

SYNTHETIC MEN, Real-World Stigma

How lay people construct male anthropomorphic sex technologies — combining reflexive thematic analysis with computational sentiment and toxicity detection of YouTube comments.



32,360

COMMENTS ANALYSED
COMPUTATIONALLY

522

COMMENTS CODED
QUALITATIVELY

4

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

4

QUALITATIVE THEMES
DEVELOPED

METHOD

QUALITATIVE PHASE

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

Purposive selection of 522 comments across 4 YouTube videos. Four-category coding scheme: positive, negative, ambivalent, trolling.

COMPUTATIONAL PHASE

Sentiment & Toxicity Detection

VADER for sentiment classification (positive/neutral/negative). Detoxify for toxicity scoring across six sub-dimensions. Log-odds ratio analysis for distinctive lexical features.

4 QUALITATIVE THEMES

THEME 01

Negotiating Human-Likeness

Commenters moved between assessments of attractiveness, aesthetic appreciation, and uncanniness — praising realism while evoking the uncanny valley.

"These look really good. I'd want one modeled after a younger Chris Hemsworth — tall, around six feet, basically perfect. I'd honestly pay for that." — "He looks too thin and kind of childlike"

customisable ideal

creepy / weird

works of art

THEME 02

The Promises and Perils of Embodied Male Sex Tech

Benefits and disadvantages negotiated at the individual and interpersonal level — risk-free outlets and therapeutic potential alongside concerns about reciprocity and social drawbacks.

"Dolls seem much easier than dealing with men — you can relax without constantly worrying about how the other person feels. A doll doesn't have feelings, which makes things simpler." — "I'd want one mainly for creative reasons, like styling outfits or even just for cuddling sometimes... being alone gets difficult"

risk-free outlet

therapeutic potential

loneliness

THEME 03

Stigmatization of Use

Sexual interaction with male artificial partners was pathologized as perverted, immoral, or unnatural. Users depicted as "lonely" or "desperate". Anti-feminist frames positioned the technology as unsuitable for women.

"Anyone who actually wants this must be seriously disturbed" — "I suppose lonely or resentful feminists might end up turning to robots for companionship"

pervert / immoral

not for women

for feminists

THEME 04

Essentializing Gender

Hostile sexist stereotypes targeting both men and women. Female commentary construed men as abusive or cheating; male trolling portrayed women as exploitative or deceitful.

"Men have slept with anything — they lie, cheat — at least this guy wouldn't have a phone to hide things on" — "The only issue with a male robot is that it won't have a wallet"

men as abusive / selfish

women as exploiting

mutual trolling

COMPUTATIONAL RESULTS

VADER SENTIMENT — N = 32,360

Neutral 38.5%

Positive 37.9%

Negative 23.6%

Predominantly neutral-to-positive profile. Bimodal score distribution consistent with polarized online discourse on a contested topic.

DETOXIFY TOXICITY CLASSIFICATION

24%

of comments classified as toxic (n = 7,768; threshold p > 0.5)

Obscenity 13.7%

Insult 5.8%

Identity attack / Threat / Severe ≤ 0.7%



Classifier Blind Spot

Gender-essentialist and manosphere-coded hostility identified qualitatively was frequently **undetected by Detoxify**. VADER could not distinguish trolling from positive or ambivalent comments. **Sentiment ≠ stance**.

BEYOND STIGMA: CUSTOMISATION AS DESIRE

Alongside aversive and stigmatising commentary, a notable thread of women expressed genuine interest in male sex dolls/robots, frequently articulated through requests for customisation — body type, hair, proportions, or a likeness modelled on a personal ideal. Rather than rejecting the uncanny valley outright, these commenters negotiated its terms, pointing to real appeal in a technology rarely designed with female desire in mind.

Lay constructions of male sex dolls partly reflect academic "benefits vs. harms" frameworks — while revealing how **gender dynamics, trolling, and sexual stigma** shape responses to male sex tech in ways current classifiers cannot capture.

KEY FINDING · 2026