Mattel's new athlete Barbies falter at the track



Mattel released a new range of Barbie dolls this week honouring nine trailblazing women in sport. The recognised athletes include Matildas soccer star Mary Fowler, tennis champion Venus Williams and seven other record-breaking and world champion sports stars from across

Mattel's Krista Berger said the brand wishes to acknowledge "the impact of sports in fostering self-confidence, ambition and empowerment among the next

generation". But is this a genuine effort by a corporation to be gender progressive, or is it a marketing ploy that co-opts feminism in the pursuit of profit?

Dolls and 'learning' gender: Discussions about Mattel's revamping of its Barbie range matter, as research has long recognised that "play" is foundational to children's development.

Dolls matter in all kinds of ways: they connect us to our younger selves and are transitional objects that provide us with an early sense of comfort and se-

FEATURE

However, doll play has historically been marketed as "for girls", while promoting gendered norms of domesticity and ideals of physical attractiveness.

Feminists have long raised concerns about the impacts of such stereotypical portrayals and especially their potential to socialise children in ways that both highlight and exaggerate gender differences.

Barbie in particular has often been accused of spreading narrow

ideals of femininity, girlhood and womanhood into the lives of

Does this latest range promise something different? Part of answering this question requires us to trace Barbie's origins.

A chequered history: Barbie was originally a West German doll named Bild Lilli, which was crafted for an adult consumer. Ruth Handler's discovery of this Ger-

man figurine led to her adaptation for an American marketplace, which included a name change and wardrobe update. Significantly, Barbie was first marketed as a "teenage fashion model" whose anatomically impossible curves and dimensions proved to be a marketing triumph. Ever since, Barbie's unrealistic body has generated body image and appearance-focused anxieties. The long-term cultural repercussions still resonate today.

The doll also communicates a narrow erful tennis player - is missing

set of beauty ideals that conflate blondness and whiteness with physical attractiveness. In response to growing backlash, Mattel has introduced more "diverse Barbies" in recent times. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, said there is something uncanny about dolls, in that they mediate between reality and fantasy — a tension sustained by a fear and wish they could somehow

The question is, does this new range of Barbies modelled on real pioneering athletes fall within the realm of reality or fantasy? Is it a genuine attempt to make Barbie more relatable?

Broadening and narrowing representation: On face value, Mattel's recent efforts to diversify its range of Barbies through embracing and promoting women's sporting is positive. After all, women's visibility in sport is a longstanding problem, plagued by issues of unequal pay, representation

and participation. And you can't be what you

But what exactly are we seeing in the new Barbies? While the range promotes diversity in terms of skin colour and abilities, we're once again confronted with a sameness of bodies. Each of the Barbies conforms to a prescriptive thin ideal and doesn't convey the athleticism of their likeness. For instance, Venus Williams's muscularity – a feature that makes her a pow-

A corporate hijacking of feminism: By portraying Barbie viz a viz these pioneering women athletes as strong, capable and accomplished, the doll appears to challenge gender stereotypes.

Yet, in popular culture, the contemporary woman is increasingly being represented by notions of autonomy, agency and choice. This sensibility, that women can "have it all" (known as post-feminism) positions women as individually responsible for their own wellbeing, care and liberation.

When taken up by brands that promote this kind of "girl power", a new type of corporate feminism is created.

The result is a watering down of feminism. Women's empowerment is reduced to a marketable commodity rather than a genuine engagement with feminist politics. The dolls in Barbie's new

range embody a combination of physical perfection and sporting prowess. As such, they communicate new levels of expectation and standards for young girls

to "aspire" to. Realistic Barbie? Mattel's new range suggests the company is willing to go only so far in its efforts to be "inclusive" unable to break away from the rigid plas-

tic mould of Barbie's unrealistic contours. Evidence shows that girls who play with a doll with a more realistic body exhibit less body dissatisfaction than those who play with Barbie. Could Barbie be realistic? Could she ever represent the countless women in the world who might be "ordinary", unremarkable and even flawed?

If Mattel really wants to join the inclusive revolution, it ought to rethink the rigid ideals that Barbie continues to pro-



Investors should take ownership of their investments



by Vineet Sachdeva Entrepreneur Partner-Quantitative Equity Investing, Alpha Alternatives

lenges. It therefore needs strategic and deep thinking to grow and prosper.

learning and straitjacketed thoughts to find superior and sustainable solutions. Regrettably, many individuals cease their pursuit of knowledge upon completion of their formal education, assuming graduation or professional certification as the culmination of the process of learning.

This highlights a systemic issue with our educational framework, which often prioritizes exam outcomes as the end goal. For this reason, most people stop read-

ing as soon as they clear their graduation or professional course. The simple activity of reading books has

a multiplier effect not only on one's career but also on their wealth. The ability to consume knowledge at a

high rate accelerates mental and profes-

sional maturity resulting in superior deci-

The world of investing and wealth creation is full of opportunities and chalsion-making ability.

A writer invests a copious amount of time to write a book, doing in-depth research, expressing his feelings, storytelling, and showcasing a larger picture. The beauty of reading books is that you can absorb knowledge from different fields, assimilate the knowledge, and create mental frameworks using different thought processes.

This leads to lifelong learning and evolution of thought process.

This also has many parallels with the

world of investing.

Just investing in traditional products, buying a house for self-consumption, or buying life insurance is not wealth cre-

Investment is a complex activity, and finding the right investment solutions is even more challenging in current times. If one does not have an investment background, the DIY (do it yourself) approach will not only impact returns but may also lead to capital loss.

Getting a fund/portfolio manager who provides investment solutions in a simple, compelling, and effective manner is a powerful and rare skill.

It requires the ability to think out-ofthe-box, thereby creating alpha with low

In today's world, the most preferred way to get any information is through social media. People spend a lot of time on variplatforms to consume information and, within a short span of time they start believing in the so-called 'influencers', without knowing their background, educational qualifications, experience, and ex-

Some influencers use marketing tactics to attract people's attention, and people who lack investment knowledge blindly trust the advice given by these 'experts' without even looking at the basic investment parameters like risk, liquidity, and safety. They therefore tend to fall for these 'quick money' schemes.

Human beings have been risk-takers from time immemorial. The recorded history of various bubbles over the centuries highlights the basic human character of

winning quickly rather than patiently. The fundamental principles of investing get ignored in the zeal of getting rich

'This time it's different' is the most common phrase used in every scam/bubble. Investors end up making losses in the race to do things by themselves from things they don't even understand completely. Within a few trades, people have lost their lifelong saving, and retirement money.

It is surprising that most investors do a lot more research on buying consumables like electronics, vacations, clothes etc. than on their investments, which have a lot more long-term effect on their financial well-being.

Investors should do simple things when it comes to investment and wealth cre-

1. Invest hard-earned money with the help of a fund manager who has the required qualifications, background, and track record. Look at the past performance for a better understanding of the risk-return matrix.

2. Look at the fee structure (fixed fee or performance-based fees). Ideally, the interest of the fund manager should be aligned with the investor.

3. Diversification should be done at multiple levels like Mutual Funds, Portfolio

Management Schemes, Real Estate and Alternatives. Within this, it should be in equity, fixed income, commodities, quant, private credit etc. As investors evolve over time, they can add more sophisticated products to their portfolio.

4. Investors should continuously enhance their knowledge by reading books and meeting quality people. This helps them to constantly look for better investment opportunities/solutions.

5. Keeping abreast of market trends and economic indicators will help in making informed decisions. This includes staying informed about geopolitical events, central bank policies, industry developments, and emerging market trends. In addition to enhancing one's wealth, it will also make them interesting conversationists!

Finally, while it's important to stay informed and adapt to changing market conditions, investors should maintain a longterm perspective.

Short-term market fluctuations and volatility are inevitable, but maintaining a disciplined approach and focusing on long-term investment objectives can help investors ride out market fluctuations and achieve sustainable wealth creation over

Dr Vinay Mishra's

corner...

Q. I'm married since the past 4 years. My husband seems to have more sexual attraction towards

my sister than me. Both of them always talk in sexual terms and keep teasing each other. What should I do to make my husband change his behaviour? Please

A: Your husband doesn't seem to be distressed by the current state of affairs. However, you sound worried and affected by it. Thus, it will be better if you bring the focus to yourself and see what you want to do about this. If the situation is bothering you, then the onus lies on you to do something about it. It might be a good idea for you to express your thoughts and feelings around this to your husband. What are your fears, insecurities, how is it affecting you? Talking to your sister is another option to know what is on her mind? How does she view this situation? Be very firm in telling her that you disapprove of such behaviour and would not hesitate to prevent her from coming to your home. This would help you get more clarity to decide upon any further course of ac-tion. You are right in not feeling okay with this behaviour of your husband. Also, couple counseling could be a big help in your



A novel that shows the precarious position of a woman in a man's world

by Prakash Shrivastava; Title: Far From the Madding Crowd; Author: **Thomas Hardy**

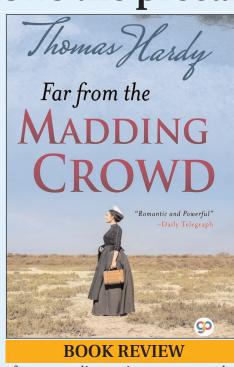
Thomas Hardy's powerful novel of swift sexual passion and slow-burning loyalty centres on Bathsheba Everdene, a proud working woman whose life is complicated by three different men respectable farmer Boldwood, seductive Sergeant Troy and devoted Gabriel - making her the object of scandal and

Vividly portraying the superstitions and traditions of a small rural community, "Far from the Madding Crowd" shows the precarious position of a woman in a man's world.

I fell in love with this book after reading chapter one. Everything about it captivated me and the story stayed with me for a while after I had finished reading. I wistfully think about it, wondering whether it is too soon to pick it

Hardy's writing was enthralling and I didn't want to put the book down. I had to force myself to stop reading so that I could extend the experience of reading this book. It was just a wonderful read-

ing experience. Far from the Madding Crowd is full



of sorrow, disappointment, tragedy, joy, and humour. Reading the novel was emotionally fulfilling, but almost overwhelming, as the mood changed so quickly. One word from a character could completely alter the direction of the scene but every action (or inaction) felt completely natural. It wasn't contrived or strained in any way.

I'm not sure what to say about the plot. I thoroughly enjoyed it, don't get me wrong, but I can't think of any particular moments to discuss without spoiling the novel. Can you spoil a 147year-old novel? Anyway, the plot is one of scandal and intrigue as it follows Bathsheba's relationships with three men: Boldwood, Sergeant Troy, and Gabriel. It's a novel about passion, relationships, and hard work.

Hardy created some of the most compelling characters I've ever encountered in a nineteenth-century novel. I truly cared about Bathsheba and I wanted the best for her, even if she was annoying and stubborn at times, and this caused me a lot of heartache. I hated Troy with an absolute passion and wanted to reach through the pages, into the novel, and slap him silly. Hardy developed Troy into a complex character and I began to pity him, towards the end of the novel, but I still hated him. He was a cad. Boldwood was annoying and insistent while Gabriel was awkward and sweet.



Gabriel was like a lost puppy and I found myself hoping that he'd leave everything behind and live a happy life without the drama that Bathsheba attracted. I really liked Liddy and her relationship with Bathsheba too.

I found that the pace of the book was manageable. It wasn't unbearably slow but it lingered in the right moments. It

was a pleasant but reflective read. I also found the writing easy to read but I don't think I'm the best judge of this because I read much older literature on a daily basis. I'd say that it was a typical Victorian novel in regards to language but I'd also say that it's easier to read than Dracula, for example. Does that help? Probably not.