

"girl" and barbie doll essay



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In the past, women were always considered the subordinate gender that was expected to powder their nose and stay at home to be a homemaker. Even now, despite the movement to liberate women from stereotypical gender roles, women are still seen as the inferior gender that is discriminated against in society. As suggested by the popular Barbie doll created by Mattel, the idealized image of a woman in our patriarchal society is one who takes care of the home and is flawlessly beautiful with perfect skin, long legs, small waist, and slender figure. The Barbie doll is used as a tool for patriarchy in that it reinforces the notion that women should be domestic workers and maintain a feminine outer appearance. Also, patriarchal values affect girls starting at a young age as they unconsciously begin to believe that Barbie is what a woman should look and be like. With the appeal and popularity of this doll for the past several years, it is difficult to alter the notions of womanhood suggested by this doll.

This implies that patriarchy is something we can not permanently overthrow because it is so deeply rooted in our society. In contrast, the short story "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid suggests that women are sentenced to patriarchy as a result of socially constructed gender stereotypes. She criticizes the idealized patriarchal norms and pressures which overshadow the lives of women. Starting early on in their childhood, little girls are explicitly exposed to the pressures and expectations of how they should live. As a result of gender stereotypes, young girls are brainwashed to believe that their role as a woman is a domestic homemaker and that they should always be kept and maintain a feminine outer appearance. Kincaid ultimately criticizes how

women and girls are trapped under a system of patriarchy that can not be erased.

Concurrently, both the Barbie doll and " Girl" suggest that socially constructed gender stereotypes begin to affect girls early on in their life. Girls are taught to be feminine, and they grow up already exposed to the ideal standards they should fulfill as a woman. The Barbie doll and " Girl" also suggest that the notion of womanhood is characterized by gender stereotypes such as domesticity and a feminine outer appearance. Whether it is in the workforce or even at home, women are still plastered with the role of being a domestic worker. For example, a woman who works a fulltime job is still expected to go home and take care of her family. Women are expected to fulfill this socially constructed gender role, which eventually confines them under patriarchy.

As a result, women are unable to hold equal jobs as men or gain the same respect as men in the workforce. Therefore, this suggests that women are considered the inferior gender, and our society is surrounded by patriarchal values, which are considered the norm. We are both consciously and unconsciously affected by these patriarchal notions, so this suggests that, despite the measures to overthrow this system of patriarchy, it is ultimately something that will still be a part of dominant culture. The popular Barbie doll presents a body image of a woman that is flawless and characterized by femininity, suggesting that this is the ideal body image of a woman. Barbie's overall slender body with long legs, a small waist, and full chest is unrealistic, yet it is still viewed by society as the ideal body type. For

example, the first impression of a woman who is tall and slender is more positive compared to a woman who is shorter and heavier.

With this in mind, young girls become negatively influenced by the stereotypical body image presented by the Barbie doll. They begin to believe that as a woman, they must emulate Barbie's image, so they long to have Barbie's perfect complexion, smooth hair, and make-upped face. In relation to body image, the Barbie doll also presents an idealized image of a woman that is characterized by femininity. For example, Barbie is usually sold wearing a gown, dress, skirt, or floral printed clothing, which no Ken doll will be found wearing. Also, the common color for Barbie is pink, which is considered a feminine color.

The fact that this notion of femininity is so deeply rooted in our society, affects women in a negative way, pressuring them to attain an unrealistic body image and a feminine outer appearance. Ultimately, this notion that is associated with women leads them to feel inferior and weaker compared to men. As young girls grow up surrounded by the perfect image of the Barbie doll, they begin not only to feel pressured to obtain an idealized body image, but also to believe that it is the norm for women to be domestic workers. The accessories sold with the Barbie doll illuminate the implication that women should be domestic workers.

For example, the Kitchen Barbie doll comes fully equipped with pots, cooking utensils, apron, oven mitts, and baked goods. She comes packaged in a mini kitchen with an oven, refrigerator, and sink. As young girls play with this doll, they build a positive and fun association with working in the kitchen, and this

encourages them to do the same in the future. In addition, the accessories sold with the Babysitter Barbie doll also suggest that women should be domestic workers.

The accessories sold with this doll include a television set, DVD, stuffed animal doll, and Kelly. Barbie is responsible of taking care of Kelly, and this reinforces the notion that women should fulfill the domestic role of housewife and mother. As young girls grow up surrounded by these dolls, they become influenced to hold similar jobs in the future, so this suggests that the Barbie doll may be considered a tool for patriarchy. The longstanding notion that women should be domestic workers and maintain a feminine outer appearance and the fact that girls are exposed to patriarchal values at a young age suggest that women cannot escape from patriarchy. They are surrounded by patriarchal values, and no matter what measures are taken to challenge those values, women still cannot completely escape from patriarchy.

For example, the creation of Doctor Barbie and Sporty Barbie attempt to liberate women from stereotypical gender roles. Doctor Barbie attempts to break the idealized notion of domesticity, and she comes fully equipped with a lab coat, stethoscope, and clipboard. However, her lab coat is pink, and she also comes with two new born babies and all the equipment needed to keep them healthy. Despite her "liberating" role as a doctor, Barbie is still associated with domesticity, which reinforces the stereotypical notion that women are characterized by domesticity. In addition, the creation of Sporty Barbie attempts to break the stereotypical notion of femininity. Sports are

mostly considered highly active, competitive, and aggressive, and it is more commonly associated with men.

But Sporty Barbie seems to send the message that women can play sports too. However, the sport that Barbie "plays" is yoga. Yoga is considered a woman's exercise, so this reinforces the stereotypical notion that women should be characterized by femininity. Ultimately, this sends the message to young girls that women are able to fill similar roles as men, but in the end, they will still be characterized by domesticity and femininity. In contrast, while the Barbie doll may be considered a tool for patriarchy, in "Girl," Kincaid criticizes patriarchy, arguing that it confines women to stereotypical gender roles and ultimately, makes them feel inferior. While young girls are influenced to believe that they should emulate Barbie's body image, Kincaid argues, through the use of diction, which creates a condescending tone, that young girls are forcefully pressured and commanded to fulfill the standards of idealized patriarchal norms.

This ultimately has a negative affect on them and leads them to feel inferior. For example, diction such as "don't," "always," "this is how you should...," and "make sure to..." suggest that the girl is being pressured and forced to prescribe to society's ideals of womanhood (485-86). Young girls are not given the opportunity to challenge those ideals, which suggests that they are trapped under patriarchy. Also, the older woman who is speaking to the girl continually commands the girl to be lady-like and "not like the slut [she] is so bent on becoming" (485). This suggests how the young girl feels pressured, not only by men but even by women, to live according to society's idealized standards of womanhood. The pressure that is forcefully

placed on the young girl by the older woman suggests a feeling of inferiority directed towards the young girl, which creates a condescending tone.

The young girl is prescribed numerous rules that she must follow as a woman such as how to set the table for different occasions and how to cook certain dishes. This ultimately illuminates Kincaid's criticism of how girls are pressured and forced to adhere to idealized patriarchal norms starting at a young age. While Barbie subtly reinforces the idealized notion of womanhood, Kincaid criticizes how women are idealized to be domestic workers. Kincaid utilizes images of domesticity and femininity to criticize the stereotypical gender roles that are thrust upon women and young girls.

By listing detailed rules and standards such as " wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry," Kincaid criticizes how women are labeled to domesticity and that their only role is to complete household tasks such as these (485). The girl is also told " this is how you sweep a corner; this is how you sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard" (486). The girl is given directions on how she should cook, set the table, sew, iron, do laundry, grow plants, and make medicine, which are all considered domestic tasks. These images of domesticity fit the stereotypical gender role that women are expected to fulfill. In tandem, Kincaid also uses images of femininity to criticize how women are socially expected to maintain a feminine and more hygienic outer appearance.

The girl is told " don't walk barehead in the sun; ...always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; ...on Sundays try to

walk like a lady; ...be sure to wash every day, even if it is with your own spit" (485-86). These images of maintaining a feminine outer appearance represent the pressure that is placed on women to fit the criteria of an idealized woman. For example, the fact that the girl must resort to washing herself with her own spit suggests that society views hygiene and a feminine outer appearance as very important aspects of idealized womanhood. Women feel pressured to fit this idealized description of womanhood because they don't have much of a choice. They may attempt to challenge society's views on womanhood, but ultimately, they lack power or influence in this society that is so deeply rooted in patriarchy.

While the creation of Doctor Barbie and Sporty Barbie attempt to liberate women from stereotypical gender roles, Kincaid, on the other hand, manipulates structure to suggest that women cannot completely escape from idealized patriarchal norms. The content of the story consists of rules and demands women must follow, so the justified paragraph structure suggests that women and young girls are being contained and are unable to break free from those strict and rigid rules. The justified paragraph creates an image of an immovable block, which suggests that women are confined to patriarchal norms and patriarchy is something that cannot be permanently abolished. Another example which implies the same message is the grammatical structure of the story. Kincaid chooses to write the whole story as one long sentence, and the significance of this lies in the definition of the word sentence.

More commonly, a sentence is defined as a unit of words that expresses an independent thought. However, an alternative definition for sentence is " to <https://assignbuster.com/girl-barbie-doll-essay/>

condemn to punishment. " This strengthens Kincaid's argument that women and girls are condemned to patriarchy. Kincaid criticizes patriarchy, arguing that it is punishment for women, in that they are unable to escape from the idealized notion of womanhood and viewed as the inferior gender. Yet another example of the use of structure to suggest that women are confined to patriarchy is the use of italicized phrases in the story.

The two italicized phrases in the story represent the girl's responses, as she is being bombarded with all the rules and expectations she must fulfill. When the girl is told that she must not " sing benna in Sunday school," she responds by saying " but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school" (485). Also, when the girl is told to " always squeeze the bread to make sure it's fresh," she responds by questioning " but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread? (486). The limited responses suggest that the girl has no power to voice her concerns, and the nature of these responses suggest that she is confused and uncertain about the validity of the tasks that she must carry out. More importantly, this suggests that women are trapped under patriarchy and confined to stereotypical gender roles. The notion that women should be submissive ultimately leads them to feel inferior in comparison to men.

In conclusion, both the Barbie doll and " Girl" reinforce the notion that patriarchy is all around us and we become influenced by it starting at a young age. Kincaid criticizes how women are trapped under patriarchy and questions the notions of womanhood prescribed by dominant culture. Dominant culture characterizes women with domesticity and femininity, but recently there have been some attempts to liberate women from the

stereotypical gender roles. However, even though women attain similar jobs as men, they are still unable to escape from patriarchal norms because the social systems they are part of exist because of patriarchy. It is so deeply rooted in our culture's history that a life without patriarchy is unknown.

Women are clearly aware of the idealized notions of womanhood that surround them, yet why do they still adhere to those notions of womanhood? For both men and women, there is no model to emulate for a life without patriarch. If dominant culture is so powerful and influential, and if women knowingly prescribe to patriarchal norms, how can women ever escape from patriarchy? Works Cited Kincaid, Jamaica. " Girl. " Dimensions of Culture 3: Imagination. Ed. Nancy Gilson, Cristin McVey, and Abraham Shragge.

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