

Process Paper:

I have always been interested in feminism and loved researching it and learning more about it. Last year, I did a research paper on child beauty pageants and became very intrigued by insecurities and eating disorders in children. I wanted to do my project on something similar but on a greater historical level. In July, I watched the Barbie movie and loved its take on gender roles. At first, I wanted to look into how Barbie broke the stereotype that girls can only be housewives, but after doing research I found more evidence showing how Barbie made girls more insecure. Barbie is a timeless yet controversial doll that broke records and changed what it means to be a girl in the United States.

I decided to start my research from the beginning of the Barbie timeline. I found most information in research papers done by concerned child psychologists. I decided to do more research on the time period and circumstances surrounding the doll. Due to how commercial and non-traditional my topic was, I had little to no luck in finding databases or textbooks that would be useful. This was challenging because the sources my school recommended weren't much help. I knew it would be a struggle to find a lot of information and sources but I continued with my research and found archives that helped expand my ideas.

I debated either doing a poster or a website. I think my two strongest qualities are my writing and creativity so although I knew it would be harder to learn how to use the website builder, I decided having more words was important to me. I first made a layout using Google Slides. Each slide was a different page on the website and I included all the photos and text I would put on the final website. NHDWebCentral was intimidating at first, but after watching many YouTube videos and reading the tutorial on the NHD website, I began to try to format my website in a way that was aesthetically appealing and informative.

In a time of housewives and gender stereotypes, the majority of the dolls reflected these same stigmas onto children, specifically girls. While trying to change this sexist narrative, Ruth Handler accidentally created the most controversial toy of the century. Parents were outraged then, and the outrage continues now. Rather than empowering girls, it introduced body image issues to children, causing detrimental results.

Toys are a key part of growing up and I think that often people don't realize how much children's minds develop in their childhood. When you put a skinny doll in front of a girl and tell her that she's rich, an astronaut, a teacher, a model, etc, they absorb all of that and engrave it in their minds. We've been surrounding girls with these dolls for years and it's time to realize the effects it can have on the psyche of an already insecure girl. Childhood should be about imagination, not insecurity and eating disorders.