

# *How Does Barbie Influence the Aesthetic Standards of Growing Children?*

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**Abstract:** The research hopes to explore the relationship between Barbie dolls and beauty standards in growing children, taking body dissatisfaction as a direction. The research analyzes the experiment conducted by Dittmar et al. in 2006, The Effect of Experimental Exposure to Images of Dolls on the Body Image of 5 to 8- Year-Old Girls, about the body image of different dolls and responses from young girls. The responses include their actual body shape, the body shape they ideally desired to be, and their ideal body shape as an adult woman. It is proven that girls with Barbie dolls experienced body dissatisfaction due to our theoretical framework. They experienced lower self-esteem and higher body dissatisfaction, which reflects the internalization of Barbie's proportion as the beauty standard. This research focuses on the potential reasons behind the body dissatisfaction of young girls with Barbie and why they might take Barbie as the aesthetic standard. Compared to previous research, this research provides more references for improving Barbie, whereas previous research focuses more on Barbie's impact on teenagers.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic standards, Barbie, Body dissatisfaction, children

## **1. Introduction**

Since Barbie was created in 1959, it has quickly become popular among girls. It quickly became the most popular toy among young girls. The Barbie doll quickly became a young girl's favourite toy due to its perfect body. The purpose of Barbie doll's mother's creation of Barbie doll is to make it an idol for young girls. In the mind of the Barbie doll's mother, an idol should be a perfect existence, even if the design of the Barbie doll has been criticized by social media [1]. However, this leads to a problem: young girls want to have the exact figure as their idols [2]. Therefore, girls will restrain their diet and, at the same time, have a desire for a thin body in their minds [3]. The behaviour of girls who restrict their diet can significantly impact their developing bodies. In addition, fashion has also become one of the symbols of the Barbie doll [4]. Therefore, in pursuing fashion trends, young girls' aesthetic concepts have been deeply affected unconsciously.

Much of the current research on Barbie dolls focuses on how Barbie dolls are destroying girls' physical health and changing their perceptions of fatness and thinness. In this paper, we will focus on

explaining how the Barbie Doll Company unknowingly constructed a toy that affects girls' aesthetic concepts differently.

## **2. Literature Review: Barbie's Definition and Fashion Model**

Advertising is usually used to promote companies' products and attract consumers who belong to these products. The Barbie Doll Company puts much effort into advertising. In 1959, the Barbie Doll Company released its first commercial on television. The advertising included the phrase, "Someday I am gonna be exactly like you till then I know just what I will do." This sentence shows that the Barbie Doll Company hopes to make children aware that Barbie doll is a goal of their future development and make children addicted to Barbie doll. The adoration of Barbie dolls from children is also the purpose of the mother of the Barbie doll, to make Barbie the perfect idol for children [1]. It is one of the Barbie doll's advertising strategies to boost sales by influencing children's immature conceptions of beauty. From today's perspective, this strategy is very successful. Because its purpose is to sell to children, parents usually respond to children's requests, not to mention that Barbie dolls are not expensive.

In addition, the Barbie Doll Company gave Barbie doll the definition of a "teenage fashion model." Because most people are chasing the trend, and the trend is led by a few people [4]. The Barbie Doll Company's 1959 newspaper advertisements clarified their purpose: "Barbie is a living doll, a real grown-up fashion model." It is a definition given to Barbie dolls by their company. In order to maintain the status of a "teenage fashion model," the Barbie company also cooperates with luxury goods companies. They invited luxury companies to create clothes for Barbie [4]. After cooperation was made, the Barbie doll entered the luxury goods ranks.

The advertisement of Barbie Doll Company can successfully market the image of Barbie doll, and it is inseparable from the popular culture and consumerism of American society at that time. When the Barbie doll was first created, it was defined as a symbol of "female beauty" and the "American dream"[5]. At the same time, the Barbie doll reflects the fusion of American cultures, such as success, charm, and wealth [5]. After the 1950s, the United States entered a comparative or competitive type of consumption [5]. People will compare to stars and celebrities. Such comparison is similar to setting a standard to prove that they are wealthy and successful and to satisfy their inner needs [5]. The Barbie doll is a toy that young girls use for comparison. The young girls will dress up these Barbie dolls to make them the most dazzling existence to satisfy their inner needs for "beauty."

Through the advertising strategy of Barbie Doll Company, the influence of Barbie Doll is not limited to young girls but the whole female group. Nevertheless, the impact will be more significant among young girls. In the following, we will focus on how Barbie influences young girls in their aesthetics and why Barbie has such a significant influence around the world.

## **3. Literature Review: Self-identity Aesthetic and Impact**

In terms of health, Barbie is severely malnourished. In addition, the original design of Barbie dolls was not for children but for men. With the advancement of the times, Barbie has been improved into a "mature" doll designed for children. However, the birth and popularity of Barbie dolls have negatively impacted children's aesthetics. For the phenomenon that Barbie dolls affect children's aesthetic deformity, Barbie dolls also have a certain impact on children's self-cognition. Speaking to self-cognition refers to insight and understanding of oneself, including self-observation and self-evaluation [7]. Self-observation is awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, and intentions. In some studies, it is known that Barbie dolls will lead children to prefer appearance features such as "tall", "thin" and "big eyes" [8]. This is because most parents buy toys for their children according to the market's sales volume. In addition, the product positioning and advertising of Barbie dolls are also

affected. Barbie became the first toy that parents bought for girls. Barbie dolls bring not only joy but also some harmful effects on children. Barbie dolls will become one of the ways for them to know social groups. Children will think that women with Barbie characteristics are beautiful women. For example, big eyes, red lips, long hair, and long legs. This will affect their development of self-awareness, so children want to become such people when they grow up and say these wishes in the first advertisement of Mattel of Barbie dolls in 19s there is a paper proving that Barbie dolls unconsciously influence girls playing with Barbie dolls. They will unconsciously choose long hair, red lips and slim characters. Not like other games, there are more than these costumes to choose from. Similarly, this is affecting their aesthetic cognition [9]. Children will judge their appearance by the figure of Barbie dolls. When they fail to meet the standard, it will significantly impact their psychology and life. For example, in the news, girls born to parents who own Barbie dolls are forced to play with Barbie dolls. This is because her parents believe that Barbie dolls are the norm in society.

Unlike other papers, this paper proves that Barbie dolls influence children's aesthetics. Not to prove that children prefer to look like Barbie dolls. This topic is of research value because, although this situation exists, there is no practical solution. After all, it is unreasonable to ban the production of Barbie dolls. However, changing Barbie's appearance and official character setting is possible.

To sum up, the negative impact of Barbie dolls has far exceeded the joy brought by her as a toy. Assuming that Barbie dolls cause children's aesthetic deformity, the most severe impact is that it has caused significant damage to the child's growth process. For example, children will choose to lose weight to achieve Barbie's figure, which will cause children to be unable to be healthy.

#### 4. Literature Review: Prevalence, Trend, and Disproportionate Body

Lastly, the prevalence of Barbie dolls may also cause body dissatisfaction in young girls. The ubiquitous Barbie doll was examined in the present study as a possible cause of young girls' body dissatisfaction [9]. However, no more research has been done on the reasons for large-scale body dissatisfaction in young girls. As reviewed in the previous paragraphs, children lack the realization of the disproportionate body of Barbie dolls. In this case, prevalence became one of the critical factors of the impact of Barbie dolls. As the first adult-shaped doll for kids, Barbie dolls satisfied the anticipation of young girls about the adult world. Barbie is the cultural icon of female beauty that provides an "aspirational role model" for young girls [10]. The concept advertisements of Barbie partly contributed to the prevalence, as reviewed above. Barbie doll ownership is widespread among young girls in many different countries, with an estimated 59% ownership rate among U.S. 4 to 7-year-olds and over 80% ownership rate among 6- to 9-year-old Australian girls. Barbie's high level of market penetration has led to the establishment of Barbie as an iconic representation of the female ideal [11]. The penetration of Barbie dolls in kids conversely contributed to the image of the "Teenage Fashion Model", which leads to further penetration. Within a crowded and competitive marketplace, the Barbie doll holds an iconic status as the best-selling fashion doll world-wide. Mattel estimates that 90% of girls between the ages of 3 and 10 own at least one Barbie doll. It is further estimated that over one billion Barbie dolls have been sold in over 150 countries, with three Barbie dolls being sold every second [12]. A more extreme data points out that "99% of 3- to 10-year-olds in the United States own at least one Barbie doll [10]."

It is possible that the high prevalence of Barbie dolls could have led to a trend in kids, which further penetrated the idol status of Barbie in young girls. Her status justifies Barbie's disproportionate body in kids' hearts. Comparing themselves to Barbie, girls would find their bodies problematic. Body dissatisfaction is thus formed, contributing to children's development of beauty standards. Research on trends and Barbie recognized the hypothesis. A few people always lead the fashion trend, and most people are just chasing the trend. Therefore, if a brand can become the famous object of a few people, it will attract more followers, thus producing a group linkage effect. Undoubtedly, Barbie dolls know

the way of fashion [4]. Sadly, no research has been done directly on the relationship between the body dissatisfaction of young girls and the possible trend between them.

In conclusion, research on three possible ways of impacting young girls' body dissatisfaction with Barbie dolls is reviewed. The first part reviews previous papers on product positioning, concept packaging, and advertisement. The second part reviews papers on children's perception of body structure and self-identity influenced by Barbie dolls. In the third part, prevalence, trend, and disproportionate body are reviewed around the influence they combined with having on young girls. However, no paper proved the reason behind the body dissatisfaction of young girls. By contrast, this research would provide a more comprehensive view of Barbie and beauty standards, which analyzes how Barbie may trigger the body dissatisfaction of young girls.

## 5. Methodology

Our study's subject is to explore Barbie's aesthetic impact on growing children. In the previous parts, we have used extensive literature to develop our hypothesis that Barbie dolls influence growing children's definition of beauty in advertising, self-perceptions, and fashion trends, and thus internalize their aesthetic standards, namely considering Barbie's body proportion as the classic beauty. The preceding are logical theoretical reasoning, but we will use data to prove our conjecture. To test and explore our hypothesis, we chose to find the relationship between Barbie and growing children in aesthetic norms through body dissatisfaction. Through data collection, we will use quantitative analysis in the paper to test our hypothesis. We selected data from Dittmar et al.'s experiment, The Effect of Experimental Exposure to Images of Dolls on the Body Image of 5 to 8-Year-Old Girls, to prove our idea. This experiment explores girls' responses and body image data to images of Barbie, Emme dolls, and no dolls [9]. The sample was drawn from 162 girls aged 5 to 8 from six elementary schools in East Sussex, southern England [9]. Over 90% of these girls were white from middle-class families [9]. These tested girls were taught according to the English National Curriculum in Year 1, 2, and 3 groups [9]. The test was conducted during normal class time, with each group lasting roughly 15 minutes with no more than 3 girls [9]. The girls were shown three sets of picture books representing Barbie dolls, Emme dolls (normal size dolls), and scenes without dolls [9]. After observing these picture books, the girls would select the picture books to represent their actual body, ideal, and ideal adult body sizes [9]. The experimenter assessed each girl's data on body esteem and body dissatisfaction [9]. The experimenter organized the data for the corresponding girls into tables by different age groups [9]. However, despite this, the sample size of the experimental data is far from sufficient, and all these sample data have limitations.

Table.1. Story Scenes and Images in Picture Books by Exposure Condition

Scene	Exposure condition		
	Images of Barbie	Images of Emme	Control images
"Mira" wakes up, sunny morning	Barbie getting dressed by bed	Emme in pajamas	Sunny meadow with flowers
Shopping for party outfit	Barbie in top and jeans	Emme in top and jeans	Windows of clothes shops
Trying on clothes in shops	Barbie in skirt and top	Emme in skirt and top	Clothes on hangers
New clothes and matching shoes	Barbie with trousers, top, and matching shoes	Emme with trousers, top, and and matching shoes	Collection of shopping bags
Supermarket on way home	Barbie in supermarket	Emme in different dress	Supermarket shelves
Getting ready for party	Barbie in long pink dress	Emme in long pink dress	Colorful balloon collection

There was no available image of Emme in a supermarket.

## 6. Analysis

For this experiment's data, we will focus on changes in body esteem and body dissatisfaction among girls of different ages who are still growing up. The experimenter assessed the tested girls and gave body self-esteem scores for girls of different ages. The scores ranged from 6-18, with higher scores indicating that the girl had higher physical self-esteem [9]. The experimenter calculated body dissatisfaction using the Child Figure Rating Scale by subtracting the girl's ideal body size score from her actual body size score [9,13]. A positive body dissatisfaction score means that the girl wants to grow, a negative body dissatisfaction score means that the girl wants to be thinner, and a score of 0 means that she has no body dissatisfaction [9,13].

By comparing the overall body self-esteem data for the Barbie, Emme doll, and control (no doll) picture books respectively, the overall body self-esteem mean values are 14.45, 15.62, and 14.96 [9]. We can find that the overall body self-esteem mean values for the girls who choose the Barbie picture book are the smallest, which also indicates that the girls who choose the Barbie picture book girls have the lowest body self-esteem. On the other hand, the girls who chose the Emme doll picture book had the highest value, which means they had the highest body self-esteem. The overall mean values of actual-ideal figure and actual adult ideal for body dissatisfaction of the girls who chose Barbie, Emme doll, and control picture book were -0.85, -0.45, -0.31, and -1.13, -1.00, -0.44 respectively [9]. In the data comparison, the girls who chose the Barbie picture book have the smallest values, meaning they are the most dissatisfied with their bodies and want to make themselves thinner. While the girls who chose control picture books had the highest data values and the lowest body dissatisfaction. By comparing the body dissatisfaction and body self-esteem scores of the different experimental groups, we can see that the Barbie doll has influenced the girls' judgments and requirements of their bodies to some extent, and they all have body dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in their bodies.

By analyzing the comparisons, we can also find out how Barbie affects girls' aesthetic standards from different age groups. We compare body dissatisfaction mean values of the actual ideal figure mean for Year1, Year2, and Year3 girls who chose Barbie and Emme doll picture books, which are -0.76, -0.85, -0.5, and 0.00, -0.44, -0.94 respectively [9]. Year3 girls who chose the Barbie picture book had the largest mean value, while Year3 girls who chose the Emme doll picture book had the smallest mean value. This data set of Year 3 girls with the lowest degree of dissatisfaction with Barbie's body but the highest degree of dissatisfaction with Emme dolls' body. This proves our idea that Barbie has influenced girls' aesthetics, and girls of a certain age have gradually accepted this "Barbie body norm", "thin is the standard" aesthetics, so, when they see barbie dolls, they do not produce an idea that wants to become thin like Year1 and 2 girls, but see Emme dolls is the most want to become thin because they do not want to become Emme doll, the "Barbie aesthetic" internalized into their aesthetic standards.

Similarly, we compared the values of body dissatisfaction mean to the actual ideal figure for Year1, Year2, and Year3 girls who chose the control picture book, with data values of 0.00, 0.00, and -0.97, respectively [9]. As usual, seeing a picture book without dolls does not affect body dissatisfaction, and the test result should be 0, like the results obtained by Year1 and 2 girls. But the Year3 girls got a negative value, in the absence of any dolls they want to be thin, which means they have internalized the "Barbie body" into their aesthetic that thin is the standard, so they will want to be thin.

## 7. Conclusion

To sum up, this paper proves that Barbie dolls do affect children's aesthetic outlook. Different from other papers, this paper focuses on the research to prove this phenomenon positively, rather than through other ways. In addition, the focus of this paper is to prove this phenomenon from many aspects and perspectives, such as poster advertising, video advertising, global sales of Barbie dolls,



and the number of Barbie dolls per capita. In the first part, this proves the hypothesis of this paper many times: Barbie dolls affect children's aesthetic outlook. In view of the significance of this study, first of all, we hope to confirm this phenomenon and publish a paper so that more readers can understand and clearly understand this phenomenon. This can prevent the deterioration of this phenomenon and avoid irreversible consequences. This article is highly compatible with other papers on Barbie dolls, making it more convincing. Secondly, as the summary of related articles, this paper has summarised the main content and sublimated the theme, making the research on Barbie dolls more critical. Finally, this article focuses on the real impact of Barbie dolls on children, which is closer to life, so this article can serve as a warning to readers and contribute to reducing the negative impact of Barbie dolls on children.

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