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STORY

Barbie



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DOLLS, CLOTHES,
CARS, AND HOUSES



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NEW YORK
FASHION WEEK
"ONE-OF-A-KIND"
BARBIE®
2014

Why We Love Barbie

When we see her, we see our dreams
and hopes for our future.

BY MARIA SPEIDEL

WHY WE LOVE Barbie



H

HELLO, BARBIE!
In her tiny stilettos, Barbie teetered into our lives on March 9, 1959, at the American International Toy Fair in New York. "Teen-Age Fashion Model" Barbara Millicent

Roberts sported a black-and-white striped one-piece bandeau bathing suit and gold hoop earrings, and came with a pair of sunglasses. As for options, she had either a blonde or brunette ponytail and poofy bangs. The Mattel company of Hawthorne, California — also the birthplace of American icons Marilyn Monroe and the Beach Boys — suggested a retail price of \$3. Extra outfits cost \$1 to \$5.

Many of the toy buyers in attendance at the fair, including the all-powerful one from Sears (with a popular mail-order catalog, retailer Sears was arguably the Amazon of its day) passed on the 11.5-inch high doll with breasts. But not for long. With a boost from advertising during ABC's *The Mickey Mouse Club* beaming directly to Mattel's desired →



BARBIE®
1959

HONORING A CLASSIC

Three-year-old fan Lyla Mulcahy (opposite page, left) admired a copy of Barbie® as she was sold in 1959 (and advertised in her first commercial, opposite page, below) to celebrate the doll's 50th anniversary on March 7, 2009, at London toy emporium Hamleys. Another version (right) was displayed 10 years later in New York City at the Barbie® 60th Anniversary Pop-Up Experience, a one-day event featuring a shop and an art exhibit exploring Barbie's history and legacy.



WHY WE LOVE Barbie

BARBIE® AND KEN® FASHIONISTAS™ 2020

A NEW ERA

At the 2020 Spielwarenmesse in Nuremberg, Germany — the largest annual toy industry trade show held in the world — Mattel unveiled the newest editions to its Fashionistas™ line, including the first Ken® doll with long hair (below, center), and a Barbie® with a gold prosthetic leg (far right).



ANDY WARHOL BARBIE® COLLECTOR GOLD LABEL® 2017

consumers, Barbie was soon selling out at the shops that *did* take a risk on her. High heels be damned, Barbie moved.

Sixty-four years on, artist Andy Warhol has immortalized her. Balmain and Vera Wang have designed for her. Barbie has run for president, been to the moon, and dabbled in some 200 careers from a nurse, doctor, teacher, CEO, and rapper to a ballerina, dentist, vet, firefighter, and computer scientist. She has been created in the form of celebrities from 1960s model Twiggy to transgender actor Laverne Cox and environmentalist Jane Goodall. Frannie, the first Black doll made in the Barbie mold, debuted in 1967, ushering in a wave of Barbies in a full range of ethnicities, skin tones, and nationalities from Thai to Moroccan.

Barbie reigns over a multiverse that includes some 45 categories of products starting with the classic Barbie doll; her stalwart boyfriend, Ken; all their friends and family; the Dreamhouse; clothing for children and adults; and food, like Barbie Funables fruit →

WHY WE LOVE Barbie



PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT BARBIE®
2016

CAMERA READY
While Barbie (Margot Robbie) look Ken (Ryan Gosling) on an adventure beyond Barbie Land in the 2023 film *Barbie* (opposite page), the doll has hit the presidential campaign trail in every federal election year since 1992 (except 1990). Here, in 2016, was the first all-female ticket.



snacks. Sold in 150 countries, the brand earned about \$1.49 billion in 2022. (Notably, Barbie never flourished in India and has at times been banned in countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia.) There are animated shows and streaming movies, a YouTube channel (with 11.3 million subscribers), and a live-action feature film starring Margot Robbie and directed by Greta Gerwig due July 21, 2023.

It all began when Mattel's Ruth Handler had an epiphany while watching her daughter, Barbara, playing animatedly with paper dolls who represented adults, a stark contrast with how she interacted with the more popular baby dolls of the time. "There was a definite need for a different kind of doll that would give girls the chance to interpret the adult world in all sorts of ways," Handler wrote in the foreword to 2000's *Barbie: A Visual Guide to the Ultimate Fashion Doll*.

Unforeseen by Handler, Barbie's unrealistic figure would be blamed for perpetuating gender stereotypes and contributing to

body dysmorphia. She has been called materialistic, especially in 1992 when Teen Talk Barbie spouted bon mots like "Let's go shopping," and "Math class is tough."

Still, we continue to love Barbie. Writing in 2010's *The Good, The Bad, and The Barbie: A Doll's History and Her Impact on Us*, novelist Meg Cabot (*The Princess Diaries*) wrote, "How Barbie looked was never the issue. Not to the girls who loved her. It was what she taught us that mattered. And what she taught us was that, like Barbie, we could be anything we wanted to be."

Author M.G. Lord, who wrote 1994's *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll*, references Hopi Indian dolls, Carl Jung, and ancient mother cults to get to the core of Barbie's meaning. "In Barbie's universe, women are not the second sex... Critics who ignore Barbie's mythic dimension often find fault with her lifestyle... Of course Barbie inhabits a prelapsarian paradise of consumer goods; she has never been exiled from the garden." **B**



Sign of the Times

Through missteps and misjudgments,
Barbie has endured, taking on all comers
and forging a path ahead.

BY MARIA SPEIDEL



SIGN OF THE TIMES

VIDEO GIRL™ BARBIE® 2010



SHARE A SMILE™ BECKY® 1996

F

FOR ALL THE POSITIVES creator Ruth Handler envisioned her doll could bring about, tiny Barbie has also long been held up as a mirror of society's ills, and the foil for a sometimes blundering corporation. She has been accused of everything from perpetuating harmful gender roles to cyber espionage.

From the moment Barbie debuted as a teenage fashion model in 1959, her idealized



BARBIE™ AND KEN™ FASHIONISTAS™ 2020

mature figure was a symbol of hyper, unrealistic femininity and seemed to put pressure on girls to be thin, most directly with 1965's Slumber Party Barbie, who had a diet book that said, "Don't Eat!" Social scientists have studied her effect on children every which way and the results are damning. For instance, some calculate that a life-size Barbie would be an unrealistic 5'9", 110 pounds, with a 39" bust, 18" waist, 33" hips, and size 3 shoes. And a 2006 study in *Developmental Psychology* said that 5- to 8-year-old girls who had Barbies were less confident about

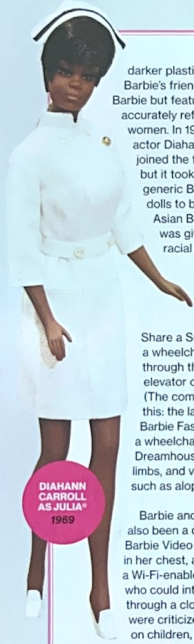
their bodies and wanted to be thinner than girls who did not have Barbies.

"She was everything we didn't want to be and were being told to be," feminist icon and former *Ms.* magazine editor Gloria Steinem says in the 2018 Hulu documentary *Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie*. In February 1972, feminists leafleted the annual Toy Fair saying Barbie, along with other fashion dolls, were sexist and "encouraged little girls to see themselves solely as mannequins, sex objects or housekeepers," according to *The New York Times*. Stereotypes

die hard: Barbie went on to have some 200 incredible jobs from astronaut to presidential candidate, but a 2010 book, *Barbie: I Can Be a Computer Engineer*, had programmer Barbie needing male co-workers to make a video game and fix a virus.

The path to racial equality has been equally rough. Mattel's first Black doll in the Barbie line, 1967's "Colored Francie," came out when that label was already an offensive anachronism. Plus, Black Francie was made from the exact same mold as white Francie, just using

SIGN OF THE Times



DIAHANN CARROLL AS JULIA® 1969

darker plastic. The next year, Christie, Barbie's friend, had the same body as Barbie but features and hair that more accurately reflected those of Black women. In 1969, Julia, modeled after actor Diahann Carroll's TV nurse, joined the force of working Barbies, but it took 11 more years for generic Black and Latina Barbie dolls to be introduced. In 1981, an Asian Barbie was launched but was given the now-outdated racial label Oriental Barbie.

Likewise, Mattel's first attempts at making a doll with disabilities, 1997's Share a Smile Becky, used a wheelchair that could not fit through the door or into the elevator of Barbie's Dreamhouse. (The company has corrected this: the latest models of the Barbie Fashionistas doll have a wheelchair that fits in the Dreamhouse, dolls with prosthetic limbs, and various skin conditions, such as alopecia and vitiligo.)

Barbie and technology have also been a dicey mix. Both 2010's Barbie Video Girl, who had a camera in her chest, and 2015's Hello, Barbie, a Wi-Fi-enabled Barbie akin to Siri who could interact with a child through a cloud-based system, were criticized as ways of spying on children, security risks, and potential tools for pedophiles.

On a pure toy extension level, Barbie had some unsuccessful iterations: 1975's Growing Up Skipper, who grew an inch taller and developed breasts when her left arm was turned all the way around counterclockwise; 1997's Oreo Fun Barbie, specifically the Black version as Mattel apparently was not aware that Oreo was a racial slur; and 2003's Midge & Baby Happy Family set, who had a tiny baby hidden below a belly flap.

It's hard to predict what Barbie's next kerfuffle will be, but odds are, she will survive. **B**

Visible change

On April 25, 2023, Mattel introduced the world to a Barbie with Down syndrome, complete with her own ankle foot orthotics, and an ensemble with butterflies and shades of blue and yellow, the symbols and colors that represent Down syndrome awareness. "It was an honor working with Barbie on the Barbie doll with Down syndrome," said Kandi Pickard, president and CEO of the National Down Syndrome Society. "This means so much for our community, who for the first time, can play with a Barbie doll that looks like them. This Barbie serves as a reminder that we should never underestimate the power of representation." As part of their ongoing inclusion efforts, Mattel introduced a doll with a hearing aid in 2022 (below).



FASHIONISTAS™ BARBIE® 2023

FASHIONISTAS™ BARBIE® 2022



DAWN™



BARBIE™ AND DARCI™



FULLA™

New Girls on the Block

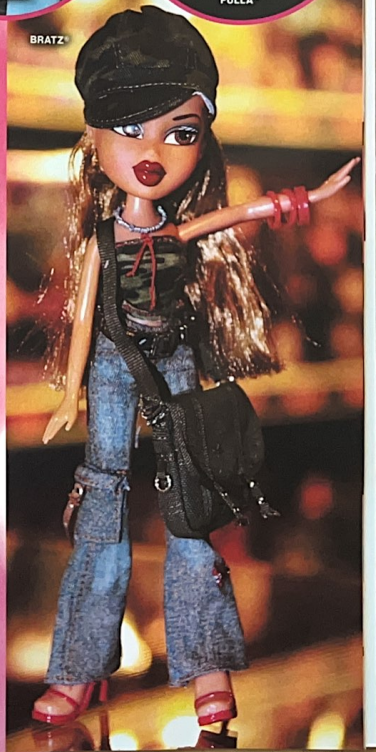
Dawn
Introduced in 1970, at 6½ inches tall, Dawn dolls were shorter than Barbie – and shorter-lived as their manufacturer, Topper, went bankrupt in 1973. Like early Barbie, Dawn and her friends were models, who for a brief, disco-drenched early 70s moment, held their own against the statuesque Barbie.

Darci
Produced by Kenner in 1978, Darci Cover Girl was yet another model. Taller (at 12.5 inches) and more realistically proportioned than Barbie, Darci, too, discovered the cruelties of the doll-making industry; she only lasted until 1981.

Bratz
An inch and a half shorter than Barbie, with an oversized head and large almond eyes evocative of Margaret Keane paintings, Bratz challenged Barbie's fashion-doll dominance. Since 2001, the racially ambiguous Bratz have

cut into Barbie's sales and kicked up a lot of controversies. The American Psychological Association criticized them for sexualizing young girls, and their manufacturer, MGA Entertainment, got mired in a legal battle with Mattel, which claimed they owned rights to the Bratz since their designer, Carter Bryant, had been working for Mattel while developing the dolls.

Fulla
There are some hijab-wearing Barbies, but in the Arab world, Fulla – named for a type of jasmine – is the princess. Introduced in 2003 and sold by Dubai's NewBoy, Fulla looks a lot like Barbie but is marketed with qualities appealing to Muslim values. Fulla comes with a pink prayer rug, likes to pray, and wears modest clothing, which can include a hijab or abaya. She does not have a boyfriend.



BRATZ™

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