

Dolls, Dolls, Dolls

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Year after year, toy companies try to make new toys that will appeal to the public and sell strong. Whether it was the Barbie trend in the 90's or the newest Eastern influenced plush dolls today, dolls have played more than an admiring role in society. Dolls take different forms and materials, from cotton fabric to straw harvested from a dry field. These toys do not only appeal to children but also to adults, many adult consumers buy collectable and rare toys each year as a hobby. Dolls like *Mamegoma*, *Mameshiba*, *Gloomy Bear* and even *Ugly Dolls* have many similarities, but each is different in a special way. The way people make dolls now is extraordinary. We are able to give emotion and character to a doll, so humans can connect to it. You could say that we connect these dolls so much to people that these dolls have become an extension of our bodies. Dolls can become so magical that even a prick of a pin to the doll can hurt the person it is connected to like the infamous voodoo dolls. From pink fluffy bears to misshaped monster figures, dolls have grown to be apart of human, culture changing as each new generation evolves.

The first known dolls were found in Egypt, where tombs of deceased children, dated back to 2000 BCE, had dolls of themselves in their grave. Since the Romans invaded Egypt, the influence of dolls grew on their culture, thus making more refined dolls. These Roman dolls had removable clothing and moving limbs. Later on in history, the rest of the Eastern continents started to catch on the doll trend and in the 1860's, it was brought to America. When the science of plastic came out, the 1900's became the generation of plastic dolls in American culture.

Dolls were made of various materials in the past such as wood, clay, paper, ivory or even wax and the doll did not always take a human shape. The *matryoshka* is a wooden Russian doll that has several dolls inside of it. The first layer of the *matryoshka* is a rounded figure that can be opened in half, and inside another smaller *matryoshka* is hidden. There can be several layers of the *matryoshka* as each layer gets smaller and smaller until the last doll is no bigger than a hair bead. Each layer is usually hand painted carefully and glossed.

With the biggest sensation of dolls going around, there might be a small conspiracy about dolls being another type of mirror for humans. Dolls were originally modeled after a human and continue to resemble people, exaggerated body parts, symbolic material and even the structure of a doll is similar to a person. People are attracted to dolls because they are attracted to themselves. From a psychological viewpoint, people like dolls because people like objects that resemble themselves. Why? Because people like them self as it is apart of human nature. What we think is cute is either what we want to be or what society tell us is cute.

Like women in the media, dolls are another reflection and a historical record of what cultural norms humans should be. Because of this mirror, types of pop dolls were made such as *Bratz*, dolls that are associated with different races, and Cabbage Patch Kids, the dolls that reflected which baby a child wishes for. Aside from pop, traditional cultures also use dolls as a mirror for themselves such as China dolls. Each doll is individually crafted but they are all similar; black hair, black eyes, pale skin, and similar clothing styles. Some traditional cultures have strong morals or traditional lifestyles that encourage conformity. Back in World War II, Germans stood strong by the ideal of true blood kin with blue eyes and blond hair. In American culture, women used to stay home and be the housewife while the husband worked. Strong tradition is still passed down through dolls as a mirror for a perfect human being.

On a personal level, dolls have had a great impact on my life. Whether it was to sooth my pain or have a bundle of happiness in my arms, dolls have affected my personality. As a child, Barbie was the first doll I had...she ended up in the microwave. I played with Barbie dolls because I though they were fun. Growing up, I realize that those dolls were not a good influence

my growing self, they did not change me, but kept me happy and entertained. As I grow up, stuffed bears and oddly colored animals were embraced in my arms. These dolls had more purpose than to be played with. They were decorations, something to hold because it was more comfortable, a object I could squeeze if I was crying. They reflected how I felt, cheery, colorful, and odd.

At this very moment, I have a pink stuffed bear, drooling out of its mouth, sitting on my bed and a lime green bean shaped dog on my pillow at home. The weirdest doll I have ever had in my house was my old bunny. The fabric was old and full of lint, the facial material was wrong, the ears never stood up, and the eyes looked so sad that it looked as if it was about to cry. Every little detail can change how I look upon dolls. Those light hazel eyes were not the warm color this doll deserved. The fabric was too faded to be a child's toy, and the nose was nowhere near pink, it was a smoky light red like used makeup blush. This doll clearly expressed a sort of sadness even if it did not have a generic sad face on it. I don't know why I kept the doll. Maybe it was because it looked the same way I imagined I did towards the kids at school who excluded me and bullied me. Maybe it was because I thought of the doll as my only friend, like my other imaginary friends as a child. The doll was another mirror, like every other doll, so it had to mean something to me to keep it.

Through research, keen observations and personal experience, I have learned the effects of dolls on people and culture. Dolls are there to comfort, to remind us what our culture has created, and to be a influence in everyday life. Dolls were not created solely for marketing purposes; they were created as symbols. An American made doll will be different than a Russian doll whether it is materials, purpose, usage, culture or idea.

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