

## Response Essay – BARBIE: IS IT SIMPLY A TOY?

When Ruth Handler created the Barbie doll for the toy company Mattel Inc. in 1959, she had no idea that her creation could cause controversy. Barbie was created during the time of economic growth in the USA. Life standards were improving; people could buy larger houses, bigger cars and better clothes. Because people were getting richer, consumption of goods was increasing. So Barbie Doll (and all her by-products like her shoes, clothes, houses, etc.) symbolized the consumer culture.

Although Mattel Inc. produced Barbies with different ethnic features over the years, many people remember the original Barbie, which is thin, blonde with big blue eyes. She has the ideal female body. But is she really perfect? It may seem innocent as a toy but for Mary Ann Rogers, Barbie Doll has more negative influence on society than positive. In her article, “Barbie Culture”, she argues that Barbie’s physical ‘perfection’ is a problem because many young girls want to look like Barbie, but they can’t and shouldn’t.

Heather Thompson and her group of sociologists from the University of Columbia conducted a survey on what young girls think of Barbie. The girls were between the ages of 5 and 8, and the survey revealed interesting results. It showed that 58% of the girls believed blonde women prettier. Another question in the survey demonstrated that almost 80% of the girls said slim women were more successful and loved more by society. The survey also showed that more than 60% of the girls who played with Barbie Dolls were worried about their weight and found themselves “fat”. Today, there is even a scientific term called the “Barbie Syndrome”, which can be explained as a form of bulimia. Bulimia is a kind of a dangerous eating disorder.

Thomson’s research shows that the Barbie Doll is damaging young girls’ mental and physical development because a large percentage of young girls find themselves either ugly or unsuccessful in comparison with their Barbie Dolls. She affects their self-esteem negatively as they grow up. Mattel Inc., however, declared that they did not have any secret intentions when they created the toy. Walter Briggs from Mattel Inc. says that they simply made a doll that girls would enjoy playing with, and they are going to produce it as long as people want to buy it. He also says that scientists are too sensitive about this issue. Both parent and children like the Barbie Doll because she gives excellent play time and encourages creativity for fashion. He adds, “All toys have the risk of being misunderstood. It is even possible to say that toy cars lead to accidents and toy guns lead to wars”.

Barbie Doll celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009 with an amazing fashion show, presenting designer brands such as Chanel and Christian Louboutin. Public interest was huge as usual, and millions of girls around the world were at the toy stores the next day to buy the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary limited version of Barbie. Clearly, Barbie Doll is not simply a toy anymore, but is it a dangerous figure in the way of children’s development? (516 words)

**Question: Do you agree that the Barbie Doll has a negative influence on the development of young girls? Explain your answer in a response essay.**