an order for 50 dolls. However, the project was put on hold and eventually dropped when the Dresden studio was destroyed by bombings.

Despite this story, crediting the Nazi Party with the invention of the blow-up doll is problematic. First, the whole history is reliant upon a single document, seemingly based-on hearsay, and does not include any citations (Lenz). Second, Lenz’s article was originally written in German and has several obvious translation flaws (e.g. poor grammar and incorrect spelling). It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that some contextual errors were also made during the translation. Third, the inanimate eroticized female forms mentioned in Lenz’s article do not even appear to be of the blow-up variety. The article explicitly mentions the team of experts debating what materials to use to construct a spine.

Nonetheless, despite its weaknesses, this urban legend is an important aspect of the history of the erotic, inanimate, female form. The fact that it has been picked up and distributed by popular online news sources shows a cultural interest in sex dolls and their origins. The focus is moved from sex dolls as an abnormal object to the fact that Nazi's might have used sex dolls as an abnormal situation. This shift from object to practice allows the idea of sex dolls as an object of discomfort to become temporarily overshadowed by western society's discomfort with the Nazi party.

While the Nazi contribution to the blow-up doll's history discussed in the last section is unreliable, the 1950s German sensation, Bild Lilli (Figure 14), has undeniable factual claims to the evolution of inanimate eroticized female forms. The doll, built from 1955-1964, was based upon the comic-strip character "Lilli." The comic, written by Reinhard Beuthin, first appeared in 1952 in a German newspaper, *Bild-Zeitung*, known for its sleazy reputation (Smith, 2013, p. 201; Ferguson, 2010, p. 27). In the comic, Lilli appears as a bodacious blonde woman whose main hobby is "exploiting sex-crazed businessmen" (Ferguson, 2010, p. 27). The 11.5-inch tall doll's appearance- long legs, ample hips and breasts, a tiny waist, and heavy-lidded eyes- made her widely recognized as a "sex symbol, sold mainly to middle-aged men" (Lury, 2013, p. 3). Not intended for young audiences, she was usually marketed as a gag gift for men who could not successfully lure an organic partner (Ferguson, 2010, p. 27-28). In fact, these dolls were not even sold in the presence of women and children. Instead, Bild Lilli dolls were only stocked in places that were frequented by the targeted male consumer: bars and tobacco stores (Lord, 1994, p. 8; Lury, 2013, p. 3; Ferguson, 2010, p. 28).



Fig. 14. (left). Unknown, *Bild Lilli* 1952-1964. Vectis Auctions Ltd: Collectible Toy Specialists www.vectis.co.uk (accessed March 2, 2015).

Fig. 15. (right). Mattel, Inc., *No. 5 Ponytail Barbie*. 1961, hard plastic, vinyl, synthetic hair, plastic. The Strong: National Museum of Play, Rochester. From: The Strong | National Museum of Play, <http://www.museumofplay.org> (accessed March 2, 2015)

Although Mattel claims that the Barbie doll (Figure 15) was based on bringing the proportions of a paper doll into the third dimension, it is hard to deny the dolls' similarities to Bild Lilli (Lord, 1994, p. 7). Ruth Handler, the “creator” of Barbie and co-founder of Mattel is known to have toured through Switzerland and Germany in late 1950s. It is said that without realizing its sexual history, she purchased several Lilli dolls to take to her daughter in the United States. Additionally, many believe that once home, she convinced Mattel to buy the rights for manufacturing Lilli dolls and started producing them in 1959 under the name “Barbie” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 28; Smith, 2013m p. 201; Rand, 1995, p. 35). Whether one believes this history or not, it does not change the fact that an eroticized inanimate female figure, such as the Barbie, can gain vast popularity in the United States. Additionally, it should be noted that Barbie

is the first toy marketed to children that featured breasts, an hourglass figure, and a seductive facial expression (Ferguson, 2010, p. 29). Most other dolls marketed for children were, and continue to be, asexual. Inanimate sexualized female figures such as the Barbie doll were allowed to be marketed and reached gross popularity in the United States because their use was not explicitly sexual.

Starting in 1930, with the movement of the power to regulate obscenity away from the U.S. Customs Department and the U.S. Post Office and into the courts, the Comstock Laws of the late 19th century were slowly overturned. However, it would be another 30 years before the 1960s collapse of censorship granted legal public distribution of advertisements for erotic items, such as blow up dolls (Moya, 2006, p. 14). Beginning with the 1957 ruling by the Supreme Court in *Roth v United States*, the United States began to loosen the laws blocking sex dolls from being openly marketed.

This case played an influential role in determining what the federal government considered to be “obscene” and thus “illegal.” With sex toys

(including sex dolls) falling outside of this category, “everything changed in terms of availability of sexually explicit materials” (Moya, 2006, p. 14). In 1968, sex dolls hit the popular media in the United States, with advertisements appearing in multiple erotic newspapers and magazine publications (Figure 16) (e.g. *Hustler*) (Moya, 2006). As Anthony Ferguson points out in his



Fig. 16. Smith, M. (2013). *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

book, *The Sex Doll: A History*, in these advertisements, and the ones that followed, sex dolls are represented as “an idealized woman in a state of constant sexual arousal” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 33). This objectification of women’s sexuality, as well as the fact that sex dolls were sold in the sex stores that began appearing in the red light districts of major the United State’s cities in the 1970s. Coming out of the feminist movement, the anti-pornography movement, wished to end the culture of objectifying women that is perpetuated in pornography. This movement viewed sex dolls as contributing to the growth of the pornography industry (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31; Smith, 2013; Moya, 2005, p. 106). Nonetheless, after the induction of blow up dolls into the United States market during the 1970s, sex doll popularity has experienced continued growth.

Arguably the most prolific of all sex dolls, blow up dolls (Figure 17) are described by Ferguson as being “both the archetype and stereotype” of modern sex dolls (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31). Culturally, blow up dolls are often perceived and portrayed as gag gifts. Much like the earlier Bild Lilli, blow up dolls are often used to say that a certain man is unable to have sex with the “real thing”. Blow up dolls have most likely maintained their popularity because they are usually cheaper and sold in more locations than other forms of sex dolls.

Blow up dolls’ popularity is not based upon the doll’s realistic appearance or durability. Although advertisements often feature organic women and statements expressing the “extremely life-like qualities” of the doll, the actual product is far from realistic. Instead, blow up dolls are “arguably more comical than sexually arousing in appearance” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 33). Most often made of vinyl, there is little similarity between their “skin” and the skin of an organic woman. The blow up doll’s face and hair are usually two-dimensional: painted or printed right onto the nub considered the head (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31). Their physical features are more

cartoonish than realistic. For example, most sex dolls feature penetrable mouths set in wide “O” shapes that make them appear to be in a constant state of shocked surprise.



Fig. 17. *Fancy Pants Alley*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 March 2015.

The bodies of blow up dolls are also rudimentary, usually featuring hands and feet without individualized fingers and toes, limbs without joints, and breasts without nipples (Moya 2006, p. 145). Ferguson claims, “much of the [blow up dolls’] bodywork was also anatomically flawed because of low-cost manufacture, or a simple lack of technology” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 34). The vinyl material used to construct the bodies of blow up dolls is not malleable, making it impossible for the user to enjoy much positional variation during penetrative sex. The bodies are difficult to maneuver and, because of their welded seams, repetitive use often leads to puncture marks, leaks, or total deflation. Attempts to fix the issue of durability have only contributed to further problems. For example, certain chemicals used to make the vinyl more flexible have been known to cause health risks if the user is exposed to them for extended periods or in large amounts (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31).

In the early 80s, Sex Objects Ltd. invented a blow-up doll with an added voice synthesizer (Forsyth, 1979). The artificial voice box came stocked with several pre-recorded erotic phrases such as “I want you” and “don’t stop”. However, this model, similar to other blow

up dolls, was poorly manufactured. Her appearance was rudimentary and the voice synthesizer often broke leaving the doll mute or out of pitch.

Blow up dolls made out of latex are slightly less popular and more expensive than their vinyl counterparts. The latex used to make these dolls is a slightly thicker material than vinyl and does not include seams (making them more durable and longer lasting) (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31). These models are overall more realistic than the vinyl models. Instead of featuring a blow-up head with two-dimensional features, these dolls usually come with a mannequin-type head with a “realistic” wig of hair and plastic or glass eyes (Ferguson, 2010, p. 31). Their hands and feet usually have distinguishable digits. Similar to the vinyl dolls, the chemicals used to make the latex can be harmful to the user’s health. However, most of these harmful chemicals can be washed away by placing the doll under running water prior to use (Ferguson, 2010, p. 32). Like vinyl dolls, latex dolls are usually available both in stores and online. Unlike the latex version, these dolls are more expensive and less often used as a prank or gag gift. However, these dolls are still inexpensive enough that they are replaced rather than repaired when damaged: only cloth and silicon dolls frequently experience repairs. Silicon sex dolls are the most expensive and realistic dolls on the market (Ferguson, 2010, p. 32).

In the early nineties, Matt McMullen, an artist from California, invented an eroticized inanimate female form that revolutionized the technological manufacturing of sex dolls (Ferguson, 2010, p. 42). While working for a company that manufactured Halloween masks, McMullen began sculpting life size silicon women, which he called “malleable mannequins” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 44). In 1994 he decided to post his creation to an artistic website so that he could receive feedback. Much to his surprise, users began asking whether or not the mannequin had correct sexual anatomy. McMullen replied that they did not, but seeing the high demand for anatomically correct hyper-realistic dolls, he agreed to build a penetrable doll and allowed men to place orders with \$5,000 paid up front. McMullen became obsessed with replication of correct anatomy (Ferguson, 2010, p. 44). Seeing the future profitability in his creations, McMullen founded Abyss creations in 1996, and became the first manufacturer of real-doll forms. McMullen named his eroticized inanimate replications of the female form “RealDolls.” Many consider his models to be “the prototype of the new millennial sex doll” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 44).

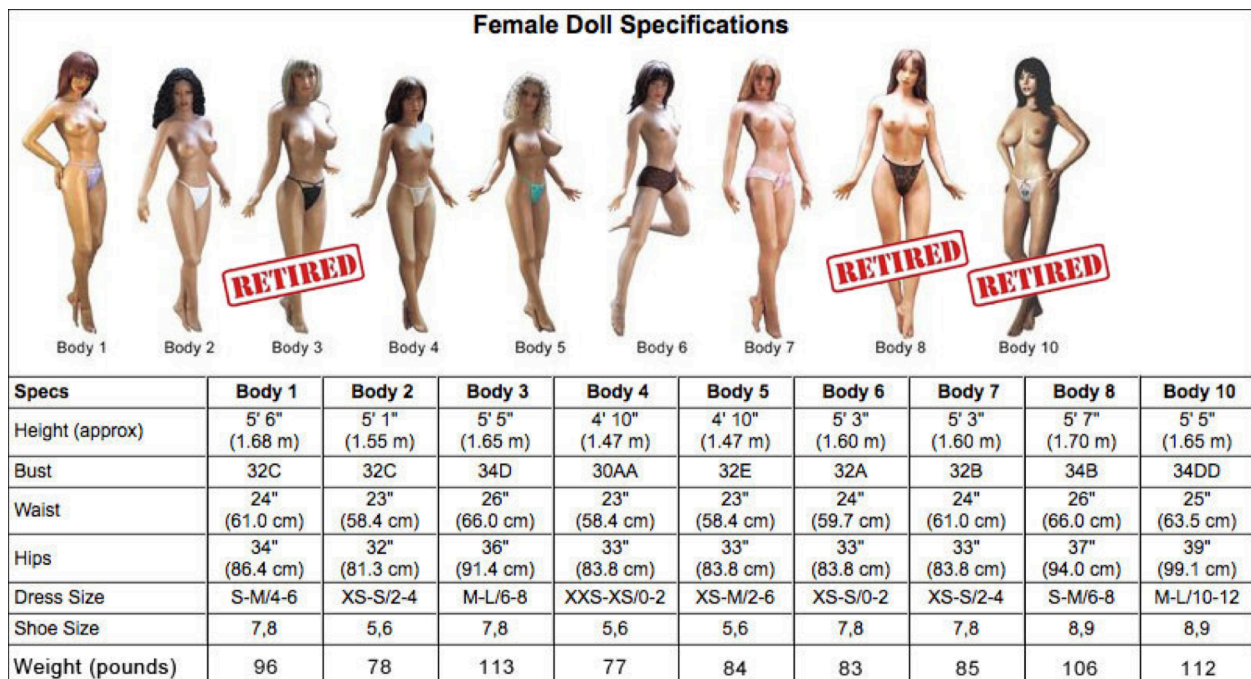


Fig. 18, *RealDoll Classic Sizing Chart*. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

While there are several other manufacturers of hyper-realistic penetrable dolls, Abyss continues to be the most popular⁶. McMullen continues to try to stay ahead in the growing technologies. His site features nineteen female-bodied dolls that come pre-configured. However, for an additional price, dolls can be personalized. The “Doll Configurator” application allows the consumer to go into extreme detail when designing their doll. The consumer can determine the doll’s eye color, hair color and cut, and pubic hair. In 2003 Abyss introduced “Face-X:” dolls manufactured with interchangeable faces so that the consumer can have more variety. Several other companies have incorporated a similar feature into their models. For example, the company 4Woods features a body with multiple removable heads that the user can interchange (Ferguson, 2010, p. 53).

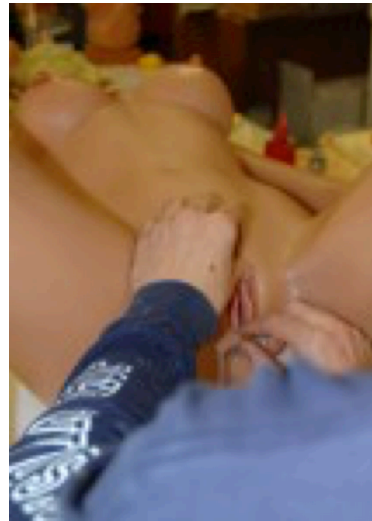


Fig. 19, Unknown, *Production employee trimming dolls*. Studio. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

Fig. 20, Unknown, *Labia installation*. Studio. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

⁶ Others include: CybOrgasMatrix dolls, manufactured by Mimicon (www.CybOrgasMatrix.com); 1st-PC dolls (www.1st-pc.com); Mechadoll (www.mechadoll.com).

The most technologically advanced dolls' features have an uncanny resemblance to an organic human being. Unlike other, more rudimentary sex dolls, these hyper-realistic dolls are manufactured with "articulated steel skeleton with stainless steel joints" (Ferguson, 2010, p. 54). The material used to create the skin is made out of hyper-realistic products made especially for the new-age sex dolls such as "Cyberskin, UltraSkin, or Eroskin" (Ferguson, 2010, p. 35). Since 2009 there have been even greater technological improvements in materials used to simulate skin (Smith, 2013, p. 237). Even with these advances, RealDolls must be regularly cleaned so that their skin remains fresh. Smith explains that "RealDolls come with a cleaning kit that includes a douche ball, anti-bacterial soap and instructions since, once the dolls have been used, they need to have their cavities flushed out." (Smith, 2013, p. 241). RealDolls also feature eyes that can be manually opened or closed by the owner (Ferguson, 2010, p. 45). The realistic manufacturing of these dolls also makes them significantly heavier than earlier models. Their weight is perhaps more similar to an organic human being.

In order for these dolls to look and feel like an "organic" woman, manufacturers produce their dolls out of high-quality (and often costly) materials. As a result of the fine craftsmanship involved in silicon sex doll production, these dolls are often quite expensive. Most sites offer dolls starting at around \$4,000 and, depending on the manufacturer and accessories added to the model, go up to a little over \$10,000 (CybOrgasMatrix, 2015; Mimicon, 2015; 1st-PC, 2015; Mechadoll, 2015; RealDoll, 2015). With financial costs being so high, most doll owners do not make their purchases on a whim. Instead, most owners invest a significant amount of time and energy into perfecting their order. In a post on *Our Doll Community*, an online forum for sex doll owners, Mayor (user ourdoll1) suggests that potential doll owners first ask themselves "What is it you want in a doll? What will her primary purpose be? Where will you be able to store her?"

How much will the doll's weight be a factor? How durable (how much use) do you need in this doll? How much are you willing to spend on the doll?" (ourdoll1, 2009). The large monetary and financial investment that potential owners put in to the design and purchase of their doll(s) is a good indication that the men who go on to become sex doll owners often view their dolls as much more than an expensive masturbatory aide.

Studies have shown that the invention of the RealDoll in the late 20th century radically



Fig. 21, Unknown, *Dolls in the production area waiting to be trimmed or painted*. Studio. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

interrupted the motif of men using inanimate female forms to temporarily replace organic women (Ferguson, 2010, p. 115). In the next chapter, I go into greater detail about the common aspects of these relationships and the necessary role of imagination. RealDolls' extreme likeness to organic women has presented men with the opportunity to completely replace artificial relationships with synthetic ones (Smith 2013, 193, p. 225). Since their creation, Real Dolls, and the relationships that men form with them, have been prominently featured in several films and

documentaries (e.g. *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), *Guys and Dolls* (2006), etc.). However, in a quote by McMullen in Lisa Beck's article, "A (Straight, Male) History of Sex Dolls," he says, "The female form was [his] muse." He insists that actual women have nothing to fear from his dolls. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Do I think the dolls will replace women or threaten to replace women? Absolutely not" (Beck, 2014). Whether or not one believes that inanimate female forms may eventually replace some organic relationships, it is undeniable that the market for top of the line sex dolls is continually growing (Our Doll Community, 2015) (Ferguson, 2010).

The growing market for sex dolls can be widely attributed to the large technological



Fig. 22 (On left) Stacy Leigh, *Stacy RD Classic Configuration 2*. Studio. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

Fig. 23 (On right) Stacy Leigh, *Kaori Classic Real Doll Configuration 4*. Studio. From: REALDOLL, <https://secure.realdoll.com> (Accessed on March 2, 2015)

advances in the late 20th and early 21st century. With advancements in material technology, new fibers have been artificially created and manufacturers have "[u]tilized now widely available

man-made materials” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 29). Additionally, “the Internet increased consumer demand and preserved anonymity” (Ferguson, 2010, p. 40). Whereas one used to have to create one’s own inanimate eroticized female form, or physically walk into a sex store, one can now with the discretion of the computer, order from home. Additionally, the Internet has spurred the creation of chat rooms dedicated to men who have relationships with their inanimate sexualized female forms, creating vast virtual communities that contribute both inspiration and support.

From Ovid’s marble woman, brought to life by the gods, to RealDolls, brought to life in their user’s imaginations, western culture continues to be fascinated by inanimate sexualized female forms. With new technologies quickly approaching on the horizon, one might wonder what will be next. However, whatever materials or technologies are presented, one can rest assured that there will be those who use such innovations to craft replicas of the female form.

Chapter Two

In the previous chapter, I discussed the history of the inanimate, eroticized, female form. In this chapter, I explore the intricacies of the relationships men form with their sex dolls. I argue that sex doll owners are able to surpass any potential feelings of “the uncanny” by placing their relationship with and to their doll(s) outside of the normal constraints of “reality⁷.” Synthetic relationships occupy an existence within both reality and the user’s creative thought. For this reason, I claim that the relationships men have with their dolls are fueled by imagination: and without which, they likely would not exist. Doll owners’ employment of their imagination is vital; owners become experts at distancing themselves through fantasy from the discomfort that most human beings experience when interacting with inanimate hyper-realistic human forms (Mori, 1970)⁸. As explained by a user named dave7311 in a post on “Our Doll Community” (an online forum for iDollators), “Doll ownership has several levels of reality. (Some are in suspense and some are not), but nevertheless; [doll owners] share the same affinity” (dave7311, 2013).

In western culture, it is not unusual for children to attribute human-like characteristics to their inanimate dolls (Wolf, Rygh, & Altshuler, 1984). In fact, at some point, most children experience the desire for their toys to “come to life” (Freud, 1919). However, as one matures, the thought of inanimate forms being “brought to life” becomes less appealing. For many individuals, the very idea often provokes discomfort, anxiety, and unease (Mori, 1970). In his essay, *The ‘Uncanny,’* (1919) Sigmund Freud separates such feelings from what would generally be considered “anxiety.” Granting these feelings a category of their own, Freud (1919) names them “the uncanny”. He claims that, unlike regular anxieties, the “uncanny” feelings of

⁷ Similar to Freud’s explanation of an author’s ability to create a fantasy that distances the reader from what would, in the real world, be considered “the uncanny” (Freud, 1919)

⁸

discomfort arise from circumstances that cause “repressed infantile complexes” or “primitive beliefs,” that were previously cast aside by knowledge, to be experienced as truth (Freud, 1919, p. 13). Using Freud’s explanation, one may posit that adult uneasiness surrounding interactions with hyper-realistic dolls can be attributed to the arousal of a previously abandoned “primitive belief” that inanimate objects possess “life.” The discomfort arises when the discrepancies between what one’s eyes see (a very realistic replication of a human being) and what the mind knows (dolls are not human and do not possess life) are brought into a direct conflict.

To identify some of the places where the separation between reality and an imaginary world are vital for doll users to avoid “the uncanny,” I have chosen several activities that are popular amongst doll users: establishing background information for the doll, engaging in sex with the doll, primping the doll, photographing the doll, cleaning and repairing the doll, and interchanging the doll’s body parts. To conclude, I discuss some of the struggles that doll owners must face when they are forced out of their imaginary world and into reality.

When scholars have previously discussed men’s relationship with hyper-realistic silicon “sex dolls” they have tended to focus on, not surprisingly, the sex (Ferguson, 2010; Smith, 2013; Moya, 2005). With this limited dialogue, many important care-taking aspects of men’s relationships with and for their doll(s) go unacknowledged. While watching the documentary “Guys and Dolls,” I was blown away by the dolls’ lifelike qualities (Holt, 2007). The extreme details of the dolls’ facial features, vaginas, and bodies were both frightening and impressive. However, what I found to be even more astounding, and admittedly confusing, was the relationships that these men have with their doll(s). On a daily basis, doll owners must overcome two levels of “the uncanny:” (1) discomfort at the doll’s close resemblance to an “organic” human being, and (2) discomfort at performing tasks (e.g. applying make-up, carrying, styling

hair) for a figure that closely resembles a human being; tasks that would not be permissible or normal to perform for or with an “organic” woman.

To support my claims, I reference individual case studies provided by four different sources: the documentary *Guys and Dolls*, interviews conducted by Anthony Ferguson for his book “Sex Dolls: A History,” and *Our Doll Community*, an online forums for doll collectors/enthusiasts (Ferguson, 2010; Holt, 2007; Our Doll Community, 2015). Generally speaking, each of these sources was chosen because of their primary concern with the relationships that male users have with their female sex dolls⁹. I decided to limit my forum focus to “Our Doll Community” because it was the most cited by previous scholars, easy to navigate, and had a broad range of information available to the general public. (Ferguson, 2010; Smith, 2013). This last element was especially important to me when choosing an online forum because forums, of any genre, are often used to build a virtual community. As someone who is only interested in the academic application of sex doll ownership, the creation of a “member profile” in order to access “member only” forum information felt like an infiltration of the private world of “community members.” Although there are not many films that depict men’s relationship to or with high-end sex dolls, I chose the documentary *Guys and Dolls* over the few other options available¹⁰ because it is often referenced in previous works about sex dolls and offers several (variable) examples of male relationships to and with female sex dolls.

⁹ There are male sex doll owners/enthusiasts who prefer male-bodied sex dolls, as well as female sex doll owners/enthusiasts, for the sake of this thesis, I decided to limit my scope to male owners of female-bodied sex dolls. I chose this category for several reasons. First, historically, the individual histories and societal fascinations of heterosexual men have received better documentation than the individual histories and societal fascinations of women or non-heterosexual. Second, men who prefer female-bodied sex dolls make up the majority of high-end sex doll purchases and have the largest number of posts in online community forums. Third, the male fascination with inanimate, eroticized, female forms poses interesting questions about male sexuality and female objectivity (which I discuss in the next chapter).

¹⁰ De Guerre, M. (Director). (2005). *A Perfect Fake*. [Made for TV film/Documentary]. Canada: Primitive Entertainment.

Before presenting my findings from these materials, I wish to briefly acknowledge that the information provided by these men about themselves in the interviews, online forums, and the documentary, *Guys and Dolls*, is not necessarily true. The Internet provides a degree of anonymity that is often used to create a new identity (Christopherson, 2006). Similarly, the persona that one wishes to display to an international audience (e.g. via a widely distributed documentary) is not necessarily the same as the persona that one inhabits on a daily basis (Hill, 2005). The authenticity of documenting “reality” is often negatively affected by factors both on and off camera (e.g. the individual being filmed wants viewers to see only the aspects of themselves that they find positive or desirable. Furthermore, the content of the Ferguson interviews and documentary was edited prior to publication. Therefore, it is likely that some of the information that the sex doll owners provided was excluded from the final production. Overall, it is important to reflect on the message that the documentary is attempting to produce.

The Sex Doll Owner: A Storyteller of his Own Imagination

The story-teller has this license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. We accept his ruling in every case. In fairy-tales, for instance, the world of reality is left behind from the very start, and the animistic system of beliefs is frankly adopted. Wish-fulfillments, secret powers, omnipotence of thoughts, animation of lifeless objects, all the elements so common in fairy-stories, can exert no uncanny influence here; for, as we have learnt, that feeling cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement whether things which have been “surmounted” and are regarded as incredible are not, after all, possible; and this problem is excluded from the beginning by the setting of the story.

(Freud, 1919, p. 18).

In this quote, taken from near the end of his essay, *The “Uncanny,”* Sigmund Freud claims that authors are able to express themes in their stories that in real life would arouse

“uncanny” sensations, without causing the reader discomfort. He explains that authors are able to do this because, through their narrative setting, the reader is able to escape the preconceived notions they had formed in their true “reality” (Freud, 1919, p. 18). He then lists several examples, one of which being “animation of lifeless objects” (Freud, 1919, p. 18). By listing this as an example, Freud is arguing that in “reality” humans have a natural fear of objects that are typically thought of as “lifeless” being given life. Furthermore, he is saying that through the reader’s escape into the imaginative world of the story, they are able to overcome this fear.

In creating their “fantasy world,” high-end sex doll owners assume the role of both the storyteller and the reader. Granting himself the “license” to depart from reality in “what particulars he pleases;” the sex doll owner is able to avoid feelings of “the uncanny” (Freud, 1919, p. 18). However, that isn’t to say that by creating this world, sex doll owners lose sight of “reality.” On the contrary, they are able to live within both worlds simultaneously. For example, in the documentary *Guys and Dolls*, one user, Gordon, claims that he likes having sex with his dolls better than having sex with organic women because while having sex with “a real woman” he often gets preoccupied with thoughts of unwanted pregnancy or contracting a sexual disease (Holt, 2007). In this statement, Gordon shows that he is capable of identifying with facts of the “real world” while simultaneously enjoying the comforts of his imaginary reality. His connection to “reality” is shown through his understanding that sex dolls are dissimilar to organic women in that they are biologically incapable of reproduction. His connection to his own “imagined” reality is shown by the fact that he refers to the physical act he commits with the doll as “sex” (an act involving more than one individual) instead of calling it masturbation. Similarly, when commenting in a post discussing sex dolls’ personalities on an online forum, Mahtek (2012) writes that his doll Roxaen “is a bad girl, for sure, but not evil or cruel for it’s own sake,

she just has no boundaries”. This statement makes it seem as though Mahtek is consumed by his imaginative reality in which dolls are animated and possess human traits and characteristics. However, this is not the case. Mahtek is conscious of the fact that her personality is created by him and exists within his imagination. He states that for sex doll owners “that is what playing with dolls is all about, pretend interactions with people” (Mahtek, 2012).

For many, it would be “uncanny” to engage in sex with a “partner” who looked and felt organic but was silent, stiff, cold, and maintained a stagnant facial expression. In his article, “The Uncanny Valley,” Japanese robotics expert Masahiro Mori describes this discomfort as “The Uncanny Valley” (Figure

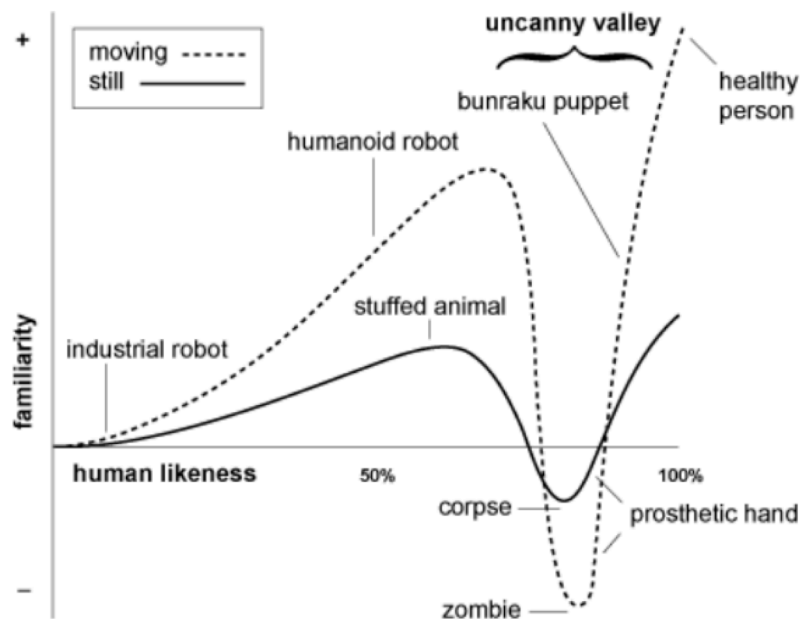


Fig. 24. Mori, Masahiro. (1970). *The Uncanny Valley*. (Trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Nori Kageki). IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine.

24) (Mori, 1970, p. 33). He claims that, as humans, we usually enjoy the sense of familiarity that can be found in objects that mimic our humanity. Mori states that, at first, the sense of familiarity is increased as the object becomes more “lifelike.” This linear progression can be seen as an upward slope (climbing the mountain). However, the enjoyment for the object is quickly diminished once the object (reaching a valley) becomes too lifelike. Once the object reaches this point, the individual begins to notice the things that set the object apart from an organic being

instead of noticing the object's aspects that mimic the known. For sex doll owners, these attributes are just a normal part of their imagined reality because, in their world, they are capable of realizing the doll's likeness to organic women while also accepting the dolls' inherent differences. Instead of seeing it as an inanimate version of an organic woman, they are able to recognize it as its own separate entity, with its own set of merits (e.g. safe sex, silence, reliability) (Holt, 2007; Our Doll Community, 2015).

This ability to occupy the spheres of one's imagination while staying in touch with reality is not unique to sex doll owners. In fact, it is common for children to attribute lifelike characteristics to their dolls while interacting with them in ways that they would not interact with organic humans (DiLalla & Watson, 1988). In a study conducted on children's objects and fantasy play, A.D. Pellegrini and David F. Bjorklund found that "fantasy play is the paradigm case of play during childhood" (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 2004). They describe "fantasy play" as any activities in which one adopts a relationship to "actions, objects, and peers" that is outside the limits of reality (e.g. a young child pretending to be a mother). In order to take part in fantasy play, the child must be able to differentiate between fantasy and reality. In a study (1988) conducted by Lisabeth Fisher DiLalla and Malcom W. Watson, results showed that, as children (age 2.5-6.5 years old) progress, differentiation between fantasy and reality sharpens. This greater understanding of the boundary between reality and fantasy allowed the older test subjects to engage in play that was "more emotional or frightening in theme" without disturbing their ability to grasp the distinction between reality and their play (DiLilla & Watson, 1988, p. 291). DiLilla and Watson claim that this has positive real-life applications because "when children have achieved this level of control, they can use fantasy play to accomplish one of its

hypothesized functions- to work through new information and negative affect without suffering real-life consequences” (DiLilla & Watson, 1988, p. 291).

Drawing from my own childhood experiences I am able to recall that as a six year old I played with both dolls and my one-year-old “organic” sister. Although I carried both around, frequently dressed and styled their hair, addressed them both by name, and ascribed them personalities beyond what they had the capacity to display, there were certain actions that I would perform with my doll that I would not perform with my little sister. For example, after playing with my doll, I would often leave her lying on the floor. If my mother called me down for a meal, I would carelessly toss my doll onto my bed or chair. If I was not in the spirit to dress my doll, I would leave her naked for several days. Even as a young child, I knew that these actions were permitted when caring for a doll, yet, not permitted when caring for a live human being (e.g. my sister). However, there was never a conscious separation of these actions into categories of permissibility. I did not compare my relationship with my relationship with my doll to my relationship with my sister because, for me, these relationships existed within different spheres; my interactions with my sister took place in “reality,” whereas my interactions with my doll existed within the sphere of my imagination. In my imagination, I was able to make up the rules; therefore, it did not seem uncomfortable that I was performing actions on a human-shaped object that would not be allowed with an actual human. These differing actions did not inhibit me from viewing my doll as “lifelike” because in the imaginary reality that I created, these actions were a part of our relationship.

Establishing Background Information

It is common for human beings to attribute human personalities and emotions to objects that resemble the human form (Wolf, Rygh, & Altshuler, 1984). For example, when looking at a

statue of a queen one might feel as though the statue was regal, proud, and maybe even arrogant. Similarly, children who play with dolls often create personalities and moods for each individual doll in order to further their relationship to the doll and expand upon their illusion (Wolf, Rygh, & Altshuler, 1984). In much the same way, many sex doll owners attribute personality traits to their doll(s). For example, in the documentary “Guys and Dolls” Davecat, a male doll owner, states that his doll enjoys having her feet rubbed and misses him when they are apart. By imagining the doll’s likes, dislikes, and emotions, Davecat creates a background and personality for his doll.

In the “Guys and Dolls” documentary, Davecat is not alone; all four men created personal intricacies for their dolls. One of the users, Mike, owned eight dolls at the time the documentary was shot. In the film, Mike claims that each doll has a different personality that coincides with the kind of women he wants when he is in different moods. Similarly, a respondent in a survey conducted by Antony Ferguson in his book “The Sex Doll: A History” claims that the names he gives his dolls “go with their personalities” (Ferguson, 116). In both situations, the men choose to suspend reality in order to further the realism of their doll(s).

Once again, I find it important to reiterate that for sex doll owners, these actions do not arouse a sense of “the uncanny.” Sex doll owners are able to avoid experiencing “such feelings of discomfort while participating in these practices because, unlike how many non-doll-owners might view the situation, doll owners do not see these practices as “animating an inanimate being.” Perhaps, in their imaginary world, the relationship to their doll is neither a stagnant human nor a talking doll. Although, in reality, the partner that exists in their imaginary world might have qualities that we would attribute to both of these things, in their imaginary world, the

doll does not have to fall into any predetermined qualities because their “reality” and their “partner” is whoever and whatever they want it to be.

Sex

Undeniably, sex (defined by male penetration of the sex doll) is one of the major aspects of the relationships that men have with their high-end silicon sex dolls. Many view the sex that the men have with their dolls as a high form of masturbation. However, many doll owners say that this definition does not accurately represent their experience. For example, Slade, a professional sex doll repairer from California, said that during a past sex experience with a doll it was “not just like [he’s] pushing on it but it’s pushing back” (Guys and Dolls, 37:23-26). Most likely, what Slade was experiencing was the realistic weight of the doll (most dolls are around 100 lbs.) and the life-likeness of the silicon used to make the skin. The sexual imaginations that are often experienced by the doll owners are often heightened by emotional attachments. Davecat explains that when he first received his doll in the mail their relationship was all about sex. However, now that he and his doll have been together for six years, he experiences them as being “just there for each other” (Guys and Dolls, 4:06).

The sex shown in pornographic films depicting men having sex with sex dolls opposes the views expressed by the doll owners in the “Guys and Dolls” documentary. In the documentary, the owners discuss the importance of creating a suspended reality in order to heighten the sexual experience. However, in researching for this thesis, I viewed several pornographic films that featured an eroticized inanimate female form. In these films, the way that the men addressed the dolls was different from the way the iDollator community discusses their experience of having sex with their doll (Domination Blue, 1975; Liquid Assets, 1982; Dolls who can’t say no, 2000). In the porn, the primary feature of the man-doll relationship was the

men's repeated use of phrases such as "Oh, I love your silence" or "I love how you don't talk back to me" (Liquid Assets, 1982). Additionally, the men let the doll move around in an unrealistic fashion (i.e. with limbs turned at unnatural angles and the head being continually flopped around); seemingly not even attempting to make the doll appear to be an "organic" woman. The obvious differences between the pornography and the sexual relations shown in the forums and documentaries, leads one to question the porn industry's targeted audience for films depicting men having sex with a sex doll. If the target audience is doll users, the pornography producers seem to misunderstand the allure that most users find in depicting their dolls as being alive. Additionally, seeing men have sex with an inanimate woman is, for many, rather disturbing. In their attempt to separate themselves from these natural feelings of discomfort, it would be counterintuitive for doll owners to draw attention to the "uncanny" aspects of their synthetic partner.

Cleaning, Repair, and Primping

In order to keep their doll(s) in premium condition, users must take several steps to preserve the physical appearance of the doll. After sex, it is recommended that the user clean the doll of all lubricants and bodily fluids in order to preserve the doll's material form. To keep their skin fresh, "RealDolls come with a cleaning kit that includes a douche ball, anti-bacterial soap and instructions since, once the dolls have been used, they need to have their cavities flushed out." (Smith, 2013, p. 241). In this way, the men take on a caring-taking role for their doll. As was previously mentioned, the more realistic the doll appears, the easier it is for the user to suspend their notions of reality. Therefore, when dolls lose some of their lifelikeness to overuse, many doll users choose to pay the high costs of shipping their dolls to individuals who specialize in sex doll repair. For example, in the documentary "Guys and Dolls" Davecat decides to send

his doll to a specialist after her joints start to become loose. He explains that fixing this problem is important to him because slack joints make it impossible for him to pose his doll in a realistic matter, thus, interrupting his illusion of lifelikeness (Holt, 2007).

For similar reasons, most doll users spend a large amount of time altering the doll's appearance with wigs, make-up, and clothing. When the dolls first arrive, their hair and make-up is in place and their outfit is in a pristine condition. However, after use, the appearance of the doll begins to deteriorate. In the documentary, all four doll users chose to apply make-up to their dolls (Holt, 2007). Their most common choice of product was lipstick. However, because most men are not familiar with applying make-up they must learn the necessary applications processes from studying photos or online tutorials (NBS1985, 2013; LorileiXAlec, 2013). Additionally, most doll users tend to build extensive wardrobes for their dolls. Contrary to what some may believe, the outfits for the dolls are not always erotic in nature. On a day-to-day basis most users choose to dress their dolls in day wear. In this way, the doll owners are able to have their doll become assimilated to the organic women that surround them in real life. Similarly, most doll users express spending large amounts of money on wigs for their doll(s) so that their hair have both the look and the feel of hair belonging to an "organic woman." After the purchase, the wigs must be maintained by the men through frequent brushing and styling. In "Guys and Dolls," Mike chooses to purchase the pubic hair of "organic" women online so that he can attach it to his synthetic dolls and enjoy a more life-like experience (Holt, 2007).

In addition to increasing their doll's physical realism with pleasing visual stimulations, many users choose to elevate the lifelikeness of their doll's aroma by apply various forms of perfume. On the online forum, Our Doll Community, there are various strands depicting discussions about "favorite perfumes," scented lubricants, and "perfumes infused with human pheromones"

(vhd95, 2013), the last of which is particularly interesting. As is obvious in the commented post, doll owners hope that by applying human pheromones to their dolls, users are able to access an even higher level of illusion by triggering a biological attraction (Grammer et al., 2004). Several doll owners claim that they achieve this by applying “vulva” scent to the doll’s groin (Ceej, 2013; guitarpussey, 2013). In this way, both the user’s mind (via their imagination) and body (via a chemical reaction to the scents applied to the doll) are telling the user that doll is “real.”

Obviously, all of the practices mentioned in this section would not be considered “normal” in an organic relationship. In fact, cleaning out an organic woman’s sexual orifices after sex or applying their make-up (a practice most sex doll owners were previously unfamiliar with) might, in some individuals, give rise to a notion of “the uncanny.” Therefore, it may seem counterintuitive that sex doll owners perform these actions in order to *heighten* their experience of an imagined “reality.” Instead, these practices should be viewed as yet another way sex doll owners excel at *avoiding* “the uncanny.” Whereas non-doll-owners might see it as “taboo” to touch the genitals of a silent, immobile, figure that so closely mimics an organic human being; the relationships that these men form with these dolls in their imaginary realities grants them a sense of emotional “closeness” and “intimacy” with the doll that is able to expel any negative feelings.

Changing Parts

Many high-end sex dolls offer features on their body that adapt to interchangeable parts. For example, most RealDolls feature eyes that can be manually opened or closed and tongues that can be switched out for different sizes and lengths (RealDolls, 2015; Ferguson, 2010, p. 45). The practice of removing and interchanging one’s partner’s body parts is not common amongst organic couples. In fact, there are not any organic human body parts that, for the common man,

is removed or exchanged. Thus, witnessing a hyper-realistic human form have its body parts manipulated in an “uncommon” way (e.g. face removed, eyes opened or closed manually) causes many people to experience “the uncanny.” Yet, doll owners manually make these changes to their doll(s) on a regular basis. For example, in “Guys and Dolls” Davecat shows the camera how he can remove and interchange his doll’s tongue (Holt, 2007). During the removal process, Davecat admits that many individuals find this feature uncomfortable or weird yet he seems to be unperturbed. For some individuals, watching a doll owner make these changes brings about a feeling of “the uncanny” because, in our mind, we know that body parts (e.g. tongues) cannot be removed without causing pain and damage. However, in the doll owner’s reality, closing the dolls’ eyes or changing the dolls’ tongue are not the same as removing and interchanging body parts. For a doll owner, manually shutting the eyelids of their doll does not mean that they wish the power and control over their partner’s sight. Instead, the way that in the “real world” it is normal for an organic individual to tuck their partner into bed; in the doll owner’s imagined reality, they may view such a practice as manually closing the eyelids as the way they assist their partner in getting to sleep.

Photography

In the doll community, the suspension of the “real” is also furthered by the use of photography. Many users enjoy taking and sharing photographs of their doll(s). For example, starting in 2009 the online forum “Our Doll Community” started holding monthly photo challenges (Our Doll Community, 2015). In the documentary “Guys and Dolls” one user, Everard, frequently dresses and poses his dolls for photo sessions (Holt, 2007). Everard claims that “the photos give the dolls a life, which “makes them seem more real” (Holt, 2007). In Everard’s photographs shown during the documentary, the dolls are all dressed in elegant but

informal attire and partaking in casual activities (i.e. reading). Often times, Everard sets up a timer on his camera and steps into the frame, which he says are “almost like family photos” (Holt, 2007). However, admittedly, Everard’s photos are not the norm. Most pictures shared within the sex doll community are explicit or overtly eroticized¹¹. In this way, another user featured in the “Guys and Dolls” documentary, Gordon, provides a more accurate representation of popular photography in the sex doll community (Holt, 2007). In the film, there are several shots of photos that he had previously taken. In the photographs, his dolls are shown in clothed in schoolgirl uniforms and posed in sexually suggestive poses on a bed.

Sexually explicit or not, the photos taken by the users are undeniably used to further their illusions. For example, in a thread on the online forum “Our Doll Community” one user asked the doll community to “Show us what you wake up to in the morning” (coralsheep91, 2014). Of the 28 replies, most photos displayed dolls posed as if they were asleep (coralsheep91, 2014; Euchre, 2014). For many, photographs are a good way to distance oneself from experiencing “uncanny” feelings. Similar to reading or listening to a story, experiencing a three dimensional object displayed in two dimensions puts the subject matter into a different “reality,” no longer consistent with one’s three dimensional world. As mentioned in Masahiro Mori’s article, “The Uncanny Valley,” humans enjoy the familiarity of human shaped objects until they are get to a point where their semblance is too close without actually being organic (Mori, 1970). The example Mori gives for this is the new technology offered for artificial limbs. He explains how the new prototypes include veins, hair, and even nails, making them appear to be an “organic” arm. However, once the individual touches the arm and notices that it is cold, and without a

¹¹ However, some forums (e.g. The Doll Community) have rules regarding photography forbidding “Human/Doll pics involving Sex Acts,” pictures that “would elude to Human/Doll Sex (IE POV close-ups),” and “simulations of Bodily Fluids, except Tears of Joy and lube” (Mayor, 2009). These rules appear to be contradictory to the idea of furthering realism for the doll owners.

pulse, all familiarity is erased, leaving in its place feelings associated with “the uncanny.” When experiencing a doll through photography, the illusion does not run the risk of being broken by “the uncanny” experience of physical touch.

Bringing an Imaginary Relationship into the Real World

Due to the “uncanny” feelings many experience while in the presence of hyper-realistic sex dolls, apart from online forums and scheduled “iDollator meet ups” there are not many communities that are accepting of synthetic relationships. For example, in the documentary DaveCat discusses how his doll spends the majority of the time in his room because he lives with his father who sees DaveCat’s relationship as “unnatural and strange” (Holt, 2007). Another doll owner, Mike, admits that he takes extra care to hide his dolls because “doll owners may be seen as perverts” and he does not wish to be viewed in that way (Holt, 2007).

As a result of this uneasiness and other factors (i.e. difficulties caused by the doll’s inability to transport itself/stand on its own) it is hard for many doll users to enjoy the kind of activities that many organic couples take for granted. For example, one user on the online forum, Our Doll Community, submitted a post asking whether or not it is possible to travel with your doll (i.e. bring them on an airplane or a cruise) (LorileiXAlec, 2014). While some users addressed the post with a shared sympathy, admitting that they too wish to travel with their dolls, others submitted much harsher replies pointing out the “true” reality of the doll; that it is an inorganic being (Camp, 2014). One user wrote “just as you would not expect to be allowed to bring a chair or a piano into the cabin of a plane, you cannot expect that the airline would allow you to travel with a large doll”(Camp, 2014). Another example, Everard, a real doll user, always attaches an “I am a doll” sticker/tag to his doll when taking her on car rides if he knows that, at any point in the journey, he will have to leave her unaccompanied (Holt, 2007). He explains that he does this so

that people do not think that she is an organic human who has “gone catatonic or something” and try to “rescue” the doll.

However, before even leaving the house, many doll owners face issues with transporting their dolls short distances (e.g. from one room to the other). High-end silicon dolls typically weigh from 50-100 pounds (RealDoll, 2015; Ferguson, 2010; Our Doll Community, 2015). In order to transport the dolls from place to place, doll owners must carry or “roll” their doll. On the online forum, Our Doll Community, one user chose to upload a thread (with photographs) discussing and demonstrating different ways to carry a doll (incred, 2013). He lists the pros and cons of each position, claiming that one makes the doll’s head susceptible to getting bumped on walls and doorframes, while another creates a large strain on the user’s back. The user also points out that it is important “not to squish the boobies” while carrying the doll because the silicon can be malformed (incred, 2013). Do such commentaries dispel the fantasy of the doll as an animate companion? It appears not. The majority of the user’s comments on the original post noted the intimacy of the photos and obviousness of the man’s affection for his doll. Some users, such as noquiexis, commented about the intimacy of the moment by posting comments such as, “I don’t know why, but this series is making me get a little emotional. It’s like I am seeing how deeply you care for her” (noquiexis, 2013). Others focused their attention on the doll, claiming that the photographs made her look “so innocent and trusting” (Jesse1965, 2013). Similarly, in the documentary “Guys and Dolls” Davecat is forced to transport his doll from his room upstairs down to driveway (Holt, 2007). To move her, Davecat transitions between carrying the doll and rolling her across the floor while seated in a rolling desk chair. While moving her, Davecat talks in a soothing voice to his doll, seemingly attempting to comfort her and calling her “my sweetie.” In this way, the doll’s inability to move on its own appears to be treated within the

user's imagination as if the dolls were organic people who do not have control of their motor functions rather than inanimate objects.

Unlike the ways in which users are able to easily overcome the doll's inability to move, the doll's inability to stand creates a larger problem. High-end silicon sex dolls are most commonly manufactured in a sitting or lying position, and, therefore, do not stand on their own. If the doll users wish to have their doll posed in an upright position, they must attach them (via a hook hidden on the back of the doll's neck) to hooks attached to the wall or ceiling or prop them up on a "stand." In the documentary, the camera often zooms in on the user's multiple ceiling hooks (Holt, 2007). One user, in particular, even has one located inside of his shower. The act of "hanging" the doll or setting the doll onto a stand, is very un-lifelike. On the internet forum, Our Doll Community, there are several threads dedicated to users searching for dolls that are able to stand on their own (Haremlover, 2014; grenouille, 2014). While some users agree that they would like their doll to stand on its own in order to ease transportation (Haremlover, 2014), others are open about the way in which the doll's ability to stand on its own contributes to the user's illusion of realism (grenouille, 2014). In one such thread, user grenouille proposes that users post photos of their dolls standing on their own by using Photoshop to edit out the stand and gets many enthusiastic responses of users posting their dolls without the stand (grenouille, 2014). Wanting the doll to be able to stand on its own two feet contributes to the illusion that the doll has physical autonomy.

Additionally, many doll owners wish to have relationships with both organic and synthetic women at the same time. However, for most doll owners, finding an organic woman who is comfortable and open to this idea proves to be a difficult task. For example, in the documentary, Mike, the owner of eight high-end sex dolls, explains that he has recently entered into a

relationship with an organic woman named Jody (Holt, 2007). In the beginning of the documentary, Mike explains that he can see his relationship with Jody being “long-term” even though she does not know the full extent of his interest and involvement with sex dolls. When Jody is first interviewed, she admits that she finds his relationship with his dolls “confusing” and claims that he has told her multiple times that “they’re for masturbation only” (Holt, 2007). During this interview, she also states that Mike has repeatedly told her that his relationship with her has negated his need to use a sex doll. However, Mike also claims that he has been continuing to spend time with his dolls while dating Jody and: “if [Jody] is the right woman, why wouldn’t she be ok with the dolls?” (Holt, 2007). In order to put this question to the test, Mike decides on his birthday to throw a party with Jody and two sex dolls dressed in very revealing clothing as the guests. Upon her arrival at Mike’s house, Jody seems very taken aback by the situation. However, during a private interview (still visibly shaken) Jody says that she is ok with the dolls and proud of Mike for being honest with her. However, the documentary ends with a single sentence that says differently: “Jody broke things off a week after he told her about the dolls” (Holt, 2007).

Conclusion:

Sex doll owners are not the only ones capable of occupying both the “real world” and their “imaginative reality” simultaneously. Instead, because of necessity, the sex doll owner has, with practice, honed this ability. In this chapter, I proved that sex doll owner’s ability to attribute animation to their inanimate dolls is commonly practiced by non-doll users in other common situations (e.g. childhood doll play). Most humans have the capacity to overcome their feelings of “the uncanny” associated with the inanimate realness of sex-dolls through the creation of an alternative “reality.” However, it is quite possible that, one day, such practices will no longer be

necessary. In the next chapter, I discuss how synthetic relationships are already working to expand societal notions of male heterosexuality. As further technological innovations are created, and more people begin entering into synthetic relationships, such practices might find their own place within the “real world.”

Chapter III

“What is necessary now, and long overdue, is to base publication deeply upon some meaningful and mature interpretation – socio-analytic, or psychoanalytic, or any other kind of analytic so long as it is analyzed – of what the material means, and meant to the people who have transmitted it; what it tells us about their unwritten ‘verset’ in human history, what it has left for us to understand about their otherwise unspoken and unrecorded lives and emotions, and most centrally about the emotion of physical love.”
(Legman, 1964: p. 254)

In the first chapter, I discussed the history of the inanimate, eroticized, female form in western culture. In the previous chapter, I discussed how men must overcome “the uncanny” in order to enjoy their synthetic relationships. In this chapter, I explore the relationships between men and inanimate eroticized female forms. Specifically, building upon my analysis in previous chapters, I discuss the expansive effect that these synthetic relationships have on cultural perceptions of heterosexuality. I present my analysis in four main parts. First, I examine the modern day constructed limitations of heterosexuality. To do so, I discuss Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s explanation for the modern-day rigid binary system of sexuality as presented in her book, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick, 1990). Second, I explore the attempts of previous scholars to classify the relationships that men have with eroticized inanimate female forms. Third, I introduce Freud’s understanding of fetishism; questioning the minoritizing aspects of Freud’s theory of fetishist sexual maturation. Fourth, I emphasize the fact that the relationships that men have with synthetic partners are able to have an expansive effect on notions of heterosexuality if such relationships are viewed through a universalizing, rather than minoritizing, lens. To conclude, I argue that although the work that these relationships do to expand heterosexuality is important, ultimately, these relationships show that sexuality is far vaster than the cultural rules of the current simple binary system allow.

Minoritizing and Universalizing Views of Sexuality

In her book, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the nineteenth century western cultural metamorphosis of sexuality into a binary system of categorization. Through this discussion, Sedgwick gathers evidence for her claim: that a dualistic division of sexuality into heterosexual or homosexual is too simplistic. Sedgwick (1990) argues that the division of sexuality into these two mutually exclusive categories is subject to several inherent contradictions (p. 1). She claims that one such contradiction exists within the tension between viewing sexuality as either 1) universalizing, applying to all sexual individuals, or 2) minoritizing, applying only to a select few (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 1). Viewing sexuality as universalizing ignores the intricacies of individual's experiences, while viewing sexuality as minoritizing creates exclusivity. Sedgwick's argument does not favor either of these modes of discussing. Instead, she elects to discuss the way the two categories are interrelated. She claims that neither view is capable of articulating a pre-existing truth because it is the action of creating nominal categorizations that marginalized groups are produced (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 2).

Sedgwick begins her book with a history of how and when these two categorizations were created. In this, she claims that the binary system for classifying sexuality was particularly intense during the Victorian era. She continues by positing that one of the primary motivators responsible for these transformations was the creation of fields such as psychoanalysis and sexology. Sedgwick then points to the late nineteenth century, when a great realignment took place in regards to the way Anglo-Americans novels view and discuss sexuality. She credits this shift for the creation of an American ideology of "inner self": the alleged personhood that resides within each individual and holds the true essence of personal choice. In *Epistemology of the Closet* her philosophical thought process follows the American obsession with exposing the "inner self" and in particular, one's sexuality. This expected divulgence is often harmful to those

who do not follow the heteronorm because “there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 46). The symbolic closet leads to a discussion coupled with further questioning of 20th century western society’s need to invasively judge character and grant individual rights based on displayed sexuality.

Admittedly, Sedgwick’s work is focused on the minoritization of homosexuality, not doll lovers. However, I think that the general theme of her work could be expanded to include all forms of “abnormal sexuality,” including fetishism. For Sedgwick, homosexuality is viewed in two ways: that which minoritizes and assigns its interest only to a particular group of people within western society, the gay community, and that which universalizes with an understanding that sexuality is fluid and varies within us all (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 58-59). Similarly, fetishism broadly, and synthetic love in particular, has previously been discussed by scholars as something outside of “normalized” sexuality. Instead of expanding current notions of heterosexuality to include such practices, they have been cast aside to “the undesirable” or “abnormal.”

Scholarly discussions of Synthetic Relationships:

Previous scholars cannot seem to agree upon how to characterize the love that men have with inanimate eroticized female forms (Ellis, 1936; Moya, 2006; Smith, 2013; Ferguson, 2010). Even within their own work, there are sometimes contradictions (Tabori, 1969; Moya, 2006; Ellis, 1936). Some, like Freud, have taken a minoritizing approach: limiting an interest *in* or openness *to* synthetic relationships to the abnormal (Freud, 1928; Ellis, 1936; Santolini, 1973). Others claim that doll love is spurred by the heterosexual man’s hyperactive imagination or agitation with the demands of an organic female partner (Del Piombo, 1971; Tabori, 1969; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Gebhard, Johnson, Kinsey, & Institute for Sex Research,

1979). This second view harbors an inherent claim that an ability to form a relationship to a doll exists universally within all sexual beings and, furthermore, that all recorded instances of synthetic love occurring are born from circumstance, not sexual abnormality. To understand doll lovers' influence on societal perceptions of male heterosexuality, I find it vital to examine how previous scholars have brought them into their discussions. For her dissertation, Cynthia Ann Moya compiled a collaborative list of scholarly works pertaining to penetrable sex devices (sex dolls and artificial vaginas) (Moya, 2006). When brought together, these sources, spanning the scientific¹² to the satirical, offer a vast preview of both the practice of men as intimate doll lovers as well as the way that western society (both common and academic) view synthetic relationships¹³.

Henry Havelock Ellis initiated the minoritizing academic analysis of men's love for eroticized, inanimate, female forms in the 1936 version of his book, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Ellis, 1936). As a psychologist and medical doctor, Ellis had access to the spoken experience of many different types of individuals. During his studies, Ellis came across several patients who admitted to practicing what was then referred to as *Pygmalionism*¹⁴: "falling in love with statues" (Ellis, 1936, p. 188). Ellis, like many of his contemporaries, had negative views of such practices. In his book, he writes, "we may observe among ourselves that it is the ignorant and uncultured who feel the indecency of statues and thus betray their sense of the sex appeal of

¹² Although many of these books claim to be "scientific" and thus, allude to a sense of objectivity, it is important to remember that science in general, and social science in particular, is often jaded by cultural understandings of morality.

Phillips, D.C. (1990). Subjectivity and Objectivity: An Objective Inquiry. In E. Eisner & A. Peshkin (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in education*. New York: Teachers College Press: 19-37.

¹³ It may be important to keep in mind that even though these scholars participate in active discussions about men having intimate relationships with eroticized, inanimate, female forms, most works were published before the creation of hyper-realistic high-end silicon doll. Had they had the opportunity to witness this, their opinions about doll lovers might be different.

¹⁴ With obvious reference to Ovid's Pygmalion from *Metamorphoses* (Ovid, 8).

such objects.” (Ellis, 1936, p. 188). This analysis is minoritizing because it limits erotic feelings towards inanimate eroticized female forms (in this case statues) to a certain group within our population: “the ignorant and uncultured” Pygmalionists.

Ellis is not the only scholar who associates such feelings with negative or already stigmatized attributes. In his “pulp paperback,” *What you always wanted to know about the use of sex devices * but were afraid to ask*, Santolinni discusses sex dolls, claiming that only “. . . the ugly and the handicapped, as well as the extraordinarily shy, or simply those with a penchant for sex products, may be attracted by such a come-on” (Santolinni, 1973, p. 94). Additionally, similar to Ellis, he minoritizes attraction to inanimate eroticized female forms by claiming that “[a]side from the physically incapacitated, it is probably safe to conclude that most men who use artificial vaginas are partial or total fetishists” (Santolinni, 1973, p. 94).

However, Alfred Kinsey published findings in *The Male Volume* and *Marginal Tabulations* that would seem to debunk both of these ideas (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Gebhard, Johnson, Kinsey, & Institute for Sex Research, 1979). Although they only appear briefly in his study, Kinsey discussed men who masturbate with objects simulating the female form in a different, more positive, light. In *The Male Volume*, Kinsey claims that although only a small percentage of the subjects admitted to masturbatory practices beyond manual stimulation: “experimentation is most often found among better educated individuals who have well developed imaginative capacities”¹⁵ (Kinsey, 1948, p. 510).

Additionally, in his *Marginal Tabulations*, Kinsey displays a table of findings that shows that, amongst the participants surveyed, a small yet significant number admitted to penetrating

¹⁵ Kinsey does go on to make some negative assumption. Such as that these men are also “of course, the ones most likely to have a minimum of overt socio-sexual contacts.” (Kinsey, 1948, p. 510).

inanimate objects resembling female genitalia (Figure 25). Although these percentages initially appear small, they make up a rather large number of men if applied as a percentage of the US male population (approximately 159.5 million men). These findings support the idea that, with such a large amount of men participating in such practices, it would be fair to conclude that an even larger number would be interested in such practices but have just never performed them. If so, it would make sense to view such practices as an expansion of heterosexuality as a larger structure, rather than a practice of a select group of abnormal individuals. Kinsey's work is beneficial in that it provides an idea of the expansive nature of these practices.

Other scholars, instead, chose to focus on particular case studies (either real or fabricated) when discussing such practices. For example, Paul Tabori, a journalist with no traditional training in sexology, published several interesting pieces about the various types of sex that he ran into during his travels. In 1969, Tabori wrote a book entitled *The Humor and Technology of Sex* (1969), with an entire section devoted to "The Toys of Love," in which he discusses synthetic relationships. In this discussion, he provides (without citation) the case of

Michael Calcin (Tabori, 1969). Calcin, described as a “wealthy French artist,” fell in love with a Jewish girl named Maryse. Yet, despite their love, Maryse’s father would not grant Calcin Maryse’s hand in marriage because he was not of their religion. Instead, Maryse married another man with whom she started to create a family. Depressed and alone, Calcin commissioned an artist to construct a wax replication of Maryse from a picture she had provided him during their relationship. So pleased with this figure, he commissioned subsequent wax models of each of the children Maryse bore with her new husband. This behavior, seen as abnormal and psychologically unsettling, resulted in Calcin eventually being committed to the Brussels Asylum (Tabori, 1969, p. 371-373).

TABLE 164. CURRENT MALE MASTURBATORY TECHNIQUES:
USE OF DEVICES

FREQUENCY	MALE		
	White		Black
	College	Non College	College
	%	%	%
None	75.4	84.4	91.1
Rare to occasional use of bottles, tubes, holes in objects	13.0	7.2	7.1
Rare to occasional use of other devices; vibrators, water jets, etc.	4.5	2.9	0
Frequent use of devices: any sadomasochism, any highly unusual technique	7.0	5.5	1.8
Known N	2903	346	112
Unknown N	1542	370	33
Inapplicable N	249	50	32
Card and column	9/30		

STANDARD QUESTION: "What other ways of masturbating do you use?" (Examples often cited.)

Fig. 25. Gebhard, Johnson, Kinsey, & Institute for Sex Research, 1979:213

This “case,” extreme in many ways, is interesting in that it shows the fluidity between doll ownership and partnership with an organic woman. Although, as discussed in my last chapter, it is typical in the doll community for men to have and enjoy both synthetic relationships and organic relationships, scholars often discuss fetishists (e.g. doll owners) as separate from heterosexuals. Through the process of normalizing heterosexuality, western society created sexual activities that are “normal” for the heterosexual male (e.g. reproductive sex). All other sexual practices were then considered “abnormal,” effectively marginalizing fetishism and attributing its practices to a small group of “abnormal” individuals (Sedgwick, 1990). This story is important because it shows that heterosexuality and fetishism are not mutually exclusive categories. Instead, as Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet*, both fetishism and heterosexuality, as with all forms of sexuality, are interconnected.

Positing a similar idea of synthetic relationships existing within a fluid notion of heterosexuality, Norman Rubington (under the pen name Akbar Del Piombo) provides the case of Vincenzo. In his book, *The Erotic Tool* (1971), Del Piombo tells of a machinist, Vincenzo, who grows tired of his wife and decides to build a female sex doll in his basement. Upon discovering the doll, Vincenzo’s wife provides him with an ultimatum: either the doll is sold or their marriage is over. Vincenzo chooses the doll because, as Moya explains, “Vincenzo enjoys the doll’s beauty and readiness, and admires that she has no back talk and does not spend money. Even though the doll cannot cook, neither could his wife” (Moya, 2005, p. 183). Similar to the story of Calcin and his Maryse doll, Vincenzo’s doll serves as a replacement wife. In this way, both Calcin and Vincenzo are wishing to continue a heterosexual relationship with an inanimate female substitute, thus expanding upon the notion that heterosexuality exists solely between an organic male and female partner. Additionally, there are even stories of two heterosexual men

enjoying female dolls together as a bonding experience.

In *Sex Devices and How to Use Them*, Dumont and Dumont discuss an unnamed fellow who, while housesitting, happens upon his wealthy friend's collection of sex dolls (Dumont & Dumont, 1970). Upon his discovery, he chooses to have sex with one in the friend's apartment. Throughout his time as housesitter, the man has many more relationships with the dolls. He creates an alternate reality: dressing them, naming them, and talking to them. He engages in multiple sexual acts with the dolls and is pleased that the doll, unlike an organic woman, does not play games or talk back. When the friend returns, the man reveals his discovery and the two partake in sexual actions with the dolls together. This case, interesting in itself, is made more interesting by the fact that following this story "Dumont assures us that these men can maintain a —normal life along with their interest in dolls; they do not have problems with their mental health or social stability." (Moya, p. 184-185). This comment is interesting because it shows that some scholars have previously discussed synthetic relationships as being capable of existing within the realm of "normative" heterosexual behaviors, as long as one's notion of what is to be considered "normal" is expanded.

Roger Blake, PhD, a pseudo-scientific historian¹⁶ discusses another case of a synthetic relationship in his book *Sex Gadgets: The Stimulators* (Blake, 1968). In Blake's story, a 22-year-old man fashions a sex doll out of a mannequin he steals from a clothing store. Blake claims that the man dresses the doll in clothing and lingerie, buys her a wig, and creates a penetrable "vaginal" hole that he then lines with fur. The man treats the doll like an organic woman, caressing it, kissing it, and talking to it. Again, this story, similarly to the last, is interesting in

¹⁶ In her book *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*, Rachel P. Maines calls him "admittedly not the most reliable of historians" (Maines, 1999: 108).

Maines, R.P. (2001). *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

itself but made even more interesting by a comment made by the author. In conclusion to the case, Blake claims that the man in the story was cured by psychoanalysis. However, as mentioned by Moya, Blake does not provide an explanation of the cure's details. In response to this comment, Moya then ironically asks: "Did he stop penetrating the mannequin, and start having relationships with flesh and blood women? Or did the cure leave him satisfied with his sex doll sexuality?" (Moya, 2005, p. 181) Obviously, Blake assumed that the answer was implied. Any "cure" would most likely have meant that the young man converted to sexual practices that fall inside the realm of the heteronorm.

Lastly, in a pseudo-scientific paperback, *Sex Devices: A How-To-Guide to Pleasure*, Erler introduces three cases of men having relationships with sex dolls (as cited in Moya, 2005). In his first case, a shy 17-year-old, too nervous to have sexual relationships with organic women, purchases a blow up doll by an older friend. The young man has enjoyable sex with the doll several times before engaging in sex with an organic woman. After experiencing both, the young man decides that he enjoys his doll better and goes on to live a content life. In the second, an older man "too old to chase after women" purchases several sex dolls and ends up enjoying sex with them more than sex with organic women because he feels "more relaxed" (as cited in Moya, 2005). He too, goes on to enjoy a satisfactory sex life fueled by his dolls and his imagination. Both of these cases share several common ties: the men's heterosexual sexual attraction to women, the men's use of a sex doll as an object at which to aim that attraction. These cases prove that men who consider themselves to be heterosexual are capable of redirecting their heterosexual aim at an object not usually considered within the realm of normalized heterosexuality: an inanimate eroticized female form.

The third and final case discusses a man who, at his wedding, gets jealous upon

witnessing his wife dance with another man. In drunken revenge, the man comes up with the idea to sleep with a prostitute as payback to his new bride. However, upon discovering the blow-up doll he received as a bachelor gift, the man settles on having sex with it instead. The next morning, the man apologizes and returns to his wife. This case, different from any other previously discussed, is interesting because it shows a man having a sexual relationship with a doll within the realms of what would most likely be considered a heteronormative relationship. This story shows that an attraction to dolls is not something that can be minoritized upon a certain group of individuals. Instead, it is something that should be seen as universalizing proof that even categories that seem very constricted (e.g. male heterosexuality) have room for expansion and growth.

Freud's Minoritizing Explanation of Fetishism:

According to Elizabeth Wright's, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, during the Freudian era (1856-1939), sexology had taken upon itself two major tasks: 1) distinguishing the key attributes of masculinity and femininity, and 2) differentiating between the sexual "normal" and "abnormal" (Wright, 1992, p. 153). During this time, a set of normative (heterosexual, reproductive) sexual acts were deemed "normal" while "other sexual activities were either accepted as fore-pleasures or condemned as aberrations and perversions." (Wright, 1992, p. 153). Broadly examined, Freud's discussion of fetishism appears to be minoritizing rather than universalizing because it furthers the notion of heterosexuality as the "norm" and fetishism as an inability to accomplish the terms of normalcy.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will limit my focus on Freud's discussion of fetishism to the statements made in his essays *Three Essays on the Theory Sexuality* (1905) and *Fetishism* (1928). In *Three Essays on the Theory Sexuality* Freud discusses sexual abnormality, adolescent

sexuality, and puberty. His later work, *Fetishisms*, is an expansion upon what Freud posited about fetishes in his earlier paper. For this discussion, both essays are important because Freud's concept of "fetishism" exists within a larger framework of his theories regarding the development of sexuality. Freud describes man's development into the fetishist as being incapable of fully grasping notions from typical heterosexual development. In order to discuss Freud's account of fetishism, one must first understand what Freud deemed to be "normal" sexual development for heterosexual males. I provide an in-depth look into these early stages of development to showcase Freud's notion of early sexual fluidity, regardless of sex or gender. In order to accept heterosexuality as a category that can be expanded and changed, it is important to realize that in many situations, that categorization is ineffective or does not exist.

In Freud's 1905 essay, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he discusses how and when "normal" sexuality occurs. Defined in simplest term, sexuality, for Freud, is composed of learned behaviors as opposed to innate actions. Freud's model of sexuality is centered on three interlinking concepts: the object, the aim, and the source. The aim, sometimes referred to as the libido, is the "basic, instinctual sex drive" (Freud, 1905, p. 41). The purpose of "the aim," is to acquire a build up of sexual tension so that the individual is lead to perform actions that will result in a release. Initially, one's pleasure is only concerned with attaining its aim. From there, it evolves into seeking other human beings as "an object." It is important to note that during this stage of development, Freud does not believe that one longs to experience pleasure from a certain gender. Instead, one simply harbors the wish to share their pleasure with others.

This development of redirecting one's pleasure to an outside object can be observed in children who remove their clothes within public viewing. Their ardent want to expose their bodies, especially their genital regions, to those around them is not done to acquire an object, but

to gain camaraderie with other sexual beings (Freud, 1905, p. 192). In fact, Freud believes that children “can be led into all possible kinds of sexual irregularities,” which, “shows that an aptitude for them is innately present in their disposition” (Freud, 1905, p. 191). Infants have a drive to make connections and create relationships with the outside world by “loving, eroticizing, wanting everything and everyone that interests it” (Thurschwell, 2009, p. 41). This instinct to possess is demonstrated by the child’s tendency to put everything in its mouth (Thurschwell 2009, p. 41). In this way, the child wishes to connect with the world through an unconscious process of self-discovery: it is through this search, that the child identifies its individual sources of pleasure.

Freud claims that this search for self-stimulated pleasure begins in early infancy. According to his theory, all humans are born in a state of open sexuality called “polymorphous perversity” (Freud, 1905, p. 191). Unlike the later “developed” sexualities, polymorphous perversity is not associated with a direct alignment of sexual desires. Instead, during this stage, sexuality is simply equated with receiving pleasure (Freud, 1905, p. 191). According to Freud, these pleasures are typically developed through common instinctual actions such as breastfeeding, thumb sucking, and bowel retention. With repetition, these innate actions become separated from the instinctual drive and are, instead, performed out of satisfaction (Freud, 1905, p. 179-183). The satisfaction gained from these actions is concentrated into different “erotogenic zones” on the infant’s body. Erotogenic zones can occur on any sensitized areas of the skin or mucus membrane that produce pleasure when stimulated. These erotogenic zones can develop into miscellaneous regions of the body but, eventually, in most individuals, end up being centered on the “genital zone” (Freud, 1905, p. 187).

Typically, the first erotogenic zone develops at the infant's mouth. For oral sexuality, the aim is ingestion and incorporation. From birth, infants are taught to receive nourishment from a human breast or, its mock image, a bottle. In order to receive milk from a nipple, real or artificial, it is imperative that the infant form suction with their mouth. Most children are born already equipped with an instinct to grasp, latch, and suck. When presented with a recognized source of food, these actions are instinctually triggered. In the presence of nourishment, Freud does not consider such actions (i.e. grasping, latching, sucking) to be sexual behaviors; such actions appear to be motivated by self-preservation rather than sexual gratification. However, infantile sucking does not begin and end during feeding sessions. Once the child has grown accustomed to the pleasant feeling they receive as the fluid escapes the nipple, washes into their mouth, and down their throat, they wish to replicate this feeling and take to sucking on inanimate objects or various parts of their own body (i.e. hand, fingers, foot, toes). For example, many children take to thumb sucking because it allows for an independent and self-fulfilling satisfaction. The thumb, unlike a bottle or breast, is never taken away (Freud, 1905, p. 179-180). It is then, in the absence of a source of food, that Freud attributes such behaviors as being performed simply for pleasure. Such actions, performed with the presence of pleasure in juxtaposition with the absence of a self-preserving function, are, for Freud, evoked by sexual satisfaction.

This autoeroticism is continued with a transfer of libido around eighteen months to a second erotogenic zone: the anus. Human bodies naturally digest and dispose of consumed nourishment. Therefore, Freud does not consider this action, in and of itself, as linked to an attainment of sexual pleasure. It is through the pleasure attached to the control of this innate and customary function that Freud views the action as becoming sexualized. For anal sexuality the

aim is retention and expulsion. During this time, the child recognizes the abundance of pleasurable sensations received when holding back their bowels. Additionally, the child's developing knowledge of bowel retention creates an understanding of their feces as a bartering tool. In this way, the feces become a currency: when given to the caregiver the child in return receives praise and acknowledged alignment with social standards. In turn, by withholding the feces, the child is able to make a statement against their caregivers' production of power and control (Freud, 1905, p. 185-187). Though continued sexuality of this kind is often enticed by an outside party, it is regularly the result of an internal impulse (Freud, 1905, p. 191). As children progress, new areas of pleasure are found on the body and they enter into a stage of early masturbation and nocturnal emission. During this time, all children, regardless of their future sexual orientation, share a similar experience of sexual variation.

It is during the next stage, when gender differentiation is revealed, that differing sexual object choices occur (Freud, 1925; 1905). Freud claims that, pre-fetishists, like all other young boys, do not suspect the mother's lack of a phallus until they are presented with her female genitalia. Upon witnessing her lack of a phallus, they register her genitalia as being the result of castration. The boys then fear that her castration will lead to his own castration. Freud claims that different sexualities emerge in response to the fear. Only the heterosexual male is able to overcome the mother's lack of a phallus and refocus their aim upon the castrated members of the opposite sex. The fetishist, unable to fully come to terms with the mother's castration, represses the mother's female genitalia and creates a phallic substitution for her from some other object or body part. For this reason, past scholars have claimed that the doll lovers use the doll as a substitute phallus so that they do not have to face their discomfort with female genitalia. Freud believes that the fetishist, upon their inability to conquer the Oedipus Complex, "falls a victim to

neurosis” (Freud, 1905, p. 226) However, the fetishist is not unaware of reality. The fetishist has two streams of cognitive understanding of the woman’s castrated state: a wish for a new reality and an acceptance of the truth.

These stages of early development, primarily based on gaining a greater knowledge of one’s own sexual pleasures, and an awareness of differing genitalia, are almost impossible for most individuals to recall. Freud attributes this lack of personal recollection of one’s own experience of unrestrained sexuality to “infantile amnesia” (Freud, 1905, p. 174-175). He claims that erotic pleasures that fall outside of the heteronorm become repressed so that conscious thought can safely align with the limitations of one’s moralistic society. Freud claims that through social education we gain the inhibitions that force us to reel away from the cornucopia of pleasures we found seducing during infancy and early childhood. As we become plagued by the sense of social constraint we allow “mental forces” to act as dams, filtering the content we allow into our conscious (Freud, 1905, p. 178). Though these pleasures are forced from the conscious thought, they do not completely disappear from our mind. The diversity by which one gains gratification leads to a spectrum of sexuality developed within all children, though repressed in most, this spectrum never completely disappears. Our own interpersonal spectrum of sexuality is constructed within the unconscious. In order to ensure its containment to this region, our conscious mind associates these lingering pleasures with vile words, therefore, making their exposure uncomfortable and, at times, worthy of a neurological disorder (Freud, 1905, p. 175). These breaches of infantile latency play a role in shaping our sexual maturity and forming us into the image of the socially responsible adult we display to others (Freud, 1905, p. 179).

Minoritizing v Universalizing View of Expansive Sexuality:

Freud's theory of infantile sexuality lends itself to notions of sexual fluidity that are universalizing. It is at the stage of recognition of gender differentiation that his theories become minoritizing (Freud, 1905). As discussed in the previous section, Freud claims that there are developmental differences between the heterosexual and the fetishist (Freud, 1928). In terms of expansion, this definition does not benefit heterosexuality. Instead of allowing for fluidity between the heterosexual man and the fetishist, Freud appears to lock them into stiff constraints.

In his book, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, Marquard Smith attempts to explain synthetic relationships through the lens of fetishism (Smith, 2013). By doing this, he does not attempt to deny the heterosexuality of the organic man. Instead, Smith is intentionally making a comment about the doll lover's sexuality. By allowing the sexual actions between doll and doll lover to fall into the category of heterosexual sex, Smith hopes to reinforce the idea that heterosexuality "is already perverse" (Smith, 2013, p. 13). Smith's argument, similar to Freud's concepts of infantile sexuality, is attempting to claim that the lines differentiating normality and perversion are not as clear as they culturally appear.

Though Freud claims that the concept of polymorphous perversity remains repressed within the unconscious of the outwardly heterosexual individual, in *Introductory Lectures*, Freud claims to regard everyone as being "capable of making a homosexual object choice," regardless of projected sexual identity (Abelove, 1985, p. 389). This statement, shocking to the Victorian society of Freud's time, is just as surprising today. Western culture is raised on the media's image of sexuality as indispensable. Those who believe that sexuality is a choice, are thought to be insensitive to those who suffer the negative reciprocations of a community fixed upon the traditions of heteronormativity. Freud challenges this, acknowledging those who try to "represent themselves," and their cause as being specific to "a special variety of the human species" as

contributing to a population bound by sexual limitations and unaccepting of variation (Abelove, 1985, p. 389). To categorize homosexuals, or any other sexual deviation from the heteronorm, into a league of their own is to “reject, in fact to repress, the psychoanalytic theory of sex” (Abelove, 1985, p. 390). That is, to deny our origins as a polymorphous perverse organism and limit our sexual experiences as an adult. Crediting sexual desire to erotogenic zones, rather than biological forces, leads to an open interpretation of sexuality, one that invites and encourages various forms of sexual practice and fulfillment.

Heteronormative culture denies individuals the freedom to openly express fluid sexual choices by attempting to limit sexuality to reproductive acts; and effectively excluding any practices with the sole aim of sexual fulfillment. Thus, many men who participate in or wish to participate in sexual acts that deviate from the heteronorm (e.g. forming a relationship with a sex doll) are silenced by their own fear of being considered “abnormal.” One reasonable explanation as to why men may wish to hide their interest in non-normative venues of expressing their sexuality is that men, in particular, face stigmatization when admitting to using, or even desiring, a masturbatory aid meant to mimic female genitalia (Rainbird, 1981). *In The Illustrated Manual of Sexual Aids* (1973), a narrator under the penname “Evelyn Rainbird” states

The lonely female being more to be pitied than the male, society tends to —admit to the dildo, but rarely, if ever, to the equivalent sex aid for the male. Thus, even in the fully-illustrated contemporary catalogues of some suppliers of sex goods, while it is not uncommon to find intermingled merchandising of wispy lingerie, erotic books and sex aids generally, it is rarely that one finds a photograph of description of a simulated vagina even though they are invariably made and marketed by large- scale manufacturers of dildos, prosthetics and clitoral stimulators. It is as if there is a tacit admission among the male compilers of such catalogues that artificial vaginas are destructive to the male ego and must seldom, if ever, have their existence admitted.

(p. 4)

Admittedly, a lot has changed since the 1970s. With the birth of the Internet, female sex dolls became widely marketed worldwide (Ferguson, 2010). However, there is still something

worth considering in the way Rainbird describes the artificial vagina's blow to the male ego. In a direct response to Rainbird's claims, Moya (2005) explains that

Artificial vagina and sex doll use indicates, to many pseudo- scientists, a physical or emotional problem in the user. If a man must resort to using an artificial device rather than a real woman, he must obviously be either inept or perverse. Admitting to using artificial vaginas, to Rainbird, is destructive to the male ego; even more destructive than admitting to masturbation.

(p. 191)

In this way, male heterosexuality becomes limited to those who can provide "proof" of their sexuality by performing sexual acts with members of the opposite sex, thus defining sexuality by actions rather than desires. Similarly limiting to male heterosexuality, culturally defined non-sexual attributes are often used to (inaccurately) determine men's sexuality. For example, *Gender-Related Traits of Heterosexual and Homosexual Men and Women* lists "to play with dolls" as a "feminine behavior" indicative of homosexuality (Lippa, 2002, p. 83). This is problematic because it 1) attempts to define sexual preference by factors with no relation to sexuality 2) It characterizes doll play as "feminine behavior," and 3) it makes the inaccurate assumption that gender sexuality have an inherent correlation. Both non-sexual and action based attributes for defining a particular sexuality sets up boundaries that limits sexual choice and personal expression.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, if viewed universally, the relationships that these men have with inanimate eroticized female forms work to highlight fluidity within male heterosexuality. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud claims that a "certain measure of fetishism is found in normal love" (Freud, 1905, p. 154). This statement is positive in that it calls for an understanding of sexual variance within what is considered "normal." However, its positive message is undermined by its continuation of the idea that "normal love" exists. In order to expand the

current notions of sexuality, we must first resign heterosexuality from its position as “the unacknowledged, undifferentiated absent centre against which so-called marginalized sexualities are defined” (Smith, 2013, p. 14). Instead, sexuality must be envisioned as something fluid and changing. As Freud said, heterosexual maturation is established by “a series of developments, combinations, divisions, and suppressions which are scarcely ever achieved with ideal perfection” (Freud, 1913, p. 180; Wright, 1992, p. 154). This means that there is not a “true heterosexual” a “true homosexual” or a “true fetishist.” A variety of sexual interests, desires, and actions exist within these pre-conceived categorizations. According to Freud, humans are born polymorphously perverse, drawing pleasure from multiple erotogenic zones and erotogenic stimuli. Thus, humans are capable of developing a vast variety of sexual interests; none of which explicitly define their sexuality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, men have, and will most likely continue to form intimate relations with inanimate, eroticized, female forms. In the first chapter I proved synthetic relationships' constant, yet evolving, presence in western society. In the second chapter, I showed the role of imagination in creating a life-like experience for the user in which "the uncanny" can be avoided. In the last chapter, I showed that the relationships that men have with their sex dolls showcase how heterosexuality is fluid, and even "queer." Within our current culture, synthetic relationships exist outside of what is considered the sexual "norm." Given their current marginalization, these relationships have the capacity to expand contemporary cultural perceptions of heterosexuality.

Looking ahead, I believe they have the ability to do even more than that. With the current high demand for continuous technological innovation, it is likely that in the near future sex dolls will have a vast array of new technological features. Given the pattern of technological innovation encouraging a higher form of intimacy between organic men and synthetic women thus far, it is likely that as these new technologies are revealed, more organic men will choose to be in relationships with synthetic women.

If western culture continues to marginalize these relationships, as these dolls become more capable of emulating the appearance of an organic woman, it may be necessary for doll owners to go to even greater lengths to avoid the uncanny feelings associated with lifeless objects resembling the human form. However, if western societies eventually accept these relationships into popular culture, it may no longer be necessary for doll owners to overcome the "uncanny" feelings associated with hyper-realistic dolls. Only objects or actions that oppose notions of normalcy or reality are capable of producing an "uncanny" feeling. If synthetic

relationships continue to spread throughout western society, and eventually become normalized, it will become more commonplace to interact with synthetic human-shaped forms: eliminating the feeling of discomfort associated with an inanimate object possessing life-like qualities.

Future work in this field might involve feminist critiques in conversation with the Queer Theory arguments presented in this paper.

Of course, this returns the discussion to some of the feminist questions I had previously set aside. For example, in the future, what would it mean if sex dolls were manufactured with what western culture currently views as “flaws” (e.g. cellulite, acne, and frizzy hair)? Currently, these dolls are designed and created under the constrained ideas of feminine beauty that are popular in modern day western culture. Historically, these standards have experienced changes, however, they have always existed in some form. Will there be a time when feminine appearances, and thus, the manufactured appearance of these dolls are not dictated by idealistic standards?

Currently, there are ideas of body inclusivity being marketed such as Dove’s “Campaign For Real Beauty” in which women are being told to love their body, no matter what shape or size. If this trend continues, there is a chance that idealistic standards of female bodies will be reduced or altogether extinguished. Should this be the case, I would predict that the appearances of the sex dolls would evolve as well.

Additionally, as western culture becomes more comfortable with female sexuality, will the number of female sex-doll consumers grow? Will female sex-doll consumers ever equal the number of male sex doll consumers? If so, will their synthetic relationships have the same expansive effect on female heterosexuality?

My ambiguity surrounding the moral implications of sex doll creation and ownership's contribution to female objectification still remains. Although I am critical of synthetic relationships' effect on the popularization of an "idealistic," silent, and overtly eroticized notion of the female, I continue to be optimistic about the expansive effect these relationships have on male heterosexuality. With this, I look forward to a future in which there is no longer a distinction between "male heterosexuality" and "female heterosexuality," or, "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality." Instead, I hope that synthetic relationships are moving towards a notion of fluid sexuality that is beyond the current limitations of sexual categorization.

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