

Name _____

Barbie in the Labor Force

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Learning Target: I can identify gender issues in the workplace.

Read the following and underline the important points. Answer the questions.

In the early 1960s, a group of women dubbed the “Mercury 13” successfully completed a grueling set of psychological and physical tests in a private program designed to explore if women were as qualified as men to become astronauts. Led by Jerrie Cobb, the first woman to pass all the tests, their performance in these tests equaled or surpassed that of the male astronauts hired by NASA and clearly demonstrated that women were physically capable of working in this capacity. The bigger challenge proved to be the struggle to change prevailing attitudes and convince the United States government that women had the right to become astronauts.

Despite an extremely well-organized and persistent lobbying campaign, their proven qualifications, and high-level connections (the group of 13 included the wife of a senator), Ms. Cobb and her colleagues failed to gain admission into NASA’s official astronaut training program. Their political efforts could not overcome intense opposition stemming from the condescending coverage in the media, stonewalling from Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson (he famously scribbled “Let’s stop this now!” on a memo about women in NASA), and damaging testimony from a renowned but resentful female pilot at a key Congressional hearing. It took almost two more decades before women gained admission into NASA’s training program.

1. Mattel introduced an astronaut Barbie in 1965, but the first woman in space was Sally ride in 1983. Why do you think that it took so long for women to be able to participate in the space program?



Video: *Why More Women Aren't Computer Scientists, Engineers*

<http://video.pbs.org/video/2227552207/> (7.57 minutes)

2. What are three reasons why so few young women choose to study computer science, physics and engineering?

3. Why should women consider computer science, physics and engineering?

4. What was the one thing that happened in the 1970's that may have resulted in an increase in women become doctors and lawyers? _____



Note: In 2010, the company announced that Barbie's 126th career would be in computer engineering (a still heavily male-dominated field).

The following article is from the *Onion*, which is a satirical publication. There was never a CEO Barbie.

CEO Barbie Criticized For Promoting Unrealistic Career Images

Issue 41 • 36 • Sep 7, 2005

EL SEGUNDO, CA—Toy company Mattel is under fire from a group of activists who say their popular doll's latest incarnation, CEO Barbie, encourages young girls to set impractical career goals.

"This doll furthers the myth that if a woman works hard and sticks to her guns, she can rise to the top," said Frederick Lang of the Changes Institute, a children's advocacy organization. "Our young girls need to learn to accept their career futures, not be set up with ridiculously unattainable images."

The issue was first brought to national attention by mother, activist, and office manager Connie Bergen, 36, who became concerned when her 5-year-old daughter received the doll as a birthday gift and began "playing CEO."

"Women don't run companies," Bergen said. "Typically, those with talent, charisma, and luck work behind the scenes to bring a man's vision to light."

She added: "Real women in today's work force don't have Barbie's Dream Corner Office. More often than not, they have cubicles—or Dream Kitchens. I mean, what's next? 'Accepted By Her Male Peers' Polly Pocket?"

Despite the growing furor over the doll, Mattel's top brass has indicated no plans to cease its production, insisting that the newest member of the Barbie family represents a positive role model for girls.

"Young girls can be anything they want. There is nothing standing in their way," read a statement signed by Mattel CEO Robert Eckert, president Matt Bousquette, executive vice president Tom Debrowski, and CFO Kevin Farr.

Said Bergen: "I graduated cum laude from Radcliffe and have worked hard all my life, and my career doesn't look anything like Barbie's. Currently, there are only nine female CEOs in America's top 500 companies. To tell our daughters anything else is a lie."



Mattel's controversial CEO Barbie.

*Used with permission.

Handout 5: *Onion* Article (page 2 of 2)

Figures released by the Changes Institute indicate that, although women make up 46 percent of the work force, a mere 15 percent are senior managers. Lang maintains that these facts don't square with the image of the career woman put forth by the doll.

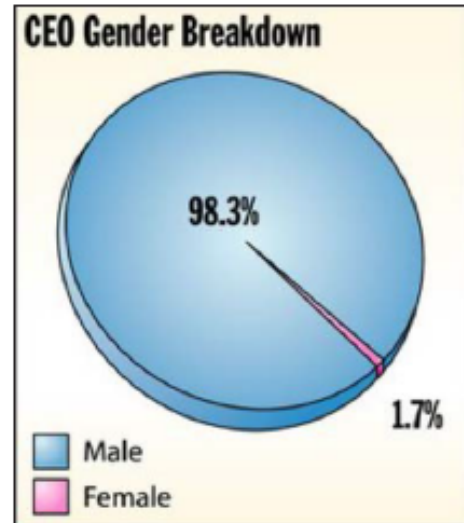
Said Lang: "Any girl who thinks that she can run a large corporation when she grows up is in for a bitter disappointment, and it is simply shameful that Mattel would seek to cash in on impressionable young girls this way."

CEO Barbie comes with a number of accessories and environments, including the Super Barbie Conference Fun Table, Barbie's Company Dream Car and Underpaid Assistant Ken. But by far the most popular version of the doll has been the Talking CEO Barbie.

"This doll says things like, 'Did you get me those projections?' and, 'We need to cut our operating costs by 10 percent,'" Lang said. "It is dishonest to dangle this carrot of success in front of our daughters' noses, when we know that the odds that a girl will grow up to order someone around are virtually zero."

Lang said he does not expect Mattel to recall CEO Barbie, but he wants to send a powerful message to the people in charge.

"When your daughter comes home crying because she was passed over for a promotion for the fourth time, what are you going to tell her?" Lang asked. "It would be easier if she'd been raised with dolls like Glass Ceiling American Girl, Service Sector Bratz, or Maria The White House Maid."



5. According to this article how many of the top 500 American companies had a female CEO in 2005? _____
6. What percent of Fortune 500 CEO's were women in 2005? _____%
7. What is the trend in the appointment of female CEO's since 1995?

8. What career do you think would be a good one for Barbie next year? _____
Why?
