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Female Empowerment

Barbie and Representations of Black Women

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Abstract

This paper originates from a master's thesis, recognized for its investigation into the realm of toys, and subsequently presented at the ITRA 2023 conference. It delves into the dynamics between children, the adult world, and empowerment. The analytical framework employed encompasses the representational and compositional metafunctions as delineated in Kress and van Leeuwen's seminal work, *Grammar of Visual Design* (1996, 2006), as well as the Transitivity System within the ideational metafunction of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978, 1985). Specifically, the present investigation focuses on examining the packaging of a Black Barbie doll through a qualitative-interpretivist lens, aiming to unveil ethnic representations within the realm of fashion dolls over the past decade. The results point to a representation of an empowered Black woman through Barbie, coupled with the integration of more adaptable kinetic attributes in the design of this doll.

Keywords: Barbie, Black women's representation, Female empowerment, Semiotics.

This paper is derived from a master's thesis conducted within the framework of the Postgraduate Program in Linguistics at the Federal University of Paraíba, located in the northeastern region of Brazil, during the period spanning 2018 to 2019¹. The study was conducted in the context of the Visual Semiotics and Multimodality Research Group (GPSM/CNPq), focusing particularly on the examination of texts designed for children.

As the researcher of this investigation, I chose to delve into the examination of

¹ The complete thesis is available at:

https://repositorio.ufpb.br/jspui/bitstream/123456789/18582/1/Jana%C3%ADneDosSantosRolim_Dissert.pdf

how Black women are represented through Barbie, “the most popular doll in the world” (Chung, 1994). According to Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2002) Barbie, as a doll, represents “social actors through its design, movement, color schemes, among other things, [being] always conditioned by the social and ideological contexts of the production time” (p. 91); besides being also considered a “microcosm of the adult world” (p. 93), since it portrays characters that are part of a society immersed in an adult world, although belonging to the children’s audience.

As icons of American culture, Barbie dolls exhibit certain characteristics related to how Americans perceive women, reinforcing a sexual and racial stereotype in the materiality of the dolls aimed at girls. Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2002) highlight stereotypes concerning Barbie, such as: tall and slim model-standard stature, white skin color, blonde hair, and blue eyes. Other studies in this same segment have addressed ethnic and racial issues related to an under-representation of Black women in fashion dolls (e.g., Almeida, 2006).

The objective of this paper is to use a case study approach to examine the visual and verbal semiotic elements encoded within and outside the packaging of the Black Ava DuVernay Barbie doll (2015) in terms of the four empowerment levels established by Charlier and Caubergs (2007): *power over*; *power to*; *power with*; and *power within*.

Drawing on previous research addressing the portrayal of gender in toys and their influence on career choices (see, e.g., Caldas-Coulthard & Van Leeuwen, 2002; Almeida, 2006; McNeill, 2017), I consider Barbie dolls as integral components of the “human circuit of discourse”, a concept supported by Griswold in Tulinski (2017, p. 4). This concept emphasizes that Barbie dolls represent both social and economic entities, contributing to the dissemination and reception of their representations within the social sphere through discourse. Additionally, Barbie doll packages serve as multimodal texts containing verbal and visual elements, conveying beliefs from specific social and cultural contexts. Hence, this study examines visual and verbal semiotic elements within and outside the Barbie doll packaging, including verbal texts, packaging material, doll characteristics (such as skin color, accessories, clothing, hair, profession), and body movement or lack thereof, all of which contribute to the construction of meaning.

I believe that investigating whether the representation of a Black woman by Barbie reflects empowerment or its absence holds the potential to foster heightened critical consciousness among researchers, parents, and subsequently, their children, regarding the acquisition of such products. This heightened awareness

carries the capacity to exert a positive influence on the representation of women in toys for forthcoming generations.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study is underpinned by the concept of multimodal discourse (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2006), developed within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday, 1978, 1985), for the purpose of visual and verbal analysis. Hence, its relevance lies in the fact that discussions concerning research related to the context of female empowerment tend to be more vigorously pursued outside the realm of linguistic analysis.

Literature Review

Female Empowerment and Barbie Dolls

According to Charlier and Caubergs (2007), the term empowerment covers four levels of power that permeates all social contexts. The first one, *power over*, concerns the idea of moderation regarding the relationship of domination and subordination, that is, power is used to guide other people who have less power, not more oppressively, but by guiding them to be themselves in order to achieve their goals. *Power to* regards the 'know-how' knowledge, and the intellectual abilities, which "includes the ability to make decisions, have authority, and find solutions to problems, and which can be creative and enabling" (p. 10); *Power with* is attributed to social or political power, the sharing of objectives, which revolves around a purpose that is applicable and common to all involved. And *power within* is related to 'knowing how to be', in other words, how people themselves are aware of their self-sufficiency and power to "change their lives and make changes" (p. 10).

These levels of empowerment provide the analytical framework to examine the extent that toys, particularly Barbie, support the right of women, as human and social beings, to live up to their full potential and be able to choose how they want to be represented in any sphere they are engaged in.

Following this line of reasoning, it is possible to see that Mattel has consistently introduced iterations of dolls that transcend traditional representations previously confined to domestic roles that were submissive and passive in nature. Mattel has diversified the portrayal of Barbie dolls across various contexts, featuring a wide range of professions, especially in its 2015 "I can be..." collection which included the Ava DuVernay Barbie as well as in the earlier *Fashionist* line launched in 2009.

Over her 65 years, Barbie has represented 250 professions (DeCarbo, 2023) and twenty-two different ethnicities (Bansal, n.d.).

Systemic Functional Linguistics

According to Halliday (1994), the main advocate of SFL, language is “a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning” (Cameron & Panovich, 2014, p. 103). The meaning in the text is affected by the social environment and ideologies that come to life through social relations of communication, which are only possible through language, “a product of the social process” (Halliday, 1978, p. 1).

Halliday (1994) declares that “all languages are organized around two main kinds of meaning, the ideational and the interpersonal” [and] “combined with these is a third metafunctional component, the ‘textual’, which breathes relevance into the other two” (Ming Liu, 2014, p. 1238).

Therefore, considering the data under examination, I shall henceforth restrict my focus to elucidating solely the ideational metafunction and the system of transitivity.

The Ideational Metafunction and the System of Transitivity

Halliday (1985) established a grammar based on the functions of language, proposing to analyze the language into three social metafunctions, which are realized in the lexicogrammar level. For him, the concept of grammar revolves around the representation of patterns of experience. He states that to represent such an experience, humans ‘build a picture of reality’ through patterns of experience. These patterns of experience are established through what Halliday calls metafunctions.

Focusing on the *ideational* meaning, Butt et al. (1998), according to what is claimed by Halliday (1985), explains that the term *ideational* is distinguished into two components: the *experiential*, the representation of the experience itself; and the *logical*, with the function of ‘connecting’ the experiences of representation (p. 13), referring to the concern of providing a theory related to the concepts of “experience of the world” and “conveys a picture of reality” (Butt et. al. 1998, p. 13).

For a more consistent definition of the *experiential* meanings, Eggins (2004) explains that it is “expressed through the *System of Transitivity* or process type,

with the choice of process implicating associated participants roles and configurations" (p. 206). In other words, the *participants, processes, and circumstances* are realized by the *System of Transitivity*, that is, the *representation* in language process (lexical-grammatical realization).

The *System of Transitivity* is concerned with the content that is expressed in language to understand the nature of the participants involved in it. These *processes* (verb elements) in the clause are divided into: *Material, Mental* and *Relational*. The first two processes, *material* and *mental*, are related to the process of *doing* and *sensing*, while *relational* processes are related to the process of *being*.

Material processes are characterized by the presence of an *Actor* (doer), which is realized by a nominal group, and it is obligatory in the clause. There might also be a *Goal*, which is the participant affected by the Actor's action. The probe question for material processes is: "What did x do to y?" (p. 225). For example, the following clause: She hit me. She is the *Actor* who made the action of hit (Material Process) me (*Goal*).

Mental processes can be divided into four classes or subtypes of verbs *perception, cognition, affection, and desire*. There are two main participants in this process, which are the *Senser*, that is the conscious participant, and the *Phenomenon* which felt. Both participants can be identified through verbs such as "see / hear / feel" which is related to *perception*; "know / understand / believe" for *cognition*; "like / love / adore" which indicates *affection*; and "hope / want / wish" related to *desire*. The following clause represents an example of mental process: I (*Senser*) believed (*Mental Process: cognition*) you, Tommy.

Relational processes refer to the attributes of a participant and can be realized through verbs such as 'is/were/was', 'have/had'. They are divided into two types: *attributive* and *identifying*. For the *attributive* type, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p. 239) state that it involves linking two terms using the verb "be" or a similar term. In the *Attributive* subtype, a quality or description is assigned to a participant, *Carrier*, always expressed by a noun or nominal group. As an example of attributive relation process, there is the following clause: The concert (*Carrier*) is (*Relational Process: Attributive*) great (*Attribute*).

Regarding the *identifying* relation process, it is related to something/participant giving value to a thing or simply defining it, and they can be identified as *Token*, "which stands for what is being defined" and *Value*, "which defines" (ibid., p. 242). For example: They (*Token*) are (*Relational Process: Identifying*) the president and vice-president of the United States of America (*Value*). These processes that were

cited are the three main processes identified by Halliday. However, there are still three other secondary types of processes, which are: *verbal*, *behavioral* and *existential*.

The nomenclature of *verbal* processes gives us in advance an idea of what it concerns. It is the process of *saying*. The participants in this case are the *Sayer*, who says something, the one who verbalizes; the *Verbiage*, what is said; and *Receiver*, the one who receives what is said. For example: She (*Sayer*) told (*Verbal Process*) me (*Receiver*) bad things (*Verbiage*). Halliday (2004) calls our attention to the fact that there another type of verbal process, in which instead of a *Receiver*, there is the presence of a *Target*, and that instead of the *Verbiage*, there is a *Recipient*. It happens when a participant is “targeted by the process of saying” (p. 256). In this case, the reader can find some verbs, such as: *insult*, *praise*, *slander*, *abuse*, and *flatter* (Bustam, 2011, p. 28). For example: He (*Sayer*) insulted (*Verbal Process*) me (*Target*) in front of everyone (*Recipient*).

Regarding the *behavioral* process, this process is related to physiological or psychological experiences. There is a participant who is aware of what is happening, the one who behaves, who is called the *Behaver*, and it is followed by the process. For instance, the girl is smiling. We infer that the girl, the behavior, is happy (psychological) and because of that she is smiling (physiological). So, the clause can be analyzed as follows: The girl (*Behaver*) is smiling (*Behavioral Process*).

As for the *existential* process, the name reveals the existence of something. The *Existent* refers to what exists. Usually in an existential sentence we will notice the presence of the verb form *there is* or *there are*, as an example: there is a girl crying, or something other verb related to existence, such as *exist* and others. In this sense, the clause can be analyzed as follows: There is (*Existential Process*) a girl (*Existent*) crying.

By looking at these processes presented in the lines above, it becomes feasible to interpret and understand the experiences lived by the participants. However, Halliday (1985) emphasizes the importance of the circumstantial elements in the clauses to achieve a more concise and complete interpretation of the information related to the occurred event and, in this way, to better understand what is / was experienced by the participants. In this sense, we rely on the table prepared by Bustam (2011) in view of what is proposed by Halliday (*ibid.*), as he calls our attention to the seven types of *circumstantial elements*. Through the circumstantial elements the reader can analyze the whole clause itself to embrace a better discussion of the analysis, aiming to achieve a more faithful interpretation.

Grammar of Visual Design

The Grammar of Visual Design was developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) to read and understand the text in all its forms, especially regarding its visual elements. Based on the metafunctions of Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar (1978; 1985), the Grammar of Visual Design is aimed at analyzing images and their semiotic modes to consider the meaning related to their context and their syntactic structure.

Kress and Van Leeuwen turn their critical and reflective gaze to the fact that the two modes do not serve the same function. This implies that both have their communicative function in the text, establishing interaction to produce a significant effect simultaneously.

Thus, *representational* metafunction is responsible for the "world experiences" of the represented participants in the image (Fernandes & Almeida, 2008), which can be people, animals, objects, toys, places, etc. They are subdivided into the *narrative* and *conceptual* processes. *Narrative processes* in a visual structure occur whenever there is the presence of vectors, which indicate an action involving two "represented participants" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 47), from an *Actor* towards a *Goal*. Vectors can emerge from any object or person represented in the image, as well as from body parts. Where there is the presence of one or more represented participants and the *Goal* in an image, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) regard it as a *transactional structure*. However, when two participants are interacting, each one performing an action towards the other, a *bidirectional transactional structure*, as described by Halliday, takes place. That is, a participant can be both the *Actor* and the *Goal* at the same time (p. 14). However, when there is the presence of an *Actor* in which we cannot see the *Goal*, this is referred to as a *non-transactional structure*.

In addition to an action, an image may also present a *reaction* process, which is related to the direction of the represented participants' gaze. The participant, then, is called *Reactor* and the object of his / her gaze is the *Phenomenon*. The *reaction* process can also occur through *transactional structures*, with a visible *Phenomenon*, and through *non-transactional structures*, with no visible *Phenomenon*.

As for *verbal* processes, they can be identified by a 'dialogue balloon' which connects two participants, the *Sayer* and an *Utterance*. The *Sayer* is the animated participant, while the speech is represented by the *Utterance*.

Mental processes are characterized by a 'thought bubble' that connects two participants, the *Senser* and the *Phenomenon*. The *Senser* is the participant in which

the 'thought bubble' emerges (Kress & Vanleeuwen, 2006, p. 75). And there is the *circumstance*, that is, the context in which the text is located and is organized in terms of *setting*, *means* and *accompaniment* (ibid).

Regarding *conceptual* processes, they occur when there is no presence of vectors due to the absence of participants performing an action; instead, they are represented in a static and timeless manner. These representations are divided into *classificational*, *analytical* and *symbolic* types. In *Classificational conceptual* processes, the participants are represented as belonging to the same group, to the same category, with characteristics that are common to all.

In relation to the *conceptual analytic* process, the participants are related through a structure of *part* and *whole*. There are two participants identified in this process: the *carrier* represented as the *whole*; and the *possessive attributes* represented as the *parts*.

Concerning the *conceptual symbolic* processes, the participants are "represented in terms of what they mean or are" (Fernandes & Almeida, 2008, p. 17) and are subdivided into: *attributive* and *suggestive*. The attributive process considers the relationship between the carrier and the symbolic attributive. The *Carrier* is the participant which stands out in the image, in other words, the attributes such as meaning, and identity are conferred to the Carrier which assumes a virtue of great significance in the image due to its attributes.

In regard to *Suggestive conceptual* processes, it occurs when there is the presence of a participant, which its meaning comes from within, being presented by the lack of details, as its characteristics derives from the carrier itself, not by its attributes. Most of the time, it is only possible to see its silhouette.

The *compositional metafunction* represents the modes of organization or layout of the visual text, related to the presence or not of interconnected objects, involving categories such as i) *value of information*, which deals with the structuring (Ideal x Real, Center x Margin, Given x New), ii) the *real* information, that comes on the lower part of the visual text, and iii) the *ideal* information coming on the upper part.

In relation to the *given information*, it comes on the left side of the image, while the *new information* comes on the right side. The *given information* is related to the message that is already known by the reader. As for the element that comes at the *center* of the image, it is related to the most prominent information, while the ones that come on the *margin* are associated to the least relevant or prominent information.

Saliency concerns the emphasis that the elements receive during the reading, by way of example: the color tonality, contrast, brightness, etc. The element in the visual text stands out due to its contrast of colors. *Structuring* refers to the connection and disconnection of elements in the image and it is related to the presence or not presence of interconnected objects. The visual characteristics in an image as well as its colors, vectors, size shapes, and position can influence the element to be *weakly framed*.

Methodology

The data of the present paper was collected during a research fellowship at The Strong National Museum of Play in October 2017 by Danielle Almeida, Visual Semiotics and Multimodality Research Group (GPSM) coordinator. Of the 400 images of 85 different dolls collected at that time, the AvaDuVernay Barbie was the only Black Barbie represented. The decision to investigate representations of empowerment depicted on the packaging of the Ava DuVernay Barbie doll (2015) emerged from the analysis of the larger corpus of images focused primarily on gender.

Therefore, this study can be regarded as qualitative and interpretive case study, focusing on “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13, my translation). As part of my master’s research and engagement within Professor Almeida’s research group, I was granted access to the corpus and allowed to select images for any research project that interested me. Consequently, I opted to examine the topic of female empowerment in the Barbie doll, as Female Empowerment had been a subject of my research interest since 2016 and, particularly, following the assassination of the Brazilian sociologist, activist, and politician Marielle Franco in 2018.

Analysis

The Case of the Ava DuVernay Barbie Doll (2015)

It is noteworthy that Ava DuVernay, the Black woman represented by the Barbie doll, is not merely a renowned American filmmaker; she also serves as a director, screenwriter, advertiser, and film distributor, achieving significant

recognition in the United States as one of the first African American women to win the Best Director Award at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival. Consequently, she was honored by having her profile portrayed in the most famous Fashionist Barbie doll of all time. This gesture acknowledges a segment of the global female racial diversity, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Front and back view of Ava DuVernay Barbie Doll (2015) in original package from the collection at The Strong National Museum of Play



Credit: Photo by and used with permission of Danielle Almeida.

As for the doll herself, the producer represented Ava at her work environment as a filmmaker. The image shows a Black woman, representing Ava's ethnicity. She is dressed in Black clothes, as well as in the original image that comes on the back of the package and is represented together with filming equipment. Her hair is represented long and braided, a copy of Ava's hair. As for what she wears on her feet, she does not wear high heels, but sneakers.

Regarding the materiality of the package, it is presented in cardboard on the back and transparent plastic on the front, so that the buyer can visualize all the accessories contained within it. It is wide so that it fits not only the doll, but also the accessories that come with her. The back of the package is the place where the buyer can find information about who is the woman represented by Barbie in this edition.

In terms of *representational* meanings, Ava's doll is the main *actor* of a *narrative process*. Although it seems very subtle, there is an action vector that comes out from

her right hand towards the director's chair. This action is performed through a *transactional action process* since it is possible to see the *goal*. She is the most prominent element of the image, suggesting to the reader / buyer that she has the power, she is in charge. Through the image, it is possible to understand that she is the woman who supervises and directs the execution of the filming, using technical and artistic resources. These resources are represented in the images through the accessories that come with her, such as a filmmaker's chair and doll stand.

It is, firstly, due to the highlight of her accessories that I acknowledge that this doll stands out, above all, through the *conceptual process*, for her *symbolic attributes*. However, her physical attributes also draw out attention, and, consequently, the buyer's attention. As we can see in the image, she presents an articulated body, not only is her hand or thighs articulated, but in this edition the producer chose to produce a doll that infers, through the crossing of her legs in the image, that she can have a sit, a fact that is reinforced by the filmmaker's chair that comes as an accessory.

She is singular in relation to having an articulated body. The producer was very clever when s/he chose to make a Barbie doll with an articulated body, that looks like she can move her legs in any direction, even cross her legs as pointed out. Such a characteristic is very important for gender representation, since Barbie is mostly represented in a static form, without body movement, without being able to sit.

As for her skin, she represents the profile of a Black woman. Notwithstanding, it becomes evident through the analysis that such a choice was intentional since the doll represents Ava's profile. However, this is not the first Black Barbie Mattel has produced. The first one was produced in 1980. While Mattel produced other Black fashion dolls before then, they were friends of Barbie and not Barbie herself. It does seem that it has taken the popularity of some Black stars to break the color barrier for Barbie (e.g., Dianna Ross Barbie).

With that said, regarding the *compositional* meanings, the front of the package, which deals with the visual appeal of the product, represents the workplace of Ava DuVernay. The *subordinate information*, that is, the elements around the doll, such as the filmmaker's chair and images that come as a background, which brings filming equipment and form a supposed wall, are distributed in order to build the recording set. As for the doll herself, she is the one where the attention is focused, the representation of Ava DuVernay as Barbie, that might influence the purchase of the product, so the producer put her in the spotlight.

By reading the verbal text that comes on the back of the package, I noticed that some verbs stand out throughout the text, such as: [She was] *nominated*, she *won*, she *founded*, and [She] *worked*. It gives the impression that the producer does not follow a chronological sequence of events, but s/he first is committed to present Ava's life through her achievements, suggesting a persuasive strategy for the buyer to start reading the verbal text by getting to know who this woman is, so s/he feels flattered by the doll's achievements. After presenting her achievements, the producer reaches the starting and most intimate point of her personal life, her birthplace. It is at that moment that other verbs appear, such as: (to be) born, raised and loves.

When looking at the first four verbs, the buyer can acknowledge that this woman was nominated for two Academy Awards and four Golden Globes. This means that what she has done in her life reveals work worthy of honor. I can realize, then, that she, being a woman, has the possibility to act; there is action in her life, which is revealed through the verbs 'founded' and 'worked', both of which represent *material processes*. See her biography below, now with the analysis of the processes:

- (1) Ava DuVernay (**Carrier**) [has been] Nominated (**Relational**) for two Academy Awards and four Golden Globes (**Scope**).
- (2) Writer/director Ava DuVernay's most recent film "Selma" chronicled (**Verbal**) the historic 1965 voting rights campaign led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (**Verbiage**).
- (3) She won (**Material**) the Best Director Prize (**Goal**) at the Sundance Film Festival (**Circ: location: place**) in 2012 (**Circ: location: time**) for her acclaimed feature "Middle of Nowhere" (**Circ: cause: reason**).
- (4) Her previous narrative and documentary work (**Carrier**) include (**Relational**) the feature film "I Will Follow" and the documentaries "Venus Vs.", "My Mic Sounds Nice" and "This is The Life" (**Attribute**).
- (5) In 2010, she (**Actor**) founded (**Material**) ARRAY, an independent film distribution and resource organization (**Goal**) for filmmakers of color woman filmmakers (**Circ: cause: behalf**).
- (6) Prior to her directorial career, DuVernay (**Actor**) worked (**Material**) as a film marketer and publicist (**Circ: role**) for more than 14 years (**Circ: Extent: time**) through her company, The DuVernay Agency (**Circ: location: place**).
- (7) She (**Actor**) was born (**Material**), || [she] (**Actor**) raised (**Material**) || and [she] (**Senser**) loves (**Mental**) life (**Phenomenon**) in Los Angeles, California (**Circ: location: place**)."

The producer informs the buyer in sentence 5, through a *material process* and a *circumstance of cause, behalf*, that Ava DuVernay was the person responsible for founding the ARRAY organization, which got very famous for supporting woman of color filmmakers. But more than that, the producer reports in sentence 6, through a *circumstance of role* “as a filmmaker and publicist” highlighted by the *circumstance of location, place* “through her company”, that she has the right to property, which evidences goods conquered as a result of her work. A fact that, some years ago, was a reality that could be considered as a utopia for women, due to oppression towards them. However, we can see that, nowadays, women, especially Black women represented by this doll, have the possibility to fight for what they want to be, event though, they still suffer with prejudice as we could see during the Pandemic with the *Black Lives Matter* movement many reports of prejudice against Black people.

In the face of these facts, it is possible to see that Ava is an example of a woman who has obtained results from her work. The story told by the producer suggests that, for the fact that she is a Black woman who has fought in life for the conquest of her ideals and has great visibility in the media, other women felt influenced by her and recognized her work. I refer to women here, because this investigation deals with the theme of female empowerment, but certainly the recognition of her work was not only in the field of the female gender. This fact is evidenced through a *relational process* in sentence 1, [has been] ‘nominated’, when the producer implicitly shows that the results of her work have inspired other people, and for that reason they nominated her ‘for two Academy Awards and four Golden Globes’.

Public recognition of her work becomes even more explicit when the producer uses a *material process* in sentence 3 to inform the buyer that Ava was not only ‘nominated’ ‘for two Academy Awards and four Golden Globes’, but she ‘won’ ‘the Best Director Prize’ ‘for her acclaimed feature “Middle of Nowhere”’. Not only Ava, but also the public did action since they voted for her.

By analyzing these sentences, I understand that the producer aimed to communicate the buyer that this doll, that is on sale, represents the image of a woman that did a great job at working, at influencing other people, at being successful in life. But not only that, at the end of the verbal text, in sentence 7, the producer makes it clear, through a *mental process*, that she ‘loves’ the place where she lives. The chosen of the verbs suggests an aspect of affection from her towards the place of her birth, since from a *relational* and *material process*, the producer explains that it was in Los Angeles, California, the place where she was born and

raised. Which is not so difficult to find the opposite, since Los Angeles has been at the forefront of promoting gender equality through career opportunities (Yaara Schattner, 2017).

It is possible to see, then, through the representation of this doll, that women have achieved their rightful place as a citizen at work. Not only white women, but also Black women, a fact that indicates the victory of feminist struggles, especially of what was claimed in the third wave of feminism in the 1990's. However, it is relevant to mention that this is not related to a hundred percent, since there are still few women who stand out, that's why Ava became so famous and was represented by Barbie. She is an example of the freedom and voice that women have always longed to be, and that now is only possible to be this woman due to the struggle of other women throughout history.

Conclusion

In parallel with a more diverse range of body shapes and the incorporation of more flexible kinetic properties in doll design, the issue of ethnicity has also been a problem observed in terms of doll representation over the last decade.

Through the analyzed representation of the Ava DuVernay Barbie doll (2015), women embody the levels of power advocated by Charlier and Caubergs (2007): *power over*, *power to*, *power with*, and *power within*. The analysis of the visual and verbal representations of this doll has shown that Black women, such as the one represented by Ava DuVernay Barbie doll, can have *power over*, meaning the power to lead and guide those with less power to achieve their goals. But not only that, they also have the *power to* make decisions, pursue their dreams, find solutions to problems, and be creative. Additionally, they have *power with* others; they can share goals with others for the common good of all. And finally, they have *power within* themselves, which is the power to "change their lives and make changes" (p. 10).

By playing with dolls like Ava DuVernay Barbie doll (2015), children can incorporate into their play the themes represented by her, as her materiality and physical attributes make this possible. Although children can assign any role to toys in their play, as mentioned by Almeida (2006), representative dolls like the Ava DuVernay Barbie doll have an identity that can influence how the child plays. This is why offering more representativeness and inclusion in toys not only helps children mirror themselves in their playthings but also triggers their desire to act

and fight for their rights in an exclusive society.

In conclusion, with this paper, regarding the grammatical analyses conducted from the theoretical chapter based on the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and the Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar (1978; 1985), I can affirm that this doll, concerning her physical characteristics, has her skin color valued without needing to compare herself to other skin tones, especially white, to have her values respected and goals achieved. The representation of the body characteristics and life of a real woman by Toymaker Mattel opens doors to a hopeful future for Black children who play with Barbie, allowing them to see themselves represented through the doll without feeling silenced or erased in any way by their racial characteristics. The Black Barbie is, then, considered valued and empowered in this representation of the Ava DuVernay Barbie doll from the year 2015.

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