

***More Than Just a Phase:***  
**The Discursive Constructions of Girlhood as a Transitional Identity**

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## ABSTRACT

*More Than Just a Phase:*

### **The Discursive Constructions of Girlhood as a Transitional Identity**

Amy McKinnon

This thesis identifies the concept of transition as central to the construction of girlhood identity and examines this through three key discourses on girlhood: academic discourses, market discourses, and discourses of the self. By providing a discourse analysis of the construction of transitional girlhood identity through the lenses of the social world, consumer culture, and personal narrative, this research outlines the ways in which girls have been constructed as transitional, fluid, unfixed identities in need of surveillance, guidance and control – neither children nor adults, two identifications that encompass fixed points in the social world. A discussion of the fashion doll as a technology of gender that codes normative identity in girls' play provides an opportunity to discuss this discursive formation in the context of everyday social practices and acknowledges the ways in which these codes are negotiated in girls' interpretations and readings. While this element of identity construction is central to the ways in which girls interact in a variety of social territories, girls are able to actively engage with elements of the social world and carve out their own identities to become multidimensional, relational social subjects.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	
Identifying a <i>Transition</i> : Research Contexts	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
Transitional Identities: The Feminist Construction of Girlhood	15
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<i>The Only Girls with a Passion for Fashion!</i> : Marketing Girlhood	37
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
Playing with Identity: Memory-Work and Self-Construction	67
<b>Conclusion</b>	
Extending Girlhood Scholarship to Other Spaces	94
<b>Appendix A</b>	
Informed Consent for Focus Group Participation	103
<b>Appendix B</b>	
Informed Consent for Children's Focus Group Participation	106
<b>Works Cited</b>	109

## Introduction

### **Identifying a *Transition*: Research Contexts**

Three years ago, while shopping for toilet paper at *Zellers*, I stumbled across Hilary Duff's Canadian tour promoting *Stuff*, her new line of clothing to be sold at the store. I was admittedly bothered by the large number of girls and their extreme reaction to the celebrity and was struck by the ocean of pink bags held by the hundreds of girls and their accompanying parents. My initial outrage at such blatant marketing, consumption, and normative displays of gender soon became a fascination with girls' culture, the notion of celebrity, and the products they consume. And so began my academic interest in this very public, very popular, and very pink phenomenon. This research began examining the connection between consumption and identity formation in "tweens" – girls between the ages of eight and fourteen – and has grown to encompass feminist memory-work, dolls as technologies of gender, online spaces of play, and the overall notion of constructed girlhood identity.

This thesis research emerged from a nascent interest in the contemporary academic work being done on girls. It began as a query, an urge to understand the context of contemporary girlhood, and desire to contribute to this strain of academic work in a multidimensional way. It became clear that one cannot look at girlhood identity in the contemporary Western context without addressing the notion of consumer culture, a space in which girlhood identifications, such as the term "tween," emerged and continue to exist in a large way. While it is extremely important to acknowledge the increasing influence that consumer culture has on girlhood identity, it also became apparent that this endeavor would be full of marketers' normative statements about gender, sexuality, race,

and class that paints a picture of brainless, one-dimensional girls standing in line with their parents' credit cards in hand. This depressed me. My own lack of understanding of contemporary girls also lead me to research this topic in an interdisciplinary way, as I found myself sitting on my pedestal of adulthood, shaking my head at the things that girls say, like, and do. My mother reminded me of my own girlhood interests that make me cringe, and the fact that I had grown up in the midst of consumer culture (loving every moment of it) and still turned out to be a strong, empowered woman doing feminist research in graduate school.

This thesis identifies the concept of transition as central to the construction of girlhood identity and examines this through three key discourses on girlhood: academic discourses, marketing discourses, and discourses of the self. By providing a discourse analysis of the construction of transitional girlhood identity through the lenses of the social world, consumer culture, and personal narrative, this research outlines the ways in which girls have been constructed as transitional, fluid, unfixed identities in need of surveillance, guidance and control – neither children nor adults, two identifications that encompass fixed points in the social world. While this element of identity construction is central to the ways in which girls interact in a variety of social territories, girls are able to actively engage with elements of the social world and carve out their own identities to become multidimensional, relational social subjects. Both childhood and adulthood are defined by their identifications as social subjects: children have yet to enter that terrain, while adulthood is the emergent point from adolescence. Girlhood exists in a space in between these fixed points of identity, transitioning between the place where the fluidity of childhood is acceptable in the social sphere, and the zone of adulthood whereby

identity is positioned as constant and solid. This concept of transition is present in both the academic and market discourses surrounding girlhood and provides an outlook on the position of girls as incomplete and powerless in a variety of social territories. This, in turn, contributes to girls' own discourses of themselves, which include both an understanding of their transitional position in the social world and a critical outlook on this positioning. These discoveries were brought to the surface through interviews, focus groups, and written accounts with girls and women. The construction of girlhood as a transition provides the opportunity for girls to be discursively guided through this unfixed territory, ensuring that they become proper social subjects and that they contribute to their own sense of self.

In outlining the ways in which girls interact with the construction of their identities in various social territories, it is important to acknowledge the innate inter-subjectivity<sup>1</sup> of girlhood as a series of identifications that meld together according to context, location, background, and experience. I adopt this term to define my approach to discussing girlhood through the relational concept of identity, comparing the ways in which identity is constructed according to context. Susan Douglas coined the term "cultural schizophrenia" to discuss the complex experience of being a girl in the mass media context, explaining: "Along with our parents, the mass media raised us, socialized us, entertained us, comforted us, deceived us, told us what we could do and told us what

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this research, I make use of the term inter-subjectivity in order to discuss girlhood identity as relationally constructed and affected by and in a number of cultural territories and social spaces. While I am using this term to emphasize the multidimensionality of girls' identities, I acknowledge that this is a concept used by psychoanalytic feminists and feminist psychologists (Benjamin; Butler 1990; Henriques et al.; Young) and warrants a large space of interrogation in relation to girlhood subjectivity.

we couldn't" (13). Girls interact with media in diverse ways, consuming ideology, products, and concepts while encompassing the ability to actively engage with them and be critically aware of their place in the social world and within their own skin. A need to include the other dimensions of identity became apparent in my interactions with young girls who loved all things "girly" and "pop" at one moment and enjoyed reading, playing sports, or collecting graphic novels the next moment. This became clear when girls explained the numerous things that they didn't like about their Bratz dolls or the problematic elements of the online communities for kids in which they were active participants. Girls are able to acknowledge that they are more than marketers insinuate in their advertisements and strategies. Although girls actively engage with normative elements of consumer culture, popular culture, and girls' culture, they feel that parts of their complex identities do not fit into the molds handed to them in these spaces. Girls' relationships with the world are complex, messy, tumultuous, love-hate relationships in constant flux, as they shift from one activity to another. This research is a response to my many conflicting experiences with girlhood, in my own memories, in the context of volunteering with girls, in my personal experiences with friends and their daughters, and in an academic, feminist, political economic context.

In looking at girlhood as a range of identities in constant flux according to subject and location, it is necessary to take a combination of methodological approaches. This research takes a three dimensional approach derived from cultural studies: "(i) analysis of the production and political economy of social and cultural phenomena; (ii) textual analysis and interpretation; and (iii) analysis of audience reception and (re)appropriation of cultural products" (Kellner qtd. in Russell and Tyler 623). Joke Hermes refers to

triangulation as an ideal approach that makes use of a variety of methodologies: “Triangulation means using either different sources of different methods, and occasionally it means using different researchers to collect and interpret data” (207). This research combines a variety of methodological approaches in order to fully address the topic of girlhood as a transition. Chapter One utilizes feminist theory and girls’ studies literature to provide a theoretical overview of transitional girlhood identity and a discourse analysis of girlhood scholarship. Chapter Two provides a discourse analysis of the market construction of girls and a political economic examination of girls’ online doll play. And, Chapter three adopts memory-work in its discussion of the self-construction of identity and girls’ own understanding of their position as transitional identities in other social territories.

Girls have been the topic of conversation, analysis, and debate for years, decades, centuries. Girlhood has, and continues to be, constructed as a moment in need of protection, guidance, and surveillance. Parents worry about their daughters’ influences and actions, popular psychologists write about the need to protect girls from the dangers of the world, peer pressure and sexualization, treating girlhood as a victimized place lacking pleasure and fun (Pipher; Wiseman; Lamb and Brown). This social construction of girlhood as a victimized moment provided as the starting point for Chapter One, which reviews the literature surrounding girls and girlhood and provides a analysis of the construction of girlhood identity through the concept of transition. This concept continues to make me uneasy and it became necessary to tease out the relationships between *real* girlhood – one that is relational, complex, and active – and the dominant model of girlhood – one that has constructed girls as unstable, transitional beings in need

of guidance as they travel from childhood to womanhood. The notion of guidance became an integral factor in the discussion of transitional girlhood along with the fashion doll's strong presence in girls' lives, both in the past and in the present context. After conducting research on Barbie and the Bratz dolls, it became clear that the fashion doll acts as a technology of gender in the formation of girls' identities (De Lauretis), loaded with normative statements about identity and heavily scripted by the large corporations that create them. Teresa De Lauretis' theory of technologies of gender accounts for the ways in which gender is shaped, coded, and learned in our everyday experiences and in relation to everyday practices and representations. Technologies of gender include a range of cultural figures, texts, sets of practices and social technologies that contribute to the construction of gender identity. While the strong presence of the doll as a technology of gender is an integral element to this discussion of girlhood identity construction, so too is the notion of play. Similarly, issues of fantasy and mimicry are important elements to this exploration of the multiple dimensions of girlhood.

Chapter One analyses the complex interplay between social and cultural forces, and the ways in which girls interact with these forces through play and experimentation. This is discussed by looking at the larger social construction of girlhood as a pre-existing identity that is formed, in part, through an interaction with technologies of gender and examines the ways in which girlhood identity is constituted in different ways. The preceding feminist work done on girlhoods is both influential and essential to this research, as it provided a base from which to extend and contribute to this strain of scholarship. A combination of earlier feminist theory and contemporary feminist work is necessary. Teresa De Lauretis' influential work on technologies of gender is combined

with contemporary work done by Catherine Driscoll, Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, Yasmin Jiwani, and Anita Harris (to name a few) in order to provide a theoretical overview of the social construction of girlhood as a transition and to conduct a discourse analysis of this academic work.

It is important to note, however, that this research focuses on the construction of girlhood identity through a specific lens: in the context of play, consumption, and memory. Within this research issues of race, class, and sexuality are integral to an analysis of girls' identities and experiences in the social world. Barbie's status as the emblem of white, upper class, heteronormative femininity plays a key role in an analysis of doll culture and girls' play. Similarly, MGA Entertainment's dismissal of a racial identification of the sexy, shop-a-holic Bratz dolls makes clear the importance of an analysis of identity that acknowledges the multiple social influences that contribute to subjectivity. As Yasmin Jiwani, Candis Steenbergen, and Claudia Mitchell argue:

For girls who are present with these dominant scripts, the task becomes one of negotiating and navigating this terrain, its various cul-de-sacs and spaces of safety, and its hyphenated third spaces. What we have said of race here could easily be applied to issues of sexuality and class, albeit not as separate and mutually exclusive categories, but rather as experiences articulated through a framework of patriarchal and capitalist structures of power (xiii).

An extension of this work would expand upon the variety of girlhood locations that contribute to identity and subjectivity.

In the contemporary context, the notion of consumer culture is an intrinsic element of girls' culture that cannot be ignored from a discourse analysis of the construction of girlhood as transition. While Chapter One takes into account the strong influence that the doll has on girlhood identity along with the social discursive

constructions of girlhood as a transition, Chapter Two explores the construction of girlhood identity in the realm of consumer culture. This is accomplished through a discourse analysis of contemporary Canadian marketing literature, an examination of the economy of girls' online doll play, and an analysis of girls' ability to remain critical and active within these economic spaces made clear in a personal interview with a ten-year-old girl and a focus group with her parents. Robert Hollands examines a political economy approach to studying youth, outlining the central issues to this methodology:

Clearly, one important aspect of this approach involves setting out young people's distinctive economic position in capitalism, while remaining acutely aware of the effect social divisions like class, gender, ethnicity, and locality have for different subsections of youth [...]. [T]here is a crucial need to examine how and in what ways modern forms of capital reorganization and regulation have begun to alter traditional youth transitions, cultures, and identities and to assess the relevance of these changes in terms of political resistance and conformity (444).

A discussion of girlhood in the contemporary context demands an analysis of consumption, as the girls' market has grown exponentially in recent years along with a more direct approach to children's marketing. Ellen Riordan argues: "A feminist political economy presents ways to move away from conceptualizing political economy as only looking at labor or class relations in order to broaden our understanding of accumulation and the reproduction of capitalism" (7). In this, a feminist political economic approach to girlhood provides the basis for an analysis of the economy of girls' play as a foundational element to the production of future capitalist consumers. "Studying consumption is an ideal bridge between research on the economy and the sociology of culture and provides new sites for examining the family, gender, and social class" (Zukin and Maquire 173).

Examining girlhood through the lens of consumer culture provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which girls are discursively constructed by marketers through an analysis of contemporary Canadian marketing texts and youth marketing firms, such as Toronto-based *Youthography*. A discourse analysis from this perspective extends from Chapter One's discussion. The market construction of girls further contributes to girlhood as a multifaceted identity that is influenced by and in a variety of cultural territories and provides as a starting point from which to discuss the ways in which girls interpret these marketing approaches and the products marketed to them. A feminist political economy of girls' online doll play outlines and analyses the ways in which girls are active members of the economic world and how this form of play shapes their lives. "[F]or feminists it is not sufficient to examine only the mode of production, but we must investigate the social relations arising from patterns of commodity consumption, not just as a cultural phenomenon but as an economic practice shaping women's lives" (Riordan 8). A feminist political economic analysis of girls' play and the construction of girlhood in the market extends to address the ways in which this affects girls' interaction in the world, the ways they view themselves, and what they think about their involvement in these spaces.

A historical understanding of the emergence of the girl as a consumer is necessary, as this historical construction of the girl in the market brings forth issues of power, consumer citizenship, and the ways in which girls are defined in the marketing world. The inclusion of girls and children in the market is overshadowed by the dogma of power and citizenship whereby it is considered a position of privilege to be included in marketer's scopes of interest. From a marketing perspective, girls are gendered,

emotional, and only interested in shopping. They are easily guided by celebrity endorsements, steering clear from physical, aggressive, and dirty play, which is left to the boy's section of the toy store. Girls play with dolls... and they want to. Marketers and corporations are simply giving girls what they want, right? In discussing market identity construction in the context of doll culture it becomes clear that girls' doll play has shifted from a physical experience to a virtual one, whereby girls play with dolls online. These online economies of play provide the opportunity for corporations to script these technologies of gender more heavily in the virtual world. Similarly, the extreme and overt push towards consumption is clear in these virtual contexts, as online play educates children and girls on the exchange of currency and the ways in which they may consume products without the funds to do so in reality. The market and consumer elements of girls' play rely heavily on corporate codes and economic-driven scripts, from Bratz, "the *Only Girls with a Passion for Fashion*," to Barbie's indispensable cash and material items. Similarly, normative scripts surrounding gender, race, and sexuality guide the ways in which girls interact with these technologies in person and online. However, personal interviews and focus groups with girls between the ages of eight- and ten-years-old expose the ways in which girls participate in dominant models of play and normative displays of identity and remain active, critical and multidimensional subjects. This negotiation of the codes of gender is a large part of girls' experiences in the world as they read and encode the dominant messages of femininity in a variety of ways.

The voices and experiences of real girls provides yet another integral element to this research: memory-work and the role of personal narrative in inquiring about identity. Chapter Three utilizes the stories and experiences of girls and women collected in

memory-work focus groups and written accounts of girlhood, dolls, and play. The importance of this analysis lies in its ability to simultaneously complicate and compliment the discursive constructions of girlhood identity outlined in the previous chapters. Similarly, it confirms that girlhood identity is complex and inter-subjective, changing and morphing into a variety of spaces and stances according to context, experience, and location. It also became clear that gender is but a small element of identity construction, as race, class, and sexuality became important factors in the memories compiled. This chapter provides a space for the voices of girls to emerge, as this is an extremely important element of this research.<sup>2</sup> These subjects provided honest accounts of their girlhoods, allowing for an opportunity to challenge the normative accounts of girlhood construction and they display a sense of agency and a role in their own self-identification.

A discussion of girlhood from the perspectives of feminist theory and political economy provided an important analysis on the ways in which girls are coded by others. Chapter Three makes use of memory-work, a feminist social constructionist methodology that explores the ways in which girls take an active role in the shaping of their own identities. Memory-work involves three phases. According to June Crawford et al., Phase 1 begins by the researchers choosing a topic, key word, or trigger around which the memories will be written according to the following set of rules:

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<sup>2</sup> Originally, I set out to interview girls who took part in an after-school girls' program in Verdun, Quebec. However, the tone of this program prevented me from including my research in this space. My relationships with the girls took time and effort to cultivate. These relationships were based on a trust that I worked hard to achieve and this space was one that was based on respect, safety, and honesty. It became clear that it was not ethically viable to include these girls in this research, as I did not want to make them feel as though this relationship that we had worked at was based on research. I, therefore, chose to include other girls in this research and made clear my intentions from the start.

1. Write a memory
2. of a particular episode, action or event
3. in the third person
4. in as much detail as is possible, including even ‘inconsequential’ or trivial detail (it may be helpful to think of a key image, sound, taste, smell, touch)
5. but without importing interpretation or biography.
6. Write one of your earliest memories (45).

An emphasis on including extremely detailed descriptions, including inconsequential detail denaturalizes existing value judgments in the process of writing. “Detail is important because in detail we recognize the constraints placed on our understandings by the notion of ‘relevance’; the so-called ‘irrelevant’ aspects of episodes or events point to the hidden moral and normative aspects of our actions” (46). Memory-work is “a method in which the analysis has to be seen as a field of conflict between dominant cultural values and oppositional attempts to wrest cultural meaning and pleasure from life” (Haug 41).

Phase two involves the collective analysis of the written memories according to the following rules:

1. Each memory-work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn, and
2. looks for similarities and differences between the memories and looks for continuous elements among memories whose relation to each other is not immediately apparent. Each member should question particularly those aspects of the events, which do not appear amenable to comparison. She or he should not, however, resort to autobiography.
3. Each memory-work member identifies clichés, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, metaphor... and
4. discusses theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.
5. Finally, each member examines what is not written in the memories (but what might be expected to be), and
6. rewrites the memories (Crawford et al. 49).

The analysis aims to uncover common understandings of social experience. “What is of interest is not why person X’s father did such and such but why fathers do such things. The aim is to uncover the social meanings embodied by the actions described in the written accounts and to uncover the processes whereby the meanings – both then and now – are arrived at” (49). This element of analysis aims to expose and discuss the processes of construction involved in the recollection of memories and, Crawford et al. argue, raises the possibility of transforming common sense understandings of everyday existence in culture and society (49). In this process, a theoretical understanding of analysis is not necessary; on the contrary, Crawford et al. suggest that the analysis stems from two sources: “each co-researcher’s reflective activities… [and] how co-researchers ‘talk to each other’ about their own and others’ actions and experiences” (50). They argue that focus group members are regarded as experts in every day life in the process of interpretation and analysis. “Whether the memories accurately represent past events or not, however, is irrelevant; the process of the construction of the meanings of those events is the focus of memory-work” (51).

The aim of memory-work is to account for the process of memory and the larger mediating factors behind everyday experience. Phase three includes further critical analysis of the collective memory-work in combination with academic theory to further understand the process of memory, identity, and larger cultural factors. Crawford et al. write:

We asked questions about the ways in which women are portrayed as ‘emotional’ and about the language of emotions. We discussed forgetting and remembering, repression and suppression; we thought about the impact of our gender on the ways in which we worked and theorized as well as on the construction of our emotions; and we wondered about the differences between childhood and adult memories and noted the relative

lack of clichés in our childhood memories. In other words, Phase 3 is the phase in which we evaluate our attempts at theorizing (51).

Rather than seeking to unpack the assumptions of feminist work surrounding girlhood and play, this phase, and this methodological approach in general, is important in its ability to allow the theory to speak to the memory-work in order to discuss larger issues that contribute to identity and everyday experiences.

This research critically discusses girlhood identity through the concept of transition and acknowledges the ways in which identity is constructed in a variety of social territories and discourses: academic discourse, consumer culture, and self-construction. Girlhood is constructed as a space that is unfixed, fluid, and in need of guidance from a variety of angles and cultural zones. These identifications and multiple spaces represent the fluidity of girlhood as an inter-subjective space, relational to a variety of social territories in which it exists. Girls have the ability to carve out their own identities by critically engaging with this construction. The relational aspect of girls' identities in the context of contemporary Western culture is the core of this research, as it acknowledges both the dominant discursive construction of girlhood and addresses girls' ability to adapt to multiple scenarios and contexts.

This research paints a portrait that resists the dominant portrayal of girls as victims of the dangerous, sexualizing, normative, corporate world in which they live. Girls have the cognitive ability to be active, critical, and engaged in alternative elements of the cultural spaces at the same time as they participate in dominant culture. While this research discusses the coding of normative femininity, it also aims to include the experiences and voices of real girls' and women's pleasure and pain within the social world in order to provide a complete account of identity.

## Chapter 1

### ***Transitional Identities: The Feminist Construction of Girlhood***

A number of perspectives surrounding girlhood identity have emerged over the past few years, including a morally concerned approach to girls' sexualization (Pipher; Wiseman; Lamb and Brown), a redefinition of feminist conceptions of contemporary girlhoods (Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell; Harris; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005), a historical understanding of the social positioning of girls in contemporary Western culture (Driscoll 2002; Douglas), and a discussion of girls' action, girls' spaces, and girls' creativity (Driscoll 2002; Mazarella; Kearney). In reviewing the core feminist and girls' studies literature, it is apparent that the focus on girlhood has been centered around either outside influence on identity (Pipher; Wiseman; Lamb and Brown; Schrum; Rand) or the inside perspective of girls' experiences (Driscoll; Mazarella; Kearney; Douglas; Harris Mitchell and Reid-Walsh Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell; Rand). Girlhood is a process of learning how to become a complex, inter-subjective being in the social world which requires an analysis of both the discursive construction of identity and the ways in which girls negotiate their positions in the social world – as the transitional girls that they're told they are and as active and engaged subjects. From this view, girlhood is more than just a phase, but a moment in itself.

Taking this into consideration, the following theoretical overview and discourse analysis adopts the concepts of transition and normalization in girlhood identification through play in order to outline the ways in which girls are constructed and how that effects their negotiation with others and themselves in the social sphere. This chapter provides a perspective on the socially ingrained construction of girls' identities as in need

of cultural surveillance, guidance, and control and acting as a starting point from which to discuss girlhood as a multifaceted range of identities that are both influenced by this concept of transition along with girls interpretation of the social world. Girls are positioned between childhood and womanhood and technologies of gender act to guide them through this moment of transition to the proper zones of womanhood.

## The Territories of Girlhood

“One is not born a woman, one becomes one”  
Simone de Beauvoir.

A definition of girlhood is difficult to articulate, as it connotes many meanings and identities, some of which are considered acceptable and others that go against the current of the social world. Harris argues: “The category of ‘girl’ itself has proven to be slippery and problematic. It has been shaped by norms about race, class, and ability that have prioritized the white, middle class and non-disabled, and pathologized and/or criminalized the majority outside the category of privilege” (xx). Girlhood has been constructed as an identity “training zone” whereby girls are in constant guidance in a variety of social spaces in order to ensure that they enter the solid state of womanhood as normative beings, valuing those elements of identity that sit at the top of the hierarchy: white, upper class, heterosexual, able bodies are the pinnacle of normative identity perfection and hold the majority of the social power in contemporary Western culture. Girls are meant to strive for these central elements of normativity and work to remain in the centre of the social world. Arrays of girlhood territories are produced through the range of discourses on girlhood embodiment and identity. The shaping of girlhood is defined in terms of power and status in the social world. “The term ‘girl’ is clearly a

marker of status, denoting both a positioning within childhood but also a relatively passive designation within a gender hierarchy, one that (now seemingly defunct) theme of ‘girl power’ attempted to re-articulate” (Russell and Tyler 620). In the social world, girlhood may be identified as a process of normalization, guidance, and social positioning in which girls learn what it means to be feminine subjects.

While girlhood demands a specific investigation in terms of gender and sexuality, a girl-specific approach to studying identity is difficult at the best of times. What it means to be a girl differs dramatically according to subjectivity and location, interpretation and experience. Upon reviewing the literature surrounding girls and girlhood these discursive themes continually emerge, positioning girls as transitional identities and defining the space of girlhood as a period of “becoming,” a space in which girls are in need of guidance and control. It is apparent in the literature that it is imperative to discuss girlhood in this way in order to fully comprehend the ways in which girls interact with this construction of themselves in social territories. While this concept of transition is one that I avoided in the preliminary stages of this research, it has become an integral element in the discussion of girlhood identity because it is predominant within the three discourses under interrogation. This section will discuss the feminist literature that constructs girlhood identities through the concept of transition. This will act as a starting off point to further analysis of girlhood through a discussion of the fashion doll as a technology of gender that codes normative gender identity and scripts appropriate feminine actions in the social world.

Transition is defined as “a passing or passage from one condition, action, or (rarely) place, to another; change” (“Transition”). The space of childhood in general is

occupied by notions of transition or becoming and approaches to studying the space of childhood are guided by the discourse of development. Children develop into adult social subjects in the world and must be guided through this space in order to reach the desired location. Julian Henriques et al. argue that the concept of human beings as subjects relies on the notion of change and transformation, whether change is determined within the subject, in the social arena, or both. This notion of an “interplay of changes” makes it necessary to recognize a person as a contextual subject produced by the social, and places emphasis on the individual as an element in social change (3). While the girl-subject is a result of the social world in which she exists, she also has the ability to affect change. Rachel Russell and Melissa Tyler argue that childhood and, more specifically, girlhood “is an inter-subjective experience that involves the constant and complex renegotiation of a range of social and cultural identities” (622). As social and cultural beings, a variety of influences become integral to the process of identification: structural and institutional frameworks play a role in identifying race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability as markers of what will be available and accessible to a person. As Driscoll (2002) argues, this is particularly important to a discussion of girlhood because girls are positioned in Western culture as transitional identities floating amidst the realms of childhood and womanhood by means of structural factors behind girls’ socialization. “Girls in the sense we now use the word – encompassing no specific age group but rather an idea of mobility preceding the fixity of womanhood and implying an unfinished process of personal development – are produced at a nexus of late modern ways of being in and knowing the world “ (47).

This discussion assumes that girls are positioned in Western culture as transitional beings in the process of becoming whole, or becoming women and female social

subjects; however, the notion of becoming a whole subject *and* female in dominant culture is somewhat of an oxymoron where white phallocentric heteronormativity and ability reign supreme. I move through the world, embracing elements of my identity at times and shedding them at others. Women must negotiate and transition between the variety of identifications that they encompass in their lives: racial identities, mothers, daughters, lovers, sisters, friends, wives, girlfriends, workers. This negotiation reflects the fluidity of identity in womanhood, a place that is interpreted as a fixed end point that girls must strive for. Simone de Beauvoir argues that the adolescent girl “becomes an object, and she sees herself as an object; she discovers this new aspect of her being with surprise: it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside” (361). This objectified sense of knowing oneself lends to Driscoll’s classification of girlhood as transitional in its focus on an outside influence on the ways in which girls come to know themselves and their status in the world as objectified *others*.

Girls are shaped and molded into feminine social subjects in a variety of ways. “The range of available discourses on girlhood produce distinguishable fields of girlhood, even if we can debate how much they arise from a developmental norm. Each of these girl territories is filled with objects and activities, with practices of being a girl” (Driscoll 2005 225). The classification of the “tween” girl further contributes to the discursive positioning of the girl as transitional, as she is identified as existing on the edge, in a gap between childhood and womanhood. However, the coining of the term “tween” as an age-specific girlhood moment does not erase the discursive positioning of other girl territories as transitional. While puberty represents the physical transformation from

child to woman in the girl's body, girls continue to experience the surveillance and normalization associated with the discourse of a transition in a variety of forms.

The physical space in which girls exist in the world contributes to the contradictory notion of a transition from an incomplete child to womanly wholeness. Iris Marion Young argues that, "every human existence is defined by its *situation*: the particular existence of the female person is no less defined by the historical, cultural, social, and economic limits of her situation" (142). In exploring the phenomenology of feminine body comportment, Young explores the embodied repercussions of the social world through French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's argument that subjectivity is located in the body, rather than in the mind or consciousness. Femininity is "a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical *situation* of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by women themselves" (144). While it is assumed that the transition from girlhood to womanhood is an experience in which girls' grow into whole subjects, it is clear that womanhood is defined and constricted by a number of normalizing elements in itself. Women learn to exist in a specific embodied state. "For the most part, girls and woman are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys are to develop specific bodily skills" (154). Girls learn that their bodies are the sites of a number of experiences: discipline, pain, and violation are positioned before pleasure and other positive embodied states. A dominant comprehension of femininity is understood to be a given in structuring girlhood as a forward to womanhood, a space restricted by normative notions of gender and femininity.

Girlhood is intrinsically defined through the body. While she never discussed girls specifically in her work, Judith Butler's (1993) theory of performativity can usefully aid in an understanding of gender embodiment and the process of "doing gender." "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (241). The body is the site on which gender is played out, acted, performed, and surveyed. "[P]art of doing gender involves the presentation and performance of a female body as feminine in ways that conform to patriarchally determined, and often instrumentally imposed, aesthetic codes on gender difference" (Russell and Tyler 628). Puberty is the transformative experience in which girls become "women." The body provides a set of rules by which girls will encounter the social world. If a girl's gender representation does not correspond with her body, she will experience difficulties in the social world. Debra Gimlin argues:

[T]he body is a medium of culture. It is the surface on which prevailing rules of a culture are written. The shared attitudes and practices of social groups are played out at the level of the body, revealing cultural notions of distinctions based on age, sexual orientation, social class, gender, and ethnicity. But cultural rules are not only revealed through the body; they also shape the ways in which the body performs and appears. Ultimately, it is through the body's actions and demeanor that the self is constructed and displayed to the social world (3).

In understanding girlhood through the concept of transition, adolescence and the pubescent body are integral elements. Girls experience a process of aligning the body and the self in puberty. "The representation of adolescence as identity formation and identity crisis relies on the physiological trauma and psychological crisis of puberty, and ideas about puberty have in turn helped define distinctions between child and adult.

Puberty both defines the boundaries of adolescence and asserts its importance” (Driscoll 2002 81).<sup>3</sup>

The body is the site of change for the adolescent girl. It is the surface on which the social etches out its normative statements about identity. The body morphs and is altered throughout this time period: it grows, leaks, and stumbles from childhood to womanhood. This is constructed as difficult and uncomfortable. The discursive positioning of adolescence and puberty as a crisis or trauma sets the tone for girls to be constructed as fragmented identities and bodies in need of outside guidance, surveillance, and control. “Feminine adolescence is not a transitional period but an assemblage of transitions, many of which are repeatable or reversible and all of which are culturally specific, subject to interpretation and regimes of power” (Driscoll 2002 58). Driscoll’s approach to understanding girlhood embodiment and experience through the lens of puberty and adolescence relies on the social need for girls to be guided through this “physiological trauma and psychological crisis” (81). The positioning of girlhood as transitional space, or an assemblage of transitions, creates an opportunity for girls to be treated as identities in need of outside influence, guidance and help through this difficult, awkward, and painful time of ‘crisis.’

Driscoll (2005) defines guidance manuals as, “texts dedicated to the better understanding and regulation of girls” (39). Because adolescence is positioned as an inherently difficult moment in a girls’ life or the “Bermuda triangle for girls’ selves” (Pipher), the act of guidance may take both normative and pedagogical forms. While parenting manuals, media watch guides, and popular culture texts explore the pitfalls and

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<sup>3</sup> This distinction between childhood and womanhood in puberty is a recurring theme in the stories and memories of girlhood and is discussed further in Chapter Three.

dangers of being a girl in contemporary culture, guidance and surveillance may be the result of more constructive intents. Discourses of guidance and control take shape in a number of spaces. While the transitional identity and body of girlhood is construed as needing guidance through dominant popular texts, feminist texts on the topic of girls' studies must also acknowledge their role in this discursive construction. Jennifer Eisenhauer explores feminist constitutions of the girl through tropes of awakening, growing up, and becoming. The construction of the girl as a "future feminist" replicates similar issues of control and surveillance associated with more normative guidance texts:

When the 'girl' is understood as a contradictory rather than a coherent subject, discussions that situate the 'girl' as 'young feminist' shift from articulating narratives of replication and continuation of feminist constructions across linear time, to understanding the 'girl' as well as the 'young feminist' as critical sites for problematizing the definition of feminism as the growing up and awakening of women (82).

This inherent generational need to aid in the socialization of girls seems to be innate whether it is by feminists, educators, parents, advertisers, or popular cultural producers. The construction and positioning of girls as fragmented, transitional beings going through a series of crises creates the space for guidance manuals to take a variety of shapes, including plastic molded bodies with large breasts and blond hair.

## **Girl-Doll Relations**

Barbie, Bratz, MyScene, Diva Starz, baby dolls, fashion dolls, collectables, celebrity spin offs: you dress them up, give them fantastic, normative, surreal situations in which to live, and then start all over again after someone has declared that they're "*not playing anymore!*" This section will explore notions of guidance and surveillance through a discussion of the fashion doll as a technology of gender. When reviewing the literature

on girls and dolls and in conversations with others, it has become very clear that the doll has become synonymous with Barbie. The plastic blond doll represents a dominant discourse on girls as embodied identities (Driscoll 2005 224). Similarly, within the discussions of girls and play lie a number of assumptions: dolls are the equivalent of play, girls play with dolls, and the doll is synonymous with Barbie. Barbie is a cultural phenomenon that has spanned over four decades and managed to become present in the majority of people's lives.

Barbie is a loaded figure: the very mention of the doll brings forth strong reactions, opinions, stories, and memories. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell write:

To mention the name “Barbie” at almost any adult gathering is to invite derision or interrogation – a chorus of unbelieving “oh nos.” Our families wonder what could possibly be “academic” about Barbie, and ask how we could devote so much time, energy, and even research funds to this seemingly frivolous subject (115).

Barbie is “the bestselling character of all time” (Kline 1989 309). She has become the plastic embodiment of girls’ play, and has caused pain, pleasure, and fun while placing emphasis on white heteronormative femininity as the gold standard for girls and women. While this research aims to unpack the assumptions and associations couched within Barbie and the doll-medium, the majority of the research on girls and dolls surrounds this white blond Mattel creation. In discussing the notion of the doll as a technology of gender, Barbie may be used as an example of the extreme ways in which dolls may act as a medium for girls’ guidance, but also girls’ experimentation with identity through play.

In defining the term technologies of gender, De Lauretis argues that gender, “both as a representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and

critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (2). Girls’ identities are the result of the variety of social technologies they encounter in the multiple facets of their daily lives. They exist in a variety of spaces and territories, trying on new roles and playing with a range of identities. I argue that the doll acts as a technology of gender in its role in girls’ play. Discourses on what it means to be a normative gendered subject are couched within the doll. In exploring the concept of technologies of gender, De Lauretis is concerned with “not only how the representation of gender is constructed by the given technology, but also how it becomes absorbed subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses” (13). This will be explored in more depth throughout the rest of this text through a discussion of the multiplicity of girls’ doll play and the boundaries of market, play, and personal experience.

Victoria Carrington argues for a discussion of dolls and toys as cultural texts that demand a specific form of literacy from the children who play with them. In her analysis of Diva Starz, a line of interactive fashion dolls from Mattel, Carrington writes:

It is incumbent upon us, then to examine the kinds of messages these dolls send to our girl-children as they interact with them. They are clearly not printed texts. Instead, the Divas are powerful markers of the necessary expansion of the notion of ‘text’ in contemporary post-industrial societies and, more specifically, in discussions around literacy [...]. Being ‘literate’ is about having the skills and knowledge with which to participate in and transform one’s social and cultural context. The literacies with which our young children must engage to achieve this are increasingly multi-modal, complex, and intertextual (84).

The common association of girls and dolls, relies on the notion of control under the guise of guidance. Girls are positioned in the world as transitional identities in need of guidance, surveillance, and control and the toys they play with hold the intention of guiding them in the correct gendered direction. Erica Rand refers to Mattel, the company

behind Barbie, as the “master author” with “hegemonic smarts” in its use of scripts for girls’ doll play: “On the one hand, Mattel presents Barbie as the character who can be whatever you want her to be. On the other hand, Mattel works to promote a few options as particularly attractive, options that can be enhanced by the purchase of Mattel items and that avoid associating Mattel with the bad-girl side of the available option spectrum” (63). “Barbie is a signifier of ‘we girls can do anything’” (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002 171) and “infinite possibility discourse” (Rand 59), both versions of the same pop commodity feminism that screens the variety of normative discourses behind the notion of guidance in these technologies of gender. “A range of disciplinary discourses shape this multiplicity [of Barbie play], but Barbie is nevertheless an assemblage of girl-doll relations that denaturalizes gender as well as framing it” (Driscoll 2005 228).

In discussing the doll as a technology of gender, Driscoll (2005) elaborates upon this by defining Barbie as a puberty manual for girls. Drawing from what Foucault terms “technologies of the self,” she argues that technologies, such as Barbie, are “underpinned by disciplinary regimes and, this theoretical model allows us to recognize both girls’ individual desires and the systematic exercise of disciplinary power” (232). While Barbie play does not always correspond with the scripts, her status as Barbie creates a situation in which Mattel’s discursive allowance of what a girl can and should be still prevail over other options. Barbie and other dolls such as Bratz, as technologies of gender, act to normalize girls’ identities and bodies.

The premise of puberty guidance is that girls lack knowledge about their own bodies or the means to attain it, and while Barbie is clearly not a realistic representation of any body, neither are puberty manuals. As bodily change in puberty is often represented as sexual development, sexual organs remain definitive indices of puberty[...]. Like the discourse

on puberty, Barbie maps the constitution of the body as a space marked and crossed by lines of inclusion and exclusion (Driscoll 2005 233-234).

The doll is a social technology that acts to guide girls to specific realms of femininity with little room for movement. Rand writes:

Mattel promotes compulsory heterosexuality by making it look like the most natural and attractive choice; it promotes capitalism and the unequal distribution of resources by glamorizing a character with a huge amount of apparently unearned disposable cash [...]; it promotes ageism and sexism [...]; it promotes racism by making ‘white’ Barbie the standard (9).

The lack of representation of alternate identities in doll culture is extreme; there are few tomboy dolls, dolls in a variety of bodily shapes and sizes, very few brunettes or red heads, and even fewer dolls with dark skin that is not the result of a Malibu tan.

Barbie acts to reinforce whiteness as the norm: “Being blond and being white are marks that signal being unmarked – like nothing else does” (Rand 54). However, while Barbie represents whiteness as pure and unmarked, the racialized Bratz dolls do little more to disrupt racial and gender stereotypes and normative notions of femininity. In an interview with Isaac Larian, the CEO of MGA Entertainment, he addresses the racial or ethnic origin of the Bratz characters (or lack thereof) whereby he denies any racial or cultural representation through the dolls: “When we came out with these dolls, one of the things we did not want to do was just label them. Don’t call them African-American. Don’t call them Hispanic. Don’t call the Middle Eastern. Don’t call them white. Just convey difference” (Talbot 76). However, Bratz dolls do nothing but convey sameness through their representation of the same body in a variety of skin tones and their lack of uniqueness in their scripted roles, mimicking the melting pot mantra of the United States, where issues of ethnicity are watered down by American citizenship, lacking any contribution to a discourse of difference. Rather, the Bratz nod to conveying difference

smells more of a nod to political correctness to overshadow the commodification of ethnicity for the sake of profit. The Bratz are Barbie's nemesis. They are racialized dolls (despite Larian's dismissal of this), created with the intent to "convey difference" to young girls. There is no one character that is centrally located in the group and they are meant to clearly represent girlhood (as troubling as that may seem). The Bratz go to school, they solve dilemmas (mostly involving a fashion crisis), and they participate in many fashion- and consumer-centered activities. While the Bratz are progressive in theory – having a line of dolls that represent something other than the supreme whiteness of Barbie is a great idea – it becomes clear that the Bratz variation from Barbie are not as progressive as one may anticipate.

In a personal interview with Jesse,<sup>4</sup> an eight-year-old girl and avid Bratz fan/player at the time, this became starkly clear. Jesse introduced me to Bratz dolls, showing me each character, giving examples of their clothing and media spin-offs, and taking me on a tour of their website. As a newcomer to this brand, I asked her if Bratz were similar to Barbie, to which she responded that Bratz are way "cooler than Barbie because they dress better." It became clear that the dominant discourse behind the new dolls surrounded fashion, beauty, and appearance. When I asked Jesse what the Bratz were interested in, she responded with a simple "fashion and hanging out with friends." While the intent is to convey difference with these dolls, whether that difference be racial, gendered, or simply through interests, MGA Entertainment's notion of difference includes nothing further than a variety of brown and bronzy skin tones. This racial element of the Bratz was a concern of Jesse's, as she showed me how the dolls' shoes are

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<sup>4</sup> A personal interview with Jesse and her mother Wendy was conducted on 23 February 2006 at their home in Mont Tremblant, Quebec.

removed by snapping off above the ankle. Jesse explained that she did not like this because it limited her ability to change shoes among her dolls, as their skin tones were different. While the intent to convey difference is shown through the variety of skin colours and the representation of racial difference, it becomes clear that the fashion discourse behind the dolls with a “passion for fashion” overshadows the difference discourse.

Like the girls who play with her, the fashion doll is also positioned as a transitional identity. Along with Barbie, most contemporary dolls marketed towards girls represent the shift from childhood to womanhood, or a complex mixture of the two. The Bratz are a clear example of this, as they take part in both the realms of childhood – going to school, hanging out with friends, planning the prom – and womanhood – eating at sushi bars that can conveniently be purchased to accompany the dolls, spending infinite amounts of money on shopping. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2005) write that within Bratz dolls, “there is a fascinating interplay of ‘wanting to grow up’ and ‘wanting the security of childhood’ play found in these artifacts” (3). Similarly, Driscoll (2005) asks, if Barbie “is a girl, why does she have her own jobs, houses, cars, and holidays? If she is a woman, why is she constantly trying on new roles and then giving them up for new games?” (226). Why don’t dolls ever grow up, yet why are they able to do more than most adults? Barbie has no age and her scripted activities provide a complex indicator of age, constantly teetering between being a girl and being a woman. This is a result of the infinite possibility discourse behind Barbie and the Bratz, allowing for these texts to represent normative femininity and to allow for girls to play with them in a way that

allows them to do whatever their hearts desire. This creates a space for play in which girls can play with gender, identity, and social scripts.

## **Playing with Identity**

Fashion dolls normalize, discipline, and script girls as feminine subjects in the making. However, I am hesitant to dismiss these dolls and the girls who play with them, despite their controlling and disciplinary nature. Not all girls play with their dolls in the way they were meant to be played with and not all play corresponds with normative notions of gender, identity, and social citizenship. In fact, girlhood play may be considered exploratory, experimental, and liberating from the social world, while also being scripted and normative. And girls' play involves encoding and playing with these normative scripts given to them in complex ways. This negotiation is in constant flux and affected by the boundaries of play and concepts of mimicry, and fantasy.

Theories of play have been discussed and defined in a number of ways. Johan Huizinga argues that "play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'" (28). Huizinga, in seeking out the essence of play in the domain of culture, also claims that it is an activity with no material or profit-driven interest that exists in proper boundaries of time and place (13). Similarly, Roger Caillois argues that play is "carefully isolated from the rest of life, and generally is engaged in with precise limits of time and place" (6). The notion of boundaries are integral to a theory of play in that they designate a space that exists outside of reality and

the social and, therefore, free from the constraints and normative scripts of the social world... or is it? "The confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced, in this fixed space and for this given time, by precise, arbitrary, unexceptional rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game" (Caillois 7). While this may be true in a number of cases, doll play is so heavily loaded with normative ideology that it seems impossible to exist outside the boundaries of the social world, but it offers the opportunity to play with these elements of life in a fixed place.

Doll play has the ability for girls to take the normative gender scripts bound within these plastic figures and try on new identities and gender roles within the boundaries of their play spaces. Girls mimic and play with the world outside and the people that they can be in that world. Allison James argues: "From the child's perspective... the boundaries to the play world are neither fixed nor constant, for adults may arbitrarily intervene to put an end to play in both the class-room and the playground. The time for play may be cut short, styles of play disapproved of and particular games outlawed" (172). Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) argue that the child's bedroom is an important cultural space because "the bedroom space is still the one which offers the greatest possibility for children-in-control" (114). Comparing spaces of play for children, Mitchell and Reid-Walsh discuss the ways in which play is governed spatially, arguing that "behind closed doors (at least partly closed) doors – bedrooms-as-playrooms offer possibilities for exploring popular culture artifacts in ways that are less socially governed" (118). Similarly, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber's analysis of girls in British youth subcultures in the 1960s and 1970s places emphasis on the bedroom as a social space for girlhood consumption, relationship building, and identity formation:

It might be suggested that girls' culture of the time operated within the vicinity of the home, or the friends' home. There was room for a great deal of new teenage consumer culture within the confines of the girls' bedrooms. Teenage girls did participate in the new public sphere afforded by the growth of the leisure industries, but they could also consume at home, upstairs in their bedrooms (6).

The boundaries of play are in constant flux, allowing discourses of normativity and the social world in at times and filtering them out at others. In both cases, girls are able to play with imaginary identities and experiences or mimic those that they have seen in the social world.

In outlining a definition of play and games, Caillois argues that "games are not ruled and make-believe. Rather they are ruled *or* make-believe" (9). Caillois, therefore qualifies that play may involve wagers and games of chance *or* play may be based on mimicry and interpretation (9). In discussing the classification of games, he argues that there are four rubrics of play: *Agôn*: competitive games such as football or chess; *Alea*: lottery games based on a decision independent of the player such as roulette or lottery; *Mimicry*: games based on the illusion of an imaginary universe and the ability to become someone else such as doll play; and finally *Ilinx*: games based on the pursuit of vertigo such as spinning and twirling (12). Doll play falls into the category of mimicry, whereby the players temporarily accept that they are someone else, somewhere else, or both. This type of play assumes a number of forms of mimicry, whereby the players mimic identities, transform their play space into an imaginary universe separate from the social world, or try on a variety of identities and roles that they may not otherwise experience. Caillois argues that within the realm of mimicry play "for children, the aim is to imitate adults" (21).

The notion of mimicry in doll play is important to the previous discussion of the doll as a technology of gender. The doll is a loaded figure, full of normative discourses on identity, however, girls' experiences and imaginations also play a dominant role in the way they will use the doll as a text and as a toy. In personal interviews, focus groups, and memory-work, it became apparent that when a girl plays with womanhood, she can play with it in a variety of ways, as she may have experienced womanhood or imagined femininity in multiple ways.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, girls play with identity and experiment with a variety of roles in their mimicry, including alternate class locations, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations. It also offers girls the opportunity to make statements, take a stand, and act out in a way that they wouldn't in the social world. Rand argues that doll play, or, more specifically, Barbie play, takes many forms, including mimicking the world outside or using the text to remove the player from the social world in which she exists. These subversive or queer acts of play with Barbie create meaning and speak to the world in which the player exists:

One consumer might dress Barbie in Ken's clothes to protest repressive gender stereotyping. Another might do it because she thinks that girls should be girls and wants to make Barbie look like the kids she tortures on the playground. Still others seem to have expressed resistance through the games that seem to follow Mattel's directions, using Barbie's glamorous careers, for instance to imagine themselves out of difficult circumstances (10).

Play as mimicry speaks to the ways in which a girl interacts in the dominant spaces of the social. As Caillois states, "Play tends to remove the very nature of the mysterious" (4) and may point to a number of experiences in a girl's life.

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<sup>5</sup> This will be elaborated upon throughout the rest of this thesis.

Mimicry, as a form of play, is largely based on the notion of fantasy. The players use their imaginations and found experiences and act them out in another world, created and fantasized about in their imaginations. “The dynamic principle of fantasy is play, and as such it seems inconsistent with serious work. But, without play with fantasy, no creative work has ever come to birth. The debt that we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable” (Jung qtd. in Kline 1989 299). Fantasy allows girls the opportunity to gain experiences that may otherwise be inaccessible to them. The notion of fantasy play allows doll play to be conceived of as subversive and unscripted. Girls play with Barbie and the Bratz in ways that they were not meant to: the Bratz may do naughty things to one another, Barbie may get tattooed, and Ken may get a lot of action from Barbie and her friends. Similarly, every girl that plays with dolls has her own fantasies of who her doll is. Whether Barbie is a porn star or an animal activist, these roles exist in the realm of fantasy play.

While fantasy and imagination may offer an out from the normative elements of dolls as technologies of gender, these concepts are taken into account by doll creators. Commodity pop feminism is couched within both Mattel and MGA Entertainment creations through what Rand terms the “infinite possibility discourse.” “The discourse maintains that the limits come only from within you – you can be rich if you set your mind to it; you can make Barbie anything you want her to be. The goal of the discourse is to mask external limits so that you have appeared to choose freely actions – working for low wages, buying Malibu Barbie – that will benefit the discourse spinner” (Rand 28). While the infinite possibility discourse allows one to think that she can play with a doll in any way, corporate and market driven scripting of dolls limits the possibilities associated

with fantasy and imaginative play. The fantasy/reality binary of these cultural texts provides a complex analysis of doll play, which can teeter between the subversive, imaginary play realm and the scripted, normative realm.

Fantasy: Mattel has always promoted Barbie as a catalyst for the free play of fantasy.

Reality: Barbie “changes with the times” so that the face that Barbie wears will match the concept of “beautiful and glamorous” perceived to reign among girls and so that the outfits you can buy facilitate fantasizing about up-to-date career and leisure options (Rand 40).

The presence of the market and the positioning of girls as consuming subjects is important to this discussion. “Children’s imaginative play has become the target of marketing strategy, allowing marketing to define the limits of children’s imaginations” (Kline 1989 299). This complex interplay between the reality of the social world and the fantasies played out within the context of the personal will be outlined further in the following chapters.

In discussing girlhood in terms of transition or becoming in relation to dolls, it is clear that this is more than a process of learning to be a normative social subject; rather it is a process of learning how to become a complex, inter-subjective being in the social world. Girls have the ability to comprehend the construction of their identities in the social world and also have the ability to critically engage with this construction through play. A discussion of the discursive construction of the girl as a transitional identity begins this dialogue by outlining the ways in which girls are understood and formed in the social realm and in academic discourse. The process of learning to be a social gendered subject is guided by a variety of factors and played with in a number of ways, but in the contemporary context, it is abundantly clear that girls learn to be feminine and consuming subjects at the same time. Girlhood, market, and consumption have become

synonymous. The consumer world then becomes yet another territory of girlhood identity, a space in which girls are shaped and guided through technologies of gender that can be purchased for as little as \$19.99.

## Chapter 2

### ***The Only Girls with a Passion for Fashion!: Marketing Girlhood***

Girlhood is constructed in a number of ways. The previous chapter outlined the discursive construction of the girl as a transitional identity, a fragment in the social world on the road to becoming a normative gendered subject. This construction of the girl is multidimensional and the transitional girl is identified in a variety of spaces and contexts. Among other discursive spaces, the girl is formed within consumer culture by marketers and within brands and products. The market positions girls as transitional identities, guiding them to be active in consumer culture at a young age to ensure that they become adult spenders and the right brand of female social subjects. While girls' play is scripted with figures who flaunt their *passion for fashion*, infinite amounts of disposable cash, and normative displays of gender, personal interviews and a focus group with a ten-year-old and her parents make it clear how girls are more critical, and active than the marketing discourse insinuates. This chapter explores the marketing of girlhood through a historical analysis of the emergence of the girl as a consumer, the discursive construction of the girl in the market, and a political economic analysis of girls' consumption (and resistance) of normative identity through online doll play, making it clear that girls express passions for a variety of other activities and interests that reach far beyond fashion.

### **The Emergence of the Girl Consumer**

The girl's location in the market world as a consuming subject is a multifaceted one. It involves a sense of agency and power in the economic world, holds cultural capital, and is affected by processes of commodification and discursive normalization.

This economic position of girls in the market has a history. Before taking a critical approach to understanding the girl as a member of consumer culture, it is imperative to acknowledge how advertisers and marketers have created the girl market and the girl consumer. The girl consumer is a market creation rather than an identification. The post-war era was an integral moment for the recognition of the impact that youth and girls could have in the consumer world. “The projection of youth or ‘teenagers’ as a distinct sub-culture, with its own consumer-related priorities was an outgrowth of the booming post-war economy in many industrialized societies” (Gunter and Furnham 1). In discussing the emergence of the teenage girl market, Kelly Schrum (2004) argues that consumer culture was integral in the positioning of girls as a group identity in the post-war era. The growth in high school attendance after WWII contributed to the separation of teenage culture from adult and children’s cultures, creating a distinct teenage market for the first time in history. “The remarkable growth of high school attendance affected the formation of teenage culture as the proportion of fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds who attended high school grew from 11 percent in 1900, about 630,000 students, to almost 80 percent in 1940, over seven million students” (136). This distinction between teenage and adult culture became a turning point in terms of target marketing and made clear the potential spending power that teenagers could have (and continue to have) in the market.

This growth followed a shift in North American lifestyles over the next twenty years: “By the 1960s, this generation was spending \$2 billion a year in America alone. By the end of the 1980s, this figure had risen to \$6 billion among young Americans” (Gunter and Furnham 2). The shift in standards of living contributed to the growth in

youth spending: as families grew smaller and dual income living became the norm in Western culture, children had more money to spend and fewer siblings to share it with. This increased economic power for children and youth created more potential for the children's market through the success of "character marketing," "licensed spin-offs," and "multimedia marketing" in the 1980s. These three approaches are linked, as the success of character marketing led to the urge to market spin-off products in multiple media venues. While the spin-off approach to marketing and selling products existed in the 1930s with Disney and the 1960s with Barbie, the 1980s marked a boom for these intricately linked marketing approaches: "By 1988 licensing had become a \$54.3 billion-dollar-a-year business, with a 15.5 per cent share of the toy market. In 1988 Mattel itself sold \$55 million dollars' worth of licensed identities to other children's merchandisers. Spin-offs were transforming the economics and infrastructure of the culture industries" (Kline 1993 137). This turn in marketing directly to children is pivotal in the history of children's consumer culture, as it acted as a starting off point from which to expand advertisers' area of potential marketing venues, turning virtually every medium of children's culture into a potential advertisement.

One of the estimated perks of creating a market dedicated to children and youth consumer culture was an urge to create brand loyalty by "capturing" potential customers at a younger age (Gunter and Furnham). This discourse of "capturing" and "targeting" a consumer group is reflected in the notion of consumer socialization, which "can be defined as the process by which children acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to function fully as consumers" (9). The creation and socialization of the youth market played a large role in the development of a gendered consumer identity: "when

producers and marketers first identified high school girls as a potential market, albeit tenuously, they shaped girls' sense of themselves as individuals, consumers, and actors in a complex social and economic system" (Schrum 2004 20). The market and consumer culture became an integral part in the ways in which girls constituted themselves in the social world through the notion of consumer socialization. Stephen Kline (1993) argues for an acknowledgement of "the marketplace as a part of the matrix of contemporary socialization" and serious attention must be devoted to "how children learn those roles, attitudes and sentiments that reinforce the consumer culture" (13). This has continually evolved to become an evident part of contemporary life, as children are overtly trained to become consumers at a younger age.

The notion of socialization, social participation and identity-formation through consumption is reflected in the concept of consumer citizenship. Kline (1993) explains that in eighteenth-century Europe the marketplace was believed to be the guiding institution for modernizing society. In this marketplace it was believed that "consumers will be sovereign because their choice determines what will be produced for that market; and that an invisible hand of market competition will ensure that these self-serving individual choices ultimately will be a benefit to us all in the form of endless growth in the economy" (2). In this sovereign economy, consumers are rational, informed, and make choices in the market based on want and need rather than market competition or consumer capital. Harris argues that, "[c]onsumption has come to stand in as a sign both of successfully secured social rights and of civic power. It is primarily as consumer citizens that youth are offered a place in contemporary social life, and it is girls above all who are held up as the exemplars of this new citizenship" (163). Referring to the role of

the consumer in the market in terms of citizenship and sovereignty draws from the notion of economic status and cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital provides some insight into this skewed democratic notion of citizenship:

[C]onsumption is linked directly to taste and beyond this to differential accumulations of cultural capital, social position and identity. The conversion of goods is as much about social and class position as it is about the exchange of money. It follows that it is useful to view the construction of identity or 'self' in contemporary consumer culture as the conversion of particular acts of consumption [...] into the performance of identity via the deployment of taste in the marketplace (qtd. in Carrington 87).

Cultural capital is important in discussing the construction of the consumer citizen in marketing discourse and the specific construction of the girl consumer. Carrington elaborates upon this in terms of cultural capital and childhood:

Consumer products are consequently linked inevitably in attempts to gain, strengthen or change social position and, to this end, a series of conversions of economic to cultural to symbolic and/or social capital takes place. When the consumer goods are directed specifically at young children, they demonstrate the construction and imposition of a particular version of childhood onto the market (87).

While it is integral to recognize the role that consumer products and consumer culture has on social status in contemporary society, the conflation of consumption with citizenship and sovereignty is dangerous, as it disregards the pairing of citizenship with issues of democracy.

Harris further complicates this pairing of terms:

The reinvention of youth citizenship as consumer power has been largely enacted through young women. Girls have become the emblem of this consumer citizen via a problematic knitting together of feminist and neoliberal ideology about power and opportunities, combined with some socioeconomic conditions that appear to have favored their rise in status over that of young (and older) men (165.)

Citizenship includes the ability to actively participate in a democratic system, insinuating a sense of civic, political, and democratic agency. To couple the notion of citizenship with consumption overshadows the discursive construction of the consumer by the market and insinuates that individual consumption of products is an act of social power. Consumer citizenship insinuates the notions of freedom and choice, positioning the consuming citizen as an active free agent who is given the opportunity to choose for herself. The term consumer citizen in gendered terms also insinuates that the inclusion of girls in consumer culture should be recognized as an increase in their status as social subjects in the economy. This is an important factor in discussing girls' roles in youth culture and as active social agents (however contrived that activity may be at times).

However, while there is power and a degree of agency and cultural capital associated with the notion of consumer citizenship, to ignore the normalizing discursive affects that this has on girls' culture and girlhood subjectivity is dangerous and one-sided. Even more dangerous is to ignore the class-based issues that consumer citizenship brings forth. “[T]he new mode of enacting citizenship, that is, through empowered consumer choice, is in fact feasible only for those who have the financial capacity to take their custom elsewhere” (Harris 165). While it is naïve to ignore the state of contemporary Western society and the emphasis that capitalism has on our daily lives, to place consumption as a defining factor in the constitution of identity and subjectivity is to place a price tag on girlhood, which inevitably excludes the variety of identities that do not fit that brand or cannot afford that style of femininity. Similarly, the emphasis on power and individual agency through consumption suggests that without the ability to purchase

commodities, a girl is not powerful. Social power and consumption are inevitably linked in these terms.

This is not to suggest that we trap young girls in their bedrooms free from the normalizing effects of consumer culture. Nor does this seek to construct girls as victims of the consumer world. Rather, I suggest that girlhood identity extends beyond the spaces of consumer culture. Frank Trentmann argues: “The consumer is sometimes a descriptive or analytic category, at other times a normative one, and at yet others all at once, giving little attention to the specificity of the consumer as a subject and object of public life” (150). The historical construction of the girl consumer mimics the discourse surrounding girls found in contemporary marketing literature and points to the significance that marketers have in the construction of identity via consumption. Taking the historical construction of the girl consumer into consideration, it is imperative to analyse ways in which girls are situated in contemporary marketing discourses.

### **The Discursive Formation of the Girl in Marketing Literature:**

Upon reviewing popular North American marketing literature,<sup>6</sup> a number of discourses surrounding girls as consumers emerged. These discourses include: the growing girl market as a demographic with spending power; gender disparities in the children's market; an emphasis on the large role that celebrity and, in turn, American culture plays into girls' market interests; “age compression” and the patterns of marketing

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<sup>6</sup> Between ten and fifteen articles from popular marketing publications and firms were reviewed for the purpose of this research. Publications included: *Marketing*, *Forbes*, and *Fortune* while a review of the discourses within youth marketing firms *Fuse Marketing* and *Youthography* were included in identifying the following discursive themes and analysis.

to children at a younger age; the transitional “tween” market; the notion of girls’ empowerment in the market; and contemporary covert approaches to youth marketing. This section will identify the concept of transition as a dominant discursive element in the marketing construction of girlhood and outline the ways in which the marketing approach constructs girls as future consumers in training.

Girls have continued to occupy a large space in the marketing world since their emergence in mass consumer culture. However, the continuing growth of the girl market segment is a dominant thread in marketing discourse. Similarly, the ways in which marketers view girl consumers has changed as, “mass marketing has been replaced by the ever more sophisticated techniques of market segmentation in which consumer markets are identified and ‘targeted’” (Sawchuk 176). Girls have and continue to be the ‘targets’ of marketers and a profitable market segment due to their ever-growing wallets, budgets and willingness to consume. While the girl market is increasing in size, so too is the amount of disposable income to which girls have access. “[C]hildren’s ‘consumer power’ has reached unprecedented heights in recent years [...]. Market researchers estimate the value of the children’s market at around \$115 billion USD and \$1.8 billion CDN for the Canadian ‘tween’ market alone, including both the money children spend themselves and the influence they exert over family purchases” (Grimes and Shade 181). From the marketer’s perspective, the “teens of the Britney Spears generation have got attitude to spare and money to burn” (Hitchcock) and are, therefore, an increasingly popular and profitable market segment.

The increasing amount of income for children and youth is a central factor in this growing girl market. Not only are children getting their small hands on more income and

purchasing more products directly, indirect consumption also plays a large role in the amount of money that is spent on children's products. Products purchased as gifts, entertainment, and household items, such as food and drink all reflect the spending power that children and girls have in the market, whether that power is reflected directly or indirectly. This negotiation between direct and indirect consumption became clear in nine-year-old Jesse's context, as her mother's reluctance to purchase products that she found inappropriate did nothing to deter her collection of Bratz dolls and accessories from growing. Jesse had plans to purchase the Bratz sushi shop with birthday money that had been recently acquired and she continually received Bratz-related items as gifts from her older siblings and extended family. This large amount of spending power constructs children and girls as a growing and profitable market segment to companies with hip products to sell.

According to Barrie Gunter and Adrian Furnham, "the child consumer resembles all other consumers. Children want to purchase things to satisfy various needs. Satisfaction may be gained directly from the items purchased" (7). The conflation of children and adults in the context of consumption reflects the trend in marketing to children and girls at a younger age and also plays a large role in this growing market. The notion of "age compression" as a fundamental factor in marketing to young children is clear in the emergence of the "tween" girl, who provides an important example of both this growing girl-specific market segment through the expansion of age-related target markets and the increasing spending power of a younger group of consumers:

The term Tween Marketing refers to promotion of products and services to young people between the ages of eight and twelve. This multi-billion dollar segment's views and attitudes are constantly changing; therefore, any brand targeting tweens must keep up with the ever-changing

landscape of tween trends and fads. No longer do tweens play with toys, instead they keep an eye on music, fashion, and their individuality (*Fuse Marketing* “Tween Marketing”).

The “nearly 10 million tween girls also are getting more attention from fashion, skin care and makeup businesses. [In 2006], NPD Group says 7- to 14-year-old girls spent \$11.5 billion on apparel, up from \$10.5 billion in 2004” (O’Donnell). The motto “get ‘em while they’re young” (Hitchcock) has taken on a whole new meaning in marketing dogma within the context of the tween phenomenon. “As tweens start to develop their sense of identity and aspire for a stylish self-image, magazine publishers are seeing an opportunity to treat tweens like teenagers, but with a little less sex (or at least more subtlety)” (Mah and McKnight).

This growing emphasis on marketing to girls in an older way is made abundantly clear in marketing discourse. The emergence of “little sister” stores, brands, and products such as *La Senza Girl*, *Cosmo Girl* or *Teen People* emphasize that the girl market is one that is prepping these young ones for their role as adult consumers... and marketers better keep their eyes on this large demographic.

With their keen but shifting senses of style, tween girls present some of the biggest rewards and challenges for retailers and brands. What’s called for: a delicate marketing dance that tunes in tween girls without turning off their parents, who control both the purse strings and the car. Retailers to tween girls also must stay in close touch with the fashion pulse, because being “out” is even more painful for girls who haven’t hit the teen years, say retailers and their consultants. They’ll drop a brand faster than you can say Hannah Montana if the clothes become anything close to dorky (O’Donnell).

The growing girl demographic and the presence of the profitable tween market provides a perspective of girlhood in consumer culture as a transitional space. Farah Malik suggests that the existing work surrounding girls and consumption views girls’ roles in the market

as a transitional process, “concentrating on how the act of consumer choice (whether real or falsified) can serve as at transition into adulthood” (258). The presence of women’s brands shrunk down for their daughters or younger sisters emphasizes this classification of girls as women- and consumers-in-the-making.

The new marketing approach to girls is to adapt already established adult brands to fit the younger girls, educating them on the normative restrictions of gender in the media and training them to be active consumers at a younger age. This notion of transition is a dominant discursive element for marketers in their approach to targeting girls as a market segment in preparation for adulthood. In this, marketers are educating girls on the consumption of gender, sexual, racial, and class-based stereotyping through a normative representation of the white, thin, feminine, conventionally beautiful girl/woman. This form of gendered consumer education is evident in the gender-specific approach to marketing to girls, selling them makeup and beauty products at an earlier age in order to create dedicated adult buyers.

Gender disparities have a large presence in contemporary marketing to children and youth. According to the marketing literature, boys are inherently interested in dirty, tough, and active play, while girls are interested in nurturing, pink, celebrity-infested, image-based products and play. From the marketer’s perspective, “boys and girls are different [...] Girls want to be in touch all the time (particularly with their friends). Girls are more interested in their community. Girls are more socially conscious. Girls are less likely to want to take chances and therefore are more risk averse” (Erskine and Shular). While the image of the socially conscious girl who is active in her community is a pleasant one to anyone perched to the left of the political spectrum, these gender

classifications that split girls and boys into separate aisles in the toy department set the tone for normalization and gender surveillance.

If products are created and marketed with these thoughts in mind (and they obviously are) then the opportunity for girls and boys to experience social pressures associated with gender arise at a younger age. In discussing the marketing of print magazines, it is assumed that gendered topics include, “horoscopes, quizzes and fashion for girls; soccer, hockey stats and video game cheats for boys” (Mah). The girl who loves to play soccer or the boy who (heaven forbid) enjoys reading his horoscope must cross the market boundaries in order to do the things they enjoy or must deal with the potential stigmatization of not correctly corresponding to gender codes. While there is an acknowledgment in marketing literature that girls are becoming interested in products previously left to the realm of boys, there is still a push to market them in a “girl-friendly” way. Marketing technology to girls through pink cell phones and laptops provides an example of the gender division in consumer culture.

This girl-specific approach to marketing reflects Driscoll’s (2002) discussion of the girl market in terms of consumption and the act of gendered participation:

An idea of the girl market is employed to sell participation in girlhood. The commodities marketed to the new (global) girl consumers [...] included the idea and the means of feminine adolescence. But rather than being equivalent to the girl market, girl culture names the circulation of ways to articulate identities as girls (268).

The gender division in marketing discourse reflects this notion of gendered participation and makes abundantly clear the dominant role that the market believes to have in the formation of identity. Within consumer culture there exists both the consumption of discourse and ideology and the commodification of identity: “in capitalism the girl has

represented ideas of consumption or commodification. Analogies between girls and commodities are widely promulgated, and commodities are often aligned with girls (and their desirability)" (109). Girlhood has been taken up by the marketplace and sold through products in a number of ways: "On the one hand, marketers use the media to sell products to consumers; on the other, the media audience is a 'commodity' regularly exchanged between media organizations and merchants" (Kline 1993 9). Girls' participation in the market involves participation in the market production of normalized and commodified girlhood and this is particularly dangerous in terms of the increasing and extremely present gender segregation from a marketing perspective.

The notion of consumed identity and gender participation in the consumer world is evident in a similar trend in marketing to girls through the status of celebrity in consumption. This marketing approach is an extremely gendered one and remains a successful strategy for gaining girls' interests in products. Vincent Mosco argues that, "commodification has long been understood as the process of taking goods and services which are valued for their use [...] and transforming them into commodities which are valued for what they can earn in the marketplace" (8). The female celebrity is a market commodity in her ability to represent (or overshadow) a product, allowing the consumer to purchase the commodified identity via the product. The emphasis on celebrity in marketing to girls also reveals a strong American influence in the Canadian girls' market, which has brought forth a challenge within Canadian marketing literature to find a counterpart to this successful US trend:

Established brands such as Cover Girl and Maybelline continue to use dueling actress-slash-singers to appeal to teens. Maybelline uses Sarah Michelle Gellar of TV's Buffy the Vampire Slayer in its ads while Cover Girl counters with teen R&B singer Brandy. Procter & Gamble also gave

Cover Girl a Canadian face earlier this year when it signed MusiquePlus veejay Genevieve Borne for a Quebec campaign aimed at 12- to 17-year-old girls. The tag line? “Simplement moi” (Simply me) (Hitchcock).

The trend of celebrity endorsement/embodiment of products overshadows the overt marketing process. By placing a celebrity face or body in front of a product there is a sense of consuming an identity or concept rather than a brand. Similarly, “below the line” marketing, a popular approach to youth marketing is extremely present in the literature. Also known, as grassroots marketing, guerilla marketing, street marketing, and brushfire marketing, below the line marketing “is immersed in youth culture and resonates because it fits in” (“Good Youth Marketing? Try Starting with Youth”).

*Youthography*, a Toronto-based youth marketing and communications company, boasts their success in this approach as attributed to a “Connected Youth Marketing Philosophy – daily interaction with youth 13 to 29 combined with intimate relationships inside the five pillars of youth culture: Music, Entertainment, Fashion, Sports and Technology” (*Youthography* “Marketing Overview”). The language used in below the line marketing strategies suggests that the more valued relationship exists between the marketer and the corporation rather than with the youth who will eventually consume a product. A successful marketing company has “intimate” relationships with the producers of products while maintaining an “immersive understanding” of youth culture through “daily interaction” with young buyers. Job titles such as “youth strategist” and “consumer insight planner” correspond with this “grassroots” approach to marketing to youth, however, without their knowledge that they are being “targeted” and marketed. The use of the term “grassroots” in marketing provides an understanding of the ways in which terms and concepts have been taken up and used in ways that are completely

different than intended. Grassroots refers to front line activism and non-profit work rather than the covert market espionage that companies such as *Youthography* make use of in their below the line approach.

To the marketer, youth is simply a space in which to immerse oneself and mine youth interests for corporate profits. "We need to be concerned about the fact that girlhood is produced as a space of consumption at the expense of girlhood as a space of cultural production or social and political engagement" (Taft 75). This coincides with Mattel's infinite possibility discourse discussed in the previous chapter, which sets the stage for corporate producers to create the illusion that consumers are acting on their own accord. Geraldine Laybourne, head of the Disney/ABC cable networks provides an example of this, stating: "We will have to get clever at making [kids/girls] feel like they're in control" (Munk 136). Rand explains that the pop-feminist infinite possibility discourse allows Mattel the opportunity to have consumers purchase their products on their own behalf, removing any sense of corporate responsibility or, in the case of *Youthography*, provides a marketing company with an opportunity to boast their smarts in their ability to tap into the youth market through immersion. In the 1980s, with the help of Jill Barad, a former cosmetics executive, "Mattel expanded its language of the infinite possibility to pick up on a somewhat feminist revision of the American Dream, according to which anyone, girls included, can be and earn whatever they want, if only they try hard enough" (Rand 67). Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown argue:

In the world of play – from dolls to sports to musical instruments to slumber parties to cheerleading to instant messaging to kissing and more – there is a common belief that when a child herself chooses a game, activity, club, instrument, or toy, she is expressing her individual personality and cannot be coerced by old-fashioned rules of gender (210).

This is also the case in the context of the commodification of girl power, which has taken up feminist discourse about women's power and marketed it to girls through corporate identities and products, such as the Spice Girls.

Similar to the co-option of terms like “grassroots” by marketing agencies, girl power originated in the Riot Grrrl subcultural movement and was more popularly embodied by Madonna, representing “explicit feminist intentions and aggressive displays of female sexuality” (Fritzsche 155). The commodification of girl power was embodied by British Pop group the Spice Girls who “have been accused of presenting nothing more than a new halfhearted and commercialized version of a style which had been initiated by [its] predecessors” (155) and has been referred to as “a co-option more heinous than any Riot Grrrl’s worst nightmare” (*Rolling Stone* qtd. in Fritzsche 156). This commercial phenomenon “produced much speculation about how girl power can be interpreted and what it might reveal about young women” (Budgeon 115). From this blatant marketing perspective, girls are encouraged to express themselves via consumption and to formulate an identity that can be worn on their bodies in glittery pink fabrics and through the products that are in fashion at the moment, but they are only encouraged to do so in ways that are deemed appropriate and *normal*. The market construction of a very specific and normalized girlhood identity provides little room for other identifications and representations. This specificity creates a space in the consumer world in which alternate representations are stigmatized for not corresponding to the identity advertised. If a girl wants to dress more like a boy and cut her hair short, she is stigmatized for consuming the wrong brand of girlhood and femininity. Similarly, if a girl chooses to take the girl power or infinite possibility discourse too far by taking action in a way that is *too sexual*

or unconventionally powerful or by thinking that she actually can do anything, she ventures into the bad girl spectrum of girlhood and must suffer the social consequences and stigma.

From a marketing perspective, the girl is a gendered, consuming “citizen” who is lucky to have the power associated with being an active member of consumer culture. She is marketed in a way that overshadows the normalizing gender discourses within consumer culture and fits the mold of femininity only if she consumes the correct products and uses them in the correct way. She is socialized and educated on the ins and outs of the consumer world from a young age and has the potential to be loyal to her choice brand for the rest of her life. The following section will take this market-constructed identity into consideration and further examine the ways in which girls are trained to become consumers through scripted doll play and explore their interpretations of this corporate identity construction.

### **Scripted Gender Consumption**

The economy of girlhood is clearly embodied by contemporary fashion dolls, from Bratz to Barbie, and the emerging economic spaces of doll play. Both these brands revolve around economics and consumption: the Bratz’ *passion for fashion* guides the discourses of shopping and femininity that they embody while Barbie always had an indispensable amount of cash to spend on whatever and whomever she pleases. Both these dolls are guided by discourses of buying, consuming, and spending money. In 1959, Mattel introduced Barbie to the toy world (Rogers; Rand). The blond high school fashion model has embodied the commodification of girlhood in the toy market for

decades along with the ability to promote normalized gender, sexual, and racial identities to girls around the world.

Despite Mattel's inability to account coherently for Barbie's unrealistic measurements and lack of panties, despite decades of disapproval by mothers, feminists, antiracists, and others, Mattel has sold billions of dollars worth of Barbie items, and Barbie continues to sell on, to an ever-expanding market of consumers who buy more dolls than did their counterparts of the past [.... In fact, in 1992] placed head to toe the nearly 700 million Barbie dolls and 'family members' sold since 1959 would circle the earth more than three and a half times, and a Barbie doll is now sold every two minutes (Rand 26-27).

Mary F. Rogers argues that Barbie "epitomizes the *consumerization of children*, their transformation into consumers with some measure of autonomy as spenders and buyers" (62). While Mattel has attempted to cover up the overt consumer discourse within Barbie play through its infinite possibility discourse and the marketing of numerous Barbie personas – from doctor Barbie to president Barbie – it is clear that through the marketing of the doll, economic scripts of play emerge. The case is similar – and not so covert – with the Bratz dolls.

Nearly fifty years after Barbie's inception, the toy world was overcome by a new generation of dolls and Barbie's reign as the Queen of commodified girlhood play ended when she met the Bratz. In 2001, MGA Entertainment released the first Bratz line consisting of four characters, collectively known as the *Bratz Pack* (Talbot). The design for the Bratz doll was brought to MGA by, "a doll designer and on-and-off-again Mattel employee named Carter Bryant" (Talbot 74). The dolls were developed by MGA Entertainment as a response to the slipping age for acceptable Barbie play. As Barbie was being relegated to the preschool market, Bratz took her place with girls between the ages of six and twelve (Schor 143). Coincidentally, they hit the toy market around the

same time that many other companies were developing products specifically for the new tween demographic that emerged in the late 1990s (Durham). “They are hip and sexy – much sexier than Barbie, who, in spite of her conical breasts and tiny waist, always seems fairly asexual, even in a bathing suit. Not the Bratz. The Bratz radiate a cartoon-like, street-smart, in-your-face combination of sex and toughness” (Schor 143).

The Bratz are 10 inches tall with oversized heads and feet, which conveniently detach above the ankle to avoid losing their platform shoes, a lesson we all learned from Barbie and her tiny high heels that got lost a day after the package was opened. They have large, almond-shaped eyes, which are slightly closed, large pouting lips, and a small nose. “The trunk is quite compressed with a small chest or breasts with big hips. They appear to be a three-dimensional cartoon or stylized caricature of a young teen, or even tween, body [...]. The gaze is direct and indeed almost feline (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2005 3). They have long, thick hair in a variety of colours that sits below their waists and emphasizes their short bodies. The Bratz emerged and quickly became popular, challenging Barbie and her cast of characters. “The queen of pink, however, didn’t go down without a fight. Executive Barbie must have been paying attention because she quickly diversified into the multicultural My Scene Barbie” who exists on toy shelves and online (Lamb and Brown 217). My Scene Barbie is different than her original counterpart, expressing an edgier side of girlhood that is demanded by the ever-growing market of girls who consume Avril Lavigne and Bratz in the same breath. She is also more contemporary in her occupation of virtual spaces, carving out her own “Barbie Girl” virtual world.

The Bratz are the “Only Girls with a Passion for Fashion!” (Bratz.com). The discourse behind this brand of doll is completely driven by the consumer world in which they exist:

Unlike Barbie, who sort of recovered from the bad press of saying ‘Math is hard’ some years ago by morphing into everything from Dr. Barbie to President Barbie, the Bratz dolls are unapologetically focused – no, obsessed with – fashion and boys. There *is* no other career unless maybe it’s modeling the animal skin miniskirts and bikinis they come with. There are ‘the girls with a passion for fashion’ – period (Lamb and Brown 218).

The economic discourse is extreme and evident in both doll brands. The extreme presence of consumer values in these cultural figures was made clear in my interview with eight-year-old Jesse, as she explained that the Bratz are interested only in shopping, fashion, and socializing with each other. Similar to Barbie’s back-story and corporate scripting, the Bratz’ “passion for fashion” guides their imagined lives and the ways in which girls play with them. Not only are girls explicitly taught about consumption through the characters and their plot lines, but they are also bombarded with the consumption of a specific type of femininity. The presence of the TV shows and movies contribute to creating a specific type of play according to gender and consumer scripts and codes. The characters have their own personalities, likes, and dislikes that contribute to the ways in which girls may play with the dolls both on and offline. The characters’ main form of expression is fashion, which sets the tone for the overt consumer-based thread that runs through the dolls, the characters, the plot lines, and the themes of each product line. As ten-year-old Talya and her mother Vaneza<sup>7</sup> explain:

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<sup>7</sup> A focus group was conducted with Talya and her parents Vaneza and Marc-André on 26 August 2007 in their home in Montreal, Quebec.

Vaneza: Yeah, it's all about going to the mall and meeting with your friends. Being with your crew.

Talya: All about, you know, the girl who plays with those things, 'cause all they've been taught by playing with those dolls is that's the dream life: being able to hang out with your friends and go shopping.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to Barbie's über accessorized life, the Bratz line of related accessories range from coffee shops to hummers to pink Bratz laptops and bedroom furniture.

The emphasis on the Bratz "passion for fashion" is not a new concept in the marketing and consumption of dolls. Barbie play has always revolved around the clothes that she wears and her fashion style.<sup>9</sup> This was evident in ten-year-old Talya's (not-so-distant) memories of real-life doll play, as she explained her long and calculated games with her Barbies:

I would dress her up and then do, like... if I was alone I would dress her up, dress all of them up that I had and give them themes of what they were dressed to... say, party, um, I don't know, she's getting married, like, school, whatever. And, then, when I was with a friend, we would dress them up. At first..., we would combine all of our clothes and we would put all the shirts there and say, one-by-one, we would do rock, paper, scissors, and then the person who won went first and would pick something, then the other person would pick something and then another shirt....

Barbie's fashion-inspired scripts of play are also mimicked in twenty-five-year-old Rachna's<sup>10</sup> memories of girlhood play: "When my sister and I were playing with our Barbies and not just fussing about accoutrements, we spent hours and hours in the damp basement dressing them up. It was a lengthy affair – each of us would attempt to assemble the hottest outfit du jour in order to win the heart of (and a date with) Ken."

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<sup>8</sup> While Talya actively participates in online doll culture and has memories of playing with dolls offline, she remains critical of the normative elements of these spaces of play. This will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Barbie was introduced to the toy world as a teenage fashion model (Rand 49).

<sup>10</sup> Rachna provided written memories that were triggered by three themes (girlhood, play, and dolls/toys) on 7 September 2007.

The logistics of fashion-inspired doll play may vary to a certain extent, but for the most part, they revolved around the dressing up of the dolls, designing and styling outfits in preparation for a, usually anticlimactic, act, whether it was a date with Ken, a night out with the girls, or something more subversive. Rachna, a designer and artist, also used the term “passion for fashion” to describe her girlhood interests that have continued into her adult interests and lifestyle.

Carrington argues for a discussion of dolls and toys as cultural texts that demand a specific form of literacy from the children who play with them. In her analysis of Mattel’s Diva Starz Carrington writes:

[The] Divas are powerful markers of the necessary expansion of the notion of ‘text’ in contemporary post-industrial societies and, more specifically, in discussions around literacy [...]. Being ‘literate’ is about having the skills and knowledge with which to participate in and transform one’s social and cultural context. The literacies with which our young children must engage to achieve this are increasingly multi-modal, complex, and intertextual (84).

In adopting this approach, contemporary dolls act as cultural texts and technologies of gender that demand a specific form of literacy – one that is economically driven... and girls are learning how to read and interpret the consumer world in ways that they never have before.

Contemporary doll companies are taking the act of girlhood consumption to a new level with the development and marketing of virtual spaces of economic consumption. The emergence of the Bratz Empire followed a seemingly popular trend and extended to the virtual world where girls could play online games and purchase more items. This virtual children’s economy has spanned beyond the realm of doll culture or girls’ culture,

creating a space in which all children can play and interact in the economic world before having the funds to do so.

We find ourselves in a context in which childhood has changed from one of our society's most cherished and comforting narratives to a site of competing signification and discourses. This competition takes place against a backdrop of aggressive consumer culture and the evolution of an unprecedented range of texts, many of which have moved beyond the simplicity of print (Carrington 86).

Carrington's discussion of the evolution and expansion of the notion of texts is important to a discussion of these dolls, which are loaded with discourses that are written by the corporations producing them and can be read by the girls who play with them. This understanding of dolls as cultural texts that are coded with gender norms draws from De Lauretis' concept of technologies of gender. In the economic context, this allows for an understanding of dolls as cultural texts that can be read as consumer culture guidance manuals that teach children how to be active consumers and gendered subjects. Sara M. Grimes and Leslie Regan Shade write: "The creation of online communities and spaces for children and youth has [...] become a growing and lucrative endeavor for many media toy and food companies" (181). These online communities are driven by economic discourse, where the acquisition of market goods is the main activity that takes place in these spaces.

Like Neopets.com and Webkinz.com<sup>11</sup>, the newest brand of online virtual pet words, Mattel and MGA Entertainment have developed online spaces for girls to interact with each other through instant messaging and chatting, interact with the brand and products, and, most importantly, learn how to be active consumers through the buying

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<sup>11</sup> Webkinz requires the users to purchase their pets and, in turn, interact in the online world, accumulating money by playing games and selling items, and purchasing food, housing, and clothing for their pets.

and selling of products with *virtual* money. Other online doll sites include Stardoll.com, which gives you \$25.00 of online currency when you set up an account, but requires the user to purchase online currency by paypal or a parent's credit card once that seed money is spent. Similar to these online communities, both Bratz.com and Barbiegirls.com revolve around the purchasing of goods through the exchange of online money.

This mode of online economic-driven play is evident in the Bratz online world. The website includes a number of interactive activities, product advertisements or "TV spots," and draws to win free merchandise. It also emphasizes the interactive activities that girls can take part in on the site,<sup>12</sup> of which fifty percent surround themes of fashion, physical appearance, and consumption. The heavy presence of design-related activities creates a tone of emphasized creativity and the push for girls to create their own fashions and styles. The same is true on Barbiegirls.com, whereby one can explore the *Barbie Girls* town, which includes a nightclub, a pet boutique, a clothing shop, a coffee shop, and a public park. Each girl has her own room, complete with a closet to be filled with clothing and accessories, which she can decorate using her online currency. She can purchase furniture, artwork, and entertainment systems for her room along with an unlimited amount of clothing for her avatar. While the heavy use of design-related activities pushes a discourse of creativity, the coded nature of the online space becomes clear when attempting to create a design or avatar that does not correspond with normalized gender scripts. The construction of online spaces requires coding and design that creates a specific navigation, experience, and outcome. In this, the designer (or

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<sup>12</sup> Game titles include: Mix n' Match, Bratz Ice Champions, Fish Tank, Fashion Designer, Diamondz Big Night Out, Tale Twisterz, Babyz Mall Crawl, Diamond Glam, Gettin' Ready, Model Makeover, and Bratz Bedroom Designer.

company) has the power to control the way users experience the online environment. (Cruikshank). This is evident in the variety of design- or creativity-based games that dominate the activities available on interactive doll websites. While the discourse of encouragement to be creative and unique is evident in the design of the site, the actual games allow for a very specific kind of creativity to emerge. The tools and choices available in these design games mimic the styles and choices available in the dolls themselves, only online, there is a lack of ability to play in a way that is not heavily scripted and coded by MGA Entertainment or Mattel.

This coded element of creativity is extremely prevalent in the majority of online doll spaces. When designing an avatar for these online environments, the options for varying body sizes and skin tones are extremely limited, making it clear that thin bodies and whiteness are the pinnacles of beauty. A personal interview with ten-year-old Talya,<sup>13</sup> a member of all of the above-mentioned online communities emphasizes this. When asked about the motivations behind the design of her avatar in Barbigirls.com, Talya made clear that the point behind the design of her avatar is to make her “as pretty as possible” rather than a more realistic online self-representation.<sup>14</sup> The case was similar in Talya’s accounts of her memories of offline doll play, as she made clear that she always wanted the most beautiful doll, and that standard of beauty was never constant:

Talya: I’ve never been, like, “oh, I want the white one. I want the blond one.”

Vaneza: You just wanted the prettiest one.

Marc-André: Which was?

Talya: It really depends on the kind of doll.

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<sup>13</sup> Preceding the focus group conducted with her parents on 26 August 2007, a personal interview was conducted with Talya on 2 August 2007 in her home in Montreal, Quebec.

<sup>14</sup> Talya, who has dark brown hair and eyes and an olive skin tone due her Colombian background, is more interested in avatars with pale complexions, freckles, and red hair.

Vaneza: Yeah, you were all over, ‘cause sometimes you would be, like, “oh my god, the Asian girl, I have to have her, she’s gorgeous!”

Talya: Or sometimes I’d be like, “I have to have the redhead.”

Vaneza: Or the black girl. It was never the blond is the prettiest and she has to have the blond one.

As previously explored in Chapter One, the element of fantasy in doll play was clear as Talya explained that the last thing on her mind was being herself when playing with dolls, both offline and in these virtual spaces. These multiple spaces provided her with an opportunity to be someone else and play a different role. However, the coded nature of the online world makes the span of fantasy limited and controlled by corporate normative interests.

While exploring Barbiegirls.com with Talya it became clear that the site’s main function revolves around the consumption of products. The lack of alternate forms of expression and play in these virtual economic spaces makes clear the notion of consumer socialization, as girls are educated on the function of currency and the ways in which they may use it to acquire products and goods. Not only is this economic socialization extremely evident, it is also normative in essence. The lack of representation of an array of skin tones and body sizes points to this normalized representation of girlhood. Similarly, the lack of space for girls who express interests other than shopping, fashion, and makeovers represents the market-constructed image of girlhood as embodied by dolls both online and offline. Talya made clear her understanding of these elements of her online spaces of play. When asked what the main activities included in Barbiegirls.com, she explained the overt focus on money and consumption stating that, “it’s all about how much money you can get.” When asked if there is space for girls who don’t like fashion

and dolls in these sites, Talya made clear the lack of alternative spaces in these virtual communities and expressed her disapproval of this normative coding of play.

It was also very important for Talya to emphasize that this is not her only interest or hobby, as she explained that she enjoys playing soccer, reading comics and graphic novels, writing stories, and dancing, emphasizing the multifaceted elements of her girlhood identity and play. While both Talya and Jesse found pleasure in the normative elements of doll play, both online and offline, they expressed pride in their many other interests and accomplishments, revealing, in turn, a sense of satisfaction in their abilities to be “real” girls and their abilities to overcome the normalizing elements of doll culture. Talya made an effort to emphasize her ability to be critical of her interests as she gave me a tour of the various online communities, pointing out elements that she found problematic and uninteresting, from the lack of appropriate fashions to the body sizes of the avatars to the lack of space for girls who don’t express an interest in fashion and image.

Her multifaceted and, at times, critical stance towards her pastime was directly reflected in her parents’ discussion of their interpretations of their daughter’s interests. Both Vaneza and Marc-André made clear their strategy in raising their daughter in a consumer-saturated culture, as Vaneza stated that she had a rule that she would never buy Barbies for Talya, nor would she place judgment on her daughter if she received them as gifts or desired to play with them: “Yeah, I was, like, ‘I’m not paying for this.’ If people give it to her, that’s fine, but, my sister, who was concerned..., she loaded us up with all the pink stuff.” Coincidentally, when Talya did receive Barbies as gifts from her

concerned aunt, her parents made a point of discussing the “political incorrectness” of the doll. Marc-André explains:

Even when she got those second hand garage sale Barbies, it was right away with all the proper political instructions that came with it... which was: “Talya, a woman cannot be built like this. It’s impossible. This is not a good body type. I mean, this is not a realistic body type. This is nothing to aspire to.” You know? And, she was fine with it, you know... but she was totally able to differentiate that this is not a human, you know, this is a Barbie... this is its own thing.

Talya’s ability to differentiate between the fantasies of her doll play and real life aspirations are made clear in the way she has been raised to think critically while avoiding the hierarchies of pleasure and cultural interests. Both Vaneza and Marc-André understand the importance of raising their daughter to be able to maneuver in her consumer world, while remaining critical and self-aware. Vaneza referred to the virtual consumer spaces in which Talya participates as “a part of the kid currency to know about this stuff” and stated:

To not let your kid play with it and not let your kid know it... it’s... I don’t know. I don’t want to do that to Talya because, you know, she’s growing up with these principals that I’m imposing on her instead of choosing her own principals. So, if she wants to have fun with Barbie or if she wants to waste her time doing something banal, like dressing a doll or something, that’s fine. I mean, it’s my judgment for myself, but if she wants to do it, that’s fine.

The definition of a knowledge of consumer products as “kid currency” makes clear the parental recognition of the inherent consumer thread that runs through girls’ and children’s culture and the multiple elements that contribute to the construction of girlhood identity while emphasizing the importance of a multifaceted approach to girlhood through their own parenting styles.

While it is extremely clear that girls are constructed as consumers in a variety of ways by marketing discourse, the inclusion of girls' experiences, likes, and dislikes with products and play makes clear the complicated relationship between identity, pleasure, and consumption. The construction of girlhood in consumer culture has a strong history and the discursive formation of girls in contemporary marketing literature points to the large presence that consumption has in girls' experiences. This presence has emerged in virtual spaces and created yet a new territory for the construction of girls as women- and consumers-in-training. The discursive construction of girls online presents a context in which dominant meaning is difficult to subvert and monitor. While the market construction of girlhood identity is troubling and frightening at times, a girl's ability to steer through the world as an active agent is made clear in the voices and experiences of real girls and women. The focus on the normative scripts of girlhood play along with the experiences of girls reveals the importance of a multidimensional methodological approach to exploring this topic.

Girlhood is discursively constructed as a transition in consumer culture and the products sold to girls act as technologies of gender and economic cultural texts that attempt to script and guide girls' identity formation through play. The large presence of normative issues in consumer culture present girls with little room to identify differently. However, the viewpoints of active parents and girls make it clear that it is possible for girls to exist in consumer culture while remaining critically aware and expressing alternative interests and identifications. This will be elaborated upon through an examination of girls' play through memory-work and personal narrative in order to challenge the dominant constructions of girlhood identity as outlined in the first two

chapters and reveal the potential for girls to subvert these messages and create new meanings of technologies of gender within the privacy of their own play spaces.

## Chapter 3

### Playing with Identity: Memory-Work and Self-Construction

In thinking back upon my childhood experiences in a white, middle-class, suburban, nuclear family, a number of memories come to mind: living in my bathing suit during the hot summer months, running, laughing, exploring my surroundings with the neighbourhood children. I remember playing in our basement for hours on end on my own, with my mother or father, and, when she was old enough, with my sister. Our favourite games were immersed with bursts of laughter, tears, screaming, sharing, exploring, and experimenting. When we played library, high school, fashion show, Barbies, and house, we explored the variety of roles that we could potentially perform or embody in our lives. Neither of us wanted anything to do with Lego, trucks, or GI Joe. We wanted and loved the gendered divide in the toy department and never had any urge to cross the line to the section dedicated to those dirty, roughhousing boys. We wanted to dress up and play with our Barbies.

The previous chapters have outlined and discussed the discursive construction of girlhood identity in a variety of spaces and contexts: from the academic construction of girls to the formation of girlhood in consumer culture. However, as made clear with Talya's voice and experiences in Chapter Two, it is clear that an integral element of identity exists within the realm of self-construction. This chapter will explore how memory and personal narrative can play a role in the construction of the self. The discourse of girlhood as a transition in other social territories remains an integral element to the ways in which girls and women construct discourses of the self, whether they involve the confirmation of girlhood as a transition or complicate this concept through

subversive experiences. I will discuss these previous discursive constructions of girlhood as transition and complicate this concept through an analysis of information compiled in memory-work focus groups and personal interviews, making clear that girlhood is more than just a phase, but rather a range of experiences and constructions, including a construction of the self.

### **Working with Memories:**

Memory serves as a portal into the self and also points to the role of self-construction in identity. It is valued, treasured, suppressed, and taken for granted depending on the context. Memories bring forth nostalgia, pleasure, happiness, and pain and they represent an experience, however clear or tainted they may become over time. “Memory-work is a social constructionist and feminist research method that was developed in Germany by Frigga Haug and others explicitly to bridge the gap between theory and experience” (Onyx and Small 773). It takes into account everyday experience as a valuable form of self-construction as well as a legitimate source of knowledge. Crawford et al. write: “[Memory-work] does not give priority to either subjective experience or theory; rather it sets them in a reciprocal and mutually critical relationship” (42). In the context of girlhood and play, memory can make use of experience, voice, and self-narration in order to challenge the social construction of the girl as a transitional identity and the market construction of the girl as a consumer-in-the-making.

The recalling and sharing of memories may break apart these constructions and challenge the ways in which girls are perceived in the world and in theory while making a space for the voices and experiences of real girls and women in academic research. Haug

et al.'s work starts, "from the assumption that human beings do not simply fulfill norms, nor conform in some uncomplicated way; that identities are not formed through imitation, nor though any simple reproduction of predetermined patterns, but that the human capacity for action also leads individuals to attempt to live their own meanings and find self-fulfillment" (42). While memory-work may act to challenge the normative constructions of girlhood, it may also reassert those constructions, pointing to larger structural issues of power and identity construction. In this, memories act to reassert the important notion that girlhood is comprised of a complex range of experiences and identities, making clear that there is no one normative way to be a girl, but that girlhood identity may include a variety of subjectivities in one body: masculinity and femininity, normative and subversive, gendered, racialized, classed, sexualized, and so on.

A number of theoretical approaches to girlhood take into account memory in a variety of forms. Driscoll (2002) takes a Foucaultian genealogical approach to writing the history of girlhood that contributes to a "history of the present" (3). She writes:

A genealogy of girlhood will not discover new knowledge about girls, and it will not discover new forms of girlhood, but it will discuss how knowledge about girls has shaped what it means to be a girl and how girls experience their own positions in the world in relation to diverse ways of talking about and understanding girls (4).

Not only does this approach look towards a structural understanding of girlhood experiences, it also considers personal history as a foundational factor in the ways one experiences the social world. In this, history becomes an important factor in the ways in which a researcher approaches the study of an identity that has an array of histories: the social history of girlhood, the history of girls' bodies in feminine adolescence, the history of representations of girls, and the researcher's own histories – as a girl, as an academic,

as a feminist, and as a woman. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002) acknowledge the importance of childhood-in-memory as an integral factor in studying children's popular culture from the position of adulthood. They argue that, "for adults engaging in memory-work about child play and engagement with popular culture it is a fascinating way to study their own identity and childhood of a certain era" (10). This acknowledgment of the researcher as encompassing a historical location in her or his work and approach is extremely important, as it recognizes a sense of self-reflexivity and a historical location in one's work.

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh write about the mediating factors of memory:

what people remember of their childhood, as we know from the vast body of work on memory, is mediated by a range of factors: class, gender, the age of the rememberer, the time of childhood, the emotional state of the rememberer or the time being recalled, and so on. Memory is mediated both by the 'critical space' within which one experiences a particular event as well as by the ensuing period of time (59).

Mediating factors in the way we approach memory and personal narrative are an important element to memory work as a methodological tool and need not be dismissed in their ability to "taint" the evidence of the past. The ways in which one remembers the past point to larger structures of power that contribute to the ways one views the world, oneself, and others. "It appears that this symbiotic relationship of what we remember, how we construct our memories, and how we *re-member and re-construct* our pasts can provide us with clues as to the formation of our identities" (O'Reilly-Scanlon and Dwyer 82). Mitchell and Reid-Walsh consider how "work" is an important factor in the process of memory-work as a theoretical approach to research and draw from novelist Toni Morrison's notion of "deliberate remembering" and the collective memory work done by Frigga Haug and associates and Crawford et al. in addressing the mixture of "history and

myth” in the recollection of memories. “In approaching memory as a deliberate or purposeful act, the various methodologies that we discuss here [...] fit with the distinction bell hooks makes between nostalgia [...] and that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (63). The deliberate elements of memory-work make clear the active construction of the past and the self, placing girls and women as active agents in their identities and lives, despite the mediating factors of memory and of everyday life that act to guide girls through the world in a specific way.

Rand explores memories of Barbie and the “queering” of the doll through transgressive and subversive play. In discussing the role that Barbie plays in memory, Rand writes: “People [...] wanted to tell me Barbie stories. My friends told me about how they had loved or hated Barbie and about what they had done with and to her – how they had turned her punk, set her on fire, made her fuck Midge or Ken or G.I. Joe, or on occasion, gotten as much advertised “hours of fun” by following Mattel’s directions” (3). While she encountered interest in her research and an openness to sharing memories, experiences, and stories, Rand warns that “Barbie accounts have also been shaped by the teller’s own interpretations; they are products of interpretation rather than raw data awaiting a first interpretation by me. Both children and adults act as editors, cultural critics, theorists, and text-makers” (17). In this, Rand warns readers about the complexities of conducting memory-work with Barbie, a loaded cultural figure, and the construction of memory in the context of research. She writes:

the evidence of how much is lost or transformed in memory indicates that the reliability of individual memories cannot be judged against some ‘truth’ about the time remembered; much of what happened, what was, or what was perceived during childhood simply cannot be accessed. Thus, accessing the roles of both convention and personal history in the construction of a particular narrative requires a study of that narrative in

relation to other narratives as much or more than in relation to other information about the narrator (19).

In looking at memory-work in this way, it becomes clear that the purpose of this approach is to account for the ways in which identity is understood as a historical construction, as Driscoll outlines, but it is also concerned with the process of remembering, the mediating factors that control and guide the ways in which memories are uncovered, revealed, or forgotten, and making a space for the self in the construction of identity. Additionally, the ways in which technologies of gender work to contribute to identity and personal narrative play an important role in this analysis of memory and identity.

### **Remembering Girlhood: Stories of Girls, Dolls, and Play**

*“It is just about my favorite game in seventh grade, second only to Hooker Barbie and Pimp Ken”* (Howey xi).

Crawford et al. argue that, “The task of memory-work is to uncover and lay bare earlier understandings in light of current understandings, thus elucidating the underlying processes of construction involved” (40). In highlighting the process of self-construction through memory, it becomes important and necessary to highlight and uncover the larger factors that also contribute to our memories. Larger structural mediating factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality become highlighted in the process of memory-work as elements that contribute to the ways in which an individual’s identity has been constructed in the larger social and cultural context. While memory-work illuminates social factors of identity construction, it also makes clear the ways in which individuals are active agents in their self-construction and complicates this duality by emphasizing

the ways in which this complex relationship between the self and the social plays a role in identity.

Thus experience may be seen as lived practice in the memory of a self-constructed identity. It is structured by expectations, norms and values, in short by the dominant culture; and yet it still contains an element of resistance, a germ of oppositional cultural activity. It is this intertwining of processes of self-fulfillment with the fulfillment of cultural expectations that is responsible for example for the fixity with which notions of morality become established in our minds (Haug et al. 42).

The following focus groups and written memories take into account the relational elements of self-construction in memory by exploring girlhood through the concept of play.

These focus groups and written accounts were adapted from Crawford et al's memory-work method, which includes three phases: "First, the collection of written memories according to certain rules. Second, the collective analysis of those written memories. [And third,] a reappraisal of the memories and their analysis in the context of a range of theories from academic disciplines" (43). Both focus groups made use of the three phases outlined by Crawford et al. while the written memories only made use of phase one, allowing for a combination of collectivity and personal anonymous self-reflection. Phase one included the collection of written memories that arose from the following three triggers or themes: girlhood or being a girl, play(ing), and toys or dolls. The following accounts were compiled from two memory-work focus groups conducted in fall, 2006 and summer, 2007 along with a series of written memories compiled in summer, 2007. Participants ranged from 10-year-old girls to 60 year-old women from a variety of economic, geographic, sexual, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Both memory-

work focus groups were conducted in person in Montreal, Quebec and the series of written memories were collected from girls and women across Canada.

Throughout the collective discussion and analysis in the focus groups and the reading and interpretation of the written memories, a number of interesting and, at times, troubling, themes emerged throughout the memories and stories. Bronwyn Davies et al. write about their own collective memory-work, explaining, “our storying made visible how talking and writing memories in a collective context, and teasing through them in detail, in critically reflective talk, enables the writers to move towards a revelation of the social and discursive processes through which we become individuals” (170). Whether the memories were written or recounted to the group, they were all rich, honest, funny, and troubling and emphasized a large array of girlhood experiences with play (a lot more than marketing discourse suggests). The notion of girlhood as transition was an important emergence within this information, as a number of experiences and themes pointed to the social and discursive construction of girlhood as a transitional space and an early understanding of normative social codes. This emerged through stories surrounding the following themes: *Becoming Women, Playing with Sex and Sexuality, Queering Barbie, and Difference and Marginalization.*

### ***Becoming Women***

In response to the trigger “being a girl or girlhood,” a number of responses surrounded memories of wearing a dress. In this, the dress becomes a symbol for femininity in a number of memories, which surrounded performing girlhood or being

expected to perform femininity while wearing a dress. Twenty-four-year-old Ainsley's<sup>15</sup> memory surrounded her preparation to meet her new baby sister for the first time:

Dad helped me pick out my clothes for the trip and I picked out a red dress with a white collar. I remember being so excited to see my new sibling that I wanted so badly to look pretty. My straight blond hair was freshly cut and I took my time getting ready despite my excitement and want to get there as soon as possible.

Similarly, twenty-five-year-old Nasra's memory of girlhood involved the performance of femininity through her clothing: "Nasra wore a checked print red and white dress. She wore pigtails in braids. It was a lovely sunny day at a local park in Richmond, Virginia. Summer was officially here. She wanted to play but didn't want to ruin her new dress her mom bought her." In both these accounts, each participant explained how important it was to them to fit the role of the good girl in their dresses, emphasizing the need to act in a certain way that mirrored their appearance.

In Nasra's memory, this was made clear in her restraint from playing in fear of ruining her new dress, however, her good girl behavior did not last long:

She threw caution to the wind and got down and dirty with the kids of the playground. She had an absolute blast being covered in grass stains and dirt. Nasra came home covered with dirt with her neatly displayed pigtails in ruin. She greeted her mother in the kitchen. Her mother had a look of shock and disappointment.

An emphasis on wanting to perform the correct kind of girlhood, particularly one that cohered with normative notions of femininity, along with the failure associated with not being good enough, is clear in Nasra's memory of her mother's disappointed look at her

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<sup>15</sup> A memory-work focus group was conducted with Ainsley, Kristine, and Nasra on 15 November 2006 in Montreal, Quebec.

ruined appearance. Twenty-five-year-old Cynthia's<sup>16</sup> memory reflects Nasra's down and dirty girlhood play:

I was wearing my favourite blue dress and I'm pretty sure Joey was in shorts. We dug around the garden for a little while and kept the worms in some sort of container. I liked to watch them wiggle around in there. I'm not sure if I actually touched one of them. This went on until one of our grandparents caught us, I don't remember who it was exactly, and told us to come inside because we were going to get dirty. Only when we stood up did they realize it was too late and I remember being scolded for playing in the garden with my dress on.

Both Nasra's and Cynthia's memories of being punished for ruining their clean dresses makes clear the contested relationship between girlhood and play. In each instance, the girls threw away their cautions and played freely without concern for their appearance or their attire, which inevitably brought on punishment or disappointment. Failing to look pretty and put together was a failure to be a good girl for both of these participants.

This notion of failed femininity is clear in the latter portion of Ainsley's dress-related memory as well:

My father drove the car and we stopped to pick out a present. As I attempted to take the seatbelt off with my tiny fingers it wouldn't move. My father tried to help and realized that my red dress was caught in the seatbelt. I was frustrated, upset, and discouraged by my mistake and felt as though I had failed in some way. The red fabric was ripped in our attempts to free my dress from the seatbelt and I sat in the heat and cried. I wanted to look pretty and perfect in my new role as a big sister. I had waited so long and worried that I wouldn't look good enough for her.

Ainlsey's conscious effort to look acceptable and pretty for her new sister represents an understanding of gender codes and representations at an early age. The same is the case for the other girls, who had an understanding of why they were being punished and knew that they must reflect the normative notions of femininity by looking clean and pretty.

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<sup>16</sup> Cynthia provided written memories that were triggered by three themes (girlhood, play, and dolls/toys) on 12 September 2007.

While all of these girlhood memories associated with dressing up provide examples of the restrictive gendered aspects of girlhood and gender performance, twenty-one-year-old Kristine's memory of dressing up provides a liberating example of practicing her feminine performance through dress:

When [my mom] wouldn't be around, I would sneak up into her room and put on one of her bras and then put on her black dress, cocktail style dress and then her black heels. After I was all dressed up I would walk up and down her room and then look at myself in the bathroom mirror. I would do this for a good hour or however long she was gone for.

In discussing our memories, Kristine elaborated on her experience of practicing her walk in high heels and posing in the bathroom mirror: "I felt like a movie star. Like, getting my picture taken, that's what I felt like." While Ainsley, Cynthia, and Nasra emphasized the constricting elements of representing femininity through their appearances, Kristine's memory made clear a liberating element of her femininity through the pleasure she gained by her appearance and her ensuing fantasies of being a movie star.

The act of practicing femininity was also illuminated through stories of playing house, as it became an emblem for the girls' future womanly roles. The game "house" spanned generational boundaries and emerged as a universal training game for girls and boys to play with gender roles. Both twenty-seven-year-old Sarah and sixty-year-old Linda<sup>17</sup> recalled these games as prominent memories of girl play. Linda remembered the momentary joining of boys and girls in their summer playtime routines to play at domesticity:

The girls in the neighborhood gathered in the mornings, bringing their dolls with clothes [...]. My mom strung a clothes line out and we'd wash the clothes in the pool, hang them up, feed the babies - Tiny Tears actually

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah and Linda provided written memories that were triggered by three themes (girlhood, play, and dolls/toys) on 11 September and 9 September 2007 respectively.

wet her diaper - change them. I always had fun and we all got along. Boys came later and we'd build houses out of card tables draped with old sheets and army blankets or we'd be lucky enough to have a refrigerator box to crawl in... the boys were the dad's and we played house - that got boring real quick once the houses were set up and all of us paired up - extra girls became the children in the family - never had extra boys....

While Linda's memories of playing house represented very normative domestic roles – boys and girls pairing off to become heterosexual couples and extra girls taking on the roles of their children – Sarah's memories of playing house provided her with an opportunity to play with and subvert gender roles:

So we developed this game where we were two orphans running away from Miss Hannigan, the evil woman who owns the orphanage. We had a 'cave' where we lived in the forest (my backyard). In hindsight the game was an elaborate version of house. Every once in a while Miss Hannigan would almost find us but other than that we cleaned up our cave and made food (Eli made a mean pine cone casserole). Because we were in the forest we would have to go out into the woods and collect our food. I would go 'hunting' and Eli would gather the pinecones [...]. Interestingly, there was no part of the game where we were trying to get 'home' or find our 'parents'. The whole point of it was to just play house, I guess.

The world that Sarah and her friend created in her backyard emphasizes the subversive potential of the realm of fantasy in girls' play. The girls took a universal, and potentially traditional game and made the choice to take on different gender roles. They could have easily created a different context for their game, but Sarah's emphasis on the gender division in their roles – Sarah's masculine role of providing for her housemate and Eli's mastery of the pinecone casserole – makes clear the subversion of the gender codes of husband and wife in their domestic sphere. This queering of gender roles, as Rand would put it, provided an opportunity for the girls to experiment with and learn more about the ways in which women and men interact differently in the social world. Inevitably, the male character goes out in the world and provides for his lady who remains in the

domestic sphere. Twenty-seven-year-old Ellis<sup>18</sup> remembers playing with gender codes in her sexual game of house:

I used to make out with the girl next door, Stephanie, who was a few years younger than me. We would play house, which would involve lying on top of each other. The man, or the father, was always on the top. I guess it wasn't making out, but it was kissing and pressing against each other.

Both Sarah and Ellis' memories point to an early understanding of gender stereotypes and codes – the male/husband/father taking an active role in play – and opens up the space of fantasy play to become a space in which girls can experience and experiment with the freedoms (or lack thereof) of being gendered in a different way.

While gender play was particularly subversive in some memories, other stories and accounts emerged from memories of girlhood and femininity that supported the notion of girlhood as womanhood-in-the-making. Kristine continued her memory of dressing up by stating: "I remember when I put on a bra I really wanted boobs. [Laughter] I really wanted to be a hard-core woman." The emphasis on wanting to embody womanhood was clear in the discussion, as many participants remembered waiting for their bodies to fit their "future woman" identities:

Nasra: ...I used to steal my mom's bras and put socks in them.

Kristine: Yeah. We did that.

Nasra: And, look at myself in the mirror and just stick my chest out even further.

Ainsley: Yeah, we have a photo of us doing that in our bathing suits and posing and we had our chests sticking out and we had socks stuffed in our chests.

While the notion of bodies changing to appear womanly was something that some participants longed for, contradictory issues arose when the embodiment of womanhood

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<sup>18</sup> Ellis provided written memories that were triggered by three themes (girlhood, play, and dolls/toys) on 10 September 2007.

actually began. The development of breasts was a long-awaited and welcome moment in some participants' lives; however, memories of menstruation were contradictory and troubled. Kristine's longing for womanhood and a woman's body were conflicted when she got her first period. In this, issues of disclosure and familial relationships became very apparent:

Kristine: I remember about first periods and stuff.... I thought that if I got it, dad wouldn't accept me.

Ainsley: Oh, really?

Kristine: Yeah, like I wouldn't be the youngest or something.

Ainsley: Oh, wow.

Kristine: And, so that's why I never told them that I got it and that's why the one time mom found out, she was, like, "how long have you had it for?" and I had had it for, like, a year.

Kristine's emphasis on her fear of being rejected by her father for becoming a woman complicates her girlhood identity as focused primarily on the longing for this transition.

### ***Playing With Sex and Sexuality***

Similar issues arise surrounding the theme of playing with sex and sexuality.

Kristine's written response to the trigger play or playing surrounded a Barbie house she constructed out of an entertainment unit:

Kristine: I made it into this mansion this Barbie mansion and it was, like, fucking fabulous because it was huge, right. There was even a garage, like, it was so, so nice. But, then, the best part was I only had one guy, one guy Barbie doll...

Ainsley: One Ken.

Kristine: Yeah, one Ken. But I remember it was really, really dramatic and it was also because it was around that time that Melrose Place was really, really popular and I used to watch it with you and mom and so I felt like it wasn't a home, it was, like, an apartment building and so it was all these friends living in the same apartment building and I thought I was so fuckin' cool and there was only one Ken, so, like, each time, he'd be with someone else.

Ainsley: Like, romantically?

Kristine: Yeah. It was, like, romance central.

Because Kristine's Barbie play mimicked the older television shows she watched with her sister and mother, it became clear that the adoption of certain pedagogical tools in order to learn about sex and sexuality was a necessity. In discussing the romantic elements of Barbie play, it became clear that Kristine and Nasra learned about sex and sexuality in very different ways. Kristine adopted the dramatic love triangles from television shows such as *Melrose Place* and *Beverly Hills 90210* in her games played out through her Barbie dolls, while Nasra explained that her Barbie play was extremely heteronormative in terms of gender roles and naïve concerning sex:

No, but I used to play in such a traditional disgusting way, like... she was a woman and she was at home and cleaned and Ken was, you know, brought home the bacon and they would kiss and I would be, like, "oh my god they're having sex!" And, that, to me, was having sex, when I was younger.

Similarly, Cynthia remembered the sexual elements of Barbie and Ken: "We also had Ken dolls in there and I remember trying to get them 'sexy' but it was hard because they were Barbies. But I got them to kiss, and then French kiss which is when Barbie got pregnant and had a baby (I thought that French kissing got you pregnant and was the same thing as intercourse at the time)."

While many participants learned about sex differently, it was clear that the majority of them learned and understood sex at that age as strictly heterosexual. Kristine went to a lot of trouble in order to ensure heterosexual relationships with her Barbies by juggling Ken from bed to bed:

Kristine: ...I never had two Barbies, two girls kiss each other. It was always, like, I never had lesbian Barbie sex.

Ainsley: That's because you had a Ken. Do you think if you didn't have a Ken that you would improvise?

Nasra: You'd make it work somehow...

Kristine: I don't know, I don't think I would know that.

Ainsley: Like, do you think you would dress one of them up as a boy?

Kristine: I don't think so. I think that's way too smart. [Laughter] Way too smart.

The strength of Barbie's status as a technology of gender was clearly represented in the various stories of doll play. Mattel's scripting of the doll as a heterosexual girl with a boyfriend (Ken), a best friend (Midge) and a little sister (Skipper) transferred onto girls' accounts of playing with Barbie. As Kristine elaborated upon the lengths that she went to ensure Barbie and Ken's heterosexual relationship flourished, the calculated and somewhat universal stages of Barbie play were made clear. This is exemplified in twenty-five-year-old Rachna's Barbie courtship:

We had two Kens: one came in a Tux and could be a blonde or a brunette depending on what temperature of water you wiped his plastic head with. The only thing I recall about the other Ken was that it had the outline of boxer-briefs on his rock hard body. We always kept Ken in his stretchy white tuxedo - we were far less concerned about men's fashion and the tux was classy and versatile enough to go with whatever Barbie was wearing. When we decided which Barbie was hot enough (and it was always mine, seeing as I was the older sister, unless I had borrowed and dressed her favourite Barbie, who was the newest and somehow the prettiest Barbie we had ever seen), we would arrange a scenario in which Ken and Barbie would meet and hook up. Having been preceded by hours and hours of anticipation and costume-changes, the date lasted mere minutes before we mashed their plastic heads together in a sexy, if violently so, make out session.

Rachna's memory of the events that lead up to Barbie and Ken's inevitable (hetero)sexual encounter was a memory that crossed a number of identifications and generations. Similarly, some accounts of heteronormative Barbie play were followed by memories of alternative forms of sexual expression. Rachna had her Barbies date each other, Talya dressed a shorthaired girl doll as a boy to account for her lack of male (Ken) dolls, and Ainsley had her Barbies kiss each other and sleep in the same beds. While the

heterosexual scripts of Barbie as a technology of gender (and sexuality) were enforced in memories of play, most memories of Barbie include both normative and subversive sexual representations.

Playing with Barbie not only provided an opportunity to play with sex and sexuality, whether that was homosexual or heterosexual, but in a number of cases, it opened the door to learning about sex and sexuality in a variety of forms. While both Kristine and Nasra discussed the strictly heterosexual elements of their conception of sex as children, they also emphasized their lack of knowledge concerning the logistics of heterosexual sex. Although Kristine made clear that she never experimented with sexual orientation in her Barbie play, she admitted to experimenting with representations of heterosexual sex by making Barbie pornography with a friend in elementary school despite the fact that she did not fully understand what sex was and how it worked:

Ainsley: You made Barbie porn!  
 Kristine: We were in grade four.  
 Ainsley: What kind of stuff did they do? Just humping?  
 Kristine: They'd just have sex, just humping and then we'd make the sounds.  
 Nasra: How did you guys know that? I never knew any of this!  
 Kristine: Because we watched movies.  
 Nasra: I was very oblivious to sex...  
 Kristine: But, it wasn't just kissing... they'd be naked.  
 All: [Laughter].

This mimics Nasra and Cynthia's conception of kissing as the equivalent of sex when they played with their Barbies, and Rachna's description of mashing Barbie and Ken's faces together in a violent/passionate fashion. While Kristine understood that sex involved being naked and making noises, she admitted later to not understanding what sex was and taking it upon herself to fully understand what was taught to her in sex education class years later.

Kristine: I never knew that it involved penis IN vagina, but, when our parents were divorced, and dad got the Internet, I remember looking at pictures online.

Ainsley: Of penises or just everything? Like, porn?

Kristine: Yeah. And being “OH!” I was in grade six. ‘Cause, I was, like, “it really does go in there.”... ‘Cause, I remember mom related it to putting in a tampon and I didn’t really understand.

The connection between pedagogy and play are apparent in these accounts of girls playing with concepts unfamiliar to them or taking it upon themselves to learn about these concepts in a different space, as Kristine made clear in her attempts to learn about sex through the internet and pornography. Pedagogical play is further exemplified in the following accounts, as subversive, or ‘queer’ Barbie play provided girls with an opportunity to learn about difference and learn about their own place in a diverse world.

### ***Queering Barbie***

Erica Rand writes extensively on the various ways in which Barbie is “queered” and subverted in memories of play and deliberate subversive acts. Rand is interested with “queerness in two different common senses of which one, the other, or both may apply to a given interpreter: the narrow sex/gender sense of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender and the broader sense of odd, irregular, and idiosyncratic” (11). In this, Rand’s description of *Barbie’s Queer Accessories* include the subversion of Mattel-sanctioned play, whether that includes Barbie and Midge kissing each other, chopping off Barbie’s hair, or painting her body. Queering Barbie includes emphasizing elements of diversity in play and going against the normative scripts of the heavily coded doll. The previous section on sex and sexuality, whether the memories of play represented heterosexual or homosexual orientations, provides an example of the sexual queering of

Barbie. Enacting sexual relations in any way is an act of queering Barbie, as it goes against Mattel's scripted sanctions of acceptable, clean, wholesome Barbie play. But queering Barbie goes beyond Ken getting past second base on his date with Barbie. This section will examine the other ways in which Barbie is queered or subverted.

When discussing this research topic, I have received a number of reactions, some good, some bad, but most revealed some sort of Barbie queering. The inherent shame associated with Barbie revealed itself in my discussions with people in a casual setting, in a classroom, in a focus group, or in written memories. It seems when the people confess to Barbie-play, the need to justify their political, social, or academic position by following their confession with a subversive Barbie account. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2000) revealed similar experiences when hearing Barbie stories, arguing that confessing to Barbie play is "representative of [a] political positioning as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, liberal woman" (178). This corresponds with the notion of destiny narratives in memory-work, as certain memories are censored or highlighted in order to reflect one's current personal, political, sexual identification: the woman who identifies as a lesbian remembers making Barbie and Midge have sex; the teacher remembers Barbie leading a classroom of stuffed animals; the tattooed woman remembers drawing on Barbie's body. While some research would snub the concept of self-construction and active self-representation in "ethnographic" work, the destiny narrative in memory illuminates the focus on the ways in which identity is self crafted in both the past and in the present.

My memories of Barbie were not very *queer*. I liked to make Barbie kiss Ken and my other Barbies a lot. But I enjoyed dressing her up and having her play the role of

mother. She would go to fancy parties, take care of her children. She never worked. I never defaced her, she didn't get the different asymmetrical hairstyles or tattoo-covered arms that I see when I look in the mirror every morning. Perhaps I lived out my heteronormative maternal roles before I reached puberty... perhaps I got it out of my system back then and now I'll never grow up in the way that I thought I would as a girl. My sister was the one who did all the "bad" things with her Barbies. She got in trouble for cutting all their hair in the bath while my mother went to get a new bar of soap from the hall closet. She was the one who took her fascination with sex to the next level with her Barbies. I never went as far as she did.

A common queer Barbie tale involves the alteration of the doll's appearance. Ellis' memory of doll play includes a Barbie makeover of sorts: "The last time I played with Barbie dolls, I cut off all of one's blonde hair, fashioning a crew cut with super short sides, and painted her breasts with nail polish in a heart shape." The blasphemous act of cutting Barbie's long flowing blond hair is a universal queer memory, as it represents the act of stripping Barbie of her status as the dominant white blond prototype. To cut off her hair was a deviant act that usually resulted in punishment, as Rachna remembers:

I always had the makings of a radical feminist. Signs of this appeared when I put Barbie in Ken's clothes, had the "spare" Barbies date each other, and most noticeably, when I severely chopped the long, flowy hair off as many Barbies as I could get my hands on before my traumatized sister, clutching her exceptionally beautiful and make-up heavy doll, fled in tears only to return with my mother who insisted I stop before I regret ruining my overpriced dolls. I did regret it; their hair was just as difficult to comb and after that, I couldn't tie ribbons in their hair or give them great sweeping updos. Looking back, my oldest Barbie (who had no trace of make-up or oversized lash rimmed eyes) looked pretty damn hot in her close cropped mussy trim.

While Rachna admits to regretting cutting all of her Barbie's hair, her memory of her attractive doll with a short hairstyle and minimal make-up makes clear the complexities of pleasure and identity and the importance of recognizing the inter-subjective nature of girlhood and womanhood.

Other queer Barbie tales involve altering Barbie's body in order to make it appear more realistic. Forty-nine-year-old Kate<sup>19</sup> recalls pushing pins into her Barbie's breasts in order for her to look more like her own (albeit flat) chest and drawing pubic hair on her Barbie's crotch so that she would look more like her mother's body. Cynthia remembers trying to put make-up on her Barbie's faces with crayons after making over a rocking horse in her playroom, but "it didn't work out as well because the crayons were bigger than Barbie's face." While these queer accounts are not subversive in their emphasis on making Barbie look more realistic, they emphasize the editing of Mattel's construction by girls in order to reflect their own realities which inevitably went beyond the normative "reality" that the company scripted.

### ***Difference and Marginalization***

In discussing the inter-subjective elements of girlhood identity, the tension between real experience and normative stereotypes became clear in a number of memories. Girls' understanding of difference, especially with regards to their own identities were made very clear in their memories of girlhood and play. Ten-year-old Talya and her mother Vaneza spoke candidly of the difficult experiences that she had

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<sup>19</sup> A personal interview was conducted with Kate on 20 April 2007 in Kamloops, British Columbia.

already undergone as girl with an intercultural and multilingual background.<sup>20</sup> Talya stated that the first time she realized that boys and girls were different revolved around a realization that girls were more hurtful to one another than boys: "I was, like, come one, why do these girls have to be so mean to each other? You know, like, why do they have to be so mean to me?" Talya's cultural background became an issue in a number of instances, as she was forced to explain her identity and deal with issues of discrimination and marginality at a very early age. Vaneza explains her daughter's experiences in the cultural margins:

There was a lot of rejection and a lot of, like, you're different and you don't look like us, "tu es pas normale." And, even at camp this summer, some girl said to you, "where are you from? You're not like me. You're not normal." You know, there was that sort of stuff. And, I think the relationships at the school where she was at... she was in a very homogenous group of people. You know, it was all white Quebecois girls.

Talya's plethora of experiences with difference brought forth an early understanding of her intersubjective marginal identity, as an intercultural, multilingual girl.

While Talya's understanding of difference is the result of her experiences (both good and bad) with identity, Rachna's memories of difference served more as an epiphany than Talya's early and constant understanding:

One day, a Barbie came into my life that changed everything as I knew it [...]. The most jarring thing was that she had straight, black hair and an olive complexion. She was wearing a cropped electric blue sweater with a hot pink guitar on the chest. She was a part of a Barbie's Rock Band-type series, and though she wasn't the lead singer (that was a blonde, white Barbie) she rocked my world. It was the first moment in which I realized I was different, while at the same time realizing that I was not alone in my difference. She had black hair; so did I. Her skin was darker than the

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<sup>20</sup> Talya's mother Vaneza is Colombian and speaks French, English, and Spanish while her father Marc-André is Acadian and speaks French and English. In Talya's experiences growing up in Montreal, Quebec, ethnic and linguistic issues have played a role in her experiences with difference and marginalization.

other Barbies; so was mine. And, all that on top of the fact that she *did* something; she was in a rock band. I myself wanted to play guitar and fancied my singing voice to be on par with that of Madonna. For the first time, I started questioning my assumption that I was just like the rest of the world. Though there was one Chinese girl in my class, and my best friend was the only other Indian girl, everyone else was Caucasian – *and* I actually believed I was just like them. Around the same time, I began to get made fun of by my classmates, especially when my best friend and I were hanging out alone. I started to wonder why I thought my future consisted of a white veil and wedding dress, God and Church and sandwiches... when my private home life reflected nothing of the sort. All thanks to the Latina/Asian fusion rockin' out Barbie.

Rachna's revelation of her difference served both as a liberating sense of belonging with other identities within the margins, but also as a reality check to the ways in which difference may be perceived in the social world. Rachna's complex sense of wanting to belong in dominant culture and confusion about her dismissal of her cultural upbringing and background emphasizes the complexities of identity, as it is in a constant state of construction, revelation, and experimentation. The irony that Rachna's marginalized epiphany was inspired by a Mattel design brings forth the ability for girls to explore a variety of identities and elements of the social world with heavily coded texts and technologies of gender. However, Rachna and Talya's painful experiences of existing in the margins are also an integral element to this discussion, as they account for the difficulties associated with not fitting in the normative mold that these technologies of gender set.

This is also emphasized in twenty-eight-year-old Sydney's<sup>21</sup> memories of her tomboy girlhood:

I was always mistaken for a boy, my mom's son, a grandson. It could have been the sporting equipment that was always with me or the grass

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<sup>21</sup> Sydney provided written memories that were triggered by three themes (girlhood, play, and dolls/toys) on 5 September 2007.

stained pants or fresh wounds on my body after trying some new stunt. Who knows? Anyway, I was on a summer vacation with my grandparents and some lady mentioned to my Nana how polite her grandson was. Nana, who had heard this compliment too many times previously, freaked out and stated, “From now on pink clothes and ribbons for you.” I laughed but I was really scared. I hated pink. And so I started getting more and more “girly” things which each went further and further into my closet. When finally that Christmas my aunt bought me a pink frilly dress. When I opened it, I burst into tears and from then on they backed off a little bit at a time... until my grad, but that’s another story.

Sydney's painful memory of being coerced into a more conventional girlhood identification emphasizes the ways in which difference is perceived in the social world. While Talya and Rachna's marginalized identities were a result of skin colour and cultural background, Sydney's difference was seen as an active choice, rather than as an innate identification. If she wanted to, she could choose to appear more conventionally feminine and by receiving “girly” things in lieu of sporting equipment, she grew to believe that an alternative gender representation was a choice. This was made clear when approached to take part in this research. Sydney explained that she would not have any interesting stories to share because she was not a “real” girl growing up. She didn't play with dolls and didn't look forward to becoming a woman because she found those things less interesting. Sydney states: “I never really played with toys, well maybe a Frisbee or ball of some sort, does that count? I always would rather be outside, running around, biking, blading.”

Sydney's dismissal of any memories of girlhood play emphasizes the powerful ways in which toys are marketed in extremely gendered terms, as discussed in the previous chapter. Because of her interest in sports, rough, and, dirty play, Sydney was considered boyish and, therefore, deviant. An emphasis on this gender divide was made clear in sixty-year-old Linda's memory of being one of the boys:

About grade 4-5 I became a show off, or was it competitive or was it just a lot of energy... dolls were boring and running diving, acrobatics, and jumping were my favourite activities along with my very first Cadillac red bike. Boys figured into my life more. Donny Grossman lived 3 doors down and he had a friend 5 doors from him, Jeffery Stark... the 3 of us would climb onto the roof of Donny's garage and dare each other to jump – I loved jumping from higher and higher. We rode our bikes to the junior high school because they had bleachers. We started in the middle, jumping off into the grass – it began to hurt, but I liked the feeling of being scared and doing it and keeping up with the boys – I was the only one to jump from the highest bleacher. We were popular with the other kids for being able to jump from so high.

The ways in which gender defines action is clear in these memories of difference. Boys are allowed to take on an active role in play: getting hurt and dirty, performing stunts, and being good at sports remains in the realm of acceptable play. Girls' play is meant to be passive, clean, wholesome, and domestic. This gender divide exists in contemporary girls' play, where fashion and physical appearance reign supreme in the toy department. The ability to exist in the realm of boys' play as a girl represents both an act of deviance and an exceptional ability to step up the gender hierarchy. To be better than the boys was an empowering experience for Linda, while memories of being one of the boys represent issues of deviance and difference in Sydney's recollections. In this, as in the other thematic accounts of girlhood memory, experiences with difference are complex. They are painful and liberating. They represent an understanding of being marginalized, while emphasizing a sense of community. They account for the ways in which the social world constructs identity and allow an opportunity for one to cross the boundaries and exist in another space.

The importance of uncovering memories lays in an understanding of the complexities of girlhood identity. These memories point to a comprehension of girlhood as a range of identifications and a process of learning what it means to be a subject in the

world. This process not only involves an understanding of how to be a feminine subject and a woman in the social world, but it also includes an early comprehension of issues of difference, discrimination, gender codes, and sexuality. Girlhood is comprised of a number of experiences, identifications, and constructions. This chapter elaborates upon the discursive construction of the girl as a transitional identity, highlighting the ways in which dominant discourses contribute to girls' self-construction. It is clear that girls adopt the dominant discourses of girlhood and play with these meanings in a variety of ways.

While memory-work can serve to challenge the ways in which girls are constructed in the social and consumer worlds, it also illuminates the discursive and structural effects on identity. Memory-work acts to uncover the ways in which girls interpret these discursive and structural effects in the territory of play. Memories of queering Barbie were written beside memories of playing house. A critical account of the social world was stated breaths away from an account of understanding that girls were meant to be passive. These accounts not only compliment the previous arguments surrounding the construction of girlhood, acknowledging girls' early understanding of the social and cultural norms, but they also complicate these constructions and reveal the ways in which girls actively experiment with identity and play a large role in the construction of themselves. While an acknowledgment of girlhood as a space in which girls learn what it means to be social subjects points to an understanding of girlhood as a transition, this chapter creates a new understanding of a transitional girlhood: one that suggests that girls are active in learning about themselves in the realm of play and have the ability to take a large role in the construction of their identities. Girlhood is more

than just a phase, rather, it is a range of identifications that are affected and constructed in a variety of territories and spaces, including the territory of the self.

## Conclusion

### **Extending Girlhood Scholarship to Other Spaces**

If Girls are not a demographic, and there is no direct link between girls and girl products, is there such a thing as girl culture? What field would girl culture describe – all of a girl's life and all fields she enters; or specific fields of cultural production directed to, produced by, or perceived as particular to girls? (Driscoll 2002 303).

This research emerged from a fascinating and troubling trip to buy toilet paper and grew to encompass a theoretical discussion of girlhood identity from a number of perspectives, including the experiences and viewpoints of young girls themselves. This work has accounted for the multitude of girlhood identities that exist and the ways in which gender is normatively coded. Identity is complex, fluid, and shaped in a number of ways: in the social world, by culture, in the marketplace, and re-written within one's own narratives in relation to the dominant codes. All these elements of identity formation combine to provide a vision of contemporary girls who are active in the consumer world at one moment, extremely aware of their location, and critical of their positions in the world. A discourse analysis of some of the cultural practices in which girls are constructed provides an account of girlhood that acknowledges the power of the dominant scripts of gender. They also position girlhood as a transitional identity, a phase that one must go beyond. But how one travels must go beyond these codes and involves a negotiation of normative gender coding. The academic discourses, the marketing discourses, and discourses of the self, clash and collide, coalescing around the metadiscourse of transitional girlhood. Girlhood is constructed in a variety of spaces, all playing a large role in this formation; however, the girl as a transitional identity, as a consumer, and as a self-constructed being prove to be key areas of interrogation.

The discursive formation of the girl as a transitional subject is the central concept of this research. It provides an explanation for the ways that girls have been historically constructed in the social world and remains an integral element to an analysis of girls' experiences in contemporary culture. Issues of guidance and control remain fundamental to the ways in which girls are disciplined to believe that girlhood is a key phase to becoming normative feminine subjects. This extends from issues of adolescence and puberty to the construction of the girl as a future feminist and tomorrow's consumer.

Adolescence also functions as an explanation of the indispensable difficulty of becoming a subject, agent, or independent or self-aware person, as well as a periodization that constructs both childhood and adulthood as relative stabilities. Understanding this difficult adolescence as universal trauma is a twentieth century Western idea that retrospectively constructs childhood as a period of stability, heightening both the crucial intensity of adolescence as transformative passage and the distance between childhood and maturity (Driscoll 2002 6).

Girlhood as a transition positions girls as identities in need of surveillance, guidance, and control, creating a power dynamic in which girls are scripted as helpless victims lacking a sense of identity, stability, and purpose.

The concept of a transitional girlhood is one that I avoided throughout the majority of this research process. It made me uneasy and I steered clear of contributing further to this strain of girlhood scholarship. However, a discussion of the girl as an unfixed and negotiated identity has become integral to an overall discussion of girls' experiences and engagement with the social world. The positioning of girlhood as a transition from the fixity of childhood to the stability of womanhood creates a rational for monitoring girls in every aspect of their lives in order to ensure that they pass through this "difficult" time and achieve a desired final gender identity. This desirable womanhood is evident in dominant discourses that position white, heterosexual, able-

bodied, upper class women at the top of the hierarchy of femininity. This normative notion of femininity is only attained through guidance and control and emerges through technologies of gender in the form of cultural figures, such as dolls.

De Lauretis draws from Foucault's theory of technologies of the self and Althusser's theory of interpellation to discuss the ways in which gender is coded, scripted, and learned in the context of everyday practices. Representations of gender (however small they may appear) contribute to one's own understanding of themselves as gendered subjects. "For since the very first time we put a check mark on the little square next to the *F* on the form, we have officially entered the sex-gender system, the social relations of gender, and have become en-gendered as women; that is to say, not only do other people consider us females, but from that moment on *we* have been representing ourselves as women" (12). The fashion doll codes gender and scripts girls' play with discourses of normative femininity, upper class consumer status, and a variety of other normalizing elements of identity, such as race and sexuality. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the doll's status as a technology of gender becomes clear when discussing the ways in which it acts as a guidance manual for young girls, steering them in normative directions through corporate scripts of play. From Barbie's status as the pinnacle of unmarked whiteness to the Bratz' consumer-driven and fashion-heavy scripts, the fashion doll has and remains a technology of gender in its role that it attempts to guide girls to a desirable state of womanhood.

The concept of transition is also present and extremely clear in memories and stories of girlhood. This repetition of a concept that I avoided in the stories of real women made it clear that it was necessary to include the construction of girlhood as

transitional within this research. While pointing to the relevance of this concept in an analysis of girls' identities, the narratives of feeling unfixed, fluid and women-in-training supported the argument that girls are positioned as transitional identities in a variety of cultural zones. This discourse of transition extends from marketing discourses to girls' and women's own discourses of their girlhoods and of themselves and makes it clear the severity of this culturally ingrained concept. While this concept provides an opportunity to discuss the ways in which identity is constructed relationally from the outside, it is also imperative to provide a historical discussion of the construction of girls, and this concept comes with a history, making it clear that this formation of the transitional girl is unavoidable and ingrained in a dominant understanding of girls and identity.

In conducting research on the fashion doll and contemporary doll play, it has become clear that the virtual economies of girlhood and play were dominant in the construction of girlhood identity. The fashion doll has been a loaded figure, full of discourses surrounding issues of femininity, consumption, ethnicity, and heterosexuality since Barbie's inception and its status as a technology of gender makes it clear that the fashion doll acts as a guidance tool to push girls into normative identifications. Dolls have and continue to be scripted by the companies that design them, urging girls to value certain traits and social positions over others. The virtual move of doll play to online spaces further contributes to the heavily scripted and guided elements of the fashion doll. The ability to discursively script toys in the virtual world is extremely evident and difficult to subvert due to the coding of online environments.

While girls have the ability to play with their dolls in subversive ways when face-to-face with the plastic bodies, it is virtually impossible to play with the online versions

of Barbie and Bratz in an alternative way. Girls are left only with the choices offered to them by Mattel and MGA Entertainment, leaving little room to play with fantasies online. Similarly, the overt economic tone of these spaces provide an opportunity for companies and marketers to train girls and children to be future consumers, showing them the ropes of buying, selling, and earning money.

[T]he emergent ethos established through the commercial construction of childhood is one that promotes capitalist exchange value as the very objective of play and cultural exchange. This development is crucial [...] because the children's commercial media is essentially 'instructional' – teaching children models for being and experiencing the world (Cook qtd. in Grimes and Shade 186).

While the economic scripts of Barbie were covered up with the infinite possibility discourse in the past, [Barbiegirls.com](http://Barbiegirls.com) overshadows its previous mantra – "we girls can do anything!" – with the exchange of virtual currency for overtly feminine consumer products: clothing, furniture, and overly accessorized pets. Similarly, the dominant tone of the Bratz dolls, "the Only Girls with a Passion for Fashion!" provides a space for girls filled to the brim with discourses of feminine aesthetics and the consumption of products as a primary activity for girls and women. Both these and other online spaces represent an extremely present territory of the construction of girls as feminine consumers and provide us with a virtual understanding of the doll as a technology of gender.

The concept of transition is also present and extremely clear in memories and stories of girlhood. This repetition of a concept that I avoided in the stories of real women made it clear that it was necessary to include the construction of girlhood as transitional within this research. While pointing to the relevance of this concept in an analysis of girls' identities, the narratives of feeling unfixed, fluid and women-in-training supported the argument that girls are positioned as transitional identities in a variety of

cultural zones. This discourse of transition extends from marketing discourses to girls' and women's own discourses of their girlhoods and of themselves and makes it clear the severity of this culturally ingrained concept. While this concept provides an opportunity to discuss the ways in which identity is constructed relationally from the outside, it is also imperative to provide a historical discussion of the construction of girls, and this concept comes with a history, making it clear that this formation of the transitional girl is unavoidable and ingrained in a dominant understanding of girls and identity.

The voices, stories, and experiences of girls and women provide this research with narratives that supported and complicated the previous discussions of girlhood construction. The inclusion of these narratives was necessary. Their presence in these pages allowed for the work previously done from a theoretical perspective to be illuminated. This also provided me with the opportunity to better understand myself, as a girl-in-memory, a woman who is still unsure of her own space in the world, and as an academic dedicated to ensuring that her work extends into the lives of real people. This concept of writing the self became a way to include the experiences of girls in the text and also to include my own location and experiences in my work. "I don't 'begin' by 'writing': I don't write. Life becomes text starting out from my own body. I am already text" (Cixous 52). This work, this text, extends from my embodied experiences to the world of feminist scholarship and the lives of contemporary girls. To exclude my own stories and experiences would continue to broaden the hierarchical divide between researcher and the subjects of research and felt like textual poaching. To take the stories of others and not include my own went against the intent of this research, presenting

myself on the page alongside the other selves that were written, spoken, and shared by so many women and girls.

The array of themes that emerged from these narratives was vast, from issues of difference and diversity through discussions of ‘mean girls’ and girlhood conceptions of beauty. While compiling, reading, and reflecting upon the stories and narratives, it has become evident that this chapter could become a work of its own, as the memories offered were full of interesting themes and, at times, the participants offered their own analysis of their past: why a particular story surfaced, the importance of a memory in terms of identity, and the sharing of a memory that did not necessarily fit into the triggers offered, but seemed relevant to the research. Not only were the memories an element of participation, the participants’ analysis and reasoning behind a memory became essential to my own analysis of the narratives.

It is imperative to include and expand upon girlhood scholarship and to include girls’ studies in the canon of feminist work, as it is the girls – the subjects of this and other research – who will continue the work that has been started by myself and the academics who have inspired and supported this thesis. Girlhood, as a subject of academic scholarship, is an important one; however, the inclusion of girls’ voices, stories, and work in feminist writing must be expanded upon. Including girls as subjects, authors, and producers of knowledge will decrease the divide between the adults writing about a space so distant to them and will challenge the hierarchical structure of academic scholarship. Similarly, the extension of the theory and knowledge produced by girlhood and feminist scholars beyond the university, the classroom, and the library to the world of real girls is essential. Including girls, both within and without the theoretical research is

integral to the expansion of this strain of academic work, as it is the voices, the experiences, and the lives of real girls that this research seeks to have an affect upon. Expanding upon girl-specific programming, creating resources for organizations, educational institutions, and for girls themselves are but a few ways that this work may expand into girls' culture. Similarly, media literacy and education from a feminist perspective continues to remain an important element of girl-specific pedagogy. The tools for being active, critical, social agents must be made accessible to girls, now more than ever.

This analysis of girlhood, girls, and girl culture goes beyond simply uncovering issues about girls' experiences. It recognizes specific elements and spaces of identity construction, through a discourse analysis of the construction of girls as transitional identities in a variety of spaces: academic discourse, marketing discourse, and discourses of the self. A discussion of girls acknowledges the ways in which knowledge about girlhood is produced as encompassing a transitional, unfixed place in the world. Similarly, exploring the ways in which girls are constructed in the realm of the marketing world – understanding how marketers, advertisers, and corporations view and understand girls as consumers – provides an understanding of the construction of girls as capitalist consumers-in-training and acts as a basis from which to discuss the ways in which girls interact with elements of consumer culture and play. And finally, an analysis of girlhood memories and stories allows for one to view these elements of identity construction from the perspective of the self both acknowledging the ways in which girls are constructed in other spaces and examining how girls interpret and play with these constructions.

In conclusion, this research emerged as a way to understand girls' culture and girlhood and ended up understanding how girls' identities are complex, fluid, and inter-subjective, and relationally affected. Therefore, a true understanding of girlhood includes the acknowledgement that it may never fully be understood. That is not the point. Rather, a comprehension of the dynamics of the social world, the ways in which it seeks to normalize and sell ideas about identity to girls, and the coding of identity in our everyday practices will make it possible to form alliances with contemporary girls themselves. This will provide them with the opportunity to be active social agents and to be confident with their morphing identifications as future women, consumers, social subjects, and girls.

## Appendix A

### Informed Consent for Focus Group Participation

#### INFORMATION LETTER FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

[Date]

Dear [Participant],

#### **Your Consent to Participate in a Concordia University Research Project**

This study has been designed to explore memory and personal narrative in the context of thesis research surrounding personal narrative and memory, girlhood identity, and gendered play. The aim of this research is to collectively share and discuss personal memories according to specific themes and explore your experiences as a girl, with consumer culture, and with specific cultural texts.

My name is Amy McKinnon and I am a Masters student in the Media Studies program at Concordia University, working under the direction of Dr. Kim Sawchuk.

I would like you to take part in a focus group, which will be guided by the following research questions:

- How do larger social issues and structures of power account for the ways in which memories are recalled and/or forgotten?
- How is *play* an important element of identity and self-construction in memory?
- How are memories connected to specific objects and how are these objects connected to gender?

I am seeking participants for this research. If you agree to participate, I would like to conduct a small-scale memory-work focus group. In this setting, I will ask you to write a number of memories according to specific guidelines and we will collectively discuss and analyse both the memories and the process of remembering. If you choose to consent to participate, your part in this project will be included in a larger work on girlhood identity formation, personal narrative, and technologies of girlhood play. This will use a combination of focus groups and a review of literature.

**For the pilot project, there will be 2-3 participants who will each take part in the focus group.** As the researcher, I will take part in the memory-work session as a focus group member and will record the collective discussions with a video camera. If you do not consent to being video taped, I will record the discussion with an audio recorder.

In keeping with the ethical standards of Concordia University, I will strive to protect your dignity, anonymity, and confidentiality. Specifically, the video and audio recordings from the focus group will be kept private and secure in my home office throughout the research project. I will ensure that the transcriptions made of the video and audio tapes will be viewed only by Dr. Sawchuk and myself. Furthermore, I will not identify your identity in any articles, reports, or other documents I produce and you can choose a name by which you will be identified in the papers. Following the completion of the project, I will keep all the data private and secure for five years. After that period I will destroy all the data.

I will make a copy of the focus group transcripts available to you and you will have the choice to have any statements with which you are uncomfortable excluded from the final research product. When the research is complete, a copy of the final project will be made available to you before it is handed in.

I do not anticipate any risks from your participation in this project. You are under no obligation to consent to participate in this focus group. If you volunteer to participate, you may decline to take part in any portion of the focus group and still participate in the rest of study. You may withdraw from the entire study at any time. If you decide to withdraw after the focus group has been conducted, the information collected from you will be destroyed including the video and audio tapes, the transcription, and the notes.

If you have any concerns about this research project, you can contact Dr. Sawchuk at (514) 848-2424 ext. 5909 or via email: [kim.sawchuk@sympatico.ca](mailto:kim.sawchuk@sympatico.ca). You may also contact me at (514) 223-9401 or via email: [a\\_k\\_mckinnon@yahoo.ca](mailto:a_k_mckinnon@yahoo.ca).

Sincerely yours,

Amy McKinnon  
MA Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Concordia University

Kim Sawchuk  
Associate Professor  
Department of Communication Studies  
Concordia University

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION  
CONSENT FORM**

I understand the purpose, activities and potential benefits and risks of this research project. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality and privacy, that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time.

**I agree to video taped recording of my interview:**    Yes      No

Printed name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to use your first name?    Yes      No

If you do not want your first name used, what pseudonym would you like used?

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

*(For your records, a copy of this letter and consent will be provided to you).*

## Appendix B

### **Informed Consent for Children's Focus Group Participation**

#### **INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN**

[Date]

Dear [Parent/Guardian of Participant],

#### **Your Consent to Your Child's Participation in a Concordia University Research Project**

This study has been designed to explore memory and personal narrative in the context of thesis research surrounding personal narrative and memory, girlhood identity, and gendered play. The aim of this research is to collectively share and discuss personal memories according to specific themes and explore your experiences as a girl, with consumer culture, and with specific cultural texts.

My name is Amy McKinnon and I am a Masters student in the Media Studies program at Concordia University, working under the direction of Dr. Kim Sawchuk.

I would like your child to take part in a focus group, which will be guided by the following research questions:

- How do larger social issues and structures of power account for the ways in which memories are recalled and/or forgotten?
- How is *play* an important element of identity and self-construction in memory?
- How are memories connected to specific objects and how are these objects connected to gender?

I am seeking participants for this research. If your child agrees to participate and you grant permission, I would like to conduct a small-scale memory-work focus group. In this setting, I will ask your child to write a number of memories according to specific guidelines and we will collectively discuss and analyse both the memories and the process of remembering. If you choose to consent to your child's participation, her part in this project will be included in a larger work on girlhood identity formation, personal narrative, and technologies of girlhood play. This will use a combination of focus groups and a review of literature.

**For the pilot project, there will be 1-3 participants who will each take part in the focus group.** As the researcher, I will take part in the memory-work session as a focus group member and will record the collective discussions with a video camera. If you do not consent to your child being video taped, I will record the discussion with an audio recorder.

In keeping with the ethical standards of Concordia University, I will strive to protect your dignity, anonymity, and confidentiality. Specifically, the video and audio recordings from the focus group will be kept private and secure in my home office throughout the research project. I will ensure that the transcriptions made of the video and audio tapes will be viewed only by Dr. Sawchuk and myself. Furthermore, I will not identify your identity in any articles, reports, or other documents I produce and you can choose a name by which you will be identified in the papers. Following the completion of the project, I will keep all the data private and secure for five years. After that period I will destroy all the data.

I will make a copy of the focus group transcripts available to you and you will have the choice to have any statements with which you are uncomfortable excluded from the final research product. When the research is complete, a copy of the final project will be made available to you before it is handed in.

I do not anticipate any risks from your participation in this project. You are under no obligation to consent to participate in this focus group. If your child volunteers to participate, she may decline to take part in any portion of the focus group and still participate in the rest of study. She may withdraw from the entire study at any time. If she decides to withdraw after the focus group has been conducted, the information collected from you will be destroyed including the video and audio tapes, the transcription, and the notes.

If you have any concerns about this research project, you can contact Dr. Sawchuk at (514) 848-2424 ext. 5909 or via email: [kim.sawchuk@sympatico.ca](mailto:kim.sawchuk@sympatico.ca). You may also contact me at (514) 223-9401 or via email: [a\\_k\\_mckinnon@yahoo.ca](mailto:a_k_mckinnon@yahoo.ca).

Sincerely yours,

Amy McKinnon  
MA Student  
Department of Communication Studies  
Concordia University

Kim Sawchuk  
Associate Professor  
Department of Communication Studies  
Concordia University

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION  
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM**

I understand the purpose, activities and potential benefits and risks of this research project. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality and privacy, that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time.

**I agree to video taped recording of my interview:**    Yes    No

Printed name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to use your first name?    Yes    No

If you do not want your first name used, what pseudonym would you like used?

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent/guardian (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

*(For your records, a copy of this letter and consent will be provided to you).*

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