

Guest  
VIEWS

# Welcome to the Dollhouse

*Reshaping Barbie won't fix female body image problems* | *Kids know Barbie's not real, but Mattel makes right move*

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(U-WIRE) BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — When I first heard Barbie had an appointment with the plastic surgeon, I shed a silent tear for her boyfriend, Ken.

Despite having no job and just one outfit, Ken was the envy of most guys. Barbie had more curves than a Porsche, and a chest that made Pamela Anderson's look like a snooker table.

Being a '90s kind of gal, she wasn't shallow either. If Ken was feeling kinky, Bizarre Barbie would tease him. If he were sick, Doctor Barbie would comfort him, and if his Compaq Presario blew a microchip, Computer Nerd Barbie would have it fixed in a snap.

Ken could also watch football and drink beer all day without having his butt hauled off the couch by a nagging Barbie. Wouldn't we all love a girlfriend who never talked back?

But, spoilsport feminists with a Camille Paglia fixation shattered Ken's wonderful fairy tale. They convinced Barbie to stop being Ken's bimbo and grow flabby thighs and a butt the size of Roseanne's.

Forgive me for sounding like a sexist, narrow minded, un-PC lump of testosterone. I'm trying so hard to be politically correct.

But with Barbie we've taken this political correctness way too far.

Mattel is planning to downsize Barbie. The new model, Really Rad Barbie, will have a more contemporary look with a bigger waist, flatter breasts and wider hips.

It is unfortunate that toddlers are being forced into the straitjacket of political correctness while they are still figuring out the wonders of poop.

Research says babies are influenced by toys. I guess I should be wearing my underwear over my pants and leaping off buildings. I guess I should also be crawling up walls on all fours.

Barbie bashers claim the 11-inch doll is responsible for all our social problems except Dan Quayle: bulimia, anorexia, low self-esteem — they blame it on a \$15 doll.

You want the real answer to these problems? Try Cindy Crawford, who has enough silicon in her to operate a supercomputer. Or how about Kate Moss, who's so fragile you could blow her off the laminated pages of Vogue?

Don't these people have a greater influence on a modern girl's body image?

Has anyone mentioned the effects of Hollywood bimbos and Madison Avenue models on women's self-esteem? These hollow-eyed models are revered and idolized, while Barbie gets the boot.

What we've gained in political correctness, we've lost in common sense.

By that logic, why aren't men schizophrenic, emotionally raped and psychologically scarred? After all, we played with He-Man. Besides Fabio, few men care to have a body like that. Action heroes stimulated our imagination and satisfied our fantasies, until we discovered the cute girl next door in her nappies. We didn't make our dolls into role models, and we certainly didn't expect to develop physiques like theirs. And thank heavens! Otherwise, they'd have to give G.I. Joe a beer belly and a bad haircut.

Barbie is a doll made of cheap plastic. Girls enjoy bullying her into a million uncomfortable dresses, shoveling micro cups of tea into her face and chaperoning her on dates with Ken. If you read any deeper meanings into that, I suggest you sell your imagination to Spielberg.

Barbie is a symbol — not a problem. She's a symptom, not the disease. Long before Barbie wobbled onto the scene in 9-inch heels, Scarlett O'Hara was slipping her 17-inch waist into a corset.

Have kids been asked if they want a fatter, lumpier Barbie? Have we asked for permission before barging into their fantasy land? The Chicago Sun-Times recently reported a read-

er's poll in which 31 percent responded Barbie ought to be remodeled, while 69 percent suggested Barbie be left alone.

Before the feminists give each other high-fives and arm-wrestle themselves to an orgasm, let me assure them that Mattel has agreed to put Barbie under the knife only because there's a quick buck to be made. A new Barbie model will want her own fall and summer collections, new shoes, treasure chests of jewelry and a new Malibu mansion. All that costs money and makes for a prettier balance sheet for Mattel, Inc.

Barbie creates a magical world of unlimited imagination where everyone is beautiful, rich and accomplished. It's an exaggerated world of fun. Let kids enjoy the make-believe of perky breasts and ultra-slim thighs while they can.

They'll have a lifetime to deal with the reality of sagging assets and thunder thighs.

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(U-WIRE) MEDFORD, Mass. — It wasn't her curvaceous hips. Or her Scarlett O'Hara-esque waist. Or even her unnaturally voluptuous bustline. The only things that bothered me were her feet.

Those tiny little plastic feet were bent up in this permanent high-heel position — that was extremely aggravating, because I could never get those itchy-bitsy high-heel pumps to stay on.

Ah, but the handsome Ken, he had these big, wide, "manly" feet that were perfectly flat. Those sensible shoes never fell off.

Poor Barbie, on the other hand, never got to wear shoes in my house.

To my dismay, the Mattel toy company has not yet announced whether they will bring in their podiatry experts to examine 38-year-old Barbie's feet before her upcoming surgery.

Earlier this week, the company told the world that the shapely Barbie is scheduled for

some extensive nips and tucks: a wider waist, wider hips and a smaller bustline. She's even getting a new face, minus the toothy grin.

Many who felt the pop-icon Barbie doll upheld an unrealistic standard of beauty are hailing Mattel's decision to make her look more like a real woman. According to them, her highly unrealistic 38-18-34 figure (according to some estimates) gives girls a negative body ideal from a young age.

"I actually think it's healthy, because we are surrounded by cultural icons that create unrealistic expectations in adult women. ... Barbie's change is a wholesome step in the right direction," retired plastic surgeon Sharon Webb told the Boston Globe.

I don't know about you, but for me Barbie was always, well, a doll.

When Barbie's skinny plastic legs popped out of their sockets, I knew she wasn't real. When my friend Lauren's bratty, semi-cannibalistic 6-year-old neighbor chewed off Barbie's foot, and Barbie kept up that same cheery grin, I knew she wasn't real.

I never deluded myself into thinking we little girls were supposed to grow up to have 38-18-34 figures. My mom didn't look like that. My teen-age sisters didn't look like that. NO women I knew looked like Barbie. She was fun. She was a fantasy.

And she sure did have some nice clothes.

I've always been a big fan of Barbie. I'm not alone. According to M.G. Lord, the author of "Forever Barbie," the average American girl owns eight Barbie dolls. Eight gals, that is, to "one pathetic, overextended Ken," she says.

That was the case with me, although I think the number far exceeded eight. I don't remember all of their "official" names anymore, but I remember many in the lineup: There was punk-rock Barbie, bride Barbie, "day-to-night" Barbie (her outfit converted from a work-suit to evening wear a la yuppie '80s), the Barbie that came with an assortment of "fashion wigs", the Barbie with the funky hair curler, birthday Barbie, ballerina Barbie, and, my permanent favorite — puckered kissing Barbie, who, at the push of a button on her back, would give Ken a big smooch. I was very upset when Barbie's "kissing button" stopped working. Looking back on it, I realize perhaps she just didn't like Ken anymore.

My Ken was a busy fella. He was forced to play the boyfriend, brother, father, husband, "insert male role here" role in every one of my Barbies' adventures. What a nice guy.

And, oh, those adventures. I could dress her in fancy clothes and send her on a romantic date with Ken, give her a bath in my Barbie bubble bath, put her to bed in the Barbie dream house (I didn't actually have one, but I could pretend). It was a fantasy.

"I mean, they say Barbie is unrealistic. But she's got a Ferrari, a Malibu dream house, and big plastic boobs. Here in LA, you can't get more realistic than that," said late-night TV host Jay Leno earlier this week.

Don't get me wrong. I do understand the concern many have with Barbie's current look. And, although her incredibly unrealistic body image did not consciously affect me as a child, there is a good chance it did affect me unconsciously.

There is no one cause of the obsession with body image in this country and the rampant eating disorders young girls and women develop.

While I place more of the blame on unattainable images of sickly thin women in advertising, movies and television for the perpetuation of unrealistic standards of beauty, I must say that, despite my love for the Barbie with whom I grew up, Mattel is making the right move. If it helps one girl not internalize the ridiculous ideal of big-busted thinness as perfection, it's worth it.

But, I'll never forget my Barbie.

Even Christina Hoff Sommers, the author of a book entitled "Who Stole Feminism" told the Globe, "The new Barbie is more attractive, and she did need a makeover. But I didn't mind the fact the older one reflected earlier ideals of feminine beauty. I liked Barbie as a child. She was glamorous. And part of being a child is fantasy and play, not an exercise in self-esteem."

In the end, she's a doll. A fantasy. An anatomically correct piece of plastic with a ridiculously extensive wardrobe.

And funny feet.



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