

Wheelchair Barbie



Okay, I'll admit it-on some level I wanted to look like Barbie. Even though I intellectually knew she wasn't real and didn't resemble any person I knew, that skinny piece of painted plastic still had the power to make me feel woefully inferior. There was something about her silent perfection that could not help but scream "pretty," "hip" and "athletic" to me, especially when she was dressed up to go hiking or roller-blading with the ever-hunky Ken.

Of course, every child goes through something like this. And because I did not develop MS until well into adulthood, I at least did not have the additional burden of incorporating a cane, a walker or a wheelchair into my developing self-image. That would only have made things more difficult and infinitely more confusing.

And it's not just Barbie. Traditionally, images have abounded on television and in books and movies about "desirable" people, who almost never include people with disabilities (unless we are shown as unrealistically cheery and inspirational or as sinister and even evil, driven mad by our disabilities).

But it's refreshing to see that things are slowly but steadily changing. There are more television shows, movies and even commercials that feature people with disabilities as just regular people-because that's all we really are.

That's why it was good to read that later in 2019, Mattel is going to introduce new Barbie dolls that will look a lot more like real people. [According to a CNN article](#), the dolls will be varied in their bodies, hair, skin and clothes, just like we are. And significantly, one of the

dolls is a wheelchair user, and another one has a removable prosthetic leg.

So, while Barbie is not going to bring world peace, feed the hungry or eliminate discrimination, she can at least provide a little more comfort to children with disabilities who want to feel a little more connection with a very confusing world.

Flash-Forward: I'm now 67 years old and have had multiple sclerosis for about three decades. I haven't played with dolls for a long time, and I think I'm pretty much over "Barbie Envy." But when I feel particularly frustrated with my limping and tripping, it gives me some measure of comfort to see more and more people like me out there on the Internet, in movies and otherwise scattered all over our world. It reminds me that "real" people are not made of plastic!