

Original Research Article

Semiotic Analysis of Barbie Dolls Using Roland Barthes' Mythologies

Forough Amoian^{1*}, Bahman NamvarMotlaq²

1. Assistant Professor of Faculty of Art and Architecture, University of Mazandaran , Babolsar, Iran.

2. Associate Professor of Literature and Humanities, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

Received: 12/08/2020 ;

accepted: 31/05/2022 ;

available online: 23/09/2022

Abstract

Problem statement: In the present era, with the advancement of technology in design and construction, the toy industry has entered a new phase of mass production with a significant profit for the owners of this industry. In addition, branding and advertising Barbie dolls among the different toys have caused them to stand at the top of the supply and demand chain in the world market. The repetition of Barbie characters over several generations has made it a collective memory for users, especially girls. Therefore, most children and adults know this character and have used it in their games and plays during their growth time.

Research objective: This research investigates the functional effect of this best-selling toy in the formation of modern myths and the strengthening of the bourgeoisie around the world. In this regard, emphasizing Roland Barthes' theory of mythologies, the human-object relationship is studied in the case of Barbie dolls. The objectives of the present research are to identify the signs related to the Barbie doll myth based on Roland Barthes' theory and to find how the Barbie doll myth has been formed.

Research method: The research method used is descriptive-analytical. The bibliographic and Internet data were used as the research sample. In the first phase of the research, Barbie's implications were mythologized to recognize the mythological language of the dolls as a meta-language. In the next phase, according to Barthes' mythological criticism, meta-meta-language layers were identified and introduced.

Conclusion: The research results show that mythologies have been used in the design, production, and sale of Barbie dolls. There are common implicit messages in the advertising and branding of Barbie dolls. They have hidden layers that affect the consumers' subconscious and temporarily lead them to meta-Barbie consumption. Moreover, in the demythologization process, Barbie's domination turned out to include a wave of political and commercial services as well as the film industry and multimedia.

Keywords: *Semiotic Analysis, Myth, Barbie, Roland Barthes.*

Introduction

The post-World War II period is considered to be the industrialization era and has changed lifestyles from traditional to modern. Since the late twentieth century,

for more sales and profitability, branding has shifted its focus on product design from the physical quality index of the product to factors with emotional effects, semantic concepts, and values, as well as lifestyle and perceptions of the masses from their identities. The feedback on this shift of focus encouraged

*Corresponding Author: f.amoian@umz.ac.ir, +989122479362

consumers to participate in the cycle of demand and consumption. Paying attention to the messaging of products in the form of a cultural medium provided an opportunity for the symbolic and indirect dimension of the implicit messages in the design patterns, marketing, and economic and political institutions. Nevertheless, the spread of media and propaganda as global neoliberalism has explained a common culture through the assimilation of the needs and expectations of the masses. This research seeks to study the most popular and best-selling girls' toys through the lens of semiotics in the field of mythological criticism, using the mythological theory of Roland Barthes, the great French semiotician. For this purpose, the meaning of the Barbie doll has been investigated from the audience's perspective. Barthes is one of the most important left-wing intellectuals who criticize the current social issues and questions the world outside the text and relates it to the world of theoretical semiotics. In other words, Barthes represents interpretive criticism and criticizes positivist and academic criticism. Barthes believes that people subconsciously interact with myths in their daily lives, and these myths have been able to elevate every simple and ordinary thing in consumer society to the level of holiness or super-heroism. This research, using a descriptive-analytical method, tries to answer two main questions.

What are the characteristics of mythological signs in Barbie dolls based on Roland Barthes' theory?

How can Barbie dolls become a myth and a hero for their audience?

In this regard, an interdisciplinary perspective has been taken for data analysis and Barthes' mythical criticism has been used in examining Barbie's influence on the audience.

Research Background

Several studies have been conducted in Iran and other countries to identify and study the effects of Barbie dolls on socio-cultural relations, tendencies, and structures as well as political visas of nations. Khani Hanjani and Alvandi (2017) analyzed the factors influencing the girls' tendency to mannequins in a case study on

Barbie dolls. Bashir and Hoseini (2012) investigated the effect of characterization on the audience by studying the case of Barbie dolls and examined this issue from the perspective of religion and customary sociology. A study conducted on Muslim Barbies by Budiyanto (2009) in Indonesia entitled "Playing with Piety: The Phenomenon of Indonesian Muslim" focused on the role of Barbie dolls in cultural propaganda. Moreover, Yaqin (2007) in an article entitled "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity" criticized the issue of veiled Barbie in Syria. Mire-Beigi (2016) discussed the entry of myth into the critical community in the semiotic study on Wall-E animation. Moreover, Roland Barthes (2007), in his book "Myth Today", translated from the English version by Shirin dokht Daqiqian -the original French version was translated into English and then into Persian- criticized the system of objects in today's society and believed that some items such as toys have the potential to become myths. Despite the abundance of research on superhero issues in cinema and Barbie criticism in the field of sociology, Roland Barthes' approach to the critique of Barbie dolls has not been considered yet.

Theoretical Foundations

• Roland Barthes' mythological theory

Every object has symbolic functions and conveys a message in its form and function, which determine its semantic aspect. In the field of semiotics, semioticians are interested in mythology, which is the pure study of myth. They investigate the myths and their practical examples in the outside world through their specialized knowledge. Roland Barthes, a theorist in the fields of semiotics and narratology, is not introduced as a mythologist. However, he offers an influential interpretive critique of cultural studies and the open structural norms in French and European¹ society. He reaches meta-language through language, and as he describes the system of objects in consumer societies, he believes that the sign language in objects, foods, photographs, media and propaganda, sports, cars, toys, fashion, and consumer products has layers. He believes that different level of meaningful communication is

required for the audience in each product as they are literally different. These goal-oriented layered signs eventually lead to a new definition of meta-language or meta-text. This is the myth, and Barthes is trying to open the language layer of objects through the decryption of meta-language and illuminating their transcendental messages. Thus, Barthes studies the function of myths and mythological signs through semiotics (Namvar Motlaq, 2014, 162) According to Barthes, “the first language element in semiotics is the sign, obtained from the sum of signifier and signified” (Fig. 1). This view was first posed by Saussure and then considered and expanded by Barthes to the subject of myth and its relation to the linguistics of Levi-Strauss.²

The relation between the signifier and the signified shows that the sign explains a level of the product messaging that includes the signifier, which can be the mere form, without any specific meaning to the audience. It can also explain the signified, which is beyond the signifier and is like the mental signifier. An audience makes an apparent connection with the sign, perceives the message beyond the form, and finally arrives at a sign that justifies the presence of the signifier. A sign is an objective issue full of meaning; at the same time, a sign is conventional and will be meaningful if the audience can decrypt the codes that define the signifier or the signified, or percept the sign language.³ In short, it seems that in various verbal systems, any semiotic connection is considered a sentence. Saussure refers to the “abstract and functional forms of language (Langue) and speech (Parole)”, respectively, and Barthes uses this duality to analyze the semiotics of applied elements. In his view, “objects, from the moment they signify something, become a text, and in a sense, they are called a unit of reading.” This unit of reading contains a message and meaning. Barthes goes on to discuss language and, finally, meta-language and the system of myth-making in products (Barthes, 1968,48).

In a general definition, “myth is a model narrative that is imitated and repeated as a hero.” Barthes interprets myth as a specific language or form of speech that has an implicit meaning”(Namvar Motlaq, 2018, 19). At the same time, Barthes considers several attributes of myth:

Myth is a sign.

Myth is a speech.

Myth is a method of expression.

Mythical signs have two layers of signification.

All signs are not myths (ibid., 165-167).

In the stages of myth formation, there must be a linguistic system and a meta-linguistic logic. These two factors form the two layers of signification through which the implicit implications leading to meta-language are identified (Fig. 2).

A signifier has a dependent nature, which is a meaningless form outside of a signification system. When placed in a symbolic pattern, it helps to create a purposeful sign. It adds one layer of language comprehension. In semiotics, the form of an object is meaningless for the audience unless it is placed in an interactive pattern. The language-subject, which is designed by the designer purposefully, should take into account the requirements of culture, knowledge, tradition, and society for the target group and make the final gestalts⁴ of the object understandable to him in the form of a sign. However, Barthes believes that in some phenomena, the language of the subject is a level of the semiotic system. This means that the function of the sign does not end at this level.

On the contrary, it is placed again in the process of implicit signification to create a new layer called meta-language at another level. In this case, the sign becomes meaningful, and since it functions as a sign, it has an empty form and needs a symbol to fill it at a higher level for the audience. In the discussion of object design, the language that connects the designer and the consumer is the language that transforms the meaningful content of the work into the identity of the person perceived by the audience (Solomon, 2013, 73). In his book *Mythologies*, Barthes states that today’s toy always “signifies something which is always socialized and it is based on the myths or techniques of the adults’ modern life” (Barthes, 1972, 54). He calls the sign of meta-language a myth and believes that the object consumption system in societies has an implicit meaning, which is the main key to forming the object meta-language. He then critiques this system by proposing the meta-language

Signifier	Signified
Sign	

Fig. 1. The implicit meaning of the sign. Source: Authors.

Signifier	Signified
Sign/Signifier	
Sign/Myth	
Signified	

Fig. 2. The signification stages of the formation of signs/myths. Source: Authors.

layer, revealing the layer of meta-language in objects, which results in greater consumption in the capitalist structure of society. In other words, he demystifies (Barthes, 1968, 92).⁵

• Mystification of Barbie Dolls

Barthes maintains that the relationship between the semiotics and the consumable objects is the process of mystification and mythology. In other words, sanctification layers in the audience are hidden. When this consumed object is a toy, the semiotics criticizes the hidden dimension of its function in an activity called “game” or “play”. In analyzing toys, Barthes then sees them as “a miniaturized copy of everyday objects in adults’ life that confronts the child with his adult self on a small scale” (Barthes, 1972, 53). In a general definition, “playing is any purposeful physical or mental activity done individually or in groups, causing pleasure in the child” (Motlaghzadeh, 1999, 66). “The most definitions that are offered about toys consider them as tools used by children to gain experience and discover the outside world to grow” (Asgarizadeh, 2006, 64). Furthermore, in addition to entertaining and educating children, with their hidden rules and meanings, toys also include a wide range of users, including adults (Ahmadian, Sharifeh & Mohammadian Bisheh, 2016, 14).

With these definitions, toys can be considered as multidimensional products in interaction with human beings, society, customs, beliefs, and regulations of societies and nations, which have many potential audiences and, like other products, contain visual and semantic messages and signs and produce behavior. The toy industry is also considered a high-profit industry. At the onset of the twentieth century, as the toy industry expanded around the world, the first Barbie doll was created by Ruth Handler, the wife of Mattel’s C.E.O.6,

in March 1959.⁷ Ruth Handler had some children and named Barbie and Ken after her daughter Barbara and son Ken. The face and body of the Barbie doll, contrary to the common custom of existing dolls, did not evoke an infant or child, but a beautiful woman in her twenties, creating a wave of different emotions and feelings among families, especially girls. It is now the world’s most popular toy, with annual sales of \$3 billion (Toffoletti, 2007, 58). This product is usually designed with a collection of women’s accessories, shoes, bags, cosmetics, and jewelry with one or more dolls. The rules of playing with Barbie dolls in the field of design are defined so that their emotional and semantic aspects focus on the user, and, according to Barthes, it signifies a myth in adulthood (Barthes, 2007, 39). These indicators are investigated in the doll’s form, performance, and content (identity).

Form-The Barbie doll has special charms that have made it the first choice of children in the world. In the first evaluation by the customer, the unique and attractive appearance and the use of high-quality raw materials⁸ in making the doll put it in a superior position. Meanwhile, Barbie has a feminine body with exaggerated and fancy forms in the body that appear with all kinds of colorful and fashionable clothes and high-heeled shoes. This interests every little girl. The accessories are carefully designed, and Barbie has all the details for young girls. In the first series of productions, the hair was beautifully adorned in various modes and was long and silky. Her limbs were elongated, thin, and without the slightest excess weight (Krik, 2002, 74). The pink, purple, lilac and red colors used in Barbie’s girly and fantasy personality patterns have been introduced and are known in the world as the Barbie color palette. The visual connection that

the product establishes with its owner in the first place seems to exhibit a mythical, extremely beautiful, and flawless creature (Padmanugraha, 2007, 51). A beautiful young woman who does not need anyone and is not going to get pregnant. She sometimes goes fishing or swimming with her boyfriend, Ken, in the role of a self-sufficient goddess and superhero. This interpretation, after various objections and criticisms from all over the world, is updated to reach a wider range of audiences. In a forward-looking move, Mattel has replaced traditional beauty with a motivational beauty policy. From now on, Barbie is presented with a little sister, baby, family, overweight, racial difference, colored skin, physical disability, injury, old age, and hijab. This identity has led to children's empathy and made the customers more eager. Barbie activates girls' imaginations, dreams, and excitement for hours in a variety of jobs and situations to inspire them constantly. Therefore, it is clear that all types of Barbies refer to beauty and ideal perfection, even if they have a physical disability.

Identity- The characteristics of Barbie are widely manifested symbolically in the imagination and behavior of adolescents and young people. For example, women and girls who are beautiful or have a mannequin body are considered Barbie. Excessive weight loss, blue eyes, luxury and fitishness, indifferent and insensitive smiles and looks, colored hair, male attraction, isolation and loneliness, and similar behaviors have led to youth empathy and aggressive behaviors. Some of these behaviors are incompatibility with the traditional family and mother, self-alienation, and, ultimately, depression as a result of the emotional crisis caused by the petty bourgeoisie and capitalism created by the Barbie industry and female superheroes in the world.⁹

In the indicators of form, function, and identity of the Barbie doll, some issues are found that can be analyzed using Barthes' semiotic system. Barbie is a toy because it is produced by a toy company, packaged with childish visual cues such as color, shape, font typewritten on the box, and children's favorite fantasies, and marketed in the world-famous toy stores and sites. However, this meaningless signifier chooses a different path that makes the audience realize that this doll is reminiscent

of an adult. In other types of dolls, the child usually takes on the role of mother or mentor and plays a supportive role during the play. How does a child play with Barbie dolls? Barbie does not seem to need any support, food, or care, and she happens to be very rich, well-groomed, and educated. In the first place, the factor that manifests itself in this character, like a mannequin, is one thing: "beauty". The Barbie doll is defined as the embodiment of beauty, and the child's play is directed toward decorating watches, changing clothes, and accessorizing accessories. In Fig. 3, the analyzed implicit signification in the Barbie structure shows that this doll has become a female superhero and a myth during its pervasiveness. The description of Barbie's mystification process shows how a petty-bourgeois capitalist society turns the object into a sacred and desirable phenomenon. The images behind the toy seem to indicate consumerism and narratives of a meta-linguistic myth that is hidden but influential. In the composition of Barbie dolls, the layer of beauty and fitness recommends the use of exaggerated make-up and slimming, tidiness, and exercise. Still, on another level, there is an indirect reference to mannequins and models. Anthropologists such as Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund, in a study conducted in collaboration with the Anorexia Association in the United States, referred to "Barbie's role in promoting obesity and its consequences" (Urla & Swedlund, 2007, 306). Layering causes one to doubt the purposeful design of a product. "The two-layered language of mythology conveys a direct and explicit message on the one hand, and on the other hand, an indirect message institutionalized in the product" (Namvar Motlaq, 2014, 172).

The continuity of messages and the filling and emptying of the sign create a motivating situation in the audience (Barthes, 1968, 93). The beauty criteria hidden in Barbie dolls, as a pattern presented to the audience, has caused a wave of people who use Barbie's appearance as a model. The sales of superhero movies, the popularity of Hollywood celebrities, and the widespread growth of slimming clinics and cosmetic products are examples of this influence (Botz-Bronstein, 2012, 2). Also, motivational examples of U.S. military dolls, which

Barbie Doll	Beauty
Independent girl and symbol of beauty	
	Modeling

Fig. 3. Implicit signification in Barbie doll. Source: Authors.

were very popular with boys, show that children’s behavior with American soldiers and storytelling during the war and heroic games is a matter of pride, and statistics show that these dolls have been influential in motivating young Americans to join the military for the Vietnam War and settle in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰ This motivational process exists in Barbie and the ultra-Barbie world.

Meta-language processes show that to deepen the influence of myth, studies on the wants and needs of the audience are done in different ways and methods.¹¹ Mattel designers also go among the girls to get an awareness of their age and gender concerns to design new models for the world’s market (Wallak, 2016, 492). This process, in the present age, is not limited to Mattel and is a part of the design industry.¹² In the study of the system of the semiotics of objects in toys, Barthes explicitly refers to a wave of objects in adulthood in which the adult human mind lies and there is no creation and invention regarding them: “... invented objects are very rare. There are only a few blocks that are considered by children who present dynamic objects. However, among the rest of the toys, it should be said that French toys have a predetermined meaning and what is always in society is formed by the myths and techniques of living in adulthood: the army, radio, post office, medicine (small tables, small surgery rooms for dolls), school, barber (drying and modeling hair), air force (paratroopers), transport (trains, Citroen, Vespa, gas station), astronomy (planet and Mars) and toys. “ (Barthes, 1972, 53). In fact, Barthes first became sensitive to the object design industry by studying repetitive systems in French society. It was what the designers of the best-selling companies later used to strengthen their production and sales strategies.

• **Barbie doll Demystification**

According to Barthes’ theory, mythological narratives

are multi-layered with hidden dimensions that try to deceive the audience into consuming more. Myth manipulates language and uses language as a tool for deception. In the process of deconstructing the myth, these layers of deception are revealed (Barthes, 1972, 108). In reconstructing the myth using this technique, components are used to explain the hidden layers of profiteering. These components include the characteristics explored in the Barbie doll.

• **The signifier/signified**

Change of History into Nature- The superhero myth uses the linguistic system and communicates with today’s audience in the form of sign language. The form shaped in the context of toys is gradually introduced in its connotation with the concept of absolute beauty and modeling and normally occupies a part of people’s natural lives. In this regard, Barthes refers to the “bourgeois ideology that makes historical myth natural in its favor” (Barthes, 1972, 142). This is how history evaporates and what remains is a word that is not of the mythic kind. However, it affects the masses in the form of a myth.

Change of Temporary into Eternal- Children are the absolute consumers of the superhero genre and interact with it in the media. Thus, they imitate the superheroes (Lowe & Brown, 2016, 358). Barbie consumes clothing, objects, cosmetics, and fast food. Under her white skin and indifferent look, she has a message about using beauty products to attract and maintain her youth. What portrays Barbie as a female protagonist, who is eternal and immortal, seems to go back to her enjoyment of the lifestyle she uses. An example is the Ukrainian model Valeria Lukyanova, whose efforts to look like a Barbie face with the use of beauty lenses, strenuous bodybuilding exercises, and special diets have made her famous.

Fig. 4 shows the face of young Valeria, who gradually

becomes more like a Barbie doll during her teenage years in her longing for mythical immortality. In Fig. 4 (Valeria and her doll), the depth of objectiveness is shown.

• **The signifier/signified/sign**

The most important consequences of strengthening the assets in the works and goods produced are increasing the social class distance and dominating the affluent class as the ruling class of society (Barthes, 1972, 142-143). Although these types are inspired by different cultures around the world, the dominant Western culture overshadows all Barbie products and tries to bring their audiences closer to the same global culture.¹³ On the other hand, the difference in the type of clothing in the new generation of Barbie tries to approach other cultures, including the Eastern bloc, e.g., the veiled Barbie is a new generation of Barbie who entered the Arab world market in full hijab in 2005 in the early twentieth century (Yaqin, 2007, 173). At the onset of the twenty-first century, a Barbie doll named Fulla was first introduced to the Middle East in 2004. It came from Syria and was named after a native jasmine flower (Fig. 5). This doll with accessories such as a pink prayer mat has had an unprecedented sale to Muslims and has brought modernity and Islamic tradition to homes and cyberspace in a cultural discourse with

fashionable Islamic clothing, branding, Islamic fashion, and feminism (Roy, 2004, 247). Moreover, imitating the celebrities of today’s world in the design of dolls similar to them as another way of expanding the variety of products and consequently covering more customers has become widespread.

According to New York Times¹⁴, the Barbie doll in Fig. 6 is seen in the hands of an Olympic medalist in swordsmanship “belongs to Ibtihaj Muhammad, a different-colored American female athlete with a muscular body and a veil. This image has shattered the stereotypes of Barbie defined in the past.” However, this is not the only time Mattel has made dolls from celebrities. Barbie created a stronger and more believable mythical signifier in the computer games genre and video game characters, e.g., in 2018. The production of Lara Croft doll -the hero of the Tomb Raider video game and action movie- was released simultaneously with the movie. Lara has been defined as an amazing woman who kills many people during many adventures (Paananen, 2017, 7). This form, although meeting the criteria of classical beauty, is manifested in a representation of excitement and violence. According to Noel Carroll, she is “a meaningful and layered form” (Gaut & Mc. Ayverloopse, 2016, 72; Carroll, 1985). The live-action cinematic Barbie, starring Hollywood

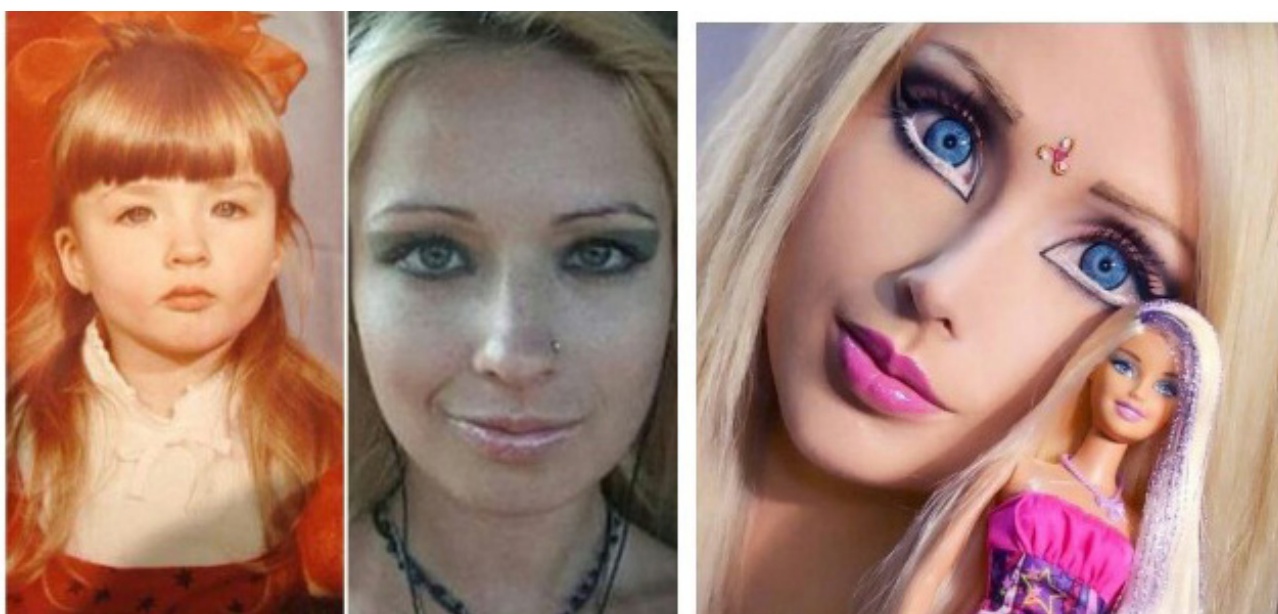


Fig. 4. Face change process. Source: www. i.reddit.com/r/Atoaplasticsurgery/comments/ahmlv9/valeria_lukyanova



Fig. 5. Veiled Barbie. Source: www.Emel.com.

actress Margot Robbie, scheduled for release in 2021, shows the expansion of the studies on Barbie and the continued presence of this myth in the conditions of the day. The development of the Barbie style worldwide has its roots in the past years, but it is possible to keep this style alive by making Barbie a female superhero. In 1997, e.g., the Danish-Norwegian dance troupe released a single song with the theme of Barbie and considered Barbie a sexual theme.¹⁵ The producers of this work considered Barbie's fame among the youth and brought her to the stage through a happy melody and strong lyrics with fantasy and imaginative worlds that quickly became famous. This song was at the top of the global charts in May 1997, especially in Europe and the United Kingdom, and peaked in the United States in September that year (Wallack, 2016, 477). This is while, in 2000, Mattel Company claimed in a protest that due to the neglect of the copyright regarding its logo, pink color, and Barbie's market etiquettes in the music video and song lyrics, their market popularity has weakened and their marketing has been influenced (*ibid.*). However, the song's popularity not only made a huge profit for the band but also rewrote the girly themes in the form of Barbie's Fantasy with Ken, which became popular among a wide range of audiences and affected



Fig.6. Ibtihaj Muhammad. Source: www.Instagram/ibtihajmuhammad

the continued sales and popularity of Barbie dolls. In the next step, it created meaningful implications for the cultural infrastructure. The band's decision as to which myths to use for the theme of their song itself indicates Barbie's position as a myth. There are other reasons for this success, e.g., as developing countries and the third world have been profiting from markets for commercial goods, weakening national cultural products has paved the way for replacing culture-civilization-building identities with a wave of modernity. Moreover, cultural studies and research on the audience in countries such as Iran, which also consumes toys such as Barbie, are superficial and unsuccessful inside and outside the country. In designing toys, cultural indicators and audiences' needs must be given full consideration. The initial characterization and model of what is to be given to the children in the form of a puppet is not only something far from a myth, but also doomed to destruction if there is no proper cultural infrastructure for it. An example of this is the effort of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, which, in contrast to Barbie, has introduced two eight-year-old Iranian twin dolls named Dara and Sara in different Iranian ethnic costumes. The feedback of the first series of these dolls in 1996 showed that

despite the short-term attention to this brand, in the long run, it could not be a serious competitor for Chinese Barbie and has not even been a pleasant interactive toy for Iranian children (Fig. 7). Society’s culture, form, ergonomics, and economy had no scientific justification for the production of these dolls. The high weight of the dolls due to their thickness, their high price, inappropriate size for children’s play, and so on, has affected the expansion process of the design, made the audience reluctant, and turned them into a decorative objects.

The most important components that should be considered in the audience’s interaction with Dara and Sara are their implicit signification, the meta-language role, and their semantic dimension. The faces of the dolls, which were made in China, do not have any kind of familiar message to the audience.¹⁶ The signifier, which is dependent on the signified, reaches a form that is sculptural and passive and cannot create a sign-signifier layer and achieve a lasting meaning. For this reason, due to the silence of the media in introducing and advertising the national content, children did not watch any movies or animations with these characters. Thus, Dara and Sara remained as decorative objects in the corners of the homes. The sign-signifier of the doll needs important mediators such as individual, social, formal, technical, cultural, and economic indicators to produce a stable signified and finally reach the sign-myth. In the case of Dara and Sara, in the design of the doll, none of the indicators had the necessary strength

to create a cultural and symbolic identity. Therefore, they were quickly replaced among the users by Barbie, and the myth of Barbie in Iran entered the homes of Iranians through various media outlets. The result is the formation of Iranian myth because the only aspect that is growing rapidly on this issue is the expansion of beauty clinics, bodybuilding clubs, brand clothing boutiques, and plastic surgery in the country. Therefore, in recent years, according to media reports, one or two world-famous celebrities have been referred to offices and clinics inside Iran-Tehran for rhinoplasty, cosmetic surgery, and statuary.¹⁷

• **The signifier/signified/myth**

One of the hidden functions of the myth is to make the constructed objects pretend to be self-constructed. The masses are interested in imitating and trusting natural processes. As Barbie and Ken came to the homes of people around the world, they gradually gained the trust and interest of their audiences. Young girls and, subsequently, the last generation of teenage and young boys have chosen this pattern as a template to compete with each other in becoming more and more like Barbie and Ken by making changes in their hair color, eyes, nose, and body shape (Botz-Bornstein, 2012, 2). In the meantime, actors and TV performers try to make self-made changes to their faces, bodies, and lifestyles to attract more audiences, and they try to show that they are natural. In this way, they give these patterns their mythical weight. Three well-known cases in this regard are shown in Figs. 5 and 6. Pixie Fox, with the title of



Fig. 7. Sarah doll (national production) and Barbie in advertising posters. Source: Authors’ archive.

“live animation”, after numerous surgeries, became a legendary and unusual character in the real world. With more than \$100,000 to assemble a new body, she has become the world’s thinnest woman. Aspiring to be an actor, she has more than a few million followers on her Instagram page. She also did rib removal surgery -a removal of a part of the ribs-[18] and made it a lucrative and profitable niche (Fig. 8). On the other hand, interest in bodybuilding in young men has also increased considerably. For example, the famous Brazilian-British performer did numerous surgeries and was able to earn the title of “living Ken”. Some characters have given semantic aspects to this structure in the process of becoming self-constructed from constructed. Justin Jedlia, with over 300 surgeries, not only calls himself “Ken” but also states on his website that he is an independent artist who has pioneered reformed men’s aesthetics¹⁹ (Fig. 8).

It should be noted, however, that the ugly praise that is the consequence of the age of technology creates a range of intentional physical violence on the body (Eco, 2019, 289-290). Each myth has ideological and political goals relative to its audience (Barthes, 1972, 147 & 157). These general goals are programmed by the capitalist powers over the long term and affect almost every contemporary myth, including Barbie dolls. In Table 1, the feedback toward the Barbie myth and superheroes is identified.

Barthes, in his mythological criticism, “demystifies and generates an artificial myth in the form of three-layered implicit significations.” According to Fig 9, the signifier/myth is used at the third level as a signified



Fig. 8. Pixie Fox. Source: Instagram / pixiefox

beautiful.” Beauty standards are summarized in Barbie dolls. The sense of need formed in the growth process leads to a phenomenon through which the children of consumer society decide to have nose surgery, change their hair color, and inject beauty gels as soon as they reach the age of eighteen. Excessive weight loss, followed by depression, is a complication of an identity disorder caused by mystification. Bennett points out that “the rise of consumerism in contemporary social life has led to consumerism becoming a new form of power that undermines traditional forms of power, especially class and family background; it opens a space for new forms of individual identity” (Bennett, 2007, 97). Identity, which includes a set of acquisitive traits, changes the perception it gives to the audience (Amoian & Mahmoudi, 2018, 133). Under the influence of propaganda and due to the strengthening of the audience’s wishes, social groups try to show a new identity through objects and their ownership. In this way, a new wave of consumerism begins and huge profits flow to the capital market (Asa Berger, 2011, 42). In the capitalist era, the process of artistic production becomes a process of order and production, and cultural products are standardized for advertising. The products are made sacred to the masses in this way. Moreover, the policies adopted to introduce Hollywood models for mass entertainment are aimed at goals such as cultural assimilation, capitalist domination, fake identity, and lifestyle (Angus, 2016, 104). Similarly, the motivations that are created in the public mind and the target age group lead to competitive behavior in the phenomenon of consumption. Thus, the concept of class distinction that manifests itself in consumption, despite the humanitarian slogans of the West, is increasingly dominating the target communities.

Conclusion

The result of all the studies conducted on the mythological semiotic analysis of Barbie dolls using Roland Barthes’ method describes the future deception and the cause of this deception. The results of this description are as follows: New Barbie dolls are presented to everyone in the mass media. They appear to be valuable and superior objects

to generate the second myth. The second myth deals with meta-linguistic criticism and reveals the myth by deforming it (Namvar Motlaq, 2014, 180).

As mentioned above, the layers are explored in the process of forming a research sample as a superhero at three levels.

1. Attention to aesthetic needs
2. Attention to and encourage consumption culture²⁰
3. Strengthening the capitalist system

These three layers, respectively, lead to three specific goals, which are shown in Fig. 10.

Myth in the present age, in a kind of distorted and contradictory message, naturalizes historical phenomena (Moriarty, 1991, 19). Barthes believes that the “myth belongs to the bourgeois society and seeks to unveil the culture of this society” (Najafabadi & Nazeri, 2017, 35). He tries to decrypt and clarify the distorted messages of capitalist society, which are dictated to the world in a natural and obvious way (Chandler, 2008, 216). First of

all, the mystification of all has had destructive effects on developing countries and third world countries. Barbie establishes herself through worthwhile girl contests, which receive extensive news coverage around the world every year and target the proletariat class. People who cannot supply their daily lives greedily follow the repeated pattern of the living Barbies in the mass media every year, and children expect to have even a Barbie of their own. Likewise, high demand sends a wide range of Kitsch products to the market (Madadpour, 2009,98). Small companies seeking more profit and sales produce low-quality models that imitate the main models and send them to the market at a cheaper price. This is because people can improve their taste for the affluent class (Eco, 2019, 270). China, meanwhile, has built the world’s largest Kitsch factory, and the most common toys in the world belong to the Chinese market.²¹ A child who receives a Barbie gift from his parents receives an indirect message from it: “You are not

Table 1. Myth goals. Source: Authors.

Purposive components in mystification	Myth	Barbie Superhero
Propagation of Consumerism and Profitability	Encouraging more consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modeling the multiplicity of Barbie’s personal belongings - Reproducing more complete Barbie models and encouraging shopping - Various prices for more coverage - Updating the users’ wants and needs
Change of Lifestyle	Leading society to a liberal lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equalization of beauty criteria for communities - Bachelorism and narcissism - Exaggerated attention to appearance and body
Justification of Aggression	Persuading through benefiting the position of the myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Europe-orientation - Destruction of tradition and ethnicity - Capitalism domination

Signifier	Signified	
Signifier/Sign		Signified
Signifier/Myth		Signified
Criticism		

Fig.9. Implicit signification in demystification. Source: Authors.

Barbie Doll	Beauty	
Beauty Function and Identity		Flawlessness, Modeling
Consumerism, More Demand, Emerge of Kitsch Phenomenon		More Sale, Ultra-Barbie Consumption, Growth of Bodybuilding Clubs
Globalization of Capitalist Culture, Future Deception		

Fig. 10. Analysis of three-level layers in the demystification of Barbie dolls. Source: Authors.

among other toys due to their glamorous forms. Barbie is charming in form. In practice, its inherent subtlety embodies a hidden innocence, but identity emerges from fairy tales in the material and real world.

Barbie's advertising seems simple at first sight. However, this is only the outer layer of a mythological system. Behind the surface layer, there are hidden layers that determine the guidelines of the advertised product. According to Barthes, this makes up the world.

Repetition of the image of Barbie leads to the repetition of the signifier/signified and changes history to nature and the temporary to the eternal. This repetition will attract the attention of the masses.

In the next step, the sign/signifier/signified are followed by the cultural influence on the world. Excessive advertising of fitness clubs and beauty salons, the prevalence of supplements and diet pills, surgical procedures, genetic manipulation of generations, as well as Kitsch food and industry, create a kind of predetermined behavior in communities in a coordinated manner. This behavior arises from the creation of a false need, and in the process of its deception, it deprives the next generation of the opportunity to decide and makes them have unnatural demands and needs and ready-made responses.

In the signifier/signified/myth step, the connection of the ultra-Barbie mythological system is shaped so that the individual changes from constructed into self-constructed and is completely solved in the world of Barbie myths. In the demythologization of Barbie, after decrypting the messages hidden in magazines, political discourses, and propaganda, the globalization of consumer culture ultimately strengthens the capitalist system and the integration of consumption patterns. Behavior also leads to a dominant ideology over human societies which is not shown to the audience.

In response to the first research question, it should be mentioned that the mythical signs of Barbie dolls are crystallized in creating a multiple and comprehensive model of the female heroine who has formal, sociological, and symbolic indicators. In the signifier/signified indicators, it expands on visual elements, and in the signifier/signified/sign indicators, it expands on functional and behavioral elements. Moreover, in the signifier/

signified/myth indicator, it expands on the change of values and systems of responding to the needs of human societies. In response to the second research question, it seems that the change of the sign/signifier and the sign/myth cause the production of the meta-language layer. This implicitly creates demands and needs in the target group. By emphasizing the signs such as modeling and consumerism, it speaks for a wide range of audiences and puts the Barbie doll in its dominance of power. This consumption has consequences such as temporal deception, depression, emotional crisis, despair, breaking with cultural roots in the younger generation, and strengthening capitalism in the world.

Endnotes

1. he was one of the most influential members of the Tel Quel group.
2. Levi-Strauss considered myth to be derived from speech (Namvar Motlaq, 2014, 166). Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009).
3. this decryption is influenced by culture, climate, social class, age, gender, education, and sociological factors in different societies.
4. Gestalt is a German word and in industrial design, it refers to the bodies made up of components: the elements that make up the form, the elements that fill the form, the macro, and microelements, and all the visual values that represent the nature of the product body.
5. some semioticians describe the meta-meta-language patterns following Barthes, e.g., Julia Kristova, Tzutan Todorov, and Umberto Eco (see Eco, 1976).
6. Mattel is the largest toy design and manufacturing company in the world, located in California. Barbie, the Lion King, Naruto, the Hot Wheels, Tarzan and Batman are the products of this company (Ahmadian et al., 2016).
7. Ruth Handler made this doll using the expertise of Jack Ryan, the engineer who designed the first Barbie doll for her. The idea of Barbie first came from a doll named Bild Lily, popular in Germany. It was inspired by a street woman of the same name in Germany. In 1964, Mattel became the sole manufacturer of adult dolls after purchasing the Bild Lily franchise.
8. Barbie's body is made of a plastic material called A.B.S and Barbie's head is made of soft P.V.C. At the joints, to be more real, the elbows and knees can be folded.
9. Northrop Frye describes this phenomenon in four myths, whose period of romance and poetic heyday is in the half of the analogy of innocence. (Namvar Motlaq, 1998, 292 & 297).
10. see notes, Communication and Meta-Linguistic Chapter (Barthes, 1968, 89-97).
11. Kansei engineering is one of the study methods for analyzing customer expectations of the product, which is done using various methods, including a questionnaire. They realize their customers' interests and desires and use this data to achieve higher sales through visual cues in product design. See Nagamachi (2017).
12. See Barthes, 1972, 71-90.
13. Japanese women in Japan see Barbie as a symbol of a stylish and well-groomed woman (Kakkoi) because she acts like a strong man and has independence and individuality. This is what they are looking for. Today, Barbie is a woman who has the traditional beauty of Kwai (beautiful) along with Kakoki beauty (new and modern) (Shibagaki, 2007, 50).
14. See Nytimes.com/2018/07/24/books/Ibtihaj-Muhammad-fencing-hijab-olympics.html.
15. the lyrics of this song are: -Hi Barbie, -Hi Ken. - Do you want to go for a ride? -Sure, Ken! - Jump in! - I'm a Barbie girl in the Barbie world. Life in plastic is fantastic. You can brush my hair and undress me everywhere, imagination; life is your creation. - Come on Barbie! Let's go party. - I am a blond bimbo girl in a fantasy world. Dress me up! Make me tight! I am your

dolly. - You are my doll, rock, and roll, feel the glamor in pink. Kiss me here, touch me there, hanky punky. You can touch, you can play if you say I am always yours. - Come on, Barbie! Make me walk, make me talk, do whatever you please. I can act like a star. I can beg on my knees. Come jump in, bimbo friend, let's do it again, hit the town, fool around, let's go-to party!...

16. See www.kanoontolid.com

17. See Fararu.com/en/news/295559

18. Rib removal, for more information, see En.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rib_removal.

19. For more information, see justinjedlica.com

20. Modeling companies make product life cycle shorter. Therefore, there is a need to buy and consume more products (Brannon, 2005, 28).

21. Over 90% of the country's toys are owned by China (Ahmadian et al., 2016, 44).

Reference List


- Ahmadian, R., Sharafieh, M. & Mohammadian Bishe, I. (2016). *San'at-e Asbab-Bazi-ye Iran, Forsat-ha va Chalesh-ha* [Iran toy industry: Opportunities and challenges]. Tehran: Noban Publications.
- Amoian, F. & Mahmoudi, F. (2018). Objectification Process of Product Design in Contemporary Society: Culture Industry Theory (Case Study: Cell Phone). *HONAR-HA-YE-ZIBA; HONAR-HA-YE-TAJASSOMI*, 24(1), 125-134.
- Angus, I. (2016). *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, New York: Mothly Review Press.
- Asa Berger, A. (2011). *Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture: Advertising's Impact on American Charater and Soiety*. London: Romman & Littlefield.
- Barthes, R. (1968). *Elements of Semiology*. AnnetteLavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill & Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York: Hill & Wang.
- Bashir, H. & Hoseini, S. B. (2012). Impact Of Characterization Modeling Function On The Reasoning, Heart And Limbs Of The Audience; Case Study Of Barbie Doll. *RELIGION & COMMUNICATION*, 19(1), 5-35.
- Bennett, A. (2007). *Culture and everyday life* (L. Javafeshani & H. Chavoshian, Trans.). (1nd ed.). Tehran: Akhtaranbook Publications.
- Botz-Bornstein, T. (2012). Barbie and the Power of Negative Thinking: Of Barbies, Eva-Barbies and I-Barbies. *Post Modern Cultural Sound, Text and Image*, (9), 1552-5112.
- Brannon, L. (2005). *A Human-Centered Perspective on Interaction Design*. London: Springer.
- Budiyanto, A. (2009). Playing with Piety: The Phenomenon Of Indonesian Muslim Dolls. *EXPLORATIONS a Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, (2), 1-14.
- Carroll, N. (1985). Formalism and Critical Evaluation. In P. McCormik (Ed.), *The Reasons of Art*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press
- Chandler, D. (2008). *Semiotics: Basics* (M. Parsa, Trans.). Tehran: Institute of Islamic Culture and Art.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics (Advances in Semiotics)*. Bloomington, IN & London: Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (2019). *On Ugliness* (H. Bina & K. Taghizadeh Ansari, Trans.). Tehran: Academy of Arts.
- Gaut, B. (2016). *The Routledge companion to aesthetics (Encyclopedia of Aesthetics)* (M. Sane'i Darebidi, A. A. Nojournian, S. Ahmadzadeh, B. Mohaghegh, M. Ghasemian & F. Sasani, Trans.). Tehran: Farhangestan-e Honar.
- Khani Hanjani, N. & Alvandi, H. (2017). Affective Factors on Girl's Tendency to Mannequinism Case Study: The Particular impact of Barbie Dolls, among others on the Girls Tendency toward Mannequinism. *Pazheshname-ye Zanan [Women's Studies]*, 8(3), 19-45.
- Krik, D. (2002). *The Social Constraction of the Body in Physica Education and Sport*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Lowe, G. F. (2016). *Managing Media Firms and Industries*. London: Springer.
- Madadpour, M. (2009). *Falsafe-ha-ye Postmodern-e Gharbi: Goriz va Gozar az Modernite* [Escape from modernity: Western postmodern philosophies]. Tehran: Soore-ye Mehr Publications.
- Mire-Beigi, S. V. (2016). Criticism and Myth: The semiological analysis animation Wall-E.. *Cultural Studies & Communication*, 12(42), 89-113.
- Moriaty, M. (1991). *Roland Barthes*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Motlaghzadeh, R. (1999). *Vasayel-e Bazi-ye Koodakan* [Children's play equipment]. Tehran: Tehran Beautification Organization.
- Nagamachi, M. (2017). *Innovations of Kansei Engineering*. Tokyo: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Najafabadi, E. & Nazeri, A. (2017). The Myth and Modern Cinematic Superhero-Making from the Perspective of Cultural Studies. *PAZHUHESH-E HONAR*, 7(13), 31-42.
- Namvar Motlaq, B. (2014). Barthes' mythologies; mythology of a semiotician. *Naghd-Name Honar*, 1(6), 161-184.
- Namvar Motlaq, B. (2018). *Daramad-i bar Ostoureh-Shenasi: Nazarie-ha va Karbord-ha* [An introduction to mythology: Theories and applications]. Tehran: Sokhan Publications.
- Paananen, A. (2017). *The Development of the character of Lara Croft as manifested in the dialogue between her and other characters in the Tomb Raider reboot video game*. Retrieved august 19, 2021, from <http://jultika.oulu.fi/files/nbnfioulu-201706072625.pdf>
- Padmanugraha, A. S. (2007). Woman's Values in Society as Reflected in Marge Piercy's "Barbie Doll". *DIKSI*, 1 (14), 48-56.
- Roy, O. (2004). *The Globalized Islam The Search for a New Ummah*. NY: Colombia University Press.
- Shibagaki, A. (2007). *The Barbie Phenomenon in Japan*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis in Folklore, Department of Folklore and

Ethnomusicology, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

- Solomon, M. R. (2013). *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, Being*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Toffoletti, K. (2007). *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the Posthuman Body*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd.
- Urla, J & Swedlund, A. C. (2007). *The Anthropometry of*

Barbie: Unsettling Ideals of the Feminine Body in popular Culture. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- Wallack, H. (2016). *Mattel, Inc. v. MCA Records, Inc.* 296 F.3D (9th Cir. 2002). *DePaul Journal of Art, Technology & Intellectual Property Law*, 2 (12), 477-494.
- Yaqin, A. (2007). Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity. *Fashion Theory*, 2/3 (11), 173-188.

<p>COPYRIGHTS Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p>	
<p>HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE Amoian, F. & NamvarMotlaq, B. (2022). Semiotic Analysis of Barbie Dolls Using Roland Barthes' Mythologies. <i>Bagh-e Nazar</i>, 19(112), 59-72. DOI: 10.22034/BAGH.2022.242064.4618 URL: http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_151680.html?lang=en</p>	