

Debate

The Appropriateness of Tattoo Barbie for Children

ISSUE: Does Tattoo Barbie send the right message to girls?

Mattel's Barbie dolls are no strangers to controversy. For years Barbies have been criticized for their unrealistic bodies, with accusations that they contribute to unhealthy body images for young girls. Occasionally, Mattel releases a Barbie doll representing a controversial subject, which creates even more debate around the appropriateness of the doll. The most recent example is 'tokidoki' Tattoo Barbie, designed by tokidoki fashion company. At \$50 each, this limited edition Barbie is targeted toward collectors, and the 7,400 original dolls have sold out in less than a month.

'Tokidoki' Tattoo Barbie sports a pink bob haircut, an off-the-shoulder black shirt featuring a skull and crossbones, a hot-pink mini-skirt, leopard-print leggings, and silver stilettos. She is walking her cactus-dog companion Bastardino. But while the clothes might be eye-opening, the controversy around the Barbie centers around the tattoos on her arm, neck, and back.

The Barbie doll caused outrage among some parents, who believe the doll sends the wrong message to children. One concerned parent argues that Tattoo Barbie influences impressionable children who are too young to dress like Tattoo Barbie and who do not understand the permanency of tattoos. While it costs very little to get a tattoo, it costs thousands of dollars to have it removed and often takes multiple painful treatments. Because children see Barbie as a role model, they may decide they want a tattoo so as to be like Barbie. Many parents dislike the idea of tattoos even for their teenagers, let alone young children. And even though Tattoo Barbie is marketed toward adults, children may still come across Tattoo Barbie and be impacted by her style. This is particularly important since a Harris Interactive Poll revealed that the most common reason people regret their tattoos is because they feel they were too young when they received the tattoo to make an informed decision.

On the other hand, many consumers—even parents—have no problem with Tattoo Barbie. They feel that Tattoo Barbie is not being marketed to children but to adults. Even though their children might see Tattoo Barbie, supporters feel that Tattoo Barbie is simply a reflection of pop culture. Nearly 40 percent of millennials aged 18-29 have tattoos, and many people desire tattoos because of their permanency. For instance, tattoos of religious symbols are becoming more common. Tattoos are quickly entering the realm of the mainstream, a trend occurring before the release of Tattoo Barbie. From this perspective, Tattoo Barbie is merely an artistic reflection of what is already popular. Additionally, the amount of influence a doll could have on young children, as opposed to other cultural images, their friends, or their families, is questionable.

There are two sides to every issue:

1. Mattel should not have created tokidoki Tattoo Barbie because the doll sends the wrong message about fashion and tattoos to impressionable children.
 2. Tokidoki Tattoo Barbie is an artistic reflection of modern culture and intended for adult collectors. It is up to parents to teach their children about making good choices for their personal appearances.
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