

# Influencing Girls' Career Choices: Basic Applications of Barbie Dolls

Tianheng Liu

PEARL Program, Faculty of Economics, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

liutianheng1129@keio.jp

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**Abstract:** Since playing with toys is a large part of the young's life, Barbie dolls play a vital role to the young girls. Prior researchers mainly focused on Barbie dolls' influence on self-esteem and body-shape cognition. Even since researchers have identified the relationship between Barbie and career choices, they did not give detailed explanations of the relationship and suggestions to change the negative effect. How can barbie dolls be applied to influence young girls' career choices? Playing with toys is proved to affect children's career choices, and Barbie dolls largely affect girls' gender and career recognition. If Barbie dolls can be applied to diversify girls' career choices, gender-based career choices will be reduced. Consequently, the gender inequality in the job market will be better balanced.

## 1. Introduction

Have you ever played with a Barbie doll or saw others play with it? Since Barbie dolls have been created, they dominated the global toy market immediately. Only 1 percent of young American girls aged 3 to 10 years old did not own Barbie dolls, showing its popularity among teenage girls (Rogers, 1999, as cited by Dittmar, et al., 2006 [1]). Since playing with toys is a large part of the young's life, Barbie dolls play a vital role to the young girls. The potential influence of Barbie dolls on young girls is being analyzed and applied. Prior researchers mainly focused on Barbie dolls' influence on self-esteem and body-shape cognition. Even since researchers have identified the relationship between Barbie and career choices, they did not give detailed explanations of the relationship and suggestions to change the negative effect. How can barbie dolls be applied to influence young girls' career choices? As an immense influencer, if Barbie dolls are proved to be related with career choices and exemplified in encouraging diverse career choices, gender-based career choices will be reduced. As a result, the gender inequality in the job market will be better balanced.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Career Cognitions Emerge at an Early Age

People decide their career choices at an early age. As career choices are essential throughout people's whole lifetime, professionals surprisingly found that the essential concept of career conceptions and attitudes first originate in childhood (Super, 1980 [2]). After the career conception originates, children begin to make career choices. Specifically, according to Schultheiss, Palma, and Manzi (2005 [3]), the first conception of career choices is formed in elementary school or middle school. But their career choices are not made suddenly. Before the first career decision, children switch their interests in occupation during the time but will be more stable at the age of elementary school to middle school (Tracey, 2002, as cited by Schultheiss et al., 2005 [3]). Thus, children's career choices mainly became stable between 7 to 14 years old after frequently changing interests.

### 2.2. Career Choices Emerge from Gender

Children can distinguish others' jobs by gender. Children have the awareness of sex at an early stage (Anggard, 2005 [4]). They acknowledged that jobs are related to men and women differently (Liben et al., 2001 [5]). For instance, when asked to draw a scientist, only 28 in 5000 children draw

a female (Chambers, 1983, as cited by Brown & Weinberger, 2021 [6]). In this case, most of the children believed the job of a scientist is related to men. It can be further indicated that children base their career recognition on gender stereotypes (Brown & Weinberger, 2021 [6]).

Moreover, children associate their job decisions with their own gender. To be accepted by society, children prefer to act in a suitable and right way for their sex (Anggard, 2005 [4]). As they split the jobs by gender, they tend to choose a job that is closely related to their sex in order to fit in the society. To sum up, children showed greater interest in jobs culturally linked with their gender (Liben et al., 2001 [5]).

Particularly, girls have fewer interests in masculine careers. As they prefer to choose careers that traditionally fit their gender, they put less focus on masculine careers. Their interests in traditionally masculine careers are weaker, which leads to gender inequality in different career fields (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). To balance the interests, people should intervene in children when the career choices develop initially (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]).

### **3. Research Result**

#### **3.1. Playing with Toys Affect Children's Career Choices**

As children determine their career choices when 7 to 14 years old, several things can be applied to affect their career choices. Children gain information through career exploration, identification of main characters, and exploration in playing to improve their self-career understanding (Tracey, 2002, as cited by Schultheiss et al., 2005 [3]). Among those factors, playing takes over an essential role.

Playing can be counted as one of the essential factors of children's development. During childhood, playing is the most recurring activity children do. As exploration, information, and interests play a part in early childhood career decision development (Tracey, 2002, as cited by Schultheiss et al., 2005 [3]), playing is related to all the above. By playing around imaginatively, they can explore the world and society in their own ways. Also, during exploration, they can keep in touch with novel things to find their interests and gain information about daily situations and even society. Children play to experience various social characters (Önder, 2018 [8]), finding their true interests through numerous tries during play. At the same time, they achieve vocational knowledge and further research (Super, 1980). For example, some types of play contribute to success in STEM (Wai et al., 2009 [9]). These all show that play is closely related to career and career choices.

By playing with toys, children imitate real-life situations (Önder, 2018 [8]) and find solutions. They explore information and accumulate experience through playing with toys as it is a studying process for them. Children who play with no gender toys for four months are aware of the possible occupations for both sexes, being reinforced the available-career messages by toys. (Riley & Powers, 1977, as cited by Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). The accompanying toys increased the influencing strength of play and sent information through play. Hence, toys are the important elements of play because they are invested in children's future (Önder, 2018 [8]).

#### **3.2. Barbie Dolls Impact on Girls' Gender and Career Recognition Largely**

Among toys, Barbie dolls are one of the most representative of girls' toys. For the first, Barbie dolls reveal an impact on large groups of girls. Barbie dolls are highly popular with young girls and boys (Kuthor & McDonald, 2004 [10]). Ever since Barbie dolls have been created, they remain the most popular dolls internationally (Stone, 2010, as cited by Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). The selling stores that target girls are full of Barbie dolls (Anggard, 2005 [5]). In America, 90% of 3- to-10 years-old girls have one or more Barbie dolls (Stone, 2010, as cited by Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). This shows that both the supply and demand for Barbie dolls are incredibly high. Besides, the body shape of Barbie dolls is the figure of a female adult. The body size of the typical barbie dolls is incredibly curvy and thin, which is unhealthy and unrealizable for humans (Dittmar et al., 2006 [1]). Barbie dolls reveal to be distinctly sexist with unrealistic body shapes (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]), showing gender characteristics. The dolls depict the imaginary perfect woman body shape and can be viewed as one of the typical gender-identified toys, especially targeted to girls. Because

of the popularity and gender specialization, Barbie dolls as the most representative girls' toys impact girls largely.

Meanwhile, Barbie dolls can influence girls' awareness of gender stereotypes and career choices. To begin with, the attitude of girls at a young age can be changed relatively easily. The previous experiment found that the flexible attitude towards jobs linked with gender is high among children, in which girls' attitudes are more flexible (Brown & Weinberger, 2021 [6]). Hence, inequality can be solved through influencing children as their flexibility is high and decide their career choices at that time. Then, toys are proved to influence career choices based on gender (Riley & Powers, 1977, as cited by Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). Since Barbie dolls are the most popular toys played by girls, they can be the crucial influencer on girls' attitudes. Young teenage girls may be influenced by playing with barbie dolls unconsciously (Kuthor & McDonald, 2004 [10]). Because Barbie dolls have backgrounds that describe Barbie's jobs, it will influence the girls to make their career choices. Indeed, some have proved that Barbie dolls influence women to choose novel careers instead of traditional careers through presenting images of women in novel careers when Barbie is first available (Valis, 2010, as cited by Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). At that time, dolls for girls mainly presented the idea that girls become housewives when growing up, but Barbie is set to be a woman with a job rather than a housewife (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). With Barbie's popularity, young girls tend to choose more novel careers rather than housewives at that time. The argument proves that Barbie dolls influence girls' job choices.

### **3.3. Barbie Dolls Can Be Improved to Change Gender-based Career Choices**

To increase job choice diversities and eliminate gender-based choices, Barbie dolls with various careers and characters should be produced. One of the methods is to diversify Barbie dolls' careers. Not many Barbie dolls clearly show their career. They merely play with friends, do make-up, and hang out with their boyfriend. Even though there are career Barbie dolls, they mainly take part in traditional feminine careers such as teacher and fashion designer. In order to widen girls' recognition of career choices, more career Barbie dolls with different kinds of careers should be produced. Career fields which are traditional masculine jobs should be designed and emphasized to eliminate gender-based choices. However, not only Barbie but also other characters should be produced. The feature that most people hate about Barbie dolls is perfect, as people think it is too phony (Kuthor & McDonald, 2004 [10]). If Barbie dolls are designed with too many different careers, they will appear to be phony and be disliked by people. Different careers can be designed to Barbie's friends with their diversified personalities. It is closer to reality as everyone has one job. So, more characters similar to Barbie should be produced with various careers. Overall, girls can keep in touch with more jobs by playing with Barbie dolls, leading them to be aware of more available career choices.

Barbie doll videos providing career information should be accompanied to expose to girls. Girls are likely to choose familiar careers (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). To make them familiar, detailed career description and information is necessary. Barbie dolls merely wearing career uniforms is not enough for girls to know about career information. Take news anchorwomen and CS engineers as an example. The percentage of girls doing CS jobs is relatively low compared with that of news anchorwomen (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). For news anchorwomen, girls can learn about the job from television, but they cannot learn CS career's daily life from Barbie dolls (Martincic & Bhatnagar, 2012 [7]). This points out the necessity to provide the information of various career Barbie dolls. The information can be fabricated into stories or fairy tales in Barbie doll videos. The stories make the careers attractive to girls, increasing their willingness to make different choices. Furthermore, exposure to video has proved to influence teenagers' career choices. Students exposed to one-time videos about school psychology have a higher rate to apply for psychology courses (Bocanegra et al., 2019 [11]), proving the usefulness of videos. In brief, girls can learn more detailed information about different careers from videos telling stories, which encourages them to make diversified career choices.

#### 4. Conclusion

By designing diverse career Barbie dolls and more characters accompanied with clearly stated career backgrounds, Barbie dolls can be applied to encourage girls to make more diverse career choices. Children relate their gender with their own career choices at a young age. During that time, playing with toys allows them to gain career information and find their interests. As Barbie dolls are a kind of famous gender-specialized toy played by girls, they can change girls' career choices. Barbie dolls can be designed with more diverse careers to widen girls' recognition of career choice. More characters should be produced as well since it is close to reality and will not be too fake. Moreover, Barbie doll videos introducing career information should be accompanied by Barbie dolls. In conclusion, Barbie dolls should be produced with more diverse careers and more characters with career information. In doing so, girls will be willing to make more diverse career choices and the gender-based choices will be gradually eliminated, which leads to a more gender-equal job market. (1991 words).

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