

The Doll Look

I: I want to talk to you, Janine and Chanel, if I may, about a friend of mine who has told me that his daughter, who's 19 years old, she's become interested in this new fashion for trying to look like a doll. And she's starting to spend literally hours — two to three hours every day — making herself up to look like dolls as she sees them on the Internet. What do you think of this, Janine?

J: Well, in one way, I'm not surprised. I think it's just one more effect of the general visual culture we have now, where there's so much emphasis on the way you look, and you can be photographed anywhere. Your picture could be posted on Facebook. So you want to look good when you're that age. Obviously it sounds a bit more extreme if you're making yourself up to look like a doll. I read a newspaper article the other day where they said that people spend a long time trying to get exactly the right type of lips, huge eyes, sort of porcelain complexion if you're white, very long straight hair. And I suppose if this girl is spending two hours every day, that's going to affect her school work as well, and that's a bit worrying. But maybe it's just a phase.

I: It's very interesting what you said about this, and it fits in with the picture I've been given. Chanel, would you like to come in there?

C: I think it's interesting, actually. I've seen the pictures and just from artistic expression, from that point of view, I think it's actually quite brilliant, because it is an art form when you're looking like how they do look like dolls. And so on some level, you can say that it's a bit strange or a bit odd, but I prefer that to what the girls have been doing before with regular makeup — lipstick and eyeliner and eyeshadow — and they've changed themselves or enhanced themselves so much that they no longer look like themselves. So you can see it when you look at magazines, at different celebrities with makeup and without makeup. They look like two different people. And then it becomes hard to live up to your own version of yourself.

I: Is this because you want to feel you're someone different or because you want other people to see you taking up the point Janine made about your public image?

C: I think it's just something different to do. Just something different to do. A character, if you will, as opposed to, you know, these are my lips, but I'm going to make them bigger, but it's still pretending that they're mine. Or my eyes aren't this way, my lashes aren't this long, but I'm going to pretend that they are. So I think instead of doing a fake version of yourself, just do something different altogether.

I: Somebody actually asked the question, who wants to go through life just being themselves, which to me sounds desperately sad.

C: I would not agree with what that person said, but I think for myself, it's more of a character. It's someone... a different role to play or a different way to look. I like myself and the beauty of it is that you can be different things at different times and you don't have to be a particular role.

J: I suppose where I would start getting worried with your friend's daughter would be if she got to the stage where she wanted to change her looks surgically, so that she would change the shape of her eyes, her cheek bones, do things to make sure that her waist was even smaller, change the size of her breasts — all the typical things people do to look like a Barbie doll. Then it's getting more serious.

I: I take that point. I mean, it's easy to kind of trivialize this, I suppose, but it seems to be making a big impact on her life as well as on her face and her body maybe.

J: But does she enjoy doing it?

I: Apparently she does. She thinks of it as important enough to spend this amount of time and probably quite a lot of money on it.

C: I would say that if she spends two hours, you know, when you look at, I would say, many women with blowing their hair out and combing their hair and putting on their regular makeup, some people spend an hour and a half doing their makeup and their hair. So, you know, this is different of course if they're dressing like dolls. I agree that if you're doing surgery, it's no longer fun and you're no longer creating a style and you're taking on that identity a little further as opposed to just having fun with it if you're doing surgery.

J: Maybe the question is also how much control you have if you're forced to do it. Then we're talking about strong social pressures to be a certain way. But if you're doing it as a way of experimenting and finding out who you are or what kind of identity you have, being able to play a bit... I mean, if you think about the way kids' normal day-to-day lives are, there's a lot of serious stuff going on, a lot of pressure at school. You have to perform well all the time. Frankly, I think people deserve to have fun as well.

I: This is a very external thing, isn't it. It's how you look — that image of yourself — rather than what's inside you, I mean what you're good at, learning to master some skills, to play a musical instrument for instance, for God's sake. You could spend two hours a day and you could do something useful.