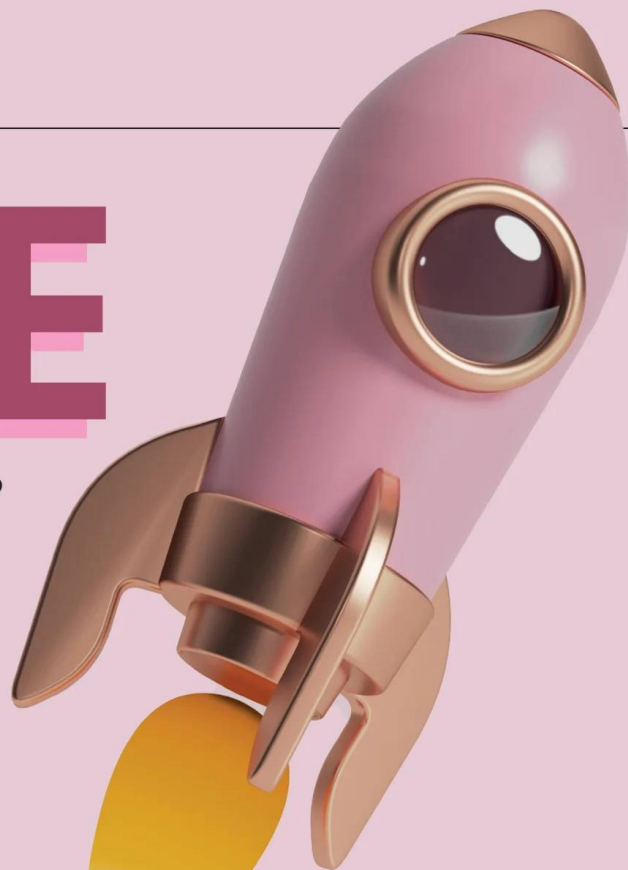


# BARBIE

*the first woman in aesthetic medicine?*

**Aesthetic doctor and Women in Aesthetic Medicine board member Dr Anna Hemming discusses Barbie's effect on the aesthetics industry, and beauty standards in general**



**T**he first Barbie doll was released by Mattel in 1959 after creator Ruth Handler observed her daughter playing with paper dolls and giving them adult jobs and roles. At the time, most manufactured dolls were babies, and Handler spotted a gap in the market for an aspirational toy for little girls.

Over her 64-year history, Barbie has become more than just a doll. The Barbie brand has expanded to develop new characters and playsets, animated films, TV shows, books, and now, a live-action film starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling. She has, however, inspired her fair share of controversy, from concerns about body image to the lack of diverse representation. What kind of role model is she for modern women?

Dr Anna Hemming runs Thames Skin Clinic, where she specialises in creating natural results for her patients: "With my practice, most people find me because they want to look like a normal version of themselves. They don't want to be Barbie-fied, they want to be gently smoothed and have good skin."

Dr Hemming is the mother of two young girls and a bit of a Barbie expert. "I thought 'What

do I know about Barbie?', then lots of things crept out the woodwork. I suddenly realised that in the background for probably the last five or so years, I've had Barbie influencing my life."

Dr Hemming acknowledges Barbie's potential effect on the body image of children: "There is a portion of them that will come away thinking I need to look like that. I think the bottom line of the new movie is that perfection comes from the inside, and the key to happiness is being yourself."

Stereotypical Barbie's look is an unrealistic standard – if she was real, her proportions wouldn't allow her to stand up. In more recent years, Mattel has moved towards creating a more diverse range of body types, with 'petite' and 'curvy' variations, and dolls with prosthetic limbs. Dr Hemming thinks that this is a step in the right direction, with other companies following suit, creating differently shaped bodies for their dolls and toys, such as LOL Surprise.

Barbie influenced the public's perception of perfection for years before some aesthetic treatments were available. "There are different kinds of people, and some people take on the image of wanting to be perfect, whatever that might mean. They might see being extremely slender and having a tiny waist and large breasts to be what they perceive as normal. Maybe back in the seventies and eighties, when Barbie was gaining a lot of traction, we would have seen a lot of people coming in for liposuction. I think we find that less now."

Dr Hemming also stresses this isn't a women's only issue: "The same goes for

male superheroes, the macho, angulated, chiselled, look for the boys. If you look at Ken and how he is portrayed, he's also got his six-pack."

Despite all of Barbie's controversies, Dr Hemming still considers her a great role model, stating we should focus more on who Barbie is as a person, as opposed to her appearance.

"I looked up how many careers she's had – over 200! She's ground-breaking. In the 1960s, she was an astronaut – she got to the moon years before Neil Armstrong. Pretty impressive, and she's a woman! In the 1970s, before women became very commonplace in medicine, she was a surgeon. She has pushed the boundaries for women in aesthetic medicine, which I think is incredible. In the 1980s, before women became mainstream in the C-suites, she was chief executive of Barbieland and in the 1990s, she ran for president.

"Thinking about trying to get women into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers, she has also been a computer engineer, a video game producer, and a robotics engineer. This is pushing the idea that women can be very successful in these roles."

"If you think of a five-year-old watching Barbie, she may be thinking, 'Oh my goodness, this person has just learned how to surf, she's become a world champion, she's running boutiques, she has all these amazing marketing ideas'. There's never an argument, it's always settled sensibly. What a great role model. Forget what she looks like. I think she's hugely inspirational." **CM**

