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# AP<sup>®</sup> Research Academic Paper

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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AP® Research — Academic Paper 2021 Scoring Guidelines

The Response...				
Score of 1 Report on Existing Knowledge	Score of 2 Report on Existing Knowledge with Simplistic Use of a Research Method	Score of 3 Ineffectual Argument for a New Understanding	Score of 4 Well-Supported, Articulate Argument Conveying a New Understanding	Score of 5 Rich Analysis of a New Understanding Addressing a Gap in the Research Base
Presents an overly broad topic of inquiry.	Presents a topic of inquiry with narrowing scope or focus, that is NOT carried through either in the method or in the overall line of reasoning.	Carries the focus or scope of a topic of inquiry through the method <b>AND</b> overall line of reasoning, even though the focus or scope might still be narrowing.	Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.	Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.
Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works <b>OR</b> through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works <b>OR</b> through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	Situates a topic of inquiry within relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives, although connections to some works may be unclear.	Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives <b>AND</b> logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.	Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives <b>AND</b> logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.
Describes a search and report process.	Describes a nonreplicable research method <b>OR</b> provides an oversimplified description of a method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	Describes a reasonably replicable research method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry.	Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry.
Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	Conveys a new understanding or conclusion, with an underdeveloped line of reasoning <b>OR</b> insufficient evidence.	Supports a new understanding or conclusion through a logically organized line of reasoning <b>AND</b> sufficient evidence. The limitations and/or implications, if present, of the new understanding or conclusion are oversimplified.	Justifies a new understanding or conclusion through a logical progression of inquiry choices, sufficient evidence, explanation of the limitations of the conclusion, and an explanation of the implications to the community of practice.
Generally communicates the student’s ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	Generally communicates the student’s ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	Competently communicates the student’s ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	Competently communicates the student’s ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	Enhances the communication of the student’s ideas through organization, use of design elements, conventions of grammar, style, mechanics, and word precision, with few to no errors.
Cites <b>AND/OR</b> attributes sources (in bibliography/ works cited and/or in-text), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline-specific style.	Cites <b>AND/OR</b> attributes sources (in bibliography/ works cited and/or in-text), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline-specific style.	Cites <b>AND</b> attributes sources, using a discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited <b>AND</b> in-text), with few errors or inconsistencies.	Cites <b>AND</b> attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited <b>AND</b> in-text), with few to no errors.	Cites <b>AND</b> attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited <b>AND</b> in-text), with few to no errors.

## Academic Paper

### Overview

This performance task was intended to assess students' ability to conduct scholarly and responsible research and articulate an evidence-based argument that clearly communicates the conclusion, solution, or answer to their stated research question. More specifically, this performance task was intended to assess students' ability to:

- Generate a focused research question that is situated within or connected to a larger scholarly context or community;
- Explore relationships between and among multiple works representing multiple perspectives within the scholarly literature related to the topic of inquiry;  
Articulate what approach, method, or process they have chosen to use to address their research question, why they have chosen that approach to answering their question, and how they employed it;
- Develop and present their own argument, conclusion, or new understanding while acknowledging its limitations and discussing implications;
- Support their conclusion through the compilation, use, and synthesis of relevant and significant evidence generated by their research;
- Use organizational and design elements to effectively convey the paper's message;
- Consistently and accurately cite, attribute, and integrate the knowledge and work of others, while distinguishing between the student's voice and that of others;
- Generate a paper in which word choice and syntax enhance communication by adhering to established conventions of grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Barbie-ism: the Evolution of Barbie Movies Since 2001

AP Research

May 20, 2021

Word count: 4081

## Literature Review

The original Barbie doll was first introduced in 1959 by Ruth Handler; named after her daughter Barbara. Handler saw a gap in children's toys, the market at the time was primarily targeted towards young boys and the most successful girl's toys were paper dolls. Handler devised a "three-dimensional, sharply dressed version of these paper commodities" (Handler). The paper dolls at the time would soon have a newer, redesigned competitor. While facing a lot of criticism for the redesigned toy from its own company Mattel and competitors, the Barbie doll would later become Mattel's best-selling toy for years (Weissman). The initial introduction of this doll marks the beginning of what would be the "world's most iconized doll" (Lord and Weissman). Barbie would continue to become a success for decades and would later enter other mediums to sell the brand including shows, video games, and movies (Lord). The success of Barbie is due to her uniqueness and ability to represent an individual. Little girls can find themselves using Barbie as a role model and find their own identity in the character. Her marketing is geared towards helping children find their potential and develop a sense of independence. This branding worked, however, one aspect of her brand was lacking. Barbie's 2001 entrance into the cinematic sphere was met with a comparatively dulled response to the plastic counterpart.

Producing television and movies for children has become increasingly difficult over the years and has been held to a much higher standard than its adult counterpart (Potter). Children's culture is where entertainment and advocacy meet to construct the definitions of what it means to be a child in gender, race, and class positions in society (Giroux). It has an impact on children and is made to educate, socialize, show national cultural representation, and mirror their own

lives. It is much more complicated to produce as long-standing societal concerns and children's interactions with the media are big factors to its production (Potter). The expectation for this media produced for children is that they are learning from every aspect they see and grow up because of it (Giroux, Inan, and Potter). The delicacy around this version of media results in a higher quality output from other markets creating many competitors.

The leader of this children's media would be Disney. With monumental success in toys, television, and movies; Disney would become a model to duplicate success in this industry marketed towards children. The success of the Disney princess movie lineup would bring many companies interested in the princess scene to create their take on princesses, one of which was Barbie (Orr). When Barbie released her first movie she seemed to challenge the princess narrative by being more innovative to the traditionalist Disney counterpart (Orr). Disney films have been criticized for sexist and oppressive gender messages nonetheless, they have captured audiences worldwide for their animated pictures regardless (Lueke). Orr continues his argument by stating that the movies are more similar than different in every aspect from marketing to content; the way in which this princess culture is created may be advertised in different languages of marketing to suit each brand, however, how it successfully influences consumers, be they adults or children remains constant (Orr).

When looking at the thoughtful consideration that goes into creating children's movies, no research has been done to analyze the variables in relation to Barbie. Therefore my gap lies in between Barbie and children's media as I want to assess the transformation of the Barbie movies through the years, considering the factors that need to be taken into account when creating children's media.

In order to properly assess the Barbie movies, this research will be divided into two major classifications: data collection and application. When collecting the data, I plan to analyze the top two grossing movies from every 5 years since the inception of the movies in 2001, for a total of eight movies. Using a metric I will look for how many times themes are repeated. Modeled after Ellen N. Junn's research for The Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (1997), similar content analysis will be done in application to Barbie movies with consideration for key factors in relation to children audiences. In application, I plan to analyze the data and develop a conclusion on the movie's abilities to incorporate cultural changes and Barbie's ability to be a role model for children.

### **Method**

For this research, I used a mixed-method approach approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to explore Barbies capability to be a role model based on the characters in her movies and how the movies have changed over time. This will be a content analysis research designed to determine the presence of themes in the movies. I will quantify and analyze the themes to look for a relationship between them. This will help make conclusions and find answers to my question.

Before my research could begin, I proposed my research project to an IRB composed of three approved individuals at the high school I attend. The objectives and procedures of this research project were approved without modifications, as there were no ethical problems. The exclusion of the involvement of other humans simplified the process of my approval as my methodology consisted of me applying a metric to children's movies. There were no problems in either my metric or methodology, so I began after the approval of my research proposal.

I initially approached my research by first selecting which movies I would watch. I choose ten of the thirty-seven existing movies with consideration to time and diversifying the subject matter of the movies. I remained unbiased when choosing however this is a weakness in this project due to the fact I choose the movies myself over a random sample or other methods. The movies I chose are evenly spread out from the inception in 2001 to the most recent in 2020. The selected movies have a gap of one to four years in their release dates. This was to show a coherent change over time. The movies I will be watching include: *Barbie in the Nutcracker* (2001), *Princess and the Pauper* (2004), *Barbie Fairytopia: Mermaidia* (2006), *Barbie as the Island Princess* (2007), *Barbie a Fashion Fairytale* (2010), *Barbie: Princess Charm School* (2011), *Barbie and Her Sisters in a Pony Tale* (2013), *Barbie and the Secret Door* (2014), *Barbie Spy Squad* (2016), *Barbie: Princess Adventure* (2020).

This study and metric are modeled after research done by Ellen Junn, an academic administrator and researcher at multiple California State University campuses. Her paper, *Child Audiences: A Select Content Analysis of Walt Disney Animated Family Films*, chose 11 films that were analyzed and underwent a code that looked at patterns in the movies regarding certain variables. These variables were sorted into 5 different categories. Her metric consisted of: Love-Romance, Marriage-Wedding, Sexually-related, Film Demographics, and Miscellaneous Variables. I developed a metric based on hers but adjusted it to better suit my research question for the content of Barbie Movies varies from Disney's.

I will use a metric composed of friendship, gender roles, independence, and overcoming hardship. Each section of my metric will be applied by using specific questions to determine whether or not a scene fits in that category. These questions are: Friendship; how have her

friendships changed, how many times can she rely on her friends for aid. Gender roles; how often do characters diverge from stereotypical gender roles. Independence; does she set out to do things on her own. Overcoming hardship; is there a struggle and what is it. Following the questions considered for each category of the metric, I will use examples of key scenes to contextualize the categories. I will also include scenes that do not specifically fit into any particular section of the metric but are of equal importance in showing the storyline or the role model abilities of Barbie.

I will access these movies by using a rental service of Amazon movies and a subscription service to Netflix. The accessibility to the movies differ based on popularity and release date so I must use both.

After watching the movies I will develop a chart to compare the shift in the movies over time. My data will be documented in a Google spreadsheet that is formatted with metric components across the top row and timestamps for each scene down the columns. Each timestamp will be counted as one point, which will be added up for each category of the metric and the overall total for the movie. I will use the totals of each movie to form a line graph that will represent each section of the metric per movie and the overall total. I will then examine the relationships between the sets of categories to determine an answer to my question.

Potential limitations include difficulty in understanding the relationships and creating an understandable conclusion. This is due to the categories being somewhat narrow in the subject matter, however, I hope to offset this difficulty with the inclusion of specific scenes including those that may not specifically fit in a category but are notable enough to aid in the development of a conclusion.

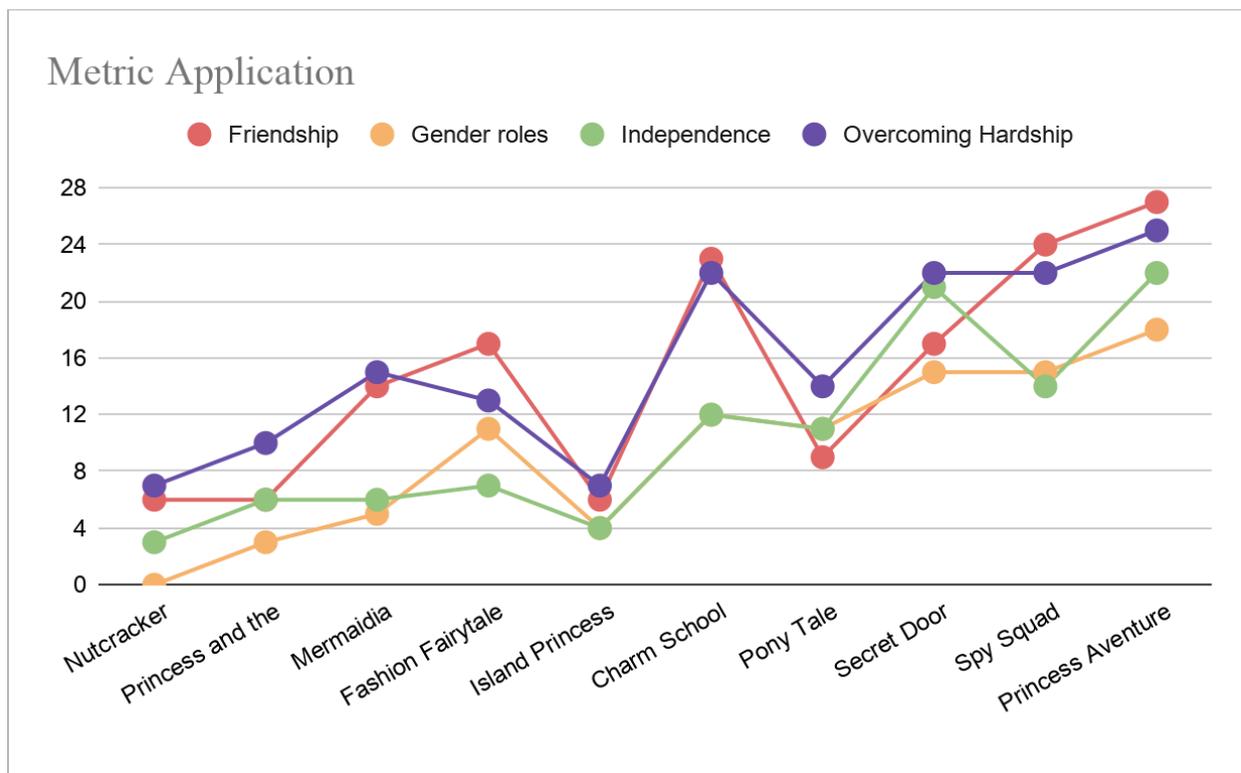
### Results

**Table 1**

	Nutcracker	Princess and the Pauper	Mermaidia	Fashion Fairytale	Island Princess	Charm School	Pony Tale	Secret Door	Spy Squad	Princess Aventure
Friendship	6	6	14	17	6	23	9	17	24	27
Gender Roles	0	3	5	11	4	12	11	15	15	18
Independence	3	6	6	7	4	12	11	21	14	22
Overcoming Hardship	7	10	15	13	7	22	14	22	22	25
TOTAL	16	25	40	48	21	69	45	75	75	92

*Note.* In table 1, it shows the number of times the themes are repeated in each film.

**Figure 1**



*Note.* In figure 1, it is a plotted visual of the numbers in table 1 to show the change over time.

I will now explain notable scenes that did not fit in the metric to provide a greater depth of analysis of the movies. *Princess and the Pauper* at 0:19:01 mentions indentured servitude and shows class difference but understanding that everyone has their own responsibilities that makes everyone similar. *Barbie a Fashion Fairytale* at 0:07:45 Barbie is fired from her acting role, rumors spread online, she doubts herself yet her friends continue to persist in her pursuit for acting and her dreams and 0:24:56 sequin expresses a rebuttal against opposition to her becoming a muse in fear she will look like a clown. Rather explains that confidence in one's self is what truly expresses style. *Barbie: Princess Charm School* at 0:07:06 Blair can't come to accept her admission into Charm school with the reasoning that she understands she has responsibilities of taking care of her sickly mother and getting out of an impoverished lifestyle and 0:19:18 everyone has potential if you just work hard and stay dedicated. *Barbie and Her Sisters in a Pony Tale* at 0:30:57 the trainer helps Chealsey realize that judging from a superficial standpoint demolishes the possibilities to find common ground and grow bonds and 0:43:12 Barbie guilds Stacy to understand not everyone can be amazing at everything the first time. *Barbie Spy Squad* at 0:43:40 doing something you enjoy is always a good way to get out of your head, 0:44:03 controlling your mindset by visualizing yourself succeeding leads to greater success, and 0:52:33 it's okay to make mistakes because no one expects you to be perfect, it is not up to one person to decide your worth. *Barbie: Princess Adventure* at 0:04:45 a person has endless possibilities to be anything and not one thing can limit a person, 0:20:49 every picture online has been retouched and planned, only to showcase the best. It is hard to uphold an image that isn't the truth, and 0:38:32 life isn't what is captured online, but what is seen when the cameras are off, so it is important to be who you are not what you appear online.

## Discussion

Using the results, I will be determining the change in Barbie movies over time to develop a conclusion on whether or not Barbie should be classified as a role model. This is solely based on the characters Barbie plays in her movies and will not include other aspects of the brand. The metric used, focused on four important themes: friendship, gender roles, independence, and overcoming hardship, which can be seen throughout the movies to provide different aspects of the priorities of children's media.

As time goes on there is an overall increase in the presence of these themes in the movies as depicted in table 1 and figure 1. While the use of friendship, gender roles, independence, and overcoming hardship is somewhat weak at the beginning of the timeline there is a 475% increase to the last movie comparatively. This is important because it shows that the creators of these films are purposefully changing the initial narrative of what they wanted the character Barbie to represent and modernizing the films through doing so.

The importance of friendship within the films is that children see positive examples of what healthy relationships are. Gender roles and the divergence from them, show that shifts in cultural priorities and helps children view other possibilities of who they can possibly become. Where Disney movies tend to play the princess saved by the prince trope, Barbie shows that her strengths lie in her own ability to produce strong healthy relationships, while also learning which battles she needs to do on her own. She is able to overcome hardship with the power the character has due to her own abilities. Explaining the presence of friendship, gender roles, independence, and overcoming hardship within the movies shows that Barbie's character goes beyond, the already established storyline tropes that constantly get reused.

Unexpectedly there are two movies that did not follow the upward trend of the graph: *Barbie as the Island Princess* and *Barbie and Her Sisters in a Pony Tale*. In *Barbie as the Island Princess*, the overall approach of the movie was very different from the other films I evaluated. The storyline followed a more generic approach where the princess feels the need to have her troubles taken care of and be saved by a prince that can be seen in the vast majority of princess movies. The metric did not apply well to this movie considering the use of the four themes of the metric is what makes Barbie movies stand out from typical child media storylines. Rather than seeking reliance on oneself or her friends, the character can be seen chasing after a man throughout the entirety of the film. This undermined most aspects of the metric and produced a negative spike in the results. The second film that did not follow the trend of the graph was *Barbie and Her Sisters in a Pony Tale*. This is because the storyline of this movie revolved more around Barbie's sisters rather than Barbie herself, making it harder to apply a metric that should be applied to Barbie alone. This film should not be criticized for this, however, due to the fact that in instances where the themes were present Barbie was outspoken in her leadership and showed a familial aspect not present in the other films I analyzed. The prioritization of family in this film undermines the metric as the story did not primarily focus on Barbie, but her sisters as well.

Every Barbie movie has a grounding theme that makes it different from the previous. This helps create endless possibilities to continue this series of movies due to the ability to change storylines and priorities within the message of each film. There are certain scenes that clearly provide a different aspect of "substance" or meaning to the films. This also progresses the idea that Barbie is divergent from general Children's media because it is through these scenes

that Barbie makes impactful lessons that need to be exposed to children. I will now go through each movie mentioned in the notable scenes to explain the significance and implications the movie has for the incorporation of the scene/s.

In *Princess and the Pauper*, the mention of indentured servitude goes beyond a periodical approach to the subject matter. The topic can be applied to modern-day class differences and shows that despite different struggles based on wealth or responsibilities, everyone has their own obligations that make people similar. It is through these similarities that human connection is able to form and leads the protagonists to strengthen their bond and overcome their problems. The quote “unassuming on the outside, but a treasure within” stands out in this movie because simply judging a person from superficial aspects can lead to ignorance and the loss of seeing great potential in people. A person’s capabilities are not limited to their financial status but are greatly impacted by the support system built around them.

As the movies progress there is greater incorporation of themes that can be seen in the present day. In *Barbie, a Fashion Fairytale* deals with hardships that include the struggle of rumors, and the damaging effect lies can have on one's career. Her friend's reassurance leads her to a path of self-discovery that strengthens her own image of self-worth. The idea of self-worth is also present in the message that confidence in one’s self is what truly expresses style. Children and viewers of this movie can take away that lies and self-doubt can be very harmful but when a person like Barbie uses this as motivation to find the best version of herself, it shows that others should not have the power to tear someone down, rather it is the power you give them and what you do with their words that matters.

In *Barbie: Princess Charm School* the protagonist has a very relatable backstory. The character who Barbie takes place as is Blair, the adopted daughter of a single mom with health issues. She has an opportunity to go to princess charm school but is heavily reluctant due to the responsibilities she faces at home as a provider for the family's needs. Her only motivation for attending charm school is the possibility to provide a better life for her family and get her mother the treatment she needs. Unlike the girls who have been born and bred for their spots at charm school, Blair struggles to maintain the workload and social life of the school, however with help from her instructor, she ensures that everyone has potential if a person works hard and stays dedicated. This character that Barbie is portrayed as is relatable to a different audience of the spectrum. While in the other movies, she is often established as a princess or someone with an affluent lifestyle, Blair is just a normal girl who wants to help her family. The diversity in character tropes that Barbie can play is remarkably adaptive, shows the flexibility the character has and the spectrum of relatability children can find in her. This character similar to Barbie a Fashion Fairytale has a hard-working motivation that helps her persist through her struggles. Although there were times where she almost gave up, that shows that not everything in life is without a doubt. It is important to be self-motivated but to have others by your side to continue to support your journey from fitting in at school to learning how to walk with a book on your head.

*Barbie and Her Sisters in a Pony Tale* was a movie that created a negative spike in the chart. However, this does not take away from the actual contents of the movie. The familial love seen in the movie grounds the character and shows that independence is not always the greatest priority in order to succeed in one's life.

Both *Barbie Spy Squad* and *Barbie: Princess Adventure* offered the most modern perspective from the film lineup I chose as they are the films with the latest release dates that I evaluated. The incorporation of the pressure a person can put on oneself paired with social media or others' expectations changed the dynamic of these films in a very positive manner. Especially the section of *Barbie: Princess Adventure* that chooses to talk about how social media is a planned visual of people and is not something one should compare themselves to. It is easy to fall for a lot that is portrayed online, children especially are susceptible to this, however, the message of these films is more so to negate the worries of children who feel their life in comparison to what they see online is not enough. Social media has created unattainable standards that Barbie shows she struggled with, but through understanding what truly matters she is able to overcome hardship. What truly mattered was living life to the fullest for one's self and not trying to live to the expectations of others. Children now have to grow up with so many things creating pressure upon them, this only increasing with social media usage being more widely accessible to children. This message Barbie presents is a topic that is a priority of society but is not widely used within the media children are consuming due to the possible sensitivity around it. This ability to go outside of media norms to present thoughtful conversations led me to my greatest conclusion in her abilities as a role model.

It is through these scenes that Barbie films present adaptability and modernization. As time goes on the films incorporate ideas that are commonly prioritized in society. With this, the films have shown remarkable progress to better suit the target audience. Barbie can definitely be considered a role model for children. She speaks on topics that have not often been discussed in other media aspects for children, and her films have become more adaptive towards the

ever-changing problems in society. The characters she plays do not remain stagnant but are constantly evolving to be better for the children watching at the time presented.

### **Conclusion**

A suggestion for future research would be to increase the number of movies in the timeline. The overlap of movie plots may show that the differences between the movies are not as great as my results. The large increase of change in my results may be due to the variety of plots I chose, and the possibility for movies with similar plots to result in similar numbers on the metric is very likely. Also, the possibility of looking into greater depth at the reasoning behind the changes in movies such as directors, producers, and writers may be a place for further research. I was unable to do this due to time constraints.

A limitation I found was trying to decide when a scene ended to mark the next one and deciding when to mark a scene. If the subject matter was the same for a long period and there were multiple messages in a scene I tried to note multiple different times, however, this may have skewed the results in my favor to show an increase. When marking a scene, if it satisfied the conditions of the metric, it was marked. However due to some scenes were more abstract, I did include some scenes that followed the metric a little looser. If the scene was too abstract to even be considered for a category in the metric, they were noted specifically in the notable scene section of my paper.

This does not reduce the credibility of the paper because the purpose was to conduct this test to determine whether the characters Barbie plays defines her as a role model for children. Even though some numbers may be off because of human error, the Barbie movies have consistently shown the inclusion of topics that make the films divergent from typical children's

media. By putting Barbie in the position as the main character in 36 movies, she will be a role model regardless of the choices the character makes due to her repeated “position of power” to children. However, this project sought to determine her capabilities in that role and the results show that she is highly capable of that position. She repeatedly showed meaningful lessons in her movies from beginning to end. Making Barbie and the different characters she plays a great choice for children to look up to and offers guardians greater options when choosing media to show their children. Through this analysis, Barbie Has shown an evolution of change that I call Barbie-ism. This application of her evolution is the shift in her character over time as a way to adapt to societal standards and priorities.

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## Academic Paper

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

**Sample: E**

**Score: 3**

This paper earned a score of 3. A method of content analysis is presented on page 4, followed by a description of the method on pages 4-5. The methods, however, are inconsistent, with two different descriptions given for how movies were chosen on pages 4 and 5. While there were themes of analysis listed, no detail on how themes were analyzed were given. Still the methods are reasonably replicable.

The paper also earned a score of 3 because there is a new understanding discussed on pages 9-10 in the discussion of trends in Barbie movies such as friendship, gender roles, independence, and overcoming hardship. The findings also discuss movies that did not follow the trends on page 10.

This paper did not earn a 4 because, while a gap is stated on page 3, it is not logically defended. Furthermore, the discussion of the results lacks detail, and while there are graphs and charts to show the results, there is not a strong link to the discussion of the results.

This paper did not earn a 2 because there is a reasonably replicable method present on pages 4-5. Also, the paper presents a new understanding on pages 9-10.