

## Marketers As Barbie Game Changer

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### **Abstract.**

*This essay addresses issues about how the Barbie doll can provide an unrealistic vision of how women should look and what marketers can do about it. Barbie is a well-known doll that has become a role model for girls. However, Barbie dolls have attracted much criticism. Studies found that Barbie shapes the body image of young girls and possibly creates body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among girls. Body dissatisfaction can lead to eating disorders and low self-esteem can lead to depressive behavior. Answering that phenomenon, Barbie launched Barbie Fashionista that has a diverse body type. However, Girls still tend to choose thinner Barbie. Barbie's marketer should encourage girls to play more with a more realistic body image Barbie such as curvy, tall, and petite, and encourage the children to feel good about their bodies.*

**Keywords:** Barbie, Body Dissatisfaction, self-esteem, Marketing

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Mattel is a toy company that was founded in 1945 (Mattel, 2020). In 1959, Mattel launched a Barbie doll that aimed to encourage girls to be anything (Mattel, 2020). Barbie dolls are the best-selling fashion doll in the world (Ollila, 2016). Barbie dolls are well known with ideal figures such as a flat belly and pointy breasts (Wanless, 2001). This doll is also not huggable, not squeezable, not comforting, hard, inflexible, plastic, and unrealistic (Wanless, 2001). But still, Barbie is perceived as beautiful because she has attractive physical feature such as square shoulders, tall and long-legged, slim-waisted, non-sloping forehead, long neck, large eyes, curved red lips, smooth and hairless skin, short torso, straight teeth, long and straight finger, a flat abdomen, and not bow-legged (Wanless, 2001). Barbie's huge market penetration led to the perception of Barbie as a female ideal representation. Fashion dolls may become role models for young girls and provide them with mental representations about expected body appearance (Anschutz and Engels, 2010). Furthermore, Barbie can provide an imaginary point of view because when young girls play with Barbie, they pretend to be like Barbie dolls (Dittmar et al, 2006). A study found that Barbie does promote the thin ideal to girls. A study by Rice et al (2016) investigated the effect of Barbie on young girls in 160 girls aged 5-8 years in South Australia compared to little Pony dolls. Exposure to Barbie in physical engagement, print observation, and physical observation led to higher thin-ideal internalization and suggested that Barbie may encourage girls to prefer thin bodies (Rice et al, 2016). This can distort the perception of the normal women's body shape among children. Because of the unrealistic body shape, Barbie dolls have attracted much criticism. Barbie has a slender body. Barbie weight proportions are unhealthy (Dittmar et al, 2006). Barbie's body weight is so low and if Barbie is a real person, she would not be able to menstruate (Rintala & Mustajoki, 1992).

Exposure to Barbie is linked to high body dissatisfaction in girls. Jellinek, Myers, and Keller (2016) tested the impact of exposure to dolls of several body types and clothes on girl's body dissatisfaction. The study found that girls who play with Barbie, which is a thinner doll, accomplished higher body size discrepancies than girls who played with full-figured dolls (Jellinek, Myers & Keller, 2016). In addition, Jellinek, Myers, and Keller (2016) stated that playing with unrealistic slim dolls may motivate young girls to have thinner body shapes. Girls who play with Barbie dolls experienced a need for a slimmer body shape (Jellinek, Myers &

Keller, 2016). Dittmar et al (2006) also found that there is an association between Barbie exposure and body dissatisfaction among five until seven years old children. This finding implies that Barbie may have a negative impact on girls' body image. Exposure to Barbie's unrealistic body may negatively influence girls to feel about their eating behavior and their own body (Dittmar et al, 2006). In addition, A study done by Anschutz and Engels (2010) found that girls in six until ten years old who played with full-figured dolls eat more food after playtime compared to girls who played with barbie dolls. It may be because the girls were inspired by Barbie and willing to achieve a thin body and therefore ate less food (Anschutz & Engels, 2010). When girls experience body dissatisfaction, it will be harmful to them in the future, especially to their self-esteem. A study found that body dissatisfaction is associated with low self-esteem (Dion et al, 2016). Paxton et al (2006) found that body dissatisfaction predicts low self-esteem in adolescence. Low body image during the developmental stage could lead to feelings of unattractiveness and lower self-esteem (Paxton et al, 2006). Other research also found that girls who report high levels of body dissatisfaction also report lower self-esteem (Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2006). Body dissatisfaction affects girls more than boys (Ricciardelli and McCabe, 2001; Dion et al, 2016). The finding by Dion et al (2016) stated that more girls than boys wanted a slimmer shape and children who are dissatisfied with their body weight can develop lower self-esteem. Girls who play with Barbie dolls might be more susceptible to experience body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem.

## II. METHODS

This study describes the body dissatisfaction phenomenon in Barbie's previous advertisement. This study used qualitative or content document analysis, Meta-Analysis is research from main data that performs systematic and empirical descriptive data. This study aims to investigate the body dissatisfaction phenomenon in Barbie's previous advertisement. qualitatively. In this study, researchers collected documents as data to be processed from journals and articles. This data collection focuses on research journals, Books, newspapers, and articles. The collected data was then sorted based on the year of publication.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Body dissatisfaction or someone's dissatisfaction with their body is defined as a cognitive-emotional distortion related to how a person views their body (Ortega-Roldán, et al., 2014). Dion et al (2016) studies among children between 9 and 14 years of age found that body dissatisfaction is common among girls. Another study by Tatangelo et al (2016) found that children under the age of six years old experience body dissatisfaction, and most likely happen in girls. Body dissatisfaction or what is also called negative body image can be represented in various forms. One of the most visible is an eating disorder experienced by a person. Moss (2011) states that body dissatisfaction has been repeatedly stated as a major risk factor for eating disorders. the characteristics of the mind that encourage women to engage in behaviors that reflect eating disorders are such as overeating and vomiting food so that the woman can achieve her dream body. Usually, this happens when women are dissatisfied with their body size and shape (Tylka, 2004). A more severe form of body dissatisfaction is Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). BDD sufferers believe that they look ugly or have deformed body parts when in reality, there is nothing wrong with them. They are often filled with fear of rejection and feelings of inferiority, shame, feelings of worthlessness, and also feelings that they are not loved (Phillips, 2004). Furthermore, Phillips (2004), states that individuals with BDD may have little or no friends, and tend to avoid dating and other social interactions. Most patients also have impaired academic, work, or role function. The obsessions, behaviors, or self-awareness generated by BDD are often seen to reduce concentration and productivity. It is not uncommon for BDD sufferers to leave their educational institutions or stop working. Another term related to the Barbie doll case is self-esteem.

Self-esteem is the degree to which we perceive ourselves in a positive or negative way or our overall perception of ourselves. (Baron, & Byrne, 1987). Self-esteem is a subjective evaluation of an individual as her

worth (MacDonald & Leary, 2012). Girls who experience low self-esteem also report feeling more depressed, feeling worthless, low level of approval, and unable to devalue success (Hartner, 1993). Although Barbie dolls may increase body dissatisfaction and lower the self-esteem of girls, there are ways that marketers can do to reduce this situation. Some researchers suggest the company produces dolls with diverse body types. Answering that, A new Barbie fashionista line has Barbie in four different body types such as original, curvy, petite, and tall (Fashionista.com, 2016). However, A study result by Harringer et al (2016) in 84 girls in three until ten years old in Barbie fashionista variations, found that there is a greater negative attitude to curvy Barbie dolls and positive attitudes towards thinner Barbie dolls. Furthermore, the newest study by Harringer et al (2019) found that children referred to the curvy doll as ‘chubby, big, and fat’ and the original Barbie doll as ‘pretty. This study is in line with a study by Worobey & Worobey (2014) that found that girls are still more likely to choose thinner dolls. Worobey & Worobey (2014) tested a study among 40 girls between ages three until five years old to assign several traits to thin, average, and fat dolls. The study found that positive characteristics attributed most often to thin and average dolls and the negative characteristics have happened more in the fat dolls (Worobey & Worobey, 2014). The researcher asked the question like: “which of these dolls would you like to play with?” and the girls perceived the thin dolls which are Barbie as “happy, smart, help others, look pretty, and have lots of friends” (Worobey & Worobey, 2014). Barbie body is the trigger, not the clothes, exposure to dolls clothing which is a swimsuit and modest did not influence change in girls’ body size discrepancies (Jellinek, Myers & Keller, 2016). In addition, Even though the new body types of Barbie are more diverse than Barbie in the past, The body shapes are still not representative (Nesbitt et al, 2019).

The research implies that the availability of different body size Barbie dolls might not be a powerful intervention to prevent harmful weight attitudes (Harringer et al, 2016). From this phenomenon, Barbie marketers should promote positive marketing and normalization of curvy Barbie dolls to counteract harmful weight-based attitudes (Harringer et al, 2019). Marketers should encourage a more realistic body image and emphasize the source of self-esteem can be non-appearance-related also (Dittmar et al, 2006). Most researchers agree that body dissatisfaction is closely related to beauty standards or forms of beauty ideas that prevail in society (Šivert & Sinanović, 2008). Marketers and parents need to limit their children’s access to sexualized clothing figures (Slater and Tiggemann, 2016). Plus, girls are constantly exposed to various kinds of appearances and are taught that beauty standards can be achieved by spending large amounts of money, time and also doing hard efforts, even though in the end beauty standards tend to be impossible to achieve (Tiggemann, 2011). Marketers should make a perception on media that focus on the importance of accepting our body, address body dissatisfaction interventions to increase self-esteem. Parents and marketers also can help girls increase their self-esteem by identifying children not just the way they look (Dohnt and Tiggemann, 2006; Osad’an & Hanna, 2015). The ads should emphasize promoting young girls about healthy body image and providing healthy role models. Marketers also should communicate about a healthy lifestyle and encourage the children to feel good about their bodies while maintaining a healthy weight. Barbie marketers should encourage playing with dolls that do not promote unhealthy physiques and sexualization and promote more about other types of the body in Barbie products such as curvy, tall, and petite.

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