

Slow Italian, Fast Learning

Ep.407: Autism Barbie is unboxed to mixed reactions from advocates

Italian	English
<p>Non puoi essere ciò che non puoi vedere: è una massima che forse hai già sentito.</p> <p>E i creatori di Barbie, la Mattel, affermano che questa filosofia è alla base della loro decisione di realizzare bambole Barbie che rappresentano donne e ragazze autistiche.</p> <p>L'azienda ha inviato la nuova bambola all'attrice australiana e attivista per i diritti dei disabili Chloe Hayden, che non è riuscita a contenere la sua emozione quando ha condiviso la sua reazione sui social media.</p> <p>"Growing up, I never saw myself anywhere. Not in media and definitely not in the toys that I played with. So to now be able to see myself in Barbie is mindblowing. And the impact that this is going to have on little girls is so exciting."</p> <p>La bambola è stata progettata per riflettere alcuni dei modi in cui le persone neurodiverse possono vivere il mondo, tra cui gomiti e polsi articolati per consentire movimenti stimolanti delle mani, uno sguardo leggermente distolto anziché un contatto visivo diretto e accessori legati all'elaborazione sensoriale e alla comunicazione.</p> <p>Questa Barbie è stata sviluppata in collaborazione con l'Autistic Self Advocacy Network per la sua collezione Fashionistas, che include già bambole che rappresentano un'ampia gamma di tonalità della pelle, tipi di corporatura, condizioni mediche e disabilità.</p>	<p>You can't be what you can't see - it is a maxim you may have heard before.</p> <p>And the creators of Barbie - Mattel - say that philosophy is behind their decision to make Barbies that represent autistic women and girls.</p> <p>The company sent the new doll to Australian actor and disability activist, Chloe Hayden, who couldn't contain her excitement when she shared her reaction on social media.</p> <p>"Growing up, I never saw myself anywhere. Not in media and definitely not in the toys that I played with. So to now be able to see myself in Barbie is mindblowing. And the impact that this is going to have on little girls is so exciting."</p> <p>The doll is designed to reflect some of the ways neurodiverse people may experience the world, including articulated elbows and wrists to allow for *stimming hand movements, a gaze that is slightly averted rather than making direct eye contact, and accessories linked to sensory processing and communication.</p> <p>It was developed with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network for its Fashionistas collection, which already includes dolls representing a wide range of skin tones, body types, medical conditions and disabilities.</p>



Monique Botha, professoressa associata di psicologia sociale e dello sviluppo presso la Durham University nel Regno Unito, ritiene che si tratti di un passo importante.

"There are a lot of autistic children who will see a Barbie with ear defenders and an AAC device, which is a communication device, and absolutely be delighted. They will be delighted that there is a toy that might capture a bit of their experience, that they can see themselves in someone else."

La dottoressa Kristyn Sommers, scienziata australiana specializzata in sviluppo infantile e madre di un bambino autistico, ha affermato che non acquisterà questo giocattolo per i propri figli.

Recentemente ha pubblicato un video su Instagram in cui spiega le sue preoccupazioni riguardo alla creazione di un modello visivo per l'autismo.

"And the moment that exists, autistic kids, particularly girls will start to be compared to it. The second problem I see is that it creates a right way to be autistic. If your autism does not look like this, if you don't use an A-A-C, if you stim visibly, if you mask this doll does not say that you're being included, it says you are not being autistic the right way."

Ma la creatrice autistica di contenuti Ellie Middleton afferma che questa bambola riflette un cambiamento più ampio nel modo in cui viene inteso l'autismo, allontanandosi dalle rappresentazioni tradizionalmente maschili.

"Up until very recently, autism was seen as something that was something that young white boys had and it was kind of especially a male thing. It was seen as something that

Associate Professor of Social and Development Psychology at Durham University in the UK, Monique Botha, believes it is an important move.

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Australian developmental scientist and autistic mother, Doctor Kristyn Sommers, says she won't be buying this toy for her children.

She recently released a video on Instagram explaining her concerns over the creation of a visual template for autism.

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But autistic content creator Ellie Middleton says this doll reflects a broader shift in how autism is understood, moving away from traditionally masculine representations.

"Up until very recently, autism was seen as something that was something that young white boys had and it was kind of especially a male thing. It was seen as something that was almost like one specific type rather



was almost like one specific type rather than a spectrum. And I think we're starting to see the movement of society understanding that actually women can be autistic, people of colour can be autistic, adults can be autistic."

Altri hanno espresso preoccupazioni sul fatto che Barbie potrebbe in realtà rafforzare gli stereotipi, anziché ampliare l'inclusione.

Per la professoressa Botha questa, come per tutte le rappresentazioni, non è universale.

"There will also be an entire group of autistic people who don't particularly see themselves in this toy, who don't feel represented, and a toy cannot possibly represent everyone. Similarly, from other research, we know that children who play with ultra-thin dolls also, it affects how they see themselves and is related to an increased strive towards thinness itself."

La celebre bambola è famosa per incarnare diverse professioni e identità sin dalla sua creazione negli anni '50, e questa ultima versione arriva proprio mentre in tutto il mondo si stanno definendo le politiche sull'autismo.

Nicole Rogerson è amministratrice delegata di Autism Awareness Australia e madre di un adulto autistico.

Pur riconoscendo che la comunità autistica avrà una serie di opinioni diverse su questa Barbie, ritiene che ciò non rifletta un progresso significativo nel miglioramento della vita delle persone autistiche.

"It did make me honestly roll my eyes a little bit and say in the grand scheme of the challenges that the autism community has both nationally and internationally, you know a doll is not really going to do much here. It's really important for the autism

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While others have voiced concerns the Barbie could actually be enforcing stereotypes, rather than broadening inclusion.

Professor Botha advises this - as with all representation - is not universal.

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The iconic doll is famous for embodying different professions and identities since her creation in the 1950s - and this latest iteration comes as autism policy is being formed around the world.

Nicole Rogerson is CEO of Autism Awareness Australia and a parent of an autistic adult.

While recognising the autistic community will have a range of opinions on this Barbie, she believes this isn't a reflection of meaningful progress in improving the lives of autistic people.

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community to be able to look at today and say look, great there is a doll. But let's get back to the serious work we need to do."

Un anno fa, l'Australia ha lanciato la sua prima Strategia Nazionale sull'Autismo, un piano settennale che stanzia 42,3 milioni di dollari nella sua prima fase.

Per Rogerson questo è un momento di stress e incertezza per molte famiglie.

"We know that autism is spoken about so often when we talk about the overrun of costs in the NDIS. And the government are frantically trying to reign in on some of those costs and make really big changes to how children with autism are treated in early intervention and education in Australia. Those changes are happening right now, those policy changes are happening now and families are very nervous about what that looks like. Because it is - has been not very clear."

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A year ago, Australia launched its first National Autism Strategy, a seven-year plan that dedicates 42.3 million dollars in its first phase.

Ms Rogerson says this is a time of stress and uncertainty for many families.

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Report by Camille Bianchi for SBS News.

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