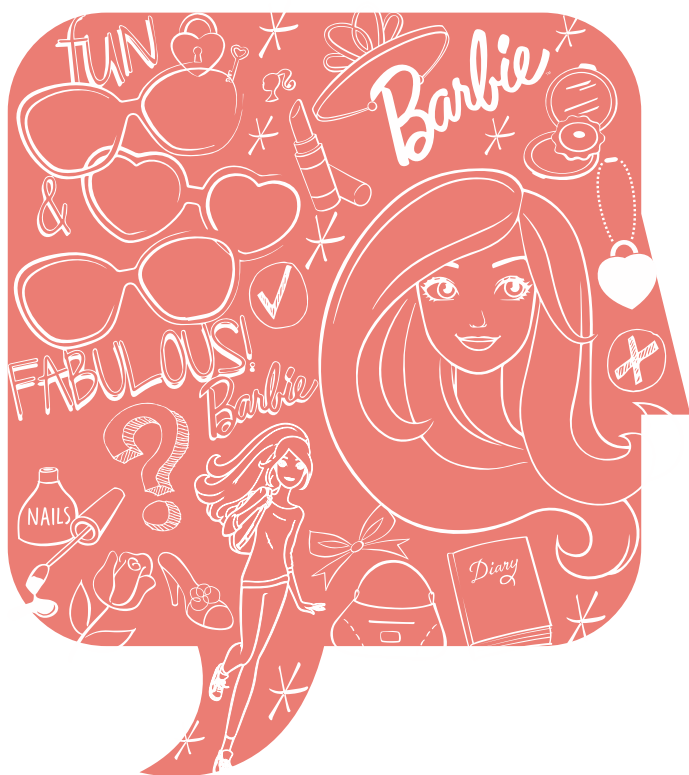


## This week's issue:

# IS BARBIE A BAD INFLUENCE?



Author and television personality Cindy Jackson loves Barbie. When she was a little girl, she thought her Barbie doll was beautiful and glamorous. As an adult, she decided to **undergo** surgery to look more like Barbie. Doctors made her lips and breasts larger and her waist, legs, and nose thinner.

Of course, Cindy Jackson is an isolated case. Many children love Barbie and other dolls like Bratz, but very few will go to such extremes to achieve the unrealistic body types they promote. Still, many adults worry about the **implications** of Barbie's body-type. When children role-play with Barbie, they often imagine themselves as Barbie. Some adults say that Barbie's thinness makes her a dangerous **role** model. It is rarely explained to young girls that Barbie's body is so unnatural that if she were real, she would not be able to lift her head and she would have to walk on all fours.

Adults also worry that Barbie's emphasis on glamorous looks encourages girls to focus on beauty instead of school, sports, and other interests. Focusing too much on appearance may hurt girls' self-esteem. A report from the Department of Health and Human Services found that 80% of girls in grades 3–6 have bad feelings about their bodies. Sometimes, feelings like these can lead to eating disorders.

Mattel, the company that makes Barbie, **denies** that the doll hurts girls' self-esteem. Instead, it claims that Barbie is a girl-**empowering** pioneer who is an inspiration to millions. Before Barbie, most dolls were babies or little girls, not women. The woman who created Barbie thought that giving girls dolls that looked like beautiful women would make them feel good about growing up. In 2014, a Mattel design executive defended Barbie, saying that the doll was not the problem. She argued that it was the fault of parents and peers if a child had body image issues.

There are some reasons to think that Barbie could be a positive role model. Some Barbies are shown in strong roles, such as the Olympic Gymnast Barbie and the Barbie for President doll. Seeing a woman in these roles may encourage girls to set high goals. Also, Barbie's body has changed over time. In 1997, Mattel made Barbie's waist slightly thicker and her hips and breasts slightly smaller. The company said Barbie's new body would look better in new clothing styles.

If you were a mom or dad, would you buy a Barbie for your child?

# IS BARBIE A BAD INFLUENCE?



undergo | empowering | implications | deny | role

## USE THE FOCUS WORDS

**undergo** (*verb*) to experience or endure something

➞ **Sample Sentence:** As an adult, Cindy Jackson decided to **undergo** surgery to look more like Barbie.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Why do you think immigrants must **undergo** a medical examination before becoming permanent residents of the U.S.?

**empowering** (*adjective*) giving confidence and a sense of control over one's life

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Instead, it claims that Barbie is a girl-**empowering** pioneer who is an inspiration to millions.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Is speaking in front of an audience an **empowering** experience for you? Why or why not?

**Empowering** can also be used as a verb ("empower")! *New laws are **empowering** women in the workplace.*

**deny** (*verb*) to declare to be untrue; to refuse to provide

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Mattel, the company that makes Barbie, **denies** that the doll hurts girls' self-esteem.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Is it ever okay to **deny** you said something that you really did say? Explain.

**implications** (*noun*) likely consequences

➞ **Sample Sentence:** Still, many adults worry about the **implications** of Barbie's body type.

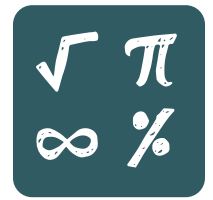
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What are the **implications** of watching a movie instead of studying for your math test?

**role** (*noun*) a job or function; a part played by someone or something

➞ **Sample Sentence:** The governor is taking an active **role** in fixing the subway system.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What is your **role** in preparing dinner at home?

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## DO THE MATH

In 1965, the “Slumber Party” Barbie doll came with several accessories. Among them were a pink bathroom scale showing a weight of 110 pounds and a diet book containing only the advice “Don’t eat!” Some people were angry. They said these toys were disempowering to girls and could play a dangerous **role** in girls’ lives. The scale implied that 110 pounds was a good weight. Girls who believed this might **undergo** dangerous dieting to be skinnier.

However, at the time, many people **denied** that this toy had negative **implications** for a girl’s body image. Instead, they said Barbie **empowered** girls by reflecting their real-life concerns. But can Barbie be a good **role** model if she’s too thin to represent a healthy person?


**Option 1:** Doctors **deny** that 110 pounds is a good weight for a woman with Barbie’s height and shape. They say she should weigh at least 145 pounds. How many pounds should Slumber Party Barbie gain?

- A. 30
- B. 35
- C. 40
- D. 5

**Option 2:** A person’s Body Mass Index (BMI) provides a general sense of how healthy their weight is based on how tall they are. If Barbie were a real person with a height of 5’9”, her BMI would be 16.2.

What if Barbie decided to **undergo** a plan to gain weight to reach a healthier size? At what weight would Barbie reach the minimum healthy BMI of 18.5?

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight in pounds} \times 703}{(\text{height in inches})^2}$$

 **Discussion Question:** Every day, we see thin female celebrities admired as beauty ideals. Commercials showing skinny models promise us our bodies will **undergo empowering** transformations if we join a gym or buy a diet plan. When we see so many distorted images, how do we know what healthy bodies should look like? While BMI can play an important **role**, doctors **deny** that BMI is always an accurate indication of health. For example, a muscular athlete might have a BMI in the overweight range, but the conclusion that the athlete should lose weight would be false. What is the best way for a person to know if his or her weight is healthy?

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## THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

Mr. Seemy’s class was discussing the **implications** that different cultural images have for the way people see themselves. “I read about a study done in 2006,” said Jacky, “where they found that the type of doll young girls are exposed to plays a **role** in how the girls see their own bodies.”

“Yes, I know which study you’re talking about,” said Mr. Seemy. “Experimenters read stories to a group of five- to eight-year-old girls, and had the girls follow along with books that had different sets of illustrations. One set of illustrations used the well-known, super-thin Barbie doll. Another set of illustrations featured the Emme doll, which looks more like a real woman. A third set of illustrations didn’t show any dolls, just images of objects and scenery relating to the story. After **undergoing** this process, girls in kindergarten and first grade who looked at the Barbie illustrations were less satisfied with their own bodies’ appearance than girls who looked at the Emme illustrations or the illustrations without any dolls.”

“That’s interesting,” said Aliyah. “I think it’s important to empower kids at an early age to resist unrealistic expectations of how they ought to look. Some girls feel so bad about their bodies that they end up **denying** themselves enough food.”

“How do they know the doll was the reason that some girls felt worse about their bodies after the experiment?” asked Manvi. “What if the stories were different?”

“Great question,” said Mr. Seemy. “The stories were exactly the same—a ‘controlled variable.’ A variable is anything that can change or differ in an experiment. Researchers distinguish between three basic kinds of variables: independent variables, dependent variables, and controlled variables.

“An *independent variable*,” continued Mr. Seemy, “is a variable that is changed by the scientists in an experiment.

“A *dependent variable* is something scientists observe that is caused by, or depends on, the influence of the independent variable.

“And a *controlled variable* remains constant in any experiment, regardless of changes to the independent variable.”

Mr. Seemy drew the first table below and helped his students check off which variables were independent, dependent, and controlled. Then he drew a second table for another experiment, and challenged his students to identify the variables correctly.

**Experimental question:** Do different types of dolls affect girls’ satisfaction with their own bodies?

Variables in this experiment	Independent variable	Dependent variable(s)	Controlled variable(s)
Amount of satisfaction girls report with their bodies		✗	
Story that is read aloud to girls			✗
Which set of illustrations girls see	✗		

**Experimental question:** Does the amount of fertilizer affect how quickly a plant grows?

Variables in this experiment	Independent variable	Dependent variable(s)	Controlled variable(s)
Pot, soil, amount of water, amount of light			
Amount of fertilizer			
Rate of plant growth			

Why did you identify each of the variables in the fertilizer experiment the way you did?

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## DEBATE THE ISSUE

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A**

I would buy my child a Barbie doll if he or she wanted one.

**OR**

**B**

I would not be willing to buy my child a Barbie doll.

**OR**

**CREATE YOUR OWN**

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jot down a few notes on how to support your position during a discussion or debate.

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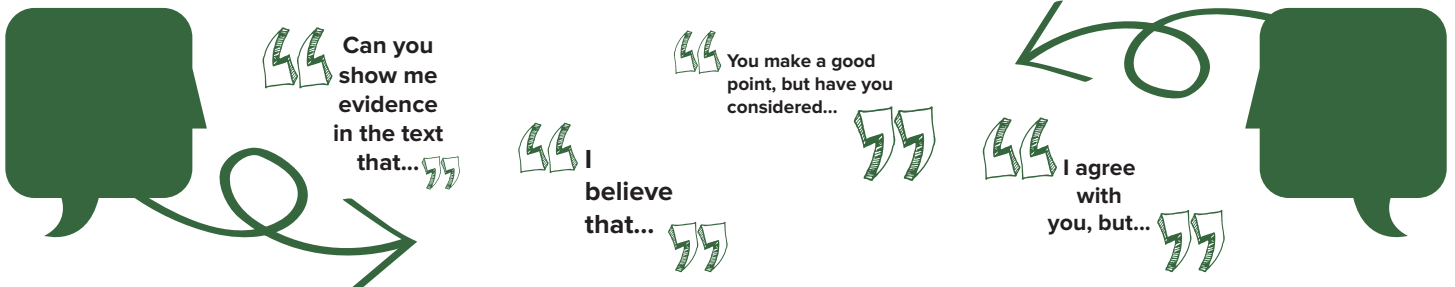
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Be a strong participant by using phrases like these:



# IS BARBIE A BAD INFLUENCE?



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## TAKE A STAND



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

**undergo | empowering | implications | deny | role**

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