

Barbie doll and its development history

[Design](#), [Fashion](#)



The American toy-company, Mattel manufactures the fashion doll, Barbie. The first doll came in to the market by March, 1959. The first colored Barbie doll however was manufactured in 1967 and with it came with a lot of controversies of racisms; claimed to have been produced using the existing head molds for the white dolls and lacked African characteristics other than a dark skin.

As part of their promotional efforts in marketing the Barbie doll, the Mattel together with Nabisco, a biscuit company, launched a cross-promotion of Barbie with Oreo Cookies. The Mattel, as always manufactured both the black and white versions of the doll. Racisms allegations came along with African American Community terming it that the Oreo was a derogatory term meaning that the person is “ black on the outside and white on the inside,” like the chocolate sandwich cookie itself.

The 2013 protests against the Barbie doll in Berlin had both the elements of racism and sexism. The females protesting and not males with “ pink stinks” remarks, and not any color is a clear indication of how the Barbie doll is perceived across the cultures. Despite the challenges on racism and sexism, the Barbie doll has had a significant impact on societal norms and values by portraying female independence representing a good life-style that can be exchanged with amongst friends. The Mattel, being a multinational firm has enjoyed its presence globally leading to a hegemonic domination as compared to other dolls in the United States, and to the rest of the world.

Racism is an antagonism belief that one’s race abilities and characteristics are much more superior that it deserves a different class and perception

over the other races. Sexism on the other hand is a form of discrimination based on a person's gender and more often inclined towards the female gender. With regard to Barbie's Berlin protests, the idea of racism and sexism is on the basis of females protesting and not males and or of transgender thereof. Remarks of "pink stinks" and not any other color can be seen as a racism connotation targeting a given group of people with a given skin color.

The Barbie doll Berlin's case raises three issues; neutrality, objectiveness and fairness in dealing with societal norms that faces the elements of discrimination. The firm should always uphold neutrality; considering people are equal regardless of their color, race or gender. The firm is in the business to make sales and generate revenues. How this is achieved should be objective, giving considerations to race and gender in their products, whether on consumption or in production state. The element of fairness is also at stake here. Had the firm manufactured all colored Barbie dolls, the issue of racism and sexism wouldn't have arisen.

Media have a role in spreading any issues on discrimination, whether perceived or real. The mainstream media will incline towards a given angle. As was seen in the Berlin, without media platforms, the Barbie doll, however much it might look to have had elements of racism and sexism would have gone global since the firm is multinational. The firm will nevertheless be forced to abandon the products if it cannot be inclusive in matters gender and race. Reports indicate that the Barbie doll revenue has been declining

since 2014. This further shows that the long effect on revenue due to customers not willing to buy the products.

Multinational companies will always have a marketing strategy aiming at a given market niche. They however take into considerations that discriminations based on gender; race and color are avoided at all cost. Their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) will always target their customers. In whichever the case, if racism and sexism are advocated by the firms in their products and services, how will they give back to their customers, the same customers to whom they are discriminating?

Sexism and racism comes as a result of diversity; how well the society understands the ideological and structural understandings of an individual dictates the wellbeing of a society and its forms of discrimination. To reduce sexism and racism, a liberal pluralist conception about diversity should be identified. “ The location of the source of oppression and change in individuals suggests an elision between ideological and structural understandings of power and domination and individual, psychological understandings of power.” (Mohanty, 1990).

Gramsci (1971) however notes that when an ideology becomes common sense, it will no longer be questioned. That is, if we are to assume that women, and by larger extent females in Berlin doesn't like pink Barbie dolls but instead like any other color, the company would have manufactured all other colored Barbie dolls except those pink and the idea of racism wouldn't have arisen.

Racism and sexism should however be fought collectively and not individually by seeing it as systematic and interpersonal. “ The first thing we must do, regardless of whether we belong to minority groups, is to break the conspiracy of silence that has ensured the perpetuation of sexism, racism, and other forms of marginalization and exclusion.” (Ng, 2000)