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RESEARCH PAPER

PORN IDENTITY

THE SEXUALISATION AND OBJECTIFICATION OF YOUNG GIRLS

by

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Statement

This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

List of illustrations

Abstract

Acknowledgments

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List of illustrations

Abstract

Over the past five years the increasingly explicit sexual nature of a range of clothing and toys for children, mainly girls, sold in Australian shops has become the focus of a sustained public debate. My Masters project aims to contribute to this critical discourse. The project explores the social, cultural and commercial influences on childhood identity that result from an acceptance of the sexualisation and objectification of young girls. It questions the impact that this tendency towards an earlier sexualisation process may have on the sense of identity and wellbeing of the contemporary generation of children and reflects on what may be driving these changes.

Porn Identity

The sexualisation and objectification of young girls.

Sexualisation and objectification of young girls is a current social and political issue. Young girls in contemporary western cultures are developing their identities based on popular culture and stereotyping which begins in childhood. Influenced through fashion, toys, magazines, music videos, social media and the internet, these 'young consumers' are being seduced into stylising themselves on hyper-sexualised ideals.

Over the past five years the increasingly explicit sexual nature of a range of clothing and toys for children, mainly girls, sold in Australian shops has become the focus of a sustained public debate. My Masters project aims to contribute to this critical discourse. The project explores the social, cultural and commercial influences on childhood identity that result from an acceptance of the sexualisation and objectification of young girls. It questions the impact that this tendency towards an earlier sexualisation process may have on the sense of identity and wellbeing of the contemporary generation of children and reflects on what may be driving these changes.

Broadly defined, sexualisation is the act of giving someone or something a sexual character, sexual associations or attributing sex too. Theories about sexuality and the cultural codes that attempt to define and regulate this basic human drive are complex and cover an extremely large field of human behaviour. In this paper I have attempted to critique those areas which ultimately affect children.

My approach to the subject has been influenced by feminist writings. This has meant I have approached the issues with an interest in how learned cultural roles connect to societal power structures. I have also chosen to concentrate on a specific area of sexuality that is a critically important site in the debates that surround the control and social regulation of sexual behaviour;

the clothing styles of pre-pubescent girls. I concentrate on this area because it presents the issues at the heart of the debate in a particularly clear way. Debates covering adult sexuality and behaviour mirror the issues raised in the debates I concentrate on - with the critical difference being that the issue of individual choice can complicate the debate at an adult level.

As childhood development includes a sexual dimension prior to puberty, the acknowledgement that children have a sexual dimension is not in itself of concern. Sexualisation referred to in this paper is in association with the slowly developing sexual identity of children moulded into stereotypical forms of adult sexuality. My project seeks to connect the sexual roles offered by these recent trends in mainstream children's fashion to the broader concerns raised in feminist theory.

While sexualisation and objectification of the female is not new, the contemporary concern is the age of the females being sexualised and objectified. They are clearly children. Children are defined as people aged 12 years and younger. In Australia, this includes preschool, all primary school students and many students in their first year of secondary school. This rough partitioning of human development by the education system reflects the biological partitioning of puberty. Loosely speaking, teenagers are understood to be people aged 13 to 17 years and those 18 years and over are legally adults. 'Young girls', in the context of this research and art practice, incorporates the definition of children with the relatively new category of 'tween'. Tweens are people 7 to 13 years of age. I am interested in the way these age groupings are becoming less rigid, especially when subject to commercial market forces.

Chapter one opens with identity formation considered through three frames of reference; feminist, medical and neuroscientific. Through the readings of Feminist theorists Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir and contemporary author Natasha Walter, light is shed on identity formation and sexuality with particular regard to constructed gender identity v's biological determinism. In addition, Theorist Sally Haslanger signals identity formation from the

perspective of cultural hierarchies and power and their encoding in social structures. Supporting the sex and gender distinction, Shuvo Ghosh MD and his colleagues propose that the development of gender identity begins to take shape prior to birth. While Cognitive neuroscientist Cordelia Fine discusses how both explicit and implicit messages delivered through gendered stereotypes influence the formation of identity and impact on social roles. Also of consideration in this chapter is how the sexualisation of children occurs with particular regard to advertising and mass media and in the context of Ariel Levy's 'Raunch Culture' and a broader cultural shift towards a highly sexualised consumer society.

In chapter two, marketing strategies that seek to exploit imaginative interactions between reality and representation are examined. Mannequins and the role they play as social templates are used as an example of this and for this reason play a primary role in my art practice. This section presents an account of the rise of this form of bodily representation and its entwined relationship with mass consumer culture. Mannequins as art object in themselves and artists who use them as part of their practice are also explored.

The third and final chapter focuses on my art practice and the development of the studio work. It is a reflection on the research I have conducted. The evolution of the work is traced from its conception to the proposed installation of the final work with its selection of cultural markers as medium. Additionally, my attempt to link my art practice to other areas of public discourse dealing with the sexualisation and objectification of young girls is documented in the form of three case studies.

Chapter 1

Identity Formation

The formation of identity is complex and multifaceted as it is built upon race, religion, culture, gender and economic position. In other words, it is based on a group's or individuals lived experiences. While acknowledging this, the focus of this paper is on a collective gender identity, through a feminist lens, specifically as it relates to women and young girls in contemporary western cultures.

Women have been asking questions about the gendered nature of power and fighting for changes to the political status quo for more than two hundred years. This militant questioning of accepted truths was from the beginning connected to the questioning of aesthetics and notions of feminine beauty. To call for a change in the political status of women has always meant simultaneously questioning the stereotypical models of beauty offered to women by mainstream culture and the way in which these were connected to stereotypical roles and modes of behaviour. From Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 to Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* in 1970 to Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* in 1991, women have demanded a change to these ideals. "Yet", states Natasha Walter in *Living Dolls The Return of Sexism,* in 2010, "far from fading away, they have become narrower and more powerful than ever."[1]

In the English language, the terms sex and gender are often used interchangeably. However, in a medical and technically scientific sense, these words are not synonymous. Sex refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male or female. There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including chromosomes, hormones, gonads, internal reproductive organs and external genitalia. These are the attributes, along with references to the brain's

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[1] Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*(London: Virago, 2010), 3.

physical structure, supporters of biological determinism deem most significant in terms of gender identity. Gender refers to the attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Historically many feminists endorsed the sex/gender distinction. Provisionally: 'sex' denotes human females and males depending on biological features; 'gender' denotes women and men depending on social factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity). This enabled them to argue that many differences between women and men were socially produced and, therefore, changeable. The main feminist motivation for making this distinction was to counter biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny.

In this next section I will very briefly survey a number of theorists whose writings reflect Feminist approaches to the nature versus nurture debate. I have included these samples to give an indication of the breadth of the debate and to broadly indicate my position; that culture (or nurture) is the most important factor in determining the differences in gender roles both historically and now.

In 1990, Judith Butler writing on *Subjects of sex/gender/desire,* considered Simone de Beauvoir's statement; "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."[2] In relation to the identity of 'women' as 'subject', Butler discussed the distinction between sex and gender with regard to the biology-is-destiny formula and suggested that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed. Butler stated, "Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and cultural constructed genders."[3] Both de Beauvoir and Butler claimed that gender is a cultural interpretation of sex and that gender is culturally constructed. In 1999 in *Gender Trouble,*

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[2] Judith Butler, 'Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire', *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1
[3] Judith Butler, 'Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire', *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 6

Butler redefined her position on biological sex and social gender concluding that both sex and gender are culturally constructed. Butler stated;

> If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.[4]

A social construction framework explains that there is no essential, universally distinct character that is masculine or feminine. Instead behaviours are influenced by a number of factors including class, culture, ability, religion, age, body shape and sexual preference. Construction of gender theory argues that girls and boys are actively involved in constructing their own gendered identities from what they observe in the world around them and that gender identity is a personal conception of oneself, not necessarily based on biological sex.

Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician, McGill University Health Centre, Montreal Children's Hospital, Shuvo Ghosh, MD and his colleagues agree that early development of gender depends on the environment in which a baby is reared and begins to take shape prior to birth. As prenatal ultrasounds allow the sex of a foetus to be determined quite accurately by the second semester of gestation, Ghosh believes;

> Families who receive knowledge of the child's biological sex often use this information to tailor parental planning and reactions. Gender-specific names, items of clothing/toys, and even aspirations for the soon-to-arrive baby may differ depending on the anticipated sex. Thus, a preformed idea of the child's preferences is in place even before the child is delivered.[5]

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[4] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2 ed.(New York: Routledge, 1999), 10-11.
[5] Shuvo, Ghosh MD, "Gender Identity", *Medscape,* Updated June 11, 2012
http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/917990-overview#aw2aab6b3 accessed January 11, 2015

Essentially, sex is assigned at birth, after which a significant environmental role begins in gender development. Most parents usually rear the child as either male or female, with all of the associated social interactions. At this point, the parents (consciously or unconsciously) create the gender role, and parental decisions play the largest part in determining environmental influences. Theories of social learning describe differing types of reinforcement in families. Opportunities to experience a variety of activities or restriction to sex-stereotypical ones are said to have an effect on gender development and gender identity. As gender development progresses in children, an acceptance and personal expression of a gender identity occurs. Ghosh states;

> Eventually, the concept of gender constancy develops in the growing child. This refers to the ability of a child to concretely differentiate between the genders, frequently occurring by age 2 years, at which time the first expressions of gender identity are commonly made. Gender constancy is thought to be achieved by age 6 years in nearly all children, barring those with specific variations from the usual pattern.[6]

Throughout the rest of childhood and school years, a child's gender identity is typically reinforced by gender roles. The school environment often serves as a model for society, and adherence to the binary male or female gender role is often presented there. In teenagers, the influential factors of sexuality, personality traits and peer interaction, are important in gender development and identity. Ghosh proposes, "Although many believe that gender identity is fixed in early childhood, it is more certain that, by late adolescence and early adulthood, an established gender identity is unquestionably in place."[7] On the evidence presented by pediatricians and child psychologists and from a feminist perspective, gender roles enacted through gender stereotypes, in play, toys, clothing and media, become of critical importance during childhood in relation to the formation of identity.

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

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Another contributing factor signaled by feminists in relation to the formation of gender identity, can be found in cultural hierarchies and power structures, particularly in relation to sexuality. Theorist Sally Haslanger's analysis of gender is founded on female and males differing in two respects, physically and in their social positions. Haslanger argues that gender is a matter of occupying either a subordinate or a privileged social position and that societies in general, tend to privilege individuals with male bodies so that the social positions they subsequently occupy are better than the social positions of those with female bodies. Haslanger states;

> *S is a woman* iff [by definition] *S* is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and *S* is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction.
>
> *S is a man* iff [by definition] *S* is systematically privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and *S* is 'marked' as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction.[8]

This then generates sexist injustices and persistent social inequalities between males and females. Acceptance of Haslanger's analysis, lends justification to arguments of sexism and power under a patriarchal social structure. However it raises questions of, who is precisely in control and who benefits from a gendered submissive system. It theoretically robs women of the potential of agency, something that is central to feminist politics.

Cognitive neuroscientist Cordelia Fine adds another dimension to the formation of gendered identity. In, *We Think, Therefore You Are,* in *Delusions of Gender*, Fine considers how, even if you personally don't subscribe to stereotypes, there is a part of your mind that may. Referencing research by social psychologists, Brian Nosek and Jeffrey Hansen, Fine reports that stereotypes, as well as attitudes, goals and identity also appear to exist at an implicit level, and

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[8] Mari Mikkola, "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/feminism-gender/>. *First published Mon May 12, 2008; substantive revision Mon Nov 21, 2011* http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-gender/ p16

operate "without the encumbrances of awareness, intention and control."[9] The implicit associations of the mind connect representations of objects, people, concepts, feelings, your own self, goals, motives and behaviours with one another based on your past experiences and current context. The strength of each connection depends on how often particular elements have previously gone together. Fine asks, "So what does the implicit mind automatically associate with women and men?"[10]

During tests to assess implicit associations, social psychologists work from the assumption that particular stimulus will, rapidly, automatically and unintentionally activate strongly associated concepts, actions, goals etc. more than weakly associated ones. These primed representations are more likely to influence perceptions and guide behaviour. Fine explains the learning of associations takes place without the need for awareness, intention or control and associative memory learning picks up associations in the environment. While this has benefits as an effortless and efficient way of learning about the world around you, there are also drawbacks. Unlike explicitly held knowledge which can be reflected on and on which beliefs and choices are made, associated memory, according to Fine's research, seems to be fairly indiscriminate in what it takes on board. Fine states, "Most likely, it picks up and responds to cultural patterns in society, media and advertising, which may well be reinforcing implicit associations you don't consciously endorse."[11] As for gender, Fine asserts that the automatic associations of the categories male and female are not a few flimsy strands linked to penis and vagina. Measures of implicit associations reveal that men, more than women, are associated with science, mathematics, career, hierarchy and high authority. Women, in contrast are implicitly associated with the liberal arts, family and domesticity, egalitarianism and low authority.

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[9] Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences* (London: Icon, 2010), 4.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 5.

Culture, Stereotypes and Toys

If it is accepted that gender identity begins in childhood, the question then becomes: what are the stereotypes that shape identity and what is the current state of affairs?

It is clear that traditional female stereotypes have been given a submissive role in relation to masculine roles. For this reason many feminists in the 1970's argued that girls and boys should be encouraged to play across boundaries. A fundamental concern of my work is with the issue of how childhood toys shape adult lives and identity. Because it is an issue that has been repeatedly addressed in Feminist writings and in broader cultural debates for many decades, I am now interested in it as a measure of progress. While it is true that in some areas these ideas have brought about changes and there are more roles on offer for young girls in contemporary society, I am more concerned with the lack of change and what I perceive to be a backwards movement in children's toys towards even more exaggerated differences. When I raise these issues in my work I am asking, what changes have been made in this area over the past forty years and what role commercial forces have played in this recently?

"I didn't expect we would end up here,"[12] wrote Natasha Walter in 2010, after a visit to a toy shop in London. Walter had moved up through the shop on the escalator to arrive "into a dream world"[13] on the third floor. Walter states;

> Here, it was as though someone had jammed rose-coloured spectacles over my eyes, and yet the effect was nauseating rather than beautifying. Everything was pink, from the sugared-almond pink of Barbie, to the strawberry tint of Disney's Sleeping Beauty, to the milky pink of Baby Annabell, to the rose pink of Hello Kitty.[14]

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[12] Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 1.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 1.

Fig 1. Big W. *The home of Disney Princesses.* Scanned pages from Big W catalogue March 12 until March 18 2015

Walter believes not only does the division between the pink girls' world and the blue boys' world still exist but for the current generation, it is becoming more exaggerated. (fig 2) For this Walter points to the return of sexism and a new (biological) determinism which strengthens the persistence of stereotypes about how men and women should behave in everyday life. However these assertions raise the questions; was sexism ever absent, and what is new in the biological debate?

Fig 2. Big W. *Girls Toys, Boys Toys.* Scanned pages from Big W catalogue June 2 until July 9 2014

Paradoxically, Walter believes, that throughout much of our society the image of female perfection to which women in this generation are encouraged to aspire, has become defined primarily by sexual allure. She describes this new ideal as, "slender exhibitionists with large breasts gyrating around poles in their underwear."[15] Observed through advertisements, music, films, magazines and television programs, this image of female sexuality and what it means to be sexy, arises from the sex industry as it has become more generally acceptable.

Walter states, "The movement of the sex industry from the margins to the mainstream of our society can be seen in many places …."[16] However, above all, Walter identifies the influence of a much greater presence of pornography in the lives of many young people, driven by the internet.

In this claim Walter is supported by Australian author, speaker and media commentator Melinda Tankard Reist and Dr Abigail Bray, who in *Big Porn Inc.* write; "We live in a world that is increasingly shaped by pornography. The signs are everywhere: …."[17] Tankard Reist and Bray state;

> Children and young people are exposed to pornography at increasingly early ages. Pornography has become a global sex education handbook for many boys, with an estimated 70% of boys in Australia having seen pornography by the age of 12, and 100% by the age of 15… Girls are also exposed to pornographic images; Joan Sauers found that 53.5% of Australian girls aged 12 and under have seen pornography, with the figure rising to 97% by the age of 16.[18]

Tankard Reist and Bray continue; "The mainstreaming of pornography is transforming the sexual politics of intimate and public life, popularising new forms of anti-women attitudes and behaviours and contributing to the sexualisation of children."[19]

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[15] Ibid., 3
[16] Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 4.
[17] Melinda Tankard Reist and Abigail Bray, *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry*(North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 2011), viii.
[18] Ibid., xvi.
[19] Ibid., xiv.

While many feminists in the 1970's objected to Barbie with her tiny waist, large breasts and perfect features attempts were made to market her with a career; as a doctor, pilot or astronaut with accessories to match her roles. Bratz dolls, the more recent fashion doll, were created with a wardrobe for clubbing and shopping. They come dressed in crop tops and miniskirts with fishnet stockings, shoes instead of feet and heavily painted faces. They also have large breasts. The 'Princess' is not overlooked in the Bratz range of dolls; though it is a fetishized version marketed as *Pouty Princess.* (fig 3) Walter states, "When you wander into a toy shop and find this new, altogether more slutty and sultry ideal pouting up at you from a thousand figurines, you realise that there has been a genuine change in the culture aimed at young girls."[20] Bratz dolls however, represent only a fragment of the messages young girls access each day from a wider culture which appears to encourage young women to see sexual allure as their primary asset.

Fig 3.   Fig 4.

Fig 3. Bratz doll, *Pouty Princess,* 2009. Photograph, Linda Wilken. 2011.
Fig 4. Barbie billboard Time Square New York. 2014. Reproduced from https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152667119262506&set=a.10152667118152506.1073741837.6245 97505&type=1&theater (accessed March 17, 2014).

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[20] Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 4.

Raunch Culture

Celebrated as a positive sign of the success of the 1970's women's liberation movement, which insisted women should be released from conventional morality around sex, which saw them confined to idealised chastity on one hand or promiscuity on the other, the 'new' highly sexualized culture is often associated with women's empowerment. In *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture,* Ariel Levy disputes the empowerment claim and conceives the term 'Raunch Culture' to articulate this phenomena.

Raunch culture, originally referred to the over sexualised culture of the United States, where women were not only objectified but were also encouraged to objectify themselves in the belief that this constituted female empowerment. Levy's 'Female Chauvinist Pigs' – 'A new generation of empowered women', sees women performing what was previously considered the behaviour of male 'chauvinist pigs' and 'going one better'. Pole dancing and wearing the Playboy bunny with pride, they make sex objects of themselves.

In the preface of the second edition of Levy's book, published five years after it was first released, Australian author of *Princesses & Pornstars,* Emily Maguire states; "Within a year, the phrase "raunch culture" had passed into common usage and soon after it took on a life of its own."[21] Maguire explains that the term since then has been used to discuss everything from children wearing make-up to the increasing popularity of cosmetic surgery to the apparent penchant of footballers to bond via group sex. By the late 1990's Maguire asserts that, "raunch culture" seemed to be behind every obscene, nasty, degrading, tacky or harmful aspect of popular culture, not to mention every social problem or crime involving young women or girls in any way."[22] Maguire believes that an anti-raunch message has become the dominant one communicated by mainstream media and that some social conservatives may have willfully

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[21] Emily Maguire, preface to *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture,* by Ariel Levy (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2010), xii.
[22] Ibid.

misrepresented *Female Chauvinist Pigs* to bolster their case for a return to traditional gender roles.

Recognising the paradox between a strong presence of traditional values and a highly sexualised culture, Levy makes the following comment.

> If the rise of raunch seems counterintuitive because we hear so much about being in a conservative moment, it actually makes perfect sense when we think about it. Raunch culture is not essentially progressive, it is essentially commercial.[23]

Here Levy is referring to the United States of America, however it could be argued that Australia is also having a 'conservative moment' under the current Liberal - National Coalition Government, and therefore the same perspective applies. Levy goes on to explain, that going to strip clubs or flashing one's breasts is not embracing something liberal, it's not 'Free Love', it's not about opening our minds to the possibilities and mysteries of sexuality. Rather Levy believes raunch culture is about "endlessly reiterating one particularly commercial – shorthand for sexiness."[24] Sexiness does not equate to beauty, which has been valued throughout history, it equates to 'hotness' which can be commercially acquired. In this context Levy essentially argues that raunch culture is doing young women real harm.

The sexualisation of children.

It is widely believed that across western cultures, children are being increasingly sexualised at younger and younger ages. Although it appears the trend is particularly advanced in the United States of America, Australia's children are no exception. Evidence points to girls being sexualised and objectified to a much greater extent than boys. However with increasing sexual objectification of men in advertising in parallel with a highly sexualised culture in general, it is likely over time boys will also become subject to increasing sexualisation pressures.

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[23] Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing, 2005), 29.
[24] Ibid., 30.

The sexualisation of children occurs when the slowly developing sexual identity of children is moulded into stereotypical forms of adult sexuality. This happens in two distinct ways, both resulting from different cultural processes driven by commercial interests. In the past, the sexualisation of children occurred indirectly through exposure to representations of teen and adult sexuality in advertising and popular culture where sex was used to sell 'things'. Emma Rush believes, "As advertising and popular culture have become more heavily sexualised (to the point where some scholars speak of the 'pornification' of culture more generally), the impact upon children has increased."[25]

More recently, the sexualisation of children occurs directly. This involves sexualising products being sold specifically for, and marketed to children and children being presented in images in advertising modelled on adult sexual behaviour. Images of sexualised children are becoming increasingly common in advertising and marketing material as to now be considered 'normal'. Children who are aged 12 and under, particularly girls, are dressed, posed and made up in the same way as sexy adult models. The term 'corporate paedophilia' first used by Phillip Adams, was adopted by The Australian Institute for its report on the sexualisation of children in Australia, to describe the process of directly sexualising children. Sexualising products are those linked to cultural norms of sexual attractiveness. They are products aimed at highlighting sexual difference between females and males. This includes defining hips, waist and breasts of adult females. Children do not yet possess these physical attributes, "yet", state Rush and Andrea L Nauze, "they are dressed and posed as if they do, often with the aid of cosmetics that mimic the secondary effects of sexual arousal."[26] Sometimes this takes place in a setting that is normally used by adults rather than children.

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[25] Emma Rush, "What are the Risks of Premature Sexualisation for Children?" in *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls,* ed. Melinda Tankard Reist. (North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 2009), 41.
[26] Emma Rush, Andrea La Nauze, and Institute Australia, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia*, vol. no. 90([Deakin], A.C.T: Australia Institute, 2006), 7.

Sexualised children's products include bras, G-strings, platform shoes, lip gloss and fake nails. Such products were previously reserved for teenagers and adults but are now sold directly to girls of primary school age. In 2010 a British Government report; *Sexualisation of young people review* was sparked by an inquiry into the growing trend for padded bras for five-year-old girls and high-heeled sling-backs for eight-year-olds. Advertising for these products clearly shows that they are not being sold for creative dress-up purposes as they once were. Instead they are marketed as products to be worn on a daily basis by young girls to achieve a look which is 'Hot'. Rush states;

> So today's children are not only exposed to hypersexualised adult culture, but they are directly sold the idea that they should look 'hot' – not later, but now. This means that today's children are facing sexualising pressure quite unlike anything faced by children in the past. What risks might children face as a result of such pressure?[27]

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[27] Emma Rush, "What are the Risks of Premature Sexualisation for Children?" in *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls,* ed. Melinda Tankard Reist. (North Melbourne, Vic: Spinifex Press, 2009), 42.

Fig 5. *Sultry kids ads for Witchery spark store rage.* Fig 6. *Adult cult: Children in Witchery's advertising campaign,* 2011

Fig 5 Reproduced from Herald Sun (http://www.heraldsun.com.au/entertainment/fashion/sultry-kids-ads-for-witchery-spark-store-rage/story-e6frf8o6-1226017373738 (accessed March 26, 2011).
Fig 6 Reproduced from http://melindatankardreist.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/03/witchery-single-girl.jpg (accessed March 18, 2011).

Fig 7.   Fig 8.

Fig 7 *Adultification and Sexualisation of Girls in French Vogue.* 2011 Reproduced from Sociological Images
http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/?s=Adultification+and+sexualization+of+girls+in+french+vogue (accessed August 6, 2011).
Fig 8. *"Bras, make-up and high heels for 3 year olds. Much wrong with that?"* 2009 Reproduced from Mamamia
http://www.mamamia.com.au/parenting/bras-make-up-and-high-heels-for-3-year-olds-much-wrong-with-that/ (accessed March 05, 2011)

In the Australian Institute report; *Corporate Paedophilia, Sexualisation of children in Australia*, Rush and La Nauze identify potential risks to children from advertising and marketing material and categorise these risks in the following way; physical harm, psychological harm, sexual harm, the 'opportunity cost' of sexualisation, and its ethical effects. They address each category in detail with supporting evidence. This paper will not expand on Rush and La Nauze's findings, nor reference the multitude of writings which report, increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, body image problems, eating disorders, self-harm and sexually transmitted infections are linked to the sexualisation of children and a hypersexualised adult culture. Instead the associated art practice is influenced by and relies on empirical evidence from child and adolescent healthcare professionals, (including mental health professionals), who address the public forums that accompany the art exhibitions which are, in part, the subject of this paper. The speakers will be identified in the case studies in chapter three of this paper as they publically confront issues related to the sexualisation and objectification of young girls and discuss the lived experiences of young girls in contemporary Australian culture.

Children as consumers

> They influence parental purchases, often have their own money to spend and it is likely they will continue to purchase the same brands into adulthood.[28]
>
> Rush & La Nauze

Advertisers are now targeting children using increasingly sophisticated techniques, as children are recognised by marketers as a particularly valuable group to capture. According to social research company Australia Scan, in 2006, the tween market, which covers 7 to 13 year olds, was worth more than $10 billion in Australia. Of this, it was estimated between $250 million and 1 billion was spent on clothing. Rush and La Nauze explain that research consistently shows that children under the age of eight do not have a well-developed understanding of advertising. In particular, while older children may understand the persuasive intent of

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[28] Rush, La Nauze, and Australia, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia*, no. 90, 32.

advertising, younger children are more likely to see the same advertising as informative. As children become teenagers, although they understand persuasive intent, they are entering a vulnerable and self-conscious period which marketers tend to exploit and in using sex to market their products, marketers incidentally promote sexualisation as desirable. Rush and La Nauze state;

> Even if children were able to reject the links between advertising and particular products or brands, it is a further and much more difficult step for them to reject the cultural underpinnings on which most advertising depends, including the desirability of both consumption and sexualisation.[29]

In Australia, department store Myer has a separate 'Big Girls' clothing range for 8 -16 year olds, offering smaller sizes in its existing teen and young women's brands. This according to Myer's general manager of apparel, (2006), is because, "tweens don't want to wear children's clothing any more, and instead prefer to wear what's in fashion, what their older brothers and sisters are wearing."[30] Another Australian fashion retailer with a distinct 'tween' range is Bardot. Initially launched as women's fashion, the Bardot brand promotes itself as having in excess of 1,000 of the hottest fashion styles for women every year. In 2004 Bardot launched its junior division, Bardot Junior. On its web site it states, "Bardot Junior captures the imagination of little ones and reflects the true essence of youth."[31] (fig 9 & 10) Its tween range for girls is 8-16 year olds. Its tween range for boys is 8-14 years. This raises questions; why the difference between age groupings for girls and boys, and even though 8 year old girls might want to wear what older girls are wearing, do 16 year old girls want to wear the same styles that eight years old wear?

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[29] Ibid., 33.
[30] Ibid., 48.
[31] Bardot, "About us" http://www.bardot.com.au/About-us.aspx (accessed 9 February 2015)

Bardot Junior August 25 She loves him. She's just playing it cool… #younglove #sumerfun #bffs #bardotjuniorinspo #bardotjuniorstyle

Fig 9 Reproduced from https://www.facebook.com/BardotJunior (accessed October 2, 2014)

Bardot Junior November 20, 2013 · Planning this weekends dress up party! Who will you be dressing up as?

Fig 10 Reproduced from
https://www.facebook.com/BardotJunior/photos/a.234221736676694.48141.116354901796712/504233223008876/?type=1&theater (accessed October 2, 2014)

There seems to be a consistency throughout the children's fashion industry as to what age group is defined as tween, i.e. 8-16 year olds. This differs from a wide variety of dictionary sources which define tween age as 10-12 years and from social research company Australia Scan, whose tween market data is based on 7 -13 year olds. To be a tween, is to be considered part child and part teen. However it is important to remember that the word 'tween' is primarily a marketing term used to define a particular audience. You will not find tween listed as a developmental stage in childhood.

Many writers have noted that the sexualisation of children is linked to the relentless drive of business for new markets. Elizabeth Preston and Cindy L White in, *Commodifying kids: Branded identities and the selling of adspace on kids' networks* state; "that while children have been marketed to since the 1920's, from the late 1980's marketing to children has become increasingly sophisticated in the 'quest to identify and exploit new markets'."[32] Although marketing aims above all to increase children's consumption, it also has the secondary effect of shifting their consumption from certain types of products to other types.

When American company Abercrombie for kids was criticised for selling g-string underpants to girls as young as seven years, the company responded in the following way. The underpants they said were intended for 10 year olds. According to Abercrombie, at this age girls are style conscious and want underwear that does not produce a visible panty line. "But of course", state Rush and La Nauze; "there is no evidence anywhere in the world that ten-year-old girls have ever approached companies requesting the production of g-string underpants for children."[33] Rush and La Nauze point out, that in reality it is far more likely that companies invent new products and then rely on advertising to attract a market to them.

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[32] E. Preston and C. L. White, "Commodifying Kids: Branded Identities and the Selling of Adspace on Kids' Networks," *Communication Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2004): 116-7.
[33] Rush, La Nauze, and Australia, *Corporate Paedophilia: Sexualisation of Children in Australia*, no. 90, 49.

The advertising and marketing industries sometimes claim that they merely reflect prevailing community values and standards and therefore cannot be blamed for various undesirable social effects. However, Rush and La Nauze claim the opposing view is almost unanimous among humanities and social science scholars. In *The distorted mirror: Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising,* Richard W Pollay states; "advertising and marketing function as a 'distorted mirror', reinforcing only a particular set of cultural values and symbols."[34] This can be seen in advertising through the implicit messages about what it takes to be attractive, how men and women treat each other and what's valuable about being a male or female. Susan Linn writes in *Consuming Kids: Protecting our children from the onslaught of marketing and advertising*; "Common media messages about adult sexual behaviour normalise the treatment of woman as objects, present sex and violence as linked, and show sex as a commodity."[35] Linn adds, "These messages mean that the sexualisation of children goes well beyond matters of appearance to include the promotion of particular 'behaviours and values, especially related to sex'."[36] And Preston and White believe; "The marketers themselves appear to see nothing problematic about a media-saturated environment that promotes children forming their identities in part through identification with given brands from toddlerhood."[37]

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[34] Richard W. Pollay, "The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising," *Journal of Marketing* 50, no. 2 (1986): 22-23.
[35] Susan Linn, *Consuming Kids: Protecting Our Children from the Onslaught of Marketing and Advertising*(Anchor, 2005), 130.
[36] Ibid., 132.
[37] Preston and White, "Commodifying Kids: Branded Identities and the Selling of Adspace on Kids' Networks," 118.

Chapter 2

Real yet Unreal: Girls, Dolls, Mannequins.

Fig 11. *Real girl with real doll.* Scanned pages from Big W catalogue June 2 until July 9 2014

In *Living Dolls The Return of Sexism,* Natasha Walter points out, that nowadays it often seems that the dolls are escaping from the toy shop and taking over girls' lives. Not only are little girls expected to play with dolls, according to Walter they are also expected to model themselves on their favourite playthings. Walter states;

> The all-encompassing nature of modern marketing techniques means that it is now possible for a little girl to sit at home watching her *Sleeping Beauty* DVD, playing with a Sleeping Beauty doll complete with the same costume, while dressed herself in a shiny replica of Sleeping Beauty's dress. She can then trip off to school with Barbies or Bratz on everything from her knickers to her hair clips to her schoolbag, and come home to look at her reflection in the mirror of a Disney Princess dressing table.[38]

As young women enter a period where they are the prime participants cited in 'raunch culture', many embark on a routine of grooming, dieting and shopping to achieve the bleached, waxed

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[38] Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*, 2.

and tinted look common to both pornstars and Barbie dolls. Thus the melding of real girl and doll can continue well beyond childhood.

Mannequins as social templets

In this next section I will be examining the role of the mannequin in the cultural and commercial modelling of identity. Fashion dolls, tailors dummies have always offered a glimpse into the changing nature of identity in the modern period. I will start with a brief history of the shop mannequin.

During the fourteenth century, dolls with the latest 'coiffures' and dresses were sent from fashion centres in France, Belgium and Italy to courts throughout Europe. By the eighteenth century 'gentlewomen' in India and America were also relying on these foot-tall dolls to keep up with European fashions. Also during this time, miniature figures were made to the exact proportions of women who sent them to distant designers. Seamstresses then extrapolated from them a life-size body and tailored a new wardrobe to fit. These 'womannequins', according to Hillel Schwartz in *The Culture of the Copy Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles,* had a power that the generic dressmaker's dummy could only in part maintain, the power to demand 'FIT'. Thus these womannequins, acting like portraits, bore the markings of a Double.

The Industrial Revolution, which saw the development and manufacture of large steel-framed plate glass windows, the invention of the sewing machine and the electrification of cities, also saw womannequins become life-size public figures. Schwartz States;

> Under new social pressures for clean clothes, then under commercial pressures for window display, the vaguely contoured cloth-and-straw clotheshorse of the 1600's had to be more precisely human and supple,[39]

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[39] Hillel Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*(New York: Zone Books, 2014), 114.

Though life-size, the mannequins of the early 19th century were mostly glorified dress forms. Headless bodies made from wood, leather, wire and papier-mâché mounted onto heavy iron bases, if they have limbs their poses were extremely limited with arms hanging limply at their sides. Alexis Guerre Lavigne, a Paris based tailor and inventor is credited with directing the first firm production of full-trunk mannequins. His student the Belgian sculptor Frederic Stockman, working in Paris, added limbs articulated at hip and knee to these flesh-toned busts with their surfaces made of percaline. Hiring mask makers to produce papier-mâché heads that could be fitted into the figures and modeling the torso on live fashion 'mannequins', Stockman and his son, founded an industry producing complete life-size figures. Improvements in the joints extended flexibility to these figures which were also being made in Rome, Brussels and Berlin as well as Paris. However it was the wax figure, introduced at the Paris Exposition of 1894, with its human hair, glass eyes, wax face and 'commanding presence', that Schwartz identifies as signaling a significant shift in the development of the 'figures'. Schwartz states; "Where before she had been adjusted to every style, now each womannequin, rouged and coiffed, owned an enduring persona which apparel and accessories had to FIT."[40]

In 1899 addressing a window trimmer's convention, one trimmer, according to Schwartz, said, "You do not place that [wax] figure in your work simply because it has a head. When you place it in your displays you do so to represent life."[41] A decade later a trade manual repeated the window dresser's creed claiming, not only should the mechanical device of wax, wood and iron, assume all the graces of the human figure, the form should not be considered a lay figure but "a living, breathing being."[42]

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 117.
[42] Ibid.

Shameless undressing

With increasing realism, mannequins began to reinforce social norms and ideals and became a proxy for larger cultural tensions, especially in relation to sexuality and body image. In *Retail Therapy: What Mannequins Say About Us*, Hunter Oatman-Stanford explains;

> In 1899, a wax figure dubbed "Miss Modesty" made her debut in shop windows, with her arms and hands raised to cover her face in embarrassment, as she was explicitly designed to sell undergarments. Miss Modesty acknowledged her own sex appeal, and made it all the more alluring with her mock shyness.[43]

During the same period, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU); a group formed in America, which supported the prohibition of alcohol, among other social and moral issues; began pushing for limitations on the spread off such "vulgar" mannequins. As a result some cities passed laws requiring windows to be completely covered anytime a mannequin was being undressed, lest passersby witness 'her' shameless undressing in public.

Fig 12. 'In the early decades of the 20th century, it was easier to deflect criticisms about vulgarity by using partial display forms to model lingerie and corsets, rather than realistic female mannequins'. Reproduced from http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

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[43] Hunter oatman-Stanford, "Retail Therapy: What Mannequins Say About Us," Collectors Weekly, http://www.collectorsweekly.com.au/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/

Like the larger fashion industry, mannequin design echoed styles and changes in regard to both technological improvements and society in general. Though wax allowed 19th century sculptors the ability to create detailed bodies and realistic facial features, the switch from gas lamps to electric lights exposed this materials weakness. Under the intense heat of store window lightbulbs, wax mannequins began to melt thus signalling the transition to other materials like papier-mâché and plaster. By the turn of the 19th century; influenced by L. Frank Baum, Founder of the National Association of Window Trimmers of America, editor of its trade journal, *The Show Window,* author of *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* store windows became stages, the mannequins, in elaborately crafted tableaus, the players, and the men and women who strolled the streets 'window shopping', were the audience watching the dramas unfold. What Baum advocated, was the use of mannequins to sell the romance of merchandise and merchandising by creating scenes that lured customers into a fantasyland. (fig.13) To maintain this fictional world, (particularly after World War I) mannequins, made with moveable limbs were positioned in more active, realistic poses. However, typically, says Oatman-Stanford, "male mannequins of the early 20th century lagged behind their female counterparts, with blasé expressions on cartoonish faces that appeared to be coated in too much makeup."[44]

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[44] Ibid.

Fig 13. 'This extravagant 1928 window display for Atwater Kent radios shows the heightened realism of many mannequins following World War I. Image via the Library of Congress.' Reproduced from http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

Mannequins as art

It was the surrealist artists who expanded the idea of mannequins and fantasy, embracing the womannequin as, sleep-walker, found object, biomorph and dream subject. Schwartz notes; "Surrealists stuck a womannequin's legs into the horn of a Victrola, her hand the armature for the needle; they mutilated large dolls; they sculpted humanoid figures as if long-necked womannequins."[45] Visitors to the International Exposition of Surrealism in Paris in 1938 proceeded along a Surrealist Street whose streetwalkers were womannequins dressed by Andre Masson, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Arp, Sonia Mossé, Yves Tanguy, Man Ray, Hans Bellmer and Joan Miro. Schwartz writes;

> "One of the most admired was Masson's, the head of which was enclosed in a bird cage, the mouth gagged by a black velvet band decorated with pansy; beyond that it was adorned with nothing but a G string made of glass eyes." There were pansies at the armpits, too and a peacock mask curling up from the crotch, and a fracture line at the waist where top joined bottom.[46] (fig 14)

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[45] Schwartz, *Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, 118.
[46] Ibid.
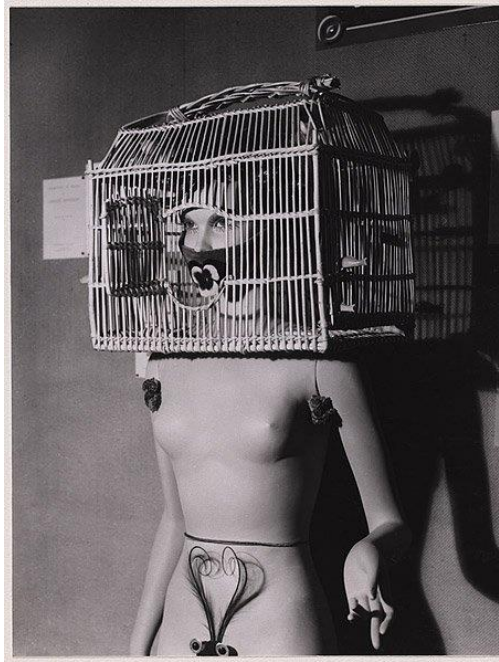
Fig 14. 'Photographed by Raoul Ubac, André Masson's *Mannequin* (1938) was one of sixteen artist-decorated dress-shop dummies on view at the 1938 Paris *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*.' Reproduced from http://artblart.com/2015/01/04/exhibition-forbidden-games-surrealist-and-modernist-photography-at-the-cleveland-museum-of-art/ accessed 1/06/2015
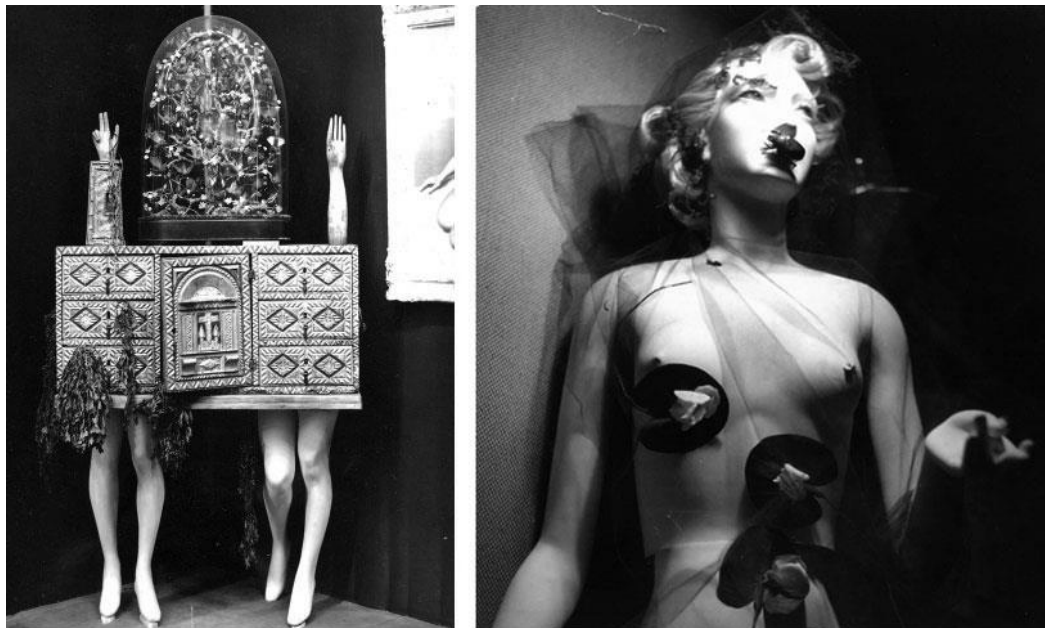
Fig 15. Images from the 1938 International Exposition of Surrealism in Paris show. At left, André Breton's chest with legs, and at right, Sonia Mossé's altered mannequin. Reproduced from http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

Surrealists applied the word 'assemblage' to their womannequins, who were in modern art, as in the clothing industry, heirs to the ready-made. And just as Andre Breton was issuing his manifesto on Surrealism, the womannequin herself became art.

The Art Deco womannequin with forehead too large, eyes too vast, body too long and gestures too literary was not sculptured from live models but from fashion drawings and suited Art Deco shop facades. (fig 16) Victor-Napoleon Siegel, the Canadian 'Mannequin King' now allied with the Stockman firm stated; "The old wax mannequins were too realistic to respond to the abstract form assumed by architecture and decoration."[47] Andre Vigneau, an artist who worked with Siegel and Stockman added; "What is surprising is that now that the mannequin is no longer an exact copy of nature, it has more life."[48] And Pierre Imans believed that freed from the tyranny of the realistic mannequin, "a designer could achieve the intensity of highly stylized figures driven not by the actual but by the ideal body of the modern woman, with her supple grace and charm."[49]
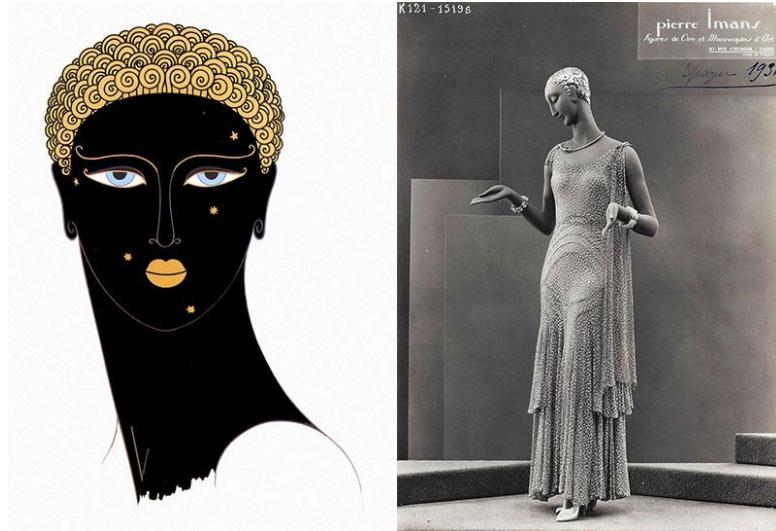
Fig 16. 'Left, an Erté illustration entitled "Queen of Sheba," which was incorporated into a Pierre Imans mannequin modeled after Josephine Baker, seen at right. Photograph courtesy Marsha Bentley Hale.' Reproduced from http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

Imposters and imitations

When Lester Gaba, an ivory soap sculptor and designer of womannequins, created the lifelike 'Cynthia' in 1937, shoppers were already familiar with mannequins as abstracted versions of perfection. As one of a number of 'Gaba Girls', whose thin bodies and regal poses were

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[47] Ibid., 120.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

modeled on real New York socialites, Cynthia was modeled after Cynthia Wells and designed for Saks Fifth Avenue. According to *Life* magazine,

> Gaba boasted that his mannequins were nearly indistinguishable from well-dressed human women, and pointed out that his creations had charming imperfections just as real women did, such as freckles and different size feet.[50]

Gaba later wrote in *The Art of Window Display,* that the famous milliner Lilly Dache was so intrigued by his mute girlfriend; she encouraged Gaba to bring Cynthia to the opening of her new salon the following week. Thus began the 'social life' of Cynthia as she appeared with Gaba in a box seat at the opera, in bars and taxis and high society events in New York. (fig 17) Once she achieved a certain level of fame, gossip columnists began writing about Cynthia as if she were a living breathing socialite reported *Life* magazine. "When partygoers tried to engage the mannequin in conversation, Gaba begged off by claiming she was suffering from a touch of laryngitis."[51]

Fig 17 Left, Cynthia enjoys a cigarette with Lester Gaba at a New York City bar in 1937. Right, Gaba makes a small repair to Cynthia's upper body. Reproduced from http://time.com/3877720/life-with-cynthia-the-world-famous-mannequin/ accessed 24/02/2015

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[50] Ben Cosgrove, "Cynthia the Mannequin: A Curious Star Is Born," *Time Life,* August 4, 2013, http://time.com/3877720/life-with-cynthia-the-world-famous-mannequin/ Accessed February 24, 2015.
[51] Ibid.

Fig 18 'Sunday Brunch with Novelist Thyra Samter Winslow's Park Avenue home. Lester Gaba's mannequin Cynthia.' 1937. Photographer, Alfred Eisenstaedt. Reproduced from http://time.com/3877720/life-with-cynthia-the-world-famous-mannequin/ accessed 24/02/2015

As Lester Gaba did with Cynthia, so American photographer Suzanne Heintz is doing with Chauncey and Mary Margret, though for altogether different reasons. Tired of the relentless expectations of family and friends and the pressure women still experience to conform to a life of marriage and motherhood, Heintz bought a husband and daughter and has spent the last decade travelling and staging 'Kodak moments' of their domestic bliss. The series, *Life Once Removed,* is a retort to those who suggested her life was lacking. Heintz states;

> It didn't seem to matter how well I'd done in my career, or that I had a great social life. If I didn't have a husband and child, somehow I was failing. So I filled in the gaps. My life was now officially perfect, as proved by my pictures – which, as everyone knows, are the part that really matters.[52] (fig 19)

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[52] Nione Meakin, "The Man(nequin) of my Dreams," *The Sun-Herald, sunday life,* June 8, 2014, 11.

Fig 19.Artist, Suzanne Heintz. Selection of images from series, *Life Once Removed.* Reproduced from
http://suzanneheintz.com/ (accessed 4/ 06/ 2015)

And as Gaba and Cynthia appeared in *Life* magazine in 1937, so Heintz, Chauncey and Mary

Margret graced the cover and featured in The Sydney Sun-Herald, 'Sunday *life'* magazine, June

8, 2014. (fig 20)
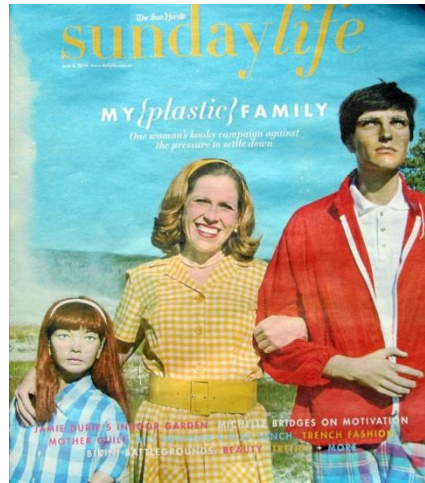
Fig 20. *Sunday Life* magazine front cover. Image Linda Wilken 2015

Mannequins back to the future

The 1940's saw the first fully plastic mannequins. Broad shouldered and somber in feature, turning a greenish colour when subject to the extreme conditions of display windows, these mannequins reflected the mood of World War II society. Post war and manufacturers experimented with the new plastic material and though the 'mood' of the mannequins improved their 'sexuality' did not. Mannequin historian and author Marsha Bentley Hale states; "during the 1940's and 50s, American companies had to sand the nipples off of older mannequins that were deemed too overtly sexual."[53] Fiberglass mannequins were the industry standard by the 1960's and in line with the changing beauty standards of the sexual revolution, both male and female mannequins began to express a more realistic physicality. On the males, broad chests and muscles began to appear. On the females, nipples returned as the braless look became popular. Again retail mannequins were modeled on real life celebrities, like Adel Rootstein's 1967 Twiggy mannequin. (fig 21)

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[53] oatman-Stanford, "Retail Therapy: What Mannequins Say About Us". p6
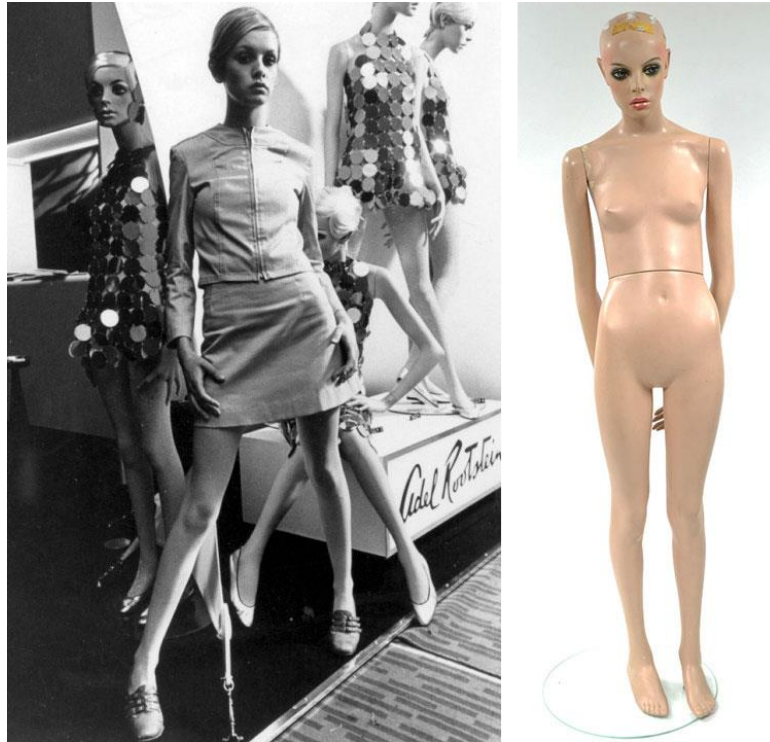
Fig 21. Left, the real Twiggy poses in front of a Rootstein display, and right, Twiggy mannequin. Photo at right courtesy ChadMichael Morrisette. Reproduced from http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/what-mannequins-say-about-us/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

The 1970's and 80's saw most mannequins move from hyper reality to become increasingly abstracted. This lead to groups of identical, faceless or sometimes headless 90's figures, which were typically painted solid white, black or grey. (fig 22)

Fig 22. Reproduced from http://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-image-sale-boutique-window-mannequins-image17944686 (accessed 5/06/2015)

Echoing the past, there is currently a move underway towards more realistic mannequins that represent the 'real woman'. Wings Beachwear mannequins in Miami, have tattoos like some of the women who shop there. At David's Bridal in New York, mannequins will get thicker waists, saggier breasts and back fat to mimic a more realistic shape according to Michele Von Plato, a vice president of the nation's largest bridal chain. Von Plato states; "This will give (a shopper) a better idea of what the dress will look like on her." [54] In 2007, the company scanned thousands of women's bodies to figure out what the average woman looks like. P J Sylvester, David Bridal's director of visual merchandising states; "We're focusing on the initial impression and emotional connection."[55]

In March 2013 Swedish department store Åhléns was one of the first to display 'curvy' mannequins in a variety of sizes. (fig 23) Dressed in lingerie which exposed their fuller stomachs and curvier thighs in comparison to their usual svelte American counterparts, they were received with mixed feelings from consumers. While most women seemed to welcome and encourage more stores to feature 'real' sized mannequins, some were concerned that this would encourage obesity – not to mention, making the presumption that slimmer ladies are not 'real' sized women. When UK department store Debenhams introduced its larger mannequins (size 16) in 2014, it was also simultaneously lauded for setting realistic body standards and accused of promoting obesity. Whether or not larger mannequins present healthier ideals in relation to woman and body image, they do make good business sense. British women report they are 3 times more likely to buy clothes if a mannequin is their size.

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[54] Staff Writer Associated Press. "From wider waists and back fat to ungroomed bikini lines… The changing shape of the store mannequin", *Daily Mail Australia,* January 29, 2014, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2547561/From-wider-waists-fat-ungroomed-bikini-lines-The-changing-shape-store-mannequin.html accessed February 12, 2015.
[55] Ibid.

Fig 23 Swedish mannequins. Photograph by Becka.nu 2013. Reproduced from
http://www.becka.nu/2010/10/23/tummen-upp-for-ahlens-skyltdocka/   (accessed 5/06/2015)

American Apparel, the teen fashion retailer's 'realistic' mannequins, while revealing pubic hair and nipples through lingerie, still possess the unusually tall, svelte bodies of mannequins of the recent past. (fig 24) Ryan Holiday, an American Apparel spokesman, reported that the number of customers to the store had increased 30 percent since the debut of the new mannequins. Holiday stated; "We created it [the store window] to invite passersby to explore the idea of what is sexy and consider their comfort with the natural female form."[56] It is more likely however, that the company known for its racy advertisements was considering commercial imperatives.

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[56] Ibid.

Fig 24. Michael Ip. 'Hairy situation: American Apparel has stirred up quite the controversy for decking out the mannequins in one of its New York stores with very visible patches of untamed pubic hair.' 2014. Reproduced from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2540819/American-Apparel-stirs-controversy-giving-mannequins-VERY-unkempt-bikini-lines-New-York-storefront.html (accessed 5/06/2015)

Venezuelan mannequins take the 'real woman' to a new level. William Neuman of *The New York Times* writes;

> Frustrated with the modest sales at his small mannequin factory, Eliezer Álvarez made a simple observation: Venezuelan women were increasingly using plastic surgery to transform their bodies, yet the mannequins in clothing stores did not reflect these new, often extreme proportions. So he went back to his workshop and created the kind of woman he thought the public wanted – one with a bulging bosom and cantilevered buttocks, a wasp waist and long legs, a fiberglass fantasy, Venezuelan style.[57] (fig 25)

[57] William Neuman, "Mannequins Give Shape to a Venezuelan Fantasy," *The New York Times,* November 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/07/world/americas/mannequins-give-shape-to-venezuelan-fantasy.html?_r=0 accessed 19/05/2015

Fig 25. 'Mannequins with extreme proportions on display in Caracas, Venezuela. Photograph: Meridith Kohut/New York Times/Redux / eyevine Reproduced from http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/shortcuts/2013/nov/12/cosmetic-surgery-changes-shape-venezuelas-mannequins (accessed 5/06/2015)

While it appears the transformation has been both of the woman and the mannequin, there is concern that these mannequins, which have become the 'normal', are catering to and fueling a national obsession with breast implants and plastic surgery. There is some evidence that this development can be traced to Venezuela's success in beauty pageants and linked to a culture of consumerism fueled by oil money. Mr. Álvarez's mannequins may have been meant to imitate life however these new models confront women with equally unnatural physical ideals.

Fig 26. Venezuelan Mannequin. Image credit The Velvet Rocket Reproduced from http://thevelvetrocket.com/2010/03/11/puerto-colombia-venezuela/ (accessed 5/06/2015)

While debates will continue on representations of the 'real woman'; for representations can never be real, what of representations of 'real children'?

"Four-year-old children don't typically have breasts. That's a simple physiological fact, unlikely to garner any Nobel prizes for biology"[58] states Jennifer O'Connell in the *Irish Times* in 2014. O'Connell was commenting on child-size mannequins with breasts which had begun appearing in Target retail stores in the United States. O'Connell confirms, "In the children's section at my local outlet, tops for girls aged four and up are modelled by child-size mannequins with small, but unmistakable, breasts."[59]

As mannequins throughout history have served as a reflection of society and a proxy for larger cultural tensions, especially in relation to sexuality and body image, it is surprising not more criticism has been made of these child mannequins. There is however no doubt as to O'Connell's outrage. O'Connell states, "By and large, I don't subscribe to the notion that our daughters are in a state of crisis, but the sight of a tiny top stretched tight across a mannequin with perky little boobs makes me want to hurl a child-size glittery heel at someone."[60] Target responded to questions about the mannequins to say that they, "always want to present our clothes in a fun and family-friendly way".[61]

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[58] Jennifer O'Connell, "Breasts on child mannequins- what next?", *The Irish Times,* November 3, 2014, http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/jennifer-o-connell-breasts-on-child-mannequins-what-next-1.1983603 accessed February 12, 2015
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

Chapter 3

My Art Practice

The complexities of conformity, stereotyping, subversion, sexualisation, idealised childhood, cultural markers, social templets and public forums are reflected on through my art practice. The techniques employed include, photography, printmaking, collage, assemblage and installation.

Conception – Conformity

My Masters studio work has developed in response to the idea of conformity; conformity being the act of matching attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of an individual to what they perceive is normal within their society or social group. These influences may be subtle and unconscious or direct overt social pressure. Individuals often conform from a desire for security within a group or society in general. Psychologists say that the desire to conform or not is a personality trait. However, studies have shown that females are more likely to conform to societies' expectations of them than males.

Stereotyping children

Reflecting on how gender stereotypes are conveyed to children, I considered a range of children's products. In the first instance I used colouring books that dealt with the theme of princesses.

The technique employed was one of collage. Like the Dadaist of modernism, who made use of mass media in their collages to comment on their society, my intention was to use children's products that were currently available to reflect contemporary society. To this end I condensed, juxtaposed and subverted characters and stories from children's colouring books available from department stores and 'two dollar' shops. As multiple colouring books of varying quality were

used in each collage, the different tones of the paper became a visually important component of the work. No further colour or drawing elements were added to the collages in keeping with the authenticity of the source material. The result was a series of 20cm x 20cm collage works on paper titled the *Fairytales series.*

In *wall flower,* 2009 (Fig 27), less than perfect couples dance happily while a young 'beautiful girl', a recognisable Disney princess, sits alone. She is marked as undesirable to a social ideal. This work makes use of narrative in its composition. In *True love,* 2009 and *The Kiss,* 2009 (Fig 28), the 'normal' heterosexual couple is subverted in support of an altered gender identity.

Fig 27. Linda Wilken, *wall flower,* 2009.
collage 20 x 20cm Courtesy of the artist

Fig 28. Linda Wilken, *The kiss,* 2009
collage 20 x 20cm Courtesy of the artist

Presentation of the work in this series was considered in regard to the source material. A number of the collages were framed within a 3D book construction which included a screen printed front cover. This was in acknowledgement of the children's story books that these characters are drawn from. (Fig 29)

Fig 29. Linda Wilken, *Don't tell me lies,* 2010. 3D book and front cover detail. collage, screenprint and hinged box frame. 29cm x 29cm x 6.5cm. Installation detail Firstdraft Gallery. Courtesy of the artist

Sexualised children's products

Bratz dolls, Bratz colouring books and adult style products directly marketed to children were the source materials for this body of work. In the photographic works *Take me* and *Hello Kitty,* a used, naked, (apart from painted on panties) Bratz doll is the main focus of attention. In *Hello kitty,* 2009 (Fig 30), she stands full length and in full view astride a pole. The Bratz doll is accompanied by a child mannequin (torso) gesturing with one arm out as if to protectively embrace the smaller doll. However the mannequin represents a 'child' that is being sexualised and objectified by the close up view of the bralette underwear.

Fig 30. Linda Wilken, *Hello kitty,* 2010. Archival ink on100% cotton paper, 80 x 90cm. Courtesy of the artist.

This work shows an adult style product which is commercially marketed as acceptable for girls as young as 2 years old. The title of the work, *Hello kitty,* takes its name from the brand of the bralette and accompanying panties. It is based on a children's cartoon character. These products and others like them were sold in the children's underwear sections of Best & Less and Target, major department stores in Sydney.

The unknowing child – "what's your name little girl?"

Childhood innocence is considered an attribute of the child's body. This is because the child's body is naturally innocent of adult sexuality and a child's mind is considered blank particularly in relation to adult sexuality. The child is unknowing of such things. In *Pictures of Innocence,* author Anne Higonnet states, "The ideal of childhood innocence is perhaps the most cherished concept of modern Western culture, all the more so because it seems to be under siege."[62] If it is believed that the innocence of the child is a natural quality, then the problem lies with the adult gaze. Literary historian James Kincaid in his book titled *Child –Loving,* points out the danger of attributing childhood innocence to the unknowing child. He writes that "If childhood is understood as a blank slate, then adults can freely project their own fantasies onto children, whatever those fantasises might be."[63] In practice adult projections onto childhood are bound to incorporate a range of feelings from predatory to oblivious to adoring. Herein lies the source of fear and anxiety for adults concerned with the safety and welfare of children and the preservation of childhood innocence.

In my work *"what's your name little girl?"* (Fig 31), the child mannequin stands in for a real child. Using a life size mannequin I exploit a tension between artifice and realism. The mannequin is a commercial product dressed in white panties and a white bralette embellished with the words *Rio* in pink. The bralette is stuffed with tissues. The colour white of the

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[62] Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: the History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), back cover

[63] James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture.* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992)

underwear symbolises purity, while the stuffing of the bralette with tissues exemplifies the lack of sexual development of a child and the inappropriateness of a bra style garment. The screen printed princess style dress, the pink teddy bear and princess crown, all recognisable symbols of childhood, play on the ideals of childhood innocence and the princess archetype. In the sound component, a softly spoken male voice asks, "What's your name little girl?" and a child voice answers "Emily". The male voice continues with "and how old are you Emily?"

Fig 31. Linda Wilken, *"what's your name little girl?"* 2010.
mannequin, commercial products, plastic, screenprint and
sound installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Emily (the mannequin), represents an 'unknowing child'. She is a cartoon of innocence, the object of voyeurism and potential victim of a paedophile. However my work is not primarily about paedophiles. It just happens that the paedophile elicits the most fear and anxiety in adults and represents the extreme end of the danger spectrum for young children being sexualised.

The knowing child – Daddy's little princess

> Innocence turns out to be highly susceptible to commercialisation. The ideal child as object of adoration has turned all too easily into the concept of the child as object, and then into the marketing of the child as commodity.[64]
>
> - Anne Higonnet

The knowing child, according to Anne Higonnet, is one whom in the eyes of many people violates the ideal of childhood innocence. This child is seen as a distortion or perversion of a true and natural childhood. As an example Higonnet cites the work of photographer Sally Mann. In Mann's 1987 photograph *Jessie at 5* (Fig 32), the central girl snakes outward, flat torso naked, face made up with rouge and lipstick, hair slinking, adorned with earrings and a pearl necklace, gaze unabashed. She is contrasted with girls on either side both dressed in the traditional clothing of childhood innocence, both receding into the background. In Mann's 1989 photograph *The New Mothers* (Fig 33), elements of traditional childhood such as ruffled printed dresses, dolls and two little girls playing mummy are present. However these are conflicted by the cigarette, the Lolita heart-glasses, the tough stances and again the direct unabashed gazes. *Jessie at 5* and *The New Mothers* send signs that convey two conflicting messages, childhood innocence and adult sexuality. This is the essence of the knowing child.

Fig 32. Sally Mann, *Jessie at 5* 1987. Photograph reproduced from
http://fantomatik75.blogspot.com/2010/03/lenfance-du-demon-iii-sally-mann.html?zx=db1fcc0599e29d48
(accessed October 4, 2011)

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[64] Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: the History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood.* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), p194

Fig 33. Sally Mann, *The New Mothers* 1989. Photograph reproduced from
http://marylee31.blogspot.com/2010/08/sally-mann.html (accessed October 4, 2011)

Daddy's little princess is an installation work incorporating sound. The focus of attention is a vintage child mannequin, chosen for being more realistic in design than those currently available. As with the mannequin in *"what's your name little girl?"* the child mannequin stands in for a real child and aims to exploit a tension between artifice and realism.

For reference, the work of the Chapman Brothers who are known for their use of child mannequins was considered. In Pollock Fine Art's biography on the Chapman Brothers, it is claimed that they employ life-size child mannequins to explore ideas of innocence and to challenge moral boundaries in much the same way as I do. However in relation to their 1996 work *Tragic Anatomies* (fig 34) they were quoted as saying, "We are interested in the convergence between filth and science….The imagery originates from mannequins rather than dolls. Both dolls and mannequins are nearly human – they are approximations."[65] The Chapman Brothers art practice makes use of 'the spectacle' in art and deliberately relies on shock value. Part of that success is the proximity to reality of the mannequins they use. With the aim of

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[65] Chapman Brothers, "Chapman Bros. at Gagosian Gallery". ARTseenSOHO (1997)
http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/GAGOSIAN/chapman97/chapman2.html (accessed March 15, 2011)

achieving that proximity to reality, this mannequin, has the inclusion of 'real' hair as opposed to the plastic hair of my previous work.

Fig 34. Chapman Brothers, *Tragic Anatomies.* 1996. Installation detail Reproduced from ARTseenSOHO. http://www.artseensoho.com/Art/GAGOSIAN/chapman97/chapman2.html (accessed March 15, 2011)

To strengthen the ideas of sexualisation and objectification of the child, fetishlike materials such as plastic, fur and stiletto heels where considered for incorporation in the work, *Daddy's little princess.* (fig 35) During the process, the stilettos were disregarded as impractical for child mannequin feet and deemed unnecessary in the original installation. The mannequin does however wear a 'princess pink' fur G-string and a plastic skirt. These elements are meant to push the boundaries of what is decent and acceptable for young girls and encourage the viewer to consider where to draw-the-line. The clear plastic skirt with 'white lace' screenprint embellishment is to add a level of modesty to the 'child'. It is obviously ineffective at achieving this and along with the pink fur G-string and the princess crown, sets up the required duality of signals; childhood innocence and adult sexuality.

Fig 35. Linda Wilken, *Daddy's little princess.* 2011 detail. mannequin, commercial products, plastic, fur, screenprint. Courtesy of the artist

The mannequin in *Daddy's little princess* is presented as a knowing child. The choice of clothing, the pose, the direct gaze, implies this. The question arises, does the pose enacted by the child mannequin mimic feminine flirtation a bit too well providing viewers with signs of sexual availability coyly grafted onto a body coded with the signs of innocence? In conflict, the title of the work reinforces an idealised childhood stereotype.

Daddy's little princess - The installation

Borderline: In keeping with previous collage work and the commercial aspects of gender stereotyping, a commercially available Disney border print was included in the installation. Through the technique of collage, the traditional princesses were subverted and sexualised with images and text from Bratz colouring books, Zoo magazine, Dolly magazine, women's fashion magazines and advertising material. There were a number of considerations for the inclusion of a wall border print in the installation. Firstly a wall border would add to the idea of a child's room. Secondly a multitude of issues in relation to the topic could be explored in its 4-metre length. Thirdly, if the audience felt uncomfortable looking directly at the 'child', the border print could be a diversion, something else to focus on. At the same time the audience would be drawn into the range of the motion sensors incorporated in the mannequin stand, triggering the sound component and encouraging further investigation of the work.

The sound component is a child giggling. Sound equipment and amplifiers are invisible within the mannequin stand. The motion sensors are inconspicuously positioned on the top-side of the stand. The stand was designed to enhance the performative aspects of identity while positioning the mannequin as an art object on display.

Subject to the limitations of an allocated space within a large graduation exhibition, both the Honours examiner and I agreed, a 6-metre length of white wall in a brightly lit gallery was not the ideal installation of the work. Discussed was my preference for a more intimate space with lower lighting conceptually representing a child's room. In Case Study I this idea is tested.

Fig 36. Linda Wilken, *Borderline* detail, 2011. Collaged Disney wall border, 13cm x 12 metres variable.
Courtesy of the artist

Fig 37. Linda Wilken, *Daddy's little princess*. 2011. Courtesy of the artist
Sydney College of the Arts, Undergraduate Degree Show. Honours

Case Study I

Daddy's little princess - The Exhibition

> Sexualisation and objectification of young girls is a current social and political issue. This exhibition represents the way young girls in contemporary western cultures are developing their identity based on popular culture and stereotyping which begins in childhood. Influenced through magazines, music videos, social media and the internet, these 'young consumers' are being seduced into stylising themselves on hyper-sexualised ideals.
>
> Artist statement - Linda Wilken

The exhibition title takes its name from the major work in this exhibition. Presented alongside *Onside,* as part of the broader *Women In Sport* initiative at Casula Powerhouse Art Centre; this was my first solo show. Selected for covering similar themes; gender stereotyping, body image, femininity and sexualisation of the body, my installation was slightly adapted to incorporate women in sport references. That is, it included a framed photograph of a cheerleader and naked Bratz doll on a National Rugby League (NRL) football.

An entire gallery space allowed a body of work that spanned more than four years of art practice, to be exhibited. Nine works from the *Fairytales series,* 2009 -2012, an interactive colouring competition installation, *Stay within the lines,* (first installed in a smaller version at China Heights in 2009) and the *I'm no princess series*, 2012- 2013 were included. This last series consists of seven screenprint and collage works. A major element in this exhibition was the negotiation of a purpose built room within the gallery space. This room was referenced a young girl's bedroom and was painted pink.

The next step in the research process was testing the effectiveness of the exhibition work on the discourse it related too. As the exhibition fell within March, *Daddy's little princess* became part of an 'Explore' event in Art Month Sydney 2013 Contemporary Art Festival.

GO WEST

Explore Western Sydney's arts precinct with a guided bus tour and day trip. Visit Casula Powerhouse, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Blacktown Arts centre and Parramatta Artists Studios. Join Tom Polo and friends for a tour with talks, performances, interactions and prizes from local artists.

10 March, 1.00 – 4.00pm
Free[66]

As I was an artist in residence at Parramatta Artists Studios, those on the bus tour were able to view my studio, hear me speak about work in progress, its influences and the topic of my research, followed by a visit to the exhibition at Casula Powerhouse. Sometime later, both Tom Polo, artist and tour guide and artist Liam Benson who was performing on the tour, independently told me that my exhibition at Casula Powerhouse was the most popular topic of conversation on the bus tour. To quote Liam Benson, "it (the exhibition) was amazing".

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[66] Australian Art Events Foundation, "Explore: Go West" *Art Month Sydney Contemporary Art Festival, March 1-24, 2013* (Sydney: 10 group, 2013), 7.

notes

1. Wall height 1800 mm

2. No added ceilling so existing light rails can be used.

3. Room dimensions   3500 x 2500 mm
        use back existing wall

4. Door way opening 800mm
        no actual door

5. window opening   450 x 500 mm
200mm down from top of wall
        no actual window

Light Rails

POLE

ENTRANCE

Marsden Gallery Casula Powerhouse
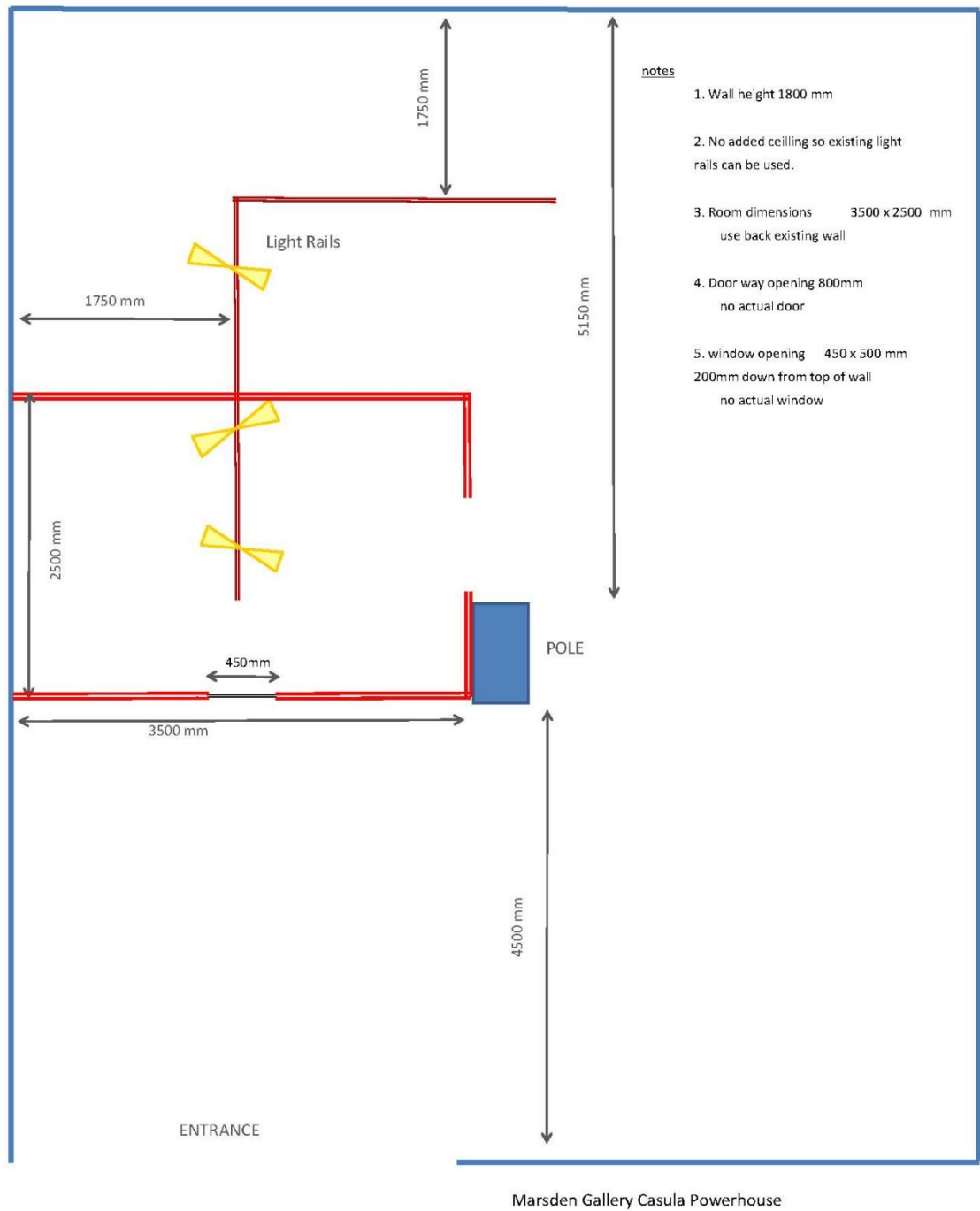
Fig 38. Room design, Floor plan. Marsden Gallery, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2013. Courtesy of the artist

Fig 39. Linda Wilken, *Daddy's little princess* and *Borderline.* Room installation detail 2013. Marsden Gallery, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Courtesy of the artist

Fig 40. The pink room constructed, Marsden Gallery, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. 2013. Courtesy of the artist

Case Study II

Daddy's little princess goes to Newcastle – The Discourse

DADDY'S LITTLE PRINCESS | Linda Wilken | A Backyard Bus Artist in Residence
Exhibition Opening Featuring A Spirited Panel Discussion with the Artist and Health Experts
The Commons | Level 1, 150 Beaumont St Hamilton | Friday, November 15th 2013 | 6:30 PM

Aware of the necessity of my studio work finding its place in the discourse, I responded to the following artist residency and proposed an exhibition and artist talk in conjunction with a guest speaker to address girl's health issues in relation to the sexualisation and objectification of young girls.

> **'The Backyard Bus'** is an initiative of *Emerald Violin*. It is a new artist in residence program located in Newcastle, Australia which seeks to provide artists of any discipline, who are committed to creating work with a strong alignment to health, social justice or community development values, with free accommodation and studio space in which to immerse themselves in their practice.

> This focus has been chosen given Emerald Violin's commitment to advocate for and foster the critical role of creativity in cultivating social and emotional wellbeing at the individual and collective level. Extensive evidence now abounds to support what we arguably have always instinctively known – our participation in creative endeavours can offer an avenue to healing, health, connection, dialogue and an understanding of our shared humanity. There is even international recognition of the fundamental need and right to experience and participate in cultural practice as detailed in Article 27 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts".

> The residencies offered in 2013 will constitute the ***pilot phase*** of this program. A key feature of the residency will be the requirement for all artists to make a tangible contribution to the local community by devising and facilitating a community engagement activity such as a lecture, workshop, performance or master class. [67]

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[67] Matthew Cother, "Newcastle residency The-Backyard-Bus-Application-Form-Final_copy," *Emerald Violin,* last modified September 4, 2013. http://emeraldviolin.com/work/the-backyard-bus/
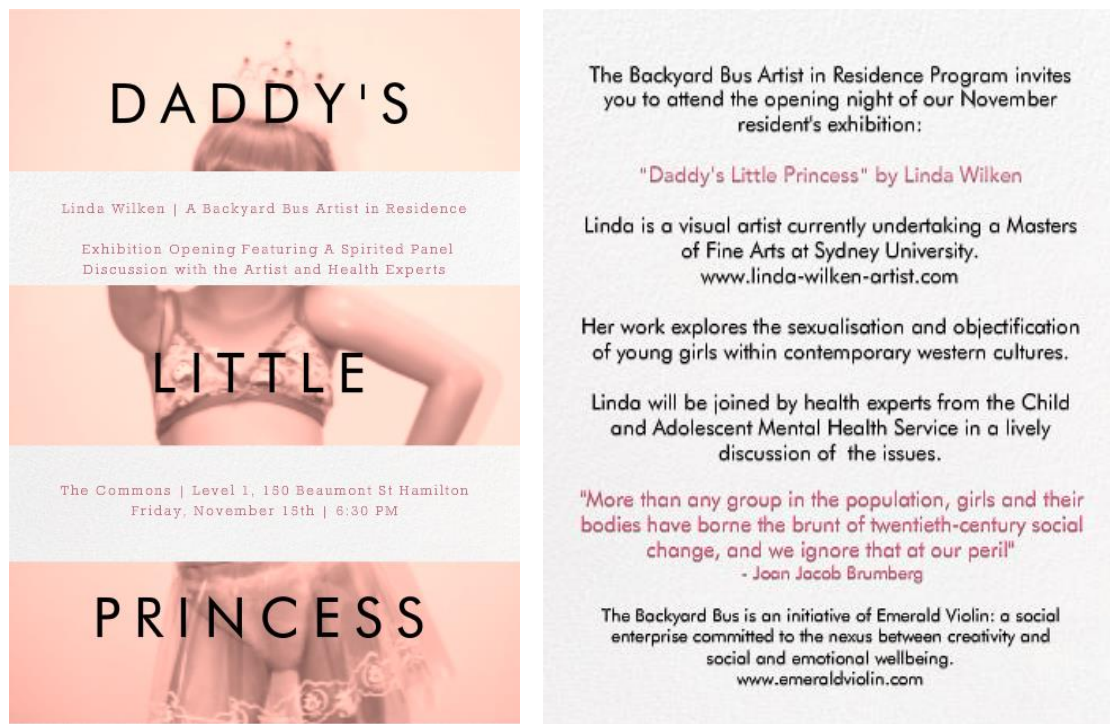
Fig 41. Email invitation: *Daddy's Little Princess 2013,* The Backyard Bus Artist in Residence Program Newcastle.

The three week residency commenced on the 4th November 2013 and the exhibition opening and panel discussion took place at The Commons in Newcastle on the 15th November 2013. As this residency was in the pilot phase of The Backyard Bus program and I was the first visual artist in residence, having been preceded by a 'sound' artist and a playwright; there was actually no gallery or space for the exhibition that had been proposed. Instead I was introduced to Caitlin O'Reilly at The Commons.

> **About**
> People's library, fair trade cafe and arts space - open Wed and Fri nights + other events, groups and activities throughout the week.
>
> **Mission**--Commons Vision Statement--
> The Commons is a place where all are welcome. It is a place that celebrates and respects diversity.
> We care for the environmental commons by practicing sustainability.
> We care for the social commons by practicing social justice and creating a safe place for people to be present.
> We care for other commons by providing a community space for groups to meet and they in turn care for The Commons.
> We care for the creative commons by fostering creativity and providing a place for people to share their skills. [68]

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[68] The Commons, "About, Vision statement", 2014, http://www.thecommons.org.au/about/ http://www.thecommons.org.au/the-commons-our-vision-statement-and-code-of-conduct/

The 'arts space' mentioned was presented as, "hang anywhere you want." As The Commons was a physically and visually cluttered space, (Fig 42) being used by multiple community groups, including a children's play group, the installation of the mannequin work was going to present a major challenge. Fortunately an extra room had recently been acquired by The Commons. It was full of 'stuff' but could be cleaned out and the walls painted white if I wanted to use the room. It was two days until the exhibition installation.

Fig 42. The Commons. Photograph reproduced from
https://www.facebook.com/TheCommonsCafe/photos/a.331401403556783.88036.248807475149510/71664496169909
0/?type=3&theater (accessed July 12, 2015)

The advantage of working with people who are passionate about the projects they take on is that they 'make them happen'. With no budget, no approvals needed and in their 'spare' time, Caitlin and her partner Tim Evans achieved what they said they would. What I had been given was an actual room, 4.4 x 3 metres in size, situated off a communal living room in representation of a domestic setting.

Fig 43. Linda Wilken, *Daddy's little princess,* installation detail*,* 2013
The Commons, Newcastle. Photograph by Justine Potter

To enhance the young girl's room idea, (and trial another version of the work), the walls where painted pink to the halfway point leaving the top section pale grey. *Borderline,* the collaged Disney wall border was limited to two walls at the intersection with the pink paint and the, *I'm no princess* series was included to contribute to the discourse. The mannequin was centred in the room, the sound element included and the cupboard incorporated a selection of commercial children's products as 'cultural markers'. Lighting during the day came from the window and at night from a single ceiling light.

The members of the discussion panel were recommended by Emma Cother, Director of Emerald Violin, project manager of national and regional mental health initiatives and founder of The Backyard Bus Artist in Residence Program. I opened the discussion speaking of my art

practice, my associated research on the sexualisation and objectification of young girls and the products I identify as cultural markers that subsequently become components of the work in the exhibition. Natalie Kentish, Senior Social Worker, Youth Mental Health Project Officer, Hunter New England Local Health District, Health NSW Government; presented information on programs available to help young people access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, (CAMHS). Kentish also spoke of her work at Headspace (Newcastle) which provides early intervention mental health services to young people aged 12 – 25 years. Liberty Hickson, who at the time was seconded to CAMHS, was the final speaker. Hickson whose substantive position was in sexual assault, Melbee House, Maitland Hospital; referenced the clothing and imagery in my work and identified the influences of social media in relation to her experiences working with young women and girls. The discussion was then opened to the audience.

Case Study III

I'm No Princess – The discourse continues

On October 2, 2013 negotiations began with the Arts Coordinator of the Peacock Gallery, Auburn City Council, for an exhibition. I was asked to consider working with young local artist Kate Williams in a mentoring capacity, as William's art work explored some similar themes while specifically focusing on body image issues facing young women. When asked to suggest a community engagement activity, I suggested a public forum similar in format to the one I had proposed for the Backyard Bus project. This idea was enthusiastically accepted.

The dates for the exhibition were confirmed in early November 2013 and set for February 1, 2014 – March 9, 2014, taking in International Women's Day on the 8th March 2014. Decisions on the content of the exhibition however were not so easily resolved. Problems instantly arose with the child mannequin and how it was dressed, as well as with the content of the collage series, *I'm no princess,* on which the exhibition title was based. I was informed that Auburn was

a particularly conservative Local Government Area with a high Muslim population likely to be offended by my art work. The council's gallery manager indicated the plastic skirt on the mannequin was unacceptable and suggested the mannequin be dressed in jeans. I rejected this idea outright. It was then suggested that the installation go ahead without the mannequin. I also rejected this as the child mannequin was key to this work. Another work of particular offence to the council's manager was, *Banned in Britain but not Australia,* a work unaltered by collage, a page taken directly from a mainstream woman's magazine and framed. (fig 44)
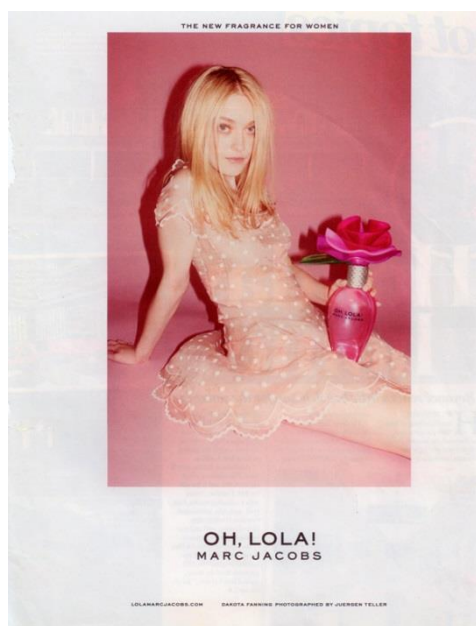

Fig 44. Linda Wilken, *Banned in Britain but not Australia.* 2013. Courtesy of the artist

At this point I suggested that perhaps the exhibition and therefore the community engagement activity not go ahead. That however was not an option for the gallery or council. The exhibition and accompanying forum had already been scheduled and committed too. In reality I believe the community engagement activity was highly desirable to the council. It would facilitate bringing high school students and health professionals together to discuss a current social issue which was gaining traction in the public discourse. It would extend activities planned for International Women's Day.

After much negotiation by the Arts Coordinator on my behalf and the challenge of finding a 'non-offensive' image to be used on the invitation and advertising material, a compromise was reached. There would be no plastic skirt. Instead the mannequin would wear matching underpants and bralette top. The convincing argument was that these items of clothing were available and purchased from mainstream Australian stores. The same argument was applied to all the 'offensive' imagery and products proposed for the exhibition.

The exhibition went ahead with the following conditions attached.

> Hi Linda
>
> Thanks for discussion and suggesting options for your exhibition. After further discussions we are happy to go ahead with the content that you have outlined along with the mannequin dressed in the matching "Hello Kitty" underpants and top as you suggested. I think that that will provide a good body of work to present as part of the *I'm No Princess* exhibition.
>
> In addition to your discussion points, we all discussed that audience visiting the Gallery are often accidently visitors (visiting the Gardens and discovering the gallery) rather than having planned to visit the gallery. The windows in the gallery mean that the exhibitions are visible beyond the opening hours of the gallery (and when staff are available). Extra care will be taken to inform visitors about the exhibition prior to accessing it- this will include:
>
> - Blinds on front facing windows
> - Information about content of exhibition to put into context
> - Restricted access- warning requesting children to accompanied by adults who have been advised of content by staff (Fig 48)
> - Consideration of need to cover doorway entrance during Closed periods of gallery if necessary
> - Gallery will supply additional comments book, so that there is one in each room rather than just at the desk as usual.
> - Staff will be briefed and have prepared answers to possible questions and comments. It would be great to meet with you at that meeting or perhaps prior to discuss.
>
> Regards, Arts Coordinator| Auburn City Council [69]

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[69] Extract from email to Linda Wilken from Arts Coordinator, Peacock gallery │Auburn City Council, 19 December 2013
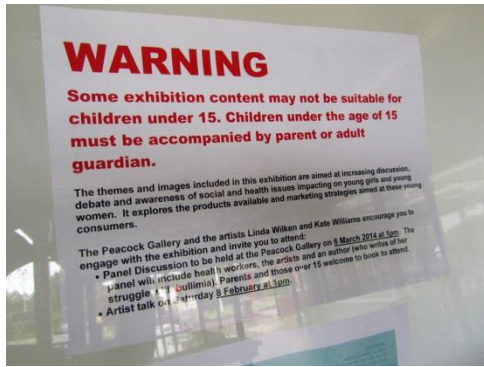
Fig 45. Warning Peacock Gallery window 2014. Image Linda Wilken

Fig 46. Linda Wilken, *I'm No Princess*. 2014. Exhibition view, Peacock Gallery Auburn. Courtesy of the artist

The public forum went ahead on 6th March 2014. I opened the discussion, followed by artist Kate Williams, Sarah Spence from the Butterfly Foundation, Dr Eman Sharobeem and Author Grace King. (fig 47)

Fig 47. Advertising leaflet *Princesses? Panel and Forum* Peacock Gallery Auburn City Council 2014. Courtesy of the artist

Sweethearts and postcards

sweetheart, *noun*

- A person with whom someone is having a romantic or sexual relationship.
- Used as a term of endearment or affectionate form of address.
- A particularly lovable or pleasing person or thing. [70]

The use of mannequins as social templets and the technique of collage have become significant to my art practice. In the *postcard series,* 2013-2014, found postcards form the foundation of a new body of work. In keeping with the use of mass media to comment on Australian contemporary society, layering of images and text taken from advertising material, (junk mail), mainstream girls magazines such as *Dolly* and *Girlfriend* and 'lads' magazine *Zoo,* push the boundaries of what may be considered decent and acceptable. Aware of current 'concerns' (both moral and legal) in relation to representations of children in art, and reflecting on past experiences exhibiting in community spaces and public galleries, I apply a level of self-censorship to my art work. This is achieved in part by limiting the magazines used to those which may be termed soft core porn and that are easily accessible to children. In this way I avoid images of nipples or genitals in collaged works that incorporate images of children.

The lenticular works *"show us your tits"* and *"great arse baby!"* have been developed from the *postcard series.* (fig 48) The reference here is to 'Raunch Culture' and the phenomena of sexting; the act of sending or receiving sexually-explicit images or messages, typically via mobile phone. The works *My pussy* and *Megastar Master Flirt,* (fig 49) also from the *postcard series,* have been scaled up from postcard size and commercially printed to become display banners. This evolution sees the 2D collage works move into 3D format as hanging banners in the *Sweethearts* installations. The increased scale changes the encounter with these images, from intimate viewing to public spectacle.

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[70] Google Search – sweetheart, https://www.google.com.au/?gws_rd=ssl#q=sweetheart (Accessed 9/04/2015)
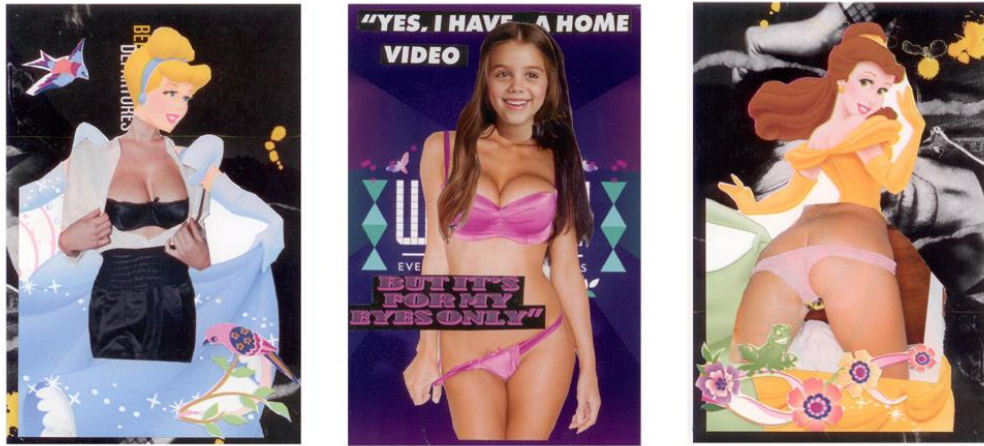
Fig 48. Linda Wilken, *Nice tits. For your eyes only. Great arse.* 2013-14. Collage on found postcards. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig 49. Linda Wilken, *Untitled. My pussy. Megastar Master Flirt.* 2013-14. Collage on found postcards. Courtesy of the artist.

Another significant development in my work has been a shift in the role the mannequins play. Where previously the child mannequins stood in for 'real children', in the *Sweethearts series* the 'real mannequins' represent themselves.

Initially I visualised the studio work as a reproduction of a children's retail shop window. It would be based on those in contemporary shopping centres and reference Baum's idea of an elaborately crafted tableau where mannequins are used to sell the romance of merchandise by creating scenes that lure customers into a fantasyland. The visual language of retail space is one

which encourages the audience, as consumer, too look. This is in contrast to the experience of encountering a bedroom space and an intimate interaction with a 'child'. The focus of this work would clearly be the commercial aspects of the sexualisation and objectification of young girls.

After some consideration I decided that the work in this format would be too literal and may reduce it's reading to one particular aspect of the project. The outcome of this decision saw an expansion of the work into three separate pieces. With the capacity to include a greater range of products as cultural markers and more enlarged collage works, the aim was to broaden the concept of a shop front and allow for a more complex reading of the work.

The approach I took in the execution of these three works was to consider each a 3D collage. In this way the assemblage of cultural makers and identifiable symbols, such as the Lolita glasses, contribute to layers of context being built into each work. Much of the material carries established associations which I seek to retain and exploit. Each mannequin wears a copy of the plastic screen printed skirt which has in past work caused unrest. While these skirts signal previous success and continuity within my art practice, more importantly they represent a reflection on repetition in merchandising.

Viewing position is another important contributing factor in these works. Unlike 2D collages where information is selectively hidden in the layers, in 3D format what lies behind is revealed as the viewer adjusts their position. Also of importance are reflections both in the conceptual and physical sense. As store windows and mannequin design has throughout history echoed technological change and served as a reflection of society in general, so the incorporation of a 'window pane' was considered essential to my works; even as it proved technically challenging. The nature of commercial shop fronts see them fitted with glass windows even when they occupy space within an indoor centre. The primary viewing experience is almost always through glass with its inherent property of reflection. Thus the consumer may unwittingly catch their own image superimposed amongst the mannequins and merchandise. The inclusion of a

mirror in this series of works aims to enhance and exaggerate this phenomenon, implicating the viewer in the context of the work.

Utilising both the visual language of retail space and art gallery, these part fantasy, part documentary works aim to exploit existing social contradictions while intersecting with other social practices. Through my art practice I see myself as a provocateur, consciously using the exhibition as a platform to question issues that challenge community standards and social acceptability.

Conclusion

The sexualisation and objectification of young girls is an important social and political issue for contemporary western cultures. The topic has recently been discussed in parliaments in France, Britain, Belgium, America and Australia. While it is particularly identified with the consumer culture of the United States, Australia is also implicated. In 2008 the Commonwealth Parliament, Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts, conducted an *Inquiry into Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media*[71] and in 2010 Amanda Rishworth presented *Sexualisation of girls in the media*,[72] Private Members Business, in the House of Representatives Australia. Furthermore, in 2012 The Hon. Greg Donnelly addressed the New South Wales Parliament on *Sexualisation of Children and Young People*[73] and The Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2013 report on the *Sexualisation of*

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[71] Commonwealth Parliament, Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts, "Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media", (2008) http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/senate/committee/eca_ctte/sexualisation_of_children/report/report.pdf

[72] Amanda, Rishworth. "Sexualisation of girls in the media", Private Members Business, House of Representatives Australia (2010) http://www.openaustralia.org/debates/?id=2010-02-08.117.2 accessed February 15, 2010

[73] Greg, Donnelly. "Sexualisation of Children and Young People", NSW Parliament (2012) http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/hansart.nsf/V3Key/LC20120502042

Children[74] was published by the Parliament of Western Australia, Perth, in June 2014. Thus the focus of this research has examined the way the sexualisation and objectification of young girls manifests within Australian society and how it is possible for young girls to develop their identities based on hyper-sexualised ideals.

Central to this discussion is identity formation. As sexualisation and objectification of the female has its origins in gender identity, feminist theories on constructed gender identity v's biological determinism have been explored.

Considering children as consumers, marketing strategies seem to be managing to fuse the doll and the girl leading to discussions on what is real and unreal. Likewise through history, store mannequins appear to have suffered the same fate. With increasing realism they have reinforced social norms and ideals and become proxies for larger cultural tensions especially in relation to sexuality and body image. In fact mannequins, both historically and more recently, have been accused of 'shameless undressing'. It is of course, this proximity to realism that retailers and artists have sought to exploit. From earliest time to contemporary art mannequins have attracted the attention of artists.

My Masters studio work has used mannequins to address the issue of child sexuality and to explore how the 'stereotyping' that seeks to create conformity can lead to distortions of gender roles. I aim to interrogate these distorted versions of 'mainstream culture' through the manipulation and subversion of gender stereotypes and considerations of idealised childhood. I have used child mannequins as social templets and sexualised children's products as cultural markers. This is ongoing within my art practice and the source materials remain the same;

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[74] Parliament Western Australia, Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. "Sexualisation of Children The Commissioner for Children and Young People's 2013 report on the Sexualisation of Children", (2014) http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/(report+lookup+by+com+id)/e7d4e8553f6256b 548257d02001fa408/$file/sexualisation+report+-+june+2014+-+19+june.pdf

children's fashion, toys and other products currently available in mainstream Australian stores and magazine and advertising material.

The key innovation of my Masters project has been to extend the parameters of my art practice to align directly with health and social issues and the community programs that attempt to address them. This resulted from the realisation that I was not qualified to respond to questions put to me in artist talks, relating to the sexualisation and objectification of young girls. I decided to explore how my work could be presented alongside public forums and panel discussions. This process has been documented in the case studies. While this proved successful in bringing together those who are qualified to speak on these issues and allowing me a place in the discourse, Case study III highlighted what is problematic in positioning art practice within a specific public discourse. At times it seemed the discourse dominated the exhibition work.

The final outcome of this Masters Research Project is the realisation of a body of work. Consisting primarily of the *Postcard series,* lenticular works and the *Sweethearts series,* the development of these works has been driven by and is in response to feedback from curators, gallery directors, artists, youth social workers, audience discussions and public reactions, to the work which has come before it. While revealing that which is often masked by habitual complacency and the unsettling effects of consumerism on one of the most intimate areas of life, these works seek to negotiate a paradox that exists between images in mainstream media and moral panic which is applied to images in art.

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1. Mannequin Installation from the *Sweethearts series, 2015*
    Princesses Rule, I Love Pole, Hellno Kitty. Child mannequins, commercial products, screen printed plastic, commercially printed collaged banners, mirror, plinths, perspex sheets, wire suspension. Dimensions variable; this installation approx. 3m x 6m x 4m. Private View, Postgraduate exhibition, SCA Galleries.

2. *Princesses Rule* - Child mannequins, commercial products, screen printed plastic, commercially printed collaged banner, plinths, perspex sheet, wire suspension. Dimensions; 3000mm x 1200mm x 880mm

3. *I Love Pole* - Child mannequin, commercial products, screen printed plastic, mirror, aluminium pole, Bratz doll, plinth, perspex sheet, wire suspension. Dimensions; 3000mm x 900mm x 880mm.

4. *Hellno Kitty* - Child mannequin, commercial products, screen printed plastic, commercially printed collaged banner, plinth, perspex sheet, wire suspension. Dimensions; 3000mm x 900mm x 880mm.

5. The *Postcards series, 2013 - 2015.* 18 x Collage on found postcards. size; 15cm x 10cm each.

6. *"show us your tits", 2015* Lenticular print; developed from dual collaged postcards, 10mm thick perspex, text and symbol stickers. Size; 1080mm x 600mm

7. *Hot Pink, 2015* Lenticular print; developed from dual collaged postcards, 10mm thick perspex, text and symbol stickers. Size; 1080mm x 600mm

1. Linda Wilken. Mannequin Installation from the Sweethearts series, 2015

Princesses Rule, I Love Pole, Hellno Kitty. Child mannequins, commercial products, screen printed plastic, commercially printed collaged banners, mirror, plinths, perspex sheets, wire suspension. Dimensions variable; this installation approx. 3m x 6m x 4m. Private View, Postgraduate exhibition, SCA Galleries.

2.   *Princesses Rule* - Child mannequins, commercial products, screen printed plastic, commercially printed collaged banner, plinths, perspex sheet, wire suspension. Dimensions; 3000mm x 1200mm x 880mm
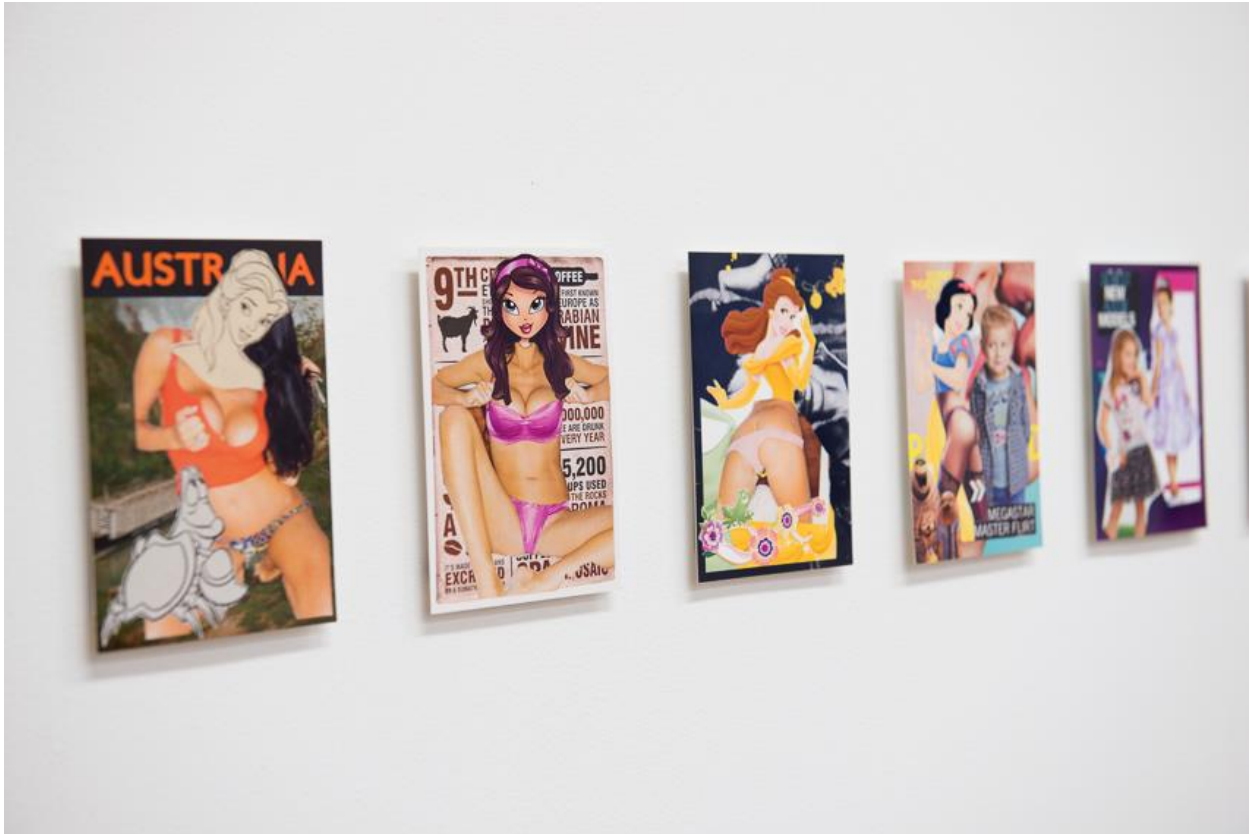
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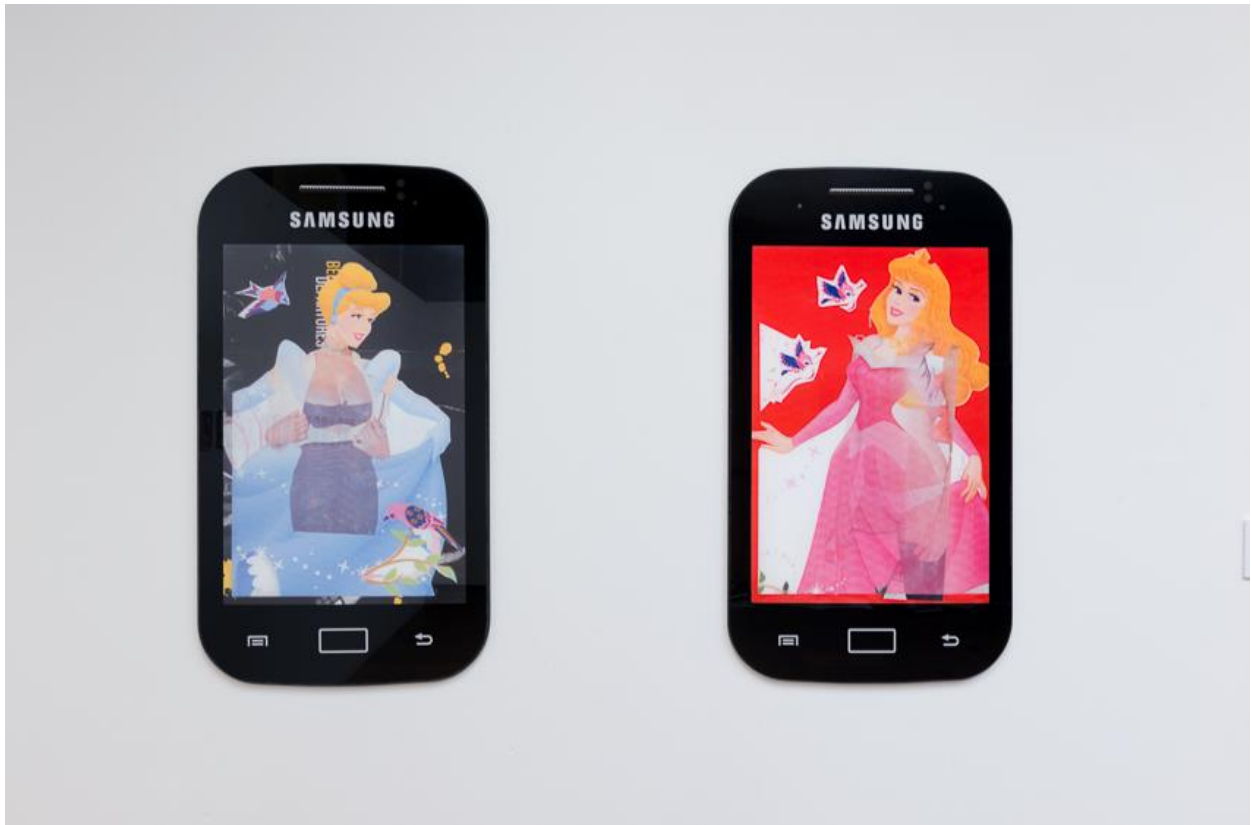
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