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Barbie

Imagining and Interrogating a Popular Culture Icon

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Editorial

The story of Barbie is a tapestry woven with threads of cultural significance, societal shifts, and corporate narratives. It's a tale that encapsulates the evolution of American post-war capitalism,

mirroring the changing tides of social norms, aspirations, and identities. Barbie's journey from Germany to Los Angeles, along the way becoming a global icon, is a testament to the power of Ruth Handler's vision and Barbie's marketing. Barbie embodies and reflects the rise of mass consumption and the early days of television advertising, where one doll could become a household name and shape the dreams of children worldwide.

The controversies and criticisms surrounding Barbie – from promoting a 'thin ideal' to perpetuating gender and racial stereotypes – highlight the complexities of representation in popular culture. Yet, Barbie's enduring message, "You can be anything", continues to inspire and empower, even as it evolves to embrace a more inclusive and diverse portrayals of power, beauty, and potential. Barbie's story is not just about a doll; it's about the aspirations she represents, the societal changes she's witnessed, and the ongoing conversation about her impact on gender roles, body image, and consumer culture. It's a narrative that continues to unfold, as Barbie adapts to the times and remains a symbol of possibility.

Barbie: A Popular Culture Icon

"It is impossible to conceive of the toy industry as being anything other than dependent on a popular culture which shapes and structures the meanings carried by toys" (Fleming 40). The relationship between toys and popular culture is symbiotic. While popular culture influences the creation of toys, toys also contribute to the spread and longevity of cultural icons and narratives. Today, one of the most influential, popular, and contested toys of the twentieth century is Mattel's Barbie doll. Her launch at the New York Toy Fair on 9 March 1959 by Mattel co-founder Ruth Handler was a game-changer in the toy industry. Her adult appearance, symbolised by her fashionable swimsuit and ponytail, was a bold move by Mattel. Despite the doubts from the toy industry which thought nobody would want to play with a doll that had breasts (Tamkin) and Mattel's skepticism of its commercial success (Westenhouer 14), Barbie was a success, selling over 350,000 units in her first year, and she quickly became an iconic figure, paving the way for other male and female adult dolls.

For the first time in mid-century America, Barbie meant children could play with a doll that looked like a woman, not a little girl or a baby. In a 1965 interview, Ruth Handler argued that American girls needed a doll with a "teen-age figure and a lot of glorious, imaginative, high-fashion clothes" (cited in Giacomini and Lubinski 3). In a 1993 interview, Handler said it was "important that Barbie allowed play situations that little girls could project themselves into ... to imagine, pretend and to fantasize". Hence Ruth Handler's Barbie could be an "avatar for girls to project their dreams onto" (Southwell). Barbie hit the market with a "sassy ponytail, heavy eyeliner, a healthy dose of side-eye and a distinctly adult body" (Blackmore). Her arched eyebrows were matched with a coy sideways glance reflecting her sexual origins (Thong). Mattel did not reveal that Ruth Handler's Barbie was inspired by a German novelty men's toy, Bild Lilli, which Handler had purchased on a European holiday in 1955. Mattel fought several lawsuits and eventually secured the rights to Bild Lilli in 1964, which required the German maker of the Bild Lilli doll to not make her again. Barbie dolls, both blonde and brunette, changed little until 1967, when Mattel launch the 'new' Barbie doll which is the foundation for today's *Stereotypical Barbie*. The same size as the original, thanks to Mattel engineer Jack Ryan she could twist and turn at the waist. Her facial features were softened, she had 'real' eyelashes' and took on an 'outdoor look'. The new 1967 version of Barbie originally retailed for US\$3.00. Mattel, assuming consumers may not want to buy a new Barbie when they already had one, offered buyers the new Barbie at US\$1.50 if they traded in their old 1950s Barbie. The television advertising

campaign for the new Barbie featured Maureen McCormick (who would go on to play Marcia Brady in the TV series *The Brady Bunch* from 1969 to 1974). The original #1 Barbie today sells for over US\$25,000 (Reinhard). The most expensive Barbie sold to date was a Stefano Canturi-designed Barbie that sold in 2010 for US\$302,500 at Christies in New York (Clarendon).

Barbie has been described as “the most successful doll in history”, “the most popular toy in history”, the “empress of fashion dolls” (Rogers 86), the “most famous doll in the world” (Ferorelli), the biggest-selling fashion doll in history (Green and Gellene), and is one of the world’s “most commercially successful toys” (Fleming 41). Barbie is both “idealistic and materialistic” and characterises an “American fantasy” (Tamkin). More so, she is a popular culture icon and “a unique indicator of women’s history” (Vander Bent). The inclusion of Barbie in America’s twentieth-century Time Capsule “cemented her status as a true American icon” (Ford), as did Andy Warhol when he iconised Barbie in his 1968 painting of her (Moore). During the 1950s and 1960s, Barbie’s name was licenced to over 100 companies; while a strategic move that expanded Barbie’s brand presence, it also provided Mattel with substantial royalty payments for decades. This approach helped solidify Barbie’s status as a cultural icon and enabled her to become a lucrative asset for Mattel (Rogers). Sixty-five years later, Barbie has 99% global brand awareness. In 2021, Mattel shipped more than 86 million Barbies globally, manufacturing 164 Barbies a minute (Tomkins). In 2022, Barbie generated gross sales of US\$1.49 billion (Statista 2023).

With this fiscal longevity and brand recognition, the success of the *Barbie* film is not surprising. The 2023 film, directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Australian Margot Robbie as Barbie and Canadian Ryan Gosling as Ken, as of March 2024 has a global box office revenue of US\$1.45 billion, making it the 14th most successful movie of all time and the most successful movie directed by a woman (Statista 2024).

Contested Barbie

Despite her popularity, Barbie has been the subject of controversy. Original Barbie’s proportions have been criticised for promoting an unrealistic body image (Thong). Barbie’s appearance has received numerous critiques for “representing an unrealistic beauty standard through its former limited skin tone and hair combination” (Lopez). The original Barbie’s measurements, if scaled to life-size, would mean Barbie is unusually tall and has a slim figure, with a height of 5 feet 9 inches, a waist of just 18 inches, and hips of approximately 33 inches. Her bust would measure around 32 inches with an under-bust of 22 inches, and her shoulder width would be approximately 28 inches. Original Barbie’s legs, which are proportionally longer than an average human’s, would make up more than half her height (Thong).

A 1996 Australian study scaled Barbie and Ken to adult sizes and compared this with the physical proportions of a range of women and men. They found that the likelihood of finding a man of comparable shape to Ken was 1 in 50. Barbie was more problematic. The chance of a woman being the same proportion as Barbie was 1 in 100,000 (Norton et al. 287). In 2011, *The Huffington Post*’s Galia Slayen built a life-sized Barbie based on Barbie’s body measurements for National Eating Disorder Awareness Week. Slayen concluded that “if Barbie was a real woman, she’d have to walk on all fours due to her proportions”. One report found that if Barbie’s measurements were those of a real woman her “bones would be so frail, it would be impossible for her to walk, and she would only have half a liver” (Golgowski).

A 2006 study found that Barbie is a “possible cause” for young girls’ “body dissatisfaction”. In this study, 162 girls from age 5 to 8 were exposed to images of a thin doll (Barbie), a plus-size doll (US doll Emme, size 16), or no doll, and then completed assessments of body image. Girls exposed to Barbie reported “lower body esteem and greater desire for a thinner body shape than girls in the other exposure conditions”. The study concluded that “early exposure to dolls epitomizing an unrealistically thin body ideal may damage girls’ body image, which would contribute to an increased risk of disordered eating and weight cycling” (Dittman and Halliwell 283). Another study in 2016 found that “exposure to Barbie” led to “higher thin-ideal internalization”, but found that Barbie had no “impact on body esteem or body dissatisfaction” (Rice et al. 142). In response to such criticism, Mattel slowly introduced a variety of Barbie dolls with more diverse body types, including tall, petite, and curvy models (Tamkin). These changes aim to reflect a broader range of beauty standards and promote a more positive body image.

Barbie has always had to accommodate social norms. For this reason, Barbie always must have underpants, and has no nipples. One of the reasons why Ruth Handler’s husband Elliott (also a co-founder of Mattel) was initially against producing the Barbie doll was that she had breasts, reportedly saying mothers would not buy their daughters a doll with breasts (Gerber). Margot Robbie, on playing Barbie, told one news outlet that while Barbie is “sexualized”, she “should never *be sexy*” (Aguirre). Early prototypes of Barbie made in Japan in the 1950s sexualised her body, leaving her to look like a prostitute. In response, Mattel hired film make-up artist Bud Westmore to redo Barbie’s face and hair with a softer look. Mattel also removed the nipples from the prototypes (Gerber). Barbie’s body and fashion have always seemed to “replicate history and show what was what was happening at the time” (Mowbray), and they also reflect how the female body is continually surveilled.

Feminists have had a long history of criticism of Barbie, particularly her projection of the thin ideal. At the 1970 New York Women’s Strike for Equality, feminists shouted “I am not a Barbie doll!” Such debates exemplify the role and impact of toys in shaping and reforming societal norms and expectations. Even the more recent debates regarding the 2023 *Barbie* film show that Barbie is still a “lightning rod for the messy, knotty contradictions of feminism, sexism, misogyny and body image” (Chappet). Decades of criticism about Barbie, her meaning and influence, have left some to ask “Is Barbie a feminist icon, or a doll which props up the patriarchy?” Of course, she’s both, because “like all real women, Barbie has always been expected to conform to impossible standards” (Chappet).

Diversifying Barbie

Over the decades Mattel has slowly changed Barbie’s body, including early versions of a black Barbie-like dolls in the 1960s and 1970s such as Francie, Christie, Julia, and Cara. However, it was not until 1980 that Mattel introduced the first black Barbie. African American fashion designer Kitty Black-Perkins, who worked for Mattel from 1971, was the principal designer for black Barbie, saying that “there was a need for the little Black girl to really have something she could play with that looked like her” (cited in Lafond). Black Barbie was marketed as *She’s black! She’s beautiful! She’s dynamite!* The following year, Asian Barbie was introduced. She was criticised for her nondescript country of origin and dressed in an “outfit that was a mishmash of Chinese, Korean and Japanese ethnic costumes” (Wong). More recently, the Asian Barbies were again criticised for portraying stereotypes, with a recent Asian Barbie dressed as a veterinarian caring for pandas, and Asian violinist Barbie with accompanying violin props, reflecting typical stereotypes of Asians in the US (Wong).

In 2016, Mattel introduced a range of Barbie and Ken dolls with seven body types, including more curvy body shapes, 11 skin tones and 28 hairstyles (Siazon). In 2019, other Barbie body types appeared, with smaller busts, less defined waist, and more defined arms. The 2019 range also included Barbies with permanent physical disabilities, one using a wheelchair and one with a prosthetic leg (Siazon). Wheelchair Barbie comes with a wheelchair, and her body has 22 joints for body movement while sitting in the wheelchair. The Prosthetic Barbie comes with a prosthetic leg which can be removed, and was made in collaboration with Jordan Reeve, a 13-year-old disability activist born without a left forearm. In 2020, a No Hair Barbie and a Barbie with the skin condition vitiligo were introduced, and in 2022, Hearing Aid Barbie was also launched. In 2022 other changes were made to Barbie's and Ken's bodies, with bodies that became fuller figured and Kens with smaller chests and less masculine body shapes (Dolan). Down Syndrome Barbie was released in 2023, designed in collaboration with the US National Down Syndrome Society to ensure accurate representation. By 2024, Barbie dolls come in 35 skin tones, 97 hairstyles, and nine body types (Mattel 2024). Spanning hundreds of iterations, today the Barbie doll is no longer a homogenous, blond-haired, blue-eyed toy, but rather an evolving social phenomenon, adapting with the times and the markets Mattel expands into. With dolls of numerous ethnicities and body types, Barbie has also embraced inclusivity, catering to the plethora of different consumers across the world (Green and Gellene 1989).

Career Barbie

While not dismissing Barbie's problematic place in feminist, gender and racial critiques, Barbie has always been a social influencer. Her early years were marked by a variety of makeovers and modernisations, as have recent changes to Barbie's body, reflecting the changing social norms of the times. Stereotypical Barbie had her first major makeover in 1961, with her ponytail swapped for a short 'Bubble Bob' hairstyle inspired by Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe, reflecting women's emerging social independence (Foreman). In the early 1970s, Barbie's original demure face with averted eyes was replaced by a new one that "depicted confidence and a forward-facing gaze" (Vander Bent). Her "soft look" was a departure from the mature image of the original 1959 Barbie (Lafond). The 'soft look' on *Malibu Barbie* with her newly sculpted face featured an open smile for the first time, as well as sun-tanned, make-up free skin and sun-kissed blonde hair. The disappearance of Barbie's coy, sideways glance and the introduction of forward-looking eyes was a development "welcomed by feminists" (Ford). Barbie's early makeovers, along with her fashion and accessories, including her homes, cars, and pets, contributed to shaping her image as a fashionable and independent woman. Barbie's various careers and roles have been used to promote ideas of female empowerment. From astronaut to presidential candidate, Barbie has broken barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields. However, the effectiveness of these efforts in promoting female empowerment is a topic of debate.

The post-war period in America saw a significant shift in the pattern of living, with a move from urban areas to the suburbs. This was facilitated by a robust post-war economy, favourable government policies like the GI Bill, and increasing urbanisation. The GI Bill played a crucial role by providing low-interest home loans to veterans, making home ownership accessible to a large segment of the population. It was a significant transformation of the American lifestyle and shaped the country's socio-economic landscape. It is in this context that Barbie's first *Dreamhouse* was introduced in the early 1960s, with its mid-century modern décor, hi-fi stereo, and slim-line furniture. This was at a time when most American women could not get a mortgage. Barbie got her first car in 1962, a peach-colored Austin-Healey 3000 MKII convertible,

followed short afterwards by a Porsche 911. She has also owned a pink Jaguar XJS, a pink Mustang, a red Ferrari, and a Corvette. Barbie's car choices of luxurious convertibles spoke to Barbie's social and economic success. In 1998, Barbie became a NASCAR driver and also signed up to race in a Ferrari in the Formula 1. Barbie's 'I Can Be Anything' range from 2008 was designed to draw kids playing with the dolls toward ambitious careers; one of those careers was as a race car driver (Southwell).

While Barbie's first job as a baby-sitter was not as glamorous or well-paying as her most of her other over 250 careers, it does reflect the cultural landscape Barbie was living in in the 1960s. *Babysitter Barbie* (1963) featured Barbie wearing a long, pink-striped skirt with 'babysitter' emblazoned along the hem and thick-framed glasses. She came with a baby in a crib, a telephone, bottles of soda, and a book. The book was called *How to Lose Weight* and had only two words of advice, 'Don't Eat'. Even though there was a backlash to the extreme dieting advice, Mattel included the book in the 1965 *Slumber Party Barbie*. Barbie wore pink silk pajamas with a matching robe and came prepared for her sleepover with toiletries, a mirror, the controversial diet book, and a set of scales permanently set at 110 pounds (approx. 50kg), which caused further backlash (Ford).

Barbie's early careers were those either acceptable or accessible to women of the era, such as the *Fashion Designer Barbie* (1960), *Flight Attendant Barbie* (1961), and *Nurse Barbie* (1962). However, in 1965 Barbie went into space, two years after cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space, and four years before the American moon landing. Barbie's career stagnated in the 1970s, and she spends the decade being sports Barbie, perhaps as a response to her unpopularity among vocal second wave feminists and reflecting the economic downturn of the era. America's shift to the right in the 1980s saw in the introduction of the Yuppie, the young urban professional who lived in the city, had a high-powered career, and was consumption-driven. More women were entering the workforce than ever before. Barbie also entered the workforce, spending less time doing the passive leisure of her earlier self (Ford). It also signals the beginning of neoliberalism in America, and a shift to individualism and the rise of the free market ethos.

In 1985, *Day-to-Night Barbie* was sold as the first CEO Barbie who "could go from running the boardroom in her pink power suit to a fun night out on the town". For Mattel she "celebrated the workplace evolution of the era and showed girls they could have it all". But despite Barbie's early careers, the focus was on her "emphasized femininity", meaning that while she was now a career woman, her appearance and demeanor did not reflect her job. *Astronaut Barbie* (1985) is a good example of Barbie's 'emphasised femininity' in how career Barbies were designed and dressed. *Astronaut Barbie* is clearly reflecting the fashion and culture trends of the 1980s by going into space in a "shiny, hot pink spacesuit", comes with a second space outfit, a shiny "peplum miniskirt worn over silver leggings and knee-high pink boots" (Bertschi), and her hair is too big to fit into the helmet. A dark-skinned *US Astronaut Barbie* was released in 1994, which coincided with the start of the Shuttle-Mir Program, a collaboration between the US and Russia which between 1994 and 1998 would see seven American astronauts spend almost 1,000 days living in orbit with Russian cosmonauts on the Mir space station.

Throughout the 1990s, Barbie increasingly takes on careers more typically considered to be male careers. But again, her femininity in design, dressing and packaging takes precedence over her career. *Police Officer Barbie* (1993), for example, has no gun or handcuffs. Instead, she comes with a "glittery evening dress" to wear to the awards dance where she will get the "Best Police Officer Award for her courageous acts in the community". *Police Office Barbie* is pictured on the

box "lov[ing] to teach safety tips to children". Barbie thus "feminizes, even maternalises, law enforcement" (Rogers 14). In 1992, *Teen Talk Barbie* was released. She had a voice box programmed to speak four distinct phrases out of a possible 270. She sold for US\$25, and Mattel produced 350,000, expecting its popularity. The phrases included 'I Love Shopping' and 'Math class is tough'. The phrase 'Math class is tough' was seen by many as reinforcing harmful stereotypes about girls and math. The National Council of American Teachers of Maths objected, as did the American Association of University Women (NYT 1992).

In response to criticisms of the gendered representations of Barbie's careers, Mattel have more recently featured Barbie in science and technology fields including *Paleontologist Barbie* (1996 and 2012), *Computer Engineer Barbie* (2010), *Robotics Engineer Barbie* (2018), *Astrophysicist Barbie* (2019), *Wildlife Conservationist Barbie*, *Entomologist Barbie* (2019), and *Polar Marine Biologist Barbie* (all in collaboration with *National Geographic*), *Robotics Engineer Barbie* (2018), *Zoologist Barbie* (2021), and *Renewable Energy Barbie* (2022), which go some way to providing representations that at least encompass the ideal that 'Girls Can Do Anything'.

Barbie over her lifetime has also taken on swimming, track and field, and has been a gymnast. Barbie was an Olympic gold medallist in the 1970s, with Mattel releasing four Barbie Olympians between 1975 and 1976, arguably cashing in on the 1976 Montreal Olympics. *Gold Medal Barbie Doll Skier* was dressed in a red, white, and blue ski suit completed with her gold medal. *Gold Medal Barbie Doll* is an Olympic swimmer wearing a red, white, and blue tricot swimsuit, and again wears an Olympic gold medal around her neck. The doll was also produced as a Canadian Olympian wearing a red and white swimsuit. *Gold Medal Barbie Skater* looks like *Barbie Malibu* and is dressed in a long-sleeved, pleated dress in red, white, and blue. The outfit included white ice skates and her gold medal. Mattel also made a *Gold Medal P.J. Gymnast Doll* who vaulted and somersaulted in a leotard of red, white, and blue tricot. She had a warm-up jacket with white sleeves, red cuffs, white slippers, and a gold medal.

Mattel, as part of a licencing agreement with the International Olympic Committee, produced a range of toys for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. The collection of five Barbies represented the new sports added to the 2020 Olympics: baseball and softball, sport climbing, karate, skateboarding, and surfing. Each Barbie was dressed in a sport-specific uniform and had a gold medal. *Barbie Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 Surfer*, for example, was dressed in a pink wetsuit top, with an orange surfboard and a Tokyo 2020 jacket. For the 2022 Winter Olympics and Paralympics, Mattel released a new collection of Barbie dolls featuring among others a para-skiing Barbie who sits on adaptive skis and comes with a championship medal (Douglas).

As part of Mattel's 2023 *Barbie Career of the Year* doll, the *Women in Sports Barbie* range shows Barbie in leadership roles in the sports industry, as manager, coach, referee, and sport reporter. *General Manager Barbie* wears a blue-and-white pinstripe suit accessorised with her staff pass and a smartphone. *Coach Barbie* has a pink megaphone, playbook, and wears a two-piece pink jacket and athletic shorts. *Referee Barbie* wears a headset and has a whistle. *Sports Reporter Barbie* wears a purple, geometric-patterned dress and carries a pink tablet and microphone (Jones).

Political Barbie

Barbie has run for president in every election year since 1992. The first *President Barbie* came with an American-themed dress for an inaugural ball and a red suit for her duties in the Oval

Office. In 2016, Barbie released an all-female presidential ticket campaign set with a president and vice-president doll. The 2000 *President Barbie* doll wore a blue pantsuit and featured a short bob cut, red lipstick pearl necklace, and a red gown to change into, "presumably for President Barbie's inaugural ball" (Lafond).

This followed the introduction of *UNICEF Ambassador Barbie* in 1989. She is packaged as a member of the United States Committee for UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), which is mandated to provide humanitarian and development aid to children worldwide. Rather problematically, and again with a focus on her femininity rather than the importance of the organisation she represents, she wears a glittery white and blue full length ball gown with star patterning and a red sash. While some proceeds did go to the US Committee for UNICEF, the dressing and packaging featuring an American flag overshadows the career and its philanthropic message. The period signalled the end of the Cold War and was also the year the United States invaded Panama, resulting in a humanitarian disaster when US military forces attacked urban areas in order to overthrow the Noriega administration.

Military Barbie

Barbie has served in every US military branch (Sicard). Barbie joined the US army in 1989, wearing a female officer's evening uniform, though with no sense of what she did. While it may be thought Barbie would increase female interest in a military career, at the time more women were already enlisting than in any other period from the early 1970s to 2012 (Stillwell). Barbie rejoined the army for the 1990-1991 Gulf War, wearing a Desert Combat Uniform and the 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagle" patch, and serving as a medic.

Barbie also joined the Air Force in 1990, three years before Jeannie Leavitt became the first female Air Force fighter pilot. Barbie wore a green flight suit and leather jacket, and gold-trimmed flight cap. She was a fighter pilot and in 1994, she joined the USAF aerial demonstration team, The Thunderbirds. Busy in the 1990s, she also enlisted in the US Navy wearing women's Navy whites. Marine Corps Barbie appeared in 1992, wearing service and conduct medals (Stillwell). All of Barbie's uniforms were approved by the Pentagon (Military Women's Memorial). The 2000 *Paratrooper Barbie* Special Edition was released with the packaging declaring "let's make a support drop with first aid and food boxes". She was dressed in undefined military attire which includes a helmet, dog tags, parachute, boots, and hairbrush.

Barbie's Influence

In 2014, Barbie became a social media influencer with the launch of the @barbiestyle Instagram account, and in 2015, Barbie launched a vlog on YouTube to talk directly to girls about issues they face. The animated series features Barbie discussing a range of topics including depression, bullying, the health benefits of meditation, and how girls have a habit of apologising when they don't have anything to be sorry about. The Official @Barbie YouTube channel has over eleven million global subscribers and 23 billion minutes of content watched, making Barbie the #1 girls' brand on YouTube. Barbie apps average more than 7 million monthly active users and the Instagram count boasts over 2 million followers. The 2023 *Barbie* film really does attest to Barbie's influence 70 years after her debut.

Barbie, as this article has shown, is more than an influencer and more than a doll, if she ever really was only a doll. She is a popular culture icon, regardless of whether we love her or not.

Barbie has sometimes been ahead of the game, and sometimes has been problematically represented, but she has always been influential. Her body, race, ability, careers, independence, and political aspirations have spoken different things to those who play with her. She is fiercely defended, strongly criticised, and shirks from neither. She is also liberating, empowering, straight, and queer. As the articles in this issue reflect, Barbie, it seems, really can be anything.

Imagining and Interrogating *Barbie* in Popular Culture

The feature article in this issue outlines how Australian Barbie fans in the 1960s expressed their creativity through the designing and making of their own wardrobes for the doll. Through examining articles from the *Australian Women's Weekly*, Donna Lee Brien reveals this rich cultural engagement that was partly driven by thrift, and mostly by enjoyment.

Eva Boesenberg examines the social and environmental effects of a plastic doll that is positioned as an ecological ambassador. While there is no doubt that climate change is one of our most pressing social issues, Boesenberg questions the motivations behind Barbie's eco-crusade: is she an apt role-model to teach children the importance of environmental issues, or is this just a case of corporate greenwashing?

Emma Caroll Hudson shifts the focus to entertainment, with an exploration of the marketing of the 2023 blockbuster film *Barbie*. Here she argues that the marketing campaign was highly successful, utilising a multi-faceted approach centred on fan participation. She highlights key components of the campaign to reveal valuable insights into how marketing can foster a cultural phenomenon.

Revna Altiok's article zooms in on the depiction of Ken in the 2023 film, revealing his characterisation to be that of a 'manic pixie dream boy' whose lack of identity propels him on a journey to self-discovery. This positioning, argues Altiok, pulls into focus social questions around gender dynamics and how progress can be truly achieved.

Rachel Wang turns the spotlight to Asian identity within the Barbie world, revealing how from early iterations a vague 'Oriental' Barbie was accompanied by cultural stereotyping. Despite later, more nuanced interpretations of country-specific Asian dolls, problematic features remained embedded. This, Wang argues, positions Asian Barbies as the racial 'other'.

Kaela Joseph, Tanya Cook, and Alena Karkanias's article examines how the 2023 *Barbie* film reflects different forms of fandom. Firstly, Joseph interrogates how the Kens' patriarchal identity is expressed through acts of collective affirmational fandom. Here, individual fans legitimise their positions within the group by mastering and demonstrating their knowledge of popular culture phenomena. Joseph contrasts this with transformational fandom, which is based upon reimagining the source material to create new forms.

The transformation of the titular character of the *Barbie* movie forms the basis of Eli S's analysis. S examines how the metaphor of 'unboxing' the doll provides an avenue through which to understand Barbie's metamorphosis from constrained doll to aware human as she journeys from the pink plastic Barbie Land to the Real World.

Anna Temel turns her critical gaze to how the 2023 film attempts to reposition Barbie's image away from gender stereotypes to a symbol of feminist empowerment. Director Greta Gerwig, Temel argues, critiques the 'ideal woman' and positions Barbie as a vehicle through which contemporary feminism and womanhood can be interrogated. Temel finds that this is not always successfully articulated in the depiction of Barbie in the film.

The reading of the *Barbie* movie's Barbie Land as an Asexual Utopia is the focus of Anna Maria Broussard's article. Here Broussard draws the focus to the harmonious community of dolls who live without social expectations of sexuality. *Barbie* provides a popular culture reflection of the Asexual experience, expressed through Barbie's rejection of a heteronormative relationship both in Barbie Land and the Real World.

Completing this collection is Daisy McManaman's article interrogating the multiple iterations of the doll's embodied femininity. Incorporating an ethnographic study of the author's relationship with the doll, McManaman uncovers that Barbie serves as a site of queer joy and a role model through which to enjoy and explore femininity and gender.

These articles have been both intellectually stimulating to edit, and a joy. We hope you enjoy this collection that brings a new academic lens to the popular cultural phenomenon that is Barbie.

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