



New hip-hop fashion dolls leave young women with a sour Flava

By CARA NISSMAN

If we lived in a world according to Mattel, the cast of characters would be changing from anorexic, buxom blondes to a diverse band of girl thugs.

Move over, Barbie, and make way for **BY THE WAY...** Flavas, the company's new line of hip-hop-themed fashion dolls.

The six dolls are said to "reflect the look of real teens," with their individually sculpted faces and varied heights. That's a nice goal, but do we want to teach our 8-year-olds to front as homeys, lurking on street corners in gold chains and belly shirts? (Each doll also comes with a graffiti-covered cardboard wall so she has a place to "hang out.")

Mattel claims the dolls celebrate girls' "fearless self-expression." (The company's even trying to, ahem, justify its coolness by being one of the sponsors of Christina Aguilera's "Stripped" tour.) Puh-leez. Are these pint-sized punks teaching values? Like what? How to bag the best bling?

The dolls feature "10 points of articulation" so girls can manipulate them into several poses to front "more attitude." I suspect Flavas playas soon will get their kicks telling their moms to step off so they can enjoy their phat Saturday-morning cartoons.

And I'd like to know what sorry-ass suit came up with the name "Flavas." Sure, it's a slang word for style — three years ago. Sounds like some toy exec got it off an old hip-hop CD. 50 Cent could have come up with something tighter.

You can find Flavas dolls — if you really want to — at www.mattel.com.