OUR BARBIES, OURSELVES:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF GIRLS' PLAY WITH BARBIE™

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ABSTRACT

Barbie has been a significant icon in mainstream Western culture since its debut in 1959. Adults have imposed their own visions of children's play, most of which were negative. At the same time their assessments of children's play were based on assumptions rather than on actual observations. This thesis explores the ways in which young (7-9-year-old) girls play with Barbie™. Through a unique methodology that incorporated open-ended interviews with the girls, role-playing with the dolls and a demographic survey completed by the parents, this study produced a window into the girls' world of Barbie.

Beauty, dating, marriage, heteronormativity, male privilege, competition, power and agency emerged as significant themes which informed and structured the girls' play. The girls imagine themselves as the dolls, leading glamorous and exciting lives while at the same time imagining the dolls as themselves experiencing the girls' lives. Occasionally, the girls use the dolls to subvert mainstream ideologies but most often Barbie™ is used to reinforce the conventional notions of femininity which are inscribed onto the body of the doll as well as in the marketing strategies of Mattel. One unexpected finding was the centrality of the Ken doll to the girls' play which enabled the girls to practice heterosexualized romantic scripts (dating and marriage). The girls played with Barbie™ as a way of imagining their future lives as women in a patriarchal society. They see the benefits and rewards that can be acquired by becoming successfully "feminine". It became apparent that the girls were using their interactions with Barbie™ to balance the tensions and pleasures of growing up female in a patriarchal society.
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DEDICATION

For Bob and Edie
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Since its debut in 1959 at New York's Toy Fair, Mattel's Barbie™ Doll has been a 'must-have, trend-setting' item for pre-teen girls throughout North America. This seemingly innocuous plastic icon has become a cultural demi-goddess that has impacted the experiences and lives of women and girls for the last forty plus years. More personality than plaything, Barbie™ has captured the collective imaginations of millions of people around the world becoming a pervasive phenomenon signifying ideas about gender, sexuality, race, class and ability.

Even if they are not intimately involved with her on any level, most people are aware of Barbie's existence. Those who have the most contact with Barbie™ and her "culture" are usually children, parents, collectors and researchers. Despite the fact that children are the predominant consumers of Barbie™ and her culture, they have often been neglected in the research. Moreover they are usually seen as research subjects and not as collaborative research participants with valuable first hand experiential knowledge to contribute to this rapidly growing body of literature. Barbie™ is a reflection of the way that gender relations are learned and understood in Western patriarchal culture. Therefore I decided that my research should focus on the first-hand experiences of girls who
play with Barbie™. Consequently, I chose to interview girls between the ages of seven and nine about their experiences with the doll.

1.2 Research Questions

Like many girls my interest in Barbie™ began early in life. When I was about four years of age I received my first Barbie. When I was five I received Superstar Barbie™ (1977), who became my favorite Barbie™ of all time. Superstar Barbie™ was my favorite doll not just because she came in a hot pink dress with a boa and was modeled after Farrah Fawcett-Majors, but mostly, because you could bend her knees really far in the opposite direction that knees are supposed to bend. Although I thought that the doll was beautiful, I loved pink and I loved Charlie's Angels, it now seems like a very strange reason to favor one doll over another. Perhaps to my five-year-old imagination, making Barbie do things that she was not designed to do gave her, and me, a certain kind of agency. I had no Ken dolls and I do not remember wanting them. My Barbies lived in a feminist utopia and participated in many exciting activities including, but not limited to, camping in the Barbie™ camper, kung-fu fighting, taking hours to decide what to wear and looking for lost shoes. One day I forgot about the Barbies and moved on.

In 1995 I took my first Women's and Gender Studies class. We had to participate in a group project and my group had chosen to examine eating disorders. For our presentation we decided to draw a Barbie™ doll to scale in order to demonstrate her ridiculously unhealthy measurements and how damaging that image could be to the healthy body image of women and girls.
We drew the Barbie™ doll to scale and were amused and horrified to discover that her dimensions were an incredible 38-18-33. I had never thought of Barbie™ in relation to eating disorders or for that matter, anything else. After the presentation, I began to think more about Barbie™ and her potential to influence people and what kind of latent impact she might have on society. I was hooked on Barbie™ again, but this time for different reasons.

Since that time I have been trying to understand the hold that this eleven and a half inch icon has on people. Barbie™ obviously has the ability to both beguile and repulse, as I have heard her described as ‘evil incarnate’ as well as a ‘fun toy’. I have heard people claim that she is designed to permanently damage young girls’ self esteem while others believe that she is just a toy that happens to have enormous breasts. But most of the information about Barbie’s positive and negative attributes is disseminated by adults and not by children, which seems paradoxical because children are the main participants in Barbie™ culture although parents buy these toys. It often appears as though adults are projecting their understandings of Barbie™ onto their children.

When I first began to delve into this phenomenon, I discovered two anecdotes that made me question whether or not children see Barbies in the same way as adults. These examples illustrate differences in the perceptions of adults and children with the dolls. In the first example cited by Lord, four little girls came together to play Barbies. One played with the horse, the other three with the Barbie™ convertible. Suddenly a commotion breaks out around the car. One girl yells, “My mommy says men are supposed to drive!” and then proceeds...
to pull the Barbie™ doll out of the driver's seat and replace it with a Ken doll (Lord 84). In the second example cited by Lord, a little girl with a black father and a white mother is playing with a Barbie™ doll and numerous other male dolls. The Barbie™ goes on "dates" with all of the white, male dolls all the while ignoring the one black, male doll. Her mother, concerned that her daughter was ignoring the black doll because she thought the black doll was inferior to the white dolls that the daughter seemed to prefer, asked, "Wouldn't Barbie like to go out with [the black doll] Jamal?" her daughter replies, "But she can't Mommy . . . That's Daddy." (emphasis in original) (Lord 81).

In the first example with the car, the girl who objected so strongly to Barbie™ driving the Dream Car™ had absorbed the messages that she had received about acceptable female roles from her mother and projected those ideas onto the doll play. In the second example, the mother's concern that her daughter perceives the white dolls as superior is unfounded because her daughter sees the black doll as directly connected to her father and understands that dating her father is inappropriate behaviour, hence the exclusion of the black doll. In both of these examples the child negotiates her reality differently than might be expected. In the first instance the child absorbs very traditional ideologies and applies them in ways that her other playmates do not understand. In the second instance the child applies her unmediated logic to the situation and negotiates the experience in ways that adults would not expect. This made me wonder how differently a child might negotiate the same signs and signifiers associated with Barbie™ than an adult.
Barbie™ has been deconstructed, reconstructed and criticized for her portrayals of race, class, gender, sexuality and the perceived damage that she does to the minds and self-esteem of young girls (duCille, 1994; Gilman, 1998; Lord, 1994; Steinberg, 1997). Yet little has been written about young girls’ views about Barbie™, and the ways in which they conceptualize and construct race, class, sexuality, ability and gender. The following research questions have formed the basis for my inquiry into the secret worlds of girls and their Barbies. How and why do girls play with Barbie™? Do they take away from their Barbie™ playtime the same things that we, as adults, expect them to? How are their reactions to the doll different from or the same as adults? Do children construct and conceptualize gender, class, race, ability and sexuality differently than adults? Do they negotiate their own lives/lived experiences through the doll or does the doll reify the dominant ideologies’ baggage? Most importantly, how do the girls relate to their Barbie™ dolls?

This thesis has been organized into seven chapters. Chapter 2 examines the relevant literature to the Barbie™ phenomenon as well as the literature on beauty and gender construction. The herstorical explanation of Barbie™ and her significance is outlined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 outlines my methodological framework and details my methods of data analysis. The substantive findings of my research are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 centres on the girls’ understandings of gendered relationships, marriage, dating and heteronormativity while Chapter 6 focuses on the ways that the girls use their
Barbies to understand and negotiate the dynamics of power. The broader implications for my study and conclusions are given in Chapter 7.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The literature on Barbie™ is burgeoning in some areas but still relatively inadequate in others. The literature for Barbie™ collectors, fans and children is expansive and includes trade publications, collectors' catalogues and storybooks with Barbie™ as the central character published by Mattel for children. The academic literature focusing on the critical analysis of Barbie™ has grown exponentially over the last five years. In part this growth in the literature owes itself to the expansion of popular cultural studies as a field of inquiry but particularly to the growing interest in girl culture over the past decade. Finally, one cannot help but notice that interest in Barbie™ coincides with her entry into middle age – the age of many of her critics who are now raising their girl children in a 'post-feminist', 'post-colonial' environment.

Most critical research on the Barbie™ doll focuses on either the quantitative aspects of her anthropometry (Magro, 1997; Urla and Swedlund, 1995) or as a mediating factor through which race, class, gender, ability and/or sexuality can be understood (duCille, 1993, 1996; Gilman, 1998; Ingraham, 1999; Steinberg, 1997). Although many of these sources do not focus particularly on children, they are still an excellent starting point for research, given that this literature focuses mainly on critical theories of race, gender, class
and sexuality. An understanding of this literature will be helpful in explaining how and why children's perceptions diverge from or agree with the theories and why "Barbie is a cultural site in her own right" (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 145).

2.2 Beauty

Barbie™ is perceived as "beautiful" and many theorists believe her beauty is one of the most important ways that she is used to mediate and construct identity. Young girls are bombarded with messages about femininity and beauty, and Barbie™ is often presented as the embodiment of the ideal to which girls should aspire. This ideal is based on mainstream North American culture's perception of beauty as a means of prescribing behaviour (Wolf 14). Through the creation of an environment where girls and women must compete with each other for "resources" such as jobs and men, beauty is seen as an asset. This ideal is best explained by Wolf's theory of the beauty myth. Since youth is linked with the idea of beauty in North American culture, the eternally youthful, and therefore beautiful, Barbie™ has remained viable in the world market in part because of her physicality.

In order to understand how the Barbie™ doll's physicality promotes what mainstream North Americans find most beautiful, Magro compared "primitive" human traits such as short neck, sloping shoulders and dorsal foot flexion with "derived" human traits such as long neck, square shoulders and plantar foot flexion (Magro 372). Magro then showed pencil drawings representing these physical differences to a group of 495 participants, and asked them which trait they found more attractive. In almost all cases the "primitive" traits were found
Based on these findings, Magro concluded that the Barbie™ doll, which possessed in very exaggerated forms all of the “derived” traits, is considered much more attractive than other dolls, such as the Happy-To-Be-Me™ Doll, which possess the attractive traits but in a much less exaggerated form (Magro 373). The preference for “derived” traits — those that conform to a Caucasian physiognomy — reveals the ways that race is linked to embodiment. The further that women are removed from this “ideal” form, the less attractive they are perceived to be.

Chapkis argues that women who do not fit into what society has defined as “beautiful” are conditioned to believe that it is their fault if they are not (6). The hostility directed at unattractive women is justified on the basis that they have failed to traverse from the female (sex) to the feminine (gender) (Chapkis 5-6). If a woman has difficulty in achieving an effortless femininity, then the reason must be she has not started her beauty regimen early enough (Nichter 6). This perception — that lacking beauty is not genetic but rather a question of one’s moral character or ambition — is problematic in that girls perceive that their value as human beings is judged solely on how their external selves are presented. If they do not meet the standard of beauty with the “right” weight, hairstyle, complexion, etc. then they begin to perceive themselves as worthless or without value beyond the external (Nichter 35; Wason-Ellam 432).

The beauty ideal has a tendency to act as a double-edged sword. Girls who are beautiful by traditional standards are often reviled and hated by other
girls who do meet the societal norms of beauty (Nichter 19). But to reject the traditional norms of beauty leaves one open to other, often more severe, forms of rejection by other members of society. Reflecting on her own experiences as a woman with a moustache, Chapkis finds herself subject to cruel comments and stares because she chooses not to conform to traditional norms of beauty by removing the "offensive" hair (Chapkis 1-3). If the idea that "the body beautiful is woman's responsibility and authority [and] she will be valued and rewarded on the basis of how close she comes to embodying the ideal" (Chapkis 14), then the belief that in order to be accepted one must not only embody the ideal, but be the ideal becomes the norm. These "ideals of femininity" -- niceness, quietness, docility -- demonstrate to girls and women what behaviours are acceptable within the confines of the definition of feminine (Lamb 43; Wason-Ellam 432).

In addition, girls are then encouraged to assist in maintaining the patriarchal order by policing their own and others’ behaviour. "Wild girls", aggressive girls, sexual girls, girls who exist outside the boundaries of what the patriarchal norms consider properly feminine are shunned and censured so that "good girls" can maintain the feminine ideal without contamination from more undesirable elements (Lamb 43; Walkerdine 259). This reification of the feminine ideal affirms both Chapkis’ and Wolf’s conclusions that the beauty myth is not used to ensure women maintain their appearances but that they keep their behaviour in check (Wolf 14). By demanding that women focus solely on the external, Western culture’s beauty myth keeps women, and girls, in competition
with one another and vulnerable to the approval of the dominant power structures (Wolf 14).

This continued objectification of women leads many women and girls to commodify their bodies as a form of “interpersonal currency” (Nichter 26-27) and to barter their beauty for goods and services (Wason-Ellam 433). In order to get what she needs to survive, financially (a big promotion), emotionally (a man), and physically (not being verbally or physically assaulted for her “ugliness”), a woman will begin to adhere to the rules of the beauty myth. This conformity to the ideal can range from the mundane practice of wearing make-up to the drastic reconstruction of body parts through cosmetic surgery to stave off the “unfeminine” signs of aging (Wolf 105-107). Therefore, by presenting Barbie™ as the “natural” beauty that possesses all that Western culture deems “ideal” in a woman, young girls learn that beauty is an integral aspect of being valuable and lovable, as well as a form of currency to be exchanged in the sexual economy. As Lamb explains,

In aspiring to femininity girls are encouraged to seek power through their appearance and their manners. The ideal of femininity is pretty, nice, desirable and popular. Truth be told, there really is power in this ideal, but it is borrowed power, a granted power – granted by men who benefit most from girls’ niceness (Lamb 43).

In order to achieve any kind of power, young girls and women must be willing to curry favour with the dominant power structure. To be considered successful and accepted, girls must learn to present themselves as desirable objects that can “reproduce the ideals of femininity” (Walkerdine 162). Transformation into the desirable can be achieved through the use of artifacts like makeup and high
heels, and although these objects are often viewed as the tools of the oppressor, young girls still view them as having “special power” (Lamb 41) because they allow girls access to the dominant power structure if only peripherally.

2.3 Critical Analyses of Barbie™

Although Barbie™ is represented as the “personification” of what Western culture values as “beautiful”, she has been critically analyzed in relation to these ideologies. Much of the research into the Barbie™ phenomenon is focused on discovering what effect the gender, race and class stereotypes have on the young girls who play with her (Steinberg 216). But much of the “scholarly literature on Barbie™ treats children themselves as irrelevant and contains remarkably few examples of the ways in which children interact with and think about the doll” (Chin 129). Many writers believe that Barbies “instill in little girls a preference for whiteness, for blond hair, blue eyes and delicate features, for an impossible überfigure, perched eternally and submissively in high heels” (Gilman 18). Barbie’s physical characteristics – blonde, blue-eyed, slender, tall – conform to the dominant Western ideal of femininity. These same characteristics are coded as white, middle-class, heterosexual and Christian, thereby explaining her appeal to mainstream culture as well as the extensive criticism of this icon. Because Barbie™ embodies these ideals, she appeals to almost anyone who desires upward mobility.

Barbie’s lifestyle, accessories and biography all suggest that the “appropriate” way for a girl to act is to focus on the external features of her body, so that she can achieve and maintain the ideal look, shape and presentation of
self considered attractive by men (Brumberg, 1997; Ingraham 81; Inness 171). The dominant codes of femininity are literally embedded in the doll’s body. Her persistent smile denotes compliance and has a non-threatening appeal to prevailing patriarchal beliefs. Her passivity is reinforced in the rigidity of her body. Unlike toys such as Action Man™ (G.I. Joe), which has upwards of twenty jointed body parts, Barbie™ has relatively few jointed parts, suggesting that Barbie™ is better suited to posing than to feats of daring (Attfield 82). In addition, Barbie’s phenomenal amount of clothing, footwear, accessories and lifestyle accoutrements reinforce the view that Barbie™, and de facto women are to be displayed. In this way, children are encouraged to learn about “appropriate [heterosexual] coupling”. Despite the fact that Barbie’s original “occupation” of fashion model has now been expanded to run the gamut from air force pilot to paleontologist, Barbie™ still regularly participates in activities like shopping and outings such as “dates”, where she can be displayed. As a result her various employments are still constructed as accessories to a lifestyle and not as a way to feel fulfilled or to earn a living. According to Ingraham, the purpose of all this grooming and primping is so the child can imagine herself in the traditional, heterosexual role of bride (Ingraham 95).

This ritualized adherence to the norms of beauty allows the child to visualize herself conforming to and being successful at the patriarchal ideal for her sex. The numerous patriarchal signposts embedded in the doll’s body are a cause for concern for many of the theorists that examine Barbie™. Gilman concludes that Barbie™ is a dangerous and damaging influence to the self-
esteem of children and adults because of the many subconscious messages that can be transmitted through the doll. As a child, Gilman claims she preferred playing with Dawn™ dolls instead of Barbie™ dolls because Dawns were a smaller, more realistically shaped doll that could be purchased in multiple ethnicities. (Gilman 14-16). Gilman hypothesizes that her exposure to the more realistic Dawn™ doll allowed her to revel in and celebrate her individuality whereas the Barbie™ doll funneled everyone into the same white, blond, thin, tall, upper-middle class mold (Gilman 17-18).

For many theorists, Barbie’s whiteness is a central issue when examining the ideologies that she promotes (duCille 1993, 1996; Ingraham 1999; Lord 1994; Steinberg 1997). Ingraham, in her examination of the effects of Barbie’s exclusion of a multicultural ideal of beauty, questions how young girls of color can feel positively about themselves when Barbie™ is obviously reinforcing a white ideal of beauty.

Barbie products, which are wildly popular with young girls, teach children many powerful messages, the least of which is what race is the most important. While Mattel offers a range of “multicultural” Barbies, there is little variation in the facial or body characteristics of these multiethnic dolls, and the default Barbie is still understood to be white (1999: 97).

Mattel, despite its attempts at diversity and inclusion, has strengthened the Euro-centric idea that there is a “normal”, white Barbie™ to which white children can relate and “Other” Barbies to which non-white children can aspire. However, white parents who purchase dolls of color for their children can feel secure in the knowledge that they are “celebrating diversity”. These parents can take comfort
in the belief “they are enacting tolerance without the messy problems of actually redistributing resources or living with the effects of affirmative action” (Banet-Weiser 20). Despite Mattel’s supposed foray into diversity, Urla and Swedlund argue that Barbie™ still enforces a homogenization of bodies into a tall, thin, white ideal.

Multiculturalism cracked open the door to Barbie-dom, and diversity could walk in, so long as she was big-busted and slim-hipped, had long, flowing hair and tiny feet, and was very, very, thin (285).

In writing about her relationship to Barbie™ as a Black woman, duCille also believes that Mattel’s attempts to promote ethnic and racialized versions of the doll are “an easy and immensely profitable way off the hook of Euro-centrism that gives us the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference” (duCille 555). Moreover, duCille argues that cultural identity is much more than the traditional clothing or hairstyles of a certain culture. If a person from Kenya wears a Rasta hat does that make him or her Jamaican? Of course not, a generic brown doll can in no way represent the many complex, cultural traditions spanning Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas just by putting on a different hat (duCille 556). Besides doing a disservice to the cause of racial equality, this way of typing cultures through “quick and dirty ethnographies” treats “race and ethnic differences like collectibles” (duCille 556). The array of what can be considered beautiful becomes limited to what is considered beautiful by the dominant culture (Chapkis 44; Urla and Swedlund 284). “Difference” looks remarkably similar to what is already considered a standard in terms of beauty norms (Urla and Swedlund 284).
Although it would seem that the intent of the Barbie™ doll is to maintain the status quo by inculcating the children who play with her to the dominant ideologies of Western culture, many critics of Barbie™ insist that children can and do subvert these ideologies (Attfield 86; Urla and Swedlund 278). The doll has a “capacity to represent an imaginary world beyond the ordinary world of everyday roles and rituals” (Kline 193). Even though children are captivated by the glamour of the fantasy worlds that Barbie™ presents to them, they still play with Barbie™ in ways that reinforce their individuality and creativity as exemplified by the anecdotes presented by Lord (Attfield 86; Dubin 27).

2.4 Children’s Play and Child Culture

From the Victorian age to the twentieth century both toys and play have become industrialized (Kline 144-47). The mass-marketing of toys and play styles “was one of the ways of forging a unifying bond across North American culture” (Kline 148). Instead of playing made-up games or making their own playthings, the mass marketing of toys increases the probability that children, cross-culturally, are being socialized into a similar set of norms of child culture. Although there are many ways of socializing children, through church or school for example, playing with toys is supposedly a child’s milieu. Therefore, play can be considered one of the most important activities that a child engages in because play, and the toys children play with, can be seen as tools of socialization (Kline 151; Maccoby 32). Although toys in the absence of children still hold value, it is the presence of the child and his or her engagement with the toys that “infuses them with meaning” (Corsaro 110-11).
Researchers have found that often “girls . . . use dolls as props for their domestic play, and doll play has often been seen as the prototype of female nurturance” (Maccoby 42). For instance baby dolls were often seen as a way to teach girls how to be mothers. However this example of stereotypic play should not negate the idea that “children are actively engaged in the production of their own social worlds” (Caputo 29) and may not necessarily play with toys in culturally sanctioned or expected ways. Children have a distinct culture separate from adult culture in fundamental ways and “transform information from the adult world in order to meet the concerns of their peer world” (Corsaro 41). Children need to be “viewed as active creators and reproducers of social relations and culture” (Helleiner, Caputo and Downe 136), in their own right and not only as extensions to adult producers of culture. Children can and do ingeniously use adult culture in ways that are surprising, unique and different from what adults would do with the same information because the children are still entrenched in a belief system that allows them to act creatively and beyond the rules of the mundane (Corsaro 18-19; Fine and Sandstrom 34). Maccoby argues that “play with Barbie™ dolls can be seen as expressing fantasies of becoming attractive, glamorous young women” (Maccoby 42) and may perpetuate stereotypic ideas of what it means to be female and feminine. However, because the children are “expressing fantasies”, it is possible that their imaginary constructs exist beyond the realm of what would be considered normative play behaviours.

There are very few studies that depict children as active social agents in their own development (Caputo 22) and therefore we cannot assume that all
children play the same way or even in a socially expected way. As illustrated by the anecdotal evidence in Chapter 1, children may mimic adult ideas but they may also construct their own ways of knowing. Children are often seen as mini mirrors that reflect adult culture and norms. "Adult-centric" researchers often dismiss children's own unique culture and experience of the world (Chin 136; Corsaro 30). This dismissive attitude exists partly because children are seen as extensions of adult culture and partly because of the inherent egocentrism of adults and the belief that children are adults-in-training, waiting to be socialized into adult culture (Chin 135). Children are marginalized but unlike most disenfranchised groups they can exist within the mainstream of society and still maintain their marginality. In many cases, children of colour, poor children and disabled children can be seen as doubly marginalized.

Toys are often understood by adults as educational tools of enculturation into adult society (Kline 96). For example, doll play is often thought of as a way for girls to learn traditional female roles. And while toys are often used experientially by children to engage with their ideas about adult culture, toys also need to be studied as "... complex, hybrid manifestations of adult culture, engaged with in various and contradictory ways ..." and not as tools to fit children into pre-existing adult moulds (Seiter 299). Childhood has its own distinct culture with its own cultural rules and norms.

2.5 Gender Construction and Child Culture

Despite concerns about the influence of Barbie™ on the identity construction of children, there are no studies, except Hohmann, and to a lesser
extent Rakow (see Chapter 4.4 – Pilot Study), that examine this relationship. There is, however, a growing literature on children’s conceptions of gender in relation to gender roles. The general belief is that gender roles are constructed “through a process of socialization” (Ingraham 215). For example, Bailey (1993) found that children ages four to six tended to pay more attention to socially constructed indicators of gender (e.g. clothing, makeup etc.) rather than anatomical differences (Bailey 27). Moreover, Bailey found that children divide up their world into “boys’ things” and “girls’ things” (Bailey 34). The children thought girls should play with dolls and boys should play with trucks, as the children deemed this behavior “gender appropriate”. Although some of the children that Bailey interviewed thought that it was alright for boys to play with ‘girl things’ and vice versa, the children also felt that it was important that the majority of things played with or activities participated in belonged to the child’s gender. Calvert agrees with this conclusion, explaining that for children there is often an immediate need to define and divide into “boys’ things and girls’ things” so that gender can be immediately understood (Calvert 67). In addition, many of the children Bailey interviewed felt that the older you were the less you should want to play with toys that did not belong to your gender. However, if you were younger than four, the other children could forgive the transgression of playing with toys outside of your gender (Bailey 44-45).

Similarly, Devor found that children have very specific ideas about what is masculine and what is feminine. In an experiment comparable to Bailey’s, Devor found that children identified the gender of the anatomically correct dolls by using
the doll's secondary sex characteristics (Devor 44). This way of understanding sex and gender suggests that children do not see anatomy as the absolute definer of what is male, masculine or female, feminine (Devor 24). Children often use gender as a means to negotiate their lived experiences and, as they become older, they incorporate ideas about race, class and sexuality in order to help them define their place in the world (Devor 27). The early introduction to the classification of people by gender may result in a very static view of what roles, activities, mannerisms and characteristics are acceptable for men and women to perform or to display (Devor 29).

How children define gender seems to be a very straightforward and static process of elimination – boys play with trucks and wear blue and girls play with dolls and wear pink and never the twain shall meet (Calvert 67). Martin et al discovered that boys and girls were likely to form ideas about gender appropriate play based on their own preferences and were more likely to think toys defined as girl toys were only appropriate for girls and toys defined as boy toys were only appropriate for boys (Martin et al 754). It is very difficult to change children's stereotyped versions of gender because

the ways in which children's play with toys such as Barbie or Power Rangers appear to encourage gender-stereotyped and biased play and to restrict the gender roles children are prepared to explore as they construct their identities via play (MacNaughton 19).

Furthermore children are inundated with television characters and toys whose gender identity is completely exaggerated to hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine ideals that encourage children to define male and female in complete
binary opposition to one another (Seiter 300). This is not surprising since almost all toys, television programs and popular culture items associated with children and childhood are created and disseminated by adults. Collectively, children are a marginalized group without peer representation in the dominant power structures of society (Corsaro 8) and as such are subject to control by adults. So even though some adults would like children to be able to live a stereotype free existence the vast majority of adults do not; and since they are the major purveyors of child culture, children are subjected to these hyper reified ideals (Calvert 67).

As children grow older and gender roles become even more static, gender hierarchies are defined and reinforced through play structures. A gender order is created to help reinforce the normative behaviours learned in early childhood and to prevent gender transgressions (McGuffey and Rich 609). Gender transgressions would be defined as cross sex friendships or participating in activities deemed to be inappropriate for your gender. As discussed earlier, both girls and boys are encouraged to play with toys deemed gender appropriate by their peer group. Moreover, as children age, there is an expectation from the peer group that not only will children maintain appropriately gendered toy preferences but that they will also maintain homosocial peer preferences (Martin et al 755, McGuffey and Rich 610).

There is a status hierarchy on the playground. Older boys are usually at the top of that hierarchy and as such are the ones responsible for policing other children's behaviours (McGuffey and Rich 612). Connell refers to this
phenomenon as hegemonic masculinity which always exists "in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (Connell 183). In this way all things on the playground become defined by or against what is acceptably masculine (McGuffey and Rich 612). For girls, if accepted by higher status males, this means that power can be gained by heterosocial interaction while for lower status boys, heterosocial interaction could be detrimental to any power that they may have. The gender order cannot be maintained by the higher status males alone, although they are integral to this construct. Lower status males and females must internalize their perceived inferiority in order to perpetuate the hierarchy and maintain the status quo (Stachowski 31).

2.6 Summary

Dominant, mainstream Western ideologies about beauty are constructed to continue the objectification and commodification of women's and girl's bodies in order to maintain the patriarchal power structures. Most critical analysts of Barbie would suggest that the makers of the doll are complicit in maintaining this impossible white, thin, Euro-centric ideal and that children are the unwitting pawns. Although many theorists make the assumption that these stereotyped ideals do affect girls who play with Barbie™, they are unable to prove this beyond anecdotal references (Attfield 1996; duCille 1994; Gilman 1998; Lord 1994; Steinberg 1997); there is a lack of relevant literature that involves the voices of children as collaborative research partners. Many theorists whose beliefs stem from reflections on their own childhood with Barbie™ believe that
Barbie™ is damaging to children because of the ways that she is coded. In order to understand the effect that the Barbie™ doll has on children, we must examine the history and ideology of the doll and the lived experiences of the children that play with her.
Chapter 3

Herstorical Significance of Barbie™

3.1 Birth of an Icon

The herstory of the Barbie™ doll is a crucial aspect in understanding the impact and effect that the doll has had on the world. Early in the 1950s, Ruth Handler, co-founder of Mattel, noticed that her daughter and her daughter’s friends enjoyed playing with Hollywood cut out dolls (Tosa 25-27) designed to look like grown women. The girls would spend hours pinning the paper evening gowns to the dolls’ shoulders and imagining their lives as glamorous starlets. This type of play sparked an idea in Handler about creating a three dimensional doll that looked like a grown woman. In the 1950s, the only dolls available for everyday play were baby dolls, which Handler felt were toys used to train girls for motherhood and a role in the home. Handler herself had always worked outside of the home as an entrepreneur and businesswoman so dolls that trained girls for a life of domesticity seemed incongruous to Handler’s own experience. Therefore, in order to provide her daughter with a “realistic” alternative to the baby dolls, Handler set about to create a doll more reflective of her life experience, that is a doll that could portray a life that was dynamic, adventurous and creative (Lord 16, 48-49).
In 1956, Handler traveled to Lucerne, Switzerland and found the Lilli doll which was originally a cartoon character portrayed as a gold-digging floozy in the Bild Zeitung newspaper. When Handler discovered her, she was a three-dimensional incarnation sold as a kind of overtly sexualized bar mascot with Aryan good looks. Handler purchased several of the dolls and set out to change the tarty German sex-fetish doll into something palatable that a white, middle-class, American audience would want to buy for its daughters to play with (Lord 26-29).

Initially, Handler had a great deal of difficulty convincing the predominantly male board members of Mattel Inc. that the production of the Barbie™ doll was a good idea. The board members were extremely reluctant to produce such a "sexy" toy both because the intended audience was young girls, and because Ruth Handler initially had no intention of producing a male consort or father figure to go with the Barbie™ doll. The absence of a male figure represented a potential threat to traditional patriarchal values, as Pearson and Mullins observed: "Initially, the doll provided a relatively empowering image of women's social and labour possibilities as well as evidence of the power of feminine sexuality." (Pearson and Mullins 229). This doll was not going to be a mommy; she was going to be a career girl (Lord 30-34).

Handler found a Japanese manufacturing company that would be able to manufacture the doll to her specifications. Once that was in place, Handler hired a clothing designer to produce couture designs for Barbie™. Handler's idea, taken from watching her daughter and friends play with the Hollywood cutout
dolls, was that girls would have one Barbie™ but many outfits and enlisted Japanese women to do piecework in their homes. Originally all of Barbie’s designer clothes were hand tailored. This was only the beginning. Handler created a market research team to study the psychology of the consumer so that they would best understand how to promote the doll for maximum effect. Psychologist Ernest Dichter interviewed parents and children in order to understand what would be most appealing to them and in what way Mattel could present the doll to the buying public so that its members would cast aside their aspersions and embrace Barbie™.

With Barbie™ appropriately coiffed and attired and the marketing research into the psychology of the potential consumers in place, it was time for Barbie’s unveiling. But despite all Mattel’s best efforts, Barbie™ debuted at the 1959 American Toy Fair in New York City to a lukewarm response (Lord 34-41). The purchasers for the major chains did not want little girls to play with a sexy, single doll. Some orders were taken but certainly not to the extent that Mattel had hoped.

Enter television advertising. The Carson/Roberts advertising agency had created an elaborate advertising campaign intended to run on television, which at the time was considered an avant-garde and risky venture, especially to promote a doll (Lord 21). The secret to Carson/Roberts’ plan lay in its presentation of the Barbie doll as an independent individual with a biography and a glamorous lifestyle. The advertisements depicted Barbie™ doing glamorous things and living an adventurous and exciting life. The magic of television was used to
promote the illusion that Barbie™ was a ‘real’ person. As Cy Schneider, a copywriter for the early ads, explained, “We never mentioned the fact that she was a doll” (Lord 41). After the television ads ran, the newly personified Barbie™ doll practically flew off store shelves and by the end of 1959 she was a run away success (Kline 170). The way that the Barbie™ doll was marketed literally changed the way that advertising was viewed. Prior to Barbie, advertising for toys was seen as a waste of money. The assumption was that children would ask for and receive toys whether money was spent on advertising or not (Kline 163-64; Lord 17). Mattel’s Barbie™ campaign changed that assumption by creating a purchasing frenzy among consumers as had never been seen before.

3.2 Watershed Moments in Barbie™ Herstory

Barbie™ has had many incarnations over the years but the original Barbie™ doll (Barbie #1) came wearing a black and white striped bathing suit, black high heels and gold hoop earrings. She had a blonde ponytail, blood red finger and toenails, a rigid body, a heavily made-up face with arched brows and a coy, sidelong glance. The coyness of Barbie’s stare, one of the features that remained from her original Lilli incarnation, is an important aspect of the doll and her message. Her sidelong glance demonstrates that while she is still constructed and displayed in an overtly sexual manner, we do not need to fear that sexuality as it is not hers to control, but ours, the owner/surveyor. This reading of Barbie’s gaze fits well with John Berger’s analysis of the male gaze in Ways of Seeing. In his study of European nude paintings Berger posits that while women are the centerpieces of this art form, their nudity has nothing to do
with female sexual power but is being used to reassure the male spectators/owners of their own dynamism and sexual power (Berger 55). Thus by having the doll’s eyes positioned so that they avoid direct eye contact with the owner/surveyor, she is rendered powerless and without agency (Berger 55-57). Similarly, in her analysis of the male gaze in film, Mulvey argues that the passive celluloid female becomes a site for men/the viewer to enact their fantasies of power and desire (Mulvey 834,843). A parallel can be drawn between Mulvey’s analysis of film goers and child consumers of Barbie™. Although Barbie’s main consumers are children there is still an element of the patriarchal other contained in Barbie’s body whereby the girls can imagine themselves as glamorous and sexy. As they look at and display their Barbies they can imagine that they are experiencing the pleasures of being looked at and displayed (Mulvey 835, 837). In order for Barbie™ to have a highly sexualized body, she must remain unaware of the power that it confers upon her. Similar conclusions can be applied to understanding the attractiveness of Barbie™.

One of the problems with Barbie’s “sexy” body was her single status. It seemed improper for a girl like Barbie™ to be without sanctioned male attention. So in 1961 Barbie™ got a boyfriend. Ken was introduced as the all-American boy next door that was to squire Barbie™ to and from different events as her glamorous lifestyle dictated (Tosa 10-11). Ken was a white, well-muscled, smiling escort devoid of genitalia and therefore non-threatening. He was, like a eunuch, there to protect Barbie™ and provide her with suitable male company but without permeating the air with sexual tension. With the advent of Ken,
Barbie's façade of heterosexuality and decency were confirmed, as she was now a part of a legitimate couple participating in 'wholesome' asexual, dating activities.

Over the years, Barbie™ has acquired over 60 family members, friends and pets. In 1963 Barbie's best friend Midge was introduced and in 1964 she gained a little sister, Skipper (Tosa 10-11). During the turbulent 1960s, in order for Barbie™ to "keep with the times" and bridge the waters of racial segregation, Mattel felt that she should extend her hand in friendship to the African-American community and so in 1968, Barbie™ made her first friend of colour, Christy. Although befriending people of colour was 'okay' it was not until 1980, twelve years later, that Barbie™ herself was produced as a doll of colour by an African-American designer, Kitty Black Perkins (Lord 108). Despite this seeming advance in the Barbie™ world, the new doll of colour was still referred to as "Black Barbie" while the original Barbie™ was referred to as Barbie™. This distinction continued to serve as a subtle reminder that even though Barbies could now be purchased in many "colours", the norm was still white.

Despite Mattel's attempts to desegregate the Barbie™ world, many of their efforts seemed questionable at best. In 1980, with the inception of the Black Barbie™, Mattel also launched the Dolls of the World collection (Lord 176-177), which introduced between two and five "ethnic" Barbie™ dolls per year. Each doll was presented in a traditional costume depicting her country of origin with a brief lesson in the history, customs and traditions of that region reprinted on the back of the box. Some Barbies of the World were given high marks for
"authenticity and attractiveness" such as the Malaysian incarnation (Lord 177). Others, however, were not received so positively. Referring to the Jamaican Barbie™ doll's head rag and apron, cultural critic Ann duCille declared "that's the one I call the anorexic Aunt Jemima" (duCille as quoted in Lord 177). Although Barbie™ has become more racially diverse, those Barbies who do not fall into the white, blonde version are still considered "other".

3.3 Summary

Although Handler had originally wanted to move away the constraints of domesticity and create a doll that was active and able to go beyond traditional gender expectations and roles, this goal was impossible given Barbie’s origins as a sex-fetish doll. Her beginnings in the porn industry left their mark on how Barbie’s body was read and Handler’s attempts to legitimize Barbie’s sexy demeanor through sanctioned monogamous heterosexual behaviour created a dichotomy that viewed Barbie™ as a Madonna or a whore. Barbie’s sordid past coupled with Mattel’s full steam ahead approach to marketing her as ‘the girl that you would want your daughter to be’ created a complicated intersection of gender, sexuality and race.

Barbie’s adherence to the Western ideals of beauty and femininity are further informed by her whiteness. Over the years a variety of dolls have joined the Barbie™ “family” and most every culture and racialized group has been represented as “other” to Barbie’s white, Aryan¹ good looks. Her embodiment of the white, middle-class, American dream is intended to inspire those who already

¹ used in Nazism to designate a supposed master race of non-Jewish Caucasians having especially Nordic features (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)
represent it to maintain the status quo and to convince those who have not yet achieved the American dream to continue aspiring to do so.

Barbie's omnipresence as an icon of white, Western femininity and her continued market success have made her a force to be reckoned with. She has managed to grip the global marketplace around the throat with her tiny blood–red fingernails by never letting go of the capitalist, patriarchal ideals that have made her so successful. Historically Barbie™ has been constructed to meet the perceived needs of Western consumers for the last forty plus years. With her recent expansion into the technological arena with such things as Barbie™ computers and Barbie Fashion Designer™, she has continued her ascent as the poster girl for the capitalist American dream.
Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Overview

One of the goals of feminist research is to help bring to voice those who have been previously rendered silent (Chin 133; Evans 5). Most of the research that has been done on the Barbie™ phenomenon has excluded the voices of children and primarily focused on the past experiences of women which are based upon their reflections from twenty or more years’ distance. Because the focus of the literature on Barbie™ is skewed to privilege reflected experience, I wanted to focus my study on girls who are playing with Barbie™ now so that I would be able to have access to their ‘unadulterated’ ideas about the doll and her significance to them. In order to gain access to their life-worlds, I used three methods; a semi-structured interview, role-playing and a demographic survey.

One of the main challenges in this research was the obvious power differential between my participants and myself. My participants perceived me as a de facto authority figure simply because of my adult status. As a result I feared that the children would not be as forthcoming as they may be in front of a peer or that they may censor themselves and tell me things that they think a grown-up would want to hear instead of what they were really thinking. In order to make my participants feel that they were collaborative research partners who could speak freely about the topic at hand without feeling the need to self-censor in front of a
"grown-up", I had to relinquish a lot of control over the interview process. In essence I was doing cross-cultural research with a marginalized group of people with their own language and culture so it became doubly important for me to earn their confidence in order to glean the information that I desired. In part, the focus of my study was to hear the stories of the participants and how they felt those stories were significant to them. Stories are often seen as “the pathways to understanding culture” and I hoped that the girls’ Barbie™ stories would help me to better understand child culture (Plummer 18).

4.2 Ethical Considerations

Working with young children raised a number of ethical issues around informed consent and power relations. As an adult, I was instantly perceived as an authority figure. In addition, I was also a researcher who was there to gather information from the children. I developed a number of strategies, ranging from the formal to the informal, to reduce my authority in the eyes of the children.

Since my participants had not yet reached the age of majority, it was necessary for me to receive not only their permission but also the permission of a parent or guardian. It was essential for me to create a rapport with the parent/guardian so that they would allow me access to their child (Fine and Glassner 167). I created a consent form for the parents to sign and an assent form for the children to sign (see Appendices C and D). Both the consent and assent forms explained the nature of the study in great detail, although the assent form used far more accessible language (Fine and Glassner 160). I read the assent form to the children and had them sign or print their names on the
form if they agreed to participate in the study. I also tape recorded the reading of the assent form and then asked the children to verbalize their agreement onto the tape. No one declined to participate. I found that the children appreciated the formality of signing the documents which encouraged them to see themselves as collaborative partners in my study.

In order to facilitate this bridge-building, it was necessary to practice reciprocity. I did this by providing all of my participants with culturally appropriate gifts in the form of a Groovy Girls™ doll as thanks for their participation in the study. I chose these gifts because they were popular, and because although I was aware that all of the girls liked Barbie™, I was unsure how the parents felt about the doll and did not want to antagonize those who were trying to limit their daughter’s Barbie™ doll consumption. The Groovy Girls dolls were also chosen because they came in a variety of colors and ethnicities so as not to perpetuate the white, blond mystique of the Barbie™ doll (Gilman 17).

I tried to downplay my perceived authority as much as possible, emphasizing to the children that they were in fact the focus of my study and that what they thought was very important. I also stressed to them how vital their participation was and how my research would not be possible without them. To facilitate my entry into the home I always spoke with the parents first to get permission and to arrange the interview (Fine and Sandstrom 33). Once I arrived at the girls’ homes, the parents, with whom I had already met, could introduce me to their daughters. In this way I was already viewed as a “safe” grown-up (Rice and Ezzy 62). As well, I always arranged so that the interview would take place
on the girls’ “turf.” The interviews took place in the girls’ homes. In addition, they would be in the girls’ bedrooms or playrooms – wherever they felt like they were in the most control of the situation (Rice and Ezzy 62). I always asked if it would be okay if we sat on the floor so in this way the girls and I would be on the same “level”. In other words, I would be entering their domain. I endeavored to subvert my role as authority figure by practicing atypical adult behaviours. For instance, I established the girls as the authority figure in our relationship – often playing “dumb” and pretending to not understand situations that they told me so that they could elaborate points and “explain” things to me (Fine and Sandstrom 17; Rice and Ezzy 58). The interviews were conducted in a way that allowed me to collect data while still allowing the girls to assert their individuality and maintain the integrity of their participation.

It was also necessary for the parent or guardian to review the transcribed interviews. I found that some of the girls had little or no interest in reviewing the transcriptions. Those that did wish to read them were very reluctant to make any changes. The parents also were very reluctant to make changes to the transcripts. For example when I went to review Natalie’s transcripts with her, she noticed that I had not been able to hear a name during our interview and that I had subsequently left a blank space for it in the transcript. She asked me if she could write it in, to which I replied, “Sure. You can add or change anything that you want.” Natalie’s mother had been out of earshot for this exchange and when she came back to the table a moment later and saw that Natalie was writing on the transcript she was slightly horrified and scolded Natalie saying, “No Natalie.
Don't write on that. That's Tracy's work." Even though I had explained to both Natalie and her mother at the beginning of the review process that the transcripts were theirs, and that although I would be using the interviews for my research, it was important for Natalie and her mother to make any changes that they felt were necessary, there still seemed to be a feeling among the participants that the transcripts were mine and not theirs because I was the one writing the thesis. Despite my explanation during the consent/assent process, the interview, and the transcript review that they could add, change, or delete anything that they wanted, no one really exercised this right in any significant way other than the addition of one name. Possibly because their words were now on paper waiting to be reviewed, the girls, and their parents, no longer felt that they had ownership over the thoughts and ideas expressed during the interviews. As well the children may have had difficulty moving from the oral to the written traditions as the length of the transcripts could be daunting to a young child. I provided each family with a complete transcript of their child's interview, for their own records. Some of the parents were very interested in the study and wanted to talk about the transcripts in detail and others hardly made it past page five before saying, "I'm sure it's fine" and signing the transcript release form.

Confidentiality was another issue that emerged a number of times during the course of the interviews. Although all of the girls had pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity, they loved to talk about the study with their friends and other grown-ups. Many of the parents would tell me things like, "Oh Meagan is so excited about this study! She tells everyone that she is participating in a study
about Barbie." While the girls and the parents had consented to this study none of them seemed to have any vested interest in maintaining confidentiality. I thought that the girls may have wanted to share their participation with their friends and communities because they were excited about being asked to participate in a study. As well, it is possible that they were able to glean some prestige from their participation. In addition the parents may have felt that their child's involvement in a research project was interesting news. Most likely, the girls and their parents could not see any potential negative repercussions from their involvement. So secrecy was never really an issue for them at all.

The issue of confidentiality was again raised in the context of the parent/child relationship. I occasionally encountered parents of my participants in social settings. Most parents wanted to talk about the study and quite enjoyed repeating some of the "funnier" comments of their children and laughing at them, even if the children were present. I felt very uncomfortable during these encounters because I felt like part of my job, as a researcher, was to protect the anonymity of my participants as well as be respectful of their words and ideas. But these encounters could impart the perception that the parents did not see their children as autonomous beings or that the parents did not see the interviews as the children's intellectual property. While it was true that some of the things that the girls said during the interviews were humorous, I did not want the girls to feel that their words were being devalued or that they themselves were being disempowered. While I was certain that the girls' parents had no nefarious intent in their discussion of the interviews, my impression was that the
girls' participation in the study was not seen as something that required confidentiality or anonymity because after all I was "just speaking to prepubescent girls about Barbie."

In the context of the parent/child relationship, I began to view the girls as marginalized peoples. As persons under the age of legal consent, they are reliant on their parents or guardians to make informed decisions for them, but because they are also viewed as non-autonomous beings, their participation in this study seemed to be viewed as a collective effort and as such their voices could be appropriated. Certainly, as there is an obvious power differential between the girls and myself, there is also a power differential between the girls and their parents.

Because I was dealing with human participants it was necessary to receive ethical approval from the Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Science Research. The following are the principles that guided my research.

1) In consultation with my participants, pseudonyms were chosen to provide them with complete anonymity.

2) The participants and their parents or guardians were made aware that participation in this study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without fear of penalty or loss of service from the University of Saskatchewan. They were also made aware that if they choose to withdraw all data collected from that participant would be immediately destroyed.
3) Participants were made aware that all information, data and conversations would be kept completely confidential.

4) Participants and their parents/guardians were offered the opportunity to review all transcriptions and were offered the opportunity to clarify, edit and delete any and all information. No information was used until the transcripts had been approved and a release form had been signed by the parents/guardians.

Once my thesis project has been completed and defended, all transcripts and taped interviews will be kept in a securely locked place with my supervisor, Lesley Biggs, for five years and then destroyed.

4.3 Design

In order to gain access to the life-worlds of children, and to their understandings of gender in particular, I utilized three methods: open-ended interviews with the girls, role-playing with the dolls, and a demographic survey, with the girls’ parent(s). Through the use of triangulation where different types of data are used to explore different dimensions of the child’s world, I was able to gain insight into the complexities of the girls’ construction of gender, femininity, sexuality, identity and beauty as mediated through the Barbie™ doll. For instance the demographic survey provided me with background information that I may not have been privy to otherwise, thus supplementing the information that the girls provided in the interviews and through the role-playing with the dolls. In addition, I was able to gain insight into the ways in which the girls accept, modify or subvert the dominant ideals.
The purpose of the interviews was to inquire as to what kinds of things the girls did or games they played with the Barbies, why they liked playing with Barbie™, and what things they liked most or least about the doll. These kinds of questions allowed me to understand how the child used the doll to negotiate familial and cultural ideas of gender. (See Appendix A) Role-playing was an especially effective technique as it allowed the girls to express themselves using multiple voices – both their own and those of their dolls. The demographic survey (See Appendix B) allowed me to contextualize some of their responses based on the information with which their parents had provided me. I based my research design on the pilot study that I conducted in March 2000.

4.4 Pilot Study

In March 2000 I conducted two pilot study interviews under the auspices of a graduate level methodologies course. I interviewed two girls, aged eight and ten, who were active Barbie™ players. I conducted these interviews in the girls' home with the consent of their mother. I spent approximately one hour playing with the girls and their Barbie™ dolls in their living room. During the interview process, the girls insisted that I be responsible for the “doing” of the Barbies’ hair as well as changing the dolls’ outfits as the girls directed. By acting as a “quasi-friend” (Bogdan and Biklen 85) and willingly “playing Barbies” I was able to engage with the girls almost immediately.

The girls took turns being interviewed and changed places at about the halfway point. They occasionally found it difficult to articulate the answers to questions until Angela, the 8 year old, suggested that the Barbies might have
more to say. The Barbies, given voice by Angela and Pamela, had opinions on just about everything including themes such as beauty, hair and likeability. Occasionally the Barbies' opinions and the girls' opinions contradicted each other, and at other times they brought forth information that could be directly related to information I had received on the demographic survey. For instance, through the demographic survey I had learned that Pamela was a foster child. When I interviewed Pamela she made no mention of it, but when I interviewed her Barbie™ doll, she [giving voice to the doll] intimated that if she had a [doll] house of her own she would not have to sleep on the floor. When I returned later to go over the transcriptions with her foster mother, Maggie explained that before Pamela came to live with her she had never had her own room and had in fact often slept on the floor. In addition, this result demonstrated to me that while all the questions on the demographic survey would not apply to all participants in the same manner that they had applied to Pamela, the survey was still an important instrument to help explain and contextualize some of the responses as well as allowing me to see both the similarities and differences between the girls in my sample.

The pilot study was a valuable experience in that it enabled me to formulate new and different strategies, such as interviewing the Barbie™ dolls. This process also demonstrated the importance of letting the girls shape the course of the interview. Having the girls set the time limits on the interview and trade-off in the middle when they needed a break, allowed them to remain focused as well as allowed me to collect more salient data.
As noted in section 2.3 Critical Analyses of Barbie™, very few studies engage directly with children’s experiences with Barbie™. However, two studies came to my attention. In a similar project, Delf Maria Hohmann, a researcher from Memorial University in St. John’s, Newfoundland conducted a participant observation and interview process with a seven-year-old participant named Jennifer. Hohmann acted as a friend/playmate to Jennifer and reported what transpired during each play encounter. Hohmann found that Jennifer tended to re-enact many of her own experiences with her family including play patterns with other siblings, punishments and parental roles (Hohmann 116). Through play, Jennifer often related her own status in the family as well as explaining the roles of her mother and younger sister by mimicking their actions (Hohmann 116). In addition to reflecting her own reality, Jennifer occasionally referenced the doll’s cultural importance by talking about how she thought society valued slenderness and prettiness in women (Hohmann 113, 120). These examples demonstrate how Jennifer was able to use the Barbies on multiple levels to reflect ideas gleaned from both inside and outside the family structure.

In addition to Hohmann’s study, Lana F. Rakow briefly explored her daughter’s relationship with Barbie™ in a one-on-one interview. Rakow questioned her 10-year-old daughter Caitlin about her experiences with and thoughts on the Barbie™ doll. Rakow describes this interview as a conversation and sets off the preamble to the text with a statement that “not all girls want Barbies or think that they are good for girls to play with” (Rakow and Rakow 11).
The Rakows’ conversation centred on Caitlin's dislike for the doll and her explanation of why she thought Barbies might be bad for girls to play with.

These projects differ from mine in that only one girl was used as a participant and the researchers who gathered data were already well integrated into the children’s lives in the role of babysitter and mother, respectively. While Hohmann and Rakow found some of the same themes that I did in the pilot study, both studies are limited by their sample size and therefore, it is difficult to compare the results. In addition, while Hohmann’s participant, like my participants, was quite enamored of Barbie™, Rakow’s participant was vehement in her rejection of the doll and the mainstream ideals that she represented.

4.5 Participant Observation and Semi-Structured Interviews

I was primarily interested in discovering the social and fantasy worlds of children through careful observation and questioning that allowed the child to direct the flow of the conversation into areas which were most important to her (Rice and Ezzy 51). Often it seems that “adults have a difficult time taking what children say seriously” (Morrow, cited in Bogdan and Biklen 85), and as a result children expect that adults will treat them like children and not as partners in collaborative research (Bogdan and Biklen 85). I hoped that my study’s design would allow for the girls to see themselves as participants and not as subjects and Natalie, an 8-year-old girl who was very eager to participate in my research project, provided an excellent example of this. I received a phone call from Natalie that went like this:

Tracy: Hello?
Natalie: Hello?

Tracy: Hi? Can I help you?

Natalie: Are you the lady that wants to talk to girls about Barbie?

Tracy: Yes.

Natalie: Good. Because I am a girl and I happen to love Barbie.

Tracy: Ohhh. How old are you?

Natalie: I am 8 and my name is Natalie.

Tracy: Okay Natalie, does your mom know that you're calling me?

Natalie: Yes.

Tracy: Well why don't you let me talk to her and we can arrange a time for me to come and talk to you.

Natalie's mom told me that Natalie had seen the poster on campus and had immediately requested that she be allowed to phone me to find out more. This exchange demonstrates that Natalie saw herself as integral to the research project and that she felt like she had knowledge to share.

Based on my pilot study and the observations of Caputo, Fine and Hohmann, participant observation was the best method to allow me entry into "the worlds" of the participants so that I could actively engage with them and learn from them through their activities (Bogdan and Biklen 2-3). I combined participant-observation techniques with a semi-structured interview, which according to Anderson and Jack "offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility for researchers and narrators" (emphasis added); (Anderson and Jack 11). In addition semi-structured interviews were preferable in this situation because they allowed the participant to control the direction of the interview while allowing the
researcher to collect data (Plummer 21; Reinharz 18). This method allowed for the effective inclusion of the voice of the participant as both the Barbie™ and as herself (Reinharz 19).

Feminist research is actively involved in encouraging the recording of the histories of those who are silent (Evans 5). Children can be considered a group that has often been rendered silent, in that their perceived powerlessness allows adults to ignore their voices (Bogdan and Biklen 85). For this reason, the combination of participant-observation and semi-structured interviews was most effective because it ensured that the participants be actively engaged in the process. I chose a semi-structured interview format for a number of reasons. Although the children that I was interviewing had some aspects of a shared culture in common, (i.e. they all live in Saskatoon, are roughly the same age and play with Barbie™,) they are not a homogenous group. It was quite possible that they would all have the same interests in the Barbie™ doll but it was also possible that they would not or that they would play in vastly different ways or have different favourite games based on their own personal interests and backgrounds. I wanted a small set of questions that I would be able to refer back to but I also wanted the girls to have latitude based on their interests as individuals. Semi-structured or open-ended interviews are ideal in this situation because “the phrasing of the questions and the order in which they are asked [can be] altered to fit each individual” thus celebrating the unique stories of each participant (Rice and Ezzy 58). I assumed that all children would not have the same attention span and that some would be more willing to sit through an
interview than others. Some participants literally would have talked all night. They never ran out of things to say about Barbie™, and they had opinions to share about their play with the doll and their friends' doll play in addition to their own theories about the doll. Other participants were less forthcoming and eliciting more than a “Yes”, “No”, or “I don’t know” response became a personal challenge for me.

A semi-structured interview format does not assume that all the questions are known before the research begins (Fine and Sandstrom 13). While I found that having a short list of guiding questions was very helpful as a reminder to myself, I found that I received far more interesting and individual responses when I let the girls take over the interview and lead me in the directions that were most interesting to them (Chambon 125). In fact, some of the most surprising responses usually came near the end of the interview when I would ask, “Is there anything else that you think is important for me to know about Barbie™ that I didn’t ask you about?” (Rice and Ezzy 59). After asking this question one participant gave me a very complex answer about racism and another gave me her thoughts on Barbie™ collecting and capitalism. Usually by the end of the interview, the girls were very comfortable with me and were freer with their answers thus asking a general question that allowed the girls to reflect on all that we had talked about sometimes elicited surprising responses.

It became obvious to me early on that note-taking during the interviews was not going to be feasible. The interviews took place on the floor and I was occasionally required to hold Barbie™ dolls while talking to the girls. For the
most part during the interviews the girls moved around quite a bit while drawing my attention to the different Barbies in their possession. As a result, it was logistically impossible for me to take notes and be an active participant in the interviews. While I was able to make notes after each interview I found that the tape recorder, "provided a level of detail and accuracy not obtainable from memory or by taking notes" (Rice and Ezzy 63). The tape recorder was also preferable because the children sometimes gave unpredictable and changing responses. As I explained in section 4.4 Pilot Study, the Barbies and the girls did not always agree on what the proper response would be. Therefore I felt that the girls were in a process of identity invention and may give multiple and varying answers so they needed a lot of latitude when constructing how they wanted me to perceive them (Wetherell and Potter 171). The nuances of their shifting meanings and ideas when constructing their social worlds would have been very difficult to capture by note-taking alone (Davies 16; Plummer 20).

4.6 Sample

Studies indicated that girls who play with Barbies tend to fall into the age range of five to ten (Maccoby 42) although there is a downward shift in the ages of girls who play with Barbie™. To locate my potential participants, I used a combination of "snowball" sampling, where I contacted one participant and hoped that she would refer me onto more potential participants, and advertising. I advertised mainly on the University of Saskatchewan campus by placing posters advertising my study in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Ally Centre, the Aboriginal Students' Centre, Disability Services for Students, the
International Students Office and the Women's Centre. I also asked professors in Women's and Gender Studies and Native Studies classes to pass around my request for volunteers in their classes. I had hoped that advertising on campus would allow me to reach people of various classes, races and sexual orientations but I realized that limiting my search to campus would skew my sample in the direction of those with higher levels of education. This was an exploratory study, and although I relied on the University of Saskatchewan sample, I tried to include a diverse range of experiences.

I found ten girls who played with Barbie™ and who (I initially thought) would be able to adequately articulate their feelings and experiences. Unfortunately, after the initial interview I had to drop three participants from the study. The oldest girl that I interviewed was 15 years old and, although her interview was interesting, it seemed very forced and she seemed uncomfortable with the process. She was in a completely different space than the other participants in that I would characterize her more as a Barbie™ player2 rather than a girl who played with Barbie™. The five-year-old was also dropped from the study because she did not have the verbal skills to adequately articulate her experiences and ideas about Barbie™ beyond the immediacy of the play situation. Finally I dropped one 8-year-old from the study who was a very reluctant participant, and seemed uncomfortable with my presence in her home even though her mother was in the next room. Since Brittany was very shy she spoke directly into her chest for the entire interview. When I tried to listen to the tape afterward it was completely inaudible. I felt that the interview did not go very

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2 Barbie players are often grown women and men who use Barbies in subversive ways.
well because I did not feel that I had been able to engage her in the process as much as I had been able to with the other girls. The impression that I received from Brittany was that I was overstepping my bounds as an adult and invading the child world. This view was reinforced by the observations of Fine and Glassner who found that entering a child’s worlds is sometimes problematic and can cause children to reject the participant observer as an interloper (Fine and Glassner 167). I considered re-interviewing her but she had been so reluctant the first time that I thought if I had to approach her again and explain that I was unable to use any of our first interview she might feel upset and rejected or that I did not like what she had said the first time.

4.7 Demographic Survey

The demographic survey contained questions about the structure of the family, how household labour was distributed, what other alternative child care arrangements existed, ages of children in the family, the children’s extra-curricular activities, education and income levels of both parents and to which racial and/or ethnic groups the family has affiliated. (See Appendix B). I asked the parent or guardian to fill out the demographic survey (this took approximately twenty to thirty minutes) while I was interviewing her/his child(ren). The demographic survey helped me to contextualize some of the answers that the children gave, as well as helped me to compare the backgrounds and responses of the participants. This information was important for understanding the kinds of gender roles to which the child had been exposed.
The demographic survey was divided into eight separate sections – Individual Identification, Family Dynamic, Work, Childcare Responsibilities and Division of Labour, Education, Ethnic Origins, Your Child, and Income Level. All of the surveys except one were filled out by the female parent/caregiver. (The person who filled out the survey is referred to as the parent and the other adult member of the household is referred to as the partner.) I have demographic results of seven girls from five different families. Four of the girls were seven years old, one was eight and two were nine. The ages of the parents/guardians who filled out the survey ranged from twenty-three to forty-three with a mean of 34.5 years. The ages of the partners ranged from twenty-four to forty-five with a mean of 35.8 years. All of the girls except Meagan had at least one sibling living in the house with them. Meagan was an only child and Terri and Toni were identical twins. Three of the families had male/female partners that identified themselves as heterosexual and married, one family identified as male/female partners that were heterosexual and cohabiting while the remaining family identified as cohabiting male/female partners with the male partner identifying himself as bisexual. All the families except one (Meagan) had children from their present relationship only.

Three of the parents worked outside of the home full-time as an Associate Professor, student and student/cashier respectively. The other two parents considered themselves to be full-time homemakers. All of the partners worked full-time outside of the home. One worked as a guidance counselor, two worked in management and two were students. One of the partners who worked in
management was also self-employed in addition to his full-time work. None of the partners were considered to be full-time homemakers.

All of the female parents that filled out the survey with the exception of one felt that they provided most of the childcare. One female and the one male parent felt that childcare duties were evenly divided between themselves and their partner. (Incidentally, it was the youngest two parents with the lowest incomes that felt childcare duties were equally divided.) Domestic labour activities were primarily split along traditional gender lines with the full-time homemakers (female) estimating that they did the greatest share, 75 percent or more, of all household labour. Three of the families had no alternative childcare arrangements other than the parents/guardians themselves. The other two families used daycare, drop-in babysitter, grandparents and a daycare centre, grandparents and close friend respectively.

As can be expected the educational backgrounds were all skewed towards higher levels of education. Two of the parents had some college or a technical diploma, one had a university degree, one had some university and one had a post-graduate degree. One of the partners had some college or a technical diploma, two had some university, one had a university degree and one had a postgraduate degree.

None of the parents identified themselves as being a part of an ethnic group or as being a visible minority. One parent identified her partner as Metis but not as a visible minority.
All of the children with the exception of one were identified as being involved in extra-curricular activities. The girls who did participate in extra-curricular activities took part in a wide range of activities including – sports (skating, soccer, cross country running, baseball and swimming), cultural (music, dancing/singing, choir and piano lessons), clubs (Brownies and Guides) and socially-conscious (volunteering at Sherbrooke community centre). In addition to these activities, the girls all watched television. Two of the girls watched 6-10 hours of television per week, two of the girls watched 11 -15 hours of television per week and three of the girls watched 16-20 hours of television a week.

The girls all received their first Barbie™ between the ages of one and three and all were given by a relative as a gift for either Christmas or a birthday. Two of the families bought Barbies for their children, one family sometimes did and two never did. The families that bought Barbies for their child(ren) also bought Barbie™ accessories such as houses, cars, pets, etc. Those that did not buy Barbies for their children explained to me that they chose not to purchase Barbies for their children because, “she gets so many as gifts”, “we have been fortunate enough to have a lot of hand-me-downs from family and friends”, and “we were concerned with how thin Barbie™ is, as many have professional costumes (Doctor, Businesswoman) but these are the exceptions and she is always advertised as a ditzy fashion doll.” I interpreted these responses to mean that some of the parents perceived that Barbie™ may have an effect on their daughter’s perception of what it is to be female.
The families' income ranged from very low to very high. Two of the families made $10 001-20 000, one made $75 001-100 000, one made $100 001-125 000 and one made $150 001-175 000. There seemed to be a direct correlation between how much money a family made and how many Barbies and Barbie™ accessories a family owned, with the families who made the most money also having the most Barbies.

4.8 Role – Playing

Role-playing became an important aspect of the interview process because many girls, as an aspect of their play, give voice to their dolls so that they can direct their actions to others during playtime (Hohmann 115-116). Moreover, role-playing allowed the child to enter her imaginings of the adult world. Motz found that "... a preadolescent girl ... can imitate adult female behaviour, dress and speech and can participate vicariously in dating and other social activities thus allaying some of her anxieties by practising the way she will act in various situations" (Motz 127). The dolls often acted as an extension of the girls in that they reinforced the girls' life experiences while at the same time allowing the girls to use them as a form of social commentary that may not be socially acceptable. For instance, when I asked Pamela in the pilot study if she thought it was important to be pretty she said "no", but when I asked the dolls if it was important to be pretty they said, "Yes, because if you are not pretty no one will like you." Although Pamela was the respondent for both questions, I received very different answers. The girls seem to perceive that it is acceptable for the dolls to respond in 'politically incorrect' ways but not for the girls
themselves to do so. Perhaps they did this to maintain the façade of niceness that is expected of little girls or because, by giving voice to the dolls, they can distance themselves from their actual, and possibly unpopular, responses.

The role-playing was not my idea as mentioned in section 4.4 Pilot Study but rather it emerged from my interactions with the children. Since it had worked so well with Angela and Pamela, I tried it with all of my other participants. Only one declined to participate in the role playing (Toni) because she seemed uncomfortable with the idea, and the two oldest girls (Leanne and Tami) would talk about what she [Barbie™] might think, to the others it seemed a natural extension of the play and not at all awkward for them to speak as another during the course of their play. The role-playing elicited some responses that were surprising, like Pamela’s responses, and that I would probably not have been privy to otherwise. But it seemed to work best with those girls who had not yet reached the age where they became self-conscious about pretending in front of grown ups.

4.9 Data Analysis

Following each interview the tapes were transcribed into a word-processing program. Transcription was a very difficult and arduous task requiring twelve to thirty hours to transcribe each interview. The transcription lengths were between sixteen and thirty single spaced pages. Some of the transcriptions took considerably longer to transcribe than others because of poor tape quality. I transcribed everything that the girls said and included comments such as (trailed off) and (nods) to explain absences and actions in the interview.
I did not make grammatical corrections to any of the transcripts and I included the “ums” and “uh huhs” that the girls peppered throughout the interview so as to maintain the integrity of their words. Once I had all of the interviews transcribed I printed off paper copies of each interview so that I could code the data.

The major themes that emerged from the data were those surrounding femininity, beauty, boys, gendered relationships\(^3\), competition, shopping, consumerism and identity creation. In addition to this thematic analysis, I also employed a process of open coding which allowed me to discover similarities and differences that appeared across the interviews especially with regard to the demographic survey. In turn, these categories helped in developing concepts about the relationship between the child’s play with the Barbie™ doll, and how they negotiated their gendered identities. When I returned to have the parents review the transcripts, they were often able to offer additional insight into the comments of their children. For example, Maggie’s explanation of Pamela’s previous living situation might account for why Pamela’s doll so desperately wanted a bed and house of her own.

4.10 Summary

With two exceptions, the previous research has not examined directly the girls’ experiences with the doll. Following Hohmann and Rakow, I interviewed girls from the ages of 7 to 9 but this study went beyond Hohmann and Rakow since I interviewed more girls from a wider range of backgrounds. In addition, I used role-playing and a demographic survey to complement the interviews. These different methodological strategies allowed me to enter the life-worlds of

\(^3\) Marriage and dating were included within the gendered relationships theme.
the girls, allowing me to appreciate the complexities and nuances of their lives as they negotiate their gendered and racialized identities. These methods allowed me to gain insight into the fantasy and social worlds of the girls.

As the previous methodological research in the area of child's play indicated, it was impossible for me to pass unnoticed within the group because of my adult status but by acting as a "quasi-friend", I was able to gain the trust of my participants and was allowed entry into their worlds. The literature on children's play suggested that, children, as a marginalized group, were often seen as research subjects and not as collaborative research partners. There was an absence of children's voices in the literature on Barbie™, as this form of research had not previously been conducted. Working with girls of this age group has both helped to fill the gap in the literature on Barbie™ as well as to enhance current methodological ideas about research with girls.
Chapter 5
Accessory After the Fact: Heterosexuality, Male Privilege and the Sex Lives of (Ken) Dolls

5.1 Overview
This chapter examines the ways that girls use Barbie™ to engage in and practice femininity, heterosexuality and gendered relationships. The girls enact scenarios with their Barbies that help them to explain and negotiate what may be expected from them in later life in the form of male/female interaction, and gendered relationships. Through their play with the Barbies and Kens, the girls construct an understanding of gender, sexuality, race, and ability informed not only by their perceptions of boys and how they feel that boys perceive them but also from real-life interactions with the opposite sex. These girl/boy real-life interactions were often reflected in the girls' fantasy lives where they practiced "grown-up" relations, like dating, as women through Barbie™ with Ken.

When I had originally completed my review of the literature on Barbie™, I had no idea that the participants in my study would so heavily focus their attentions on the Ken doll and their experiences with boys and Barbie™. The discussions and analyses of boys, especially themes of violence and male privilege, were central to how the girls situated the Barbies and themselves. Even at their young ages, they were already demonstrating to me that they
recognize male privilege and the denigration of the female/feminine. The girls use Barbie™ and Ken as tools for their socialization both to challenge and reinforce cultural expectations and to explore gender boundaries.

5.2 Girls’ Perceptions of Boys’ Play with Barbies

All the girls that were interviewed had opinions about boys and Barbies. When asked “Do boys play with Barbie?” most said they believed that boys did not play with Barbies; others believed boys could play with Barbies but they would not or would only do so until they realized that they were engaging with and enjoying a “girl toy”. The reasons given by the girls who did not think boys played with Barbie™ centred on boys’ perception of Barbie™ as a “female” toy. Terri told me that it was “because they [boys] are not interested in them [the Barbies]”. When I asked her why boys were not interested in Barbies, Terri responded that “[boys] don’t like girl toys and stuff like that.”

The other participants felt similarly about boys’ play with Barbies. The girls often revisited the same theme – boys play with boy toys and girls play with girl toys and crossover between these realms is very rare. Leanne explains

Tracy: So you don’t think that boys play with Barbie then?
Leanne: No not very often.

Tracy: How come they don’t?
Leanne: They’re girls.

Leanne believes that boys will not play with Barbies because they, the Barbies, are girls. When I asked Tami if she thought that boys played with Barbie™ she replied “No”. When I asked her why she thought that, she replied,
“Cause they think they’re too girly.” The implication is that it is bad enough to be “girly” or like a girl but Barbie™ is even beyond that, she is “too girly.” Being “girly” or “too girly” is identified with gender specific practices performed only by girls. Nicole agreed with Leanne, saying, “I’ve never seen a boy play with a Barbie.” She told me “Um Barbie is kind of a girl and boys aren’t that much into girls uh like girl toys. So I noticed that when I have show and tell at school they’re not really interested if someone brings a Barbie or a girl toy”. Nicole also reasoned that Barbie’s doll status was not necessarily why boys rejected her. Rather she thought that a boy might play with a boy doll but not Ken. Nicole thought that boys would realize that Ken is not a typically macho, masculinized boy doll.

Tracy: Okay so I’m going to pose a question for you. What about Ken? Cause he’s a boy.

Nicole: Yeah, he is . . .(sounds really doubtful). I don’t think they would play with him that much if they got one but . . .

Tracy: Why is that?

Nicole: Cause Ken’s kind of like a Barbie. And um that’s kind of similar to Barbie cause um. . . I don’t really know why they’re like that but it’s like if they got a Ken they might play with it a little bit but then after a little while they’ll say this is like a Barbie toy so I’m just going to put it away for a little bit.

Tracy: Do you think that boys play with dolls? Like any kind of doll a boy doll or a girl doll . . .

Nicole: Yeah. Probably a boy doll but not usually a girl doll.

Tracy: But not Ken?

Nicole: No.
Nicole recognizes that Ken is often perceived as 'effeminate' by boys and is not the type of doll that boys would use to reinforce their learned ideas about masculine norms. As evidenced by the previous quote, Nicole 'knows' that Ken, as a masculine ideal is problematic. Seemingly, the quandary with Ken is that although technically he is a boy doll, his status as a Barbie™ accessory marks him as one of the girls. Although many of the girls thought boys might play with boy dolls, Ken gives them some pause for concern because his gender status is in doubt. Despite the fact that he appears male he is still described as a Barbie™ type doll, a female toy. Nicole found it difficult to articulate the reasons why a boy would not play with Ken but she knew there was something that was 'not quite right' about Ken. Ken is a doll and not a typically macho “action figure”, and although he plays a fairly important role in the romantic lives of the Barbies, there always seems to be a lingering question about his sexuality. He is portrayed as the safe, nice, boyfriend but the girls seem to know that his gender ambiguity is problematic even if they do not quite have the language or theory to explain it.

In her novel “The Handmaid’s Tale” Margaret Atwood uses the term “gender traitor” in reference to characters who refuse to participate in heterosexual relationships (Atwood, 313). “Gender traitors” participate in activities that are deemed to be against their gender, like homosexuality, and are seen as dangerous to the social order. In the novel, “gender traitors” are shamed, coerced, or killed. Although the consequences of being a “gender traitor” in Atwood’s novel are extreme, the implications can be extended to
encompass the girls' beliefs about boys' reactions to boys who play with Barbie™. Boys who play with Barbie are seen as a kind of “gender traitor” because they are participating in something outside of the realm of accepted behaviours for members of their gender; the girls believe that other boys would categorize this behaviour as “traitorous”.

Most of the girls believed that boys who played with Barbie™ would try to hide that fact from their male peers. If the boys were found out to be playing with Barbies, they would be subject to censure.

Tracy: Do you think that boys would make fun of someone that plays with Barbie?

Nicole: No but if it was another boy playing with Barbie and it was their best friend they would kind of make fun of him probably.

In this exchange, it is clear that Nicole believes that the “someone” I refer to is a girl and that boys would not make fun of girls who play with Barbie™ because Barbie™ is a “girl toy”, and therefore, playing with Barbies is accepted behaviour. But Nicole thinks that a boy would make fun of another boy who was playing with Barbie™, especially if that boy was their best friend. In this scenario the best friend who played with a Barbie™ represents a “norm violator” (Nielsen, Walden and Kunkel 286). It becomes necessary to tease the offender so that he learns what is appropriate for his gender and rejects the inappropriate toy. It is imperative to do this in case there are negative repercussions because of the discovered play. The “friends” who discovered this misdeed will be able to effectively distance themselves so that they too are not tainted by the transgression.
The underlying assumption is that "boys should be boys and girls should be girls and that those who aren't should be ridiculed" (Rand 391). The discovery of the Barbie-play acts almost as an "outing". In essence the "norm violator's . . . taken for granted heterosexuality" and gender have been called into question (Nielsen, Walden and Kunkel 286). In the following exchange Nicole explains how this norm violation may be discovered.

Tracy: Why do you think that [boys would make fun of other boys playing with Barbie] would be?

Nicole: Um probably because they thought all this time that he wouldn't like Barbie and now he's playing with Barbie?

From Nicole's imagined scenario this inappropriate play has been going on for a while as characterized by her assertion that "all this time" the boy had been playing with Barbie™ unbeknownst to his friends. The other boys had been sure that their friend did not like Barbie™, thus his gender identity was not in question but "now he's playing with Barbie?" The boy who plays with Barbies would essentially have to participate in a kind of "closeted play" in order to continue playing with Barbie™ without chastisement.

Unlike the other girls, Meagan had two male friends that willingly participated in Barbie™ play and from Meagan's account, seemed to enjoy it.

Tracy: Do you think that boys play with Barbie?

Meagan: Yeah. My friend Cody plays with Barbie and my friend Aiden plays with Barbie. And they're both boys. Cody, he lives right down there.

Tracy: So do you and Aiden and Cody play together sometimes?

Meagan: No.
Tracy: So . . .

Meagan: No, we do, we do, we all play together sometimes.

Tracy: So what kind of games do you play?

Meagan: We play lots of games. Sometimes we play with Barbies.

Meagan describes the play relationship that she has with Cody and Aiden as reciprocal and egalitarian in that these boys willingly play “lots of games” including Barbies with Meagan. Despite Meagan’s seemingly positive experiences with Cody and Aiden, she still has negative experiences with boys. Like many of the girls, Meagan has tried to make friends with a boy by inviting him to play Barbies and has not only been rejected but has been made to feel inferior by the “mean boy’s” derogatory and negative comments.

Tracy: Do you think that everyone likes Barbie?

Meagan: No, not everybody

Tracy: Who doesn’t like Barbie?


Tracy: Why doesn’t he like Barbie?

Meagan: Because he’s like a mean boy to me and when I asked him to play Barbies with me he said “Ewww that’s a girl game.”

Meagan felt hurt and rejected by Zack’s refusal to play with Barbies. In part her feelings were structured by the hostility of his response. By declaring “Ewww that’s a girl game” Zack is in fact saying that girls and play associated with girls like Barbies are inferior as denoted by the “Ewww”. Meagan is rejected because of her “otherness”. She lacks maleness and therefore both Meagan and the
things she is associated with are less valuable and desirable almost to the point of being contaminating (Dallery 55).

Natalie also had experienced negative reactions from boys through the course of her Barbie™ play.

Tracy: So besides your brother do other boys play with Barbie?

Natalie: Hmmmm . . . Do I know any boys that play Barbies? Only one named Nathan who’s a big troublemaker that lives across the street in the brown house. Um, he’s a really big troublemaker and he likes to play Barbies and the only thing he ever wants to be is Ken.

Tracy: And what does he play when he plays with Barbies?

Natalie: He plays beating up all the other girls. He’s really violent.

In this encounter, Nathan agrees to play Barbies but only if he can play with Ken, presumably as a way of reinforcing Nathan’s masculinity. At the same time Nathan only wanted to beat up all the girls – a strategy which also reinforces his masculine identity by alienating and intimidating Natalie. She correctly characterizes his behaviour as violent, but does not confront Nathan and demand that he cease.

Nonetheless, Natalie resists his violent behaviour by adopting the persona of a female superhero. Although she never actually said anything to Nathan about his offensive behaviour with the Barbies, Natalie still imbued her Barbie, and herself, with power and agency by pretending to combat Nathan’s violent play with the Barbie™ dolls by mentally “throwing” him out of the house or apartment.

Natalie: I pretend that I’m her . . . Pink and Purple woman. Um and I pretend that she’s stronger than the Ken doll and she throws him
out of the apartment (giggles) or her home and so and then she locks the doors and he keeps trying to get in.

In this scenario, Natalie imagines that she is “Pink and Purple woman”, one of her favourite dolls, who uses her physical strength to counter Nathan’s violence and then bars him from entry. By inhabiting this imagined character, Natalie feels empowered which is reflected in the shift in language from girl to woman. In her current role as ‘girl’, Natalie believes that she must accept this negative behaviour but when she achieves ‘woman’ status, she will have enough power that she will be able to assert more control.

The girls heard negative gender talk not only from their male peers but also from adults. When one of Meagan’s male friends went to the store with his mother to buy a Barbie™ doll, the store clerk queried the mother about her son’s choice.

Tracy: Other than Zack. You told me about Zack and why he doesn’t like Barbie. Why do girls like Barbie?

Meagan: Because they’re girls and I think that the people, they made Barbies for girls, but boys buy them. Are you sure you want your son to have this Barbie?

Tracy: Hmm who says that?

Meagan: The store people. When he asked for a Barbie. That’s what happened.

Tracy: Hmmm.

Meagan: But he got one.

Tracy: Why do you think that happened?

Meagan: Are you sure you want to buy your son a Barbie? And then she said yeah, he wants one.
Tracy: How come someone would say that? Was it a lady at the store or . . .

Meagan: It was a boy.

Tracy: How come the person that said that “Are you sure you want your son to play Barbies?”

Meagan: I don’t know. He’s [the store clerk’s] like; “I don’t think he [Meagan’s friend] likes Barbies to play with.” He likes to play with Barbies.

Even though the reason they came to the store was to purchase a Barbie™ doll, from Meagan’s story, the male store worker assumed that the boy would not want to play with Barbies. His question indicates that the store worker recognized the gender transgression that the son and his mother were about to commit. Moreover, he felt the need to police the young boy’s behaviour, to stop a gender traitor and to maintain the gender hierarchy by trying to persuade Meagan’s friend and his mother that Barbies are not appropriate toys for boys.

The girls would occasionally concede that some boys may at some time want to play with Barbies but they seem to say this only to humour me as the resident adult. For instance, when I questioned the participants about boys playing with Barbies, they either sounded very doubtful or they would agree that it was within the realm of possibility but highly unlikely to occur. I was often left with the impression that the girls thought that because I was a grown up, I would want to hear that everyone got along and played well together even if the girls knew that was not the case.
5.3 Competition and Gendered Relationships

One of the major themes that kept surfacing throughout the interviews was competition among the Barbies, especially in their dating relationships with Ken and other male dolls from the Mattel line like Brad. Ken has existed in the role of “boyfriend” for the last forty-one years. Since 1961 his sole purpose in life has been to squire Barbie™ to and from “events” and to act as her consort and perpetual date. That’s easy enough to manage when it is a 1:1 Ken – Barbie™ ratio. But what happens when it is a 1:10 or 1:20 Ken – Barbie™ ratio? Since the girls own many Barbies and few Kens, Ken becomes a hot commodity in the Barbie™ world. Each girl had in her possession at least one Ken doll, with the exception of Leanne, who owned none. From my earlier observations pre-study, as well as many anecdotal conversations prior to the interviews, I had speculated that the girls would possess far more Barbies than Kens, which was borne out when I entered my participants’ homes. I assumed that there would be fewer Kens because of his role as accessory. Ken was never supposed to be the centre of the play dynamic but was a supporting character for elaborate Barbie™-centric scenarios. Moreover, most of the Barbies and Kens were purchased for the girls by female relatives and I imagined that the gift givers would be more interested in perpetrating the perceived fun and fantasy of learning femininity than in providing a consort to assist in acting out adult heterosexualized scripts.

Competition for male attention is still an integral part of the Barbie™ play and is perhaps exacerbated by the dearth of Kens. When I asked Natalie if the
harmonious interaction, they still see competition as inevitable and not entirely unwelcome. This became clear as later in the interview Natalie explained how part of the pleasure that she derives from playing Barbies is from the competition of fighting over and winning boys.

Tracy: So you said before when I asked you how many Barbies you would like and you said you want all of them. Why is that?

Natalie: Mm I like playing Barbies all the time and then I’d have more Barbies to fight over Ken.

In Natalie’s alternative scenario boys are the prize and successful Barbies have boyfriends. Success is a measure of a girl’s popularity. If you are pretty and popular then a boyfriend is your reward. In turn, popularity is a resource which can be translated into a sense of entitlement as the following exchange with Tami indicates.

Tracy: Okay. So is anyone particularly sad about not having a boyfriend?

Tami: No. Like she is.

Tracy: Maria is?

Tami: Yeah.

Tracy: Why is she sad?

Tami: Well because she thinks she’s popular and she should have a boyfriend.

A sense of entitlement thus fuels the competition among the Barbies in part because having a boyfriend is a sign of a girl’s self-worth.

The girls hold simultaneously contradictory beliefs about competition between the Barbies. On the one hand they want all the dolls to have dates but
on the other hand a good “catfight” would be nice too. To achieve this end the girls often construct at least one Barbie™ in the role of resident ‘bad’ girl. One doll who can be the bully, the bitch, the vamp, the nemesis; who will act in ways that the girls know are “bad” or at least not the way that “nice girls” are supposed to act. The “Bully Barbies”, (imagine Joan Crawford in “Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?” or Joan Collins in “Dynasty”), help to carry the plot action as well as allow the girls an outlet to act appallingly.

A sense of entitlement is not restricted to the popular Barbies but is present for the Bully Barbies. Natalie’s Bully Barbies, like Tami’s Maria, also have a sense of entitlement when pursuing Ken.

Tracy: So does Ken like everyone or does he not like some people?

Natalie: He likes everyone but he’s half and half with Bully Barbie.

Tracy: I see.

Natalie: And whenever he goes out on dates with all of them and its time to dance um she’s always, Bully Barbie is the first one there and then when the guy says ladies pick she always says “Ladies pick! Ladies pick! I want to dance with you!” So she’s sort of . . .

Tracy: So does she really like Ken?

Natalie: She’s sort of half and half about him so she doesn’t really like Ken very much she just thinks he’s cute that’s the only reason that she likes him.

Even though Natalie explains that Bully Barbie™ is only after Ken for his looks, she still constructs scenarios where Bully Barbie™ aggressively pursues Ken in a way that antagonizes the other Barbies. By laying claim to Ken, Bully Barbies seek to elevate their status among the other Barbies. In the following example
Natalie explained that, even worse than just pursuing Ken for his looks, the Bully Barbies will “sleep” with Ken to get what they want.

Tracy: Do they [the Barbies] ever get angry or sad when it doesn’t involve Ken?

Natalie: Yeah when someone else gets the bed and the person who usually gets the bed is Ken because he always gets fought over and the other popular bed they usually get is this [loveseat] so he can sleep and watch TV. But you know what the problem is?

Tracy: No.

Natalie: Little Miss Phony sleeps right beside him.

Tracy: Oh I bet that makes the other Barbies mad.

Natalie: I know. So these two get to sleep beside Ken. She [Teresa] gets to sleep on one side of Ken so that makes the Bullies mad and she [Pocahontas] sleeps on the other side of Ken so the Barbies are really mad at these two. Although she gets the racism so they’re half and half about her. So they like her and they don’t like her? And they’re like arrrrrrr about her.

The sleeping arrangements in Natalie’s dollhouse did not seem to be fixed. Because of her elaborate play scenarios, it appeared as though Natalie rewarded different dolls with the spot beside Ken depending on her mood. Although Natalie only made mention of the sleeping arrangements to explain to me how the Barbies seek power and status by sleeping beside Ken, I believe it is possible that “sleeping” was not the only reward. Although none of the girls discussed the Barbies’ sex lives with me I think it is possible that sexual activity occurred especially during Natalie’s bedroom rivalry.

Interestingly, both Tami and Natalie, when describing the scenarios, take on a “she thinks she’s so great” attitude when talking about the aggressive dolls
even though Tami and Natalie are the ones directing the play. In her book, *Catfight: Women and Competition*, Leora Tanenbaum argues that women are taught to see each other as "natural enemies" especially when in pursuit of finite resources such as eligible men (24). But women have been socialized not to express openly their competitiveness lest their behaviour be construed as aggressive and therefore masculine. Rather women's aggression comes out in subtler ways (61) as exemplified by Tami and Natalie who can barely contain disgust for their 'bad' Barbies. But Tami and Natalie only indirectly disapprove of their Barbies' behaviour by impugning their character (Little Miss Phony). But their rage is impotent. They never do anything to confront the wicked dolls rather they seethe inwardly (as indicated by the arrrr) and do a lot of 'trash talking' about the bad Barbies. Furthermore in Natalie's play scenario there is conflict not only because of sex but because of race. Natalie's Pocahontas and Teresa dolls are rewarded with space beside Ken even though he only sometimes dates them out of pity [see 5.4 Dating]. Natalie tries to give her disenfranchised dolls of color some perks that they may not otherwise receive and that the other dolls are entitled to because of their whiteness.

Despite the high level of conflict, many of the girls, when telling me about the Barbies' interaction with each other, characterized the Barbies' relationships as familial. As Natalie explained to me, "Well they're sisters, cousins that sort of thing . . . Unless they're step or something". In contrast, the Ken dolls are never portrayed as family members unless it is in relation to another male doll in which case they are described as brothers. The construction of familial relations
among the Barbies enabled them to remain friends and weather any conflict arising out of the competition for the male dolls.

Ken is the object of the competition that exists among the Barbies and as such he is often constructed as a "player". He loves them and leaves them as he pleases but the Barbies always come back for more. Ken is the epicenter of the play activity and the girls assist him in the maintenance of his male privileged status. As with other learned behaviours like heterosexuality and femininity, the girls also learn how to maintain male dominance and internalized misogyny. I asked Natalie how Ken felt about all the Barbies fighting over him, to which she replied,

He’d rather go to a restaurant with every single Barbie at each table and pretend that he was on a honeymoon with one of the Barbies and all of them wanted to come. So he could date all of them at the same time or he could date them at different days and months. Like one month is for bragger Barbie, one month is for Pocahontas and that sort of thing . . .

Ken’s dating options, at least his heterosexual options, are not as limited as the Barbies’. Ken’s maleness privileges him in this instance since he is the one who asserts control in the dating arena while the Barbies must silently suffer and wait to be chosen (Ingraham 206). Terri goes even further, constructing a harem setting for Ken.

Tracy: So you have one Ken. Would you like more Ken dolls?

Terri: No.

Tracy: How come?

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4 player n 1. someone who dates more than one person at a time, usually just for sex or other perks (The Online Slang Dictionary: A Collaborative Project).
Terri: Because one is enough.

Tracy: What about having more Barbie dolls? Would you want more?

Terri: Yeah.

Tracy: How come?

Terri: Because then he [Ken] could have more girlfriends.

In Terri's vision, Ken should never want for anything, least of all female companionship. The girls and their dolls often take second place to male desire and privilege even though the girls control the situations.

Despite the significant amount of intense hostility that existed between the Barbies over the Kens, that same competition did not exist for the male dolls on the same level as it did for their female counterparts. Although it was possible for fighting to occur between male dolls it was rare.

Tracy: Do Brad and Ken or Brad and Aladdin ever fight?

Tami: No.

Tracy: How come?

Tami: Because Brad and Ken are brothers so they kind of don't fight as much. And uh Ken and Aladdin don't really fight.

Tracy: Is there anything that they would fight about?

Tami: Girls.

Tracy: Just girls? What would make them fight about girls?

Tami: Like they would go on a date with a girl and she would have accidentally forgot that she had a date with one guy and then the other guy would show up. And uh that's pretty much all they would fight about.

Tami prefaces the potentiality of the boys fighting by explaining that any squabbles that do take place are uncommon. Ultimately the boy dolls'
friendships were never in serious danger of being compromised because of the rivalry for female attention. Since the Kens are always in the minority and, as the girls primarily construct the Barbie™-Ken relationship as heterosexual, they are necessities for the dating lives of Barbies. I was left with the impression that any fighting that did occur between the Kens over a Barbie™ was only a plot device to spice up the love life of that particular Barbie™.

5.4 Dating

Dating is a major activity in the Barbie™ play of my participants. Barbie™ and Ken go out on dates usually to a restaurant for supper, which is then followed by a movie or dancing. Although these dates seem to follow a standard format, the dating lives of the Barbies are still fraught with drama. Elaborate machinations take place whenever a dating relationship is entered into by the Barbies and the Kens. Tami, for example, explained to me that Brad, her male doll, and Christy, her favourite female doll, were boyfriend and girlfriend but that Brad still occasionally went on dates with the other Barbies. When I asked her to clarify her statement she replied, “Yeah. We were playing a game where uh [Brad] liked another girl and then falls in love with like the other girl and then he ditches her for Christy”. Even though Brad and Christy are in a dating relationship and Brad participates in “affairs” with other Barbies, he always comes to his senses and returns to his one true love, Christy, and she always takes him back.

Tracy: So if Brad goes on dates with other girls how does that make Christy feel? Does she care?

Tami: Yeah.
Tracy: But she doesn’t really do anything?

Tami: No.

The reward for the patient girl, the one who “suffers in silence”, doesn’t complain or get upset or angry is always the prince, or in this case, Brad (Walkerdine 175-177). The message is that good girls, nice girls, if they stay good and nice will be rewarded in the end. The girls seem to embrace this Disneyfied version of relationships and romance wholeheartedly.

The dating activities in which the girls have their Barbies participate allow them to practice the rituals of dating not least of which is the primping and preening that takes place before they leave the Dreamhouse™. All of this preparation is not only for the benefit of the Barbies’ potential male escort(s) but it also allows the girls to practice making someone beautiful. The girls spend a lot of time getting the Barbies ready to go out on dates but do not characterize the time spent readying the Barbies as play. Looking beautiful is not play but work and is an important aspect of dating, and attracting and pleasing the opposite sex. Therefore preparation time is necessary for a successful date. The ritualized primping before the date is as important as the date itself. By preparing the dolls in such a manner for their dates, the girls put on their adult selves and rehearse becoming objects of desire.

The way that the participants construct the dating relationship leaves little room for agency on the part of the Barbies. Ken is the one who ultimately decides who will be the “lucky lady” to participate in the dating ritual. As Natalie explained to me when I asked her how she decided who went on dates with Ken,
Um I just um well let’s say Ken wanted to go to the beach. I would choose someone who looked like she was ready to go to the beach like her because she has shell earrings. Let’s say he wanted to go out on a date um at a ball I’d choose someone who looked like it was ready for a ball. If he was getting married I wouldn’t know who to choose because they’re all ready to get married. I’d choose her because her hair goes out like that and I use the veil to hold it back. That’s what I like about her.

In the dating narratives Ken is the active subject – the choice of where to go depends on Ken’s preferences and what he wants to do. There is a Barbie™ ready, waiting and costumed in any conceivable attire to suit Ken’s every whim. Ken’s choice for his date is structured by the Barbie’s attire to appease Ken’s every caprice. But Ken has one small problem. What should he do if they want to get married and according to Natalie “they are all ready to get married”. Natalie’s solution is to pick the Barbie™ that looks best in the veil. Since dating and marriage are both activities where a woman has an opportunity to display herself, it seems only logical to the girls that the Barbie™ chosen will be the one that is best suited to the outfit.

Yet despite the amount of agency with which the girls confer on Ken, he is still very much constructed as an accessory to the Barbie™ lifestyle. For instance,

Tracy: How come Teresa is your favourite?

Terri: Because she . . . . she . . . . she comes with a boy and a surfboard.

Tracy: She has a surfboard and a what else?!?

Terri: A boy that can go with her.
In this situation Ken is just something that you might take along to the beach, like sporting equipment. He is constructed so that he adds to the fun of playing with Barbie™ by becoming a prop for innumerable Barbie™ games, especially the dating game. In fact, his accessory status undermines his authority, male privilege and agency. The girls again hold simultaneously contradictory beliefs leaving Ken with all of the power and none of the power.

Ken’s accessory status became especially apparent when I asked the girls about the careers and jobs in which the Barbies and Kens participated. The Barbies worked in the mall, were doctors, entertainers, helicopter pilots and students of topics ranging from math to the study of owls. Ken was a different story. When I asked the girls what Ken’s job was, Toni replied that Ken didn’t have a job. When I asked her what he did all day she said, “He um he just sits there and does nothing”. Tami replied “He kind of just stays at home and sleeps and kind of just goes on dates with the girls and stuff. I’m not sure . . . He does play sports and stuff”. Similarly, Tami also has a Brad and an Aladdin doll. Brad didn’t have a job but Aladdin is “sometimes . . . the photographer for magazine covers”. Terri’s Ken doll “. . . works in shops and stuff”. Nicole says that her Ken doll, “usually just stays at home. But I’ve got the other Ken and he goes to school because he has a backpack and it has papers in it”.

Nicole’s Ken doll’s role is easy to assess because he has accessories that denote his occupation as student. But the other Kens are completely dependent upon the Barbie™ lifestyle. If they aren’t on a date then what are they? They are fashion photographers and shopkeepers but other than that they do not have
jobs. Ruth Handler, the creator of Barbie™ "realized that ‘boy dolls’ had a long history of failure in the toy industry, but Mattel pushed ahead because subservient male dolls like Ken were needed for love interests, dates, proms and the like" (Pearson and Mullins 236). Ken’s sole purpose in life is to provide for the Barbie’s need to date, shop and be displayed. If this is true, then Ken is a gigolo. Natalie’s explanation of Ken’s role reinforces this idea. “Ken um . . . he doesn’t have a job but if I had to say one job for him which isn’t really a job but work it would be dating girls”. Ken and his equivalent male counterpart dolls are kept fairly busy servicing the Barbies who clearly need Ken to have a social life. This need for Ken is best exemplified by Terri’s response to the question, “If . . . God forbid . . . Ken got lost would the Barbies still be able to go out?” Without hesitation she firmly replied “No”. Without Ken it would seem that there is no social existence for the Barbies other than trips to the mall or a trip to a friend’s house.

Despite the fact that Ken is constructed as the “subservient male doll”, the girls still confer a lot of power on him. Most of the games that the girls played involved getting ready for a date, going on a date, getting ready for a wedding and getting married. Seldom did they discuss the Barbies other activities in as much detail as those involving Ken. Ken is the approving male audience. If he is not there then there is no one to sanction the girls’ behaviour. Ken is like an overseer. His presence helps to maintain the patriarchal structures by making them subject to the male gaze. If he is there, then the Barbies can date, be photographed and be displayed.
Ken's actions in relation to dating were often constructed as very self-centred and macho but that does not negate his ability to act as a champion or protector when necessary. For example, Natalie had a number of Barbie™ dolls including a Pocahontas doll, from the Disney movie by the same name and a Teresa doll, Barbie's Hispanic friend, who, in an unfortunate accident, had her left leg amputated above the knee. In addition, Natalie had two blonde, blue-eyed dolls that she established in the role of bullies who harassed the Pocahontas and Teresa dolls endlessly. Natalie explained to me that the bullies acted this way because they were racist. Wondering how this behaviour might affect the dating relationships with the Ken doll, I asked Natalie if the Ken ever dated Pocahontas or Teresa. "Yeah. He sort of feels sorry for them too and cause he has the biggest muscles he likes to chase the bully Barbie too". Natalie has constructed a scenario in her play where some of her dolls are being marginalized because of their race and ability. The only way that she can redeem the Bully Barbies' bad behaviour is by making Ken date Pocahontas and Teresa thereby giving them each a pass into "normal" Barbie™ society. I had no doubt that Natalie felt troubled by this scenario, and although I did not know why she had created it, it seemed to be something important that she needed to work through and understand. I hypothesized that perhaps Natalie had witnessed an act of racism and that this was a way that she could respond to it and imagine herself, embodied as Ken, "championing" those that were "other".
The Ken doll can occupy multiple and often seemingly contradictory roles. In some instances he is cast as the protector but as the script changes he can become the villain/robber.

Natalie: I pretend that when I...when Nathan is here I play my own game but I pretend that when Nathan is...when it's Nathan playing I pretend that he's [in the guise of Ken] the robber that tries to throw Barbie into the lava pit.

Similarly, in Tami's play with her Barbies and her three male dolls, a Ken, an Aladdin doll (from the Disney movie by the same name) and a Quasimodo doll (from the Disney version of The Hunchback of Notre Dame), the boys often acted as knights in shining armour but could also fulfill the role of rogue. Tami explained that, "sometimes we play that they are robbers and stuff and they save the girls". In these examples, both Natalie and Tami used the boy dolls to alternately victimize/rescue the Barbies. The girls portray their dolls as helpless victims to big, strong men in need of rescue by big, strong men. Situations such as these frequently appear in soap operas, fairy-tales and Disney movies. In these forms of popular media, women are often in need of rescue and seldom are they able to rescue themselves, hence the need for Ken. The sheer lack of Kens is reason enough for Ken to pull double-duty as evil-Ken/good-Ken but one could also hypothesize that the use of Ken in this manner may symbolize the dangerous duality that the girls perceive in men/boys. Natalie had experience with two boys, both aged seven; Nathan, a violent boy who wanted to beat up the Barbies and her younger brother, Jamie, who wanted to be Barbie™ because of her beautiful blond hair. The girls expect, and are expected, to be attracted to
and fall in love with men/boys, but that expectation does not make the unknown world of men/boys any less frightening.

Through the Barbies the girls are learning to negotiate the contradictions of femininity in order to be rewarded with the pleasures of patriarchy. The girls make their Barbies into the stereotype of the feminine ideal – sweet, demure, beautiful, innocent, dressed and coiffed perfectly so that they will be able to attract Ken. The contradiction is that the perfect feminine mask hides the cutthroat competition that takes place between the dolls before one is granted Ken’s favour. The girls have complete control of this situation so they can dole out the reward. They are in fact rewarding themselves for portraying the ideal femininity and the prize is Ken and the prestige that goes along with being the successfully feminine girl who can get and keep a man. This ability to seduce through her “weak” feminine wiles gives her clout and convinces Ken that she needs a big strong man to keep her safe.

The theme of rescuing was so prevalent in the girls’ scripts of male/female interaction I wondered what might happen afterwards. Would they go on a date? What usually occurs after a male character saves a female character in a Disney movie is some kind of romantic coupling or dating relationship so I thought that I would pursue this question and asked Tami the seemingly logical question, Do the Barbies go on dates with Quasimodo? To which in response Tami rolled her eyes and said, “pffft He’s like a Grampa”. I continued, “And what about Aladdin?” and Tami responded, “Sometimes”. Aladdin is not different enough to be reviled and yet not mainstream enough to
go steady with. Tami's response indicated that my question was ridiculous; of course no one dates Quasimodo. It would be social suicide especially when there are other available, attractive men to be had. The Barbies know that ugly people/outsiders/the un-cool, like Quasimodo and apparently racialized people and the disabled, like Pocahontas and Teresa do not get dates, unless it is out of pity. Ken's maleness establishes him in the upper echelons of the hierarchy. His position cannot be usurped by dating beneath him. His male privilege assures him of his continued status. But because a woman's social mobility is often closely linked to the male with whom she associates herself, there seems to be a different standard for the Barbies than for the Kens. Barbie™ would be adversely affected by choosing to date below her class.

The girls have a very narrow vision of masculinity and Ken fits that image. Ken is young, attractive, has big muscles and he is not racialized, disabled or ugly - exactly the kind of boy a Barbie™ would want to date. Ken does not have an identity beyond the role of generic boyfriend; he simply sits around and does nothing until it is time for him to date someone. His main role seems to be to provide a male audience with whom the girls can measure their burgeoning femininity. Ultimately though, Ken is an accessory. Natalie told me that she really enjoyed playing Barbies at her friends' house "because they have three cars and two Kens". Like a car, Ken is a status symbol. He is something that can be held up and lorded over other, less fortunate, girls who may only have one Ken or even no Kens.
5.5 Marriage

Weddings are the ultimate patriarchal institution (Ingraham 19). Not only do they establish heterosexuality as the dominant institution but a wedding is a spectacle that allows for the conspicuous consumption of material goods. In addition it is a showcase where the bride can display herself. She is the centre of the entire affair, swathed in white, pure, virginal, beautiful, the ideal woman. A wedding is supposed to be the pinnacle of a woman’s existence; something that she has been striving for since girlhood (Ingraham 160). Not surprisingly, with this kind of cultural saturation, weddings were a major theme in the play of my participants. The girls see weddings as the next natural step in a dating relationship. “The promise of a relationship that will provide unconditional love, shore up self-esteem, meet every affective and physical need, and make one feel worthy and fulfilled is compelling” (Ingraham 162).

An intrinsic part of the play involves preparation for the spectacle. There is a lot of groundwork that goes into playing the wedding game. All the dolls, not just the bride and groom, have to be dressed and organized for the big event. It is the ultimate display for the Barbie™ and the girls treat it as a performance. Meagan loves the wedding game and is thrilled by the spectacle. “It’s like other Barbies and Kens come to watch them. Let’s say this was a Ken and this was the Barbie™ and then this was an audience that came to watch. And then they all “dan da da da dan da da da” like that.” The pomp and circumstance of marriage is not the only reason that Meagan enjoys this game so much. It was also fun.
Meagan: Because it's like because they like jump around after they're done doing their wedding things Woo!

Tracy: How come they jump around afterwards?

Meagan: Cause they're married.

Tracy: Is that what married people do?

Meagan: That's what married Barbies do.

Obviously, at least to Meagan, getting married is a joyful occasion. But Barbie™ marriages are usually a short-lived affair though. Meagan explained to me that,

Meagan: They divorce sometimes . . . but they just play.

Tracy: Ohhhh they're pretending.

Meagan: Yeah. To get really married they'd have to be 28.

Tracy: Okay and you said she's 27 so she's still . . .

Meagan: One year younger and she's [referring to the second Barbie] a couple years younger

Unlike real life marriages Barbie™ marriages that do not work out are allowed a do-over. And as Meagan's explanation illustrates it is easy to create rules in the Barbie™ world that justify the ending of a marriage so that the girls can legitimize the many relationships in which the Barbies participate.

Meagan was the only child who in her discussion of marriage and dating explored the option of homosexual relationships. I asked Meagan if her dolls, Flower and Headless Barbie, would ever get married and she responded that they would because "They're cool. They believe in getting married and they believe in girls getting married with girls cause I believe in that too". Meagan's acceptance of homosexual marriage can be partly explained by her step-father's
responses to the demographic survey that I had all the parents fill out. Meagan’s step-father had identified himself as bisexual and Meagan had obviously absorbed the message that it is perfectly acceptable to be gay. As well I had encountered Meagan and her parents on several occasions at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Allies Centre at the University of Saskatchewan and Meagan and her parents marched directly in front of me in the Gay Pride Parade. Meagan mirrored the relationships that she saw around her by constructing same-sex relationships for her dolls and by having her dolls divorce. Despite the gay positive message Meagan received, as the only child that had a non-heterosexual parental example she still returned to the heterosexual ideal with her elaborate descriptions of Ken and Barbie™ getting married. The overwhelming cultural message of heteronormativity clearly overrode the parental message.

The repetitive and elaborate nature of the wedding game allowed for girls to practice the crowning achievement of heterosexual romance with the Barbies over and over and over until they are old enough to try it out for themselves with society’s blessing. Ken and Barbie’s marriages allow girls to “explore their anxieties about future relationships with men” (Motz 128). By practicing heterosexualized rituals repeatedly, they become less frightening and more familiar. The girls can build up a mental image of what their future life ideally has in store for them but to prepare for their future fairy-tale existence they must compete with each other for the potential prince. Men are to be sought after and competed for and the prize is romance -- and romance is exciting. Furthermore,
as in many fairy tales, romance often leads to a wedding. But the message seems to be clear; in order to find the perfect romance you must struggle. There are always obstacles that a woman must overcome in her search for the perfect boy. Finding that perfect boy though can be somewhat of a challenge. For example, Natalie had an elaborate wedding game that she played with the Barbies. Her Barbies had to go through marriages with a succession of men, all portrayed by the same Ken doll, until she found the perfect boy. Natalie adopts a fantasy narrative that allowed her to achieve the ideal fairy tale ending (Walkerdine 165). In response to my question, “So do they get married lots?” Natalie replied, “Um yes I pretend that the Barbie . . . gets married with um first it’s a robber then it’s someone that she doesn’t like and then it’s the perfect boy.”

Similarly, Natalie’s Barbie™ has to undergo trial and tribulation to meet the perfect boy. Her first husband tried to kill her by throwing her into a volcano. When she finally left him, it was to be with a man with whom she had nothing in common. Finally she was able to find the “perfect boy”. Natalie describes the perfect boy as someone who is “nice to her and he doesn’t try to kill her”. This violence seems to signify that Natalie views normative heterosexual relationships as somehow inherently violent and that her ordeal to achieve a successful heterosexual relationship is expected and normal (Epstein and Steinberg 98). This search for the perfect boy is imbued with the myth of heterosexual romance where “getting and keeping a man” is every (normal) girl’s ultimate dream (Walkerdine 176-177).
Once this ultimate marriage fantasy is achieved, some of the girls had their Barbies enter into less romantic, more companionable lifestyles. Some of the Barbies even settled down and had families. For Nicole the companionship aspect of marriage was an especially important theme.

Tracy: Do you think that, the getting married part is important?

Nicole: Yeah.

Tracy: Why do you think that is?

Nicole: Cause then they're not alone in the house. They've got a bi[sic] . . . they've got a frie[sic] . . . like somebody to help them and help them cook so they're not always alone.

Nicole went beyond playing the wedding game; she played the marriage game. As illustrated by the previous quote Nicole believed that being married meant that you would always have a friend near and that you would not have to be alone. To Nicole, marriage seemed to mean togetherness and friendship more than romance. Issues around companionship and child rearing were important to Nicole in the way that she constructed Barbie™ and Ken’s relationship. Nicole explained, “I like to pretend that Ken’s the dad and Barbie’s the mom and then I’ve got little Kelly dolls and I pretend that they’re the kids”. Tami’s dolls also experimented with family life. “They did have kids once and then, cause we only have 3 babies they were rushing and then the kids has to grow up really quick and then the kids were like 5 years old and they still didn’t have a name and they were like 5 years old.” Tami also explained that if they were able to have more Kens then “they would have more dads and stuff.” As was true for Meagan in regards to her father’s bisexuality - the marriage game was mirrored play.
Nicole’s mother told me that Nicole did not like to be alone so she could understand why companionship was so important in her play. Tami had two younger sisters who were twins and “rushing” was definitely the word to describe their house and activities. I felt that these two girls focused their play in this way because of their personal circumstances but also that “playing family” was another way of exploring expected norms.

5.6 Summary

I began this project with the thought that girls negotiate their own lives through play with the Barbies. The girls are using the dolls to practice heterosexuality and gendered relationships and the games they play help reinforce traditional norms. Through the Barbies, the girls are working out the details of their post-Barbie™ heterosexual lives. The Barbies learn about racism, ableism, competition and heteronormative expectation and the girls use the Barbies to understand and develop strategies for dealing with these inevitabilities. Ken is used as the generic guy whom the girls can use in an attempt to understand the opposite sex although they confer on him their own fantasies about male and masculine behaviour. Although the girls that I interviewed did not discuss the sexual relationships that their Barbies may have participated in beyond the dating, marriages and the occasional chaste kiss (which I witnessed), it seems likely that they would have used Barbie™ to explore their sexualities in ways that I as an adult observer would not have been invited to discover. They used the Barbies as a means to explore romantic fantasies and possibly to express their sexual curiosity but I can only speculate
as to what other fantasies that the girls engaged in when I was not there (Lamb 51).

The girls believe that the Barbie™ doll is important and they interpret the signs and signifiers associated with the doll in their own unique way but these interpretations are still informed by mainstream society's and popular culture's messages about race, class, gender and sexuality, as well as a mirror of their own family dynamics. The girls do not perceive the Barbie™ doll as damaging to their self-esteem but, on the contrary, identify with Barbie™ and use her as a tool to explore and reinforce their ideas about heteronormative expectation and gendered relationships. Barbie™ play inculcates the girls with the pleasure that can be derived from participating in a patriarchal culture. Femininity, as defined by conventional cultural norms, rewards those who are successful at performing expected gender roles. The girls receive the benefit of acceptance and popularity for achieving the ideal feminine. Although Barbie™ is merely a toy she combines all the recognizable symbols of a patriarchal culture into a small but extremely effective device for cultural indoctrination.
Chapter 6

"Who's the boss?": Narratives of disempowerment and limitation in the Barbie™ play of girls

6.1 Overview

This chapter examines the ways that the girls use their Barbie™ play to understand and negotiate the dynamics of power. Children are often seen as a marginalized and somewhat powerless group. In response, the girls developed strategies in their play to become self-actualized. Consequently, themes of power, agency, control and freedom often emerged during the course of the interviews, although subtly. The girls used various tools to acquire status in a self-defined but socially reinforced hierarchy including beauty, shopping, being witches and coolness. The information that Mattel provides about Barbie™ suggests that she is a blank slate that girls should use to imprint their hopes and dreams upon. But, the girls are extremely reliant on the information that they receive from Mattel and thus limit their own imaginations in exchange for the external validation that Mattel’s scripts provide.

6.2 Power

The girls’ experience of power manifests itself in various ways through their play. Power becomes an expression of desire; desire for control, freedom and perfection. In this way, power is defined for the girls as a means of becoming self-actualized and as a channel for exploring their burgeoning
independence. While great potential exists for the girls to create roles of agency and power for themselves through their Barbie™ play, they are also extremely limited in their desire for freedom and agency by their parents, by Mattel and most importantly by themselves. The reality is that constraints, both tangible and ephemeral, exist for the girls and inhibit their ability to become self-actualized.

Frustration with being treated like a child is an integral part of the girls’ Barbie play. Rules about behaviour or dress that existed for the girls could be subverted through the dolls. Although the girls are required to submit to parental whims about what is appropriate attire, the Barbies do not.

Tracy: So what do you think has made it [playing with Barbies] be interesting all this time?

Tami: Just the way we played Barbies and stuff. You can do things like their clothes and stuff. They can buy whatever they want without their mom telling them that they can’t do it.

Tracy: So they have a lot of freedom?

Tami: Yeah.

Tami’s response indicated that conflict over clothing choices was a paramount issue between Tami and her mother. Tami’s reference to the Barbies’ ability to make their own choices in regard to clothing purchase, without limitation by their mothers, demonstrated her own desire to have more freedom in that regard. Later in the interview Tami revisited this theme.

Tracy: Does Barbie like to look nice all the time?

Tami: Yep. . . . She can just look plain if she wants to or really fancy. She can look any way she wants without anybody telling her that she can’t wear a certain outfit. So she’s kind of like her own boss when it comes to clothes and stuff.
Tami sees Barbie™ as, above all, an individual. By resisting conformist notions about what fashions are appropriate, Tami, through her Barbie™, is creating an entity that can flout authority and become distinctive, and therefore powerful. Most likely for Tami, negative consequences would exist for defying her parents’ rules directly, but Barbie™, lacking the same kind of supervision, can become a tool for Tami’s perceived liberation.

Although the girls often define Barbie™ as an individual with free will, she is in fact, controlled by the girls, and as a result, is often used as a mirror for the girls’ desire.

Tracy: So you said before that the Barbies go to parties. Do they go to lots of parties?

Tami: Not really. Like sometimes they’ll get an invitation and they won’t have time to finish it. Like once we had a hot tub party but then we didn’t get to do the hot tub party.

Tracy: How come?

Tami: Because we had to go somewhere.

The girls construct elaborate play scenarios that allow them to explore the possibilities of adult socializing. For Tami and her two sisters, parties, like the aforementioned hot tub party, are an important part of their play. Because all three girls are involved in the creation of these events, they are usually quite lavish and time-consuming which is why the interruption of these get-togethers can be disappointing. Parental timelines and familial obligations supersede the Barbies’ parties and the girls’ wants. The preparation time that the girls invest in creating these scenarios is exceptional but elaborate play scenarios can be cut short because of ‘real world’ responsibility. And although learning responsibility
is commonly thought to be a part of growing up, for the girls it is just one more indicator that they are not yet in control of their own lives.

The Barbies have a façade of freedom and free will that the girls aspire to for themselves but simultaneously (and ironically) they control the Barbies in the same way, if not more rigidly than, their own parents control the girls. As evidenced by the previous quote, the girls are often made to stop playing in order to participate in family life, even if they would rather be doing something else. In that same vein the girls enjoy making the Barbies 'do things'. As Tami explains,

Tracy: What do you like about Barbie?
Tami: They're fun to play with.
Tracy: What makes them fun to play with?
Tami: Well, like you can do anything with them.

Tracy: Like what?
Tami: Like you can dress them up and do their hair and you can make them go to parties and stuff.

Terri concurs.

Tracy: So umm what do you like most about playing with Barbie?
Terri: You can make them pick up stuff and you can make them go out.

Both of these girls not only expressed enjoyment in their control of the Barbies but explained that it was what they liked most about playing with the Barbies. Although the girls themselves may not enjoy being controlled by their parents they imagine that the Barbies derive pleasure from their dependence. The girls
believe that they are acting as benevolent dictators in that they may be forcing
the Barbies to do things but only fun things.

   Tracy: This is a very nice outfit that you have on Teresa [a Barbie
doll]. . . Did you pick that out yourself?

   Terri: [speaking as her Barbie doll] Yes.

   Tracy: Is that your favourite outfit?

   Terri: Yes.

   Tracy: So do you always like to wear the same clothes or do you
like it when Terri dresses you up?

   Terri: I like it when Terri dresses me up.

   Tracy: Do you spend lots of time dressing up? Putting on dress up
clothes?

   Terri: Yes.

   Tracy: Is that like one of your favourite things to do?

   Terri: Yes.

Terri [the girl] imagines that her Teresa doll feels very positively about an aspect
of play that Terri herself greatly enjoys. Terri reassures and validates herself by
imagining that Teresa receives pleasure from this game.

   Although the girls have complete control of the Barbies and are
responsible for directing their play, they are still extremely reliant on the
information that Mattel provides them about her. Mattel provides a constantly
changing array of dolls with complete identities including names and careers
seemingly to enhance the girls' play and stimulate their imaginations. However,
the girls sometimes become mired in the details and use the information provided
by Mattel to the exclusion of their own creative abilities. They become reluctant
to disassociate themselves from the “true” story of Barbie™, as provided by Mattel, and end up relying on the packaging to learn about their dolls’ potential. In the following interchange, Natalie exemplifies this reluctance by adhering to Mattel’s storyline.

Natalie: This doll is pretty new. I call her Cassandra. She um is a cowgirl. She’s not wearing her real clothes. She’s a farmer.

Tracy: What kind of a farm does she have?

Natalie: I don’t know. They said she’s a farmer on the box.

Tracy: Okay.

Natalie: She’s not exactly in her usual clothes. Her name is Horsy [sic] Riding Barbie and she came . . . she’s a cowgirl. She came with this horse. So she rides the horse all the time.

Although in this example Natalie has given her doll a new name, perhaps signifying a stamp of ownership, she still feels the need to explain why she has chosen to dress the doll in different clothes. She refers to the doll’s original dress as “her real clothes” indicating that the clothes she now wears are “fake” and no longer denote her true identity.

I was at first surprised when Natalie explained to me that she had a doll who was a farmer as Natalie was a city dweller. Initially I thought that this could be an aspect of Natalie’s fantasy life until I questioned her further and discovered that this was not Natalie’s idea and that she was just reiterating the storyline Mattel had provided. While Natalie enjoyed making this Barbie™ ride the horse she demonstrated to me that Horsy [sic] Riding Barbie™ was the only Barbie™ who could participate in this activity because the other Barbies’ legs would snap
off if they attempted to sit on the horse. The script provided by Mattel limits the girls’ imaginations.

This reluctance to criticize Mattel’s scripted creations is further exemplified by the reverence with which the girls’ speak of Barbie™.

Tracy: So if you could change something about Barbie what would it be?

Tami: Um I don’t think I’d change anything because they’re perfect the way they are.

When describing Barbie™ the girls often refer to her as a nice person and as a good friend. They view Barbie™ as faultless in part because they are never exposed to any of the negative aspects of the doll and all of the information that they are provided with has positive connotations. Even when they are exposed to negative criticisms of the doll, it only seems to reinforce their loyalty. In the following example Meagan maintains steadfast attachment to her Barbie™ in the face of mounting parental criticism. Meagan’s parents had explained to me that they were concerned about the potential impacts that the Barbie™ play might have on Meagan [Chapter 4.7 Demographic Survey] but Meagan herself disregarded them.

Tracy: So what do you not like about Barbie?

Meagan: I don’t like anything bad about Barbie! Nothing’s bad about Barbie! To me.

Tracy: Okay so nothing is bad about Barbie.

Meagan: To me.

The statement “to me” suggests that Barbie™ is “bad” to someone else, namely her parents. Her strong response indicates her strong approval of Barbie™ while
also demonstrating that she understands that not everyone will feel the same way that she does. Meagan is exercising her freedom to play with the doll of her choice and perhaps, part of the pleasure here may be that her approval of the doll is in proportion to her parents' concerns.

Although Barbie™ was originally intended as a blank slate on which the girls can imprint their hopes and dreams; I discovered that the girls sometimes waited for Mattel to provide them with information about what those hopes and dreams might be. Instead of having to rely solely on their own imaginations to create scenarios for their dolls, they knew that Mattel would provide new imaginative spaces and commodities.

Tracy: What do you like best about her then?

Tami: Um I just like how you can play with them and how you don’t get bored playing with them because they get new ideas and stuff.

Tami understands that she is a consumer and that she will never be bored with Barbie™ play as long as Mattel keeps producing dolls for her to buy. In this way Tami doesn’t even have to think anymore. Her original and creative thought is not necessary to the play process as Mattel will provide her with scripts which frame the play. Consequently, Mattel usurps the girls’ power to express their individuality and teaches them to be passive consumers.

Conflict and power struggles are themes that were explored in most of the girls' interviews but none more so than in Tami’s and Terri’s interviews. Tami, Toni and Terri were all sisters and they played Barbies together quite regularly. The girls tended to inhabit the dolls during play and their play scenarios tended to draw parallels between themselves and the dolls. When discussing her favourite
doll, Tami indicated feelings about the doll that could have easily been interpreted as how she felt about herself.

Tracy: So why is Christy your favourite?

Tami: Because she's um smarter than all her other sisters and she's better at stuff.

Since Tami had explained to me that she considered all her Barbies to be 'sisters', this example suggests that she is working out her relationships with her 'real life' sisters.

Similarly, Terri, while speaking to me as one of her dolls, also described events that could have taken place inside or outside of the play scenario.

Tracy: So who's your best friend out of the Barbies?

Terri: Ashley.

Tracy: Ashley. We better bring Ashley over to talk. Why is Ashley your best friend?

Terri: Because she never annoys me.

Tracy: Now who annoys you?

Terri: All my sisters.

Tracy: Okay so what kind of things do they do to annoy you?

Terri: They talk to you too much and say bad things to me.

Tracy: Say bad things? What kind of bad things do your sisters say to you?

Terri: They say things to make me cry and that kind of stuff.

Tracy: Well that's not very nice. But Ashley doesn't do that?

Terri: No.
When reviewing the transcripts of the interview, Tami's and Terri's mother had indicated to me that fights often occurred during the course of the Barbie™ play and that one or more of the girls would end up in tears. In the interviews the girls were not only providing me with details of how they played Barbie™ but also details of their own lives.

6.3 Beauty

Beauty is the great divider in Barbie™ play. As previously discussed [Chapter 2.2 Beauty] being beautiful is a legitimate way for a girl or woman to acquire power in a patriarchal society. Beautiful women are more often afforded special treatment like access to better resources and being better liked than their less beautiful counterparts. Beauty is often seen as something that should be aspired to and can be achieved if you just try hard enough. The girls adopt this idea and begin to view beauty in a binary way, equating beauty with positive traits like niceness, kindness, intelligence or goodness whereas ugliness or unattractiveness is often equated with negative moral connotations and personality traits like stupidity.

Natalie: Okay. I used to have a stupid ugly doll with that had her hair really wacky and I cut her hair but she broke so my mom threw her out.

Natalie had attempted to give her doll a haircut in order to not only beautify the doll, but also to make it 'smart'. When it didn't turn out the way she expected, the Barbie™ was cast aside and rejected because she was even uglier than her previous state and hence, even more stupid.
Hair is a common sub theme of beauty. The girls often talk about the dolls' hair in indirect ways. Hair and hair play is central in the Barbie™ play of girls but is often observed as peripheral or preparatory to the games in which the girls have their Barbies participate. 'Doing' hair is an important aspect of the doll play and long hair is often associated with being successfully feminine. Learning the rituals of beauty is a way for the girls to learn how they may become beautiful. Although as Natalie's example shows, it is a long and arduous process and it is possible to fail at making oneself or one's Barbie™ beautiful.

The girls privilege beauty in very specific ways. While the beautiful dolls receive more attention from the boy dolls and more perks (as seen in Chapter 5), it is only the dolls that are beautiful but do not know they are beautiful who receive these advantages. The lesson to be learned is that you cannot 'own' your beauty: Someone can tell you that you are pretty but then you need to be self-effacing about it. If you believe that you are beautiful then you are 'full of yourself' which is worse than being ugly. In this way girls are encouraged to begin viewing themselves critically.

Tracy: Do you think it's important to be pretty?

Tami: Not really because people are made Barbies and people are made the way they are and everyone is special.

Tracy: So do you think the Barbies think it's important to be pretty?

Tami: No.

Tracy: They don't care?

Tami: Except for Maria she thinks she has to be so pretty cause she's stuck up.
Tami explains the standard parental line that everyone is special in their own way and that her Barbies feel the same way, and in fact they don't even think about their looks. Most of Tami's Barbies are pretty and they are unaware of that or at least they do not make other people aware of it; and their reward is to be able to remain pretty and nice. Maria, on the other hand, is aware of her beauty and because she thinks it is important is now defined as "stuck up" which denotes haughtiness and pride, rather than self-confidence. The girl who is pretty and knows she is pretty is a threat -- the best way to bring her down is to hate her.

Awareness of one's beauty is a conduit for exercising power (either positively or negatively). Natalie had a doll that she described as being mean to dolls that were less attractive.

Tracy: So are Barbies strict, generally speaking?

Natalie: Some Barbies like um Mrs. Bossy over there. She's strict and bossy. She's strict for being pretty and she wants everyone to be pretty like her.

Tracy: Why does she want everyone to be pretty like her?

Natalie: Because (tape ran out).

Tracy: So you said that Miss Bossy here thinks that ugly people are brats.

Natalie: Because she doesn't want people to think that she's one.

Tracy: Oh okay... That she's a brat or that she's ugly?

Natalie: That she's a brat. Cause she is. She's a brat.

Tracy: I guess if she's bossy.

Natalie: And she's strict and she thinks she's so good and she brags and she doesn't only brag about prettiness she brags about
how she has a twin and nobody else on earth does and there really is people on earth that are twins.

As in the previous example where ugliness is equated with stupidity, this exchange indicates that ugliness is also associated with being a “brat”, disruptive behaviour of ‘not being nice’. Ugly people (girls/women) don’t conform to the standard of femininity of ‘being nice’. Mrs. Bossy’s role is to enforce those standards. Simultaneously, Natalie applies the same appellations to Mrs. Bossy in order to force the doll to ‘toe the line’.

Although beautiful people are more valued, the girls already understand that in order for them to succeed they will need to hate beautiful women. In the following example Natalie provided me with a popular culture analogy to help explain the differences between her Barbies.

Natalie: She’s like a Veronica’s twin.

Tracy: Like from Archie and Jughead?

Natalie: Yeah a Veronica’s twin.

Tracy: Right she’s like that.

Natalie: Yeah that sort of a girl. Same with the Little Miss Borrow earring she is also another one of Veronica’s twins. Well let’s see she is more like a Betty because she does a lot of chores and stuff and she’s nice.

Tracy: Now which one do you think it is better to be like? Like the Veronica or like the Betty?

Natalie: Betty because the Veronica is a bully. Course I like how Veronica looks just not her act.

Tracy: Okay.

Natalie: She’s a smarty-pants.
Tracy: Do you like the way that the Betty doll looks?

Natalie: I don't really like the way they look just the way that they act.

In the Archie and Jughead comic books, Veronica and Betty are both beautiful but Betty is from a less affluent background and is always nice and helpful, and Veronica is a rich bitch. Natalie understands that there are two types of women, the nice, sweet, poor, drudge or the beautiful, wealthy, mean girl. She explains that she would rather be like Betty; well thought of by others, attractive but a passive doormat. Although she appreciates Veronica's appearance, she still criticizes her, explaining that she is a “bully” and a “smarty-pants”. Her dislike of Veronica's snobbery demonstrates that she understands the intersections of gender and class as, in this example; wealthy women look down on poor women as beneath them. This becomes another way that women are separated from one another and discouraged from creating connections across class lines.

Beauty also becomes a benchmark that life's successes can be measured against. Career and self-actualization become secondary when weighed against appearance. If you are not pretty, then you are nothing.

Tracy: So [Chelsea] do you like being a musician?

Terri: Sometimes.

Tracy: When don’t you like being a musician?

Terri: When I have a bad day.

Tracy: Oh when would you have a bad day?

Terri: When my hair is messed up.
Tracy: That would be how you would define a bad day that your hair was messed up?

Terri: Yes.

Tracy: Is there any other reason that she would be having a bad day?

Terri: No.

In this exchange, Terri, speaking as her doll Chelsea, has defined the doll's joy in her career by whether or not her hair looks nice. Chelsea only sometimes likes being a musician, presumably only when she feels pretty. Talent, skill and enjoyment take second place behind looks and appearance. Having 'a bad hair day' is the only reason that Terri thinks her doll would have a bad day. The absence of beauty can destroy happiness and self-esteem.

Tracy: So you said Theresa is your most favourite Barbie which one is your least favourite Barbie?

Terri: Her.

Tracy: Ariel?

Terri: Mm hmm

Tracy: And why's that?

Terri: Because she's really old and she has messy hair.

Hair seems to be of particular importance to Terri and becomes a definer of both beauty and likeability in her relationships with her dolls. Terri's aged, unkempt doll has fallen out of favour as the new, younger and prettier dolls have moved in to take her place. Terri equates age with ugliness. As dolls are played with they become 'used up' and are no longer objects of desire. Youth and vitality are seen as more valuable than maturity and experience. The young, new dolls and
the old dolls are made enemies, not unlike the way older women and younger women are taught to fear one another.

The girls find pleasure in playing with something beautiful, possibly because it allows them to pretend to be beautiful or that they can control something beautiful and thus vicariously experience the power that beautiful people possess. The girls have learned that beautiful people get more things, attention, are valued more for their beauty than even for good works and talent. Thus beautiful people have more power and influence, something to which the girls should try to aspire.

6.4 Shopping

Barbie™ is designed as a consumable that consumes. Part of the thrill of the Barbie™ play involves acquiring accoutrements (like clothes, houses and cars) for the Barbie™ lifestyle. Barbie’s purpose is to showcase the rewards of a lifestyle based on capitalism, consumerism and materialism. In this vein the girls learn that you need money to buy things, which in turn, will make you happy; therefore success is measured by material gain and not by personal growth. This type of play encourages the inculcation of the girls into the current capitalist market economy. By teaching them early on the joys of shopping and spending, the girls are learning to focus solely on their external selves and not on internal growth and development.

Shopping was a central theme in many of the girls' play narratives. When I asked Leanne “What do you think that Barbie is interested in?” she replied without hesitation “shopping.” Similarly when I asked Toni “What kind of games
do the Barbies play?"  She replied "Umm they go on dates and go shopping."

Shopping was so essential to Leanne's Barbies' lives that Leanne had difficulty thinking of any other activity in which the Barbies participated.

  Tracy:  So what other kind of stuff do you do besides playing "go to the mall"?
  Leanne:  Nothing.
  Tracy:  Nothing else. That's it?
  Leanne:  Yeah.

For Leanne shopping became a friendship/social activity. Because Leanne's Barbies did not date, the main focus of their activities revolved around shopping and spending time with each other.

  Tracy:  Barbie, when you play going to the mall who are your friends that you like to go with?
  Leanne:  Christina.
  Tracy:  Where's Christina? Christina . . .
  Leanne:  Or Lifeguard Barbie.
  Tracy:  Or Lifeguard Barbie okay so how many people go to the mall together?
  Leanne:  Everyone.
  Tracy:  Everyone.
  Leanne:  Once in a while.
  Tracy:  How often do you go to the mall?
  Leanne:  Every week.

Leanne's Barbies spent time together and perhaps because of the absence of Ken dolls, the competition aspect of the play was somewhat under-emphasized.
Because the Barbies participated in shopping as a group, it became a bonding activity that bolstered their friendships.

Barbie™ has been given numerous high powered and high income generating careers like doctor, astronaut and president. Seldom does she participate in these careers but lives a life of conspicuous consumption and leisure as explained by Leanne and Toni.

Tracy: Um do you think Barbie has a job?
Leanne: No
Tracy: No? So then what does she do?
Leanne: I don't know.
Tracy: Does she just lay around in a box?
Leanne: She shops.
Tracy: She shops?
Leanne: I did have a Doctor Barbie but this year I put her in my Christmas box that you give to children that don't really get toys.
Tracy: Okay.

Leanne, instead of playing doctor or exploring the possibilities that might exist for a medical professional, would rather shop. In Leanne’s eyes, the satisfaction of having a career – not to mention the status, power and prestige of being a professional – were entirely absent from Leanne’s imaginative play. Her doctor Barbie™ was not as engaging in her professional role as was the potential for further consumption. In fact Leanne enjoyed shopping to the exclusion of all other activities.

Tracy: So does Barbie ever go out and do stuff?
Leanne: Other than shopping? No.

Likewise, Toni's Barbies felt the same way about shopping and careers.

Tracy: Okay what about Cool Clip Barbie. How old is she?

Toni: She's 20.

Tracy: And is she still in school?

Toni: Yeah.

Tracy: And what is she studying?

Toni: She's going to be a helicopter pilot.

Tracy: A helicopter pilot? And where does she fly to?

Toni: New Orleans.

Tracy: New Orleans! Wow that's pretty far away. What's she do when she gets there?

Toni: She goes shopping.

Tracy: What does she shop for?

Toni: Clothes.

Tracy: What kind of clothes?

Toni: Skirts and t-shirts.

Toni's Barbie™ is studying to be a helicopter pilot not so she can experience the thrill of mastering a challenging profession, nor to travel and experience new cultures, but so she can go shopping. Like Leanne's Doctor Barbie™, the sense of accomplishment associated with studying and learning the skills for a demanding job is completely absent from Toni's discourse.

Shopping is obviously an enjoyable experience for both girls, and while they did not explain to me why shopping would be more enjoyable than other
types of play, I imagined that they may be drawn to this type of play because Barbie’s lifestyle is founded on the idea that conspicuous consumption is normative and desirable. Barbie’s lifestyle and mainstream beauty denote a successful existence to which girls can aspire and possess through consumption. They are led to believe that by participating in the material aspects of Barbie™ culture, they too can achieve what Barbie™ has. Tami stated this point unequivocally.

Tami: You need a lot of Barbies so you can have fun.

Tracy: What would happen if you just had one Barbie?

Tami: They wouldn't have any friends and they would have nothing to do and they couldn't play sports and they couldn't go shopping because the malls would never be open because nobody would be working in them.

Tracy: So it would be lonely?

Tami: Yeah.

First and foremost in order to have fun you need a lot of Barbies. One is not enough to sustain her way of life. Rather she needs a network of friends, team players and staff to maintain her lifestyle. Without these additional Barbies available to act as an audience it would not be possible to display one’s wealth and receive gratification. While additional Barbies are also necessary to establish a sense of community and connectedness, they are also essential to provide the girls with external validation. Accessories are needed so that the girls have something to display to their audience.

Tracy: What about their houses?
Tami: Well because they have to have a place to live they can't just go on the street because Barbies need to have a house because they have to then you won't need like bedroom stuff and then Barbie wouldn't be anything without the furniture and the beds and stuff. So they need blankets and stuff.

Tracy: What would happen if they didn't have houses?

Tami: Then Barbies wouldn't be as much fun as they are because they won't have anything to do in the houses and they won't sleep.

Tracy: What if they didn't have cars?

Tami: Then they couldn't get to places like we sometimes go to the bedrooms and then make them shopping malls and stuff. So they wouldn't be able to get to cool places.

Tami firmly believes that the trappings of the Barbie™ lifestyle are the most crucial aspect of the play. Without things Barbie™ is nothing. Many of the games that Tami and her sisters play involve Barbie's accessories. When they have the Barbie™ paraphernalia, the play is enhanced but without props their imaginations are limited. Barbie’s lifestyle has become so focused on dating, shopping, and being displayed that without the items to fulfill these needs, Barbie™ does not function.

6.5 Witches and Magic

Unexpectedly, the themes of witches and magic were recurrent throughout Natalie, Leanne and Meagan's interviews. The girls spoke of witches and magic longingly. Witches are often thought of as possessing great power; something that the girls lacked in their daily lives. They can cast spells to get what they want and to change fantasy into reality. A witch's power makes her special, select and out of the ordinary; better than the average individual. In the following
example, Natalie’s doll could be a witch because she has special feet – an atypical characteristic that makes her unlike any other Barbie™.

Natalie: Um hmm. The reason why I saved this one for last is she’s my favourite Barbie cause she’s a Snow White Barbie that I got . . . I forget what I got her for . . . I got her last year when I was seven. She only has one kind of shoe that fits her that’s why I like her sort of.

Tracy: Which shoe is that?

Natalie: I don’t really know where it is. It’s a red high heel.

Tracy: How come only one kind of shoe fits her?

Natalie: Because she’s uh . . . It’s sort of like a Cinderella thing.

Tracy: Oh I see she has special feet.

Natalie: Yeah. She’s my favourite.

Natalie makes reference to two fairy tales -- Cinderella and Snow White -- in her explanation of why she likes this doll. In Snow White, witches are evil but magic is good and saves the heroine. In Cinderella, both witches and magic are good, and help to liberate the heroine. Together these stories reflect the tension between the messages of passivity imposed on the girls and their desire for freedom. In both cases, magic represents a form of power which enables the girls to transcend their current position. These narratives of liberation and freedom are interconnected with the achievement of a male romantic partner. Thus status is acquired not only by being powerful but by being powerful enough to attract a man.
Natalie associates specific physical characteristics as being more witch-like than others and thus the more a doll resembles her vision of what a witch is the more desirable the doll becomes to Natalie.

Tracy: So you told me this one your favourite . . . Oh wait no you didn’t . . . you told me that she had small little feet and that you got her for your birthday . . . so why else is she your favourite.

Natalie: Um I’m really into magic stuff and witches and that kind of thing and I figured that black hair was most like witches so I like her because of that.

Tracy: So hair color is the thing that does it?

Natalie: Yeah.

Natalie has constructed a binary vision of her dolls in which she categorizes those with black hair in opposition to those with blonde. The black haired dolls are more mysterious and witch-like, whereas blond dolls are considered the norm.

Similarly Meagan’s Headless Barbie is given special powers to make up for her doll’s lack of a head. Like Natalie, in her discussion of Barbie’s special feet and black hair, Meagan sees the introduction of a unique body part, or lack thereof, as a reason that magic may exist.

Tracy: Headless Barbie is very cool. You can do all sorts of magic stuff with her, hey?

Meagan: Yep. Any doll without any head can do lots of magic.

Tracy: Really? Why do you think that is?

Meagan: Cause they can’t see anything but if they stand upside down they can flip around-round-round-round-round.
In the fantasy worlds of the girls, differences have the potential to elevate a doll’s status if the girl can imagine the deviation as a benefit. Meagan’s Headless Barbie has increased mobility and freedom because Meagan can imagine the loss of a head as liberating instead of detrimental. Without a head, Meagan’s non-conforming doll is free from the constraints and limitations that a doll with a head may experience.

Magic allows the Barbies to have special abilities and for the girls to imagine being extraordinary. The girls can picture themselves in fantastic situations that they can control with their powers.

Tracy: Oh she’s a good dancer. What else does she do?

Meagan: Sometimes she’s like she rides on her flying horse and she goes up over the city and up over every place.

Tracy: Where did she get the flying horse from?

Meagan: It just grew in her garden.

Tracy: Oh Okay. So she’s got a garden and what other stuff?

Meagan: She’s . . . like . . . there’s flowers on her and they pop up every day.

Tracy: Oh so is her dress magic?

Meagan: Yes. Every night her flowers pop up like that. Pop pop pop pop pop pop pop.

Tracy: Beautiful.

Meagan: But they can’t break.

Tracy: They can’t break?

Meagan: And they’re really soft too.

Tracy: What would . . .
Meagan: Like this one. It's broken and it always stays up.

Tracy: Oh I see. So what would happen if they break?

Meagan: Every single one?

Tracy: Yeah.

Meagan: That would mean that she didn’t have power in her dress anymore. They used to be a nice white . . . *I'm just pretending right now* . . . They used to be a nice white flower right there with this on it and with a nice clear flower on it.

Meagan’s fantasy is completely implausible, even to Meagan, as she advised me that she was only pretending, in case I was unsure. Despite its implausibility this is one of the rare instances when the girls participate in fantasy play that does not involve adult situations (most significantly shopping and dating), allowing the girls perhaps to distance themselves from reality. In this example, Meagan’s fantasy is replete with metaphors of freedom like the flying horse that grew in her garden and her dress that spontaneously grows flowers.

In contrast to Meagan’s unbridled thoughts, the following example demonstrates how magic can be experienced not as pure imagination but as an explanation for a technical aspect of the doll that Leanne doesn’t understand.

Tracy: So what else do you play with Barbies besides going shopping?

Leanne: Nothing else well . . . except that they’re witches and they do spells on each other.

Tracy: Okay.

Leanne: I pretended that her hair was all braided and I took it out and then I pretend that someone took it out. Or else I pretend that someone did a spell and lightened her hair.
Tracy: Okay. That's the one that you can put her hair in hot water and it changes color and then you put it in cold water and it changes back?

Leanne: Well I think it would be her because if I got her batteries changed then it would sort of bring her powers out.

Tracy: So the one Sailor doll is the one who does all of the spells?

Leanne: Yeah she has all the powers.

Leanne imagines that the doll’s magic resides in her hair because of its ability to change color when immersed in water. This aspect of the doll lends itself to Leanne’s fantasies about witches and magic. Hair is often associated with femininity and by constructing this game Leanne is tapping into her own female power.

Despite the appeal of a witch Barbie™, some of the girls were still constrained by the absence of a Mattel production of a witch doll. Imagining another Barbie™ who has been designated by Mattel for another purpose is only a substitute for a ‘real’ witch doll. Natalie desires a witch Barbie™. Even though she doesn’t have one, she casts her favourite doll in the role of witch hoping that there will someday be a ‘real’ witch Barbie™. She can imagine that her doll is a witch but she wants the sanction of Mattel’s creation of a witch Barbie™ to externally validate her desire.

Tracy: Okay. If you could change something about Barbie what would you change?

Natalie: I’d make there a witch Barbie that had a broomstick and witch clothes and I’d want to buy it really badly.

Natalie is still immersed in the consumerist culture, believing that purchasing power will make her dreams come true. Until that happens Natalie knows that
the Barbie™ that currently plays the role of witch is not special at all but just a
regular doll. Natalie seems sad for her doll because she represents both the
don’t and Natalie’s unrealized expectations. Reality intrudes and Natalie cannot
even maintain the semblance of her fantasy life because deep down she knows
that magic does not exist.

Tracy: So what about the other Barbie, the one you say is
sometimes a witch what does she do?

Natalie: My favourite Barbie?

Tracy: Your favourite Barbie.

Natalie: She doesn’t really do much she just likes to, she likes to
like, she wishes she was a witch and stuff and she um not only the
job I told her but she also is a magician for a job that’s why she
likes magic so much. Like she doesn’t even know how she does
her magic tricks but she thinks that she’s magic. She thinks she’s a
real witch.

Tracy: But she’s not a real witch?

Natalie: She’s just a normal person so she is sort of friends with
phony Barbie a little bit.

The witch/magician has a job – unlike the regular Barbies – but the absence of
appellation of a witch doll means that she doesn’t know how she does her job –
the knowledge is passive in that she can act but she doesn’t know why.

In Leanne’s witch game, being witches involves a connectedness to other
girls by participating in a coven and sharing power.

Tracy: So you still play shopping and going to the mall?

Leanne: And being witches.

Tracy: And being witches. I’m interested in the being witches
game. How did you come up with that game?
Leanne: My friend said that we were all part of a witch thing.

Tracy: Mm hmm

Leanne: And I was like mmm they (the Barbies) could be part of one.

Ultimately the witch games involve the realization of both individual and collective power as women. The witches and magic games allow the girls to pretend that they have power – so much power that they can alter reality. Not only would they be the equal of grownups, boys or anyone who could potentially make them feel powerless but they could be so powerful as to surpass them.

6.6 Coolness

Coolness is an intangible concept that is difficult to define but apparent when you are faced with it. The girls recognize things that they, with the approval of their peer group, would define as ‘being cool’ or popular but they sometimes have difficulty articulating exactly why it is or is not cool. Coolness accords an object or idea special status which may or may not be used as a resource in the hierarchies of power being negotiated by the girls. Something can be defined as cool if it is accepted and reified by the most popular members of a group. Coolness functions as an exclusionary practice that legitimizes the power associated with the possessor of the artifact or attitude which hinges on power, beauty and charisma. Coolness is a signifier which establishes hierarchies of status. In order to rise in this hierarchy or to maintain one’s status, one needs to be cool.

Natalie’s Barbies enact scenarios of the coolness hierarchy by attaching themselves to the more popular doll.
Tracy: Right. So is it that you sort of reward the Barbies?

Natalie: Um Yeah. Actually all of the Barbies get to sleep in the bed but um actually all these Barbie are sisters and cousins except her she’s not really related or anything. She’s just a friend, a good friend to some of the girls so the other girls that are related have to play with her too. And so they used her and they sort of like her too now although she is sort of a bully the only ones that can see through her are those three (the bullied Barbies) all the other Barbies like her they think she’s so popular and so cool. Um whenever they are always with her but whenever she [Skipper] walks by they leave her [Bully] because she is even more popular.

Tracy: Oh the Skipper doll is?

Natalie: Yeah she’s the most popular doll of all so whenever [Bully] she’s bragging to them and she walks by [Skipper] she gets really angry [Bully] because she doesn’t like her at all So she tries to steal her stuff so she’s more popular.

Tracy: So what makes Skipper the most popular doll?

Natalie: She’s the only one with the yoyo and these shoes only fit her so she’s the most popular girl. Plus she’s sort of . . . I like her lipstick. That’s the best lipstick.

At first the dolls associate themselves with the Bully Barbie because she has the most power but when an even more popular and therefore powerful doll arrives, in the form of Skipper, the other dolls transfer their allegiance to her. As indicated in Chapter 5 [5.3 Competition and Gendered Relationships], the Bully dolls are not rewarded by the girls but yet they still are powerful. All the dolls, except for the ones that they bully, see that they are powerful and will attach themselves to the Bully dolls as a way to avoid being bullied or to at least share in some of the power that the Bullies have. By associating with the Bullies in a friend relationship, non-bullied dolls are able to increase their status. Through switching allegiance to Skipper, they can continue to raise their standing without
fear of reprisal as the Bully Barbies’ anger is then focused on Skipper. Skipper’s coolness stems from the uniqueness of her possessions – in this case Skipper’s yoyo, shoes and lipstick. The shoes have the added bonus of only fitting Skipper’s feet so as a result they are even more desirable because of their exceptionality and unavailability.

Although they understand what can be considered cool, or popular, the girls are sometimes unsure and need external validation for their beliefs. At times they seem apologetic for liking something that their friends may not have sanctioned.

Leanne: (looks for other Barbies) I don’t know how cool this Barbie is but it’s my favourite dress.

Nicole: My cousins gave her to me and um I changed her clothes but I like her.

Both girls like something associated with Barbie for no other reason than it gives them pleasure. Yet they feel powerless to state their desires unapologetically. Their individual popularity and coolness rating could potentially be at risk for liking something that has not been endorsed by people higher up on the coolness hierarchy.

While it is important to have the right things as well as to have the approval of others, sometimes just being involved in an activity that is considered special is enough to be cool. As illustrated by the following quote, it is not just that they have things but that these dolls are active and have been accorded special talents and abilities.

Tracy: Why do you think Barbie is so popular with little girls?
Tami: Because, because they look fun and they are fun because they can do things like special and they have a special power, like Christy is like a surfing Barbie. She has a surfboard and everything and Kira is a soccer Barbie and her special talents can come out. So that's kind of what attracts the girls.

Tami hypothesizes that her dolls are popular because of their special abilities. The need to be special is prevalent in Barbie™ play and if the Barbies are presented as having an attitude of coolness then they will be desired. Tami’s Barbies are of the moment in their choice of activities and so are viewed as cool.

While Tami’s dolls are trendy in their activities, Nicole’s Barbie™ and Ken are cool because their clothes and hair are fashionable.

Tracy: Oh neat. So you’ve said that Ken is cool and Barbie is cool and that they are both smart and so what makes someone cool? What makes Barbie cool?

Nicole: Probably because they have cool dresses and they do their hair cool. The clothes and hair make the doll and those who dress and present themselves in the proper fashion can elevate their status. Although it does not seem necessary to possess all attributes — fashion, attitude and accessories — it is important to have at least one. Those who do possess all are secure in their place in the hierarchy.

Symbols of coolness can also be drawn from popular culture as this example illustrates.

Tracy: What makes them [Harley Davidson Barbies] cool?

Tami: Well because they can have like they have leather jackets on and then they have like motorcycles and stuff and that makes them really cool because they're like expensive and they cost a lot of money and it makes them special because they are hard to get and people who have them don't really take them out of the box.
So it'd be kinda boring if you do take them out of the box because then you wouldn't have anything to do.

Traditional signifiers of coolness such as Harley Davidson motorcycles, leather jackets and money are not lost on the girls. These items are viewed as instant status symbols. Their value is compounded by their rarity as Tami explains they are “hard to get” and “expensive” and that makes them better. So special are these items that they are not taken out of the box but are displayed as collector’s items. Even at this young age Tami understands the potential monetary value of her dolls and how it might be more important to not play with them.

Coolness is something to be desired because the perception of coolness makes the Barbies more attractive toys and the girls more attractive playmates. The girls reenact the coolness narratives that they have been exposed to through the dolls as a way to negotiate and understand their own hierarchies. The girls understand that by having something that is considered cool, they, by extension, could also be considered cool and therefore popular. Coolness links them to a potential upward rise in status and personal power.

6.7 Summary

The dynamics of power are an integral aspect of the girls’ Barbie™ play. By exerting control over their Barbies, the girls are able to express their own desire for freedom and control of their own lives. Despite this yearning for independence, the girls often limit themselves by a strict adherence to the scripts that Mattel provides through its product development and marketing strategies. The girls are reluctant to diverge from socially accepted play scenarios, although they occasionally will allow themselves the freedom to explore uncharted play
territory as exemplified by the girls witch games. The games that involve witches and magic show the girls exerting power and imagination outside of patriarchal norms.

Barbie™ is often viewed as a toy that helps children to conform to norms, of femininity (as we have seen in the previous chapter) and of upward class mobility. The girls often reflect this desire for status in their Barbie™ play and mirror norms that they have been exposed to by their parents and their peer groups. The girls insert themselves into status hierarchies by using the tools of acquisition that they have defined as “important”. Consumerist messages permeate the girls' consciousness and inform their readings of status markers such as beauty and coolness so that the girls can properly recreate the behaviours that are associated with these tools of indoctrination. Barbies' exciting lifestyle demonstrates to the girls that if they are able to possess the same markers of success that Barbie™ does then they too will be powerful and self-actualized.
Chapter 7
Beyond Good and Evil: Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

7.1 Overview

"So is Barbie good or bad?" I cannot tell you how many times I was asked this question during the course of my research, by laypeople and academics alike. I hated that question and the more I was asked it the angrier I became. My ire stemmed from the reductive nature of the question. The people who asked assumed that there was an easy answer. Do girls like Barbie™ or don't they? Is she harmful or not? The only problem was that there were no easy answers, no yes or no answers that would clear up the mystery that, really, who cared about anyway? That was where my anger came from. Few seemed to think that talking to girls about Barbies was a worthwhile endeavor. Oh sure, it was neat and cute and didn't the girls say funny things but it wasn't really serious research. Or was it?

I began this research project because the voices of girls, the primary consumers of Barbie™, are almost completely absent from the literature. Their experiences are often negated or discounted because many of their narratives transpire in fantasy worlds that exist outside of the worlds of grown-ups and are therefore not seen as valuable. In the beginning, I wanted to discover what impact Barbie™ play had on young girls and how they used the doll to explore their worlds. I wanted to know how they used her to inform their understandings
of sexuality, race, class, gender, and ability or if she was of no consequence at all. This study has demonstrated that Barbie™ does influence the girls and that the doll is an important narrative tool for the girls to practice their future lives and to experience both the pleasures and pains of patriarchal relations and values.

7.2 Fun with Patriarchy

Beauty, dating, marriage, heteronormativity, male privilege, competition, power and agency emerged as significant themes which informed and structured the girls' play. These concepts helped to explain the complexities of the girls' interactions with their dolls and demonstrated the intricacies and ambiguities that exist for the girls when imagining their post-Barbie™ lives. Barbie™ became the tool to help them negotiate what they viewed as inevitabilities. Occasionally, the girls use the dolls to subvert mainstream ideologies but most often Barbie™ is used to reinforce the conventional notions of femininity which are inscribed onto the body of the doll as well as in the marketing strategies of Mattel. From the interviews and my observations of their play, it became apparent that the girls were using their interactions with Barbie™ to balance the tensions and pleasures of growing up female in a patriarchal society.

That the girls derived pleasure from Barbie's beauty is undeniable. The fantasy aspect of imagining themselves as grown-up, beautiful women with access to material resources is alluring. The girls play with Barbie™ as a way of imagining their future lives as women in a patriarchal society. They see the benefits and rewards that can be acquired by becoming successfully feminine and they embrace this vision. Through my observations during the interviews,
the girls demonstrated to me that they desired acceptance into mainstream culture and that the Barbies acted as a training tool for heteronormativity. The girls understood that a part of that acceptance had to do with attaining heterosexual dating or marriage relationships through a successful performance of patriarchal femininity. The girls have learned that by practicing and perfecting the demands of patriarchy they will be rewarded with a dating or marriage relationship and thereby increase their status. The girls are able to focus in on the benefits that can be acquired by acceding to the demands of patriarchal values, and they have learned that being beautiful and embodying the ideal is important work and if they participate then they will reap the rewards.

Through dating and marriage relationships, female figures exchange their beauty and femininity for status and material rewards in a kind of sexual economy. Beauty and femininity have external worth and are a valuable commodity for girls and women to possess. By complying with and conforming to patriarchal and Western notions of ideal beauty and femininity the girls begin to see heterosexual relationships as normative and as a reward for 'good-girl' behaviour.

Despite the advantages of successfully internalizing patriarchal notions of femininity, there are dilemmas that the girls encounter. The girls learn that having beauty is essential to their future triumph but that not having beauty is a moral failure. They learn that their value is external and that any power that they have is derived from those who deem them beautiful. Through the rigors and expectations of beauty, girls learn the limits of their power, and in turn, they learn
how to limit other women’s power. Girls become skilled at policing other girls’
behaviour and those that can successfully denigrate are rewarded with status,
power and material resources. The girls devalue themselves and others under
the banner of humility and modesty in order to gain status in the hierarchy. This
constant policing helps to fuel the competition in their social relations, both in
Barbie’s relations with other Barbies and in the girls’ ‘real’ life play with other
girls. In order to rise in society, a female must be beautiful enough to attract a
handsome high status male but at the same time not acknowledge her own
beauty. If she does, then the successful girl becomes the object of envy and
hatred by other females. But if she is esteemed in male eyes, then it doesn’t
matter what other women think because her status is derived from men. As long
as a woman can attach herself to a high status male her position in society is
safe.

Ken symbolizes men, and the girls subordinate their own needs and
desires to his. Despite Ken’s accessory status he is still an extremely valuable
and desirable commodity. The girls construct the Barbies’ relationships so that
Ken’s masculinity is never threatened and he retains the balance of power
among the Barbies. Without Ken the girls explained to me that they would have
a very difficult time enacting patriarchal play rituals that help them to embrace
heteronormative expectations. In most cases, the girls see Ken as necessary for
scripts that involve dating relationships or marriage. Ken is an indispensable
prop that allows these storylines to continue. Through these games, the girls
experience the future pleasures that await them if they are able to successfully
reproduce desired femininities. The girls see men as their ticket out of the female
ghetto and consequently avoid antagonizing men. As a result, Ken becomes a
necessary tool for girls to learn how to appease men and achieve status.

Once status is achieved, it is necessary to acquire goods that help to
denote one's power and wealth. The girls see shopping and consumerism as a
way to display wealth, and therefore power, to their audience of friends and
Barbies. During their play with the dolls the girls constructed scenarios that
demonstrated the importance of possessions. They often equated the amount of
fun that they could have with Barbie™ with the amount of things that Barbie™
had. The more "stuff" that they could purchase for their dolls the more they
would have fun playing Barbies, and as a result, they may become more popular
with their friends. The scenarios that the girls constructed where the Barbies
were able to display their accoutrements were also a chance for the girls to
display their own personal wealth to their friends. Having more Barbie "things"
was a way of accessing status not just for the Barbies but also for the girls. By
having the latest Barbie™ or Barbie™ accessory, the girls could and would be
considered 'cool'. Coolness, in concert with beauty and shopping, was another
way to climb the status hierarchy. Although connection to a high status male was
important, the consumerist aspect of Barbie™ play cannot be overlooked as a
way to gain standing in the eyes of their peers.

Barbie™ was originally intended by Mattel as a blank slate onto which the
girls could imprint their hopes and dreams, but the girls have learned to limit their
hopes and dreams to reflect patriarchal norms. Mattel's marketing is based on
heteronormativity and the girls limit their scripts to the scenarios and products that Mattel provides. Even though the girls are the architects of their own fantasy lives, they follow Mattel’s blueprint. The agentic potential of Barbie™ remains unrealized as does the girls’ desire for self-actualization.

Power is something that the girls’ desire and can be granted, if they learn how to play by the rules. There is an impetus to adhere to patriarchal norms because the girls can see the benefits of doing so and also because they derive pleasure from them. The girls learn to limit themselves according to what is deigned acceptable behaviour for females and they are rewarded with resources – like men, material possessions or simple acceptance by their peers. Until the girls can see no benefit in maintaining the patriarchal order, they will continue to limit their agency and be willing participants in their own domination.

7.3 Research Implications

Typically, research about Barbie™ is based on the author’s first person narrative of her own girlhood experiences with the doll. These are retrospective accounts through which the authors reconstruct an understanding of growing up female. These narratives are written through these authors’ memories and in relation to contemporary feminist discourses – itself a complex process and worthy of systematic study. In contrast my research relies on the immediacy of the participants’ experience. Girls’ voices have been conspicuously absent in the literature. Yet it is through the girls’ voices that we learn the intimate details of their Barbie™ play. This kind of research is significant because it allows observation of the process of “doing” gender. We can observe how girls become
immersed in the norms of our patriarchal culture and how they learn the benefits of accepting their own subjugation. Furthermore, we can gain insight into the performative nature of beauty, gender and relationship rituals that inscribe girls into heteronormative discourses.

The richness of the data was enhanced by the use of multiple research methods. The integration of a demographic survey, role-playing and engaging my participants in conversation garnered results that were beyond my expectations. I anticipated that I would learn more about how girls relate to their Barbies but was surprised by the breadth and depth of their responses. The girls allowed me access to both their ‘real’ and fantasy lives and this permitted me to gain more vivid insight into the multiple layers of meaning that the girls’ play possessed. My interpretations of the data were enhanced by the girls’ willingness to reveal the secret worlds of their Barbies.

Although I was able to gather richly detailed information from my participants, my study did have limitations. While I was able to glean a significant amount of data from my participants, the scope of my research was limited by the small sample size. As my study stands now the girls that participated view able-bodiedness and whiteness as affirmed by mainstream culture, naturalized and taken for granted. While they occasionally comment and explore these issues they do not struggle with them personally as all of my participants were white and able-bodied. Further research should include the experiences of children of color and disabled children.
Commonalities existed among my participants but the results are not intended to be generalizable, rather they represent an exploration of individual girls’ lived experiences. My research was further limited by the fact that all the participants came to the study through some connection to or affiliation with the University of Saskatchewan, and therefore may represent a unique group who are not even representative of girls’ play with Barbies in Saskatoon, let alone anywhere else. Future research should include children from a variety of regions including larger urban centres with more diverse populations, rural areas, regions that are primarily inhabited by recent immigrants to Canada and First Nations’ communities.

Although I was able to access families with non-traditional structures, it would be beneficial to incorporate more children of gay and lesbian parents, as well as children from blended or single-parent families. As the study stands now, the participants are relatively homogeneous in many ways and the inclusion of more children would reveal the ways in which children from a variety of backgrounds negotiate, incorporate or subvert the dominant ideologies inscribed onto Barbie™. The study could also be expanded to include boys that play with Barbie™ although they may be reluctant to participate in a study that could challenge accepted notions about masculinity or expose them to ridicule by their peers. In addition further research should include girls who do not like Barbie™ in order to understand why some girls find the doll unappealing.

Finally, observational techniques could be employed in addition to my current methods in order to view how girls interact with their dolls without an adult
present. I felt that in some instances the girls were not as forthcoming as they may have been because of my grown-up status. It would be interesting to see how they engaged with their Barbies without adult supervision as this may provide further insight into the ways in which girls negotiate patriarchal values and expectations. A natural play setting would be helpful in learning how the girls inhabit their dolls; that is, it would be instructive to learn when they “become” Barbie during their play and when they shift from being the child playing with the doll.

7.4 Summary

Mother. Lover. Whore. Wife. From her early beginnings as the gold digging German floozy Lilli to the new world where she was transformed into something palatable for North American audiences to accept as their new golden calf, Barbie has seen and done it all. She has been cast aside, abused, loved, cherished, reviled, put on a pedestal, honored, castigated, privileged, called impure, evil, dirty, beautiful, a good friend and a bad influence. Barbie™ has insinuated herself into the lives and consciousness of women and girls not because she is trying to rob us of something but because she is us and we are her. The stereotypic roles of women are neither many nor varied and Barbie™ has embodied all of them. She is a complicated toy because she is so heavily laden with cultural signifiers. She would have to be to garner such vitriol and adoration.
WORKS CITED


Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary (June 10, 2004).


Appendix A
Sample Interview Questions

1. Can you introduce me to your Barbies? What are their names?
2. Who gave you your Barbies?
3. Which Barbie is your favorite? Why?
4. Which Barbie is your least favorite? Why?
5. What other Barbie “stuff” (house, car, etc.) do you have?
6. What kinds of things does the Barbie do in the house, car, etc.?
7. (If you don’t have a house, car, etc.) Would you like to have one? Why?
8. What about Barbie’s clothes? What are your favorite/least favorite outfits?
   Why?
9. Do you have a Ken? If not, would you like a Ken? When you play games what does Ken do?
10. How often do you play with Barbie?
11. When you play with Barbie do you like playing alone or with other people? Why?
12. Who do you play Barbie with?
13. Would you prefer to play alone or with other people?
14. What kinds of games do you play with Barbie?
15. What makes Barbie fun to play with?
16. Do boys play with Barbie?
17. Why do boys like/dislike Barbie?
18. What do you like/dislike about Barbie?
19. If Barbie had a job what kind of job would it be? Would you like that kind of job?
20. Is Barbie’s body realistic or unrealistic? Why?
21. If you could change something about Barbie what would it be?
Appendix B
Demographic Survey

My name is Tracy Ridalls and I am a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan working on a Master of Arts degree in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies. I am very interested in Barbie dolls and how girls play with them.

This demographic survey is used to gather information about you, your children and your family dynamics that will enable me to contextualize your child’s responses from the interview. As well, it will be used to give me an idea about the similarities and differences between all of my interview participants. This survey is strictly confidential and any information used from it will only be attributable to a pseudonym. I am asking questions that specifically pertain to my study and your responses are very valuable to my research. This being said, it is your right as a participant to refuse to answer certain questions or to ask for clarification before responding to certain questions. Thank you very much for participating in my study.

Instructions

Each question has its own set of instructions. Please read carefully and respond with the most appropriate answer. If you are unsure of how to answer any of the questions please ask for clarification before responding.

Section A

Date: ________________
Name: __________________
Sex: Male____ Female ______
Age: __________

Section B – Family Dynamic

1. Please list the members of your immediate family and include their ages. Mark those still at home with an X:

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<th>Age</th>
<th>still at home(X)</th>
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2. Are you (check as many as apply):
   a) single
   b) queer/bi/lesbian
   c) married
   d) divorced
   e) widowed
   f) separated
   g) cohabiting

3. Does your family consist of any of the following (check as many as apply):
   a) Children from your previous relationship(s)
   b) Children from your partner's previous relationship(s)
   c) Foster children
   d) Children from your present relationship
   e) Grandchildren
   f) Other (please specify)

Section C - Work

4. Do you work outside of the home? Yes No
   If no, skip to question 7.

5. If yes, what is your occupation?

6. Are you: (Check the one that most applies to you)
   a) Full-time
   b) Part-time
   c) Casual
   d) Shift worker
   e) Self employed
   f) Other (please specify)

7. Do you consider yourself to be a full time homemaker? Yes No

8. Does your partner work outside of the home? Yes No
   If no, skip to question 11.

9. If yes, what is his/her occupation?

10. Does he/she work: (Check the one that most applies to him/her)
    a) Full-time
    b) Part-time
    c) Casual
    d) Shift worker
11. Do you consider your partner to be a full time homemaker? Yes___ No___

Section D – Childcare Responsibilities and Division of Labour

12. What childcare arrangements do you use? (Check as many as apply):
   a) Daycare centre
   b) Live in babysitter
   c) Drop in babysitter
   d) Grandparents or other relatives
   e) Previous partner
   f) Respite worker
   g) Other (please specify) ______________________

13. How do you and your current/previous partner share childcare duties? (Check one)
   a) I do all
   b) I do most (75% or more)
   c) He/She does all
   d) He/She does most (75% or more)
   e) We each do an equal amount

14. Which of the following domestic labour activities are primarily your responsibilities? (Check as many as apply)
   a) Washing dishes
   b) Car maintenance
   c) Cooking
   d) General cleaning (bathroom etc.)
   e) Laundry
   f) Bill Paying
   g) Vacuuming
   h) Household repairs
   i) Yard Work

15. Which of the following domestic labour activities are primarily your partner’s responsibilities? (Check as many as apply)
   a) Washing dishes
   b) Car maintenance
   c) Cooking
   d) General cleaning (bathroom etc.)
   e) Laundry
   f) Bill Paying
   g) Vacuuming
h) Household repairs
i) Yard Work

Section F – Education

16. What level of education do you possess? (Check one)
   a) Less than high school
   b) High school diploma
   c) Some college or technical diploma
   d) Some university
   e) University degree
   f) Postgraduate
   g) Other (please specify)

17. What level of education does your partner possess? (Check one)
   a) Less than high school
   b) High school diploma
   c) Some college or technical diploma
   d) Some university
   e) University degree
   f) Postgraduate
   g) Other (please specify)

Section G – Ethnic Origins

18. Do you consider yourself to be a member of an ethnic group? (Please list as many as you feel are applicable)

19. Do you consider your partner to be a member of an ethnic group? (Please list as many as you feel are applicable)

20. Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority group?
   Yes_____ No_____
Section H- Your Child
This section of the demographic survey deals particularly with the child that is participating in the study. If you have more than one child participating in this study, I will provide you with a copy of this page for each child.

21. What activities, outside of school, does your child participate in? (i.e. Sports, Music, Brownies, etc.) (Please list)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

22. On average, how much television does your child watch in a week? (Check one)
   a) Less than 1 hour_____
   b) 1-5 hours_____
   c) 6-10 hours_____
   d) 11-15 hours_____
   e) 16-20 hours_____
   f) More than 20 hours_____

23. What are her favourite television shows? (Please list)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

24. How old was your child when she received her first Barbie doll? _________

25. Who gave it to her? ___________________

26. Was it given as a birthday or Christmas gift? Yes____ No____

27. Where does your daughter get most of her Barbies?

________________________________________________________________________

28. Do you buy Barbies/Barbie accessories for your child? Yes____ No____

29. If yes, what items have you purchased?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

30. If no, briefly explain why not.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

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Section I – Income Level

31. What is your gross income for your household (before taxes)?
   a) Less than $10 000
   b) $10 001 to $20 000
   c) $20 001 to $30 000
   d) $30 001 to $40 000
   e) $40 001 to $50 000
   f) $50 001 to $75 000
   g) $75 001 to $100 000
   h) $100 001 to $125 000
   i) $125 001 to $150 000
   j) $150 001 to $175 000
   k) $175 001 to $200 000
   l) More than $200 001
Appendix C
Consent Form for Parent or Guardian

Dear

I am a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan working on a Master of Arts degree in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies. I am very interested in how girls play with Barbie dolls. I would like to interview your child about her Barbie dolls and the things she does when she is playing with them. This interview will take place in your home. I would like to interview your child once (or possibly twice) for approximately one hour per session. I would like to ask for your permission to let your child participate in the study and to audio-tape the interview.

In addition to requesting permission to interview your child, I would also like to request that you fill out a demographic survey. This demographic survey is used to gather information about you, your children and your family dynamic that will enable me to contextualize your child's responses from the interview. As well, it will be used to give me an idea about the similarities and differences between all of my interview participants. This survey is strictly confidential, and any information used from it will only be attributable to a pseudonym. You and your child will remain completely anonymous. I am asking questions that specifically pertain to my study and your responses are very valuable to my research.

When I finish the study, I will use the information gathered to write a thesis and complete the requirements for my Master's degree. Your child's real name will not be used in the study. I will ask her to help me choose a pseudonym. The transcripts of the interview will be returned to you, and you will have the opportunity to read the transcripts to clarify, add or delete information so it will accurately represent your child and her thoughts and ideas. When the study is finished, the tapes of your interview will be kept by my supervisor, Dr. L. Biggs, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, in a locked place at the University of Saskatchewan for five years. Your child's participation in this study is your choice and you are free to withdraw her from the study at any time. Your child is free not to answer any question if they so choose, turn off the tape recorder or to withdraw at any time from the study without any penalty or loss of services from the University of Saskatchewan. If you/your child withdraw(s) then all collected data will be destroyed. If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign your name and the date.

I, ______________________ understand the guidelines as described to me and agree to let my child participate in the research study. In addition I understand that I can choose to withdraw my child from the study at any time without penalty or loss of services from the University of Saskatchewan.
Parent or Guardian's signature ______________________ Date ____________

I, ______________________ also agree to allow her discussion about her Barbie dolls to be audio taped.

Parent or Guardian's signature ______________________ Date ____________

I, ______________________ also agree to participate by filling out the demographic survey.

Parent or Guardian's signature ______________________ Date ____________

Date ____________

Researcher ______________________

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-4053) if you have any questions about the study or you may contact me, Tracy Ridalls, at 966 – 5378 (office) or at (home) or my supervisor, Dr. Lesley Biggs, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Saskatchewan – 966 – 6931. This research has been approved by the University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research on July 3, 2001.

A copy of the consent form is provided for your records.
Appendix D  
Assent Form for the Child

Dear

I am going to school at the University of Saskatchewan and I am very interested in Barbie dolls and how girls play with them. I would like to talk with you about your Barbie dolls and what you do when you play with them. We can do this at your house and I would like to use a tape recorder to tape our talk. I would like to talk you once (maybe twice) for about an hour each time. When we are done talking I will take the tape that we make and type out what we said. If you want I will bring back our talk all typed out and you can look at it. Your mom or dad will also look at it. Do you want to do this?

When I am all done my work, I will write about it in a paper so that more people will learn about how you and other kids I am talking with play with Barbie dolls and why you like them. We will not use your real name and you can help me make up one for you. No one will know that you are talking to me except for your parents, my teacher and me. When I am done my work, my teacher, Dr. L. Biggs, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, will keep the tapes of our talk locked up at the University of Saskatchewan for five years. It is up to you if you want to talk to me or not and you can stop whenever you want. If you do not want to answer a question, or want to turn off the tape recorder or to stop at any time, you can. If you change your mind about talking to me at any time then I will destroy all our tapes and papers. If you want to talk with me please print your name and the date or say “Yes I will talk to you about my Barbies” into the tape recorder.

Child’s signature_________________________ Date_____________________

Researcher_________________________ Date_____________________

If something bothers you about our talk you can tell your parents about it and they can phone one of the names on the bottom of this paper.

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-4053) if you have any questions about the study or you may contact me, Tracy Ridalls, at 966 – 5378 (office) or at (home) or my supervisor, Dr. Lesley Biggs, Department of Women’s and Gender Studies, University of Saskatchewan – 966 – 6931. This research has been approved by the University Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research on July 3, 2001.

A copy of the assent form is provided for your records.
Appendix E
Transcript Release Form

I appreciate your participation in my research study on Barbie dolls. I am returning the transcripts of your child's audio taped interviews for your perusal with the release of confidential information. I will adhere to the following guidelines, which are designed to protect your anonymity, confidentiality and interests in the study.

1. You may add or clarify the transcripts or delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.

2. The interpretations from this study will be used in a thesis and a colloquium presentation. Except for the researcher in the study, your participation has remained confidential. Your name will not be used in the final report or in any scholarly articles or presentations.

3. In accordance to the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, the tape recordings and transcriptions made during this study will be kept with the instructor in a locked file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes and the transcripts will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.

4. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of services from the University of Saskatchewan. If the participant withdraws then all collected data will be destroyed.

I, __________________________ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised transcripts to the researcher.

Date_______________ Researcher's Signature__________________

*As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-4053) if you have any questions about the study or you can reach me, Tracy Ridalls at 966-5378 (office) or my supervisor, Dr. Lesley Biggs, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, University of Saskatchewan - 966-6931

A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.