

Amaranthus

Volume 1996 | Issue 1

Article 3

1-30-2013

The Curse of Being Barbie

Mary Holstege
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus>

Recommended Citation

Holstege, Mary (1996) "The Curse of Being Barbie," *Amaranthus*: Vol. 1996: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1996/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Amaranthus by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Mary Holstege *The Curse of Being Barbie*

Barbie seems to lead a good life. She has more worldly goods than Donald Trump, and she doesn't even have to worry about paying taxes. But how good can it really be? Barbie's life was not merely given to her to accept or decline. It was forced on her with no consideration as to whether she wanted it or not.

Most people have at least some say in what their lives are like. Barbie, on the other hand, doesn't get to decide anything. Say, for example, that you don't like the color pink. Okay, you can avoid pink. What if Barbie doesn't like the color pink? She has to live with it and even pretend to like it. Moreover, she is given many toys, and not only were they made with someone else in mind, but she didn't ask for them in the first place and had no vote in what they turned out to be.

Barbie does not seem like a greedy individual. In fact, with her happy smile she looks giving and caring, exactly the opposite of greedy. But surrounded by a large townhouse, horses and a closet full of clothes, that innocent smile could almost be mistaken for one of selfishness.

Barbie does not have these luxuries because she wants them all. What woman could handle all of this? No, I'm sure that she would welcome a long vacation. Contrary to most popular beliefs, Barbie's life is not a continual vacation. After relaxing in the pool, then taking a therapeutic horseback ride, then lounging in the three-story townhouse and finishing off the day by going shopping for some new miniskirts, who feels rested? Plus she probably has to go to work the next day, as either Doctor Barbie or Firefighter Barbie or Businesswoman Barbie, just to pay the fictitious bills for her fabulous lifestyle.

Barbie is definitely the victim here. A rigorous lifestyle was thrown on her so somebody could reap the rewards, yet this someone is certainly not Barbie. The real winners in this situation are Barbie's creators and the people who design all of this great paraphernalia for her. Years ago, Barbie, with her all-American pearly white smile and long killer legs, stole America's heart away. Ever since she has been given more and more things, more houses, more vehicles, and more clothes than anyone could ever hope for.

Yet these were not created to make Barbie happy or to motivate little girls to succeed. The person who created Pizza Party Barbie, complete with Pizza Hut and spatulas, was thinking only of himself. He was not considering that the pizza would make Barbie worry about gaining weight or that perhaps this was not a good nutritional example for someone of Barbie's status to set. Rather, he contemplated making some good money if the idea caught on.

The excess of accessories may have the famous "B" engraved on them, but really they were made for the enjoyment of little girls. The pink canopy bed was not made so Barbie could sleep well, but so a child who always wanted a canopy bed could have one, indirectly.

Similarly Equestrian Barbie and her horse were made for the child in 4-H to give her something to do when it was raining outside or too dark to ride. Or for the girl who loves horses but doesn't have one. This child can have a horse, but not the responsibility associated with owning a horse. Barbie's horse never has to be cleaned or fed, doesn't smell, and takes up a

limited amount of space. Little girls everywhere may be convinced that owning a horse is a breeze, and they mercilessly beg their parents for a pony.

Even the Barbie car is not totally for Barbie's enjoyment. Barbie would get very tired walking to the mall, and everyone knows that designer shoes were not made for walking in anyway. Think of how embarrassing it would be to show up at a party on foot! So Barbie has a car. That means that Barbie also needs insurance and probably road service, too. And now she becomes the continuous car pool driver. Skipper is too young to drive, and what man, even Ken, would be caught dead driving a pink convertible?

Recently, Barbie's parents had another daughter. They named her Kelly, and along with Skipper and Stacey, they dumped her on Barbie and left for yet another vacation in the Bermuda Triangle. Complete with crib and bottle, Barbie gets to play mother. Again. Barbie's parents are like her creators, lurking unseen in the background, enjoying what Barbie gives them, and taking no responsibility for the mess they leave her in.

Wedding Barbie is also available, equipped with every girl's fantasy dress, a huge white gown. Yet I have never seen a Honeymoon Barbie or a Wife Barbie. Was Barbie left at the altar? This is hardly a reasonable suggestion. It seems as if she is suspended in perpetual wedding animation, getting a fantastic wedding, but never getting to experience the joys of married life. Still she smiles, bearing her cross patiently.

Barbie does in fact symbolize greed. She symbolizes the American dream and then some. But poor Barbie is not the cause or the guilty party. The greed lies in her makers, who love the money Barbie brings them. A Barbie is created for every girl and every situation possible, except anything blatantly negative. So the makers do have some restrictions, only because they know that negative values will not sell. Otherwise, I believe that they would be promoting Cigarette Barbie, complete with a carton of pink carcinogens and a complimentary Zippo with a "B" engraved on it.

Recently, there was a controversy because a new talking Barbie said, "Math is hard." Well, math is hard. I think that most of the people in the world would agree with that. So what is the big deal? Experts said that girls who played with this doll would have less motivation to try hard in math class. So now Barbie is being censored.

But what about Barbie's male counterpart, GI Joe? He is no teacher of good mores. Saying that school is difficult would be the least of his faults. If toys are supposed to motivate, what good are Joe's hand grenades and machine guns? Why is it that girls are compelled to consider the responsibilities of real life while boys are allowed to frolic in a fantasy land? Barbie is compelled to be a role model while GI Joe gets to be the good-time guy.

Barbie faces obstacles in being a role model. Her plethora of possessions causes girls to look at her and want what she has. Greed once again enters the picture, and Barbie stands helplessly on the sidelines, unable to stop the green-eyed monster from overtaking her human makers and consumers. If Barbie were a real person, I'm sure she would tell them all that it is not easy to be Barbie. The responsibilities are enormous, and the rewards are few.