"I WANT TO BE JUST LIKE YOU"—

BARBIE MAGAZINE

AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE FEMALE DESIRING SUBJECT

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Abstract

Drawing on Foucauldian notions of power relations, I argue in this paper that Barbie: The Magazine for Girls (hereafter referred to as Barbie Magazine) acts as a site for the operation of disciplinary power practices. Barbie Magazine seeks to organise, normalise, and categorise the bodies of its young female readers, presenting appropriate gestures, acts, appearance, behaviour, and adornment. The Barbie doll becomes the essential tool for the fulfilment of an appropriate female subject: there is a conflation between becoming female and owning a Barbie, or lots of Barbies. The ultimate aim is a subject positioning and understanding of the desiring self in which the body of the young girl is intimately linked with the appendage of the Barbie doll. Readers of Barbie Magazine are not just learning about domesticity but about becoming acculturated as properly female through living life like Barbie. This promotion of the Barbie lifestyle represents a colonisation of the bodies of young girls by the artificial, sterile, and stereotypical.

MEET BARBIE

From the very beginning, Barbie was like no other doll. Barbie was named after the daughter of her creators, Ruth and Elliot Handler, and made her debut in New York in 1959. By 1961 Barbie was one of the hottest-selling toys of all time; her face was emblazoned on a variety of merchandise including trading cards, vinyl travel cases, lunchboxes, vacuum bottles, and doll carry cases. In 1997 Barbie continues to be a world-wide best seller in 140 countries. She is still most popular in the United States where little girls own an average of seven Barbie dolls. An
estimated one billion pairs of Barbie shoes and outfits have been sold internationally. A recent count suggests that more than 600 million Barbies have been made (Adams 1996). The proliferation of Barbie merchandise in recent times is mind-boggling: there are Barbie fan clubs, cartoons, commercials, swap-cards, manchester, clothing, footwear, furniture, stationery and stickers, and even a Barbie Fashion Designer CD-ROM and “Game Girl.”

*Barbie Magazine* was established in Australia in July 1996, joining the vast number of international Barbie magazines such as *Barbie Bazaar* in the United States. Unlike other such texts, which are primarily aimed at doll collectors, *Barbie Magazine* is aimed at young girls aged five to twelve. The magazine, under licence to Mattel to use the Barbie name and logo, is produced by Gore and Osmet publications. It is the only such publication targeted at young Australian and New Zealand girls, and has estimated sales of 55,000 per edition after nine editions. The booklet that traditionally accompanied Barbie dolls, picturing a range of dolls and outfits, has morphed into the more sophisticated and media-savvy medium of the fashion magazine.

As described elsewhere (O’Brien 1997), *Barbie Magazine* adheres to a recognised magazine format with a contents page, editor’s column, readers’ page, an overview of “music, movies and new stuff,” stories, poems, activities, cooking, a fashion spread, competitions, a bazaar page, and a shopping guide with consumer information. This format gives the publication a sense of credibility in a number of ways. In addition, the publication is sold in newsagents (A$2.95, NZ$3.95) rather than as a giveaway with purchases. Further credibility is lent to the project by the editor, Nicole Hodson, who is a former editor of *Girlfriend*, a well-known Australian magazine for teenage girls. The appropriation of the magazine format also indicates that a certain separation can be drawn between the advertising and editorial pages, suggesting that the editorial content provides an unbiased or neutral account of goods or activities. This is not, however, true in the case of *Barbie Magazine*.

Peers (1996) suggests that the articles in *Barbie Magazine* appear to be sensible and balanced, emphasising activity and initiative through cooking, crafts, poetry, and story-writing. I would suggest that a closer inspection reveals the completely transparent nature of the enterprise which aims to instil in readers the notion that no little girl is complete without a range of Barbies and Barbie merchandise. Each of the activities listed by Peers operates as little more than a standard consumer message: the magazine promotes cooking with Barbie, poetry about Barbie, story-writing about Barbie, and crafts so one can dress as Barbie. For example, the November 1996 edition has a make-over of t-shirts which includes tips on how to write “I love Barbie magazine” on a store-bought shirt.

*Barbie Magazine* emerges at a curious juncture in the herstory of Barbie. A recent proliferation of articles and protests about the inappropriate body image of Barbie dolls follows a well-established trajectory (see Ducille 1994; Norton et al. 1996;
Consumers' Association of Penang 1996; The Body Shop 1996). However, the well-justified seriousness of such articles, which situate Barbie as a tool for the oppression of women, is matched by a growing irreverence towards Barbie dolls. Bill Tull, a shop owner in San Francisco, is selling Trailer Trash Barbie, complete with a baby straddling her hip, platinum hair with dark roots, a cigarette dangling from her lips, and a voice chip that says, “My daddy swears I’m the best kisser in the county” (Legon 1997, 12). Websites abound that offer brazen and humorous images of distorted, tattooed, and dismembered Barbies, and texts such as Mondo Barbie (Ebersole and Peabody 1993) and Barbie's Queer Accessories (Rand 1995) bring Barbie into the world of sexual transgression and camp culture. Rhonda Lieberma in Artform (1995, 20) unveils another new Barbie model: Jewish “Nose-Job” Barbie, complete with detachable pre-operation nose.

The present diasporic epoch is also witnessing the counter-narrative of Barbie as an aspirational role model (Norton et al. 1996). Indeed, Ruth Handler’s original concept for Barbie was that of a career woman who is independent and financially comfortable (Fennick 1996). As early as the 1960s Barbie dolls were produced as college graduates, nurses, teachers, and astronauts. A 1980s slogan, “We Girls Can Do Anything, Right, Barbie?” is exemplified in the replacement of Nurse Barbie by Doctor Barbie at that time. In the 1990s, Barbie has been a police officer, a teacher, a fire-fighter, an American Desert Storm trooper, an animal rights activist, and even an American presidential candidate (Fennick 1996).

This paper is positioned within the plethora of competing claims produced by this explosion of Barbie-induced discourse. I do not seek to establish definitively what Barbie Magazine stands for, or how the young readers view it. I do not think it is essentially and totally repressive. As I explain in the following section, I adopt a Foucauldian theoretical framework which situates power as dispersed, circulatory and relational rather than totalitarian and despotic. Within this theoretical model, Barbie Magazine is not established as inherently powerful, but as a tool for the operation of disciplinary practices seeking to organise, normalise, and categorise the bodies of the Barbie Magazine readers into an approximation of Barbie herself. I suggest that the young reader’s body is presented as no longer sufficient in its natural state and must be morphed into the world of the female through Barbie ownership and imitation. This hypothesis is based upon a textual analysis of the first ten editions of Barbie Magazine. It is, I acknowledge, just one such reading of these texts, and one that is critically informed by my commitment to postmodern feminist scholarship and my near-total deprivation of Barbie ownership as a young girl. My suggestion that Barbie Magazine presents itself as a key pedagogical tool for learning about appropriately gendered bodies mirrors similar research on women's magazines (Bail et al. 1985/6; Carrington and Bennett 1996; Luke 1996; Tait and Carpenter 1996).
DISCIPLINARY POWER

Disciplinary power is a central Foucauldian concept, outlined most clearly in Discipline and Punish (1977) and Foucault’s numerous articles and interviews dating from this time. Foucault explains that the individual inmates of the schools, armies, hospitals, and prisons established in the late eighteenth century were subjected to the instrumental control of the state through techniques of discipline designed to individualise, normalise, adapt, and construct them as characters with specific actions, skills, and attributes. This process involved the moulding of the body of the inmate according to distinct regimes: time, work and play, food, morals, values, habits, and ethical laws (Foucault 1977). Dividing practices based upon normative judgements served to separate one person from another (Foucault 1982), providing a means for effective supervision based upon self-regulation and external surveillance. Foucault describes this disciplinary power as a new mode of investment which controls not by repression but stimulation, exemplified by the current compulsion to “Get undressed—but be slim, goodlooking, tanned!” (1980, 57).

Foucauldian notions of power break from those analyses that concentrate on measuring power, examining the distribution of power among the population, and linking power to overarching ideological frameworks such as the Marxist capitalist mode of production, the liberal state, or the Weberian bureaucracy. Foucault does not analyse power per se, but rather the way in which power operates to construct certain types of subjects. As Foucault explains in “The Subject and Power”:

This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others must recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (1982, 212)

This “new subjectivity” (1982, 216) represents a break from the ahistorical individuality which has underpinned much of modern Western philosophy. Foucault forces attention on the reign of the rational, unitary humanist subject in the modern epoch, signalling a new epoch in which the subject is tied to a particular time and location. Foucault explains that there is no “pure” subject which exists prior to the individual’s initiation by the operation of power in discourse. Power, similarly, only exists “when it is put into action” (1982, 219). For this reason, Foucault asserts that power should be analysed in relation to carefully defined institutions and texts.

Foucault does not view power as a purely symbolic or imaginary ideological mechanism but a concrete (although not fixed) operation consisting of micro-penalities which circulate in discursive mechanisms. Within this mode of power relations the body of the subject becomes the site for the operation of power and also acts as a surface for resistance, self-organisation, and investment. In The History
Foucault uses the example of the sexual subject to illustrate how there is no a priori natural or anatomical body which at some stage acquires activation when it becomes a subject: its material reality is located solely in the realm of the cultural. It is a body constructed by cultural power discourses which take the body as the site of activation and realisation. Consequently, the arrangement, terrain, and spaces of the body, rather than the mind, are situated at the centre of Foucauldian analyses of power, representing deconstruction of the mind/body dualism which has long underpinned epistemological and philosophical considerations.

Accordingly, I suggest that the power relations operating on the pages of Barbie Magazine are designed to instruct the young readers to recognise themselves as female subjects through the organisation and adornment of their bodies. The process of becoming recognised as female is a process that depends on the production of an acceptable proto-typical female body—white, hairless, coiffed, well-groomed, and with the appropriately submissive bodily postures and movements (Bartky 1988). I do not simply suggest that the magazine is the producer of standard feminine ideological stereotypes. In this analysis I depart from standard theoreticisation of Barbie dolls by Motz (1983), Willis (1991), Urla and Swedlund (1995), and Fennick (1996) which place emphasis on the ways in which consumption of Barbie merchandise and dolls enables girls to achieve an ideological state of femininity. In such texts femininity is presented as a metaphysical undertaking which can be ignored by those with a sufficiently strong will. This stands in opposition to my view that becoming recognised as a female is not an ideological process that arises from the "truth" of the anatomical body but one in which the actual bodies of young girls become marked with particular subject positions enabling them to be read in particular ways by their owners and others. The risks of having a body marked as "deviant" become serious, often resulting in a lack of recognition as a female. As Currie and Raoul (1992) note, the body is only seen as properly human when it is culturally acceptable.

Recent feminist applications of Foucault's notion of disciplinary power have, however, made gender central rather than marginal to the analysis. In "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988), for example, Sandra Lee Bartky argues that disciplinary power enacted through the female body is one of the mechanisms of patriarchal power. She details the way in which men's and women's bodies are different in terms of posture, gait, adornment, expression, the conceptions of personal space, beauty, and fitness, and suggests that such practices produce a female body-subject on which an inferior status has been ascribed. This paper argues that the form of power exercised through the pages of Barbie Magazine is similarly gendered and acts upon and constructs female bodies, sculpting and organising them into certain subject positions.
MECHANISMS OF DISCIPLINARY POWER

Disciplinary power operates through the pages of Barbie Magazine by conveying the general message that having a Barbie and being part of Barbie's world is a key way in which to develop into a young woman. This process is represented within a heterosexual discourse of desire which is created by the simulated sexual posing of the models in fashion shoots, the use of makeup and accessories, and the profiling of "cute" young male singers and actors. Such practices are an imitation of Barbie herself, who is sexual without having sex (Motz 1983; Ducille 1994). Rather than backseat sex and teenage angst, Barbie has pyjama parties, barbecues, shopping trips, proms, and dates (Urla and Swedlund 1995). The magazine offers readers a disciplinary process through which they can approximate a young adult lifestyle through the adornment and movement of their bodies in a simulation of the body of Barbie herself. At the heart of this process, then, lies the goal of the acquisition of Barbie dolls and Barbie merchandise which is presented as an integral part of any activity.

This process is a showcase for what Cox (1977, 304) terms the "total Barbie market." The specificity of Barbie's presentation and packaging ensures that there is an appropriate (new) Barbie for each activity. Barbie Magazine reinforces this notion: Twirling Ballerina Barbie accompanies an article on "When I grow up I want to be a ballerina," Slumber Party Barbie is presented on a cooking page showing "Slumber Party Treats," and the Jewel Hair Mermaid Barbie completes the article on "dress-ups" featuring Samantha (aged eight) dressed as a mermaid. Accessories such as the Barbie typewriter, cookie cutters, writing paper, and sheets and pillowcases ensure that each event has an appropriate Barbie accessory. Such instructions are specific, precise, and detailed, encapsulating all aspects of a young girl's life. Her body is organised and arranged in space and time: a frequent prize offered by Barbie Magazine is the Barbie Daily Organizer, offering a constant reminder to its owner on how to live life as Barbie. A regular monthly Barbie calendar ensures that the Barbie doll acts as an ever-present source of surveillance. The disciplinary techniques are total, seeking to encircle the bodies of the readers with instructions on how to look, what activities to undertake, and what material goods are necessary for entrance into the young adult world of Barbie.

The magazine suggests that the rewards of adhering to such maxims are numerous: in particular, through playing with Barbie and owning lots of Barbies, the readers are granted entrance to a community of Barbie owners. Members are judged by the way in which they look like Barbie and the number of Barbies they own. This is clearly illustrated on the regular "Me and My Barbie" section in which readers are urged to "Show off all your special Barbies." Photos show young girls with enormous collections of Barbie dolls, campervans, houses, and cars. Many are groomed to look like the Barbie doll they proudly display. A secret bond is formed: the members of the club unite in their desire to attain common consumer-based goals. As Urla and Swedlund (1995) explain, this process also takes place in play groups and fan clubs in which children share an identity based upon their desire.
This disciplinary power operates through three mechanisms: the creation of the Barbie doll as an embodied norm, the seeking of knowledge about the population (readers), and the creation of consumer desire. Each ensures that the readers are self-regulating. *Barbie Magazine* seeks to establish itself as a regime of truth, a key text through which readers will form judgements and values in terms of which they will (ideally) live their lives as females. A regime of truth is a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, and distribution of statements and acts (Foucault 1984a). As Foucault explains, truth is “linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it” (1984a, 74). In this case, the central value is that of the Barbie doll as a key feature of the world of the female; her (fictional) life represents the norm through which the young readers are to assess their own lives. I now turn to a discussion of these three mechanisms of disciplinary power.

The establishment of Barbie as an embodied norm

As a key tool for the operation of disciplinary power, *Barbie Magazine* presents the Barbie doll as an embodied, rather than synthetic, creature with feelings, desires, and a personality. This enables the Barbie doll to operate as a normalising force and a model against which readers can compare themselves. The distance between the artificial and the actual is reduced as Barbie is presented as a “real” person whose glittering life is within touch of the reader. The personalisation of the object, notes Baudrillard, is a key strategy of the management of desire. Fashion spreads appear to be useful opportunities in which to present Barbie as a “real” person rather than as a doll. “Barbie’s American Holiday” has a Barbie doll “visiting” authentic locations represented by photographic backdrops (September 1996, 40–43). Another fashion spread shows a Barbie look-alike model (complete with artificial poses, a plastic smile, and a bionic-looking Ken) holding a similarly dressed Barbie doll to reinforce the comparison between the doll and the model (September 1996, 10–11). Indeed, Barbie, I would suggest, is becoming more “real” as time passes. With the advance of technology, the production of more “realistic” Barbie dolls is possible: Barbies can now swim, dive, exercise, and talk. The baby accompanying the Dr Barbie even comes complete with a heartbeat. As Motz (1983) notes, had Barbie failed to appear “real” to young girls, her popularity would have ended years ago.

In addition, the bodies of the readers are manipulated so that they “become” Barbie through dressing up as Barbie and acting like Barbie. A number of song and fashion competitions are featured in the magazine in which contestants compete for prizes dressed as their favourite Barbie. Regular articles such as
"When I grow up" stress this link through comments such as "I want to be a teacher just like Barbie," echoing the familiar Barbie jingle: "I want to be just like you." The magazine also uses life-size Barbie doll mannequins as promotional tools. The mannequins are dressed in Barbie's own range of clothing. Fashion Avenue Clothes, which are available in children's sizes for girls to wear. Motz (1983, 127) suggests that when young girls play with baby dolls they usually become the mother, but when they play with the teenage Barbie, they "become" Barbie herself, enabling them to engage personally in the appropriate adult role play. The pages of the magazine are emblazoned with images of Barbie in "life-like" poses, engaged in activities such as diving, teaching, swimming, holding a dinner party, and going to the opera. The exquisite detail finish on the accessories in such scenes—tiny dolphins, tea cups, tennis racquets, flowers—contain detailed instruction for the young reader about what is "appropriate" and therefore desirable.

The creation of a norm (Barbie) enables the identification of certain types of bodies as normal and healthy, while others become suspect and thus "abnormal." Indeed, the readers of the magazine pose next to their embodied hero, appearing a poor simulation to the "real" thing. Barbie becomes embodied and real while the female readers strive for meaning and recognition for their artificial Barbie-like bodies. The norm is thus a postmodern body, a symbiosis of the artificial and the natural, the technical and the embodied (Balsamo 1996). At the centre of this morphing process is the body of Barbie, who, in her eleven-and-a-half inch vinyl glory, is a representative of and a gatekeeper to the future female world.

The seeking of knowledge

As Foucault explains (1984a, 66), the new form of disciplinary power which emerged along with technical inventions and discoveries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gained "access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behaviour," producing meaning, knowledge, and categories through which individuals began to recognise themselves as subjects. In order to operate as efficient disciplinarians, it was important to gain detailed information about the desires and needs of the population. Foucault explains that this process of knowledge collection was undertaken in the human sciences: demography, public health, medicine, sex therapy, psychology, and education.

Similarly, Barbie Magazine is a site for the production of knowledge and detailed information about a population consisting of young Barbie readers. A large proportion of the magazine is composed of letters, competitions, poems, and stories from the readers, providing their personal views on their favourite Barbie dolls, play stories, dreams, feelings, ambitions, and goals. This knowledge is organised into articles on favourite pets, best friends, baby photos, birthdays,
and views about the "new mag" and "the cool mum award." Some of this information is most revealing: we learn that readers are keen to read about Barbie's family, that they love the fashion and dress-up sections, and that their favourite colour is pink. Other knowledge is more specific: there are suggestions that Mattel should produce a Bush Ranger Barbie and a Police Barbie, that readers want to make teeth-brushing more fun by "brushing with Barbie," and that many of the ballerina readers like playing with Ballerina Barbie.

While this material must be of considerable benefit to the marketing department at Mattel and other regular advertisers, it also provides idealised and appropriate models of behaviour for other readers to follow. The "truth" of these readers is extracted and juxtaposed with the constructed world of Barbie and friends. Such statements create new sites for the construction of the Barbie-subject, sites which exist in "real" homes using "real" actors. Readers get to see how others—just like themselves—reconstitute themselves in the image of Barbie. This confessional method of power relations is productive rather than repressive, creating new positions and possibilities.

The creation of consumer desire

The creation of consumer desire ensures that there is a conflation between the desires of the merchandisers and those of the individuals who become self-regulating and thus largely complicit in the project of becoming "properly" female as suggested on the pages of the magazine. It is not so much that power is exercised over the readers against their will or interests, but that the young readers themselves identify what techniques, acquisitions, and behaviour they must acquire or undertake in order to (re)fashion themselves into female subjects. At the centre of this process is the acquisition of Barbie dolls and Barbie merchandise. As Paula Rabinowitz notes (Urla and Swedlund 1995), Barbie dolls and their continual consumer demands are central figures in the historiography of post-war culture in which women in particular are positioned as consumers.

Commentators (and parents) have long anguished about the high level of conspicuous consumption demanded by a young girl with a serious Barbie habit (Cox 1977; Motz 1983; Urla and Swedlund 1995; Adams 1996). Adams suggests that such a girl by the age of six or seven "will have been programmed to spend the rest of her life as an obedient consumer" (1996, 2). This rabid consumer ethos is based upon an understanding that the physical body must be artificially remade and supplemented with icons and symbols in order to become what "nature" intended, in this case, female (Urla and Swedland 1995, 277). There are three ways in which this incitement to consume is instilled in the young readers: advertising, the use of competitions, and the provision of consumer information.
Advertising  The insidious advertising of Barbie and non-Barbie merchandise in *Barbie Magazine* encircles the bodies of the readers, acting upon conscious and unconscious desires. Barbie merchandise is frequently sold through integration into the text, blurring the line between advertising and editorial pages, a distinction that is, at best, dubious in magazines such as this. For example, on the “What’s Hot” page, readers are urged to “Get Organised” with a “cool new Barbie Diary or Address Book, $7.95 each from Reed for Kids.” Advertising pages are frequently presented using the same features as the text, with fun colours, competitions, and “things to do,” further blurring the distinction between editorial content and advertising. To confuse matters more, the magazine also appears to have sponsors that do not specifically advertise through the pages of the magazine but are nevertheless prominently featured. One example is Planet Hollywood which is the location for *Barbie Magazine* celebratory lunches and dinners for winning readers. When “lucky reader” Chantelle won a competition to meet, interview, and sing with New Zealand band Past to Present, the location was the Planet Hollywood “theatrette.” The text notes that “after the interview it was time for a yummy lunch and our friends at Planet Hollywood provided just that” (November 1996, 28).

Win a competition  The competition discourse is regularly used to instil desire into readers. For example, if readers take out a subscription to *Barbie Magazine* they can win a “pressie” such as a Barbie heart necklace (“ONLY available when you subscribe to Barbie magazine”). Such competitions present Barbie merchandising as a prize or a coveted present rather than as just another plaything. Most of these goods are advertised separately in the same edition, enabling young readers to “win” the prize if not the competition. In one issue the ultimate competition is advertised. Barbie heaven: the best Barbie prize in the whole world “includes a Dream House, a Picnic Van, a Mustang, Cool Shavin’ Ken and Songbird Barbie, worth $5,000” (December/January 1996/1997, 16). While this is a typical advertising discourse in which ownership of the merchandise is presented as a dream come true, in this case it represents the pinnacle of Barbie ownership. This is consistent with the suggestion that Mattel lets a little girl dream (Urla and Swedlund 1995). The irony, suggests Ducille (1994), is that living up to the Barbie ideal brings not dreams but nightmares in the form of eating and shopping disorders. This incitement of desire is based on the pleasure-principle: the magazine seeks to ensure that readers desire certain goods so that they will feel satisfied when they succeed in obtaining them (Baudrillard 1996). This notion of self-regulation based upon shared goals and values lies at the heart of Foucault’s disciplinary society.

Consumer information  Consumer information is a critical part of the discourse of consumer desire designed to ensure that the bodies of the readers are complete only when there is an appropriate Barbie article of merchandise or doll for every facet of their daily lives. The messages speak directly to the young reader: each time an item is mentioned, readers are reminded that “You’ll find Barbie at your favourite toy store” or “for details on where to buy all the pretty things, turn to
the Shopping Guide on page 55.” Stores such as K-Mart also advertise widely in Barbie Magazine with the aim of illustrating that the actual products are not out of the economic or geographic reach of the young reader. This kind of practical information is valuable to the young consumer. The aim is, presumably, to coach the readers to become highly adept at consumer purchasing, able to distinguish between goods and brands that may be very similar.\(^1\)

**Resistance**

I do not suggest, however, that these forms of power are inescapable, amounting to a total regime of oppression in which the bodies of the young Barbie Magazine readers are rendered passive and helpless. A number of feminist theorists have criticised Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power as negative, claiming that he portrays the body as a malleable object battered by oppressive exterior power forces (de Lauretis 1987; Hartsock 1990; McNay 1992; Grosz 1994). Although I agree that the language and some of the examples in Discipline and Punish support this analysis, I would suggest that a wider reading of Foucault’s comments on the operation of disciplinary power suggests that the subject, although subjugated, is also in a continual process of development. As Hindess argues, disciplinary power is harnessed to a need for individuals to know more about themselves, to become the self-knowing conscious subject (1996).

This knowledge also operates as a point of resistance to discursive mechanisms of power. Foucault argues that the operation of repressive power discourses which have circulated at certain historical junctures (such as the campaign against homosexuality in the nineteenth century), rather than purely subjecting individuals, in fact serve as the springboard for a series of tactical and positive power-based interventions (Foucault 1984a). The body becomes subjectified but is also a site of resistance and strength, mounting counter-offensives to the bombardment of discourses seeking to normalise, rationalise, and customise it. When Foucault uses the word “power” it is shorthand for “relationships of power.” The subject is active in the sense that he or she is able to exert and deflect power.

An examination of the forms of reader resistance on the pages of the magazine illustrates how the form of disciplinary power is not a monolithic entity but exists in a relational situation with freedom, liberty, and resistance (Foucault 1984b). The reader photos on the pages of the magazine illustrate the various modes in which readers respond to the messages in Barbie Magazine.\(^4\) Many of the young girls pictured have long hair, wear make-up, and are elaborately dressed in princess and fairy play clothes in a simulated approximation of the fantasy female world of Barbie herself. Some are even posed in mock model stances, hands on hips, lips pursed, hair tossed. In particular, the girls chosen for the cover of the magazine tend to be fair-skinned with long blonde hair and pretty in a conventionally feminine way. However, many of the readers pictured are childishy
plump, freckled, bespectacled, mousy, and, well, "normal": either consciously or unconsciously resisting the strictures of the bland Barbie image.

Resistance is a cultural imperative for those from non-Anglo cultural backgrounds: the goal of a pert nose, luxurious blonde hair, and blue eyes is a biological (but not technical) impossibility. However, in the entire series of ten magazines examined, not one reader who is non-Anglo is posing with a Barbie doll which represents her own cultural heritage. Many different Black, Asian, and Hispanic models of Barbie have been produced from as early as 1967, but despite aggressive marketing they do not sell nearly as well as Anglo Barbie, even in Asian countries (Jones 1991; Urla and Swedlund 1995). The norm of the white, blonde Barbie remains intact and is virtually the only model of Barbie doll used in advertisements and editorial stories. The few articles featuring international Barbie dolls present them as exotic and distinctly foreign collectibles rather than as a legitimate alternative to the blonde version of the doll. Accordingly, I would suggest that *Barbie Magazine* appears to be largely untouched by the cultural diversity of its Australian and New Zealand readership despite obvious attempts to include a wide range of culturally diverse readers as models.

CONCLUSION

As this paper outlines, *Barbie Magazine* is a highly organised tool of disciplinary practices seeking to categorise, normalise, and order the bodies of the young readers into certain subject positions which largely conform to predictable stereotypes. The magazine, I argue, attempts to convey an image of the desiring subject in which the body of the young girl is intimately linked with the appendage of the Barbie doll. By looking like Barbie or by owning lots of Barbies the young girls enter a mystical adult world of which Barbie herself is the epicentre. While it is obvious from the pages of the magazine that resistance is possible, and indeed positive for some, I would suggest that resistance comes at a cost. Despite the protean promises of the culturally gendered body (Butler 1990; Elam 1994), the "reality" of the pages of *Barbie Magazine* illustrates a norm that is disappointingly traditional and rigorously promoted and defended. Barbie remains, I suggest, a perfect icon for the late capitalist process of becoming female, a process which is primarily achieved through the consumption of merchandise and the presentation and organisation of an appropriately gendered body (Urla and Swedlund 1995).

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NOTES

1. Urla and Swedlund (1995) note that the plastic mould from which the first Barbie was cast was designed by Jack Ryan, well known for his work in designing the Hawk and Sparrow missiles. They comment that it was with fears of "nuclear annihilation and sexually charged fantasies of the perfect bomb shelter running rampant in the American imaginary, that Barbie and her torpedo-like breasts emerged into popular culture" (280).

2. Sales figures obtained from the Barbie Magazine national advertising manager, current for May 1997.

3. Much anthropometric research has been undertaken on the actual body of the Barbie doll, examining proportions, body shape, and image (Motz 1983; Urla and Swedlund 1995; Norton et al. 1996), and surmising on possible consequences for young girls' self-esteem and health. Norton et al. (1996) compare the adult size dimensions of the doll to actual proportions of groups of adults. They conclude that the probability of such a body shape for young women is less than 1 in 100,000 and that the probability of a male body shape matching that of Ken is about 1 in 50. Indeed, the vast amount of plastic surgery undertaken by some women in order to look like Barbie illustrates the plastic impossibility that her body represents.

4. Thanks to Vicki Carrington for bringing this article to my attention.

5. Ms. magazine reported in 1979 that a Mattel marketing manager admitted that such occupations were more of a public-relations exercise and never sold very well (Leavy 1979).

6. In Australia in the 1970s my mother brought me up to believe that Barbie dolls represented the objectification of women as mere playthings to be dressed and undressed for the pleasure of men. Luckily, I didn't believe her, and this personal deprivation of Barbie ownership drove me to form friendships for many years based solely on the amount of Barbies a playmate owned. Twenty years later I am now solidly anti-Barbie, but still remember the delirious desire I felt when playing with a collection of contraband Barbies.

7. This analysis of gender thus surpasses the confines of the sex/gender binarism in which gender is seen as a culturally determined representation of biological "sex" or anatomy (see Oakley, qtd in Grimshaw 1986; Barrett 1980). The work of Grosz (1987, 1994, 1995), Butler (1990, 1993), and Elam (1994) have been seminal in the deconstruction of this binarism.

8. For example, there is extensive literature about the ways in which obese women feel that they are denied recognition as female, and thus become neutered or invisible (Orbach 1978; Brownmiller 1984; Schwartz 1986; Brumberg 1988; and Bordo 1988). Such constructions, are, of course, culturally specific.

9. In defence of Foucault, McHoul and Grace (1993) argue that to reduce Foucault's notion of the subject to that of an elementary relation between the bodily differences of men
and women is to analyse subjectivity exactly in the ways Foucault eschewed. Foucault does not believe, they suggest, that there is a global "ethos" indebted to a generalised "other."

10 The birth of Barbie in the 1950s came at a time when the teenager was a newly emergent category with an appropriately distinctive lifestyle (Urla and Swedlund 1995), involving a nascent sexuality and freedom without involving actual sex. As Peers (1996) notes, Handler had to fight hard for her concept of a doll with breasts which was found by mothers in pre-sales tests to be too sexy for little girls. Ironically, it appears that the Barbie doll herself will remain a well-developed nineteen-year-old forever: there is no place in her life for children, wrinkles, or menopause. Perhaps it is this hyper-suspension that gives Barbie her cross-generational appeal: she is never permitted to outgrow the children who play with her.

11 See Foucault (1978) for a discussion of the ways in which the confessional serves to incite subjects to tell the "truth" about themselves, providing an efficient fount of knowledge about individuals and the population at large.

12 Talking Barbies as early as 1968 sprouted sentences such as "Would you like to go shopping?" In 1994 in the US the special "Shopping Spree" Barbie doll was released with her own credit card and matching shopping bag (Fennick 1996).

13 The readers would be able to distinguish between the value of Jewel Hair Mermaid Barbie, advertised in a toy shop catalogue for A$23.99 (with a A$3 coupon) compared to a generic Barbie such as the Pretty Hearts Barbie which is A$9.99.

14 I acknowledge, of course, that Barbie Magazine is just one site for the operation of such discourses aimed at young girls: others may include television advertising and programmes, other toys and dolls, school-yard play, and family expectations.

15 Concern in countries such as India and Malaysia has been expressed over the cultural as well as anthropometric body image of Barbie. In Malaysia the Consumer Protection Agency's call for a ban on Barbie dolls prompted a furious debate in the press about the inappropriate Anglo stereotype presented by Barbie dolls. In India, a local company, Leo Toys, produces Barbie dolls with blonde hair and blue eyes as demanded by the local market although the darker haired Barbies are popular in rural areas (see Ducille 1994; Consumers' Association of Penang 1996).

16 Ducille (1994) explores the ways that efforts at internationalising Barbie can be reduced to an illustration of the contemporary commodity culture that gives us "the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference" (51-52) (see also Urla and Swedlund 1995). The Indian, African, and Asian Barbie dolls are the same dolls with a different skin tone and accessories rather than a genuine attempt at reflecting ethnic diversity (Ducille 1994). An example of this discourse is the article in the December/January 1996/97 edition of Barbie Magazine presenting a variety of international Barbies pictured with a map of the world. Readers are reminded that "these Barbies are a great way to start you [sic] very own Barbie Collection." Cultural difference is effectively reduced to a collectable commodity.


