

Domestic Abuse Barbie Brings Us Back to Reality

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[Meredith Green](#)

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Malibu Barbie, Flight Attendant Barbie, Fashion Design Barbie, Domestic Abuse Barbie...wait, what?

In case you're worried you read that wrong, you didn't. While not a Mattel branded version of the ever-popular doll, Domestic Abuse Barbie is a student art project that is turning Barbie from a feminist nightmare, into a statement about the cultural realities of domestic abuse.

The student artist, Sam Humphreys, painted over the doll's perfected face to make her appear battered and bruised. With a blacked-out eye, ratted hair, and a bloodied fat lip, this Barbie is a shadow of her formerly-glamorous self. Humphreys then staged photos where Barbie appears in tableaux of her abuse. In one of these tableaux, Barbie sits looking "Betty Draper perfect" (with the exception of her cuts and bruises), with Ken's looming and violent hands on her shoulders. Now, if her bruises were gone and Ken were wearing a shirt, they would be the picture of happily ever after: *Sex and the City's* Charlotte and Trey posing for *Home and Garden* magazine (although that wasn't so happy either). But with the simple removal of Barbie and Ken's nuclear family perfection, Humphrey's creates the image of a woman isolated from the outside world with only her abuser for human contact.

Her point in doing all of this, Humphreys says, is to highlight the difference between the life we are sold and reality. While domestic abuse isn't the norm for most women, [1 in 4](#) women will be a victim of abuse at some point in her life. Humphrey's employs the Western image of female perfection thrust upon us all practically from birth to ["show the difference between how children view the world and its much darker realities."](#)

As to why she chose to use a children's toy, Humphreys [states](#), "Using Barbie is a nice way of using a toy that everyone recognizes as an imagine of perfection and undercutting that," exposing the truth that Barbie, her Corvette, and her Dream House are all ways of keeping women and girls obsessed with material items and distracting women from the suffering that is the daily life for 25% of us.

Furthermore, Humphrey's believes if we are to rid the world of domestic violence, the message against it must be received in childhood. "Children must be taught about domestic violence from an early age if the crime is to be stamped out."

This isn't the first time Barbie has been used to further a feminist cause. According to a Mattel spokeswoman, "Barbie is often used by adults to start conversations or leverage a cause in society." While it seems her statement shrugs off the importance of this artwork, it begs the question, why is Barbie brought in to all these "adult

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conversations”?

Maybe it’s that Barbie has been an effective and successful scapegoat in the past for everything from eating disorders to imperialism, but I think it’s something more. I think it’s because Barbie is symptomatic of our cultural sickness and fixation on perfection, especially regarding women. Barbie is the center of a culture that values the image of perfection above all things and promises happiness to all those who uphold the image. What Humphreys has done, is remove the façade and destroy that image to reveal a much darker truth that needs our attention.

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