

# Womenews

Women's Center of Montgomery County



## Prevention is Key

Each year the Women’s Center supports approximately 5,000 adult victims of abuse. We are grateful to have a multitude of services to offer those in need. However, we also look at relationships from another angle – Prevention Education and Community Outreach.

In May alone, our Prevention team reached approximately 2, 500 students in Montgomery County. The teens participated in workshops which incorporated subjects such as: What does a Healthy Relationship Look Like, Power and Control, Consent and Boundaries and How to Leave an Unhealthy Relationship. Some groups took part in a special activity designed to create an awareness of inclusion. This summer is also a busy time for us as we are doing library programs for pre-school children, nurses’ training and elder residence visits.

Our Outreach Program has been buzzing as well. The Women’s Center has been very present in our community via information tables. The locations include: colleges, businesses and special Community Days. Prevention materials and victim support is made readily available to the public. Our trained staff and dedicated volunteers take time to answer table visitors’ questions in a sensitive and caring way. All outreach efforts are designed to raise awareness of the Women’s Center’s vast resources.

Would you like to learn more about the Women Center’s Prevention and Outreach programs? Feel free to call Robin and Shelby at the Colmar office – 215.996.0723 - to discuss opportunities.



## Second Chances Thrift Shoppe

A Project of the Women's Center of Montgomery County



**WE'VE MOVED!!!**  
Come checkout our new, spacious location **318 Leedom Street** (across from the playground)



318 Leedom Street, Jenkintown, PA 19046 Telephone: 215-885-0651  
Open: Monday-Friday 10 am to 5 pm/Saturday 10 am to 4 pm  
Website: [www.wcmontco.org/thrift-shop.html](http://www.wcmontco.org/thrift-shop.html)  
Facebook: [Second Chances Shoppe](#)



## The Importance of Pride Month 2019 & Ways to Be a Better ALLY

*By: Colleen Dych, Director of Special Projects*

### *What is Pride Month?*

Throughout the month of June, members of the LGBTQIA+ community gather across the globe to celebrate diversity and inclusion. Pride provides a time where it is safe for LGBTQ+ folks to be out and proud in their communities- perhaps the only time of year where some may feel comfortable being who they are. Pride celebrates the accomplishments of the LGBTQ+ community so far, and spreads awareness about all of the work that still needs to be done for everyone to have access to basic and equal human rights.

June 2019 is undoubtedly one of the biggest Pride months yet, as it marks the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

### *What are the Stonewall Riots?*

The Stonewall Riots began at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. Located in Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Inn provided a safe haven for members of the LGBTQ+ community to gather, easily making it one of the most popular gay clubs in the city at the time. In the early hours of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969, the Stonewall Inn was raided by the police. Patrons, who had grown tired of the constant harassment, discrimination, and aggressiveness of law enforcement, fought back. A rebellion of hundreds of protestors began, and continued for five more days. The events that took place at the Stonewall Inn were key in the launching of LGBTQ+ activism.

### *Ways to Be a Better ALLY:*

While being an ALLY to the LGBTQ+ community is welcomed and great in June, it is vital to remember the importance of being an ALLY to the LGBTQ+ community all year long. Here are some ways you can show your support on every level:

**Respect Pronouns:** Not everyone uses the pronouns “he/she” to identify themselves; many people prefer “they/them”. If you’re not sure which pronouns someone prefers- ASK: “*What pronouns do you prefer?*”. DON’T assume, and when they tell you make sure you use them. Most people are happy to tell you.

**Advocate:** The world is a more troubling place than it has ever been for LGBTQ+ folks. There is so much hate in the world right now, and it can be quite a scary place for people who identify as LGBTQ+. Find ways to get involved and show your support in your local communities. Donate to and/or volunteer at an LGBTQ+ agency. Educate yourself on LGBTQ+ terminology, history, and politics, and then join the movement to help educate others. Encourage your employers, teachers, and religious leaders to adapt more inclusive and protective policies for LGBTQ+ folk. Encourage your family and friends to open their hearts, minds, and doors to LGBTQ+ folks in need- especially for holidays. Contact your local government officials to implore them to support protections and inclusions for the LGBTQ+ community. Display a Pride flag, an ALLY sticker and/or an “All Are Welcome Here” sign in your home, business, school, and/or place of worship.

*Everyone deserves the right to feel happy, safe, and welcome in the world- together we can make that happen.*

*Stand up. Speak out. Be an ALLY.*



5K Run  
3K Walk  
Rain or shine



## Unmask the Abuse!

The Women's Center of Montgomery County

Put on your sneakers and costume to Run or Walk  
To help End Domestic Violence and help to Start  
New Beginnings

**When:**

Sunday, October 20, 2019  
Run/Walk starts at 9:00 am  
In person registration starts at 8:00 am

**Where:**

Montgomery County Community College  
Blue Bell Campus - Rt 202/DeKalb Pike

**What:**

EJZ Entertainment \* **FREE face painting by Tania Tardif** \* 3 Raffle Baskets \*  
**Prize** for best Adult and best Child (12 & under) costumes \* water ice

**Registration:**

\$20 pre-registration before Oct. 18 online at [www.wcmontco.org](http://www.wcmontco.org)  
\$25 day of event  
Children under 12 free

**Sponsorships:**

Details available at [www.wcmontco.org](http://www.wcmontco.org)

**ALSO: Please bring any gently used children's costumes to donate to:  
The Halloween Helpers ([www.thehalloweenhelpers.com](http://www.thehalloweenhelpers.com))**

**Start a Team/Register at: [www.wcmontco.org](http://www.wcmontco.org)**

## The Feminist Possibilities of Barbie for Young Girls

By Gina Heller, WCMC Intern

Since its release in 1959 the Barbie doll has been critiqued by mothers and feminists for a multitude of reasons. Many critique her unrealistic body type and claim that it contributes to negative body images in young girls. Some feel that she is too “sexy” for young girls to play with, too pretty to be taken seriously, too domestic, or too materialistic. However, these critiques of Barbie focus on the perceived psychological effects that they believe to be associated with Barbie instead of focusing on the actual ways in which young girls play with and understand Barbie; they do not take into account that imaginative little girls rarely play with products the way manufacturers expect. They believe that girls will want to be like and/or look like Barbie and thus struggle to achieve perfection when in reality girls understand that Barbie is a doll and use her as a tool to explore possibilities for themselves.

Feminists should allow women to be whatever they want to be, and that includes being feminine, glamorous, being a housewife or stay at home parent, and playing with Barbie. These women are coming from a theoretical and critical perspective. Child play should be respected for what it is as acts of imaginative agency, not what adults make of it from an adult-centric position of a superior being.

I will address the critiques of Barbie including the idea that Barbie influences negative bodily perceptions in young girls and the idea that Barbie play centers around superficiality and consumerism and compare them to actual experiences of Barbie play from first-hand accounts and from qualitative studies. Through this I will argue that gendered toys do not determine play scripts for children, that feminist devaluing of “girly” toys does not help girls but further stigmatizes femininity, and that there are feminist possibilities of identity exploration in Barbie play.

Ruth Handler’s intentions for Barbie when she invented the doll were arguably feminist in nature. Up until that point dolls were primarily baby dolls or adolescent dolls intended to foster nurturing qualities in young girls. However, when Handler observed her daughter playing with paper dolls, she found that her daughter most commonly acted out scenarios where the doll was a teenager or a working woman.

From this she came to the conclusion that girls most often used dolls to act out future, rather than current, roles. She was right. Handler released Barbie in 1959 and by 1965 her toy company Mattel was making over \$100 million dollars in sales.

Handler’s model for Barbie was a German doll called Lilli who was based on a racy comic book character. According to Jennifer Latson in her article “The Barbie Doll’s Not-for-Kids Origins” Lilli the comic book character was “witty, irreverent, and sexually uninhibited.” She describes one comic strip in which Lilli is wearing a bikini and a policeman tells her that two-piece swimsuits are illegal and Lilli replies “Oh, and in your opinion, which part should I take off?”

Handler acknowledged that Barbie was a “sexier” doll than other American dolls at the time and she purposefully was designed that way. Barbie’s breasts in particular were an important feature for Handler, who once said “If she was going to do role playing of what she would be like when she was 16 or 17, it was a little stupid to play with a doll that had a flat chest. So I gave it beautiful breasts.”

For these reasons many mothers despised Barbie upon her release and still do to this day. This rejection is “symptomatic of the typical discomfort mothers feel about their own daughters’ sexuality,” and presents a possibility for Barbie as a form of rebellion for daughters against their mothers.

Aside from her intentions for Barbie, Handler's operation overseeing Barbie was also progressive for the time. Handler herself was a woman working as a leader in a male-dominated field, and she surrounded herself with other working women. She recruited a group of young women from fashion design to produce Barbie's wardrobe, headed by Charlotte Johnson. Johnson was single, sexually aggressive, a perfectionist, and a tough negotiator.

Barbie's makeup was overseen by a woman named Hiroe Okubo-Wolr, and a woman named Jean Ann Burger was in charge of her hair. The women who created and produced Barbie rejected the housewife/mother script that women of "The Feminine Mystique" era were expected to follow, and these were the types of women that Handler wanted Barbie to embody. Despite significant pressure to turn Barbie into a wife and a mother, Handler maintained Barbie's status as an uninhibited woman by simply creating for her a boyfriend in Ken and a little sister in Skipper.

One of the most discussed critiques of Barbie is that her unrealistic figure promotes bodily insecurity in young girls. However, M.G. Lord writes in "Forever Barbie" that "Barbie's proportions were not the result of some misogynistic plot. They were dictated by the mechanics of clothing construction. The doll is one-sixth the size of a person, but the fabrics she wears are scaled for people. Barbie's middle...had to be disproportionately narrow to look proportional in clothes."

Barbie seems to be the only doll that people expect to have accurate body proportions; other popular girl's dolls like Bratz dolls, cabbage-patch kids, or American girl dolls have even less accurate bodies than Barbie with huge heads that are not at all proportional to their bodies. Beyond that, the research linking Barbie to negative body image in young girls is unreliable.

In their article "The Science of Barbie's Effect on Girl's Self-Esteem" Diep observes a few of these studies and their insignificant outcomes. One study from the U.K. in 2006 found that young girls who looked at a Barbie book were more dissatisfied with their bodies compared to girls who looked at a book featuring a more realistically proportioned doll. However, they found that past the age of 7 girls in general were more dissatisfied with their bodies regardless of which books they were shown.

Another study from 2010 which gave girls either a Barbie doll, a more proportionate doll, or Lego blocks found no difference in body image among the girls after playing with the different toys; similarly, a survey of young women from 2014 found no association between body image and how old they were when they started playing with Barbies, or how many Barbie dolls they owned.

These studies were inconclusive because it is too simplistic to link a negative body image in young girls to Barbie when body image is such a complicated concept with numerous contributing factors. For example, research shows that young girls' body image is more influenced by their mothers' attitudes than anything else. As Jennifer Legra writes in her blog post "Why My Daughter Will Get a Barbie for Christmas" "if a doll is teaching my daughter where to get her self-esteem, then I am doing something very wrong."

Those who focus on Barbie's physical attributes are ignoring the feminist and liberatory aspects of her persona. As stated above, Ruth Handler strongly resisted pressures to make Barbie into a housewife or stay at home mother. Lord writes in *Forever Barbie* that Handler turned down a vacuum company's offer to make a vacuum for Barbie because Barbie didn't do "rough housework."

Lord goes on to say "to first generation Barbie owners, of which I was one, Barbie was a revelation. She didn't teach us to nurture, like our clinging, dependent Betsy Wetsys and Chatty Cathys. She taught us independence."

Barbie offered a chance for young girls to rebel against what society and what their mothers believed that they should embody.

Barbie has had 150 careers including a doctor, an astronaut, and the President of the United States. She even visited the moon before Neil Armstrong did. Instead of focusing on these aspects of Barbie feminists choose to focus on her ‘unrealistic’ appearance and inclination toward fashion. Ironically, this focus on looks over achievements is something that all women face, and thus in a way feminists who critique Barbie on this basis are perpetuating that. They are also perpetuating the devaluation of traditional femininity as if a woman cannot care about her appearance or enjoy fashion while being progressive at the same time. Women who enjoy growing up with Barbies oftentimes reject this “girl culture” in their adulthood.

One woman from Walsh and Mitchell’s study “Just a Doll? Liberating Accounts of Barbie Play” notes that she did grow up to be somewhat ashamed of such ‘girls’ culture’ items as Barbies, playing house, and soap operas. She notes that there are “justifiable concerns about the kind of messages that are given to girls when they play with popular culture items,” but she acknowledges that our culture’s tendency to valorize men’s culture while devaluing women’s culture has negative effects on girl’s self-esteem.

This negative perspective on girl culture and femininity is incredibly limiting to women and feminists should be the last people to limit what women can do and who they can be. As Jennifer Legra writes “If you choose to view Barbie as an inflated-boobied, blonde bimbo with no brain who is single-handedly destroying the self-esteem of young girls everywhere, then that is exactly what she will be. If you choose to see her as a fierce fighting feminist who breaks barriers, challenges stereotypes, and shows girls limitless possibilities, then that she is.”

Notably, the first generation of women who grew up with Barbie dolls contributed more to the advancement of women than any other generation of this century, in terms of degrees acquired, nontraditional jobs entered, honors awarded, and any other measure of secular achievement.

In her essay “Barbie Genesis: play, dress, and rebellion among her first owners” Linda M. Scott addresses the perception that Barbie is unrealistic and “thus encourages girls to create fantasy worlds when they play. Scott believes that the real unrealistic expectations for girls were the “perfect housewife” image that was so emphasized in the 1950s and that the ability to imagine alternative lives through Barbie separate from the “problem with no name” identified by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* may have been a catalyst for the Second Wave of feminism.

I will now turn to the possibilities for children in Barbie play. According to anthropologist Carolyn P. Edwards in her essay “Play Patterns and Gender,” “play” is a “culturally universal activity through which children explore themselves and their environment, test out and practice different social roles, and learn to interact with other children and adults. This play is influenced and limited by the institutions of family, neighborhood, school, and the media. Parents tend to present boys and girls with strict gender expectations and create gendered environments for them from birth.

Media and advertising which tend to present the sexes in stereotypic ways also influence children’s perceptions and play. Edwards and her colleagues Lisa Knoche and Asiye Kumru found that young girls typically participate in “sociodramatic play” which involves plots, props, and roles and tend to act out familiar events and settings like going to school or going to the doctor. The dramatic play of young girls tends to be structured with a specific script and outcome in mind, and they may be upset when someone interferes and prevents them from completing the sequence of events they have agreed upon. Cross-sex role play is typical among play in both boys and girls, and children often incorporate many disparate elements into their play, for example,

pretending to be a repairman but carrying a vacuum cleaner in the tool kit, or wearing a hard hat but carrying a purse. Barbie is a vessel through which these sociodramatic scripts can be acted out. Barbie can be used to act out real-world events, but she can also be used in fantasy play. Barbie and her accessories can also be used for cross-sex role play and this is typical among children in mixed-gender homes.

Kim Toffoletti explores this concept in her essay “Leave Barbie Alone- so we can talk about how kids actually play.” She notes that critics of Barbie fail to consider the unconventional ways in which children play with Barbies that do not always fit gender expectations. Some girls might play with Barbie in “rough” ways like cutting off all of her hair or grinding her breasts into the pavement as Toffoletti herself did. In addition, at home, siblings of different sexes can access each other’s toys.

For Toffoletti’s sons, “their sister’s pink handbags become holders for their toy cars and mobile phones.” Toffoletti notes that the structures and institutions that influence children’s gender roles are complex and diverse, and so it is difficult to pinpoint one toy as a “primary cause of detrimental gender behaviors.” In addition, children are capable of reacting to these influences in complex ways. They do not always behave as they are told to by their parents or expected to by toy manufacturers. To conclude Toffoletti writes “I loved Barbie as a child and I turned out OK. I became a feminist.”

Another feminist possibility for Barbie play is the ability to explore sexuality in a safe context. At the time of her release in 1959 there was little to no sex education for girls either from parents or from the education system. M.G. Lord writes in her book “Forever Barbie,” “Barbie, with her shocking torpedo orbs, and Ken with his mysterious genital bulge, were the extent of our exposure to the secrets of adulthood. Sex is less shrouded now than it was thirty years ago, but today’s young Barbie owners are still using the doll to unravel the mystery of gender differences.”

Barbie play is typically a private activity done without the supervision of parents, and Barbie and Ken dolls have semi-accurate adult anatomy. This allows children to explore an “adult” activity, their own curiosities, and their own desires with privacy and without physical or emotional consequences. Barbie-play also provides an avenue for young children to explore same-sex sexuality and attraction in a relatively safe and judgement-free space.

In her article “My Barbies Had So Much Sex. It was Great.” Ann Friedman explores her own experiences with Barbie and sexuality and compares it to those around her. One of her friends stated “My Barbie was a WHORE,” and another said her Barbies “had the most active sex life ever. I rubbed their little flat fronts together almost every time I played.” These possibilities for Barbie may be exactly what parents are afraid of, but sexual feelings and curiosities are natural for children and Barbie can help them understand and work through them.

The accounts above demonstrate that while Barbie may be a universally recognized image, what she represents in a child’s inner life can be as personal as a fingerprint. Despite all of the critiques against Barbie, the doll has remained incredibly popular for decades. The current designers of Barbie are attempting to keep her relevant; she now comes in a variety of body types, hair colors, skin colors, and eye colors, she has her own web series, TV series, and multiple movies, and there is even an AI Barbie called “Hello Barbie” which can hold conversations with children.

In one demonstration with the doll, a young girl told “Hello Barbie” that she wanted to be a scientist. Barbie replied “You sound to me like the next Marie Curie or Albert Einstein!”

With her possibilities for role playing, identity exploration, career exploration, and sexual exploration Barbie will likely remain popular as long as young girls remain imaginative and inquisitive.

## **Guess How Many Domestic Violence Offenders Go to Jail**

*Whatever the number in your head, it's probably even lower*

*By Sherry Hamby, Ph.D.*

We identified 517 cases of domestic violence in our nationally representative survey and asked family members whether they reported to the police, and, if they did, how the police and criminal justice system handled their cases. What we found are cracks in the system and lots of them. In the end, you won't believe how few people who commit domestic violence ever spend even a single day in jail.

Start: 517 cases of domestic violence

Crack #1: Not reported to the police.

This is the biggest "crack." Only about 1 in 4 cases of domestic violence are reported to the police. There are probably a lot of reasons for this, not all of them bad. In some places—Ferguson, Missouri comes to mind—calling the police might create more problems than it solves. In other cases, some other, more informal intervention might happen. It is important to realize that in some cases, victims might not be physically able to call the police, either because of their injuries or because the assault happens in a socially isolated place where they cannot access their telephone.

Number of cases left after Crack #1: 130

Crack #2: The police do not investigate.

This was the most surprising crack and one that "disappears" from many official police records. Even we were shocked to see that out of those 130 reports to the police—already a select and, on average, more serious group of incidents—that in 27 of those cases police never showed up in person to investigate. That is 1 in 5 dismissed on the phone! Domestic violence is a serious problem that should not be getting screened out over the telephone.

Number of cases left after Crack #2: 103

Crack #3: Police do not arrest.

All 50 states have, in recent years, passed probable cause, mandatory arrest, or other laws to encourage or require police officers to make an arrest in a domestic violence incident. I am actually a fan of police discretion—there are too many situations, probably millions, for any one-size-fits-all approach. However, only 3 in 5 cases that were investigated by police led to an arrest. Perhaps even more surprisingly, this rate was not higher in mandatory arrest states than in other states!

Number of cases left after Crack #3: 61

Crack #4: Criminal charges never filed.

This is one that must be frustrating for police officers. Domestic violence incidents are

some of the most dangerous calls that they go out on and they are already applying a lot of discretion in who they choose to arrest. Laws have also changed so that “victimless prosecution” is possible—the district attorney can usually proceed without the testimony of the victim. So imagine law enforcement’s frustration that in a large number of cases, the prosecuting attorney’s office never files charges. This probably happens more often than people realize—our data are similar to other research in this area. For 18 of these perpetrators, they get out of the system here. Almost 1 in 3 do not have charges filed.

Number of cases left after this crack: 43

Crack #5: No conviction or guilty plea.

Now we are truly down to a very select group of perpetrators—less than 10% of the original sample. And yet, probably much to the frustration and chagrin of prosecuting attorneys, less than half are ever convicted or plea guilty in a plea agreement.

Number of cases left after this crack: 16

Crack #6: No jail time

Out of those 16, still more than a third never spend more than a single day in jail. Not one day! I know I was personally shocked by these data because I developed a whole series of questions about the length of the jail term, whether they were released early, whether they received probation after their incarceration, etc. I would never have devoted that space in our survey if I’d known those questions would be asked about only 10 incidents.

Earlier data on domestic violence arrests were similarly grim, but I really believed that the system had changed. It is not often that I feel naïve about the system, but these data made me feel that way.

Number of cases left after this crack: 10

Less than 2% of domestic violence offenders ever received any jail time

I do not think that all 517 of these perpetrators deserved to spend time in jail. However, I am pretty sure more than 10 did. More than a third of these cases involved some kind of physical injury and 61 involved an injury bad enough to need medical attention. So 61 might be a good minimum starting point for how many of these offenders should have been convicted for assault.

The next time you wonder why a victim did not call the police, remember that more than 90% of the time, when the police are called, the offender does not go to jail. Even in this day and age, calling the police is not a way to get a domestic violence offender out of the house. That needs to change.

Sherry Hamby, Ph.D., is a research professor of psychology at Sewanee, the University of the South. You can visit her at her websites, [Life Paths Research Center](#) and [The Vigor](#). This piece was previously published at Psychology Today.

COME JOIN....

The Women's Center of Montgomery County for



# BEEF & BEER

FUN \* FOOD \* DRINK \* MUSIC \* RAFFLES

WHEN: AUG 9, 2019

TIME: 6 PM - 10 PM

WHERE: VFW, 805 W 2<sup>nd</sup> St. Lansdale

TICKETS: \$30.00/pp online at <https://womenscenterbeefandbeer.eventbrite.com>

\$ 35.00 at the door

\*\* Proceeds will support the Domestic Violence Project of the Women's Center of Montgomery County, a non-profit organization that offers free services to victims and survivors of domestic violence. \*\*

