

## The Changing Face of Dolls

### Wholesome Dolls Deliver Positive Values to Young Girls

by Shannon Grotzinger

One lap around the girl's section of a clothing store will tell you what the media, parents, and toy manufacturers all know—young girls are growing up sooner. Mini-me versions of hip-hugging pants and low-cut halter tops hang on racks, and sparkly purses and platform shoes line shelves. This trend exists outside of the clothing realm, too.

Recent studies and articles have highlighted the trend of girls under the age of 10 getting microdermabrasion and waxes, while girls as young as age 6 are altering their hair color with highlights and getting professional manicures and pedicures. Clothing and cosmetics companies are capitalizing on this trend and are marketing products directly to young girls; toy manufacturers, in turn, have taken note and are producing items to coincide with this phenomenon. For many years, Barbie was the ultimate fashion doll. Today, she is joined on the shelves by dolls, such as Bratz and various licensed teen personalities, all sporting trendy clothes that would have once been reserved for an older crowd but are now the norm for young girls.

Another line of fashionable dolls that provides young girls with rewarding values is KidsGive's Karito Kids World Collection. The line of multicultural dolls debuted in 2007 with 11-year-old characters from the U.S., China, Italy, Kenya, and Mexico, each of which came with a storybook. The dolls teach kids to make a difference while staying true to themselves. Three percent of the products' MSRP is donated to Plan USA, using an online component that lets kids decide how to help by choosing one of four causes to support—food, home, school, or health.

"In all instances, they are used to foster and develop a child's imagination and creativity," says Laura Rangel, one of the founders of KidsGive, in regard to dolls in general. "As parents, it enables us to be involved with our child, guiding them directionally as to the lessons we wish to reinforce."

Along with the positive messages, dolls have to appeal to girls on the surface. And the most obvious canvas for that appeal is fashion.

"Fashion is critical to girls at any age," says Rangel. "But, hip fashion doesn't need to translate to inappropriate fashion to be accepted by girls." With that in mind, the fashions in the Karito line are trendy and mom-approved.

The roleplay aspect of these older, more fashionable dolls is quite different from the roleplay that girls might engage in at a young age with baby dolls. As they grow up, girls oftentimes dabble in recreational activities, develop hobbies, and become interested in fashion. Therefore, it is only natural that the play patterns of dolls mirror girls' interests.

"Over time, the play dolls that represent older girls enable for more roleplaying in life situations, transitioning from 'mom' with her baby doll to that of a sister or friend," explains Rangel.

With girls growing up at a younger age, dolls must reflect their ever-maturing interests in order to remain relevant. It is inevitable, after all, that one day the dolls will be packed away to make room for young adult activities, such as dating. By staying on top of trends and making the dolls match the values of young girls, however, doll manufacturers can keep their spot in girls' hearts for a bit longer. ■

## Dolls



KidsGive introduces a new character to its Karito Kids World Collection. A native of Sydney, **Piper Whelan** is an 11 year old who loves surfing and works as a life guard. Piper teaches her friends and family about how they can help the environment, which leads to her nickname of "Greenie." Her accompanying book follows her while she picks up trash on Bondi Beach and uncovers the mystery of why the sea life is dying. Three percent of the MSRP is donated to Plan USA, a children's charity.

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