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### “Our Barbies, Ourselves” OPR

When contemplating the significance of Barbie, Emily Prager’s casually written essay, titled “Our Barbies, Ourselves,” aims to equate Barbie’s figure to a ‘weapon’ of feminism, as well as an unequivocal role model to young girls everywhere who epitomizes the impossible standard of female attraction. Created by Jack Ryan around the same time as the emergence of the feminist movement, Barbie has been regarded by generations of critics as an emblem of the perfect, ideological American blonde. Considering Mattel was never concerned with physical proportions or human resemblance, the Barbie doll was designed for playing, not to be criticized by curious adults. However, according to Prager, even as a little girl, she detected a peculiarity about the Barbie and Ken dolls, comparing them to real-life male/female physiques. Through the use of rhetorical devices such as allusions, logos, ethos, euphemism, repetition, sarcasm, similes, metaphors, and anaphora, Prager manages to convey a distinct perspective on the representation of Barbie and how she stands for herself, since women are justifiably independent of men in accordance with feminist viewpoints. Consequently, Prager encourages her readers to examine Barbie with a closer focus, not just as a popular doll most girls enjoy as children.

Among the plethora of semiotic arguments concerning the portrayal of Barbie, Prager’s most effective include rhetorical devices, reflecting her background and entertainment during the 1950’s and 1960’s. First, in the sixth paragraph, Prager employs allusion and simile: “Madame Alexander was the queen of doll makers in the fifties, and her dollies looked like Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet*.” (Prager, pg. 354) In the 1944 movie *National Velvet* that Elizabeth Taylor got her big break as a twelve-year old actress, she was remembered most prominently for her violet eyes, becoming a huge star in the Hollywood film industry, much how Barbie’s façade satisfied the standard of a blonde American girl with blue eyes, fair skin, and pink lipstick. Second, in the fifth paragraph, Prager demonstrated euphemism, pathos, and ethos, “There is something indescribably masculine about Barbie—dare I say it, phallic.” (Prager, pg. 354) By upholding the anti-patriarchal display of ‘topless women and covered men,’ Prager shows how Barbie’s over-proportioned breasts in comparison with the absence of male genitalia is an excellent example of the concurrent feminist movement, advocating freedom and unrestrained roles of women in society, as opposed to the typical 1950’s notion that a man’s duty is to work outside to support his family, while a woman’s duty is to cook and clean in the home. Third, in the sixth paragraph, the use of anaphora, metaphor, and logos serve to emphasize the ‘impossible standard of physical perfection’ and seemed to illustrate an era with exuberance, “Her dolls’ boyfriends were figments of the imagination, figments with large portfolios and three-piece suits and presidential aspirations, figments who could keep dolly in the style to which little girls of the fifties were programmed to become accustomed, a style that spasm-ed with the sixties and the appearance of Barbie” (Prager, pg. 355). Finally, Prager stated, “God, it certainly has cheered me up to think that Barbie was designed by Jack Ryan...” (Prager, pg. 355) By employing repetition and sarcasm, this statement indicates the importance of gender on the creation of Barbie, because Prager suggests that if a woman designed Barbie, she would have been criticized much stronger, potentially emphasizing injustice and negative influences on young girls rather than connections to the feminist movement and an epitome of the ‘perfect’ woman.