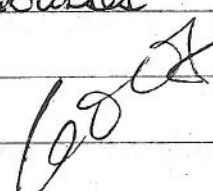


Women have had to live up to standards
and been subject to stereotypes for
a long time. In the late 1960s, Marge
Piercy wrote "Barbie Doll" that portrays some of
these standards & stereotypes. Using multiple
perspectives, "Barbie Doll" ~~addresses~~ addresses
these issues of today and yesterday. 

Historically speaking, in the late 1960s, women were spending
time at home and not working. Most middle class families
had moved to the suburbs and women were busy
taking care of their home & family. They were expected
to be feminine homemakers. "The girlchild was born as
usual / and presented dolls that did pee-pee / and miniature
G & E stones and crowns / and wee lipstick the color of cherry candy"
(Piercy, lines 1-4). Piercy is echoing the female roles of the

unruly, grotesque, and resistant to categorisation"

(Carson 94). Far from meeting the standards

of beauty, feminists believe women

should not be categorized at all. Their bodies

are allowed to be ugly or different from

society's standards. Many ~~women~~ women

line up to the standards anyway and this is

shown in the poem. After being told to

change and not being able to the character's

"good nature wore out / like a fur belt. So she

cut off her nose and her legs" (Piercy lines 15-17).

The girl could never live up to what society

was telling her so she finally gave up.

One of the things Marx shows is "the

ways in which our socioeconomic system is the

ultimate source of our experience" (Tyson 281).

Critiquing this poem through a Marxist Critique

highlights the society part of the socioeconomic

system. Being accepted by society as beautiful,

women can "often gain economic & social advantage"

(Rubin, Nemeroff, Russo 35). Being society's definition

of beautiful can give a woman economic & social

power. In the poem, the character did not

have that power. Even though she had intelligence

and other physical traits that were good, "She

went to and fro apologizing. / Everyone saw a fat

nose on thick legs." (Piercy lines 10-11). The

girl was not appreciated for her smarts or strength;

instead she was only seen as a fat-legged, big-

nosed girl. She didn't measure up to society's

few
and

standards, and she felt she had to apologize for that. Her social experience of being fat, led her to apologize for being fat.

The Marxist critical perspective also talks about propaganda. This poem fits that because it is a reflection of the author's beliefs. In an interview with Johnette Rodriguez of The Providence Phoenix, Flory explains her views on the female body image:

The standard required body image for women to achieve or maintain is impossible for 90 percent of the population. The media is so powerful that they are constantly pushing the image of these perfect, skinny blond women which don't correspond to the genes, body structure, or health requirements of most women. (Rodriguez, "Right Words")

Piercy is explaining her views on the unfair practice of requiring women to live up to the impossible beauty standards the media creates. She believes women cannot possibly live up to these ideals, at least most women. She also mentions that most women are not satisfied with how they look so "a woman" feels inferior" (Rodriguez "Fighting Words"). Piercy's character in the poem is also shown to be dissatisfied with her inability to meet beauty expectations.

In fact that she "cut off her nose and ^{her} eyes/ and offered them up." (Piercy lines 17-18). Ending it all was her way of dealing with not living up to what society wanted her to

look like. Like Percy said, most women can't live up to the body image the media creates, and like her character, are unhappy. In allowing her views to speak through the poem, Percy was propagandizing her female audience.

Looking at this poem through an historical, Feminist and Marxist perspective, "Barbie Doll" shows the effects

Feminine standards have on women.

2 They rebel against these roles sometimes, like the character in the poem. Even if they don't rebel, the standards will always be there.