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# Dolls, Play, and the History of American Girlhoods

## An Interview with Miriam Forman-Brunell

Miriam Forman-Brunell, Emerita Professor of History, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, has long been at the forefront of girlhood studies, dolls' studies, and the field of play. She is the author of *Made to Play House: The Commercialization of Girlhood* (1994, 1998) and *Babysitting: An American History* (2009). She edited *Girlhood in America: An Encyclopedia* (2001), *The Girls' History & Culture Reader: The Nineteenth Century* (2011), *The Girls' History & Culture Reader: The Twentieth Century* (2011), *Princess Cultures: Mediating Girls' Imaginations and Identities* (2015), *Dolls Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls' Toys and Play* (2015), *Deconstructing Dolls: Girlhoods and the Meanings of Play* (2021), and *The Story of Rose O'Neill: An Autobiography* (1997, 2022). She has served as guest editor for an issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (Fall 2019) focused on the history of girlhoods and the girling of work, play, and performance and for an issue of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (2012) on new research in dolls studies. Forman-Brunell codirected *Children & Youth in History*, an online world resource for students and teachers, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is currently working on *Girls in America: A Narrative History of Girlhoods* as well as a history of her mother's girlhood in Nazi Germany and wartime America. **Key words:** babysitting; doll collectors; doll makers; doll play; dolls' studies; girls; girlhoods; girls' studies; princess culture; Rose O'Neill

**American Journal of Play:** Your research and scholarship have made significant contributions to the history of dolls, girlhoods, and play. What exactly is girlhood, and how would you describe girls' studies to those unfamiliar with the field?

**Miriam Forman-Brunell:** According to popular understandings that draw upon deeply rooted beliefs, girlhood is the natural (biologically determined), uniform, unchanging, and inconsequential condition and period in the

life of a female child. Decades of research has demonstrated, however, that girlhood—comprising girls’ lived realities and cultural constructions—is not a fixed category but a fluid one of experiences and expectations. As changeable as the category of “girl” itself, girlhoods are culturally constructed, historically specific, contingent, mutable, discursive, contested, intersectional, and heterogeneous. While recognizing the significance of continuities among girls across time and place, the many differences among girlhoods renders the term girlhood less accurate than “girlhoods.” This is because the particular ways in which age, race, class, ethnicity, religion, region, gender, sexualities, and other forces intersect with historically specific and changing material realities, biological developments, shifting discursive prescriptions, and girls’ contestations. These have given rise to different opportunities and obstacles, identities and agency among various populations of girls.

This revision of inaccurate notions about girlhood is the result of decades of research dating back to the emergence of the “new women’s history” in the 1970s. Nancy Cott, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Debra Gray White were among the first to study the history of adolescent girls, although they did so still within the larger framework of women’s history. By the 1980s, other historians (e.g., Joan Jacobs Brumberg, Jane Hunter, Barbara Benzel, and myself) began to place girls at the center of analysis as did influential scholars in other fields (e.g., Carol Gilligan in psychology and Angela McRobbie in cultural studies). The subsequent rapid growth of scholarship by literary scholars and those in mass communications soon gave rise to the interdisciplinary field of girls’ studies (also referred to as girlhood studies), that coalesced in a flourishing academic enterprise by the mid to late 1990s. Seeking to establish girls’ history within the broader fields of history and girls’ studies, in 2001 I published the first reference work, *American Girlhood: An Encyclopedia*. Also aiming to define the field of American girls’ history, I coedited with Leslie Paris *The Girls’ History & Culture Readers*, a two-volume collection that features the canonical essays on American girls’ history and culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

**AJP:** How did you come to study the history of girls and girlhoods?

**Forman-Brunell:** My scholarly interest in the history of girls and girlhoods began with a curiosity about dolls and what they seemed to be saying about gender. While taking a class in U.S. women’s history my senior year at

Sarah Lawrence College, our professor, Barbara Berg, asked us to consider what kinds of sources one might use to study the history of women. I had just returned from a trip to the Philadelphia Children's Museum where I had seen cases of well-heeled, adult-looking Victorian-era bisque and china head dolls that looked nothing like the plastic girl dolls (Ginny, Patti Playpal, Barbie) of my midcentury girlhood. Although I thought that dolls might be informative sources, just what they might have to say about girlhood eluded me until I began my dissertation research in the mid-1980s.

**AJP:** Who were the scholars who influenced your approach to what was, at the time, an emerging field?

**Forman-Brunell:** Returning to Sarah Lawrence College for a master's degree in women's history, I studied under Gerda Lerner, a pioneer of the groundbreaking field of the new women's history she assiduously sought to legitimize. While I researched and wrote an uninspired thesis that fit more squarely within the framework of women's history, frustration with the marginalization of girls led me to consider other historical subfields. In so doing, I came upon John R. Gillis's 1974 *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770–Present*. In this groundbreaking work, which traced the emergence of youth as a distinct category in England and Germany, Gillis's youth-centered perspective brought to light the historical significance young people and their interactions with their elders played in changing expectations. Inspired by Gillis's approach and encouraged by his response to my embryonic doll project, I decided to continue doctoral work under his direction in the department of history at Rutgers University. Girlhood itself gradually moved to the center of my analysis as I located more and more evidence of girls' unconventional doll play. I began to see evidence of girls' acceptance as well as their rejection of dominant girlhood ideals. By viewing the past through a girl-centered lens, I came to realize that occasionally, girls, eager to shape their own girlhoods, were willing to engage in political struggles with doll producers and gift-giving parents.

A breakthrough in my understanding of dolls and girlhood had taken place after I came upon the work of cultural anthropologists, such as Mary Douglas, and social archeologists, folklorists, and historians who used material culture methodologies to read objects as texts. It wasn't long before I began to see that the intentions and beliefs of doll makers could be gleaned from dolls that together constituted a body of historical evidence.

Developing a self-styled methodology to analyze dolls, I came to see that they did not embody a single notion of girlhood but many notions that were often at odds with each other and changed over time. Rather than seeing dolls as mute and impassive, as had others before me, I came to realize that along with girls, dolls had a lot to say about girlhoods. My dissertation director, T. J. Jackson Lears, played an important role in my understanding of the broader significance of dolls and girls in American history, society, and culture. Lears's essay on cultural hegemony, in particular, enabled me to finally comprehend how and why cultural producers and parents give dolls to girls.

**AJP:** Dolls were at the center of your first book *Made to Play House: Dolls and the Commercialization of American Girlhood, 1830–1930*. Before your book, how had scholars and researchers studied dolls?

**Forman-Brunell:** A major problem I faced early on in my research was the dearth of scholarship on the history of dolls. Although this is no longer the case, in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I first began my research, dolls were widely dismissed as trivial objects unworthy of serious scrutiny. Historians of women influenced by Second Wave perspectives saw dolls as uniform, static artifacts and agents of patriarchal culture. Within that limited framework, girls who played with dolls were understood to be passive victims of an oppressive ideology that promoted femininity, maternity, domesticity, and consumerism. While I questioned the patriarchal imperative of dolls and the presumption that girls were passive players, there was no research upon which I could build.

Fortunately, there were many books written by doll collectors! These included a treasure trove of information, although it was presented in ways that were highly fractured. Collectors generally disregarded the historical forces that informed imagination and invention, production, consumption, and reception. The information included in doll encyclopedias, for example, often obscured significant patterns as well as meaningful contexts in which doll artifacts were situated. Cataloguing dolls by national origins or material make-up typically concealed the historical forces that gave shape and meaning to dolls, such as the changing and competing notions of girlhood that dolls embodied. Collectors' uncritical perspectives, moreover, praised leading doll manufacturers but in ways that made it difficult to discern much of anything about the motivations and intentions of doll making businesswomen and men. Other works suffered similar problems. Orga-

nized according to the principal material used to make a doll head (wax, wood, porcelain), they also isolated dolls from the people and the cultures that produced and played with toys. Girls were largely absent, or—if they did appear in collectors' histories—they were presumed to conform to conventional notions of feminine girlhood they did not challenge.

**AJP:** What did your research discover about the American businesswomen and businessmen who designed and manufactured dolls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

**Forman-Brunell:** Although collectors' works provided little more than names and dates of inventors, producers, and designers of dolls and feminists assumed that all doll manufacturers promoted a uniform notion of gender, there were clear differences between the business models established by female and male entrepreneurs and the dolls they produced. The Victorian separate sphere ideology informed the gender-based principles and practices, skills and sensibilities, intentions and inventions, aesthetics and attitudes, perceptions, production, and marketing of male and female doll makers. Male producers would ultimately achieve greater ascendancy over the American doll economy during the 1920s, but there were important interludes when businesswomen reappropriated dolls as cultural forms that reflected women's prevailing social agendas, such as "scientific motherhood" during the Progressive era.

Dolls were contested artifacts of businesswomen who traversed the private and public spheres, on the one hand, and of businessmen who would ultimately appropriate the dolls they marketed as symbols of an idealized feminine domesticity, on the other. Not only were adult producers at odds over the meanings of dolls, so were girls who often engaged in embryonic struggles to define the place and purpose of dolls in their own lives and girlhoods.

**AJP:** What purpose did these doll makers believe their products served for the girls whose families could afford to buy them? Did this change over time?

**Forman-Brunell:** American male and female doll makers were motivated by concerns as different as the dolls they designed, manufactured, and marketed. American male inventors turned out hard-bodied feminine-looking mechanical dolls meant to "entertain" and "amuse," as they explained in their patent applications. Drawing upon a tradition of homemade rag dolls, late-nineteenth century women producers—critical of bourgeois and breakable European bisque and china head dolls that encouraged feminine

rituals and display—instead created soft-bodied dolls that promoted caring and understanding. Female inventors, guided by a different conception of American girlhood, were more likely to cite the needs of children as the basis for their inventions. In their patents, these women claimed that children needed safe, portable, and durable dolls to teach them about relationships. Businesswomen like Martha Chase and contemporaries like Rose O’Neill believed that the purpose of dolls was to instruct children, girls along with boys, middle class as well as working class, in health and hygiene. By the 1920s, when the American doll industry achieved dominance over the European trade, women in the American industry were more likely to serve as doll designers for male manufacturers who promoted idealized notions of maternity, domesticity, and consumerism in the dolls they marketed to girls.

**AJP:** What were Kewpie dolls? How did their creator, Rose O’Neill, and her dolls differ from other early twentieth-century American doll makers?

**Forman-Brunell:** Kewpie dolls, the best-known figures in American culture before Mickey Mouse, evolved from the cherubic-looking characters created by Rose O’Neill in comics printed in popular women’s magazines. She was a talented young illustrator and “new woman.” As a cultural feminist, O’Neill’s modern ideas about gender found expression in the realistic-looking Kewpie boy figures (different from highly sentimentalized Victorian depictions of children) whose playful activities centered on municipal reform—even women’s suffrage. O’Neill disliked the small bisque Kewpie dolls manufactured by German manufacturers that flooded the American market. Responding to changing notions of childhood and play in the early twentieth century, male manufacturers made poorly constructed (and racist) dolls that, like the Kewpie, encouraged children—and adults—to play. (For those who are interested in learning more about Rose O’Neill, the University of Missouri Press has just published the paperback edition of *The Story of Rose O’Neill*, an autobiography that I edited of the creator of the Kewpie doll.)

**AJP:** You have suggested that dolls were objects of struggle, particularly for children who often viewed and used their playthings differently than doll makers and parents intended. What kind of evidence did you find to help you understand how girls (and boys) played with their dolls?

**Forman-Brunell:** Many girls who challenged adult prescriptions expressed their preference for one kind of girlhood over another through their play. Instead

of following the visiting and other social rituals encouraged in juvenile magazines, some girls staged doll funerals. When girls outright rejected dolls in preference for running, roller skating, or riding bicycles, they sent a strong message to parents and producers that they preferred an active and outdoor girlhood. There is an abundance of evidence of doll play in Victorian children's print culture, twentieth-century advertisements, and other sources of consumer culture. Most prevalent are sentimentalized images of girls affectionately hugging and bathing their dolls, washing their clothes, or pushing them in prams. Surprisingly widespread are depictions of girls lopping off their dolls' heads and engaging in other unconventional doll play that provide evidence more of loathing than loving. One need hardly read against the grain when interpreting the many images in juvenile magazines, children's books, prints, stereographs, and other visual sources depicting hoydens challenging conventional gender prescriptions. Girls' agency is corroborated by recollections of doll play in memoirs, autobiographies, interviews, and oral histories.

**AJP:** What were some of the challenges you faced in interpreting these sources? What did you learn about children's doll play from them?

**Forman-Brunell:** Analyzing the history of dolls posed a number of challenges beginning with museum curators who would not allow me to undress the dolls in their collections. As a result, I more closely examined the many broken dolls not typically included in exhibition display cases. These revealed construction methods and materials and the impact of girls' play on dolls. Another challenge I faced was the dearth of extant records from the many small doll-making enterprises. As for other sources, recollections, memoirs, and the like are not wholly reliable, and popular culture sources are heavily mediated. Both are also subject to nostalgia, sentimentalization, and stereotyping. Among the many sources I used, I found patents to be enormously useful. The problem was that not all inventors included the same kind of information. Some provided fuller justifications for their inventions than did others. What helped to mitigate the challenges I faced with these sources was the emergence of patterns and recurring themes that corroborated broader understandings.

**AJP:** How has the study of dolls changed since the publication of *Made to Play House*?

**Forman-Brunell:** Since the 1990s, the scholarship on dolls has expanded into the recognizable field of dolls' studies. During the last decade of the twen-



tieth century, historical forces such as Girl Power and major disciplinary developments—girls’ studies, Black studies, and cultural studies—along with the commercial success of the American Girl doll line and the proliferation of the Barbie brand fueled doll research. In departments of English, anthropology, and sociology, a new generation of feminist scholars explored relationships between dolls and girls’ identities from interdisciplinary, intersectional, and discursive perspectives. Although Ann duCille, Elizabeth Chin, and Sherrie A. Inness, among others, recognized the ways in which dolls reinforced normative notions and racial and gendered “otherness,” they showed too how girls who played with dolls also negotiated, revised, and disrupted the cultural categories of girlhood. Building on the work of previous scholars, Robin Bernstein pioneered a new methodology for interrogating dolls and doll play in regard to race. Applying performance theory to the study of dolls, Bernstein’s 2011 *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* demonstrated the ways in which dolls and stories about them scripted children’s behavior and beliefs.

For more than a decade now, the state of doll research has been in the hands of a new generation, pioneering Gen X and Millennial dolls’ studies scholars who apply postmodern, feminist epistemologies and critical race theory. They employ innovative sources of evidence, novel research designs, and a variety of critical practices to explore new themes in doll scholarship—from cultural work to historical memory reception practices. Their imaginative scholarship, featured in the 2015 *Dolls Studies: The Many Meanings of Girls’ Toys and Play* and the 2021 *Deconstructing Dolls: Girlhoods and the Meanings of Play*, two collections I had the privilege of editing, is particularly noteworthy for its amplification of girls’ voices, challenges to notions of scholarly objectivity, privileging of subcultural principles and practices (e.g., DIY), and expansion of the age of doll players and sites of doll performance. Locating novel doll play in new spaces and sites where doll performances take place, they unpack dolls’ and doll players’ potentiality to construct and disrupt, mediate and contest, perform and rescript girlhoods. Together, those conducting doll research today see dolls as dynamic texts that represent layered versions of realities, mediated by the often contradictory ideologies, values, or world views of doll creators, producers, consumers, and players.

**AJP:** How have the ways in which children played with dolls changed or remained the same over the past century?



**Forman-Brunell:** The variety of girls' doll play has long been informed by changing doll products along with coexisting, competing, and changing notions of girlhoods. Robin Bernstein argues that dolls (and stories about them) functioned like scripts that elicit particular performances or behaviors. In this way, a girl is more likely to dress a sexy fashion doll than to cuddle it. Despite dolls' "scriptive" nature, however, girls have long turned dolls on their heads, figurately and literally subverting adult expectations by playing with them in unexpected and unauthorized ways. (Along with many girls, my mother simply rejected the dolls she received from her conventional mother, preferring less girlish activities instead.)

While Bernstein researched the ways in which turn-of-the-twentieth-century white girls followed racist scripts in their often violent play with Black dolls, other scholars have more recently examined Black girls' doll play through an intersectional lens. Media scholar Rebecca C. Hains's 2012 study, "An Afternoon of Productive Play with Problematic Dolls: The Importance of Foregrounding Children's Voices in Research" looked at the activities of a small group of African-American girls playing with Bratz dolls. What she found was that, while playing with their dolls, the girls explored issues of racial identity and racism within historical and contemporary contexts but paying little attention to the sexualized nature of the Bratz dolls. Building on the work of Hains (and a study by Elizabeth Chin in 1999 called "Ethnically Correct Dolls: Toying with the Race Industry"), Janet Seow in her 2019 essay "Black Girls and Dolls Navigating Race, Class, and Gender in Toronto" found that inner-city Afro-Caribbean girls' play with Black Barbies and Bratz dolls revealed their accommodation to racialized identities and marginalization. But the girls' repurposing of narratives also led them to circumvent dominant Western constructions of girlhood.

In the 1990s, new types of dolls and refashioned doll lines drew upon Girl Power, a girlhood ethos that commercialized Third Wave Feminism. The political activism and artistic critiques of adolescent girls and young women not only empowered girlhood but also extended the age of girlhood past the teenage years. Since the 1990s, older adolescent girls and young women musicians have been imaginatively toying with dolls as symbols of feminist resistance. In musical performances, subcultural Riot Grrrl bands and rappers like Nicki Minaj have been reappropriating dolls as signifiers of idealized white feminine girlhoods they mischievously deconstruct, reconstruct, recontextualize, and reinvent.

*AJP*: What prompted you to write *Babysitter: An American History*?

**Forman-Brunell**: While researching *Made to Play House*, I had run across several accounts of turn-of-the-twentieth-century girls who, to earn money to buy the dolls they wanted, worked as “baby-walkers” and “baby tenders” pushing prams for mothers. These early twentieth-century babysitters proved to be just as business minded as a group of plucky preadolescents I happened to encounter at the end of the century who confidently charged the parent-employers they worked for by the number of children they cared for. I understood the piecework they had reappropriated within the context of women’s labor history, which had first captured my interest during my adolescence in the early 1970s. I struggled to find research materials until the rise of the internet and the founding of eBay enabled me to access a wealth of popular culture sources that eventually made plain that babysitters were a lightning rod for broader fears about teenage girls and their subcultures.

*AJP*: Does the history of babysitting provide insight into the relationship between girls’ work and play?

**Forman-Brunell**: The history of babysitters is useful for the light it sheds on the fluid and contested borders of girls’ work and play. Hiring white, middle-class girls to “mind the baby” and modern American girlhood occurred simultaneously in the 1920s, a period of major transformation in American society and culture. Parents then, as now, believed that high school girls brought a particular set of age- and gender-specific skills and sensibilities to the job of babysitter: not only were girls young enough to still want to play with younger children but they also possessed innate maternal instincts and domestic abilities. During the interwar period, the development of an American girls’ subculture—with practices and principles that frequently challenged traditional ideals and gender norms—informed teenage girls’ play in ways adults generally found threatening. Parents’ worries that teenage girls’ play might be neither wholesome nor child centered reflected widespread cultural anxieties that teenage girls were more harmful than helpful. In magazines and movies, cartoons and conversations ever since, adults have imagined babysitters as girls who recklessly transgress the boundaries between private and public, family and community, work and play, childhood and adulthood, girlhood and womanhood, love and lust, reality and fantasy, culture and chaos, yours and theirs. Aiming to satisfy parents’ needs for youthful feminine accountability, harness girls’

autonomy, empowerment, and enjoyment and transform seemingly disruptive and destructive girls into future mothers, generations of advisors and educators, among other cultural producers, have sought creative ways to discipline girls' work and play beliefs and behaviors through the changing field of babysitting.

**AJP:** Speaking of work and play, you and other play scholars have written about girls' "playbor." What is playbor and what impact has it had on girls' play in the twenty-first century?

**Forman-Brunell:** Playbor is a concept that refers to the recent intertwining of play and labor among media audiences who unwittingly provide digital businesses with free labor. I was introduced to this incredibly useful concept by Cheryl Williams, whose essay "The ROI of Play: Girls' Immaterial Labor, Smart Toys, and the Digital Economy" that I included in a 2019 issue of the *Journal of the History of Children and Youth (JHCY)* I edited on the girling of work, play, and performance. In her piece, Williams examined the ways in which the digital toy industry that produces digitally connected smart toys (like *Barbie Digital Makeover* introduced in 2013), has transformed play from the physical to the virtual realm. In the process, they have eroded the distinctions between girls' play and work while also exploiting girls' immaterial labor. Although this is a new phenomenon, the division between play and work has often been an indistinct one in the history of girls. Also included in the *JHCY* issue, an essay by Michael B. Kahan, entitled "Jewish Girls' Street Peddling in Gilded Age Philadelphia: Ethnic Niche, Family Strategy, and Sexual Danger," examined immigrant working-class girls who played games between street-trade transactions and performances that blurred the borders between work and play, discipline and pleasure, opportunities and obstacles.

**AJP:** Some critics and parents have said that commercialized princess culture traffics in stereotypes and encourages passivity, consumerism, and unrealistic beauty ideals. Are these fair criticisms? In the introduction to *Princess Culture: Mediating Girls' Imaginations and Identities*, you write that princesses are discursive and disruptive figures. How so?

**Forman-Brunell:** What many parents and pundits might not realize is that there is not one type of princess but many whose identities range from the traditional to the transgressive, the submissive to the spunky. Whether graceful or gritty, moreover, princess figures have played important roles in the construction of various girlhoods. Within dominant cultures, the hege-

monic princess discursively deploys girlhood ideals for experts, educators, parents, and others who seek to constitute girls' subjectivities and constrain girls' power within the social order. Within girls' subcultures, however, generations of agential girls have been instrumental in the reinvention of princesses they imbue with alternate identities that are less dependent and more disruptive. In their resistant play, girls often redraw and recast commodified and commercialized princesses into empowered figures who assist girls in their mediation of the conflicts and contradictions of girlhood.

**AJP:** Did you play with dolls or as a princess when you were a child? What do you remember most about how you played?

**Forman-Brunell:** When I was a little girl, I wasn't all that interested in dolls and much preferred to play in the orchards and fields where we lived in Vienna, Austria. When we moved to New York City in the mid-1960s, I spent a lot of time in the park across the street from our apartment where I played with friends and rode my bike. At home, I liked to dress my Ginny doll but also play with my toy carwash, Tonka jeep, and the innumerable animals—frogs, mice, turtles, rabbits, and cats—I brought home and cared for. My mother, an early feminist, encouraged our creativity with arts and crafts materials and classes.

**AJP:** How do you play as an adult today?

**Forman-Brunell:** In my adulthood, toys and play have remained important to me. I continue to use my imagination to make everyday activities more delightful and less dull. For years now, I have been collecting mid-twentieth-century German stuffed animals—Kersa cats; Schuco miniatures, and Steiff in all sizes, including a nearly nine-foot giraffe, life-sized baby elephant, and mountain donkey. I still love animals: I have three cats and three big-breed dogs. I also collect dolls, household toys, and other things “girl,” justified by my various scholarly projects. Over the last five years, my long-standing passions have come together in the eight-inch “Anidoll” figures I needlefelt and dress in vintage Ginny doll clothing purchased on eBay.

**AJP:** What are you currently working on?

**Forman-Brunell:** As to book-length projects, *Girls in America: A History of Girlhoods* is a narrative history of girlhoods from precontact to the present that places girls and beliefs about them at the center of American social, cultural, economic, and political history. Synthesizing more than half of century of scholarly studies on girls and using textual, material, and visual culture methods to analyze archival and artifactual sources, *Girls in America* pro-

vides a unique interpretive framework for understanding America's past in ways that brings to light the significance of girls and girlhoods in our nation's history.

I am also researching and writing, *Resisting and Reinventing Girlhoods: The Everyday Life of a German Jewish Refugee from Germany to the US, 1923–1946*, a book about my mother's girlhood. The historical figure of the German Jewish refugee girl to prewar America has long been overshadowed by girls in Holocaust narratives who survived or succumbed to mass extermination on the one hand and the adult professionals who have dominated the historiography on German Jewish refugees on the other. *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees*, published in 2001, examined the generation of adolescent refugees, but what has remained unexamined is the difference that being a girl made.

Placing girls at the center of historical inquiry, this new book project aims to contribute to the historiography on German and Austrian Jewish refugees by demonstrating the significance of girlhoods among those born during the Weimar Republic, who endured the Nazi regime and who fled to the United States in the years before World War II.

More specifically, drawing upon a memoir and recollections, this work examines how Ruth, an unconventional bookish girl in provincial Germany, resisted her mother's assimilated bourgeois feminine expectations and persisted amidst anti-Semitism and the ideal of Aryan girlhood. A self-styled smart girls' subculture and the transformational Zionist Socialist youth movement—which taught Jewish girls that they, too, could be critical thinkers—led to the development of Ruth's contested intellectual feminist identity. The book demonstrates that among this youthful refugee generation, which would excel professionally, there were fledgling feminist girls like Ruth whose intellectual girlhood principles and practices enabled them not only to survive family and fascism but also to thrive as refugees. The feminist intellectual identities and intersectional girlhoods of these girls transported to and transplanted in the United States would enable them to flourish in the future as pioneering feminist professionals.