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**More Than A Helping Hand:
Male Masturbatory Aids and the Construction of Heterosexual
Masculinity**

A Master's Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts (120 credits) in Visual Culture

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore the construction and articulation of heterosexual masculinity through male masturbatory aids, and how these aids manipulate and interact with heterosexual desires, pleasures and intimacies. The first chapter of this paper is given over to historically contextualising attitudes and perceptions of male masturbation and entwining this with a history of masculinity. What follows is three chapters that each examine one male masturbatory aid: The Fleshlight, The TENGA EGG and the Teddy Babe. Each of these aids represents a different level of feminine mimesis, as well as cost, that acts to enhance the male masturbatory experience. These analytical chapters employ a mixed methodological and theoretical approach, drawing on discourse analysis, image analysis and phenomenology to produce new knowledges about these objects and the cultural texts that surround and accompany them. By considering each aid as a 'boundary object' I have employed numerous theoretical positions in order to question what the relationship of cis-gendered heterosexual man is to these disembodied/constructed feminine/female object is, and how intimacies, desires and pleasures arise and are affected by them. This thesis uses Raewyn Connell's understanding of hegemonic masculinity and Marquard Smith's formulation of heterosexuality as perverse and unacknowledged in order to make these two concepts visible for interrogation. Ultimately, this thesis reveals that a multitude of desires, pleasures and intimacies are produced by each of these objects, and a plurality of masculinities are constructed and articulated, that all position the female sexual subject as the other, that must be worked against in order to achieve sexual gratification and climax.

Keywords:

Heterosexual Masculinity

Masturbation

Heterosexual Desire

Intimacy

Sex Toy

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Introduction

Within western visual culture, sex toys exist as a consciously invisible item. The majority of people know they exist, what they are, what they do, and yet, do not openly discuss them: “We have to use the indefinite article, ‘a dildo’, never.... ‘your dildo’;”¹ While dildos, vibrators, and other female masturbatory aids have begun to become more culturally visible, sex toys and masturbatory aids aimed at men remain surprisingly under-discussed. While the social and medical sciences have undertaken investigations of male masturbatory aids in terms of their ability to treat sexual dysfunction, it appears there is a gap in knowledge that considers what their presence, use, and design is constructing, articulating, or even deconstructing in terms of masculinity, heterosexuality, desire, pleasure and intimacy.

What this thesis will question is how heterosexual masculinity is articulated and constructed through male masturbatory aids. I will question masculinity as a contract that can be bought and sold, the relationship of cis-gendered² heterosexual men to the disembodied/constructed feminine/female, and how intimacies, desires and pleasures arise and are affected by these masturbatory aids. By doing this, I aim to discover how the construction of masculine heterosexual identities is achieved through a reliance on, and manipulation of, societal taboos, shame, anxieties, norms and stereotypes surrounding men and masculinity, as well as mediated relationships.

Empirical Material

The empirical material that is the focus of this study attempts to be a non-exhaustive cross-section of male masturbatory aids (or sex toys), that, through advertisements, design, intended usages, and references to other aspects of sexualised visual culture, are aimed at heterosexual men. The male masturbatory aids considered here are The Fleshlight; both the Fleshlight Girls collection, and the Stamina Training Unit. The TENGA EGG; the Lovers Heart and the Wavy design, and finally, the Teddy Babe; a sex doll made of plush material rather than the standard plastic or silicone. Each of these objects, in my opinion, represents a different level of

¹ D Fincher, *Fight Club*, Running Time: 2hrs, 31mins, Fox 2000, 1999.

² Cis-gender is understood in this thesis as a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth, and perform their gender in a way that society considers appropriate for their sex.

commitment to undertaking an enhanced form of auto-erotic pleasure.³ The TENGA EGG represents the bottom of the scale; a throwaway, one use item, whereas the Fleshlight is reusable, cleanable and a considerably larger monetary investment. The Teddy Babe represents the largest monetary investment and dedication to sexual pleasure. While it is auto-erotic, as it involves no flesh-and-blood partner, it cannot be understood as masturbatory in a traditional sense, or in comparison to the other objects discussed in this thesis. While other sex toys and masturbatory aids aimed at heterosexual men exist, such as silicone vibrating strokers, and masturbators that act as vacuums in order to replicate the sensations of oral sex, I have chosen to limit this thesis to these objects, as they appear to be the most well know (the Fleshlight especially) in wider culture, the most readily available (online as well as physically in stores), and represent a range of pleasures, desire, intimate affects and effects. For each of these objects, I have considered them as an entire object, as its own cultural phenomenon, surrounded by perceptions, marketing, communities, media and communications; much of the empirical material analysed in this thesis draws on this understanding, enabling the inclusion of the Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit's manual, phenomenological experiences, and images constructed by the Teddy Babe owner/users' community.

I have also delimited this thesis to only consider the heterosexual male usage of these objects. This delimitation was undertaken as this is the articulation of gender and sexuality that sparks so much interest and consideration in many academic disciplines but remains understudied and under-interrogated when thinking about sex, sexuality and masturbation. By concentrating on the cis-gendered heterosexual male, I will move away from examining homosexual uses (both male and female), and female heterosexual usage of masturbatory aids and sex toys, in favour of creating a new knowledge that does not 'rehash' older research and merely attempt to apply it to a different object of study. My aim here is to understand cis-gendered male heterosexuality as both the most visible and the most invisible of gender and sexuality articulations, and use an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach to research that will make visible an understanding of understanding masculine pleasures, desires and intimacies, and how these are articulated and become present in wider society and culture.

³ By enhanced, I am referring to an auto-erotic event that deviates from just using the hand, but includes another object to intensify stimulation.

Previous Research

Outside of medical and psychosexual research, that discusses male masturbatory aids and their usage as a treatment for premature ejaculation, there is a significant lack of attention paid to these objects. Each of these objects are not ‘new’ in regards to the history of heterosexual male masturbation, but academically seem to have been passed over for research in favour of dildos, vibrators, the ubiquitous rampant rabbit, and all the female and queer usages associated with these objects.

Penetrable sexual devices are part of the long genealogy of masturbatory aids for men, starting from at least the 19th century when they became available for purchase via advertisements in magazines, mail order brochures or illustrated catalogues. These masturbatory aids, more often than not, were disembodied torsos (women’s abdomen without the legs, arms or head). Over time these masturbatory aids have become mainstream due to a number of factors outlined in Marquard Smith’s book ‘*The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*’. The first factor is an “upsurge in the popularisation of knowledge about sexual behaviour by way of Sexology...,”⁴ such as Kinsey, Masters and Johnson. A second factor is simply availability. Advertisements moved from small-ad pages to specifically focused men’s lifestyle and soft-core publications, and the “settings for purchasing them moved from clandestine brothels, porn cinemas and other seedy environments to glossy high-street sex-shop chains....and to the convenience of the internet.”⁵ A third factor is a switch from text-based advertisements to image-based advertisements, and the fourth factor is an advancement in technologies relating to rubber and plastic production.⁶

Fleshlights, TENGA EGGs and Teddy Babes exist as objects, with or without a user. They are part of a wider cultural understanding of sex and sexuality, of sensuous experiences, of desires, pleasures and intimacies. They are visual, in their existence as well as representation (mimetic or not), and through the way they are bought and sold; their advertising, their interaction with wider pornographic visual regimes. Here, they are discussed in their entirety, as sensuous objects that interact with the body. These objects involved fleshiness, affective intensities, conventions of representation, media technologies, and

⁴ M Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p.189

⁵ *ibid*, p.191

⁶ *ibid*, p.191

circulations of money, labour and emotion.⁷ All of these concepts, constructions and ideas pass object to body, and from body to object, and thus tell us something about heterosexuality and masculinity in this contemporary moment. As this thesis is only one analysis of these objects (which could be the individual focus of entire articles, essays or thesis⁷) a huge amount of delimitation was undertaken, and numerous perspectives have been consciously omitted from this thesis; such as class and race considerations, or non-western cultural perspectives. In the conclusion of this thesis, I will discuss how much further research could be undertaken when thinking about heterosexual cis-gendered male masturbatory aids.

A huge debt of research gratitude is owed to Marquard Smith and Thomas Laqueur, whose books are heavily referenced, agreed with, argued with, and analysed as a starting point for this under-researched topic. As this topic is under-researched within the humanities much of the research used in this thesis is often quite recently published (in academic terms) and comes from peer-reviewed journals. Strictly visual culture research is sparse; sociology, psychology, film, porn studies, queer theory, gender studies and feminist theories are mixed together here to create, what I feel, is a truly interdisciplinary thesis for a deserving topic that requires much more academic attention.

Methodological Approach

This thesis does not undertake one rigorous or structured methodological approach but instead uses a mixture of methodologies in order to produce research results that consider the political and cultural circumstances that affect and effect the empirical material studied here. As Fleshlights, TENGA EGGs and Teddy Babes exist within a wider culture and social context than purely sex and sexuality, and are not limited purely to vision but are sensuous objects that interact with the body, I have considered them as ‘boundary objects’ within this thesis. A boundary object is an object that is part of multiple worlds and facilitates a communication between these numerous worlds. The identity of a boundary object is both concrete and abstract, it is fluid and well-defined. Susan Leigh Starr and James Griesmer state that “boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a

⁷ S. Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011, p.2

common identity across sites.”⁸ They theorise that boundary objects are most strongly structured when used individually, though they have different meanings depending on the social worlds they are being used in. Boundary objects must be seen within the context of the motivations of their users, and cannot be considered politically neutral.

The purpose of considering each of these masturbatory aids as boundary objects is to allow a multiplicity of methodological regimes to be implemented in order to analyse them. I have drawn from elements of methodological structures such as; phenomenology, discourse analysis, and image analysis. Gillian Rose states that mixing methodologies of visual analysis can “allow a richly detailed picture of images’ significance to be developed, and in particular it can shed interesting light on the contradictory meanings an image may articulate.”⁹ Though Rose later states that mixing methods “obscures the very real power relations in which visual images - and all social life -participate,”¹⁰ I feel that not relying on one regimented methodological structure has allowed me to interrogate objects from numerous positions, and reflect on the research process. By understanding that research is not conducted within a vacuum I have been able to deviate from a strict methodological regime in order to analyse these masturbatory aids and the cultural texts that surround and accompany them, such as advertisements, user constructed images, and social media posts.

The reflexive, mixed methodological approaches within this thesis are all qualitative in nature in order to allow the objects and their accompanying cultural texts, to produce knowledges about masculinity, heterosexuality, desire, pleasure and intimacy.

Theoretical Approach

This thesis employs numerous theoretical approaches in order to analyse the TENGA EGG, the Fleshlight and the Teddy Babe, and to understand how these objects articulate masculine heterosexuality.

Heterosexuality is understood here as the attraction to the opposite sex; the Greek root ‘heteros’ meaning ‘different’ or ‘other’. Male heterosexuality can be seen as over-determined

⁸ SL Star & JR Griesemer, ‘Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39’, in *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 19, 1989, p.393

⁹ G Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif, Sage, 200, p.202

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.202

and yet, under-articulated, and masculinity, as understood through heterosexuality, can be seen as “embattled or hysterical, sometimes, even ridiculous.”¹¹ This ridiculousness is intrinsically tied to heterosexuality through the root of its invention, and its closeness to ideas of perversity. Heterosexuality emerged out of the institutional, classificatory, taxonomic thinking of latter half of the 19th century, and its interest in policing the body (both physical and the body-political). During this period, heterosexuality was defined by its opposition to sexual relationships that did not have the intention to be procreative or reproductive, positioning these relationships as perverse. Contemporary heterosexuality today is not marked by its need for reproduction, but just its erotic desire for a sexual relationship with another; object or human, that can be understood as the opposite sex. Marquard Smith states that “straight behaviour and sexual practice in and of themselves as an end in themselves, are always perverse and as such are considered dangerous,”¹² and this dangerous perversity emerges precisely due to the fact that straight practices place themselves as commonplace, normal and conventional. This is why this thesis will take the position that “heterosexuality should not be taken as read or simply as the unacknowledged, undifferentiated absent centre against which so-called marginalised sexualities are defined.”¹³ Heterosexuality is understood through this thesis as an intrinsically “polymorphous perverse sexuality,”¹⁴ and thus must be researched and interrogated in order to make the highly invisible, visible.

My understanding of masculinity is informed by sociologist Raewyn Connell’s work on masculinities from her 1993 book *Masculinities*. In this book, Connell theorises masculinity as formed through both normative and semiotic perspectives. Normative masculinity is viewed as an idealised standard, which men approach in a multitude of ways and to varying degrees of success.¹⁵ Most men do not fully achieve the standard expressed in normative masculinity, and it is a continuous identity formation operation. Semiotic forms of masculinity represent a cultural vehicle and symbolic practice through which masculine identity is constructed and operated within social life.¹⁶ Through both of these views of masculinity,

¹¹ M Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p.12

¹² *ibid*, p.13

¹³ *ibid*, p.14

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.7

¹⁵ R Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

¹⁶ R Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012.

Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity can be seen; masculinity as a quality of cis-gendered maleness is continually called into question, scrutinised and requires constant verification.¹⁷ As well as understanding masculinity in sociological terms, masculinity within this thesis is placed into historical contexts. Psychologist Linda Brannon sees common elements of male identity historically including stigmatisation and rejection of the feminine other.¹⁸ Historically, the value of masculinity has been placed in strength, confidence, and independence, with an emphasis on aggression and violence, and the need for status and accomplishment.¹⁹ These themes will be further explored in the first chapter of this thesis. These archetypal stereotypes can be understood and identified as Connell's idea of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Hegemonic masculinity functions to sustain patriarchy through prominent and valorised features that are culturally and historically contingent.²⁰ Hegemonic masculinity operates "in opposition to women and subordinated men,"²¹ leading to a "compulsory devaluation and rejection of the feminine in order to assert a masculine identity."²² Hegemonic masculinity can be understood as both a gender accomplishment and an ever-shifting and precarious set of rules at which different elements of gender, sexual identity, geography, race, class and society intersect. Due to this, different forms of masculine expression operate to affirm and disavow hegemonic masculinity. For example, where one man may signify his masculinity through social status and financial power, another would employ idealised standards of the male body. Throughout this thesis, masculinity is understood as a societal construct, that comes with a set of ideals, and norms of behaviour that many heterosexual cis-gendered men attempt to adhere to. By analysing male masturbatory aids through an understanding of the societal construction of masculinity I hope to reveal a new knowledge around heterosexual masculine desire, pleasure and intimacy.

By understanding heterosexuality and masculinity as specifically rooted theoretical concepts, with a wider social construction, this thesis is able to draw on numerous disciplines

¹⁷ J Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge Classics, New York, Routledge, 2006.

¹⁸ L Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives*, Seventh Edition, New York, Routledge, 2017.

¹⁹ L Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives*, Seventh Edition, New York, Routledge, 2017.

²⁰ RW Connell & JW Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', in *Gender & Society*, vol. 19, 2005

²¹ S Cosma & M Gurevich, '(Re)producing the "Natural Man" in Men's Online Advice Media: Achieving Masculinity Through Embodied and Mental Mastery', in *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, 2018, p.87

²² *ibid*, p.87

to interrogate these constructs, and how desire, pleasure and intimacy affect and effect them. Through a highly interdisciplinary approach, this thesis attempts to understanding these objects as cultural phenomena in their own right, that have numerous ideological, societal, and cultural forces working on them, and thus, can be interpreted differently from discipline to discipline, theory to theory and person to person.

Structure

In order to explore these objects, using the methodologies and research themes outlined above, this thesis has been separated into five chapters; three of which deal with the empirical material discussed above.

Chapter one creates an entwined narrative of the history of masturbation and masculinity. This chapter considers the societal reception and perceptions of masculinity and masturbation, and how these two concepts have impacted each other. By considering historical events, I will show how ultimately both masturbation and masculinity's performance and conception have influenced and changed each other. Using the 1716 publication of *Onania* as a starting point, chapter one progresses through a linear timeline in order to analyse different cultural texts in order to discern the contemporary view of heterosexual male masturbation. This history is limited, paying attention to what I have considered key moments in the history of auto-erotic sexual acts. A more comprehensive study can be found in Thomas Laqueur's book *Solitary Sex*, which I have used in order to inform the history that is presented in this chapter. By understanding the changes to masculinity, through the changes in cis-gendered male masturbation, this thesis is better able to situate the Fleshlight, TENGA EGGs and Teddy Babes in a wider cultural discourse, rather than seeing them purely as objects without wider societal and cultural implications.

Chapter two explores the Fleshlight. Instead of attempting an analysis of every Fleshlight available, I have selected the two best selling models as examples; the Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit, and the Fleshlight Girls collection (as a whole). In order to analyse these I have employed theories concerning the construction of masculine identities; Anthony Giddens's idea of 'plastic sexuality' and how it interacts with the 'crisis of masculinity,' as well as media and communication studies theories of 'parasocial interaction' and 'parasocial relationships.' Using these theories, this chapter proposes that the Fleshlight creates

intimacies, both real and imagined, and attempts to tie these intimacies to the formation of masculine identity, and how this masculine identity is embodied and performed in the male subject, and how these objects portray female sexual subjectivity in relation to this.

Chapter three concentrates on the Japanese masturbatory aid, the TENGA EGG. In order to analyse this object, which, though available worldwide remains hugely tied to the culture of its creation, I have employed a phenomenological research method to analyse its affects and effects on heterosexual and masculine identity construction. This chapter analyses two models of the TENGA EGG; one specifically aimed at heterosexual couples, and other aimed at heterosexual men for solo-usage. The initial analysis of these objects considers TENGA's marketing and advertising through marketing theories dealing with the concept of 'cool' and 'cute', and Thorsten Botz-Bornstein's combination of the two; 'cool-kawaii'. This then feeds into the phenomenological analysis of the objects. This research method breaks away from the rest of the thesis as a whole, but I feel it is important to engage this specific aid in this way and draw conclusions from what is immediately available to me as a researcher: the TENGA EGG itself. This phenomenological section is a frank and candid discussion of my partner David's experience with the TENGA EGG; the sexual act and masturbatory event itself, feelings, and discussions we had about the object. This candid methodological approach was inspired by, and is indebted to, the work of queer theorist Paul B Preciado and their book *Testo Junkie*.²³

Chapter four takes the Teddy Babe, a plush sex doll created by Eight Wonder LLC, as its object of study. This chapter moves away from the current academic and journalist discussions that employ psychoanalysis as the main method of enquiry or attempting to moralise the usage of such dolls and instead considers the Teddy Babe as an object in and of itself, rather than attempting to assign deviance or symptom to users. Using theories of touch, stemming from research surrounding haptic geographies, this chapter considers the implications of their plush construction. Further to this, this chapter focuses on ideas surrounding 'erotic communities'; the way in which sex doll users use social media forums and construct images in order to normalise ownership and use, and considers the Teddy Babe as an object that informs a construction of domestic masculinity through use, intimate relationships and erotic community.

²³ PB Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, New York, NY, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013

Chapter five is the conclusion of the research presented above and draws together all the themes of analysis, theoretical and methodological understanding in order to present new knowledge about masculine heterosexual desires, intimacies, and pleasures. Here, the idea of the boundary object is presented in order to make sense of the different ideologies, interpretations, theories and findings that have been undertaken in the research and analysis of these objects. This chapter is broken down into thematic sections; masturbation and masculinity, heterosexuality, and finally, desire and intimacy, in order to allow for a comprehensive overview of the knowledge produced in each chapter. This chapter also includes a reflection on the need for further research.

Chapter 1: An Entwined History of Masculinity and Masturbation.

Masturbation is auto-erotic stimulation, or more simply put, “pleasure outside of a physical sexual encounter with another person.”²⁴ It is this pleasure outside of ‘the other’, that creates the strange status of masturbation in contemporary western society. In his essay, ‘*The Mainstreaming of Masturbation*’, film scholar Gregg Tuck describes masturbation as a “rich source of enquiry”²⁵ as it “brings into questions or seems in excess of many of the binaries associated with hegemonic sexual ideology.”²⁶ For Tuck, masturbation is an embodied, visceral event, linked to identity formation, sexual imagination, behaviours and desires. Tuck describes this event as unlimited; masturbation is not bound to any sexual orientation, gender, race, or class, and for most individuals, it is the first kind of sexual activity experienced.²⁷

Masturbation is in no way a new phenomenon. The word masturbation first appeared in the 18th-century, and is commonly theorised to be a portmanteau of the Latin ‘*manus*’ (hand) and ‘*stuprare*’ (to defile the self), and thus, is often directly translated to ‘rape by hand’. Culturally, masturbation has gone through many articulations, both positive and negative. Currently, within contemporary media and visual culture, masturbation seems commonplace. A brief look at the magazine *Cosmopolitan*’s website reveals numerous articles with headlines such as ‘*Your Hands-On Guide to Solo Sex*’, ‘*The 12 Best Things About Masturbating*’, and ‘*4 Masturbation Moves You Should Try*’. It appears that masturbation in adulthood is acknowledged, publicly, privately, and by economic markets. But these headlines only pertain to women’s masturbation. Looking at the website of *Men’s Health* magazine, masturbation is still acknowledged, but not in such a positive light, with headlines such as “*Can Watching Too Much Porn Give You Erectile Dysfunction*’, ‘*He Used to Masturbate Up to 12 Hours a Day. Here’s How He Got His Life Back*’, and ‘*Can You Masturbate Too Much?*’

What these magazine headlines reveal is how female masturbation is celebrated, encouraged, sensual and, most importantly, marketable. Men’s masturbation is talked about as if it is out of control, damaging and dysfunctional. This, for me, marks a shift in attitudes from

²⁴ G Tuck, ‘The Mainstreaming of Masturbation: Autoeroticism and Consumer Capitalism’ in F Attwood (ed.), *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualisation of Western Culture*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 78

²⁵ *ibid*, p.79

²⁶ *ibid*, p.79

²⁷ *ibid*, p.79 - 80

adolescence to adulthood, one that has played out historically as well as contemporarily. While some publications (Teen Vogue most notably) takes on the issue of adolescent masturbation, for many, it remains a private or secretive action. Talking with my partner, he revealed that as a young teenage boy he and his friends discussed masturbation, and upon realising they weren't 'weird', they actively set out to facilitate masturbation for each other - finding 'sexy' scenes in films, or secretly recording late night television.²⁸ My experience as a young girl was one of vehemently denying masturbation - claiming girls who did were 'weird' or 'disgusting'. These headlines mark a shift in these attitudes, adult women's sexuality enjoys freedom, whereas men's is repressed and becomes considered dangerous. But why is this? What is it about masculinity and masturbation that becomes a battleground in later life? Why within western culture do we panic about masturbation so much; who's masturbating, how much, how are they doing it, how can I improve masturbation for myself? Gregg Tuck further comments that "outside of the work of medical/social historians there has been very little consideration of masturbation in relation to contemporary sexual identity or representation."²⁹ In order to explore heterosexual male sexuality and its relation to masturbatory aids, it is pertinent to historical situate masturbation in order to explore it in relation to contemporary sexual identities and their representations.

Starting from the 1700s onwards, I will intertwine the historical narrative surrounding masturbation, with a particular onus on male auto-erotic pleasure, and changing social and cultural construction of masculinity. By linking these two historical threads together, this chapter will explore how masturbation and masculinity are linked to increased industrialisation and a capitalist economy, and how this has impacted the contemporary cultural articulation and societal reception of both masculinity and masturbation. The intertwining of these historical narratives will draw on a range of texts from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries (ranging from pamphlets, academic studies/reports, to films and television) that deal with a range of thematic issues that run throughout this thesis such as disease and masculine health, imagination, boredom and, liberation and repression. All of these texts

²⁸ At the time of its launch in 1997, the UK television channel 'Channel 5' was renowned for playing soft-core porn late at night, as well as Channel 4 showing programmes such as 'Eurotrash' playing past the watershed. Within my generation, these programmes are fondly remembered as an introduction to masturbation, breasts, penises, and sex itself.

²⁹ G. Tuck, op. cit., p.78

come from western cultural history, this limitation is due to my personal socio-economic cultural background, as it will enable me to draw more significant conclusions. I will end my brief history of masturbation in the late 1980s, as this marks the production of specific male masturbatory aids for heterosexual men, and for the purposes of this thesis, it will mark the beginning of mainstream technological mediated cis-gendered male heterosexual masturbation.

Masturbation in the 18th and 19th Centuries.

Prior to the 1700s, masturbation was the primary the concern of religious moralists. It was during the 18th and 19th centuries that masturbation became a larger social and medical issue. Published anonymously³⁰ in 1716, ‘*Onania*’³¹ is considered the starting point for the medical and social demonisation of masturbation.³² Historian Thomas W. Laqueur attributes the “blooming commerce in books and medicines”³³ and its ties to the “profit motive”³⁴ to the existence of this publication and the presence of the concepts laid out in *Onania*. The pamphlet, and its ever-expanding editions, deal with the idea that masturbation (self-pollution”³⁵ or “self-abuse,”³⁶) causes a multitude of disease, and offers spiritual and practical advice to those already suffering with masturbation-inflicted maladies.³⁷ Aside from detailing the diseases that masturbation causes, *Onania* attempts to discourage partaking in auto-erotic acts, focusing on deterring young boys especially, by linking masturbation with religious morals and societal anxieties of the time, including stating that masturbation, “hinders

³⁰ In *Solitary Sex* Thomas W Laqueur identifies the author of the pamphlet as the early 18th century author of medical soft-core pornography John Marten

³¹ The full title of the pamphlet: *Onania or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and All Its Frightful Consequence, In Both Sexes, Considered: With Spiritual and Physical Advice To Those Who Have Already Injured Themselves By This Abominable Practice.*

³² Its original publication stemmed from the commercialised print district of London’s Grubb Street, an area that gained notoriety for its concentration of hack writers and low-end publishers and booksellers.

³³ TW Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York, Zone Books, 2003, p.25

³⁴ *ibid*, p.25

³⁵ The edition of *Onania* I have used for this thesis is a digitalised version available through the Wellcome Collection’s Library Archive: Unknown, *Onania*, London, H.Cooke, 1756

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ These diseases (as detailed in Unknown, *Onania*, London, H.Cooke, 1756) include, but are not limited to, fits, epilepsy, consumption, impotence, dizziness and wandering pains. The pamphlet also advises on treatment in the form of powders and tinctures available to purchase from sellers of the pamphlet. See: TW Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p.26 for more details.

marriage, and puts a stop to procreation.”³⁸ *Onania*’s historical importance comes not from the ideas set forth in the concept, but the popularisation of these concepts. Laqueur details the expansion and movement of the pamphlet through Europe, stating that by 1800, *Onania* had as many as five German editions, as well as translations into French and Russian.³⁹

Though *Onania* experienced enormous success, it was the publication of Samuel Tissot’s ‘*Onanism*’ in 1760 that can be considered as the most influential text to spread an anti-masturbatory message. Tissot’s position as a prominent Swiss doctor and Fellow of the Royal Society of London gave *Onanism* medical legitimacy that *Onania* lacked. Tissot’s pamphlet entered its last printing in 1905, spreading its pseudo-medical anxieties for 150 years. The effects of masturbation are detailed in a similar way to its predecessor - disease and illness awaited those who self-abused. While both 18th century pamphlets discussed female masturbation, *Onanism* concentrates very little on the subject. Sociologist Steve Garlick comments that “even when Tissot attempts to mark out the bound of a specific female concern...he seems ineluctably drawn back to the masculine...”⁴⁰ In my opinion, this concentration marks Tissot’s text as the start of constructing masculinity through societal ideas of masturbation. Steve Garlick comments that Tissot’s “concern is animated by the belief that masturbation robs men of that which makes them men,”⁴¹ in this case, the loss of seminal fluid. For Tissot, semen was the most important liquid within the male body, describing it as a form of concentrated blood, remarking that “the loss of one ounce of sperm is more debilitating than the loss of forty ounces of blood.”⁴² Tissot theorised that during penetrative sex an exchange of essential fluids between man and women takes place, claiming that heterosexual sex “aids digestion, animates circulation, accelerates all the functions, restores strength and supports it.”⁴³ In Tissot’s opinion, an “addiction to women is to be preferred to an addiction to the solitary vice.”⁴⁴ Masturbation robs men of what makes them

³⁸ Unknown, *Onania*, London, H.Cooke, 1756

³⁹ TW. Laqueur, op. cit., p.36

⁴⁰ S Garlick, ‘Masculinity, Pornography, and the History of Masturbation’, in *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 16, 2012 p. 311

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.312

⁴² *ibid*, p.312

⁴³ SAD Tissot, *Onanism, or, A Treatise Upon the Disorders Produced by Masturbation : or, the Dangerous Effects of Secret and Excessive Venery*, London, Richardson and Urquhart, 1781.p. 83

⁴⁴ S Garlick, op. cit., p.313

men, whereas heterosexual sex restores a natural order, and creates a strong, healthy male body. Unlike Onania, Onanism did not attempt to sell commercial medicines to its readers, but recommended a healthy diet and exercise as “instruments that nature uses to support herself, repair her losses, and remove those irregularities which happen in the body.”⁴⁵ Within *Onanism*, masculinity is understood as a natural entity, housed in the heterosexual male, and therefore requiring no medical intervention, just careful control.

In 1865 Orson Squire Fowler, a leading American phrenologist and scientific writer, published *Amativeness: Or Evils and Remedies of Excessive and Perverted Sexuality*. Within phrenological terms ‘amativeness’ referred to “that part of the brain governed by sexual character and function.”⁴⁶ By mixing the ideas presented in *Onania* and *Onanism* with phrenology, Fowler demonised masturbation through positioning it as the worst perverse act, as it is “the substitute of an imaginary partner for a real one;”⁴⁷ and therefore a greater violation of nature's laws. Fowler's text, and its concentration on the natural order of things, presents the theory that masturbation is a problem that primarily afflicts boys and men. Like Tissot, Fowler saw semen as a vital fluid, and as such masturbation would cause a loss of vigour, energy and include a state of idiocy. As such, those not outwardly performing masculinity ‘correctly’ could be characterised as self-abusers.⁴⁸ By the latter part of the 1800s, masturbation had become equated with masculine control, and the performance of strength, energy and competence became masculine traits. This control rides on what Steven Garlick describes as “bringing sexual desires under control, yet while simultaneously maintaining the illusion that such control is, in fact, the product of a natural order that is independent of human influence.”⁴⁹

In 1897 noted English physician and social reformer Havelock Ellis published his book *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. The book introduces the term ‘autoeroticism’, which became an all-encompassing term for sexual expressions of the mind “generated in the absence of an external stimulus, proceeding directly or indirectly, from another person,”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.100

⁴⁶ S Garlick, *op. cit.*, p.313

⁴⁷ *ibid*, p.314

⁴⁸ O.S. Fowler, *Amativeness: Or Evils and Remedies of Excessive and Perverted Sexuality*. New York: Fowler and Wells, 1856, p.70

⁴⁹ S Garlick, *op. cit.*, p.315

⁵⁰ H Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Volume 1*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2013, p.161

ranging from day-dreams to “unashamed efforts at sexual self-manipulation witnessed among the insane,”⁵¹ as well as masturbation. Ellis’ book documented an extensive range of masturbatory practices in the non-human world in order to situate masturbation as not only a product of culture but one grounded in nature. While the text attempted to dispel fears and ignorance surrounding sexuality and gender, Ellis still equated masturbation in men and women as one of the main, if not “sole efficient cause”⁵² of numerous neurological conditions, and physical ones, such as “inaptitude for coitus, as well as to indifference to it,”⁵³ and premature ejaculation. Through grounding masturbation as an aspect of the “human experience where the imagination, sexuality, and art commingle,”⁵⁴ auto-erotic pleasure became seen as a “paradigmatic form of sex in the mind.”⁵⁵ Ellis continued to position masculinity as an inherent force within men, but also as a force that must remain controlled.

What these 18th and 19th century texts reveal is a complex combination of issues and anxieties about the rise of commercial culture and individualism, and the perceived threat to social good with the emergence of a capitalist consumer society. Thomas W. Laqueur speculates that masturbation was an easy target due to its perception as an unnatural, secret and private act, with an excessive imaginative desire went beyond natural reproductive limits. Steve Garlick comments that Laqueur’s argument neglects to discuss the “connections between an emergent dualistic (hetero)sexual difference, heteronormativity, and the authority of the natural order.”⁵⁶ Garlick introduces discussions about how the rise of the natural sciences was a major contributor to social anxieties around masturbation. Masturbation, like sodomy, disrupts the ‘natural’ order of heterosexual reproduction, and the “telos of both natural and social orders.”⁵⁷ For Garlick, it is not the excessive desire of masturbation or its private nature that makes it the object of societal anxiety, but rather that it “lacked a *natural* object that would ground it in a secure (hetero)sexual order taken to guarantee the

⁵¹ *ibid*, p.162

⁵² H Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 261

⁵³ *ibid*, p.261

⁵⁴ TW Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p.68

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.68

⁵⁶ S Garlick, ‘Masculinity, Pornography, and the History of Masturbation’, in *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 16, 2012, p.309

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.308

reproduction of society.”⁵⁸ I believe it is a mixture of both Laqueur’s and Garlick’s arguments about the historical conception of male masturbation that has led to the continuation of anxieties surrounding male auto-erotic acts from the 18th and 19th centuries into the emerging industrialised commodity culture of the early 20th century. This perception of masturbation, plus the medical panic incited, created an issue of control within a society that is experiencing major cultural changes. These issues of societal control are detailed extensively in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. Foucault states that the repression of sexuality was not overtly carried out to affect the working classes but instead the “most rigorous techniques were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes.”⁵⁹ For Foucault, this notion is tied to the establishment of bourgeois hegemony, and the bio-political care of bodies in order to “represent politically, economically, and historically for the present and future of the bourgeoisie.”⁶⁰ Foucault theorises that it is a healthy body and mind that is the bourgeoisie legacy, as opposed to the claims to heritage the aristocracy hold, and thus, masturbation became the perfect target for a moral panic surrounding the body, natural and unnaturalness, and masculinity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the masculine body became a site for politicised health education. Masturbation disrupted the hegemonic heterosexual order, it made men lethargic and diseased, and ultimately unable to continue the bourgeoisie aims of longevity. Masturbation was a threat to the social order, but only in that, it disrupted economic forces. The effect of the 18th and 19th-century’s theorisation of male masturbation turned the act into a site of struggle; between class, social and economic anxieties.

20th Century Masturbation.

In the early part of the 20th century, attitudes towards masturbation were still imbued with social, class and economic anxieties. Thomas W Laqueur theorises that it is Sigmund Freud’s theories that create a “great intellectual leap”⁶¹ from disease-causing to natural-fact, and then, to the psychoanalytical conception of sex drive. The rise of industrialised capitalism, the

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.309

⁵⁹ M Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley, London, Penguin Books, 1998, p.120

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.125

⁶¹ TW Laqueur, *op cit.*, p. 70

subsequent changes to birth rates and a greater understanding of class consciousness, created a struggle to “make out of the body and its desire the sort of useful, reproductive creatures - male and female - that [civilisation] it needed to sustain itself.”⁶² In order to do this, wider society need to create an educational, medical and psychological structure that organised the sexuality of adulthood to “become the model for how desire itself had to be managed and directed if we human were to attain higher goals: not only families, but art, music, literature, and all that culture stood for.” Masturbation at the turn of the 20th century became a battleground issue for the improvement of culture, society and masculinity as a whole.

In his 1905 publication, *‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’*, Freud drew psychoanalytic boundaries between childhood, adolescent and adult masturbation. Freud saw no harm in childhood masturbation, but adult masturbation remained taboo; “a symptom of abjection, a sign of failure, a font of guilt and a token of inadequacy.”⁶³ Freud believed that childhood masturbation must be given up in order to become ready for the reality of adult sexual relations. Masturbation ceased to be physically harmful and instead moved into the realms of development. Auto-erotic acts became a natural part of growing up, but something you outgrew. When practised by an adult, masturbation was the mark of failure to develop. But when masturbation was ceased post-adolescence, a productive male subject, who was mature and disciplined, emerged properly socialised as a capitalist subject capable of loving reproduction. The fantastical element of masturbation came to represent an incomplete emotional growth, and thus, the adult individual would never experience the “spiritual value that sex was meant to offer a socialized-adult.”⁶⁴ Freud associated masturbation with addictive substances, just like addiction to tobacco or alcohol, masturbation was a substitute for a lack; “a lack of sexual satisfaction.”⁶⁵ Freud’s theorisation of auto-erotic acts was often contradictory; on one hand it was the cause of anxieties, hysteria, obsessions, vomiting, repressed memories etc, but on the other, the shame and guilt that occurred due to the demonisation of masturbation lead to sexual dysfunction and impairment in adulthood (for women especially). The long-lasting legacy of Freudian psychoanalytical auto-erotic

⁶² *ibid*, p.70

⁶³ S Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey, Mansfield Centre, Conn., Martino Publishing, 2011. p.63

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p.73

⁶⁵ Freud writing to Wilhelm Fliess, quoted in TW Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, New York, Zone Books, 2003. p. 71

understanding is one of active masculinity, and passive femininity (though this was challenged by second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s).

It was the work of noted Sexologist Alfred Kinsey during the 1940s and 1950s that began to effect a notable change in the perceptions of sexuality and masturbation. In the *Kinsey Reports*, masturbation was theorised as an instinctive behaviour for both men and women, not just in childhood or adolescence, but throughout life. In opposition to the ideas of the 18th and 19th century, Kinsey theorises that “the so-called perversion of masturbation was in fact remarkably commonplace,”⁶⁶ and that people of all classes and education levels were as likely to masturbate, and to report doing so and did not, as theorised earlier, detract from the heterosexual marriage bed, but went hand in hand.

The 1950s also experienced significant changes in the societal conception of masculinity. As men returned from the frontlines after the Second World War, women were forced out of jobs and back into the domestic sphere. Women’s changing roles caused concern about the masculinisation of women, and the blurring of gender hierarchies, and the return of men did not simply return masculinity to the pre-war status quo. While the war did not change masculinity, it transformed within public and self-perceptions. According to Tom Pendergast, masculinity morphed from being concerned with honour, loyalty, self-control and being a patriarch, through the military-industrial complex, to a form of modern masculinity that valued personality, cooperativeness, expressiveness and sexuality.⁶⁷ According to Lynne Segal by the fifties, “there were at least two opposed faces of masculinity... There was the new family man, content with house and garden. And there was the old wartime hero, who put ‘freedom’ before family and loved ones.”⁶⁸ Both of these ‘new’ forms of masculinity emerged from the controlled masculinity of the 18th and 19th century due to significant social and political changes.

The 1966 *Human Sexual Response* report, compiled by William Masters and Virginia Johnson was actively used by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s to ‘rehabilitate’ and change ideas surrounding female masturbation, and by extension heterosexual sex. Masters and Johnson’s research into female clitoral response allowed the feminist movement

⁶⁶ *ibid*, p.74

⁶⁷ T Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950*, Columbia, Mo, University of Missouri Press, 2000.

⁶⁸ L Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, London, Virago, 1990, p.16

and male gay movement to embrace masturbation as “a practice in the service of freedom, autonomy and rebellion against the status quo;”⁶⁹ heteronormative male sexuality. Numerous books were published surrounding ideas of female sexual desire, pleasure and empowerment: Anne Koedt’s *Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* (1970), Nancy Friday’s *My Secret Garden* (1973), and Betty Dodson’s *Liberating Masturbation* (1974) to name but a few of the more popular titles. These books along, with a sex-positive feminist rhetoric, “hailed masturbation as the safest, most pleasurable path to self-discovery and fulfilment,”⁷⁰ but this was only true of female masturbation. Male masturbation was unaffected by feminist sexual liberation, but instead, some feminist rhetoric focused on how male sexual desire (and masturbation by extension) upheld misogynist views of the female body and female sexuality.

During this period, the American porn industry entered its golden age (from around 1969 - 1984), with commercial sexually-explicit films gathering positive attention from mainstream cinemas, movie critics and the general public both home and internationally; the most notable being 1972’s *Deep Throat*. Post-Kinsey and, Masters and Johnson, male masturbation still carried the burden of the 18th and 19th century. This was then further complicated by the late 1970s and early 1980s view of male masturbatory fantasies being viewed as a “fantasy-driven rehearsal for real sexual aggression,”⁷¹ due to academic feminist reactions to increased availability of pornographic imagery, and their equation of pornography with the sexual abuse of women.⁷² This equation of male desire to violence continued the control narrative of the previous centuries and contributed to an opposition of ‘real’ masculinity and masturbatory acts. Where male masturbation became the antithesis of masculinity, female masturbation became a celebrated and lucrative opportunity, and the sale of vibrators, dildos and other sex toys aimed at women became a huge industry.

Sexuality became a larger issue in the mid-1980s due to the HIV/AIDs epidemic. This crisis of sexual health within the LGBT community, especially male health, moved masturbation from the private into the public social sphere. The closure of gay meeting places, such as bathhouses, led to masturbation becoming the new option for homosexual pleasure. During this period, male heterosexual masturbation continued without direct sexual

⁶⁹ TW Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p.75

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p.80

⁷¹ *ibid*, p.80

⁷² Most notably in the scholarship of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine McKinnon

liberation, and instead, masculinity pluralised and many new masculine identities emerged; the sexually promiscuous and diseased homosexual, the ‘New Man’, the ‘Hypermasculine’ and the inexperienced virgin. This pluralisation can be seen as part of the ‘crisis of masculinity,’ characterised in the 1980s by the service, commercial and information sectors impressing on male identity, causing a fissure or break in identity formation. The ‘New Man’ can be understood as being sensitive to the needs of his female counterparts, and having emotionally expressive qualities. Images of the ‘New Man’ emerged through 1980s cinematic features as characters who encouraged audiences to consider men as sensitive, nurturing partners and fathers, rather than emotionally detached controlling figures, a notable example of this can be seen in Robin William’s character *Mrs Doubtfire*. The ‘Hypermasculine’ trope emerged in visual culture through hard action films such as *Die Hard*, *The Terminator*, and *Rambo*, and can be seen in direct opposition to the ‘New Man’. Film Scholar Yvonne Tasker theorises that this visual focus on the muscular masculine body is an attempt to reinstate ideas of male strength and power. These characters are able to ignore societal changes that occurred due to the feminist movement and appealed to male audiences through unchanging, strong, and clearly defined masculine roles and bodies.⁷³ The inexperienced virgin trope emerged in American teen films such as *Porky’s*, *Fast Time at Ridgmont High* and *Risky Business*, and continued well into the 1990s. Timothy Shary theorises that these films dealt with the protagonist’s quest to lose their virginity as a “result of the repressive mentality of the Reagan era and the desperation of Hollywood movie studios,” though notes that after the advent of the AIDs crisis, the representations of carefree sexually active teenagers were replaced with characters who were more educated and informed.⁷⁴

Masturbation during the 20th century moved from control to the creation of opportunities for pleasure, and thus, masturbation becomes a necessity for male sexual gratification and satisfaction. By the late 20th century, masturbation fit perfectly into the neoliberal model for individuality; not in that it withdrew or detached the subject from wider society, but as it allowed for the satisfaction of individual desires and needs. As the market and an industry for sex toys and masturbatory aids, sex manuals and couples sex help books, and popular print magazines grew, the availability of different masculine identities to buy and

⁷³ Y Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, Comedia, London ; New York, Routledge, 1993.

⁷⁴ T Shary, ‘Virgin Springs: A Survey of Teen Films’ Quest for Sexcess’ in *Virgin Territory: Representing Sexual Inexperience in Film*, Wayne State University Press, 2010, p.57

buy into increased. Masturbation then became a means of discovering yourself,⁷⁵ in order to reveal the masculine identity you are, and how to change this identity based on the visual representations of heterosexual men available. This buying of masculine identity through sexuality has continued into the contemporary period.

Conclusion

Throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th century's attitudes towards masturbation have changed significantly. What both of these brief historical sections reveal about male masturbation is an economic imperative entwined with issues of class and identity formation that has manifested in a wider societal anxiety surrounding heterosexual male desire, pleasure and intimacy. Laqueur hypothesises that the "dramatic, sudden and radically innovative formulation of masturbation as the pressing problem of solitary and secret, always excessive, and artfully created desire maps precisely onto the problem of the new economy,"⁷⁶ and through the history presented above this can be seen. By comparing masturbation to the Adam Smith problem (dealing with how to reconcile the emphasis of moral sentiments with the emphasis of self interest in capitalism), it can be seen as the limit to selfishness and luxury that capitalism brings. Where luxury was produced, and society as a whole benefited, masturbation was an excess of fantasy and imagination, with no productive benefit and thus, presented the ultimate challenge to all moral and ethical conversations about how to control selfish desires and regulate individuals. Laqueur's economic understanding of masturbation fails to note the centrality of the body to masturbation. The shifting conception of the body and how to control the body (the body and the body-political), both male and female, is crucial to understanding the change in cultural perceptions of masturbation. Steve Garlick relates this continual demonisation of male masturbatory practices to Foucault's notion of biopolitics; how this "conception of security, what is meant by 'naturalness' is very much at stake through these shifting discourses on sex, medicine, and life."⁷⁷ By regulating masculinity through economic, social and political means, reproduction and production are

⁷⁵ Non pun intended.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p. 280

⁷⁷ S Garlick, 'The Biopolitics of Masturbation: Masculinity, Complexity, and Security', in *Body & Society*, vol. 20, 2014, p.51

able to “remain secure and under control,”⁷⁸ something that is made increasingly difficult when masculine identity is now considered through its relation to different bodies; the female, the diseased, the adult, and the body of the identity you have purchased. The history of masturbation, and its contemporary cultural understanding, can be seen as an “attempt to organize a population of sub-individual elements into a coherent and controlled form in order to stake a claim to power.”⁷⁹

For adult masturbators, the event can be seen to now to represent “a practice of individual autonomy and of sexual energy, an instrument of freedom...”⁸⁰ Though masturbation remains a stigmatised and taboo topic, especially childhood or adolescent masturbation. In 1994, the (then) Surgeon General of the United States, Dr Joycelyn Elders, proposed information about masturbation be included in school sexual health classes. This statement caused so much controversy that she was forced to resign. What has emerged now in the 2010s, especially in the U.K, is another moral panic surrounding sex and sexual experience. Rather than a panic about masturbation, it is concerned with access to pornographic imagery, and how this has introduced children and young people to sex and sexual acts. It appears the panic is now no longer concerned with masturbation being a person’s first sexual encounter, or encounter with their sexuality, but rather the depiction of sex acts and how this influences desires and intimacies. Once again the body and fantasies are central to a bio-political regime to control sexuality. This ‘concern’ has manifested as age verification; first proposed to be implemented at the beginning of 2018, the British Conservative government will allow external companies to police access to pornographic media and collect and store data on individuals and their porn usage.

Currently, the ‘crisis of masculinity’ is framed in journalistic articles as a crisis of intimacy and desire. The overwhelming access to desirable visual material has created a ‘broken-ness’ in adolescent boys and young men; their broken identities and their inability to form intimate relationships (both sexual and non-sexual). Sex is now situated as a moment of pure uncontrollable consumption, that inevitably leads to a dangerous excess, and in some

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p.65

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.65

⁸⁰ TW Laqueur, *op. cit.*, p. 22

cases, the death of young women.⁸¹ I end this brief history of masturbation with this conversation about the contemporary moment as Steve Garlick believes pornography is inherently tied to masturbation and masculinity.

Men's masturbation remains "largely at the margins of sexual culture;"⁸² due to a lack of research and the "lack of a developed cultural language with which to discuss pornographic representations of men's bodies,"⁸³ and the current political and cultural discussions appear to compound these issues. Heterosexual male masturbation appears once again to be becoming a case of control; control of natural urges, and a control of visual technologies. It is from this contemporary position that this thesis will analyse and interrogate heterosexual masculinity and its sexual desires and masturbatory tendencies through the aids discussed in the introduction. As masculinity and heterosexual desire appear to be entering into an era of new moral panic, it is from this historical contextualisation that I will attempt to understand what these aids do, how they interact with cis-gendered heterosexual men and their desires. What follows will analyse masturbatory aids by prying them away from the historical contexts of control, shame, guilt and disease, but also with an understanding of the history that constantly still informs their existence as cultural objects.

⁸¹ Some more in-depth journalistic articles that deal with this claim can be found here: D Victor, 'Mass Shooters Are All Different. Except for One Thing: Most Are Men', in *The New York Times*, , 2018, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/17/us/mass-murderers.html>> [accessed 20 February 2018]. J Wright, 'Men Are Responsible for Mass Shootings: How Toxic Masculinity is Killing Us', in *Harpers Bazaar*, , 2018, <<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a18207600/mass-shootings-male-entitlement-toxic-masculinity/>> [accessed 20 February 2018]. A Martin, 'The Incel Rebellion - How Involuntary Celibates are Dangerous in their Desires', in *The Independent*, , 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/incele-what-is-involuntary-celibates-elliott-rodger-alek-minassian-canada-terrorism-a8335816.html> [accessed 5 May 2018].

⁸² S Garlick, 'Masculinity, Pornography, and the History of Masturbation', in *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 16, 2012 p.318

⁸³ *ibid*, p.318

Chapter 2: Fleshlights

This chapter's subject is the Fleshlight masturbatory aid, understood here as a participatory sexual device that is commercially available and mass-produced. The Fleshlight, in its essence, is a penetrable sexual device, designed specifically for penetration by the male penis. First, this chapter will examine the Stamina Training Unit, a masturbatory aid that promises to improve the users' sexual performance, then it will turn to look at the Fleshlight Girls collection, a masturbatory aid that employs a mimetic vagina moulded from the genitals of porn performers. Marquard Smith considers these artificial body-part devices as being without compassion, or desire for shared intimacies; "they are penetrable sexual devices for sex, for masturbation"⁸⁴ and that is all. What this chapter will explore is if Fleshlights are more than just penetrable masturbation devices, if they do offer a more intimate connection, and how that connection operates with desire and pleasure. By exploring the Fleshlight as a cultural object, analysing not only the product but its advertising and marketing, this chapter will explore the relationship between Fleshlights, masculinity and heterosexual desire. This chapter aims to understand how the Fleshlight produces a productive male masturbatory, as opposed to an unproductive one, and how users of Fleshlights perform masculinity within wider society.

Marquard Smith argues that Fleshlight's fail to create intimacies, due to their disembodied and semi-mimetic nature, but I believe they do create forms of intimacy; both real and perceived. By considering the Fleshlight as a boundary object, with numerous ideologies, cultural and societal conceptions working on the object, this chapter will argue how the Stamina Training Unit creates intimacy from the body to the self (the male subject in this case) and how the Girls collection creates an illusionary experience of intimacy.

The Fleshlight: A Brief Background

The Fleshlight is a brand of masturbatory aid, designed by Steve Shubin who received the patent (No. US5807360A) in September 1998, as a "device useful for discreet and camouflaged collection of sperm from human males."⁸⁵ Its name reflects its simplistic design;

⁸⁴ M Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p.193

⁸⁵ S Shubin, 'Device for Discreet Sperm Collection', US5807360A, Texas, 1998.

a flesh-like material contained within a plastic sleeve that resembles an oversized torch (or flashlight). The design of the case is supposed to add discretion, but in my opinion, the sheer size of the product means it fails in its purpose. Each end of the case has a removable cap, the larger end covering the entrance point of the product, and the smaller end can be loosened and tightened in order to control the level of suction for the user, in order to enhance the sexual experience. The inner sleeve is available with a mimetic vagina, anal or mouth orifice, available in a variety of ethnicities, sci-fi inspired and see-through sleeves, as well as the Fleshlight Girls collection, and is available with 48 internal textures. The inner sleeve is made from “Super Skin,”⁸⁶ a patented material that the company claims is “unmatched in replicating the feel of real skin,”⁸⁷ which the company recommends warming up before use in order to deliver a more realistic sexual experience. Each sleeve is made of non-toxic, phthalate-free, easy clean material that can withstand multiple uses and cleans.⁸⁸ Fleshlight is the heterosexual imprint of the company, and for the purposes of this thesis, I will not take into consideration products produced and marketed for the ‘Fleshjack’ range aimed at homosexual men.

The Fleshlight has become the word most closely associated with male masturbatory aids, becoming the generic term used for all masturbatory sleeves of this kind. In an interview with *EAN* magazine, Miguel Capilla (the CCO of Fleshlight International SL) stated that “male sex toy sales have risen by 1,000 percent in the past 10 years,”⁸⁹ with the Fleshlight selling 400,000 units in 2016 within Europe alone.⁹⁰ Retailing for around £60 for a basic model, and available with additional accessories (including VR headsets, pornographic subscription services etc.) the Fleshlight represents a masturbatory aid that is not outside the realms of possibility for the average man but involves a considerable investment compared to the TENGA EGG but less than a Teddy Babe.

⁸⁶ Fleshlight EU, ‘FAQ: Product Information’, <<https://www.fleshlightdistribution.com/faq-product-information>> [accessed 2 March 2018].

⁸⁷ Fleshlight EU, ‘FAQ: Product Information’, <<https://www.fleshlightdistribution.com/faq-product-information>> [accessed 2 March 2018].

⁸⁸ S Shubin, ‘Device for Discreet Sperm Collection’, (US5782818A), Texas, 1998.

⁸⁹ E Morse, ‘We Have Sold More Than 400,000 Male Masturbators Last Year in Europe’, in *EAN Magazine*, 2017, <<http://www.ean-online.com/insights/interview/we-have-sold-more-than-400000-male-masturbators-last-year-in-europe/>> [accessed 2 March 2018].

⁹⁰ E Morse, ‘We Have Sold More Than 400,000 Male Masturbators Last Year in Europe’, in *EAN Magazine*, 2017, <<http://www.ean-online.com/insights/interview/we-have-sold-more-than-400000-male-masturbators-last-year-in-europe/>> [accessed 2 March 2018].

At the same time as the original patent was filled, Steven Shubin filled a separate patent for a “female functioning mannequin”⁹¹ [Patent no. 5466235]. Shubin says this mannequin is needed because “women are cruel, vain, superficial, that they humiliate and break the hearts of men and that dolls, on the contrary, are reliable, compliant, compatible and loving.”⁹² Shubin goes on to qualify the need because “men may be suffering a break-up, be chronically shy, lonely, agoraphobic, premature ejaculators or have physical disabilities,”⁹³ and continues on to say that the invention may “help decrease the transmission of AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution and even rape and molestation.”⁹⁴ While the patent is not representative of the Fleshlight, it gives an insight into the ideological conditions of its existence. Marquard Smith comments that Shubin’s statement about women bypasses the need to debate the fact Shubin was “planning to shape... a new paradigm of the lucrative commercial market for modern masturbatory or penetrable sex devices.”⁹⁵ For me, this is an insight into why there is a lack of discussion about the Fleshlight beyond the surface image of the object. What both of these patents reveal is a deeper ideology within the Fleshlight, one that is implicitly tied to male heterosexual anxieties, about themselves and about women, as well as issues surrounding heterosexual intimacy, affective desires and affective intensities.

The Stamina Training Unit.

*“If you can last 10 minutes in the STU, you can last 20 minutes in bed with anyone”*⁹⁶

In the mid-2000s (I estimate around 2007), Fleshlight released their *Stamina Training Unit* (or STU for short), a vivid gold plastic Fleshlight sleeve containing the *Pink Lady* sleeve. The STU is specially designed to recreate “the sensations of sexual relations”⁹⁷, and the “intense

⁹¹ M Smith, op. cit., p. 194

⁹² *ibid*, p.194

⁹³ *ibid*, p.194 - 195

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p. 195

⁹⁵ *ibid*, p.195

⁹⁶ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video], 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgldDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

⁹⁷ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

stimulation”⁹⁸ of penetrative sex. The narrative that follows the STU is one of improvement, development and a sense of masculine achievement, success and health. In the context of these themes, the STU can be seen to transform male heterosexual masturbation from simple auto-erotic pleasure into personal growth and enhancement.

The STU employs the imagery and emotional associations of improvement through sports, military involvement and exercise. The brief statement on the Fleshlight website states that the STU is “just like your college track coach”⁹⁹ and will “train you long and hard for any race you want to compete in.”¹⁰⁰ The STU also employs the fantastical narrative of desire, claiming that the product “forces you to be better in bed - something you may have fantasized about the hot track coach teaching you as well.”¹⁰¹ The images used in the STU advertising and marketing are hyper-sexualised images of women in the middle of exercising. The current promotional video on the Fleshlight STU website is a comedic featurette that pokes fun at those who can’t perform at the gym, though this ‘plot’ barely covers the true meaning - poking fun of men who can’t perform sexually and satisfy their female partners. (*See fig. 1*) The video shows a stereotypically attractive white, blonde woman running on a treadmill in an office-cum-gym. The empty treadmill next to her soon becomes occupied by a man who is styled as a 1980s nerd/pervert. He is not overly muscular, neither overweight, his hair is wavy, he wears a gold chain with running shorts that are too long and non-branded trainers. He is unexceptional and average, and functions here as a blank slate for the projection of masculine anxieties about fashion, attractiveness, height and musculature. The two run alongside each other, with the woman increasing her speed every few seconds and the man trying to keep up. His face contorts with effort, echoing the distortion of the face that natural happens during sex acts. Eventually, the speed is too much for him and he falls (this is understood here as being representative of premature ejaculation). The female runner continues, unimpressed and uninterested in the man who is now on the floor. A shot of the treadmill fills the screen, and

⁹⁸ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

⁹⁹ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

¹⁰⁰ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

¹⁰¹ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

the STU slides into view accompanied by the text “Can't Keep Up With Her?”¹⁰² which quickly changes to “Fleshlight. The Stamina Training Unit. Become a Sex God.”¹⁰³ In my opinion, this advertisement for the STU mixes humour and anxiety to imply that without the Fleshlight STU, potential users are destined to become the man in the video - unable to keep up with their female partners.

This marketing technique has followed the STU throughout its product life. In 2011, Fleshlight’s Youtube channel uploaded a promotional video, lasting 1 minute and 31 seconds, for the STU. The video features a conventionally attractive blonde woman, who describes the product against a plain black background. (*See fig.2*) She uses conversational language, opening the video with “I think I speak for a lot of girls when I say it’s pretty frustrating when you’re right in the middle of passionate lovemaking with your man, building up to an intense climax, and then, it’s over.”¹⁰⁴ The overarching narrative of this video is that most women are disappointed sexually because most men cannot perform; “We’ve all experienced it.”¹⁰⁵ the frustration is “probably even worse for you guys.”¹⁰⁶ The video’s statements can be seen to imply that ‘we’ is both Fleshlight the company, and women. This direct appeal to anxieties surrounding sexual performance, without associating it to individualised or medically specific issues, normalises the situation, creating a comfort - it’s not just me - but also highlighting the issues for the female sexual partner, reinforcing the heterosexual need for the ‘other’. By quickly creating a narrative of communal, shared anxiety and symptoms, Fleshlight is positioned to increase sales of the STU; “It’s with exactly this in mind that we created the Stamina Training Unit.”¹⁰⁷ The video ends with a plea, sexualised to almost be a form of begging; “So why don’t you do something great for yourself, and even better for all of us

¹⁰² *Fleshlight. The Stamina Training Unit. Become A Sex God*, [online video] , unknown date, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/collections/stamina-training-fl-toys>> [accessed 3 March 2018]

¹⁰³ *Fleshlight. The Stamina Training Unit. Become A Sex God*, [online video] , unknown date, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/collections/stamina-training-fl-toys>> [accessed 3 March 2018]

¹⁰⁴ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video] , 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹⁰⁵ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video] , 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹⁰⁶ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video] , 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹⁰⁷ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video] , 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

girls, and get the STU. Please.”¹⁰⁸ Anxieties concerning male sexual performance can be seen as being characterised by a number of elements, but Fleshlight hone in on the most common and shared experiences; fears of underperforming and not satisfying their partner, poor body image and concerns about premature ejaculation.

The 2011 video also mentions another aspect to the STU experience; the *Stamina Training Unit Field Manual*. Now available to download from the Fleshlight website without purchase, the STU Field Manual is marketed as an “...exclusive e-booklet, with tips and techniques on how to have total control over your ejaculation, and become a lover with no equal.”¹⁰⁹ The manual is a 10-page, ‘how-to guide’ that teaches the reader how to use the STU to its best training potential, or, in fact, to train the reader to their best sexual potential. Fleshlight claims that manual can help STU users “increase sexual stamina, improve performance and techniques, and heighten and intensify orgasms.”¹¹⁰ Throughout the manual, the reader is given ‘tips and tricks’ for pleasing female partners whilst having penetrative sex. The manual even describes how to practice giving direct clitoral stimulation during penetrative sex using the mimetic genitals, and how to practice oral sex with the mimetic genitals. The STU Field Manual takes its visual cues from sexualised parodies, drawing on high-street sex costuming, with the women within the guide wearing ‘military’ clothing. (*see fig.3*) This fashioning is not, in my opinion, intended to fetishise; the outfits are not intended to serve those with a fetish for military uniforms, and neither are they intended to serve as a fantasy of male subservience. These ready-to-wear sexualised uniforms perform a task of changing how masturbation is viewed within the context of the STU and its manual. Uniforms here are tongue-in-cheek but are used to convey do’s and don’ts. They prescribe behaviours of authority, order, hierarchy and rules.¹¹¹ In the context of the STU, sexual improvement is acceptable masturbatory behaviour, but masturbation purely for self-gratification is not. The STU Field Manual also employs the language of sports and exercise in order to transform the

¹⁰⁸ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video], 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹⁰⁹ *Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit*, [online video], 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9kgIdDbq_E> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹¹⁰ Fleshlight EU, ‘*Stamina Training Unit: Lady*’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stamina-training-unit>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

¹¹¹ D Bhugra & PD Silva, ‘Uniforms—Fact, Fashion, Fantasy and Fetish’, in *Sexual and Marital Therapy*, vol. 11, 1996, pp.393–406.

user into a “sexual legend,”¹¹² likening the user to an athlete “who practices for hours a day by himself so that he will be ready to perform in a game.”¹¹³ The manual normalises and practicalises the act of masturbation through the idea of self-development. While the images in the manual are mostly of sexualised women, the main focus of the manual is to improve the users’ sexual prowess for these sexualised women.

The combination of the advertising campaigns and the STU Field Manual, and their focus on exercises, improvement and male sexual anxieties, moves the STU from *Scientia Sexualis* to *Ars Erotica* through Foucault’s ideas of ‘technologies of the self’. *Scientia Sexualis* is identified by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* as unique to western civilisations, and defines the truth of sexuality by means of knowledge production; the conditions of sexuality are defined and determined by a scientific discourse which determines its moral, legal and societal limits.¹¹⁴ *Ars Erotica* is found, according to Foucault, in non-western, non-contemporary countries and periods, draws truth from pleasure.¹¹⁵ Through its intensity, quality, duration, and physical and spiritual reverberations pleasure is defined in an of itself rather than according to external standards of law and unity.¹¹⁶ The Fleshlight STU may provide direct stimulation and male pleasure, but its benefits are far-reaching. This articulation of pleasure as self-development sees masculine heterosexuality and its pleasures placed at the centre of intimate and affective cis-gendered male relationships.

The STU and Male Heterosexuality.

In a study pertaining to how intimacy and male heterosexuality are constructed within Men’s Magazines, Anna Rogers asserts that “the rise in interest in intimacy has entailed a problematization of masculinity, with particular consequences for the ways in which men’s lives are thought about and discussed.”¹¹⁷ This interest in intimacy and masculinity can be

¹¹² Fleshlight EU, *Stamina Training Unit Field Manual*, Interactive Life Forms, Inc, 2008, p.3

¹¹³ Fleshlight EU, *Stamina Training Unit Field Manual*, Interactive Life Forms, Inc, 2008, p.3

¹¹⁴ M Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley, London, Penguin Books, 1998. p. 61

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, p. 61

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 51

¹¹⁷ A Rogers, ‘Chaos to Control: Men’s Magazines and the Mastering of Intimacy’, in *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 8, 2005, p.175

seen as a result of what British Sociologist Anthony Giddens describes as “plastic sexuality,”¹¹⁸ a form of “decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction.”¹¹⁹ Plastic sexuality is shaped according to individual erotic wants and needs, and can serve as a marker of individual identity. Giddens sees plastic sexuality as leading “to increase the emphasis on pleasure and decrease on the emphasis on phallic sexuality.”¹²⁰ For Giddens, plastic sexuality has emerged as a consequence of the ‘crisis of masculinity’ and its liberation of men from traditional gender roles¹²¹ and can be seen as a source of male anxiety, often manifesting itself in worries about sexual performance.

Anna Rogers asserts that men’s magazines, such as *FHM* or *Loaded*, are sources of heterosexual masculine communities that bring together fractured masculine identities in order to create a homogenous masculinity that can be certain in their ideas of intimacies and relationships.¹²² Like men’s magazines, the STU employs a sense of certainty by assuming that users (or potential users) are sexually active, and have someone who he has (or could have) sexual relations with. The STU assumes that sex for the user is easily, unproblematically, naturally and inevitably available, but that the user is not completely certain of their ability to perform or pleasure a female partner. The STU and its *Field Manual* also take the quality of sexual relationships into account in order to affirm masculinity. While the STU and the *Field Manual* produce a homogenous masculinity through a shared experience of anxiety, competition and improvement, it also constructs a feminine subject who is parallel to the male subject. This anxiety around female sexual subjects is framed as the women’s fault within the STU Manual; she is too needy, too expectant, or not understanding. Female sexuality is positioned by the STU Manual as opposing male sexuality; where men’s sexuality is easy, straightforward, and natural, female sexuality is dangerous, unpredictable and complicated. The STU sets masculine heterosexuality up as

¹¹⁸ A Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008, p.2

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, p.2

¹²⁰ ‘Plastic Sexuality’ - *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, G Ritzer (ed), Oxford, UK, Malden, USA and Carlton, Australia, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007, <<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/b.9781405124331.2007.x>> [accessed 1 May 2018].

¹²¹ ‘Plastic Sexuality’ - *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, G Ritzer (ed), Oxford, UK, Malden, USA and Carlton, Australia, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007, <<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1111/b.9781405124331.2007.x>> [accessed 3 March 2018].

¹²² A Rogers, ‘Chaos to Control: Men’s Magazines and the Mastering of Intimacy’, in *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 8, 2005

easy, natural and straightforward, whilst also recognising it as fragile due to the involvement of women, thus, the STU improves sexual prowess, and by extension masculinity, by removing the threat of the female sexual other until the user is ready to perform their STU increased masculinity.

The STU, understood as a cultural object with numerous factors operating on it, shows that men should be striving for sexual self-improvement, as sexual performance forms part of what is it to be a man. The STU is, what Foucault would call, a technology of the self.¹²³ The STU focuses on self-surveillance and the disciplining of bodies and minds in the service of reconfiguring the masculine identity. The STU suggests that self-transformation and disciplining of bodies cannot be achieved solely on one's own, and external intervention is required. Specific discourses of athletic masculinity, untamed rugged masculinity and natural masculinity are provided to show what a true man looks like, and thus, a successful performance of heterosexual masculinity can be emulated and ultimately achieved through self-improvement and discipline. The use of the disembodied mimetic female genitalia as an object to engage for self-improvement can be seen as an element of the "heterosexual marketplace,"¹²⁴ in which women's bodies are used as cultural symbols of value. By employing the (literal) objectification of women in order to economise on the anxiety of men in relation to their masculinity and sexuality, the STU places sexual prowess above the valorising of traditional male roles in order to create a homogenised heterosexual masculine subject. The STU *Field Manual* expresses masculinity as inherently residing within all male bodies, but lying dormant and in need of sexual mastery to become outwardly expressed. This internalised masculinity is framed as a powerful tool that can be accessed through continual practice; carefully honed it can transform the user into a masculine 'sex machine' who is able to satisfy any female partner, and therefore, is a 'real man'. The STU *Field Manual* finishes with an affirmation of its own technologies of self; "now it is up to you to put in the time and dedication. You have the potential to be a legend, now is your chance to accept your legacy."¹²⁵ Each man contains hegemonic masculinity, and by mastering sexual potential, they can continue to add to the patriarchal dominant legacy of masculinity.

¹²³ M Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self' in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, LH Martin, H Gutman & PH Hutton (eds), Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp. 16–49.

¹²⁴ B Fahs quoted in S Cosma & M Gurevich, '(Re)producing the "Natural Man" in Men's Online Advice Media: Achieving Masculinity through Embodied and Mental Mastery', in *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, 2018, p. 86

¹²⁵ Fleshlight EU, *Stamina Training Unit Field Manual*, Interactive Life Forms, Inc, 2008, p.10

Fleshlight Girls

*“Get inside your favorite stars”*¹²⁶

The Fleshlight Girls collection is probably the most well-known imprint of the Fleshlight products available, and in my opinion, is what made the Fleshlight a culturally known object. The inner sleeves of this collection are moulded from the genitals of female porn performers, and boasts a huge range of models; 28 for the main collection, 12 in the ‘collectors corner’ range and 4 ‘Dorcel’ girls. Each Fleshlight Girl is available to buy an ‘orgy’ set, that urges men to “get inside as many of today’s adult stars as you want and save!”¹²⁷ The inner sleeves of each mimetic representation have a texture designed specifically for the girl the consumer is purchasing, and is embossed with the signature of the porn performer whom it is moulded from. The moulding process is done through plaster casts; each performer’s vulva, clitoris and anus are moulded in order to produce the best mimetic representation of the performer’s body parts. This process has been detailed in documentaries concerning the production of Fleshlight sleeves.¹²⁸

Each ‘Fleshlight Girl’ has a small biography accompanying their model. Here, I will describe the Stoya model, as this is the only porn performer I personally have any familiarity with. (*see fig.4*) The description details where Stoya was born and raised (Wilmington, North Carolina¹²⁹), describes her as “America’s sweetheart of smut,”¹³⁰ and continues on to say that she is “famed for her assertiveness and confidence that just might break you, but in the best way.”¹³¹ Parts of the description is written using quotes from Stoya, including one that details how Stoya feels about her Fleshlight model - “I encourage you to take my Fleshlight home

¹²⁶ Fleshlight EU, ‘Fleshlight Girls’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/collections/fleshlight-girls>> [accessed 5 March 2018]

¹²⁷ Fleshlight EU, ‘Fleshlight Girls Orgy’, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/collections/orgy>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

¹²⁸ A few documentary that I watched for the purposes of researching how Fleshlights are made can be found at: J Bowers, ‘Watch This Very Un-Sexy Short Documentary About How Fleshlights Are Made’, in *Vice*, , 2016, <https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/nn9pwq/watch-this-very-un-sexy-short-documentary-about-a-fleshlight-factory> [accessed 2 February 2018] J Gold, ‘Watch How Fleshlights are Made in This Gripping Documentary’, in *Joe*, 2016, <<https://www.joe.co.uk/life/fleshlights-how-they-are-made-47283>> [accessed 2 February 2018].

¹²⁹ Fleshlight EU, ‘Stoya’, date unknown, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stoya>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

¹³⁰ Fleshlight EU, ‘Stoya’, date unknown, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stoya>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

¹³¹ Fleshlight EU, ‘Stoya’, date unknown, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stoya>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

because it has a much better attitude than I do.”¹³² The description ends with a statistics about Stoya including her birthday, zodiac sign, bra size, eye colour, height and weight, as well as options to follow Stoya on various social media networks. Each of the Fleshlight Girls’ descriptions included a personal element as well as a professional description; these vary from collection to collection; the Collectors’ Corner concentrates on the ‘legendary’ status of individual performers, and the Dorcel Girls collection exoticises their non-American status. All of these descriptive elements, combined with the images used to advertise the Fleshlight Girls work together to create a relationship between porn performer and the consumer. Fleshlight capitalises on this, even selling accessories as each individual performers ‘favourites’. Now, not only is the performer yours to consume and own, but now you can satisfy her as an individual by buying her favourite lube. Ultimately this works to marry the performer and the consumer’s sexual desires.

What the Fleshlight Girls imprint does is extend the pornographic script. While the STU complicates the relationship between heterosexual men and women and the vagina, featuring the moulded body part of porn performers collapses the Fleshlight and performer into one. What is being sold is not simply the promise of sexual fulfilment, but the opportunity to extend that sexual act by stimulating the experience of sex with a particular woman who, through her existence in pornography, is understood to exist primarily as a receptacle of male fantasies and by extension, male fluids. These fantasy women, and their disembodied mimetic genitals, are ever-ready and ever-willing, and their moulded vagina’s state that they are also desiring of, and sated by, whatever the male consumer wants.

Fleshlight Girls and Male Heterosexuality

Pornography has moved from specific sites of consumption, such as adult video stores or pay-for-view websites, on to social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr. This movement from specificity to social media has complicated the already complex notions of authenticity and intimacy inherent within pornographic visual culture. The complication is bound up with the media communication theories of ‘parasocial interaction’ and ‘parasocial relationships’. PSI and PSR are described as an illusionary experience in which consumers

¹³² Fleshlight EU, ‘Stoya’, date unknown, <<https://www.fleshlight.eu/products/stoya>> [accessed 5 March 2018].

develop one-sided relationships with the media they are consuming.¹³³ Consumers of the Fleshlight Girls collection interact with the porn performers represented by the object as if they are engaged in a reciprocal relationship with them, and as such, feel as though the mediated ‘other’ is talking to them directly as if they are ‘real friends’.¹³⁴ Brands use the feelings that PSI and PSR activate, and nurture them through carefully constructed mechanisms in order to increase brand loyalty and increase sales. Research has shown that interacting with individuals through social media platforms increases parasocial relationship intensities.¹³⁵ By using social media to increase their brand presence, barriers between consumer and performer begin to blur and breakdown as PSI and PSR feelings increase. A brief look at porn performers’ Twitter pages who are mimetically replicated for Fleshlight Girls collection shows this increase. A mixture of personal, promotional, and business information is contained within these public social media profiles; no longer are these women constrained to private fantasies, but instead are online public figures with whom consumers can interact on a personal level through attempts to engage in conversations, read blog posts that update them on day to day life, and see intimate snapshots of their daily life outside of porn performances (such as Jenna Haze going back to college and documenting scenes of her desk)¹³⁶ All of these aspects increase the level of PSI and PSR within consumers, that can then be exploited and manipulated to increase the selling power of Fleshlight models. A brief search for Dorcel Girl Valentia Nappi’s Twitter page reveals that she works with porn distribution and production company ‘Naughty America’, who specialises in producing High Definition and 4K videos which can be used with VR headsets. They promise to move consumers “light years ahead in turning your fantasy into a reality.”¹³⁷ Naughty America’s Twitter promotion of Valentina Nappi’s videos uses highly charged intimate language,

¹³³ LI Labrecque, ‘Fostering Consumer–Brand Relationships in Social Media Environments: The Role of Parasocial Interaction’, in *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, vol. 28, 2014, p.135

¹³⁴ *ibid*, pp.134–148.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, pp.14 - 148

¹³⁶ Haze, J [Social Media Post], “(@jennahaze) #collegelife”, 19 March 2018 <<https://twitter.com/jennahaze/status/975823258376331264>> [Accessed 2 April 2018]

¹³⁷ Naughty America, ‘Experience Virtual Reality Porn’, 2018, <<https://tour.naughtyamerica.com/vr-porn?nats=4.4.8.8.1169.0.0.0.0>> [accessed 10 March 2018].

referring to her as “your girlfriend,”¹³⁸ and the viewer as “the world’s best boyfriend.”¹³⁹ Rather than porn performers being professionals, they become good friends or girlfriends whom consumers enter into a perceived authentic relationship with. The boundaries here between performer and consumer collapse and this is where this Fleshlight model begins to affect heterosexual masculinity.

The dissolution of these boundaries can be seen to relate to ideas surrounding presence theory; defined as “the perceptual illusion of non-mediation,”¹⁴⁰ in which “an individual perceives a mediated experience as an authentic first-hand experience to which he/she may respond physiologically, cognitively and emotionally as he/she would in non mediated setting.”¹⁴¹ The Fleshlight Girls collection seeks to produce presence by using the mimetic representation of genitalia, coupled with advertising and marketing, to build an emotional connection to those represented in the object. Perceptual realism is produced through the ‘accurate’ (according to Fleshlight’s description of the masturbatory sleeve) representation of both genitals, sexual stimulation and sensory experience of intercourse with the porn performers available for purchase. The heterosexual male user responds to the object as if it were the real vagina, bringing the body of the performer into the users’ space. By bringing the body into the space of the user Fleshlight manipulates and creates intimate experiences; a shared space in which the user and the representational object appear to interact together as if the performer were there. It is in this intimate relationship that issues concerning the role of fantastical desire comes into play. When a user is purchasing and consuming the product they are probably not fantasising about the object as an object, much in the same way as a non-mediated masturbatory is probably not fantasising about their hand. From this, a conclusion can be drawn, that users of Fleshlight Girls internal fantasy is what plays the most significant role in the masturbatory experience, desire, pleasure and intimacy.

¹³⁸ Naughty America, [Social Media Post], “(@naughtyamerica) You shall feast tonight! Your girlfriend @ValeNappi wants to show you her appreciation”, 16 March 2018 . <<https://twitter.com/naughtyamerica/status/974518133493981184>> [Accessed 2 April 2018]

¹³⁹ Naughty America [Social Media Post], “(@naughtyamerica), Tonight, you reap the benefits of being the world’s best boyfriend. @ValeNappi #VR”, 20 March 2018 <<https://twitter.com/naughtyamerica/status/976020705979650048>> [Accessed 2 April 2018]

¹⁴⁰ M Lombard & T Ditton, At the Heart of it All: The Concept of Presence, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol.2, issue.1, 1997, cited in M Lombard & M Jones, ‘Presence and Sexuality’ in *Unpublished*, presented at the Presence, Porto, Portugal, 2004, p.28

¹⁴¹ M Lombard & T Ditton, At the Heart of it All: The Concept of Presence, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol.2, issue.1, 1997, cited in M Lombard & M Jones, ‘Presence and Sexuality’ in *Unpublished*, presented at the Presence, Porto, Portugal, 2004, p.28

Conclusion

What both the STU and the Fleshlight Girls' models do is construct a reinforcing narrative that sexuality, and sexual activity, is intrinsically tied to masculinity, and the construction of heterosexual masculinity is achieved through the manipulation of intimacy; both the intimacy between user and self, and the intimacy between user and the disembodied mimetic feminine. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed through the Fleshlight by positioning the male body as a container for masculinity, that resides naturally inside of all men. Instead of using historical narratives of male sexuality (taming and controlling masculinity), the Fleshlight uses an idea of activation and transformation in order to unleash the masculine potential in its users. Fleshlights employ Foucault's idea of 'technologies of self' in order to transform internalised masculinity into something useful. In this sense, the masculine heterosexual self is constituted through embodied sexual practice with mediated objects that then allow the subject to achieve full heterosexual masculine success with female subjects in non-mediated relations.

Both the STU and the Fleshlight Girls range frames masculinity (and all its inherent cultural and societal privileges) as simultaneously being in crisis and as an essential role ascribed to heterosexual men as directors of sexual relations. Despite the STU's focus on improving the masculine role during sexual relationships (lasting longer, being a better lovers, giving as well as receiving pleasure, etc.) the STU reinforces masculinity and masculine dominance in sexual relationships by gaining mastery over his own sexual performance and, thus, being able to gain mastery over a women's pleasure too. This is reinforced in the STU *Field Manual*, which closes with a statement pertaining to women; "And if she acts overly upset or angry, she is either completely self-absorbed or intentionally manipulative..."¹⁴² The STU, and Fleshlights as a whole, do not recognise female agency in sexual relationships, but rather, position the masculine subject as the dominant and singular sexual actor, homogenising the female subject into an object that desires sexual satisfaction; taking from the man but never giving. The Fleshlight Girls range works in a similar way, homogenising female porn performers into willing subjects who desire the user as much as the user desires them. The Fleshlight Girls range creates a female sexual subject who is always willing, always ready, and always wants what the male subject desires. She is the perfect girlfriend who will gratify the user by rewarding him with sex and sexual favours for being the best man

¹⁴² Fleshlight EU, *Stamina Training Unit Field Manual*, Interactive Life Forms, Inc, 2008, p.10

they can be. Both of these male masturbatory aids position masculinity as a hegemonic force of sexual importance that, while creating intimacy between object and user and between user and mimetic representation, may reinforce a masculinity that denies female sexual agency. Within the history of masturbation, this could be considered a reaction to female sexual agency and the anxieties of men who are replaceable with mimetic phallic representations.

Other than the effect on heterosexual masculinity, intimacy and the role of women within heterosexual relationships, the Fleshlight range raises ethical questions including the (im)morality of having sex with mediated disembodied and embodied feminine mimetic objects, and of replacing non-mediated sexual relationships with idealised virtual version and the implications of this for men's psychological health; the ability to distinguish between behaviours that are acceptable, and how this affects the cohesiveness of society.

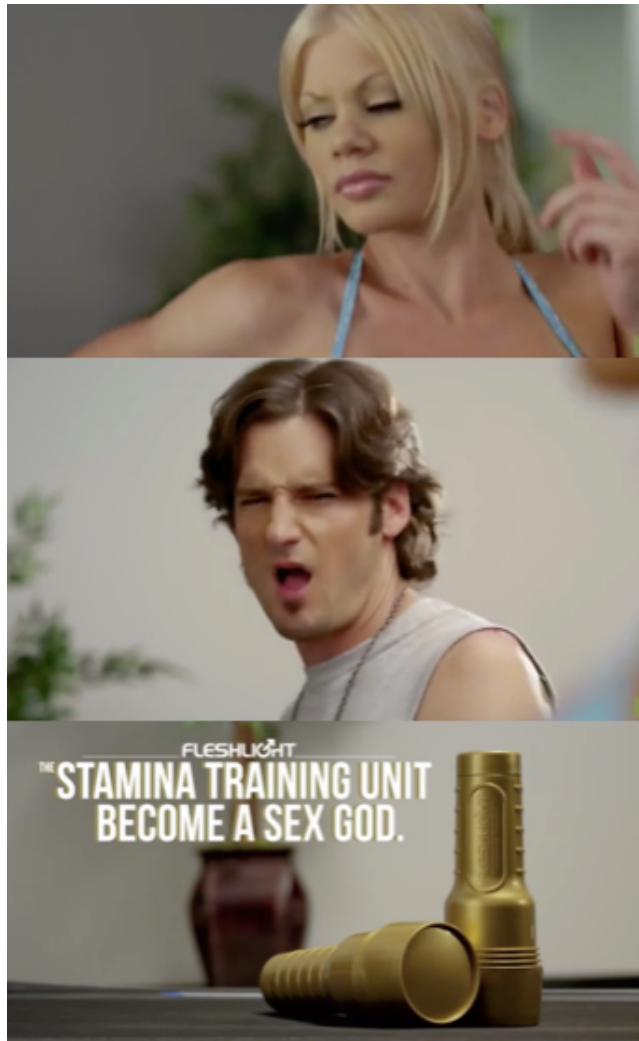


Figure 1. Composite image of screenshots of Fleshlight STU advertisement, date of video unknown.

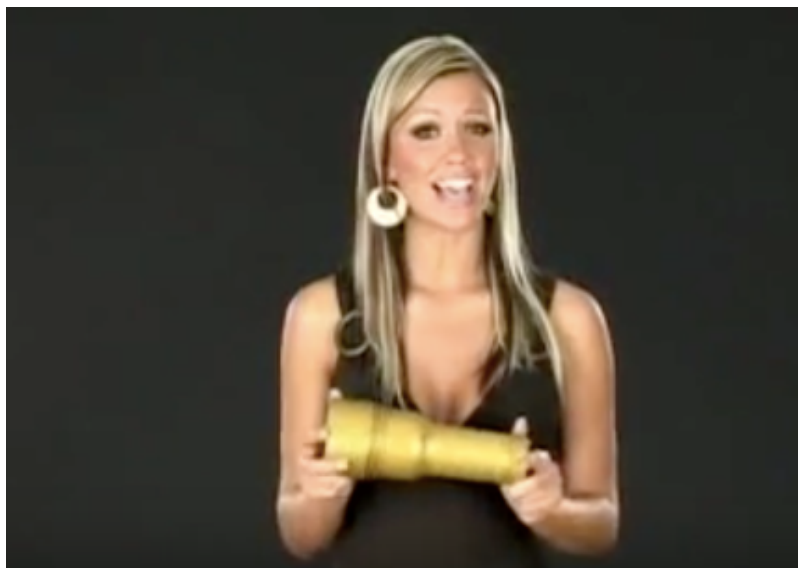


Figure 2. Screenshot from Fleshlight Stamina Training Unit Youtube Video; 2011

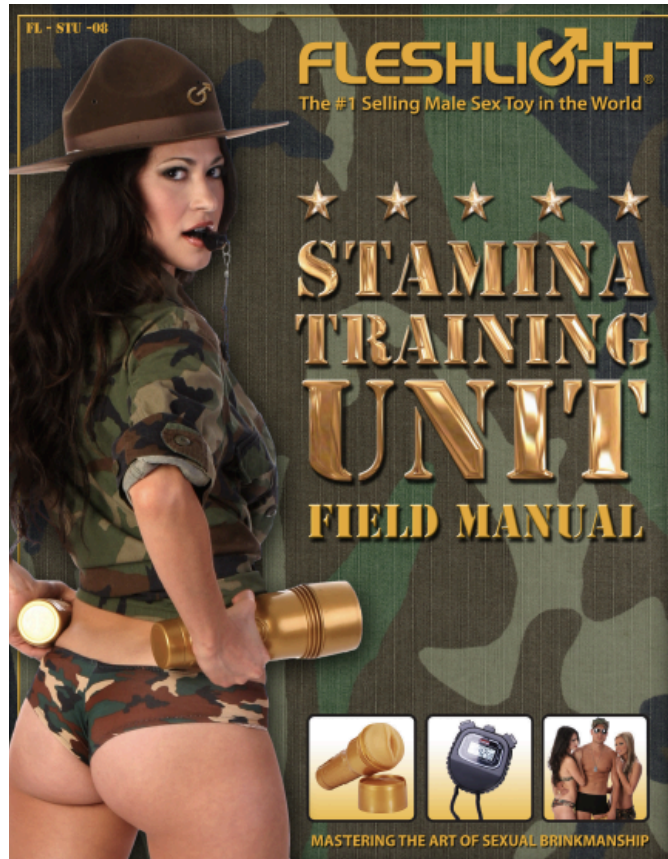


Figure 3. Front cover of STU Field Manual, 2008.



Figure 4. Stoya Fleshlight Girls promotional image, date known.

Chapter 3: TENGA EGGs

“Get Different Strokes from Different Yolks!”¹⁴³

The focus of this chapter is the TENGA EGG masturbatory aid, understood here as a participatory sexual device, much in the same way as the Fleshlight. What sets the TENGA EGG apart from the other masturbatory aids explored in this thesis is the lack of female mimetic representation employed in its design. While it can be argued that the EGG series is gendered due to its egg-shaped design, the TENGA EGGs marketing and advertising does not employ any allusions to maternal elements of the female body, such as the shape of the ovaries etc. The TENGA EGGs lack of female mimesis has ensured its positive reception by female-centric lifestyle magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*¹⁴⁴, as it can be seen to create a safe and comforting way to encourage the use of sex toys and masturbatory aids within the heterosexual sexual experience.

TENGA Co. Ltd, describe themselves as a “lifestyle brand of sexual wellness”¹⁴⁵ that “aims to revolutionise sexual pleasure by bringing sexuality to the forefront, for all to enjoy.”¹⁴⁶ Launched in 2005 in Tokyo, Japan, TENGA has now sold over 50 million products across 45 different countries.¹⁴⁷ Alongside its range of male and female sexual wellness products (read: masturbatory aids), TENGA states that their intention as a business is “spreading correct knowledge of sexual health, disease prevention and sexuality.”¹⁴⁸ TENGA sells a range of masturbatory aids for men that are designed to be penetrated, some of which are single-use only, and others that can be cleaned and used multiple times, ranging in price from £5 for a TENGA pocket to £200 for the TENGA Flip Hole Zero EV. Though the

¹⁴³ *Tenga Egg*, [online video], 2012, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EghiwNzrCc>> [accessed 2 March 2018]

¹⁴⁴ P Gilmour, “I Gave My Boyfriend A Hand Job Using This Futuristic Space Egg and He Bloody Loved It”, in *Cosmopolitan*, 2017, <<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/love-sex/sex/a9983640/tenga-egg-male-sex-toys/>> [accessed 27 April 2018].

¹⁴⁵ TENGA Co., Ltd., ‘*Corporate Information*’, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/about/company/>> [Accessed 20 March 2018]

¹⁴⁶ TENGA Co., Ltd., ‘Pleasure, The Way It Should Be’, in *Concept*, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/about/concept/>> [accessed 20 March 2018]

¹⁴⁷ TENGA Co., Ltd., ‘*Corporate Information*’, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/about/company/>> [Accessed 20 March 2018]

¹⁴⁸ TENGA Co., Ltd., ‘*Corporate Information*’, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/about/company/>> [Accessed 20 March 2018]

concentration of this chapter will be the TENGA EGG; a pocket-sized, egg-shaped penetrable male masturbatory aid designed for single-use and retails for about £7 each.

The TENGA EGG is a super stretchy condom-like device housed in a plastic egg-shaped case, which gives it a close resemblance to Kinder Surprise chocolates. (*see fig.5 & 6*) The masturbatory sleeve itself is made from thermoplastic elastomer (TPE) much like Fleshlight's sleeve, and contained within the sleeve is a small packet of water-based lubricant. TENGA states that their EGG series is designed to be penetrated without a condom, and thus, is for one use only "regardless of ejaculation"¹⁴⁹ as washing may compromise the design and safety of the inner sleeve. TENGA EGGs are available in four categories - regular, hard-boiled, cool and lovers, and the entire range has 17 different textures/sensations to choose from. Each of these textures is designed to be used in slightly different ways and may not always be best suited to stroking actions, but may require pulling, twisting or squeezing. Each EGG is named to reflect the inner sleeve design and plastic film wrapping of the case, with none of the names being overtly sexual in nature.

TENGA's design choices have been internationally recognised; the TENGA 3D (a reusable sleeve housed in a plastic tubular display case) won the Red Dot Award for product design in 2012, due to its "innovation, functionality, ergonomics, ecology and durability."¹⁵⁰ TENGA positions themselves as design innovators and furthers this by collaborating with companies, individuals and brands when creating packaging and products. These collaborations include RIPNDIP (a popular streetwear brand featuring a swearing cat) and an entire Keith Haring range.

The collaboration of TENGA with the Keith Haring Foundation (a non-profit organisation who aim to educate the public on issues surrounding HIV/AIDs as well as sustain Haring's art and legacy) can be seen to move the TENGA EGG away from a purely heterosexual usage. Though, I dispute that TENGA is intentionally aiming this product at the homosexual community. The press release for the Haring collaboration avoids associations with the homosexual community, instead focusing on the idea of opening up the "genre of

¹⁴⁹ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'EGG Series FAQ', in *Frequently Asked Questions*, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/faq/egg/>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁵⁰ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'TENGA 3D Series Awarded "Red Dot Award: Product Design 2012"', in *News*, 2012, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/topics/2012/03/14/50/>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

male pleasure items to the mainstream”¹⁵¹ in order to create “open communication about enriching the sexual health of people around the world.”¹⁵² It is the ambiguity of this press release, and the marketing, research and advertising of TENGA EGGs and masturbation that positions the TENGA here as an item of male heterosexual pleasure, be that through solo-usage or as part of a heterosexual couple. This idea of solo or coupled heterosexual usage is what will be explored within this chapter.

Due to the TENGA EGG’s cultural origins, much of the existing academic research surrounding them considers them within a Japanese sex-cultural context, which is not something I wish to replicate here, or have the cultural background to produce myself.¹⁵³ While discussing the TENGA EGG, and other masturbatory aids detailed in this thesis, with friends we’ve employed the ‘top drawer’ hypothetical situation to understand our reactions to the objects. My ‘top drawer’ hypothesis is; when dating, if you were asked to grab an item from the top drawer of the man you are dating’s bedside drawers, would you be disturbed by the presence of a certain toy? In order to explore this hypothetical position, I will consider the TENGA EGGs movement from the ‘cuteified’ sexual culture of Japan into western sexual culture (both visual and wider), and how this cute-ness is mixed with a brand awareness of male identity construction through ‘cool-ness’ in order to create a purchasable male heterosexual identity. In order to further understand how these concepts interact with heterosexual masculinity, I will undertake a phenomenological analysis of TENGA EGGs. This phenomenological method will mix a traditional philosophical understanding of the method with Paul B Preciado’s concept of “autotheory”¹⁵⁴ in order to produce an understanding of the “structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Market Wired, ‘Liberator and TENGA to Release Keith Haring Branded Products’, in *Market Wired*, 2012, <<http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/liberator-and-tenga-to-release-keith-haring-branded-products-otcqb-luvu-1675354.htm>> [accessed 21 March 2018].

¹⁵² Market Wired, ‘Liberator and TENGA to Release Keith Haring Branded Products’, in *Market Wired*, 2012, <<http://www.marketwired.com/press-release/liberator-and-tenga-to-release-keith-haring-branded-products-otcqb-luvu-1675354.htm>> [accessed 21 March 2018].

¹⁵³ Currently, huge swathes of research are currently being undertaken in order to understand the medical and cultural reasons for the decline in birth rates and sexual activity in Japan.

¹⁵⁴ PB Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, New York, NY, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013. p.347

¹⁵⁵ DW Smith, ‘Phenomenology’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition)*, 2013 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>>> [accessed 1 April 2018].

Cool-Kawaii

For me, the TENGA EGG is cute, or *kawaii*,¹⁵⁶ its simplistic design and clever packaging creates a visual cue to Kinder Surprise chocolates, a popular British treat of a chocolate egg containing a capsule with a toy surprise. It also bears a resemblance to a capsule egg toy, often won from a machine in an arcade.¹⁵⁷ TENGA EGG's one use nature and their design relation to cheap, throw-away and momentarily exciting toys constructs the idea of the TENGA EGG as an exciting, cheap, opportunity to introduce a new form of masturbatory pleasure into the auto-erotic or partnered sex act.

Though I call the TENGA EGGs cute, cuteness appears to be difficult to articulate. In a socio-marketing analysis of the implications of cute, Granot et al. theorise that women are not sure what makes something cute or why they like cute things, but that cute is “visually easily identifiable and clearly generates a sense of desire and emotional affect in certain people.”¹⁵⁸ Cute may be “accessible exclusively through consumption,”¹⁵⁹ as it “encourages hedonism and sensual pleasure necessitating consumption,”¹⁶⁰ and providing an escape for the consumers of cute: “cute consumer culture does not condemn materialism and the display of wealth.”¹⁶¹ Granot et al. theorise that the rise in availability of cute products were said to “attest to a rapidly expanding desire for cute, cuddly, reassuring consumption experiences,”¹⁶² especially for female consumers. The TENGA EGG's cuteness works through its non-threatening nature; the names of the products are not overtly sexual, the design is not obviously a male masturbatory aid, and they are reminiscent of exciting experiences, and comforting chocolate.¹⁶³ All of these design choices work together to create a male

¹⁵⁶ *Kawaii* is understood here as the Japanese term for ‘cute’ or ‘adorable’. My understanding is that is not a direct translation, but a culture of cuteness, that is a prominent aspect of Japanese popular visual culture.

¹⁵⁷ While the idea of an arcade has a significant cultural relation to Japan, winning a capsule toy prize is something experienced in western culture too.

¹⁵⁸ E Granot, TB Alejandro & LTM Russell, ‘A Socio-Marketing Analysis of the Concept of *cute* and Its Consumer Culture Implications’, in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 14, 2014, p.80

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*, p.79

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, p.79

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, p.80

¹⁶² *ibid*, p.75

¹⁶³ For Valentine's Day 2018, TENGA released a limited edition box of TENGA EGGs stylised like a box of expensive truffles. More information can be found about it here: <https://blog.tenga-global.com/valentines-day-special-relationships-and-sex-toys-be71bd116e74>

masturbatory object that heterosexual couples may purchase for use by the male partner. In a heterosexual male masturbatory marketplace dominated by silicone female body parts, love dolls and explicit sexual marketing, the cute nature of the TENGA EGG stands out as an option that doesn't reinforce male objectification of the female body but also enhances male pleasure outside of direct heterosexual sexual encounters.

As well as a cuteness, or kawaii-ness, TENGA uses collaborations with male lifestyle brands, and testimonials from male celebrities to create an image of 'coolness'. In 2010, TENGA created the RESPECT YOURSELF PROJECT, which on Worlds AIDS Day 2012 involved a collaboration with numerous streetwear brands from the USA, Japan and China to release a limited edition range of products that raised money for AIDS charities in "participating countries."¹⁶⁴ This project aimed to promote "taking care of yourself"¹⁶⁵ by "not taking part in any sexual activities that hold a high risk of disease."¹⁶⁶ TENGA claims that the brands and artists involved in the project "all believe that 'Education and controlled sexual appetite will prevent HIV.'"¹⁶⁷ This collaboration project positions TENGA as a different kind of male masturbatory device; one that is not just promoting masturbation for the sake of masturbation, or masturbation as a personal enhancement, but one that understands the cultural moment, even selling TENGA merchandise such as enamel pin badges. Further to positioning themselves as a provider of sexual health knowledge, their collaborations spill over from packaging design and products into testimonials. TENGA's global website contains a 'Celebrity Testimonials' page featuring staged photographs and interviews with a range of male celebrities including, internationally famed DJ Jaguar Skills, the 1990s/early 2000s pop-punk band Zebrahead, Japanese male models, pro-skaters and BMX riders and Japanese comedians. TENGA are attempting to position themselves at the forefront of male cultures, covering numerous sub-sections of male identities - from punks, to streetwear lovers, skaters, and comedy aficionados. Instead of targeting masculinity directly by using anxieties or other issues to sell their products, TENGA position themselves as an added element of particular

¹⁶⁴ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'Respect Yourself Overview', in *Respect Yourself Project 2012*, 2012, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/ryp2012/overview/index.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁶⁵ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'Respect Yourself Message', in *Respect Yourself Project 2012*, 2012, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/ryp2012/message/index.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁶⁶ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'Respect Yourself Message', in *Respect Yourself Project 2012*, 2012, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/ryp2012/message/index.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁶⁷ TENGA Co., Ltd., 'Respect Yourself Message', in *Respect Yourself Project 2012*, 2012, <<https://www.tenga-global.com/ryp2012/message/index.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

masculine lifestyles, that can be enjoyed as part of that lifestyle - rather than to achieve it or improve it.

Male identity can be seen to tie into an idea of coolness, as opposed to cuteness. Cool, is considered “essentially a male phenomenon,”¹⁶⁸ in which “escapism rather than aspiration”¹⁶⁹ is celebrated. Coolness within marketing perceptions has a considerable power, whether regarded as a “structure of feeling”¹⁷⁰ or as a “dominant ideology of consumer capitalism.”¹⁷¹ Like cuteness, cool is primarily about consumption. TENGA uses their collaborations and celebrity testimonials in order to use individuals and brands “cultural capital”¹⁷² as a way of creating a desire around their products and thus encourage their purchase as buying into what can be seen as a larger identity of lifestyle. Detailed in Nancarrow et al. cool values can be characterised from the 1960s onwards as seeking “to destroy order, convention, and tradition for the sake of sensation, liberation and self-exploration,”¹⁷³ and these ideas have been co-opted by late consumer capitalism in order to create a “hip consumerism”¹⁷⁴ that is a new ideology of consumption. TENGA’s association with streetwear brands, rather than pornstars, with AIDS charities, rather than appearing solely profit driven, and carrying out research on masturbation habits of men in the UK and the USA establish TENGA as a different kind of company. TENGA is a company that strives for men to explore their sexuality, in a safe and healthy way, that is moving with the current cultural ‘cool’ trends for men and produces interesting limited edition products that are as desirable because of their ‘cool’ consumer status. TENGA doesn’t attempt to create a brand image centred around the fact that it is a sex toy, but a brand image centred around male lifestyle habits, acknowledging that men masturbate, should be able to explore their sexuality, but perhaps don’t need to invest in a

¹⁶⁸ C Nancarrow, P Nancarrow & J Page, ‘An Analysis of the Concept of Cool and Its Marketing Implications’, in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 1, 2002, p.313

¹⁶⁹ Cross, G quoted in E Granot, TB Alejandro & LTM Russell, ‘A Socio-Marketing Analysis of the Concept of *cute* and Its Consumer Culture Implications’, in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, vol. 14, 2014, p.68

¹⁷⁰ C Nancarrow, P Nancarrow & J Page, ‘An Analysis of the Concept of Cool and Its Marketing Implications’, in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 1, 2002, p.312

¹⁷¹ *ibid*, p.312

¹⁷² *ibid*, p.312

¹⁷³ *ibid*, p.313

¹⁷⁴ T Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, (1997) cited in C Nancarrow, P Nancarrow & J Page, ‘An Analysis of the Concept of Cool and Its Marketing Implications’, in *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, vol. 1, 2002, p.314

mimetic replica of a porn performers genitals, but would rather include a more ‘exciting’ masturbatory experience once and a while.

Both of these socio-marketing techniques reveal the TENGA EGG to occupy a unique position within the larger male masturbatory aid industry. As a Japanese product being marketed and sold in the West, they carry cultural signifiers of their site of production as well as elements that make them marketable to a western commercial audience. In order to do this, coolness and cuteness as utilised to create what Thorsten Botz-Bornstein calls “cool-kawaii.”¹⁷⁵ While coolness and cuteness may seem at odds with one another; cool is “masculine and preoccupied with the dissimulation of emotion”¹⁷⁶ and cute is “feminine and engaged in the ostentatious display of sentimentality,”¹⁷⁷ these two aesthetic and lifestyle articulations have many conceptual structures in common. As described by Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, both are “social expressions that invite interaction and involve the spectator’s imagination.”¹⁷⁸ Both aestheticise sexuality, and “operate within the realm of possibility,”¹⁷⁹ and both are the construction of a form of personal identity. Botz-Bornstein theorises that in the contemporary moment, there is a fusion of cool and kawaii lead by what is called the “third wave of Japanophilia”¹⁸⁰ in which “cool and kawaii consistently penetrate the cultural fabric of international youth culture”¹⁸¹ in order to form “cool-kawaii.”¹⁸² What Botz-Bornstein theorises is that the concept of ‘cool-kawaii’ works to open up possibilities of identity formation and works as “antidotes to stereotypes of their respective homogenous “official” societies...”¹⁸³ to establish personal identities. The TENGA EGG uses cool-kawaii to reinforce its position as a sexual wellness and lifestyle object, that does not restrict its users

¹⁷⁵ T Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii: Afro-Japanese Aesthetics and New World Modernity*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011

¹⁷⁶ T Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii: Afro-Japanese Aesthetics and New World Modernity*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011, p.xii

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.xii

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*, p.xxv

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.xii

¹⁸⁰ T Botz-Bornstein, ‘Cool-Kawaii Aesthetics and New World Modernity’ in M Nguyen (ed) *New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics*, 2018. p.207

¹⁸¹ T Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii: Afro-Japanese Aesthetics and New World Modernity*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011, p.xvi

¹⁸² *ibid*, p.xxiv

¹⁸³ T Botz-Bornstein, ‘Cool-Kawaii Aesthetics and New World Modernity’ in *New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics*, M Nguyen (ed), 2017., p.210

to a stereotypical view of a male masturbatory user who objectifies the female body and requires direct stimulation pertaining to the female to achieve sexual satisfaction.

What follows is an exploration of the TENGA EGG and its cool-kawaii nature through an experimental phenomenological research method in order to examine how effective the TENGA is at using desire, pleasure and intimacy to inform a heterosexual male identity.

Methodology

In order to analyse the TENGA EGG in a western context, I have chosen to engage the object in an experimental phenomenological study, informed by the work of Paul B Preciado, and philosophical phenomenological tradition. Phenomenological research can be understood as the study of particular phenomena; “the appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience,”¹⁸⁴ in this case, the experience of the TENGA EGG. The notion of “autotheory”¹⁸⁵ can be seen as a methodology that uses autobiographical and other explicitly subjective and embodied modes of experience with traditional academic discourses in order to transgress genre conventions and disciplinary boundaries. This form of academic engagement with lived and embodied experiences helps to shift how this thesis approaches the TENGA EGG and its relationship between the personal and the cultural, and the material and the visual.

Phenomenology and ‘autotheory’ produces an analysis and research conclusion that is wholly subjective, but allows for this subjective position to be analysed within the wider context of cultural conditions; how TENGA’s marketing and branding, understood as cool-kawaii, affects and effects their usage by heterosexual men and couples during sexual encounters.

While introducing a phenomenological methodology at this point is a break from the rest of the thesis, I feel it allows for a textual analysis of the TENGA EGG that moves beyond ideological meaning and signification towards sensory, material and embodied understanding. It is important to disclose here, that while every attempt to make this phenomenological understanding as individually subjective as possible the nature of relationships means that my partner has an understanding of what this thesis entails analytically.

¹⁸⁴ DW Smith, ‘Phenomenology’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition)*, 2013 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>>> [accessed 1 April 2018].

¹⁸⁵ PB Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, New York, NY, The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013, p.347

As discussed in the introduction, my phenomenological research method takes its case from traditional philosophical conceptions, namely Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception* address the role of the experience of the body, the spatiality of the body, the motility of the body, and the body as sexual being, speech, other self and temporality in order to understand embodied experience as a research method.¹⁸⁶ All of these features are key to understanding masturbation and sexual acts as embodied, fleshy moments.

The TENGA EGGs used in the phenomenological study were purchased from lovehoney.co.uk, the largest online sex toy retailers in the U.K.¹⁸⁷ The two TENGA products used in the phenomenological study are the 'Lovers Heart' and the 'Wavy'. Lovers Heart is described as a "petite and couple-friendly egg,"¹⁸⁸ that is "peppered with embossed hearts."¹⁸⁹ Wavy is described as "lined with undulating internal textures that create intense sensations as you stroke,"¹⁹⁰ and is not marketed specifically outside of solo male masturbatory usage. What follows is my partner David's experiences of using the TENGA EGG. I asked him to write his experience down, in his own words; summarising his thoughts and feelings about the experience. I have edited his texts only for grammatical clarity and cohesion.

David, Me and The TENGA Lovers Heart

I wait as you prepare the TENGA EGG, it seemed to take a while to figure out how it was supposed to work and it felt like a process that separated us, it wasn't really a shared intimate moment like when using other toys, perhaps just as it was new. It isn't very easy to get on/in and I don't feel an immediate sensation beyond the coldness of the lube when it's put on. As you begin stretching it down, I feel the insides of the EGG massage me, it's definitely more of

¹⁸⁶ DW Smith, 'Phenomenology', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition)*, 2013 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/phenomenology/>> [accessed 1 April 2018].

¹⁸⁷ About Lovehoney', <<https://www.lovehoney.co.uk/help/about/>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

¹⁸⁸ 'TENGA Egg Lovers Heart Textured Male Masturbator', <https://www.lovehoney.co.uk/product.cfm?p=24048&fo_c=24&fo_k=73dc018e2e498d3c6af38b2ef0abc7ea&fo_s=monetategb>. [accessed 20 March 2018]

¹⁸⁹ 'TENGA Egg Lovers Heart Textured Male Masturbator', <https://www.lovehoney.co.uk/product.cfm?p=24048&fo_c=24&fo_k=73dc018e2e498d3c6af38b2ef0abc7ea&fo_s=monetategb>. [accessed 20 March 2018]

¹⁹⁰ 'TENGA Egg Wavy Textured Male Masturbator', <https://www.lovehoney.co.uk/product.cfm?p=15676&fo_c=24&fo_k=cf4ba74046e8516c14aaf4d05172b723&fo_s=monetategb>. [accessed: 20 March 2018]

a soft massage rather than an ecstatic feeling. The EGG warms up and we get into the swing of using it. When I use it on myself, it feels soft and gentle yet the width of the EGG makes it feel like my dick has more girth to it and it feels heavy and thick. It's hard to get out of the feeling that I have a silicone EGG over my dick and the sensation of it being stretched and rubbed up and down is subtle. The ridges on the inside don't seem to do that much and it feels very removed from our hands, it obviously feels good but I miss the natural texture of hands. It squelches and sounds like wanking with a condom on, the sound brings me out of the moment a bit and reminds me how similar the EGG is to a thick condom. As I get close to cumming, the see through-ness of the TENGA EGG when fully stretched really highlights the fullness of the end of my dick and I'm worried that somehow when I cum it will shoot through the end of the EGG. When I do cum, it's a hard orgasm but immediately after it feels somehow unsatisfactory, like a functional orgasm rather than something euphoric. It doesn't require any clean up but also it has removed the body from the fluid and from the experience. you take it off in a rather unceremonious way, lacking the usual sensitivity, perhaps as we both feel equally removed from the situation but it doesn't feel like there is much intimacy at that moment, where there usually is. The cum in the EGG highlights the heart pattern within the EGG and I think how smart that is, like the engineering behind it and it looks pretty cute, yet it also is a bit gross. Normally when I cum everywhere and we clean it up it's not really a gross thing but it been trapped within this otherwise cute EGG thing makes it feel a little like a specimen and stripped of any intimacy that normally comes with sex. It's cute how the EGG maintains its shape and that it can be neatly put back in its Kinder Surprise like container.

TENGA EGG Wavy and David

I start off struggling to open the plastic seal around the EGG, before noticing that it has an obvious 'open' strip. I open the EGG case and feel the TENGA EGG inside, it is soft and smooth, with a comfortable weight to it. It is almost too smooth and nothing about it suggests anything sexy. It is cute but it seems quite alien in its form, nothing about it suggests that I should put my penis inside of it. It takes me quite a while to clumsily dismantle the inner part which contains the lube packet, I try to balance the EGG in some way in the case while I open the lube and it just rolls over. The clumsiness of the whole situation really doesn't do anything

to make me feel sexy. Eventually, I manage to get the lube into the EGG and I try and relax into it a little. I recall memories of recent sex me and Abbie have had and try to ignore the bed being full of little pieces of the plastic seal, the lube wrapper, the case itself. As I put my dick inside the EGG, I immediately feel like I've done something wrong as it doesn't seem to pull down. So far this is all very clumsy and awkward. After pulling and twisting a little I can start to pull the EGG down, it makes a squelching sound that isn't really equatable to any sex act which immediately pulls me out of the experience. I continue pulling it up and down and I start to feel the 'wave' pattern inside. It definitely gives a nice sensation but it is also very removed from any feeling of my hand or anything relatable to sex so it doesn't deliver a familiar feeling. It is hard to keep the images in my head while looking at the silicon EGG stretch up and down, obscuring my dick behind this cloudy material or it becoming clear at full stretch and my dick appearing wrapped and shiny. I feel alienated from my dick and from the whole experience of masturbation. It starts to build more sensation and I try to get into it a bit more. I lay back and close my eyes and it's instantly a lot better, I move it slower to minimise the unsettling squelching sound and start to thrust into it rather than pulling it down. I picture Abbie on top of me and for the last ten seconds or so it feels a little closer to sex. I cum and I open my eyes and the illusion sort of shatters, nothing takes you out of the situation like having a cloudy, slightly stretched out of shape EGG full of cum sitting on the end of your penis. I give myself a minute to breathe and try and enjoy the orgasm that was quite strong, physically at least but I can't wait to get this EGG off me. It feels warm but looks a little wonky and has lost any of the cuteness it did have. There isn't much sign of cum, just this bizarre warm shape that I feel weirded out by. I'm back to being clumsy with trying to tidy up all the pieces, now just a little more out of breath. There is no retention of any sexual or sensual feeling, there is no real sense of any satisfaction and I'm quite happy to have the EGG and all its packaging put back together and thrown away.

Conclusion

While the TENGA EGG is designed to be masturbatory aid that enhances auto-erotic pleasure, from David's experience, it doesn't appear to function as such. David's experience shows that while he climaxed, ejaculating into the object, it did not provide a satisfactory conclusion to the auto-erotic event; he experienced no sexual satisfaction or retention of

sexual or sensual feelings. David details a disconnect from his body, from the sexual sensations that he normally experiences when masturbating. As such, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the TENGE EGG does not create desire or intimacy within heterosexual male masturbatory usages. Instead, the TENGA EGG's design, material construction and visual appearance seems to disrupt intimacy from user to body, as well as during heterosexual couple usages. The TENGA EGG's design removes the tenuous experience of touching the penis, and the 'cute' package design reveals itself as burdensome and housing an alien form. The egg-shape appears to complicate the intimate situation, and its capturing of ejaculate merely creates an awkward post-climax moment. By mediating the intimacy of touch through a thick egg-shaped barrier, and destroying the post-ejaculation 'clean-up' moment, the TENGA EGG disrupts further erotic moments, and thus, disrupts heterosexual desire; for further auto-erotic moments and for further partnered sexual encounters. In this sense, the TENGA EGG functions less as a masturbatory aid, and more as a masturbatory accessory; another feature to the auto-erotic event that does not enhance the experience, but does not completely disavow the experience either.

The presence of the mediated barrier between penis and subject (be that the self, or the partner), removed the pleasure of direct touch during the sexual encounter. During mine and David's use of the TENGA EGG, his position as the masculine subject of the sexual act was unable to be affirmed, though it was not disavowed by the presence of the TENGA EGG. If I think of our usual sexual experiences, in which I touch David without a mediating barrier (the TENGA EGG in this case), I realise that a pleasure and desire stems from the visual and sensuous confirmation of his maleness and masculinity, in that I have a direct contact (both physically and visually) with his penis. David's experience with the TENGA EGG gives a similar conclusion, the alienation he experienced from his penis did not negate his masculinity, but neither did it affirm it. Afterwards, he told me that the masturbatory experience was so unsatisfactory that it made him desire a penetrative sexual encounter more than he had desired one before undertaking masturbation. This result seems to directly contradict TENGAs aims of expanding male sexual pleasures through revolutionary means, and their emphasis on sexual health that avoids dangerous sexual encounters. The lack of sexual satisfaction that the TENGA EGG delivers could even be an onus to seek out other sexual encounters.

As an object that exists within a wider cultural context, affected and mediated by perceptions of male masturbatory practices, the visual culture of the male masturbatory aid industry, and the visual representation and perceptions of masculinity, the TENGA EGG constructs a masculine identity that goes about traditional conceptions of men, and their sexuality. By employing cool-kawaii's antidote to stereotypical homogenous masculinity, TENGA EGGs construct a masculinity that is less threatening, less voraciously sexualised, and even, cute. By situating the TENGA EGG between cool and cute it becomes a masturbatory aid that is accessible to men who do not view themselves as active consumers of female bodies, but perhaps men who operate under Botz-Bornstein's 'cool-kawaii' performance of identity. Botz-Bornstein understands cool-kawaii as requiring "non-confrontational social techniques"¹⁹¹ in order to overcome "problematic power relations and acts of violence produced in an overly hierarchical society,"¹⁹² though this is coupled with a narcissistic involvement in self image, that expresses itself through a group identity related to style.¹⁹³ These style based group identities are elastic, meaning they can cover "large fields of aesthetic expression."¹⁹⁴ I view this articulation of cool-kawaii as a more contemporary version of the 1980's 'New Man', who I will call the 'Hip Man'. Drawing from the ideas of the New Man's sensitivity to female sexual agency and emotional wellbeing, and combining that with the ideas presented in this chapter concerning cute and cool, the Hip Man can be seen as a masculine figure who uses brand loyalty, hyperawareness of the cool cultural moments (such as the enamel pin) and attempt to engage in a liberated form of heterosexuality. The TENGA EGG does not produce this form of masculinity directly but facilitates it. TENGA use their collaborations, celebrity testimonials and design excellence to exploit this new commercialised form of masculinity, but ultimately the object lacks an affirmation of desire, pleasure and intimacy, that so often arises in identity work, and leads to unsatisfactory sexual conclusions, perhaps both sexually and in regards to identity.

¹⁹¹ T Botz-Bornstein, *The Cool-Kawaii: Afro-Japanese Aesthetics and New World Modernity*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2011, p.xxvii

¹⁹² *ibid*, p.xxvii

¹⁹³ *ibid*, p.xxvii

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, p.xxviii



Figure 5: Images of TENGA Lovers Hearts Masturbatory Aid, both within the packaging and unwrapped, date unknown.



Figure 6. Example of stretchiness and how to use TENGA EGG, date unknown.

Chapter 4: Teddy Babes

“Plush Girlfriends for Boys Too BIG for Teddy Bears.”¹⁹⁵

This chapter takes the Teddy Babe as its object of study; a plush sex doll designed for sexual and comforting encounters. The 19th century witnessed the emergence of the term and concept ‘heterosexual’ and the perverse ‘others’ in opposition to it. The convergence of these ideas and the demands of a growing consumer society resulted in a proliferation of waxworks, shop window dummies, and, in turn, customisable love dolls. In 2018, the convergence of these ideas appears to be happening again. A technological advancement in mimetic representations of women has placed the love doll’s more ‘scary’ counterpart at the forefront of ethical, moral and perverse worries - the love robot. A slew of articles (both journalistic and academic), television documentaries, books and other investigatory and analytic texts have appeared in the last few years tackling questions of intimacy, morality, masculinity and violence towards women in relation to full-body mimetic female representations designed with sexual activity in mind. Instead of repeating research and analysis, both pertaining to this new worry and in line with Marquard Smith’s work on the erotic doll, this chapter will consider a popular sex doll that can be seen as a mimetic anomaly; the Teddy Babe.

Dismissed by Smith as an unrealistic novelty, this chapter will explore the Teddy Babe by considering the structures of desire and intimacy that arise between Teddy Babe and doll user. I will explore the complex relationship that heterosexual cis-gendered men have with this specific articulation of sex doll, in order to offer an insight into heterosexual masculinity and its discontents. Through this exploration, I will tease out an understanding of why men establish relationships with inanimate human forms, and how we can make sense of these relationships through understanding the intersection of cultural, societal, economic and historical conditions that are inherently present in these relationships. I have chosen the Teddy Babe as its lack of mimetic accuracy and its physical material construction are particularly interesting and differ greatly from other popular western male masturbatory aids. Teddy Babes appear to have a dedicated online following and community which will be used to begin to understand the intersections of desire, intimacy and masculinity

¹⁹⁵ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Teddy Babes’, in *Teddy Babes*, date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/home/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

What is a Teddy Babe?

Teddy Babes are stuffed, plush erotic dolls made by Eight Wonder LLC. Each doll is made of “soft velvety-plush material”¹⁹⁶ and is stuffed with non-allergenic polyester-fibre filling, much like the filling found in cushions, other similar items and children’s soft toys. (*see fig. 7*)

Teddy Babes are intentionally created to stand apart from their latex and silicone counterparts; according to Eight Wonder LLC comparing them is like “trying to compare apples and oranges,”¹⁹⁷ as they are less realistic, but at the same time convey “a sexy and very attractive character image.”¹⁹⁸ The information regarding their representation of the female body is peppered with references to teddy bears, children’s soft toys and comfort items. Due to their plush nature, many reviews of the Teddy Babe products comment on the polyester fibre’s ability to retain heat, thus negating the need for heating pads to warm up the doll - unlike silicone or latex products.¹⁹⁹ The stuffed, plush nature of the doll extends even to its penetrable orifice; a semi-leak resistant ‘*Pussy Velour*’ vagina insert, that can be swapped out for a silicone masturbatory sleeve, much like the one that is produced by Fleshlight. (*see fig.*

8) Interestingly, Teddy Babes contain only one penetrable orifice; each doll only has a penetrable vagina and no anal or oral entries. Teddy Babes also include movable joints, enabled by a wire skeleton that goes through the entire body of the doll, and into the fingers, allowing each doll to hold a small object and make gestures. Each doll comes with replaceable wigs, paintable fingernails and toenails, pierced ears with hoop earrings, and come dressed in a lingerie set consisting of babydoll nightie or corset, stockings and suspenders but can also be dressed in women’s clothes or costumes and take a women’s US size 6 shoe. All of these elements allow each Teddy Babe to be customised to the purchaser’s personal preferences. According to the manufacturer’s website, the doll can withstand up to 500 pounds of pressure, and the plush nature of the product means the doll can be re-shaped if

¹⁹⁶ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁹⁷ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁹⁸ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

¹⁹⁹ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

flattened by forceful play.²⁰⁰ Each Teddy Babe Deluxe model is 5 feet 5 inches tall and weighs around 20 pounds, have exaggerated breasts and buttocks and produce, what I consider to be, a childlike, cartoonish representation of a woman.

While the Teddy Babe seems to be an unusual object that stands out amongst the proliferation of plastic and silicone sex dolls and disembodied genitals available on the market they relate directly to the historical lineage of the sex doll. Marquard Smith notes that sex dolls are known as ‘Dutch Wives’ (*Dacchi Waifu*) in Japan. In the seventeenth century Dutch seamen and traders, who had access to trade with Japan, often fashioned masturbatory devices from sewn cloth. Japanese erotic masturbatory tradition also sees a “lascivious travelling pillow,”²⁰¹ from the late 1600s, made of “thin tortoiseshell with an opening lined with velvet,”²⁰² and other devices made from “velvet, raw silk, soft rubber and cotton,”²⁰³ including a “complete female puppet fashioned to the size of a young girl, with a vagina of velvet.”²⁰⁴ These historical articulations of the sex doll place Teddy Babes closer in lineage with them than other more mimetically accurate dolls that are so researched by academic currently.

Teddy Babes are not marketed purely as sex objects. The manufacturer claim they can be “collected as ‘soft sculpture’ art objects,”²⁰⁵ and even have a section in their ‘FAQ’ called ‘acceptability factor,’ in which they reassure potential buyers of the normalcy and acceptability of their product. Though they claim that Teddy Babes are easy to conceal, due to their plush nature, they suit being “out in the open for all to see, sitting them in a chair or out on their bed, etc,”²⁰⁶ as they are “not typically perceived as sex dolls or adult sex toys, but as cute and sexy novelties,”²⁰⁷ even going as far as to claim that “women especially seem to find

²⁰⁰ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁰¹ M Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013. p. 224

²⁰² *ibid*, p. 224

²⁰³ *ibid*, p.224

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, p.224

²⁰⁵ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁰⁶ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁰⁷ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

them attractive”²⁰⁸ - though, I’m not sure of the legitimacy of this statement. Teddy Babes are frequently referred to as objects which are “perfect for cuddling,”²⁰⁹ making them more of a companion object, with an optional sexual function. References to ‘hand holding’, ‘caressing’, ‘wrapping arms around the user’, ‘kissable nipples and lips’, and ‘squeezeable buttocks’ create a perception that the Teddy Babe is more of a surrogate for human interaction, and perhaps a cure for loneliness, than a purely functional male masturbatory device.²¹⁰

The Teddy Babe Community

Beginning in 2001, The Doll Forum emerged as an online site for discussion and community-building for those who use or admire sex dolls. The Doll Forum enables members to engage in various discussions pertaining to their sex dolls, including issues such as introducing new dolls to other forum members or correcting issues with their dolls (be they fantastical narrative issue or physical issues related to wear and tear). Along with engaging in discussions, members often post images to the forum and create digital photo albums devoted to individual dolls in their collection. As of May 2018, The Doll Forum has over 57,000 registered members from all over the world.²¹¹ Currently, there are over 1,200,000 individual posts contributing to over 90,000 topics.²¹² The Doll Forum is separated into specific sub-forums that deal with individual brands of doll, and currently, the Teddy Babe sub-forum has 1819 topics with 29,070 posts, and is currently organising its ninth annual European ‘meet-up’, taking place in the UK in September 2018.²¹³ What The Doll Forum does is construct “new forms of alternative pornography and of participatory cultures which serve corporate and community needs,”²¹⁴ enabling what Shenja van der Graf calls “collaborative

²⁰⁸ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²⁰⁹ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²¹⁰ Eight Wonder LLC, ‘Doll Features’, in *Teddy Babes*, , date unknown, <<http://teddy-babes.com/doll-features/>> [accessed 5 April 2018].

²¹¹ ‘The Doll Forum’, 2001, <<https://www.dollforum.com/forum/>> [accessed 21 May 2018].

²¹² ‘The Doll Forum’, 2001, <<https://www.dollforum.com/forum/>> [accessed 21 May 2018].

²¹³ ‘Teddy Babes’, in *The Doll Forum*, , 2001, <<https://www.dollforum.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=35>> [accessed 18 April 2018].

²¹⁴ F Attwood, ‘No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures’, in *Sexualities*, vol. 19, 2007, p.443

eroticism,”²¹⁵ which places pornography, sex and masturbatory aids in a broader cultural context and allows for community engagement and culture building within niche subcultures of desire and intimacy.

For the purposes of this chapter, and in order to explore the intersection of touch, heterosexuality, masculinity and place/space, I will use posts, blogs, photos and discussions from The Doll Forum as empirical material for study. This is in order to view the Teddy Babe outside of a psychoanalytical framework and bring concentration back to the doll as an object as a whole, rather than a symptom of perversion. In this chapter, I will view the Teddy Babe as both an object of masturbatory pleasure, but also as a surrogate for the absent feminine subject of heterosexual relationships. I will consider the Teddy Babe as an object that constructs masculine identity, and a domestic sphere for that masculine identity to be performed and practised.

Touch

At first glance, it is easy to dismiss the Teddy Babe as just another perverted conception of a sex doll that reproduces female oppression and subordination through a patriarchal understanding of women’s bodies as commodified, passive objects (receptacles) of male desire. I will not deny that the Teddy Babe by its very nature and historical legacy is imbued with this understanding, but I wish to steer away from repeating these narratives found in current academic and journalistic discourses that investigate sex dolls.

Historically, huge amounts of speculation about the differences between male and female masturbation has occurred. Men require more visual stimulation, whereas women are more imaginative and rely on touch.²¹⁶ While this argument may be applied to more mimetically representative dolls (such as the silicone RealDoll) it does not explain why the Teddy Babe is designed without realism and constructed in a highly tactile fabric. This use of plush fabric, and the name of the doll can be seen to relate directly to ideas of touch, comfort, safety and self-soothing. Writer and a regular contributor to ‘The Good Men Project’, Mark

²¹⁵ S van der Graf, ‘Blogging Business: SuicideGirls.com’, *M/C Journal*, vol.7, cited in F Attwood, ‘No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures’, in *Sexualities*, vol. 19, 2007 p.443

²¹⁶ Gregg Tuck’s discussion of the perception of the dangerously fantastical aspects of men’s masturbation and how it is articulated in cultural texts and reiterated in journalistic articles is an excellent piece that delves into this further: ‘The Mainstreaming of Masturbation: Autoeroticism and Consumer Capitalism’ in F Attwood (ed.), *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualisation of Western Culture*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 77–92.

Greene believes that men have foregone “gentle platonic touch”²¹⁷ in their lives, and now live in a zone of “touch isolation.” Gentle platonic touch is described as “contact that is lasting and meant to provide connection and comfort.”²¹⁸ This touch isolation has been created from changing historical narratives of masculinity, and a masculine fiction that deems touch with another man inappropriate due to homophobia, and the creation of the heterosexual masculine subject, as well as sexualising men’s touches towards the opposite sex.²¹⁹ By considering this, the Teddy Babe is no longer just a sexual object but one that becomes a surrogate for intimate touch and comfort.

Touch is a fundamental form of non-visual perception; it is both immediate and unmediated as there is no time delay between nerve impulses, and no medium between subject and object. Touch is not imagistic but physical; most people cannot resist the allure of checking if the paint is wet when a ‘*Wet Paint*’ sign is seen. Touch can be understood in a variety of ways, but here touch is understood as ‘active’ or ‘haptic’; touch that involves voluntary or exploratory movements or movement of object against subject.²²⁰ This form of touch involves awareness of movement and bodily position and can be seen as ‘cutaneous’, as it is a touch that is mediated entirely through the skin.²²¹ All forms of touch link themselves to other senses; vision and touch are intrinsically linked through philosophical conceptions. Both visions and touch bring the subject information about size, shape and location, but do so in different ways. Vision provides an awareness of object into a spacial field - where objects reside or could reside, touch only seems to bring awareness of individual objects that occupy or do not occupy specific locations. Touch then is what Carey-Ann Morrison describes at “a complex set of sensory practices and emotionally felt experiences that connect people and

²¹⁷ M Greene, ‘The Lack of Gentle Platonic Touch in Men’s Lives is a Killer’, in *Medium*, , 2017, <<https://medium.com/@remakingmanhood/the-lack-of-gentle-platonic-touch-in-mens-lives-is-a-killer-5cc8eb144001>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²¹⁸ M Greene, ‘Touch Isolation: How Homophobia Has Robbed Men of Touch’, in *Medium*, , 2017, <<https://medium.com/@remakingmanhood/touch-isolation-how-homophobia-has-robbed-all-men-of-touch-239987952f16>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²¹⁹ M Greene, ‘Touch Isolation: How Homophobia Has Robbed Men of Touch’, in *Medium*, , 2017, <<https://medium.com/@remakingmanhood/touch-isolation-how-homophobia-has-robbed-all-men-of-touch-239987952f16>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

²²⁰ M Fulkerson, ‘Touch’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*, , 2015, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/touch/>> [accessed 15 April 2018].

²²¹ M Fulkerson, ‘Touch’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*, , 2015, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/touch/>> [accessed 15 April 2018].

place...felt in and through the body, shapes people's everyday geographies and plays an under-recognised role in sexuality..."²²²

While touch plays a crucial role in a number of our sensory experiences, it is also an "everyday experience and a site of embodied and social politics,"²²³ and as such is always situated. Place is crucial to understanding where, when and how bodies may or may not touch. These politics and embodied experiences differ from place to place, person to person and encounter to encounter. For this essay, the Teddy Babe will be understood as a private object, for consumption within the domestic sphere. The domestic home space is a private space away from the public world, in which touch can be conducted behind closed doors in ways considered inappropriate in public. Touch can be considered in this regard as "between loving, monogamous heterosexual couples..."²²⁴ The relationship between heterosexuality and the domestic, private space/sphere is linked; heterosexuality can be understood as domestic, and is often bound by heteronormative milestones such as 'getting your first house together,' 'children' etc., but this assumption ignores how the private and domestic sphere "become heterosexualised through performance and practice,"²²⁵ By using the notion of touch to "explore the mutual construction of heterosexual bodies and domestic space,"²²⁶ I hope to discover why Teddy Babes are purchased and used, and why exactly does the plush body appeal to those owners/users. While Carey-Ann Morrison notes that studies regarding touch do not "look at the ordinary practices and processes of embodied sexual experience. Sex itself is a series of touches, feelings and embodied sensations,"²²⁷ I will not consider the Teddy Babe as a uniquely perverse or deviant concept of sexual relationships, but consider it as Marquard Smith does, as part of the historical legacy of perversity that is heterosexuality, which is "untenable to separate...from the embodied practices of touch."²²⁸ And as such, is an important part of domestic relationship making. By mapping heterosexuality, masculinity,

²²² C-A Morrison, 'Heterosexuality and Home: Intimacies of Space and Spaces of Touch', in *Emotion, Space and Society*, vol. 5, 2012, p.11

²²³ *ibid*, p.10

²²⁴ *ibid*, p.11

²²⁵ *ibid*, p.10

²²⁶ *ibid*, p.10

²²⁷ *ibid*, p.11

²²⁸ M Smith, *The Erotic Doll: A Modern Fetish*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2013, p.131

touch and the Teddy Babe together I will consider how “sexuality enters the body consciousness...and the way hegemonic society seeks to regulate sexuality.”²²⁹

What I wish to consider here is touch and the sexual object of the Teddy Babe as an extension or feature of embodied sensuous experiences. I will consider theories of bodies, space, and these conceptions in relation to touch, vision and heterosexual construction. Touch in this sense is a transgressive act, in which the intimate nature of touch is physical, perceived as reciprocal and unmediated through a mediated object. And from this, we can understand why touch is so often associated with emotion - we are touched by emotions. The Teddy Babe occupies the private space of the owner/user, most often than not, the home, and creates an emotional “sensuous experience and haptic knowledges,”²³⁰ and to focus on touch is to consider the “ways in which heterosexual bodies and domestic spaces are mutually produced and constructed.”²³¹ It appears that we are becoming more receptive and understanding of heterosexual relationships that are not reproductively useful, but we are less understanding of emotional attachments that are not socially reproductive, especially those that spill from private to public. Sex dolls do this, they have become a point of academic and public fascination, exemplified by the plethora of documentaries exploring the lives of men who believe they are in a reciprocal relationship with life-sized female dolls. The knowledge of these encounters threatens heterosexuality due to the exposure of its perverse nature.

Domestic Masculinities

Elena Dorfman’s seminal photographic project ‘*Still Lovers*’ explores the relationships between life-sized, synthetic sex dolls and their owners. While photographing the relationships of men with highly realistic dolls Dorfman found herself forced to “evaluate my own notions of love and what it meant to value an object - a replacement human being, in effect - as real.”²³² Despite the function of these dolls, Dorfman finds that they “seem to defy

²²⁹ P Hubbard, ‘Desire/Disgust: Mapping the Moral Contours of Heterosexuality’, in *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 24, 2000, p.193

²³⁰ *ibid*, p.10

²³¹ *ibid*, p.10

²³² E Dorfman, ‘*Artist Statement*’, date unknown, <<http://elenadorfman.com/still-lovers/artist-statement/>> [accessed 21 April 2018].

our expectations and question the limits of our acceptance.”²³³ In her exhibition and published monograph, Dorfman details how, “one doll owner fantasizes about marrying his doll, another holds the hand of his ‘date’ as they watch television on the coach.”²³⁴ What Dorfman’s work reveals, when considering heterosexuality, is the domestic nature of these sex dolls, and while Marquard Smith may have dismissed the Teddy Babe as a novelty item, I feel that they are domestic in their nature and fulfil a multiplicity of purposes for their owners. Continued academic scholarship has explored femininity and masculinity gender identities as a continuing process of becoming; fluid, dynamic and constantly contested. Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose have developed Judith Butler’s work on the construction of gender as an embodied performance and suggest that instability and slippage of performances of gender takes place in different spaces, and as such, there is a relationship between space and gender identity construction.²³⁵

In his book, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and The Middle-class Home in Victorian England*, historian John Tosh highlights three areas that place the home as central to masculine identity historically, and can be argued to have a continued presence in contemporary masculine identity formation.²³⁶ First, Tosh details that “compassionate marriage stood at the heart of the Victorian ideal of domesticity,”²³⁷ secondly, fatherhood was considered a foundation stone of domestic masculinity,²³⁸ and finally, the leading of families on a spiritual path, through prayers and Bible study.²³⁹ While perhaps the last point is not applicable to contemporary hetero-masculine domesticity, there are “striking signs of continuity,”²⁴⁰ from the 1990s onwards with the conception of the ‘New Man’. Gorman-

²³³ Edwynn Houk Gallery, ‘Elena Dorfman: Still Lovers Press Release’, in *Edwynn Houk Gallery*, 2005, <<http://www.houkgallery.com/exhibitions/elena-dorfman>> [accessed 21 April 2018].

²³⁴ Edwynn Houk Gallery, ‘Elena Dorfman: Still Lovers Press Release’, in *Edwynn Houk Gallery*, 2005, <<http://www.houkgallery.com/exhibitions/elena-dorfman>> [accessed 21 April 2018].

²³⁵ N Gregson & G Rose, ‘Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities and Subjectivities’, in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 18, 2000, pp.433–452.

²³⁶ J Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 2007.

²³⁷ *ibid*, p.27

²³⁸ J Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 2007.

²³⁹ *ibid*, p.161

²⁴⁰ *ibid*, p.14

Murray notes that “despite tensions and contradictions.... since the 19th century the home has been a keen site of masculine investment and identity work across Western societies.”²⁴¹

Andrew Gorman-Murray defines ‘hetero-masculine’ domesticity as the “performances of heterosexual masculinity at home, comprising diverse relationships, some more ‘traditional’, others producing new masculinities and domestic imaginaries.”²⁴² This conception of hetero-masculine domesticity can be seen in the idea of the man as the head of the house and the breadwinner, and the idea that a man’s home is his castle; a place of his own away from the working world. Hetero-masculine domesticity is conceptualised as a way of creating identity through defining a male space inside of the home, that is articulated through ‘man-caves’, barbecuing or ‘tinkering’ in the shed/garage, enabling men to carve out space in the symbolically feminine environment of the domestic sphere.

Using my research from The Doll Forum, I have assumed that the majority of Teddy Babe users are ‘bachelors’; an unmarried man, living alone (or with their Teddy Babe). The status of bachelor carries a connotation of the antithesis of domestic; immature, messy, and slobbish, with their house often said to be needing a ‘feminine touch’ in order to recreate it as a home.²⁴³ Single men living alone subverts the normative model of domestic masculinity, which requires marriage and fatherhood to function. From the 1950s/60s onwards, the bachelor pad was seen as a manifestation of a consuming masculine subject, whose identity was anchored not in those around him, but in the products purchased and consumed.²⁴⁴ While Teddy Babe users may be in large bachelors, this may not be the identity they wish to create and perform. The Doll Forum is littered with topics discussing the end of relationships with women, feeling wronged by them, but at the same time desiring heterosexual relationships in order to complete their masculine identity. A thread entitled ‘Alexis the Lazy’ chronicles a conversation between user ‘Slave to the Plush’ with their Teddy Babe Alexis who refused to perform domestic duties.²⁴⁵ The conversation is framed as a playful fight between partners, but is centred around the domestic and includes a photograph of the Teddy Babe swearing at

²⁴¹ A Gorman-Murray, ‘Masculinity and the Home: A Critical Review and Conceptual Framework’, in *Australian Geographer*, vol. 39, 2008, p.372

²⁴² *ibid*, p.370

²⁴³ A Gorman-Murray, ‘Masculinity and the Home: A Critical Review and Conceptual Framework’, in *Australian Geographer*, vol. 39, 2008, p.373 - 374

²⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.373 - 374

²⁴⁵ Slave to the Plush, ‘Alexis the Lazy’, in *The Doll Forum*, 2015, <<https://dollforum.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=35&t=98926>> [accessed 10 April 2018].

the user. (*see fig. 9*) The fantasy situation is reminiscent to me of my relationship; playfully refusing to do chores because you don't want to, or having 'arguments' that are part of the performance of the relationship.

As an object constructed for the purpose of sexual pleasure, Teddy Babes are inherently imbued with touch, but, in the performance of a heterosexual relationship, Teddy Babes facilitate a fantasy domestic relationship that exceeds their materiality. Teddy Babes can be seen as both a space for gender construction, and an object within the domestic sphere that helps construct gender. Where the reality of the Teddy Babe's owner relationship status may not allow them to complete a performance of domestic masculinity with a flesh-and-blood partner, the Teddy Babe becomes a material surrogate for identity construction, and the construction of domestic masculine subjectivity.

Photo-Sharing.

The Doll Album is a website associated with The Doll Forum that enables registered users to create thematic photo albums to share images of their sex dolls. Many of these images draw from the conventions of pornographic visual cultures.

The Doll Forum user 'GFELube' has created multiple albums, one for each sex doll they own, but here I will concentrate on a set of images of the Teddy Babe 'Cymona', purchased by GFELube in January 2012. Cymona is a 'Mona' Teddy Babe model, described by the American online sex toy retailer 'Sexclectic' as a "super slutty nympho,"²⁴⁶ who "likes it hard and rough and dirty."²⁴⁷ For me, the images of Cymona follow the conventions of 'Readers' Wives' segments in soft-core pornographic magazines.

In 1966 Fiesta magazine was launched and quickly became Britain's best selling adult magazine. Fiesta is cited as being the creator of the pornographic magazine phenomenon: the Readers' Wives section. Figure 10 is an example of a Readers' Wives image from a 1983 print edition of Fiesta featuring images of 'Pat from Yorks' who was photographed for Fiesta's striptease section by Frank Grovesnor. Figure 11 is user GFELube's most highly viewed image of Cymona, posted shortly after she was 'unboxed'. Both Cymona and Pat of Yorks lie

²⁴⁶ Sexclectic, 'Mona - Super Slutty Nympho', date unknown, <<http://sexclectic.com/product/CNVTBS-MONA>> [accessed 18 April 2018].

²⁴⁷ Sexclectic, 'Mona - Super Slutty Nympho', date unknown, <<http://sexclectic.com/product/CNVTBS-MONA>> [accessed 18 April 2018].

on their backs, dressed in stockings and suspenders, though Cymona is still in the teddy lingerie she comes in when purchased. Neither of them makes eye contact with the camera/ audience, giving both subjects (objects) a passive gaze. Both Cymona and Pat use their hands to draw the spectators eyes downwards to the genitals, and use their other hand to highlight the breasts; though Cymona's touching is almost crudely more obvious. While Pat doesn't directly touch genitals, Cymona is posed to be touching her clitoris in a masturbatory fashion. Both use repetitive poses to draw on and transform the conventions of representing the female nude; it is reminiscent of high art and yet is placed within a mass-market context. Both poses are angled towards the camera in order to offer maximum exposure to the body part that is being emphasised in the image. While these images do have a specific interest in the female body parts that demarcate the body as not male (breasts, labia, etc.), including the whole subject in the image the spectator is guided in their reading of the image and fixes meanings into the image. Both Pat and Cymona are transformed "into fantastic creatures telling fabulous tales,"²⁴⁸ who contain a "vulgar and naughty pleasure to be pursued in the context of ordinary, everyday life..."²⁴⁹ Both lie on their backs in a fabric covered environment; Pat's is easily read as a bedroom setting, whereas Cymona's seems more detached from a normal domestic environment (though other images in GFELube's photo series reveals that Cymona is also in a bed). Both images show the female subject displayed in the most mundane settings; living rooms, bedrooms..."²⁵⁰ and similar banal locations. The inclusion of silk, velvet, lingerie and stockings creates an image of the unordinary; both Cymona and Pat are available for a sexual encounter that is outside of the ordinary, placing them at odds with their setting.

Both of these images introduce the erotic and banal to each other. Unlike the more 'high class' pornographic print publications of the time, Readers' Wives segments do not present women as exotic or unreachable. By avoiding constructing images of women in fantastical locations, but using scenes of everyday life and banal locations as "staging points for, the erotic encounter,"²⁵¹ instead, these images create a social reality for the audience; creating an

²⁴⁸ F Attwood, 'A Very British Carnival: Women, Sex and Transgression in Fiesta Magazine', in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, 2002, p.104

²⁴⁹ *ibid*, p.95

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.97

²⁵¹ J Pratt, 'Pornography and Everyday Life', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 3, 1986, p.74

idea of a natural sexual encounter. Teddy Babes are displayed in these owner constructed images as keen participants to sexual encounters; they have a sexual awareness and agency, and are readily available. This style of ‘glamour photography’ allows ordinary people, or ordinary Teddy Babes in this case, to undertake ‘image-work’ usually associated with celebrities and porn stars. The creation and subsequent sharing of these images by user GFELube and other Doll Forum users construct a sense of normalcy both around sex in general, and the sexualisation of women, but more importantly around sexual relationships with sex dolls, and the Teddy Babe. While these images are easily and readily available for anyone’s viewing, their presence on The Doll Album and The Doll Forum helps to continue building the erotic community of doll users/owners/partners and creates a niche subculture of desire and intimacy.

Feona Attwood argues that the Readers’ Wives convention can be seen as “upending the convention of woman as beautiful object and the repository of domestic value.”²⁵² I, instead, see a tension between the doll as a sexualised object, and the doll as a domestic subject. By creating these amateur boudoir shots that share visual conventions with those created for Readers’ Wives segments, the Teddy Babe’s domestic value is reinforced. By sexualising the Teddy Babe through a perceived domestic role; sharing and staging photographs and often accompanying them with fantasy narratives on The Doll Forum (for example, celebrating anniversaries of ‘unboxing’ as if they were wedding/relationship milestones/anniversaries) the Teddy Babe moves from object to subject. Rather than purely masturbatory aid, the Teddy Babe is constructed through the images as a domestic subject; one is who both highly sexualised but also glorified as a surrogate for the owners lack of female domestic subject. These images draw on conventions of Readers’ Wives ‘soft-core’ pornography, fashion photography and pin-up photography to create a tame, and clean image compared to commercial pornography or masturbatory aid advertisements. The overall effect of these images can be seen through Ruth Barcan’s understanding of glamour images, which are often constructed during times when “identity and/or body image have become self-conscious or precarious in some way.”²⁵³ This can be seen as part of a “shift towards understanding identity

²⁵² F Attwood, ‘A Very British Carnival: Women, Sex and Transgression in Fiesta Magazine’, in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 5, 2002, p.94

²⁵³ R Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004 cited in F Attwood, ‘No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures’, in *Sexualities*, vol. 19, 2007, p.452

in terms of a 'staged authenticity,'²⁵⁴ which combines "desire for the real, fetishization of the real, resignation to the fact the real is always elusive, fun in fakery, and celebration of the delights of role-play and performance."²⁵⁵ Both Cymona and Pat's images construct the female body as a spectacle but in different ways. Pat from Yorks is constructed as a sexual object; a wife who is removed from domesticity through participation in the erotic image. Cymona becomes a subject through her participation; a doll who becomes a 'horny housewife' for male consumption.

Conclusion.

By drawing together themes of touch, hetero-masculine domesticity, and pornographic image construction, my analysis of the Teddy Babe has shown that these objects are not purely a masturbatory aid with the purpose of sexual pleasure or enjoyment. Instead, Teddy Babes can be seen as complex and multi-dimensional transitional object. While Teddy Babes do, obviously, provide a physical masturbatory pleasure, they appear to have exceeded their materiality. Instead, Teddy Babes perform an auto-pleasurable masturbation of identity, where masturbation is understood as pleasuring one's self to reaffirm one's identity, rather than purely physical pleasure. The satisfaction of a Teddy Babe is not found in the ejaculatory climax, but in feeling masculine through an embodied gender performance.

This embodied gender performance is achieved through the intersection of touch, heterosexuality and domesticity. Heterosexual functions within the domestic sphere as given and natural, but it is through performance that heterosexual space and subjects materialise and are given reality. Through "physical intimacy - bodies touching and feeling,"²⁵⁶ Teddy Babes are imbued with an emotional subjectivity and embody significant meanings and signifiers of comfort, intimacy, domesticity, femininity, and friendship. Through the Teddy Babes' haptic construction, a secondary space within the domestic sphere appears for identity construction making the Teddy Babe a site for heterosexual practice, and the object through which embodied heterosexual masculinity can be played out.

²⁵⁴ R Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004 cited in F Attwood, 'No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures', in *Sexualities*, vol. 19, 2007, p.452

²⁵⁵ R Barcan, *Nudity: A Cultural Anatomy*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004 cited in F Attwood, 'No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography, and New Sex Taste Cultures', in *Sexualities*, vol. 19, 2007, p.452

²⁵⁶ C-A Morrison, op. cit., p.17

The Teddy Babe becomes a subject for the owner to project heterosexual masculine fantasies on; the object allows the practice of stereotypical and societally determined masculinity to be performed. 'She' is at home waiting for the owner, 'she' is always ready to listen, and never judges. Many Doll Forum topics contain images detailing the friendship between owner and Teddy Babe that is no different to how my partner and I perform our relationship; I wear his clothing, we drink beers together and watch films. The Teddy Babes perform this surrogate girlfriend/wife role for their owner/users and as such allows a domestic masculine identity to be performed and formed. Though this constructed identity is illusionary, it relates to Barcan's idea of 'staged authenticity.' and thus is tied directly to wider ideas of identity formation.

Teddy Babes are then further used for sexual identity formation through the construction of the doll's identity as 'horny housewife'. Readers' Wives style images work to make the Teddy Babe more domestic, more female and more sexual. Each of these images builds the fantasy of subjective participation in sexual encounters between the doll and the doll owner, and the production of the images reaffirms masculine heterosexual identity. Through sharing these images in the erotic community of doll owners the community and the individuals' sexual desires are reinforced and normalised. These images and discussions produce a heterosexual masculinity through their production of femininity. The Teddy Babe is produced as a female subject who is sexually alluring, attractive, and readily available for male consumption, who can be seen to contrast against perceptions of women, often understood by owners to have wronged men in some way and thus disavowed their masculine identity.

Ultimately, the Teddy Babe is a masturbatory aid but is treated by owners as both subject and object. The Teddy Babe can be seen as a 'transitional object'. D.W. Winnicott considers the transitional object as a "means of self-soothing"²⁵⁷ that allows for "working through trauma through repetitive action, and also afford a means of turning active into passive, victim into master."²⁵⁸ As stated in the introduction to the chapter, I do not wish to psychoanalyse the owners of Teddy Babes, but Winnicott's transitional object can be removed from its psychoanalytical roots to be considered in relation to the materiality of the doll and identity construction. The Teddy Babe allows for self-soothing of masculinity and the

²⁵⁷ DW Winnicott, *Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1965, cited in CC Kieffer, 'Guys, Dolls, and the Uses of Enchantment', in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, vol. 25, 2015, p.509

²⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.509

masturbation of one's identity to bring pleasure and conclusion. The Teddy Babe allows the owner to transition through different forms of masculinity depending on space; at work, they may not be the man they wish to be, but at home, with their plush girlfriend they conform to the domestic masculine identity who provides, protects and is sexually proficient. By repetitively performing a constructed masculine identity through their Teddy Babe, and through the erotic community of The Doll Forum, heterosexual masculinity can be practised and constructed in the domestic sphere. Teddy Babes then act as a haptic geographic site of identity formation, and as a masturbatory aid for the self.



Figure 7. Image of Teddy Babe, from Teddy-Babes.com, date unknown.



Figure 8. Close up image of the Teddy Babe's 'Pussy Velour' vagina insert, date unknown



Figure 9. 'Alexis the Lazy' image, from The Doll Forum user Slave to the Plush, 2015



Figure 10. Pats from York, images from Fiesta magazine, 1983



Figure 11. Cymona, image by The Doll Forum user GFELube, 2012.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to place the cis-gendered male heterosexual body and its sensuous experiences the centre of analysis. By doing this, I have discovered a plurality of ways in which male masturbatory aids construct a masculine heterosexual identity through auto-erotic acts. As discussed in the introduction, I have considered the masturbatory aids presented here as boundary objects, seen within the contexts of the motivations of their users, as well as through their cross-cultural social roles. By understanding these objects as boundaries, and considering how each of them manipulates pleasures, desires, intimacies, anxieties, social norms and stereotypes, I have been able to analyse the various ways in which masculinity is constructed, performed and reproduced. All of the objects discussed within this thesis share one commonality: they are penetrable, and penetration must be understood here as a two-way street; penetrable and penetrating. All of these objects are designed for penetration by the male penis, but the male subjects using them are penetrated by the ideologies inherent within the objects; the wider cultural and societal understandings of masculinity, heterosexuality, desire, pleasure and intimacy.

By considering Fleshlights, TENGA EGGs and Teddy Babes as boundary objects, with a relationship to the owner or user of the object, a narrative of regulatory masculine identity construction emerges, that can be seen to have a direct relation to a bio-political neoliberal capitalist regime. Within the current neoliberal capitalist regime, the male body is profitable, a site of economic, social and political intersection that is able to produce and reproduce a secure understanding of male heterosexuality, but only through identity formation that is related to the consumption of objects.

All of these objects are masturbatory and are supposed to enhance auto-erotic pleasure, but instead, they reproduce male heterosexuality in relation to its 'other'; the female sexual subject. None of the objects discussed within this thesis liberate male sexuality in order to increase embodied sensuous pleasure (like the 1960s female sexual liberation), but instead reproduce cultural narratives of anxiety and worry concerning the role of men within culture, male sexual performance and fears about the fantastical element of male masturbation.

Masculinity and Masturbation.

By the very nature of these objects, they continue the history of male masturbation and its ties to masculine identity construction. As discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, male masturbation missed its emancipatory moment. Gregg Tuck comments that contemporary media representations of male masturbation continue to link it to abuse, suggesting that “the real horror of male masturbation, a fear that it is neither properly independent nor socially or emotionally productive.” but it is “anti-partnered sex”.²⁵⁹The implication that male masturbators lack imagination compared to female masturbators persists, and the existence of the Teddy Babe and the Fleshlight support this - cis-gendered heterosexual men who use these objects can be seen to need some form of female representation in order to feel intimacy and pleasure through desire. The TENGA EGG attempts to move male masturbatory aids away from mimetic representation, though its lack of masculine affirmation prevents it from creating a pleasurable and intimate experience from sexual desire.

When used for auto-erotic pleasure, these objects attempts to disrupt the historical legacy of male masturbation as dangerous, damaging or anti-social. The Fleshlight STU attempts to do this by creating a masturbatory aid that can be considered as a self-improvement device. Instead of the mimetic female representation contributing to the historical narrative of dangerous fantasy, it functions as an accessory to desire and as an object that increases the ability of cis-gendered heterosexual men to experience pleasure (and give pleasure), thus facilitating sexual intimacy with flesh-and-blood female partners.

The TENGA EGG positions itself as a device that improves sexual health and wellbeing through an understanding of the need to expand male sexual pleasure out and away from mimetic representation. But instead of enhancing male sexual pleasure, the TENGA EGG operates as a cool-kawaii identity formation device. The Teddy Babe attempts to produce a stereotypical masculine subject, provider, husband, secure and supportive and provides comfort and a non-homoerotic touch experience to the male user. By doing this through a non-realistic representation of the female other, the Teddy Babe seeks to distance itself from the active objectification of women.

Each of these objects subverts the historical legacy of masturbation as non-independent, or emotionally or socially productive by taking up the productive task of creating specific

masculine identities, with the exception of the Fleshlight Girls collection, that, in my opinion, reproduces dangerously fantastical narratives through manipulating perceived relationships with porn performers. Each of these objects helps construct a masculine identity within the private sphere and auto-erotic event that can be performed in a public space, be that through sexual performance, aesthetic style, or within erotic communities.

Each of these objects subverts the idea of the anti-social, non-productive male masturbator, but rather than liberate masturbation from this history they capitalise on it in order to construct masculine identities. This continuation of historical conceptions of masculinity can be seen in each object; the Fleshlight constructs a controlled, strong masculine subject whose masculinity is inherent within the body. The TENGA EGG reproduces a version of the 'New Man', and the Teddy Babe reproduces the male provider and head of the household. This continuation of historical stereotypes of masculinity reinforces the notion of neoliberal, bio-political control, that requires a regulated and policed male body to ensure procreation and reproduction that can only be achieved through pleasure, intimacy and desire as it related to the feminine other.

Heterosexuality and Masturbation.

Male heterosexuality is revealed through the Fleshlight, TENGA EGG and Teddy Babe to be incessantly reliant on desiring the feminine other. Each of these objects manipulates a historical conception of masculine identity in order to construct a narrative of heterosexuality that is tied to sexual activity, and its intimacies and pleasures.

Heterosexuality, as understood through these objects is purely performative. The Fleshlights (both STU and Girls collection) and Teddy Babes consider male heterosexuality as inherent within the male user. This heterosexuality needs to be honed and refined through sexual practices in order to be outwardly performed in a way that affirms the users' masculine identity. The STU hones the sexual performance of the male subject, the Girls collection manipulates desire for particular women in order to place the subject in direct opposition with a feminine other. The Teddy Babe gives the male subject the opportunity to perform heterosexuality with a feminine subject of their own creation, given legitimacy through constructed images and imaginary relationships. TENGA EGGs constructs a heterosexuality that is performed, not through sexual acts, but through personal image construct by using a

wider societal understanding of what is cool and what is cute. By understanding the feminine other emotionally, and constructing an identity that is socially and culturally aware, but also interested in sexual pleasures, but not necessarily desiring a female representation to achieve pleasure and intimacy.

Within each of these objects, heterosexuality transcends the idea of merely desiring the opposite sex but instead is a commodity that can be bought and sold. In these male masturbatory aids, heterosexuality becomes a commodity fetish. Commodity fetishism is the concept that, what should be a relationship between people (male and female sexual partners, in this case) is actually a relationship between subject and thing (male user and masturbatory aid). As such, heterosexuality becomes a societal relation that can only be expressed through things; heterosexuality must be purchased in order to include it into the performance of identity. Much like the anthropological roots of fetishism, these objects appear to be imbued with a strange power to produce heterosexuality. Heterosexuality can be seen as contained within the subject but in need of mediation in order to complete its outward performance. Without the 'thing', without the object, without the feminine representation (be that mimetic, or not), male heterosexuality cannot be fully performed as there is no visual anchor, no concrete other to oppose. It is this opposition to the feminine other that these masturbatory aids manipulate in order to produce desire, pleasure and intimacy.

Desire, Pleasure and Intimacy

Desire, pleasure and intimacy arise in these objects and are produced within them through the manipulation and performance of masculine and heterosexual identities. While these concepts run through each of the masturbatory aids discussed here, they must be understood as individualist; no one person desires the same thing as another or desires it in the same way as another. The production of desires, pleasures and intimacies differs through each male subject, but each object can be seen to produce a specific idea of what desire, pleasure and intimacy should be.

The Fleshlight STU and Girls collection produce a desire that is reliant on the sexualised representation of the feminine other. By working with the pornographic industry, and using mimetic representations that are modelled directly from the genitals of porn performs, Fleshlights reinforce narratives surrounding the ideal female partner; one who lacks

sexual agency, but is instead always ready, willing, and able. Fleshlight capitalise on this highly sexualised feminine subject, both imaginary and those that exist within the pornographic visual regime, by emphasising and reinforcing male anxieties around sexual performance. Desire and pleasure within the Fleshlight are directly tied into the ability of the male subject to not only match the insatiable desire of the female subject, but also be the best sexual partner she could have a sexual encounter with. Intimacy within the Fleshlight is reliant on sexual satisfaction, rather than emotional intensities.

The TENGA EGG's lack of mimetic representation allows for a more imagination driven masturbatory experience, but, as David's experience shows, ultimately destroys pleasure and intimacy and increases desire for a flesh-and-blood partner for sexual satisfaction; something that is at odds with TENGAs business aims. The design of the object, while being cute, compact and unassuming, is so alien, fiddly and large that while it may affirm the desire for penetration, it doesn't give a satisfactory conclusion to the auto-erotic act.

The Teddy Babe produces desire, pleasure and intimacy for a male subject who lacks a flesh-and-blood partner, or access to these concepts in their day-to-day life. Many owners of the plush sex dolls expressed a feeling of being spurned by 'real' women in their public and private lives, and Teddy Babes, and perhaps other sex dolls, produce an intimacy and pleasure that conforms to heteronormative expectations of cis-gendered heterosexual men. The production of pornographic imagery including the Teddy Babe normalises desire for sex dolls and helps produce the Teddy Babe as a female subject in its own right.

Overall, these objects all produce desire, intimacy and pleasure, to varying degrees and with varying effects. As I have understood these masturbatory aids as boundary objects, and desire as an individualistic want, it is not possible to use these objects and this study as the definitive understanding of how desire, intimacy and pleasure are produced. But, each of these objects reinforces desire for the feminine other and pleasure as achieved through climax during the auto-erotic act. Intimacy, as produced through each of these objects, relies on touch and sensuous experience.

Further Research

The analysis, work, and conclusions I have presented here can only be seen as the beginning of a project that requires a huge amount of interdisciplinary research. The current academic

obsession with sex robots and sex dolls is not grounded in the everyday realities of male masturbatory practice; we have jumped ahead of ourselves. Sex dolls and robots are not a reality for a huge section of the population, this could be due to the uncanny valley that they represent, the huge cost that they entail, or the societal demonisation around them. The moral and ethical implications of these objects have been discussed both academically and in popular discourses; the BBC have released yet another documentary exploring their use this April (2018). In ignoring the everyday objects that heterosexual men use in order to pleasure themselves, other than a hand or a partner, a huge gap of knowledge has emerged, one that this thesis cannot possibly fill.

Further research into these objects, and other male masturbatory aids, should be undertaken in order to understand these objects through numerous disciplinary approaches. In my opinion, none of these objects have received enough individual academic attention. The spillages of ideologies, marketing, images, social media, mimetic representations etc., all interact through these objects, overlap and inform each other. This spillage creates effects and affects, that are enacted through the usages of these objects. Due to the need for delimitation, numerous research threads that have emerged while conceiving of, and writing this thesis have not been followed. No considerations of class or race have been undertaken here that could reveal more about masculine heterosexuality and its desires and pleasures. Further research could include discussing the implications of semen capture for each object, and how this could relate to Michel Serres' ideas of pollution, ownership and territory. Research that culturally contextualises TENGA products, and discusses the emergence of TENGA branded sexual health clinics in Japan, that specialise in assisting conception (TENGA have recently released a device in Japan that can be attached to an iPhone camera in order to inspect sperm quality!) needs to be undertaken. There is a need to research the proliferation of DIY Fleshlights and other penetrative masturbatory aids, or the genre of DIY porn that is concerned with men using their masturbatory aids. Other non-mimetic sex dolls exist, not just the Teddy Babe, which need to be analysed in order to create a deeper understanding of sex dolls that are not mimetically reproducing women or creating the ideal feminine subject.

In short, male masturbatory aids deserve academic consideration in the way that has been afforded to female masturbatory aids, and to queer usages of sex toys.

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