Title
Just Like You, But Not Like Us: Staging Multiracial Feminity, National Belonging, and Collective Memory in the American Girl Family

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STAGING MULTIRACIAL FEMININITY, NATIONAL BELONGING AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE AMERICAN GIRL FAMILY

Since their debut on the toy market in 1985, American Girl dolls have evolved into a cultural icon with extraordinary appeal for 7- to 12-year-old girls. In 1995, American Girl introduced a new line of “Just Like You” dolls designed to reflect the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of American youth, and to offer a ‘customized’ approach to packaging racial identity. I will use American Girl and its products as a case study through which to address the fashioning and anchoring of racial and national identity in relationship to visual culture and collective memory. I argue that American Girl enlists visual tools foundational to colonial and racist iconography and, by so doing, evokes a troubling history of racial identification efforts. By selectively emphasizing or erasing specific histories associated with class and ethnic diversity in the U.S., American Girl contributes to confused visions of racial, ethnic, and national identity. To make these claims, I situate the dolls in a broader history of racialization in the U.S. and analyze artifacts (website, catalogues) from American Girl’s Just Like You collection.

Karina Eileraas has been a CSW Research Scholar since 2008. She received her Ph.D. in Women’s Studies at UCLA in 2003. In 2007, she published a book entitled Between Image & Identity: Transnational Fantasy, Symbolic Violence, & Feminist Misrecognition and is currently working on a second book, tentatively titled “Re-Membering Representation: Feminism, Popular Culture, & the Spaces of Memory.”