

# Barbie becomes a real computer engineer in a new book

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A selection of Barbie dolls fill a shelf at a store in Caracas, Venezuela, Nov. 10, 2014.

ATLANTA—Barbie, the popular doll, has had many jobs over the years. She has been a pilot, an astronaut and even a race-car driver.

A new book imagines her as a computer engineer—someone who builds apps, websites and video games. But the book, called “Barbie: I Can Be a Computer Engineer,” is being criticized.

In the book, Barbie is helping to create a video game.

“I’m only creating the design idea,” Barbie says. “I’ll need Steven and Brian’s help to turn it into a real game.”

Also in the book, Barbie has problems with her computer, and needs two boys to help her with it. Critics say this gives the message that girls are not good with computers.

The book caused a lot of arguing on the Internet. Many people felt the Barbie in the book was not a good role model for young girls.

## **Student Rewrites Barbie Book**

A university research student in Georgia saw the book and had a problem with the message it was sending. Casey Fiesler studies technology and she felt that the book's message was that girls are only smart enough to be designers and boys should be engineers. She disagreed.

Fiesler decided to do something about it. The pages of the book were available online and she downloaded them. Brainstorming with her roommate, Fiesler used Photoshop to change the book.

She rewrote the story, making Barbie one of the software engineers who is building the game. In Fiesler's story, Barbie is tougher and more confident.

In the new book, Barbie says: "Really good games are made by a team of people. I'm doing some of the coding now, but Steven and Brian are helping, too."

## **An Apology From Barbie's Maker**

Susan Marenco wrote the original book, where Barbie is not very good with computers. She blamed Mattel, the company that makes the Barbie doll, for the book's message.

Marenco said the company still thinks that Barbie is "nice, she doesn't show anger, she doesn't show frustration."

In another interview, Marenco said, "Maybe I should have pushed back, and usually I do, but I didn't this time."

Mattel apologized for the book in a Facebook post. It said the story does not fit with what Barbie stands for.

"We believe girls should understand that anything is possible and believe they live in a world without limits," the toymaker wrote.

## **A Successful New Story**

Fiesler was surprised and delighted by the success of her rewrite. Her website had about 800 visits before the project and now has nearly 50,000. Almost everyone loved the book, she said.

Fiesler is a doctorate student at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. She is studying copyright law and technology. She also has a law degree from Vanderbilt University, and she is a writer.

"If Mattel would like to pay me to write a new version, I would be happy to," she said.

