

# Argument persuasion

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



Barbie dolls have been faithful companions of American girls for generations. Millions of young American women have grown going to sleep with their glamorous companions. Now, however, more and more feminist voices are rising to accuse Barbies of stereotyping girls' perceptions of their bodies, making them strive for unattainable ideals.

Emily Praeger in “ Our Barbies, Ourselves” vindicates the producers of toys for instilling in girls harmful stereotypes, creating unrealistic expectations of men that taint love life for years after, and showing a cold sexless world instead of real love. To many, these worries may seem overdrawn.

However, a closer look of issues involved in the Barbie controversy reveals that concerns of mothers and the community have valid reasons. These elegant dolls do affect young girls, creating body stereotypes that often last a lifetime, negatively impacting the life of an adult woman.

### 1. The Role of Toys in Child Education

In the first place, toys do play a role in a child's upbringing, and a very serious one. Rachel Karniol and Amir Aida (1997) state that gender stereotypes heavily influence the games with toys in which children engage in their childhood.

The use of toys that corresponds to their gender stereotypes is important for most children, so that girls prefer to engage with toys depicting women and boys with toys portraying men. Even the notion of ‘ badness’ in children stems from the moment when they “ draw an inference that violating gender stereotypes is bad” (Karniol & Aida 1997: 2).

The research about children who condemn other children breaking toys revealed that girls “judged toy breakers who violated gender stereotypes more severely than toy breakers who did not violate gender stereotypes” (Karniol & Aida 1997: 10). This was an experiment with preschool kids that shows the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes. From our early years, they shape our perceptions of the outside world. We know that girls should play with Barbie dolls, and boys with men toys and cars and toy weapons.

The images imprinted on the young girl’s mind. When she consistently sees a portrayal of a beautiful woman with large breasts, thin waist, and long legs at the time when her own gender stereotypes are formed, she will inevitably retain this image on the subconscious level well into her adulthood.

## 2. Childhood Impressions Lead to Adult Problems

With time, the imprinting that occurred on the childhood level can cause serious conflicts in the time when a woman has fully grown. The problem can get especially painful if the girl’s appearance happens to be very different from the Barbie image.

This can be seen in the story of Graciela H. Rogriguez, an 18-year-old Latino girl who ended in prison when she tried to improve her appearance by dropping from size seven to size three in a short while, responding to the recommendations of an agent whom she wanted to hire her as an actress or a model.

There is clearly a problem with the fashion industry if it will not accept anybody out of proportion, and even more so with the actor’s profession that, as we all hope, should bring talent on the screen, not breasts or

buttocks. But there is equally the problem with the girl who will accept such treatment of her body - perhaps because she had been pre-programmed in her childhood that her body is wrong because of its size.

The problem is clearly not just the Barbies; instead, it lies in the whole fashion and movie industry that makes women strive for one single ideal that is out of reach of many. Of these influences, Barbies also form an important part. It is the type of stereotyping that makes girls like Graciela feel “depressed, thinking [she] would never look like model because [she] came from a line of full-figured Mexican women (Rogriguez).

Having been brainwashed with the unattainable ideal in her childhood, the girl may spend the rest of her life struggling with normalising her body image. It seems simple to feel positive about one’s body, yet today’s womanhood cannot come to terms with their own bodies.

The childhood stereotypes are too strong, the real-life women too far away from these ideals (excluding plastic surgery, of course), and the psychological crisis becomes inevitable. Ophira, the editor of AdiosBarbies.com in her travels around the world has found body image to be “a topic that people of all walks — male and female alike — can get passionate about” (Ophira).

### 3. Are Concerns over Barbies Just Empty Fantasies?

While many point to Barbies as source of problems with body image, there is also opposition to this viewpoint. The opponents of Barbie’s importance suggest treating the doll’s unnatural appearance as a minor problem.

For example, the Editors of Mothers Who Think ridicule the recent shift in the fashion industry that has created Barbies of healthier and more real-life proportions. Instead, they call the allegations against the favourite toys of generations “ the paranoid fantasies of conspiracists who'd like us to believe that the doll is an agent of antifeminist mind control” (So What’s It All About, Barbie?). The claim that the slim toy is “ being partly responsible for eating disorders in teenage girls as well as breast implants and cosmetic surgery in adult women” is proclaimed ridiculous (So What’s It All About, Barbie?).

However, the question arises then who is at all responsible. Few would say that Barbie is the only culprit. It is a combination of influences that occur throughout one’s formative years. The Barbie and other toys, however, play a major role by occurring early in a girl’s lifetime, and there is little reason why this harmful influence should be not corrected.

## Conclusion

The fashion industry and toy manufactures have a responsibility to those they affect with their well-crafted work. Their produce does affect an average girl’s body image, and while there are problems, they are also partly responsible. Gender stereotypes are formed early in our lives and are found already in preschool kids.

Toys and images found in glossy magazines are simply bound to exert influence on these stereotypes, and few can deny the link between this propaganda of sexy slim bodies and later problems with girls who feel uneasy about their bodies. The pervasiveness of problems with the body image makes it difficult to deny that in this particular case the toy is not just

a toy – it is a symbol, a cultural phenomenon, and an educational tool – and because of this, it has to be produced by responsible people evaluating its repercussions.

### Bibliography

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