

Being Doll

Being Doll:
A Study of Youngness & Oldness at Interface

By

Lisa Pavlik-Malone

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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For
Ann, Doug, Fluff, Harr

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INTRODUCTION

COGNITION, WHOLENESS, AND THE (DOLL) OBJECT

One construct in psychology that incorporates personal subtleties of thought and emotion is that of *cognitive dissonance*, a term coined by pioneering social psychologist Leon Festinger (1956). It has been frequently defined as *an uncomfortable feeling caused by holding two contradictory ideas simultaneously*. Cognitive Dissonance theory includes the intimate relationship between integration, wholeness, and self, through the characterization of certain thought-emotion complexes that are necessary in order to maintain emotional equilibrium and a sense of internal harmony. It has been characterized more intricately, in the following way.

...This contradiction is between two beliefs creates a sort of ‘pressure valve’ that will spontaneously create a third belief in order to be filled... A powerful cause of dissonance is an idea in conflict with a fundamental element of the self-concept, such as “I am a good person” or “I made the right decision”. The anxiety that comes with the possibility of having made a bad decision can lead to rationalization, the tendency to create additional reasons or justifications to support one’s choices. A person who just spent too much money on a new car might decide that the new vehicle is much less likely to break down than his or her old car. This belief may or may not be true, but would reduce (internal contradiction and conflict) dissonance and make the person feel better...Please be advised that cognitive dissonance is a largely unconscious process; you are seldom consciously aware that you hold two contradictory beliefs... simultaneously...Generally, this ‘third belief’ is pure confabulation (from Wikipedia).

Thus, the interplay between *rationalization* and *truth* is often made even more complex by *confabulation*. The term *confabulation* can be defined as “the falsification of memory in which gaps in recall are filled by fabrications that the individual accepts as fact. It is not typically

considered to be a conscious attempt to deceive others” (2007: 214). In other words, in the process of remembering an experience or event, the mind automatically “fills in” details that were not part of the actual experience or event when it happened. This is so, even if those particular details were initially encoded as part of the memory, but, for some reason, have not been retrieved in that moment. The above example of cognitive dissonance that also incorporates confabulation in the thought process might be, *one’s belief that a new, expensive car will be less likely to break down, even though, one was recently told by a close friend that his own expensive car bought at the same dealership recently broke down three times*. In this particular case, the confabulated idea *that a new, expensive car will be less likely to break down*, may have been unconsciously generated by one’s memory based on one’s current self-concept (“I made the right decision again, like I usually do.”). The mental process of confabulation is important for understanding *cognitive wholeness* because it supports the idea that, in general, the mind may seek to unwittingly integrate various thought patterns using imagination. If this is the case, than it may be that imaginative faculties function in the human mind *both* beyond the recall of past perceptual experiences, i.e. envisioning a previously owned hat or remembering the voice of a relative now deceased, *and* beyond the summoning to the personal challenge of generating some original and valuable idea or thing during creativity, be it in art, science, music, or business, for example. Indeed, cognitive dissonance may utilize imagination automatically through confabulation, particularly where one’s creating and maintaining of a certain “image of self” is concerned.

Zahavi (2005), has linked the imaginative process of confabulating to constructing self-narratives in forming a personal identity.

It is possible to tell different, even incompatible, stories about one and the same life, but not all of them can be true. The fact that our narration can, and does, include fictional components give rise to at least two questions. First, how do we distinguish true narratives from false narratives? It is obvious that a person’s sincere propagation of a specific life story does not guarantee its truth. In fact, in some cases the stability of our self-identity may be inversely proportional to the fixed stories we tell about ourselves...the second, more worrying issue: What is a narrative self-understanding an understanding of? What is the question “Who am I?” a question about? Is the self an independently existing entity that makes the questions we ask about it true or false? Is it something whose nature we gradually unearth, or rather, is it wholly constituted and constructed by our descriptions (2005: 110)?

To the extent that the formation of narrative self-understandings is a *natural*—i.e. a genetically hard-wired psychological trait—or not, may be related to its degree of linkage to human brain and body processes that are uniform in most individuals, and that necessarily include various neuro-cognitive processes co-opted to achieve this developmental effect. Indeed, the mental process of confabulation as internal to experiencing cognitive dissonance has been attributed, in general, to neurological patterns of the brain as well as the body.

The brain will try to resolve this uncomfortable cognitive dissonance in a myriad of ways. Oftentimes choice is required to reduce the internal conflict being experienced, and often the choice is irrational or confabulated. Response to internal contradictions on many levels drive most human behavior and render human behavior surprisingly predictable and irrational...Humans are hardwired to remove dissonance...(from Wikipedia)

Cognitive dissonance an unpleasant psychological state resulting from inconsistency between two or more elements in a cognitive system. It presumed to involve a state of heightened arousal and to have characteristics similar to physiological drives (e.g., hunger). Thus, cognitive dissonance creates a motivational drive in an individual to reduce the dissonance... (APA Dictionary: 2007).

Thus, to the degree that certain neuro-cognitive mechanisms involved in producing cognitive dissonance interplay with certain genes that drive this particular motivational process, the entity of “self” may be a fundamental or “base” dimension of the human mind. This dimension necessarily relies on particular mental processes such as confabulation that (under conditions described by Zahavi, for example, can function in memory formation related to the developing self-narrative without “dissonance”) may become op-opted to reduce internal, physiological tension between two (or more) inconsistent patterns of thought and feeling that rattle one’s current understanding of who one is.

Cognitive Consonance

Part of Cognitive Dissonance theory is its opposite referred to as *cognitive consonance*, which involves “...a situation in which cognitive elements are consistent with one another, that is, one cognitive element follows from or is implied by the other” (APA: 2007: 188). Thus, as an internal feeling of dissonance presumably includes physiological changes

in the body associated with anxiety, i.e. increased heart rate, breathing, etc., as well as being linked to a motivational drive to reduce this psychological state of inconsistency, an internal feeling of consonance may be associated with emergent inner harmony and calm, i.e. decreased heart rate, breathing, etc., that is fuelled by a motivation or desire to achieve understanding (which may include, at times, an integration of elements that may have been previously inconsistent). These latter dynamics, more than the former, seem akin to the equilibration process described by Piaget, in that disequilibrium (or an anxious feeling of not understanding) is not only reduced, but also replaced by equilibrium (a calm or satisfied feeling of understanding). At its core, Piaget's theory characterizes equilibration as the basic emotional or motivational component of the cognitive system, that necessarily facilitates the gradual development of increasingly sophisticated and complex mental processes and mental structures; this leads first to the *internalization of thought*, followed by the achievement of *operational dynamics* in thought, and epitomized by the mind's ability to *think abstractly*.

This cognitive distinction of thought from emotion in the form of motivation, is theoretically useful here, in an attempt to characterize the role of consonance in forming new, personal understandings of self. Indeed, this distinction may be important as it relates to both the "desire to maintain" as well as the "desire to expand" self-understandings. In his book *The Created Self* (2000), psychologist Robert Weber describes the self as having the capacity to both expand and contract, and describes this dualistic mechanism as "the internalization and broad elaboration of natural tendencies to approach and avoid (2000:152). Pavlik-Malone explains, "By the *expansive self*, he means the 'stretching' of one's conscious (and, presumably, unconscious) understanding of whom one is. By the *contractive self*, he means, among other things, the *simplification* of this understanding. In this sense, the self 'stifles' or 'restricts' itself from change and growth" (2011: xx). Weber also uses the term "affliction" to characterize the contractive self. He states,

The contractive self is manifested most clearly under two principal conditions, affliction and simplification. In affliction, we suffer illness, pain, stress, or adversity that tends to cut back our normal voluntary responses for engaging in the world. In each case the question is, How do we make inner contractions to deal with the outer impositions? In simplification, we feel the need to cut through the complexity of an unsatisfying and stressful way of life, and we do so voluntarily and intentionally (2000: 148).

Thus, while the former term “affliction” seems oftentimes linked with feeling dissonance, since it implies an immediate emotional need or urgency to maintain a current self-concept that is at risk of coming apart, the terms “simplification” and “restriction” imply a consciously motivated attempt to maintain the “inner world order”. In the latter circumstance, one is currently satisfied with one’s sense of “wholeness”, one’s sense of self; thus, the inner harmony of consonance rather than inner discord of dissonance is experienced.

Consonance relates not only to simplification, but also to expansion. Indeed, the expanded mind necessarily feels at ease with its new “inner order” or new understanding of self, that has grown in terms of the number of added or strengthened and/or removed or weakened elements, as well as in terms of possible changes in the nature of the configurations of such elements. The idea that semantic opposite elements can become integrated into one overall physical configuration is not new. Noted philosopher and psychologist Alexander Spirkin, in his book *Dialectical Materialism* (1983), states:

The scientific approach to an object of research involves skill in perceiving a dynamic essence, a combination in one and the same object of mutually incompatible elements, which negate each other and yet at the same time belong to each other (1983: 143).

The ultimate cause of the development of any concrete system interaction ... is possible between objects or elements of objects that are not identical to one another but different. Identity and difference have their degrees. Difference, for example, can be nonessential or essential. The extreme case of difference is an opposite—one of the mutually presupposed sides of a contradiction (1983: 144-145).

In the whole world there is no developing object in which one cannot find opposite sides, elements or tendencies: stability and change, old and new, and so on. The dialectical principle of contradiction reflects a dualistic relationship within the whole: the unity of opposites and their struggle. Opposites may come into conflict only to the extent that they form a whole in which one element is as necessary as the other. The necessity of opposing elements is what constitutes the life of the whole (1983: 145).

Thus, to the extent that the complex action of developing an object involves the simultaneous manipulation and application of mental processes and mental structures, the idea of being more or less cognitively whole is plausible as well. In fact, some developmental theorists and writers who study adult cognition have characterized it as potentially

dialectical (Arlin, 1984, 1989) and readily able to have “mixed emotions”. Both characteristics include nuanced thought-feeling complexes in which opposing patterns, such as happiness and sadness, comprise the psychological experience on conscious and unconscious levels. Presumably, these mental connections can become increasingly personal, even idiosyncratic, the more intra-subjectively “deep” they become. Pavlik-Malone has stated, “These involve the forming of mental connections of ‘surface’ ideas that are already accessible to consciousness or close to it, with ideas at increasingly deeper, less accessible levels ...intra-subjectivity involves ‘the personal within the personal’, whereby the number of iterations contributes to the complexity...uniqueness and personal nature of mental representations” (2011: xviii).

In terms of dialectical thought, the result of merging opposites is a new psychological pattern that expands existential understanding or experience of self. As an example, Pavlik-Malone (2011) introduced the metaphor of the “I Clown”, and states that “...the clown image can be characterized as a *foolish social ‘self’ standing in the very crowd that collectively represents the normal, logical, rational ‘self’*” (2011: 58). In terms of creating a timeless yet contextually flexible symbolic representation of this image, Pavlik-Malone asks the following two questions, “How might these two selves, the fool and the non-fool, relate to one another in such a way as to merge into one metaphoric representation of *the clown in the crowd?* And, how might they do so in such a way as to seem, essentially, like two opposing selves agreeing to meet on a whim?” (2011: 58). She goes on to explain how this psychological effect might be achieved “through the rather subtle, interactive energies of constraint and need” (2011: 58) which she explains, in greater detail, in the following way:

Metaphorically speaking, the source domain includes the crowd or *collective self*, the visual gestalt or clown himself or herself, and the psychological distance that divides the non fool and fool. The target domain includes the duality of sense/nonsense that exists as a “whole” of human nature, as well as the human *need* to express this duality of nature in a *constrained* way. This latter domain, is expressed using particular instances of creative imagery (2011:58).

Pavlik-Malone characterizes the initial creation of this metaphor, as well as continuous personal experience of this metaphor by the group, in the following ways.

...the self is collective, in that, presumably, many minds have come together over the course of time to produce a certain highly symbolic

image of the clown. Here, expansion and contraction processes seem to work together in such a way as to successfully hone in on the qualities or characteristics of the overall image desired, both consciously and unconsciously, by the group. This may be the result of many individual minds coming together, so to speak, at all levels of consciousness, to provide certain “embodied parameters” for both “stretching” and “constricting” the image. The result is a timeless image that is simultaneously flexible and curable (2011: XXV).

...its essence has been created collectively over time from mental “scraps” that contain form, feeling, and colour. Thus, in the act of perceiving various aspects of the finished image such as a tear, a sigh, an expression of loneliness, deep subconscious feelings of all viewers...are stirred (2011:60).

Indeed, what adult viewers often feel are “nuanced emotions”. In her book, *The Secret Life of the Grown-Up Brain* (2010), author Barbara Strauch writes,

As we get older, we also have more mixed emotions, a trait that works in our favour. A study by Susan Turk Charles found that when viewing a scene of clear injustice—a film clip ... younger people react only with anger, but older people are both angry *and* sad.

This more complex, nuanced response to the world slows us down, restricting impulse acts...another case in which a middle-aged brain may function better simply because of how it’s set up. “If you have one emotion it is easier to act,” Charles explained. “And if you’re on the savannah and a lion is chasing you, that quick action may help you out there. But in our complex world, it might be good to go slower, to think twice” (2010: 43-44).

Also, it may be that this greater tendency in middle age to integrate emotional experience, reflects a human need not only to adapt, continuously, to one’s outer world of people, places, and things, but also to develop one’s “inner world” of thoughts and feelings, which necessarily coincides with, and synergistically connects with, the outer world. In her book, Strauch includes three dimensions of this “inner experience”, which include the *cognitive*, the *reflective*, and the *affective*. The cognitive dimension includes, among other processes, the ability to generate understandings which incorporate “shades of grey”, so to speak, rather than patterns of “black and white”. Thus, to the extent that different categorical dichotomies, such as *black/white ... love/hate ... young/old* have diametrically opposed “sides” of thought and emotion, each “side” of

each pairing come become psychologically “mixed” or intertwined with the other in various ways, symbolically merging together into a myriad of “shades of grey”. This cognitive merging process can result in a modification of one’s “inner world”, that possibly allows for greater personal understanding and personal control, and that necessarily integrates certain “key” elements of one’s “outer world” relating to people, places, and/or objects.

To follow, the author re-introduces three categories of self and object from her previous book *Dolls & Clowns & Things* (2011). Each of these categories corresponds to one of three essays which comprise the current study, and which represents a profound move into subjective experience in the form of “cognitive wholeness” using “the object” to promote self-understanding and discovery. More specifically, each category is described in terms of how cognitive consonance relates to the presence of the “doll” object uniquely characterized. In each case, certain cognitive processes are used that stimulate the formation of personal understandings which contain integrated patterns of “youngness” and “oldness” symbolized by “the doll”. Broadly speaking, these integrated thought-emotion complexes include various ideas and elements of *childhood*, *youth*, and *beauty* combined with those of *adulthood*, *maturity*, and *aging*. Integrating these two dimensions of experience necessarily includes both conscious and unconscious mental processes and mental structures, along with a deep-seated, even unconscious, need or desire to be more “whole” or psychologically complete than before through co-incidentally representing self as *both* young and old.

Integrating Youngness & Oldness; Three Categories of the (Doll) Object

My physical object

In Chapter 1, cognitive consonance develops as “youngness” and “oldness” become integrated as part of an episodic memory. This memory incorporates one’s current thoughts and feelings generated in adulthood (“oldness”) with memories of one’s then thoughts and feelings in childhood (“youngness”). Here, sentimentality for the “doll” object is explored in two major ways: one, in terms of how one’s *once coveted* doll was used as a plaything in childhood to create imaginative scenarios grounded in everyday life, such as “playing doctor” and “playing house”. Through this imaginative process referred to as *dollification*, the child uses the physical object which is her/his doll, to symbolically represent the self

who is learning how to behave in a “pretend” real world. This play activity may contribute to the development of memories involving personal identity that extends into adulthood; and two in terms of an adult literary character’s intense feelings of sadness and personal defeat that involve her possibly confabulated version of a childhood memory. This cognitive process is also dollification, in this case the losing of her *beloved friend*, her favourite doll, to her mean-spirited schoolteacher. Her internal, subjective experience fuels an emotional turnaround in having a sudden positive vision of her life for the future. These latter cognitive dynamics may involve certain re-alignments of spatial, temporal, and emotional components of both childhood and adulthood memories with one another, a process that this author refers to as *episodic nonlinearity*. Here, this process seems a necessary part of an expanding sense of self achieved by this particular literary character.

My objectified being

In Chapter 2, cognitive consonance takes place when “youngness” and “oldness” become integrated through the objectification of the human female body, a psychological process that this author describes as “dollification in reverse”, and which involves, essentially, treating a living subject as if this subject is a non-living, non-sentient physical object. Here the analogical relationship is between *the human female torso* and *the quality of malleability typical of mouldable clay*. Semantic and semiotic elements of “youngness” symbolized by *the corset* metaphor can become idiosyncratically intertwined with such elements of “oldness” symbolized by *the girdle* metaphor. This can result in an expanded understanding of self in which existential (thought) dynamics interplay with physiological and anatomical ones, to produce a more complex, nuanced metaphor for what it means to be both young and old simultaneously.

My personified idea

In Chapter 3, cognitive consonance develops as “youngness” and “oldness” become integrated through artistic *personification*, as well as through an imaginative process referred to as *vivification*, which is *attributing ... a more diffuse life force to the non-living*, such as a field of flowers seeming to “come alive” in the wind. Here, an art doll is made that contains physical attributes that indicate both youth and aging. This author introduces the concept of *the intuitive self-construct*, in an attempt to

characterize the (cognitive) study of personality, self, and subjectivity. Integral to this complex concept is the neuro-developmental quality of *plasticity*: this is the dual ability of the brain to continuously *change* as well as *retain* the current integrity of its neural circuitry. In this particular context of “wholeness” and the (doll) object, a more complete or expanded understanding of self may form through various dynamic neuro-cognitive energy flows that intertwine certain elements of youth and aging.

Now, to the essays.

CHAPTER ONE

ON YOUNG OF OLD, *VICE VERSA*

This chapter is about cognitive processes that can produce *sentimental* feelings toward a once coveted doll. The nature of this sentiment is explored specifically in terms of a need or desire to mend a *lonely heart*. In this case, feelings include elements of both childhood and adulthood that have become intertwined over time to produce personal understandings which symbolically portray episodic memories involving the (doll) object, in principally phenomenological and existential ways.

A Childhood Memory

(Described by Gloria Farese, the author's mother, in September 2011.)

I remember I was eight years old at the time, and lived in a big apartment building with my parents. I was allowed this day to go outside and play and so I brought my favourite and only dolly. Another little girl my same age and I began talking and playing. Suddenly, she ripped the doll from my hand, and tossed it onto the ground, without any reason. My doll was on the ground with a crack down the middle of her head and forehead. (The body was of material, fortunately, and so were her limbs.) I was totally devastated. I felt only negative and painful feelings. I had lost my best friend doll. It would take time for me to recover.

The episodic memory described above expresses two complementary deep-seated psychological needs, namely the desire to “make” or form, and the desire to “mend” or heal, deep emotion. In the “making”, both the girls had personally and privately “connected” with the same doll, but in different ways and for different purposes. Gloria, the owner of the doll, had presumably found continued joy in possessing her “only” doll which she also deemed her “favourite”. Indeed, it was traumatic for her that her favourite doll cracked her head on the ground. Her emotional reaction can be viewed as intense, even overwhelming, perhaps partly due to the “bestness” quality of a coveted doll that ranks above other no less-

cherished dolls that could rather quickly begin to fill an emptiness or void within a little girl's heart. The other little girl, who was also emotionally connected with the doll, did so rather instantly and abruptly. Here there is no firsthand expression nor even implication that this girl had taken a personal liking (or disliking) to "Gloria's doll" specifically. However, the "talking and playing" that the girls had engaged in beforehand, may have in some way stirred a private need in the other girl to hurt Gloria through the aggressive manipulation of her doll. While Gloria's emotional connection to the doll is personal in a way that speaks symbolically to the melding of social bonds with a developing individual identity and growing ability to love someone or something in particular, the other girl's emotional connection to the doll is personal to the extent that this object was quickly deemed useful by her, perhaps to satisfy a need to instill psychic pain in another human being. Furthermore, like the "making", the "mending" seemed to also be there inside both girls. Gloria, explicitly stated that it would "take time" for her to recover from the devastation and the emotional pain associated with her loss. For the other little girl, the impulsive grabbing and smashing on the ground of another child's doll presumably fulfilled at least a momentary visceral need in her, not necessarily specific to "Gloria's doll" either, but which seemingly occurred as one with and integral to her "made" emotional connection with this particular object for the time being. Thus, the subjective experience of both girls in this encounter speaks to the presence of very private places in consciousness where both *emotional hurting and the need to heal* become relevant to an object. For Gloria at least, that fact that the object is specifically *a doll* to play with, rather easily allows for developmental change and growth through a type of personified process referred to as *dollification*, in which an object is treated as an animate and sentient being (Ellis and Hall, 1896), in this case, as a beloved friend.

Sentimentality of the Object-Subjectivized

Sentimental Adjective: 1. Of or prompted by feelings of tenderness, sadness, or nostalgia... (Google)

Over a century ago, two behavioural researchers, Caswell Ellis and Stanley Hall, conducted a psychological study of dolls using principally the survey method. Their questionnaire was issued to 800 teachers and parents in order to access certain information. They state, "The data desired are juvenile feelings, acts, or thoughts towards any object which represents a baby or a child" (1896: 129). The following are excerpts from

the instructions to teachers and parents on the questionnaire.

1. Describe your dolls and get children to do the same; whether of wax, rags, paper, pasteboard, rubber, china, wood, stone, etc., and give instances where clothes pins, nails, bottles, vegetables, sticks, flowers, keys, button hooks, etc. have been regarded as dolls in any respect or in any degree.

2. Feeding ... Describe imaginary foods, dishes, spoons, and other utensils. Is there any regularly or system of feeding, and any hunger starvation, food preferences, or growth imagined.

3. Medicines, diseases. What diseases, pains, symptoms are imagined. How is sympathy shown... How, and with what conceptions. Imaginary doll doctors, their visit and functions...

4. What constitutes the death of a doll. Funeral services, and burial of dolls. When lost or crushed do children assume a future life for the doll, and does this assuage their grief.

5. Give details of psychic acts and qualities ascribed to the dolls, and show how real, how treated, etc., are their feelings of cold, fatigue, anger, pain, jealousy, love, hate, goodness and badness, modesty, tidiness, etc. Is any individuality or moral or other characteristics consistently and persistently ascribed to dolls.

6. Dolls' names. Are they of real persons, and if so, is their any resemblance real or fancied.

7. Accessories and furnishings, toilet, articles, clothes, beds, tables and dishes...for the doll, etc...

8. Doll families, and the relationship of the members, doll schools, doll parties, balls, entertainment, weddings.

9. Doll discipline, hygiene and regimen. What toilet and what rewards and punishments are usual, and what moral qualities are aimed at.

10. Dolls' sleep. How are they put to sleep...

11. Dress...Can taste in dress, tidiness...or other moral qualities be cultivated. How does the material of which the doll is made and the degree of life-like perfection react on the child. Is there regularly and persistency in the care of the dolls...(1896: 129-130).

The various elements of the above list were described to the teachers and parents as “merely suggestive”, and were expected by the researchers

to be used by them to “write down with accuracy any facts which memory or observation may suggest...” (1986: 130). Each of these characteristics implies the presence of an imaginative process capable of bringing the (doll) object squarely within the realm of another’s private, subjective purview, be her or him a child or an adult. This personal scope not only enables “my doll” to possess “psychic acts and qualities”, for example, *not* principally attributed by others to “me”, but that such displays and characteristics can be individualized to points of psychological subtlety and idiosyncrasy. In his essay titled “Eye of the Doll” (1993), Aesthetics scholar Curtis Carter alludes to this imaginative process in the following description:

There may be important differences between a doll’s function as intimate companion and confidant of the child or adult participating in and reflecting life, and the doll image functioning as an expressive, conceptual symbol in a work of art. For the child or adult who “plays” with dolls, the dolls share a personal, if in part fantasy world that helps to define the personal narrative that constitutes the individual self. As a mirror consisting in part of what is given by the cultural prescriptions for making dolls—dress codes, gender behavior for instance—and in the part of the behaviors enacted through it, the doll reflexively helps the person watch himself or herself live. In turn the doll may contribute to the shaping of a person’s identity by virtue of the experiences that it provides. In art...doll images function...as a metaphor for contemplating the universal concern that human beings have for personal identity (1993: 8).

In his book *Life Like Dolls* (2004), anthropologist A.F. Robertson describes how the act of (Porcelain) doll collecting can not only help symbolically define personal identity, but can be used by the collector to re-write the narrative in one’s emotional favour as well. Thus, sentimental feelings such as sadness and nostalgia, towards the (doll) object can, ironically, be in the form of memories that have been at least partially recoded in the here and now. He writes:

The... advertisements play on an emptiness in the life of the collector that can be resolved by the act of the purchase: “Share the love in her heart. Send for *Grace* today.”... Key words in the emotional vocabulary are “adore” and “adorable”, used in the quarter of the advertisements. Similar words are “delightful,” “charm (ing),” “enchant (ing),” and “captivat (ing).” Overflowing with affection, the dolls may sound better than the real thing to women who have been through emotional deserts with their own teenagers...The dolls represent a second chance, an assurance of *undying* affection (2004: 97).

Scholar Juliette Peers, in her examination of the Fashion doll through modern history, describes the societal construction of the female identity using the doll as the mediating object between gender and culture. “Dolls raise so many issues about the representation and cultural positioning of the feminine in society that the narrative could be extended to censorship and the erotic ... or ethnicity ... or marketing, branding and global corporations—subjects that cut across but are not synonymous with the doll and fashion interchange.” (2004: 8). Here, Peers infers that “the narrative” can be quite varied, which presumably lends itself to the influence of individual perspective and personal exploration beyond cultural demarcations and parameters. In line with these ideas of persistence as well as change in personal narrative, comes the possibility of neurotic tendencies, even perversion. In his book *The Sex Doll* (2010), writer Anthony Ferguson describes the artist Oskar Kokoschka’s use of a life-sized doll constructed specifically for him in the uncanny physical likeness of his deceased wife. In this case, what begins as behaviour fuelled by sentiment towards his “dear departed”, ends as a serendipitous experience of the object as better than the previous “living thing”:

Kokoschka had a torrid love affair with Alma Mahler, the widow of the great composer ... when she ended the relationship after three years, Kokoschka reacted badly and continued to obsess over her for the rest of his life ... so powerful were his residual feelings for Alma that he tried to exorcise his obsession by commissioning the construction of a life-sized doll. He ... commissioned Mahler’s personal dressmaker ... to make the doll for him. He bought the doll clothes and underwear, and brought it out for public engagements ... Jon Stratton notes “He got his servants to spread rumors about the doll, to give public impression that she was a real woman ... Kokoschka held a big party during which, the servant paraded the doll as if at a fashion show”. For Kokoschka the doll was not only a surrogate for Mahler, but she was, to his mind, a considerable improvement on the original... As to whether he has sexual relations with the doll, Kokoschka never told. (2010: 20-21)

In his article “Passion for Possessions: Mine!” (2011), psychologist Bruce Hood explains:

We are the only species that... covets possessions... The most conspicuous examples of the desire are the emotional attachments we forge with sentimental objects that extend far beyond their functional use or market value... Extreme fondness for specific objects increases between the ages of one and three, plateaus between three and four, then drops around age six. Yet many individuals retain these sentimental items into adulthood. An

eminent neuroscientist ... famously travels everywhere with his dilapidated Steiff teddy bear, indicating that attachment is not the preserve of the weak-minded (2011: 58-59).

“Furthermore”, says Hood, “the trauma we experience from the loss of these sentimental possessions has a common physiological basis” (2011: 59). In 2010, he and his colleagues found an anxiety response present among a group of 31 adults using the Galvanic Skin technique, when they were asked to destroy (by cutting up) photographs of their own sentimental objects. However, this response was not found among this group when they destroyed their “valuable” objects, e.g. one’s cell phone, with “no sentimental attachment to them”. And, marketing professor Russell Belk has written about “investing self in objects” which he refers to as “the extended self”.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) provide a ... psychological explanation in suggesting that we invest “psychic energy” in an object which we have directed our efforts, time, and attention. This energy and its products are regarded as a part of self because they have grown and emerged from the self (1988: 144).

Possessions can also symbolically extend the self, as when a uniform or trophy allows us to convince ourselves (and perhaps others) that we would be a different person than we would without them (1988: 145).

Also, where dolls (as well as teddy bears) are often concerned, great efforts are sometimes made to preserve the physical integrity of the object as it becomes increasingly worn. Indeed, the *doll hospital* functions for just this purpose. To date, there are over two hundred of these businesses in the United States alone. One resides in Secaucus, New Jersey, owned by Luis and Ana Casas, originally from Bogota, Columbia. According to Jim Beckerman, staff writer for The Bergen Record, “The front parlor is the ‘waiting room’. It’s overflowing with patients: Raggedy Anns, teddy bears, Cabbage Patch Kids. Pinocchio and his IV tube (he’s on ‘5 percent dextrose’ solution), on a shelf on the far wall...” (2011: F-3). The owners, who also run the hospital, mention how they have become well acquainted with high sentimentality in individual Americans. Beckerman continues, “Most of the toys here have stories. Some are so heartbreaking, it’s all that Dr. Casas and his wife can do to maintain their bedside manner” (2011: F-3).

The (play) doll as facilitator of episodic nonlinearity

Explored from a cognitive perspective, the internal, imaginative act of doll play may fulfill an existential need to develop personal understandings of self. These understandings can resonate *both* from “reflexive” experience in the moment through the use of a doll that functions as an “intimate companion”, as well as from “reflective” experience across time, which Curtis Carter relates to the Art doll. The “in the moment” one includes the doll being immersed in everyday activities that are centred around the physical manipulation of objects and people, such as toys, feeding utensils, furniture, and friends. In addition, this play may include the projecting of personal qualities that one desires one’s doll to have, which leads to the imaginative effect of considering one’s doll a “human-like” friend. These genuine feelings of friendship may be why its perceived collapse is so upsetting, such as when Gloria’s doll broke when it hit the ground. In this real-world situation, another human intervened in the friendship in such a way as to alter, even destroy, its ongoing psychological dynamics. All of these experiences can potentially become related to the development of the “personal narrative”, described earlier by Carter, as “reflexively” watching oneself “live”. This process presumably contributes to the development of personal identity, as the person (often a child) creates thoughts, feelings, and behaviours tied to a particular moment in the everyday life *of* or *with* her or his doll, that he or she goes through. These experiences become newly created long-term memories, in part, to construct a “self-narrative” that may continue to evolve over the lifespan, even into adulthood; this is, basically, the motivation to *reflectively* connect elements of one’s personal narrative constructed in the past, with thoughts, feelings, and memories that comprise one’s current understanding of oneself. Carter attributes the self-narrative as emerging from a “universal concern” that individuals have about personal identity, which can be expressed by the raising of such personal questions as, *Who am I? What is my essence? What is my purpose in life?* Thus, this latter narrative may not only relate to creating a *doll as art* as Carter describes, but may also have relevance for the mind’s ability to grow and transform an ongoing self-narrative. This narrative may contain links that reach directly back to specific memories of one’s childhood “doll play”, and that continue to allow one to *subjectively* identify herself or himself with her or his doll, as an adult.

In cognitive psychology, “personal accounts” come in the form of at least three kinds of memory having definitions which semantically overlap. First, *episodic memory* is “memory for specific, personally

experienced events that happened at a particular time or place. Retrieval from episodic memory involves using cues based on context associated with the original experience (time and place)” (APA, 2007: 337). Second, *autobiographical memory* is “a type of EPISODIC MEMORY comprising vivid personal memories recalling the time and place of events” (APA, 2007: 90). And third, *autonoetic memory* is “the recall of a personal memory and the conscious awareness that one is reliving a moment of the past” (APA, 2007: 92). Presumably, one major way in which episodic and autobiographical memories may differ is in terms of the level of emotional intensity at which the personal account is felt. In addition, these first two memory kinds may differ from autonoetic memories, in that the latter necessarily include being consciously aware that one is in the midst of recounting a personal or very personal experience. In this essay, the term *episodic memory* will be defined as “memory for specific, experienced events, that are personally-to-very-personally felt (in terms of intensity of emotion), and which may or may not contain a degree of conscious awareness in the midst of remembering”.

All three of the separate definitions include three fundamental components, namely a temporal, a spatial, and an emotional one. *Temporal* refers to *when* something took place. *Spatial* refers to *where* something took place. *Emotional* refers to the *personal feelings* experienced when and where something took place. Both the temporal and spatial components of episodic memories are *declarative*, in that one can express in words both “the where” and “the when” of a personal experience. This declarative part is rather dependent on a brain structure referred to as the *hippocampus*, for its neuro-cognitive processing. In contrast, the emotional component of episodic memories depends considerably on the *amygdala* instead. Thus, the declarative and emotional parts of these kinds of memories correspond to, at least somewhat, different neurocognitive energy flows in the brain, that become integrated to produce the conscious experience of any single particular personal memory. Indeed, from the traditional psychoanalytic perspective on personal memory, the declarative and emotional components have been understood to dissociate from, and even inhibit, one another. For instance, according to the *Categorization of Defence Mechanisms* by Vaillant (from Wikipedia), *intellectualization* involves one “...concentrating on the intellectual components of a situation so as to distance oneself from the associated anxiety-producing emotions; separation of emotion from ideas...”; while the converse is present in *repression*, “...seemingly unexplainable naivety, memory lapse or lack of awareness of one’s own situation and condition; the emotion is conscious, but the idea behind it is absent.”