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**Would The Real Barbie Please Stand Up!
by Anna Matthews**

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in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design - 1996.**

I would like to thank my tutor Niamh O' Sullivan for all her help and advice; many thanks also to Des Cahill (RTE) who gave me an interview.

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Introduction

In 1959 the American toy company Mattel introduced their latest creation - the Barbie doll, an 11 a half-inch plastic vinyl fashion princess. Intended as a 'prototype of beauty and success' (Carter, 1993, p.17), the doll has assumed cult status. American and European studies carried out in the last decade, however, suggest that this blue-eyed beauty may possess a more sinister dimension, that she is not, after all, the innocent doll promoted by Mattel. Barbie is now perceived as a threat to personal individuality, and potentially damaging to the 'psyche of developing children and youth' (Carter, 1993, p.17). The doll's pneumatic curves have also been accused of incurring feelings of depression, guilt and shame in grown women about their bodies, a condition known as 'The Barabie Syndrome'.

This thesis will examine the Barbie phenomenon. Chapter 1 will deal with how Mattel Toys promote the Barbie doll as a positive force in childhood, and look at the relevant literature currently on the market which appraises the doll. Chapter 2 will explore the ways in which Barabie psychologically manipulates the minds of young girls and women. In conclusion I will attempt to establish that it is no longer good for little girls to play with Barbie.

Chapter 1

Barbie as a Positive Force in Childhood



Andy Warhol (1986)



Barbie Profile

On the 24th of June, 1952 a daily cartoon entitled "Lilli" began to feature in the German sensationalist newspaper Bild Zeitung. Lilli was portrayed as a tall, slim, blonde model-type of teenage girl [Figure 1]. Stemming from the cartoon's popularity, by August 1955 Lilli had become a series of three-dimensional dolls. These were the first dolls of this nature ever to be produced - shapely in figure, made of heavy plastic, wearing hard, tough facial expressions. Their success, however, was short-lived and the doll was eventually sold to Mattel where the remake of Lilli's image resulted in the Barbie doll. At the time, Mattel were accused of using the Lilli mould to produce Barbie, that they had not changed any aspect of the doll. Mattel denied such accusations, but the first Barbie doll introduced in 1959 did indeed resemble Lilli - ash-blonde hair tied back into a ponytail, the same size with identical body proportions, and the heavily defined eyes that characterised Lilli, were also present on Barbie [Figure 2].

During the 1950s many aspects of culture were changing, particularly in America, where the notion of youth and teenagers as positive, peer role models began to be strongly embraced (Boy, 1987, p.16). Between 1956 and 1961 eight teenage movies were made - Teenage Rebel (1956), Teenagers from Outer Space (1959) and Teenage Millionaire (1961), to name a few. The cause of youth was advanced even further in 1959; this was the year that the Little Miss America contests began; it saw the publication of Teenbeat, the first magazine for teenagers; and 'Pepsi' cola arrived, for 'those who think young' (Boy, 1987, p.16). A new niche in the fashion market was created world-wide as a result of teenagers using clothes as a form of group identification (Howell, 1975, p.203). This was the era of the perky girl, a persona that symbolized what being young and female was all about. Television sitcoms such as 'Gidget' with Sally Field and fashion beauties



Figure 1. The Lilli doll and the Lilli cartoon that featured in the German newspaper Bild - Zeitung

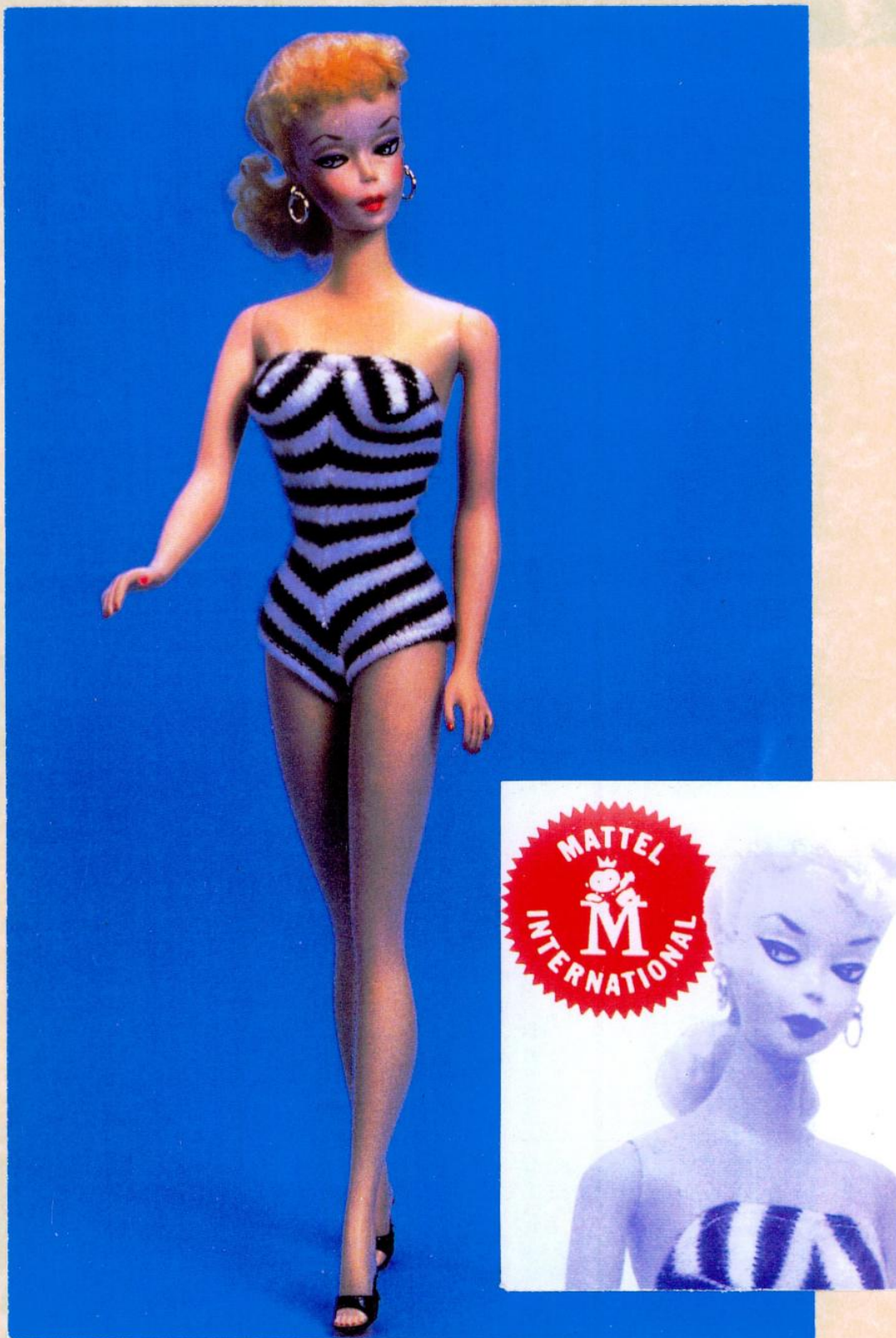


Figure 2. The original Barbie doll.

Twiggy and Jean Shrimpton professed a character that combined a physical image of youth and beauty with 'an irresistible zest for life' (Hoffman & Bailey, 1994, p.183). The word 'teenager' had acquired a new definition and its culture was being torpedoed across America. It was into this scenario that Barbie was introduced, to be one of the representatives of this positive definition. The Mattel catalogue exclaimed - 'New for '59, the *Barbie* doll: A shapely teenage fashion model.....an exciting all-new kind of doll (She's grown up!)' (Boy, 1987, p.18). She was to become the very essence of the 'All American Girl'.

In due course Barbie underwent several face-lifts and body tucks, the first series of changes occurring around late 1959/early 1960 when the doll lost the hard facial qualities associated with Lilli [Figure 3]. By 1961 Barbie had replaced her ponytail with the more fashionable bouffant, bubble cut which had just been introduced in Paris. While Lilli had a pale skin tone, between 1959 and 1963 Barbie gradually acquired a tan, changing her skin colour five times to make her as different as possible from Lilli. In February 1965 the doll was given a new lease of life when she received 'bendable' legs, particularly useful for the Twist n' Turn era; by 1967 she was also allowed to pivot at the waist. In fact by this time her entire face had changed to better represent the contemporary American teenager. She developed a slightly paler tan and a younger, wide-eyed, more innocent face; losing the heavy eyeliner of previous years, she was given long eyelashes and more natural looking eyebrows; she also returned to long blonde hair which was more sleek in texture and much blonder than before. By 1975 Barbie had become the most poseable doll ever - she now swivelled at the neck, waist, arms and legs, and became naturally bendable at the elbows, knees, ankles and wrists. Since this 1975 model, there have been no further remarkable changes made to the doll as she was now considered by Mattel to be 'the perfect one' (Boy, 1987, p.9) [Figure 4]. The doll's prettiness and her curvaceous figure are a matter of great pride to her



Figure 3. Barbie after the first series of changes around 1959/1960.



Figure 4. Barbie in 1975 - since this version of the doll, not much has changed.

makers, who consider that Barbie represents the ideal 'that Western culture has insisted upon since the 1920s' (Boy, 1987, p.22).

The manufacture of Barbie

Ruth Handler, one of the co-founders of Mattel, had for years wanted to make an adult doll for children, believing that little girls would use such a doll to reflect the adult world around them (Lord, 1994, p.30). The male designers at Mattel, however, told her that from a design perspective, it would be impossible to make a doll like this, not to mention expensive. Handler then came across Lilli while on vacation in Switzerland. Realising that the doll of her dreams could be manufactured she persevered. Although there are now factories in the USA, Germany, Britain and Mexico that manufacture Barbie dolls by the million each year, Mattel at first could only convince a small-time novelty toy maker in Japan to make Barbie - the Lilli doll which they were to copy looked tough and mean and did not appeal to the major toy companies they initially approached, either in the States or in Japan.

There were many obstacles during the initial stages of Barbie's production - Lilli had been made from rigid plastic, but Handler wanted Barbie to be made in soft vinyl, a substance which did not fill out the doll moulds sufficiently. To ensure that Barbie had fingers and toes, her arms and legs had to be rotation-moulded, a concept that Japanese doll makers had never heard of. Lilli's face suffered minor modifications to become Barbie, but designers at Mattel were never satisfied with the results. In the end Barbie's head was cast directly from Lilli's with some minor adjustments. Even the doll's body proportions caused problems - according to Mattel her proportions were dictated by the mechanics of the clothing industry as

the fabrics used for Barbie's extensive wardrobe are scaled for people (Lord, 1994, p.12). Despite Mattel's assertions, however, Barbie's chest had to be enlarged and her waist narrowed to look proportional in clothes.

Barbie's clothes were Japanese manufactured in the early years. Charlotte Johnson, Barbie's fashion designer at Mattel, worked with a Japanese designer and two seamstresses to provide a range of items that required the minimum of sewing, yet were of the highest quality and reflective of haute-couture in Paris (Boy, 1987, p.22). Johnson was meticulous about the type of clothes Barbie wore, thus she came to have undergarments such as slips, strapless brassieres and petticoats - 'a doll like Barbie couldn't wear couture clothing over bare plastic' (Lord, 1994, p.33). By 1958, the dolls were emerging from Japan, dressed in fashionable attire - Barbie was ready to make her debut.

Marketing Barbie

Mattel's first promotional efforts were to toy buyers at the American Toy Fair in the Winter of 1959 where Barbie emerged unseasonably dressed in a black and white swimsuit. She was initially stocked by only a few small stores. The evolution of the child-as-consumer, however, played a crucial part in the success of the doll - instead of parents choosing toys at random from shop displays to give as birthday presents or at Christmas, children could now see for themselves the latest toys being advertised on television all year round. Through clever television advertising, of which Mattel were the pioneers, they pitched their 'dream princess' directly to little girls. An important aspect in the launch of Barbie was commercial persuasion - 'the toy advertiser can help the child by providing her with arguments which will satisfy mother' reads one of Mattel's reports (Lord, 1994, p.41).

Initially, many mothers found Barbie to be too racy and unnecessarily sexy, but with a little help from advertising, the child learnt to reassure her mother. Indeed, Barbie was always impeccably turned out, a phenomenon designed to impress a mother who had hopes to reform her, perhaps, tomboy daughter.

Just before Barbie was first advertised, Mattel decided to introduce her as a fashion model, to add a touch of 'reality' to her doll-like world. The advertising took this idea one step further by imaging her as a real, living, glamorous American teenager. Cy Schneider, the author of Barbie's commercials says 'We never mentioned the fact that she was a doll' (Lord, 1994, p.41). Mattel also pushed to establish a moral framework for Barbie, promoting her as respectable girl. With the realisation that to be a woman in the fifties without a male escort would be considered a failure, Ken, Barbie's boyfriend, was introduced in 1961. Everything concerning the launch of Barbie was planned in such a way as to make little girls think of her as if she was real. Mattel hoped that girls would see Barbie as a friend, confidante and, perhaps, a role model from whom they could learn about fashion, explore social possibilities and educate themselves as to what the future might hold for them (Mattel UK Information Pack, 1994).

It is difficult to determine precisely what age group the doll is aimed at, indeed there is little to indicate into what age bracket Mattel themselves place Barbie. Maeve Nolan, an Irish psychologist has observed girls between 3 and 5 years of age playing with the doll and believes that their fascination with Barbie occurs at a time when they are coming to terms with the figure of a mature woman, usually that of their mother (Holmquist, *Image*, July 1995, p.67). Mattel's own research shows that today many little girls receive their first Barbie doll when they are as young as 3 years (Lord, 1994, p.71). Although a study of the readers' letters printed in current *Barbie* magazines reveals an age group of 6 to 10 year olds, Maureen Gaffney, psychologist and columnist with the *Irish Times*, would argue

that only 5 to 6 year olds really play with the doll (Holmqvist, *Image*, July 1995, p.67). One assumes that Mattel's ambitions are to see Barbie as suiting a much wider age group; the clothes which belong to the life-size Barbie doll currently available (retailing at £100) are stated as suitable for young girls anywhere between 3 and 10 years.

Mattel deliberately cast Barbie as the wholesome all-American girl to appeal to middle and upper class American markets (Lord, 1994, p.9). It has been noted, however, that Mattel allows the doll to occupy several classes at once, thereby creating more opportunities for play and fantasy - Barbie has attended high school according to the early *Barbie* magazines brought out in the 1960s; she has worked as an air hostess (1961, 1966 and 1972), and she enjoys activities such as water-skiing and rollerblading, all of which suggests a middle-upper class social environment. In other instances she wears expensive fashions, such as "Madison Avenue Barbie" (1992, retailing at \$60) where Barbie is dressed and coiffed to resemble Ivana Trump. This class status was further emphasised by the fact that this particular doll was exclusive to FAO Schwartz, one of the leading toy stores in New York.

Undisputedly Mattel initially catered exclusively for white American buyers. Other caucasian dolls introduced in the 1960s such as boyfriend Ken, best friend Midge and Barbie's first little sister Skipper, support this theory [Figure 5]. Then in the early 1980s Mattel appealed to a wider audience, both at home and abroad, creating the International Barbie Collection [Figure 6] - Barbie now hails from South America, Hawaii, Germany, Ireland, Japan and Kenya, for example, with many of the dolls wearing traditional costumes. Barbie now also has friends who originate from Hawaii and France, and a cousin who lives in England.



Figure 5. A caucasian world - (L - R) Barbie's best friend Midge, little sister Skipper, boyfriend Ken and Barbie herself.



Figure 6. Malibu Christie and Curtis from the International Collection.

Mattel's Success

Barbie has undoubtedly become the most successful toy in US toy history - she helped make Mattel the biggest American toy company by the early 1960s. Merely five years after her debut, approximately 9 million dolls had been sold (Hoffman and Bailey, 1994, p.27). The doll has enjoyed such success in North America and Western Europe that in 1994 Mattel decided to target poorer countries such as China, Portugal, Argentina and Venezuela. Barbie sales teams now operate in over 35 countries. Two Barbie dolls are sold every second somewhere in the world and in 1993, on average, more than a million dolls were sold each week while Woolworths sell half a million Barbie videos a year. Between 1988 and 1993, sales of Barbie (including her accessories) doubled, leaving Mattel with a comfortable profit of over \$1 billion (Economist, 05/02/94). August 1995 saw the arrival of Baywatch Barbie and traditional Irish Barbie in Irish toy shops [Figure 7] - by September 1st, Irish Barbie had sold out in most outlets, with Baywatch Barbie following suit by Christmas. The equally successful Happy Holidays Barbie was launched in the States, November 1995. With demand exceeding supply, Mattel have had to issue redemption certificates guaranteeing this latest Barbie being mailed to previously disappointed customers by the end of April 1996 (Tran, Guardian, 07/12/95). Mattel might well be pleased; 36 years on Barbie remains the best-selling doll ever.



Figure 7. Recent additions to the Barbie collection - Baywatch Barbie, traditional Irish Barbie and Happy Holidays Barbie 1995

Barbie's Appeal

The average American girl owns eight Barbie dolls, adding two or three new ones each year (Economist, 05/02/94). The British Barbie magazine features a 'Collector of the Month' article, suggesting that many young European girls also own between six and ten dolls each, and eagerly await new additions. According to Glenn Mandeville, a buyer and collector of dolls, the initial attraction for young girls was that they viewed Barbie as a 'tiny, perfect, miniature person' (Kahn, Herald, 15/04/95, p.18) who offered excitement and glamour at a time when little girls were encouraged to grow up, get married and become housewives. Today the attraction is similar in that the doll evokes the same excitement and glamour, only now, young girls know that there are many more options available to them - they play with Barbie to live out their own fantasies of what the adult world has in store for their futures (Hoffman and Bailey, 1994, p.27).

Indeed, the fantasy aspect plays an important part in Barbie's world-wide appeal. Maeve Nolan believes that a young girl uses toys such as the Barbie doll to come to terms with what occurs in her own world (Holmquist, Image, July 1995, p.67). Piaget has noted that the essence of pretend play is that the child transforms herself or an object into something else - this usually occurs with children between 2 and 7 years of age (Sylva and Lunt, 1982, p.162). Des Cahill (R.T.E.), having observed his own 5 year old daughter Amy, who is obsessed with Barbie, confirmed this in an interview - Amy has a friend named Jonathan in school and when she plays with Barbie and Ken 'she pretends that it is herself and Jonathan'.

A glimpse into Barbie's extensive wardrobe is yet another reason why little girls love this doll, for her 'frilly, feminine clothes' in satin, brocade, lace and silk, possess a certain dream-like quality (Deed, Cosmopolitan, December 1994, p.75). Floor-length sparkling ballgowns, pink patterned leotards, soft fur stoles, full skirts

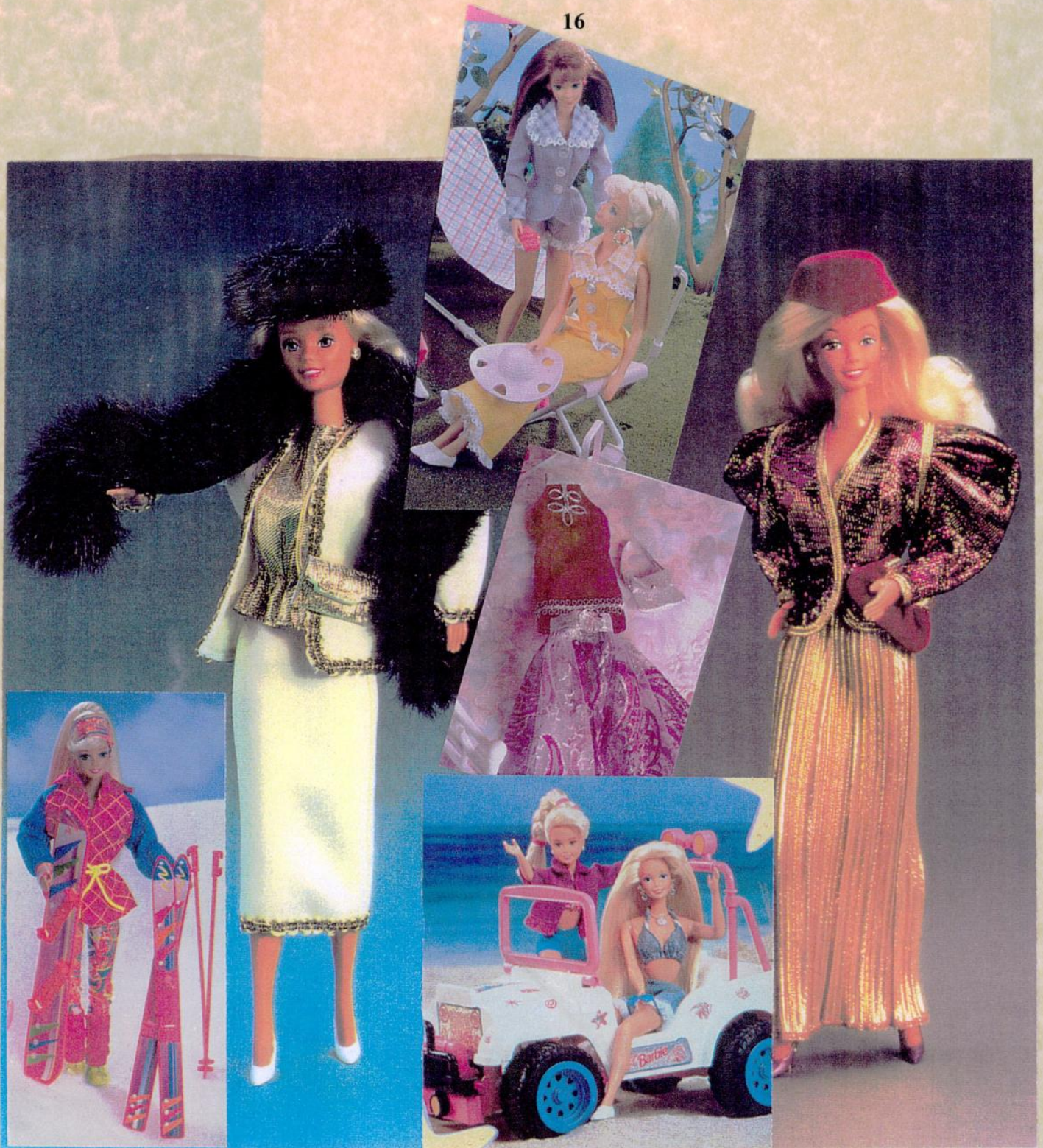


Figure 8. A glimpse into Barbie's wardrobe - she has an outfit for every occasion!



Figure 9. Career girl Barbie.

with lace petticoats, wispy chiffon blouses, red leather high-heel boots - Barbie has an outfit for every occasion [Figure 8]. This of course, adds to the excitement, as a child could not possibly identify such garments with her own, more mundane clothes. Maureen Gaffney believes that girls use Barbie and her clothes to learn about social roles, and that they must do it by exaggeration, in other words they have to overdo it to come to terms with it. Barbie's favourite colour is typical of this attraction - Mattel's own research shows that 3 to 6 years olds love anything coloured fuchsia (Lord, 1994, p.188).

The Secret of Barbie's Success

Mattel insist that the secret to Barbie's success is that she is continually refreshed - she has the occasional face-lift, and every year the doll has approximately 120 new outfits designed, 'to keep her at the leading edge of fashion' (Mattel UK Information Pack 1994). She also takes up, on average, 3 new careers each year: professional ballerina (1961), surgeon (1973), famous rock star (1986), UNICEF Ambassador (1989) and baseball player (1993) [Figure 9]. Barbie was created 'not to lead, but to follow society' (Yoe, 1994, p.14), and this is a crucial part of her success story, in that Mattel use the doll to mirror what is going on in the world. The 1965 space race between America and Russia, for example, was marked by Barbie becoming an astronaut [Figure 10]; she was later used to denote various fashion breakthroughs, such as when it became acceptable during the 1970s for women to wear trousers as part of an everyday wardrobe; and predictably, in 1992 Barbie's entire tribe was equipped with brand new rollerblade boots.

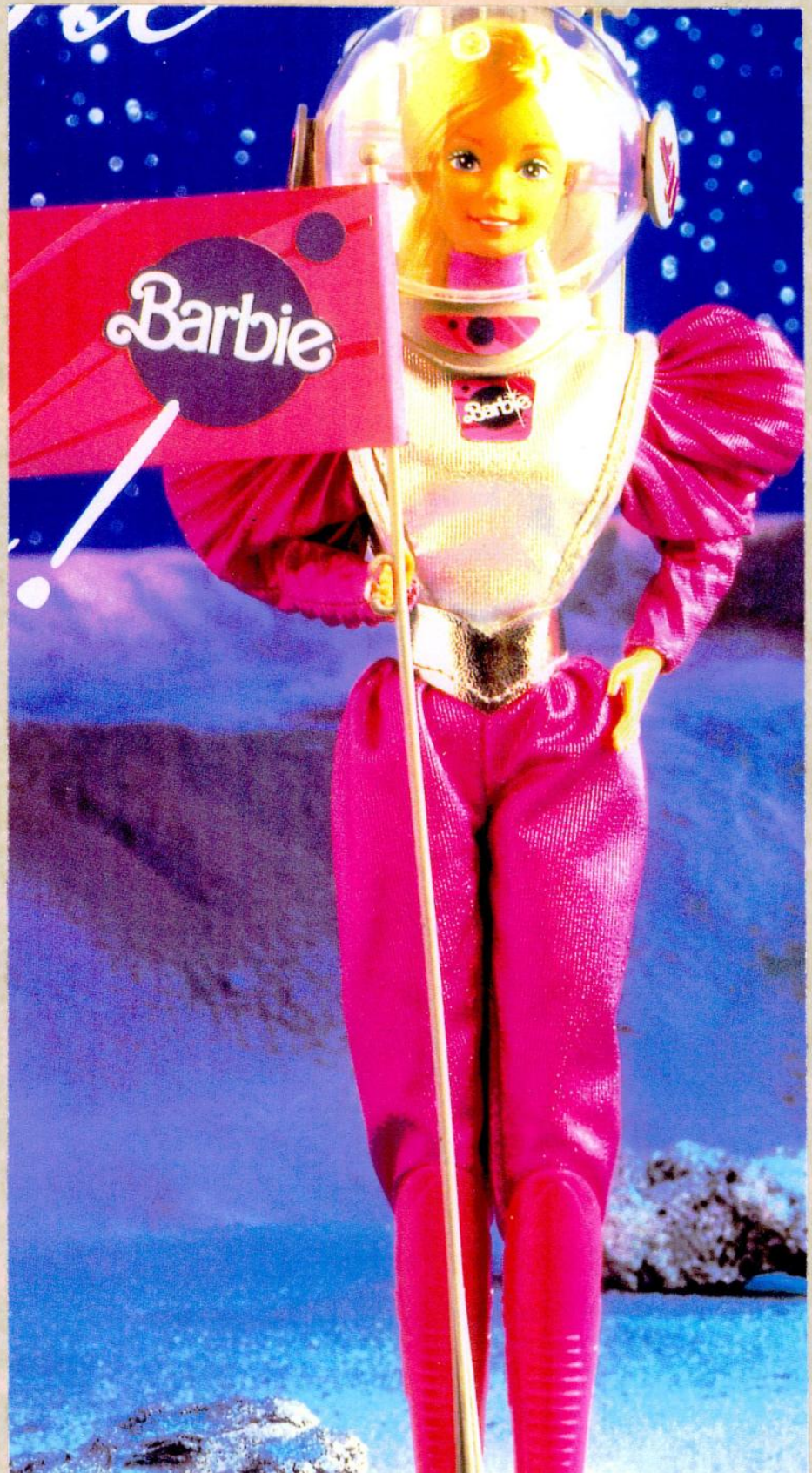


Figure 10. Astronaut Barbie.



Figure 11. The original Sindy doll.

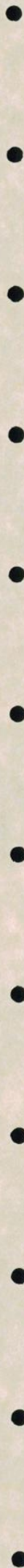
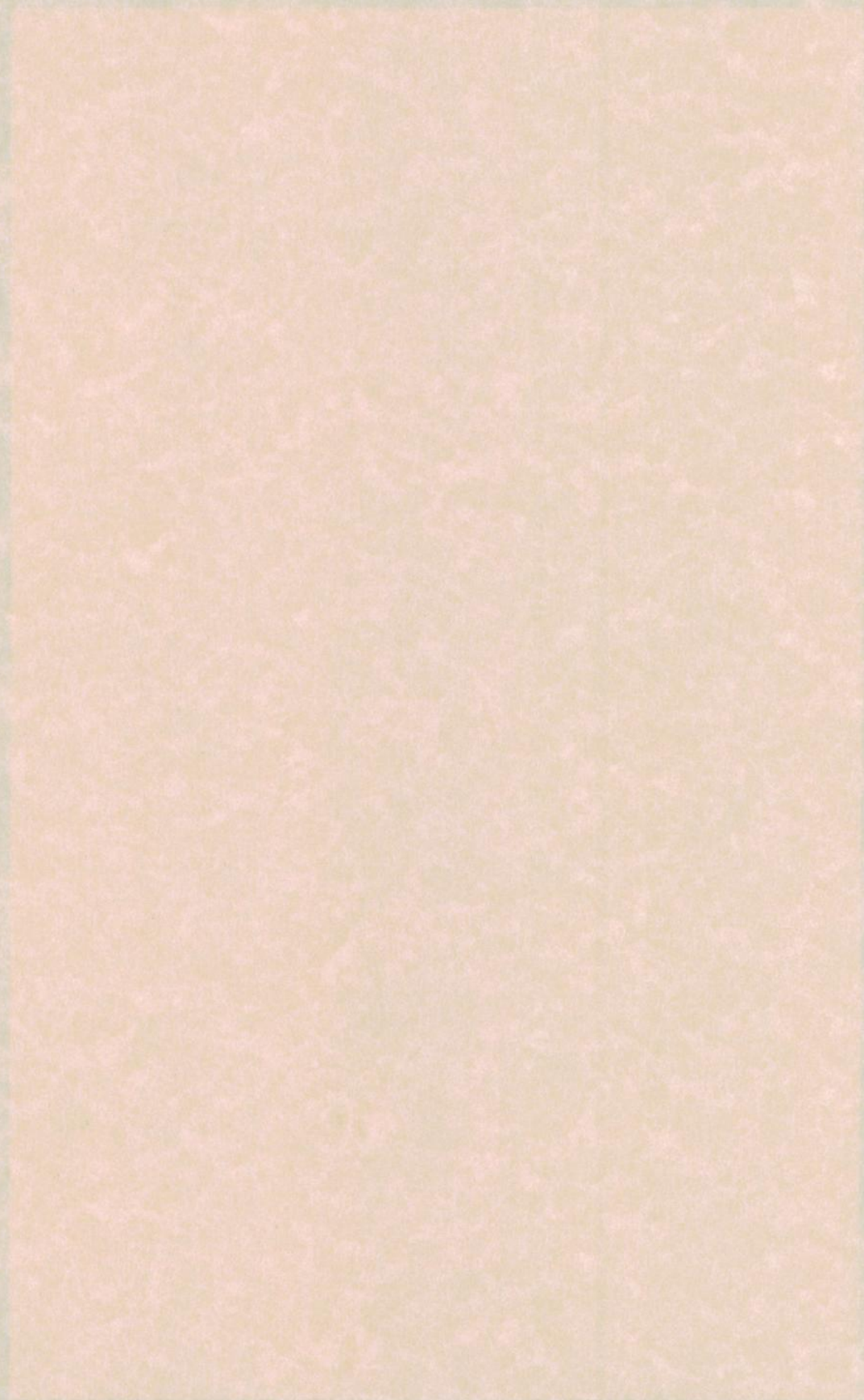
Despite being in existence for more than 36 years, Barbie has managed to remain supreme over other dolls on the market. According to Mattel she was created to fulfil every little girl's dream, and this dream was to include a maturity of figure, at least for the late 1950s (Boy, 1987, p.22). Barbie's full figure is the only aspect of the doll that has never been changed. It has been suggested that it is her figure which has given her an obvious advantage over her rivals (Lord, 1994, p.40). 'Ginny', for example, the pot-bellied, flat-chested, ordinary doll who had been in circulation since 1950 and 'Tammy' who appeared in 1962, in the body of an eight year old are both now non-sellers. Tammy came with a mother, father and baby brother, shackled to the family and forbidden to taste the joys of freedom, unlike Barbie, who, Mattel realised, desired independence to go to a disco, ski-ing in the Alps, or on holidays with boyfriend Ken in the Barbie Camper Van. Shrewdly Mattel dispensed with Barbie's mother and father in the American Barbie magazines from the 1960s onwards.

The British counterpart, Sindy, is relevant to Barbie's success. In 1961 it was thought that Barbie might not be an appropriate doll for European children, especially in Britain. Thus, Sindy was born - matronly in stature with a round, innocent face, small bust, and short, thick legs [Figure 11]. Colette Mansell's latest book The History of Sindy - Britain's Top Teenage Doll 1962-1994 tries to persuade us that Sindy reigns as Queen of the dolls, which begs the following question: why, if Sindy was doing so well in the UK, did she undergo a major transformation in 1987, only to emerge looking like.....Barbie? Sindy could now be Barbie's twin sister, with longer, more sculpted legs, an inflated chest, sleek blonde hair and a considerably younger and prettier face [Figure 12].

Few critical books have been written about Barbie - most of what does exist is positive in nature, promoting her as 'the perfect one' (Boy, 1987, p.9). The



Figure 12. Sindy today, looking remarkably like Barbie!

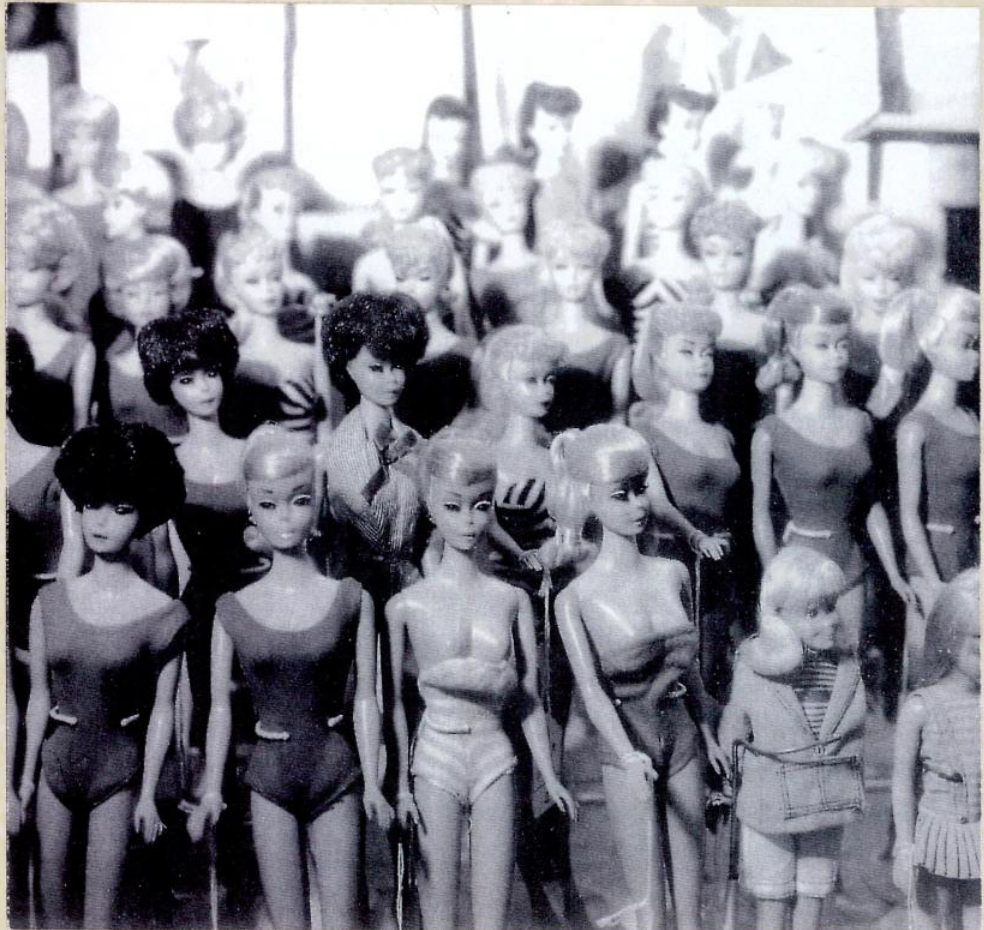


first informative book, Barbie - Her Life and Times, was written in 1987 by Billy Boy, an avid collector of Barbie dolls - Mattel provided much of the information, and the book predictably professes adoration for 'beloved Barbie' (p.9). Both Mattel and Boy believe Barbie to be an excellent role model for little girls. They insist that many leading fashion houses yearn to design for Barbie. They also imply throughout the book that Hollywood starlets looked to Barbie, particularly during her early years, for the latest trends. In the mid 1960s, for example, Barbie switched to the 'flip' hairstyle which Boy tries to persuade readers caused Barbara Streisand and Liza Minnelli to adopt the look (p.94). Whilst informative, the book is out of touch with reality, promotional and uncritical.

Barbie Fashion by Sarah Sink Eames, published in 1990 categorizes and dates every outfit that Barbie has ever worn. The author sees her book as a 'must' for every doll collector. The most recent book about Barbie, A Life in Fashion by Laura Jacobs (1994), is written as if narrated by Barbie herself - each chapter is broken down into sections such as her favourite nightwear, best-loved coats, most memorable ballgowns and so on. She describes various changes and innovations in both make-up and fashion throughout the decades, and insists that she couldn't have made it to the top without all her young fans inspiring her, confiding in her and caring for her (p.7).

Articles about Barbie appear in magazines and newspapers almost every week. Although none necessarily promote Barbie as a positive force in a young child's life, the doll is still commanding considerable attention, judging by various titles given to the articles such as "Golden Girl Barbie" (Irish Independent, 04/12/95), "A Real Doll" (Today, 19/05/95) and "Forever the Babe" (Herald, 15/04/95). Overall, however, such pieces are merely informative of the latest styles available.

Chapter 2
Barbie is a Negative Influence



'Barbies' (Sylvia Plachy)



Over the last ten years it has become apparent that many people now view the Barbie doll as a malign influence upon children - feminists have criticised her as a 'stereotyped dumb blonde' (Economist, 05/02/94), doctors have named an illness after her (The Barbie Syndrome) and psychologists at the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in London are claiming that this doll is the forerunner to childhood anorexia nervosa (Riley, Independent on Sunday, 08/10/95). Political awareness groups in Britain recently expressed their outrage at Mattel, insisting that Barbie is racist and accused her of 'hooking little white girls into consumerism and narrow, senseless gender roles' (Halpin, Daily Mail, 27/09/95). Islamic leaders in Kuwait have even banned Barbie from the toy box, insisting that she is too voluptuous, wears 'shameful clothing', and that their children must be protected from 'this evil Western style of living' (Daily Mail, 06/04/95).

The few articles written which denounce Barbie tend to do so in a light-hearted way. Jonathan Ross has tried to persuade Barbie to gain some weight and 'get a life' (Sunday Times Style, 15/01/95). In her latest book Forever Barbie - Unauthorised Biography of a Real Doll (1994), M.G. Lord expresses her childhood love for Barbie within the first few pages. While her book is informative about the doll's origins and Mattel's business affairs, Lord does not assess the doll as a negative influence, although she does criticise Barbie's full figure, her lack of affection towards boyfriend Ken, and her ability to change careers on a whim. This is the only study to suggest that Barbie might not be the positive influence Mattel insists she is upon children and that there might be more to Barbie's psychological manipulations....

Age Ambiguity

'To study Barbie, one sometimes has to hold seemingly contradictory ideas in one's head at the same time' (Lord, 1994, p.10). This is certainly applicable when trying to ascertain her age - is she a child, teenager or woman? Mattel insist that she is a 'teenage fashion model' (Boy, 1987, p.18) from whom younger girls will be able to learn about romance and fashion, and of course, how to be a model teenager. Slumber parties were popular with teenage girls during Barbie's early years and according to Mattel she hosted many of her own (Boy, 1987, p.26). Singing Barbie arrived in 1961 with a record where a real teenage voice sang about everything that could possibly concern Barbie - first dates, going to the Prom, boyfriend troubles, indicating that Barbie was in fact a teenager.

Contradictions arise, however, when one considers that Barbie's figure, when converted to adult measurements, would be an unrealistic 39-18-33; in other words she possesses the body of a well-endowed mature woman, and yet Mattel consider this doll suitable for children as young as 3 years. Barbie recently revealed that she once attended Willow High School (Barbie magazine, 20/12/95, p.26) which in chronological terms, would suggest that she is long past the teenage stage of her life! The Day to Night Barbie of 1985 portrayed her as a career woman: an active business woman by day and a glamorous belle-of-the-ball by night and this particular ensemble came complete with a computer, Time magazine, calculator and of course credit cards. If one were to follow her life in realistic terms Barbie would be heading for middle age. Indeed a story recently depicted in the Barbie magazine (25/10/95) went so far as to portray the doll as a mother-figure, where she had to change, feed and dress her baby sister Shelly [Figure 13].



Figure 13. Barbie as a mother figure.

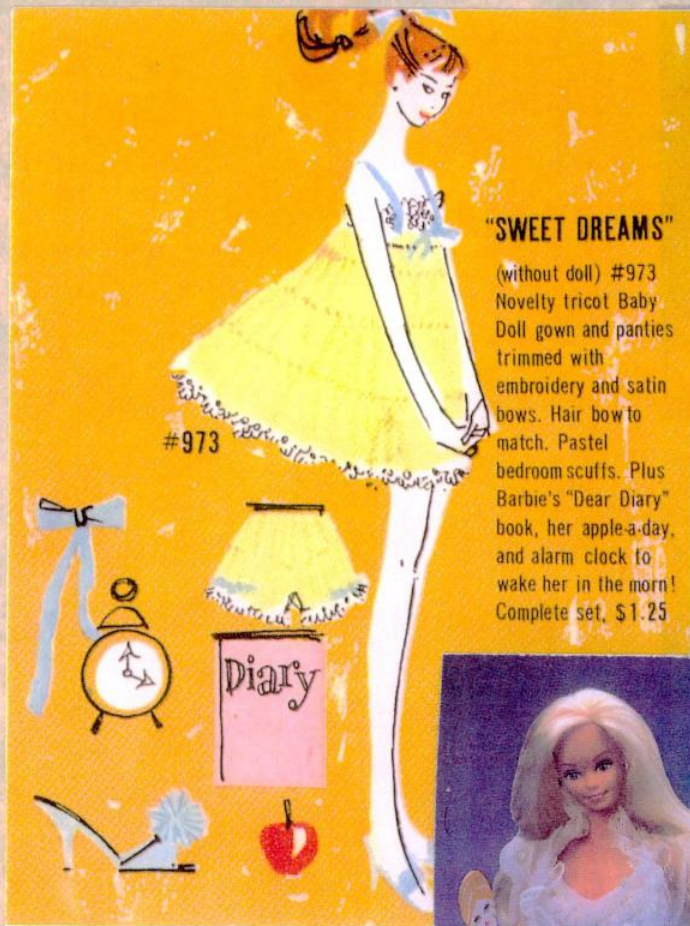


Figure 14. Barbie's childish preferences - babydoll nightdresses and frilly gowns.

Needless to say Barbie's preferences for baby-doll nightdresses and long frilly gowns such as Butterfly Princess Barbie or Bubble Fairy Barbie emphatically identify her as younger rather than older [Figure 14]. Obviously Barbie's age diversity is intended to cater to many age groups simultaneously, although Mattel's assertion that the doll appeals to children up to 11 years of age is undoubtedly commercially optimistic.

Barbie the Materialist

Barbie is portrayed as the luckiest female in the entire world! After all, she is stunningly beautiful, has the perfect family, a devoted long-standing boyfriend (33 years to be exact), excels at everything she does, owns beautiful horses and has the most comfortable lifestyle imaginable. Her personal motto is 'I'm Barbie and I can do anything' (de Cerbo, Irish Independent, 01/09/95, p.7), while Mattel insist that they produce 'Toys that mold character' (Hoffman and Bailey, 1994, p.28), implying that little girls should strive to be just like her.

Assuming that Barbie is the teenager Mattel insist she is, one cannot say that she reflects a realistic teenager's existence. She is portrayed as a rich kid who has it all, permitting young girls to fantasize, and aspire to, a way of life which most will never achieve. Barbie claims to have her clothes exclusively designed for her by Coco Chanel, Christian Lacroix and Yves Saint Laurent, though she admits that Bob Mackie is her personal favourite (Deed, Cosmopolitan, December 1994, p.75). In the 1950s and 60s she accurately reflected the fashion trends of the time with her full skirts, twin sets, tight-fitting blouses and her hair in a ponytail [Figure 15]. Three decades later, however, it would appear that Mattel have led her astray - her outfits have become more elaborate and varied and as such, she no longer

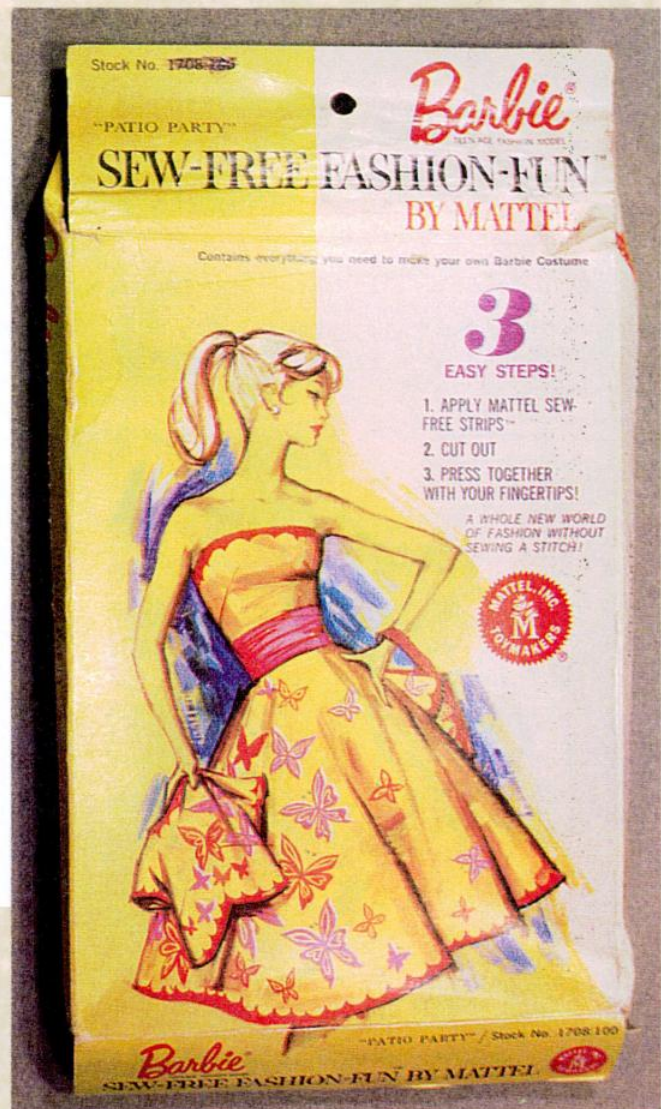
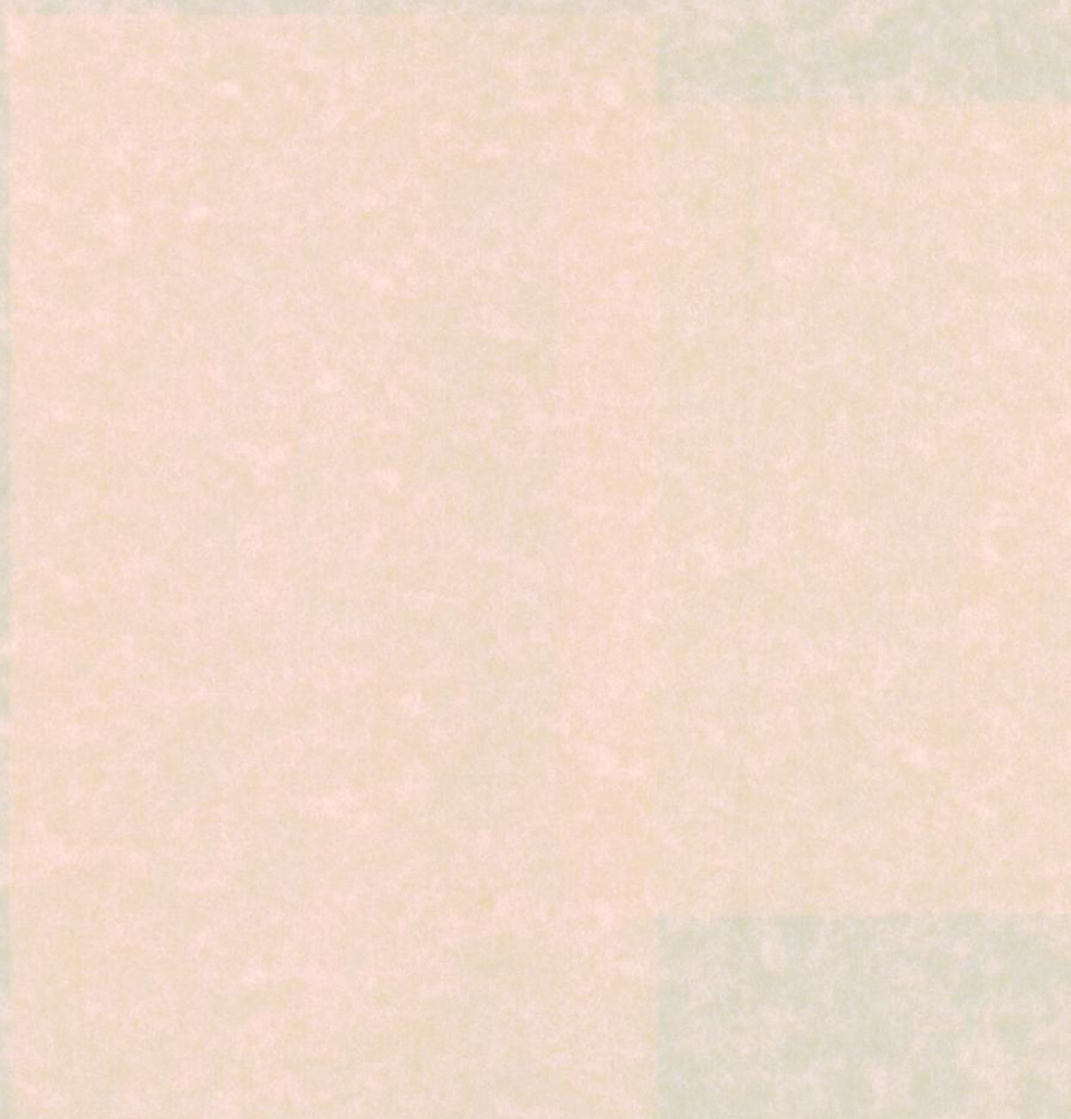


Figure 15. An accurate barometer of trends during the 1950s and 60s.



slots into one particular youth category. One day she is setting the pace in her rollerblades (1992), reflecting current youth trends, while the next sees her assuming an upper-class status, attending balls in her elaborate gowns (Happy Holidays Barbie 1995), far removed from that 'all-American teenager' concept.

Despite the emphasis Mattel place on her endearing human qualities, Barbie has a strong materialistic streak. In addition to the 120 new outfits every year, Mattel are proud to tell the young girls who write to them that Barbie has owned more than one billion pairs of shoes, and that since 1990, she has changed her car three times; from a flashy red Ferrari, to a pink Jaguar, to a white Porsche, not to mention the various new camper vans, carriages and picnic vans she has acquired over the years (Mattel UK Information Pack 1994).

In *Fashion and Merchandising Fads* (1994), Hoffman and Bailey have noted that in various editions of the American *Barbie* magazine, clothes and money dominate conversation in Barbie's world. Sifting through the current British *Barbie* magazines, all that really interests Barbie is acquiring expensive possessions and then taunting her so-called friends with them. When she purchases yet more fabulous clothes from Paris or Milan, she feels that she must throw a party as it is a 'good way of showing off her new look' (20th December, 1995, p.23). Barbie receives far more pocket money than any real teenager, which she liberally spends on her horses, cars, clothes, shoes, going to parties, visiting the beauty salon, skiing in the Alps or jet-setting to Hawaii. Piaget has repeatedly argued that many young children experience difficulties separating fact from fantasy (Bybee & Sund, 1982, p.79), and as all these activities are openly depicted in the current *Barbie* magazines, what might they come to expect of their lives when they become teenagers?

Viewed from this aspect, Barbie is little more than a rich exhibitionist who adores shopping. By playing with Barbie and following the magazines, little girls

are really only learning 'how to behave as consumers' (Holmquist, Image, July 1995, p.68). In fact 'Lets go shopping' is one of the current Talking Barbie's favourite phrases (Lord, 1994, p.250). This doll puts forth the misguided notion that when one has everything one desires materially, one will find happiness and friends.

Competitive Barbie

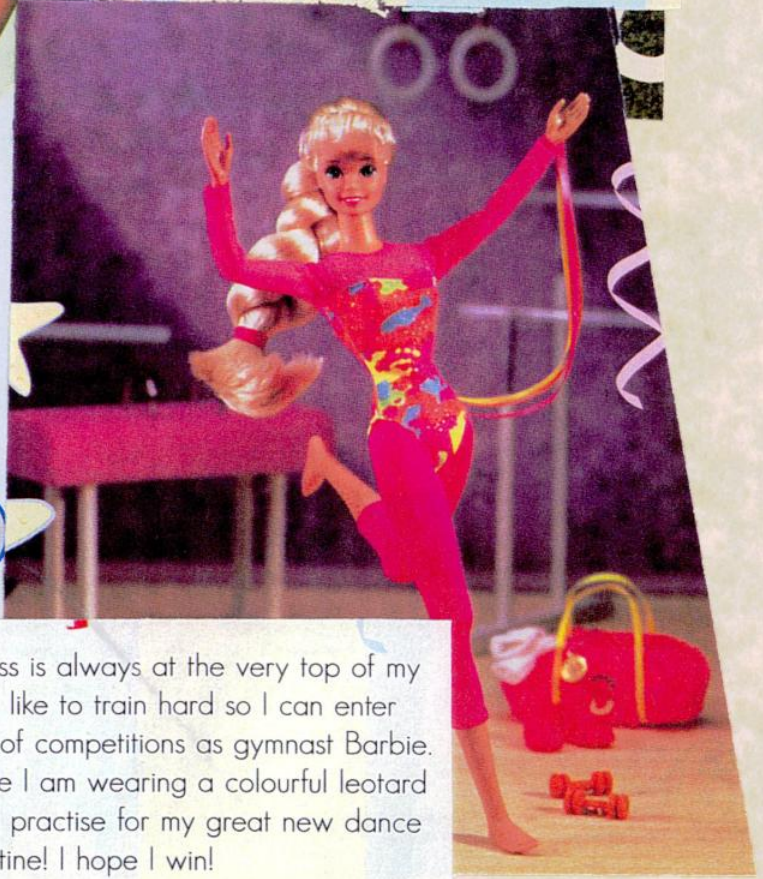
No matter what sport or activity Barbie takes up, she is portrayed as an all-round winner, teaching little girls that winning is of paramount importance. The British Barbie magazines depict her in all sorts of activities and the implication is that when Barbie looks fashionable and radiant, she will be the champion [Figure 16] - Gymnast Barbie tells of her intense training programme ending with 'I hope I win!': she insists that her sporty tennis outfit with 'essential sun visor' will make her 'a sure winner on the centre court': Barbie on her 'beautiful black horse', wearing a 'stunning' pink, blue and silver riding outfit 'make a winning team' in the show-jumping arena (20th December 1995, p.5). Team spirit, health and enjoyment should be encouraged when young children become involved in sports. Winning should not be promoted as the expected outcome.

Anyone for tennis?

Tennis is one of my favourite sports and here I am in one of my trendy and fashionable Wimbledon outfits. My sporty outfit and racquet, together with essential sun visor and tennis shoes make me a sure winner on the centre court!



Show jumping is so exciting and when I team up with my beautiful black horse, we make a winning team! Wearing my stunning pink, blue and silver outfit, I dazzle the crowd as I ride pass!



Fitness is always at the very top of my list! I like to train hard so I can enter lots of competitions as gymnast Barbie. Here I am wearing a colourful leotard as I practise for my great new dance routine! I hope I win!

Figure 16. Competitive Barbie.



Barbie and Racism

According to Mattel, Barbie crosses ethnic boundaries and 'is symbolically the universal woman' (Boy, 1987, p.126). The reality is, however, that although Barbie has many foreign friends, she lives in a totally white world (Hoffman and Bailey, 1994, p.28). In Britain the Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources is attacking toy companies who deny that their products promote a white-only existence. Many of these companies believe that since the toys are fantasy figures, they do not have a detrimental effect. The Group along with the Commission for Racial Equality insists that such toys do have an effect, and claim that Barbie in particular gives little girls a false sense of white being the norm.

Admittedly Mattel did produce the International Barbie Collection in the early 1980s, but they do not appear to apply the same effort in promoting these dolls as they do white Barbie. Even in South America blonde Barbie outsells all other dolls. One only has to look at the ratio of white to coloured dolls that comprise the Barbie displays in any toy shop to realise that white, blonde Barbie is infinitely the more popular. The display in Toymaster (Mary Street branch, Dublin), for example, features only three black dolls amongst hundreds of white Barbies, most of whom are blonde. Of the black dolls, only one is a Barbie, the other two are Barbie's friends. There is also a Chinese Barbie, whose facial features are identical to blonde Barbie's, although she has long black hair and is wearing a kimono. In relation to physical characteristics, Kenyan Barbie does look authentic, and the texture of her hair is very realistic. Mattel, however, ruin this progress by dressing the doll as a peasant which contrasts shabbily with the other, exquisitely dressed Barbies. Even the prices of the Barbie brigade merit classification: Tropical Steven and Tropical Splash Christie are depicted as good friends of Barbie - both are black dolls and cost a mere £4.99. To own any doll,

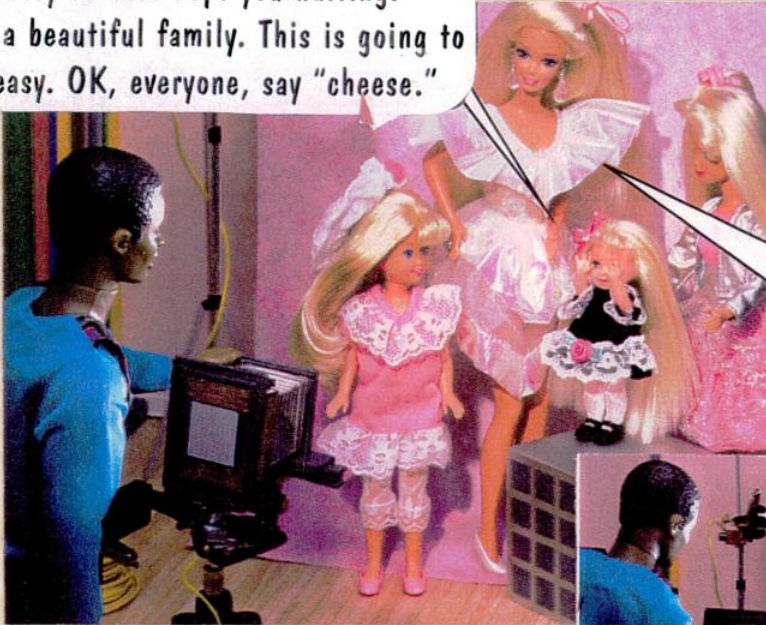
however, who has been christened 'Barbie' such as "Princess Barbie", "German Barbie" or "Rapunzel Barbie", one must part with £20 to £30, which suggests that race has value.

A recent Barbie 'Photodrama' (25/10/95) is a prime example of such racist views held by Mattel. The scenario entails a grown-up Barbie taking her three sisters Skipper, Stacie and Shelly to a photography studio for a family portrait [Figure 17]. The four females are blonde, and the photographer is a black doll, usually with his back to the reader. Whenever he is permitted to contribute to the storyline, all he manages to say is "What a beautiful family....Wow!....This is going to be the best family portrait I have ever taken!". The racist association of white equals beauty is a reprehensible aspect of Mattel's characterisations.

Barbie is too thin

Mattel want little girls to identify with Barbie but, not surprisingly, she does not suffer from normal teenage problems: she will never have acne or dandruff and of course, she will never put on weight, which makes her an unnatural role model for young girls at this stage of their lives. Throughout America and Western Europe 'weight loss has become a modern feminine goal' (Thebaud, 1994, p.378), even more disturbingly, weight loss amongst very young children has been dramatically increasing over the last five years. Barbie's body is abnormally proportioned and unnaturally thin, and at the hands of Mattel she has been psychologically influencing young female minds since the early 1960s. When "Barbie Goes Babysitting" arrived in 1963, she was equipped with reading material entitled 'How to lose weight'. In 1965 "Slumber Party Barbie" was also given this book, plus a weighing scales permanently set at 110 pounds, a mere 7 and a half

Sorry to have kept you waiting.
What a beautiful family. This is going to
be easy. OK, everyone, say "cheese."



Wow! Your baby sister has
one super smile! This is going to
be the best family portrait that
I've ever taken.



More pictures, Barbie!

Figure 17. Mattel's racist views.

stone (Lord, 1994, p.226). In 1979 approximately 60 diet-related articles were featured in the popular press. During January alone of the following year 66 articles appeared. By 1984, more than 300 diet books were on the market and this number has been steadily increasing every year (Wolf, 1990, p.67).

In America, by the time girls have reached 4th grade (9 years) 28% of them have been on at least one diet. By the time they reach 5th grade 80% claim they are too fat (Oprah Winfrey Show, 26/10/95). On this side of the Atlantic the condition is worse, where researchers at Swansea University have found over a quarter of 5 to 7 year olds wanting to be thinner, with one in six already dieting (Riley, Independent on Sunday, 08/10/95, p.60). Mattel constantly remind young girls of Barbie's beauty and success. Subconsciously the child acknowledges this and then compares herself with what she believes to be normal whereby 'any variation from the norm, or the ideal can affect a child's self-image' (Lansdown, 1984, p.83). Deanne Jade of the National Centre for Eating Disorders in Britain has observed that young children 'have a startling awareness of body image' and that the message they receive is everywhere: that 'to be popular and successful, you must be a size 10' (Riley, Independent on Sunday, 08/10/95, p.61). She also believes that this message begins first with the Barbie doll and is then carried on through television and magazines as children grow older.

Barbie continued her quest for thinness amongst young girls when Mattel brought out a new Barbie Workout video in 1992. The video depicts a real class of young girls, all of whom are blonde, tanned and very slim. The workout instructor is, of course, Barbie, an animated version, whose encouragement to the class consists of phrases such as "You are so cool!". In the USA a growing number of girls between the ages of 5-12 years now workout 2 to 3 times a week (Oprah Winfrey Show, 26/10/95). Dr. Andrew Hill, a lecturer with Leeds Medical School has conducted various studies with groups of 9 year olds, where he has


found that even at this age, most of the groups were stereotyping overweight people as unfit, unpopular and less successful in school (Riley, Independent on Sunday, 08/10/95, p.61). The Barbie magazines also play a part where regular features appear concerning exercise and weight loss with Barbie again advising young girls to 'Keep off those pounds' (Barbie magazine, 20/12/95, p.28) and 'Work that body!' (Barbie magazine, 14/02/96, p.22).

Barbie as a role model

36 years on, Mattel still maintain that Barbie is an inspiring role model for little girls. Simone de Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, argues that a child 'sees herself in the doll more accurately than in her own body' (de Beauvoir, 1993, p.662) and psychological research suggests that children both pay close attention to, and imitate, the behaviour of same-sex roles models (Baron & Graziano, 1991, p.172). Aside from Barbie's previously mentioned negative character traits, many more reasons exist as to why parents should be anxious about their daughters choosing Barbie as their role model.


The fact that Barbie descends from the German doll Lilli is of relevance, as Lilli was never intended for children. She 'was a symbol of illicit sex' (Lord, 1994, p.27) and was sold mainly in tobacco shops for men [Figure 18]. Significantly, the first Barbie produced was identical to this 'ice-blond, pixie-nosed specimen of an Aryan ideal', especially in body measurements (Lord, 1994, p.8). A glimpse into Barbie's world might also lead a young child to believe that she should always be happy, after all, there are no Funeral Barbies or Homeless Barbies to disturb her expectations (Holmquist, Image, July 1995, p.67). Mattel promote the idea that Barbie inspires little girls to take up careers as astronauts, business executives and

... zu allen
Gelegenheiten
sollte
Lilli
Sie
begleiten
!



"YOU SHOULD INVITE LILLI
AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY!"

BILD LILLI PROMOTIONAL IMAGE



... ob mehr oder minder nackt
Lilli bewahrt immer Takt

"WHETHER MORE OR LESS NAKED,
LILLI IS ALWAYS DISCREET."

BILD LILLI PROMOTIONAL IMAGE

Figure 18. Lilli as a symbol of illicit sex.



Figure 19. Barbie owns her own franchise.

pilots, irrespective of the education required to follow such careers. Barbie has been a member of royalty, a surgeon, a TV News broadcaster, a teacher and a vet, but she has also been in a rock band, a professional rollerblader, a rap musician, not to mention an Olympic gold medallist. Other flights of fancy include Butterfly Princess Barbie, Glitter Hair Barbie and Bubble Fairy Barbie. Consistency is obviously not one of her characteristics. The Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources is now advising parents to encourage their daughters to question Barbie's lifestyle and to perhaps come up with one suitable and realistic career for her (Halpin, Daily Mail, 27/09/95). Others believe that she is ridiculing career issues (Face, February 1995). Barbie was first associated with McDonalds during the 1980s. A new improved version appeared in the early 1990s, complete with Big Macs, french fries, milkshakes, a counter, menu and drive-thru section [Figure 19]. This new version has received much criticism in America, due to the startling fact that over 40% of Americans obtain their first job in McDonalds and have to be satisfied with low career expectations, while Barbie jumps to the top of the commercial ladder and immediately owns her own franchise.

One of Barbie's favourite colours, Bubblegum Pink, is a blatant little girl colour which is 'one of the markers of our sexual differences' (Gallop, 1988, p.163). By associating Barbie with this colour, Mattel project a stereotypical gender role, to which, throughout her existence, Barbie has conformed. She was instilled with 'the perfect skills for the perfect wife' (Boy, 1987, p.51): media images of the 1950s housewife showed 'a doll-like figure dressed in rustling skirts, nipped waist and narrow-fitting bodice' (Baker, 1991, p.28) wearing a full length apron with frills and deep pockets. For the first decade of her life Barbie emulated this concept [Figure 20]. Since then, the role of women both at home and in the workplace has changed dramatically. Mattel reflect this dichotomy, on the one hand promoting home skills in the form of Barbie's Kitchen, her Cook and Serve



Figure 20. The 1950s housewife - Barbie conforms.



Figure 21. Barbie and Ken - two people supposedly admired by everyone!

set, 26 piece tea set and 2 in 1 Kitchen and Pantry, while on the other hand she moves from one demanding career to another with relative ease. Paradoxically, during Barbie's early years, Mattel turned down an offer by a vacuum company to make a Barbie-sized vacuum cleaner, because Barbie just didn't do 'rough housework' (Lord, 1994, p.10). In fact she herself is reputed to have said 'I do not do housework. It's not in my contract!' (de Cerbo, Irish Independent, 01/09/95).

Barbie experiences emotions inappropriate for young children. A supposed 1961 television commercial announced the moment when Ken met Barbie, with a husky female voice revealing Barbie's innermost thoughts; the moment she saw Ken in his tuxedo, across a crowded dance hall, she knew that somehow 'she and Ken would be going together'. After all, the commercial went on to say, they had many co-ordinated outfits to wear to the beach, movies and dances (Boy, 1987, p.41). Since then, Ken and Barbie have depicted many teenage scenes, specifically geared by adults towards children's fantasies of what adult life is like - the two are romantic and sophisticated, the life and soul of the endless parties they are invited to, two people admired by everybody (Boy, 1987, p.42) [Figure 21]. What is promoted here is a romantic attachment, suggestive of a female state of dependency upon men.

Real-life Barbies

During the past decade eating disorders among women have considerably risen and cosmetic surgery has become the fastest growing medical speciality. We constantly ask 'How do I look?' because in Western culture a woman's social value is constructed through appearance (Bonner, 1992, p.155). Women as a rule, rarely feel good about their image (Bordo, 1993, p.56) and such conceptions amount to what is known as Physical Attractiveness Stereotype, whereby people assume that physically attractive people possess more highly desirable characteristics than less attractive individuals (Baron & Graziano, 1991, p.276). This attractiveness combines the perfect body with a beautiful face and it is linked to the notion of the ideal: 'All her life the woman is to find the magic of her mirror a tremendous help in her effort to project herself and then attain self-identification' (de Beauvoir, 1993, p.663).

Exposure to pictures of fashion models in magazines such as Cosmopolitan or Vogue causes many women to regard their own images with disgust because they believe that these glamorous models represent the ideal. Apart from growing thinner over the years the 'current ideal beauty remains a narrow-hipped, high-breasted woman with flawless skin' (Chapkis, 1988, p.8). A generation ago, the average model weighed 8% less than the average woman. Today these models weigh 23% less (Wolf, 1990, p.184). Nearly every woman at some point in her life attempts to reshape her body to bring it closer to this ideal (Chapkis, 1988, p.125). In the past five years more than 33 thousand American women have told researchers that they would rather lose 10 to 15 pounds than achieve any other goal as if it is these extra pounds that obstruct their path to happiness (Wolf, 1990, p.10). 'Punishing themselves with drastic diets and excessive exercise' (Freedman,

IT, February 1995, p.82), many of these women become anorexic as a result. These women are victims, but also the bearers of 'very distressing tidings about our culture' (Bordo, 1993, p.60).

For those who are unable to face the ordeal of losing weight, there is always the option of liposuction while cosmetic surgery is the only method that can, temporarily, achieve both the appearance of youth and make one more attractive. California is 'the land where dreams come true' (Allen, 1981, p.179) and it is the world's current centre of cosmetic surgery where such elitist operations are a 'lifestyle choice' (Holmquist, *Image*, July 1995, p.67). During 1981, in the USA alone, almost 2 million cosmetic surgery operations were thought to be performed, and this figure increases by 10% each year. Although such practices are less common on this side of the Atlantic, Britain is slowly becoming the European centre for cosmetic surgery.

Cindy Jackson, founder of the London-based Cosmetic Surgery Network, has had over twenty operations and spent \$55,000 to become a 'living doll' [Figure 22]. Ivana Trump and Dolly Parton have also spent considerable fortunes rearranging their anatomies while actress Sharon Stone maintains her figure through obsessive exercise (Holmquist, *Image*, July 1995, p.67). The average woman, however, perseveres with the 'fruitless search for an unachievable body' (Freedman, IT, February 1995, p.83) because she believes that when she attains perfection she will have the world at her feet: 'each woman lost in her reflection rules space and time, alone, supreme: she has every right to men and fortune, to fame and pleasure' (de Beauvoir, 1993, p.663). Barbie has repeatedly been identified as a factor in generating such unreputable anxieties.

Over the last 20 years children's beauty pageants have become a lucrative business in America. Unlike the innocent bonny baby competitions of the past, parents spend up to \$50,000 on children as young as 4 months old, travelling



CINDY JACKSON, AT HER HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATION, 1973



CINDY JACKSON, NINETEEN OPERATIONS
LATER, 1993

Figure 22. Cindy Jackson...A living doll - Before and After.

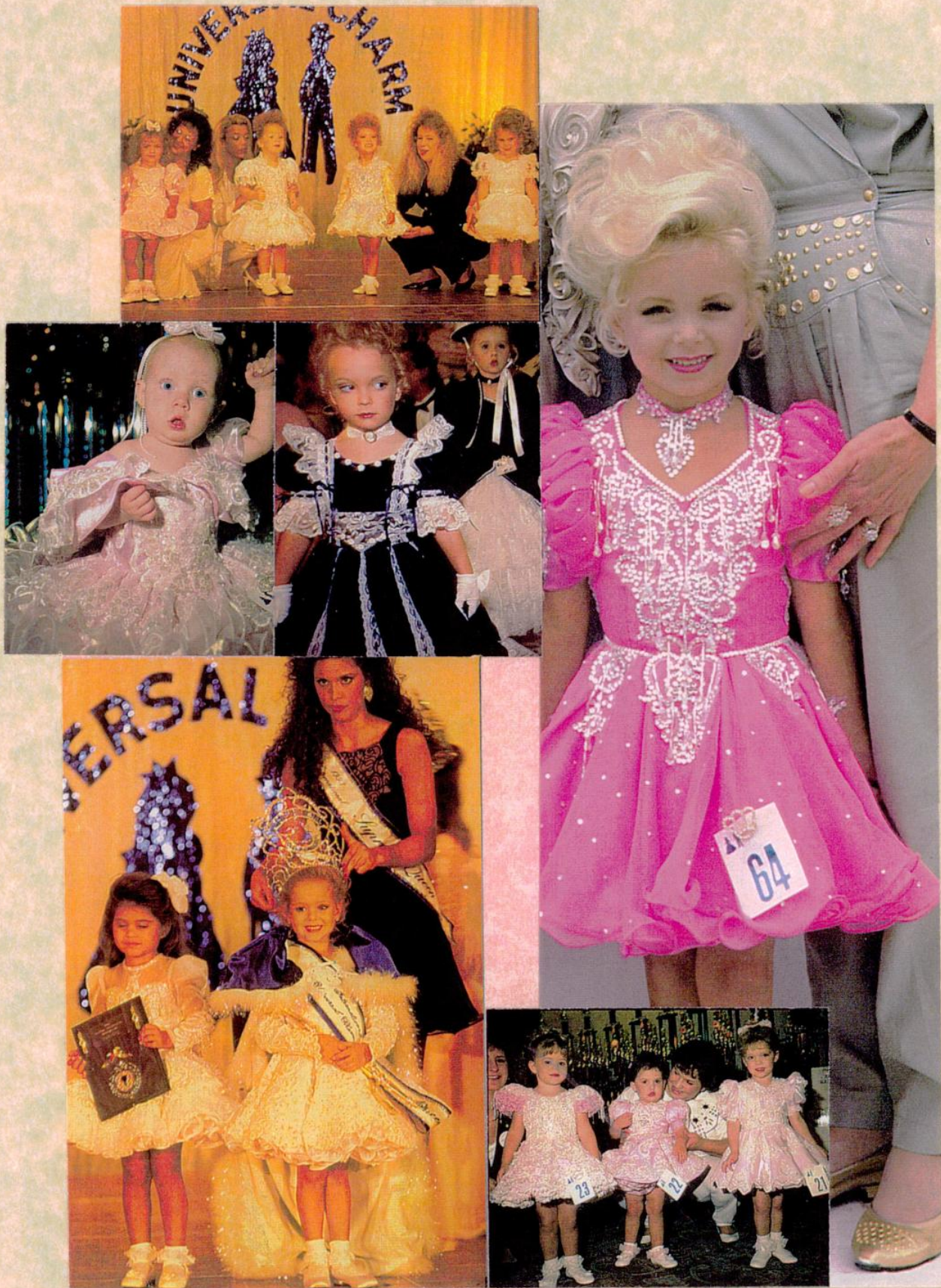


Figure 23. Mini-Barbies - young contestants at the American Baby Beauty Pageants.

endlessly round the country in the hope that their child will be chosen as the most beautiful girl of the season. Often these parents coerce their 2, 3, 4 and 5 year olds into taking up activities such as tap dancing, gymnastics, ballet, modelling and singing so that they stand a better chance of being titled the 'Grand Supreme' winner. Contestants from Florida and Tennessee are particularly hard to beat, where mothers bleach their daughters' hair, apply tanning creams and cake them with make-up, producing remarkable 'mini-Barbies' (Hilboldt, Marie-Claire, October 1994) [Figure 23].

It has been argued that these pageants give young girls confidence, promote good eating and fitness habits and, ominously, improve relationships with men (Hilboldt, Marie-Claire, October 1994). These competitions, however, promote the notion that appearance is everything. Such parents teach their children to be overly competitive and set them punishing schedules. On the days of these three and four day competitions the young contestants get up at 4am to have their hair set and their make-up applied. The competitions are composed of a variety of sections, mimicking adult beauty contests, including talent, sportswear and elaborate formal wear. Under-3's are judged on the most adorable personality and the prettiest face while the Over-3's are judged on an overall assessment of beauty, presentation, personality and talent.

An Oprah Winfrey Show (26/10/95) recently revealed the startling truth about the growing number of beauty salons in the USA which cater exclusively for clients who are only 5 or 6 years old. American psychologist Jane Hirschmann insists that mothers who constantly compliment their daughters, subconsciously glorify beauty to an unhealthy degree. Carmella (8 years) claimed that by wearing make-up she looks prettier, and will not go to school without wearing some. 6 year old Christina said that it is important to look pretty 'so that people will like you' (Oprah Winfrey Show, 26/10/95). Trisha, another 6 year old, likes to wear

sexy clothes to school because she wants to be popular - a typical outfit consists of a black off-the-shoulder chiffon blouse and a tight, very short black skirt. She also wants to join an aerobics class to lose notional excess weight. Hirschmann maintains that the mothers of these children are the cause of such problems, setting undesirable examples by fussing about make-up, looking sexy/glamorous and worrying about weight.

Conclusion

Although most children's dolls currently on the market have blond hair and blue eyes they are invariably more realistic than Barbie; Tiny Tears, for example, cries and requires frequent nappy changes just like a real baby. Even the Cabbage Patch dolls, despite their physical attributes, have a realistic element to them, individualised as they are with personalised birth certificates. While Barbie is far from realistic, she should not be banned from the toy box altogether. Caution, however, should be exercised when giving them to young girls. Insecure children or young girls whose mothers endorse the Barbie image are more likely to develop unhealthy expectations than children who play with other dolls. The anxieties Barbie engenders in young girls is a well documented topic, unlike the insecurities she seems to encourage in young men. Photographer Ken Botto's representation of Barbie in menacing high heels which he sees as 'The Modern Male's Worst Nightmare' must surely merit analysis [Figure 24].

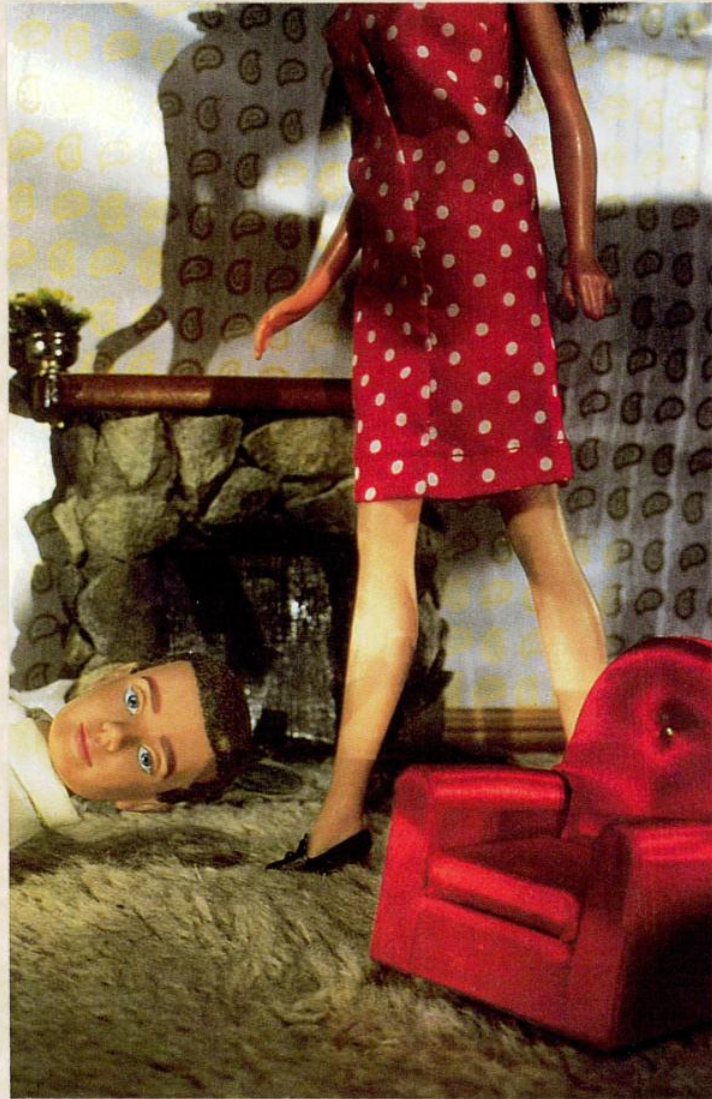
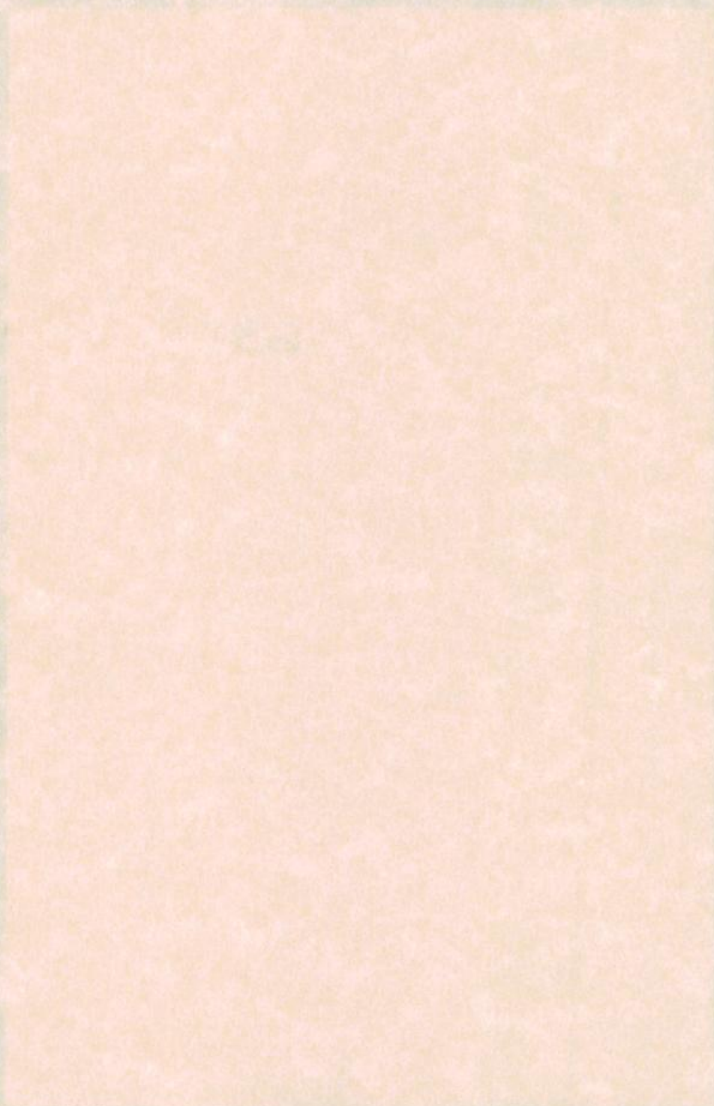


Figure 24. Photographer Ken Botto's worst nightmare - Untitled, 1982.



Interview with Des Cahill (RTE) - 28th November 1995

....Daughter is obsessed with Barbie

Subject : Amy, 5 years old.

1) At what age did your daughter first become interested in Barbie?

DC: She first became interested in Barbie when she was about 3 years old.

2) Where did she learn about the doll?

DC: She noticed Barbie on television, from a Christmas advertisement.

3) From whom did she receive her first doll?

DC: From her grandmother...it was a Christmas present about two years ago.

4) How many Barbie dolls does she have now? Do most of them have blonde hair or does she own some with brown/black hair?

DC: Her two friends don't have Barbies. At the moment she has 6 dolls, they are all blond.

5) Does she own any of the other dolls eg. Ken, Skipper etc? If so, do you think that she includes all of them equally in her play?

DC: Yes, she also has Ken and his role with Barbie seems to be just going for drives in the jeep (Barbie jeep). And when she has Ken playing with Barbie there is definitely a knock-on effect because she puts high heels on Barbie and gives her a handbag, but Ken only appears sometimes. (Ken is the only other doll that Amy owns) Its quite funny sometimes because Amy has a friend called Jonathan in her class and I think with Barbie and Ken she pretends that it is herself and Jonathan which worries me greatly because he has four Barbies.

Would you say she role plays? Would she become Barbie?

DC: Yes I would but thankfully she doesn't become Barbie....well she does in the sense that she dresses up, with make-up and high heels.

6) Does Amy own any other dolls such as Tiny Tears etc. and if so does she ever play with them?

DC: Well she's loads of other dolls but there's no doubt that Barbie is the favourite. They have a playroom in the attic and she'd be up there four or five times a week....for hours...on her own...she's very happy on her own playing with the dolls. She's got the Barbie kitchen as well.

7) Do you believe that she is obsessed with Barbie?

DC: I wouldn't say she's obsessed with her but Barbie is usually time consuming for her. I don't worry about it because I feel she's just at that age and she's happy. Like she never goes to bed with her or anything, she would always take a softer more cuddly toy. No I don't worry about her...I'm more amused by it. I'd say she'll grow out of it.

8) Does she think Barbie is perfect...ie. because the doll has long blonde hair, is pretty and has a perfect figure? Has she ever mentioned that Barbie is too thin?

DC: Oh yeah she loves the glittery clothes and...I think her favourite item is one of those ballgowns. She's never mentioned that Barbie is too thin and I'd say she hasn't even considered it. Amy has long blonde hair herself but I don't think she's really conscious of thatyet(laughs).

9) Do you believe that playing with Barbie could affect the way in which your daughter thinks? Does she think that Barbie has a great lifestyle?

DC: Yeah she thinks Barbie has a great lifestyle...she always wants new clothes for the dolls....and herself. Amy is very fashion conscious and make-up conscious herself which may be a Barbie spin-off, but I don't know.

Is her mum very fashion conscious...very feminine? Yeah I suppose she is. Barbie is really Amy's only toy of significance.

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