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What do you want to be when you grow up

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1

STARTING POINT

This is ~~not~~ the first attempt at trying to work on my thesis. It just feels like an impossible task. It's very odd as many other university projects I worked on in the past required the same amount of commitment. This time there is something different though, the thesis is supposed to be the final project, the one project where one is meant to show how much they have grown during their studies.

I have the opportunity to choose whatever topic I like and develop it with the tools I have used and learned during my bachelor course, apply them creatively and make something I feel proud of.

It's not supposed to be this hard, why am I avoiding it as much as possible and why is it so difficult to do the exact thing that got me into Fashion studies in the first place?

There is something else that is different about the thesis project. It is the final project a student is required to present to finish the bachelor course.

After that there is no additional project or extra course classes. The student and the university have finished their exchange. The university will guide the new graduate through the first internships or the student will choose a master course of their choice. What doesn't change is the fact that three years of studies, many different projects, workshops and classes are meant to give the student the ability to learn about the subject and about themselves.

We should all have in our mind an idea of what we want to be when we grow up, even the faintest plan for our future post-graduate self. It's natural as many different situations require us to not only think about the present but also the future. Maybe this is the reason why I am so stuck.

I am absolutely terrified by the fact that there is nothing in my mind yet.

Although I consciously know that postponing my thesis and graduation won't change anything that is what I have been doing. How is it that something so clear and solid in my mind, as the choice to study Fashion design has led me to this point, a foggy limbo between training and the real world?

I am not doubting that many things have changed for me in three years of studying, not to mention a global pandemic that didn't only shuffle the cards but knocked over the whole playing table.

How can I be so grateful and sure to have chosen the right study path but so lost and confused about what the next step should be?



I guess it's always easier to start from our own experience, I remember a piece of advice I received from a professor: when in doubt of where to start from, go back to your own memories and life.

Tracing back to what is the reason that got me to this exact moment, back to when the answer to question: "What do you want to be when you grow up" was so clear and confident that I didn't even have to think about it.

To place a starting point in my childhood, and with the tools and sensibility I have developed during my studies to identify what was lost and gained during all these years, to be able to retrieve that spark and use it to create something now.

I should try to be as scientific as possible, collect data and information, interview witnesses and form a clear and honest portrait of the child I was.

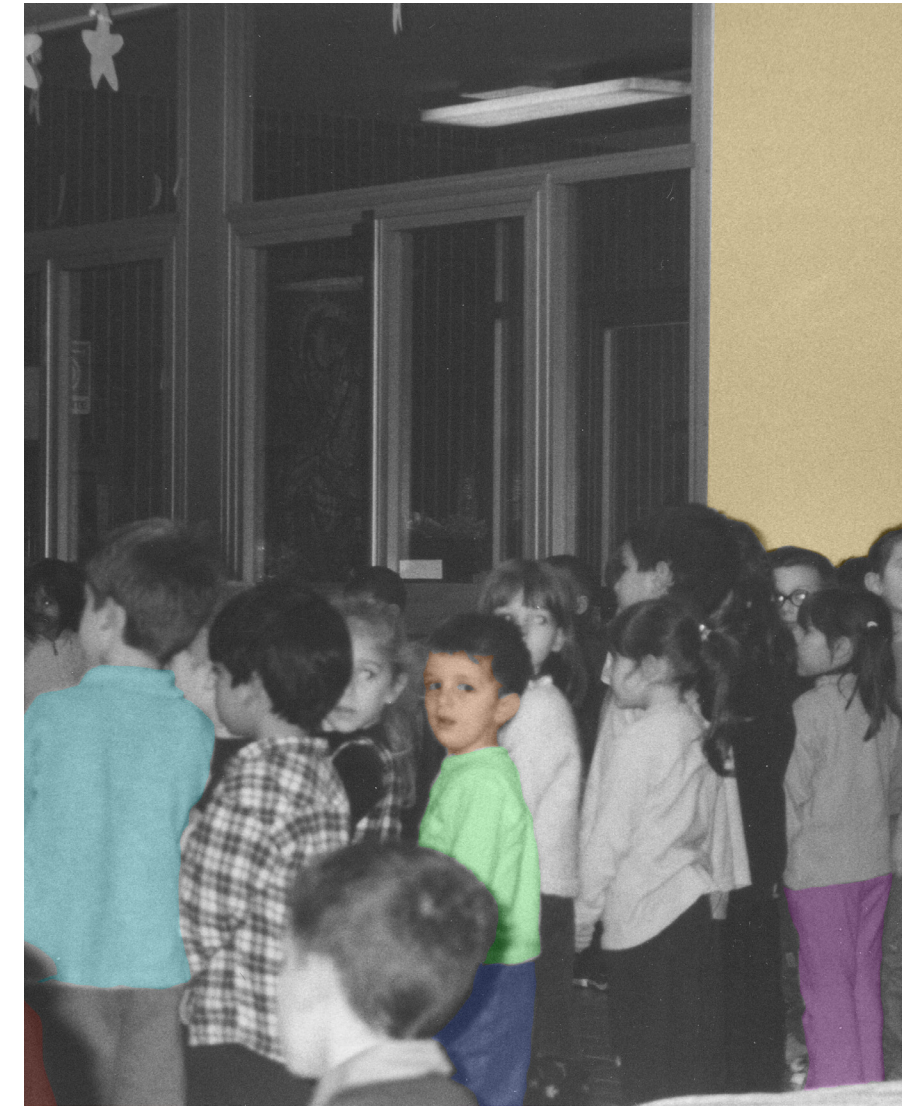
I should also be as deceptive as I need to, sometimes being able to depict memories as we would like to remember them and not exactly as they happened is the best way to heal from them. My propensity for pleasing visuals and aesthetics might make me fix some things and change some colours but just know it's all part of the retrieving process.



x

To transport these memories to the present while preserving their power there must be some editing.

I hope this attempt will be perceived as an act of self discovery and healing and not as mere self celebration. Still, I do believe there is something so fabulous and fearless about a young child expressing himself free of social barriers and adult preconceptions.



So, despite the fact that I might come off as self-centred, I mean to start this self-discovery journey to try to trace back what the original plan was and how I was so sure about it back then.

At the end of this process I hope to remind my present self how I got to where I am now and not to be so afraid of the dreaded question:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?

2

PINK BARBIE MANSION

A Barbie doll house has always looked cooler than a toy truck. The packaging, the details, textures and colours. It's the ability to test try what being a grown up might look like, or at least what a kid can imagine it to be like.

I was always drawn in by the excitement of creating your own stories, the freedom to play out whatever fantasy version of myself I had in mind.

It was a two-storeys high pink Barbie mansion that my sister got for Christmas, I remember how excited I was when I saw the package, it was as tall as us.

As much as I enjoyed playing with dolls I remember that even as a kid I knew that it was wrong for boys to play with girl toys.

One time, after a petty argument, my sister had threatened to tell everyone at the family table that I played with dolls, I was so afraid and ashamed. Needless to say that when the news broke they were not met with tragic astonishment but with unexpected indifference.

I now wonder how much a toy can impact children growth and future careers. What are the consequences of the blatant divide between blue and pink packaged toys? How do gender-specific toy store aisles and deceptively targeted marketing impact children choice of toys?



Any kid can like a pink and sparkly doll, a ball, or a blue police truck, if we work to change the gendered messaging around them. But why should they be the ones doing the work? As if trying to figure oneself out wasn't hard and terrifying already.

The gendering of children's toys and clothes is surprisingly recent. Until the early 20th century, kids were dressed mostly according to age, not sex, with boys and girls alike wearing frilly dresses and sporting long hair until they went to school. Research by G. Stanley Hall, a pioneer of child psychology, found that as many as three-quarters of boys played with dolls.

As the fields of psychology and sexology gained prominence at the turn of the 20th century, fears about homosexuality rose.

Parents began emphasising masculinity in boys by regulating what they wore or played with to try to ensure that they'd grow up to be straight. No more frilly dresses for boys. Meanwhile, toys became increasingly gendered too, with construction equipment for boys, and dolls and housecleaning toys for girls.

The homophobic and misogynistic practice of teaching kids to be straight and perform traditional gender roles through toys and clothes continued throughout the century. Yet many boys still played with dolls, often secretly. When G.I. Joe debuted in 1964, it was, after all, a doll for boys.

As Professor Gina Rippon explains in her book *The Gendered Brain*, this binary mindset isn't set in stone. It's learnt and therefore it can be changed. ←

"This is a centuries-old myth based on the early assumptions that because women and men had different statuses in society, this must be because they had different brains."

"Spatial cognition has been shown to be powerfully influenced by experience with construction toys, sports, hobbies and video games that have hand-eye co-ordination or spatial awareness elements," says Rippon.

"If these are seen as 'for boys', then they will get better at these sorts of tasks, enjoy them more and pursue them more in the school subjects where they're important - especially science. Similarly, the 'nurturing' opportunities offered by dolls and soft-play toys can develop the kind of skills that fit those kinds of careers."



This clearly shows how so-called training opportunity toys can influence career paths of kids, early behavioural development and skills.

Now, one could use my personal experience as direct example of this: I played with dolls and 'girl toys' therefore I might have developed an affinity towards fashion and creative expression. And although it might have been difficult coming to terms with it, feeling ashamed because of it and getting ridiculed for it, it played a major role in defying what I am today.

What if this hadn't been an exception, what if children of all genders had the opportunity to develop and train any skill, despite its color or how it is packaged, to have the opportunity to define oneself without the heavy preconceived notion of gender society rules.



3

A LONER THAT FOUND
HIS CALLING BEING ALONE

Faced with a potentially dangerous situation one can choose how to act: either try to objectively analyse the situation and try to learn from it or to completely shield from harm and avoid any kind of exposure. The choice between the two is conditional to many factors, one of them is certainly experience.

Experience can come naturally with age or through personal life experiences that shape the kind of person we become.

Bullying sucks, it's insidious and it grows like mould. Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying takes many different forms and can include verbal abuse.

In the past, you probably heard the phrase, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me," says Dr. Khan, Cleveland Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. "But then, over time, we learned words are harmful in their own ways." It's understandable that bullying might cause kids to be depressed, though symptoms of this might look different from what you expect.

Many kids hide their experiences with bullying because of the stigma attached to it, so you might not notice the signs. "These behaviours can be observed in children as young as preschool-aged," says Lisa Casavecchia, a clinical social worker at Neponset Valley Pediatrics.

"Younger children use behaviour as their primary way of communicating," says Casavecchia. "Therefore, signs and symptoms of bullying in younger children are most recognisable through behavioural changes. [...] Even though teens have the language to communicate, they still express themselves mostly through their actions." ←





The hardships I was facing stayed with me, I carried them at home without ever sharing them directly with anyone. I felt an overwhelming sense of anguish and shame and I did not believe that talking to someone about it would help me out of these situations.

The best option for me back then was to isolate, to remove myself from potentially dangerous environments. The social circumstances where kids would hang out and be together were scary to me. I would avoid walking through town, going to the park and to the parish' courtyard. I wanted to avoid the 'pack', no confrontation meant no harm.

So, I slowly started to create my own space, where I would feel safe, far from potential harm and distress. My room became my safe shell, outside of school and with very little social interactions, this is where I would spend my time.

My mom would worry a lot. I have two other siblings and the way they handled their free time was much different, I was not a particularly social kid and it showed. My mother would push me to get out into the real world and make real connections.

Friendships are an essential part to self-development, especially in our formative years. We are not lonely creatures, we are meant to create connections with our peers, learn and grow through the difficulties of adolescence. All of these were precious experiences I did not take part of. I was, consciously or not, willing to shut myself out, leave all the fear and harm out of the door.

All of this holding back surely left me with a lot of free time, loads of it. I would fill all this time in my room drawing. Hours of sitting down at my desk, music blasting on the stereo, sketching from the time I got home till it was dark outside.

It was my own small world and I had full creative direction of it. I was enamoured with late 2000's pop-culture, fabulous and dazzling women on TV. The absolutely crazy music videos, the choreography and costumes. It's what I was inspired by and what I wanted to reproduce.

Years of sketching, a slow process of improvement, thousands of outfits, with as many creative liberties as the mind of a kid can allow. Queens, pop-stars and princess-warriors: my favourite subjects. Ballpoint pen: my original technique, I had a fabulous set with pink and purple ones. I saved dozens of notebooks, with all of the pages filled with drawings.

The joy of drawing and the excitement of how many possibilities a blank page and a pen could offer is what got me into attending an Art High School. All that time alone in my room guided me towards something that could really make me happy. A loner that found his calling being alone. But what if I hadn't shut myself in?

What if I had gone out and played with the boys that seemed so annoyed by me? What if I had overcome my fears and started to play real life back then?

4

LET'S PLAY DRESS-UP

I have always been fascinated with the transformative and dramatic power that fashion can have. Performance is defined as an act of presenting a play, concert, or other forms of entertainment.

I like to think that every-day life can be sort of a performance, not because it is a constructed or dishonest representation, but because of the creative power we can exercise daily.

As most of the interpersonal communication happens to be nonverbal, directing one's personal image is essential to project a clear and honest version of ourselves. I am not implying that we all care about what we wear in the same way, but I believe that we all -consciously or not- make choices about how we present ourselves.



The ability to cure our self-image gets more complex and refined with age but it's something that starts from our early years of childhood. Playing dress-up as a child is something of a rite of passage and can help children grow and learn.



"Dress-up is an ideal way for young children to work on so many early childhood development skills: literacies, life skills, and creative play," according to Dr. Karen Aronian, a longtime schoolteacher, college professor, and the founder of Aronian Education Design.

Dressing up is a form of imaginative play — and imaginative play boosts problem-solving and self-regulation skills. Kids create situations and scenes and act out social events. They're able to test out new ideas and behaviours in a comfortable environment. "Children are stretching their imaginations through different identities and occupations in dress up and practicing their gross and fine motor skills," Aronian says.

Growing up I would always play dress up. I would gather pieces of clothes, blankets, bedsheets, pillows and whatever I could find in the house. Standing in front of a mirror each piece was carefully added, shaping my reflected image.

What that gave me was the ability to sculpt something new, to create a fantasy where I could feel invincible. It was a very personal process.



My grandmother always tells me about how during the Sunday's family get-togethers at our house, me and my siblings would put on shows for our relatives. Multi-act amateur productions at the end of which we would walk through the audience and demand an offer for the amazing show they had witnessed, the confidence of children is gold.

My grandma and great aunt were seamstresses, they used to tailor wedding dresses together. Growing up I never questioned why there was a sewing machine in my grandma's apartment.

From time to time my mom would have my grandma take in or adjust our clothes, I remember how much my mom would stress about how special that was. I didn't get it then, but I do now.



My grandmother worked very hard her whole life. The sewing machine station in the kitchen is where she spent most of her days, and nights.

I guess that the fashion design path was always in the background waiting for me to actually notice it and immediately start running towards it. It took me some time to understand how fashion was the meeting point for all the things I was passionate about.



The power of shaping my ideas, first in my mind then on paper and finally through my fingers. To believe in a concept and see it come to fruition. It's almost magical how creative vision and physical work perfectly marry into fashion to create a tangible object that retains its romantic intangible quality.

I think I can see it better now, what got me to this exact moment. Tracing back the steps that got me into studying fashion design, playing with dolls, the passion for drawing and how invincible and special a garment can make a kid feel.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?". Nobody can rewind time, childhood is so special because it cannot be lived again. What I would like to do with my work is to try to get as close as possible to that feeling, design something that can give a taste of that boundless freedom.

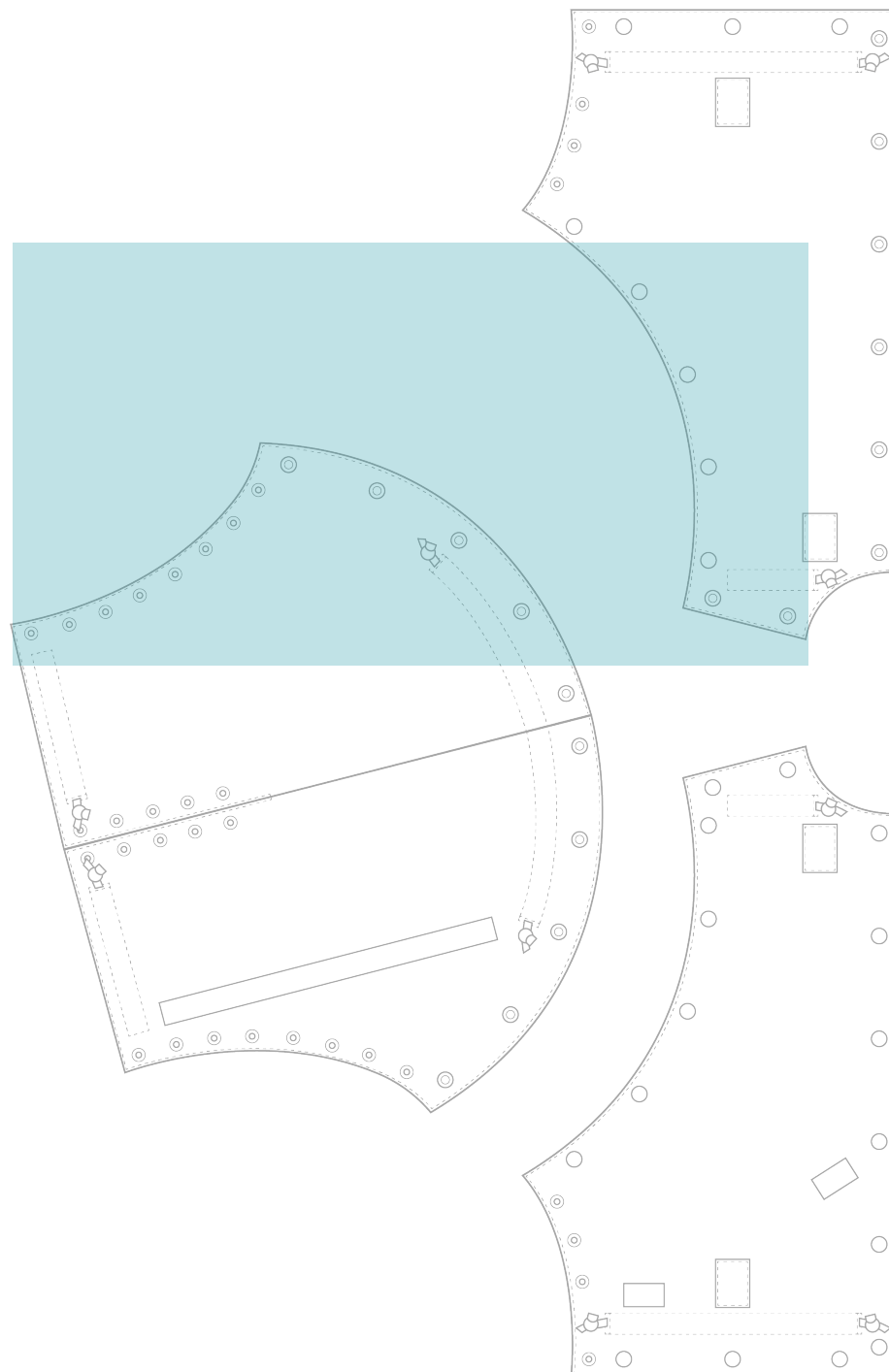
Walking up to a mirror wearing something that gives you a moment of simple child-like joy, while leaving no doubt about who you truly are. How awesome would it be to have a taste of childhood wonder. I would love to think that what I make can gift a moment of joy. Recess to that sense of freedom and careless happiness.

5

PLAY-SET COLLECTION

So, what to do of this journey now? How to preserve the precious lessons learned and channel them in a creative way?

Something I am very happy to have learned from studying fashion design is the ability to shape a project. Starting from a concept and developing it, moulding it to resemble our creative vision.



The excitement a blank page can hold. Infinite possibilities, boundless imaginary, so vast yet so intimately connected to our life experiences and familiar references. Sketching is the first step our ideas take in the real world, the initial meeting point of imagination and tangible reality.

Creative freedom is one of the best kind of freedom there is. Through fashion one can weave stories, it is what I was so enamoured with growing up. The ability to morph into a fantasy version of yourself can be as easy as changing a doll's outfit. I like to believe that we are all living our fantasy, -although some more than others- we are self directing our play and the first thing we are in charge of are the costumes.

I want to give others the opportunity to do so. I would like to share with as many people as possible what it feels like to have this power, to own the tools to shape your image and not be afraid to experiment with it.

Being able to recess to childlike wonder would give us the opportunity to go back to a much simpler time, before boring and structured social notions repressed what was once boundless imagination into pragmatic adulthood. I believe in the healing power that self expression can have. It's by playing with stage costumes and among all the grotesque theatre masks, that we might find out that we have been wearing one this whole time.

In order to do so I must equip others with the right tools: a blank page where one can experiment and maybe find some gratification.

Being able to wear something you were part of making, is a very special feeling, and I would like to share that feeling with people that wouldn't normally find themselves sewing or designing.

I also must remember how fundamental context and environment are in setting the mood of this experiment. I don't want to have people feeling pressured or uncomfortable. I want to offer a safe space, where curiosity and honest joy can create a play-date feeling. A moment where imagination can run wild and time flies.

Starting from basic sartorial patterns I developed a Play-set collection. Four pieces that offer many different solutions, that can work on their own or combined with others.

A sort of 'building blocks made garments': I wanted to translate that feeling of creative liberty that fashion design can give. The pieces can be disassembled and reassembled in many different ways, without having to know anything about pins or sewing.

Technical elements such as automatic buttons and zippers can give one the ability to shape the garment on their body, to feel the fabric and to see how it behaves. Coulisse straps and velcro strips can change volumes and transform the fit of the look through easy steps. Open or close armholes and necklines, change the silhouette with tight knots or create bulges and dramatic volumes with padding.

Through these colourful transformative pieces I would like to give the chance to experiment, to feel the magic of creating something yourself and moulding your image in the mirror. I like to think that even as grown-ups, we still retain that naive child-like wonder, and through experiences such as these we can train our creative muscles, and even for a moment we can be able to live our fantasy. I want people to be queens and kings, soldiers and mermaids, to run through palace corridors or to be the first astronauts on Mars.

I know that these are just pieces of fabric that wrap around our body, that for some of us life has had its tough challenges, and our fantasy muscles may be waiting and not as strong as they used to be. But I would still love to see people try this, to step out of their pragmatic reality shoes and into a world of boundless creative freedom.

The one thing I am sure of -is that if younger me would have got something like this for Christmas- he would have loved it.

ERILDE



ILEANA





LOREDANA



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This is a love letter.

I want to thank everyone the helped me through my path.
My family for giving me the great opportunity to pursue my passion. My friends with whom I shared three amazing years. Marco for every single valuable moment.

And finally everyone that helped me with this project I feel so proud of.



Sources:

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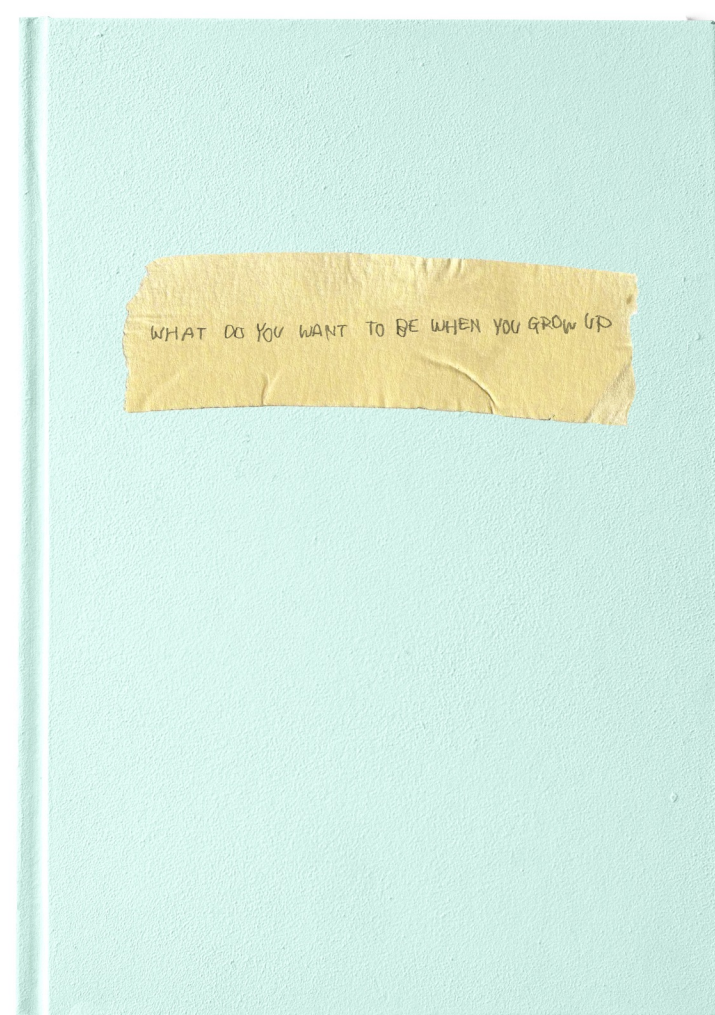
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"Playing Dress-Up" By Karen Gill MD for Healthline.

Inspiration:

My Dead Dad's Porno Tapes, 2018 short documentary film directed by Charlie Tyrell.





Entry 1

PINK

A Barbie doll house has alv
details, textures and colour
might look like, or at least
drawn in by the excitement
whatever fantasy version o
It was a two stories high p
remember how excited I was
As much as I enjoyed playin
it was wrong for boys to pl
sister had threatened to td

