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Performing Motherhood

The institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not "reality" but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives. —ADRIENNE RICH¹

IN A 1960 EPISODE ENTITLED “BEAVER’S I.Q.,” THE YOUNGEST Cleaver, title character of the long-running family television show *Leave It to Beaver* (1957–63), tells his mother that girls have it lucky because they “don’t have to be smart—they don’t have to get jobs or anything—alls they gotta do is get married.” June Cleaver, a paragon of 1950s-style maternal virtue, was the cornerstone of her idealized American nuclear family. Her husband went to work, her two boys to school and on dates, and all the while June held down the fort. The house was always clean, food was on the table, and June, the consummate wife and mother, was there to greet her family when they returned home.

In recent decades, the nuclear family—composed of mother, father, and child(ren)—has broadened to include “nontraditional” structures. Adoption, unwed parents, and LGBT and interracial couples have become increasingly common and accepted components of alternative families. Motherhood, conversely, has remained stubbornly narrow in definition and ideology. The characterization of motherhood as a set of presumably natural or predetermined functions limits the ways a woman may perform her role as mother, should she choose to accept it.²

Both motherhood and the nuclear family are socially constructed, regardless of biology. American “family values” have been

complicated by the legal practice of adoption, as well as by the rapidly increasing incidence of divorce and single-parent households. Illegitimacy, once a dirty word, has given way to television shows that turn teen mothers into reality stars. An unwed mother at one point would have been shamed into putting her child up for adoption, but is no longer ostracized should she choose to keep the baby. This is not to say, however, that the decision to raise a child outside of marriage isn't still contentious, even if it is no longer experienced to the same extent as a shameful family secret.³

According to a Pew Research Center study released in November 2010, of the nearly three thousand people surveyed 99 percent defined a family as a married couple with children.⁴ Only 80 percent considered an unmarried couple and their offspring a family, and as few as 63 percent recognized families headed by couples who happened to be the same sex. Counter-intuitively, those surveyed considered single parents with children to be closer to their definition of "family" than were households headed by unwed couples. The absence of a marriage license was enough to sway those being polled in a different direction. However, when asked if they considered single mothers "bad for society," 70 percent said yes.⁵

Within the ideological framework of contemporary visual representations, mothers may either succeed or fail in their designated maternal post, with very little room in between. The roles of adoptive versus biological mothers, however, function differently, as the former must twice perform her part; first to overcome any fears of inadequacy or failure at not having produced a biological child, and second in order that culturally predetermined expectations of motherhood be met. Echoes of June Cleaver still reverberate fifty years later, regardless of the way a family is created. Rather than conforming to traditional models that situate motherhood within the heteronorma-

tive confines of a bygone nuclear family, alternative constructs may open a space that allows socially determined definitions of motherhood to expand and/or fracture.

In her book *Bodies That Matter*, philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler states:

*[Performativity] cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject . . . controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance.*⁶

It is not the mother who enacts her role as such and deliberately performs it. Rather, she does so as a reaction to motherhood as reflected and consumed by society. The same can be said for the way in which a girl relates to her baby doll. The reiteration of images and narratives that celebrate a specific mode of caretaking contribute to how motherhood is viewed and, in turn, performed. Role-play with dolls helps to confirm the ritualized production of which Butler speaks, reiterating the importance of motherhood within the normative social construct of family.

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BARBIE HERSELF—THE ONLY DOLL IN MATTEL'S LINE THAT HAS never been renamed or removed from production for any period of time—is untraditional in the way that she has "lived" her life.⁷ Since her 1959 inception, Barbie has been criticized as a poor role model for young girls, most notably for her unrealistic body measurements. Still, in many ways Barbie is a modern woman who balks at certain social conventions.

Rather than marry and "settle down," Barbie lives alone in her

FIGURE 1—*Going Home Barbie*



dream house and has multiple cars, all of which she bought with her own hard-earned money. She doesn't just spend on herself; Barbie is a philanthropist who has supported multiple causes, including the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the International Fund for Animal Welfare.⁸ She has had more than one hundred careers, including doctor, aerobics instructor, paratrooper, astronaut, ballerina, and ambassador for world peace. Unable to get Ken to commit, she broke up with him in 2004 and went on to date an Australian surfer named Blaine.

While the doll has been marketed as an independent, well-educated woman—it takes many degrees to be a surgeon/architect/paleontologist—one job that Barbie hasn't officially had is mother.⁹ The doll, which allows for girls to role-play any number of fantasies, nonetheless fails to model the supposedly natural duty specific to the female experience. Though Barbie may engage in maternal behavior, as babysitter or “baby doctor,” she herself, for all intents and purposes, is barren. However, for a select few, Barbie gets to adopt from China.¹⁰

In 2001, Mattel began manufacturing “Going Home Barbie” (GHB) on a donation basis (*fig. 1*). The doll, made exclusively for the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou, China, is available only to adoptive parents who stay there as they await an exit visa for their new child.¹¹ At the five-star hotel, once located near the U.S. consulate, Mattel runs a play center filled with the brand's toys. The Barbie is placed on the parents' pillow, like a mint, and is taken home as a souvenir of the time they spent in their adopted child's homeland. Yet the doll symbolizes more than the Chinese adoption itself; it is something akin to a trophy for the new mother, and a familiar icon that celebrates her choice.

Meant to represent the adoptive mother, GHB is white (in varying shades of tan), and conforms to the impossible measurements of

every other Barbie doll produced. There is no “Going Home Ken.”¹² Each year, new Going Home Barbies are issued, and each year they are Caucasian. Some have red hair, others are blonde, and each doll is dressed stylishly.¹³ These Barbies aren’t from “bad” neighborhoods with low-income housing or trailer parks, nor do they appear to be from farms in middle America. GHB is cosmopolitan, outfitted with jaunty hats or shawls and sassy dresses.

The child in Barbie’s arms is gender ambiguous, with black hair and vaguely Asian features.¹⁴ The vast majority of children being adopted from China are girls, so it’s not surprising that the babies lean toward a more feminine appearance. Despite its accuracy, China has grown increasingly sensitive to the fact that the majority of children described as orphans and adopted from the country are girls, and it is often recommended that adoptive parents maintain a low profile.

According to the U.S. Department of State:

*Adoption is also a sensitive subject in China. It is therefore advisable for any person interested in adopting a child from China to act with discretion and decorum. High-profile attention to adoption in China could curtail or eliminate altogether adoption of Chinese children by persons from countries, including the United States, that have caused adoption to become the subject of public attention.*¹⁵

In recent years, the country has tightened its laws in regard to international adoption in response to its increasing visibility and number of applicants. Singles, gays and lesbians, the mentally or physically disabled, anyone with a body mass index of 40 or higher, and those over fifty and under thirty years old, are all barred from adopting.¹⁶ Going Home Barbie may be a kind of trophy for those who adopt from China and stay at the White Swan Hotel, but the doll herself would not be eligible. Barbie is now over fifty, though in the

ageless land of make-believe she is in her late teens or early twenties; either way, she doesn’t fit the age requirements.

New mom Going Home Barbie casually holds her baby at her waist, as if it were a jacket or some accessory rather than a child. Conversely, Bedtime Barbie, sold with her baby sister Krissy and a nursery room, holds the baby close to her chest in a way that more closely mimics how a real child ought to be held. Likely unintentional, this subtle difference may imply a certain lack of maternal instinct on the part of GHB and the new mother with whom she goes home. Why is Barbie’s adopted child held so indifferently, unlike little sister Krissy? In the case of Going Home Barbie, her new, unidentified baby seems more like a prop, unlike Krissy, who is named on the box and held with care.

The box in which Going Home Barbie is housed features a picket fence, a mailbox that reads “Going Home,” and a brick building with a front door and vines that frame mother and child. The baby, now officially Barbie’s, is free to go home with its white, Western mother, and enjoy all the privilege those surroundings denote. The picket fence, often a white one, has come to symbolize an American ideal. The fence that encloses Going Home Barbie harkens back to the one surrounding the home occupied by the Cleavers, the idyllic mid-century television family in *Leave It to Beaver* (fig. 2).

Within the picket fence there is room for a yard, a dog, and a family: symbols of middle-class suburban life. The fence offers them safety from that which is on the other side—that is, what is outside of the family unit. This icon is a specifically suburban one. Cities are often cramped, with apartment buildings and people on top of one another. The picket fence, and the home within it, presents an image of safety and stability, and a level of comfort that, as a child in an orphanage, Barbie’s new baby has likely not experienced. Still, unlike Bedtime Barbie, who is in the relative comfort of a nursery room,

FIGURE 2—*The Cleaver house*



GHB and her new child remain outside the brick house; they may be on the “right” side of the picket fence, but they’re not yet inside the home. They are “going home” but they haven’t yet made it all the way.

Over the years Barbie’s family has expanded to include siblings and cousins, as well as friends of various ethnic backgrounds.¹⁷ Barbie has often acted as babysitter to one or more of her little sisters, including baby Krissy, though she herself has never been marketed as a mother, presumably because she and Ken are not married. The single exception to this rule is Going Home Barbie. Still, the various baby sisters with whom Barbie is sold may not be recognized as such by those playing with the doll, but rather as her children.

Regardless of whether or not Krissy is seen as child or sister, the fact that she exists suggests that Barbie’s ability to nurture is independent of her relationship with a male partner.¹⁸ Ken has always acted as accessory to Barbie, and she even “broke up” with him on February 14, 2004, after forty-three years of togetherness.¹⁹ While Ken may be less popular with young girls who play with dolls,²⁰ in the real world of Chinese adoption, Going Home Barbie needs Ken in order to take her baby home to the house with the picket fence. Though only one parent is required to travel to the country, both parents are necessary in order to proceed with the adoption process.²¹ All too often, however, the father—whether biological or adoptive—is left out of the adoption narrative. GHB reiterates the seeming invisibility of the father’s participation in the adoption process while simultaneously celebrating Barbie’s new role as mother.

Ironically, some parents who have adopted from China have petitioned Mattel to make Going Home Barbie available to everyone adopting from the country. They feel somehow shorted in not receiving this doll as a token of their time in the country. The desire to own a Going Home Barbie reflects the way in which society consumes the

idea of motherhood. The new mother will have the Barbie to cherish as a memento of the adoption, and will be able to pass the doll down to her daughter when she gets older. Mattel likely recognized GHB as a valuable, targeted marketing tool: by making the Barbie available only to those who stay at the White Swan, the doll becomes more desirable because of its exclusivity, and in turn the hotel profits.

There are no official pictures of Going Home Barbie available; only those posted on the Internet by adoptive parents who have stayed at the White Swan Hotel.²² It seems that the majority of those who choose to keep the doll leave it in its box, untouched. In March 2010, an adoptive mother in Seattle created the website *The Going Home Barbie Project*.²³ Devoted to the doll and the families who have brought it home, the site encourages others to share their stories and pictures, though there are very few posts and no recent activity. Of the handful of testimonials from parents who have contributed to the project, only one speaks of a discomfort with the doll and what it may represent to both mother and child. This same parent is the only one to let the doll be removed from the box, while the others describe how their daughters want to play with the Barbies but are not allowed. While these mothers' dolls and other toys were likely put aside long ago, GHB, with her Chinese baby, is no longer something to be used in role-play, but rather is a reward for having role-played.

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UNLIKE BARBIE, WHO HAS DATED KEN FOR DECADES BUT NEVER married, her oldest friend Midge is part of Mattel's "Happy Family" line of dolls. Midge is married to Alan and they have three-year-old son Ryan and newborn Nikki. In 2002, a pregnant Midge was sold in stores nationwide (*fig. 3*).²⁴ Pregnant Midge was quickly pulled from the shelves of Wal-Marts across the country when parents com-

FIGURE 3—Pregnant Midge



plained that the doll was inappropriate. The problem was not that the toy had a baby, but that she was pregnant. Parents argued that the doll promoted teen pregnancy, despite the fact that Midge and her Happy Family had included two children prior to this 2002 addition.

While the fantasy of a family is considered acceptable role-play, a pregnant doll, however inaccurately portrayed—Midge’s stomach opens to reveal a baby—somehow becomes too real. For the parents of these girls and the manufacturers of their fantasies, even make-believe has its limits; Barbie may babysit but may not have a child of her own as a single mother, and Midge may help form a nuclear family, but the singularly female act of giving birth is deemed inappropriately “authentic.”

In the case of baby dolls, authentic or “lifelike” creations may be considered suitable, or even preferable for children to play with. FAO Schwarz, the legendary toy store located on Fifth Avenue in New York City, is home to the Newborn Nursery. Here, Lee Middleton baby dolls await adoption for \$99.99, and children, often swayed in one direction or the other by their parents, choose the right one for them.²⁵ Mimicking a “real” hospital nursery, the Newborn department is painted in pastels, and the infants are lined up in tidy rows of incubators. The employees, dressed as nurses, help the children select a baby doll. According to its website:

*The Newborn Nursery™ Care Center is a feast for the senses. As you enter the area, you’ll hear sounds of happy baby noises cooing from the nursery viewing area. . . . Once you do make your selection, a sales associate, dressed like a real nurse, will help you put on your hospital gown. Papers are then completed with the baby’s name, address, and birth date.*²⁶

The new parent is given an application and asked to answer questions to ensure that she is ready to take care of a baby. She is then

presented with the newborn’s birth certificate, which includes the child’s date and time of birth, its sex, measurements, and finally, a space provided for the parent’s name—singular. Just as Ken was left out of Going Home Barbie’s adoption, so too is the father absent in this process. Likewise, the biological mother is absent from each doll’s narrative.

Since Going Home Barbie’s child is orphaned—or presumed to be—she needn’t worry that her baby’s Chinese parents will come to reclaim their child. Lee Middleton babies, however, dwell in an incubator of ambiguity. The process is described as an adoption, however the experience more closely resembles a birth. According to the website, the room in which this takes place is painted blue, with letters above a bench that read “Center” in colorful building blocks.²⁷ The new mother sits on a white wooden bench and wears her hospital gown. To the left is what appears to be a changing table, presumably just a prop, as none of these newborns will ever need their diapers changed. The nurse places the child in its mother’s arms, and proceeds to take a picture of the happy new parent. It is then suggested that the girl “cuddle and rock gently” her new baby to sleep as she thinks of a name.

Much has been done here to perform the space of a hospital’s maternity ward. Individual incubators are behind protective glass, which allows prospective parents to gaze at all the newborns. Once a doll is selected, a nurse and child-size hospital gown complete the process, suggesting that this is an enactment of a biological birth, not an adoption as stated.²⁸ What is missing, as in the case of Midge’s Happy Family, is what actually takes place in a hospital. Just as parents reacted strongly to a pregnant Barbie doll, so too might they react if their child were given a fake belly to wear around the nursery.

Once the Lee Middleton adoption takes place, the doll’s previous history is erased. The birth certificate reflects the day and time that it

was adopted/born to the girl. It is also at this point, when the child says that she's ready to take the baby, that she places herself in the position of caretaker, perhaps establishing for herself a lifelong role.

The Newborn Nursery website has a page devoted to “new parents” (fig. 4). The children are never called mothers, even though there are only little girls pictured. If the experience is meant to mimic an adoption, the choice in language could suggest that one is only a mother if she gives birth. Or such a direct reference to the role of “mother”—like Pregnant Midge—is too explicit for a young girl even if she is treating the doll as her baby. In the pictures of the new parents with their Middleton dolls, everyone appears to be white. It would seem that those pictured represent the majority of girls adopting the dolls.²⁹ The Middleton dolls themselves, offered on the Newborn Nursery website, are more diverse.³⁰ Still, of the twenty-seven dolls currently listed, only one is described as having “dark skin” (doll farthest left) or “medium skin” (doll farthest right), despite the fact that the dolls are available in varying shades.³¹

While the new parent picture provides proof of the girl's accepted position as caretaker, and though she may say she is ready to have the baby doll, there are no instructions that accompany it. The site simply claims, “Caring for your baby is easy.” It may be just a doll, and leaving one's Lee Middleton newborn outside in the sun to melt won't result in a visit from child protective services; but there is nonetheless a conditioning that occurs when a girl agrees to care for her plastic baby. It is at this point that she begins to perform her role as caretaker, in preparation for the moment when she may become a parent. The child's own mother assists in situating her daughter within this institutionalized space of a fictional motherhood, wherein the child is encouraged to enact a supposed maternal instinct toward her baby doll.

FIGURE 4—Parents and babies from *The Newborn Nursery*



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IN A 2008 EPISODE OF THE RADIO PROGRAM *THIS AMERICAN LIFE* entitled “Matchmakers,” writer Elna Baker recounts her time as an employee at FAO Schwarz. Baker worked in the Newborn department as a “nurse,” and positions her experience as one dealing exclusively with white, middle- and upper-class mothers and children. According to Baker, white baby dolls were the most popular and easily “adopted,” followed by Asian and then Hispanic infants.³² Black dolls were the least adoptable. There was also a “defective” baby doll, which they named Nubbins, that became something of a mascot for the employees. This doll had had an accident during the manufacturing process. Its hands and feet had molded together, creating plastic flippers.

Nubbins had curly red hair and was top heavy, so he always fell over. Nubbins wasn’t available to adopt. Instead, he sat on a shelf behind the counter, and sometimes when Baker and her coworkers were bored, they’d play a game with him.³³ When the store was busy, the nurses would drop Nubbins in front of customers, and everyone would gasp in unison, despite knowing it was just a doll. The realistic setting, as well as the fact that Middleton dolls are lifelike in both weight and appearance, seems to have created a stopgap for a real nursery.

According to Baker, the dolls gained in popularity when the stars of MTV’s *Rich Girls* came into the nursery with a camera crew.³⁴ When the episode aired, mothers from the Upper East Side flocked to FAO Schwarz to get Middleton dolls for their daughters. There were lines out the door to adopt the dolls, and within a week all the white babies were sold out; the nursery was left with incubators full of minority babies. Baker’s story is indicative of the racism that exists within the real adoption system.³⁵

Middle- and upper-class white families who shopped in the Newborn Nursery were not interested in their daughters adopting dolls of color. “Do you have any other shades of babies?” the mothers would ask. While the children didn’t appear as concerned with the ethnicity of their baby dolls, their mothers were concerned about what it would “look” like.³⁶ One mother in particular, when offered a Hispanic baby, asked what people would think if they saw her daughter carrying around a “dark” baby doll. The parents who objected to minority baby dolls would do so in subtle, almost embarrassed tones, afraid to blatantly state their racial prejudice. However, this anxiety in regard to the visibility of a transracial doll adoption left parents’ biases exposed. Nurses would tell the parents that there was a *whiter* selection of babies online, having been instructed to recommend the *wider* selection available on the website.

Faced with only minority babies to adopt, parents would spot Nubbins and ask to see him. Once they realized he was defective, they would change their minds. The nurses made a bet. Who would sell first: the minority babies or Nubbins. The Asian babies were the first to sell out, followed by the Hispanic babies. Eventually all that was left was Nubbins and incubators full of black babies. One mother, loaded down with bags from Bergdorf Goodman, demanded to know if it was a joke. “Where are all the white babies?” she asked. Then she saw Nubbins. Baker demonstrated, to full effect, the deficiency of Nubbins, and the mother said she’d take it.

Baker asked the questions she asked every prospective “parent” (that is, the child): did she promise to care for it, read to it. The child answered no, and when asked what she wanted to name it, the girl said “Stupid.” Veronica (the “grandmother’s” choice of name) would be adopted, but it was clear that she wouldn’t be loved. A white infant with disabilities may be preferable to a minority baby, but that didn’t

mean it was wanted. Baby Veronica (née Stupid, née Nubbins) went home with the mother and daughter, leaving the nurses with only black dolls to adopt out.

Though Lee Middleton Dolls are primarily purchased by a particular demographic and are arguably the most realistic representations of newborns on the market, any doll may serve to help situate the child in her role as caretaker. Baby dolls are often sold with pacifiers or bottles, and some even wet their diapers. The purpose is to nurture a girl's maternal "instinct"—that is, to teach her to nurture. Going Home Barbie reiterates this supposedly natural inclination for the new mother who has already undergone her conditioning, and supports her choice to enact this role, even if not biologically.

The danger is not in the child's desire to own a Barbie or a baby doll, but rather in the ways in which this desire is supported and encouraged strategically. Little boys are discouraged from playing with dolls, thus perhaps suppressing any inclination to nurture, while little girls are rewarded for their participation in caring for others. Establishing their role as caretakers from an early age, girls are instructed in the ways of motherhood through role-play with their dolls. Conditioned to believe that this is a natural progression, motherhood may be viewed as inevitable, rather than as a choice that a woman makes long after she has done away with her dolls.

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IN AN INTERVIEW WITH *MORE* MAGAZINE IN APRIL 2011, FORTY-three-year-old actor Kate Walsh said, "I feel like a loser [for not having kids]. I would definitely love to be a parent. But I definitely don't think I want to do it on my own."³⁷ It is unclear who or what precisely has led Walsh to feel like a "loser" simply because she doesn't have a child. Fifteen years her junior, I would imagine it is the undue pres-

sure from the media, as well as friends and acquaintances, heaped upon women in our childbearing years. In addition to an increasing number of women in the workforce, women receiving postsecondary degrees now outnumber men.³⁸ Still, expected to succeed academically and professionally, women in our twenties, thirties, and even forties are also saddled with familial expectations. Pregnant too young, a girl could become the newest cast member of *Teen Mom*. Too old, a woman may be left with only "reborn" dolls to care for.

I cannot say definitively what is outside a nuclear family model, but I believe there are myriad ways in which to create lasting bonds. In February of 2011, singer Rufus Wainwright announced the birth of his daughter, Viva, whose biological mother is Lorca Cohen. The two will raise the child together, along with Wainwright's partner, "deputy dad" Jorn Weisbrodt. It is nontraditional families such as this that may help the nuclear model to expand and include different definitions of family and caretaking.

Though the desire to procreate may be biological—and vital to propagating the human race—the act of becoming a mother is not, in and of itself, a natural state of being. It is learned through real practice, not role-play with dolls. Barbie and her comrades merely act as conduits between the girls who play with them and the larger society they will join as adults, encouraging them toward gender-specific roles that remain somewhat static. In lieu of venerating or vilifying mothers and perpetuating a construction of family that, no matter how unique, is absorbed into traditional definitions, a more flexible vision of motherhood allows for what is seen as "normal" in the American zeitgeist to be brought into question.

While alternative constructs of family and motherhood are often criticized—*How can a child be raised without a father/mother? What makes a mother?*—the more these questions are addressed through

the visibility of alternative models of family building, the more open such definitions can become. However, so long as women continue to bear the brunt of responsibility as caretakers—at least publicly—and are expected to perform as such, only so much can be done in the way of visible change. As attitudes shift toward a greater acceptance of different family models, it is necessary that they also embrace “unconventional” views of motherhood, including single mothers and fathers’ roles, lest we continue on in a perpetual cycle of baby dolls, tabloid drama, and endless iterations of the Cleaver clan.

Regardless of the myriad alternatives available to us, the conversation often returns to *when are you going to get married, settle down, have kids?* It is not a question of “good” or “bad” mothers, but rather why, after so much progress has been made in the last fifty years, is the definition of motherhood still so constrained? Whether a woman chooses to work and raise a child, become a stay-at-home mom, or not have children at all should not be subject to public debate or scrutiny. Nor should little girls be taught to nurture as if it’s unavoidable. In order for American culture’s long-standing anxieties regarding the family to be exposed, understood, and transformed, notions of motherhood and caretaking must be distinct from one another, and not considered part and parcel of the female experience.

Notes

- 1 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1995).
- 2 This paper will deal almost exclusively with a woman’s role as caretaker. While I will address the role of single fathers briefly, there is a distinct and visible separation between female and male caretakers.
3. Maternity homes still exist today, and many young women continue to feel judged and under pressure to make certain decisions in regard to their pregnancy. This will be discussed later in the paper.
- 4 Pew Social Trends Staff, “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” Pew

Research Center Publications, November 18, 2010, accessed February 24, 2011, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2010/11/18/the-decline-of-marriage-and-rise-of-new-families/2/#ii-overview>.

- 5 I will discuss this statistic in greater detail later in this essay.
- 6 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- 7 Other Barbie dolls, including Midge, have gone through various name changes or been discontinued altogether.
- 8 Barbie Media. “History.” Mattel Inc. 2010, accessed December 15, 2010, <http://barbiemedia.com/?subcat=4>.
- 9 In the popular narrative of the Mattel doll, Barbie is childless. Going Home Barbie is the only one to have a child of her own, rather than act as babysitter. However, GHB is not included on the Barbie website; her storyline is absent from the doll’s history.
- 10 Going Home Barbie is not available to the general public, and she is excluded from Barbie’s history on the official Mattel website. Still, within the doll’s “life” she has adopted, even if this story line is reserved for a select few.
- 11 Except among collectors, who are willing to spend hundreds of dollars on rare dolls, Going Home Barbie is not widely known. As of March 2011, there are nineteen pending eBay auctions for a Going Home Barbie. The “buy it now” price is \$281.25, down from \$375 for the most expensive listing. At time of publication there were no active bids for any of the dolls.
- 12 There are countless papers devoted to the deconstruction and criticism of Barbie (her measurements, skin color, etc.), so for the purposes of this essay I will not focus on the myriad issues and concerns raised by this iconic doll.
- 13 Whether or not they’re actually stylish is a matter of opinion, however they’re meant to seem stylish. Additionally, there don’t appear to be any brunette Going Home Barbies—at least not according to posted pictures—only blondes and redheads.
- 14 In later editions, the child has become decidedly more feminine looking.
- 15 “China.” Intercountry Adoption, Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State (2010), accessed October 10, 2010, http://adoption.state.gov/country_information/country_specific_info.php?country-select=china.
- 16 The age limit is increased to fifty-five for couples applying to adopt a special needs child.
- 17 Krissy, Kelly (later renamed Stacie), Skipper, and Todd, are among the family members who intermittently appear. Additionally Barbie has friends such as Midge, Hispanic Teresa, “Oriental” Barbie (later renamed Miko) and Christie, Barbie’s first

- African American friend.
- 18 Ken's baby brother Tommy was introduced in 1996 and sold with Big Brother Ken. However, the majority of Tommy dolls are sold separately (e.g., Halloween Tommy and Sailor Tommy).
 - 19 Barbie's official website offers the entire backstory of the doll, from her upbringing and relationship with Ken to the many careers she has had. After a trial separation, Barbie and Ken announced their impending marriage via Facebook on Valentine's Day 2011. Now that Barbie is officially engaged, the doll will likely be sold in various bridal and wedding scenarios and, after some time, we may expect to see Barbie sold with her own baby. After fifty years as an independent woman, Barbie has conformed to the heteronormative standards of contemporary American society. See "She said yes! Barbie and Ken rekindle their epic romance," Barbie Media, February 14, 2011, accessed February 20, 2011, <http://www.barbiemedia.com/?cat=16>.
 - 20 Every adult woman I've spoken to has expressed a strong feeling that, as girls, they cared little for Ken as anything but ornament for Barbie.
 - 21 China was an appealing country from which to adopt for single women who couldn't adopt in the States. By 2009, however, there was a major shift in adoption policies, and now it's almost impossible for single parents to adopt.
 - 22 In all my research, I didn't find any websites or blogs that were written by or included the adoptive father.
 - 23 Melanie Curtright, the woman who created the blog, adopted her son from China in 2007. She posted a picture of herself and her son, Eli, with Going Home Barbie, and wrote "Do you know how hard it is to get a normal picture of an 8-year-old BOY holding a BARBIE?" While she doesn't discuss her son's feelings toward the doll, it seems that he isn't interested in playing with it. She also states that she wishes she had been given a brown-haired Barbie, rather than a blonde one. Her sixth-edition Going Home Barbie is blonde and holds a baby girl (by 2007, the baby had begun wearing skirts); yet despite having no resemblance to mother or son, Curtright won't take the doll out of the box and still seems to view it as representative of her time at in China.
 - 24 Like Going Home Barbie, pregnant Midge is a collector's item. The doll sells on Amazon.com for \$100+, and as of March 2011 a rare African American Midge was listed on eBay for \$260.
 - 25 I wish to acknowledge but not elaborate on the studies done by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s. A great deal has already been written about the doll experiments, wherein they found that black children preferred to play with white dolls and considered black "bad" and "ugly" while the color white was "good" and "pretty." The research was used to argue that segregation in schools was unconsti-

tutional. The study was re-created in 2006 by filmmaker Kiri Davis for the documentary *A Girl Like Me*. It was re-created yet again in May 2010 by the University of Chicago and shown on CNN in a segment called "Black or White: Kids on Race." Here, the study showed that white children had a high rate of "white bias," whereas black children as a whole had some bias toward whiteness but not nearly as much. Each study fails to account for any other person of color. For more than seventy years now, it has remained a black and white debate.

- 26 Newborn Nursery official website, accessed January 5, 2011, <http://www.newbornnursery.com/about.php?PHPSESSID=717c37869fa25035c8e5c3c64f29b875> (site discontinued).
- 27 What precedes "center" isn't clear, however one could imagine it refers to "newborn center" or "new mom center."
- 28 The white bench and changing table, however, denote a home nursery, not a hospital room. This further blurs the line between birth versus adoption. If they were in a hospital, there would be a bed, not a bench, and if they were home, there would be no nurse or hospital gown. Because it is fantasy—albeit one that is based in reality and meant to mimic it—perhaps it doesn't matter how accurate the setting actually is. Still, most adoptive parents aren't present at their child's birth, and therefore do not experience the act of dressing in a hospital gown to hold their new baby. In the case of open adoptions, wherein the biological and adoptive parents meet, all four may actually be present at the child's birth. However, closed adoptions differ in that there is no contact between the two families, and the adoption often takes place outside of a hospital setting.
- 29 In my research, I was unable to find any statistics, sales or otherwise, in regard to the demographic who purchases the dolls. However, the images available on the website, as well as the related episode of *This American Life*, which I will discuss, indicate that the majority of those shopping at the Newborn Nursery are white, and likely middle- to upper-class.
- 30 There are inconsistencies between the Newborn Nursery and FAO Schwarz websites. FAO offers more than one African American doll (though only one is called so, the other two are simply "brown hair and brown eyes"), as well as two Asian baby dolls. The toy store also sells them for \$84.99 rather than \$99.99.
- 31 I selected these five dolls to show the range of skin color and facial expressions. It may be worth noting that the only dark-skinned doll is wide eyed and looks surprised, for whatever reason. Additionally, the first and fourth doll appear to have been made with the same mold; only the hair and eye color have been changed.
- 32 The same is true of white infants in real adoptions.
- 33 The object of the game was to get the "nurse" to break character while she was with

- a prospective “parent” by doing something horrible with Nubbins. Baker would rock the doll while singing a lullaby and run his head into cabinets and walls.
- 34 A reality show starring Tommy Hilfiger’s daughter that aired on MTV in the fall of 2003 and winter of 2004.
- 35 By no means do I intend to imply that the entire system and those involved are racist. However, there is no question as to the fact that racism does indeed exist within the process of adoption. White children are most in demand and least in supply. By the 1960s, with the advent of birth control pills and the country’s shift toward a more accepting view of single and unwed mothers, there were fewer healthy white babies to adopt, and so white adoptive families began to consider children of other ethnicities and children from abroad. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) stated in 1958 that children would be integrated more easily into families whose racial characteristics were the same. Within ten years, however, in response to the decline of available white infants, the CWLA amended their stance to say that some families could handle children whose ethnicities were different from their own.
- 36 Margy Rochlin, “Practice Makes Perfect,” *More* (March, 2011), accessed April 2, 2011, <http://www.more.com/entertainment/celebrities-movies-tv-music/practice-makes-perfect-o>.
- 37 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Condition of Education, 2010*, accessed April 2, 2011, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=72>.