

Barbie Brand Audit

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A. The Brand Inventory

Mattel Inc. is an American multinational toy manufacturer which produces pFisher-Price, Barbie, Polly Pocket, Hot Wheels, American Girl, and other recognizable brands. Barbie is a crucial product for parent company Mattel as it contributes most of Mattel's revenue. Barbie's commercial success has allowed Mattel to become the sixth most valuable toy brand worldwide in 2017. In 1959, the first Barbie doll was created and named after Mattel's co-founder, Ruth Handler's daughter. It was first launched at the New York Toy Fair. The first doll was dressed in a black and white zebra striped costume. Her hair was in the signature topknot ponytail and was available in either blonde or brunette. The first dolls were factory-made in Japan; their clothes were hand-stitched by Japanese homeworkers. In the first year of production, 300,000 barbies were made. Barbie's appearance has changed numerous times. In 1971, the eyes were changed to look forward as opposed to a sideways glance. It has caused much controversy as she has a tiny waist and larger breasts. If she were a natural person, her measurements would be 36-18-38 (Piece, 2021). Barbie became an iconic character for children to look up to.

The character of Barbie has been consistent from the start. Barbie is a fashion icon who owns a dream house and hangs out with her best friends. She is humble, kind, confident, and is a role model for young girls. Barbie launched "Life in the Dreamhouse" which consisted of 12 characters, including Barbie. "Life in the Dreamhouse" was a web series and featured short clips of the characters in animation. The other characters included Ken, Barbie's boyfriend, her oldest sister Skipper, the middle sister Stacie, youngest sister Chelsea, Barbie's two best friends Teresa and Nikki, and Barbie's pets, a dog named Taffy, a cat named Blissa, and a horse named Tawny. Raquelle is a character who is Barbie's frenemy. Barbie and Raquelle are

competitive and jealous of each other. Ryan is Raquelle's twin brother and has a crush on Barbie (Barbie, 2012). These characters have become staples for Mattel. Over the years, collections have been made consisting of more characters. Animating Barbie and other characters was a strategic way to personify the brand because not only are these characters dolls, but they also are animated online, allowing consumers to connect with the characters.

The products offered by Barbie are dolls, accessories, and clothing. Their diverse product range brings in consumers of all kinds to buy their products. The different Barbie dolls are available in four types: petite, tall, curvy, and the original doll. The dolls are 11.5 inches tall and come in different skin tones, hairstyles, body features, and clothing. The different collections consist of Barbie Fashionist, Signature, and others which are available on their website. Some Barbies resemble famous movie characters like SuperWoman, High School Musical Stars, and many more (Barbie.com, 2021). Barbie focuses on their brand attributes as it builds their brand equity. Barbie makes sure to reach their target market by creating their brand image through their logo, slogans, packaging, pricing, and trademarks.

Barbie's logo has had numerous redesigns throughout the years; however, the brand chose to stick with its first logo decades later. The original barbie logo was first introduced in 1959. It features a bright pink of custom cursive letters spelling Barbie. The first letter was capitalized and more significant than the rest of the letters. This logo is very recognizable and has stayed with the brand for many years. The redesign that occurred in 1975 brought another version of the logo that lasted a reasonably long time. This logo featured a diagonally placed Barbie inscription in a white bold sans-serif font. It is outlined in bright pink with a vast pink shadow. The ends of the letters become thick and rounded, and the B is capitalized and curved.

Barbie has famously used Candy pink for the bright pink we always see associated with the brand. In 2009, the company decided to return to its original design. Mattel decided that this original logo was the best representation of their Barbie's character, mood, and style. The famous iconic pink often associated with Barbie is called Candy Pink and it is featured in their logo and across all products (Barbie Logo).



Photos from <https://1000logos.net/barbie-logo/>

Barbie has always represented women who can make choices for themselves. In 1984 their slogan was, "We can do anything, right Barbie?" Consumers reacted well to this saying as it allowed young girls to use Barbies to envision a fulfilling future for themselves. The slogan stayed with the brand for decades. It was not until the rebrand and new Barbies' release that Barbie released a new slogan, "You Can Be Anything" and "B who U Wanna B, B-A-R-B-I-E." They have videos and clips of Barbies' animation on their website doing what they want and reaching their goals (Barbie, 2021).

Barbie's packaging gets the same amount of attention as the actual dolls themselves. There is a considerable amount of money that goes into the creation of the packaging along with its design. Mattel has shifted its packaging design process from physical to digital design by using Adobe Creative Suites to create the designs. Each package has at least numerous designs that went through a creative process. Mattel can use 3D technology and augmented reality software to create packaging designs. The packaging design team used 3D mockups to pitch their design to get the sign-off on concepts without wasting any physical materials. Investing in technology empowers Mattel to be more creative. By the end of 2011, Mattel had promised that they would use 70% paper packaging to be recycled material or sustainable fiber. They continued to promise that by the end of 2015, Mattel would increase this goal to 85%. Mattel was committed to advancing its sustainability as it is a priority for its consumers (Team, 2020).

The first Barbie trademark owned by Mattel was registered in 1959 and is still valid today. There have been over 1,800 Barbie trademarks registered to date by Mattel, and of that number, 1,100 are still valid today. Most of the Barbie trademarks are registered in Class 28, Toys and Sporting Goods in the United States, Italy, and France. Barbie is a protected brand, and Mattel is exceptionally protective in terms of monitoring the brand. Mattel has filed over 260 oppositions as they are aggressive with infringements (Team, 2020).

Barbie's pricing ranges per product, starting at \$10. Dolls that are included in collections are priced higher in value. Barbie prices are premium prices that most upper-middle-class and upper-class people can afford. The pricing of products is based on the differentiation of classes, and Barbie uses the marketing strategy of Price-Discrimination Strategy to determine the prices of products. The prices are changed to make them competitive as they have many competitors.

The company has reduced Barbies' distribution cost by selling it online and having consumers benefit from the lower prices (Piece, 2021).

Barbies are known nationally and can be found in more than 150 countries. They are sold at retail and toy stores. These outlets are usually in malls or shopping centers where foot traffic is higher than most. The stores are supplied through distributors. Some retail stores stock these dolls for products well-known in different areas. Mattel now sells Barbies through their website to reduce distribution costs, which helps their profit margins. Barbies can also be purchased online through e-commerce websites like Amazon, Target, and Flipkart (Team, 2020).

Mattel is aggressive in its marketing tactics to maintain Barbie's brand image. Promotions for Barbie are done through the channels of TV advertisements, newspapers, movies, and through their website. Mattel has recently rebranded Barbie and promotes Barbie to encourage girls to be what they want to be. Mattel has brought in celebrity influencers who are featured as dolls in limited collection series. Barbie has also been featured in modeling events during New York Fashion Week, where new barbie collections are launched with fashion shows. The company launched many animated films. Barbie launched TV specials such as "Barbie and the Sensations", and "Barbie and the Rockers." In 1997, the song "Barbie Girl" was released by The Aqua and became a sensation. Barbie has also been featured in movies such as Toy Story 2 and 3. Barbie movies differentiate its dolls from competition in the industry (Pasquarelli, 2019).

Barbie was created to be more than a toy brand, and the founders wanted Barbie to represent the "American Dream." As competition grew, Mattel realized that toys also serve as an opportunity to entertain and educate. Barbie had to think of a new way to reinvent Barbie as it has lost its zest with consumers. Barbie's communication of what it stood for made Barbie look

inconsistent. In an attempt to engage moms and reframe the brand's image to consumers, Mattel launched a campaign that showed young girls that they have the power to dream and create their future. The advertisement was a huge success, and it gave Mattel the motivation to change Barbie's appearance. The brand conducted extensive research by conducting real-life conversations with children and mothers, collecting data, and analyzing trends. This research led to the production of a new range of Barbies that have numerous shapes and sizes. This line was significant as it was the first time Barbie became a trending topic. Celebrity influencers showed their praise and support for Barbie's new looks (Piece, 2021).

In response to the research conducted and wanting to better connect with consumers, Barbie launched the Barbie Dream Gap initiative in 2018. Barbie raised money for charities that support and empower young girls. Mattel created Barbies for Black History Month to represent strong black women such as Rosa Parks and Maya Angelou. In 2020 with the racial justice uprising, Mattel reconfirmed its commitment to black lives by creating a Barbie vlog on their Youtube channel and spoke about racism (Barbie, 2021).

In 2019, Barbie celebrated its 60th anniversary by producing 20 new role model dolls who were a part of the Dream Gap Project. This campaign was to honor extraordinary women in 20 fields. The role model Barbie was created to inspire future women in our society. Barbie has consistently stayed connected to its consumers using social media, TV, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram. Barbie provides accessories and clothes for Barbie. The brand also includes Barbie-like furniture, appliances, musical instruments, dollhouses, cars, clothes, shoes, and accessories. The company's website and Youtube feature tutorials about Barbie styling, hair designs, and how to restore older Barbies.

Since the pandemic hit, Barbie has had to refocus its marketing efforts. Mattel has used this time to understand better its consumers, trends, and what kids care about. The brand has worked on Barbie's new look and has reached consumers through its multichannel strategy, which includes content marketing, streaming, and video gaming (Team, 2020). Barbie is the number one brand in children's minds for their parity point and point of difference. Barbie has distinguished themselves with their doll's signature look. Many of the dolls are catered towards what consumers want, their culture, and their interests. Collectibles sold and advertised separately like the Dream House, Ponies. Mattel is a successful leader in its niche through its multi-brand strategy. The introduction and development of multiple brands that don't compete against each other in their niches (Cavill, 2021).

Barbie's appearance has changed numerous times. In 1971, the eyes were changed to look forward as opposed to a sideways glance. It has caused much controversy as she has a tiny waist and larger breasts. If she were a natural person, her measurements would be 36-18-38. Many consumers did not like this as it gives little girls a negative body image. The body shape of the doll impacts the body image of young children. In 2014, parents were questioning if Barbie was a positive role model for their children. For a while, many criticized Barbie for its unrealistic beauty standards. As of 2015, Barbie has aimed at moving toward a more inclusive and equitable future (Team, 2020).

Many happy consumers think positively of the original Barbie doll. Consumers who like Barbie and all it stands for, believe it gives young girls the freedom to imagine and a future to believe in. Barbie's connection to Mattel has created a positive brand association for consumers. Mattel is a reputable brand that sells other products like Hot Wheels and Polly Pockets. This

association will get consumers to buy other Mattel products. As of 2019, Barbie has diversified its products and includes new Barbies of all shapes, sizes, and professionals. At the beginning of this year, Barbie released a barbie in a wheelchair to connect all consumers. Barbie realized its consumers were unhappy and fixed the issue by expanding their products.

Mattel reinvented Barbie to connect with consumers. Some of Barbie's success is due to their marketing and connection to brands like American Girl. Barbie changes consumers' perceptions by understanding their consumers and what they like, their TV commercials and productions, and their commitment to their consumers' futures.

Mattel has fostered Barbie as their brand and is considered one of their most popular toys. Barbie is still in the game after 60 years which is unheard of in the toy business. Distributors everywhere are looking to sell Barbies in their stores. Consumers can walk into any Walmart, Target, Toys R Us, and other toy retail stores and buy a Barbie product. Their products are tangible for their consumers as they are sold in most areas and are reasonably priced.

Mattel is one of the first toy companies to use TV advertisements widely. Barbie became a cultural icon. The company believes in little girls' imagination, and they have the power to imagine their future. Barbie has generated significant sales with its rebrand. Many females have enjoyed how diverse the Barbie products have gotten. Some Barbies are air stewardesses, doctors, astronauts, and Olympic athletes. Mattel utilizes purpose-marketing to show consumers how their dolls will benefit their children. Their commitment to staying relevant with their consumers has kept them at the top of the industry.

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B. The Brand Exploratory

Prior Research

Mattel reported their financial results for their third quarter in 2020. In this quarter, net sales were \$1,632 million and this was a 10% increase from 2019 (Mattel, 2020). During this quarter, Barbie experienced a 29% increase in sales and this was higher than Mattel's doll average of 22%. Mattel's changes to Barbie have proven to be successful. Part of this was due to Barbie's viral YouTube video of Barbie and her friend Nicki discussing racism. The entire toy industry also experienced growth in 2020. During 2020, the coronavirus pandemic spread throughout the world, forcing people to quarantine in their homes. This led to many parents deciding to save money during this economic challenge. Mattel saw this as an opportunity to gain more control of the market and this led to an extremely successful quarter.

CFO of Mattel, Anthony DiSilverstro said, "In spite of the pandemic, we have continued to make meaningful progress towards our strategy to restore profitability and regain topline growth" (Mattel, 2020). A few years ago, Barbie's future was in question. Sales were declining and competitors were moving ahead in the doll market. Mattel President Richard Dickson knew that Barbie did not inspire people and it didn't accurately represent our current society (Gilblom, 2021). Barbie's makeover is what led to their "best sales growth in two decades" (Gilblom, 2021). In the past year, Mattel's shares have increased 50%. Barbie has received many criticisms

for being outdated and sexist. Slowly Barbie is making changes to show they are inclusive. These changes were made to represent the current culture and world we live in. The transition into more realistic dolls was worth it. For Mattel's full year financial results in 2020, they experienced \$4,584 million in net sales and a net income of 126.6 million (Mattel, 2020).

In 2019, a study was conducted regarding how children felt about the new realistic and diverse Barbie dolls. This research consisted of 84 girls from ages 3-10. They were asked their opinions on the new Barbie shapes: original, tall, petite, and curvy (Harriger et al., 2019).



The Barbie dolls were presented in different orders and the children were given an adjective and then told to point to which Barbie thought fit the description best. The ten different adjectives were: “happy, smart, has friends, pretty, helps others, sad, not smart, has no friends, and not pretty” (Harriger et al., 2019). The results for the positive attributes showed that 42% said the tall Barbie was happy, 31% said the tall Barbie was smart, 37% said the tall Barbie has friends, 37% said the tall Barbie was pretty, and 33% said the original Barbie helps others (Harriger et al., 2019). For the negative attributes, 35% said the original Barbie was sad, 30%

said the original Barbie was not smart, 43% said the curvy Barbie has no friends, 54% said the curvy Barbie was not pretty, and 33% said the tall Barbie was mean (Harriger et al., 2019). The participants were then asked which doll they would want to play with and which doll they would not want to play with. The results showed that 39% would choose the petite Barbie doll to play with and 39% said they would not want to play with the curvy Barbie doll (Harriger et al., 2019).

	Original	Petite	Tall	Curvy
Positive attributes				
Happy	22.4%	18.8%	42.4%	16.5%
Smart	29.8%	22.6%	31.0%	16.7%
Has friends	21.4%	33.3%	35.7%	9.5%
Pretty	25.0%	28.6%	36.9%	9.5%
Helps others	33.3%	22.6%	19.0%	25.0%
Negative attributes				
Sad	34.5%	33.3%	9.5%	22.6%
Not smart	29.8%	26.2%	16.7%	27.4%
Has no friends	17.9%	26.2%	13.1%	42.9%
Not pretty	16.5%	14.3%	16.7%	53.6%
Mean	19.0%	17.9%	33.3%	29.8%

	Original	Petite	Tall	Curvy
Choose one doll	21.4%	39.3%	33.3%	6.0%
Not want to play with	1.7%	8.5%	23.7%	39.0%

In this study it was hypothesized that the original Barbie doll would be chosen for the positive adjective and the curvy Barbie doll would be chosen for the negative adjectives. This proved to be correct in the overall data above. Also, the girls said they did not want to play with the curvy doll. This is because they viewed the curvy Barbie doll as “big, fat, or chubby, while the original doll was commonly described as prettier” (Harriger et al., 2019). This demonstrates how even children are able to form a bias toward thinner individuals due to society’s beauty standard.

The tall Barbie doll was the overall favorite during this experiment. The girls said she looked more grown up next to the other dolls. It is possible that the tall Barbie was “viewed as a figure that they would emulate when they were older or that they viewed older as more positive” (Harriger et al., 2019). The girls said they wanted to play with the petite doll the most. This could be due to her thin size or because they associated this doll with kindness. The researches estimated that the girls who are more insecure with their body are more likely to select a thinner Barbie doll. It’s interesting to see how girls at this young age are aware of their body image. Exposing young girls to these different body types will allow them to feel more comfortable in their own body.

Another study conducted in 2019, to analyze how Barbie in a wheelchair welcomed a new era of Barbie. At this time the newest release was Black Barbie in a wheelchair (Ahmed et al., 2020). Over the years, Mattel has tried different things with Barbie and some of them have been successful, while others led to controversy. In 2016, Barbie released their most diverse line, the Fashionista dolls. Mattel worked with wheelchair experts to create an accurate representation for Barbie. This specific wheelchair was “the design of a wheelchair-user with a permanent disability” (Ahmed et al., 2020). Barbie created another disability doll with a prosthetic leg. In

2019, Mattel collaborated with 13-year-old Jordan Reeves, a disability activist. Jordan Reeves helped with the design and suggested that the prosthetic leg should be removable, similar to real life. In the past, Barbie has attempted to include disabilities. In 1997, Barbie's friend, Becky, was in a wheelchair and this became a huge hit. The issue was that Becky's wheelchair "could not fit into the line's DreamHouse and other accessories" (Ahmed et al., 2020). The wheelchair was too wide to fit through the doorways. Becky was redesigned a few times, but then Mattel discontinued this doll. This was because "she did not fit into Barbie's world, and it was easier to get rid of her than to change everything else" (Ahmed et al., 2020). People felt this is exactly how disabilities are treated in real life. It took years for Barbie to recover from this.

This new wheelchair is meant to show kids how to embrace their differences instead and feel embarrassed by them. Many people with disabilities often experience discrimination and Barbie has the opportunity to show kids that they are enough. When the new wheelchair character was released in February 2019, both kids and adults were excited to buy this new doll. Mattel has experienced a lot of criticism regarding unrealistic body images, sexist career choices, lack of diversity and more. These new dolls can help Mattel "break down stereotypes developed at a young age that will help remove disgraces developed unpleasantly impacting people" (Ahmed et al., 2020). This is the start of a new era for Barbie and will help a lot of people feel more confident in themselves.

Consumer Interviews

Original research was conducted in order to learn more about how consumers view Barbie and their recent changes. Two interviews included, Juliette Squicciarini, a 19-year-old who played with the original blonde Barbie as a child, and Kelli Pecunies, a mother and Barbie collector.

Relationship with Original Barbie

Juliette Squicciarini, 19 years old, Consumer:

An interview with a 19-year-old, Juliette Squicciarini, was conducted to gain insight on how she views Barbie and their current changes. Juliette played with the original blonde Barbie as a child. Juliette and her sister had a Barbie Dreamhouse, where they played with different dolls. When asked what drew her to Barbie, Juliette replied “It was what my mother got me. It was a cute dress-up game to explore our creativity.” Juliette enjoyed creating different story lines with her dolls and creating her own world in the doll house. She had at least ten Barbie dolls, and Juliette and her sister each had their favorites. They were very attached to their Barbie dolls, “One time I cut my sister’s Barbie bangs and she didn’t talk to me for a week.” When asked to describe Barbie in three words she said: fun, creative, and interesting. Juliette is also a big fan of the Barbie movies. She said “I was actually planning on re-watching them today.” Her favorite Barbie movies are the Nutcracker, 12 princesses, and Rapunzel. She was so excited to talk about them and started to sing her favorite song from 12 princesses. Many people have concerns about the original Barbie having an impact on young girls’ body image. Juliette was asked about this and responded, “I think I wanted to look like Barbie because she had soft hair and she was my favorite character. Everyone says that no matter what it is. I probably said I wanted to look like Barbie too. I don’t think kids realize these issues yet.” It’s interesting to see how Juliette felt about her body image regarding Barbie. Juliette further explained by saying how she thinks kids are not aware of body image and at such a young age.

Juliette also played with other dolls as a kid, such as Polly Pocket and Bratz dolls. She was a fan of Polly Pockets and liked these better than Barbie. She thought Polly Pocket dolls were better due to their small size, which made them easier to travel with. Juliette also liked that

their hair didn't get knotted, but the clothes were always falling off. As a kid she never focused on the different types of dolls she played with. Juliette just saw them as her friends and played with them all together.

Juliette had a strong relationship with the original Barbie dolls and she associates the brand with her childhood. Discussing Barbie brought back good memories for her and these dolls left a memorable impact on her.

Kelli Pecunies, 57 years old, Consumer (Mother):

Kelli is a mother of five children and has been purchasing Barbie dolls for 23 years. She thought the price of some Barbie dolls are reasonable, while others are more expensive. Depending on how unique the doll is, people may be willing to spend more. Kelli emphasized how there is something for everyone at each price range. Kelli has bought around 100-150 Barbie dolls throughout her life. She was first introduced to Barbie as a child, and her dolls had different fun qualities. She said her favorite one danced and spun. She wanted to share this with her daughters, and that's why she started buying them as an adult. Her children have grown up, and she has given their Barbie dolls to her nieces. In three words Kelli described Barbie as: beautiful, cultural, and keepsake.

Kelli was asked what other dolls her children played with. This included: Shu Shu dolls and lots of baby dolls in carriages. Her kids had a variety of toys and she said there was no clear favorite. Kelli had an emotional connection with Barbie as a child and this led to her purchasing Barbie again as an adult.

Opinions on New Barbies

Juliette Squicciarini, 19 years old, Consumer:

Juliette was shown the following image and asked her opinion on Barbie creating dolls that are more diverse and realistic. Below is her response.



“I don’t care. I think it’s cool. I don’t think kids look at that or even notice it. They just throw dolls around. When I was a kid, I just played with whatever was in sight. Kids don’t realize this stuff and if they did, I don’t know if they want to play with a version of themselves. I think they want to use their imagination and go into a fantasy world. Like if you’re in a wheelchair then you can walk.”

Juliette views Barbie dolls as a way for kids to explore their imagination and create a fantasy world. She thinks kids are unaware of life’s realistic changes, and believes they will just pick up any doll in front of them. Juliette was also informed about Barbie’s new accessory stickers you can buy, which includes acne and stretch marks. Juliette immediately said she did not like this and expressed:

“You think these four-year-olds have stretch marks. Barbie is being treated like it’s targeted towards teens. Body image, stretch marks, and acne are things you develop after puberty. Barbie is meant for young children. Why are people trying to adapt these dolls to please adults, when kids are going to take that sticker off and pretend it was never there. Stop trying to please the parents when the goal is to entertain children.”

This was an interesting perspective from the consumer. Parents are the primary buyers and children are the end users. Even though Barbie creates dolls for children, their parents are the ones buying them. Juliette also explained how this diverse angle for Barbie feels forced. She said it feels like Barbie was about to be “cancelled” for their original Barbie dolls and was pressured to make change. Barbie has had several different controversies in the past and the changes in the appearance of their dolls were meant to appeal to their audience. The line of realistic, diverse dolls is called the Fashionistas. This line was meant to reflect the current culture and reflect what the real world looks like.

Juliette was then asked if she likes the new or old Barbies better. She hesitated to answer this question, and then said the new Barbie dolls remind her of American Girl dolls. This was interesting because Mattel also owns American Girl and it makes sense as to why their brands would be showing a similar image. Juliette continued by saying she likes the old Barbie dolls better because that’s what she played with growing up. She also emphasized:

“I have played Barbie’s with all different types of people/backgrounds and there was never a problem. But honestly buy whatever you want, new or old. I personally would buy the regular Barbie if I had a kid.”

Juliette likes the original Barbie dolls better because she has an emotional connection. Throughout her interview she’s expressed how she, her sister, and friends never really looked into what their dolls looked like. To them, dolls were just dolls.

Lastly, Juliette was asked what she would like to see Barbie do in the future. She said she felt like people were trying to change Barbie into something it’s not. She explained how when Barbie first came out, it was just blonde Barbie and Ken. Juliette expressed how she thinks the newer Barbie dolls should be a different brand of “Barbie and Friends.”

Kelli Pecunies, 57 years old, Consumer (Mother):

Kelli was shown an image of the new diverse and realistic Barbie dolls (refer to image on page 16), and then asked her opinion. Kelli liked the new Barbie dolls and said “I think it will create more of an audience and kids or even adults can relate.” It’s important to feel accepted and understand that it’s okay to be different. Kids deserve to be themselves and not have to worry about their body image, skin color, or disability. People should learn to accept themselves at a young age.

Kelli was then informed about Barbie’s new accessory stickers that include acne and stretch marks. She explained:

“I think it’s going to appeal to some people and not to others. It would be cool to include heart tattoos and other stickers that appeal to everyone. If you want to

show those other things that's fine, but it should not only be imperfections. It can be country flags or "go team", different packs to express yourself."

Kelli thinks it's important to be able to express yourself and this is possible with Barbie dolls. Barbie can include more than acne and stretch mark stickers to add to the doll's body. There can be different stickers for everyone to enjoy. This gives kids the opportunity to truly make their Barbie anyone they want them to be.

Kelli likes the diversity in the new dolls and how people can now relate to their dolls. In the future, she would like to see Barbie "add more to their existing collection showing different cultures." Lastly, Kelli was asked if she had younger children, would she purchase the old Barbie dolls or new Barbie dolls. She said she would buy both. It would be fun for kids to have different dolls to play with that include various shapes and sizes. This encourages them to do more with their imagination.

Vintage Barbies

Kelli Pecunies, 57 years old, Consumer (Mother):

Kelli was asked about her opinion on the prices for the collectable vintage Barbie dolls. She said that several of the collectables are highly priced, but some of the dolls are stunning that it's worth it. The most expensive Barbie doll was sold in 2010 for \$302,500. Some other valuable vintage Barbie dolls include: Bild Lilli (\$1,195), Original Barbie (\$10,000), Black Christie (\$2,500), and Barbie Loves The Improvers (\$10,000) (Conklin, 2021).

The most Kelli has spent on a collectable Barbie doll is \$200. She's a big fan of the Silkstone collection, which featured the lingerie Barbie dolls. She thought these dolls looked

really beautiful and classy. One of her favorite vintage Barbie dolls is an Indian Barbie with a long robe and long hair. Kelli loves seeing different cultural Barbie dolls.

When Kelli started buying Barbie dolls as an adult, they initially were for her daughters. The more she searched for Barbie dolls, the more she discovered their collectable dolls. Over the years Kelli has purchased collectable Barbie dolls for herself. Kelli was asked if she liked the old Barbie dolls or new Barbie dolls. She responded:

“I like them both. I like the vintage barbies for the classic look and now I like the new ones with the cultural diversity and representation.”

Kelli would like to see Barbie add more to their “Barbie’s Around the World” collection. This collection consists of different cultures from various countries in their traditional celebratory outfits. Every few years, Barbie releases a doll in this line. When asked if there were any Barbie dolls Kelli might be interested in collecting, she replied:

“I have been looking at the cinco de mayo Barbie. It’s so cool to see the different ways people dress and celebrate things. Including the Kelly doll in this cultural idea would be fun to see.”

The character Kelly was Barbie’s younger sister from 1995-2010. Now Barbie’s sister's name is Chelsea. It would be interesting to see Chelsea included in different cultures. Barbie could explore more designs for their dolls.

Overall, Juliette and Kelly had different perspectives on Barbie and how it's changed. This reflects the current public's opinion as well. Many people support Barbie's new changes, while others are still hesitant.

Problems Identified

- Society's Beauty Standards: In prior research, it was evident that young girls already have a preference towards thin women. This is due to society's beauty standards, and young girls are already aware that expectations show that thin is "pretty" while being "fat" is not. Barbie should be aware of these existing ideas and create stories that show everyone is beautiful in their own way. This study consisted of 84 girls, and a pattern identified demonstrated the girls who were more insecure with their body were more likely to use negative adjectives to describe the curvy Barbie. This was established in a group of girls ages 3-10. These young girls are aware of their body image at a young age. This makes it that much more important for Barbie to promote their Fashionista line with the diverse group of dolls. The new Barbie dolls can help people feel more secure with their body and create a meaningful connection to the kids using them.
- Social Media: In 2016, the line of Fashionista dolls were released. Barbie saw an increase of sales during that first quarter, but the next few quarters after that their sales decreased (Segran, 2017). This is due to Barbie not promoting this new line enough. Instagram is an effective way for Barbie to reach millennial parents, and Youtube, as well as, Netflix is a way for Barbie to reach young children. Barbie already has a large audience on these platforms, Instagram has 1.9 million followers and 10.4 million subscribers on YouTube. It's become noticeable that Barbie is not featuring their curvy dolls on their Instagram. Barbie needs to make a bigger push for their diverse dolls. These new dolls have

increased consumer's perceptions for Barbie from 35% to 41% (Segran, 2017). By featuring these new dolls, Barbie can experience more growth and reach more people.

- Being Authentic and Genuine: Consumers have felt that Barbie's sudden change to include more diverse and realistic Barbie dolls feels forced and not genuine. Mattel has been trying to make changes to "shake the stigma that the brand is a bad influence on girls and promotes sexism" (Segran, 2017). This perception of the brand is not going to change overnight. Consumers have expressed how the curvy Barbie dolls are impossible to find in stores and they were not featured on the Instagram or website. Barbie has to show their consumers that they are making these changes for the right reasons, and not just to sell more dolls. People want an emotional connection with a brand and Barbie needs to show that they care about their consumers.
- Versatility with Accessories: With the introduction of more diverse and realistic Barbie dolls, there have been some issues regarding the versatility of different accessories. Research examined the 1997 release of Barbie's friend Becky in a wheelchair, and noticed several problems (Ahmed et al., 2020). The wheelchair was too wide to fit into the hallways of the Barbie Dreamhouse. Mattel thought it would be too difficult to change the accessories to fit the wheelchair, and eventually this doll was discontinued. (Ahmed et al., 2020). The new Barbie Dreamhouse has elevators for their Barbie's. Another issue was the clothing for the curvy Barbie doll. Consumers were explaining how the original Barbie doll's clothes does not fit the curvy Barbie doll. This is another issue Barbie will have to consider.

C. Recommendations for Brand Positioning, and Marketing Strategy

Brand positioning is a significant component of any marketing strategy. It is “the act of designing the company’s offer and image so that it occupies a distinct and valued place in the target consumer’s mind” (Keller, 2013, p. 51). Effective brand positioning clarifies how the brand is unique and why consumers should choose their products over competitors. With this in mind, the following recommended strategies and tactics are outlined below for Barbie:

Brand Positioning:

Primary Target:

Young Children Ages 3-5: When Barbie was first founded, it was more common for children up to twelve to play with dolls; however, more recently, the brand lowered their target audience to aim for ages three to five. Children are reportedly becoming “more sophisticated” partially due to technological revolution. Many six and seven-year-old girls view playing with dolls as childish behavior; in fact, “girls who years ago played with Barbie dolls have moved on to music, computers and other sophisticated playthings and may never return to Barbie’s world” (Goldman, 2002). By losing a large portion of their initial audience, Barbie had to quickly adapt to this shift in the market to maintain its status as Mattel’s most lucrative line. Understanding who their target audience is essential to continue to grow revenue. By lowering their target, Barbie focuses on sustaining their existing customer base. One change Barbie reportedly made was offering more “nurturing play” options that appeal to young children’s sense of family values that is part of their developmental growth at that age (Goldman, 2002). Understanding

their primary target is now much younger, gives insight to the additional products Barbie should release to encourage children to repurchase from their brand.

Secondary Target:

- Millennial Parents: Though Barbie dolls are a product typically played with by young children, targeting parents is just as crucial for Mattel. After all, parents are often the individuals who purchase the dolls, so appealing to them can increase Barbie's revenue. Millennial parents, ages twenty-three to thirty-eight, are an optimal target because they are likely to already have a preexisting relationship of the brand from when they were younger. Nostalgia can be a powerful tool that influences purchasing decisions. Parents will want their children to experience the same joy they did when they played with Barbie dolls when they were young. This positions Barbie to have high repurchasing value.

Millennials living in the United States are reported "more politically liberal than generations that precede them," which is why they are more likely to embrace the modern leap Barbie is initiating (Hains, 2019). Washington Post notes, "Millennials apply their progressive ethos to their purchasing decisions, tending to be socially conscious shoppers who support businesses that share their values" (Hains, 2019). The more socially conscious Barbie is about continuing to develop their diverse doll collection, the more likely this millennial demographic will purchase from the company and remain loyal customers. Having the association of being an inclusive brand will positively increase Barbie's reputation and build brand equity.

- Children Ages 6-10: Barbie classifies its target audience as children between the age of three and five; however, introducing a more mature concept of diversity will help them reach a wider age range. The longer Barbie can encourage repurchasing from customers, the more Mattel's profits will grow. The biggest challenge for Mattel is to remove the notion that Barbie is not a childish toy. Featuring advertisements with older children playing with trendy new "fashion" dolls with expanded "skin tones, hair textures and colors, and face molds" (Hains, 2019) will help appeal to this slightly older demographic. Children around ten are often much more aware of the societal beauty norms, even if they do not fully comprehend it. To a three year old a doll is a doll, which is why their new addition of body positivity will better encompass children six to ten. Female empowerment is a topic geared towards older children, so it is appropriate to broaden their target audience. In addition, the television series, "Barbie Life in the Dreamhouse" can be used to generate awareness among this new target since the average viewer is between eight and ten.
- Collectors: One unique aspect of Barbie is that they can be very valuable collectors items. The most expensive Barbie is valued at just over 300 thousand dollars because it was designed by Stefani Canturi who reportedly used real emerald cut pink diamonds in the doll's necklace. The more rare a Barbie is, the more expensive it is priced. Barbie's extensive history on the market has positioned their vintage sets to be very profitable collectors items. As mentioned in the interview with Kelli, "I have been looking at the cinco de mayo Barbie" which points to collectors still being actively engaged with

finding exclusive dolls. This group can yield very high profits as particular dolls hold such high value.

Points-of-Difference: Barbie should highlight the outlined “attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with the brand” listed below to set them apart from competitors (Keller, 2013, p. 55).

- Been on the market since 1959 (produce feeling of nostalgia for parents)
- Represent self-expression in children
- Most diverse doll line on the market
- Produce popular movies and television series
- Extremely recognizable logo
- Strong brand reputation
- High quality products
- Extensive line featuring dolls, clothing, many accessories
- Highly valuable collective items

Competitive Frame of Reference: Competitive frame of reference “determines the category membership for the brand” that “tells consumers about the goals they might achieve by using a product or service” (Keller, 2013, p. 57). Barbies products are a premium quality toy that never goes out of style. The brand’s point of parity is evident by their word of mouth recommendation and the fact they have been a leader in the market for decades. The notorious reputation of Barbie has helped them stay relevant and maintain high brand equity.

In order to stay ahead of competition, Barbie needs to maintain their leadership in the market by evolving their product line. Though Barbie has experienced a controversial past that

includes many lawsuits and missteps by the company, they have grown into a toy brand that is dedicated to promoting diversity. Barbie establishes their point-of-parity by offering a wide variety of quality dolls that are the most diverse on the market. An area of concern is people do not think the line is as diverse as it should be. They have just scratched the surface of depth of diversity they can provide to customers. Barbie should continue producing even more inclusive dolls as they are in high demand and can make a difference in the market.

Branding Mantra: The brand mantra is a short phrase that "captures the irrefutable essence or spirit of the brand positioning" to establish what the brand stands for (Keller, 2013, p. 65).

Barbie has an established slogan, "You Can Be Anything," that captures their core values as a brand. Barbie's existing mantra shows they are a brand that celebrates and encourages children to express their individuality. There is a sense of childhood wonderment that emulates from this phrase and it shifts focus from the original association that Barbie was merely a symbol of standard beauty.

In more recent times, they have expanded to showcase female dolls with various careers to encourage young girls to follow their dreams and pursue an education. Advertising Barbie's mantra "You Can Be Anything" on social media platforms, merchandise, and their website will effectively portray their company morals that Barbie is as unique as the children who play with them. "Brand mantras help the brand present a consistent message...their words and actions should consistently reinforce and support the brand meaning" (Keller, 2013, p. 65). With this in mind, this is a powerful strategy that sets Barbie apart from its competitors and aligns with their

focus on diversity which should be and the forefront of their brand positioning in the marketplace.

Marketing Strategy:

Strategy 1:

Increase awareness of Mattel's diverse Barbie dolls among target audience and millennial parents through the use of social media.

Tactics:

YouTube: Barbie currently has 10.4 million YouTube subscribers. Though they post daily, they have low views proportional to their following. Barbie averaged approximately 65.5K views within their most recent six posts. This shows a lack of engagement with followers and how the brand is not reaching their maximum audience. Barbie could partner with popular children's toy review channel, Ryan's World, to improve this weakness. Ryan's YouTube account is one of the most watched channels on the platform. He averages millions of views on most of his toy-related content videos. Having a young boy review Mattel's Barbie dolls would appeal to the male demographic and help erase the stigma that Barbies are only for girls. Barbie would be exposed to millions of new parents and children who are fans of his channel. The benefit of having a child view the dolls is that it would add credibility to the quality of the products and effectively showcase how fun they are.

Digital content is becoming an increasingly popular advertisement method as technology infiltrates more of our daily lives. YouTube is an inexpensive way to promote brand messages and reach the desired audience. YouTube plays a pivotal role in providing content for children, and "81% of all parents with children age 11 or younger say they have let their child watch

videos on YouTube” (Smith, 2020). Thus, Barbie has tremendous growth in the market if they successfully utilize the platform.

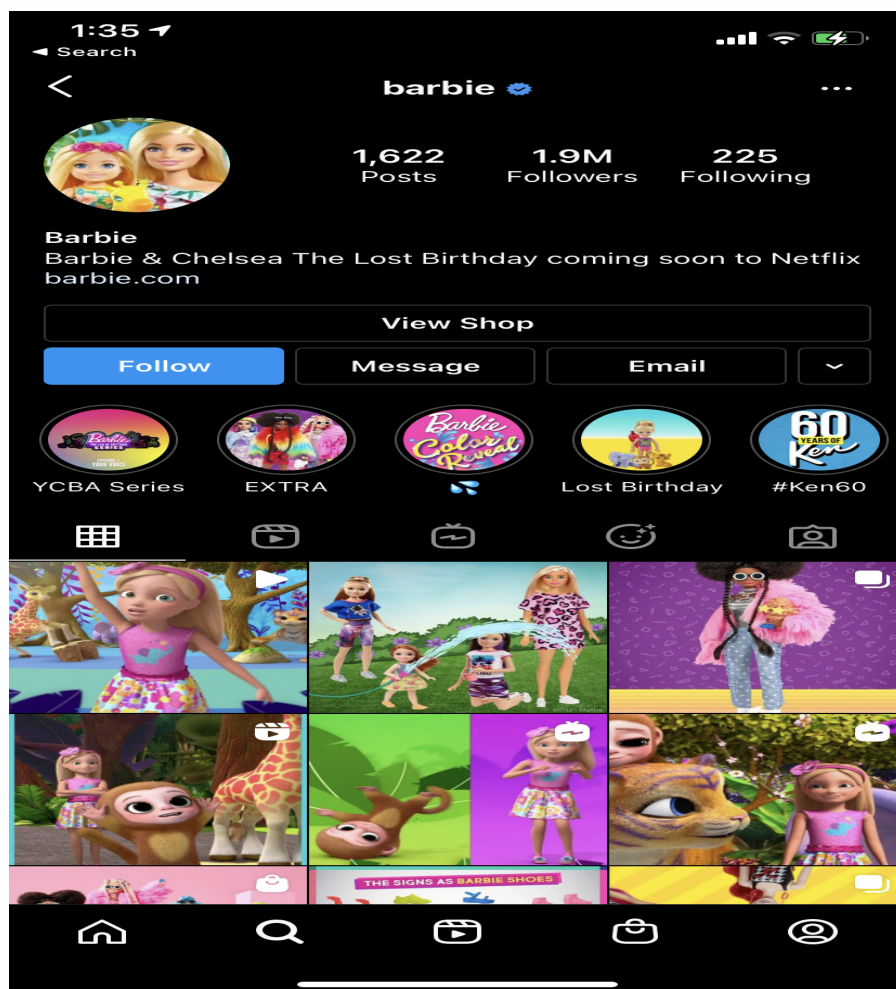
It is reported that “76% of users are more likely to buy a product online after watching it” (Thorpe, 2019). Barbie can link their website at the top of their YouTube page to give followers easy access to purchase products they are interested in after watching their video content. This would increase website traffic and awareness of Barbie and their new products.

Barbie should enable their comment section on their YouTube platform to increase two-way communication. Having a disabled comment section inhibits their ability to connect to their audience directly. Comments would give the brand insight into how their audience perceives Barbie and analyze how they can better appeal to the public.

Instagram: Barbie has a reasonably strong Instagram page, yet improvements can increase awareness for the brand. Barbie’s Instagram account has 1.9 million users, and they post very colorful and uplifting posts; however, they lack consistency. Posting on a more frequent schedule will help grow the account and increase brand visibility. As shown in the screenshot below, the famous Barbie logo is not featured on the account, which is a misstep. Having consistent branding that coordinates with all socials builds brand image. Though the social platform features some diversity, there should be more emphasis on promoting their inclusive dolls that defy typical beauty standards. In addition, they should add their tagline, “You Can Be Anything” in their Instagram biography to promote the brand’s core values. Lately, Barbie has been using minimal hashtags and typically only utilizing “#barbie” on their page. Incorporating more hashtags will make their page more discoverable to users, and grow their audience reach. Barbie should feature giveaways as a promotional tactic to maintain relevancy and incentive repurchasing within the brand. Focusing on building a relationship between company and

consumer is necessary to continue to sell their products. Despite an exact number is not disclosed, Mattel invests millions of dollars in advertising Barbie, so budgeting for such promotional strategies will not be an issue for the brand.

Screenshot of Barbies Current Instagram:



Strategy 2:

Develop a reputation that positions Barbie to be associated with representing diversity.

Tactics:

Netflix: Barbie was one of the first toy brands to incorporate film as part of their advertising strategy. In 2001, Barbie released its first feature film, "Barbie in the Nutcracker." Since then,

there have been over 38 additional films. More recently, in 2012, Barbie has an animated series titled "Barbie Life in the Dreamhouse" featured on Netflix which has been growing in popularity. The style is intended to mock reality shows and is categorized as a goofy comedy. Based on the success of this series, Barbie should expand to create a limited series exclusive to Netflix that features more diverse dolls that represent all body types, races, and more. This partnership benefits both companies because it will increase streaming on Netflix and build brand awareness for Barbie. Mattel has the opportunity to celebrate diversity in a fun and unconventional way that targets children directly. Introducing children to multiple cultures is vital because "media misrepresentation of ethnic groups can cause confusion in aspects of their identity among children" (Dobrow, 2020). This unique aspect would set Barbie apart from competitors and position the brand to be progressive.

For example, each 20-minute episode of this new series would be focused on essential topics like body image, insecurities, and self-esteem. Having diverse representation will encourage more children to watch the show because they can identify with the character more easily. This reflects positive perception on the brand by becoming associated with social justice. As cultural norms change, society becomes more invested in exposing young children to diversity. Mattel has an already established following their "Barbie Life in the Dreamhouse," which will make the extension easier as fans of the show previous show will likely be invested in the new series. Barbie's diversification initiatives will promote positive press and position them as a symbol for change in the market. Releasing a show that defies traditional beauty standards will also make the brand more relatable to children. It is likely children will want to purchase their favorite character in the show, which will generate revenue for the brand as well.

Corporate Social Responsibility: Consumers are increasingly becoming aware of the role companies play in society, which directly affects their purchasing decisions. A major agency quoted, "the only sustainable competitive advantage business has its reputation" (Keller, 2013, p. 386). Maintaining a positive brand image is essential to keeping the loyalty of customers. It is proven that corporate social responsibility (CSR) tends to increase brand awareness, financial revenue, and public perception. CSR is an effective way to reposition and show the brand's core values. Barbie has been a widely successful brand for decades, and with such a large audience, they have a platform to promote change in the market industry.

Barbie has the opportunity to partner with charities and nonprofits that support social justice. For example, each year around the beginning of fall, in time for holiday shopping, Barbie could select an organization they will focus on that year to support and raise awareness. One non-profit could be the American Foundation for the Blind. Barbie could even go further and partner with Molly Burke, a popular blind YouTuber who promotes young women's positivity. Barbie would release a look-a-like doll of the young influencer. Also, the actual outfits that Molly has worn would be featured in the exclusive set. To add, Barbie could introduce service dogs into their product line as an accessory as an additional step towards diversity. A portion of proceeds would be donated directly back to American Foundation for the Blind as part of their philanthropy activism. This gives a voice to a community that is often not represented in children's toys. It would allow children to be exposed to diversity beyond just race. In addition, this can be heavily promoted on their social media accounts to generate anticipation for the release. Barbie could even send a survey of what organization the public wants the brand to support next, motivating brand engagement.

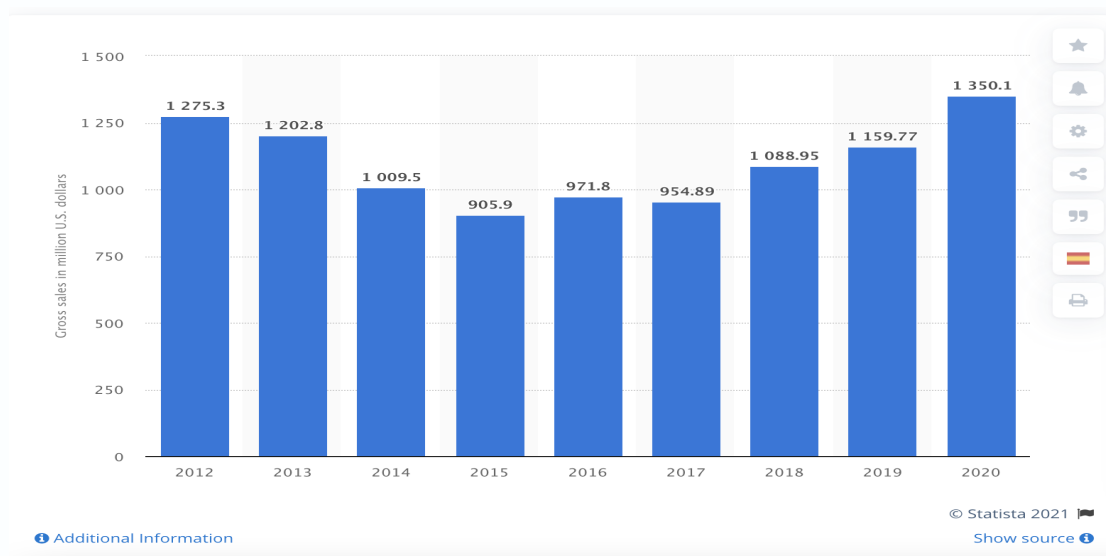
Strategy 3:

Increase user engagement with Barbie among the target audience.

Tactics:

Multiplayer Online Game: Creating an online network where people can virtually play with their Barbie dolls strategically blends physical and digital play. A few years ago, Barbie created a virtual world on BarbieGirls.com, but it was shut down in 2011. Revamping the virtual user experience would increase children's engagement with the brand. The graph below shows in 2020, the gross sales of Mattel's Barbie have hit a new high within the last eight years. With popularity surging, now is ideal for releasing the new game for maximum reach to their target audience, being children.

Gross sales of Mattel's Barbie brand worldwide from 2012 to 2020
(in million U.S. dollars)



Barbie would mimic the marketing strategy of Webkinz, which was an overwhelming success in the children's market. Webkinz were stuffed animals that featured a unique code on the tag. This allowed the purchaser to register the toy online and gain access to a virtual world

where players could connect with friends, collect prizes, play games, and chat. Webkinz was able to generate income by having an expiration date of the code, forcing individuals to repurchase to stay active in the game. The same concept can be applied to Barbie by creating the virtual world “Barbie’s Bubble.” Each new doll, clothing item, or expansion set would have a code that allows children to play with their Barbies on any smart device. The CDC notes that “children ages 8 to 10 spend an average of six hours per day in front of a screen” (Reynolds, 2020). With technology becoming a more critical part of children’s lives, this marketing strategy allows Barbie to stay relevant and adapt to generational changes. It can be designed to reward children for completing challenges and logging on every day to keep players coming back. This virtual world gives children an incentive to repurchase from Mattel, which creates loyal customers.

This also acts as a form of exclusivity where consumers would be forced to buy from Barbie to gain access to “Barbie’s Bubble”. New products can be exclusively shown on the website to give players a sneak peek and generate hype before release. Children would have the ability to continue engaging with the brand, even when they are not home to play with the physical dolls. By incorporating digital aspects to their brand, they will appeal to a wider demographic and generate revenue for the brand.

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Appendix A:**Interview Questions #1**

Juliette Squicciarini, 19 years old, Consumer

1. Did you enjoy playing with barbies as a kid? What drew you to them?
2. Roughly how many barbies do you think you've had?
3. In three words how would you describe barbie?
4. Are you familiar with the barbie movies?
5. What's your favorite barbie movie?
6. What do you think of the barbie creating dolls that are more diverse and realistic? (shown the following image)



7. The newer dolls have accessories stickers you can buy and some include acne and stretch marks? What do you think of this?
8. Which do you like better, the new or old barbies?

9. Do you feel Barbie impacted your body image?
10. What would you like to see barbie do in the future?
11. What other dolls did you play with as a child? What was your favorite doll?

Appendix B:**Interview Questions #2**

Kelli Pecunies, 57 years old, Consumer (Mother)

1. How long have you been purchasing barbies?
2. What are your thoughts on the price of barbies?
3. What's the most expensive barbie doll you've bought?
4. Roughly how many barbies have you bought throughout your life?
5. How did you discover barbie? What drew you to the brand?
6. Do you or your children still have/use barbies?
7. In three words how would you describe barbie?
8. What do you think of the barbie creating dolls that are more diverse and realistic? (shown the following image)



9. The newer dolls have accessories stickers you can buy and some include acne and stretch marks? What do you think of this?
10. Which do you like better, the new or old barbies?
11. What would you like to see barbie do in the future?
12. What other dolls have you bought for your children? Which was your children's favorite doll?
13. If you had younger children in the family, would you consider repurchasing the barbies?
Would you purchase the old barbies or the new barbies?
14. Are there any current barbies you would be interested in collecting?