

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

Hybrid Rose One Of The Dolls



One Of The Dolls by Rose Muollo-Gray
An exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree 'Master of Creative Enterprise'
15/04/2024
Massey University.

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where collaborators have been identified and other material is appropriately referenced. 21/04/2024.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks and appreciation to my supervisors and mentors who made this work possible. Catherine, for working with me closely for the last year and a half on my exegesis work. Jon for the words of encouragement, hours and hours put into crafting the perfect business model and teaching me to look at music from an enterprise perspective. Erica, for all your input into the creative work, always inspiring me and showing me so many cool projects and sources of ideas.

Getting to work with you all has been so enjoyable. Thank you for allowing me to let my dreams and messages flourish, and allowing time and space for growth.

I would also like to show love and appreciation for all the creatives who contributed to the musical composition of this project. Sam, Sinny, Hazel, and Hannah, all your songwriting, singing and production abilities helped craft the most perfect pop album. I loved working with all of you individually and at times as a team.

All my trans sisters whom I've met through the years, whom I've had long and powerful conversations, connected and bonded with. So many to list, but you all know who you are and I love you.

Finally, I would like to thank my mum, for the phone calls, money, time, love and compassion. For encouraging me to grow past all my hardships and adversities and keep following my passion, so I could go to University and thrive. I can make a difference in this world and continue to spread love. I love you forever and ever.

INTRODUCTION	4
WHAT IS A DOLL?	5
My Approach to this Exegesis	7
Key Features	7
Motivation and Exegesis Structure	8
CONTEXT REVIEW	10
Born This Way	10
FROOT	11
Highlighting Misrepresentation... but no advocacy?	12
Music and Queer Spaces	14
TRACK BY TRACK BREAKDOWN + CREDITS:	16
1. 'Hourglass' (1:36)	16
2. 'You Make Me Feel Like A Lady' (3:36)	16
3. 'Naked (feat. Hazel Rose)' (3:23)	16
4. 'I Am So Pretty (feat. DEITY)' (3:33)	17
5. 'Angel' (3:55)	17
6. 'Snakeskin Dress' (4:10)	18
7. 'Dream (feat. SiNNY!)' (3:52)	18
8. 'Mama (feat. Hazel Rose)' (2:11)	18
9. 'Diamond Encrusted' (0:46)	19
10. 'Bitch' (2:30)	19
METHODOLOGY	20
THE SCRAPPED TRACKS AND THEIR BACKGROUND:	21
Maybe... I Am The Drama:	21
MUTATION (stylised in all caps):	21
The rest of the scrapped songs - are not attached to Project	22
REFLECTION	26
CONCLUSION	30
REFERENCE LIST	31

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1: Logo and visual reference for <i>One Of The Dolls</i> . March, 2023. Author's collection.	0
Image 2: Official album artwork for <i>One Of The Dolls</i> . February, 2024. Author's collection.	0
Image 3: Screenshot from @femqueencaptain's Twitter/X, 2023.	7
Image 4: Screenshot from @zayaperysian's Tiktok, 2023.	7
Image 5: Screenshot from @areyoukunt's Tiktok, 2023.	7
Image 6: Screenshot from Andromeda Alighieri's Facebook, 2023. March, 2024.	7
Image 7: Screenshot from a laptop on the Notes app. May 2023. Author's collection.	21
Image 8: Photo taken at Hobsonville flat. July, 2023. Author's collection.	22
Image 9: Photo taken at Glen Innes flat. January, 2023. Author's collection. January, 2023.	22
Image 10: Photo taken at Parachute Studios. April, 2023. Author's collection. April, 2023.	22
Image 11: Front Cover of <i>One of The Dolls</i> coffee table book. Author's collection. 2024.	27
Image 12: Art of Transformation: Day To Day Makeup chapter from <i>One of The Dolls</i> coffee table book. Author's collection. 2024.	27
Image 13: Images from the Art of Transformation: Photoshoots chapter of <i>One of The Dolls</i> coffee table book. Author's collection. 2024.	28
Image 14: Album artwork on the last page of <i>One of The Dolls</i> coffee table book. Author's collection. 2024.	28
Image 15: Front Cover of sold-out <i>Mutation</i> vinyl. Author's collection. 2023.	28
Image 16: Side C of sold-out <i>Mutation</i> vinyl. Author's collection. 2023.	28
Image 17: Personal screenshot from Instagram DMs, 2023. August, 2023. (Page 27).	30

INTRODUCTION

One Of The Dolls is a musical project inspired by the concept of being femme-identifying. Conceptually, it is deeply rooted in the LGBTQIA+ community culturally, sociopolitically and historically. The title came from the term 'Doll', reclaimed by black queer culture as a term to describe a woman of 'trans experience' but does not identify as a transwoman.

My project aimed to highlight the trans experience from a point of view that is not frequently acknowledged in an academic or musical perspective and amplify stories of being in the LGBTQIA+ community.

One Of The Dolls was created with the intent of writing, producing, recording, mixing and mastering a pop album for the commercial music market. Each song covers a different topic or state of mind or at least provides some information into the mind of someone who is of the trans experience. With creative works being my form of self-expression, I was able to document and present a creative project that showcases in real time the reality of what it truly means to transition.

The body of creative works produced includes:

- A musical recording/body of work, consisting of 10 tracks
- Accompanying Artwork (single covers, album cover)
- A coffee table book (a journal-style depiction of the creative process)

This project also includes collaborations created with other musicians, either LGBTQIA+ or femme-identifying artists, representing what this project means to me. Having different forms of musical and artistic expression incorporated throughout the creative process creates an immersive experience, and assures the listener that this project was crafted from the minds of an entire team of people who are a part of/or affiliated with the doll community.

The featured collaborators on the final product of this project are

- Samuel "LOZ" Lozano, an LGBTQIA+ producer based in Canada
- Hannah Avison (AKA Deity), a female singer/songwriter based in LA
- Hazel Rose, a female songwriter/rapper also based in LA
- SiNNY!, a doll who is a producer/singer based in Virginia Beach

Key to this project is the idea that every person of trans experience does things differently. Through my choice of collaborators and the tracks, I want to emphasise the diversity and gender and gendered experiences, and how these can be expressed through creative forms.

WHAT IS A DOLL?

doll [slang] (noun): a beautiful trans woman.

About the project, the term Doll is often used by people of the trans community on social media to contextualise the experience in a hyperfeminine context. The usage of this term, which applies most to this project comes from a black queer culture in the ballroom scene - whereby a significant amount of queer terminology comes from and yet is often under-represented in queer culture historically. Quinn J. Troia puts it best in their thesis "Cyborgs, Dolls and Passing Narratives: Trans-femininity in Popular Music" (2023);

"The idea of "realness" or "passing" in this context comes from the linguistic practices of predominantly black queer subcultures (Valentine, 2007) and has historically been the goal of transgender embodiment for trans-feminine people in America. This has meant being seen as a "real" woman and achieving "stealth" (Valentine, 2007) where a person is not socially known to be or read as transgender and is instead assumed to be cisgender in most situations." (Quinn J. Troia, 2023)

With *One Of The Dolls* being a creative project based around Barbie-inspired visuals, a creative goal was to produce and write the music based on what a Barbie pop album could sound like. Musical and visual inspiration for the project would look like 'Barbie: The Princess & the Popstar' (2012).

Barbie dolls were a huge part of my childhood, and channelling my inner-hyper-femininity. Breanne R. Forrest and Suzanne L. Osman define Hyperfemininity in their thesis "Hyperfemininity and body-related constructs" as "an exaggerated adherence to the stereotypic feminine gender role". A Barbie to me is the embodiment of hyper-femininity with its portrayal of the Westernised concept of female gender roles. (c.f Butler 1991)

Barbie dolls are often always done up in hair, makeup, costumes and accessories. There is a Doll-like behaviour to going to salons and getting your hair, nails, brows and cosmetic procedures done. The same energy as dressing up, wearing makeup, and fashion being used as a statement to style and aesthetic, the same way kids play with the dolls as children.

More broadly, Doll as a slang term has historically had gender connotations:

"As early as the 15th century, the diminutive Doll had developed an often derogatory slang usage, meaning "a mistress" or "promiscuous woman". It is possible that Shakespeare took inspiration from this usage in naming his character Dorothy "Doll" Tearsheet, a foul-mouthed prostitute in his play Henry IV, Part 2 (1600)." (Antidote, 2020)

Furthermore, <https://greensdictofslang.com/> has several recorded timelines of when the slang started being used differently. The first definition was to describe someone as a prostitute, in 1560. In 1624, Robert Davenport first used of Doll to describe a woman. The most commonly used term, which still stands up in 2024 - Doll being a term that describes "a conventionally attractive young woman; Occas. used of (homosexual) young men." (Jonathon Green, 2024)

The images below show how the term 'Doll' is used on social media within the community.

Omg **Dolls** Night will be speaking at a panel with Michigan's Attorney General to help pass a bill that'll make it easier for **trans** ppl with minor legal offenses to get their name changed. Im in my political era BAD!

Image 1: Screenshot from @femqueencaptain's Twitter/X, (femqueencaptain, 2023).

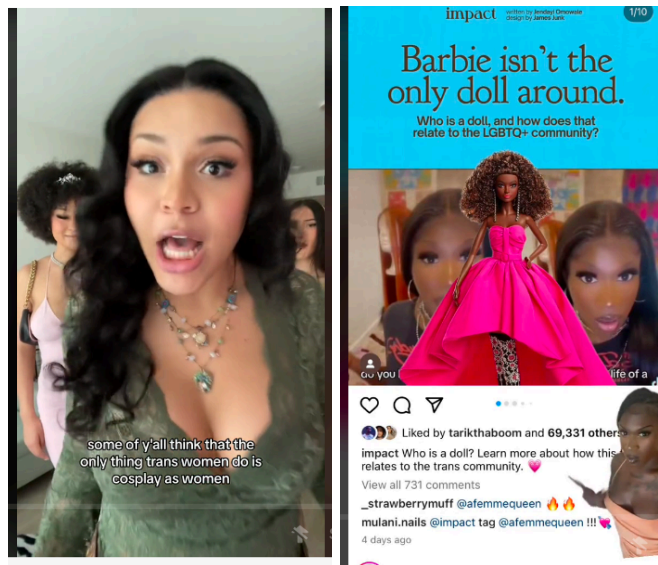


Image 2: (Left) Screenshot from @zayaperysian's Tiktok, (zayaperysian, 2023). Image 3: (Right) Screenshot from @areyoukunt's Tiktok, (areyoukunt, 2023).

Oh hell ya the trans mascs arrived



Image 4: Screenshot from Andromeda Alighieri's Facebook, (Andromeda Alighieri, 2022).

My Approach to this Exegesis

The writing in this exegesis takes an auto-theoretical approach (c.f. Fournier, 2021) that seeks to dismantle barriers and ‘centres and legitimizes individual, bodily experiences as a means of processing knowledge production’ (McNamara, 2021). Autotheory, which has a long legacy in queer theory and feminist writing (Stacey, 2023; Ioanes, 2022) can allow for the blending of personal narrative, experience, and embodiment with theory.

As such, while this exegesis explores academic and popular texts, it is largely driven by unpublished experiences, often spoken about within the community. However, it needs to be more acknowledged online or in inaccessible media. This work is informed by and through community conversation, and the voices within the community - both my own and peers that I have had lengthy discussions with over the years with mutual trauma and stories.

Key Features

3 key features have driven this project and its research:

1. Personal experience — Being in the public eye as a musician, local artist and general representation of the trans community, I have seen a lot of discrimination and uncomfortable experiences with other people due to their ignorance or misunderstandings.

I am a survivor of a cis straight man's sexual curiosities or harassment. It does not get better with time, because the more passable you become, the more attention is on you from men who do not know your body or identity.

2. Lack of awareness — you can find the general idea of what it means to be transexual, transgender or on the trans experience of some kind, but there is not enough conversation on what the experience can be or feel like. There is still a big gap between what it is, what it means and why we need to be more aware.

When I came out, I did not know about hormones or surgery, just that you could identify as a gender that you were not born as. This is probably still the case in some parts of the world, as it is still a topic that is not taught in enough schools, and there are not enough influential celebrities or public figures coming out to raise more awareness.

3. Misrepresentation — The Mayo Clinic explains misrepresentation perfectly with the quote “Transgender man and transgender woman. Terms used to describe a transgender individual's gender identity or expression within the gender binary.

Not all transgender and gender-diverse people use these terms to describe themselves.” I discovered the term “woman of trans experience” from being a fan of a YouTuber “Victoria Rose”¹, who makes

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/@thevivirose>

transitioning-related content on social media, specifically YouTube. Being a “woman of trans experience” means that you identify as a woman first and foremost, but when you complete your transitioning journey (in any subjective context), you no longer identify as someone who is transitioning and can live your life 100% as your gender identity.

These 2 stereotypes come from an article by Vox.com, and in my experience have been the most commonly used and the ones I address in this project:

- Sexual orientation is linked to gender identity (that being trans makes us a whole different sexuality and sexual preference category.)
- Transgender people make up a third gender (people think being trans is a whole new gender identity and that it is not just the experience/journey of transitioning from one gender to another.)

My hope for this project is that it can respond to the gap of representation that allows people to understand the layers and complexities that go into this experience. Identifying as a woman is something I take very seriously, and I do not like to be seen as the “trans girl” or be the “trans sister” or “trans partner”.

Ultimately, I want this project to directly influence the audience to be aware of what the trans experience means. It is often misguided, silenced or misunderstood, due to the lack of awareness of reliable sources projecting information into mass media platforms. I also feel driven to make a change in a way where we can shed more light on the subjects or ideas that are less spoken about in the general public, but more common within the community.

Motivation and Exegesis Structure

My ultimate motivation is to break down anything anyone has to say about their idea of the trans experience and create a clean slate on the audience to base their ideas and perceptions. I am a woman and deserve to be seen in such a light. I do not want to be another victim of rejection or being swept under the rug culturally due to where society sits with the trans community. I can hold myself well in society, and in the industries I work in, but the media is a completely different ballpark and can influence people and ruin their entire way of thinking. If there is something I want to change about the current sociopolitical climate of the general public treatment towards the LGBTQIA+ community, is to normalise the concept of physical/sex ambiguity.

One Of The Dolls as a project was created to contribute to the conversation that is about to start, so we can create more spaces for those in the community to make their stories highlighted and normalised. More trans experiences being highlighted and broadcasted also means more opportunities to connect with others, and people earlier on in their journeys will have more experienced people to idolise.

This exegesis contextualises and discusses my creative work, *One Of The Dolls*. It takes as its central theme how my work seeks to respond to the misrepresentation of people of the trans experience, and how music can offer transformative spaces. Following this, the context review provides case studies of

related influential creative works, focuses specifically on trans representation in contemporary media, and explores the role that music plays more generally in fostering and supporting queer spaces and experiences. Following this introduction, I provide a track-by-track overview, outlining the significance of each track and why it's important to the project. The methodology then discusses the making of my musical work and the accompanying artwork, focusing on my process and collaborators. In the results and discussion, I reflect on the project outcomes and my main learnings from this process and revisit the aims of this master research in my conclusion.

CONTEXT REVIEW

In this context review, I begin with two case studies on musical works that have been influential conceptually as well as musically. From here I focus on the academic texts that contextualise a lack of representation as well as understanding the importance of music and queer spaces. Having queer spaces is so important, no matter how progressive society or the media becomes. They allow us opportunities to be free in our expression and feel safe. It also allows the opportunity for queer allies to feel included in queer expression and identity as well, which is especially important in New Zealand.

Given the importance of these spaces, I begin this context review with a brief anecdote. The trans community is quite tight all around the world, which in my experience generally becomes an online community. I remember a few years ago, meeting another doll at a music gig where a drag artist performed who was a mutual friend of ours. While we were talking, she said "(mutual friend) tells me that you're *One Of The Dolls*", and it took me a second to realise that she was as well and we had an instant friendship that also felt like a sisterhood.

Months later, I see her again for the first time since that night and I ask her why I never see her around. She tells me that she and her other doll friends in Welly often feel unsafe being out and around in public for too long in one block of time, so they all meet at each other's houses or just chat online since there are not enough safe spaces around.

An anecdote like this is another example of why trans awareness and misrepresentation are so important to advocate for, as the lack of support and lack of genuine knowledge results in a lack of safety for an entire community of people.

As such, this context review focuses specifically on trans representation in contemporary media and further explores the role that music plays more generally in fostering and supporting queer spaces and experiences. I offer two case studies of albums that have influenced my musical practice.

Born This Way

'Born This Way' by Lady Gaga is an electro-rock/dance-pop record that was released in 2011, and has been enormously influential for queer people all over the world, which serves as an example of a project that sits in the politics of specific themes and communities. It is not just about LGBTQIA+ appreciation; more themes of prejudice and identity unravelled as more singles like *'Judas'* and *'Hair'* emerged before the album's release.

The album, as a whole, touches on so many ideas and queer philosophies. One significant song beyond the singles is *'Americano'*, a song about a forbidden love between lesbians who want legal marriage rights or loopholes. *'Bad Kids'* is about rebelling against the norm. It is usual for anyone who feels like an outsider to have an "emo phase."

“Born This Way” came at a time when discussions about gay teen suicide were reaching all-time highs, and shows like Glee were trying to normalise queer love onscreen. Gay identity was still on the fringes of culture, and that very much affected how gay teens lived their lives. “ (Rosa 21)

Track 10 on Born This Way is an anthem for rebellious children called “Bad Kids”. The song is about embracing your queer identity and standing up towards prejudice. Some queer people must struggle just to be seen. People close to us frequently believe that our rebellious actions result from treatment. We participate in it because we feel like outsiders. Because of this, I was a bad kid growing up and rebelled against my family and society since I did not feel like they embraced me for who I was.

I picked these lyrics to highlight because out of all the songs on the album, Bad Kid expresses so much direct self-advocacy, and why it is okay to be different or not be what society expects you to be.

“We don’t care what people say, We know the truth. Enough is enough with this horse shit. I am not a freak I was born with my free gun. Don’t tell me I’m less than my freedom ... Don’t be insecure If your heart is pure.” - Lyrics from Bad Kid

There are core themes of unapologetic self-expression and themes of queer-identity individualism. Gaga talks about being half-woman, half motorcycle as a reference to being a symbol of strength, whilst visually, I interpret this as hyper-realistic femme energy. The core of *One Of The Dolls* is about queer-identity and unapologetic self-expression. I take much of my passionate writing style and hyper-realistic femme energy from Born This Way. An example of this would be Snakeskin Dress, lyrically establishing a desire for freedom and self-assurance directly.

The original article where Gaga discusses the album cover and its symbolism has since been taken down, but the original quote was posted on Reddit around the time:

"The cover with me half-female, half-motorcycle is meant to be or symbolic of the fact that I'm endlessly always changing in so transformative, many ways." (NY Times 11)

FROOT

Another case study about self-identity is ‘FROOT’ (2015) by Marina (Aka Marina and The Diamonds) is an album about self-discovery and learning to love oneself, so naturally, this became a comfort album for me. It is typical for queer people who come out early to "grow up" fast. Contributing factors to growing up at a younger age than expected involve learning about what it means to be queer, learning to fight against prejudice, and protecting oneself from any trauma or struggles society might put on the queer individual. Growing up in Blenheim in a conservative and sheltered family, most of my teenage years involved self-isolation and a lack of supportive community.

The album also talks about finding strength in a feminine way with songs like ‘Can’t Pin Me Down’, which is a song that defends the idea of feminising while still living by traditional rules. You can still believe in gender equality, especially for women but still want to live traditional woman gender roles. I

feel strongly about this as a woman of trans experience. For me, it is about living my life as a woman, which does have undertones of female gender roles, but I still support the human rights of a woman.

Piggybacking off these feminine themes, taking ownership of them is represented in 'Gold' a song about understanding your worth, a message I speak highly to and of. You're not selling out or compromising morals for what others would expect of one's self and living for yourself. Marina speaks from a standpoint of being in the music industry, and certain industry tropes. I can take pieces of that and apply them to both my own music and gender identity.

The album cover is also quite significant for me because it is a portrait of Marina with rainbow lighting glowing around her. I do not imagine there was intentional pride symbolism, at least in a queer way, but it feels like affirmations at the time of this release. 'FROOT' centres itself around conveying self-discovery and identity, especially on the lyrical and visual aesthetics and referencing her growth to a fruit plant developing over time. I am attracted to on-the-nose commentary and if the visual references connect with the messages. I am a doll. I comment on being a doll and produce visual symbolism that connects the audience with the message as Marina does.

In an interview with Spin, Marina details why she took this approach with her album and the feeling behind it. This interview and quote specifically resonate with me as I appreciate the desire to rediscover and understand myself deeper through the creative process.

"I don't know... I think I just wasn't very happy as myself. I just didn't feel good enough, and I never felt like I was progressing in the way that I wanted to ... So that's very connected to that, but "I was born to walk alone," that was more about doing things on my own and being independent and creatively so as well. It's about growing up and looking after yourself. It sounds really basic, but it is. If you don't like yourself, you're not going to look after yourself." (Brennan Carley, 2015)

Highlighting Misrepresentation... but no advocacy?

Having briefly explored the politics of misrepresentation in media, in this section, I focus on research that explores the misrepresentation of trans experiences in media. However, I also note here the limitations of academic work in this area, which I believe is still a field that can do more to engage with lived experiences. Specifically, I argue here that academic and popular material, such as that discussed in the below examples can significantly influence perceptions of the trans community. These texts don't support an auto-theoretical approach, rather they may highlight the issue of trans misrepresentation without actively advocating for the lives and safety of the trans community.

Kim Cannerstad's text - *Popular and Contextual Trans Representation (Kim Cannerstad, 2023)* covers trans representation in the context of a film or a TV show. It fails to address any of the deeper issues, other than the basic struggles that you can find in any TV show or movie about understanding the trans community. A TV show that digs deep into the same discussions I am addressing in my creative works would be Pose, an HBO original about ballroom culture and the queer community. A common narrative

of trans people in fiction media is generally to show that they exist. The decision on whether or not the character should be accepted, alienated or blended in with the rest of society, is left up to the scriptwriter, which will ultimately influence how the audience should perceive them too. Their characteristics are also left up to how the writer characterises them, whether or not they're passing, sexual objects or confusing gender-benders.

“Core findings in this thesis involve that neoliberal media integrates a preoccupation with predominantly white, “passing,” and indifferent trans women who firmly reject critical self-reflection. That is, a media fixation with trans women who essentially “blend in” among cisgender people as if these women allegedly represent the “exemplary” trans people distinguished from “undesirables.” (Kim Cannerstad, 2023)

Here, the notion of ‘passing’ is again explored in Isabel Villegas Simón - ‘If you don’t “pass” as cis, you don’t exist’. The trans audience’s reproofs of ‘Cis Gaze’ and transnormativity in TV series (2023). The research in this text aims to find out how trans audiences relate to their portrayal in TV series and understand how these depictions affect their everyday lives. This text nonetheless covers much of the same ground in contemporary media, as it addresses discourses already circulating through communities where a person of trans experience is included insofar as they are positioned as a diversity-hire-type character. Academic research has nonetheless made clear to a wider audience the influence.

“The representation of trans characters is mainly based on a transnormative pattern, understood as a social construct that decides which trans people are acceptable and which are not, and therefore who should be excluded from the logic of the capitalist, heteronormative system (Johnson, 2016; Mocarski et al., 2013). These media imaginaries impact both society’s conception of how trans people should be and behave, and also the trans community’s own identity, self-image and self-esteem.” (Isabel Villegas-Simón, 2023)

Research has nonetheless made clear for a wider audience the influence of mass media public perceptions of the trans experience. For example, the text ‘The Rise of Transgender and Gender Diverse Representation in the Media: Impacts on the Population (2019), by Richard Mocarski Et. Al researches the TDG (The transgender and gender diverse community) representation displayed in mass media. The main themes that emerged were TGD awareness TGD identity discovery and role modeling. There is a disconnect between transnormativity in the media and transnormativity in reality.

I like the way this thesis perfectly describes the impact that mass media has on its ability to influence the general public's perception of different minority groups. Trans people being in the media is becoming more frequent, and the media that represents the community at its best and most knowledgeable isn't mainstream enough. As they note:

“Media is one discourse that reflects and creates reality, working within a complex tapestry of discourses to create and recreate cultural understandings. The larger purpose of our community-based research is to pave a pathway to better conditions for TGD persons, with a

specific aim of reducing health disparities. Therefore, our analysis of the impacts of media on the TGD population is situated within a health paradigm.” (Richard MocarSKI Et.Al, 2019

Music and Queer Spaces

Having queer spaces like clubs/venues/bars is a good way to connect with people in the LGBTQIA+ community who are also either musicians or working in the industry. The relationship between queer people and pop culture is infinite, as musicians (especially mainstream) can use their platform to reference queer culture (either pandering or an ode), and queer people can take inspiration from the music that connects them best with their queer identity

In an article written by Allison Palum at blog.songtrust.com (2021), they acknowledge the LGBTQIA+ community’s influence on the music industry through music, dating back to the late 19th and early 20th century with blues music:

“Many people may know about the blues being inherently linked to the Black experience, but it is also a genre that held space for many queer people, specifically queer women ... As the 20th Century progressed, the jazz and blues communities continued to provide space for some artists to express queerness. This can be seen with artists, composers, and producers like Billy Strayhorn, Francis Faye, Janis Joplin, and Jackie Shane.” (Allison Palum, 2021)

In a thesis written by Derrick Lacasse (2019) about the importance of exploring queer spaces, they acknowledge the lack of research gone into the misunderstandings around LGBTQIA+ and what these safe spaces mean to the community. This is important for my exegesis, as my biggest motivation is to create more space in the academic realms regarding the lack of research around the LGBTQIA+ community - specifically people of trans experience, and musicians who are of the trans experience. As Lacasse states:

“Socially, there is a stigma identifying with the LGBTQ+ community, which may lead to a feeling of dehumanization for these individuals There has been little research exploring the connections between music, art and being queer.” (Derrick Lacasse, 2019)

In the book *Playing It Queer* (2012), Jodie Taylor discusses the relationship between popular music, queer self-fashioning and creating sub-cultural spaces for people of the queer community. This book presents a critical evaluation of written texts about queer identity, political debate, popular music and sexuality, and acknowledges creative practices, including camp, drag, genderfuck, queercore, feminist music and club cultures. One of the few published books that argues community conversation, personal experiences and academic resources in a creative output.

It’s also worth noting, creating queer spaces and opportunities for people of queer identities and sexualities to feel safe, social and engage in escapism through music, does not touch much on its impact or mass influences in society. Queer people should have these spaces, but we should not be driven to only have exclusive spaces. We should be able to blend into society and live our truths peacefully and openly.

In a thesis by Mackley-Crump and Zemke, they break down a good example of a safe queer space in New Zealand an Auckland-based arts collective called FAFSWAG, which is a group comprised of young queer Pasifika artists and dancers. FAFSWAG has taken up activism and aesthetics based on US ball culture to create its underground vogue scene, a scene that reflects both global pop culture as well as Indigenous paradigms of gender and sexuality. The movement has been a place for community and collaboration for those traumatized and rejected by mainstream society.

“As Pacific queer people, I feel like we don’t always have the opportunity to express ourselves in life in general. When we do get the opportunities that FAFSWAG gives it’s important, because where else can we tell our stories? We need to be the authors of our own stories. (Olds 2015)”

The need for queer spaces in creative contexts is also connected to the idea of a Ballroom being a safe space for queer musicians and artists dating back to the 80s when it first came up in Chicago and New York. For example, the HBO original tv show “Pose” showcases ballroom and trans/queer cultural history in a semi-fictional way (real stories portrayed through fictional characters):

“Central to ballroom culture, and also a striking parallel to the tour itself, are ballroom “houses” — groups of individuals who form chosen families within the community. Due to the rejection and lack of acceptance experienced outside the ballroom scene, these houses offered a sense of kinship, support, and understanding. Members of the houses often shared surnames, creating a familial bond that transcended biological ties...The landscape of ballroom culture underwent a significant transformation only following the historic riots at Stonewall in 1969. The uprising, led by Black and Latinx queer individuals, marked a turning point in the LGBTQ+ rights movement and ignited a push for equality, in turn transforming the ballroom scene into something more diverse and more accurate in its reflection of the queer community. - <https://harvardpolitics.com/queer-renaissance-beyonce/> (Vikram Kolli, 2023).”

As this context review has explored, safe queer spaces are a crucial environment for queer folk in creative contexts and are vital to dismantling representation. I explore this more in the next chapter. With this project following practise-based methods, I want to take my knowledge and understanding of the project purpose and narrative, expand on it with further knowledge, and apply it to what I’ve already produced for this project. It was about creating a base of demos and lyrical ideas. Once I knew what direction to go in, then the research came in and inspired my future ideas, which helped elevate the project lyrically, conceptually and academically.

TRACK BY TRACK BREAKDOWN + CREDITS:

Below is a track-by-track of the recorded work. *One Of The Dolls* is a 10-track album recorded between 2022-2023, located in multiple home studios and studios as shown in Images 6-8. Most of the tracks I have recorded, produced, mixed and mastered in Fruity Loops, whereas the productions by Sam were made in Logic Pro. Our tracks were shared and collaborated on through Zoom call sessions, text messages and sharing files through WeTransfer. *One Of The Dolls* was curated based on the dates of when the songs were recorded. As the trans experience at times can be complex, it feels better to make each track stand on its own as a story, as opposed to a storytelling project.

1. 'Hourglass' (1:36)

Production/Programming: Samuel Lozano

Mixing/Mastering: Samuel Lozano

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray

Arrangements: Samuel Lozano

'*Hourglass*' is a song about gender and body affirmations, using feminine power like a toned, curvy body. HRT (Hormone replacement therapy) has a certain level of power in how it makes your body change and shift—physically transitioning ties into the idea of being a Doll, transforming yourself from a natural state into an exaggerated feminine appearance. The production is inspired by R&B Pop, with a hyperpop twist. The idea behind the production was to set the album tone for a futuristically seductive experience.

2. 'You Make Me Feel Like A Lady' (3:36)

Production/Programming: Rose Muollo-Gray

Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

'*You Make Me Feel Like a Lady*' continues with the R&B-pop production, and mixed so the vocals and lyrics are the focal point. Lyrically, this song is extremely personal. When dating, I am often interrogated about my transition, identity, and body to uncomfortable extremes. It takes away from feeling like a date and like I am being tested for a new drug. It can make me feel less like a woman. I wrote this song about someone who never asked questions, never needed to come to me about anything and knew exactly how to treat me and make me feel. Being a Doll, but still having someone who cares more about you than the physical, can humanise these doll-like contextualisations.

3. 'Naked (feat. Hazel Rose)' (3:23)

Production/Programming: Rose Muollo-Gray

Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray

Lyrics: Hazel Rose Kleingrove, Rose Muollo-Gray

Performer: Hazel Rose Kleingrove

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

'Naked' is a playful track about feeling comfortable with your partner and being ready for them to see you completely naked and vulnerable. This is a big step for women of trans experience. Sometimes, a partner can say they are comfortable until they see you naked and see you for everything you are. It can be what they were not expecting and be turned off. Feeling this level of safety and comfort is a big feeling and important in relationships with people of trans experience.

The production is leaning away from the R&B production and moving more into a pop sound, lovely tropical synths and groovy guitar. I wanted the production to sound sultry like Hourglass but more upbeat and timeless. Hazel is on vocals, she is a talented rapper and can do this style of music well. We wrote it together over Zoom.

4. 'I Am So Pretty (feat. DEITY)' (3:33)

Production/Programming/Mixing/Mastering: Samuel Lozano

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray, DEITY

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray, Samuel Lozano

The song 'I Am So Pretty' is a playful take on beauty affirmations, using them to boost confidence and manifest a new energy. My verse is about falling back in love with myself, whereas DEITY's verse is about putting yourself first in order to protect one's peace and feel pretty.

Lyricaly, on the nose, but that is what makes it so special. It was also written with Hannah Avison, a ciswoman based in Los Angeles, also hyperfeminine and of a doll-esque lifestyle. The production has a Disney channel anthem, or Barbie soundtrack element to it, with the chimes and orchestral elements over a simple drum.

5. 'Angel' (3:55)

Production/Programming: Rose Muollo-Gray

Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

'Angel' is a symbolic track lyrically, using blasphemy as an example of submitting to someone or an idea. 'Angel' is like the Yin to 'Snakeskin's' Yang, where this song is about finding escapism in submission instead of finding oneself in said escapism. Being a doll at times can feel confusing, and for a while, I didn't have friends or family around me and just had these men who wanted me for my hyper-femininity.

The lyrics can also be contextualised in a satirical sense, where I am being controlled and used like a doll. Angel is one of the more experimental tracks production-wise, inspired by Madonna's Erotica album with the breakbeat drums, simple pads and techno-inspired bassline.

6. 'Snakeskin Dress' (4:10)

Production/Programming: Rose Muollo-Gray

Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray
Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray
Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

'*Snakeskin Dress*' plays as the album's centrepiece, right in the middle of the tracklist and right before the final creative choice for the album's name and aesthetic. The production on '*Snakeskin Dress*' is also the album at its danciest and most pop sounding - upbeat, groovy and maximal production. The song is about finding escapism in fashion. I love wearing clothing that expresses my feelings internally, especially clothing pieces that are not just jeans and a T-shirt. Snakeskin material is also the symbol of power and transformation, which can come through clothing and influence the feelings of internal gender. **Refer to both '*The Art of Transformation*' chapters in the *One of The Dolls* coffee table pdf for the screenshots that inspired this track.**

7. 'Dream (feat. SiNNY!)' (3:52)

Production/Programming: Samuel Lozano, Joel Van Dijk, Rose Muollo-Gray
Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray
Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray, SiNNY!
Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

'*Dream*' is a song about the grey area between confession and questioning. In '*You Make Me Feel Like A Lady*', I talk about how women of trans experience often find themselves coming out to their dates, and they become open to the idea. I wrote this song with Sinny, also a woman of trans experience, with whom I had a long heart-to-heart conversation about our mutual struggles with being trans and having had situations where our safety is at risk due to the men we often find ourselves getting involved with. The production was in collaboration once again with Samuel and an LA-based guitarist Joel Van Dijk who did production on this track. This is the album's most bubbly track production-wise with the textural ambiences, overly processed vocals and synth choices. It also feels like the most Barbie-inspired track, with its playfulness lyrically and production-wise.

8. 'Mama (feat. Hazel Rose)' (2:11)

Production/Programming: Samuel Lozano, Rose Muollo-Gray
Mixing/Mastering: Samuel Lozano
Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray, Hazel Rose Kleingrove
Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

Mama was written at the beginning of 2023. The song breaks from all the questioning and internal/sexual turmoils. The idea about being so far in your transition, with all the gender dysphoria and working hard to reach a level of femme-presenting, that you look "unclockable", which means a passable woman in the street. When a woman of trans experience reaches this level of success in their transition, they becomes a mother and a mentor to a baby trans (a trans person earlier in their journey) and nurtures them as a mother would. I was super inspired by Rosalia's MOTOMAMI project when Sam and I worked on the production for this track. MOTOMAMI feels transformative visually with her aesthetic choices, as well as the production and mixing of the album, so we wanted to embody that to give this body of work some range.

9. 'Diamond Encrusted' (0:46)

Production/Programming: Samuel Lozano

Mixing/Mastering: Rose Muollo-Gray

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

Diamond Encrusted happened very quickly. The song was written in 5 minutes through a surge of pain. It was recorded in one take, and it is a very straightforward song about questioning someone's choices that psychologically devalued my worth and reminded me of it. No matter what someone is going through, no one deserves to feel like their own life and journey is the cause of not being worthy of love from someone else. The instrumental was Sam freestyling some chords, I requested them as they feel pessimistic but still optimistic. It's minimal but focuses on the lyrics and production.

10. 'Bitch' (2:30)

Production/Programming: Samuel Lozano

Mixing/Mastering: Samuel Lozano

Lyrics, Performer: Rose Muollo-Gray

Arrangements: Rose Muollo-Gray

Bitch was the last song recorded for *One Of The Dolls*, but it ends the album on a note that deserves to be echoed and processed after listening. I wrote about a new subculture that creates a dichotomy between the queer and non-queer. Straight men in long-term commitments, like a marriage, dating or relationship, actively seek out women of trans experience to spice up their sex life. This creates a culture of trans-chasing people who want to be with a girl because of her experimental body type and dehumanises the woman they seek. I have had many experiences where I come across these people, and they do not have anyone's best interest at heart except for their sexual desire. **Refer to the 'Mission' chapter in the One of The Dolls coffee table pdf for the screenshots that inspired this track.**

Production and lyrically-wise, I took inspiration from the character Jules a fictional character from the HBO original TV show *Euphoria*. who embodies the concept of a Doll from a trans experience. There's a lyric in the song where I say "Inject me like oestrogen" about a clip of her injecting oestrogen into her body. Followed by a segment of her doing her hair and makeup, dressing hyperfemininely to go have sexual encounters with discreet straight cis men, of whom one ends up being the father of another character Nate Jacob. It also shows a segment of sex scenes in which the men portray misunderstandings and mistreatments towards Jules and her gender identity. The production feels current to what's popular in music, and could easily be played over the said segment.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will discuss the development and making of *One Of The Dolls*. This creative work, which follows a combination of practise-based and practise-led methods, was developed through an iterative prototyping process that emphasised collaboration and reflection. A key factor to my research was it needed to come from authentic minds and real experiences. Academic blogs did give me good insight but it came from a fundamental point of view, I needed direct and honest experiences that not only applied to my creative work but were also similar if not the same experiences I had. In the earliest stages of this research, I drew both on conversations with friends and community members, as well as community members, as well as a wide range of popular material including blogs, news sites, and social media platforms.

During the research and development phase of the project, I would find myself inspired by keywords or phrases found in the resources I was reading/watching/listening to and write them down like titles - Most of the songs started as titles. Then, the lyrics were built around the titles. With the keyword titles, the lyrics would write themselves based on where they came from or what I could grasp.

Below is a list I have compiled over the research and development portion of the project, with the used song titles missing. None of the titles on the list below reached the demo process, but more as ideas I was inspired by between April 2022 and August 2022.



Image 5: Screenshot from a laptop on the Notes app, 2022. Photo by Rose Muollo-Gray.

Not just the songs on the list and album tracklist manifested. I also had a tonne of other items created for the song. Some of the album's tracks and leftovers were used to create "Mutation," a project that was leaked online, and "Maybe... I am The Drama," an EP of bonus tracks for vinyl buyers. Additionally, there are song titles that were developed into demos but were never finished or finalised, because they lacked inspiration, or did not serve the objectives of the project.

Some of the spaces I recorded this project in.



Image 6: (Left) Photo taken at Hobsonville flat, 2023. Image 7: (Middle) Photo taken at Glen Innes flat, 2023. Image 8: (Right) Photo taken at Parachute Studios, 2023. Photos by Rose Muollo-Gray.

THE SCRAPPED TRACKS AND THEIR BACKGROUND:

Maybe... I Am The Drama:

1. Maybe... I Am The Drama (prod. by LOZ)
2. Koi Fish (prod. by Rose)
3. Planet Intercourse (prod. By LOZ)
4. Disconnect (prod. by Rose)
5. YSUGLY (interlude) (prod. by Rose)

I spent the most time listening to the album and visualising 'Maybe... I Am The Drama.' In December 2022 and May 2023, it served as the album's title. The project mostly concentrated on my NT adventure. The music was created to capture my psychological crises about my lack of support for my neurodivergence and serve as a storytelling experience. Aesthetically, I identified with blonde hair and purple clothing to create a dreamy pop star image.

MUTATION (stylised in all caps):

1. Blackout (prod. by Rose)
2. Hugs N Kisses (prod. by Rose)
3. Mutation (prod. by SYSYI)
4. Xanadu (prod. by Rose)
5. Ooh La La (prod. by Rose)
6. Frankenstein! (prod. by Rose)
7. NSFL (prod. by LOZ)
8. Angel (prod. by Rose)

9. Unapologetic (prod. by LOZ)
10. Whore (prod. by Rose)

After finishing the track "Mutation", the project title was changed to correspond with the song being the title track. Mutation is a powerful song that does not resonate with the doll theme. Mutation is much darker, inspired by horror films and gothic club music. The album's core is rooted in sexuality-based trauma. It is pretty heavy, with lyrics about fetishisation, sexual abuse, and the long-term effect objectification can have on someone (specifically a transwoman).

I did not want *One Of The Dolls* to have too many dark themes attached to it, as it is supposed to be a sparkly pop album. The song "Bitch" is on Mutation but encompasses most of Mutation's message, so I decided to keep it on that project.

The rest of the scrapped songs - are not attached to Project

1. Bad News! (prod. by Rose)
2. All Of Me (prod. by LOZ)
3. GBTSQ (God Bless The Size Queen) (prod. by LOZ)
4. Call me Spice (prod. by Rose)
5. The Beach (prod. by Rose)
6. Black is The New Yellow (prod. by Rose)
7. No (prod. by LOZ)
8. Blonde Demon Bitch (prod. by Rose)

A majority of these songs still need to be fully realised, whether elements of the demos are not finished (lyrics, melodies, production), and so they never developed into anything. 'Bad News', 'Call Me Spice' and 'Blonde Demon Bitch' are the only songs that are fleshed-out demos. The rest are instrumental or lyric demos.

There was a time during the creative process of *One Of The Dolls* when I was producing everything myself. I brought Sam into the picture to be a fresh set of ears and ideas for the project. He sent me ten different demos in one sitting before we found our middleman process. Three are in the scrapped section (*No*, *All Of Me* and *GBTSQ*), but '*Planet Intercourse*' was in that section, which became an SRN chart-topping smash.

The purpose of keeping these titles is because it can be creative re-fuelling to revisit unfinished ideas if the inspiration for it sparks. Jotting down every idea keeps the window of opportunity and brainstorming open. I am not restricting myself to one idea, but the possibility of expanding any idea that comes to mind. In the past, I have kept lists of song title ideas for specific projects and have gone back to them and revived those titles and concepts for demos in other projects.

An excellent example of this is a song titled on the list above called '*Baby, It's You.*' I have since revived it into a demo on an unrelated project. The demo has also been completed and now goes by '*YSUGLY (You are So Ugly)*,' an interlude I made for a live music project. The track '*Naked*' was originally a title

from a list I made for another project called 'Renaissance', which did end up getting a demo and instrumental. However, the instrumental for it was repurposed for another project I did called 'HyperKunt' and was used for the song 'Paris (feat. Jeivenchy)'.

This project has been redeveloped and reimagined a handful of times over the last two years, so to keep track of my process, it is essential to work in a way that allows me to build and expand on ideas. It can be removed if anything does not work but is still documented as a failed process. The project presented to the audience with extra behind-the-scenes content allows the consumer to experience the growth and progress the project takes on over time.

Another section of my methodology was practising and acknowledging various prototyping strategies.

The list below works as a checklist of requirements for the creative process:

- Do I have any additional creatives on the team with me?
- Do I have all the synths, instruments, hardware or soundtracks to help me achieve my sound?
- Am I being influenced and/or consuming the correct aesthetics and references to embody in the music?
- Does my timeline allow me the space to practice my production skills in a specific genre?
- Quick design
- Producing beat demos
- Recording vocal demos
- Making collages of conceptual art or visual mood boards
- Build Prototype
- Build on the beats and turn them into fully realised instrumentals
- Engineering, recording, and fine-tuning studio vocals with my recording gear
- User Evaluation
- Listening to the music with fresh ears every 1-2 days
- Jotting down any potential production notes that could be applied to a revision
- Refining Prototype
- Mixing, mastering
- Sending to any collaborators for notes/ideas on how to improve the demo's quality
- Implement and Maintain
- Curate the demos into a project to become a body of work for marketing opportunities.

When collaborators are in the mix, I have to change my process to support the other collaborators so they are involved in the process, too. As the sole creator of a body of work, I use Incremental Prototyping, where the final product is disseminated into different small prototypes and developed individually. Eventually, the different prototypes are merged into a single product. This method helps reduce the feedback time between the user and the application development team. Nevertheless, as a collaborator, I use Evolutionary Prototyping, which is described best in Martin's notes:

"Here, the prototype developed is incrementally refined based on customer's feedback until it is finally accepted. It helps you to save time as well as effort. That is because creating a prototype

from scratch for every process interaction can sometimes be very frustrating." - Matthew Martin, 2024 (www.guru99.com)

An idea I had was splitting this project into two volumes - volume 1 would be the final product, with all the songs polished and refined and perfectly packaged, and then Volume 2 would be all the demos and pre-production creations, but that would outweigh the final product in the number of demos and ideas. This idea had only a little purpose or intent; I like creating a juxtaposition between the pre and post-elements of production.

Some of the prototypes on this project also went through musical and creative direction shifts. Most notable was the work on Hourglass, co-produced by LOZ. This prototype started as a self-written and produced track but was revisited near the end of the creative process. The track was a psychedelic trip-hop track inspired by the 90s new-wave sound, most noted in some of Aqua's deep cuts of Aquarium or even some of the more down-beat grooves from Janet Jackson's self-titled "Janet". The song was revisited to modernise its sound and the rest of the project.

Another prototype shift example with a different process was "Naked", co-written with Hazel Rose. This song was not initially created for this project but more for a songwriting pitch made by Hazel's A&R for their label artist push. She felt it would suit my projects more and let me use it for this project. The final demo showcases her as the main vocalist, which was the song's original version. The song was later re-iterated on July 24th to feature my vocals. When returning to the demo in March 2023, I decided my vocals did not match the vibe or feeling of the song, so I scrapped it and went back to Hazel's version. I still co-wrote the music and did the production, mixing and mastering it.

Songwriter demos are also considered demo prototypes, as the melodies, lyrics or even cadence of the lyrics can be altered for studio recordings. I have songwriter demos for almost every song on this project. When listening back to them, I have noticed how I changed the melody, how I pronounce my words or even the arrangements of the songs. It is an excellent way to workshop new ideas and freestyle new ideas. For example, the chorus for Angel was a voice memo melody idea I wrote months before starting this project. However, I rediscovered it and built the prototype around its hook, using a key signature and rough bpm identification.

The visuals are a creative component that comes to me commonly as I near the end of finessing the music production. For this project in particular, I wanted to incorporate different versions and styles of the Fashion Doll in the album cover while still in the pop-star aesthetic sense. The photo of me was from 2019. I made these platform shoes out of cheap rubber Jandal bases, glued them together and sewed material over them. The pictures of the dolls around me are stock images sourced from Google images that were photoshopped in later.

As a woman, I still stand out and want to make my feature a statement about being true to myself but still identifying within a particular box. Within the project context, standing out can also be a metaphor for transitioning and identifying as a woman.

With that being said, I was able to complete the recorded work, album cover/visual aesthetics and a coffee table book using the creative process previously stated in this exegesis.

REFLECTION

My intentions for this project were to highlight the trans experience from points of view/stories from a community conversation perspective, as opposed to previous academic attempts or a medical perspective. *One Of The Dolls* needed to appeal to a wider audience than just the trans community. I intended to write, produce, record, and master a pop album for the commercial music market.

The creative works for this project will not be released commercially, as tracks of the musical project are released onto digital platforms in different ways under different names and platforms - which have had their commercial successes. Throughout the creative enterprise, there was a commercial release intent, the outcome just came out differently. The album some of the tracks were included in called "Mutation" ended up gaining almost 3000 streams on Spotify. The album was featured as the album of the week in November by Wellington Access radio and the small batch of vinyls that were dropped sold out in just a few days.

My motivations shifted once I achieved my creative goals, of showcasing the trans experience in the form of a pop album. There is a gap regarding academic resources that highlights the lack of advocacy for misrepresentation that I want my exegesis to respond to.

I discovered also prefer to work on my own due to creative/control/vision. In a majority of my projects leading up to this song, it has always been a one-woman show production-wise. A collaborator in this project, Sam, is very talented at pop production and making clean/slick music, so he was important for this project. Working with him heavily on production was a learning experience. Since I am so production savvy, I can be quite controlling with it, but working with him taught me to be less of a control freak and trust the other person in the mix. That being said, it has taught me that production collaboration is not an ideal form of collaboration for me, but I'm grateful for the experience and having the opportunity to learn that about myself.

One Of The Dolls is a project based on Barbie-inspired visuals. I intended for the project to represent what a Barbie pop album could sound like. Based on the Barbie soundtrack '*Barbie: The Princess & the Popstar*', that I took visual inspiration from. I was able to capture that bubbly and cute production and writing on this production. The album cover has an eerie-ness to it, in the same way, the production and mixing of the album do.

Through this process I discovered I also prefer the possibility of hiring a studio and/or a photographer who works with portrait imagery, to get cleaner and more polished visuals for the project. The final artwork works for what it is, which I am happy about, but it does not scream a commercial pop album as much as I intended. I would've also worked harder to blend myself into the visuals more. This project is bigger than me, so it makes sense to not centre myself around the visuals, but for representation purposes, it would've made sense to include myself in with the Barbie dolls. This is also where hiring a professional photographer can come into play as well.

I developed a strong skillset during the songwriting process. For me, I find studying and dissecting objects or music the best way to develop my sense of ability. I did this by listening to lots of pop music, dissecting the lyrics and following the classic pop music genre. The melodies were the most difficult part, as most pop songs are quite simple melodically, but my favourite were the songs that were very diverse melodically, so learning how to compose a strong melody. In the end, I was able to write strong pop lyrics and melodies and I'm quite proud of that new skill.

With this newfound ability to write lyrics, I took it a step further and learned how to tell stories lyrically. This album is not a concept project in the way that each track tells a story chronologically, each song is a story or an experience within itself. Concept albums, in my experience, are less about the commercial viability and more about the artistic experience. It was important for me to make sure I did not cross that threshold too far, so this project could still be marketable as a pop album visually and musically.

With all this time and documentable media, I was able to make a coffee table book to journal the whole experience and show the entire visual experience of creating the musical project. It's less academic and commercial marketing-based and more about the personal stories and experiences that foreshadow this project. It covers the creative process of the album, screenshots and messages of the people who indirectly made this project what it is now. It documented the visual creation process, and how the album came to be, with references.



Image 9: (Left) Rose Muollo-Gray. Front Cover of One of The Dolls coffee table book. 2024. Image 10: (Right) Rose Muollo-Gray. Art of Transformation: Day To Day Makeup chapter from One of The Dolls coffee table book. 2024. Photos by Rose Muollo-Gray.

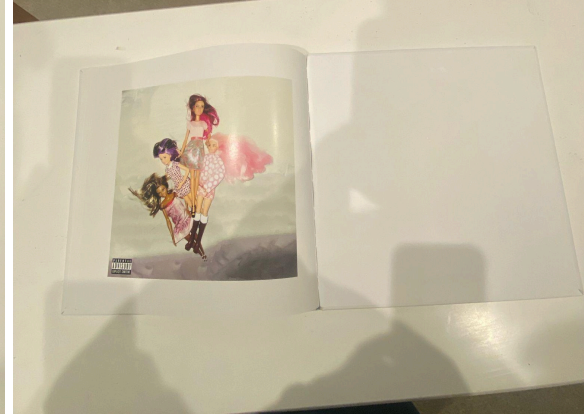


Image 11: (Left) Rose Muollo-Gray. Images from the Art of Transformation: Photoshoots chapter of One of The Dolls coffee table book. 2024. Image 12: (Right) Rose Muollo-Gray. Album artwork on the last page of One of The Dolls coffee table book. 2024.

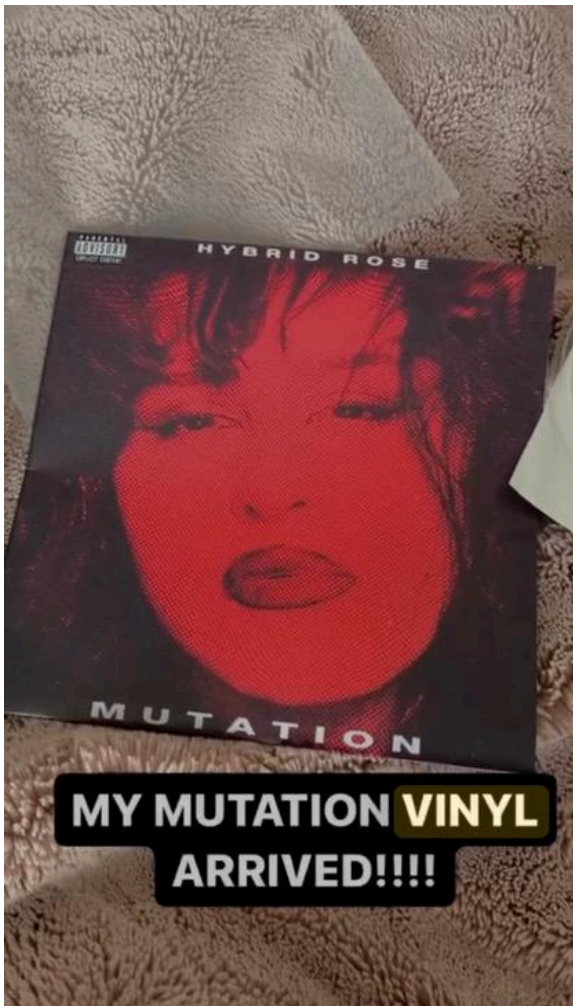


Image 13: (Left) Rose Muollo-Gray. Front Cover of sold-out Mutation vinyl. 2023. Image 14: (Right) Rose Muollo-Gray. Side C of sold-out Mutation vinyl. 2023. Photos by Rose Muollo-Gray

I was also able to experiment with vocal production and vocal stylings. Different popstars have different approaches to their vocal performance. One that was most notable during the early 2000s was singing with a baby-kind voice, so I experimented with this. I also experimented with more jazzy vocal stylings - even wrote and recorded my raps throughout this project. It creates more depth and personality for a character to be able to adapt to any type of style, especially in a commercial pop form. That was exciting to discover within myself.

The general public and fan reception of this album was extremely positive. Prior to the album's creation, I did not talk too much with my friends about what the project was going to be, or what I would be addressing. It was nice to be able to surprise them. I got a lot of positive responses from friends, regarding their reception to *One Of The Dolls*. My favourite response was an Instagram DM of a fellow woman of trans experience who could connect with my stories. It affirmed to me that my music had reached the target audience.

Moving forward, I aim to publish this exegesis and put on an event in collaboration with the femme and genderqueer group at Massey called "Cheerios and Chinwags". The event is to showcase the project visually with a mini-film made especially for the event, musically by listening to the album and personally by showing the book and sharing it around so the audience can experience the entirety of the project.

The screenshot below is a DM from a supporter expressing their appreciation for the project, signifying the success of this project and its intent.

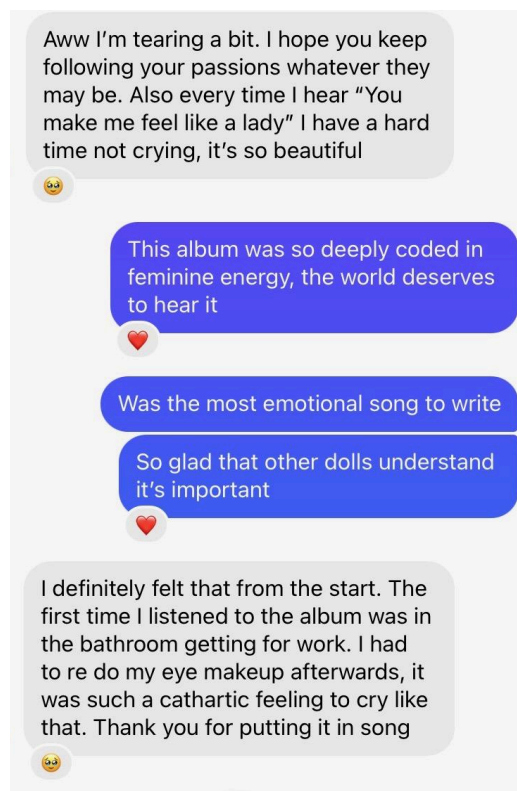


Image 15: Personal screenshot from Instagram DMs, 2023. Photo by Rose Muollo-Gray.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wrote, produced, engineered, mixed and mastered a creative work that was inspired by the concept of a Barbie pop project. There were creative collaborations (especially production and mixing) throughout the final product of the creative work. If this project was self-produced, it would've made for a smoother and cohesive project, regarding some of the production and mixing. If I were to have collaborators, I would just recruit songwriters and vocalists, as they're easier to collaborate with, and I get to maintain the sole producer control.

Music can be created proficiently with just one person, as there is only one vision to make space for and that can be delegated to other writers. With the delegation in place, it means each element of the creative process can have as much time put into it, and others aren't more prioritised or neglected, therefore a cohesion of quality amongst each creative element.

There are a few outcomes of this project that I am most proud of:

- I was able to achieve a digestible bubblegum pop sound for this project, with a queer twist that appeals to the commercial market, and successfully reached radio play and Spotify playlisting, which is a part of the commercial market strategy.
- I was able to channel the musicians and comparable artists that I researched and create space for new ideas using my creative influences for this project. I was able to use this exegesis to dig deeper into these ideas and elaborate on why the trans experience is several underappreciated, yet overlooked.
- While *One Of The Dolls* is still quite a bubbly project, it does have some dark undertones to it that make it quite a heavy project. I was able to take these dark tones and make them into a digestible format for people to learn and understand what this project is about.
- Did I bring something new to the conversation? Yes. In my experiences and media consumption around people of trans experience, it's common to take the hypersexual route (which is present at times in this project) and make everything sexual. Unfortunately, this does not help the narrative that I've discussed about the over-sexualisation of the trans community. This project takes an interpersonal route into a general idea of the trans experience, which makes for more conversation inside and outside of the overall queer community.

Suppose there's one thing I want people to take away from this project and experience. In that case, every gender experience should be explored and deserves rights and support, in schools and media representation. I made something I am proud of based on creative and community conversation components, there is something that anyone creative, political, queer or perhaps lacking knowledge of the queer community can take out of this.

REFERENCE LIST

- Andromeda Alighieri. (2022, January 16). Oh hell ya the trans mascs arrived. Social Service, Retrieved May, 2024. From <https://www.facebook.com/ida.fox.3344/posts/pfbid04XNvMX98RjgRMF3X8rBJRxT3X9q6ZNAyWWMbY5KuWd1uctqjghrfubc6imiAc25YI>.
- areyoukunt. (2023, August 13). Like crazy #trans #transwomen #dolls. Social Service, Retrieved May, 2024. from <https://www.tiktok.com/@areyoukunt/video/7266519272933854506>
- Branigin, A. (2023, April 13). *Trans people have never been so visible — Or so vulnerable*. Washington Post. Retrieved April 13, 2023, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/04/13/trans-representation-popular-culture/>
- Carley, B. (2015, March 11). *Marina & the Diamonds Shatters the Pop System's Ceiling on 'Froot'*. Spin. Retrieved March 11, 2015, from <https://www.spin.com/2015/03/marina-and-the-diamonds-froot-interview/>
- Daw, S. (2018, August 5). *Kim Petras on Being a Transgender Musician: 'I Hate the Idea of Using My Identity as a Tool'*. Billboard. Retrieved August 5, 2018, from <https://www.billboard.com/culture/pride/kim-petras-transgender-identity-interview-8455075/>
- Dawson, J. (2017, May 19). *'I can't be a 24-hour sexual fantasy': Juno Dawson on dating as a trans woman*. The Guardian. Retrieved May 19, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/19/juno-dawson-cant-be-24-hour-sexual-fantasy-dating-trans-woman>
- Fournier, L. (2021). *Autotheory as feminist practice in art, writing, and criticism*. The MIT Press.
- femqueencaptain. (2024, April 24). "Omg Dolls Night will be speaking at a panel with Michigan's Attorney General to help pass a bill that'll make it easier for trans ppl with minor legal offenses to get their name changed. Im in my political era BAD!" Twitter, Retrieved May, 2024. From <https://x.com/femqueencaptain/status/1784589283120038019>
- Green, J. (n.d.). *Doll n.1*. Green's Dictionary of Slang. <https://greensdictofslang.com/entry/uoitqa>
- Hoskin, Rhea & Earl, Jessie. (2021). *Trans Representation in Popular Culture*. 10.4135/9781544393858.n241.
- Ioanes, A. (2022). What the Afterlife of SCUM Can Teach Us about Autotheory. *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, 94(4), 677–703. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-10341734>
- James, A. (2023, December 19). *Transgender slang, slurs, and controversial words*. Transgender Map. Retrieved December 19, 2023, from <https://www.transgendermap.com/guidance/resources/words/slang-slurs/>
- Kolli, V. (2023, September 4). *Unveiling the Queer Renaissance: Beyoncé's Recognition of Vogueing and House Music*. Harvard Politics. Retrieved September 4, 2023, from <https://harvardpolitics.com/queer-renaissance-beyonce/>
- Lacasse, Derrick, "Exploring Intersections of Queer Artist Identities through Music: A Community Engagement Project" (2019). Expressive Therapies Capstone Theses. 221.
- Madden-Smith, Z. (2023, February 6). *Toilet politics: Trans people are more likely to be victims, not perpetrators*. Renew. Retrieved February 6, 2023, from <https://www.renews.co.nz/toilet-politics-trans-people-more-likely-to-be-victims-not-perpetrators/>
- Martin, M. (2024, February 24). *Prototype Model in Software Engineering*. Guru99. Retrieved February 24, 2024, from <https://www.guru99.com/software-engineering-prototyping-model.html#:~:text=Evolutionary%20Prototyping.can%20sometimes%20be%20very%20frustrating>
- McNamara, R. (2021) 'A deep, feminist dive into Autotheory, Hyperallergic, June 20. Online: <https://hyperallergic.com/647014/autotheory-as-feminist-practice-lauren-fournier-mit/>
- Mocarski R, King R, Butler S, Holt NR, Huit TZ, Hope DA, Meyer HM, Woodruff N. The Rise of Transgender and Gender Diverse Representation in the Media: Impacts on the Population. *Commun Cult Crit*. 2019 Sep;12(3):416-433. doi: 10.1093/ccc/tcz031. Epub 2019 Oct 2. PMID: 31709008; PMCID: PMC6824534.
- Murnen, Sarah & Byrne, Donn. (1991). Hyperfemininity: Measurement and initial validation of the construct. *Journal of Sex Research - J SEX RES*. 28. 479-489. 10.1080/00224499109551620.
- (2023, February 14). *Transgender facts*. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved February 14, 2023, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/transgender-facts/art-20266812>
- Stacey, J. (2023). Personal value, impersonal subjects. *Subjectivity*, 30(2), 113–129. <https://www.healthline.com/health/transgender/difference-between-transgender-and-transsexual#key-differences>
- Taylor, Jodie. (2012). *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-Making*. 10.3726/978-3-0351-0420-2. <https://blog.songtrust.com/how-the-lgbtq-community-has-influenced-the-music-industry>
- Toffoletti, Kim. (2007). *Cyborgs And Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture And The Posthuman Body*. 10.5040/9780755696284.

Villegas-Simón, Isabel & Soriano, Juan & Ventura, Rafael. (2023). 'If you don't "pass" as cis, you don't exist'. The trans audience's reproofs of 'Cis Gaze' and transnormativity in TV series. *European Journal of Communication*. 39. 10.1177/02673231231163704.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-023-00161-y>

zayaperysian. (2024, March 24). A day in the life of the Dolls 🏳️💕👩 special thank you to @Half Magic @Donni Davy @Han Korean BBQ 🍷 #trans #transandproud. Social Service, Retrieved May, 2024. From <https://www.tiktok.com/@zayaperysian/video/7349701102251691306>

Zemke, Kirsten & Mackley-Crump, Jared. (2019). 'Sissy that walk': Reframing queer Pacific bodies through the FAFSWAG Ball. *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*. 4. 85-98. 10.1386/qsmc_00007_1.
<https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/dpdfilm/chapter/intersections-of-race-gender-class-and-sexuality-in-pose-2018/>