

***Guys and Real Dolls: a Story of Stunted Emotional Growth, Fear of  
Rejection, Acute Loneliness and Necrophilia by Proxy***

**Presented to**

**Jacobo Schifter, Ph.D**

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**By**

**Marie Labbé**

**M.A. in Sustainable Peace in the Contemporary World**

**University for Peace**

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## **I – Introduction**

In 2007, the BBC produced “Guys and Dolls<sup>1</sup>”, a groundbreaking documentary about men who choose to buy life-like dolls (“RealDolls<sup>2</sup>”) as companions. Based on a 2008 case of necrophilia in Quebec<sup>3</sup>, the definition provided by Rosman and Resnick<sup>4</sup> and observations gleaned from the documentary, I will endeavour to draw a parallel between necrophiliacs and men who form attachments to RealDolls. Using as an example three sex doll owners from the documentary (Everard, Gordon and Davecat), I will show that a dysfunctional relationship with an overbearing parent (or parents) can stunt a person’s emotional growth, causing him or her to have difficulty forming meaningful attachments with humans out of a fear of rejection and to find solace in anatomically perfect ‘alternative’ partners. I will then argue that media and a culture of male domination also account for the three men’s unrealistic expectations of women and romantic relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Guys and Dolls (BBC Real Doll Documentary), 2007, 50 min.

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RealDoll>, last checked on 15 December 2012.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/story/2009/03/17/mtl-proulx-trial-jury-0317.html>

<sup>4</sup> Rosman, J. P.; Resnick, P. J. (1989). “Sexual attraction to corpses: A psychiatric review of necrophilia”. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 17 (2): 153–163. PMID 2667656.

## II – Recent case of necrophilia<sup>5</sup> in Quebec

In May 2008, Nancy Michaud, a political staffer from Quebec, was abducted from her home by a neighbour, shot in the head and raped three times post-mortem. The culprit, 29-year-old Francis Proulx, a marginalized individual and only child raised by a highly devout, manic depressive and controlling mother, claimed to have suffered abuse, bullying and rejection all his life and to have had problems socializing with people and functioning normally in society. After the rape, he proudly boasted to his cellmate of 'having had sex with a woman' for the first time. He was also found guilty breaking and entering into people's home carrying a gun and wearing a James Bond uniform.

According to the definition provided by Rosman and Resnick (Wikipedia), the following factors could be considered as precursors of necrophilia: 1) poor self-esteem, perhaps due in part to a significant loss; 2) a great fear of rejection by women/men and a desire to find a sexual partner who is incapable of rejecting him/her; and 3) an exciting sexual fantasy with a corpse, sometimes developed after having been exposed to one. Rosman and Resnick also indicated that among the 'necrophiliacs' surveyed in their study, "68% were motivated by a desire for an unresisting and unrejecting partner; [...] 15% by sexual attraction to dead people; 15% by a desire for comfort or to overcome feelings of isolation; and 11% by a desire to remedy low self-esteem by expressing power over a

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<sup>5</sup> necrophilia n. A paraphilia characterized by recurrent sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviour involving intercourse with dead bodies. <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067.013.5383>

corpse” (*Ibid.*). Recent minor researches in the UK revealed that some necrophiliacs “tend to choose a dead mate after failing to create romantic attachments with the living.” Proulx had low self-esteem, great difficulty making friends (a failed relationship at the age of 16 had left him highly fearful of rejection – it has been a significant loss to him), and faced with a corpse as a 29-year-old virgin, he had his first unplanned ‘sexual’ experience (it can then be argued that he had developed a sexual fantasy after being exposed to a corpse).

Several parallels can be drawn between his case and that of Everard, Gordon and Davecat.

### **III - Dysfunctional relationship with an overbearing parent (or parents)**

Unlike Davecat who was raised by his two parents, Everard and Gordon were both brought up by their mothers. Gordon’s father walked away from his family when his son was an infant. One can presume that the mothers projected their own fear of rejection unto their children and lavished them with affection or tried to control their every move to ensure that they would always need them and never leave them. The way that these men relate (or do not relate) to women implies a castrating oedipal relationship with mothers who thought their sons were the centre of the Universe. It can be assumed that

they are used to women taking all initiatives because of their presumably highly controlling mothers and are now completely powerless in front of real women. “The castrating mother, a popular image in contemporary society, is seen as causal in Jung’s *Puer Aeternis*. The eternal boy – man is symbolically castrated by a symbiotic, infantilizing mother and sacrifices his manhood to remain his mother’s beloved boy. In both the modernist Freudian as well as Jungian reading, the *puer aeternis*, a castrated boy in fantasy, may be male or female in external reality” (Leeming et al., 2009:128, citing von Franz, 2000).

Everard’s mother is the last person with whom he lived and she has been dead for 11 years. Her things have been left untouched. The scene where he enters her room is reminiscent of the movie *Psycho*<sup>6</sup>: one half expects to see a fully dressed skeleton in a rocking chair. He has preserved everything as a shrine (down to her bin!), implying that his mother has always been on a pedestal. “I just try to keep everything as it should be.” One wonders if things must be left as they ‘should’ be or as ‘Mother would want them to be’.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054215/> - *Psycho* (1960) – Alfred Hitchcock

Everard still seems concerned with what his mother would think. He wonders what she would make of his dolls and assumes that she would prefer him to have a girlfriend but that she would rather he had RealDolls than no “female” companionship at all. He claims that his dolls have improved his quality of life tremendously. If his mother’s opinion still matters 11 years after her death, this would imply that he has been so dominated by her that he cannot function without her approval; this could explain why he would rather go for ‘perfect’ women that cannot be faulted than opt for ‘real’ women who would not get the maternal seal of approval. This is what happened to Norman Bates (Psycho), who still had ‘conversations’ with his deceased overbearing mother based on what he thought she would say.

Davecat claimed that his parents are very disappointed in him (his dad, in particular, finds his doll “creepy”). Like a lot of immigrants, they probably had very high hopes for their son; one would imagine that they put so much pressure on him that they crushed his spirit completely and left him unable to grow and to face the world. Sometimes, the parental expectations are so high that people are conditioned, even years later, to act according to their parents’ wishes. This happened to the son and daughter of immigrants, Frank and Gina<sup>7</sup>, who needed to seek the help of a therapist to finally consummate their marriage

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<sup>7</sup> [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-07-10/features/1994191102\\_1\\_gina-massage-marriage](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-07-10/features/1994191102_1_gina-massage-marriage)

because they had been conditioned to think that sex was something sinful and to be so afraid of conceiving a child out of wedlock that they still could not shake the guilt and fear 16 years after tying the knot. Gordon mentioned his fear of getting a woman pregnant before he moved on to inanimate sexual partners; he claims that sex with dolls is better because there is no risk of an unwanted pregnancy. He was probably warned by his mother against impregnating a girl and it stuck with him.

#### **IV - Stunted Emotional Growth**

For all their bravado with their hand-gliding and guns, emotionally, they are still four-year-old mamas' boys with toys. Tellingly, Davecat has a Hello Kitty frame in his bedroom and still lives with his parents, Everard has models airplanes and toy soldiers, and Gordon still has childhood posters and toys his mother gave him (e.g., a sword).

#### **V- Difficulty forming meaningful attachments with humans/feelings of inadequacy**

Everard feels like an outsider; like Gordon, he thinks he is being ostracized because of his appearance. Strangely enough, both men look perfectly normal.

Everard sees real women as “unobtainable”. However, having his “RealDolls” at home makes it bearable or at least not so difficult. This statement denotes acute loneliness on his part. So to him, dolls are more “real” in a way than women as they are ‘attainable’.

For Gordon, relationships with humans are almost temporary. He did live with a woman at some point but they parted ways 10 years prior to the documentary and the breakup was acrimonious. He speaks unkindly of her and of ‘real’ women in general (except his mother), claiming that they are ‘cheating,’ ‘deceitful,’ and ‘lying.’ It would seem that he attracts the type of women who, feeling his vulnerability, will take advantage of him, like the one who called him up on a Saturday night to ask him to babysit. Unfortunately, that does nothing to increase someone’s faith in the opposite sex. He says himself that all the women he meets are “users”: they only want him because he is “convenient”. Before he had his dolls, he felt like he was everybody’s “doormat”, but not anymore. This is a man who, out of loneliness and desperation, was ready to put up with anything just to be with somebody, and his dolls have given him the self-confidence to live by himself. His painful experiences with the opposite sex have obviously been traumatic. Referring to his dolls, he asserts that “as good as the sex with them is, the peace of mind [of not having to put up with deceit, etc.] is even better ... It’s like being your own God living in your own



world.” The fact that he says that he only has to answer to his boss and the rest of the time he does what he wants implies that he once lived with someone very controlling (mother? Girlfriend?) who kept him on a very short leash. He also rationalizes that if, like him, you have reached the age of 39 and do not have a real-life companion yet, you probably never will. This denotes great hopelessness.

Davecat admits to occasional attempts at dating “organic” women, but that it is a “fool’s errand” and he would rather be with his doll that gives him stability because with her, there is no “variables, no bizarreness that may or may not occur.” He likes constancy and argues that you cannot get more constant than with a doll, that she is an anchor with whom you know what to expect. It is ironic that he would associate “bizarreness” with dating ‘real’ women and not dolls. He draws a comparison between being alone and being lonely and concludes that he is perfectly happy alone but unable to stand loneliness, and Everard reveals that “there are worse things in life and living with dolls really: living alone.”

**VI - Fear of Rejection, looking for security in an alternate universe, and attachments to inanimate objects**

This morbid fear of rejection seems to have caused these men to bond with inanimate objects, like Gordon who admits to getting attached to “physical stuff”, such as a poster he has had for more than 20 years. It is not uncommon for people with a fear of rejection or abandonment to find comfort in inanimate objects. Painfully lonely and greatly dissatisfied with their lives and womenfolk, Everard, Gordon and Davecat have created their own alternate universe to escape their disappointing reality. Although they acknowledge that their dolls are inanimate objects – Davecat even admits that “she’s not alive, she’s not a human being” – there a measure of anthropomorphism<sup>8</sup> or personification<sup>9</sup> in their ‘relationships’ to the RealDolls and it is troubling that they should keep referring to them as “female company”. They call them by their names (“Chichan,” “Virginia”) and talk about their activities as though they were humans (“She spends 99.9% of her time in my room,” “When she first came into my life it was sex sex sex sex sex but now we’re just there for each other, we’re always there for each other” (again emphasizing the idea of stability), “I’ve had a pleasant morning in bed with Virginia. I think she’s sleeping it off now. Yes, she’s still asleep.” Davecat actually talks about Chichan looking at him and him looking at her and about their being together, as if she is

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<sup>8</sup> Attribution of human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate objects, animals, or natural phenomena (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/anthropomorphism>).

<sup>9</sup> A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/personification>).

not an inanimate object. He even massages her feet. When he sent her away for maintenance, he stated: "My sweetie is going to be away for quite some time. There is an obvious sadness going on because we will be missing each other. When she comes back it'll be pretty much like a second honeymoon." As for Everard, he makes up for his lack of family by taking "family" photographs with his dolls as it makes them seem more real.

## **VII - Necrophilia by Proxy**

It can be argued that finding solace in anatomically perfect 'alternative' partners is a form of necrophilia by proxy as these dolls are corpses of sorts. They are 'idealized' synthetic versions of human corpses. According to Rosman and Resnick, one of the precursors of necrophilia is for someone to have 'an exciting sexual fantasy with a corpse, sometimes developed after having been exposed to one.' Davecat admits to always have had a fascination with "synthetic humans" as he calls them (recalling a time when he was seen chatting to one in a department store as a child) and to like mannequins for "their beauty and their stoicism," while Everard mentions that the dolls are very "static," that they do not do anything at all, as if this was somehow surprising, "but if you don't mind that,

they're good fun. It's certainly better than going without female company at all." There seems to be good cause to lump these men in together with the 15% who feel sexual attraction to dead people and those who "tend to choose a dead mate after failing to create romantic attachments with the living" (Wikipedia).

### **VIII – Gender stereotypes in the media and objectifying of women**

As for Gordon, although he did not comment on the dolls' beauty and motionless quality, he used a disturbing analogy and made disparaging comments about women, showing how little regard he has for members of the opposite sex. He admitted to being turned off by anything that makes a woman sexy as "it makes [her] look like she's been had by a hundred different guys..." as if "someone put a steak in front of you, took a bite, and spat it out on your plate." This troubling meat analogy and the use of the phrase "been had" show that to him, a woman clearly is a kind of 'consumer product', an object to be passed around for everyone to enjoy; it is a case of reversed Madonna-whore complex.<sup>10</sup> Male control over female sexuality and reproduction is central to the subordination of women, which stems from the commoditization by men of women's sexual and reproductive

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<sup>10</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna%E2%80%93whore\\_complex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna%E2%80%93whore_complex), last checked on 16 December 2012.

capacity (Ray, 8). Tellingly, unlike Everard and Davecat who are very gentle and tender with their 'alternate' partners, Gordon does not treat his dolls with the same reverence. As a matter of fact, his dolls are quite clearly sex objects with their legs slightly spread apart. In this, he is not so different from the other patrons of the Californian maker of RealDolls who get to have their orders customized to suit their tastes. They actually can dictate what their 'partner' will look like down to her pubic hair (real one from Sweden in some cases!). In an interview, a factory employee revealed that a customer had said to her that being a balding 50-year old, he could never get a real-life woman who looks like this, but the RealDoll could give him that and it would love him no matter what. Here is another example of necrophiliac by proxy who assumes women have a duty to live up to his unrealistic expectations. "As an affirmation of masculine power, [...] men's violence against women takes place in the inter-personal realm of relationships characterized by social despair, misogyny and ideas of male entitlement to women's bodies" (Groes-Green, 2009:295, citing Morrell, 1998, 2003). However, this extreme case of commoditization of women is merely an extension of what is done in fashion magazines, in which models are so airbrushed as to be unrecognizable; the idea conveyed out there is that women must be perfect; "[f]emale sexuality and identity tend to be fragmented, based on body parts" (Kaschak, 1992:76).

The media are known to perpetuate gender stereotypes. Women are, for instance, portrayed as sex objects who must possess such qualities as attractiveness, sex appeal, passivity and helplessness while men are expected to possess attributes that are associated with abuse of women, such as aggressiveness, dominance, sexuality and strength (Wood, 1994:36). In short, according to the media, women are victims and men are aggressors. “Masculinity is constructed as powerful, aggressive, controlling; femininity as inferior, weak, submissive, serving or (more positively) nurturing” (Francis, 2004:3). Media like to keep women in “a role that reflects a masculinist definition of femininity and of women’s proper place in the nation” (Nagel, 1998:252).

However, by conveying idealized stereotypical images, they also create unrealistic expectations of the way women and men should look, act and be. Like most people, Everard was strongly influenced by the manly man stereotype portrayed in the media, claiming that his self-image was based on the fact that he flies hand-gliders, that he’s a real man, a real adventurer, qualities that, according to him, set him apart from the “common man.” He expects women to be attracted to the type of guys who do exciting things and says that he is trying to impress members of the opposite sex with that but that they prefer beer-drinking smokers who watch soap operas, which is baffling to him. So he also has unrealistic expectations of what women want in a man. He truly lives in an

alternate universe where he considers himself to be “a superhero,” but his efforts are deemed irrelevant. With his swords and guns (“Three guns, two girls” he says proudly, as if they were both manly possessions), Gordon goes out of his way to show that he is virile.

### **Male domination**

Like 11% of necrophiliacs who claimed a desire to remedy low self-esteem by expressing power over a corpse, RealDoll owners also have the satisfaction of having complete control and power over an object to which they attribute human-like qualities, something that they do not and could not have with real female partners. Could this need for domination stem from the fact that they were treated like dolls themselves by overly doting mothers and that they view this kind of relationship as normal? Maybe they tried to recreate them with real women who felt suffocated and rejected them, so they tried again with dolls? If this is the case, their failure to form a similar bond with women other than their mothers must have been crushing to them, and their turning to dolls would be hardly surprising as the failure to create an attachment with the living sometimes triggers necrophiliac tendencies. However, they now have dolls to dote over to their hearts’

content, lavishing them with attention, doing their hair and make-up and dressing them up.

If buying and trafficking a human being is the ultimate manifestation of domination and commoditization of a person, it could be argued that buying a life-like sex doll is a close second. Zillah Eisenstein (quoted in Ray, p. 9) defines patriarchy as a “sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege.” These dolls owners certainly enjoy certain economic privileges if they can afford to pay the hefty price tag on these pseudo-humans and buy the illusion that they possess sexual power by proxy.

## **Conclusion**

In my article, I have drawn a parallel between necrophiliacs and men who form attachments to RealDolls using as an example a recent case of necrophilia in Quebec and the relationships of three doll owners (Everard, Gordon and Davecat) with their inanimate partners. I have shown that their likely dysfunctional relationship with an overbearing parent (or parents) has stunted their emotional growth, causing them to have low self-esteem and a great fear of rejection that account for their difficulty in forming meaningful attachments with humans and their finding solace in anatomically perfect ‘alternative’ partners. I finally argued that the media and a culture of male domination are partly to blame for their unrealistic expectations of women and relationships.



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