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### Does Barbie Need a Makeover?

In an industry where success is sometimes measured in a season, the lifespan of Mattel's iconic forever young teenager Barbie is positively ancient. She may look girly and dress like a fashionista, but when it comes to longevity, Barbie is as tough as old boots. Not that Barbie herself would be caught dead in tough old boots. Nevertheless, Barbie's performance has been lagging and of course she is in the midst of another in a long stream of never-ending debates of what to do about Barbie. When considering the case of does Barbie need another makeover, the question is a resounding yes, but probably not for the reasons that most people think.

#### HISTORY OF BARBIE

Barbie was introduced to the American public in 1959 and little girls everywhere and their mothers fell in love with the well dressed, long haired beauty. Flash forward fifty seven years later and she still is a beloved icon of the young and old alike. The fact that she has remained relevant over six decades and survived countless onslaughts from competition demonstrates that she was built to last, no pun intended. Remember the Dawn dolls that actually topped the sales of Barbie briefly were going to bring down the reign of her most royal majesty Barbie back in the 1970s. When is the last time anyone spotted a Dawn doll except on Ebay? Whether it is the Dawn dolls of yesteryear or Disney's Frozen dolls of today, she has faced a host of competition and always ultimately wins.

## SALES

Barbie's sales have slumped, but part of that was caused by Mattel allowing the Disney Frozen characters to encroach in on her territory. They were producing both product lines and certain made great money off of the Frozen characters, but it was made off of the back of their own product (Kell 2015). Disney has since moved their product line from Hasbro, and Mattel will suffer in two ways, the loss of the Frozen revenue and the fact they let Frozen characters steal market share from Barbie. The upside is that the Frozen products have nowhere to go but down. They are forever frozen in time so to speak and cannot change and update like Barbie can. Barbie is always fresh and forever young. All Mattel has to do is create another lifestyle, adventure, hobby, or simply a new outfit and Barbie is instantly new.

## A MAKEOVER

Barbie received a makeover in 2015, and certainly it should quiet her critics, as she now comes in all sorts of sizes, shapes, hair colors, and eye colors. There is a veritable rainbow of Barbies available and that certainly is not a bad thing. Of course the complaint now is that she looks chubby or she looks unhealthy (Steinmetz 2016). The truth is that some people just want to criticize and Barbie is either too perfect or she is unhealthy. Either way there is no pleasing some people.

On the hand Barbie did need updating and the new versions of Barbie are appealing, but Barbie has always undergone changes. Anyone that has ever seen the 1959 Barbie will understand why. The times change, so Barbie should change as well. The 1959 Barbie may have been the height of fashion, but even by the 1960s it was understood that the 1959 version was rather harsh looking. What is interesting is to look at Exhibit 1: Barbie Careers Over Time in the case. It is noticeable that the exhibit reflects not only the changing careers

of Barbie, but how women and their careers have changed at the same time. From Barbie being a Candy Striper in the 1960s to her being a surgeon in the 1970s demonstrates a change in how women saw their careers. She was also an Olympic Athlete in the 1970s at the same time a lot of the great women athletes began to emerge. By the 1990s Barbie was a presidential candidate, a business executive and NASCAR driver, long before Danica Patrick appeared. Her careers clearly demonstrate that she is what each decade's women want to become. Perhaps the best way to look at Barbie is to see her simply as a reflection of women of the time period.

One of the criteria of being a good toy is to be inspirational, and Barbie has clearly been inspiration. If you strip away all of Barbie's clothes and accessories, she is a representation of every woman and in essence is a blank canvas upon which every single child can create an image of themselves on. In other words they can visualize themselves to be anything through her. That is pretty powerful. Barbie is merely a tool and a child can use that tool to create their future with it. If their imagination can create it, then Barbie can do that, whether she flies a jet or explores the Arctic. If Barbie can do it, then that child can do it.

#### CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The best thing Mattel can do is to examine the trends of careers, as well as any advancements in technology and sciences. Where ever those trends for the future are that is where Barbie should go, blazing a trail for all children to follow. Whether that is being the first woman to live on Mars or a social worker reaching out to the homeless, that is who Barbie should be. Scientist, technology expert, explorer, historian or president of a country, that is what Barbie is capable of just as every woman is capable of. Should Barbie change?

Of course Barbie should change. That is realistic. Nothing stays the same. Perhaps they should just invent a yawning Barbie, because that is what she would do if she was forced to listen to another one of these debates over whether or not she will last.

Work cited

Kell, John. Mattel's Barbie sales down for a third consecutive year. *Fortune.com*. 30 January 2015. Web. 14 June 2016.

Steinmetz, Krystal. At 57, the Iconic Barbie Doll Gets a Makeover – Several Actually. *Moneytalksnews.com*. 1 February 2016. Web. 14 June 2016.