

Chapter 7

THE “BARBIE” DOLL AS A POPULAR CULTURE ICON: A NEW IMAGE OF WOMEN CREATED WITHIN, THE CONTEXT OF GENDER ROLES*

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ABSTRACT

Barbie, one of the world’s top-selling toy, is discussed and criticized by academicians, feminist groups and popular media commentators in terms of her wide range of symbolism. Barbie’s statement is ‘girls can do anything’, which presents the idea that women are able to overcome any obstacle or make any choice in life. The Barbie doll was created as a fashion phenomenon in form of a perfect, well kept, good looking image of a woman. At an early age, children meet with this perfect woman image and want to be like, look like her and act like her. Consequently, children grow up with this ultra feminine women image in their mind, and therefore effects children’s socialization process and gender roles negatively with its unrealistic body image and perfect life-style. As a response to this ongoing problem, the firm was forced to make some major changes on Barbie’s overall concept. Barbie’s image and role was converted from the always-consuming, perfectly beautiful woman to a successful career woman. However, the new physical features of the Barbie doll still remains the same. The doll does not portray an ideal representation of the role of women in society. Barbie still continues her life far away from the realities of life, in the same beautiful and desirable looking figure. In this study, a literary review has taken place as well as the historical transformation of the Barbie doll has been examined. In this process, the meaning and value imposed to woman and the changes over woman’s image has been explained conceptually.

Keywords: Gender, Women, Barbie, Popular culture, Toys

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the company's loss of profits and was renewed in response to the intense demand. The perception of Barbie's placement is that it is still designed as a fashion icon and created for the market appeal. Mattel, who had to take a position against these expectations, considered the changes he made on the doll as a crisis management because of the loss of profit and produced new doll figures against intense criticism. Today's perception of Barbie is that it is still a fashion icon, it represents beauty and a flawless life, and is created for sales. Even the image of the working woman created by Mattelin has to always look well-groomed and flawless and visuality is in the foreground. Even in business, women are evaluated with their external appearance and femininity, not their success and intelligence. This doll, whom many girls have met at an early age, encodes the message that the woman must be flawless and the only way to be happy is to look beautiful. The appearance and lifestyle of Barbie causes children to have negative social relations in their future lives, making them feel inadequate, miserable and worthless.

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