



## Barbie Dolls and real women

by Simon Belt

Mattel's Barbie Doll collection for aimed primarily at girls is getting its biggest makeover since 1959. Obviously they've had numerous private makeovers by young girls for decades, but this time it's in public. So what you might say, but it's got a number of right-on wadicals rather dizzy with excitement and all of a flutter.

What's the big issue that's being addressed with a more diverse product range of dolls? And why can't some grown-ups just let go of the inanimate plastic barbies?

As the youngest of four boys in a loving but relatively poor family, I never had any of my own dolls. In fact I never even had my own teddy bear, or clothes for that matter, wearing a series of hand me downs that were patched and darned such that it was sometimes hard to tell what the original item would have looked like. After mithering my parents for my own teddy bear throughout my teenage years - I don't think I realised I should have had my own before then - they finally bought me one on my 18th birthday. At last I understood what shape and colour I should aspire to be.

My sister on the other hand, being the baby of the family and the only girl was lavished with all her own clothes, new ones, and all her own toys rather than what was left of the out of fashion one handed down to me. I'm not bitter. In truth, I quite liked the fact that I had to work for and earn the things I wanted for myself, and getting out delivering papers and later, caddying for the posh people at weekends helped me appreciate the real value of useful things. Spending money of Mattel's Barbie Dolls would have seemed a waste.

So how did the Barbie Doll makeover make it out of ironic articles in the fashion pages and onto the more serious and political pages and programs? Jess Cartner-Morley deals with the ironic approach quite nicely when taking sounding across the fashion team at the Guardian when she writes "*With four body shapes, seven skin tones, 24 hairstyles and 22 eye colours, Mattel's new Fashionistas range has expanded the options for its famous dolls* " followed up by "*The full range now has four body shapes, seven skin tones, 24 hairstyles, 22 eye colours – who knew there even were 22 eye colours? – and feet that can wear trainers as well as high heels. What next: Barbie with flat hair?*"

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