

Chapter Five

MY STORY OF 'BARBIE'

Chosen Name:	Barbie
Age at the time of the interviews:	17 years old
Age at the time of parents' divorce:	10 years old
Currently living with:	Mother
Number of interviews:	Three

Introduction

This story is based on the transcribed interviews between the researcher and Barbie. The transcribed interviews can be found in Appendix B. The story has been reconstructed in terms of themes that were identified by the researcher and reflect the researcher's way of 'seeing'. The lens of the researcher thus colours her understanding of the participant's experience. Others may view the participant's story through a different lens, thus different themes may emerge as their understanding of the participant's experience develops. It is suggested that the interpretation of the participant's story is one of many possible interpretations and can therefore not be viewed as the ultimate truth.

The chapter begins with an explanation of how the participant came to be named Barbie, followed by a description of the setting in which the interviews were conducted. The researcher has also included a Genogram and a brief description of the structural changes to Barbie's family. Thereafter, Barbie's experience of her

family prior to the divorce as well as the divorce itself will be discussed. This should set the context for the focus of her story.

The dominant themes that emerged for the researcher, which she felt characterised Barbie's experience of her parents' divorce, will then be discussed. The thematic punctuations will illustrate the following: the nature of Barbie's relationships with significant others following her parents' divorce, a description of the manner in which Barbie coped through the years following the divorce, as well as the legacy of her parents' divorce. Finally, the researcher will comment on the effects of the research on Barbie as well as on her.

Choosing a Name

To maintain the anonymity of the participant in the study, the participant needed a pseudonym. The researcher felt it was important for the participant to be able to choose a suitable name for herself, since it was her story that was being given a voice. At the completion of the first interview, the participant informed the researcher that she had chosen for herself the name, Barbie, to represent herself in her story in the study. Interestingly, the participant had made reference to this name during the first interview in saying that

most people think I'm also not very clever, they think I'm a Barbie that isn't two inches deep. I don't think they believe I can think a bit deeper than just having fun.

The participant explained to the researcher that she felt this name to be appropriate in that it accurately reflected the perception that she felt others have of her, which she maintains is of no consequence to her, since she feels that "*it comes with the territory of school*" and "*the people that count in [her] life know that there's more to [her]*".

In choosing this name for herself, the researcher felt it was appropriate and represented more than merely the perceptions that others have of the participant. For the researcher, 'Barbie' is representative of the perfect woman, with a smile

that does not fade, but one that does not necessarily reflect the emotions within. Thus, one can only speculate about the 'self' within that seems to differ from what is portrayed on the outside. In this way, the 'plastique' persona of 'fun' that the participant projects to the world may be indicative of a mask that the participant wears in her everyday interactions to protect what others cannot see. As a result, this may also prohibit others from getting to know the person within.

The participant exhibited an almost unbridled enthusiasm when given the opportunity to choose an identity for herself. This response corresponds with the researcher's general experience of the participant, in that, the participant displayed an ease with being the centre of attention as well as satisfaction, in being given the space to share her story.

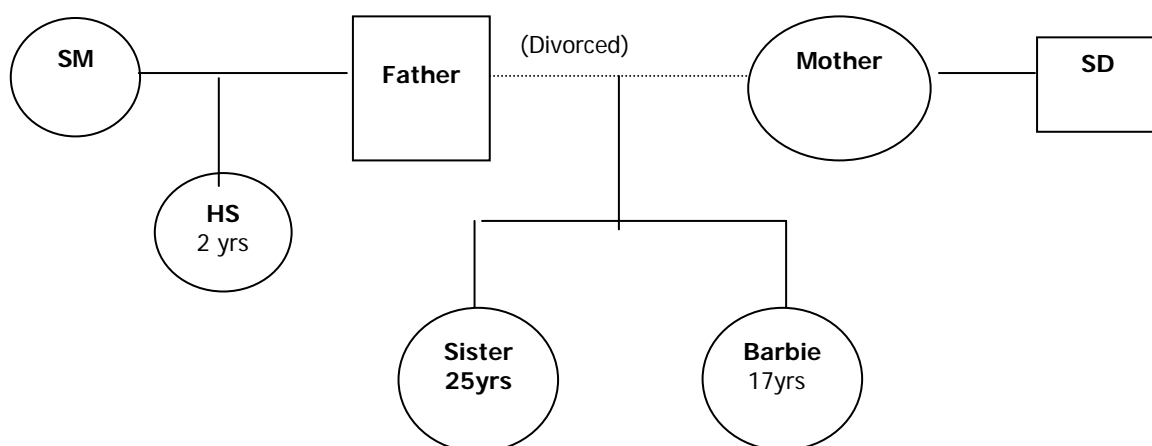
Furthermore, the participant seems to acknowledge that making meaning of her experiences is a process in making sense of her 'self' and others. Thus, for the participant, it may be that naming herself is an extension of the meaning making process and part of her journey in disclosing her story with those who will listen.

Research Setting

Barbie warmly greeted the researcher on the four occasions when they met, namely, the initial meeting and the three interviews. Barbie was interviewed three times in her home, which she shares with her mother. The first two interviews lasted one and a half hours each. However, the third interview, a supplementary interview, only lasted twenty minutes. Even though they were alone in the house, Barbie suggested that she and the researcher speak in Barbie's bedroom, perhaps to ensure that they would not be interrupted when her mother arrived home. The researcher felt privileged to be invited into the privacy of Barbie's bedroom, which assisted in creating a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere in which the interviews took place. Furthermore, the 'bedroom setting' environment seemed to contribute to Barbie feeling safe and secure, thus allowing her to discuss her story openly and without reservation.

From the initial meeting, the researcher experienced Barbie as a vibrant and open young woman, who displayed enthusiasm at being invited to participate in the study as well as a curious interest in the researcher's understanding of her experiences. At the start of the first interview, the researcher expected that the participant might be a bit hesitant to share her life story and that it might require a period of time to establish rapport. However, the researcher encountered little hesitation from Barbie and instead felt she was confident to be the focus of attention – to be on 'centre stage'. The conversations focussed on Barbie's experience of her parents' divorce and her life experiences thereafter. The ease with which the researcher and Barbie dialogued is reflected in the conversational format of the interview, where the researcher allowed Barbie the freedom to deviate to seemingly unrelated topics. The researcher felt that in allowing Barbie to speak openly and without guidance at times, would enable the researcher to gain a richer understanding of Barbie's world. Furthermore, it was felt that this allowed Barbie to share her intimate experiences, which reflect the constitution of her 'self', which is inextricably entwined in the relationships she holds with the significant others in her life.

Who's In – Who's out: A Genogram of Barbie's Family



Key

SM = Barbie's Stepmother

SD = Barbie's Stepdad

HS = Barbie's Halfsister

To understand Barbie's experience of her parents' divorce and her life thereafter, the researcher feels it is pertinent to create an approximate timeline of events that relate to the changing structure of her family, which has been compiled from the interviews with Barbie.

Barbie's parents were divorced when she was ten years old. She is the second child in the family. She has a sister who is seven years older than her. Six months after her parents' divorce, Barbie's mother began dating a man. They were then married when Barbie was approximately thirteen years old. Around sixteen years of age, Barbie, her mother, and her sister moved into a separate home, due to the conflict Barbie was experiencing with her stepdad. However, her mother's marriage to her stepdad has continued despite their living apart, and Barbie's mother visits him in the evenings and on the weekends. Since the change of residence, Barbie has had no further contact with her stepdad. Barbie's sister is currently living with her boyfriend; she is therefore no longer technically part of their home.

Barbie's father seems to have kept any relationships he may have had with other women from Barbie until he met a woman who would become Barbie's stepmother. His relationship with this woman began when Barbie was approximately twelve years old. According to Barbie, her father and her stepmother married about two to three years ago and soon after, Barbie's half sister was born. Currently, Barbie's stepmother is expecting another child. At this point, Barbie no longer spends weekends with her father or much time in his home. Instead, Barbie's father will take her to a restaurant or coffee shop and spend time with her in that way.

At this point, it is considered important to note that Barbie utilises the terms stepmother and stepdad. The researcher has chosen to remain consistent with the manner in which Barbie has referred to her stepparents in her interview so as to ensure that the extracts taken from the interview remain consistent with the interpretation.

Perceptions of the Early Family

Barbie's experience of her family prior to her parents' divorce resembles a sweet innocence. She felt their time together was filled with joyous and pleasurable experiences, and implies their family was unified and *"perfect"*. She remembers:

We went overseas together, we had fun holidays together, and we did everything together. It was very ... you know, if I could describe it at that time, it was like the perfect family.

However, now as she looks back she feels that she *"was very blind"* and is unsure if she *"was covering it up"*, as she explains:

[N]ow that I speak to both of them I hear of all these things and I don't remember it.

It seems that Barbie may have romanticized her memories and experiences of her early family, perhaps due to her being so young when the divorce occurred and maybe as a way of downplaying the difficulties that may have been present in her family. Whether the belief in her *"perfect family"* is an accurate depiction of the nature of her family prior to the divorce or a portrait created by her, it appears to be necessary for her to preserve this image as something good to cherish and to hold on to.

Despite Barbie's inability to recall the details of the early nature of her family, she did feel *"very loved and secure"*. It seems, from an early age, Barbie was raised with the freedom to express herself, which she attributes to her being a *"very confident"* child. She explains that her parents *"raised me much different"* to the manner in which they raised her sister, since

from small they were telling me to go through things ... to do what you want. [W]ith me, they let me do whatever I wanted. If I wanted to wear socks on my hands, then I wore socks on my hands.

In essence, Barbie feels her *"family gave [her] a lot of support"* and seemed to have sheltered her from the difficulties that may have been more prominent in her parents' marriage closer to the time of the divorce.

The Divorce

Since her earlier experiences of her family are safeguarded in perfection, perhaps it is understandable that Barbie *“didn’t expect the divorce at all”*. She was unaware of any turmoil and difficulty her parents may have been experiencing, and this seemed to contribute to the *“shock”* she felt when she was told of her parents’ decision. Barbie recalls that day:

[I] was lying in my room ... I was in private school so my holidays were different to my sister’s because she was in a government school. I was lying in my parent’s bed watching TV and then my mother walked in and she said they were getting a divorce. And I was shocked and I remember the first thing I asked her was who is it that wanted the divorce. And my mom was like, no she wanted the divorce.

It seemed important for her to know that it was her mother who wanted the divorce. However, her vagueness in disclosing the reasons for the divorce may suggest that they are either too difficult to speak about or irrelevant compared to the moment her *“perfect family”* disintegrated. For Barbie, her initial reaction to her parents’ decision to divorce was blurred by the intensity of the situation and only once the implication of her parents’ decision set in, when her father left their home, did the emotional gravity of the situation become apparent. She said:

And then it was ... the end of that week, my dad moved out and it was just a shock. It just ... it happened all so fast. I think, a lot of my emotions are delayed so I ... in a way I’m shocked and then only two weeks later or a while later it ... it like sinks in and I understand what’s happening.

Time seems to have dissolved as Barbie struggled with managing the initial changes. At first she continued in a state of confusion as she *“tried to pick up, like what [she] had left and go on at school”* and *“pretend like nothing was wrong”*. Barbie had once envied the attention a classmate had received when her parents divorced. However, it was only from her own experience that Barbie began to understand what a *“hard thing”* divorce was. Barbie managed to maintain a sense of normality within her school environment and found solace in being *“involved in drama”*. However, she could not escape the void that was created by her father’s absence. It seems with his departure, the life force of her family had begun to

dwindle, thus symbolising the imminent death of her “*perfect family*”. As a result, her home appears to have been transformed into a place of mourning, which may have echoed Barbie’s feelings of loss and sadness at that time. She recalls:

[O]nce my dad moved out, it was a very depressing atmosphere. No, not quite depressing, but it was like very, like a sad environment. Like, you know when someone died, that type of feeling in the house. So I think that just ... yeah it was just so dead.

The silence within Barbie’s home at the time of her father’s departure may have been amplified by the physical absence of her sister, as her sister had “*just finished writing her matric, so she was gone and on holiday*”. In addition, her mother’s emotional absence from the relationship, possibly due to her mother’s difficulties in managing the divorce, may also have contributed to Barbie feeling more isolated and alone.

Life after the Divorce

The following themes emerged as an understanding of Barbie’s experiences following her parents’ divorce was gained. It is the understanding of the researcher that these themes describe the influence Barbie’s parents’ divorce has had on her life up to now as well as the role the divorce has played in her development as a person. Barbie’s experiences following the divorce were characterised by the following themes:

- ❑ Connection and Disconnection
- ❑ Shifting Boundaries
- ❑ Sacrifice of Self and Needs
- ❑ Silence
 - Sustaining the Tenuous Connections within Relationships
 - Levels of Communication: Maintaining the Collusion of Silence
 - Masks that Disconnect to Protect
 - The Impact of Silence: Finding a Voice

Connection and Disconnection

The following theme describes the pervasive shifts between connection and disconnection that have developed in Barbie's relationships with the significant others in her life, both family and friends.

In relation to her father, following the divorce, Barbie experienced a connection with him and characterised him as "a nice friend to have". Their time together was spent engaged in fun filled activities to the point that they were "quite irresponsible together". They spent money without much care or concern and Barbie felt indulged by her father and the focus of his attention on the weekends that they spent together. She says:

[W]e would go to the game world and then we would play, like hundreds and hundreds of rands of games. And we would eat out at like any restaurant we wanted to and we would like, go watch movies and we had total fun. It was just absolute fun and there was no ... and I didn't get homework at that time, so it was just from when I arrived there, on the Friday until the Sunday night, it was just fun.

The level of freedom Barbie enjoyed with her father after the divorce appears to have been without limits and may have compensated for his noticeable absence in her everyday life. However, the boundaries between parent and child seem to have become blurred, thus allowing Barbie to define their relationship as friends. Perhaps Barbie's father did not perceive the definition of their relationship the same way. However, it is possible to see how Barbie came to feel that her father was her friend and not a father, since his behaviour exhibited a disregard for responsibility and a lack of any sort of limits. Without having knowledge of the definition of their relationship prior to the divorce, it is possible that Barbie played the role of the friend to her father to nurture the connection she had with him. In doing this, perhaps Barbie could ensure he would not forsake her.

When Barbie's father introduced the woman who would become her stepmother into their lives, the exclusive connection that Barbie had come to enjoy with her father shifted. Barbie's initial reaction at meeting this woman was of devastation.

Even though her mother had already remarried, Barbie felt the presence of this woman in her father's life was the *"final nail in the coffin"*, as she came to realise the finality of her parents' divorce. However, once the initial shock subsided, Barbie continued to see her father on their scheduled weekends and began to develop a relationship with her future stepmother. The security that Barbie felt in her connection with her father was short lived though. Following her father's remarriage, Barbie's relationship with her father *"changed"* and gradually began to be redefined. Where at first they *"used to do fun things with her [stepmother] as well"*, the presence of a new wife in her father's life directed her father's behaviour towards being more responsible and Barbie *"felt [they] didn't have that connection anymore where [they] could wake-up, roll out of bed and go and eat pizza for breakfast"*. It appears that the remarriage of Barbie's father symbolised the end of their 'friendship', which threatened the only connection that Barbie felt she had with her father and perhaps instituted the pattern of disconnection between them.

Barbie continued to visit her father, despite the expanding gulf that had begun to develop between them. However, following his remarriage, it was not only her relationship with her father that changed, the home environment with her father was also *"changed"*. Whereas her stepmother had always *"looked like she enjoyed"* Barbie being there, she began to feel that her stepmother was competing with her for her father's attention and affection. Nurturing the belief that her stepmother and her father's commitment to his *"new family"* were stealing her time with her father, she felt she was becoming less of a *"priority"* in his life. She felt

[t]hat you know he's supposed to be my dad, when I'm with you...you know I see you every second weekend, I'm supposed to be a priority, not you know, she's not supposed to be such a big factor.

It appears that as a result of her father's remarriage, Barbie no longer felt that she was the apple of her father's eye. Thus, her weekends with her father became less enjoyable and more emotionally despairing for her. Compounding Barbie's

despair was the deteriorating relationship between Barbie and her stepmother. Barbie began to take note of subtle comments from her stepmother, such as:

'Look at that photo, that's when you were still nice'. And I'd be like, what...why am I not nice now or...um...my stepmother would comment on my weight, she'd be like, 'look how many rolls you've got now'.

Barbie felt powerless against her stepmother's subtle attacks, choosing instead to remain silent. However, the verbal onslaught was not reserved for Barbie alone and extended to comments concerning her mother, which Barbie felt even more helpless to react to. The impact of her stepmother's comments and behaviour, as well as the guilt she experienced in the silence of her divided loyalties, began to influence Barbie negatively as she returned home from her weekends

so upset [she] wouldn't be able to go to school the next day or she wouldn't be able to eat.

As a result, Barbie gradually withdrew from her weekends with her father. It is possible that Barbie viewed her stepmother as an extension of her father and the gatekeeper of her connection with him. Thus, she may have needed to submit to the subtle degradation and the changes instituted by her stepmother so that she could continue to feel connected with her father. However, Barbie's submission as well as her father's passivity in his relationship with Barbie appears to have created the opportunity for her stepmother to be positioned between them and disconnect Barbie from her father.

The disconnection that has taken place over the years between Barbie and her father has eroded their relationship to the point where Barbie cannot confide in her father since *"he doesn't know [her] anymore"* and *"it's maybe even awkward in a way, when we see each other"*. Even the time that Barbie now spends with her father has been reduced to the odd coffee date at a restaurant. However, the physical and emotional distance in their relationship has not gone unnoticed by Barbie as she still experiences feelings of regret that they *"were so close and in a way it slipped away"*. One cannot help wondering whether Barbie experienced the depth she seems to find missing in the 'fun' relationship she had with her father.

Barbie feels she did try to "*mend that bridge*" and restore the bond that she perceived existed between them but felt that her father was not "*willing to try or make an effort*". Barbie seems to still feel some residual anger and disappointment at her father for not having "*taken control and made sure our relationship lasted*". However, despite her father's increased efforts to mend their relationship now, it seems for Barbie, the connection they once shared in their relationship cannot be restored and the memories of feeling discarded for his new family cannot be undone. She explained:

I think he has tried but he did it too late, you know, when it was already gone. And now how can he expect me to be all close to him when we've let that gap come, which he knows. It's there, it's visible. I'm not all of a sudden going to be like, oh let's forget about all those years that you let that slide and now suddenly try and have this great relationship. I'm not going to pretend that nothing happened.

It is possible that the absence of her father in her life and their disconnection has become something that is in some way comfortable and consistent, something that Barbie can count on. It may be that she feels she can no longer trust him. That is, if he could let her down before, what would prevent him from doing it again? Therefore, by maintaining the distance in their relationship, Barbie is able to ensure she does not have to suffer neglect and rejection by her father again, when her father didn't define the boundaries of his relationship with Barbie for his new wife by saying

'listen, this is our time, I need to give Barbie a little bit of attention, I'm with you the rest of the time, I live with you, this is now our time'.

Thus, for Barbie, it seems she is no longer prepared to risk placing herself in a position that leaves her vulnerable to the emotional pain and disappointment that comes from her relationship with her father.

Regardless of the disconnection that pervades their relationship, Barbie seems to continue to believe there is some connection with her father. She said:

[M]y dad actually understands me quite a bit, because, he'll ... he sees things that other people don't see. He'll see if I'm really sad

or that I'm unhappy, but I don't have that connection that I can talk to him about it. He can see it but I just ... I will, even though, if I'm having a terrible time or I would just always tell him that I'm happy and everything is fine. Yeah, school is fine; everything is fine when he asks.

It is unclear how Barbie has come to know that her father "sees" when she is unhappy. Perhaps it is an intuitive feeling. It may also be 'wishful thinking' on her part that her father remains connected to her in some way despite their relationship having been transformed into a shell of its former 'closeness'. However, her father's swiftness to believe her deceptive denials regarding her emotions may reflect the true nature of their relationship. Perhaps it is easier for her father to believe Barbie's lies since urging her to tell the truth would require them to confront the disconnection that exists between them. It is also possible that Barbie's father is living under the same guise of connection in their relationship. That is, by showing some concern for Barbie, he may feel he is fulfilling his role as a concerned father.

Barbie's relationship with her father seems to have moved gradually from a context of connection to emotional disconnection. However, it seems that even when there were threads of connectedness in their earlier relationship, they appeared to be tenuous and shrouded in emotional disconnection.

In relation to her mother, following the divorce, Barbie appears to have experienced the polar opposite of what she enjoyed with her father. Barbie's experiences of her mother at this time were of a strict parental figure who established clear boundaries for her. During this time, Barbie's mother provided her with the necessary physical structure to continue her life despite the changes created by her parents' divorce. However, Barbie feels they "*didn't have a relationship*". Thus, Barbie's affections and sympathy were strongly aligned with her father in the period following the divorce. She said:

I always felt sorry for my dad in a way instead of my mother who was, you know working very hard and trying to do the best that she could to keep her children in clothes and, you know just to

grow up and to get to school and this and that. You know, to make sure we're all okay.

Perhaps the strong alignment came as a result of the connection that Barbie perceived she had with her father and thus felt it was more at risk of being lost at the time of the divorce. It is also possible that Barbie experienced her father as more fun to be with and since he was the one who had 'lost' his family and was alone, Barbie felt more concern for him than she did for her mother at this time.

Soon after the divorce, Barbie's mother became romantically involved with the man who was to become Barbie's stepfather. As a result of this new union, Barbie felt rejected and ignored by her mother. It is possible that Barbie may have needed more emotional closeness and support from her mother than her mother was able to give her at that time, perhaps due to her mother's own emotional difficulties in dealing with her divorce. It is also possible that Barbie's mother was focussed on establishing her new relationship with Barbie's stepdad and may not have wanted to go back and confront any issues regarding her divorce, which she had already put behind her. However, Barbie's mother seemed to be aware of her inability to 'be there' for her daughter, thus she entrusted Barbie's emotional well-being to a psychologist, with whom Barbie shared her feelings about her mother's new relationship. She told the psychologist that

with my stepdad and her relationship, I don't feel that I fit in. I feel that she loves him more than she loves me. She gives him more attention than she gives me. That ... it's like she's trying in a way to just push me behind and say 'just behave or do whatever, I've got other things'.

Barbie's already precarious relationship with her mother was further threatened though when the psychologist shared Barbie's feelings with her mother. Her mother was shocked and outraged. Although it was not Barbie's "*intention to hurt [her] mother*", Barbie learnt from the experience that

I can't tell anyone my emotions and I can't say anything about my stepdad, and I can't object, I must just keep to myself and keep quiet.

Initially Barbie felt that her stepdad was a *"really nice guy"*. However, when he married her mother, *"everything just changed. It was like he had a split personality"*. Barbie was confronted with *"living with a tyrant"* whom she experienced as a *"strict"* and controlling man where *"things had to be done his way"*. Her stepdad's demanding and unreasonable nature permeated Barbie's home environment, where his unpredictable outbursts left Barbie with the feeling that she needed *"to walk on eggshells when he was at home"*. Her stepdad's behaviour escalated to a point where Barbie felt

everything I did was wrong. I didn't enjoy ... I had to stay in my room the whole time. I didn't have freedom, I couldn't do anything.... He'll try and find something like wrong in the house or ... and it just ... it was a cold environment. It's really ... you were so careful for what you did or what you said.

As a result of her stepdad's behaviour, Barbie interacted less with her mother and became isolated within her home. She spent most of her time in her bedroom, perhaps her only sanctuary from the chaos. Barbie also seemed to be very aware that her mother's loyalties lay with her stepdad as she *"was constantly there pleasing him"*. Therefore, in spite of her mother's efforts to create a 'normal' environment for Barbie following the divorce, Barbie and her mother were functioning as separate individuals merely sharing a common space, which seemed to perpetuate the disconnection in their relationship.

Barbie did not disclose her feelings regarding her stepdad with her mother. Perhaps she no longer trusted her mother to acknowledge her feelings, since she had not done so previously when Barbie had expressed negative feelings regarding her mother's new relationship to the psychologist. It is also possible that Barbie interpreted her mother's actions to mean that her stepdad was more valued by her mother than she was. Thus, Barbie's stepdad appears to have become the gatekeeper who was isolating Barbie from the fragile connection she had with her mother. As a result, Barbie may have felt that she had no other choice but to suppress her feelings so as to sustain some bond with her mother.

The conflict between Barbie and her stepdad remained unrelenting although Barbie avoided confronting him in any way. Instead, she retreated to the safety of her room. However, the isolation seems to have taken its toll on Barbie as she attempted suicide a number of times, perhaps as a means of ending the unhappiness. Yet even throughout the suicide attempts and Barbie's struggle with depression, it seems her mother was unwilling or unable to connect with Barbie in an attempt to understand her emotional state. Instead, she

gave me the anti-depressants and thought...she didn't really have time...uh, I can't really say she didn't have time but that's sort of what came across. I think maybe she was sorting out her own emotions, so she didn't really want to still deal with mine which might bring up more emotions for her to deal with. I think she tried with the psychiatrists and getting me anti-depressants in a way but not in the way that I could sit there and say, 'I feel depressed because...'. You know it was just not like that.

Barbie's mother probably felt that she was carrying out her responsibility by eliciting the help of the 'experts'. However, this appears to have become a pattern in their relationship. Barbie's mother seemed to rely on the expertise of psychiatrists and doctors to manage, support and understand Barbie and the emotions she was experiencing, thus freeing her mother from the responsibility of doing so herself. However, interactions with strangers and a few tablets could not resolve the emotional void Barbie experienced in her relationship with her mother as well as the unrelenting and erratic behaviour of her stepdad. It seems to have only contributed to the disconnection.

It was only when Barbie and her mother moved into a separate home from her stepdad that her relationship with her mother began to shift. Whilst her mother continued to be married to her stepdad, the unusual living arrangement came as a result of incompatible differences in Barbie's relationship with her stepdad. It was this sacrifice that Barbie's mother made for her daughter's well-being that allowed Barbie to begin re-connecting with her mother. Although Barbie now feels "*to a certain extent [she] can tell her anything*", she continues to keep her emotions to herself and does not share them with her mother because she doesn't

want to burden her. She's already got so much stuff she has to worry about; I don't want to go on top of everything else with my stuff. So I'll tell her nothing is bothering me.

Perhaps through her earlier experiences in their relationship, where her mother was emotionally unavailable for her, Barbie came to understand that she could not rely upon her mother for support and understanding through the difficulties she was experiencing and perhaps that her emotions are too much for her mother to bear. Furthermore, Barbie seems to be aware that how distant and close her mother and her are, is managed and controlled by her. Thus, it seems that although their relationship has grown closer and her "*mother has sort of accepted that [she is] different*", the newly established connection that she feels with her mother continues to be established within a context of emotional disconnection.

In relation to her sister, following the divorce, there was also disconnection. Although they lived in the same home before the divorce, their relationship was characterised by distance, possibly due to the seven-year age gap between them. Simultaneous to her father leaving their home, Barbie's sister also left for her matric holiday. Thus, leaving Barbie with a home that was "*very quiet and very different from what it used to be*". The gap between them continued to grow when Barbie's sister "*went to Cape Town straight after school for a while*", leaving Barbie with little support during her parents' divorce. However, the nature of their relationship at that time was emotionally and physically distant, "*so I couldn't speak to her... I was still her little sister*".

It is unclear when Barbie's sister moved back into the home. However, as Barbie matured, she and her sister began to establish a bond, finding a connection in their common interests. The nature of their relationship appears to have evolved into a friendship where

we have fun together. We can be quite silly sometimes, like poking each other and pushing each other around and ... we can also like, our ultimate is when my mother goes away on holiday and she leaves us money and we can go out to restaurants and just sit there, drink, smoke and talk and complain about men.

Barbie feels that she has established a "*good relationship*" with her sister. However, the emotional disconnection is still evident in their relationship, which tends to be competitive at times. From early, Barbie has not been able to seek comfort from her sister through the trying times that Barbie has faced, despite Barbie's competence in being the pillar of strength for her sister. Instead, Barbie has been 'brushed off' and her emotions minimised by comments that her sister has made such as "*the past is the past, forget about it*". As a means of understanding her sister's behaviour, Barbie has come to believe that

my sister is someone that although she'll easily cause conflict, I think she's also quite emotional. She doesn't like speaking about problems if she can't handle it, like if you start to cry. She's not good at problem solving.

However, even in finding a way to understand her sister's behaviour, it seems it is still insufficient to satisfy the emotional void she feels in their relationship. Barbie continues to harbour anger and resentment toward her sister for her inability to support her, as she has done for her sister so many times. However, Barbie seems to display some confusion in her feelings regarding her relationship with her sister. On the one hand she feels residual disappointment for her sister's lack of support but on the other hand she also expressed that she "*wouldn't want [their relationship] any other way*". Perhaps Barbie is appreciative of the connection she does have with her sister, as they can share their common interests as girls, but she may not be completely satisfied, as her sister remains emotionally disconnected from her.

In relation to friends and others, following the divorce, Barbie's experience with those she chose to confide in "*would go, 'Yeah, that happened the same way, I know how you feel'*". However, their attempts to identify with Barbie appear to have left her feeling more unheard. Although she understands now that the reactions she received then can be attributed to their immaturity, Barbie continues to feel misunderstood in her friendships as they

always want to know the details, like it's a gossip story, not how am I actually feeling at this point in time.

It seems that Barbie's unsuccessful attempts at finding understanding and support from her friends has had an influence on her ability to reveal to them her authentic self. That is, as a means of coping with the consistent disappointment, she reveals "*masks*" of herself to them and conceals the difficulties she is experiencing, since others have proven to her they cannot contain them. In doing this, Barbie has developed the necessary mechanisms to portray herself as "*the fun, party person*", which has enabled her to manage the connections she has with her friends and maintain them on a level that is emotionally safe for her. However, this means that she remains disconnected from herself and not completely 'real' in her friendships.

Although Barbie presents her "*mask*" to most of her friends, she appears to relate authentically with one friend, Kathy (pseudonym), to whom she describes as being closest. In her friendship with Kathy, Barbie has found someone who can "*contribute to [her] life*", and feels her difficulties are understood. Perhaps through both of them having parents who are divorced, Barbie has been able to establish an authentic emotional connection amongst the disconnection; since Kathy is able to reciprocate the effort and understanding that Barbie gives to all her relationships.

In relation to her boyfriends, Barbie has difficulty in establishing an emotional connection. Instead her relationships are characterised by flirtatious "*mind games*" that seem to test the commitment of her boyfriends. Barbie explained:

I'd be affectionate but then I won't be affectionate, I'd just stop and then I'll see if they come to me, to see that it's not just one sided or if they will make the effort. Yeah, or I'll ignore them for a bit and make them wonder where I am and then suddenly I would just come back again. And that feeling that they have to have me and they can't get me.

Barbie seems to find security in portraying herself as the "*fun person who likes having parties and entertaining and adventurous*", thus allowing them to know "*one of my faces and one of my masks*". Any endeavour by her boyfriends to

enter into a close and intimate relationship with Barbie leaves her feeling "*smothered*" and as a result she will "*push them away*". Barbie fears establishing intimacy in her relationships as her boyfriends might come to know the secrets of her pain and her past and reveal them to others. It seems that the risk of making herself vulnerable to betrayal is too great for her to take. Thus, the "*games*" Barbie plays with men in relationships seems to be motivated by a need to remain emotionally disconnected so as to remain invulnerable in these relationships.

Barbie has become aware and frustrated with her inability to connect in relationships, which has fostered a desire within her to experience a long-term relationship with "*someone [she] could actually open a little bit more with than [she does] to most people*". It seemed that Barbie found this with one of her boyfriends with whom she remained in a relationship for eight months. Within this relationship Barbie felt she had found someone who "*was really different*" who "*listened to a certain extent*" and with whom she felt "*comfortable being there and showing emotions*". However, it appears that Barbie's fears continued to surface and sustain the disconnection in her relationship as she found herself unable to communicate with him regarding her emotions or accept any help from her boyfriend. It may be that Barbie was more motivated by a deeper need to prove to herself that she could sustain the relationship for a longer period of time than her previous relationships as opposed to connecting with a man on a deeper level. She commented:

I guess the security I feel now is at least I have broken over that whole fear of commitment. I feel now I can be with someone... But in other ways they don't really know me.

In all Barbie's relationships, there seems to be a consistent shift between connection and disconnection. Within her relationships with her family, Barbie has found ways to connect with them, and especially feels her relationship with her mother and sister is indeed 'good'. However, her connections in these relationships seem to remain within the context of emotional disconnection as she experiences a consistent lack of emotional acknowledgement and support from them. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the 'good' relationships Barbie has

with her family are in fact as good as they are going to get. Thus, Barbie may be settling for the connections she can have instead of continuing to hope for the deeper connections she desires. This pattern seems to extend into her relationships with others, both friends and boyfriends, where she seems to play out a fear of risking vulnerability and being disappointed and discarded again. That is, Barbie seems to guard against establishing any emotional connection by concealing her authentic self from those with whom she interacts.

Shifting Boundaries

The following theme is a description of Barbie's relationships with her parents, with an emphasis on the influence boundaries has had on these relationship.

In relation to her father, as previously mentioned, Barbie experienced him as a "nice friend to have". Due to her young age, the fun and irresponsible adventures that she experienced with her father seemed to appeal to her interests. However, the lack of any limits created by her father appears to have blurred the boundaries within their relationship, thus creating a confusing and tenuous friendship connection. As with any friendship, the stability and security that can be found does not parallel that of the defined relationship between a parent and a child. However, it seems that Barbie may have been uncertain about her father's capabilities of providing her with security and stability within their relationship. She said:

[H]e is emotional and he is very lovable but sometimes...he is like ... his emotions are like a see-saw. The one day he will be very happy and the other day he will be very depressed. And when he's depressed, he pulls you down very low and he just ... you know, self-pity and it's sort of the idea that the whole world owes him something. And then the next day he ... you know he's really unstable in a way, but you know you love being around him also, because he was fun and he was also in a way irresponsible with money. Like he'd buy us a lot of stuff and ...

Barbie was aware of the benefits that came from her relationship with her father. However, it is possible that his "unstable" nature did not inspire much trust within

her regarding his role as a father. Therefore, Barbie may have felt compelled to continue playing the role of her father's friend, since their connection was rooted in this behaviour and to shift it may have placed their relationship at risk.

Following her father's remarriage, the diffuse boundaries within their relationship shifted and the uncertainty that Barbie experienced with her father seemed to escalate. Her father's remarriage appeared to set up an impermeable boundary between Barbie and her father that influenced the nature of Barbie's relationship with her father dramatically. That is, the presence of her stepmother seemed to put an end to their fun escapades by establishing rigid boundaries within the home and indirectly redefined their relationship as father and daughter. It seems that the flexible boundaries between Barbie and her father made it easy for his remarriage to dissolve the connection they had and for her father to shift his role within their relationship. However, the changes that came as a result of the remarriage were never explicitly defined for Barbie and she appears to have been left to manage the shifts in her relationship with her father without any guidance or clarity. Thus, Barbie may have been left feeling confused about what was expected of her in her new role as a daughter, since it was her stepmother who had instituted the change in the definition of their roles and not her father.

Barbie's relationship with her father remained undefined and the role that he had taken on as 'father' continued to be inconsistent. As father, he did not fulfil the commitments he had made to Barbie and he seemed to utilise guilt tactics with her, perhaps as a means of indirectly addressing an issue with her, through the use of comments such as, "*oh, do you still remember me?*" or "*do you still love me?*". As a result of the disappointment that Barbie continued to experience within their relationship and the instability that her father displayed, Barbie seemed to develop mistrust in her father. Thus, she began to withdraw from spending time with her father as a means of protecting herself. However, this seemed to break the continuity within their relationship and made it more difficult for them to connect.

The blurring of boundaries also occurred in her relationship with her stepmother who initially was also part of the fun relationship. This relationship then shifted to one where boundaries between her stepmother and father became more rigid in excluding her and their implicit expectations of her set her up for failure and created more distance within the relationship. In summary, the boundaries between Barbie and her father remained diffuse, with her stepmother becoming the boundary between herself and her father.

In relation to her mother, the boundaries of their relationship seem to have been firmly set. Although Barbie describes their relationship as distant following the divorce, there appears to have been no confusion regarding their roles as mother and daughter. Following her mother's remarriage to her stepdad, Barbie's mother became "*very controlling*" under the influence of her stepdad. Thus, the remarriage seems to have been a boundary in itself as it created a greater divide within Barbie's relationship with her mother.

The roles between Barbie and her mother remained clear following her mother's remarriage. However, her stepdad enforced rigid boundaries, which she seemed to experience as an intrusion. With regard to his attitude towards children, she said:

[M]y stepdad is someone who doesn't like kids and he doesn't feel he must give kids a lot of freedom or buy them stuff or luxuries. I think he had the idea that they must stay in their room with ten books and if you're lucky, one picture frame.

The rigid boundaries that were enforced by her stepdad appeared to have been condoned by Barbie's mother as she did little to change them. However, her mother also undermined her stepdad by assisting Barbie in hiding the few luxuries from her stepdad she purchased for her. It is possible that these acts by her mother may have generated confusion in Barbie regarding her stepdad's role within her life as well as the boundaries that were established by him.

To escape the intrusive constraints that were placed upon her, Barbie created her own boundary by retreating to the sanctuary of her bedroom. However, even this boundary needed to be flexible for Barbie, since once inside the stillness of her room, her sanctuary became her prison as she was confronted by thoughts and emotions that she could not manage and that would only perpetuate the despair she was feeling.

Her stepdad's rigid control continued until Barbie's mother moved them into a separate home from him. Once there, Barbie's mother maintained the "*strict rules*", although Barbie seemed to have different ideas and "*started pushing [her] boundaries*". She said:

Like I would push my curfew. I would come an hour later, then two hours later, until finally I stayed out until the next morning. At 3 o'clock, my mother would wake up and she'd find a house full of guys, all still busy drinking and everyone's smoking, so little by little we pushed it. [A]t school, because I also push my boundaries there, like if you're not allowed to paint my nails, I'll paint my nails.

Barbie's mother did not approve of any of the boundaries that Barbie was pushing and Barbie knew her mother "*want[ed] [her] to stay in the rules and be easier and more convenient*". However, at some point her mother submitted, as they seemed to establish a compromise. She explained:

I can do a lot, but she's not letting me do everything as long as I'm honest with her and tell her where I am and with whom I'm with.

The nature of the boundaries in Barbie's relationship with her mother appears to have shifted from rigid to open, where Barbie is now given the freedom to explore being a teenager. It is possible that Barbie may have begun pushing her boundaries with her mother as an attempt to take control or perhaps as a test of her mother's commitment and love to her. It seems that the shift in Barbie's behaviour from pushing boundaries to behaving more responsibly as she grew older allowed her mother to give her more freedom. Barbie emphasises that the compromise that she and her mother have reached allows her mother to "*still be*

the mother figure, not just a friend that's going to help me out". Perhaps this even allowed Barbie and her mother to reconnect and bridge some of the disconnection that had been pervasive within their relationship prior to the move to their new home.

In essence, when looking at the boundaries within Barbie's relationships with both her parents, their remarriages seemed to have acted as a boundary between Barbie and her parents. Prior to her parents' remarriages, Barbie did not seem to have any difficulty with her stepparents, perhaps because she felt she had full access to her parents. However, following the remarriages of her parents, the rigid boundaries that were instituted by her stepparents seemed to isolate Barbie from her relationships with them. Thus, Barbie appears to have been left with the uncertainty about how to gain access to them.

The uncertainty that was generated within Barbie seemed to be heightened by her parents not defining the roles that their new spouses would play in Barbie's life as well as their expectations of Barbie. This seemed the norm within their relationships, as they did not appear to communicate openly about anything that was of relevance. Thus, it seems only natural that Barbie would perceive her stepparents as a threat to her relationships with her parents and find a way to navigate herself around the obstacles without placing the relationships with her parents at too much risk. With her father, Barbie withdrew from spending time at his home and managed to gain his full attention again, since they now spend most of their time alone together at restaurants. With her mother, Barbie isolated herself until after the move, where she too managed to have her mother all to herself again.

Furthermore, it appears that Barbie gravitated towards the parent who had more flexible boundaries. At first it was with her father following the divorce. However, when Barbie's father and stepmother established rigid boundaries within their home, Barbie began withdrawing from spending time with her father and once out of the control of her stepfather, began pushing her boundaries with her mother.

Barbie succeeded since her mother redefined the boundaries with Barbie to be more open and flexible in nature. It is possible that since her parents' boundaries and expectations were never properly defined and shifted continuously, Barbie may have sought out the safety and comfort of an environment that was familiar to her. That is, prior to the divorce, Barbie's parents raised her *"to go through things...to do what you want"* and gave her the freedom to express herself. Thus, Barbie's parents may have nurtured her need to resist their rigid boundaries themselves since Barbie has acknowledged that she is

a person who doesn't like being told what to do. I have very set ideas of things and very set ideas of who I am. I feel almost like a boiling kettle when someone says, "You can't do that!". Then I automatically want to say, "I want to do that".

Barbie's experience of a lack of, as well as strict boundaries, appears to have had an influence on her ability to establish boundaries within her relationships with others. It seems that Barbie has become a *"people pleaser"* where she volunteers to go the *"extra mile"* for others when they are in need. However, her lack of boundaries within these relationships appears to be motivated by her need to be accepted by them. It seems that her lack of boundaries within her relationships with others, ensures that she is not isolated again, as when boundaries exist, isolation seemed to result.

Sacrifice of Self and Needs

The following theme is a description of how Barbie has placed the needs of others above her own in her relationships with both family and friends so as to maintain the relationships she has established with them.

In relation to her father, Barbie's need to please him seemed to have increased following his remarriage. As previously described, Barbie's relationship with her father was initially established as a friendship and she seemed to indulge him in that role, while the endless fun seems to have strengthened the connection between them. However, following her father's remarriage, Barbie's receding

importance in her father's life may have left Barbie feeling confused and insecure about their relationship, since the only connection she had known with him had been severed and their new roles as father and daughter were unfamiliar to her.

Barbie's deteriorating relationship with her stepmother seemed to fuel her insecurities as she felt that her father "*didn't hear it or maybe because he didn't want to hear*" the subtle verbal attacks that Barbie had to endure from her stepmother during her weekends with him. Her father's passivity in defending her seemed to confirm the lack of importance she felt in his new life and further highlighted the fragility of their relationship. Thus, Barbie "*kept quiet and just tried to stay nice to her [stepmother]*" so that her stepmother could not "*say anything to my dad that I'm not behaving*".

Barbie's father's remarriage appears to have symbolised the start of a new chapter in his life, and it seems that Barbie was uncertain about her place in this new family. She seemed to believe that if she spoke against her stepmother, she would lose her father completely, since she perceived her father's allegiance was to his new family. Thus, Barbie sacrificed her needs regarding her relationship with her father so as not to disturb her father's newfound role as husband and father to his new family, as a means of maintaining the tenuous bond she had with him. However, by not demanding more from her father, Barbie seemed to indirectly contribute to the distance that has developed in their relationship, as she has not held her father accountable for fulfilling her needs. Instead, her sacrifice appears to have allowed Barbie's father the freedom to invest completely in his new family and "*do differently what he did with*" his first family. Thereby, confirming her beliefs that her father values her less.

In relation to her mother, Barbie seems to have established a pervasive pattern of sacrificing her needs, which consistently seems to have been motivated by her need to maintain the bond she has with her mother. As previously mentioned, Barbie felt disconnected from her mother following the divorce. The tenuous bond that existed between them appeared to be fraught with emotional

disconnection, which was exacerbated by her mother's relationship with her stepdad. Barbie endeavoured to express her needs when she disclosed to the psychologist. However, Barbie did not receive any acknowledgement from her mother regarding her need to feel loved and secure. Instead, her mother's reaction to her disclosure only seemed to further perturb their already fragile relationship. Thus Barbie may have taken from this experience that demanding more from her mother was in fact threatening the bond they already had. It is possible that Barbie understood this to mean that her needs were less important to her mother than her mother's relationship with her stepdad. Thus, to sustain the connection with her mother, Barbie needed to sacrifice her needs and feelings by placing her mother's relationship with her stepdad above her own needs, a pattern which continued to emerge throughout her mother's new marriage.

Despite the endless difficulties and confrontations Barbie experienced with her stepdad, Barbie concealed her unhappiness in the solitude of bedroom. Thus, sacrificing her need for a sense of family and belonging to *"keep the peace...even if it makes me unhappy or angry"*. Perhaps Barbie did not feel that her mother would acknowledge her above her stepdad, since her mother *"was constantly there pleasing him"*. Thus, Barbie began taking on the responsibility of maintaining the *"peace"* within their home by sacrificing her needs and ultimately submitting to the unreasonable demands of her stepdad. Barbie continued to veil her difficulties and emotional despair from her mother. However, the burden of carrying them alone became too much and Barbie seemed to be looking for an outlet for the despair she was feeling.

Barbie attempted suicide *"quite a few times"*. However, with her last attempt it was serious enough to require hospitalisation. The relationship between Barbie and her mother had become so distant that her mother could not connect with Barbie in her attempt *"to cry for help"*. Instead, her mother could only comment to Barbie, *"Don't be naughty again"*, a reaction that is reminiscent of Barbie's earlier experience with the psychologist, when her mother scolded her for expressing her needs. Beyond those words from her mother, Barbie's *"cry for help"* was forgotten

and never spoken of again. However, for Barbie the suicide incident continued to linger as she was confronted with a feeling of "*guilt*" that she had once again

disappointed [her] mother...that [she] wasn't the perfect child who could just be happy with [her] circumstances and be grateful for what [she] had...it felt like [she] was constantly in trouble and [she] didn't want to always be the child who makes [her] mother unhappy.

Despite the extreme nature of Barbie's actions, Barbie appears to have taken from the experience that she needed to do better as a daughter or be a better daughter. Thus, she seems to have spent the remainder of her teens sacrificing her need to connect with her mother and receive support and comfort from her to ensure she is no longer a burden to her mother. She said:

I don't want to burden her. She's already got so much stuff she has to worry about; I don't want to go on top of everything else with my stuff. So I'll tell her nothing is bothering me.

Barbie's ability to sacrifice her need to be emotionally parented through her struggles appears to have evolved into a concern for her mother's needs, thus justifying her inability to confide in her mother. She explained:

[I]t's not in a sense her [mother's] fault, its more me not wanting to because she does so much for me, I guess I don't want to... it's like a bank account, if I keep taking withdrawals, somewhere you have to deposit, otherwise you're going to run out of money.

Her use of the metaphor of a bank account seems to suggest that Barbie does not consider herself worthy enough to have her emotional needs met by her mother. It appears that Barbie feels indebted to her mother for all she has, and as a result she does not deserve to demand more from her mother. Yet she also appears to be the one who is always considering her mother's needs above hers. It may be that in her mother's inability to take care of Barbie's emotional needs, Barbie has now become the emotional parent to her mother, thus ensuring that her mother's needs are satisfied.

In relation to her friends, Barbie displays an innate need to please them despite the immensity of the sacrifice to herself, as she finds it difficult "*to say 'no'*

to someone". Thus she will go "the extra mile" to fulfil their needs, ranging from acts such as

if we are reading a book and I would summarise the whole book into notes and photocopy them for the other person who hasn't read the book [to] if my friend's boyfriend broke up with her, although I've got homework or tests or whatever, I'll drop everything and go and try comfort her.

Barbie seems to value her needs less than the needs of others. Perhaps in doing this, Barbie is able to protect herself from revealing her own neediness to others. This is especially evident when the need of others involves emotional despair. Barbie seems to succumb completely, wanting to "take on somebody else's pain from them" so that "they don't have to go through what I had to go through, or going through". It seems that Barbie is unable to bear witness to the pain that she herself knows too well. Through the years following the divorce, it seems that Barbie has yearned to find a soft place to fall, a place where she feels understood by others, especially within her family. However, in her endeavours to find such a place or person, Barbie experienced consistent disappointment. Perhaps in the absence of finding understanding for herself, she developed an innate awareness and sensitivity within her to the plight of others. Nonetheless, Barbie is still unable to "let people know that there is more" to her since she doesn't "want people focussing on" her. Perhaps in rescuing others, Barbie is 'ministering' to herself vicariously. That is, she is able to do for them what was not done for her and in doing this; her own pain probably feels less helpless and enduring.

Barbie's current ability to sacrifice her needs when they are in conflict with others seems to have developed from earlier experiences with her parents following the divorce. Through her silence and the avoidance of conflict, Barbie was able to maintain the peace in both her father's and mother's homes and new marriages. It seems that the sacrifices Barbie made were motivated by her need to please her parents, perhaps her only means of sustaining the tenuous connections that had developed between them. It is also possible that Barbie was desperate to feel accepted by her parents and receive the acknowledgement that she was indeed 'good enough'. Barbie seems to have continued her search for acceptance through

her current efforts to please and support others. That is, through her earlier experiences, Barbie may have learnt that her value as a person or as a friend is measured by the amount she is willing to sacrifice for others, thus ensuring her acceptance in these relationships.

Her need to feel accepted has impacted on her ability to communicate her needs directly to her friends. Instead, Barbie will indirectly hint at what she would like to do or what need needs to be satisfied, and in some way, her friends will then offer to do this. She said:

Like if I want to go somewhere, then I'll be like, 'I haven't done anything for so long and it's going to be such a boring weekend. I've got so much work to do, so I'm just going to be working'. Then someone will immediately be like, 'No, we'll come fetch you, we'll do something'.

In doing this Barbie is able to prohibit her needs from being unfulfilled in a direct manner, which she may feel is a direct rejection of herself. Thus, her indirect expression can be viewed as not even existing in 'reality', which then ensures she is still accepted by others, even if they are not fulfilled because it did not even happen.

Silence

The following theme describes the manner in which silence has come to fulfil specific functions within Barbie's relationships. The theme will also provide a rich description of the impact that the silence has had on Barbie and her struggle to find her voice within its suffocating effects.

Sustaining the Tenuous Connections within Relationships

Initially, as it will be described here, silence seems to have been an ally to Barbie that she came to rely on, out of necessity, to sustain the tenuous relationships with her mother and father.

In relation to her father, Barbie's use of silence seems to have begun at the point that their relationship shifted. Barbie seems to have perceived her stepmother as taking the "*nice friend*" that Barbie had come to know as her father, as well as her role as 'daddy's princess'. The lack of effort by her father in redefining their relationship as father and daughter only seemed to confirm her suspicions, leaving Barbie with no alternative but to silence her confusion. The shift in their relationship seems to have immobilised Barbie and her ability to speak out against her stepmother's denigrating comments regarding Barbie and her mother. Thus, Barbie chose to "*keep quiet*" as she felt she had "*to show loyalty to them*". Although Barbie needed more from her father, she seems to have relied upon her silence as an ally, perhaps reasoning that if she played the role of the 'perfect' daughter, she could preserve the threads of connection that remained between them.

In relation to her mother, silence seems to have become a recognisable part of their relationship soon after her father left their home. Barbie wanted "*someone to make it clear in [her] head...someone to speak to about how [she] was feeling*". However, it was not her mother that she confided in. Instead, Barbie was sent to speak to a psychologist with whom she revealed her feelings of uncertainty regarding her mother's relationship with her stepdad. It appears that Barbie did not have the type of relationship with her mother where she could unburden herself. Thus, silence already seemed to exist within their relationship. The security Barbie had found in voicing her feelings was betrayed when they were revealed to her mother. Perhaps Barbie was aware of the impact her emotions would have on her mother, which is why she "*didn't want [her] mother to know how [she] felt*". It is also possible that she did not want her feelings revealed since she was also aware of the code of silence that existed within their relationship.

Despite her mother's intentions to help Barbie, her outrage at how Barbie was feeling at that time "*just brought more fear*" into Barbie, which may have only heightened the insecurity she already felt regarding her mother's love and

commitment to her. Feeling "*betrayed*" and misunderstood, it appears that Barbie no longer felt safe to express "*how [she] was feeling at the time*". Therefore, Barbie began to silence her emotions, perhaps as a means of protecting herself and preserving her relationship with her mother, which she perceived to be under threat by the presence of her stepdad. However, where Barbie had once chosen silence as an ally to sustain the bond with her mother, it began to dominate her life. In remaining silent, Barbie relinquished her freedom, thus allowing her stepdad's extreme behaviour to control their home and even invade the privacy of Barbie's room, where she would

have to put my TV on like 2 and sit right there and listen to it so that he doesn't hear the TV, and the cell phone permanently had to be on silent and hidden, and my radio also had to be covered and hidden so that he didn't catch you...to that extent.

Barbie's mother appeared to tolerate the extensive influence that Barbie's stepdad exhibited upon Barbie's life. Perhaps this behaviour by her mother confirmed Barbie's fears about her value to her mother. Thus substantiating Barbie's need to maintain her silence to prevent the tenuous relationship that existed between Barbie and her mother from fracturing further.

Levels of Communication: Maintaining the Collusion of Silence

The insidious nature of the silence that had once been an ally to Barbie revealed itself when it became established as the manner of communication within Barbie's relationships with her significant family members. The function of the silence appears to have been to conceal the matters that could not be confronted so as to further maintain the tenuous bonds within these relationships, thus concealing the disconnection within them.

In relation to her father, Barbie has remained silent about the real issues that have afflicted her. Throughout her struggle with depression, Barbie did not seek out his support and even concealed her hospitalisation following her suicide attempt from her father. It may be that as the disconnection became pervasive within their relationship, Barbie no longer felt comfortable confiding in her father.

Although, it is likely that Barbie may have learnt through previous experiences with her father that he was not equipped to handle the immensity of the difficulties she was confronting. Perhaps due to his inability to confront the disconnection in their relationship and redefine her place within his new family, Barbie came to understand that she could no longer rely on him as a father, a role that he seems to have relinquished quite easily after his remarriage. Perhaps in settling to converse about the mundane and trivial matters, Barbie and her father can avoid confronting the obvious way that they have drifted from each other. Thus, they can maintain the disconnected bond in their relationship, which remains safe and effortless.

In relation to her mother, from early on in their relationship, there appeared to be little space for Barbie to confide in her mother about how she was feeling, as has been discussed previously. Perhaps Barbie's mother reacted with outrage at Barbie's disclosure to the psychologist because Barbie had dared to violate their code of silence. That is, Barbie revealed her genuine fears and feelings instead of concealing them, which seems to have been the norm within their home. It is also possible that her mother's reaction reflected that there was some degree of truth to what Barbie was feeling.

Barbie's mother appeared to be emotionally absent from their relationship, which seemed to perpetuate their inability to relate on an authentic level. Thus, Barbie continued with the pretence by continuing to conceal the truth of her feelings from her mother, especially surrounding her 'uncomfortability' regarding her stepdad's demanding and unreasonable behaviour. It seems that the superficial level on which Barbie and her mother related prohibited them from speaking about or confronting any real issues, perhaps as this would bring into focus the disconnected nature of their relationship.

Even when Barbie almost succeeded in ending her life, her mother was unable to address the seriousness of the issues that were disturbing Barbie. She seemed to be disinterested in Barbie's reasons for wanting to end her life. As Barbie lay in

hospital, it seems that she yearned for understanding and comfort from her mother. However, all she received was disdain as her mother responded, "*Don't be naughty again*". Thus, Barbie's "*cry for help*" was "*never spoken about ever*", and the silence within their relationship was maintained. This pattern continued even throughout Barbie's struggle with depression, as Barbie never felt she could reach out to her mother and say "*I feel depressed because...*". Instead, Barbie was very aware that the nature of their relationship "*was just not like that*".

Barbie's mother was obviously aware of the emotional difficulties Barbie was experiencing as she provided Barbie with professional help to support her throughout the ordeal. It appears though that these 'experts' may have been utilised as a go between to maintain the collusion of silence so that Barbie's mother could avoid confronting the possible source of Barbie's despair, as she did with the reasons for Barbie's attempted suicide. It may be that her mother could not acknowledge that certain choices she had made may have been contributing to Barbie's unhappiness, that is, the divorce, her new marriage, as well as her apathy in dealing with her husband's irrational behaviour and the impact it was having on Barbie. It is also possible that her mother could not confront the source of Barbie's despair, as she would then have to acknowledge the lack of emotional connection she had with Barbie.

The help that Barbie's mother sought for her throughout her difficulties seemed to fulfil its purpose, as Barbie's mother continues to avoid confronting "*the bigger issues that bother*" Barbie. However, since the move from her stepdad, Barbie feels her relationship with her mother has improved. It seems though that this shift is not authentic, as the manner in which they communicate is still an edited version of what is happening with Barbie. Barbie continues to conceal what is really happening with her, perhaps to maintain the threads that keep Barbie connected with her mother, despite how it contributes to the emotional disconnection in their relationship as well as their superficial level of communication.

In relation to the 'expert' help, the function of which could have been to break the silence that enveloped Barbie by providing her with the space to verbalise the issues that she could not address with her mother. However, it seems to have only assisted in maintaining the collusion of silence. Within her sessions with the psychiatrist, Barbie felt further *"frustrated"* due to the impersonal and cold manner in which they related. It seems that Barbie was looking for someone to relate to on an interactive level, someone who *"actually gives you feedback"*. Instead, Barbie continued to feel unheard, which only seemed to perpetuate the isolation of the silence that already surrounded her.

In addition to the sessions with the psychiatrist, the collusion of silence within Barbie's life was further maintained through her use of anti-depressants. Barbie acknowledges that initially the medication helped her, in that it lifted her *"from just being in total despair"*. However, with her continued use of the anti-depressants, Barbie became numbed to her experience of day-to-day life as the medication *"helped [her] to forget all [her] feelings"*. Thus, perpetuating the silence that surrounded her by prohibiting her from confronting her emotions and the issues that were at the source of her emotions.

In relation to her sister, Barbie has not always been able to connect with her sister. Although, as Barbie matured, her sister *"also [became] like a friend"*, where they

share the same clothes [and] go out to restaurants and just sit there, drink, smoke and talk and complain about men.

However, the bond that has evolved within their relationship has come at a cost for Barbie. In the times that Barbie has *"needed someone to listen"*, Barbie has been *"cut short"* and silenced by her sister's retorts, which have left her feeling disappointed and angry. Thus, Barbie has come to silence herself and her emotions, since her sister has displayed ineptitude at confronting the past as well as managing Barbie's emotionally overwhelming issues. It seems that as a result of this, the level at which Barbie and her sister now communicate ensures that they only speak about the things that her sister can handle, perhaps to ensure

that the relationship that they have established, which is relatively new, is maintained.

Masks that Disconnect to Protect

Barbie appears to have utilised silence as a means of maintaining the fragile bond that had developed in her relationships with her significant family members, namely her father, her mother and her sister. The contexts in which the silence has been utilised have been very different within each relationship. However, the evolution of the silence seems to have taken the same course by influencing the manner in which Barbie has come to communicate with her family. The norm that appears to have been established is one that conceals the truth of what is really going on in these relationships and especially within Barbie. Thus, their relatedness is founded on the matters that they can manage, for the rest, *"it doesn't exist...it's forgotten, like it never was...like it was a dream"*.

It seems that as a means of sustaining this superficial manner in which Barbie and her family communicate, it has been necessary for Barbie to develop various masks that she wears to guard her from revealing her authentic self to her family. Thus, she can conceal the parts of herself that her family do not want to see or cannot manage. However, it appears that Barbie's use of silence and the masks that she wears have become the very mechanism that has contributed to and sustained the emotional disconnection that exists between them. That is, by concealing parts of herself, Barbie cannot authentically connect with her family either.

Barbie seems to be in a precarious position though. On the one hand, by complying with the norm of the family and by wearing a mask in her relationships, Barbie can sustain the tenuous connections even though it maintains the emotional disconnection, which in turn then perpetuates the fragility of their connection. However, on the other hand, the distance that is provided by sustaining the emotional disconnection appears to protect Barbie from being placed in a vulnerable position, thus prohibiting her from experiencing further

disappointment within these relationships. It seems that Barbie has chosen to protect herself and her connections, thus continuing to silence her emotional needs even though this decision appears to ensure that the threads that hold the relationships will remain tenuous and few.

The masks that Barbie developed within her relationships with her family seem to have been as a means of survival. However, it appears that Barbie's need to conceal her authentic self has been carried over into the relationships that she has developed with others, namely her friends and boyfriends. Barbie allows others to see "*only one of [her] masks*" but "*as soon as they get past that mask*" or "*come too close then [she will] immediately just shut down*". It may be that Barbie's experience within her relationships with her family have taught her that she needs to anticipate being placed within a vulnerable position. Thus, Barbie conceals parts of her authentic self by wearing a mask as a means of controlling the emotional distance within these relationships and guarding against the possible disappointment she could experience.

The Impact of Silence: Finding a Voice

As Barbie developed into her teenage years, time seems to have stood still as the evolving silence began to impact on Barbie. The following is a description of the events that characterise her behaviour from the ages of 14 years to 16 years. These events appear to melt into one another, highlighting a bleak descent into self-destructive behaviour as Barbie struggled to find a voice that could be heard.

Barbie's silence may have ensured the preservation of her relationship with her mother and her father. However, in the years that followed, it seems that Barbie's voicelessness may have begun acting as a slow toxin on her emotional well-being. It appears that with each day that passed, Barbie became desperate in the suffocating isolation of concealing herself and her feelings. However, her apparent helplessness to alter her circumstances seems to have led her to transform the only environment she could, herself. Barbie's actions appear to have begun with minor behavioural changes where she embarked on an expedition to **rebel**. Barbie

was "*looking for a change all the time*", which resulted in her decision to "*pierce her tongue*" and experiment with "*weed*". However, in her efforts to shed her 'good-girl' persona and dabble in her newfound freedom, she was "*busted*" by her mother. The change in Barbie's behaviour appears to have been sudden and extreme in nature. It seems that Barbie was desperate to capture someone's attention and direct it to the overwhelming unhappiness she was feeling at that time.

However, she continued to be unheard and her behaviour seems to have escalated, culminating in several **attempted suicides**. Despite the vociferousness of her "*cry for help*" that "*there's something not 100% right*", her plea was absorbed into the 'unsaid' vacuum that was her life and Barbie returned home, feeling "*like it actually didn't happen, it was just another thing*". However, the hopelessness and despair continued to grow within Barbie. The onset of Barbie's **depression** is unclear. Perhaps her inability to actively participate in her life at that time contributed to her current lack of clarity surrounding her depression. Barbie recalls:

[I had] [t]he feeling of I didn't want to go on, like I just want to lie in my bed and not do anything. I wouldn't be hungry either... I wasn't living, I was surviving in a way and I didn't enjoy normal things, fun things, I didn't enjoy going out anymore... I think my personality changed also quite a bit...just being dull...no ambition, no nothing. It was just one level of...just 'uuugh'.

Barbie's unheard and desperate cries seem to soften to that of a whisper and her light within began to dim. With each failed attempt to attract the attention of someone to her pain, she seems to have internalised her cries to where they could only be heard by her. The isolation and despair she experienced throughout this time is apparent as she also began to rely on **self-mutilation** to gain a sense of "*release and control*" over the overwhelming emotions she was feeling.

Barbie was referred to the care of a psychiatrist where she was told she was "*manic-depressive*" and placed on anti-depressants. At first "*the anti-depressants actually helped because it lifted [her] up from the floor*". However, over time, the

medication made her feel that she was a spectator to her life, observing the events of day-to-day living without any experience of emotion. Deep within, Barbie became aware that she was devoid of any emotion at all. Thus, the lifeline she had come to depend on had in essence become the tool that continued to erode her sense of existence. Motivated by a need to *"feel like a human being again"*, Barbie made the decision to discontinue her medication. Even the pain she had once yearned to numb became a symbol that she continued to exist in this world. In discarding her medication, *"a new world [opened] up"* to Barbie, although this was short lived.

Soon after she stopped taking anti-depressants, the intensity of her emotions continued to eat away at her and an **eating disorder** took hold. Her ability to hide her newfound obsession was easy as Barbie was left to prepare her own meals. However, Barbie came to realise that she could not conceal the dramatic changes to her appearance from her family for very long, as they began to take note and comment on the dramatic weight loss. Their awareness brought forth passive action though; even Barbie's mother *"didn't do much about it"*. Perhaps by physically eroding herself on the outside, Barbie may have felt that she could somehow alter how she felt on the inside but this too proved to be ineffective. However, upon returning from a trip, Barbie stopped her self-destructive behaviour as rapidly as it had started.

It seems though that Barbie was unable to cope with being immersed into the silence of her new families, which she experienced as cold and restrictive and so different from what she desired them to be. The silence that Barbie may have felt obliged to endure within her relationships seems to have become a burden she could no longer continue carrying. However, since she could not scream out in reality, she may have attempted to speak out in a more indirect manner, that is, through her actions, perhaps in the hope that someone would recognise and acknowledge her distress and despair. As Barbie described it:

[B]ecause then it was all new to me, you know, from happy family and then over the years everything just changing...Especially with my stepdad, with the change of going to...living with a tyrant in the house where I was used to the gentle giant...You know, suddenly everything disappeared. You know, suddenly everything disappeared.

Barbie seems to believe that the difficulties she experienced with her stepdad were a significant contributing factor to her feelings of despair. Since moving away from him, there does appear to have been a change as Barbie no longer experiences feelings of depression and she feels "*much happier now*". However, it seems that Barbie's despair has not been completely resolved, as she continues to face feelings of unhappiness when she is "*completely alone and there's no distractions*". She said:

[I]t feels like something is hanging inside my heart, like where my heart is ... like into my stomach. This feeling of ... not quite frustration, but like ... like there's no hope or ... but it's ... it's almost ... it's not so extreme. In a way it's subtle but yet strong.

It seems that Barbie is yet to understand the source of her day-to-day struggle with the feelings of dejection. It is possible that since the silence and her solitude have continued, Barbie may still be confronted with the same feelings and experiences that drove her behaviour before, and may continue to haunt her until she is able to understand and resolve the meaning that is within them.

Conclusion

Barbie has fought a relentless battle to try and be heard amongst the unspoken rule that has become established within her family. However, it seems that Barbie's pleas, no matter how loud and obvious they were, could not surmount her family's need to maintain the status quo and avoid what they could not manage. Through each failed plea and even her attempts at confronting the issues directly, Barbie has been met with resistance, which results in further conflict, and the issue is then "*pushed back like it never happened*". Thus, Barbie has come to realise that "*it's not going to change the situation*", and "*for the convenience of others*", she has succumbed to the norm within her family, that is, to be silent.

From Coping to Finding Meaning

In her emotional isolation from others, Barbie was unable to effectively communicate her feelings, fears, and concerns. Barbie felt compelled to maintain the peace in her relationships and within her home. Although she came to rely on certain destructive behaviours, perhaps as a means of containing her discomfort, she also sought out other alternatives to assist her in making sense of herself and the chaos that surrounded her. The following theme illustrates the various methods Barbie began to utilise, and still relies on, in her quest to understand her world around her.

Barbie found comfort in the security and safety of her bedroom, especially during the years she lived with her stepdad. As a means of escaping the conflict with her stepdad, Barbie would retreat to her bedroom to "*sort it out with myself*". Once in the shelter of her four walls, and when her stepfather was not home, Barbie found solace in "*heavy metal, loud music*". It seems that despite the voicelessness Barbie may have experienced in other contexts and relationships, she managed to find a way to voice the turmoil she experienced in her daily life. It seems that the lyrics of the music Barbie listened to resonated with her feelings, thus generating a context where she felt understood and acknowledged, something she rarely felt elsewhere. It may also have given expression to the feelings and emotions Barbie may have felt she needed to keep deep within her, and through the music she could also hear the "*screaming*" that perhaps she too longed to do.

In **writing** in her journal, Barbie was able to utilise a variety of styles that assisted her in alleviating her escalating emotions. She would

write stuff there from day to day stuff, to like automatism where you just write whatever comes into your head. I also write where I actually think and then my feelings come out or when I'm upset. If I'm writing poetry, it's very eerie, very depressed, not the kind of stuff you're going to want to read at a wedding or something.

It seems that in her journal Barbie had created a space to express herself, a way to expel the constrained thoughts and emotions. Especially in her darkest times, as with her suicide attempt, Barbie relied upon her words to bear witness to those

moments when everyone else seemed to fail and disappoint her. Writing may have also provided Barbie with some objectivity that allowed her to gain a different perspective for herself in the situations she documented. In the absence of communication with others, it appears that Barbie's writing may have been a way for her to create meaning for herself from her experiences and the emotions that surfaced.

Although Barbie experiences relief through music and writing, this outlet does not seem to completely satisfy her need to make sense of the actions of those around her. Thus, Barbie has come to depend upon herself to

try to put things in my mind, to make it very clear, and understand and realise what or why I am unhappy or why, you know, I feel funny. I try to reason what the person was that said that, how they feel.

Perhaps in generating her own conclusions, Barbie is able to manage the uncertainty that comes from 'not knowing' the motives of others' actions and through this achieve a sense of understanding so that she may resolve the emotions she is experiencing.

This process of **rationalisation** appears to have become an essential tool in maintaining her relationships, especially with her family. Barbie's need to explain away the lack of emotional support she receives has even extended to her blaming herself. This is especially apparent in her relationships with her mother and her sister. It seems that in the years Barbie experienced despair and helplessness, she may have needed to understand why her mother could not be there for her. She appears to have found comfort in believing that she does not speak to her mother about her problems because "*its more me not wanting to because she does so much for me*". Barbie also explained that she will conceal her emotions and difficulties from her mother because

[s]he's already got so much stuff she has to worry about; I don't want to go on top of everything else with my stuff. So I'll tell her nothing is bothering me.

Barbie seems to use a similar process of rationalisation to explain the lack of emotional support she receives from her sister, in that her sister *"doesn't like speaking about problems if she can't handle it, like if you start to cry"*. It appears that in both these relationships, the explanations that Barbie generates, places the needs of her mother and her sister above her own. Perhaps focussing on others and not on herself helps her to keep from becoming overwhelmed by her pain. It is also possible that Barbie needs to create 'logical' reasons to explain why her mother and her sister are unable to emotionally support her because this helps her to gain closure on the disappointment she feels, since Barbie believes that

anger starts to eat away at you from the inside. Because if you don't deal with it, it's like tying a rotten body to you because you're progressing with your relationships but it's still based on that anger and how can you have stable relationships when there's just anger at the bottom that can at any moment just explode.

Thus, Barbie is *"trying to let go of small things"* and *"forgive them"*. It seems Barbie's ability to rationalise has allowed her to move beyond the initial feelings, although she still experiences some residual anger and disappointment towards her family. Thus, it appears that as an enduring solution, Barbie's construction of logical and acceptable explanations may not be effective. However, it may be the only remedy she has at this time that can allay her emotions sufficiently so that she can move forward in her relationships.

When the discomfort of her physical solitude begins to stir up the pervasive feelings of unhappiness that Barbie still experiences in the stillness, she finds comfort and relief in any **distractions**, most of the time seeking out physical company. It is only in being with others that Barbie has been able to **forget** *"what's happening at home or what has happened"*, and *"escape everything"* into a world of new connections and interactions. Although her interactions seem to only be that, distractions, since she wears a *"mask"* when she interacts with others, displaying an edited version of herself and her past. Perhaps it has become a necessary form of survival for her to be someone else, motivated by a need to escape the unhappiness that hunts her each day. It is possible that Barbie feels that if she lives in the part of *"the fun, party person"*, the happiness that she

portrays may become integrated into her authentic self and she can essentially drown the fears and emotions that awaken in the stillness.

Perhaps by reaching out for distractions, Barbie is able to focus on something that is external and outside of her self, which allows her to create sufficient distance to gain perspective but to also heal herself. Barbie showed a similar consciousness of her needs when she was taking the anti-depressants. That is, she seemed to have an innate sense within her that the medication was no longer helping her to heal but was in fact contributing to the continuation of her despair and disconnecting her from her life. Thus, she chose to distract herself with the many "*parties*" in her "*December holidays*" to ensure that she couldn't focus on the "*withdrawal symptoms*" because she was "*concentrating on going out*".

It seems that in **forgetting**, Barbie has been able to 'put a lid' on her emotions and her experiences of the years following her parents' divorce, so that it has become like a "*dream or a nightmare*" and it "*doesn't feel like it's a part of [her] life*". Thus, in 'forgetting', Barbie's memories no longer seem to be in the foreground, in that they are there and they have impacted on her life, but they are no longer prominent. Although, Barbie displays an awareness that in 'forgetting' all that has happened, "*it's always going to come back to haunt*" her. However, she appears to feel overwhelmed by the prospect of having to manage her past while she is "*still sorting out what's happening to [her] now*". Perhaps Barbie fears that in confronting herself and the emotions that remain linked with the past, she will open 'Pandora's box', which could perturb the relationships with her family, which she has fought relentlessly to maintain. Maybe Barbie's relationships with her family are similar to that of a teacup that has been chipped many times. It still fulfils its purpose in this world as it can still be drunk from. Perhaps it is even more valuable because it has a history and stories surrounding each of the chips to its exterior. Similarly, for Barbie, her relationships with her family have endured many bumps and chips, but for her they may still fulfil their purpose and are thus invaluable to her. Therefore, in forgetting, the memories

that are linked to the pain of her past can hopefully fade into her mind and become remnants of a "*dream*" so that she may move forward into her future.

Barbie seemed to have a burning will to surmount the many challenges that have come as a result of her parents' divorce. In spite of her pain and not having the ideal environment to support her, she seemed to never give up trying to be heard. Furthermore, throughout the years, she seemed to find new ways of coping, ones that would guide her toward the meaning of her experiences and assist her in creating stability and structure amongst the chaos. In essence, Barbie negotiated the adversity, on her own, and in her own way.

The Legacy of Divorce

Throughout the difficulties Barbie experienced in the years following her parents' divorce, she has managed to emerge physically and emotionally intact. The significance of pivotal events in those years continues on in the impression they have had on Barbie's definition of her 'self' as well as on her relationships with others. This will now be described.

Past Mistakes by Others vs. Future Mistakes by Herself

When Barbie's parents' marriage dissolved, it seems to have brought forth an awareness of the fragility of intimate relationships. As a result, Barbie has developed a sensible definition of relationships and marriage, deficient of any romanticised notions that you might expect from a girl Barbie's age. However, this same event in her life has also generated a fear within Barbie that she may be destined to repeat the fate of her parents one day in the future. The self-doubt that Barbie experiences has not been reserved for relationships only, and has also generated a fear of "*having children*", in that, she's "*scared that [she is] going to raise them wrong or be too overprotective or too lenient*". Although the reality of becoming a spouse and mother are still in the far and distant future, Barbie is haunted by a desperate need to not

relive my past again, through my marriage or let my kids go through the same that I had to go through.

Barbie's ability to make links regarding her life with her parents' divorce may be contributing to her insecurities regarding her abilities within relationships. It appears that the memory of her parents' divorce may be chiselling away at her confidence in herself, resulting in feelings of dread that she may experience divorce again as an adult, since *"it's just as devastating as getting divorced as going through it as a child"*. Thus, what may be considered 'normal' behaviour from a seventeen-year-old girl who is exploring herself within various relationships; Barbie seems to have pathologised her behaviour due to her intense fear to not relive her past.

Realistic Perceptions of Love, Relationships, and Marriage

Despite the fears that haunt Barbie, like most girls her age, she still desires to be married one day. Barbie has abandoned the fairytale notion that marriage and relationships consist of a *"white knight"* and *"happily ever after"* and she seems to have developed a more mature outlook. In being a witness to and a survivor of her parents' divorce, she seems to have become aware of the difficulties that a marriage can encounter and the considerable investment it entails to sustain it. Furthermore, Barbie has come to understand that love and relationships are not about perfection and can also entail pain and disappointment. One might expect the experience of such a lesson to generate cynicism and resentment within Barbie. Instead, she seems to have drawn on her experiences in her own relationships with family and others to generate the meaning of love for her. She believes that

you can still love somebody although you're angry with them. I believe they can disappoint you but you can still love a person. I think that love stretches from little affectionate kisses to, you know, like silly clichéd things like running a bath or, just being there to listen, like I said, just a story you can tell and just keep on telling it. And being able to strengthen your relationship through your weaknesses. Like, if something bothers you or you're angry with a person, to read something positive about it and making it grow, and working at it.

Barbie's definition of love may be a reflection of the meaning that she has been able to generate from her parents' divorce and the struggles she encountered in her relationships due to the divorce. It may also reflect her awareness of her needs in all relationships, both intimate and family. This may be what motivates Barbie to consistently enter into relationships with men who are a few years her senior. Therefore, in relationships, Barbie may be in search of someone who can understand and fulfil her needs. However, she has placed herself in a paradox because, although she may find someone who can fulfil her needs, the risk of becoming vulnerable and revealing her neediness may be too great. Thus, Barbie may be left wanting but never receiving the fulfilment she needs.

A Last Word...

When Barbie reflects upon her years following the divorce, she feels that it is a part of someone else's life, *"like a dream or a nightmare"*. However, if given the choice she would still not change the decisions that were made and the experiences she endured because Barbie feels that *"it's made me the person who I am"*. Through her own difficulties, she feels that she has become sensitised to those around her and *"concerned about other people"*. In addition, she feels that due to her parents' divorce, she has been able to develop her independence and decision-making abilities, which have contributed to her abilities in being a more responsible person.

Although Barbie feels apprehension regarding the manner in which her parents' divorce has had an impact on her relationships, she continues to cultivate feelings of hope *"that if [she's] had this bad part then maybe [she] can only have a better future"*. Finally, Barbie feels that her ability to navigate through the pain and despair that she has experienced has given her the opportunity to *"know what is going to help [her] and what's just going to leave [her] frustrated"* in dealing with future ordeals, since *"pain is always part of life"*. Her only regret through those years is that her parents did not or could not *"listen more"* and see more clearly that Barbie was *"calling out"* for someone to *"help [her] out of this situation"*. She

feels that at times they could hear her but they didn't listen closely enough to the meaning of her pleas. However, it seems she always felt loved.

Reflections of the Researcher

From the initial meeting with Barbie, the researcher felt immediately drawn to her warmth and enthusiasm, and felt a connection to this vibrant young woman who had come so far through her struggles. The researcher feels that Barbie has shown immense courage in being able to look back at her past and share her story openly and with integrity, which illustrates to the researcher that Barbie's journey to understand and unearth the meaning of her experiences has only just begun.

The connection that was felt with Barbie and her story became a challenge for the researcher throughout the interpretive process, in that many of the struggles that Barbie has endured resonated with the researcher. Although the context of Barbie's story differs greatly from that of the researcher's, Barbie's desperate fight to be heard in the silence that had become her world echoed a similar struggle for the researcher in her own family. Furthermore, the researcher could identify strongly with Barbie's willingness to sacrifice herself for the needs of others, as this has also been a significant struggle for the researcher in her training to become a therapist. The researcher feels that her connection to Barbie has contributed to her understanding of Barbie's story, although it also elicited a concern in the researcher that Barbie's story might become enmeshed with her own. Thus, throughout the interpretive process, the researcher needed to reflect upon her processes and emotions to ensure they did not contaminate the interpretation.

The researcher felt very overwhelmed throughout the interpretive process in that Barbie seemed to relate her story in a very chaotic and almost, derailed manner. However, this gave the researcher a glimpse into the confused nature of Barbie's world as well as an opportunity to comprehend how Barbie may feel at times

when she too attempts to make sense of her experiences. This became a challenge for the researcher to make sense of the significant links and events that Barbie was revealing.

The experiences that Barbie has endured highlights for the researcher the destructive effects that a divorce can have and she feels that Barbie's story brings this clearly into awareness. Barbie's story shows that it is not the event of the divorce itself that is destructive but the ripple effect it creates in the lives of those whom it impacts. The researcher feels that Barbie has shown great strength of character in being able to find her way through the chaos and the silence that had become her world and she feels that she better understands the desperation that comes with being emotionally isolated. Furthermore, the researcher deeply respects Barbie for never relinquishing her fight to overcome the many obstacles that have emerged for her in the years following her parents' divorce. Barbie's experiences with her blended families have revealed to the researcher the complexities that come with trying to merge the past with the future and brings into awareness the significance of the roles of the parents in making this merger a success.

The researcher admires Barbie's ability to cling to the goodness in her relationships with her family and the ability to forgive them, in spite of the consistent disappointment she has experienced in these relationships. The researcher feels that Barbie's desire to understand and create meaning from her experiences has contributed to her ability to emerge from the pain of her experiences with the hope and determination she displays for the future. The researcher strongly believes that Barbie's ability to endure her struggles alone reflects that she is a courageous and determined young woman who has emerged as a true survivor.

Barbie's Reflections

Barbie feels that the predominant belief is that *"everyone's parents are getting divorced and that it's not that hard"*. However, for her this study represents that there are people who *"care about teenagers and divorce"* and *"not just saying it's a statistic"*.

Following the interviews, Barbie experienced relief and felt that it *"lifted a great weight off of [her] shoulders"* to be able to share her story with someone who could listen and respond to her, perhaps for the first time. The interactional style of the interviews was important for Barbie, in that the researcher could acknowledge her opinions and experiences, which she feels does not always happen with others, especially parents. Barbie's experience is that teenagers are patronised in that they are often still classified and treated as children. However, she believes that every teenager has some experience in the world, enough to form an opinion, and needs to *"express it to someone"*, but this does not always happen.

Reading the researcher's rendition of her story was upsetting for Barbie because she had never confronted the events of her past in such a holistic manner before. She felt that the researcher had portrayed her experiences in a truthful manner, which was difficult for her to face. However, she also felt that the interpretation helped her clarify and understand her patterns of behaviour, thus relieving some of the frustration and confusion she feels about her past. In essence, Barbie felt that she benefited from this experience and found it a comfort that the researcher could identify with some of the struggles that Barbie has faced.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has presented a glimpse into Barbie's experience of her parents' divorce. The event of her parents' divorce has been described in relation to the role it has played in Barbie's life experiences following the divorce and the perceived effect it has had on her 'self' and her present relationships.

Barbie has displayed an overwhelming ability to be present in her struggles, in spite of her youth and being isolated from the most significant support system she has, her family. Perhaps in her isolation, Barbie was able to develop the resilient component of her nature, as she was able to move from being present in her difficulties and knowing when to create sufficient distance from them to prevent her from being consumed.

When viewing divorce within the context of Barbie's story, it has been revealed as a complex event with wide spread implications for all those involved but most especially the children of divorce. Barbie's story highlights the emotional challenges teenagers can encounter through the complicated restructuring of their family and the lingering effects of losing their security. However, in spite of the complications divorce brings, Barbie's story also illustrates that in the midst of the pervasive darkness, the desire to transcend the challenges that face you can be sufficient to guide you through. It is this aspect that challenges the traditional beliefs about the effects of divorce on adolescents. Furthermore, this story of an adolescent's lived experience has managed to extend our understanding and challenge the 'expert' opinion.

