I was told by friends that English 102 was primarily a “research paper” class where you built one topic up for the whole semester and finally turned in a stapled mass of researched words and simply hoped the teacher liked the argument. Therefore, when we were asked to choose a topic in the first few weeks of class, I panicked thinking once I picked an area of research, I could never change or alter the topic. I racked my brain thinking of interesting facts or tidbits I thought I could expand upon to make a massive eight to ten page paper without first experiencing a nervous breakdown.

I started formulating ideas but found myself coming up with topics that did not have a concrete argument behind it. For example, I have always been obsessed with Hello Kitty and even though I tried, I could not think of a way to make it into a lengthy research paper with an argument. That got me thinking of cartoon characters, which led me to thinking about toys in general. I remember reading a snippet in my Sociology 101 book about how toys are very gender based and can affect how children grow and develop. Reading only a brief mention of a subject with so much research behind it made me want to find out if toys really do have a direct correlation to how you behave and act as an adult.

I can honestly say that when I was a little girl, I most certainly enjoyed playing house and putting on fashion shows with feathered hats and sequin belts, so this topic intrigued me to the point of wondering if I had been exposed to an array of gender-specific toys. When I first started with the broad research in the proposal, about the only
thing I knew was that there was a definite division of the kind of toys each sex is intended to play with. Most of my information was derived from the WVU Libraries site, primarily with the help of LexisNexis and EBSCOHost. Through these, I discovered that the toy companies directly market certain toys to a specific sex and sometimes discriminate with what they develop and sell. The most common thing I found through the articles was that they speculated that most toy preferences of children are guided by feelings of their parents and by society’s standards.

My research really started to heat up when I began with the review of literature. This allowed me to filter my research into sources that provided me with the most information rather than just gathering anything with the word “toy” in the search bar. Through this paper, I realized that the choices we make as infants and growing children could also be innate and have a biological tie-in rather than being completely influenced by society. In an article from Ascribe Newswire, it observed Gerianne Alexander, who worked with vervet monkeys to examine the possibility of toy preferences being innate. She and her collaborator, Melissa Hines of the University of London, found that the monkeys' toy preferences were consistent along gender lines with those of human children. Though the monkeys had no concept of a "boy" toy and a "girl" toy, they still showed the same gender preferences in playing with the toys.

The annotated bibliography helped me immensely when trying to figure out how to cite my sources. From the beginning, I had trouble figuring out how to cite them according to MLA style, even if I had the guide right there. This assignment actually helped me the most to formulate a style and order that I wanted to apply to my final paper. It allowed me to dissect what sources were the most beneficial and which ones I
did not need to include in my final argument. Reading my first proposal compared to my proposal revision showed me that I really have gained an extensive knowledge base of my topic. I went back through what I originally had and changed it so it flowed with both my ideas and the ideas of my chosen sources.

One of the most rewarding parts of my research was when I actually saw a commercial over Thanksgiving break for one of the breakthrough toys that Mattel was designing at my time of research. It is called “Ello”, but was called “Ellos” at the time that I wrote my paper. They are brightly-colored building toys for girls that strengthen hand-eye coordination and allow them to build picture frames, jewelry and mini houses. I felt like I had a preview of this new toy before it even hit the toy shelves!

Overall, I have kept the same stance on my paper – that toys are stereotypical and can affect how a child develops and grows. Through my research, though, I have been able to conclude what causes certain gender stereotypes and why children sometimes choose what they do. Another source, generously by my lovely teacher, was The Baby X story in the Women: Images and Realities book. It provided me with an excellent basis for the gender issue relating to not only toys but clothes and attitudes of society as well. I also found an interesting article on the influence of television and toy commercials by Ayesha Shajahan when looking up “gender misguidance” on google.com. Before finding this, I had never thought to incorporate how toy commercials can play into children’s decisions.

Before I had started an entire semester’s worth of research, I really wondered how I would ever get a minimum of eight pages coherent, typed and ready to turn in. Starting with a broad topic in the very beginning, then through the process of research and editing
the most important information, I was able to add new ideas as I saw fit. With all of the assignments feeding into each other, it allowed me to combine many of the ideas from one paper to another, making my paper flow in an organized fashion.